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University of California
Berkeley, California

Tomás Almaguer

Tomás Almaguer: Reflections on a Career in Chicana/o Studies

Chicana/o Studies Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Todd Holmes
in 2019

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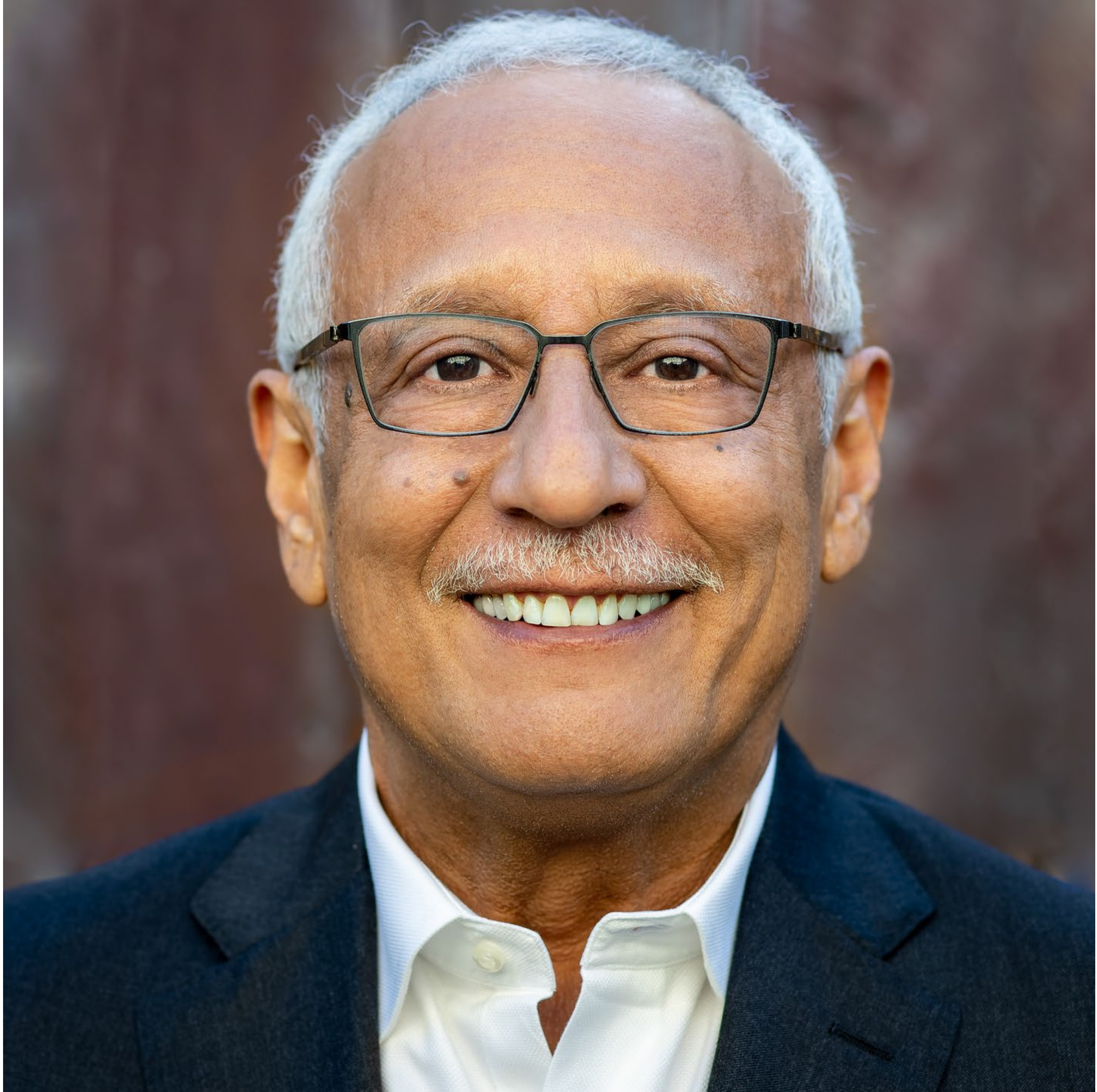

Tomás Almaguer

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Abstract

Tomás Almaguer is professor emeritus and Dean of the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University. Born and raised in the working-class community of Moorpark, California, Professor Almaguer received his PhD in sociology from UC Berkeley in 1979. In the years that followed, he held faulty positions at UC Berkeley, UC Santa Cruz, and the University of Michigan, where as the Arthur F. Thurnau Professor he served as Director of the Latino Studies Program. He came to San Francisco State as Dean of the College of Ethnic Studies in 2000. He is the author of many publications within the field of Chicana/o Studies, such as: "Towards The Study of Chicano Internal Colonialism" (1971); "Chicano Men: A Cartography of Homosexual Identity and Behavior" (1991); "Between the Material and Cultural World of Latino Gay Men" (2011); "The Latin Americanization of Race Relations in the United States" (2012); as well as books, *Racial Fault Lines: the Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (1994), and *The New Latino Studies Reader* (2016). In this interview, Professor Almaguer discusses: his family background and upbringing; his educational journey from high school and junior college to attending UC Santa Barbara; his graduate experience at UC Berkeley and establishing himself as a Chicano scholar; his reflections on the state of Chicana/o Studies during the early years and how the field evolved over the decades; the aims and contributions of his scholarship in the field; the reception of Chicana/o Studies at the universities he served; as well as his thoughts on important works, themes, and high points in the field's development over the last fifty years.

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Project History

By Todd Holmes
Berkeley, California

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Irene Vásquez [University of New Mexico]

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Interview 1: March 12, 2019

01-00:00:05
Holmes: All right, this is Todd Holmes with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. Today's date is March 12, 2019. I have the pleasure of sitting down with Tomás Almaguer for the Chicana/Chicano Studies Oral History Project. We are here in the Bancroft Library at the University of California in the beautiful city of Berkeley. Tomás, thank you so much for taking the time to sit down with me today.

01-00:00:39
Almaguer: Oh, my pleasure.

01-00:00:41
Holmes: Our two sessions are going to cover your life and career, and your experience in those formative times of the development of Chicana and Chicano Studies. But I'd like to start with a little bit about you and your family background. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your family?

01-00:01:01
Almaguer: Yeah, that's a good way to start. My family came to the United States in the 1920s. My father's side, they came from Guanajuato. They were from Leon, a little village, Silao. They came in 1923 to the United States. They had relatives—cousins, I believe, in the city of Moorpark in Southern California. And, they arranged for my family to come. I was amused much later when I discovered that they actually came in '23 before the border patrol was fully set up, and they came with visas, so they came legally. We probably overstayed our visa by a hundred years now, but anyway, that's kind of the genesis of my family. I'm from a very humble, working-class family. My grandfather was actually homeschooled, and it was a very strange thing to hear. No formal education, but apparently the family had some resources and wrote beautifully. Large family—my dad was the youngest of eleven.

My mom's family was from New Mexico. She was born and raised in Anthony, New Mexico and spent most of her life in the Columbus and Deming area. And so, they also eventually relocated to California. It was actually in Ventura County where she and her family settled as well. My parents actually met, unsurprisingly, in the world of agriculture. My dad was a truck driver delivering produce. My mom and my dear aunt were working in the packing houses. And, my aunt introduced my mom to my father, and the rest was history. But it was a very kind of typical Mexican reality. I think the thing that probably sticks with me more than anything is that my grandfather and my uncle built these two adobe homes in this small lot in this Mexican part of town in Moorpark. And, to this day, those homes are still there. My family lives in the larger one now to this day.

So, there's something just very endearing, rewarding for me just to have that particular background, and because of those positive dimensions, there were

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also other sides of that family reality that I may chat with you about. But that's kind of the genesis of how I came to be.

01-00:04:02
Holmes: And, you had a fairly large family yourself. Were you the oldest of nine siblings?

01-00:04:08
Almaguer: Yeah. Birth control was not a big issue or something they were very attentive to. As I mentioned, my dad was the youngest of eleven. My mom was the oldest of thirteen. And, I was the oldest of nine in my family. My poor mother, she must have been pregnant half of the first ten years of their marriage, just about every year. So, yeah, it was a very, very large family reality.

01-00:04:39
Holmes: Maybe chat a little bit about the family environment growing up. You're saying it was a typical kind of Mexican household.

01-00:04:47
Almaguer: Yeah. So, we had aunts and uncles, extended family in the area. There was plenty of opportunity on both my mom's side and my father's side for interaction, extended family all around. And it was a very typical kind of working-class family reality punctuated by Catholicism, notions of hard work. Also, it had its downsides. There was certainly alcoholism. There was other kind of assorted parts of Latino family, patriarchal life, that we are very critical of now, and rightfully so, that kind of was part of that world and reality. My dad was just a very humble man. He did very well after the war as a truck driver but eventually became a construction worker and went back to truck driving. My mom did a variety of things, worked in the electronics industry at Burroughs for a number of years, but prior to that, sales work, working in the packing house. And she was a maid for a number of years for a very prominent family in the area.

Neither of them had a chance to go to high school. They both had an elementary school education. I think my dad may have gone for a brief period of time as well as my mom, but they never graduated. They immediately went to work with all those people in the family and their station in the pecking order. So, it was a world of work and a world of trying to survive and make ends meet and trying to meet those family obligations to care for a large family and all of their various needs. So, it was a very, very hard, very, very difficult time. And, my own personal family life was kind of punctuated with all those worlds of pain and promise. But I think what sticks with me most was the difficult parts of that—my father being arrested, the drunkenness, the cheap scenes, the spousal abuse, and all of those things that we don't really want to remember, much less talk about or document. But they were really traumatic for me. They stuck with me and, I think in many ways, propelled me

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to find a way out of that world, if not literally, in an embodied way, at least psychologically and intellectually.

01-00:07:26

So, I think my world, the world of academia, the world of books, the world of libraries became a refuge for me in many ways, not so much fleeing from that world but looking for other things to fill those gaps and those painful moments that I experienced as a young person growing up in that family. If I must be completely honest with you, people say, when you ask what is your childhood like and how do you define yourself, there's a really pithy little phrase that I only use to describe myself: I'm the overachieving first-born from a dysfunctional working-class Mexican family. That's it. That's what I am. And so, that really is kind of the bedrock, the foundation from where I sprung and from where I branched out.

01-00:08:31
Holmes: Tomás, tell me a little bit about growing up in Moorpark. You had said earlier that you grew up on the Mexican side of town. Describe that experience as well as the community there in which you grew up.

01-00:08:45
Almaguer: It's a very interesting, small little town. It comes to people's minds during the Rodney King era, the Simi Valley, which is where Moorpark is located. But, when I was growing up, it was a very small town of about four, five thousand. It was a town that was so classically segregated. Half the population was white. Half the population was Mexican. There were, to my knowledge, no Asians, no African-Americans, Native Peoples. It was simply a brown and white world in the kind of rural backwaters of Ventura County. The railroad tracks symbolically divided the town. One side were tract homes, largely a white population, a few Latinos, not many Mexicans on that side of town. Way out three miles on one end was a small place called Home Acres. It was kind of rural country white folk. Three miles out of town in the other direction was Virginia Colony, a largely Mexican community. On the other side of the tracks from this was the two Mexican communities, Charles Street on one side and Walnut Canyon, where I was born and raised.

So, these were very segregated worlds. And, growing up, half the students were white; half were Latino. Predictably, most of us were not in college prep and not in the same kind of track. I was the anomaly. And, I've always considered myself to be an outlier. The word "freak" was probably more appropriate and used currently. But I always was that kind of amphibious person that could move rather seamlessly between multiple worlds and navigate my way through those worlds very effectively. So, I was in college prep, the only Mexican person in that track. Somewhat athletic, but I was also very much into student council, class president, all of those things. It was a weird reality in some ways and an anomalous one, certainly, in that regard. But that was growing up.

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I never lost a sense of who I was, where I was from and how I was located. I never aspired, at least consciously, to try to be something other than what I was and simply kind of navigated my way through that world. I was trouble, though, Todd, if I was to be honest. I was an outlier in many ways. But I was also very precocious politically, academically and all. I was a difficult person to kind of contain in that community. And so, I looked for ways to break out of that, and I eventually did by going on to college.

01-00:11:49
Holmes: Let's talk a little bit about your high school years. If I have this correctly, you went to high school probably, what, '62 to '66?

01-00:11:57
Almaguer: Exactly.

01-00:11:58
Holmes: So you're really in this hotspot of the 1960s—civil rights, anti-war. The Watts riots happened in '65, so probably around your junior year or the beginning of your senior year, as well as the grape strike of Cesar Chavez and the farm worker movement was also beginning. You have all these things—and if we think about it, Southern California is a real hotbed of a lot of this.

01-00:12:26
Almaguer: Right.

01-00:12:28
Holmes: Discuss your experience with that.

01-00:12:30
Almaguer: I very, very quickly gravitated to supporting those kinds of issues, certainly the farm workers. My family, for God's sakes, was embedded in that world. And anything to redress the horrors of those realities for working-class Mexican farm workers was something that was true to me, deeply felt. So, the farm workers movement obviously was a crystallizing and catalyzing moment for me politically. The anti-war movement, I became very much opposed to the war. I became a conscientious objector. I eventually was able to avoid the war through a medical deferral. But, I cut my teeth politically at that moment. And even though the town was a rather conservative one, and certainly the school was a very small, conservative school, I pushed those boundaries. I was always kind of at the edge of pushing in more progressive kinds of directions than most folks at that particular time.

So, it was a formative period of political awakening and foment for me. It wasn't until I left Ventura County and I spent a number of years in community college and then went to UC Santa Barbara where I really kind of cut my teeth in a profound way and kind of aligned myself in an embodied way with the politics of that period.

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01-00:14:07
Holmes: How did these issues, as well as activism, impact the community? Because, often what we see in some communities is a generational divide, the young aligning themselves with this kind of activism and these new political issues, the earlier generation calling that into question. Did you see any kind of friction or any kind of discussion across generations in your community on these issues?

01-00:14:40
Almaguer: There probably was in the larger community context. And immigrant families and perhaps even second-generation tended to be a little bit more conservative about some of those issues. Certainly the younger people of my generation were moving and pushing the boundaries of that. But I'm not sure I could say that those generational divides were profound. Even in my family, my parents were largely apolitical. I don't remember them voting or being active, even during the Kennedy period. So there wasn't a lot of that friction and tension that I experienced within my family, and it may have had resonance outside of the family in the larger community, but it wasn't profound. Very small community, Todd. My high school had three hundred people. My graduating class had sixty. It was a small, small little part of the world, largely untouched by what may have been happening in larger communities like Oxnard or Ventura.

And so, again, when I say the rural backwaters of Ventura County, it truly was. So, some of those generational divides and friction which had resonance in a profound way in a larger context didn't resonate, at least at that historical moment, for me as I was growing up.

01-00:16:17
Holmes: After you graduate, you headed off to community college for a few years.

01-00:16:21
Almaguer: Yes.

01-00:16:24
Holmes: You attended Moorpark and Ventura Community Colleges?

01-00:16:26
Almaguer: Yeah.

01-00:16:28
Holmes: You were the first of your family to go to college?

01-00:16:30
Almaguer: Yes. And I'm sure all the people who you've interviewed lead parallel lives, first in our families. When those opportunities eventually emerged for people to go on and take advantage of that moment, but certainly in my family, if I was to reflect, I mentioned I'm the oldest of nine. Not a one of my brothers or sisters ever went on to college, much less graduated. A good number of them never actually graduated from high school. They didn't get a diploma, maybe

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got a certificate for having served time. And so, there wasn't that context of understanding and knowing what the academic world and opportunities were elsewhere. If I was to be completely candid with you, I should have been the valedictorian, but I was next in line. I graduated with a very, very strong record. I probably, in retrospect, could have gone to a number of places. I was simply not ready psychologically, emotionally, to leave my family and to trek outside of that world.

So I stumbled into community college. I went to Ventura College. I remember driving the thirty miles to go there, carpooling with people. And then eventually, after a couple of years there, when Moorpark College opened right in my community, I went there. Not perhaps the most profound way, in retrospect, for people to position themselves and move into an academic career, but that was the world that I knew. I remember when I eventually did have the opportunity to go on to a four-year college. I got admitted to UCLA, but UCLA and LA was such a daunting, menacing, threatening world for a country bumpkin like myself. I couldn't possibly go there. Santa Barbara was probably equal distance, but it was easy. It was less hectic, less urban. And so, I went there. Again, in an academic way, I probably should have gone to UCLA. It would have positioned me better. But I was simply unprepared.

So I kind of stumbled my way into an academic world and life with not a clear understanding of all that was involved. I had certainly the ability and the talent to do well, and I eventually did. But I remember it was like a fish out of water. It was just such a foreign, alien world to me. And navigating it had its challenges. But again, I was kind of amphibious. I could kind of navigate my way through worlds with some agility and some success. So, that's perhaps what allowed me to overcome those obstacles and those challenges that I faced at that time.

01-00:19:30
Holmes: As you were getting into junior college and spending those two to three years before transferring to Santa Barbara, which we'll get to in a minute, what were some of the majors and career paths you were considering at that time?

01-00:19:46
Almaguer: People would be completely shocked to hear that my earliest major was English. I was an American Lit person. I was immersed in the world of literature. Why? Because the people who I took courses from at Ventura College, they were the most interesting. They were the most progressive. They were the ones who were pushing the envelope on not only academic issues but political issues. They were more liberal, kind of left part of the faculty that I gravitated to. So, I was an English major. I actually also studied art history. The art history stuff stays with me, as opposed to the literature.

I eventually gravitated to political science, probably the most conservative field in the social sciences. But I was deeply already piqued by the politics of

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the moment, the anti-war movement, the civil rights movement, the emerging, eventually, woman's movement. And so the politics of the moment completely captivated my interest. So, I studied political science, and then I took a course from a woman, Maxine Tallman. I'll never forget her, a sociologist. And, that's where I found myself, okay, this is what I want to do. This explains the realities that were most resonant and important to me, locating myself, locating my family, locating where I'm from in a larger kind of context of migration, of settlement, of work, of opportunities, lack of opportunities, the impact on quality of life of families.

So, much of what people go through in their undergraduate years are kind of reconciling and finding themselves in those autobiographical dimensions of our coming of age. Sociology provided that window, where political science was a little bit too limited. Literature was a little bit too immediate and personal and individual. I wanted a larger context to understand and wrap my head around what was happening with me, my family, with the moment that I was living in. And, that's where I fell into sociology and haven't looked back since.

01-00:22:22
Holmes: Let's talk a little bit about UC Santa Barbara. So you transfer there after three years in junior college. That had to be probably a huge adjustment, going from a smaller community colleges to a big research university. Talk a little bit about your experience there at Santa Barbara.

01-00:22:45
Almaguer: Getting there was probably where I should start. I was in my third year, maybe fourth year of community college. And, I remember distinctly a young, white activist with SDS, Students for a Democratic Society, who actually knew the sociologist that I had worked with, came to recruit people. He was from Santa Barbara. And he brought applications. He brought financial aid forms and came and talked to a group of people about transferring. I had not really thought about that too much, but here was the golden opportunity. And he came with these applications. I remember filling them out. My dear friend and my *compadre* and still dear friend, Jorge Corralejo, lived in the other side of town where I did, was a year behind me. We both were in community college at the same time. We applied. We were doing incredibly well academically and got in.

Perhaps most importantly, EOP was emerging at that moment and provided the resources that my family could not have possibly provided. So, I just remember it was those early moments of affirmative action, of extending a hand and an opportunity, not doing anyone a particular favor, but just showing how you do that. This is how you apply. Yes, there are monies. Yes, there are loans. Yes, there are grants. Yes, there is a way to do this. And, my family really struggled. My dad was unemployed, was in jail. We were on welfare

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more times than I care to admit. There were no resources to send Tommy to college. It just wasn't going to happen.

So, that was the pathway that I fell into and found, and that opened up a world. I'm always deeply grateful and indebted to those people that opened those doors, that shared that information, that made it possible. I think if I was just to very quickly kind of encapsulate my life, someone opened a door for me. Someone nudged it open. I stepped into that breach. I pushed that door open and went into that world. And I've spent fifty years with my hand on that door, making sure that other people followed that footstep and had those same opportunities. That's what my life is all about. It's really very simple, paying it forward and doing the same kind of good work and good things that people provided me and those critical moments. So, that's enveloped my life and guided me through this world.

01-00:25:43
Holmes: As you started there at Santa Barbara in your undergraduate years, what really stands out to you about that bigger environment? Particularly when we think of the field of Chicano Studies, Santa Barbara was really one of the main institutions. I think about the year before you came, the *Plan de Santa Bárbara*, in 1969, you also had a Chicano Research Center there in Santa Barbara. Talk a little bit about that.

01-00:26:17
Almaguer: I was actually an undergraduate at Santa Barbara in 1969. I remember going to the *Plan de Santa Bárbara* conference and meeting held near the campus. And so, I had just come to Santa Barbara, so I had not been there long, was not a student activist and leader by any stretch of the imagination. But I was a part of that world, and it was a world that opened up in front of me. We were all this kind of group of people with similar backgrounds, this kind of backlog of people that had not had opportunities before that. So there was kind of a floodgate of people of very similar backgrounds and experiences that all came together and who were all coming together in a profound way at that moment—the birth of the Chicano movement. And certainly, the farm workers were already on the scene in a profound way.

So, it was a very heady moment where people were beginning to kind of crystallize a sense of who they were. I probably called myself a Mexican-American. I can only imagine that that was an identity category, cut my teeth on the meaning of the word "Chicano" and embraced that. My family was a little dubious of that because of what that category meant to them and stuff. But I fell into that world and embraced it and ran with it and never looked back.

01-00:28:04
Holmes: Talk a little bit about some mentors and advisors that helped you along the way, because you continued with the major of sociology.

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01-00:28:11
Almaguer: Yeah. I found myself in sociology, and this was at the very beginnings of the foundation of Chicano Studies. Actually, the first Chicano Studies course I took was at Santa Barbara. And, I was blessed. It was with Pedro Castillo, who eventually became my colleague at UC Santa Cruz. He was a lecturer in the history department. I learned at his feet about Chicano history. I remember it was a large lecture course, and it may have been a couple of semesters or quarters long. But I took a number of courses with Pedro, and that was kind of foundational on that side. We have remained friends to this day.

In sociology, where I really kind of found myself, I was blessed. I had mentors like Dick Flacks, Harvey Molotch, Milton Mankoff, in that field who introduced me to Marxism, introduced me to critical sociology. And provided another dimension of the Mexican migration history reality that I was trying to wrap my head around and come to terms with, and brought a larger way of mapping and understanding that reality. Again, these class issues, working-class realities, capitalism, and all of those kinds of dimensions that were part of an ethnic history but that filled it in a larger kind of historical process. So, that's what sociology gave to me.

So, I brought that sociological world and understanding of big themes, historical processes, whether it's capitalism or imperialism or colonization. And how those larger trends and historical dimensions of our reality impacted on my small world and life and understanding the Mexican experience in a much broader kind of social context. And that's what sociology gave me, and that's what I gravitated to, that explanation. Now, other colleagues would move into the humanities. They wanted to focus on the individual, autobiography and the profundity of that aperture and vantage point as a way of understanding the same population and the same realities.

That was not satisfying enough for me. If I was to step back, idiographic, particular unique dimensions of history and reality as opposed to nomothetic, larger group processes, generalizable patterns, this is the stuff that made the most sense to me. So, that was foundational. I was convinced. I bought in. I said, "Okay, sold. Sign me up." And I spent the next forty years doing that.

01-00:31:45
Holmes: Of course, I want to get your thoughts on the development of the field. But before we leave Santa Barbara I had just two more questions on that front. And one is, with EOP at this time, did you see a diversification within that world there at Santa Barbara, with the student body and faculty, as well as what was being taught in the classroom? Did you see a blossoming of diversification within on that environment?

01-00:32:35
Almaguer: There was a blossoming. We were not just a handful. We were there in large numbers, given the demographics of Southern California and Santa Barbara. And yet, if I were to look at the foundational things that were there for us, it

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really was EOP. I just remember Bill Villa, Fernando de Necochea. I remember these folks who were staff people helping people navigate their way through the academy. At the faculty end, there was Jesus Chavarria who was assistant professor in history. Pedro was there. Carlos Ornelas was there in political science as well. There were not a lot of faculty as there certainly is now. And so, the faculty presence was there. But it was a different world for me. I was an undergraduate, not even a graduate student, and they were faculty, and so I didn't travel in those worlds.

I was just a small part of the bigger picture. But it was always an incredibly supportive environment, which is not to say that there were not divisions, and there certainly were very profound divisions among the students at Santa Barbara at the time. There was just a commemoration of the *Plan de Santa Bárbara* that happened just a month or two ago, and honoring some of the people that were there at the time. And again at this point I know that Fernando de Necochea and Bill Villa, the staff people who were so central there, were honored and were part of that. And the founding activists from MEChA were there.

Yet, if I was to be honest with you, I was part of the opposition. I was part of a group of people called La Raza Libre who were a group of people who were also cut from the same cloth, but we had a very different kind of emerging politic. It was less kind of cultural nationalist "rice and beans" Chicano kind of politics and nationalism. We were far more interested in left critiques of the world. We were far more open to certainly socialist kind of politics. We were certainly more open to coalition politics, Third World politics than the people who were far more embedded and focused on strict Chicano MEChA, Chicano Studies kinds of politics, which we all supported. But, again, there were these tensions and divisions.

So, even at the founding moments of the field, where I kind of locate myself and identify with the field, I was always kind of at the edge, always kind of a part of but also throwing rocks—good metaphor, come to haunt me later—throwing rocks from the sidelines and from afar and always questioning, always critical. That's what we do. It's so easy to become a sociologist when you have that mindset. And so, those are the things that resonate most from that particular period.

01-00:36:09

Holmes: Before we leave Santa Barbara I want to talk a little bit about activism on campus. And certainly one of the most famous incidents of activism there at Santa Barbara was the Isla Vista riots in 1970, which resulted in, of course, the burning of the Bank of America. Discuss a little bit about your experience with that.

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01-00:36:37
Almaguer: Oh, Todd. I won't use much discretion here. Let me just begin by saying the politics of that moment were profound, not only because of the Isla Vista riots. And what kind of punctuated much of that was the critique of capitalism that was so profoundly emergent. I remember two of my mentors, Dick Flacks and Milton Mankoff, wrote an article about the Santa Barbara bank burning, and it was the biggest capitalist institution there, and so people went after it. Where I have some hesitation is that I was centrally involved in the politics of that period, deeply influenced by some of the faculty, not so much in sociology but in other fields where I also studied, left-political-leaning folks who also became very active that particular moment. And, the kind of people that I was affiliated with were centrally involved.

I eventually got myself arrested during that period. I didn't get arrested for the burning of the Bank of America. There were five other people that were indicted, and they were eventually not convicted of that. It was by some grace of God that I was not implicated in that. I was a Disneyland revolutionary at the time and got involved with other forms of protest. And one of them actually led to my arrest for attempted arson on a police car. I was arrested with a firebomb in my pocket with a gun put to my head, told that if I moved I was going to get my head blown off.

So, when I say Disneyland revolutionary, I bought into it, ran with it as I run with things, with gusto, most of my life. And, I ran up against the state in a very profound way. So, those were heady moments. Those were moments where we thought socialism was in the offing, and these were possibilities and going after the Bank of America was considered a good thing. I remember having a poster of the burning of the Bank of America on a poster that was made during that period on my wall. So, yeah, that was a profoundly important part. And that kind of fracas, kind of politic and playing a role in that, and being influenced by that, was a profound turning point for me.

01-00:39:53
Holmes: I wanted to get your thoughts on, as you were saying, you were there in 1969 at the *Plan de Sánta Barbara*. And, in many respects, what became known as Chicano Studies was really taking shape right around this time. Discuss your observations even as an undergrad of the field and its development at this time. Were there particular works during this period that really strike and stand out to you?

01-00:40:28
Almaguer: It was such an early period. I remember the classic book at the time was Carey McWilliams' *North from Mexico*. Ernesto Galarza's work was also profoundly relevant at that particular point, *Merchants of Labor.* I remember Meier and Rivera's *The Chicanos,* one of the first compendiums of the history and mapping of the history of Chicanos. Rudy Acuña's foundational *Occupied America* came at that period. But it was early on. It was Carey McWilliams. And, for all of the promises and perhaps the problems with that work, the field

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was just emerging. There was so little there for us. So, it doesn't surprise me in the least, Todd, that in that vacuum where it was difficult to do sociological, anthropological literary studies without having a firm understanding of the foundational history of this population we were going to look at, many of us gravitated towards historical work, full-fledged historians and people not trained in history. The fellow travelers who were from sociology, anthropology, taking on historical themes in our work. So, we all gravitated to that moment, and it was a convergence of interest, of study, of this emergence of historical work that we could use in the classroom that would become central to training people at the undergraduate and graduate level. Then with that foundation, I think the hope was that it would be built upon in various other disciplinary ways that enriched work because these works would be embedded with some historical foundation.

So, that's where people just kind of gravitated to. Of the twenty-four people who you're interviewing for this project, sixteen are card-carrying historians. There's five of us who are social scientists, who have done historical work. Mario Barrera, David Montejano and myself. That's what we did. And then you have the people in the humanities, Rosaura Sanchez, *The Squatter and the Don,* and Ramón Saldívar. All of us who were non-historians were doing work that was deeply immersed in some understanding of a historical period. And so, that moment was just a rich era of foment and excitement, passion and dedication to filling that gap and that vacuum. It was wonderful.

01-00:43:58
Holmes: As this field is taking shape, there's a number of journals that begin to publish this new scholarship. We have *El Grito* in 1967, which was much more literary. That was started here at Berkeley. *Aztlán: the Chicano Journal of Social Science and the Arts* at UCLA. And then even at Santa Barbara by 1970, *The Journal of Mexican-American History*, which I know was related to the Chicano Research Center. During this early period are there other academic journals that stand out in your memory that are developing at this time?

01-00:44:57
Almaguer: Well, I think you've put your finger on the core ones. There was also the short-lived *Atisbos* at Stanford back then. And certainly on this campus, someone like Octavio Romano in public health, doing work like that, when I came to Berkeley in '71. Nick Vaca was a couple of years ahead of me in sociology, and he was foundational in the work of *El Grito*. His classic article on his review of the literature and the social sciences had a profound impact on me. I was blessed to have gotten to know Nick at that time. So, Berkeley was just the perfect place for that interdisciplinary foment. What I was experiencing and seeing emerge at Santa Barbara, then when I came here it was kind of in full flower. And I came as a graduate student, so it was no longer just an undergraduate taking courses, but graduate seminars and studies

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and working with different people in my department and other departments. So, it was a profound moment.

01-00:46:16
Holmes: Here's a very new field developing, and now you have journals where scholars can publish, present new ideas, and start a discourse. What did that mean for you to have a place where you can do work in Chicano Studies and actually have a place to publish it?

01-00:46:45
Almaguer: I was profoundly thrilled that we had these journals. I didn't really give much thought to my playing a role in them. It just seemed to happen. And then I became deeply immersed in that. But having a place, a venue, a publication outlet where a final product could reach an audience, was a really profound moment and opportunity for us, particularly, again, with the focus on Chicanos and Mexican populations. So, someone like myself in sociology, yes, we were expected to publish in race relations journals and these kinds of things, whether historical sociology journals and all. But our heart was always with the Latino or Chicano focus of the journals that were important at the time, *El Grito* and *Aztlán*, I think, probably most centrally.

So, I was deeply supportive and grateful for those opportunities because I very, very quickly, in maybe the second or third issue, actually had an article published. It was kind of stunning and daunting. I go back and read it and, of course, cringe at every sentence that I wrote fifty years ago. I keep thinking this is not a complete sentence, Tomás. But, that aside, it was a moment of welcoming, a moment of openness to ideas and different ways of thinking and trying to make sense and mapping out these realities. So, for that, that was profound for me because I ended up publishing an article in 1971. It was actually a paper that I wrote for Dick Flacks for a graduate seminar that I took with him as an undergraduate student at Santa Barbara. He allowed me to take a graduate seminar with him. I wrote this paper and took it to Berkeley with me because I had referenced Bob Blauner's work and showed it to Bob Blauner in my first year. He helped me, gave me some feedback, and it was published the next year.

01-00:49:19

And, then I ended up publishing a number of other things in that period, mostly in *Aztlán*, later in *Labor History* and *Review*, *The World-Systems Journal.* And so, there were not only the Latino journals, but there were also other journals that were open to the kind of work we were doing that wanted to expand the scope of what they were doing, whether it was history journals or social science journals or left journals, they were open. Many of us took that opportunity and challenge and submitted stuff. And sometimes they got accepted. Sometimes they didn't and you just reworked them. That's what we did. So, I was just deeply grateful because I know that many of us continue to face the challenges of getting our work out there and getting access to venues

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and places where they can find an audience and be recognized for the value of the contributions they make.

But at that point, there was a thirst and there was a hunger, and so there was far more interest in our work. I will always be grateful for those people like Juan Gómez-Quiñones and others at *Aztlán*, and Romano here with *El Grito* that pushed and made those journals a reality and then welcomed people to write for them and do peer reviews for things that were later submitted.

01-00:51:14
Holmes: Let's talk briefly about the Chicano movement because this obviously also played a very important role in the rise of the field. And it's one that you, as you were saying, were connected with pretty closely. How did you see these facets of social activism begin to influence the field of Chicano Studies?

01-00:51:37
Almaguer: The movement certainly was intimately bound up with the development of Chicano Studies because the development of Chicano Studies was anchored in an understanding of that population and their movement and their struggle. There was a very passionate not only commitment to the study and the population but for the redress of the various things that we were contesting at the time, whether it was educational, job, what have you. And so, the movement had an undeniable impact in shaping the spirit of the times, the politics of the moment, and in shaping a research agenda for those of us who were going on to say, "Okay, we don't quite understand all of this," or "No, this history was a little bit more complicated," or "No, this strike was not simply something that happened in this way, here were other things that impacted that."

So, it was the profundity of the politics of the moment and bringing that sense of social justice to the field of study that we brought, that linked these things together in this kind of symbiotic way that was almost impossible for people to rip away because, why? We were talking about ourselves, our families, our communities and all. And so, this was not just academic enterprise and ivory tower self-indulgence. These were serious things. These were profound things. We carried a burden to understand and shed light and to push against those obstacles and impediments, and to redress those things that the movement was so centrally involved with. So, it's not the least bit surprising that the academic agenda and world were shaped profoundly by not only the movement but the politics of that period and the people who were guiding it, like Galarza, Chavez and others. It was a very heady foundational moment.

01-00:54:56
Holmes: Let's talk a little bit about coming to UC Berkeley. You started graduate studies in sociology at UC Berkeley in 1971. What was the environment like for a young Chicano scholar and graduate student here at Berkeley?

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01-00:55:16
Almaguer: It was heaven. Coming to sociology in particular, I remember there were always ten to twenty graduate students, Chicano graduate students, in the same department who would take classes together, who would meet, who would socialize and commiserate and all. And then, I think there was always ten to fifteen, upward to twenty people in that department and related departments. So, to come and to have people in anthropology like Pat Zavella, people like Lupe Frias in economics, and others in a variety of fields here, all coming from similar backgrounds, all with similar kind of politics and similar passions about the Chicano movement, similar sets of research interests around Mexican populations, it was an absolutely glorious moment. It was that critical mass—I wasn't just the only one. And that's what made the profound difference. It was a critical mass of graduate students.

There was also a handful of faculty at the time. Romano was around, certainly. But Mario Barrera and Carlos Muñoz came later to Berkeley. But there was already emerging Chicano Studies. I actually, I think in my third year as a graduate student in sociology, began teaching in Chicano Studies here on this campus as a lecturer. So, the opportunities were here. That critical mass was here. And that's what made all the difference in the world. I feel for those people who were in other schools where they were the only one. I'm sure my colleagues will share multiple stories of that. But Berkeley was different. And, I'll be honest, I fell into Berkeley. I applied to UCLA and got admitted in sociology. I applied to Santa Barbara to go to graduate school there. But as a result of having been involved in the Santa Barbara riots and all and having been arrested, I lost my fellowship at Santa Barbara. They took it away. I would have probably stayed if they hadn't.

Then there was UCLA, I got admitted both as an undergrad and a graduate. It was just too scary, too daunting for me as a country bumpkin from adjacent Ventura County to attend UCLA. It was just too scary, and I didn't want to commute. And then I remember applying late to Berkeley. I was months late. They made an exception, and they admitted me, and they gave me money that I didn't have anywhere else. I probably had resources at UCLA offered, but it wasn't where I wanted to go. So, I came here and I just kind of fell into it. It's just like, okay, yeah, you're late app? Okay. I graduated with high honors, and so I was certainly qualified. So, I came, and best set of circumstances that could have ever happened to me because I completely flourished and found a sense of identity and purpose here.

My identity as a graduate student, junior faculty, and even now as a senior faculty is always anchored here on this campus because this is where I cut my teeth. This is where I came of age. This is where I helped contribute to an emergence of the field, my very small part in that much larger kind of moment in history and series of contributions that were made by people from this campus. And then, later, the critical mass led to the convergence of people, graduate students and faculty, to form a collective, the Chicano Political

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Economy Collective. It was a study group and we gave a name to it. But it became kind of a refuge of intellectual support and development of our own work. We read one another's work outside of the classroom, outside of the feedback that we got from our mentors and the faculty.

01-00:59:55

So, there was kind of this looking inward and support and development that happened here. It happened in a number of places. It happened in UCLA. It happened certainly at UT Austin. It happened at Stanford. And there were these critical nodal points, maybe at Notre Dame with Julian Samora. But there were small little pockets of critical masses of people, and Berkeley was one of them. I reflected as I was thinking about this interview, and I think about a handful of people that I worked with in that Political Economy Collective. David Montejano has written, like, four books. Pat Zavella makes us all look bad by having now done nearly ten book projects. A couple of things I contributed, Felipe Gonzalez did a couple of books more recently in New Mexico, Jorge Chapa's *Burden of Support.* I can count fifteen, twenty books by people who were part of that critical mass of graduate students in the seventies. That's amazing.

Mario Barrera, how could I forget Mario's *Race and Class in the Southwest*? Carlos Muñoz' *Youth, Identity and Power* was fomented and nurtured in this context. So, Berkeley has much to be proud of for what it did, maybe sometimes in spite of itself, but it did welcome and open opportunities. The Graduate Minority Fellowship was the fellowship that many of us had access to, that became the foundation of our support. Some of us got other forms of support from the Ford Foundation and elsewhere. But this campus made that possible. It brought people together. It nurtured. It helped us grow and develop in conversation with the larger institutional offerings but also when we turn inward.

And it was that turning inward that was perhaps most profound. And we were supportive of one another. We were also lethal with one another, obviously little bantam roosters fighting for position and status and all of those ridiculous kind of trappings of that moment. But again, my whole career is deeply anchored, and I owe a great deal to the opportunities that this campus afforded me coming in the seventies.

01-01:02:26

Holmes: Talk a little bit about the mentors and advisors that you worked with here on campus.

01-01:02:33

Almaguer: The people in sociology were profoundly important. I came to study race relations, would be the field at that moment. And I came to work with Bob Blauner, who passed away recently, a profoundly important person in my life in shaping of my academic interests, and he pushed me. And equally profound was Troy Duster, a mentor, colleague who I deeply owe more than I can ever

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repay. His mentorship guided me through various pitfalls and obstacles that I had to navigate, and always with a sense of grace and dignity, a profundity of intellect that he carries with him—I was in awe of the man. Michael Burawoy was a younger faculty at the time, profoundly brilliant in kind of the Marxist tradition. He was incredibly helpful. I had David Matza; William Kornhauser. I had a number of people who I studied with and who shaped my way of thinking about whether it was stratification or race or eventually gender historical sociology or theory. Sociology, I think it was still ranked the number one department in the country. And again, I was blessed to have fallen into that world.

Also, here in Ethnic Studies, I mentioned I was a lecturer in the early seventies. I remember it was a profound moment—we actually fired ourselves so we could convert all of that lecture money into a tenure-track position. And Mario Barrera and Carlos Muñoz were the initial hires, the first tenure track faculty. Ron Takaki came from UCLA at that moment. So, there was a critical mass of faculty outside of sociology that were a source of great support and nurturance to me. Mario and Carlos in important ways shaped my thinking because of our common interest in race and class and internal colonization.

01-01:05:04

But perhaps more centrally Ron Takaki, that man was so central to shaping my academic career and my way of thinking about the world and race issues and comparative race issues most profoundly. Ron Takaki became a central mentor. So, I had sociologists. I had people in Ethnic Studies, Ron Takaki centrally. And also, I took full advantage of working with Albert Camarillo, who had been hired at Stanford. So, I had two historians on my dissertation committee and a couple of sociologists. Again, I was blessed. Where do you have people of that caliber working with you, giving generously of their time, and nurturing you and supporting you in multiple ways, in the classroom, outside of the classroom, and just guiding you through that life in the academy?

Yeah, that was, again, so central. I've never forgotten that. And so, I have done to the best of my abilities, as much as I can to do what they did, to be there, to always be available, to always offer feedback, to always be supportive, to always write those letters, to always help them with career decisions, and to help shape and develop not only their work but their careers and their opportunities. I was socialized really well into that world and the obligations and responsibilities that come with that. And I have carried them with me, and I've done everything I can to honor those people that helped me and to try to pay that forward in similar ways for other people. So again, the metaphor: They opened the door. I squeezed in. And I've done everything that I can to keep that door open and to welcome people in and to nurture them all along the way. That's kind of a very simple metaphor that I use to explain that.

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01-01:07:23
Holmes: Let's talk a little bit about some of your early scholarship.

01-01:07:28
Almaguer: Boring. [laughs]

01-01:07:30
Holmes: You were just speaking of some of these early articles, and I wanted to get your thoughts on this because a lot of it is, as we were talking off camera, when we look at someone's work, that's only one part of what they've done, outside the teaching and mentoring and other facilities, even in administration, the thankless job.

01-01:07:53
Almaguer: Thank you. That's the word, thankless.

01-01:07:57
Holmes: But I wanted to talk about your first article in 1971, "Towards the Study of Chicano Internal Colonialism." And again, if we think about the internal colonial model, this is published a year before Rudy Acuña's *Occupied America.* This is published even before Mario Barrera, if I'm correct on that, Mario's book on this. And, you published this in *Aztlán*. Again, one of the earliest, only the second issue, I want to say.

01-01:08:36
Almaguer: I think it was the second.

01-01:08:39
Holmes: Yeah, because I think it just started in 1971, in regards to putting out those issues. So, discuss the genesis of this article.

01-01:08:51
Almaguer: As I mentioned a little earlier, I wrote that article as a seminar paper with Dick Flacks as an undergraduate in Santa Barbara. Again, he was kind enough because I had taken classes with him before to let me sit in his graduate seminar. I was out of my element, I have to admit. But I did reasonably well. I wrote this interesting piece that was in conversation with Robert Blauner's *Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt*, which was an attempt to kind of push me on assimilation and prejudice kinds of theories of race relations, particularly assimilation models and acculturation models. And Blauner was profoundly talking about folks of color having a qualitatively different historical experience and the profundity and centrality of racial inequality punctuating those histories.

And so, Blauner's work, although it was focusing on African-Americans—oh my God, colonization? Wait a minute. Mexican War, imperial conquest, the colonization of the Southwest—it all made perfect sense to me. It was like, okay, wait a minute. This isn't the mother country and the colony and this kind of classic colonial India and England. It was a different relationship. But, it was part of a much larger pattern and process of not only global capitalist

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development and expansion and imperialist conquests of the non-Western world. And when I began to think about that, it completely transformed my way of thinking about race relations from the canon at the time, assimilation theory. And so I wrote this little think piece like, okay, well, what about this and what about that?

01-01:10:42

And it was just a think piece. There was no history. There was no archival work. What did I know about that as an undergrad in sociology? And so I wrote this piece, and Flacks really liked it and said, "You should work on this. Take it to Bob," he knew Blauner, "and develop it further." And so, I did, and I believe it was probably one of my first seminars my first year. I took a class with Blauner and rewrote that piece. Bob was always so polite and so supportive. He realized the limitations of my work. And yet he was always so generous with his time and his compliments. So, I look back, and again I cringe when I look at that. I try to not think about that piece. But yet, I do have to acknowledge like that was pretty heady at that time, to come into your first year and write a paper and have it published in your second year in the emerging journal of the field.

Unfortunately, as my colleagues would probably attest with great enthusiasm, I became a little megalomaniacal, I'm sure, incredibly competitive with other folks who were equally pushing the envelope. You mentioned Marrio's *Race and Class in the Southwest* would come out, and Carlos and [Charles] Ornelas had wrote "The Barrio as an Internal Colony" right about the same time that my *Aztlán* article appeared. We were, of course, following on William Tabb and Bob Allen's work, and certainly the work of Latin Americanist Pablo Gonzalez Casanova, Rodolfo Stavenhagen who were talking about colonization and internal colonization of native peoples in Mexico.

So, there was this amazing kind of foment of ideas outside of Chicano Studies and outside of Ethnic Studies, per se, if we were just thinking about them focusing on the ethnic populations and at that moment their kind of historical realities. Here were people talking about larger issues that impacted us that may have helped explain what the trajectory of our history, the modalities of the realities that that history spawned in our communities. And so, those things were the things that excited a sociologist like myself. I just was immersed. I was sold. I was into it.

01-01:13:31

Holmes: One of the things I found that was interesting in that piece is that you look at both the colonial and the internal colonial model. And this is where I think you draw the distinction that the Chicano experience fits in both. That's what makes it so unique in the Southwest, say, vis-à-vis African-Americans, that it's really one of the unique communities within America that has experience with both of those models.

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01-01:14:07
Almaguer: Again, it's those linkages and trying to parse out the commonalities and the differences and what is unique to one context as opposed to another. The intellectual excitement and foment that those kinds of things generated for social scientists among us was something that we just reveled in. We were just voracious in our reading of works outside of our field to try to understand these much larger kinds of mappings and processes that were apparent, that were beginning to see like, oh yes, this is really a part of that for Mexicans. Yeah, we're not from the immigrant population, from the Mayflower that landed on the East Coast. No, this is a different reality. We're part of a population that was subject to conquests and to imperial conquests and eventual colonization and incorporation in a fundamentally subordinate kind of way.

So, it was all of that, Todd, that I think just excited us beyond belief. Montejano's work, *Anglos and Mexicans in Texas*, it's the same thing in that particular context in Texas. Mario's work in the Southwest and my own work in California, we were all grappling with very similar issues, trying to understand what was going on. We knew we weren't just in the most recent immigrant group going through these immigration stages of incorporation. We knew that didn't quite resonate with our history. So, this notion of being colonized or some kind of conflict as opposed to consensus theory of patterns of race relations was something that we gravitated to because it made more sense that some of the other explanations. And we ran with it in really interesting ways. I'm not sure what else I can add to that.

01-01:16:31
Holmes: Well adding to that, you published your second article in 1974, which seems to build off the same thing, particularly the importance of looking at race and class. And that's where you're looking at the historical notes on Chicano oppression, again published in *Aztlán*, "The Dialectics of Race and Class Oppression in North America."

01-01:16:53
Almaguer: Such infelicitous terminology and choice of terms. Get over it, Tomás. Get over it. Get rid of the dialectics and the Marxist spin.

01-01:17:02
Holmes: But it is 1974, right?

01-01:17:05
Almaguer: Yeah. Thank you for letting me forgive myself.

01-01:17:08
Holmes: I think if we're being honest, Jerry Brown during this same time as governor, during his first run as governor, would use the word "dialectic" in a news conference.

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01-01:17:19
Almaguer: Okay, well I'm in good company, I guess. I'll forgive myself. But yeah, if the first piece was just this kind of think piece like, oh, this might be an interesting idea to pursue, that second piece was an attempt to kind of ground it a little bit more historically. And again, I look back at that and say, okay, obviously all secondary sources. There's nothing really profoundly new and important about this. Nice try, Tomás. Good hit. Interesting. Okay, no gold star. But again, I was incredibly critical of my own work, needless to say. And yet I kept reworking that. Much to my surprise, actually just a month ago, *Aztlán* issued a book in which that article was reprinted. It still haunts me. It still follows me. I can't get away from that piece.

Then that piece eventually morphed into "Race and Class, Chicano Oppression," in the *Socialist Review* version of that piece. Not surprisingly, while I was at Berkeley I ran in various circles, and because of my kind of left Marxist leanings, I became part of the *Socialist Review* or *Socialist Revolution*, actually, at the time. How subtle. I'm worrying about dialectics, and I'm part of a journal called *Socialist Revolution*? Come on. Get over it. But, they asked if I would rework that for them, and I did. And probably that was the cleanest version of the piece. My work has always been working, reworking, shamelessly, not just for multiple publications but to try to get it right because I have always been so deeply, deeply critical of my work in retrospect, and tried to save face by just doing a little better job. Even to this day, actually, one of the more recent things that I've published in an anthology is, again, a reworking of something. And so, I'm constantly endeavoring to try to get it right. I'm not sure I really ever do. But, we make the gallant effort.

01-01:19:26
Holmes: In 1977, you published a piece, "Interpreting Chicano History, the World-System Approach in the 19th Century." And this is where I saw one of the most direct influences of the Chicano Political Economy Collective, because I know David Montejano was also working with world-systems around this same time and Wallerstein's very important framework. Discuss this piece a bit, the kind of adaptation you perceived.

01-01:20:04
Almaguer: It was yet another attempt at reconciling our reality with a body of academic literature. And here Immanuel Wallerstein, whose world-systems books were just completely exploding at the time, and this much larger mapping of the global capitalism and how it developed and the circulation of money and labor systems. So, his book we all read. We all were impressed. And, I don't know quite how it happened. I know that I was one of the people involved with those communications with Wallerstein and the journal *Review.* They asked if they could do a special issue with some of the stuff that we were doing. They knew a little bit about what we were doing.

We had Malaquias Montoya do the cover art for that special issue. We were really thrilled that he was willing to do that for us. And, we published a whole

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issue of stuff. I think another think piece was looking at world-systems stuff and trying to map that into the timeline. I was working on California and 19th century history and even going back. So, again, trying to play around, okay, does this make sense, just like I did with the internal colonial model. Does that shed any light? No. Is that too reductionist? Is that too functionalist an analysis? Again, Todd, my whole career is just struggling to try to make sense of realities and trying to articulate them in the most precise and cogent way possible and then always looking back and saying you didn't quite get there, that didn't quite work, and trying again.

For historians, it's the value of your archival work and the rigors of what you bring—for us social scientists it's, how cute are your ideas? How profoundly do they help explain something? So, our trade is anchored in different stuff. We grant ourselves the folly of being able to just rework and try to get something right, because we're simply dealing with ideas and frameworks as opposed to the hard work that historians actually do to not just give us a cute framework, but why don't you bring something to the table that's new, that we can actually value as an original kind of contribution in that sense as opposed to some clever idea.

01-01:22:50
Holmes: Well, I will have to say that those ideas and frameworks sometimes have much longer legs than what our archival work can have. Those are important as well. They help us historians actually take all that archival work and actually make sense of them. So, they go hand in hand.

01-01:23:08
Almaguer: That's kind of you to say. I'm not sure I believe it. [laughs]

01-01:23:15
Holmes: It's true. Well, let's talk a little bit about your dissertation and first book before we take a break. You finished your dissertation in 1979, titled "Class, Race and Capitalist Development: The Social Transformation of a Southern California County." And this would turn into the book *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California,* which is now in its second reprinting. Discuss the genesis of this project. What we see a lot in the field is scholars going back to their home communities to try to figure things out and to see how things then expand from there. That seems true here. So, discuss the genesis of this work and how it started out.

01-01:24:04
Almaguer: Academics are always very honest about their work and the autobiographical dimensions that underpin that work. And many times, and certainly in my case, my work, aside from these kind of think pieces, part of my payback to honor my family and honor where I'm from and all of that was to produce something that documented my family's history in Southern California. I remember being profoundly impacted by Albert Camarillo's *Chicanos in a Changing Society.* I still just absolutely love and revere that book and Albert's

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ability to look at a community, looking at Santa Barbara, and doing it historically and marshaling the archival evidence needed to make the case that he made in that seminal work.

Santa Barbara was right adjacent to Ventura County. Ventura County was actually a part of Santa Barbara County for a time. And so, as a dissertation I kept thinking, don't be heady. Just do something that honors and acknowledges who you are, where you're from, and your family in some way. And, I committed myself to doing a very small, not ambitious at the time, study of Ventura County. Who cares about Ventura County? Why is it important? Well, it was important for me personally, autobiographically, maybe not in the broad sweep of western history. But, it was something I wanted to do. It was my payback.

And I remember I started that by coming across a reference to the Oxnard sugar beet workers strike in 1903. It was just a paragraph or a couple of sentences, and I can't even remember now, it's been so long ago, which secondary textbooks made reference to that. But there was nothing written about that. Then I reflected. My mom and dad met in Oxnard. I lived in Oxnard for a brief period of time. I need to know something about this strike. And maybe that would be a way of opening up that window into that kind of autobiographical thread that I wanted to pull. So, I did this. I just immersed myself. I tried my hardest to do what historians do as an interloper from an adjacent field doing historical sociology, whatever that is.

I just immersed myself into finding every archival source I could possibly find and pull everything together I could possibly find on the Oxnard sugar beet workers strike and try to make sense of that. That's what drew me in. And rather than having the good sense to move from 1903 forward, to make sense of when my family came in 1923, and to kind of follow that, I foolishly went back in time from the early dawning into the 19th century. I kept going, only a sociologist would be foolish enough to say, oh, well let's just go back. Let's not go forward. And so, I did that. And so I said, okay, what I'll do is I'll look at the Mexican-American War. I'll look at the transformation of California, the decimation of the ranchos, the gold rush. And I'll try to track that period from the Mexican-American War to the turn of the century in this small, little world.

01-01:28:10

And that's what I did. It was just a very modest kind of contribution. So, that led to a dissertation that I am not proud of. It's crude, kind of Marxist analysis. I just cringe when I think about that. But that's where I was at the time. I was interested in class. I was interested in the economics of that transformation. I was interested in capitalist development, whether it was world-systems or whether it was a different process. And so, that's what kind of led me to focus on that particular period. It wasn't until I really got into that dissertation that it took me a long time to realize that you're not really looking. You're looking at

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the Mexican population in this particular locale. You're looking at capitalist development and how it impacted and shaped the transformation of the political economy of that area.

I came to finally realize very late in the game that what you're really interested in is race and racialization and the different ways that ethnic populations were racialized, and particularly the profoundly unique way in which Mexicans were racialized, at least segments of the population, as honorary whites, the elite, and others were not. And it really wasn't Marx and capitalism that was so profound. It was actually another theorist, Max Weber. Status, ethnic groups, status groups he called them. And it was not the exaction of monetary gain but the exaction of privilege and status on a racial basis that was profound.

01-01:30:02

So, that worked more from a Marxist kind of framing of the world with capitalism as the motivating and driving force of that history and trajectory to an understanding that it's really about race. It's really about the vagaries of colonization in a racialized colonial context that you're looking at. And the word that finally emerged, that crystallized that, was not internal colonialism. It was white supremacy. George Frederickson's work was profoundly influential in getting to that stage. And so, that dissertation with its limitations, and I remember my committee signing off on it. It wasn't quite ready, but I had a fellowship. And they said, okay, I've been in that situation now, so I know that feeling. I lived that experience where someone needs to get done and say, okay, it's good. It's not as good as it could be, but here you go.

And so, I got that done. But as always, I was deeply committed. I'm going to get this right. This is not what it should be. I did get the labor history Oxnard strike article out of that dissertation. And eventually, two chapters of the seven-chapter book of *Racial Fault Lines* drew from that. So, I used that. One of my fiercest critics, Edna Bonacich, when that book was published—hardcore Marxist, and I say that not in a disparaging but in an affectionate way—trashed the book when it eventually appeared but said she actually loved the historical, the two chapters, the Marxist chapters. It still had some of that residue in that Oxnard and the Ventura County chapters of the book.

01-01:31:57

But I morphed. I guess I switched sides in our big divide in sociology, Marx and Weber. Durkheim and the others, we didn't care too much about. But I switched sides, and so it was a profound transformation of my thinking and kind of moving away from class to race and then complicating what we mean by race in ways that needed explanation. And the Oxnard strike was the case in point. Samuel L. Gompers was willing to admit the first agricultural workers union, successful one in the country, into the AFL as a result of the victory of the Oxnard sugar beet workers strike. But they were only willing to

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bring in the Mexicans. They would not bring in the Japanese. Why? Well, because of the Exclusion Act, all the hysteria against the Japanese.

And that was a profound awakening. Here we were talking about people of color, stand united and fight. We are all the same, victims of racial inequality. Yet here was a case in point where, no, they recognized these differences far more profoundly than we were acknowledging now, kind of wrapping our inequalities all into one package as Third World people, and that there were moments when people were viewed quite differently. And, that cried out for an explanation, for a sociological explanation. So I spent—it was actually fifteen years after that dissertation that I wrote the other five chapters, wrote chapters on Asian-Americans, the brutal chapters that I wrote here at the Bancroft Library on Native Americans. This is before James Rawls' book appeared.

There were earlier things, but the imperial conquest in California had not yet really been given much visibility. And so, I said, okay. Get it right, Almaguer, if you're going to do this, if you're going to play in this world. So, I put my head down, and I spent years and years. The number of days and time that I spent in this library looking through microfiche, looking through manuscript censuses to track population demographics and work experiences and how people were embedded, the newspapers that I read endlessly to document the history of Ventura County but also the history of Native Americans and these different atrocities and the archival home, it was just—they say history is a bottomless pit. It is. There's no doubt.

So, I'm profoundly in awe of what historians do because they do it so well, and are profoundly critical of us interlopers who attempt to do this but never quite get it right. And yet, at this point, I wanted this work to be a work of historical sociology that had a serious archival core of original primary documents that I had excavated and looked at myself as well as these cute explanations from other theorists and social scientists to try to shed light on those realities. So, it was a profound kind of compilation of history and sociology that I was aiming at. Eventually the book was finished in kind of a truncated form. I'm never really happy with it. It was kind of out of joint. It should have been three times the size. It should have been a compendium of racial histories comparative throughout the state.

01-01:36:02

But I couldn't. That would have taken me another thirty years to do that. I couldn't possibly have done that. So, I just kind of said, okay, this is what I'm going to do. Two chapters on Mexicans, two chapters on Natives, two chapters on Asians, and try to make sense of what these folks and these histories have in common and how they are different and explain why. So, that's what I endeavored to do. It seems rather straightforward. It was hard. It was painful.

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01-01:36:30
Holmes: Well, if I'm correct here, it also stands as really one of the first real comparative works on race making and race relations in the US, particularly in the West.

01-01:36:47
Almaguer: Thank you. I'd like to think so. And Ron Takaki's *Iron Cages,* his 19th century sweep of that period was obviously deeply influential in getting me to think about multiple groups and racial formation and all. But that was my niche. But stop and think for a moment, Todd. Here I was, Chicano, Mexican-origin person, coming into a context, helping to contribute to the shaping and formation of Chicano Studies, both as an undergrad, graduate and faculty in terms of my writing and my teaching. And yet, my culminating work was not on Chicanos, per se. It was on different groups and looking at them comparatively and then ultimately saying, as bad as we've had it, folks, we were at least granted honorary whiteness and had some advantages.

That was heretical. I actually left California and went to Michigan when the book was published. I probably had to flee in some ways because I kept thinking, oh, you are just setting yourself up for a real beating, a real disappointment.

And how does this reconcile with Acuña, with Montejano and other people, Ricardo Griswold del Castillo, Camarillo and all of their profoundly important foundational works on Mexican populations, per se, in all of the depth? Here you're doing something kind of historical, kind of sociological. And you're not even giving us central focus. You're talking about us in comparison with other groups and then not making us look all that good, ultimately, in the bottom line. So, it was a troubling accomplishment, with some misgivings and some excitement and some appreciation, like okay, you at least gave it a good effort. You tried to pull this off. And yeah, maybe it's going to be useful. But I was deeply, deeply aware of how I was once again an outlier. I was once again at the margins, as I've always been, of a field. Even in one's first book, generally one's major contribution, I had already kind of moved in the different direction, for better or for worse. History will tell us.

01-01:39:26
Holmes: Well, that it's in its second printing, I think it already tells us quite a bit here.

01-01:39:31
Almaguer: Well, thank you.

01-01:39:33
Holmes: Well, Tomás, this is a great time to maybe take a break, and we'll finish up the second session.

01-01:39:36
Almaguer: Absolutely.

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01-01:39:37
Holmes: All right.

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Interview 2: March 12, 2019

02-00:00:00
Holmes: All right, this is Todd Holmes with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. Today's date is March 12, 2019, and we are starting our second session with Tomás Almaguer in his oral history as part of the Chicana/o Studies Oral History Project. We are here at the Bancroft Library in the beautiful city of Berkeley at the University of California. Tomás, thank you first of all for joining me for lunch.

02-00:00:31
Almaguer: Thank you for paying!

02-00:00:34
Holmes: It's the least I can do. We finished up in our last session talking about your dissertation and book and finishing up at Berkeley. I wanted to talk here about some of your early academic appointments to move us along into our second session. Let's maybe talk about your post-doctoral fellowships and appointments after graduate school. These connected with some of your earlier appointments give us a pretty good vantage point of looking at the development of Chicano Studies but also on different campuses. To start off, you received a postdoc fellowship here at UC Berkeley with the Institute for Study of Social Change. Talk a little bit about that experience.

02-00:01:23
Almaguer: Well, that was a wonderful opportunity for me because I graduated, or I got my degree in 1979. I finished the dissertation. And one of the people that I had been very close to, he actually wasn't on my dissertation committee, but he was really more like a very central advisor, was Troy Duster. Troy Duster headed the Institute for the Study of Social Change and had a very interesting NIMH project, and it was a very broad and expansive project and had predocs and postdocs. I ended up applying for one and was fortunate enough to get it and spent some time at the Institute for the Study of Social Change here and did some interesting work. I think probably any time anyone finishes a dissertation, as you might recall, it's a period of recovery and rebuilding and kind of reorienting yourself to the next stage. So I spent a lot of time doing that and then immediately realizing I needed to apply for jobs or other postdoc opportunities.

I was kind of excited about having completed the dissertation but saw very clearly its limitations and knew I needed a lot of additional work. I was nothing but absolutely blessed, and I can never, ever have one disparaging thing to say about having not been given opportunities, because I was completely blessed. Got a postdoc with Troy at the institute, certainly got a postdoc later at Stanford. I'm sure I had a Ford post. I was blessed. I spent more time off doing work than anyone should ever really be granted, I have to say in all candor. And, I used some of that time very productively, other times not so productively, but always doggedly kind of moving forward with a

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project. Eventually things fell in line and came to fruition for me. But, it was not a straightforward path—lots of dead ends and U-turns and all of that.

I was just fortunate enough to have the opportunity to be able to indulge those pitfalls and still kind of stay on course and get back to where I wanted to be and needed to be. But, when I think of that period after finishing, there's always a sense of misgiving, of squandered opportunities and time to have really catapulted my work forward. Yet, there's always other elements of one's life. I was married with two kids. I was dealing with personal kinds of issues and concerns, identity things. So, I also needed to jump off the academic bandwagon and address some of those things, those concerns. And postdocs, for better or for worse, sometimes provided those opportunities. When you're not holding down a job, working, teaching and doing all the other rigors of full-time employment, they afford you that opportunity. And so, I was blessed in that regard.

02-00:04:37
Holmes: You mentioned Stanford, because I know you were here at Berkeley on a postdoc. And then you got a two-year postdoc at Stanford. And I believe that was the Presidential Postdoc Fellowship. If I have things right, you were with the Department of Sociology on one hand as well as the Chicano Research Center.

02-00:05:00
Almaguer: Right. So, it was both in the Center for Chicano Research there that Al Camarillo headed with Armando Valdez, and courtesy postdoc appointment in the Department of Sociology where I did take classes and tried to work with those folks. But really, most of my attention was at the center and helping with one project in particular that kind of preoccupied my time there.

02-00:05:31
Holmes: Discuss a little bit about the environment there at Stanford, because Al Camarillo had come there by 1975, and the Chicano Research Center is only a few years old, I think, by the time that you come there. Discuss the environment for a Chicano scholar. What was built there at, of all places, Stanford University?

02-00:05:56
Almaguer: That's a really good and interesting question. It's strange because of the rivalry between Stanford and Berkeley. This is kind of my core identity. Stanford was always such a very different and strange world for me. I don't think I've ever been into a more pasteurized, homogenized place in my life. It was so beautiful, pristine but so sterile and so uninteresting for me in so many different ways. It was so very different. It was an isolated campus as opposed to the middle of a place like at Berkeley with all these access routes in and out of campus. And so, I felt like a fish out of water there. I certainly was not a big Stanford booster, having spent all of my graduate years at Cal.

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So, it was an odd fit, but I was deeply, again, as I mentioned earlier, deeply grateful for that opportunity and to have spent more time directly with Albert Camarillo, who had been on my dissertation committee and had been so incredibly generous. I will forever respect, admire and be indebted to him and what he has done and afforded me in terms of opportunities in my career path. And so, that was a godsend, and I was so happy to be able to work on one project in particular. I actually wrote a grant, and I forget now who it was to. But it was actually nicely done. I got funded, and we had a wonderful conference that was fully funded, brought in a number of people that led to a publication that Armando and myself edited. And, we brought a little something to the center which was a fledgling center at the time, and did some good work.

02-00:07:59

My own misgivings about that is that I just didn't do enough and was a bit too self-absorbed, self-possessed with other issues and concerns of a more personal kind of an immediate level that just distracted me. Again, postdocs are wonderful opportunities to soar and to excel and push things forwards. They're also a time to kind of contemplate and maybe even commiserate. And so, they're fleeting, and if you don't take full advantage of them, you certainly regret it later when you're on the academic bandwagon teaching and all. But that was just a very, very different reality for me. I remember living on campus. My roommate was David Gutierrez, an incredibly gifted and prominent historian in his own right.

I developed a network and friendships there with Al and Dave in particular that I cherish. I'm not as close and in touch with them as I was at that particular point in my life, but it's those kinds of connections that were key. And through Al I met George Fredrickson, who eventually played a very interesting role in the reshaping of the book that became *Racial Fault Lines*, and wrote some very nice things about it in the cover, or the back cover. And so, Stanford was a place of great sustenance and support and yet also a bit of an odd place for someone like me to have been there. I could never have stayed there or taught there. There was some possibility, but I was not the kind of person they were looking for in that department. I would have absolutely just died in that department. As luck and fortune would have it, I was there and applied and got a position at Berkeley. So, I came back very quickly and spent formative parts of an assistant professor career on this campus after having spent a couple of years there at Stanford.

02-00:10:25
Holmes: I want to transition to your time back here at Berkeley, because you were here almost nine years, I believe.

02-00:10:34
Almaguer: Yeah.

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02-00:10:35
Holmes: Discuss that experience. Let's start with the job market. You're applying for positions—are they just in sociology, or are there maybe Chicano Studies positions that are also opening up that you were able to—

02-00:10:53
Almaguer: I was a card-carrying sociologist, and so that's where I was kind of positioning myself for appointments, realizing full well that I could certainly do the Chicano Studies work that I was deeply committed to and would have relationships with whatever Ethnic Studies, Chicano Studies programs might be on a particular campus, because that would just be inevitable as something I would absolutely want to do. But I was looking for sociology positions, I think. And I never really applied to very many, unlike some students. Some of them applied to five, seven different places or whatever. I just only applied to just a couple of places, and if it happened, it did. If it didn't, then so be it.

I ended up applying here. They had been looking for many years for a Latino sociologist because of the large number of Latino students and the generation and emergence of the field, particularly on this campus. And so, sociology was good enough to realize that opening up a field for a specialist in Latino sociology, which was in its infancy at the time, just an emerging area within sociology, was something that they wanted to invest in. It was not without its very predictable set of differences about what kind of person and all. I remember distinctly when I did get the nod. It was an eleven-to-ten vote, and I beat out the competitor, whose name I'll use some discretion, but more quantitatively-oriented sociology, which more quantitatively-oriented mainstream folks were more enamored with because he did stuff that was more similar to what they were doing.

02-00:12:41

I was doing more of the stuff that some of the outliers in the department were doing who were on the other side of the political fence. And so, the alliances and the department divided along those lines. In retrospect, I thought it was like a football game—oh, I won the game. But, no, you don't win a game like that on an eleven-to-ten vote. So, in a normal context, without being in the midst of that, at that particular moment, it would be something I would tell somebody that you don't want to accept a position like that, because you're already set up for problems and stuff. But, of course, I was oblivious to those things at the time and ended up accepting the job.

And it was not without its immediate problems. I remember the appointment letter was submitted, and the budget committee turned it down. Basically, I think it was that I wasn't either qualified enough or wasn't really positioned enough sufficiently for that, even though I had maybe four or five publications and an anthology from the proceedings to that conference. I didn't have my first book. Obviously that was in the works. But even then, because they were in *Aztlán*, they were in these journals that were not mainstream sociology journals, I'm just not the classic white boy from Harvard that gets anointed

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and brought in. It's just, I was out of the mold. And so, that eventually was overturned, and they did recommend the appointment. But it was a very tough, exhilarating, and yet deeply crushing experience for me at Berkeley.

02-00:14:46

Berkeley is so heady. It was the number one department in the country at the time, or certainly among the top three. And, Berkeley already had a tradition, I'll say impolitely, of incest. They would always hire their own. They would not be averse to hiring because they thought they were the best department and hiring their best students, and inbreeding was—I cannot remember the number of people, but more than a handful of people in that department had been former students and maybe had gone on, come back or what have you. So, my having gone for just two years and going to Stanford and coming back was not too anomalous. But, since I was an anomalous character to begin with, it wasn't the kind of thing that led to an easy career there.

02-00:15:39

Holmes: Looking back, if we took that kind of broad sweep of your time here at Berkeley as a graduate student as well as those nine years here on the faculty, did the environment change for a Latino scholar? Meaning, was there a greater opportunity for both the student and faculty within that and the interaction with Ethnic Studies? Did you see that grow during your time here? Or did you see it contract?

02-00:16:09

Almaguer: No, it grew. And again, as I mentioned earlier, it had already been a very important part of what this campus was about at that moment with the collaboration between graduate students across departmental lines and conversations and study groups with faculty. So, Berkeley was always kind of rife and vibrant with that kind of synergy of bringing people together and supporting one another within our own kind of framework of just our work in Chicano Studies and on Mexican populations. And that continued. I was hired, and eventually Montejano, and they had a variety of different people in those positions. Those folks have always been really just there for the students that are part of that department, who they're hired to mentor and to support.

Sociology was a unique because there was always five to ten. I remember at one point there was upwards of fifteen of us at one point. So there's always been a critical mass. And, to have a critical mass in a department that actual has a Latino faculty, even though a junior faculty, was just an exciting set of opportunities. So, we could develop courses. And I remember, unlike other places where I've taught, here we would do a teaching load that was equally graduate and undergraduate. I would do huge courses, intro 300 students or some social change or social stratification course of two or three hundred people. And then I would be allowed a small seminar and be on a Chicano issue. I did one of the first seminars on the sociology of homosexuality.

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02-00:17:58

We had that flexibility because we were servicing large numbers, and so the faculty was granted an opportunity. And I would seize on those opportunities to do work in an area of my own interest or the area of graduate students. I remember teaching a graduate sexuality course, only, like, three people in that course, and it didn't get cancelled. And, two of those people—Steve Epstein has an endowed chair at Northwestern right now, and Arlene Stein, who is at Rutgers, with multiple books. So, it was a critical mass of brilliant students who I learned more from than they ever would learn from me. It was just a wonderful thing. And the undergraduate huge lecture courses were exhilarating. I was completely on fire at that point with my teaching, and then having the other context to develop and nurture.

So, I read with people, for example, in the sexuality seminar and cut my teeth on Freud and Lacan and Foucault and a variety of other people who I'd been reading individually but with other graduate students. It was just a wonderful, wonderful environment that wasn't the same at Santa Cruz. It wasn't the same at Michigan for me in those departments because it was a different campus. I didn't know them as well, obviously. But Berkeley just always has a very, very important and central place in my heart for those opportunities. And the glorious things that came out of that, I think, ultimately, not necessarily for myself but for the people that came through that department and the things that they've gone on to do and the doors they've opened and the wonderful work they've done and the places where they have taken central roles in shaping institutions. To be part of a network and critical mass where that was possible and spawn that can be nothing but gratifying.

02-00:20:10

Holmes: Let's talk a little bit about the development of the field. When we look at the work of the first generation, much of it is very interdisciplinary scholarship, as you were discussing—historians and social scientists sharing methodologies. What struck you about this early work of the first generation in the field?

02-00:20:40

Almaguer: That's a really good question. There's so many things, but I think it's the excitement, the passion, the commitment to the work we were doing, not in a megalomaniacal way because we thought our work and ourselves so important, but because it was part of a much larger project. It was a much larger intellectual project, the emergence of a field and an area of study, a discipline—I'm not sure I'd go that far—and also in lockstep and in synchronicity with a political movement, and instead of politics, affirmative action, of inclusion and diversity that was so much a part of the academic conversation at that time. So, it was just a vibrant moment to have a hand in.

I think this sounds so simplistic, but the thing that we were obviously interested in, Mexican populations, and all of us were Chicanos or Mexicanos almost to the person. And so, we were looking at our population. We were trying to make sense of our own particular community histories, family

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histories, larger areas, counties, states, regional kind of histories. And so, that brought a really interesting, vibrant conversation, whether we were talking about what happened in New Mexico in the turn of the century, whether we're talking about Texas or California or Colorado. It was just, you had a sense that we were all in this together. We were all rowing in the same direction. We were knee-deep following different tributaries and different currents and all.

We were in the same fight. We all had the same kind of passions, commitments and desire to help one another and to move the entire field forward and at the same time help one another get to where we wanted to get to and do what we wanted to do. So, it was the most formidable, foundational and profoundly rewarding kind of period of my life, I think, and career, because that was just a very precious moment at that time. It was so foundational. I guess it's a very hackneyed word to use, but it was just the bedrock of our careers, of our lives here.

02-00:23:24
Holmes: Well, you were speaking of the anthology, *The State of Chicano Research in Family, Labor and Migration Studies* (1983), which you co-edited with Al Camarillo and Armando Valdez. This came out of a conference, but it's also at this point, if we look at the date, that it's almost about a decade into the field itself, really, and trying to take stock—where have we come from; where are we going next? In my reading, that is what this anthology was trying to do.

02-00:24:05
Almaguer: It was trying to get a sense of a state of the field and where we are, where we're going. What are the promises? What are the obstacles? And so, it was taking a reading. We pulled together a very interesting conversation. Memory is not my strong suit at this point in my life, but I just remember we brought some interesting people together. I remember we did a session on migration, and so we would bring Wayne Cornelius to come in and talk about international migration. Again, we were so Mexico-focused and Mexico-centric. We weren't talking about Puerto Ricans or Cubans or others at that point.

So, he delivered a paper on that topic. Then, we had distinguished sociologist Marta Tienda come in and talk about the internal migration of Latinos. Once they come to this country, what has been the pattern? Where have they moved? So it was an attempt to try to take stock at the vagaries of migration but not just in the international kind of in-migration but the internal migration patterns and how work opportunities and timings of arrival and push factors and pull factors kind of converged in both of those processes. So, we had an economist and a sociologist talking about that. I think that's an interesting thing to do.

02-00:25:25

I forget all of the other articles that were commissioned, the people who were invited, because that was so long ago, forty years ago. But, we did the same

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thing with poverty, with labor. It was exciting. It was a very successful, well-funded conference and the kind of thing that you could pull off with money at Stanford. I forget where we got the grant from that I wrote, but I just remember it was one of the happiest moments of my life, and I said yes, can I do this? Okay, I'll give it a try. And I pulled it off, got the money, and then of course inviting people and pulling them together and having the conference and sponsoring it. And then, looking at proceedings and pulling those things together for publication and trying to capture that moment and the state of the field at that particular time was a total delight and a joy. That's stuff that I've done all my career. The editing and the pulling together and the harassing people to get their stuff in and meet publication deadlines became part of what I've known now for the past forty years. And so, I cut my teeth on that kind of work at that point in my career.

02-00:26:42
Holmes: Let's talk a little bit about your next two appointments, moving west and then going back east. So, you went to UC Santa Cruz in 1991, hired with tenure as an associate professor in American Studies. Talk a little bit about leaving Berkeley and taking up that new position.

02-00:27:09
Almaguer: That's a very interesting and actually rather painful part of my career because I had been here at Berkeley, and I actually extended it to nine years. I was on medical leave one year, and I took an unpaid leave. So, it was not a straight run through, there were some gaps there. But then I came to the point where I faced the tenure decision. I didn't have the book done. *Racial Fault Lines* was not complete. And, you don't get tenure unless you have the book in hand—that's just the rules of the game. We all understood that. Of course, I foolishly thought, oh well, it's close enough, and UC Press has given me a contract. It's going to see the light of day and should be fine. But it wasn't.

And after having been hired on a marginal kind of vote and endorsement, I would not be surprised that the same set of concerns and issues would come when it came time for tenure. But, I was foolish enough to not have fully appreciated the demands and expectations of institutions. I just figured, close enough. But no, the standards are very straightforward. So, I got a negative tenure recommendation here, and I ended up appealing that. It may have been overturned when the book was done, but at the same time, I think the following year I applied for positions in only two places. I think it was Michigan and Santa Cruz. And I got them both with tenure. There was no question. They read the manuscript. It was finished. They said, this is clearly quality work. It certainly meets our standards.

So I got tenured appointments in both places. I couldn't decide where I wanted to be, so I took both positions, and very greedily would teach in Ann Arbor in the fall and then teach in Santa Cruz in the winter and spring. I would take a leave half the year from each place. It was kind of silly, but I wasn't sure I

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wanted to spend my time in Ann Arbor. Santa Cruz was very weird for me. I wasn't quite sure I could hang with UC Santa Cruz. And so, I kind of went back and forth for a couple of years, only to realize, ultimately, that because of the clock I was actually teaching from early August until, like, late June. I really had a month or month and a half in between because of the configuration of the three quarters at Santa Cruz, and I was teaching two quarters, and then the one semester.

I was driving cross-country in my car, which made it multiple treks, and then renting a house and renting furniture and then giving them up and coming back. I was just like a peripatetic kind of academic. But it was very difficult. And so, I ultimately left Santa Cruz. It was the most nettlesome of the two. It was the most unlike Berkeley. Michigan was very much like Berkeley. It was an oasis out in the Midwest and had all the trappings of Berkeley that I knew, had none of the idiosyncrasies of Santa Cruz or pasteurization of Stanford. I never thought I would stay in Ann Arbor, but I did.

And actually, it was my dear mentors. I remember Troy Duster—you've got to go to Michigan. That's what you do when you leave here. You go there. Then you can come and go wherever. By that point finally I was kind of getting the grasp of the lay of the land and the rules of the game and the trajectory in how you play and negotiate all of that. And so, I did that, and it rebounded to my advantage. I did quite well there.

02-00:31:43
Holmes: Discuss a little bit about the environment there in Michigan, particularly as a Chicano scholar. It snows there. It's cold. It's the Midwest. Talk about your impression of Ann Arbor when you showed up and settling in.

02-00:32:01
Almaguer: Well, when I set up in the fall it was glorious. It was glorious. I had never been in the Midwest, and I was like, oh, but this is all so weird and so nice and such a beautiful, big campus. And so, it was great. And then the winter came, Thanksgiving and Christmas. Usually I took off generally at that point and went to Santa Cruz. But in the third year I was there full-time. And I remember the unsettling moment when I had to go to campus, and I went to my car and I couldn't get the key into the ignition because it was frozen over. I couldn't get into my car, much less start it, much less get to campus. You know you're not in Kansas anymore. It's like, you're in Ann Arbor. And that was both gloriously different in an interesting way, and I came to appreciate the seasons.

But, I quickly got over that appreciation. I kept thinking like, okay, wait a minute. You're not in Moorpark. You're not in Santa Barbara. You're not even in Berkeley. You're out here. And I was one of a handful of Latino tenured faculty on that campus. I cut my teeth with Puerto Rican, Dominican, Cuban populations that were an unknown category out here. And so I said, oh, okay,

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we're all Latinos. And so, it was this kind of panoply of Latino ethnicities and idiosyncrasies that I had not had to ever consider. And then, of course, the challenge to be in a context where I was doing Latino courses, and I couldn't just do my one-note Chicano Studies kind of shtick.

02-00:33:54

So I very quickly retooled and learned all that I could about Cubans, Puerto Ricans and Dominicans and brought them into my worldview and expanded my kind of imagination of what Chicano Studies was and evolved into Latino Studies and a broader kind of ethnic mapping. And that was also challenging, exhilarating. I loved that. I loved the challenge because I had done comparative work. So, to do comparative work with the Latino context was just a continuation of that kind of comparative fascination that I had. It was exhilarating. Then, dealing with new graduate students who were not just Chicano but Puerto Rican and Dominican and all, and their projects, and to try to be equally helpful in that regard, which I certainly attempted to do, was just an exhilarating challenge. I just reveled in it. I just loved it.

I had a great run in Ann Arbor. My book came out when I was there, and it was the lead book review in Contemporary Sociology. Howie Winant sang its praises. And I just remember I'd finally arrived. I had finally landed. All of the pain of the dissertation, the postdoc dilemmas, the troubled and checkered kind of history and slow pace of my own work and my own kind of transformation as a human being was finally overcome. When the book landed and was anointed as a legitimate piece of work that couldn't simply just be scoffed at and dismissed as people were very apt to do at the time. I knew only too well how they could slash and burn and dismiss.

It was a formidable challenge for them to try to do that, and particularly in sociology when the book is framed around Marx and Weber and class and race. Come on. This is not far afield. I remember, what is the central problematic? The transition from feudalism to capitalism, what Marx and Weber and Freud and everyone was completely preoccupied of that transformation and the momentous change and the politics and the culture and group relations, et cetera. I was doing something that was part of the central problematic in the field, even though it was dealing with a different topic—it wasn't in Europe or whatever—they had to recognize that. And I was using the same language, the same sources, bringing in a whole variety of other experiences into a different kind of context. They couldn't just dismiss it.

That, I think, was the greatest consolation for me in the challenges of embarking on an academic career. It's always been a very critical context where the lifeblood of the institution is this critical inquiry and critical assessment. And you get evaluated on whether or not you meet those standards and that level of rigor and sophistication, methodologically, theoretically. Part of the paralysis and the slow work is that you understand that and you know that you'd better get it right. If you need another chapter, if

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you need to do this, you'd better do it because someone is going to just say, well, they didn't even talk about that, and dismiss it out of hand.

02-00:37:36

So, I was much too savvy with the way the world worked in the academy and in my field in particular, that I was not going to let them do that to me. And they didn't. I got them. So, I was good. And I think those were the moments when it all came to fruition and said, look, I have in fact arrived. I'm tenured now. They see it even without the book. And then when the book came out, I think my second year there, and it was anointed and all, even though I was not nearly as productive as the quantitative people in that department that were cranking out articles in mainstream journals and being lauded and praised and rewarded. I was just doing historical sociology, just a book.

It was recognized as having met the standards and expectations, and that was key. That was crucial to me. I may have been an outlier most of my life and career, and yet at a certain point I was there, and I did not have the constant incessant doubts and questions. God, I can't write. God, I can't really express this well. God, this really is not good enough. All of those doubts that you shoulder are really kind of the ticket, the price we pay to immerse ourselves in this world as first-generation people of this cohort of people that you're interviewing. Once you've landed and you know that they can't just dismiss you, that I will always cherish because it's so important, it finally means an acknowledgement. You've met the standard. You've arrived.

I didn't know how many years it took going at it from '71 to '94, more than twenty years of toiling and trying to contribute and having been somewhat successful but always in kind of marginal ways in a marginal field and all of that. But to be able to land was just really, really wonderful. Then it being published by UC Press was still very highly regarded. It was not an ethnic press. It was not a small publisher. They couldn't just say, well, look where it got published, and that's always cheap, dismissive. It was good enough there, but it wasn't good enough to be published in that. We know how that works.

So, yeah, that was wonderful. That mollified the pain of being one of the few and only Latinos, and not to mention the only gay Latino man in that world. There is a price to pay here, but the reward, the acknowledgement is also here. And so that, after all the struggles, was a relief.

02-00:41:01

Holmes: Let's talk a little bit about your time at the University of Michigan. You were also director of the Latina and Latino Studies programs. You just were discussing that transition of a Chicano scholar now having to put more tools in the toolkit, if we will, intellectually, to address others of the larger Spanish-speaking Latino community. Discuss this program and your experience as director.

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02-00:41:33
Almaguer: I have to preface this by saying that my appointment was in sociology and American Culture on that campus. And it was only within American Culture department that there were subsets and programs, one of which was in American Native and Latino Studies. So, I was the chair of the commonwealth of Latino Studies within the American Culture program, and that used to piss my colleagues off when I would say that. But I would always want to rattle their chain a little bit because we were this small little program. I was program director, but it wasn't like a chair in the real sense. I didn't have five to ten faculty. I didn't have my own budget. I was just kind of a subsidiary of another somewhat larger program.

But it was fine because it became a venue and a place where graduate students who were admitted and funded very nicely to come to Michigan—some people came and followed me to Michigan to study with me, such Gil Conchas, who's now a tenured professor at Irvine [UC Irvine], and Elena Gutierrez who is at UIC [University of Illinois, Chicago] in sociology and each written a number of really important books. I had a hand in both of them as their mentor and they emerged from dissertation projects that they did with me. And so, they were both in sociology. There were also people in American Culture, Latinos and Latinas at the time.

And so, to be able to become a mentor and a supporter and to do the good things that my colleagues here at Berkeley and Al at Stanford and Takaki in Ethnic Studies had done for me was a joy, to give generously and wholeheartedly of my time. My efforts to them and to help train and develop a new set of contributors to the field was just a glorious basis of satisfaction for me to be able to do that. So, that was always the most important part of what I did, certainly even here at Berkeley. I had the good fortune of working with a number of people that were really kind of my contemporaries, because I was just a few years ahead of them. But to be able to be helpful and to be able to sign a dissertation and then see it develop into a book, that's where I get the satisfaction more than anyplace else.

The undergraduate teaching I loved there at Michigan, and to be able to teach Pan-Latino courses and be able to teach sexuality courses in sociology and in American Studies. In places like that you can do just about whatever you want. There are requirements and expectations that departments have, but they hire people to do those things. We were privileged, and so the support, the pampering, the indulgence, the prerogatives, the privileges we had in places like that are not lost to me. I know that doesn't happen everywhere. Clearly, having spent some time in the CSU [California State University] I can absolutely confirm that. And so, it was great. Yet it was in the Midwest. It wasn't in LA. It wasn't in San Francisco or in Austin. It wasn't where there were hotbeds and centers of Latino kind of cultural life and political and intellectual life on a much broader scale. It was small.

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But it was there, and it was important, and it served its purpose and function. I had a very good run. I became the director of the Center for Research on Social Organization. It was the institute that Charles Tilly, a very prominent, incredibly distinguished historical sociologist, founded. And it had been kind of the mainstay of a research institution there in the sociology department. And, I think after my book was lauded and all of that, they looked for a new director, and I was appointed. I remember they would always go, you broke the color line here at Michigan in that appointment. So, I chaired that institute, and we did a number of things. There were projects, but we also colloquium. I just remember my most glorious moment is that I sponsored Stuart Hall to come and give a talk and a number of other luminaries. But it was Stuart Hall, and he was brought for another reason, but he came graciously to speak.

It was like being in the presence of Marx or Weber. The man was just brilliant. And he just walked in and just talked, and it was kind of a spontaneous discussion. I just was never in awe of anyone in my entire life. To this day, I will cherish that moment and that opportunity to be in the presence of such brilliance. And, it happened in Michigan. I was able to help pull that off. So, these are the things that always kind of stick with me about that experience. I ended up being nominated for a named chair for my distinguished teaching at the time. I was on fire. I took teaching very seriously and was really effective at what I did.

I got a named chair and $25,000 just for research and travel and stuff. The institution was just flush with money and with acknowledgements and awards, and I got grants to go and work on the sexuality book. And so, places like that, even more so than Berkeley at the time, they had money. They could do things. They could recruit students. They could fund them. They could hire faculty. They could arrange their appointments. They would give you lines if we would find a qualified person that applied for an open position. There were things that were possible that institutions could do with resources, and Michigan was a place where that happened.

For me, I only intended to stay there a few years, maybe three or four, and then bail and come back to California and look for a job here. But I stayed because it was a very good run. And then eventually, I was just like okay, I'm a fish out of water. I need to get back to *Aztlán*. I need to get back to California. I need to get back to the Bay Area and places that I love. The only two places would be to come back to Berkeley, which is not going to be in the cards after a horrible battle here, and Stanford, which I would never want to spend any time on, certainly not teach there or have a career there.

02-00:49:06

So, a dean position opened up at San Francisco State, and I kept thinking am I going to go from Michigan to San Francisco State? Do I really want to go back that bad? Yes. And when they doubled my salary I said, oh, okay, thank you. Yes, okay, yeah, absolutely. And they literally did. So, I just said like,

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okay, that's it. I'm done. I had a number of friends there, and I swept that position, got that successfully and with aplomb. And so, I was good. I knew it was going to be a torturous experience, which it was. But, it was a nice way to kind of segue myself out of the Midwest and out of the research one treadmill and booms and busts.

02-00:50:05
Holmes: Well, before we discuss your time at San Francisco, I want to talk about the maturation of the field during this time while you're there at Michigan. We see the field of Chicano Studies really just blossom. What started out with some community studies in California and Texas, grew to dozens of community studies throughout the West that were put into conversation. Other areas such as women and gender really opened up. As did borderlands and studies on migration. It's very interesting to go back and look at that. Maybe I should start off with the question of, what really strikes you about that maturing of the field? What are a few of the aspects that stand out to you?

02-00:51:14
Almaguer: I just want to say very quickly that the growing sophistication of the field, the quality, the rigor of the work, the broader focus, what gutsy kind of lines of inquiry and analysis that people were pushing forward. It was just a different type of work. The easiest example for me to give of that would be like the early historical works in Chicano Studies—beautiful, foundational. Ricardo Romo, Griswold del Castillo, Mario Garcia, Albert Camarillo, of course Juan Gómez-Quiñones, Rudy Acuña, a variety of people focusing on Mexican populations. And yet, it was the Mexican population and the centrality of those experiences that was really quite central.

And then, a few years later, even in the world of history, the focus began to shift. It was no longer the great men, the great activists—Flores Magon, Cesar Chavez, you name it. There was a different historical subject was being brought at the center. And I remember being really profoundly influenced by Ramón Gutiérrez' work, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away*. And Ramon was kind of also a bit of an amphibian because he was a historian but also had some sociology training, so we'd been kind of kindred spirits in that regard from different disciplinary sides.

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But he wrote a book where women were at the center of it. It was the conquest. It was a conquest of women. And it was not just the political economy of this but the structuring of gender and sexuality as a basis for the social organization of that world and its transformation. So here you have earlier works looking at race and class and ethnic history. And then, we take a historical turn where the cultural dimensions and gender and women and sexuality are kind of at the forefront, the heart of Chicano historical inquiry. So, I saw that obviously as a tremendous kind of evolution and ratcheting up of the scope and the kind of worldview and issues that we brought central to

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the table and conversation and the maturation of sophistication of the field of history.

The same thing happened in sociology. The same thing happened in other fields. But I think that the reach was always still with the Mexican population. It was far more nuanced, far more sophisticated, far more rigorous, far more than the world of work and struggle and opposition. And we were so invested because of the politics of the period and our own kind of embeddedness and contestation of the institution to foreground issues of resistance and contestation. Undeniably that has been the hallmark of our historical reality in all of our worlds of work, the academy, et cetera. Yet, there's always two sides to that. There's the side of our complicity. There's the side of our acquiescence, that it's not just a matter of opposition and contestation, but the way in which we kind of invest and are subjects and victims of our own oppression and oppression within our own group, particularly getting into those messy lines of difference and inequities around gender lines, sexuality lines, within communities.

For so long we were averse to opening up that dirty laundry and that conversation. We kept women in check on that. Don't go to that woman's movement stuff. Let's stick here with Raza, and let's be supportive, et cetera. There was always an attempt to kind of short-circuit and to silence that kind of voice. And now, it had come into its full glory. Certainly with women's issues, I think that the work of Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua were really central. Then, the work of Vicki Ruiz and Pat Zavella and all of the other kind of more straightforward social science historians and academics had brought their work to the table. But it was in the literary world and the queer Latina world in particular that pushed those conversations to the foreground first and then set the possibilities for other women of color, and Latinas in particular, to ply that terrain with great success and with great validation because those initial obstacles had been surmounted already.

So, it was a vibrant time. Again, now I think that has certainly continued. But I'm so overwhelmed with the diversity of work and the even broader scope of things that it's hard for me to even wrap my head around them. When something would come out, I would instantly have it or photocopy this or that. It's almost impossible to keep up now. I probably continue to bring kind of a critical edge. I'm not always happy with the stuff that I read and that I see. I go like, what are you talking about? I will cringe, particularly around identity stuff and all. But that was a moment of exhilaration and joy for many of us because we had come of age. We had arrived. And there was no denying, there was no going back, the doors were just going to be opened even broader and wider and even more welcoming in some ways.

02-00:57:34

Holmes: I want to talk a little bit about your scholarship outside of the book. You continued to publish a number of articles and book chapters and your research

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agenda, certainly by 1990, began to shift a bit. Reference a 1989 article, *What's Love Got to Do with It*, which was published in *Outlook,* and then, 1991, *Chicano Men: A Cartography of Homosexual Identity and Behavior.* Discuss the genesis of this new line of inquiry and these new works, because this also dovetails with the maturing of the field, making a very important and early contribution to advancing the area of sexuality within Chicano Studies, which probably wasn't always an easy road.

02-00:58:40
Almaguer: It was not a welcome conversation. Gender, sexuality was not a welcome conversation, particularly for that first generation that you're interviewing who were so foundational to the forging of the field but in a very gendered way, in a very masculinist way, in a very kind of bantam rooster competitive way. So, yeah, to kind of open the doors of those conversations was a risky thing to do. I think that's why, on the women's side, I think the non-academic types outside of the canon of the field helped push those doors open because the people within the disciplines were greeted with far more resistance.

It didn't happen here because there were people like Deena Gonzalez, whose work became very important, Pat Zavella, obviously, and a number of others. So, there were always people pushing on those issues where there was, in fact, support. But, more often than not there was an attempt to kind of silence, and you did that at your peril in some ways. For me to push in that area was a very difficult thing. On the one hand, it was a logical extension of my entire career in sociology where we look at big issues—race, class formation. Then at that point, clearly the signal was it's not just the class and race issues, fellows. There's also gender and sexuality. There's family. There's other forms of inequality that we need to take a look at and acknowledge and contend with and also dignify and find a revered place for in our field.

And that was slow in emerging. For me, it seemed a logical kind of move. If I can be really facetious about it, my entire career has been wrapped around my idealization of white men, whether it's Marx or Weber. And then finally I discovered Freud. I was like, okay. So, my whole world has been kind of guided by my love for white Western thought. Go figure, the total contradiction there. I'm not looking at the Aztec roots of our knowledge. I'm looking at European classic theory. So, I remember doing a seminar at Berkeley, actually, before I left to Michigan, where I read Freud more carefully. And I remember the three essays on the theory of sexuality just completely blew my mind because it became the foundational text for what we now call the social construction of gender and sexuality. Freud was very clear about the differences between the categories and the relationship and the social nature of these categories.

So, I reveled in the intellectual excitement of what I did, sociology, understanding broad systems of inequality, their trajectory, they unfold, how they play themselves out on the ground and in real conditions. Part of it is just

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a logical trajectory of my own kind of way of thinking about the world. And a lot of it is also very biographical. Coming out as a gay man in that particular period with a wife and two kids was not an easy thing to do, particularly since I had not been in a relationship with a man. I think it would have been the most worthless, unproductive thing anyone could possibly do. Men are worthless relationship investments. And so, I say that very candidly.

02-01:02:35

So, it wasn't like I was moving on up. No, it's like I knew the limitations of that particular life and worldview for me. But yet, I was on that pathway, and so I eventually kind of came out. That sounds like such a ridiculous word—come out of what. So I embraced that dimension of my life and, again, started the whole quest yet again as I did with the first book, understanding my childhood, understanding this, honoring my family. And here I said, okay, well, now I'm going to do it very personally. How am I going to understand the evolution of one's gender identity and the gender socialization? How does one understand the emergence of sexuality or sexual identity and desire? And these are not just biological. They're also socially constructed and shaped and inflected in very interesting and important ways that are a fruitful way to do analysis of it and to come to understand.

So, my work was incredibly autobiographical in that regard. The first article, and probably the key one, and still a claim to fame, is the Cartography piece. And that actually emerged as a conference talk I gave at Santa Cruz. I think I was there at the time. And Teresa de Lauretis, professor in the History of Consciousness program, put together an issue of *Differences*. It was a feminist journal. And, she really worked on my article and translated my Spanglish into English and kind of reframed things. She really was quite a gifted editor. And whatever success that article may have had, I'm deeply indebted to her editorial eye and guidance.

I laugh because I've always referred to that piece, which I think is still a smart piece of academic work, as notes from therapy. This is notes from therapy. So, I remember distinctly someone—actually, it was a dear colleague, Hector Carrillo, gave me a handful of articles on Latino sexuality in Latin America, Joseph Carrier's work and a number of other people that I didn't know about. I remember reading them and saying, okay, why does this make sense to me? I remember it was literally both therapeutic as well as an intellectual exercise, as is everything that I have done.

So, I pulled that together. I was actually very happy with it at the time. It still stood the test of time. Some people have uncharitably been critical of it. And it kind of moved me in another trajectory. I felt really good about, like, okay, this is what you're supposed to be doing, opening up the field, pushing new avenues of inquiry, raising questions, challenging old ideas, and making a contribution, not a big definitive splash but just pushing the envelope and being a little bit edgy and brave about doing that, as well as being ready to

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take the criticism and the beatings that will come with it. But, we all carry our cross. I'm a good Catholic. I've learned to suffer. I can survive. So, I plied in another direction—I went down another tributary.

02-01:06:42
Holmes: And on that, there's a number of articles and book chapters after those formative two pieces. "Looking for Papi: The Longing and Desire among Chicano Gay Men," and "Between the Material and Cultural World of Latino Gay Men." Discuss these works a bit.

02-01:07:08
Almaguer: Well, they keep asking me to write something. And the publication in the *Gay Latino Studies* book, I was thrilled. I'm kind of an outlier because I'm very sociological, and most of the other stuff was more humanities-oriented. I'm flattered to be considered as one of the people that's contributed to that field and to still be asked to do things. I say no now all the time, but then I was foolish enough to say oh yeah, sure. Come to a conference, do a paper, and then talking me into reworking it for publication. But I've always been open to doing those kinds of things, and particularly when it builds on something or gives me an opportunity to rethink and kind of tack in another direction or bring in something else.

So, I've reveled in that. Now, the reality is I have another book. Actually, I owe UC Press another book. And I have all of the interviews, and I have all of the time right now that I have retired that I can do that. I sometimes tell myself quit going to Europe, and quit indulging yourself, and just settle down and stay out of the garden and just finish writing this book. And I may well scare the hell out of my colleagues and world by actually doing that in the next couple of years. I just may have to go through the interviews and write it up. I don't have to write it up as ambitiously as I'd initially planned, even if it becomes just a couple of articles.

I've done a number of things recently that are directly related to the question of politics and academic work, what is sexuality research good for? I'm an expert witness on asylum cases for transgender Mexicans coming into this country and trying to keep them in the country and not get them deported and killed in Mexico. I've probably done maybe ten cases. I've never lost a case. When it comes to writing up these reports, I'm fierce. I take that more seriously than I did my regular academic work, because there's a person, and there's a life involved. And I say facetiously I'm going to save one queen at a time. If that's all I can do, that's fine. I'm not going to stand in front of a bus and get my ass run over, but I am going to be an expert witness, and I'm going to help somebody, because it's the easiest thing for me to do.

I know that field. I know the literature. I know the country conditions. And, I almost always do it pro bono. It's just like, because I think sometimes academics are worthless work. I'm being obviously facetious, but this is real.

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And so, there's always been that embeddedness in politics, and it's sometimes behind the scenes, and now I don't have to worry about promotion or job or embarrassing the institution. I can just do what I do. So, I'm hopeful that there'll be more to come. We'll see.

02-01:12:13
Holmes: Before we leave the scholarship, I also just wanted to hear your thoughts on your co-edited volume, *The New Latino Studies Reader: A 21st Century Perspectives.* Here you edit this with Ramón Gutiérrez. Discuss the genesis, but more importantly, I'd like you to compare, because that's why I really like the subtitle, the 21st century perspective. And here are two first-generation scholars who've already been in the field for at least forty-plus years, sitting down to put together new sets of essays for students on Latino Studies. In doing that work, how much did you see that the field has just expanded phenomenally?

02-01:13:09
Almaguer: I cannot begin to tell you the amount of time and effort it took for us to review countless articles that we knew separately, that we knew together. And it was a yearlong project of kind of assessing the state of the field. It really was. And we were realistic. We couldn't do both humanities and the social sciences and history, so we just kind of stuck to what we knew best. We couldn't begin to move into areas of music and culture and literary works and stuff, and so we did what we could do best. But that project, its genesis was just so practical. Every year at San Francisco State, when I had been teaching and I stepped down as dean, I was putting together materials for classes. And we would use books. More often than not, we would have to pull together a series of articles in readers. I don't know if people still do that. We'd go to a copy center and copyright issues and one thing after another. And then we'd put them on PDFs, and then there would be problems.

So every semester I would teach a couple of courses, and every semester I would put a reader together for this course, another reader for that course. Sometimes they were very similar; sometimes they were different articles. I kept thinking this is just ridiculous. And they became very expensive for students to photocopy and to buy them and then whatever they did with them. I just remember my dear editor at UC Press, Naomi Schneider, got a hold of me one time—she's been such a stalwart supporter—and asked, hey, do you have anything you want to work on? I'm looking for something that will sell books, that will give visibility to Latino Studies.

I kept saying, Naomi, I would love to put together a collection of contemporary kind of Latino Studies works that talk about the state of the field, its direction. Then I could stop having to put together these readers every semester, which is painful, and then just put them between covers. Make it as cheaply as possible. She says, we just want to sell books. We don't want to make any money. We just want to make a valuable kind of classroom

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thing available. So, Ramon and I—we're old friends, and we think incredibly alike. We probably have very similar personalities. I will let my colleagues judge that.

But anyway, we had the most fun time, just because we agreed almost instinctively on everything, how we assess things. So, it was easy. It was so easy to do. And we figured, okay, let's do five chapters, ten sections. Make a long story short, we finally put together something. It turned out to be 1,200 pages. It turned out to be, what, twenty chapters. And I did fifty articles. I can't remember. It was just like three times the length of what they wanted. Of course, we didn't have any sense of what these articles were going to translate into. Some were commissions. Some were reprints.

02-01:16:27

So, I remember Naomi said we want to get this out quickly, but you've got to cut it in half. You're an author. If someone said, okay, we'll take that, but cut it in half—so we were both kind of stunned. And yet, in one afternoon, we just said okay, boom, boom, boom—simple. It didn't take any time. And, it was still, what, 600 pages. It was a fifty-pound book and it was still way too long, far too monstrous a thing, impractical for students unless they get it in the downloaded form. But, it was our attempt to try to assess the state of the field, always a foolhardy proposition because I'm like, who's in the canon and who's not?

We were foolish enough to say, well, let's keep the costs down. Oh, let's just use some of our own work. Let's not pay people to do this or pay to have students that have to buy this. So, we ended up using some of our own work. Of course, people would then see megalomaniacalness on our part. No, we're just trying to save money and stuff. And so, it was a no-win proposition. I'll be completely honest with you. That book came out, I guess, a couple of years ago. I've not read one review of the book. I have no sense. It sold very well the first year, too. I have no idea how it's doing. I have just completely erased it from my memory banks, as I do with most of the things that I do and move away from.

I guess my one great consolation is that it hasn't ignited a huge backlash. The humanities people weren't happy, but we put the caveat in there. And, we put some really interesting articles together that anyone would just pick up and find something. It's not the kind of thing that you would use in a classroom, cover to cover, but you would be able to draw from. And that was our expectation, just to make it available and accessible so that people don't have to struggle like we had done every semester. So, it was a modest but also kind of gutsy and bold, foolhardy attempt to adjudicate the field. And then to say New Directions in the 21st Century, it wasn't Chicano Studies. I think Pat Zavella and Ramon had done *Mexicans in California*, an anthology for Stanford. And so, we said no, we're going to do a big, broad sweep.

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It was such an investment in time, and most people will not realize that if you look at the cover, just the politics of the cover of that book and the time that we spent looking at hundreds and hundreds of possibilities, different collections of work, and then to find something that would reflect the diversity of race issues. There's white, black, mestizo and then very Asian-looking Latino on the cover, very self-conscious, two men, two women, part of the Castas paintings, the Latino artists. We used the beautiful artwork of Chicana artist Margaret Garcia. And so, everything that went into that was so vetted, so self-conscious, so deliberate, having used Frances Negron's article on Celia's shoes as kind of the Cultural Studies access to identity issues as well as the historical analysis of the evolution of Latino identity that Ramon did.

02-01:20:08

We just said, let's just find the most interesting, best things that we can find that we like that resonate, that we've used in our own classes, that work well together. And that's what we tried to do, Todd. It's something that I'd like to say I'm really proud of. I'm glad that we did it. I'm glad that it's done. I don't know—and I really don't want to know, because I cry still too easily—how well or poorly it's been received. It hasn't caused any fierce debates, so that's good. I know we haven't pushed any buttons unduly and stuff. And so, again, it's just one little, small little pebble contribution to the field that we figured like, okay, we can do this. We spent some time doing this. And if it's a valuable contribution to anybody in any way, then good for us. I will have done, Ramon will have done, what we're supposed to do, help open up ways of thinking about old issues in new ways, honoring and anointing the quality work that's able to do that really successfully, and to offer something to this next generation of people that will be a place to start rather than to have them go out looking for themselves.

It's all here together, and if it's useful, good. And if there's nothing there for you, then that's fine, too. We only do what we can and make the contributions we can with the hopes that they will be well-received and will be of some value. If they are, then good for us. We've done what we're here to do, simple as that.

02-01:21:46

Holmes: That's very well said. I wanted to talk about your return to California. So, you left Michigan, and you came back to San Francisco State, which you mentioned. And you were hired as dean of the College of Ethnic Studies, which is a very unique college with a very powerful historical legacy. But, of course, also coming in as dean, that's not the easiest, which is probably maybe why they doubled your salary.

02-01:22:24

Almaguer: No, I was just poorly paid, and they pay administrators far more than they're worth.

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02-01:22:34
Holmes: But talk a little bit about that experience, of moving back to San Francisco State. You spent another eighteen years or so at San Francisco State.

02-01:22:46
Almaguer: That's actually hard to believe when you say that. I kind of cringe in disbelief, but yeah. That was a crucial decision point for me. I could have stayed at Ann Arbor, and I would have struggled to finish the sexuality book to get promoted, so I did not want to be a marginal associate professor that is slow to promotion, because that's something that I just didn't want to do. And I wasn't completely happy just being there away from my family for as long a period of time as I was, so when the opportunity to apply to this position opened up, I jumped on it.

And yet, full disclosure, having spent time at Berkeley and at Stanford and at Santa Cruz and at Michigan, heading from elite public and private institutions, research ones, to a teaching university like San Francisco State, that was not anywhere near in the same status, was a big dilemma. Am I really ready to jump off the research one bandwagon? I've got plenty of money to travel, to do this, to do my own work. I've got glorious teaching options and opportunities. And yet, I was ready to come back. So, I took the plunge. I did that. I didn't have any expectations to do that for more than four or five years. Of course, I didn't do it for more than four years because I immediately ran into some trouble while at San Francisco State.

02-01:24:28

If I was to be honest with you, sometimes institutions will bring in someone to clean house, and sometimes they call them gunslingers uncharitably to come in and see what they can do to kind of move people off the dime and to push something forward. That's how I saw myself being brought in. This was an old-school college, foundational, rife with people that had been there for many years. There was a very strong Asian-American, particularly Chinese, faculty. There was a fledgling Native American program that imploded, actually, when I got there. Latino Studies program had been around for a while, Raza Studies. African American Studies, Black Studies, was very Afrocentric and something I was not very sympathetic with because of my own kind of politics and orientation around the field and that kind of politic.

So, there was just a lot of stuff that I would have to address. And whether I address that in a small, slow, gentle way and just kind of cajoled and moved and spent the time—five, ten, fifteen years—as my predecessors had moving things forward. Or I could come in and do the shock and awe and just, by administrative fiat, ignite that change in a way that I could get away with and yet push the envelope forward. I chose the Almaguerian path as opposed to the wise path of the sagely beloved administrator. I came in, and I transformed that place in four years. I hired 40 percent of the new faculty. I instituted a new department. I built a new department in Native American Studies when it imploded.

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I was able to pull off and do what I did in four years and that place is completely transformed now. It's not anywhere what it was before. And I will take some of the credit for that but also the blame because it was done in a very rapid, sometimes heavy-handed, take-no-prisoners kind of way that was not the most astutely political way of doing it for long-term survival. Yet, I wasn't about to do that for twenty years and become a beloved figure there. I was there to help transform the field. And it wasn't just Latino Studies. It was Ethnic Studies.

What did I do? First appointment was an Asian-American woman, sexuality specialist. They had never hired a sexuality specialist before. She is now the current dean of the college. And I put her in a different department and started a new department, hired Rafael Diaz, an AIDS sexuality researcher. I ended up hiring, like, five. The first five hires in this new department were all kind of gay-lesbian scholars and first-rate. Rafael was from Yale, and he was teaching at USF. These were very prominent, highly-regarded people doing incredibly powerful and important work.

02-01:28:08

So, I was able to get new lines. I had the power to be able to shape and move programs into a new focus and to build them. And I did that very quickly, of course with great consequences because I ended up privileging Latino Studies and Native American Studies. I ended up probably taking some of the resources or stalling the unbridled growth in Asian-American and Black Studies. So, I literally kind of got caught in crossfires in the college. But, what did I care? I was ready to do it. It was important to do.

So, by the end of my fourth year, the opposition, particularly from Asian-American Studies and Black Studies, they were just done with me because all the things that they had going for them were now being called into question. There was a reallocation of resources. I built a brand-new department. I hired four faculty in Native American Studies. I was able to eventually hire more people in Latino Studies, although that was troubled because of enrollment issues and all of that. But, I did that. And then, when I stepped down—this is probably in 2004 or '05—I had the option. What am I going to do? Am I going to go back into the UC system when I could have applied for jobs? I could have probably gotten a job somewhere. I could have probably gone back to Michigan even at the time.

I just said no. I'm not going to go back and go through that Research 1 degradation and pain again. I survived that. I did well. I thrived. I excelled in some ways. And, I'd done something different now, administration, which I had never really done that intensely. I did what I did well with some casualties and some loss. I eventually just had to resign, and it just got too untenable. I was not foolish, got a wonderful parachute. I came to Berkeley for two years and spent time on this campus with colleagues and friends, and then went

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back into the classroom and said, okay. I forget how old I was. I must have been sixty. I can retire in a couple of years, and that's it.

And then I just enjoyed teaching. The anthology was going to come out. I said, I'm going to teach here. I want to do this. So, I stayed until I was seventy. I was stunned that I did that. I just celebrated my seventy-first birthday last month. I just said no, that's it. And I could have done a slow transitional retirement, but no. I just got to say *no más*. That's it, I'm done. The best decision I ever made, to leave and to retire. I'm glad I didn't do it any earlier because I was able to draw more for my retirement and Social Security and all that. I can now kind of indulge myself and my grandkids in ways that I probably couldn't have four or five years ago had I just retired then.

02-01:31:48

So, now I do whatever I want to do with my time. What a concept. I don't have to look at my phone and see, Professor Almaguer, what was that assignment? I don't have to deal with high-maintenance colleagues that don't return emails, that are snarly. I don't have to deal with cheap scenes within departments. I don't have none of the things that just used to drive me nuts about teaching in the CSU. I went from Michigan, where I had three offices—my sociology office, my American Studies office, and then my office as the head of the Social Organizations Institute, which I gave to my graduate students. I wasn't using them all.

I came to San Francisco State, I had to share an office with somebody. Are you kidding me? No, you've got to share, maybe with two lectures. I said, are you kidding me? Travel, there's no travel. I had $25,000 to travel, buy books. I never once took a trip to a professional conference on the university's dime in the eighteen years I was there, never once got any money for any research or anything because that institution didn't have it. And so, I come to fully appreciate the old adage: "Berkeley is where the show horses are. The workhorses are in the CSU."

And so, it was a different institution. Look, I had to buy my own paper. I had to buy my own printer cartridge, stuff, out of my own pocket. I did not have any money for anything, nothing. That got tiresome, too. And so, I just bailed. I just said, that's it. Now, my only concerns are mine and what I want to do with my day, with my time, with my life.

So, I've learned to say no. I've learned to kind of take care of myself. It's not apparent, but I've finally been able to lose that fifteen pounds that eluded me that I gained when I was teaching. I'm a happy camper. I'm in retirement heaven now. I don't look back with any regrets, no hard feelings. Things went the way they did. If something worked out really well, good for me. Good for us. If they didn't, I'm sorry for that. We'll give it another try at some point. But, life is just so good right now, and I just feel like I've been through this

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fifty-year cycle. I've just kind of gone into this world and have just kind of stepped out of it. And it's really nice.

But anyway, so that's what I have to share with you, Todd, here. I don't know if that makes sense. Is there anything else that you want me to elaborate on or comment on?

02-01:35:48
Holmes: No, that was very well put. Well, before we go, I wanted to get some of your thoughts and reflections on the evolution of Chicano Studies. The field has obviously matured and grown since your early days at UC Santa Barbara. In your view, what have been some of the major developments in the field, looking over these last fifty years?

02-01:36:16
Almaguer: The simple one is kind of the burgeoning of the field, the proliferation of work in a variety of different areas that's certainly pushed from the humanities, social sciences, history kind of realms, some really interesting cultural studies work. There's stuff in film. There's a whole kind of emergence of stuff in these cultural realms after the cultural turn some decades ago that I am thrilled to see. There's stuff on different cultural expressions and all of that. So, I'm really excited about that. And I still support Amazon by buying these books as they come out incessantly. Of course, I don't get to read many of them. They're stacked up higher than I would want to admit.

But I revel in its development, and I revel in the sophistication. I also am dismayed at some of the other things that I read and see. But that just comes with the territory. I revel in those differences of opinion and different points of view and takes on the world. So, that has been a joy to see, to see it just mature and develop and expand in its scope and its sophistication. Part of that scope has certainly been from Chicano Studies here in Berkeley and here in California and the Southwest, to Latino Studies bringing in the experiences of a variety of other, you know, Salvadorans, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Ecuadorians, South Americans.

So, the aperture has been opened. The scope of things has broadened and widened. And that is wonderful, too, because it puts us into conversation not only with ourselves regionally and in the Southwest but across all of these lines. That has been a vibrant an exciting trajectory. There is still the ongoing set of issues around the categories and the centrality of these different categories—race, class, gender, sexuality. And certainly, the work now that looks at them intersectionally and the relationships between them is an exciting and vibrant one. I revel in people that can do that kind of work and do it really well.

So, I am only heartened, only overjoyed at the success of the field overall with the various contributions of individuals whose work I particularly admire and

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like and am happy to support. Yet there are still a number of debates, particularly around identity. I spend too much time on Facebook and read these different standpoints and stances and debates on X, Y and Z, nomenclature and identity labels and stuff. And so, that is ongoing and fruitful and important. I don't scoff at it other than just kind of dismayed that these things have continued for fifty years. It's a different kind of permutation on an old theme, but it is still there.

02-01:39:42

I just think back to when I came to this campus and kind of cut my teeth and embraced fully this notion of being a Chicano, I remember so distinctly the only people who were called Latino at that point in '69, '70, '71 were people who were from Latin America, who were white, educated, upper-class, largely immigrants from Latin America. We designated them as Latino because they were non-Mexican, and they were not from the same class, the same kind of racial background. It was not a disparaging term, but it was a category. But it meant something very different.

I was at San Francisco State.. I was entrusted to write the proposal to change the name from Raza Studies to Latino Studies. And, a term that I abhorred thirty, forty years ago, I would never embrace, I very slowly kind of wrapped my head around it because it literally was what Raza Studies was at its inception, a pan-ethnic label and category. They used Raza. Now the term is Latino. So, we basically saw it as kind of a continuation, not a compromise if anything but just a new nomenclature for the same kind of commitments and passions, a kind of multiple-group study and all.

I've seen how those identity categories have shifted over time and the debates that have run with that. And this Latinx debate has been the most recent kind of wrinkle on that theme. Of course I read that stuff. I chuckle sometimes. I get angry sometimes at the arguments. Then more often than not I do what I typically do: I just let it go. I say, well, you can call yourself whatever you want to call yourself. I don't give a damn who you say you are, whether you put an X in front of, behind your ethnic label. I don't care how Indian you claim to be or how mixed or whatever. I don't get as invested as I perhaps would in earlier life with some of those things. I'm basically, look, if we're talking about people of Mexican descent and we're talking about people from Puerto Rico or whatever, whatever their background, generation, status, et cetera, if that's what we're talking about, then we're talking about the same thing.

If you want to put a different label or put it in a different bottle or a different carton and call it something else, I won't tell you you're just putting old wine in a new bottle and putting a new label on it. I will respect what you call yourself. I will probably give you a little bit of grief at first until I can reconcile myself with it. But then it's okay. And so, there's an element of trying to let go those deep investments that were so central to a forging of an

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initial identity and an evolution of an identity and to just be a little bit more open, a little bit less rigid about battle lines and the investments people have and who and what they are and what they call themselves.

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I see the contradictions. I see the individual contradictions. I see people who are mixed race, for example, who have a white father and Mexican mother, and they're mixed. But yet they identify solely with their mother. In fact they don't even identify with their Mexican mother. They identify with her indigenous ancestral roots. And here you have a mixed-race person who identifies as indigenous. Who am I to question that person? Who am I to tell them no, you're this, you're that? How can you claim to be something that—you're half-white. How can you claim to be Indian? Give me a break.

I could do that, and I have. But, you call yourself whatever you want to call yourself. If we're fighting on the same side and we're rowing in the same direction, then good for us. Let's do it. But, I don't want to battle you along the way. I don't want to take an oar out and smack you and vice versa or push you off the lane. Of course I read these young testimonials. I am this and I am that, with all the passion. I read their narratives. Or I'll see these ancestry DNA. There's this young Latino kid who's this tall-looking, fair-complexioned guy, straight hair. He says I've discovered that I'm Indian, and then looks at his DNA thing, which you can't take very seriously anyway. 40 percent white, 10 percent indigenous, and from Chihuahua, so he proudly proclaims, I am indigenous. I am from Chihuahua. Are you kidding? You're 40 percent white. What about your white father and stuff?

02-01:44:50

And so, when I did my DNA the first time, 23andMe, many years ago, it came back that I was 67 percent European. I go, wait a minute. And finally they revised it a couple of times, and it turned out that I was only, like, 35 percent European, that that other 30 or 40 percent was in dispute. And then they put some of that over into the indigenous side. So, it turned out to be as much European as indigenous and about 4 percent African. But, at a certain point, if I believed those things, I could claim that I was white because I have 40 percent European ancestry.

Now, of course, the irony is my birth certificate says that I'm white because when they asked my mother, my mother asked the nurses what do I put down here, and the nurses looked at her. Well, you're white. My mother was very fair with green eyes. And so, I was listed as "white" on my birth certificate. I go, okay, I'm legally white by law. Even though I didn't identify that way, that has been the way I have been mapped. So, when I got verification that I was something like 65, 70 percent white, I kept thinking, oh damn, this is just not good. I had to go into therapy. I don't have money for therapy at this point in my life.

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02-01:46:17

And so, I don't take those things very seriously anymore. I don't take people's identities—I'm obviously respectful, but I don't fall on a cross like I did, "*Soy Chicano.*" That moment and investment, I've been there, done that multiple times. I'm a little more sanguine about these things, and so I'm a little bit more forgiving and not as rigid about them. But, that's where people are and that's what people are battling, and that's what's important and where the struggle and strife is around personal identity categories, then good for you. Be rigorous about that, and come to your own determinations. I'll respect and honor that, even though I look at you and say like what are you talking about? Anyway, any more trouble I can get myself into here at this point?

02-01:47:14
Holmes: Well, I wanted to ask, as one who's worked at multiple institutions, you usually have your two models. You have, say, an Ethnic Studies department, or you have standalone, say, Chicano Studies departments or other programs, right, intermixed throughout the departments. Where do you fall, because there's the aspect of mainstreaming. There's the aspect of, no, we should stand alone and have a separate department. Where do you fall in this, because you've had experience on both fronts? What do you see has worked the best?

02-01:47:52
Almaguer: I don't think there's one size fits all. I think that every place has its own unique location and population and what it can and can't realistically do with the resources and what the institution can provide for those kind of multiple possibilities. And so, yeah, I've been a part of programs like in Michigan, and I guess at UC and even at Santa Cruz where Ethnic Studies was part of American Studies. And there's American Ethnic Studies, I guess, at USC, and then the American Cultures program. And I've seen how that works, where it's a subsidiary of another interdisciplinary program. I've seen it where they're ethnically inflected, where there's Chicano/Latino Studies or Puerto Rican and Latino Studies or Cuban, however they refract and fall.

And so, I don't think there's one particular way that is the only way to do it. I'm just very respectful of the multiplicity of pathways and strategies and institutional configurations of these programs as will be allowed or as is possible in many cases, given the history of the institution and what's possible and what's not, fiscally and programmatically. So, I don't have a really good answer other than an open kind of fluid approach to how these things get configured, as long as they're there, as long as there's a presence, as long as there is a program or a series of programs that will offer courses in Latino populations.

02-01:49:40

Whether Latino History is taught in the history department or in Latino Studies or in some comparative Ethnic Studies program doesn't matter to me as much at this point, as long as it's there, that it's available to people, to take in whatever course they want. And this notion of being separate and not

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mainstream, I read a lot of that stuff even more recently that annoys me. We're institutionalized. We're here. We get paid. We're subjects of the state. We get paid by the state, whether it's the CSU or the UC or what have you. So, this notion that we need to be autonomous, we need to have our own college, we need to have our own separate department, we need to control our own destiny, that makes an awful lot of sense. But then I see the internal strife and positioning and craziness that happens within those departments around other lines of difference and other notions of who's authentic, who's inauthentic, what is a legitimate thing that we should be doing, what is frivolous and not so central in importance.

I've seen those debates, and all I can do at this particular point in life is to just be ecumenical about it, to just be open about it, just to say like, I'm not going to prescribe one path, one way, one identity. As long as we know who we're talking about, and for me, again, from the Chicano Studies standpoint, I'm talking about Mexican populations that may have been here for hundreds of years and may have migrated in the last century like my parents, or this century. But we're talking about people of Mexican descent that have come from this, that have shared culture. And again, that's messy because many people are indigenous and don't speak Spanish. And so, I recognize all that.

But, we know who we're talking about. What you call them, what they call themselves, the labels, the generational labels and other that we give them, all that stuff is a bit more fluid. And I take, not with a grain of salt, but I don't take as crucially as I used to. I won't fall on a sword for that anymore and stuff. So, if these young people want to call themselves Latinx, and use that as a mark, for example, to designate the fluidity of their gender identity or their sexuality, then that's fine. I bristled at that initially because I assumed they were talking about it replacing Latino and Latina as the umbrella category. But no, it's more just an acknowledgement of this particular segment of the population. And sometimes you use that nomenclature as the all-embracive term for everyone.

So I just remember the last couple of years my own thinking on Latinx has evolved. More often than not I'm using that term myself around proposals that certainly have to do with that population. But even in a broader sense, I see programs that have transformed and changed their name from Latino/Latina Studies to Latinx Studies. There was a point when something evolved from Mexican-American to Chicano Studies. That was the big traverse. That was the big political statement. And I can see that now.

02-01:53:12

It's not that crucial to me how they define, as long as we're talking about the same population, the same set of issues, the same set of concerns, and bringing the same critical lens to it. That's what's important to me. So, I think we need to get over our identity issues. We've been going through an identity

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angst for way too long. And certainly, I've seen it for fifty years. It's time we get over it as best we can.

02-01:53:42
Holmes: So, I like to always give narrators the chance to recognize scholars in the field who have passed. We all stand on the shoulders of many, many people. Are there any scholars in the field who have passed that you would like to recognize, who played a profound influence in you and your work?

02-01:54:13
Almaguer: I gave that a little bit of thought, and I guess I'm blessed because a lot of my people that were part of my formative years and that I grew up with are still with us. But there have been two people from this campus that have passed that were so central to my graduate years here, were on my dissertation committee and were absolutely generous with their time, with their support, despite my failings and disappointments that I may have caused them, that have passed, that I do want to mention and acknowledge.

One of them is Bob Blauner. The reason I came to Berkeley is to work with him. Idiosyncratic, interesting man. I loved him dearly. And he passed a couple of years ago, and it was a sad, sad thing because of his generosity. I remember just going to—this was in the seventies—so we would have graduate seminars, and we wouldn't even hold them on this campus. He would bring us to his house to meet, to have a seminar in his home and stuff. Other people have been equally gracious. I just remember these people who would not only be supporters and mentors here but would invite you into their home and take you in and show you a glimpse of life. Troy Duster did that for me, and he would often invite graduate students over to a fabulous place. Not only did you admire his success and what he could do, but you just saw another part of academic life that you could perhaps aspire to in some way. And so, I revered that.

And the other is Ron Takaki, who committed suicide a few years ago. The people who were my mentors: Ron, Al Camarillo, Bob, and Troy, these are the people who were so foundational to my life here, some of them have passed. And I mourn their loss. I mourn their not being here for others. But I take great consolation that far after I left, many years after I left here in the late seventies, they continued. And I've gotten to meet many of the people who they mentored and have helped move on and signed off on their dissertations as well. And so, that's a source of great pride, satisfaction, inspiration, to see that legacy continue.

02-01:57:41
Holmes: I think he looks younger than I do.

02-01:57:44
Almaguer: I keep thinking—and I don't see any Grecian on his hair.

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02-01:57:49
Holmes: He passed it to me, I think. I'm making up for him.

02-01:57:52
Almaguer: Albert Camarillo would be another person who I would have to say was absolutely central, that I revere to this day and celebrate all of the good things that he has done so selflessly and so graciously on my behalf, not when it was always due, not when I always deserved that support, not without perhaps more criticisms than he offered and should have given me more grief at the time. But I admire that. I've learned from that, so I've learned to bite my tongue and to be gracious when I'm called upon and say okay, this is what we do. This is what we do. This is what we signed up for, and not to become prima donnas but to give back and to help, to help that next generation of people, to be that basis of support, of guidance, of maybe some inspiration, and to continue this good work that we've been on for now fifty years. It's just stunning. It's just stunning to think about.

I'm blessed to still be here, to be able to be in this moment. Of course, I started pretty young, my early twenties, mid-twenties, on this pathway. But fifty years later, in my seventies, I'm thrilled to still be here, to be able to look back, to be able to revel in our successes, to bemoan our challenges and our disappointments, and overall to still be incredibly optimistic about what's going to happen. And if for no other reason than the demographics are changing, no other reason. It's not maybe the benevolence or the goodwill or the enlightenment of power brokers, but that we are also moving into those positions. We are segueing into those deanships, presidential appointments, chancellor appointments.

We are becoming a central part of the institution and in the process changing it, transforming it, not reproducing it and being co-opted and mainstreamed. We all are positioned in different places. And yet, we're all part of the same good fight, from different vantage points, different positions, on different fronts, some embattled, some less embattled. But, we're in this for the long haul. This started as a good fight. It continues to be a good fight. And for those of us that are still here and part of that, we're lucky. Good for us—survivors.

02-02:00:59
Holmes: Tomás, thank you so much.

02-02:01:00
Almaguer: Did that make sense?

02-02:01:02
Holmes: Absolutely.

02-02:01:03
Almaguer: I don't know. It's hard to put these things into words without sounding just hackneyed and just like, oh, get over it. But yeah, I want to be respectful but

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also critical. It's just like, we made our contributions. We tried. We all tried really hard and, yeah, won some, lost some, but we're still in the battle, and that's what counts.

02-02:01:41
Holmes: I think that's a beautiful place to end.

02-02:01:43
Almaguer: Okay. That's it. Cut.

02-02:01:44
Holmes: Thank you Tomás.

[End of Interview]

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