A TEI Project

Interview of Philip Castruita

Table of contents

1. Transcript

1.1. Session 1 (May 18, 2010)

Espino
This is Virginia Espino and today is May 18, 2010. I'm interviewing Mr. Phillip Castruita at Cal State Los Angeles in [unclear] Los Angeles.
So Phillip, we're going to start with your earliest memories, your earliest family history, and maybe you can also give me your date of birth.
Castruita
Okay. I was born on October 19, 1946, but I could take my family history back from my grandfather Castruita. Modesto Gomez Castruita was born somewhere in the 1880s in Zacatecas, México, on a hacienda called the Hacienda Mesquite, and I think it was near Jerez, México, somewhere there. He was raised till about thirteen, when he had to leave. Somehow he got into a dispute with the hacienda's owner, so he left and he wound up in Chihuahua, where he married my grandmother, Amanda Ontiveros. Her father, Dionicio Ontiveros, had a small bar in Chihuahua, and her mother ran a boarding house where my grandfather stayed and met her and they married.
They came to the United States somewhere around the beginning of the revolution in 1910, the whole Ontiveros family, specifically. She was pregnant with my father at the time and returned from El Paso. She went back to Chihuahua to have my father, because, I suppose, all the midwives

she knew and all that type of thing, were there. So my father [Oscar Ontiveros Castruita] was born on May twenty-sixth, 1911. I think that was about the time Porfirio Díaz was leaving Mexico, 1910, 1911, I'm not sure about the date. But it was a time Porfirio Díaz was leaving Mexico. They had kicked him out. And I remember that day specifically, because Díaz was in transit somewhere when my father was born, and that's my father's side. Now, on my mom's side, Federico Tarín, I have no idea of where he was born, but somehow he wound up in Chihuahua and began working for the railroads and began to work in the United States when he was somewhere around like early teens. So I would say in the early 1900s, because he remembers the meeting of Porfirio Díaz with William Howard Taft. He described it to me when I was a little kid. Then I found the same description in Walter Prescott Webb's book, the same description, and I don't think my grandfather read Walter Prescott Webb. But he described the same thing, and that was pretty powerful for me to read. But my grandfather was there, and he was either a waiter or a cook on the railroad, Southern Pacific Railroad.

And he remembered the Fred Harvey Restaurants. He would describe them to us when we were small. He would get into all these grand stories of his railroad days. But he wasn't a railroad worker out on the line. He was on the cars themselves as a cook/waiter, and he remembered those days as really great memories for him.

Now, he married my grandmother, Dolores--I'm not sure what her last name was now, but--Quintana, Dolores Quintana, and they wound up in El Paso, Texas, around the time of the revolution, about that period. They had their first daughter, Evangelina [Tarín], in Texas, and their second daughter in El Paso, Texas. The second daughter was Enriqueta Tarín, and that was my mom. Now, there were a few other children, but I think one or two may have died. I think one died at that time, and that's the Tarín part.

Now, for the Castruita part, as I said, my dad was born in around 1911, and then there were around, let's see, three more children. But right now I think they're still on the border in El Paso and in Texas. My grandfather Modesto was a tailor. He learned that on the hacienda when he was really young, and that was his trade. He made suits and see my father walking around well dressed, very well dressed. The Ontiveros family was very well off. They weren't that poor. When they came to the United States, they wound up on what they called the west side of town. It was on the west side of the L.A. River, around Adams Boulevard where USC is, and I think at that time, that was a pretty well-off area, I think around where St. Vincent's church is now, close to USC. There was a whole enclave of Mexican immigrants in that area who were not exactly poor.

But my grandfather--I'm not sure if they lived there that long with them, but my grandfather Dionicio had a nice little set up for himself, and the

Ontiveros side of that family remained--let's say they weren't of the working-class poor Mexican immigrants. So what happened after that--

Espino

Do you want to tell me a little bit about how they made their money?

Castruita

Well, the Ontiveros family had that bar in Chihuahua and that boarding house. That's part of how they made their money. They were even driving nice little automobiles at the time, and there's pictures of them being--pictures that are really interesting photographs. But I think that's how they made their money, by that bar, and they kept it. I'm not sure exactly what they did when they came to the United States, but that was the Ontiveros, Dionicio. He has a really fantastic memorial over in Calvary Cemetery. He died in the 1920s sometime.

Now, let's see. Now, Federico [Tarín] worked on the railroads primarily, and even when he came to Los Angeles, he was still in the railroads, but then he became a cook somewhere else, downtown L.A. somewhere. But again, he wasn't that poor either. He was, say, high working class. I'm not sure how you would describe it, but they had jobs that were pretty well off. Then his brothers, Adam [Tarín]--it was a younger brother, and there were two or three other brothers [Frank] that had garages, automobile garages, that that's how they survived. So that was again early in the 1920s, but how they come to L.A., how the Tarín̈s come to L.A. is interesting.

I had an aunt named--well, we called her Cuca. Her name was Ruth "Cuca" Quintana, I guess. She was getting married in L.A. to a man named Cipriano Lopez, I believe his name was, so the whole family comes over for the wedding. [laughs] And they decide to stay. Again, this is Evangelina at this time, most likely my mom Enriqueta, and their brother Armando [Tarín]. And I'm showing a picture. This is Armando, and this is Enriqueta; that's Evangelina. So that was the beginning of the family residence now in the Los Angeles area. Now, this was, I would say somewhere--my mom was born in 1919 in Texas, and Evangelina was born somewhere around 1917 in Texas, so by 1920 they're in Los Angeles, 1921, in there, for Cuca's wedding. So that's how they come to L.A.

Now, on the Ontiveros-Castruita side, my grandfather Modesto's family, the Castruitas, there was a big family. There were like nine kids or something, I don't know. But his father, Modesto's father, winds up somewhere in Riverside, and the Castruitas, they're primarily farmworkers. And these people are, I guess because all the family--if you look at the Castruitas, most of us remain in Riverside and that area, and El Monte and in that area there's a bunch of them that are somehow related to me, I'm not sure exactly how. But that's where the Castruita family really is located.

We didn't have a strong connection, but I guess they had a sister, my grandfather had a sister named Altagracia [Gomez Castruita], and she raised I don't know how many kids herself, maybe four, five, something like that,

and they lived around Claremont. It was Higenio LaVerne, and, again, farmworker family, basically, and my father is very, very close to that part of it. But that was my grandfather's sister, direct line. He had so many brothers, Higenio Grande, Higenio Chiquito, and my uncle has a better history of this than I do. He's written all this down, and somewhere I could probably get that to you, but he has an exact record of literally the whole family, the Castruita side. But that's a story that is something that I need to find out too. But that's how we began to grow.

My father's father, however, came into L.A. with the rest of the Ontiveros family, because I suppose they were sticking closely to my grandmother's side. You know how the Mexican families have to go to the wife's family. But this was, again, really, really early. We're talking about the early twenties, in there somewhere, so there's the beginnings of Mexican--in L.A., you could see the community is just beginning, starting. And my grandfather was in a situation, Modesto, where he was part of this community that wasn't poor, wasn't rich, but they're that immigrant community that were very active in Honorificas and organizations like that. Because of his business, I suppose, a tailor, he had to kind of like get out there and do his trade. He'd have to talk to people and do that type of thing.

My grandfather Modesto was very much an individual who was very well respected to a larger degree. He used to write poetry on the backs of paper bags, and he could give a speech at the drop of a hat, and people used to ask him to give speeches at these organizations he belonged to. He was part of that type of society. There was a small little church where he lived, called La Purísima. It was right around off of Whittier Boulevard on Concord Avenue. Right now the Pomona Freeway is right about thirty or forty feet from his old house. [laughs] But they bought property there. It was called Hoyo, not quite Maravilla, but it was closer to Euclid Avenue, if you know where that is. But it was in a ditch almost. It was like in a little valley, little hole in the wall ground, and there was a lot of Mexican community, a little neighborhood, a little barrio by itself, where most of those people were immigrants.

My grandfather used to play the harp. He used to play the guitar. They had a piano. They would entertain themselves, right? And there was a little church called La Purísima up the street, and that whole little area was a Mexican enclave. And the Dominquez family, I don't know, was another part of that community. They had I don't know how many kids. But later they became movie actors, they became policemen, and there's a story that we'll talk about later on about this Dominquez family, so they become kind of important.

So all these--this was like a little village. It was like a little Mexican village. Right now you probably know the area as White Fence. White Fence was the area, around Lorena Avenue and Whittier and Euclid, so it's right in that area. So La Purísima became a center of that area.

Now, it's interesting because my grandfather became friends with a woman--oh, I wish I could remember her name right now, but her name was [Juanita] Pesqueira, La Señora Pesqueira. I can't remember her first name right now. But they used to get together and sing and play music. Señora Pesqueira used to be a traveling, I don't know, musician. She used to be part of a theater group, Mexican theater, that would go up and down Baja California into Arizona and all this stuff, and she had a little boy named Eladio. Eladio met my grandfather first. Then he met my father. Eladio is a little bit older than my dad, and they became friends. They went to high school together, and Eladio married my Aunt Evangelina and he became family later on. That's the story, it's all intertwined. It's almost like a little neighborhood, people meeting and getting together and developing friendships and later on families. Now, we're talking 1920s now.

Espino

Still in the 1920s.

Castruita

We're still in the 1920s, and we're not even to the thirties yet. So my dad went to Hollenbeck and Roosevelt High School. And because he was late, I don't know whatever, but they put him back a few years. That's the time when you really couldn't speak Spanish and all that stuff. He remembers that time period as a cruel time for him. He didn't really talk about it that much. But he was quite a character, my father. His name was Oscar Ontiveros Castruita, and he went to Roosevelt. He was a little bit older than the rest of the student population, but he graduated, which is the main thing. He graduated I think in 1931, so, actually, he was about twenty-one years old when he graduated. [laughs] But he was a little bit older, I guess. Was it three years older than the usual? But the main thing is he graduated, and he was really happy that he did. And I think my grandfather made him do that; he wouldn't get around.

My father used to work with the tailor shop. My grandfather had a tailor shop, and Amanda, his mother, was primarily a hard-nosed woman. She was a stickler for a lot of things. Because her family was pretty well off, she expected certain things from a family, certain ways things should be and things like that, so she was a demanding woman. She taught father how to cook, okay. She taught him how to take care of the rest of the family, because by that time, now, they had another child named Hector [Ontiveros Castruita] and a daughter named--another Amanda [Ontiveros Castruita], I guess, because we used to call her Nena. And then they had later, in the early thirties, I think, my uncle George, Jorge [Ontiveros Castruita]. Interesting about this. Jorge was going to be given a really long Mexican name, Marcelino or something, Gustavo, and because he was born close to George Washington's birthday, my father said, "Why don't you give him an American name? Call him George. Call him Jorge." And they accepted that.

And my uncle remembers that to this day, and he writes that down in his story.
So we have now Oscar, Hector, Nena, and Jorge. That's the Castruita side under the Modesto Gomez Castruita. So they were in L.A., they were living around White Fence, Whittier and Concord Avenue, and went to Roosevelt High School, and the family begins to grow. My father is pretty much of a social animal, a very good dancer. A lot of people in the little neighborhood knew him, and because they were in a small community, my father was very respectful of the other individuals in the community, and he was very Mexican-oriented. He used to go to Million Dollar Theater. My dad was very close to his family, and I can't remember one day when my father didn't speak well of his family, and he would get very angry if you said anything about them.
But he spoke Spanish well, also had this talent a social ability, and a terrific, terrific dancer. He was a member of all these various social groups that Mexicans used to have. He was part of this--they used to have black-and-white balls. Did you ever hear of that? Every year these honorificas would have various dances, and one of the dances they had, they used to call them black-and-white balls, and everybody would wear black and white. A Women would wear white or black gowns. Gowns, okay, they're gowns. And the men would usually wear tuxedo-type suits or whatever. These were like the social events of the year, really, and my father would be part of that and was very much involved with that stuff.
Now, there were all these other Politica going on, but our family, I think, wasn't that political in that regard. They weren't that active in labor movements at this point, because my grandfather didn't have that background in that area. But because of his position, it was necessary for him to be involved in the community affairs as part of his business. My grandfather would sew these suits and make the gowns for my aunt and for my father, and so they were very well kept, and in a sense, they were the advertising for my grandfather, that type of thing. So that was it.
Now, for the Tarín family, my grandmother, Dolores Quintana Tarín, had about seven children. Two, I think, died in--one died very young, and the other died of an appendicitis attack. They didn't know what it was. She didn't know how to deal with appendicitis. Otherwise, she probably wouldn't have died. But they lived literally all over Los Angeles for a while, growing up, and by the 1940s, however, they wound up at a place called 604 South Mott Street. That became our family digs. They always rented, all right.
Now, my grandfather Federico [Tarín], during the depression, had it really rough. The whole family had it rough. This was now around 1929, 1930. My mom, Enriqueta, was born in 1919, October twelfth, and she remembers having to go to the social-welfare departments, I guess, doing the translation for my grandmother, all that type of thing. My mother literally was one who became like the second mom to the family. My grandmother

depended on her an awful, awful lot, and my mom became literally my grandmother's voice to these governmental agencies. They would walk from Mott Street all the way across the bridge, the L.A. River bridges into downtown, literally walk, to go talk to these people.
My grandfather right now, I don't know how he worked, but I remember them telling me that he would go through the trash cans at the restaurants. They would throw away these lettuces and things like that. They would get them and they would take them home. That's how they would eat part of their food, things like that. But then they would also get food from the other agencies and things like that. The depression was rough for everyone then. But at this time, both my families, Castruitas and Taríns, were raised in the Boyle Heights region. Concord Avenue was still kind of on the edge of the Boyle Heights, but it was still Boyle Heights, and at that time it was literally--you probably know this--it was a very mixed community, Japanese, Chinese, Russian Jews, whatever, it was all kinds, Italians, so it was a very broad little immigrant community, and it seemed to be a whole world in Boyle Heights. This was when Brooklyn Avenue used to be Brooklyn Avenue. It would have the delicatessens and the Jewish shops and all that, the synagogues. They still have it there over on St. Louis Street or Chicago Street. They have some of those synagogues still there. So that's the way our family was raised. It was a Mexican area, but it was still an immigrant community, a large--and it was totally mixed up.
I remember seeing rag men. Have you heard of rag men? They would have these big wagons, and they would have horse-driven wagons. They'd come down your street asking for used rags, and they would call them the rag men. This was when I was growing up in the 1950s, right around Mott Street. They would come down the street with their horse, and because we were little kids, we'd just go run outside to see the horse coming down the street. But these things looked like--have you ever seen a covered wagon? Well, this is without the cover and the same big old wheels rolling down the street. But this was common. This was like a leftover remnant of what had been in the thirties and the forties, okay. These were common. On Brooklyn Avenue they would have these big barrels of pickles. You could go buy pickles, and these were Jewish-owned stores, and this again was the 1950s, and you could imagine what it was like in the forties and the thirties.
Then you had the Japanese community right there on Soto Street, right across from Roosevelt. Right around Evergreen there would be Japanese temples and Japanese youth groups, where they would have their judo and martial-arts classes and their dance classes. This was before the repatriation. So that little area was very cosmopolitan, seriously cosmopolitan. So my mom and my father grew up in an area where they were able to contact other individuals and other peoples and have that exchange with other groups, so they were very fortunate in that regard. It was a segregated community, but they were very fortunate to have that

opportunity to mix with so many other people. Now, this again was early thirties and into the forties and even the remnants in the fifties, but by the fifties, the Japanese had been removed already and they were beginning to make their comeback, but slowly. They weren't coming back as they used to be.
But okay, now, that's the beginning of the family. My grandmother was a seamstress. She worked in various--like how would you call them? They weren't exactly sweatshops. They didn't seem like sweatshops, but that's what they turned out to be later. She worked for Lily Diamond, I remember.
Espino
Do you think it was a little better than a factory?
Castruita
Yes. They were sewing factories. I'll show you a picture of them. I have a picture of her working there with my aunt, my Aunt Cuca. She's the one that got her the job. No, that's my Aunt Evangelina, my other aunt, her sister, my grand-aunt, I guess. Now, Evangelina got married young--this is a little bit before the war started--and so she wasn't in the house all that much. This was in like around 1939, 1940. She got married around 1940.
My mom didn't get married until 1945. She had met my father, but she waited for him. She wasn't going to marry him till after the war. She wasn't going to take the chance. [laughs] That was that way; that's the way it goes.
Espino
Did they go to the same high school?
Castruita
But don't forget, my mother graduated in 1938 from Roosevelt High School, my dad in 1931. The way they knew each other was that Eladio and Evangelina--well, Evangelina knew my Aunt Nena, okay. Nena was my father's sister. That's how everybody began to meet each other. That's the way it worked.
Espino
What about the church, La Purisima?
Castruita
Now, Purisima was--
Espino
Was it Catholic?
Castruita
It was totally Catholic, very traditionally Mexican Catholic. I remember it was very small, and I even went to it when I was a little kid. I remember us going, my dad taking me just showing me around. It was one of those Spanish-Mexican churches, where you have the Christ all beaten up and body all bloodied and all that type of thing. That was that type of church mentality, but it was very strong.

My grandfather was a very strong Catholic, very strong Catholic, Grandfather Modesto; Federico not so much. [unclear] He just said, "Good luck." But Modesto, when my Aunt Nena was going to get married, was planning this big event for her, because, of course, it was his only daughter. But I think my Uncle Fred Amaya, who Nena was going to marry, didn't really want that, so his mom was a very independent woman. There's another story for you. My Uncle Fred's mom, María Campana, was a very independent Mexicana, very strong, which is very unusual back in this day. So she told him, "Why don't you just elope?" And they did. And it made my grandfather--my Aunt Nena was literally disgraced and, "Don't talk to us," that type of thing, and for a long, long time, for a long time. But that strict. But my grandfather relented after a while, so then they did come back into the fold, but it was still a somewhat strained, difficult relationship. But there are stories like that that go on in the family.

Now, this is interesting too, because my Uncle Hector, my father's brother, and my father went to the Civilian Conservation Corps back in the thirties, and they fought some fires, and they built some roads. That's where my Uncle Hector met Uncle Fred, and that's how Uncle Fred became part of--that type of thing. But it was the CCC and that was part of the depression years, and that's what our families were involved with. So it was one of those things. Now, that's the depression time we're talking about, like now in the 1930s, 1934, '35, '36, in there somewhere. So the family goes back that far.

So then the war--let's just say by that time, I think we now have--my grandmother Dolores, or Grandma Lola we called her, Grandma Lola now has a few more children, Uncle Tarin Armando, and I think she has by that time William or Guillermo Tarin, and I think my Aunt Dolores is born, and my Uncle Robert [Ontiveros Castruita], and then my Aunt Helen [Ontiveros Castruita]. I think they're born somewhere in the 1930s somewhere. So that's about seven kids, right? They also had a little girl named Tarin Gloria, but she died I think in the late thirties somewhere. So that's the family on the Tarín side.

Now, what else can I tell you there? Now, almost all of them graduated from high school, which is really good. None of them dropped out, which is unusual for the time, I think.

Espino

Do you know anything about the language that they used in the home?

Castruita

Spanish. Spanish, both sides. They were able to speak both languages. My grandmother Dolores, Lola, didn't really speak English. It was primarily Spanish. But the family spoke both languages, all of them.

And so now for the Castruita side, my Grandfather Modesto spoke a pigeon bit of English, not very much, and my Grandmother Amanda totally Spanish. They didn't really have to speak that much English, amazingly, because the

work was primarily with the immigrant population, immigrant Mexicano population. But the family spoke both English and Spanish, because they were raised that way. They went to school and they learned both languages. So that's the way it works.
So when the war comes in 1941, my father winds up in the United States Army Air Force.

Espino

I thought you had to take an exam to get into the Air Force.

Castruita

This is probably before that time, I don't know, because this was still part of the army air force. The air force was just a brand-new service. And the reason he got into the air force is because he knew how to sew. Would you believe that? He was sewing parachutes.

Espino

Well, then it is skill-based. He did have a skill.

Castruita

He had a skill, and he wound up sewing parachutes. And he was really lucky. He wound up going to St. Augustine, Florida. Then he wound up in Hawaii, and I think he went to Guam and he was somewhere in the Mariana Islands out there. But he really remembers Hawaii the best, because that's where he really--Hawaii changed his whole life. He had a great time in Hawaii; can't blame him. He met some good friends, the Wong family, that literally, he's still part of the family, almost. My mom just went to Hawaii a while back, and she visited with the Wong family. It was a great time for her. They welcomed her with open arms. So that's wartime experience [unclear].
Now, my dad was fortunate in that he didn't have to face combat duties. However, he remembers that there were a few snipers still on the islands when he was doing guard duty in one of these things, guarding some B-17s or something. He had to do that once in a while. But my Uncle Hector didn't go to war.
My Uncle Larry Pesqueira, Evangelina's husband--Eladio was already married, had a busted eardrum. Uncle Larry was trying to fly airplanes when he was a teenager or something like that. My Uncle Larry was quite a guy. He was an acrobat. He was a Burt Lancaster-type acrobat, if you know what that means. He was trying to fly airplanes, and he flew a little bit too high, and he broke an eardrum, which eliminated him from the war. He also had a family at the time, so he was able to get out of going to the war; lucky guy. But my Uncle Armando, he was about eighteen years old in 1942. He wound up going into the war in Europe, and his first battle was at the Battle of the Bulge, and he was made a prisoner of war. He was caught in the first drive--the Germans were coming in--and it changed his life.
That was our war contribution of our family. Oh, and my Uncle George, pardon me, was a navy man. He was up in the Pacific, a radio man, and he had stories to tell. But that's our war contribution.

Now we're up in around the 1940s. Now, at that time, if you notice, we have a lot of women in the family. My Aunt Lila Pesqueira had had her first baby, Michael, Michael Tesqueda Pesqueira. That was their name. And my mom had graduated from high school in 1938, from Roosevelt High School. She was given a scholarship to go to Redlands University, but she didn't know where Redlands University was, and she didn't want to leave the family, and so she decided not to take it. She wound up with a cosmetology license and became a hairdresser, and there are stories of her working downtown L.A. at some hotel. They used to have nice hotels. Well, the Hilton, Biltmore, one of those, where they had these women who would work primarily for the guests, and my mom was one of those cosmetologists. She remembers some of her clients used to be ladies of the night, let's just say it that way, that would come in primarily to get their hair colored black, because they wanted to be like Hedy Lamarr. That was the thing. Hedy Lamarr back in the 1940s was the sexy image, so they would come and get their hair done for black, and my mom said they gave very good tips. [laughter]

Espino

They're working girls. They know what it's like to work.

Castruita

And my mom said she had already met my dad, but she wasn't sure whether or not he was going to come back, so they kept a romance through the mail.

Espino

They wrote letters.

Castruita

Of course. But then, of course, my mom had her own thing, and she remembers going out with some guys who were soldiers. She was telling me about this one guy who came from the South, that she was dating him for a little bit, and they were on the bus one day, and a black man came up and somehow bumped into my mom or said something to my mom, and the southern guy got really upset, really uptight. And my mom just looked at that guy and said, "Don't act like that. Don't even--." She never saw the guy again. She didn't like what he did.

But, see, my mom's story is another interesting story, because she was very independent, and she grew up a very strong woman because of the way she had to deal with these other agencies, and she took care of the family. Literally, she became the second mom, and if you talk to the rest of the family, they know that, that she was the one that kind of like helped everybody do their thing, and she was the disciplinarian of the family and very, not strict, but she just made sure they did what they had to do, that type of thing.

In 1938, well, even before that, she remembers going to little schools around here, the Euclid School and all those little grammar schools, and Roosevelt she really enjoyed. She remembered that Japanese tea garden they used to have and all those things that she learned a great deal from.

But some of her boyfriends were very much union people, and she would remember them talking about labor strikes and the difficulties of the labor, and she would talk about that, that some of her friends used to talk about. So we had a larger family, the Quintana family, my grandmother's family, that would come. They would work in the northern area of the fields. They would stay at our house, their house, and then head on up to the fields, and they'd come back and they would stay at the house again. So my Grandfather [Federico] Tarín was very welcoming. I mean, I remember him saying that family is everything. He used to tell us that. "Don't ever look down on your family. Your family is everything. That's the way you'll live." And his house was open to everyone. It was amazing.

There were other people that used to come to my grandmother's house during the depression and she would feed them. Neighbors would come and literally stay there, and I remember that even when I was a small little boy. The people that used to come to my grandmother's house still came to my grandmother's house, and part of their family became part of our family, so much so that one woman's name was Jesusita. Her son--they used to live in her garage. Her son was named John. They were Jesusita, Felix, and John. John became a part of our family. So they were very, very close to my Uncle Armando and to my Uncles Robert and William. These guys, Mando, William, and Robert, were--well, Armando was the oldest. They were very mechanically oriented. Mando would have these cars, but even on bikes he would make these things that were amazing. And they were very creative. Armando became known as Dad to the rest of the group, I don't know how, but they always used to call him Dad. He even had a zoot suit, and my grandmother, when she saw it, started to cry and said, "Now you're becoming a criminal." But anyway, this was around the early forties, around the time of the zoot suit riots. He burnt his suit. I have pictures of him in a suit, with Johnny and someone else, but I think he burned it because the zoot suit was made illegal to wear, period. I don't know if you remember or know that, but they were declared illegal. So he didn't even want to deal with it, so he burned it. But these were the zoot suiters, right?

My Uncle Mando was very hip, and my Aunt Dolores remembers that one time they had a neighbor girl go into the room in the house. Grandma would go as God *[CORRECT?]. They took her into the room and my Aunt Dolores walks in, and they said, "Get out of here," and she just took off. That was a long story, so we don't know what happened. We'll just leave that alone. But those were teenage years of these guys. It was a neighbor girl, so we know the way it goes. And they were still teenagers.

Espino

Well, I know. You're talking about--you weren't witness to any of these events, just what the stories that have been told.

Castruita

This is my Aunt Dolores telling me the story, so she just remembers--you could imagine her a little bit younger, walking into their room and that type of thing. So this is just who knows what happens. But like they were all young. We're talking about maybe sixteen or--my mom probably was around like sixteen years old. So my grandmother was--I'm not sure if she was working at that time, but possibly.

Espino

Well, do you think that--because obviously your mom didn't get into the war industry.

Castruita

No, no.

Espino

But she had her profession, her vocational training. But did any of your other aunts or grandmother--did jobs open up for them?

Castruita

I don't think so. Well, the jobs were opening up, but none of my aunts really went into them. I think my Aunt Nena was already married, and my Uncle Fred became an engineer, and, no, I don't think they went into any of that. No, I don't think they had to at that point, because Fred was still around, and he didn't go to war. My Aunt Lila's husband was still around, and he didn't go to war, so they were basically housewives.

My mom was working in cosmetology, and she made some good friends, and they remember driving back and forth to--I can tell you stories of their times when they used to go see Frank Sinatra, right. They went to see Benny Goodman. They were very much a part of that scene, and they enjoyed their Aragon Ballroom down there by the beach, and there are stories of how they used to get out of the house with my Aunt Cuca, right. My Aunt Cuca would say, "Let's go," and then they would take the daughters and somehow that's the way the girls were able to leave their chaperone, because Cuca took off and left them somewhere. [laughs] And then would come back after them, that type of thing. But that's the way they would kind of get away from the chaperone concept, and they were probably around seventeen, eighteen around that time. But Frank Sinatra was the person. This was at that time, right, and Benny Goodman. These guys were the people of the Big Band era, so they were very much a part of that.

So nothing like the defense industry for our family. My Aunt Dolores was too young. My Aunt Helen was too young. So, what else would you like to know? We're talking about now late thirties into the early forties. The repatriation didn't hit us, but our family was aware of them. They knew these things were going on, because they would see it, and we talked a little bit about that before. And my grandmother wasn't really a citizen either, so she was concerned about that. None of my grandfathers were citizens, but they did have their papers. They used to register themselves every January, I think. They had to do that alien registration thing. But they had come in before

some of the heavy immigration laws were around, so they were fortunate in that regard.
For example, my Grandfather Modesto came early in 1910. I don't think they had to worry about that at all. But later on, after the twenties it was a concern. But there were some heavy-duty--how would you say this, not diseases, but what's the word, when there's a sickness going around?
Espino
Like the pandemic?
Castruita
An epidemic of various typhoid and things like that during these years. Fortunately, it didn't hit our family, but other families that they knew did suffer from some of these things. And some of the things that our family were lucky to have--they were pretty healthy. Well, wait a minute, I shouldn't say that. My Uncle Hector did have tuberculosis, and he did have to go to a sanitarium, so that, again, was part of the larger aspect of it.
Espino
Right. Tuberculosis was impactful.
Castruita
Yes. So we did have part of that in our family.
Espino
So you know the name of the sanitarium that he went to? Was it Olive View?
Castruita
It was up--you know where they had the earthquake back around the Northridge earthquake? It was up in that area where the bridges were. In that area; I'm not sure of the name.
Espino
I think that's Olive View.
Castruita
Possibly.
Espino
Lots of people went there.
Castruita
Yes. It seems like that could have been, because that's where it may have been. But that was pretty intense for him.
Espino
Okay, we're back, and you said you remembered something about your aunt?
Castruita
Well, we were talking about, what did they do during the war, and I remember my aunt was looking for a job, and I'm not sure if this was before the war, during the war, or when. But my mom had told me that my aunt went--I think she went downtown looking for a job. Downtown at that time was really a great place. She went to apply for this job, but she couldn't get

it because they said she was too dark, and she is one of the lightest in our family. [laughs]
And one of the other things I needed to tell you, that my mom was working as a hairdresser, but during the war she began to work at a bank as I forget what [Farmers' and Merchants] not as a cashier but as one of the loan-type persons, as whatever. And she remembers the person really well. The man's name was Eddie Jewel that worked with her. But she began to work at the bank because the men were at war, okay. You were talking about the defense industries. Well, other jobs opened up, okay, like the banks. And my mom went to the bank, and she asked for a job that probably a man would have gotten, and she was able to get it, and then from that point on, she starts working at banks till the end of her life; not the end of her life, till the time she has to retire, because she retires from Security Pacific First National Bank I think in the 1980s sometime.
So that was the beginning of her bank career, right. So I just wanted to-- because you had asked a little bit about that, and I remembered that part of it, because those are significant, I think, because not that many Mexican women were working in those positions at the time, very, very few, women particularly.
And then my aunt's situation, because she was told, literally, she was too dark, that type of thing is important to note, because, again, my aunt is very, very not pale, but she's not prieta like my mom. My mom's darker. But those were important things that you should know about, okay? So we're talking then somewhere around the forties, in there somewhere, so these things were going on.
Now, when the war is over and people start coming back, my father comes back to Los Angeles. He marries my mom on December thirtieth, 1945. Are we ready for this?

Espino

Yes, 1945.

Castruita

Okay. So my dad tries to look for a job, and he finds small stuff, not really big things at this point. We live primarily on Mott Street near my grandmother's house, old house, little house had been there forever. The bathroom was down the hall, if I remember right, and we lived with my Uncle George for a while. He married his wife, Priscilla and so we were literally neighbors for a while.
My parents marry at St. Mary's Catholic Church, which was a church really close to Talpa. Now, that church was primarily, when it was first built, it wasn't really for Mexicans. Talpa was the church that was for Mexicans, okay, and it was known like that. But later on as the years go by, I guess after the forties and the war, the church begins slowly to change. Monsignor O'Dwyer was the pastor. He's significant because he was pretty much involved with the zoot-suit riots. He later becomes part of that commission

investigating the riots, and that's important, because he's part of that early CSO [Community Service Organization] history, and I think he becomes an activist really during the time of the zoot-suit riots. He's the pastor of St. Mary's Church in the forties, all the way into the sixties. So the church begins to change. The population begins to change.
Guy Gabaldon, the Marine hero, you may have heard of him, who saved I don't know how many Japanese because he could speak Japanese, was a member of that church area. You'll see his name somewhere later on. We won't even talk about him here.
But, let's see now. We're back in 1945. We're living near my grandmother. But then housing is really difficult during this period, and it is one of the biggest issues for Los Angeles at this time, and there's a big discussion over housing in the city council. People thought that if they were going to give government subsidies to housing, it'll be too much government, and socialism would be involved, and there were debates on this. [Edward] Roybal now is getting to be part of the city council. There's another story there too--how did Roybal get on the city council--but he's part of this debate. And the debates go on like, "You're going to be feeding little communists. You're providing housing for young rebels down the line." The debate is amazing to hear. There's actual documents, historical articles on this period.
And finally, however, the housing is granted and the housing battle is won, and the housing projects, right, are now being able to be built. We lived in them, Aliso Village. There's a picture of me by the old little--there's a field that there used to be, and I have a picture of that somewhere. There's another one over by the now Freeway 10. I'm not sure, the Ramona Gardens?

Espino

Possibly. There's Pico Union, which is further.

Castruita

That's too far. That's too far in, too far west. But it's right here where the Santa Teresita Church is and where the murals are. Remember all those? I think it's Ramona Gardens. We lived there for a while. Now, those were modern, ultra-modern for us. The reason why they were necessary is because the old houses had literally dust impacted into the walls, and it created a lot of asthma and things like that. I had asthma when I was small, and part of it was because of the way the houses were so old that the dirt was built into the walls, so that's what you would breathe. So L.A. really needed housing, period. And when the returning vets were coming back, they needed to have homes. They started their families, and they needed to have homes. So we were part of that story for Los Angeles.
And for me, I was a little kid. Again, there were all kinds of people living in the projects, ex-veterans and white, black, okay, all that, not just one group, so that was interesting. I was born then in October of '46, and there

were all kinds of stories that--what's his name from USC --[George] Lipsitz writes about this period, and he talks about the labor struggles that were going on in the forties. You never really thought about it, but it was a very important period, and this is the time that Roybal begins to be active, and the CSO begins to start moving. From '46 to the fifties, there is the beginnings of Mexican activism, political activism, and a lot of it was due to Roybal.

Now, our family has a story of Roybal that's connected. Again, we were all closely in this little neighborhood. My father used to date Roybal's sisters, and he could tell you who the names are, all right. Talk to Lillian [Roybal] or talk to Lucille [Roybal], and ask about the sisters. And every time I would see Roybal, he would say, "You're Oscar's son." I'm serious. Every time he would see me, he'd say, "You're Oscar's son." So the story goes way back. And Roybal became very, very significant to our community, and our story cannot be told without Roybal's story. But there were so many people in back of him. Grace Montañez Davis is one. My Aunt Cuca's daughter, Alicia Lopez, was very active in the CSO, very, very active. Stella Tafoya, I think her name was, she later married Ralph C. Guzman, a very close friend of my Aunt Alice.

So the activity of the CSO is actually families and communities that go way back, that have been here for a generation or so. So that's the way the CSO begins is that the younger generation--remember, you have your immigrant generation that Mario Garcia talks about, then this new generation, the postwar generation, the World War II generation starts moving, and their consciousness is totally American now oriented, and they really feel like they deserve something after the war and all that. And CSO becomes important, and my mom even gets involved, doing small cook events or those type of things, because of my Aunt Alice and that type of thing; they get involved. One thing leads to the other, because you know each other, right? It's type of little community. "Let's put on this bake sale. Are you going to come? Are you going to do this?" type of thing. That's the way it begins. "And if you belong to this church or this thing, we're doing this." Monsignor O'Dwyer was very much involved with CSO and the beginnings of it and very active with Roybal's campaign. We'd go to church and there it is, a Roybal thing, so that's the way it begins. I was just a little kid. I wasn't even two years old, right, 1948. But this is what I'm growing up in, okay, and there are so many labor strikes during this period and the growth and development of labor that becomes so important, that we never really hear about, but they're all around us.

And my parents, for example, are part of that era, and they're seeping this in, just because they're living there and all these other things are happening around them. My father later--he works with my grandfather for the beginning when he comes back, in the tailor shop down somewhere around USC, close to the Ontiveros side of the family. My grandfather has a shop

there somewhere. He works downtown at one of those--what do they call those big--Bullocks or one of those Broadway type stores?

Espino

Department stores?

Castruita

Yes, one of those department stores, as a stock clerk or something, because those were the jobs that were available for these guys when they come back. Later he works in the defense industry, right, North American Aviation. He builds the F-14s, and the sabre jets were the big deal at that time. Those were used in the Korean War. And he was also working on the X-15. I'm not sure if you're familiar with that. X-15 was one of the first experimental ships to go outside the Earth's atmosphere. My father was part of that stuff. But again, he was a basic stock clerk. He was not an engineer. But he was a union man, UAW, okay. We were very much part of that union. Our family went on strike a few times, so we had to depend on the union for food and things like that.

We lived in Boyle Heights, first at 528 East Soto Street, 528-3/4. They were like courts or somehow right off Soto Street, very close to Hollenbeck, very close to my grandmother's house on Mott Street. Again, we still live very close to the family. We would get together every Sunday, everybody. My Uncle William was married and he had three kids. My Aunt Lila was married, she had two kids. My Aunt Helen had just gotten married. She was going to have three kids, but at this time, around the early fifties, she had one, and my Aunt Dolores had two kids in the fifties, and Uncle Robert, he was a single guy. But every one of those, Armando, Evangelina, Guillermo, Dolores, Roberto, and Helen, every Sunday we would get together and have the kids, the husbands, and have my grandmother, the wives and the daughters would cook, and we would have a grand time. And we still talk about that.

Everybody loved my Grandmother Lola, you could imagine, especially at Christmastime, it was another wild story. And then on Thanksgiving Day, the whole thing. It was wild. Every Sunday for I don't know how many years, but for as long as my grandmother lived.

Espino

Maybe you can talk to me a little bit about some of those memories, like specifics. What did you do? Was there music? What kind of food did you prepare? Maybe some details.

Castruita

Oh, gosh. Oh, wow, details. Remember, TV was just coming. My grandmother was, I think, the first one in the family to have a television set, a really small little thing, and that really attracted a lot of attention. TV was a big thing. All the kids kind of like went into the--we would have parties, for birthday parties, for example. My party was a big party, because it was close to Halloween. It was October nineteenth, so every birthday I had was a

costume party. So all the mothers would dress up their kids in different ways, really dress us up. I was dressed up as a spaceman, I was dressed up as Sabu. Do you remember Sabu? He was a guy from India. He did some movies in the early fifties, late forties.
Music, we had Mexican music, although Mexican music at our household came on Sundays. My father would turn on the radio, and we'd listen to, I'm not sure who it was, but it was corridos or rancheras or romantic music. At that time, let's see who it was. I can't remember right now. But so the Spanish came that way. My father on Sunday mornings would wake up early, go to church, and bring back to our house menudo, okay, with a big bowl. He had a big pot. That was pretty much a regular thing on Sundays. Oh, on Fridays, for our family, enchiladas were a big thing, because, of course, we had no meat on Friday, right, at that time. So enchiladas was a big thing, and my father used to make these shrimp cakes. I'm not sure if you're familiar with them, the little circles with shrimp cakes. Those were a big thing.

Espino

Right. They were really popular around Lent.

Castruita

Yes, that's right. And my father would make nopales, all right? I couldn't stand them. They were too much like string beans, and I didn't like string beans either, so [unclear]. And then my father--again, my mother, no, my father--it was a special Christmas thing.

Espino

Capriotada]?

Castruita

There you go. Man, he made that good. My dad would make that, because he learned that from my grandmother. He would be the one that would cook for my grandmother, and he brought it over to my mom. My mom just was happy that he could do it. And, of course, the pots of beans and all that. So those are the dishes I remember, the menudo, the capirotada, the shrimp cakes, the enchiladas. That I remember really well. But every Friday. [laughs] But I'd look forward to it. My mom had a special style of making the enchiladas that I still--they were special enchiladas. So I'm trying to make them myself now, and I'm getting to it, I'm getting to it. But those were the meals that we would have.
Now, for the Sunday meals, they would range from all kinds of different things, but rice and beans were a very big deal with us, and even to this day there's a special way for me to--I like the rice the way my grandmother made it. And I'm sorry, my grandmother made it this way, and that's the way I'm still used to having it. Has to be puffy, has to be not too orange, almost kind of like a light orange, but it has to be puffy, not all piled in one little thing. [laughter] Why, is that the way you make your rice? Anyway, anyway. And, of course, a little bit of onions, a little bit of tomato sauce,

actual real tomatoes. But anyway, those were the way we did it. But that was it.
Now, we primarily, when we'd go to see my grandmother, my father's mom, she really didn't cook that much, because by this time she had a stroke and was kind of out of it, and she was kind of getting ill by the day. But my Grandmother Lola, now, that was where we would have our celebrations, so that was amazing stuff. I still think of it.
Let's see now, what else. During the 1950s, we would have those great parties. The cousins--we call each other cousins--we're still trying to do that, and we're trying to keep that memory going. So we're having now, every couple of years we have a big get-together for ourselves, just to remember that stuff. So we're having one soon. So that was part of our early family life in the fifties. We would play in the yard, and I would dirty my pants with green grass stains. My father would say, "Why, you--." Anyway, that's another story, but there's other stories. But we had a great time, and the kids would look forward to it.

Espino
You were going to say what your father said. Would he scold you in English?

Castruita
Oh, Spanish. [laughs] Let me think. When people would get mad at me, Spanish would come out fast. It was Spanish. "Felipe, ven acá," that type of thing. So it was Spanish. That was the formal language that you knew you had done something that you'd better watch out.

Espino
What about with your cousins?

Castruita
Same thing.

Espino
You spoke Spanish to them?

Castruita
Oh, no, no. We all spoke English. Spanish wasn't really a big language. But my grandmother always spoke Spanish, and we would speak to her in English, and she understood us. But still, it would have been nicer if we both spoke Spanish, or somehow she spoke it. But it was a little barrier, but it didn't really matter, because we understood each other. The language wasn't the important thing. We had this relationship.

Espino
And did you speak with your parents in English as well?

Castruita
English primarily, basically; basically English. They wanted me--and especially my other cousins too--they wanted us to learn English. That was a basic, basic part of our lives. Spanish wasn't the big thing for us. Although my cousin Norma, my Aunt Lila's daughter, later on took Spanish in college, right, and now she has great Spanish, and it's there. But it was part of our

background. We grew up, in a sense, very bicultural, because we would always have the idea of Mexicano around us, but the language wasn't the essence of it. There was something else, somehow. That was part of it. But we felt we were American kids.
My Uncle Larry, again, he was born in Arizona. His family was not Mexican. He's Mexican, but I don't know how far back. My Aunt Dolores married a guy from New Mexico, Aragon. His family goes back to the 1600s in New Mexico, the Aragons. So it was just the way we were raised. It was no big deal for us; that's the way we are, who we were.

Espino

You don't remember placing a value on which language is the dominant language or the language that's the language of power?

Castruita

Well, the dominant language--

Espino

Or you were punished for speaking a certain language? One is inferior? Did you ever remember--

Castruita

The dominant language at my grandmother's house, at both grandparents' house, was Spanish, dominant language. It was the older language, okay. It was the formal language. The everyday language at school, sometimes at home, was English. The dominant language, the more powerful language, I guess, would be the--I never really thought in those terms. Now, we lived on Soto Street, but then we moved to 4th Street, right around the corner. [laughs] Literally, 4th and Soto, okay, literally right around the corner, and at that time I was going to St. Mary's grammar school. Now, my cousins had moved to El Sereno, which was a little bit away from Boyle Heights, and it was considered a big move.

Espino

Move up, move down, move lateral?

Castruita

Move up, a move up. You're moving to the country, right? [laughs] It's funny to say now. But they had trees that were larger, green grass, and the streets weren't that crowded. You could hear birds. You laugh, yes, you laugh, right. You could hear birds. But, see, like on 4th Street, it's pretty busy. It's essentially cars running back and forth, and it was kind of like a little rougher neighborhood, I guess. But it didn't seem that--when I was growing up, L.A. seemed like a tiny little community to me, although I was pretty much in a segregated little neighborhood, because the Jews had begun to move out. They were big in City Terrace, but at this time the move had started to happen.
See, we had now moved from the projects. We moved back to Soto Street. Then we moved to 2418 4th Street, and I was still going to St. Mary's from first grade to the eighth grade. From the projects, at Ramona Gardens I had

gone to Santa Teresita, a preschool, I think. So now we're back into Boyle Heights, and it's a little community. We're feeling good. I'm going to school. My father is working at North American. My mom's working sometimes, not all the time, at Aetna Maintenance. She works part-time, and she works on Saturday. She's a phone operator working in the business office. These guys are a maintenance company. They send people out to work cleaning up buildings and things like that, and she works in the office taking care of different stuff, only on Saturdays, and helps my dad out.
But it's really funny. My dad never told my mom how much money he made, never, and he never really gave her the check or anything like that. He always kept it himself. Tried to keep things--when you think about it, he was really a macho trip for him in that regard. But he had his own idea of how women are. But my mother wouldn't stand for things, right, and she had her own mind too. But then she had her own idea of what women should do in the family and all that too, so it was a nice balance. They would have their fights, there's no doubt, but it didn't turn into anything violent or crazy, which I'm really grateful for. Because my dad didn't go drinking or a lot of stuff like that, and he usually was pretty much of a homebody for the time. He liked going out on the Sundays and being part of the family thing. He really, really liked that.
My mom was working. My dad would take me on Saturdays, and we would go downtown. We'd go to downtown L.A. We didn't have a car, so we went on the bus. We would probably go to a movie, check out some magazine stands. We'd go to the department stores. My dad introduced me to George Putnam. It was a big deal for my dad to meet George Putnam. Oh, man. "Oh, hi, little Mexican kid." [laughter] "You're a good little Mexican boy. Oh, yes."
But anyway, I remember when I was really small, my mom got us into the Cub Scouts. My mom's a big deal here in my life. We had a scene--Cub Scouts do this. They put on little plays and things like that. So we put on this little skit, and we were a bunch of cowboys, right, cowboys around a campfire. We were singing a song. Then we all went to sleep. And everybody, "Oh, very good, very good." [claps] Then out from the sides jump a bunch of Indians. They massacre all the cowboys. [laughs] And everybody is, "Yay." Everybody in the audience went, "Yay." It was great. What a different scene. I think we had a different emphasis of who's important here now, but I think that was significant for some reason. The Indians won this time.

Espino

Right. Do you remember who decided that, or how that came to be?

Castruita

I think it just happened. I think we all decided among our little group how we were going to do this. But I think my mom was the director of all this, so who knows.

Espino
Your mom was the Cub Scout--
Castruita
She was the den mother. She was our den mother, okay, and she was part of this stuff, so the den mother is part of how this stuff goes on. So my mom also became the mothers' club president at St. Mary's in 1958, and there's a whole story to this too. But she was a pretty powerful lady. She had her own will. She could have gotten--well, she was very powerful.
Espino
Okay, we're back.
Castruita
Okay. I think at this point in the early fifties, our community is beginning to have more feeling about itself, more awareness and consciousness about itself. My father's in the union. He's aware of some of the things that are happening with the union. Some of the memories I remember, like on Labor Days we would have Labor Day picnics, and those were great. They were a lot of lot of fun. But so the union in my mind is good, and I had that feeling. We were always Democrats--Adlai Stevenson, Harry Truman type of thing. My dad may have voted for Eisenhower, but my Uncle Mando couldn't stand Eisenhower, couldn't stand Eisenhower, because of the war. But anyway, Democrats were very much a part of our lives. This is the time we didn't have any representative except Roybal, so Roybal was the big deal. And he was also close to the family, so it felt like it was someone that we know who was important.
My mom worked for the census one time, so she was real important in my life, and so was my--my mom was very important in how I was brought up. I don't know why she didn't have more children, but I suppose they felt that it was good for their economics, whatever decision that she made, I suppose.
I was a little kid who had a heart murmur, and she wasn't sure--they said I wasn't going to live very long. Because of that, she got all worked up and started to take me to the doctor's, like I don't know how many, how often we'd go to the doctor's. I remember going to the Mount Sinai Clinic that used to be, I think, on Chicago Street where the temple is now. It used to be right south of it, and we would go like every Wednesday or Thursday. We would walk from our house up to Brooklyn Avenue past 1st Street, or past 1st Street up to Brooklyn Avenue, and I would sit there and get the clinic and all that stuff. They were really helpful. But I came through. Evidently, it worked out all right, and I think that was due to her vigilance.
But, see, this clinic, Mount Sinai, was really important in our community, some of the health services that they gave to the community. And I never thought about it, but they gave dentist work, they gave medical care, and that was significant in 1954.
Espino

Right. You didn't have to use a county hospital.

Castruita

No. No. But it was there, and we knew it was there. But it was too far from our house. See, we didn't have a car, our family. Uncle Larry had a car. And my dad would get a ride to work, which was amazing at the time. This was the early period, maybe before '55, I think. We didn't have a car for a while. And I remember Friday nights, again, Friday nights around there, my dad and I would walk to the Safeway down on Whittier Boulevard. So we'd walk down from our house on Soto Street to Whittier. It seemed far, but I would have a wagon. I had a little red wagon, and we filled it up with groceries and then we'd take it back. Every week, my dad and I would do that. So I felt close to my dad, because we would do that, so we did that. What else.

Espino

Well, do you know who it was that decided that you should go to a private Catholic school?

Castruita

I think it was both my parents, but specifically my mom, I would have to say, because my mom was more concerned about my--my dad would say, "Well, good luck," type of thing. [laughs] "Whatever she says, that's good enough." It was like ten dollars a month, I think, which was kind of difficult at the time.

Espino

Wasn't Talpa--how do you pronounce that?

Castruita

Talpa, Talpa.

Espino

They also had a school.

Castruita

Yes, but I went to St. Mary's, because it was closer to our house, not that much, but that was--and St. Mary's was the place where my mom and dad got married, and they felt more comfortable with St. Mary's. It was a classy church. Talpa was a little chapel at the time, and they felt better at St. Mary's. Now it's a little different. They used to have a tower. The earthquake, the last earthquake, the larger tower had to be demolished, so a lot of different things have happened over the time. But the school was, literally, almost brand new, and my mom wanted me to have as much as I could. Interestingly enough, most of the school were made up of Mexican kids, okay. Lillian [Roybal] went there, I think, St. Mary's. She didn't tell you?

Espino

I don't think she went there.

Castruita

Well, Lucille did. Okay. I think Lillian [Roybal] did too. But anyway, they were a few years ahead of me, but I'm pretty sure--anyway. St. Mary's sent

kids on to, well, Salesian wasn't there yet. Salesian was built in 1960. It had just opened when I was--so guys would go to Cathedral, probably, or--

Espino

Cantwell or Pater Noster.

Castruita

Yes. Cantwell, primarily. Pater Noster, not that much from my school; Cathedral or Cantwell. But that was a long time ago. Pre-1960, wow. So we played at Hollenbeck Park, which was really cool that we had that whole park to play with, and so that was fun. But our nuns were the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, and they were primarily Irish nuns. We had primarily Irish priests; O'Grady, Gannon, O'Dwyer were the basic priests. And we had Father Lucero. I guess he was the flunky Italian. They had to throw in someone. But they were all good people. I was an altar boy, and luckily, I didn't have to go through any problems, because the priests were really very, very, very good people.

Espino

What do you think their perspective was as far as the Mexican students? Do you think they had an ideology or a belief or some sort of perception or misconception?

Castruita

I think they felt they were missionaries and that they were going to save our little heathen souls. [laughs] But I don't know, really. But they really worked with us, and they did their best for us, and I appreciate that very much. I feel like I received a very good education in that little school. I learned how to read there. My mom also would take me to the Benjamin Franklin Library, and we would walk. It used to be right there on 1st Street. It's still there, but the original building where I remember had been knocked down.

We would go to movies all--there used to be one by Sears on Olympic Boulevard. We'd go to the Brooklyn Theater. See, the movies were big. TV was just coming out, right. Wow, this is weird. TV was just coming out, so you'd have your TV, but it wasn't--for us, it took us a while to get a television, so the movies were the big thing. The weekends, we would go to the movies, and you'd have a bunch of people there, a bunch of people. But I would go with my family, so I would be very well behaved. But those were the things we would do.

We didn't go to the Million Dollar, but my dad had gone in that time. He told me that the Million Dollar would bring in Mexican actors and had these great Vaudeville-type shows that they would have there. That was back in the thirties and the forties. They would be really wild shows. Well, Los Angeles then was really different than what we know it now. By the time in the fifties, L.A. would be--basically on Main Street was a bunch of burlesque shows. They were all kind of decrepit by the time they were there. But I remember Tempest Storm. Have you ever heard of her? She was a big burlesque queen. I would go by the bus stop and I would look at these

burlesque theaters--go, "Ooh, look." My mom would just try [unclear], but anyway, that's another story, right? My early puberty days. But anyway, that's another story.
But the bus was called the 47 bus, I think. That would go down right from our house, right all the way to downtown. We also had streetcars that would be there, so no problem, on Whittier Boulevard, and so the transportation seemed to be pretty good, actually.

Espino

So you didn't feel like you needed a car?

Castruita

In the beginning we didn't, because the bus was pretty good, the streetcars were pretty good, and downtown was--my dad probably needed a car, because he had to go to work at North American, which was kind of far. So we finally got a '51 Ford somewhere in '55. My dad had to learn how to drive, and he used that and took the beginnings of the freeways were coming up. The freeways were just being built, and they were going through our communities. The 10, the 60, those were just being put in, so they were brand new.

Espino

Were you affected by that at all?

Castruita

My grandfather was, because the 60 Freeway like went really close by his place. Just up the street was the freeway. We weren't affected, but everybody, in a sense, was affected, because we had easy access to different--and then all of a sudden, there are these things. But it also helped, to a degree, bringing people closer together in some ways. It was easier to get around, in some ways. My dad could go to work easier now. But then you had your traffic jams beginning then early too, that type of stuff.
And you could also go to Disneyland. Wow, that was something. The opening of Disneyland was something.

Espino

Were you there?

Castruita

Oh, yes, well, not the opening. The next year we went, but we went pretty close to it. We got a TV pretty quick. You couldn't not have a TV. And one of the first things I remember was the "Disneyland" programs, okay, and then "Davy Crockett." Now, that was a trip for me, growing up seeing "Davy Crockett." I had a coonskin cap and everything. I know it's crazy. And the Alamo--really weird, growing up and seeing that stuff, because you were totally for Davy Crockett. Then all of a sudden you see, hey, he's killing Mexicans. Wait a minute. And all of a sudden--that had an awful lot to do with, what's going on here type of thing. That was my early shock, for me.

Espino

So at that time, you realized--

Castruita

It was something--

Espino

--at the time that you were watching those shows, you realized something was--

Castruita

Something is strange here. Like, are Mexicans good or not? Then you also begin to see Mexican characters on TV, like I forget this one guy had "Garcia, Garcia--." I forget his name, but they had one long strange name. They were acting like little idiots, and you kind of wonder what their story is about. We were acting like fools, in a sense. And you kind of wonder what this is about. It's like the black "Amos and Andy" that used to be on. It was a good program, but then you realized that there were underlying overtones. Underlying overtones? I'm not sure if that's correct. But there's something there, and we had to grow up with that, so there's a feeling of ambiguity that we had to feel, and I think I was about maybe eight yeas old around the time.

I remember when our nuns--there was like one Kennedy in our school and maybe a Kathleen McDonald; the rest Gomez, Hernandez, right, Garcia. Literally, our school was almost entirely Mexican. It was segregated pretty much, but you never really thought about it. You're like, this is ordinary, no big thing. This is the way it is. And again, you have these little white nuns, really young nuns. During Confirmation, which I guess I'm about twelve years old, St. Mary's Church has this big, big space, and then you have this choir high above it in the back. So the nun was up there, and she was looking down and she went, "It's so, so beautiful, all of you in red, and all of you having black hair. Oh, so beautiful!" We're beautiful, but she was seeing that like, literally, we were all--but she said, "Oh, so beautiful." Well, thank you.

Espino

That makes a difference if someone sees you as beautiful, versus--

Castruita

Yes, and she said that, so it makes you kind of feel good. But there were struggles between styles. One sister in particular wanted a certain way, and the children had to, we children--she wanted to keep them separate from the families. For example, first Fridays you go to Communion, right? My mom, as president of the mothers' club, said, "Well, let's bring them in, give them breakfast, chocolate, little breads." The sister said, "No. They've got to get back to school." There was a struggle over that. My mom won, okay. We got breakfast. But they had to do with the timing of the schedules that nun wanted to keep.

But then I was talking with, would you believe, another nun just a few weeks ago, who went to St. Mary's, who knew that nun and said, "She was

somewhat of a stickler." So it really wasn't anything that was prejudice. She was just somewhat uptight herself.

Espino

Well, that's an interesting observation, because you wonder about someone's prejudice versus someone just being rigid.

Castruita

A stickler, yes. And when I found out from this other nun that this woman was already stiff the way she is, I felt a lot better. But at the time, my mom had to deal with that, and I don't think my mother thought she was prejudiced, Sister Roberta Mary, but it was a clash of wills.

Espino

Well, you never heard any racial comments, any demeaning statements, insults?

Castruita

I grew up with a bunch of Mexicans. We weren't going to insult each other too much.

Espino

Well, no, but I mean from the school administration.

Castruita

Not really, not really, nothing that--no. I didn't hear anything. Doesn't mean that there weren't, but I doubt if there were, because O'Dwyer, for example, had been working with Roybal closely. He had been part of the state's committee investigating causes of the riot in the '40s, so his mindset was pretty well in our favor, I think, for a long time. Now, I didn't really pay attention to that. I was just growing up, and I wasn't going to be looking for this. There may have been, who knows, but I didn't hear any specifically.

I was a little kid. I was too concerned about Davy Crockett killing Mexicans at the Alamo. There had to be something else. I was a dark little kid, so dark I told my grandmother that, "Hey, Grandma, I want to be president." I think this was about the time Kennedy was in. And she looked at me and said, "Pobrecito y tan prietito." That was her answer to me, okay. [laughs] But she recognized, I think, the situation as it is, and I think she kind of like--I wasn't sure what she meant, so I just let it slide. But it stuck with me, and I still remember it. But every time I say that to other Mexicans, we all laugh like it's a George Lopez joke, because I think we all understand somehow that experience. Maybe not that one, but somehow there's a commonality that we grew up somehow with that in our background, so they feel--it's almost funny.

When I was talking with a psychologist about it, and he said, "Did that hurt?" And I said, "That must hurt, because I remember it." [unclear] kind of I didn't want to get into it, because I thought I would be tearing up, because it must have hurt a lot, when I think about it now. But what's strange about it is that how many other Mexicans have gone through that same thing that we all kind of laugh at it and just toss it off. How much of that deep hurt do

we really have and carry with us from those little past experiences, and that we don't really understand? It's part of our makeup as a community, not just individually, and that's what makes it less of a hurt, because it's through a larger collective, that we all have gone through some kind of experience like that, so it's a little bit less.
So I grew up knowing people like Senda Luz Rios. Her father was Tony Rios, head of CSO. We used to go to the Carioca. I didn't know it was a brothel on the top floor, okay? But anyway, at one time the Carioca used to be a community hangout for a lot of different reasons, I guess. Tony Rios was beat up outside of it. You heard about that, right? Okay. Well, I'm sure my parents heard about it, but they didn't let me know. We didn't talk about it. But we used to go there like on weekends, have dinner. My father knew Margaret *[LAST NAME?], the owner. I don't know who else he knew. I'm not going to say anything. But we had a friend that used to work there, Frank Osuna, he used to work behind the bar or something. Who knows what went on there? I was a little kid, not even ten years old. But these things were part of our growing up, the bloody Christmas and all these things. But when you're five years old, you're not going to pay attention to that stuff, right? You're just having fun, riding your bike, playing with your dog. Those were my concerns. But these were the things that were happening when I was growing up.
My father was aware of this. My grandmother I'm sure was aware of this. That's why she probably said this to me, right, with all the zoot-suit riots and all the things that she went through. So in a sense, they were kind of protecting me. Look, this little kid has these grand ideals, pobrecito, and can he really do it? That's what she was saying, in so many ways. And to me, I said, "Yeah, I'm going to go, no problem. Yeah, I'm going to go for it," because I was protected by my family, like a lot of us were at that time. The Roybals, for example. Lillian and Lucille were seriously protected. You know that, the way they were raised and how they were raised. That was one part of it. They had to do certain things because of who they were. Same thing with our family. We were very protected, and we had to do things because of who we were. You act with respect. My father would say, and my mom would say, "You have to do better than just average, because average isn't good enough. You have to do a little bit better than the white person. You have to be a little bit better than the white person." I thought white people didn't sweat, swear to god.
And Guillermo Gomez Peña one time asked his audience, "Did you ever--?" He has this performance group. You know Guillermo Gomez Peña. He asked, "Have any of you in the audience ever wanted to be something else besides Mexican?" "Yeah. I wanted to be white, because they don't sweat." [laughs] Hey, of course, but those were--and they would drive convertibles, and they were getting beautiful women. Sure, why not? This is what we would see on TV. This is the epitome of what you would see. You wouldn't see yourself.

There was nothing like you on TV, except at the Alamo and they were being shot. Oh, and that foolish guy with his double name. Poor guy. He was trying his best.

Espino

He was on--well, were there Spanish stations and then also English stations?

Castruita

He came on on "[The] Groucho Marx [Show]" one time. That's where--

Espino

I've never heard of him.

Castruita

Oh, god, I can't remember his name. That's how famous he was. He was pretty famous at the time. He was pretty popular. He came out in all the shows. Groucho Marx was his introduction. Groucho Marx had a show, and he was one of those contestants. But that was the beginning.

But now we're somewhere in the 1950s. I was influenced by Pat Brown. I was influenced by the growing Chicano CSO movement. I was influenced by the Catholic church. I was influenced by the growing Democratic power strength. Pat Brown becomes governor of California. My community is primarily a Mexican community. I live in a town called Los Angeles, which I think is a small, normal, little everyday American town, just like any other city in the United States. Hardly, right? But that's what I believed.

We go to Knotts Berry Farm, we go to Disneyland, my cousins and I. My closest cousins were my Aunt Lila's children, Norma Pesqueira and Michael Pesqueira. They're my closest cousins. They were like brothers and sisters to me, being raised. I would go over to their house in El Sereno. During the summertime I would stay there. We would go into the creek. We would have a great time in the creek, catching pollywogs, running through the hills, setting up camps in the back, playing Indians, playing war, great time. So this is the way we grew up, and it felt really good. The creek used to be almost like you're living in open country, right. It was a little creek bed in this little open area. It wasn't like Soto Street. You would have frogs. You would have open country there, and it felt good as a little kid to be able to run around there, so that was part of it, and that was El Sereno. Even the Roybals moved to El Sereno, right? [laughs]

But anyway, that was the early fifties, but it was a great time. What can I tell you? Now, let's talk about the early sixties, because this is another phase. You've got some introduction, and we've talked a heck of a lot, but there's a lot more to talk about. Let's do this at another time.

Espino

Yes. Excellent.

1.2. Session 2 (May 26, 2010)

Espino

This is Virginia Espino and today is May 26, 2010. I'm interviewing Phillip Castruita at my house in Los Angeles, Mount Washington.
Okay, Phillip. I wanted to start with some general memories that you might have of role models in junior high school, or maybe some of your [unclear] experiences with peers, your social life, that kind of thing.
Castruita
A lot of them have to do with TV and the movies at that time. I remember really enjoying going to movies and seeing John Wayne films. John Wayne was a big influence even on television, right, films like "Iwo Jima" and all his war movies, "Audie Murphy" and "To Hell and Back." Those were really influential for me growing up. Even Davy Crockett, would you believe, was a role model; Daniel Boone, all these historical guys.
When I was young, there were a group of us, maybe we were ten, eleven years old. There were a group of us that used to really enjoy the King Arthur's knights of the round table, and we would go back into history and talk about, would you believe, Phillip II of Spain and those type of things. I had another friend whose name was Phillip Martin. His parents were, would you believe, Mexican, but would say "marteen." But I had a problem with him, because he was able to get to be Phillip II, and I wanted to be Phillip II, but anyway, that's a big story. That's nothing. But we were very much involved in the idea of the knights of old and the histories of old, and that was my thing, and I think that's the way I got involved in history. The ideas of the Crusades were part of how I started thinking about what could be, noble and glorious and all that.
When 1960 came to be, a little bit before that, I had a scrapbook, would you believe, of Pope Pius XII. I don't know why. I think he was about to die or something, so I collected all of this stuff on Pope Pius XII. I also was an admirer or General [Bernard] Montgomery, the British general that fought at El Alamein. Something came out about him in "Life" magazine, I think, and I really liked the pictures of his beret and his tanks, and he became a hero in my mind. Winston Churchill, "The Charge of the Light Brigade," all that stuff was part of my history. Over films too, movies, that influenced me.
But around 1960, then, John [F.] Kennedy runs for president. That really influenced me. John Kennedy became really the person to admire. My parents even took me to the Democratic Convention that they had over here in L.A. Sports Arena, and we walked around the convention, and it really impressed me, the fact that the whole country was watching us. So that was an early, early role model. In 1960 I think I was, let's see, I was about thirteen years old, I think, so I started getting involved in politics in 1960. And the fact that he was a Catholic was important too. I think the idea of Catholicism really influenced me a lot when I was growing up. I didn't think about it till very recently, how much it was part of my life. So there we go.
Espino

You talked mostly about male role models and maybe let's start with that. If you could just elaborate a bit on what was it about them that you were attracted to.

Castruita

Okay. Well, adventure, adventure, gallantry, nobility, the idea of heroism, all that was part of a little boy's growing up, and the warrior, the idea of fighting for good, defeating evil, fighting for truth and the American way. Superman was also part of our growing up. That came on television too, so all that we were literally engrained with there is an American way, there is something that we can fight for, for honesty and truth and justice, and there is a real possibility of democracy. Seriously, when I was growing up, these were the attitudes that we were told over and over. Fight communism, right, during the McCarthy era. Because we're fighting for our religion, our country, our society. We need that for liberty. All that stuff was literally engrained on us.

We were a part of that generation and used to go underneath the desks to prevent yourself from being nuked, a great big deal, right, what that was going to [unclear] help. Every end of the month we would have the sirens come on, warning us of a nuclear attack, every end of the month. Every end of the month we would dive under our desks as soon as we heard those sirens, so that was part of my culture, I guess, at that time, and so that's what they taught us. So I guess I was looking for there is something to democracy, there is something to justice, and there is something to liberty that is important, and I was engrained with these ideas, and they did affect me.

And because I was brought up in Catholic school, there is a way of being truly a good human being, and we need to work with other human beings to be kind and to show our love for other people and to demonstrate that love to other people, and to act as a servant and not try to be the leader all the time, but the way you lead is by serving. Those were the things that I was engrained with. The saints that we were taught about in school, those were other influential individuals.

I guess that most of my ideals were the males, but women--my mom, I suppose, was my most important role model there, because she literally taught me how to read. We would take the bus, and she would point out the advertisings on the bus sides. On top, they would have advertising along the bus, and she would point out the words, what they meant, and I would read them back to her. And then she would tell me, read whole books, and took me to the library, as I mentioned last time, so that infected my life. Learn how to read. And then going to the library and getting these books, all that was important, and that was my mom.

And then my dad would take me to the movies on Saturdays. I'd buy comic books, and comic books were another influential part. And if you talk to a lot of these people about my age, comic books were very influential. There used

to be a little Japanese market called the Half-Moon Market on 4th Street, right before you get to Mott, and Mama, Mama San was one of the owners of the grocery store, and right next to it there would be a little five and dime I guess you call it. But right outside they would have comic books galore, and magazines and all that. That's where I would buy my "Classics Illustrated." It was "Three Musketeers," right, "Ivanhoe," "The Count of Monte Cristo." That's how I learned about these guys, and they were comic books, but they were well drawn. They were great. Fifteen cents a copy. Every weekend I would go get some like that, fifteen cents.

Espino

In the classic stories you have, like you're talking about, a common goal, democracy, liberty, but you also have an enemy. Do you remember what that was?

Castruita

The bad guys. They would always wear black hats.

Espino

Right. But the common--like during the cold war, do you remember the meaning of who you were fighting against?

Castruita

They looked Oriental. [laughs] Oh, they looked very Oriental. And even we used to see the old Flash Gordon movies with Buster Crabbe. They would come out every week or something. And Emperor Ming, you had no doubt Emperor Ming was Chinese or something like that. And then Tarzan, the Tarzan films. Oh, those were the black savage, those type of things; with John Wayne, the Indian. That was wild too. But so there was a quiet racism there, subtle racism of those were the enemies. But then, don't forget, Mama San was Japanese, my grocer lady, and she would help us out. "Ah, how are you?" So that kind of balanced things out.

And in school there was a little girl that used to help me put on my clothes, jackets, raincoats and all that. Margaret Puebla was her name, I think. She's an Indian girl, total Indian little girl, and so all these ideas didn't fit my reality, in a way. It didn't seem real, but that's what we grew up with. You'd go to Knotts Berry Farm, all these cowboys and all this stuff. This was the time Orange County was becoming, oh, it was really white, okay, in the early fifties. It was really, really white, and this was the base for right-wing politics. The anti-communist movement about that time came out of Orange County. We'd go there to see Disneyland and Knotts Berry Farm. We would go in and out. Alhambra was still pretty much white. Monterey Park was white, because they still had the segregated housing.

So we lived in our own little neighborhoods, and we felt very secure. Well, I felt very secure. I didn't have any real problems that I could see. This was my community, and we were all like this. And I did mention--didn't I mention to you last time that I grew up thinking white people did not sweat? Yes. And you would see these things on TV that these guys didn't even work

hard, and they had these nice cars, they had these beautiful blonde women. That was the epitome of success, right, a blonde woman riding in your convertible. [laughs]

Espino

Did you ever feel unwelcome when you would enter Orange County or other places that were predominantly white, do you remember?

Castruita

That's a good question. I didn't really think about it that much, because I was with my family. Don't forget, now, I was a little kid. I was around ten years old. I didn't even think about it. It wasn't that big of a deal to me. So I was just there, and I'm not sure how this other thing affected me. But I realized that much later, that I did have that complex of working with white people, Anglos we'd call them, right. But my father and mother had white friends, Jewish friends, and a lot of friends, Chinese, Japanese friends, so it balanced out. I was protected, to a large extent, although we lived right in the heart of Boyle Heights, right in the middle of 4th and Soto Street. But that was my community. That was the whole world. And to me--I think I mentioned this to you last time--the whole world was like my community. I just lived in a little town, and I felt that.

But I didn't feel different, I think, until I went to high school. But I didn't really put things together. I went to San Gabriel Mission High School. Our family moved from 4th Street after my eighth grade, when I was going to go to high school. Salesian High School had just been built, a brand-new school, and I wanted to go there, because most of my friends were going there. Cathedral was already kind of like another place, but Salesian was brand, brand new. And we moved. Okay. So I wound up going to San Gabriel Mission. Primarily, my mom felt--my mom felt--that I needed to broaden my horizons, to get out of the barrio, right, and to associate with girls. Salesian was an all-boys school. Mission was coed, and my mom felt that I could socialize better or become more of a civilized human being if I didn't hang out with too many crazy guys, so I wound up at San Gabriel Mission.

And Mission had a combination of people that were from the white neighborhoods. But at the same time, we had some Mexican priests. Claretian priests were the teachers, and Father Herrera was one of the principals when I was going there, and he's from Texas, and a few others that I remember that were important in my development. Now, there were a lot of people from Alhambra, from Arcadia. Now, Arcadia at that time, you could imagine. It was a total-white community, and Alhambra was a total-white community, and so that was kind of like my introduction. And I didn't find it or anything, because I participated in everything I could. I couldn't participate in sports because I had a heart murmur, but I participated in drama club and all that other stuff.

So I grew up with Italians, Irish, and we had our own little group, like you always have cliques. I wasn't in the clique, but I was in my own clique,

which wasn't the clique, but it was still a clique, but it wasn't the clique. And, of course, the clique was the football players and the cheerleaders and all that, but, so anyway.

Espino

What was your clique?

Castruita

The weird clique. [laughter] The nerd clique, that type. But let me tell you about this. I was put in the--we were tracked. We had a C group, a B group, and an A group. The B and the A were the college prep. The B were right in the middle between the C and the A, but were on the verge, right? That's where I was put when I first got there. They gave us a test and I was put there. I wasn't quite A, and I wasn't quite C, that type of thing. But I had a professor named Hanrahan, total Irish, blond-haired young guy, and he told my parents that I should be put in the A group.

Espino

Wow.

Castruita

Yes. And he was one of the most fantastic English teachers ever, tough, tough, tough as nails. And my mom said, "Maybe he shouldn't be, because he wasn't quite ready for that." Then Hanrahan said, "Pressure him. Push him. Let him go for it. Let him try it." And I wound up in the A group. So from my first year I was put from the B to the A, and I felt --I didn't think it was a big deal, but I think it was good for me. That's where I belonged, I think.

Espino

That's a vote of confidence.

Castruita

Yes, and someone else saw it. And Hanrahan was really a tough teacher. Every week we would have a test. Well, every day we would have tests. We had certain vocabulary words, Greek mythology, spelling rules, etymology, was put in a potpourri, and every day we would have to go through give elements in that potpourri, and then the next day we would have to stand up in class, and Hanrahan would go row by row, individual to individual, asking them questions. And you were part of teams, right, and if you missed so many questions, say three questions that week, you wound up in the back standing up. We called it the boobs' area, and they would just call us boobs, and he would really, boobs. So anyway, it was fun. Thinking about it now, it's fun.

Espino

Would you consider that, like, corporal punishment?

Castruita

No, no. No, no--

Espino

Corporal punishment is definitely hitting, but--

Castruita
Oh, we had a priest with a glass rod, Father Joe [Anglem], and Father Hogan used to have a twisted hula hoop, and those were corporal punishments. There were times--I got hit with, I think it was a glass rod. Took us to the bathroom, "Take down your pants," and voom, once or twice, boom, and that was it. The glass rod was Father Joe Anglem. I respect that man a heck of a lot now. And Father Hogan I really didn't know that much, but Father Joe was someone we respected. He taught religion. The priests were Father Finnegan, Father Joe Anglem I believe it was, Father Hogan, Father Daries were some of the priests that I used to have. Father Daries was a Frenchman, and he would teach literature. Father Hogan used to teach math, primarily to the C group. Then we had lay people also teaching. Again, San Gabriel was a mixed town. You have the old Mexican families, and one guy in the C group was named Marty Delgado. Marty was a pachuco, word--wouldn't believe it. And I talked to Gil Cardenas, who's now at Notre Dame, who used to live in San Gabriel. They knew the family, the Delgado family. These guys were gang guys, and they used to wear their khakis and all that. Marty used to have his hair like all slicked up with that hard, what do they call it, I forget now, Tres Flores type of thing [pomade].
Espino
Gel?
Castruita
Yes, that type of thing. And Marty was dark, and he was kind of the clown of the class. But he enjoyed being the clown, or he used that for his benefit. And there was a Mexican priest one time said--they were good friends, Marty and this Mexican priest, and the Mexican priest, "Marty, would you lie to me?" And Marty said, "Oh, no, Father," and everybody just started cracking up. I mean even the priest and Marty both started to laugh. [laughs] Just remembering that now kind of brings back a funny laugh. But Marty was one of those wild guys. I think he died from a drug overdose later on, I found out, but that was another story. Those were the guys that were tracked. Anthony Arredondo was a good friend of mine, Luis Abril. Rudy Yanez, was one of the shortest guys I'd ever met, and he was, I would say, a little pain in the butt. But I dealt with him because he was part of our little group. Anthony was really one of the guys from El Sereno, and we would all take the bus home together. Alicia Armendares, Kathy Borello, this is the All Saints group, the El Sereno group, and we would all travel back and forth, until we got cars and drove a little mess of cars. But the El Sereno group was primarily Mexican, except for one or two white people, and they still get together for our reunions, and the El Sereno ones are the ones that pull these reunions together.
Anthony Arredondo was one of the guys that I really appreciated. He had a brother named Alfonso [Arredondo]. No one messed with Alfonso, not one. Alfonso used to be a big guy, one of the nicest guys and a joking guy, but

you did not want to mess with Alfonso. He was very strong and no one messed with Alfonso, and Anthony was his brother, so you wanted to be friends with those guys. But Alfonso was such an easy-,going guy, you would wonder why people would freak out, but Alfonso could beat you up like that.
And it was fun because in El Sereno about this time, we would have Fourth of July parades. They still have them. This is before my teenage years, around eighth grade when I was still going to St. Mary's. I would wind up at these Fourth of July parades with my cousins, and we would wind up in this park, and they would have this fantastic rock-and-roll music. And then during the high school time, freshman-sophomore and even into the junior year, these were like great young Mexican bands [unclear]. And this is when you kind of leave your parents behind and you start doing your thing as a little teenage kid, right, and these were great summer evenings. Fourth of July in El Sereno at the great American parade, right. And our little community had a great parade, then fireworks and all that. El Sereno at that time was a jumping little place.

Espino

Did those parades have--like today you go to the Highland Park parade, and you'll have the schools participate in costume, in Mexican regalia. Did they have that kind of thing then?

Castruita

Same thing, same thing, same thing.

Espino

Or was it more American-U.S., red, white, and blue type of thing?

Castruita

No. You'd have the same thing as you were describing, but both, both. Now, you'd have your councilman coming by and politicians and all. That same thing; some of your community bands. But at that time it just felt good to go out there, because you were a little kid. Again, I'm talking about like thirteen, fourteen years old, and you're just enjoying being out there and seeing all these people, and it was a lot of fun, your neighbors, people that you knew who knew you, and then people that you didn't know, from Wilson High School, right. Now, that was a school that was in the El Sereno area. So that was our little community parade.
Highland Park was over the hill. We didn't deal with Highland Park that much. As you probably remember, we're two separate communities. But our little parade, I just remember the band music that came was, later on these were the guys that came up to be the Village Callers and the Midnighter-type guys. It was that type of music that first began there at these little community events. That's how these bands, Chicano bands, literally grew and developed. Then they would wind up at the larger clubs, but that's where they came from in those early days. This, again, we're talking about,

say, '58 through '63, '64, so, yes, those were the high school days, and they were fun.
Now, remember, Kennedy was about to become President of the United States, and that was really important during that period. Kennedy became really someone that I totally admired. Now he's president. His brother Robert [Kennedy]--the whole family became something that I really was paying close attention to at that time, and I was just watching everything that was happening. I was in high school when he was assassinated, I remember that.
But there was another part. Pope John XXIII came up in 1960, '59, or somewhere in there. The Cuban revolution with Fidel Castro, that was something that affected us too. And it comes out in "Life" magazine, right. "Life" magazine was something important, because it was a--they don't have them anymore. Do you remember "Life" magazine? Okay. Well, it had these stories and fantastic photography. It would come out every week, I think, if not maybe month. But these were something, and then you could actually see Fidel Castro and his beard, and everybody was really into this in the beginning. He was really like a hero. Castro was moving against the evil [Fulgencio] Bautista, and everybody in the United States kind of admired that, from that I remember, the fact that he was up there in the mountains, the Sierras, and he was doing his thing, guerrilla war. That was, wow, for all of us, I think.

Espino

What do you think Bautista represented to people?

Castruita

Corrupt dictatorship, a banana-republic dictator. [Rafael] Trujillo was also, I think, in the Dominican Republic, I believe, and so these guys were pretty bad, and everybody knew about it, how bad they were.

Espino

So tell me then, the "Life" magazine, was that something that you would get to your home, or that you would go out and buy?

Castruita

Well, both, both at different times. But those were really significant. They really helped to politicize us, to an extent.

Espino

Do you think that many families in your neighborhood had that?

Castruita

I don't know. I don't know. I couldn't tell you.

Espino

So it's not like going to somebody's house and seeing the "Life" magazine laying around?

Castruita

No.

Espino

You don't remember if that was common or not?

Castruita

No. I wanted to go to West Point when I was in seventh grade, seventh or eighth grade. I really wanted to go to West Point. There used to be a TV program called "West Point," and I think that's what kind of made me start thinking about it. I admired the idea of the discipline that you'd see, these guys marching and all that. They looked [unclear] these uniforms, and it's something that--

Espino

We're back now.

Castruita

Okay, military academy, West Point. General [Douglas] MacArthur, I remember General MacArthur. He was news when he was taken off by Truman in Korea. My uncle went to Korea, my Uncle Robert Tarin, my mom's brother. This was back in the 1950s. I was like about five years old. And everybody was really concerned. My Uncle Mando had already been a prisoner of war after the Battle of the Bulge, and he came home and he became an alcoholic, and everybody was kind of concerned about--at least they were happy he was home, but he was never the same. So my Uncle Robert then wound up in Korea, and he sent me this Korean jacket with a tiger on the back and all that. I don't know how many kids got those Korean jackets. I was really proud of it. My uncle was in the war and all that. And we were really proud in the sense that the Army was, in a sense, something good.

I didn't know that my uncle was put in jail in the Army. He almost killed an officer. They were somewhere that I think the officer said something that my uncle didn't like, and I think it was a prejudiced statement. They were probably in a bar or something, and my uncle did not take it from him, and he literally almost beat him to death. My family was tough, and he wound up in the brig, and my mom was writing back letters, back and forth, and we still have those letters at home. My mom saved them, tried to work with him and make sure that he wouldn't get in too much trouble. He was put in jail, and he did get a dishonorable discharge, but he got back home and did live for a while longer. But that was something that I didn't find out until much, much later, and no one really talked about it, that my uncle almost killed somebody in the Army, because it was a prejudiced army at that time, and my uncle was tough, and if he also was drinking at the time, he wasn't going to take anything from anybody. He was part of this artillery outfit that used to work with these howitzers back then, and there's pictures of him that we have, and he was proud of it at the time. He was really proud of his gun, he used to call it. But unfortunately, that happened. But he made it back, and that's the main thing.

Espino

What happened to him afterwards? Did he show an effect from that experience?

Castruita

He had trouble finding jobs and things like that, became a taxicab driver, and he really couldn't have a job that--the dishonorable discharge followed him all through his life. And he was kind of like, oh, he was one of my favorite uncles, Uncle Bob.

Espino

You spent time with him?

Castruita

Oh, a lot of time, a lot of time. He was like my mom's closest brother, so he would come over to the house and we would always have a great time. And he just died a while back, I guess, now. But they were just good memories, just good memories. My Grandfather Modesto Castruita used to come over to the house when we lived on 4th Street and was very, very happy to help us buy this house in El Sereno. We probably couldn't have done it without him. My mom [Enriqueta Tarín] was working at the time, and we probably couldn't have done it without my mom's help. And so it was my dad, my mom, and my grandfather who bought us this house, and my Grandfather Modesto was so proud that we had this. He would come over Friday afternoons, and he would always bring a little suitcase, and he tried to teach me how to speak Spanish. That was something. I don't think he did that well, but anyway, I tried. But that was really great.

He died--he was hit by a car. He was somewhere in his seventies or--the car was going down Whittier Boulevard, and he was coming home. It was night. He was crossing the street and the guy didn't see him and just hit him. And we took him to court, but they got off, and we had a good case against him, but I guess it didn't happen. But those guys should have had some guilt about them, but the lawyers weren't that--we didn't have a lawyer.

Espino

Just getting back to your uncle, why do you think that that was kept a secret? I mean, how did you find out?

Castruita

Oh, I found out about it when my mom was talking about it, I guess, much, much later. I was already an adult, and I'd already been--this is back in 1978, I suppose. We just started talking about it, and it was all kept quiet. No one really mentioned it. No one talked about it. I guess it was because the fact that he was in jail, okay, the brig, and the fact that he almost killed somebody is something that our family didn't do, right. It's not something that--again, it's just something our family didn't do. That simple. But we all still loved him, and it didn't make that much difference to us. That's probably it. It probably didn't make that much difference to us. Okay, so he did it. All right, he's home now. And we could understand it, probably, and we moved on. The whole family moved on and worked from there.

I think some of these things are common. I think that there are certain things that happen in families, that wind up in jail somehow or go through somebody's traumatic experiences, that, okay, well, they happened, but, yes. They're expected sometimes, because the world isn't that great sometimes, and we can understand why this would happen. We face reality head on. Those things happen, and especially in the situation back in the fifties when those times were so crazy, those things could be expected, right. It's a wonder more didn't happen. My uncle was tough, and he was already a fighter. He wasn't going to take anything from anybody, my Uncle Robert, and he had a temper. But he was one of those young men who grew up in those times, who was facing a lot of crap, to tell you the truth, and from our own too, and so he was ready. So when he went to war, and he was given this jive from this officer in this bar, he wasn't going to settle for it. When they're kind of already half tipsy, well, probably more than that, you don't mess around, right? And that was my uncle.

My Uncle George [Castruita], now, my father's brother, this is another uncle, this is in World War II. He was Navy. Now, my Uncle George turned out to be a boxer. He was already an athlete. He was a well-respected runner. He was a champion runner. This was back now in the late thirties, early forties, in here somewhere, and he was known, from Roosevelt. They called him Snake, because he would weave in between the runners as he would run. I hope that's why they called him Snake. But he grew up, again, in the White Fence area, and one time he remembers coming home, and he's dressed up in a Navy suit. He remembers coming home and getting off around Lorena somewhere, and he remembers hearing someone say, "There goes one." Because he was dressed up in his Navy uniform. This is after the zoot-suit riots. "There goes one." And he knew what they were saying. So because my uncle is a runner and he knew that neighborhood, he was going through that neighborhood fast, jumping over fences, going through neighborhood houses, just to make it all the way home. He made it home, and my uncle remembers my grandfather saying, "Hijo, que pasa con tigo?" Because he was all sweaty and he was just coming home breathing hard. And my uncle said, "Nada." [laughs] "Nada importante." And they just kept on going.

And he remembers going to Texas and dating some of these white girls, and then when they found out he was Mexican they would take off. They would leave. And he was still in his uniform.

Espino

Did you describe to me how he looked? Was he fair and light hair and that kind of thing?

Castruita

Oh, no, he didn't have light hair, but he could pass, I suppose, if you want to say that. But that's weird to say, he could pass. But if you looked real close, he would look like a dark Italian, right. [laughter] They probably thought that's what he was.

Espino
What about your uncle [unclear]?
Castruita
My Uncle Robert. Well, my Uncle Robert was dark, but again, he was a little darker, but I don't think it had anything to do with that. Just saying that if you look at my Uncle Robert sometime in a weird way, he could jump at you, and like you have to be careful. And he had friends like Leopard and stuff like that. They were some wild guys.
Espino
Well, you said something about he didn't take any crap.
Castruita
No.
Espino
And I think intuitively I know what you mean, but maybe just for the record you can give some details of what you're talking about.
Castruita
I wish I could. I really wasn't living at that time. But those were really rough days. I remember the stories of [Edward] Roybal going out on a date with his future wife, Lucille [Beserra Roybal], going to a taco stand and the police coming up to you and like throwing the tacos in the street. And there you are with your best girlfriend, right, and being really insulted like that. Those things were common. Those were ordinary things, and that was with the LAPD. That's just one individual. Now, if you look at a bunch of guys going on the street and when the police would come up to you, you don't mess around and you've got to be real careful. Don't forget, this was just after the zoot-suit period. The zoot suit--anti-Mexican. And this whole time was when my uncles were growing up, and they saw this stuff, and they understood. Later on, when I tell them what I'm doing about the police, working with police brutality, there's no question that what I'm doing, that, yes, no question from these guys. They understand what's going on, and they're literally supportive of me, totally, backing me up, and actually very proud that I'm doing it. So what else can I tell you. But, see, this is my family, and they're really happy, my uncles, that I could do this. My Uncle George, for example, was really very strongly involved in the early movement and was totally supportive of this stuff. He was one of the first firemen in the City of L.A. or the County of L.A. When he came back from the war, there was heavy segregation even against some of these guys, and they gave him a rough time in the fire department. He could tell you stories about what happened there. But he was able to get the job, and he turned out pretty good.
There's all kinds of stories like that that we don't hear about, the small little fights against this discrimination and segregation. Remember, this is the time when they still had Mexican schools in Orange County and up in northern California, and in central California that continues. But this is that

group of people, group of Mexicans who were paying attention to those concerns and were taking the first stands. We would have been nothing without this generation. Definitely, we would have been nothing without this. So we need to respect that and realize where this really came from.

Espino

That's a really great point, and that sounds like an oral history project, those first people who integrated these different--but anyway, not to go off on a tangent.

Castruita

But it is, it is. It's not really a tangent, because we're still talking about our life experience and how we grew up and what we came from. These were the stories that our families shared. "How you doing, George? How's the fire department going? Are you working okay with this?" So we grew up with this stuff. "How's Uncle Bob doing? Is he still finding a job? Is he still working okay? How's the family going?" All these were part of our concerns and were part of our life. "Oh, you have a car now. Fantastic." All these little successes were part of our growing up.

And as I mentioned to you last time--I think I mentioned this to you last time--when the families married, we would get together every Sunday, every weekend sometime, especially my mom's, and literally just a whole day spent at my grandmother's house, to the point where the cousins who were kids at that time, we're getting together this summer to do a big family thing again, because we want to do that. So that feeling is still there, it's still close, although we're older, much older now, with their own kids and their own children. So those memories are real important to us, because I think you asked about who our heroes were, who--

Espino

Okay, we're back.

Castruita

I think I was mentioning, these are the heroes that really were heroes in our own family, because they did all this stuff. And you don't think about it until much later, when you have time to talk about them. My Uncle George, for example, is still a very strong guy. He's in his eighties. My Uncle Robert died. My Uncle George is probably the only uncle that I have left. He's my father's brother. He's somewhere in his eighties now. But he was telling me about the time when he was a boxer when he was in the Navy and how he fought. Now, that's pretty heavy for me to hear as a young kid. Well, actually, I wasn't a young kid. This is about three or four months ago he mentioned this to me. I never even knew about this, that he was this type of an athlete in the service. He was recognized and had some real power in him.

So anyway, these were what we grew up with, and this is just one family. I'm sure others--and I'm really fortunate in the sense that I don't know if anybody had this type of experience, but we had a real tight, sharp family.

My Aunt Nena Amaya, now, she's the one that eloped. Remember, I mentioned her last time. They wound up in Indonesia. They wound up in Sumatra. Fred [Amaya] became an engineer, and he was working as an American, one of those ugly Americans, right, in Sumatra, Indonesia, and there's a picture of him with a dead elephant that he shot. [laughs] Oh, yes, right. Anyway, the white hunter, the great brown hunter.
Now, this guy, Fred Amaya, he was really light skinned, heuro, too. He could pass for anything, and they went for it because that's the way they could succeed. They didn't really deny it, but they didn't out claim it. When they came home, when they didn't want us to know what they were talking about, they'd start speaking Indonesian. I said, oh, man, okay. They had two daughters, Kay [Amaya] and Terry [Amaya]. Now, Terry is very, very blonde, amazing. She's my cousin. And Kay is a little bit dark haired, but she's still very huera-looking. That's because my Aunt Nena was very huera, and Fred was pretty huera too. But anyway, that's part of the story. So that's a large family. You got a little bit.
My Uncle Hector Castruita died. He married a woman from Arkansas, Peggy Gallagher. She was part of this Diaspora during the Dust Bowl, and he met her in the sanitarium that he went with his tuberculosis. She had it too. And they married and they fell in love. My Uncle Hector worked in the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps]. That's where he met Fred, and that's how they introduced Nena to Fred, and so the story goes on like that. But that goes back to the 1940s.
Now, remember, you asked about my heroes. You don't really think about these people as heroes, but these are the people you grew up with and admired, that you learned from. My Uncle Hector used to wear cowboy boots, and he used to have shotguns all over the place in his house. Hector was Hector. I don't know about your Hector, but Hector means a person that kind of like pushes you a little bit, that kind of like pushes you to the point where you're being imposed on, to an extent. Hector had that power in him. He was a big guy. You do not mess with my Uncle Hector. So he fit that name perfectly. He was one of the first guys who wound up in North American Aviation. He took my dad to North American, so all that stuff. Family connections were always important, as I think in most Mexican families.
So I went back a little bit, because I think it's important for you to hear that other part. I didn't really talk about my Uncle George or Uncle Hector that much--

Espino

That's true.

Castruita

--or Nena, but they were significant people. My father, before he died, would always take a trip over to see my aunt, because he always wanted to see how his sister was doing, that type of thing, and that's pretty powerful. And

my Uncle George, I still go see him--it's been a while now--once a month maybe, and I went over there for Easter, for the earthquake, and that was nice. So that's that part of it.
Now, how are we doing? What time is it?
Espino
Yes, we have forty-seven minutes. But I wanted to follow up on something that you mentioned earlier.
Castruita
Are we going for two hours?
Espino
Now, we'll go for an hour and a half. Is that okay?
Castruita
Okay.
Espino
I wanted to follow up on what you said about your uncle being arrested, and I was wondering--I don't know if you want to talk about this, but what your experience with the police growing up was like, if you had any encounters.
Castruita
No, not that much. No. As I said, I was pretty much protected. I'm trying to remember when I first had some encounters, and it's hard to think of them now. Maybe I'll go back and think a little bit about it.
Espino
For next time?
Castruita
Yes. But in high school I don't think I had any. I was a good kid. I was always, oh, the good Catholic kid, right. I was brought up to obey the law, and the law was always right. You do not mess around with cops, because they are out there to protect and serve. That's what I was brought up with.
Espino
You're animated when you talk.
Espino
Okay, we're back. Well, go ahead and finish your thought.
Castruita
I was in the Law Explorers, would you believe. Yes, in high school we had a man named Mr. Modjeski. He was a lawyer, used to teach the civics course. And again, this is where I kind of learn all my ideas of justice. I wasn't sure what I was going to do, so a lawyer sounded good. What the heck is a lawyer? I don't know what a lawyer even does, right. It sounds good. Abraham Lincoln was a lawyer, right? So he asked me to participate in this Law Explorers. It's like connected with the Boy Scouts. You have the same thing for the police and for--they have Police Explorers now, still. It continues.
But they took us to law school, they took us to see courtrooms and things like that, to try to influence us to go to law school. They considered me that

capable, all right, or capable of that, which is kind of nice to think about it now. But that was fine. But my connections with the law were something like that. It was very, very formal, nothing--I had no problems with the law when I was growing up. I was just a good kid.

Espino

When did you get involved in--when did you start becoming active? Was it when you were in high school, then?

Castruita

No. It was in college, much, much later. I went to Cal State Los Angeles.

Espino

Did you go right out of high school?

Castruita

Yes, right out of high school. It was amazing. I remember the first day of school. It was immense, Cal State L.A. I had a little briefcase, and I remember going to the cafeteria area and sitting--did I tell you about this--sitting on the bench feeling dejected and depressed, because this place is so big. I went to a small school. We were like less than five hundred in the whole school, and our class was around maybe--girls and guys, we were probably about a hundred, maybe. So when I went to Cal State, we were like twenty thousand students. So the first day I didn't know anyone. There I was with my briefcase, wondering what the heck this was all about. My cousin Norma was there, but she was somewhere else.

So I sat on the bench and I see this little dog coming over, and I pet this little dog. Okay. So then the next thing, I look over and the little dog's pissing on my briefcase. Oh, yes, oh, great Cal State L.A. Welcome to Cal State L.A. It tells you where I was at. And so that was my introduction to this immense bureaucracy that we know as Cal State.

So one of the nice things about that is I joined the Associated Men Students group. I think it was a freshman--yes, I was a freshman, and the president was Bob Carrasco, a Chicano guy. All right, Mexican guy. All right. And they were pretty active, and I started getting involved with student involvement, right, through the AMS, Associated Men Students. We had John Huerta, who worked with MALDEF and a well respected attorney, was student body president, Felix Gutierrez, who was vice president, and we go down the line, a bunch of Mexicans. Bob Carrasco was Associated Men Students President, and the women, also Chicanas were doing their own thing. And then the fraternity there were Mexicans in these fraternities, so that was attractive, the fact that these people were actually participating and doing things.

And John Huerta was very strong. He was in a fraternity called Kappa Phi Sigma, Kappas, and Felix was in another fraternity called Theta Chi, and Felix was the editor of the college paper--so it was a very, very strong Mexican presence, and that felt good. I joined a fraternity, and I'm accused of wearing my pants too long, below my ankle. I said, uh-oh. I'm sure there were situations where I got blackballed because I was Mexican, I'm sure of

that. But because of this other fraternity--I was in the one John Huerta was in and it later became Sigma Nu, so that helped a little bit. There were other Mexicans in that group, and I took out one of the brothers' sister to the prom when I was in high school, so that helped, right.
So I become a college boy, a college man, pardon me, a college man, and active in student government, active in my fraternity. And I was in sociology class one day, and we're talking about Moynihan's Beyond the Melting Pot. I can't remember the other guy's name--Glazer Moynihan? Anyway. They were talking all about these experiences about assimilations and immigrants' experience. There's not one mention of Mexicans, not one single experience about Mexicans, nothing. And I remember leaving that class really disturbed and the professor coming up to me, asking me what's my problem, and I told him. And he just said, "You're right." And we kept on going. But that was one experience.
One of the nice things, we did have Mexican teachers, or she may have been Spanish, I don't know, Mrs. Prado. She was a Spanish teacher, right. I took Spanish again. So that helped a little bit. And then there were, of course, other Mexicans from like Montebello High School, and I remember them now. So that kind of became a little bit more friendly place as the dog experience wasn't that bad, my dog and my briefcase. But I always remember that to this day. That little dog really made an impression on me in more ways than one.

Espino

Well, why did you choose Cal State over any of the other--

Castruita

Well, would you believe, when my mom was taking me to her doctor's when she was pregnant--she used to go to the doctor's over in City Terrace, and they were building the school right next to City Terrace. She looked over there and she said, "This is great. They're building my college for my son." So anyway, it was close by. I didn't have to go all the way to UCLA, and I could stay at home, and I had just started learning how to drive, just started. The first day of opening at Cal State I drove over there, one of the first times I'd ever done that on my own, and I was like almost seventeen, eighteen years old, so it made it a lot easier.
And the way it is now, it's totally changed from the way it used to be. Beautiful campus, and the professors there were exceptional, exceptional. If you have a chance to talk to Felix Gutierrez, ask him about the professors at Cal State in the early sixties. Remember, people like Rudy Acuña were Cal State L.A. students. Yes. So it was someplace that a lot of people came out of that now became leaders, John Huerta, for example, Felix Gutierrez, another, Gil Cardenas, another. And East L.A. College was really a powerful place. Ralph Guzman went to East L.A. College after the G.I. Bill. So our little place, our little neighborhood was our neighborhood. Why not take advantage of that? It's right there. And that became the place.

UCLA was too far away. USC was for spoiled children, all that stuff, and it cost too much money, and Cal State L.A. was perfect. And thinking about it now, I was really fortunate to go there. I'm remembering my professors, outstanding. Dr. De Armond, Latin American history; Dr. Harding, [Timothy] Harding, Latin American history; [Dr.] Donald Dewey U.S. history; Dr. Chapin, European history; Crecilieus, Middle Eastern history; so my focus became history, as you could tell. Dr. Simmons, political science, Mrs. Twilliger, English, a powerful woman that Mrs. Twilliger, so those were my beginning years at Cal State.

Now, fortunately, I met people like Felix, and I met people like Huerta and Bob Carrasco. Bob Carrasco was a hustler. Boy, he was sharp. Wound up in Massachusetts, I'm not sure where, but doing something out there. So these guys were very sharp, and I learned from them.

So by the time 1966 comes around, I've been there now for about two years, my sophomore year, approaching junior year, I get involved with--I have a friend comes out of the seminary, named Richard Montes. His brother was a dentist. I can't remember his name right now, but he was very active in a Mexican American organization that I wish I could remember the name, but if we go to Rosalio's *[CORRECT?] Saturday, I'll show the organization. I'll show you the name. Richard had just come out of the seminary and became close to our family, Pesqueiras, and because of his activity and his involvement, he tells me that there's a program at Malabar Street [Elementary] School, working with the possibilities of bilingual education. "It's a new program. We're not sure how bilingual education will work, but there's this experiment right now at Malabar--," he was trying to put this together, "--and they're looking for people who would like to work there. So why don't you sign up? Because I'm working there now, and we need other people."

So my cousin Norma, me, and a few other bunch of people work at Malabar, under the direction of Dr. Constance Amsden. She develops the program of bilingual education, and it is an experiment, but it turns out to be real successful, as you probably know. And a lot of it was based on what she did, Dr. Amsden. And at that place, maybe a year or so later, around April or May Richard says, "Hey, there's a conference at Loyola. They're going to talk about Mexican students and education. Are you interested?" "Yeah." So I wind up there, and that's where I meet Monte Perez, I meet Lillian Roybal, and I forget, but those were the three individuals I remember specifically who were at that conference. I remember Moctezuma Esparza, and I remember Rene Nuñez, and, oh, Jerry Faustinos from Loyola, and Frank Hidalgo from Loyola. Frank, it's now Dr. Francisco Hidalgo, and Jerry, I don't know what happened to Jerry, but Frank is still around.

So at this conference, all of us--every college in southern California is there, San Fernando Valley State, Loyola Marymount, it was a girls' school, women's school, USC, UCLA. You name the college, they were there. Rene

Nuñez was part of the establishment of this conference. I think Juan Gomez Q[uinones] may have been there too, Juan Gomez Quinones. Because later on we decide to meet over the summer to establish an organization. We're not sure what, but we want to do a Mexican American student organization. I think I meet Al Juarez there. I believe he was there. He was from East L.A. College. They already belonged to an organization called MASA, Mexican American Student Association.

So during the summer of 1967, I think, yes, we'd meet once every month I think, or maybe even twice a month, I'm not sure. But we'd meet often at the USC Newman Center, right. I think Ricardo Nuñez was involved with this. That's Rosalio's brother. I think he was a USC student at the time. And another young man named Raúl Isaís, okay, who later dies tragically in a fire, one of the more intelligent men around, literally burns up. So anyway, we meet often during the summer to try to figure out what we were going to do. We develop a set of by-laws. We develop a constitution. We select a name. Roosevelt High School students suggested the name, UMAS, United Mexican American Students. MASA wanted MASA, but then the students--Roosevelt won out, and I'm glad. We had too many MAs around. I was always, MA this, MA that, MA this, so with UMAS, at least it was a little bit different sound to begin with. So UMAS begins.

So every time we have a meeting, it's generally all the Chicano students, excuse me, Mexican American students. Now, that's radical too, because remember now, we were Americans of Mexican descent. I had a conversation with Richard Montes, who later becomes Judge Richard Montes, right, about what do we call ourselves. Richard was saying Mexican American, and I was saying, "I'm an American. I'm American first." And Richard said, "You're Mexican." I said, "Yeah, but I'm American first." He said, "Oh, you're an American of Spanish surname." I said, "Yes." "Oh, you're an ass." I said, "Oh, okay." [laughs] I'm not sure he said that, but that's how I went.

Espino

You're talking about a conversation you had back then?

Castruita

Back around before 1966, around there somewhere, getting ready to go into--see, the Malabar project also kind of introduced us to what the Mexican problems were in education specifically, because of the dropout rates and the problems with education generally at that time.

Espino

Since you brought that up, can you tell me a little bit about what you did in that program?

Castruita

I wish I could remember.

Espino

Did you read to the kids, or?

Castruita
No, no, no, no. We would work with the documents--I wish I could remember what we did. I'll have to go back and maybe ask my cousin Norma or Richard and find out. But we were looking at statistics, and we were looking at some of the records that were written by the teacher program themselves.
Now, remember, one of the other individuals there was a woman named Dolores Usigli. She was a very light-skinned, blonde woman, but if you've ever heard of Usigli, he was a famous author of Mexico, famous Mexican author. He wrote some stuff that I can't remember now, but he was one of the writers of the 1940s in Mexico. You look for Usigli, you'll see his name, and she was one of his relatives. So the connection with Mexico was always close by. This woman wasn't really--let's just say that she was very cultured and she was aware of what was going on, and she was working as a secretary-boss type of thing. So that was really cool. Dr. Amsden was very, very friendly and a very, very sharp woman. Cal State Education Department was concerned with these issues.
Espino
Then you didn't work directly with the students?
Castruita
No, no, no. We worked with the results of the--
Espino
The data.
Castruita
--the data stuff, the data collection, somehow. We were workers. We were like the clerks, that type of thing. We were the guys working with the material and handed it on to Dr. Amsden.
Espino
Like research assistants.
Castruita
Pretty much. That's a good way of describing it. So there were several of us, and really, that was a fortunate job, because I think that made us aware of the possibilities. But again, we were still relatively new. We were still juniors in college, maybe, if that at all, sophomores, juniors, in there. That program lasted for about two or three years, I think, so that helped pay the tuition a little bit and buy some books, but that was a good job.
Espino
Well, that was also radical, that concept of bilingual education at a time when--I've looked at newspaper articles where it states that bilingualism was viewed as a deficiency.
Castruita
Yes. Yes. It was considered that, and this program was radical for the time, because bilingual education was something entirely new. No one really even thought it significant, and Dr. Amsden kind of took it and realized it could be

used. A bicultural, bilingual program in schools can be beneficial for kids. Boom, that was really a surprise for everybody. I think people were talking about it but really weren't aware of the possibilities, and that's what made the program so important, I think. And no one really even talks about it that much, but there it was, the Malabar Educational Program. That's something that should be talked about too. Dr. Amsden, Constance Amsden, at least her name is down somewhere. So that's something that some people need to look at when we talk about education in general. Yes, I agree with you. So those were the beginnings of consciousness, the fact that our sociology books, our history books had to stretch to look for Mexicans. We didn't really have a history. We knew that there was a lack there somewhere, and we began to talk with other students from other colleges, and then we'd get together at those, I guess you'd call them mesa directiva type of things. Moctezuma was one of the people, Juan Gomez was another, Susan Racho was another, Rebecca Sandoval, Gilbert Lujan. I can't remember her name now, but she's a good friend of Magoo's, and Susan. So that's when we began to put ourselves together.

Espino

Do you remember what were some of the original goals of the organization and what people were talking about as the important things that you wanted to address as a school?

Castruita

The dropout rate. The dropout rate was a real big, important concern. That was a development of the Loyola conference, the dropout rate and recruitment of Chicano students into college. Less than 1 percent, about one half of 1 percent were graduating from the University of California. That was a concern. When we found out that, everybody was shocked, and, "Something has to be done about that. This is crazy. We're not special. And wait a minute. Are we going to graduate?" That was a concern. How can we help each other graduate? How are we going to get out of this place? That was a concern too. But our basic concern then was education, and how many Chicanos were graduating from the UC system; and how many were being recruited into the campus; why couldn't they stay on the campus; what were the issues around our retention, right, we would call it now retention of students; and why don't we have classes that relate to our history?

And remember now, the Civil Rights Movement is getting to be stronger in the South, and we're watching the stuff on TV. We're watching Selma. We're watching the bus boycotts. We're hearing these things, and we're seeing people being beat up and hosed with these water hoses, and women being pushed against walls, and dogs, German Shepherds going after these people. It was a shock. This wasn't our America, what we grew up with. This is totally different than what we knew. This was our first contact, my first

contact with what police could do on the other side. This was totally wrong. It became real to us, to me. This is wrong and should not happen.
We would have conversations at Cal State L.A. Free speech was important. Mike Antonovich, who later becomes my fraternity brother, my eminent commander, was a Young Republican. This was around the time of Barry Goldwater now, because, remember, Kennedy had been killed, Johnson takes over. Then I'm in college, '64, '65, and then, yes, '64, '65, we're having these wild conversations about the Rumford Fair Housing Act and whether or not it's constitutional to have fair housing. Aren't we taking away the rights of the people to sell their house to whoever they want to? The same talk that just came out with that guy who was running in Kentucky, that Republican. His name is Lynn I believe?

Espino

I don't remember his name.

Castruita

He's a Libertarian. The same conversation, same attitude was present back then about, what's wrong with civil rights legislation is that you're going to take away these other people's rights. That was very--it was real then. So when I heard this new conversation it's, oh, that sounds familiar to me, like this guy's just talking the same language back then. But, remember, this was the time of the invasion of the Dominican Republic. The Marines went in there. The Vietnam War is going pretty strong, beginning to get stronger, the build up. The housing segregation is being challenged in California.
So at noon at Cal State L.A., right around where the old library is now, there would be rows of faculty and people standing up to protest the war in Vietnam. I didn't really pay attention to it, but those things were happening. And we also had the student movement in Berkeley was going on with Mario Savio. One of our professors, Gerald Faber I believe his name was, was calling the student as a nigger, right, and how we are being really put in another class, and all these things were coming up at the time. And Dr. Simmons would always say--political science--"I'm a very dangerous professor. I am teaching you how to think critically. I am saying things that are dangerous and subversive." And all of a sudden we start wondering, what is he saying that's being subversive? So this was part of our education about the idea of real democracy, real--the idea of what a republic is all about.
And don't forget, we had the John Birch Society that we were growing up with. Ever hear of that? Okay. Well, the John Birch Society was an organization, very right-wing at the time, really right-wing at the time. They were considered the radical Right. Now it's considered normal Republican Party centrism, but at the time, they were considered the nuts. Their basic southern California office was right there on the corner of Mission and Los Robles, right there in San Marino. I go to my barber; I can see the old headquarters right down the street. It was right in our neighborhood, The

John Birch Society, not in Orange County but right here in San Marino. Yes, that was weird.

Espino

What was their ideas that you remember from that time?

Castruita

Eisenhower was a communist. We have to fight the communist menace. Communism is a real danger. All of the southern Civil Rights Movement was based on communist conspiracies. You have to watch out because under your bed there may be a communist, that type of thing.

Espino

Do you think that you were anti-communist around the cold war, early cold war, when you had the drop-and-cover drills, the atomic bomb or the nuclear--

Castruita

I think we were raised to be anti-communist. Don't forget, we went to Catholic school. Communists were bad guys. They imprisoned different cardinals in Poland and places like that. We would pray for the cardinals and pray for their release and all that stuff, so those were the bad guys.

Espino

Did that change for you when they started to look at people who just believed in social justice as communists?

Castruita

Yes, it began to change. It did, it did. I started to question things. Something's weird here. Yes. It's a gradual change. It didn't happen all of a sudden, like overnight, but I began to start questioning, this is kind of crazy. But when they started saying union people were communists, your father was a union man, and all these things were--people started really beginning to doubt, and that kind of helped a little bit. We weren't that anti-communist, but anti-communism was always there.

My mom used to work where she had to give security clearances, and she would tell me that certain people in the community who were social activists, like the Mounts, Julia Mount, had communist tendencies so be careful. They were never communists, the Mounts, but they did work with the [Independent] Progressive Party for Wallace and things like that, that were labeled communist later on. We listened to George Putnam, who was a strong anti-communist, and if you remember--if you think talk radio today has any right-wing tendencies, you should have seen back then, and that's all that was on the stations. And George Putnam was an early FOX newsman, before FOX. So the "L.A. Times" was also an anti-communist piece, so we subscribed to the "Herald Examiner." [laughs] And we did it for a long time. We didn't take the "L.A. Times." That meant something, I think, in my family.

Espino

And that was an ideological choice?

Castruita
Yes, definitely, definitely.
Espino
Do you think that was coming from your mom or your dad?
Castruita
Dad, my dad. My dad was a union man. Yes. I guess my mom too, but it was primarily my dad. He was the one that would get the paper. My house was--we read a lot. My dad brought all the encyclopedias home, and he used to work at a bookstore before he got married, I mean after he got married, and after he got married, he worked several jobs, and one was a bookstore. And I remember him buying an encyclopedia. He would bring me books home that had to do with these wild fairy tales and great stories and great photography and great drawings, fantastic stuff. They're classic books now, literally. But my dad did that for me. And luckily I liked them, and they were there.
But don't forget, I was influenced by the military, because of things you see, and John Wayne, of course. You always admire John Wayne, and his message, you didn't realize until a bit later, you've got to wonder what's going on. There was a fantastic series called "Victory at Sea." These were stories about World War II, and the music was so beautiful. They made--it was just fantastic. I forgot who composed the music, Richard Rodgers I think. We would watch those every week. Every week at night they would come on, "Victory at Sea," the story about Guam and--and you would watch these things, and you'd become totally patriotic, because it was stories about World War II and how America defended the world from fascism. They were great programs, though. There was fantastic World War II photography, and the music is like unbelievable, beautiful, so it's another way that we became military.
Espino
Well, how did you reconcile--this will be the last question and then we can stop until next time. How did you reconcile the patriotism of your childhood with the discrimination that you started to fight against and witnessed in college?
Castruita
Well, it's because we're fighting for justice. We were fighting for what the United States really taught us. This is what the United States really represented. This is what the United States was all about, and this is what we have to protect. That's how it became reconciled, okay. It was really very simple. We're fighting for justice. We're fighting for liberty. What does America represent, anyway? It became very simple. Free speech, recognition of human beings as human beings; it wasn't that hard. Especially when you see people being thrown up against the wall and being chased by a German Shepherd dog.
Espino

Do you think that was something that you saw as new and not like part of the history of the U.S.?

Castruita

This was like entirely new. This came out on television. You didn't hear about this stuff as part of the United States history. This wasn't United States history. This was not something that the U.S. does, okay. And even for some people, even today some people think the individuals who were marching and demonstrating were going against the proper authorities and deserved to be beat up like that.

But we had a different attitude, and I think part of it was because of my training as a Catholic kid, that you don't treat people like that. We're supposed to love people. We're supposed to be kind to each other, not beat each other up. So I think the reconciliation wasn't that difficult. It wasn't that difficult or far of a jump, because that's not the way we're supposed to be. We're supposed to be fair. We're supposed to be honest. We're supposed to be kind, and what we were seeing wasn't that. And we were learning that in school, and when you begin to put that together, we have to do something. Look at what they're doing up in Berkeley. Why are students considered like little machines? We're not machines. Doesn't this make sense to you?

When the professor used to say, "You need to stand up and start thinking for yourself and start being real human beings," what does that mean? All these were kind of like--and how do they all fit into where you're going in your future? How does this fit for what you are today as a human being? These were the questions we were looking at.

And don't forget, you had our philosophers, Sartre, all right, for one, for example. We were reading these guys in classes, and they're talking about real change. The battle of Algiers, you don't even hear about these stories, but we hear later on when you take a class, about the countries that were fighting for their freedom from colonialism. You hear about these countries that were forming organizations in Indonesia. All of a sudden Indonesia, oh, okay. Sukarno was putting together a group of people to fight for their anti-colonial ideas. Oh, what does this supposedly mean? But this was happening in the 1950s, and we were listening to that. I was listening to that.

We were reading about it in college, and then we'd look at our own situation and we'd begin to see, slowly, that somehow we need to do something for ourselves in our own communities, and then we'd begin to put things together, and we would create our organizations. We'd meet as students, and we began to move, slowly but deliberately, and surprisingly, the slowly part of it turns quickly into speed, and fast. Things begin to move very fast after '67 and '68, very, very fast. So, okay.

Espino

Great. Well, let's stop there. Excellent.

1.3. Session 3 (June 23, 2010)

Espino
This is Virginia Espino. Today is June 23, 2010. I'm interviewing Mr. Phillip Castruita at the East Los Angeles Library in East Los Angeles.
Today, Phillip, I wanted to start with a little retreat back to something you mentioned in the last interview, and that was--
Castruita
Before we do that, though, let's go--I know you want to talk about that part.
Espino
Right.
Castruita
But there's something that I did leave out, and it was the breakfast that we had with Robert Kennedy. Then we can go back to what you're concerned about.
Espino
Perfect.
Castruita
Sometime around November, after we had come back from the El Paso conference, Ralph Guzman got in contact with me and a few other people, saying that Robert Kennedy was interested in talking to some Mexican American students. He wanted to find out what we were all about. Now, this is the time that Robert Kennedy was thinking of running for president. He hadn't made his decision. He hadn't really announced, and he wanted this meeting to be a private meeting. He didn't really want any press around or anything like that. He wanted it just to be a meeting between a few people, to talk about what we, what Mexican students, were concerned about.
Now, Kennedy had already met several other students around this time, and he was getting the feel of what the issues were for us and that's for Mexicans were. So we were really glad to have that opportunity. So most of us, I think--a couple of the UCLA people, like Moctezuma Esparza, I think Susan Racho, and a few others--but there were more people from Cal State, Vicki Castro, Raúl Cardosa, Antonio Rodriguez, Richard Montes--now, Richard Montes had already graduated and he was already on his own. He became Judge Montes later, Judge Richard. And there were a few others.
We met at the Frank and Lucy Casados restaurant, El Adobe, in Hollywood, right across from Paramount Studios, I think it is. Frank Casados and Lucy Casado were very active in the Democratic Party at the time, very, very active, and I guess Guzman knew them well, so that was the place we figured we'd have our breakfast meeting. So we were able to sit down with him, and we had a long conversation with him. He had spent the night somewhere, and he looked like he was a little bit--had a morning hangover, possibly. But he sat down with us and then let us talk. I was sitting about one person away from him. Al Juarez was sitting between us, and so that's

how close we were. We were about the same distance as--he was about as far away as you are from me now, then.
So we had our conversation, and I remember saying something and pounding on the table, causing the table to shake, and spilling something, coffee and something. And then I apologized for that. I was being very forceful. Then I said, "Oh, excuse me. I hope I didn't disturb you." And that, evidently, had an effect on Kennedy, because he had told Guzman that there were gentle revolutionaries, and he was referring to my action, that I was very strong but yet still concerned about spilling something on him. That later came up in other areas, what we mean by gentle revolutionaries, and I thought that was an interesting comment.
Somehow it did get--I think maybe Casado had let the word out to the Paramount people across the street, so when we were going to have breakfast, there was a newsman who walked with Kennedy and Guzman into the restaurant, and then there were a few reporters there afterwards. But it was basically a very private meeting. Kennedy later left by the back door through the back alley, to avoid the people in front.
Interestingly enough, this was mentioned in a book recently, dealing with California politics. They got the whole thing wrong. First they mentioned that it was the day of the Kennedy vote, the day the primary vote was going to occur, and the day he was going to be assassinated. That was totally wrong. They said that we were going to--that after we had met with him, we went out to take people to the polls. That was totally wrong. We didn't do any of that. We didn't even promise support or anything like that. The meeting was primarily for Kennedy to find out what the issues were. He hadn't even--how would you say this--he hadn't even made his announcement to run yet, so it was one of those real private, quiet things, and I think that needs to be on the record, because it needs to be corrected. We were not in support of him. We did not go out there and vote for him or anything like that. It was just a meeting so that we could show or explain our concerns to him.
Later, after the walkouts, which happened later in March, he met with the walkout students, but this happened before, and I have pictures of that. Felix Gutierrez took the pictures. He was also at the meeting. So I think that's significant to know about.

Espino

Are you talking about Ken Burt's "California Politics"?

Castruita

Yes, yes, that's the one. That's the one. And his whole description there is inaccurate. And we can't--the person he spoke with has passed away, so I'm not sure what--the friend that passed away was named Raúl Henderson, so I don't know what Raúl told him, but it was an incorrect description of the event. And I told him. I told that man who wrote--the author--that it was wrong, and he was taken aback, but I didn't make anything out of it. But it was wrong.

Espino
How important was that meeting to your group, to UMAS? I'm assuming you were with UMAS at this time.
Castruita
It was UMAS. This was--again, we had officially began in around September or late August, so this was after the time we had come back from the El Paso conference, so this was somewhere around November sometime. What was significant about it is that it gave us feelings of credibility, that we were being listened to, that we were--we did have something to say, and Kennedy gave us the feeling that we were worth hearing or listening to. He lifted all our spirits, that's for sure. And Kennedy was someone that I think most of us respected, because, of course, all of us there knew of his stature, and most of us I think at that time were involved with the Democratic Party or somehow connected with it, but we were still--we were beginning to be very active politically, even though we had just been in--we had been in existence overall since May with the Loyola conference. Officially, we were a brand-new organization, and here we have Kennedy meeting with us, so it was significant for us. Now, this was after our return from El Paso, too, so it gave us even more hope that we were doing something and even gave us more inspiration, too, that we could do more.
Around this time, or maybe later, a few months later, around the time of the elections, there was something called the Council of Mexican American Unity, I think, or something like that, that had nominating conferences, that the community would support certain Assembly candidates. I think Alex Garcia was running for Assembly or a state senator, and he was not at that meeting. I think Richard Calderon was running for something, and a few other people. I can't remember their names right now. But we, as students, participated in that conference and literally took it over, and as I think I mentioned to you last time, we knew parliamentary procedure, because we had them in our own meetings, and we were able to use parliamentary procedure to take over that conference. [Laughs] And the candidates who wanted our support had to pay attention to some of our issues. They were the Vietnam War, and they were issues dealing with education. So we felt pretty good in the sense that we knew that we could have an influence on our community, and I think at that time, students really made themselves felt.
Now, this pertains to some of the questions you were asking me earlier this morning, before we got here.
Espino
Can I just stop? Your microphone is rubbing against your T-shirt.
Castruita
All right. Okay, now, again, this pertains to some of the issues that we were discussing earlier, and they were, what were our reactions to the earlier, older leadership. We felt the older leadership were, oh, use the term,

[Spanish words] sellouts, the idea that they had kowtowed to the Anglo hierarchies, the political hierarchy. Ross Valencia, for example, was Art Snyder's rep to Boyle Heights, and although he was a good person and tried to do his best, he still was Art Snyder's representative and had no real political power. He had to listen to what Art Snyder said. These are the people we kind of reacted to. Other people, like Dr. Francisco Bravo, who had a very good reputation in the larger political, white political structure, did really nothing for the larger community. Scholarships were nice, but we wanted something more. Most of the organizations that were around then were actively involved in raising scholarship monies, and we wanted more than that. We wanted people to take more of an active role in the community and we would be more of a voice somehow, that would shout out about the needs of our community.

We really were very naive and really didn't know the political moves of the time. But we saw these individuals with people like [Sam] Yorty and [Art] Snyder and the rest of the political hierarchy of the Democratic Party, and we felt that they could be doing much more. This was the time, I think I mentioned to you a little bit earlier, that many of us were listening to people like Malcolm X. He was one of my heroes, I'd mentioned to you, and in 1964 he gave a speech called "The Ballot or the Bullet," and that influenced a lot of us. The idea would be at this time to start making a ruckus. Just don't sit back now. Start, really start, he would call it whipping, but this is what we were concerned about too.

Now, this is where I'll tell you about Walter Karabian. Walter Karabian was an assemblyman in our district, and Richard Alatorre was working for him as an aide, and he had, through Richard, arranged a meeting for us to meet with Karabian. These were some students from Cal State L.A. Felix Guitierrez and I and I think Monte Perez, I'm not sure who else--this was my crew that I worked with--were able to get over to Karabian's office. And again, this is the early--maybe '67, still after all these other events had gone on. And Karabian welcomed us in and started talking about his own bill. I think he thought we were there to be--to listen to what he was doing, right. And he started talking about saving the condor or something like that. And he kept on going and going, and Felix Guitierrez reminds me of this every time we see each other, that I stopped him and said, "Well, Mr. Karabian, I'm glad that we're talking about this, and we need to save the condor or whatever, but we're here to talk about the possible extinction of the Mexican American student." [Laughs] And Karabian all of a sudden kind of sat back and all of a sudden started listening a little bit more.

Then he started asking me about what were some of the problems, and I said some of the problems were the Democratic Party, and he got really freaked out. He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, look at gerrymandering." And then he really blew up. He really came down on me, saying that the Democratic Party was the best thing that we could have ever

had, really works hard for the Mexican people. He just really came down on me. Now, don't forget, I'm a young kid probably in my early twenties and just being pounced on by this Karabian, tried to intimidate me, trying to just show that I'm a total ignoramus, and just said I was totally ignorant of the political ways of the world. And I was surprised. I really wasn't going to say any more. I was shut up pretty well, and somehow that was the extent of our meeting.

But the gerrymandering was very real at that time and very, very significant for our community. That was something that we had a problem with and had to deal with, and we didn't know how much until later in the eighties, when the Californians for Fair Representation start making their moves to show how gerrymandering really was dividing our community and keeping power away from our people. So my issue, I think, was strong, and it was later vindicated, so that was significant.

So those were the early parts of our movement, and some of the people that we were concerned about now, and some of this older generation, didn't really talk to these issues. These are the issues that we were raising again. Now, there are people that we respected. I think [Edward] Roybal was someone we respected, or some of us respected, because of the history that he had gone through. But at the same time, we wanted more. We wanted more to be done, and they weren't doing it.

So when the walkouts came by, it showed us that we could take action and that we had to take action, because no one was going to do it for us. We were going to do it. If they weren't going to do it, we were going to do it. So that was our position when the walkouts developed. Now, don't forget, from '67 through '68, these were developing years. These were like formation, formative years, that allowed us to develop our political viewpoint and to create an organization that could take action like the walkouts, like the moratoriums, but these were still in the future.

So when you asked me about what we thought about the older generation, we felt that a new generation was now having its turn, and we were not going to allow them to tell us what to do or how to do it. We were naive. We didn't know the political machinations or the operations of some of these things. For the Conference For Mexican American Unity, we didn't know all the things that were going on, but we were still just going to be in their faces. We weren't going to just let them get away with it. We wanted to make sure that they knew that students were around, and that was our role.

Espino

Were they hostile to you, or were they welcoming? Or maybe you can talk to me about different personalities.

Castruita

Well, it was in between. It was in between. They were glad that we were there, but at the same time, they were sad that we couldn't be controlled by them. So there was a--how do they deal with us is something that they had

to work out. So we began to be thorns in the Mexican American establishment's side and something that they couldn't overlook. And I think people like Guzman even was someone that some people felt that he was part of that older generation and didn't really understand all the things that that generation had done. Guzman was trying to play both sides. He was working with the young people and giving us support, but also was playing with the old generation and generally dealing with us and more willing to work with us, but he had his foot in the other camp and tried to use our positions to push the people that he knew to come across to our side. Guzman was one of the radicals of the older generation. Even in the fifties he was a young radical who was fighting police brutality at a time when people like Tony Rios were red-baiting certain CSO members. Ralph saw that part and I think he took the other position. So when people like Rudy Acuña were still little guys, had no real influence--I think Rudy Acuña just had graduated from Cal State L.A. and was just beginning to be a professor, just learning about his own political skills and what Chicano Studies was all about. He was just beginning to participate with us too. But again, all of us were young at this time.

Espino

Right. And this was also pre-Chicano movement.

Castruita

Well, don't forget, this is 1967, and we're at the Chicano movement. So don't forget, in '67 we're still Mexican Americans, but by June of '68 we're Chicanos. So within that less than a year, we've made a big transition, from Mexican Americans to Chicanos, and even making the transition from Americans of Spanish surname to Mexican Americans was a big deal. For a time, Mexican American was a radical term for many to accept, and we were part of that generation that was pushing for a recognition of that part of us and that Indian part of us. Even then that idea was important for us. That indigenous part of us was something that was included in our idea of Chicano and Mexican American. So these were the things that were happening in that early period.

So I think I answered some of your questions, I think.

Espino

Yes, perfectly. So we can just continue with the normal flow of the interview, but I did have this other question I wanted you to elaborate on, and that is what you just talked about, the move from Mexican American to Chicano, considering Mexican American was a radical movement in and of itself. In my interview with Dr. Acuña, he said it was very difficult for him to embrace the term Chicano. Do you remember discussions, debates, arguments, either side, when that happened?

Castruita

Well, we were very fortunate at that time, because we had several discussions over identities, ideas of self that we were looking at among

ourselves. We also had a mechanism through "La Raza" newspaper and the publication "El Grito," from Berkeley, and the others newspapers of the Chicano Media Association, which was just developing to happen, so we had a network of newspapers and media publications that helped us examine these questions. I would say--"Con Safos" was another magazine from Los Angeles that was coming up about this same time. So we had "El Grito," and we had "Con Safos," literary journals that allowed us to examine questions of self.

Now, I think "El Grito" was an outstanding journal that really got us into the ideas of Chicano. It was also--in its very first issue it said "Mexican American thought." Then later on it says "Chicano thought." We were all going through that change, and the idea of Chicano was, again, the fact that we were from the people, from the neighborhood. This was a term that was used by the lower classes, so-called, okay, the barrio people, our people. We would use this among ourselves, the Chicanada, right? Well, here we are. And in a way, we were accepting that larger idea.

And don't forget, the idea of black power and the idea of accepting your blackness was also an issue that we kind of latched onto for ourselves. Let's go back to our originality, our origins. Let's go back to who we are. Let's go back to our masses of our people. "Yo Soy Joaquin," I think, was a poem that also came out about this same time, that allowed us to develop a real pride in ourselves. That poem and that film by the Teatro Campesino was really, really significant. Maybe the poem at this time was more important, because I don't know if the film had been developed yet. But these ideas were in the air all across our state and parts of the Southwest, but our state for sure was something that kept us going.

Northern California really had an influence on us too. Again, "El Grito" came from Berkeley. People from San Jose State were important players in this dynamic too, and it made our world a little bit bigger. We weren't just talking about Los Angeles.

I think the debate isn't really a debate. I didn't find the transfer from Mexican American to Chicano that difficult. I actually felt it to be almost an ideological progression, a way of accepting the idea that we were different, but we were not Mexican, and we weren't quite American. We were a unique community, and the fact that we had both cultures, and Chicano expressed that, and it was a political statement, that we were aware of things going around us. And it was very similar to the idea of being black, accepting that idea of pride of self and that you're politically aware and you're up for change. Those were the issues behind Chicano, and I think people were willing to accept that and really weren't held back by it.

There were some who still went for Mexican American, others who also went for Americans of Spanish Surname. You never could get rid of the ASSes, but the question would be, where are you politically. In a sense, we kind of like judged each other. "Where do you stand? How do you call yourself?"

And maybe that was wrong, but that's the way we were able to identify who was on what side and how far would you go. And sometimes people would--"How Chicano really are you? What would you do to prove yourself as Chicano?" and sometimes it got a little heavy. "So you're not Chicano. You're not really. You're still a coconut," things like that. But those were a part of the debate, part of the growth, part of the political times. But we created a larger movement.

But the papers like "La Raza" allowed us to have that real exchange and that real discussion, and most of us, I think, wanted to be Chicano, because it was different. But it also showed that we did have a concern for our community. There are as many reasons to be Chicano as there are many people that are in our world. Everybody had their own idea of what Chicano was, what Chicana was, so we would discuss them in our meetings. Remember, don't forget I'd mentioned to you, that we would have time for interchange among ourselves at our meetings. We had a specific certain amount of time devoted just to that, among ourselves. We would separate into smaller groups and have these exchanges, and come back to larger groups and have a larger group discussion.

So all these things allowed us to really examine these ideas on how do we relate to the larger society as well. How do these issues fit into the issues of Vietnam, for example, the issues of housing discrimination, the issues of education. All these were part of that discussion, and if you stood a Chicano, you had a better understanding of where you really were. You were in that direction. You were, in a sense, a politically aware person with a political direction. That meant that you were someone who would literally--couldn't be walked over, but had a position and was ready to defend it. That was the basic idea.

And I think most of us who would use that word, that term, if ever challenged would be able to answer back and even challenge others about their positions. So one of the nice things about our meetings is that it was a political education for all of us to go through these debates. On questions of police brutality, for example, that Antonio and Francisco, Antonio Rodriguez and Francisco Martinez, would really push us to. They would push us to the edge, and we would have to respond to them. But then when we'd come into the larger group--I mean, excuse me, when we would go into the larger society after we'd come out of our meetings, we would stand generally in similar positions. Even the people who were a little bit more cautious would generally take a stronger position when faced with a larger challenge. So we had a large group, don't forget. We filled a lecture hall, and those lecture halls were pretty big. And each one of them was going to be a different mind, and we always felt that way. Was it, "Cada cabeza es un mundo"? Is that Santana or one of those guys? I'm not sure. Ortega y Gasset, I guess. Anyway.

But we believed those ideas, that all of us did have our own individuality. But at the same time, we also felt we needed to be a group. We needed to think pretty much alike. We needed to go in one direction, and we were pushing for that too, though we also recognized all of us were individuals, but we wanted to be a unity. Because they always said at this time, "Mexican Americans don't have any leaders." I remember always saying, "We are all leaders. We are all our leaders and if you want to talk to our leaders, pick any one of us, because we're all leaders here." That was my idea.

Espino

Well, before we move on, I wanted to interject. You sort of answered this question, but I'm going to state it clearly. Do you think that during that period, that asking people or people having to defend, "How Chicano are you?", do you think that it was a unifier or something that divided people, where people were sacrificed because they weren't--they were sacrificed out of the movement because they weren't Chicano enough?

Castruita

I don't think we really kind of cared about the people that didn't call themselves Chicano. We were concerned about our own group. We didn't have time--I remember I specifically spoke about this at one time. "We don't have time for people that don't want to identify. Go on your own way, but we can't wait for you. We would like you to be with us, but I can' t focus on you when I have these issues to think about. If you want to deal with it, it's up to you. But here we are. These are where we're at. This is where we're going to go. Where do you want to go? If you don't want to be with us, don't bother us, but don't get in our way." That was my viewpoint. I don't know how many other people felt that way.

And I kind of tried to work the organization in that way, because we didn't really have time to deal with those issues. Although, in a sense, we were still concerned about conversions, if you want to say that, to bring people in and to recruit and to start them thinking Chicano. That was a concern and always a concern, but it wasn't the focus. Once people already were there, we began to move on the issues. We always were trying to bring in people and try not to exclude them, but it wasn't a major-major concern. There were other issues that had to be dealt with. But again, you only could do this if you had your numbers, right? So you always were trying to bring in people as much as--and talk and see where they're coming from. And sometimes they were real opposition, and there were some real ugly things that may have happened, and we didn't want to think about that too much. And maybe we were a little bit stronger and turned off some people, but isn't that the way some political movements build and grow?

I, unfortunately, saw that there are some people that were turned off, but we couldn't--how do we do it? How else can we have done it? Some people

in the walkouts were angry because we walked out. Some people said that was very impolite. Oh, okay. But then--

Espino

The gentle revolutionaries?

Castruita

Well, it was very impolite. Those weren't the revolutionaries. We were--the general revolutionaries was the fact that we were concerned about other people, and we did have that idea of respect. But we also needed to have respect for our communities and our own people, and that's what we were moving for. So I think we did pretty well, generally. Again, this was again very early. We're talking before the walkouts. We're building consciousness. We're building activities and we're looking for--I remember looking for things to keep our membership busy, looking for things to keep them interested. The Huelga was a fantastic way of keeping things going, people like [Reyes Lopez] Tijerina.

Later on, after we had the walkouts, we had community days on campus, Días de la Raza, that were very special, that brought to the campus other smaller--how can I say this--that brought the community onto Cal State campus. We felt that the campus belonged to the community, that the campus was there to serve the community's needs. That's what it was there for, and most of us in that early organization believed that way, that the purpose of the college campus was to serve the community. And we were right in the middle of East L.A., so East L.A. was our community, and what East L.A. wanted, Cal State was there to serve its need. That was our idea, and we pushed for that.

And I suppose the administration, some individuals, like Greenlee, who was the president of the college, and Ken Martin, who was the academic vice president, wanted to keep peace in our community and realized that we could explode. They tried to keep us controlled, and they did a pretty good job. But we also were able to get some kind of--how can I say it--compensation for that. We wanted to make sure that we had an EOP program, we had an Ethnic Studies program, and we began those programs. But they were also very much a way that the administration was able to handle us too. We didn't have the same blowups as [Cal State] Northridge did, with Hank Lopez and those guys, but--

Espino

Were you able to work with high school students, junior high school students, to develop those kinds of programs?

Castruita

Yes. We had an Education Committee headed by Vicki Castro. That was from the very beginning, and that was primarily involved with tutoring programs, and we worked closely with EPIC [Educational Participation in Communities] at the time, which Felix [Gutierrez] was part of. So we were able to get some of our people out into the community and have that exchange, and

that was another part of the way we tried to keep our activities going, that we were active in the community as well.
Later on we get a community center right there on Atlantic and Whittier Boulevard. We had a community center which turns out to be a place where Cal State L.A. is literally represented in the community. A tutoring program, college recruitment, college counseling, everything was done there, and we'd have our community meetings there.

Espino

And that was the work of UMAS?

Castruita

Yes, with the Community Center of Cal State L.A. UMAS ran it. It was a man named Victor Morga *[CORRECT?]. Victor Morga was a small man, no, it's not small. He was about five-foot-six, five-foot five, five-foot-six, kind of big and always dressed in a suit. We used to call him the landlord of East L.A., because he was very much involved with property, a good friend of Felix Guitierrez, very good guy, very good guy, and he managed the center for a while. There was a problem later on with the people that came later and how they treated Victor and how what they thought should be done, I thought there were certain actions that got kind of crazy. That's further down the line. I had already left. This was later, in '69, '70, in there somewhere.
But things change and I guess after the walkouts, things began to move quickly. We even had a Pinto program, working with former prisoners. We had met people from San Quentin, through Ralph again, and this was a time when the prison movement was beginning to be very, very active, Attica and all that stuff, the Soledad Brothers. All of that was beginning, and some of the people--we had gone to San Quentin. Ralph took us to San Quentin, Ralph Guzman, and allowed us to meet some people there, and one of the guys we met was Ed Moe Aguirre. Ed used to have a broken nose and everything, a big guy. And we had set up a program that brought Pintos into Cal State L.A., and that was an interesting program, and all kinds--you could imagine some of the problems that came out of that, because that was one of the first Pinto programs anywhere.

Espino

Well, tell me about those programs.

Castruita

Well, drugs and all that happened and all those things, and some of the guys that were involved were kind of--when you're dealing with Pintos, you're dealing with another type of individual that have a different mentality, and the prison programs have to deal with those mentalities, and we were just beginning to learn what that meant and what's involved. Some of these people, some of the guys were still not off drugs completely and because of their probation situations had connections with the police that were more difficult to handle than we thought and sometimes created situations where it was easy for police infiltration, things like that. This is where things begin

to be rough and sometimes guns appear in meetings in the community center, for example. Things like that occur.
So this is the time that I'm getting ready to leave, and I leave to northern California. I stay at Cal State L.A., but I leave in '69, I think, and I go to northern California. But let's just talk a little bit about what happens at Cal State L.A., because this is the time that after I graduate there in '68, there is an Ethnic Studies program set up, and Ralph Guzman becomes the coordinator, I think. Since he's already a department chair, is a little bit older and respected individual, had written some articles, still working on his doctorate, he works and is trying to set up this program. I become his graduate student. I become his teaching assistant, I guess you call it, and my job is to work with him, and I develop bibliographies and things like that, and we're trying to set up this program.
And on the other side, Oscar Martinez and Maria Baeza are setting up an EOP [Educational Opportunity Program], and the EOP program is even put into effect, and I think Maria Diaz is involved. Carlos Jackson is involved, Monte Perez, Maria Baeza, Carlos Muñoz, are all working on the EOP program, and I'm working with Guzman with the Ethnic Studies program. Now, they're bringing the students now. They're beginning to develop that. But we're having a hard time getting--see, what Ralph wants to do is he wants to integrate the Chicano Studies into the rest of the curriculum. He wants to get Chicano history into the history program, into the History Department. The History Department, for example--let me give you the rough example--they don't want to do that. It doesn't fit their criteria. So Ralph is trying to face that battle, is developing the course guidelines and all that. He sets up these courses, offers them for police science, for political science or English, for history, and all these departments don't want these programs. So Ralph is still struggling to set this up, and the students are getting angry because the programs aren't being put in yet. And Ralph is trying to fight the departments to get them in and then the students say, "Well, let's develop our own. Forget that." And Ralph is saying, "Well, let's try," and somehow there's an animosity built between the students who want this now and between Ralph. And Ralph is saying, "We could still try to do it," but there's no real communication of how to work this out. The students are just saying, "Push, push, push," and don't understand what Ralph is going through, and Ralph can't really talk to the students--I'm not sure for what reason--and there's no real sitting down to examine this, from what I remember.
Maybe Carlos Muñoz may have a different perspective, but Carlos is one of the guys that starts pushing for a new chair, a new coordinator and to get Ralph out, and later on he does, and he's successful, and he takes over. He becomes the new coordinator of [unclear]. And I kind of like wonder a little bit about that, because it seems like to me--to me--that we were eating up each other. This is when we first begin that cannibalization that becomes

later on pretty prevalent in other campuses. But that really bothered me, because I felt that it was a plan from the administration, that the students accepted, to get Ralph out of power. That's what I thought, because Ralph was really very effective and very strong, but was not able to put these programs together. So people like Ken Martin, to keep the peace, decided with the students rather than setting up some kind of understanding of how this could be worked out--that's my view.
And the administration, I thought, used students to get rid of one of us, and I really didn't like doing that. I was on the other side. I think Gil Cardenas and myself were some of the people that spoke against this move, and I think even Gil Cardenas today remembers that and can talk to you about that. But Carlos, of course, says that Ralph was not radical enough or listening to the students. I have a different viewpoint. I have several different viewpoints. But that was a concern, that we were beginning to lose our family idea, that we really couldn't work it out among ourselves, and that divided us right down the middle. And it hurt. It was sad that we had to go through that, very much.

Espino

Were you able to talk to Dr. Guzman about his feelings afterwards?

Castruita

Yes. Well, I was very close to Ralph. He and I wound up in northern California. I decided to leave. There was an opening at Cabrillo College in northern California in Aptos, which is near Santa Cruz, near Watsonville, and Ralph was going to Santa Cruz, so I decided I'll go. And I became one of the early teachers of Chicano Studies up at Cabrillo College, and Ralph went to Merrill College, I believe and UCSC, and we would talk often about this stuff and what happened. He was severely disappointed and really saddened by this. It was as if they really kicked him out, and they did a number on him, and he felt it. And then people like Lillian [Roybal], myself and Gil Cardenas were very disappointed and even angry with some of the individuals who had done the deed and felt in a lot of ways disgusted with it, because it seemed so unnecessary. And we were just kind of like eating each other up for no reason but to prove who's more Chicano. That's when we started getting into that type of business, which was kind of crazy.

Espino

Do you see that as a pivotal moment in your history, Cal State L.A. history?

Castruita

In mine, in mine. Definitely in mine. And I didn't talk to some of these guys for a long time. For Monte [Perez] I was really angry with. He even asked me, "Do you really think we were--?" Later on he asked me, "Do you really think we were bought by the administration and used?" And I said, "I sure do. I sure do." And later on, Monte becomes an EOP director, and students, in a sense, take over some of these positions, and a lot of them getting paid for this stuff. I was getting paid, I guess, but I was a teacher's graduate

assistant, I guess. I guess I was taking a position, but I also was taking a position, I thought, within our own family, that we could have still discussed it. After all, we were Chicanos, and why do we side with the administration rather than ourselves? That's the way I felt.

Espino

Do you think that Dr. Guzman was going to eventually become--that would have been monumental, to have Chicano Studies as part of the U.S. history.

Castruita

Well, you see, the problem was that Guzman did not have his doctorate yet either, so that was another concern to some people. And again, we were accepting the rules of the administration, you see, and we were accepting the old rules and not really trying to develop our own. So those are the things that were all part of my thing. We were here trying to change things, but people were all of a sudden getting right into the game again, so let's just say I was not happy that we were doing that. Maybe it could have been done some other way, I don't know. I thought it could have been. I thought we could have sat down and discussed it. That's what I was coming from. But there are certain individuals that were totally unhappy what Guzman was doing, and those individuals, in my mind, really weren't giving a fellow raza member a chance and were willing to jump on the guy rather than sit down and work it out like familia, and I didn't like that.

So when things began--when Ralph was kind of like forced out, I didn't really feel like participating anymore with some of these guys, and then when we had the opportunity to leave, I left. This was just one of the elements, because there were other things that were going on. At some of these meetings that we would have in our community center, things were getting kind of rough. People were taking guns to the meetings and yelling at each other a little bit, again, not really sitting down and talking to each other, and I didn't really feel like I wanted to be a part of that. That wasn't what I got involved with, and that's what I didn't begin, and I didn't want to be a part of that type of movement, so when the opportunity came to go to Cabrillo, I went for it. Just leave the neighborhood, leave the area. I don't need this stuff.

So I moved to Santa Cruz in 1969, and I became a member of the Cabrillo faculty and also was able to go to Berkeley to study in the Cooperative Internship Program, to work on my master's. At Cabrillo, I was one of two Chicano faculty. Rudy Ortega was the other. He was a counselor. We were designing the Chicano Studies program, and I felt pretty good about that in the sense that we were trying to build something. In a sense, this is why I call myself a missionary, right, spreading the word of Chicanada, and we were able to develop something there.

So there's another story there, so how about if we stop there?

Espino

It's only been forty minutes. Can you go ten?

Castruita
It's around eleven o'clock and I'd like to stop, if that's okay.
Espino
Okay, sure.

1.4. Session 4 (June 30, 2010)

Espino
This is Virginia Espino and today is June 30, 2010. I'm interviewing Phillip Castruita in the library at Cal State Los Angeles.
Phillip, you said that after our last interview you remembered a few things that we didn't get to. Do you want to start with that?
Castruita
Yes, let's do that. I want to take it back a little bit, because I thought I remembered that I participated in something called the Center for Social Action at the University of Southern California. I'm taking it back even--this is something that you're not even aware of. But this was a weekly seminar that was held at USC to discuss community organization and how to do community organization. People like Tommy Jacquette, who was part of the Watts riots and was really well known in the community, was part of this. He was one of the individuals who was in charge of the center and one of the person's who sponsored the program.
We were mostly students. Ralph Martinez was a participant who was also an UMAS [United Mexican American Students] member, and some students from Immaculate Heart College and other colleges from around the area attended that. We were talking about how to do community organization, and we were talking about how we can utilize our talents to work with the larger community, and it fit perfectly for us, because we were at that time still beginning to put UMAS together. They said something like, "Work with what you have. Realize the community has talent. But never forget who you're working for." So those were ideas that we were going to use when we came back to Cal State.
And we were still--again, this was from September of 1968 to November of '68. We would meet at USC pretty regularly in a big seminar room and talk over these ideas and issues, and I thought that I should mention it, because it was something important for our community development, and it taught us how to do community organization, so that was really important. We took it back, and I think we did use it, and just the fact of Tommy Jacquette, who not very many people know about, but he was an important key leader in the black community around the time of the Watts riots. He recently died, so I just wanted to make sure that we know that he was part of this.
I also wanted to say that about this time in '68, October--we already talked about that we had met with [Robert] Kennedy, I think, in '67. But in October of '68 now--well, this is before we do that. No, October '68, there had been

a riot in Mexico, or call it Tlatelolco Massacre, student riots or student demonstrations. We met with some of the students at Cal State L.A. Again through Ralph Guzman, we were able to make contact, and some of the students came up and spoke with us in one of our meetings. And so right off the bat, I want you to be aware that we did have contact with the Mexican student movement.
And one of the students names was Gilberto Lopez y Rivas. I'm not sure if you've heard of him, but he's a bigtime journalist now in Mexico and is really well known and respected. Every so often his name comes out on the radio. He's interviewed for something or other. But Gilbert was one of the students that came to us and spoke with us about the situation there in Mexico City. So we did have that exchange, and that was something that should be known for the record. Whether or not many of us--what we got out of it was just a closer connection to what was going on in the larger student movement.
But what I really wanted to talk about was the campamento.

Espino

Before we start with that, can you just give me a little bit more detail about this center that you participated in? It was called the Center for Social Action, and that was something that was established after the Watts riots? Or was it something--

Castruita

This was established after the Watts riots. Now, the Watts riots were much earlier. But because of the activities that were going on in the communities and because of the concerns that came out of the Watts riots, people wanted to begin to organize community leaders, or students who were community leaders, about different approaches to organization and how that could be done. So that's what that was about. I don't know who were the other people that were involved, but I know [Tommy] Jacquette sticks out in my mind.

Espino

Was he a professor at USC?

Castruita

No. He still was a student activist and still a community activist. But he was very well respected, along with Watkins, Ted Watkins and those type of people. So we did have that exchange across races, I suppose you want to say, but across communities. But we did work with the black community, and I think those were important times. So that lasted very briefly, though, from September through November, but it was really--the director is named William J. Williams, and I believe he was a faculty member at USC.

Espino

Was it diverse, the people who were in attendance?

Castruita

Yes, but they mostly were Mexican, if I remember right. Mostly it was for Mexicans. So it didn't last very long, but I found it important for me to attend, and I still remember some of the principles--always work with what you have, and try to remember the idea of the strengths of the community and the talents of the community and the concerns of the community or the issues that you can begin to build with. So those were what we worked with. So we brought them at Cal State L.A., and we realized these are the people, what we have, these are the issues we had to work with, and we began. But we also were lucky in that we had our Mesa Directiva still with the UMAS [United Mexican American Students] group, that met pretty regularly, at least once a month, and that kept us going and kept us aware of what was going on at other campuses. So by the time we begin our own programs, we had a good background, I think, of what we wanted to do.

But remember, we went to El Paso, Texas, Monte Perez, myself, and Felix Gutierrez and Gilbert Cardenas, and we'd attended conferences with other students from across the country, people like Sal Alvarez from up north, Juan Garcia from San Jose State, and people from Colorado and New Mexico, I believe, Texas. So we did have meetings, and we developed some ideas for our return, and one of them was more Chicano Studies classes, the beginnings of Chicano Studies, and more relevant classes for us. And so these ideas, along with our ideas from our Mesa Directiva and from our own state, began pushing us towards Chicano Studies and recruitment programs like EOP [Educational Opportunity Program] programs.

And by the time 1968 begins, so early '68, we start seeing Chicano Studies classes being initiated and programs being designed and implemented. We also see EOP programs recruiting more students and bringing them all to campus, and this leads into my next point.

By June I think of '69, Ronald Reagan is the governor of California, and he threatens to cut the new program of EOP. He's just going to eliminate it from his budget. It's a threat. So on June twenty-third or so, I believe, we have a community march from Obregon Park to Cal State L.A. We're going to have something, a demonstration to make sure that our community knows of the importance of the EOP programs and the importance that we keep the program and that the message be sent to our legislature to reinstate the program.

Here's a little paper that I brought that dealt with that time period. There were several community organizations that participated along with us in our demonstration. This little campamento, which was really small--it was around two hundred students altogether, two hundred people--involved community people as well as our students. Well, there was a threefold program. We wanted to show that Cal State must be more involved in the community where it was located. Second, we were going to be adding our support, our physical support, to the EOP programs in the bills that were going to be presented to the state legislature, and we were going to show

the college and the community our proposals for reform. These are our larger plans.
Monte Perez was president now of UMAS, and Arturo Sandoval was the vice chair. So that whole week we camped out on the free-speech area, which was right in front of the--right by the P.E. building. It's not there anymore. But it was a little campground, and we stayed there for like a whole week. So that was an important part of what was going on in the early sixties. We already had established an UMAS community-relations building on Atlantic Boulevard. It was a place where we could recruit students, offer tutoring classes. It was a place where we could show that we were--Cal State L.A. was present in the community. And that was significant, because I don't think there was another other college at that time, or university, that had anything like that, so we were feeling pretty good about ourselves. But anyway, we were able to get EOP reestablished in the budget, and so after that first year and Reagan's attempt to get rid of it, we were successful in our demonstration and in our campamento. Felix Gutierrez could also tell you more about this, as well as Monte.

Espino

Who did you negotiate with?

Castruita

Well, we were dealing with the Assembly and the state senate and certain individuals there. They were trying to give us about $300,000, which really wasn't enough for the program. The Democrats continued to fight for the program. They wanted 2.5 million dollars for the state colleges only, but we wanted it expanded. Jesse Unruh was one of those who were involved with this, and they were going to add new amendments, so it was a larger battle. It wasn't just a little student thing. So we were involving our whole community in the process of making sure this bill would not fail us, and I think our campamento was successful, because EOP still exists. But as usual, we always have to fight for the funds, and we continue to do that.
But that was the first battle, to get the EOP to continue, and Reagan was tough. He was a real obstacle. And we were, at that time, beginning to see the development of this whole new Right, and as Chicano students, we found this something really serious that we had to face. I think it was just the beginnings of a longer struggle that we still continue to face. But at that time, it was entirely new, and Reagan was becoming very, very popular. Fortunately, we had people like Unruh, who were very, very powerful, on our side, although we still had to push, kick, fight, bite, yell, demonstrate, sit in, to make sure our ways were at least given some attention, and they proved to be somewhat successful in the long run. But again, Reagan was a new entity, and we already were familiar with his anti-union stance and anti-Chavez stance, so many of us did not appreciate him at all, or his policies, but we felt them more harmful to our community, and they still are.

There was another event that was held at the Biltmore Hotel, I think for dealing with education. I almost forgot to tell you this one. Reagan was going to be honored, and as students, we were invited to participate, and we wanted to make--how do you say this--well, make a mark. We wanted to show our discontent. So we went to the Biltmore, and we were eating I think in the Biltmore Bowl, I think. You may have heard of this incident. When Reagan was introduced, the groups--everyone stands except our section. That's the way we were showing our anger. We just didn't stand. That was the extent of my protest. But later on--I don't know who does this, or whatever--there's some fires in the building and some problems, and I don't know who caused them. But there was a little bit larger demonstration than our sitting down and not standing.
They called it the Biltmore incident or something like that, the Biltmore fires or something. Did you hear about it? Did you ever hear about it? Okay, good. So, yes, that was Ronald Reagan, and we, as students and as UMAS, didn't feel like he was a friend to our community at all and didn't want to recognize him and felt from the very beginning that he was someone that was going to harm our community. I considered him an enemy to our community and someone that was, I'll just say, an enemy to the community. Let's just leave it like that.

Espino
How did you decide how you wanted to respond to his policies at that event? Did you discuss what you would do?

Castruita
Well, when we got there, I think most of us felt we weren't going to stand up. Why even bother standing up? We were going to clap for him, just sit there, sit there quietly as a little sign of protest. How the fires began, who started them, maybe one or two individuals, but they weren't associated with my group or the group that I knew. I'm not going to condemn the fires. I'm not. But it was someone else who did it. I can't tell you; I don't know who did. But at least I'm glad something happened, okay.

Espino
You mean something radical?

Castruita
I'm glad something happened that made a larger impact, that people saw how angry people should be over that guy. He was really someone that was harming our community, really harming our community. He was a representative of the John Birch wing of the Republican Party. He was an arch conservative, and I don't think he ever changed his attitude. But at that time, my feeling was he bombed Berkeley because of the Free Speech Movement there and the garden issues that were there, the public park, Peoples Park.

Espino
Peoples Park.

Castruita
All those things stuck in my mind of what Reagan represented to me, so my sitting down was a small protest. But other people--but the larger group felt, I think, that we were disrespectful--[unclear]--but that's their perspective. Again, that just showed me that some of our leadership had a very different perspective from the rest of us, and we were going to continue in our own struggle, and that we were right. That convinced me more.
Espino
It sounds like there were a range of ideologies just even within the Mexican American and Chicano community. You had the old timers you're talking about, who felt like your actions of silence were disrespectful. But then you had people who were taking it another level and setting fires. And then you had yourselves, who were--I don't know if you would consider yourself kind of middle in your--or maybe, how would you describe your position or your ideology within that, within the UMAS group?
Castruita
Progressive. That's a simpler way to say it. We were still learning how to deal with all this. Having demonstrations, we were still seeking permission, we were still seeking support of our larger community. When we did have this campamento, for example, we went to the community and we asked for community support. We went and asked for other organizations to support us, and they did.
One of the things that we were very lucky in having--Felix Gutierrez was a journalism major. He was able to get us in the newspapers, into the "L.A. Times," because of his knowledge of how to work the media. Felix would go on Friday nights, would you believe, he would run to these news media outlets, and he went to the "L.A. Times" and places like that and to the community newspapers, handing them their news releases about what we were doing. That was something new for us, but because we had this skill, we took advantage of it.
Now, whether or not we were--we weren't the old thought. We weren't the way-out radical, like some of the left-leaning organizations, the Socialist Workers Party, for example, or the Communist Party for another. But we were still thinking we needed to do something. We needed to show something different than what has been. We were dissatisfied with the old Democratic Party, and I mentioned to you last time, even the Democratic Party felt we were a little disrespectful to their good graces. But again, we felt that they weren't helping us, and again, we felt that they were, in a sense, holding us back, and we had to push our issues. I don't think we really thought that much about ideological ideas, except that we knew that we had to do something and say it out loud and be in their faces somehow. Now, my parents felt that maybe we--they wanted us to be respectful. They wanted us to be courteous, and they wanted us to be people who showed respect to our elders. And I think we--I know I did.

Espino
Okay, we're back.
Castruita
Well, as I was saying, many of wanted to--I wanted to remember my parents, and I still thought about what they would think about. I didn't want to go too far away from their wishes, but again, I was, because I was participating in these things and very actively participating in these things. But I was also watchful of what I was doing and aware of how far I could go, and I was learning still. I was learning still. The fact that I sat down for Reagan--I don't think my parents would have minded that at all. All I did was sit down. But they were concerned about whether or not I would be harmed or get in trouble or that type of thing, because I think they knew because of their own experience, my dad with his labor unions and my mom with just her knowledge of what she grew up with--they were concerned about what would happen to me and whether or not I would ruin my life and my future, that type of thing, and have a record, whatever that means. But it was important for me to do, and they supported that. They supported my wishes in that regard.
So that was the campamento, and it was a pretty wild time. Imagine two hundred people out here in the front yard, camping at Cal State L.A. It was an event that still brings back good memories. When you talk to Felix Gutierrez, ask him about this. He'll tell you another story. It'll be fun too. We did sit in and we kind of broke into the administration building, and we did cause some damage there. That's one of the reasons why I think now that they built the administration and the president's office particularly, in that new tower, so they made it defensible, so they could turn off the elevators and make sure no one goes any higher than so many floors. But at that time, the president's office was on the first floor and easily accessible, and we got in there, or towards there anyway. Anyway, it's another story.
Espino
Well, tell me about that story.
Castruita
It's not that much more to say. We'll just leave it like that.
Espino
Was this during the campamento?
Castruita
Yes. Yes.
Espino
Did you just feel like--did something happen?
Castruita
Somebody turned on the water hoses and some stuff got damaged, yes, that type of thing. How those water hoses got turned on I have no idea. And we'll leave it like that.
Espino

Okay.

Castruita

Thank you very much.

Espino

So then when you were sitting in or sleeping in at Cal State Los Angeles--

Castruita

Camping in.

Espino

--or camping in, did you have any fears of being arrested?

Castruita

No. No. We had sought permission from the campus to sit in, and again, we sought permission. And again, they realized that it was for their purposes as well. They accepted the idea of EOP as something beneficial, and they wanted EOP to be successful. Ken Martin and Greenly, President Greenly, John Greenly, understood, I think, the value of EOP, so they gave us support, and we had their backup for the demonstration. We were, in a sense, working in conjunction with the school administration on this.

Espino

Well, then, why would you--I'm curious, why would you break into the president's office, if they were working with you?

Castruita

I think just because of anger and the fact that we wanted to do something wild. There may have been other issues, I think, more than that, in the sense that some of us weren't as happy with the administration, and we wanted more from them. The other issues were--although they were supporters of the EOP, there were other issues that we wanted more action on, more support. We wanted them to do more for us, get out there more, and we wanted to show that the community wanted more from this campus. So I think that was just a way of letting off some steam too. So they weren't going to get away scot-free either, because of the issues that we realized--they could have done this a long time ago, too, so. That was such a long time ago now, I can't really remember all the issues except the larger issues and what we said we were looking for.

But there were underlying concerns that we had with the administration here--Chicano Studies programs. Was the campus really being honest with us? Were they just doing this for show? And we wanted to show that we were unhappy, too, with the way the administration was treating us on the larger issue. Why weren't they hiring more Chicano faculty? Why weren't they implementing the Chicano Studies program? Although they gave us lip service, we wanted more, and we just wanted it now, fast, quick. Make it, do it, type of thing. Make it happen.

Espino

It sounds like that's the same impetus that pushed Ralph Guzman out, what you spoke of last time.

Castruita
Make it happen?
Espino
In our interview last time, you talked about people were challenging him with those same arguments.
Castruita
Well, we were challenging him with those arguments, but it wasn't really his--Ralph couldn't do anything. Ralph didn't have any real power. But Greenlee and Ken Martin were the president of the college and the vice president of academic affairs, and had the power to do certain things, and these were the people that we were challenging at the time. And that was our main concern. "Why don't you guys--you people specifically--make something happen now?"
Espino
So then are you saying that, for example, was it Carlos Muñoz?
Castruita
Yes.
Espino
That he--could you say that he was misguided then in those arguments being posed to Ralph Guzman? Or did you think he had some legitimate concerns?
Castruita
Well, I think all of our concerns were legitimate, okay. It's just that how did we pose them, how did we dialogue with each other over these issues. Did we really go the full extent, as we could have, to help each other out rather than make quick decisions and cannibalize and hurt each other? Was there another way that we could have treated ourselves as a family? It was my concern. I don't know. It's hard to say. I think that we could have done it a different way, by sitting down and talking these things out rather than taking the actions that we did take, or that were taken.
So, that's basically 1968 and '69. So in June of '69, that's one of my final goodbyes here, right, at Cal State, because by September I'm now going to--oh, by September I'm going to be in northern California.
During the summer months, I think this may have been the months that I worked for the Western Center for Law and Poverty. Derrek Bell, you may have heard of him, he became a very important judge in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and also very involved with Harvard Law School and things like that. But he was very much an activist lawyer in Los Angeles. I think he was in charge of the Western Center for Law and Poverty. They were studying the court system and whether or not the court system was prejudicial towards minority peoples, black and Mexican, and looking at how the jury systems were selected and that type of thing.
Well, during those months, I believe, of '68 or '69, I'm not sure exactly now, but the Western Center for Law and Poverty had a study of the court

system, and it recruited so many students. Some people from UCLA like Moctezuma Esparza, Rene Nuñez, and I were part of the study group or the investigatory group that went up into the Central Valley as well as San Jose and San Francisco, I think, looking at the court records. In other words, we were the crew that did the dirty work of looking at the actual files, etc., of how the court system worked. After we got all the information together, we gave it to the larger study group, and they put together whatever they had. I never found out really what happened.

But the trip was worthwhile because, well, especially Moctezuma, Rene Nuñez and Ann, his first wife, we got to know each other better, and going into the northern California-Central Valley regions we saw the different cultures of our own community and the difference between the rural Mexican and the urban Mexican. That was a time when Castroville was still a racist town. San Jose had an incident when one of the judges, a Judge Chargin, said, "You guys, you Mexican people, are animals." He literally said something like that, "And you should know better." He really came out with a strong racial attitude, and this was in the news at the time. It was in our community at the time, and then we were studying the court system at the time. So we were facing these issues face up, and we were trying to look at these issues.

And when we went into--these urban Chicanos going into rural towns, I know I saw a real difference. I felt like we were going into the Deep South. But one of the nicest things about it--when we went into San Jose, we met people like Danny Valdez, Luis Valdez's brother, I think Rudy Madrid--is that his name--some of people who were involved with El Teatro Campesino who were at San Jose State, and we got to know the movement in northern California, which wasn't as political but more cultural, and that was exciting, because it was a different perspective of the movement altogether, and began to realize that there's another way of protesting.

For example, Danny Valdez and Red--I forget his name now, but he's still up there and he has a cultural center in San Jose--they would break out the guitar after a party or so and really just start singing songs, like "Siete leguas el caballo, que Villa más estimaba,' and it was just beautiful. We'd just start singing and having a great time. But it got back into the ideas of your Mexican roots, and in the city we didn't do that. They spoke Spanish more than we did, because they had that closer connection, and it made me feel stronger in my history and in my culture and in who I was, from a larger perspective. And it gave me another way of looking at what Mexican was, or Chicano was. And it was great. It was something that was opening up larger vistas.

There was a difference between northern California and southern California in that they had that closer connection to their larger roots than we did, I think. The fields were there, okay. It wasn't as cemented, all right, as our river is right now. There still was a lot of openness, and excitement was still

there. So that was something that was exciting for me to participate in. And the huelga was there. A huelga was the influence in that movement there, and it was still very strong, and it was just getting to its impact. That's the time of the grape boycott, and it was very, very strong all up and down that valley, and it was exciting to be there, because people were actively, actively participating and knew the directions they were going in and had a stronger sense of organization, stronger sense of movement. Cesar Chávez had the idea of nonviolence. The idea of huelga rang through that whole valley, and San Jose, it was on the edge of that valley, and people were still participating in that back and forth.
Well, Danny [Valdez] and Luis [Valdez] were very much a part of that, so when we were there, the huelga became, for me, something that affected me greatly, and it was important for my larger development. And then at the same time, we saw people like Octavio Romano working with "El Grito." That influence was very strong in the San Jose region. So those ideas, I think, in a sense were more focused. I'm not sure how to say it, but they had stronger, for me, resonance than some of the things we were doing here. I don't know how to explain that, but for me, the northern California experience was very important, just to be able to see the activity, the organization, the ideologies of our own movement, and it gave me a larger sense of Chicano, the idea of Chicano, what that was all about.

Espino

How much time did you spend up there?

Castruita

That was just one summer.

Espino

Just one summer.

Castruita

But then after that summer I wound up at Cabrillo College in Santa Cruz, California, and I was going to be there from 1969--I was going to be in northern California from 1969 through 1978, so about ten years I was living in northern California. And it was an exciting period. And I did participate in some of the activities, specifically the Salinas boycott, and I did participate with some of the farmworker organization in Watsonville, and that was exciting. But again, the racism there was much more open, and in a sense, organization was a little bit more--very really grassroots, and the issues were very real, and the poverty was even more real. We weren't city. It wasn't city. It was rural raza, and the extent--Spanish was spoken more, the culture was used more, the ideas of the fields were--it was right there, right? So it was a different perspective, a total different perspective from a citified Mexican like me. So that was an important experience for me.

Espino

Do you have any examples of the racism that was so blatant that you talk about?

Castruita
Well, in Castroville. Castroville was used as an example in a book by Thomas Carter on Mexican American education back then. It was given a different name, but the whole story of Castroville in this book showed the extent of the racism that existed in a small northern California rural town, towards Mexicans. It was literally de facto segregation, very similar to what you have in the South. The racial hierarchy was very evident. The whites were in control, and the Mexicans were the field workers. They were the workers, and the middle classes were very rare. Mexicans had their place, and you did not go beyond that place. And it was evident that there was a segregation of the lines that could not be crossed, and that existed all up and down Central Valley.
Some of the stories were described in this book about Mexican American education. This was one of the early books, around 1969, 1970, that described these situations that were even more impactful than what we had in Los Angeles. These were real, real live racial situations that were hard to cross, very much like, again, a southern town, that were hard to see and hard to live with, and I think to a certain extent they may still be there. But because of the huelga, because of all the movement, they've grown less and less over time. But the differences at that time were very real, and Mexicans acted a certain way to adjust to those situations, especially in the northern California towns. And I think they'd be very similar to places like south Texas, so those commonalities did exist in California in rural places.
The city had different ways of doing their things, a different way of segregation. It wasn't as blatant. It wasn't as out front. It wasn't as clear. But there it was very, very clear. Yes. And for me to see, going through the learning process was very important in my education, in my politicalization at that time, and I was never, ever going to be the same, even after the walkouts. Those were important, but seeing these similar racial beliefs and attitudes so prevalent, still there, was powerful for me.
Espino
Did you question your own identity?
Espino
I wanted to ask you about your own identity. What did that do for your identity, having that experience of intense racism and segregation?
Castruita
That's a good question. I'm not sure, except it made me feel like I'm doing what I should be doing, and I wanted to know more. I wanted to understand this Chicano movement, understand that what's this all about and where can we go with this, what can we develop with this? It made it clear that this is what I want to do. I want to be more involved. I want to get more into this. I was already going in that direction, but this even made it clearer for me. And there's much more to talk about on this, because there are certain things that happen now when I'm in northern California. I'm going to be

teaching at Cabrillo College, and I'm going to be one of two faculty members. We're going to be designing a Chicano Studies program. But at the same time, I'm like, I don't know, I'm twenty-two years old, twenty-three years old. I'm really young, and I'm in a position of authority, and I don't know what I'm doing. I was still learning, and here I am teaching others. Yes, okay. But I'm still going through change, and I'm still finding out different things about myself. So this was a very exciting opportunity for me, and I'm glad I was able to take it. But again, this is the time that I am changing and I am learning and I am developing my identity, all right, and I'm learning about who I am in this process, and I enjoy it all the way.
I'm living a period of intense political activity, and Cesar Chávez becomes really very important, because this is the area where he is taking his action. And I'm also a faculty member. I'm also going to school in Berkeley at the same time. I'm a young graduate student, and I'm learning Chicano history. It's Chicano history now. And this is a time period where we're also designing Chicano Studies curriculum. We meet every month, I guess, in a different university or a different college campus, call ourselves Chicanos for Higher Education. It's called CHE, and we discuss every month what we would like to see for Chicano Studies and what kind of plan can we develop to make a Chicano Studies program that would fit universities and colleges throughout the state of California. We meet almost every month. Almost all the universities up and down the state of California meet to design a Chicano Studies program, and the result turns out to be the Plan de Santa Barbara. But these were the months of heavy exchange, really, really heavy development.
But let's talk more about that next time. That's a perfect way to stop, and begin our next chapter.

Espino

Okay. Thanks, Phillip.

1.5. Session 5 (July 16, 2010)

Espino

This is Virginia Espino and today is July 16, 2010. I'm interviewing Phillip Castruita at Cal State Los Angeles.
Today, Phillip, we're going to start with some more detail about the organization you were involved in, Chicanos for Higher Education [CHE]. What can you tell me about that organization?

Castruita

Well, that organization was made up of probably graduate students and some faculty members. I think Jesus Chavarria from Santa Barbara was one of the faculty members involved, and Armando Valdez from, I believe, northern California. I think he was out of Berkeley at the time, but later, much later, wound up at Stanford. But they were at this point our movement

really very important individuals. High-caliber leadership came from these people. And Juan Gomez Quinones was another individual who was very actively involved with this group of people called Chicanos for Higher Education.

We were meeting often during the spring of '69 and probably even late fall of '68, but we would meet often at various college campuses, and we would discuss what we would like to see for Chicano Studies. Northridge had been going through problems and had a big sit-in and conflict with their administration. Probably one of the biggest conflicts that occurred in southern California was at Northridge at that time, over the implementation of Chicano Studies. Hank Lopez was one of those guys I remember who was at Northridge at the time, is still there, I think. But he was an active member of UMAS [United Mexican American Students], part of the early Mesa Directiva, and all these individuals would meet to discuss what we would like to see Chicano Studies become and be. And that resulted in the Plan de Santa Barbara. It involved the curriculum development, involved how to retain students on campus to allow them to graduate. All these were written down and given as a guideline for other campuses to follow and to use to implement their own programs.

Now, Chicano Studies was brand new, and what we were concerned about is to have some kind of uniformity, some kind of quality control, you might say, how these programs can be developed. For example, there were designs in what history could look like, what Chicano Studies in history, what would that mean, what would that consist of. And there was a design from various campuses. UCLA I think had one, and Cal State L.A. had submitted some designs from their own programs, that we would choose which programs for our own campuses. Those were really very useful. The ideas of an EOP [Educational Opportunity Program] and how do we recruit students and how they would be utilized to implement Chicano Studies was part of the plan too.

Now, the plan was finally written and published, and it was called the Plan de Santa Barbara because the last meetings came out of the University of California at Santa Barbara, and again, Jesus Chavarria was part of that program. So that's why it was called the Plan de Santa Barbara. It was quite an important document, and I think I mentioned to you that recently Reynaldo Macias and Javier Rangel did an interview in some education booklet, a review over the Plan de Santa Barbara and going over what were the relevant aspects of that plan for today. And I think that Reynaldo Macias, who was from UCLA at the time, but was the recent dean of humanities, I believe, at UCLA, was very much a part of the development of that plan too.

So it's still significant. Although some parts of it may not seem pertinent, I still feel that there are many parts of it that can be adopted to our present.

But it's worth taking a look at, not just as a historical document, but still as a working document. Look at it.

Espino

Are you saying that you see some patterns in what affected Mexican Americans, Chicanos, back in 1969 and how, what they're facing today?

Castruita

Yes, I do. But the developments in Chicano Studies, how those approaches can be looked at, how they can be examined, looking at history, for example, how do you approach history. Some of the ways that we looked at the plan, how those can be done I think still can be looked at. How do we involve students in developing your programs? That still can be looked at. So how are students recruited on campus, and what are their roles in Chicano Studies departments, and how do we involve community in the planning of our programs I think still might be useful for our college campuses, especially our Chicano Studies departments.

There are some areas probably that could be implemented and adapted, but at the same time, we have to remember that we're talking about forty years later, and we need to remember that we are now a multicultural Hispanic community, right, that we're looking at Guatemaltecos, Nicaraguenses, and Central Americanos and others, to enlarge those ideas that we had back then. But the basis can be worked with is what I am saying, and we have something to work with and something to at least have a model to use, to adapt, so that we could keep up with our present moment. We're not working from a vacuum is what I'm saying. Those things are still viable and can at least be examined and questioned whether or not they still can be worked with. These are things we may want to still look at as a larger program for ourselves. But at least we have those that we can work with.

Espino

Well, let me ask you, then, because what you're talking about is more like the bigger picture involving students, involving community. Do you think that what you were developing for Chicano Studies back in 1969 could have applications for other ethnic groups, or for the education of the whole nation, of all groups?

Castruita

I don't know about all groups, but let's just look for ourselves, and we were specifically looking at our specific college campuses. We were looking specifically at the state of California, but we also felt that these may be used for other states as well, maybe Texas or Arizona. We didn't have much of a population in other areas, or Kansas. We didn't really realize that these things could be possibly used in Notre Dame, but I think they can be and might even be able to be looked at for New York or Massachusetts or Brown University up in Rhode Island. So these things could still be used, but again, we have to go over them and find out their relevance for today.

And it might be worthwhile to call a conference just to look at that, to get people together to go over what might be useful of the Plan de Santa Barbara, or to create something new out of the plan. That might be at least a thought that might--because we were acting very much in conjunction with each other. We were acting as a large community of raza and not independent entities, and I think that was something that was very valuable, because we realized that we were a large community of people who had something in common. Maybe that was probably the most valuable thing that that document may show. But it was something that we were creating that was brand new.

Remember, Chicano Studies hadn't been around, wasn't a discipline at all. And now when you think about it, programs like Chicano Studies have affected all of the academic areas of our present. History, there's no doubt that Chicano Studies has affected history tremendously, and the impact has been so strong it's almost unbelievable. But it's changed academics, Chicano Studies programs. It's changed. And especially with the impact of women and how women have been a part of our Chicano Studies programs, it's literally blown everything out of the water. Look at Vicki Ruiz's work, for example. That has totally changed the way people approach history now. So beginning with Rudy Acuña's "Occupied America," then looking now at Vicki Ruiz's work, for example, "Out of the Shadows," you could see the change of how people approach even the ideas of race and gender have been fantastic, and this has been a development over a forty-year period that has affected the total discipline of history. And I'm sure other disciplines, other subjects have also been affected just as much.

Now, around the same time, maybe in the 1970s, there were other developments in Chicano Studies. People were looking at the possibilities of what Chicano Studies could be. Luis Nogales was at Stanford University at this time, and I think there was a summer program that was examining what Chicano Studies was, and I was part of that program at Stanford. Ralph Guzman was there, and that's how I got involved, and Felix Gutierrez I believe was there. I think Graciela Molina de Pick--is that her name--I think she was there. Antonia Castañeda was part of this, and Jose Angel Gutierrez was part of this. Nick Vaca was a part of this. Did I say Octavio Romano? Well, he was part of it too. So it was a fantastic program and there were other people there that I can't remember right offhand, some people who were from Washington State University, from Texas, New Mexico universities, as well as California, and so there was a broad range of people. Luis Nogales was the head of this program at the time, and we were examining what the possibilities of Chicano Studies were. Now, Octavio Romano and Ralph Guzman were the older scholars of this program, and they were able to take us into whole new directions. And then we have Nick Vaca, who was also one of the new scholars, who was, again, opening up ideas of what--critiques of sociology and Romano's critiques of anthropology

that later turned into what we saw as critiques of deconstructionism from other scholars later on, especially in the areas of anthropology and looking at how social sciences could be critiqued through deconstruction. But these were the early pioneers of these critiques, and for us they were very important, especially Romano's critique of anthropology and the social sciences. These really were very important, because they foreshadowed later developments that became very important in the areas of deconstruction, for example, that challenged the way we look at social science. These were the beginnings.

Now, what was fun about this conference is that we were given a taste of what we could become as Chicano Studies' scholars. Now, it was also important to see people from other campuses and from other disciplines. Jose Angel Gutierrez, I'm not sure what school he was with at the time, but I remember he brought his family at the time. I think her name was Luz [Gutierrez], his wife, and his little boy. They even stayed at my house in Santa Cruz, and we rode the roller coaster at the pier, but that's another story. But that's where I first met Jose Angel, and we had some interesting conversations.

So those were exciting exchanges and exciting developments. That was one element that I think needed to be discussed. I wish I could give you some of the papers that we had and looked at, but I don't know whatever happened to them. But Guzman was examining the ideas of political science and how social sciences had treated political scientists, and again, it all circled around the idea of what Chicano Studies could be, how as a critique to the larger disciplines, and also inputting our own thinking, own philosophies into a new discipline. This was brand new.

There was another conference later on, similar to what we were doing, that was being held down here, so we were kind of looking at what we were doing and trying to figure out how we were going to develop this. But these were the things that were happening about this time, so that was an exciting exchange. I wish I could tell you more, but that's--it was a quick summer program, and it was gone after about a month or so, maybe a month or a month and a half. But the people who were there, Antonia Castañeda and Octavio Romano, were very exciting people to be around--Ralph Guzman--because these were the thinkers of the time. And as you know, Antonia Castañeda is an outstanding historian, Molina de Pick a fantastic educator in San Diego, I believe, now. And we were all thrown together, so can you imagine that exchange?

Espino

In what, you were, what, about twenty, in your mid-twenties?

Castruita

Yes.

Espino

Most of you?

Castruita
Well, I don't know how--
Espino
Except Ralph Guzman.
Castruita
Well, Molina de Pick was also older, but Antonia Castañeda--we were about the same age, I guess. I don't want to give--it's not polite to put ages of others, but we were all about the same age, and we were all new scholars in the field, and so we were exchanging these ideas back and forth. And Jose Angel had his own brand-new ideas. Again, he was still pretty involved with La Raza Unida Party in Texas, so he had just come off that, and we were all thrown together, so it was a dynamic exchange of views.
Espino
Well, let me ask you, because I don't know Ralph Guzman's work very well, but intuitively, I think he wasn't strong on the idea of history and Aztlán and conquest and that kind of thing. Like was that part of the discussion?
Castruita
No, he wasn't into the idea of Aztlán, okay, not really. Ralph was a practical politician, almost. He had been working since the 1950s with the CSO [Community Service Organization], and Rudy Acuña really details his work in one of his books. I can't remember one of the books. It's not--
Espino
"Anything But Mexican"?
Castruita
--"Occupied," "An Occupied Community"? No, it's not "Anything But Mexican."
Espino
Oh, "Community Under Siege"?
Castruita
The "Community Under Siege," where he chronicles the writings of Ralph in the early newspapers of the neighborhood. See, Ralph was very much a community activist and had written against police brutality when people didn't speak in that way, because of the threat of McCarthyism and all that. But Ralph was one of the outspoken individuals of the CSO in that area. He also became--I think he just came back from the Peace Corps. He was working in Chimbote, Peru, as the director of the Peace Corps in that area and had made close contacts with [Sargent] Shriver and the Kennedy administration. He was very close to Sargent Shriver, who was the father of Maria Schwarzenegger. So he had those contacts with the Kennedy administration, and he didn't lose himself in the rhetoric of the time. Let's say that. And as a result, it was looked on as suspicious by some of the younger radicals of the period, like Carlos Muñoz, like Juan Gomez Quinones, because all of us had a different line of thinking, and he was still a little bit from the '50s generation. But he wasn't really that generation either. He was

caught in between. But he was his own independent mind, which made him very valuable, and he always said--I remember this very well--"Nothing is wrong with the Mexican people, and we don't need to really look at the Mexican people as such, but we have to look at how American society works. Let's look at American society and see how it operates and how it moves around and how it makes Mexicans appear to be a population problem."
So in other words, he was saying, "There's nothing wrong about Mexican. Forget looking at Mexicans. Let's look at how American society works on Mexicans," that type of thing, and that was kind of new for a lot of--because people would say, "Well, let's look at the Mexican problem," right? "Let's look at what's wrong with these people as Mexican people." Ralph was saying, "No, that's totally a false way of looking at that." So he was challenging that aspect of it, and so that was Ralph.
But Octavio Romano, now, on the other hand, was a true academic. He didn't have that much of a community part of him, where Ralph did, a stronger activist position, but he was more into the idea of academics. He was a true scholar, right, and his mind was into anthropology and the critique of anthropology and was totally in that mindset. So he lived the university, where Ralph was in between the university as well as the activist sphere. And that's what I admired about him, and I wanted him as my model, because I liked the idea of the activity in the community and the activity on the campus. That was, I thought for me, what I would like to see for myself. So. And again, to see these models for ourselves was very important, because, again, we didn't have that many models for ourselves at that time. So to have that exchange and to be able to sit around a table and to discuss at a very high level what might be was very exciting.
And then with people like Jose Angel, who were actively doing things and throwing things out there, and people like Antonia Castañeda, who were starting to think in ideas of gender and feminism, totally exciting for the rest of us.

Espino

Okay, we're back.

Castruita

See, Ralph was not an ideologue, and he didn't go along with the party line, right. He was a thinker, a very practical individual, and very often would run into trouble with those people who were interested in the idea of Chicano power. However, one of the things that Ralph did do, he recruited I don't know how many Chicanos on that campus, and some of the people that he worked with turned out to be really very sharp people, like Isauro Garza I remember, a sociologist, a political scientist, who I think was one of the sharper minds on that campus and later on has his own consultant firm in the Central Valley somewhere. But some of the individuals that he brought to Cal State L.A., would you believe, Reyes Tijerina, Corky Gonzales. He didn't make it obvious. He even brought these people to UCLA. He didn't

make it obvious that he did it. He let the students take the credit for it, and that's what was good about Ralph. He let other people take his credit, but he did it, he's the one that did it. Without him, we wouldn't have achieved half of what we have done, okay. And he's the one that got us to get into the El Paso conference, things like that, had our breakfast with Kennedy meeting and all that type of stuff.
But he wasn't into the politics of the larger Chicano movement. People like Cesar Chávez knew him. People like Reyes Tijerina knew him. There would be people behind the scenes that you probably have heard of, [Manuel] Aragon, who became deputy mayor of Los Angeles--

Espino

Manuel?

Castruita

Lupe Anguiano; almost everybody at the time knew Ralph. But Ralph was very practical and wasn't going to fall into any ideology of the day. And because of that, very often he would run into trouble with people like Roberto Rubalcava from UC Santa Cruz, who ran the EOP program. They would conflict, because Ralph would have his own ideas and Rubalcava would have his Chicano ideas, and Ralph wouldn't go along, and Rubalcava wanted to do things, and Ralph did not want to go that way, so that would be the power problem. And he was not going to wave the flag, but he would work in his own way, and he did work to get Chicanos on campus and to get them to graduate. He got them scholarships and fellowships and very often did not get the credit, and very often would get in trouble for his way it worked. [Laughs] But he worked very hard to help raza, I think, learn the best way.

Espino

Would you consider him a nationalist?

Castruita

No. No. But he was a very strong Mexican, okay, and very proud to be a Mexican, and he spoke Spanish probably better than any of these nationalists. But he was not going to be going around yelling or saying irrational things. Students appreciated Corky Gonzales and what he said, his ideas of Plan de Aztlán, and were not going to really look at Ralph's rational approach, practical, political approach, when they would have something like the Plan de Aztlán around him. Ralph would not be that caliber. However he would understand why people would use those things, he had his own way. He wouldn't speak against it. He wouldn't be anti-that. And actually, he would understand why people would say these things, but he was very moderate in that way and would be willing to work with the system to get what he needed. And I think most of us now would understand that, because a lot of us are doing that now ourselves and realize sometimes that the rhetoric isn't always the best way to get things done.

Espino

How did you identify yourself? Did you consider yourself a nationalist, or do you?

Castruita

Well, as I say, Ralph was a very good friend of mine, and I don't know if--I guess he would call me a nationalist. I was very supportive of the ideas that were going out there by Corky, but I was really supportive of the farmworkers and didn't realize that till much later. But I enjoyed Acuña's writings, and those early writings were supposedly very strong, but I didn't find them that strong. I found them--for example, the "Occupied America"'s first edition was considered--it's considered now to be highly volatile. But at the time, that was my thinking. That's the way I thought, and that was my attitude. I don't even think--I don't know how Rudy would describe himself, Rudy Acuña, but I think Rudy Acuña would be my type of thought.

Espino

Well, it's really interesting, because there's nationalism, but there's also the term Chicano that people like Rudy Acuña, Julian Nava, and possibly Ralph Guzman found it difficult to accept.

Castruita

Well, I wouldn't put Julian Nava in the same category of Ralph Guzman. I would not. Neither would I--if we would have categories, let's just say, of nationalists--I don't know if that really makes any sense, though. I don't find this valuable. But I would say Rudy Acuña had appeal to a large group of activists. Ralph would have less. But Rudy Acuña respected Ralph Guzman to a very high degree, okay. And then you'd have Julian Nava.

Now, Julian Nava, not very many of us held--we didn't hold him in very high regard. He wasn't really a part of us, and he really removed himself from us, and we didn't find any struggle with that or any problem with that. So he wasn't part of our movement. Although a lot of us supported his move for the Board of Education, we went beyond that, and Rudy Acuña, Ralph Guzman were in a different category altogether.

Espino

Well, I'm looking at--what I'm referring to is from the interviews that I've done with both Guzman and Nava and how they identify themselves and how we talked about that shift from Mexican American to Chicano. It was difficult for both of them, even though they had--like what you're saying, are coming from two different perspectives. They just--it was--

Castruita

They were older. They were older, and they had their feet in that other generation. So that's what made it a little bit difficult. But they were sympathetic, and I think they understood what we were trying to do. That's the best way I can understand it, because, again, they had a different perspective. They had been around longer. We were attacking that, okay. So even Rudy, although he wrote--Rudy's now considered one of the

grandfathers of Chicano Studies in high respect. Everybody has high respect for him.
And people didn't really know Ralph that well. But I've had very many conversations with him, had dinner at his house. He house became my second home, so I really understood very much of what his interests were, and I felt that they were very strong, even, in a sense, to the point challenging a lot of our beliefs of what Chicano should be. But he was a man who had very real strong political beliefs and believed in our people and what we could do and helped as much as he could. And the ideas of nationalism, it really didn't appeal to him. Although he would understand them and find them necessary for political development, he was not going to be carried away with them.
Again, he saw things from a different perspective, and because of that his own sincerity and his own honesty caused some troubles with people who didn't go along with his practicalities. That's for Ralph, in my mind. But again, but again though, I think he was very, very important, and for me, I really appreciate all the work he did for me. And I think because I was close to him, I have a different perspective of him and appreciation. But again, what he did show is that, don't look at Mexicans as the problem. We have to look at American society and what's wrong with American society.
He was a person that was open to others, had worked with others, and wasn't ready to just work and become a Chicano-only type of person, like some of us were, like Corky would be. He had worked with Jews in the CSO and was very appreciative of that, was very aware of some of the lawyers who had helped, non-Mexican lawyers who had helped in his early movement years, and so he was more open than we would be at the time. We were totally raza primero, todo por la raza and that type of thing, where Ralph couldn't really say that, in that direction, because he also knew where those ideas came from. He understood that [José] Vasconcelos' concepts of raza were somewhat racist, you know, and there's no doubt about it, and he couldn't accept that. He was totally a man against racism, so those contradictions he couldn't easily accept.
And he knew people like Ernesto Galarza, and we respected Ernesto Galarza, but Ernesto Galarza wasn't going to be someone totally back of Corky Gonzales, all right, for example. All of us respected Ernesto Galarza, but Ernesto Galarza wasn't working with us, okay. He wasn't in the trenches with us. He was, again, considered an honored and all that, but he was in another category altogether. And again, he was more like Ralph Guzman, though they could talk very easily to each other, and they did.

Espino

Well, even the UFW [United Farm Workers] could not be exclusively Mexican-Chicano. They really needed to build a coalition.

Castruita

They couldn't, and they even were somewhat hesitant to get involved with the larger Chicano movement as such, because of that, that very part. But they did make efforts, and they did make overtures, and they had to kind of like ride the fine line, because the idea of the nationalist concepts were going in that direction. And we all had to kind of find where we were at the time. All of us had to kind of like find that balance. So even Luis Valdez had to find that balance, and he did finally see it. In one of his writings, he talks about, "You are my other self," or something like that, In Lak'ech. Anyway, I'll have to share that with you some other time.
But there were various phases in the Chicano movement--movements, all right? You have the California, you have the Texas movement and the Colorado movement. California, Cesar Chávez; Texas, Raza Unida; and Colorado, Corky Gonzales.

Espino
Well, when you were with--because you talked earlier, in earlier interviews, about your involvement with UFW and the impact that it had on you. Do you remember that there were other groups? Then how did that dynamic--I mean, more Jewish or white, Anglo.

Castruita
We didn't really associate that much with them.

Espino
So you don't think they had--or you don't recollect them being a strong presence?

Castruita
No. Not within the movement. You had your SDSers [Students for a Democratic Society], your Socialist Workers, Communist Parties, but they were a separate group. The farm workers, we would be closely working with them. The Brown Berets, these were the groups that we worked with, other student movements, other Chicano student groups primarily, so basically, that's that. What else?

Espino
So when you were with the UFW, then, you didn't really have contact with people from other ethnic groups. And then what about when you were a professor?

Castruita
Well, wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute. I should say we had--in the beginning we were primarily concerned--in early '67 and '68, '69, we were pretty much on our own. When later we began to work with some of the black groups, some of the Black Student Union, for example. When Mohammed Ali comes on campus, UMAS [United Mexican American Students] is there, and I think Carlos Muñoz even is one of his escorts. We take him over to the student union and introduce him to the student body government, and Carlos is part of that escort, because the blacks involved us with that practice. Then we have some of the young Asian movements,

and we have the American Indian Movement, AIM, so those are the groups that we work with, closely with. And even when I go up in northern California, the same thing and the same groups.
So we have the student movement as well as the farmworker movement in California, very strong, so there's [unclear] aspects of the Chicano movement, right. So each aspect of it, student, farmworkers, Corky's movement--Corky's is probably closer to the student movement, but again, its essence is in Colorado. But when the Denver conference in '69 occurs, and everybody decides to change the names of UMAS to one overall MECHA [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán], that's significant. There's even a little conflict here at Cal State L.A. over the change of name, because some people want to keep UMAS, other people want to go MECHA. I was already gone, but on my campus, we accepted MECHA without any problem. But here it finally went to MECHA, so it did become one essence, and the idea of the Plan de Aztlán was acceptable, and we moved on. And again, we also had the Plan de Santa Barbara, so we moved on. We had other things to work with.
To me, it was just a continuation of what we were doing and just a larger development. So that's in '69. And on my campus over at Cabrillo College, now, we're a very rural area. We're very close to Watsonville, and most of the Chicano students who are there come from the Watsonville areas, who were farmworkers. The area is apples, strawberries, lettuce, which are part of the Salinas Valley. Chávez was beginning to be very active in that area. The farmworkers were making their moves, and there were some demonstrations in other parts of the valley, and I think I had mentioned to you I went to one of the demonstrations and the president of the college, I think--didn't I mention this to you--the president of the college calls me in and reprimands me, saying that, "You shouldn't be going to these things." I think we talked about that.
But these are the things that we're concerned with, where here in Los Angeles, those weren't that significant to our lives as they were in northern California. Those were significant issues to our lives there, because, for example, our students parents were working in those fields, and the strike was affecting their very livelihoods. Some of the women were cannery workers, and there was one woman, I remember her name was Belen, who had a miscarriage when she was working on the cannery line, so those issues were not the same issues we had down here, okay. Our student issues were student issues, and there those were your daily life issues, right? So I don't want to make them look different, but they were different, or seemingly different. Those were issues of everyday existence, of, how are you going to work, how are you going to eat and put food on the table. Those were very real issues, for me, which made it a little bit more real for me to go through. I'm not saying these other issues didn't have that same quality, but I felt it more there.

Espino
How do you think it changed you, that experience?
Castruita
I began to appreciate the rural life more, and I saw there the real hierarchy, racial hierarchy in communities that I didn't face down here. I realized, too, that the Mexicans up there in northern California were closer to their roots. They had a different quality about them. They weren't city Chicanos. They weren't, quote, "sophisticates," unquote. They were farmworkers and had those qualities, and they felt uncomfortable in white communities, okay, which would be Santa Cruz, for example. And there were places where they would not go, because of that felt discrimination--it was very evident--and they had their own places. Because I was from the city, I could go to both, and because I was from a different area, I felt very comfortable in both and not worried about either thing. And because I had a good little paying job at the time, a teacher, I had money and I was able to spend it.
So they were, again, from a different background, different experiences. But because we were still Mexicanos, raza, we were able to communicate well with each other and work with each other. Again, people like Elias Ochoa I think I mentioned to you, he's one of the people that hired me for Cabrillo, a student. They had student committees that approved you, that type of thing. We were able to have a good working relationship, and we developed a stronger student-teacher experience, and that was very valuable for me.
Espino
Did it influence your curriculum development?
Castruita
Yes. We worked together on how we were going to develop these ideas, and again, these were brand new. How do you develop programs that are brand new? By magic, right? Pull rabbits out of the hat. But again, we had an idea of what we were looking at, the Mexican war, the ancient peoples of Mexico, the Aztecas, Mexicas. We looked at these. We also looked at the present circumstances. In a sense, what made it more fun is that we didn't have a set curriculum, and we would pull stuff up, what was important for us at the time. How do you combine history with our present movement, with our present realities? This was, in a sense, how do we put this together was the exciting part of it, and still keep it academic. These were exciting, and we were discovering these things together, and in a sense, that's what made it move in a powerful direction, because I think we were learning together at the same time, and in a way, that's what education should be is a journey through knowledge and a common experience, not something that's just fed to you by someone above, but working together we were learning together what this is all about, and that's what made it exciting.
And because I was new and I was trying to see this done in a [unclear] way, I experimented, and that was exciting to see. So there was a real

interchange, and it was dynamic. I'm sure I did several things wrong, that I wouldn't do now, but it was powerful, for me anyway. I learned a lot.

Espino

Well, in talking with people who'd helped develop the Northridge Chicano Studies, one aspect of their program was social services and was tutoring. Was that something that you were looking at as well? It was like trying to bring up to par students who weren't adequately prepared.

Castruita

Well, this would be our EOP program. This was done--we had special tutors, things like that, for our students and all that. Yes, we had that, and that was also Rosa Maria Gomez's responsibility. And our MECHA became really important to us, so we included MECHA in our development of our overall programs. Don't forget, we were real small. There were just three of us at the beginning, Rosa Maria [Gomez], Rudy Ortega, who's a counselor, and myself. It's not very huge. So we were able to utilize students to help us as a larger base, to plan what we wanted to do. Without the students, we wouldn't have been successful in any of this. So that's what made it such an exciting dynamic in that we worked with each other. Elias Ochoa, Alejandra Ramirez, Richard Morales, Rita Morales, Maria Galvan were some of the students at that time that I remember, Yolanda Ramirez and others. Those were all students I mentioned to you, so those were important; David Vargas. So these were really essential young people to help us make some strong impact on the campus, and I think we did. Those were exciting years. One of those years we had the third annual Festival de Teatros with the Teatro Campesino. It was the third festival. We opened up Cabrillo College to all the theater groups that were in California, the Southwest, and Mexico, and Mascarones--did you ever hear of them--they were part of this group. Teatro Campesino were part of this. It was a big festival, a whole week or so, maybe one week or two weeks, and it was at Watsonville and at Cabrillo College. Luis Valdez and Danny [Valdez], all this. So we had it in Watsonville, and we had it in San Juan Bautista, and we had it in Cabrillo College, so this was exciting. And some of our students went down to I think San Juan somewhere, and they had, like, workshops with the Teatro Campesino.

This is where Manuel Santana--I mentioned to you last time--he had a small restaurant called Manny's in Aptos, right by the beach, fantastic little place. So he had bought property in San Juan Bautista, and at that time, at that very same time, he offered part of the property to the Teatro, and he literally said, "Be productive." And that's what he charged the rent, "Be productive." He literally gave that property to the Teatro, and it's partly because of that festival that we had and that connection that we made between El Teatro and Manuel Santana and Luis Valdez.

And interestingly enough, the Teatro is still there. And they were going through their own changes. They were going through some collective

development, and they were examining very closely their indigenous roots. Jesus Treviño writes about these years in his book, his memoirs, about the time the Teatro was early in San Juan and the things that they were going through, and I think he writes about that very well.
So these were the things that we were going through, and we knew--we had those connections at Cabrillo. We were just a small little community college, but we were doing these things. It was wild. It was really exciting years.
Espino
Right. You were experiencing the same thing that CSUN, who had much larger faculty, much larger student population, was going through the same arguments and debates. Can you talk to me a little bit about that idea of idigeneity and just you personally. Was it something that came easy or difficult for you?
Castruita
Well, I didn't really focus on those issues. There were other issues like the farmworkers' issue, which was more real than having to go into the philosophy of it. Let's go to the--tomorrow we're going to go to Chávez's demonstration. They're having something, a rally for the lettuce strike. We weren't going to be thinking too much about Mexicas philosophy at that point. We had to think about other basic politics that the farmworkers were working with, so that was our basic concern. And then we were also talking about the development of the Chicano Studies program on the campus and working with our students, developing our programs, etc., so we weren't really getting into the philosophies of indigenous philosophies at that time too much.
But we knew that they were something that was a part of us, because I remember having this discussion with Ron Lopez from UCLA. I don't know if you know Ron. He's been around for a long time. He was another one who went to the Stanford conference in ethnic studies, Chicano studies. And I think it's where I had this conversation with--he said, "How far back to you want to take this?" I took this way back into the Mashika time, and he said, "You're being ridiculous." But at that time, I felt that was important for me. Now, I wasn't getting into the indigenous idea, but I realized for myself that that was an important part of our development that we needed to discuss, and Ron said, "That doesn't fit with our practicalities now." That was the discussion, how things were back then.
The Teatro got into the Mayan philosophies in great detail, and that's what Treviño talks about, whereas--I knew it was important, that we had to examine it, but on the balance, on the balance. And I still feel that's important, to look at the philosophies.
Espino
But you yourself, did you identify with being Indian?
Castruita

I felt--I identified being Mexican, okay, primarily, and at that time Mexican meant a lot of different things. We were still discovering how far back did you want to go into it. Now you know that there's this indigenous movements who are very strong in this aspect. I felt it was a part of our movement, not the total aspect of the movement, so what I looked at is I offered courses in the ancient history. So we did look at the early writings and the early stories of the Aztecas and the whole things, but we brought them up to the present time and how it worked overall to get us to our present day. We were really interested in, don't forget, trying to help our students recognize who they were and how their realities with the farmworkers, with the school system, with their communities in the present, shaped their lives, and convinced them that they could have an influence in the shaping of their own life, but using all this knowledge to help them grow, to transfer out of Cabrillo, to go to either Santa Clara University, San Jose State, or the UC system.

Those were our concerns, especially, at that time, to get out students in and get them out, to have them graduate and get them out. The idea of the indigenous at that point wasn't our emphasis. Our emphasis was to get our students in and get them out, okay, with the Chicano concept, in a sense, with this new consciousness of community, of getting out there to make an impact, getting out into your community and serving your community, and in a sense, making the campus an aspect of the community. Again, what we were doing was very similar to what we did at Cal State L.A., and in a sense, we were missionaries, as I had mentioned earlier, taking the message and getting it out to other people, as more people as we could, and bringing in groups like the Teatros, to show them all the things that were going on in the larger Southwest and all the changes that were going on within the movement at that time.

So that's what we were trying to do, waking them up to the possibilities that they had available for themselves and the changes that they could create within their own communities if they chose to participate with people like the farmworkers, and many of them did. Because the farmworkers were such a close element in their lives and in their community, we were able to make that contact very easily, very easily, and we had that change in them that we could see, and it was very powerful. There were some students who had problems identifying with that, but, unfortunately, I didn't have time to work with those students. I was concerned with the students that I had in my classes right now who wanted to make that change, so those are the people that I concentrated on, and I had to let the others go on their own way, unfortunately. But that was my main focus.

Later we were able to get two more faculty members, Felix Robles, Spanish, and Marcos Lopez, Spanish. Again, see, that was such a traditional way of getting Chicano faculty, but we got them--Marcos was teaching English, I think, too, and maybe he wasn't teaching Spanish, so that was good. And he

was teaching writing, etc. Felix was teaching Spanish. I remember one of the good things about Marcos Lopez is that he would teach them Shelley's "Frankenstein," right? That was way out there. But he was a Chicano from, I don't know where he was. He was one of the weirdest guys I've known, Marcos Lopez. There's all kinds of stories to him, but we will not get into. But those were powerful years.
But, again, this was our crew that we were working with, and we did have an impact on that campus. Things did change to a large degree, and there were more Chicanos that Rosa was able to recruit, that we were able to get them into our Chicano Studies programs and send them on. We did have good graduations, good groups of graduates I'm seeing their faces now. Many of them had, again, farmworker backgrounds, they were very talented. What we offered them was an opportunity to show their talents, and that was exciting. And that was just a small college, and that was in a small little place on the coast of northern California. But they found their voices, many of them, and many of them found their talents. But that's part of the story. We did have some prison guys come by, and it was some difficulties, again, with the drug situation, but it didn't affect us too badly, but it was something that we did have to work with. We tried.

Espino

Yes, it sounds like you did an incredible job with that first generation of students who benefited from the movement.

Castruita

Also, we had connections with the people at UCSC, and that was exciting too. Now, those people were very strong, and they were moving in their own directions too, so that was a nice connection that we were able to do. Again, because of Rosa's connection with [Roberto] Rubalcava, the San Jose State connection that she had, and then the connection that I had with Ralph [Guzman]--and it was interesting, because both those individuals, Ralph and Rubalcava, had a little conflict. But because Rosa and I were very good friends, and because we had both of them on our side, Ralph and me, and Rosa's Rubalcava, we were able to work those things out. So we were very fortunate.

Espino

Was it about this time or before when you received your draft notice?

Castruita

Oh, this was after my draft notice. My draft notice came in 1968. Now, talking about the draft notice. Around 1970, I take a carload, two carloads of students down to the moratorium in Los Angeles. It's August twenty-ninth. Remember, this is our summertime, but we're still able to get our students together to go to the moratorium. I walk the moratorium and my students go their own way. "We're in L.A., now go your own way, but don't get lost, but we'll see each other at the park. Make sure we'll get together before we

leave." Everything looks like it's no problem. "Sure, we'll find each other somehow. We'll find each other in the park."
So I find a good friend of mine, Ralph Martinez, from Cal State L.A., and another man named Henry Ronquillo, who turns out to be later the Roosevelt principal, the principal at Roosevelt High School, Henry Ronquillo. We walk together in the march from Atlantic all the way to Laguna Park, and no problem. A friend of mine, Gilbert Cardenas, who now is at Notre Dame, is on the roof, takes a picture of us. I have the picture of us marching that day. So anyway, Ralph and I get into the park and Henry takes off, and Ralph and I are thirsty, and we know there's a liquor store down the street, because we know the neighborhood. We walk over to the liquor store and we get our drink, I think, and then we walk out, and all of a sudden we start seeing a lot of sheriff cars come by. And this is where the incidents begin, right here. The sheriffs were called by the liquor store owner, saying that there's a problem, that the people are walking out without paying. I didn't see that. All I saw was that there were a lot of sheriffs outside now, I don't know how many cars gathering, so we just kind of walked back to the park, Ralph and I. [Laughs] Let's just start moving.
And police start following people into the park, and there are some things thrown. I'm not sure what's thrown, but there are some things thrown at the police. And I guess the police--these are the sheriffs--ask for any incident to start moving in, and they begin to move into the park. This is at the northwestern part of the park, and the rest of the group is at the eastern end of the park. Now, at the east end of the park, people are gathering. There are crowds, there's families, and there's buses all along that border part of the park. They're in a baseball diamond-like area, and there's a stage set up. Rosalio Muñoz is beginning to talk. There's a folk group up there playing their guitars. A dance group is going to be doing their dancing, and this is at one end of the park. The families are settling down, because all the people now--there's about thirty thousand people here, right, coming into the park. People are now settling down.
This is August 29, 1970. People are settling down and beginning to just be real relaxed, enjoying this, what's going to happen, and waiting for the speeches. There's little kids, little babies, all right, and older kids, and older senior-citizen types, all of us are there. But again, Ralph K. Martinez and I are at the complete other end of the park. We wanted to go get something to drink. And we're seeing now that the police are coming in. They're coming in, and they're beating up some of the guys--they're beating these stragglers up. I was able to take pictures of one young man being beaten by a cop against this fence. I had my camera with me, so I was taking pictures, and I was realizing the police were still coming in. They were coming in, they weren't stopping. And all of a sudden, the people started realizing that something was going on and they began to start realizing there's a little

panic going on here, and people start making moves to try to get out of the park.
But remember, I had mentioned to you that there were buses, like school buses, big yellow buses blocking their path out of the park. So the police were still coming in. They're still coming in, and people are now beginning to panic, and they're starting to try to get out, but the buses are blocking their passage and they can't get out right away. I'm able to get through this crowd, climb one of those baseball back-stoppers and climb on top of it, and just laid there. I laid down and I'd just take pictures. I'm on this thing and I'm taking pictures, and I see the police coming in, people trying to leave and they can't. But then I see a bunch of young guys attack the police, pushing them back, giving the people time to get out, literally saving some people's lives. They push the police back way, way to the west end of the park. The police, the sheriffs, gather their forces, but the young men push them back. People are able to get out somewhat, not peacefully, but they're running out of the park. Their babies are crying, mothers are trying to find their kids, and older people are trying to just get themselves out. People are just trying to get out of the park now.
But the police were pushed back, giving them time to get out and not trample over each other. So when the police are pushed back, they regroup. I suppose that they're trained how to do that. And then once they're back and regrouped, they charge in to the park, pushing back the young men, firing tear gas into the crowd, but then they start going wild. This is where they start beating people up and just go swinging, and there's pictures of this in some films that we've had. And people literally just leave the park and go into the side streets in the community--you know, it's surrounded by houses, that little park. There's little communities all around that area, and people just literally pour out into those communities. They've already been tear gassed, and the neighbors literally open up their yards to us, give us water and help us wash our faces off.
So I climb down after I'm tear gassed and go find someplace where I could wash my face off. I don't know where my students are, and good luck to them. We'll find them later and we'll see what happened; just want to get out of there. I jump into some house and I try to wash my face off and then, okay, we're trying to find out what's going on. Try to find where people are. I wind up on 3rd Street where the sheriffs' station is, and I remember walking up to get some water and going to get--there's a water fountain right before you get to the doors of the police, the sheriffs' station. I'm going to get my water, and the sheriff somehow comes out of that building or were still in that building, I'm not sure. I don't remember exactly, but all I can remember is seeing a shotgun pointed at me, saying, "Get back, get back." I said, "I want to get some water." He said, "Get back." I said, "Okay." [Laughs] So I forget the water. I go around and get out of there.

So a bunch of people wind up at the park. There's people all over that area now, just kind of like trying to get out, going--whatever they were at. So then, okay, I've got to find my students, okay, I've got to find my students, because we all came down together, and they're all over the place. I don't know how we find each other, but we do find each other, and we recount what's happened. That was a heck of a day, and we don't find each other until late evening. This happened earlier in the afternoon, maybe around twelve or one o'clock or sometime, and I don't find my students till much later, five or six. And we go home, talking about that incident. But that was it.

Later there's other moratoriums, I think at least two more, but that's the one we went to, and our students--like I never get over that, and we never get over that. But that was an experience, and that was the moratorium, August. That was our moratorium experience. So, the students that I took are so worked up about that, they set up a workshop or a seminar, some kind of speaking engagement for us--I think I have a tape somewhere of this thing--just to talk about what happened that day, so other people find out what happened, on Cabrillo College campus, right. So that's how the word about the moratorium spreads, what happened and etc., etc. But other people who were there, from El Paso, from New Mexico, Colorado, do the same thing. They go back home and they tell what happened to their communities. So the people realize what happened in L.A., like that was a big deal.

And then later on in that day we find out, of course, Ruben Salazar was shot and two other people were killed, so that day three people were killed. A young man of fifteen years old, Ruben Salazar, and another young man were shot dead.

Espino

How did that affect you? Because some people, like we heard Gloria Arillanes talk about how--or did she say this publicly? I'm not really sure--but how that changed her afterwards, how she was afraid.

Castruita

I think, well, don't forget, we had had walkouts, and we had had the feeling that we were going to be thrown in jail, and then we have the moratorium. I think it makes you more--it made us more angry and more aware of what the system was doing to ourselves, doing to us, and it made us want to change things even more. It convinced us that we were doing something right, that we had to make some kind of real change.

I think it's time. Yes, we'd better stop there.

Espino

You want to stop here?

Castruita

Yes, because I'm already overdue.

Espino

Okay, we'll stop it now. We'll pick up next time.

1.6. Session6 (July 27, 2010)

Espino
This is Virginia Espino and today is July 27, 2010. I'm interviewing Phillip Castruita at Cal State Los Angeles.
Phillip, last time we finished with a wonderful story you told about the day of August twenty-ninth, the Chicano moratorium, and I was wondering if you could give me a little background of how you came to have a position against the war, the Vietnam War specifically?
Castruita
Okay. When I got to Cal State L.A. in 1964, the fall of '64, I knew that there was a war going on, or there were people in Vietnam, and in 1967 or so, about that time, Cal State L.A. began to have faculty members and students stand along the walkways to the library at that time, which was a big open field, and just stand there at noon, quietly, protesting the war in Vietnam. I really didn't pay that much attention to it. I didn't have an opinion on the war one way or the other, but those demonstrations began to create an interest in me that there was something going on.
And as the years moved forward, especially in '67 and early '68, the antiwar sentiment began to grow and there were larger demonstrations on campus and across the country that you had to take notice of. People were paying more attention to the war, and again, on television the war was ever present. And around '67, '68, you hear about these things more and more, and some of your friends are winding up being drafted.
When I began to be aware of the war, it was a gradual, gradual development on how I felt, and when the statistics came out--I think it was in early '68--came out in "La Raza" about all the Chicanos who were dying in Vietnam, and it was written by [Ralph] Guzman, again, all of a sudden you began to realize, I began to realize the injustice of that situation itself. Again, it wasn't really an attitude against the war, but over the injustice of the drafting of the Chicanos more than necessary, more than our populations, let's put it that way. That became, for me, the object of concern.
And then as the year goes forward, I'm drafted in I think around '68, and I wound up in the downtown draft board, and I was really making it known to them that I had a heart murmur, and I'd had a heart murmur since an early age. I couldn't play hard games like football or baseball, because I would, quote, "exert myself," unquote, and I couldn't exert myself because of the murmur, or so I was told. So I took my doctor's note, a note from my doctor, right, to the draft board, waving it at them, saying that, you know, like I couldn't go, I had a heart murmur. And they made me go back another time to make sure that I was telling the truth, and they recognized the fact that I did, and that prevented me from being drafted, fortunately.

I remember talking to Guzman about the fact that I felt that I probably should have gone, and he really got mad at me or angry with me, saying that how fortunate I was. Can you realize that I could come back maimed, handicapped, or I could come back dead? And he was just telling me that I should be very, very happy that I couldn't go, and I was very fortunate that I couldn't go. But again I was kind of like feeling that everybody else was going and I should do my part, but that was my attitude.
But as the year went forward, you begin to see, or I began to see and understand some of the problems that were going on with the war, the unfairness of it and the evil of it. And again, like everything in my life, I suppose, it's a gradual evolution, a gradual development. I weighed, tried to weigh both sides. But then when you see monks burning themselves in the streets during this time, Buddhist monks immolating themselves in fire, and the assassination of [Ngo Dinh] Diem, these things make an impact on you, or me, and I began just starting to realize what was the problem. Then the Catonsville 9, when the Berrigan Brothers and these other Catholics go into the Catonsville draft board and they throw blood on the draft board's records, all these things build up, kind of like make me question what's going on. It's not a strong, strong antiwar stance, but it's beginning to make me think something is wrong here, and I'm not totally for this thing.
So by the time 1969 rolls around, it's a stronger attitude, that there's something definitely wrong here, and because there are so many demonstrations and other people have become more and more aware of the real situation in Vietnam, I, too, begin to change my mind. At that time, almost all the people my age were beginning to turn against the war, and there were people like Joan Baez, who had been against the war for a long time, people who I admire, who I begin to listen to and start paying more attention to, and my view begins to change, gradually, but begins to change. After '68, with all the assassinations and the Chicago convention, my view really changes, because of the attitudes of the government, etc., etc. And "The Pentagon Papers" come out and all that. It begins to be bigger and bigger and bigger, and it's pretty hard not to be against the war at this point. So, again, events kind of push you into--events pushed me into my antiwar position.

Espino

Can I ask you about your position against communism, something--you grew up during the cold war, you grew up during the drop and cover; did that have any influence in your early perception of what was happening in Vietnam and the U.S. role in Vietnam?

Castruita

It did in the beginning, the fact that we were trying to defend the world against godless communism, the evils of communism, that all of Asia would fall to the communists if we didn't do something. All that played a part. And again, I was pretty pro-government. I was a very strong Kennedy supporter,

but I was how old? I guess I was maybe my early--I was still in high school. Kennedy died in '63, and I still was in high school, so I would be around sixteen or seventeen, so I was quite young.
But the ideas of communism began to change, because people who I saw who were calling for change were being called communist, and the John Birch Society was calling everyone communist, and I was having a strong reaction to the John Birchers, because they were standing for things that I was totally against. And when [Barry] Goldwater was running for office, I was totally against his positions, and he was calling everybody communist. This, again, would be in 1964, so my attitudes were beginning to change at that time, around '64, on communism specifically. The right wing in Orange County was growing strong. Again, this was over the Goldwater election, and I couldn't accept those beliefs at all.
And then when [César] Chávez started making his moves, around '66, '67, and people started calling him communist, I just went the other way. I began to realize communism was always used for people who wanted to bring change, and I couldn't accept what was being called communistic, because I was getting those ideas. I was beginning to believe these things. The Civil Rights Movement was called communistic, and that was ridiculous to me. I'm beginning to realize how much the Civil Rights Movement played a part of my development. As I mentioned, I met--didn't meet, but I went to hear [H.] Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael around '67, and these people were at that time called rebel rousers and communist-inspired, and I began to just see the ridiculousness of it all. And when Chávez was called communist, that really pushed me over.

Espino

Do you think that your idea of what it means to be an American changed at that point, too, and if so, can you maybe elaborate a little bit?

Castruita

The idea of being American, for me, well, I thought we were being American, because this is what Americans do. They challenge the rules. They seek freedom. They go for liberty. They are for justice. That was American for me. I grew up with those ideas and ideologies, and that's what I was fighting for. I was very American. I didn't see the conflict there. Although I was doing it from a different perspective, I was still an American, and I didn't see the opposition or any opposition to that. This is what Americans do. This is what America is all about, and if you love your country, this is what you should do. That's what I thought, and I still believe that.
But at the same time, we were still calling ourselves Chicanos, and I didn't see the conflict or any critical difference.

Espino

What about the idea of--because you talked about in your childhood how you would play war, and then eventually in the Chicano movement, people

started to bring guns. And then you meet César Chávez, and he's a pacifist. Where did you fit in all of that?

Castruita

And Martin Luther King, don't forget, and Martin Luther King. Where did I fit?

Espino

I mean, were you an antiwar, against the war, or were you a pacifist? I mean, how would you--because there are all these different extremes of what kind of positions people took.

Castruita

Well, I'm not really a pacifist, but I'm anti-violence. I think we're all violent, but we need to control that, and we need to understand its role in our lives. These were the years that I was beginning to examine these questions. What does anti-violence really mean? And I think Chávez and King were very instrumental in opening up those ideas for me. And these were the years that were creating this discussion for me and for others. In our movement, some people felt violence was necessary. The Brown Berets didn't espouse violence, but they were symbolic of willing to take any means necessary, all right, the Malcolm X idea. I even admired Malcolm X a great deal, so I wasn't [unclear] away from his attitudes either. But I was questioning and examining for myself, what were the roles of ourselves in this movement? Which way should we go? Which way would be more effective in the long run? Would revolution really be the only way to go, and were we speaking of revolution? We were really looking for revolution, but I don't think we really understood what revolution really may have meant, the real idea of revolution and what may be involved, although many of us felt revolution was important. Viva la revolucion and all that.

I think some--we were--well, I may have been naive, and others were naive at this time too. Talking with people like Moctesuma [Esparza] now, who's made a complete change, we realize that maybe certain things that we were calling for were somewhat juvenile, to put it plain.

Espino

Can you be specific? Are you talking like La Raza Unida Party?

Castruita

No, no. I'm talking about revolution, the real, what could we do to really create change? Was revolution really going to be part of what we were asking for, or was it something more like evolution, change, evolutionary change? Those are the things we were discussing among ourselves, our discussions of Marxist Leninism. Very many of us were taken by that, and maybe that's why we found communism not that much of a threat but something that may be something to look at. For example, the Cuban revolution and what many of us admired about the Cuban revolution, and Che Guevarra, etc., etc.

But at least we were beginning to question these things and examine these things, things that were happening in Colombia, for example, with Camillo

Torres, the priest who turned guerrilla fighter. All of us were looking at these things, and many of us, as I mentioned, were heavily influenced by Marxist Leninism, and if you look at some of the writings of those early days, you will see Marxism being very influential. And still, Marxism itself doesn't mean anything definitely wrong. Actually, it was a way to interpret our society in a critical aspect and examine it, and in a sense it was really useful. And even Marxism today as a sociological tool, as an historical form of analysis, is still very useful. And if you think of people like [Michel] Foucault, heavily influenced Marxist, neo-Marxist, I suppose. It's still influential to our movement and to the way we want to go.

So these were the years that we were taking in all these ideas and trying to make sense of them for ourselves, and some of us may have been carried away with these ideas or the idea of armed revolution or armed struggle. There are some of us today from those times who I know still talk like that, armed struggle, and when I hear that and some of my friends, close friends hear that, we kind of look at each other and raise our eyebrows and say, "Oh, yeah, mm-hmm," as if to say, "Sure. Where is that guy coming from? What's he all about?" Thinking as if, this guy has to grow up. But there's people who still feel like that, but I think that's somewhat--for myself, that politics has shown its ineffectiveness, and we have to look for other ways of getting things done. So for me, nonviolence is really one of the key ways of creating and bringing change, and I'm committed to that now.

Espino

Can we talk a little bit then about the La Raza Unida Party and how much of a supporter were you of that, and did you play a role?

Castruita

Okay. Well, as I mentioned to you, I met José Angel Gutiérrez at Stanford at the Chicano Studies Institute, summer institute, I think somewhere in '69 or early '70, maybe '70. I was teaching at Cabrillo, and he was very much involved with the La Raza Unida Party, and as you know, it was from Texas, it's the Crystal City, Texas, which was in the lower Rio Grande Valley, which is an area of almost all Mexicans, and it was very effective there, very effective there, especially in Crystal City. And around the lower Rio Grande Valley, I think, it became a very popular party, and in Texas it became a very strong party. In Los Angeles, people like Richard Santillan, Carlos Navarro, Raúl Ruíz became strong advocates. Raúl Ruíz even ran for office on the ticket, taking some votes away from, I believe it was Richard Alatorre. He took enough votes away to give it to the Republican Party, which was really unusual, I think, at that time, because no Republicans ever won in a Mexican district, and it was really in Los Angeles a spoiler party. In other words, they weren't going to win. It wasn't going to be effective here. I didn't feel that way, anyway. I thought that the Democrats weren't that effective either for us, but at least we could work within that party and have a chance to win. And people like Richard Polanco, as Alatorre and some

others, Art Torres, were beginning to make an impact and were beginning to have influence in the party. Grace [Montañez] Davis was still a member of the party, and there was a progressive wing of the party. [Edward] Roybal was still a Democrat, and that was the party I would support, because of those individuals. And when you look at it, Los Angeles at that time was gerrymandered, and we still didn't have our representative. We had people like Art Snyder, who was a city councilman from the Fourteenth Council District, which included El Sereno, Lincoln Heights, Boyle Heights, the main areas of downtown. The main areas of East L.A. were--no, I can't even say that. The main areas of the city of Los Angeles where Chicanos were located, Art Snyder was our rep. Julian Nava was already now a board member of the Board of Education, and he was a Democrat.

So we had certain people like Roybal, Grace Davis, who was a member, I think, working--at this time I think she was with [Tom] Bradley, but I'm not sure. But they had been actively working with the Democratic Party. We had a strong Chicano contingent, and still we were gerrymandered. So La Raza Unida Party offered some an alternative way of approaching politics or to come to at least have another voice heard. That was the good part of it. And I think because of people like Richard and Carlos, Richard Santillan and Carlos Navarro allowed for a close investigation of the practices of gerrymandering in the city of Los Angeles and the county of Los Angeles. Ernest Debs, who was a supervisor at the time--Debs Park is named after him--had literally cut the community into two, making his district larger on the west side of Los Angeles so he wouldn't have to deal with the Mexican American population, making sure that his district would be whitened. J. Morgan Kousser, do you remember him? He was at Claremont, maybe before your time, and he had written a book about this called "Colorblind Injustice." He describes this process of gerrymandering and discusses this part of Debs' whitening his district. So these are the things that we had to deal with, and this was the Democratic Party's attitude towards us. They'll use us when they can, how they can. We were there, in a sense, not as any real population or people that they had to pay attention to, and the Raza Unida Party at least offered that alternative. Maybe you should talk to Richard [Santillan] more about this, because he was totally in support of this.

Me, now, I felt that we couldn't be effective because our districts were so diverse. We couldn't appeal just to one population, to Mexicans. We get to deal with Asians, we have to deal with blacks, we had to deal with other Latinos and even white people. Our district wasn't as racially united or a singularity as it would be in Texas. Los Angeles was a diverse community and was not dominated by a Mexican community, as Crystal City was, okay. The majority of the population there was Mexican, but in Los Angeles it doesn't work out that way. Chinese, Japanese, go the whole route, at that

time in 1967, '68, '69, '70, even then. So for me it was Raza Unida Party was not going to be effective overall.
But we had to learn--the Democratic Party had to be aware that we could be a spoiler population, and that was what the La Raza Unida Party did. And the Democratic Party began to pay attention, and so after the spoiler party's actions worked, the Democrats did elect and put into office Alatorre and Richard Polanco and many others. Gloria Molina was part of that group, and that was not Raza Unida.

Espino

Were there tensions between people who wanted to maintain loyalties to the Democratic Party and those who were pushing for a separate--did anybody try to convince you--what kind of discussions went on, debates?

Castruita

Well, there were tensions in the sense that there were debates, there were name calling and that type of thing, but we still are one community, and it's just politics. People took sides, but we were all fighting for the same thing. Now we could see it and understand it more clearly, but at the time, those were the radicals. Oh, those were the conservatives. Oh, those were the sellouts. Oh, those were the crazy ones. Those were the people that didn't really understand politics, and you could go on both sides, which--both sides. But what it was, what was important about it, I think, is that our community was growing, and we were taking positions, and we were looking at the dynamics of our situation and trying to make sense of that, and this whole process did play a very important, significant role in the fact that through it we learned what the gerrymandering process was doing to our community.
We had recognized this much earlier. As I mentioned earlier to you, when we went to see [Walter J.] Karabian, we had talked about the fact that our community was gerrymandered. This was back in '67, and his feeling was, "You should realize that the Democratic Party is working for your good." "Yeah, okay." Again, almost a patronizing attitude, very condescending.
So what this Raza Unida Party did was create the consciousness among lots of people that something really had to be done to change our situation politically, and something called the Californios for Fair Representation--have you ever heard of that, Californios for Fair Representation?

Espino

I think you mentioned that before.

Castruita

Well, they're the people that created lawsuits and did studies to fight gerrymandering, and their actions, the court actions and along with MALDEF, Mexican American Legal Defense [and Education] Fund, in the 1980s now, changed that process and as a result opened up the city's elections processes, using the Voter Registration Act of the 1960s to really make an impact. We're still using that, and this is what Kousser talks about in his

book "Colorblind Injustice." So in the 1980s, that when everything really opens up in Los Angeles. You have all these people becoming city councilmen, assemblymen, senators, more congressman, just the whole town opens up. And that was not the Raza Unida, but the Raza Unida played an important part in creating that. At the same time, there were others, Democrats, who were also involved in creating that. So that was a process. I think Rudy Acuña talks about this in his book, one of his books, not the "Community Under Siege," the other one, "Anything But Mexican." I think he discusses it there. But anyway, that's the Raza Unida Party.

Now, see, the Raza Unida Party was early in '69 and '70. But taking it back to José Angel Gutiérrez, now, for Texas the Raza Unida Party is very strong, and for parts of Colorado it's very, very significant. There they run certain candidates, especially in Texas, even all the way up to the governor, and are able to create and pull some votes and have an impact. And for those states, it's a very different story than it is in California. California is not Texas and is not Colorado. We have a different type of population here, and in my estimation, we have to be aware of those facts to have a real politics of any effectiveness.

Espino

Were you able to visit some of those other states during this period? I know you had kind of a life-changing or an ideological shift when you were able to visit other parts of California. Were you able to visit Texas, New Mexico, during this time?

Castruita

I went to work in Utah about this period. In '73, I left to work in Utah, and also I went into Colorado about this time, '73, '74, '75, and I saw there, again, people taking very strong actions, and the Raza Unida Party creating the feeling that a politics had to be created. But this was part of a larger Chicano movement, I think, that was happening all over the place. In Denver, Colorado, you have the Crusade for Justice with Corky Gonzales. Now, that's a separate group altogether from La Raza Unida Party. And literally you would say in a sense, in some ways there is tension and conflict even opposition between Corky and José Angel, and you see that in the various conferences that come up. Corky makes an attempt to take over the conference, and José makes an attempt to take over the conference, and so there's this little turmoil, and you see this in some of the film "Chicano," that civil rights struggle documentary. So there's a little bit of tension between those groups.

And as I had mentioned to you before, again, the Chicano movement is not something that's a singular movement or a monolithic movement. Corky Gonzales, José Angel Gutiérrez, César Chávez, Reyes [Lopez] Tijerina, all have their different approaches, and then the student movement. Corky was supposedly the leader of the student movement, supposedly. But again, be aware that each one of those little segments have different ideologies and

approaches to what they think Chicanismo is and how they move within this time period. Chávez is on his own, literally, from these other groups, and is concerned primarily about union. Corky Gonzales and Reyes Tijerina work in conjunction with each other early on. Then Corky goes on his own way. Tijerina stays very concerned about the land question but then is thrown in prison and is taken away from the scene for a while.
José Angel Gutiérrez is very much involved with the Texas Raza Unida Party, but with that Raza Unida Party, the Texas Chicano movement develops its strengths and creates a whole new movement that needs to be looked at closely, very different than California, but still an important part that I wish I knew more about. It's a Texas movement, and it's unique to itself. It has its own history and its own stories and its own characters, its own leaders, its own activists, its own issues, similar to ours in California, but uniquely Texan. I'm not saying it's bad or good or anything's better or whatever, nothing like that. It's just that it's different and needs to be studied, because it's unique. In California, we have our own style. Texas has its own style, and New Mexico and Colorado, each of them have their own ways, so we can't really put it all in one bag, and all of them are interesting to look at. Each one will have their own dynamic, and it's interesting to see, though, how all these dynamics play into one larger picture. It reminds me almost of something like the populist movement of the 1890s in the United States. Each one of them had their own significant stories and histories.

Espino

Well, it was really interesting when you expressed how impacted you were by experiencing rural Chicanos versus city, so even within California what you noted was that there were differences in how people manifested their protest, expressed their protest.

Castruita

And again, in California what I found is that the northern California movement had more culture to it. They involve the arts. They involve poetry, they involve music as part of their struggles. Here we were more involved with just the politics of it, the plain politics, and I was thinking recently, reading recently one particular pamphlet or proposal where they said how the artists would be involved in this movement, and it was saying, like, oh, to create pamphlets and draw banners. I felt that almost insulting to the artists. Very recent, and you probably know what I'm talking about. But that was an attitude that we had back then too. The arts weren't really that significantly considered part of this total thing. The politics was more important, and that's what made, for me, southern California a little bit drier, mas teco than the liveliness of northern California's activities, because of the culture that they involved in this, not just as an add on but something integral, something totally part of the larger picture.
I think we're beginning to change in southern California. The fact that we have places like Avenue Fifty and Self-Help Graphics, we see now the more

importance of Day of the Dead, how that draws people to the larger movement, and I think this is what becomes real important that we need to discuss, too, that back in this time around '68, '69, we begin to see the arts begin, especially in southern California, to play an important part on their own. They create their own aspect of it. The murals begin to develop and come out. The murals become real important to the overall larger movement. People like Los Four, Gilbert Luján Magu, Frank Romero, Carlos Almaraz, and I forget the other one, the last one, but Judy Baca and Judith Hernandez, all were instrumental in the early artistic movement at the same time in southern California. Sister Karen [Boccalero] from Self-Help Graphics, she creates that institution, which we now see that forty years later is still alive. It's still alive, with all its struggles it's still going through. It becomes very significant, because of all the artists that have come through there, Leo Limon, for example, Judy Baca, I think I mentioned her, Yolanda Gonzalez now, a young woman artist who came out of Self-Help, so many. And now we have places like Avenue Fifty who have taken off from that, the Avenue Fifty of Highland Park art gallery and studio. And then the children of these artists--Frank Romero's daughter, Sonia Romero, for example, an artist in her own right now. So these were important years for these creations of these things.

Now, GRONK, Patsy Valdez, Willie Huron, all these people, they were part of that ASCO group that were the anti-muralists. They have their oppositions and their differences within the artista movement with themselves. The Eastside Streetscapers, David Botello, Wayne Healey, George Yepes, all these people were at the same time we're talking about here, in the early seventies now, you see their development and their influence. And now we see it so much, that these people have impacted the art scene of the United States and not just the United States, but we see them in Spain, we see them in France, Germany, really being studied and examined closely, and other Chicano artists, like not even Chicano, they're people from--Andres Montoya, he's from Honduras, outstanding young artist.

So again, there's all these things happening that are part of this larger movement, aspects of the literature. Malaquias Montoya, he's from northern California. We have the writers like Jose Montoya of the--did we call it Royal Chicano Air Force? That's what we used to call them, anyway. And there's a couple of Chicano Liberation artists or something, whatever. But these were all part of that time period, and many of these things came out in books like "Con Safos." Magu would draw for "Con Safos." It's a literary magazine in Los Angeles. Malaquias Montoya would draw and his work in "El Grito," which was Octavio Romano's publication that came out of Berkeley. But all these things were very much influential in our growth and our changing in this time.

So the development of the literature, of the poets, people like Tomás Rivera, who became very well known for his work, all these things were now

developing and opening up so many realms of new creative thought and ideas for ourselves, and in a sense we were creating our own world, literally, leaving the larger society to its own. We were aware that it was there. We were influenced by it, but we were also not going to stop living our own lives and doing our own thing for our own community, and in the process creating something brand new from something very traditional, from our history, from our life experience. That's what we were beginning to put together at this point in time. The Vietnam War was there. The moratoriums were creating a larger awareness. The demonstrations were bringing us together. We were seeing all these things through these events.

So all of this time, from the early sixties--well, I guess you could say that, because there were people working like Guzman with the Democrats, with the young Viva JFK, people like Grace Davis, who had been working with Roybal, Roybal himself, all these were part of our experience as well, because these were things our parents were working with and growing up with, the development of the early unions, my father's involvement with the UAW, United Auto Workers, and other people like that, like Frank Lopez, Juan Gomez Quiniones' uncle, again another union man, J.J.Rodriguez was another union man, the silver fox, the older generation, people that we considered maybe not as radical as we were, but we know they really were quite expressive and quite innovative in their own way. That's a bad way to put it, but they were very much activists and forward thinking in their approaches to things and very much concerned about their community.

So when we see our movement, we're, in a sense, a culmination of their work, of their activities taken into a new generation, a new way of thinking. Chicano Studies programs, EOP programs, all this was part of the student movement, because we were already on campus. We were the people on campus. But on the outside you have people like the farmworkers, who were literally--there was one guy named Max, the farmworkers--I don't remember his last name--who was always down here on weekends representing the farmworkers, always reminding us that the farmworkers were here and making sure that we would not forget their role in our movements here. So these things were a part of our life experience.

There was an event in Coachella where [César] Chávez met with Corky Gonzales. It was a big, big thing, because there was a coming together of movements. This was, again, 1970, I think, and that was a significant event, the Coachella rally, I guess you'd call it, the desert rally. I think Chávez was in Coachella because the strikes in southern California now became focused on in Indio and those areas. But the bringing together of Corky and César Chávez was a big event, because that meant the farmworkers were getting together with the other Chicano movement, right, and pulling themselves together, which hadn't really been done before. Chávez was making the recognition that we were together. I thought that was significant.

I'm sure you know--it's interesting, because I'm thinking how many people would view these things differently than I am looking at them. I'm sure there are people who have totally different views of this.

Espino

I'm just going to pause it for a second.

Castruita

Sure.

Espino

Okay, we're back.

Castruita

You wanted to know a little bit about what the influence of Chávez was on me, or what? Can you explain this a little bit more, so [unclear] know too.

Espino

Yes. Well, maybe you can talk a little bit about some of the meetings that you attended where he was present and the kind of feeling you got from the people that were there, as well as from him, the man himself.

Castruita

Well, again, the farmworkers were more Mexican. They had not been as assimilated as I have been. I'm not going to say we, I say as I have been. The farmworker movement were made up of people of different generations, adults through young people, even children. When I was in northern California, again, this is again part of that larger cultural difference that I saw, these people were from the fields, okay. They were simple people. They weren't as urban or as American or assimilated into the American system. They were closer to the land. They had grown up with the earth, and here we're used to cement and parking lots and freeways. There you had open spaces and open skies still, and the farmworker movement people would have connections with the land more than we would in the city. They knew where their food came from. We would get ours from supermarkets. But anyway, when Chávez was in Salinas with the Bud Antle strike, I think it was, and arrested, I remember going to the courts and seeing the crowds already in the hallways of these court buildings very early in the morning, before the courts even opened up. They were already lining themselves up, and they were moved by religious experiences. They would carry pictures of la Virgin de Guadalupe, they would carry large crucifixes that they'd carve themselves, and they were very respectful of the larger representations of American institutions. They were sitting in in these buildings, but they were taking off their hats doing so.

When Chávez was arrested, after these demonstrations in the court, we went over to a church, and I'm not sure which priest it was, a Catholic priest said the mass, but it was a mass that was very much influenced by the new Catholic ideology at the time, which was influenced by the Vatican II council, of a liberation theology, and the readings were readings from the Book of Isaiah that called for change and newness, innovation, a new change of

heart, a real conversion. And the songs were Mexican songs from my grandfather's time that reminded me of something that my grandfather would go through, and, again, very Mexican, that I identified with so close, that made me remember my own Mexicanness more so. It intensified it, something that I would never have felt in Los Angeles, okay.
It was an experience that united as a movement people who were there for Chávez, for the farmworkers, and we realized we were there for ourselves. It was an exciting--how can I say this--something that changed me and made me feel good that this was my faith, that this was something that was alive and not something put away on a shelf, but something that really could be pertinent to my everyday life and my everyday experience. I hadn't felt that way before, and my own faith had begun to question its value, but this brought it back to a large degree. But then after this, I went through my own dead period for a while, till recently, but this was something that was very significant in that the movement, the faith, my everyday was brought together and combined in that it could be something that would fit together perfectly into what I wanted to do, where I was going. And that was the Chavista movement.
And, of course, later on, at night when we were having the march, Ethel Kennedy came by, Rafer Johnson came by, and I mentioned to you that I was one of the bodyguards. We had a group of first bodyguards marching through the crowd and led her second group, which were closer, her surrounder group, Rafer Johnson and a few others around Ethel in particular, but we were part of that bodyguard contingent, and I'm on film. I'm on a videotape. You'll see me somewhere in one of those things doing that, so for proof, if you need proof. But those were significant times, and again, those marches and demonstrations were community felt. It was just hard to explain. It's a little bit different than--it meant something more, because people really felt we were doing this for Chávez, we were doing this for the farmworkers, we were doing this for ourselves, but it was almost a very spiritual experience, hard to explain, but a very spiritual experience. And I think that was part of what the farmworkers did, and you could see it in Chávez. You could see in how his whole actions--so that was the significance for me of the huelga and how it empowered people so much more than any other experience that I'd ever seen, and I had seen some stuff.

Espino

Right. We had mentioned earlier the walkouts. That was another huge, momentous event, historical event. But you feel that there was something a little bit different between what you experienced with the students versus--

Castruita

This farmworkers with Chávez? Oh, yes. Oh, yes. The walkouts were, in a sense, my initial experiences and confrontations with the institutions of Los Angeles, the educational institutions and some of the people and the police of the L.A. sheriffs. But this Chávez thing and the huelga just took on a

larger, larger implication. But there's no doubt the walkouts play a significant part in my life too. They were my introduction, in a sense, my baptism to all this other stuff. Yes. And then, of course, the moratorium later. But it made me realize that we're part of something larger here. And then, of course, the questions with the Vietnam War, the Chicago convention, all those things kind of like made you, or made me realize that we're really having an impact. We're creating change. We are part of this change, and we have taken a position for change, and we're part of history in a way.
Let's stop here for today.

Espino
Perfect. Thank you.

1.7. Session 7 (August 4, 2010)

Espino
This is Virginia Espino and today is August 4, 2010. I'm interviewing Phillip Castruita at Cal State Los Angeles in the library.
Phillip, last time you covered a little bit of your involvement with the 1968 walkouts of the students from East Los Angeles, and I was wondering if you could elaborate some more today on exactly how you got involved in that protest.

Castruita
Okay. This goes back to the early days of UMAS [United Mexican American Students] again. Sal Castro had contacted some of us to meet with him at the Epiphany Church. I think we already knew [Eleazar] Risco and knew Ruth Robinson, the people who were involved with the "La Raza" newspaper at the time. And Risco helped set this up because of our acquaintances. Sal wanted to talk about the possibilities of a student demonstration and would we be willing to support that. I think Monte Perez was with me at that time and, now, I'm not sure if this was near the end of '67, because I think I was still present in Cal State L.A. at that time.
And remember, the walkouts now are going to happen in March of '68, so this is a couple of months beforehand, all right, that they're beginning to start planning this now. And Sal said, "Would you be willing to work with the students?" And we said, "Yes," and we said--I remember saying, "Let's just make sure that we take it as far as we can with the Board of Education. This'll be our last resort." And I remember Sal kind of looking at me and kind of, in a sense, giving me a look that was somewhat unsure, a questioning look, like what did I mean by that. But he already knew that it was going to be necessary that the walkouts were going to have to come, because the Board of Education wasn't going to change or make a move. But I wanted to make sure that this action was going to be the last resort, after all the

negotiation would happen. But there had been so many negotiations before that, that I really didn't know about.
So Sal said, "Yes, of course." And he also said, "Don't think that you'll be the leaders. The students themselves will be the leaders. We would like you to be the security. If the police come down, you're the heads that the police will be, not the students," or something close to that. And Monte and I looked at each other kind of like, "Oh, yeah?" [laughs] "They're going to beat our heads? Okay, sure, we'll do it. We'll take it. We'll be there. We'll be responsible for that."
So the months go by and the walkouts happen. We had already planned who was going to go where. Certain people would go to Roosevelt, certain people would go to Lincoln, and certain people would go to Garfield. Monte Perez and I went to Garfield. Ralph Martinez and I, we were at Garfield. And that morning we went through the halls around nine o'clock yelling, "Walkout, walkout, walkout," and the students came out. We had already met with some of the students there, like Mita Cuaron, Ken Ortiz, John Ortiz, through Ralph Cuaron, who had been a member of various organizations in the community in the 1950s and the early sixties, a labor organizer, member of the Communist Party, and I don't know what else he was. Someone wrote a dissertation on him recently. Vicki Ruiz knows about him.
So anyway, we used to meet at Ralph Cuaron's house to talk with some of the students, Mita and these others, just to see if we could encourage them to go on to college, and Ralph Cuaron wanted us to associate and talk with the students, just to be there and to give them encouragement and support. But when the walkouts came, we already had contacts with Mita, who was on the walkout committee, for example, and she was a junior at the time in Garfield, so we already knew some students. And Monte Perez had been I think the student body president of Garfield High School, so we felt comfortable there.
And when the walkouts did come, it was well organized at Garfield. At Roosevelt it was a little bit chaotic, and at Lincoln it was very well organized. Lincoln, they walked over to Hazard Park and had a good little demonstration. At Garfield, we walked out to the park near the St. Alphonsus Church there on [South Atlantic] Boulevard and were able to have some speakers talk and get the students to speak about the issues of the walkout. And remember, Monte was on the inside, and I was on the periphery. I was on the sidewalk down the street, in a sense watching the students and watching for security, basically. I wasn't involved with the speaking or anything like that, but I was watching the crowd, looking at the sheriffs, because they were already there. I'd met the community rep at that time. His name was Dan Castellon, and I was very close in contact with him. I did see some bottles or plastic bottles flying in the air, but we stopped that and kind of pushed students into the main area away from the street, pushing them in further.

And Castellon came up to me, and I was the person responsible to be keeping the connection between our student group and the police, the sheriff. It went well. Castellon understood, and I think we had a good relationship in the sense that nothing happened, and that's what I considered good. There may have been--if the bottles had continued, it would have been a good excuse. But Castellon, I think, helped a little bit there on the communication that we were able to keep up. I hope that was it. So that was the beginning of the walkouts.

Wilson had already walked out the week before and kind of pushed up the walkout date. But at Roosevelt there was a little problem. It was very difficult for them to find a place. Hollenbeck, maybe they could have walked over to Hollenbeck, but they didn't, and there was some scuffling with the police. Some people got hurt. I'm not sure who was there from our organization. But Garfield went well.

Now, the walkouts were really instrumental in creating new consciousness in students. After this, these early days, I found out later that some of the parents kicked their kids out of the house, and, for example, some of the students were staying at Ralph Cuaron's house. I don't know how many. But during that time, maybe a month or so, they were there because their parents were that angry with them.

Espino

Were you still living at home at that time?

Castruita

Yes, I was still at home. This was back in 1968, March, and I didn't leave until '69.

Espino

How did your mom respond to that, your involvement?

Castruita

They were supportive of me. They were supportive of me. They were concerned about me, and they didn't want to see me hurt. But they understood--they trusted my judgment. They trusted my judgment, and they were supportive of me. And I explained to them what was going on, and I kept them informed, and they objected but realized the necessities, which somewhat, I think, shows our relationship.

So anyway, Monte Perez was very active in this point. Francisco Martinez was another--this was another Francisco Martinez, not the infiltrator Francisco Martinez, but one of our UMAS members was one of the speakers there too. Ralph K. Martinez, a good friend of mine, was also there and I forget who else, but there were several others. Those weeks were crazy. We brought the students up to campus, Cal State L.A., especially all the walkout students, to have a meeting here to discuss what they were going to do. We had it under the auspices of UMAS. We met--if you know where the biology department is on campus, there was a little annex very close to the visitors' parking lot, where the visitors' parking lot is today, where the students met.

They filled up that little room, a small lecture hall, and discussed among themselves, with us, their plans, and it went well, how they were going to approach this thing, Paula Crisostomo, other members of the [unclear] committee, Mita Cuaron and others.
I remember the day when we were going to have that meeting, I went through East L.A. to pick some of the students up to bring them up to campus, and right around 3rd Street, I guess where the L.A. Sheriff's station is, on Mednik and 3rd, I guess--no, no, no. It's higher up, where the library is today. Anyway, I saw this what looked like a tank driving down the street, and, man, that shook me up, a tank. It was with wheels, but still looked like a tank. Oh, man, somebody's getting ready for something. But anyway, we grabbed the students, we picked them up, took them to campus. They had their meeting and everything went off well, no problem.
So the students kept on protesting, and then later on, the demonstration with the Board of Education with Sal Castro, that was quite wild, and it's documented with the "Chicano" film. All those things were at this period. But there's no doubt that we walked through those halls, Monte and myself, yelling, "Walkout, walkout, blowout, blowout," at nine o'clock, and they came out. It was interesting to see. The doors open and the students just walked out. We helped in that regard. It was planned, but the students did most of the planning. Sal Castro was there as an aide and an advisor, but this was student planned. Paula Crisostomo, again, was one of the main persons to get this thing started, a young Filipina Chicana, right, who's still around, and she's teaching over or working over at Occidental College.
So these events were really significant for us at the time, and everyone seemed to be--all the students were very, I thought, brave to do this for themselves. And they knew what they were doing. But this was all over the city, basically, and these events were like some of the first protests in southern California and across the Southwest, I think. That really kicks off what we see as this Chicano movement and made us become more aware of the issues that were facing our people at that time and the bureaucracies that would have to change.
It was pretty intense. We were taking on something that we didn't know that was going to be that significant, really, or historic. It was just something we did. It was just something that we had to do. But we were doing some tutoring, and we were realizing that there was really a problem in education and the high dropout rate was really serious, and these things became really very important, and the fact that we needed to become more aware of ourselves and the needs of our community.
There was some opposition, a lot of opposition from parents and from the conservative side of this community. At Wilson High School, where the first walkout began, unplanned, literally. The talk had been in the air for such a long time, and because of the incident over a play that was cast, students were that angry, they walked out, totally spontaneous. But they had already

been listening and hearing about the walkout, about the walkout. It had been in the air for such a long time that when this happened to them, they were that angry that they just took it on themselves to walk out. No college students were there. They did it on their own, and no one was hurt, fortunately. So the next week is when the others began to walk out because of Wilson's move. It kind of like pushed us forward into our plan, because we didn't expect to do it at that time.

Espino

How instrumental were you in the demands of the students, in formulating those demands?

Castruita

They were the students' demands. The college students didn't do anything. They weren't ours at all. Those were all the high school students' issues. As Sal Castro said, we were there just to provide aid, assistance, support, and our bodies. Those are what we were supposed to do, and I took Castro literally, because I did go out there and put myself in between the cops and the kids at Garfield. I know I did that. [laughs] I thought, "We will talk to these police and make sure they know what we're doing and make sure that everything will be peaceful and make sure nothing's going to happen." I took that responsibility on myself, and no one had to tell me what to do.

Espino

How did the police respond to your--

Castruita

Because of Castellon, I think, he listened to me and worked with me, and we had a good rapport. He said, "Make sure that you keep things peaceful, and we'll be okay too. Let's keep our lines open for our communication," and we were able to do that at the Garfield walkout. And I didn't mention to you that there were some bottles flying, little bottles, Coke bottles I guess, but we were able to stop that, because it was just the quick reactions that kids were having, the students were having. And Castellon was able to keep kind of control on that, too, on the police, the sheriffs under control. We understood what had to be done, and I was making sure that all our lines were--all our security lines from the students, from the high school students had their own security, then I was part of that security. We kept ourselves really tight, and it worked well. It worked really well, and there was nothing that happened to anyone. No one got beaten, as they were at Roosevelt. Roosevelt was the biggest problem.

Espino

What do you credit that to? Just to Castellon, or--?

Castruita

The students themselves, in part, and the control that they had for themselves and how they worked it. And also, Roosevelt was difficult because they were--some of the students--I wasn't really there, so I really can't tell you specifically. But I would think it's that the students couldn't all

leave at one time, and some were jumping the fences, and when the police saw this, they went after them, okay. There wasn't as orderly of a walkout as may have been. Maybe there was--at earlier times there had been a walkout where all were able to come out, but after that, other students started trying to get out and that's when the police went after them, if I remember this right. So that was a difficult part.

Espino

You don't remember feeling any hostility from the police towards the students that you were with, any angry words or--?

Castruita

Oh, I could see that they were ready. They were ready. They had their riot gear on, and they had their stuff ready. But because of Castellon and our communication, Castellon was able to kind of like keep that under control too. So they were ready, but we were able to manage.

There was, as I mentioned, some opposition. And then, remember, Jesus Trevino writes about this, a meeting at Wilson High School, where the parents wanted to get together and understand what's happening at Wilson, and I don't know what happened at Roosevelt, but because I live in El Sereno and Wilson was my neighborhood high school, and I had some friends who went there, young friends--Naomi Quinonez was one, and she became later a poet, well-known poet, and her mom Yolanda Quinonez, was very anti-movement, anti-anti-walkout. Naomi and I had gone to the same church. I knew the family very well. They were living right next door to one of my best friends, and they had gone to the same church, and Naomi's sister, Yvonne, and I had taught CCD or religious training.

So the walkouts happen. They have this community meeting, and I decide to go, and I see that on their stand there's no student representative from the walkouts. So I stand up and say, "Look. You have no student representative. Let me go up there and talk." And everybody looked at me. Who's this guy, right? So I went up there and I represented the students' position, and a lot of questions came at me. A lot of questions came at me, but I was able to manage. Jesus remembers this really well, and he writes about it in his book "Eyewitness." And he was inspired by the walkouts and all the things that we were doing. That's when he began to change. His consciousness is impacted at this point, and his story, I think, is the story of many people that begin to start making that realization that something now is new, something is coming. And that's what was so important about the walkouts in that it created that idea that something really can be done and that there is something that needs to be done. And those were the walkouts.

Now, Sal [Castro] was later arrested as--well, he was part of the L.A. 13 [Los Angeles 13], as you know. They were charged with conspiracy to commit a misdemeanor. People like Moctesuma Esparza, Carlos Munoz, Joe Razo were arrested because--and David Sanchez. They were arrested because there was supposedly a conspiracy here to commit a misdemeanor.

It was a trumped-up charge, just to try to prevent this thing from going any further. And as a result, Sal was removed from teaching, and there was a reaction from the community on this. There was a sit-in at the Board of Education and a whole big organization--the Educational Issues Coordinating Committee, I think. Vahac Mardirosian is in charge of that, and other people--Horacio Quinones, I believe, is another member of the clergy, Protestant clergy, who's involved in this. They see this as something important for them, and they work in the communities to try to wake up their constituencies to the necessity of supporting the young students, and the film "Chicano" really documents this really well.

So the ideas of education become really, really important, and they always were important before this, but the Board of Education never really listened to the community. Now we have Julian Nava on the Board of Education. Around '67 or so, '66 or '67, there was a big move to get in Julian Nava to the Board of Education, huge, huge. It wakes up a lot of people in the community to the need of having someone there. I think we talked about that, don't we somewhere? But so Nava is important there, and it's good to have him there, but again, he's working with I don't know how many other individuals, so he's one out of, what, ten or twelve, I'm not sure, people on the board, maybe less than that.

But the community decides to sit in--most of these people are young people--until Sal is put back into teaching, and there's a sit-in. Some people are removed and arrested. Juan Gomez Quinones is part of this group, this demonstration, Raúl Ruíz, Devra Weber, several people, several, several people are there. Father Luce from the Epiphany Church says mass there. People sleep there overnight. So this is really an important event for our community, and we do win. Sal is reinstated. But at the same time, though, this L.A. 13 thing is hanging over their heads, and it doesn't go away for a couple of years.

But people like Al Wirin, one of the more famous attorneys of the ACLU, comes to their defense, the L.A. 13. I think Al Wirin was involved with some of the early labor strikes in Los Angeles, so he's really well respected and well known. W-i-r-i-n, a Jewish attorney, of course, who was part of this. Not very many people know him, but he's really one of the earlier civil rights-labor lawyers. So these were the walkout years. And again, what this does, I think, it tightens up our groups. It tightens up UMAS groups.

Now, remember, all of us are on campuses throughout southern California, and now we're seeing these walkouts occur almost all over the area, southern California, all the way to the beach and the West Side. And our UMAS Central, our Mesa directiva, it becomes real important, because now we're able to organize ourselves and we're able to have some base that all these colleges can come together and talk about what we're doing and how we support each other, and begin to realize, again, these are the other issues that we have to look at. And again, we're tightening up our

organization, we're tightening up our politics and our focus, and we're becoming radicalized in the process. We're seeing what we have to fight against, and we're becoming closer, and we're sharing these ideas back and forth with each other, and we're having debates, which way we're going to go, how we approach this. And again, though, we're listening to the students themselves, but then we have to--like how do we approach this for ourselves? Where do we go? Who does what? What school is going to do this? Where are they going to go?

Espino

You said there was resistance from the parents.

Castruita

Yes, some parents.

Espino

From some parents. Did you find resistance from some of the UMAS members to the walkout?

Castruita

No. No. We were already--I think most of us were willing to go along with this, because we understood why we were there in the first place. Because, remember, UMAS organized because we realized there was a problem in education, so this was a problem. It was showing itself off. There it is, and how do you fight that? [unclear]. And if you did have resistance, people weren't going to pay attention to you. "Get out, because you don't belong here." This is what we're all about. And in a sense, it brought it down to the nitty-gritty, right. This is it. This is what we're all about. Either you're going to support it, or you don't belong here. This is what UMAS is. It was that basic. And it kind of made us realize what we were there for.

We had talked about being militant. Remember I mentioned to you from our meeting with northern California--well, this was it. This was literally it. Either you're going to come down and support, or [claps] you really don't belong here.

Espino

Did you worry about being arrested?

Castruita

Oh, yes, yes. Oh, yes. When the L.A. 13 were arrested--I remember talking about this with Monte later. Because that Friday--it's a Friday evening these things started--there was a protest march or a demonstration at the Hollenbeck Police Station, and this was in the film, the walkout film. I was walking with my picket sign, and I saw Moctesuma Esparza come, and I gave--I said, "Monte, take my sign. I have to leave. Come and stay; march, march." He said, "Okay," and he grabbed my sign, and I left. The next I hear that the police had come and taken Moctesuma off the line and threw him in jail. He was the first one to get arrested. And I said, "Oh, my god. What did I do to him?" [laughs] And later--he's even forgot it. I talked to him about it later. I apologized to him. I felt really guilty.

But later on at night they arrested Carlos Muñoz. They literally go at him in the middle of the night and tear down his door. He talks about it. So that weekend the word comes out, "These guys are getting arrested," and we didn't know who was going to be next, okay. Who's going to get arrested? Anybody that participated in this thing, because here these guys are being picked off. [Eleazar] Risco's going, Razo's going. So, uh-oh. So I figured I'm going to get arrested. So I remember that weekend, those evenings, that evening, laying in my bed just looking up at the ceiling, waiting to get arrested, just waiting. When are they going to come?

Espino

Were you scared?

Castruita

I'm not sure if that's the right word for it, but you could use that word, scared, to maybe cover some of those feelings. But there was a lot of feelings going on, like, why am I doing this? Do I really want to be involved in this? Oh, god, how did I get involved in this? All these things come up. But there I was, just--and I remember--and I'm talking to Monte Perez about this, and he, too, was feeling the same thing. And we were immobilized. We should have come out and gotten together somehow, but it was happening so fast that weekend, we couldn't get together. Fortunately, Carlos Jackson from Cal State L.A. UMAS, did call the other groups in. He wasn't that in the forefront, but he was able to get the UMAS meetings together and did start getting people together to react and to respond, and later on others participated also. Again, all these UMAS groups and community groups came together to start protesting these arrests.

And there were demonstrations in Olvera's street kiosko's plaza, protesting these arrests. And later on, the lawyers were brought out. The guys were released on bail. It was scary. It was meant to intimidate. It was meant to create fear in the community--you guys shouldn't even open your mouths. And it didn't work. They just made people angrier, because after all, they were fighting for their basic human rights.

So those were exciting times, but it's funny. When you look back at it, I felt those were just some of the things that we did because it was important. Those things that had to be done didn't seem that historic. Now it does, but at the time, just something that had to be done.

Later on the community starts becoming more aware of itself and its strength and power, and people begin to start speaking up more. Within a year or so, less than a year, there's a Festival of the Arts, one of the first Festival of the Arts that I've ever heard of at the time, in the community, at Lincoln High. They call it the Fiesta de los Barrios, again, beginning to show the art and the idea of poetry. This was right after the walkouts, and in a sense it was part of a continuation of what the walkouts created, the Fiesta de los Barrios. It was really something that I found significant in the fact of the ideas of the way the culture could be used to celebrate our political

power and strength was used right away in this movement, and it was the beginning, in a sense, of the early Chicano art movement, I think.
But again, it was still forming. It was still incubating, in a sense. All these things were just beginning to be put together, and the walkouts were part of that. And in a sense, this was our baptism of fire, you could say. Moctesuma Esparza, Juan Gomez Quinones, Susan Racho, Becky--Becky Ramirez I think was her name, from UCLA, a friend of Susan. I'm trying to remember some others, but I can't think of them right now. Gloria Santillan, Maria Vallasan, all these people were part of this. Lillian Roybal. Lillian wasn't that active, but her father [Edward Roybal] became active, and I know Lillian was talking to her dad, and her father was supporting us right from the beginning, and I know Lillian was there in the background, telling him what we were doing. I've no doubt. And her father was giving us support from the very beginning. He was at that Lincoln Heights walkout, and he was telling the police to be quiet and easy, because if you look at some of the film in the "Chicano," you see Roybal telling the police to kind of calm down. So I didn't see that, because I was in my own situation, but he was there too.
So these things were quite something, now that I think about it. The walkouts were the first big demonstration that kicks off this movement. That was in March of 1968. But again, remember, though, we had talked about this earlier. This had been in the planning, that somehow this was going to happen. But again, the issues were being developed by the students themselves, and the time--building the community support, building community support, preparing for this discussion over a long period of time, and maybe that's why they called it a conspiracy, because so many people--but it was not just those individuals that participated. If they were going to arrest people, they were going to arrest the whole community. So, in a sense, that's what they did. They were trying to slap a community when they arrested these guys, the L.A. 13. Yes.

Espino

Were you at the meeting, then, when Mr. Mardirosian establishes the Educational Issues Coordinating Committee?

Castruita

No, I wasn't there. Again, he did this primarily with community people, and I'm not sure who else he did this with. I was working with UMAS and ourselves first, and they were on their own. I wasn't part of that.

Espino

So the meeting that's filmed in that documentary by Jesus Treviño where he gives a speech, you weren't at that meeting?

Castruita

Okay, now there's several speeches that he made. One of those--let's just say at the Board of Education, I wasn't there. Some of those events I did not participate in. There were so many things happening, you couldn't be there all over the place. I thought my participation should be with UMAS and stay

with what I knew rather than go out. Other people could do their work on their own. I wanted to concentrate on what I knew and stay there, and that's what I did. So I didn't participate personally with the demonstration at the Board of Education. I knew someone else was doing it, so I let them do it. So that was me. But others did, and they were very effective.

Espino

Okay. Well, I thought I read something about you being at that meeting in Jesus Treviño's book "Eyewitness," but maybe I could have been--

Castruita

I think that was at the Wilson High School meeting.

Espino

Possibly.

Castruita

That's what he describes in the book.

Espino

Yes. That seems to have been a very important meeting, as far as gaining support from the parents.

Castruita

Yes, that was, and from other people in the community, like Jesus. And I think that's the reason why I just took the responsibility of getting up there, because no one--they didn't have their representative, and no one else was willing to speak. So I just raised my hand and I said, "I want to talk. The students need to be represented. You don't have a representative. I will be that person." So I just jumped up there and started talking, and Jesus talks about that pretty good, I think.

Espino

Yes. Okay, well, let's move on to some more current or later events. Maybe we'll talk about--do you want to do an hour?

Castruita

Well, actually, I'm not sure. What did you want to talk about?

Espino

Well, I wanted to ask you about some of your--we talked a little bit before about your sense of Americanness, your identity as being American and some of these civil rights issues. But I want to explore that a little bit more and see if you can define for me--because I was reading--this is kind of a long question. I probably shouldn't be asking this very long question.

Castruita

That's okay. No, no, no, no, no.

Espino

But I was reading the book on the Chicano moratorium written by--her name is escaping me right now [Lorena Oropeza], and it shouldn't, because I was just looking at it. She talks about patriotism as part of the resistance movement, that it was a patriotic responsibility that some of the moratorium activists felt. So I just was wondering if that was something that you

thought about at that time, you know, what is patriotism, what does it mean to be patriotic and serve your country?

Castruita

Ah, there's various ways that a person can be patriotic, aren't there? The idea of patriotism, I guess, supporting your flag, supporting your country, doesn't always mean going widely into a war. And when the moratorium came up, what really gave it impetus was the fact that [Ralph] Guzman had come out with a report on the casualties of the Vietnam War where you see Mexicans at a very high rate, dying in numbers that were unequal to their proportion of the population, and you kind of begin to wonder, how is that possible. Then you begin to see, where is the justice in this? And what does the country really represent? Doesn't it stand for justice? Doesn't it stand for freedom and liberty and all the fine words that we use? So if you're going to be patriotic, don't you think that maybe we should live up to our principles, was another way of becoming conscious of the fact that maybe we should reevaluate this.

And if you're going to be fighting for your country, or if you want to be patriotic, doesn't it mean that you tell your country that it's doing wrong when it's doing wrong, and that it should be reminded of its principles when it is doing wrong, what it stands for. And I think that's the way many of us felt who went in that direction. Well, I know that's the way I felt, that there's a higher good, that the country stands for something other than violence and war, of unjust war especially, and we were finding that out, that there were other ways of being patriotic and serving your country by being responsible to your communities and to your families. That can be patriotic. Yes, it was a difficult decision to make, because you had to decide for yourself what was the correct move for yourself. What principle did you want to stand up for? And we had been taught for so long that, you know, your country right or wrong, and now at the time we were beginning to realize, maybe that's not quite right. And doesn't our country owe us something? John F. Kennedy [unclear], do not ask what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country. In a sense, that's what we were doing. What can we do for our country to make it more responsible, make it live up to its principles, make it more democratic, make it more just, make it more fair to everyone. Isn't that a basic American ideal? So in a sense I thought what we were doing--we were being patriotic. We were fighting for our country. We were making that decision that this was the way we should be as a nation.

So I don't think we were being unpatriotic, and we would always use, in a sense, that [unclear]. We are being patriotic. We are doing what we think is important for our nation.

Espino

Well, how about for you personally? When you look at some of the symbolism of U.S. patriotism and the symbolism of the Chicano movement,

where did you fit in adapting or embracing those different--like the U.S. flag, how did you feel about that?

Castruita

Oh, it was still my flag. Don't forget, my uncles fought for that. My father Oscar fought for the country and he was very proud of the flag. My father would fly the flag proudly every Fourth of July, and every national holiday he'd put the flag outside the house, and he was proudly buried with the flag, because he's a veteran, right. He had flag over his grave, over his--what do they call it--casket. So my uncles fought in the war. My Uncle Mando [Tarin] was a prisoner of war, caught at the Battle of the Bulge, so this was our flag too. So I didn't find any problem. The Mexican flag, too, was my flag, and I can fly that too, and it was another flag. And I felt because I was from this country, I had that right. That's what it says in the Constitution, doesn't it? I think it says that somewhere. I have that right.

So that's what we were trying to show others as well, that we have those rights and we have that as part of being citizens of this country. We can do that. So I didn't see any big problem. In a sense, we were doing that to teach the rest of the country, to our communities, well, we can do that too. The Fourth of July parades are great. So are the September sixteenth parades. They're fun. Why not celebrate them? I even celebrate St. Patrick's Day, so.

Espino

Well, how did you feel, how did you respond to some individuals that, not just within the Chicano movement but I think across the board, the student movement, maybe the Black Power Movement, the rejection of the U.S. flag, the rejection, the burning of flags and that kind of thing?

Castruita

I can understand why they did it, and, yes, the anger, and sometimes it was more symbolism than anything else, and sometimes the idea of burning the flag was to show that the flag is being disrespected not just by burning the flag, but the flag became representative of something that was evil of a fact of My Lai. You get very angry at your country and then sometimes that was the only way that you could show that anger, and I can understand why people did it. I won't condemn it either, because at that time, remember, there was real apartheid, and the people who were using it, used it as a justification for their wickedness, okay. And the reaction that others had to that was just showing how they felt, of how it was being used in the wrong sense.

Some people put a little flag on their suits, Bush, for example, and had that after the 9/11. But they took it to such an extreme, you could almost become ashamed of having it on like that. Sometimes patriotism can be the disguise for the most wicked actions that people could take. There's a phrase, I'm not sure how it's used, but sometimes it can be a defense for

monsters, and we have to be aware of that, and that's false patriotism [unclear].

Espino

Do you remember any U.S. flags flying the day of the moratorium?

Castruita

I don't remember seeing any, really. I don't remember seeing flags. I remember seeing banners, or maybe one or two Mexican flags, but I don't remember that much.

Espino

Like you go to an immigration march today, and you'll see hundreds of U.S. flags.

Castruita

Yes. But I don't remember that many back then. There may have been some. But people's attitudes change over flags, and it's just symbolism. I enjoy saying the "Pledge of Allegiance" and singing at a baseball game. I get chills. I'm not going to deny that. And some of my good friends are in the service and have been very proud of fighting for their country. I'm not going to deny their right to do that. And in a sense, I'm proud of them, too, for their service that they've given. Some of these Chicanos are Vietnam vets. They're very proud of what they did, their work. And then you have all these Medal of Honor winners that we have as a community, and I think Moctesuma Esparza--and it's in the film "Chicano"--talks about the ambiguity of our community supporting the military actions and have this feeling of discontent. That's not the right word, but, yes, sometimes you can understand why you want to support it, and then there's other reasons why you feel really very angry with it, but that's just part of the game, isn't it. So what else would you like to know on this? There's patriotism--remember, we are Americans. We are from the United States, and our country, I think, we can be proud of that. But at the same time we have to realize when our country is doing evil, and we need to do something about that. For example, the things that are happening right now, the plundering of the nation by these banks. We can't be proud of that. Anyway.

Espino

Okay, that's another discussion. I want to go back to your reaction--last time we finished, it was around 1970. We had finished--you talked about the moratorium. What happened? And then you said that instead of making you afraid and instead of retreating, you actually felt like it inspired an anger to continue. How did you direct that after witnessing the violence of the police brutality?

Castruita

Well, I think the police brutality grows. Okay, first we see it happening at Roosevelt High School. I did. Then you see it happening in the community in various instances. Then you see it happening against yourself, and then everything that people have talked about becomes real, right, to you, and it

just convinces you to move stronger in what you're doing. It convinces you that you have to do something, something, and for me it was to continue my education and to get out there and examine these reasons and histories of how we got here and how these things occurred and to really look at American society to understand why these things happen.
I always took Ralph Guzman's lesson seriously when he said, "There's nothing wrong with the Mexican, but there's a lot wrong with American society, and if we're going to correct this situation, we have to look at the basis of what makes American society work like this." So the best way for me--for me--was to really get my education, and I was reading like crazy the various books that were coming out at the time that were examining these issues. I was looking for writers who were explaining these issues and at the time there were some that were really very good. The late sixties was full of exciting writers--I wish I could remember them now--but who were bringing these issues to the scene, and I was eating that stuff up and listening to people talk, listening to people like Carmichael, Stokely, people like Martin Luther King. These were people that--Malcolm X--these were the people that said something positive to me that I could learn from.
For me, it wasn't just hit the streets, hit the demonstrations, but to organize intelligently, work somehow with something that could really bring real change, and for me, that was education, and then I continued making sure I would graduate. And then working with Guzman as a teacher's graduate assistant, teaching assistant with the Chicano Studies program, the implementation of Chicano Studies, and then going on to Cabrillo College, again in Chicano Studies, and working recruiting students, making sure that they would graduate, all this was part of my rationale, my idea of working to bring real change, staying within the areas of the Chicano movement and trying to be a part of the Chicano movement.
So that, for me, was community organization, and trying to remember that academics itself was part of the problem. The way social science had written about Mexicans, the way history had denied Mexicans, the way sociology had ignored Mexicans, all this had to be changed, and we were at the forefront of changing those ideas. And in a way, that kind of hurt my own education, because I could have gone straight into getting my degrees, but other things became more important, and not wanting just to fall into line, not wanting to always agree with the way things were but challenging that, not just accepting it--this is the way to achieve your position--I didn't go for that for myself. Maybe that caused me some problems, but it was something that I felt that I needed to do. So I was concerned with seeing if there was real change possible, and that's what I was studying. That's what I looked for.

Espino

You were in Cabrillo until '78.

Castruita

Seventy-three.
Espino
Seventy-three?
Castruita
Then I went to Utah in '73 or '74, Salt Lake City. I was at Cabrillo from 1969, September, through June of 1973.
Espino
Oh, '73. Okay, I had a mistake.
Castruita
And then from '73 to '74, I was at Salt Lake City, Utah, or '75 maybe, University of Utah.
Espino
Do you go back to Cabrillo?
Castruita
No.
Espino
So then you go to Los Angeles?
Castruita
Pardon me?
Espino
Then you go to Los Angeles?
Castruita
I'm not sure--
Espino
In '74?
Castruita
No, I go to Salt Lake City, Utah.
Espino
No, but you said you were in Salt Lake City from '73 to '74--
Castruita
Or '75.
Espino
--or '75, and then after that, what do you do?
Castruita
I go back to San Jose, Santa Clara.
Espino
So you go back to northern California.
Castruita
I go to the University of Santa Clara Law School.
Espino
Well, before we talk about that, can you just maybe reflect on your time at Cabrillo and talk about some of the big accomplishments that you feel like you made there and how it impacted you or how you impacted the university?

Castruita
You know, I'm really going to have to leave, because I have a pressing engagement to have to help a friend, but--
Espino
We can finish that up next time.
Castruita
Yes. Now we're ready to talk about another segment--
Espino
Chapter, yes.
Castruita
--yes, and so if this would be okay, we could stop here.
Espino
Let's stop. Perfect. Okay, thanks, Phillip.

1.8. Session 8 (August 12, 2010)

Espino
This is Virginia Espino and today is August 12, 2010. I'm interviewing Mr. Phillip Castruita at Cal State Los Angeles.
Phillip, we're going to start with your move to Utah, and you were going to tell me a little bit about what you did and what it was like to live in the Midwest.
Castruita
Well, let's go a little bit before that. So back at Cabrillo College, I want to make sure that you have in here the Third Annual Festival of el Teatros of Tenáz. Our campus was able to sponsor the festival, and we brought Luis Valdez and all kinds of Teatros from all over the Southwest to our campus at Cabrillo. The festival was on the campus, but at the same time was held in the community of Watsonville and brought attention to Teatro as well as to community for Cabrillo, but the larger Santa Cruz area as all of the larger Southwest. It was an international theater festival. There were people there from Mexico as well. I don't know how many people you could think of, but all the teatros around the 1960s through the 1970s were there.
I already mentioned [José] Revueltas, didn't I talk about that on the tape? We were really a small campus, but we had a pretty good impact, I think, on our community as well as other areas like San Jose and San Francisco and the Central Coast. It was a good little campus, and one of the other individuals who was teaching there was named Lorenzo Campbell. I don't know if I brought his name up. But Lorenzo Campbell came from UCR, Riverside, and he was one of the other draft resisters, along with Rosalio at the time. He was teaching sociology. So we had a good little group at that time.
In '73 I left Cabrillo. Again, I wound up at Salt Lake City, Utah, teaching Chicano history and still continuing my school, my master's. At Salt Lake

City it was interesting because the person in charge of Chicano Studies was named Carlos Esqueda, I think, and [unclear] talk a little bit more about him later. But he was in charge of Chicano Studies, and one of the academic vice presidents was Hispano. They didn't really call themselves Chicano. They weren't that into it, because they were Chicanos but they were also very much Hispanos. Many of them--in Salt Lake City, Chicanos came out of the San Luis Valley and were extensions of the New Mexico populations of raza, so they had that tradition. Some of them were Mormon, and that was interesting.

We had a demonstration there, I think one of the first demonstrations against police brutality. I remember that, being involved with that. And I couldn't get used to the snow. It was rather difficult for me. But one of the individuals that I remember very much was named Charles Dibble. I took a course on Aztec history, and Charles Dibble had translated the Florentine Codex and was one of those knights, Caballeros de Aguilar, knights of the eagle, I think, something like that, and along with Miguel de Leon Portilla, okay. So it was a privilege. I didn't even know him that much. A little old man walks in, shuffling his feet, little bald-headed guy, gray hair, and such an outstanding teacher. I was privileged to have been with him, because later, in the 2000s, actually, I was teaching ancient Mexican history, ancient Mexican cultures, and I was going over some of the books that he gave me. So that was one of the outstanding highlights of my Utah sojourn. It was at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City.

Interestingly enough, Carlos Esqueda really didn't like me that much. I didn't know this until later, but I found out that he was embezzling from the school, and he wound up in jail for it, which was kind of interesting. [laughs] Maybe the people that I don't like, that's okay, or people that don't like me, maybe that's okay. But I'd like to know a little bit more about that, what happened to him. E-s-q-u-e-d-a, I think his name was. Maybe there's somewhere or something written about him. That was around--I was there in '73 to '74 and '75, in that period.

Espino

You seem so happy in northern California. Why would you leave?

Castruita

Well, it was a chance to see something else and a chance to do something else and to go into another university. And I didn't do all my work at Cabrillo, so I had to kind of move on, right, so I took this opportunity to try to finish the work at Utah. But I didn't particularly care for it, so when leaving Utah, I wound back up in San Jose, and there, if I remember right, I was working with some of the community groups there, and again, got in contact with some of the people from CASA [Centro de Acción Social Autonómo] who were in San Jose. I remember this woman, she was working with CASA and I was working with her, and at that time I knew Naomi Quinonez in San Jose, and she and I and a few other people used to be a

part of a community patrol group that went around looking at how police were treating people. So we would literally cruise a neighborhood looking for police activity, and we worked very closely with the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union], and we had some cases that we brought up together, not outstanding, but they were still significant.

At that time, too, I started going to law school or had an interest in going to law school, and just before I did that, I was working as a public defender investigator for the Santa Clara County. It was one of those CETA [Comprehensive Employment and Training Act] programs, where you're kind of like being introduced to the field. CETA was a job program that came out of the War on Poverty type of thing--I think that was right--with Richard Nixon's people, a little bit after Richard Nixon, because remember now, Richard Nixon is now about to be--oh, he's gone around '75. Yes, in '75 he's gone.

So, actually, I was working in the Public Defender's Investigator's Office in '73 before I went to Salt Lake City. But when I came back, I was working at the public investigator's office, and it was interesting because there was one guy there--his name was Bernie Schwartz--who had been a former CIA agent with Operation Phoenix in Vietnam. Now, if you about Operation Phoenix, it was pretty--it's a notorious operation that used to work doing some crazy things. Let's just say that they used other people to do their torture, all right. Some of the things that they were known for is taking people in helicopters and questioning them and throwing them out of the helicopters. That was Operation Phoenix, all right? So Bernie Schwartz was a member of that team.

And the Soledad Brothers had had a--George Jackson and those guys--had already had their revolt and all their issues had been brought out in the press, and much of it had been pretty well quieted down around '74, '75. But there was another person from that time named Rashell McGee I believe, who was still going through some court cases, and the Santa Clara office, Public Defenders Office was defending him. And interestingly enough, this ex-CIA agent was his investigator. See what that means. What the investigators do is they get all the information from the defendant, right, and they turn it over to the lawyer for defense. So I don't know--so what Bernie Schwartz was doing was interviewing McGee, getting all his information down, everything, so you figure that one out, okay.

Espino

Well, tell me, what do you think it meant?

Castruita

I think it went to the CIA, right. I think all that information went to the CIA. Bernie Schwartz was a small, thin, wiry guy, maybe around five-foot-eight and smoked heavily, pretty intense, [unclear] and craggy features. But one time there was a black girl working with us, a woman I should say, also an intern-type person, and he spoke very blatantly about the Stanford--I think

his name's Shockley, --scientist who--the man who discovered transistors, but who also believed in the inferiority of black people, and he said it out loud. He said, "Well, you know this person from Stanford had said that the blacks are inferior," and this is what Bernie Schwartz believed, there was no doubt. And I argued with him. I did not shut up. The black woman didn't say anything, but I stood up and said this was totally wrong.

And one time Bernie Schwartz was at a party and he was a little drunk. This was at the [Public] Defenders Office, and he got mad at me, I don't know for exactly whatever. He may have been jealous or something that I had said or something, I'm not sure. But he was drunk, and he got me by the neck and threw me against the wall, and I just kept my hands down, I didn't say a word back, didn't do a thing, just let him do his trip, and as soon as I got out of there, I went into the bathroom and I smashed my hand into the wall and I broke my hand. But anyway, that was the Public Defenders Office of San Jose, Santa Clara County. It was kind of like a little blatant.

Espino

How did you get into that position?

Castruita

It was open and I took the chance to go for it, and I went for it. This was the time when the American Indian Movement [AIM] was up and down, going up and down the coast in Watsonville. I knew some people who were part of that. And I took the public defender's car, right. I probably shouldn't have done that. I took it to this Indian demonstration where we took over some land, and I'm sure they probably got the license number and took it back to the office. Now that I'm thinking of it, right, now I'm sure they did it. But I was never confronted with that, and I denied everything. [laughs] But, yes, we took over some land in Watsonville, outside of Watsonville, and we called it Indian land. I remember bringing food in with the car. Naomi Quinonez was with me at the time, and we sat in--we were just waiting, and we could see in the dark, could see cars, sheriff cars surrounding us, because it was totally dark in Watsonville by--it's close to the beach there, where we took over this place. It's like a lot of warehouses there, but it was Indian burial grounds if I remember right, Ohlone Indian burial grounds. We had rifles and they were loaded, too, just waiting for the police to surround us.

The next day I left and the demonstration had gone on, but I stayed there that night. And Chris Matthews, who later becomes a supervisor of Santa Cruz County, was also part of that demonstration. Naomi later works with Chris as one of his assistants on that board, I suppose, whatever it was. I'm not sure if it was supervisor or city council; one of those. But that was one of the exciting things I need to mention, because we did--again, I wasn't part of a Mexican--yes, we were. We were still part of the Chicano movement, but we were doing other things, all right. But there were several things that were happening in the Chicano movement that aren't written down. Our association with AIM, this is one of them. And there were several Mechistas

from Santa Cruz, the University of Santa Cruz, as well as from Cabrillo, that were at that demonstration along with the AIM members. So that was one of the interesting things that happened.
Then I wound up in law school, did that for a while. Then I decided that law school really wasn't right for me. I didn't like the confrontational approach and the hierarchies that were involved, especially after coming from a, quote, unquote, "revolutionary, radical background" that I thought I had or I was a part of, and I decided to do something else.
So about from 1977 through '78, I literally was a beach bum in Watsonville County. In '78 I came home to Los Angeles, and I made contact with Al Juarez, a former member of MASA from East L.A. College and president of MASA, and then he went to law school at UCLA. And Al was working with One Stop Immigration, and One Stop Immigration had been an organization that was founded to help immigrants get their paperwork all done. I worked there with Al from 1978 through about 1982 or '83, probably around there sometime, probably '82, around '82, I'd say that. We saw the transition from a Democratic administration with Carter to a Republican administration with Reagan. That was going to be a real big change.
But while there, the issues of immigration were very real and beginning to be real strong, and immigrants were being attacked left and right, and this is pre-Pete Wilson. Some of the issues had to do with healthcare, and these issues came before the Board of Supervisors, and we were part of a coalition of groups that prevented the supervisors from taking away healthcare, and we were successful at the time. The Rodino Bill, I think, was part of that time period, so all those things we were really beginning to have to fight back.
And some of the things that CASA had done earlier in the seventies were carried out by One Stop, the ideas of working with the immigrants themselves. We had a crew of around maybe ten paralegals, if not more, three lawyers, three or four lawyers that took on various cases, and this was an important organization at the time, and it won several court cases. This is where I met Peter Shey, who later becomes one of the--well, is at that time, too, was one of the more important lawyers in the areas of constitutional law concerning immigration. Steven Holopeter was a part of this movement we were working with. Grace Davis had been sponsoring us, Grace Montañez Davis, and that's where I began to know her very well. Snyder was supporting us, Art Snyder, the councilman of the 14th L.A. District.
And I learned an awful lot about how government works, city government works and city councilmen's operations worked, through One Stop Immigration, because we were very active in the city at the time. Let's see, [Tom] Bradley was the mayor, and fortunately for us a progressive mayor who was backing us up, because Grace Davis also was the deputy mayor and was also supporting us. We had a government block grant that gave us money that we were able to work this through. We were trying to go for

foundation grants, but those never came through. We were an operation that, amazingly, did some really good things, advocating for the rights of immigrants. We were a little center that anybody who wanted to know anything on immigration, they would come to us. All the news people would come to us often, and newspapers would come to us often. [unclear] Frank--what was his name, from "L.A. Times"?

Espino

[Frank] Del Olmo?

Castruita

Yes, was working closely with us, too, and we had connections all over the place you wouldn't believe, all the way to Washington, D.C. I even went to Washington, D.C. Well, there's another part of the story. There was another group called the Academia del Quinto Sol in Long Beach, which had Frank Sandoval, a former member of UMAS at Long Beach State, Armando Vasquez Ramos, another member of Long Beach State, and several others who had set up in Long Beach something called the Academia del Quinto Sol. It came out of the Long Beach Centro, but the Academia was primarily for a daycare operation. It had a school, and it had property, literally half of block on both sides of the block, a house in the back which we called our clubhouse, a two-story house, and then there was an old Christian Science church which had a house next to it and a house behind it, and those were where we had our educational programs. And I don't know how many kids graduated from that little school. We had little graduations that took place in that church, so it looks like your grand setup there.

We were doing some things, but because of a problem with the boards of directors of the Centro and the Academia, we lost the whole property. It was a tragic, tragic thing. This was in '82. It was very sad to have to go through those experiences, but we were also being defunded and we got into a fight among ourselves as to how this was going to operate, and as a result we lost everything. I'll let that be a lesson to you. Don't be greedy. But the operation was really important, and I still had my contacts with One Stop, so I was on the board of directors of the Academia, and I was also working with One Stop.

Later I worked with a Pico Union neighborhood council, working to try to work with neighborhood revitalization, working with commercial development. That didn't last that long, but it was an interesting experience. I worked with MALDEF [Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund] census project. That didn't really last that long either, because I really wasn't interested in doing that work, that type of work. So I kind of like went back to One Stop.

But around this time period I was able to get to Washington, D.C., met Manuel Gomez, who--you've heard of him? He's now one of the big heads over at UCI, or was. I'm not sure if--he was high, high up in the administration there. He was a poet and at the time I'm not sure what he

was doing in Washington, but stayed at his house and he knew Ralph Magallan, who used to work at the Tomás Rivera Center. Now I'm not sure what he's doing, but he's doing work in Sacramento. Used to be the USC Centro, Chicano Centro director. Got to know Sy Abrego, who is now the vice president of Cal State Fullerton. All these people were part of Long Beach's group, but they went on to do different things.
Let's see, we were talking about Washington, D.C. That was primarily dealing with the immigration issues, again, and we went to a National Concilio de La Raza meeting, I think, and it was interesting to be a part of that. Met some people that became real--and are important. George Castro had come down to work with us at One Stop. He'd been going to school at Harvard. His brother--was it Thomas? It was George Castro that came down, and George was really very, very much involved with immigration at the time. And he came from Harvard to work with One Stop because he knew of our reputation, so we created a larger national circle.
Gil Cardenas was already working I think in Texas, but later works with Notre Dame. Again, Gil was a former UMAS [United Mexican American Students] member, was very, very active in immigration and still is active in immigration, and besides being a well-known, respected art collector, his area is immigration, and I think recently he was on an immigration committee or something [unclear], besides being on the Chicano--he's very active, Gilbert, Dr. Gil.

Espino

Well, we've been talking a lot about the Chicano movement. The Mexican American student movement, that evolves into the Chicano movement. How does this new involvement on your part, with immigration issues, fit into that, or does it fit into it?

Castruita

It's an extension of--it's an extension of. The immigration question becomes very much a part of the movement in the 1970s through CASA and with Bert Corona's direction. People start paying attention to how the issues are tied together, our communities are tied together. We really can't talk about our community without talking about immigration, because our communities are constantly reinvigorated with this new populations. Literally almost every day we have new people, and our communities get larger. And then we start seeing new populations, not just Asians now coming into East L.A., because we do see the Asians' population growing during this time, Chinese specifically, but also Vietnamese. But now we also see larger populations of Latinos. Guatemaltecos, people from Nicaragua, especially during the eighties because of the civil war, and El Salvador--people start coming in and we see them coming around, again, the Pico Union District, where I wind up, right.
So I see this partly developing and, like, how is this connected with Chicanos? It's because we're now dealing with a larger community here.

We're beginning to see how does this fit into the larger, what we called our Chicano issue? Then the idea of nationalism has to be--how would you say this--reconfigured or reevaluated and maybe rethought to explain these new populations. And how do we really talk to them? So this brings a new aspect into our movement, and it's a larger movement now. We're still not quite identifying with the Guatemaltecos or the other people from Central America, but we are faced with a new situation and we have to deal with it if we want to continue our progressive outlooks and working within our neighborhood.

When you think about it, South Central Los Angeles has always been part of a Chicano community, although Watts used to be a Chicano community. But now it has become larger and even more Mexican and other nationalities, and if you look at South Central Los Angeles, it's a really extensive community and probably will blow all your ideas of what South Central is if you really go down there and look. If you go look around Western Avenue, go all the way down into the Baldwin Hills area, go look around that Baldwin Hills Mall around Leimert Park. There are blacks, but there's also a bunch of Mexicans down there. I just came from a--last Friday I went down there for an event that had to do with--it's this little small type of guitar, arimetto [Jarana jarocha] or something like that. I'm not sure exactly the name of it. But they brought up for--

Espino

Jarana.

Castruita

Okay, there you go. They brought up I don't know how many musicians and they played at the Plaza de Mexico. I went to the pre-concert. It was a backyard party, and it was one of the most outstanding little events that I've ever been to. The music was so fantastic and so beautiful. This is just a new addition again to what I just referred to as to this reinvigoration of our communities with these new populations. It's a constant thing of our culture that's uniquely ours, because we're so close to that border. No other immigrant group has had that, none. Italians, the Germans, none of them have had that experience. Irish, none. But we have, and that's what makes us such a unique population and a unique community, because it's constantly changing, and we have to deal with that.

So immigration becomes a part of those issues that we're working with and something that we have to work to understand and to deal with. And Bert Corona saw that and was very much aware of that. [Soledad] Chole Alatorre was another person involved with doing that, and when the 1970s--this was still very much alive. Now, CASA became very doctrinaire, very doctrinaire, and Ignacio Garcia in his book "United We Win" describes that. I think La Raza Primero, I think Ernesto Chavez--he's from Texas, but--

Espino

Chavez.

Castruita
Okay, describes that. Ernesto Chavez describes that. But there's still a lot that's not there. They became so doctrinaire they fought between themselves, and Bert left because of it, I think. I wasn't totally involved with this, but I know that that was part of it. So this was not something that was far afield from the Chicano movement, although CASA felt they were separate from the Chicano movement, because they felt that the Chicano movement was made up primarily of students. They were right, but one of the persons who made that criticism came from that Chicano movement. That's Antonio Rodriguez, okay. He was part of UMAS, but later he becomes president of CASA and states that, that the Chicano movement was just-- weren't that revolutionary and all that. But anyway.
Espino
I think we're also talking about like differing ideologies in addition the nationalist question--
Castruita
Very real, very Marxist in some degrees, and very, very real, supposedly revolutionary ideologies that they felt they were revolutionary, in the vanguard. But they were still friends, and they were still people that we associated with, and I still call them friends. However, they alienated a lot of people in the process, and there were divisions between and name calling back and forth, which was rather unfortunate, but it got to that point.
Espino
Do you have examples of some of the names?
Castruita
Well, there's just name calling that you're not revolutionary enough. Basically, that was it. You're not brown enough. You're not as Mexican as I am. Those type of things were common, and it got to a point where people were dividing between themselves. They were creating antagonisms that probably weren't necessary, but it was all a process of growth and development.
Espino
So how would you compare the whole linguistic issue?
Castruita
Spanish?
Espino
Spanish, yes, coming the Chicano movement to this later immigrant rights, CASA, nationalist movement?
Castruita
Remember, CASA really isn't nationalist. CASA is more internationalist, and, again, their concepts were primarily dealing with workers of the world, right, and their concept was "Sin Fronteras." That was their newspaper with Carlos Vasquez was the editor for a while. It was outstanding, I thought, newspaper, again, but they had a particular perspective, and if you didn't

agree with that perspective, you'd have to go somewhere else, something like that. I think that's what happened with Bert Corona, I believe. But again, that's just my impression, so don't take that as gospel truth.

Espino

Okay, that's true. You're right about that.

Castruita

But I can tell you about One Stop. One Stop did take a lot of what CASA worked with, the fact that there were needs for immigrant peoples and the fact was that there were unities between peoples and that we needed to have better immigration legislation, and there was no such thing as an illegal alien, all these things that we were beginning to talk about, and immigrant rights was our issue at One Stop. A strange name, One Stop Immigration, but it originated from other peoples. Richard Montes, who became a judge and was a judge at this time in courts of L.A., who had introduced me back in the 1960s to being Mexican American, was a member of the first board of directors of One Stop Immigration, which is kind of interesting.

Again, One Stop became really a significant player in this immigration history in Los Angeles, especially in the early seventies and early eighties, and it continues after the eighties with other peoples taking care of it. But again, Al Juarez and I worked closely together; David Bojorquez, another UMAS Cal State L.A. member. David was the accountant, you could say controller of the office. I was kind of like an assistant to Al. Just kind of like we were talking different things in policy, and I would be the one that goes out to talk to the city councils and make those contacts with the politicians and [unclear] still looking for the foundation, doing some of the basic research type of stuff, and I would feed it to Al and we would talk back and forth.

He calls me his consigliore. Remember "The Godfather"? There was someone called consigliore. That's what he calls me.

Espino

Legal counsel?

Castruita

Yes, but--

Espino

But in Italian.

Castruita

--but not a lawyer, but his counselor. But at that time, too, [Edward] Roybal was involved with Koreagate, or involved with taking bribes from Korea. I'm not sure if you heard about this. Okay. Now, he was accused by the House Ethics Committee, which you may be familiar with recently over Maxine [Waters] and [Charles] Rangel. He was accused of being--and going to be censured, and we took up his case as a community. Because this was also the time our whole community was being attacked, around the early 1980s. Mario Obledo was secretary under Jerry Brown, Secretary of Health and

Education. He was accused of being involved with EME or the Mexican Mafia, the Chicano Mafia.

Espino

Chicano or Mexican?

Castruita

The Mexican Mafia, excuse me, the Mexican Mafia. They were accused of having all these close contacts, and Art Snyder was one of the main accusers, because he had been threatened by the Mexican Mafia. There were some people in our community who had come out of the prisons and were in charge of some programs and may have had some contacts. We don't know. But Snyder was accusing them of such. They were involved with drug programs, that type of thing, and they were former Pintos and some of them were working in Lincoln Heights.

Anyway, it was a political move against our community. And we organized under Al and Grace Montañez's direction an organization called Chicanos Contra--an anti-defamation league that was going to fight all these type of things. This was, again, in the 1980s, right, and Grace Davis was a member of our group, and Mando [Armando] Morales from UCLA, a former--he wrote the book Ando Sangrando. He just died recently. Mando Morales? Yes. Corky Rodriguez, Magdalena Mora, you've heard of her, me, and Joe Duarte from the East L.A. Health Task Force, and a few others took on the job of an anti-defamation group. We met at One Stop and were able to fight back this stuff.

We had a conference at the convention center, where we invited I don't know how many Chicanos, and we filled that place. It was a banquet, and we invited Jerry Brown, Ed Roybal, and Mario Obledo, and we got them all together. George Castro at this time was working with us, a young student from Harvard, and we fought it back. We were able to--we had marches for Roybal, specifically, to make sure that he would stop being censured, and we won, we won, and we won the whole thing. We beat it back. Obledo was protected and we were successful. I have a picture of us somewhere, but we were successful. And there hasn't been anything like that since, such a community effort.

Al could tell you probably more. I hope you interview him, someone interviews him, because this was an important aspect at that time, because this was more than just a Chicano movement, but it was part of what we learned from the Chicano movement. We were now taking on something stronger, something bigger. We were defending our own, to tell you the truth, and we were being attacked hard, hard, as an illegal community.

Espino

What was the name of the organization again?

Castruita

Oh, god.

Espino

You can't remember?

Castruita

Anti-defamation something or other, Latino anti--I'm not sure, not right now. But I know anti-defamation is in the name of the group. But we were able to--when Jerry Brown saw the numbers of people, he just was amazed how many people were here, because we filled up that place, and they were all people that looked very middle-class, people who were already beginning to make that move. But they all had a consciousness to them, which had been effected by the earlier movement. I know Rudy Acuña probably was there, and people like that were there, because we wanted to show our power. That was the reason why we did it, because we had to protect our own, and Roybal was defended at that time by the community's efforts. There's no way he would have gotten through that without the community defending him. They came out in total mass, and I'm sure that helped anything that he was trying to do in Washington. I'm sure people went back there to defend him, too, but because he has such a strong base here, he was defended and there was no censure, from what I remember.

Espino

Do you remember the agenda? Did you have speakers?

Castruita

We had speakers and that type of thing and some small events, but we had a big dinner and we just filled that place. And Brown was impressed, and Obledo also was protected, too, from some of the further attacks. And don't forget, we had Frank--what's his name?

Espino

Del Olmo?

Castruita

[Frank] Del Olmo was also writing for us, too, and we had all these connections. It was amazing what we had at One Stop and how we had the connection with the mayor's office through Grace Davis. We were able to get something done.

Espino

Well, I did want to ask you, if you look back on your activism that started way early in the 1960s--

Castruita

Sixties, yes.

Espino

--and what were some of the outcomes and what were some of the achievements that--

Castruita

Well, that was a highlight. That was a highlight.

Espino

That you think came from that period?

Castruita

Ethnic Studies, Chicano Studies, UMAS were some of the things that came out of it, because what we have now is we still have Ethnic Studies and it's developing to such a fine extent now, the scholars that we're seeing are really changing the world of history and social sciences in particular. And then when you look at the student organizations that still exist forty years later, they may not be the same thing, but they changed and evolved and they're still around. To me that's still significant. And the fact that we were able to create this immigration agency to fight for immigration rights and to create the consciousness among a lot of people about immigration, and that we were able to maintain healthcare, and we were able to support other individuals like Roybal and like Obledo, I think were some of the highlights of this period, for me, for me.

After this time, Reagan really created a real change in that we had to reevaluate all the things we were doing and how we were going to operate, because all our monies were going to be taken away from us. People like George Castro and his brother Tom Castro are significant, too, because these were young Democrat fundraisers, and George later works for Goldman Sachs and becomes very much a part of Henry Cisneros' group and now has his own firm here in Pasadena. That's George.

Tom [Castro] owns a couple of radio stations in Texas, very influential. Both these guys became very much involved with TELACU [The East Los Angeles Community Union]. Now, TELACU is another story that develops in the 1970s under Esteban Torres, and it develops and creates the TELACU corner, I guess you could call it. They become very much involved with the politics of the day, and Art Torres, Richard Alatorre are part of that TELACU group. George Pla is another individual who was very much involved with TELACU and involved with the political aspects of it. They become a powerhouse in this time in politics at that state level and government level. They become very powerful in the 1970s and early eighties, but again with Reagan, a lot of that power is cut.

However, people like Richard Polanco come out of TELACU, right? That was their base. And TELACU still exists, and they have all kinds of businesses and is still a significant player in the politics of our community. But they're another side, another way of looking at things, doing things.

At this time the women, under the Comisión Femenil--Grace Montañez Davis is one part of this, and if you look at her story, she talks about how it was founded with--I think Francisca Flores may have been a part of this too. But other younger women come in, like Gloria Molina and a few others, and it become as something important, as a base for women power, and they confront TELACU, and their positions are taken. Art Torres and Richard Alatorre's group against Gloria's group, and it's something that we had to deal with at the time, so that the whole movement changes. It's not a movement anymore. It's changed. It's changed around this time period.

I don't know how you describe this, but people say, "The movement's still alive," and I just say, "Our movement is not there anymore." Me, I say that. I say, "In a way, it's dead," okay? It's hard to say these things are alive or whatever, but historically, the process changed and evolved, and it moved into something different and new around the 1980s, okay. Now we have people who are actively involved in politics. We have so many people in positions of power. We didn't have this when we were beginning. We didn't have any of this. We have a mayor in the city of L.A. We have a supervisor, okay. We have I don't know how many representatives in the state legislature, so that in itself has changed.

The unity we had early days had to evolve, and--how can I say this--the way the marches have developed, and, oh, the Million People March over immigration, maybe you could say that's part of the Chicano movement, but it's different, in my estimation. The issues are primarily dealing with immigration. They don't march on education. They don't march on issues of job cuts, okay? Ours concerned--was just different, and I don't say that--it's a new way of doing things now. They don't stick to what we did, but learn from what we did and make their own and create their own.

One of the things I could say--maybe some things that continue would be the arts. Okay, the spirit's still there of that identity, that community, that sense of beauty, what we called Chicano--it's there in our literature, it's there in our arts. When the politics--I'm not sure how I would describe it. People are still struggling over the ideas and the ideals of community. But, again, I hope it's evolved. I hope it's changed. I hope it's not the same as it was in 1968 and '69 or '70, because our communities have changed.

Espino

How about the question of, are we better off now after that movement--

Castruita

Some are.

Espino

--than we were then?

Castruita

Some are.

Espino

Or when you look at the original schools where the walkouts occurred, is the education better?

Castruita

Yes, that hasn't changed. That hasn't changed.

Espino

Like your objective to ensure college graduation of Chicano students and Chicanas.

Castruita

Yes. Well, actually, we have a lot more. We have a lot more Chicano teachers. We have a lot more people who are doctors. Remember when I

went to graduate school. I went to graduate school really late. In 1990 I started, after I went to--I started real estate in the 1980s. I left academics. I left the movement, but I came back in the 1990s. I guess for about five years I was gone, but seeing something different for myself. But when I got back into graduate school and I saw the issues that were being discussed and how we were approaching ideas of race, I began to see this newer generation of Chicano students, and I was impressed. People like Matt Garcia and yourself had a new way of thinking about this. Now, this was a newer generation from mine, who were still wanting to do research into Chicano issues and concerns. This didn't seem that far removed from what I remembered, at all. That continued, okay.

That was something that continued from that period into this time period, and I was really glad to see--and I see that their interest, though, was in what we did, which was kind of unique. Which I felt, it was just something that we lived through, and they felt it was something special. But I felt through graduate school that there were so many things now to learn, using new ways of approaching these studies and these similar issues and using critical theory, people like Foucault, Derrida, can still be useful for us.

And then I met Professor Vicki Ruiz, who was very impressive in her work with women's studies and women issues, and her book "Cannery Women, Cannery Lives" was something that changed a whole way of how people looked at history. And I remembered speaking with some of the professors on campus, not really understanding what that book meant for our communities and how that impacted everyone else's studies, Professor Robert Davidoff, for example, okay? You have to realize that these were similar issues, again, fighting to maintain Chicanos on campus. Those were very similar issues to what we had done. Those issues have not changed and still continue to this day. That, in a sense, you could say the Chicano movement is still alive, because how did we create a Chicano-Latino presence on those campuses? That still exists. That's still alive. Those issues are very present, and in reality, there are other issues that we were fighting for that are still very much alive, present, only they have to be fought in a different way.

I was listening to Dolores Huerta last night. She's celebrating her eightieth birthday, and she was talking still about the need for basic organization. That hasn't changed. Talking and educating people door to door. She said, "The marches are good, but now we have to start knocking on doors." And those are the basic ideas of organization. Now, that has not changed, but no one's really doing it, okay. She wants to remind people, again, these are the things that we have to do, and she goes back to the days of Cesar Chávez, she goes back to the days of the Community Service Organization, the CSO, Fred Roth and Saul Alinsky, so in a sense, she goes back further than the days of the Chicano movement but still calling for organization and community work.

So in a sense, that is still very much alive and has to be continued in a new way of approaching these things. But we live in a time post-Ronald Reagan, which means post-conservative, and it's something that we have to be aware of, and how do we deal with that? We live with a new generation and your children's generation, which present a whole new world. How do we keep that Chicano movement, that part of it alive, is your question. How's that?

Espino

That's beautiful.

Castruita

Okay. Good. Let's stop there.

Espino

Okay, great. Thank you. Can I ask you just one quick--

Castruita

Sure.

Espino

--on that note, before we stop, and that is, how do you feel about the use of that term in today's world? Because--

Castruita

Chicano?

Espino

Like, for example, you mention my children, who are not Mexican American. They're Mexican Guatemalan American, and how does that word--is it going to still be applicable to this new L.A. of Central American-South American immigration?

Castruita

Ah. Well, I think Chicano for me was a style of like, okay, a way of life. And I don't know, I'm not a fortune teller. But the word Chicano was more of an ideal, okay, a dream concept. It came from people who would just talk to each other as, "[unclear]. Como estas, Chicano?" or almost like, "We're nothing but Chicanos. We're just raza." And I think it can be all inclusive, really, the larger Latino population. It doesn't have to be just for Mexicans living on this side of the border anymore, but people from that other side coming now, who believe in the same ideas of what we believed in at the time, the quality of all peoples, the pride of self, the idea of self-determination, self-rule, independence from oppressive institutions can be probably adapted by others if they so choose to call themselves that.

I think our movement was a movement to have people get to a point where they could call themselves anything they wanted to. They could call themselves anything and not feel that this was something that they had to be, but they could be anything that they wanted to be, but at the same time be aware of themselves and be aware of the world around them and all the things that affect them, to be conscious of their society and be aware that they can change that society. That, for me, is what Chicano is, and the fact

that they came from a people who had a long history and that they can be proud of, and they can be aware of what that color meant to them, and that they were a part of this earth, and that they could be anything that they chose for themselves to be. I hope your children will have that for themselves. That's up to you to give it to them, right? Let's see what happens.

Espino

Thank you.

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