

Race and Oral History Project, UCSD

Interviewee: Jose Cortez

Interviewer: Jonathan Chavez

Transcribed: Jonathan Chavez

Location: Interviewee's house in El Cajon

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Length: 01:24:33

00:00

Jonathan Chavez: hey All! How are you all doing? My name is Jonathan Chavez, and I'm here with Jose Cortez. I'm gonna be the interviewer. And yes, Jose will be the interviewee. And we're gonna talk about their experiences as an organizer in San Diego, in the community. And what brought them to organizing. And the politics around that, and their experience as like a Chicano organizer inside the community. You have any questions Jose, you wanna say anything else before we start.

00:38

Jose Cortez: No, I'm grateful to the for the opportunity to be able to participate in this really cool class activity and thank you for your time for coming over and getting this all set up.

00:49

Jonathan: No worries, excited too. Okay cool, so we'll get into this, dope. First question wanted to ask is, where's your is family from? And like, why did they come to the US.

01:03

Jose Cortez: A very good question. Yeah. I mean, I have 3 kind of general thrust for my family where they come from. One half of it comes from Colombia, my family was from the city of Bogota, and they decided to come to the United States, I believe, just to like, try and do what a lot of people do work and provide for their children. My mother, her family is from Mexico and Italy, so one half from like, right across El Paso, and suit up Juarez and the other half from Southern Italy, a little village called San Giovanni. So they all came over for different reasons. My grandfather from Italy, obviously post war Italy, you know, on top of Post World War one, pre world war, 2 Italy. Not really a great place, lot of migration from especially Southern Italy to the United States. The same thing with my family from Mexico, basically like what I would now know is like them

being displaced either economically or sometimes literally, by like wars to like migrate, to try and find some semblance of a better life, but that brings us all here to Southern California, sunny San Diego.

02:27

Jonathan Chavez: Yeah yeah, forsure yeah, thank you for sharing your family's like experience. And how they came over here.

02:35

Jose Cortez: Yeah, I'm multiracial, as they would say. I guess Italian and Mexican and Colombian. But you know, in the states it just kind of comes down to like, are you, Brown? Alright cool? You're in California then you're this. So I'm a mix of a few different things. But appreciated that they all kind of brought me to where I currently am. And I have like a cool perspective on it.

03:00

Jonathan Chavez: Yeah, that's true. I mean, I know, United States the racial hierarchies, or how it operates. It doesn't matter where you came from with South America. You're just kind of lumped in the same bracket of people. And yeah, that's true.

03:16

Jose Cortez: Oh, yeah, yeah, that's a trip. But I'm sure we could talk about that all day for one of the other conversations. One of the questions.

03:26

Jonathan Chavez: but yeah, anyways maybe we can go to Another question I had, which was what was it like for you growing up? and did your experiences growing up affect your choice to become an organizer like a community organizer, activist?

03:43

Jose Cortez: I grew up in an area of San Diego called East County, Town called Lakeside, not necessarily known for its progressive worldview about frankly, anything. Maybe, you know, to describe it as like semi rural kind of like smaller by San Diego, California, you know. So Cal standards the kind of community. My upbringing was very Quiet. My my upbringing in the sense that I knew about inequity when we would go and visit like San Diego and my mom's family is from La, and we go to east, you know, east of La to Boyle Heights and you see the contradictions of capitalism right on display, like homelessness, like a lot of really bad stuff like how the living conditions for people in exclusively black and brown communities like, you know how the amenities, You know how horrible they were, provided definitely was enough to like at least plant a seed with me of like oh, not everyone has the same things that even I do, or you know, other people, you know, do and that helps to, I guess helped to Inform me of like this innate, well, what's right is right and What's is wrong. It's like it's wrong that there's rich people while there's like homeless people dying on the streets. So like, you know, even growing up in like a semi rural conservative area. I was lucky enough to be like raised in a family that did try to instill some kind of like moral compass in me of. Like Do what's right, do it

even when it's not like popular. They were, for you know, primarily kind of pushing that a religious direction, too, but I kind of took it in a in a new direction for our family by, you know, really vibing with Socialist politics like growing up was, you know, very much like seeing contradictions like that in East County context and hearing the various kind of responses to it. So, growing up, I would always hear, it's like, Well, that's just a personal problem for these people like these individuals made individual choices. And that did frame a large kind of block of like thinking I had about like a lot of things that kind of led to a nihilism or a very like at least the very least like apathy about like world suffering. It wasn't until, like I connected with people who actually were interested in doing something about something and doing it a little bit more of a scientific approach. Would that kind of change. But yeah, growing up where I grew up definitely impacted my my life. And you know, give me some formative experiences about racism, about like the history of this land, I mean. I went to a school where it was like we were the lakeside farmers. [The mascot had] overalls with a wheat thing out of is mouth. I joke you not like until the fifth grade that school was the lakeside farmers.

06:46

Jonathan Chavez: the Farmers, man you can't get much more settler than that

06:51

Jose Cortez: No, no Your most stereotypical, they are the Cougars now. Seamless transition, like wooo that's cringe, no one's mad at the cougar. But yeah, you know, it was a very conservative place that prides itself very much in its identity, and it's given me, I think, in its own weird way, a strong sense of like fighting for I think what are ethical values and just like common sense values which I just think that's what draws people to Socialism. so I don't know. I mean, I like, where I grew up and my experience is growing up out here.

07:33

Jonathan Chavez: Yeah, yeah, thank thank you for sharing that. I yeah, I mean I'm not from San Diego. So it's like t's interesting, always. It's always interesting. Hearing about like a part of San Diego that even I'm not even usually around. So that's cool. And yeah, I didn't know you like, also visited La. And all that and Boyle Heights and everything.

07:56

Jose Cortez: Yeah, it was. It was a good opportunity for me to get to know my family up there, and my mom has a strong base of support up there, lots of siblings and cousins and whatnot, and so like getting to see like it was very much a contrast. It's like here in one end, like in lake side, you know, I'm up on stage at my elementary school, dressed like a little cowboy dancing like line dancing the electric slide, or some shit with, like the school principal and a cowboy hat, and like. Then you go to like Boyle Heights, and it's like very much like Chicanismo everywhere. There's like, you know, more brown people than I've ever seen, probably in one sitting outside of like a family party, you know, in Lakeside, which was very heavily, like white semi rural, or like just stratified, based on class, too. It's like you know, there was like communities of migrant workers and people from Verona and those others, you know, bands of the Kumeyaay out here, But they

were like everybody was very segregated at that point. I don't know if it's gotten any better, because they've moved a lot of military housing out there now, but I know that you know at least that has, like historically, pride of itself on it's like small town semi rural identity, I mean, so much so. They have a fucking rodeo. Let's just put it out there. They do a rodeo every year. They're like super proud. And they'll like, defend it against anything. Yeah, it definitely informs like I, after growing up out there and seeing like you know this like just completely blatant, no regrets given kind of just like patriotic nationalism. I you know it instilled in me like a deep sense of like discomfort and like kind of anger. At what I was seeing, especially from these like communities studying history, I was like, Oh, that like I was learning had like come up on the backs of other people. So you know I love what you know the place. I grew up because I feel like it gave me a unique way of kind of like, I think coming to Socialism cause I wasn't like initially like even probably very like open minded to it.

10:09

Jonathan Chavez: Yeah, you said that you weren't politically like a Socialist at the beginning, right? And I guess that kind of brings us back to my next question here is, what do you consider yourself politically? And maybe you can explain a little bit about that and and just, yeah and explain what that means to you I guess?

10:34

Jose Cortez: Yeah, sure, I guess. Like to keep it as base as possible, because I think I one of the things I hate the most is when people like get into the like most rigorous like I am a, this tendency, this person, this thing. I would define myself as a Socialist, a member of the Party for Socialism and liberation. You know a Marxist, a Leninist. You know, in the sense that I like acknowledge and very much respect those lived examples, and that revolutionary organizing style which has led to like a shitload of successful revolutions. Excuse my language. but that being said like how I would define it to myself you know, specifically like what it means to be a Marxist Leninist Socialist is that, like, we believe in the actuality of revolution here in the US Imperial core, that we're organizing, using a party format to effectively train cadres of working class people on what it means to have a successful seizure of State power, and what that means is like having ownership over the means, the means and modes of production, right? What they say, the plantations and the the factories and all that stuff, And it's really just like a means to an ends of obtaining Socialism effectively, not with idealism or dogmatism. But like dialectically doing it in a scientific way where we're, you know, acknowledging and assessing the political and historical epoch that we're in against the material conditions and material, and then and making the decision that moves the working class closer to our Stated objective, which is obviously throwing off the yoke of capitalist oppression and the the contradiction between worker and owner and getting the opportunity to have, like a truly just equitable society. After a working class you know, consolidation of power.

12:37

Jonathan Chavez: Yeah, yeah, thanks. Thank you for explaining that. And yeah, I I definitely think, you know, I know you've have a lot of experience talking about

Socialism and what that means to a popular audience, to a lot of people. And I, I appreciate that a lot. Because, yeah, it's true that a lot of people can be in their little like academic circles talking about that and is not what we're about at least.

13:02

Jose Cortez: Yeah. Yeah. My favorite is, when someone comes out with like some really obscure thing like I'm a what was it like? I'm a Posadist, or whatever I was like the Alien Guy? I don't know anything about that. But nice to meet you, I guess? like I just I think if it can't be accessible to our people who are like the UPS drivers, the like other people. I mean to be fair, like a lot of these ideas were read and disseminated, and like, studied vigorously on the like factory floor, with like. sometimes semi literate. You know, people in various places like the Soviet Union and China, and you know they're easy enough. These terms are easy enough to just like, have normal people come. We don't need to make them. I mean, there's a space for the academic rigor which is important. We shouldn't shy away from that. But I'm definitely like, happy to see Socialism entering the mainstream and us giving like definition to it beyond, just like Socialism means I don't know free education. Yes, yeah, which is like sure. Yes, free education. But Socialism is more than just like free education or free healthcare, or whatever.

14:10

Jonathan Chavez; Yeah, exactly. Sure. Right. Give, give real definition, give it, have give it real meaning more beyond, just like a few honestly basic human rights that we should have already.

14:21

Jose Cortez: yeah things that, like, you know, should have been obtained. If, like United Healthcare or some other kind of greasy insurance Company wasn't standing in the way.

14:29

Jonathan Chavez: Exactly, exactly, but well, cool. Thank you for explaining that and I think then we can kind of go into, a good segue into talking about what made you into a Socialist right and you know I guess we can talk about that through what brought you into community organizing. And what was any specific events that you know brought you to that organizing work and maybe explain. Go into detail into that.

14:55

Jose Cortez: Yeah, of course. So yeah, for a large chunk of my life up into my mid twenties like I would not have described myself as like an activist of any kind, like I had a healthy interest in history like, I studied history and college briefly, while I was attending a university and like I'd always kind of been interested in seeing like how things got to this point, I guess like is the best way I could put it But I didn't feel compelled to change anything about it, or even participate in actively it really wasn't until I started learning some very basic ideas about just like, you know, things that we, you know, see, Liberals talk about like learning about emotional intelligence in a very limited way. Through like a friend that. I even became open to like going to a protest. So that

was like back in like 2015, 2016. And really, I think what kicked into overdrive, I think, for a lot of people, including myself, was the kind of rhetoric just surrounding Trump's first like, run for office. Like how like vitriolic he was like, like, literally just over the top, like, you know, there was a lot of political violence. This was still the era of like a lot of police mass shootings, or, like, you know, killings of armed people And it was actually like in that environment of like, I would say, trump, and also the brutal murder of Alfred Olongo on September 27th, 2016 that really like made me a Communist like. I don't think if you had asked me like months before that like that whole year like you know. What would I define myself? I would have said some just weird off the wall stuff like I would have been like, I'm just like politically unaffiliated. What's the point? But seeing how things would play out over that basically hot, vicious summer like made me a Communist like it just transformed me in the same way I think that, like carbon put under pressure, you know, transforms minerals into other things right. So I kinda just like fell into it specifically, the brutal murder of Alfred Olongo was like a cauterizing moment for me.

17:13

Jonathan Chavez: Do you think you could talk a little about the experience from that Alfred Olongo protest. And what happened with that?

17:20

Jose Cortez:

[When they first heard of the Alfred Olongo Killing]

yeah, yeah, this was 2016 in El Cajon, California. So another East county town, probably known for having a reactionary mayor than more than anything like our city councils, like all developers, and you know, typical East County, you know, corrupt politics, and whatever like one family dynasty ruled that. You know Congress, the House of Representatives for like 40 years. Super democratic stuff. Yeah, you know. So it's that kind of area right? And you know, I heard because I was working with children at the time I was working as an instructional assistant for children with, like, you know, children who have special needs. One of these like alerts popped to my phone. Be like, Oh, someone was shot and killed off of Broadway in El Cajon. And this is like an area that I kind of am familiar with, because it's right across the street from a very, you know, iconic like East County Staple, which is like this place called the Yogurt Mill. So it's like this big tower pizza kind of looking building, but it makes frozen yogurt. So we all have gone there, you know, for decades. Most of us live up there. It's like a pretty familiar place in El Cajon. And so I was like dude, Somebody was shot and killed in the parking lot, like, right across the street from there. And it's also happens to be the parking lot of my dentist office to give you just like a a kind of idea of how like intimate this, you know, it was like, Oh, it wasn't just like, Oh, somebody's been shot, killed, or even oh, someone's shot and killed in my town, I was like, Oh, someone's been shot and killed in the parking lot of where I went, since I was like 10 years old to get my dental work done.

19:00

[Previous Experience in Protests Prior to Olongo Uprising]

So like I went out to kind of just check it out, right? At first, because, you know, I'd been watching TV. I had never really been to a lot of, like, big protests like that. I'd gone to the Trump stuff over the summer and actually had been arrested at a non violent sit in that I was just like compelled by this, like organizer in a beret there. And he was like, 'Oh, like, I'm an educator. I'm a high school teacher, and we're gonna do a sit down protest against the unlawful assembly declared downtown.' And I was like, you know, if this teacher, because I worked in education at the time as an IA. I was like, if this teacher's out here risking it all, like what's my excuse, you know? So I like on a complete whim, with no planning, with no, with no thought process beyond, like, I just wanna do something because I felt like what was happening at the civic center that day was so foul, but I got arrested, so I had some experiences, right? Like I had obviously been arrested for a nonviolent political crime, and seen how fucking shitty jail is, but also how like you know how indifferent the police were to the like brutal attacks on protesters by like the far right. How they responded with like extreme repression, not just like repression, but like extreme repression in the face of you know, millions of people hedging the streets in 2016, like, 'Yo, this is messed up.' So I had like some brief experiences by the time I got to El Cajon.

00:20:29

[The Alfred Olongo Uprising]

But it was still very like. okay, where do I fit into any of this? Like, I'm just kind of like a dude in this massive sea of just like other people all experiencing oppression and and these horrors, but not really knowing what to do. And so when Alfred was killed, There was kind of like a day or 2 of just like trying to figure out what to do. Everyone kinda like showed up to the site, which obviously is a very tragic thing, because there's like blood, there's like, you know, it's a crime scene, right? Like the police just murdered somebody. And I got there a couple hours after it happened. And people were like active, hundreds of people like in the streets, in this parking lot, specifically, like a shopping center of a small strip mall, right? And it's like right in the middle of like a drive through for a taco shop. So like, there's all these people. There's a lot of energy. And I was really just kind of impressed with like, how powerful people were, like they literally like chased out like the entire El Cajon police department, just with no planning, with no preparation, with no like even really like, thoughts besides like anger at the murder of this person, right? So it ended up turning into like a 2 plus week long, 2 to 3 weeks, I'd say, of just like organizing and including like a lockdown of that parking lot, by, like, community members. These were not organizers like that I can... At the beginning there was like a handful of organizers I can think of like NAN was there the National Action Network. So I think Shane Harris was there, and there was like a handful of like nonprofity people there that were trying to advise the family and obviously help them process everything. But I really noticed that the, like, energy from the, like, community really picked up because originally it was just like people marching. They would face repression when they would try to actually do anything that like challenged anything. So if they were like, we're gonna go just near the area, not even in the Mall, but like to the area. There's like iconic photos from that, you know, kind of series of events of them, setting up like riot dogs and like taser banks, like so, you know those like big blocks of tasers that they use to like stop rioting, charging prisoners basically, it like just shoots off a bunch of tasers.

23:03

Jonathan Chavez: Oh I didn't know all that

23:04

Jose Cortez: Oh, it's like, it's, it's crazy. It's like one of those things that the cops have that you're just like, why does this exist? And it's like, well, in case, you just need to shoot indiscriminately into a crowd of people with a bunch of tasers. Here's this device. What's the worst thing that can happen? Besides, someone gets like shocked to death. So you know, you're seeing these things like you're seeing like things that like you would only see like in a war movie or something, right? Where it's like I saw cops with like dual magazines taped together. And just like you're in El Cajon, we're like in El Cajon, like an area that has like no notoriety. Besides, you know oh, it's like people like to joke. It was like, it's the crystal meth capital of like, wherever, which I feel like every inland valley town tries to say. But then suddenly, you're seeing like, yeah, like M16s, you know MRAPs, these mine resistant ambush vehicles driving through the streets of El Cajon.

24:00

[Commentary on Spontaneity in the Alfred Olongo Uprising]

And it really, I think, like woke me up to like oh, this is not just like a struggle of evil people versus good people, or whatever, like this is a struggle of like forces with like measurable components like, you know, those MRAPs and those rifles and those those vests and those people we're all just like, you know? Conditions that could be accounted for and like, contrasted with like organizing and other things like I kind of for the first time realized. It's like, 'Oh, we're not just adrift in a sea of like hopelessness, you know?' It's like, oh, no, what we're facing is infrastructure developed by a very conscious class of capitalist owners and us as workers don't necessarily have those vehicles built up at the same capacity,

24:47

Jonathan Chavez: Those institutions to resist that

24:49

Jose Cortez: right? And I learned firsthand, they're seeing the limitations of like one organic people's uprising without those kinds of structures like, for example, a unifying or even just, like coherent political ideology, right? One that was tying obviously the crisis of the class contradictions to the issue at hand, like Alfred was brutally murdered. But it wasn't just because of the actions of like one bad cop, but because of obviously the systemic racism and injustice within, like capitalist policing, But there wasn't even like clear unity on those kinds of points, right? Everybody was kind of coming from a different place, with different motives and different kinds of experiences, and the family did obviously the best that they could to navigate a very traumatic, horrifying event.

25:37

[Alfred Olongo Uprising continued]

But after that kind of, you know, closed out. They do the things that they always do. They release the body cam footage. They, you know, they, they kind of stage talks with the family. They try to, you know they release the pressure from the community who's righteously, you know, enraged about the murder of of this community member, an Ugandan refugee, you know, of all people who they shot and killed in the middle of the street. 2 kind of tendencies emerged, like one was the more reform-based one which was like, let's meet with these people, the police chief, and see if we can get them to fire the officers. No administrative action was ever taken against these officers, by the way.

26:21

Jonathan Chavez: almost never, never is

26:25

Jose Cortez; No, never, never at all. And then, like an organic group of like people who started calling themselves Olongo Village who were trying in the best ways that they could identify, to figure out a way to, to push for accountability from the ECPD, And the, and the sheriff's office and whatnot. So the Olongo Village people would become like the primary organizing body of the actual like protests. And they would culminate into a lot of really weird stuff that I would see there, like, you know, like the police throwing like tear gas at like one kid on a bike, you know? Just like the level of,

27:01

Jonathan Chavez: The Absurdity

27:02

Jose Cortez: yeah, the absurdity of just like, you know, there was the relationship of the number of police they brought out to protesters was easily at, at points like 3 or 4 to one, if not more, like cops to protesters, you know? And the level of like viciousness, in which they crack down on it, like I said, they had to bring 3 mine resistant ambush vehicles. They had to bring basically every police department in Southern California to kind of put down this organic uprising.

27:32

Jonathan Chavez: I had no idea it was that big.

27:34

[Defining Moment from Alfred Olongo Uprising for Jose]

Jose Cortez: It was pretty decently sized, at least, at least initially, like I think of, like a defining moment, a couple of defining moments, for myself from this particular struggle. One was the brutal arrest of a person from the cabin in La Bandice who, you know, people were protesting on the sidewalk. They're very agitated. They're obviously very like emotional about the brutal murder of Alfred still and somebody was being arrested, you know? Even because they had dared to step on the mulch of the taco shop, which, shout out to the taco shop people. They were really cool. They never really gave us any issues, but like, yeah, they used that as justification to stage like a vicious crackdown.

Really, really, at the end of the day, it was like people holding signs on the side of the road, right?

28:19

Jonathan Chavez: Peaceful Protest

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Jose Cortez: Yeah And so, you know, that all goes down. Obviously, you know, peoples kind of step in to kind of see what's going on. And that led to this police officer putting like a grenade launcher into my face at close range, like one of those little foam I'm assuming ones, but looked like something you see in a video game, like the first thing I thought it was like, oh, my God! It looks just like Call of Duty, or some shit, because it was like, yeah, a black grenade watcher, but it was pointed because the guy was, the officer was a lot shorter than me, so it's like pointed directly upwards, like into my face, so close that I can like, basically like, lean out and kiss it. And I was like at that moment really aware of like, oh, I could actually die, like, just because I'm like here, you know argumentative about this dude being like brutally beaten and arrested. He was like beaten with sticks, like batons. And so, even though we're not doing anything, and we're like, I'm on the sidewalk, basically just like you know, protesting peacefully, it's like, 'Oh, shit, I could actually die.' And then, you know, the second, I would say, is like seeing the police. I remember watching because they were like, you know, the first few nights, like the first few, like real days, there was like this release that happens like after Alfred was killed everyone gathered, and they were like, well, what do we do? Well, we're gonna march and shit, like we're gonna run the streets and so for a first few days, like the police like were too weak to actually do anything, like they had to just kind of like watch, and they could, they could try like shut down streets, but they were, they were not trying to like, come into the actual, yeah, protest area. They were mostly just like there observing and trying to like get people to, like, disperse. But things got, you know, hectic in the nighttime. People would show up, and then all of a sudden those marches would end, and just like, just like it was like this organic showing of people's power once they're like aware of it. It's hard to describe. They were just like, people were like celebrating. It's like people were like actively celebrating, pushing the cops out. They were actively celebrating you know, like having a space that they were like able to do what they wanted to do.

30:40

Jonathan Chavez: A Liberated zone

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Jose Cortez: yeah, you could call it something like that. But yeah, you know, it was, it was a really transformative experience, because I went from just being like some dude just like attending something, to when the camp started coalescing, I, you know you can see how I look, I have a background in doing security and stuff. One of the people like in the inner circle.

31:05

Jonathan Chavez: maybe for reference, Jose is like, 6 foot 4

31:08

Jose Cortez: Yeah, and like, 320 pounds, so yeah, I, having played college football and done like moshpit security and stuff, I stand out, and like this dude, who was like helping to organize the first few days protest, asked me to help with like security stuff. And so I started helping out that way. I had a truck, so I would load up all the barbecue and food stuff, because every day there would be like food there, food and drinks. People would barbecue. People would do their thing during the day, come back to the camp at night, eat, and just like hang out and like, basically celebrate until the early early morning, and then the day would just start over again. People would go home, so I would drop off stuff in my truck. That's how I got to know people, how I got to be involved in the Olongo Village thing.

31:55

Jonathan Chavez: Is ugh, maybe we can, cause this is extremely fascinating I had no idea, I guess

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Jose Cortez: oh yeah but we are getting stuck on the details

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Jonathan Chavez: But it's good though, I like it

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Jose Cortez: We can obviously go into more detail at a later time

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Jonathan Chavez: maybe but also I guess I wanted to maybe ask to maybe connect it back to like, you know, it got you started as an organizer. How did that bring you to PSL? I guess I'm wondering.

32:21

Jose Cortez: Yeah, it's a great question. I, you know, had never met socialists in person, so it was like the first, the first people that I met that were socialists were the PSL, and it was in the parking lot of this shooting where the police had killed Alfred. And I remember because the parking lot is filled with working class black and brown people, you know? It's like a dark parking lot during a police uprising that has like helicopters flying, and it's you know, it's one of those, it's one of those places that it's like you're there if you're there and if if you're not you might feel like a little uncomfortable or something. But the PSL didn't. There were a couple of their members lived down the street from where the shooting happened. They made it a point to like be out there with people, and like I said, I didn't know anything about socialism, so I just kind of started hanging out with their people, noticed I was like, 'oh, these people like to share cigarettes,' and they're like, you know, they're always really cool about like giving a cigarette. Or you know, having a good conversation about history and so like, you

know, over the course of that protest. I wasn't even like what I would say, like friendly to the PSL fully. I was kind of like, well, that's cool and all, But like I know better. I'm in this local group of people. We're getting things done, but I was, you know, honestly meeting socialists and seeing the contrast of how I was doing things, and how it would eventually play out. Contrasted with like how the party was organizing and what their objectives were. You know I was just like doing things, hoping that it, hoping that it would work out, and they're they were doing things with like an analysis behind it. That would eventually change my perception about socialism, about like, 'Oh, this is, this is, you know, if not the only viable, like a very viable route for seeing actual changes and not just like going down fighting.' If that makes sense.

34:16

Jonathan Chavez: Yeah, yeah, that makes total sense. And then, maybe these are questions I, just what I'm curious about now. But like I guess we'll talk a little more about this and then we'll get into the rest of the questions, or we could take a break.

34:29

Jose Cortez: Sure I'm down for whatever, yo I'm having a good time.

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Jonathan Chavez: This is great. Oh man, I guess from when you met the PSL there and then, like from, you know, meeting them and seeing their analysis and what not, what then, brought you to join the party, I guess?

34:49

Jose Cortez: Yeah, well, I took a vicious beat down outside of like downtown San Diego in November of 2016. So right after the election of trump, I was like, you know, the thing with Alfred at that point was like winding down, because by that point the repression had gotten so heavy that most people had either dropped out of the movement like for getting justice for Alfred Olongo, or they had just become like weakened, like they were now fighting court cases, and they were now, you know, having to deal with the ramifications of like losing jobs or something like that. So I was feeling this like, 'well, this can't be over' kind of feeling, right? Like this, you know, we didn't see all this horrible stuff and fight for this, not to see it succeed. There's gotta be something more. And I saw the PSL were still doing stuff like they were doing stuff around the election, the inauguration, so we actually went, and we participated in a PSL rally through ANSWER, got on the mic somehow and took the protest away from the planned PSL route. We were just like, 'Oh, let's go to the Horton Plaza, because we're more, we just went through like this uprising in El Cajon. We know better.' God, for the record historically, we did not know better. We like made the worst decision by like doing a half-baked like, 'let's take the freeways' kind of thing, which did not work. Yeah, which did not work, which is like, you know, like the playbook now, what we see back, you know, in like these other earlier movements when people don't know what they're doing, they're just gonna do the same things, and they don't always work.

So you know, I, I had gone through that experience to kind of learn the hard way of like, maybe my loose group of politically unaligned friends from El Cajon aren't enough to like initiate a revolution. Who would have thought that propaganda of the deed was not a thing, who would have thought? You know, I mean, I had to put it into the laboratory of the reality to see that this didn't work. And so, you know, I kind of met with the PSL people a little bit more, just to kind of like, get to know them. And so I was like, okay, like the theory they're talking about, even if I don't fully understand it, is like interesting. It seems to align with a lot of what I kind of knew about wealth inequality, and you know it posed some really unique resolutions to it that I never thought about under, you know, you know, my previous mentality. So I, you know, eventually just kind of got close to a handful of their members, like 2 or 3 members, and one of them just asked me to join which I didn't even know was like possible. I just thought it was like, okay, like, either ask to do it, or you just kind of don't. The idea of recruiting somebody was not like, even in my mind at that time. But I commend the people who recruited me, cause I've been in now at this point for going on 8 years, and they just, all it took was them literally just being like, 'Hey, do you want to join us?' And I did, cause I was like, fighting charges. I was like, you know, aware that the movement in El Cajon was dying out, but like this movement seemed to be like going on for a long time, the, the like, the movement for socialism, and I was genuinely curious about knowing more about it, because I knew like nothing. So that's how I met the PSL. They just like were really cool people who put their money where their mouth is, they didn't like, you know, speak out of turn or out of pocket. They kind of just like you know, kept it real. They kept it, like, respectful in spaces like at the at the end of the day. It's a shooting location of like a black man, you know? And they were always very respectful and earned people's trust. I'll give an example, I think it's important for the historical record. So in those early days, like when they would declare unlawful assemblies and like people, would like, because things were happening, like, like the cops lit a fire outside of the Wendy's, which is crazy when you think about these words, it's like, but it's also like almost like surreal, because it's like 'outside of a Wendy's?' It's not like outside of some great battlefield. It's like outside of the jank ass, Broadway Wendy's? Yeah, like you know? So all this stuff would happen, right? And I remember, you know, people were like really concerned, because people were getting arrested, and we were like, 'Oh God, we gotta like get away,' because I think we had done like some marches where we were shutting down like big streets in El Cajon and causing a big traffic jams, and the PSL offered to shuttle people to like a safe place where we could kind of debrief. This was after the first, like, I think, raid of the camp where the cops brought like an MRAP, and, and police and shields and pushed people out. So I was like, oh, these people are cool, like they're, you know, they've got, like, they're knowledgeable. They're intelligent, but they use what they've got to like help other people, right? It wasn't just like a book club of like, well-intentioned nerds. Although I did think that, you know, they were kind of nerdy when I first met them, you know, because it was like 6 people. And they were like all good friends, basically from you know, a younger age, and you know I was like over here doing like 'well, I work mosh pit security,' like I, I could judge whoever, no. They were really cool people, and I'm glad that they invited me to join them.

40:21

Jonathan Chavez: Yeah, yeah, that's cool. That's cool. Yeah, I mean unfortunately, well not unfortunately, but yeah, I think most Left groups start out like that, honestly.

40:30

Jose Cortez: Yeah, I mean they were like, I said, the coolest people, artists, like musicians, people that had like skills that like were very impressive, because I mean me, I was just some like burnout, you know, dude like, like working for barely minimum wage, you know, and like with kids, and just like with nothing really going on. So to meet people that were like, one of them was like a teacher at Southwestern College, like you know, the other people were just like me, and like kind of just had jobs, but were like, but they were smart and funny, witty. I was like, oh, these people are cool, even if, like I thought they talked about Star Trek a lot, I was like, alright. Like, and I felt like I could have an impact. Because I was like, you know, one of the first, like, you know for our people in the, in the branch, like there was like a handful of us, but I, you know was bringing in, like I had just come from like a mass organization, as we would call it now, right? And so they like recruited me very deliberately, so that way I could like learn about socialism and use some of the advantages I have, namely, being like a big loud, you know, brown dude, to be like, be, you know, be, be effective and not just be alone anymore, you know? So they did a good job.

41:53

Jonathan Chavez: Yeah, I mean they, clearly you're a leader!

41:56

Jose Cortez: Yeah, there it is. Who would have thought. If you had asked me like, you know, months before joining the PSL, like, would I be like doing a leadership role of any kind in anything? I would have been like, who me? The PSL has really made me a different person, like a better person, frankly.

42:14

Jonathan Chavez: That's beautiful, and uh, I was always curious about the story of how you came to the party. I appreciate hearing it.

42:23

Jose Cortez: There's stuff, yeah, I'll tell you about afterwards that I think is more appropriate then, but yeah, you know, like, it was definitely not your standard 'I read an online post or something and became radicalized.' It was like, which is nothing against that either, but what I'm getting at is like, for me, it was like meeting socialists and seeing how they conducted themselves, made me a socialist, versus just the theory itself.

42:45

Jonathan Chavez: Yeah, you can. We came to the struggle. And you saw the seriousness of, like, what socialists are and what they can be, right?

42:54

Jose Cortez: Oh yeah, the potential

42:57

[Break begins]

43:06

[Break ends and Jonathan Chavez giving a brief recap of what was talked about before taking a break]

43:36

Jonathan Chavez: So yeah we can move on to one of my next questions here. What kind of work have you done since, as your time as an organizer?

43:46

Jose Cortez: Yeah, so I've actually gotten to do a weird assortment of things, and all of them useful, and all of them kind of linked by the underlying cause, being capitalism. So I've organized tenants around housing issues, whether it was measure W in National City or Prop 10 statewide, which were, I believe, in like 2017 and 2018, we organized around black housing, a lot of police brutality in communities, like justice kind of stuff. We worked with a lot of like families who had been brutalized by the police and we did a lot of immigration stuff at that time, cause this was the height of Trump's presidency where they were militarizing the border. And you see a lot of the like iconic images of the barbed wire. We had people, including myself, on the ground for that struggle where they actually like brutalized a bunch of like pastors and religious officials down at the border, in ironically named Friendship Park. I've gotten to run for public office twice. I've got to be the Peace and Freedom Party's Congressional candidate here in the 50th and 51st district, which was a big, a big honor. So yeah, I mean, I've gotten to do everything from electoral politics to outreach campaigns for everything from like policy to community improvement projects. We did a program called Beautify the Boulevard, trying to address just how underfunded and underappreciated the eastern area of San Diego is, organized for LGBTQ liberation, including our very successful defense campaign of a trans elder out in Santee, where, you know, we successfully stood up to the Klan and the literal, and I don't use this word hyperbolically, but like, tattooed swastika Nazis, were the people who like came out to oppose trans rights.

46:04

Jonathan Chavez: I remember that day

46:05

Jose Cortez: Yes, yes, I literally wrote my will before that event, you know, just because I was like, this is East County. I grew up out here, but all the more reason why it's like I felt a sense of ownership as like this is where I grew up, and being able to bring community organizing into these spaces where I grew up, where I thought there was no chance to be progressive in any way, has been truly amazing. So I've been very, very, very privileged and grateful to get to do a lot of different kinds of things, and learn a lot of different skills, whether it be like graphic design, or how to have an organizing

conversation with like a complete stranger, or how to build relationships with you know, key people within a community. All of that stuff I learned in the PSL, and got the chance to do.

46:53

Jonathan Chavez: That's great. That's great. Yeah, I mean you, you've been through so many experiences organizing. It's like, I mean, I guess there, it's hard to focus that, what to talk about, I mean because this is, this I mean, I've only been in the party for a couple years, but I've been already through so many things, and you've been in for a while and been through many even more things, but maybe I could ask just to maybe, maybe you can get more pinpoint about, I mean, what are some specific events that shaped you as an organizer throughout the time you've been in organizing, you know, maybe 2 or 3 events like, besides the Alfred Olongo stuff.

47:35

Jose Cortez: Yeah, which we went into in detail, I think one of them I'll touch on is the migration struggle, which I've seen like I said, I kind of talked about that event where I saw them pushing these elders and these priests into like contaminated ocean water, which is contaminated because of a biological crisis happening with like a sewage processing plant. And you know you're at the border like you've just walked like a mile and a half to get from the like parking area down to the beach, where you can actually get to the wall. There's, you know, up above on the rocks. There's like vanguard America, you know, doing like a weird banner drop up there with like no scrutiny from the pigs, while militarized Border Patrol agents are forming like phalanxes basically. And they're flanked by like massive, like, little bushes of barbed wire. And I mean the, to give you an image, like the people that were there were like priests and pastors and rabbis and imams, and people like, you know. And I don't use this like, you know, in any sort of like joking way or anything. But there was like literally a blind person there who was like walking with an aid of an attendant, who was like in their seventies, if not older, and they like arrested them at the border, and just kind of seeing like oh, like when you talk about a militarized border, and you see like how like quickly the US will like try to squash dissent of any kind when it comes to like the humanitarian crisis, so, you know? What we've done to Central and South and just basically the Caribbean and everywhere, basically, where people are coming from, it's a very, I think, consciousness building moment. So that was one event that was back in, I think, like 2018, and that was, like, you know a reminder of the scope of the struggle like Alfred Olongo had been like the murder of an individual, but seeing, like the vast police response, because in that same cycle you're seeing like the images of them shooting tear gas at the kids and the families across the border and that stuff. That campaign that we did, which culminated in the big rally with like a few thousand people in San Ysidro.

49:59

Jonathan Chavez: I think I was there.

50:00

Jose Cortez: Yeah, that might have been like, right when you were, you know, getting activated. Yeah, something around there before all the Covid stuff, and before all that would hit in 2020. You know, that was a big moment for me, organizing-wise, because it made it very clear what kind of position we are as a border town and a branch that exists on the border of the United States. That gives us like a very particular view, and responsibility within that struggle.

50:32

Jose Cortez: So that was one, and I would say another, you know, kind of big event where I would just lump up both campaigns together, the electoral campaigns, being able to go from someone who, like, had no understanding of socialism to being trusted to like be a very visible public face of like our party, was an incredible honor, and something that, like I cannot express enough was like, you know, a growing moment for me to like, you know, not be stagnant, to learn the line, to learn about these historic moments, to know what I was talking about as much as I could, to get to talk to a bunch of people who believe in the electoral system. Obviously, we all know as Marxists, and just because revolutionaries, that you're not gonna win revolution through a ballot box. If we could've, we would've already, but the state obviously contrives all these, you know, blocks and things to stop people from doing that. So being able to participate and meet people where they're at, where their consciousness was, and to kind of put a face to socialism, that it wasn't like this boogeyman, you know, hiding under your bed, wanting to take your toothbrush and shoes, or whatever. It's like, really, just like something that would benefit their community and benefit their personal lives, was really fucking cool. Well, excuse me, language. It was really cool. Yeah, either way, it was really cool, because I got to like talk to a lot of people. It's so far, you know, even so like just at the encampment, you know, somebody like, I think, day 5, so like the day before, somebody had approached me, this younger person from San Ysidro. So not even anywhere near where I was running for office, but he recognized the campaign, potentially even before he could even vote, he was like aware of the campaign and, you know I had a conversation because I was trained, I was, you know, doing the walk-around to set up our shift change for the security team at the encampment and just to have him come up and talk about it, and the people I was, you know, shift-changing, being like, 'that's really interesting,' and being really appreciative that, like, I would be there with them, you know? It was an example of, I think, how meaningful that experience was. It's like, people see doing something like that, as like engaging in the political process, and they respect it even like, I said, 4 years after we did it at a completely different college in a completely different area of town.

53:04

Then, just if I was gonna pick out a last one that was like a formative. I think, Palestine, you know honestly, what's going on right now has been one of the biggest events that I've been fortunate to be, you know, organizer in. Seeing how much energy there is and seeing like, like the organization of students and the organization of, you know, migrate communities like where I grew up in El Cajon. There's a lot of like a lot of Syrians and Iraqis, and you know, people from Afghanistan. And there's like a lot of different people from all over, you know. Southwest Asia, North Africa, seeing like how much turnout is

coming out to these events, how like multi-generational, and how like kind of dynamic these events have been, has been really, really reaffirming. Considering, I remember when I joined, we would do Palestine events. And it was kind of like, okay, yeah, we'll show a screening, we'll, we'll go out and we'll support the PYM when they do like a public speaking thing. But it was nothing like what we're seeing now. No, and the level of consciousness that's being developed and the impact that it's having like to the point where it's like actively helping to change policy, and like at least like public image and perception about Israel is, makes, makes this period one of the most transformative and important in my organizing life. There's like a million and one events, as you know, like the events come and go. But I would say those are 3 of some of the most, like, ones that I, that stand out, that I appreciate. And one of them's still going on right now.

54:41

Jonathan Chavez: Yeah, the struggle will continue. Well, for the, I guess in the future, for people this will be timed, obviously from today's date. But yeah, we're like, in the middle of the struggle against, for Palestine and people, students at UCSD were arrested. I was one of them, it was, you know the, like, the things that Jose talked about with like Alfred Olongo happened at UCSD as well. So yeah, I mean, it's just, the struggle continues is the point, yeah.

55:13

Jose Cortez: Yeah. Oh, yeah. I mean, officers putting their knees on someone's neck in my hometown in El Cajon were doing the same thing at UCSD just this year and all the more reason why, hopefully, in the future if anyone's watching this, we're living in a post free Palestine, a socialist utopia would be nice. I would love that.

55:33

Jonathan Chavez: That would be amazing, and they'd be like, oh wow look at the such horrific things they used to do to people in the past.

55:41

Jose Cortez: Yes, I look forward to being like put into a place of dinosaurhood, how we treated each other.

55:48

Jonathan Chavez: But yeah, I guess one thing I would, there's one was one event I think it'd be interesting to hear about if you're trying to talk about it, is I know, I think it was called Defend Chicano Park, was it?

56:03

Jose Cortez: The autodefensa, yeah.

56:05

Jonathan Chavez: Yeah, cause the white supremacist came to Chicano Park Day, was it? Like, and the PSL and yourself were there to help defend that park against them.

56:14

Jose Cortez: I would say that was a very transformative, you know, moment for our relationship with the people of Barrio Logan. Initially, we had shown up, there was, this is like an event that's broken down into like 3 separate events. There was the initial, what they called, you know, with no irony, because they have none, they're Melvins, basically, the patriots, they called it the Patriot Picnic, because they felt like they weren't allowed to use the park, and they should be allowed to, I don't know, be terrible bigots, and eat pizza at the same time, which, if they had made less of a stink about it they probably would have just been able to go to the park and eat some pizza and no one would have ever known who they are, cause it's a park, like no one's there like checking the ID of every person that uses it. But we went, and because there was, you know, Chicano Park has this militant organizing history, and is the heart of a lot of struggle in San Diego, we went. We approached the Chicano Park Steering Committee very respectfully. We're like, hey, we're members of a revolutionary political party. We're just here to help. And they put us on duty working security. This is like before we had any sort of formal relationship, and the autodefensa would eventually be like a proving ground for our members who, had, you know, been coming out of police brutality uprisings, like myself, but also, like the many, many months, if not longer, of uprisings around Trump's inauguration election, so fresh from those kinds of like learning, you know, grounds. We had come to Logan. We demonstrated a lot of discipline and professionalism. We like helped protect the mural from like you know, a couple of like really kind of weird escalated threats, And that kind of led to us, continuing to like keep up a relationship with a couple of people. One was a commander of the local Brown Berets de Aztlan, and the other the chairman of the Chicano Park Steering Committee at the time. So yeah, we did that. We helped defend the park, and it led to us participating even more proactively with myself being given a captain's role of the security team for the second autodefensa, which was billed as like a larger. The Patriot Picnic had been like 7 sweaty dorks getting like sweated as they walked, with, like some Little Caesars pizzas, and, or like Dominoes or something. And then they basically got flexed on till they left the park. They just like sat there, ate some pizza really quickly, and then just left. So when they got like trounced by like a thousand Chicano people and their allies. They were like, we'll be back, but with more racists, and that led to the second autodefensa in which we organized a massive response, including, like probably 4 digits, again to defend the park, and which resulted in the brutal beating and eventual death of a young man by the name of Jefferson, who was like just happened to be wearing the wrong colors, because our security teams were all wearing red. He was wearing red and crossing the street in Logan, was attacked by the SDPD actually, like a, ironically, public relations, lieutenant officer, right? And you know they had been briefed, the SDPD on, oh, the organizers are wearing red, right? He was actually living in like a transitional living facility at the time, he was like formerly homeless, and so he was beaten viciously by the cops. He defended himself and ended up later, dying in prison, awaiting extradition to Maryland. But just, it was that kind of day, right? Where it's like the pigs are like looking for any excuse. They brutally just beat senseless this, this unarmed black man, you know? The right wingers are just being terrible, horrible people, like urinating, and just like doing offensive stuff, you know, to the murals, And

we, you know, were tasked, and, with keeping the community safe, and we did a good job of that. The PSL was actually able to keep out Joey Gibson from Patriot Prayer up in Washington who had flown down just for this. And Joey has a video of us, you know, coming toe to toe, basically as they walk down with their little flunkies from Washington and see not, you know, Antifa in his own words. But like 'those are communists. Those are real communists, bro. You know, we better watch out.' They don't like the American flag or whatever, which is like, you know, his logic for them walking away and with his tail between his legs, and not even attempting to breach the park. So yeah, you know, that was a pretty formative event, too, because it helped us establish even deeper relationships with Chicano Park to the point now where we are actively known as like a sister organization, like the PSL is like a sister organization of a federally recognized historic landmark. And you know, a city landmark, you know, a public park. It's definitely some, an honor, something that, like, you know, I can feel good about my role and help, and as a Chicano person, kind of helping to be a bridge between like socialism and my comrades, who maybe don't come from that community, and the, and, and socialism, you know, community and socialism being bridged.

1:01:49

Jonathan Chavez: Yeah, yeah, that's I mean, this is such an incredibly wild situation to be in. I mean, to face down literal fascists who are trying to like invade the park. That's, that's crazy.

1:02:06

Jose Cortez: Yeah, then, Mayday that year, I told you, you've probably heard me talk about this, but I went toe to toe with my old high school football coach. Right, the proud boys of, I don't know, January 6th, 2020 fame, who, like raided the capital or whatever, you know? They showed up to attack Gloria La Riva and our, and our campaign basically, like they had come, in their words, to fight socialism. And they came with sticks, just to touch on this for one moment, because I think it's such a reflective example of like, what we're fighting for and what the forces of repression are fighting for, is like these people showed up while the march for Mayday was en route. It was already out, so there was only a skeletal crew at the location in Chicago Park. But the entire community came together, you know, organically to basically like, defend the park from these people who wanted to walk through, disrupt the event with weapons with, you know flying Proud Boy gang colors, you know, and shit and I remember, like, you know, the police doing nothing obviously, and this old lady, like in a wheelchair, like rolled up on me, and I'm next to there, you know, we're all doing like a little the toe to toe, just like, you know, just making sure that they don't come into the park and this old lady looks out, or whenever she like tugged on me, and she's like you know, 'take off your jacket so you could defend the park,' so she, she literally like asked me to take off my jacket, so I take off my jacket, and I laid it laid across her lap, and she held my jacket as I like defended Chicano Park with, you know, the Brown Berets, and with a lot of other community people. And it culminated in, you know, the commander of the park at that time, which was the security lead being like, hey, to the police, like you need to get these people out of here because they're like antagonizing. They're threatening. They're like waving these sticks around. The cops did nothing. And so they're, as per usual, and

the police, you know, so so, the people moved them out, like actively like pushed, including like children and women and elderly people, pushed these fascists who are like 6'4" burly Santee dudes. Like I had recognized at least 2 of them from East County, right? And they drove them out, and the police, the police stepped in with sticks and gas, and even then couldn't gain entering the park, so they all had to walk away with their tail between their legs. But I'll never forget that image of that old lady taking my jacket, and just like, in the way that like my grandma would sound, right, being like, like you know, you know, 'Please like, do, do what you can,' right? And me being in a position where I could actually do that, right? It felt like an amazing to be a part of that community and being successful at the community self-defense thing. So yeah, the autodefensas were huge, cause it gave us experience, but it also helped us establish a very meaningful and strong relationship with the people of Logan that is existing to this day. I mean, we actively participate every Chicano Park Day, you know, those events. If those events don't happen and the PSL doesn't act the way it did, being respectful, and you know, 'what can we do for the community' focused? We wouldn't have those relationships.

1:05:18

Jonathan Chavez: Yeah, I mean, that's incredible, and I mean it's, I mean it's even more like, I mean it's kind of crazy that you, you saw your gym coach, you said?

1:05:38

Jose Cortez: Yeah, he worked with my, he was like the assistant coach, because he worked with my offensive line coach, who was like a prison guard, who would pass away. But yeah, he was, he was there, and it's definitely an experience to like lock eyes with somebody from who you know, right? But they're on the other side of the political divide, and it's not just like a 'Oh, do we like pineapple on our pizza?' divide. It's like a 'Do this, does this person genuinely believe I deserve human dignity?' Or the fact that, like, you know, we shouldn't, you know whether or not genocide is all right. It's like, it's that level of divide. And I have no shame in saying, yeah, we pushed his fucking ass out of the park, too, you know. Yeah, he showed up with a violent gang of white supremacists, and if you don't expect to be, you know, addressed, like there's a saying it's like, show me who your friends are and I'll show you who you are, right? And it's like, if you're, the people you're with are violent white supremacists extremists, you know, that makes you a violent white supremacist extremist.

1:06:38

Jonathan Chavez: Period, I mean, it kind of reminds me, because I had a similar, a similar experience from the, the encampments. I, you know, one of the pigs who was, not, he didn't specifically arrest me, but he was one of the, he was one of the sheriffs who was beating on students outside of the, the truck that was taking us away to the jail, but the person who was beating, one of those sheriffs, was my old sergeant major when I was in the Marine Corps. It was crazy. It was surreal.

1:07:08

Jose Cortez: Yeah, and that's, you know, part of, I think, what we have to learn to, I guess just not only overcome but like expect is that we're not just fighting ideas. We're fighting like real people with real infrastructure, right? Like these are not just like, you know, people who decided one day, it's like, they're supported by an entire ideological system like it's this superstructure of media and entertainment that like perpetuates their worldview. So yeah, you know, it definitely makes it a lot more personal, but that's kind of what I appreciate in a certain way, is like, those autodefensas were very personal. It's like I'm a Chicano person, although my family is from Colombia and New Mexico and Italy, but like, I live here, I live in the heart of like, you know, Chicanismo, or what have you. Yeah, so yeah, it was definitely a very important event, and one that would lead to a lot of, a lot of growth for our, our people, and I would say also, like growth within Logan too. There was a lot of struggles that people were a part of that we got to assist with.

1:08:18

Jonathan Chavez: Yeah, that's incredible. I mean, few people can really say they, they stared down the fascists and repelled them. And maybe we could talk about, you mentioned being like Chicano and like, and that I mean, I'm also Chicano as well. And like being in Barrio Logan is also is, I, I definitely relate to like how special that is being part of those like movements, and maybe we could talk about maybe a little bit about what does it mean to you to be like a Chicano communist?

1:08:57

Jose Cortez: Yeah, that's a good, it's a good question. So, I know what it means to me. Chicano is an identity that I can like ascribe to myself, if that makes sense. Like in a society where you're constantly, I mean, just if you could see me on camera, like I get hit up twice a week, if not more, on like the 3 question statement that happens every week, which is like, what are you? People are fascinated by race and identity, and how they can assign value, or at least like an idea of how to respect you, based on what they perceive you to be. And so you know, growing up, I had to have like a whole spiel, right? About like explaining my lineage like I was a poodle or some shit, and so, you know, I kind of leaned into the Chicano identity more as a way of being able to self-identify rather than being like reduced to like one thing like, 'Oh, I'm Mexican because I'm brown, right?' and I live here, which negates my like Colombian family, which is like half of my family, and then, you know, the other parts of my family, like my grandfather, was named John Guido, right? Like that's the Italian part was like very present in my life. I could finally choose an identity for myself, and it was a specific one. It was a political identity rooted in like a national liberation struggle for people who have also been impacted by like, you know, forced migration or dehumanizing conditions in the Southwest, you know? Obviously, there's like 2 schools of thought on Chicano, and I tend to fall on the one that's like it's a useful identifier that more and more youth and younger people, I've noticed, are kind of picking up again in a similar vein, and it kind of helps to establish, like, our unique position, as like either sometimes first or second generation, you know, sometimes older people here, and as a communist, I kind of just bring that like perspective of like, 'Well, what is a nation? What is a state?' to these spaces of like being able to differentiate. It's not just like people fighting back against

racism. It's like a national liberation struggle of Mexican, American, and just like at this point now, descendants of people from Central and South America, Haiti and other places coming together to like fight for like basic human rights, like access to hospitals and house, dignified housing. So being a Chicano communist to me means like being like part of a very particular subgroup in a very particular time and place in US history, one that didn't exist, let's just say, in like the 1820s, right? There wasn't much Chicano whatever, and one that may not always exist, because of the changes of like how a people identify, but being a Chicano communist means being like a revolutionary, with the aim of aiding in the national liberation of oppressed people here In the Pacific Southwest and elsewhere. Being a dedicated anti-imperialist, so obviously like we could talk about Puerto Rico, we could talk about, we could talk about all of the different places. Being a Chicano communist means being like dedicated towards building vehicles of community power that can actively achieve changes in a positive direction for Chicano people, and not, not just, you know, in the short term, with like one off reforms, but like through like radically building up even just our sense of self and worth. I think of how important Chicano has been to me to be like, able to identify with something in a positive lens, whereas, like, I think Latino lacks that like political fire of like, okay, there's not like an affirmation of identity in that. It's like, we're not Latinos, you know? And it's like, what the fuck? But yeah, that's what it means to me. And I think that like it's not for everybody. Some people might identify as like, Latino, and that's cool, too. But organizing out here, I like the power, and I like the history that comes with calling myself a Chicano person.

1:13:27

Jonathan Chavez: Yeah, definitely. I definitely, definitely hear you and relate to that a lot. I mean, I think things like Hispanic, terms like Hispanic and Latino are so devoid, I think, of a real political meaning and, like, Chicano gives that real political history and meaning to the people who are from Latin America and Mexico here, so yeah, I appreciate that.

1:13:51

Jose Cortez: I feel like it's also a term inclusive of the fact that we share a lot of shared relationships with, like the indigenous people of this land, like Chicano acknowledges, like Latino makes it sound like, given the Latin speaking in terms of like we didn't come from Europe only, right? Like a lot of us, like my grandparents, have, like family that like spoke the indigenous language of like Central Colombia, right? And like, you know, if you look at like how we look, right? It's like, I like Chicano because it acknowledges a non-European like identity as well. It like it upholds that. Like people want it so bad, like the Hispanic thing, they so badly want to be like, 'Well, I'm from Spain.' I like it because it has like an appreciation for like, not like this weird caste system that the Spanish brought, but like all of its people.

1:14:43

Jonathan Chavez: Yeah, I, I agree with that, too. Yeah, I mean, I think that's, that's been a similar like reasoning as well. We don't need to get into. I'll tell you about after.

1:14:54

Jose Cortez: We could talk about this out here all day, because like, I have a lot of identity I want to, I have a lot of thoughts about it.

1:15:08

Jonathan Chavez: Yeah, another question, larger question here is, where do you see yourself in the context of the socialist movement in the United States, and actually, internationally, I mean, we could bring it to wherever you want to talk about it.

1:15:19

Jose Cortez: I mean, locally the PSL is a keystone organization of the socialist movement here in San Diego. I mean, we at this point, I think, have had, like, if not the most consistent, definitely the most dynamic and, and, and, and successful run I've seen since I've started organizing here in San Diego. So I think my specific role in that is just to be like a member, like I mean, I help and do the work that I've done. I've been grateful to do, you know, leadership roles in the past and being given opportunities to study more and more things and try to expand my understanding of the world and my place in it. So I see myself as just being like a good comrade in San Diego struggle, trying to help build a political party that can, you know, not only sustain itself, but like thrive and like help, people actually, in the same way that they helped me, help, you know, potentially thousands, if not millions, of other people actualize like the power that they have within they just don't know about. So yeah, I mean, I, how I see myself in that movement is just like being one of the many people that get to do this work in the party that have their place and get to do something. I feel like capitalism has given us an idea of like what leadership is, it's like this aspiration for like a role or something, or like public acknowledgement. And I've been grateful to like, yeah, people have publicly acknowledged the work I've done. I have a very, I stand, I stand out, right? I'm 6'4, have a ponytail. I look, I look a very particular way, people are like, okay. But I've appreciated. I think if I was going to place myself on that spectrum of the socialist movement as being just like someone who every day who still feels just like happy to, to be like, allowed to show up and keep doing this. And all I want to do is like keep doing the work that I've gotten the chance to do, because it's brought me into contact with like a lot of really cool people, a lot of amazing revolutionary future leaders, current leaders, and then, as far as like the international scene, I think that the PSL, like, really reflects and represents the, the socialist movement here in the United States appropriately. It's not like, chauvinistic, like the fact that we just sent like \$60,000 of aid to the Cuban people for, like, pediatric cancer drugs like, you know, like the fact that they send, you know, working class, like, black and brown people to go to Cuba in the first place, myself included, you know, like, like is really reflective of the fact that the PSL is an internationalist formation. It's one that's like rooted in like making sure that we're plugged in and like participating and like offering, you know, assistance to our people all over the country, all over the world. Yeah, I think internationally, the PSL, and me as a member of it, get a chance to like, really show like what we're capable of here in the belly of the beast, right? I think there's certain tendencies we've all seen where they're just like, well, somebody else in the global South will do this. That's the only place a real revolution could pop off. And I've, I feel very good about our place in the international

movement, like we're doing it, like we're helping the PYM nationally put on these big ass events that are changing the discourse. It's like these are not just theoretical waiting around. We're like making things happen. The fact that like we've gotten like a bigger and even more vibrant campaign with Claudia and Karina this cycle, you know, 2 really amazing organizers, you know, we're seeing so much interest. I think it's reflective of, of that growth.

1:19:28

Jonathan Chavez: Yeah, so that's great. Yeah, I mean, I agree. I mean, I think clearly like this party has had an effect that I think other groups just can't even dream of having an effect on the socialist movement, at the very least.

1:19:45

Jose Cortez: To survive the things that we've all had to survive. I mean, we exist in a capitalist system which is constantly draining us of time, of energy, or even just like basic things like hope, right? Like, you have to just like sit there and like actively try to have hope in this place, because it's just so much that wants to suck it right out of your out of your sale. The fact that we've been able to survive like as an organization, locally, pandemics and police repression, and, like you know, massive like uprisings, where repression by the state, including what we saw with our comrades in other parts of the country, was not just like a theoretical like, 'Oh, what, well, what if this happens?' You know, the fact that we've like come out of all of these things stronger, whereas I've seen other organizations formations like fall apart, break apart, like stagnate, you know? Gives me a lot of hope that like, what we're doing isn't just like, we're not just like in a social club to make ourselves feel better, like we're actively putting the rubber to the road and making shit happen. That's a very good feeling.

1:20:50

Jonathan Chavez: It is, it is a great feeling. Yeah, and speaking of that, we can get to what's probably the final question. If you could give your past self advice before you became an organizer, what would you say to yourself?

1:21:06

Jose Cortez: I would probably tell, because the person I was, and the person that I've become are so radically different, you know? I mean, there was always the core person like I mentioned like, who was like, oh, I know that this is not right. The world we're living in is not fair. This shouldn't be happening. So I would probably tell that person, with the person I am now, the person before I was an organizer, to not lose sight of what's right, to not be drawn into the apathy and indifference that, that capitalism requires in order to like, extract the most profit and use out of us. I would tell myself to put a premium on what makes you a good person, like an ethical person. And like you know, and creativity on what the world could be, not how it's, you know, how it should in this completely idealistic, detached from reality sense. And just to stick it out, because I think capitalism has breached so much hopelessness in a lot of people, that I remember before I started this work I was horribly depressed, like looking around and you're seeing wars, and you know, all these horrible things, and you're just like, well, this is the best system we've

ever been given. So you know, if this is the best that we can do, it makes you like, believe in this very fatalist view of like, 'Well, we're all just damned,' which is obviously very convenient for the capitalists who are damned themselves and want to damn us all with them. So I will tell myself just like don't, in the words of public enemy, don't believe the hype, and just like, you know, make the world a better place if you, if it's not going to be made for you.

1:22:51

Jonathan Chavez: Yeah, that's that's beautiful. Appreciate it, well, I guess that's kind of the end, the end of my questions. Is there anything else? Any other final words?

1:23:02

Jose Cortez: No, thank you, Jonathan, for doing this cool project, and very super humbling and grateful that you thought of me, that I'd be good for something like this. I'm very appreciative that, like, we're getting a chance to like record our own history, you know, like, as working class organizers, how many, you know, stories exist of like assholes like George Washington like, who were frankly bad people. And then there's like a million people just like me and you who like, I wish we could hear all those stories because they're doing some really cool, you know, really cool stuff. Yeah.

1:23:38

Jonathan Chavez: Yeah, that's true. And I mean, thank you for being willing to share your story. And the things you've been through. And I mean you came to mind right away, just because, like you've been through the struggle. You've been through so many of it, so far. And obviously, there's more to come in the future. But yeah, but yeah, so thank you for being willing to like, talk about your experiences, and we'll talk again.

1:24:09

Jose Cortez: I'm sure we will. I would encourage us to keep talking about what we've learned, and I'm sure you, you know, you've taught me a lot already. So I'm sure I have more to learn from you, and, and coming conversations as well.

1:24:21

Jonathan Chavez: For sure, cool. Well, thank you so much.