**Interview of James Ramos**
UCLA Library, Center for Oral History Research, University of California, Los Angeles Interview of James Ramos

## Transcript

## SESSION ONE (April 12, 2014)

00:00:18

**COATES:**

Okay, this is Julia Coates , and the date is April 21, 2014. I am with Supervisor James Ramos , San Bernardino County Supervisor, also a citizen of the San Manuel Band of Indians. Is that—what's the—

**RAMOS:**

Band of Mission Indians.

**COATES:**

Mission Indians is the full title?

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

Okay. And in this first session, I think we just want to talk a little bit about your upbringing and sort of the environment of the tribe, what it was like when you were growing up and so forth, because we're going to overall try and get sort of a sense of the progress and the evolution of the tribe over the past thirty to forty years, maybe, something like that. So I guess we'll just start out if I can ask about your

ancestry and your family and—

**RAMOS:**

Yeah. The ancestry goes to Santos Manuel, who is the leader, the keeka, of our clan of Serrano people, which is the Yuhaviatam clan, and so Santos Manuel actually was my great-great-grandfather, and his son, Tom Manuel, was the father of my grandmother, Martha Manuel Chacon, and Martha Manuel Chacon was married to Raoul Chacon, who my mother, Rowena, now Ramos, is where I come from. So I'm a direct ancestral line to Santos Manuel, the keeka, and who the San Manuel Indian Reservation was named after. It was the Santos Manuel Indian Reservation, similar to in our area of Morongo, Captain John Morongo, and Cabezon, and some of those others that were there.

00:01:52

**COATES:**

Okay. And so this is on your mother's side of the family?

**RAMOS:**

On my mother's side.

**COATES:**

Okay. And then your father's lineage?

**RAMOS:**

My father's side, my father, James Ramos, Sr., grew up in the original East Highlands area here in the Highland area, and it was really a village, East Highlands village, where there were actually laborers that would actually go into the orange groves and pick some of the citrus fruit that was there, and the men from the reservation also, because that was the jobs that was here in the agricultural industry, and that's where a lot of our cousins married some of the guys from that original East Highlands village.

**COATES:**

Okay. So the East Highlands village, is that a tribal village? (laughs)

**RAMOS:**

No, it wasn't a tribal village, but back then it was only the San Manuel Indian Reservation, the original East Highlands area because of the workers that was needed for the citrus industry, Bryn Mawr in Verdemont mountainous area. So you'd see the cycle of the agricultural industry, and that's how people came to be. My father came from the original East Highlands ranch. So did one of my cousins' dad, Martin Hernandez, and others. We have others that came from that area too. So we have a close relationship, and still to this day.

**COATES:**

Okay. The reservation boundary, has it been longtime legally established then?

**RAMOS:**

So, ancestral ties and ancestral to our area is land from the valley floor all the way up into the mountains, Big Bear, Baldwin Lake area. The San Manuel Indian Reservation was established in 1891 by executive order, and from that point moving forward became the Santos Manuel Indian Reservation, San Manuel Indian Reservation.

**COATES:**

Okay. But the ancestral lands that were utilized and so forth, are larger than—

**RAMOS:**

Oh, yeah.

00:04:00

**COATES:**

—I presume much larger than the actual boundary of the reservation that was established, huh?

**RAMOS:**

Much larger. The Serrano territory encompasses a large portion, Serranos, all clans of the Serrano, one of the largest ancestral lands here in Southern California that stretches San Bernardino County and even into L.A. County with different clans. It's interesting we're doing this now, because on the 19th, just this last Saturday, we celebrated our Yucca Harvest, which we actually go out and pick the Yucca plant out in our ancestral territories outside of the reservation, because sometimes people think—and this is pretty much according throughout California, is that those that you see, the reservation boundaries, that that's where all the activity took place, but the reservations is land set aside, held in trust by the government, but our ancestral land, the plants that are blooming, are still within our ancestry territories. So our ancestral territory for our clan really stretches from the Big Bear Valley area, Baldwin Lake, Big Bear, all the way down and through Running Springs, the San Bernardino Mountains, and into the valley of San Bernardino Valley, and over into Yucaipa. And then Hitikmadinam, the Morongo people, which are our cousins, actually have ancestral territory that moves over into those areas like Pipes Canyon and even the Morongo Valley.

00:05:14

**COATES:**

Okay. So where were you born, exactly?

**RAMOS:**

I was born at St. Bernardine Medical Hospital here in San Bernardino.

**COATES:**

Okay.

**RAMOS:**

My mother had me and I was born on January 29th, 1967.

**COATES:**

Okay. And where did they live? Where did your family live?

**RAMOS:**

My family lived—we lived in a place in Highland off of Olive Street, and then when the land claims settlement came through, my mom and others got some settlement from the State of California, and my parents used that money as a down payment for a mobile home from Winston Head. He was a gentleman that had a mobile home business out here on Baseline, and they went and used that money as a down payment, and then we had a mobile home on the reservation. So we used that settlements claim in the State of California, my parents did, for a down payment on a mobile home from that business.

**COATES:**

Okay. So if I'm understanding, the house that the family lived in and that you came home to when you were born was off reservation—

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

—was here in San Bernardino, but then they moved on reservation into the mobile home.

**RAMOS:**

On reservation into the mobile home, yeah.

**COATES:**

Okay.

00:07:05

**RAMOS:**

Back then there was far in between of housing on the reservation and infrastructure. I know my grandmother, Martha Manuel Chacon, worked hard along with others within the Tribal Council at that time to bring fresh running water and electricity to the reservation. San Manuel was probably one of the most poverty-stricken reservations here in California in general. People from other reservations, Cahuilla and others, would come and bring different food and different things when they would travel and visit through our people here at San Manuel.

So during that time, there wasn't much housing. HUD, going after those grants, we were such a small tribal government, that others that were larger would actually get more of the funding, and if there was anything left over, then we would be able to get it. So when that lands claims came, there was money that was given to the families, and they used that for a down payment for the mobile homes. And there was three families that ended up having mobile homes right when you first enter the reservation: my mom, Rowena Ramos, and then Christine Hernandez and Marguerite Gonzales. We all three lived next to each other for some time in those three mobile homes.

**COATES:**

Were they related to each other?

**RAMOS:**

Yeah, they were all cousins. Because everybody on the San Manuel Indian Reservation comes from the lineal descent of Santos Manuel, whether it be his son, Tom Manuel, or Tom Manuel's—Tom Manuel was a direct son of Santos Manuel, and so out of there came sisters and brothers that actually created the people of Santos Manuel.

00:08:43

**COATES:**

Okay. All right. Oh, so many questions out of that. (laughs) Trying to think where to go with this. Let's just continue down the road of your personal story, then, for a moment, and we'll weave it into some of the things that you said. But when you came home from the hospital after you were born, how long was it before they—how old were you when they moved onto the reservation and into the trailer?

**RAMOS:**

Well, I know that I was—when I started school at Belvedere Elementary, it was in kindergarten, so that must be five or six years old.

**COATES:**

And Belvedere is on reservation?

**RAMOS:**

No, Belvedere is the school that's closest to the reservation that we all went through.

**COATES:**

So that's where the reservation kids would go then?

**RAMOS:**

Yeah. I went to Cole Elementary School in Highland when we lived on Olive Street, probably for the pre-K or preschool-type deal, but I remember going to kindergarten at Belvedere Elementary School, and then that's where we ended up going through our whole elementary school.

**COATES:**

Okay. So the home in San Bernardino, did they own it or did they rent or—

**RAMOS:**

I'm not sure. I think it was more of a rental. I don't know. I'd have to ask my parents about that.

**COATES:**

Okay. Okay. What did they do? What kind of employment did they—

**RAMOS:**

Well, my dad worked for the San Bernardino City Unified School District. He started off in maintenance and then ended up retiring as a mechanic out of there. My mom was a beautician, so she cut hair and styled hair for a lot of women in Highland. There was a boutique that she worked at, a couple of them, off of Baseline, and that's what she pretty much did. So she cut hair and styled hair for a lot of people in the city of Highland, and friends.

00:10:36

**COATES:**

Uh-huh. Was it commonplace, then, that the people of the tribe found employment or had employment? I mean, you were talking just a moment ago about the extreme level of poverty at that time. Were most people employed? Were they underemployed? They weren't employed? What was the—of people from the tribe?

**RAMOS:**

Well, there was some that were employed and there was some that weren't. Certainly my parents worked and were employed. So was our neighbors and my cousins. Martin Hernandez was employed. So was Henry Duro and others were employed. We'd see them come up. I remember seeing Henry Duro come up from working hard, and he was the chairman at the time also, long-serving chairman, and would still come up and do the business of the tribe. Back then, it wasn't as much as it is now, but seeing that workability, seeing how people would go and work in the community and still come back and be engaged in the tribal government, the culture, and everything there, too, and I would always wonder, you know, that's a lot of work, but as we grew up, we understood the importance of maintaining the tribal government and the sovereignty that exists for us.

**COATES:**

Okay. So what I'm trying to understand, I guess, is if there was a difference between people—were there people living on reservation always, I presume?

**RAMOS:**

Mm-hmm.

00:10:36

**COATES:**

And then there were those who didn't live on reservation, who lived just off, but close, probably. And I

guess I was just trying to understand if there was a difference in, you know, employment between those that lived on and those who lived off, or if it was basically close enough that it was all kind of people in the same situation.

**RAMOS:**

So you have to kind of put into perspective, too, of ailments that face any community.

**COATES:**

Exactly.

00:13:49

**RAMOS:**

Certainly growing up on the reservation, there were people that worked, and then there was people that went off and fought in the war and came back. The things that I grew up seeing on the reservation is the same things that people would see in deep poverty-stricken areas in the community, in the city, or even in the county. You would see that alcoholism; you would see all those things going on; you would see unemployment issues. But at the same time, there was those that moved forward and did have those jobs, that were providing for their family. So those members that lived off the reservation, certainly, some worked, some didn't, but I think when you start to see the reservation, you have to really see it as any community that's struggling with poverty, that's struggling with a mindset of the rest of the government of saying, "Do you even exist or do we even want to acknowledge that you exist?" If you're asking if there's those that worked, yes. If you're asking if there was those that didn't, yes. And if you're asking if there were those things that we hear so much about as far as alcoholism and some of these other things that tackle communities, those were there, too, but they face any community.

And I think seeing some of that and seeing the way people did work builds inside of somebody the culture and the understanding that something has to be done, and that's where it really engages in your heart and builds that character of who you are and where it is you want to see your people (unclear) to.

**COATES:**

Yeah. I guess what I'm trying to understand is that I know that for my people and for people from many other reservations and so forth, what has happened is that because there hasn't been employment on

reservation, they've had to leave, and it's led to a situation where, in my tribe and many others, the majority are no longer on reservation, right?

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

So I'm just trying to understand if it's a similar dynamic, because around here when your reservation is actually in the middle of an increasingly urbanized area, right, I'm trying to understand if it's the same sort of dynamic or not where people have to leave in order to gain employment, or if they're able to stay on reservation and still have employment.

00:15:32

**RAMOS:**

Yeah, it was. There was a lot of members that did end up leaving the reservation in pursuing of work. The way you see the reservation now in this close proximity, when I grew up, the houses and stuff weren't really that close yet to the reservation, so my uncle and one of my aunts, they actually moved off the reservation and they seeked employment. So, yeah, you did. When I grew up, there was a lot that moved off to provide, one, better housing, because there was no housing there to raise your family, and to pursue the education.

My uncle retired out of San Bernardino city, the city maintenance and stuff, but then once you seen the economic development start to flourish on the reservation, you see people now moving back, because now the housing was adequate, you had infrastructure, you had sewer lines, you had all these different things that you could actually build a home and have a safe place for your family to live.

**COATES:**

Okay. So the housing—the lack of housing may have been more of the issue than the lack of employment, huh?

**RAMOS:**

Well, unemployment was high on the reservation also, because when we first started the Bingo Hall in nineteen—construction started in 1985, and we were the ones getting a lot of those jobs. We created jobs there, and people were able to work, and so the unemployment came up. But for those that did move off, it's because of the lack of infrastructure that was on the reservation at that time, and then once the tribal government was able to have the means to connect those sewer lines and get the running water and all these things and create a home loan program, then the housing started to be able to be better than what it was.

**COATES:**

And did all of that begin before the Bingo and the gaming and all of that, or was it really—I mean, were there federal programs and things like in the sixties and seventies, where that infrastructure began to be developed previous to the economic development around—

00:17:36

**RAMOS:**

I remember when we were younger, there was a HUD program that came through, and finally our reservation got some funding from it, and there was some homes that were going to be allocated, because some of the larger tribes would get some of that funding prior. So it was HUD homes that came through, and there was families and there was applications that came through that if you had a—I remember if you had a family, if you had children, that you got some type of—up on the list a little bit.

So there's a series of HUD homes that were built, and that became where the infrastructure came from, and that's where now the dirt road, Victoria, that I remember, going all the way up to the top, actually got paved, and lines were put in there based on that HUD program. And 584that's when some moved families—now we're getting older—and so they ended up getting some of those newer HUD homes.

**COATES:**

Okay. So people began sort of maybe returning when—some through the availability of HUD homes now, and then others through homes that were acquired through the land settlement that you mentioned—

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

—and there's sort of a beginning of a return?

**RAMOS:**

A return for the infrastructure—

**COATES:**

Like in the seventies or something like that?

00:19:28

**RAMOS:**

Yeah. The HUD homes came up, and it was more of some of them being able to move from the homes they had to a better home, and then the next person in the family would come in and have that home. But there seemed to be—now, what was happening, though, during that time was infrastructure was now starting to be addressed, right? And so now you had the sewer lines, you had the water, you had all these different things going on. And even when I was chairman of the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, there was a waiting list for members, even as late as in 2008 that there was at least eleven—there was people waiting on a list for home lots that were waiting for four to five years, and that wasn't because there wasn't, but it was because we're still trying to catch up with that infrastructural need.

Then the tribe grew from that point to people wanting to move back, right? And so we've been providing for that. Then my aunt, Carla Rodriguez, who was the chair after myself, continued to build that infrastructural flow of the reservation itself to build that infrastructure. So I think, if anything, the most important thing for our tribal government is building that infrastructure to allow for running waters and floods and sewer and all those different things to build the quality of life and the housing that members would have.

**COATES:**

Is the reservation allotted also?

**RAMOS:**

No.

**COATES:**

People have their use areas? That did not happen here, huh?

**RAMOS:**

No. Our tribal government, the land still resides under the jurisdiction of the tribal government itself.

**COATES:**

But particular families don't have particular use areas that they claim as their own for themselves or their descendants?

**RAMOS:**

What happens is the land itself still remains the jurisdiction of the tribal government. The homes themselves, there's a loan that you could get or you could pay for with your own money and construct that home, and so the home and the money you spent on that is the tribal member's, but the land itself still resides under the jurisdiction of the San Manuel tribal government.

00:20:49

**COATES:**

Right.

**RAMOS:**

One of the case in point for that is that where these three mobile homes were at when I was growing up, it was the only flatland that was there. So prior to nineteen—in 1985, the general council, full voting membership of those over the age of twenty-one, voted to use that land for the original Bingo Hall that went up. That meant that those three families had to move.

**COATES:**

(laughs.) And so there was a little turmoil, if you will. I remember we were being stubborn also, and didn't want to move, and so we just kept, "No, we're not moving, not moving," until there was these big earthmovers, and the dirt that they piled up was higher than the trailer, the mobile home itself. So that's when everybody said, "Well, you know, we're probably going to have to move." So then we packed everything out the front door.

**COATES:**

So yours was one of the families, then, huh?

**RAMOS:**

Yeah, we were one of the families.

**COATES:**

Okay.

**RAMOS:**

So what happened after that was that the tribe, through the developer for the Bingo Hall, purchased three mobile homes across the street, so we moved everything across the street, and then we actually were the mobile home that was closest to the wash there on the reservation, and then the Bingo Hall was constructed. Then later on, they needed that land, too, and so the general council voted again to move those families.

00:22:17

**COATES:**

Yours included again.

**RAMOS:**

Ours included, but by this time, the tribal government had means for itself, and so they actually put up homes and built new homes for those families that were there.

**COATES:**

Okay. How big is the reservation overall, the square mileage?

**RAMOS:**

Well, originally it was one square mile, and then we've added some acreage to it, so I couldn't get you the full direct acreage on it now, but it's actually increased from that one square mile that it was for many years, to more property. We actually got the Amber Hills project. We purchased that from a foreclosure in a bank and got that federalized, and now that's part of the reservation through

federalization process.

**COATES:**

So is it contiguous with the—

**RAMOS:**

Contiguous to the existing for home use.

**COATES:**

And when you say federalized, you mean in trust or—

**RAMOS:**

In trust. It became part of the reservation tribal government, the Amber Hills project did, and now that's where a lot of family members live. Then when I was chairman, we also got another property, Widemeyer property, for homes contiguous to the reservation into trust. So you see the need for the homes, but there's also the need for the infrastructure for those properties to stay up with things.

**COATES:**

Right. So what is the tribal citizenry, then, the population right now?

**RAMOS:**

The last count that I remember, we had something like 282 members, and I'll get back to you why that's significant. But our voting age in the tribal government is over the age of twenty-one.

00:23:59

**COATES:**

Oh, okay.

**RAMOS:**

So over the age of twenty-one actually voting, full members, is probably about eighty, eighty-nine members at the last count that I have. Now, have some have projected that's going to go up to a hundred by the end of this year or the beginning of next year, but you still see that the majority of those within our membership is still below the age of twenty-one. Now, why it's significant to have a membership over 282 members, children, everybody together, is because in 1866 there was these conflicts that took place in our area, and it's well-documented battles that took place. It got documented as a thirty-two-day battle, and it's documented in the sagas of the San Bernardinos and Boyd and some of these different historical journals that there was skirmishes that took off here in the Valley that spread out into these mountains. This thirty-two-day battle took place because then finally a militia was formed here in the San Bernardino Valley to go into the San Bernardino Mountains to rid the mountains of all Indian people. It was during that time that Santos Manuel, our keeka, our leader, led the remaining of the Yuhaviatam clan down from the mountains, down into the valleys, never to return to that way of life again, and our clan dwindled down to less than thirty members at the time.

**COATES:**

Wow.

**RAMOS:**

So to have a membership now of about 282 shows that once we were—we were almost wiped out, but now we're actually making our way back.

00:25:38

**COATES:**

You've got like 1000 percent increase or something, isn't it? (laughs)

**RAMOS:**

Yeah. And villages were set up during that time where the present-day National Orange Show is. More encroachment came, and a village was set up by this area called Meadowbrook that has running water in it. More encroachment came, so the village moved farther east now, over by Baseline and Victoria, to a place called—they called it Harlem Springs. We call it Jubuvot Springs. The village stayed there for some time because there was these springs that were there, there was hot water, and there was different things. Then more encroachment came, and the village moved up to the foothills where you couldn't go anymore. Then that's when in 1891 it was designated as the Santos Manuel Indian Reservation, San Manuel Indian Reservation. That's how we ended up where we're at.

**COATES:**

Okay. So how many houses, households, etc., are there on reservation right now? Do you have an estimate?

**RAMOS:**

Well, I know that there's homes that are being constructed now with the economic developments on the reservation, that we're now—after the era of 1985, they've been able to have home loan programs, build the infrastructure, get lots that are engineered and tested, structurally sound, compacted, so there's construction that's still going on. I would say that there's maybe eighty homes now on the reservation.

**COATES:**

Okay. Are the majority of those 282 people living on reservation now at this point?

**RAMOS:**

The majority of the members over the age of twenty-one reside on the reservation. We do have members that do live off the reservation, some out in states like Oklahoma, some in areas of Montana, and other parts of California, up in Bishop and throughout the region. Now what we see, we see members that for whatever reason have found homes off the reservation again, but they're in areas that are pretty nice, you know.

00:27:40

**COATES:**

And close by?

**RAMOS:**

And close by.

**COATES:**

Mm-hmm. So there's still a great deal of interaction (unclear).

**RAMOS:**

Oh, yeah. We just had our—so I run the cultural programs for the tribe since 1996, and we started Spring Celebration, which we celebrate in March, and families come and cultural friends from other communities. And we just did the Yucca Harvest, so we seen everybody come out. So there still is that connection, and that's one thing that's important, because a lot of people will think that the tribes that are now into gaming, that's all they're thinking about, but yet there's guys like myself and others within our community that maintain the culture, and the culture is still very much alive. I mean, we went and picked the plants and ate them. We have our Spring Celebration. We still have our—now the bird songs that we sing, myself, I was taught by a Robert Levi, a Desert Cahuilla elder, and Ernest Siva, Serrano songs. So we get out there and we still maintain the cultural aspect of the tribe, and it's still going pretty strong.

**COATES:**

Yeah. Okay. I've really jumped into the present day and so forth, and sort of these larger tribal kinds of questions, which I have listed for the second session, but it's very interesting. (laughs)

**RAMOS:**

Well, it's however you want to—

00:29:06

**COATES:**

It's how it all weaves together. I know it doesn't—

**RAMOS:**

If you want to bring it back or—

**COATES:**

Yeah, it's not going to go in a linear fashion. This I already know. So that's fine. Yeah. Do you have memories, then, of the home in San Bernardino and of going to preschool and public schools in the city and so forth?

**RAMOS:**

Mm-hmm.

**COATES:**

So what was that like? Was the school sort of mixed racially and culturally, and do you have recollections of that experience?

**RAMOS:**

Well, yeah. I remember me and my sister Elena, we went to Cole School. She's older than I am; she's my older sister. And we were coming back home from school and walking down Thirteenth Street in Highland to get to Olive Street, where we live, and for some reason these kids started throwing rocks at us, you know, and we went through that there. But then we went to Belvedere and we had all our cousins with us, and everybody seemed to get along a little bit better.

**COATES:**

(laughs) You had the numbers there, huh?

**RAMOS:**

Yeah. But I was so young. My sister still talks about it and she seems to think it was because of who we were.

**COATES:**

But you were too young, really, to probably be aware of it, and it was her awareness of it—

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

00:30:39

**COATES:**

—more than yours (unclear), huh?

**RAMOS:**

Yeah. So there was some things that did happen back then. So then we moved from Olive up into our mobile home, and the families came, you know, were moved up, too, and we all went to school. We had to walk through the wash, go down the wash and climb back out and then go in to Belvedere. There's me, and my sister Elena, she was there, my cousins Johnny Hernandez and Martin Hernandez, and Cookie and others where we walked together to school. I think one of the big things that I remember in school was more of teachers trying to tell us what type of Indians we were, you know, where they'd say, "Well, here's the kids from the Indian reservation," and they'd play drum songs or things like that and say, "What does that mean," and we didn't know, because that's not really our culture. So they would say, "Well, then maybe you're just not Indian enough."

**COATES:**

You're not real, huh?

**RAMOS:**

Yeah. So we're like, "What the heck," and then we didn't want to go back, you know.

**COATES:**

So were they playing sort of these stereotypical—

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

—you know, Lakota Plains-type Indian?

**RAMOS:**

It really was, and which is a great culture, but it just—

00:32:06

**COATES:**

Right. But it's not yours.

**RAMOS:**

—isn't the culture from us. And part of that, some didn't want to go back to school. I didn't want to go back to school. But we had to, because if we didn't go back to school, our parents were on this side and the school was on the other, so we ended up going back. And we did the best we could. But that always stuck in my mind and led to a lot of the things that we'll probably talk about later as far as engaging in the school system to correct some of those things when we got older.

**COATES:**

Yeah. So they're—I don't know. It's a common thing that I hear from a lot of people that the teachers, you know, who really knew nothing about Indians at all, were very, very important in sort of imposing

an identity—

**RAMOS:**

Mm-hmm.

**COATES:**

—on children who were really too young to understand or to, you know, resist that or to counter that in any way. Did your parents enter into that dynamic of trying to correct it at all, or were they aware that this was going on in the classroom, or—

00:34:09

**RAMOS:**

We would come home and say some things, but mind you, back then, parents were more of trying to make sure we had food and money and shoes and, you know, making sure that we had the pants and shoes so that the other kids wouldn't, you know, point at us and stuff like that. I think at that point that was more important than some of these things that were going on, because certainly if we felt it, they felt it, and there was a lot that was happening. But the means weren't there like it is now today to say if there's a problem with the administration, with one of our tribal members, or even here as the role as county supervisor, if I hear that somehow someone's being Pan-Americanized into a certain culture, regardless of what culture you're in, then we will get involved and try to correct some of that and make sure that people truly understand.

But things have evolved also since those days in early school. Now there's been cultural sensitivity courses for educators. We've actually done a great job with the State Superintendent's Office and myself sitting on the State Board of Education, appointed by the governor in 2011 as the first California Indian person ever in the history of California to sit on the State Board of Education. We start to now show that there is a culture of the California Indian people, and we've worked hard since 1998 where a piece of legislation recognizing the fourth Friday of September as California Native American Day for the area schools to focus on the (unclear) council of the local Indian people, whether it be Serrano and Cahuilla in this parts or Gabrielino,Tongva out in the L.A. County area and throughout the state. So we're trying to make that headway.

**COATES:**

Right. Okay. Can you sort of compare the two homes, the one that you first came home to and then the one that the family moved on to on the reservation?

**RAMOS:**

Mm-hmm.

**COATES:**

What were they like, I mean just physically? How many rooms, what were they like, and the neighborhood that they were in and all of that?

**RAMOS:**

Well, the one on Olive Street that I remember when I was young, there was rooms that were there and things, and it was a big backyard, and we were next to the Baseline Drive-In. But then when we moved up to in the mobile home, it was doublewide mobile home and it was new, so we thought that was the greatest thing. We had four bedrooms there. I had my own room and so did my younger brother, Tommy Ramos, and my sister, then my parents. It was doublewide, and I remember that the heater worked pretty good.(Coates laughs.) Because it would get cold, and the heat came out pretty good.

**COATES:**

And that hadn't been the case before?

**RAMOS:**

That hadn't been the case before.

00:36:15

**COATES:**

Okay. (laughs)

**RAMOS:**

It was pretty cold in some of those rooms back at that other house. But I will say that my parents did the best they could with the means that they had.

**COATES:**

Mm-hmm. So there are three of you, the three children, or did you have—

**RAMOS:**

There's actually four of us. My older brother, Ken Ramirez, during that time when we were living in the mobile home, actually lived with my grandma up by the cemetery on the reservation.

**COATES:**

Okay.

**RAMOS:**

He was older by then.

**COATES:**

Okay. What was the neighborhood like in Highland? Was it—

**RAMOS:**

In Highland?

**COATES:**

Yeah. Was it a mixed-neighborhood? Were there other San Manuel people in the neighborhood, other family close by or—

**RAMOS:**

It's funny you bring that up, because Olive Street was here and the next street over was Vine, and my older aunt, my mom's oldest sister, Pauline Murillo, lived on Vine. So there was a couple from the area, our family members, at that time living close to each other. But also the neighborhoods in the street, there was a guy, I think his name was Boris, an African American gentleman, we all kind of played around there. And there was our neighbors that would take care of us sometimes when we would stay overnight, me and my sister.

**COATES:**

Mm-hmm. Okay. So you had a little community that was pretty close-knit, it sounds like, huh?

**RAMOS:**

In Highland?

00:37:45

**COATES:**

Uh-huh.

**RAMOS:**

There was a few that were there that would come and talk, and there's some that didn't.

**COATES:**

Okay. (laughs) All right. What—this is such a general question. I don't know how to get to more specifics, so take it wherever you want to go, right? But—so you moved on reservation when you were about five, six years old, something like that?

**RAMOS:**

Yeah, because I remember that's when I was going to kindergarten at Belvedere. So it must have been—

**COATES:**

About that time.

**RAMOS:**

—about that time.

**COATES:**

So what was—did you perceive a difference between your environment, how you were living, what kinds of activities you were engaged in, things like that, from once you moved onto the reservation, or was it just sort of a continuous kind of experience for you? I don't know how to frame this exactly.

**RAMOS:**

No, it was different, because once we moved onto the reservation, again we lived close, next door to Christine and Martin Hernandez and their boys, my cousins Martin and Johnny and Larry. We grew up together. So then the reservation had programs through AHMIAM that would bring different trips together. I remember we'd go to Universal Studios and the L.A. Zoo, and we all had to wear these white shorts and bright yellow shirts, you know, to mark the federal program that was paying for it. I still have pictures of those. But I think after—

**COATES:**

Was that something that was part of Belvedere, or was that—

**RAMOS:**

No, that was part of the federal.

00:39:40

**COATES:**

That was tribal then.

**RAMOS:**

That was a tribal program. It was AHMIAM. I think it was the Housing Authority that got some money for some of that. It started to bring programs to the reservations for some of those things.

**COATES:**

So MIAM is an acronym for something?

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

It's M-I-A-M or M-I—

**RAMOS:**

AHMIAM.

**COATES:**

AHMIAM.

**RAMOS:**

Yeah. I'd have to look what the—

**COATES:**

I'll look it up, yeah. That's all right. But it's A-M-I—

**RAMOS:**

A-H. It's Indian Housing Authority something. We'll have to look it up. I could get it.

**COATES:**

Does it still exist as a—

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

Okay. I'm not familiar with it, yeah. Okay. (laughs)

**RAMOS:**

I don't remember what it—but I remember it's AHMIAM that did it, A-H-M-I, All Housing Indian something. But the programs came through for those, and we rode on the buses and things like that, and it tried to bring the reservation kids together. And I guess the point was going out to some of these areas outside of the reservation was that the world is larger. So we went and stuff.

00:40:51

**COATES:**

(laughs) It includes zoos and Universal Studio and—

**RAMOS:**

Yeah, yeah, yeah. We went and stuff.

**COATES:**

Okay. Was it just San Manuel then, or was it a number of reservations going all together on these—

**RAMOS:**

Well, all that I remember is when we went from our reservation, it was all San Manuel.

**COATES:**

Okay, okay. So other reservations probably had the same thing, but it was just theirs, and—

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

—you weren't all sort of—

**RAMOS:**

I'm not sure if we all ended up there the same time, because I remember—because I was young, and I had to remember to stay with who I was with, and it was the yellow shirts and the shorts that I remember. But when we left the San Manuel Indian Reservation, it was all San Manuel tribal members.

**COATES:**

Yeah, yeah. Okay. Did you—I mean, it doesn't sound like you had much of an awareness of discrimination or prejudice or anything, although your sister did when you were—

**RAMOS:**

When we were younger.

00:41:46

**COATES:**

When you were younger?

**RAMOS:**

But we did as we grew up more in the area. We've seen it more and more.

**COATES:**

Did you experience it in school like at Belvedere? Because you had said something like there were more of your family and your—

**RAMOS:**

Oh, yeah.

**COATES:**

—cohort or something there. But did you still experience it?

**RAMOS:**

I think it's always been.

**COATES:**

Because that's a mixed—

**RAMOS:**

I think it still exists to some point today too. But, yeah, we've experienced some of that, especially prior to the economic success of the tribe, when it seemed to be that once there was—when people were able to come out and say, "Here, we're helping you out." But then all of a sudden, when you're able to get beyond that level, I think that became a backlash itself, because now you had means, means that now you're able to go to some of these restaurants like everybody else and, you know, put down payments on homes that are next to people and things like that.

**COATES:**

So there actually became something of an increase of discrimination as the tribe began to progress, huh? Is that—

**RAMOS:**

I think so.

**COATES:**

Really? Wow. Okay. That's interesting.

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

We'll talk about that more next time maybe.

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

00:43:06

**COATES:**

Yeah. What that dynamic is about.

**RAMOS:**

But I think there still is some sense of—and I don't know if it's more of a—and certainly there is some out in the community throughout California, throughout the United States, throughout our region, throughout our local area that still have some type of resentment towards Indian people, for whatever reasons it might be. But I think there still is that, that some of that comes down to the not understanding truly who and the contributions that Indian people have actually given to the community itself. I went through a lot of—and we can talk more about some of the discrimination, some of the words, some of these different things that have gone on, but when you get down to it, it becomes part of that lack of knowledge of who we are as Indian people. It's easy to make up in your own mind of who Indian people are, whether you watch movies or different things and associate all tribes with an East Coast-type cultural and Midwest. But to truly understand Southern California Indian people and California Indian people in general and what they went through, I think once you truly start to understand that, then you're going to truly start to break down some of those misconceptions, some of those boundaries of us-versus-them-type deal. So I think the discrimination that still exists is because of the lack of not truly knowing who we are as Indian people.

00:44:44

**COATES:**

Yeah. Is there a fear of the rising economic influence of the tribe and things like that?

**RAMOS:**

I believe so, but I think it's now within the communities itself that fear of some affluent tribes and tribal members being able to purchase and do things now that were out of reach for so many years, but now you're going to the same functions, you'll be able to contribute and do these things. But also I think—and this is going to be a topic that some might not like, but I think there also is some discrimination going on between Indian people themselves.

**COATES:**

Toward each other?

**RAMOS:**

Toward each other, towards those that have become affluent, those that have forgotten what it was like to have that poverty on the reservation, and now that you actually have that political clout to move forward, I think we have to be able to work for all Indian people, regardless of now if they're a reservation that has economic means or not. And they're struggling? I think it's part of our role to make sure that we're addressing their issues as well, not just our own tribal government, individuals that are moving forward, but—

**COATES:**

So this is the other tribes—

**RAMOS:**

—the Indian tribal community itself in the State of California.

**COATES:**

Okay, okay.

**RAMOS:**

So maybe there is some disparity in the mindsets of how we're treating one another.

**COATES:**

Okay. So when you talk about Indians against each other or conflict with— "contention" maybe is a better word on this point, you're not necessarily talking about the community within San Manuel, but you're talking about San Manuel and other tribes.

**RAMOS:**

Other tribes.

00:46:22

**COATES:**

Other tribal communities, okay.

**RAMOS:**

I think now it's we opened up to the whole macro of Indian issues in the State of California and even the United States. And San Manuel, at least when we were there and my aunt, we helped out other tribal communities because we remember where it is that we've come from. Is there a point to where all these things that we're talking about that another generation doesn't even remember that, and now they're just thinking straight businesswise, right, whether they have the degrees or not in education? Or is it our role to take this window of opportunity to address the issues that still plague the majority of the California Indian reservations in the State of California? And I would say it's our role that we address what's plaguing the majority of the reservations in the State of California, but that puts me at odds with some other leaders.

**COATES:**

(laughs) Within your own tribe?

**RAMOS:**

Not so much within my own tribe, but I think—

**COATES:**

Within others, though.

**RAMOS:**

—with a view throughout the state and throughout the nation.

00:48:03

**COATES:**

Okay. Okay. Now, you are clearly from a family that has been historically, ancestrally in leadership, prominent and so forth in your tribe. Can you talk about a little bit your sense of that as a child and a youth and someone growing up? Was that sense of responsibility and so forth really instilled in you? What was your awareness of this family heritage, so to speak?

00:50:13

**RAMOS:**

Well, even the family heritage, you know, there's difference in culture and then the tribal government elected official. Culture is something that you learn from elders, from people, and that stays with you. No one could ever take that from you. I'm a firm believer that what you learn culturally no one can take from you and makes you who you are. What you gain educational-wise, the degrees and the universities that you go through, education in general, what you learn there no one could take that from you, and your spirituality. Those three things, culture, education, and spirituality, makes you who you are, and regardless of what's going on, no one could take those three things from you. So culture, for me, started—you know, my grandmother grew up. She was there. Originally we had horse stables on the reservation where we would rent out half-hour rides, hour rides. Jerry and Ann Buckles were people from the community that had the horses up there, and we leased out that land to them behind the mobile homes. It was the only flatland. My grandmother had a little snack shop out of our backyard where she would sell soda pop and frybread and stuff to riders that would come through, and myself and George Murillo, my cousin M_____, would help out and do these different things there. So we seen that

business, everybody trying to make things go forward. Then my grandmother would actually go up to Palm Springs, Agua Caliente, to Biff Andreas'ranch, and that's where I seen bird songs was being sung, and that's how I knew that that was our culture. There wasn't drums. There wasn't any other stuff. It was our gourd rattles, and it was at the Andreas Ranch that actually that came to light that we seen the culture moving forward, and we've always been interested in that. Then ultimately I ended up learning the Cahuilla bird songs from Robert Levi, but me and Biff Andreas—Anthony Andreas is his real name—stayed in contact for years up until he passed away.

**COATES:**

Okay. So do you make a distinction between the cultural heritage, that was always emphasized a lot in your family, and would you say that was the case across most families among the tribespeople at San Manuel?

**RAMOS:**

I think so. I think culture—

**COATES:**

Because most of the families are pretty closely related anyway, right?

**RAMOS:**

Pretty much closely related. Yeah, we are all related. But one thing that when we were getting older that we seen was that there wasn't an activity of culture for everyone, the whole tribal government, the whole tribal membership of San Manuel, and so myself and Vincent Duro, back in 1996, came up with the Tribal Unity and Cultural Awareness program, and we went to—I was on the Business Committee. I was an elected official on the Business Committee and that time, and we wound up with our idea, "We want to put these programs together." And they said, "Well, you need a budget." So we penciled out a budget, and they approved it. So then we reached out to then Ernest Siva to come and teach us the Serrano language as a whole for anybody that wanted to partake in it, and then Robert Levi to come and teach some of the bird songs to us, Cahuilla bird songs. So the program started back then, and that's what we celebrated our Yucca Harvest here now. Since '96 to 2014, we've been engaged in that. They're moving it forward. So we created that whole tribal community effort of culture being—that

doesn't mean that individual families still had culture and they would sit around and talk about certain things on their own, but now we created something for everyone, and it's been going pretty good.

**COATES:**

So that didn't exist when you were a child, then?

00:52:15

**RAMOS:**

No.

**COATES:**

Okay. So was it—what was the situation? I mean, I'm trying to understand. Because you sound like you had a pretty good grounding in the culture as a child that came from your grandmother and from certain other family members who taught you things. Would that be accurate?

**RAMOS:**

It would, but also within our—

**COATES:**

But not everyone had that, huh?

**RAMOS:**

Yeah, not everybody was engaged in it. It wasn't until 1996 when we start that program that culture started now to be spread throughout the tribal government as an area that was open to every member to come and partake in it.

**COATES:**

Why do you think it was something that seems—I mean, it sounds to me like it was fairly continuous in your particular family so that you had access and you had teaching and so forth when you were a child, and other people didn't. So what do you think was the difference between your family and some others where maybe those cultural teachings weren't quite as persistent?

**RAMOS:**

Well, I don't know if my other cousins went with their family members down to other reservations like Mesa Grande or some of those others and seen some of the same things, but it was because my grandmother went and sold frybread and she was known from other cultural leaders, so we were kind of engaged in that. Originally it was more of going and getting all the materials or carrying everything around. We were kind of like the laborers, but then we would see it, so we were exposed to it, and then—

**COATES:**

So it was her economic activities, then, and what she was selling—

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

—that actually—

**RAMOS:**

That took us to—

00:54:11

**COATES:**

—facilitated—

**RAMOS:**

That she needed help, especially out in the Palm Springs Andreas Ranch fiestas out there that would go three days, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and we'd sleep there and stuff, and we'd unload the car for her and stuff. I'd go with my grandpa to get what we needed to get. It was because of that that we were really exposed to it, at least for myself.

**COATES:**

Okay. So other people whose grandmothers may not have been selling frybread or whatever— (laughs)

**RAMOS:**

Well, whatever it was—

**COATES:**

—might not have—

**RAMOS:**

—to try to make—

**COATES:**

—gotten that exposure, huh?

**RAMOS:**

—some income, yeah.

**COATES:**

Okay, okay. (laughs) Interesting.

**RAMOS:**

And that was when I remember we were up there at Andreas Ranch, and that's when Sonny Bono was the mayor of Palm Springs, and he would come through, and everybody'd be, "Oh, yeah, there goes the mayor."(Coates laughs.) And we didn't know who was Sonny Bono was when I was younger. But later on in life when I was elected business community member and then treasurer, gaming commissioner, and then ultimately chairperson, but I remember during that whole time of being involved in tribal government that we were lobbying up in federal Congress, and I ended up lobbying an issue in front of then-Congressman Sonny Bono, and I remember that. I don't know if—I never sat down to tell him, "Hey, you know, I was a kid when you would walk through," but he would always be engaged with Indian people at that time.

00:55:43

**COATES:**

Was he?

**RAMOS:**

Yeah. That's what I remember, anyway.

**COATES:**

Yeah. Okay. So you talk a lot—you talk some—well, you said culture, education, and spirituality, but you didn't mention government as being part of that. So does that fit in anywhere? Because, I mean, you talk a lot about government, tribal government nowadays, and your family, obviously, whether it's in the contemporary form of tribal government or in sort of a more indigenous or past kind of form of tribal government, whatever it may have been, your family has been involved in that. Is that true?

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

Is that correct or—

00:57:34

**RAMOS:**

I think there's a separation between the two. I think culture is something that you learn, and it's something that's been here way before the articles (phonetic) association, all these different things have come into play, and it's culture that's going to be here long after some of the economic development that's there. I think there is a separation between the two, because cultural leaders and cultural people

aren't elected by any vote of a straw. It's because of the time that you give to your own people, and not only your own people, but cultural leaders throughout the region itself, like Ernest Siva and some of these others. That's culture. You don't need to have an election to say that you're a cultural person, but you do have to be taught by elders like Robert Levi, like Ernest Siva, like my grandmother, and others, so that you're carrying forward that tradition.

**COATES:**

And yet you're someone who's been able to bridge that separation, at least in that you've held—that you are a cultural person and have that expertise and that knowledge and have been taught and so forth. But then on the other hand, you also have been in tribal government, right?

**RAMOS:**

In tribal government.

**COATES:**

And so—

**RAMOS:**

That's how I know they're two different— (laughs)

**COATES:**

Exactly. So are you then one of the first—maybe I'm not understanding. Are you one of the first, then, in your family to actually enter into tribal government as well as the cultural, or—

00:59:1401:00:10

**RAMOS:**

I think if you break it down to under my mother, Rowena, and her kids, yeah, I'm the first within there to become tribal chairman and run cultural programs. If you're talking about my larger family from my grandmother and her daughters and sons, there was others that became tribal chair. Now the tribal chair (unclear) Lynn Valbuena. She's the daughter of my aunt Pauline Murillo. When I left as chair to run for county supervisor, my aunt Carla Rodriguez, became the chairperson, and she's my grandmother's daughter. So our family has been involved in—our family, as in general, has been involved in tribal politics from my grandmother forward. My mother was also secretary/treasurer for the tribe. But the tribe was so small that everybody had to take a position on something.

I remember growing up that once gaming did come through, after we kind of didn't want it because we had to move and we kind of were stubborn and all these different things, but it moved forward. Then once income started coming in, I remember that the tribe had to use an attorney as a trustee for the tribe, and I always thought that wasn't right to have to ask somebody else how we would spend our own money. I mean, that was just another layer from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. And so, you know, I asked, I said, "Well, why can't we—?" "Well, no one really knows how to run these books and stuff." "You know what?" That's when I started talking about, "People, we need to go back to school and learn these things," because that's the only way. We talk about sovereignty, but true sovereignty is being able to handle all the business within the tribal government and culturally. That's true sovereignty. So we started talking about people going back to school, and finally someone said, "Well, why don't you?"

"Okay." So then I went back to community college and got my associate of science degree in business administration and then moved forward to try to convince the tribe that we could handle our own accounting purposes. And I guess it was all new at the time for everybody to have income coming in, but ultimately, you know, we ended up taking over our own financial obligations, and it was kind of touch-and-go at first, but it was the best thing for the tribe, because now you start to see it and it really comes home when you start to make some decisions that are there.

**COATES:**

Mm-hmm.

**RAMOS:**

And then I ran for Business Committee member, was elected there, and then I was tribal gaming commissioner, chairman of the Gaming Commission, the first Gaming Commission for the tribal government, and worked on minimum internal control standards for the State of California for Indian gaming with other tribes. We put together a coalition there with people. Marshall McKay and Anthony Pico and some of these others, we brought them all out, and Henry Duro was our chairman at the time. So we worked on a lot of that stuff with an associates degree.

**COATES:**

Nothing like hands-on experience, right? (laughs)

01:02:14

**RAMOS:**

And so then everything started. Now we're into the governmental aspect of it, no one knew how long gaming would exist, because prior to that, we had horse stables, right, and that was there for a couple of years, and then finally the couple that had the horses herded them out. Then we went through an era of smoke shops on our reservation. We had one that was right next to the trailers that my cousin Jeff Jimenez worked in. He was the one, the night-shift, working there selling the cigarettes, and we would unload the boxes for twenty bucks a truck, but now we probably should've got more, thinking about it. (Ramos laughs.) But we were one that actually had one cigarette shop here and another one up on top, so there's peer competition.

And then that went away because of laws that changed in not collecting taxes when it was crossing, I guess, state lines coming to the reservation, and we didn't have money at that time to hire attorneys to fight it. So it was kind of like it was great and you just kind of let it go, and I think that mentality stopped because now tribes, or our tribe, was able to now have money to fight some of this stuff in legal challenges that moved forward.

**COATES:**

Yeah. When—I guess the question that keeps coming to me is that you are obviously very, very reflective, you know, about culture, about responsibility, about government, about the macro picture, the relationships with other tribes and so forth, and given the long history, maybe not in your immediate family, but in your extended family, certainly, of involvement in the political realm, in the governmental realm and so forth, was that something that was stressed to you? Is that something that you were brought up with to think about these things? You know, I guess I'm wondering where—how did that reflectiveness come to you? Is that something that runs throughout your family, throughout the tribe? Does the tribal community actually engage in this kind of conversation? Those kinds of things. (laughs)

01:04:37

**RAMOS:**

I think it's evolved. I think we've seen the need is there. We've seen some of the things that were

needed. Certainly getting the educational aspect was something that I seen with the associates degree, and then went to Cal State San Bernardino and had got my bachelor of science degree in accounting, in business administration, and then became the first tribal treasurer. They actually separated the secretary/treasurer position and created the treasurer, because now roles were getting more important. So we ended up getting our degree, the undergraduate degree, and then became the first treasurer of the tribe, and started asking questions like formulas and how do you come up with this and that.

I remember one time we had a presentation in a PowerPoint that was dated almost five years earlier, and I asked the question was that data still relevant to today, and the presenters were shocked that somebody asked. "Oh, no. This is where she's telling you what it was like back then, but we would have to do a new study to bring forward." I said, "Well, why don't you go and do that new study and come back and talk to us."(Coates laughs.) And everybody's like (demonstrates). And then they basically asked them to leave. Then that's when the rest of the business community started, "You know what? We've got to ask these questions. Yeah." Because for some time—and this is anywhere—if you don't have the knowledge of knowing what it is that's being presented to you in life in general, right, then sometimes people could be presenting things that might not be in the best interest of the tribal government itself. So then I ended up getting my master's in business administration from the University of Redlands, so we were able to now really truly understand. So then when I became chairman, to weed out some of those meetings, I would put "James Ramos, Tribal Chairman" and then "MBA" under it, so now they've got to really, really think about what they're going to present, and I think we weeded out a lot of presentations that came in front of us.

**COATES:**

(laughs) Okay. So it really is an expertise that was gained out of education, the second of your three—

01:06:10

**RAMOS:**

Out of education, yeah.

**COATES:**

Yeah. And not so much in the family maybe saying, you know, you have a responsibility, you need to do this, or this is what you—it really came out of the educational experience for you, huh?

**RAMOS:**

And it was always people saying that if you're not going to go to the meetings, then you shouldn't complain. Well, I had a lot to complain about, so I would go to the meetings, right?

**COATES:**

Right.

**RAMOS:**

And some of those things just didn't seem right, especially where we had to ask for parts for sprinklers and things like that, and then it had to go through a trustee to get approved. Well, wait a minute. And I hope that is still something that is instilled in some of the younger members or even members now that want to get engaged. It's not about running for an elected office just to say I'm elected. You run for an elected office because you see that something needs to change or there's something you could add value to. Just to get elected to be elected, I'm not so sure if that benefits the tribal government or any government, for that matter, in moving forward.

01:07:32

**COATES:**

Yeah. I agree. (laughs) I run into a lot of that myself, people with that sentiment. "I'd like to be on the Tribal Council. Maybe I should go out and start networking with the community." And that's backwards to me, you know. It's like— (laughs)

**RAMOS:**

It is, right. You see a need.

**COATES:**

Yeah. You should have been networking with the tribal community, and then that's what makes you want to—

**RAMOS:**

That's what makes you engaged.

**COATES:**

Yeah, seek office. But anyway, that's my opinion. That's not supposed to be in the interview. (laughter) You just—I know we're running up to time when you need to go to another meeting here, but if we could take just a couple more minutes, because you started to share about—just paint a picture for us of your grandmother having a stand where she's selling refreshments and things outside of her backyard to people who are renting horses and doing trail riding, I guess, and that kind of thing. What are your recollections just of life on the reservation when you were a kid? Like what were your summers like? What kinds of activities did you do as a child? What kinds of things did you participate in?

**RAMOS:**

Well, there was certainly the part where we would have to clean our yards.(Ramos laughs.) And then the reservation, all the guys would get together at least twice a year to clean the cemetery together, and then we'd eat at my grandma's house. But it was a lot different than what it is now. Growing up, we'd go out and hike up and down the canyon, and we would get bikes. And once the tires were flat, we'd ride around on our little—on the rims and things. But we made time outdoors. We were running around out in the fields that were there and up in the canyons. It's a lot different than what it is now.

**COATES:**

The city had not extended out this far—

**RAMOS:**

No.

01:09:35

**COATES:**

—and swallowed up so much of the land, huh?

**RAMOS:**

No. Because when we grew up in those mobile homes, and this was before ’85, too, where the Bingo Hall and all that started coming through, there was—I think through one of the USDA grants, there was cows that were given to the reservation, so they’d run around. I remember they would be in our yard eating the trees, and my mom would say, “Go get those cows,” and we’d hit them with brooms trying to get them out of there, those types of things. And then a water project came through MWD that dug a tunnel close to the reservation. It was pretty deep, tunnels, you know, so we would run around in there and play. And we would always go back and say—this is the Indian reservation. We’d be acting like we’re hunting and this and that, and we never really got anything.

**COATES:**

Playing Indian? (laughs)

**RAMOS:**

Yeah. But me and my cousins, we all—it was a different time. Now you tell the kids go out and do stuff. And we’d catch lizards and watch them race. (laughs) We’d have them race and stuff. We had to find things to do because our—

**COATES:**

(laughs) And you were probably pretty creative about that, too, huh?

**RAMOS:**

We were. Some things we probably won't say on tape that we did.(Coates laughs.) But we were pretty creative on what it is that we did and stuff.

01:11:11

**COATES:**

Did people have—you talk about cows. Did people have stock then?

**RAMOS:**

No. It was just a few, a few cows that were there that would run around.

**COATES:**

And what were they there for? (laughs)

**RAMOS:**

I think it was a grant. Now that I'm learning more about it, it was a grant where there was some livestock that came through, that might have led to breeding, but they never got that far.

**COATES:**

So they were just sort of pet cows, basically?

**RAMOS:**

Yeah, pretty much.

**COATES:**

(laughs) Did they have other kind of things, chickens or—

**RAMOS:**

Some did. My grandmother had some chickens up there at her house, and then some others did too. They had some chickens.

**COATES:**

Probably not pigs or things like that (unclear)? (laughs)

**RAMOS:**

No, no, not so much pigs, although my uncle, who lived down in San Bernardino, had a house that actually had some pigs and goats and stuff like that.

**COATES:**

Did people have gardens and—

**RAMOS:**

There was areas there, some would start to have gardens, and the cows would eat it, but, yeah, there wasn't a full-fledged, like, community garden-type deal.

**COATES:**

Yeah. Was there game around? Did people engage in hunting and—

**RAMOS:**

Tried.

**COATES:**

Uh-huh. What does that mean, "tried"? (laughs)

**RAMOS:**

Well, I mean, me and my cousins, we would go out and try to hunt. We never really caught—we got quail pretty much. Me and my cousin George Murillo, we would go out. We'd get some quail—buckshot—and rabbits and stuff, and we would eat some of that, but not as a staple diet, because there was still the KFC and some of these other things that were there.

01:12:58

**COATES:**

Right. So that was more just for the sport of it, so to speak, and something to do and—

**RAMOS:**

Pretty much, yeah. But as far as providing hunting and stuff for the survival of our community, I think that might have been prior to my birth.

**COATES:**

Yeah. Did hunting, and does it to this day, does it remain important as—does it have cultural significance to you?

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

So that even maybe it's not for subsistence purposes, it's still something that people do?

01:14:16

**RAMOS:**

Oh, yeah. I mean, we do more on the plants now with the Yucca plants, the Chia plants, and some others. We do sing, with Ernest and Kim Marcus and Shorty, bighorn sheep songs that you would sing before you would actually go out and hunt the bighorn sheep. So we'd talk about all those things. As far as hunting the bighorn sheep, we talked with elders before, and it was agreed—now, things could change down the road as others grow up or whatever, but it was agreed back then that the bighorn sheep gave its life for our people in that time for food and nourishment, and that now more people are living off of—you know, you could to Stater Bros., you could go to all these different markets, so now it's time that we would leave the bighorn sheep, let it live its life because it gave of its life for our people to live.

So we've never—at least I've never, and others that I talked to, we'd never go out to hunt the bighorn sheep, but we talk about the songs that we sing, that you would actually sing before you'd go out for the

hunt of the bighorn sheep, so that people in culture understand. Because again, it breaks down the misconception of all Indian people and the big mammal being the buffalo. Where the buffalo's foreign to this area, our big mammal is the bighorn sheep. And you run challenges that if we don't keep culture moving forward and talk about those things, even in songs, even though we're not hunting it, we run two things, that the community will make up its own mind of how Indian people are and what it is we hunt, but also if the community's saying that, then sometimes maybe our own tribal members would buy into that philosophy too. So that's why you keep those songs moving forward. That's why you still talk about it, even though we're not going out and hunting.

**COATES:**

Right. Are there dances as well—

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

—that go along with that? And so there's some sort of—even though you may not actually be engaging in hunting, there's still—and "symbolism" isn't even the right word—

**RAMOS:**

No, it's the cultural—

**COATES:**

—because it's more than that, that it's—

01:16:03

**RAMOS:**

The cultural teachings on that still go on, and still we would sing, and the bighorn sheep songs, (name of song), and you would move like this so people would see, and we'd talk about it. So even though it's not like we're getting ready to go out on a hunt, because, one, those that had the knowledge to go out and do those things have passed away, so we still have part of our culture where we still talk about it and what would take place before you would actually go out and do the hunt. So there's respect for it.

**COATES:**

So there still is a physical practice of it, at least through the dance, that continues to kind of feed the identity—

**RAMOS:**

Oh, yeah.

**COATES:**

—of the people in their relationship to these animals and this practice.

**RAMOS:**

Yeah. Because even though the bighorn sheep gave its life for our people in the past, no one knows what the future holds. So being able to hold on to that culture, and if we do have to—if something happens and now you do have to survive on the land, you still have parts of those songs that will move forward that you would actually start to engage. I'm not saying that there's never going to be another time in the future where we might have to hunt the bighorn sheep. I'm just saying at this point it's not here, and who knows what the future holds, what the world holds.

**COATES:**

Are the bighorns still around?

**RAMOS:**

Yes.

**COATES:**

Very good.

**RAMOS:**

Very much so. And the state issues hunting permits for the bighorn sheep. So there's a group in San Bernardino County that actually are hunters, and I'm going to go out with them in August to look at the herd in San Bernardino County.

01:17:04

**COATES:**

And these are predominantly non-Indian, I would presume, huh?

**RAMOS:**

Mm-hmm.

**COATES:**

Okay. So there's not a depletion in their numbers that's significant? I mean, it's still possible for people to hunt them for sport, and there's not really any problem about that, huh?

**RAMOS:**

Well, we would think that you would leave them, but up in the Mojave National Preserve there was just recently a stock of the bighorn sheep were coming down with pneumonia and dying, so it could wipe out the herd, and that came from a domestic sheep that was out there, which prompted me to call the Governor's Office and ask that they wouldn't issue any more permits out in that area because it could wipe out that whole herd. And the governor called and said they're looking into it. But from what I understand now, that herd, some died off, but on this other side, this herd, this part of it fought off the pneumonia and they overcame it, so now that herd's moving forward.

**COATES:**

They've got some immunities, huh, perhaps?

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

Okay. All right. Great. You wanted to talk about the county, San Bernardino County, and so in the context of what we're—I mean, we've going back and forth a lot, and that's fine and everything, but I'm trying to stay in the past in this question, you know, like when you were a young adult, perhaps, a youth, and so forth. Before the advent of gaming and the economic rise of San Manuel, what was the relationship of the county and the tribe? Was it a good relationship? Was it a patronage relationship? What was that like?

**RAMOS:**

Well, I think—

01:18:58

**COATES:**

Did it exist, even? (laughs)

**RAMOS:**

See, that's the question, did it even exist. When we were growing up, we existed on our own a place that maybe some wanted to not even acknowledge existed in San Bernardino County. But there was nonprofits that would come up, the Jaycees that helped build the original Tribal Hall, and there was nonprofit groups that would bring up food and different things for the tribes, so there was nonprofit organizations that would help. But as far as the government-to-government relationship, I think it was one that didn't even exist, one that still needed to be built on, and I think that still exists throughout the majority of California Indian reservations here in the State of California. Is there truly a relationship that exists? And so back then, we pretty much survived on our own, water that wasn't tested, floods that came through. I remember when I was young that a flood came through and wiped out the road to my grandparents' house and the cemetery. There wasn't the county, there wasn't the city, there wasn't none of that. We had to wait for the Bureau of Indian Affairs to, number one, get the money allocated, and then come out and inspect it, and then go back to request the money to come back to fix that road. Meanwhile, it was about eight to nine months where my grandmother and grandfather's house, they didn't have sewer, they didn't gas, they didn't have any of that stuff. So we would take food up there, take water up to them during this whole time. So there really wasn't that existence that was there.

01:20:48

**COATES:**

Now, the county wouldn't have helped out with what you're talking about with after the flood and everything like that because it was federal trust property, huh, because it was a reservation?

**RAMOS:**

Because it was a reservation. But now knowing that there is—and maybe back then the laws aren't the same as they are now, but there is some federal assistance to come through that you could actually get involved with some of these things and seek reimbursement. But yeah, people would see the reservation as, "Oh, that's federal. That's not ours," and would take a stand back, even though you needed some of that service.

**COATES:**

Right. So for other kinds of social services, did tribal people that lived on reservation, would they access county services, then, in that regard or—

**RAMOS:**

When we grew up, whether it was available during that time or not, there wasn't that relationship going back and forth, so all of our resources went through Riverside Indian Health, San Bernardino County Riverside Indian Health through the Indian programs, so everything was there. Through the clinics, you had counseling. Through the clinics, you had all these different things, and so that was where you would go. Now I think that—

**COATES:**

Did you have much engagement with Human Services, like Child Protective Services and things like that were county, or—

01:22:37

**RAMOS:**

No, we really didn't. And that's part of the problem, too, is that when these things do exist—and they do exist on reservation land—who do you go to? Do you go to your tribal electives that might be your uncle or your aunt, and maybe it's somebody, a close relative that's doing these things to you, and now that the community, you feel embarrassed? So who's going to come out and say these things? And so there's something that needs to be done about that, and I think there is a stronger role that the county could play because funding comes from the federal government, and so we could be engaged in those things. But again, it's everybody knows everybody, so that's part of the problem.

**COATES:**

Right, right. Okay. I think you have a meeting at ten, and it is ten right now. So is that correct? I've run you right up until the meeting time with this. (laughs)

**RAMOS:**

Yeah. It's with staff, so if you have one more, I think we could probably do one more unless you want to—

01:24:05

**COATES:**

We've—there's always more. You know, I feel like some of these we've just kind of skimmed, but we'll come back to them because we've already touched on a lot of the things that I had for the second session as well, and they've kind of gone back and forth, and that's just very natural, I think, that that would happen. You talked—the only one I see that we haven't maybe even skimmed a little bit is the conflicts or the tensions or the challenges within the community itself. And I think about this, and particularly in relation to a tribe which has in the past twenty-five years come up tremendously in terms of the resources that are now available, is there a conversation going on internally about what to do, what direction to go in, how to use those resources, and so forth? I would presume that there is. And to the extent that it would be appropriate to just outline maybe the directions of thought on that?

**RAMOS:**

And so the conflicts in the community is—which community? The community outside the reservation or the—

**COATES:**

No, I mean the San Manuel Tribal community is what I'm—

**RAMOS:**

Yeah. Certainly there's good and bad in economic uprising within the tribe. Certainly the good part is being able to have adequate housing for members and to be able to have educational scholarships for members to engage in. If they get into Harvard, the tribe will pay for it. If they go to Cal Baptist University, the tribe will look at it and scholarships and things like that. As far as the internal conflicts of always trying to—and this is within any leadership body, of trying to get everybody to understand and letting your leaders understand where is it do you want to be in the next five, ten, fifteen, twenty years. If it's to maintain what you have, then there's some things that we have to do to protect it, right? And that means now you're dealing with a tribal government that had no public safety, no public—so there's regulations and laws that are going to be implemented that would create a safe environment. If you want to maintain what it is you have, you've got to create a safe environment for customers and those to partake in there. So there was conflict there, but we actually established a Tribal Court system with ordinances, so that's taking care of some of those conflicts. I think there's some conflicts within some of the members—or maybe my generation, and I'm not that old, but seeing it and growing up without the economic development that's there and appreciating more that we have it, right, and to make sure that we do have guidance, that we never revert back to the pre-1970 conditions.

01:26:05

**COATES:**

Because I presume there's a younger generation that doesn't really—that has never experienced that, huh, and—

**RAMOS:**

I think, for me, originally, the more that we put into the tribal government was the way we should have done it, and we did, because no one knew how long this was going to last. But now the tribal government has means to put into certain restricted funds for infrastructure, for growth, a twenty-year-plan-type thing, and so I think the conflict is where it is that members want to see a tribal government moving forward, and I think that's something that's internal. Will some like to just create a whole business sector and kick everybody out? Probably. Will others want to kick the business out and just make it all residential? Probably. But you have to create that balance between the two, where residents and business can flourish. And that philosophy isn't just to tribal governments; that philosophy is in government across the board, county, state, federal. You have to find that balance and you have to move according to what your people and what your constituents, how and in the direction they want to move.

**COATES:**

Right. Does the tribe make per capita payments to individuals?

**RAMOS:**

Mm-hmm.

**COATES:**

Okay. Is it enough that they don't have to move anywhere? (laughs) In terms of, you know, gaining the expertise that advances the tribe in the future.

01:28:06

**RAMOS:**

I think some things, and the way to look at anything in life is that nothing lasts forever, so you have to prepare yourself for the day when that stops, and can you survive and provide for your family, can you survive as an individual. That goes back to that philosophy of education, culture, and spirituality. You have those three things, you're going to be able to get out and market yourself, regardless of what situation comes your way.

**COATES:**

And so that's a conversation that's going on within the tribe right now, and there is that emphasis on those aspects, and people are engaged in that conversation, huh?

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

Okay. Good. Well, thank you.

**RAMOS:**

Thank you.

**COATES:**

Thank you very, very much for the time today.

**RAMOS:**

No problem. Thank you. (End of April 21, 2014 interview)

## SESSION TWO (June 2, 2014)

00:00:17

**COATES:**

Okay. So the date is June 2, 2014. My name is Julia Coates, and I am with James Ramos, who is from the San Manuel Tribe, is also former tribal chairman, and presently San Bernardino County supervisor.

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

Okay. And this is our second session together, and today we're going to continue talking a little bit about just Supervisor Ramos' personal story, but also getting—you know, tying it in more with the larger story of San Manuel in the last thirty to forty years or so, and some of the changes, because I think there have been a lot of changes that have taken place over this time period.

**RAMOS:**

It is. You know, I'm from the San Manuel tribal government, but my tribe were Serrano and Cahuilla. So we always try to make a separation there between the tribal government and then the tribe—

**COATES:**

Okay. Good.

**RAMOS:**

—who are Serrano and Cahuilla, and the government is called the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians.

**COATES:**

Okay. Good. Because that's something that I know I have a lot of lack of clarity about that, and I suspect a lot of people do.

**RAMOS:**

Yeah, yeah.

00:02:26

**COATES:**

So thanks for bringing that in. I wanted—one of the questions I wanted to start with, I think we talked a little bit, left off a little bit about your educational background in higher education and your work experience and things like that. I've been talking with people from a number of the different tribes in Southern California that are indigenous to this region, and it seems like one of the stories that is consistent with a lot is a story in the last thirty or forty years of really a reclamation of tribal identity, whether the tribe is recognized or non-recognized. That seems to be a story. But my impression from the first time that we spoke was that in the families in what is San Manuel now and the reservation and all of that, that there's been a pretty consistent sense of a Native or an indigenous identity among the people. Am I perceiving that correctly, do you think, or is that—

00:04:29

**RAMOS:**

No, it is true. I also sit on the State Native American Heritage Commission as the chairperson there, so we deal with federally recognized and state recognized tribes in the State of California. Cultural identity is something that's always been strong within our family and within members of the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, but also what happened in 1996, myself and Vincent Duro actually created the Cultural Awareness program that now opened up a program to the full tribal membership. Rather than one family and another family, now this was a program, the Tribal Unity and Cultural Awareness program, that was open to everyone, regardless of which family and this and that, and those that are involved in tribes understand the difference between the families and this and that. We created a program called the Tribal Unity and Cultural Awareness program in 1996, and then my cousin David Manzano came on and supported us, and so did Vincent's younger brother, Leonard Duro, and the four of us got together and started looking at culture, bringing in different speakers. We actually got Robert Levi, who's a Cahuilla elder from Desert, Torres-Martinez, to come in and teach bird songs to us; and we actually engaged with Ernest Siva from Morongo to come in and teach the Serrano language to everyone; and Donna Largo, teaching baskets; and David Largo, her son, teaching pottery; and also Katherine Kitchen at the Cultural Awareness program at Cal State, teaching wiiwish; and my grandmother, Martha Manuel Chacon, and Pauline Murillo. We all worked within the cultural program to bring back the cultural aspects for the tribe itself.

Now we've been actually having since then our Spring Celebration, Yucca Harvest, Yuhaviatam camp, and Cal State Bernardino, we have a program that reaches out to area schoolchildren, and that's been going on since 1999. So the culture is very much alive. Now, what happened after gaming is that now tribes were able to have—our tribe was able to have funding, so that we could actually go to the tribal government itself and request funding, rather than having to write grants that would have to go to the federal government to try to get approval, to reengage in revitalization. Robert and Luke Madrigal and Leroy Miranda and Mark McCarl were all part of a grant that was given to those individuals. Robert Levi led it, through an Arch grant that started to bring back a lot of the bird songs, Cahuilla bird songs.

00:05:57

**COATES:**

Okay. There's a perception in terms of, I don't know, like a racial or political identity, I guess, not the cultural that you're talking about, but moving into sort of some different aspects of identity. I think that among—or at least what I've encountered in the time I've been here, that among many of the non-Indian, much of the non-Indian population locally, there's a sense that, "Where did these tribes come from?"

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

"Where did these tribal people come from? All of a sudden these people are here that we never knew were here before." And, you know, this is probably an offensive phrase, but a lot of people who will say, "Well, I do. I always knew them as Hispanic," or Latino or Mexican, or something like that, and the sense at least on the part of the outside world that there's something sort of, I don't know, "fraudulent" is maybe too strong a word, but, you know, but there's something here that was not being claimed before.

00:07:2800:09:2300:11:34

**RAMOS:**

Well, it is and it's true, and certainly for some tribes it's more of the financial means to be able to do different things. When we were growing up on the San Manuel Indian Reservation, we grew up in mobile homes that were there, went to the local school, Belvedere Elementary School, and Serrano Junior High and then Pacific High School and San Gregorio High School, and during those times, no one really knew about the people of San Manuel and probably Indian people in general throughout Southern California, because we were probably the most poverty-stricken area in San Bernardino County. So no one really paid attention, and the lines as far as getting resources from the county or the city, it wasn't there because it was a federal Indian reservation, so we relied on federal means to come in and help with the infrastructure.

I know I remember there was a time when this flood came through or rain came through and flooded out and washed out one of the roads and broke the sewer lines, gas lines up to my grandparents' house, and the BIA—we requested funding—didn't come for at least six months. So we had to bring water and food up to my grandparents' house. We had to go through the neighborhood of the local city people to get up

to their house because we couldn't drive there, and that didn't get fixed for some time. And then, you know, people just didn't—whether they cared or they didn't, there's always people, good people in the community that cared about things, and sometimes the nonprofits would come up and share different things, and that's something that I've always remembered and so has the tribe, those members that do remember. That's why the philanthropic activities that the tribe does with the community continues to go. But the political aspect of it, it was okay when the tribe was in those different situations, right, and you're here in a pictured stratosphere, like we're here, and so we need the help. But the moment that gaming came, originally Bingo Hall, you started to see the infrastructure of the tribe start to grow, right, and that was still okay. Before we actually started having the Bingo Hall and construction started, the City of San Bernardino filed an injunction about any heavy equipment going up the street of Victoria Avenue. So we brought that equipment in overnight, so the injunction took place, but we already had the equipment and we constructed our first Bingo Hall, and we employed many people from the community. So there was that tension at that time and there was things that were going on.

And then once the tribe started elevating and members started to elevate into areas where they could afford homes, do these things, they started to take a little bit of notice, and there was this friction that was going on, where I guess the community and the nation said, "Well, we want tribes to succeed," but the moment they started to exceed the per capital financial that others had, "Well, we didn't want them to succeed that much," right? And so with that came a lot of responsibilities. And I'm not going to say that that solved everything. I think what happened was that tribal governments now had a newfound deeper responsibility not just to the members, but now within the community itself, because those political bodies that were out on the city, the county, some had good relationships, some remember the tribal communities prior to some that now are able to have different things with income and through gaming. But the fact of the matter still is in the State of California and the nation is that the majority of the tribe still live below the poverty-level status, and it's up to the leadership that do have the political clout, if you say it that way, to bring those areas to the forefront within the nation and within the State of California. So that political climb for tribes was something that just didn't happen; it was something that everybody had a (unclear) in, and there was a newfound responsibility to be able to work things out or to be able to let the courts work things out, but yet the tribes now found something that was able to start to liberate. And a lot of us call it—that era is really a stronger movement of the civil rights of American Indian people throughout the nation and throughout the State of California. But to be focused—and some are just focused on gaming, and if that's all that leaders are focused on, then we miss the whole opportunity to make it a better place for everybody within the Indian communities.

**COATES:**

Mm-hmm. Okay. Going back to when you—I've got a lot of questions off of that off of what you've just said. (laughs) But going back to the very beginning of your statement, when you were talking about it took the BIA six months to come in and repair at your grandparents' place and all of that—

**RAMOS:**

Just to come look.

**COATES:**

Even to come and look, huh?

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

Okay. If they had not been on a reservation, what would—would there have been a state and county response instead in that situation?

**RAMOS:**

I believe so. I mean, certainly now in the role that I'm in as San Bernardino County supervisor, if it's on a county road, if there's things that happen within the county jurisdiction, there's crews that will go out and fix those, twenty-four hours, within twenty-four hours.

**COATES:**

So they did not do that at that time—

**RAMOS:**

No.

**COATES:**

—because of the awareness that that was federal—

**RAMOS:**

It was federal property—

**COATES:**

—property or jurisdiction and—

00:12:51

**RAMOS:**

—and the mindset of elected tribal leaders at the time too. You were never able to put in a request to the cities or the counties, because the funding came from the federal government. So you would call the local BIA field office here in Riverside, and they would start the paperwork moving.

Still to this day, I mean, we had a situation here a couple of months back in Alta Vista where a Tribal Council was—a horrendous crime took place where family members shot each other and killed each other, yet the BIA was the one that was sending counselors in for resources. And I'm not so sure that the county up in those areas were able to respond with the same type of counselors and things. But yet still to this day, 2014, that situation did happen up in that area in Northern California.

**COATES:**

Yeah. So there was an awareness of an Indian population in the area, but it was just sort of, what, marginalized or—I mean, you know, because, "Well, that's not within—that's not our responsibility," and—

**RAMOS:**

Really. And some would come up and help out. The local Jaycees helped build the original Tribal Hall there that I remember growing up, and there's others that are older than I am that I remember that coming up, and then there was other nonprofits that would come up and share food and different things, activities. I remember at the Junior Performing Arts College at Paris Hill Park, they would come up and ask if anybody wanted to be part of the program, and we did, and one time I played Rumpelstiltskin. (Coates laughs.) So there was those nonprofits that did come out, but for the major infrastructural stuff, it was more of the tribal government left to itself.

**COATES:**

So the business community didn't necessarily interact in supportive ways in those days?

**RAMOS:**

Not that I remember.

00:14:40

**COATES:**

And the county government didn't necessarily, so it was just sort of a benign neglect kind of situation?

**RAMOS:**

Yeah, until the means came, and now the San Manuel tribal government became a tribal government that other governments now wanted to work with.

**COATES:**

Right.

**RAMOS:**

And we had to go through a whole educational process of the sovereignty of the government-to-government relationships. Even though the San Manuel tribal government has been in existence here since 1891, it wasn't until then where people really started to truly try to understand, "Well, how come the tribal government can do these things, and how come we can't say anything about it?" And so the tables kind of got turned a little bit. Because when I was growing up, houses were built right up to the boundary of the reservation itself, and we had no say in what was going on. Certainly one morning you open up your window and there's houses right there next to you, but now the reverse comes around and now the tribal government's building things, and the community's saying, "Well, wait a minute. You're taking away these sunsets." And, "Well, wait a minute. You took ours away sometime back."(Coates laughs.) So now the tables get turned a little bit, and I think that's where some things get a little cloudy in people's minds, is that tribal governments aren't here to cause disruption within the governmental system, but what's happened is, is that the State of California and the United States has left out the tribal government process within the United States history, and so when people learn about the history, in eleventh grade, about the United States, they talk about cities, locals, counties. They never included the tribal government. So now it's like, "You have to deal with them, so let's learn a little bit more about the (unclear) thread within the Constitution of the United States of how tribal governments survive and work on a government-to-government basis."

00:16:41

**COATES:**

Yeah. We had a former governor of this state that needed a pretty good education on that point, didn't we? (laughs)

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

I think so. (laughs) Not too recently—or not too long ago. When you talk about starting with a Bingo

Hall, which—when was that?

**RAMOS:**

That was back in 1985 is when they actually started construction.

**COATES:**

Okay. And they brought heavy equipment up—

**RAMOS:**

Heavy equipment, yeah.

**COATES:**

—overnight before an injunction was about to be—

00:17:39

**RAMOS:**

Before the injunction was there. So we had the equipment there, and there were tilt-up cement walls. I remember they just popped up. We were all amazed at how quick they came up. Now, I'll let you know that prior to that, though, the tribal government was actually split. There was some members that didn't want the gaming and there was some that did, and it goes back to the democratic process as far as the majority moving forward. I think some didn't want it because it meant that those families that were here in this flatland would have to move because there was only so much flatland within the San Manuel tribal government.

The San Manuel tribal government in the land base is land that's directly under the tribal government. It's not allotted land. You've got members who have homes, but the land that those homes are on still actually reside to the property of the tribal government as a whole, so the house is the member's, but not

the land. So at any moment, the tribe could say, "Well, we need this land," and a full vote of the General Council majority could actually move families, and that happened to those three families. My mom was one of them twice. So there was some, but after the first couple of years, everybody kind of liked Bingo after that. (laughter)

**COATES:**

So that was—when was the Seminole decision about—was it '87? Am I—

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

Yeah. So this was actually a couple of years before that.

**RAMOS:**

Before. So we were one of the tribes that were actually engaged in Indian gaming prior to IGRA, the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, being instituted or being approved at the congressional level in 1988, I believe. So we were conducting gaming, Cabezon, and I believe Morongo was too. But Cabezon was actually engaged and Cabezon brought a lawsuit. They were part of the lawsuit, Cabezon was. So then that cleared the way for the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act to move forward.

**COATES:**

Now, when the Bingo started, was there some anticipation that it would go further than that?

**RAMOS:**

No.

00:19:15

**COATES:**

So what was the impetus, simply to—

**RAMOS:**

When we grew up, everything that—economic development that came to the tribal government was short-lived. We had horse stables—and I think we talked about that last time—that came, and they were behind our house, again the flatland that was there, leased out property and conducted horse rides on the reservation. My grandmother put a snack shop behind our trailer and sold soda pop and frybread and candy bars and stuff like that, pickles, out of there.(Coates laughs.) And then the horses left, right? Then came the cigarette shops. We had cigarette shops, trailers. I was still younger, so we would unload the boxes, and my older cousin, Jeffrey Jimenez, actually was the guy at the window selling the cigarettes.

**COATES:**

And that was done through a compact with the state, or how was that—

**RAMOS:**

There was no compact.

**COATES:**

You just did it, huh?

00:20:52

**RAMOS:**

It was just a business-type deal, right, so exercising the sovereignty. And so that came, and then all of a sudden there was a lawsuit that said it was a violation because the cigarettes crossed state lines, and there was no taxes collected. We had no money to fight it, so that left. So when Bingo came, it wasn't about how long is it going to be; it's about, "Let's take advantage of it while it's here." And we all started working there and doing all these different things, and, lo and behold, it's been around now for some time, here in 2014, and has evolved. So, yeah, for those of us that were there, and believe, too, also for the leaders, that no one knew how long it was going to last, and still no one knows how long it's going to continue to last.

**COATES:**

Yeah. So was there discussion within the community about Bingo? Was it perceived as different in some way from—

**RAMOS:**

In the outside community?

**COATES:**

No, within—

**RAMOS:**

Internal?

**COATES:**

—the internal community. Because we talk about horses and tobacco and things like this. Was there a perception that Bingo was sort of a qualitatively different thing, that there was an aspect of gambling involved in it—

**RAMOS:**

Oh, yeah.

**COATES:**

—or anything like that, and was that problematic to the people at all?

**RAMOS:**

I think what was more is that remember we were the most poverty-stricken area in Southern California and one of most of the most poverty-stricken Indian reservations in Southern California, where other reservations' members—you talk about coming out and bringing food. I remember there was Tom and Corinne Siva out in Palm Springs that would come and bring Kentucky Fried Chicken to my grandma's house. We thought that was the greatest thing. So you see other members coming now and sharing. So in '85, it was pretty much anything had to be better than what it is now, and so that happened. And those that were in office at the time, you've got to give them a lot of credit, because you had investors come through and invest money and wanted to have these long-term relationships, but the tribe ended up getting every penny that they could and paying off that debt. We became one of the first independently Indian-owned and -operated establishments in the State of California.

00:22:32

**COATES:**

Okay. So when—

**RAMOS:**

Which could go back to the growing up as far as making payments on cars, and then you might not be able to make that payment, and then they come and try to repo it. So that terminology was always in some of our leadership at that time as, "We got it. Let's pay it off so it truly is ours," right?

**COATES:**

Right. So there was a communication that people could really relate to on a personal level—

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

—that had been their experience. They understood it in those terms. Okay. So as that's going on and you're trying to pay it off, are there other pressures? Were there other pressures for—you know, develop social services?

**RAMOS:**

Oh, yeah.

**COATES:**

I mean, what was the conversation like in the community in terms of how to—you know, what proportion do we give of the profits—

**RAMOS:**

Yeah, there was always—

**COATES:**

—and the prosperity that we're beginning to see to all of this?

00:24:01

**RAMOS:**

There was always a big push. Even though when we were growing up we had to work, we had to get out there, and I think we went through the working of a Jack in the Box to Long John Silver's to the school district to Payless and Kmart, and then ultimately went back to school. But there was always that deal that education had to be something that we looked at as a whole. Whether it was pushed from early age, family, this and that or not, the government took the position that education was important, so scholarships were set up.

And then the housing, people knew there had to be housing that was there, so a housing component was set up. And then the infrastructural, I mean, we were replacing water lines that were basically rubber hoses, and so we were able to root all that out and put in the correct stuff, and then formed a UBC code for planning and things like that. So those things became the nucleus of where that money was going to go into the tribal government, and then anything that was left over would be able to go to the individual members.

**COATES:**

Okay. But the repayment to get out of this debt to the financiers, right, was right in there along with all of the—

**RAMOS:**

Oh, yeah. That was a general—

**COATES:**

—other social services as a priority, huh?

**RAMOS:**

Yeah, yeah. That was a General Council direction. That's the full vote of the members able to vote over the age of twenty-one. That was a clear direction.

00:25:19

**COATES:**

Okay. Good. What was—and then how quickly after that—the decision on the Seminole case is in '87, IGRA's established in '88. So how quickly does the expansion into other kinds of gaming, how quickly does that happen and—

**RAMOS:**

Bingo—well, there was different, other mechanisms that were going on at that time, too, because the Bingo cards, we had the largest Bingo Hall in California, if not the country, and we still do, but also within there, people like to play these Bingo cards, and they would line up with ten, twenty cards on it. So there became this machine that would take all these cards and put them in a machine, and paper pull-tabs also would be one that people would buy for a dollar and they pulled tabs, right, and people would stand in line and get twenty of them, this and that. So then you use technology and you put these paper pull-tabs into a computer-type deal, and then now you're able to feed this computer twenty bucks, you got twenty cards, and you see if you win, right? That became—now the legal challenge as far as that was outside of Class II gaming, because—so IGRA was created, and so what IGRA did was create the different classes of gaming, right? Prior to IGRA, there was no strong definition of classes, so it was exerting the tribal sovereignty that we were able to conduct high-stakes gaming. Certainly Bingo was the one. Others challenged different areas. So then IGRA came in and created the different classes. Class I is one that we would argue that shouldn't be there at all, and that's your traditional custom games like Peon and Shinny and some of those things that are more of our traditional cultural games, but they stayed in there. Class II is any type of gaming that a state allows—anywhere else in the state that you reside in, that you're allowed to do that, too, without a compact, right?

00:27:08

**COATES:**

Mm-hmm.

00:29:32

**RAMOS:**

Class III is any type of gaming that the state doesn't allow anybody else to do in the State of California. Now you need a state tribal compact to conduct that gaming. So what happened was during that time, these paper pull-tabs came up, and we used the technology to put them into these machines, and so people were paying money for these machines. You'd get in there, you could buy twenty at a time, fifty. Some would give $100, 100 at a time. People liked them, and you'd just pull the tabs and you could get like three cherries or whatever. Then you win money, you turn them in, paper pull-tabs. So that became the challenge that that no longer was a Class II game, but it was just a technological advantage for the Bingo Hall, Class II. So that became the challenge over the whole Class II, Class III that we filed and we were all in lawsuits over. Then ultimately Janet Reno put out a cease-and-desist order on those areas, and that's where the tribal state compacts came through, and the governor, Pete Wilson, refused to negotiate with California Indian tribes. We tried to invoke the bad-faith negotiation part of IGRA, went up to the Department of Interior. John Garamendi was the undersecretary there and things and so at that time. And then we tried to work those things out, but that became the whole nucleus of getting to where Class III now, everybody's agreed that the machines that are in the casinos are Class III if they follow this type of schematic. There is Class II machines that just follow Class II that don't need a compact. So the big thing with the state was—and we had protests down in L.A. Now it's not just Indian people; now it's everybody working. Now our employment was up to almost 1,500 people, one of the largest employers in the area. So they rode buses down to (unclear) in protest and all these different things, showing that Indian gaming now was spearheading and moving the economy forward, because in our area, Norton Air Force Base just closed, Kaiser's still closed. So we were the only one that was really bringing the jobs to this area. So we ended up allowed us to continue to offer those types of games now known as Class III while the courts worked it out.

And then Governor Gray Davis was elected and agreed to sit down with tribes to work out compacts. That came Prop 5-A, and then that passed, and the governor signed those compacts, and then there was a group that challenged the constitutionality of Prop 5, saying it wasn't in the constitution itself. So then Prop 1-A had to come forward to change the constitution to allow tribes to be able to be in that area. Then that was the beginning of the tribal state compacts, and in 1999 was when those compacts were brought forward, because you still have some tribes that are under the 1999 compacts and you have others that actually amended their compacts in 2008.

**COATES:**

Okay. So that's been about fifteen years, and the struggle to that point was another, what, five, six,

seven, eight years—

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

—before that, something like—so basically from the early nineties—

**RAMOS:**

Yeah, it was pretty—

**COATES:**

—you know, to try to bring this forward and all that?

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

00:30:47

**COATES:**

So what were you doing at that time? What was going on in your life professionally and so forth? Because you're, I'm presuming, were involved in this pretty much from the get-go.

**RAMOS:**

Yeah. At first I was elected on the San Manuel the first Tribal Gaming Commission, because tribal governments now had to create a gaming commission to oversee and regulate the games that were going on on federal Indian reservation.

**COATES:**

And what had you been doing and what was your expertise that you were selected for that?

00:32:45

**RAMOS:**

Well, we went back to school and we got an associate's degree in business administration and accounting, came back, and we ran for it and we got elected. And because my degree was in accounting, community college accounting, we got put into that area, because what was going on was there had to be some type of accounting for all these things. So we called—his name was Tom Flahey out of Arthur Andersen, we had Deloitte Touche, we had all the other tribal governments coming forward under the guidance of CNIGA, who at that time the chair was Marshall McKay. And we went to CNIGA, said, "We need to put together a minimum internal-control standard for Indian country before the state, before the federal government says, 'Here. Here's your minimum internal control.'" So they bought into it and pretty much let us run with it, and we brought all the commissions together, those tribes that wanted to partake. And we took the minimal internal requirements from Las Vegas, Atlantic City, put them together, and we started tearing them up, going together, and we shaped and mold a minimum internal-control standard for Indian country at that time. Took it back to CNIGA, where Marshall McKay was the chair, then Anthony Pico, I think, was vice chair at that time, and they adopted it. So that was a big push because now everybody was, at least on a minimum level, agreeing to all these different standards.

Now, from that point, the minimum internal-control standards have evolved and gotten more stringent as time has come on, but the tribes still do have their own set of minimum internal-control standards that they regulate the gaming industry on their own land, but the state also has some minimum internal controls, and the federal. So it's the most heavily regulated enterprise in the history of the United States.

**COATES:**

It sounds like the tribes at that time were sort of almost a step ahead of the state, maybe a couple of steps

ahead, because—was there kind of a widespread expertise, to some degree at least, among tribes? I mean, you know, you had the degree in accounting, and were there similar people in other tribes throughout the state that sort of saw this—

**RAMOS:**

Oh, yeah.

**COATES:**

—before the state did, and that there was going to be a need for regulation, and "Let's get on it before anybody—"? I mean, how did that—there's kind of a lot of foresight to that, it seems like, and—

00:34:15

**RAMOS:**

Yeah, but I think that's more ingrained in the people themselves, because even now, I mean, certainly seeing businesses come and go, you're always trying to stay ahead of it. So if you see things that are coming, you could either wait for the federal government to tell you what to do, or you could have the opportunity to now create your own set of rules and say and tell the rest of the world, "This is what we're following."

So it was newfound sense of, "We need to be ahead of the curve." And there's always been that philosophy, that whatever standards are out there in the community, tribal governments want to meet and exceed those expectations. So that's something that's more ingrained in the persona of Indian people themselves, I believe, that back then, or our leaders now, that, "We'll meet what they said, but we're going to exceed. We're going to show—." It's always working thirteen times harder than the rest of the counterparts because there's always that sense that somebody's watching. "Let's keep this stuff above board."

**COATES:**

Now, the people who had this kind of expertise in each of the tribes and so forth, did you all know each other already? Had you been interacting on other types of economic development already, or—

**RAMOS:**

Not so much economic development, but you've got Housing Authority, all Indian Housing Authority. You've got some cultural people that knew each other, certainly. What Indian gaming did, though, was expand the knowledge base, expand the networking. Those here in Southern California certainly knew that the chairs in Morongo, the chairs down in Pechanga and Pala and all those areas, but now what that did was open up the whole state and then open up the whole nation, and now you're able to talk about issues that were affecting everybody.

00:35:48

**COATES:**

So there were some pan-tribal sorts of institutions that had existed even before this around housing, for instance, as you said, that you kind of drew on them to—

**RAMOS:**

Oh, yeah. The National Congress of American Indians have been around since 1970 and have brought people together on issues: EPA, environment, law and justice, those areas.

**COATES:**

But within California itself, there were also these sort of just these state tribal—

**RAMOS:**

In areas, yeah. Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association, Southern California Housing Authority, and Riverside-San Bernardino County Indian Health would have all these meetings, and you would have delegates and members from the tribal government go out to meet these areas. So you would meet other Indian people at that time, and it's the same everywhere. Those that are involved, they're going to be involved in every aspect, so you get to see the same people.

**COATES:**

Mm-hmm. So anybody who says that they didn't know Indians existed around here probably just wasn't looking very hard, huh? (laughs) Because there were these types of institutions.

**RAMOS:**

There was. There was institutions. As far as being open to understand the plight at that time, might have been in one's choosing, I guess.

**COATES:**

Mm-hmm. You said it much more diplomatically than I did. (laughs) Okay. All right. Were there—I mean, you had talked about some other types of what could be called small-scale economic development, I guess, with the horses and the tobacco and things. Were there other types of things, as well, that you can remember that—

00:38:10

**RAMOS:**

Growing up, not so much for me and then as the tribal government. Now, there's some that are older that might remember other things, but for me it was more of—you know, certainly the beginning, and I was young, real young, but my mom was there when they started, when the reservation actually was going through different things, and they had apricot groves and things like that, but that never amounted to revenue. That was more becoming more of a staple food for those in the area. And my mother grew up in those areas. I didn't grow up in that time, but they tell us stories about that. So for me it's more of the horse stables, the cigarette shops, and Bingo, and then ultimately the casino, and I separate the two.

**COATES:**

Yeah, yeah, obviously. They're very, very different kinds of development.

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

So when you talk about the orchards and people farmed?

**RAMOS:**

Mm-hmm.

**COATES:**

And so there was really kind of a—

**RAMOS:**

Agricultural.

**COATES:**

—subsistence economy, huh, where people were producing for their own households and—

**RAMOS:**

Yeah, and working. That was the main work in the area. The people of San Manuel also worked with those in the original East Highlands that were the agricultural laborers during that time.

00:38:55

**COATES:**

Mm-hmm. In your own family, you talked about your parents last time and kind of the work that they had done and everything, and they were engaged more in wage-labor kinds of professions, I guess.

**RAMOS:**

Later on when we were there, but earlier on their lives, my dad grew up in the East Highlands original ranch and actually picked the oranges out there for the different providers there, too, so they were part of that also. Now, once they got married and had the kids, my mom became a beautician and my dad worked for the San Bernardino City Unified School District and retired out of there.

**COATES:**

Okay. So did they keep a mix of things? I mean, after they had gained this kind of employment, did they continue to also, you know, grow and gather and these kinds of things, or did it mainly go to the work? I mean, the—

**RAMOS:**

Well, the groves stopped. There was no more groves. The groves were—because of housing, because of all these things, they were gone.

**COATES:**

So that type of economy just basically kind of got wiped out by the—

**RAMOS:**

By the development.

**COATES:**

—by the urbanization of the region, huh?

**RAMOS:**

Really, really.

**COATES:**

Okay. What kind of impact did that have on people when that happened? I mean—

**RAMOS:**

Dramatic. I mean, people had to either go back to school, find jobs other places. My dad was lucky enough to get a job at the city schools and stayed on there for years. So, you know, there was still some type of agricultural industry going on, but for the most part, it was just being choked out along the way.

00:40:24

**COATES:**

Mm-hmm. Were most people able to gain other employment as your father did, or didn't—

**RAMOS:**

You know, it was more of a focus on—yeah, my cousin's dad, Martin Hernandez, ended up working at a lumberyard, and we were real close. I remember my dad used to take side jobs and he used to cook meat for weddings and things like that. But pretty much you seen a part of history leaving with the groves and that type of agricultural industry, not just an affect on us, but it was an affect on the whole region, Redlands and Highland, all those areas, that now that you see, you wouldn't even know that you would look that way and it'd just be covered with orchards. Whether the industry was still feasible at the time or not, I wouldn't know, but I'd imagine the land was worth more as with homes on it, I guess.

**COATES:**

Yeah, in somebody's world. (laughs)

**RAMOS:**

Somebody's world. Right.

**COATES:**

Yeah.

**RAMOS:**

But that's the evolution of things, I guess.

**COATES:**

Yeah, everywhere. So most members of the San Manuel Band were able to find some kind of wage employment then, as this agricultural subsistence kind of diminished?

**RAMOS:**

Some did and some didn't, and that's prior to the gaming too. So some did, some didn't.

00:42:02

**COATES:**

Yeah. Because I'm trying to understand. When you said that, you know, was the most poverty-stricken of all, that would tend to indicate that as the agricultural work goes away, that it wasn't replaced with anything for many people, huh?

**RAMOS:**

It wasn't replaced. I mean, every community goes through the different statistics things, and certainly alcoholism, it's no secret that alcoholism is a big number-one component within Indian country, and it's a thing that we all fight against. So that did happen. After that was there, some weren't able to find any work and became pretty much reliant on income that they got through the mail. And alcoholism was something that I grew up seeing rampantly that was out there, and not so much to say that—you know, to bring an awareness to say, okay, yeah, all the statistics are true. You've got Indian reservations with high alcoholism rate. Yeah. You've got communities like San Bernardino city with high alcoholism rate. You've got Indian communities that are looking at illegal drugs. Well, yeah. There's communities in the state that are part of that too. But the thing is, what do you do as a person? What do you do as a community that's going to stand up and say, "You know, enough's enough"? So now there's leaders that are out there that says, "You know what? We don't drink anymore because we've seen too many of our people pass away from it." And when you're able to wake up and see your own people out there shaking because they need that alcohol, then when they drink it, it calms them down, we need to see, I think, more of that to make sure that us, the younger generation, myself included, understands that what we have today wasn't for nothing. It was because of what those people went through that we're here today, and if we can't give back something, what are we doing? Right? It's nothing that I've done that allowed me to partake in the financial riches there within (unclear) tribal government, but if I stand back and do nothing, then I think that we've failed our whole elders and our ancestors in what it was that they had to go through.

00:44:03

**COATES:**

Mm-hmm. Do you think the younger people in the tribe understand that?

**RAMOS:**

I would wish that they would. I think that was the big reason why we pushed Cultural Awareness program. Now you have generations that haven't seen that, but have been born into some of these financial (unclear). I would imagine the more we get out speak, people understand that, but unless you see that firsthand—and I'm not saying people need to see that, but I'm saying that once you do, then that gives you a passion and desire to change the community that you reside in, whether it's an Indian community or whether it's the community as a whole. I think the community as a whole needs to stand up now, certainly in this day and age, to start to combat some of those things that are affecting all of our people.

**COATES:**

Mm-hmm. What about tribal government? Did it change in its nature, in its character as all of this is going on? First of all, when you're moving through an era as a band where the agricultural sector that everybody has engaged in is diminishing, and there's not necessarily anything replacing it, what kind of impact does that have on governance within the community?

**RAMOS:**

I think there was a period of those that had to leave the reservation to go in search of work that ended up living in other communities, that found work, so people just generally trying to survive, going out. And just like anywhere else, you follow where that work is. You go out and try to find some jobs. So at that point, people were leaving. Some families left and found work other places.

00:45:41

**COATES:**

How far do they go when they leave?

**RAMOS:**

Some of them—my aunt lived over in Fontana, my other uncle lived up in Bishop, and so others lived at different places, and then actually we lived in Highland for a little while. Then once the land settlements came back and we had some money, my parents had money to put down a down payment for a mobile home through Winston Head Mobile Homes, we moved backed to the reservation, but all that was going on. So what happened now after gaming came through, now there was a responsibility, and everybody wanted to make sure, because every member wanted to make sure, "Are you spending it right? Are you putting it in the—?"

**COATES:**

Did they really? Huh.

**RAMOS:**

So it got people coming back to the meetings.

**COATES:**

Uh-huh.

00:47:41

**RAMOS:**

And certainly as things evolved even more, members started moving back, and it's a natural progression as far as following the job, following the money it's providing for your family. You want to make sure it's being managed accordingly, right? And so members did come back. What happened was now that the topics and decisions that the General Council was making were far more—I don't want to say "advanced," but far more affecting everybody's lives than they were, where General Councils, prior to that, were talking about how we're going to spend $300 a year for an annual budget for the tribal government. Well, you were lucky if five or whoever showed up. Now you want to talk about it's going to education. It's going to all these things. Money's coming in. There's more people coming in. So it created more involvement, whether it was more of an oversight on who's elected to make sure you're

doing the right thing, did it cause—was everything good? There was a lot of things that were good. Was there some things that were bad? Yeah, there was some things that were bad, too, but I think you've seen a tribal government grow now, right? Where now you could actually get out there and put the money to fix the roads, the infrastructure on the reservation itself.

And I think that became a topic, too, at one point as far as why is all the money coming to the tribal government when others are living somewhere else? And the fact is, it's the tribal government and why IGRA was created to make sure that governments were succeeding, so you ended up having to be able to create paved roads, infrastructure, testing water now, sewer lines corrected in twenty-four hours, no longer waiting for all these things. That was something that everybody agreed on, or at least the majority did. And so you brought some more discussion into the tribal government.

**COATES:**

Was there outreach to families that had moved away, to bring them back to participate, or was that something that just sort of organically happened? I mean, this interest that you say nobody cared when it was only $300 a year, did the interest just—did the government solicit that interest, or did people just—

00:49:51

**RAMOS:**

Yeah. I think more of—there's always minutes and things, you know. Then actually we rose from a gaming commissioner to a Business Committee member to a treasurer to the chairperson of the tribe. So there's always memos that would go out anywhere, people that lived on the reservation, people that lived outside. But when they started hearing about this newfound economic deal going on, they might open their letter a little bit more, show up, see what's on the agenda, right, come in and work there. (Coates laughs.) So, yeah, more members would show up at some of the meetings now more than ever, but the decisions always were in the best interest of the tribal government. As a leader being through there, you see that you try to do that, and there's always some that think, "Maybe it's not," but it truly is, to be able to maintain what you have and to never revert back to those 1970 conditions again, or '80 conditions. So money's been put away and things.

**COATES:**

Now, when did you begin to be part of tribal government itself and to gain elected positions and so forth? Did the Gaming Commission work come first, or were—

**RAMOS:**

No. That was first, and then we were on the Education Committee, and then we ran—we did everything.

**COATES:**

Now, when you say "we," who—

**RAMOS:**

It's just me.

**COATES:**

Okay. Yeah.

**RAMOS:**

Some people—

**COATES:**

No. I do that too. (laughs)

**RAMOS:**

Yeah. And even in this role as county supervisor, I say "we" a lot, and it's because, you know, whenever you hear somebody say "I," it seems more self-serving, and we would get kind of scolded for saying "I." "What, are you selfish?" So it's always "we" as a people, I mean, because you can't move forward without everybody. I mean, some try. So when I say "we," it's our family, it's all of us. So, yeah, so we did a lot of work there.

00:50:57

**COATES:**

Yeah. So what was the first position that you held as part of the tribal government?

00:52:48

**RAMOS:**

The government, was a Business Committee member. During those times when we were marching for Indian sovereignty, I remember Henry Duro was the chairperson and I was elected Business Committee member, but I was real close to Henry. And, you know, we were in there trying to figure it out, this and that. And my brother also was on there, Ken Ramirez, and he was, I think, the vice chair at the time. He would spend a lot of time in Sacramento, and he was going to go to Sacramento for the end of—we're all learning politics and all this stuff—for the end of session in August, because trade bills and amendments and all that would be gutted and amended, and people would throw stuff in. So they were watching, and he said, "You need to come with me to Sacramento." And then Henry said, "Well, I need him in D.C." And so it became a deal. And, you know, I've always been one that would follow the hierarchy. I said, "Well, if the chairman's calling, I've got to go." So I did. So then, lo and behold—and at that point there was Henry Duro and there was Art Lopez out of Torres-Martinez and there was—what's her name, out of Cahuilla Reservation—Michelle Salgado. And then there was Carl Lopez out of Soboba and then there was Hunter out of Coyote Valley and some others that were there. And Dean Mike out of Twenty-nine Palms, chairman, and stuff that would all come there, and they would tell me, "Oh, this is what we need you to do." So I had like six chairs, as a Business Committee member, saying, "Hey, we need this and that." So what they wanted was to get a meeting with Jesse Jackson, and they didn't know how to do it. They said, "Can you do that?"

I said, "Well, I don't know how to do it either." But then we started going in there, finding our way around, and, lo and behold, we found a guy that set up a meeting with someone that knew him, and it was one of the housing persons. And we had breakfast with Jesse Jackson in the morning.(Coates laughs.) We went in there, and I said, "Come on." So we all went in there. I remember because I prayed with him, with Jesse Jackson. We got him to come to California. The reason we engaged with him is because no one was listening to what was going on in California as far as the bad-faith negotiations, this and that. The press wasn't picking up on it, but yet if he showed up, then now people are going to start to report on this. So he agreed to come out, and we did a bus tour from San Diego all the way to Sacramento, came by through here on our reservation, on the bus, "Save the Dream. Stop Discrimination Against American Indians." We ended up at Loveland Church over in Ontario, out in Ranch Cucamonga there. Frank Stallworth, a good friend of ours who's passed away now, helped set that up. So Henry and Art ended up getting on the bus and rode with him up to Sacramento. They got up to Sacramento, myself and a couple of other guys were there singing bird songs as they ran through. That probably the first part

of now bringing the attention that something has to change. And so we got that moving and everybody was happy. But, yeah, we got Jesse Jackson to come down. And they were supposed to stay in contact. I'm not sure if that's continued or not, but that was a—

00:54:33

**COATES:**

(laughs) How did you get him to—specifically how did you get him to do this? (laughs)

**RAMOS:**

You know, I don't know. It just seems like things always fell into place when we were asked to do those things. Certainly we didn't know him or things like that, but I guess he always wanted to have a connection with the Indian people. So being able to have Art Lopez and Henry there with him taking pictures showed that now that his—and it was the Rainbow Coalition, Rainbow PUSH Coalition, but yet they were missing the Native American component. So that allowed him to get that component, and that allowed him to get some exposure out here in California.

**COATES:**

So it benefitted him as well, huh? (laughs) Which is the way things work usually.

**RAMOS:**

That's what we've learned through this whole political process.

**COATES:**

(laughs) Right. Okay.

**RAMOS:**

And then I stayed there and then went back to school at Cal State San Bernardino and got my bachelor's in science and business administration with a concentration and a four-year degree in accounting, and came back and became the first treasurer for the tribal government, because they separated the secretary/treasurer. So I was the first treasurer and created reporting structures for the casino to report to the tribal government, worked on a lot of the bond financing for a bond that came forward, and also for different calculations and formulas that were missing from that time, and now was able to hold those that were saying they had all these things under control, now someone was able to check-and-balance them, because we actually were in that new-gained knowledge also.

00:56:22

**COATES:**

Okay. And all of these are elected positions?

**RAMOS:**

Elected positions.

**COATES:**

Okay. All right. And you've got kind of an unusual structure in your band in terms of who is on your Tribal Council, or at least I was reading. It's everybody, basically, huh?

**RAMOS:**

It is. So we have an elected body, seven members now, since we separated those duties, and that's the elected body.

**COATES:**

So is that more like a cabinet or something like that with these specific positions, you might—

**RAMOS:**

Yeah.

**COATES:**

Okay.

**RAMOS:**

Something like that. And then you have the General Council, which is every voting member over the age of twenty-one—

**COATES:**

Right.

**RAMOS:**

—and that brings everybody together, and you need to get at least a quorum to hold meetings. The chairman presides over the Business Committee, which is called our elected body, and the General Council. So it gets pretty testy. And everybody's related, so it's your aunts, it's your uncles, it's your cousins, so it gets pretty heated at times.

**COATES:**

(laughs) Yeah, yeah. So you were the treasurer?

**RAMOS:**

Treasurer.

00:57:30

**COATES:**

And then when did you become the chairman?

**RAMOS:**

So the treasurer, I was the treasurer and then decided to go back to school again and pursue my master's in business administration from the University of Redlands. I was into my second year. I was coming into—finishing my first year, and when things were going on in the tribe that I didn't agree with, so I ended up running for chair, was elected. And while I was chair, I still completed my last year of my master's degree. So I got my master's, my MBA, from the University of Redlands after my first year as chairman, and then we were able to—you know, we worked on a lot of issues. But prior to that—and so while I was treasurer, I also ran for the Community College Board of Trustees here in San Bernardino region and won. So I was actually the elected community college board member for this area and the president of local college board. In 2005 I was elected there. So we've always been involved, and I think that involvement at the community college level allowed me to have friendships throughout the community with those in education—superintendents, state superintendents, certainly other elected officials in the area—and so we created a good network. So when I did become chairman, I had all that network already outside of the lines of the government, of tribal government, so we all worked together to deal with the issues that were at hand that I needed to deal with. I think we did an all-right job.(Coates laughs.) So we were there for two terms and then ran for this position.

00:59:41

**COATES:**

Now, you said a few minutes ago that there were good and bad impacts, basically, of the growth, the economic growth of the tribe and of people coming back and being much more participatory and all of

that. Can you describe a little of each, some of what the good impacts have been, some of what the bad impacts have been?

**RAMOS:**

Certainly the good impacts, I mean, you can't discredit the good that it's brought as far as being able to have adequate homes, being able to have a twenty-four-hour emergency response-type deal, being able to provide public safety on the reservation. Certainly the scholarships, educational component, I certainly was one that benefitted from that. Certainly the quality of life of the majority of the members has gone up, certainly, and I think an awareness of culture, people, I think that's there. Those are all the good things there. The bad things—the good and bad. The bad that I talk about is that all of a sudden you've got members able to find this new wealth, right?

**COATES:**

Mm-hmm.

**RAMOS:**

And if they have some type of mentality where they want to associate with these types of groups, then they're going to associate. All that does is just capitalize on the funding for it. There's not a catch to say, "Hey, wait a minute. Let's bring you over here. You don't have to run around over here with these types of people anymore," or if you had an alcohol problem or if you had a social legal drug problem, you know. All that was happening in some of those areas is that with newfound wealth, it just escalated. And I'm not saying everybody, but there was at least a percentage, a small percentage of those that were there. So I think those are some of the things. And then other things is, too, that now when there's money involved, it comes back to everybody from all over and causes more of a tension, more of a disagreement, more of those things, rather than seeing the big picture of, "Hey, wait a minute. We survived on $300 a year prior to this, and now that we're getting money, yeah, it should stay here." So there became that divide. But I think, if anything, there should be—and our tribal government has reached out and has done these things—a better job at identifying those social ills that are there, too, that's in everywhere, right?

01:01:48

**COATES:**

Yeah.

**RAMOS:**

But I think sometimes that might be the mechanism for it. Certainly the arguing amongst members and even any elected body is going to happen, but you have to have a common goal. So there's a lot of good, but there is some bad that came with it.

**COATES:**

Okay. So are you saying that the increasing revenue sort of—I'm trying to think if I heard what you were trying to say, accurately, if I heard it accurately. Because you said something about those that came back. So was there sort of an internal versus—you know, those who had stayed here versus those who had left, that maybe wasn't a big divide until money came into it, and then it became a bigger divide? Am I interpreting that correctly, or—

**RAMOS:**

I think one thing and statement is that, you know, I grew up on the San Manuel Indian Reservation. Prior to gaming, we worked out there and we lived in those mobile homes, and I was there, my family was there. And certainly everyone has a right to seek jobs and different things. And then once gaming came, more people came back, right?

**COATES:**

Mm-hmm.

01:03:24

**RAMOS:**

And will they still be there if gaming is gone tomorrow? I know for me, I will be.

**COATES:**

Mm-hmm. But there's a resentment on the part of some? Would that be a fair statement? Because there were people who wouldn't be here if it wasn't for gaming?

**RAMOS:**

If.(Coates laughs.) If Indian gaming never evolved to what it is today, would the issues that are facing not just San Manuel, but Indian country in general, be the topic of debate today, or are we still talking about, prior to Indian gaming, about the lack of infrastructure, the lack of judicial process, the lack of all those things that still affect the California Indian people today, if not the Indian people in general? I think more attention should be brought to that.

**COATES:**

Yeah. Yeah. (whispers) I'm going to pause for a minute. (recorder turned off)

**RAMOS:**

—L.A. And so now there's a Serrano dictionary. There's more cultural activities going on for the kids, and so it's actually—only thing that happened with the cultural revitalization is that it's actually grown stronger and there's more buy-in now from the government itself in order to create a whole department around it. We still run the Tribal Unity and Cultural Awareness programs. We still have our Yucca Harvest, our Spring Celebration, the stuff that we started, and the tribe's been great, letting me do all these different things, in or out of office. So we count our blessings every time we do it, because there's still that mentality, "This might be the last one, so let's do a great one."

**COATES:**

Yeah, yeah.

**RAMOS:**

But cultural revitalization has only evolved within the San Manuel tribal government, so much so that now there's a class being offered at Cal State University San Bernardino in the Serrano language that qualifies as your general requirement as a foreign language, which is—"foreign language." But anyhow—

01:05:23

**COATES:**

Yeah, I know. (laughs)

**RAMOS:**

But it still qualifies as a general requirement.

**COATES:**

Right. Yeah. And so for the younger people in the tribe right now, the kids, the youth, is this something that they've pretty much grown up with, these cultural programs, so it's like just—

**RAMOS:**

Those that want to partake in it, certainly. My kids, they were with me through the cultural program, and we sing bird songs, Serrano bighorn sheep songs, and the culture, so it's there for those that want to engage in it, and there's been a youth that have actually engaged in it. So it's good.

**COATES:**

Are the majority of the youth right now interested in participating in these kinds of efforts, do you think, or is it—

01:07:07

**RAMOS:**

I think the youth are all exposed to it. Whether they want to partake in it or not is their choice. Would I like 100 percent to be involved in culture and understanding the history and the culture of our people? Yes. But it's the same thing in the city of San Bernardino, the county of San Bernardino, people and cultural identities. I mean, you deal with a lot of the culture of society itself: Disneyland, the movies, baseball, football. So you've got to deal with all that and try to find a balance somewhere. I'll be speaking at Ernest Siva's Dorothy Malone Learning Center next Monday. So we're still involved culturally, and I will be speaking at the University of Riverside with Cliff Trafzer on a topic "Exterminate Them," that was during the Gold Rush years. So we'll be talking that. So we're still very much engaged.

One of the things, too, I want to talk about is the evolving of the relationships within the governments surrounding the San Manuel Tribal Band. Certainly now being in this position as San Bernardino County supervisor is you start to see that there is relationships that need to be built, not just within the San Manuel tribe, but Indian communities in general throughout the State of California, because when you start to hear in some of these different arenas that we're in, as far as counties and their tribal governments, and some work out great, some don't, there's such animosities there. But I think it goes back to being able to have that mutual respect from one another. I think once you're generally able to have mutual respect and understanding of one and the other, then you could actually bring people together, and you could agree on things and you could disagree on things, but at least you understand where everybody is basing their discussion points and their topics on. So I think the communication now within the San Manuel tribal government and the city of San Bernardino, San Bernardino County, certainly I'm here representing one of the five supervisors, but our role isn't just strictly Indian roles. Our roles are everything from police to district attorneys, and our educational attainment has given us that knowledge to deal with all these different topics. But still to have an American Indian person sitting in a position, representing over 400,000 people, addressing all those different issues that are there is something that I hope that others would see and start to be able to move forward into these arenas also, because this is where you actually have a better decision-making process, or at least a stronger voice, because now within the fifty-eight counties of the State of California, as a county supervisor, we're able to get into any of those topics or discussions, and no longer is it just for elected officials. We're one of them—

**COATES:**

Right. (laughs)

**RAMOS:**

—so you've got to let us be there, right?

01:09:17

**COATES:**

You're a pretty big player in the region now. That wasn't the case before, huh?

**RAMOS:**

Well, I think so, but it's a responsibility. It's a responsibility to be able to find that balance and not to go overzealous. And sometimes there might be a need to be a little zealous, right? But I think, for the most part, that mutual respect has been built throughout this community for one another, and I think it needs to be replicated throughout the state, if not the nation.

**COATES:**

The kinds of things that you're reflecting on about, you know, the responsibility, the interrelationship with the other communities in the county in the area and so forth, are these things that people who are in tribal government are sitting down and having sort of these theoretical types of discussions about, "What is our role? What is our relationship?" Is that kind of vision—

**RAMOS:**

I would hope.

**COATES:**

—actually being discussed?

01:10:53

**RAMOS:**

I would hope that it is, I mean, because no man's guaranteed tomorrow, and it's the same thing. Things that you have today, nothing lasts forever. So those discussions I would hope are going on, because that only gives you clarity as far as where is your role and what is it you're going to work on now for the next five to ten years, fifteen, twenty years, right? If all that happens is these things disappear, gaming disappears, right, and then you revert back to, "Well, it was a great deal," and now you're back to the same, "What did we really do?" So I would hope that those discussions are being done, and I think there is some discussion being done at that point, or else tribes wouldn't be looking at diversification.

One of the things, too, we talked about the horse stables, the cigarette shops, and Bingo, but the tribe has diversified into some areas, Marriott Hotels in Sacramento and D.C., business development out in Orange County, and certainly trying their foot in different things, another development over here in the city of Highland. And that breaks away from the misconception, too, that if a tribal government buys property, all of a sudden it's federal property, that's not the case. You buy property, you're just like a developer. So the tribe has evolved in some of those areas, things like that, but would it be enough to substantiate and keep members at the rate of financial impacts that they're in now? No. It's up to each and every individual person to market themselves, to learn the skills that no one could take from them, and those things are your education. Whatever you gain education-wise, no one can take from you. And your culture, you learn your culture, and no one can take that from you. And your spirituality. Those three things, if you have those things, you're going to be able to market your skills wherever you go and not have to be dependent on the tribal government itself or any government.

01:12:06

**COATES:**

Right. So is educational attainment increasing, then, among the young people and—

**RAMOS:**

It is. Because when we were on council, we pushed a resolution that said that anybody that was going to receive full financial gain had to have at least a high school diploma or the equivalency, so that became the bar. So now kids were getting their high school diploma, they're going straight into junior college or four-year universities themselves. So the education is gone, but we're not at a second-generation college graduates yet, and I'm looking for the day when we become three-generation, because then it's set.

**COATES:**

(laughs) What were you? Were you one?

**RAMOS:**

I was one.

**COATES:**

You're first? (laughs)

**RAMOS:**

I was the first. I was the first in my family to get an associate's degree, the first of the family with a four-year degree, and the first in our tribal government to get a master's in business administration. Darren Marquez got a master's degree in history, but I was the first to get it in business.

**COATES:**

Mm-hmm. Very good.

**RAMOS:**

So it's evolving.

**COATES:**

And so your kids are—

**RAMOS:**

Oh, yeah.

**COATES:**

How old are they?

**RAMOS:**

The ones that are still at my house, my son, he's fifteen, and my daughter, she's eighteen, going to be nineteen, and she's going to Cal Baptist University, finished her first year.

01:13:25

**COATES:**

So the second generation is coming up, huh?

**RAMOS:**

It's coming and we're looking forward to that. My nephew just got accepted out to St. John's out in New York—

**COATES:**

Oh, my goodness.

**RAMOS:**

—so he's going out there. So once that third generation clicks, I think we've done something. Now, I know there'll be a push to, at one point, move the high school equivalency up to a college degree, which I'm not sure if we're there yet. Let's take it a little slow.

**COATES:**

(laughs) Yeah. Not everybody needs to go to college, you know. They're—

**RAMOS:**

Not everybody. And there's technical trades and certificates, and I'm a big proponent of that.

**COATES:**

Yeah, exactly. And they make more money than college grads a lot of time anyway. (laughs)

**RAMOS:**

They really do. I mean, mechanics come out now at forty-eight bucks an hour and up to fifty-eight, you know.

**COATES:**

I don't make that much. (laughs)

**RAMOS:**

No. Right. And so there's something for the technical trades to be said. I was on the State Board of Education, the first California Indian person ever to be on the State Board of Education, appointed by the governor. I was a big advocate for technical trades on there.

01:14:50

**COATES:**

So what spurred your interest to get into service outside the tribe? I mean, you talked about the community college board or the college board, right, first of all, and then the board of supervisors right now. What's your philosophy about that? Where did your interest—

**RAMOS:**

Well, I think it started back within the tribal growing up. I mean, you seen a need that was there. Certainly seeing when money did start to come into the tribal government that we have a trustee oversee all of our income, and it was a lawyer out of L.A. He was a good guy. I still know him and he still works for the tribe. But to see that someone had to—we weren't—there was a problem, "We couldn't handle our own finances? Well, wait a minute." So then, you know, we brought that up over and over. Finally, we got some traction on it, and then we went back and got our associate's degree, a big—you know. (Coates laughs.) It was great. It was big at the time. Came back and said, "We want to take the funding back into the tribal government," basically arguing sovereignty, arguing all these things, you know.

**COATES:**

Yeah.

01:14:50

**RAMOS:**

And we ended up getting—I got them to approve a forensic audit, and so we went in and did a forensic audit on the attorney and then just basically it was papers, showing papers and all this stuff. Ultimately we got some of that money put into a bank account, but now the tribal government was involved. Not all of it yet, but some, right? And so as time went on, it evolved, and now it's fully within the tribe. So seeing the need, the need to happen and seeing resolve in making that change is something that once it happens, you can do that.

Now, for everything you get involved in to make a change, there's five or six that you get involved that don't even get there. It just causes a lot of stress, right? But seeing those changes there and always knowing and hearing in school that, you know, no man's an island. So the tribal government didn't survive on its own. We were part of the larger community. So why couldn't we run for the office outside? At one point I held—they wouldn't let me do it here, but I held it on the community college board. I was a community college board president. I was the treasurer for the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, and I was the chairman, too, because I didn't have to give up that seat until I won this and things, and on the State Board of Education, all there. But now when I won this position, this was so much here that my other positions were incompatible, and the governor said that I couldn't be on the State Board. But my friend Nickie Sandoval from Chumash is actually on the State Board of Education now. So since I've been appointed, there hasn't been a lapse of a California Indian person or a Native American person now in the State of California since 2001, which took a long time. So we have to make sure that seat stays there. But, you know, as far as being engaged, I think here at the county supervisor position, we're able to work in the community and see the community and resolve that's there, working for it for the betterment of people for San Bernardino County, not one ethnic group over another, but generally to see the economy. As economy moves forward, people start to prosper. And so being engaged in that type of activity is something that's rewarding as long as you're able to tackle issues and you're able to stand your ground, and we have good working relationship here with Supervisor Gonzales and Supervisor Lovingood and Supervisor Rutherford and Supervisor Ovitt. We all seem to work together, because it's not either one of us trying to push an agenda on either one of us. We're all working to see the economy move forward in San Bernardino County. And when the economy moves forward, then all people prosper.

01:18:43

**COATES:**

Okay. What do you think are some of the most pressing issues for San Manuel today?

**RAMOS:**

I think some of the pressing issues for San Manuel reside pretty much the same issues that are facing all the communities, but certainly being able to plan for the future, being able to make sure that the education component continues to grow within the tribal government itself, and not to be fooled by that what you see today will last forever, right?

**COATES:**

Mm-hmm.

**RAMOS:**

And you know as well as I do that tribal governments and families, they're not standing back and they're not creating more population. More population is being increased. Same within the tribal government. So being able to balance that need with everyone else, and that means that if we had 98 members over the age of 21, in five years you'll probably have 150. So that pie is shrinking, right, the pie here, but the membership is growing, but everybody's partaking in that deal that's coming down. So moving more cognizant, I guess, of business structure in the State of California.

**COATES:**

Okay. All right. I guess this kind of goes along with it, but the tribe has a tremendous impact, it seems to me, on Southern California generally, I mean all of the tribes together perhaps, but in this particular county, in this particular area specifically. Can you talk a little bit about the changes that you've seen over the last thirty or forty years in terms of just the relationships with the community itself, with just—not necessarily even with government or with business leaders or—

**RAMOS:**

With the community—

01:20:55

**COATES:**

—anything like that, but just one-on-one? How are people relating to each other? What's been the evolution of that over the last thirty years?

**RAMOS:**

Today there's more respect between one another than there was prior. When I was taking my kids to school, to Del Rosa Christian School, there was a city councilman that would lead a protest over at our parking lot, saying—just holding these signs up saying "Shame on the Indians," and they'd run at the car. And I remember my kids, they would throw blankets over their heads. They were scared. And that never left me and never left the kids as far as, "We're just here trying to survive, we're creating all these jobs, and yet you're going to do that as an elected official, and have all these mob come forward?" And that happened for a good two months, three months, and we always had to go that way.

**COATES:**

And these were just objections by Christian people over—

**RAMOS:**

No, no, no.

**COATES:**

I'm not following, I guess.

01:22:31

**RAMOS:**

Not so much Christian. I was taking my kids to a Christian school, so that's where that came in, but they were there over an objection as far as expansion of the facility, because now our Bingo Hall was too small, so we were going to expand, and we did expand. But the city councilman took it as a vendetta to come against the tribe, "Shame on the Indians. You're destroying our community." Well, that was the whole belief as far as, "Okay, it was okay when you did that. We couldn't say anything." But now that we want to expand and create jobs for people in our own community, meaning the county and stuff, now it was a problem. I never forgot that, so much so, and then I would follow his deal as far as being on the city council, and then he ran for county supervisor. So I decided to run for county supervisor, too, and beat him.

**COATES:**

(laughs) So he was your opponent, huh, or you were is? (laughs)

01:23:55

**RAMOS:**

And so we're here and we'll for run for reelection in 2016. (Coates laughs.) But it's evolved from injunctions to protests to now that mutual respect, and I think Indian communities, whether local municipalities and local government, might have to go through that evolution, too, but if you're never willing to sit down and to say, "Well, okay, there might be blame on both sides, but now let's try to make better decisions for everyone," right? I think that has to evolve in other areas, too, not just on gaming, but on policing, environmental, education outreach. I mean, there's still—there's areas that we're working on here in San Bernardino County out in the Chemehuevi Reservation out by Needles, where we need a stronger outreach from the county school system, and even the deputies need to understand where they're responding to, and everybody's provided that process. So I work very hard with—we're very close with Supervisor Lovingood out in those areas also, so we all seem to be working together, but there is an evolution, and first you've got to get past the distrust, then you've got to get to where you agree on something together, and then you're going to be able to start to move forward.

**COATES:**

So have your kids had sort of a different experience in the schools? I mean, this was somebody standing outside of their school and everything, but within their own school environment and—

**RAMOS:**

Not in the school, but on the parking lot of the casino.

**COATES:**

Oh, okay.

**RAMOS:**

We would have to drive out and turn. They were right here on the corner, and there's still some that are in the community, but we represent them now.

**COATES:**

Yeah, yeah. (laughs)

**RAMOS:**

But we don't try to hold any of that—all we want to do is do the best job that we can while we're here.

**COATES:**

Right. I mean, people are going to feel differently about all kinds of things, so you have to—

01:25:14

**RAMOS:**

Hopefully they'll see that some of their mental pictures of how people are aren't true at all. I think that's a bigger role that we have, too, as leaders is not to buy into the misconceptions or the stereotypes that the community might have for you because you're an American Indian or Native American, but to carry yourself accordingly, and that comes back to being thirteen times harder or meeting and exceeding what the community is. When you're in these different positions, you've got to carry yourself a little bit higher because everybody's looking at you because they have some type of stereotype or they have some type of already some misconception of how you're going to be.

You'd be amazed at how many people—when I got elected to the community college board, after about a year, I had one elected official write an op-ed piece, you know, and it said, "James Ramos, he came in and blew away my thinking of what he was. I thought he was going to come in here and be this strong this and that, but he's able to work with people." Like, "You're surprised?"

**COATES:**

(laughs) Yeah.

**RAMOS:**

Right? And not only that, but he said, "And I voted for him to be the president of our board." And I was like, "Yeah!"(Coates laughs.) But I think that's our bigger role as Indian leaders is to be able to carry ourselves accordingly and probably more responsible than others, because people are watching in the state and at the federal level. And again, you know, one of the people say that they thought that with the invent of Indian gaming that the money was going to cause everybody to start fighting, and Indian people would kill themselves out, and that didn't happen. So how true that is, I don't know, but I think we carry our own destiny as far as being able to carry ourselves accordingly and to be able to get along. Now, you might have some disagreements, but let's keep them here and put a better picture for everyone for the betterment of the state and the country.

01:26:52

**COATES:**

So when your kids go to school nowadays, when, you know, any of your people go into a supermarket, when they go into any just sort of, you know, everyday sort of situation, is it different because of this than it was thirty years ago or forty years ago, or—

**RAMOS:**

Oh, definitely. I'm not so sure what the question as far as different, but when I was growing up, we would have stickers on our cars that said "San Manuel Reservation" or "Indian Pride," and all these things. We'd have stuff, you know, on our rearview mirror, and people knew we were from the reservation. We wore shirts and everything. But once the wealth came forward, those that are out there watching this go on, now you become this target out in the community. So you've seen withdrawal as far as wearing that type of shirts and associating you as an actual tribal member there, because there's been so many things that have gone on, and people still don't know the true amount that members are getting, but they think it's a high amount, and it's high enough that sometimes if you put yourself out there, then those that aren't so following society's laws will kind of pinpoint you. And I think that's what I was getting back to as far as saying that some members will associate here growing up, and now that wealth comes, they still want to associate. You don't have to. You could get yourself into a better

place.

**COATES:**

Okay. Yeah. Okay. Well, that's an interesting response. I was wondering if the situation had sort of eased in that people had more positive sorts of, you know, perceptions about the people of San Manuel and maybe less prejudice and discrimination from forty years ago, and it hadn't even occurred to me that there would be this kind of targeting, on the other hand, of a different kind—

**RAMOS:**

That happens, but also the—

01:28:37

**COATES:**

—that might take place too.

01:30:19

**RAMOS:**

—cultural aspect, because of what we started in 1996 with the schoolchildren and teaching culture. We've talked on it. The community now knows about the culture, and while I was chairman, we were able to put educational commercials on major airwaves talking about that. So now there's no misunderstanding that you don't know that we're there as far as culture, and if you choose not to, then that's your own decision, right? But I think people generally start to understand now, know more about the culture and the heritage of the people of Santos Manuel than they did prior to 1985. And there still is some that are out there that would complain about, "Well, you know, there's traffic going up." "Yeah, there's traffic." "There's lights." "Yeah, there's lights. But you know what? We can mitigate that stuff." And here in the role that we're in as county supervisor, we deal with a lot of mitigation in all facets, turning lanes, grocery stores going up in Big Bear and in some of these other areas, so it gives you that sense. One of the things, though, that people might not truly understand—and thank you for coming out and recording all this—is that the role of a tribal government official and the issues that we deal with are no different than the local elected people in the local cities or the counties. We deal with all these issues, and sometimes even more at the federal level. And so coming into this position, certainly there's a lot of learning that needs to happen, but we're familiar with some of the different aspects that already are engaged in this position.

So if Indian people have worked and been elected to their council, they're in a prime position to run for some of these regional positions, whether it's the school boards, whether it's the county supervisor, whether it's the State Assembly or the Senate or federal Congress, U.S. Senate. If you've been successful in working for your own people, your own Tribal Council, you're dealing with these issues. Don't think for a moment that this is something that's so high and out of reach. As a matter of fact, that is a great resource of doing that to get you into this position that's here now.

**COATES:**

Yeah. That's a really, really excellent point, because the fact of the matter is, it might be difficult for somebody who is not in tribal government to gain the same level of experience to serve in a position—

**RAMOS:**

Oh, yeah.

**COATES:**

—such as you are, you know, without that opportunity of tribal government really dealing on a federal level—

**RAMOS:**

It really is.

**COATES:**

—oftentimes on a national level. Yeah, I hadn't thought of it in those terms, but that's really the case. Yeah.

**RAMOS:**

It's good.

**COATES:**

Are there other things that are on your mind that you want to—I think—

**RAMOS:**

I think we covered it all. I think—

**COATES:**

As I'm kind of looking at my list, I think we have and—

01:31:41

**RAMOS:**

Yeah, I think we covered it.

**COATES:**

Okay. Well, I thank you very, very much for spending the time with me. I know you're an extremely busy individual, and I really appreciate the early morning—

**RAMOS:**

Yeah. No, it's good. And thank you—

**COATES:**

—hours and everything else.

**RAMOS:**

—for coming out at this time.

**COATES:**

My pleasure. It's been a real pleasure. Thanks.

**RAMOS:**

Thank you.

**COATES:**

Okay. (End of June 2, 2014 interview)