

Ricardo Romo

*Ricardo Romo: Reflections on a Career in Chicana/o Studies*

Chicana/o Studies Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by  
Todd Holmes  
in 2018

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Ricardo Romo

## Abstract

Ricardo Romo is professor emeritus and the former president of the University of Texas, San Antonio. Born and raised in San Antonio's westside, Professor Romo began teaching courses in Chicana/o studies in 1970 and received his PhD in history from UCLA in 1975. In the years that followed, he held faculty positions at UC San Diego and the University of Texas, Austin. He served as president of UTSA from 1999 to 2017. He is the author of numerous publications within field of Chicana/o studies, including: "Responses to Mexican Immigration" (1975); *New Directions in Chicano Scholarship* (1977); "Chicanos in the West" (1982); *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio* (1983); "George I. Sanchez and the Civil Rights Movement" (1986); and "Borderland Murals: Chicano Artifacts in Transition" (1992). In addition to his scholarship and faculty appointments, Professor Romo also served in many administrative capacities before his presidency at UTSA. Such positions include: Director of the Center for Mexican American Studies at UT Austin; Director of the Tomás Rivera Center in Texas; and Vice Provost at UT Austin. In this interview, Professor Romo discusses: his family background and upbringing in Texas; his educational journey from high school to attending UT Austin; coming to California and teaching Chicano studies courses at California State University, Northridge; his graduate experience at UCLA and establishing himself in the profession; reflections on the state of Chicana/o studies in the early years and how the field evolved over the decades; the aims and contributions of his scholarship in the field; the reception of Chicana/o studies in higher education and at the universities he served; moving up in university administration as a Chicano scholar; serving as president of UTSA; as well as his thoughts on important works, themes, and high points in the field's development over the last fifty years.

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## Project History

By Todd Holmes  
Berkeley, California

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



### **Advisory Council**

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## Interview 1: October 18, 2018

01-00:00:01

Holmes:

All right, this is Todd Holmes with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. Today's date is October 18, 2018, and I have the pleasure of sitting down with Ricardo Romo, for the Chicana/o Studies Oral History Project. We are here in his beautiful home in San Antonio, Texas. Ricardo, thanks so much for sitting down with me today.

01-00:00:29

Romo:

Thank you, Todd.

01-00:00:31

Holmes:

Well, in our two sessions here, we want to talk about your life and career and your observations in the development and evolution of Chicano and Chicana studies. To start though, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself and your family background.

01-00:00:47

Romo:

Okay. I was born in San Antonio. My family came here about 1900, from Mexico, and so my grandfather came at a very early age. He came to America about 1880 and then same to San Antonio in 1900. He was a field worker, agricultural worker, but technically, he really—when I asked him what he did for a living he said, "I broke horses." He was a "ranch guy," who then turned to picking cotton. You can't break horses forever, you know, it's a pretty rough sport, a pretty rough job, it was more so that was his job on the ranches.

They grew up here; both my parents met working in the fields. My grandfather would pick up some neighborhood kids and take them out—drive out for a couple of days, pick cotton and drive back. Both my mom and dad worked in the fields from a very early age, but not migrant workers. He pretty much decided to settle down in San Antonio, unlike individuals who went away for months and months, many of them going up north to pick crops in Wisconsin and other areas. Very popular here, among a lot of our neighbors but he just kind of more retired here. So, when my dad came back from the service, he opened up a grocery store, a mom and pop grocery store, and so I spent a lot—they ran a grocery store and as kids, we spent a lot of time in the grocery store. We're a family of five and pretty much everybody lives here. My brother doesn't live too far from here, but the five of us live here in the area.

01-00:02:55

Holmes:

Talk a little bit about your family environment and childhood.

01-00:03:00

Romo:

Growing up, it always had—I'll show you the neighborhood. It hasn't changed at all in seventy-five years for that matter, and I wrote a couple of essays. There's one essay I wrote about the cultural icons of San Antonio. If you get a chance, look at that, because I also throw in a little bit there that yeah, you

know I used to go to the movies there and we used to kind of hang out in that area. I like hearing from other people, because I always gain something from it, so I'll call an old timer and interview him, and he says well, here's what I remember about that neighborhood. I've actually gone back to thinking more about the neighborhood, because I'm writing about art and the neighborhood and kind of things that happened.

I grew up in a—I would say my first years were in a very poor neighborhood. My parents actually lived in the housing project, which was one of the first housing projects in America. It was built in like 1939 and it was such a big deal that Eleanor Roosevelt came to do some ribbon cutting for it, because it was one of the first in the country and it was a very large housing project. When my dad went off to the service, mom took the two kids and said you know—I can't afford the housing project, so we went to live with my grandparents. It looks like we spent some time with one grandparent and then another grandparents, and actually, the place I was born, in the West Side, it was a little grocery store. Apparently, her mother had knowledge about running grocery stores, from Mexico maybe, and ran a little grocery store. I don't know how she did it, but she did it. And I was born in back of that little grocery store.

One of the artists here in town is a very good artist, and just won the Joan Mitchell Award, which is a really big deal, \$25,000 prize. I got her to paint the little grocery store, and I can show you an image of that, where I was born. So I grew up in a couple of neighborhoods because of my grandparents living a little but further west, this way north, and the other ones lived kind of right in the middle of the real popular West Side, more the commercial. If you were in East L.A., this would be like Brooklyn Avenue or Cesar Chavez Boulevard, so we grew up in a very commercial, popular area, lots of activity going on. There were four bars, kind of wild bars, within a block of my house, so everything was popping or something was always happening there, especially Friday and Saturday nights. So of course, at an early age, my parents had to be very protective; "Don't go out in the street at nighttime." But it was a good experience. I didn't know how the rest of the world lived. We didn't have a car and we didn't ride the bus much, so that was my world. On a couple of occasions, my mom would take us downtown on the bus and we'd go to a movie downtown and go to a restaurant downtown, on the bus, and as far as I knew, there was only two parts of the world; there was my neighborhood, and then downtown where the movies and department stores were. I had really no knowledge of the rest of the city. Later, as I got to be maybe ten or twelve, we kind of drove around on occasions and got to see a little bit more of the town.

01-00:07:15  
Holmes:

You had written before, that your parents were very active in the community. Could you talk a little bit about that?

01-00:07:22

Romo:

My dad was especially active. He was the director locally, the head guy, of the American GI Forum, which had been established by Hector Garcia in Corpus Christi, and the founding of that is in a lot of history books, in terms of the [Felix] Longoria case and the denial of the family to have a proper burial. So my dad was a veteran and that particular case kind of galvanized and got people really engaged about our rights, about civil rights. Dr. Garcia had initially started all of this, the movement, not so much the Longoria case, but felt that the veterans coming back did not know about the benefits, like the GI benefits for education or the benefits for healthcare or burial, and that they were not familiar with this. He wanted to educate people about that. He felt the veterans knew that that was something they lacked, so they engaged my dad and others. He was involved for quite a long time. So they had this little grocery store and they survived twenty-five years at the grocery store, and then the big stores kind of came in, the convenient stores came in and just killed their business; not only their business, but a lot of businesses on the West Side.

So they moved way south and opened up a restaurant, and then everything changed for him then, because he was really kind of trying to—struggled for financial survival. It was the kind of business where the big days were Friday, Saturday and Sunday, which is when they were open in the restaurant. The rest of the days they were kind of running around and cleaning, but I'd say for twenty-five years he was pretty active. The last thing I remember him being active in was the commercials on TV, they had Dr Pepper, "I'm a Pepper, you're a Pepper," you know and didn't like that. Then the Frito Chips, the Frito Bandito stuff was you know, here's this Mexican looking guy with a Mexican hat, a kind of revolutionary kind of guy, stealing chips all the time, and so he was the Frito Bandito. They were on the warpath, the American GI Forum was, and they were one of the ones.

Now, the other groups in town included LULAC, [League of United Latin American Citizens] and they worked together, collaborated on stuff. They actually didn't really like each other. The American GI Forum called them the "LULAC Cadillac group," that they were kind of way too much middle-class and upper-class people. Both were good organizations, and LULAC had more lawyers and others, and teachers, than the American GI Forum. The forum just had veterans and many of them were just kind of blue-collar workers.

01-00:10:43

Holmes:

So, growing up in the West Side of San Antonio, you talked a little bit about your neighborhood and community there. Maybe talk a little bit about your high school years. You went to Fox Tech High School?

01-00:10:58

Romo:

Yeah. The school nearest my house was Lanier Vocational High School. My dad had gone there and he had been kicked out when he was about age fifteen, for playing basketball too long, in the noon hour, and they just kind of ran off,

these kids. Kind of like come on in, the bell rang, and they were just like "one more shot!" The principal got mad at all of them and kicked them all out of school, just saying you guys go home, you're not ready for school. So he went downtown and opened up a shoeshine stand right next to one of those popular theaters and that's what he was doing, and then decided he'd go back to school. Tech High School, which was San Antonio Technical and Vocational High School—actually, the school changed names three times. He actually went there when it was called Main Avenue, and then it got changed to a vocational school, so it was San Antonio Technical and Vocational High School, and they had night classes. So he went back and graduated from high school at age twenty-three, and that's when he went into the service. He actually graduated and then Pearl Harbor came and he went into the service. So yeah, he was very conscious of the fact that he didn't have a high school education and that meant something to him. When he came back, he had two kids and wanted to start supporting the family and didn't think about college. I doubt he could have gone to college, based on the financial needs. He would have probably been interested, he would have probably liked college, but he didn't do it.

My mom stayed home, she had five kids, but my mom had actually, interestingly, not only worked picking crops, but actually worked as a pecan sheller. There's a lot of history and stuff here, with Emma Tenayuca and that group. My dad said that in the thirties, he went to hear her speak and she was just an incredible speaker, fiery speaker. She was nineteen years old and a graduate of Tech High School, which is where he had gone to school. He might have known her in school for all I know. In any event, he did follow that kind of activity and all of that happened '36 to '39, and '39 was a big, kind of settlement kind of deal. So, my mom had been shelling pecans when I was a kid and worked very hard, and then worked very hard to kind of raise five kids.

01-00:13:48

Holmes:

You started attending Fox High School, was it in 1958?

01-00:13:54

Romo:

Yeah. I graduated in '62, so I arrived in '59.

01-00:13:57

Holmes:

Okay. What was the environment like for you at that high school?

01-00:14:03

Romo:

Well, it was probably about 99 percent Mexican school. My wife has gone through the yearbook looking for Anglos and she found one or two, but it was pretty much a Mexican school by that time. It didn't start off that way in the early part of the century, but it just kind of transitioned into that. To me, it was my neighborhood, kind of like there you are and you think this is great, and there's always people helping. I never thought too much about poverty until I got to about high school, and then sort of started reading the paper and there

would be reports that it's one of the poorest communities in America, one of the poorest urban areas in America, became conscious a little bit, of that. But while I was with Tech, we just went to school and you know, probably would have been working blue collar jobs had I not been a standout in track. I actually got into track because I was doing what a lot of kids did in my neighborhood at age thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen, and that was boxing, so I was trying to be in golden gloves boxing. I would go to the gym and train and box, and skip rope, and then they'd have us running around the blocks, sort of like Rocky, you know kind of running. I was in junior high at the time and that got me into really good shape, so when I joined the track team, which was sort of by accident, kind of went out there, I was the best. I was in the best shape, I was already the best runner, because everybody else had been doing nothing over the summertime, whereas I had been training to box. So the fall comes and we go to a cross country meet and I jumped in there and ran two miles and got second to the best runner in the city the previous year. So they said you're just a tenth grader and this guy's a senior and he's the best in the city and he barely beat you, sort of like a couple of feet, in two miles, so you've got some talent. From that point on, I didn't lose any races until the state meet, and then I won three state championships, but I was also the best in the state and then by the time I was a senior, one of the best in the country. That sort of changed everything for me, fortunately, and by the eleventh grade they were saying you're going to go—I was actually getting scholarship letters in the tenth grade.

01-00:17:11

Holmes: Oh, wow.

01-00:17:13

Romo: So my coach said you know, "There are coaches already interested in you and they were surprised to learn that you were just a sophomore." So that encouraged them to say you're going to go to college, you've got to take the academic courses. So, I didn't get into any shop courses. I would take like business math, and then I would take some of the business courses, which included typing. I was the only male in the typing class. Everybody was going to be a secretary, and I was there because it meant that I didn't take plumbing or something else.

01-00:17:55

Holmes: During those years at high school, we also see the rise of civil rights activism beginning to percolate.

01-00:18:08

Romo: Right.

01-00:18:10

Holmes: Did you have any observations of that during your high school years?

01-00:18:14

Romo:

Yes I did. The school was 99 percent Mexican and 1 percent black. We probably had thirty to fifty black kids in the school and a lot of them went there because they wanted to be in sports. I was on the basketball team and on the track team, and on the basketball team, I'd say half of the team was black, and they had just gotten along. So, my grandparents lived right on the dividing line, where there was a black neighborhood and a Hispanic neighborhood, and there was sort of this street where most of the blacks lived on this other side. But, there was a playground where, when I stayed with my grandfather a lot, I'd go play ball there and everybody in the playground was black, I was like one of the few Hispanic kids, and I got to meet some of those guys. Later on, they ended up at Fox Tech and I knew them and became friends with them.

Numerous experiences, but I think the one that was the most telling was 1960. I went downtown to take the bus, I rode the bus everywhere, and I went downtown to take the bus and one of our basketball players, whose name was Joel, was standing in front of the Aztec Theater, where they were protesting the fact that they had to go—there was a back entrance, or they had to sit in the balcony. There were three big theaters and one of them was the Majestic, and there you sat in the balcony. I believe the Aztec was pretty much the same way; if you were black, you sat in the balcony, and everybody else got to sit underneath there. There were some theaters, I'm sure that were sort of divided if they didn't have a big balcony in the back. So he would protest—he was with several other people and they were protesting, and he asked me would I join him on this protest, and I said, "Well I can just join you for a while," because my job, I had to be at the grocery store, my little mom and pop grocery store that dad had. When I got there, my dad left, went home, he'd been there since seven in the morning, and I'd get there about three or four and then he would like head on home and go relax. So he didn't really care for me to be doing anything after school, like anything else. Fortunately, track didn't take a lot of time and I was done by three or four, and so I said I can stay a little while, what are we going to do? He said, "Well, you go up to the counter, to the ticket office, and you say you want two tickets; one for you and one for me," Joel said, and I said, "Joel, I can't go to the movies, I've got to go home." He said, "Oh, they're not going to let us in." He said when you tell him that you know, there's two, one—they're going to say well, you can't buy tickets, you have to go in the balcony, and then so no, we don't want to go in the balcony. So then we just get back in line again and do this for a while, and of course people would see that we're protesting. So we did that.

Joel and I, we talked several years ago, and I told him, "I remember you being on the basketball team, but I especially remember you being a trumpet player." He said, "You remember that?" I said, "Yeah, you were a trumpet player and you were in classes with me." I do get to see my buddies. This week, Tuesday, we got together with five of my buddies for lunch, and they all kinds of have different jobs, you know one was in sheet metal, he learned sheet metal working there and he spent the rest of his life in sheet metal. The

other one was in drafting, became an architect, and the other one went into the service and spent his entire career. He went five tours in Vietnam and he became—I don't know what he did, I think he was in interrogation, but anyway, he doesn't talk too much about it. His whole life was in the service and he retired after whatever, thirty, forty years in the service. We were very good buddies in high school, best buddies in high school, he was there, one of the guys that I'd see all the time. In fact, when I went with David Montejano, I said to him that I'm going to see this guy later, he and I were on the basketball team together, and the guy on my right, when I went to lunch, was on the basketball team. That's kind of one thing about coming back home and these guys are still here, they're healthy and we visit and talk about high school and stuff.

High school to me was sort of interesting, and kind of began to expand my horizons and view of San Antonio. Actually, the junior high school that I went to, Horace Mann, was an all Anglo junior high, and I had gone there because my junior high, in my neighborhood, had had a gang shooting and my mom got real worried, because the guys who were involved in the shooting were from our neighborhood. There were so many different neighborhoods at that school, and she said, "If you go there you're going to be viewed as kind of like from this area and they're going to pick on you," and so she encouraged me to go to another school, which at that time I really couldn't have gone, except giving my uncle's address, and I did, so I went there the whole time.

High school was open. You could be from anywhere in the city and go, so then I went downtown, and I went downtown because the school four blocks away from me, which was my school, Lanier Vocational—Lanier Voks, that was their nickname, the Voks, the Lanier Vocational High School—was where my dad had gone and he'd been kicked out of there, so he still had this little thing about that high school. He didn't really like the high school and I think that principal that kicked him out may have still been there. But anyway, I told him I can go to Tech—and that's where he had gotten his degree there at night and thought it was a pretty good little school, so that's where I went.

01-00:25:26

Holmes:

Let's talk a little bit about your undergraduate years at UT Austin. You enter in 1962 and were you the first in your family to go to college?

01-00:25:38

Romo:

My brother went to a community college in '61, he went to San Antonio College, SAC, and his dream was to go to UT, and he actually realized that dream. I was the first to go to a four-year school in my family, but I did have some cousins that had gone to college.

01-00:26:00

Holmes:

And you chose UT, not just because—I'm sure many people here in Texas always want to go to UT, but you also were awarded a track scholarship, is that correct?



01-00:26:11

Romo:

Oh yeah, yeah, I was number two in the nation. In the national high school championships, that's a race I probably could have won, did not run a smart race, but I was number two in the country, so yeah, I got scholarship offers from lots of schools, and inquiries and stuff from West Point, Stanford. So yeah, Texas was one of the schools that pursued me, and UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles] pursued me, but Texas, my mom said go there, this will be a good; stay home, stay close, it was only eighty miles down the road. So I went, I was glad to go. There were four hundred athletes and there were two Hispanics in the whole athletic program, everything, swimming, tennis, everything, there were two Hispanics, and one of them left after the first semester. He came in with me and then didn't last but one semester and went home. He was from Houston. He was a big, chubby, offensive guard. Yeah, that was kind of an eye-opener.

01-00:27:36

Holmes:

You majored in history, is that correct?

01-00:27:39

Romo:

What I did is I didn't know what I wanted to major in, so my first couple years, I kind of just—and then I found history. History was of course, the area where I took most of my classes and most courses, more than anything else, but to get my degree and to teach, I had to go do a teaching credential. So I ended up getting an education degree with a major in history kind of deal, but history was what I was majoring in.

01-00:28:13

Holmes:

Did you consider other majors?

01-00:28:18

Romo:

No, none at all, no.

01-00:28:17

Holmes:

What inspired you to go into education?

01-00:28:20

Romo:

I went into my first history class and it was such an eye-opener for me, you know, because I didn't have any history in high school, they didn't teach us much in history. So all of a sudden everything they said was kind of like new to me, I mean I kind of had this sort of outline. I knew that Abraham Lincoln had been president and stuff like that, but I didn't know anything about the Civil War. So, when we got into this introductory history course, I was like this is fascinating, and I loved it from day one, so that was my major, I did major in history. My BS degree includes education and history because of my teaching credential needs, and I was going to become a teacher and I did become a teacher in social studies, we'll get to that in a minute. But yeah, history was absolutely the most fascinating thing. I took psychology, I took philosophy, and I took languages—forget it, there's nothing like history, so it was always my love.

01-00:29:34

Holmes:

Discuss a little bit about your experience at UT, particularly as you were just discussing the demographics there—this was before a lot of the diversity initiatives were in place.

01-00:29:50

Romo:

I entered UT when it had probably twenty thousand students—I think when I graduated, they talked about twenty-four thousand. It was a place where the initial couple of years, I didn't really do anything but run track or study, it was just so hard and so much different from high school. I was telling Harriett [Romo] the other day, how people remember me as a runner and they'll say, "Yeah, I used to see you run to school and I used to see you run back from school," and she said, "Did you really run from school?" I said, "No, I didn't run from school, I took the bus, but I ran to the bus station." I was always running, I liked running, I said, "But I didn't really do that." Some of these people remember me and she said, "Did you have any books?" I said, "No we didn't ever have any homework." I cannot remember a single time in which they assigned us anything that we couldn't do in the library in fifth period, just kind of knock that out and go home and go help my dad.

My brother went to a different kind of school. He didn't want to go to Tech, he went to a regular school, and he had homework all the time. I used to sit there and just kind of watch him just tearing his hair out, and it was kind of, "What are you doing, what are you working on?" He'd say, oh, I've got to write this, I've got to do this. Really? I never had that. It was just like you know, I cruised through, made As, which helped me get into Texas, I was an A student. There were only two of us that went to college. There's a graduating class of 430, and two of us, John Taboada, and I were the only ones that went to a four-year school. He was a science whiz. I joke, because I said, you know only two of us went to four-year college, and both of us got PhDs. I said what are the odds? Think about those percentage numbers. He lives in town and I see him on occasion, I run into him on occasion too, he's done really well. He became a scientist in optics, sort works with different things in optics.

I might add, when I got to Texas and there was twenty thousand students, as I became a little bit more conscious—now, the first two years, I don't have time, I'm just kind of over my head and I'm working and studying all the time, and running twice a day. By the time I ran twice a day and then studied, there was not much time for anything else. But about my junior year—this is now, you start entering the time of Santo Domingo, and the Marines land in Santo Domingo, 1965. People in my class were just talking about it and then my professor, Warren Dean, who taught Latin American History, he was like super upset about it, and he said anybody who wants to kind of talk about this, come by my office, we're going to have this little study session, and it was all about that, and of course Vietnam started, having all kind of conversations about that. I remember one time he said, "I don't think I've ever met more than twelve Hispanics in the whole school here." I said, "That's how many there

are, twelve of us," [laughter] and we kind of see each other walking across the mall, you see the same ones. There weren't many. There could have been a hundred but it seemed like a really small group of Hispanics at the time, and you had a lot of kids coming from rural communities, their thoughts and images about Mexicans was pretty biased, pretty weird, and I saw that.

01-00:34:45

Holmes:

Well, talk a little bit about maybe the diversification of topics in the classroom. This is something, particularly as we see with Chicano and Chicana studies, one of the biggest impacts over the years is how the history offered in college classrooms really changed, right?

01-00:35:09

Romo:

Yeah.

01-00:35:10

Holmes:

It's a more diverse focus of the experiences of that broader category of people we call Americans. Did you see that at UT, or what was your experience?

01-00:35:24

Romo:

Well, first of all, I started history, you know I didn't see any—we didn't have much conversation, but I did write an article, actually for the UC Berkeley Law School, called "George I. Sanchez." I don't know if you've seen that piece?

01-00:35:41

Holmes:

Yes.

01-00:35:42

Romo:

George I. Sanchez was a professor there at UT Austin, in the School of Education, and I got to meet him. It didn't occur to me to take a class with him but apparently, he was just a great teacher, he was engaged in a couple of civil rights cases, and probably, had I taken his class, I probably would have learned a lot more about civil rights earlier on because he was involved with several of the initial desegregation. Kids here in Texas went to Mexican schools and I went to a Mexican—I mean, my elementary school was a hundred percent Mexican. Had I gone to Irving Junior High would have been a hundred percent no blacks, a hundred percent Mexican, but as I told you, I went to Tech. They had just pretty much opened it up and by 1954 they said blacks could go anywhere in the city. Well, blacks couldn't go anywhere in the city because of transportation and everything else, so there was certain schools where you had—Tech was right downtown and you could get there on the bus pretty easy, so we did have people, and Hispanics came from everywhere else.

When I go to Texas, and you know my brother and I have talked about this, and he said, "Do you remember the barber shop across the street there, in front of the dorms?" I said yeah. "I never went there, I just, I would go downtown to get my hair cut, because downtown was Hispanic, the Hispanic barbers there." I said, "You'd walk fifteen blocks to get a haircut?" He said yeah and

said well, just as well, you know the guys across the street would not cut Mexicans—they would not give Mexicans a haircut, he said they'd let you just sit there. He said that's what happened to me, it happened to Danny, and I said you know, that's kind of interesting. I didn't go there actually, because it was a little more expensive, so I said I went to the cheaper one. He said that's what we experienced.

Because I had dining privileges, I'm an athlete, I've got friends there, I've got all my meals, every day of the week there, except on Sunday nights. On Sunday nights, we would have to go and get our own food. They'd give us ten dollars a month for laundry and I would use that money to go across the street. I remember the first time that I went across the street, the guy who ran this little café, we called him pops, was black, and he ran this little operation. There were no blacks there; they didn't enter until 1964, but I didn't really see a lot of what might have been happening in that city because that was my little world. If I could walk to pops' place and get a hot dog on Sunday nights, I did. Had I gone anywhere else, would I have experienced the stuff? I might have. Now, I knew stuff was going on and I saw that growing up a little bit because the priest at the local church would ask for volunteers and we would go do stuff with him. He took us one time, several of us, all the way to Abilene, because he had connections there and they'd gone to school together and they were doing stuff, and we stopped in Abilene to get hamburgers and we walked in and he was Hispanic. We walked in and he didn't have his collar on, or maybe he did. I don't think he had his collar on that morning and we walked in and they said, "We don't serve Latin Americans," and he said, "Well, that's not a problem, we're Mexican Americans." They were all, "We don't serve you either." You know, I'm thinking he did have his collar on, and the lady said I'm sorry, I just feel really bad, but the boss is not going to let me serve you all, and he said, "That's fine." So we knew prejudice existed.

My dad actually was involved with a really important case. So when we were probably ten to fourteen years of age, my dad had heard that New Braunfels, which is kind of a little German community, there was a park there, Landa Park, and then there's another place that might have been the same place, that they wouldn't serve Mexicans in the park, you know this is this giant public swimming area. People swam in the river but there was this giant space and my dad said we're going to go over there and go to the park. We drove thirty, forty miles and got there and said let's go get something to eat. We went in there and they said, "we don't serve Mexicans here," and there was like five hundred people all over the point. He said, "You don't serve Mexicans?" So then he wrote a letter to the newspaper the next day and said I'm a veteran, I served my country, we fought against people who were racist and so forth. I kept that little letter for a long time, but I don't know if I could find it easily. So that would have been about between 1953 and '56, and the next week, Henry B. Gonzalez, who was a state senator, went to that place and he showed up and they said, "We don't serve Mexicans." He said, "Well, you guys are going to hear from me," and so he went on a giant, long filibuster in the senate

of the Texas Capitol in Austin, that lasted for hours and hours, all about segregation and ending segregation and equality for Mexican Americans. It's a very famous filibuster and he got to be well known, and he was good friends with my dad because my dad was with the GI Forum and Henry B. would kind of come talk at all their little meetings and picnics and so forth. So that, it was pre-1958 for sure, because in 1958, Henry B. ran for governor and my dad had a little space, he and my uncle had a little space that was empty and he let them use that as the West Side headquarters of the Henry B. Gonzalez for governor campaign area.

01-00:43:30

Holmes:

At your time at UT, what drew your interest to the field of Mexican American history? Was that where it developed?

01-00:43:42

Romo:

Yeah. I had a real good professor, Robert Cotner, and his class had a social history of America book. I liked social history. So he asked me—I think I took one of those independent courses with him—and he asked me what I wanted to write on and I said I don't know, but I know my dad and that group have been talking a lot about braceros, the bracero workers and the exploitation of braceros. Now, I think when I did my research, I don't think I knew about Galarza, Ernesto Galarza's books and so forth, but I did know Henry B. Gonzalez and he was on a committee that had been kind of looking into this, of course they wanted to end the bracero program. This would have been '64, '65. It was '65 and I went to my professor and I said, "I'm going to write about the braceros," and he said, "Yeah, okay, let's meet next week and tell me what you're finding." So, I wrote a letter to Henry B. Gonzalez and said you know my dad and you know we're from San Antonio, and I'm in college and I'm going to work on this paper; can you send me some material? He sent me these two gigantic books, bigger than a dictionary, on the hearings on braceros, and so when I went to see my professor I said well, I've got this material from the hearings and he said, "Oh my God, that's not even in the libraries here, how did you get that?" I said, "I just wrote my congressman." So there was plenty of material there and I ended up writing about braceros, but I think that was the first moment when I just kind of thought, and began to learn about Mexican Americans.

Then I had a couple of people from the neighborhood were really involved and one of them was Joe Bernal, and Joe Bernal, who is still alive, he's like ninety, was a senator. After Henry B. Gonzalez left for the [United States] Congress, and he left in 1961 in a special election, Joe Bernal later ran for his seat and won his seat, to be the state senator from the West Side. And when he was there and I was in school, Joe Bernal asked me to come by. Everybody knows Joe Bernal. When I sat with my five buddies three days ago for lunch and I said—it was Tuesday, the same day I saw [David] Montejano—they said did you write about Hispanics in Kelly Field? Kelly Field was the big employer of Hispanics in San Antonio. I said I did and I said, "In fact, I

interviewed your sister," and he said, "Oh yeah, that's right." I also interviewed Joe Bernal, and all of them said, "Oh, we don't know him as Joe Bernal, we know him as Chama," that was his nickname, C-h-a-m-a. I said, "Damn, I'd forgotten that one," and they said well he was my teacher in the seventh grade. I said, I went to that Guadalupe Cultural Center too, at age five, not seventh grade, he said age seven. I said well I was there too, but I was five when I started there, and that's when I met Joe Bernal, not when I was five, maybe when I was between five and eight, and so he was just all over. That was the housing project where my parents had once lived and all the kids from the housing project were over there and said oh yeah, what a great guy, so we just commented. And then he became our senator and he's still pretty—you know, I called him up, he's ninety years old, and he's like yeah, this is what happened, this is what had happened.

So I think people like Joe Bernal were really involved in civil rights, he was like following what Henry B. was doing. Henry B. is battling, 1955, '56, this filibuster, it's all about rights for Mexican Americans. Joe Bernal is like one of the founders maybe, likely one of the founders of MALDEF, [Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund] yeah I think he was. In fact, like the very first annual MALDEF convention, I was in town and I saw Joe Bernal at a restaurant and he said, "Hey come with me, I'm going to go to the MALDEF convention meeting," and I said, "Who's MALDEF?" He said, "Yeah, come on down." So we went and we sat there and it was quite impressive in terms of the speakers, everybody else. That would have been in—that was in 1970, because I came after my grandfather passed away and spent about two weeks here and every day, ran around and saw people after the funeral, and I remember going back and telling my friends about the MALDEF group.

01-00:49:22  
Holmes:

So, after you graduate from UT Austin, you move to California, and part of this, which I want to get to, is that was the start of kind of your teaching career and later graduate career, but it was also, I guess the tail end of your track career as well.

01-00:49:45  
Romo:

Yeah. I expected to try to run in the Olympics and it was a disappointment, because I had made some good friends with some of the Mexicans and they actually, pre-'67, '68, several times they came to Los Angeles to run in meets, the Mexican runners, it would be about anywhere from five to ten of them, and they would come to our house and we would sit and visit and talk. The coach of the Mexican runners was a UT graduate, his name was Joe Villarreal, and he was a really great—Joe Villarreal was really a great miler. He was before me. I think he must have graduated '59, '60, and we had a good relationship. I actually broke his record that he had there for a while and so we kept in touch and they said you make the team, it will be great to have you. I didn't make the team and so he they came and visit with us anyway, but really

nice people. I had gotten injured, which was probably good, because I turned all my attention to getting my degrees, but honestly what happened is I got there in '67, I got a job teaching in Lincoln High School, but then right before the school started—I got the job in August and in September, like a week before September, they said we're going to transfer you to Franklin High School. Now, Lincoln High School, of course is where the walkouts began you know, and I knew all those guys. I got to meet them because a lot of them were history, social studies teachers.

So I went to Franklin. At my first two years at Franklin, I did continuation, which was really working with all the dropouts, almost every one of the kids. The school was about half Anglo and half Hispanic, but all the kids I had, all the dropout kids I had were all Hispanic, they just didn't want to go to school, but the California law says you have to be in school until you're eighteen. So they would get picked up for truancy and they dropped out, they weren't coming back any more. They'd get picked up and so if you don't do something, you can be I don't know, fined, arrested, whatever. I ran that program for two years and then they asked me to come and teach social studies in the regular school. I had this little bungalow in the school grounds there and my little bungalow was for the dropouts. Then they asked me to come into the main campus, the big house, the main house, and teach there, and I did, and one of the courses that I decided to start was Mexican American history. So I taught Mexican American history and Todd, just so you know, just for you, I have pulled out and looked up all my photographs from that period, and I have some photographs of my students from that era, 1969, '70, when I was teaching Mexican American history. They're kind of cute, I mean one of them had this big Zapata T-shirt, Emiliano Zapata T-shirt.

I was the faculty advisor to the club, which was UMAS, United Mexican American Students, which then later became kind of a different versions; MEChA was the obvious one. But we were UMAS and I organized the first exhibit of prominent Mexican Americans in the library, a book case. So I had a book case there and I don't know if we did it, I just, I wrote on Hispanic Heritage Month, a couple of weeks ago, but apparently, Lyndon Johnson created Hispanic Heritage Week in some time like 1965, '66, so I think we had Hispanic Heritage Week, and then I got to put all these pictures of people who were prominent, including football players and writers and everything else—they let me have the exhibit in the library. So I was sort of involved with the students, as their faculty advisor for UMAS. I was the only Latino that was interested. There were probably about ten Latino professors, teachers, men and women, none of them had any—like don't talk to us about this stuff. And I was engaged and enjoyed it.

From that interest in Mexican American studies, then I got hired to do the Upward Bound program at Occidental [College]. Franklin High School kind of was the lead, but the kids who came to the Upward Bound program came from Watts and they came from different communities, they just kind of got

selected. I did Upward Bound and I have pictures of the kids, of the Upward Bound stuff, a lot of them, at least half of them black, kind of interesting photos.

01-00:55:44

Holmes: Oh, that's great.

01-00:55:48

Romo: I'm going to take a break.

01-00:55:49

Holmes: Yeah, that's fine.

[Pause in Recording]

01-00:55:56

Holmes: Tell me a little bit about your impressions of California. You grew up in Texas, you grew up and spent most of your life in the West Side of San Antonio, and then you lived to Los Angeles. What were your impressions, and particularly of comparing California to the environment you knew in Texas.

01-00:56:12

Romo: Well, honestly, I thought Texas back then was a little bit backward and California was a little bit more liberal, more tolerant and it wasn't something I discovered. I think a lot of blacks coming from the South discovered they could go run around the city, go to restaurants and so forth, and not run into the sort of prejudice. I was getting the sense that Texas was prejudice and little things were happening, I was seeing stuff and it was bothering me, it was bothering Harriett. So we got married, I said we'll just go to California, because I wanted to run track, that was one of the things. The other thing is that I just had been there several summers running track and had enjoyed the environment and kind of openness, and more exclusiveness. I didn't know a lot about it but when I got there, I started learning. Fortunately for me, in teaching in the Los Angeles School District, they told me, you need to take some additional courses because you don't have any California history, and here we teach California history, we don't care about Texas history. I said okay. That was a good turn of events for me, because I started out taking some classes at Loyola, because they offered some good night classes and I was going to school. I wasn't ready to just—I didn't have any money, I wasn't ready to just stop and go to school the whole time, and so I started taking classes. My professors were good—one of my top professors had been at Berkeley and my history classes were really interesting, I just found it totally fascinating.

So I was enjoying my classes and the last day of one of my classes in German history, the professor was running a little late, we were just sitting around waiting, and someone said, "What are you going to do after this?" And he said, "I've been accepted to either USC [University of Southern California] or UCLA, in the PhD program," it was like wow, that's really great, and then



something else and he said, "What are you going to do" and I said, "I don't know, I haven't really thought about it, who knows maybe I'll get a PhD." Well, when I finished my masters, I finished my masters say June 1. May 5, 1970, I'll never forget that day because May 5th was Cinco de Mayo at Cal State Northridge, and that was the day of my interview with [Rodolfo] "Rudy" Acuña. I went over there and the night before, they had burned down the Chicago House, so they had been given a house by the administration, to kind of hang out, a place where the students could feel at home and everything else, because at that time, it was still quite Anglo, there wasn't almost any blacks and the only Hispanic students were from the San Fernando Valley, in Pacoima, more from East L.A.

Rudy Acuña was teaching history and I had just finished a masters, and he thought I could teach history and teach Mexican American history, and liked the fact that I'd been teaching Mexican American history in high school. He said, "You know, we've got to take you to the next level," and told me what they were doing, and I said "sure." Oh, and then he said, "When you come teach in the college, you're going to have to get your PhD," and I said, "Well, I've already applied to UCLA and I'm waiting to hear." I think that week I heard, had been accepted, and so I called him back and said, "I've been accepted for the PhD program." It didn't occur to me, just being very naïve about this whole thing, I'm working full-time, teaching four classes, and I teach almost every day, and I'm in the PhD program at UCLA, taking classes. So, what I arranged was that I would teach Monday, Wednesdays and Friday and then have Tuesdays and Thursdays for my classes. I took all my classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays. It was sort of a long day but it was doable.

01-01:01:15  
Holmes:

That's a lot of work.

01-01:01:17  
Romo:

Oh, I don't think I've ever been as busy in my life, is those four years, five years, but I taught the whole time.

01-01:01:30  
Holmes:

I wanted to talk a little bit about your experience at CSU Northridge. Now this is one of the earliest Chicana and Chicano studies departments in the nation, which is also interesting, as you were teaching probably one of the earliest Mexican American history classes, particularly in high school. At the same time, Rudy Acuña was at the forefront of crafting probably the earliest curriculum of what would be Mexican American History, and the kind of curriculum that would fall under that umbrella of Chicano studies.

01-01:02:05  
Romo:

Right.

01-01:02:07  
Holmes:

Talk a little bit about that experience at Northridge.

01-01:02:08

Romo:

Rudy, a brilliant, brilliant fella, you know he was very passionate, very hardworking, teaching and trying to write his textbook. I think back, I got a chance to read both of his manuscripts, *Occupied America*, and I'm credited in the idiom for having read it. I think back of how little I knew. I mean here I am, reading stuff, and said gosh, I didn't know about the Louisiana Purchase and all the problems it caused here in Texas, and then conflicts later. So I was learning a lot, kind of working and reading. He was ahead of me, he had a PhD, had written, had studied Mexican history and knew Mexican history more than I did. He was a really good guy, he was very supportive of what I was doing. It could be a little crazy at times—I mean he just basically, he would just say these guys have got to start listening to us, they don't take us seriously, and he would say something. Well, I remember one time, he was meeting with one of the deans or presidents and he said nobody will get any support, any help, so forth, he says, I think the easiest way to just get a bookcase, as an example, or get some shelves, is to just bring my .45 and just fire some shots there and then I'll have some holes where I can put the screws in the wall. He says, "Because I'm not going to get any help with my bookcases. I'll just bring my gun and just put the holes in myself." He would say stuff like that. He would never do that, but he would just kind of like to shock them. It was interesting.

I started there in '70, the program was probably a year or two old at best. Acuña had been teaching at a community college and I think they brought him in, in '68 or '69, and by that time it was really getting big and successful, we had a lot of students. When I got there, they had somebody in the languages and Gerald Resendez teaching Spanish and Carlos Arce teaching politics, and Raul Ruiz, the editor of *La Raza* magazine, was teaching politics, he was next door to me. It was a kind of interesting group. They were all very committed activists. Arce had been at Berkeley and he was concerned more about the hardcore sort of Marxist in the group. He gave up academia and became a very successful entrepreneur, CEO, businessman, and is doing well, but he hung in there, in academia for a while. So those were the people that I was talking to, they were a bright group.

01-01:05:58

Holmes:

Rudy Acuña is credited by a lot of scholars, of having an impact and influence, not just on the field, but particularly on young scholars around the L.A. area, of also being somewhat of a mentor. Did he have an influence?

01-01:06:17

Romo:

Oh yeah, definitively, he did, he did have an influence. He basically was pushing to create the field. If not for him, they wouldn't have had Chicano studies as a department, as an example, if not for him. Once we had the department, then we could kind of put in some classes, and he of course put in history and political science and different things, but I considered him an absolute mentor. He was a little older, knew more than any of us, had good training. He was a quick writer, sometimes too quick, you know just in terms

of what he wanted to say and do, but the whole time, he was thinking. He was different. He wasn't somebody that needed to be out as the activist, I mean I think he liked to spend time writing, teaching, and working with students and then writing. Just in curiosity, I was going to political events and community events and stuff in East L.A. at the time and I might see Juan Gomez-Quiñones there or I might see some other people, but you never really saw Rudy Acuña, and that's not to say that he wasn't committed. What the students need is something to read here, and we just can't all be soldiers, you know, you've got to have some people writing up plans, and he did that real well.

01-01:08:12

Holmes:

Talk a little bit about the student environment there at CSU Northridge.

01-01:08:20

Romo:

Well, it was a great environment. Two friends of mine from Fox Tech High School were among the student leaders; they were kind of older and they'd both been in the service, and they came back out of the service with the GI Bill, and they were like the head of MEChA, the president of MEChA and the vice president of MEChA. So they helped me immensely, to kind of steer me through, because I came in, I had one year of experience in terms of what the movement was about and the walkouts were about and Ruben Salazar was about, what the war protest was about. I had one or two years. I had met some of the people who were in the anti-war protest group, but it was just an incredible time. I have some pictures I can share with you, of when they boycotted the cafeteria because they wouldn't quit selling lettuce. The cafeteria sold lettuce and [Cesar] Chavez said you know, we're boycotting this kind of lettuce, we're boycotting grapes, and then we're boycotting this lettuce, and they wouldn't eat there. I have pictures of them and a really good picture I used in a photo show one day, of the vigil. They had a tent, they had the Cesar Chavez flag and the Virgin Guadalupe over here, and they were kind of—they stayed in the tent for weeks and some of my friends were right there in the forefront. So there was an example, I mean there was always some kind of cause. I had learned a lot about the Chavez movement the previous years, and actually I'd taken Upward Bound students to Delano to meet Cesar Chavez, and they met him and I met him. My wife and I went numerous times, to be a helper in the office of the farm workers, because they had a lot of stuff that they needed. They had a bunch of membership forms and things that they kind of processed, and it was pretty primitive, you know pre-computers and everything else, so we went during the summertime, when we could go there, and helped out. I knew all about the cause and Dolores Huerta, and we had met her and stuff.

01-01:11:12

Holmes:

Well, that's a good segue, because I wanted to ask you a bit about the Chicano movement, and particularly being here in California during those years, that it was really gaining steam. Particularly, we think about the United Farm Workers movement, as well as the Civil Rights Movement at large, also anti-war protests.

01-01:11:35

Romo:

I couldn't have been at a better place, to have witnessed sort of history in the making. Numerous times, Chavez came to Los Angeles to plead, to get the community to support him, and Harriett and I, early on definitely, in '68, were in front of Safeway, boycotting the store because they sold grapes. So we got engaged that way, with the farm workers, and then that's '68 and they had all these meetings to determine the fate of the schools and the students and the walkouts, and Sal Castro, what's going to happen to him. I was curious and we got him involved with the farm worker group, they would kind of spill over this way, and so we'd go to meetings in East L.A., kind of like what's going to happen to these guys. I met people like Moctesuma Esparza and others, who were really involved, of course met Sal Castro numerous times, because he was a historian, and he was friends with other friends who were also kind of a social studies group. In essence, I had access to history, I could plug into history, I could plug into the anti-war movement, and I was fighting my own case in terms of the war movement. It was amazing.

I was at UCLA when Chavez came to speak at UCLA, and I was at UCLA and heard Jane Fonda speaking to the students about the anti-war movement. It was just you know, you can imagine what Berkeley was like in '66 and '67. Not that much was happening in Los Angeles in '66. It started happening in '67, '68, '69 and '70, and then it was just always buzzing, and that was the campus environment too, it was buzzing there. People were, you know, tomorrow we're going to go march with the march for justice, Católicos Por La Raza, this group Catholics for the Race, they got arrested for boycotting and demonstrating against the bishop, so they were arrested. The Biltmore Six, the students, the leaders of the group, who got arrested in the hotel because they were going to protest Ronald Reagan, and they got arrested, and I knew them, got to know them and others. So yeah, it was—the students were saying one group is over here working with the farm workers, the other ones over here working with a Catholic group, and the bishops and the churches having all this money, and then this other group over here is the anti-war group, and they're going to go protest something with Rosalio Muñoz, who was one of the leaders of the anti-Vietnam and they're going to organize for the rally there. Whoo, it was just hopping.

01-01:15:28

Holmes:

Well, I wanted to talk a little bit, before we touch on your graduate years at UCLA, I wanted to talk a little bit about your observations of the early stages of Chicano studies. The movement obviously played an important role and dovetailed a lot with that and certainly, in many respects, the field as we would know it, was really beginning to take shape. What were your observations from that part of those founding years of the discipline?

01-01:16:07

Romo:

They were very hard years for us to carry forth and offer students everything that they needed. There wasn't much written that we could use, there was so little written, but ironically, here I am in Northridge, and Acuña was guiding

me and he was a mentor. I went in one day and I said to him, "I only have three or four books, I want to do a couple more, what do you recommend?" He said, I'm going to use Américo Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand*, and I thought God, I went to UT Austin, I heard about Américo Paredes, and it's amazing, it didn't even occur to me. He said, "Oh yeah, because that tells the Texas story." So, Texas, that early period of Texas with Américo Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand*, the guy who struggles for justice, it's a great story. In teaching that, eventually, Américo Paredes and I became very good friends and he actually recruited me to Austin later. Anyway, so I taught that book and I said, "What else are you using?" He said, "Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor*, that's a good book." It had earlier appeared. I think that by 1970, the book *Merchants of Labor* had appeared. Of course later on, we will use *Barrio Boy*, which appears later.

So we got Ernesto Galarza, Américo Paredes, and just about that time—and of course the years are a little off, some of them are '72, '73, '74—Julian Samora is writing his stuff on immigration, and through that I got to meet people who were writing about stuff. In '72, I got to meet Jorge Bustamante, who was writing about immigrants and of course teaches now at Notre Dame. There were a number of books, definitely *North From Mexico* was a really great book for us—indeed, a brilliant book by Carey McWilliams, and so we used *North From Mexico* for sure, because that was published in 1948, '49, and it resonated, there's a lot of stuff there. Later on, I would use Leonard Pitt's book. Leonard had done his PhD at UCLA, the *Decline of the Californios*, and by that time his book, it was already out. In fact, Leonard Pitt was actually a neighbor of mine in Mar Vista, so when I taught at Northridge in '72, he actually came to my house one day for a party, a little gathering, and a review of his book had come out in *Quinto Sol* at Berkeley and it had tore into him in this book, just kind of like this guy doesn't know anything about us kind of, it was awful. I told him I'm so sorry about that review in *Quinto Sol*. Do you know *Quinto Sol*?

01-01:19:53

Holmes:

Yes.

01-01:19:54

Romo:

I said, "I just feel so sorry." I said, "I love your book and I'm going to continue using it." He says, "What review? Do you have it?" I said yes. He said, "When I leave, I want to take it with me," and I said okay, so when he left, I went to my study and got that *Quinto Sol* issue and gave it to him. Those were tough times, it was a sort of conflict, I mean what does an Anglo know about our history and our culture kind of deal. On the other hand, everybody loved [John] Womack and thought the Zapata book was just the greatest book. So we were using that and then later on, some other things came out. Julian Nava, who was a Harvard trained historian, was there at Northridge, and he was more like the middle class, kind of over here, I'm not going to get into this stuff, and Rudy Acuña is more radical, I will get my hands dirty if I have to.

So, I got to visit with Julian Nava, he was a very good historian, and his book came out later, several years later. I'm not sure we used it but I do think that he had a book that I used maybe in high school. Nava has got this overview of Mexican American history and then of course Acuña starts getting some stuff. We instantly put Acuña's book in there when it came out, and I'm thinking his book might have come out about '72, '73. Then articles, I'm sure I'm missing a couple, but that's how we started. I didn't know Leonard Pitt or Leonard Pitt taught at Northridge and had written a really important book, *Decline of the Californios*. I didn't know Nava, well he taught at Northridge, you know so I got to go in and meet with him. I didn't know Galarza, well Galarza came and spoke at Northridge, and of course Jose Angel Gutierrez, La Raza Unida Party, from Texas, I don't know if I knew him or not, but Acuña brought Jose Angel Gutierrez. Acuña and his wife had a dinner for him and it was a smart gathering, and Jose Angel Gutierrez, he was tough. So we'd sit at dinner and Rudy Acuña's wife is German, born in Germany, a nice lady, his first wife, and Jose Angel is there with his wife, who is a Mexican American. I don't think my wife joined me that day, I think she was studying for her masters, but we were at dinner, we hadn't gotten to dinner, we just eating around the living room and he says I can't understand why talented Latinos like yourself, or Chicanos, Mexican Americans like yourself, marry Anglos. It's like she's sitting right here he goes, wow you know, pow! Well, he understood it later because he divorced his Mexican American wife and married an Anglo, but those were tough times you know, and it got personal, not only at an intellectual level. People are saying we're headed for a revolution, where are you going to be? Then it got to, so who is going to be in the foxhole with you, an Anglo wife? What? That's how it was kind of playing out.

01-01:24:12

Holmes:

The field was also taking shape and I wanted to ask you about some of the events that were piecing together in these early years. One of them was the El Plan de Santa Barbara in 1969. Were you aware of it when that was going on? I know you were in the area.

01-01:24:29

Romo:

I was aware. I was in Los Angeles and I was taking classes at Loyola, a few, but all the folks running around with the walkouts and then the aftermath of the walkouts in '68, there was quite a few of them who were involved with the Plan de San Diego. I probably went to a conference or two, it was discussed, but yeah, I was aware of it. I wasn't connected to the MEChA and UMAS and so forth, was invited because they were all pretty much college students and a few college professors. They came back and started talking about it right away and I heard about it right away and just said wow, what?

01-01:25:31

Holmes:

I know Rudy Acuña was involved.

01-01:25:36

Romo:

Yeah, and I remember Juan Gomez-Quiñones also being involved. Since I wasn't there, I don't know actually—he would definitely have been involved. I mean he was one of the leading intellectuals of the whole Chicano studies and creation of stuff, and of course his book had the internal colonialism model and so the Plan de San Diego would have been perfect kind of. Who knows who was writing it, I mean I'm sure Acuña might. Have you interviewed Acuña?

01-01:26:15

Holmes:

Yeah.

01-01:26:16

Romo:

Did he tell you he was involved there?

01-01:26:17

Holmes:

Yeah, yeah. According to him, Juan wrote much of the Plan, but Rudy, has a very interesting perspective on this. In his interview, he mentions that we have the Plan but really in his view, Chicano studies is actually in the classroom and so it's developing the curriculum. Rudy was, I think already doing this by 1967, with the Equal Opportunity Education Programs, the EOP programs. He did, he wrote the curriculum that went along with that conference.

01-01:26:52

Romo:

Interesting, yeah. I thought that to me, Jesus Chavarria and Juan, might have been more the architects, but I don't know that Juan would write it by himself.

01-01:27:13

Holmes:

Chavarria was there too. Yeah, I'm not sure on the writing. So as this is going on in 1969, we also see with Chicano studies that a developing intellectual space for the field is also emerging. In 1969, the journal, *El Grito* from UC Berkeley, is now being published. By 1970, *Aztlán: Chicano Journal of the Social Science and the Arts*, is published at UCLA under Juan.

01-01:27:45

Romo:

Right.

01-01:27:47

Holmes:

As well as the *Journal of Mexican American History* at Santa Barbara, that comes out that same year. What are your recollections of encountering these new journals, but also what did it mean as a young Chicano scholar and historian?

01-01:28:02

Romo:

It was so great the stuff was coming out, because it was frustrating not to have almost any—very few books that we could use in the classroom. Not to have any kind of criticism or short stuff, you know. I was a big fan of the art and *El Grito* had art in it. That's how I got to meet Malaquias Montoya, that's how I got to meet Jose Montoya, his brother who was a poet, that's how I got to interact and meet Alurista, the poet. These folks did a great service to us,

because they were just contributing so much, and I was there when *Aztlán* started. I wasn't one of the founders, Reynaldo Macias was really involved with Juan Gómez-Quíñones. The right-hand man for Juan in the activities was Macias and a couple of other people, and I wrote something for *Aztlán*. I didn't write much initially because I was working on my graduate studies and then my dissertation at the time, the first few years, but I did write a piece for them. It was great, all of us welcomed it. I still have all my old issues of *Aztlán*, which I'm giving to the San Antonio Public Library. All my *El Grito* books which I had, I took *El Grito* and I took *Aztlán* and we subscribed to it, read it, and it gave us insight, introduced us to new ideas and it was great.

01-01:29:59

Holmes:

And would you say also for young Chicana and Chicano scholars, that these journals also kind of underscored academic legitimacy in some respects.

01-01:30:11

Romo:

Yeah. When I went to head up and became the Director of Chicano studies at UC San Diego, I brought in a new scholar into the fold and then from there we created *Ethnic Affairs*, and that was my creation, I think they have an *Ethnic Affairs* thing there and right away, it was really welcome. In fact, in one of the first issues of *Ethnic Affairs*, we have an essay by Américo Paredes, it's a long piece, a great piece that he helped us out with. Also, in *New Scholar*, which was—the one we put out was *New Directions in Chicano Scholarship*, that I did with Raymund Paredes. Are you familiar with that one?

01-01:31:03

Holmes:

Yes.

01-01:31:04

Romo:

That one—I have it right there. It included Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, who was from San Antonio and then was at Stanford at the time, and he wrote some pieces and created sort of some new ideas about our art, *rasquachismo*. Kind of, you know, all these found objects, we'd grab them and we'd use them and then we'd created art kind of stuff, it was an interesting concept. So yeah, I mean they were introducing things that were very useful to us.

01-01:31:44

Holmes:

I wanted to ask too, in 1973, the *Pacific Historical Review* devoted a special issue to Chicano history, and of course the editors there at UCLA, which I want to hear more about, we'll get to in a minute, is Norris Hundley.

01-01:32:04

Romo:

Norris Hundley.

01-01:32:05

Holmes:

Discuss the impact, because by this time—we're moving a little ahead here, but by this time, you're about three years into your PhD.

01-01:32:15

Romo:

Right.



01-01:32:17

Holmes: You're getting much more acclimated into the field. What kind of impact did you think that special issue had, particularly on you, on the field?

01-01:32:27

Romo: Well, it had a big impact. I started going to conferences in 1970 and I remember, there was a conference in 1972 that was organized by James Wilkie, who was a Mexicanist, and he was Juan Gómez-Quiñones' supervisor or mentor, I don't know mentor so much, but James Wilkie had helped organize and had brought Mexicans and Mexican Americans and put some people on a panel. I think I ended up being just kind of a discussant on that and it kind of opened my eyes, we're now talking about stuff about our community and about us. I don't know if you saw the review that I wrote on that piece. I actually wrote a review, I think about the Norris Hundley edition.

01-01:33:25

Holmes: No, I haven't.

01-01:33:25

Romo: I'll put some of those things together. It was one of the earlier pieces, because I didn't write much before finishing my PhD, but I definitely wrote a review of that, and it was a tremendous launching. You're right, up until this point, you have people like Ernesto Galarza writing *Merchants of Labor*. There's just not enough specifically about Mexican Americans. *Merchants of Labor* is really about Mexicans, but specifically about Chicanos and Mexican Americans, there's just not very much, and when people start writing that stuff, it was so needed for the classroom, so needed for us—that somebody actually could care about us. One of my first essays was in the *Pacific Historical Review*, "Work and Restlessness" essay, was because of Norris Hundley, and it was the lead article, which helped me get a job at UC San Diego. I already had the job there, they'd seen it, but then when it became the lead article, it legitimized, you know like put me in the okay, you're a serious scholar.

Norris was on my dissertation committee and thank goodness he was, because when I presented my proposal in '72, my mentor, Stanley Coben, had different ideas, and so one of his ideas was that I should do a comparative study of Los Angeles, East Los Angeles, and San Antonio, he said you're from San Antonio, you know the history. Well, that made sense, except that just East L.A., getting my hands around it took years and if I had to do it too, it would not have gotten done, or if it had gotten done, it wouldn't have been done very well. He was impressed with the Grebler Report,<sup>1</sup> which had already just come out, and he said oh yeah, they did San Antonio, this would be great. Then, Norris Hundley, we had this discussion when I was presenting and Norris Hundley thought that maybe I should do Pacoima in the San Fernando Valley, because that's just too big, and maybe you can do this, and I said well

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<sup>1</sup> Leo Grebler, Joan W. Moore, Ralph C. Guzman, *The Mexican American People* (New York, 1970).

that's just too small. I stuck by my guns and said, "I'm going to do East L.A. guys," and they finally supported it. Juan Gomez was in the room and he supported East L.A.

01-01:36:25

Holmes:

It's interesting, I wanted to ask too, is Norris Hundley is also the cofounder of the Western History Association and in that special issue, one of the things that really struck me is that Norris Hundley, he was representative of what was called the new western history, and that he thought the inclusion of the Mexican American experience in that is very much a part. When we think of the WHA, you have the old stereotypes of a bunch of white guys in flannel shirts wearing cowboy hats and these kinds of things.

01-01:37:05

Romo:

Right, that's true. [laughter] One of our first meetings ever.

01-01:37:10

Holmes:

Talk about that.

01-01:37:12

Romo:

Things have changed.

01-01:37:13

Holmes:

Yeah. Talk a little bit about that, because Al Camarillo had the same reaction, and who also worked with Norris Hundley, and so he could see the ideal with Norris.

01-01:37:24

Romo:

That was his mentor and supervisor, Norris Hundley was, yeah.

01-01:37:28

Holmes:

So, talk a little bit about that experience and its inclusion.

01-01:37:31

Romo:

Oh, I don't know, I think there were some guys there and two or three in particular were kind of very influential, and they did come—one of them came from Wyoming and they did come with their cowboy hats and boots and so forth, and said this is western history, kind of like what do you guys do? But everybody seemed to be initially, I think people liked Norris helped pave the way for us. I was grateful to Norris, you know he was more supportive. Basically, when I presented in '72, there weren't too many people presenting on doing a study of Chicanos and about urban Chicanos. It was pretty—in that range, in terms of Camarillo and Pedro Castillo, Pedro came after me, Camarillo and I were in the same class, but it was all kind of new and we needed people to say I certainly see the logic of that, and Juan Gomez of course would. Norris was kind of buying into it, okay I like it, yes, good. My professor was totally bought into it and he thought this was going to be the new urban history, and then my other professor in there was Simon Gonzalez, who was in education, and he was totally in, like you know, in terms of education. His questions might have been do we know anything about the

schooling experience and so forth, more familiar with George I. Sanchez' writing about education. I had a very supportive team.

One of the things is that they had been watching what was going on from '67 to '72, that's five years. There's been a lot of unrest and lots of turmoil and lots of stuff coming up, and confrontations, Cesar Chavez getting arrested just for marching. Going through these things and people gave a sense that if we didn't write it, nobody else was going to write it. If you don't write about East L.A., nobody else is going to do it, that's the first thing I noticed when I decided on a topic, as I went to the bookshelf, and I said I wonder how much there is on East L.A. and there was nothing, not a single book on East L.A. There were books on Los Angeles, fragmented society or something, but—and I still have all those books, I'm going to probably give them to UT Austin. I collected a lot of books on California but none that anybody could say hey, this is about my grandfather's community or my mother's community, or where I live, just that didn't exist.

01-01:40:53

Holmes:

You were talking a little bit about the unrest and I wanted to kind of circle back here, to the Chicano movement. What impact did you see that activism for social justice, civil rights, inclusion and equity, how did you see that influencing the field, as well as influencing you as a scholar?

01-01:45:15

Romo:

Well, the day that I interviewed for my job at Cal State Northridge, is the day that everybody is all in turmoil and upset, because from what they perceive, the white supremacist or white racists came and burned down our house because they didn't like Chicano studies, they didn't like the fact that we hung the American flag upside down or something and they just were teaching us a lesson. It was kind of a moment and you started to say, you know I thought I'm getting into something big here, bigger than me, it will be interesting. I just felt that it was kind of an unusual experience in that there was so much that we said that the students had never heard about. Like the Longoria case, they said do you mean there was a community basically says to a war hero's family, the remains of the war hero cannot be brought to the funeral home? What really made that case important and interesting was that it didn't have to be that way, LBJ said this is not right guys, your guys are doing a great injustice here, it's embarrassing to Texas to do this. It wasn't like—I mean everybody understood it took many people. It wasn't like some Hispanic solve it all, it was LBJ, it was Hector Garcia.

So you would talk about that in the classroom and you could tell, at that exact moment it was like all right, raise your hand if you've heard of Hector Garcia. No hands would have gone up if I had asked that question. Raise your hand if you've heard about the Longoria case, no hands would have gone up. Raise your hands if you heard of the pecan shell strikes, and no hands would have gone up. What happened, tell us. So it was kind of great, it was fun, and we

just kept thinking somebody's got to write this up. Some of it did get written up and some it is still left to be written. I think that's what Norris Hundley was saying, you know, this is the new frontier guys, you guys are going to create a path here. We in western history, we're done, you know we've already done all the big stories, it's kind of like there's nothing left to write about, but you guys have got lots to write about. I'm exaggerating some, but it was sort of suggested. We don't have as much exciting stuff as you do, and that was the encouragement we needed, you know should we hang in here and do this stuff or is it going to be legit stuff, will we get jobs. So yeah, people will see this as an important part of California history, American history.

01-01:44:46

Holmes:

Let's talk a little bit about your graduate years there at UCLA, as we close in here on the end of this session. As you were saying, you were part of that growing and yet early cohort studying Mexican American history, at UCLA, with other first-generation scholars such as Al Camarillo, and others. Discuss your experience at UCLA. What kind of environment, particularly for a Chicano scholar, did you have there?

01-01:45:20

Romo:

I loved UCLA, I just felt so lucky to have been in a community that had that university not too far from my house, the libraries were great. We had professors interested in what I was interested in, and not only in the case of Juan Gómez-Quíñones, but there were other professors around the campus that I got to meet and interact with, who were teaching about the similar fields, that were interested. No one said why are you doing what you're doing and as I mentioned, all the history people that I worked with, all of them, every one of them seemed interested, even Stephan Thernstrom, who actually influenced my writing of the *Pacific Historical Review*, in terms of "Work and Restlessness." They were interested, the top guns were interested in what we were doing, that just meant so much to me, that I wasn't alone, I'm not some kind of pioneer like Ernesto Galarza, writing way back in the times in which why are you doing what you're doing? So that's one.

Two—I don't think there's too many places in the country where there were as many Chicano scholars and people there. There were a number of us there, of course Al Camarillo being the one that I interacted with a lot, and he was to write something about Santa Barbara. There were a few others that were there—well, of course Oscar Martinez, who just wrote about the borderlands, a book about Juárez, I believe, El Paso Juarez. In that kind of interaction, we would interact with other people not too far from there, who would come around and do stuff with us, but it didn't take many.

My good buddy, Raymund Paredes, came in '71, as a professor of English at UCLA, and he had studied under Américo Paredes and had done his work. His dissertation was how Mexicans were viewed in Anglo literature, so actually, he wrote a piece for us. He and I became co-editors of the special

issue in Chicano studies, and he writes about attitudes towards Mexicans, going back to the days of the pilgrims.

01-01:48:32

Holmes: Oh, wow.

01-01:48:34

Romo: Really good stuff. He was one of those people that I bounced stuff off of. He's my best friend and we became real close friends while I was at UCLA, so if ever was a moment there where I was having second thoughts, am I doing the right stuff, he read all my stuff, as did my wife, and he gave me encouragement, yeah this is good, keep on, keep on. He still gives me encouragement. I send him my essays on art or about voting, I wrote about a civil rights leader, Judge Carlos Cadena, and he says, "Hey, keep on track, this is good stuff, keep on doing that." This is last week. That was what he was saying in 1971, so it was a really good environment for me. I'm sure there were other places almost as good or better, but none that I know of.

01-01:49:34

Holmes: I wanted to ask too, about the Chicano Studies Research Center. This was founded, I think the year before you arrived, in 1969.

01-01:49:41

Romo: Probably in '69, it was. I was at Loyola, going over to take class. I was taking some classes at UCLA at the time too, because they offered some classes that counted for Loyola, so I had taken some classes there. It was an amazing undertaking and I was glad to see it, because they started collecting all the books and bringing all the stuff together in one place. There was always scholars in there, that's probably where I met Alurista and just the idea that they cared about our history and about our art and about our literature. There was no excuse. I mean, if you could go into a big library and ask is this book available and they might say well, we have never seen it, we don't know anything about it, but if you went into Chicano studies and you said do you have this rare book by Ernesto Galarza or something, they'd say man, if we don't have it, we're going to get it. They were always like [snaps his fingers] tell us what you guys are reading, tell us what you need, constantly asking me, if you see something that we should be getting, let us know. So it was a really good space, it was a really good place to study, it was a good place to hang out and talk to people. It was an excellent spot for getting people to buy and support things that you needed for your own class. That's before Google and everything else, you know you literally had to go there and Xerox it there, make a copy there.

01-01:51:27

Holmes: I was going to ask too, the Chicano Studies Research Center is also renowned and particularly, with Juan and others there at UCLA, of building networks, both on campus and between campuses. One of the things that comes out in a lot of these conversations is this early type of inter-institutional network

between UCLA and UT Austin that Juan helped developed. Some have called this the California—Texas axis. Did you have any experience with that?

01-01:52:07

Romo:

Oh yeah. Of course, Juan came at the invitation of Américo Paredes, who helped bring Juan to Austin, and then there he became very good friends with Jose Limon. One of the founders of Mexican American studies at UT Austin was Raymund Paredes, when he was a graduate student, and the people that were there included David Montejano and Jose Limon, and then Jose Angel Gutierrez came and taught there for a little while too and it was quite a group. So, when Juan came, one of the other historians, Victor Nelson-Cisneros came, and then of course Samora came. Samora was there and maybe Samora was at Austin, and then he ended up studying with Juan and interesting kind of—I mean, he ended up writing about labor. Victor Cisneros-Nelson didn't end up finishing and then went on to become sort of a student counselor kind of guy, but Emilio [Zamora] did and Emilio is now prominently involved in Mexican American studies at Austin. So yeah, I think he was there because of Emilio and Limon were the initial. Of course Emilio then left and Limon was there for a while and left as well, but Américo was one of the big anchors and Américo later recruits me to be the head of Chicano studies. He recruited me in '75 and then in '78 and then in '80. In '75, I had just taken a job when he contacted me, I had just taken a job at UC San Diego, so I said I'm not moving. In '78, I said no it's not time, and then in '80, I said well we'll try, see how it works out.

01-01:54:28

Holmes:

Well as we'll get to in our next session, I think it worked out well. [laughs]

01-01:54:34

Romo:

Yeah it did.

01-01:54:37

Holmes:

Before we finish up this session, I wanted to talk a little bit about your early scholarship, and mostly focusing here, on your dissertation and first book. The dissertation, "Mexican Workers in the City of Los Angeles, 1915 to 1930." The book, of course, as we well know, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio*. Now, you talked a little bit earlier about how this came together. Discuss the genesis a little bit, of this project, particularly because as you were mentioning, a lot of first generation scholars write about their communities and so here many would probably wonder, why didn't you write about San Antonio, versus East L.A. What was the attraction there?

01-01:55:27

Romo:

Well, one is that I think I was writing a paper or something, and I went to look up stuff on East L.A. and then I was going to East L.A., and was shocked that there was so little on East L.A. And then I found a couple of things that were written about East L.A., or written about Los Angeles, and I was surprised, as a young scholar, how weak the studies were. My thought was my God, I can

do better than this, I can write better than this stuff, so that was my initial thought on it.

I was just fascinated by East Los Angeles, it was just big and so much happening, you know unlike Berkeley or unlike San Antonio. Berkeley is defined by the student unrest and the anti-war and kind of a revolution of overall student stuff, which goes—it's all worldwide, in '68. Los Angeles, we've got Chavez coming down, we've got anti-war, we've got walkouts, we've got student movements, big Chicano student movements, I mean Berkeley didn't have Chicano student movements. They might have had some Chicanos there kind of making noise, Malaquias Montoya. But in L.A. there was a million plus Chicanos in the city and there's always issues. One day, what are they protesting? Well, they're protesting the very expensive church that's got the bishop, who could have put some money into the community and then he built a million-dollar church instead, and so they go protest the church. What are they protesting now? Well, Reagan said something about Chicanos and they're going to protest, and then they get arrested. And so you've got a series of things going on and it seemed like there's so much happening, and so much related to Chicanos, really important, and we're not even talking about politics yet or other things.

Some of the leading kind of thinkers and people running around were coming through L.A. Oscar Zeta Acosta's wife was a graduate student with me, and I would talk to her about Oscar Zeta Acosta, even to the extent that when he disappeared and I said what the heck is going on, she said, "I don't know." There were just amazing kind of things swirling in our world, which was you could move a little bit and be right in only the world of Chicanos. Then you move a little bit this way and you're like mid, half Chicanos and half Anglos, or you could go to the valley and be isolated. It was quite a remarkable feeling, as I just drove around and to see things, and then to say God, we know so little about it, it would just be great to write about it.

01-01:59:07

Holmes:

Well, the book is known as really such an important work, as really the first book on the Mexican American community in modern Los Angeles. You employed in this book, which we would ascribe as the new social history type of methodology, community reconstructions, but also of looking at different facets of culture, work life, family life. Discuss a bit of that research process and putting it together.

01-01:59:41

Romo:

Well, the first thing that I did was I read as much as I could, of the really good important books about immigrants. So Humbert Nelli, *Italians in Chicago*—wow, I read that book and said I'd like to do the Mexicans in Los Angeles kind of book, because I love the way he just did that. Well, who influenced him, if not Oscar Handlin, and Oscar Handlin's handling of the Irish and other groups. So what I was doing is I was reading books like *Italians*, or *Black*

*Chicago* was another example. These were like my models and I read them and read them again, and then kind of noted their styles and structure. So like *Italians in Chicago*, there's a whole chapter devoted to politics and how the Italians get into running for this and being politically strong and leverage and everything else. I couldn't find it in the first thirty years and write about 1900 to 1930, the creation of this barrio, there is no Chicano politician in the barrio, so forth. There is now and it has been for the last thirty, forty years, but it was kind of interesting, so I didn't write a chapter purposely, there's not enough material, this is it, that's what we know. So I was influenced by the book about immigrants, because my group was an immigrant community too, small in 1900 and gigantic by 1930.

01-02:01:39  
Holmes:

One of the things you do in this book too is you're connecting that immigration and that history of an immigrant community, also with these same dynamics of industrialization, and showing how the community had to evolve, had to adapt, was forced to adapt. Urban history was really again, similar to Chicano history, rather new at this time.

01-02:02:07  
Romo:

It was, and I read Thernstrom's books, Stephan Thernstrom's books, impacted my thinking as well. He had studied under Oscar Hamlin. So I was taking from different—I definitely was into urban history. For my master's work at Loyola my last year, I took several courses on urban history and started reading about urban history. That's where I first read Thernstrom, pre-UCLA, and then I had taken a course on western history and I said—this is not me, you know writing about the closing of the American frontier. That's just not me, and so I knew that this was going to be new stuff. Ironically, I felt like I took way too long to revise the book, because the dissertation needed a lot of—you know, it wasn't going to be published as a book that way, and I kept changing it and writing it and changing it and writing it. Almost all the chapters were changed, with the exception of "Work and Restlessness," I think that chapter pretty much stayed intact. I had good mentors at UC San Diego, we'll talk about that later, but that's Northridge, teaching there, and trying to get my work done.

01-02:03:44  
Holmes:

My last question on this is that in the book—and I have to be honest, actually, I've wanted to ask this question for a number of years, ever since I first read it, to see what your thoughts were. In that last chapter, you do a sketch, because the bulk of this is largely from World War I to almost the Great Depression, and the last chapter of course, as it was published in what was it 1983, I believe it came out.

01-02:04:17  
Romo:

'83.



01-02:04:19

Holmes:

Is that sketch of the history of East Los Angeles and the Chicano community there in L.A., almost up to the present. It's kind of a sketch that you know, I think you even say it someplace, where it was kind of laying it out, to bring the reader to the present, but also kind of laying out some areas that you thought other historians would dig into. Now that we are here many years after, what were your impressions of how historians have done, of adding much more detail onto that sketch you gave?

01-02:05:00

Romo:

I never thought about it that way. The reason I did that chapter was because I would tell people, I would write about East L.A., and they would say something like are you going to write about the Zoot Suit Riots, and I go well, it doesn't really come to that. Oh, it doesn't okay. Are you going to write regarding the walkouts and I'd say well, I don't really take it through the walkouts. So I just think, is anybody going to read my book, does anybody really care about our grandparents' generation? God, I hope so. And so, I kind of did that and when I wrote—when the book was published in Spanish—do you have the Spanish version?

01-02:05:45

Holmes:

I don't.

01-02:05:47

Romo:

I have to give it to you, if you can give it to Berkeley. In the Spanish version, Juan Gómez-Quiñones writes an introduction and then I write an introduction, and in the introduction I say a lot of things have happened. It's only in Spanish. I wrote it somewhere in English and it's probably disappeared somewhere, because we changed computers three times since that time, but remind me and I'll give you my Spanish version, because I only have four copies left. UNAM [Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico] published it, and I don't think there's any more anywhere. I did it in part because I felt that people had this feeling about the most important stuff about East L.A. is what happened in my lifetime, in the last twenty years, and I was going to say look, you've got to look at this. There's still a lot more to do and I wanted to say I wish I could do this, but just I'm laying it out. There are some things here that I stumbled on, read about, thought about, and that's for somebody else, that's for another book kind of deal.

01-02:07:06

Holmes:

Well, Ricardo, thanks so much. I think now is a good time to take a break.

## Interview 2: October 18, 2018

02:00:00:05

Holmes:

All right, this is Todd Holmes of the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. Today's date is October 18, 2018. I have the pleasure of sitting down again, for our second session with Ricardo Romo, for the Chicana/o Studies Oral History Project, and we are here at his beautiful home in the city of San Antonio, Texas. Ricardo, thank you for joining me again today. We left off in our last session, just finishing up graduate school at UCLA and talking about your dissertation and first book. I'd like to start off discussing your first full academic job after graduate school, which I believe was at UC San Diego.

02:00:00:47

Romo:

Yes. I've always considered, and I don't always note it and write about it, I've always considered Northridge to be my first really full job in university college teaching, and I taught there full-time for three years and I had a great experience. Everything that I was doing later, there was a lot of foundation building there for me, in the aftermath of that, I taught Chicano history in one way or the other in my next jobs.

So, finishing my dissertation, I was able to get a job at UC San Diego, and I arrived in '75 and was there—actually, I arrived in '74, I mean technically, they hired me in '74, just to be sure I came onboard. They were pretty anxious to see me get there and start, and they were wanting a Chicano story. The Chicano studies faculty there, which included Mario Barrera as an example, had really pushed to have history being taught, and Ramon Ruiz, the Mexicanist there, was I'm not sure, probably chairman of the department at the time and was keen on having me also join their faculty. So I came in '74 and did one semester of what I would call commute, and then moved in '75, in the summer of '75, I moved there and we got that going.

02:00:02:44

Holmes:

So you join the History Department. What was your initial impressions and experience there at UC San Diego, because as you mentioned, this really wasn't your first time having a permanent job within a university.

02:00:03:00

Romo:

Right. Actually, at Cal State Northridge, after three years, you pretty much earn tenure if you were teaching well and doing productive things, so I had gained tenure at Northridge and as [Rodolfo "Rudy"] Acuña told me, he said, "You're going to give up a tenured job to go and become non-tenured, begin at the bottom at UC San Diego?" And I said, "Yeah, I think I'm going to do that." I liked the idea that UC San Diego gave you time to research, and I thought if I was going to get my book done, it would probably have to be in a setting where I didn't teach four classes a semester, which was pretty heavy teaching, at Northridge. But I appreciate everything that Acuña did for me and the Northridge group did for me and learned a lot, and went on to UC San Diego.

The program was just in its infancy, the program at UC San Diego, Chicano studies was sort of starting, it wasn't too old. Mario Barrera was the chair of Chicano studies and he got tired of that and they appointed me chair of Chicano studies, so I did that and got some things going in terms of the *New Scholar* and *Ethnic Affairs*, which we did, which was kind of fun to do, and then taught classes and did what you normally have to do, just try to get some writing in and articles in and so forth.

02:00:04:45

Holmes:

What was the state of history and Chicano studies at UC San Diego?

02:00:04:51

Romo:

Well, no one had—I was the first one to teach Chicano history and we were not quite sure they were ready for Chicano history, so I tried to carve a course called Race and Ethnicity in America. Race and Ethnicity was a course that we taught, that I taught, then after I had done this for a couple of years, I started more into Mexican American history kind of courses. I don't recall the actual name. I know that when I went to Austin, we did not teach Chicano history. It was like you can teach history and it can be Mexican American history, but it's not going to be Chicano history, there was kind of a resistance to that, and the same thing happened when they established the center. Would it be called Chicano studies or would it be called Mexican American studies, so it became Mexican American studies. A similar kind of conservative voices there at UC San Diego, you know there was not as much activity there with students as I saw at Northridge or UCLA, but I would guess that the Latino population may have been ten percent, and it was more like in the hundreds that we kind of interacted with, versus in the thousands.

02:00:06:21

Holmes:

As you mentioned, you were at CSU Northridge for a number of years, you were at UCLA. How would you compare the level of university support in the effort to establish Mexican American studies, to have a representation there of Chicano history, in comparison to those other institutions?

02:00:06:49

Romo:

Well I think in comparison, there's a great difference. UC San Diego was trying to be supportive and in 1976, they gave me a grant to put together a Chicano art show, and we called it *Arte Picante* and we brought about fifty artists and we did a show right there in, I think it's the Mandeville Art Center, and it was like the first Chicano show ever on the campus. We had a thousand people show up on opening day, it was a really great response to the fact that we're doing Chicano art and history.

I helped bring Cesar Chavez to campus one year and I helped bring Dolores Huerta to campus. The Cesar Chavez thing was a pretty interesting day because I was there and we had worked on it for months, trying to get him to come, through all our contacts, and he agreed to come. He was there and we were getting ready to go on stage and I have a picture of me and Cesar Chavez

there. We're getting ready to go on the stage and they said, "Tom Hayden is here and he wants to introduce Cesar Chavez," and I said well, you know, he's not been involved with anything, you mean he just showed up right now and he's going to make the introductions of Chavez? He said, "Yeah, you've got to let him do that," and I said, "That's crazy," and he said well, he's running for the senate and so he needs any moments and so forth—so all right. I wasn't too happy about it but I said okay and did it. So Hayden steps up and introduces Chavez as his good friend, you know making all these great causes and great things and accomplishments that he's done and so forth, and then I stepped up. I remember saying that my friends have close contact with Chavez and we told them, the university is not going to pay for this and we don't have any money but we'll raise some money and we are raising some money for the farm workers, and said we'll get him to come free, he'll do it, you don't have to pay Chavez, I says fine. So I got up and said, "We're so grateful that he could come and especially grateful that he was not going to require an honorarium or a fee," and everybody kind of clapped. Then jokingly, Chavez looked at me funny, he gets up there and says, "I'm not getting a fee for this?" [laughs] And he just laughed and then he talked about his deal.

I was in the middle of a lot of stuff. I was the lead guy for the Chavez thing, I was the lead guy for Huerta. It was like Chicano studies had one secretary and me, and we weren't quite yet ready to offer any classes. It was kind of an interesting division there with the campus, because of Third World studies. Third World studies was sort of seen as a little bit suspect by the other colleges at the time. We would have liked to have a little bit more respect, a little bit more funding. But the provost was great, Joe Watson was a great provost and he was very supportive of everything we did, but those were hard times. There was not too many faculty, just a handful of us, there were not too many students, and even though they had MEChA, [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán] they didn't have it quite—I started going to all the MEChA meetings, because I had at Northridge, gone to all the MEChA meetings for three years, but it was a bit divisive, I couldn't sense what exactly was driving it. There seemed to be a little bit of politics from the guys from East L.A. there at UC San Diego, and then the local guys from San Diego there, kind of like who's going to run the show, so there was always these tensions there. So I quit going because there was always a feeling that it wasn't working as well as I'd like to see it work.

02:00:11:16

Holmes:

A lot of scholars comment that one of the aspects when diversifying the curriculum at a university, if they were able to have a department of say, Chicano studies, or if it was just going to be an affiliated program, one of the aspects—and Al Camarillo talks a lot about this—was the need for the university to also push to diversify the student body, that they would have Mexican American students there taking the classes.

02:00:11:51

Romo: Right.

02:00:11:52

Holmes: Did you see this type of effort? I know the UC system is a very large system, but on the university front, at least there at San Diego.

02:00:12:01

Romo: That was always an issue from day one, at Cal State Northridge. It was, you know we've got to recruit more students, we had some student recruiters, there's so many students that don't know about it. Initially, it changed dramatically, Northridge did, changed dramatically from a few hundred students or a thousand students, to thousands of students. I imagine that today, the campus is way over half Latino, half Hispanic, half Chicano. Same thing happened at UC San Diego, where we're not doing our jobs, there's not a lot of students here, there's not a lot of kids who know about going to college, there's a lot of talented kids going elsewhere, kids from San Diego going to UCLA and Berkeley and they're not coming here, so we've got to do a better job. I would go to meetings where there would be community people there and they would be addressing some of the issue, and this happened at Northridge. The issue was you guys have got to come into the community, roll up your sleeves and help us tackle police brutality and help us tackle whatever kind of the deal was, and that was kind of another tension.

I remember going to numerous meetings and people were sort of pleading for help with the Barrio Logan. I remember a long evening, talking about Barrio Logan, which is one of the big barrios of the San Diego area, that's where all the murals are, and how gentrification—they didn't use the word—but it's basically we're being squeezed out, we're being pushed out, people are losing their homes, nobody cares about us, and you guys have got to step up and do some stuff and come over. Kind of like if you're real Mexican Americans then you would come and help us; a lot of pressure. It's just you know, you do a little bit, but this is way too much. I remember in some of those settings, meetings, people like Alurista, who came and did some poetry reading for us, and I don't know where he lived but Alurista may have started his life and career in Tijuana, so he had a connection there. Yeah, those were interesting, volatile times, and at times there could be lots of heated discussions. Certainly internally, the frustration of not having the resources and not having people understand that we need to have a diverse student body and a larger Latino presence and everything else.

02:00:15:29

Holmes: I wanted to ask, at UC San Diego, were there university-based centers and programs that were able to open up new avenues for scholars within the Chicana and Chicano studies area? If we think of the Chicano Research Center at UCLA, and then there was one at UC Santa Barbara, was there anything that's somewhat equivalent or close to that there at San Diego?

02:00:15:57

Romo:

Not at all, no. When I got there in technically '74, the school had just opened in 1970, so it wasn't that no one cared, it just was you're building a brand-new school and you guys are getting ahead of yourselves a bit here. No one has centers or you know, we don't have a lot of centers here. So it was a struggle, but you sort of knew that, you got into it knowing that they're not as established and as old a program as UCLA for example. I don't know too much about the Chicano studies research centers at Berkeley or any other campuses, but I know UCLA was a real model.

02:00:16:57

Holmes:

I wanted to talk a little bit about the development of the field, again, moving into some of your work that was also coming out during this time. When we look back at that, the work of the first generation has a few themes right, it's mostly focused on California and Texas, it's covering a time where Mexican Americans became a racialized minority in the Southwest and was reinforced by class and of course social discrimination. The community, their experience is increasingly defined by an urban context and of course the immigration, in the first third of the twentieth century.

02:00:17:45

Romo:

Right.

02:00:17:46

Holmes:

If we look at those themes, your first book almost checks every single box.

02:00:17:52

Romo:

Well, thank you.

02:00:17:52

Holmes:

[laughs] Yeah. And you address a number of these. I wanted to talk a little bit about scholarship of this first generation, but I wanted to start a little bit with some of your essays that were coming out too. We already discussed your first book, which came out in 1983. I think one of your first articles, at least that I could find, in 1975, was an essay you published in *Aztlán*, "Responses to Mexican Immigration."

02:00:18:22

Romo:

Right, and that came from my dissertation. I kept some of that probably, for my book, I don't recall how much. I know that in '75, when I was finishing, it seemed apparent that it would take a lot of revisions, and I'm a slow writer, so we just moved it and moved it and finally got it to where I was happy with it. That article, there wasn't much to improve on, I mean I had found such great sources and great things to it, and I said you know, we can go with this right now. A lot of the young scholars don't have the connections to the top journals and I didn't even worry about getting into a major historical journal. I just said this is what these guys want to publish, I mean they basically were asking me all the time, are you going to give us an article, when are you going to give us an article. I'd say well I don't have anything I can give you right now. Well,

you know, when you get something give us—so they were weekly, monthly, checking with me, and do you have something to give, and that was flattering. I'm young and I went with that and I'm glad I did.

In terms of making a statement about it, it was kind of interesting because that was historical, and one of the tensions that I found in the community, in the academic community at UCLA and Northridge, and a little bit at UC San Diego, was this idea of we have to step up more for the immigrants, there was sort of the division. There was this one group that his family had come from Mexico and they were like first generation Americans, which many of us were not, and they thought that the most important thing we could be doing was like one stop immigration center, you know we've got to be protesting immigration coming into our community versus police brutality against Chicanos. We looked upon this as sometimes, there are kind of people mad at us because we're not doing enough, and looking back on it, I don't know how we would have resolved it. It was just basically, like any improvised or marginalized community, there's just way too many things.

02:00:21:24

Holmes:

Well, historically speaking, this piece, I think, is one of the earliest studies on Mexican immigration, using the sources that it's pulling from, and particularly, one of the earliest references of the "Brown Scare," when we look at the history of Los Angeles and Mexican immigration during the Mexican Revolution.

02:00:21:48

Romo:

The "Brown Scare" was really one of my strongest chapters and my regret was not taking it right out of the dissertation and sending it to a journal. I don't think I ever published the Brown Scare and it's just like I wish I had done it, but I was kind of moving on to "Work and Restlessness," the article for the *Pacific Historical*, and it was just, things were moving fast, and then teaching, creating new courses. The Race and Ethnicity course was how do I get Chicano stuff in here and put it in here and what are we using, and it was a little intimidating. Ramon Ruiz was there and he was a senior scholar and he was a Mexicanist, and he was sort of curious, "What are you teaching?" Those kind of inquiries came around, and so you felt a pressure to be sure that you're working within those standards, versus totally doing whatever you want to do at Northridge. You want to teach a course on Chicano music, go ahead let's do it, and if you could convince them you knew enough about it, then you could teach it.

At UC San Diego, I saw a lot more kind of what reading list are you going to include? In fact, one of my colleagues who I was working with in the Race and Ethnicity course, ended up not getting beyond her third year, simply because she felt kind of like why do I have to explain to you what I'm going to teach and what books I'm going to use kind of stuff. Conflict, I just hated to see happen, but I think there was intimidation, kind of like "you're in women's

studies and women's history, and we never taught that before, so why do you think this is a legitimate field, sort of convince me that we're ready for this women's studies stuff." The same thing, "convince me that your Chicano stuff isn't just a bunch of novels or something, it's got good historical basis." It was hard because there wasn't a lot out there for us to use, and as I used in the example, Américo Paredes, I used him again, a very established respected scholar. Ernesto Galarza, whom we used, wasn't an academic, he was a labor leader and he just wrote a good book, but you couldn't say scholars at Yale use Ernesto Galarza's book, so who uses this book? And you go like you know, we're going to take a chance on it.

02:00:25:14

Holmes:

I also wanted to ask about—which you've mentioned before—the volume edited *New Direction in Chicano Scholarship*, which you edited with Raymund Paredes.

02:00:25:25

Romo:

Right.

02:00:25:27

Holmes:

Discuss how that work came about.

02:00:25:30

Romo:

So, when I was at UC San Diego, there was a group of graduate students working with a journal called *New Scholar*, and the *New Scholar*, one of the editors was Anglo and very interested in things that I was interested in, and the other was a Chicano graduate student and he had similar kinds of interests. They had this journal going and they asked me to be a member of their editorial board and write something. I'm not sure I ever wrote anything for them, but so we got involved with that. After a while, they were very slow, and it just took them forever to look at anything. I asked Raymund if he wanted to be on the editorial board. He said yeah. Then, Raymund and I one day talked and said you know, we just ought to create our own journal, because these guys will eventually get it done but—. He said, "Well I've been waiting three months for them to respond to something I sent them and they still haven't responded." I said, "Let's just do our own," and so we created *Ethnic Affairs*. Then, I think we did *New Directions in Chicano Scholarship* initially, and I believe we did that in '77 maybe and it was fun. I said, "We need to get some good people engaged," and he said, "I'll ask Américo Paredes, he's my supervisor, mentor, good friend," and he asked him and he said yeah, I'll give you an essay. He gave us a really strong essay, and then we had some other good pieces. So we were off to a good thing.

It happened that in 1980, I decided to go to Texas and when I arrived there, I had to give up *Ethnic Affairs* because they were not interested in publishing it, but they wanted me to help solve a problem and that is, they were publishing this little Chicano sort of monograph on Chicanos, and they couldn't get distribution. So I got placed on the editorial board of UT Press and while



there, I kind of negotiated, "If I bring you a manuscript that somebody has given us to publish in Chicano studies, Mexican American studies in the campus, will you guys consider sort of co-investing and co-publishing, and basically distribute the book?" They said yeah, we can do that. So, our first book was David Montejano's book. He called me up and said—I think our first book, we had several, actually maybe not the first book, it's one of our first books. But he called us up, called me up because I knew him, and said, "I've got this manuscript." So he sent me the manuscript, I said wow this is going to be great, and so I took it to UT Press and they got it reviewed and it was like a great book. But he wasn't finished with the book, so he just basically said look, I'm either halfway done or three quarters done, and I'll have it in six months. Well, six months passed, he didn't have it, a year passed, he didn't have it, and whatever the time was, like fifteen months, they said this is it, we're going to cut, we're not going to do this. So they called me up, because I was the editor of the series, and they said we're going to move on, get some other things done and so forth, but we're not going to publish Montejano's book. I said, "Oh that's crazy, this is a major book," and I went on and on and on about it, finally they said, "Okay, but tell him he's got two months and that's it, no more, no more time."

02:00:29:48  
Holmes:

Was he already under contract?

02:00:29:50  
Romo:

Yeah. I don't know if he was contract, I'm sure he was, but they basically had their rights. They basically said if you don't give it to us in six months, everything else is over. Well he didn't and then in a year he didn't, and I had to call him up, I said, "David, you've got to do it man, you've got to finish this book." I think he was at New Mexico at the time and he said, "I'm trying, I'm trying man, I'm just really trying." I said, "Well get it in," and he did, it came in.

So we had a really interesting, contentious History Department, and we had a very, very extremely talented person, highly, highly regarded historian, whose name I'm not going to mention, who was always clashing with the other people but had been chairman of the department for a little while and then he had been involved in several searches that had kind of gone haywire, and so I was asked if I would chair the search for western history, maybe Chicano history. I forget exactly how we began, but Montejano, being a sociologist, would normally not be contacted in terms of the outreach, so I contacted Montejano and I said, "You need to apply for this job." He said, "A history job, in the History Department, are you kidding?" I said, "No, your book is history man, it's just the historical stuff." So he applied, we turned it in, we had this discussion about the short list of ten people we wanted to bring, and somewhere there that week or later, his book wins the prize, the Jackson Turner Prize, best new book in history by anybody in America, and he's a candidate. So there had been some kind of opposition to hiring a sociologist

and that quieted it down. I said you know this guy, if you don't hire the best historian, the best book guy, you're crazy. So they hired him and he turned out to be a great colleague. Well, it went so well, they were all happy with the whole thing, they were happy with him, that I got asked to chair the second, the next search that was going to happen.

The next search had again, kind of open, U.S. historian, preferably twentieth century but nineteenth century, it was real broad, and I've gotten David into kind of being a member of the little executive group that was doing the search and we discovered Neil Foley. So there's another scholar there named Doug Foley and I always want to start with Doug Foley, but he taught at UT Austin at the same time. So in the second, in this new search, we came across Foley, Neil Foley, and his book and he was doing amazing work, so we brought him down for an interview. A couple of people said this guy is really good, and David and I said you know, it's probably better not to emphasize that he's a Chicano—because Foley is, he's Irish, Mexican—for now, because they'll say three Chicanos is too many in the History Department. So we moved forward and we brought him and he wowed everybody, he was just really good—made a great presentation, his material. I think he worked with Robin Kelley. An excellent presentation, excellent letters, so we hired him and that went well, and nobody looked at him initially as—you know, they didn't worry about the fact that we now have three Chicanos. So that went well, and so I got appointed to be the chair of the next search committee, which was broadly American history, and in the next search committee is when we hired Antonia Castañeda, and she taught there for a while and then decided they weren't going to move to Austin, it was a commute, the commute was hard on her, and maybe just teach locally at St. Mary's. Everybody understood that.

I'll tell you some asides here in a minute but not on camera. Anyway, so that went fine. We got a number of good books. We had Manuel Peña's book called *Conjunto*, on Mexican American music, is a really good book, really important, one of the first books about this, and Américo loved the work he was doing. Did that one and then we did the zoot suit riots book, and a number of other ones. Alex Saragoza did his book on Monterrey, Mexico and the elites of Monterrey, and several others.<sup>2</sup> It was an interesting time. I was interacting with a lot of Chicano scholars, (a) because they wanted to get stuff published initially, in *Ethnic Affairs*, started interacting there, or (b) because they wanted now, to get published with UT Press.

I remember what happened one day with Montejano, someone sent him a copy of what they [UT Press] had published in the past and said we're so glad you're going to publish with us. Well he knew in the old days in Mexican American studies, it got five hundred copies, it looked like a brochure kind of

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<sup>2</sup> Manuel Peña, *A Texas-Mexican Conjunto: History of A Working Class Music* (1985); Mauricio Mazón, *The Zoot Suits Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation* (1984); Alex Saragoza, *The Monterrey Elite and the Mexican State, 1880-1940* (1988).

stuff, and someone sent him some new things and then he would call me and say, "Is mine going to be like this, like a little brochure?" I assured him no, UT Press will design the book, UT Press will distribute the book and UT Press will be sure we get reviews. He said okay. But they were worried. He doesn't have tenure and he's got things that he wants to do. I was so glad for him, he's a terrific scholar and made a lot of contributions to us and then to Berkeley.

02:00:37:35

Holmes:

You edited another volume, if I'm correct on this, in 1982, and it was based off of, I think a symposium, held on Rudy Acuña's *Occupied America*. Do you recall that?

02:00:37:50

Romo:

Not too much. I do remember, yeah, I do remember we brought him down for a symposium and it might have been something that several of us did. I helped bring him down to the campus and we did have a symposium, and I do remember him giving me a hard time for kind of acting like a Texan now. I think he gave me a hard time about my accent, I said something, "Are you all going to get lunch?" "You all going to get lunch?" So, Acuña was giving me grief because he said you know, it's kind of like you belong in California and now you're over here and you're talking like the Texans talk. That was Acuña—he was very witty, a very humorous kind of guy, always kidding around. I enjoyed his company a lot.

02:00:38:57

Holmes:

And then, another work, another article that you published, again in 1982, right before the book came out, "Chicanos in the West," and this was with the *Western Historical Quarterly*. Tell us a little bit about that piece, but also your thoughts of how you saw western history begin to change, particularly if we think of first going into the PhD program in 1970, now here, twelve years later.

02:00:39:23

Romo:

Well, the first thing I should add, that when I was doing my work, my research work, my dissertation work, my classes, I didn't feel that western history sort of appealed to me. I thought that everything I saw written in western history was written from a very Frederick Jackson Turner perspective, you know the closing of the western frontier, and maybe somebody said the New West. I did see a couple of things about San Francisco and others, but for the most part, it didn't appeal to me and I thought well what's wrong with it was that they had kind of left Chicanos out and didn't even think about it, didn't even know about it. It was like what is wrong with our field? I mean, if I looked at the last ten years of what you guys have published, I'm not going to find anything about East L.A., I'm not going to find anything about San Antonio. It's going to be the coming of the railroad and the closing of a goldmine or something, water fights, but I just felt like we'd kind of been left out and nobody had really paid notice or paid that much attention to it.

02:00:41:07

Holmes:

And did you see that change in western history over the years?

02:00:41:14

Romo:

Yeah. I think over time, I got really engaged in a few of the things and wasn't going to as many conferences, and so by the mid-eighties, I'm working with UT Press to get more Chicano books done and I'm working with the Tomas Ybarra group, kind of about colleges, which is very consuming and I'm going to a lot of meetings, and then doing the normal things of helping Mexican American studies with their conferences and so forth. I quit going to a lot of conferences, so I don't really know what the big battles were, I went to a couple of them. I went to one where Ramon Gutierrez—his new book had just come out and so forth, and I organized a panel for that. I was really involved with NACCS [National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies] and I was in the founding of it. I didn't go to the very first meeting in Las Vegas, because we actually had started an organization called the Association of Chicano Historians, which I was one of the organizers for, and Rudy Acuña and Juan Gómez-Quiñones, and Carlos Cortez and Al Camarillo, and all of those guys were on it, but we never—you know, we had like one little meeting. Well then it occurred to the social scientists and the political scientists and people like Carlos Munoz and others, well wait a minute, you know, the social scientists were left out of here, the Chicano historians, and so they began to organize, and I started going to their meetings and they had a little bit more energy. Some of it had to do with if you have an organization kind of working and led by grad students, and that was me, a grad student, it's iffy, if it's going to get done, but we had enough kind of connections with Chicano studies. I was really involved, for over ten years, and was actually the head of whatever title they gave us, when you're the head guy, I was one of those probably in the late seventies, early eighties. I sort of switched my allegiance to western history and other organizations, to Chicano studies and NACCS.

02:00:44:16

Holmes:

From your view, how have you seen that organization grow from its very humble beginnings in some respects to—

02:00:44:25

Romo:

Well the one thing that began to shift and two major things happened and happy to see it. One was that the leadership engagement was a lot of women began to feel that this was theirs and they wanted to be part of it and engaged. I worked with some of them, Chris Sierra initially, and others really well, and we did some good things together. The other one was that they wanted undergraduate students to present, and not just grad students and not just professors, so we had kind of moved into the direction. We're no longer grad students, we're not professors, let's get professors to be panels. There was a shift to where now we have the grad students making 90 percent of presentations, to a shift where I don't know what it is the last five years, but undergraduates can present. So it's kind of become an area of networking and

people kind of talking about what they're doing, and they probably are having excellent success in networking. I might work with this person at Yale one day and who knows anybody from Yale, and the person says I'm at Yale, or I'm a grad student at Yale, or I'm thinking the same thing, so it of great use to many young people.

02:00:46:19

Holmes:

And in some respects too, if you look at it as a young field, particularly in those early years, struggling to get its footing, to have a successful national organization that's yours, right?

02:00:46:32

Romo:

Yeah.

02:00:46:34

Holmes:

By probably any measure, that's still around too. Organizations come and go, particularly in this business. To see that here, thirty years later, it's going.

02:00:46:46

Romo:

Well, I think we sort of discovered there was a great need to interact with each other. The people from Arizona weren't meeting the people from the Midwest, and the Midwest thought the Californians were isolated, and so they began to find a place and a space for them to kind of talk and meet and do all this great stuff, which I thought was really important. I would have never wanted it to be just like the way we created it. We didn't know what we were creating, other than we wanted a voice, a space, and a place to have our presentations. If anything, I can criticize it for, it was that anybody could talk about anything. There were some interesting presentations, like not as well thought out, and it was okay. They would present it and they would get criticism, and then they would say, "Well, so much for that, I'm going to abandon that path, it didn't play out that well" and they'd go on to the next thing, which is part of what happens in academia and part of what happens at the level of even the big conferences. It's very revealing when you never had that happen to you. You know you're sitting there with a hundred people in the audience and someone is saying I'm confused by what you're telling me, I don't see a theory here, and you go like well, I'm sorry you didn't get it, and so they have a conversation and then you start realizing maybe this can be useful when I write this up for an article, or it doesn't fly and I'm going to do something else.

02:00:48:51

Holmes:

I wanted to switch gears here and talk a little bit about moving back to Texas. As you mentioned earlier, Américo Paredes was trying to recruit you a few times, starting in 1975, to come back to UT Austin, which you finally did, I believe, in 1980?

02:00:49:11

Romo:

1980, yes.

02:00:48:13

Holmes: And you joined the History Department as an associate professor.

02:00:49:16

Romo: Right.

02:00:49:18

Holmes: What was your impressions and experience of UT Austin as a Chicano scholar and a faculty, coming back, particularly how much the university had changed since leaving there in 1966.

02:00:49:33

Romo: Well, so I left in '67, because I stayed there to coach the freshman team and was coaching the team and having a good time, and then got married in the summer of '67, that's when I went to California, that's when we left officially, that's when I left Austin. Thirteen years, it changed a little bit, not dramatically. Certainly, when I was there, I knew nothing about Mexican American studies, and there were a number of things I was learning by being a little engaged. I was grateful to [Ernesto] "Ernie" Cortes, who was the founder of Communities Organized for Public Service, or COPS, out of South Texas, and they ended up creating an organization in Los Angeles which was very influential in East L.A., called UNO, and they would attack all kinds of issues, urban neglect and everything else.

So, Ernie Cortes came to recruit us when I was there in '66, '67, and he recruited me to do a little stuff with the farm workers, that was my first engagement with the Chavez group. I didn't meet Chavez then but we did go and do some fundraising and other things, and then I left, so I said I don't know what happened here. So I come back. Américo reached out to me in '75, when I finished my PhD, he said, "Would you be interested in a position, the History Department would be interested in hiring you." I said, "I just finished taking a job at UC San Diego and right now I'm all set." So then in '78 he contacted me again because he said we need a director of Chicano studies and I said, "Well, tell me what can be worked out," and he told me, I said eh, it's okay. So I came in '80 as a visiting professor, just because I wanted to try it out. I'm not sure I wanted to move back to Texas, my wife Harriett has indicated, I don't know, maybe yes, maybe no, so let's go try it out and take this visiting professorship and see if we like it.

So we came in January and then come March or April, I got contacted by the University of Arizona, Tucson, asking me if I would apply for the job as the director of Chicano studies, or in this case Mexican American studies, and so I went to visit and they were very serious. I actually met with the president of the university and he said he had looked at some of the things we had published in *Ethnic Affairs* and a few of the things that he liked, this is '78. He said we'd like to have you here. This is in 1980. So I came back from that and I was informed by the History Department that they're going to do a search for a Chicano Mexican American scholar, a Chicano scholar kind of person and

would I apply. I looked at them and said well, and they said here is the job description and it said assistant professor. I said hey guys, I'm not doing this. I started as assistant professor at Northridge, and then I became an assistant professor at San Diego, I'm not coming here ten years later in 1980 and do that, and I said, "Plus, I have a book contract and Arizona will offer me a tenure job if I want, so you guys, if you get something better for me to look at, I will." So they rewrote it and basically said this would be an associate professor position and a bunch of people applied and I did, and I got the job.

02:00:53:37

Holmes:

Discuss a little bit about Chicano studies and Mexican American studies at UT. Now this had blossomed during your absence. One of the things I guess, in those thirteen years that changed, I believe they have a center, right, the Center for Mexican American Studies. Discuss a little bit about that.

02:00:54:00

Romo:

Well, Américo Paredes, working with Raymund Paredes—no relationship, he was his graduate student—they had pretty much put together the proposal and everything else to create it in 1970. I believe they created it in '70, because Raymund left in '71, when he finished his PhD, to come to UCLA to become a professor of English. So it got started in '70, when I got there it was ten years old, in '80. They had their director, they weren't interested at that point, as me being the director, because when I didn't take an interest in 1978, to come, they went and hired somebody else and he was the director, Arnold Vento, and I said that's fine, I'm perfectly happy doing all the things I'm doing right now. A few years later it came up again and did I want it, and I didn't show enough interest so they gave it to Rodolfo De La Garza, but in that time, I was involved with the program. I was involved with the publication unit, I was involved with their curriculum, trying to recruit faculty to reach certain courses. I was there when we had numerous visitors, in terms of visiting professors, we had adjunct professors, we had the poet Salinas there and I'm sure we had Alurista come in and out, and Jose Limon was in and out, he was gone and then came back. We had a good group, Gil Cadena in sociology was very active, by the mid-eighties we had brought David and he was engaged, David Montejano. I think Américo Paredes was pretty pleased with where it was in terms of being recognized as a pretty strong program.

I think at that time there were only two strong programs; there was UCLA and UT Austin. Everybody else has some activity going but not to that level, of having that many professors. I would say we probably had twenty Mexican American professors. We had one in psychology, we had one in Spanish, we had three in history. So it was perhaps twenty, which is not bad. We had our own center, we had a little budget, a couple of staff people, so it was moving along pretty good.

02:00:57:03

Holmes:

What was the interaction like between, say the History Department and Mexican American studies?

02:00:57:08

Romo:

From the perspective of the History Department, they had no interaction, I mean no one in the History Department even knew—they didn't talk to each other. I was kind of like the—we've got Romo going over there—I was the liaison and if there's something we're supposed to know, he'll come back and tell us. But I seldom came back and told history anything, other than that Mexican American studies would support it, if we hired Montejano, and would hire Castaneda, that they would support it. So the group there would maybe send a letter to the History Department saying this would be a great hire, maybe they'd say we'd like for them to teach a course with us or something, but other than that, if we didn't initiate it they didn't.

02:00:58:06

Holmes:

I wanted to ask too, what's interesting is in these interviews with scholars, you hear various stories of how, when there's only say a handful of Chicana and Chicano scholars at an institution, they develop their own community and networks. From my understanding, at UT Austin, that developed as well. I think both Ramon Saldivar and David Montejano talked about a scheduled gathering, you know maybe for coffee, with yourself, Montejano, Saldivar, Américo Paredes, and others.

02:00:58:47

Romo:

I organized the first series of coffees and what happened was I was very good friends with Américo. Américo had numerous friends but there was a point there where I was pretty much the guy that spent the most time with him, and he told me he was feeling really kind of like, "I need to get out of the house, I need to keep up." He basically says "I made a mistake, I should have not retired when I did, I should have gone another five or ten years," he said "but you know my brother died, I was very sad about it, and I just didn't feel I could kind of handle it and I retired." He said, "Now that I look back on it..." I said, "Well, you know, any time you want to have coffee, you tell me when," and he said, "Well, I can come on campus on Tuesdays." So then I went and I got this other scholar to go, and then we got David Montejano to come, and then we invited Ramon. I mean, we did this for years, every Tuesday for I'm sure five years easily. I remember saying to myself, should I have brought a tape recorder? He's just so full of good history. He's a very, very well read, intelligent person, there wasn't much that he didn't know about. He read all the time, wrote all the time, a great writer. And then Peña would come and that was the group.

First it was me, him and David Montejano joined us, and Ramon started joining us six months later or something, but it was all along the idea that this was good for Américo. The way we looked at it, it was certainly great for us, because we get to be with a scholar we so admire and get to talk to him. Half the time would be spent telling jokes. Américo collected, as an anthropologist, folklores and jokes, and so if you say did you hear the joke about when John Kennedy was elected, he would say, "There are five versions to that joke," and you go like "There are?" He says yes. The first one came out of Chicago, and



he'd tell you the joke, but it wasn't as funny as the one that came out of Los Angeles, and then he'd tell that one. He was amazing, and he had an incredible memory. So if he'd tell you the five jokes, he was never going to miss a punch line, unlike the rest of us, kind of stumbling, oh you know okay, let me start again, let me start again. Not Américo, you know it was, telling jokes. I think he wrote a book about jokes, but he was just quite a scholar, and all of us, we basically sat at his knees, just kind of like we'd be totally happy if we got there, sat down, and he would talk the whole time. We would have been totally happy, but he was kind of generous and he would say, "Well, Ricardo, do you have any LBJ [Lyndon Baines Johnson] jokes?" The other one that would come and join us would be Rolando Hinojosa. There was a couple of times when people were traveling and so forth, and I'd get this frantic call and say well, "I'm not coming and by the way, I hope somebody is going to be there," and I would say, "Well, I'm going to be there pretty much. I never go anywhere on Tuesdays. I teach and I come over here with him before I teach." So I said, "I'll be there." "Oh, thank goodness, I was worried that nobody would show up and then he would be sitting there by himself." I said, "No, somebody's going to show up."

02:01:03:34

Holmes:

I wanted to talk a little bit as well, about some new experiences in policy, and those new avenues that you started to explore, mostly with the Texas branch of the Tomás Rivera Center. Discuss how that came about and your experience there.

02:01:03:54

Romo:

Well, Tomás Rivera was one of the first scholars that I actually remember sitting next to or with and kind of I was in awe, because I knew that he had written this book, which is like one of the first Chicano novels, *And The Earth Did Not Devour Him*. I remember thinking, 'Wow, I'm sitting next to a very important, famous person.' At that time, he was teaching at UTSA [University of Texas at San Antonio] and had become probably dean or provost, but he was the most humble guy, just a really easygoing, humble, very South Texas kind of guy. I asked him one time, "How did you start writing?" And he said, "Well, I wouldn't have been doing any writing if I hadn't gone to college." He said "I was a fieldworker, working in the fields," he said, "But the big shot I got was when I became a bus driver," and I said, "You were a bus driver?" He says, "Yeah, in Crystal City I was a bus driver, and I would drive all these kids. It was Crystal City and then there was this community college about ten miles away and I would drive these kids to the community college." I said, "Well, how did that impact your life?" He said, "All these kids would be sitting there and they would be saying 'so remember that one of the questions that's going to come up is who was Thomas Edison,' and the guy would say 'yeah, he's the guy that discovered rubber tires?' So I'd be driving like oh gosh, even I know the answer to this," and he says so numerous times, "I would hear these people talking about stuff and I knew the answer and they didn't. I'd say I know that, I'm reading enough, so I said if they can go to college then I can

go to college, and so I decided I can go to college too, these kids aren't any smarter than I am." So that's how I got going in college, I took up writing and the next thing you know, I'm a writer. So he was basically saying look, you know, I wasn't one of these very, very smart kids, just everybody was patting on the back for being some bright star, I came up the hard way.

02:01:06:54

Holmes:

And his policy center, that's California based right?

02:01:06:59

Romo:

Yes, it started in California. It was started by him initially. His idea was that—he's a very capable, bright guy who said look, I'm not writing any more, that's not what's important. What's important is our communities, what's important is our people, what's important is their health, what's important is that they're informed, and we need a center that comes out and does studies that helps inform our community and inform the people in the greater community about us. He says, "We don't have enough sufficient healthcare, who's writing about that?" We see stuff written about education all the time but a lot of it is just not the right kind of questions, who's writing about that? So you know, he started that idea in '83 and then in '84 or '85 he died and they decided we're going to do this, I mean he had already kind of convinced a number of people of the significance of it, including the Claremont Colleges, and they were like okay we're in, because he was at Riverside I guess. Then he died, he was president there, then he died and they decided to name it in his honor.

I was contacted by Arturo Madrid, who contacted me and said, "I'm recruiting somebody to be the director and vice president of the center, with a Texas office, and I came to you to get some ideas and pick your brain and see who you think could do this job." So I said, "Well, there's ten possibilities or ten people that I think you might want to go talk to," and he said "Well who are they?" Then he wrote them all down and then he went and talked to different people and then he came back and says, "Everybody I talked to says you need to be the guy, you need to be the director." He said, "They're pretty much unanimous that you'll probably be the best, because I asked them, I said who are the people I should be talking to in Texas, and they said have you talked to Ricardo Romo? Yeah, I've talked to him. Well is he interested?" So that's how I ended up doing that. I did that from '85 to '92, and I formed a Tomás Rivera Center here at Trinity University. In fact, it's one of those things, you know my book came out and things are going okay, I write an article, but now I jumped into policy, and a lot of the work that we did was we fundraised. One year, we went to five large granting agencies, including Ford and Mellon, and Carnegie, and all five funded us, that was my grants, every single one got funded, five out of five.

02:01:10:15

Holmes:

Wow.

02:01:10:16

Romo:

Which is pretty unusual, and big money, you know two-fifty, five-hundred million. So that's what I did for seven years and I put all my energy and time into that. I did some articles here and there but it was clear I wasn't going to be able to write a book and do that at the same time, so I said that's fine, I'll do this, this is important. In '92, I'm doing this and I had kind of written some stuff about UT Austin, in terms of they're not doing enough. In one of those articles, I used UT Austin as an example, and the articles might have been brief, two- or three-page kind of data analysis, and I used UT Austin as not being as responsive, given their resources and given this large population of the state of Texas, most of which is not educated and so forth, they could be doing even more. So I got a call from the president to come see him and he basically wanted to convince me that that was wrong. It turns out he was a historian, his name Robert Berdahl, a great guy; I loved Bob, he was a great guy.

So I went to see Bob and he was trying to convince me and he basically was saying look, without saying it, this kind of stuff gets into the hands of the legislators and then you're saying that we kind of are not doing—and those Chicano legislators are going to be mad at us, so this is not helping UT Austin. I said well I understand that, I said, but you've got the resources. I don't want to say you're doing everything great when I don't see it as outstanding, I'm just giving you guys a C, I'm not giving you the A-plus. So we had a good conversation and he said, "Would you like to work in the provost office, I'd like to have you there as the vice provost." I said, "Well right now I'm doing all this stuff," and he knew what I was doing because of those reports. He said, "You can continue doing that and work for us. You can continue doing the stuff with California and Trinity, just as long as you work for us." I came home and I decided I want to do it but I'm not going to do—it won't be fair to them and fair over here, so I'm just going to do one job, and I stuck to my doing one.

02:01:13:10

Holmes:

And that's when you left the Rivera Center.

02:01:13:12

Romo:

Yeah, I left them after seven years, where I was pretty much engaged.

02:01:13:18

Holmes:

Well, I wanted to talk a little bit about your time as provost, but before there, I wanted to just shift a little bit to get your observations about the maturation of Chicano studies. The field is beginning to mature by the 1990s. We have the second generation now coming out with new books and we see an expansion of community studies that we didn't see before, of when it was just this focus on California or Texas, now see things going into the Midwest. New dimensions obviously within social and cultural history, labor unionization, you know?

02:01:13:58

Romo: Yeah.

02:01:14:00

Holmes: What are some of the areas that were beginning to emerge that really struck you in your recollections?

02:01:14:17

Romo: I think certainly, we saw addition of faculty in legal studies, so like Michael Olivas as an example, at Houston, and others. Michael kept the line of fire under the UT system, to hire a Chicano legal scholar at Austin and they didn't do the job for a long time, they finally did. I think what was kind of interesting is that Michael Olivas sort of was a respected voice in the legal community and he would go to—he said at every presentation I make, I'm in with there's more we can do, I wish we had more scholars, but I also wish that universities, great universities, great university law schools like UT Austin, would join and go hire a Chicano scholar, they need one. He went on and on for years on this and so you know, it was kind of interesting is that they helped the cause, I mean they were helping to open up doors. He said, "We can use more in Houston, sure," but he helped the cause. Like any field, in terms of my own field, there were a lot of topics that we didn't get into either, because I was writing about California and sort of like no one got into it, and that is an example of the whole discussion of the Mexican War, the Alamo, and what Raul Ramos has written about, Raul did a great job. And then the work that was done by Frank de la Teja in terms of early stuff, and Felix Almaraz, I didn't see any of that.

When I was getting ready to teach a course, if I was developing a brand-new course in 1975, just as an example, at UC San Diego, there was nothing by Frank de la Teja, there was really nothing by Felix Almaraz, maybe a little bit but Raul Ramos had not come along yet. Those are some good scholarship. So I think the people who were doing work in the nineties, were really benefiting from the new scholarship, but you also saw quite a bit of addition of new people in education, a lot of people doing studies, more kind of in depth, on civil rights and segregation.

I wrote an article for one of the legal journals and looked at all the kind of cases where segregation was being fought and so forth. I did not find a lot of Chicano scholars writing about it. There's a lot now and lots of good stuff out there, but it was that and then I'm sure in sociology—you know, my first interest in the work of sociologists was immigration, and that's where I found Julian Samora writing, when I was writing in '75, kind of Julian Samora and Jorge Bustamante, just as an example. There were people like Octavio Romano, *El Grito*, anthropologist, I mean they were producing every year, somebody, they were producing scholars. Renato Rosaldo is an example. It was multi-disciplined, it was sort of in the way that I was using Américo Paredes and his folklore stuff, into my history stuff, people were using my history in their anthropology courses. I've seen some of the work that—Carlos

Velez is an example, in terms of what he wrote back in the seventies and then what he wrote in 2000, just kind of bringing a lot of new ideas, new theories, new discoveries, and some of it being by Chicano scholars. Cynthia Roscoe kind of spinning off and learning from Vicki Ruiz and others.

02:01:19:48

Holmes:

Also, and Vicki Ruiz reminds me of this, is that two of the really burgeoning fields that we see by the 1990s under the umbrella of Chicana and Chicano studies of course, is the issues of women and gender, really the rise of Chicana history. We see this with Vicki Ruiz, Antonia Castañeda and others later on. But also we see the concept of the borderlands, speaking of David Weber, as a topic beginning to infuse within Chicano studies around this time. What are your observations on those?

02:01:20:32

Romo:

Well, the first part, on women's studies, not only is there women's studies to sort of see women interested in what women write, and therefore owning it, like this is only going to be about what Chicanas have written, like Gloria Anzaldúa. Gloria Anzaldúa was a powerful, powerful voice in women's studies, I mean just like everybody quotes her all the time, but there's also the application of feminist studies to works like art history, which I'm very interested in art history. So, their ability to critique works was just like oh you know, it's just a Chicano painting a mural, and for them to critique the works and say to you, you see shapes and forms and color, but I see really disturbing things here, or I see something really uplifting here, and they'd take a feminist perspective on say, an art piece, and that's kind of interesting as well.

I find that in art history, there's some really good works being done, and some of these people who were trained in the UC system, bless their hearts, some of them began in Chicano studies. Carlos Jackson, Carlos Francisco Jackson, at UC Santa Cruz—or UC Davis—learned so much from the pioneering work of Malaquias Montoya, who was an artist and of course his brother was a poet. They had built on that, and then not only did they paint and have workshops, but then they write, and so Jackson has an excellent book on Chicano art. George Vargas has excellent works on art, and it helps to explain things. There's a good discussion as to the role of the farm workers and I'm interested in that, as an example. What did the UFW, [United Farm Workers] what did Chavez and UFW do for Chicano history and Chicano culture? You say well, you know, the theater groups, El Teatro Campesino, and I have photographs for you, of when they appeared at UCLA in 1970.

02:01:29:39

Holmes:

Oh wow.

02:01:29:40

Romo:

El Teatro Campesino. Murals. Most people agree, the first Chicano mural was done right outside Delano, former headquarters, and then people say well okay this is great. We had the Mexicans example for years, the Diego Riveras

and the [David Alfaro] Siqueiros, but nobody was using it. I mean those guys were painting in the forties and fifties and we didn't run with it until someone said I think we can do a mural and we should do a mural, about Cesar Chavez, and they did a mural with Cesar Chavez and that became like okay—it takes off. That interests me a lot but you know, I was writing about Texas artisans and art over the last 250 years and I can't tell you how helpful the historians are. I'm just reading art books and art articles, and I found them not deep enough, so I went to the historians and I took the historians and I said oh man, this is interesting. I discovered, as an example, a piece done here, an art piece done in one of the missions in 1780. Now, in most cases, all the art done in any missions in California, they don't know who did it, they just know Indian labor, an Indian artisan, maybe they can say his name was Jose. I actually found, by piecing together using Jesus de la Teja and a couple of other historians, pieced together, found the name, the full name of the person, the fact that they had a family, the fact that he came to Texas as a mulatto and after working in the community as an artisan, twenty-five years later, he lists himself as a Spaniard, and he gets don attached to his name.

That kind of stuff you can't put together just with one field, you know you have to utilize several fields. I used the anthropologists, who kind of discovered this piece, and I used the art historians who criticized the piece, and then I used the Chicano historians who tell me who's in the community. They didn't tell me this is a great artisan, Jesus de la Teja didn't say that. He just basically said this is an artisan who had done and become this. Well, I think that's—and I'm doing this with art history. I think you can be doing that with literature, I'm sure Jose Saldivar will tell you, I'm sure Ramon Saldivar will tell you, what he was writing about and his accommodation of history, anthropology, folklore, everything else.

02:01:27:16  
Holmes:

Well in many respects too, Chicano studies as a field, has always been interdisciplinary almost from the beginning, and we see this even in your first book, the quantitative work that you were doing with census records and city directories. So as the field matures, and we see in the 1990s, that this is becoming even more commonplace.

02:01:27:40  
Romo:

So many early works were just not greatly appreciated, so Manuel Gamio comes from Mexico and he does a study of immigrants, and he looks at the immigrant community here in the United States and he does some quantification, I mean he basically says I just want to know what states they come from. So he quantifies it by using remittance and using other things to kind of find out, and then he basically says Guanajuato, Michoacán, these are the states that the immigrants come from. I took this to Stephan Thernstrom, mister quantification, and I told him, I said, "I want to do something like this but a little bit different, using some data sources that have been used by historians." It's a brand-new field. He said yeah, that sounds great, he says,

"God, this guy did this?" I said yeah and I said, "He was well trained, he got his PhD at Columbia, under Franz Boas."

02:01:28:38

Holmes:

Oh wow, oh wow, that's interesting. Well, Ricardo, I wanted to talk a little bit here, about your moving up the administrative ranks, and I wanted to start this by discussing, I believe it was in 1992 or '93, becoming vice provost, as you were talking about, at UT. Discuss your experience and not just the experience but also, how your background as growing up on the West Side in San Antonio, and coming to age in the profession within that first generation of Chicano scholars. How did that background also impact how you looked at the vice provost position?

02:01:29:26

Romo:

I'm not looking at it that way. The way I looked at it was there I am, in 1992, I'm meeting with a person I think does an extremely good job running the university, Robert Berdahl, who then left us to go to Berkeley, I'm getting a chance to work directly under a great provost in Mark Yudof, and Mark Yudof left after a while to become the chancellor of UT System and then the chancellor of the UC System. So I'm working really, with two or three really—actually, maybe we can take a break a second.

02:01:30:07

Holmes:

Oh, okay.

[Pause in Recording]

02:01:30:10

Holmes:

So, you were just explaining, before our break here, having the opportunity to work under Mark Yudof and Robert Berdahl, as great administrators, and obviously, if we look at the rest of their career that shows through, right?

02:01:30:34

Romo:

No question.

02:01:30:35

Holmes:

My question for you is when one is trained as a scholar, you're a historian, a Chicano scholar, what attracted you to working in administration, because it's a whole different level of showing up, teaching, and writing a book, versus I'm in charge of helping this university, you know the wheels in this university go around. I mean as many faculty would often look at, until you wear those shoes, you stand on the sideline and just throw criticism.

02:01:31:11

Romo:

Robert Berdahl told me that he had been chair of the department and during the time that he taught, he said, "I've taught for ten years, I've been chair of the department and every Friday night we played poker, and then I got appointed dean and the Friday night group disinvited me, like they didn't want to play poker with me anymore." He says it was clear, as one said, that now

that I've gone over to the dark side, it was like you're not really one of us. So, that was kind of interesting, wow.

I thought I could do more things, especially in recruiting faculty. I liked recruiting Chicano faculty for the History Department, I could do it at a bigger level and I did. I was allowed, by Mark Yudof, to seek out and work with faculty and deans and chairs, to be sure that they identified Chicano scholars in their searches, and if they didn't have anybody, I was the one that was going to be quietly just reminding them, this doesn't seem to me like a really good search if you didn't have a single, you know not a single woman apply or not a single Chicano apply or not a single black interview or something. So those were the things that I ended up doing, and so I was sort of giving some resources to kind of help move things along and we hired more Chicano faculty.

The other thing kind of interesting, since you've interviewed David Montejano, and I think this maybe had come up. After one of the major cases where we basically got into a battle with affirmative action, and then lost that battle and the idea was you cannot have affirmative action any more, what are we going to do? This was the last year of my Tomás Rivera Center times and I got a state senator from Austin by the name of Gonzalo Barrientos, and I said, "Senator Barrientos, I need to get you to talk to the scholars and see if the policy people, the scholar people, can come up with any way, any alternative, anything that we can do to be sure that we don't get cut out, and you never see any more Hispanics at UT Austin." He said, "Tell me when, I'll do it," and I said okay, and I got the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations] office to give us their hall and we called a meeting, and I brought some of the people that had been kind of working with us at the Tomás Rivera Center, which included David Montejano and Jorge Chapa, who was teaching at the LBJ School, a UC Berkeley graduate, well Berkeley and Chicago. Anyway, I told him what we were going to do and he said you know, "We've got to come up with sort of an alternative or a way to get around this stuff and still see that we don't lose Chicanos."

So, Montejano came up with the idea of a Top Ten Percent Plan, and I had him explain it to me and I said, "I think I understand, I'm not quite sure but let's go." So, he sort of briefed me, it was sort of cryptic, I wasn't quite sure what everything was. So we came to this meeting, there's about a hundred people in the room, and everybody's kind of talking about it and how this Hopwood case is just going to kill us, we can't use affirmative action, we can't use race, we can't use ethnicity, we can't use this. And David said well, "If we can't use any of those then let's just say that the state should agree to let any kid from any high school in Texas, who graduates in the top ten percent, automatically get into UT and forget SAT scores." You can imagine now, this is 1992, 1993, they were like are you serious? They're not going to ever agree to this. Okay, but tell us how it works. So, he got Jorge Chapa to do some data crunching and basically says okay—and I'm going to make this



number up, but something like okay, there are one thousand high schools in the state of Texas and the majority of them, at least half of them, have Hispanic students, so we're always going to get students from the top ten percent. Take a school like Fox Tech, where Ricardo went, if you have a graduating class of four hundred and you take the top ten percent, you've got forty kids from that school eligible to come to UT, to UT Austin, and what we're basically saying is you've proven yourself, your SAT scores don't matter.

So we actually sold that and I was the liaison person, because of my relationship with my friend, Senator Barrientos. I went to Berdahl, I went to Dr. Berdahl and told him, I said, "This is what's being planned," and I said I think we need UT Austin to be in favor of it, or at least not opposed to it, because it's going to be put in as a bill. He said "wow," and so we went in and I worked with the very distinguished and able representative Irma Rangel, who was from Kingsville, Texas, she was in the house and Gonzalo was in the senate, I went back and forth to both of them, we got a bill drawn. I basically took David's words and we wrote the bill, and then the SAT, we wrote the bill, and my contribution to the whole discussion was that any student who qualified for that plan and would need financial aid, then the state would provide financial aid. It was sort of based on the HOPE program out of what, Georgia, Mississippi. So we took it and Gonzalo got it into committee, but the real powerful person was the head of the Education Committee was Irma Rangel, she was a lawyer. Irma Rangel brought it up to discussion in her Education Committee and it was explained and so forth, and of course you know, there was lots of resistance to it, but she was going to hold up everything. She said well we have the votes, the senate has the votes, and I think they thought maybe [George W.] Bush would veto it, but we got Irma Rangel to talk to Bush and Bush talked to Berdahl and so forth. Agreed, let's do it, so they passed the Top Ten Percent Plan, and that was like in the mid-nineties.

02:01:39:11  
Holmes:

I think 1996.

02:01:39:14  
Romo:

And Marta Tienda has written kind of a bunch of reviews about it and every year, they keep thinking we're going to get rid of it, but the last time they had a serious fight on it, all the rural communities of Texas, mostly North Texas Anglo communities, said you will not get rid of this; up until this point, none of our kids could ever get into UT Austin, but now they get in.

02:01:39:44  
Holmes:

In talking with David on that, it's one of the aspects that he also pointed out, that he said, "Listen, it's not really about race, it's about class," and that aspect helps students of color, because of those regions, but it also helps rural Anglo communities.

02:01:40:13

Romo:

It's one of the few times in history where the rural Anglo community, conservative Anglo community, basically says I agree with South Texas, we need our kids to go to school. In both instances, there were a lot of schools that had never seen anyone go there, including Fox Tech, just not since Ricardo Romo went to Texas back in the sixties, have we seen anybody go to Texas kind of deal, so it was good. I think that that's ultimately, if I were to say what did you accomplish while you were doing policy, and I would say we were doing policy not ever thinking we were going to run into this kind of an issue or question, but when we did, we said even though we never thought about this and we've never done this before, I'd put my money on guys that have good brains and good ideas, and they might come up with something.

02:01:41:20

Holmes:

I wanted to move now, to you becoming president of UT San Antonio, and we can see, by these past experiences that you've been discussing, you were well experienced and prepared, I think, for the challenge. Discuss how this position developed and your experience of walking in.

02:01:41:41

Romo:

In '99, when I was appointed, I interviewed in '98, in December, in twenty-two hours of interviews, and there were three candidates. One of them was the Hispanic vice chancellor in a chancellor's office, in the top office, a former dean at UT Austin, Hispanic; they were the top two candidates, and there was another candidate who was a dean at the College of Business. So it was tough, but I think in the end, all of the things that I learned in that seven years under really good leadership paid off, and the fact that it happened to be in San Antonio, where I had lots of friends, knew the community pretty well, I could respond quickly to questions about San Antonio has this, and I would say the South Side does but not the North Side, or something along those lines; city government tried that before but not in recent years kind of. So I was very well prepared. I had people like Henry Cisneros come to my house and sit and have me pitch presentations to him, and kind of like oh no, not that, I wouldn't go there, because he was a former regent at Texas A&M, and when all of this was happening, he'd already been in the Clinton administration of course. So I had people like him, very extremely thoughtful, insightful people, sit down with me and help prepare.

Different perspectives, I had, not all of them were Hispanic, my friends, some of them. One is a psychology professor, who sort of had great expertise with faculty and how faculty responded. He said when you present to faculty, don't assume this and concede this, and so forth, and it was all very helpful and so when I met with the faculty, which had an influence. So, I have a great friend and mentor in Dr. Peter Flawn, who was former president of UT Austin, and he was really good friends with Américo Paredes, they'd come in the same year, and as a consequence of my friendship with Américo, he and I became friends and I sought his advice, you know what should I be doing and thinking, how do I prepare, you've hired a lot of people, and so forth. He was

very helpful. So I got the job and um, lots of things to do, there were just some great opportunities.

02:01:44:40

Holmes:

Becoming a university president, and this is not something that when somebody is getting a PhD and thinking they're going to go into academia, that they ever probably envision of taking the top spot at the university itself. But especially for you, and in preparing for this interview it really struck me, which I'm sure it struck you, is that first of all, you most likely were one of the first Chicano university presidents in the state of Texas. The second thing is to think about what a huge step that was, from arriving at UT Austin as just only one of two Hispanic athletes in pretty much a completely white college, to in 1999, as an accomplished Chicano scholar, stepping into university president. Discuss and reflect a little bit on that experience for you.

02:01:45:45

Romo:

Well, certainly things, when I started to apply, and it was at the encouragement of numerous people, including my wife Harriett, who said, "You should apply. You're doing so much already, probably some of the things you do at this university, you could do easily, what would be major duties at UTSA." She says, "You're doing a lot of this work." So I applied and once I applied, things were real intense, and just a lot of preparation, a lot of discussions, a lot of things. Then, when I went through those interviews and in February, when I was appointed in February, and I said okay, I'll start in May, I had so many things to kind of finish up. I started reading and thinking, started reading a lot of leadership books and I started having conversations about what do we need to know, and then I did one of those executive sessions at Harvard, for new presidents, I did it two summers in a row just to be sure I got it all right, but it was real fast, it was real intense, it was real busy.

The first six weeks that I came here, my wife Harriett was teaching a class and we had our son there. Well, she was teaching a class and had not finished yet, and so we had a house which we were not going to get for six more weeks, so I moved back into my old neighborhood with my parents. So, my first six months of being president, I lived with my parents. At the end of the day, I would go over there and lie on the sofa and watch TV with them, just kind of like when I was a kid, and it was kind of funny, it was fun. They were very supportive. Then you just kind of roll up your sleeves and face a whole bunch of things, trying to get some more resources. My friendships with the chancellor allowed me to get an \$80 million, which is like one time, unheard of. Here's \$80 million for your next two buildings, go do it. Normally, you have to go through this long process of legislative monies and everything else, but he got the University System to basically give us the money to make sure San Antonio was going to be a great university. Of course, a lot of comparisons with the California Systems, you know the way that the UC San Diegos get going, the way the UC Irvines and Santa Barbaras get going, in the shadow of UCLA and Berkeley. You've got to support them, you've got to

give them resources, you've got to believe in them, and they said that's for us, we're going to believe in UTSA to be the next great university.

02:01:48:59

Holmes:

Well, and during your tenure as president, UTSA, it doubled in size.

02:01:49:06a

Romo:

It grew by 65 percent, from eighteen to thirty, thirty-one and all that. And the budget, I mean the first year, we raised the same amount as the previous year, by the president who had been there nine years. He raised \$3 million, I raised \$3 million, and I thought I was doing pretty good, that I didn't lose any money, but I met with Chancellor Mark Yudof, who was my friend, and he said "You're doing good here, oh by the way," he said, "I've just got to mention this. You didn't raise very much money." I said, "Well you know, I didn't lose any money," he said, "No, no, you've got to be thinking much more." He didn't give me a number. I said, "Much more?" He says, "Yeah, lots more." So we took that and soon, we were hitting \$25 million a year, which is a good amount for a school our size that doesn't have a history of alumni, is a very young school. But we did this little campaign and raised \$200 million, which is the most anybody had ever raised in the city, and one of the larger amounts raised in the state, other than the big guerillas. We did pretty good.

02:01:50:30

Holmes:

And just for the record, and again correct me if I'm wrong on the stance. You added ten new buildings and also as a research university, you went from three PhD programs to twenty-four.

02:01:50:45

Romo:

Yeah. Now that was the hard part, because that's not something a president can do. You really have to work with faculty and deans, and everybody's got to pitch in. This is not something where you just kind of declare, we will get two more, or we're going to get ten more. You say we want to, but then you work with everybody. You mentioned some important things, because when I got there in '99, the whole campus, which is a campus of two million square feet, and when I left it was nearly five and a half million square feet, so we more than doubled the size of the campus. The amount of research dollars went up significantly, the amount of you know just—when I got there, we were a 44 percent Hispanic campus and when I left, it was about 51, 52 percent, so we kept increasing the minority population to where it actually became the majority population.

02:01:52:02

Holmes:

And I think it also stands out that I guess to kind of cap this discussion, is UTSA was a commuter school and under your tenure, it actually grew into a top tier research institution, which is a heck of an accomplishment.

02:01:52:22

Romo:

Well, pretty high level, high education officials, whose names I shall not mention, said exactly that, it was a commuter school; one actually said it was

a glorified high school. To be one of the top fifty young universities in the world, which we did when I was there—twice, among the top fifty best universities in the world, that I feel really proud of, because when I look at those schools that competed, and there's a lot of them, but we were in the company of UC Irvine at one point, UC Davis and UC San Diego. Those are the schools that you know, not many Texas schools have ever accomplished that, so yeah we moved it up a lot. The last year I was there, the people that we hired were all from top universities, which we had never done that before. We would hire good faculty, but they would be from such and such state university, but now we were University of Chicago, Yale, Berkeley, UCLA type schools, top schools.

02:01:53:54

Holmes:

Well, Ricardo, here towards the end, I wanted to get some of your reflections and thoughts on the evolution of Chicano studies over the decades, and maybe your thoughts on where it may go. The field obviously has matured and grown since your early days as an undergraduate at UT Austin.

02:01:54:14

Romo:

Right.

02:01:54:15

Holmes:

We see this in the rise of ethnic studies departments, as well as Chicana and Chicano studies departments themselves. In your view, what have been some of the major developments in the field that you've witnessed?

02:01:54:27

Romo:

Well that's a tough question, because if you think about it, certainly 1968 would be an okay year to say that's like the first year of Chicano studies. It could have been '67, it could have been '69, but really, let's say '68, that's fifty years ago. So you say what kind of changes have you seen in fifty years, and I've been in the field for, I've been here in universities for fifty years, so I can say that the obvious is that there's been a lot of changes. I think what makes it gratifying in terms of I can't really identify all the changes, because sometimes there's changes in the way that we would teach psychology, in terms of whereas before, Chicano studies never could be thought about inclusion in psychology, maybe it is, or some of the other fields. I say none of us know everything in all the fields in terms of—I'll give you the example of what I know about art and art history, and how we now need all the disciplines to kind of come to conclusions about what was being done.

So I think that one of the changes is the fact that we have sort of major tools, the maturity of numerous fields that we as historians can use. We now have the anthropologists helping us out, we have the folklores helping us out, as I mentioned, we might have the psychologists helping us out in terms of certainly the book on zoot suit riots was utilized in a lot of psychological kinds of things. Those are the things that I see one, and then we have more kind of scholars in different fields and they all kind of lend and help, so that

we're not alone. You know, Rudy Acuña writing his book, *Occupied America*, and I was two doors down from him the entire time he was writing it, just relied on what he could check out of the library, you know, and most of it was history and most of it was saying—a lot of it, I know many of the chapters were these guys don't say anything about this. They think that the territorial wars were simply guys with six guns. No. It was about Chicano farmers and Chicano shepherders and Chicano cowmen and other kind of battles that brought people into conflict. It wasn't just shoot 'em up, there was economic and land conflicts, and territories, and I think Montejano writes about that in his book, in terms of the South Texas ranches and the conflicts and the loss of land. So I think back then, we had fewer resources, we had fewer tools, we had fewer ideas, we had fewer of everything. So that's one.

Two. I think it's just been—you know, my daughter is a historian, whereas you saw not many women in the field and not many women students and not many women scholars, it may be that now the majority of scholars in many of the departments are women, and that's a significant change. Certainly, as I am proud of what my daughter is doing as a Latin American scholar, I'm proud of what's been accomplished there, and we're going to see a continuation, I hope, of that.

I think at some point, in some colleges, Chicano studies was sort of a marginal kind of operation, a marginal program, viewed in some cases sort of suspect, but it's allowed the space for a lot of people to kind of grow, including myself. Chicano studies gave me my first opportunities. I didn't have a PhD, and I'm studying and teaching at the same time, and it gave me that sort of entry into the academy that a lot of people didn't have before and maybe have more so now, so that the changes, that the discipline is mature enough that people respect and talk about it and use it, it's not just for us. I think if maybe early on, *Occupied America* was just for us, but now, the new books coming out, and I'll use an example, Raul Ramos' book, it's not just for Chicanos. It's for the broader community here that is totally torn over what the heck was the Alamo and who, in the old days, there's only one kind of hero, and that's John Wayne, he's the only one, that's the only kind of hero. They were saying Davy Crockett was not the only hero here, you know there are some other people who played a role in ultimately, the creation of Texas as an important state.

So I think we benefit from new scholarship. Of course technology helps a lot. We're able to contact people around the world now, easily and quickly, not back then. You'd write somebody and it would take you a couple of weeks to find out whether or not you've been invited to the conference or not. Now you can know instantly, whether you're in or not. I think it's healthy that we—I hope so—that we're seeing more people interested in being in the academy, in being professors. I know there's a tremendous turnover among the secondary teachers, there's just a revolving door of people who go in and then kind of don't stay very long. In many schools, of course teaching doesn't pay much and it's very demanding kind of work, and there are other jobs that will pay

you more for your talents. Well, college teaching doesn't pay that much, but it is something, that's what makes us kind of different in that we're willing to do it for so little, and it's because we love it.

I love history and I like exploring different parts of history, I like writing about history, I like going back to books as I did recently, because there's a big discussion. History is so essential. There's a big discussion right now about San Antonio being three hundred years old, and so I decided to write a couple of essays about what I knew about the founding of San Antonio, it's not what we think it was. And in doing that, I used numerous books by Chicano scholars, no question about that, and without that I can't do it. I would never rely on the works done in the past, because the Chicano scholars have uncovered so much, and it's helped me uncover a few things myself. So we're needed, and so maybe I can say that fifty years ago, nobody saw a need for us. What could I possibly need a Chicano scholar for? But now, the city says we've got to have a Chicano scholar on the committee, the city says we have to have a Chicano architect on this committee, and someone in conservation who is from the community, and it's got to be Chicano. This is not going to work with ten white guys sitting at a table, deciding what the history of San Antonio is about, it ain't going to work that way. There's going to have to be some Chicanos who are from this community, there's going to have to be some women, there's going to have to be some Native Americans, and that's the only way we can really do a good job and reach a truth.

02:02:03:46

Holmes:

As the field has matured and developed, we saw the rise of ethnic studies departments and Chicana and Chicano studies departments. You also worked in numerous university settings, some that had their own departments for Chicano studies and those who they were more blended in with others, maybe like a program, right? What is your view on having a separate department say, of Chicana and Chicano studies, versus having those scholars maybe under a larger umbrella in the different departments?

02:02:04:41

Romo:

I think you need both. I think there are some scholars and bless their hearts, they have gone to good schools and they want to be in the discipline they got trained in, and that's all they want to do. They're anthropologists, psychologists, who happen to be interested in Chicano studies, not that they are only supposed to be in ethnic studies. I know that some scholars have that issue with some of the California schools, kind of like I want to be in the major discipline, that's where I want to be, and then I also want to be doing this. So when I got hired by the History Department, we're going to hire you in the History Department but you will also be a member of Third World College. Fine, sounds good to me. If you want, you can hang out with the Chicano studies people. Well I did, to where they made me the chair of it. So yeah, I like that I was in Chicano studies and I was perfectly happy. I was not in the History Department at Cal State Northridge. I certainly would not have

wanted that. I wanted to be in a cutting-edge field. These other guys were doing the western history like in the old days. So I think those things fortunately fell on my lap and I did it and pursued it and enjoyed it, but I think we need both. I think there are some people who feel that in order for them to accomplish in their comfort level and to be able to say things and so forth, they need to have their own kind of department, probably no different than Teatro Campesino saying we can join a San Francisco theater group or we can join a Los Angeles theater group and propose that they let us do something along the lines of protest theater, but it ain't going to work. We're going to have to form our own group and it's going to be called Teatro Campesino, and Luis Valdez is going to do it, and one day, we'll do some stuff with the big boys but not now. So yeah, I think we need both. I think we do need Chicanos playing on Broadway, but I think we also need Chicano theater that plays out in the community and does anything it wants, it does things that people on Broadway would say that doesn't appeal to a lot of people.

02:02:07:47

Holmes:

I had a question about activism in the field. It played an important role in the founding of Chicana and Chicano studies. What are some of your observations, how activism has continued to influence and impact the field?

02:02:08:07

Romo:

It's sort of a sad statement about the state of affairs. Here we are in 1965, so very few Chicanos going to college, and many of them feeling like when they go to college, they're just like isolated, they don't have a lot of networks, they don't have support groups, they don't have safety nets. I would have been one of those if I had just gone to college on my own, but I had the track team guys to kind of hang out with and do stuff. A lot of people, college is not as friendly to them, coming from a barrio, where it's just too big a jump for many of them, in their mind. So activism was basically saying there's something wrong with this picture, there's not enough Latinos here, you know there's only twelve of them at UT Austin, we're going to need more and why aren't there more? Then when you heard the excuses and you realized my God, these people really don't care, they really don't understand, you'd hear excuses, "Well Chicanos aren't prepared to go to college. They're either not smart enough or haven't gotten enough kind of math behind their background and so forth, and they really, they shouldn't be in college yet, they're not quite ready for that." Activism said uh-uh, we're not waiting, we want to do this now, and so the activists pushed to open the doors and I'm glad they did, otherwise we'd be still waiting.

02:02:10:07

Holmes:

I wanted to ask, which is not always the easiest question, where you hope to see the discipline go?

02:02:10:26

Romo:

I don't know where the field should go. I think this is a kind of field that will evolve, sort of still based on the forces of personality and whether there's



enough kind of champions to create extremely good model programs that everybody else can say, "Wow, let's do that." I think Acuña did that. I think there was nothing and then he created it, and then if you had asked him was it going to evolve, he'd say, "Well, I hope we're not the only school doing this," that would have been his reaction. My reaction is we need some really good models, people really devoting their time and efforts to it, and then the rest of the world will look and see it as something to emulate and put together. Now, I'm not close enough to the field any more to stay which ones are the really good models. I do know that there's a lot of change taking place right now in terms of student interest, and so the freshman class in certain Ivy League schools is just all going into technology. They all want to be the next Bill Gates and is that going to help us produce more Chicano writers and Chicano historians and Chicano anthropologists? I don't know. It appears that it could endanger the interests in literature and humanities and social sciences, that's just one of the things that would worry me, but it's too early to tell.

02:02:12:29

Holmes:

Well finally, Ricardo, in these interviews, I like to ask the scholars I'm able to sit down with to maybe reflect a bit and recognize their fellow scholars who have passed. We all stand on the shoulders of others.

02:02:12:47

Romo:

Right.

02:02:12:48

Holmes:

Are there scholars in the field who have passed that you would like to recognize and say something about?

02:02:12:55

Romo:

Certainly, one of the very first scholars I read, that particular scholar was Ernesto Galarza, who was an amazing person coming out of a very small town in Mexico and then growing up in California, and then moving on to do great work and PhD work at Columbia. I think Ernesto really kind of influenced a lot of young scholars in terms of what he was doing.

I certainly was influenced by a very important scholar, George I. Sanchez, who grew up in New Mexico and ended up his entire career at UT Austin. I'm happy to say that when I was in the provost office, I had the opportunity to impact the naming of a building, and I noted that we only had one building named after a Hispanic scholar, and that we have kind of given all the non-Hispanic names, whatever they were, like five hundred names—so we got a building named for George I. Sanchez, and that was the George I. Sanchez School of Education. So that kind of recognition was very deserving and I think he was a pioneer in the area, not just of education, because he did some incredible work in studying bilingualism and studying in terms of challenging the use of IQ tests on monolingual kids who only spoke Spanish kind of stuff, it was amazing, certainly those.

I was hired at UC San Diego, by Ramon Ruiz and he passed several years ago, and he was a Mexicanist. He had this sort of strong personality that helped influence UC San Diego in terms of bringing more studies and more emphasis on Latin American studies. He hired me, knowing that I was going to do Chicano history. And lastly, Américo Paredes, who was a great mentor and friend, who passed in 1999, and I was able to help the family and organize the particular ceremony for him, and remarks. He was quite an amazing fellow, who grew up in Brownsville, Texas and born in 1915 and lived a great life. He certainly was one of the fathers and founders of Chicano studies, Mexican American studies, totally. He's in that same category with Rudy Acuña. When you open up a center in 1970, called Mexican American studies, and there's only one or two around the country and one of them is at Northridge and UCLA, so he was responsible for putting that program on the map at UT Austin.

02:02:16:27

Holmes:

Well, again, Ricardo, thank you so much for your time. Is there any final thoughts that you would—?

02:02:16:34

Romo:

Let me just commend you, Todd, for what you're doing. I think it's long overdue. What I found, in doing oral history myself and being a historian, there was always somebody that you thought you were going to interview, and you kind of set it aside, and six months later they weren't able to help you any more, they either passed away or some accident or something. So this has to be done now, this generation, the first generation group is getting older. I think a lot of the people you're talking to have made solid contributions and have still got good memories and good opportunities to help you and help us understand what Chicano studies was about.

02:02:17:30

Holmes:

Well thanks so much for your time, Ricardo.

02:02:17:31

Romo:

My pleasure, Todd.

[End of Interview]