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Berkeley, California

Albert Camarillo

Albert Camarillo: Reflections on a Career in Chicana/o Studies

Chicana/o Studies Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Todd Holmes
in 2017

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Albert Camarillo

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Abstract

Albert Camarillo is the Leon Sloss Jr. Memorial Professor of history, emeritus, at Stanford University. Born and raised in the Los Angeles suburb of Compton, Professor Camarillo received his PhD in history from UCLA in 1975 and joined the faculty of Stanford that same year. Over his forty-year career, he trained dozens of graduate students and helped to make Stanford one of the leading institutions in the study of race and ethnicity. He is the recipient of numerous teaching and educational awards, as well as the author of many publications, most notably the foundational text, *Chicanos In A Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930* (1979). In this interview, Professor Camarillo discusses: his family background and upbringing in Southern California; his educational journey from high school to UCLA; the mentorship of Juan Gómez-Quiñones and his decision to study Mexican American history; his career at Stanford and work to develop a program for the study of race and ethnicity; his reflections on the reception of Chicana/o Studies within the academic profession and how the field has evolved over the decades; as well as his thoughts on important works and developments in the field of Chicana/o Studies and its overall impact over the last fifty years.

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Project History

By Todd Holmes
Berkeley, California

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Interview 1: November 30, 2017

01-00:00:07
Holmes: All right. This is Todd Holmes with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. Today's date is November 30, 2017, and I have the privilege of sitting down with Albert Camarillo. We are here at Stanford University, in his office, and this is for the Chicana/Chicano Studies Oral History Project. Al, thanks so much for sitting down with me today.

01-00:00:32
Camarillo: My pleasure.

01-00:00:33
Holmes: Well, you're our first interview in what's going to be a very long, multi-interview project that's trying to trace the history, through these interviews, of the rise and development of Chicano studies. But we're also going to talk a bit about your background, and your participation in that development as one of the pioneers and first-generation scholars within this new discipline. Usually, I like to start my interviews from the beginning, and have you talk about your family and background. Now you were born in Compton, California, is that correct?

01-00:01:15
Camarillo: Yes, I was born there after World War II in 1948. My father was an immigrant from Mexico, from the state of Michoacán, who came with that first great wave of Mexican immigrants, early twentieth century. So he came here in 1912, in search of his father who had already left Michoacán because the revolution was already affecting the society there, but his father didn't come back. So he went searching for his father, and with an uncle who helped him get across the border and into California, and found him in Compton.

01-00:01:51
Holmes: Interesting.

01-00:01:51
Camarillo: And so, the typical immigrant story: He works for a while, earns enough money doing various work, agricultural work, migrating throughout the West, goes back and starts bringing other family members, the next brother, and they settled in Compton. They settle in Compton by 1914, and he soon meets my grandfather, my mother's father, who was also from Michoacán and had immigrated in 1910, and settled in Compton about the same time, maybe 1913, 1914, and was friends with my grandfather and met my mother that way. So, they get married and they settled in Compton, in a particular place in Compton, because at that time, Mexicans, really the only minority, small minority, in an otherwise homogeneous, white community. There was a segregated section of Compton, the north-central section of Compton which bordered Watts and Willowbrook, and that's where the "little barrio," as we called it, evolved, and that's where all of us were born.

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01-00:03:08
Holmes: Okay, yeah. And your extended family, was it just your grandfather and your mother, or is your—

01-00:03:14
Camarillo: So there's an extended family. Unlike a lot of families that still had ties with family members that stayed back, almost the entire family, the Camarillo clan, came to two parts of Southern California: either Santa Ana in Orange County, or they came to Compton. We had aunts and uncles and cousins scattered throughout mostly Compton, so that's where we settled, and that's where the extended clan lived very close to one another.

01-00:03:46
Holmes: Did you have any siblings?

01-00:03:48
Camarillo: Yeah, so I'm the youngest. My mother had ten children, and there're six of us survived, and I was the youngest, the youngest of six, so I had a lot of older brothers and sisters.

01-00:04:01
Holmes: Oh wow.

01-00:04:01
Camarillo: The oldest was seventeen years older than me, who was my oldest sister and like a second mother to me. So yes, I grew up as the youngest of six other children that survived.

01-00:04:15
Holmes: And, whatever you would like to share, but could you talk a little bit about the family environment and your childhood there?

01-00:04:25
Camarillo: Well, the barrio was an interesting place because you had—like a lot of immigrant communities, both Mexican and otherwise—you had this mix of generations. You had the immigrants themselves, and these were some of the elders that had immigrated as seniors, as adults. And as we were growing up as the Mexican Americans—and we were bilingual, and some of us spoke more Spanish, or more English, depending on what the household is like—they were the older generation, they were the immigrants, and they only spoke Spanish, and it was clear that they were Old World. They were from México; they were Méxicanos and Méxicanas. And the new generation, although it extended over a big age cohort—people born in the 1920s and '40s, like those of us who were born in the 1940s and '50s—we were part of that new generation first born in the United States, although my mother was born in the United States, barely. Her mother, when they crossed, was pregnant, so my mom was actually born in the United States, of all places, Santa Catalina Island.

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01-00:05:37
Holmes: Oh wow! [laughs]

01-00:05:38
Camarillo: And there are not many people born on Catalina Island. [laughs]

01-00:05:40
Holmes: No, there's absolutely not.

01-00:05:41
Camarillo: Just as a footnote, it's an interesting development there, because Catalina at that time was owned by the Wrigley family, the gum industrial giants, and it was a privately-owned island, and my grandfather was the head of a Mexican working crew. So my mother was born there, and lived there until seven, until they came over to Compton, and then they were part of that Compton Mexican community. So, you had this mix of generations, the younger kids growing up as Mexican American. We were growing up, as we were going to school, and at Compton at that time, in the neighborhood school, it wasn't segregated. There were too few of us from the barrio that it didn't necessitate a separate school. Now, that didn't mean that there were other institutions that, especially my older siblings knew, you couldn't go to. You didn't go to the Catholic Church on the other side of town, the white part of town, because they established a Mexican parish, the Mexican ethnic parish, two lots away from where I was born, where our house was. And so that was our religious, social, cultural hub—and the little *tienditas*, the little store; operated by the Gonzalez family, Ramon Gonzalez was my mother's *padrino*.

So there was all of this what we call *compadrazgo*, the godparent relationship, which really tied people, bound them together, not only as neighbors, but as kin, as extended kin. So there was a lot of that operating in the community which I was aware of. I didn't really understand it much, but we knew the closeness of that community. So that, growing up as a small child there, it was an insular world, because we had our *tortillerías*, the place where the *pan dulce* and the tortillas were made, and the couple of small markets, but you could also venture to downtown Compton. It wasn't far off, and I remember going there as a child, and it seemed like, [laughs] for a small child, like a big downtown. It was two blocks, the old downtown Compton, which goes back to the early twentieth century.

Mexicans, unlike blacks, who later come into Compton, were allowed to go on the streets of Compton when I was a young child. For African Americans, at the time, late 1940s and early '50s, they had just begun to penetrate Compton. You weren't really expected to go, or you could face harassment if you were African American and you went downtown. For Mexicans, it was different, because there wasn't that line drawn—the color line—that excluded you from going to downtown shops and things. So I remember going with my parents, my mother or my sisters, to downtown and not seeing any discrimination. But, my parents' generation saw that discrimination. So, that

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was interesting, for me, of course, as I reflect back, a fundamentally important part of my development, because I was thoroughly in this Mexican community, but by going to school with mostly white kids—and the barrio kids went to the school that was integrated—very few African Americans. So by the time I left in the third grade, there were one or two African Americans that had come into the school, and it was the early wave of blacks that had moved into the northwest quadrant of Compton, and now were coming into some of those schools.

But my world was Mexican, Mexican American, and the association, the friends I had, the little *vatos*, I call them. There were four little guys that hung together. We were all the same age, funny names: Biggy, Papito, and Lulee. [laughs] No one used their regular name. Everyone had these nicknames, and, we could go anywhere around the barrio. It was next to a light industrial area, so we used to jump the fence and go mess around in the—and the train tracks bifurcated the barrio, the Pacific Electric Railway—so we'd play on the tracks.

It was almost like an insular community of Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans, our own little social world, and you could go outside that world, but, as I learned later, the previous generation—so my parents' generation, my *tíos* and my *tías*, my uncles and aunts—they were the ones that knew the boundaries, the color line was much more pervasive in the 1920s and '30s and into the '40s. By the 1950s, they were beginning to break down a little bit. So I only learned that later. So that, for example Rosecrans Avenue, which, was one of the thoroughfares in Compton, up to the '40s, if you're Mexican you didn't cross that line. You didn't go across that, because that was the start of the white neighborhoods, and you could suffer consequences if you went over Rosecrans Avenue. But those are things I found out later, because that wasn't true when I was growing up.

01-00:11:15
Holmes: You mentioned, so in third grade, did you switch schools? Did you move out of Compton?

01-00:11:19
Camarillo: So, here's what happened. As I mentioned, we lived two doors down from the Church. This was a little, rickety, old, tiny Mexican ethnic parish, that's what the Catholic Church did in communities, because if you couldn't go to the segregated Catholic church, which was on the east side of Compton and we were on the west side of Compton, divided by the train tracks, typical barrier, they established little parishes. So there's this tiny little gathering spot. Well, the Catholic Church decides that the Mexican community is large enough to have a larger church. So, that entire side of the block, they buy out; they ask that we sell our property to the church, and good Catholics don't refuse the church.

01-00:12:04
Holmes: Exactly, right?

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01-00:12:05
Camarillo: So, we sell; my dad sells our property, and moves us to—he finds a lot in south Compton. So it's south Compton, still on the west side, and we move when I am in the third grade. So, again, my perspective changed because we moved to a place that, it's mostly white, but it's divided. It's an interesting place, because—it's called Richland Farms—it abutted the largest, undeveloped acreage in all of Los Angeles County at the time, like thousands and thousands of acres, what is today Dominguez Hills and the Carson area. Today now, it's the largest industrial park in Los Angeles, [laughs] of course. But at that time, it was absolutely wide open. We lived on the edge of it, and so it was almost like a kid going from this inner-city little barrio to this almost semi-rural place, because just across the street started this massive open area where there were farms, and ranches, and things, little farms and ranches, interestingly, run by tenant farmers, Mexican and Japanese.

01-00:13:18
Holmes: Oh wow, yeah.

01-00:13:19
Camarillo: You know, kind of a holdover from earlier generations. So my world changed. I went to a different school; it was predominately white, but there were some working-class mixed neighborhoods right next to where we lived. So there were some Filipino families; there were Mexican families; there were white families, poor working white families, some middle-class families, because it was this remnant of Compton that was rural. It was the one place in Compton, to this day—which is really funny, because the image you have of Compton—where you could own livestock: horses, hogs. You name it, you could—[laughs] It's still zoned for that.

01-00:14:01
Holmes: Is it still zoned for it?

01-00:14:02
Camarillo: And people still have some horses there. It's all African American and Mexican now, but at the time—I had some friends that had horses, which was really weird for me, because I don't think I'd ever seen a horse in the barrio. So, for me, it was an important. Looking back, I went to this school, another elementary school, that in the course of the third to the sixth grade, was going through the transformation of West Compton from white to black. So, over time, each grade, there were more and more black kids, with some Mexican kids, a few Asian kids, and then a decreasing number of white kids. So this is the demographic change of West Compton, by the mid-1950s, and that was, again as I was reflecting, was going to form an important part of my development as an adolescent, and my sense about race in American society.

So I go to the middle school, and when I started there at Walton Middle School, there were still maybe 20, 25 percent whites. They were rapidly moving out. It was almost an exodus in West Compton, as African Americans

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were really, in large numbers now, taking over neighborhoods as they moved. The racial barriers for housing now had been breaking down, and once African Americans started moving in, the blockbusting effect was taking place rapidly. So when I started middle school, seventh grade, it was maybe 20, 25 percent white; then there were not ten white kids in the school when I graduated in the ninth grade. And over the course of that time, kind of the nature of my friendships changed from multiracial, white and Mexican, even a Filipino friend, to exclusively black. So, my world really turned black. All my friends were black. My girlfriend was black. And I was an athlete, so I had black teammates. And, that exposed me to yet another racial reality, and I was incorporated into that community, so, my sensibilities about race, although had you asked me at the time, as a thirteen- or fourteen-year-old, I couldn't have told you, but later on, it was going to have an impact on my multicultural, multiracial sensibilities, which were formed during this period.

And then, ninth grade, interesting development, which, the end of this period of going through the Compton schools, West Compton was increasingly black. My father had built us a home, and it was like going from rags to riches compared to the little house in the barrio that with every child, he added another room. It was like a little mystery house. [laughter]

01-00:17:03
Holmes: Is that—

01-00:17:03
Camarillo: And with all these children, he built us just this beautiful new home. So for us, it was amazing to have this new home. My mom loved it. But, my oldest sister, who held some racists views against blacks, told my father, "You're going to lose the value of your property if you stay here, as all these Negroes" —I didn't know this until later, of course— "all these Negroes move in, and we better move." Because she was living with us at the time. And here's my dad, a Mexican American, broken English, never spoke English really fluently, had, when we attempted to move the first time from Compton, he looked at a lot in Lynwood, which is an adjoining community, all white community. They told him in no uncertain terms—in fact, I remember my mother telling me that she went to the Realtor, and they told him in Lynwood, "Sorry, sir, we don't sell property to Mexicans." So that's what directed him back to Compton, and here now, he's selling this house because the blacks are coming in.

So, where do we move? Far East Compton, on the boundary of Paramount and Compton, two blocks from the segregated white high school, Dominguez High. And, all my friends are black and they're all going to Compton High, where all of my brothers and sisters went, and I say, "I'm not going. You can move; I'm just going to go live with my friends." That wasn't going to work, [laughs] not at fifteen. So, we up and move, and I go to Dominguez High School, and there's not one black kid, not one, and there's a handful of

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Mexican kids, very few Asian kids. So, it's the high school built in East Compton so that—the documents don't bear this out, but we know the rationale of the school board: build a new high school in the east side so the white kids can go there, as Centennial High was built a couple of years earlier on the west side for the black kids. But Compton High, the historic high school, was also turning black. So, segregated high school.

So I go there as a sophomore, and I didn't really want to go. I was an athlete, so I played football and I had kind of a group, a cohort of people that made it easy to transition, and, in looking back, it was a great experience. I had a great time at Dominguez High. And I'll finish the Compton experience with this, because it shaped me as well, again, not knowing till later. This is 1965 and 1966. So the Compton Unified School District, when I'm a junior, decides it's time to desegregate—we better do it ourselves, because we're so highly segregated.

So, by my junior year, the first black kid comes to Dominquez, and he was from Centennial High on the west side. He was an athlete, so, he became one of my teammates. Man, that poor kid suffered a lot of racism and hatred, from some of the guys I knew on the team, and in the school, because at that time, there were like three black kids, out of an entirely white school with a few Mexican kids. And then the next year, all hell broke loose because they started bussing over dozens and dozens of black kids from the west side, and a substantial portion of them were the kids who had been my friends, and that I knew from Walton Junior High. So here, fights are breaking out. The white kids are writing nasty stuff on the walls, epithets, "Go, N-word, go back home," and I'm student body president by that time.

01-00:21:11
Holmes: Oh really?

01-00:21:12
Camarillo: So, it's interesting. I didn't know at the time, but when I was a sophomore, I'd only been there like a month, and school elections were coming up for class president and all that stuff, and the vice principal calls me in, and I was damned scared, because I didn't do anything, and the vice principal's calling me in! What the hell? What did I do? I didn't [laughs] do any—and so he says, "We would like you to think about running for sophomore class president." I was taken aback. He obviously knew that I had been a student leader at Walton, and my hunch is, they anticipated the desegregation was going to occur, and—this is just a hunch—that they actually pointed to me as someone they knew. I was the youngest of the Camarillo clan, so they knew my brothers and sisters, and they were athletes. My brothers had been quite good athletes, football players.

And so, I ran for president. I won. I don't know how, [laughs] and when you have to give a little speech: "I don't know you guys, I'm from the West Side,

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but"—so, anyway, that got me kind of plugged into another community of students at Dominguez. And I was interested in student government, so I ran for president my senior year and I'm president when all this hell breaks loose the first semester. So, the principal pulls me in one day, said, "We're going to start a human relations group of students to try to help heal some of these problems, and deal with some of the tensions, and we want you to be chair of it." What the hell did I know about handling human relations? They picked me, obviously. I was president. I knew the black kids, I knew the Mexican kids, and I was friends with the white kids.

But, looking back, that gave me, for the first time, this really interesting look at how race operates in a really naked way when racism is alive and well, and these are black kids who, I was part of that community, and I was part of the community of the white kids, and yet, there was this enormous tension. So, looking back at it, growing up in Compton gave me this multiracial, multicultural sensitivity that as an undergraduate, as I go to UCLA, is going to play out in interesting ways at the same time that universities are changing. So that gave me a foundation that—of course, I had no way of knowing—would shape the course of my life and my career.

01-00:24:04
Holmes: Yes indeed. I wanted to ask you—before we move on to your time at UCLA—during these high school years it's not just that we have desegregation and civil rights, as activism on those issues is very much on the rise, and front and center. But, we also have Vietnam starting at this time, as well as racial tensions, like the Watts riots.

01-00:24:30
Camarillo: Right. So Watts elevated the racial tension. So, summer '65, my sophomore year, all hell breaks loose, and you can see the smoke from where we live; it's less than two miles away. My brother is on the police department, so he's experiencing how they're going to try to contain Watts moving into Compton in terms of the destruction. So we're getting it from him and we're seeing it, but it elevated race tensions to a level that was unprecedented, the first major race riot which shocked the nation, shocked LA. No surprise, now that we look back on the nature of the racial inequality. But, it led to two things: the very rapid—I was a junior, I'm sorry; I was a junior when it happened, right before my—

01-00:25:28
Holmes: Your senior year.

01-00:25:29
Camarillo: Yeah, senior year—the rapid demographic shift of Compton. So the west side had changed quickly. I described what happened after Watts and on the east side of Compton as a white exodus. I mean, they left. Dominguez High, within three years, is overwhelmingly African American. In fact, I had a

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chance to interview a white alum from Dominguez who was the last of ten white students in 1970.

01-00:26:04
Holmes: Wow.

01-00:26:04
Camarillo: That's how rapid it had gone from, when I started in 1963 to no African Americans, to probably 95 percent African American by 1970; that's how rapid that change was. But it also meant that by the time African Americans in larger numbers were being bussed to Dominguez, the racial tensions you could cut with a knife because of Watts. And so, it was an awakening; it was something that I hadn't seen before. I mean, I had seen aspects of tensions between individuals, but not in groups. And as a sixteen-year-old, the Civil Rights Movement, the black freedom struggle, was not hitting home as much. We saw it on television, and as an adolescent, a teenager, it didn't send shock waves through us, because we were naïve, and we didn't pay much attention to the news. But when it hit home, that's when I first really began to understand the nature of race relations.

We held, as part of the human relations group, we held little forums, and I remember one where we had, in the library, we had a little panel, a black student, myself, a white student, and we were talking about race relations. And I'll share with you this one anecdote just briefly. So, I was chairing the panel, and I remember this young black girl, and I think she was maybe a junior, so she was younger than I was, and I remember saying something to the effect—to this day, I'd like to reach out to her and say, "I was wrong; I'm sorry." She said something to the effect, "Well, you know, slavery was so important in what happened to African American, black, Negro people at the time, and it shaped"—anyway, she was trying to explain that the system of slavery had so profoundly shaped the experience of African Americans, and I remember stopping her and saying, "That was a hundred years ago; what impact could it have now?" Duh, right? [laughter] And as a historian, that's why I said I'd like to go back to her and say, "You were so damned right, and I was so wrong, and I apologize!" Because she was absolutely right!

And those are the things that I began to study by the time I'm a junior at UCLA, because now, the Civil Rights Movement, the Ethnic studies movement was just beginning to happen, the war in Vietnam which is reshaping us in profound ways as undergraduates, it's hitting full force at UCLA and campuses around the country, and reshaping our world views. So UCLA was like the light came on for me, in so many ways.

01-00:29:11
Holmes: Well speaking of your time there, you enter UCLA in the fall of 1966. Were you the first of your family to go to college, or did your brothers and sisters also go to college?

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01-00:29:23
Camarillo: So, my family was the first family out of the barrio to send someone to college. There had never been a Mexican American that had gone to college. My oldest brother, Ben, a very smart guy, especially in science. He won a scholarship to USC, and went for a semester, commuted from Compton to USC, and this was pre-affirmative action days. He lasted only a semester. Then my two older brothers were really good football players. They both won football scholarships. One, the next oldest, went to the University of Mexico, only lasted a semester, and then the other brother who is seven years older than me went to the University of Utah, and he only lasted a semester. [laughs] They came back and they went to Compton Community College.

So when I was accepted to UCLA, out of my senior year, I had doubts about whether I should go to UCLA, because my brothers had failed out of the university for whatever reason, and my mother was also concerned that this would happen to me too; that I'd be back with my tail between my legs, and in a semester. So they were concerned. I remember there was one teacher I raised this with, and she was a terrific English teacher, and one of the really good English teachers out of some mediocre teachers that we had at Dominguez High, and said, "Look, if UCLA accepted you, they think you're going to do just fine there. Why wouldn't you go there?" That kind of gave me enough confidence. I said, "Yeah, I'm going to go there," plus, I wanted to see if I could walk on the basketball team—I was a basketball player, and UCLA was an amazing basketball school—

01-00:31:08
Holmes: Yeah they were. Still are. [laughs]

01-00:31:11
Camarillo: Yeah, they still are. So, I didn't have the money to be able to live in a dorm. My parents—my dad was a cement mason, retired by that time, my mother stayed at home with us kids, and so we didn't have much money, and there was no way I could live in the dorms. My next older brother, the one that had gone to the University of Utah, came back, went to community college, was drafted, went to the Army for two years, and then went to UCLA to finish up for, I think a year. He had to be there, a year and a half. So he's there when I am a freshman, and my mother basically says, "Well, you got to live with your brother." No fun. [laughter] So I lived with my brother and one of his friends in an apartment, and struggled initially. I was lucky to have a scholarship—when I tell people this, they think it's funny. I'll share this anecdote with you. So, you may or may not know about the Mexican American Political Association, one of the early political advocacy groups and—

01-00:32:32
Holmes: Oh yeah, MAPA.

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01-00:32:33
Camarillo: —right, MAPA, in the '50s and '60s. Well, in 1965, '66, they offer the first scholarships to Mexican Americans, at the local chapter level, that are admitted to university. So I'm one of the recipients—

01-00:32:49
Holmes: Oh wow.

01-00:32:49
Camarillo: —and they gave me a whopping $300 to go use that first year. It paid my entire tuition and fees at UCLA that first year, and I pocketed $70. Now that's a change; [laughs] that shows you what it cost at UC back then—

01-00:33:05
Holmes: That was a big change.

01-00:33:06
Camarillo: Yeah, a university education at that time was almost free, almost free. It was incredible, and a real change over time.

01-00:33:16
Holmes: Well, Reagan was the one who, under his administration, that began to change that.

01-00:33:19
Camarillo: Right, right. So, you begin to see then the steady increase of tuition and fees. But, it helped; it certainly helped financially, to attend UCLA that first year.

01-00:33:32
Holmes: I wanted to ask a little bit about your undergraduate experience there at UCLA. I believe, in reading one of the articles you wrote that when you entered UCLA, you were one of forty-four Mexican Americans that were there in 1966.

01-00:33:50
Camarillo: Right, so this is pre-affirmative action. This is pre-educational opportunity programs under the Johnson administration. So that's happening in terms of legislation in Congress, but it doesn't hit until my sophomore or junior year, that is, scholarships for historically disadvantaged students to go to the university, to college, and affirmative action to identify students of color to be admitted, or potentially to be admitted to a place like the University of California's system. So I remember reading this article in the *Daily Bruin*, sometime my first year, and it was about the ethnic makeup of the entering class. And, as I read it, I said, "Oh my God, there's only forty-two others besides my brother and I?" And this is the entire university, not just the freshman class, the entire university. There were forty-four Mexican Americans out of I think 28,000 students at that time, and looking back, as you know, you didn't have to go very far to reach a population of almost three quarters of a million Mexican people, in the metropolitan area, in Southern California, and likewise, I think there were maybe ninety African Americans,

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most of whom were probably athletes. I knew a lot of them. So UCLA was pre-affirmative action, UCLA when I went there, so it was homogeneously white. Now that was going to change within the next several years. So by the time I graduate, affirmative action is changing, beginning to change the ethnic profile, the racial profile, of the student body.

01-00:35:44
Holmes: Yeah, because I think you mentioned, by the time you graduate, there was close to 1,000.

01-00:35:49
Camarillo: Yeah, there were, I'm not sure, but I think there were about 1,000 Mexican Americans. There had to be at least that many African Americans or more, so, it was beginning to have an effect, and that meant that it was more—you could begin to see that there was some diversity there. But, when I started, there was not. I played basketball the first year at UCLA, so I got to know the black athletes, some pretty famous ones, Lew Alcindor, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, who was a year ahead of me, and I knew the black kids that way, but man, there were so few black kids my first year. It's interesting because I knew it, but I didn't think about it, because I was just trying to fit in and make it through school. But the first year was pretty tough academically.

01-00:36:43
Holmes: Yeah. Well, let's discuss that. So you made the basketball team at least?

01-00:36:51
Camarillo: I played for one year, [laughs] on the freshman squad at UCLA, yeah.

01-00:36:55
Holmes: Yeah. Well, not everybody gets to say they got to play basketball at UCLA, right?

01-00:36:58
Camarillo: Oh, that's right, every day out on the same court with Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

01-00:37:01
Holmes: Oh wow. But you were saying, by your junior year, you started really digging in more academically. Is that correct?

01-00:37:10
Camarillo: So, yes. So, through the freshman and sophomore year, I'm trying to make it, and went on academic probation the first year, because it was tough, and my study skills were not that great. Sophomore year, it got a little better. A girlfriend, who's been my wife now for forty-six years, forty-seven years, very smart, from Westside School, great study skills, so, I began to see what you have to do to perform well in the classroom, at the same time now, the intellectual light begins to go on. So by my junior year, this is when so much is changing, in terms of the university. As I mentioned, the antiwar movement's beginning to gain ground, hits full force by my senior year. More kids of color on campus, but still, but communities relatively speaking. The

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very first courses ever offered at UCLA on Mexican American history, taught by Juan Gómez-Quiñones, who became, in my junior year and my senior year, my advisor. First Mexican American Chicano history course ever offered in the UC system as far as I know, right?

01-00:38:42
Holmes: Yeah, yeah.

01-00:38:43
Camarillo: And, then, a group of real liberal white colleagues, well, faculty who I later became colleagues with, Gary Nash, and people like that who become really prominent historians, who are dealing with race relations, put together a course on racial attitudes in America. I think that was my first quarter of my senior year. And I take those courses, and I take the first African American history course, or maybe the second time it's ever offered, because Ron Takaki, interestingly, who goes to Berkeley later, of course, taught the first African American history course at UCLA, and then left. By my senior year, I took the second African American history course, and that's when all these things congeal to kind of change my intellectual agenda, as a student, and my world view.

So I'm beginning to question all the stuff that's ingrained in us as students, and as naïve young people in American society calling into question institutions in American society, the nature of racial inequality, the nature of gender and equality, the start of the women's movement. So, things being articulated about the inequality of women as well, so, it's just the start of these things. And, after I take that Chicano history class, I'm just sucked in. Man, first time I've ever had an opportunity to know something about the group from which I am a part, right?

01-00:40:32
Holmes: Yeah, talk about that a little bit, because that's what I've always wondered about that. I was fortunate enough, as a younger generation, that when I began to study history, there was a plethora of courses offered that give you that wide exposure. And if students pay attention, it changes your world view. It really adds to that. But then thinking how history was taught in the classroom, before this kind of diversification of the curriculum, of looking at these often-overlooked citizens and groups within the US society. How was that for you?

01-00:41:11
Camarillo: So it was eye opening. It really changed your world view. And for me, it allowed not only for insight and analysis and understanding, but an intellectual fire that was now lit, and it was going to propel me into becoming a really good student, because by that time, I matched the skills to be able to perform better in classes with an intellectual passion. And at that point then, I was at least as good as the best students in my classes, and getting mostly As in those history classes, and related classes that now I had a passion about. And I latched onto two faculty that became my undergraduate advisors, both

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of whom later became my graduate advisors, because I stayed on for UCLA for graduate school. Juan Gómez-Quiñones, who really is one of the pioneers—so he writes some of the early essays—trained as a Mexican historian, but a Mexican historian who is also affected by all these changes, comes from East Los Angeles, and now is writing about the Mexican American experience.

And so he's teaching the first courses and will now, by the time I'm a senior and first-year graduate student, publishing the first essays, trying to conceptualize what Mexican American history is about. So he is one of those pioneers or the early pioneers that write the initial essays which influenced us, and then we begin to expand and elaborate and fill in. So Juan became a mentor. As an undergraduate, I took other classes with him, and I remember Juan in his own interesting way, and I told him I really wanted to know more about Chicano history. He says, "Well, let's have you do some research." And I thought he was going to send me to the library. Well, at that time, they—[laughs]

01-00:43:20
Holmes: There's nothing in the library.

01-00:43:20
Camarillo: One shelf of my library here [referencing his office] you could put all the books of Mexican Americans out of a million or two copies in the main library at UCLA. So what did he do? And this was interesting, I think. I'm sure it was a technique on his part to tell me, "You've got to—for this group, build the documentary evidence. We have to go and find the sources ourselves." I told him, "I want to do something on what stimulated the GI Forum, and the Community Service Organization leaders, and the MAPA leaders in the 1940s and '50s and early '60s to advocate for change, promote civil rights, push back." He said, "All right. Let's send you into East LA. Let's go; you go interview those people." And, I don't know these people. Well, you open the door for a lot of these people, and that was a real eye opener too, because I began to see the value of what oral history was going to open up. And that was an amazing experience, because I got to meet some of these veteran organizers, like Bert Corona, and he becomes a real close friend as a result of that—we have an association for twenty-five years after that—

01-00:44:39
Holmes: Oh wow. That's great

01-00:44:40
Camarillo: And with other people, and these were people that were going to die within the next ten to fifteen years, so I'm lucky I was able to interview them. They became part of the first article I ever wrote about the GI generation, as a first-year graduate student. But it also exposed me to the research that would have to be done if you're going to recover, and in fact, build a history of Chicanos

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and Mexican Americans in a place like Los Angeles, or anywhere for that matter. So, it was a primary research, right? [laughs] Primary research.

01-00:45:17
Holmes: But what's really interesting about that is, it's primary research that's really pushing into more interdisciplinary directions, outside of just the archive, which, for many American historians, that's the first place you go. But for this as you were saying, for Chicano history, there was no archive for that. You had to build that.

01-00:45:38
Camarillo: That's exactly right. Now, we can send students to many places where there's archival material, rich archival material. Stanford has one of the most extensive archival records on the Mexican American experience. But back then, virtually nothing. Virtually nothing. So we had to scratch and look, and do the oral histories, and they are interdisciplinary, and look for other sources to start putting together narratives that would form the basis, kind of the building blocks of the field of Mexican American history by the early to mid-1970s.

01-00:46:16
Holmes: And the other mentor was Norris Hundley?

01-00:46:20
Camarillo: Yes, the other mentor was an amazing guy, Norris Hundley. He was a California historian, a Western historian, and I remember I was a senior when I met him. I took his California history class, and I got a B or B+ on the first exam. And I wanted to get an A. At that time, I knew I could get an A, and I went in to talk to him and I was trying to argue that I should have an A. [laughs] I had enough guts to do that, though I was scared, and I knocked on his door and he was such a gracious man. I came in and I told him that I really wanted to do well in this class, and that I was interested now in Mexican American history. And he was such a nice guy, he said, "Well look, if you do better on the final exam, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt." And I did, and that was the start of a relationship in which then I took other courses from him, and he was already emerging as a well-known historian.

By then, he had already taken over the editorship of the *Pacific Historical Review*, which was really an important journal, and he was editor for like thirty years. And he's a guy that I attribute being able to write well because both of my undergraduate papers, and especially in graduate school, he was just the best editor, brutal editor, but the kind of editor that would painstakingly go through every sentence, and if you could learn from that editing, all of that red ink—he used to put it in red. I used to kid him about it. My papers bled red. But man, what a way to learn how to write. So I attribute a lot of my skills to writing from Norris Hundley, because he took the time to do that, which I do with my students now, and have in the past.

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01-00:48:28
Holmes: It's a lot of time.

01-00:48:30
Camarillo: So Norris Hundley, as California historian, Western historian, interested in issues of race and ethnicity, and then Juan Gómez-Quiñones emerging as one of the first specialists in Mexican American history. There were a couple other people, but not at UCLA. Rudy Acuña, of course, is beginning the process of writing a book, the first textbook; that would be the updated version, if you will, of Carey McWilliams's book published in the 1940s. But he was at Cal State Northridge, so we had no contact with him. I didn't, until later. But, UCLA becomes—because of Juan Gómez—for historians, *the* place by the mid-1970s, when Chicano history is really going to take its nascent stage of development, importantly, and where the very small cohort of us would develop our skills as historians.

01-00:49:38
Holmes: Well I wanted to talk about your time in graduate school there at UCLA. But before we do, I wanted to go back, as you were just hitting on, and discuss the state of this nascent field, the state of Chicano studies. By the time you're looking to go into graduate school, by 1970, Juan Gómez, very much an early pioneer, in his articles, he mentions those who even came before him, such as Ernesto Galarza, George Sánchez, Carey McWilliams. How inspirational were these works, to your studies?

01-00:50:16
Camarillo: So we came to realize, as we looked at the thin nature of the secondary literature, that Galarza, who I got to meet in the latter stages of his life, which was quite a treat for me; Julian Samora, who was a sociologist, but wrote this historical sociology—you had Paul S. Taylor, who I got to meet as a graduate student at Berkeley, who wrote this amazing, multivolume study of Mexican workers, and then you had George I. Sánchez, who was writing about New Mexicans, and some about Texas. So there was a small cohort of these writers—these are truly the pioneers. And so, we read those. We read those closely, because we knew how important they were. It still gave you a very sketchy understanding of what the Mexican American experience was about, but they were foundational for us.

And I think, I certainly began to appreciate, by the time I was doing research as a graduate student, and especially when we get to the dissertation stage, we really appreciated the work that these people did, in isolation. It was total isolation for them, as the first people, just a handful of people in the United States, that had made it to the level of PhDs and were writing this stuff. That's when I think we really had a sincere appreciation for one, the difficulty that they went through to make it to higher education, because my generation was the first cohort. They were isolated individuals, and my generation was the first small cohort of people now to matriculate, the first to go to college as a cohort, the first few to go to graduate school, and then train as faculty.

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So, yeah, those pioneers, and I got to meet—the only person I didn't meet was Carey McWilliams, because he, I forget when he passed away [1980], but, I didn't meet Sánchez. I didn't meet Sánchez but I met Taylor, and I met Samora and got to know Samora, and got to know Galarza really well. And so that, for me, was bringing the personal to the academic, and seeing these men in their latter stages—about my age right now—and appreciating who they were, and how special they were.

01-00:52:56
Holmes: At the same time as you are building on the shoulders of these very early pioneers, even by the time you're starting to look into graduate school, what was called then Mexican American history, really begins to kind of take shape, like in 1967, especially in the field with journals. So you have *El Grito*, which is published out of Berkeley, and then both in 1970, you have *Aztlán: the Chicano Journal of Social Sciences and the Arts*, which is based out of UCLA, and then the *Journal of Mexican American History*, out of Santa Barbara. Maybe discuss your recollection of these new journals. As you were saying, by the time you're a junior or senior, you're blown away, your world view is now opening, but now you also have journals that are especially dedicated in the academic context to studying this new kind of field of history.

01-00:54:03
Camarillo: That was an important development, as you know, that they were dedicated to an emerging Chicano studies and they were multidisciplinary. They were multidisciplinary journals. The *Journal of Mexican American History* was much more focused, and didn't have a long publication record, but it was specifically history. The other two, *El Grito* and *Aztlán*, were multidisciplinary. There were two important things about these journals: they gave us the publication avenue, and we read them cover to cover, because the early essays were exploring things that we didn't know about, or were expanding on things that we knew something about. So, both of those things together were really important, because now, there was an avenue. In fact, my first two essays were published in *Aztlán*, and in one of the very early journals, because I was one of the graduate students at the time at the Chicano studies Research Center which started the *Aztlán* publications unit. And so I was embedded in that development at UCLA to see *Aztlán* develop. I published the first edited book with a friend of mine [Pedro Castillo] as first-year graduate students.

So, it gave us a vehicle. It gave us enormous pride too, because I was very closes to *Aztlán* and its staff. We were so proud that we now, collectively, had an avenue that was ours. It's also at a time when you submit something—I learned this later—you submit something on Chicanos in one of the mainstream journals and the response typically was: "Chicanos? There's no study of Chicanos." So there was still that reaction in academia, and we saw it early on in the conferences we attended as graduate students and as young faculty—there was pushback. You know, "Yeah, maybe Western history, or

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immigrant groups in the West, but what's this Chicano history stuff?" So, it was a source of enormous pride, and activism for us, and now we are saying we can get people to publish this stuff, and it's changing the way we're thinking and writing about the Mexican experience in the United States. So, it was hugely important, hugely important for a lot of us.

01-00:56:36
Holmes: You were mentioning how this young field is developing, and that it's not immediately accepted by the larger academic community, or at least, there's eyebrows raised, these kind of things. But then by 1973, of course, Norris Hundley, as editor, does an entire special issue of the *Pacific Historical Review* on this new subfield.

01-00:57:02
Camarillo: Right. That was hugely important because now, it gives credibility to this emergent field, in the infancy of this field of study, because there are enough people that Norris could go to and solicit article manuscripts. He could put a special journal together, a special thematic journal of a hugely, widely respected journal, the *Pacific Historical Review*, and have it focus on Chicanos. But Norris was a risk taker, and he was ahead of the wave. It was the first time this had happened anywhere in the country in any journal, and later by the mid and late 1970s, then you have other journals following that lead. But, he was way out in front, and it showed both his interest and his realization that something was happening with the study of this particular ethnic group that was serious. And so, that not only gave greater, I think, importance to the field, but sets the basis for then a historiographic assessment, because people will turn to that special issue and say, "Well, here's some of the early articles that plot the development of the field, thematic topical articles, and others." But it gave recognition, I think, most importantly, to this is a field of study that's worth paying attention to, and it's emerging.

So, that was important, of course, and again, he was my advisor and he was trying to get me to get one of my seminar papers published in that. [laughs] I couldn't do it. I was too immersed in trying to get other papers finished, but yeah, that was the nature of his mentoring too. He wanted to show you the ropes. He's the first one that told me, "You need to go to the Pacific Coast Branch American Historical Association meetings," and they were first conferences I attended, right?

01-00:59:18
Holmes: Yeah. Those are great conferences. I mean, they're usually always here in the region.

01-00:59:21
Camarillo: Well that's how I met Paul Taylor. He gave maybe one of his final papers, about Mexican labor in the United States, so I met him there. And so, it was academic mentoring and exposure that both he and Juan—because Juan would

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also suggest that I go. It was Juan Gómez-Quiñones that promoted our first sessions at the Western History Association meetings, and let me tell you, that was a very different organization when we first went to those conferences, and the pushback there was particularly evident.

01-01:00:03
Holmes: I wanted to talk a bit about that. If we look at the WHA, it's often stereotyped as white men in flannel shirts wearing cowboy hats, studying the frontier, and sometimes that stereotype can fit, depending where you're at. Sometimes you look at it as like, no, that's not what I see either. It depends, and it has obviously changed over time. But you have Norris supporting the study of Mexican Americans and Chicano history. Ray Billington, who was also the cofounder of the WHA, I think, among others, very supportive in trying to promote Western history to expand and actually look at the diverse population within the West. But then as you just mentioned, your first WHA experience, there was pushback. Can you discuss this a little bit.

01-01:01:14
Camarillo: Sure. So you're right; you have to pay tribute to people like Billington too. Here's a guy that, one of the premier older Western historians, in effect, kind of carves out the study of the West, and he's at the Huntington Library; he's a senior fellow. I meet him when I'm a graduate student, because I'm doing work there, and he seeks me out because he knows I'm working with Norris Hundley, right? And, he's a gracious, older man. I knew who he was, of course; I'd read a couple of his books, and he reached out, and he was supportive, and it turns out, in a few years later, he and I co-write two essays that are published together out of the Clark Library at UCLA, right? So there were people like Billington and Hundley, one substantially older than the other, because Hundley is part of the, you're right, the "new" Western history, and Ray was part of the "old" Western history, but he realized that there was real merit to studying this group [Chicanos] in the West.

But they were the exceptions to the rule, because I have to tell you, the first Western History Association meeting that we went to, I was astounded that people dressed up as Indians and cowboys. I mean, there were still the amateurs, and I don't know, maybe it was the night they partied or something, but some were dressing up as Indians and cowboys. And here I was, this young Chicano graduate student, kind of a militant, young historian, and kind of cocky too. We were kind of cocky at that time. We knew we were onto something, and we were proud about this stuff, and seeing them dress up, I said, "What the hell is this group about?"

And I remember the second meeting we went to. We had a session, I was a commentator, and we were all graduate students; there were no faculty on the conference program. We were all graduate students, in our first, second, third year, maybe fourth year, and a small cohort of us, all aligned with UCLA in one way or another, either from Texas (UT Austin), or UCLA, and we went to

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this one session, and it was about labor history. And I remember this one white woman. This elderly white woman came up to me, and I don't know why she came up to me, but she said, "You sure are an angry group. Why are you so angry?" And I wanted to be cordial [laughs], and I just let it kind of fly over, but from her perspective, because she'd probably gone to all these sessions over the years, and now you've got this rebel-rousing group of young Chicanos that are telling them something they don't want to hear about Western history: racism, inequality, oppression, all this stuff, and we were hitting hard those themes at that time. It was resistance. It was labor agitation. This was before we had a really more nuanced historical narratives that we were in the process of developing. But for some people, yeah, that was probably really hard to swallow to see a lot of these—well, not a lot—but a small group of young Chicanos, and, few Native Americans, very few African Americans were going to these conferences at all.

The Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association was now, by the late 1970s, the place where the Chicano historians were going to present their material, because we kind of pulled back from the Western History Association—it was not fun to go to those meetings. So, we started to use the vehicle of the Pacific Coast Branch of the AHA as the place where we would assemble and present our papers and engage. And to this day, it is a very important forum for Latino scholars. But to give kudos to the WHA, it's changed significantly. It's not like it used to be. It is a place now where you can have a diverse collection of scholars, including Mexican American historians that routinely present papers there. But back in the day, it was different. [laughs] We saw, as graduate students, kind of the end of the origins of the WHA as a quasi-amateur organization. It still has some elements of the amateur historians but not as prominent as we saw as twenty-two- and twenty-three-year-olds. We thought it was pretty funny, too. [laughs]

01-01:06:20
Holmes: We still laugh about that today. [laughs] Well, you were talking about this cohort of young Chicano scholars, a bit militant, obviously knowing that you're very much onto a field that's going to grow, and it's wide open. At this same time, you have the Chicano Movement really gaining steam, hitting the issues of civil rights, social justice, antiwar in a racial context, if we look at the Chicano Moratorium in 1970. And also labor with the Farm Workers Movement, which includes all of these themes—Chavez was very, very good at that. How did you see these kind of facets of social activism beginning to influence and dovetail with the field of Chicano history?

01-01:07:18
Camarillo: So, that side of the story is really a fascinating one, because you couldn't have one without the other. You had to have a social movement, tied to civil rights, tied to an ethnic identity, a renaissance if you will, one that was going to be critical of the status of Mexicans in American society, of race in American society. You had a political movement, the Chicano Movement, which was

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brewing, beginning to show its face on college campuses, and erupting in a lot of places, particularly in a place like Los Angeles. So, as a junior, the East LA High School walkouts, the "blowouts," and I remember saying—and this is just at the time that I'm starting to take these courses— "Man, look what's happened on the Eastside with these kids, and what are they talking about? They want more Chicano teachers, and Ethnic studies, and better-quality education. Well, this is the stuff that now we're reading about and we're seeing it explode in high schools."

The militancy that's exhibited by Brown Berets and others, the push for reform, the reform nature of that movement as well as the ethnic identity part of the movement that was going to be the other leg, if you will, of a three-legged stool. So a social movement, which is going to be eye opening, it's going to give you a sense of who you are, and pride in being an ethnic person, a Chicano. It's going to open your eyes in profound ways. The other leg for those of us in a university: the curriculum that's just beginning to be developed, exposing us, and now giving us a passion that we can latch onto as students, making us better students. And then, that third leg, and that third leg is the United Farm Workers movement, because yes, it's a labor union movement, but it's far more than that, because what does it do? It's a rural movement of farm workers, but it doesn't take long before that reaches out, and it gives us a sense of yet another source of inequality. And for those of us that were urban/suburban Chicanos—I'd never worked in the fields. The kids from UCLA, they were Chicano mostly from East LA, there were some of us from the metro area, but we weren't farm workers.

Man, did that hit home in a way. Look at the poorest of the poor, the underdogs, and look what they're doing. So it converges at the same time to instill a sense of, my goodness, these people are pushing back. Chavez and Huerta and the others, they're leading a movement that for us, was bigger than a farm movement. This was a social justice movement. We didn't call it that; we called it, "This is the Chicano Movement. This is the rural side of the Chicano Movement which needs an urban base." So, here I am, nineteen/twenty-year-old, and never having any association with farm work or rural California. My mother did; for a while her family were migrant farm workers in the Central Valley and she told us horrible stories about what happened there. And here I was going to Safeway, picketing to try to inform white folks they shouldn't buy grapes, and I did that for a long time. And so it politicized me at the same time that I was now latching on intellectually to some of these things, and, an antiwar movement that would politicize us further.

I started out at UCLA as an NROTC student. I was going to fly jets. I wanted to be a commercial airline pilot, and the avenue to do that was to be either an Air Force or a Navy pilot. Well, of course, in 1966, the war in Vietnam hadn't blown up to what it would be in 1968, and so, [laughs] I had to figure out a way how to worm my way out of NROTC as I became an antiwar activist. And I did, luckily, otherwise I probably would have been bombing villages in

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North Vietnam. But all of those things together, for those of us that are in college at this time, the Chicano Movement, the Chicano student movement, it's in high schools now coming to campuses in their early forms: United Mexican American Students, later, by '68, becoming MEChA, a more unified—Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán—organization that now becomes the name of almost all Chicano organizations, student organizations on various campuses. That was an important development as well.

So all those things together created, as I look back, quite an amazing environment that would shape us in so many ways. It would shape us politically, socially, a consciousness-raising phenomena, and for so many of us, a career path. Some of us went to law school. Some of us went to higher ed. Some people just went into teaching, not just, but into K–12 teaching. Other people went into community organizing. So, it shaped my generation in ways that had never before happened in American society.

01-01:13:11
Holmes: Well I wanted to talk about that. So here you are as politicized student; the Chicano Movement is affecting your generation in these profound ways as you were just discussing, and then you decide to go to graduate school. And you were one of the first Chicano graduate students at UCLA, is that correct? Talk about that.

01-01:13:34
Camarillo: Yes. So there were just a few people there at the time that I entered graduate school in 1970. So, it turns out, as I talk with colleagues later, I'm the first US historian trained as a Chicano historian, historian of the Mexican American experience, in the US field, in US history, because the others had been trained, like Gómez-Quiñones and Rudy Acuña, they had all been trained as Mexicanists. They were Latin Americanists. So I'm the first one to get a PhD as a Mexican American historian, as a Chicano historian, trained by a specialist, an emerging specialist, in Mexican American history. That's 1975 and I'm the first, right? I look back and I say that's ridiculous that it was not until '75, but, I am proud to be the first.

So there were a few of us; not all of them worked with Juan Gómez-Quiñones. So, you had someone like Ricardo Romo, and he wrote the first book on East LA. But he didn't work with Gómez-Quiñones, and I knew him, but I didn't know him real well, because he wasn't in our seminars, and he wasn't in Norris Hundley's seminars on the West. Francisco Balderrama was, I think, a year after me. He ended up working with Norris Hundley, and some with Juan Gómez, and he wrote a book on repatriation. There was Oscar Martinez, but a Mexicanist, so he was working with, I think Wilkie and one of the other Mexicanists or Latin Americanists. I knew him, but not as a Chicano historian, although later, he too, as a Latin Americanist, moves into Mexican American history.

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Richard Griswold del Castillo wrote a dissertation and book on Los Angeles in the nineteenth century, but we didn't know him at all. He was not part of that cohort. Later, he becomes a colleague that we know, but he was really not a graduate student at that time in our group. And there's another person, Devra Weber, who starts out with me in 1970 as a graduate student, and I know her because she's in Norris Hundley's seminars, and she's working with Juan. They'd known each other earlier, when in earlier days she was a photographer of the Chicano Movement. And then, she leaves graduate school for about a decade before she comes back, and she then wrote a book on, as you know, on the great cotton strike of—

01-01:16:13
Holmes: In the 1930s, yeah.

01-01:16:14
Camarillo: —right, the 1930s. So that was the core, but by the time I was a third-year student—maybe it was second year. So just to give you some chronology: I went directly to graduate school because by the end of my junior year, Juan Gómez and Norris Hundley were suggesting to me, certainly by the beginning of my senior year, "We think you should consider graduate school." Graduate school? And what's that? [laughs] And so I begin to inquire with some graduate students, teaching assistants, and talking more with them, and I think about applying. And, by my senior year, I know that's what I want to do. I want to be a professor and I want to write about Mexican American history, because I already had a sense about the new field. By that time, I knew that we were on the ground floor, because I had been exposed to some of the literature, I knew there wasn't much, and the stuff that I was already writing in senior papers, I knew that I could expand, and I was excited about it.

So, I decide to apply to Harvard. Again, the cockiness, totally naïve. Harvard, in Chicano history? Rejected. I apply to Stanford, and I visit. I knew that I was going to apply to UCLA. They didn't tell me, Juan and Norris didn't tell me, "You really should stay here, because this is the place where you're going to get the training," and I knew that, but I wanted to see. So, I share this anecdote, I visit Stanford. I apply, and I visit Stanford, and I make an appointment to see the chair of the department who is one of the senior US historians; his name's George Knowles. And he's about ready to retire, and I talk to him, "I want to come here and do Chicano history." Well first of all, he doesn't really know what it is. He said, "Well, you can come here and you could do slavery with Carl Degler." Well no, I didn't want to be a nineteenth century historian [laughs] of slavery. Yeah, I'm interested in it, but—and he said, "Well, you can't do that here. You should just stay at UCLA." I was really pissed, that this guy, this old white guy, could tell me I shouldn't come here. So, I don't remember but I didn't follow through with the application, but I was told that, in no uncertain terms, I shouldn't come here.

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So, clearly I was going to stay at UCLA and was admitted. Gary Nash wrote for me, and Norris Hundley and Juan, of course, and so, I was admitted to UCLA. And, obviously, I knew at the time, but I tested the waters, and knew that UCLA was the place. The transition would be easy, but way harder than I thought, to move from an undergraduate to a graduate level, and the expectations of what you're supposed to do as a graduate student. But, it was absolutely the right decision to stay there, because I continued to work with Norris and with Juan.

01-01:19:29
Holmes: You've said that UCLA certainly was the center, it was the place to be as a young Chicano scholar. Can you discuss a bit of your experience there in graduate school?

01-01:19:42
Camarillo: So, the first year of graduate school is interesting, because now there's a handful of Chicano graduate students, my same cohort, all starting programs. There are probably fifteen or twenty of us, out of the [laughs] huge graduate population of what, 15,000 at UCLA or something like that? But we organize. We organize the first Chicano graduate student association there. And there are some people that later I know as colleagues that go into sociology, and several of them were in education, a couple of us in history, and a scattering of other people, some political scientists, and so we had an identity as a group. It wasn't a real solid group, but, we start reaching out. So by my first and second years, the National Association for Chicano studies gets started when I'm a graduate student. And there are some colleagues, some graduate students at Irvine—Carlos Muñoz is one of them, who is later hired in Ethnic studies at Berkeley—and they are now putting together with us the basic foundation of this national organization. At the time, we called it the National Association of Chicano—let's see—National Chicano Association for the Social Sciences, something like that, before it becomes the National Association for Chicana/Chicano studies [NACCS].

So I go to the very first meetings and we decided that we were going to have annual meetings, which become really a fun place, because all of us, for the first time ever, from different states, as graduate students, and some faculty, from different disciplines come together one time a year for intellectual collaboration and fun. So, it's this *Chicanada*; it's this group of Chicano students, graduate students, and faculty. It's the start of Chicano studies, the inteligencia, if you will.

But the interesting thing that helped shaped some of my interdisciplinary interests in Chicano studies was this early Chicano studies organization. We decided to form small clusters of graduate students and faculty that would meet routinely throughout the year, to share our work. So, this is where I get now the influences of sociology, of political economy, from this group of students. By the way, they were all men. There were no women in this group.

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So this was all men, and only later does that change, thank goodness. But it begins to shape our influences of and appreciation for interdisciplinary study, because in a sense, we couldn't do strictly disciplinary study, because Chicano studies, Chicano history, or Chicano sociology—the disciplines were too shallow. There wasn't enough literature there, so we always had to borrow to help get some material, the resources as well as our perspectives. A lot of theoretical stuff was happening at that time, which was interesting stuff, which some of us used and some of us rejected Marxian analysis, the internal colonial model, all those things were vibrant ideas that we discussed and debated, and took sides on.

So it added yet another level of intellectual exchange, and importantly, the camaraderie, because we knew we were in it all together as the early people involved in the formation of this thing we were already calling Chicano studies. And so those were the building blocks of the intellectual group, the camaraderie, and the intellectual foundations of this emerging, still nascent field of Chicano/Chicana studies. And only later do we add the *a* to make it Chicana studies. But that's in the formation as well, right?

01-01:24:18
Holmes: Yeah. Sure. I wanted to also—

01-01:24:23
Camarillo: By the way, there was a militancy to this. We took the name Foco, and you know where that comes from? The Cuban Revolution, meeting groups that talked about revolutionary stuff. So, [laughs] we weren't really revolutionary. In a way, revolutionary in terms of the intellectual discourse, and what we were doing, but not politically revolutionary, per se. But yeah, we adapted; we were the Focos. I was part of the Southern California Foco in 1970, '71.

01-01:25:00
Holmes: Oh wow, and—

01-01:25:00
Camarillo: And it lasted for several years.

01-01:25:02
Holmes: Well, and they still use the Focos, right?

01-01:25:04
Camarillo: Yeah, as far as I know, they do.

01-01:25:04
Holmes: With NACCS.

01-01:25:05
Camarillo: Right, yeah as far as I know, they do.

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01-01:25:07
Holmes: Yeah. So here we have UCLA as a very significant hub for Chicano scholars, and then you guys were organizing as well, building those kind of networks, intellectual networks, across disciplines. In addition to that, you had the UCLA's Chicano studies Research Center, and I think this was founded in 1969 when you were an undergraduate.

01-01:25:36
Camarillo: Yes, it was actually founded, but the building blocks of it started my first year of graduate school.

01-01:25:42
Holmes: Oh, really? Talk about that.

01-01:25:42
Camarillo: So I was there, working with Juan, and Rey Macias, and Teresa McKenna, who were the first co-editors with Juan of *Aztlán*. So, I was there early on in the formation of both *Aztlán* and the center, as a graduate student, and it gave us a sense, an anchor. It was an anchor for those of us that were now in the thrust of our graduate studies; we had a place, and it was Campbell Hall, the one place where all the [laughs] minorities are. African American studies, Native American studies, Chicano studies, we were all right there in the same building. So, it seemed like we had a presence, and we did, we did. It was an important institutional development to, in a sense, give us legitimacy as young scholars.

Oh, by the way, the chronology which I was going to mention. I go to graduate school that first year, and I'm kind of burned out after the first year. And so I need a little bit of a break, and I was going to go teach, and I applied to some community colleges. I wanted to see if teaching really was what I wanted to do, because the first year as a graduate student, I wasn't TA'ing. I wasn't a teaching assistant, so I hadn't taught. And so, I was applying to places. My girlfriend goes to Berkeley Graduate School in the School of Social Work [Social Welfare] there, and so I was thinking of going to Berkeley. But then this job opens up. Pedro Castillo, who was in graduate school at UC Santa Barbara, and [had been teaching Chicano history there (turns out he becomes a lifelong friend), decides to take a leave of absence to finish his studies. There was no one at UCSB to take his place, though] there was a guy like Juan Gomez-Quiñones, Jesus Chavarria, who was a Mexican historian who was now dabbling and starting to write a few things about Mexican Americans.

But Pedro [Castillo] decides, and I think he's in his second or third year, he wants to come to UCLA to work with Juan, to get more training in Chicano history, and they need someone to teach in his place for one year. So, Juan says, "Let's have you go to Santa Barbara, fill in for Pedro [Castillo] and teach those courses." That was really important for me, because that was the first time that I actually was a lecturer. I taught three courses in Chicano history,

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and for me, it solidified, that's what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a teacher. And importantly, it exposed me to the history of another community which Norris suggested and said, "Well, while you're there, why don't you look into the kinds of research materials that might help you think about a dissertation project," because he was already ahead of me. And in fact, that's what I did.

01-01:28:42
Holmes: Good mentors usually are, right?

01-01:28:44
Camarillo: That's exactly right, he was a great mentor, and Juan said, "Yeah, why don't you see what Santa Barbara holds for research"—and of course, two years later, the Santa Barbara Mexican American community becomes the focus of my dissertation, because I started to look into the mission archives, the historical archives of the history museum society, and a whole bunch of other things. And so, they were right; it exposed me. But that was a crucial year for me because it concretized for me that I wanted to be a teacher, an educator, and it got me further into beginning to see where I could take my research for a dissertation. Then I came back to UCLA the next year, and was in the throes of all the courses with a number of people, Gary Nash, another mentor, Juan, and Norris Hundley and others.

01-01:29:42
Holmes: Was that before—because I think Gary Nash goes to the University of New Mexico eventually, is that correct?

01-01:29:50
Camarillo: No, you're thinking—

01-01:29:50
Holmes: Gerald Nash, that's who I'm thinking of.

01-01:29:52
Camarillo: Yeah, right. And David Weber is someone who is a colleague of Juan Gómez, who was at San Diego State before he went to UCLA, and I forget exactly what the chronology was. I think during his graduate school years, he taught for a while at San Diego State. Weber was another person Juan connected me with, who started out as a Mexican historian, a Latin Americanist, but who starts writing about Mexicans in the American Southwest during the Mexican period, and becomes a dear friend and colleague for many, many years. But again, a white scholar that is now moving his research into the borderlands, as one of the early borderlands historians.

01-01:30:39
Holmes: Yeah, yeah. I had the privilege of meeting David, I think my first year of graduate school.

01-01:30:44
Camarillo: Did you?

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01-01:30:44
Holmes: Yeah.

01-01:30:44
Camarillo: Yeah, a great guy, great guy—

01-01:30:46
Holmes: An amazing scholar.

01-01:30:46
Camarillo: —and he became a dear friend, and colleague for a long time.

01-01:30:51
Holmes: I wanted to ask a quick question, and still in regards to the Chicano studies Research Center. So you have *Aztlán*, the journal that's published and edited out of there. What were the other programs, or seminars, or activity that the center was also involved in?

01-01:31:12
Camarillo: So, Juan became the director, the initial director, for a couple of years, and then they brought in a guy from Yale, Rudy Alvarez, a sociologist. Didn't last long as director. But, as the focal point of intellectual inquiry and activities for Chicano studies, forums, visitors, conferences, of the type that we have never been exposed to before, and bringing some amazing people. So I remember meeting Américo Paredes, the great folklorist from Texas. And Juan was really instrumental in creating that California-Texas axes in Chicano history and Chicano studies. When I'm—I think it's my third year, he takes a fellowship and goes to UT Austin. And there, with Paredes, there's a handful of Chicano historians that are like me, now, the early cohort, but at the University of Texas at Austin, who are now studying Mexican American history, and folklore and other things under Paredes. And Juan binds those two groups together.

So now, when we go to conferences, we know all these people. Juan brought them to UCLA and for me, for example, he invites me out that year so I can meet these people. They're all guys. They're all men, and they become lifelong colleagues and friends of mine. And so in a sense, it was the first time ever that there had been a connection between those doing Chicano history and Chicano studies in Texas, and California, and the early meetings of the National Association of Chicano studies, this is when we'd kind of reunite with them, and so we knew now the Texas-California axis. There weren't many people in New Mexico at this time doing this work, but certainly, in those two states with the largest Chicano populations. So that was yet another development in the Chicano history evolution as well as Chicano studies.

01-01:33:39
Holmes: Well, and that axis—we very much see that still today.

01-01:33:44
Camarillo: Oh, still, yes very much so.

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01-01:33:45
Holmes: Very vibrant today.

01-01:33:46
Camarillo: You know, it was funny too, because it was my first glimpse, as a Chicano from Southern California, from LA, from Compton, I didn't know much about the Chicanos from [laughs] Texas, and, it was always kind of fun, a teasing among us: they would say "Oh man, you guys aren't Chicano in California. You guys speak more English than Spanish." "You know, we're real Méxicanos in Texas because we speak Spanish"—

01-01:34:12
Holmes: The Tejanos, yeah, yeah.

01-01:34:13
Camarillo: They're Tejanos, right? And so, and then we'd start comparing and contrasting our experiences, and we saw the fundamental historical connections between the Mexican experience as it played out in California and Texas. So intellectually, it allows us to see, these are phenomena that go across sub-region; they are regional phenomena; they are part of what defines the Mexican American experience in the United States.

01-01:34:49
Holmes: Yeah. I wanted to talk a little bit about your early scholarship, before we end our first session. And, Chicano history in this early period, it's very much interdisciplinary, and it's, from my understanding, very focused on recovering the past. Recovery is a very crucial aspect, it seems, at least from my interpretation of, as we were just talking about, even in your earlier work, research work. It's not just, "Read this." It's, you need to go out and do oral histories; you have to create the archive and the kind of record of sources. I wanted to ask you about your first—one of your first—research papers that you called "The Chicano Frontier," and I think this was from Norris Hundley's American West class in 1970.

01-01:35:41
Camarillo: Yes, exactly. When I saw that in your outline, I said, "Gee, I'd forgotten about this." Norris challenged us in a seminar. It was called "The New Frontiers of Western History," and Francisco Balderrama and I were in that seminar; I think it was a two-part seminar. And he challenged us to come up with new ways of thinking about the West, and of course, at that time, I already knew that this is what I was going to write about in a dissertation, so I proposed to him, there's a "Chicano frontier." And what I really meant is that, this experience had been long neglected, ignored, not incorporated into the writing of the West, and so if you think about a frontier, not in the Ray Allen Billington, or the frontier thesis historiography, but breaking new ground in the field. And so that's what it was really about: new ways to think about including the Mexican American experience in writing of the West? I didn't publish that per se, but it was kind of a, as you know, it was a historiographic

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piece, and it challenged us to think about research questions. But it clearly was a springboard for thinking about what I was going to do down the road.

But it was also at the same time that I was publishing two papers out of my other seminars the first year. One was on that GI generation, which I started as an undergraduate, and then kind of continued to do research on that in the first year of graduate school, and write a little piece. It was more a research note, because it wasn't a full-on study. I think I'd interviewed eight or nine people and, I would have liked to have interviewed twenty or thirty, but as you know, it's so time consuming.

01-01:37:38
Holmes: It is.

01-01:37:38
Camarillo: So I wrote a piece about what I thought motivated these, they were all men, in the organizations of the postwar era, the 1950s and '60s: GI Forum, LULAC as it comes to Southern California, MAPA, and the Community Service Organization. All people that were involved in labor, and they were all tied to labor community development, advocacy, and civil rights. And I learned a lot from doing that and putting that paper together to understand what—because at that time, we (the young Chicano students) were also critiquing that generation. These were a bunch of *vendidos*; these guys were sellouts. They called themselves Mexican Americans, or Americans of Mexican descent. And so, we had a chip on our shoulder at that time too, and we were the young Chicanos. And we were militants; [laughs] we were the vanguard. But that kind of research allowed me a deep appreciation for what that generation went through, and I think, for me, it really allowed me to see, in a much more historical way, the work of that generation and the odds that they faced in trying to build those organizations and advocate for change. So my militancy level and critique of the GI generation really melted away because I had far greater respect for these people.

By the way, this is when I hear, for the first time, from those interviews, the names of Luisa Moreno and Josefina Fierro. Bert Corona opened the doors for me to meet these two women, and interview them. These were phenomenal people who went back even further than people that Bert Corona—they went back to the early 1930s. I am working now with my very first graduate student, Vicki Ruiz, to write a biography about Luisa Moreno.

01-01:39:53
Holmes: Yeah.

01-01:39:56
Camarillo: So, that was one of the early papers, and then the other paper I wrote in a course on urban studies as part of a "new" urban history at this time. And so, I proposed to the faculty member at that time (his name was Clyde Griffin, who was visiting UCLA, and one of the new urban historians) that I wanted to do,

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interestingly and not surprisingly, a study of where I grew up, the barrio of Compton. And so it was the Compton barrio piece that I wrote in *Aztlán*, in one of the early volumes, I think it maybe was the second or third volume of the *Aztlán*'s journal.

01-01:40:35
Holmes: Yeah, it was in 1971.

01-01:40:36
Camarillo: Yeah, right. So that really prompted me to want to publish more, because I loved it, [laughs] and graduate students didn't publish papers back then. So, we knew that we were doing something that was laying foundations. And then the next year, with Pedro Castillo, the person I replaced teaching at UCSB—we became good friends then—we wrote a book. So, you mentioned, yes, it's recovery, it's conceptualizing the nature of the field, and, it's pushing back. So you think about some of the themes: labor agitation, labor conflict, resistance becomes a big theme. We young historians were saying, "We were there. We were pushing back all the time. We weren't passive recipients of history; we were shaping our own destiny." So it was not surprising that the book that Pedro and I decided to pull together, a collection of essays, were about the Chicano bandits of the nineteenth century, based upon the idea, the theory of social banditry. So, we take the people that are the maligned bandits, right?

01-01:42:01
Holmes: And that's from Hobsbawm, the theory, right?

01-01:42:02
Camarillo: Yeah, Eric Hobsbawm's work on social banditry, and we apply it to Chicano history. So, the robber, the bandit Murrieta, right? No, he was a social bandit, right? And then we looked at somebody, Tiburcio Vásquez, the last Mexican American hanged for his crimes in San Jose in the late 1870s. He was a social bandit, look what he tried to do. So, it was that kind of revisionistic work that we were also pushing back on, and I remember, when I was reading some of this Western history stuff that, it was a Rodman Paul, I think, an essay that said, "You know, Mexican Americans really have no nineteenth-century history to speak of," and I was appalled. And so we were also reaching back to the nineteenth century at that time and said, "Wait a minute. The things that happened there had profound impact later." Social banditry was one of them. So, we were trying to do revisionistic history, the recovery, the reinterpretation and conceptualization all at one time, which made it very exciting, but very difficult.

01-01:43:07
Holmes: Yeah, yeah. Well, at the same time, even just looking at the interdisciplinary research that you used in that kind of effort—I'm thinking of "Chicano Urban History in Compton." In looking through that, it's a true social history, a community reconstruction. What did you use—

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01-01:43:44
Camarillo: The city directories, the census, to doing block-by-block stuff, and the oral histories that were a part of it. Yeah, that all formed a part of it. It had to be interdisciplinary to be able to tell that story.

01-01:43:57
Holmes: And dare I say, as a historian, you used numbers, right? I mean—

01-01:44:03
Camarillo: Oh my goodness, yeah. [laughter]

01-01:44:04
Holmes: That's a quantitative analysis.

01-01:44:06
Camarillo: Well, that was big at the time, and it fizzled over time, but it was a method that helped us to think about doing the demographics and understanding how residential segregation formed, and how it formed, and when it formed, right?

01-01:44:18
Holmes: Yeah, looking at that kind of community formation and migration. And at the same time, if we look at some of the works that are kind of beginning to come out now, during the 1970s, there's a lot of focus on labor; because of the farm workers movement, there's a lot of focus on farm labor, in some respects.

01-01:44:38
Camarillo: Absolutely. It becomes one of the pillars of Chicano historiography.

01-01:44:43
Holmes: Yeah. And yet, here again at the same time, you're pushing towards urban, arguing that actually, post-World War II, Chicano history really is about the urban experience.

01-01:44:54
Camarillo: Right. So, many of us are really focusing on the urban, because it made sense; that's where the vast majority of Mexican origin people had lived through much of the twentieth century, and certainly post World War II was an urban, overwhelmingly an urban phenomena. We get pushback later on that we've overemphasized the urban, and I'm the first to admit, yeah, absolutely, and we see later then people that are now looking more at the agricultural localities. The farm workers movement prompts a lot of that, so that there's now more attention to the development of rural agricultural communities. But yeah, we were focusing, a lot of us focusing early on, if we weren't doing labor history per se, we were doing community studies and they were urban community studies. There was another group though that was doing the labor history that was getting into agriculture, going back to the early strikes of the 1930s in particular. So, the early labor history writing was linked to the rural, and was obviously influenced by the United Farm Workers Movement.

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01-01:46:10
Holmes: Well I'd like to talk a little bit about your dissertation, which becomes, well, not really your first book, I guess first monograph. Is that fair to say?

01-01:46:18
Camarillo: First monograph, that's right, that's right.

01-01:46:21
Holmes: Because you did, you edited the collection of five essays on banditry with Pedro Castillo, which, I believe that is the first kind of bound book.

01-01:46:31
Camarillo: I think it was the first or second book published by *Aztlán*.

01-01:46:37
Holmes: Yeah, yeah. And, in your dissertation, as you were just discussing a while ago, you focus on Santa Barbara, which is also tracing from the nineteenth century into the twentieth century, so you're covering both. You're also challenging back, pushing back. You say, "No, there is a nineteenth century history, and Santa Barbara's important, a very important hub of Mexican American labor."

01-01:47:05
Camarillo: And I didn't know that until I spent that year there and looked a little further into the sources and realized that it was the second largest Mexican community in the state of California in the nineteenth century, and, persisted as a community through much of that nineteenth century as Santa Barbara becomes American. A couple of people had already been working on Los Angeles, so I didn't want to do Los Angeles. [Ricardo] Romo was working on Los Angeles and Pedro Castillo was working Los Angeles, and so was [Richard] Griswold del Castillo. So, Los Angeles had three historians, and so I said, "Oh, let's stay away from LA. "

So Santa Barbara, because of its demographics, and because it was the most important Mexican American political community in the state of California during the nineteenth century, it held onto the reins of political power longer because of some of the *Californios* that were embedded in that society, and demographically, it was a community that changed much more slowly than Los Angeles, which was overwhelmed as the Anglo population, white population moved in. So Santa Barbara was still holding onto a demographic population still, what I thought was pretty interestingly, throughout the nineteenth century and into the early decades of the twentieth century. The original old Pueblo site, there were people that I interviewed that were born and raised there, whose parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents were born there.

01-01:48:41
Holmes: Oh wow.

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01-01:48:42
Camarillo: So, it was the remnant of still, a Mexican American community with roots that go way back. I thought that was fascinating. So those things that I thought were interesting, and as well, it was a community that was transformed by Mexican immigration as was Los Angeles, and all of Southern California, in that first huge wave between 1910 and 1930. And as I looked into it further, they developed a community pretty separate from the people that lived in the old town, the old Pueblo town, Pueblo Viejo. Mexican immigrants created their barrio on the east side of Santa Barbara, and though there was some interaction among them and the native born (because they spoke Spanish and they went to school together), the lower east side was thoroughly a Mexican immigrant community.

So here I had both a native-born Chicano population, and a Chicano population that is immigrant in origin. I thought, that's pretty interesting. Are there any other places in California? No, so let me look at these two together. So that became the idea behind the dissertation. Follow that, both populations, the one population over the course of three generations up to the 1930s, and follow that first generation of Mexican immigrants and their children as they settle in Santa Barbara in the first third of the twentieth century. So that became the origins of the dissertation. And as you had mentioned, I expanded the dissertation as a monograph to include discussion of other Southern Californian cities based on books, articles, and primary sources focusing on Los Angeles, Riverside, and to San Diego. So the book became a regional study of Mexican American history up to the Great Depression.

01-01:50:40
Holmes: And so, you were looking for a community to study, that, in the sense you were already drawn to looking a bit at the more community experience versus labor, yet labor is also obviously included in that—

01-01:50:54
Camarillo: It's embedded in there, yes, right. And the vehicle of community study allowed us to do that, so it was a natural to do, because you could fold in labor; you could fold in race relations; you could fold in residential formations; you could fold in class relations. It allowed a unit of analysis that was manageable, and then for me, I wanted to be comparative. I wanted to see how the experience of Mexican Americans in Santa Barbara compared to others, so it allowed me as a unit of analysis to compare other community studies to get at a regional history, but it excluded the rural areas. And so it was primarily an urban history. I'm going to have to close off here soon, Todd so—

01-01:51:47
Holmes: No problem, we're actually about at the end. I just wanted to ask quickly—so I think the book comes out in 1979, great reception, how did you feel about the final product?

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01-01:52:03
Camarillo: You know, I felt real good, because I knew it was one of the first to be published, and I remember, Griswold Castillo and I, because he finished at UCLA about the same time, did a book on LA, and our books were released at about the same time, but I beat him out by a couple of months. [laughter] So I can argue I had the first monograph that represented the field of Chicano history, and yeah, I felt real good about that because I knew that now people could turn to a book, and understand so many themes that in effect, explain the Mexican American experience as it unfolded from the nineteenth century into the early twentieth century. And I included women in there, because there was a lot of analysis of women in both my data and other things, Mexican American natives of second and third and fourth generation, and the new Mexican immigrants and their children. So, I felt that I was melding the nineteenth century with the twentieth century and seeing the continuity, because people had argued that there was no continuity between the nineteenth and twentieth, and I was arguing against that.

I look back, and I even tell my students today, "Can you believe that I was arguing in that book that there was something relevant to the Mexican American experience in the nineteenth century?" I mean, it's [laughs] such a no-brainer today. Of course there is, but back then, I felt that that was one of the contributions. See the continuity: how Mexican immigrants came into a society that was already shaped by what had happened to the people in those fifty years after statehood, and as they experience the Americanization of their Mexican community. This helps us explain a lot of what goes on in the early twentieth century and even later when we see these continuities, but understanding that they're also discontinuities. They're new things that we always have to think about that are shaping the experience of Mexican origin people, and of course for me, I'm starting to think about how the Mexican experience begins to compare to other groups, and over the course of the next twenty years, that will shape my intellectual trajectory.

01-01:54:23
Holmes: Yes indeed. Well, I think we'll cover that next time.

01-01:54:25
Camarillo: There you go.

01-01:54:26
Holmes: Thank you, Al.

01-01:54:26
Camarillo: Now, this has been fun!

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Interview 2: December 5, 2017

02-00:00:03
Holmes: All right. This is Todd Holmes with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. I'm sitting down for our second session with Albert Camarillo for the Chicana/Chicano Studies Oral History Project. Today's date is December 5, 2017, and we are here at Albert's office on the beautiful campus of Stanford. Al, thanks for sitting down with me again. Speaking of Stanford, I think that might be a good place for us to start. We left off with you, of course, turning your dissertation into a book, leaving UCLA, as a graduate student, and you finished your PhD at UCLA in 1975, is that correct?

02-00:00:45
Camarillo: '75.

02-00:00:46
Holmes: And, your dissertation was also nominated by the UCLA Department of History for the Allan Nevins Prize, for the best dissertation in the United States on American history.

02-00:01:00
Camarillo: Yes, that was a shot in the arm, as you're going out on the job market.

02-00:01:05
Holmes: Yeah, it was. Well, it's also good recognition too, that here you are as one of the, really, that first generation of Chicano historians, and that your dissertation was so well received by the larger history department.

02-00:01:19
Camarillo: It was recognition that this field was, yes, in its infancy, but there was something there, and I had good mentorship so that it was well written and well researched, and UCLA faculty thought it was worth nominating. The Stanford part of it, it's interesting, because before I actually finished the dissertation, I was out on the job market. There were no people [laughs] out on the job market when the universities, like Stanford, were making their first affirmative action appointments. And so, I think I had three chapters written in the dissertation when I was going on the job market, and going to universities for job talks; the three places where I actually ended up getting offers were UC Santa Barbara, UC Santa Cruz, and Stanford. But for me, it was a no-brainer, one, because just the stature of the institution. I figured if I could break into that institution, it would both promote me and the field. And, graduate students, the training of graduate students, because I knew, it was clear even early on, before I finished my graduate student career, that there had to be more of us if this was going to be a field. So, I knew I wanted to train graduate students. I didn't know what it was, but I had some good mentors, so I figured I could do this eventually. I didn't think it was going to happen as early as it did, but those two considerations brought me to Stanford.

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02-00:02:58
Holmes: Now, you were, as you were saying, you were one of the first Latino faculty here at Stanford, is that correct?

02-00:03:05
Camarillo: I think I was the fifth or sixth Latino faculty member here—

02-00:03:08
Holmes: Among the first.

02-00:03:08
Camarillo: I was the second faculty hire in the humanities. So there was someone in engineering, in the Graduate School of Business, anthropology, English, and education. So, I think I was the sixth appointment of a Latino.

02-00:03:30
Holmes: Now this was a long way from your hometown of Compton, coming here to Stanford, to say the least. How was the reception of Chicano history at Stanford, by both faculty and the university?

02-00:03:46
Camarillo: Right, so, there was never any intense scrutiny or overt racism that I experienced. There were subtle things however. So on one side, you could tell that, yeah, my job is going to be difficult because I not only have to do the work to get tenure—and that was always on my mind, but raising a family, buying our first home, all that stuff at the same time. I was really lucky. In this department there were a couple of the older generation faculty in the US and Latin American fields, and other fields too. These were preeminent scholars. They were world-class scholars, but they were the old, genteel generation. So there were a couple of them that actually reached out to me and kind of took me under their wing, and in a sense they buffered my first years in the department a little bit. I remember when Johnny Johnson, who was a famous Latin Americanist, really a nice guy, and he invited us to his home, and just opened up the home so I felt comfortable with him. Another fellow was Gordon Wright and his wife, Louise. He was one of the preeminent French historians in the world.

They were just really wonderful people, and they knew, because these were liberals; these were liberals from the old days, and they knew, this is the first minority young guy that we've got in the department. There was also Clay Carson, the first African American historian, who was my friend and colleague at UCLA and graduate school and we came to Stanford within two quarters of one another. He was doing African American history and I was doing Mexican American history, the first time in the US field they've had someone doing Ethnic studies, per se. So, on the one hand I look back to those older scholars, and the way they created an environment to make you feel more comfortable. I learned from them too, because you can bring in someone intellectually into your community, but that community is not going to thrive unless you create the social environment to make them feel comfortable and

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feel wanted, and want to be a part of a larger community in many ways. I learned that from these guys, and I incorporated that into both my mentoring and my outreach to other colleagues here and elsewhere, so that was an important lesson for me.

But I also knew they had no clue what Chicano history was. [laughter] Most of them, "Duh?" [laughter] But, there was no resistance. I think that Stanford of the era was, "All right, let them in, as assistant professors; let's see what they can do. If they can jump the hurdle in all of our expectations for teaching and research and publication, well, okay." And, I knew from the get-go that I had to get that dissertation revised, expanded, and published, and so that was in the forefront of my mind all the time, at the same time as one of the new Latino faculty and part of a really pretty small cohort of minority faculty. The minority faculty, there weren't more than probably, at the time I started, maybe fifteen at the university, African Americans and Chicanos, so it was a tiny group of faculty colleagues. And so, we also knew at the time coming in, look, affirmative action, if it's going to work—they brought us in as the first—we have to continue to push and bring more people in. We had no power, most of us untenured. Even when we were tenured we still didn't have any power. [laughter]

So it was constant, constant pushing, as assistant professors—mostly it was assistant professors—convening, trying to lay the groundwork, talking with administrators, and constantly pushing. It was an era of a lot of frustration, because the incremental faculty appointments were few and far between. But, every time a new person came, it was progress. So those were interesting years of trying to get your feet on the ground, establish your credentials as a scholar, work towards getting tenure, teaching your courses. And all the minority students, of the relatively few—there were about 350 Chicano students when I start at Stanford—they were thirsting for something about Chicano history, so [laughs] our classes were not homogenously Mexican American, but were overwhelmingly Mexican American, because for the first time, these students had access now to someone teaching Chicano literature in English, or someone like myself teaching Chicano history in the history department. And so, that was a big deal for them, and it was, I look back, a really rewarding period of time, because I could see these were really smart students. These were all first-gen students, like myself, and some of them went on to amazing careers, one of them, now the attorney general of state of California. Xavier Becerra was in my very first Chicano history class, and then he went on to law school here, and I was one of his recommenders.

So we knew that it was so important. This was the first real cohort of Chicano students at a private university, and if it could succeed here with our minority students, then it could succeed anywhere. We knew Stanford would be a model looked at to see if affirmative action could actually work, that you could develop a group of faculty that would help students, and to help them succeed in their careers, and get them through Stanford and elsewhere. Look,

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we knew we were on a mission. I always knew I was on a mission, and history, as you know, it connects you to the past, so I knew this had to be an intergenerational effort, if progress was ever going to be made. If we were ever going to make inroads into higher education, my generation as the first group, small, but committed, we had to make it work. And so, that was both a challenge, but it was a good challenge, because yeah, we saw some people not make it, not get tenure, some students drop out, but for the most part, we were beginning to see modest achievement, modest progress, and then some of us start getting to the next level. We get tenured.

02-00:10:51
Holmes: I wanted to ask you too, how would you compare—because you did a lectureship; you taught a class I think in 1971 during that summer, at Yale University. How would you compare the experiences of coming here? Now granted, it was four years later, but when you first came to Stanford versus Yale University as a Chicano scholar.

02-00:11:12
Camarillo: So, it was a Yale-sponsored course, but here's the interesting connection. The person who organized the course at Yale was the next director at the Chicano studies Research Center, so he was in the process of leaving Yale, and he had this cohort of students. There were no faculty at Yale, no Chicano faculty, so he wanted exposure of these students to some type of curriculum that deals with the Chicano experience. So my mentor [Juan Gómez], who knows this guy, this is Rudy Alvarez, a sociologist, and he organized a class, and Juan Gómez had recommended me to teach this class. So I had mostly these juniors and seniors who had gone to Yale, and they were almost all from East LA. So there was that connection between East LA, and the first students, Chicano students that went to Yale. And so they were back in East LA, where I was teaching the course, and they were about ready to graduate from Yale—some were about ready to graduate the next year as seniors—and the others were matriculating.

So that's how I got the Yale gig, but it was important. It was a teaching experience for me, and to see the students at Yale, the same kind of students that I would experience here at Stanford a few years later. So, it wasn't Yale per se, but it exposed me to the kind of high-quality students that a top-notch, elite, private university was now enrolling.

02-00:12:52
Holmes: In the early years, as we were discussing in our last session, UCLA and UT Austin are recognized as really vital centers for those early foundational years of the field. And then as you were discussing that the first generation of Chicano graduate students then goes out. So there's this possibility of expansion, like now we can send these scholars out to other universities, and it was hoped, that it would spread to, of course, places like Stanford. And so, as you were saying that, the Stanford position was looked at, not just by you, but probably by others, as a really, really important opportunity to expand the

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field, but also establish it here at one of the world's top universities. I wanted to discuss a little bit about the university's support in that effort. And first of all, it comes to, of course, diversifying the student body. Now you talked about there's about 300 or so Chicano students already here at Stanford when you arrived.

02-00:14:01
Camarillo: So by the time I visited the first time in '74, some students were the seniors, members of the very first cohort of Chicano students admitted to the university. Around 1970, the university started to do its affirmative action, it's push for admissions—it's not to say there weren't a few African Americans and Chicano students before that time, but as far as a cohort of students, by the time I got here, it was really the first cohort to graduate. And so, yes, there were about 350 Chicanos.

So the university had started to make its admissions efforts along the path of affirmative action, and all of the universities were struggling to bring in students they think that can weather the storm. It was difficult for those kids, because they were first generation, there was very little in terms of support mechanism for these students. That's why they were rushing to us as faculty. There were a few administrators. They had just established the ethnic-themed dorms for African Americans, Asian Americans, Chicanos, at that time, so that was a little cultural hub, and one of our faculty members was the resident fellow, the faculty member that resides in the dormitory. So we had our Casa Zapata, a little cultural hub for students and a few faculty. At that time we played critical roles in helping the students, really to convince them that they belonged here, that it wasn't a mistake, even though they hear, "Oh, you're affirmative action; you took someone else's position to be here, to be admitted." We did that kind of counseling, in addition to trying to build up their skills academically so that they could make it at Stanford.

So it was an interesting time, because in a sense, we were juggling a lot of things, and that's why there are reasons to explain faculty at Stanford and elsewhere that didn't make it, because they couldn't successfully juggle those many commitments. Publications, research, the teaching, the mentoring, and doing whatever other things, committees, the initial committees, so, any committee, affirmative action-type committee, we were pulled in because there were so few of us. It was a challenging time. It was an exciting time, again, because I think we knew that this was a challenge that we had to meet. We had to be successful, and to do everything that was necessary to make sure that we as individual scholars were secure, with tenure, and knowing that that security would give us entrée to the university as well.

02-00:17:00
Holmes: There was also the university's support of campus-based centers and programs, and here I'm thinking of the Stanford Center for Chicano Research.

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Can you talk about the founding of that? Was it based on the model there at UCLA, that you and other faculty were trying to create here?

02-00:17:21
Camarillo: Absolutely. The model had been established. There are basically two models. The more ubiquitous model by the mid-1970s was Chicano studies programs, curricular programs. We knew we couldn't do that because we just didn't have enough faculty to field the kind of curriculum that would justify an undergraduate major, so we didn't go there. We instead took—well, to no surprise because of UCLA—the research model, research and intellectual promotion that create the intellectual foundation of a center for graduate students and faculty, research, and intellectual activities, writ large. So we took that model. It was important.

Just to back up a little bit. So, when the undergraduate student body begins to diversify, in its early stages, with African Americans in particular, and Chicanos, the university decides it needs someone to help it think about how do we deal with all these new people on campus. So the president, with pressure coming from the students, established an Office for Chicano Affairs, which is the person appointed by the president, who reports to the president, and an Office for Black Affairs. And so these are people that are helping the university think and plan, and so that office (Chicano Affairs) and the first person that was appointed in that office, brought us together regularly, because she had the resources to get us together. Cecilia Burciaga would play an important role here for the next 25 years. So, we were meeting, all along, whether it was to try to figure out some strategy for pushing affirmative action, to get more departments, the deans, and the provost to say, "This is important. Let's make some more appointments here, and let's go search for faculty over here," or, "Student services, our students are crying out for more services. How do we go about developing these things?"

Two things came out of those early discussions in '75, '76, and '77, '78. One was to create a Chicano cultural center. Now I had mentioned Casa Zapata, a residence, a themed dorm, as they're called here at Stanford, was important, but there needed to be a cultural center; that was a model that some of the universities had developed. So, Stanford develops El Centro Chicano, and that really becomes the cultural hub for the Chicano undergraduate population. And, importantly, going back to 1973, the first few faculty that were doing Chicano studies, in anthropology and in English—Renato Rosaldo and Arturo Islas—they, together with students, push for curriculum related to Chicano studies.

Well we couldn't really mount a Chicano studies program, so what did they do? They established the Chicano Fellows Program, a program I inherited, and some of the other faculty directed as they came on board. The few advanced graduate students that were doing Chicano-related research, they were teaching courses for undergraduates as part of the Chicano Fellows

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Program; it was overseen by one or two of the faculty. So that was the start of Chicano studies at Stanford, the Chicano Fellows Program, and it ran for another fifteen years or so. So, in a sense, that was our Chicano studies. The students could take those courses from graduate students, at the same time they were taking courses from the faculty. In a sense then, there was a curriculum in Chicano studies at Stanford between those two efforts.

But in 1979, some of us were just about to get tenured, and a couple of colleagues were already tenured, so we were getting a little more bold. At the same time, importantly, there was a new president, Donald Kennedy, who was appointed. And this guy, he was sensitive to all these issues. He was a liberal. He knew that Stanford had to develop; a part of its repertoire had to be Ethnic studies and diversity. At the same time, the admissions office was trying to figure out how do they crank up the affirmative action effort to increase the number of students of color? So all those things come together.

So we propose to the university, "Why not be the first university in the country, private university in the country, to develop a research capability around Mexican origin people in the United States?" And so we proposed the Stanford Center for Chicano Research. And Don Kennedy, who had been the provost for one year—and the provost makes academic and budget decisions—the next year he became president, but as provost, he said, "I agree with you. Let's do it." And, they appointed yours truly as the director. I said, "Wait a minute, I'm coming up for tenure next year." And I remember, Don saying—and this was remarkable that a provost would say this to students, and some faculty. I wasn't there, but they reported to me. He said, "Al's going to get tenure, or you come and talk to me." I mean, provosts don't do that, right? This is a guy that was really committed too; he knew it was important. And so with his support, and money that came out of the provost's office, we established the Stanford Center for Chicano Research, and I was promoted to tenure a little early. So five and a half years in, I was promoted, a little bit of accelerated tenure, and, here I was, brand-new associate professor, first year of tenure, taking over the directorship of a new center.

02-00:23:22
Holmes: And you steered that ship for about five years, is that correct?

02-00:23:25
Camarillo: Yeah, five years, and then another three years when we developed a component of it, the Inter-University Program for Latino Research, which I took over for the first three years.

02-00:23:37
Holmes: That was next on my list; I wanted to talk about that program. Now, that was also, at least from my reading on the outside, seemed, there's a kind of a UCLA influence there as well, as in the type of—

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02-00:23:50
Camarillo: Absolutely. And Texas.

02-00:23:53
Holmes: Yeah, the type of relationship it created with UT Austin and other universities in Texas.

02-00:23:58
Camarillo: So the genesis of the Inter-University Program for Latino Research, which we called at the time IUP, it started out with four institutions. But it was a reaction. So I'm director of the Stanford Center for Chicano Research, and I'm now going to foundations, local and national foundations, to promote the kinds of research that our faculty want to conduct, and establishing the intellectual programs for graduate students and undergraduates. So we're putting together the building blocks of the center, and I'm, for the first time now, going to the major national foundations, the Carnegie Corporation, the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation—I mean all the biggies, and they're in New York City. So here I am. I've been to New York before but I've never been fundraising. I'm hearing, time and again, "Chicano research?" Now, get this: These are Eastern-based institutions. They do not, when they think about race, think about Mexican Americans for the most part in the West. They're about African Americans if they're going to support race-related research.

So, I'm spinning my wheels; I'm getting frustrated. At the Ford Foundation, there was an important development—they hire their first Latino program officer, and he's a real good guy, and he takes me aside and says, "Look, you're not going to get funded to do just Chicano research. If you can do more comparative, if you can link in some way"—he's Puerto Rican, by the way—"if you can link with the Puerto Ricans, Puertorriqueños, and maybe the Cubans," although that was a stretch at the time, "and other centers outside Stanford, if you can make it a collaboration, then we'll talk with you." So this was the message from Bill Diaz at the Ford Foundation. The Ford Foundation for the previous about ten years had been important in establishing Chicano studies programs, and the first women's studies programs. So they were already on a trajectory of continuing to support this kind of work, and building the infrastructure of Ethnic studies at universities and colleges across the country, but they needed a real strong justification to do that, and they weren't just going to fund one center at Stanford; that was clear.

So, I got on the telephone—no e-mail at that time—wrote a memo, [laughs] picked up the phone and I called Juan Gómez-Quiñones, my mentor at UCLA who's the director still at that time at UCLA, and then I called up the folks at Texas [Center for Mexican American Studies]. This is where I met Ramón Saldívar, who you're interviewing, and for a time, he was director there, and I had met him earlier, but now, rekindling those earlier relationships which I discussed with you about how the graduate students started to form some connection. Well I already had connections there, and so, I reach out to them.

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I say, "Look, if we can develop a collaborative Latino, not just Chicano but Latino research initiative, there is a chance they'll talk to us at least." And they said, "We're in."

So, we meet, but there was a missing ingredient: the Puerto Ricans. So, I go visit a fellow who had just left Stanford two years before I got here, and I'd heard about him. His name was Frank Bonilla, one of the early pioneers and really important figures in the development of Puerto Rican studies, and he was the director of El Centro Puertorriqueño at City University of New York. El Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, it was called, and I'd never met him. So I go to New York, and Frank, and he's one of these guys that just makes you feel one of *la gente*, a beautiful guy, wonderful guy, and he makes you feel comfortable. But, the people he brought around to meet with me are suspicious I was suspect. "This Chicano from California, what does he know about Puerto Ricans"—I wasn't claiming to know anything about Puerto Rican studies. I was saying, "I think it will suit your purposes at El Centro, at Texas's Mexican American Studies Center and UCLA's Chicano studies Research Center, and our center at Stanford, if we can come together to talk about the similarities and differences of the work we're doing now, Puerto Rican studies and Chicano studies." And Frank said, "Let's try it."

So, we put together a proposal. I go to Ford; they said, "Great, we're going to fund you to get started. Pull some conferences together," and here's when we started to do these multidisciplinary conferences supported by the IUP to form research teams, Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans, at those four institutions, and Ford Foundation loved it. And over the course of the next many years, they poured millions and millions of dollars into the IUPLR, which meant that it was also funding the work of our respective centers, and our faculty, so it was infrastructure support, not only for the IUP, but for our centers. It was a huge development for us. And the wonderful thing about it, Todd, is that it allowed us to make those connections to other Latino scholars and for us to see the comparative nature of the Latino experience, really for the first time, because those of us in the Southwest, Chicano studies scholars, we were very parochial. It was the region. It was the Southwest. Even, less than that, it was California. It was Southern California. Now, we got to see these broad contours of the Latino experiences unfold, some that are different for Puerto Ricans, obviously, in very specific ways, but other things that were similar.

And so we developed an appreciation for the kind of work that we are doing collaboratively, comparatively, and over time, I was director of that, executive director for the first three years, and then it was supposed to rotate to the directors at the other centers. I don't know the latest count, but I think near thirty universities are now part of the IUPLR. So, we developed an infrastructure that grew, and obviously there were needs that were met. And then, the Ford Foundation did some amazing things. They gave us money to bring graduate students, Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans, and some

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Cuban American graduate students together for PhD training, to give them a little mentoring from the now, "senior" Latino faculty, right—we're all about 35–37 years old, [laughter]—but we're mentoring these young people as they are now the next generation to go into the professoriate. So we did that; they supported undergraduate leadership training as well, which allowed us to open up in amazing programmatic ways support for Latino undergraduate and graduate students and faculty.

02-00:31:31
Holmes: In coming back to Stanford, another way which the field grew, I know we've hit on this in some of our side conversations, was the building of collections here for the study of the Mexican American experience. Here at the library working with those kind of special collections, can you talk a little bit about that experience of building that collection to, which outside the centers and the research, really helped bolster Stanford's place within the field?

02-00:32:03
Camarillo: It was so obvious to me wearing the other part of the historian's hat. Well, how are we going to go on conducting our research if we don't have archival material? We are scratching here and there and finding some important sources. So when I got to Stanford, there had already been an effort by the first appointee to the position of assistant to the president for Chicano affairs [Luis Nogales], and he'd had a close connection with Ernesto Galarza, the pioneer scholar-activist, and he had convinced Ernesto to give his collection to the Department of Special Collections in the Stanford Library. That was the first ever. The universities' libraries had never had anything to related to Mexican Americans, and when I found out, I said, "Man, that's got to be a goldmine." They were starting to do the cataloging of it, and I said, "[whistles] This stuff is amazing," because it took Galarza's work back to the 1930s, and all the way through his work in farm labor unionizing.

So in a sense, I knew; when I saw some of that stuff from his national farm workers initiative in the '50s, I said, "This is the stuff that was the precursor, obviously." We had read about some of it in his books, but this is all the archival material that allows you to understand why [Cesar] Chavez later on, would either be successful or have enormous resistance, because Galarza had already been there. And then his stuff that dated back to, for example, he had materials on the Congress of Spanish-Speaking People from 1939. I only later discovered that because I was fishing for that those original sources.

So, it convinced me that, as a historian, if I'm going to start bringing in graduate students we need to build archival collections. I inherited graduate students the day I step foot here. Antonia Castañeda was my first student. She had already been admitted, the first Chicana admitted to the US field, and she was already here. [laughs] So, I figured, if I'm going to continue this—and by the late '70s, I already had two graduate students, actually three. And I knew that we had to build that archival base. So I go to the Department of Special

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Collections, the director of the Green Library, and I say, "Look, would you support an initiative if I were able to identify collections for you, and get commitments from these people to give you archival materials?" They said, "Sure!" So, now I put on the archivist hat, kind of the Sherlock Holmes, looking for archives. I knew where they were. I knew the people that had these things. So, before, in the early 1980s, they hired an archivist to take over the responsibility to do this work, I was going to Los Angeles and calling up people that I knew. Bert Corona, he had a huge collection; he was willing to give it. I sent a graduate student down there to work with him, actually, physically, put some of these boxes, dozens, into vans so they could be shipped up here to Stanford.

But that was the start of it, so then we got the CASA [Centro de Accíon Social Auntomo-Hermandad General de Trabajadores] materials—CASA, kind of the revolutionary vanguard organization that started out under the auspices of Bert Corona, immigrant rights, but turns into a vanguard leftist Chicano organization. I knew it was a critical organization, and I knew, through a friend, the person who had the archives in his garage, and I figured if there was any kind of water damage, and it was gone. I went down to LA and I helped him [laughs] put the stuff in, and it became one of our big collections. So to the point where we could go to the president and the provost and the director of the library, and say, "We're onto something. No other library in the country, especially a private university, with the resources that we have, are capable of doing this. If we are going to be an institution that promotes the Chicano studies, we have to have these archives." They said yes; they put the money in to bring in an archivist, and Roberto Trujillo was appointed and is still there. He dramatically expanded that archive over time. I worked with him the first ten years in identifying key historical archives, but he branched it to where we are today—the Mexican American archives at Stanford are an amazing treasure trove of documents.

02-00:36:51
Holmes: Yeah, yeah. I wanted to talk a little bit about the development of the field, particularly during this time. But before we do, I wanted to ask: we talked about building the center here at Stanford, and then also creating the inter-university program with the partner universities. Were there other significant centers around the country that your colleagues in the first generation also built out at universities to really help promote the discipline?

02-00:37:27
Camarillo: It was less about, at that time, Todd, building new programs, than trying to hold onto those that had already been established, because this is the period from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s where universities were beginning to cut back—

02-00:37:46
Holmes: Yeah, there's a recession during this time.

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02-00:37:48
Camarillo: Yes, and Ethnic studies is being scrutinized, and some of these places are not real stable: they weren't given much funding, some on relatively soft funding, not enough faculty and fights among faculty. So it was a period when you see also the demise of some, the fights to keep some from falling completely, of disappearing, so there wasn't a whole lot of new institutional building. I'm sure there was some; I think the center at Notre Dame was established during the 1970s under Julian Samora, one of the old pioneers who had been at Notre Dame for a while. So that was new. I think there may have been some new Chicano studies curricular programs established. I couldn't tell you off the top of my head where they are, but it wasn't an era of enormous expansion.

Where the expansion occurs is the placement of the PhD students, once they're finished, into positions in the professoriate. That was expanding, and that was really important, because now you get to see the establishment of positions in Ethnic studies across the board, at institutions primarily in the Southwest, but not exclusively in the Southwest. So, some of the Midwestern institutions now are establishing programs and if they're not establishing Chicano studies, they're hiring some people, and that was a big development. Some Eastern institutions, a couple Ivy League institutions, were now hiring people by the '80s, and that was an important development as well.

So that's really where the expansion was, and the trench work of doing the work in the field with that expanding cadre of faculty, and newer graduate students that are being trained. And I said that's where the expansion is; those of us that were committed to graduate training, and were at institutions that funded graduate student training, then that's where we were putting a lot of time. So, for me, the 1980s was a period when I was significantly increasing the number of graduate students that were coming to work with me.

02-00:40:18
Holmes: Well, let's turn to kind of recap here on the development of the field. The work of the first generation, in one of your writings, you identified four themes that kind of encompass that first generation: the focus on California and Texas, within the scholarship; the importance of the nineteenth century, and really putting a spotlight on that, which I think, you and others have identified that the nineteenth century was often overlooked. Also, to spotlight that Mexican Americans became a racialized minority in the Southwest, that was reinforced by class, social, and cultural subordination. The communities' experience increasingly came to be defined in the urban context, which we also see in your work, and then also immigrants from Mexico in the first third of the twentieth century entered American society en masse. So these are kind of those four to five themes that you see in the work. Now in your scholarship, I think your next work was *Chicanos in a Changing Society*, which we talked about a little bit, and these were one of the first significant community studies looking at that of cross-generational, and that change over time, really focused in California, is that correct?

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02-00:41:49
Camarillo: Yes.

02-00:41:50
Holmes: But then you also, during that same year, you co-wrote, *The American Southwest: Myth and Reality*, and here you co-wrote that with Ray Billington.

02-00:42:04
Camarillo: Right, so here's where the old study of the West comes to the new West, and the new Chicano history, and as I mentioned earlier, Ray Billington was really a wonderful gentleman. He was, again, part of that generation that was sensitive to these new, young, Chicano scholars that were trying to open up part of a field that simply had neglected the Mexican experience. So he was very good about opening up opportunities, and to put his essay together with mine into this publication out of the Clark Library was a big deal for me. I guess I didn't understand it quite at that time, but again, it was orchestrated by Norris Hundley. He knew Ray real well. I'd already known Ray for a few years. But it was precisely with the idea, the old meets the new, how different and how similar is it? I mean, those articles are [laughs] starkly different, right? But, that was part of the plan, obviously, that Norris Hundley had, is to see what are the new aspects of research with groups now that had not really been part of the old Western history, and someone who's kind of synthesizing some of the old Western history literature.

It was strategic on the part of Norris, there's no question, and it took me a while to understand that, but he was mentoring me at the same time because he knew the Clark Library, those were prestigious publications that came out of Clark at that time, and I did not have tenure. So that was published before the monograph. Without telling me, he was mentoring me and steering me in a way that fortified the curriculum vitae, if you will, for tenure.

02-00:44:09
Holmes: You also, in the years after that, began to work on edited volumes. You co-edited a volume with Mario Barrera and Francisco Hernandez, *Work, Family, Sex Roles and Language*, which was a conference. I think it was selected papers from the National Association for Chicano—

02-00:44:29
Camarillo: That's exactly right. So when we decided, it was time for us to have an avenue for the best papers that were presented in the NACCS conference, to publish those. And so, we formed a committee, a publication committee, again knowing that some of the articles were not ready for publication, but with a little bit of work, they could be, and so we were encouraging people to do some revisions, but to put on notice that the National Association for Chicano studies was here to stay, and we have people doing serious research, here is some of the best research out of that conference. So, we formed a committee, got the publisher to say yes to it, and it wasn't done every year, but it was done occasionally. I think this was the first volume of those proceedings.

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02-00:45:27
Holmes: You also did another edited volume with Armando Valdez and Tomas Almaguer: *The State of Chicano Research in Family, Labor, and Migration Studies*. Was this from another conference?

02-00:45:39
Camarillo: So this was our first research conference from the Stanford Center for Chicano Research, and we, again, said, "It's important for us to put us on the map with a publication. We know that conferences are fleeting. There's no record." So, we took the best papers out of that conference. I think it was, any of the invited guests, we told them we wanted to do a publication; we have the funds to do that, and it'll be the center's first book, first compilation of articles. And everyone, I think almost everyone, agreed. And so this was again, to promote the kind of research that we're doing. It was multidisciplinary Chicano studies research, with some of the best young people—well, they were all young people at that time. [laughter]

02-00:46:28
Holmes: Even the mentors were young at that time.

02-00:46:29
Camarillo: Can you imagine? We're barely 40, right? So, that was our effort to, again, do Chicano studies at Stanford so people knew at Stanford that we're serious about this. We've got a publication; there are some outstanding essays in that book. It was, yet again, part of the strategy—research, intellectual community, and publications.

02-00:46:56
Holmes: And then, in 1984, you published, which I believe is a textbook, *Chicanos in California*.

02-00:47:03
Camarillo: Right, it was part of the Golden State series that Norris Hundley and John Schutz, who's a Western historian out of University of Southern California, edited it; they thought it was time to put together the new California history. So these were relatively brief books, 125-, 150-, 175-page overviews, that would mostly go to California State University campuses, community colleges, some in the UCs, but to basically do a thematic series, and I think they had over twenty different publications in the series. It was really to showcase the new California history.

It was the first time they had put together requests for scholars of Ethnic studies, or ethnic histories, so I was the first to write one—no, they had one on African American history in California, and then I did the *Chicanos in California*, and later, they did one on Asian Americans, I think one on Native Americans as well. And then, topical series. So there was one on urban California, Los Angeles and San Francisco; on agriculture; on a whole bunch of other topics and themes which were part of what they considered to be the

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new California history. And that little book, *Chicanos in California*, took hold, especially in the Cal State University system.

02-00:48:39
Holmes: Oh yeah. I remember seeing it as a Cal State student.

02-00:48:42
Camarillo: Did you?

02-00:48:43
Holmes: Yeah, yeah. Before we move on, I wanted to ask you more about the textbook: what was that experience like? As scholars, we, and particularly when we write monographs, we're very focused on various themes, communities, maybe even regions, and time periods, of course. Here, you're asked to step back and give the large overview of the Chicano experience in the Golden State. How was writing that?

02-00:49:10
Camarillo: It is different because you step out of the finely detailed monographic literature mode, and you step back and say, "How do I paint this broader picture so that someone picking up this little book comes away with a pretty good sense of the narrative of the Mexican American experience in California?" And so, you have to approach it as, what are the most important parts, what are the most important topics that you put in this? You can't give too much narrative to anything, so it's a picking and choosing of what to put in to make it at least readable, and engaging, yet at the same time, trying to—for me, at the time, about not quite a decade of literature had been published—include new literature on the Chicano experience. So synthesizing that and trying to put it as best I could into the narrative.

So, I'm revising that book now; it's *Latinos in California*, and it'll be published by Stanford Press, but it's way harder now, because the literature is so vast, [laughter] it's way harder. It was way easier, when I look back, at that time, because there wasn't that much literature. It was not voluminous. Now, it's huge, so in all areas, not just history, which I have to pull from some of the social sciences, and the literature part of it, which is so rich. Well isn't it a wonderful dilemma? That now, to write that synthesis of Latinos—it's not just Chicanos. It has to be, given the demographics of the state, Latinos, and, it's such a more difficult proposition because the wonderful dilemma of having so much at hand.

02-00:50:56
Holmes: I wanted to ask you on that, did you ever think, or foresee, say, when you're first stepping onto campus—you know, as one of the first generations, scholars, of the field—that about thirty years from now, we're going to have so much work that we're not even going to know what to do with? How we get through all this?

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02-00:51:16
Camarillo: I tell my students, Todd, my undergraduate students and graduate students, "You could not imagine, now, how your life's going to turn out in academia, because, I had no clue." I mean, I had a vision that, yes, we want to promote Chicano studies and Chicano history and build the field, and yes, I knew I was going to train students, and I was going to continue to write, and as best I can, try to change the university in any way I could, but, there's no way, in my wildest dreams, that I could have imagined what would've happened over twenty or thirty, in my case, over forty years. It's a wonderful thing. It's really a great story about social change in this nation, about the nature of social justice, of exclusion, and what happens when you develop opportunity for people who've never had it before, and you open up the gates of opportunity to institutions of higher education, which are life changing. For anyone that goes through higher education, it's life changing. For us, it was monumental. When I look at our African American brothers and sisters, a small cohort of them had access to higher education going back to the nineteenth century, and developed their middle class and their intelligentsia. Chicanos never had that, so we were the first, my generation was the first to experience that.

So, I couldn't have, in my wildest dreams, thought about where this would lead me, and yeah, it's quite an amazing story, and I'm happy to look back and say with a lot of pride that there's been change. It's institutional change, about our universities, about higher education. It's about social justice, it's about inclusion, it's about diversity, and it's about opportunity.

02-00:53:19
Holmes: Yes, indeed. Well, what other—because you mentioned, in talking about the volumes that are now out within Chicano studies, but the scholarship of this time, during this kind of early period, what other significant works do you recall or that really strike you that were so important coming out during this time?

02-00:53:42
Camarillo: Well, for Chicano studies, there really were a handful of books that everyone was turning to: Mario Barrera's *Race and Class in the Southwest*, a political scientist, but a social scientist with multidisciplinary interests, basically looking at the nature of work and the capitalist society, and how it created these structures that kept Mexican-origin workers from, in a sense, tied to "Mexican work." So, that book was really important. I look back on that and it being one of the cornerstones. There were a number of other studies. So we were also at the same time going back to—well not going back to. For example, one of the pioneers, Ernesto Galarza, published *Barrio Boy* in the early 1970s, I think, '71 or '72, and that was really important for us, because then we had a life experience to plug into the structures that we were talking about.

For history, I have to give credit to Rudy Acuña. Rudy Acuña wrote the first overview about the Chicano experience since Carey McWilliams. And,

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though a lot of people could critique that book, and I could critique the book too in terms of its emphasis and other things, it was still an important book, especially for our students, because they wanted a book that would bring history more up to the present time of the Chicano experience. So the Acuña book was very important, especially in history, but Chicano studies in general. Others—none are jumping out immediately—

02-00:55:31
Holmes: It's one of those trick questions that, when I turn off the camera, you know? It's like the people at the award ceremonies who forgot their list to thank everyone, right?

02-00:55:39
Camarillo: [laughs] Right. Well, but, at that time you have to realize, there probably weren't more than a dozen books by the late 1970s, early 1980s, but into the '80s now, we begin to see all of this monographic literature being published. The historians are publishing: Mario Garcia, Ricardo Romo, Richard Griswold del Castillo. It was a number of other people, and the first Chicanas beginning to write their studies. So it now begins to open up a component part that had been missing from Chicano studies. The *a* was really missing, and now, the 1980s, you begin to see the emergence of those studies that will get the Chicana experience center stage into the historiography. So, the 1980s, which was really the first generation of the monographic literature, across the board, in some of the sociological work, the political science studies, Carlos Munoz's book that would take us to the Chicano Movement—all of those were really important foundational studies for us to say, "Now there's a threshold in Chicano studies regardless of what discipline you might want to look at, that there's something there."

02-00:57:02
Holmes: So, speaking of how this literature is developing, I want to talk a little bit here about mentoring the second generation. Now, as you were just discussing earlier in this session, you pretty much stepped onto campus here at Stanford, and you already had graduate students lining up—

02-00:57:19
Camarillo: I had one, at least, yes.

02-00:57:21
Holmes: [laughs] Discuss the experience of that, and then, take us a little bit into the new directions that you saw this second generation, this generation of graduate students starting to take the scholarship.

02-00:57:38
Camarillo: So—

02-00:57:38
Holmes: Oh! Hold on a second here. All right, we're back after a little microphone malfunction. We were talking about mentoring the second generation, and the

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new directions of scholarship; that experience of seeing this new generation of scholars really expand out in new directions.

02-00:58:02
Camarillo: Right. If you put the annual conferences together, both in our disciplines, and then the interdisciplinary work, Chicano studies Association conferences, we're getting a lot of exchange, and at the same time as we're bringing in students, new students, they are posing new questions about the historiography. They are opening up with their dissertation topics, new avenues of research, ideas that those of us that were considered the first wave hadn't, or we maybe had touched on, and now they were expanding. This was an indication that the field was growing, and expanding, and becoming more nuanced, and more complex. So the graduate students would play a really important role in shaping the next generation research, whether you call it a generation and a half or the second generation of monographic literature that would begin to hit by the late 1980s, early '90s. This is where I think you begin to see within Chicano history, but Chicano studies in general, a real fluorescence of the literature. It's expanding. It's getting deeper. It's getting more nuance. It's getting more complex, in lots of different ways.

02-00:59:27
Holmes: Yeah. And also, a lot of this is probably building on, say, for example, the development of archival collections, which early scholars such as you were helping to develop at places like Stanford and other archives around the country.

02-00:59:42
Camarillo: Absolutely right, they are opening up vistas through the use of these documents for people to pose new questions and say, "Well, look, I wasn't able to, your group wasn't able to address it because there was nothing there you could turn to." Now we've got collections at UCLA. We've got the Mexican American Political Association materials here at Stanford, or elsewhere. So it's going to again, deepen and enrich the kind of research that students are going to be able to do.

02-01:00:19
Holmes: I wanted to ask, too—you touched on this a little bit earlier in our session—the importance of mentoring this second and younger wave of scholars. As you were saying, a lot of your generation looked at this as, outside of publishing and teaching, that this really was critical, that the expansion of the field really depended on nurturing these graduate students. Can you talk a little bit about that experience here?

02-01:00:48
Camarillo: Without us having a strategy per se, we knew it worked. We knew it worked with us individually, and as we became more savvy about the nature of the institutions that we were working in, we knew what we had to do to promote graduate student success. So, funding, of course, is a hugely important thing,

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regardless of where you are, so we were always pushing the institutions too. Again, still the era of affirmative action—before affirmative action kind of turns into diversity, by the 1990s—we'd say if you're serious about this, and you should be because now you have faculty, then you need to fund our students in a way that allows them to matriculate more. And so that's one thing, just the recruitment and admission, which is a difficult thing, because you're also still pushing boundaries here. When you start getting three and four graduate students, you've got a cohort, and they themselves will begin to change things, because they're pushing the department, pushing the university, at the same time along with you.

But we also learned that, and again, I mentioned this briefly, that I learned certainly, and I think a lot of people learned that, if we were going to succeed as a graduate student, you better be comfortable as much as you can be in a foreign environment. And these still are all first-generation students: college undergraduates and then certainly graduate studies, for the first time. We tried to do whatever we could to make them feel welcomed, that they were a part of this university, and to create the cultural/social mechanisms in addition to the intellectual foundations for them to prosper. And here's where the institution, a place like Stanford, plays an important role. So the *El Centro Chicano* begins to outreach not only undergraduates, but to the graduate students, to make that a home for them. The Stanford Center for Chicano Research became a home for those students doing Chicano studies per se, so there was an institutional anchor, if you will, for them.

So all of that had to be part of the formula to get our graduate students through, knowing that if we could help them be successful, they too were going to go on and do the same thing. And in fact, that's what happens, over the course of the next generation. They themselves are teaching and training the next generation.

02-01:03:32
Holmes: Well, I wanted to follow that generation now, of what I think you and others have called a maturation of the field by the 1990s. Here we have an expansion of community studies, but of hitting areas that were long neglected, so, the Midwest, other cities that were kind of off the radar.

02-01:03:53
Camarillo: Right. Rural areas, agricultural communities, labor movements in those areas. That was all part of—especially women, the Chicana experience unfolds in dramatic ways with the new historiography; ideas about culture that, when we were writing in the 1970s, we weren't touching, I think, explicitly or in the nuanced ways that people were doing by the 1990s; looking at music, looking at cultural organizations of the type that were being written about by the 1990s with this second wave. So, it's both expansion, digging deeper, creating new topics altogether, and elaborating on those that had already been written about.

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02-01:04:52
Holmes: I wanted to discuss also the methodology of this next wave of scholarship. Would you say this is similar to the earlier generation? I know Chicano studies, it's always been interdisciplinary; we see this in your work, in pulling from the new social history, the kind of community reconstructions. Would you say that by the 1990s, that waves of Chicano scholars are following and even digging deeper and expanding that type of methodology?

02-01:05:25
Camarillo: I think they are, but it's also reflective of some disciplinary boundary crossing that has been, for the last twenty to thirty years, part of what's happening in academia. So I think it's part of a larger phenomena, of greater interdisciplinary work, but it of course builds on the foundation of Chicano studies as interdisciplinary from the get-go, so it has both of those stimuli to continue this interdisciplinary work, in some books and studies more than others. But I think there's a real openness to try and to see what the literary or the cultural arts has to do with history, or sociology, or the social science work that tells us about structures and categories, and how that can be woven into historical, or even a literary analysis of something to make the topic more understandable.

02-01:06:25
Holmes: I also wanted to ask, it's during this wave of scholarship that Chicana history starts; as you said, we get the *a* back into the discipline, and this really opens up a lot of doors, of looking at and analyzing gender dynamics, particularly even within Chicano communities. What was your observation on the reception of this? Of course, you may have maybe the old guard who's a little more conservative, may raise some eyebrows at this or not. What was your observation of that development?

02-01:07:08
Camarillo: Well, I think for the most part—so this is a man speaking, right? I'd like to know what the Chicanas—I mean, they knew that there was resistance. They knew that they had to push hard to get the kind of recognition. But I saw it as just a real boon to expanding our understanding of the Mexican-origin experience. When you leave out half of the population, you ain't got it right. My first two graduate students, in fact, helped shape the field of Chicana history, and I thought it was just terrific that they were doing this, because it needed to be done, and we needed this history. We couldn't have a real historiography unless the role of women, the nature of gender relationships, are understood here.

So, I know that there were—I could identify by name, which I won't—some of the more macho guys that thought, "Nah, look what they're [Chicanas] trying to do here. " But, I think those of us that knew it was absolutely essential that the Chicana experience be embedded in every aspect of Chicano studies, was absolutely the right thing to do, and the best thing to do. And, you look at that literature, it's amazing. It's wonderful. It's deep. It gives us

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perspectives that the first wave, we may have touched on some of this stuff, but we didn't talk about it.

02-01:08:40
Holmes: Yeah, yeah. And yes, both Vicki and Antonia are on my list in this first generation to interview, because you're right, to get their perspectives, I also believe is really important. The additional challenge, I think, that was there for them as scholars.

02-01:08:57
Camarillo: And I knew, Todd, that as the first women in the subfield, having gone through it as the first of the ethnic group, I knew that it would be doubly hard for them to feel comfortable, to be accepted. And so, again, I tried to build that level of comfort and camaraderie, and to try to create the environment that, you know, we're in this together. We're building something, all of us together. You are the younger people, and I'm part of that first group, and you're going to be the continuing saga of the development of this field of study. And they understood it, too. I think they understood it really well.

02-01:09:48
Holmes: Yeah, yeah. Well, if we look at Vicki, just Vicki Ruiz alone, outside of her scholarship, of what she's been able to do and shape the larger field.

02-01:09:59
Camarillo: That's exactly right, Vicki's had an amazing career, and she's just retired. As of, I think January, she no longer is teaching. So, yeah, she's retired, right after her mentor, retired. [laughter]

02-01:10:15
Holmes: Which isn't a bad way to do it. I was still hoping for that myself, but I don't think that's going to work. Another development within the scholarship which I think also hits on some of the influences of your early life, and also that we see here later in your later scholarship, is that comparative experience. I think, as you were discussing here, the relational studies, that kind of interracial analysis, and comparisons across, not just ethnic communities, but also generations.

02-01:10:51
Camarillo: Right. Going back to the book, *Chicanos in California*, that synthesis of the Mexican American experience in California, it got me thinking more about, well, I do know something about African American history. I took courses in that subject, and in doing urban history, of course, there was a richer literature evolving on the black experience in urban America. So I was being drawn more and more to really raising the question: Well, if I've got a handle on the Chicano urban experience—and by the 1980s, I was fashioning a study that originally was going to be a Chicano urban history of the Southwest—and as I started to put together the framework of that book, these big questions of comparisons across the nation's largest minority groups, the people of color, the African American experience, with, in a sense, more profound urban

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experience, especially after the Great Migration, and what happens to them in the industrialized city.

I couldn't avoid doing that work, and at the same time, my past was always kind of pricking me in the back, and because growing up in Compton, and being incorporated into an African American community as a teenager, all of that was a part of who I was. And I think it was only in time that it would surface in my work as someone that was interested in the comparative framework between groups, across generations, across regions. How is the Southwest different from the Northeast? Those were big questions, so those began to surface by the mid-1980s, as I took that initial conceptualization of the study of Mexican Americans in cities of the Southwest to African Americans.

And then, I should've stopped there, because, the next big question of course, which never would go away, and it shouldn't, well yeah, the racialization process, of course, dramatically affected the nation's largest minority, the African Americans. Race is really defined in so many ways by the African American experience. But it also deeply affected the Chicano experience. But African Americans aren't immigrants. The vast majority of Mexican-origin people in twentieth-century America are the products of immigration. So, the immigrant phenomena, I had to deal with it. So, lo and behold, it becomes this big project, comparisons between Mexican Americans in cities in the Southwest with African Americans in cities of the North, and European immigrants, the new European immigrants of the 1880s, 1890s, in the first two decades of the twentieth century in Northern cities. So, it gets out of hand. It's too big. It's a lot of literature. [laughter]

02-01:14:05
Holmes: Well, before we touch on that, you also begin to really kind of explore that project by even 1986, there's an article, "Blacks and Chicanos in Urban America. "

02-01:14:18
Camarillo: It was the first foray into those comparisons, trying to set out, what are some of the parameters, if you look at these two groups, because no one had really yet incorporated a lot of work in the African American studies curriculum and literature, so it was booming, both with white scholars and African American scholars. But no one was making connections to the new Chicano historiography, and so I said, "Well, here's my opportunity. Let me take this idea and see what kinds of comparisons." So it's a very broad initial foray into the comparative urban experiences of African Americans and Mexican Americans.

02-01:15:02
Holmes: And then, this also leads to, I think by 1996, Stanford's Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity.

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02-01:15:13
Camarillo: It does, very explicitly. At Stanford, we hadn't really fully developed Ethnic studies. There was the first African American studies program ever established in higher education, actually established here at Stanford in 1968. But there had never been any parallel Chicano studies, or Asian American, or Native American studies. At the same time as I was getting further into the comparative studies curriculum, and teaching courses with people like George Fredrickson, a colleague here in the history department who had done a lot of work on not only African Americans in nineteenth century, but his work was doing comparisons between the African American experience in the era of South African apartheid—so he was a comparativist, and we were co-teaching courses by that time in American studies. And in '94, we got money from the Mellon Foundation. Through the university, you could submit a competitive proposal to the Andrew Mellon Foundation to support interdisciplinary work on various topics, and so George and I, and several other colleagues that were interested in the comparative studies across and between groups and both domestic and international, put together this group, and we got the funding from the Mellon Foundation to run our two-year seminar on comparative studies in race ethnicity.

Then there was a political factor that happened. Earlier I mentioned the name Cecilia Burciaga; she was one of our long-time Chicana administrators here, and had been the resident fellow with her husband Tony Burciaga in the Chicano theme dorm, Casa Zapata. They were a beloved couple and family at Stanford University, and in the budget cuts of the mid-1990s, the university decided to fire her. And, it caused an enormous uproar, and the students in general, but the Chicana students in particular who felt a real affront, the highest-ranking Chicana administrator—highest-ranking Mexican American administrator at Stanford, and clearly, the only Chicana that had reached that level (she was an associate dean of graduate studies at the time)—and she was let go, like that, by the provost. Condoleezza Rice was the provost at that time.

They were furious. And, what do they do? They take a tactic out of the toolbox of the UFW, and they sit in the middle of the Quad and go on a hunger strike. Day one. Day two. Day three. It's causing an uproar, and it's getting press, and Stanford doesn't like this kind of press. And they're demanding things from the university, and there are a few of us that are advising them, because they, of course, reach out to the Chicano faculty, "How can we be successful about this?" And they had a huge list of demands, but two in particular that would—in the long story, to make it a little shorter: how there was the political movement at the time to really create the environment for the establishment of the Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity.

They wanted Chicano studies. It had not been a formal curricular effort at Stanford. Chicano-related courses went way back to the 1970s with individual courses taught by faculty. They wanted Chicano/Chicana studies, and the

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university said, "Okay, " like universities do, "and we'll form a committee," and met their demands on that level and a couple other ways, but as far as the most important legacy that the group of hunger-striking Chicana students, it was a big part of the formation of Chicano studies. But, when it came to the process of faculty consideration of doing that, none of us wanted to establish a separate Chicano studies program. We already had a group, a small group but an important group, of now pretty senior faculty, including myself, people like Claude Steele, one of the nation's foremost social psychologists, African American, in the psych department; George Fredrickson, one of the preeminent historians of his generation; and a number of other people that said, "Let's create a comparative studies curriculum and research center."

As we went through the process of committee work, we proposed a center for comparative studies and we had to convince the students: "Well, look. We'll fold in Chicano studies into the curriculum, but it's not going to be a standalone, and we're going to do Native American studies, and Asian American studies, and collaborate with the existing African American studies program, so that we could have an umbrella unit at Stanford that would both be on one side, one wing, the curricular side for undergraduates, but a research part of it, and research institute that would support the work of graduate student and faculty." That's how the Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity was born, and they asked me to be the director, the founding director.

02-01:20:54
Holmes: Once again.

02-01:20:54
Camarillo: Yeah, once again, yeah, not what I anticipated, but, I knew it was an important moment for institutional change at Stanford. I knew that if we could get curricular studies in these areas, it would be the next generation of Ethnic studies. Some people call it the third generation of Ethnic studies because of the timing; that's a debate that we could have. Clearly it was different because it was collaborative, it was comparative, it was interdisciplinary, it was curricular, and research based, and that's what made it unique, and, we didn't know at the time that it would become a model for at least a dozen other university centers that are thinking about developing Ethnic studies of a second or third generation, and in fact, becomes a model for, yeah, at least a dozen universities, private and public universities as they think about developing new Ethnic studies structures.

02-01:21:59
Holmes: Yeah, I was thinking about that, too, in my familiarity with the center, that it is different than an Ethnic studies department, that it has the, as you were laying out, that larger umbrella that includes curriculum, includes research, but it's also very focused on the comparative component in both.

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02-01:22:20
Camarillo: Yes, in both, and interestingly too, I think still, to this day, it's the only Ethnic studies center that has Jewish studies as a part of it. [laughter] So, we knew we were doing something different because we had learned a lot from the past. We knew what worked, what didn't work, what would work at Stanford, and what our faculty wanted, and what we thought, as faculty, would be the most cutting-edge, most innovative, creative kind of research and thinking about race studies that we could develop at that particular time. And, I think we were right. I think we were headed in the right direction.

02-01:23:00
Holmes: I wanted to now turn to your forthcoming books, which kind of hit on aspects of these themes that we were just talking about, one that's going to be coming out with Oxford, that's in press: *The Racial Borderlands of America*.

02-01:23:16
Camarillo: Right. So, it's this long journey, right? [laughs]

02-01:23:18
Holmes: Yes, you were discussing that.

02-01:23:20
Camarillo: Comparative, adding new groups, doing more work, trying to fit in the research and writing in between doing all these administrative tasks, and at the same time in the 1990s, when I'm being asked to go into mainstream administration of the university. I was dean of undergraduate studies in the School of Humanities and Sciences for a few years. And so, those kinds of things, and anytime a racial incident came up, first major one happened in the late '80s, they asked me to chair a big university committee. So, it's interesting that I think all of my generation, of the Chicano studies and Ethnic studies people in general, had to do this work. I mean, some people said no, and they probably were more productive. But a lot of us, coming from where we came in the social justice movement, knowing where our legacy derived from the pioneers, knowing that we were creating a beachhead, you couldn't say no to these things. I would have liked to have said no to these things because they take a lot of time, but I knew I couldn't because it was important for the legacy, but it also prolonged the research and writing. [laughs]

So yeah, that book, it's a broad synthesis. So it's a historian, an Ethnic studies scholar, stepping back and saying, "Let me look at the broad canvas of race and ethnicity, immigration, and racialization in American society as people go to the cities. What are the similarities? What are the differences?" And that was always driving it. How was the Chicano experience similar and different to Italians that settled in Chicago? To African Americans that moved from Alabama to New York City, or the Pittsburgh African American communities in the Steel City? How did that look like in comparison to East Los Angeles as that city was industrializing, but its largest ethnic group was Mexican? So it was kind of those questions that propelled me, and it's a big overview, pretty

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big book, and it's my contribution to comparative studies in race and ethnicity. So, I'll be glad to say bye to it—

02-01:25:57
Holmes: Finally get it off your desk.

02-01:25:59
Camarillo: [Laughs] Yeah, and to see it published and have people read it and critique it if they will, but I'm hoping it'll be, again, part of the building blocks of—you know, it is an emerging field. Comparative studies is an emerging field, and I'm hoping it'll be part of that building blocks for the next generation of people that will pick this up. And I wanted to be provocative, so I've added some terminology in there that I know graduate students are already grappling with, because a couple other publications I've had that have given kind of notice to some of the ideas I have embedded in the book, and, that's what you want. You want graduate students to think about these, and even if they reject them, or modify them, they're thinking about the next generation of work that they will do, and it'll take us even further into understanding race and ethnicity and class and all these dynamics that shape our present and shaped our past.

02-01:26:52
Holmes: Then, the second book that's also forthcoming that you're working on is *Going Back to Compton*. And this almost seems like a bit of an intellectual memoir, in some ways.

02-01:27:06
Camarillo: It is. There's a genesis to that, this book which I'm starting to put the pieces together. It's not an academic book. When people ask me, I say it's autobiographical historical. I leave Compton at the time that Compton becomes overwhelmingly African American. Compton of the 1970s and '80s and '90s is what people imagine Compton today, overwhelmingly African American community, drugs, gangs, rap music, the gangster rap, right? Well it was part of the evolution of that city, and I was reading about it from afar occasionally in the *LA Times*, and other things that people now talk about this iconic black city. And I knew it, of course, from a different perspective, and saw where the transition was occurring demographically, and I knew it was also becoming Latino. The nature of the Latinoization of Southern California, it was affecting places like Compton, so I knew the demographics of the changing nature of Los Angeles metropolitan region, from doing the research that I was doing on LA.

But then my oldest son, who graduated from the University of Pennsylvania as an urban education major, decides to go to Compton to teach. And he's there for eight years, and it's a great way for me to kind of get back in to Compton. I hadn't lived there for thirty-some years. I had some relatives that still lived there, but most of my folks had dispersed, as most people did who lived in Compton. The Mexican American middle class and the black middle class left Compton for the most part, and added to its spiraling downward

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economy in other ways. But I wanted to familiarize myself with this place, a city that I still called home, and so I was going there all the time, and decided to do some research on Compton. I wanted to put my historical understanding of that place, and link it to what happened through the second half of the twentieth century and into the early twenty-first century. So I started to publish on Compton. But at the same time, it rekindled my memories, going there so often, and making contacts with the local folks as we were doing some community development work for youth there too.

I was aligning with some African American and Latino advocates to create some opportunities, hopefully—we thought we could create some opportunities for the kids there—and kind of getting back into the nature of that community. And that's when I said, "I've got a story to tell here. Compton, this iconic place—and people don't really know about it, both past and its present." So I started to do some lectures on it, and then wrote a couple pieces on it, published it, and one was autobiographical, and that kind of launched me into thinking about it. Then I was contacted by a couple of publishers asking, "Are you writing a book on this? If not, you should."

And so, I said, "You know, I should." And this is towards the end of my career, and thinking about that long journey which we've talked some about, and it's a story. There're not many stories told like this. We don't have my generation's versions of their lives wrapped into American society that's going through these profound changes, and opening up doors to institutions which we had never been exposed to before, coming from the place I did, and being involved in its multiracial development, and having a son teach at one of the rival [laughs] middle schools where I went to, and hearing all the time about his experiences. In fact, he'll write a couple chapters of this book about his experiences as a middle school teacher there, with just pretty amazing stories too, because he got to see it every day and live it every day.

It's something [the book on Compton] I'm putting together now, the components of it. I'm going back and rekindling my relationships with some of the African American kids that I went to middle school with, my high school, the people that graduated with me from Dominguez High School, and pulling that in as well. It's going to be a story though. It's not an academic book. Thank goodness, it's not going to be an academic study—that would kill it for sure [laughs]. It'll be a story about growing up in Compton. My family goes back there well over a hundred years now, so it's a story that's deeply embedded in that city. But, originally, I was going to cut the story off when I leave for UCLA in 1966 and then return in 2000 as a very senior Stanford faculty member, re-immersing myself into contemporary Compton, seeing the city through my eyes and the eyes of my son, and then leave it at that. But when publishers and book agents called, these folks that were thinking about the potential for a book, they said, "You can't end there. You got to tell your story about Stanford," and all the stuff we've talked about. And so I said, "Yeah, you're right. I've got to put that piece together." And I've written a

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couple pieces about the Latino community at Stanford, and I've put together some broad outlines of this story, and yeah, it'll be probably the last book I publish, I suspect.

02-01:32:58
Holmes: Well it's a way to go out, I think, yes. [laughter] I think it's a good time to take a break.

02-01:33:02
Camarillo: Okay.

02-01:33:05
Holmes: All right, we're back. Al, in our last session here, I wanted to kind of get your observations and reflections on the evolution and future of the field, being there from the beginning to see how it evolved, and then just maybe some thoughts you have of, perhaps, where the field may go. The field was interdisciplinary, really interdisciplinary roots from the beginning. We see this in the methodology, as well as the inclusion of scholars from a variety of disciplines that you interacted with. Also, we saw the rise of Ethnic studies departments, as well as even Chicano studies departments. What was the relationship? I know we didn't have that here at Stanford, but, from your observation, what was the relationship between say, history and Chicano studies? Because once you develop a different, a separate department, there seems to be at times, maybe, some tension or a fissure there, or do you still see this kind of collaboration?

02-01:34:18
Camarillo: Well, I think the institutional structure that was built at whatever university, that was going to have an influence on people's work. So there were some institutions that had freestanding Chicano studies departments, others that were Chicano studies programs within larger Ethnic studies programs. And in a variety of others, like Stanford here, we went more the research side until comparative studies and then created a different kind of umbrella. So I think that would influence some people's work, that would continue to be multidisciplinary, but those people that ended up, like myself, in a department per se, a disciplinary department, I think there were always kind of these forces, disciplinary forces that kept you more closely tied to the discipline, than those people that over time were in Chicano studies or Ethnic studies programs and departments, because constantly, you're having to deal with the interdisciplinary side of it. For me, it was where I thought it was going to advance my work, my knowledge, my publications, my understanding of the Mexican experience in the United States, so I'd borrow, but I never had the kind of institutional pressure of being in a multidisciplinary department to do that. So, I think those structures altered the trajectory of some people's work because of that.

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02-01:35:59
Holmes: Because we also had, during that time, a firm establishment of Chicano studies programs and departments, and at that same time, we see the cultural turn becoming more present—we definitely see that, a lot more theory, different structures of analysis. Did you see—and again, I guess this is asking more of a hypothetical question, or at least from your observations, experience: Did the interdisciplinary programs and departments allow that to flourish more than say, in history, where there was at least some of the old guard that had reservations about that cultural turn?

02-01:36:44
Camarillo: I think absolutely, absolutely, that there, in those multidisciplinary programs or departments, again, the rise of the theoretical. In a sense, we kind of started out with a theoretical, because some of these theoretical questions of Marxian analysis, of variations, the internal colonial model, other neo-Marxist perspectives, all of these we were grappling with at the time. But especially on the kind of cultural studies, literary side, the rise of these bigger theories that are propelled not so much by Americanists per se, but kind of, people writing it around the world from these theoretical perspectives. I think those clearly influenced a number of people who were more closely tied to Ethnic studies programs and departments than those of us that were in departments per se, because we didn't have that kind of imperative that we had to, in some way, engage with the theoretical. And then again, the nature of history as a discipline, we're not theory based. We might consider it and incorporate it, but it's not incumbent upon us to do that kind of theoretical work. It's useful, but it's not something that is expected of us as we publish. So I think, as a discipline, history is a little more conservative that way, maybe a lot more conservative.

02-01:38:14
Holmes: Yeah, and that goes back to, as you were saying, the disciplinary forces that begin to kind of shape your work throughout your career.

02-01:38:23
Camarillo: Right.

02-01:38:24
Holmes: I also wanted to discuss: So as Chicano studies is maturing, and now we're moving from, well, from the second to third generation—depending again how people wanted to label that—we also see this diversification of Chicano studies. And we see this certainly in the name from just Chicano to Chicana slash Chicano, to Chicano with an "at " sign, which I actually kind of like—it's a little bit of both—but then to more recently, Chicanx. And this is of course expanding not just in name, but also recognized really a diversification of topics, looking at gender, but also sexuality.

02-01:39:15
Camarillo: Understandable, and it's a natural progress. You don't want to have a stagnant field of study. So it's always going to be changing, and it should change. It's a

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good thing that there is change, and if it furthers our understanding of a group of people or a society's experience, and it should be welcomed and there shouldn't be a reaction to it. They're saying, "Oh, you know, we did it better in the old days. " That doesn't work. I welcome all these changes, and some of the theoretical things that come along with it. If you were to consider gender as a unit of analysis, how fundamentally that alters the stuff that we were doing back in the 1970s and 1980s. It's fundamental. It's absolutely fundamental, but it took a while for people to be able to say, "Yes, it is. " You can't do history without looking at some of these fundamental parts of a human experience.

02-01:40:17
Holmes: Yeah, yeah. Well it even goes back to some of your earliest work of incorporating Hobsbawm, in the social theory of banditry, in looking at that.

02-01:40:27
Camarillo: Exactly. And, if it promotes your work, if it expands understanding, it's a good thing.

02-01:40:34
Holmes: Yeah. I wanted to get your thoughts on activism in the field. As we discussed last session, of course, as you were in your undergraduate and graduate career, this was a very heady time of activism: antiwar, civil rights, but also the Chicano Movement itself really comes on the scene. This was important in those foundational years. I'd like to get your observations on how activism has continued to influence the field.

02-01:41:07
Camarillo: Well, it starts out, as you note, it was a proposition for career and professional development, but it was so intimately linked to social change. It was linked to a movement of social change. First and foremost, that's what it was about, and I hope that the great majority of my generation never lost sight of that. As you move forward in your career, you can be influenced by the institutions and fall into the trap of just conforming to the ivory tower scholar. But that's not who we were, and I think for the most of us, it never defined the trajectory of our careers, so that activism in one or many different forms has always been a part of who we are. It's certainly been a part of my work as citizen scholar. I've never been able to, nor did I want to, detach the two: citizens as activist, scholar.

02-01:42:13
Holmes: And in looking at it, if we come to today of course, there's some generational divides around that, as well as of course, that glowing ideal in academia of objectivity. What are your observations? How did you, yourself, grapple with that?

02-01:42:32
Camarillo: Well, early on, I think I was a little defensive. We had to be defensive because we were getting a lot of pushback about Chicano studies. So, "How can you as

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a Chicano write objectively about your group?" So we were defensive, but I think we had arguments as well. I think there's no such thing as objectivity in any academic work. All of us are human beings; we create our biases and our conceptions of things and our perceptions of things, and they obviously come into play. I think what we have to be honest about it, how are we balancing any potential bias that would affect how we analyze, how we interpret, and how we conclude about a group's experience? And as long as you're aware of that and keep it in perspective, and you're balancing that, catching yourself sometimes, reminding yourself sometimes: "Is something influencing me in a particular way?" If I am adamantly pro-immigrant, how am I writing about immigration from Latin America in the last third of the twentieth century? It's those types of questions you ask yourself, and to be as honest as you can as a scholar in what you write, and the research that you do, and the interpretations that you draw.

02-01:44:00
Holmes: In looking at today, Chicano studies really has established its place in the academy, and I think as you were just saying earlier, beyond what you could have imagined how much the field has not just influenced our understanding of history and other disciplines and contributed to that, but, has also really carved out and solidified its own intellectual space as a discipline. And, we see this with a number of panels, from our national organizations, not just in history but also disciplines that are dealing with race, dealing with the Mexican American experience. We also see this in, of course, you being elected president of a lot of these national organizations, from the Organization of American Historians in 2012, as well as the American Historical Association's Pacific Coast branch, in 2005. Vicki Ruiz and other scholars would also follow you in those footsteps. Discuss, if you could, what those positions actually meant to you, not just as an academic and a professional, but also as one of those first generation of Chicano scholars, one of really the first that have held those positions.

02-01:45:36
Camarillo: Well, they're wonderful honors, honorary [laughs] positions, right? Some of them would carry a lot of work too, unfortunately. But for me, it was, yes, it was a personal recognition that I'd contributed to the organization and made an impact in the field, but it, for me, it was real pride in that there's recognition of a field that I helped carve out, that there is a widespread understanding that it is an important part of American history. And when someone's identified with a particular part of a historiography—so, some of the first women, for example, that were appointed as presidents, elected as presidents of these organizations, that was a big deal, because women's history had been around for a while. And now, in a sense, it's an institutional recognition of importance of an individual, but who that individual represents in the discipline, in the field.

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02-01:46:44
Holmes: Speaking of the field, if we look back to something you wrote a while ago of, your first seminar paper, "The Chicano Frontier, " and that, you wrote, in reflecting on that piece one time, that for you, "Chicano history really had the promise and potential to really profoundly shape how we look at the American West and the study of the West, as well as broadening that nationally. " Reflecting on your long career, how have you seen the work of not just Chicano history, but largely Chicano studies, also impact the field of US history, and others?

02-01:47:28
Camarillo: Well, I think if you look at any social science discipline, maybe with the exception of political science, because they're so number oriented—they're a quantitative discipline more and more all the time—but sociology, absolutely; anthropology, absolutely; literature, profoundly; the experiences of this very large group in American society over time, and its contributions or its part in shaping an American experience, or a transnational experience. In the last generation of research, transnational analysis has become huge, as it should be. And that's a good critique of our work way back when. Yes, we talked about immigration, but we weren't thinking about the exchanges, the constant impact of forces across the border, or borders. But I think today, just in addition to what I just said, in shaping the disciplines in some profound ways, now that you have sections of the—we actually, in Political Science Associations, the American Sociological Association—you have sections devoted to these groups, which mean, they know there is a substantial cohort of scholars in their disciplines that do this work and it's recognized as such.

So that, I think, this shows the maturation, that it did impact over time each of these disciplines. And more importantly, I think, Chicano studies, and by extension, Ethnic studies in general, has allowed us to see a diversity in the American experience where my generation growing up in public schools had no inkling of whatsoever. And it's now beginning to penetrate the public schools and textbooks. Still slow to do, but it is, and that for me is social change as well. So what kids write, and read and write about in high school, certainly in college, it's expanding our understanding of what the American past, and by extension, what the American present is about. I think the greatest challenge though to push it forward for Chicano studies, whether we call it Chicano studies or not—there's a bigger challenge today than those of us working in the early stages of the field. Here's why: I would argue that the immigration from Mexico and Latin America, and by extension, Asia as well, in the last third of the twentieth century, and the beginning of the twenty-first century, reshaped the entire nation in profound ways, way more so than some of these immigrations earlier, and the trajectory of this society for the future.

Now, as historians, we know it takes about [laughs] thirty years plus to kind of catch up, but I would say the greatest research challenge is to understand the profound nature of several things: what this immigration, this unbelievable,

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the largest immigration in American history, how it shaped existing communities, how it's impacted American institutions and American life and culture; and to try to understand where this is taking American society and democracy in the twenty-first century. Right now, Chicano studies and most Ethnic studies are working on the 1970s, but that immigration was really, though it started in the '70s, it's had its greatest impact in the 1990s, and forward. That's the challenge for people of the next generation of scholars, to tackle that big issue, because the numbers are monstrous, and the impact is equally huge, and to start sorting it out. What did it mean? How did it change society? How did it change the worldview of a lot of Americans? How did a lot of Americans react to this?

We're seeing that full force now, because in a sense, you can argue we're in an important watershed in American life and culture and civilization right now. And I would argue, that immigration, and what happened to their children as they're maturing in American society, has prompted so much of these reactions and protests, at the same time that it's, at a different level without protest, altering the nature of society. Well, that's part of the agenda for the next generation of people doing Ethnic studies and Chicano history or Mexican American history.

02-01:52:29
Holmes: Yeah, well and that really hits my next question—where you see the future of the field going. And you laid it out pretty nicely right there. It's a very big challenge.

02-01:52:38
Camarillo: And for me personally, this work that I'm doing on Compton, trying to understand the changing nature of that local society, every time I turn around, it makes me think about, "Well, wait a minute; this was occurring in other cities throughout the United States." Maybe not exactly the same way, but it was having profound impact on changing the demography, the culture, the social, the inter-group networks, all this stuff. So, that's a big challenge because it's such a huge population at an important and interesting time in American society.

02-01:53:15
Holmes: That also brings me to—here I was thinking about the needed changes both in the field but also at the university level, and what really comes to mind, particularly after you say that, are programs like CSRE, comparative studies in race and ethnicity, programs that are going to be able to tackle not just one subgroup or community, but look at this interaction between these communities as you were discussing.

02-01:53:43
Camarillo: Yeah, there's another thing. This is an anecdote, but I'll share it with you, from yesterday. So I mentioned to you I went to our son's school, Luis Valdez Leadership Academy, and laying the plans for our Stanford-Luis Valdez

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Leadership Academy collaboration in Mexican American history courses being taught there, and my students will mentor them. Well, the lead teacher who I've been working with now for six years—it's their first group of students now, so this school has four classes and the seniors are applying to colleges and universities—and she excerpted three personal statements from the Mexican American history class that we were co-teaching, collaborating on three years ago when these kids were freshmen. And, each of them basically says: "I didn't know anything about my past or the group to which I relate. I feel that history has connected me in a way that I not only understand myself, I understand my community, I understand society, and it has given me the impetus to continue to study this in college and to contribute to American society."

Man, I could barely hold back the tears reading those statements, because that's what it was all about, right? It's this intergenerational change, so that kids like these seniors at Luis Valdez, when they were freshmen, they were exposed to something that I was exposed to for the first time ever when I was a junior at UCLA; I was twenty years old. It had the same effect on me; it's having the same effect on them. They'll be better students, they'll go to college, they'll change their lives, they'll change their family lives, they'll change their communities, and they'll change society, and this is all a part of that phenomena, which Chicano studies is a part of.

02-01:55:42
Holmes: Here I wanted to give you the opportunity—when I was putting together this project, and of course, in oral history, it's always a game of time, because you identify some of the key scholars of that early generation only to realize that some of those scholars that you would love to interview are no longer here to interview. I wanted to give you the opportunity, in kind of an in memoriam, to pay tribute or discuss some of these scholars that have passed that were very influential on you.

02-01:56:18
Camarillo: Sure, there are a number of them. Unfortunately, my generation is dying off too. We've lost three or four of our Chicano historian colleagues in the last couple of years, because they're all approaching their late 60s, early to mid-70s. And so, some of them have passed on, and I wish that I would have had more of an opportunity to talk to them about these intergenerational experiences, because now we're doing that. We're doing that more and I'm encouraging people to start thinking about writing their autobiographies, because everyone has a story to tell in some way that is connected to what we've been talking about through this oral history.

There were people like, both some of the pioneers and more recent people that were my generation, that were really, I think, influential, and good friends, and people I looked up to. So, some people weren't scholars, but they had an academic orientation to everything they did. Like Bert Corona, labor leader,

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community organizer. He was so attuned to history and luckily, I did have an opportunity to interview him, together with Josefina Fierro, and they did a remarkable interview, two of them. But it was one of my first oral histories as an undergraduate with Bert Corona that concretized for me the importance of oral history and personal history that opens up vistas for you to understand a group experience. So, I look back to someone like Bert Corona, and then people, pioneer scholars, like Julian Samora, a sociologist who I read and he wrote about immigration. So he was one of those that trained a number of sociologists who were involved in study of immigration. And he was both an important scholar and the role model as activist scholar, because he was always pushing the boundaries.

More recent colleagues—I'm blanking right now on his name—Arturo Rosales, who was a friend for many, many years through the National Association of Chicano studies. That's where we met, and he ended up working in Arizona, Arizona State University, and he and I had a long friendship. Well, we wouldn't see each other all the time, but he had an interesting history, and personal history, and he was the first to write in conjunction with the PBS series on the Chicano Movement. He wrote the big book on the Chicano Movement, and I would have loved to have had a conversation with Arturo before he passed away, I think the year before last, about doing the Chicano history series and that book. What did it kindle most in his mind when—we were about the same age—when he was getting started, and, because we never had that kind of those discussions, about what was it like for you in graduate school? I didn't know. I just assumed there were similar things.

So, scholars like that that are of my generation that have passed on, and they've left their mark, and they've published a couple books, if not more, and they are part of this cohort. So they are also pioneers. I've mentioned Galarza and Julian Samora, and others that I was really fortunate to meet, and they left a real legacy. And, I think, when we pass on, people will look back and say, "Well, yeah, that generation really helped establish something that was important that we're carrying on, " and I hope that my name is added to that list. [laughter]

02-02:00:32
Holmes: Well I'm sure it will. We are here at the end. Any final thoughts that you'd like to share?

02-02:00:41
Camarillo: Just to reflect, briefly, that—and I've been reflecting a lot lately, in thinking about putting together this autobiographical account, and part of this too, talking with you about the formation of Chicano studies—I'd say, it's a life journey. It's shaped by history. We are all products of history, and to be able to latch onto something that transformed me, transformed my life, altered the trajectory of my family, and brought me to a place like Stanford University

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where I like to think I had some impact. Those are things, when I think about my father and mother's generation, systematically excluded—they're the ones that experience "Jamie Crow," as I call it, the version of Jim Crow that came to the Southwest—and, they lived in segregated areas, and they were immigrants, or children of immigrants, and to think about that generational change, and when I put my own generational experience in there, that's what gives me hope about American society and American democracy.

As I work with these youngsters in high schools, first gen, they're the children of the families that came in the 1990s, and I see what giving them opportunity can do, like opportunity that was given to me, and it's an intergenerational phenomena that must be continued and promoted, because it makes for better citizens of the nation, and it makes for a better society. So when I look back over those many, many years, my entire life, it was because opportunity was created for me, and I wanted to create opportunity for others, and it goes on and on and on.

02-02:02:49
Holmes: Well thanks so much, Al.

02-02:02:50
Camarillo: It was my pleasure, Todd. It's been a lot of fun, as a matter of fact.

02-02:02:54
Holmes: It has. Thanks so much.

[End of Interview]

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