Jorge Garcia, Track 2

Tape 1, side B

JG: To record like that huh? No, to say even in the Black case or any of the cases, that it was the violence that led to this—uh—that, in and of itself doesn't explain what happened, I don't think it's a good enough rationale. The violence could've occurred, things would've happened, in the sense that people would've been busted, people—but if there hadn't been a move or something positive and with support—both on and off campus you know what I mean, and it's very important, that off campus support—uh nothing would've happened.

JB: How was the department actually formed?—What happened?

JG: This department and I—I was not here the first—year and a half. But I, you know, had a lot of conversations with people who were—um—in response to those, both the—the student demand, student pressures, the twelve-point agreement, then the community pressure—basically Rudy was hired um—as a founding, (laughs) department chair, as a founding department (unintelligible) as well, because he was—and he was given a work study, assistant, and put up in one of these, you know, your kind of offices, up in a tower, right?—And given two weeks to write the original curriculum.

JB: Two weeks?

JG: Two weeks—and he produced the first, I think it was forty-two or forty-six course proposals—the original curriculum, that's in the first catalog that has Chicano Studies, he did that. Uh—

JB: Solo.

JG: Solo.

JB: With a student assistant?

JG: With a student assistant, right. And—now I think that, in some ways is the strength of our department, because one of the things that happened with PAS [Pan-African Studies], is that they were um, at least at the time it was under the table, it came up subsequently—they were given consulting money to bring in—some so called national curricular experts in the area of Black Studies, which means you had some people come in and put together a curriculum, and other people then are left to teach it and run it. And I think one of the strengths of our department is that the founding chair put it together, and he put it together—his own background was uh, he talks about the area studies—he has a Latin American Studies background, an American Studies [background], and he's not just a historian if you look at his program, the program he

went through as SC [USC], and then prior to that, his master's at Cal State LA [Los Angeles], so that he had that kind of an approach, and it's in the numbered system—it's gotten messed up since then, because of subsequent course changes, cross listings, and then additions as well, but there was uh—for example, the 130 was the freshman comp, and if you went up to 430 you found a corresponding— you know there was a linkage, if you went to 460, you could go back to 160 or 260, there was uh—it's lined up in that kind of fashion, the numbering system was put together in that way, and he thought of it as areas of you know—of curriculum. Um—then he began the hiring, and in his hiring, I think he made um—a very important decision, he decided to balance out. One, he got people like Rafael Perez-Sandoval, Joe DeAnda, these were people who already had PhD's—uh who were—middle aged, who were you know, had teaching experience, uh, at a variety of levels, most of them not at the university [level], perhaps community college—but typically secondary experience. And—but he mixed that, he always made sure that he had that mix—not only that kind of faculty hire, and also different discipline areas, but also, he went for a group—he used to say, "Young whiz kids," I mean he, one of the things he said that uh—he liked about my own vita, the one I submitted is, one, I had a high GPA—and coupled with that a—a track record of involvement and activism—and his idea was, you get somebody like this on—and you know, you can make them into the professor in the sense that they'll get their terminal degree and all that, but you'll have somebody who will be committed to program and who will also be someone committed to community, and that's a very important link—and he wanted people who um—who would learn—he wanted that mix—and I think that through those you know, you hire four of the first year, four of the second year, and I think it was three of the third—it was very quick growth, we were up at twelve very quickly—and—I think that you know, he only stayed on a year and a half as chair, that's the other interesting move, is that, he did not stay—most of the founding chairs stayed on until there was a coup—and the coups came typically sooner than later—and he saw a need to develop some kind of a collective shared responsibility—that the chair would not be a leader in the sense of, this is the person who is in charge, but this is the person who—who serves—this is the person who takes care of certain administrative duties that have to be taken care of but, it's not permanent, in fact, we had for several years—the first um, eight, ten years of the department, a one year chair. We would take it for one year and resign, that was the agreement we took it on, and our initial idea was that everybody would be chair. We found out after a while though, after forcing a couple of people who didn't want to be chairs to be chairs, that that's not a good idea because if somebody really doesn't want to do that kind of work, they either won't do it, or they're going to do a very poor job of it. So, we changed our mind, and I got to be the first person to serve more than one year, I got a two year um term and could've had a third year, this is in what, '79, '80 and no, '78, '79 and '79 '80. I could've had a third one but I said no, I can always—I could see where you could start getting used to—you spend a lot time with other chairs, you start thinking like a lot of other chairs. (laughs) And I, you know I was getting tired, that was before I took off in '81, I was getting tired of some things that I didn't want to deal with anymore.

(00:06:12)

JB: Were all the members of the department, the original members, whether they were whiz kids or whether they were middle-aged previously experienced teachers, activists, had they made a social commitment in the barrio community, uh or was there a mixture there too?

JG: Well—

JB: Was there a bottom line among that group, anything that held them together?

JG: No there was uh—there's that mix, but there's also a commitment to the community, commitment to change, commitment to working with students. I think there were—it wasn't just, we're going to get some traditional types, because there were people who interviewed, and at the time I was being interviewed there, and there were people who interviewed subsequently—I got to sit in on the interviews, and they—that was part of the reason we had that three part interview, that we wanted to see them in a situation where it was normal as far as situation the students were in—and the students in those days then were very different (John laughs) you know? And would ask you a question, What are your three priorities in life? And you'd list to them, and then they'd blast you as a sellout, a revisionist, whatever, and you'd have to deal with that. And then the community, and uh—people like Guadalupe Ramirez, people like Susan Morales, people like Irene Tovar, who had kind of a proprietary attitude about the whole program saying you know, We went out on a limb to start this, and we want to see that it stays a program that serves the needs of the community, and that serves the needs of our students, and that will continue to be active in the community. So that was part of that interview process; it was built in—there were certain things that we were looking for, as—

JB: Has it continued to be active in the community?

JG: I think it's continued to be active in the community um—but—what is going on in the community is very different now. It's very difficult—people can't look at it and say, Oh no, this is not right, the late '60s early '70s—but what is?

JB: Um-hm.

JG: And, they say, Well the students aren't like this, well of course not, how could they be? Anybody, who for example um—sat through, if you could, the televised 1968 Democratic Convention—and they would sit through the Democratic convention today, is not going to have the same notion about politics, even mainstream politics—so that when you talk about what's going in the Latino communities—there are some very different kinds of things going on today, and I think—that's why in part, there's a tendency I think, in this superficial evaluation to say, well no, the faculty's not as

involved—I think the faculty is involved in a variety of ways. I think there was a tendency in those days, where there would be something going on that was clearly department sanctioned, or department endorsed, or department focused, and we would expect everybody, or almost everybody, to be out there. I think what has happened today is that you've seen the development of a variety of interests. People's specialties have grown and developed—there's a certain degree of aging and gentrification too—

JB: In the department?

(00:09:26)

JG: In the department, in the departmental faculty. You can't spend—I mean I would be lying to you if I said that we've spent twenty years in an institution, and didn't become a part of it in some way, including some ways that perhaps bother me. Some people have gotten comfortable—when the department in those days had a policy that if you're full time, you have a five day schedule, period, no discussion—that was a policy for people who were trying to get degrees and so on, we were required to get—there would be adjustments made, but those were seen as exceptions. Today um—a three-day schedule is not that unusual; there's even a couple that occasionally have two-day schedules. I'm not happy with that—I'm not happy with that in anybody's department, when I see that kind of thing going on, because it seems to me, this is a full-time job, at least for the eight months that we're supposed to be around, it should be a full-time job. And, I also know too that when you look at the types of research and reading and so on—say what you will, this library is an invaluable resource, and to say, Well I'm going to stay at home in the comfort of my home with my PC and do my work, I have to wonder what kind of work you're doing at some level, you know, are you checking books out and taking them home, or what? I think that the research part is—very important. The faculty, like any departmental faculty is spotty—it's also spotty in terms of traditional community involvement, I think there's still a good dose of that, but—age, and time, and gentrification has taken its toll—there's no question about it—you know, it's a problem.

JB: Did it start, did the department start with an ideological cutting the edge—the term Chicano suggests that it did, because that's a freighted term—the fact that Rudy framed the curriculum suggests that it did, because Rudy's a person with very deeply held values. Did it?

JG: It may have, but you see, you do have—even though I think we had a strength in that one person put it together, immediately you hire four other people to teach what you put together, so that it starts—it's that curriculum development process that you could write a proposal, get it approved, but ultimately the final development of it is when somebody walks into that classroom and does it—so that it begins to change immediately, because the curriculum is not the study, the course proposals are there on file, but that's not it, as you know, you can walk into the class and maybe see something very different. But use of the term Chicano, yeah there is an orientation there. Rudy

now interestingly says, and he's written—that we may have made a mistake—in picking Chicano, because it seemed like a good idea at the time, but we in effect, picked a name that we have to keep explaining—even to some of our—to our own because every survey I've ever seen, it's a minority of our general community that selects Chicano as their first choice.

JB: Is that right?

JG: Typically, Mexican-American ends up the number one. Those who are from Mexico and still identify with those who are still Mexicans says We'll check Mexico—and those who are born here or have been here a long time will typically pick Mexican-American as a growing— this Hispanic nonsense is also fairly in, but Mexican-American among Mexican origin people still comes up number one. I guess it does describe Mexican, like Luiz Valdez put it, "Mexican, but American," you know, how's that? Well, that's the struggle, to resolve that, and in one's daily life, you're dealing with that. And just earlier this morning, I was speaking with a group of students—potential students, they are sophomores and juniors of Ventura High School, and they were here—ESL [English as a second language], heavily ESL students, so most of the presentations in Spanish, and one of the questions at the end of the presentation was, "Do you feel you've had to give up your Mexican just to be able to come and stay in the university?" And I said, "I think I've had to give it up to live in this country!" To me, that's a given, it's a question of you deciding, and you being aware of what you're giving up. So, there has been I think—Rudy hasn't controlled that development, he put something forward and then—I think in some cases people may have taken courses in other directions, and people have been part of the process, but as far as, was there an ideology, the ideology was basically one of commitment to students, commitment to—what we used to call the Chicano movement, or a move to improve the social, economic, and political conditions of our people, and Mexicans in the United States, but not limiting it at the border, because we see the border as an arbitrary geopolitical line, I mean you drive down there, you don't find it on the ground—it's not there. But there's a couple of interesting items, one is that we've been seeing, and I've heard and read, on campus and off campus, how we're supposed to be a radical group. Only in the sense that the forward carrying of a tradition can be a radical move—because one of the things that we're very conservative in one way, in that there is an emphasis on maintaining language, maintaining customs, maintaining almost—and sometimes you might even say—we are reinventing a cultural past that never existed—in that we are one of three institutions in this country that offers Nahuatl. 15:15 It's part of the curriculum (??), UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles], UT Austin [University of Texas at Austin], and Northridge are the only three that I know of. there may be others, but there aren't too many more that offer Nahuatl as a—and most Mexicans don't know Nahuatl. But it provides, even for those of us who come from areas of Mexico that were not primarily Nahuatl speaking, but maybe under a Nahuatl influence, as the Aztec influence, provides an incredible insight—the study of the language into things Mexican, so that—a concrete example—going into a Spanish class in high school or college—both places, I lost points, because um—they ask to

translate “how much?” and I would say “que tanto,” and they say, That’s wrong, you translate in English “how much,” well, it’s only in 1975, ’76 while sitting through Fermín Herrera's Nahuatl course, and using Alonso de Molina’s dictionary of Nahuatl and Spanish—then one of the Nahuatl terms—see this is the strange way where we go back and reestablish who we are and what we are. One of the Nahuatl terms was translated “que tanto.” Now, if I lost points because I allegedly was (unintelligible) using English influenced Spanish in the classroom—instead of saying “cuanto,” I said “que tanto”—Alonso de Molina wrote in the middle of the 16th century—there was no US here to influence him. So I said what happened? So you start examining that simple little phrase like that. Well it turns out that’s a perfectly good answer, even though Spanish professors were docking us for points all over the place, “que tanto” is an archaic form—that collapsed into “cuanto.” (John laughs) It’s an older form, and you think about it and say, yeah, my grandparents are hillbillies from Jalisco, they got their elementary education in the end—the last decade or so of the 19th century, so their teachers were probably trained in the middle or early 19th century. They went off to the hill country and they went to—my grandfather had a fourth-grade education, my grandmother had a third-grade education, and my dad’s people that we were close to—geographically close to when I was growing up—and they had tremendous influence on me. But they were literate—you know, around the turn of the century in any country I think, of the world, if you had gotten a third or fourth grade education, you were basically literate. I mean heaven help you today if that’s all you got, you know in just about any country in the world, but—I could show you, they read books in Spanish till the day they died, and I can show you the books, and it's not simple, elementary Spanish. So, the Spanish I learned from them is who knows how old? It’s hill country Spanish. But here you’re losing points, wrong, wrong, and it’s only through this convoluted way of studying Nahuatl that you find out what—what we’re about. See that—in a way is a very uh—and you find out that don't—ende(??), and it was—so many, you just go on and on and on, you also find out that some of the words we use that we were told, Those are not—that’s not Spanish. Like el guajolote instead of pavo for turkey. Well the guajolote, güey(??), is a Nahuatl origin word, of course Mexicans are going to use that, and so you find out that many of the things that—the strange Spanish, the maligned Mexican Spanish, is heavily influenced by the native languages—particularly Nahuatl. Now that, to me is going back and retaining, but it—while it is conservative, it is also in some ways very radical, it’s very empowering for students, and also for me as a professor to get into that. Also, to find out that I—one of the courses I've done in the department is the History of Mexico, and I always thought I was doing a real good job, because I could research in English and Spanish. And I find out that when you go to Nahuatl, that some of the Spanish translations of Nahuatl documents couldn’t possibly be accurate—it’s not grammatically possible, which then gives you a whole new perspective on—the pre-European invasion period, and also that incredible period of the colony, when Mexico's becoming Mexico. See and that’s not—that may be radical in one sense, but it’s also conservative, and you go back and you redevelop interest in—you know I know more about Mexican music now than I ever did. I’m not a musician, I can barely play the radio but—by being around—that’s one of the fascinating things

about being in a multi-disciplinary setting where you have somebody like Chavela, where I can go to her and teach in a history of Mexico course and I can say, look Chavela, I'm looking at say, the 18th century in Mexico, tell me about the music, what the heck is going on? I know the politics, I know the economics, I know—now tell me about the music. And you just start putting together this—to me, is this incredibly exciting, more complete version of who we are, where we came from, so that then, if we want to decide—and this is what I always tell the students even today, I says, "If you want to decide you want to be a brown gringo, do it, but know damn well what you're rejecting, because in many we're creating a past that personally didn't exist for us." When I talk about a past that didn't exist, I'm talking about a um—an Ovidian Golden Age—I'm talking about a past that for a variety of reasons we knew nothing about—we know nothing about. But yet, has had a tremendous, and is having a tremendous impact on us. And that—that, it has its conservative elements.

(00:20:49)

JB: This is fascinating—it's one of the best cases I've ever heard for foreign language studies—

JG: Yeah.

JB: — for example.

JG: Oh yeah.

JB: Does your department bring in to its penumbra other Latinos from Central America or from South America that we're seeing on campus now?

JG: We've had a debate about—in a couple of campuses, like at Fresno, and I think it's San Diego also—I know Fresno for sure, has gone through Chicano/Latino, and we've talked about that, and we keep saying, well—that's another hang up with saying Chicano. If we were Mexican American, maybe—we'd probably still have the problem, but we keep getting back to the fact that 80% plus, of the Latinos are of Mexican origin, so that's important, but we have always had that, in our Title V courses, History of the Americas, it's always been that—see that's once again is I think part of the imprint of Rudy—the comparative. And you never look at things in isolation, and even like a History of the Chicano is in a Title V, because we don't just look at the Southwest—but it's the Southwest as a part of the United States. And very clearly you cannot understand the—I mean how could you possibly understand the Southwest if you don't look at it as part of the United States. I'd like to drop back to one point on the other—

JB: Sure.

JG: In terms of ideology, our thing has always been—that was the ideology, the commitment to teach, the commitment to working with students, commitment to community, and we

expected and looked for, and wanted a variety of perspectives. In other words, there was the agnostic Rudy, and then the others who are still believers. And we wanted that range, because we felt there was that range in our community. And what we were looking for is a group of people on the faculty, that the students could find somebody to relate to. That the one who was still very much—very Catholic, could go there and find people who were still practicing and believers and so on, and so it's very interesting when you have somebody who says, I'm a Marxist, I'm an atheist, and that's why I'm an activist, and the other person will turn around and say, I'm a practicing believing Catholic, and it's because of the social justice tradition of the Catholic Church—that's why I'm an activist. So it's the doing and the commitment that draws us together, not necessarily the philosophical ideological underpinnings of that.

JB: What was—as you came to the department, and in your early years in the department, coming in almost on the ground floor at a year and a half, what was its relationship to the rest of the campus?

JG: (laughs) Uh—it was incredibly mixed. I think there was a tremendous sense of isolation, almost like a circle the wagons. Going to committees, and you could almost feel in those early days if not hostility, suspicion, and some of that's still there, there's still people who say that we shouldn't be on campus, that we're not a legitimate area of study. And our response is, you're a legitimate area of study academically when the president signs a paper and you become one, that's how—how can you justify the breaking off of the social sciences? That's one of the good things about going through a doctorate program, you do your methods of history of your discipline—you know, you still realize that some of these kinds of debates have not just taken place in terms of something like Chicano Studies. My contention's always been, had people like you John, you all—if history had done what it should've been doing all along, there wouldn't have been any need for us. If Poli Sci had done, both in terms of hiring and course offering—because the students and the community looked at this institution and said it's public, but it doesn't reflect us, in its curriculum, in its staff, whatever. But I think that over time—I used to joke about—whoever was chair of the department was the official Mexican on campus, because they would need—at various points you'd need a Chicano input, or a PAS input, what you'd do is call whoever is chair, and the chair would end up serving in all kinds of committees, and that was—we thought that was good because that's another reason—with a rotating chair, the idea was that the next chair didn't have to take on those committee assignments, and hopefully this person who was now the ex-chair would continue to be involved, and it was an idea of moving out and working within the institution. We never saw ourselves as separate, we're always accused of being separatists, but we saw ourselves as part of the institution, and trying to understand the institution and use it to foster our own goals.

(00:25:31)

JB: Did you want to be inclusionary where non-Latino White students were concerned? Did you want them in your classes and—

JG: If you go back to the early days and you look in the catalog, and if—it's not there, we used to have a brochure, I don't know where we could get a copy of it because it's out of print—we used to talk about the various goals, one of them, very clear, the service of specific EOP [Educational Opportunity Program] students, the Chicano Latino, then even the non-Latino, but the other one was also to make others aware of and appreciative of things Mexican, yeah.

JB: So this was ecumenical?

JG: Yeah.

JB: Basically, institutionally through the bureaucracy and through the way this—the layers of bureaucracy and committees and so on, you'd get your faculty spread out through the institution, and at the same time it was ecumenical in terms of spreading the word among students.

JG: It was clear that we were partisans, but in the same way that a history professor would go into a committee—an all university committee, and be clearly partisan for history.

JB: Sure.

JG: That obviously, history is the most important discipline, that how can a student graduate without history, and this type of thing, and of course we had—we had a certain missionary zeal to us, then, we were all 20 years younger and committed to a cause, there was tremendous social ferment going on, and there was a something called the Chicano movement, very—I mean you could turn on the evening news and see things being reported, whether it's Tijerina taking over the courthouse, or something with Chávez and the farmworkers, this all had—it created part of a climate that we operated in.

JB: There was another ecumenical department of course at the same time(??), that was Pan-African Studies. What was your relationship with them, cooperative, competitive, both?

JG: Both. I think it's been a difficult relationship with them—in part because of some of the internal dynamics of their department, in part too because we are promoting the interests of two communities out there that aren't always together. And it's not an accident we're in different schools, because when the Letters and Science was split up into three, we were initially assigned to Social and Behavioral, and we requested out—of course Pan-African also requested out, and they asked to go with a joint request—in other words, take us as a package deal. We said no no no, we want separate consideration. And that caused some hard feelings and some debate between ourselves

and them, and we just told them out front, Listen, we don't want to be fighting with you. We'd—

JB: In separate schools?

JG: —we don't want to be fighting with PAS. We'd rather go to another school, because it—because we said, If we have to fight for resources and space and curriculum and academic legitimacy, we don't want to be fighting against you. We want to fight the English department, or the philosophy department, or foreign languages, we don't want to be fighting with Blacks, I think we've been fairly good on that one in not seeking any conflict. Unfortunately through the EOP program, at various times has been kind of this pendulum or teeter tott—more teeter totter I guess. Back where—or times when there's been more Black students brought in than Chicano students, and more—and it's gone back and forth kind of depending on who's in charge and who's doing what, and that has created some conflict. Because when we have moved what we see as a proactive position for more Chicanos, it has frequently been seen as an anti-Black move because the administrator in charge is a Black, and our thing is we don't care what color the administrator is if there's not the Chicanos coming in, we're going to march.

JB: We're talking about the recruitment of students, has the way in which you recruit students in Chicano Studies changed since you arrived? It's been twenty years now, how did you recruit originally, how did you bring kids in and how is it done now?

(00:29:46)

JG: I think the way it's—I think in an interesting way we may be starting to come back to some of the things we used to do, in that, in the early days, there was—EOP was not over there, and seen as a separate unit that is responsible for outreach and— what do they call it now?—transition—outreach group and transition, all that nonsense. It was seen as a joint effort, I mean I can remember going every year to San Fernando High School, to going to Oxnard, to going to Van Nuys High School, with their recruiters, typically a student recruiter—and making the pitches. I can also remember spending hours over there reviewing applications and interviewing candidates, because at that time they had a personal interview for every EOP applicant, so there was a considerable(??) amount of contact, and I think that we were at least marginally successful during those first few years, when we had those tremendous jumps. We went from what, twelve, sixteen, up to about 1,200, 1,400, in a matter of about five years—just very rapid growth, and what happened is that the EOP formulas filled up, and that's when we had to sit—that's my interpretation of the fact that since 1975, we've been more or less stable, and it's because half or more of the Latinos who come on this campus come as EOP special admits, and that number is, by formula, set—I think there cannot be anymore. But in those days, what we were getting more of were sons and daughters of blue collar workers, because we could go out there and make that pitch, and we'd talk to them, and then with time, with a more fo—

[END OF TRACK 2]