

Transcription:

- Narrator name: Dr. Luis Alvarez
- Interviewer: Sam Sotomayor
- Date: 05/13/2024
- Location: Zoom / San Diego
- Collection: Race and Oral History Course, Spring 2024
- Length of interview: 01:03:29

SS: Okay. Good morning.

LA: Good morning!

[00:00:55]

SS: Can you please introduce yourself?

LA: My name is Luis Alvarez. I'm a professor of history at the University of California, San Diego.

[00:00:20]

SS: Thank you. Can you please tell us where you are from, and what your childhood was like?

LA: I'm from San Diego, I have deep roots in the city and the surrounding areas. My grandparents were born in La Mesa. My dad was born in La Mesa, I was born in La Mesa, and my twin daughters were also born in La Mesa and most of my family on my dad's side is all from Lemon Grove, Spring Valley, that neck of the woods here in SouthEast San Diego. On my mom's side, I have roots in New York City and the East Coast and most of my childhood was spent bumping around San Diego and lots of other places.

I lived the first few years of my life in San Diego, and my father, who is also an academic, was finishing up graduate school, so I also came of age of sorts in Palo Alto while he was finishing his degree in anthropology at Stanford. And then, as many academics do, we moved around quite a bit. He had a postdoctoral fellowship at Columbia University in New York. So I lived in New Jersey when I was younger. Then he had a teaching gig at Sacramento State

University and we moved back to California and spent 4 or 5 years there. He left the Academy for a stretch of time, and we moved back to Southern California and that's where I went to high school at Long Beach, Millikan. And when it was time for me to apply to university myself San Diego had a draw because it had been home, as really any place had been my entire life, even though I hadn't lived there since I was 3 or 4, and my grandmother was still there at the time, my grandfather, cousins that I was very close with, my Tia Sylvia, and others. So I ended up back at UC San Diego in the summer of 1990, and like I said, it was a bit of a homecoming, had no idea I'd still be here these many years later, but that's a little bit of my childhood in the moving around part at least.

[00:03:00]

SS: What—What was your favorite place to live at? You know you've mentioned all these different places? Is there one that stands out the most, other than San Diego?

LA: Other than San Diego. If I put myself in my young adult and teenage and childhood brain, I would probably say Palo Alto and Stanford, specifically, we moved around a bit, lived in Menlo Park and a few different areas in that region. But Stanford was really formative in my own kind of coming of age. We lived in graduate student housing in one of the courtyards, and I remember playing in the playground in the middle of the housing complex. I remember walking or riding my bike to school on my own for kindergarten and first grade. It was a different era. I remember going to Stanford football games and basketball games and baseball games with my dad and my parents. So I also remember being dragged along with my dad to his Phd student offices and just lots about the campus was sort of really fundamental to who I was for a while and when we left it was really sad for me as a kid. And that was probably I'd say I among my favorites, partly because we moved around so much that it was hard to kind of develop roots, and I always

thought about San Diego and Stanford as places where I had roots, for whatever reason, family and otherwise.

SS Yeah, places that you could like claim, so on-so to speak.

LA: Yeah, I gotta say, though Sacramento was alright, I didn't like leaving Sacramento and New Jersey was great, even though I was only in second and third grade because we got to connect in a different way with my mom's side of the family because we were so close to them. And usually we had been on the other side of the country.

[00:05:22]

SS: Of course. Okay. So your family has deep ties in San Diego with your grandfather being the center of the Roberto Alvarez versus the board of trustees of the Lemon Grove School District, the first court case to discuss segregation within the school system. How did this impact your childhood? Was this a common story that was told to you?

LA: Yeah, it's a remarkable story. I think, one that's important to our family, to San Diego, to Chicax history, and education history, and really US history more broadly. In some ways it played, I think, an important role, and in others it was beneath the surface. At least, when I was younger. I mentioned, my dad was an anthropologist, and he was the one when he was a young adult and a student that first heard whispers and stories about that school thing that happened back in the 1930's in Lemon Grove. And that it was a story, I think, that was passed down more orally than anything else, and hadn't been fully fleshed out, let alone researched in any kind of academic or intellectual way. And so when he heard about it and became intrigued and curious, I think he began asking questions, and he began ultimately interviewing family members and community members about what had happened, including his parents, my grandparents, Robert Alvarez and Mary Smith Alvarez. And so I think in some ways it kind of starts with obviously

my grandparents and my great grandparents generations. But then, my dad, you know, sort of figured out that this was something that should be excavated and heard and circulated in ways. And so I was a kid when some of that started to bubble up and unfold and I do remember family dinners where it came up with my Grandpa or my Nana, my grandmother, separately, because by the time I was a kid they had divorced, and so they were rarely in the same room together. My wedding was one of those times, and a few others that I can remember. But those conversations generally happened separately. And yeah, I think it was—we recognized it was important, even as kids. My sister and I, I have one younger sister 4 years younger, Amalia, and I think we understood that it had happened, and that it was really important, and I think all of our generation, my cousins included, sort of had a sense that it was a really important chapter in the family and San Diego's history. So it was definitely around, and we were aware of it. And then, as my dad continued to sort of flesh it out. Research wise in the late 70 s. And early 80's. It became a much more known story and in lots of ways. I mean his work and scholarship, but ultimately in the film that he helped create that was produced by Paul Espinosa, the film maker at the Lemon Grove incident, and that was 1981. Somewhere around there. I can't remember exactly the year it came out, but that kind of changed things and made it a much more known story, but I kind of have the—these memories of bits and pieces of it coming together, and then kind of flowering into this, you know much more well known narrative. And I would say, too, that I think that generational aspect of having a relationship to the Lemon Grove history and court case and story continues. You know, it's not just my generation, those of us that are in our, you know, early fifties and that and thereabouts. But my daughters, too, who are 13, you know, are aware of it, and they sort of have a different kind of relationship to that history, one, they never met my grandparents because they had passed away before they were born, but they also

have kind of this engagement with children's books that have been written about the Lemon Grove school case with the film, obviously. In the last couple of years there was a new community mural by Mario Chacon that was unveiled in Lemon Grove. And my daughters were there along with their cousins, who are also young in around their age, were there for the unveiling. And so they understand that, you know, it's also a really important piece of history for all of us, and it's kind of an arc or a kind of, you know, ongoing generational relationship to it. That yeah, like, I said, continues.

[00:10:56]

SS: Thank you. What was it like being told that your family was getting this—this movie, this PBS series, not Docu series, but like documentary?

LA: I don't remember if I'm being totally honest with you. I really don't remember the Lemon Grove incident, but I do remember because my father's anthropological historical work was about our family. He was part of another film, also made by Paul Espinosa, called The Trail North, which was about our family migrating from Baja, California to San Diego. So it was really my great grandparents generation. And for that film. And this was 1981, because I remember I was in third grade and got to miss school for 3 weeks. My dad and I, along with Paul, the film maker, and a camera man named Tom and a sound guy named Matt. The production team basically spent 3 weeks following the trail north, up and down— up the Baja Peninsula back to San Diego. And so we were essentially camping and filming this movie, this documentary, The Trail North, which is also still available and out there. And, you know, shown every once in a while, so that I remember. So I kind of remember, you know these couple of documentaries together. But I wasn't involved in the incident, but the other one I was so they were kind of around the same time.

[00:12:32]

SS That's awesome. Okay. So in the video you recorded for UCTV, you state that you originally planned to get your degree in engineering and cited that HILD [History Lower Division] 7 C changed the course of your studies. Do you think that your family's history also had an impact on your decision to—to pursue a degree in the social sciences?

LA: There's a lot in that question, personal.

SS: Sorry.

LA: No, it's all good. I'll say that it was [HILD] 7 C. So to start when I showed back up to—when I showed back—when I came back to San Diego as an incoming freshman in Summer Bridge, 1990, I was a structural engineering major. The short version of that part of my professional and academic career is that it lasted about a quarter. By the time winter quarter of 1991 came around I kinda figured out that math and the science wasn't entirely my cup of tea, and I started to experiment and try other things. So I took a bunch of different classes in all sorts of different fields and departments and took a couple of history classes, and one of the first that I took was HILD 7 C. With Professor David Gutierrez in spring of 1991, and that course covers Chicano Mexican American history and was one of those moments that I just sort of later viewed as a turning point of sorts that it just engaged me. I was interested. I was enveloped by it all and Dave was a big part of that. I remember one class in particular that he played the ballad of Gregorio Cortez. This Corrido about an ethnic Mexican guy who kills a sheriff in Texas at the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century, and makes a run for the border, abating the Texas Rangers and making them look foolish along the way, [Professor Dave Gutierrez] played the ballad of Gregorio Cortez, and then, without saying a word, played, I shot the sheriff by Bob Marley right after it. And I'm sitting in the second row of Peterson Hall just mind blown. I

listened to a lot of Reggae back then and still do, and I just thought, wow, this is like amazing and incredible. And that was a big part of me, I think, ultimately settling in as a-- as a history major. The other class in person I would also flag in that regard is Professor Ramon Ruiz, Don Ramon, who was a former chair of the department of History. As far as I know, the only other ethnic Mexican chair until I became Chair a couple of years ago. But he was a Mexican historian, and much more formal than Dave Gutierrez than me and many others. Often wore a suit and I don't think he had a pipe in his pocket. But it was kind of the image that I had of, you know, kind of Ivy League professors with the patches on their elbows, and just kind of pacing up and back in front of the classroom, telling these really incredible stories about the Mexican revolution and Mexican history. And he also, I think, was really influential in me kind of becoming a history major in deciding ultimately to pursue it as a career. And there were many others, too, but those two definitely stand out, and I should say that Professor Ruiz has since passed away. David has since retired, but remains a really close friend and mentor. These some 30, almost 35 years later.

[00:16:50]

SS: That's amazing. What is it like to be able to teach the same course that had a profound impact on your life, or just be in the same department?

LA: It was a little weird at first. If I'm being totally honest, took me a little time to get used to being colleagues with some of the professors that I had once been in awe of as an undergraduate. Few of them are still around Pamela Radcliffe, Hasan Kayali, and others were also really important figures when I was an undergraduate for different reasons. And when I initially came back I remember Pamela Radcliffe met me at the hotel where I was staying during my campus interview and came to pick me up for breakfast, I believe it was, and very strange sort of

experience she had been my undergraduate honors thesis seminar instructor, a long time ago, and she just gave me a hug said “it's so great to have you back,” and that was, you know, helpful. But I gotta say it was—it was weird for a while, just because I had always thought of UC San Diego in my mind as this place where I was 18, 19, 20 and 21, and it was a number of years before I was walking around campus and not remembering things that I had done as an undergraduate. I'll leave it at that.

SS: Yes.

LA: And teaching [HILD] 7 C, I gotta say, [HILD] 7 C is awesome. I love teaching [HILD] 7 C. It's a big class, some 400 students, but I love it in part because of the impact that it had on me. I don't know if I would have ended up majoring in history or not without [HILD] 7 C. But I think about that every time I get a note from a student that says, “Wow, [HILD] 7 C was really cool and fun. And I'm thinking about majoring or minoring or double majoring in history,” and then having those students show up in upper division classes. And so like, I understand, for some, not for all, but for some, perhaps a select few, that it can be like a really important experience to sort of have professors that look like you to cover history about you and your family and your community, and where you come from, and the things you care about that are often part of curriculum at UCSD or anywhere else, for that matter. So yeah, [HILD] 7 C the best. And I'm going to say this. So it's recorded for history. But we have one other person in our department, Veronica Martinez Matsuda, who also was an undergraduate at UCSD, and took [HILD] 7 C I believe, with Dave Gutierrez also after me and is now a professor in the history department, and teaches [HILD] 7 C or is going to teach [HILD] 7 c. beginning this year. And I think it would be really cool for us to kind of think about the question you asked. A kind of historical, and perhaps even, you know, anecdotal personal way about the impact class had on us and what it's like to



teach it all these years later. So I'm not the only one.

[00:20:41]

SS: Of course, of course. Okay, how did not having a Cross Cultural center or a Raza Resource Centro impact your time as a student when taking these classes?

LA: [Pause] UCSD was not always the most welcoming campus, in part because the student demographics didn't reflect San Diego or California didn't come close in 1990, let alone moving back in the years prior to when I showed up. I don't know the exact numbers, but I want to say that the Chicanx Latinx student population around that— at that time was in the single digits high single digits, that could be wrong. But I know that the African American student population was around 2%, which is around where it is now. And it's a little higher now, starting to inch up a bit. When I graduated in 1994, I drove with a friend to Palo Alto, where she was from, 3 of us drove up there, in fact. and I was in the backseat of her 1984 Volvo Sedan. And as seat covers for her car she had graduation T-shirts from the double ASU, the African American Student Union, which was the predecessor—predecessor to today's BSU, Black Student Union, and they had—the T-shirts had the name of every black student at UCSD on the back of the shirt. So I was sitting in the backseat looking at this list of names, and by the time we got to Encinitas or Oceanside, we had barely left San Diego. I just blurted out “how in the world can the name of every black student fit on the back of a T-shirt.” Not the ones that were graduating, but all that were enrolled at the University were on the back of the shirt. And so that was just a reminder that UCSD wasn't always the most welcoming or diverse place back then. It's—I know lots of us might still have those feelings critiques, but back then I think it was particularly striking. And so that made certain experiences stand out in ways like Summer Bridge where I was around other incoming freshmen that were from diverse communities and backgrounds, or [HILD] 7 C. Where

I sort of had this kind of experience, and I think, like it had for previous generations of UC San Diego students. It motivated a kind of desire to create more spaces and resources for changing the university for the better, and including more folks from black and brown communities. And I think that's kind of where the push for the Cross Cultural Center, there wasn't a push for Raza Resource Center then, I mean, that was, as you know, much, much later and I think the Cross [Cultural Center], at least in my memory, became kind of a symbol for changing the campus. Even though it might have been just a push for one institution and one kind of community center, and one kind of place where folks could come together, and but it kind of became a symbol for how to reimagine the university, and how to make it more inclusive and equitable because there were a lot of students for sure, that had feelings of alienation and exclusion. And wanted it to be different. And so I think, not having those sorts of spaces on campus was very impactful, and it led students to push for a lot of things, including including the Cross Cultural Center.

SS: I—I don't know. It just feels like it would be very isolating as a student without having like resource centers or resource centers on campus.

LA: Yeah, I mean, you're a current student. Now, it's really amazing to think about what our campus would look like without the Cross [Cultural Center] or the [Raza Resource] Centro or the BRC [Black Resource Center], or the Women's Center. Those places form a kind of archipelago, if that's the term, across the campus that I think all of us as faculty, as students, as staff, graduate students and undergraduates sort of see as critical to anchoring our existence on the campus. And without that, especially with a lot fewer numbers across the board and all those constituencies, I think it was really difficult for a lot of folks. And so, you know, in my own case, you know, Summer Bridge was like the group of people that I stayed in community with over 4 years. Those are the people I lived with, those are the people I hung out with back then, and those are

the folks that I still—I don't live with them anymore, but I hang out with them. I mean my closest friends in San Diego are the ones that I went to Summer Bridge with. I mean, those are the—you know, at least in terms of a group of close friends, I mean, we go—we're running buddies, we go jump in the ocean once a month together. My partner and I are godparents to children that were born of a couple that met in Summer Bridge, 1990, a former roommate of mine, so that experience of living in Argo Hall for a month with those folks, you know, stayed with me, and I know it did most of them, too, in part because the broader landscape was not what it is now, and there was not a lot of places to get that kind of support and community. And so we just kind of, you know, really, I think learn to lean on one another one another during our time at UCSD.

[00:27:57]

SS: Of course. Thank you. Okay. Your father is a prominent anthropologist, as you've stated before, who earned his Doctorate from Stanford University, and has a long list of career achievements. Did this put any kind of pressure on you as a young student trying to forge your own path?

LA: That's a good question, one that I've kind of wrestled with in different ways over the years. I don't think I would say my father's career choice and long list of career achievements has put pressure on me necessarily. But I do think it's something I've considered and thought about. I don't know if I ever decided, like, I don't remember a moment when I decided to go to graduate school. So I almost feel like it was baked in. Perhaps from those days back in Palo Alto, when I was following my dad around, or what have you? And my mom also has, you know, an advanced degree, at least a masters. So I came from a family that you know, obviously valued education. I actually think there's some connection back to the Lemon Grove case, where education was really thought to be important, and my great grandparents sort of stood up to the face of, you

know, segregated you know, discriminatory racist behavior by the Lemon Grove School board to organize in part because they thought their children deserved an equal education. So I think that kind of, you know, views infuse my entire upbringing. So I don't really remember, like pressure. But I do feel like there was, you know, a kind of an unspoken expectation of educational achievement in ways. My parents never really put pressure on me to do one thing or another. I think they knew I wasn't gonna be an engineer but didn't tell me and let me figure it out on my own. But I do think that over the years I've considered the ways that my own professional and intellectual trajectory is unique, not just because that's part of the gig, you want to be original and contribute stuff to the world at large; but also because you know my father had produced, you know, a body of work that was also original and unique. And so I remember once somebody asked me, it might have been Dave, it might have been somebody at— in— at UT Austin, where I went to graduate school, who asked me if I would consider writing a dissertation on my grandfather and his life and I pretty quickly thought that wasn't for me because it felt too close to a lot of things that had been influential on me. And then when I came back to UC San Diego as a faculty member, after finishing at UT Austin, and spending 3 years at the University of Houston, which was my first teaching job as an assistant professor. My dad was a professor in the Ethnic Studies department here at UC San Diego, and I actually had the opportunity, because I interviewed in both ES [Ethnic Studies] and history to join the Ethnic Studies department. And I don't know if I ever said this part out loud, although I do think I remember having this conversation with my dad, I do think you know, I think one of the reasons, not top of the list. But me way, way, way, way, way, way, way down the list was, I did want to sort of have some autonomy and self-determination, and you know, sort of not necessarily be in the same department as my father. And you know, we were on committees and such together before he

retired, which was always interesting. I enjoyed that part of it. But I do think that there was, you know, some conscious thinking about carving out my own path. and not kind of getting too close to my dad's intellectual terrain.

SS: Yeah.

LA: I also remember a couple of times over the years when we were both still professors at UC San Diego before he retired, where I would get mail, like hard copy mail, in my faculty box in the history department addressed to Robert Alvarez. So there was, you know, a few moments where things kinda— the wires got tangled up, but. Yeah, not a lot of pressure necessarily.

[00:33:02]

SS: Right. What did you end up doing your dissertation on?

LA: I ended up writing my dissertation on Zoot Suiters during World War 2, in part because I had always been interested in questions of popular culture and resistance and race and racialization. [Pause] And I initially wanted to write a dissertation that covered black and brown Chicano and African American cultural relationships and social movements in the post war period. It's kind of from the forties to the present. At the time, the present was the mid 90's, late 90s. And the Zoot Suit with the first chapter and that ended up being the whole thing. The other thing about that project is that it also stemmed in part, because when I was an undergraduate at UCSD, I took a class on the history of Los Angeles, a small seminar with Bill Devereil. And for the final project in that class I interviewed my great Uncle Tony, who was the brother of my grandfather, Robert Alvarez. And he had been a Zoot Suiter back in the day in LA, in the late 30's and early 40's, and that conversation with him always stayed with me for lots of different reasons, and I ultimately came back to it when I was a graduate student. So yeah, I wrote about the Zoot Suits and World War 2, and race and citizenship and youth culture.

SS: And then that became your first book. Correct.

LA: Yes, The Power of the Zoot.

[00:34:56]

SS: Awesome. Okay. While you mentioned in the same video that you—that you recorded for UC. TV that you left Ucsd for some time stating that you went to Guanajoto, and then the University of Texas at Austin. What made you want to become—What made you want to come back to UCSD and become a professor?

LA: So I did take a gap year between undergrad and graduate school. I actually applied to graduate school from a variety of places between Mexico City, Cuernavaca and Guanajuato really just kind of traveled around that year after I graduated UC San Diego with the expectation that I would go to graduate school. And I ended up in Austin, and I think the motivation to come back to UCSD was, you know, partly a homecoming, partly that my partner, Marilyn and I were living in Houston, and she's from New York, and I'm from San Diego, and we kind of figured that at some point we would end up in one of those 2 places. And it ended up being San Diego. [Pause] And for whatever reason, you know, UCSD had this draw on me, I actually think it had more to do with San Diego than UC San Diego. Look UCSD in the history Department, you know, offered a lot of opportunity professionally to come and do the things that I really cared about and continue to care about. You know, training Phd. Students and writing and teaching the things that I was interested in but I do think the motivation to come back was really to almost come full circle to a place that I had lived in first 4 years of my life, and then another 4 years as an undergrad and always thought of as home, but never really like, had lived there.

SS: Hmm.

LA: And now I've been back for—since 2006. So for almost 20 years now it definitely feels like.

SS: Like home.

LA: Yeah, it was a homecoming more than anything else, I think.

[00:37:29]

SS: That's amazing. We're Gonna move on to questions about the community partners. So UCSD has an incredible history of student activism ranging from the 1960's to now, you were a student in the early nineties when the cross cultural center was being fought for as an undergrad. During this time. What did the protest for that look like? Is there one day that stands out more than others?

LA: I love the framing of this question because I think that UCSD does have an incredible history of student activism, even though it's a relatively new university formed in the 60s. It was formed in the 60's. And of course it was as we've talked about before, it's UC San Diego, but it's not in San Diego. It's in La Jolla, it's, you know, a good distance from downtown San Diego by design, so that it wasn't sort of in the heart of black and brown communities that during the sixties were rebelling and rioting and going up in flames from '65 to '68. And then that kind of 60s phase of UCSD student activism around Lumumba Zapata and the push for Third World Studies College and the anti apartheid activism in the seventies. I think all of that sort of sets the stage for the period of time that I was an undergrad. The early 90's, the first half of the 1990s. But did so in a way that was in some ways unique. It was very kind of, I think, a history of black and brown students working together. So it was kind of a multiracial history of student activism that I think manifested in the early 1990s, in some new and kind of fresh ways. So I think the Cross [Cultural Center] became kind of a signifier of that. And it was partly kind of like a building on that longer history of activism at UCSD dating back to the sixties, seventies, and eighties. It was about reclaiming the University for ourselves, and also kind of projecting a future

of a different university, one that would reflect who we were and where we came from in ways that was not the case at that time. I also think it was really critical and crucial that the push for the cross cultural center happened around the same time that the university and everywhere else in the state, country, and world, for that matter dealt with the [pause] Rodney King rebellion in Los Angeles in April of '92. When the 4 officers accused, you know, were acquitted of beating African American motorist driver, Rodney King. Obviously we know what happened in Los Angeles, but in so many places around, there were also kinds of mobilizations and responses, including UCSD, so this is kind of my answer to like the day that I remember most. All to say, I kind of remember the Cross Cultural Center mobilizations and organizing that had been going on sort of becoming intertwined and interwoven with a response to the Rodney King decision and acquittals. And whatever day that was in early April, students met in front of the old gymnasium at that grassy hill known as the Hump. And it was sort of a protest of sorts, and started marching across campus, and we went through the Price Center and then down via La Jolla, if I remember right, past the hospital to La Jolla Village Drive and hung a left and then folks that were out in front veered onto the onramp of the 5 South Interstate. And the rest of us followed and we were out there for 4 or 5 hours blocking traffic. It was, yeah, just a real, both empowering and educational experience. I remember when the cops rolled up in the—with the patty wagons, I remember that some folks were saying, “we're not leaving until the verdict is overturned.” Some were saying, “we want the Cross Cultural Center.” Some were saying, “we want more faculty that study this or that.” It was just sort of a range of different demands. It was a lesson in ways that social movements work and don't work in hindsight, too. But like I said, it was kind of the day that I remember most. I remember meetings also kind of affiliated with the Cross Cultural Center, organizing one or two that I think happened in my living room, and it's orange shag



carpet over in Claremont, Luna drive or Avenue just off to 52 with MEChA [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan] and double ASU [Associated Students] folks sort of just thinking through what where next moves, and also who was willing to get arrested or risk suspension those kinds of things, and who wasn't. Ao I remember a few meetings like that, too. but I do see it as a really kind of important moment in UCSD's student activist history. because, like I said, it kind of built on that 60s 70s organizing. And then, I think, was picked up, the thread was picked up later in the 2000's for sure, in the 2010's most definitely.

[00:44:12]

SS: So speaking of the 2010's, in 2010 the fraternity Pi Kappa Alpha, or Pike, held the Compton cookout. Following this there was a noose found on the third floor of the library, and a pillowcase which resembled a KKK hood found on the Geisel statue. This sparked a campus wide protest that led to the establishment of the Raza Resource Center and D.E.I programs. Since the establishment of D.E.I courses, how do you think these new standards have impacted campus culture?

LA: Yeah, there was also just to throw into the mix of racist incidents that unfolded on campus all within the span of about a week. I remember at the time I was on sabbatical but also was coming back to San Diego frequently from this fellowship gig I had at Arizona State and was here for a good 3 or 4 week period when a lot of this was happening. But it felt like everyday or every other day there was a new racist incident happening on campus. But just to throw one more that I remember quite clearly was the Koala Newspaper. Which was kind of a putting it generously a satirical paper that often crossed lots of boundaries. I think they had some UCSD TV program and made a number of racist comments on UCSD TV, that folks were also mobilizing and responding to following the initial Compton cookout invitation. So there's a lot to

be said, I think, around those incidents and the mobilization and the organization that responded mainly, the Black Student Union. Also, again with MEChA as a critical partner. And I think the students—the undergraduate students were really extraordinary. There were faculty that I think—critical faculty, Danny Widener, in history, Jorge Mariscal in literature in particular, that I think really helped serve as both allies, but also translators between the undergraduate organizers and the upper administration. Because the students, I think, knew what they wanted, pretty clearly. There are a lot of very concrete demands, but I think, having faculty allies, and support, was really critical in making legible what the university could do, and when the university did do it, what it actually meant. So like, if you ask for a program, for example, programs don't have faculty lines. So things like that—that sometimes get lost in translation. But I think you know, that was an extraordinary moment, in part because the undergraduate students knew how to kind of really successfully connect the dots between their mobilization and like concrete stuff programs and appointments and the new DEI requirement that you mentioned. So you asked about that specifically, and I would say, I think if I'm being totally honest, I think it's been a mixed bag. Right, the— one of the things that I think happens not just with D.E.I Diversity, equity, and inclusion sort of affiliated programs, but also with kind of intellectual disciplines and units like, say, Chicana Latinx studies is that they get disciplined by the University. And so you take Chicano studies, for example, and when it was kind of emerging in the late sixties and seventies as a discipline at San Diego State or Northridge and other places. It had real kind of organic links to social movements and community efforts for social change. I mean, that was kind of baked in and embedded organically in the methodology of the discipline. And these many years later, of course, like the one we're in together now, the Race and Oral History in San Diego class is in some ways an exception to the rule. Right? So what happened between then and

now? There's a way in which I think the university has disciplined Chicano studies so that it's in that kind of connection is not what it once was. It's not completely gone, but it isn't what it once was, and I think the same is true of the D.E.I. is that we, you know, sort of have these visions of what it might mean to invest in diversity, equity, and inclusion. And I think in some ways at the worse end of the spectrum there are results in which D.E.I becomes not just a kind of rhetorical device, but also one that can obscure institutional and structural change. On the other hand, having a D.E.I course requirement is important. And just last year, 2 years ago, I was co-chair along with John Moore, the Dean of Undergraduate Education, to sort of implement the new—to help design the new D.E.I. program. So that it's not just a D.E.I. course requirement, but there's actually an academic unit, a program that is thinking about what it actually means, and looks like to sort of, you know, teach diversity, equity, and inclusion from a range of different disciplines and units across campus. That's something that I, as far as I know, I don't think any other universities across the system have. And so, while it's still young, Chris Perreira from Ethnic Studies is the new—the first inaugural director of that program. You know, I think there are things that—all to say, I think there are things that can still be much better about having a D.E.I. program or D.E.I. requirement that expects students to take one course. You know, at the end of the day, it's something but at—but there can obviously be a much deeper investment and sort of how that kind of pedagogy, anti-racist pedagogy and teaching and learning becomes central to the University's educational mission rather than just a kind of ghettoized or barrioized requirement box to tick for 90% of the undergraduate students. And that's a struggle and a process that I think is still very much information. And I think we have to also ask how D.E.I. is becoming disciplined by the university too much like, as I said earlier, Chicano studies or other African American studies. Ethnic studies have— have been experienced for the last 50 years. So

yeah, I mean, like, I said, mixed bag. I will say, too, I think some of the other victories and successes from 2010 are really important SPACES, as a kind of undergraduate, you know, led and autonomous group on campus that does a lot of really important work, not the least of which is keeping the Administration honest, is still alive, and well, and funded, and doing things that really matter, and I think make a difference. There are lots of other things that came out of 2010 that also still exist.

SS: Of course.

LA: I think you know we could point to them and say some of them work, some of them don't work, and some of them are kind of in between.

[00:53:10]

SS: Is it hard teaching a course, knowing that 90% of the students are only there to fulfill a graduate—graduation requirement?

LA: Sometimes. Sometimes. Yeah. I think about one of the first times I taught [HILD] 7 C to circle back to one of your earlier questions, I remember, and this happens most times I teach that course because it's so big, but I remember thinking that—thinking about the challenges and the difficulties of teaching a course where not everybody's engaged for the same reasons or engaged at all. But the first one of the first times I taught it, I remember maybe, like I did when Dave taught it in spring of '91 or thinking about taking classes with Ramon Guitierrez or others. I would sit in the same place every time. and when I taught [HILD] 7 C I remember there was a group of Mechistas that would sit in the second row like front center in Warren lecture hall, and they would get there early. They would always come to office hours. and you know that even if it was only 5 or 6 out of 400 that was enough.

SS: Enough to make it like worth it in the end.

LA: Yeah. And then there are others that you know, like I said, don't—might not show up thinking that it was going to be worth their time or effort, and you know there might be a little something in there for them, too.

SS: They end up changing their major from structural engineering to history.

LA Exactly.

[00:55:06]

SS: Okay, the Raza Resource Centro turns 10 years old this year, and there are rumors that UCSD will finally be considered a Hispanic Serving Institution in the next 5 years. How do you think the legacy of the [Raza Resource] Centro continues to impact and uplift the community that it serves.

LA: [Pause] I think the Raza Resource Centro is a really important space on campus. That's one of the reasons why you and others are working with them this quarter in the Race and Oral History in San Diego Project to kind of help document some of that longer history. I think we all share that commitment. I'll say a couple of things. I— I think the [Raza Resource] Centro will continue to be important as UCSD transitions to full status HSI [Hispanic Serving Institution.]. Which is imminent partly because to reach that designation for shorthand, you basically need 25% of the undergraduate student body to be Chicanx or Latinx. Our last, I believe, 2 incoming freshmen classes have been well above 25%. So we are going to get there very, very soon. And the [Raza Resource] Centro is going to continue to be the primary hub for undergraduate students. All students, it is a hub, but especially obviously for Chicanx and Latinx students. So it's a really important physical space [pause] for 25% plus of the undergraduates on campus that might experience some of those same feelings of alienation and exclusion that so many of us have over the history of the institution. So the [Raza Resource] Centro really, really

matters—one of the other reasons I'm encouraged—well, yeah, one of one of the other reasons I'm encouraged about the [Raza Resource] Centro's role is both as one of the— both as a place for interfacing with undergraduate students and kind of making home and community in ways that might not otherwise exist, but also because I think there's a way in which the transition to full status HSI [Hispanic Serving Institution] has been thought of in different ways. That is to say, I think the university has done a pretty good job and I've been on a bunch of different comm— you know, committees and task force and work groups, and you name it over the last half a dozen years. As this has become a as it's become obvious that the university was gonna get to HSI [Hispanic Serving Institution] even by accident, just because of demographic reasons, right? Even if it didn't lift a finger, it was gonna hit that 25% mark at some point. But I think they've done a pretty good job of really thinking about outreach and retention and sort of a long life relationship with students that will come. So outreach, not just to individual students, but to the abuelos and the abuelas [grandfathers and grandmothers], and kind of all folks in the community. And then really thinking about keeping the students here so they graduate. And then thinking about Chicanx Latinx alumni down the line. I mean, I think they've been really invested in that where I think some of us, as faculty said, we need to do more, is on the academic front. And so thinking about Chicanx and Latinx studies and Latin American Studies as programs, which are programs, not departments on campus. And, as you know, CLS [Chicanx and Latinx Studies] has a minor hopefully, soon to be major. and LAS [Latin American Studies], as you know, offers undergraduate degrees and a master's. But there wasn't enough being done about like CLS [Chicanx and Latinx Studies] and LAS [Latin American Studies] are kind of on the front lines with students, as academic units. And so that's where the advancing faculty diversity Latinx cluster hire initiative, the LCHI, comes in that, you know, when Frances Contreras was

still here as Associate Vice Chancellor of D.E.I before she went off to become Dean at Irvine, I believe. She helped a lot of us, a group of us as faculty and many others. Including Becky Pettit in the D.E.I office apply for a grant from the University office of the President up in Oakland to hire 14 new faculty that are affiliated with CLS [Chicanx Latinx Studies] or LAS [Latin American Studies]. And we have just— I was the lead Coordinator for that effort over the last 2 years, and it was a ton of work, lots, lots of work, and many, many meetings and lots of search committees and lots of lots of stuff going on; but we are [pause] just about done. And we've hired 13 new faculty members across mostly arts and humanities and social sciences. And so that, I think, you know is a really important piece to the transition to HSI [Hispanic Serving Institution] trend— struggle right? We're not just talking about recruiting more students. But we're talking about providing, you know, the kind of resources and faculty included that will allow and really encourage those students, whether they're engineers as I might have been, in another life track, or historians, or anything in between, to sort of really think about the obligations and the responsibilities and the love and the care and the joy they have for the communities they come from, and that they will live in and work in once they leave UC San Diego. So small piece to the HSI [Hispanic Serving Institution] puzzle, I think, but the inclusion of new faculty will hopefully, you know, lead to more moments like I had with Dave Gutierrez and [Ramon] Ruiz and others down the line.

SS: Of course.

LA: And I think the [Raza Resource] Centro will be really important. And they've been involved in that process, right? So that it's not just the [Raza Resource] Centro as community building space. But it's also [Raza Resource] Centro as like really critical activist and intellectual and scholarly space as well.

[01:02:32]

SS: Yes, so you actually answered my last question without me having to ask it. So that is all I have. I just want to say, thank you for taking an hour out of your day and doing this with me. This has been honestly a—a great pleasure. You're very interesting. Your life is very interesting. I think the work that you do at UCSD is very impactful. So again, thank you.

LA: Thank you, Sam. It was a pleasure chatting with you. You did a wonderful job asking questions. You're a very talented interviewer, and I hope this isn't the last time you're interviewing and contributing to the race and oral history in San Diego project.

SA: I hope not either. I'm trying to be the TA next quarter or spring quarter.

LA: Bring forward. See if we can make it happen.

SS: I am going to stop the recording.