

Rosaura Sánchez

Rosaura Sánchez: 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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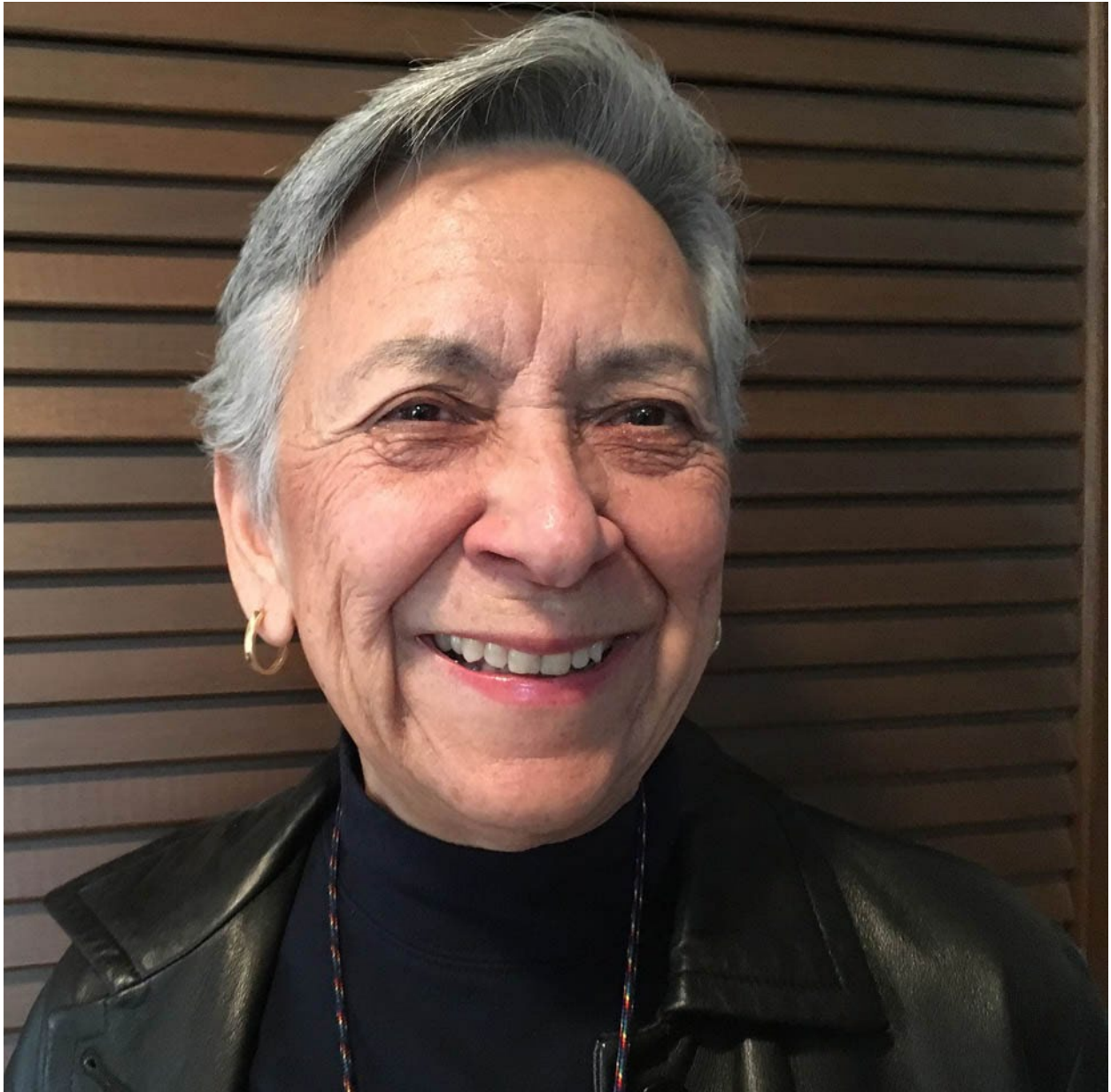
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Rosaura Sánchez

Abstract

Rosaura Sánchez is professor of Chicano and Latin American Literature at the University of California, San Diego. Born and raised in San Angelo, Texas, Professor Sánchez received her PhD in romance linguistics from the University of Texas, and joined the Department of Literature at UCSD in 1972, a department she has now served for nearly fifty years. She is widely considered one of the earliest contributors to the field of Chicana/o literature and has explored the issues of race and gender extensively in a variety of literary forms. She is the author of numerous publications in the field of Chicana/o studies and literature, including: "Essays on La Mujer" (1977); *Chicano Discourse: Socio-historic Perspectives* (1983); "Postmodernism and Chicano Literature" (1987); "The History of Chicanas: Proposal for a Materialist Perspective" (1990); "Discourses of Gender, Ethnicity, and Class in Chicano Literature" (1992); *Telling Identities: The Californio Testimonios* (1995); and "Deconstructions and Renarrativizations: Trends in Chicana Literature" (1996). She is also the editor of the selected works of Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton, as well as the author of two fiction collections: *He Walked in and Sat Down, and Other Stories* (2000); and *Lunar Braceros: 2125-2148* (2009). In this interview, Professor Sánchez discusses: her family background and upbringing; her educational journey from high school to UT Austin; her service in the Peace Corps; her activism and observations regarding race and civil rights in Texas; her graduate experience at UT Austin as a Chicana; joining the faculty at UCSD and establishing herself in the profession; her reflections on the state of Chicana/o studies and how the field evolved over her career; the aims and contributions of her scholarship in the field; the reception of Chicana/o studies at UCSD and in the academy; 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]

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Irene Vásquez [University of New Mexico]

Interview 1: March 22, 2019

01-00:00:00

Holmes:

All right, this is Todd Holmes with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. Today's date is March 22, 2019, and I have the pleasure of sitting down with Rosaura Sánchez for the Chicana/o Studies Oral History Project. We are here at her office on the beautiful campus of UC San Diego. It's a lovely day. Rosaura, thank you so much for sitting down and taking the time to participate in this project. In our two sessions together, we will be talking about your experience, your life, your career and your major contributions to the development of what became known as Chicana and Chicano studies. But before we get there, maybe it'd be good to start with a little background of you and your family. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and your family growing up in Texas?

01-00:01:03

Sánchez:

I'm from San Angelo, Texas, which is halfway between El Paso and Austin. Well, it's 400 miles east of El Paso and 200 miles west of Austin, somewhere out there in the middle of nowhere. And it used to be known for its wool, and they used to even have a Miss Wool of America thing there, but then later, they took it away and took the whole celebration of Miss Wool to Dallas because it's a big city and San Angelo wasn't. I come from a working-class family and grew up in the barrio, and my father was a working-class man. He worked for the Texas Highway Department. They fixed the highways—at nights when it would freeze, they would have to put some stuff, salt or something, on the bridges, and my father would get a call, "Sánchez, got to go put this stuff on the bridge, such and such a bridge." And, of course, because we always needed the money, the extra money, my dad would say, "Yes, I'm ready," and go put the salt or whatever. So he was a laborer, but he was a very intelligent man. Had he had the opportunity, he would have become maybe an engineer or something. But he was born in Mexico, and there's a whole backstory about his father.

During the Mexican Revolution, the *federales* were going into the towns and recruiting, forcing men to serve in the army. So his father and his neighbors there in Coahuila had to flee because the *federales* were coming and so my grandfather fled with these other men. The family never heard from him again, and it was said that he had drowned, I guess, crossing the Rio Grande. So my father then was brought up by his mother and then she died and so he, his older brother, and two sisters lived with different relatives, so he didn't have a chance to study. But my father always liked to read, and my father—he was our teacher. If it hadn't been for my father—I have two brothers and a sister—we wouldn't have been as intelligent as we were because the school system in San Angelo was pretty bad—awful, really. But by the time we went to school, we already knew how to read and write and we knew our numbers, and so, I mean, that was about as much as you got from the barrio elementary. [laughter] We were way ahead of the game by already knowing this.

01-00:04:34

And politically, my father was a liberal. He had been, as a young man, a Mason. He was very anticlerical, very anti-Catholic, and we were brought up with that. And my mom said, "So you have your masonic lodge to go to,"—which was the barrio masonic lodge—"but what about me?" When I was about six or seven, we started going to a church, a Methodist church because it provided a social venue for the whole family and literature in Spanish to read and various activities, so we became Methodists. I feel like that was an education in and of itself. My father was very anti-Catholic because he had this whole analysis, like many leaders for Latin American independence, that Catholicism oppressed the people and subjected them to this and that and so we grew up with that. So that set us apart and made us different in the barrio because we had that kind of background. I don't know.

Today, I'm an atheist, but I really appreciate that we had those years there in the Methodist church, because, first of all, the Bible is a mighty good literature book, and the church gave us the opportunity to do things in Spanish. Everything in the church was in Spanish, including the hymns, everything in Spanish. My dad would sometimes preach when the preacher wasn't there and he would preach in Spanish. It was a great formative experience, and we participated in Christmas plays and things like that in Spanish. So that was very important as we were growing up and then later, of course, it was not important at all. But for that childhood, that experience was good.

My mother came from a farm-working family that picked cotton on the Texas circuit. When my mother married my father, my father was a good bit older than my mother. He was like fifteen years older than she. In her family, she was the oldest, and she had to do everything, and in a family where there were nine children, she was taken out of school in the third grade [to cook and care for the younger kids as well as pick cotton]. I can't forgive my grandparents for doing that to my mom.

01-00:07:35

And as I was growing up, I went to elementary school in the barrio. When I was going to go from the sixth grade to the seventh grade, which is when you go to what was called in Texas junior high, I was at my grandmother's house one day; my mother and I were visiting there, and one of my uncles was there, and my grandmother and my grandfather were there. They were having a beer, and we were sitting there, and they said, "Why are you going to send her to junior high? Junior high, you have to go on a bus and go downtown." That's where the junior high was. "Because you know what is going to happen to her. She's going to be getting herself pregnant soon enough." I feel like I'm here [as a professor] because of my mom because she said, "No way is she going to be brought up dumb the way I was brought up." "*No quiero que se quede burra como yo.*" Because women were supposed to be kept at home, so they would be virgins when they married. [laughter] And I thought, oh, my God.

But it was such an impactful thing for me to hear my mom defend the fact that I would be going to junior high and so, yeah, I never forgot it. I never forgot it, and I know that they criticized her for it. But later, she had all these younger sisters, and they all had children, and all the girls in those families went to school, nobody said anything, nobody, and they all went to college, and nobody said anything. But because my mom was the oldest, she was the first one to break the norm, it was kind of difficult for her. I had great parents, very strong and intelligent parents, so I recognize that I was lucky in that way.

01-00:09:38

Holmes:

Talk a little bit about growing up in San Angelo.

01-00:09:42

Sánchez:

San Angelo? Okay, San Angelo was a very segregated town; I had no contact with Anglos except the teachers in the elementary school. When we all went to junior high then we went with Anglo students, but there was no contact really. I mean, we never made friends with them, and they didn't make friends with us, and we were like a little [separate brown] group. In the morning when we got there, we knew a certain corner, we went there where the others would be and so technically, we were integrated, but we were really segregated at school. The barrio school was totally segregated. The town itself, of course, was run by Anglos, mostly ranchers. Our barrio streets were not paved. We had dirt streets. Today, they're paved, but back then, they were not. We had no sewers. Back then, when I was a kid, we had an outhouse. I have a story somewhere about the outhouse. We were like a Third World scene in Texas. And so in the barrio, I grew up speaking Spanish, and everybody in the barrio spoke Spanish. English was something we used at school.

So the elementary school was—now thinking back, was horrible. I don't think I learned anything in elementary school because I already knew how to read and write. And the teachers, they all expected that by the end of the sixth grade, we would be pregnant and married and so what they focused on was teaching us to read and write and doing some basic math. Well, when I hear what other people did in elementary, all kinds of projects, science projects, space projects—I feel so bad. I mean, we didn't have anything. And then I would finish my stuff, and what was there to do? There were checkers there, and I would go and wait for somebody to finish, too, and so that I could play checkers. That's such a horrible, horrible experience [for a child]. The name of my school for posterity, Rio Vista, was a lousy place. It had teachers that didn't care, that saw us as people that were going to be service workers and cotton pickers—cotton was a big activity there and there were these other crops like maize for chicken feed and stuff like that. But that's all we were supposed to [be fit for]. We were laborers, and for that, you didn't need much of an education and so they didn't provide it, and they didn't care. [Not a problem.]

01-00:13:09

I really resent that because I considered myself intelligent, and I could have learned so much, and, no, I didn't learn anything and then I went to junior high. By the time I went to junior high, I remember in the English classes, they would talk about all these books that I had never heard of, or read or stories—even today, things that children read. We have a younger sister, Nelda. When she was growing up, we made a point to get those books, get those children's stories, those fairy tales. Well, [when my two brothers and I were kids,] we couldn't afford books, and they weren't available at school. I think they were at the library. In the elementary, there must have been maybe some ten books [total, *no mas*]. Horrible experiences. [My brothers and I were however addicted to comic books and in the barrio a new comic book could be traded for two or three older comics that we hadn't read before.]

My barrio was working-class. The year I went to high school, the state order came down to integrate schools. In the high school, we had like, oh, six, eight Black students that were integrated into the school, and we [Chicanos and Blacks] would stick together. We Chicanos sat on the steps of the gym, and the Blacks would come and sit nearby. At first, we didn't know them. They would just sit close by. San Angelo was a very, very racist town, a very racist town, [like I said]. In Texas, when [my older brother and] I went to UT Austin, [we had an old VW] and, sometimes, we'd want to stop to get a bite driving from Austin to San Angelo [but there were restaurants and cafes with signs on the windows that said] no Mexicans allowed. No Mexicans or dogs allowed. I grew up with that, in a very racist state. I have very, very difficult memories about Texas as a very white-oriented, racist state, and I know some things have changed, [although not so much,] but that was my experience and not a pleasant one. [All told, there were maybe some twenty Chicanos in my high school graduating class, even fewer Blacks in a sea of Anglos.]

01-00:15:38

Holmes:

Tell us a little bit about the community because at the time you're growing up, it's after World War II, the rise of the Cold War, the rise of McCarthyism. What was your observation of politics during this time?

01-00:15:55

Sánchez:

Okay. So politically, in the barrio, the enemy was the gringo, and that was clear to everybody. I remember as a kid, people would say, "*la migra*," and we'd run. We were born there, but *la migra* was something made out to be really scary, and so we're kids playing outside and with "*la migra*," everybody would run. So it was *la migra*, the police, *la chota*, and the gringo. The gringo was there to exploit us and to oppress in every which way that they could and, so they were the enemy.

So as we were growing up, my mom would talk about how things had been earlier, when they had to have stamps during the Depression to get things. And then I remember later, when I was just a kid, they had a movie at what was called the Rita, the Teatro Rita, a movie house, that once showed movies

about the Holocaust and about using people's skin to produce soaps. And my mom came home, I remember, horrified. I didn't really understand what she was talking about because I was just a kid, but it was this [idea that there were horrible] things [that happened in this world]. As we grew up then it became clear that there were all kinds of other problem besides fascists and gringos.

I remember in the fifties, talk about McCarthyism. The way it came down to us, I remember my father talking about the—what was—I forget the name now—the Rosenstein? No, Rubenstein? What was it, the people that were accused of—?

01-00:18:23

Holmes:

The [Julius and Ethel] Rosenbergs.

01-00:18:25

Sánchez:

Rosenberg, yeah, the Rosenbergs. I remember my dad talking about that, and that these people were being falsely accused. And so all these little things came in, but there wasn't much consciousness of the US political scene. Because my dad could read and write, people would come and ask my dad to write a letter for them, like to the *Standard-Times*, which was the newspaper in town, to protest against some kind of discrimination. I remember we had an Underwood typewriter, and my dad would write the letter. There was a lot of discrimination—when you went to different places, they didn't treat you right. In San Angelo, there was a family that wanted to buy a house in the Anglo area, they wouldn't allow that. They didn't want Mexicans—in Texas, we were all *Méxicanos*. I mean that's the word we used at home, and it didn't mean being from Mexico. It meant being Chicano, *Méxicanos*. So they didn't want any *Méxicanos* in their community, and so those were the kinds of problems. You were denied service at a restaurant, or some problem when you went to pay the utilities. These kinds of things were big in terms of what we were politically aware of, but not so much at the national level.

And, of course, we were aware of what was happening in Mexico because we listened to the radio—we had our little radio, and we listened to the news from Mexico every day. Because there was a local station, but they went off the air like around six or seven, and after that, you could have the Mexican stations come in. We also had shortwave and so we listened to the news from Mexico, what was happening in Mexico—not only the news, but the music, the different entertainment shows that they had, detective novels, and things like that. And then later, they had these romantic novels like soaps, telenovelas, but at that time, they were on the radio, and we'd be there listening. My mom and my brothers [gathered around] and we'd be there listening. We got all this [popular culture] through Mexican radio. Yeah.

01-00:21:25

Holmes:

So when you're in high school in that latter part of the 1950s, the Civil Rights Movement begins, particularly there in the South. Did you hear any news of this? Do you have recollections of like the bus boycott happens in 1955, or

things like that? LULAC [League of United Latin American Citizens] and the [American] G.I. Forum was also forming as well.

01-00:21:50

Sánchez:

So in terms of racism against Blacks—my dad was very much into that kind of thing, so we grew up very conscious of the racism against Blacks. I remember my dad would talk about it. My dad was also the teacher of the adult class in Sunday school at our church, and my dad would talk about racism and discrimination and all that. And so we were happy when—it must have been 1954 or '55—when our high school integrated. It was something like—we saw them as somehow in our same boat, and so we were there [with them, on their side].

When I was in high school, there was a G.I. Forum that formed, but because my dad had not been in the military, we were—my family—I mean my brothers later became Marines and stuff—but we were not then part of that, like the children of the soldiers. It wasn't so much that, as it became more of a social club, and people would have parties and things like that. It wasn't very political in San Angelo. It wasn't until I went to Austin that then I became involved. I went first to a community college there in San Angelo. My brother Alex had gone there and then he went to Austin, so then I went [to the community college first too] and then later, I also went to UT Austin. There was a Black woman [from San Angelo] who was a student there [at the college], Jolene Scott, and so Jolene and I became good friends. So when I went to Austin, I didn't know anybody except my brother and Jolene Scott, who was the person that I went to see. [She lived in a segregated women's coop.]

I lived in a dorm, a Methodist dorm that had one other Chicana, a blonde Chicana—[laughter]—from the Texas Rio Grande Valley, but I wasn't blonde. And so when I [walked to campus from the dorm,] I went by this place called Almetris. It was a little co-op, for Black women. Black students lived there, and the coop had a housemother [who went to work there] every day. The girls cooked, they took turns cooking, and they shared rooms, and Jolene lived there. This became my favorite stop. On the way to campus, I would stop on the way—[laughter] The lady that was the housemother there was so kind to me, and she would say, "How about some Kool-Aid and wafers?" "Of course," you know? [laughter] [I was very alienated and happy to have this place to go to.]

Sometimes, I'd have to wait because Jolene was in class and wasn't there. It was a safe house for me. I had a place to go, and I had people I knew there. The Blacks couldn't live in the dorms, we were so segregated, but I was able to live in this Methodist dorm—there weren't many Chicanos anyway at UT Austin—but the Blacks [weren't integrated until] much later, [but along the way] I joined the protests. The theaters were segregated, the skating rink was

segregated, the dorms were segregated, and so going out with the protesters became important.

01-00:26:07

Holmes:

And was that when you were still an undergrad?

01-00:26:10

Sánchez:

I was an undergrad, yeah. I was an undergrad. I graduated [from high school] in '59 but then I spent two years in San Angelo at the junior college and so this is '61 to '63. It wasn't until, I don't know, about '63 that they started integrating some of the dorms. Texas was, still is, a very racist state. So what I did [in 1961 or '62 when] the racism just really got to me, [I decided to integrate my dining room at the dorm]. At my dorm, you could invite a guest to come have dinner with you because it was a dorm that served dinner, and in the morning, they served breakfast. You could pick up a fruit and juice or something.

I first invited Jolene to [visit me at the dorm. I had gone to see where she lived and I wanted her to see where I lived.] So, then I told her, "Come see where I live," and then she came [to see me there]. Well, when she came [there was a reaction from several students]. I was sharing a room with another woman, [who wasn't there that day], and across the hall, there were a couple of women that I became friends with. So then after Jolene left, they told me the other girls were up in arms because I had a Black woman in the dorm. Oh, that just infuriated me, no end. And so I told Jolene, "You know what we're going to do? We're going to have you over for dinner." [And she was willing to come.] But the dorm mother, whatever they called her, the one who managed the place, she had heard that people were up in arms because I had a Black woman, a Black student over. If you had a guest, you had to go and ask, buy a ticket for that person, and I said, "I want to have a guest," "Okay, what date?" "Such and such a day," "Okay, such and such money," I paid the money. The manager[']s office was nearby and she overheard my request—and she said, "I want to talk to you," and she said, "Are you bringing your Black friend?" I said, "Yes, I am." She said, "You know, it's not that I'm racist or anything—" She had been a missionary, I don't know where. She didn't say don't do it, but she gave me reason to think that there would be a problem with it.

01-00:29:01

So when Jolene came to have dinner, I told her, "Look, I don't know what's going to happen," and she was ready for whatever happened. They all went in, and the manager told me to wait outside [the dining room] with Jolene, and all the other girls went into the dining room. They closed the door, and she told them something about Christianity and how you have to love your neighbor and this and that so that they had to all be on their best when we came in. So then we went in, and it was so bad. They didn't deny us sitting at a table. We sat because there were like eight people around this table, so we found a place. We sat there, and everybody just looked at us, but we did it, we integrated the dining room. [laughter] I haven't heard from Jolene in a long, long time, but it was an important experience. I mean just the racism there, it was just palpable,

you know. But then there were other things. Well, later, of course, it was the Vietnam War, and the police threw gas canisters at us, and we just ran and ran down what was called the main drag, Guadalupe Street. It's sad. Texas was a bad, bad experience—but that's where I learned about stuff.

01-00:30:41

Holmes:

Well, I want to get to that in just one minute. Tell me a little bit about your experience in the classroom. You decided to major in Spanish?

01-00:30:51

Sánchez:

Okay. So I have an older brother, Alex, about two years older than I and so whatever he did, I wanted to do, too. He went to the community college, and I wanted to go too, but we were poor. We never went without whatever we needed, but we were poor and so having the hundred bucks to pay tuition was more than my dad could pay. When I went the first year [to the community college], my dad had to get a loan. It hurts me now [still, to think of what I put him through]. He had to get a loan to pay for my tuition. I did well and everything. I was in the honor society and stuff like that. In the second year, my dad said, "I can't get another loan," and so I thought, what am I going to do, what am I going to do?

So my younger brother, Ruben, had gotten a part-time job at a hotel vacuuming the hallways, and he said, "They need an elevator operator," and I went, and I got the job, and I hated it. The first day I was there, I developed like 105-degree fever. I was scared stiff. It was a place where bus drivers and other people stayed, and it was the Angelus Hotel, and it was downtown. But nothing was going to keep me from working there. I was paid \$90 a month to operate that damn elevator. [laughter] The second day, I had to report in sick, but the third day, I was there, taking people up, taking people down. You know, I'm scared stiff with all these men in the elevator with me, but nothing was going to keep me from getting the \$100 that I needed to go [back to college].

Well then after that, after working there in the summer, I remember one of my profs went by one day. He had been playing tennis with his students, and I said, "Professor Miller," and he turned, "What are you doing here?" "I'm working." He couldn't believe that a college student would be working there doing this asinine work. I had picked cotton, and I was willing to do whatever. So then after that, I got a little fellowship for a hundred bucks, but I had already worked three months, and I had my—\$90 times three—\$270 bucks. I could buy books.

So I went [to the community college] and then I wanted to go on, but how do you go on? Well, my brother had gotten what they called this federal loan for people who were interested in modern languages. He was interested in Spanish and French, and he got it, and he went. That's how he paid for the tuition at Austin and so, well, no way was I not going to go. I also applied—

even though my favorite subject was English. They didn't give you a federal loan for studying English, so I said I would study Spanish. And that's how I went to Austin. And so what I did—I had this, always had this crazy life—two courses in English, two courses in Spanish, two courses in English, two courses in Spanish, like that. I even got into the honors class in English but then I thought, okay, if I'm going to go on, it's going to be in Spanish and so English became like a minor and I majored in Spanish.

01-00:35:41

At first, the Spanish teachers were so—I couldn't relate to them, but then I had a prof, a Spanish prof, Ricardo Gullón. This man loved the language, and he would come and sit at the desk and go like this. [Gesturing with hands.] And he would speak, and I came to love the language in a way that I hadn't before. It was my language and so I loved it, but not in any kind of literary way. We had all the experience with the Bible and everything, but I never thought of it as something to study and with the other professors, it was like boring, but he made the language come alive. He taught Peninsular literature—at Austin, they looked down on Latin American literature, so it was mostly Spanish Peninsular literature. That's what I studied. I came to really like it, and that's how I got into it. I mean, it wasn't like I had planned all along, no, no. I took all these English classes and I even got, as I said, into the honors class in English. The first semester was the class and then the second semester, you had to write a paper. And I decided, no, I'm not going to do it. I'm going to focus now on Spanish, and I did. Besides, I was the only one there in the English classes and so—you know? There were a few other Chicanos in Spanish but not in English.

01-00:37:36

People always ask me, "Did you study with Américo Paredes?" and I have to say, "No, I did not." I guess I don't have the same idea of Paredes as other people do. We were protesting the lack of Chicano students at the university, and Paredes never walked out with us, never marched with us, never supported us. He played it safe, and I looked down on him for it. [I guess.] And then he did folklore? I thought, folklore? [laughter] Here I was studying [Miguel de] Cervantes [Saavedra], [Miguel de] Unamuno—folklore? No, I had no use for folklore, so I never took a class with him at UT.

Years later when [David] Montejano was there [as an undergrad], and I was a grad student, and we were out there marching and doing this and that. There was a prof there, Sergio [Danilo] Elizondo, who died like a couple of years ago. He was there with us, but Paredes was not, so I never had a good opinion of Paredes. And then when I came over here, people said, "Have you read Paredes, *With a Pistol in His Hand*?" Well, I read it here, and I read his novel, which came out really late, *George Washington Gomez*. I read it here, and I read his short stories here, but while I was there, no, I did not read him, nor did I have anything to do with him. [laughter]

01-00:39:40

Holmes:

Oh, before we leave your undergraduate years, I wanted to ask, so you also worked at the Benson Library?

01-00:39:49

Sánchez:

Oh, yes, that was my salvation.

01-00:39:50

Holmes:

Tell us a little bit about that.

01-00:39:52

Sánchez:

Okay. I went to Austin with a loan, okay, but I needed to work a little bit more to [pay for things]. I also wanted to be able to send something home once in a while. And so there had been a professor at the community college, Mr. Dwyer, Charles Dwyer, he was an English teacher, but he left being an English teacher to go study library science in Austin and so I knew that he would be there. So when I got to Austin, I didn't know anybody except Jolene and my brother, so I went to the library to see him. He was like the reference librarian, and he was at a desk [in front]. Right as you went in, he was sitting there. I had worked for him like a work-study person [at Angelo College]. [So I thought it was great that he was there,] because I knew one other person there. He said, "Are you interested in working?" and I said, "You bet," and he said, "Well, they need someone up in the Latin American collection. I'll put in a good word for you." And so then he contacted me, he said, "You have it if you want it," and so I went and I met Miss Benson.

01-00:41:12

Nettie Lee Benson became a very important person in my life, and I did all kinds of things [at the library], checked cards, this, that. I worked there. I worked there my two undergraduate years and then the next year after my BA, I worked there another year. She had me doing the cards for this fabulous collection of Martin Fierro that the library had bought and so I made a little card on each thing. And then when I came back from the Peace Corps, she gave me that [Fierro poster]. Although I didn't finish the indexing job because I left [for Ecuador] and somebody else took it; [later I heard] they had a celebration of the collection and everything. But I got the poster.

It was great being there because I became really interested in Latin America by working there, and there were all these graduate students that had these fabulous desks and these chairs. I don't know if you've ever been—?

01-00:42:24

Holmes:

Yes indeed.

01-00:42:24

Sánchez:

They all had projects, and they were all traveling here and there, and Miss Benson was going to all kinds of places, Colombia, Mexico, Argentina to buy books because the university had money for books. She bought all sorts of collections of people who were wealthy and had these libraries, these private

libraries. She would come back, and she would say, "This, this," and I was really impressed. Not that there were many people teaching Latin American literature in the department, but Latin America became very important to me, and I wanted to go, and of course, I had never traveled anywhere. I once traveled with my grandmother to Brownsville, [but that was it]. We couldn't afford to go anywhere, do anything.

There was this other Chicana [working at the Latin American Collection,] and she heard about the Peace Corps, and she wanted to go to the Philippines, and I'm, "Oh, wow." So I wanted to go to Latin America and I wanted to find out about indigenous groups in Latin America and so I applied. I applied to go to the Peace Corps after my BA, but they turned me down. They said I was too myopic. Oh, that killed me, killed me [laughter]—so I wrote [to ask why]. Well, first of all, they didn't say why. They didn't say why I was turned down because I was already scheduled to go to New Mexico to the training, and I was going to go to Colombia and this and that, and then they sent me this letter—no, no, I couldn't go. I had been turned down. Oh, so then I wrote and said, "Why," this, that, and the other. And I thought, maybe my teeth. I needed work with my teeth, and no, no. When that happened then I just stayed there working at the library, and I started working full time and visiting some of the courses, graduate courses that they had there, but I didn't enroll.

01-00:44:48

And then eventually like in December, I got a letter. It's your eyes, they said—and recently there had been a change—so they said, now, they were going to accept blind people to go into the Peace Corps. [laughter] And so I could [qualify to] go and then they sent me, "You can go here, you can go there." You had to choose a program. So I chose to go to Ecuador, but the program wouldn't start until June. [In the meantime] I thought I was going to stay working at the library, and I would audit some classes.

01-00:45:34

Holmes:

Did you ever get a chance to work with Martha [P.] Cotera when she was there at the Benson?

01-00:45:40

Sánchez:

No, no. She was there after my time. There were a whole group of people, Laura Gutierrez[-Witt], all those people who retired, Dolores —what was Dolores's last name [Garces]. There was a whole little group of people there—Chicanos and then there were Latin American women working there, too. There was a guy, James, that eventually became the librarian at Stanford, and of course, Miss Benson, she was here, there, she was all over the place. And then she started doing courses for people who wanted to become librarians, so she got to teach, too. That was when I came back from the Peace Corps. I was there when that bastard was shooting from the tower. It was before classes started. I was going to be a TA, but before classes started, I of course went [to the library], and Miss Benson said, "You want to work?" and I said, "Yeah" and so I started working. I had gotten back at the end of June, so July and

August, I worked at the library. The library was on the sixth floor of the tower when, all of a sudden, [one day,] there's someone shooting, shooting from the tower. Oh, man, it's—oh, that was panic city. We took all those long tables, and we pushed them against the door. A lot of stuff happened while I was in Texas.

01-00:47:28

Holmes:

Well, tell us a little bit about your time in Ecuador there at the Peace Corps.

01-00:47:31

Sánchez:

Okay. So, as I said, I was able to go, finally, with the Peace Corps, and there was a blind guy in my group. So I had two pairs of glasses and a pair of sunglasses—I don't know why they had said that [my sight was a problem]. They were afraid that if I lost my glasses, I would be lost. [laughter] So I wanted to go to work with Indians and there was another woman from New York who also wanted to work with the Indians. Most of the people went to the two big cities, Quito or Guayaquil. And there was one guy that went south to a big town in the southern part of Ecuador. But this other girl and I went to Guamote. Guamote is a small town south of Riobamba—Riobamba being one of the largest towns in Ecuador, and it has a large indigenous population. You had to go in with some kind of connection—well, I want to say gimmick, some kind of something. And so we were supposed to teach English in the junior high there because they had like up to the ninth grade there, and that was like [our justification for being sent to that] town. And this was supposed to be a town that one [Peace Corps] volunteer had left, and supposedly had said that that it was a town run by women and all kinds of stories about it.

01-00:49:22

But [next door to the town] was a village, Mercedes Cadena. It was a little bit south of the town, and we started alphabetization, a literacy program there. So we would, in the morning, do the English classes in town because English was a required language in the junior high and then in the late afternoon, we'd go to the village to teach Spanish. I learned a lot from working there. I mean, their situation was comparable to the segregation and the racism against Blacks and Chicanos. We became friends with the people there, and I remember one day, an Indian woman asked me to be at the baptism—what do you call—as *la madrina*, the baptismal godmother of her child, like that, so we became friends like that.

She had another son, Pedro, who was a little bit older and had a different father, [the late *hacendado* of the biggest farm,] and so [one day] we were going to take him to this clinic. There was a missionary clinic halfway between Guamote and Riobamba. Riobamba is where they have the beautiful Chimborazo, a snow-covered mountain. It's just beautiful. And in between Guamote and Riobamba, there was this little town, Colta. There was an Indian village there, and these missionaries had established a clinic there. But we met them, and we could go there or take anybody there. So we were taking Pedro there and so you had to get on a bus to go there. So we get on a bus, but there

are no bus stops or anything, so people on the road would hail the bus, and so this other volunteer and me took Pedro [on the bus to Colta].

[On the way, this white] guy [hails the bus and] gets on and so he looks [for a seat. When he sees Pedro, he tells him], "Get up, I'm sitting here." Oh—[laughter]—that was a no-no. I said, "No, I paid for this ticket. Pedro stays here." He was so shocked. Here are these two foreigners—although I didn't look so foreign, but I looked like I didn't belong there, and "Pedro stays here. I paid for this ticket." It was kind of like experiencing there what I had experienced in Texas, [seeing it all] there again. All of a sudden, it was happening to the Indians there, and it was just like, oh, no, no. Yeah. So it was a great experience. I learned more there than probably [any time] after.

While I learned some expressions, [I can't say I learned] Quechua, which is my regret. I learned phrases and things like that, but not the language. I should have learned the language. I wish we had had a course there to learn Quechua because I had read all kinds of indigenous literature of Latin America, and that's why I wanted to go there. But then later when I read all that stuff, again, I could see myself there. It was a great experience [for me]. It was not politically great because I later realized that [the Peace Corps] used us there. When we left, they asked us, "Well, where did you work, what did you do?" So we were like spies, I think, in a way but—and politically, working for the government was not something I was proud of later, but my experience [there personally] was great.

01-00:53:51

Holmes:

Did your experience there in Ecuador, did that inspire you to want to continue on into graduate school?

01-00:53:59

Sánchez:

Well, I knew that I wanted [to do that] already. When I was about to graduate [from UT], I applied to Berkeley, and I was accepted, but with what funding was I going to go to Berkeley? I would have had to get another loan. I had had two years of loans to go to Austin and so there was no way I could go anywhere [without funding]. And I had applied for this—what they called the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship. And I got an honorable mention but no money. All I knew was that I wanted to go. While in Ecuador, I had this sense, [I guess] I felt shame, shame [or regret] that I had studied what I liked—literature. I wished I knew engineering. They had so many needs there. I wish I had gone into nursing. I wish I had all these other skills that I didn't have. All I could teach was literacy. And so I thought, no, when I go back, I'm going to learn something different, [something useful. In hindsight,] the joke was on me because I thought, what will I do, and I thought, I'll study linguistics. Now, there's a real area for you. I applied to linguistics, and I applied again to Spanish, and I was accepted in both departments, but linguistics had no funding for me, and Spanish had a TAship for me and so, of course, I accepted to go to [the grad program in] Spanish. So then I started this kind of zombie

life—like I would take courses in linguistics and I would take courses in literature. Until one day after two years, the [Spanish department] told me, "You can't continue here unless you take your exams and write your MA thesis." "Well, okay."

I guess what I haven't said is that I wanted to be in grad school because I enjoyed being in school, and it wasn't because I had this career sense of anything. I never thought, okay, I'm going to go to school because then I'm going to get a degree, and I'm going to get a job, and I'm going to have money. I really never thought in those terms. I thought I was just studying and studying and studying and studying just because I enjoyed it. There was no reason to stop it and so I never thought frankly in terms of a career or anything. But then there were pressures, and they said, "You want to go on? Fine take the exam." It was like a master's list exam, which would then qualify you to go on into the PhD. I took it, I passed it and then they said, "Well, now, you have to write a master's thesis," and so I did. I wrote about two Argentinian writers because it had to be Latin America for me. So, I liked doing what I was doing. It was totally—I mean I see my students now, and they're all thinking [about career paths and all], and I tell them, "Okay, now, you have to be prepared for the job and how you're going to present yourself—" I didn't have any of that. My brother Alex was just this way too—he loved what he did, and he loved the literature, he was into French and Spanish. [He was a Phi Beta Kappa student, an excellent student and an inspiration to me.] He wasn't thinking of a profession or anything and so I didn't either. I wasn't career-oriented and who else was there around that we knew that had gone on [to grad school or beyond]? There was nobody, so—

01-00:58:11
Holmes:

Were your brother and yourself the first of your family to go to college?

01-00:58:14
Sánchez:

Yes, of course. My mother went to [elementary school, but her parents pulled her out of school after third grade]. My father went to the sixth grade in Mexico. My mother came to Texas when she was two years old and so she was really like born here. When I finished my BA and I wasn't going to go to the Peace Corps because they didn't take me then, I thought, where can I go? And I thought, maybe I'll get a government job. I got all of these application forms that said, "Your parents have to be citizens." So I told my mom, "I can't get a job with the government because you're not a citizen," so my mother [prepared for the exam and] became a citizen. My father had become a citizen many years before because he worked for the highway department, and they said, "You have to be a citizen," so he had become a citizen back when I was in elementary school, but my mother hadn't and so [years later], she did.

[My brother and I] were the first two [to finish high school and] to go [to college] in our families, and no one in my mother's family had ever gone beyond the sixth grade, and my father's family was in Mexico, and they hadn't

gone either. It was a totally new experience for us, but one thing we knew is that we loved reading and writing, and we wanted to continue doing it. But in terms of like hurry up and finish, so you can get a job, you can become a prof, I mean, it was totally not part of our plan. [I have to say, without my brother's paving the way, and especially being a woman, chances are I would not have gone on.]

01-00:59:55

Holmes:

Tell me a little bit about your impression of UT after being down in the Peace Corps, and you returned in the 1960s. What were your impressions of the university? As you were just describing earlier as an undergraduate, segregation was still there. The racism was still there. The diversification of the university was slowly starting. When you returned in the late 1960s, did you see a difference?

01-01:00:33

Sánchez:

Um-hm. I returned in '66, and so that's when I was telling you, Chicanos were starting to go to UT Austin especially in pharmacy. Not too many. There were two of us Chicanos [in the Spanish department in my group], and there was [Nicolás] Nick Kanellos, part Puerto Rican, part Greek, but he became like a Chicano there. And so there was this other guy and me in department of literature. So Nick and I go way back and so he says to me, "You know you're the first person I met when I went there." But there were no other [Chicano/a students] in literature. [Of course my brother had been there before, before he went into the Marines. During the Vietnam War,] some of my younger cousins were drafted. My younger brother had gone into the Marines right after high school, while my older brother and I were in school at UT Austin. My brother, of course, was not going to be drafted because he was in college, and he felt bad about that, so he [dropped out and] joined the Marines. He joined the Marines while I was in Ecuador [and he was sent to Vietnam]. That was a difficult time for our family.

He wasn't there too long. He got a Bronze Star because he went into [the battlefield] to get the wounded out. Afterwards, as he was carrying people to the helicopter, one of them fell on him and messed up his leg—his knee, actually—and they had to take him out too and so he wasn't there too long in the field, I'd say. When he came back then I felt [less conflicted] about joining the antiwar movement and he also joined. So he was a veteran who was against the war and so all of that is going on at that time—so we're going to demonstrations and this and that.

01-01:03:23

At the same time, what's happening [more broadly] is that the farmworkers in California and Texas are protesting. And so I remember that there was a march, and I went to it. The [farmworkers from the Texas Rio Grande Valley] marched up to Austin. It wasn't the [Cesar] Chavez movement because Chavez didn't seem to want to work with the Texas farmworkers, but [Reies Lopez] Tijerina was there, and I was very impressed with Tijerina [and his

fire]. And then later, years later—I don't mean too many years later but maybe like when I was in grad school, maybe late sixties—I heard Tijerina again, and this time Tijerina had been in prison, and this time, Tijerina had been hurt in prison. He came [to speak on campus]. It wasn't the Tijerina that was there telling us that we had to *luchar* [to fight]. It was the Tijerina speaking of love, and I felt so bad for him. I felt so sad. They had crushed him in prison. Before, he had been a preacher, but he had been a firebrand preacher willing to organize people to defend *las tierras* [the lands], you know? But later when he came back to the university to speak, he spoke of love; they had broken him. They broke him and so I had those two contrasting experiences.

So that was going on and the Vietnam War was going on, and we were still trying to integrate and bring more people into the university, and that's when we had these marches. And that's where I resented that Paredes was not there with us. When there's a march the profs often go and join the students in the marches and the protest, and he did not. Like I told Limón, José [E.] Limón, [I was disappointed]. José Limón worked very closely with Paredes, but for me, he wasn't there for us. He wasn't there with us, [at least out front,] and so, yeah, that was another thing. I mean, there were all kinds of different things going on in the sixties [on different levels].

01-01:06:14

Holmes:

Well, I want to return to graduate school here in a minute, but I wanted to ask you about some observations because during this same time, what became known as Chicana and Chicano studies is roughly taking shape. Discuss your observation of those early years and that kind of formation, and obviously from your standpoint of when you began to recognize these works and the building of a field.

01-01:06:50

Sánchez:

Okay. So the word Chicano is a word that I grew up with. We were Chicanos. In junior high when I'd go to a class, and I'd check to see—and I would tell my mom, "There were no Chicanos in the class," because I wanted to find a place to sit. When I was in high school, and we had become integrated with the Blacks then I would go and look around. If there was a Chicano, I sat next to him or her. If there wasn't, I'd look for a Black person and then I sat next to her. There was this thing: You sit with your own kind. I suppose you felt a little protected, I don't know what. Anyway, that was going on in junior high and high school. But in Austin then, there weren't very many of us and so those of us that were there—and this is when Montejano's there—we started marching around the main building with signs and stuff. That's when later I told you that Montejano and I—my brother was an artist too, a cartoonist. See like the tall thing there? [Pointing to an editorial cartoon on the wall] [So we made an effigy of a cop and hanged it.]

01-01:08:08

Holmes:

Oh, yeah.

01-01:08:09

Sánchez: And the jelly beans?

01-01:08:10

Holmes: Um-hm.

01-01:08:11

Sánchez: Those were drawn by my brother.

01-01:08:12

Holmes: Oh, wow.

01-01:08:13

Sánchez: And so we asked him to draw a face for us and then we did this effigy. I was living in, what was called then, the International House. The women there, they helped me make the effigy, and we put that face on him and then Montejano and I took him and hanged him in the courtyard of the student union. Because there was a lot of police brutality and the police had killed these [two barrio] kids. There were all kinds of things happening. When I returned in '66, the police killed two young boys, and this professor, Sergio Elizondo, wrote a novel about that, and, of course, he wrote it many years later but then I felt that it was an important thing that happened there. [Sergio Elizondo, *Muerte En Una Estrella* (1984)] So a few years ago, about, oh, four years ago, there was like a looking back on Chicano literature at Berkeley. I don't know if you were there. But those of us who had published in the earlier magazine in—

01-01:09:40

Holmes: *El Grito*?

01-01:09:41

Sánchez: *El Grito* and something—I forget what it was called. Because I had published in *El Grito*, I was invited to go and so Sergio Elizondo who had his book of poetry published also by *El Grito* people, and other people from that period were there. And so I hadn't seen him in a long time, and I said, "You want us to translate your novel?" Beatrice Pita and I have done a lot of work together, and he said, "Let me think about it," and then he said yes and so we did. We translated it, and Arte Público [Press] published it. [Sergio Elizondo, *Muerte En Una Estrella* / Shooting Star, translated by Rosaura Sánchez and Beatriz Pita (Arte Público Press, 2014)] Well, he came up one day [to campus], and we talked and everything before we did the translation, but then later I said, "Okay, now that it's out, you'll have to come up, we'll have dinner," and then he didn't contact me, and then I found out several months later that he had died, and no one had told me. No one had told me. I thought, well, why didn't anybody tell me? I wrote Nick, and I was, "Did you know that he had died?" and, "Oh, yes," he said, and I said, "Why didn't you tell me?" He was living in El Centro. I could have gone up. [So sad.]

01-01:11:10

But anyway, Elizondo was there [in Austin], and he was on some city commission that investigated [the police killing] case and so he had all these insights; so then he wrote a novel about it. There were a lot of police killings. There was a kid in Dallas that this policeman was trying to get him to talk. I wrote a story about that myself, and the cop was playing with the gun, and the gun went off, and he killed the kid. The police to me were the enemy. Things were going on there in Austin. We had demonstrations asking that there be a larger number of Chicano students at the university and a larger number of Black students at the university. As I said, I resented that our professors weren't there—if [Paredes, for example,] had gone there with us, we would have gotten to know him, and maybe we would have developed a different kind of relationship. [But no.]

In the late sixties, I had gone back to UT, and I was in literature. [As I said, they didn't offer TAs in Linguistics.] I got my MA in Spanish literature, but I wanted to do linguistics, but I couldn't [without funding]. There was another guy [in Spanish]. I don't know if you ever met Tracy [D.] Terrell, Tracy Terrell who wrote *How to Teach Spanish*. So he and I were interested in linguistics, and there was a third guy there whose name I don't remember. Tracy was the kind of guy who talked to people here and there. I didn't do any of that, but he got these profs to propose that there be a romance linguistics PhD, and they set it up. And so I'm doing literature, but I am also doing linguistics classes, and I took the few romance linguistics classes that they offered in French and Spanish. [After that,] I didn't have to get a PhD in literature. I [decided to] get one in romance linguistics. So there were three of us in the program, and we were together. We started together. We prepared all kinds of charts of all the changes from Latin to all these romance languages. And so he got a job at [University of California] Irvine, and I was still [at UT]. But because people started hearing that I was doing linguistics, Paredes and Limón went to see my chair, the chair of my department in Spanish asking if I would be allowed to teach a course on Chicano Spanish. Okay.

01-01:09:41

So before this happened, there was a school of education, and there were people trying to teach Spanish in the high schools, and they had to take these linguistics courses to teach Spanish—one on structure and one on phonology or phonetics. And so because a teacher that was doing that left [the university], the chair asked me if I would take over those classes. They were upper-division classes, and here I am just a TA, but it was a big chance for me, so I said yes. The other TAs thought I was stupid because I wasn't going to be paid like a prof. I was still being paid like a TA, but given the opportunity, I took it. And so I did two years doing upper-division courses in Spanish linguistics and then Paredes and Limón went and asked if I would do a class in Chicano Spanish and, of course, yeah.

[The thing was that because of my linguistic studies in] transformational grammar, I was already, in my head, charting out the kinds of changes that we had in our Chicano Spanish variant. So that then led to my preparing what later became this article, "Nuestra Circunstancia Linguistica." That was the material I prepared to do this course. And so in that way, I became part of the Chicano curriculum, although there was no such thing then, no such thing. And, oh, those of us who eventually taught Chicano lit, Chicano language, whatever, were people who were doing Latin American, Spanish Peninsular literature. There was no such thing as Chicano literature. I was already doing a little bit of writing stories and stuff, but there was no such thing as a field.

When I came here [UC San Diego], I remember there was—I don't know if you've met Juan Rodriguez? He's also one of the early profs, and he told me, "There's a contest at Irvine where you can submit stories." He knew I wrote, and so he said, "Send in your stories," and I thought, I don't know, but I did. I sent the stories in, and they were one of the two or three that got an award, and the award was to be published. It was my first creative writing publication. There was no such thing as Chicano anything. We were there the Chicanos, but there was no field. Eventually in Austin, they created one, but I was already gone. They created Mexican American studies and even then "Mexican American" sounded so bad to me. [laughter]

01-01:17:26

Holmes:

I want to ask you in looking at those early years of what would become a field—and you're absolutely right that it is just barely being pieced together—what were some of the scholars or writers that really influenced you?

01-01:17:45

Sánchez:

As a Chicana?

01-01:17:46

Holmes:

Yes.

01-01:17:47

Sánchez:

[In terms of Chicano/a writers,] there were none, but as to Latin American writers, I was into Julio Cortázar, and Argentinian writers, Mexican writer [Juan Nepomuceno Carlos Pérez] Rulfo. There were no Chicano writers to read. Later, later, when we have Rivera, I was already here when Rivera, Tomás Rivera was being published by—also by El Grito people. I was still in Austin when I heard about the contest, and I thought, hmm. I wasn't about to send my two or three little stories there, but I thought, I'll send my article, my Chicano "Nuestra Circunstancia Linguistica." I sent that in, and of course, they chose—I think that was the year they chose Rivera's work, but they did publish my article, so it was my first publication.

01-01:19:08

Holmes:

I wanted to ask you then because—so in 1967 *El Grito* is created, which was your first publication, I think, in 1972. Then in 1970, *Aztlán, The Chicano*

Journal of the Social Sciences and the Arts is also created and that would be your—your third publication, I believe is in *Aztlán*, and that was based out of UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles], *El Grito* out of Berkeley. Then in 1973, the—Arizona State [University] creates the Bilingual Press and then in '74, the [Society for the Study of] the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States. For you to have—to finally have venues where you, as a Chicana, can really—could publish your work, be it in literature or be it as a scholarly article, what did—discuss your feelings on this or—and how you embraced that because that it seems before then there weren't very many avenues at all.

01-01:20:15

Sánchez:

[That's right.] There wasn't. There was a guy whose name I don't recall right now, but who had been in San Antonio and then I think he went to New Mexico. He brought out this little bulletin called *El Caracol*. It was mimeographed, and I submitted. One of the UCSD profs one day told me, "Hey, I found this thing in *El Caracol*." I wrote a little story about this girl that needs medical attention, and it's denied her, and she dies, and that just got me and so I sent that [to him, the editor,] because I knew him, and he published it, but it was one of these runoff things. And then Nick Kanellos started working with another guy, I forget his name, in Indiana, and they started what later became the Arte Público—it was the [*Revista*] *Chicano-Riqueña*. That was it, *Chicano-Riqueña*. I knew him because we were grad students together in Austin, so I sent him some stuff for *Chicano-Riqueña*. He later got a job in Houston, and once he came to Houston then I found that I could send him things I presented at conferences, and he would publish them, so I had a place to send things.

I didn't know at first about *Aztlán*, but when I came here, the women wanted a course on Chicanas, and I didn't feel equipped to teach a course on Chicanas. But we formed this little group called *Mujer*, and the Chicanas would come, and they'd talk about their issues. And there was a woman here, Betty Garcia, and it was Betty Garcia-Bahne at the time, and she was a counselor here. She's now at [California State University] Fresno State in sociology. We would meet with the Chicano students, and they wanted a course and so okay. Well, the one who could give a course was me [as a prof] but I thought [this isn't my field]. I didn't know what I would do and so we talked about it and we decided to do something on the family.

01-01:23:32

And then Carlos Blanco—he was the most important UCSD prof [and colleague] for me in my political development—and his wife was into indigenous women, the history of indigenous women. She had studied history. Then this other woman [Faustina Solis] I told you was the health person, and then there was a young woman from San Diego State [University] [Sonia Lopez] because we did then things with students from San Diego State at that time. They were very politically active, and we felt we were political, too. We

worked with this guy Bert Corona who's since died. So we decided we'd create a course with different people coming in to do the lectures and we did it one year. It was a big success, so we did it another year and then that year, I thought, well, why don't we put together the lectures and see if we can find somebody to publish them [all together].

By that time I had met Juan Gómez-Quiñones, and I sent them to him, and he said, yes, they would publish them. They had others, Adelaida [R.] Del Castillo and other women at UCLA writing on women. And so their articles and our articles were put together, and we published [*Essays on*] *La Mujer*. That's how that came about. It was the first publication on Chicanas that came out. I forget what year that was. But I mean it was like that, little by little here and there, you do stuff that you don't expect to be doing, but you end up doing it.

01-01:25:55
Holmes:

Well, speaking of Juan, I wanted to ask, in 1969 Juan was a principal player in what became known as the El Plan de Santa Bárbara. And it was a gathering of both faculty and graduate students there at the university, essentially laying out the ideal as well as the need for a new field studying the Mexican American experience. Did you hear about the plan?

01-01:26:31
Sánchez:

In Texas, I did not hear about the plan at all. At this time in Texas, we have people working on La Raza Unida. That's what I heard about. They were organizing in Crystal City, which is, I don't know, fifty, sixty miles south of San Angelo where I come from and so, of course, what was happening there was very interesting to me. Chicanos were organizing politically. Then in the late sixties, there were these people from California that went there to talk to us about MEChA [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán], but what we had there at that time was MAYO, the Mexican American Youth Organization. And [the MAYO people] had a meeting in San Antonio, and we went there and heard talks about this, that, and the other and then returned, but nothing much was happening in Austin. And then these people from UCLA came to talk to us about MEChA and so that's where I first heard about MEChA, but then they left and nothing much happened there.

01-01:27:40

By that time, Montejano had left. He was, I guess, at Yale and so there were other people there, but no one that was very connected with these other movements. We knew Tijerina of course, and we knew about La Raza Unida but not about what was happening in California. So it wasn't until I came here, and one of my students had been part of the Santa Barbara movement [Mariana Marin] and I heard all about it; then later read about it.

Later, there was a student here [Alberto Baltazar Urista Heredia] Alurista, [who had been at San Diego State]. Alurista is the one that proposed [El Movimiento Estudiantil de Aztlán]. He proposed that the Southwest was

Aztlán.] And so it was my coming to California that really was enlightening in that way for me because in Texas, we weren't into what was happening in the Chicano world [nor into Aztec mythology]. We were into what was happening to *Méxicanos* in Texas and *La Raza Unida* and this and that—and in a way, too, what was happening in New Mexico because there was more interaction there.

01-01:29:05

Holmes:

Well, let's return to graduate school and your time back at UT Austin. What kind of environment for a Chicana scholar did you find during those graduate years?

01-01:29:20

Sánchez:

As I said, there were three of us in Spanish—Julian Olivares [Jr.] was from San Antonio and me and Kanellos who was from back East. It wasn't until around 1970 that there was another guy from San Antonio that came. My brother, Alex, had been, of course, a student and a TA there. But by that time, after he came back from the Marines, he had the G.I. Bill, and so he was able to write his MA thesis—he wasn't a TA anymore, [but he did have to register].

There is a woman here working in one of the programs that mentor students, Cecilia Ubilla. Cecilia Ubilla is a Chilena, but she became very [*achicanada*, if I can] put it to you that way. She and I became friends in Austin, and she was part of my brother's graduate class when I was like two years behind. Later she taught at the Huston-Tillotson College in Austin, which is a Black college. She became involved with the Black Panthers. I didn't join, I didn't participate but I had her insight into what was happening there. They did the breakfast program. She drove the bus and picked up the students in the morning and then took them to school. That all was going on at that time and I'm kind of like on the sidelines over here.

But in terms of Chicanos, we organized, as I said, to protest the fact that we weren't there, but other than that—and sometimes, this man, Sergio Elizondo, he became involved with the Democratic Party of Austin. And so one year, I went [drawing out the vote] with the car because we had a Chicano running for the council. So here I'm going down the street [in a car broadcasting, in Spanish], "Don't forget to vote, come out and vote for so-and-so." At least he got us involved in something, and nobody else did much, but then he was denied tenure. He had to leave. So he was there only like two or three years while I was in grad school. He went to California and then up north and eventually ended up in New Mexico. So in terms of an organized movement—except for when we organized to protest and when we were invited to go to the MAYO meeting in San Antonio—there was not much happening there.

01-01:33:04

Holmes:

As a graduate student, were you one of the very few Chicana PhD students there at UT Austin?

01-01:33:17

Sánchez:

Of course. [laughter] Of course. Yes. There was no other Chicana PhD. There was a Brazilian woman there and then later another Brazilian woman came and so I got to practice my Portuguese; then I became friends with this woman from Paraguay, but there were no other Chicanas there. I think there might have been Chicanas possibly in education, but it was a different field. And there were several undergraduates, who were going to get their teaching credential, so they weren't grad students. There wasn't anyone else there.

01-01:34:29

Holmes:

Who were your mentors and advisors during graduate school?

01-01:34:33

Sánchez:

Well, in terms of literature—there was Ricardo Gullón who was a Spaniard who left during the Guerra Civil War and went to Puerto Rico and then later was hired in Austin. He was really a superb teacher. But then when I went into linguistics, again there wasn't anyone there. I was interested in transformational grammar and nobody in Spanish was into that. People in linguistics—I mean, I admired all those guys there because they dressed like I dress today, whereas in Spanish, everybody had a suit on with a tie. So linguistics was the field then—I mean it was it. I wanted to be part of that, but I had to work. I had to have money to go on and so it was like this dual thing. But then when I wrote my dissertation, I wrote a transformational grammar of Spanish.

01-01:35:50

Holmes:

Well, let's talk a little bit about your dissertation, which I think it was titled, "A Generative Study of Two Spanish Dialects," which you finished in 1974 but then also becomes the basis for your first book, I believe, in 1983, *Chicano Discourse: Socio-Historic Perspectives*.

01-01:36:08

Sánchez:

Well, not really but okay. I got this job here in '72 without a PhD, so I was an acting assistant professor. And they said after a year that "You either finish or you're out of here." So the next year, I finished. [laughter] Okay. So generative grammar, transformational grammar was my love, and I wanted to do something with that. I still think in those terms, in terms of rules, and it was very algebraic and I loved algebra when I was in school. So it was coming up with the analysis. We have a lot of regularization in our Spanish, forms that don't exist in standard Spanish. So what's happened, what's the rule there, what's going on? We do all kinds of things that were different, and I wanted to write the rules about it, and compare, what is the rule in standard Spanish, and what are we Chicanos doing with the language. There was no generative grammar person in Spanish, but they were willing to sign. I had one person from linguistics—I forget who it was—on the committee, but the others were a guy who did Portuguese and linguistics, and a guy that did French and linguistics and then Spanish and linguistics.

01-01:37:54

So I wrote it but then as I left Austin and came here and got much more politicized—because my politics there [in Texas] was very kind of labor and anti-racism kind of politics, you know? But I had not read Marx, and I didn't have an analysis of it. So when I came here, [Carlos] Blanco was into that, and I started reading like mad. But then I became aware that there was another field that was developing called sociolinguistics, but I had not studied that, but I got into it. I saw that what I was talking about was the social aspect of this and so Chicano discourse is a sociolinguistic text. Some of the findings of the previous work [dissertation] were brought to bear, but it's a wholly different book. My dissertation is about grammar rules, and [the book on] Chicano discourse is about practice.

01-01:39:10

Holmes:

Before we end, let's talk a little bit about that first book. I believe you really highlight and examine three varieties of Chicano Spanish, is that correct? The standard then the more popular urban and popular rural and looking at the socioeconomic connections with each one of those varieties.

01-01:39:37

Sánchez:

Yeah. One of the things that became obvious to me once I was here is the way the Mexican academics looked down on our Spanish. They called us *pochos*. They said we didn't speak the language and this and that. I mean, that just irked me. I spoke the language, and I spoke standard Spanish with them, but they said, "Well, maybe you but the other Chicanos, no." Some Chicanos here had gone with the playwright [Luis Miguel] Valdez to Mexico for some big conference there, and they presented all this stuff on the Aztec myths, and they were laughed at. So Chicanos, they were into Aztec mythology? Oh, man, they saw us as ignorant. And then they wrote about Chicano Spanish. I didn't go to the meeting, but I read about it, and they wrote about Chicanos and their Spanish. They put us down. I wanted to write that we have the standard here, too, but we also have the rural, and we have slang and other things here, which are very, very informal.

So when I came here [UC San Diego], I was teaching and I had some students from North of Calexico, Brawley. Okay. Brawley is a very rural area. And so I had these students, and they were here in my office one day, and their Spanish was Texas Spanish to me, and I said, "Okay, so where did you come from?" Well, it turned out, they were third-generation Californians and their Spanish was very rural like Texas Spanish, like New Mexican Spanish. I thought, my goodness, you come with that Spanish. I mean, obviously, their grandparents came with that Spanish, and their parents picked it up, and their children picked it up, and they were still there. And so there went my whole idea that you come with this then you develop—no, no, these varieties remained. Unless there's interaction with other types or other varieties then you continue using your dialect. So I wanted to write about the different varieties of Spanish and what we do with them.

01-01:43:00

I came to see that sociolinguists talk about language as a practice, as what is being done in the interaction rather than simply at a grammatical rule level. But because I'm very into rules, I combined two things. It was the rule, but also it was what was happening in the community. Of course, I'm one of the world's best code-switchers. I go from one to the other constantly, and my friends do, too. I love being able to go back and forth. When I do [a Spanish] class, I have to stay in Spanish, or when I do the Chicano lit, I have to stay in English. But being able to switch, code-switching is great.

And then I studied what is it that happens, not only in our language, but in other languages, with loan words. Well, they make us feel really like, oh, you don't speak Spanish. Most of the English terms are really Latin, and the Romans took that up there, and you picked it up. You know loans are very important. When they picked up "rodeo" and "cowboy" and "barbeque," nobody thinks that's Spanish. I mean any interaction between languages; you're going to have loans. It's a natural, normal process.

01-01:44:48

Holmes:

I wanted to ask before we ended: you graduate, officially in 1974, but you're here at UC San Diego in 1972. As the first of your family to go to college and then continue on to get a PhD and become a college professor, what was your parents' reaction?

01-01:45:21

Sánchez:

Well, I remember after I got my MA—my brother Alex got an MA too but then he didn't go on—my mother said one day, "You're still going to go on?" kind of where was this all going? They didn't know and neither did I. We didn't know where it was going because, as I said, it wasn't like we had a career plan. I just liked being in school, and that's perhaps why I have stayed here. I'm feeling now that I need to retire. It's been hectic, and it's been difficult because of all the racism on campus here. But part of it I've enjoyed doing that kind of stuff. And so for them, it was like, "Well, I mean, so this is what she wants to do." It wasn't anything to be boasting about or anything. Neither did I feel that it was.

01-01:46:45

Holmes:

Well, Rosaura, I thank you so much. I think this is a good place to stop.

01-01:46:52

Sánchez:

Okay.

Interview 2: March 25, 2019

02-00:00:02

Holmes:

All right, well, this is Todd Holmes with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. Today's date is March 25, 2019. I'm sitting down with Rosaura Sánchez for her second session for the Chicana/o Studies Oral History Project. We are here at her office on the beautiful campus of UC San Diego. Rosaura, thank you so much for, again, sitting down with me, especially on spring break. [laughter] Last time we left off, you were finishing graduate school at UT Austin, so I want to talk about now your transition from grad school to taking your position in 1972 here at UC San Diego. You were offered the position in 1972, which was before you were done with the PhD.

02-00:00:50

Sánchez:

With the dissertation.

02-00:00:51

Holmes:

What was your job-market experience like?

02-00:00:55

Sánchez:

Well, I had applied to two jobs, one here, and there was an opening in Indiana, and I inquired about other possibilities. A woman from Stanford had gone down to UT to interview students, and she told me, "Well, not now, but maybe in the future, there might be something at Stanford." And so there was a prof here, Arturo Madrid, who was in the Spanish section, and he wanted someone to do something on language with Chicanos, especially since they had created a field of training students to teach. The Teacher Education Program, they called it, and [Hugh] Bud Mehan was made the guy in charge of it. And so he wanted us to offer those courses in Spanish within the literature department. So Madrid invited me down for an interview. I was looked at by the linguistics department, they weren't interested, and the Spanish section in literature, and they were interested. So I had an offer as an acting assistant professor to come down and so I did.

I had been in California before because my Peace Corps training was at UCLA, and I liked California. So I came, and the second year I was here, they let me know they couldn't even consider me unless I had finished the dissertation, so I finished. I finished really that summer but then you had to go through the whole thing and the committee and stuff, so officially I finished in '74. Of course, this was a very different place then, and I found out after my first year that there was a professor who hated me, and I didn't even know who that professor was. You see up there [pointing to wall], there's that picture of me with [Carlos] Blanco? Professor Blanco was a Spanish professor, probably the best-known professor in Spanish that we have had here, and he was very involved with Chicanos. And I also became very involved, and we used to go to MEChA meetings and everything. But it turned out that this prof who was one of the creators of this department hated Blanco politically, you know? And so because I was being seen as Blanco's

protégé, he hated me, and I didn't even know who the man was. The man was Roy Harvey Pearce, a very important nineteenth-century Americanist.

02-00:04:00

Across the way, there used to be these barracks that had been used by the Army. This used to be an army base. In fact, this was a base where many of the Japanese were first brought before they were sent to the internment camps. And those of us in Third World studies because you have departments and then you have programs—I was part of the Third World studies program—and we were all housed there. The woman who was the head of the program told me, "There's a prof that hates you," and I said, "I didn't know anybody named Roy Harvey Pearce." So then, I went to Blanco and said, "It is said that this prof hates me, but I don't even know who he is," and it turns out, he said, "No, don't worry about it. It's me that he has a problem with, not you."

Well, it wasn't really the case. As time went on, this man made my life difficult. He didn't want me here. He didn't want that position being used for me, but I stayed. [laughter] I stayed, and eventually, the man came around. And when he retired, I met him in the elevator, and I said, "Hello, Roy, how are you doing?" and he said, "I'm feeling so alienated," and I said to him, "Now, you know how it feels." He had made my life miserable, and now that he retired, he felt out of it, and he was feeling alienated. [laughter] I like that story because he didn't answer anything when I told him that. But, yeah, at the end people said, "Well, now, he talks well of you." But when it mattered when I was first here, he said I was "uncooperative."

[Years before] he wanted to create this introductory ethnic minority lit in English, and I was all for it, but I wanted us to have like a Chicano-Latino quarter and an African American quarter and then there could be a quarter that was just general. He didn't want that. He wanted one quarter with everything in it. We had a meeting, and I came up with a proposal, I passed it out—he was furious. How dare I propose something different from what he had proposed. But today we have our sequence, and today, I just finished doing the Introduction to Chicano/Latino Lit, and we have an Introduction to Asian American Lit, and next quarter, we're doing Intro to African American lit. As the years went by, we won, but everything was just a battle, that's made it kind of sad [laughter].

02-00:07:14

Holmes:

Talk a little bit about the experience of coming to San Diego, particularly after spending most of your life in Texas.

02-00:07:21

Sánchez:

Well, as I said, I had been in California because the Peace Corps trained us at UCLA, so I had been at UCLA, but I loved Austin. I was coming from West Texas, and it was a very racist town, very segregated and so the university was segregated at first, but there was a different feeling there [in Austin], and I

liked it. And I was working at the library, later I was a TA, and I liked the feeling of being there and so it was a big change to come here.

02-00:08:05

Here I met Blanco and Arturo Madrid, and there were other people here that I related to, and I liked it. Actually, there was a woman Faustina [F.] Solis who was not a prof because she wasn't in an academic program, but she was in the health department; she was the community liaison. She saw me crossing the campus over here where they had the barracks, and there was grass all over. I was crossing [the quad], and she looked at me, and she said, "Hello," and I said, "Hello," and she says, "Why don't you go back to Texas?" I was shocked, and I said, "I like it here," and I kept walking, and I thought, the only Chicana on campus, and she's asking me why I don't go back to Texas? [laughter] I never forgot that because I felt it was not a supportive kind of statement. And this woman became a very important figure on campus because she became provost of what is now [Thurgood] Marshall College. It was Third College before. But I felt like, you know, I couldn't understand her comment, because I go around with a sort of a frown on my face, but this is my normal face, but I liked [UCSD]. I liked the students, and I liked what was going on. I didn't have much to do with the department, but with the Third World studies program, I did. It was like a home to me. So there was a whole group of graduate students here that I became close to. Some of them, Ileana Rodriguez who became an important person in Latin American and Nicaraguan literature and Marc Zimmerman and Mariana Marin and Marta [Ester] Sánchez who taught here for a time too—those grad students that were more like my age—and I became close to them.

And then one day, Ileana and Marc, they were very political, and they initiated a study group, and so I went to the study group, too, and we were all assigned different articles. I remember I was assigned an article on sub-imperialism on Brazil, but there was a woman there, Roberta Alexander who gave a talk on surplus value. And, of course, I had never read Marx, so I went to Blanco, and I said, "Roberta was talking about surplus value. I don't know what that is," and he said, "Do you want us to start a study group to read *Capital*, [*A Critique of Political Economy*]?" and I said, "Yes," and that's where it all began for me. And so we had a group of him and me and graduate students, and we would meet once a week, and we'd read *Capital*. We read *Capital* like it was the Bible, and we were going chapter by chapter.

It changed my life because my politics had been more [anti-racism] in terms of the whites oppressing us and exploiting us—us, meaning Black and brown. I was aware of some of the things happening in Latin America because I had been in the Peace Corps, but I didn't have the theory. With that study group I began to find out about Marx, and that's been the story of my life since. That's the theory I practice. There are all kinds of different shades and practices of Marxism, but it's very important to me still today. Some people start on that

and then after a while, it's passé. I think there's much there that we need to keep working on.

02-00:12:38

Holmes:

In many respects, you were one of the first, if not *the* first, Chicana scholar on this campus, and probably if we look broadly speaking, really among the first to enter the academy. Tell us a little bit about that experience of being one of the few Chicana scholars and particularly in this environment here in San Diego.

02-00:13:07

Sánchez:

Okay. So San Diego is a very conservative city because it's a very military city. And so when I came here, we were involved with the farmworkers movement, and we'd go protest and boycott. It's the period of the lettuce and the grape boycotts and everything, so people would look at us like—you know? One time we were at this Safeway, which is a big supermarket of the past, and this woman walked up to me, and she said, "Why don't you get a job?" [laughter] She assumed that picketing was my job—why didn't I get a real job. So in that sense, the politics were bad here. And the campus itself, although I think it fancied itself liberal, it was not. Today, there are still very few African American students. Back then, almost none. And when I came, there were like twenty, thirty Chicano students on campus. They said that they were here for the Third World studies, but they weren't doing too much about it because they weren't recruiting people.

And then I was brought here by Arturo Madrid, and he wanted somebody to work with the students, the few students that were undergrads and that were going into teaching. The second year I was here, he had an offer from Minnesota—although the department was supportive to a certain extent, the university denied him tenure. That was an eye-opening experience for me, not that I was thinking in terms of tenure because I was dumb enough not to think in those terms, but he went to Minnesota and then I realized, okay. I was here still, Blanco was here, and then we had some visiting profs that came [to campus]. Tomas Ybarra-Frausto came, and Juan Rodriguez came for a quarter or two, so I got to meet them. There were a few people in other departments, in biology and political science, and they didn't get tenure, and so I knew that chances were that I would not.

I remember when my father died, I was here and so I had gone home. I had gone on the plane one time, and I couldn't afford that, and I had gone on the bus another time and so then, I thought I need a car that will get me there. I got a BMW, and it was a good car. The first time I drove it, I had a flat tire. [laughter] I thought, this shouldn't be happening, this is a new car. Okay. I had it then for four or five years and I realized every time something broke, it was like \$800. I thought I won't be able to do this if I don't have a job, so I turned that car in, and I got one of those small Datsuns or something, so I would have

a car. I was going to be out on the street, but I would have a car. [laughter] I did not expect to get tenure, frankly.

02-00:17:16

By that time, there was a prof here, [Joseph] Sommers, and his best friend, his lover was the woman named Jean Franco who was heading the Spanish department at Stanford and so I was interviewed there. I gave a talk, and this and that and then I got tenure here first and then I also got an offer from them. I did not like Stanford. There was no way I was going to go there, but I was relieved that I would have had another option. But once I got tenure here, then I stayed.

02-00:18:01

Holmes:

What was it about Stanford you didn't like?

02-00:18:03

Sánchez:

I don't know. It was kind of stuffy, a very elite institution. Here, there were real people [laughter] and so I wanted to be here. There was a vice chancellor of academic affairs, Paul [D.] Saltman, who I did not care for because when I first came here, there had been the building of Third College, and Third College was, I guess, two years old when I came. The students who had participated, along with Blanco and other profs, in creating this college, which was supposed to be for minorities and for Third World studies, wanted it to be a different college with student participation in determining curriculum and things like that. Those first two years, they would have meetings with all the students and the staff and the profs that were part of the college.

But by the time I came here, that had changed. In the second year, there was a Black provost, a man from biology [Joseph] Joe [W.] Watson who was made the provost of Third College, and the university said, "No, this is a college, and it has to be run like the other colleges, and the students cannot participate." And so what it did was it created this division between the African American students and the Chicano students. So when I came here, that was going on, and of course, to me that was a shock because African American students were the people I and others fought for at Austin, and here, they were dividing themselves, so I couldn't understand that.

But then we had a meeting like on the first or second week I was here, and Saltman, who was the vice chancellor of academic affairs, was going like that to Blanco and Arturo Madrid and another prof there, "You're not doing what you're supposed to be doing." I did not care for that, and so I exploded [at that meeting], and I said, "What's going on here? Why are you talking like that to us? There was no need for—" And so he was so surprised I spoke up. But then later, we had demonstrations because he'd denied Arturo Madrid tenure, so we went and sat in on his office and stuff like that. So I didn't have a good feeling about the man because I felt he was looking out for the interest of the university. He didn't care about us. So then to my surprise, —[laughter]—he gave me tenure. We had a department head, Jamie Lyon, then. He told me,

"The last official thing that [Saltman] did was grant you tenure." [laughter] I thought, oh, wow, these things happen, [but it was strange].

02-00:21:19

I mean, I had a book contract, okay, but I didn't think it was only that. It was the way you fit in with the place, and I didn't obviously fit in. The profs in the department—many of them or most of them were the daughters and sons of academics themselves or professional people, but mostly academics, and I came from a working-class family and so I did not behave like a middle-class or upper-class person, and that didn't go over well and so I had a hard time. But then later, I saw that when we had two more Chicanos in the department, Jorge Mariscal and Marta Sánchez, that we were all perceived as somehow like aggressive, like we didn't go along. Yeah, being working class was not to our advantage, [let's just say].

And then [I recall] one time, we had a candidate for a position in Spanish, and one of the profs made a comment about the candidate, who was an Anglo. "He was too working class," she said, and I looked at her. I felt like there was always this prejudice, this bias. They wanted people of a certain culture, of a certain class—and we didn't fit in, and they made it known to us.

02-00:23:15

Holmes:

I wanted to ask about the Chicano/a and Latino/a Arts and Humanities Program. Is there a Chicano studies program here at UC San Diego?

02-00:23:30

Sánchez:

Well, okay, there's a whole history behind that.

02-00:23:33

Holmes:

Yeah, I came across that a bit in my research, so I'd like you to maybe talk about that.

02-00:23:37

Sánchez:

Okay.

02-00:23:38

Holmes:

But before you start, I just wanted to fix something on your mic real quick. [fixes microphone]

02-00:23:46

Holmes:

Okay – that should do it. Tell us a little bit about the development of that program.

02-00:23:48

Sánchez:

Okay. So when I came here, there were some Chicano studies groups, programs developing like at [California State University] Northridge, and Blanco felt that what we needed here was a program that connected the Chicano with the Third World. And so what he and those that had created the Third College had wanted was a Third World studies program, and they saw the Chicano as fitting within that because we were reading about what was

happening in Africa, what was happening in Latin America, and it was all interconnected with imperialism—oppression, exploitation. And so we were doing courses related to Chicano studies within Third World studies.

02-00:24:52

So that continued for a good while. But there were some profs here who didn't see the Chicano fit into Third World studies. It was problematic for some people, but for us, we were part of this whole world of people who were exploited and oppressed and so we didn't see a problem with it. So then along the way, we saw that we were having problems and that we needed to create something a little different and so we decided, African Americans and us. Because Asian Americans, at that that time, in our department, there was no one. And so we started meeting, and we decided we wanted to propose an ethnic studies department that would have the Chicano, and it would have the African American, and it would bring in other components into ethnic studies. We met, and we came up with a proposal, and we started thinking about people to invite. And, of course, the people we wanted to invite were leftists, people at Berkeley, people at Stanford, mostly at Berkeley.

And there was a prof here, a Chicano prof here [in history], Ramon [A.] Gutierrez who would later be the head of ethnic studies but who had administrative ambitions, and he wanted to do whatever the administration wanted done. So when we proposed profs to come, one of them was in lit, and we had already approved that person [in the lit department] who did Korean lit, but [the other people we] proposed—because we were not yet an entity, we couldn't bring in [without the approval of established departments, like sociology]. You had to have a department approve the position. And sociology, which has always been a very reactionary department, as far as I'm concerned, they did not approve the [candidates for those] positions. And Ramon Gutierrez went along with that, and when he did that, then those of us Chicanos, other than himself, we withdrew from the ethnic studies committee that was gearing up.

It became what he wanted it to become and we all disliked the man. He stayed there for several years as the head and then eventually, he went to Chicago, but he brought other people there—[George] Lipsitz and this other man—I forget his name right now [Charles Briggs]. But then the women who were brought into the department had problems with them, and they started complaining about them. So Briggs, Lipsitz, and Gutierrez, they ran the show, and the women who were brought in started complaining about them, and they all left eventually. So ethnic studies became something totally different. But for a while there, they didn't have many tenured profs. But now, today, they do. A lot of the younger people who were hired in the last ten years now have tenure. And Curtis Marez is there, and a prof that used to be with us in lit, Shelley Streeby, who is the wife of Curtis Marez, she decided to move most of her FTE [Full-Time Equivalent] over there so that they would have tenured

profs. Now, the relationship is different with ethnic studies. I've even given a class or two over there.

Eventually, along the way, we had Jorge Mariscal hired here in lit and so he formed a Latino, Chicano minor program. So, today, you need like seven courses. If you take four upper division, three lower division, you can minor in subjects. So he created the Latino/Chicano minor program, and they call it CLAH, [Chicano/a-Latino/a Arts & Humanities] C-L-A-H. I've got something to do with them.

02-00:30:27

Holmes:

Yeah, and there is also the Chicano/a-Latino/a studies program. Is that right?

02-00:30:31

Sánchez:

Yeah. So that program still exists, but it hasn't gone very far, but there are a few students. You can take courses in any department—like history offers courses in southwest history and literature and ethnic studies and so you can combine courses. And we have the Third World studies program still, which went in a different direction. It's no longer a leftist program. It's more like a program that invites speakers—like they invite people from the Middle East, people from Africa to give talks and things like that. They have three courses that you can take as part of the college requirement, and one of them is Latin American literature. You can [teach there too].

But two years ago, we had a new [humanities] dean, and that dean decided to take all those programs and put them together under one institute. So now, we have this [Institute of Arts and Humanities], and we have a prof from history who has been heading it, and now, he says he no longer wants to do it and so they're looking for someone to do it next year. And so that is more than a program—it's an institute that has all these different programs within it, but we don't have like a major in that, but you still have the minors. [Administration types are managers and, in the end, they manage things as they see fit for the administration. What can I say.]

So Chicano studies never took off as Chicano studies itself here. I created this Latino/Latin American lit major here, so you can take Chicano lit and also Latin American. I think we have like five majors in it. It also hasn't taken off. People come [to UCSD] to study engineering and to be premed or do computer science; the humanities are not very important here, not then and not now.

02-00:33:00

Holmes:

Well, let's talk a little bit about the development of the field of Chicana and Chicano studies. If we think back to the first generation, of which you're a part of in the seventies, how does that first-generation fit in literature? What do you recall from that, the themes or genres or particularly works and scholars that stand out to you?

02-00:33:28

Sánchez:

Okay. So our generation did not study Chicano lit. I mean, it didn't exist really. No one had done the research about what had been written before. As time has gone by, we have increasingly done that. I, too, have done research into nineteenth-century people of Mexican origin who were writing, but we didn't have any of that before. So I studied Peninsular and Latin American lit, and most of the people later who became profs in Chicano lit also had that background.

02-00:34:04

When I came here, there was a prof, Joseph Sommers, who was interested in creating that kind of study, and he came out with a volume of readings in Chicano, Méxicano literature. But when you look at it, most of the things there are Mexican lit stories or poetry. You have a sampling of some Chicano poems but we didn't have most of that available to us. I had never heard of these other people and so what we have then is little journals, things like I was telling you that started putting out things we would write. And then later, the *Chicano-Riqueña* journal sprang up in Indiana of all places and then when [Nicolás] Nick Kanellos moved to Houston, we had the journal continue there. And so, *Aztlán* at UCLA was publishing but not literature. They were publishing articles in history mostly, sociology, political science. That was the main focus of *Aztlán*. It still is today. They don't publish short stories. So it was very hard finding some place to publish one's work [on lit or creative writing].

So I told you that Juan Rodriguez was brought here to teach, and he told me to send my stories to this Irvine thing that I had never even heard of before. They were kind of stimulating Chicano lit by having people submit stories. None of this work had ever been published, of course, because who would publish us? When Nick Kanellos started his journal at the University of Houston, there was now a place to send things. So we start having like a little corpus of poetry, a lot of poetry and stories that were being published in those magazines or journals.

When I came here [UC San Diego] I was brought here to do Chicano language and to prepare people to teach language. I was here and I had graduate students who were taking these theory courses on structuralism and things like that, and they didn't understand what they were reading. But I knew what they were reading so then I started doing independent studies and then later seminars on structuralism and Marxism, which was big then. And so a number of the people that were my students went out and became Chicano lit people, but they had also this theoretical background.

We had visitors. I told you we had Ybarra-Frausto who was here for a couple of quarters then we had Juan Rodriguez who was here for maybe two years. He was like a visiting kind of lecturer, but he saw it wasn't going anywhere. He got an offer at Berkeley. He went to Berkeley; he saw that it wasn't going

anywhere there. He went to Seattle and he saw that it wasn't going to be a tenured track thing. Then he got a job at Austin first as a visiting and then at Lutheran College where he became permanent faculty and worked there many, many years. And he was instrumental in starting what he called *Carta*. It was like a letter, but it wasn't really a letter, [but a bulletin]. At that time, we didn't have computers; he would send out to different profs a listing of all the things that were being published, coming out, his opinion of the quality of the work, this and that. *Carta Abierta*, he called it, open letter. And so that became an important [network], a source of information on Chicano/Chicana-Latino work.

02-00:38:46

I was involved then in writing literature and also in writing critiques of the literature, but I wasn't teaching it because I felt that as soon as I taught it, the [Chicano literature] position would be eliminated because Arturo Madrid had been here, and he had done some of that. When he left, we considered it a position that needed to be filled. If I started doing that then there's no position there and so we fought to get someone to come. And then one of our own students Marta Sánchez who got her PhD here, asked to be considered, and she became a prof here doing Chicano lit. And so even though I was doing criticism of Chicano lit, I was not teaching it because to me, I would be kind of stepping on another person's toes. I was doing theory and Latin American lit and some Chicano things but not the literature itself.

Marta's husband is Paul Espinosa who is a filmmaker, and he later had an offer at Arizona State University. He had an offer there and so Marta asked for retention that he be considered for a position here, but they would not hire him, not in visual arts, not in communication, not in ethnic studies. And so he had a really good offer—not only was he going to become a prof there, but they were going to give him money to make films. So Martha then resigned here and went to Phoenix. She's still writing. When she left then I became the Chicano lit person, and I started doing courses on Chicano lit.

02-00:40:52

Holmes:

What year was that?

02-00:40:55

Sánchez:

Oh, maybe ten years ago, not from the beginning. In the beginning, I was doing more theory in Latin American lit and writing, writing Chicano lit but not so much teaching it. But when we had been here—well, I had been here a long time—that's when we created the sequence I told you about. So this man, Professor Pearce didn't want us to do what I was proposing that we have a different quarter for each thing. I was involved in it that way, but I was doing things that related to language or that related to linguistics or to Latin American lit and I have a strong passion for Latin American lit and so I was doing [a lot of] that. But then later I saw, okay, well, if Marta was not here then there was a need for that and so then I started doing it. It was also my field, but I hadn't been teaching it. Maybe it's more than ten years. I don't quite

remember now. But it was after she left that I started doing the classes themselves. I do a class in Chicano lit but then I do two or three in Latin American lit.

02-00:42:30

Holmes:

Tell us a little bit about the maturation of the field. So usually when we're looking timewise around the 1990s or so, this is when the second generation is really coming into their own. What developments in the field struck you by the second generation?

02-00:42:51

Sánchez:

Well, one of the key things that happened was that all of a sudden, I was not the only PhD around. There were a number of PhDs, especially in history and sociology. A lot of work has been done by especially women sociologists in terms of labor, and labor in history. And then one of the things that happened here was that there was a strong Chicano studies program at San Diego State. We started a little newspaper here when I came [to UCSD], *Prensa, Prensa Popular* and so we had a lot of contact with the people, the Chicanos at San Diego State. And then this man [Humberto Noé] Bert Corona came down, and he organized us in terms of immigrants. So there are also these various things happening, but we used to go over with them and then they divided in terms of the more leftist Chicanos and the nationalist Chicanos—it became a split in all kinds of programs where there were people that were more into [Emiliano] Zapata [Salazar], Pancho Villa, and all kinds of cultural nationalist things that had to do with Mexico, and then there were people who were talking about the Third World. So that was a big kind of political division that took place in the seventies and eighties. And so you have then a number of profs that are siding one way or the other. We were known as the Marxist university because we were doing leftist things, and other universities saw themselves as no, they were more nationalist and they were into *Aztlán* and this kind of stuff.

What happened is by the eighties, there were several Chicano historians, sociologists, and as I said, women as well, not only in California, but also in Texas. Not as many in Texas as here because many of the Californian profs were originally from Texas, especially from what we called the Valley of Texas. There was a more middle-class, Chicano, Tejano kind of population there, and they sent their kids to the university whereas in my town, my brother and I were the only ones going, but down there, you had a lot of more people. They had also a local university, [University of Texas–] Pan American. They had people like the Saldivars, people who were going to universities and especially Austin. I think one of Saldivars went from Austin to Yale, and I think Jose went from there to somewhere—I don't remember if it was Berkeley or Stanford, somewhere—to study up in California.

So a number of people were beginning to get into the field of Chicano literature, like Jose [David] Saldivar, Chicano, Latin American literature because you still had that combination, and his brother Ramón Saldívar,

American literature, but then doing also some Chicano things. So you start having people across the different universities doing things and then, of course, there were the state universities like at Northridge and people then dividing in terms of theory. I remember going to a talk where people were talking about a prominent historian and these other Chicano historians were saying, "Well, he doesn't do theory." So there were those who just did their investigation and saw these are the facts and this is the way you present this empirical evidence. And there were those, however, saying, "No, you have to have a theoretical kind of vision of the material you're choosing, and this is constructed," and this and that. And so you had these divisions within the field that had not been there before. Before, there hadn't been a field. And so now, this started happening, not only in lit—we were seen as the Marxist kind of lit place—but also within history and sociology. You start having people going in different directions.

02-00:48:25

I think it was good because all of a sudden, there was debate. There were arguments. The field was beginning to take off and grow, and you could have divisions in terms of perspective and this and that. And that means that it's a field that's alive and generating discussion where before, there had been nothing. I think the field started taking off, and today, you still have divisions in terms of how you look at things, but not as many. Back then we would go to conferences and we were presenting and then the others would go and attack us and we'll attack them, not with tomatoes or anything, just verbally. [laughter] Because it was an important moment. It was changing and the field was changing—even though it had just started.

02-00:49:31

Holmes:

Also, what we see around this time is a diversification of the field, and so for the first time, particularly by the 1990s if not before, as you were mentioning, there's a growing number of women, Chicanas in the field. And also the Chicana experience is a topic of discussion. Did you notice that as well?

02-00:49:58

Sánchez:

Oh, yes. What happened was that within the formation of the Chicano movement, even here at UCSD, men were the leaders. MEChA was led by male students and so the different things that happened: Santa Barbara and the Denver, Colorado, mostly, it was led by men. The women started reacting against that. So that's when you start having women organizing as Mujer. We also had it here. We also organized Mujer. I told you that what we did was I created this independent study type thing where since I felt I didn't know anything about the field, I had different women coming to prepare and present talks on indigenous women in Mexico, women here and issues of health, the family, this and that. So all of us together created like a course and then we published. The second year we did it, we published the articles, but this was happening everywhere that women were starting to take a leading role.

And here at UCSD, a woman became the first female head of MEChA. So what was happening in terms of the local MEChA groups was happening in terms of not only academics, but there began to be a lot more literature written by women. And so you could now do a whole class on women's writings, Chicana women's writings or combined Chicana and Latin American women that hadn't been possible before. So I think today the women writers, the Chicana writers, are the best writers in the field. They're better than most male writers. People like Helena Maria Viramontes. I consider Viramontes to be our best writer. She hasn't written as much as some of the other women, but the quality of her work is just superior. She has the novel *Their Dogs Came with Them*. She had *Under the Feet of Jesus*, and *The Moths*, and other works, but this one about *Their Dogs Came with Them* is really top notch. And so I think women in terms of not only Viramontes but [Sandra] Cisneros, [Ana] Castillo, and other women, they were all very important in the field. But also then women that are doing sociology and women that are doing history, like Emma Perez. There were all kinds of women doing very important work especially in LA. There are a number of women doing work on immigrant women workers, nannies, maids, just really top of the line stuff. They're really doing a lot of work. Women scholars now have a place, and they're doing great work. [But definitely there has been a sea change, or rather a tsunami in the field in a short thirty-year span.]

02-00:53:27

Holmes:

Well, let's talk a little bit about your work if we can.

02-00:53:29

Sánchez:

Sure.

02-00:53:32

Holmes:

Because your work also is contributing to this body of work. Maybe let's start out with *Essays on La Mujer*—Essays on the Woman—which you published in 1977. If I have this correct, you edited. It was two volumes work. You edited the first of the two volumes, is that correct?

02-00:53:55

Sánchez:

Yes, yes.

02-00:53:56

Holmes:

And this was published by the Chicano [Studies] Research Center at UCLA. It still ranks, at least from my research, as some of the earliest work on the Chicana experience when you look at this body of essays. You talked a little bit about this, but discuss the genesis of this project.

02-00:54:12

Sánchez:

Okay. So as I was saying when I was here and there weren't very many Chicano students on campus, but there was a group. And some of them were women, and this appeared when women are starting to speak out and say, "We're not here to make the coffee for the men in MEChA." And so women are starting to have a voice, and they wanted a course that dealt with their

issues. I was the only academic then that could do that course or could even do an independent study, and I felt, well, my field was literature and linguistics, what could I do with that?

And so there was a woman here who's now a prof at Fresno State, Betty Garcia, and she was a counselor here and then later she left to get her PhD in sociology. But she said, "Well, what we could do is have different women come and speak," and so then we knew the various women. One of the women was Sonia Lopez who was teaching at San Diego State in Chicano studies. And we knew her well because then she was part of the group that divided from the other group that was the nationalist group and so we knew her. And so she did, probably, one of the most important articles in the volume, which is about the place of women in the Chicano movement and what had happened in Denver, what happened in Santa Barbara, and what happened in San Diego State. So she came and gave a talk and then the next year, we did it again, and she gave the talk again, modified it and then she wrote it up. Okay, let's write it up, and see if we can find somebody to put it out.

02-00:56:02

By that time I had met Juan Gomez-Q [Quinones], and I knew about *Aztlán*, so I wrote him. And so I got the other women all to do their presentations and then I did this little, quirky thing on labor and then we got it published, but, of course, it was very thin. I mean it wasn't very much and so then he had other articles that women at UCLA had written and other women in history and sociology and then he combined them and put out the first volume on *La Mujer* that's there. It's dated and everything, but it was kind of our putting out the fact that we were here, and we needed to be heard, this kind of thing.

02-00:56:55

Holmes:

I mean speaking of *Aztlán* and Juan Gomez, you published an article in there, "Postmodernism and Chicano Literature," in 1987. Discuss this a bit because this is hitting right at the time where postmodernism is all the rage in many respects, and you're making the argument—which I'll let you speak to it rather than I—but it seems to be questioning the fit of postmodernism when we look at Chicana and Chicano literature.

02-00:57:31

Sánchez:

Yes. So postmodernism was very well analyzed by Fredric Jameson and so you're talking about different movements within an established field like American literature. Every so many years, you have a reaction against the previous movement and so modernism had been the movement but then people started questioning that, what was going on there, and people are very much into other things. We now have a computer age, and all kinds of things have changed and so the literature also is changing. And for Jameson—there's a questioning of the subject, there's a questioning of history. The structure is no longer the same. You have a very fragmented structure, which had started already under modernism but continued up to today.

And so I started looking at this is the period, this is what's happening in the field of American lit, what about us? But we were still doing things that we had not had the chance to do before, so we were still looking at the past, like immigration and what happened when you came here. We still had a very lineal kind of chronological type of time frame within our literature, and we still very much had individualist subjects, the subject that comes to learn about this, that, or the other and does this.

We were doing things more like in the work of Rolando Hinojosa[-Smith], more nineteenth-century type things, *Cronicas del barrio*, where you have people doing like sketches of quaint characters in small towns in Texas. Well, that's not even modernist. We were doing different moments of literary production that were not really up-to-date. But because we had not had the chance to do the previous, we were kind of in the postmodern periods producing modernist and even nineteenth-century literature.

02-00:59:53

But then I wanted to find something that kind of went in that direction and so there was this novel by Sergio Elizondo. I mentioned the last time that Beatrice Pita and I translated that work eventually because it was a very experimental type structure there. And it had to do with the killing of these two young men in Austin, the year I got to Austin. They were shot by the police. They were shot in the back because they had taken off on a joy ride in a car and then they crashed because they didn't know how to drive it. When the police got there and they ran, the police shot them in the back. One was nineteen and one was sixteen. And Sergio Elizondo wrote that up—but he didn't write it up chronologically. What he does is, "As the boys are lying there in the grass dying, they are thinking about their lives," and so you go from one boy to the other, you go from the family of one to the other and like that. It's a very fragmented structure. He brings in music, and he brings in all kinds of things. It was very innovative, and I thought, this is the closest thing that we're getting to going beyond the lineal and chronological, subject-oriented type structure of fiction.

02-01:01:27

Holmes:

I wanted to ask, you wrote a book chapter in the edited volume *Between Borders: Essays on Mexicana and Chicana History*, and that chapter was titled, "The History of Chicanas: A Proposal for a Materialist Perspective." At least to an outside reader, it seems like it's a very important contribution on development into the feminist discourse of—even the book, itself, if we take the volume of essays alone—a woman-oriented framework, which has been absent for so long. Discuss a little bit of that chapter.

02-01:02:08

Sánchez:

Okay. So there had been a conference at UCLA organized by Adelaida [R.] del Castillo who was, at that time, the wife of Juan Gómez-Q. And she had invited me to participate, but something happened, I don't know what it was, but I was unable to participate. At some point, I got a fellowship to do some

writing, and so I decided to get out of town and go spend a quarter at UCLA in Santa Monica in Westwood there. So I got a little apartment there in Westwood and I contacted her there, and she said, "You can still write the presentation because we're gathering people who had presented." And then she said, "If you still want to do it," and so I did. I did because I wanted to bring in all the stuff I was reading about Marx and about materialism and talk about our history and how to look at it. To me, it's not only a matter of gender and sexuality but our labor and our working-class conditions. I wanted to write about that and so that's where that chapter came from.

02-01:03:38

Holmes:

And to follow up on that—in a piece you published in *America's Review*, "Discourses of Gender, Ethnicity, and Class and Chicano Literature," you advance that argument even further, analyzing gender in relation to these other discourses and looking at those crosscurrents.

02-01:04:00

Sánchez:

Um-hm. Generally, what happens is like there would be conferences, and I would present papers and then I would work those up and submit them there to Nick. Because I come from a working-class background, to me, class is what made me who I am. And so I felt like it wasn't just important to look at issues of gender because we were discriminated and put down, and we still are today, but that our situation, as women, needed to be seen in relation to the class factors, in the kind of work we did. And so I wanted to bring that out so that when we look at the literature, we look at that. One of the things that I found—it's kind of sad—but, you know, we don't have too many works in Chicano lit that deal with working-class people? It's odd, actually.

And so there is a novel by a Dominican woman, Angie Cruz. I think it's topnotch, and she has in her novel a character that is a caretaker. There are no Chicana caretakers in our literature, and you start seeing, well, what about—? We are especially nannies and maids, and if you go to a hospital, we're cleaning there and doing all kinds of work with Filipino women who are all over the place, and we are there. How many stories do we have of women who are working in the hospitals taking care of patients? We don't have that. We don't have men that are doing tile work. We have that film on the gardener, *A Better Life*, but where are our gardeners in our literature? They're absent. And that just gets me—like what are we doing? This is the life we know: painters, gardeners, plumbers. This is the life we know and yet when we write, we write about professors. I do the same thing, professors and professionals and artists, especially artists and writers, and I think, what's wrong with us? [laughter] What's wrong with us?

Why are we not writing about our family life, where we came from? I've written a few stories about my barrio, but sometimes the barrio stories have to do with family disputes and things like that, not about the work that the people in the family do. I suppose there are a lot of paintings also about women in the

kitchen making tamales and things like that, but how many stories do we have of women, and women maybe who hate all the kitchen work and cleaning. That's hard labor, and women get no credit for that. And then those of us that write are not bringing in those people into our fiction and so it's sad, but that's where we are.

02-01:07:46

Holmes:

Well, I want to talk now about some works that you have edited and republished. Some of these are the works of Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton who was the first Mexican American author to write in English, and more importantly that she's a Mexican American woman. She lived between 1832 and 1895. And this is work that you undertook with Beatrice Pita?

02-01:08:21

Sánchez:

Um-hm.

02-01:08:22

Holmes:

And so two of these works that you've done, *The Squatter and the Don*, which was originally published in 1885, and *Who Would've Thought It?* in 1872. Discuss how you came about doing this work, in many respects, recovering this type of Mexican American literature from the nineteenth century that otherwise could easily be forgotten.

02-01:08:51

Sánchez:

So along the way, there has been an interest in recovering things. I mean, it can't be possible that we were not writing during the nineteenth century. And so I had become aware of something that had been written by Vallejo, [Don] Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, and I thought, there must be something there, you know? So I don't remember the sequence, but before the Amparo Ruiz de Burton, I became aware that the Bancroft Library has all these interviews that were done by Bancroft's men to trace the history of California, Alta California. Well, once I saw that, I wanted to write about that. So I went up there and I found that most of the works were in longhand so that became a really kind of interesting [archival project]. Bancroft published it as if it were his own, but really the work was done by others. There were other people that were working for Bancroft. And so they had interviewed these people in Spanish, and all of these texts were there and so I decided to write a book on that, *Telling Identities: [The Californio Testimonios]*.

02-01:10:40

Holmes:

Um-hm, *The Californio Testimonios*, and you used about thirty of those testimonials compiled by Bancroft, reading against the grain of that time.

02-01:10:49

Sánchez:

Yeah, because what you have are the dominant descriptions of the Californios and then you have these men and women because there were women there, too, talking about their lives and what happened to them. And so it became a really important project that took many years. But in the process of working on that, I became aware of Vallejo and his relation with this woman, Maria

Amparo Ruiz de Burton. And so what had happened was that, I think, there was a man at Santa Barbara, [Luis] Leal who had started a kind of historical project there, and he had people doing work on earlier texts that he had found. He was a Mexicanist. So Juan Rodriguez who [I mentioned earlier and] had been a prof here for a couple of years, had found out about this woman, Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton, and he did a little bit of research, who she was and this and that, and he traced her to San Diego. But he wasn't interested in it.

02-01:12:12

But one of our students, Lauro [H.] Flores, who is a prof now at the University of Washington at Seattle, and he was interested in writing a book [on autobiography]. And so Juan Rodriguez said, "Look at this, you might be able to use it," and he read it, and he had a sabbatical, and he was doing the work here, and he found that it's not an autobiographical text. It's a novel, and so he had a Xerox copy of it. He said, "I'm giving it to you," and he put it like that on my shelves. And he said, "See if you want to do something." And I said, "Well, who was she?" I thought this elitist woman from the nineteenth century, what do I have to do with anybody like that? That was my initial reaction.

But then after I got into Vallejo and that, I read it and I showed it to Beatrice and then we did research on her, and we found her letters to Vallejo at the Mission of Santa Barbara. So we went there and then we went to the Huntington [Library]. And then there's all kinds of stuff here at the library in San Diego because she lived here a good part of her life, and she had all kinds of legal issues and problems, and it's all there. It was a really interesting project that we did. And just about the time we were kind of getting all this stuff together, that's when Nick Kanellos got money to do the [Hispanic] Recovery Project. And so we presented the volume and this was the first work that the Recovery Project published. It's the novel itself because it's a nineteenth century text. And then we had all our notes and all our intros and all our material that we got on her, we wrote up the intro.

Then later, we did her second novel. We found she had a second novel, which was really the first novel. She was a really interesting woman—a difficult, difficult woman but sharp, and she married this soldier who was part of the invasion of Mexico and then came up to California with him. Her mother came along, too, because several of the *Baja Californianos* left with the invaders when Baja was not to be part of the US. They came to Monterey; that they married was a big scandal because she was Catholic and he was not and she did not marry in the church. So there was a scandal in the community—and her life was full of scandal.

[Burton] was in the Army, so they ordered him to San Diego. He was here. He and some other soldiers bought some land at Jamul. It was not too far from San Diego and then, of course, the Civil War is about to break out and so he was ordered back East, and she went with him back East. He was a widower,

he had been married before, had a daughter and then [Amparo and Burton] had two children. And so then back East, she made contact with the Mexican embassy there because she knew English and knew French and she became important to them in terms of translations and things like that. She had a lot of contact with the Mexican embassy. I think she became aware of her Mexicanness there more so than in Baja because they were like far away from the center of everything. But there, she met presidents, presidents' wives, and all kinds people there. But she also met her husband's family, and she found they were a bunch of [WASP] hypocrites.

02-01:16:47

So she wrote her first novel about a child that is taken up to the New England area. Her mother had been kidnapped by the Indians and then when she was there in the Indian village, she gave birth to her baby. She was already pregnant when she was kidnapped—the mother was afraid for her child and so she would put mud on her face to make her look dark because that protected the child.

And so, eventually, there is an archeologist who goes by there, and the mother says to him, "I have all this." The mother was into checking the rivers for gold and stuff, and she had collected all these stones that represented wealth, not only gold but silver and I don't know what all. And so she told this man, this archeologist, "I'll give you these stones if you take my child with you." He was willing to take her, too, but she felt her end was near, and she died. She died while they were there, and so he took the child back East with him. And he was from New England and so when he got home with this dark child, oh, I mean these were people who were abolitionists, and they were supposedly in favor of eliminating slavery, but there were no Blacks there. And so then it comes out that they're really racist, and, oh, she just lets them have it. If you ever get a chance, read that. The novel is *Who Would Have Thought It?*

So she wrote that and then her husband was transferred to I think it was Virginia, where they had the prison for the president of the Confederacy. And so she met them, and she found that what they said about what was happening to the South was very much what was happening to the Southwest. Even though she was a liberal and everything, but she felt that what they had to say about their situation was comparable to what had happened to the Californios, so she became, kind of, friendly with these people from the Confederacy.

And then the husband who liked to drink and this and that had a heart attack and died. Well, she had two children by then and so she decides to return [to California]. And so you have here the Jamul Ranch, which was partly hers but partly still the property of Pio Pico. Pio Pico had been the original grantor or whatever of that. Pio Pico liked women and so when she proposed to him that he grant her the title to the land that was his originally—it had not been paid for then—he did and it became her property. But it was then seen as Californio property and subject to squatters. She came with nothing and got

loans and then the banks were after the property. Then she wrote *The Squatter and the Don* and so she had all this background. The main character Don Mariano [is based in part on] Guadalupe Vallejo. Those are really two good novels and to find them and to find something for the nineteenth century written in English by a Mexican woman was a big find.

02-01:20:56

And so [Beatrice and I] did those two works. We did the intros and the footnotes and everything for them. Then because we had gotten so much material, we put out a whole volume on her [*Conflicts of Interest*, published by Arte Público Press in 2001]—the different periods of her life and also the different legal things where she was sued by her own mother, this and that. And then we added [Ruiz de Burton's] letters, the letters in Spanish because we felt it's important to have them. Making the material available in the original language to historians who will, in the future, study, we felt was really important. So we published the letters in Spanish as she wrote them as well as two or three that she wrote in English. And so this was a whole, I don't know, fifteen years or more of research on María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, who we call Amparo [laughter].

02-01:22:12

Holmes:

Well, let's talk a little bit about your short stories—you just referenced a few of them. Let's talk about the *He Walked in and Sat Down and Other Stories*, a collection you published in 2000.

02-01:22:28

Sánchez:

Okay. So I have always liked to write, and as I said, I had started writing some little short stories that Juan Rodriguez told me to send to Irvine, and they were published there. Those are all very short, little vignettes. Then I started writing a little bit more and in Spanish because Spanish is my native language. I feel like I have the language for all kinds of expressions in Spanish but that my English is more book English than it is really informal English. And so I was writing in Spanish and publishing them here and there, mostly with Nick Kanellos in what became his first *Chicano-Riqueña*. And then I thought, well, why not put them together? Then Beatrice who was by then working here, she translated them for me and so we published them.

The stories are about people in the barrio, people I know, and some of them are about students that I met here, but mostly, they're about people from home, from Texas that I knew. "*Se Arremangó las Mangas*" is a story about a prof here at UCSD. What I did is I knew the stories of two profs, and I put them together. One of the people that told me part of that story was Arturo Madrid. He told me that when he first came, the department used to have dinners and things, and people would go. And he said he had gone to this dinner, and he was standing there, and this woman came to him and asked that he refresh her drink. And he realized that she thought he was a servant there, a waiter or something. I never forgot that story. That, to me, was what this department was all about.

And so then there was another prof here in history—who, as I was saying, I was the first Chicana in my academic department, but there was another prof here who did not identify as Chicano but who was a tenured prof, Ramon [E.] Ruiz, historian. He called himself Mexicano, but he was born in La Jolla—[laughter], and he looked down on us. He didn't think that those of us who were Chicanos would amount to anything. He looked down on us, and we detested him. This was the way it was for a long time and then, eventually, he retired, and he took a job back in Washington with some humanities program or something.

02-01:26:09

When he returned from that, he returned a changed man. All of a sudden, we existed. I know there was that change in him, but I resented all those years before that he had not been supportive. When we did protests or demonstrations or walked around or sat in on people's offices, he was never with us. He did not see that as acceptable behavior. He looked down on us. And he also came from a working-class background, but he was always dressed in a suit, okay.

So there was an African American prof here who did history, and he was denied tenure. He was part of the urban-rural studies, too, and I really felt bad about that [tenure denial]. I wondered if anybody had supported him because I felt he was a good prof. Well, it turned out that Ramon Ruiz had supported him. But he was one of like three people who had supported this prof and so this prof left. But that, to me, was a story. It's a story in the book, which is called "*Se Arremangó las Mangas*," "He Rolled Up His Sleeves," because to me that's what he had done. He was always in his suit, you know? But this time, he dared and so I felt like he had done that. He had rolled up his sleeves and had spoken out in favor of this man, and even though he didn't win that fight, it was an important fight. And then I thought, well, what about the background, and so I brought in Arturo Madrid. [laughter] He must have gone through stuff like that—but I don't know anything about it. I took from here and there and composed a story.

02-01:28:37

Holmes:

Oh, that's nice. I wanted to ask you about another book, *Lunar Braceros* [2125–2148].

02-01:28:43

Sánchez:

Oh, okay. I've always been fascinated by space, and this is a family malady. When we were kids, we would sit outside at night—and San Angelo is a small town so there weren't that many lights and especially in our neighborhood—and look at the stars. And then San Angelo has a military air base there, Goodfellow [Air Force Base], and they were probably doing experimental stuff there, but all of a sudden, there would be lights that no one could explain. There were little towns, little rural towns around, and I remember reading that this woman was driving from some little town to San Angelo, and she saw this light. And so what was that? It was something really amazing, not a plane. So

we started thinking there could be flying saucers in our area because they had been spotted, or so it was said, in New Mexico, and the whole Roswell thing. We were very much into that, thinking about that stuff, and we wanted to be invaded from outer space. [laughter]

And so we'd look out there, and my younger brother Ruben—whereas my older brother Alex was the artist and literary person, my younger brother was more into astro-engineering, and that's what he wanted to do. We'd be out there looking and thinking: What if we ran into them? What if we—? And, yeah, it was always a topic for us and then, of course, we all went to Austin. When there were all these programs on TV, like *Star Trek*, I didn't have a TV back then and I never watched TV while I was a grad student. But when I came to California, and they started showing [Star Trek reruns] again—I think it was like in the eighties or something—I became hooked on that. It was a whole kind of taking the problems of today, projecting them into the future, and having all kinds of things happening there. And, of course, when one looks at *Star Trek* today, the early one, oh, man, we didn't have the technology that we have today with the computer and all, so it's very kind of lame. But still, the idea of traveling through space was just great. [laughter]

02-01:31:35

So then Beatrice and I who have done a lot of work together, we decided that we would try to write a science fiction novel, and we did. It's unusual because most fiction is very individualist, written by one person. We wrote *Lunar Braceros* together; each one of us comes up with different ideas, and we compose together then rewrite this and that. People said that ours is the first Chicano science fiction novel, and we were working on a second one, [since published (*Keep Me Posted, Logins from Tomorrow*, published in 2020 by Floricanto Press). It took a while to finish it because there's] all this other stuff that one has to do. But projecting what will happen in the future, a future we will not see, but thinking about it, and, yeah, it's exciting.

02-01:32:31
Holmes:

Well, before we end, I want to get your reflections on the field and its evolution over these last fifty years. In your view, what has been some of the major developments in the field especially in literature that really strike you?

02-01:32:54
Sánchez:

Well, I think the fact that the production of literature [by Chicanos/as] is now substantial and that we are no longer having to—well, some of us still are having to do it, finding small presses to publish our work. But a number of writers are producing works that are being published by mainstream presses and so the literature has gained a status that it didn't use to have. But like our science fiction novel, where were we going to publish it? And so there was this Calaca Press in town, and there was a husband and wife who were doing it, and they were publishing stories and mostly poetry. We asked them, and they said yeah and so we found that [venue]. And then because they called their press Calaca Press, which is the *calavera*, the skull and everything and

then they had a friend who does drawings, and he said—they wanted to have illustrations. Okay, well, the space people should be also skeleton-type people. I don't know if you've seen the novel? Have you seen the novel?

02-01:34:22

Holmes:

Um-hm.

02-01:34:23

Sánchez:

So we have these astronauts that have the *calaca* face. Anyway, I mean so it was fun, but there are still small presses that publish things, but now some of our main writers like Cisneros, like Castillo, like Viramontes are publishing with mainstream presses. And now they're including Chicano literature in American lit anthologies. Anthologies, that is something that no one questions, just like they include African American lit. Yeah, we don't have too many texts in there, but they include Chicano writings. There are conferences, the MLA [Modern Language Association]. It has sessions on Chicano, Latino because now it's Chicano, Latino literature. Because the Dominicans and the Puerto Ricans and the Cubans are doing a lot of publication, and curiously they're primarily publishing with mainstream presses whereas we started just small, small presses. There's been a mainstreaming of Chicano, Chicana, Latino, Latina literature that was [invisible,] not there and that we probably felt would not happen, [including even if in a token fashion, MARB can now be found in Norton, something that would have been unheard of even 30 years ago]. That literature is now available, and it's gained acceptance to a certain extent. [There is a field now unlike before.]

Now, what kind of literature is it or where is it going? Sometimes, people expect the literature to have *brujas*, witches, magical elements to it and so they think that that's what we do. [Rudolfo] Anaya in New Mexico has all these *brujas*, and people who are into the *kachinas*, the indigenous gods and deities that come and help people do this and that. So we are still being seen more as somehow providing some kind of marvelous element to the literature. [But that's limiting, to my mind, stereotyping of a sort.]

Within the field of science fiction, there are number of writings now, mostly in terms of chapbooks or coming out in magazines about queer vampires, queer werewolves, like that. So the queer turn has become an accepted dimension of the literature. That's [good and] pretty popular these days. We're doing like a variety of different things today that we were not doing before and did not have the opportunity to do before. I think that in terms of acceptance, the literature has much more acceptance within the field than it used to. Of course, we didn't even use to exist. In the seventies, eighties, we were still trying to find [or make] a place for ourselves within the field, and now today, I think it's accepted. There aren't too many of us writing, still, but there are a number of writers who are now part of the mainstream, part of American literature. I don't like the term American—[laughter]—but that's the field, American literature. We have a lot of not only people doing [fiction but

plays as well, like] Moraga, Cherríe Moraga. I just used this quarter her play, *Watsonville: [Some Place Not Here]*, and she has this other play, *Heroes and Saints*. I think those are her two best plays. They're about labor. Then Josefina Lopez, *Real Women Have Curves*. Her play and the movie are so different that it's interesting to discuss in class—what happened to her play when it got to the screen. [laughter]. So there are all kinds of things happening now, film and plays and fiction and short stories and novels. And now, we even added science fiction to it, so it's now becoming more heterogeneous—we're doing a lot of different things.

02-01:39:20

Holmes:

As one of the earliest Chicana scholars in the field, discuss your observations of the growing role of women in the field.

02-01:39:33

Sánchez:

Okay. Well, so originally you have people who were doing things in history on [Ernesto] Galarza, people writing about farmworkers. Then a lot of people, Carlos Munoz [Jr.], Juan Gomez-Q writing about the Chicano movement, those were very common. [Mario] Barrera writing about labor and segmentation of labor. Paredes doing folklore. Those are the main kind of writers/scholars that we could associate as coming from a Chicano background.

We have a number of women writing today, like historian Emma Perez—she also has a novel about early Texas and a queer woman riding around Texas. She's one of the few women who write about the fact that there were Indians in Texas, Indians that we exploited—we, meaning people of Mexican and Spanish descent. There are a lot of people in New Mexico too that are writing about their past. And in California, people have written about, as I said, women in labor, women at the canneries, women as maids, women who leave their children behind and migrate here.

I think that we are now involved in many different fields, not only literature, not only history but sociology, political science. There are women who are going into all kinds of scientific fields in terms of health and things like that. We, Chicanos, Chicanas are now able to study in different departments and get into universities. We have had several students who have gone into medical school when that was simply not something to be seen in the past. I have a student now who has just been accepted at Berkeley, so our students, our undergrad students are going all over the place. I have a lot of students, a lot of ex-students who are now profs at Kansas, at UC Davis, at Seattle, at Santa Cruz, etc. We're spreading out, not only in the field of literature, but also many other fields. That was not the case before when the opportunity to study [was not open to us].

And then we have a growing number of DACA [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals] students, people who immigrated here as children, and I

consider them to be Chicanos, Chicanas because they spend their childhood here in working-class barrios just as I did. But there are people who come here when they're already in their late teens with a totally different experience and many of them are what we call "*cremita*." They're middle class or better in Mexico, and they cannot relate to us. They look down on us too. They call us *pochos*, this and that. Within our Mexican origin group, we have our divisions as well—urban, rural, but mostly class. And then we've grown [demographically] in ways that we now have large numbers of Central American immigrants that are part of our community as well, and many of our students here are of Central American origin. So we have become a very complex [and contradictory] community.

Beatrice and I wrote an article for *Aztlán* on the Latino Bloc ["Theses on the Latino Bloc: A Critical Perspective," *Aztlán*, vol. 31, no. 2, Fall 2006], where we talk about these things. We are a very heterogeneous population divided by all kinds of things, but yet, there are moments when we have to come together. Like during one of the immigration protests in LA that I went to. We were thousands and thousands and then there was one here [in San Diego as well]. I don't think I had ever seen that many [Latinos]. I don't say thousands, but at least five, 600 people marching through downtown San Diego. We came together, not only Chicanos, Latinos, like Central Americans, but whites, too, as well. We're now all over. We are in every state of the union. We're no longer limited to the southwest. [That's the sea change, and that's the reason behind the xenophobic backlash we're seeing now.]

02-01:45:20

When I go someplace back East, I always look at the kitchen of a restaurant, who's doing the cooking, who's doing the dishwashing, and many of them are Mexicans. In New York City, you go down the street, you hear, what's Mexican Spanish, although often it's Caribbean Spanish, but Mexican Spanish. And now, there are Mexican restaurants all over the place. We are now all over the country, and we [Latinos/Latinas] are going to become the dominant in terms of demographics, the dominant population in this country. Within a hundred years, we will be the majority, but will we be politically dominant? I don't think so. We're going to have the South Africa situation here—we'll be the majority, but not in control, and we'll have to do something about that then. But we are a growing population, and we are very mixed in terms of different national origins but growing and studying more and developing in many different fields.

02-01:46:28

Holmes:

I wanted to ask, we all stand on the shoulders of others, and as we were discussing before, we always have those whose names come up to be interviewed in a project such as this but, unfortunately, who have passed. Is there anyone that stands out that you would like to recognize?

02-01:46:57

Sánchez:

Well, yes. I would recognize [someone like] Carlos Blanco-Aguinaga who, despite being born in Spain but being in exile in Mexico, became very Mexicanized and then when he came to the US, he became very *Chicanizado*. He was our support. He was a MEChA, I would say, mentor. A number of people here who came to UCSD were mentored by him and a lot of students were too. And I who came here as a prof was mentored, not because he went out of his way, but just by being around him and hearing and seeing what he was reading. He was a big, big mentor, a major influence, and he was into Marxism, and he spoke about that, and he spoke about what was happening all over the world. He had a very internationalist perspective, which I hope I have learned from. He was a very important person here. He died, what now, about three or four years ago—he was a very important person to all those who knew him. And he was a writer and one of the main critics of Peninsular literature in Spain, even though he was raised in Mexico. But then later he went back, and he became very important there as well as here in terms of the Chicano and the Latino and the African American. He was very involved in the African American movement as well. So, yes, he definitely stands out.

Unfortunately, I never spoke directly to [Américo] Paredes. Many people often say, "Oh, you went to Texas, so you worked with Paredes?" "No, I did not," and as I said, I had problems not with him personally because I didn't even know him, but the fact that he was not involved with us [actively and] politically, with us the students, I resented that. But as I said, he and José Limón went and asked that I do that course on Chicano Spanish, and I agreed to do it. It changed my [academic direction, so indirectly Paredes was a key figure for me]. I didn't know what I was going to do and then when I did that, I realized I would write on Chicano Spanish for my dissertation. Not the way I wrote that article because that article was written in terms of how I would present it in class but in terms of a transformational and generative grammar thing. So there are people that are there like on the sidelines and become important to one in some way or another.

02-01:50:06

Holmes:

Well, Rosaura, this has been wonderful. Any final thoughts that you would like to say?

02-01:50:12

Sánchez:

Well, just that there are many, many other people working in the field that [should be interviewed], I feel, like, okay, Marta Sánchez, who was here for a while and then went to Arizona. Arturo Madrid, Dave Gutierrez, [David] Montejano, other people who, I feel, are important figures in the field and that I hope maybe you'll have a chance to interview. They're important to the rest of us in terms of what we do and where we go and what we think.

[Let me just add that since the interview, Beatrice Pita and I have published a book analyzing the history and literary representation of Spanish/Mexican settler colonialism in Texas, New Mexico and Oklahoma. The book *Spatial*

and Discursive Violence in the US Southwest was published by Duke University Press in 2021.]

02-01:50:56

Holmes: All right. Well, hey, thank you so much, Rosaura.

02-01:50:58

Sánchez: Oh, thank you.

[End of Interview]