

Vicki Ruiz

Vicki Ruiz: 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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Vicki Ruiz



Vicki Ruiz interviewing Rosa Guerrero, 1985

Abstract

Vicki L. Ruiz is Distinguished Professor Emerita of History and Chicano/Latino Studies at UC Irvine. Born in Atlanta, Georgia and raised in the coastal towns of Florida, Professor Ruiz received her PhD in history from Stanford University in 1982. In the years that followed, she held faculty positions at the University of Texas, El Paso, UC Davis, Claremont Graduate School, and Arizona State University before joining the faculty of UC Irvine, where she would serve as dean of the School of Humanities and chair of the department of Chicano / Latino Studies. She is widely considered a pioneer in the field of Chicana history and is the author and editor of numerous publications in the field. These include: *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry* (1987); *Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives* (1988); *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in US Women's History* (1990); *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (1998); *Latinas in the United States: A Historical Encyclopedia* (2006); *Memories and Migrations: Mapping Boricua and Chicana Histories* (2008); *Latinas in History: An Interactive Project* (2009). Professor Ruiz's contributions to the field of Chicana/o Studies has earned her a number of national honors. She is a fellow of the Society of American Historians, a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, as well as a recipient of the National Humanities Medal. She has also been elected president of the Organization of American Historians, American Studies Association, and American Historical Association. In this interview, Professor Ruiz discusses: her family background and upbringing; her educational journey from high school and Gulf Coast Community College to Florida State University; her graduate experience at Stanford University as a Chicana and establishing herself in the profession; her reflections on the state of Chicana/o Studies and how the field evolved over her career; the struggle to include Chicanas in the fields of history and Chicano studies; the aims and contributions of her scholarship in the field; the reception of Chicana/o Studies at the universities she served; her experience in university administration and leadership roles in national organizations; as well as her thoughts on important works, themes, and high points in the field's development over the last fifty years.

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Project History

By Todd Holmes
Berkeley, California

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Advisory Council

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

Raúl Coronado [University of California, Berkeley]

Maria Cotera [University of Texas, Austin]

Matthew Garcia [Dartmouth College]

Ignacio García [Brigham Young University]

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Raúl Ramos [University of Houston]

Oliver Rosales [Bakersfield College]

Mario Sifuentez [University of California, Merced]

Irene Vásquez [University of New Mexico]

Interview 1: March 26, 2019

01-00:00:00

Holmes: This is Todd Holmes with the Oral History Center at U.C. Berkeley. Today's date is March 26, 2019, and I have the pleasure of sitting down with Vicki Ruiz for her first session in the Chicana/o Studies Oral History Project. We are here at her beautiful house in the city of Altadena, California. Vicki, thank you so much for sitting down with me today and participating in this project.

01-00:00:29

Ruiz: Sure, Todd. My pleasure.

01-00:00:29

Holmes: In our two sessions together, we'll be discussing your life and career, as well as your observations and contributions to the field of Chicana and Chicano studies. But maybe we should start off with a little bit about yourself and your family background.

01-00:00:50

Ruiz: Okay. I'm a child of the '50s, so my name is Vicki, not Victoria. I was born in Atlanta, Georgia. My father was an electrician at Lockheed, my mother a homemaker. I have an older sister, Julie, who's eleven years older than I. I had a very atypical experience, I would say, in terms of how I came to Chicano studies. My mother and my grandmother were amazing storytellers. My mother didn't believe in television. We didn't have a lot of television in our house. She believed that you had to exercise one's imagination with a book. And the Bookmobile came to our neighborhood once a week, parked about a block from our house—not even that. From about the age of five or six, I was checking out books, and always drawn, even as a child, to nonfiction, and particularly history, and reading biography. A biography always interested me.

My mother grew up, born in 1921, in Walsenburg, Colorado. She was considered a product of a mixed marriage. Her mother, María de la Nieves Moya, ran a boarding house. One of her boarders was an immigrant, Mexicano immigrant, from León, Guanajuato, Albino Ruiz. They were in their late thirties, maybe forty, when they got married, because my grandmother was born in Trinidad, Colorado in 1881. My mother was born in 1921. And two years later, they had Beatriz.

My grandmother, before had an early marriage, had run away with a local guy Julián Arguello at the age of fifteen. They had three boys and two girls. None of the sons lived to adulthood; one died as a baby, another of spinal meningitis at the age of seven, and sixteen-year-old Erminio, whom my mother is named after. Around 1912, 1913, when my grandmother was pregnant with my Tia Lilia, she discovered that her neighbor from across the street, was also pregnant, by guess who? She filed for divorce. The family didn't want her to do so, but she did. And the judge asked Julián, "Who do you want to be

with?" He asked "Do you want to be with your wife or la vecina [the neighbor woman]?" He said la vecina, so the judge granted the divorce. And Erminio went into the mines, and María opened up a boarding house in their small adobe. And then when he was sixteen, he had an appendicitis attack in the pit. He died in her arms, as they were trying to get him to a doctor.

01-00:04:40

So my mother was named after my grandmother's beloved son, the brother she never knew. She was also named—her middle name, Pablita, was from her grandfather, Pablo, who lived with them when she was growing up. How they had come to the mines is that Pablo had come from northern New Mexico, and had crossed the Raton Pass. And they had a little ranchito. Then as mining came in, a lot of the ranchitos were displaced, and Pablo had to go work in the mines.

My great grandmother died in childbirth, with my grandmother's sister Adelaida and the children were split up among relatives. But my grandmother stayed with her father. So I learned these stories my grandmother would tell—she would never talk about the divorce. I did not know that until I was sixteen. I had no idea. My grandmother only talked about certain things as a girl, and how hard it was, and living with her dad, and doing cooking when she was eight. She talked about Colorado, and about the coal mines, and about my grandfather Albino. But there were gaps. Of course, I didn't question, I was a little kid. And my mother would talk about, when my grandfather died in 1933, he died on the table at Denver General during experimental back surgery. He had injured his back working in the beet fields. After his death, my mother went to work. She always wanted to be an English teacher, wanted to go to school. After the eighth grade, she dropped out. She worked in a donut shop. She was so tiny—my mother was very tiny. They would hide her in the flour bins when the health inspectors arrived. When she was sixteen, she got her social security card and a better job. She was a salad girl at Wolfe's. After putting in a long day at the cafeteria, she went to a storefront business college, and then she got her best job ever as a single woman, typing Death Notices at Denver General.

My dad, Robert Mercer, grew up on a Kansas farm. Was not close—even as a child—to his parents, and in fact, he forged their signatures when he graduated from high school, and hitchhiked to Fort Riley so he could enlist in what was then the Army Air Corps. He was an airman at Lowry Field [outside of Denver]. He was visiting a sick friend in the hospital, he saw my mother and struck up a conversation.

01-00:07:30

My parents were nineteen when they married. They were married for fifty-four years, until my dad's death. I did not know my father's family. I met them three times in my lifetime; once as a baby, once when I was four, and once when I was twenty-two. We did not have a good interaction. When I was

twenty-two, they said, "Oh, you look much more fair in your pictures." My dad was driving me out to Stanford. "You're going to California. You need a car, I will drive you out." My parents were very protective. There was never a question that I was going to go out there by myself. So we stopped. I'll always remember that we got out of the car, and this old man came out with a shotgun. And my dad's saying, "Dad, dad?" He goes, "Paul, is that you, Paul?" They had been expecting us. We get there—my parents had been married for a very long time at that point. My grandmother, first of all, she looks, she goes, "Well, you look fairer in your pictures." Then she said, "Oh, Paul, that woman called," meaning my mother, because my mother wanted to know that we had arrived. We were supposed to spend the night.

01-00:08:56

I was trying to make conversation any way I could by admiring pieces of furniture that they had. "Oh, that's going to your cousin, so-and-so. This is going to cousin so-and-so." I wasn't asking for anything. So I remembered she served us Banquet fried chicken, Banquet lemon meringue pie, and they gave us a tour of the farm. Then we saw these rotting box cards on the property, and my grandfather said, "Yeah, that's where the Mexicans lived." My dad looked at me and was, like, "We've got to go." I mean, I think we were only there three hours, and I remember getting in the car. All of a sudden I think my grandmother felt bad, because she had been telling me "no" about all this stuff. And I still have it, it's a butter dish that she gave me, this little butter dish that I could have. That was the last contact.

When I was four years old—and this is a family story—I remember a little bit of it. I was very excited to meet my grandparents, and they were coming to Florida. My parents were very proud of the house they had bought. This is, what, 1959, it was a new house at the time. They came over, and my mother was cooking. My grandmother asked me to help her set the table, and I was all happy. I noticed my sister was not very friendly to them. And I'm setting the table, and my grandmother gives me a pack of Roloids. She says, "I want you to put a piece on every plate, because I know your mother's food is so spicy, it's going to give us heartburn." My mother ran from the kitchen, she slammed the door. She was crying. My dad had words. And my sister grabbed my arm, and she dragged me into a room that we shared. [laughs] She was, like, "What are you doing?"—and I was, like, I had no idea. When I came out of that room, and my mother came out of her room, they were gone. Nothing was said.

So, in fact, my mother used to really get mad at my father, that he would try to pass—because we lived in the South. I remember one time that my dad got in a dispute with a neighbor. And the neighbor called my dad a "Chicano son of a bitch," and he was so proud. My mother's going, "You're not Mexican!" You know, but he was proud. And her family embraced him. I know my father always—they helped out with my grandmother María. My grandmother had three daughters—she had four daughters, only three she got along with. And

she would do a round-robin. The woman was never in a nursing home in her life. The last three years of her life, she was, like, "I'm going to stay in Colorado. I'm going to die in Colorado. I'm going to be with Lilia."

01-00:12:16

So I remember those tales. I have a very unusual background, in that my father didn't like to work for anyone. Left Lockheed, started an outboard boat motor business. Loved fishing, knew nothing about it, but started with this outboard motor business, and then decided he was going to go to Florida. Sold the business, sold the house in Marietta, Georgia. I was three, and we moved to Florida. My dad, from the time when I was about four until about nineteen, we would have a boat—first we started out with a charter boat, The Hobo. Then we bought a sixty-five-foot boat, called the Blue Sea II. The Blue Sea II's mortgage was bigger than our house payment, and it was always about making the boat payment. My dad would take tourist fishing from Memorial Day until Labor Day, then it was the dead period. Around Thanksgiving, take the boat to Marathon, in the Florida Keys. Catch the winter tourists from about Thanksgiving to about Easter. Pack up, go back to our home in Panama City, and get ready for Memorial Day.

There are times I'd go to two or three different schools, because when my parents had the resources, I went to Catholic school. When they didn't—I went to public school. So I would start at one school in September, we would go to Marathon. I would always beg not to go to school until January. Sometimes they put me in school, sometimes they said, okay, you can stay until after the first of the year. Then I would start my second school. Then Easter, I'm usually back at the original school. It was really sort of disruptive—and also, I was severely asthmatic, so I was very sick. I was always sick. I took asthma shots—first twice a week from seven to ten, and then once a week from about ten to seventeen, then I didn't take them anymore.

So it was a different type of migrant experience. I always knew there would be a big argument, because my dad would always find the cheapest place to stay, to rent in the Florida Keys—always the cheapest. My mother would always be cleaning and complain about it. One time he splurged, and we had a really nice little duplex, and she was really happy about it. But most of the time it was, like, we are in an old-time "Conch" shack. It has a corrugated metal roof. There is one room and one small bedroom. So she would declare—"it's filthy!" We could always count on that.

01-00:15:37

You know, I was always sort of in the middle. The schools were desegregating when I was in junior high, and it was always African Americans on one side, whites on the others. I was kind of in the middle. My mother encouraged my sister and I to get the college education she never had. And she would say that. I mean, it was these lessons, they were like moral

parables, like, do you realize how privileged you are? You get to go to school. And particularly if we came home with less than an A or a B. But also the idea that we could have any career we wanted, as long as we were teachers. To her, that was the ideal for a young woman, was to be a teacher.

Actually, in high school, I started out in a business track. I took Fundamentals of Math—I wasn't in AP [Advanced Placement] courses until my junior year. Mrs. Epps, my eleventh grade English teacher, asked me if I would take the exam for AP English. I was just beginning to learn, what's AP? I started realizing, oh, that's where the popular kids are, and rich kids are, the AP courses. Okay. So I took the test, I submitted the writing sample to Miss Fay, who had been there from time immemorial. And Mrs. Epps really encouraged me, and she put in a good word for me. I didn't get in, and she was surprised. So my dad went to talk to Miss Fay, with me in tow. And she said, "Well, Vicki's not as smart as she thinks she is. She'd be a much happier child if she'd learn to accept her limitations." My dad kept pushing. "She did well on the test. She wrote a good essay. Why won't you take her?" He kept pushing her. Finally, she blurted out that she had never had a minority child in her class, in her senior Honors English class, and she wasn't about to start. And my dad said, "We are now going to the principal's office." And my dad threatened to sue the school board, which is really interesting situation, that my European American dad was standing up for me, his Mexican American child. My last name made no difference to Miss Fay.

So I landed front and center of her sour face all of senior year. We had assigned seats, and she put me right in the center. For those of us who were grade grubbers like I was, because by junior year I had become a real grade grubber, that we had to recite so many lines of poetry in front of the class. It took up about fifteen minutes of the fifty-minute class, because there were enough of us in Honors English who had the B plusses, who wanted that A minus. So I recited all of this poetry, learned all of these sonnets, and recited them in front of the class.

01-00:18:59

I went to community college, for many reasons, but one of the reasons was, I was told by a counselor Mrs. Callahan that I was probably not college material, because the IQ test I had taken in seventh grade indicated that I wasn't college material. In fact, the constant movement was disturbing my schooling. So in eighth grade, my mother told my dad, "You go down to Marathon. We're staying here." I'm not going down—you know, this is hurting her. And so my dad agreed. For one year, he went down and fished by himself, and took people out. The next year, he said, "Okay, I'm going to do some commercial fishing. I'll rent the boat out to scientists who want to go out and take boats into hurricanes and study," do all these nifty experiments. He almost lost the boat once with a group from Texas A&M, and after that he said, "I trust my boat, I know the boat. I'm never going to do that again." He said—he used the phrase—he said, "I loosened her up, and I shouldn't have

done that." So even though they paid really well, like, \$10,000, which was an amazing amount of money in 1968, 1969, for the pleasure of almost getting yourself killed. But I hope they got some good experiments out of it.

01-00:20:46

Holmes:

I wanted to ask, before we get to your college years, about the high school, your experience in high school. During the same time that you're in high school, many high schools are experiencing a rising tide of activism. Think of the 1968 blowouts.

01-00:21:06

Ruiz:

Nothing.

01-00:21:06

Holmes:

What was the environment like?

01-00:21:09

Ruiz:

It was small-town Florida. We had a new student who had come from the East, I remember his name was Sam Pizzi, and he got expelled because he wore a black armband, because of the invasion of Cambodia. And we were like [gasps]—you know, we were, like, "Wow! He did that!" But it was sort of an American Graffiti kind of a high school. It was a back in time school. And you know, I made my way. I mean, I had already gotten hazed in middle school, and understood how to cope with that. In middle school I would get notes in my handbag, in my purse, saying things like, "You're greasy. You need to wash your hair every day." You know, "You're dirty." Having people tell me, "You know, you should tell people you're I-Talian. They'd like you better if you say that."

I had friends. But I wasn't really cognizant of the world until I went to Florida State. Our local newspaper didn't cover anything. Politics—my parents were straight-ticket Democrats, FDR and JFK were gods in our home. Earliest sort of political memory is watching my sister and my mother cry as we watched the JFK funeral from beginning to end. I was eight years old. I didn't understand, obviously, what was going on.

And as I said many times before, I don't feel that I'm a first generation Chicano studies scholar. I did not arrive to California until 1977. I did not really become cognizant of such thing as a Chicano movement until 1976. And it was from books. I tell everyone that I went from being Taco Bell in high school, community college, and Florida State, to being Southern Belle when I went to Stanford. [laughs] I was different; I knew that.

01-00:24:07

Holmes:

Well, talk about your time at Florida State. Were you the first in your family to go to college?

01-00:24:14

Ruiz:

My sister is an elementary school teacher. She went to Gulf Coast Community College like I did, then she went to University of Miami. And I went to Florida State. And it was there that I grew up. I'd lived at home during community college. I had very strict parents, my mother was extraordinarily strict. It was finding my way. I was going to be a high school history teacher. That's all I was going to do. Education classes, my first quarter, bored me to tears. I got an A in Instructional Technology. I learned how to thread a sixteen-millimeter film projector. I knew how to do filmstrips. I was bored. They were big classes. I liked the history classes, I really did. I took a U.S. Woman's History class in 1976; always loved history. Always sort of questioning, "Okay, how do my family stories fit?" My grandfather was an IWW [Industrial Workers of the World] activist. You know, how did those stories mesh with what I'm learning in school? The only thing I heard about anything with Spanish surnames was Ponce de León, the Alamo, and Pancho Villa, that's it.

So that was always in the back of my mind, that there was two kinds of history: the history I had at home, and then the history when I went to school. And well, Jean Gould Bryant—she was then Jean Gould Hales—she changed my life. She asked me to come to see her during office hours. I thought "What had I done wrong?" She put me at ease. She asked me about my GPA, and I told her. She said, "Well, have you thought about graduate school?" She said, "What is your major?" I said, "Education." She goes, "Oh, are you enjoying your classes?" And I blurted out, "No, I hate them!" Because I really did. And she said, "Well, have you thought about graduate school and history?" I said, "Oh, graduate school? That's for smart people and for rich people. I'm neither." She said, "Oh, yes."

01-00:26:53

So she began to open up the door to me that there were scholarships and there were fellowships. She was a really wonderful mentor. She encouraged me. Tough love. "We've got to get your writing skills up." I took what was called "Sandbox English." It was like the old SER reading things, where you would take a laminated lesson, you did the pre-test, you did the lesson, then you did the post-test. And I had a graduate student intern look over my work and then I went to the next laminated lesson. So I did that several times, one quarter pass-fail credit.

I will say to you, I have never had Algebra II, I've never had Calculus, I've never had Trig. One of our neighbors, the month before I was to take the GRE [Graduate Record Examinations], was a retired math teacher. Got a crash course in sign and cosign, and so I had a very decent verbal GRE and a mediocre math score, but that's okay. It was mediocre. It could have been a lot worse.

The U.S. women's history was offered in the winter quarter, 1976. In spring quarter of 1976, I took a new course. I thought it was new, anyway, people were talking about it as new, because there was no African American Studies. There were no Latino Studies. But there was Race Relations. And I was going to take Race Relations. And this young, beautiful African American woman Leonor Boulin Johnson comes on stage, and it's a big class. And she can just hold the audience, like I've never seen anyone hold an audience. And I learned so much from her. I thought, 'Wow, maybe I could do that.' But she just opened up all sorts of perspectives, and questioning. I got up the courage to come see her during office hours. I learned over time that she was a freshly-minted UCLA sociology PhD, grew up in Pasadena, and here she was in Tallahassee, Florida. Talk about culture shock. And she dealt with sort of ignorant, sort of—let's just say uninformed comments about African Americans. She just dealt with it.

01-00:29:49

I met with her, and she asked me about my background, and I told her. She started loaning me books in Chicano studies. So I read Rudy Acuña, opened my eyes to a whole new world—wow, for the first time, here, my family's stories, right here. Read other books, I think I read Ernesto Galarza, *Barrio Boy*. Also around this time, I have just become a converted, second-wave feminist. I mean, I am pro ERA—you know, radical for Tallahassee at the time. I am filled with that sort of energy. And from that point—with Leonor and her influence and my background—I thought, Chicano history is what I want to do. I'm a Chicana. I can do this. I was, like, this is really what I want to do. I had no idea what I was going to do. But I knew it was going to be something in Chicana history.

And I think part of it is a lot of women of my generation, Chicana scholars, they came through the Chicano movement. Then there was, for some, flirtation with the women's movement. But then there was a distinctly Chicana movement. And for me, I came from the women's movement, but I really didn't go into the Chicano movement. I went straight into the Chicana movement. [laughs] Just straight in.

So I knew I was going to focus on Mexican women in the United States. That's what I was going to do. But I didn't know quite what it was going to be.

Applied to graduate school. I applied to Stanford, and in February of 1977, Albert Camarillo calls me and talks to me about my interest in Stanford, and my interest in Chicano history. We talked for about thirty minutes. He then calls my parents, and he talks with my parents for thirty minutes. After that, it was, like, Stanford was the only place I was going to go.

01-00:32:07

Holmes:

Did you apply to other places?

01-00:32:09

Ruiz:

Oh yeah, I applied to Harvard, I applied to Northwestern. I applied to [UNC] Chapel Hill and to Duke to work with Anne Scott, William Chafe. Northwestern just because Chicago would be a really nice place. And of course Harvard was Harvard. But Stanford was always my first choice. Jean had her PhD from Stanford, so she was really promoting "The Farm" early on.

Stanford was the first place to accept me, it was the only place to give me money. Then I received a national Danforth Fellowship. And when I received the Danforth, then all these other schools, with the exception of Harvard where I was waitlisted, decided that maybe I should be admitted there, too. But I had already made my mind up on Stanford. That was the only place..

01-00:33:19

Holmes:

Before we get to your time in graduate school, I wanted to just ask a little bit about the field. The field of Chicana/o Studies is really taking shape right around this same that you would be heading to Stanford. And I know you've told me before, "Todd, I'm not really a first generation." But I'd like to broaden the view, because with few exceptions, the first-generation of Chicana scholars, came a bit later, right? If we think about the trajectory in the field, a lot of them aren't getting their PhDs until maybe the early '80s. So that's why I think we should broaden the scope a bit.

01-00:34:00

Ruiz:

Okay.

01-00:34:02

Holmes:

So I like the broad scope. Broad scope. And thus, I wanted to get your thoughts on the field. And again, this could be from your standpoint at Florida State and also into graduate school—

01-00:34:15

Ruiz:

Yeah, okay, graduate school.

01-00:34:14

Holmes:

How do you see the field taking shape? What scholars, what works out of the field caught your attention? You mentioned Ernesto Galarza, you mentioned Rudy Acuña. Were there other works and scholars that when you read—

01-00:34:31

Ruiz:

Paul Taylor. Paul Taylor, Carey McWilliams. Read Carey McWilliams as an undergraduate and loved it. Just loved it. Read Paul Taylor first year in graduate school. Martha Cotera was like a revelation. *Diosa y Hembra*, that was so important for me, because, like, wow. [*Diosa y Hembra: The History and Heritage of Chicanas in the U.S. (1976)*] You know, the women are here. They're not just in hearth and home. They're not in the background, they're not scenery.

01-00:35:12

Holmes:

And there was also her work, *The Chicana Feminist*.

01-00:35:15

Ruiz:

Yes, there was the *Chicana Feminist* in '77, but *Diosa Hembra* is her '76 book. And it's a collection of vignettes, a notable women for Chicanas, a very small book, but very important for me.

In terms of my education, not only was Al [Camarillo] giving me things to read, but I had a fabulous peer mentor, Richard Martínez. Between Antonia [Castañeda] and Richard Martinez, I was set. Richard Martínez was preparing for orals when I entered Stanford, and he said, "It's good prep for me, and I want you to succeed." I didn't realize the status markers of Stanford, really, the classism, the idea of pedigree until I went to a reception, the Welcome New Graduate Student reception. All my colleagues came from Smith, Duke, Harvard, Columbia. Here I am, Florida State and the only person of color. And Richard said, because he came from the University of the Pacific, "I was jacketed from Day One as dumb. That's not going to happen to you."

So for at least an hour, every time before a course seminar, we met in the Political Science lounge, and he would grill me on the readings. "Ask this question. MacPhail will think you're smart." "Do this." I mean, he was my mentor. He was my coach, he was my friend. He would also give me things to read in Chicano studies. And I would say things Richard recommended, and MacPhail would be surprised, and go, "Well, that's an interesting question." "Oh, that's an interesting point." Richard invested in me. And I remember absolutely being stricken when he called me and said, "I want you to have first shot at my books." I said, "But you've got orals in two weeks." He goes, "I'm quitting. I'm leaving the program." His wife wanted to start a family. Her father was in the financial world of San Francisco. And he had a job. I have always felt bad about that, because I thought Richard was an extraordinary teacher, he was extraordinarily generous with me.

Then Antonia [Castañeda] was already working at Sac State [CSU Sacramento] when I came. But she was extraordinarily kind. After she passed her orals, she gave me her notecards, and they became sort of the people of color notecards, because I passed on the notecards to Valerie Matsumoto, who passed them on. So it was a very rich environment. I met José Saldívar, I actually met Jose when we were Danforth fellows, and we had the fall retreat in Wisconsin We found out that we had something in common, because his father was a shrimp fisherman in Mobile. And he went to high school in Mobile, Alabama, 180 miles apart. So he could kind of understand my background. It was nice to know I knew someone there who was a friend.

01-00:39:45

Holmes:

Now Antonia, as you were saying, she was already there and passed the orals?

01-00:39:52

Ruiz:

Yes. She was the first one. She passed her orals when I was either first or second year.

01-00:39:57

Holmes: Then if we look at the graduate community there at Stanford, were you and Antonia the only Chicanas?

01-00:40:08

Ruiz: Yeah.

01-00:40:07

Holmes: What kind of environment was Stanford for you?

01-00:40:16

Ruiz: Well, I will say that I was enthusiastic in terms of what I was learning. It was really hard. It was challenging. My parents were sacrificing for me to be there. You know, I had to do well. I had a very good attitude. I was full of enthusiasm. Estelle Freedman was wonderful. She created a feminist community. I had one professor—I took him for two courses—basically, everything I said was wrong even though Richard had coached me to say something the professor would like. I was, like, okay, I know this situation. In spring quarter, we had to pick a famous historian to write our major paper. We had the professor for both sections of Core Colloq. He said, you have to write about a famous historian, a twenty-five-page historiographical essay. I wanted to write about Gerda Lerner or Mary Beard, but was told they had not written enough substantial body of work in order to merit consideration, and he assigned me Richard Hofstadter. I read Richard Hofstadter's greatest works. I knew I was really behind with this project. I had faced a similar professor at Florida State, who didn't think I was very smart. So this wasn't the first time.

So I worked my butt off on the Hofstadter paper. My paper for Estelle was late, because I was really working on this one. Gave it to him early. He gave me copious comments. I followed those comments to the letter. So I made the mistake of turning in the paper a few days before it was due, because it was due after the last class. He read substantial parts of my paper to the class. Everybody knew it was me. He said, "This is a very fine undergraduate paper, but it's not graduate quality. It's certainly not graduate quality for Stanford." I did not cry. Took everything *not* to cry.

01-00:43:08

I remember coming out of class, and my peers said, "Well, I'd better rework my paper," you know, people were kibitzing. I wasn't really close to my first-year cohort, to be honest. I got in the car, and I cried all the way to my studio apartment. Called my mother, "I want to come home. Taking my master's, I'm coming home." My mom said, "What does Al think?" "I don't know, I haven't talked to him yet."

So I called Estelle, actually, first, and Estelle was full of moral outrage. "No, this is discrimination, he shouldn't have humiliated you." I mean, she was wonderful. I talked to Al. And this is so Al—he said, "What are you worried about? Take your B's. You're going to be advanced to the PhD. That's going to

happen. You're not going to have to take this guy again. What are you upset about? Suck it up." So I called my mother and I told her what Al said. "He said, basically, 'Suck it up.'" "Okay, well, that's what you're going to do, then." But I'll always be indebted to Estelle, who felt my pain.

And it was really interesting, because this scholar I've run into him several times. I remember being at a conference—*Cannery Women* had just come out—and I was talking to an editor about textbooks. I knew someone was looking at me, but I was focused on a conversation. So I looked up, he patted me on the shoulder, and said, "I just want you to know, you've done real well for yourself." Thanks. I was just, like, "Thanks." It was funny, as he did this with every person of color I've talked to who'd gone through that program. Same behavior. The thing is that unlike Dave Gutiérrez, I didn't play basketball. Dave was part of a group that played basketball with Al and the Stanford guys. He broke the professor's nose in a game. Well, we all cheered, I have to say, in a very petty way, when we heard. [laughs]

01-00:45:46

Holmes:

If I'm correct, it's also during this time in graduate school that you get married and start a family.

01-00:45:54

Ruiz:

Yeah. I did. My first year is sort of this swimming as fast as I can, learning. You know, I had fun, I dated, I had fun. Then my second year at Stanford, there were two women of color admitted, Valerie Matsumoto from Arizona State and Carmen Romero from U.C. Santa Cruz. The three of us became really good friends. Carmen would become my roommate. Carmen basically set me up with a good friend of hers at Santa Cruz who was attending law school at Berkeley. So we met, I met my first husband at the Migrant Legal Services benefit dance at Strawberry Canyon in Berkeley. Yeah, La Raza Law Student Association benefit dance for Migrant Legal Services at Strawberry Canyon, yes. And that's where we were set up. It was a very fast courtship. Met in late September of 1978, and got married in September of 1979, had an ectopic pregnancy in December, took my orals in March of 1980, and was pregnant in April of 1980, and had Miguel in December, 1980, after I had turned in a very, very rough draft of the dissertation. I had to get the work done. I conducted a lot of my interviews pregnant, I did a lot of my research pregnant. I just had to get it done.

01-00:47:56

Holmes:

Discuss that, particularly in an environment like Stanford, balancing family along with your graduate work.

01-00:48:03

Ruiz:

Well, after Jerry graduated from law school in May 1980, we moved to Sacramento where he got a job, so I was really away from Stanford, because they never really saw me pregnant-pregnant. Al was very supportive, although Al did not want me to go interviewing. UC San Diego was interested in me.

Al told me, "Don't go until after the baby's born. You could go in February. You don't have to go in November. You can hold them until January or February, and then you go." Not me. They saw me pregnant.

I went down there, it was not a good experience. I was actually asked by the chair of the department if I saw a contradiction between being a professor and being a mother. I popped off, "Do you see a tension between being a father and being a professor?" He said, "I'm divorced." Okay.

Tom Dublin was so nice to me. That sort stood out, but I knew it, I wasn't going to get the job anyway, you know? I wasn't as advanced as the other candidates. That I knew. Al said, "I told you not to go." And I said, "I know. I know." At one point, again, it was, like, I wanted to work, I wanted to teach. At one point I had an interview with a local private school, because I thought, 'Gee, extra money would be nice. I could write a dissertation and teach at Sacramento Country Day.' I never went through with the interview. Al said, "You're not going to do this. No. You're going to finish the dissertation. You'll get a job. Don't do too much."

01-00:50:12

I think about those days, it was probably the most traditional time in my life, in that we found someone who could care for Miguel for a couple of hours, a few times a week in the neighborhood, really nice family. So Miguel would go there. But I remember getting up, having coffee. If Miguel was with me, I'd set up the playpen, I'd throw him toys, and I'd write. I wrote my dissertation on an electric typewriter, Smith Corona, Selectric. You know, his first word was "book." I would read to him things that I was thinking about. I would talk to him about ideas as we played. I had dinner on the table every night. I was able, in some way, I don't know how I did it, but I finished the dissertation. The thing that we splurged on is to have someone professionally type and format it.

As an assistant professor, I remember Maurice Isserman came up to me at a conference and said, "Oh, I really enjoyed your dissertation." It was, like, "Oh gosh, I'm so embarrassed because there were so many errors in it, typos and things like that." Then I showed up to my first job at UT El Paso with a kid on the hip and one on the way, which was not an auspicious start, let's say no one would have thought I was marked for career success at that point, although I will say that I had some colleagues at UTEP [University of Texas at El Paso] who were really terrific, who really went out of their way. I mean when I interviewed for the job at UTEP, Jerry and Miguel went with me. So they knew. They just didn't know—and I certainly didn't know at the time—that there would be a second one as well. Some of my colleagues were really wonderful. The wives of the some of my colleagues, they came to a shower that was thrown for me, and they were very nice. Some colleagues were not as thrilled.

I learned a hard, hard lesson. I'd never lived on the border. And my students educated me. They inspired me. I think I learned much more from them than I ever taught them. Of that, I can tell you, because I had never lived on the border. I remember that in our dissertation group, Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter, not only were writing these incredible dissertations in Chinese women's history, but they also had written with Laurie Coyle "Women at Farah: The Unfinished Story." We actually would have transcribing parties, where a whole group of us would go and we would spend the day transcribing their Farah tapes, and then have a nice potluck afterwards.

01-00:53:53

So I remember drawing upon their research. And the newspaper archives, and the materials at UTEP's Oral History Institute. I had a really great lecture on the Farah Strike. I was prepared, I was ready. And so I start talking about it. I had these two wonderful—Elpidia and Gloria, wonderful bilingual education majors, re-entry women. Always sat in the front row. Always asked good questions, took notes. They're winking and nudging each other, and giggling. I said, "Gloria?" "Oh, we're sorry, Dr. Ruiz, but we were there." I just, like, "Here you go. Here's your class." Let me take your seat here! You know. [laughs] It was really important.

And I remember, when I had Dan, I gave birth to Dan the day after my last lecture in U.S. History survey, after my Watergate lecture. I had gotten all the way to Watergate, and was so totally proud of myself. And my 9:30 class must have all chipped in a dollar, because I had the most beautiful, huge, floral bouquet at Providence Memorial Hospital. And it said, "We love you. Your 9:30 class." That will always stick with me. I remember also bringing Dan home from the hospital, and having so much time to grade 125 exams—you know, 125. It's, like, why couldn't have I just simplified the whole thing? No, I have to do an essay. Not short answer, essay. I remember, it was, like, 2:00 in the morning, and tears are streaming down my face. I'm nursing, Dan's up—he's a newborn. I've got a toddler, and I'm grading on the dining table, and I was, like, I really did this to myself? I did this to myself! What was I thinking? [laughs] It didn't last long.

01-00:56:08

I could not have had the career I've had, if not for my parents. My parents sold everything and moved to UT El Paso, when Dan turned one, to help me with the kids, because I was just—I was really thin. And I was always sick. In fact, I was introduced at one panel by Donna Gabaccia in 1986 as, "Professor Ruiz and her cold," because I always had a perennially red nose; I was always sick. Anything the kids caught, I caught. And if I'd missed class, I missed it because of the kids. I didn't miss it because of me.

01-00:56:51

Holmes:

Well, Vicki, I wanted to ask a little bit about maybe reflecting on the field developing. Then I would like to get to your dissertation before we end today.

01-00:57:02

Ruiz: Sure.

01-00:57:05

Holmes: Well, dissertation and the first book that came out of it.

01-00:57:08

Ruiz: Oh, okay. I was, like, first-year, I'm going to do Chicanas in World War II. I was going to do that. Then it became Chicanas in the Gold Rush. Then what happened was that Al Camarillo sent me to Guadalajara. He and Susan were expecting Jeff, and he and Susan had conducted interviews with Luisa Moreno over the summers of '76 and '77, and he needed me to go to Guadalajara, have Moreno look over the interviews, have her make comments, and he said, "Conduct your own interviews, if you like. Go ahead. Have fun." So, I knew very little about oral history. Sue Cobble gave me a Saturday lesson, a Saturday school on how to do oral history. So I showed up to Luisa Moreno's apartment feeling like a kid on the first day of school who has a note pinned to her shirt. She looked at me suspiciously. She must have thought that I was harmless enough, so she let me in. And she generously shared stories with me. It was life-changing. I grew up. I feel like it's where I really grew up. Hearing her stories, what she went through, her life, the life lessons she tried to impart upon me, her no-nonsense manner. Like we were at Sanborn's having a meal, and I'd reach for a third piece of bread, and she goes, "You can do this now. You're not going to be able to do this forever. You shouldn't eat so much bread." You should do this, you should eat that. You need to take vitamins, you're too thin she was just amazing. Last day of my stay, I said, "I know what I'm going to do for my dissertation. I'm going to write about you!" She goes, "No, you're not. You're going to write about the cannery workers in Southern California."

Then I thought, okay, she will help me. She introduced me via mail to her best friend, Elizabeth Eudey, an UCAPAWA veteran. Okay, but what else? A couple of months later after I got back, I went to Centro Chicano, because that was really the student hub for Chicano studies. So there was a reception for Ed Escobar, who was a new assistant dean of grad studies, whose job was to recruit more Chicanos to Stanford, and a history ABD from UC Riverside. So he basically asked me what I did for the summer. "Oh, I met Luisa Moreno and I went on and on. He goes, "I think that was the union my mom was involved in." Of course, his mother was the star of my first book. Carmen Bernal Escobar—amazing, amazing woman. She's someone I got to know, not just as someone who invited me into her home, but later on when I taught at Arizona State, she would spend several months a year with Ed who was my colleague at ASU. Moreover, beginning at Stanford he and his wife Gayle Gullett became my dearest friends, our friendship extending over forty years. My mom was living with us at the time, so she and Carmen became friends. We would all get together. I was actually able to glean more stories and I would watch the two of them, Mexican women of same generation interacting.

01-01:00:38

Holmes:

And this was for the dissertation, which became *UCAPAWA, Chicanas and the California Food Processing Industry 1937 to 1950*, which, five years later, was published as *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry* which, if my math is correct, we are in our eighth printing?

01-01:01:02

Ruiz:

Yes. It's interesting in that when I first started it, I remember when I would talk about my research, I would have doubters—I had one labor historian said, "Why are you working on that union? It wasn't very important." And for years, it was just Bob Korstad, Bob and I working on UCAPAWA/FTA. Of course, the union is Bob's legacy. His father was an FTA [Food, Tobacco, Agriculture, and Allied Workers of America] organizer in North Carolina. It really is his inheritance. And for years, it was, like, we're the two people invested in this union. Now we have UCAPAWA Studies. This poster is from the first UCAPAWA [United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America] conference. There's an UCAPAWA collective. It's fantastic. There's a web presence, people are very generous posting of archival material and oral interviews. It's tremendous. I gave brief remarks to open the conference, and it was like—we were Trekkies at a Star Trek convention. "We were all UCAPAWA nerds." It was wonderful to have these conversations, and we didn't have to explain anything. It's terrific. And the book's impact is not something that I thought when I was writing the dissertation that—I'm still now really moved by the fact that the stories have resonated. It tells a union story that wasn't there. And people recognize the story is important, because for a long time, the idea was, you know, Chicana history, why is that important? Why are Chicanas important? Why are these women important? I just feel very privileged, because I've had the opportunity to interview so many people, so many women whose quiet courage made a difference, not just in their lives, in their families' lives, but in their communities.

01-01:03:15

Holmes:

Well, I wanted to put it on the record, too, that of course this book, over thirty years later is still standard reading in courses, at universities across the United States.

01-01:03:33

Ruiz:

It's amazing. It's amazing. I didn't pull it out for you but students of the late Camille Guérin-Gonzales made a board game based on *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*. I treasure that game. I recently, a few days ago received a note from an L.A. poet who wants to write a poem about *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*. There was a recent play staged at Casa 101 and written by Josefina López on the history of Boyle Heights and there was a line in the play that mentioned Cal San. I went with Natalia Molina, Marjorie Brown Coronel, Alicia Rodríguez Estrada, Veronica Castillo Muñoz, so all the Chicana historians, of different generations. Wow!

01-01:04:33

Holmes:

That's truly amazing. I wanted to ask, before we end, about some other work that was also going on around the same time that you were doing, which I think hits on that same theme. I think one of your first publications was a historiographical article. Not on Hofstadter [laughs] but actually on new approaches—

01-01:04:55

Ruiz:

Actually, it's a book review. My first one publication was in 1982, *Women in Politics*, a book review.

01-01:04:59

Holmes:

Oh. Interesting!

01-01:05:03

Ruiz:

I reviewed Alfredo Mirandé's *La Chicana*. I was nice, but I was very tart, too. I had all the smugness of someone who was about ready to file a dissertation. [laughs] I wrote something to the effect like, "Well, you can't say that the Chicano family is the Aztec family incarnate, there is five hundred years of Colonialism and Americanization to account for." I think it was not one of my finest endeavors. Writing my first historiographical essay, I still had a little bit of that. I think I was not as charitable as I should have been to John Chávez with regard to his *The Lost Land*, because later we co-edited *Mapping Memories and Migrations*. And if you read his prologue—I wrote the introduction, he wrote the prologue—he says that I had "a few choice words" for his *Lost Land*. I was, like, "Oh no!" When he said that at the symposium in Dallas (on which *Mapping* is based) I was, like, "Oh my goodness! Your words came back to haunt you." But he took it really nicely, because he said, "Yeah, I didn't take into consideration women."

01-01:06:24

Holmes:

Well, if we look at the works discussed in that essay—I think it's the works of Al Camarillo, Richard Griswold del Castillo, John Chávez, Mauricio Mazón, and Francisco Balderrama.

01-01:06:36

Ruiz:

Okay. Now it's interesting, because I think I was pretty nice to Richard [Griswold del Castillo], talked about *La Familia*, because he did try to talk about gender and addressing the family role. But to show you how far the field has come, it was a revelation when Al [Camarillo] had sort of a separate section at the end of each chapter, specifically on women. But by today's standards, it would be like, "Huh?" We've come so far, just watching the field develop and all these incredible stories. I mean, I think of Liz Escobedo's *From Coveralls to Zoot Suits*—in fact, I wrote about her book in the *Journal of American Ethnic History*, in a tribute article to Al, calling him a Chicano Toltec, because he is a builder, that Escobedo's book represents a smarter daughter of *Cannery Women*, because she got women to talk to her about the *pachuca* experience. When I was a young scholar, women of the 1930s/40s generation were reluctant to talk to me about pachucas, I could never get

through. These women, were my age now, and I think they were still concerned about their respectability. And they didn't want to tell me. By the time Liz got to them in their eighties, oh, they were saying it all. [laughs]

In fact, I did one interview, it was terrific. One woman—actually she said it ten, eleven times during the interview, "Now, I was a good girl. But my friends"—and talk about putting the razor blade in the bouffant, and it was an amazing story. It was wonderful. And the next day she asked me to erase the interview— "I'm embarrassed." So I did.

01-01:08:29

Holmes:

It's great, as you were just pointing out, how far the field has come.

01-01:08:36

Ruiz:

It's incredible. I mean, you look at the work of Miroslava Chávez-García, Natalia Molina—the younger generation. And they keep coming. Some of my students include Mary Ann Villarreal, Lara Medina, Lilia Fernández. And I'm very proud of Virginia Espino. I mean, she took a dissertation and made an award-winning documentary out of it. People are going to see *No Más Bebés* more than they were going to read her book. I mean, it is an amazing film. And it's based on her research ; doing the hard work, finding the physician who was the whistle blower. Having him trust her and sociologist Elena Gutiérrez (then also a graduate student) with his files.

And I've just been very privileged to work with some incredible graduate students. I worked with two Bancroft-winning historians as MA students, Margaret Jacobs and James Brooks. That was an incredible graduate seminar. I've worked with Matt García, and watching him sort from his first talk as a historian on the Paduanos, the Players of Padua Hills to his endowed chair at Dartmouth. At his community talk about Padua Hills, the Paduanos displayed their factions—those who loved the Garners—the theater owners—and those who thought the Garners had exploited them. The two groups took over in the Q and A, cross-firing at each other. I remember giving Matt a piece of paper, actually a legal pad. I said, "You go over there and you get everybody's names and phone numbers." [laughs] I feel really very privileged, very blessed, because I've had absolutely amazing students.

Alicia Rodríguez Estrada became one of my dearest friends. When Victor and I got married, she was my witness when we eloped to Las Vegas. I first met her when she was nineteen years old, and my student at UC Davis. I gave her a C on her first paper, and she was hot! She came in, she was mad, she was defensive. So we talked about it. I gave her the opportunity to rewrite it, she rewrote it. She kept taking classes with me. She became my graduate student at Davis, my MA student. She was my PhD student at Claremont. She has made a career at L.A. Trade Tech. She wrote one of the first articles on Lupe Velez and Dolores del Rio. We're very close. I feel very lucky. With some exceptions, about three exceptions, I've always maintained a good relationship

with my graduate students, with those who have gone through the program with me, and I'm very grateful for that. I mean, I really remember them with great fondness. I hear from most of them, from time to time. [List of graduate students appended to the end of this interview.]

01-01:12:32

Holmes:

Thinking about the doors that you were able to open, and if we go back to that historiographic essay, you're taking on some of the lead male historians in the field at that time; those who were up and coming—

01-01:12:39

Ruiz:

Well, it's true. It was, like, Chicano history was an emphasis on the O—the masculine ending. That's what it was.

01-01:12:46

Holmes:

Before we go, talk about when you read the *El Plan de Santa Barbara*, because I think you had the same reaction as you did right there—the emphasis on the O. And this will set us up for session two, which is really looking at not just how the field developed, as you were discussing, but also all your other contributions of bringing Chicanas into the story.

01-01:13:08

Ruiz:

Okay, I read it as someone far removed in Florida just coming to consciousness. While I was thrilled with the statements of empowerment, going back to the community with your education, it struck me as male-centric. Part of it, too, was, as I said, I was a budding second-wave feminist taking all these Women's Studies classes, and I lost a long-time boyfriend over it. [laughs] Then I realized—I'm going to graduate school. I'm not going to be a high school history teacher. And I respect history teachers so much because of what they do in the classroom, and with all the standards, all the hoops they have to go through. I've organized two teacher workshops, one in 1990, at Davis, and then a Gilder Lehrman seminar that I co-organized with Ana Rosas on immigration in American life. I've done a lot of one-shot presentations at teacher seminars. And I have tremendous respect for teachers, for what they do. It's so hard. Howard Shorr, a retired history teacher from Roosevelt High School, was a model of how you could be an engaged scholar/educator, get students involved in primary research, and make a difference in students' lives and changing students' lives.

I had pulled up some of the things that I've received over the years from students. An undergraduate from Davis, Julie Figueroa, now a professor at Sac State, told me how much it meant that when I called her to my office hours and told her how much I liked her essay. And I told her, "I remember, you were so incredibly talented, yet so unaware of your intellectual gifts." She's a former farm worker. She said, "We were homeless. We lived in our cars." "Now I'm a professor." And she thanked me. To me, that sort of mentorship has been the narrative thread of my academic life. I mean, Jean Gould Bryant changed my life. She was the first professor who really took an interest in me,

and really encouraged me. I mean, a lot of people have invested in me, in different ways. But Jean was the one who said, "Yes, you can do this." And, this is what you need to do. And she enrolled me in a graduate class as a senior. You could imagine how the graduate students at Florida State felt, [laughs]. I went from "Oh, I'm all this." at FSU. Then at Stanford, it's, like, "Oh my goodness, am I going to survive? I'm not all this. I have so much to learn."

01-01:16:54

But I was really grateful for the community that I had as a graduate student—Pat Zavella was amazing. I mean, Pat Zavella and Denise Segura. Adela de la Torre, who I still call by her graduate nickname, Lita. They were amazing to me. I got to know Antonia and Deena [González] and Emma [Pérez]. There was a community, a Chicana graduate community. And I'm really grateful for Estelle Freedman. Estelle provided a model for creating a feminist community. Joanne Meyerowitz was as scary-smart as a PhD student as she is as an Endowed Chair at Yale, and Estelle's women's history dissertation group (of which Joanne and I belonged) challenged me, prodded me. Not just supported, I mean, but really pushed—"Why do you think this piece of evidence means this? Have you thought about this angle instead." I've always tried to give that supportive, but hard nosed constructive criticism. I was moved by James Brooks's acknowledgement in his introduction to *Captives and Cousins*. He thanked me for my "gentle heart and ruthless pen."

01-01:18:34

Holmes:

Well, Vicki, I think that's a great place to stop.

01-01:18:36

Ruiz:

Thank you.

01-01:18:37

Holmes:

Thank you so much.

01-01:18:38

Ruiz:

Thank you.

Interview 2: October 9, 2019

02-00:00:32

Holmes:

All right, I'll go ahead and state this. This is Todd Holmes with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. Today's date is October 9, 2019, and I have the pleasure of sitting down for our second session with Vicki Ruiz for the Chicana/o Studies Oral History Project. We are here at her office in the Department of Chicana and Chicano studies at the University of California Irvine. Vicki, thanks so much for sitting down with me once again.

02-00:00:32

Ruiz:

Thank you.

02-00:00:35

Holmes:

Well, we left off in our last session with you finishing graduate school at Stanford in 1982. And in many respects, you hit the field running. You held a number of professorships in that first decade or so. I wanted to talk a little bit about these, not just to get your experience at each one, but it also really offers a vantage point to see how Chicano studies is operating at different universities, and evolving over this time.

So your first position as assistant professor was at the University of Texas El Paso in the Department of History. Discuss your job market experience, and how that opportunity arose.

02-00:01:22

Ruiz:

Well actually, there were three jobs in Chicano History that year. One was at the University of Houston, one was at UTEP, and one was at Humboldt State. But for family reasons, I decided only to go to the interview at UTEP because Miguel was about fifteen months old. I didn't want to be running around. So Al assured me that UTEP was a really good position, and that I would learn a lot. He thought it was a good place for me to begin my career. In fact, I never even read the job description for UTEP; I just remember writing a letter and then being invited for an interview.

And my interview went really well. My first husband and our son went with me, because I wanted them to know that, yes, I'm a mother. They were concerned that I was not yet done, in fact, the contract predicated my salary of \$18,000 on the fact that I would be done. If not, my salary would be \$17,500. So I will always be grateful for Estelle Freedman, who had just been denied tenure, and she turned around my revisions in record time. And I don't know if I could have done that, and I will always be very appreciative of Estelle. She made it possible for me to walk in June of 1982.

02-00:03:18

Holmes:

Well, tell us a little bit about the experience of moving from California to taking the job at El Paso.

02-00:03:26

Ruiz:

Very different. I never lived on the border. It was an education for me. I feel I learned far more from my students than they ever learned from me. The students were so hungry. The Chicano students were incredibly open and kind. And they were very excited. Most of them were first-gen. They were so excited, "We're in college." Unlike some students, who were, like, "Oh, this is the only place I could get into"—they were very excited. And I will always treasure the memories of my students there, because they were phenomenal.

As I noted earlier, I arrived with a kid on the hip and one on the way. If you saw me in October, December in 1982, there was no way you would think I was marked for success. And I learned that if I had been a secretary, I would qualify for maternity leave—I did not as a professor. My youngest son was due in May after classes, but I would be expected to be back in the middle of August. That's the way it was.

I was the second woman they hired, certainly the first woman who showed up pregnant. And I will say that the "faculty spouses" were wonderful. I felt very welcomed by them. I think that also—I had a mouth. I would say things without a filter, so that by the time I arrived at Davis, I learned my lesson, about picking my battles. So when I think about UTEP in retrospect, it went both ways in terms of my interactions. Pat Mora, the poet, was then working as an assistant for the for the president, not the president, the provost. And Pat and I would go to Casa Jurado for chile rellenos. And she would give me lessons about El Paso, and give me lessons about UTEP. Pat was an amazing mentor for me.

02-00:06:42

I taught everything at UTEP. I taught US from Colonial to 1865. I taught US after 1865. I taught oral history. I taught History for Hispanic Peoples, which was basically Chicano history, with a few really embarrassingly mentions to other groups at that time. I taught US women's history, and I taught Chicano history. It was a rigorous teaching load, I will say, because even when I was director at the Institute of Oral History, I taught two classes a semester, plus supervised a staff of six. I was twenty-eight years old—I had no administrative experience. There was no way, I don't know why I was tapped to do that job. It was learning by doing. The problem—and I understand it now, I did not understand it at the time—was the person who had been interim director for three years was relegated once again the associate director, as she did not get the job. I didn't even interview for the Institute of Oral History. I was basically told by the chair, you're going to be the new director.

So there was built-in conflict. And I had a huge office, the biggest office I have ever had was as director of the Institute of Oral History. And it was close to the parking lot, so I had this great idea, that I would put up a playpen, I would have Dan there, and I'd already recruited a smart, reliable undergraduate, Adriana Bocanegra, to babysit Dan while I taught, or had to go to a meeting. "Okay, I can do this. You know, I am woman, hear me roar." If

he cried she was to take him out to the parking lot. So I thought I had it all figured out.

Well, it turned out that the associate director told the chair of the department. The chair of the department brought me in and told me if I wanted to keep my job, I had one week to find day care for my kid. I remember going to the library and just in tears. Diana Twelves, wonderful librarian, saw me crying, wanted to know why I was so upset. You have to remember, I was very young, twenty-eight. And I told her, "I'm going to lose my job! And I don't want my child in institutionalized daycare. Because I had viewed one daycare center that just had rows of cribs. I was just totally taken aback. So she says, "You know, I think the daycare mother for my three-year-old, Celeste, may have an opening." It turns out this woman Azucena lived within walking distance of us. I mean, she was such a blessing, because she gave me peace of mind. Then my parents moved to El Paso when Dan turned one, they arrived the day after Dan turned one. They had sold their home in Florida, everything they owned came in a big U-Haul truck towing their car, they rented an apartment, and they helped me with the kids. I could not have had the career I've had if not for my parents, because they took full charge of the boys. Miguel was already in Escuela Montessori, a fabulous bilingual school that he loved. Dan was born April 28th, the day after I gave my Watergate lecture. Unbeknownst to me, I went into labor during the scholarship committee. "Oh, I think I'm in labor!"

02-00:10:49

And yeah, I did, I'd get remarks about being pregnant, yes. "Oh, look at Vicki, she's waddling like a duck." I mean, I was huge. I wore chanclas, because I could not get my foot into a shoe the last month.

So there were the tensions. With some of my colleagues, there was not an appreciation of what I did. I'm sure I contradicted the Texas historian's version of The Alamo. I remember I had a colleague, young assistant professor colleague, a Europeanist, tell me, "Gee Vicki, you have a PhD from Stanford. Why do you work in Chicano History? You can do something else." "I don't want to do anything else." And my students were very open and wanted to share their family stories. And there was an openness that I will always treasure.

02-00:13:37

Holmes:

So the reception among the students—

02-00:13:40

Ruiz:

Was fabulous. I loved the students.

02-00:13:41

Holmes:

With a growing demand and hunger for Chicano studies.

02-00:13:44

Ruiz:

Absolutely. Absolutely.

02-00:13:47

Holmes: But among white Texans? Maybe not.

02-00:13:50

Ruiz: Not so much. Well, I don't know. My Anglo colleagues loved Oscar Martínez, the senior Chicano historian in the department. They loved Oscar. But I was not a guy, I didn't go drinking beer on Friday afternoon at 5:00 at the Kern Place Tavern. I was different; I was cocky. And I should have been a little bit more diplomatic than I was.

02-00:14:29

Holmes: Well, you talked a little bit about the environment, especially for a Chicano scholar coming into UTEP. Maybe discuss your experience there at the Oral History Center.

02-00:14:49

Ruiz: Oh, I had wonderful—I will say that the transcriptionists were wonderful. Some of them had been my former students, and they were terrific. I did an amazing interview with Rosa Guerrero, an interview that built upon an earlier one my student Paulina Alderete had done.

And also, I had the most difficult oral history experience. I already knew I was going to Davis, and I received a call from the wife of a senior citizen, who was a scion of the El Paso community who had founded a leading law firm. And he had had a stroke or a heart attack, and as part of his therapy, the doctor recommended that he be interviewed. And I thought, I know the best person, a recent MA from UTEP, Rebecca Craver—the late Becky Craver, —really wonderful woman. Very progressive, but grew up as what she called a "Highland Park belle" in Dallas. And I said, she'd be perfect. Oh no, she wanted the director.

02-00:16:19

So I show up at the house, and he's bossing his Mexican housekeeper around. And we sit out on the veranda, and we begin the interview. At first, he's very stiff and formal with me. But in a while, he relaxes. And it's, like, I'm not a young woman, I'm not a young Chicana. And he begins to regale me with one of his happiest memories spending time on his granddaddy's ranch in the Big Bend area of Texas. He related the story of a massacre that occurred in a Mexican village like it's a good ole Texas yarn. There had been cattle rustling in the area, and they blamed the people in a border village. All were killed except one young boy. The story ended with him (as a young boy himself) riding with one of the perpetrators who offered, "Want to see the skeletons?" And he told it like it was this Texas yarn. And I didn't cry. I tried my best to make a graceful exit. I didn't cry until I got into my Subaru, and then I cried all the way home. The tape and transcript are at UTEP.

A few weeks later, I got a call from his wife, wanting to know if I would come back and interview him, that I had done him a world of good. I didn't go back.

02-00:19:06

Holmes:

It's interesting, what you're relaying are aspects that perhaps you didn't encounter before in California. That Texas was a much different environment.

02-00:19:18

Ruiz:

It was a much different environment, and it was a real class divide, not only racial, but also a class divide. If you were a wealthy Mexicano coming across the border to do shopping from Juárez, people fell all over you. If you were a domestic worker, you were often treated like dirt. And to hear people at cocktail parties, women at cocktail parties swap stories like, "My maid is so stupid that"—I remember going to these parties because I was married to a young attorney in a big firm. I would carry a little note card in my little bag that matched my little cocktail dress, and I'm going to the bathroom, and I would write down what I had heard. Because I was in a position where I couldn't say anything. And so I would go and I would record. I felt like it was the only way I could survive these festivities, was to record, to be an ethnographer.

02-00:20:39

Holmes:

And did you ever put these notes—

02-00:20:42

Ruiz:

Oh yes, I did. I published an article "By The Day or Week: Mexicana Domestic Workers in El Paso," The article included the tag line "Best thing about El Paso is the cheap maids." As a newcomer, I heard that phrase many times. In fact, my first husband got a lot of flak at work "Why are you running home?" "Why are you doing this?" You know, you can afford a maid. You can afford a live-in maid. That was not something—neither one of us would even consider.

02-00:21:34

Holmes:

Well, in 1985, you took a call from UC Davis.

02-00:21:39

Ruiz:

I applied to UC Davis. I certainly did. I had lived in Sacramento, loved the area. UC Davis had more resources. It was a UC campus. I had also been advised informally that even with the book and anthology, maybe I would not get tenure at UTEP. Maybe it was an intimidation tactic to silence my outspokenness. But Davis, I had taught there in 1981—my first class was "La Chicana" as an adjunct in Chicano studies at Davis, so I liked the students, I liked the campus. Also, I was making at that time \$20,000 a year, and I remember at the interview meeting with the chair Rollie Poppino, sitting there with him in his office, and he said, "Look, you've been out a few years. We're only authorized to fill this position at Assistant Professor Step II. We can only offer you \$32,000." It took everything I could not to fling myself onto the ground, throw my arms around his ankles, and beg him to hire me. It was one of those things where it just felt like the right job. It felt like the right job for me. So parents in tow, off we come. We lived in Davis for a few months, and then we moved to Stockton, because of my first husband's job. And I

commuted to Davis for three years. Then after the marriage spectacularly imploded, I moved the kids and my parents to Davis.

02-00:23:38

Holmes:

Well, discuss the student and faculty environment there at Davis, and what a change that was, in some respects, from El Paso.

02-00:23:47

Ruiz:

Well, about Davis—we were colleagues. Yes, people were very cordial to one another; in some ways very superficial cordiality, but I did make very good friends there. My undergraduate students were absolutely wonderful. And also, I had graduate students. In 1987, Kevin Leonard came and did his MA with me. And then, I was on his dissertation committee. I think it was 1989, James Brooks came. I was chair of his MA committee. And then in 1990, I had a group of students who became lifelong friends, they're still my friends, going on thirty years. My graduate students, the Sisterhood—Margaret Jacobs, Olivia Martínez, Alicia Rodríguez, Yolanda Calderón Wallace, Annette Reed and Kathy Cairns. We are the Sisterhood.

You have to understand, most of my colleagues, until Michael Smith was hired, were considerably older than I. Kathy and Yolanda were older. As I noted earlier Alicia, I have known since she was nineteen, when she came to argue a grade. It was us against the world, they were so smart. Some of my colleagues did not treat them very well. Colleagues told me I was coddling my students when I went to fight for them. Thank goodness I had tenure at this point. One colleague was openly hostile to several of my students, one of whom would throw up every time she had to go into that seminar—a colleague who voted against me for tenure.

02-00:26:17

I went up for early tenure. I was encouraged by some members of the department, because I had a couple of journal articles, two anthologies, and the book. This colleague, my feminist colleague, asked me to talk a walk around what was the unfortunately named Putah Creek, P-U-T-A-H, and told me that the book wasn't any good, that I needed to interview Jewish women, I needed to make comparisons with organizing in other unions, like, the ILGWU, that the book needed a lot of work. The book wasn't done, and that the University of New Mexico Press was not a good enough press to get tenure in a UC. And that she was giving me this advice for my own good. She voted against me for tenure. I had three votes, three negative votes.

And it was hard, because then I knew the landscape. And on the other hand, I had great colleagues in Chicano studies. Angie Chabram, Beatriz Pesquera and I all arrived together. We were the assistant professors. Adaljisa Sosa-Riddell had kept Chicano studies going on nerve. I mean, we were in the worst facilities on campus, Chicano studies old temporary buildings, I mean old temporary buildings. Now Chicano studies along with Native American,

African American, Asian American and Gender Studies are in beautiful Hart Hall. It really shows the progression, the respect.

And for me, with the Sisterhood, I realized mentorship is really important to me. And in 1988, I became involved in discussions about mentoring, expanding the graduate pipeline for students of color, because we were laboring under the false impression that all the baby boomers were going to retire, and there would be a glut of academic positions, and we would have students of color ready to take them, ready to be competitive. How do we groom the next generation?

02-00:28:58

Holmes:

Oh the myth of the baby boomers retiring—you know, that's been going on for fifty years now. [laughs]

02-00:29:05

Ruiz:

I know. I know. So I was the inaugural director of Mentorships for Undergraduate Researchers in Agriculture, Letters, and Science—MURALS. Between 1988 and 1997, it was geared to students of color, and you only had to have a minimum grade point average—oh gosh, I think it was, like, 2.8, 2.9. And the purpose was to pair a student with a faculty member for one-on-one research. The students had to sign, and faculty had to sign, memoranda of understanding. Gail Martínez, an academic advisor for what was then called "Advising Services," she and I, we hammered together this memorandum that outlined in detail what the professor expected, and what the student expected, and had them both sign it, so there would be no misunderstandings. And it was very clear. You could not use the—because this is pre-email, pre-anything digital. So the student could not be used as a library gopher or a copy gopher. They had to have a tangible experience of either the student's own independent research, or as part of the professor's research. Also, they could be part of an undergraduate-graduate student team, but they were to be mentored by the professor, not the graduate student

And at first Gail and I thought, can we get students interested? Can we get enough faculty interested? We paid students \$500 a quarter—a lot of money. And faculty got \$300 added to their research account. That was enough, actually. And we started out with three mentorships in spring of 1988. By the time I left, we had sixty faculty-student pairs. We were funded from Office of Student Affairs. We had an annual undergraduate conference where the students presented their work. The colleagues who came were very happy and so proud of their students. We had a steak dinner at the University Club. What else did we do? Oh, we had quarterly seminars where we brought the students together, so they could talk about their experiences. We had assigned readings about preparing for graduate school. It was really lovely. Pat Turner then became director when I left, and it was hard to leave MURALS. MURALS was/is a great program.

02-00:31:33

Gail Martínez went back to school, she earned her PhD in education, and her dissertation was on MURALS. And what she found was that between 1988 and 1997, MURALS—then only opened to students of color—had an incredible success rate as a pipeline program, something like 77 percent went on for an advanced degree. And in mailing her surveys to MURALS alums, she received a seventy-five percent return rate on her surveys, which is amazing. And people had very fond memories, not only of their mentors, but also the relationships and the friendships they made. MURALS is still in operation. It's in its thirty-first year. After [Proposition] 209, it is now open to all financial-aid eligible, first generation students who are underrepresented in the field they want to pursue—so it's a big tent. I think the last year I checked the program drew forty faculty-student pairs. So I feel very happy to have been on the ground floor of MURALS.

Of my MURAL students, Julie Figueroa is now professor of Ethnic Studies at Sac State. She received her PhD in Education from Berkeley. As I mentioned earlier Alicia Rodríguez Estrada is a professor of History and Social Sciences at LA Trade Tech, and Amagda Pérez is clinical professor of law at King Hall. And all three were incredibly special students. And I feel fortunate to have played a role in their professional development. I didn't realize how hard it would be to leave Davis until I was packing my books. The sisters all came over and packed my books. And then it hit me that I was leaving. And why did I leave? Okay, so five years past tenure—

02-00:33:37

Holmes:

Well, which you did receive in 1987, is that right?

02-00:33:41

Ruiz:

1987, I received early tenure. And I received the best piece of advice when I was at Davis from—did I tell you? From Turrentine Jackson. Turrentine Jackson was someone who took PG & E and Wells Fargo's side in disputes over water rights. He was a Wells Fargo historian. And he was very conservative. Our politics could not be more different. But he had ties to UTEP, and he took credit for hiring me, which was fine, and he always referred to me as "little lady." And I just let it pass, he was a person of certain generation. So he said, "Little Lady, I noticed at the meetings you have a mouth." And believe me, I had curbed it from UTEP, I know that. But he says, "You know, if you want to get tenure, so you can speak your mind. You're going to have to shed ink every chance you get. That protects you." And that is the best advice, publication does protect you.

I'm sorry for telling this story, Angie, but it's true. An assistant professor in Spanish who was up for tenure Angie Chabram was frank, fierce, and really exuberant; students loved her. A group of MEChA students met with the Chair of Spanish to ask for more Chicano lit offerings in the department and the chair of the Spanish Department purportedly told them that Chicano Literature was nothing but barrio crap. The students began to organize. I told

Angie, talk to the students before they march up those flight of steps in Sproul Hall but do not sit-in with them in the chair's office. You can talk to the students, but don't—you're up for tenure. Don't do this. Did Angie listen to me? No. Marched up with the students and sat in the chair's office. Fortunately for Angie, she had twelve articles. You really could not deny her tenure. But the dean was fantastic, the late Robert Crummey, and he ensured that Angie became the first full-line faculty in Chicano studies, other than Ada [Sosa-Riddell], who was a lecturer with security of employment. She was the first tenured line, and he arranged for her to get out of the hostile work environment of Spanish. And Angie Chabram has built wonderful legacy in Chicano/Latino Studies there.

02-00:36:25

Holmes:

Well, before we move on from Davis, I wanted to ask, you were the acting director of Chicano studies?

02-00:36:37

Ruiz:

For only one quarter.

02-00:36:39

Holmes:

One quarter.

02-00:36:39

Ruiz:

And my only achievement was, I managed to get the interiors of our temporary building painted. I secured the funds to get it painted, to liven up the place. It had this very drab, post-World War II paint job—I don't know if the temporary building had been ever been repainted. But we got it painted.

02-00:37:03

Holmes:

Well, was that a department by that time? Or was it a program?

02-00:37:05

Ruiz:

No, it was a program.

02-00:37:04

Holmes:

Just a program.

02-00:37:06

Ruiz:

And everyone had lines in other places, except for Ada and Angie.

02-00:37:13

Holmes:

Because it's interesting to look back, because I think they have a department there now.

02-00:37:16

Ruiz:

They have a department. We became a department when I was there, and we were able to hire line faculty—the psychologist Yvette Flores-Ortiz was hired, as was the renowned artist Malaquias Montoya.

02-00:37:28

Holmes:

Yeah, because I know at Davis, both program and then department, grew significantly.

02-00:37:37

Ruiz:

Oh yeah, we were known for years as the Chicana studies Program, because we were more women than men, and got teased about it. I remember there was a graduate student group at UC Berkeley, a group of activist Chicanas who called themselves *Mujeres en marcha*. And Alex Saragoza would respond by noting that Chicanos at Berkeley were *hombres corriendo*. The joke didn't go over well.

Of course, Davis was the birthplace of MALCS [Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social]. I really have a lot of fond memories from Davis. My women graduate students were not treated well, and it stung. Also as a young assistant professor, I wanted feminist mentorship. And I felt like I really needed it at Davis, but I didn't have it. Didn't have it in my department, that's for sure.

02-00:38:51

Holmes:

Which is interesting, however, when you look at, like, the Chicana and Chicano studies, the colleagues there—

02-00:38:59

Ruiz:

Yeah, it was fantastic. Ada was wonderful.

02-00:39:01

Holmes:

But it was largely women.

02-00:39:02

Ruiz:

Yeah.

02-00:39:04

Holmes:

But I've never made that connection to that, that that was also where MALCS began.

02-00:39:10

Ruiz:

Absolutely. Absolutely. It was a great time. We were taking on the world. At UTEP, I always felt like I was a little bit isolated. But at Davis I felt like I had a community. And particularly with the sisters, the sisterhood, and also with Chicano-Chicana studies.

02-00:39:42

Holmes:

Did we talk about the MALCS in our last session?

02-00:39:47

Ruiz:

MALCS, I was a founding mother, and I'm kind of aggrieved that the late legendary Betita Martínez did not list me as a founding member of MALCS. But I was a founding member—I attended the initial meeting.

02-00:39:57

Holmes:

Indeed. What year was that, again?

02-00:40:00

Ruiz:

I think the first meeting was '82?

02-00:40:04

Holmes: Yeah, that's right, because it was, I think—

02-00:40:04

Ruiz: Right before I left.

02-00:40:08

Holmes: Right before you left.

02-00:40:09

Ruiz: to UTEP, yeah.

02-00:40:10

Holmes: Yeah, because I talked with Antonia Castañeda about that.

02-00:40:15

Ruiz: Why did I leave Davis? Oh, a lot of reasons. I was only five years past tenure, and *Unequal Sisters* had come out. I will say *Unequal Sisters* brought me more national attention than you can realize. I mean, it reached a broader audience. And I realize that now, for good and for bad. And I was offered an endowed chair at the age of thirty-six. The Andrew W. Mellon All Claremont Professor in the Humanities, thirty-six, full professor. Don't have to go up for promotion, don't have to have the second book. And I was, like, "Okay," you can imagine. Ten years past the PhD, I saw the opportunity to really shape the graduate program, because they wanted Claremont to be known as the place to go for Chicano History, and that certainly appealed to my vanity, and particularly looking at how my students were treated at Davis—being told that some of my MA students were not going to be advanced to the PhD. I decided also at that point to remarry. And my husband-to-be Victor Becerra was in Southern California. So it seemed like a real win-win.

I did regret that I left my parents in Davis. But my parents had incredibly wonderful senior housing, low-income senior housing brand new. The kids could bicycle from my house to their home, it was great housing. And they were never going to have that in Southern California. And they were on a very limited fixed income. So Davis was the best place for them. And that was hard. I was leaving my friends, my community. My career was set. And I took a chance. And that chance worked out pretty well, because Victor and I have been married twenty-seven years. I married the love of my life. I moved to southern California, Victor had never been married, never lived with anyone. Both thirty-seven, we got married.

02-00:43:19

And I loved my graduate students at Claremont. I had great graduate students at Claremont. And faculty, Hal Barron, in particular, was terrific. But I did not fit in Claremont. I was a square peg trying to fit into a round hole. Claremont was very clubby. And in public schools, there's all these rules about tenure and promotion, and they're rules. There's the Academic Personnel Manual. No rules at Claremont. Not even a time line for tenure—your chair will tell you when it's time to go up for tenure. The Dean had a lot of power.

I was chair for two years at Claremont, of History and American Studies, it's a very small department. I had wonderful graduate students. It was tough, and I ran afoul of the dean. I was encouraged by the department, by the three-person department, to—and they would have my back if I would push, if I would go against the dean's choice to run the Humanities Center. Which wasn't hard for me, because I didn't think the Dean's candidate was as suitable as another colleague who had been a finalist. The dean threatened to withdraw all of the financial aid packages that I had made to the incoming students. I said, "But they're going to sue the University." "No, they're going to sue you, because your name is on the letter. My name's not on that letter." And so—we were always like oil and water. I told my faculty. They went and did an end run around me, didn't tell me. Went to the dean and said, "Please restore our financial aid. Vicki is a rogue actor. We all support this person you want to hire. We think he's the best person for the job." At that point, I thought, I need to leave. I can't take this.

And I had been very unhappy about the politics, and I had put my toe in the water, and had an offer from ASU, and had really debated because my kids were settled at Claremont. So I put my toe in the water, and I felt I can't stay. I had a colleague who would yell at me in public, and when you're a three-person department—. I still have friends, Rita Roberts, Hal Barron, people who were faculty affiliates, but not in the department. And Claremont didn't have the resources that I thought. Now I had great research resources. The students didn't. But I had great students. I had Matt [García], Lara Medina, Alicia had come with me from Davis as had Matt Lasar. Naomi Quiñonez was there. I mean, I had good students. And ASU made it very hard to turn down, because they matched the salary at Claremont.

02-00:47:01

Oh, and by the way, when I was at Claremont, I was told to my face by a political science colleague at Claremont that I was the "multicultural nightmare." Or that I was the "multicultural endowed chair." I learned that at the same time I was hired, the political scientist was hired. I was hired at \$50,000 and he was hired at \$120,000. And when I went to complain to the dean about it, this is gender inequity, and I was really upset—all he said was, "We paid him his market value, we paid you yours." Now, if I had been a little smarter, I'd have gotten an attorney. But I didn't. I just knew that I wanted out. I mean, the politics were pretty vicious at the graduate school, I will say. I just wanted to be a place where I could do my work, and I had friends. And I knew I had friends at ASU, because Ed Escobar and Gayle Gullett were there, people I knew and loved. I felt like I could go there and recover, in a sense. And I also knew that the graduate market was falling apart, that I was selling hope. I was encouraging people get into debt. Because what I always fought against at Claremont was the unwritten graduate school policy, at the time that I was there, would give first-year students the best packages, and then when they're in the program, let them loan up. And I was trying to be fair. And for

every graduate student that I could offer a full scholarship, I had to offer a slot to a paying student. So it became very divided—and I just couldn't sell hope.

02-00:49:01

Holmes:

But before we leave Claremont, I wanted to ask, because you said something that was really interesting, that Claremont, when you were hired in 1992, they promoted the goal to be *the* place to study Chicana and Chicano studies.

02-00:49:21

Ruiz:

Yeah.

02-00:49:23

Holmes:

Well, it's interesting if you think of, say, Al Camarillo coming to Stanford in 1972, and how much that has progressed in twenty years, where you actually had the Claremont graduate school say, "We want this specialty. We want this to be the home for Chicana and Chicano studies."

02-00:49:53

Ruiz:

Chicano history, not Chicano studies, As I said, it started with the best of intentions.

02-00:50:00

Holmes:

Indeed. Well, and it also shows how much the field was actually gaining some ground at all the universities.

02-00:50:05

Ruiz:

Absolutely. Absolutely. And as I said, I wasn't the right fit. And they've never filled the chair. The chair's never been filled.

02-00:50:17

Holmes:

Well, I want to talk a little bit about the field before we get to your other positions.

02-00:50:22

Ruiz:

Sure.

02-00:50:24

Holmes:

Because at the time you began Claremont, we see the field of Chicana and Chicano studies really maturing. The 1990s is usually seen as this beautiful maturation of the field.

02-00:50:36

Ruiz:

Yes.

02-00:50:38

Holmes:

The second generation is coming up, and the new work is coming out. Could I ask maybe to have you reflect a little bit on the works of that earlier generation? So looking at the 1970s and '80s before that. What really struck you about these works? And what did you see that both yourself and others were trying to do differently?

02-00:50:59

Ruiz:

Okay, I think that Chicano History meant Chicano emphasis on the masculine, ending in O. I mean, I look at Al's book, *Chicanos in a Changing Society*, and he offers a nod to women, but that was, like, wow, that's new. But you look at David Montejano's *Anglos and Mexicans Making of Texas*—very hard to find women. There's a couple of individual great women, but no analysis of gender. So *La Chicana* came out, not written by a historian, by a sociologist and a doctoral candidate in Literature. It was, in some ways, particularly in the beginning chapters ahistorical, where they traced the Chicano family, and Chicano family norms back to the Aztec family incarnate. In 1982, I wrote a pretty hard review of the book, of *La Chicana* in *Women in Politics*. Alfredo Mirandé, seven, eight years later was at Davis, giving a talk. And I went up and introduced myself. He was so cold, he must have read the review.

But I wrote what I meant and I meant what I wrote. In fact, that's sort of the impetus for *Shadows*, is, like, "Gee, someday I would like to write that history." I ended up just focusing on the twentieth century, because other Chicanas, like Antonia Castañeda and others, were writing on the earlier eras. I'm a twentieth century US historian. My 1982 book review laid the seeds for *Shadows*.

02-00:53:13

Holmes:

Well, and we see that in a lot of the works coming out, that maturation in the field is diversifying, and digging deeper. The first generation, those were works of recovery, largely.

02-00:53:26

Ruiz:

Yes. A lot of works of recovery. Mario García's book—Al and Mario's books were really influential. *Desert Immigrants* was my lifeline when I taught at UTEP. Mario was from El Paso. Watching the sort of class divide was interesting, watching Oscar [Martínez] and Mario talk about their upbringings, because Mario grew up in Kern Place, where "elite" Mexicans lived during the '40s and '50s. And Oscar was from Chihuahuita. And so, you know, Oscar would banter, "Well, I went here, and you went to Cathedral High. I had to sell newspapers on the street, and you didn't. I stuck gum on the soles of my shoes so I could run up and get the change that people dropped." So they would have this back and forth and sharing El Paso boyhood stories with one another, giving each other little digs. That was really instructive for me in terms of learning about the class divide.

And Mario's mother, an amazing woman. Amazing. I interviewed her. Alma, was a force of nature. And I hope her daughter, Alma, will write her story, because I'm not the one to write it, it's not my story. It's Alma's story to tell. Because it was a phenomenal story of escaping from the Mexican Revolution as the mayor's daughter along with her mother and her siblings, knowing they would never see their father again. And coming to El Paso, always maintaining middle-class appearances. Always *gente decente*, and infusing in her children this kind of pride of where you come from and who you are, and

projecting strength. A lot of women I've interviewed are, like, "Oh why do you want to talk to me? I have nothing to say. I'm not important." With Alma, "Okay, you are here for my interview." She was, very self-assured, very proud of her children.

02-00:56:05

Holmes: And rightfully so.

02-00:56:09

Ruiz: Absolutely. Absolutely.

02-00:56:11

Holmes: Well, what we also see during this time is that community studies, which was at the heart of the field from the beginning, began to expand dramatically.

02-00:56:18

Ruiz: Oh, absolutely. Everyone began to look at community studies. And I still think there's relevance to community studies. I agree, we have to have the big picture studies. But I think that the thick description of finely-grained community studies, there's still a great deal of value in looking at the daily textures of life. I don't think they're old-fashioned.

02-00:57:11

Holmes: Well, another area of the field which, of course, you were at the forefront was the rise of Chicana History. That finally got put in the name, and in the sense—as you've written in *From Out of the Shadows*—the role of Mexican American women, in that experience, was finally highlighted.

02-00:57:37

Ruiz: I felt like, in the sense what Ana Nieto-Gómez discussed being caught between the maternal and paternal movements as a Chicana feminist activist. It felt that way in the academy, I'm pushing my *colegas* in Chicano studies, you know, incorporate women, this is important. Don't just say, "Oh, just leave it to *mujeres* to do it," Then also to convey to the US women's history community that, yes, there's such a thing as Chicana history. I've always pushed, because there's this prevalent idea that Latinos came the day before yesterday. And that's one of the reasons I pushed to show the historical presence of Latinas. *Unequal Sisters* came about as a result of probably the worst moderated session ever. That was certainly my experience. Kitty Sklar and Gerda Lerner got a bunch of money, NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] money and Robert Wood Johnson money to hold at Frank Lloyd Wright's Wingspread, a national retreat on training graduate students in US Women's History. And it was one historian per campus, leading historians. But there were—diversity slots. I remember my colleague at Davis asking, "And why are you here?" "Because I was invited." Great.

So there were diversity held at the same time next door to each other. The wonderful late Louise Año Nuevo Kerr had administrative experience. She had brought the audience together—they were laughing, they were singing, it

was *Kumbaya* next door. We were *pistolas* at dawn. I was the moderator, Ellen DuBois, who had just arrived at UCLA, was the note-taker. I got into it with a number of historians, about the relevance of Chicana history, being told that my history didn't matter. Being told that the history of the United States was rooted solely in black-white relations, and rooted in chattel slavery, and that my experience had no value. Being told this by a senior African American historian. And it felt so bad to have the one African American woman in that room and the one Chicana arguing with each other, and to have very prominent historians in the field say, "I teach at an elite southern university. I teach what my students want. They don't care for this stuff." Or, my favorite, "You know, I would incorporate articles on Chicanas, but you publish in the most obscure journals."

02-01:00:39

Okay, I was not my best. I was upset. I told my roommate, my dear friend, Valerie Matsumoto, "Valerie, I'm never going to an East Coast Women's History Conference ever again! Ever. They don't care about what we do. We're window dressing!" I was really upset. And then my erstwhile feminist colleague at Davis took me aside the next day, and said, "You go over and you apologize to these women. They can ruin your career. You offended them. You're totally out of line. You go apologize to them." I asked Ellen—whom I did not know, I did not know until she was my note taker—I said, "Ellen, was I out of line? Should I do a public apology?" And she says, "No! What do you have to apologize for? Who cares? They're not that big a deal. I wouldn't worry."

And it's interesting, though, because people don't really remember that. What people remember is the skit I did with Mary Beth Norton. The last evening, we had skits, in mine—I basically put a pillow under my sweater and pretended to be pregnant. The skit revolved around interviewing at an Ivy League institution in US Women's History. We did this whole sendup where Mary Rothschild was the erstwhile feminist in the pantsuit, and very brusque, and I was the pregnant finalist. And it's for US Women's History. And then William Chafe showed up, and he had a t-shirt and khakis and was barefoot—that's who they hired. He did this whole funny sendup. In fact, Mary Beth Norton always said that if I had not pursued a career in the academy, I certainly would have been a standup comic. And that's what they remember, which I'm glad that's what most people remember about me at Wingspread, my participation in this skit.

And anyway, how *Unequal Sisters* came to be, is that Ellen DuBois had a contract with Routledge to do an anthology in US Women's History. And Wingspread was in November. And February, Ellen calls me, "Let's do this." "Let's do something really different."

02-01:03:14
Holmes:

Well, that's a perfect segue, because I was about ready to ask you about some of your books—

02-01:03:18

Ruiz:

It was, "Let's change the world. Let's shake things up. You're right. Everything is either white women's history, or black and white—let's do something different." So we started exchanging articles. First, it's, well, "What would you use in a typical US Women's History class? What are your articles?" "Let me show you my articles." And they were very similar. *Unequal Sisters* came together in about eight months. I went to LA once, we hammered out the introduction, I think, a draft of the introduction, in two days. We were on the same page about articles. Also, we had personal favorites that the other person didn't love. So it was like horse trading. You know, I love this article, you don't. That's okay. You got your article, I got my article. And it worked out really well.

And at the time, when the book came out, I thought, there's no excuse now not to include Chicana History, Asian American Women's History and Native American Women's History. It's here. These are good articles. You know, don't tell me that they're not as good as someone else's article on suffrage.

02-01:04:38

Holmes:

Are there—they're not in "obscure" journals.

02-01:04:40

Ruiz:

Yeah, they're not in obscure journals. And they were already published, by the way, which if you had looked you would have found them. *Unequal Sisters* made a big splash. Probably the only time I'll ever get a review in *The Village Voice*—it was a phenomenon. Now I feel really good about that, because what we did that was so new and novel and revolutionary in 1990 is now old hat. You don't see a US Women's History anthology that doesn't have women of color front and center.

02-01:05:20

Holmes:

Well, that's what I was going to say. This anthology was so ground-breaking, I mean, the thirty essays that were, again, diversifying women's history out of the traditional black-white binary.

02-01:05:31

Ruiz:

And it was huge. I will credit Routledge and our editor, Cecilia Cancellaro who basically encouraged us to go big. And that's what we did.

02-01:05:45

Holmes:

Well, what's also interesting is, so you can look at the reception of this. It was published in Japanese in 1996.

02-01:05:51

Ruiz:

Yes.

02-01:05:53

Holmes:

How many—I don't know, maybe Don Worster—but there's not many historians writing in US history who have their works translated, particularly into Japanese, which I think speaks volumes of that work.

02-01:06:08

Ruiz: As I said, I was really proud of that first edition, because it was groundbreaking.

02-01:06:19

Holmes: And, it's, I think, now in its third edition?

02-01:06:23

Ruiz: Fourth.

02-01:06:23

Holmes: Oh, you're in the fourth edition right now?

02-01:06:24

Ruiz: Fourth, 2008. I was the sole editor. And I changed it to, *Unequal Sisters: An Inclusive History*. In 1990, multiculturalism was this nice bright, shiny object. Now it's like a fashion victim. And there are other ways that are more illustrative. The fourth edition will be, for me, the end of *Unequal Sisters* franchise. If someone else wants to take up the banner, that's great. Ellen chose a different trajectory, particularly in terms of her interest in global feminism, so and that's why I did the fourth edition as a solo piece.

02-01:07:17

Holmes: Well, a year after that, another anthology came out, *Women of the West*, which was a guide to manuscript sources.

02-01:07:24

Ruiz: Oh, that, okay, a woman's historian who, in the 1980s was considered a pretty big deal, recruited very junior people-- Helen Bannan and Kathy Morrissey and myself to work on this guide. We used to say that we were her serfs, because we were doing all the work. We used to call ourselves "the serfs." And we revolted. "We don't want to do this work, we can quit." Helen, Kathy, and I had canvassed all these archives. I learned very quickly to say "Spanish Mexican. Do you have any Spanish Mexican women's archives?" I knew they had things. But they said, "Oh no, we have nothing on Mexican women here." Then I said "Spanish women?" Then primary documents appeared. But Susan Armitage, bless her heart. She knew that this project was a morass. I don't know what happened but suddenly Sue is the new senior editor. She organized us; she pitched in; she inspired us, and we finished. But only because of Sue.

02-01:08:27

Holmes: So it was yourself, Susan Armitage—

02-01:08:30

Ruiz: Helen Bannan and Kathy Morrissey. And you know, I still think the guide's useful, because it identified small archives where you didn't know there would be sources—a woman's diary in Spanish in a local museum in Los Banos. I still think the guide has value in broadening the archives in Western Women's History. And certainly for me, just as important was the sort of outside mentors for me I had, people like Joan Jensen when I taught at UTEP. Joan was wonderful. I would drive to Las Cruces to basically cry on her shoulder

and ask her for advice in navigating department politics. She was at New Mexico State, and I was at UTEP. Joan Jensen and Sue Armitage were wonderful mentors and Betsy Jameson and I were the troublemakers,

02-01:09:38

Holmes:

Well, I wanted to highlight especially with this volume, for our younger readers, it's important to remember that there was no internet.

02-01:09:48

Ruiz:

No internet.

02-01:09:48

Holmes:

No computer databases to help you find your material. And so the importance of this, and also keeping within that mission of advancing and broadening Women's History, particularly in the West.

02-01:10:00

Ruiz:

Exactly. And it's part of that push, in terms, you know, at that time, it was, like, "Western Women's History? Oh, that's covered wagon women." You know, Carrie Nation, the pioneer tropes. And Western women's historians really sort of pushed against that singular narrative.

02-01:10:33

Holmes:

Well, also in 1998, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* came out. Now, this is also another groundbreaking work on the experience of Mexican American women; again trying to not just develop that field, but also get coverage within both Chicana/o Studies and women's history. And it's a survey that chronicles the experience of women who migrated to the US, before both World Wars. So it was from the turn of the century to—

02-01:11:01

Ruiz:

Yes, it's about 1900 until the late '80s.

02-01:11:06

Holmes:

Okay. So discuss the genesis of this work.

02-01:11:10

Ruiz:

Well, it was again from *La Chicana*, and after *Cannery Women*. It's something I really, really wanted to do. So with tenure, I felt like I had the time, really, to develop it. Again, I found people strictly by serendipity. If I had not gone to the El Monte Historical Museum in fall of 1992, conquered my fear of the freeway and gone there at that particular day, at that particular time, to visit the El Monte Historical Museum's first ever Mexican American exhibit. As a public historian—although I was just learning public history, I knew that you do not just paste historical photographs on the back of construction paper and put them on the wall. And with very basic captions like Hick's Camp Barrio, a church, a store. So I'm looking at this, I'm thinking, 'Hmm, wonderful pictures, gosh these are great pictures.' Particularly for me, here was the Cinderella Ballroom that I had heard so much about from cannery women,

and seeing young couples posed under paper moons and airplanes, and all these sort of *novio* pictures. And a woman with a cane came in, escorted by her daughter, and she started naming everybody and everything in the photos. "That's the Methodist Church I went to. That was the Mexican Methodist Church." This was this, this was this, this was that. So I started tagging along. Then I gathered my courage, I introduce myself. I hand her my card. And a few months later, she invited me into her home. And I would never have known her story. And she had a beautiful story of resilience and faith, family and hardship. Do I have *Shadows* up here? Good. Can I show you a picture?

02-01:13:21

Holmes: Yes. Yes.

02-01:13:24

Ruiz: Okay, I have got to show you this picture, because it demonstrates a difference when you interview someone and they share something with you a photograph than if you found the photo in the archive. And I did not appreciate that difference until called to task by Jesusita. You see this photo?

02-01:13:59

Holmes: I'm going to zoom—here hold that, and I'll zoom in on it. [zooms in camera]

02-01:14:01

Ruiz: Okay.

02-01:14:06

Holmes: Okay?

02-01:14:09

Ruiz: As a historian, if you saw this photo in an archive, you would appreciate its composition, its simplicity, and for capturing the reality of farm labor in the 1930s. So I looked at this photo, and the first thing out of my mouth was, "Oh, it's a beautiful photo!" She's, like, "What's beautiful about it? What do you mean?" And I had to explain myself—its historical significance, its composition. And she would have none of it. To her, it was reflective of a very painful period in her life that she was sharing with me. And I was, like, okay. Okay. Filter. When someone shows you something in a family album, don't assume. You know, it's different from looking at a photo in an archive.

02-01:15:02

Holmes: Yes.

02-01:15:04

Ruiz: And keep your opinions to yourself.

02-01:15:06

Holmes: Right, which is interesting, because that's also the difference, you could say, of when you work in oral history, and you're actually working with the people whose memories and experiences you're trying to help document into a large work of history. It's not just that abstract—although we think after, when

we're doing archival research, we get to know people a little bit, right? Or at least you have a sense—

02-01:15:30

Ruiz: Yeah! Yeah.

02-01:15:34

Holmes: But here, no, we're sitting down and we're talking to you.

02-01:15:36

Ruiz: Exactly.

02-01:15:38

Holmes: Such a big difference.

02-01:15:40

Ruiz: It's such a big difference. And I finished the book at ASU. I started it at Claremont, but ASU had given me a semester off, and that really helped, because I could pound out the book. The book was really important to me, because of all the stories that I had collected over the years. And also, just learning about new things, community organizations that I had not encountered such as Communities Organized for Public Service or Rosie Castro's shop. In the literature, we learn about Ernie Cortes and Saul Alinsky, and how they made the Westside of San Antonio a place, as one scholar put it, "Places where people could live if they chose, rather than leave because they must." And what's always been underneath, in the shadows was Rosie Castro—it was Rosie and Ernie. She organized parish women. She went out, knocked on doors. She went to city council meetings. She's a force of nature.

So whenever I see that Annie Leibovitz picture where she looks sort of like *una pobrecita* with her sons in a house that they rented when they were growing up—that's not Rosie Castro. Rosie Castro is strong. She ran for political office on *La Raza Unida*. She is an absolute force in San Antonio. Right after *Shadows* came out, I gave the Américo Paredes lecture at UT, and I was nervous, because I heard that Rosie would be in the audience. I went, "Oh no!" Did she read it [the book]? At the reception, she came up to me, and she was very, very nice. And she said, "You got COPS [Communities Organized for Public Service] exactly right." Because I took to task Peter Skerry and his analysis in *Mexican Americans*, where he talked about COPS as women were there, but they didn't really play that much of a role. He explained that COPS gave women, Mexican American housewives, the feeling of empowerment. I mean, it was kind of snide and I was not kind to him in the book. And I think she appreciated that.

02-01:18:10

Listening to people's stories, like "The Flapper and the Chaperone." I did a lot of flapper/chaperone public talks, and people always—there would be older Mexicanas in the audience who would tell me their story of chaperonage. At

the Riverside Municipal Museum, a woman came up and told me the story of her parents. Her grandparents had a general store in Riverside, and they had caught her mother talking to a boy and she was, like, fifteen. They told her, "So you know what? We're going to send you to go pick with your grandparents in the Central Valley." So she's picking, and she's flirting in the rows with this young Mexicano. And he says, "Do you want to be my girlfriend?" And she goes, "No, but I'll marry you." So they actually locked up her grandmother in an outhouse so they could escape and elope. They remained married. So she was talking about her parents' story. Chaperonage was a generational marker. It was like getting hit with the ruler by a nun, or a public schoolteacher for speaking Spanish; the idea of chaperoning was common among women coming of age in the 1920s and 1930s. And they wanted to talk about it, because I argue that not until World War II would chaperonage go by the wayside. And I think Elizabeth Escobedo and her wonderful book, I call it the "smarter daughter" of *Cannery Women*, which is *From Coveralls to Zoot Suits*, reveals that breakdown.

02-01:20:03

Holmes:

Well, also in this work, I mean, if we take a step back and we look at *Out of the Shadows*, it is one of those second monographs where as an established scholar you say "I'm going to take on a topic this big," largely because you had been thinking about these types of—

02-01:20:24

Ruiz:

Oh, gosh, forever.

02-01:20:25

Holmes:

Right? And, you know, as one who, which we'll get to here later in this session, but I mean, you've mentored over twenty-five PhD students.

02-01:20:33

Ruiz:

Twenty-six.

02-01:20:36

Holmes:

So if one of your graduate students came up with this type of project, "I'm going to do this," wouldn't your first reaction perhaps be, like, "Why don't you take a sliver of that, then we'll talk—?"

02-01:20:45

Ruiz:

Exactly. And I do that all the time.

02-01:20:51

Holmes:

Right, but it was probably nice to finally be at the point in your career to say—

02-01:20:54

Ruiz:

I can do this.

02-01:20:56

Holmes:

I'm going to swing for the fences on this.

02-01:20:58

Ruiz:

Yeah, I did. The book remains a labor of love. I would love the opportunity, once the [Luisa] Moreno biography is done, I would love to rewrite this book, top to bottom, because there's so much that's been done, in the last twenty-one years since the book came out. Now the best review I ever received from this book was from a community college student at Rio Hondo College in Whittier, who wrote, "I feel like I've been given a history." And that's the best review I've ever gotten.

02-01:22:09

Holmes:

The broad canvas really allows you to not only trace these various experiences of struggle, and achievement, as well as the different faces of discrimination that these women faced. But also that generational change. The mother and daughter, the mother and granddaughter, you know, as that's going.

02-01:22:32

Ruiz:

And the community of political activism begins really early, well before the United Farm Workers. At the time, I didn't know, I would have put it in the book. Teresa Urrea, the great healer, talked to the workers during the Pacific Electric Railway Strike of 1903. I wish I had known. I would also include the community of radical Roman Catholic nuns of *Las Hermanas*. In fact, one of my former students at Arizona State, the late María Eva Flores was a narrator for Lara Medina. And María Eva wrote a beautiful dissertation, a community history of her hometown Fort Stockton, where there was Division Street, which literally separated the Mexican from the Anglo communities.

02-01:23:30

Holmes:

The tenth anniversary edition came out in 2008. We are now at, as you were saying, twenty one years later.

02-01:23:40

Ruiz:

I know.

02-01:23:42

Holmes:

And it's still an American Council of Learned Societies—

02-01:23:47

Ruiz:

It is an ACLS Humanities E-book, it was a Choice Outstanding [Academic] Title. I was very happy with the book. Really, for me, it showed the maturation of the field. When I thought we'd [historians of Latinas] really arrived is when Virginia Sánchez Korrol and I published *Latinas in the United States*, because we started this in '98, right after *Shadows* finished. We started the Latina Encyclopedia. And was an eight-year labor of love.

02-01:24:26

Holmes:

We're going to get to that here because I think you're absolutely right, that opened up a completely new chapter to the profession. It really did.

02-01:24:41

Ruiz:

And it was fun. It was the most fun working with Virginia. I still want to be Virginia when I grow up. She is amazing. And I hope she writes her memoir.

She talked a little bit about her life in *Memories and Migrations*. She's an incredible friend, mentor, my intellectual *comadre*. And we had a blast doing the *Encyclopedia*. And we had help. We had a brilliant administrator/artist, Carlos Cruz, a librarian at Brooklyn College, who handled all the paperwork, he made sure everyone got paid. He designed the *Latinas in History* digital project, we provided the content. It came out, I think 2008 when it came out? The digital project—okay, it looks clunky now, but at the time it was really cutting edge. And we were able to do that from the \$180,000 we got from the Ford [Foundation]. There would not have been a *Latina Encyclopedia* without the NEH, because its funding enabled us to pay the permissions and to pay our contributors.

02-01:26:03

Holmes: That's huge.

02-01:26:05

02-01:26:08

Holmes: Yes, it was 2009 is when the end of that project came. It's really interesting, speaking of websites, what we can do with technology today, there's almost no bounds. But to look back just ten years ago—

02-01:26:26

Ruiz: We had music. We had images going in and out. I mean, we had little animation. We were—[laughs]

02-01:26:35

Holmes: Well, I mean, they change the bar on us every year.

02-01:26:39

Ruiz: Every year, yeah.

02-01:26:43

Holmes: Well, I want to come back to that. But I'd like to maybe transition to talk about your time at Arizona State.

02-01:26:48

Ruiz: Okay. I will say, very frankly, that I really had a good time at ASU. I had terrific colleagues, wonderful friends. I had great students. I had been an administrator—but I was more polished an administrator this time. Also, I wasn't the only one. And ASU hired senior Chicana Latina faculty—I was not the only full professor Chicana. We had a cohort with Millie García, Cordelia Candelaria, Delia Saenz, Laura Rendón. We had each other's back. We could talk to each other. I will say I felt at home at Arizona. I felt like I had exchanged insufferable real estate prices for insufferable weather. And we had a really nice house, and my mother came to live with us, so she lived with us the last six years of her life.

02-01:28:19

Holmes: You were mentioning—

02-01:28:20

Ruiz:

And it was wonderful, because I had room for her. We would have been really squished in our home in San Dimas. It was good—ASU was right for the time. And I really, as I said, I enjoyed my experience at ASU. Did I have battles? Oh, yeah. But I also had support. I had people who had my back. And, you know professionally, it was a good move. It was hard personally. My older son Miguel loved Arizona. Moved him out the end of his freshman year of high school, which I had no business doing. But he found his footing right away, and loved it. And he still has great friends that he made in high school, they're still his friends. My other son, Dan, was in middle school, had a bad time in Arizona. In fact, sophomore year, he went to live with his father in Los Angeles And that was hard. My mother and I cried for two weeks. He would come and visit every other weekend. And it was hard.

When I moved to Irvine, he came to Irvine for college. We're all very close now. But that was a hard period. But I felt at ASU that my students were valued. I felt that my research, my scholarship was valued. In fact, I was named the College for Liberal Arts and Sciences faculty member of the year. I was very humbled by it. But part of it included me riding on the back seat of a Mercedes convertible during the Homecoming Parade and tossing out candy. The Homecoming Queen fantasy that I had as a fifteen-year-old came true about thirty years too late. Of course, my graduate students, "We're all going to be there!" But then then ASU was playing Oregon, and there were TV time scheduling issues, so the parade was going to be at 8:00 in the morning. I thought, fine. None of my graduate students are going to show up. And I know my kids aren't—I know, my older son at ASU wasn't going to show up. So there could be no pictures. I was wrong! There are a lot of pictures of me throwing candy, sitting atop a Mercedes convertible. And ASU alumni staff gave me a beautiful lei to wear, which after the parade I gave to my mother. There was a very nice luncheon at the University Club. Gayle Gullett gave a heartfelt talk, and my mom was so proud. It was only several months before she would pass, maybe a year.

02-01:32:11

My colleagues had nominated me up for a Regents Professorship, the highest ASU honor. But to many I hadn't been there long enough. So Jane Maienschein, a distinguished scientist, who is now a Regents Professor, we would joke that we were "Regents in waiting." Chicano/Chicana studies was great. Director Ed Escobar almost gave his life for that program as the proposal for departmental status came before the Arizona Regents when he was seriously ill. He had Valley Fever when he presented to the regents, and deadly sick. Ed put really his body on the line.

So we had a department, and we raised money. And it was controversial. As chair, I helped secure \$1.5 million from Wells Fargo and the \$500,000 from Motorola that enabled us to do some really wonderful things; scholarships for students, as well as the program "Teaching Arizona's Hispanic Heritage," which for five years brought a group of K-12 teachers from across Arizona.

They knew what they were getting into coming to Phoenix in the summer for a series of workshops and living in the dorms. And the teachers were terrific. I remember one teacher, she was very young and naïve, from Casa Grande, Arizona, and she became inspired. And I thought, here's this European American teacher, devoutly Mormon, teaching Latino History to her students. Now, I will never be NACCS Scholar of the Year, "taking corporate money, how could you?" I knew this blowback was going to come. And that's why my colleagues had to vote unanimously on pursuing these gifts. And I said, "Look, I don't want anyone to come up to me in the Student Union and say, so-and-so said he wasn't for it and voted against it. Why did you do this?" You know, da da da da da. I said, "If we're going to do it, we're going to do this, the vote has to be unanimous." And some of the younger professors were, like, "Oh, this is dirty money." And Cordelia Candelaria was *la doña* at ASU, older than I and more respected. And she said—and this is totally, I mean totally out of character for her, said, "Look, I lost my virginity a long time ago. We can do a lot of good things with this money." And her words turned the tide.

Now, as chair, I received nasty emails from people who did not know the situation. Nasty comments came my way at a couple of events, whatever. The department did good things with that money.

02-01:35:16

Holmes:

Well, and speaking of that environment, and not just raising the scholarships, which was huge, right, within that department, now I wanted to clarify, you were chair at the department—

02-01:35:26

Ruiz:

Yes, Department of Chicana and Chicano studies. It was not Transborder. Transborder came after with the recruitment of Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez.

02-01:35:31

Holmes:

So the School of Transborder Studies was after you left ASU, is that correct?

02-01:35:36

Ruiz:

Yes, after I left.

02-01:35:41

Holmes:

Because I know in talking with Ed Escobar, the creation and running of that program of Chicana and Chicano studies was why he was recruited to ASU.

02-01:35:48

Ruiz:

Right. And he did his job. Oh my goodness. He rallied the troops together, wrote a beautiful proposal, and fielded all the question from the Regents. And he had a raging fever. I consider Ed the founder of Chicano/Chicana studies at ASU, he brought people together, and now it's a school.

02-01:36:23

Holmes:

I wanted to ask, you were commenting on the environment, particularly for a Chicana scholar.

02-01:36:31

Ruiz:

And it's funny, because the Arizona where I taught was not the Arizona of Jan Brewer and Russell Pearce. I don't know what happened, to be honest. Yes, there was racism and Sheriff Joe. Brewer, Pearce, and others were on the periphery, and they wouldn't come to the center until later. I will state that we went from a very friendly neighborhood where we knew all our neighbors in San Dimas to a place where it took a long time for people to speak to us. We always laughed that we desegregated the Lakes, the "island" portion of the Lakes.

02-01:37:27

Holmes:

You were also mentioning your colleagues—

02-01:37:33

Ruiz:

I had good colleagues.

02-01:37:36

Holmes:

You had supportive colleagues. You weren't the only Chicana scholar there.

02-01:37:41

Ruiz:

Oh gosh, yeah.

02-01:37:42

Holmes:

And not only that, but if we look at this time how things have changed, that you were a senior tenured professor, nationally recognized as a Chicana.

02-01:37:54

Ruiz:

What's so interesting is there were some students in the graduate program complained about my students' funding. "Oh, it's because of Vicki. Vicki's students get all the money." And I can remember telling my students, "Look, you get the scholarships because you're good. They're not doing me any favors." So they would begin to answer the complainers, "No, we're good." As I said, I also had a great graduate community.

02-01:38:44

Holmes:

Looking back on your experience—from Stanford on through—how, at that point, did you see the environment for Chicana and Chicano scholars had really changed?

02-01:38:57

Ruiz:

It had changed. It absolutely had changed. It was changing nationally. By 1995 colleagues at other universities were asking me if I had students. Now I was very careful of restricting the numbers of students I recruited, because I knew the job market was bad. But it was the first time at ASU where I received letters asking if I had students. And that was so important. To be honest, I probably would have spent my career at ASU. I probably would have, if not for the fact—well, to be honest, two things: one, I didn't realize how great the UC retirement system was as well as the resources of the UC system until I was no longer in the UC system. I did not touch my retirement savings at Davis, which was a good move. Two, and the major reason—and it was a good move—was my husband was not happy at ASU, and he wanted to

get back to Southern California. And so the only place I applied to when I was at Arizona State was to be director of the UC Humanities Research Institute. I did not get the job. Knew five minutes into the interview with the committee that I was not the person. The search committee members wanted a poststructuralist critical theorist. And it was a rocky interview. I mean, it was a really rocky interview. And it was very clear to me that I was not the person. Steven Topik was chair of History at the time. We had breakfast. And he said, "Well, if this doesn't work out, would you be interested in being considered as a Target of Excellence hire?" They didn't have Target of Opportunity positions post Proposition 209, but they had Target of Excellence slots for, quote, "stars" in the profession. And would I be interested? I said, "Sure, love to."

02-01:41:04

I hadn't been back twenty-four hours when I received a call from the chair of the search committee the late Emory Elliot and he graciously called to inform me that my name would not be put forward. And I knew that. So I emailed Steve, and it turned out at the time that there would be an opening for the directorship of the brand new Community Outreach Partnership Program in the School of Social Ecology, a unit that would leverage resources of the University, to help the community. And that's exactly the kind of job my husband, who's an urban planner, wanted. So when I went for my interview, he went for his interview. And it worked out really, really well. I came back to the UC system. Dan started as a first year at UC Irvine. Miguel was still a senior in the Honors College at ASU, but the next year he would attend the UC Berkeley School of Law. In hindsight, it worked out really, really well. But it was hard. And in that transition period, literally in the transition between ASU and UC Irvine, my mother died. My mother lived [back] in California two days. But as I said, in hindsight it was a really good move.

02-01:42:31

Holmes:

How did you see the environment of UC Irvine?

02-01:42:33

Ruiz:

Okay, UC Irvine Chicano/Latino Studies was beleaguered, under siege. It was a program. And the few colleagues that were involved were a garage band: Leo Chávez, Raul [Fernández], Gil[berto] González, and a young assistant professor, Lisa García Bedolla, a joint in Political Science. I wanted a joint appointment in History and Chicano studies. The dean in the Social Sciences wanted to close up—I mean, he really wanted to close up Chicano/Latino Studies. I basically said I want to come, but I want to come as a split appointment, though I knew I would be split across two schools Humanities, the home of History and Social Sciences, the home of Chicano studies.

So I came, and Leo Chávez, all of us contributed, but he was the primary author of the documents we needed to transform the program to into a department, and to have full lines. It seemed like every academic committee at UC Irvine had to pass judgment on the proposal and we revised, revised, and

revised some more. For me, serving as chair of Chicano/Latino Studies was a gift. I had such a good group when I became chair. Glenda Flores had just been hired and Glenda had been my undergraduate student at UCI. I had nothing to do with her hire as I was dean of the School of Humanities at the time. But when we became a department, we soon lost Lisa to Berkeley. Louis DeSipio was hired the year after I, as a joint in political science and CLS. One our first hires as a department was Cynthia Feliciano, now at Washington University, then Michael Montoya, who has now retired, and psychologist Belinda Campos. For the almost four years I was a chair I felt really lucky in that we recruited Lara Enríquez, Alana LeBrón, Anita Casavantes Bradford and Héctor Tobar. Oh, and Ana [Rosas] was recruited while I served as dean of Humanities. And she had been my UC president's postdoc. And Alejandro Morales transferred his line from Spanish, where he was desperately unhappy, and as dean I helped broker that, for him to come to Chicano/Latino Studies. And it was a good group. We were all in this together.

02-01:45:02
Holmes:

Wow, that's interesting—it's another example of, if I could, you helping to put together the building blocks to go from a Chicana/Chicano studies program to department—

02-01:45:19
Ruiz:

A department. Yes, it was exciting. And it's always been Chicano/Latino here. Louis is Italian American, Raul and Anita are Cuban, Alana's Boricua—it really is a transnational department, always has been. And it's a department that doesn't fight. It's always been the tradition of the department. We're not all best friends, but we come out of a meeting and we vote, and that's it. We disagree with each other at the meetings, it's not pretty. At the end you vote, you stick together. That polity has helped us and also it's always been Chicano/Latino Studies against the world here, because we're in Social Sciences, the other Ethnic programs are in the School Humanities, and in Social Sciences, colleagues tended to ignore us or treat the department as something they were stuck with. When I was inducted to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and then fortunate enough to be awarded the National Humanities medal, my colleagues in the meetings of chairs and directors for the School of Social Science actually had to talk to me. They had to acknowledge my presence.

Chicano/Latino Studies had the worst, the saddest infrastructure facilities. When Adela de la Torre was on a Social Sciences external review committee, she wrote the dean, who wasn't terribly supportive of us, "Why is Chicano/Latino Studies in Third World conditions?" I mean, we didn't have nice furniture. We had these metal desks from World War II, honest—like, it was not even shabby-chic, it was just shabby. Then the first Chicano president of the UCI Alumni Association, Judge Salvador Sarmiento, wrote the chancellor (Michael Drake) and said, "Have you visited Chicano studies lately? Have you seen their facilities?" And one summer we got new furniture,

new paint, carpet. The place became more spruced up. I don't think we get the resources that we need, but it's no longer my fight.

02-01:48:18

Holmes:

I wanted to ask, speaking of fights, you had mentioned that this is the department that doesn't fight. How was the faculty with that department really able to negotiate and get on the same page of that role? Because we hear a lot of stories, in departments across the country, no matter—

02-01:48:40

Ruiz:

No, history, everything, yeah.

02-01:48:41

Holmes:

Right? I mean choose your discipline.

02-01:48:41

Ruiz:

It's because my colleagues, we put students first, and we always have. When I started at UCI in 2001, 12 percent of the undergraduate population were Chicano/Latino. We're an HSI (Hispanic Serving Institution) now, UCI has more than doubled our Chicano/Latino population. That was a collective response. Collective mission. We had a wonderful Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, Manuel Gómez, who labored in the trenches for decades. We have colleagues who have been here for a very long time, Gil González, Raul Fernández, Leo Chávez. And they kept it alive. They kept it going. We need to continue to grow and expand. And to me, it's not just about how many butts in seats (student credit enrollment hours) you've got, which is the coin of the realm, or the fact that, Chicano/Latino Studies doesn't have that many majors. We have double majors, many minors, and our survey courses, because of our great survey instructors, enroll over 200 students. We pull our weight in General Education classes. The UC First Gen Initiative started from this department. Anita Casavantes Bradford thought, let's have something in the school that would be a mentorship program between first generation faculty and first generation undergraduates. So we went to Bill [Maurer, the School's third dean], and Bill gave us lunch money to see if faculty would be interested, and then it grew from a school-wide initiative in a year to a campus-wide initiative, and then the following year the program is now UC-wide, 900 UC professors. And it was all from Anita coming into the office and saying—she was then an assistant professor—"Doesn't it sound like a good idea? My response: "Go! Run with it!"

02-01:50:47

Holmes:

Wow, that's great. Well, I wanted to ask you about, you were not only brought here and began to construct a very successful department, working together as a team, but in January of 2008 you were tapped to become dean of the school—

02-01:51:03

Ruiz:

I was interim dean for the School of Humanities from August of 2007 until December 2008 and then I was dean until the end of August 2012. I was dean

of Humanities before I was chair of Chicano/Latino Studies. In the spring of 2007 the School of Humanities had a failed search. The school was split right down the line, between a candidate who was provost of an East Coast university who said—when I asked him about diversity, said, "Well, I'm supposed to say yes, isn't that correct answer? It's too bad we can't tenure black faculty at our campus, because they really don't measure up." And the second person had been chair of an Ethnic Studies department, also at a prestigious East Coast university. The school split right down the middle. The provost candidate said we needed more public scholars like Victor Davis Hanson. "*Mexifornia?*" I blurt out and continued something to the effect of that racist, xenophobic tract. The provost looked down his nose at me "Well, he's a distinguished classicist. I don't know about that work, but he is a distinguished classist." He was just so—oh full of himself. A little later I was at the dog park with my dog, talking to Sharon Salinger, who was dean of the undergraduate division. I opened my mouth. We were talking about this particular candidate, how old school, traditional, and can you believe his answers? I said, "Yeah, I could answer those questions better than him."

When the search failed, she talked to our EVC/Provost Mike Gottfredson. And then Mike called me. And guess what? I really had mixed feelings about it, because I knew from being chair of history that the School of Humanities was a hard place. But I did it. I agreed to do it. And it came at a cost, I developed high blood pressure, lost a lot of friends. I tell people I went from beloved chair in History to evil dean in six months. It was very hard—the budget crisis hit. I'm very proud of Humanities Gateway, we were able to finish it. The only, from what I understand, the only non-Science, fully public-funded building to go online in the UC system during the crisis. I had wonderful staff. Some days I would not have gone to the office, if it had not been for the staff on the fourth floor. My assistant dean, the director of facilities, the advancement team, academic personnel team, executive assistant, director of computing, the tech staff—I would not have gone. But they were depending on me, they were working their butts off for me. We worked as a team, we worked together, and it made all the difference. I'll always have tremendous respect for the staff, because they really had my back. We were able to minimize the staff layoffs we thought we would have to make. Kathy Haines, a genius as assistant dean. She figured out the budget figures. We'll hire less, and use the savings from the lines of retired faculty to fund staff in the short term. I made very unpopular moves. Gayatri Spivak once received a very generous stipend to come and teach twelve students in a critical theory seminar. I could fund ten sections of English Composition, and so I ended the residency. It was not a popular decision. I was the evil empiricist from History. I was also the dumb dean.

02-01:54:59

At one point, toward the end of my term—before Kathy retired—we were going to buy Disney t-shirts. I would wear Dopey, and she Grumpy, because that's exactly how we were perceived. But we made changes, for good or ill,

depending on your feeling. The German Department had more faculty than majors, so under my tenure, the departments of German, French and the program in European Studies became the Department of European Languages and Literature. And we folded the struggling Russian program into ELL. The move to consolidate helped all involved. I kept Asian-American, Gender and Sexuality Studies and African American Studies as separate departments/programs because you can't always assume that there's a shared mission, or there'd be a shared polity. And German actually proposed the European Languages department. A faculty member in German actually proposed it, and I ran with it. But then it became, "Oh, look what Vicki did." And not in a good way.

02-01:56:08

Holmes:

From your experience also over the years, decades of dealing with Ethnic Studies programs, and looking at various programs or departments of Chicana and Chicano studies, that sometimes you have complementary programs, but they're all competing for resources.

02-01:56:27

Ruiz:

You've got it. And they're not going to come together. To me, I think Ethnic Studies programs that work start as Ethnic Studies programs. Once a department has autonomy, colleagues don't easily give that up and play well with others. The idea that you would put Chicano, Asian American, African American, and gender studies all together and say, "Get along, discuss." And Chicano/Latino Studies is in the School of Social Sciences, because by and large, Chicano/Latino faculty there are social scientists. And the other departments have colleagues who are by and large humanists.

As dean, I was very happy to help assistant professors get tenure when their colleagues in their departments were blatantly plotting—I will say plotting—for them not to get tenure. For example, asking someone to be an external reviewer for tenure, a man who had a reputation of going around and following a certain scholar around at conferences and heckling her from the audience, because he didn't like her work. A twelve-page letter, and as dean I had, along with the candidate's rebuttal, I had to go point by point why he was wrong. I mean, incredibly mean-spirited. A couple of instances were uncalled for. The colleagues up for tenure are fabulous teachers, fabulous citizens.

02-01:58:02

So I felt good about that. Also securing resources in tough times, we did hire. We had diverse classes of new hires. I had wonderful associate deans, I would argue the most diverse associate deans in the UC system. At one point Jim Steintrager was associate dean of Graduate Study, Rodrigo Lazo, associate dean of Undergraduate Study. Jim finished his term and I appointed Glen Mimura and when Rodrigo's term ended, I appointed Sharon Block. Humanities colleagues gave us really bad nicknames. If I was the "dumb dean," Sharon, whom I love dearly, speaks her mind, wonderful feminist historian, was called "pit bull." Rodrigo Lazo was my "thug," he was a big

guy. I said, "Latino thug," right? Jim Steintrager was "Svengali," because obviously he had some sort of influence over me. And Glen Mimura was "sneaky" and could not be trusted. Really, people? Grow up!

02-02:00:12

Holmes:

It's very interesting, particularly seeing with this project, sitting in this chair, and listening to those who went into administration.

02-02:00:19

Ruiz:

The barbs didn't bother me. In fact, when I get barbs at AHA (the American Historical Association), people ask, "Are you bothered about the email that you receive?" I say, "No, I've been dean." See, these are strangers that I'll never meet, saying this. It's harder when it comes from people you know. Particularly when it comes from someone you thought was your friend. You'd been over to their houses for dinner. They've babysat your dog.

I'm trying to catch my thoughts in terms of the donors. Fundraising was the hardest part. I had some wonderful donors, wonderful feminist donors. They're considered midline donors, \$25,000 a year. In terms of "big fish," the Jao family funded Viet Stories, the Vietnamese American Oral History Project. The Jaos were terrific. I did have a donor, a huge donor to the University who always gave small amounts to the School of Humanities—nothing big. I was asked to make a pitch so he would renew his graduate summer internship in a particular department. I met with him, my first year as dean (along with my development officer). He looked me up and down and said, "You don't speak French, do you?" I said, "No, *habla español?*" "Oh, I don't speak Spanish!" He just recoiled, just insulted. He says, "Well, I thought to be dean of a top tier school, a top tier school like the School of Humanities at Irvine, being fluent in French would be a prerequisite."

02-02:02:16

So after a very uncomfortable lunch, I told the advancement officer, I never want to meet with this person again. Please send the chair of so-and-so, who's fluent in French to deal with this person. Her father was a French professor at Northwestern, her mother was born in Paris. Send her. Please do not send me. Overhearing at a social event, a potential donor rant about the "socialist clown" in the White House, and having to tell myself, "okay," let me just walk away from this reception, just walk away." Or being at a literal round table, where you're the only woman, and you're the only person of color during a UCI Trustee retreat. I was part of a breakout session on the future of UC Irvine. Now the retreat was held at the Grand Del Mar, beautiful resort, gorgeous place for deans and donors to get know one another. Now at this round table Mr. Big of the trustees told me be quiet, that I had nothing to contribute, and he did not want to hear from me anymore. I stayed through the session, picked up, disappeared. I knew several of the white guys around the table and not one of them said a word in my defense.

My husband and I took walks. The Provost noticed my absence. Now Mike Gottfredson, the Provost, was a valued mentor for me as an administrator. And he said, "You disappeared. Why did you disappear?" And I told him. And he said, "Vicki, when that happened, you should have come to me and I would have intervened. That's not acceptable." And I said, "I'm not going to run to daddy." When I was dean, out of forty-three trustees who wanted to raise money for the University, people would give a lot of money each year, there were forty-three of them. Only two expressed an interest in raising for the School of Humanities as either a first or second priority.

02-02:04:31

Holmes: What were the other priorities?

02-02:04:32

Ruiz: Schools of Business, Medicine, the Law School, Engineering, Bio Sci. Not Humanities. Some in Social Science—Bill [Maurer] has done a great job in the School of Social Sciences. I realized I did not want to be a president of a small college. I did not want to be a provost. I wanted to go back to the classroom and the archives. I can't stand pretension. I don't want to feel like I have to be muzzled if I'm in a public setting, and people are talking about right-wing conspiracy theories, as though they are serious. Or going to a dinner, and no one's talking to you, because what you do is not interesting. I told my dear friend and colleague, Val Jenness, dean of Social Ecology, "Go with the idea that you're doing an ethnography, and go with the idea that you're the hired help. You're the evening's entertainment, and they may choose to talk to you, or they may choose not to talk to you."

But as I said, I had a fabulous midline. I had Peggy Maradudin, the late Virginia Laddy, the late Nira Rosten. Yvonne and Brian Smith—they were wonderful people. But they were not the people that could name the school.

02-02:06:29

Holmes: Well, given as you were just explaining those type of challenges that you faced, not just as a dean, but also as a woman and as a Chicana sitting in the office as dean, which I think was most likely very novel for UCI.

02-02:06:46

Ruiz: Oh, it was. I remember going to lunch with a potential donor for Critical Theory and a senior colleague in the field. I tell you, I needed toothpicks to keep my eyes open, as they began to basically quote Foucault, Derrida, back and forth at each other, as well as theories I'd never heard of. I was, like, okay, this isn't for me. I'm not a pretentious person, and I don't like pretense. I am not the type of person to say "Let's wear a ball gown and to the UCI Medal dinner. I guess I shouldn't say this, but Val Jenness and I used to go as each other's dates at these things. And we developed categories for ethnography: best plastic surgery, worst plastic surgery, and dress inappropriate for age group.

02-02:08:04

Holmes:

I'd like to come hang out with you at one of those parties, because that does sound fun.

02-02:08:10

Ruiz:

Afterward, we were comparing notes. Because I'm at my table, and she's at hers, and we're looking at each other, meeting at the hors d'oeuvres stand, exchanging a few things. But it was really interesting. You can always tell the women who are UCI, and those who are donors, and the spouses of donors, by the dresses, by the outfits and by the jewelry. I had a fabulous director of finance, Kevin Kramp. Kevin was amazing. He married a very wealthy man, and so Kevin would wear to the office rings and pendants, and they were gorgeous. So he always said he was going to glam me up, that he was going to loan me his jewelry. And I declined politely; I would have been so scared something would have happened to them! He is a wonderful man, retired a few years ago.

02-02:09:25

Holmes:

But given the challenges as you were discussing, certainly not, say, your cup of tea; not really the environment that you were the most comfortable in. You were still able to raise \$9.2 million.

02-02:09:39

Ruiz:

Look, I had terrific development officers and colleagues with great projects. Some of the funds were funds from private foundations, some were earmarked for the UC Humanities Research Institute. I was able to name a very nice conference room in honor of Manuel Gómez C. Affluent OC Hispanics ponied up for Manuel. They loved Manuel, they gave money. I made sure every donor had his/her name very visibly placed on a large plaque in the conference room. And that was a fun dedication. We had a lot of fun. And donors told stories of Manuel in his youth. And it was a feeling of community. And commencement was always fun.

But as I said, it was hard. I developed high blood pressure. At one point I was going to resign. I went to see the chancellor, after I was prescribed two medications. And he looked at me and he knew exactly what I wanted to say. He said, "Well, you're only on two? I'm on four!" That's Michael Drake, who's now president of Ohio State. And he's a doctor. He's an ophthalmologist. I thought he would be, like, "Oh well, Vicki, you know, your health"—no. Couldn't get out of it. I did my time. I was invited to do another five years, and I said no.

02-02:11:15

Holmes:

Well, I wanted to ask, because it was pretty soon, I think, after, within a year after leaving the Dean's office, you became chair of—

02-02:11:25

Ruiz:

I was a joint appointment in two different schools—Chicano/Latino Studies always had my back. Even when I was evil dean, half of my history

colleagues would not talk to me, but Chicano/Latino Studies faculty let me know, I was always welcome. When I left the deanship, I had a home. So I came here. In fact, one faculty member saw me in Humanities and said, "Are you still here?" Because few people in the School had seen me, because I was doing my service in Social Sciences. It was interesting, when I was inducted in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, I had several humanities colleagues say, "You, in the Academy? Unbelievable!" Really? Thank you. What am I supposed to say to that?

02-02:12:11

Holmes:

I mean, they could have just said, 'Congratulations', or kept it to themselves.

02-02:12:15

Ruiz:

Exactly. Yeah, really! You know, you hear things. People —particularly when you live in University Hills, people always wanted to gossip. It's the biggest small town. It really is. You could write a novel based on the listserv, and what people say on the listserv. And part of it, as it was explained to me, was that you have a bunch of people who've been told since they were little that they were the smartest people in the room. And now they have to live together.

02-02:12:59

Holmes:

It's an interesting way of putting it, yes.

02-02:13:01

Ruiz:

And, you know, I have wonderful friends, neighbors in Uni Hills. And I had people who would see me and would just turn the other way. Or not speak. Yeah. I mean, you know, it's just part of it.

02-02:13:18

Holmes:

So you finished out your time before retiring as chair of Chicano/Latino Studies. Now, you have held so many positions through your career. What new lessons did you bring to being chair of this department?

02-02:13:35

Ruiz:

I think a line from *Arrested Development* puts it best, "There's always money in the banana stand." And that's what the UC system is, there's always money in the UC system. There always is. And that's what I learned—knowing who to call and leverage. Knowing if there's a hiccup, you could always call. I always knew someone I could call. I had allies. As dean I had built relationships in Aldrich [Hall, Office of Admissions, Offices of the Provost and Chancellor, UC Irvine]. I had built relations particularly with staff. If I needed an answer, I could find it. It may not be the answer I wanted, but I could find out. And I also had allies that could help me get a hire done, or that could help in terms of negotiating a resource issue.

02-02:14:47

Holmes:

I wanted to ask, which is a related question on that, having served as dean, having the experience of running—chairing a—

- 02-02:15:00
Ruiz: \$36 million (School of Humanities)—that's a budget.
- 02-02:15:03
Holmes: A very huge budget.
- 02-02:15:06
Ruiz: Oh, it's huge!
- 02-02:15:08
Holmes: So you take that experience, coupled with, of course, your experience in previous years at different universities, of chairing departments, you're now towards the end of your career.
- 02-02:15:19
Ruiz: Yeah.
- 02-02:15:19
Holmes: With that experience, you were likely able to be a calming influence among some of the younger faculty—saying, "Hey, I've done this battle before, take a deep breath, this is how we will do it."
- 02-02:15:32
Ruiz: Exactly, exactly. Or, "This will pass, we will be fine, we're going to work it this way, don't get upset, it'll work out." I still get called, people call me, ask me for my advice. In fact, I'm going to do two workshops at UT San Antonio in the spring. One is, basically, twenty-one tips for tenure, and the other is, basically, how to move from associate to full professor, I don't remember the clever title I had—it may be very corny—because they are really two different processes, two different levels of expectation.
- 02-02:16:22
Holmes: That's interesting—
- 02-02:16:31
Ruiz: If people want to call and ask my opinion, I'm happy to share it. Maybe it's not what they want to hear. I was just on the phone yesterday, and I know the person didn't want to hear what I had to say. "This is my assessment of the situation, do you want to do this and this? This is what this job entails. Do you want to do it?"
- 02-02:16:22
Holmes: I think that's a good segue, to get into discussing, before we move on to your scholarship—
- 02-02:16:31
Ruiz: Oh gosh, how long have we got?
- 02-02:17:02
Holmes: Oh, I know, right? I need to get some final reflections on this. Even just mentioning your time in these administrative positions, and being able to, as a senior faculty member, work with younger faculty members—

02-02:17:22

Ruiz: It's wonderful to watch junior faculty come into their own as intellectuals, and to be so proud. I mean, watching Matt [García], at Dartmouth, moderate a symposium, and witnessing the dexterity and the deftness, and the suppleness of his intellect. Seeing my last student, Mark Oscegueda become confident in his work. It's very fulfilling, and I'm very happy that Margaret Jacobs will be inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

02-02:18:15

Holmes: That is exciting.

02-02:18:17

Ruiz: I'm really excited, I wish I could go.

02-02:18:19

Holmes: But you had also been, over the years, as we had mentioned a bit ago, you had been mentoring twenty six PhD students which is a lot. This is also a very important topic, when we look at your career, because those who've worked with you, your mentorship is discussed nearly as much—or well, at least alongside your scholarship. Discuss the experience, for you, in mentoring.

02-02:18:55

Ruiz: I think James Brooks, in *Captives and Cousins*, if you read his acknowledgements, it's very sweet, he said it's that I have a "gentle heart and a ruthless pen." I want to give students the type of comments I received, particularly from Estelle Freedman. I think it's really important. And also with junior colleagues, I want to give the type of comments I would have liked to receive. I think it's very important to provide mentorship as a senior, to junior because we need to make the academy more humane, more accessible place to be, that everyone has a place at the table. And I want them to feel like they belong, and I want to give them advice and counsel that I wish I had received.

02-02:19:58

Holmes: When we look at the field, and certainly over its long history now, officially 50 years of Chicano and Chicana studies, some of the first generation of scholars, such as Rudy Acuña, has always been adamant that the very heart of Chicano studies is mentoring.

02-02:20:20

Ruiz: Absolutely.

02-02:20:21

Holmes: It is the teaching and the mentoring that is the heart of Chicano studies.

02-02:20:23

Ruiz: Absolutely. I take greater pride, in the accomplishments of my former students, and also people I've mentored along the way as an informal mentor. And I really feel like the National Humanities Medal is, not just me, but it's a recognition of the field of Latino history, Latino history has arrived. That's how I view it.

02-02:20:52

Holmes:

I wanna get to that in just a minute, but I want to talk a few more minutes about your books before we get to there. In 2005, *Latino Legacies*.

02-02:21:04

Ruiz:

Ah, it's from the *Encyclopedia*.

02-02:21:06

Holmes:

Yes. And that's what it looked like, that was the kickstarter?

02-02:21:08

Ruiz:

Well, no, because we were working on the *Encyclopedia* since 1998.

02-02:21:13

Holmes:

Indeed, that's true.

02-02:21:13

Ruiz:

So we knew the stories, and we also knew that how much of a person's life can you say in 500-10000 words? And so, when Catherine Clinton, who was editor of a series, asked if we would like to assemble a collection of Latina biographies, we jumped at it. And the biggest process was whittling the number down, because we had a finite number, and we wanted to make sure there's representation, that women from the earlier period were included, not just twentieth-century women, and that it was balanced in terms of a range of politics, a range of experiences. And, so, that's how *Latino Legacies* came together. And it was hectic, because we were working on the *Encyclopedia*, and trying to get that to press, and then we're working on *Latino Legacies*, but Virginia and I work really well together.

02-02:22:19

Holmes:

And too, I couldn't imagine the selection process, if we see just the wonderful Latinas who are discussed in the *Encyclopedia*. Now, just pick 15—

02-02:22:32

Ruiz:

Yeah, exactly.

02-02:22:32

Holmes:

And give their story a little fuller treatment. That had to be very difficult.

02-02:22:37

Ruiz:

That was the most difficult part. We had really good contributors. We had contributors who took the job seriously, and we didn't have a lot of late submissions, which is unusual for soliciting original essays, because there's only one essay that's a reprint, and that's mine.

02-02:23:04

Holmes:

But the idea is to keep it on track.

02-02:23:04

Ruiz:

Yeah.

02-02:23:06

Holmes:

It's difficult enough when you are the author, and kind of, say, editor of your own work, but, trying to herd 15 academics, which is like herding cats, I mean, if we're being honest—academics and deadlines. That's a whole other thing on its own.

02-02:23:2

Ruiz:

Legacies came out a year before, and then the *Encyclopedia* received a 2007 Best in Reference by the New York Public Library. I could not attend, but Virginia went and represented us in force.

02-02:23:36

Holmes:

Let's talk about the *Encyclopedia*. So, it was three volumes.

02-02:23:41

Ruiz:

Three volumes, 600 entries, I think, 300 photos, it was huge. But we loved the process and we learned about so many different women, we solicited nominations from colleagues, as well as nominations from the public. We did a little early publicity, and the *New York Times* ran a story about the encyclopedia, and from the *New York Times* story, we received a number of emails. Some, were, "You've gotta interview my mother." But also, "Did you know that there was a Latina who was a member of the Women's Air Service Pilots, the WASPs of World War II? The person who suggested Verneda Rodríguez McLean was a retired military historian, and he wrote a really nice profile of her, sending a picture of her beside her plane.

We decided the encyclopedia would not be *Who's Who*. So, we tried to be really picky about including people who were still alive

02-02:25:03

Holmes:

You mentioned emails. That was one of the questions I had, was, the task of selecting, and putting out that kind of publicity. If we think pre-internet.

02-02:25:13

Ruiz:

That would have been letters.

02-02:25:15

Holmes:

How much more difficult?

02-02:25:17

Ruiz:

It would have been really difficult.

02-02:25:21

Holmes:

So, what was really the genesis of that work? We could understand, in all your years of work and scholarship, looking at the field, and saying, "Wow, there really should be a broader resource on this."

02-02:25:35

Ruiz:

Absolutely. Darlene Clark Hine—I always feel like I'm running in her footsteps, because Darlene was the always first, she was president of the OAH [Organization of American Historians], she received the National Humanities

Medal, and she edited *Black Women in America*. Darlene laughs, because when she was OAH president, and I congratulated her, and I was really happy, Darlene's a wonderful person, and Darlene said, "Oh, your time's coming, your time's coming, just wait, your time's coming."

02-02:26:08

Holmes:

She was right.

02-02:26:10

Ruiz:

Yeah. So basically, the model was her encyclopedia *Black Women in America*.

02-02:26:17

Holmes:

Right after the *Encyclopedia*, you did four works that really focused on what we would call borderlands today, of looking at the borders and migration. And this started with a 2006 article—

02-02:26:36

Ruiz:

Oh, *Nuestra América*. You know where that came from? That came from *Created Equal: a History of the United States*, I am a minor author. I was the weaver, making sure there was Latino representation, making sure there was Asian America although the other authors were pretty sensitive, but I particularly I didn't want there to be Latino history represented only as the explorers, the US-Mexican War, and let's talk about the obligatory photo of César Chávez.

And, so, I agreed. Because I had written two articles condemning US history textbooks. So, I had to put my money where my mouth was. I have so much respect and fondness for Jackie [Jacqueline Jones], and Laney, [Elaine Tyler May], and Tim [Thomas Borstelmann] and Peter [Wood]. We got along well. And it was from that process, as the weaver, especially for the first edition, that is how I envisioned my role. Others may envision it differently, but that's how I envisioned it because I did not write a complete chapter. There's little sections of me in almost every chapter. That is the genesis of *Nuestra América*, because I saw how US history looked differently when centering Latinos.

02-02:28:18

Holmes:

And then you came out, in that same year, *American Dreaming, Global Realities: Re-Thinking U.S. Immigration History*. And you edited that with—

02-02:28:31

Ruiz:

Donna Gabaccia. Well, Donna and I first met in 1986, in Toronto, at the Social Science History Association. And, we got into an unfortunate debate about what city was more diverse, New York City or Los Angeles. Really? This is important? Later on, we laugh about it. And then we thought, we should mark the changes in immigration history is changing. Why don't we do something together? And that's how it happened. And we had fun.

02-02:29:15

Holmes: And it's also interesting to think of, when this work is coming out in 2006, how much the history of immigration and its discussion within the academy was changing.

02-02:29:15

Ruiz: Mm-hmm, it was.

02-02:29:31

Holmes: Where transnational, and this is transnational—

02-02:29:32

Ruiz: It's the transnational turn, absolutely.

02-02:29:35

Holmes: Yeah.

02-02:29:36

Ruiz: So yes, Donna's terrific.

02-02:29:40

Holmes: And then, two years later, you edited with John Chavez, *Memories and Migrations*.

02-02:29:46

Ruiz: That came about because I did a manuscript workshop for Omar Valerio Jiménez at SMU [Southern Methodist University]. And David Weber was still alive, and he hosted a dinner at his lovely home, and John said, "Why don't we get money from the Clement Center and do a Latina anthology?" So I said, sure. So we worked together, and we did a national call. It was hard, to choose from the proposals we received and because we had to make tough decisions, and we decided to focus only on the twentieth century. And I felt really badly, because I had to tell people that I knew and respected, that our focus would only be on twentieth century themes.

And we had to narrow it down. But we wanted regional representation like Gabriela Arredondo who studied Mexican in Chicago; we wanted Carmen Teresa Whalen who wrote a beautiful book on Puerto Rican garment workers in Philadelphia. Of course, I had to have Virginia on the team. And so John and I tried to balance everything. And we had two workshops. We workshopped our papers, the first drafts. María Montoya, of course María Montoya wrote a brilliant chapter on the company housing in the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company

And we (the contributors) met and it was like summer camp at the SMU retreat in Taos. We really enjoyed working with each other and then again at Southern Methodist, and then we had the conference and then we worked on the volume. And there was a lot of kidding back and forth, because, John [Chávez] has certain ideas in terms of how he saw geography if you read his book *The Lost Land*, and how all these other scholars approached geography

differently but with a common understanding of the importance of region, so, it sort of all came together.

It was a great experience, we had a lot of fun.

02-02:32:23

Holmes:

Well and then the following year, I think, which we've already discussed a little bit, *Latinas in History* and the interactive site.

02-02:32:28

Ruiz:

Oh, a companion to the *Latina Encyclopedia*.

02-02:32:35

Holmes:

Then, so lastly I wanted to ask, and this actually isn't a book, you worked on *Immigration in American History*.

02-02:32:46

Ruiz:

It was a Gilda Lerner Institute of American History project. The traveling exhibit never received funding.

02-02:32:50

Holmes:

Oh really?

02-02:32:50

Ruiz:

No, so the exhibit became immigration history in a box that you can order from Gilda Lerner. And Ana Rosas and I were part of a large group of scholars who were asked to contribute ideas. I read drafts of the traveling exhibit and offered suggestions. Well, if you want this, why don't you look at this essay, why don't you look at that essay, that sort of thing.

02-02:33:15

Holmes:

But it never got funded, the traveling exhibition? That's too bad.

02-02:33:22

Ruiz:

Yeah, I'm trying to think. No, no it didn't.

02-02:33:25

Holmes:

Well are we allowed to ask about your forthcoming work, what you're currently working on now or are we supposed to wait and see?

02-02:33:32

Ruiz:

Two things I'm working on: one is *An Elegant Radical* which of course is the Moreno biography, and I really don't want to talk about it too much. It's coming, it's coming along. And another that I can now talk about that I couldn't talk about a few months ago was that I serve on the scholarly advisory board for the Obama Presidency Oral History Project, a partnership between the Obama Foundation and Columbia. We met a month ago and it was amazing. Everybody left their egos at the door and everyone has a shared mission to get this right.

02-02:34:12

Holmes:

That's exciting.

02-02:34:16

Ruiz: It is really exciting.

02-02:34:18

Holmes: Well, I do want to get your final reflections on the field before we wrap up, but I also wanted to ask you about some awards and honors that you received. In 2012 you were inducted as a fellow to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Could you briefly discuss this experience?

02-02:34:43

Ruiz: So, I'm the first Latina historian to be inducted and the second Latino, Louis Pérez was the first. It was kind of daunting. It was held at Harvard, at Saunders Hall. It was one of those very august occasions a lot of pomp and circumstance. I saw and met people from different walks of life. I met Penny Pritzker, and she had just come from the first Romney Obama debate. I met Judy Woodruff who sat next to me in the shuttle bus. When we arrived at our destination for a light breakfast reception, she began introducing me to people, she was really nice, and it was just "You know this person?" "No, I don't." And so she would introduce me.

And so, as I said, it was a lot of pomp and circumstance, but then when you get up on the stage and Alan Alda read my name as professor of history and Chicano/Latino Studies, it hits you. I walked over and I signed the book, and you understand Jefferson signed that book, Albert Einstein. I approached the book and my hand started to shake. I thought of my mother and it was really emotional. And I was glad it was quick, walk over, graduation, sign and leave the stage. It was very moving and I felt fortunate to have been nominated and then elected.

And I'm now chair of the membership committee for the history section for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences this year. And I served as a member for the last two years and now I'm chair and I think to myself going through this process, 'Wow.' Because it's a tough process, and you're voted on by your peers.

02-02:37:28

Holmes: Three years later you also received another honor, which is the National Humanities Medal. Ramón Saldivar also received one during Obama's presidency.

02-02:37:38

Ruiz: Yes.

02-02:37:42

Holmes: And he tells his story of how he found the news and received the call. Can you discuss, how did you find out, about that experience?

02-02:37:51

Ruiz: Okay, the first thing is that I am having lunch with Jim Steintrager and Rodrigo Lazo who had been my associate deans in School of Humanities. And

we're having a nice lunch and I see my phone go off. I switch it to silent. Oh, it's the History Department what's going on, what do they want? So walking back to the car, I call the department back. The young assistant in the department is so excited, "Vicki, the chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities wants to talk to you, he wants to talk to you. Here's the number of his secretary, you gotta talk to him." She was just so excited. And I thought, 'Oh I've been asked to be on yet another task force. How much time is this going to be, what's this about?' Yeah, I thought to myself, this is going to be another service commitment.

I thought, this is my year of sabbatical. Do I really want to do this? So I said, "Okay. Well, I'll call." And so anyway, we drive back Irvine and after we are back to campus. I call the assistant to the chair Bro Adams who asks, "Will you be at this number for a while? Chairman Adams really wants to talk to you." I thought, okay, it must be a big task force. Yes, I'll be at this number." About thirty minutes later, I'm in Pavilions, a local grocery store. There's bad '80s muzak blaring and I'm literally in an aisle of canned goods and I receive a call from Chair Adams informing me about the National Humanities Medal. That was an amazing experience. I was "Oh, you're kidding me. Yes, I'll be there." "What are you doing September 10?" "Anything you want," it was just really, really exciting. My children got to go, their wives got to go, at first there were only three tickets, but then, the ceremony was on a Thursday, and then the Monday before, two more tickets were made available. So Bianca and Flavia could go. So my whole family was there. Except for the grandkids who had not yet arrived.

NEH put us up in the Mayflower Hotel, which is the most amazing hotel. We land, we check into the Mayflower. The Institute of World Peace was hosting a gala for the medal recipients. So I have my mother of the groom dress, you know, double duty, and my husband runs several blocks to Men's Wearhouse to pick up his rental tux, we dress quickly and arrive just in time for the reception. It was surreal meeting people you admire, people you've read, and it was a memorable meal. The chefs knocked themselves out, because Alice Waters was a medalist.

And the next day, we were picked up, the NEH medalists were picked up to go first to NEH (the arts medalists went to NEA) where we did a lively Q&A with staff. We had a light lunch, and they put us back on the shuttle to the White House. And we go in, there's three levels of security to get into the White House. Because we were medalists we were not sniffed by the dogs. My family informed me that they were sniffed by the dogs. We were separated from our family members We waited in one room, medalists in one, families in another large space with the Marine band playing although Dan broke in and basically wished me luck.

02-02:42:08

And then all of us were taken to an even larger room where we lined up before the ceremony to have our pictures taken with the Obamas. And it took a while, because White House photographers are really good at what they do, and they take time posing you so that everybody looks good. I will tell you that the president has this aura or charisma; he's the president, he's the leader of the Free World. He has a very august presence.

And Mrs. Obama, she's as tall as he is. She's more beautiful in person. And she makes you feel at home in twenty seconds. For each of the three separate photos I had, the family photo, the one with the medalists, and then the individual photo, I was always posed next to her. And we had a regular conversation and she was very, very nice, and just real. Something I won't forget.

And I got up on the small stage the boys had bets on whether or not I was going to cry, and I almost did, because I thought of my mother, I thought about Rosa [Luisa's real name]. I thought about all my students, thought about the women I'd interviewed, and I told myself, I will not cry. I will not cry. So I smiled and I smiled and I smiled, and interestingly I did receive one email from a colleague who gently chided me (okay I took it that way, but it may have been teasing) that I may have smiled too much

02-02:44:02

Holmes:

What is somebody supposed to do in that environment? Not smile?

02-02:44:06

Ruiz:

I guess.

02-02:44:06

Holmes:

Pretend you're in deep thought, "Still working on something, Mr. President."

02-02:44:12

Ruiz:

Yeah, the medal is gorgeous. I wear it at commencement with my robes. I don't know if I'll wear it again, but I have worn it with my robes.

02-02:44:27

Holmes:

Taking a step back, or well, I don't want to say down, but taking a different step outside of the National Humanities medal.

02-02:44:41

Ruiz:

That'll never happen, nothing's ever gonna top that.

02-02:44:43

Holmes:

That same year you were also given the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Western History Association. Discuss that a little bit.

02-02:44:53

Ruiz:

I had an off and on again relationship with WHA, I mean early in my career I was elected to the nominating committee, and when I was trying to nominate Latinos to two different positions, I was accused of having an agenda by an

older historian. I'm sorry, but I have been in too many situations where a senior scholar has vision and a scholar of color has an agenda. And then finally when I kept pushing the old-school western historian why my nominees could not be considered, he admitted, "I don't know how to pronounce Spanish names. I have a hard time" and that was his objection. And I'm like, really? So I have had an off and on relationship with the WHA and the same with Immigration and Ethnic History Society. I was on the Saloutos award committee for best book in U.S. immigration history. The chair of the committee had a family health crisis, so Jon Gjerde at Berkeley, the other member of the committee and I, selected Devra Weber's *Dark Sweat, White Gold* as the winner, a work in Chicano history. The chair overruled us and refused to have co-winners, but insisted that the book that he wanted, which is an excellent book, Alan Kraut's *Silent Travelers* receive the award.

I felt bad. I had already talked to Devra. Devra had already obtained money from the Dean to go to the conference to receive the award and it was a really hard phone call to make. And so for a long time I was not involved with Immigration and Ethnic History. It was very East Coast. And now it's changed, totally changed.

02-02:46:35

Holmes:

Well in 2018, you also got a lifetime achievement award.

02-02:46:39

Ruiz:

I know, and I didn't expect that either. Donna and I were both honored.

02-02:46:51

Holmes:

But particularly if you look at the WHA, because your criticisms and observations are shared by many within the field of Chicano studies. But also, it's interesting to hear someone like Al Camarillo talk about his interaction with the WHA. We're talking like 1970—

02-02:47:10

Ruiz:

Oh, Pedro Castillo talked about the little cowboy badges and the sheriff badges.

02-02:47:17

Holmes:

But if you go today—

02-02:47:18

Ruiz:

Yeah, oh, today it's so different. Oh my goodness, today's exciting.

02-02:47:23

Holmes:

Not only did you get the lifetime achievement award from that organization, but they also, I believe, have a scholarship named after you.

02-02:47:31

Ruiz:

Article prize. It's for the best article on race in the North American West, not gender specifically. Mary Mendoza and Kelly Lytle Hernández, two principal organizers of the award wanted it to be the only WHA article prize with a

woman's name on it that didn't have anything to do with gender, and it was done on purpose. And as I said, that prize came together because of Mary Mendoza and Kelly Lytle Hernández. And now Kelly's a MacArthur

02-02:48:00

Holmes: Things are certainly changing.

02-02:48:04

Ruiz: They certainly are.

02-02:48:06

Holmes: Well, before we get to your final reflections, the honors keep coming. I mean, you were president of the Pacific Coast branch of the AHA, the American Historical Association, the American Studies Association, the Organization of American Historians, as well as the Berkshire Conference on Women Historians. Discuss your experience with these.

02-02:48:38

Ruiz: Oh no, it's too long. I will pick and choose, I will say that the Berkshire Conference was a three-year undertaking, and it was the first Berks held on the West Coast, at Scripps College. A UCI history PhD student, Jenny Thigpen, now an associate professor at Washington State, was the graduate assistant, and Jenny and I went on a roadshow, we'd go up to Claremont, and we'd meet with the conference staff at Scripps College on a regular basis. Susan Yohn, professor of history at Hofstra, was the Berks Treasurer the three of us, worked well together. I had a good program committee: Eileen Boris, and Antoinette Burton, and there was a third person who fished out when the work got hard, and so Antoinette and Eileen had to shoulder her assignments. It was a great conference. We had people come from all over the world, and it was fun and everything went really well.

And AHA—Jim Grossman is a genius. A lovely genius. He is so politically astute and he and the staff, Jim and Dana and Allison and Seth. It's a really well, well run operation. AHA is changing, it's no longer the tweed jacket with the patches organization. It's becoming much more vibrant with serious attention paid to public historians, K through 12 educators and also to graduate students and to also those who don't hold tenure track jobs. AHA has embraced sort of a genuine big tent philosophy.

02-02:50:27

Holmes: Well, I want to get your reflections now as we wrap up. I think I've held you in the seat almost long enough. The field of Chicano and Chicana studies has matured and grown since your early days at Gulf Coast Community College and Florida State. The rise of Ethnic Studies, which you also helped with at various institutions, establishing Chicana and Chicano studies departments and programs—

02-02:51:06

Ruiz: Yeah.

02-02:51:06

Holmes:

In your view what are some of the major developments that you've seen in the field over your career?

02-02:51:17

Ruiz:

Okay. Reflecting on a long career, I would have to say the Keyword Symposium at Dartmouth recently gave me perspective. Matt García was introduced as someone who's been around the block. I laughed. "If Matt is old, what am I? When dinosaurs roamed the Earth." For me, the possibilities are just limitless. I do think the transnational turn is here to stay. I think for Chicano/Latino studies to thrive, we need Central American Studies because it is vital to the field. And we need to promote it. There's so many different directions. What for me is very exciting is that there will always be a value for close empirical work. There's also very exciting theoretical work done, and I believe scholars of each can coexist. What you do is not necessarily what I do, but that doesn't mean that I think what you do is invalid. There's such a lack of public awareness about Latino lives, about Latino history, that it's really important to get the word out. Public history is critical, media projects, the museum exhibits.

In 1990, I directed one of the first History Social Science Framework residential teacher workshops, in fact it was the first at UC Davis. I designed it as a cook's tour around the world, an early version of multiculturalism. And my lecture was focused on the deportations, repatriation of Mexicans in the 1930s. The director in charge of these workshops at the California Department of Education told me that I had to change my lecture or she would yank the money.

02-02:53:36

The teachers had been invited, we were weeks away. I talked to the Director the UC Humanities Center who was the fiscal agent of the project and he laughed, "The money's safe. Go ahead. Do what you want." So I did. The director in the state department of education did not want any Mexican American history mentioned during the workshop because Mexican Americans weren't in the framework at that time. Mexican American history is in the framework now. I saw Emilia Castañeda in action several years ago. She was profiled for an Orange County Latina exhibit that one of my former students who's now a professor at Fullerton organized with her graduate students. This woman is in her nineties, and she gave a hell of a talk.

She conveyed her experience being deported as a young girl, what it did to her family, but also she talked about her quest for well over thirty years to get the inclusion of the deportation-repatriations in the California History Social Science framework as well as a public apology from the California legislature. [In 2005, the California legislature formally apologized]

What we do counts. Still, there's so much lack of awareness of this history. I would love to see more media training of Latino scholars. I'd like to see more

Latino scholars, you know on screen, and I'm not very good at it, other people are. I've become a better talking head over the years.

It's about the importance of conveying the multiplicity of Latino lives. A major news network recently referred to Mexico and the other Mexicos when they're referring to Central America. And yet, I think Central American Studies has been ignored in Chicano studies.

02-02:56:00

Holmes: Is that in the future? Do you believe that?

02-02:56:02

Ruiz: Oh, it is a really important topic.

02-02:56:05

Holmes: As this department is named Chicano and Latino Studies—

02-02:56:09

Ruiz: And that's been from the beginning, well, since I've been here, since 2001 it's been Chicano and Latino Studies. It may have been something different.

02-02:56:22

Holmes: So really building those bridges of inclusion—

02-02:56:24

Ruiz: It's inclusion and I do see a change. I think the academy is more accessible and humane. We still have a ways to go, but things are very different. I mean the idea of stopping your clock when you have children was unheard of when my children were young, of a family leave, of financial help with child care so you can go to conferences. We have miles to go, but the university (UCI) has at last, gotten serious about sexual harassment and sexual assault. And that is, an important step forward.

02-02:57:22

Holmes: Speaking of diversifying Chicano studies. When you first started at Stanford, it was called Chicano.

02-02:57:32

Ruiz: Masculine, emphasis on masculine.

02-02:57:35

Holmes: Then the A was added, and then we even merged the two with the @ sign—

02-02:57:39

Ruiz: I remember that—it was clever.

02-02:57:42

Holmes: And now we're at Chicanx.

02-02:57:45

Ruiz: Okay, look. To young people, I understand the reasons for it, if they want to embrace their term, go for it. But when a young ABD from Berkeley comes to

see me and says he's going to work on Latinx Farm Workers in the San Joaquin Valley in the 1930s, I'm like, they wouldn't have recognized that term, why don't you use the term that they would recognize? They were Mexicanos. And I told him a story about Carmen Bernal Escobar and when I interviewed her I was a very young woman, I said "Well what was it like as a Chicana working in a cannery?" And she looked and she says, "You know, you may be Chicana, *pero soy Mexicana*." Okay, lesson learned. I always ask people about their own self-identifiers—to me it's a baseline of respect for historical actors. And even in my letters of recommendation I use Latino/a. But as I tell people, I'm old.

02-02:59:05

Holmes:

If we look at activism within the field of Chicano and Chicana studies, the foundation of Chicano history, you know, if we look at the Chicano movement, activism played such a vital role.

02-02:59:20

Ruiz:

And there are two types of activists in my mind. There's the Rudy Acuña activist, and then there are those who work within a system like Al Camarillo. There are two types of activism, and they work together whether recognized or not.

02-02:59:42

Holmes:

I like that. I like that. Not much more to be said on that topic. You know, finally, I want to kind of get your thoughts on where do you see the field going, the future of the field?

02-02:59:57

Ruiz:

It's going to go a lot of different directions. There's so much still yet to be done across time, across regions, across fields, across topics. I think there's topics we haven't even thought about. We've only really begun to scratch the surface. People have history in their garages, this is an opportunity for people to donate their collections, to share them with the world. When I spoke with Alma García about her grandparents' letters, her grandfather was a mayor of a town in Chihuahua. As I noted earlier, he knew the Revolution was coming, he sent his wife and kids across the border. He died, by the *Villistas*, and he saved his family. But before Villa arrived, there's these incredible love letters.

These will be taken out of storage and published. And we need these primary sources. The fluidity of the borders. Some scholars dismiss transnationalism,, "Oh, that's a fad." It's not a fad. Because there's always been this back and forth. In El Paso, when I lived there, before it was so militarized, you want tacos? Go to Julios in Juárez. You wanted good Chinese food? Go to Shangri-La.

You'd cross the bridge, you went back and forth. The tragedy of the assassin in El Paso was he went to Walmart, and he saw us. Not only were shoppers Mexican Americans from El Paso, but also Mexicanos from Juárez. They were in there shopping for school supplies, going about their daily lives, easy

marks. Even with militarization, Juárez and El Paso depend on each other. And living on the border, if I had not taken the job at UTEP, I would have never had the appreciation for the border that came with living there. Though I was on the outside because I did not grow up there.

02-03:03:11

Holmes:

At the universities, Chicana and Chicano studies has come a long way as a field, and also by earning its place within the academy. We see this with people like you and Al Camarillo holding the presidencies of national organizations, with NAACS [National Association for Chicana and Chicano studies] meaning Chicano and Chicana studies actually has its own organization—

02-03:03:39

Ruiz:

It's been for a while, I haven't been to NAACS in 30 years or so.

02-03:03:43

Holmes:

I would just say this evolution of earning its place within the academy. What are your thoughts on others changes that still need to develop, particularly within the university campuses for Chicano/Chicana studies?

02-03:03:59

Ruiz:

Resources. To have adequate resourced. I just think of UCI and according to academic analytics, we're one of the top interdisciplinary programs (social science, humanities, interdisciplinary programs including American Studies, Ethnic Studies, Women's Studies). We're in the top tier. Yet there's not an appreciation for what we do, and I don't think we get the resources that's commensurate to our standing, particularly since now we're a Hispanic Serving Institution. And many of us worked on that HSI proposal.

We would have never been an HSI, if not for the late Vice Chancellor Juan Lara and the Center for Educational Partnerships who thirty years ago made inroads with teachers and students in Santa Ana and neighboring communities. He and his staff developed an array of programming in partnership with faculty, programs like Humanities Out There and programs in the sciences, we would not have had that base for student recruitment. Also, faculty recruitment. And that's what I would hope, that the department would be adequately resourced to support the value of what I think that Ethnic Studies faculty—certainly faculty in this department—bring to the table.

A lot of one-on-one attention that you might not get, you certainly would not get in other departments, maybe among a few professors, certainly. But it isn't the standard like it is here. Here as a Latino Studies faculty member, you're not only invested in the scholarship, but you're in the classroom you're doing mentoring.

It comes with the territory. Teaching and service are valued. In the humanities had colleagues, fabulous scholars, but average teachers and committee members. In Chicano/Latino Studies, we have incredible scholars, teachers,

mentors so dedicated, and it's gratifying to have as my colleague sociologist Glenda Flores whom I remember as my student in Chicano History here at Irvine.

02-03:06:54

Holmes:

I wanted to leave space always at the end of each interview because you know, we all stand on the shoulders of others, and if there are people, scholars who are no longer with us that you would like to recognize.

02-03:07:10

Ruiz:

Oh, wow. Louise Año Nuevo Kerr, Louise was a fabulous mentor to me. She would always seek me out at the conferences when in the early days we were the two Latinas, and more often than not, we would be on different panels, but at the same time. Or she would moderate a session, or I would moderate, and it was small group, it was Virginia, Louise and I and then joined by Antonia, Deena, and Emma and so Louise certainly.

Shirlene Soto always very, very kind to me. Peggy Pascoe. Peggy was a good friend, an excellent reader of my work. Peggy, was a phenomenal intellect, phenomenal person. And Camille Guerin Gonzáles was always in my corner and I so valued her intellect, her strength, and her joy. And also Luisa Moreno (real name Blanca Rosa Rodríguez-López). She was really invaluable to me. She touched my scholarship at every turn.

02-03:08:19

Holmes:

Well Vicki, this has been absolutely wonderful and we appreciate all your time. Any final thoughts before we leave?

02-03:08:29

Ruiz:

No. I think we covered everything.

02-03:08:31

Holmes:

Thank you so much.

02-03:08:32

Ruiz:

Thank you.

[End of Interview]

Appendix: Dissertations Directed and Postdoctoral Mentorships***Dissertations Directed***University of California, Irvine

Jessica Christian (2019), Visiting Lecturer, History, Scripps College

Mark Ocegueda (2017), Mellon Gateway Fellow and Assistant Professor to-be, History, Brown

Juily Phun (2016), Assistant Professor, Asian and Asian American Studies California State University, Los Angeles

Lani Cupchoy (2015), Visiting Assistant Professor, Pomona College

Christine Eubank (2013), Associate Professor, History, Bergen Community College

Nick Bravo (2011), Content Marketing Manager, TrendSource, Inc.

Margie Brown-Coronel (2011), Associate Professor, History, California State University Fullerton

Julie Cohen (2009), Lecturer, History, California State University, Los Angeles

Catherine Christensen (2009), Associate Professor, Palomar College

Ryan Kray (2009) Freelance Writer

Enrique Buelna (2007), Professor, History, Cabrillo College

Steven Rosales (2007), Associate Professor, History, University of Arkansas

University of California, San Diego

Lilia Fernández (2005), Henry Rutgers Term Chair, Latino/Caribbean Studies and History, Rutgers University (co-chair Ramón Gutiérrez)

Arizona State University

Virginia Espino (2007), Documentary Filmmaker and Lecturer, Chicana/o Studies, UCLA (co-chair Noel Stowe)

Francinne D. Valcour (2006), Academic Coordinator, Community College of Vermont (co-chair Gayle Gullett)

Laura K. Muñoz (2006), Assistant Professor, History and Ethnic Studies, University of Nebraska, Lincoln (co-chair Gayle Gullett)

Eve Carr (2003), Freelance Grants Consultant (co-chair Rachel Fuchs)

Mary Ann Villarreal (2003), Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion,
University of Utah (co-chair Noel Stowe)

Tim Hodgdon (2002), Reading Room Supervisor, Southern History Archives, University
of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (co-chair Edward Escobar)

María Eva Flores CDP (2000), Associate Professor, Mexican American Studies, Our
Lady of the Lake University (deceased August 2018)

Claremont Graduate School

Frank Barajas (2001), Professor, History, California State University, Channel Islands

Arlene Sánchez Walsh (2001), Professor, Haggard School of Theology, Azusa Pacific
University

Emilie Stoltzfus (1999), Senior Social Policy Analyst, Congressional Research Service,
Library of Congress

Lara Medina (1998), Professor Emerita, Chicano studies, California State University,
Northridge

Matthew García (1996), Ralph and Richard Lazarus Professor of History, Latin American,
Latino, Caribbean Studies, and Human Relations, Dartmouth

Naomi Quiñonez (1996), Lecturer Emerita, La Raza Studies, San Francisco State

Matthew Lasar (1996), Lecturer, History, UC Santa Cruz, Co-founder Radio Survivor

Postdoctoral Mentorships

Ford Foundation Program

Mireya Loza, Visiting Assistant Professor, History and American Studies, Georgetown

Elizabeth Escobedo, Associate Professor, University of Denver

Marisela Chávez, Professor, Chicano studies, CSU Dominguez Hills

Barbara Reyes, Associate Professor, History, University of New Mexico

Natalia Molina, Professor of American Studies & Ethnicity, University of Southern
California

UC President's Program

Isabela Leong-Seong Quintana, Assistant Professor, Asian American Studies, UC Irvine

Ana Elizabeth Rosas, Associate Professor, Chicano/Latino Studies & History, UC Irvine

Woodrow Wilson Program

Maylei Blackwell, Associate Professor, Chicano studies, UCLA