

Race and Oral History Project, UC San Diego

Narrator: Kayla (Kay) Burner

Interviewer: Lauren Gomez

Transcribed by: Lauren Gomez

Location: San Diego, CA

Date: 5-31-22

Length of Interview: 40 minutes and 46 seconds

Time	Transcription
00:00:04 Lauren Gomez	Hi my name is Lauren Gomez I am with HIUS 120 for the oral history project I'm here interview, with my interviewer today, so I would like if you wanted to state your name.
00:00:24 Kay Burner	Yeah my name is Kay Burner, Kay Rodriguez Burner and I am a member of Detention Resistance
00:00:30 Lauren Gomez	Alright so let's get the interview started, so first question is, how were you drawn to detention resistance?
00:00:47 Kay Burner	So a couple years, not a couple years ago at this point like five years ago. I this is gonna be like kind of like the long-ish story, but I started doing some self-education and self-research on mass incarceration and the prison industrial complex, this is stuff that I did not learn in school. In either my undergrad to it experience, where my graduate experience I was doing embarking on some self-education. Reading and really. for a few years before getting involved with detention resistance, it was like I started really obsessing over, reading every book I could possibly read doing a ton of you know just, just research. So when a friend shared a flyer to come to a volunteer orientation I *pause* jumped at the opportunity to volunteer to get more involved, and it's funny because that friend never joined but, m I went to the volunteer orientation learned more about what they do and also just more about the Otay detention Center here, I had I didn't really have a lot of experience in all of my self

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	<p>study that had been mostly focused on prisons. Not that detention centers are much different but they had been, it had been more focused on that. that scope of the industrial prison complex, and, and so the orientations used to I, they, might still do, but they did a really good job at kind of like laying up like the history in the background of the detention center and really educating us. And so, really, it was a social media post. , And from there, I just kind of showed up at a meeting, and i'm thankful that I joined during the in person meeting times. Because they had him at centro and I just kind of like showed up like by myself, like hi i'm here to join or i'm here to like learn more like I'm here that you know and and from there, they couldn't get rid of me I guess.</p>
<p>00:03:02 Lauren Gomez</p>	<p>That *clears throat* I love that social media has feel like really changed the way political activism has shaped society, so I really appreciate that it was a post that you saw that led you to that, so my second question is, are there any personal connections to this cause, or was it more just research based?</p>
<p>00:03:02 . Kay Burner</p>	<p>it's mostly research based I mean I am Latina my family, I don't know I want to say, like three fourths i'm- i'm- i'm mixed, but most of my grandparent are from Mexico, but at this point i'm I don't know whether it's second or third generation, but i'm pretty a little bit more removed from their migration path and journeys. And so yeah I think I don't have the personal connection that, like some people have with this Mostly research based and then just a sort of common or like general desire for uhh people to feel valued and for their Humanity to be recognized by the systems. Yeah</p>
<p>00:04:03 Lauren Gomez</p>	<p>yeah I feel like as Latinas we also like carry that with us like that sense of urgency because it's like passed down from generation to generation so that's something that even though first, second, third, we always have that with us.</p>
<p>00:04:19 Kay Burner</p>	<p>yeah</p>
<p>00:04:21 Lauren Gomez</p>	<p>I guess another question that goes off from that is what are your ultimate goals for the collective and how can we as young activists be part of it?</p>

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00:04:27 Kay Burner	<p>Wow, So thats a tough questions because I think *pause*, so the question was what are your ultimate goals right, and I think as a collective, we are very conscientious about being really consensus driven being really collective focus rather than individuals right, and so things like I don't I feel like I can't possibly answer what my vision is for the collective cause that it's a communal process to decide moving forward. I can/have we've been doing some dreaming over the last few years, that is really exciting to me, and I can share a little bit about that. Like we've done some big dreaming in terms of like sharing a like buying, purchasing land, and being able to sort of like open up a like shared communal living to the folks who would otherwise be detained, I think one of the big questions, that people who are on the fence, of being abolitionist in this realm, people say okay well, well what it, what do we do with people then right and, For the most part, people who are detained in Otay Mesa Detention Center have families that they could be immediately reunited with there's a very small percentage that don't have that connection right away right, and so we have dreamed about having like, you know, a big. Whatever it is like structure like sort of like commune sort of living, where we have a garden, and we, you know maintain it collectively and then folks can, folks can stay there for as long as they need to, right. So that is like something you really like long term really like but I guess as abolitionists our goal and our *pause* Our job really is to not just think about how are we going to tear down these structures, how are we going to you know. Burn it all downright , and more so, what are we cultivating, what are we growing, what are we creating so that those harmful and violent structures are no longer necessary. And so, whether this looks like this, like dream house with the garden that we're that we are doing or something else I like this idea of creating something together that renders the detention Center useless in one way or another right. And then I mean. Obviously biggest score is so that Otay Mesa Detention Center no longer exists and but then we're all really aware and really mindful of the fact that, like just because one detention Center is closed, doesn't mean that people aren't going to get transferred somewhere else, so the work really is not done until all detention centers no longer as it exists and then from there prisons right and from there, the the the structuring of our of our border and the militarization of our border and the prisons, related to migration and our border really extended beyond the sort of the line between.Uh, Mexico, the United States, Canada, United States right like they're growing so this project is so massive and expansive on the United States project.Carceral project right is so expansive that the work and the path, to abolish it or create, uh rendered useless is also must be expansive so in terms of like dreaming it's really like there's there's just so much work to be done, so it doesn't end at Otay Mesa Detention Center being done or being closed yeah, but I think with the</p>

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	<p>*inaudible* and i'm trying to circle back to the original question and see if I answered it, personal goals within the, I guess I can speak a little bit more short term for personal goals i'm excited for visitations, to be back up and happening. I-I enjoyed those and enjoyed making those friendships with the folks inside, and so I think short term, I would like to move forward in creating or- or Establishing more, one on one connections with Compas in a way that I haven't since i'm not on the phone line right now, but I was doing a lot more visitations and transportation of that stuff before before covid. That i'm that i'm excited to do again and then to continue to organize with those folks and maintain those relationships moving forward.</p>
<p>00:09:40 Lauren Gomez</p>	<p>I love that that you have, like so many different goals, because, like locally, obviously, you know community everyone wants that sense of belonging that was taken away because of ICE and I love that it transcends so much because the border is really it's not even just a line it's like. A physical difference you feel it it's when you get close to the border there's just energy of like militarism and you were talking about that earlier that. We all don't want like nobody wants to cross a line and like be shot, you know by CBP for just existing so I love that you have so many different levels, and I think that's really amazing in an organization. Speaking of your organization, I know that you've worked in all the departments, because you're working you did phones you transportation, do you have a favorite position or do you like moving around?</p>
<p>00:10:38</p>	<p>I have really been enjoying well so I think part of my perspective, and I think all of our perspectives, but i'll just speak from mine, I think it's important for me to, or it has been important in the last three years or so, to be able to be flexible, with the things that are like picking up where things are needed. Rather than necessarily pushing a sort of individual sort of agenda of things that I want to do, and more so, responding to the sort of needs of the collective right, and so I think if that means hopping around like you say are like just started being Flex- flexible in the in the types of roles that I move in and out of I think that that's important. I have been really, really enjoying, this this space, which is rather new or this like role, which is working on the oral history project that feels very in alignment with, that I'm interested in what I feel like I have something to contribute to in terms of my skill set</p>

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	<p>and my experiences and training and, etc. So that feels because there's been times, where i'm like I just I doing something i'm like I have no prior knowledge about this, but I can help in terms of like just. Being there showing up and- and supporting in that way and, but it is nice to be in roles, where I feel like I have a skill set that is useful right, and so I think all of us in movement. You know what what, whatever type of movement you're you're thinking about I think all of us have something unique to offer and kind of honing in on what that unique offering is that you have and being able to- to realize like you don't need to either person with the microphone. You don't need to be the person and there's there's a need for all types people with all types of skill sets, and so I think leaning into what. feels in alignment with with what is natural to me is really cool, so I think the oral History project feels good and so let's political ed although. I think that we could do a lot more in that realm we've done the political ed committee has done, really, really good work here to have since it's been I think about a year and a half since it started the committee itself and I think we can do so much more and that seems really exciting to me, too, especially when thinking about political ed opportunities that. cross over into the detention Center as well right, but this sort of consciousness shifting role right, which obviously as an educator makes sense that that fills in alignment and feels good right but yeah it's a political ED and the oral history project feel like I guess would be my favorite or feel the best.</p>
<p>00:13:59 Lauren Gomez</p>	<p>I like that you move around so much I think it's- it's really cool the way that potential resistance moves as a collective in the sense that like this needs to be done so you'll do this and you'll do this, and everyone like puts in their equal work, and I guess understanding that it's an abolitionist collective, would you say that, that having no hierarchy has positively impacted the way that it runs?</p>
<p>00:14:20 Kay Burner</p>	<p>Totally, totally I mean, I think that it's really important that our organizing spaces. Mirror or reflects the world that we're organized for right, so if we're organizing for a different type of world that isn't based on, domination and violence right we can't have an organizing space that also subscribes to a sort of like dominating hierarchical potentially violent structure right, and so I think it's super- super important that and I am actually reading. Adrian Murray Browns Emergent Strategy and she talks about fractals and I think one of the images that she zooms in on is the fern and so and the fern and other fractals are things that basically at their smallest form are the same as at their biggest form so ferns are made of little tiny leaves that look like the big leaf right that little tea leaves that form this and then these form like whatever it's like a</p>

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	<p>they sort of like mirror and frack, fracture out to create like the same form right so and I think her point is that what happens in at a small scale will influence the large scale right, so if we're aiming for, aiming for, like a non hierarhical society if that's where we're organizing for that we need to practice it, in our small relationships in our organizations in our families, one on one with each other right, and so I think that it's been really helpful to practice this in rela life because it's hard, because we have all internalized the sort of logics of domination and hierarchy because that's the society we live in it's the water we we swim in right it's it's the air we breathe, irs this irs this hierarchical domination sort of centered society, and so I think it has been really helpful, and I think, on a personal note it's been really helpful to experience and, I think, like many people, it can be someone who like wants to be efficient and wants to get things done right, and when you move as a collective. it's not that you're not getting things done, but it's going to look things it's going to look different right it's not this sort of like top down all of the sort of like worker I'm trying to i'm-i'm trying to think of a sort of metaphor in nature, but, yeah I guess another one of Adrian Marie Brown's metaphors has been this sort of like migration of birds right and how they all sort of get to their path, but all of their paths look different and that each individual. Bird like it's basically accounts for all of the like five or six birds around them right, rather than this sort of there's not one bird thay says, this is what we're going to do right, but instead they're all sort of like moving together in like mutual agreement right, and so I think that it's slow it's hard to rewire our brains to-to move in this way, but it's really, really, transformative and I think necessary as we move towards a world that we're hoping that is more that- that is based on life and not death on, reciprocity and healing and not domination and violence right.</p>
<p>00:18:13 Lauren Gomez</p>	<p>yeah unlearning that like capitalistic idea of work and how to get things done is really, it's really difficult because everything around us revolves around capitalism, and I guess moving away from that, but still on the same note how would you say that the different administrations impacted the work of the tend to resistance? because we've had a very tumultuous few years with a certain President I won't we know who it is I don't need to say.</p>
<p>00:18:51 Kay Burner</p>	<p>yeah you know it's kind of, *pause*So, in many ways, policy wise, we. don't see a ton of difference between Republican and Democratic leaders because I see it, and i'll just speak on behalf of my own opinion, I think you know both parties are sort of two sides, the same capitalist white supremacist quite right So the main difference and, of</p>

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	<p>course, you know Trump's administration began a number of really violent, policies that have had real resounding impacts on many, many people. The remain in Mexico policy for one right, and so, and that is something that Bidens iolence administration says that they're trying to stop right and, and it is true that, like the judges in various states and whatever are blocking it right they they keep blocking Biden and I, I for one think that Bidens administration could be doing more if they really wanted to, Yo--you know, lift title 42 to then they could, so this sort of like oh terms judges are are getting in the way of our actual progress it's like I really don't feel I feel like, if you want something to happen, it would happen and maybe that's naive and not totally understanding the electoral process or not, the electoral process, but like the sort of systems that play, but I think that this administration, like the previous one stand to lose a lot of whether it's money or political capital from detention centers being abolished so I don't think that they're in any hurry to do that, anytime soon, or in any hurry to you know respond to the violent, To the violence that's happening at the border, because of US policy like it's not just it's happening at the border, like no it's it was designed this way right like. So the many ways policy wise. Our work has it changed a ton I think what is different from one president to another is sort of *pause* Liberal- Liberal energy, so the folks who, like me. don't see either party, a sort of being or are like saving grace to like actually respond in a humane way they're the same it's the people I would say that are sort of on the left or like would would call themselves liberals who maybe a little bit more complacent now with Biden in office, so you don't have as much of the energy that you had it when Trump was empowered to sort of aggressively go against trump now I feel like, general population of liberal people: are slightly they're like more relaxed they think I didn't handling it a little bit more maybe they like trust Biden\ little bit more they trust by to maybe to do more than you know, like where I think Some of that like fire in rage that came out and people during trump's administration during trump's timing office is it as much there and, I don't know how that really affects our work we're not really that's not really our-our- our audience, to begin with, but I would just say just a general public perception and I think is an as infuriated as they should be considering much of the same stuff is still happening, I guess, is what I would say I would say, like the like passion has decreased from one President to the next and that's interesting because policies haven't really changed much right.</p>
00:23:17 Lauren Gomez	<p>If you don't see it you don't care. Really that's what it is it's like people don't see Trump saying all these racist things with the border about Mexicans and Central Americans and they don't really care. doesn't affect them I think that's a lot of it</p>

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	because Trump brought out so much like outward hate, as opposed to Biden who's still embracing it but it's like in a neat package, if that make sense,
00:24 Kayla Burner	Yup, Yup
00:24:49 Lauren Gomez	and I guess moving back to detention resistance, I like doing the transcriptions myself has been difficult i'm like getting my family involved i'm making my parents like listen to them, because I think they're important just because the way that they crossed is very different. You know the different times different administrations it's just very different so, and it's heavy it's really heavy on on who you are and like, how do you manage that work, because it can toll so heavily on your mind or your mental health as well?
00:24:20 Kay Burner	yeah, I think having a collective of people that are really some of the most, like compassionate empathetic people, I feel really in a lot of ways, like scene and like nurtured by the collective by people like they're just so, it's funny because they feel like people is in their mind they think abolitionists like might think, like more like aggressive sort of people, and yet this is a collective of like the most like the softest people, the people who are like, if anything, I would say, maybe even more, they, we feel so deeply I think as a collective we feel really deeply right, which is why we're called to do this work right. We can't possibly learn about this and and not do something, because we feel it's so deep in our beings right, so I think being just in community with them is really is number one, *pause* It has been harder well in the virtual organizing times that we're in I think meeting in person, every other week was really helpful and felt like, yeah, just being in community in face to face community with people was really just something that I felt really held by, and so I think finding moments, now that we have a little bit. That the pandemic, I don't want it's not over, I think, like when people say post covid or something that that's silly but we're in a different sort of phase of it, so I think finding moments to connect with folks in the collective was really helpful. Hearing from folks who have been detained, and hearing and I don't know how I feel about the word word resilience, but like -a- again the book that I just finished reading working on this call. Talking about it, I think, hearing the resilience and the the sort of just- just the-the power behind their survival and and not just survival, but like. The way that they were able to sometimes even thrive right, either within in some way in some capacity with with people in there or afterwards I think that that's really healing too. I think that that like, as hard as it is we're on the outside and so when i'm able to like I hosted one of our compas at my

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	<p>house uber December we hosted the collective and one of the compas who had just gotten released at the beginning of the month, and just hearing from him and hearing his stories and hearing like his hat what he. Just the the ways in which, like he he told stories of: community, of joy of resourcefulness of you know, and so just hearing the stories I think we're really uplifting and really helped to like what i'm feeling my energy levels fade and my like just you know.: Just being overwhelmed by everything I think hearing someone hearing stories like that.help to sort of lift me back up and back into the sort of headspace to be able to continue the work right. And I think just being really mindful about where I'm at I think it's. If i'm struggling and if i'm overwhelmed and if i'm even potentially burnout I think acknowledging that and sharing that with people like the collective is really responsive to that, like all of us, whenever anyone's like were, i'm going on mental health break or something were like yes go you, you need to do this for yourself we're so happy for you we'll see you if and when it feels right to come back right. So I think it's never really about, like the sort of permission to do X, I think that that's always there the doors always open and, but it's it's giving yourself that permission to be like all right, I need to take a week or a month or something and I need to recharge because i'm feeling really heavy right now. In one way or another, so I think being honest with yourself and then sharing that with others, knowing that like we said, like the. birds in the migration pattern, or like the fish in a school of fish right like. One, it it's not going to change the sort of like overall. direction if you need to be others will pick up the slack right and and that's like the beauty of not having this sort of like hierarchical structure but rather this relationship of just sort of like mutual interdependence and reciprocity right of this like I got you go take a break right, so I think being honest with yourself being honest with the people that you're working with too has been really helpful.</p>
<p>00:24:20 Kay Burner</p>	<p>yeah, I think having a collective of people that are really some of the most, like compassionate empathetic people, I feel really in a lot of ways, like scene and like nurtured by the collective by people like they're just so, it's funny because they feel like people is in their mind they think abolitionists like might think, like more like aggressive sort of people, and yet this is a collective of like the most like the softest people, the people who are like, if anything, I would say, maybe even more, they, we feel so deeply I think as a collective we feel really deeply right, which is why we're called to do this work right. We can't possibly learn about this and and not do something, because we feel it's so deep in our beings right, so I think being just in community with them is really is number one, *pause* It has been harder well in the virtual organizing times that we're in I think meeting in person, e very other week was really helpful and felt like, yeah just being in community in face to face community</p>

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00:30:01 Lauren Gomez	<p>yeah community is really, really key and also like acknowledging your own mental health because, like yes we're in such a place of privilege because we're on the outside, like trying our best to help people. Inside but it's also like accepting the fact that I also matter you know it's really good to take to take a step back and look at it from that perspective and I guess, we talked about everything being virtual like us right now. The pandemic has really just shifted everything and all of our lives, and I feel like, especially with attention resistance, just because. The hotline is like the only really outlet because there's no more in person visits and how would you say that detention resistance has like chain manage this pivot in the times of COVID-19?</p>
00:30:52 Kay Burner	<p>yeah I mean, so we initially I mean so just the sort of things that we do change right like you mentioned the *inaudible* the hotline we went from having a hotline that was active a couple hours on Saturday, and someone had like a physical phone that they would. kind of pass around for me please. Because there was only like three or four hours on the weekend and then, once the pandemic hit and visitations are closed off, then our hotline went to at the time, I think, was like you know, like 8am to 10pm or something like that it was a really kind of big time to have that there was someone on the phones and, and like I said, there was no visitations anymore, and the things shifted things the demands, this sort of the where we weren't as much doing so many sort of like actions there, it felt necessary to do actions at the Detention Center and plan those with with folks: inside and so and then do like other sort of collaborative work with other organizations to- to make to think about ways in which that we could advocate for like policy changes to to like get people out as fast as possible the- the urgency, you know, obviously, increased with updated with the pandemic the deadly pandemic right and as organized we ahh oh my gosh at the very beginning it was it was tough, we were meeting all the time! like before -before the pandemic, we would meet every other wee as a collective and then we had our committee meetings that would happen at varying timelines but mostly every other week, maybe weekly depending on the committee and again, those were in person but we went from that to having like I don't know I remember having like four or five maybe six zoom meetings, a week for various things that were going on, like so like planning the action doing this other thing doing something right again like just being, and so we really just like started just meeting all the time that I think it burnt out a lot of people it definitely I felt really. It was really hard, it was really hard the weight of the reality of being a pandemic just as a society right but also just knowing how much more dangerous it was. For the folks inside and trying to figure out like, how do</p>

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	<p>we do what we can from our positioning also staying safe and so yeah I just we just did so many meetings and we're trying to do so much. I think now we've shifted into a more we've we kind of had to come back to our slower roots are slower more mindful. reflective of sort of way of doing things that I think was we sort of got off track a little bit at the pandemic because the rush of everything and now we're kind of coming back to who we are, which is. yeah we move we move solar we move together we we don't give in to the sort of. Capitalist urgency of things right,we- yeah, so I think that would come back to that a little bit more like over the last couple years slowly getting there, and so it feels a lot. A lot more like the in--in terms of energy and pace and mindfulness I think it it feels more similar to the collective that I don't, but I think it's been hard, I think that we all need to see each other, and I think organizing spaces all organizing spaces, I think*pause* really benefit from sharing food together to like having potluck to seeing you know, took to like being in real community and like not necessarily talking about organizing and, instead of just like connecting as like humans is it that's really, really important to sustaining our work, and I think that we've. i've missed that a lot in the last couple years and we're getting back to this like I mentioned posting like them over at my house things like that, I think that that's really can't be understated how important that is for sustaining our work.</p>
<p>00:35:37 Lauren Gomez</p>	<p>Thank you for sharing that because I mean it's been difficult for everyone, but I can't imagine the heavy like toll that would take on well everyone detention resistance.: I guess Moving on to my last question, I know we've had a little little it's been good mountain time but I don't want to you're a mom you're busy I don't want to take up too much. This one I guess.Is it could be positive or negative, but do you have a favorite or even most impactful memory, working with the collective. If it's too much you don't have to answer as well.</p>
<p>00:36:19 .200 Kay Burner</p>	<p>No, No no I'll say something good, I think. So I already mentioned hosting the collective at my house, we have like our last December meeting at my house and then we had. One of our one of our compas come over and he shared stories and that was just that was really powerful because it's already mentioned that i'll mention kind of a similar experience, where. He was a friend invited a couple of us over for dinner. And again, one of the recently released compas she came over for dinner, and she is, Indigenous from *pause* Guatemala and I don't remember what her native language ais, her native language was an indigenous language from and-- and she learned and so so hearing her speak at dinner she shared stories about how she learned Spanish in</p>

Time	Transcription
	<p>the detention Center she learned. A lot of English as well, so she was speaking in English to she even was like I even learned a little bit Chinese and she just was such a bad ass like just hearing her be like I learned all of these languages in the detention Center right and her like yeah I think she was like 18 she was so young and she, but the way she like yeah I think I'm going to learn Chinese next i'm going to do this, this and and that, like her, her she's had like i'm just gonna do this this this and this and I have, like all these streams at least visions and like I just I felt so you know I think it's like really-- our instinct is to maybe victimize these people to you know, to think about, just like the hardships that they've been doing that's true they have. For the most part, many of them all of them have gone through their journeys all different, but i've been really tough, especially you know the further away than the more countries, you have together, etc, etc right and. even then, just. Even if your journey isn't as long it's still really hard: and but her energy and her just like I don't know, I think it kind of like *inaudible* me out towards like these are just these aren't people who are just like need our pity or help or whatever like they're bad as humans in their own right, that they can help us. You know, like there's and I think, just like remembering that but, like hearing them in the end and hearing her speak specifically I think in this in this night and i'm like visualizing. The dinner table and eating Mexican food and just and just and just hearing her stories of her life and her visions for her dreams about what's next you know or just was so. impactful and I think that these moments, are the ones that that sustain my energy and work and and just make me keep coming back and and knowing that I need that, but there will be no point in my life that i'm not dedicating at least part of my time to this work in various ways it'll show up differently throughout my life i'm sure, but I can't imagine stepping away and just not- right. And I think it's those moments right there that that really. have stood with me.</p>
00:40:02 Lauren Gomez:	<p>Thank you so much, I-I really feel a call to detention resistance as well, like after hearing the presentation and the quarter and I was like I have to work with them, and I was really, I'm very lucky that I've gotten to work with everyone. I think that I would love to continue, and I really, really appreciate you taking the time to talk to me today. I've learned so much and I hope that people who watch this, you know, feel drawn to working with the detention resistance so that's that's my ultimate goal, so I really appreciate it .Thank you so much for contributing to my Oral History project.</p>
00:40:39	<p>Yeah, thank you so much.</p>

Time	Transcription
Kay Burner	
00:40:46 Lauren Gomez:	I'll stop recording: Okay.