

Bernice Garcia Gutierrez: My name is Bernice Garcia Gutierrez and today is May 13, 2020. I am interviewing Victor Ochoa through a Zoom video call which is being recorded. This is for my Race and Oral History project at UCSD, can you please state your full name, date of birth, and place of birth.

Victor Ochoa: My name is Victor Ochoa. Date of Birth is August 2, 1948. Place, did you say, Los Angeles. Los Angeles, California.

Bernice Garcia Gutierrez: Can you describe more about your upbringing in Los Angeles.

Victor Ochoa: Um, you know it. I think it's a really formative thing that I've been practicing for this, med, Ted TEDx thing. How the border has affected me throughout my life in, you know, I think being born in LA, and then my parents being undocumented, it seemed like it was right after the period of World War Two, there was that Operation Wetback going on. And so they were always constantly in fear of immigration and they didn't want us to speak Spanish. So they didn't teach us Spanish. They would always say, oh no, that we weren't Mexican we were something else, you know, and Spanish, and different things like that. So, I mean, I always loved school so It was just really fun to go to school in those, you know, first grade, second grade and I think that art is always been in my life too as well. I love school if I love doing art. And so one of the things my mom always told me is do what you love to do and always be on time or a little bit earlier. I started drawing when she was babysitting some kids in there. And so she always thought that it was unusual that I put so much details and things and figures in that. She said about this one guy I'd paint, I drew sitting down with the cigarette in his hand and the hat, a tie in a vest, and shoes, and fingers, when the kids sitting right next to me were just doing little stick figures. So I think there was a there was something a lot that that those early years were really interesting to me. I, I remember the immigration agents coming over to the, to the house and they were wearing these big trench coats with these big bulging 45s coming out of their jackets and then they had like these big gangster hats. That's 1955 during Operation Wetback. And my mom, was just completely going hysterical. And you know, my dad with his friends would come around and you always call them some other name like I remember this one Percy Valenzuela and I go "mom how come isn't his name Victor Ochoa, like me," she says "yes you know, like hush," you know. And uh, but I know when they told us to you have three days to take off my dad was ready because he was pretty tired of Working in in you know what undocumented people would work at that time, you know, really hazardous things in. He died very prematurely because he did work in with ammonia and they would always never give them any respirators or anything like that. So he was, he got sick. Really, really early. He had he had bought all the craftsman tools from Sears for carpentry. And I think he already expected this to happen. So he just called my granddad in Tijuana and they rented a truck, big truck and they came over and Took all the tools and everything. It was really interesting for me the first time going to Tijuana

because we had a trailer. During World War Two, there wasn't very much housing for us. And so my dad bought a eight by 20 redwood trailer and we lived there for, for a while. And so we had that hitched up behind a '51 Mercury and my dad bought. And here we go to Tijuana with a big truck in front of a box truck and for the merc with the redwood tree back we're going to Tijuana. Driving through Calle Primera, Tijuana in those years was, I told, I was in the backseat and say, "Mom, this looks like Hong Kong." It was so funny, because I was so surprised to see the people and Calle Primera borders Coahuila, which is the red zone as they call it or the bordelos, there's different names for it. And so that was really interesting to me as far as transitioning between LA and Tijuana.

Bernice Garcia Gutierrez: Could you tell me a little bit more about your experiences on both sides of the border growing up. So like once you got to Tijuana.

Victor Ochoa: Well you know I think living, I got it before the age of seven, one of the great things that happened to my dad was so loving to us. My sister Sylvia, and I, we went to the first day that Disneyland opened in 1955 so you know how cool is that, you know, to, to go to to Disney Land when it was still under construction. So, I got the opportunity to enjoy some of those things in in LA. I never felt very much racism in those years. I guess I was a cute little, little kid with curly hair and my mom would give me my radio flyer wagon and fill it up with cantaloupes, and she would get a grease pencil and put a price on them. And then she would take us to a to a rich neighborhood and walk the streets and "would you like to have a cantaloupe," you know, was like "oh mira, look at the cute little Mexican kid." I remember a lot of gringas seeing that. And I sold all my cantaloupes, so the the idea that my parents always had with me is that we should work and we should know how to survive, and you know, it's just one of those things when you're undocumented living in a country where you're not uh you know como que estas arrimado like you're not really belonging there is something that I felt including when I came back because after I went to school in Tijuana and I got put back one year because they didn't speak Spanish and that was a big issue with me as as a seven year old. The kids would call me gringo patas saladas and all these these insults because I didn't speak Spanish, and I was always getting into fights. I was like always under the pile of kids and socking them. And because I hated that, you know, you know that wasn't even a joke to me. I remember I enjoyed baseball, because all the words were in English, it seemed like in baseball "out," "strike." You know, "bola", you know, it sounds pretty easy. It took me about three months to learn enough Spanish to go to elementary school. And you know, like I said, I always loved school so I was always really good at it, I always did my homework and all that. Interesting enough, that that year also, there was a Hong Kong epidemic going on you know similar to what's going on now. And this is kind of a tradition that people laugh at me, but my mom used to give us a shot of tequila and a half a lemon with salt before going to school in the third grade and like people go, "Tequila? When you were in the third grade?" For my mom, it was a medicinal, a medicinal,

maybe like a Nyquil or something like that. You know, but my sister and I, we never got that, we never got that flu. You know and I, I did suffer quite a bit of physical trauma moving from LA to Tijuana. Like, you know, the water. I would, you know, if you remember when you were a kid and you would go to the market and you'd be in the, in the buggy, you know, and then you're always like, if you're going by the vegetables, you're always grabbing a grape for something and putting in your mouth. Well, I used to go to the mercado with my mom, and I would do the same thing and not knowing that, you know, you have to, you know, it's a little bit different, you know, in those years, and I got sick. I, I suffered for six months or so because the, my grandparents, they had an outhouse, and you know that that was, I was so scared of the outhouse, I just could not deal with it at all. I just never been, and my granddad fixed it up with a, a toilet seat on it and painted it and then would put lye every day on there so I couldn't see the spiders. And oh my god, it would just, and then I had like diarrhea from six months that was aw. So I know that physically, it was, it was a hardship for me personally that whole. I think in retrospect, now, going to school in Mexico, I learned to be a Mexican. Right, I learned to speak Spanish fairly decent and I knew the history of Mexico, about heroes, important people. My teachers were pretty progressive in those years and they gave us a global perspective of political perspective of things. So, you know, I know as a Chicano muralist, later, I was the only one that knew who Josefina Ortiz de Dominguez was or Sorjuana Inez de la Cruz, because they would teach us that in third grade, they would teach us that those were like important women in our history, and over here the Chicanos, they don't they don't get taught jack you know kids don't know they, the only thing that they were teaching and still pretty much his Cesar Chavez. They'll, they'll talk about Cesar Chavez in the social science class. But you know, that was really contrasting for me because I really learned like also different culture, different you know, society, in that my self esteem was really good. I mean, I was like Everybody in my classroom; I remember my fifth grade classroom there was some kids that didn't have shoes, some kind of a little bit more Richie Rich, we were kind of middle, mid range, and it, but everybody in the classroom treated the same, even if those habia descalzos, you know, no shoes, or they had really nice shoes. We were all the same in the classroom. And that's something that I've seen in the classroom. I've been involved with education for close to 50 years and I've always seen those inferiority complexes and kind of racist attitudes. I know when I first, I came back on my own, back to, to East LA with my abuelita Toña. A woman that raised my dad, when my grandmother passed away when he was six. She said that because they knew that I was really good at school, that they, so you can stay, we have a garage, like in Montebello in East L.A. and you can stay there and we can take care of you in the school is Montebello junior high school is right around the corner. So I jumped at that, you know, was kind of, you know, kind of strange, you know, talk about a while you kind of feel You know, I mean that, but they were really great, plus I looked like my dad so they kind of thought that I was like another, a baby Victor, you know, and his name was Victor as well. And my son is Victor, too. So it's like we got three generations of Victor Ochoas. But, going to, to Montebello, that's where I started noticing heavy duty racism,

and I wasn't used to that it, it, it bugged me. Where, where, because we, you know, you're Mexican, you have a concept of what a gringo is, you know, might be a derogatory term, but it's a derogatory to those that deserve it. You couldn't speak Spanish at Montebello, everybody was Mexican, there was just a few Blacks, and Whites, few Asian, but its Montebello. And so we couldn't speak Spanish. I remember when I first got in trouble with these two guys from Tijuana came into school. They just got their Their English was like mine was, was worse because I spoke English was my first language, but it was a seven year old English and so I decided to help them out. They wanted, we were in recess and they wanted to know what you do at recess, I said well, we'll go to the snack bar. We call it the sugar shack over there in the playground. So I walked into the playground to show them around, you know, where, where the auditorium was where the gym was with basketball courts you know, show them the whole school, but this white teacher said, "not supposed to be speaking Spanish." But the way, the way he said I looked at him. Me cayo bien gordo, and you know, and I'm not a violent person but I socked him, I socked him in the face and I got probably taken to the principal's office. And I remember Mr Perry who I drew a big portrait of, because he retired the following year, so I remember, really good. Took me to his office and I explained to him what had happened, and where I came from, and how these two kids all they wanted to know is where the snack bar was at, snack shack, the sugar shack was. And he says, "Oh, hold on. Go back to class," and I said, "I thought I was gonna get kicked out," but I'm not sure exactly what had happened but that teacher never, I never saw him on in in school again. So, you know, I can imagine what might of happen but you know. Because I've been, I worked in schools where any kind of violence is like zero tolerance, and they sent me back to school. The other thing was always that I heard like one thing that I always remember, is that we're talking about Pancho Villa and they said that he was a bandit. I think my teachers told me that, to expect that so, and they actually told me, "You know, hey for us he's a national hero," so I would argue with with kids and teachers about Mexico, about Tijuana, they would call me pollo. You've ever heard that before, a pollo? Como eres un pollo? Pollo means that you're like recién empacado, just recently arrived back from Mexico, that you don't speak Span-, English. Of course it was, I was definitely more Mexican than them, and then my clothing. I remember that, you know, like, the first day of school, everybody dresses up with a new clothes, new shoes. My parents were making 20 bucks a week in Tijuana, so you know I had shoes and I'd shine up my shoes. But what was really strange for people is to see my pants because I'm tall, I'm six one. But I grew up during that period, really fast. So we would wear our clothes, our school pants in Tijuana with black, black and white shirt and an orange sweater. And so she would buy the pants really long. And so I had the cuffs every three quarters of an inch were taken down. So the black pants had like the grayscale you know in photography and you'd have like a darker gray, lighter gray, and a, almost bleachy-white grey. So kids they would laugh at me and I knew, you know what I mean, you're in seventh grade, the girls and like all those adolescent pressures that was pretty pretty difficult for me. And so, you know it, it took me, took me a while to, to get I guess accustomed to it and I moved up, and moved back to San Diego, because I was really missing

my, my parents, I, we are very close and only have a sister. And my mom was always you know, crying and I wasn't there. So I told her, I'm going to find a place in San Diego so I'm closer and I can go visit you more often more, it's, with no money and then living in LA how do you get back and forth. I remember somebody sent me in a Greyhound once, because my mom would just completely, you know, is going crazy, you know, not having her son close by. So I moved up with some other aunts and things like that. But in the ninth grade, I, the high school wouldn't let me work. And when I registered to Hoover Hoover High School, and I needed to work. I mean, my parents couldn't help me and I had to, you know, work. So, so they said I couldn't work and go to school at Hoover. So they sent me to Snyder Continuation School which is where all the bad kids were going, the pregnant girls, the drug kids. So it was kind of like a little bit of a tough school. I was the only one that wasn't tough. I was there maybe so I could work, and I got a job at 16. I remember in the silk screen shop printing, printing posters, bumper stickers, and things like that. Which I was able to rent a part, a little apartment, one bedroom apartment, and actually brought my sister to live with me so I could, she could go to school as well. So I had kind of liked the responsibility of both of us. And my mom would come up and make big ollas de frijoles, you know big bean things for it so that it will last all week and stuff like that. We were just, we're just in the ninth, I was only in the ninth grade, forget how old I was. Around that same time that I was in the silk screen shop, I was getting involved with Chicano, Chicano movement and I was kind of having meetings with you know, artists and you know during that time of activism. That sort of like between the middle, mid 60s, but I remember one thing that happened when I was at the silk screen shop. I was asked to print a poster for the Farm Workers about the short hole illegalities and other, and other issues that were going on at the time. I did, I did it all freehand freestyle and printed it. After work at nighttime and I was told to take them to Cesar Chavez personally at this parking lot at 5:30 in the morning. It was a Safeway store on Fifth Avenue and um, I was all nervous that I was going to meet Cesar Chavez. I printed about 150 posters, big 21 by 28 inch posters and I wrapped 'em up and I actually printed some extra bumper stickers. And then I went to the parking lot, you know asked for Cesar Chavez. I, I walked up to him to give him the posters, and he opened them up and then he looked, he just loved them. He says, and I remember he patted me on the back. He goes, "Muy buen trabajo muchacho." You know it, I remember it, because I think we still have a feeling about Cesar Chavez as kind of um, kind of like Jesus. He was kind of like, real calm guy, real. Even when he spoke it was really, was really, really nice when he spoke. So it was really an important thing for me to have met him during that time as a kid.

Bernice Garcia Gutierrez: So going back a little bit to your interest in drawing as a child. What drove your passion for art and how did it develop as you grew up and navigated all these life changing experiences?

Victor Ochoa: You know, one thing that I remember in first grade in LA, the, you know, they give you these paper, Newsprint paper that have some lines on the bottom, you can write with your crayon down the bottom you drew something up on top. Well, I drew this thing that where it's a plane, airplane, and then I, I drew City Hall, you know, City Hall, LA City Hall. And the plane flying over the city. And then I'm in one of the windows like saying "hi," and I wrote on the "I'm flying over the city" in some, you know, I wrote a couple of lines on the bottom. And we were doing the Pledge of Allegiance outside of the playground. And we were all lined up, then we would walk us through the hallway to the classroom. And my drawing was on the, in the hallway and I saw, I was like, shocked and seen it. But still to this day, it, it affected my ego like I guess in a certain, a certain way that, that was really good. My experience with art has always been really positively reinforced, you know, all the time. I won this city-wide contest in Tijuana, because we didn't even have markers in those years. One of my teachers went to an educational conference in LA, and he brought a whole set of markers. And those are these really, ones that had barely came out, they had screws on the back, and you pour fluids in the back of it for all the color. So I had this whole set of colors of felt markers that nobody else had, probably in the whole city. So I was in charge of the bulletin boards at, at the school in Tijuana. And then there was this big contests for cavities, it was for a dental campaign in Tijuana. And so the entries I entered that contest. It was a city-wide, municipales they would say, the municipal city of Tijuana. And the idea is big, giant teeth with, they had all kinds of different characters. I had started taking a correspondence course from the comic book. So my style of cartooning I still cartoon, I do do cartoons, quite often. It's kind of like a Walt Disney/ Hanna Barbera style. So they, these teeth were all, I knew how curved it was, how to draw, how to draw scared. I knew how to draw different expressions. So the cavities were like these gangsters with these these power things that you cut up the street with. What do you call them? With an air compressor and they came in, and then the superhero was like a tube of toothpaste, you know toothbrush, and a cape, and its flying and it's like attacking the gangster cavity guy. And there was one tooth that was happy. And the other one was kind of scared and you know, I won the city wide contest. For the for art and you know, things like that happened to me a lot, you know, in you look throughout throughout my school. I think I liked school so much that all the drawing things, the assignments were super cool. Geography, anything that had to do with drawing I was, really did a good job. I think I liked all, everything math, writing. I came across, that still continued, I was in junior high school, the the art teacher saw me right away, and she, she goes and gives me, she goes out to her site room and says, you know, the watercolor brushes would look really nasty like, like hair coming out like that. And she says, "Victor here's, here's how a watercolor brush should look like." And she went, I remember she put it in her mom and then made a little point on it. So integral. I had never painted with the real sable brush, so that, you know, talk about my experience with like really so positive. And it made me even paint better and more so that that was just a whole kind of expression. I think that I remember printings, I was already in college, I was already, when I did something that was entirely Chicano have a large canvas. And I

remember the teacher told me, "You know, art is, is more universal, it's more you're only painting for a certain audience." I remember that clear-clear. And I said, "Well, you know, so what, you know, so, so I'm painting for Chicanos." You know, it was like a fist, there was a book open, and a mestizo head, with, with the voice like nomenclature clouds from the Mayas. You know, like screaming out bilingually like one side in English and a side of Spanish. And it was the radiation energy. And I liked it, the other kids, the students liked it. And all that period of time was, I was trying to find out what I could work and still do art. So I did. I have a degree in technical illustration from City College. I became a technical illustrator doing aircraft maintenance books and things like that from blueprints. I did architecture for a while. I did different industrial arts and I liked everything but you know, the architecture, I went to an office for three weeks and I didn't like using just templates for toilets and, and it seems so boring. You know, to me, I wanted to do something more creative more. So I ended up just doing art, fine art with emphasis in education. I got, I just got a B.A. doing that, and went off. I was the founder of the Centro Cultural, co founder of the Centro Cultural de la Raza. That whole experience as far as setting up workshops, you know, right away I set up a silk screen workshop, so people could print posters at the, at the for building originally, then later on it at the new tank that existing building painted. Organize I was the director for the Centro from '71 to '73. And so I got a budget to buy the first paints, to paint at Chicano Park. So you know, almost all the artists that we were getting, going to meetings and all this took over the for building and then got booted out of the for building to then eventually they gave us the Centro building. I remember they gave us \$20,000 to fix it up, and they opened some doors and they handed out some fluorescent lights in some heater units. And so we moved into that, which used to be where they store all the stolen bicycles cops would, there was real dusty, just all these these old bikes in worse, it was all full of that stuff. It took me several years to get the dust out of my lungs, out of the Centro because it was so dusty. You know, and I'm jumping to the to the Centro. I don't know if I covered that, that part of your question. It did.

Bernice Garcia Gutierrez: Do you have like a favorite piece or a work of yours, like something that's really meaningful to you.

Victor Ochoa: I do all kinds of different stuff including abstracts. A lot of people think it's strange of a Chicano artist would do abstracts, but there's something that happens to me when I paint. You know I'm 71 now, so I've gone through, you know, 50 years at least painting a mural. And so there's something, the only word I usually say is I like the spiritual dimension when I do art, you know. If I get a piece of paper and I start drawing, you know, I could draw there for hours. And so I, even when I do abstract pieces, there's this dimension of I mean when I'm doing it then. Even, even abstracts it just, it just come out. And, I was doing a fist abstractly and everybody says it looks like a baby, in a family, of a document, and so the community's coming to support on him. Man, im going shh, I was just doing a fist, I'm just trying to draw, draw a fist.

So, I think you know the murals at the park, for instance. You know the Geronimo mural that I did in front of the Centro, it's been pretty famous around the people liked it. I like it because my dad was Yaqui and Geronimo is Apache, and he looked at the border like my dad did. But "All the Way to the Bay" is really popular. At the park, the Mexican Revolution is, that's one of the things that I do, I use airbrushes so, that's one when I did all the airbrush. That's one of my favorites in that style. But the first ramps that we did at the park, I, are really cool, after we restored them like eight years ago. And I've been using this pearlescent paints. It's really cool to see them how they glow and people. It's interesting because now they look new. And the young people feel closer to them than before, when they look like all bleached out and after 40 years of not using really the right paints, because we never had money. Now we know that we did have a budget to, we got that \$1.6 million to restore all the old murals. I went to go, I had to rent a van, just to bring the other paint that I wanted to use for the park. And I wrote up a manual on the techniques. I've always been kind of a technician as far as pigments and varnishes and all that. And it just, you know, really great experience because now internationally in in the younger generations, they feel more solidarity to the issues of the park, and you know, just like it's, it's new. It's like news, even though it's 50 years old, it's new. And then you probably know that we're a national landmark now, you know, in the United States, and we're, we got a museum where we're, we're pretty close to opening the Chicano Park Museum. Which is really close to me because I'm, my grandfather was a archivist, and he taught me to archive things. So this whole time, I saved, I have folders, and I put things in the folder and I put in a filing cabinet. I gave them over to the University of Santa Barbara, the multicultural Archives is where a Chicano archive is, and I gave them 54 legal-size drawers, full of files. So it was, mainly because my grandfather always said, you know, my grandfather lived in Catalina in the United States in the 30s. And they treated them really, Mexicans were treated like, like blacks in the South, you know, you couldn't go into this restaurant, you couldn't use this water fountain. And so my grandfather was, he used to call gringos "yankees", you know, that's that generation, "yankees". And when I told him I was a Chicano, he was going, "It's about time after 50 grand kids that somebody has kind of like a political attitude about living in the United States." And so he, he used to give me, I inherited books from him. These, the history of Mexico, a través de los siglos, that he archived six years from clippings out of the newspaper. Just, just an amazing influence on me, and he always would tell me those, the people up there in the United States, they don't, they don't, they don't really care about us, and they're going to try to destroy our history, destroy who we are, a community. So you save your stuff, you know, save not only your pictures and stuff like that. That's why I started saving my files because I said here's all this work that we've been doing during the Chicano Movement. Where is it, where you going to find it at? Who's, who you're going to- even when I was doing Geronimo, I read three books on Geronimo by white anthropologists, and it was always weird I didn't believe them. I think we as Chicanos we, we did not believe what we were reading especially history that has to do with Mexicans and Chicanos. And we would always, we told everybody, "Read between the lines, don't, don't believe all the



stuff that you know, they say something about Geronimo you believe it.” So I, I went to Arizona to talk to Apaches for it in the research and doing that, that mural. So that was one of the things that I learned from my granddad.

Bernice Garcia Gutierrez: Thank you. Moving forward to the Anastasio Hernandez Rojas Mural, you mentioned how you really like to incorporate the spirit, like a spiritual dimension to your art. How do you, how would you describe this within the Anastasio Hernandez-

Victor Ochoa: Oh, it was really interesting because when I did is. I invited my airbrush class to work on the panel, that we did a panel, and there was this real beautiful photograph of Maria Puga, his widow, with his two cuates kids with their, with a photograph taken right at the border. And I love that photograph, and I thought, this is a good high contrast photography thing that we can use in our airbrush class, but I wanted the students to work on the theme and the concept of the panel and because it had to do with immigration, you know, this is was the class assignment. So I said, part of doing a mural, is that you've got to do research and you gotta you know, interview people and you know, find out as much information about that. So I grew, I invited all the students to meet with Maria at the park and all the ones that showed up they, they asked questions. And it was, uh, talk about it, spiritually, you know, several of the, actually boy, boys and girls were crying after they were talking with her and they got really emotional, and they started, she was trying to tell them how it felt for her family or kids, the whole thing of having her husband such a young age, being murdered like that and then, then the case and all that. So I, I really enjoyed that part because I saw that the students really put in their hearts into, into it. And I said, that's perfect because to do this mural, I would really like to work with people that really were connected to the issue. And, so we did this panel, and the panel came out so good that we had it at several border exhibitions and even this last year, we had it at the, at the Centro as altar pieces it actually was an altar for Dia de los Muertos. Because it did do that because one of the things we have these different elements. For instance, the father and the two year old child. They were found drowned in El Paso. Remember that? Remember that image? I wanted to use that image because I thought it was, it sent a hard message. And so there was like in between the students, some students say, well, “how would you like your father and your sister being painted on a mural?” They made it sound like we were just using it for hype of some sort, like some kind of propaganda or something. And so we, it was, that was good because we saw, the whole classroom started talking about their feelings about how, why would you put a dead drowned person in the mural. And it was really, it was really good. That they started discussing that spiritual part. So we concluded by actually, you see him drowned out of the water. Then you see these kind of, kind of like smoke, like copal or something, with the images of both the daughter and the father, kind of going up to the top of the arc, because the Anastasio pillar is a double pillar, with the top and it kind of looks to me, it looks like an altar. So after seeing all the elements that we put on there, it was an altar. You know, we had, one of the things we had was

these kids in cages, right. And one of the things that elements of the altar is toys for kids. Because you always put some, you know, there's like a lot of elements you put in a altar, not just clay skulls or fruits or food, but there's toys because of the, the, the angelitos que murieron, the angels that died, because November 1st is for the kids and then November 2nd is for the adults. So I remember seeing a teddy bear inside one of those cages at one of those detention centers and when I saw that, that teddy bear in, you could see there's a blanket where they, they had taken the kid out to do something with them, but the photographer photographed the teddy bear. And so I thought that would be a good thing to put in the toys, but still talk about immigration, but at the same time cover this whole thing with the altar. So, the altar in itself is a altar, and as you look up, it's almost looks, feels like, you're in a church you know with the, with the dome on top of you. And so we have some angels going up to the top and then his portrait is almost going through a different transcendence in his own face. We pick this face is kind of like defragmenting. And so immediately, it was we were talking about spiritual energies, death, you know, the whole death part, we, we talked about the fact that Chicanos don't only do Day of the Dead altars the same way they do it in Mexico or in Spain and All Saints Day. We always would throw in the precolumbian elements of Mictlān and death, from the precolumbian perspective. So that was something to teach the students because they had never even heard of that before. And so they all had to research and one of the research was the xoloitzcuintle, for instance, who the xoloitzcuintle is up there and the top of the pillar, and he's like a guide to, to your voyage to death, to the other world. So that's like, well that's one of the elements. There's a, there's also a Mexican eagle flying up above the, the drowned spirits going up on top. You know, so the whole thing being painted with pearlescent paints gives it a mystical glow, and because it's the 10th anniversary of Anastasio's murder, all of that just seemed like a natural, you know, thing with energies and things, you know, there's like, you know, what is death? You know, I mean, people, people have different, different concepts about death, but you know what, what really is what really is it? And so there's like elements, fire, water, air, you know, all those elements. And we have an incensario, we have a copal burner that's actually a carving, four women forming the copal burner, and then the smoke is forming into corn stocks. And you know even, even corn stock or, or a bamboo or, or a reed that symbol, in a Mexican altar means bones. So that's one of the things that if you know a little bit of Mexican altars. I used to sell flowers in Tijuana when I was a kid, and I didn't know what these copal burners, why these, why, the, the whole the whole cemetery smelt really beautiful with these copal burners. You know the, there was, that's the other thing about that you learn in living in Tijuana, there's people from Mexico from every state of Mexico. So when I went to the cemetery, there was people, I remember doing rosaries you know all dressed in black and they're in their knee, on their knees. Some other group was doing a carne asada right next to the tombstone, and they would have a trio or even a mariachi jamming there, and they had like tacos, it, like, you know, so you have people from the Norteños, Chihuahuenses, to people from Oaxaca, they have you know, they do with Cempazuchitles, they do whole flower murals around the tombstone itself. So I used to grow flowers, it as a kid, and I

used to go with a little carretilla, a little, little wagon that I made out of wood, and with a bucket of water, and the flowers, a little broom. So I would go in there and sell my flowers, and sweep the tombstone, put water in the macetas there. It's, you know, it's, it's something that you know I never forget that, that I think it's still part of how I feel today. So, you know, the border is such an interconnected thing to my own personal develop, that's why I say I, I'm titling my book "Chicanosauruz at the Border," because, you know, I don't think I'm the same as a Chicano from from East LA. You know there's, there's pockets of the similar things, cemeteries, and different things in, in LA and I went to a place in Sacramento and it looked like I was in, in some part of Mexico. But this border the dynamics of the most transited border in the world and in this constant influx, you know, we're in. So I decided to, to build my house in Tijuana, as well. I figured that if the revolution came up, I would have some place to back, you know, back myself up. And actually raised partially my kids in Tijuana, and people, people didn't like that my suegras, my suegra, my suegro didn't like the idea. They said we were, "estan retrocediendo," we're, we're going backwards, is to hear of a struggle for them to come to United States and hear both of us college graduates and going back to Tijuana is like, what, you know, it wasn't heard of, but I did, I didn't want my kids to be raised in this attitude, I see it, I see it all the time where there's something that, that I think is like complex, it could be subliminal. But I see, I see it all the time where, where people don't feel empowered as, you know, as everybody else. And it's unbalanced. They wanted to put my kids when they came back, they wanted me to put in an immersion, immersion classes and I went to go visit them. It was a this lady, this lady teacher, and she had Pakis-, Pakistanians, and they had different international kids, and it's, it's my kid isn't I, the first thing I did with my, my, my, my kids is that I, I bought a satellite antenna. So they had access to the Disney Channel in Spanish and Disney, Disney Channel in English. So it's, a it's a joke, nowadays, but my son, his first words were like, "Papi, papi," and then he's looking at the TV and Donald Duck is coming up, and he goes, "Pato duck." He would start, he was starting repeating everything both in English and Spanish simultaneously, it was kind, kind of a weird thing, but they were completely bilingual the whole time.

Victor Ochoa: Well, you know, when I was raising the kids in my house in Tijuana, that was one of my big concerns- how are they going to be handling their bi-, bilingualty? I've never had kids before so I remember I talked to, uh, Alberto Ochoa, Bilingual PhD at San Diego State, and he told me, just one of you talk to them in Spanish, and one of them, talk to you in English and they'll, the kids are really smart, they're gonna, they're gonna decipher it. So living in Tijuana, I had my mother, I had a aunt, I had always had a, people watching the kids that didn't speak Spanish, I mean, didn't speak English. So they got a big dosage of Spanish, and when, the first words that came out of my son's mouth, I remember, when Donald Duck came out he goes, "Papi, papi, pato duck," and i'm looking at him, I go "Aw man i'm really screwing these guys up," because there's, they don't even know which language they're speaking at the same time. You're speaking everything. But, they, they figured it out, its, it's almost automatic. And they're

very pretty much bilingual. Victor doesn't use it as much, but he still, he still can communicate it pretty good.

Bernice Garcia Gutierrez: Yeah, going back to the Anastasio Hernández Rojas Mural, what was the part that impacted you the most about when you learned what happened to Anastasio and what his family has lived through for 10 years?

Victor Ochoa: Well, you know, I have all this history about the border and I, I, my great grandmother Cuca, she was a Zapoteca, she came over here during the Cristero, to Tijuana in 1918. You know, some of my uncle's came across the border undocumented and worked as farm workers for instance in. One of them, one of them got killed in the field. So, you know, there was always, we always knew about women getting raped at the border by immigration officers. So it was like we always so hesitant to, to sending especially girls to, to work over here in the United States. And then my grandparents, they were kind of bureaucrats already in the 30s. They got on a boat from Colima to Catalina Island. So they were in Catalina Island, treated very terribly my grandfather. There was, I think, one of my aunts was born in the United States. He had already fixed their immigration papers, all of them were documented, but he was so ticked off with how things, how much racism was going on. He got all those documents went to immigration personally and threw the documents at 'em, he says, "stick them up." You know, over there and he, he left for Tijuana. Everybody got kind of ticked off of my grandfather at first, for being such a radical. But he says, "No, we're, we're, we're going back to Mexico." An then my father and my mother were, came across in the 40s, which was during World War Two. Also, my father was a Zoot Suiter, he was Pachuco, he was in, he was in LA in '43. You know, and he was a big, big guy, and he sort of famous for, for throwing a, when the sailors, the Navy guys went up to, to East LA. He threw, he picked them up, because he could, he used to pick up beef and semi trucks, so he was like a huge arms so he picked these swabees, as they called them, up in the air and threw them in the Sixth Avenue Bridge. It's just got destroyed recently. And he has, like, chain, chain scars and pipes scars, and they used to use brass knuckles and switchblades. And in fact, I was a baby and he would still feed me, you know, apples with the switchblade, like he would cut, cut the apple, kind of like a Gaucho in Argentina, feed me with the, with this big, when I was a kid, I could see, when he flipped it, you know you could see the, the switchblade, this the chrome switchblade, flashing in my eyes. You know, he really well dressed always, you know, gabardine, sports jackets, and I remember blue suede shoes and things like that, big chains. He was a really good looking guy and my mom too, she had like the big copete, where they would stash the switch blades in there. So they had that, that part of living in the United States and then Operation Wetback right after the war, they were cut up with all that so that was pretty bad. So from '43 to '55, you know, I was born in '48, you know, they succeeded, they, my dad is a very hard worker. My mom worked for the, for the war industry, she, she did clothing for the military, she cleaned the Pullman Trains here, here in San Diego, where the you know the

Pullmans where the trains, where all the troops were being shipped around that food, K-Rations. I remember she said she worked packing food in boxes for the soldiers. So they're experience was pretty heavy duty. So I would, I'm born in the 50s and then, you know, here I am, even though I'm born in the United States, at age seven I had to follow my parents to Mexico. So my sister and I, we all have to go as a family, so that affected me. And then I would say to even my kids because of my hard-headed Chicano border perspective, I took my kids back to Mexico, because I, I felt that, at least I wanted to go. And they had a great time, they went to montes-, Montessori Schools in Mexico, the Montessori formal education is more popular, and very reasonable for me working in the United States. So it was possible for me to have my kids go to a Montessori school, and then later on a private school. I wanted them to be, to be, to, to be effective, someone like me because after, I'm looking back, I think it was a good thing. I don't tell immigration that but I think it's, it was a good thing for me and my personal development to have, to have been, you know, kicked out.

Bernice Garcia Gutierrez: What is it about Chicano Park that makes it an appropriate place for Anastasio's Mural live, and how does it contribute to the overall narrative of the history of Chicano Park, and how does it complement the other murals.

Victor Ochoa: Well, you know, When you think Chicano, you know I, a lot of people are confused on the definition of what Chicano is. To me, I've heard all the, all the different ones. Oh, it's your Mexican you're born in the United States, or, you know, something like that. And to me that's never been the definition. The definition of Chicano it's is mainly a political attitude of pride of being Mexican. We're calling ourselves Chicano not because we don't want to be called Mexicans, it's because we, we find ourselves in the United States and we have a certain attitude of pride and then of activism of doing something for the Mexican community on this side of the border. So I see it as a political attitude and then ever since I started painting murals, we've always had like six, seven issues that have remained unfortunately, still, still issues. You know, it's like, you know, like police brutality, people think, oh, that's a new thing; they were doing that all the time to me. It was, see you know, this whole thing with Cholos, or you know that you know even in graffiti artists, I work with graffiti artists. Its always been a, been a thing where the police have always been brutal, to say the least, in our community. Racism, of course, in general. But I think there's always been a feeling of oppression of our culture, and our, and along with racism. That you know, the hide our, our heritage, you know, and so much racism. Even Mexicans don't know what indigenous part they are, and it's funny when I see the DNA results of some of my friends, "Oh, I'm 65% Native American," I say, "You didn't know that? Look at your face. I mean, look at you know I draw faces. So look at your nose. Look at the way your cheek bone, you're the same as this people's here. Where are you from?" "I'm Nayarit, from Nayarit," "You're a Huichola look at, look at the way you look." So it's, it's you know that our first Chicano flag was a mestizo head. So it was like one European side, one, one indigenous site, and

then the third dimension the Chicano side, but we used that for many years, but I think we grew out of it because I think we realize how much more indigenous we are. But that stage of development of who we are as mestizos is at least one step you know forward than saying, "Oh, I'm Mexican, I don't know where I come from, If I'm from Chihuahua and like, and like am I Tarahumara or what?" And I always had that curiosity too. So there's like the farmworkers was, was an issue, still an issue just went on a train drive up north. People still living in tents and stuff. So bilingual education still an issue, they still don't want to teach us, you know, it's so weird. I've been all over Europe everybody speaks 3, 4, 5 up to 7 languages. And you go to Luxembourg and Brussels, everybody speaks at least five languages. Here they make you feel like if you have like a Spanish accent you're like gang related or ignorant. It's always like negative, if I had like a French accent, "Oh I'm romantic," or if I have a German accent I'm intelligent, I'm scientific. You it's, it's a constant battle with you know, in immigration, it's always been an issue. And, and so the murals, they were the first murals that we painted to have all of those issues. Our history, our culture, our heritage. So, Anastasio just goes along with, with our, you know, our issues, you know, it's our, it's our regular issues and, and you know, like when Sheriff Arpaio was in power, you know he did all those things where he was dressing everybody in pink. And I remember that one case where they pick up this family, Mexican family on the freeway, they arrest the mother and the tia, and the two kids in the backseat, little toddlers, they left them in the backseat. You know, at night or 10 o'clock at night. And you know this kind of stuff that keeps on happening. Well, we are calling Arizona Nazi-zona, because it's so, so radically right wing and then Trump supports everybody that, from Sherriff Arpaio to the governors all that, so where is, well I see a mural is can speak and maybe be part of a solution of the issue. We're still dealing with the same issues.

Bernice Garcia Gutierrez: Yeah, what would you hope people take away from this mural?

Victor Ochoa: Well, I think, you know, if you see the video, you see the way, the way, they're kicking him, and then they, they, they cuff him and they still taze him three times in the, in the cerebrum. You know, even with, people remember that. And I think, along with some of the other images that we, that we have on there, I think, It's going to remind people, because it's kind of interesting. We, we trying to be happy people, were trying to be, forget our problems and that kind of stuff, like anybody else right? But you know, it's like something that I don't like about forgetting is, I know people that they got their green card this happened, I saw this up, I was in San Ysidro one time. I went to go visit this friends and said, she, she had just gotten a green card like two, three months before. And she's up on these condos it over overlooked the border, and they came like 20 guys walking through the brush in the "we're going to jump the fence and walk through their parking lot. And what does she do? She calls the migra right there in front of me, I go, "What are you doing?" That's the last time I seen her or her husband, they used to be friends with me. I said, I can't believe you just, le dije, "Tas recién empacada and you just here, just

recently arrived and you're, you're calling the immigration on your same people.” And what, what that brings me to say is that people think that oh they got a green card, they're better than somebody, it doesn't, this whole issue of documentation, it's, it's, you know you're, in this especially if you're well off, got jobs, and your kids are born on this side of the border. You know you completely forget that there is this issue on immigration, it's like, oh, that's the other people. And so I think to me, part of that jolting, remind, reminding people that its still going on. It's still, they're still raping women, they're still incarcerating children, still separating the families. They're still treating people like criminals, because they don't have a piece of paper. You know, I, to me that's really valuable to, to put it back on the front page instead of hiding it back in somewhere, an obscure place. And I think that's, that's an important thing for me. And it will stand, it's a seven story, seven story pillar and it's going to be one of the largest pillars at the park and we're using all the technology that I've learned in the past 50 years. So all of that. Hopefully this pandemic will let us work to, soon, cause we still have the scaffolding installed there and we were having to pay like \$10,000 in rent. So, it, it worries me. I want to start working. I've been working at, at a mural with the short small team. Everybody wears masks and gloves and everything like, and because I can't, I needed to paint. I can't be like, it's like, not breathing if I don't paint.

Bernice Garcia Gutierrez: So you already kind of mentioned this, but can you elaborate more on if you think this is a form of public justice and why or why not?

Victor Ochoa: Of public justice?

Bernice Garcia Gutierrez: Yeah, referring to the mural.

Victor Ochoa: Well, we, the knowledge of the case, you know, they did win some part of the case. I think a million dollars for the kids, which is nothing but, you know, this whole thing where the, the criminal, the criminal part of police officers, officers in general, they never, their never found guilty. I think that's an inequity that needs to be mentioned. That we need, still need to struggle. And I guess towards the end of your questions that's been one of my relationships with the AFSC is, is dealing with all these issues, all these years, you know, when Roberto Martinez was, was there, were always doing marches, we're always doing banners for them for meetings for, constantly doing things that were kept on happening. People get, I remember that real beautiful woman that got shot in her driveway in Chula Vista, forget her name right now. You know what the hell these things keep on going on. Now it's one of those things. Hopefully the mural will bring those highlights, its already done, even we haven't even finished the mural. It's already been in *La Opinion* and *LA Times*, Coronado's paper, I forget what that means, and the local papers. I've been on every *Telemundo*, *Televisa*, different channels, Channel 10, Channel 8. Um, it could, you know, it's already in you know, getting a lot of, a lot of spread of

information. We've had, one of the things we do all the time at the park is we have tours. We had a labor union from all over the United States come over and we toured them and we were, we mentioned to them that we, we needed money. They, right there on the spot because they have different, Detroit, New York, different, different cities, were represented, 12, 12 different regions, they all gave us \$1,000 right there in one, in one tour. So, we do that all the time. We tour students and groups. I've been constantly doing that all the time. Now I've even been doing Zoom's this past few months, Zoom class, classes in Zoom groups. It's one of those things where it is, it is. That's part of the job of a mural.

Bernice Garcia Gutierrez: So elaborating more on that. How has your work with the mural look like now specifically with COVID- 19 and if you can elaborate more on that.

Victor Ochoa: We've been in quarantine since the middle of May. We were going pretty strong. We were in a period of a lot of rain, if you remember, so it was kind of being a little bit of a problem. We have a water seepage issue, that we're, we're putting some gutters in there that, that needs to be finished. But we haven't primed, we've, we haven't cleaned, prime. And we've already started putting basic colors in, into it. I've already airbrushed Maria, the twins. We, we have the team together, we have all the equipment and materials ready. I'm hoping that we, we get a permission from Sacramento and the city parks and recreation, because they, they have no, no activity going on and city property. We have seven levels, social distancing. And then there's a construction thing where if you're part of a construction team, you can, you're able to work. You know, so using, masks, gloves, all this disinfectant stuff and that we're hoping that we can start. I'm one of the older artists, and I know Mario Chacon, he has you know, had chemotherapy in the nineties, I didn't even know this, but your immune efficiency is, is weakened when you have that. So he's very frightened about getting out of this house and doing different things. So there's different concerns. I'm drinking lemon water every day and trying to take care of myself, got spray bottles of alcohol. I have a shot of tequila every once in a while. We're hoping to finish it. You know, it might be several months late but we're really planning to do it. It's gonna be a really great mural, everybody's excited. It's been on the design team, they're really, you know, sort of disappointed that we're not working, but I think we'll get out of it if once, once we're back working.

Bernice Garcia Gutierrez: Before we end, is there anything else you would like to share?

Victor Ochoa: Well, it's kind of interesting to me always when, when we talk about art and and political issues and culture, you know, like I know one of the big issues is gentrification. For instance, and, and people act like that's a new thing. Like oh they're, they building, they built a ballpark in the convention center right next to Logan. And I said so every bit of property is being swallowed up by future parking lots, and all this other gentrification. Chicano Park is acting like



a obstacle for this ramped gentrification, but I, the way I analyze gentrification is when they come, come in and they just completely destroy the history of a neighborhood, the cultural part to the, they don't care what's been there. It's the same thing that the Spaniards did when they came to Mexico, they destroyed our temples, they destroyed our language, they enslaved the people. It's the same, gentrification has been going on for four or five hundred years. So the park in itself, I think it's kind of cool that it acts kind of like a barrier and you can't and then a lot of the young people that have been reestablishing themselves are influenced by Chicano Park and there's a spirit of Chicanismo in the next upcoming generations. So that's really good. Even though they're, they're doing different kinds of arts, are having, you know, they have a coffee shop, they got, they got taco shops or breweries or whatever. That brewery as exhibitions in it you know there's, there's a consciousness, we're a cultural district now, and all those people came together and, and worked on that level. And so I think, although we don't own property, we don't own the property, they could just turn it into whatever they want, whoever those those landlords are, we still have that spirit, and I hope and keep, kept on telling everybody to to try to do cooperative things and buy buildings and instead of just paying rent and just getting their rents higher and higher you know to, to, to cut that part. I'm not much of a real estate person, but to those people that, that do that, I, I'm always, to, they're going to take, they can take this away from us, just by jacking up your rent and they did that with that bodega, is a very perfect example of you know that the conscious Inzunza family. Another slap in the face of the, they cause our community and cause the bodega to, to move to another building like a galeria Chicana, its the same thing. You know, it's, it's one of those things where, where I always want to remind people that, that the art, the art is, can be part of that solution. And I know that sounds kind of cheesy but, but it's in our history. They'll believe artists more than a politician. And I think it's because we really speak from our hearts and we do maybe have that spiritual part, and even since pre colonial times, and that's one of the reasons we call ourselves Toltecas in Aztlan, even in the 60s, we found out that the Toltecs were considered master craftsman, and that they thought that everything, it was created was, was an art form, tortillas is a art form. That we adopted that mean and the Toltecs as the founding members of the Centro Cultural and Chicano Park. We keep on struggling with that kind of strength.

Bernice Garcia Gutierrez: Muchas gracias Victor. Thank you for sharing your story today and I really appreciate you taking the time to share this with us. So this would conclude our interview for today.

Victor Ochoa: Thank you Bernice. You're a good interviewee, interviewer, right?