

Interviewer: Please state your name, title, and affiliation.

Raymond Rocco: It's Raymond Rocco, and I'm UCLA, Department of Political Science, Professor Emeritus.

Interviewer: Can you tell us a bit about your personal background, specifically where you're from, and what your home life and family life was like growing up?

Raymond Rocco: Yeah, I grew up in Los Angeles, East Los Angeles, and a Mexican-American Chicano family. And it was pretty traditional, fairly conservative, went to Catholic schools, lived there until I went to grad school.

Interviewer: How were you introduced to the field of political science?

Raymond Rocco: So this is, I'm gonna try and make it as short as possible, but I was, after high school, I went to, I got a job in aerospace, and I was in a three-year engineering program, and as part of that, I had to go to college, ran to get an associate degree. After I did that, I transferred to Cal State Los Angeles, and it was in the middle of the Chicano movement had just started. And as I began to see what was going on, I got involved in that, changed my major from math, physics, to political science, so I could go to law school, got into law school at UCLA, and decided it wasn't for me after six or seven weeks. Basically, it was, I became politically active. I was very active in the movement, and I had two mentors who I'd learned, read about social movements and all, and many of us wanted to go to law school at the time, right, and we saw a civil rights movement and all. But I'd learned from their classes that we also needed to understand how power works, because we quite often would win particular actions, but then lose the longer gain, and I began to realize that we needed folks that understood how institutions function and how to carry it on. So it was really the political activism that got me to quit my job, which was aerospace. My dad almost disowned me. He came out of the depression, so he was like, "Are you crazy?" So they helped me get into grad school. I went to the University of Minnesota, studied with a very renowned historian, a political sophomore, Alfred Sibley. He had called me to ask me to come and work with him, because we had two professors at Cal State that were his students. So it was one of those things where they happened to be there, and so I went to University of Minnesota, and I was in 1969, and I spent almost four years there.

Interviewer: Were you a first generation scholar?

Raymond Rocco: Yes.

Interviewer: Were you the first in your family?

Raymond Rocco: Yes. I didn't even know anyone that went to college before I went to school, to be honest with you.

Interviewer: Yeah. Can you tell us a little bit about your research trajectory? What was your dissertation topic? What were your current and main areas of focus? And were there any particular scholars whose work was influential in your thinking and research?

Raymond Rocco: Yeah. So when I went to grad school, I went to learn, well my intent was to learn skills and knowledge about how to work with communities for empowerment, or in that generation, most of us who came out of movements, that's what we were doing, and the African American community, American Indian, et cetera, and Chicano movement. Second quarter at the University of Minnesota, I took a class with a professor named David Kuperman, who had been a student of my mentor. And he introduced me to the Frankfurt School critical theory. And ever since then, that was my foundation. And the reason for that is the only theoretical framework that tried to link social knowledge, research theory with practice. And that's what appealed to me, because that's why I went to school. So I was very fortunate to get that early on. And everything I've done since then, in one way or another, comes from that. I continue that. So Frankfurt School, there's a number of different theorists. But then I integrated, the two major thinkers that were most important were Gramsci and Fray. And because they also dealt with the same issue of practice. And so everything I've done, teaching, I've integrated into my teaching, writing, what I've, most of my articles. Some don't address that directly, but they're things that I worked out in various kinds of articles. But that's been a consistent factor for my whole career.

Interviewer: We're gonna shift gears a bit. What does being a political scientist of color mean to you?

Raymond Rocco: Struggle. I came from a generation, we were the first generation of Chicanos for sure. I grew up during the 60s where there was rebellion. And it was on the TV, we were just... So when I got to, graduate school was fine, I didn't really encounter a lot of resistance there or any kind of racial, most of the folks there were, especially the graduate students were very open. And so it was a time, a lot of progressive radical thinkers and folks. When I got to UCLA, it was a different thing. They had been sued because they had so few professors of color. And department of political science in particular had been singled out. It was pretty conservative as most departments continue to be in my view. So eventually I got hired through this process. They interviewed like 14 people. And interestingly enough, this I learned from a colleague later, Victor Wolfenstein, came a sort of mentor to me, that all of the interviewees except two were African American. And Victor told me that they would come in with, they were pretty radical

Black militant folks, scared them, it scared them. He said they were reluctant to get folks coming with dashikis and afros and the whole thing. You know, and it was, that was a time when it was very visible, people were stating that. So I got hired to work to help build Chicano studies. But my, there was no department, there was a center. So I, my appointment was in poli sci. And from day one, it was a battle. I think the most important thing initially was that they didn't consider scholars of color legitimate. We were not trained as well. And in fact, in my file, I don't know this, I don't think anybody else there had this. There were two categories in my profile. One were scholarly works and then there were advocacy. That was the term they used. So anything I wrote about Latinos, Chicanos, some were theoretical pieces, right? That was advocacy. So the legitimacy of what we were trying to do, build Black studies, African American studies, was always contested. And we had very few, very few allies. So as a colleague of mine at the time said, it was like hand to hand combat. Every committee meeting was a battle, both in terms of having a voice and having it heard. But you know, I'm a Libra, so I'm like, you know, I'm not really like to get into it, but we had to. And we became very aggressive. And I think the most important thing for me was creating new programs, creating new spaces. And I did that, helped create Chicanos Studies major, helped create the department, Latin American studies.

Raymond Rocco: And then finally with my colleague, Mark Sawyer, an African American brother, who passed away, he was really my only close friend when we were like, they used to call us the odd couple. Chicano and a Black brother hanging out. And Mark was brilliant. And when he first came to UCLA, I mean, he was there for a while, and he had been linked, his uncle was interim mayor in Chicago, so he was completely enmeshed in the Chicago scene back in the 80s and 90s. So both of us had been organizers. And so we used those skills to propose what I think was the first subfield in race and politics in a major R, you know, R1 school. And that's when the racism came out. It was, and I can't, and we have, just reuniting with about 10 of my students here. And it was, I mean, I could tell you story after story of how that came out. Things like, you know, some of our folks, when very well-known political scientist saying, we're talking about TA assignments, and she said, well, somebody got to pick the cotton. Right. You know, stuff like that. They challenged Mark's tenure because the majority of the writers were African-American political scientists. Michael Dawson, chair of poli science Chicago, was Mark's mentor. And we had one person say, well, but these are all Black studies folks. So that's 2006. So, and it was pretty typical. We had, fortunately we won over a few allies, and we used our organizing skills and did a lot of one-on-ones, and got enough votes to get the program to go. But even then, our students would go to classes and they'd have to, they'd get, even in the statistics class, they would give them assignments that were racially based kind of stuff. So it was, you know, people think, well, in the 70s and 80s, well, no it's, as far as I'm sure, it's still there. They're the same people that opposed us then. We used to call them the Contras. Contras are, you know, opposed to, many of them are still there, right? So when we proposed what they wanted to do to say, well, it's American politics, you know, we're talking about race, like everywhere. It's not just American politics, you know? So we had been influenced by Stuart

Hall's work and some of the people Birmingham on race, Paul Gilroy. So when I say, you know, that to me was, throughout my career, there was a struggle over that. It became much better after the 90s. We got more folks through, and I was actually, at the beginning, there were only about four or five of us in poli sci.

Raymond Rocco: In 1970, we met with the president of, incoming president of APSA, Karl Deutsch. He was at Harvard. And the meetings were a week after what was called a Chicano Moratorium, one of the largest mobilizations against the war. And some people had been killed. And we got a meeting with him because they were so concerned about, when we met with him, he said, Carlos Munoz, who was one of my colleagues, both at Cal State, one of the first Chicano political scientists, Mario Barrera, and myself, and Ada Riddell, Ada, who was at Davis. So we're talking about 1970, right? So there's people there. The whole Chicano caucus met in the hotel room. So we met with them, and that's how we got them to agree to begin a Chicano caucus within the APSA. Then first, Carlos Munoz ran that, and then I did for about five years. And that was like in the later 70s. And I can't remember, a fellow on the APSA... Beach I think was his name, back then, it was very helpful. They provided some monies, and we went recruiting throughout the Southwest. That stopped when I had to work on tenure and all that. So I, and so it collapsed. Nobody took it over. Then there was another caucus that started, both in the APSA and the WPSA in the 90s. And so like Luis Fraga and Michael, Jones Correa, people like that, renewed that. But there had, the original Latino connection with APSA was in 1970. And it came out of a, concerning day, Deutsch had us meet with the consul one morning, and it was all impromptu. And I think when we met with him, and this is absolutely what he said, first thing he said to us, "Okay, we'll meet, but no violence, okay? Boys, no violence." And we just looked at each other. It was like, we were all had been in the moratorium but we were not the ones initiating the violence. So that's why for me, it's a very different generation. I'm probably one of the last folks around who still remember that or lived through that. And that's one of the reasons I wanted to do this, is kind of, I don't think, I think you had Luis here. So he's a different generation, and he was a very important figure, but it was like a maybe second or third wave. The initial wave was difficult, yeah.

Interviewer: Well, basing on that change, in your view, what is necessary in order to further diversify the discipline and make it more equitable and welcoming for scholars of color in a profession?

Raymond Rocco: I think one of the things we tried to do very early on, but there were so few folks, but I think now it's much more feasible. I think especially the APSA could help develop networking among the professors, the faculty we have, and have forums officially sponsored by the APSA in different locales for recruitment. But I think the key there is to work with, collaboratively with Latino, Black, minority scholars. And we actually try to do that. For

example, most probably know some of the people that we, I mentored several people to help them once they're done. So one thing is getting folks in, but once they're done, I really think the APSA could help sponsor mentorships. Not one year, but the first three years out are the most important. Because you don't learn in grad school how to negotiate what you're doing in departments. How to prepare a file, how to write your letters. We learned very quickly, for example, in our merit or advancements, I learned from a colleague is you lay out the parameters of how you want them to read your career rather than let them do it. So there are a lot of things we could pass on to folks at different. Lisa Bedoya, who's now Vice Chancellor, UC Berkeley, oh, she was one of mine. People I mentored. Several of us did that. I think that would really be helpful because I know folks recently come out, some of my own students, I continued to mentor them to that, but they told me they had colleagues that had no idea how to put a profile together, how to negotiate and to build a network. So like my students, I trained them from second year on, go to conferences, build networks, you're gonna need letters, that kind of thing, which you don't learn in grad school. And our kids and our students in particular don't seem to have those networks readily available to them. So I think for me, if there were one thing I would recommend is that, especially that's for people already. And then I think there are a lot of us who would put in the time to further recruitment. And for example, now there's a lot of Latino kids. When I first got there, there were hardly any Latinos. And they want to go to grad school. They have no idea what involves, how to go about it. They don't have the mentorship built into the university structure. So they come to the professors that, and that's one of the things that I didn't get trained or expect to do when I'm in grad school, but very quickly you become a mentor because many of them, they come in, they have no idea they're first generation. They don't really have anybody that they can talk to or mentor them. So I think those two, kinds of projects would be really helpful. Part of the problem is there have to be some hook for faculty to participate, because especially in mid-range, they're really busy, they're working to build their career. So there has to be some kind of hook. I don't think it has to be money, but I think it'd be other ways of rewarding them for the time. Because if it's all voluntary, people just burn out. So yeah.

Interviewer: That's really good advice. Is there anything else that you'd like to share with us?

Raymond Rocco: Not really, those are the things. I had received a questionnaire, so I was pretty familiar with what and I had thought about that. But those are the things, and I especially wanted to do it because as I said, the early part, very little in terms of the research, even among the Latino folks that I know now, they had no idea what the history was like. And that handful of us who, I would say from 1970, 1980, for that decade, it was very difficult, but that's where the fight started, when the struggle started. And slowly it's improved. But a lot of it has to do with demography. It's like demography is fate. This year, I think the proportion of Latino and minority students at UCLA and throughout the UC system is larger than white students. And that is following the trajectory of white population proportion declining. So if it's like with workers, if you don't organize people of color and workers, you're not gonna have unions. If you don't

bring in students of color, you're not gonna have universities. So I think they're finally realizing that. There's still, I think the last thing I would say is there's still a reluctance at the administrative levels, even with minority administrators who sort of lost touch with what they needed to be doing and became part of the same structure, really blocking those kinds of initiatives. So I don't think we can automatically assume that because we have a Latino or African-American or American Indian or Asians, that they're going to be supportive. Some are. You know, we've had a few that were at UCLA, but we also had some Latino faculty who were actually the main obstacles for us to move ahead. And so that's difficult for people to grasp and understand and accept, but it's a real thing. And we have to be aware of that. So pick your allies carefully, you know? And, because when you get in the foxhole, you gotta make sure they got your back. So I think that, you know, also pretty much.

Interviewer: Well, that's really good advice. Well, that concludes our interview. Thank you so much for your time and your stories.

Raymond Rocco: Thank you for having me. Yeah.