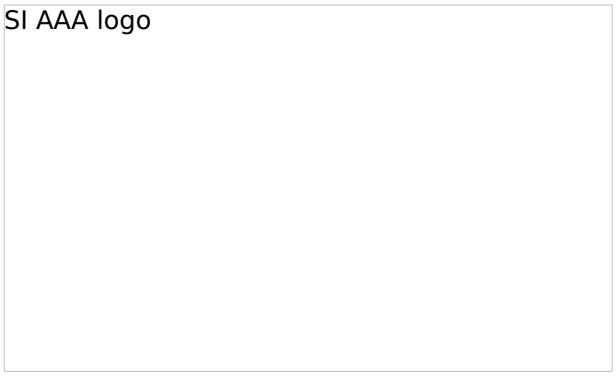

Oral history interview with Yolanda M. Lolìpez, 2019 Dec.7-2020 Mar. 24

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Transcript

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Yolanda M. López on December 7–8, 2019 and March 24, 2020. The interview took place in San Francisco, California, and was conducted by Jennifer González for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. The December 2019 sessions took place in person in San Francisco, CA, and the March 2020 session took place over FaceTime and was recorded to audio.

Jennifer González reviewed the transcript in 2021. Her corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I'm turning on the mics. This is Jennifer González interviewing Yolanda López at the artist's home in San Francisco, California, on December 7, 2019, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Card number one. Good morning, Yolanda.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Good morning, Jennifer.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I'm really happy to be here. I'm really happy that we're doing this actually [they laugh] finally, and I'm really excited about it.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Okay.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So, the oral history begins when you begin, which is at the beginning of life and youth and childhood, and so we go way back to your early life and your family life and growing up in San Diego. We will talk a little bit about your family, your community, your art practice, your uncle Mike and sort of the early influences and memories you have from that time that you think you might want to share with people thinking about your artwork. So I'm going to start with: What are some of your first memories of growing up in San Diego? Or what are some of your first memories of making art?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I didn't think of either one of those two things. When I sort of became—how can I say?—aware of myself as, you know, consciousness, when I was about, what, four or five, or even three or four, I did not think about being in San Diego. I did not think about making art. Those are all high concepts that I don't think children think about.

I grew up in Logan Heights in San Diego, which is geographically about 10 minutes by car, now, from the border. And as it turns out, is about three or four blocks from where Chicano Park is now. It was a fast boulevard—National Avenue is a boulevard—and semi-industrial. Across the street was a huge, brick building that was a commercial laundry. So they did all the laundry for the hotels and whatnot. You know, all the napkins and towels and things like that. That was across the street. So it was all very plain. You know, you wouldn't know what it was except for the steam coming out of the top.

And then down the corner, which was slightly slanted down, was—on the corner—was also a very large, plain building, an industrial building, and trucks would come in. And they would come in with crated live animals, turkeys or chickens, and sometimes occasionally feathers. They were very clean, but occasionally a feather would come out, you know, and it was kind of fun to pick up a feather. It was quite—I felt like I was—it was exciting for me to find a feather, of course. And I did think about the fact that I never saw them come out. I didn't think too deeply, but I was aware that they—all these chickens and turkeys—they were mostly, you know, fowl birds—but they never came out.

Around the corner, there was another big industrial exit with, you know, one of those sliding grated doors that rolled up, and trucks did leave there. I was aware of that. I was not able to go around the corner, but I did take a peek because my grandparents were very strict about keeping us nearby and safe. So it was obviously—now, I realize it was a poultry, and that was

just down the corner.

However, next door to our tiny, little wooden house—if we were looking at our house, on the right-hand side was a *tortería*, which was a rather cavernous—well, at least seemed to me in my, you know, three, four, five—because we lived there until I was about seven or eight—it looked really huge. Because my grandmother would go and buy tortillas there. So it was just a concrete—you know? And there was in the center—it was like the front part was like a big counter where you bought tortillas. That's where they—but that was not their main business because I think their main business was doing tortillas commercially. And behind that was a big, open space.

[00:05:32]

So I think there was another building, you know, maybe a warehouse on the other side, but in between the two buildings was this big open space. That's where the *comals* were. So there were about maybe four, maybe six women at each little stand with a *comal* and fire—you know, fire underneath it and a big bowl of masa, and they stood there just making tortillas. So that little *clap, clap, clap, clap, clap* and the motion of the hands was quite common. And sometimes, my grandmother—because we lived next door, I was able to accompany my grandma with the proprietor or the customer service person going through. They would count the tortillas from each person, and they would put it on a sheet of paper. So, you know, they—a dozen from this woman, and they would give her a tag or whatever it was. It was quite wonderful. I liked it, but it was just, like, bare-bones—like in a lot of things in Mexico actually, as I recall, just sort of being very plain. And this is a workplace, and this is what you did.

On the other side was what we called or what I was told was the *cantina*, and it was a bar. And I don't remember what it was called otherwise, but it was *la cantina.* And it was a bar, and it was a family-run bar. It was the Santos family, S-A-N-T-O-S, and their daughter was Ester. Ester and I were friends. And she had a brother, and we—there was a—sort of like a little wire fence between my grandmother's yard and the *cantina*, which—it was just another—again, just this plain, old, concrete, cylinder building. It's just a block. You know, it's a square thing, and there was the entrance with the curtains and all that stuff.

But alongside the *cantina* was a little sidewalk that went to the back, and that's where they had a storeroom where they kept all the empty bottles of the beer, I assumed, or liquor, so—because they returned, I guess, all the bottles back in the containers in which they came. We used to play because it was like—it was stacked boxes that we could play with, and I remember her brother tying a—it's one of the memories, her brother tying a towel or something around his neck and wanting to be Superman and jumping. I remember him jumping off the—for some reason I felt like he felt like he could actually fly—but jumping off a stack of boxes. And I somehow—I don't specifically—I somehow think that—I think he broke his arm. But that's where we played.

And there was also on the way back of the *cantina*, in the back part, was the bathroom, the toilet, you know. So the men who—because that's where it was, that's who went there—the men from the bar would go around this little sidewalk between my grandmother's, you know, wire-fence garden and the wall of the *cantina* and would go to the bathroom in the back. Sometimes, they didn't make it all the way to the back, and they would urinate in my grandmother's garden.

And it was a Mexican bar. That's the other thing. So they had a jukebox, and they had a lot of loud Mexican music coming from it. And I, unfortunately, was really angry that they would urinate into my grandmother's yard that way, and that I associated a lot of the pop Mexican music coming out at the time with that. So I am not a big fan of pop Mexican music. I've sort of transferred that a little bit to mariachi music, which—I don't even know if mariachi music was even done. I was born in 1942, so I don't know if mariachi music was even played during that time, which would've been around '45 or '46, somewhere in that realm.

[00:10:20]

So I'm—mariachi is all right, but I don't—I don't have the great romance. So when Linda Ronstadt did her thing, which was celebrated—and she was really good, she looked great, and I just saw her bio, which is a great bio on film—but I don't have quite the romance associated with this heroic, sorrowful—I mean, you listen to the words of the mariachi music, and it's so utterly bereft of any real hope. You know, it's always the woman's sorrow for the most part, not the men so much, but the woman's sorrow, or a man sort of complaining to a certain degree, that I just have a hard time associating with it. So that, I think, to some degree or another, has sort of

crept into my work, to tell you the truth.

I now look at—I'm looking right now—there's several movie channels, with Netflix and Hulu and all that other stuff, there's a lot of older films being shown, and a lot of older music. And I listen to it and I—especially from the '50s—and I find it really predatory. "There's no tomorrow, there's just tonight, so kiss me, darling. There's no tomorrow, there's just tonight." And that's the last thing in the world a woman needs to hear, but yet at the same time, it's depicted as high romance, you know? You know, "Please open your legs, my darling, this is it, let's have a"—you know, "Let's have a wonderful time." So it's—a lot of that is—I say this because it sort of flavors a lot of my association with contemporary—or at the time contemporary pop culture.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Postwar. During the war, postwar.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah. Exactly. So I don't know postwar. All I knew is that's what I experienced at the time.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And the men.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, because as a—I'm seeing this directly as a child, perceiving it without any kind of consciousness of what's past, present, or future.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Did you ever have, like, actual negative interactions with some of the men who would walk down—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Ha!

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —the sidewalk?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, how about—well, I—the man my mother married, whose name is Mortimer—God, this is where my brain is beginning to dissolve in my dotage—Mortimer López, and he has a middle name, which is common. He apparently was born—what I was told—in Williams, Arizona, but for some reason, there was something about he needed to have somebody vouch for him, so he married my mother against my grandparents' wishes. And my grandparents, in support of their daughter, supported him in some sort of action in the courts. I know that Mortimer López was—I was told that he was charged with extortion, blackmail. And he did some time. And that he was quite—he dressed quite well, like in a white shirt and, you know, almost like mariachi pants from what I understand and, you know, a fancy belt, and he wore a gun. I guess you could carry a small gun with you, which was part of this highly masculinized aspect to it.

My only memory of him is being in the backyard of my grandparents' house, which is—because my mother went to—she didn't even leave the house. She—they occupied—my mother and her first husband occupied a trailer in the backyard. And if you know San Diego and Logan Heights at the time, beyond that were the industrial trains, so there was a lot of crisscrossing of train tracks and then beyond that was a freeway and then the naval shipyard, which was actually a graveyard for all the Navy ships. So he was—we were in the backyard and he—I remember him lifting me up and standing me, like, on a barrel or a box or something just so—because I was about, I don't know, maybe four or five years old.

[00:15:04]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And just for clarification, this was not your biological father?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: No, it was indeed my biological father. Yes, indeed.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Okay, right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, yes, indeed. My mother was a sheltered woman and this was—in marrying—she married this man, and I don't think she dated much of anybody. So she was—my grandmother had a tight rein on—my mother was the only daughter, the oldest daughter. So that this was my mother's revenge. This was my mother's attempt at independence, was to marry this man that my grandmother and my grandfather detested. And he was an older man. He was about 35, and my mother was about 21 or 20. Very sheltered. So there was no dispute about who, you know, my biological father was. In fact, I—hearing his history, I think—and my mother had two more children—that I think, "Indeed." Because I think he was—anyhow, but that's another story down the way, because I think he had mental problems, and I suspect

sometimes that I may have inherited some of that or a tendency towards that some of that.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So he stood you up on a barrel or something?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And he demanded that I kiss him, and he was a total stranger to me. And he attempted to slap me. And I don't remember it, I don't. I have a feeling he did not slap me. And I have a feeling somebody intervened, and I don't know who it was. I have a feeling it was not my mother. My mother was very passive-aggressive her whole life so that's—even with her children, she was passive-aggressive, which is kind of bewildering to a child, but nonetheless, that's who she was. So that's the only memory is being threatened by this man who I did not know, and being told to kiss him, and him being highly offended, highly offended, that I just looked at him and he was a total stranger.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So he wasn't around while you were growing up?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I have no—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Coming and going?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —idea.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah, you don't remember?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I can't even tell you, Jennifer. I have no idea. All I know is that my grandmother said that they lived in a trailer in the backyard, and that my mother actually got a divorce from him while she was pregnant with her third child from him, and he never saw that child. And when my grandmother went to go pick up my mother and the child, I guess with my grandpa as well, they were startled that my youngest sister at that time looked exactly like him. And this was—unfortunately for my youngest sister, Sylvia, I think she paid that price throughout her life, because she was the child that ended up being blamed and to a certain degree verbally abused. And to a certain degree, even my mother would—that's the person that my mother would physically punish, you know? So all of us—you know, my other sister and I, we sort of escaped that, but Sylvia was the one that—and she was skinny, and she was, you know, very quiet and—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Is she still living?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: She is still living, as far as I know. I don't know where she is. I don't know. I assume she's still living. I don't know. She lives in—the last I heard, she lives in Oregon.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So it sounds like it wasn't easy, and the men who were next door were a source of some hostility, and even the person who is your father, who was not very present for you, was then gone.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I had no—you say "present," I didn't have those qualities in mind.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: It's just that he's somewhat a stranger.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I mean, that's the contemporary—that's a contemporary jargon for social work: "not present." I didn't miss him, I didn't long for him, any of that stuff, you know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right. You just—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I had my grandfather who adored me. I had my uncles around me who—my youngest uncle was about 11 or 12 when I was born. He also adored me. And I adored him. I adored my grandmother, I adored my grandpa. So I didn't feel a bereft of any of that, so—and I don't want that implied.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Because I did not grow up feeling bereft of a father figure. I had several father figures. So I'm saying that very emphatically because a lot of that is contemporary—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Good.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —sociological jargon, as far as I know. You know, it's sort of placed on it. But those were the experiences.

[00:20:05]

I also can tell you that along with that, that my grandparents, my grandfather and my grandmother—and my uncle, because he was the youngest child at the time—they took me—my grandparents took me to the traveling—there was a lot of traveling vaudeville shows, there were Mexican shows at the Ford theater, outdoor theater in San Diego. My grandfather loved musical extravaganzas. We had music in the house, but it was opera, and it was the radio. And my grandparents were—my grandmother was from Mexico City. My grandfather was from Guadalajara. We were an urban household. We were not farmworkers, so our culture was urban. We were—my grandmother used to use the word *callejeros*, people who walk in the street, but in an essence, that's what we were. We loved to—we walked everywhere, and we took buses everywhere, we didn't have a car. They took me to the movies with them, so I saw Mexican movies from the '40s when I was young. So I had a rather wholesome, good life.

And I don't remember my mother. Now, you talk about, you know—you want to do something like, "Who's missing?," I did not miss my mother. She was not there. You know, I don't remember her. I don't remember her. Not until later because she would—well, that's another story. But it was—up until I was about 10 years old, it was a quite lovely, varied household. There were—the adults had their own problems. This was a point where it was all kept to themselves, so there was no sharing with the children. And we had a little backyard and a little front yard. The backyard beyond the gate—the back garden—you know, were the train tracks, you know? So I grew up listening to the train and the tooting, and I grew up listening to the buoys out on the harbor. I still love hearing the buoys, you know. I don't know, even though—I used to hear them here. I don't know if they—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: The clanging, the bells clanging out—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: No, it's *booo*.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Oh, those, *booo*, mm-hmm [affirmative], yeah.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, if you don't know buoys. But, B-U-O-Y.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: No, I know. But I mean, I've been around buoys that actually clang.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, they did that too, right. But that's not what I heard. What I heard was *wooo*, you know, which was—because it was too far away, I think, to hear the clanging too much. But I did hear the—and even now and then, if I hear even Caltrain going through sometimes with their little warning as they're going through a driveway or a street intersection, it kind of—it reminds me a little bit of my younger youth.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I also grew up next to the tracks.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah. It's—and it was not pathetic for me. I don't know how it was for you—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: No.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —girl, but it was not pathetic for me. Like I say, you know, children accept what they have. This was fine. I had—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: With home.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —no longing for anything else, you know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah. Exactly.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: No longing for that. It was an interesting home. My grandmother had a garden. She grew corn, she grew squash, she—you know, all the usual things that a woman—even though she was from Mexico City. You know, her—my grandmother's family, like I said, we were an urban people, so we listened to—the music was more like what the equivalent of Rodgers and Hart or, you know, whatever was contemporary at the time, you know? This was before the '50s sappy stuff, you know, the '40s or whenever that came on in contemporary music. So Toña la Negra, who was a cabaret singer. You know, so that kind of stuff. And my grandfather loved Jorge Negrete and all that—all those wonderful—Pedro Infante. You know, that was the kind of singing. I don't know what you call that. Was that mariachi music? I don't know.

So all those musicals, you know. We went to a theater in Downtown San Diego to one side called

Azteca, and that's what it was called. It was a tiny, teeny, little movie theater. And I remember stepping into it. The carpet was filthy. I remember because it was hard, but it was a carpet, but it was—it's smelled like this popcorn. I mean, actually, they had fresh popcorn, and it was right at the entrance, so it was just—you know, it was like a sensory experience just going into it. But with grandmother and grandfather, not with my mother. Not with my mother. I have no idea where she was or what she did. At least when we were living on National Avenue, and actually even beyond that when we moved, I had no idea where she was.

[00:25:14]

My grandmother, be that as it may, took care of us and—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Can you—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Sure.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Can you spell a couple of names?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Sure.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Can you spell the names of the musical artists you were just mentioning?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Jorge Negrete? J-O-R-G-E. I don't—well, I—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Jorge? Mm-hmm [affirmative].

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Jorge Negrete, N-E-G-R-E-T-E, I think. Pedro Infante, P-E-D-R-O. Infante, I-N-F-A-N-T-E. And whoever was out there at the time, and there was somebody else, I can't remember his name. I mean, I was just, like, a little kid. [Laughs.] I learned these names almost retroactively.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And your grandparents' names.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: My grandparents. My grandmother's name was Victoria. She is named Victoria F. Franco, but the F stand for Fuentes, Victoria Fuentes Franco. She actually grew up—before her married name—was Victoria Fuentes Castillo, was her maiden name. Victoria Fuentes Castillo.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Okay, great. And your grandfather?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: My grandfather was born Margarito—and I don't know his middle name—Franco, F-R-A-N-C-O.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Great. Okay.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But he became—he did not use Margarito, because in the mail, they thought, he was a woman, even though it's—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I know.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: So he used Senobio. So he is now known as Senobio Franco. Senobio was his father's name.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Oh, okay. Yeah.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: So Senobio is—if you were to go look him up or, like, his death certificate or whatever, it would be Senobio.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Ah, interesting.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Because I doubt even if his sons know [laughs], you know, what his—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That he was named Margarito.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Florencio was the name of my great-grandfather.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And similar kind of name that sounds like a female name but is not, right?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And did he change his name?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I think he just went for—actually, I have to ask my dad. But I can't ask him now, he's dead. I have to ask my aunt. You know, González was his name. But anyway, it's not about me. I just was thinking about that. You know, Florencio is an unusual male name at that time—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —also.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: On this side of the border.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: On this side of the border. Not on the other side of the border.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Please. Not on the other side.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Totally not.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That's what I'm saying.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Exactly.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: We have—but we have to qualify it. When you say—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So Senobio—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —unusual, it's unusual on this side of the border.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: On this side of the border, exactly. Okay, great, back to—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And my mother's name is Margarita—and I don't know what her true middle name is—Franco, F-R-A-N-C-O. She married twice, so she ended up being called Margaret Stewart, S-T-E-W-A-R-T. That was her second husband's name. And she was—her first husband's name was obviously López, which she, I think, did not like. I think it was—frankly, my guess is it was too ethnically defined for her. So once she married James Madison [ph] Stewart, she kept the name Stewart even though they were no longer—they were divorced and whatnot. I think it was just more—this is, again, the racism that impedes the progress to some degree of our lives.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Very helpful. So I sort of accidentally detoured you because I wanted to make sure we had these names.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That's fine, whatever.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And let's go back to where you were, which was, you were talking about all these great cultural influences. Cinema, music, where you used to go: Azteca.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So we were kind of right there.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, they also took me to—and I say because, to me, it was like, walking between my grandmother and my grandfather, I felt like I was walking among two gods. They were like—I felt safe, I felt secure, I felt wonderful. It's like I said, two gods. My grandmother is a goddess, and my grandfather is a god.

And they also took me with them to Tijuana to—I don't know what they did. I remember—I assume we went there to eat. I remember going to the bakeries there—which, we did have bakeries in Logan Heights, but—and there was on the corner, up on the corner and was maybe a block and a half away. But the bakeries in Tijuana, you know?

[00:30:16]

And there was also—I remember just walking at nighttime—yeah, because if it got dark at five

and my grandfather was off of work, or on a Saturday, and we would go to a movie—that there was all these windows that were quite different than the store windows in San Diego. I remember seeing this shoe store with so many shoes that it was—it was, like, spectacular to me because—I mean, there were literally, I don't know if hundreds, but many, many shoes all neatly arranged in different levels, you know. So it was, you know, like little pyramids. And it was just so many shoes, and the windows were lit up, and, you know—and it was just quite—I remember that specifically because there was an amazing array of shoes. I mean, it was just the shoe store.

So we went to Tijuana quite often, or often enough where it was just sort of familiar, and we used to pass because this was, like, in the '40s, and this was also the time when San Diego was a Navy town. It was a military town. There was the large Naval Training Center, which all the young recruits, all those 17-, 18-year-olds, would come and get their initial boot camp. It was boot camp. And then along Broadway, on its way to Downtown San Diego, would be all these—they were called locker rooms. So they were little, like, businesses where the young men could rent a locker and buy civilian clothes if they didn't have it and put their uniforms in the locker, lock it up, and then they could go out on the town without looking—but, obviously, they were what we call swabbies. They were, obviously, young men, first time away from home, and the first place they headed was to Tijuana, TJ.

And that's where a lot of, like—Tijuana turned into a sin city. It became seen as a despicable place because—even though with my grandparents, before all this big transition, we could walk past nightclubs and bars where they would have, like, ladies sort of adorned in very little clothing, but there would be bars across their chest, covering their nipple area. And they usually had little scanty panties or something, but they had the bars—or sometimes even occasionally across their eyes, but it was mostly across their chest.

And then there was—it was almost like a little theater. There would be a booth out in front and then you—I remember one turning around, and there would be, like, a little door where you would enter the nightclub or whatever it was, the strip club—who knows what it was? And there would be the red curtain, you know, where you would have to pass through the curtain to go inside, so you could never, like—and there was music and all that stuff. It was all kind of mysterious and then I knew it was, like, naughty.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: [Laughs.]

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I knew it was—I knew it was nasty. Let's put it that—that's probably the closer of a word to it. It was nasty.

So all these young men who came from—a lot of them from the Midwest, first time away from home, went to Tijuana. First time they could drink, so they could go to the bars and spend whatever they—you know, get as drunk as possible. The first time they could pay for women, the first time, oh, I'm sure, many of them ever had sex. God knows what kind of sex that they had. That was probably—who knows? I mean, they were suckers, let's—they were seen as suckers. Whether they even had sex, who knows? Or just, you know, whatever variety of—whether it was just feeling up a woman or actually being engaged with God knows what kind of disease [laughs] they possibly could have gotten.

But that was the big thing at the time, that you go to Tijuana and you get VD, you know, a venereal disease, a social disease. What's it, like, syphilis or gonorrhea? I mean, those were words that were bandied around, so it wasn't—it was part of the mythologizing of where I lived, to put it that way, although I didn't think it about that way, but it was of the environment. But it was also—because of the—so that was all part of Tijuana, or TJ as we called it. That was because it was, you know, all these young men. But they were obviously—you know, God knows when—I think a lot of them came from small towns. And this was after the war, because the war ended in —

[00:35:37]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: '45.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Very good, 1945. And there were a lot of things happening at the time also, especially with the Japanese. There were a lot of Japanese in San Diego, which I grew up with, who were born in the camps. So I was born in '42, a lot of the young people that I—how can I say?—that we tracked together—were born in '42 or '43 in the camps, Japanese. So the camps to me were not a mystery. We sort of—they didn't talk much about it because their parents didn't talk much about it. But we were aware that they were born in the camps, what

they call the camps.

So San Diego was a military town, and swabbies were there. So we were also cautioned, as a young girl, and my sister, cautioned against the sailors, you know, taking advantage. Whatever that was, you know? I mean, we were, like, just, you know, nine, 10—you know, eight-, nine—seven-, eight-, nine-year-old.

The wartime industry in San Diego, it—the industry in San Diego depended on the aircraft industry, so there were several—Convair, Rohr. There were several companies that employed and hired what they call—one of my uncles was a machinist. So there was employment, but it was all wartime industry.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And then after wartime, was the industry still pretty active, or—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: No, no.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: There were layoffs?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That's when they started—because that's when the conversation about—talking about turning San Diego into a tourist industry. And part of that is where—of course, you know, when the Vietnam War and the Korean War came up, and especially in the Vietnam War, whatever remnants left of the aircraft industry turned to making helicopters. And, of course, you know, in Vietnam was the first time that helicopters were actually seen as combat, whereas before that they were seen as reconnaissance or as taking in medical supplies or lifting up wounded from the field, you know. But in Vietnam, it was a war industry, because we were dealing in Vietnam in a guerilla war. We never talk about it as a guerrilla war, but Vietnam never had a Navy, never had an Air Force. You know, it didn't have—and it was, you know—it's just really very odd, but the Vietnam War is another—but it did have a big effect, not only in San Diego and the relationship to the Japanese who—or anybody that looked Asian [laughs] was an enemy, but also—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Did you ever feel like you were misread physically when you were young by others? In other words, you know, you just mentioned anyone who looked Japanese—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah. Well, of course, Mexicans—there was also Hollywood because the—Europe was—because it was in the war, and we destroyed, obviously, Germany and parts of France, and the bombing in England, you know, all that—so it was not available during the war, but it was not even available after the war as far as any kind of intellectual or entertainment. So part of that Mexico—Mexico City, in fact—and parts of Los Angeles, a lot of the Hollywood types would go through San Diego to Tijuana. That's where the jai alai games and all that was.

And also the tourist industry, so also there was, at that time, the rise of what I would call tourist arts, which is really now an anthropology. It's another field, you know, of tourist arts. And Nelson Graburn, who was the editor of this wonderful book called *Tourist Arts*—and I can't remember what the kicker was—but I managed to get it and then I found out later that I could not get another—it was never reprinted as far as I know. But he became part of other things as far as, like, looking at culture among displaced people and the incorporation of politics and folk art, which fascinates me now, and I would like to really do something with it if I live long enough, [laughs] Jennifer. That does interest me quite a lot.

[00:40:32]

But, at that time, there was a lot of the rise of—this is like, the*Donkey Cart* [by David Avalos] and the photographic areas where you could—tourists could come in—you know, straight American tourists, rather than just the Navy people or the young recruits from Camp Pendleton, as well—so that became part of the industry. And along the Revolution Street, Avenida Revolución, all those vendors selling pottery and selling *sarapes*, selling clothing and all—and a multitude! I mean, it wasn't just one, but there was just, you know, a multitude of pottery stores with different designs going on. And stacks of pottery. You look at Mexican pottery and you think it's kind of unique, but it's not, because I could see it at the time just literally three or four feet of the same little bowl or the same plates stacked. I mean, literally, it's the same plate, you know, stacked three or four feet high. And the same bowl, the same design, part of a set, stacked also, you know, three or four feet high. It was just so interesting.

And to me that was—because people ask me like every now and then, you know, what—they ask me what I—something about Mexican art. And all I could tell them was, as a young girl up until—

well, actually up until college—the only Mexican, quote, art that I knew, being made by Mexicans, was all this tourist art stuff, you know. It was plaster pigs with velvet coatings. It was velvet paintings. It was paper flowers being walked along by vendors, being sold along the cars waiting to traverse the border there. That's what Mexican art was to me.

And, of course, it was Jesús Helguera, you know, and those wonderful calendars, which was a big influence, I think, on all of us, a lot of us, especially my generation of young people. Because he did do a lot of sort of, like, the Aztec warrior and the little—the princess—you know, holding the princess with her nipples protruding. Very beautiful, but, you know, she's like, sort of dead. Actually, she's dead, you know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Ixta and Popo, right?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's it, yeah. But it was like a whole variety of things. He even did like—he was very Catholic. He did a lot of scenes of the family in the church kneeling in front of the Virgin. I have one of kneeling in front of the Virgin of Guadalupe. He was sort of like—I think he was even—he might have even been better or equal to Norman Rockwell. But essentially, that's this kind of information that his work provided. And the calendars were handed out, you know, at the bakeries, at the *torterías,* at the grocery stores where you're buying your—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: My grandmother had them.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah. So and it was—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: On her kitchen wall.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, exactly, absolutely. And it was—you know, it was there. You know? And if you wanted to see what the history of Mexico—if you wanted to know anything about the history of Mexico, somehow it was—they were the visual evidence of it, if anything, as far as, like, some sort of indigenous past. Some sort of indigenous past. It was not fucking Frida Kahlo, it was not Diego Rivera, it was not all that little group down there in the teens, you know, doing their dress up. It was not those people at all. We knew nothing—I knew nothing about Los Tres Grandes until I was well into graduate school. Never even heard the phrase, didn't know about Orozco, Siqueiros, and Rivera.

So that was—I knew nothing. I mean, literally, in San Diego, growing up, public schools—as far as, like, any kind of—why we had—somebody made a joke about, "Why are California beach towns all named in Spanish?" And it was in part because we didn't know anything about the Spanish incursion, we didn't know anything about the genocide of native Californians. We didn't know any of that stuff. We did know a little bit about the missions. That I was taught about in—

[00:45:25]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Fourth grade.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Is that when it was? I was thinking—I was—yeah, I think you're right. Because I did a series. I didn't quite do all the 21 missions, but I did a series of maybe six. I remember Santa Barbara and San Diego, doing the different images as missions—in crayon, you know—and it was nice because it was one of the—well, throughout my public school life as an elementary schoolchild, my work was sometimes displayed even then. I could always draw. Don't ask me why or how. I grew out of the womb [laughs] crayon in hand, and I could draw. So that was the only Spanish or Mexican—and I don't think was part of that history. So other than that, at best, the distant—I didn't even hear about the 49ers till I moved to San Francisco, to tell you the truth. So that—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah, that's actually really interesting to me, like, how much history we learn and when we learn it. I remember learning about the Gold Rush also around third or fourth grade, and there was nothing in the literature or anything about genocide, Native Americans, and shockingly nothing about even the Mexican-American War.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Absolutely.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Or the fact that, you know, the timing of the war and the gold, you know, seem [laughs] to be obviously related. So no one really talks about that, and even today, in public education, it's a real issue. I think people hesitate to tell the stories that we need to tell in order for—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: "Hesitation" is good. Because the word there, what you just said, is "hesitate." And part of that is part of our intellectual, educational cowardliness.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yes, agreed.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: You know? But "hesitate" is a good way. They didn't want to—not only be unpleasant, but also they—because they didn't have the language, Jennifer. There was no—this is one of the benefits of ethnic studies, is it has provided us a language to talk about American history, the unspoken American history. Because teachers, like—I don't know where you grew up but I—and I'm not sure, like, what the contemporaneous—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Southern California. Claremont.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But I don't know what years, is what I'm talking about—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah, right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —is that there was no language for that kind of discussion. The closest I ever heard was—and it was probably in high school—was Manifest Destiny. Somehow that the idea that—and it was put in the context not even of the details of the war with Mexico in—was it 1849 or 1848?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: 1848.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Was that it was destined, destined, part of our American destiny, that we should go from coast to coast, so that it was almost like a kind of article of faith that it would happen. Without the details. So Manifest Destiny was the only way that I—that they could justify the—without mentioning, you know, the slavery, without mentioning the genocide of native Californians, without mentioning the internment of the Japanese, without mentioning the genocide of the Plains native people, you know? And relocation and all the reservation. None of that was mentioned, but it was Manifest Destiny, which was the overall—almost like a religious language used to move forward. And so that's what we—I think the only language that teachers possibly could have was that philosophical.

And that came within the context—and I'll tell you, because it has affected me, is that I grew up very patriotic. And I am not ashamed of it. I think it is a strength. They did—and I say "they"—the institutional public school system, and especially in San Diego, did not know who they were generating in inculcating in me this patriotism. Because I believe in the Constitution. I talked about fourth grade. I remember in the third grade, the pleasure that I had of standing up altogether as a class in the morning, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, and at the end singing a song. And I love "O, beautiful." I love that song with "waves of grain." I think it's just utterly beautiful.

[00:50:26]

But I grew up with that, and with the military and all that stuff. I have no shame, and I say that because in claiming—that's one of the reasons where I have a little bit of problem with a lot of the way that ethnic studies was initially stated, as we as victims, we as dispossessed people, you know? Because I did not grow up feeling dispossessed. These white people, this institution inculcated in me that I'm an American, and there's nothing in the world that can shake that from me. The Constitution is mine, I belong in this country. It's not even like a matter of country. I belong here, wherever, and "here" has been redefined through my life. But the place is always there. That's why I always—and it has influenced my work, you know, because I do not feel victimized.

I feel that if there's any fault, it's that—and especially right now, and that's one of the reasons I like—I'm beginning to like Nancy Pelosi, because she is defending the Constitution. She is defending our rights as Americans. That's what she's defending, not that this guy is an idiot or—you know, Trump and whatever—but she's defending the Constitution. And I feel in many ways, Jennifer, that that's what my work does. That's what my fucking work does. It's not about being a victim, because I feel none of my work is—because I don't come from feeling a victim. I come

from anger, yes, I come from rage, I come from, you know, "You guys are really messed up," you know, sort of thing, or "You don't know who you're dealing with." That's the other thing. But I do not come from victimhood.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And you can see that in your work?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yes, absolutely! Absolutely! But it's—that's why my son, when he graduated from high school, he went to Lowell, he graduated, and I think he—when he first went to City College and he took a Latina literature class or something, and he came home and he says, "Ma, what is this about? You know, I don't understand." This was not his experience about—especially growing up in a—I did not grow—my grandmother never went to church. My grandfather did not. My grandfather was a total atheist—I learned this later—anticlerical. My mother never went, certainly. I have no idea if my mother believed in God or any—I have no idea.

My mother never collected any of the tchotchkes of the religious stuff, so I never grew with any of that stuff, and my son didn't either. So when he came and—you know, about the traditional and the father and going to church and the idea of sin and obeying the father and obeying, you know, the mother, the downtrodden mother and the oppression of women, I think that was all—you'll have to talk with him, but my impression at that time was that he couldn't—he couldn't place it. He couldn't place it. And like I said, we're—I come from an urban people. Most Chicanos I think nowadays come from an urban background, you know? And I think at that time growing up in San Diego, a good bunch of people who came across in 1918, which my grandparents came, escaping from Mexico City—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: During the revolution or after the revolution?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: During the revolution—yes, indeed, because the revolution—and this whole thing about—my grandmother had no ideological support of Pancho Villa. He was seen as a bandit and a cruel man. And there were a lot of wandering gangs on horseback that said that they were part of the revolution. And my grandmother says, they said, "What part of the revolution—are you on our side or their side?" Who knows what that meant? And my family, my grandmother's family, "Oh, we're on your side," whatever that was. But in the meantime, my grandmother was hidden away underneath a bed or underneath a—far away so that the—so if they went in looking for women, young women, they could not find them.

But they ended up taking all the corn—you know, they ended up taking the corn, they ended up taking the chickens, they ended up taking whatever food stock there was to feed themselves, and they left. They just stripped whatever commodities the family needed to survive. So my grandmother did not grow up with that. And they were, like, urban people. That's all I can tell you. Were you going to do something?

[00:55:33]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So, can we go back a little bit to the community that you grew up in? You did a wonderful job explaining a lot about it, and I'm really interested to hear more about Logan Heights as a neighborhood, as a community, in terms of your growing up. After you left your first residence, you said you moved to another part of San Diego.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Do you want to say just a little bit about—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Logan Heights?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —Logan Heights?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Sure. We moved out in—when I was about—I can only tell you in my terms about when I was about 10 years old. There was obviously no Chicano Park. I was born in 1942, so we moved out about—when I was about—it must have been about '50—well, 1951 or 1952.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah, about 20 years earlier, right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yes, so. But it was called Logan Heights. I don't remember it being called Barrio Logan until, jeez, after the civil rights movement.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: But that in itself is, like, an interesting fact, right? This kind of

recuperation of cultural identity and calling it—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I was not—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Using Spanish.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Okay, okay, Jennifer, this is where to me it's jargon. It's not—I don't—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: It's not like—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I don't see it as a reconstitution—what did you say?—because it was—there was no sense of it being lost. It was called Logan Heights, period.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: It was always called Logan Heights, right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And so, there was—it was a small community. There was—this was before the Coronado Bridge, so it was—there was an extensive neighborhood when the Coronado Bridge was being built—which, they displaced something like 500 houses, families. There was, at that time, also—Logan Heights was also being encroached upon—what we call the junkyards. So that there were—you know, just a few blocks away, there was—which I found fascinating, to tell you the truth, because there were these big things, and it had these cranes inside these—it was corrugated fencing, metal fencing around them, and people came and went and I think they sold stuff, you know, as well as you could go and sell whatever junk you had. But there was the dump yards.

And I went to school at a neighborhood school called Lowell School, which I don't know if it's still there, but Lowell School was where I was enrolled in kindergarten and I think part of first grade. And it was next to, actually, the—I don't know if it was next to a junkyard, but it was next to something like that because there were rats. We were told to stay away from the asphalt, you know, which designated the schoolyard, and then this chicken wire fence that designated this other place because they were rats that would sort of wander around into the schoolyard from there, and I remember that.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Do you know when the Coronado Bridge was built?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Sure. [Laughs.] Well, it wasn't—the Coronado—Coronado itself is like a little circular peninsula, and this is where all the wealthy admirals and upper echelon military people went to live. And they had manicured gardens and, you know, beautiful homes—lawns, rather. And there was—for some reason, I don't know why, but there was this idea of building a bridge across there rather than have them go around this peninsula to get to their homes. I don't remember.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. When you left, it was—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Because there was no—when I went back—because I left San Diego straight out of high school, and I didn't go back until, jeez, '73, I think. And the Coronado Bridge was already displacing—being built—had already been built, in fact, and had displaced homes, so the neighborhood I grew up in as Logan Heights was totally gone. I mean, gone from—they were boarded up, as I recall. It was even, like, boarded up—this eminent domain was already—had already begun clearing out the neighborhood.

[01:00:43]

It also cleared out the Italian—what we would call Little—although we did call it Wop Town [laughs], but it's now called Little Italy, but everybody knew it as the other name. It displaced a lot of Italian—part of the Italian neighborhood, as well—in that Freeway 5 going on feeding into the Coronado Bridge.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: When you moved, it wasn't because there was any displacement going on, though.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Not that I recall. There was—not unless you want to talk about the junkyards. The junkyards, because they did take up a lot of space, and it was also—I mean, we could see the bay. We could see the bay from Logan Heights. I mean, you know, you stood up high enough, you could—you know, you could see that. You know, we were just—I don't even know, what, a couple of miles from San Diego Bay. That's how come we could hear the foghorns and the buoys and the—you know, all that stuff.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So when you left—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: So when I left—when I came back to San Diego in 1973, the bridge had already been built, or was in the process of being finished. And the under—all the displaced homes that the bridge had displaced was all like—

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YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —raw dirt, you know, underneath it. And then with Highway 5, and so that it was still like really a pretty raw place. So I don't know. I'm guessing this probably began somewhere in the late '60s, you know, but I was not there when it began, but there was certainly a lot of talk about it.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: What year did you graduate from high school?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: 1961. Lincoln High School, which was in Southeast San Diego. But when I came back, it was pretty much a devastated neighborhood. All the pretty little homes that had been built during the '30s and the early '40s—all the little, you know, wooden—small, little wooden houses, and there was cactus in the front, or there was a palm tree, or there was a banana. We had a banana plant in front of the house and bougainvillea in different houses. They were pretty little places. You know, a yard in front and a yard in the back, you know, and sometimes there was porch out in front, you know, and there was a sidewalk and maybe a little picket fence around. It was all just classically quite wonderful. Most of the, I think, men and women who—the families owned their own home, you know? I mean, I remember when my grandfather left and he—because one of my uncles, who was very astute, was able to buy the home on the—what is it what they gave the military people?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Oh, the GI Bill.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Thank you very much, the GI Bill. He could buy a home. And the home that we bought in South—actually in what's called Shelltown—was $3000. Three-thousand dollars for a home. But again, it was a very tiny, little wooden structure with a yard in the front, a yard in the back, and actually a driveway where you could put a car in too. It's a little bit bigger than the one where we rented in Logan Heights.

But Logan Heights was a little neighborhood, you know, and I remember my grandmother taking me to a bakery, a new bakery, and it was run by Cubans, who I remember spoke such a different Spanish than I had heard. And it was in years later that the Cubans complained about the way Mexicans speak Spanish because it was—we chew every single word, you know, we speak so slow. But it was, like, this woman behind the counter, and *pasteles* that I didn't even—I had never seen before—that was this rapid-fire, abbreviated Spanish, you know, which was the first time that I had ever encountered a Spanish that was different than the Mexican or the Mexican-American Spanish.

There was also, like, a strong resentment between the Mexicans who lived in Tijuana and the Mexicans that lived in San Diego. There was a lot of joking because one of my uncles, my uncle Bobby, married a young woman from Tijuana. And she was hazel-eyed and blond hair, but she was a *tijuanera* because she didn't shave her legs. And this was where the *tijuaneras* wore the stockings, so the hair on their legs, dark as it was, were plastered against the stockings, you know, with the line down the back, you know, the seam down the back of the stocking. But she, like I said, was sort of dishwater blond with hazel eyes.

I have a picture of her and my uncle, who's quite dark. He's Mexican American. He was born, I think, in New Jersey when my grandparents came across—which is another story, which I would love to tell you. So that I had a photograph of them along with—anyhow, it's a funny photograph, but I say, "Who is the Mexican and who is the Mexican American?" And they always choose my—they assume that my auntie Margie was—and she's the Mexican. She was born in Tijuana, and my uncle was born in New Jersey [laughs], you know? And he's, like, dark, dark, dark because he grew up with—his work ended up being working for the city water district, so he was outdoors a lot. So he's very, very dark.

But anyhow. There was a conflict between those that lived in Tijuana and those that lived on this side of the border. And I did encounter—as far as, like, living in Logan Heights, going with my grandparents, my two gods, and walking the sidewalk at one point, and this man passing up by—and I can't remember—sneering, and looking at me for some reason. And I felt like it was, "Oh, you think you're so good." In Spanish, you know, "Oh, you think you're so good."

[00:05:20]

So there was a sense that the Mexicans born on the American side were resented by the *tijuaneros* or the *mexicanos*, thinking that—the people on this side of the border, American side of the border, somehow felt superior to the Mexicans born on the other side. And during that time, and I think still there, there was a great resentment. And "Mexican," the word "Mexican," was a dirty word. So when I was a little girl growing up in Logan Heights—and I was a nice little girl—if a white person addressed me, they would say, "Are you Spanish?," which was a very common parlance at the time. And I would always look at them kind of puzzling. "I'm Mexican," is what I would say. But it wasn't until I was in high school, really, in my teenagehood, that I understood that "Mexican" was a bad word. So white people did not want to ask you if you were a Mexican, because it was a bad word. And unfortunately Trump—and I don't know if unfortunately, it kind of makes me laugh—but Trump has instituted again the word "Mexican" as a bad word. So now, the language among polite institutional people, like scholars, like teachers, is, "Are you Hispanic?"

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And so they don't even use the word "Mexican" anymore, because it's still going back again, because of what Trump was saying, "Mexicans are rapists and God knows maybe some of them are nice, but they're drug dealers and whatnot." So he has reinstituted—he has revived—because that—the word "Mexican" has always been bad. And now when people ask me what I—"I'm Mexican. I'm fucking Mexican." You know? So that I'm not—I've never liked the word "Hispanic." So I say, "I am Mexican," you know? And I say, you know, "Mexican American," obviously, but I do use the word "Mexican" because it has become a bad word. Nobody I know has said that, because they use the word—or even now, "Latinx."

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Or "Latinx," yeah.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: "Latinx" has become almost like a covert word that sort of covers many sins, you know, without being specific. That's why I don't think that word is going to last, because it's not political enough. I know there's supposed to be gender fluidity and all that stuff, but baloney. But right now, it's convenient, Latinx, because you don't have to say "Are you from Central America?" And you don't say *guatemalteco* or *nicaragüense* or Salvadoranian [ph]. You know, you could say, "Are you Latinx?" It sort of covers a lot of sins right now. But like I said, we'll see what happens. And it certainly covers the sin of being a Mexican. And so I say, "I'm Mexican."

But I grew up with that in San Diego. And as I said, as a little girl, I didn't quite understand why they kept asking me if I was Spanish, because I knew at that point that Spain was another country—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: [Laughs.] Far away.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —far, far away. I knew that then, as a little girl. So that that was part of the interface, like, with white people.

So growing up, also, when my grandmother and I—we went Downtown San Diego for whatever reason, she would steer me. If there were white people coming down Downtown San Diego, she would steer me, and I learned to go to one side of the sidewalk or the other to let the white people pass, so that there was no conflict of any kind. And I think that's what she—because I never knew her to be—she's not aggressive but she was also not—she was cautious but not fearful. Let's put it that way. So she taught me all these things without necessarily verbally telling me that, but by body language and just through exposure to her, how she handled herself in the street. She also taught me that—and she did tell me this, that if I needed to spit—for some reason people spit a lot during that time [they laugh]—to go over to the sidewalk, the end of the sidewalk, and spit into the street and not into the sidewalk. That was the polite way of doing it. I have no idea but people—that's what they had—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That's a great memory.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —spittoons, and whatnot. But I never felt the—

[00:10:04]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Good grandmother. [Laughs.]

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I never felt the need to spit, but it was part of that learning how to, you know, operate in the world. It's sort of quaint-looking, but it was for real, you know? She was teaching me a real lesson.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That's right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But the whole idea of—and I do remember that, just walking to—just gradually just walking to one side of the sidewalk, whatever was easiest, to let the white people go. And it was white people. Just so that they wouldn't interface with us and we wouldn't interface with them. That was mostly, like—the idea was not to encounter them. That was just—you know, they didn't want to talk to us, we didn't want to talk to them. That sort of thing. But that was part of being part of Logan Heights, you know, and part of being—the protocol of living there, you know.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And in high school, how did that play out, if it did at all? By then you had moved to a different neighborhood.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Right.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And you were in a high school with folks from all over your neighborhood area.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: It was what they call now "diverse." The high school I went to was diverse. There were Japanese Americans, there were Filipinos, there were some Mexican Americans, which I knew—one of my younger sisters was actually more—pachucos actually dressed like, you know, just high school kids. You know, just, slender skirts, and my mother made me a little fishtail skirt, which I loved—anyhow, but it was—you know, and stacked hair. I couldn't—the stacked hair, I couldn't—we didn't have the money for all of that stuff. Since I was the oldest of my generation, I didn't have any cousins or anything like that to teach me how to do any of that stuff, and I had no interest in it anyhow.

And there were white people and there were Blacks, so there was—oh, and we had Pacific Islanders, several people from Yap and Samoa.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And were these folks mostly there historically because of the—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: The Navy.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —the military? The Navy? Uh-huh [affirmative], yeah.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yes, ma'am. That's it. That was the key. And white people, as I said. So I grew up—and most of us all more or less about the same class. The white people were perhaps a—they did—I did have a friend who was white, and she did live in a track home, but that was an exception. Because she had to walk a ways to school.

My mother found a place across the street from the high school, and I think it was the only place that she could find. And it was out in Southeast San Diego, and it was a converted garage. So there was a little toilet, and there was something called a shower. It was not really. It was like a pretend shower. And a little sink, and a tiny, tiny, little place where you could cook, and a sink. And there was another room, and my sister and I slept in what was really, I think, sort of like a sheltered porch because the windows were screened. There were curtains across for privacy, but the windows essentially—and it was not cold in San Diego, or if it was, you know, "put on another blanket" sort of thing. And so my sister and I slept in a twin bed on the porch, and my mother and my other sisters slept in a room, you know, in the other side of it. But it was a garage. It was a garage. I never thought about it. It was across the street from the high school, so yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Easy commute. [Laughs.]

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, for me, yeah, but my mother went to the Naval Training Center. That's when she started working there, and she took, like, I don't know how many buses, and it took her like probably a good hour to get to work. Because it was out yonder, you know. And she took a bus, so she would leave while it was still dark at night, and if it was winter, she would come home and it was—you know, it gets dark at five, so she would come home, and it was dark.

I thought about this just fairly recently, that I don't remember her eating at home. And I think

what she did was, she ate on her own, and she probably did window-shopping, and she didn't bring any packages. I don't know what she brought home. Who paid attention? But it was, you know—she may have—

[00:15:01]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Did you end up being responsible for cooking for your sisters as you got older?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: [Laughs.] She did teach me at some point, when I was about 14, how to scramble eggs, and that was it.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: [Laughs.]

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: My mother was not a cook. My mother was not a cook, so I did—so, as it was, yes. And she did buy us what they call day old bread. It's just bread, you know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah, right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And it was like five loaves for a dollar. And she would also buy us margarine, which you had to mix the margarine to make it yellow or something, because it was a white thing, and you had to mix it. And to this day, I still love bread and butter. I still love white bread, and real butter was fantastic. I mean, it's real treat, but I can't eat it now, God help me, but it was a real treat even then. And we pretty much, you know, had, you know, five or six slices of bread, and that was dinner. That was dinner, you know?

My grandmother who lived in Shelltown, where we also lived for a while before my mom got married again, she would bring over, you know, a bag of oranges or kept us from totally getting scurvy. [They laugh.]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But we did have like a lot of—you see a lot of, like, Brown people with spots on their forearms, little white spots or spots on the sides of their cheeks. That's a vitamin B—I found out later—deficiency. So that we were probably to some degree or other malnourished. Functional, you know. What did we know?

And there was the neighbor next to us, had this giant avocado tree, so whatever leaned over—branches, you know, went into the driveway that was out in front of our house—whatever we could reach was—we supplemented the food that way. My mother couldn't pay for trash, so on trash day, we took out these little bags [laughs] and placed them in our neighbor's bins, you know, along the way, because it was just one expense that she could no longer afford.

So we lived—I lived, started out growing up in Logan Heights till I was about 10, and moved to Southeast San Diego, which was Shelltown, lived there until about 14 or so, which was also quite lovely. I loved it. And then when my mother remarried, moved with her and her husband into Southeast San Diego. So that's the sequence, you know, of where I lived as a child. And from Southeast San Diego, we—my mother moved us across street from Lincoln High School, and that's where I graduated from high school in 1961. And that's where my beloved uncle who was just 11—maybe 11 years older than me, maybe less—I have to calculate that. But he was probably—he said, "Well,"—he was, you know, living in Los Angeles—"Come and move in with me"—well, actually not, "Move in with me." He said, "Come with me, and I'll help you get into college." He didn't graduate from high school, my mother didn't graduate from high school, had no idea how to do it.

I lucked out. I had friends who were really smart. We were the nerdy crowd in high school. We were the nerdy group. None of us dated. If we went out somewhere—we went in saw *Psycho* together, and somebody had a car, and so all these little—there must have been four or five of us crowded into this car. You know, we were all friends, and multicultural, to tell you the truth. We had Yvonne Powdrill and Barry Powdrill. They were two Black—really smart—God, smart—Black students. Yvonne became a yoga master, and Barry I think became a lawyer. And then there was Conrad von Metzke, who was a tall white guy who's—I looked him up, and he's still out in San Diego doing something with aeronautics or something or other. He's the one that introduced us—because we used to meet, like, about once a week, and we would share things. And he's the one that first played Mozart for us. We never heard Mozart, or I never heard Mozart. I said, "God, this is great stuff!" But we were just kind of—there was no other Latinos.

There were Latinos in the—or Mexican Americans—there were others in the school, but there were very few, and they sort of kept to themselves to some degree.

[00:20:20]

My sister Maria was acquainted with them, and they were seen as pretty much—there was a—I think there was a certain element of criminality addressed to them, like gangsters, you know. Like, pachucas, you know, were seen as bad girls, even though, you know, they were not obviously bad, but they had a certain style and it was associated with being bad girls. And my sister María, who was very funny, she sort of—you know, they gravitated to each other with her, but not me.

In high school, I became 11th grade class president. But I also in junior high school was what they—they didn't have presidents, but they had senators, so I was a senator, I think, in the eighth grade, you know. I mean, I was always interested in school politics, and, you know, I was either a campaign manager or friends of campaign managers, you know? I mean, we were all—there was a little—again, a little group that was active in the school, and a mixture of white and nonwhite people together. Because that was the nature of the student population to a great degree.

So it was an advantage, I think, in certain ways, so it was—the schools were not segregated that way. Later when I went to college and then they were segregated [laughs] but not in—pretty much not in the public—at least not until about 1960, you know? And I had Japanese American friends who—especially in high school, Barbara Yamamoto and Kaz. In fact, Kaz Ochi, who—when I was in 11th grade, class president, I had to go what they called the prom, the 11th grade prom. I had never heard of it. But anyhow, so I said, "Kaz," because I think he was—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: How do you spell Kaz?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: K-A-Z. Ochi was O-C-H-I. And I don't know what Kaz does, but his name was—I think my understanding was his first name was Kazochi, and then it was Kazochi Ochi. And I don't know if that was a play on his name or if that was his real name, but we all—his name was Kaz, and the last name was Ochi, but his first full name may have been Kazochi and then Ochi is his last—anyhow.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Cool. And so you went to the dance with him?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah! I told him, I said, "You know, I've got to go"—you know, he was like a year or so younger, which is—in high school, a year-younger guy, I mean, it was just—we went as friends, you know, it was—in fact, I never dated at all, and nobody ever expressed any kind of romantic tendencies towards me [laughs], so, you know, that's what it was. So yeah. So somehow, my mother conjured up a dress, and we went to the 11th grade prom. I didn't go to the senior prom because that was way—and I had no desire to go, let's put that way. I was just thinking about, "What am I going to do after this? Good God." And since I wasn't dating and most of my friends did not go either, it was just, you know, that was it. You know, there was a lot of fuss and musses, obviously, in high school.

When I became—what was so funny is that, when I was elected to be the 11th grade class president, there was a group called the Marvelas, which was a social club, which was against the school rules because they wre blackballed, and I had no idea what blackballed meant. But I was invited to join the Marvelas, and I said, "Really?" [Laughs.] We knew—because those were all like—they were Latinas as well, so that they were an exclusive, you know, pretty girl club. So I don't—you know, and I was invited to go to this. So I said, "Sure," and I think—I don't remember even going to a meeting, but they could put me down as, you know, being part of the Marvelas, which was very funny. At the time I thought it was funny, because I knew that the only reason I was invited is because I was, you know, sort of, I guess, a big shot [laughs] at the time.

[00:25:02]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That's really cool. Did you ever take any art classes in high school? Or what did you like to do, rather, in high school? What was your passion, in addition to, like, public—I mean, you know, school government and stuff like that?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: In middle school, we had this wonderful art teacher. His name is Matt Matola who was an eighth-grade art teacher. It's the first time that there was actually like an art class, you know, because you didn't have that in elementary school. So I took an art class, and

he was teaching us everything about how to make African masks out of construction paper. And he took a liking to me, so I took his after-school classes, and occasionally, when I could his during the day. So that was fun. That was a lot of fun.

I also belonged to, or had this—his name was Juls Stein. Juls—I can't remember. Juls was his first name. But he had us join in eighth grade—or seventh, eighth grade—a book club, so we could actually buy pocketbooks. You know, they were like 35 cents a pocketbook, and that's where he invited us to join—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Like, paperbacks?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Paperbacks, yeah, little paperbacks for middle school kids, and I bought one of the first environmental books, *The Web of Life.* And it was—because Rachel Carson didn't come much later, but I—by that time, I was aware of the genre, let's put it that way. But I think this is called *The Web of Life* that I bought, which was talking about environmental—you know, talking about the unity in the environment: animals, plants, and, you know, the sky, and all that stuff.

And then I also bought something called *Hiroshima*, which was about the bombing of Hiroshima and the effects of the nuclear bomb. That was really vivid to me, obviously, at that time. About skin peeling and people disappearing at the time of the exposure and just leaving a shadow, you know, on the ground. So that was—was it John Hersey? I'm trying to remember who the author was.

But he encouraged us, and I don't know how—either my mother or my grandmother gave me the 35 cents to buy. And it was not—you know, it was not an assumed thing that I could actually buy a book at the time. As low as that may sound now, it wasn't. You know, it was money. And so that, he—Juls Stein. I think Mr. Stein? I think it might have been Mr. Stein, and his first name was Juls. I remember Juls because this was J-U-L-S, you know, just something unusual.

And so those were probably the two influential influences on me intellectually as far as, like, looking at the world through the books. And the other thing was Mr. Matola's art classes, which exposed—he taught us how to do enameling. He had a little kiln, and we made jewelry with powdered glass and all that stuff. So I had one of the things I did for years and years. It was pink. Pink was a big color then. It's now becoming again another color, but in the '50s, it was the pink—pink and the little stuff on it. Yeah, and I could wear it around the chain on my neck.

And of course that's—and I remember when *Peanuts* came out because—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Charles Schulz's?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Charles Schulz. Because that came out in the mid-'50s, and I don't even know if it was even called *Peanuts*. But I remember reading a strip and asking a teacher, I said, "What is Beatnik?" Or, "What are the Beats?" Because Schultz actually was always contemporaneous anyhow, and he mentioned something about the Beats. and the teacher had no idea. Zero.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Oh, that's funny.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: It was a woman. I remember asking her, "What is the Beats?" And she had—B-E-A-T-S. You know, it wasn't the fruit or the vegetable, you know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: [Laughs.]

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But eventually, I did find out on my own and the whole romance in the mid-'50s about the Beatnik generation. And that was through the beginning—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Was that appealing to you?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: No, but it was interesting. It was interesting. Because—and I was interested in fashion. It was also the time that *Funny Face* came out with Audrey Hepburn, because she also—in one of the numbers she does, she wears this whole black shirt, black pants, and loafers, black loafers. And I remember reading later, because Stanley Donen, the choreographer and I think he was a director as well, had a little tussle with her because she wanted black socks. And he says, "No, no, no, white socks," because he didn't—he wanted to sort of—and, of course, it was a genius idea, white socks.

[00:30:25]

So to this day, I often wear white socks with my black little Oxfords and black pants in homage to Stanley Donen. Every time I put my—I always think of him, you know, of that. And Audrey Hepburn, of course, in that *Funny Face*, where she does a little number in a cavernous bar in Paris where there's Beatnik-spouting poets and—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I remember the scene from the movie.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: You do?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Oh, yeah.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And she does all the sort of quirky—supposedly like a modern dance. And in high school, I did take modern dance. Because it was, again, my sort of romance of—especially with Audrey Hepburn. And I found out that a lot of Asian women, a lot of Japanese-American women also identified with Audrey Hepburn at the time. And, you know, [sings] "How Long Has This Been Going On?" Again the Gershwin songs, you know, just totally infused my 14-, 15-year-old body at the time. And like I said, *Peanuts*.

But also musically, I just wrote a little thing—somebody did an homage on the Internet about Little Richard. Because up until that point, the music was Top 40 hits, you know, which was like, oh, God, [snores] puts you to sleep, you know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: [Laughs.]

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: It was horrible. [Sings] "The shrimp boats are coming, ahh." Anyhow, but it was—or the "Tennessee Waltz," all that stuff was just deadly, boring stuff! And so when I heard—and then, of course, there was also Elvis. And Elvis was wonderful, but I didn't have the kind of romantic idea with Elvis. So a lot of my—I think the generation at the time, the young women, were all nuts about Elvis. But I liked his singing. And I love "Hound Dog," I love "Don't Be Cruel," all that stuff. I loved it, but I did not have any aspirational fantasy romances with him.

And neither did I with Little Richard, but Little Richard's voice was so—somebody said, "Well, he's a wild man." Yes, he's a wild man, and that was part of this coming out of race music. That's what it was called. Because it was not played on public radio. It was not played. And then, just then with the—and then there was Chuck Berry. I mean, all of it. My son discovered Chuck Berry [laughs] when he was in high school, and he came home and wanted to tell me about this wonderful music, and it was Chuck Berry. And, you know, it was—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That's so great.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: It was. It was extraordinary for me. It was just—it was quite wonderful. But anyhow. But Chuck Berry, you know, in the mid-'50s, and Fats Domino and Little Richard. But Little Richard was electrifying, I have to tell you. With his screaming and his—it was "Tutti Frutti" or "Long Tall Sally." Well, "Long Tall Sally" is what I really loved, but all these songs were just totally out of bounds, you know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Did you ever listen to Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, yeah, but that was sort of like a little bit later.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That was a little bit later.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah. But to me, the idea of, "Shrimp boats are coming"—which was on the Top 40, and then Little Richard—was just totally uncivilized, just totally out of it, you know? And hard to explain to adults, why is my little adolescent body thrilled to hear Little Richard singing. And to a great degree, I was—when I was doing my little homage on the Internet with Little Richard, I said—and the guy who—Rudy Cuellar, who responded, he says, "He was a wild man!" Exclamation point. I said, "Yes." Period. And my predilection in men just still sort of holds, you know. [They laugh.] What can you do, you know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right, yeah, that's great, that's great.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Anyhow. But all of that was part of that time. During the Friday afternoons during lunchtime, the school would bring out the record player, in middle school, and we could dance. So we learned more or less the Scotch, what was called the Scotch, or the—jeez, I can't

even remember the names of the different songs, where you would actually do line dancing to a certain degree.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Oh yeah, like a Virginia reel or something like that?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, it was—but it was line dancing—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Or line dancing? Yeah.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But it was, you know, the stroll.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: The stroll!

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That's what it was. So you would line up across from your partner, boys on one side, girls on the other side, and then the couple at the end would do—I could even see it, like I get goosebumps thinking about it—the stroll, *donk, donk, donk.* The couple would take—do the stroll. It was just a simple little crossover step down, and then they would go, and then the next couple would do the stroll. With the music, you know? And we would just watch them do it, you know, all the way down, and it was very simple, you know?

[00:35:33]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Did people improvise?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, whatever it is that—who knew?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, who knew? I mean, you know—I mean, we were just—we were so happy to hear music, you know, during lunchtime. And it's so happy to be out there together on the black top, you know, out, wherever it was, in the schoolyard. It was just, like—I remembered that as probably one of the most pleasant times.

Also, in ninth grade when we were to graduate to high school, there was a breakfast or—yeah, a breakfast that was given to us who were school, I guess, leaders. And I was one of the people that—there were, must have been about, oh, I don't know, eight or 10 of us. And the teachers sponsored us. I guess it was a lunch. I remember it because it was really profound, and I think this is really important, in talking with young people because—and here I was this Mexican girl, you know, with these other—I knew everybody, you know, different grades, but we all knew each other, and they told us that we were going to be [cries] the future leaders. And I think it's very important that we talk to young people, and we tell them when they're doing well.

For me, it implied—to me, it was like a shock to hear it, you know? I believed it. I believed it. But it was a shock to hear it from an adult, and especially a teacher or a group of teachers. There must have been about three teachers who did this, and I don't know what went in their minds, but they were visionaries, I think, in many ways, as far as just gathering the leadership together, as small as we were and as humble as we were. You know, dumb, just dumb, "We're just having fun," sort of thing. But to tell us that we were the leaders of the future. And I obviously remember that because nobody had ever said anything like that to me or any of the—I think any of the—my friends who were part of the school government at that time. To hear that.

So I strongly think that especially when children—not even excel, but when children sort of put themselves out there—good, bad, or indifferent, when they put themselves—they take a chance. Children take a chance or—whether it's for fun or friendship or who knows what—that you tell them that, "We see you and what you're doing right now as a 14- or a 15-year-old, we respect you and we see you as our future." That's what they were telling us: "You are the leaders of the future." It was obviously a very important thing for me to hear. And I strongly recommend that we as adults—no matter what capacity, whether we're teachers or parents or guidance counselors or taking care of—babysitting or whatever—if there's something that needs to be said, to tell the student that or to tell the young person that, especially if you see it. Don't keep it inside. Let them know that you believe in them. So that was, to me, an extraordinary—and that's just middle school.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: But it also seems like it was a real turning point in your own self-perception.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: In what way?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: In the sense that it meant something to you profound, because it was coming from outside the family.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yes.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: It was coming from—validation.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That's very interesting. Yes, that's true. That's quite true. That's great. It was coming to me institutionally. That's quite true.

And then I found like—because this teacher did not know what the Beats were, from *Peanuts*, to having this wonderful art teacher who was showing us how to do crepe paper African masks, you know, to Mr. Juls—Mr. Juls or Mr. Stein?—Mr. Juls. I guess Juls was his last name. Mr. Juls putting us in this book club and not saying, "Well, this is an adult book" or whatever. Allowing us to read *Hiroshima*, allowing us to read *The Web of Life* and whatever books that we—but those are the two I remember. There were other books, but I—that's the one that immediately comes to mind. But, you know, he didn't say, "Oh, that's too sophisticated for you." He allowed it for us, you know, because I'm sure—I don't—I think the schooling system was quite different then as it is now, I assume so.

[00:40:28]

And to a great degree, I talk with young people. Even my son, God help him, I treated him as a sentient human being. I did not treat him as an unformed puppy dog or whatever, you know? He was—you know, he could—and if he didn't understand, you know, whatever, but I did not overreach. But I talked to him as a reasonable—what they call it?—*una gente de razón*. As a—there was a phrase said. What is the reason—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Rational?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, but there's a—there is another phrase. I think it's in Spanish or French, but as a—as a person of reason, that's it. I addressed my son as a person of reason, you know. And I think that we were addressed as children within that era as persons of reason, and I'm very thankful for that.

So when I went to high school, it was another adventure that we were offered dance classes. Actually in elementary school, tap was offered, and I could not stay after school and go to tap class. I wanted to take tap dancing so much. I had two friends that took it, and they would come out and show us how to do the shuffle and the—I forget what else. It was just little preliminary tap moves, and I just so badly wanted to take tap dancing. Who knows what would've happened? [Laughs.] Because in middle school I wanted to be a—if somebody would ask me what my dream was, it was to be a musical comedy dancer. You know, like Cyd Charisse. You know, Cyd Charisse. You know, this is like where all those great MGM musicals came out, you know. So it's Fred Astaire, Gene Kelly, and Oscar Levant, who was funny, who was quirky—who was—he's probably the one I would've gone for as a boyfriend. [Laughs.] It would have been Oscar Levant.

Oscar Levant, I remember seeing him in a Jack Paar show, saying, "What do you"—Jack Paar said, "What do you do for exercise, Oscar?" He says, "Oh, I stand up and pass out." [They laugh.] So anyhow. But I have always liked witty. And in the '40s, even now in looking at old movies, I like Eve Arden who was the witty woman who never got the guy [laughs], but she was the smart one, the wisecracking, the wisecracking partner or friend of the—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Sidekick kind of—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, the sidekick, thank you, of the main—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Totally.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —lady, you know, the beautiful lady [laughs] in black-and-white films.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Well, even in the film that you mentioned before, right, doesn't Eve Arden play maybe the fashion designer that Audrey Hepburn—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: No, not—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: In *Funny Face*?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: No, no, that was another woman who played the fashion designer.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Oh, okay.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But she did play a secondary where she was an older woman. And I know her name, and I can't remember it right this minute.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right, okay, right, it wasn't—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: No, I know.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I know Eve Arden.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I know the film, so [laughs] yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah, yeah. Okay, Well, let's take a break. Shall we take a break here?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Sure.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Is this okay? Okay, great.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Absolutely.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Thank you.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Thank you.

[END OF TRACK lopez19_1of2_sd_track02_m.]

[00:00:03]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Okay. We're back again after a short break, and let's make sure both of the microphones are turned on. Looks like it. Can you test yours, Yolanda?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Sure. I don't know what you—you want me just to talk?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah, that sounds great.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Okay. So—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Okay, it sounds good.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Okay.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Okay. So we left off with thinking about the community, your childhood, various people who came into play that were really important to you, particularly Matt Matola and Mr. Juls, and books that were important like *The Web of Life* and *Hiroshima.* Sort of high school was a bit where we left off.

And I wonder if now you want to say a little about the relationship between your early art practice, where—we talked a little bit about this before, Uncle Mike, collage and found materials—like, where things started to come together for you. And then you also mentioned some other parts of early childhood history being about labor history as family history. So I guess your mother did some work as a seamstress. So—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: All my family was creative one way or another. My grandfather was tailor. His specialty was as a woman's tailor, so he did pretty much—was able to support his family by going to the biggest department store in town, wherever that was. And he could get a job as a tailor. And he was also something of an intellectual in that he was an atheist and had thoughts about the Catholic church, which he did not express directly, but which came through anyhow, as far as organized religion. And also, in his taste in where he took us to—everything from Mexican vaudeville shows to—he took us to roadshows of famous musicals primarily. And the one I distinctly remember was *The Pajama Game*. Because that was probably the last one that I actually went—that was American to him—at Ford Bowl in San Diego.

And my mother took us to—was a seamstress, so there's no—I can't think of another equivalency of a tailor, of what a female tailor is called, but she was a skilled, masterful sewer. Or a seamstress—I don't know how to describe it—dressmaker. And she made clothes, our clothes,

when she had the material for us. And she would take me and occasionally my other sisters to the downtown department store, and we would look through these big books of patterns. So we knew what was in vogue, literally, as *Vogue* magazine had a pattern book, and *Butterick* and, you know, all sorts of different brands that we would look through. And I learned the brands, and, you know, looked everything, to how to make a bathrobe to baby clothes to a dress to a prom dress. It was all sort of familiar, while she was looking through for patterns, that I or we could look through ourselves.

And my uncles were everywhere from being upholsterers to—oh, gosh, I don't know. They were good—one of them was a master carpenter. He was a cabinetmaker and made his living actually as a cabinetmaker. And my uncle Mike was a hairdresser, went to beauty school. And one of the things he taught me was, if they can't give you a good haircut, don't trust them for anything else. So to this day, I value haircuts quite well. And if they're skillful, they give you a good haircut.

He, by the way, would come down from Los Angeles and—because he lived in LA for a while—he would come in and give us whatever was the rage. So at 13, 14, or whatever age we were as little kids, one of my sisters had a poodle haircut, all curly. And in high school—was it high school? No, I take it back. I was already out of high school. In early college, I had a Sassoon haircut, so very specifically cut. You know, this is where the idea of Vidal Sassoon actually began to publicly be the masterful haircutter, you know, and so my uncle did Sassoon haircuts.

[00:05:28]

So all of them were skillful and could do many things at one time. My uncle Mike, again, was—taught himself how to do—was it wax?—how to make lost wax silver jewelry. And he learned how to make beading when beading—in the hippie era, he knew how to make beaded thing, you know, after the Native American beads that were being sold—but made in Hong Kong [laughs]—were all sold and all that rage. And so they were—and he was also—made clothing. He made me clothing, but he was not as good as my mom sometimes. I mean, he made a dress, which I could barely move my arms in, so he did not want to get caught up in all that gusset stuff and [laughs]—anyhow. So he made up patterns, but he was not skillful like my mom.

So all everybody in my family was highly skillful, multi-skillful. So I, in many ways, grew up in this environment. And I forgot: What was the question again?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: [Laughs.] I was really asking you—well, you've answered it really beautifully. I was more or less asking you about your early exposure to art practice and Uncle Mike and creativity, but also a little bit about—you once mentioned before we started our interview that labor history is part of family history.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And, you know, I think because later we'll be talking about the three *Virgins* portraits that you did, and your mother is stitching in that.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And earlier in our conversation, you said, "I don't really know what my mother was doing," but it's possible that she was working in a garment—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: My mother worked in a big industrial building on the Naval Training Center. That was her last job, and she worked at what's called an industrial sewing machine. So she worked, you know, as a seamstress with that, and it was like pulling apart seams because the young recruits needed alterations to their uniforms. So I knew what she was doing. I went to visit her, and she was—all these other, you know, working-class women, working pretty close to minimum wage, or maybe pennies above minimum wage. So I knew what she was doing.

But my uncle was the one that probably more than anybody else encouraged me to have what might be called an art life. He brought me, I remember, a Pelikan Watercolor box with—I don't know, it had something like 20 colors or maybe more, 26 different colors, and some good watercolor brushes and a good pad of watercolor paper, which was really exciting for me, and I remember that. And I still have the watercolor kit, believe it or not. So he's the one that actually brought me—he didn't want me painting and drawing on paper bags, brown paper bags, which was—you know, I mean, I didn't mind. Who cares? But he's the one that introduced me to the idea of fine arts material. Or the idea even as—the possibility of being a professional artist.

At that time, I wanted to—the most exciting art being done professionally and commercially was Walt Disney. I wanted to be a Walt Disney animator, little knowing that women did not stand a chance [laughs] of being an animator. Most women were relegated to being inbetweeners [ph], so that was little or no status and had one of the lowest paying jobs on the lot. But little knowing that, that's what I wanted to do or be. The idea of making Walt Disney cartoon pictures and being part of that industry was very exciting. And since he was from Los Angeles, he told me about the Chouinard art school, which I had never heard of, but Chouinard was an art school in Los Angeles that essentially fed into the industry. They taught costuming, set design, lighting design. You know, all the crafts that were necessary that went into film was taught by Chouinard. So that was my ambition.

[00:10:14]

So in 1961, at least in 1960, thinking that that's where I would want to go, Chouinard was bought out by Disney. Walt Disney bought Chouinard and closed down the school, in 1961. And that—I didn't know where to go from there. And my uncle did not know where to go from there. And the irony, of course, is that my son ended up getting his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from CalArts, which was owned by Disney and in essence was to replace what Chouinard did. And even though it's in Santa Clarita, which is north of Los Angeles, I feel in some way that one of us did go to that school that fed into the industry, because it still does to a certain degree feed into that industry and especially the Walt Disney films since they also bought Pixar.

And at one point, Steve Jobs, who was the most—who sat on the board—part of his deal with selling Pixar to, I guess Lucas or—I can't remember. Or he and Lucas together—anyhow—bought—they owned, I think—I think at one point, Jobs bought Pixar from Lucas, and Jobs sold it Walt Disney, and he was the largest stockholder on the board. So in essence, he was—he who owns the most stock is the biggest kahuna, you know? But anyhow, so that's—my son went to CalArts and got his Bachelor of Fine Arts from there. So to me, it's kind of a small irony.

So when I graduated from high school, the deal was with my uncle—because he had been taking me and my grandma—or he would send money, and my grandma and I would take the Greyhound bus to Pasadena, because he lived in Pasadena for a while, and he would entertain my grandmother and I. We went to the Pasadena Playhouse. We saw—he bought my first grown-up dress. It was a chemise, and he—a commercially made chemise, which was fashionable at the time because getting away from the '50s form-fitting clothes, the chemise was sort of like—well, chemise—in French "chemise" is like a nightgown or an undergown. And that he bought me—he and his partner Paul bought me my first high-heeled shoes, and he said, "If you're going to have high-heeled shoes"—oh, my uncle was also gay, so he said, "If you're going to have high-heeled shoes, you might as well—four-inch heels." Which I could not walk in, and they were black on top of everything else. So I walked between Paul and my uncle Mike to the Pasadena Playhouse to see—what was it?—something about the—something and the autumn moon, what is it? I can't remember. It'll come to me, but it was very popular at the time. And Marlon Brando even made a film trying to look like the Japanese guy, and I can't remember what it's called, something or other with the autumn moon. So all of that.

My uncle, he took me to the *West Side Story* when—the road company of the *West Side Story,* which was probably one of the great, also, events in my art life, of seeing a professional show, the road show. This was a road show that had most of the original dancers and original singers from the Broadway company. And I remember—I mean, with Leonard Bernstein's music, Stephen Sondheim, and Hal Prince, who could argue with such an exquisite, talented, hotshot, you know, group of artists? It was really wonderful at the time. You know, it was just spectacular to me, and the part where they do the "Somewhere" ballet where a young soprano or alto soprano stands up from the orchestra pit and she sings, [sings] "There's a place for us, somewhere a place." And she, you know, totally—what do they call it?—without—

[00:15:00]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: A capella.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Thank you very much, a capella. Thank you. And it was just heartbreaking and exquisite and totally memorable. There were things about the play I did not like but there were—but that, to me, was one of the great artistic moments. And especially in, you know, in a—watching the singer, you know, it was just—it was mind-altering. It was almost beyond the earth. It took me totally out of the circumstance there, sitting in an audience in this big—I can't even remember what auditorium that we saw it in—a big, professional auditorium. It was just totally—

what do they call it?—not out of mind, but anyhow, it was an alternative experience of experiencing art, you know, where it goes beyond the—beyond explanation into another realm. And so he took me to that.

So when I graduated from high school—because that was in the '50s, and I graduated in high school in 1961—he invited—he asked, you know, told my mom, "You know, that's one less child you have to support." And my mother said, "Fine, fine, fine," and I said, "Fine, fine, fine." You know, it was all great to me. And he was living in Los Angeles. But the whole Beatnik generation, even though it had already lost its blossom, as it were, by 1961, in San Francisco—and he and I had gone—he had taken me to San Francisco with him a couple of years before, just to check it out, he and I. It was just like a little "take a look and see" sort of thing. And that's when all the little coffeehouses were beginning to sprout up in the aftermath of the Beatnik generation and the poetry stuff and also the beginning of the—oh, the nouvelle vague, you know, the new wave, French new wave and all that. Even from England, and I can't remember what it was called from England, but the working-class films were all coming out, and they were all over these little art movie houses in San Francisco.

So he went up, and he went to work obviously as a beautician, as a hairdresser in the sunset. He ended up having an affair with the owner of the shop. And he and the owner of the shop went to move to Sausalito. So when he and his friend Trevor came to pick me up in San Diego, like four days out of high school—and with me and with my two little brown shopping bags with—the little shopping bag had the little strings on them, you know, which they don't have anymore, but those—that was everything. That was all my underclothes and whatever else. I don't even know what I had in there.

Trevor had this huge—well, it looked huge—Cadillac. It was a powder blue Cadillac, a convertible no less. So I was in the back. The back seat of the convertible where I sat, the back seat was bigger than my bed that I had slept in with my sister, and it was padded. It was just—you know, it was his pride and joy, so it was, you know, all this leather stuff. It was clean. It was just—you know, I had no other experience other than sitting in that back of that baby blue Cadillac car, and we went to Los Angeles. I don't remember the trip, as it were, but they had found—my uncle Mike and Trevor had found a place in Sausalito and it was in a—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Up here, not in LA, right?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: No. Because he—no. I think because of Chouinard closing down, and I think Mike had left behind some sort of sour romances that he didn't want to go back to.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: In Los Angeles?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah. I suspect that that's what it was. I don't know.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So you drove up the coast to Sausalito?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am. So that's the first—first where I went to live, you know, in the Bay Area, and that was Sausalito. And Sausalito was, you know, right on the edge of the water splashing up on the—I don't even know what you call it—you know, the front there with the concrete and all that and the receding houses going up the hill. It was just like an unbelievable romance of a city I'd never seen before. Something you saw on the movies, maybe in the French Riviera or Italian Riviera, but here it was in actuality. And across the bay, you could see San Francisco.

[00:20:11]

But my uncle still worked in the sunsets, so that summer of 1961, I got papers and found out that I could enroll at San Francisco State College. I took two art classes because I didn't have to request or order any credit for them, so I could take them as noncredit classes in the summer. So that's what I did that summer, and I met two men. One was Jim Storey, who was an art historian but teaching a class that I took, and the other one was Ralph Putzker, who was—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Can you spell that?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: P-U-T-Z-K-E-R, Ralph Putzker. And Jim Storey. Ralph Putzker—of course, you know, Mr. Putzker—taught a hands-on art class, and that was the first—how can I say?—professional, you know, college [laughs] class that I've ever taken. And Jim Storey, I don't remember what he taught but it was—I don't remember, but he was quite wonderful, a very soft-

spoken man, with a suit no less, whereas Ralph Putzker dressed in dark shirts and a necktie. He looked like a gangster, like a Damon Runyon character. He's just a wonderful man.

But it was Mr. Putzker who engaged me in conversation and found out that I wanted to go to college, but I didn't know how. And that I was living in Sausalito. And he's the one that helped me—enrolled me in the College of Marin. And thinking back on it now, he said he would write me a letter of recommendation. Apparently, you don't need a letter of recommendation for what we called junior college, but he did one anyhow, and it was just, like, the first time anybody had actually helped me in that thing.

Because in high school, I was put, you know, in that infamous track system. So you were either going to be a housewife or a mechanic, or you were going to go to college, and I was designated along with my other friends who were not white, designated into the trade sort of idea. No matter what grades I got. I took—I managed—in high school, I managed—because all my friends are smart, as I mentioned, and they were taking honors classes, because some of them were white and actually were tracked into honors classes.

And I found out that—it was a Saturday, they were going to take a test because you had to test to get in for honors history. So I showed up, and I said, "I would like to take the honors history class." Don't ask me how or why did it, but I—I knew why I did it, but I didn't know of how it worked. And I was told by the—I forgot the name of the person who was doing the testing—said, "Well, I just can't let you in. If somebody does not show up and there is an extra test, you can take it." So anyhow, I was told that, "Yes, oh, you know." And I don't know—maybe just because I was sitting there twiddling my thumbs and did not leave [laughs] that they said, "Okay, you can come and take the test."

So I took the test and passed it, so I was given, with my friends, an honors history class, which truly changed my life also. I think every person, man, woman, or child should have a class in Western civilization. And that's what it was, just European civilization, but everything from the Greeks to the Romans to the Middle Ages in France and England and the age of exploration, the —all of that was sequentially presented to me, and it changed my life. I had some understanding of the march, as it were, of civilization, but it—and also, like, the development of the church, which obviously plays a large part in Western civ, you know? So I understood the Reformation and what the Reformation was about. I understood the tenets of the Catholic church and why the Reformation took place, why Protestantism is different than Catholicism, how the fact that the Catholics colonized Mexico and how the Protestants colonized what we call northern America—how that was different in the way that our laws were perpetuated and drawn up.

[00:25:00]

And a lot of people don't know that. They don't know what the Reformation was about. They don't understand how Protestantism or Calvinism influenced the Constitution or influenced the thinking about the chosen few, which enters into racism, you know. Whereas in Catholicism in the southern states—the middle and southern continents—the middle continent was that you sort of—this is God's will and faith, you don't question it, and you have a clergy that tells you what to do. You don't directly talk to God, you talk to the clergy and the clergy prays for you.

That's why the Virgin of Guadalupe was important, because you don't—even though the Virgin of Guadalupe, and Mary, the Virgin Mary, which is—I always have to explain that when I have classes, because not everybody is raised a Christian, that the Virgin of Guadalupe is the Virgin Mary, and she has no power, but you pray to Mary as the Virgin of Guadalupe, and she intercedes for you. Whereas with Protestantism, you talk directly to God. There is no clergy, no priest, no other class between you and God. And if you do well in this life and prosper, that means you are probably among the chosen few.

So it's a very different philosophy, and taking that Western civ class changed my life in the whole viewpoint of the world. And so when Ralph—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And you had to fight to get into it. They weren't even going to let you—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, yeah, no, no, no.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —take the exam.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, yeah. Don't ask me why and how I did it. I have no idea. My family did not feel like victims. That's what I—all I can tell you is that my—and my mother never gave

me any direct instruction or encouragement.

She did—my mother—I should mention that my mother did not feel that she had any control of her children. My grandmother, who raised us until I was at least 10 and influenced me beyond that, influenced me ethically and socially, as far as how to interact socially, and also that you present yourself clean in person, because that's part of not only the way you—your self-respect, but the respect of the other person. That's why I sort of was very glad that I could shower before you came, Jennifer, because I didn't want you to be insulted that I was not [phone rings] clean. That's my son.

[Tape stops, restarts.]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: We're good.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I'm trying to think of where I left off at.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Well—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, oh, my mother—oh, okay. So my grandmother is the one that really socialized me. She did try to teach me how to cook, but I couldn't care less about cooking. It was just standing next to her, "Yes, Grandma. No, Grandma." She also taught me how to sweep the floor in our house in that little bungalow in Shelltown because the floor had once been painted, but the paint had long gone. So there were all these grooves in this wooden floor, so she taught me how to sweep, you know, along with the grooves to get all that dust and dirt out. I said, "Grandma, do I really need to do it?" Because she did everything, she did everything. And I regret it now how selfish I was, but nonetheless, that's what it was. And I told her, I said, "Grandma" and she says, "Well, you know, you've got to learn how to do this when you have your own home." She *más o menos* said something like that, and I said, "I'm going to have—I'm going to have servants, I'm going to have maids who will do this, so I don't—this is"—you know? And she says, "Well, you know, you at least will know how to teach them to do it right." [They laugh.]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That's a great answer. That's so great.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: So anyhow—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Let's come back to 1961 and going to art school in the summer and then applying to Marin.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: It was San Francisco State College I went to.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Oh, you didn't end up going to Marin? You ended up going to San Francisco State? Oh, you mean in the summer?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: In the summer. And they directed me because I had never heard of College of Marin.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Exactly, and then you went to the College of Marin from there?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And you enrolled there for two years, is that right?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: It actually was probably closer to three or two-and-a-half years.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Okay, and that was an AA program that you were in?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yes, indeed, that's all—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Okay, in art?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —what they do still do now, just an associate arts.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And from there, you went?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I took a year off, *más o menos*. I worked as a housekeeper.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Hence your grandmother—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, well [they laugh]—well, sort of but not sort of, because it was—I had never lived in a house where sheets were actually changed. And I took care—

[00:30:01]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: [Laughs.] Like regular?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —of a little girl. Yeah, like bedsheets, right. So I thought they had to be changed every single day, whereas my employer said, "No, no, no, no, no, you just change them like once a week," you know? I didn't know. She says, "Change the sheets," so I changed the sheets, so I changed the sheets every day, you know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Every day, right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And she had a young daughter who was about six, who came from her—the bus dropped her off, and it was an apartment building. And so, you know, so I picked her up, you know, at school because, you know—at the bus stop, and so—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And so you look after her?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I just sort of kept—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Were you actually her guardian? Were you like her babysitter for a while?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, I was there until her mother came home from work. Her mother worked at a place called Zack's. It was a hamburger joint. Her mother was a bookkeeper there and so that's—so I just sort of kept her daughter safe and, you know, did whatever was necessary around the house. And still going to college, you know, going to the College of Marin, which—living in Sausalito, and the College of Marin was in Kentfield.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So at College of Marin, you studied painting?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I got my AA in painting, in art.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Okay, in painting. What were the different art classes you took while you were enrolled there?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, gosh, I'm—Edwin Cadogan, who—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Can you spell that?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Edwin and then Cadogan, C-A-D-O-G-O-N [ph]. He and his wife now have the Cadogan Awards, which are given out I think by—this is CCAC or it might be San Francisco Art Institute. But Mr. Cadogan, who's a big, hulky man, had been to Mexico several times and he took me under his wing just—this is. like, where it's hard for—because there was a time within the Chicano movement about hating all sorts of white people. But I found it very hard because I had white people all along the way who were knowledgeable, who actually assisted me in their generosity and in their vision, I think, in many ways.

But Mr. Cadogan—and I took, like, a painting class from him. I did, I took a painting class. But this was a time where you had to build your own canvases, so we had to go out and somehow or other it was sold on campus, I can't remember it. Bought one-by-twos to make a frame and learned how to use wood pins, you know, to keep the things together, and bought canvas also. I think it was all available at the bookstore for us but the—they were—we bought, you know, like from a roll, a big roll piece of—and stretched. We were shown, or I can't remember if we bought it, canvas stretchers or these big clamps that you had to hold down, and then you had tacks, and you nailed them down to stretch your canvases good and tight. And they had to be good and tight along the seam of the cloth. So, you know, we all had to be—did one and then you flipped it over and did the other end to make sure that the seam was—you know, that they were both, you know, along the same bias line.

And the other part was—and this is where [laughs] I had done that. I had a stretched canvas. He invited me to come down to his workshop, and he was going to show me how to boil rabbit-skin glue, which was used as a sealer from the canvas to the primer. So he had the rabbit-skin glue, which is all these little granules in a pot of water. And he had to take a phone call. So he was taking the phone call, and I wasn't doing anything, just watching, and I guess I must have stirred the pot or something anyhow, because they had to all dissolve, and I didn't know—and I saw

that the water had run out, so I turned off—I think I turned off the fire, and I thought it was done. So it was all these little sticky granules. [Laughs.] So I took a spoonful out, and I put the canvas down and I started—I put a spoonful of these translucent granules on the canvas trying to rub them into the canvas.

[00:35:06]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: [Laughs.] Oh, that's so funny.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And when he finally came, he was a little bit—you know, I obviously did not understand that they all had to dissolve.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right. [Laughs.]

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And then they were painted on. The glue was painted on. But I remember that quite vividly.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: He must have thought it was kind of sweet, right? Because—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I have no idea. I kept thinking—he was like, "Oh, my God," sort of thing for a minute, you know, because I think it was just sort of unexpected on his part.

And eventually, and I can't remember if it was that day or a few days later, he gave me an envelope, and it said that I had won a scholarship. And there was my name across the front of the—just a plain envelope, and inside the envelope—there was no note—was a $20 bill and a $10 bill. And it wasn't till years later that I understood that he said I won the scholarship, but it was—he was offering me a fund, money to buy supplies, because it was meant to be to buy supplies. Because I had no income other than my uncle was supporting me primarily through his tips from being a hairdresser. Because he says, "We'll live on tips," and, you know, fine with me. [Laughs.] I had no inkling of what money was about. I had no inkling about what money was about. So anyhow.

And it wasn't, like I said, till years and years later that I realized that this was a gift from him, which he said it was a scholarship that I had won. And I always said, "Oh, wow, this is great," and I did—you know, I did spend it on—he said it was for art supplies, and that's what I did spend it on. And anyhow, so it was—and he was very kind, and he was a good teacher. I learned a lot from him. Like I said, he started out with the basics, you know.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: What other classes did you take when you were there? Do you remember?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I took something about Crotty. I can't remember what his first name—but I met his son—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Not Russell?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —who was an adult. Russell Crotty?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Was his son?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Was his son. And I'm trying to think of what his dad's name was, but he taught drawing. So I taught—I had a good drawing class from Mr. Crotty, and he also—and I was trying to understand what he said, and I guess I didn't quite understand. My drawings turned out pretty good, but I didn't quite understand what he was telling me as far as the drawing, what he wanted me to look at in the drawing.

Because I was a natural drawer, there was not a lot of analysis that went on in my head. You know, if I saw it, I could draw it. Period. And not much between the process of it at all. And he was trying to teach me the process, and he had a hard time with it. I think I got a C, and I think that's the first time I'd ever gotten a C in an art class, [laughs] you know? I said, "What?" But I think he did give me a C. And I did struggle. I did struggle trying to understand what it was he was telling me. And even to this day, I'm not sure exactly what it was that he was trying to convey to me. But I think he was primarily a printmaker, but he was teaching drawing at the time. Ralph? No, no, that was Ralph Putzker. I can't remember, but he did—I can't remember his first name, but Crotty. But I did meet his son later.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: What did Putzker teach?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Putzker taught basic drawing.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Also? Okay.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And one of the good things—or he taught general art skills, but he also taught lessons, and what I learned from—or maybe it was Ralph—they were good friends, Ralph Storey and Ralph—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Jim Storey.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Jim Storey and Ralph Putzker were good friends, and they were in and out, both, of each other's classes. And I was—one of our problems, I think it was probably in Mr. Putzker's class, was to do a drawing, you know, a simple pencil drawing. It was not charcoal, so, you know, it was a controlled drawing. And he kept—it was a set of keys, that's what it was. And Mr. Putzker was very surprised that I could actually draw because it was just, you know, like putting down a set—that I could draw a set of keys, and they made sense. One overlapped the other and one went to one side. And they would—I don't know what other students did, but he was amazed for some reason that my—that it was what it was, you know, that you could actually see. And he had me drawing something else, and I don't know if it was the keys, but I remember the keys that he had me drawing and his remark on that.

But he had me drawing something, and it was, you know, like, "Yeah!" And he said, "Keep drawing, keep drawing, more, more, more! Keep drawing, keep"—and I kept—and I didn't know what else to do. I kept drawing until the drawing was just ruined. It was totally overworked, and I knew it was ruined, and he knew it.

[00:40:17]

And he came to me, he said, "That is your lesson." He said, "You have to know when to stop." So that was the lesson that he was teaching me. He said, "You have to know when to stop," and he kept pushing me to keep drawing, keep drawing, keep drawing, until the whole thing looked just awful. But that was his lesson. And I never forgot it because—and I often teach, not necessarily that type of lesson, but I teach to my students, "You have to know when to stop." And it's not always easy to know when to stop, but it is a quality and when you're doing an artwork, that there is an element of time and work that you have to know, you have to be aware of when to stop. So that was an important lesson that I learned from him.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Beautiful.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But that's—and he—you know, that's basic. He taught other things, and I can't remember but those—are the—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That's great. Wonderful.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That's the lesson that I did learn from him, both with his commentary about the keys and that they had made—he was surprised that they made sense. [Laughs.] Just give it, show it to me, and I can draw it, you know? So I guess that's—so anyhow.

But at the College of Marin I took an astronomy class, and I took a geology class. Both of them, again, gave me a worldview that was quite different, especially the geology class, which is all about Earth, you know, and the—and so I learned about, you know, different kinds of rocks. You know, I forget what they're called. You know, rocks made out of fire and melted rocks and sediment and all those kinds of things, which I know, but I can't remember right now. And then all of a sudden, I saw the earth as a moving thing. And understanding, like, earthquakes as well, you know, and how it's that the earth is always moving. And from that time, when I was about 19 and taking that class, that all of a sudden, I saw the earth as sort of almost like a breathing entity, which I never understood, even though—and especially in conjunction with teaching like *The Web of Life* that all of a sudden that sort of began to sort of fill in a picture of the world for me.

And also in astronomy, I failed—or, I didn't fail, but I did not do well in astronomy because my math was not very good. My algebra, unfortunately. I loved algebra in high school, took it as a voluntary class but once I fell behind, there was nobody to help me at home. And once you get behind in algebra, the class keeps moving and then I—you know, I think they gave me a D. The teacher gave me a D mostly out of just—she knew that I was really, really trying, but it just wasn't—I didn't have the support anywhere to continue with it, but I really—and I took plane

geometry, which I loved as well.

But these are all, like, classes that—even though those are in high school, but the geology and the astronomy made me look at the world. It filled out other aspects of the world that, to this day, make me effect—like talking about climate change. I mean, they all just sort of fit in for me little by little. It's not something that was just one big revelation, you know? And especially things that I really liked about astronomy, with the whole idea of dead reckoning and how the so-called explorers from Europe came, you know, without any other electronic instruments, by just looking at the stars and sextants and all that, how to cross using the North Star and, you know, other constellations and how to cross these vast oceans by looking at the stars.

It was less of a mystery for me, and again, a sort of signpost. That the earth has signposts, you know. And that the earth itself has a rotation. I understood eclipses, and I understood that there were other planets out there, and I understood what the Milky Way is. And nowadays, even like with Stephen Hawking talking about that there are black holes, which interest me quite a lot right now—and the idea of gravity, that in between you and I, Jennifer, it's not empty space, because the space between you and I is gravity, you know?

[00:45:00]

And all of that, it's just building on my worldview of what began, you know, many, many decades ago when I was a young child, but I continue to remember. You know, I continue to remember that. And to a certain degree, it sort of has convinced me of things like—what I sort of work now with is genetic memory and the idea of being an indigenous person. Somebody asked me something about me the other day, and I said, "First of all, I define myself as—now, I'm beginning to think about defining myself as an indigenous person, an indigenous person of this continent, and of the earth." And I'm an indigenous person that grew up in a place called San Diego that was 10 minutes from the international border that was—it's sort of like when I begin to talk, I begin to see the artificiality of how Western culture is so unconnected to our actual lives.

That the idea of being an indigenous person, growing up in San Diego, 10 minutes from the border, joining the Chicano art—joining the movement, you know, the Chicano movement, joining the civil rights movement—that it all begins to—I understand the artificiality of it, but I also understand myself as being part of this Earth. Just like I was saying, you know, they inculcated in me being an American citizen, being part of this nation, being part of the Constitution, that they can't shake it for me anymore. You know, there's—I'm not a victim but this—when I stand, when I stand and when I do an artwork, I stand with my feet on the ground. This is where I am, I know who I am, you know, and this—you can't—how can I say it?—you can't dislodge me. Because I'm so embedded that it can't be—you can't take away my love of this country. You can't take away my love of being part of this indigenous part of the Earth, you know.

And this is why, like, the whole idea of Manifest Destiny, which is not only perverse—I think it's pornographic. And we have not talked about the idea of—and I mentioned it in my cards that the idea of the Manifest Destiny is pornographic in relationship to the Earth and to Mother Nature. It is—there is no other word for it that I can think of. We need to dismantle it, disregard it, throw it out the door, say how shameful and evil it is. And totally a lie. You know, I mean, it's not even a lie. It's just a total ignorance, it's a totally false—not even truth. It's such a false way of looking at the world that we teach our children this, you know? We have to, at some point, really stand up and fight for that. And that's part of, like, what the *Who's the Illegal Alien* is. That's part of *The Nanny* that we just saw there, you know, that there is no distinction, you know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I'm going to jump in because our listeners won't know that we just looked at *The Nanny*.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, okay.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And so I want to come back to—maybe we could do a brief move up. I want to look at the period between your AA and BFA.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I never got a BFA.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That's what I thought. That's what I—it wasn't in any of the things that I read. You go to get your MFA much later.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yes.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So you go—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I could tell you that right now.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So what I have in my—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Quickly, I'll try quickly.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: What I have in my notes is, you know, you move to the Bay Area, you get educated in terms of art school, the AA degree, and then according to my notes, we have a sort of Third World Liberation Front—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That's right.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —and Los Siete, and it was—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That's when I went to move to San Francisco.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —comes in right at that moment. So maybe we could talk a little bit about that and your own son and your family that happens before you get your MFA, that period.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah. No, no, no, no. My son was after graduation.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Okay, after your MFA? Okay, right. Okay.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That was the next step.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right, okay. So then, let's go through—what happens with Third World Liberation and the Chicana-Chicano movement and Los Siete?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Okay. I graduate—you want—should I—are you recording?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I am.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Okay. I got my AA degree, also after having read *The Catcher in the Rye* because that came out about that time, that era in the early '60s. I read all of Salinger's books at the time that were published.

[00:50:10]

In the meantime, I had moved to my—to the woman who was hiring me as a housekeeper, her home. And then from there, I moved to the city. And my sister, younger sister, María, had come up from—because my uncle thought, "Well, let's bring up another"—you know, trying to sort of, you know, send another one on her way to college. And I moved to San Francisco in an SRO, single-room hotel, run by a little Mexican family, the Cherrington Hotel.

And my sister found a job at the Golden Gate Theatre as an usherette. She says, "They're hiring," so I went to the Golden Gate Theatre, and I was hired as is as a candy stand worker. And that's when—once I started—the first couple of weeks—because both of us had gone without food, literally without food, so it was popcorn. [Laughs.] And they counted—they sold hotdogs, so we ate a lot of hotdogs, because they only counted the buns. The buns is where—they realized where the money—like, they—you had six buns, you know, and, you know, whatever, that's how they calculated the money. The hotdogs themselves were [laughs]—so hotdogs and popcorn until the first check came.

And I managed to enroll myself at State College, and that must have been around 1964 or ['6]5, ['6]5, probably around 1965. The Beatles, hippies, the growing of the hippies, the British invasion, changing of clothing, changing of hair, looking at macrobiotic foods, and being—all those young white people coming to San Francisco. The Beat generation was dead and gone. The rise of rock and roll music, the rise of the wah-wah pedal, the rise of even—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Jimi Hendrix.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Pardon?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I said Jimi Hendrix.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, yeah, Jimi Hendrix, and I went to see—he was alright. He was good, he was good, but he was—you know? It's sort of like liking Prince now. Most people don't see Prince, you know, unless you went to see Jimi Hendrix or Prince at a concert, you know? Whereas someone like Janis Joplin worked down at the Avalon Theater, or even like with The Doors came through the Fillmore, so you could go to—you know, you pay your three bucks and go in and listen to The Doors play a 20-minute session of "Light My Fire," which was just terrific. [Laughs.] But it was—you know, it's very—Jimi Hendrix was, you know, sort of a spectacular act on his own, just like Prince is a spectacular act on his own. But there was like—and this is where Santana was beginning to—the Tuesday night bands, you would go for a dollar, and you'd see whatever was local, and one of those people was Santana. And go see the Grateful Dead. I mean, these were all like regular house bands. That's why it's all sort of amazing that all of a sudden, like, these people became so famous, you know? And yes, I saw Janis Joplin, yes, I saw Jerry Garcia, I saw him coming out. But it was—you know, it was like—you know, I don't know. They were not—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: It was just part of the scene.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —spectacular. They were not stars, you know. Or they had their—I'm sure all of them had their groupies one way or another. But it was—nobody was goggly-eyed [ph] about them at all, you know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And so you loved to go to concerts at this time?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Absolutely. I went to the—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And how did you start—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —the Fillmore on Fillmore, and then they moved over to—the Fillmore, whatever it was, West, on Van Ness and Market or wherever that was.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Wasn't the Fillmore neighborhood originally like an African American neighborhood?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: It is. Well, it's still vestiges of it.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: It still is.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right, what was—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And that's where urban renewal came. They didn't wipe out the Fillmore, but they—that's where all those amazing, you know, dilapidated and, you know, needed—all these Victorians needed help, you know, as far as like, repair and whatnot.

[00:55:05]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I was just thinking about the cultural hub—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yes, no, it's barbecue places—you could go in barbecue places. There were jazz clubs there. I was not into jazz. I was a rocker for sure. I saw the—I mean, we saw everybody there, you know. Eric Clapton, and—you know, I hear drum solos now, and I think of Ginger Baker, you know. I said, "That's enough." You know, like these guys get carried away but they were drum solos and saw—even Andy Warhol came out with his traveling—I can't even remember what the—something or other. I can't even remember what it was called, and—what's his name—Nicole [ph] or the—his girl singer, you know? And he's the one that—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Nico.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Nico. And he's the one that—actually because—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: The Velvet Underground.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's it. The Velvet Underground. Saw them—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative], with Lou Reed.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —there and it—because it was a small space there, and it was an intimate

space.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So who were you going to these concerts with? On your own? With friends?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I went on my own. What do you mean, who I was going with?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I don't know.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I needed a date? Give me—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: No.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —a break. See that's the great thing about that era, is that it wasn't like a dating culture. It was more of a generational connection.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: People would just show up and—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: No, not just people—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —come in?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —but it was like, somebody who's about your age and looked about your—you know, both of you wearing Salvation Army clothes or wearing Army surplus jackets or, you know, Vietnam boots, you know, combat boots. I mean, there was a certain way of identifying each other. So it was more like a group dating, in that sense.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah, sure.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But it was not like who you went for. I didn't have girlfriends. I didn't know anybody, didn't have boyfriends. I just went and felt perfectly at home. We all went. You didn't need a partner to dance. You just went out and did your, you know, little hippie thing and danced free floating out on the—on down there. People were loaded. I didn't do drugs, but people were loaded. So it was—even at the Avalon, I remember being kind of surprised, and these people in—a man and a woman in a corner. And the woman is sitting straddled next to the man against the wall, and she's going up and down, and suddenly, it dawned on me that that was—they were having sex. [They laugh.] But that was, you know—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Sure, right, that could happen.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That happened, you know? I mean, they were dressed and all that, you know? She had her granny dress on, and he had whatever it was, and he just had to unzip his pants, you know, so she's doing all the work. But, you know, all that stuff went on, you know, without being showy about it. It was just—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Sure.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: It was like somebody necking in the corner, you know? Presumably, they knew each other before they went in. [Laughs.] I think so. It was just to the music.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So it sounds like a totally fun, absolute blast, actually. It'd be great to see those amazing bands.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, it was, for me—for me, it was—I felt safe. I felt safe. The whole era, as brief—and I tell you, it was brief. It lasted maybe a year and a half. It was brief, but I think all of us felt safe. I had people come up to me and said, you know, "I need 15 more cents to get on the bus, can you help me?" I gave him 15 cents. If I needed 20 cents, I could ask somebody, and I said, "Could you—I'm short 20 cents, can you help me with that?" They gave me 20 cents. Never saw them again, didn't owe them anything, and just—it was that kind of—this was like where people in the—young people in the Haight were being arrested. Food not Bombs for feeding people, you know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And how much do you feel, like, that related to a kind of anti-Vietnam sentiment? How did the Vietnam War play into the community formation that you're talking about? Like, you were talking about, well, we had boots, we had surplus jackets. Because this was actually during the war.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That's right.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right? The period you're talking about.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: When did the war end? Tell me. I told you before. When did the war end?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: [Laughs.] Vietnam?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Vietnam, yes. When did the war end?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: '75?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That's right.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Good.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: 1975, yes, the war ended, and I was already in San Diego when it ended.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: By then, right. But we're talking about a period—I mean, it was long.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yes, indeed.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: We're talking about a period, right, and you—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And there were, like, GIs Against the War, Swords Into Ploughshares.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: How did this relate to the Third World Liberation Front?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Because—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I mean, did they relate? What was the—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: It was like—it's hard to explain, Jennifer, because there was—we were of a generation—I am convinced we—and most San Franciscans hated us. There was no—I see these little nostalgia things for tourists. They hated us. The straight community in San—or the white guys—would beat up a young white guy in his skinny jeans because he had hair down, and they say, "Oh, we can't tell if you're a man or a woman," you know, from the back. Because part of it was if they found somebody attractive with beautiful hair, and they found him attractive, and then you turn around and you find out that it's a young guy with a beard and a mustache or just a young man, they got angry. They felt like they were fooled.

[01:00:30]

So that as a generation, we were part of that generation. God knows how we became who we were, but we were probably better—we were, indeed, better educated than our parents, and most likely better educated than the general population. I can't explain it. Part of that is like a philosophical and ethical reinforcements by the culture. And it wasn't a culture like us, whether it was—like talking with my friend Donna Amador, who was the editor of the *¡Basta Ya!,* and I worked with her for Los Siete—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Can you spell Bastian [ph]?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: *¡Basta Ya!*

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: *¡Basta Ya!*?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: *¡Basta Ya!*. Yeah, *Basta*, B-A-S-T-A, *Ya*, separate word, exclamation point on both ends. That was the newspaper for Los Siete. And I told her, I said, "You know"—we were talking a little bit about this, about music, and she said that there was a whole cultural environment supporting the movement, as it were. The antiwar movement, the cultural movement. It wasn't just one thing. It was food. The farmworkers fed into it, talking about pesticides—that the owners would rain down pesticides from their little planes while the workers were still in the field working, and where Chávez and Huerta talked about the pesticides in the food, where all of a sudden it's like—that filtered into—like with the grape boycott talking about —

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YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —relooking at the food and what we're being fed. So all of that was, you know—like macrobiotic things. Yoga became more—we became aware of yoga. Hermann Hesse, who was a Buddhist of sorts, you know, and even though he—I think his first book was in 1917, his books were all revived in the late '60s. I read all the books, everything from *The Bead Game* to *Steppenwolf* to—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: *Siddhartha.*

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, I loved *Siddhartha*. You know, again the story of Buddha. And so we all read that. And the Tolkien, the stories, all of that became—when we say, "Where did it come from? How did it figure out into the Vietnam War?" All of that began to philosophically and ethically—see, I keep saying "ethically," because we don't talk about ethics now, you know. But ethically, it—we all were—and there's a certain degree of accord. We were all raised to be American citizens, and we were all raised—especially all of us more or less coming out of the aftermath of World War II—very patriotic. And we had uncles and brothers and whatever coming out of World War II and going into the Korean War. My uncle was in the Korean War not understanding why or what he was there, but having his life threatened.

There was also—you have to remember, Jennifer, there was also the anticommunist scare during this—during the '50s. And here in San Francisco in 19—what—'61, '62, they were—they had the House Un-American Activities Committee, HUAC, meeting downtown San Francisco at City Hall, meeting and holding forth. And protestors from—there was also some labor activity going on at Berkeley and having—mostly Berkeley students coming here and doing sit-ins regarding HUAC, and then the police coming in and grabbing these young people by both legs and hauling them down, *dong, dong, dong,* on their spines and on their backs down those marble stairs. We saw it on TV. You know, we also saw on TV the shooting in the head—the shooting of civilians in the—old women pleading not to have their little thatch huts burnt down, you know, and holding on to their baby grandchildren, because the men were, you know, somewhere else or already dead. We saw all that on TV, so it was not a big mystery.

And the thing is, with this whole panorama of events around us, and being, like I said—getting back to Donna, Donna Amador, talking about—I told her, I said, "'Light My Fire.' Nobody talks about it." To me, the idea of "Light My Fire" was a call to arms. What is it? I can't remember what the words are. The—something—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: The Doors song?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: [Sings] "I wouldn't say the truth, come on baby, light my fire. No need to"—I mean, "You can't get much higher," you know? "Our love"—and our love for us, it was a large love. It wasn't just romantic love. See, that's what people—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That's how they read the song now, yeah.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Now. Not just romantic love, but it was, "Our love couldn't get much higher." And, you know, "So we can throw ourselves into the pyre." But that was all a reinforcement to continue on to the good fight, to the good fight. And the anti-communist scare along with McCarthy and I forgot the name of that wonderful judge. She says, you know, "Have you no decency in going about this?" I think this is what Pelosi did the other day where she says, you know, one was, "Don't put words in my mouth, don't say I hate him," and the other thing is, you know, "We have to go on with this procedure because of the Constitution." She's not talking about party because she's more or less the head of the—runs the party right now. She's not talking about that. She's talking about an ethical stance.

And it's very—and she's, what, she's 79. She's only two years older than I am, and I'm sort of the older part of the cohort of Boomer. Some say, "Oh, you're not a Boomer." I said, "Forget you, I am." You know, I'm totally immersed in that whole—regardless of whatever the historians say, I'm a Boomer. So that it was—everything enforced the—it was revolution. And some say, "Oh, your revolution failed." I don't think so, because the revolution comes in increments.

[00:05:07]

And the other thing is, my generation right now, we're still alive. We're wearing white hair. We're not dying or crinkling or curling our hair. We're proudly wearing our white hair, you know. I kind of like it a lot. But there's a lot—you start looking at people my age, you know, after 60, they're

wearing their white hair [laughs], you know, and black turtlenecks, you know, whatever. [Laughs.] So it's sort of like almost a uniform for the older generation, you know?

So the Vietnam War was part and parcel of that. It was the larger picture of all of that.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Could you move your microphone slightly?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Sure. I don't—which direction?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Just slightly to the side. Because when you bend down to talk, it rubs—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, it scrapes?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: It just rubs. Great, great. Let's keep going. So I didn't want to interrupt, but I was hearing that repeatedly, so I wanted to move it.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But the thing is, that's—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So Third World Liberation Front was where we were headed.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Okay, so when I graduated from the College of Marin and went to go live in that wonderful little hotel, the Cherrington—one room with a sink in the corner. I made my hot instant coffee by turning on the hot water to make my coffee. Started taking classes there, got a job at the movie theater, so I worked at night and worked on weekends, and went to school. And the convocation, the strike—there was a lot of stuff, and I didn't follow it all, to tell you the truth. You know, it was just sort of like ear noise to some degree.

There was a sit-in that happened in April of 1968, which was Latino students, and they were sitting in I think working for EOP, Educational Opportunity Program monies. And I thought, "How embarrassing. You're asking for monies to go to school?" I was embarrassed. I was truly embarrassed. Plus I also saw the—oh, the Black civil rights movement, excuse me. [Laughs.] I saw primarily the civil rights movement, or what they were doing was—that these Latino students for EOP was—you know, I said, "What do you—you know, what are you talking about, being oppressed?" You know, I only saw the racism within a Black context. So that's where I was. And I just sort of creeped by the administration building going to my art classes, which again I was being ignored anyhow. I wasn't one of the pretty girls that the predatory male art teachers vamped on while they were—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: This is at San Francisco State now?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yes, ma'am, San Francisco State, yes, yes, indeed. And at one point, one of the counselors pulled me. Mr.—I forgot his name—called me in and he had a sign right above his desk, it said, "Go to hell," which I don't know what that was about. Don't ask me, but that's what he had. He told me that I needed to graduate, that I would not be graduating in a wheelchair, so that I needed to take more classes. And because I was working full time—and it's a commuter school, so taking the M car to school—and I had to be at work I think at four, so I had to leave the school around 3:30, so my school day sort of was somewhere between nine and three, whatever classes I could take.

So they—so there was all the hooty-hooty [ph] about the strike. And I went to the congregation to find out what was going on. That was in November of 1968 and so all the Third World strike leaders were there at the time: Roger Alvarado, Benny Andrews —golly gee—Tony Martinez, no less. And all men, Black and Brown men, and I think even an Asian guy—I don't remember who it was these days—but talking about the education that they had gotten. Nesbit Crutchfield was one of the men that was there, and Crutchfield talking about how they did a genealogy of—I don't think he called it genealogy, but like, where your parents were born. And he had felt like he had to crawl underneath his desk because he had no idea where his grandparents or great-grandparents, where in the origin of Europe [laughs] his family came to the US. So I think—and probably knowing whatever he learned about slavery on his own, you know, all of the men there.

[00:10:10]

And then they had Dr. Smith, Bob Smith, who was head of the school, president or whatever he was at the school, saying—he listened to them very kindly and then at one point said, "Well, golly gee, you just have to buck up, you know, pull up your socks, wipe your noses on your shirt sleeve, and let's go on. You made your piece. You've said it with—we will—slavery is being

taught in history classes." You know, it's like maybe two paragraphs or one page in the history book, but it's being taught and it's being taught, you know, here and there. There is no coherent thing. And nothing about Chinese history in San Francisco. All of that was just taught, you know, a little paragraph here and there essentially. I mean, literally.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right. I believe you.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Literally paragraph here and there, and he was telling them, "You know, it's being taught, don't worry, don't"—you know, he was essentially trying to calm everybody, "Don't worry, don't worry." But that is not what the students were talking about. They were talking about having a department, having faculty, educated faculty, who knew the history, could teach the history. And it was at that point, and me in the congregation and I'm listening to all of this and—because actually, when I was at the College of Marin, I did join the Young Democrats. And the Young Democrats morphed into SNCC or SDS? SDS, I think. Student Nonviolent—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Students for a Democratic Society?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: No, or Student—I think it might have been—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Who sent—I can't remember. I think it was the SNCC probably. It was sent—because we sent students to go ride the buses—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah, that's right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —for voter registration. Was that SNCC?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, so we actually—and I had a couple of friends who came back totally shell-shocked from that.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I'm sure.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But so the Young Democrats morphed into that at the College of Marin. And then we actually sponsored the Communist Party—ha, ha!—to come and speak at the College of Marin. And his name was Gus Hall who was the head of the Communist Party, CPUSA, at least in San Francisco. He was the grayest, most uninteresting, boring speaker. He had a gray suit on, and he's just a gray little tubby man, and no fire, no sense of real conviction. He had his chance, but such a disappointment for all of us to listen to him. So it was all like, "Let's go back to SNCC." [Laughs.] And that the CPUSA was dead as a log in January, you know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So okay, I think—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: So—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I feel like we have covered so much wonderful territory here. I'm wondering if we want to—it's getting late.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But I joined the strike essentially.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Okay. So you joined the Third World Liberation Front.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I walked out.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: You walked out.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: The students from the stage said, "If you want to follow us"—they went up the center aisle, and I stood there like, "Oh, what am I going to do?" I ended up walking out with them.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And so that's when you quit school?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That's when I quit school. I didn't realize it at the time, but yes, I did quit school, never went back to class.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That's a great story, actually. I'm going to put it on pause right there.

Okay? All right, great.

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[00:00:04]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: This is Jennifer González with Yolanda López on December eighth. Yolanda, tell me a little bit about Los Siete. Who were they? What did they do? What was that group about?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: One of the things that came out of the State strike, because it ended somewhere also in early 1969 after concessions and whatnot all the way around—but several of us who had not known each other, and it was word of mouth that there was a group forming in the Mission, of Latinos, to see what we could do. You know, I had no agenda. Other people did. They were smarter than me. And there was a couple of meetings that I went to, and I can't remember what it was called. Somebody else remembers that. They were Latinos for Justice, something like that, or Latinos something or other.

And I used the word "Latinos" because we were not Chicanos. I think that's really important to understand. And we also called ourself *raza*, R-A-Z-A, *la raza*, which was also important because we, I think, collectively understood that that was a broader designation, but it was also a larger racial and ethnic configuration of some sort, you know. *La raza cósmica* you know? And I think—what's his name, that beautiful handsome guy that wrote *I am Joaquin*? Anyhow, so there was all of that sort of—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: The *El Teatro Campesino* leader? Oh, no, he didn't write *I am*—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: He is from Denver, I think.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Corky.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Corky Gonzales.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Corky Gonzales wrote—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: God, he was handsome. Short, but God, he was handsome. [They laugh.] So that hadn't been quite written yet and it—I think it was in the process of being filmed because we finally saw it, but we saw it about maybe two years later, *I am Joaquin*. Which had a big impact, I think, on Chicanos and Latinos in California, for sure.

So the group met at St. Peter's Hall, which is right in the middle of the Mission. It's a Catholic parochial school. And in fact, I go there once a week to pick up—they also manage the food bank in the Mission, one of the food banks in the Mission, so I got there every week to pick up my groceries. So there was a big meeting. Not a big—I mean, we were like—it was, God, maybe at most 10 people. At most 10 people there, talking about—because there had been in the newspaper an incident that happened just up the street on Alvarado Street here in the—just above near Noe Valley, between the Mission and Noe Valley, of an undercover cop being killed. And it turned out he was shot with his partner's gun.

They had pulled up in a pickup truck, a white pickup—sort of a slightly beat-up pickup truck. Because they had seen these young Latin guys out on the sidewalk with a TV. And there was maybe, I don't know, maybe four young men who were probably in their 17-, 18-year old—something like that. And they were in the process of taking either—I can't remember whether they were taking the TV out of this guy's house or they were taking it into his house. But either way, in 1969, you see a Latino with a TV—this was before portables and all that other stuff—out on the sidewalk, it was obviously a burglary going on. So they pulled up, and they started questioning and actually roughhousing the young men. And this was fairly common in the Mission, and the Mission pretty much—the Mission neighborhood pretty much gritted our teeth but tolerated it. You know, that that was sort of like what the world was. And, you know, there was a lot of really intense racism within the Mission.

The Mission had gone through a lot of permutations before the indigenous people who lived there, and I don't even know—they weren't—I don't think they were the Ohlone, but it may have been, but there were a lot of different names. There were the Miwok, they were—or the Herok [ph]. There were a lot of, you know, ethnic native Californians that lived around.

[00:05:13]

And that there was a lot of industrial sluice that were used to sift the dirt that was brought in from the 1849 Gold Rush. So the sluice were to separate the gold from the dirt, and there was also—there was a lot of fish and salmon in the bay, so there was a lot of—there were several canning facilities along the bay, you know, processing fish for canning. There was a lot of sort of industry already around the area. And there were—it was also like the—there were some Chinese had come out and had truck farms. You know what a truck farm is?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Sure.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah. Truck farms. And the Chinese would wagon their things down what's now Mission Street into the downtown to sell their vegetables and whatnot. And there was a whole bunch of Irish that settled in what we now call the Mission. In fact, there are still vestiges of it mostly in Irish bars, the Dovre Club, Clooney's, the Irish Rover. So there was that population. And within that population, there was a lot of Irish who had become part of the police department and part of the fire department. And it was what everybody knew and called the Irish mafia. And they pretty much had whatever they wanted, and they were not particular to the Irish but I think particular of Europeans, highly angry and resentful as far as native peoples.

And I think with Mexicans, they saw us as half-breeds. Nobody uses the term "half-breed" anymore, but I see a lot of old cowboy movies, and every now and then there'll be the idea of the half-breed as really a despicable, nowhere type of person or a culture. So there was a lot of anger by the white sort of establishment, institutional establishment, and particularly the police department in the Mission. And they picked up our young men and literally beat them. And the northern station was just—it's about four blocks—three blocks from here.

So I learned what the word "impunity" means. So they acted pretty much the way they wanted to. And one of the young men and I—we all suspect who it was because he was—he wasn't going to take any guff, and he was the tallest of the young men. And they say that he spoke back and—anyhow they're—a shoving match. A shoving match turned into a scuffle, and the police—the policeman—one of the policeman's gun shot his partner. And who did it? Who knows, you know? Because the young men were not armed.

And so then a big thing in the newspaper, you know, "Hippie Punks Kill Hero Cop." And this was one of the most brutal policemen [laughs] on the force. So there was this big manhunt. They eventually caught them about a week later in Santa Cruz and brought them back. But in the meantime, they said there were seven, but in truth, there were at least three who were not there at the time, but they were included in the Los Siete group.

And I think with us in just meeting at St. Peter's there—since Roger Alvarado, who was one of the leaders of the Third World strike, who was this brilliant humanitarian, really, and man, he was the one that said, "We've got to help." The Panthers had offered to help us with some money to get a newspaper started and to—they offered their lawyer, Charles—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: The Black Panthers?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —Garry. Of the Panthers, excuse me, yeah. They offered their Panther who was defending Huey at the time, and Bobby. They offered their lawyer, Charles Garry, who was a famous, you know, civil rights lawyer to work. And Garry did not want to do it. He already felt overloaded, but he said, "Oh, all right," [laughs] you know.

[00:10:09]

But the group there said, "We can't accept help from the Panthers, we can't even be associated with the Panthers because nobody in the community will support us." Anyhow, so the group divided in half that same day at that same meeting, and so I ended up walking out with Roger Alvarado and Donna—who's called Donna Amador now with her married name, but I knew her then as Donna James. So Donna walked out, and had been helping Roger already, because she was one of the secretaries or something like that in the Third World strike. And he was, like I said, one of the great speakers of the Third World strike. So I walked out with them, and it was just the three of us. And there had already been a group.

And so that's—I didn't start Los Siete. There was also another group that started Los Siete and so Roger incorporated them, and he became the leader of Los Siete. And that's how the newspaper got started and so that's when I went to work with the newspaper. I had—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And the name of newspaper was?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Was the *¡Basta Ya!*—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: The *¡Basta Ya!,* right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: *¡Basta Ya!*, *¡Basta Ya!*—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Which you talked about then. Mm-hmm [affirmative], *¡Basta Ya!*

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Right. And I just came in on the second edition. And there was already a little—a tiny, little storefront—[phone rings] [Laughs.]

I say this because I think the origin to some degree, as little as I know about it, was important about Los Siete and why it came out and the fact that it did stem almost organically from the San Francisco State strike—ethnics studies Third World strike. And the idea of it being Third World means that it was sort of a—almost like a class recognition around the world. And, you know, obviously, there's a lot of Latinos who were racist and do not like to do—and there were several words for Black people in our language.

But there was—because Donna and Roger, and I myself even did come out of myself as the little person coming out of SNCC and the Young Democrats and, you know, all that—and sort of evolving into Los Siete, which was—it's like the Panthers. What nobody talks about is that the Panthers were basically Marxist, you know? And that probably terrifies a lot of people who—because we have this horrible stereotype of, God knows, Stalin and whatnot, and we had come out of this whole, you know, communism scare from HUAC. So it all fit in quite well, I think, for all of us. So that's where Los Siete got started.

Eventually, we modeled ourselves quite a lot—which, I think a lot of other organizations like the Young Lords in, what, Chicago? I can't even remember—like New York, anyhow—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: New York, I think.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, New York, and then Fred Hampton in Chicago. You know, we had a breakfast program. We had two breakfast programs. The San Francisco General Hospital, there were no translation services in any language other than English and so a lot of the secondary workers, supported by the nurses and the doctors, went on strike. So in conjunction with that, we opened up a clinic in the Mission—for free, you know—and the doctors were quite wonderful, very happy to provide service. And I think a lot of them learned, but a lot of them are also part of the civil rights movement. So there was already this whole big civil rights cadre and when I say cadre, I mean experienced people, you know, who were able to provide leadership and experience in the Mission. And we all came together, you know, and it was very exciting.

So, eventually, we had a small restaurant called The Basta Ya, which was next to the Levi Strauss building where, you know, Levis were originally designed and made, literally made. They had women out there at sewing machines and whatnot, making jeans and Levis. And we opened up a little restaurant next to that. And there was also legal aid office. So there was, I think—I can't even remember, I think like a six or seven or eight little storefronts that provided services that had never been provided before.

The good thing about that—because there was the War on Poverty after John F. Kennedy was assassinated, I think, in '63, and Lyndon Johnson came in saying he would follow the route of Kennedy, and there was the development of the War on Poverty. And some of that money was trickling down into the Mission, but it ended up being what we used to—disparagingly and we still do, to some degree—what we called poverty pimps, who knew how the federal government worked, knew how to write so-called grants with all the, you know, the services that—some got to the community, a lot of it not. But a lot of the money stopped right at their salaries. And they were very conservative.

[00:15:51]

And they found us, as Los Siete, very frightening because we were not paid. I had a job at the movies. I quit—I decided never to go back again to college because it was not a good education. I just thought I would never go back again to college. I was working at the movie theater still. You know, working at night and on weekends and having my days off, you know, which I loved a lot, Mondays and Thursdays. So—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So your involvement with Los Siete would happen during your days off, your time off.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, and my time off, yeah. Yeah, during the day.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And so even though the group was called Los Siete, it wasn't seven people. It was called Los Siete in memory of the men who had been wrongly accused?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: They were—but they were caught. They were arrested. You know, like I said, they were arrested in Santa Cruz.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative], you said—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Arrested in Santa Cruz and put in the San Francisco jail.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So they were still—so all seven of them were jailed?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: There were—yes. Oh, yeah, except one did escape. Gio López did escape to Cuba, managed to get his body on an airplane, and got there. I understand he still lives there, and he's like a professor of something or other there.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So the group Los Siete was named Los Siete because of the seven that were wrongly accused, six of whom were put into jail?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Right.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And at least three of them were not even on-site.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: But I'm trying to figure out the relationship between the group called Los Siete and the breakfast programs, the medical programs, poverty programs. I'm not really sure —

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, okay. This is where Donna—okay, where it ties in? This is where Donna is much more—because she—Donna was sort of like the administrator to a great degree. And I always see her with her clipboard on one arm and, you know, going around, keeping all the programs going. Because it was all volunteer.

Several of the young men were actually tutors at San Mateo City College, were already there, and not all the young men necessarily knew each other. Or they knew each other, you know, not necessarily, you know, as good friends, but they were acquaintances. So that there already was a program that the young men who were arrested were already part of. And so within that mix, there was already an understanding of how important education was and that there was already, like, a program that dipped into the community, bringing young people to school: City College, which was what we called a junior college then, but it was an entrée point into the larger college system.

And we knew also that the Panthers were being killed. I mean, just murdered, and totally a serious—and it's hard to believe, but a serious attempt to kill them off along with the institutions at whatever way possible. So there was among—because we worked, most of us came out of the State strike. There were a lot of covert—what I call covert Panthers. There were several men who were part of the San Francisco State strike who were either—knew a lot of the Panthers or were part of the Panthers, you know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Sure.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: So there was already that kind of friendship going on around it, and the *Chronicle* had talked about the breakfast program, and it was just so easy to recognize that we were not just about police brutality, that we were about providing services for our community. And we saw already the corruption beginning to happen with the War on Poverty and that there was—a lot of that money was not trickling down into the community.

[00:20:07]

There were no health services. A lot of what eventually became, like, the Mission health clinic was started with the clinic already, this ad hoc clinic. But it operated, it worked well, had

professional nurses and doctors and community people coming in and serving as clerks, as intake workers. I mean, it was a professionally run operation just like with—so there was—that's what I say, it was a cadre.

There was already a cadre of people waiting and yearning, and I'm talking across the board. White people, Black people, Latino people coming. That's why the Third World strike is so important, and it's a philosophical importance. So it wasn't just a *raza*. It wasn't just Chicanos coming, which was very different than the philosophical difference between Southern California and especially the Brown Berets, who were probably epitomized in many ways at that time. You know, the need—you got to speak Spanish—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: The nationalism. Chicano nationalism.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Chicano *mexicanos*, you got to be *mexicano*, "Are you ashamed of your culture?" sort of thing. And not to deal with the *mayates*, you know, that they were—you know, that they had their own struggle, they didn't include us and whatever. It was just like a lot of the kind of anger regarding Blacks and other people, so there wasn't that Third World sense of unity, and there wasn't that working-class sense of unity.

And the thing is that those of us who came out of the State strike understood very much the idea of working in coalition. And that's extremely important because there was also a group called the Red Guard that came out of the State strike. There was a Filipino group, which I can't remember, came out of the State strike. Leadership had already begun to develop there, so that there was a sense of, "No problem. You work"—you know, the Red Guard work among the Chinese: "You work there, and we work among the Latinos here." Neither the Red Guard nor us were interested in having white leadership. White people wanted to join, you can join, but you join at the helper level. You can, if you want to, advise, but you advise at the very, very low advisory level. You can bring in the crates from the trucks with the eggs and with the bacon and with the milk coming in.

But we were very, very wary about having white assistance. Because eventually, sooner or later, all of us in our varied experience in organizing, saw eventually the sifting of the leadership process. The whites ended up being at the top, or at least at the top advising and actually controlling, even though there might have been a Brown or another face to it. So we were very concerned, but we could work in coalition. We saw brothers and sisters. We were not interested in becoming the Black Panthers, we were not interested in becoming the Red Guard, we were not interested in—God, that wonderful white—the Young Patriots. We were not interested in working in Appalachia and helping them. You know, it was an understanding that we all had to work in our communities, but we could work together, and that's what the big difference was, I think, within a lot of the groups in Southern California that developed.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Interesting. Yeah, that's really interesting. And it maybe has to do with not only the kinds of histories that happened in the Bay Area but even [. . . -JG] about how groups come together or stay separated in Los Angeles or Southern California, San Diego compared to San Francisco and Oakland. That's really interesting.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And the word "Chicano" did not filter up to us necessarily. We knew of it, but the thing is like within—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Let's talk about that.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Within the brothers—what we call the brothers, the Los Siete—the brothers were *nicaragüense* and I think there was maybe one or two Hondurans. They were Central American. There was not one Mexican American in the Los Siete group. And I have to sort of emphasize that a little bit right now, because there is this whole sort of lament of wanting—Central Americans rightly so want to have their story told. And, you know, I tell them, you know, "You know, there was a group like Los Siete, you know, supporting Central American youth in this brutal environment that we lived in in the Mission," you know?

[00:25:07]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah. That's what Mauricio was probably asking about too.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yes, indeed, that's what he was asking about.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah, because I think that the history has been told in a very culturally

centric way.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Monochromatic. [Laughs.]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Well not necessarily monochromatic but there's definitely—I would say in the art literature, there's a sort of monocultural Chicano-Chicana-Chicanx focus within a certain strain of art historical writing, which is what comes out in the anthology that I published.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Interesting.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Because it makes sense to itself, so it's sort of self-organizing that way. And it's actually an artifact of a European way of thinking about understanding art practice being ethnically specific or ethnographically specific or potentially, in the case of the Chicano-Chicana movement, politically specific. And so I think it's really great to hear the complexity of the story.

Can we go to your own art practice and its relation and its emergence—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Sure.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —in the context of what we've just set out? You know, we've set out—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I came out to—I joined the picket line at State from the art department, which—I was ignored anyhow. [Laughs.] And already I had been told, you know, "Take your credits and get out of here. We don't supply wheelchairs when we give out diplomas." But when I joined Los Siete and the newspaper and working—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Can we go back to that just for a second?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Sure, what's up?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: You were at the San Francisco State University art department, and you were not supported by the faculty there.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, no. No, no, no.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Not in the way you had been supported at the College of Marin.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, well, that's true.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: You had been supported there, but at San Francisco State—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, yeah, because—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —what were the artistic—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Edwin Cadogan was, I think, the department chair, actually. As small as it was, but yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: In Marin?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: In Marin. I mean, my high school was bigger than the College of Marin at the time.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So going back to San Francisco State, you went in to finish your BA in fine art. You took art classes presumably?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I did.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: What was the difference in support in terms of the practice itself?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I went to, like, a painting class. I remember vividly the painting class. We had to buy—you know, I bought readymade canvases. At the time, there was a lot of Abstract Expressionism going on still, even though to me it was sort of like, already that era had passed. But still the teachers, the professors, were already still abuzz about it, that they saw it as part of the avant-garde. And so anybody who was trying to paint in sort of a realistic mode no matter what it was, a pot of flowers or people or whatever was sort of—and I was—I can't recall any other people of color within the class, to tell you the truth.

There were a lot of young women. I have to say there were a lot of young women in the art department, and I think there had been a lot of that kind of talk, the inverted pyramid. So at the bottom, you know, early, within the early parts of art classes and the sophomore to junior—and then as you got higher up, it just narrowed down. [Laughs.] And then the men became more the dominant as far as going into graduate school in the upper—in the senior years, they survived. But the men—the professor, the one professor, I think his name was Chamberlain, was a predator. I don't know if I should say that. But he, you know, was interested primarily in the pretty white girls in the classes. And I was not a pretty white girl. And so, you know, he just sort of like kept walking past [laughs] my—past whatever I was painting at the moment.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So you weren't getting the support you needed to your art practice—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: No, no, no, no. And because I wasn't on campus too. That was the other thing. So I couldn't hang out with the other students. I couldn't hang out with the—I don't know. Some of the teachers did court some of the students, and I was not one of them. So it was really going into class, you know, and then leaving.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: When you use the word "court," do you mean actually like courtship? I mean, you indicated—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, not courtship, but seduced. There was a kind—it was predatory.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Okay, I understand that side of things, but was it also the case that they—some of them weren't actually being predatory in each case? Were they, in other words, trying to—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I don't know.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: They clearly picked their favorites.

[00:30:00]

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: All of the above.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right, okay, all of the—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: All of the above.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —above. Okay. So this was—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I could not say what other teachers did because I don't know.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Sure. So the context was not—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I just remember this very vividly, and being shocked.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right, the context was—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And I also took another class and I can't—it was a writing class—I can't remember what—a history class, who knows? And the teacher—I remember it was like a little auditorium, you know, like Anthem theater sort of going down—looking at him, and he blatantly said, "Well, if you want an A in this class, and you can do this or see me in my office." Blatantly out there, you know, saying he could do sex as a trade-off. He didn't—I don't even know how, but we all understood what he was saying. I can't remember the exact word, but we all understood it then. And everybody thought it was sort of somewhat amusing at the time, because it was acceptable. But I was shocked.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Of course.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And then I saw it in the painting class, so it was just—what can I say?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So in terms of your artistic practice, the San Francisco State University experience was not a good one?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Nope.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: But did you have any, like, aesthetic, formal practical takeaways at all?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Other than that summer with Ralph Putzker and Jim Storey, no.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right. So then when you—in the Chicano movement—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I did take a printing class. I remember that.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Printmaking at San Francisco State?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: At San Francisco—working on copperplates and different kinds of plates and acid etching and all that. Because I could draw, it was fun.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Okay. So—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And I didn't need the teacher. [Laughs.]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So you learned something about process there?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yes, I did.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That later was influence—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That was part of that—part of that little grouping of classes that I took and not necessarily at the same time but—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So, the Third World Liberation strike happens. You changed, you politically transform, you move, you leave San Francisco State University. So when—in terms of—we're just going to think about your art practice now.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, okay. When I started working with the *¡Basta Ya!*, I found out that my skills as a drawer or a designer, as self-taught as I guess as they were—I mean, I felt—my work was professional and I felt professional, so I didn't feel—I didn't feel primitive, let's put it that way, or untutored.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Untrained. You had been trained in any case, huh?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah. And plus, I had this natural ability, as I said, to draw. Some people have it, I had it. I have it. And so working with Donna—because, at the time, there was still that hippie culture going on. And there were a lot of tabloids, some of them were coming out of the Haight, that were based on literature or poetry. Some of them were political but—when I say tabloid, that means it's a large fold over—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Like a—yeah, a newspaper zine.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —and you had that lovely surface at the top, and there was a lot of drawings and paintings. A lot of it was sort of mystical, and some of it was in color, but it was all sort of free form, you know.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And what did you do for *¡Basta Ya!* in terms of artwork?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: For *¡Basta Ya!* I was—I don't even know how it came about, but I could design the fronts. And a lot of that was sort of inspired by what was coming out of the Haight, of this sort of—out of poetry, out of literature, which was, you know—we were a political group, overtly and completely a political group, so I could design things supporting the brothers.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: What were some of your covers that you particularly remember?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, it's very interesting because Fernando Martí, who actually brought us out of the closet and had this small exhibit at the Acción Latina, liked one of my favorite designs, which was called *Bring the Brothers Back to the Mission*. It's based on a photograph. It's a photographic collage, and I—you know, I had the English and Spanish, *Bring the Brothers Back to the Mission*. The idea—because the Mission was seen as a deadly, dangerous place by the rest of the city. So the idea of these young guys who you put in jail, you treat as criminals, you treat as punks killing this hero cop, and we're living in this horrific ghetto of crime and disease and God knows what, poverty—we're saying, "We love our brothers, bring them back. We want them, and we want them to come home." We saw the Mission—I saw the Mission as home, and that's what I was trying to express within that. And the thing is, that's part of, like, what we did as Los Siete.

[00:35:00]

The covers that we brought were all supported. They weren't like, "Kill the pig." They weren't like, "Smash the imperial state." None of that stuff! We were talking about, this was our family, these were like our young men, these were our boys, these were our youth. These were our youth, and we were out there to protect them.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So what other covers do you remember?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Ah, okay. Well, the rest were—some of them were—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Maybe just one more. Maybe just one more.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, one more was, like, the idea of the seven. You know using the motif of the seven and putting the Los Siete young men with their heads within—you know, as a portrait within the seven to make them real, you know? "Free Los Siete, *libertad para los siete*."

And I also designed buttons, so somewhere out there, there's—Fernando managed to [laughs]—my buttons, he even put out my little button design. I still kept, for some reason, all these. Out of color paper, I had designed buttons because everybody was wearing buttons at the time. And I designed the primary poster, which is black and white, which was a—the idea of an American flag and then in area where the stars are, there were seven stars—or six stars, I can't remember—but there were stars representing the brothers. And then the lines going down with the stripes were bars. So that there were bars and behind the bar were the young men.

And because I was brought up, like I said, very patriotic and like a betrayal. You have to understand that a lot of us felt a certain amount—just like Pelosi talking, you know, defending the Constitution, there's a sense of betrayal of what it means to be in our country, of who we are, of who we are as citizens. A lot, I think, felt our citizenship, and that's what I think was kind of surprising to a lot of people. "Yeah, I'm an American citizen, *y qué?*," you know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: So that around the edge was the Pledge of Allegiance. "I pledge of allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America"—anyhow—"and liberty and justice for all." So I tried to put that text around the flag, and I put a padlock in one of the corners. It's all black-and-white drawing, trying to show that there was a betrayal of our citizenship and using the American flag as symbolic of that.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Great. It's a great description. I wanted to ask you a quick question. You know, Faith Ringgold was producing some interesting paintings using the American flag. But she was in New York, you know, she was doing stuff with Judson Church—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Right, I don't think I—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And you probably weren't exposed to—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —even met her, but I knew of her, but that was, you know, 10 years later.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right, exactly. So I was thinking, you know, this was really great, to hear about the covers and the descriptions of the covers. I want to have time to talk about a lot of different artwork, so I wanted to ask—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But that's where I found out where I knew what I wanted to do.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Okay, good.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That's the thing, is once—it just felt so good, and I knew what it was that I—I already had this. I didn't have to figure it out. I knew what I—and I knew the attitude that I want to do. Like I said, it wasn't "Kill the pig," it wasn't "Smash the state" or any of those—what I call clichés, to tell you the truth. So that's—I think hopefully that will be seen in my work still now, that there is a real sense of—I don't know if you call it humanity, necessarily, but a personal intimacy as far as us as human beings and not just platitudes, you know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Or slogans.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Or slogans, yeah. It—that meant like nothing to me. I was already well—I

was already—how can I say?—well acquainted with the electoral system. You know, I voted for the Peace and Freedom Party, I voted for Betita Martínez, I voted for Lowell Darling— who I love, who ran for governor, who was a performance artist—because a lot of that was already—I had already been through that, you know? So it wasn't like this horrific disappointment in the electoral system. It was already like, come and gone, okay, that's it, move on.

So I wasn't interested in third-party politics, which is what eventually the Los Siete, in our short span, became interested in. One of our leaders, Roger, left, which just broke my heart, but he left. So we didn't have that kind of humane, intelligent leadership and I was—and a lot of white people started coming in who belonged to other—wanting to influence. And our leader at the time, quote unquote—and I don't know how he became that. That's something else that I—I'm still asking Donna about.

[00:40:23]

Because that's one of the reasons I left. The organization was still somewhat intact, but I left because the politics no longer reflected my feeling. Plus, I was told that the drawings and the covers that I had designed for the *¡Basta Ya!* didn't look serious enough. And they wanted—that this leader, his name is—oh, God, Martinet, and I can't remember his first name—anyhow, was interested in making it look like the *Chronicle*. No way in hell were we going to look like the *Chronicle*. [Laughs.] But the *Chronicle* with the text looked serious, and my drawings did not—my cover designs did not look serious.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Were they were more in line with what someone like Emory Douglas was doing? Did you feel like—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I knew about Emory. I adored Emory's work. Emory was much more aggressive than I was.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I mean, I loved, absolutely, when he did the policeman as pigs. Because he invented that. He invented that, you know. And it was a literal pig. When I talk to Cary Cordova about the influence of Emory, that he—his audacity—that's the only word I can think of. He just, oh, my God, was so blatantly antagonistic to the police, because that was scary. That was scary. And he was working with the Panthers. You meet him, he's a very mild-mannered man. Just like me, I'm, to a certain degree, a very mild-mannered person. But he portrayed the police, the San Francisco police, as pigs! And flies! I told Cary, I said, "Get a picture with the flies buzzing around the head that Emory had put!" You know, every time he did it, it was a pig, he had, like, flies buzzing around their heads.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Well, I know his work well. We were on a panel together about his work, which was really wonderful, some years ago. And the reason I asked is because I wanted to find out more about, or have you talk a little bit more about—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I only met him once at that time. I only met him once, and he was—I think he was at the printing shop, which I can't recall right now what it's called. But anyhow, it was a very famous alternative print shop, which—do you know what it was? You don't? It's in the Mission, it was the Mission, I can't remember. Well, you know, if I mention it to you, you'll remember. But he already had the Panther paper laid out, and Donna and I went. Donna took me with her to see how it was laid out, so we could lay out the *¡Basta!* But that was the first and only time I met him during that era. And I already seen his work and was inspired by his work, mainly because his work crossed the line. That's—it wasn't his—he did do college—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That inspired [ph]—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, that's what it was, that's right, because he crossed the—it was not polite for a Black man to—and he was not careless, and he was not reckless. Everything he did was well thought out. I could—I understood his work because it had depth to it and it had not only what the—a lot of his work had not only what was happening then and now, but also included the past, whether it was the lynching's in the '30s—'20s and '30s—to the civil rights, which already had happened in the '50s, and here we were in the late '60s and early '70s. So he brought in the past and the present, which I like quite a lot, but he brought it in through photography, through collage. And that was an influence to me. But there was also—what's the name?—Herd [ph]—John Herzfeld? I can't remember—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Oh, Heartfield.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Heartfield, who also did the same thing with the Nazis. So it was around, you know? It wasn't just—people sort of overemphasized whatever Emory Douglas did. He was an influence, but I tell you, his influence to me is that he was so reckless, so politically brave, so politically—"I don't give a shit, this is it," you know, sort of thing. That's what influenced me. And then secondarily, because there was already from the '30s and '40s, an era of collaging and dealing with the Nazis. And I knew about it, and I'm sure that Emory also knew about it. So there was a bringing in of political arts, who most people did not know about, coming in it. But also—what's his name, the *Gráfica*? I can't remember—the Mexican *Gráfica*. You know what I'm talking about. The—

[00:45:29]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: [Inaudible], no?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: No, I can't remember. It's where Leopoldo Méndez did all that wonderful drawing and work. It was also a very brief era of publication and political work in Mexico. And in fact, Donna, I don't know where she—but she sort of—because she had done a tour when she was working with the War on Poverty and the Poor People's March to Washington, DC, where they actually built, like, homes out in front—she was part of that, you know? But she had also done a tour with Oscar Rios of the different newspapers within the colleges. There were, like, 21 newspapers within the Southwest of already a lot of—there was no clip art [laughs], obviously, at the time, but there was people who had resources who knew about Mexican graphic arts, you know. Like, God, I cannot remember what the *Gráfica*—I can't remember what, but it's a very famous *taller* that did—and wonderful artists. We also knew about Posada, but to me, like, Posada came later.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: He came later.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I have—so I'm sorry to interrupt, but this is wonderful history. I want to note that we're going to run out of tape pretty soon, and—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: We'll wind it up.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —I wanted to ask for the very last few minutes to—given what you just said about Emory Douglas, given what you said about sort of the influences of image-making from other *Taller Gráfica*, how did this—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And the Nazi era, that's really important to talk about, Jews or whoever they were, doing that work.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah, John Heartfield, right, yeah. His name had been Herzfeld, but then he changed it to Heartfield, right?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, I think Herzfeld is the way I learned it.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And because he wanted an English name instead of a German name during that time, he purposefully changed it, actually. He's really—I teach about his work too, so he's interesting. I'm really glad that you brought him up too. What I wanted to ask is: How did these maybe relate to your decision to make the poster *Who's the Illegal Alien, Pilgrim*?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, that came later. Because when I left Los Siete in 1973—early January 1973, when I left Los Siete, whatever remnants there were from the original—I mean, it was a very—Los Siete to me—I think Donna and I—I was trying to get whatever information I could from Donna because there's a lot I didn't know. There was so much, but Donna was a spoke—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That's okay.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: So she said—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: This is you, not about them.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, but I'm just saying it was about maybe two years that it was actually a vital, pulsating organization. I went to San Diego. I had—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: In '73?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: About early '73. I had met my roommate's brother who was this gorgeous, young man and not political. No more armchair revolutionaries, please! I just needed—I was a burnout. This what we call now—I don't know what they call it now, but I was—we were—burnout was the state. I had been living on unemployment. My unemployment had run out, and going to the breakfast program to eat, and selling the newspaper at 25 cents a shot to get bus fare. You know, it was just really a struggle, and it was—I just—all the way around.

So I went to San Diego following this young man and pretty much imposing myself on him, I have to say. You know, a young—somewhat apolitical, you know, at the time. And he lived in National City, and he wanted to become a physical therapist, which I thought, "Well, that's sweet, that's nice." But he was working as a welder in the shipyards, and I said, "Ah, a working guy, a man who has a real job." [Laughs.] Anyhow so, but he ended up—and now, he's the head of the department at San Marcos State University [laughs], or was for a while. And he worked with Herbert Schiller at—do you know Herbert Schiller from UC San Diego, who's one of the great sort of pioneering spirits coming out of the McLuhan, Marshall McLuhan—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I know about—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —era of analyzing advertising and politics? Because Schiller, I think, did the whole analysis of football. And so once my boyfriend at the time decided to go beyond junior college into a four-year institution since I was—had begun at that point to—I had—anyhow, so.

[00:50:19]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So our—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I went—the art, the *Who's the Illegal Alien* came out of me moving to San Diego, briefly working at a social service agency, then joining the Chicano Federation as an organizer. They hired me as an organizer in a program called PEP, which was meant to hire displaced engineers because the aircraft industry was dying out, and there were a lot of, you know, like, well-educated people who had—men who had no jobs. But they hired squeezing out—so like, the neighborhood arts program here, squeezing out work for the artists. So I went to work for the San Diego Chicano Federation.

And my boyfriend at the time became acquainted with Herman Baca, who was also from National City, just like my boyfriend at the time. And Herman Baca was, again, one of those audacious men who was—had this tiny—he had a print shop, a tiny little organization, such as it was. It was more like a family, and a group of men surrounding and supporting him. There was no real structure other than a familial structure. And Herman was denouncing the border patrol and their abuse of not only workers, beating people up, but also of women being raped, you know, and having no recourse. And there was also money coming in from the Carter administration at the time because of the—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: To the arts?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: No, to the border, to build up—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Oh, to build up border patrol, I see.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: To build up the border patrol and the customs agency.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: What year are we talking about now?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: We're talking about '75.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: '75? Okay, great.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Because I went at '73, and I had a job, and then worked at the federation and—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And so then the—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And I actually, because I was an organizer, I wasn't part of the committee on Chicano Park. There was a Chicano Park steering committee, but I was—as being part of the Federation, supporting the—because we were an umbrella agency, and they were—the Chicano

Park steering committee—and we were located right there are at the old highway patrol office. Because of these straight Chicano guys, part of that—thank God, Luis Natividad and Mateo Camarillo were—Luis hired me, Luis Natividad, and Mateo Camarillo kept me on and so that—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: How do you spell Mateo's last name?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Camarillo.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Oh, okay.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I don't know how to say it.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I got it.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Camarillo, I just didn't hear it correctly.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, no, and I didn't pronounce it either in English or in Spanish correctly. But so I was part of that, and I sat on many boards.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So coming back to the poster.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah. So that's when I also became acquainted with the Committee on Chicano Rights, and Herman Baca, who I adore. I still to this day adore Herman Baca. I think he's just, again, one of those—like Emory, one of those people crossing lines, not really making any kind of—regardless of any kind of risk to body and soul and his family, for heaven's sakes, speaking out. I seem to be attracted to men who—my boyfriend was not that way, but Herman was and so was Emory. And so was Huey and Bobby. So that—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So were you—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: So working—I was on the side, like I was a girlfriend with the Committee on Chicano Rights. I was not—I was around them, and like I said, they had barbecues, because the women—and then that's where the men discussed politics, and it was all about the border and about the immigration. So that's where I did the poster for the Committee on Chicano Rights. Because there was also a lot of things—I told you before, you know, that growing up, we knew—we all—all of us had Japanese-American friends who were—I did—had friends who were born in the camps, you know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: You were missing that.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, so it was the idea of what—and this money coming down from the Carter administration, what was going to happen to that money building up the border? Because there was talk about refreshing the camps, you know, rebuilding the camps even then, and internment camps. There was also like—when the Vietnam War ended—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Detention centers.

[00:55:15]

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: The Vietnam War ended in 1975, so that there was all that technology. I always say, war accelerates technology, the development of technology. So because we were not fighting what they call a conventional war, too bad, in Vietnam, the heat-sensing instruments, motion detectors, night-vision binoculars, the helicopter already had developed these search lights attached to them—all of that technology, all of that technology came to the border. And along with the $2 million, which was a lot of money at the time, in 1976, at that time, was a lot of money, and it scared the bejabbers out of us.

And the border patrol was even instituting some sort of training program: how to tell a Mexican American from a Mexican. And it was everything from the Mexicans had Brillo cream, so they had greasy hair, the Mexican Americans had the dry look at the time. And they looked—so they also were trying to read the dust on people's tires as they were coming through. They were trying to read some—because this is all the era of body—this was all—because even within that era—of body imaging and all that advertising.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Coming back to the poster one more time because we're going to wrap

up, we're going to run out of room on the tape: When you printed it, where did it get displayed?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I did it for the Committee on Chicano Rights.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And then it was displayed in the offices or it circulated in public?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: No, no, no, no, no. I'll tell you. I'll tell you how it got distributed. Initially, it was for the border, so it was printed up. Even the barrio—what is it?—the Pintos Union. There was a Pintos Union. They asked permission to use it, and I said, "Fine." So there was the local groups that printed it. Initially, Herman, I think, was—and the Committee on Chicano Rights or whatever, they were reluctant to print because it was so strong. Eventually, the work got distributed when I moved back to—after I finished graduate school, moved back to the Bay Area, falling in love with another man, following him [laughs]—this is René Yañez—because I wanted to have a child. I said, "What's next?" So anyhow, so I moved to the Bay Area, and the Galería printed up I think 5,000 of that, and we split it. Since they paid for the printing, I got half, and they got half. I can't remember—it was something like 5,000, but there was this wonderful couple—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And that year is now—we're talking about—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: We're talking '78.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So you had moved back to the Bay Area in '78? Okay, and that's—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Or '78, '79, somewhere in that.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So you made the poster in about '75.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I made the poster in 1978, the same year—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Oh, '78, the same year—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —the same year, like I keep telling, the same year that I did the *Guadalupe*. The same, same summer. But it was—the *Guadalupe* was part of my dissertation for my MFA, but the—the *Illegal Alien* was not part of my dissertation because I knew if I inserted that as part of the work I did within my graduate school, that I would not get passed. They would have cut me off without a song. They did not understand it, they didn't. So I had the wisdom to realize that it was just—I kept thinking, I love the word "sub-rosa," under the table, you know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Sure, right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: So that's what it was. But they were done the same summer of 19—same summer and winter—'78, summer and winter.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Beautiful. Okay, we're going to stop there for now and pick up again.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I want to tell—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Thank you.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —because I want to—

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[00:00:00]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Well, let me get—let's get started. I mean, I'm going to go ahead and turn us on. We're not turned on yet. So let's go ahead and get started, and I already put in sort of who we are and what the date is and so forth while you're over there. So we can—I'm just going to hit—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: The whole discussion of even, like, the body language, as I mentioned quite a lot, because it was so interesting to me at the time, was seeing how using that as part of an analysis of how and who people are, looking at advertisement, you know, looking at John Berger's stuff and—

[. . . -JG (equipment difficulties -Ed.)]

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —and then—yeah. And then also, there was the rise of *Penthouse* magazine, Bob Guccione, and the rise of *Hustler m*agazine with Larry Flynt. Larry Flynt even had this wonderful Stieglitz, who was—not Stieglitz, Ziegstig [ph]? Anyhow, but he had Chester the Molester as part of the continuing cartoon in *Hustler* magazine. So I bought those magazines wanting to look at them. Eventually, Safeway decided just to put a cardboard panel in front of the—saying, you know, *Penthouse* or whatever, *Hustler*, rather than have people—because the people complained about seeing the covers on the magazines. So there was this—and the demise of *Playboy* magazine, which was an obvious target, obviously, but then what happened with the rise of *Hustler* and *Penthouse* was that it made *Playboy* magazine, along with Hugh Hefner, look rather innocent.

[. . . -JG (equipment difficulties -Ed.)]

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But let me just finish this thought because the reason I mentioned *Playboy*—because I was looking at—because pornography became very important at that point. And my boyfriend at the time was going to strip clubs where, you know—and spending a lot of his excess time there, and I didn't quite know what to make of that, at the time. And I was really offended by it. And I had decided that I was going to look at pornography as perhaps my way of—my motive—because I did want to do something with women. I did want to do something with feminism, and I tried thinking, but I decided that I could not work with pornography because of my—it was—pornography was beyond my conceptual reach, beyond my imagination.

So I started looking at the images within the Chicano civil rights movement—what are we, ourselves? How are we portraying our females and women heroes? And I knew about—most of us knew Kahlo because there was that Kahlo show that happened at the Mandeville Center at the time, along with Hayden Herrera's book on Kahlo. And then we also knew—most of us already knew about Dolores Huerta who—and we knew that she was Chávez's right-hand man, as it were, and working also. She's the one that negotiated with the longshore—not the longshore—the AFL-CIO, those rough and tough guys. Longshoremen, I guess. I can't remember anyhow.

[00:05:27]

But when I realized I could not work with pornography because it was beyond my imagination, I started looking at what imagery we had in the Chicano civil rights movement. And that's where I sort of latched upon the Virgin of Guadalupe, who I knew very little about. I knew it was around, and I knew it was a Mexican American, but I saw it primarily as Mexican. And even when I was taking catechism classes, it was in an Italian neighborhood, so the Guadalupe did not come up then. It was primarily seen as the Virgin Mary, and whatever cards, the imagery they sent about the Virgin Mary, were all these wonderful, little printed things from Italy, so it was—she had a long white dress and a pale blue, you know, stole or whatever it is that they wear, you know, like Muslim women now wear [laughs], but it was pale blue. So that was what the Virgin Mary looked like.

And so there, I went to religious shops. Many religious shops in San Diego did not have any imagery of the Guadalupe. So that's when I started looking at the library, and the library had a couple of books, but mostly written by these—what do you call—émigrés? This is where I also discovered—what's her name?—Anita Brenner, who I also—she wrote a book called—a very famous book called *Idols behind Altars*. And it's a very famous book, and I just adored her and her family. Her family was just an amazing family, and I'm sorry I missed her show at the—I don't know, I forget what they called it in Los Angeles, I can't remember right now what it is. But I would love to have seen it because she's one of the people I truly did admire, so.

She also, in her book, sort of gave me an insight into the melding of Christianity and indigenous culture. That's where a lot of the ideas about indigenous relationship—because she talks about *Idols Behind Altars*, that's the implication in that, and so—and the Coatlicue was just discovered, you know, by digging up I think a new subway in Mexico City, you know, right near the big *centro* there, the Zócalo, where they discovered the pyramids, the pyramid upon pyramid upon pyramid, just—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: In Mexico City? Mm-hmm [affirmative].

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: In Mexico City, right there in the *centro*. And that's also where they saw the Coatlicue. I mean, and this is the one that sits in—this is the horrific one that sits in the—with the two snake heads as her head—in the Museum of Anthropology. And the story goes that the

workmen were digging it up, and then they saw this, and they sort of cleared some of the way. And it was so horrific that they just took their shovels [laughs] and just didn't even take it out, they just reburied [laughs] it all together.

And so that was really sort of like the beginning of my understanding of how the Guadalupe is seen as really as—has a longer lineage than Christianity. And that in many ways in learning about Mexico, that's where I began to learn more about Mexican history because I knew nothing about it. And the genocide that happened at the time, like four out of five men, women, and children of indigenous folk would die from either being overworked or diseases that were introduced to them, either purposefully or by accident. They died of starvation because they—I think the Spaniards just saw them primarily as beasts of burden. There was nothing else. They didn't even see them as human beings, but as beasts of burden.

And then there was this big—I found out that there was this big argument about whether it was from the Benedictines and I can't—or maybe the Dominicans or the Benedictines just trying to figure out if the Indians had souls. Because if the Indians had souls, then the Spaniards had to convert—save the souls and convert the indigenous people to Christianity. Because—and also that whole big phrase that I didn't know about until—all of this, I just sort of knew, you know, just learned, because I knew nothing about—"God, Gold, and Glory" was part of the motto of the Spaniards when they came to what is now Mexico—Tenochtitlán, which is now Mexico City.

[00:10:10]

And where Díaz, in talking about it, kept a diary and said when he first saw Tenochtitlán that it was like more magnificent and bigger and cleaner than Venice, you know. You know, all the people were clean, and they bathed, and it was just a highly organized society. And that the Spaniards burnt two big libraries where there was all the—where there were books about medicinal plants and, you know, ancient—it was a history. But there were two huge libraries that they destroyed and just all chucked—when they finally conquered it, just chucked all the books—you know, all the books that the Aztec and other Mayan people and just the surrounding people had created.

All of that was just horrifying to me, and fascinating, and also, I began to see, like, the Virgin of Guadalupe—because there was a huge conversion after the story came out that this apparition appeared before this Indian who had converted to Christianity, and in converting to Christianity, the indigenous people had to give up their native names. So nobody really knows what the name of this man was but—and there's a sort of like, "Oh, his name was Jaro-jaro [ph]," but, you know, really in truth, we don't know. So his name now is called Juan Diego.

And Juan Diego, the story goes that he—through a lot of things and eventually takes—in his tilma takes these—what's called fine Castilian roses that had grown beside this apparition. Because she said, "I want a church built here, but take these roses and show them to the bishop so that he'll know that I was actually here." So he is refused to get in, and about the third time—this is all legendary stuff—you know, by the third time, he gets accepted in to see the bishop, and he releases his tilma and all the roses come out, but underneath the roses is the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which appears in the basilica to this day. So that the—the bishop rejected her as part of a Christian goddess because she was still—at that point still too—had too many attributes of the great goddess, which when you began just to hear the stories about Coatlicue, you begin to see that there is an overlap in the mythologies, as it were.

I say "mythologies" because even though when we talk about Christianity, we talk about religion, but we—and I say "mythologies" in equal part also to like what the Greeks understood, what the Romans understood, what the—you know, other religions. We call them mythologies, but we called Christianity a religion. So I just want to equalize everything, so I always call it a mythology, or they're all religions, one or the other. So that then there was—you know, it took about 10 years when there was all of a sudden, like, sightings happening in—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Do you—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —Peru and Bolivia. Huh?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I don't want to cut you off, but I want to come back to the MFA show that—I just want to come back to your MFA show and how you got inspired to do the final work.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, okay. Well, it ended up being—looking for a methodology. And because I did see the Guadalupe as a kind of a—because, you know, as the first media image of the

Western European front, and it worked, you know, because many indigenous people converted to so-called Christianity. And so I saw it as a media image and began to—that's where the analysis became like, what the dress meant, what the posture meant, and you know, all the—all standing, you know, on a crescent moon, which is, you know part of the menses, which is a very traditional image of women. And the crescent moon is, you know, talking about how the menses worked.

Also, because I was a runner at that time—these are all things that blended into it and because I had already done the *Three Generations*, three women series, so I already had that construct of *Three Generations*, because I recognized that the Guadalupe is only seen as one age, which is like a 15-year-old girl. And she's not even having—she's never shown actually with the Christ child. The Guadalupe is always, like, with her upper belt up high indicating she might be pregnant, but you never see the Guadalupe holding the Christ child. And so all of that, body posture, looking down, all of that stuff sort of fed into looking at it and doing an analysis.

[00:15:25]

And since I already had three generations, three different types of women—this is all because of the women's movement, the feminism about the difference in older women not being portrayed, and—you know, I mean, and activist women like myself wearing pants and my mother as a working-class woman, and also working-class women are not portrayed, so she worked at this industrial sewing machine. So—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Do you feel like—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —all of these fed into that.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Do you feel like when Manny Farber came into your studio and saw the early sketches for this project, that his reaction, which was sort of negative in calling it ethnic art, that it sort of motivated you to continue to precisely work on that?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: No, because I didn't have to do nothing else. He was stuck with me. The department was stuck with me.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: [Laughs.] And was—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: There was nothing else that I could do. That was it. They took me in and they hired me, they took me in, they gave me a studio, they gave me time, and that was it, you know? I could not—and I already had—like I said before, I had these years of working within the Chicano civil rights movement and supporting, even before then, the Black civil rights movement. So that was it. They were stuck with me. I never, never, ever considered doing anything else. Never, never occurred. They were stuck with me, and that's it. I mean, that's—I have never accommodated my thinking—what they provided—I mean, they are the ones that gave me the space and these wonderful professors and ideas, where I could actually sort of ferment, if you want to call it, this kind of thinking where I could actually apply it to my experience. And I never felt that there was a kind of censorship. Or I never felt that kind of—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Great, good.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Not even with Manny. There was no sense of—he would just sort of back out, like in essence saying, "Well, I can't work with you." That was on his part. It was not him trying to convert me or anybody else in that department.

The closest I ever came to that was with one of the professors who I requested her to be my head of my committee because she taught—Jehanne Teilhet, who taught African art and also taught Western—you know, Pacific West—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Pacific Island?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Pacific Islands arts, or art, and she had two fabulous books, which were really, really, truly fabulous. And so she's the only one somewhere down the line towards the end of—she's the one that read my thesis before it was published. And I couldn't quite understand what it was that she—she had me do several rewrites, and I could never quite understand what it was that she wanted me to do. And even to this day, I don't quite understand what she wanted me to do, but she kept telling me to rewrite this or that.

I tried, but she was the only one—and she's the one that warned me that the work I was doing and perhaps presenting, because she was head of my chair—presenting the work that I was going to present with the *Guadalupes*, that I may not graduate. Because it would not fit into the mainstream art movement. And I understood that because the professors there had—most of them, like the Eleanor Antin and David Antin and even Harold—there was just—all of them had, to some degree, connections with New York and connections with the mainstream art world, and then to a great degree that's what they were cultivating in this class that I was in, this cohort. And I was not going to fit in that. And she's the one that warned me that because I was not doing work that would fit into that mainstream, that people would not understand it, that I was endangering my career. She didn't quite use those terms, but she was very clear to tell me that it was problematic, that it was a hindrance. But at that point, I had already—pretty much, it was on my—going down just the long—you know, the finishing line, to what I was going to do.

[00:20:20]

And that's when I realized that I needed somebody on my committee who understood what I was doing, and that's when I started making—because I had to have—I said, "Well, can I add somebody to my committee?" She said, "Yeah, as long as they're tenured." [Laughs.] So I ended up just taking this—I got a list of all the tenured professors in the school, and there were—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Was that—Allan Sekula and Martha Rosler, were they tenured yet?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: They were lecturers.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Oh.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: They were minor characters.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Got it.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: They got rid of them as soon as they could, or as soon as Allan got a—I think he went back to CalArts because I think that's where—he also began there. And Martha got—I don't know where. She ended up going back east and worked at Rutgers essentially. But, you know, there was no—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: They were—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: They were not of the same ilk as the sort of, like—I don't want to point out individually but the tenure—of the tenure of the faculty there. That's how it seemed. I understood later that part of being in graduate school, and in particular that graduate school, is that we as students were almost seen as almost equal to them, as far as colleagues go. And I have to respect them greatly because they saw us as thinking artists. They saw us as artists. We were green, but they saw us as artists. They saw us as artists going out into the world and making their reputation and making our reputation. "Oh, yes, yeah, I've studied with, you know, Joe Blow, and I learned the"—whatever it is—"from him, you know, or her." And that, with whatever my reputation, would brush off on them, and they say, "Oh, yeah, that's one of my students, you know. Wow, now you're a fabulous teacher or a fabulous mentor." But that was really the underpinning of it.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Who else did you get on your committee, then?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Who what?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Who were the other people on your final committee?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Ah, you know, I don't—I think Ellie was on there. So Ellie, Eleanor Antin was there. I think Moira was probably on there. Moira Roth and—I can't remember to tell you the truth. I would like to—because they were ready to just flunk me.

So I found this woman who was a tenured professor. She came out of the medical school. And it turned out that she—her name was Solis. So I was going down all the Latin names, and I didn't care what field they were in. So she was at the medical school, and Dr. Solis had apparently done her research on pesticides and the—and in particular, seeing—not farmworkers, farmworkers were not the subject. But the pesticide was the subject, and the effect that it had on these people out in the fields. So I said, "Oh God, I"—we had a 10-minute conversation, I told her my situation. She said, "Okay, I'll be there." I gave her instructions on how to get there.

She was late. I was sweating bullets. My presentation had already started. She walked in, she looked around, looked at the—really standing there. She didn't even move as I recall. She just stood there, sort of surveyed the work that was being done, surveyed [laughs] my committee, and knew exactly what to do. So she took over the meeting. She took over the questioning of—because she was, you know, legally on my committee now. And I think, to a certain degree or another, would not let them leave because they already had the paperwork, had them sign off on my paperwork right then and there [laughs] before they left. Because I think if they had gone without signing it, they probably would have gone into serious consultation about whether I should be graduated or not.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And do you feel that that was entirely related to the content of the work?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I'm sorry. Would that be what?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Were they that hostile to the content of the work?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: No, they were not hostile. Eleanor, I know, mentioned something saying, "Well, this is all"—they were bewildered. They were not hostile. They were bewildered. I mean, it was all the concepts that I had learned about. I knew all the—all of them. We were all looking and reading—the faculty, graduate students, we were all reading the same things. You know, we all knew the same people. But I had put it into a different cultural context, and they had no reference. In fact, they—plus, they were mostly non-Christians. In fact, they were all non-Christians. I don't know what Moira was. Moira might have been a Christian, I think she was. But they were all non-Christians.

[00:25:31]

And then, you have to remember, these are people from New York, and there's a certain amount of contempt that non-Christian Jews or New York Jews had about Christianity. I mean, that was part of the intellectual construct at the time, you know? Because it was the whole rise of the Christian Right, so there was that atmosphere, that I was working with a Christian icon.

It was all—they didn't know what to do with it, and they knew nothing about the border, they knew nothing about Mexicans. They had no interest at all in the fact that all of us were 20 minutes or 22 minutes from the border. They had no, no interest in it. They all lived in Vista or northern—little northern, small, little towns—had bought themselves some wonderful little houses there and now are, you know, quite valuable [laughs] little houses, you know, in that upper enclave just outside of La Jolla, but to the north.

So that they had no interest in Mexicans. And, you know, you have to remember, at this time, that there was a real hostility towards Mexicans. We were seen as stupid, we were seen as unclean, we were seen as ignorant, without any kind of culture, without any kind of—who knows? You know, there was just no redeeming qualities at all. Not even class.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: How were—I would really like—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Huh?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I would really love to know how Allan Sekula and Martha Rosler were able to be so supportive and different. How did you see their philosophies being different from the slightly older generation of faculty?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: How did I see the difference? Well, the thing is that they obviously could not be—because they were not tenured, the could not be on my committee. Otherwise that would have been—yeah, I probably—I can't even remember. I probably immediately had said, "Oh, that's who I wanted now." So that's why finding Dr. Solis from the medical school was such a—yeah, she saved my butt. She just saved me totally. I probably would not have—there was a high probability I would not have graduated with them.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I wanted to go back to just the Martha Rosler and the Allan Sekula, because you did such a nice job of talking about their work and its inspiration.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: You know what, I'm still—how was Rosler an inspiration?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah. Well, the *Semiotics of the Kitchen* piece was one. What else?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, you know, she did all those things about measurements and all that,

where she's standing there nude and they're measuring her, which is not very exciting. And even Eleanor Antin did a piece called *Sculpture* [ph], I think, or something like that, where she loses weight and she's standing in the same place for about, I don't know, two months or whatever. She loses 20 pounds, and you see her shrinking. But there was also other artists—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That's called *Carving*. I think that piece was called *Carving*.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —who did body art like that. But I thought it—the one—I have to admit, I think *Semiotics of the Kitchen* is a masterpiece. I really do believe it. And like I said, I showed it to my students when I was working at CCAC, and they totally did not get it at all. But this was about—God, I don't know—it might have been even maybe in the early '90s, I can't remember—or late '80s, which—the women's movement had already sort of moved on. And the idea of women in the kitchen was not even—like, this is a generation that did not even relate to that at all, so that it was—[laughs] you know, it was totally—I could not understand it. It took me a long time to figure out why they didn't think it was funny.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: [Laughs.]

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But it was because it was a different context. The content was there, but the content within the context of the time, it missed it, you know? You know, how it will be seen today now, I have no idea. But I know in my class, they just sat there deadpan, just bored, had no inkling at all of the piece, at all.

[00:30:16]

So that also was a lesson to me in how the *Guadalupe* piece was seen, because it was seen originally—because I apparently had death threats. I had to have two bodyguards when it was shown at the reception and when it was shown in a couple of other places. They're fearful for my life because of the Guadalupanos. And even, like, recently in the last, what, about four or five years ago at LACMA, when one of the pieces was shown, that the Guadalupanos came out from their Sunday morning mass. And part of their work was they picketed LACMA. And this was this wonderful—I forgot the name of the curator—this wonderful woman, and she told me about it, and I just laughed. I said, "Well, I guess it still has its potency."

So that now, it's seen—you know, in this generation of scholars, now it's seen as part of the indigenous, sacred reclamation of our ancestry, of our religion. And listen, I'm not—I am not—and people put it on the—had postcards, people tell me that they put it on their altars. When I first heard that, I really cringed because it was—even though I respected what their view of it was, but it's certainly not at all the way I intended. I intended for them to see it as a manipulative tool by the Roman Catholic church, you know, in the role of women, and sort of a contrast to how the Virgin of Guadalupe is seen.

That's the way I saw it, so that it was—the context is now quite different in how the *Guadalupe* is seen. And that's how come I get sort of impatient with people interpreting the *Guadalupe*. I just got a paper a few months ago about melding the Tonantzin and the Coatlicue and some sort of sacred union or something about, like I said, resurgence of this ancestor worship and indigenous quality. And I have no interest in that. I have zero interest in it. And I sort of—they asked me about it, I said, "I don't know. Well, you know, I mean, that's"—I do see it—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Well, in, for example—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —as part of her character.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right. In, for example, *Nuestra Madre*, there's a reference—you're using the ancient image in the work that you did called *Nuestra Madre*.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So why did you use the Tonantzin there?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, sure! Oh, oh, thank you for the question. Jesús Barraza, I think, described that work, which was exactly right, is that even though it's the *Nuestra Madre*, which is the Coatlicue, and she's standing there with her hands out like this, you know, with her snaky skirt, the idea is that he said he saw it as an unwrapping. That the *Guadalupe*, her—you know, her mantle of stars and her dress—the parts of her dress where's she's standing on that remnant of her—he said, "It's like unwrapping the *Guadalupe*, and here she is."

And I just—I mean, that's the way I saw it as well. Because I felt like—because the *Guadalupe* is the—our—I mean, all those ancient images are still there. They're still in that square because they—when the Spaniards dismantled the pyramids, they built cathedrals out of the pyramid. So that a lot of times, the Indians, the workers, they would put the carvings or whatnot face down on the ground to protect it and to do some sort of connection with the earth. And then they used the other bricks and whatnot to build the Roman Catholic churches.

So it's still there. The pyramids are still there. They're just a different construction. You know, they're different, but they're still sacred sites, and you can still see it there. You can look at crosses that were built under instruction by the Roman Catholic church, which are still carvings inside—the cross on the outside is part of that ancient culture that's still there, you know? So that I feel that it's—and I think that when the Spaniards came and they saw the Coatlicue and they saw the other figures, because they came out of the whole notion, intellectually, of the beginning of the Renaissance that, you know, all men—what is it?—the measure of all things, and that all became—like Leonardo's, you know, the man standing up there in a circle. But connecting with that.

[00:35:42]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: The *Vitruvian Man*.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: So they also saw rejecting the Greek and the Roman gods as symbolic, but they saw Jesus and Mary as real people. So when the Spaniards came, they saw their gods were like human beings, whereas with the Aztecs and the native—you'll see the native, they're symbolic. And the thing is, when I talk about this, I tell them our Western European thinking is so small, so minor, so tiny, so unimaginable, because what the ancient peoples were talking about was the cosmos. They were talking about this—what you may see as these two snakeheads for her, but it was representative in part that life goes on. You know, that you are born, you live, you die and then when you shed your skin, you're reborn again. So that the idea of death as being another way of being, you know? That it doesn't end. It's just another way whether you go back to being a rock, come back as a tree, come back as part of the molecule, as being the river, become part of the stars. I really think that in many ways, we—this is where—I haven't read David Carrasco. He sort of asked me, you know—I don't know, He was not enthusiastic about me reading it. But the idea that I really think that the ancients, in some way, anticipated black holes. They anticipated, you know, the idea of gravity as—you know, because the black holes are, sort of, this high force of—[audio stops]

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JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: This is Jennifer González with Yolanda López on March 24, 2020, recording for the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution. Yolanda, thank you again for speaking with us. We are going to pick up where we left off. In fact, what we're going to do is a little bit of a recap because we missed a few minutes of our last recording, due to a technical error. So I would love to, if you're willing, go back briefly to talk about the MFA at San Diego, and more specifically to talk a little bit about some of the influential professors that you had there, how they motivated your thinking. And then we'll move on to talking about some other artists that might have been engaging for you.

So if you would like to start by going back to where we were, you were talking a little bit with me about Martha Rosler or Allan Sekula or even the question of performativity with Suzanne Lacy, or anyone else there you would like to mention.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Did I talk about seeing *Semiotics of the Kitchen*? Was that included?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That was not included, so it would be great if you—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That was not included?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That would be great if you could go back to it.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Did I talk about the interview for—was that included, my interview for graduate school?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I think that was before the *Semiotics,* so that was also not included.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, really?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And then after that, we did get—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, oh. Okay, well, let me sort of recap a little bit, because I think it's—the interview that I had for entering graduate school was probably the most indicative of my experience [laughs] there. I had applied for an M.F.A. at UCSD or UC San Diego because I had overheard in a class at State College, finishing up my B.A. there in painting and drawing, that it was a terminal degree. In other words, it was a professional degree, which was very different than an MA or a master's of art. So I applied there. It was the only school within the area that had an MFA program. And I knew very little about how any—I just sort of assumed that going into a graduate program was very similar to doing undergrad, except more advanced work, to tell you the truth. Which it is not. It's that and other things as well.

So I applied, and I applied as I mentioned before in—but since I didn't have a typewriter, I handwrote my application and my statement. And I barely remember them. But I remember writing a statement, because I rewrote it at least three times trying to make it very clear, my handwriting, and I did talk about my activism and working with the Chicano Federation at the time. And I was called in for an interview and the—oh, dear. It was a room, it was like a small classroom, with about—oh, I don't know—six people, all professors presumably. And I can't remember what their—they told me almost initially that they don't interview applicants locally, which to me at the time—and they clearly made it clear to me that they wanted an international, or at least a national, set of graduates at the graduate school. And they were doing me [laughs] a favor by interviewing me—presumably—that way. They were somewhat standoffish initially. And very formal, I think, in that sense of letting me know exactly where I stood.

And they also mentioned shortly after that that there had been a student who was Mexican American and he had been working with graffiti and transferring the work or interpreting the work on canvas. And they had to let him go after the first year because they didn't feel it was—my impression was that they felt like, among other things, they just had no grip at all on the work. This is before Keith Haring, this is before John Basquiat, so they had no New York references, because these were all pretty much New York artists, which I did not know at the time. But they were, you know, all white and all that stuff. Middle-aged, white people. So they let him go and it—why they told me that, I don't know, except—

[00:05:41]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: It just sounds not inviting in the least.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, you know, it was part of that, yeah. And so it continued that way. In fact, it got even more hostile too, and it was hostile and there was no undertone. It was hostile. They asked me why I wanted to go to graduate school, and I had told them that I wanted a professional degree. I wanted that piece of paper because I wanted to do what they do. And actually indicating the people in the room, "I wanted to do what you do, I wanted to teach art, and I would like to teach it in a college or anywhere I want," you know? And I said, "Well, you got jobs here, you know, you got that piece of paper. I know some"—you know. So the fact that I sort of alluded to them, or indicated clearly that they were employees—I think somewhere after I left the interview, realized that might have been a tactical [laughs] mistake. But nonetheless, I did. I saw them as employees.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: When did you find out that you got in? How did you—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, I—oh, they also offered me money. They said, "We don't have any money to offer you." And I thought, "Well, you know, I"—money never even occurred to me. I didn't realize that graduate students were often offered money to be part of the school there and part of the program. So they said, "We have no money," and I said, "Well, that's all right." I mean, I distinctively remember waving my hand indicating that it's all right. You know, I know how to work, and I can muster the tuition, and I can muster my own living expenses. And I was kind of a little bit surprised why they even cared how I would make my living, you know, while at school, because nobody else had ever cared about that. So the interview ended, as I recall, and as I was leaving the building, I realized that I probably had blown it entirely.

And then within a few days later—literally before the week was done, Wednesday or Thursday—I got a letter saying that I had been accepted at the program and that they were offering me $100 scholarship a month from the San Diego something or other. And so that's how I was accepted.

Oh, they also asked me who I—was there anybody I wanted to study with, and the only person I knew within the program who was not there was Manny Farber. I had known of Manny because he had been a great admirer of James Agee, and I was very much interested in film criticism. And I had read—you know, I think that he wrote—well, one famous book and a couple of others—so I figured he would be interesting and somebody I could have a conversation with, was Manny Farber.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Then he came to your studio, right?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, well, once I was in the program, I was—they asked me who I wanted to be assigned my advisor, so I chose Manny. And Manny about—oh, jeez, well into most of the year—had almost ended the first year—he had walked into—it was just a curtain, you know, a door with curtain. He pulled the curtain aside and took a step or two into my studio and immediately saw these large black-and-white charcoal drawings of my mother, my grandmother, and myself: the *Three Generations/Tres Mujeres* drawings. And it just popped out of his mouth and almost took a half step back saying, "Nobody told me you were an ethnic artist." And I don't remember truly what conversation, if there was one, came after that, but he gingerly sort of almost [laughs] backed out of the doorway.

[00:10:30]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And was that your last encounter with him? Did he—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That was pretty much it. Yeah, that was pretty much—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So he wasn't going to serve as your advisor?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: No, no. Then I asked Jehanne Teilhet, who taught Pacific Islander and, I don't know, African studies.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: African diaspora?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah. She had two great—what was it?—she had two terrific books, which I saw. So I figured she might be—and she's white, but I figured she might be compatible. And I did chat with her, and she's just a nice, very frank, lovely person. An art historian, not a practitioner but an art historian.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And then when you were there and you were taking classes, some of the lectures at the time included Martha Rosler and Allan Sekula. How did they—they weren't full professors yet. They weren't sort of—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: They weren't anything. They were just lecturers. They were literally the hired help, I think. And I knew nothing of them, zero, nothing, and it was just perchance to tell you the truth. It was a small department, and for some reason or other, I don't want [inaudible] but I ended up taking photography. And one of the professors actually took me under his wing and took me to a camera store, so I could buy a little Olympus when—this is, like, when cameras were shrinking down to small hand-size.

And so I took a class from Allan in the history of photography, and then the second class was a black-and-white lab class. In other words, processing film. And I never took a class from Martha Rosler, but I did audit her "Women In Film" class, which was both—all three of those classes were really just revelations. Revelations in the sense that I had never seen art discussed the way these two professors did—I call them professors, but they were lecturers—these two teachers did. And because I had taken—in State College, taken a standard, you know, American art history class, which of course was—what's his name?—Jenson [ph]?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Oh, yes, uh-huh [affirmative]. Janson's *History of Art*, yes. The classic—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That's it, that's it, because—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —you know, very Eurocentric.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And even there was—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, even then—not only Eurocentric, but even then, the discussion that

there were no women at all in his American art history book, but also that there was—I think there was a Black sculptor whose name I 've forgotten. Willa Cather? I can't remember her name —

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Edmonia Lewis, maybe.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —who was going to—okay, gracias, that was probably the sculptor, right?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I think that's right. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah. And there was also, concurrently, at the same time, Kenneth Clark who was on TV talking about the art of civilization or something like that, which was parallel to Western European thought. So that was all what I had known from TV and from that one class, and I had a really wonderful teacher in the art history class, and he tolerated me quite a lot. And he actually liked me [laughs] but—and I liked him too, but it was, you know, like, "Oh, what do you—what is this?" You know?

I think Martha was the one I first became aware of, because initially, like before the graduate school started for me, there was—and she was a new hire. She and a couple of others, professors, were just—demonstrate their work, you know, in this little room next to, in Balboa Park, probably adjacent to the fine arts museum there. I can't remember.

[00:15:11]

But that's where she showed us *Semiotics of the Kitchen*. And when I saw that, it just totally cracked me up.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: [Laughs.]

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: It was so funny, and it was so feminist, and it was so deadpan. I like deadpan humor, and both she and Allan Sekula share a lot of that. And so when I saw that, I said, "Well, this is who I want to take classes from." And I don't recall—like I said, I don't recall taking any classes, but I did audit her "Women In Film" once she was instituted and teaching classes. Her "Women In Film" was really important to me because she—you know, I had read John Berger, and I think she had shown John Berger's little film he was showing in England—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah, *Ways of Seeing,* right?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —critiquing advertisements. The *Way of*—what is it?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: *Ways of Seeing*.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: *Ways of Seeing.*

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: *Ways of Seeing*, yeah.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: *Ways of Seeing.* That was the book and I guess that was the little clip that she showed, which was really funny-looking because even then, the '70s look with the miniskirt and all that, it was already looking—how can I say it?—antique or nostalgic almost, but the content was so good that it was fine. And so all of that going on at the same time, I realized that Sekula and Rosler were rather unique, at least within my experience of looking at art. And it—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And I remember you said—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And it sort of—and it jived with my poster work. It jived with my political work as far as looking at class, how images show class, how power relationships were indicated in making pictures. So all of this was—how can I say?—the thinking was familiar to me, but it was what Sekula and Rosler represented was a kind of a—well, I don't know if I would call it a methodology, but at least a way of looking at things that I had never seen before, that I immediately understood and could immediately put into practice.

So when I talk to people that say, "Yes, I am a conceptual artist," they sort of—they used to, not as much anymore—back off, thinking it was some sort of highly technical language that's being done. And, you know, to me, it's just a very practical approach to art-making. And in many ways, I still do what I even did then, to not start out with a picture but start out with an idea and then with the idea being—I wrote down a couple of sentences or texts. And then I would draw, like, say, a stick figure or something that might indicate, like, where I was potentially going. Or

several little sketches, you know, very really crude stuff, but it was really the words, the idea that I wrote down, and that's really what—I could see myself as a conceptual artist, and that felt very right to me. Because people often ask me, like, "What kind of art do you do?" You know, which means, "Are you a painter? Or do you draw? Or do you sculpt?" Or whatever.

With Allan, when he taught the history of photography—because, you know, he—that standard book, and I can't—was it Hall? I can't remember the name of the text.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Beaumont Newhall?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That's it! Thank you, very good. It's all—you know, I don't know if they even teach that anymore.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I teach—I teach history of photography too, so—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: You do with that?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So I used to use that. I like Naomi Rosenblum's better now for one of these giant surveys because she's a little less sexist. [They laugh.] It's still practical, but I try to supplement it with a lot of other kinds of texts.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, well, obviously Sekula supplemented it quite a lot. And he also had written—he was like, the hotshot as far as, like, the young critic. Had written several articles that were published in *Artforum*. And that was also part of our reading, you know, in the art history class. So it was a real—yeah, just a fabulous—I can't tell you how enjoyable both of them, both of those, Rosler and Sekula, how enjoyable their classes were.

[00:20:10]

Sekula was very funny, you know, had charming wit, and kind of a lethal wit, that was totally not concerned with his status there as an instructor or any ambition he may have had. And I think that was probably true with Rosler as well. And talking about American society as it is, then and now. Because you have to remember, at this point, this is like, all at the end of the Abstract Expressionist, and this is like when I was in San Diego State taking that art history class. The whole thing ended up with Pollock and with Morris and, you know, that whole group of men who were doing a huge, large paintings, you know? Yeah, that whole thing. And obviously, no women at all. But so—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And so how did Suzanne—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: It was all a revelation. It was all a revelation, you know. And it was so outside of what I had been experiencing—not necessarily absorbed it, because I had not grown up with any art history at all. So I did not—it was all new. The Western European tradition was new, Rosler and Sekula were new. You know, we read Stuart Hall and, you know, all the sort of the classics at that time. As well as, for me being in graduate school, the benefit of it was that it allowed me time. I had time to read things, time to look at things. There was also, like, a lot within the department about the new magazines that came out, not only *Ms.* magazine but the—well, there was an art magazine, which I've forgotten, but I think it only lasted for about two years or a year and a half.

And we had people going through the department as invited guest lecturers, as it were, and some really, really young, ambitious, smart-thinking artists, you know, like Suzanne Lacy, like Carole Caroompas, who I also liked quite a lot, who was an LA artist. And there were several LA artists that were brought down, influenced by the Woman's Building in LA. I did know about the Woman's Building. I think I only visited it once, you know, like about 20 years later as sort of an iconic building, as it were. Also, what was interesting and good for me about this thing is that there was no restriction on media. So that I could use—like with the *Guadalupes*, people often call them paintings, and they're not paintings. They're actually—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Pastels.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —oil pastels.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Oil pastels.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Which I filled in with watercolor, because—not being very smart or sophisticated about materials. And there were not that many people within the department that

even knew about materials. So I bought the best paper I could, which was this nice rag, you know, rag paper. But it had a rough texture, and it had, you know, a ground that was really rough so that—so the tooth of it, the oil pastels grabbed it, but it was also very chunky, you know.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Nice.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: So it was—if I did them over again, I probably would've chosen a different kind of paper. But nonetheless, I could do it on paper. I didn't have to do a painting. I didn't have to—I could do—I started doing a lot of collaging.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: While you were still in grad school?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Absolutely, absolutely. I had never done any of it before that. Well, I did for Los Siete when I did the covers for the magazine or for the tabloid.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Well, I was thinking about that long history, and I think we talked briefly about this before, from John Heartfield's, like, anti-Nazi collage work, up through your, like, activist collage work, which also makes me think of Martha Rosler's *Bringing the War Home* collage work.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, God, I love that. This is like where she had these, oh, upper-middle-class living rooms and then beautiful—just exquisite, wonderful, fabulous, profound work. And in the shadows semi-concealed by the drapes looked like a Vietnamese warrior, you know, with a rifle and clearly the—that little triangle hat, so you knew that they were not the Europeanized soldiers, you know. Within the living room, you know. Her worked just knocked me out. I mean, I think she was extremely influential within that element of surprise, which—and she taught me—

[00:25:52]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Well, I think—go ahead and then I'm going to ask you a question. She taught you?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah. Because within that and I still—and I taught it within the classes that I taught, is that as visual artists, we don't think about time. And I think that time—I say you can either make a fast-food meal, or you can make a meal where people discover flavors or discover things that they had not seen before. And I think Martha for me was the one that really, for me, exemplified the idea of time. And I think that was also happening within a lot of the activist movements, not necessarily the Chicano movement but in the antiwar movement, where the idea also of sabotage, you know. A lot of drawings were just really—you didn't immediately see—it's like—I remember there was this wonderful—there is—I still have this newspaper.

I think it was called *Red Star*. I can't even remember what it was. But there's a drawing. There were about three or four drawings about—there was this drawing of a man and a motorcycle drawing riding along, and at the same time, he's sort of like chucking a stick of dynamite, you know, into some sort of an enemy enclave. Or another one where soldiers were marching along the sidewalk, and right above it, you see this hazard brick [laughs] in midair about to land on them. So that you didn't always see—you didn't always see, like, the dynamite being chucked, you know. You saw this man on a motorcycle or you saw these soldieries marching down the sort of destroyed neighborhood, and then only secondarily do you see this brick coming down straight at them.

Whereas to me, it indicated—and then like, with Martha's things, which were really beautiful—I mean, there's no—they're classic, and they're just beautiful—is that the idea of imbuing an image with—that's subversive. That's the only way I can think about it. And whereas my work up until that point had always been straight out, you know, just, it is what it is, right in front. You know, it was good work, but it was just straight out in front. Whereas I began to like the idea of the viewer having—the viewer looking at it and maybe not immediately seeing but maybe walking away and even then beginning to percolate in their head about what they had seen, and they say, "Oh," you know? And I have had—I personally have had that experience with people who have seen some of my work, and I can't tell you how satisfying that is. But I—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Well, I was just thinking—I was just going to ask, if you let me, you know, that the way Martha's work juxtaposes some of those mainstream images from magazines like *Good Housekeeping*, and the sort of magazines—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: *Architectural Digest*, because they were all over.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah, with those war images, and that the kind of—the jar that that juxtaposition produced. I actually experienced, both in *The Nanny* and in—which is your piece about class and representations of Mexico and women's labor, which is an installation—and then the other kind of wall, let's call it, installation, found object piece: *Things I Never Told My Son About Being a Mexican*. And for me, both of those pieces are incredibly powerful and really affected me, having grown up as a Mexican American and having dealt with all of these kinds of stereotyped images that we get bombarded with. And less now than then, but they're still there. They're more subtitle.

[00:30:09]

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And just having them all kind of laid out. Because the great thing, kind of like some of the work of Rosler, it was funny. Like, I looked at it, and I laughed out loud, and then, like, the second punch is like, the racism, you know, the oppression, the breadth, the extent of the kind of racist discourse that these objects circulate in. You know, and I love that about those pieces, is that kind of, like, humor mixed with, like, really sharp—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Satire. I saw a lot of satire. I loved the sort of—it's not as sweet or as benign-looking as Martha's early work was, but I saw my work—*The Nanny* and *Things I Never Told My Son About Being a Mexican*—and especially in the title because it comes out of a real experience with my son. And *The Nanny,* which was really an exhibit that I was invited make a piece about beauty. There were literally, in the exhibit, things about, you know, face creams and reconstructive surgery, you know, breast augmentation, things like that that sort of—things that we would immediately guess regarding beauty, you know? And so—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Like Martha Rosler did that project, *Martha Rosler Reads Vogue*, where she does this, like, critical reading. And—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh. [Laughs.]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And what I loved about *The Nanny* was all those elements that you're just mentioning, which is a really different piece than her piece. I mean, you go in a different direction.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative], yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: But that you—the research behind it. There's a certain kind of research part of the work, which is a kind of semiotic research. Like, what are these intersecting sign systems that make women feel like they have to look a certain way? You know, how is it that—we what do we do when we try to deconstruct what those sign systems do? And even though other scholars, and Stuart Hall—I'm so glad you mentioned him—is one of those thinkers. No one had really done it in the same way for women of color, the way your work did when your work did it, you know?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Looking specifically at, let's say, Mexicans in relationship to the US and juxtaposing those white models with the indigenous women who served them as tourist sort of employees and things like that. That was, I think—when I think of other works that have hit me the same way, I only can think of *Welcome to America's Finest Tourist Plantation*—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —by Avalos and Sisco and—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Hock.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Hock, thank you. And that piece—but that piece—so it had that pointed politics to it, but it did not have, like, the gender dynamics that was so powerful in that piece. It's just such an amazing piece. I think *The Nanny* is just a fantastic piece because it does all of those things.

Anyway, so I'm getting ahead of myself because we're talking about the artwork, but that's okay.

[Laughs.] Anything you want to say? When you were talking to me yesterday about when you posed for that large-scale piece as a runner, when you put your body in the work, when you decided to sort of start putting your body in the work, you mentioned that part of that was inspired by Suzanne Lacy's performance class. That there was a—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, yeah. Yeah. I had—Suzanne was one of the—she was just a young—I mean, they were all young, young, you know, and—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah, in some cases younger then you, right?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Well, in fact, we were all young [they laugh] except Manny and maybe Jehanne. The beauty and the big gratitude that I had with Suzanne was she—in her class, in "The Art as Performance," was it allowed me to use my body as another tool. In other words, I had my brain, I had my hands, and, you know, my experience, but I also had my body that I could use as part of—as an art tool. And because I had already in many ways used it, like in the *Three Generations/Tres Mujeres,* I had already used my mother, my grandmother, and myself, because I just see it as a—not a sentimental object but as types. And people have a hard time understanding [laughs] that, because they are obviously, you know, my family, but they—I did see them as types. And that was probably the only way that I could work with them, was as typed. And that was—

[00:35:22]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: When you say—sorry to interrupt but when you say "types," do you mean in the sense of, like, August Sander's photographs or—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: No, I'm telling you, when I was thinking of types, was well within the feminist thinking of the time, of expanding what I had already known, was different ages. So that my grandmother who was—you know, she's—I don't know, she was probably 82 or so within those drawings that I did of her, and my mom was in her—she's still working, so she's probably in her mid-50s, and me in my mid-30s. So that we were related, the *Three Generations*, but also three different shapes and sizes. My grandmother old, and my mother obese, clearly. I wanted a big expansive—because that's what she looked like, you know? I wanted a big, fat woman. And I didn't go looking for her, but I realized that within the three of us, we had three different types. So that's what I meant about types.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Okay.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: So I think when Manny saw that, he didn't see the work as—if they had all been white, he would have just continued on and made whatever commentary he may have had without even doing any kind of sense of disconnect about my cultural and ethnic experience. But when he saw that it was against—it was—it's very strange because that's when I knew that I was—that's when I knew. With Manny coming in like that, it clarified my position in that graduating class. It just absolutely clarified it.

And eventually, as I mentioned before, I came to understand, like, when I was ready to graduate two years later that I needed to explain [laughs] the *Guadalupe* work because most of—in fact, all of my—in fact, well, I would assume—I don't even remember who's on my committee anymore. I remember Eleanor because—Eleanor Antin, who made a comment about—who was trying very hard to understand what I was doing and said something that it had like a Norman Rockwell look to it. But I don't think she could've quite—and I think she was just mainly referring to the fact that it was representational work, as opposed to the content of the work. And she was trying really hard to sort of relate to it, but most of my committee had no way of relating to it, even as Christians. Most of them were not Christians so even—and there was a strain of anti-Christianity at the time because of, you know, all the politics. The conservative politics were all ultra-Right Christians.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: But I was going to say, you know, they couldn't see how radical it was.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: No.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Because they didn't have the cultural framework to understand that you were being incredibly iconoclastic.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, right.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That this was very interesting and critical gesture toward Catholicism—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And dangerous. [Laughs.]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —and toward women who you were celebrating, but there was a definite ambivalence toward the Virgin, right, as this kind of—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, it wasn't even ambivalence. I refer to it as a thing.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: A what?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: As "it." A thing. I refer to the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe as "it."

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative], right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Because I wanted to make it very clear with whoever I was talking with at that time that it was an it. It wasn't a she, and it wasn't a her, because I'm not a believer. And I didn't grow up with it as a—you know, as believing in anything like that, except maybe the Virgin Mary, but even so, it was mostly Jesus Christ. So that—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So as an icon, she figured in your work as a kind of sign in a big sign system, which included—

[00:40:03]

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Right.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —how women were to be represented, or how—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: No, no, no. That represented initially part of the conquest.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I see, right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Because it was—when the Spaniards first invaded Tenochtitlán, they came for God, glory, and gold. God, glory, and gold. So that part of their mission, at least their understood mission was they had to convert whatever primitives they ran across. And this is what I think I mentioned before, about where there was a huge discussion between the Dominicans and I can't remember who—the Benedictines, probably—about whether the indigenous—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: You did mention this. Yes, exactly, you mentioned this. So I think—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But that was part of—to me, I saw it as part of the conquest. Because it didn't appear until about 10 years after the so-called conquest that there was a—and this is like, you know, four out of five people who died, you know, in that valley of Tenochtitlán. And that it—conversion to so-called Christianity, but it was an accommodation.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So then, when you see—there are so many interpretations of the *Guadalupe* series, and many of the interpretations I've seen is that—or include the idea that the women are being sort of raised to the level of a kind of goddess, or everyday women are being given the status that's equivalent to a powerful female figure.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah. Yeah. There is that element, of course, yes.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And I think that that element is there, and yet, there's a sort of ironic twist because it simultaneously a kind of critical reinterpretation of this.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, it's a reappropriation, yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: A reappropriation of this kind of European mantle, and the kind of patriarchal religion, right?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Right. Right.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So I think that that's also—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That's perfectly what was in my mind. One of the things that was in my mind, yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah. Yeah, that's great.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I think a lot of people don't understand artists usually have multiple ideas all working at the same time. You know, they think—and you know, people—and I, you know, with the *Guadalupes*, I let people talk because—and they often think that they're telling me things I didn't know. And I can tell you that I would venture 99 percent of the artists who have ever worked on any piece have already had that thought cross their mind, whatever it is they're hearing.

But it's part of why I do the work. It's part of engendering that kind of conversation, and not only for me but for people among themselves, even if they argue around the so-called proverbial dinner table, which nobody has anymore, but it's part of that. It's that that I want to have going on, you know? No matter what it is. Everybody sort of discovers something within those pieces, you know? And so now, right now, it's part of the indigeneity movement of, you know, crosshatching it with Coatlicue and Coyolxauhqui and Tonantzin and, you know, trying to sort of mesh together along with that little pantheon.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Could you say—I think this is a great moment to ask you a couple of questions about feminism, if that's an okay transition for you?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Sure, whatever you want, yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So I really enjoyed your interview with Celia Rodriguez and Cherríe Moraga, and that was back in February of 2020. I'm saying that on the tape, so people can find it if they want to look for it. And in that interview, you talk about attending a really important conference. And the conference was actually a kind of, let's call it, a civil rights conference or a conference for women. I'm just going to bring up the exact name because I have it right here. It was called the Vancouver Indo-Chinese Women's Conference, and it took place in April of 1971, where close to 1,000 women from Canada and the United States met with Indochinese women in a protest to the Vietnam War organized by the Voice of Women. And you were one of the incredibly lucky people who managed to attend the conference.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yes.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And you said some amazing things about how it affected you and motivated you as an artist and a feminist. And I wonder if you could just say a little bit about that?

[00:45:05]

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, the context of feminism at that time was totally New York-based. And especially working in the Mission in San Francisco, in a Latino district, and working with an organization which I worked with, called Los Siete, which was all—you know, it was—we were all Latinos of different kinds. There were Nicaraguans, Salvadorians, and I may have been the only Mexican American [laughs] but—so that—and there was a lot of sort of suspicion about what we called the white women's movement.

But we knew at the same time that women were part of the military muscle of the Vietnamese, of the North Vietnamese or the—jeez, I can't even remember what they call them anymore, NFL [ph]. What is it? The—anyhow, but the progressive ones fighting for freedom for their country. That we knew that women were part of their military force doing the same thing that men did, absolutely the same thing. So that it was a contradiction for us to see how American feminism played out and how Asian, and in particular Chinese—because we were reading Mao's book, you know, the *Little Red Book*, but we were also reading other things as well. So we were Marxists for sure. And we, in many ways, took our guidance from the Black Panthers as far as the reading material went. So when the conference came up, we decided to go—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: How many in your group?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —not knowing really—in our?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Delegation or whatever.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, it was—you know, I mean, we're talking about a small group of people for Los Siete. We were probably—I don't even know, maybe three or four of us went.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative], yeah, nice.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But there was a whole busload of women from the Bay Area, all different kinds of women. Activists, obviously, activist women. So when we arrived, we were introduced to Cambodian, Laotian, Vietnamese, North Vietnamese—an assortment of women from Southeast Asia. And all of them had been activists, all of them had been fighters, and all of them had been taken prisoners and were tortured. And so they talked a little bit about the torture, but they also talked about the need to fight, and they also talked about—what brought home, I think, to all of us—because there was a lot of argument regarding that conference and the meaning of it.

But I think what all of us recognized was that politics is personal and that women—the condition and situation of women should be set upon as a political agenda. Because up until that point, women were not seen as part of the agenda as far as the revolution. It was seen as somehow neutral, but of course all defined by men, and the women's rights or even children's rights were never part of it.

But this conference totally locked in the equality of women as warriors and the equality of women to endure a war and even endure whatever the enemy threw at us and continue. Several of the women were damaged by being tortured and, you know, you just—your kidneys were destroyed, you know, damaged and other aspects. And the women could not even really talk too much among themselves because—although there's probably more—they were more multilingual than we are as Americans, obviously. So everything had to be translated from the Cambodian to Vietnamese, from Vietnamese to French, from French to English. So it was a very interesting exercise.

And I remember quite—I thought it was very funny, where one of the women in the Q&A asked about women sleeping with each other, How was that handled? They were talking about a queer—what we call now queer rights, or lesbians.

[00:50:06]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: It was very funny because the women who were the translators could not find a word for lesbian, let's say. It was, you know, like, lesbian. I can't remember what the word was, but I think it was probably lesbian. They could not find and then the woman who was—she says, "Women who sleep with each other." And she's, "What? Oh, we all, we all sleep with each other, [they laugh] you know, there out in the hills," you know? [They laugh.]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Not that kind of sleeping, right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: [Laughs.] But it was—when finally, and it did take a certain amount of translation and searching for words where it involved the Vietnamese and the Asian women, that it meant "women having sex with each other," that there was a lot of—a considerate amount of giggling behind their hands.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I imagine.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: It was just part of, you know, embarrassment, and it just—yeah, I don't know. It was not a concept that was opened—there was no conversational language for it, you know? So I thought that was extremely funny, but also a lot of the people—and we as guests, you know—the audience became quite contentious that when that woman asked that question, they all went, "Ohhh," you know? Because it was like the pushing of lesbian rights was fairly new at the time. And that here, "Oh, you know, bringing up this! Again!" You know, it was into this sort of context of trying to be these gracious women, you know? It was a very contentious question, and—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Well, I think what's in—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But it involved a kind of a split, to a certain degree, between women of color and white women. Because white women, for the most part, saw it as a legitimate question and women of color were, I think, more interested in the—what I would say, it was more like the politics of it, of women as being equal in—because, you know, you have to remember in the *Red Book*, there is all that, you know, that women are equal to men, you know, equal in all rights and possible potentialities as men. You were going to say something?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Oh, I was actually just going to say, it's interesting to me that right around that time, some Chicano artists started thinking about and writing about this very question. That it doesn't come out till later, in *This Bridge Called My Back* or other books, that there's a sort of effort to try to articulate what a Third World women or women of color queer sensibility would be, and how to develop that language. And we have Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga and then, you know, Luz Calvo and Catriona Esquibel and other people coming after them, really trying to pursue this question, which was more or less kind of almost like an embarrassment or a taboo in the early 1970s.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yes! Yes, yes, yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And then by the end of the decade, we began to see women starting to say, "No, this is something we really have to be able to talk about because it's a reality, and we can't pretend it doesn't exist." Right? And so that's a really interesting moment that you're describing, which is sort of that—this still-repressed aspect of that element in culture and—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, I don't know if it was repressed, but it was certainly discouraged. Because you have to remember that a lot of the—in California, there was, like, the Northern—like myself, all of us from Northern California, which were—a lot of us were influenced by Marxism. And the ones in Southern California were influenced more by nationalism and the Brown Berets. And part of the Brown Berets's thesis was that family values and the maintaining of the traditional family, which was the man as the head of the household and the woman taking care of the children, and the grandmother, you know—all of the women pretty much maintaining very defined roles, whereas the man was the leader.

[00:55:06]

So that a lot of the—there was distance to the so-called white women's movement, which is what they called it at the time, was the—that the men defined it as the breaking up of the Chicano family or the Mexican-American traditional family, and breaking up of our culture. So that it was nothing light, you know? And the idea that overall, we had to develop—that overall, that we had to sort of define the maintaining of our culture. Because it was a difficult struggle to maintain who we were culturally and ethnically, but at the same time, not wanting to retain the oppressive roles of women in traditional Mexican culture, which pretty much the Brown Berets sort of—and they're different now, they no longer have that—but wanted to maintain. And that it was important that men be developed as leaders, so that the women should step aside and sort of hold back any kind of leadership potentiality they may have had, to develop the male leadership.

Which was transferred in Northern California, where I was—was that—the idea of collaboration or—what am I thinking of?—coalition. Because what we wanted to do within Los Siete—and as well as with the Black groups, various Black groups, and in particular the Panthers—that we would develop, each of us within our own ethnic and cultural groups, leadership within ourselves. And we would accept white assistance, allies, but at the lower level. Because allies, the whites had a lot of information that we did not have, you know, of how institutions worked and could talk to people that we could not talk to that would not dismiss us. So it was a struggle, but the idea of retaining and developing our own leadership also included women.

That aspect became much more overt when we came back from the Vancouver conference. Because then we understood that the personal—politics is personal or the personal is politics, the politics is personal. Because when we came back, we immediately began to deal overtly with a domestic violence situation within the organization. Two people who belonged, a man and a woman who belonged to the organization. And so we developed what we call—not consciousness-raising groups, which was really offensive to us, but discussion groups, or caucuses or discussion groups of men and—you know, men and then women separately. The idea was that we would separately meet from each other.

It didn't last long, but there was a certain amount of consciousness that I think came to the men, as well as the women, in developing how we would work as women. And that's where the organization Los Siete also began to formally begin to develop leadership in women. And we actually had, like, one or two women that were being cultivated, that we were cultivating as speakers for Los Siete.

So it was a profound—although we could accept feminism. I guess that was the biggest thing, that all of a sudden, feminism after the Vancouver conference fit into the political aspect of what

we were fighting for as far as, like, you know, equality and justice and the potentiality for all people and all that stuff. And even something as humble as the breakfast program, which we tried to emulate, you know, because the Panthers had begun that, and we had two of those initial—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right. We talked a little bit about that before when we talked about Los Siete.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That it was—because the women's movement in New York would not have done a breakfast program. They would not have seen it as part of a class structure. That they would not have seen children as part of the overall society and the well-being of women, you know, as that. So it was quite different, and we understood the politics. We were beginning to understand that politics and feminism were fused together, but we were defining it in a way that I think is much more closer to, like, what it is now, you know?

[01:00:27]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Well, you were probably some of the inspiration for the way artists and scholars and thinkers but also activists and community organizers operated. Because they could see that those were potential ways of thinking about it that hadn't really been introduced in the same way before.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But we came out of a working-class environment—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Exactly.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —which was quite different. We did not want to be executives. We did not want to—that's why that was so funny with Martha Rosler's piece, the *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, is that because there had been this whole thing of women getting out of the kitchen, the kitchen was a prison—but what Rosler did in looking at each of the items, part of the accoutrements of all the kitchen gadgets, you know, whether it was a meat cleaver, where she banged it on the cutting board, or took a knife and—you know, those were the obvious things, but also, like, a little pan which she could use as a weapon—that all of a sudden, weaponizing all of the kitchen gadgetry, all the kitchen equipment, put the whole—not only how women were surrounded by all these potential weapons in the kitchen but also, like, that the idea of the kitchen all of a sudden became less of a prison. And maybe only women knew that this was all—"I'm surrounded by all these weapons," you know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: [Laughs.]

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I mean, it was just a total—that's what made it so political, because—and it also what made it—

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YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —feminist, and also what made it so, I guess, ironic, and it was just—it was just funny—it was funny as hell. I know that when I was looking at it and the first time that I saw it with this group of people, I was up front for some reason, and I started laughing at it, and nobody else was laughing. And it wasn't until I started laughing that little by little that the rest of the group sort of, you know, began. And we all began to understand and laugh at this wonderful political piece, you know, that Rosler had done.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Wonderful. It's so wonderful. It was so wonderful. So I'm going to quickly do a quick check in. I'm going to put the recording on pause.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[Tape stops, restarts.]

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Say that again? [Laughs.] I didn't hear the last part.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So I'm just going to ask you another question and then I'll take a quick break.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Okay.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Also in that interview with Cherríe Moraga and Celia Rodriguez, you mentioned that you had had an experience with rape. I wonder if you can reflect on its relationship to your work or life as a woman artist?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I did not talk about it because I didn't quite know how to contextualize it. I mean, contextualize it—not personally, to tell you the truth, but contextualize it in a social, political way. Because even then, there was that whole discourse about, like, rape is not personal, that it's—you know, it's about power. That discussion is a long discussion, and it had already begun then. And there was already a discussion about—that it's not something, because women lure men into doing that kind of brutality, sexual brutality.

But what happened with me was that when I was in Los Siete—which was about '71, I guess—a young man was brought to my home—brought to my apartment—just to see if I could help him because he was a Black Panamanian. And he was not accepted by Black Americans because he was essentially a Latino and he was not accepted by Latinos because he was so Black. He was really dark. And so once my friend who had brought him over had left, this young man pulls out a gun and immediately—and it was myself and my roommate at the time—proceeded this whole little thing about, you know, raping us. He had a gun, so—you don't argue with a gun, you know?

So I remember talking with him at the kitchen table, and he actually cocked the—I could hear him cock the gun within, I don't know, 16 inches of my face. And I said to him, "Well, you know, don't worry about it, you know, we'll talk about this later, it's okay. You know, you can go home and nobody's—you know, nobody's going to bother you about this at all." And it was my ploy just to get him out of the house without getting me or my roommate killed. So, you know, I tell him—forgive him, tell him whatever it is that he wanted to hear and whatever—and as calmly and as—primarily, to tell you the truth, as motherly as I could, so he can walk out feeling all right.

So when he left, I did all the things that happen with people with trauma, to—I just remember dry heaving—dry heaves like vomiting, trying to vomit into the toilet and just nothing coming up. And you know, all the other things. And debating how to deal with this. I ended up just being actually quite angry, just ferociously angry with this, that he would do this. I felt like—almost like a betrayal, you know. I don't even know how to explain it, but just burning anger. And I just wanted him at that point—because in talking with my Los Siete group, the men there, I told them—they said, "What do you want to do?" I said, "I want him dead," you know. And at the time, this was also when the Panthers were being killed, and there was a lot of discussion within activist groups about getting unregistered guns, which nobody—you could use a gun, and nobody would trace it back to you. So there was all that talk. I said, "Get me a gun." I said, "I'll do it." I said, "You know, I will—I will just"—I just was just ready to just kill, kill him, dead.

[00:05:46]

And so it ended up being that the organization—and that's to me, like, where I understood rape, in dealing with men and women. And since whereas the men—well, you know, I had been one of the founding members of Los Siete—you know, one; just, you know, a minor one, but nonetheless there—so they all knew me. We were a very small group. We were about essentially maybe 8 to 11 people altogether who actually did this. We were kind of an almost fabulous organization in the community. But they—the men put me and my roommate in a safe house for two weeks because I was afraid to come home. And they indeed promised—while I was there at home, promised to, you know, watch the house where I actually saw one of our members actually sort of going up and down very carefully in front of my house and on the street, carefully looking around. So that there was this kind of a secure surveillance, which I was extremely grateful for.

And I got a phone call while I was there at one point, and it was from this young man's parole officer, and the parole officer told me that he had already had two priors and indicated on her part that she thought I should have mercy on him. You know, not prosecute him was her point. And that he had heard that on the street that there was, you know—how can I say it?—he was out in sight, seem to be shot dead, you know? And this was very—especially with the Panthers and the Los Siete, we were all seen as thugs anyhow. [Laughs.] As nice as we were, we were all seen as thugs. So in that element, I guess, it was—you know, anyhow. But there was—and I said, "I don't know anything about that," you know, that somebody's out to shoot him on sight or sight seen, you know. But it was not true. I did know. And I knew that there was a point out there to just kill him on the spot, shoot him on the spot.

So he turned himself in to his parole officer. And I had, in the meantime, the day before, had

actually gone—because I knew the—we already were talking about rape in feminism, and so I knew that I should go in and present evidence. So I went in and presented myself. They took a swab from my—from my uterus, and he took my underwear at the same time. So that was in evidence. And whether I would pursue a court case or not was totally open, but I wanted to be—that's how calculated we were, you know, as women but also as an organization, how calculated we were in dealing with this rape. So once he turned himself in, then I had—[laughs] then I had to—then I had to go to court. And I went to court because I wanted him off the street.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yes, good.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: He had already been convicted of rape twice before, so you know pretty well that there was probably other rapes that were not reported on him. But two convictions was a pretty heavy-duty conviction to carry around, understanding what the anecdotal evidence is in rapists.

[00:10:08]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: It's astonishing that he could have a gun, but I'm sure it wasn't legal.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, he got it from—he told me where he got the gun, because I think I—I don't know if I asked him, but he told me he found it in his grandmother's closet. So she, I guess, had stashed it away for self-protection. So that's how he got it. It was all—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Do you feel like after the conviction and the court experience that you felt like putting that chapter behind you? And did you also feel like it affected your work in a specific way?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, it did in a sense that I learned that I was not a pacifist.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Okay, you're not a pacifist. [Laughs.]

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I am not a pacifist. Actually, I had already sort of had indications of that before, but this totally convinced me that—I mean, I'm not an aggressive person, but I realized that if I needed to kill, I could kill. Or at least I would have—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: For self-defense.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —I would be prepared—yeah, for self-defense—I would be prepared to do that, so I knew I was not a pacifist. And I also recognized that I had a very strong moral and ethical backup behind that, so it wasn't like an impulse. You know, it wasn't because I was annoyed or angry. But that behind my ability to really kill this guy, or off this guy—that was the language—was through a very strong moral rationale, at least what I felt. There are a lot of Quakers and whatnot who would disagree with that, but there was a very strong rationale for me to conduct that kind of business. So that I learned.

And it became sort of interesting for me when I had my son, my child, that I realized that I would kill for him if necessary. I felt that that was very comfortable for me, and I had no quandaries about how to protect my child. But that that would be one of the things that I would resort to, you know, as well as—like, every mother, I think, would be willing to probably—at least I was willing to sacrifice my own life for the safety of my child. But at the same time, I would not be shy about killing somebody to protect my child. So that was the other thing.

And also, you know, sort of—kind of—even to this day, I don't understand this whole victimization about women being confused, and men to a certain degree—"What was she wearing, and what did she do to entice him?" That has to be totally, totally smashed within—that kind of thinking within men. That they have to understand that that kind of understanding regarding rape cannot—will not be tolerated. They used it in Rwanda, they used it in middle Europe, in—I can't remember, but you know—where rape was actually used as a weapon, a weapon of humiliation. What am I thinking? It was Sarajevo? I can't even remember what it was anymore. But it was a particular weapon of choice and humiliation and torture.

See, because I see, like, rape especially like in—and there was—Susan Brownmiller put out that book about—I can't even remember what it's called right now—oh, anyhow—but it was about—a lot of it was about women in Southeast Asia and by American soldiers being raped. And she even has some really vivid descriptions about what men told her about the rape of Vietnamese and Asian women. That it is a torture. It's torture. I mean, it should be seen by the Geneva

Convention or whatever as torture.

Anyhow, so it was all of that, but that's why I do not engage right now in the whole discourse on rape. Because I think that men have to be allies. Men have to be [sighs]—they want to play protectors, this is another way. That they have to talk within their own group, you know, about how men are raised, how men are acculturated to the attitudes that they have towards women. So I—you know? But it is still, obviously, an ongoing discussion. And Cherríe in that was, I guess, surprised [laughs] that I was so angry. To me, it did seem like a natural progression, you know—

[00:15:19]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Sure.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —to be angry. But to her, it was a surprise. She just wanted it out there, and then she says, "Okay, we're not advocating guns" [laughs] but—and I'm not advocating guns, but I'm certainly not—I think the whole idea of rape has to be rethunk [ph], socially and politically. And that's why I talked about it there within that public space, because it encompassed political thought as well as, like, this torture of two women in our own place, you know, in our home. It has to be seen for what it is.

Anyhow. So that was the point of me even bringing it up then. Even now, it's still, like, developing within my head, about how to deal with rape as a political—really as a political thing. Just to say it's a power play is not enough, is not enough, because it has to involve men's thinking. It has to involve the liberation of men from their constructed roles. And until that happens, you know, the discussion continues.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah, very good. Very good, yeah. Thank you, that's great. I think we'll break right there.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Okay.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Okay, great. I'm just going to put it on—

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JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: This is Jennifer González returning with Yolanda López on March 24, 2020, for the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution.

So continuing where we left off, we were talking about some sort of really quite serious concerns having to do with your own experience as a woman under patriarchy and violence that you experienced, and some of the impact that it had on you as a thinker-maker.

And I guess what I wanted to think about now with you is how your artwork came into the public. We talked a little bit about your artwork and a bit about the MFA show, the pieces that were in that show, the last time we spoke. And I wanted to follow up and say you have an extensive exhibition record. You've shown both in solo exhibitions and group exhibitions extensively across the US. And I wonder if you want to just talk about some of your own experiences with those exhibitions, ones that really stand out in your memory, specific people you worked with, or specific shows where you felt that the work had an impact or where you were happy to be a participant in that.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: As an artist, exhibiting in museums or galleries was the last thing in the world that interested me. Period. And in talking with another person who was interested in my art, somehow the idea of the *Who's the Illegal Alien* came up and that she sort of surmised that I had gone to sort of like a MEChA [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan] conference and shown it there, and all of a sudden, everybody wanted one. Which is not true. To me, what was important is the distribution of art, of my artwork. That is important and that comes out of—perhaps of being a political artist, you know, because there's no point in just making something that is put on a frame and walks out the door [laughs] from four white walls. But I told her the story of how the *Illegal Alien*, which I think is considered one of my most important artworks, which I like a lot—how it was—when we think about showing, when we think about exhibition, I sort of like to sort of redefine what that means.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Great.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: In the early '80s, I was contacted by a husband and wife, Mr. and Mrs. Patino. Ana Patino was the woman, and they were two retired schoolteachers. And they had a little—it's almost like a little vendor business, which they were—they followed all the colleges in their MEChA conferences and their Cinco de Mayo, you know, conferences, and parents' day for Latino sort of thing, or Chicano thing. And they went around, and what they did was they distributed UFW, United Farm Worker, stuff. You know, so it was everything from bumper stickers to red-and-black buttons with the black eagle on it. And they really liked the *Illegal Alien* and wanted to know if they could sell it, and I said, "Sure, fine."

So they did that for years, which means wherever there was a little celebration in each of the colleges, whether it was junior colleges or four-year institutions, and if there was, like, some sort of little—you know, they put up their four-legged folding table and gave away some of the stuff, especially with the Farm Worker stuff, because students were hungry for that, and they had no other way of getting that. And they sold my *Illegal Alien.* And I told them that—I can't even remember what I sold. I think in the end, years later in the end, I requested like, I don't know, $20 or $10, something like that, which was a lot of money at that time. And I said, "If you have to give it away—if somebody really wants it, give it to a student, but just don't tell them—tell them not to tell anybody that they didn't pay for it," you know.

[00:05:17]

So through the years, that's how my work got distributed, and that's how I often hear people saying, "Oh, I saw this in a dorm," you know, or "I saw this in my roommate's house, or in this bedroom or her bedroom." And that to me was how the *Illegal Alien* got distributed. And in many ways, that was much more important. And plus, the *Illegal Alien*, because it is lithograph, it is a multiple, it's not precious in the sense that it's just one drawing, that it was not requested to be shown in exhibitions at home. Hardly ever, hardly ever. I can't even remember now where it was shown.

In fact, the San Diego exhibit, I tried to tell her that the *Illegal Alien* and the *Guadalupe* were, you know, done at the same time in this—you know, August of 1978. One was done sub-rosa because I knew, you know, it was—and it was done for the Committee on Chicano Rights, and the *Lupes* were done for my graduation thesis—but that they were, in many ways, still—the ideas that created both of them were quite similar, except that one was male and the other one was female. Different context but the same ideas. And I knew that if I had shown the *Illegal Alien* as part of our graduate school works that it would—I probably would for sure not have gotten passed. It would've—I think they would've—it would've have failed. It would have failed. It would have, for sure, failed my passing my orals. So, anyhow—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Because it was so—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I'm not sure why.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —explicit, you think it would have made you fail?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, yes. It would've been like the nail, the last nail. Because they would not have understood the *Guadalupes*, and since that would've been deemed a failure—and even though I tried to explain it to them, it would've been deemed as a failure. And it was like—you know, Ellie said, "You know, a little bit like"—you know, the only reference she could come up with, because it was figurative work, was Norman Rockwell. She had no context in which to put it in. And if I were to show the *Illegal Alien*, it would—they might've gotten the humor as far as like, you know, the Thanksgiving dinner and, you know, who is the illegal alien. Because the illegal alien was common parlance at the time, the whole word "alien" was. So they might have gotten that part, but it was very superficial, and that's all they would've gotten, and so it would've been, I think to them, probably trite. As opposed to the profound sense of what it meant for Chicanos as indigenous people here. That part would not have breached their mind barrier at all.

But the *Illegal Alien*—even like I said, with this curator—you know, I don't—she may or may not show it, and she may show it maybe in a different, sort of separate context, I don't know, since there was—I sort of insisted, you know, it's the same as the *Guadalupe,* you know, as far as like, the thinking and the conceptual thinking about it. But there's a need for somehow to separate the image of a man as being feminist. And as I explained in my interview with Cherríe and Celia that it was—in many ways the image, the *Illegal Alien*, is a gift of feminism to how men could be seen, not just in guns and as far as like being warriors but as—you know, because he has at the

clutch of immigration plans, you know, and in one hand that he could be seen as a thinker, you know, a person fighting for ideas. And in his anger as being part of that fight that we, as viewers, would recognize where he is at, you know. So, anyhow.

[00:10:07]

But I really like the idea of—and I cherish the idea that Mr. and Mrs. Patino distributed my work through the years. And we're talking about, like, almost 10 years of—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Fantastic.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —painstakingly selling, you know, my work five—I think it was five dollars a shot, is what it was. And they sent me a check, and there were times when that check was extremely valuable to me and my son. Because we do live on such a narrow margin of—economically, on such a narrow margin. But it's so—the idea of—and especially with Asco coming out and signing LACMA. I think it was LACMA where they signed it on the outside as their artwork, you know, with all the taxpayer monies and all the effort, all the labor, all the Mexican labor that built that building. So there was an early understanding in the late '60s and the early '70s that we were not part of the mainstream. We were not even considered part of the mainstream. So many of us and I myself had no—I just wrote it off. It was not going to happen. And that's why the alternative galleries, which popped up in California, of everything from the Centro in San Diego to Brocha del Valle in Fresno and Galería in—you know, and all the other little, tiny—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: San Francisco.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And, you know, the Mechicano—what's it called?—yeah, the Mechicano [Art Center] gallery in LA. So that—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And did you show in all of those places? I mean—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Pretty much.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah, that's what I thought.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, I did, yeah. But it wasn't—I showed it and I think most of us showed it because it was an opportunity to let our people see the work. That's what it was. It wasn't to sell, and it wasn't to get newspaper articles or articles written about us or whatever it is motivated—you know. We knew—and all of us made our living, our bread and butter and our rent doing other things. You know, there were—anyhow, even Los Angeles probably, with Los Four and Magu and even Asco had more sophisticated confrontation with the mainstream galleries there in LA, whereas a lot of us on the periphery were just happy to show in libraries and cafeterias, bookstores, and, you know, classrooms. You know, it was all just fine.

But the ambition there was for political change, for social and political change. It wasn't for any other, really, aspect of it. And unfortunately, what's come out of that is that artists should not be paid for their work and that we work for free because we're such idealists. So they don't—I think our people to a certain—at least for a strong while and probably still—see making art as, not frivolous, but it's easy and not skilled work. In other words, they'll pay a plumber, but they won't pay an artist. So I think that's—that may have begun. And a lot of idealism in trying to be part of the civil rights movement and—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And what do you—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Hmm?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I was going to say, it seems to me like there was a lot of activity also directed towards supporting Cesar Chávez and a lot of, you know, energy directed toward building up the movement. And a lot of the art was really truly devoted to expanding participation and expanding identification and engaging critically with that. And what I think is interesting, as an art historian, is the degree to which some of that gets lost as, you know, José Montoya predicted in his conversations and debates with Shifra Goldman about whether work should be exhibited or not in museums. But I also think that the *CARA* exhibition that took place really did have a kind of watershed impact on the next generation, some of the people who weren't raised as closely connected to the movement, some of the people who were not so aware of the work. And I'm not just talking about the white mainstream, I'm talking about other

Latinos in the US.

[00:15:34]

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah. No, no, I got you.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And so I wonder what your thoughts were about that exhibition.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: About the *CARA*? The *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation*. I'm just saying it for the tape, yeah.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Okay. What interested me about it is how the work was segmented in the gallery. I saw it here in San Francisco, and they segmented, like, the *Guadalupes* as something called feminism. I can't remember what they called it, but it was all like, just one—and it was just my three *Lupes* and somebody else. It was a very small aspect of it. I frankly wondered about that because it separated it from—to me it was all part of, you know, we're all, sort of like, you know, also wanting political, social justice, but it wasn't quite seen that way. It was somehow segregated out: "Well, this is a woman's thing." So I got the impression that—in this little alcove that you can actually—it was a little alcove, and you could actually, as I recall, walk right through it into the next exhibition space, you know, of the *CARA* show.

And then, like, my *Illegal Alien* was part of a vitrine that was circular, as I recall, and it had like leaflets and pamphlets, and it had the *Illegal Alien* there amongst that. Which, again, was looking at it as [sighs]—this is what I mean about the fact that it's a multiple. Multiple. And the fact that it was lithographs, so there were—you know, I think the original run was like about 5,000 a run. So it was devalued as—the imagery, the impact of the imagery, it was all devalued because it's just ink on paper, you know, and you could buy it for five bucks.

And I think some of that was reflected in the curating of the exhibit, without understanding like all the little leaflets run off on mimeograph machines and all the creativity that many artists and people who are not trained artists created in bringing people to rallies or coming to support a community organization, you know, a fundraiser. You know, doing little ads and things like that were all devalued, but they were part of our collective consciousness and the imagery and about who we were, you know? So it was very interesting. And I do believe it did have an impact, for sure, because it was, you know, shown at the Museum of Modern Art here in San Francisco. Yeah, I guess it was SFMOMA.

So that was extremely important. It sort of crossed the line that way, and it was important. It was important. And it was, like, for all of us to see it, no matter how it was displayed, but to see it in sort of a collective venue, you know? Of course, the paintings were given a much higher—an important space, you know, because that's, again, part of that Western European structure of paintings being part of that Western tradition of "what is art," you know, which I think was still quite—we'll see what happens with this digital age that we're now seriously entering into, but it was within that tradition that the curators could not escape that kind of really colonial mind if you really want to put it that way. So it was very interesting.

[00:20:01]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Well, and also just the institutional hierarchy of museums that's been there for a long time. So even if as a curator you want to resist that hierarchy, it's challenging in each new institution, you know, to have to say actually, the posters are going to have the same amount of space as the paintings, you know, and have the local curators agree with you. Because works on paper are often considered not as serious as oil paintings—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Absolutely not.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —and so forth, you know?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So I think it's—yeah, it's a social hierarchy that really goes back to, I think, 18th-century aristocratic self-representation [laughs] if we want to go all the way—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, I mean, you know, but—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Or before.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But it's also even probably, I would guess, a more profound influence was the rise of the curator, which was in many ways like the rise of the auteur or the director in film. You know, all of a sudden, they're seen as the auteur. And the rise of the curator within the '90s actually, the late '80s, early '90s was part of that, so that they were careerist.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right, right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: They weren't curators—and that was essentially the only venue that they had to do their work in if they wanted to do curating. Curating, you know, is obviously a highly skilled and sophisticated profession. So that that was also in part what sort of influenced their negotiation of how the show was hung.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: So it's not just—but I have to mention that because that is like—the rise of the curator really is quite important in this whole—what happened to me and to many other artists is ethnic—is identity politics, identity art. So that all of a sudden, my work became identity art. So that the *Illegal Alien* or even the *Lupe*, regardless of what the original intent was, and function, outside of the gallery or outside of the museum, was seen as identity art and it was sort of—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And did you feel like that was—that that was a really narrow category for understanding the work?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, it's not even a narrow category; it's stupid. Because I think ultimately the identity—see, we had no—the people in the Chicano movement and Chicano artists, we had no fucking problem regarding who we were in our identity. But I think what happened was that the curators, which were primarily white, young, well-intentioned women—which, probably they were, you know—how can I say?—definitely boosted by the feminist movement—became the curators. And because they didn't know us, they thought we had the problem [they laugh] about who we were in our positioning in America, when in truth, it was really the other way around. But we were stuck with it and we—I still hear, every now and then, identity politics and identity art, you know. And it just grinds me. But I think eventually, it will be seen as what it is, you know.

But it's—even now in this recent show that I was in at USF, wonderful people, but the curation, the art manager, the wonderful person teaching and designing the curriculum for the curators was white. They were all—it was a white staff. You know, obviously really wonderful people but essentially white, you know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Yeah.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And so that—they're senior staff now, you know, they're senior. So that it—so when you asked me about my exhibition and all that stuff, it's the—my work was primarily shown still in alternative galleries. And the first one for me that was sort of like the serious gallery was in Sacramento, in Galería Posada, and that was *Cactus Hearts/Barbed Wire Dreams*, which was a solo show that I had regarding—and all of it new work, regarding the [laughs]—how I put it is, it's a collection. I can say that it was a collection of images of Mexicans done by non-Mexicans. So when you mentioned *Things I Never Told My Son About Being a Mexican,* and that's really like a tongue-in-cheek aspect, because it was all imagery done by non-Mexicans, you know, mostly for commercial purposes, everything from Garbage Pail Kids to curtains and neckties and ashtrays and, you know, all the other stuff that was generated with a Mexican theme especially during the '30s and '40s. And that was because they couldn't get to Europe. [Laughs.] And then there was a big influx of American intellectuals going to Mexico City because they couldn't get to Paris. [Laughs.]

[00:25:50]

So there was—so that's what that, to me—and that was an alternative gallery, and that was a solo show. And they were very generous and kind. That's where I first showed my video *When You Think of Mexico*, which was all taken off of the TV. And one of the things that was really good when I was talking with Allan, Allan Sekula—because he told me how to put my f-stop to where I would get a clearer picture of—I would get a scan line on—so a lot of the imageries that I have off of TV—which, you know, people look at it now, and they never heard of the shows, but they were popular at the time. But they get, like, this little black scan line. But it's a clear image if I had just shot it without putting in this f-stop.

And then the Galería opened up and said to invite me to have that solo show from the Galería Posada in Sacramento. But, you know, I never got any offers, never got any interest, like of SFMOMA or the Dia or, you know, Intersection—so there were some, what I would call, progressive art institutions, like Intersection for the Arts did have group shows, which I was part of there, but none of the so-called mainstream or white art institutions. None at all. So when you say it's an exhibition, "You have an extensive exhibition," I think it has to be sort of defined as to what that means. It doesn't mean that I'm showing in Germany. Eventually, I did show in Germany. [Laughs.]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That's what I mean. Eventually your work really gets around, actually.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, but it was—but I'm just saying—but to say that that's like, way [laughs] way later, but it was all prime—so it was LACMA, I think, I only showed, I think—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Well, let's first see this just a little bit more. Because for example, in the early days after you got your degree, you were able to get a few early solo shows at Centros, where there was a sympathetic audience and an audience you wanted to reach.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Right.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And then things slowed down because that's often the normal pace of things for young artists, or middle-aged artists for that matter. But you also had a child. And so—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh. [They laugh.]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: What year was your son born?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: 1980.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: January.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right. And if you look at the calendar of your work, you can clearly see a direct correlation between what you were making and what you changed to making after he was born. You turned more to photography. You did—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Installation.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: You did more local activism in the Mission and less sort of showing specific kinds of work. So I wonder if you could just talk about having your son and that impact on your art practice?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, I couldn't do any real painting, you know, because that's too—that requires space. That requires—when you have a toddler running around or a young person running around, you can't have, like, paint—you can't leave your stuff out, so you had—and plus, we lived in a teeny, tiny—what seemed to me then a really teeny, tiny apartment. So there were three of us. It was René, myself, and—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: René Yañez.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: René Yañez, who is the reason I actually came to San Francisco. Because I—anyhow, that's another story, which I can tell in a minute. So just the physicality of working in the studio, there was—plus thinking time. Mothers don't have thinking time, and it wasn't until I was washing dishes in the kitchen next door, and I suddenly found myself thinking about an art piece, you know, or thinking about a piece. And I suddenly realized that it was, like, an art moment. [Laughs.] That I wasn't thinking about what's going to be for dinner or what is my son doing now or I have to hurry up and go pick up him up after school, you know, or whatever it was. Or, you know, is the laundry done, you know, sort of thing. And that was like four years. My son was four years old, so it was—it took about four years where I actually began to have some sort of art thinking.

[00:30:53]

You know, without looking at my—what I did do is I did go—I was so fortunate—wow, shoot. [Sighs.] When I asked her—when I was in graduate school, my last part of graduate school, I did have a boyfriend at the time, but—and I said to him, you know, "Well, where are we going? I'm

going to graduate, you know; are we going to have a family? You know, what's our future?" And he didn't want any of that. He wanted to date other women, and I said, "Okay." But he said, "You could be wife number one." [Laughs.] And I said, "No, no, no, thank you."

And I had met René Yañez because he is from TJ and he and his girlfriend—assortment of young women—would, every now and then, come through, and they would stay with my boyfriend and I. We lived in Ocean Beach at the time. So I had met—I had met René before then. I had met him [laughs]—I had met him in—I originally met him when he was Graciela Carrillo's partner in 1970, where the Galería, when it was over on 14th Street, put up—because she—Graciela Carrillo and Patricia Rodriguez, who eventually became Mujeres Muralistas—that San Francisco initiated the first women's art exhibit. And as I recall, the—I was told this—[audio stops]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Hmm.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: [Audio restarts.] So somehow they—this was in the 1970, so going back before graduate school. Graciela and Patricia found me because I was working for—doing the tabloid, images just for the *¡Basta Ya!* in Los Siete. And they were unsigned, so I didn't know how they found out that it was me, but they came and they invited me to be part of the show, which I was more than happy to be part of the first woman's show at the time.

There's a lot of—since I didn't keep any of the flyers or any of that, I remember the exhibit, but I don't remember—and I think it was 1970. It might have been '71, but there are others who remember slightly differently as far as, "Was it in '70, '71, or whatever?" But it was the show that they curated and initiated, the first women's show. From the Galería, but it was the Galería over on, you know, 14th and Guerrero. So I met René then, because they were—Graciela and René were boyfriend and girlfriend.

And then once I had gone through my tenure with Los Siete and then left to go to San Diego—and my boyfriend at the time, we were in Ocean Beach, René and Graciela would come through, spend the night or rest and then go to Tijuana where René's family was. And so there was sort of like an ongoing, you know, relationship between Graciela and René and myself at the time. And René was working at the Galería, and Graciela was too. So I had known René for quite some time, and—not—the thing is with René, he's always very easy to get along with and easy to talk to and talk about art. And he was, at that time—he was talking about going to—visiting, I think it was Xerox, or IBM? I can't remember who—it was Xerox or a different company, where they were developing the color Xerox machine. And the Galería actually purchased or rented a color Xerox machine as an art tool because they had—[audio stops]

[00:35:13]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Oop. [Audio restarts.] Okay, so you were just saying—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But René, to me, I saw like a bee, you know. Because in [laughs]—in *The King and I*, *The King and I* talks about men as being busy little bees sort of pollinating as they went down, you know, the little flower by flower by flower. And I saw René that way with art ideas. So he's the one that I think introduced for many of us the idea of using a color Xerox machine as an art tool. And it helped me a lot in doing a lot of the initial sketches and collages for the *Guadalupe* stuff. So I could do collages. You know, I could play with them, and he was very important in, again, breaking—and especially during there in—[tape stops, restarts]

So René, I saw René as going up and down California to all the little alternative spaces, sort of talking about different ideas and methodologies.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And when did you two become a couple?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: We were friends for the most part. He had also come to San Diego as part of—when Jerry—the first initial—Jerry Brown Jr. initiated three different exhibits at the State Capitol, which was really exciting at the time. It was, like, a Black—you know, a show of Black artists, and then there was a Latino, a Chicano show, and I think there was a third one, and I don't know what that was. It might have been a combination—I don't know what it was. I'm assuming it was a combination of Pacific Islander and Asian people.

So René helped coordinate that, as well as with the RCAF in Sacramento there at the State Capitol, and I was working with the Chicano Federation. So he had come down and was doing some organizing trying to get works—he was curating the show, exactly, is what it was. He was picking out to work to go be part of that exhibit. Because it was really important. Because it was

the first time Chicano art had been recognized as an art statewide, you know, as an artwork. So in many ways, we have Jerry Brown to thank for that to some degree, you know, as far as the state function goes.

And unfortunately, there was an incident where a curator from the state, and I have forgotten her name—who was this young, white woman—and during the reception, there was like two large rooms with the work being exhibited, and there was a hubbub in the other room, and one of the women from the RCAF sucker punched [laughs] the curator. And apparently when she hit her, it just knocked her flat, straight flat, like a cartoon, just straight flat out. Anyhow, so that sort of ended the reception. [Laughs.] She was okay but it was—this was one of the RCAF women, who is still around, by the way. [Laughs.] And so she's the legendary—I won't mention her name, but she's legendary now.

But that was—René, you know, like I said, helped facilitate that.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That's great.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: It was the RCAF, although José Montoya was there and, you know, absolutely another captain. And René, you know, just totally worked under José's direction, but definitely both of them had skills that made it all possible. And then—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So let's go back to—oh, I'm sorry.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: So when I saw that I was going to graduate, I decided—and I was having, like, this proverbial baby fever—I decided that the next thing to do was to have a child. And I never was interested in a child. And considering the men that I knew, I approached two of them, you know, and one of them was René. And he said, "Well, okay." You know, I said, "You know, no, no, no—nothing—you know, and there's nothing to you. I just want—I just want—I need some semen." [They laugh.] I didn't say it—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I didn't say it that way, but we both understood. But in the process, we fell in love. You know, it's hard not to. But he was already living with his—in San Francisco—he always had a partner, he always had a partner. So he already had a partner in San Francisco who is quite well loved and I was—eventually when I went to—within three or four months later, was seen as the evil woman who's stolen [laughs] this man away from this woman artist, you know. So it was—and René, being who he is, said nothing and just sort of like played a very passive role and just sort of like let everybody find out what was going on, without him taking some [inaudible] or anything like that. So that's how we became a couple, and—

[00:40:51]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And was he co-parenting with you, or not so much, once your son arrived?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: It's—he's very—you know, René was obviously very much in love with baby Rio, very much. It was just like an enchanting, beautiful time. It's hard to define what goes on, but I suspect it may be true of most coupling of men and women, is that once Rio stayed portable—in other words, I could take him and carry him or—but once he started going to school, then I had to get up—and preschool was okay, but once he started like kindergarten, you know, I had to get up to get him to school and then make sure that I was there to pick him up after school. Because you just can't put like, you know, a four-year-old or a five-year-old on a bus or whatever, at least I couldn't, so. And he had gone out to Bay View to the Charles Drew School. You know, a public school.

So that I couldn't stay up with René. I couldn't do the nightlife with René. I couldn't consort with him and hang out with him and his pals. Such as it was, I didn't do much of it, but I was there, you know. And so that really sort of, I think—I don't know, because I know it happens with other couples, you know, where the woman no longer has the 98 percent time devoted to her man, as it were, and it all becomes switched over to the children. I think that's in part what happened. Plus, I don't think—well, anyhow.

So anyhow, so that's—but we were very—it was just a wonderful time. Every Saturday, we went out and had breakfast at this lovely little diner called Miss Brown's, and had pancakes and coffee, and Rio with—you know, given like a little mat, a little placemat with crayons, and he had, you know, Mickey Mouse, you know, pancakes and things like that. So it was quite

wonderful. Plus Rio went to all the receptions, so there was no problem. As long as I could carry him, he was like a—because he was so used to being around adults, and because he had already known the protocol of receptions, there was not much of a problem, you know, even as he got older. But as he got older and he started having homework and started having to get up and get ready for school, it became more problematic.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Well, it becomes more of a challenge to get other kinds of work done. And yet, you were able to, you know—I'm going to make sure my mic can hear me. You know, you were able to, like, really teach for example and do other things at a certain point, right? He was at the age where that could happen.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Right. It happened right from the beginning. In fact, right out of graduate school, I was invited to apply for the Chicano studies program at Cal. So it was just like a beginning sort of—ethnic studies—the Black studies department had already become quite established and wanted to break away from the—and in fact, it did break away from the other ethnic studies programming: Chicano, Asian, and Native American, and I can't remember what else was. And there was a big fight for faculty positions and being taken seriously as a discipline.

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They ended up hiring me. I said, "I'm going to have a baby," you know. And they said, "Well, you know, we'll call you in a year." And sure enough, they called me within a year, so I started teaching in ethnic studies at UC Berkeley. And they wanted me to teach art history. They wanted me to teach Mexican art history and then they wanted, like, the second semester to segue into Chicano art history. And I said I knew nothing about Mexican art history, number one, and number two, I didn't see any segue. [Laughs.]

Because we were so isolated as a group of Mexican Americans, especially in second generation, or a grandchild. I was—you know, my grandparents came from Mexico—that there was no—I always tell people, the only connection I knew about Mexican art was what was sold as tourist arts along the border, and that was everything from velvet paintings to plaster pigs and velvet plaster bowls, you know, these wonderful little—and paper flowers. You know, along Revolution, you could see like these little stalls of stacks and stacks of pottery, you know, all the same thing pretty much. I mean, the same pattern, you know, different pattern but just pretty much tourist arts. They were not seen as serious. So that was—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: What did you end up doing? What did you end up—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: The only thing I knew about—if somebody said Mexican art, that's the only thing that I knew about. I didn't know anything about the *Los Tres Grande*s. I knew nothing, zero. Jesús Helguera and his calendars did show up on my grandmother's kitchen, you know, as it did in bakeries and whatnot, and *torterías*. You know, so we had these beautiful painted, exquisite images of, you know, like Popocatépetle or whatever, the fainting woman and the man just gorgeous-looking people. And, you know, and all the homilies that Jesús Helguera had done, you know, which were in essence sort of instructive, you know, as far as like who and what our people were. Although it was just a single image, you know, and quite beautiful. I know people have seen his work. It's quite—he's like—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I grew up with those calendars.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —about as good if not better than Norman Rockwell as far as—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I grew up with those calendars too.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, evoking Mexicanness, or at least the idealistic image of Mexicanness. And I knew that if it was calendar art, it was probably not real Mexican art, I don't know.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right, exactly.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, I mean, his work was sponsored by what? A coffee or a cigarette company?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Exactly, right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: So I got me a book and tried to stay one or two chapters ahead of the class that I taught, but there was really—I could—there was no segue of Chicano art. Me, I think most

of art, if you want to do a segue of Chicano art, who we were as a culture and all that, I would say it was probably Walt Disney, you know? Because I know me myself wanted to work as an animator, or I wanted to work in the film industry either as a prop—I wanted to make props or I wanted to do set design or costume making. I mean, [inaudible] was a big thing for me and—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: You mean when you were younger?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: When I was in my, yeah, middle—in my 14, 15 years old, yeah. And—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: But coming back to teaching, if I can. Coming back to teaching—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, teaching, yeah. Well, you know, yeah, that—but that—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Where else did you teach? You taught at Berkeley in the ethnic studies program. Where else?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I taught—then I was—with Suzanne coming in, and I don't know when Suzanne Lacy just took over. Was I working there before? I can't remember. But it seems like Suzanne actually hired me and I—but I'm not absolutely sure. Because there was also—see, I go back to this, Jennifer, in talking about the politics, because the politics—the politics of Chicano art—the artwork is—in many ways, its visibility becomes part of the politics. Because federal monies from the War on Poverty had already trickled down but now were spreading out into—this federal money was drifting into the schools. So that CCAC, College of Arts and Crafts, even though it's a private school, still saw that there were federal monies that could come if they could do multiculturalism, if they could—and that was the wording that was used around that time.

[00:50:42]

So they saw me as a potential accent as far as getting federal monies, you know? So they counted foreign students. And a lot of them, very wealthy foreign students. You know, like there were several Korean students who were quite wealthy, I know that for sure; architectural students. So that—that they even started, like, an ethnic studies program of two. It was me and this other woman named—her name was Opal, and I—Opal Palmer? I can't remember. She was a writer and a poet. So we were the ethnic studies department of two, and she's teaching literature at—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: At CCAC?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —CCAC. Yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And how many years were you there?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: I was there about six years, something like that.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Nice.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Never full time. I started out teaching—they gave me a beginning painting class, which is fine, very interesting, because all the young people who were painters, they're coming to "Introduction to Painting," were all like art stars wherever they were, whether they were art stars in—whatever city or high school they were in, they were art stars. So they come in, so I had a room full of art stars who already had these signature moves about, "This is what an eye looks like and this is what a flower looks like," and it was very difficult. It was a real challenge for me to work with them and begin to draw what they saw as opposed to what they thought it should be. These little symbols in their head of what a nose looked like or what a mouth looked like. So it was a real challenge.

And they all came in with Walkmans at the time, so they all—and I told them, I said, "What are you listening to?" And they were listening to The Beatles. I said, "Why are you listening to the Beatles? You know, that was, you know, [laughs] 20 years ago, 30 years ago, what's your own music?" And finally, I said, "No more Walkmans in the class," which they truly did revolt against, but nonetheless. Because I had had, in the past, a wonderful teacher who actually while we were painting would read like Vasari's art—what is it—*The Lives of the Artists*? You know, the Italian book—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Vasari, yeah, yeah, yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, *The Lives of the Artists* or something like that. And so he read that to us, so I started reading other things that might be pertinent to the art world and whatnot. So they had to listen to me as they painted. But that was the CCAC, and then with the—I was—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And you also taught at Berkeley?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: When I taught at Berkeley, I taught the one semester of—you know, it's from Mexican art into Chicano art. And then I also was asked to teach something called Community Art. Patricia Rodriguez had been my predecessor. She had been there before. And she had done this wonderful historic reader, which I still have a copy of it, and it really is historic. So I did Day of the Dead with students, which they absolutely loved. But the thing is like, where I always taught was in a building away from the direct central campus, so I don't know what the—and we did have a reception and all that, and I don't remember how many of the faculty actually came to see it. But the students came and their friends came, which made me feel good, and they were very proud of what they did. And this was, like, very interesting for me because these are a multicultural bunch of students, you know, white and Black and Asian and Latino, teaching them the Day of the Dead.

[00:55:09]

And I felt really good about it because it not only expanded how Mexican and Chicano thought is quite different, but also I think it was a gift for them about thinking of another way of death. You know, which was quite different than Halloween at the time. So it was—and they could bring and they could remember their own loved ones, whether it was, you know, a mother or a father or grandmother. So they could actually bring in personally something and they could—it sounds cornball, but share it with—by putting it in whatever it is that reminded them. It was quite touching. It was quite touching to have all these non-Chicano-Latino students pay homage to the ones that they had loved and had passed away.

I can't remember. I just—oh, I only taught there two years, because there had been a whole hubbub about Meryl—a woman named Meryl Wu [ph], I think, who had taught there for seven years at Berkeley and was demanding to be put on tenure track, even though she had been a lecturer all those years. And anyhow, what the school did was they said, "Oh, we're only going to hire lecturers for two years," so they did that for quite a long time.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: But it sounds like you had a really wonderful opportunity there with the teaching. And then after that, you also—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, yeah. I also taught at Mills. I mean, I—this was with Moira Roth because Moira went to—and this is very interesting. This is why I talk with students about the benefits of graduate school. Because it's often—what you learn there gives you time to learn, but it's also the contacts you make, which most of us never even think about but it's really a highly—sometimes it becomes even more valuable than maybe other assets, but you have to see it as an asset. So I used to tell my students, "Make sure your teachers know who you are. They may not know you personally, but make sure when they hear your name, they know that it's you."

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So Moira Roth hired you at Mills College?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: At Mills College, yeah. I went there—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And you taught there—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —for two years, I think, yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Also two years?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Teaching—I'm sorry.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: You were at Mills also for two years?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah. It was like two years. Because Jay DeFeo was the pioneering Abstract Expressionist and other—or she hung out with the—she was like one of those unknown—like Krasner, you know—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Lee Krasner.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Lee Krasner, yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: An unknown woman sort of attached one way or another to famous people, famous men artists, and become disappeared even though they're extremely talented and serious professional painters, but they become invisible.

So DeFeo had taught there and I was sort of like—because she had gotten quite sick, so that slot became available as a drawing teacher, and that was quite interesting too. And I did learn a lot in—and then I taught at San Francisco State College. I was invited by Christine Tamblyn, who was trying institute an experimental art component aside from the art department. She eventually became quite ill and could not pursue that. But that was very interesting for me, too, to be part of, like, this experimental—because I never saw myself as experimental, but I guess I was. [Laughs.]

And then—I never taught in—I—did I? I don't think I ever taught in the art department per se, but I did teach—and then I was invited to teach the ethnic studies at San Francisco State College. So I taught—I can't even remember what I taught. I think I taught pretty much something called "Art in Image," looking at images and beginning to become self-aware of what you're looking at, how you're looking at it, how can it be interpreted, and all that. That was fun, I enjoyed that immensely. And those were all what I call civilians, you know: not necessarily artists but who were somehow or other, out of curiosity or who knows what, taking the class.

So those are the two departments, and I can't remember what it was called—it was this experimental art class with Christine Tamblyn, and then the ethnic studies component. But never invited to teach out of the art department.

[01:00:12]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And so that's' really a wonderful—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, and then—oh, excuse me—and then I taught [laughs]—and then I was invited to teach at UC Santa Cruz, so I had a class there. And that's where I met Celia Rodriguez. I met her before, but I can't remember how or what. And she was invited to teach a class at Stanford. And the classes I can't remember, but they were—I can't remember if they're on the same day or something like that. But anyhow, we ended up co-teaching her class and my class, and that was a lot of fun, and it was also a long—because it's a long drive to Santa Cruz, a lot of discussion. And a lot of discussion. And it's one of the reasons I really adore Celia because she talks my language, which is art and politics, you know? So it was quite wonderful because we had, to a certain degree, overlapping histories. Parallel. Not necessarily together, we did not know each other, but parallel, and it was quite comforting. That's one of the reasons I think I like her so much, because we both can talk art and politics, and—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And when were you doing that?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —we know what we're talking about.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: When were you teaching at UC Santa Cruz with her? What years?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, I don't remember. I don't remember.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Was that the 1980s?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Probably the '90s—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: '90s?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —I think.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: 1990s?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, I would've—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I can look it up. I just was curious, yeah, okay.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And the funniest little story that came out of that was, I was talking about

—in UC Santa Cruz talking about—it was in the art department—talking about my *Guadalupe* pieces and the analysis I did with them, and I talked about saying that one of the art scholars had just defined the—

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YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —the *Virgin of Guadalupe* as being a nice, little—a nice—because their coloring was—she looked to be European, didn't look like indigenous at all, the Mediterranean, Jewish girl. [Laughs.] Out of the darkness, this young man says, "She's Jewish?" [They laugh.] Never realizing that the Virgin Mary was Jewish. And Christ! What was Christ? Christ was Jewish.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That's right. That's so funny.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Right. It just hit him, [laughs] and he just blurted it out! [They laugh.] And the person next to him, this woman said, [demonstrates garbled indignation], you know.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: [Laughs.] So funny.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: You know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So funny.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: You know what I mean? But it was just—he just blurted it out. But anyhow, so that to me was—this is what happens with teaching, as you well know, these little things come up, and all of a sudden, you realize you hit a nerve. [Laughs.]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That's right. I know there's so many great moments in teaching. All those light bulbs going off, you know? And you don't really know when something is going to be a revelation for the students, and it just—it just is.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Right.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So I think I—thank you so much for talking about the teaching. Teaching is one of my joys. I wanted to say a little bit now about—if you wanted to talk about any specific artworks. I could take us through a few key pieces and ask you some questions. For example, you were talking about realism in a certain way when you were helping your students to learn about how to really draw what they see. And I remember feeling like that when I was looking at your runner series. I was really impressed by the way the runner's body is represented not in an idealized way but in a very, like, straightforward, kind of true-to-life flow of flesh and clothing, so we get a sense of the liveliness of it. But it's not some sort of fake, you know, artificially rendered female form.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, that's one of the criticisms I have now with this whole warrior movement, warrior—woman warrior movement that's going on right now. Because as Chicanas, you know, it's bereft of really any kind of risk-taking or ideas, you know, or homage to real women.

So what I did was I had a friend in graduate school. Her name is Virginia, and I've forgotten her last name, but she's on the East Coast now. And I asked her to photograph me running, and in different poses. And what I did, and especially even with the *Guadalupe*, which again, I think is part of its appeal is that even like—because it would've been very easy to do her hair somehow fanning out like you often see as sort of this long but sort of curly at the end, exquisite halo, you know, romanticized. And I didn't want that. That's why her hair looks like what people look like when you run, and that's what women's long hair, that's what it looks like.

And that comes out of the women's movement, and in a sense also in wanting to do what real women look like. We all had this idealized idea of feminine strength or feminine power coming through advertisements, you know. That's why the idealized form—that's why I wanted my mother as a fat woman, you know, to come out. And my grandmother as an old woman. And not only an old woman, but an old Indian-looking woman. So she wasn't like an old white woman, you know? And she didn't have, you know, like [laughs]—so many, and even now on TV, I see a white woman, they portray themselves with white hair but they're all like they've been to the hairdresser. So I think that my grandmother never did that for her hair and a lot of older women did not. So I wanted to portray something that looked—it was beyond real, but it was sort of

almost like creating a new iconography of who we are and being willing to take the risk of a non-idealized figure.

[00:05:01]

So that's why the whole running series was the way it was. So it's me, obviously, as a runner, but it's—you know, it's a non-idealized—but at the same time, you know, as I said the other day, who knows? Maybe now—the *Guadalupe* was seen in one way in the '70s, and now it's being seen as this sort of rediscovery of the indigeneity of the goddess and whatnot. But now, you know, maybe 20 years from now, it'll be my—that work, that same set of work, will be seen as an homage to working-class women. Without apology. Without apology, you know? That my mother at her industrial sewing machine, because there was thousands if not millions of women around the world who make their living for their families working at an industrial sewing machine, and—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I think a lot of your work is about labor. I mean, if you look at—it's really about—from the very beginning, it's about certain kinds of labor. So even the *Guadalupe* series where your mom's at the sewing machine, that's one, but then you have the poster series, *Women's Work Is Never Done*, and then that continuing—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Right, Farmworker women—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Farmworker women. I mean, you want to talk a little bit about the relationship of labor policy, practices, histories?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, no. I don't—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Labor movement?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —use the word—I don't use the word—I don't use the word "labor" because it is really heavily invested in the labor movement and that whole history. So I just talk about it really more humbly as working-class women.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Okay, right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: So this means women who—and for many years, I urged my students to photograph your mother working. I don't care if she works as the cashier at Safeway, I don't care if she works as a custodian in a 10-story building, you know, with a broom and bucket. I don't care if your mother is working at home. Show her at the store picking up produce, a nice—since she's picking out good food from—you know, a good carrot or a good head of lettuce for the family. That's work, you know? Show her at the sink washing dishes. This is women's work. We don't honor working-class women and the work that we do. It's invisible. So I would—for many years, I urged: Photograph your mother working. Because I wanted them to understand that women work.

And number two is that there is—I said, Because there is no stash. There is no repository of women working and the ordinary, everyday work that women do. There is no stash of—or archive. There is no archive of women volunteering to be at crosswalk things when kids get out of school. Or sitting down at home helping with the homework, or not helping with homework, or serving dinner at the table, you know, where somebody is—your mother is setting the food for you at the table. And there is no imagery of women working out in the garden. Or taking out the trash. This is work. We need an archive of women working. I said, "You, you are right there. Photograph your mother working." Because I know they did not see their mother as working.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That's right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And I thought that if they photographed it and saved it within their head, This is my mother's work. And plus, like I said, there's truly no archive of women working, you know? And especially women of color, you know? I mean, there are some now with Ken Burns and Skippy Gates, you know, coming up with these Black women working in the cotton fields and nursing white children. But there is a need for Latina women to—we need an archive of the work that we do. Anyhow, so that was a part of my rant for a while.

So, you know, who knows, Jennifer? Maybe in 20 or 30 years, my work will be seen as an early homage to working-class women, you know? And hopefully, there'll be a lot more of that. Then it'll become chichi. [Laughs.] It becomes chic. [They laugh] Oh, yes, you know? Who knows, you know?

[00:10:00]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I think it's already incredibly valued by so many people. So many women and so many people. And we already talked briefly about *The Nanny* and that installation piece that you did, which indicates sort of the questions of beauty and so forth. We don't have to go into too much detail, but I wanted to just acknowledge that you did, in the '90s, turn to doing some installations and—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Doing some what?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Installation art.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, installations. Yes, yes.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And some of it made me think about some of the artists that I wrote about, like Fred Wilson, in the sense that you found artifacts and you brought them into the space of the gallery, to make us really think and reflect on the relationship and the juxtaposition of those artifacts, whether it was *The Nanny's* uniform or the posters. And I wondered if you wanted to say anything about that way of working? You only did a couple of pieces like that, as far as I know.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, got it. Well, the *Cactus Hearts/Barbed Wire Dreams* was almost all installation. Because all the collection that I had, everything from tablecloths—and so I set up a table and—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Oh, the *Mexicana*, right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —there was the dishes made out of—with Mexican themes. There were curtains with little sleeping Mexicans on them or little *burros*, you know, little donkeys. And then there was that big installation with the *Things I Never Told My Son About Being a Mexican,* which is all part of that. And I did a chair called the *Mexican Chair,* which was also, again, a tongue-in-cheek about racism, you know, where the seat itself is pink and green, and there's cactus spikes coming from the seat of the chair. And in the back of the chair, you know, where you put your back, there's a picture or Granny Goose who was, at that time, seen on TV over and over again as [laughs]—anyhow, you know, she was seen—it was very interesting because she was seen almost as a—was she a man or a woman because—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: She had, like, a sombrero and she had—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, yes, it was a sombrero but also it was an ambiguous figure, but nonetheless, it was seen as part of this—because the phrase in the ad was, "What's in the bag, goose?" Anyhow, but it was—anyhow, it was just a little tongue-in-cheek, and on the back side, there was also a little bit of that. But it was really tongue-in-cheek, but also hopefully a vicious comment on the sleeping Mexican. Because that's what it was about. That whole imagery about the sleeping Mexican, often seen as drunk, with the bottles behind him, but leaning against the cactus and sleeping. And the whole "*mañana*" word, that we were lazy. So that's the whole idea of the *Mexican Chair*, is that, you know, what kind of insanity would be to put a figure—because it was a folk icon.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That's right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But it's a folk icon that had started coming up in—I don't know, in the early '20s, there were all these little imageries of Mexicans. But that's the one that Americans picked up, you know, and repeated and repeated and repeated and repeated. It was this drunken guy leaning against the cactus with his sombrero down, so you never saw his face, napping and sleeping.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: As if anyone would want to lean against the cactus.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, and also within that exhibit, which was all installation—and that was done 1986, so it was—Rio was about five years old then, maybe six years old. I also did the video *When You Think of Mexico*, which is a compilation and an analysis of advertisements and TV programs based on Mexicans by non-Mexicans, again. So it was everything from ads about "Run for the border," you know, Taco Bell doing an ad calling these lanky white young kids in a Jeep and in a horizon background and saying, "Run for the border." For tacos, right?

To *Giant*, the movie *Giant*, with—and I have the last part of the movie where they have a calf, a black calf and they have a sheep, a little white sheep, and then they're looking into a crib—not a crib but a pen. There's this young toddler hanging on to the edge of the pen, and he's supposed to be the combination of white and Mexican child together, but he looks really, really—he doesn't have much white in him. But the idea of a sheep, a white sheep and a black calf. Well, who's the white sheep? The white sheep is, you know, the white component, and the black calf, which is not nearly as tender [laughs] as the white sheep is the Mexican component, you know?

[00:15:54]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: But it's also implying that here are two species that should not be—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Right, exactly.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —together because they're actually different species. So it's a pretty damning commentary, even if it's presented as if it's a sympathetic view.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, I think I even made that comment—see, this is what I mean about artists think of all this stuff, but anyhow—but I make that comment in the film itself at the end. So that was all part of one exhibit, you know, doing the imagery of—I mean, but it was installation.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And it was labor-intensive, but labor-intensive in the setting it up, you know, already. So that—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: And all the research, too. A lot of research went into it.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Well, the thing is, yeah, I'm—even to this day cannot help myself. [Laughs.] I'm looking at stuff and saying, "What?" And analyzing it, which I think probably my son is willing to run away from. [Laughs.]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Do you want to say anything more about any other exhibits or, like—not exhibits per se, or like, a group—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah, let me think about that—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —of, like, particular works?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Let me say something about *The Nanny* before we leave *The Nanny*. Because essentially it's two black-and-white photographs. One was done in 1961. It's an airline ad. And a flower vendor, a Mexican flower vendor, very humbly dressed, offering this beautiful model whose dress is sort of a chic-y [ph], Mexican-type, folkloric dress. And then the other photograph was done in 1991 with *Vogue*, and it's a woman with hoop earrings, and a white woman, a tall model and I think she's got the off-shoulder, little blouse. And then standing next to her is a very petite, dark-skinned Mexican woman. And you can't see her face because she's holding like this flat basket with watermelon.

When that was shown—that was done in 1994. And when I was invited to be part of the panel at USF, where that exhibit happened, at the end I said—I questioned the white women there—excuse me, the non-women of color. Because we are called women of color, so there was the non-women of color, the non-color—non-women of color. I said, "Why don't you protest how you are portrayed in those images? Why is it us? Why? Aren't you angry? Aren't you upset to be portrayed as that, those two images in the media? Why don't you protest in sisterhood? In sisterhood?"

And I don't know if that made an impact, but I am getting tired of doing—where we do all the heavy lifting. And I think this is—I think white women are ready, or women of noncolor are ready, portions of them are ready to join us in the fight. But for their own way. Not necessarily for our good but for their own good, for their own sense of mental well-being, you know? You know, I said, "Why aren't you protesting? Why aren't you being upset? Why aren't you arguing your portrayal of this sort of like—you're portraying the colonizer is what you're doing. You want that as part of the imagery for women of noncolor? I mean, you want that?" And I think white women have to wake up to that. That they don't need to be seen—and these are all images pretty much made by men, you know. I mean, the iconic, you know—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That's right.

[00:20:00]

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —beautiful woman, like—I said, "You know, do it for your own mental health." You know? I didn't say that then, but there needs to be a real—I think an assertive movement by women of noncolor that this is—has got—that they don't need this anymore and they work in sisterhood with us. Work in sisterhood, really, rather than do anything like us any favors, you know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right, right. That's great. Yeah, I think it's really interesting to think also about, even going back to Manet's *Olympia*, right, with the woman holding the flowers—right, you know, the painting. And I think that—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: With the Black servant, is that the one that you're talking about?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Exactly. Right. And just thinking about how that image-making tradition of the white woman and the dark-skinned servant, where the thing that she's holding is a sign of fertility. You know, I can't believe we're still there, you know, in the mid-'90s, probably into the 2000s if we were just to do a little bit of research. And I think you're right. Women have to really speak up, all women. So I'm just—I'm so happy to hear you said that to them. It's really great [laughs] that you—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, this was at the end. [Laughs.]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: They probably didn't know what to do with that, and a lot of times people feel like, you know—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, they were stunned. They were stunned, I was told. I was the last speaker. I mean, once somebody said, "Oh, Yolanda is up," somebody said, "Uh-oh." [They laugh.]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: But, you know, someone should say it.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Which is the first time I've ever heard that. I said, "Me?" [Laughs.]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Someone should say it. Someone should say it. Hallelujah. I was just going to say, it's six o'clock, and I wanted to check in with you and see how you're feeling. I feel like we've covered a lot of territory, and I wanted to just say if you've got another 30 minutes, we could press on and kind of wrap up, and we could talk a little bit about postretirement or—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh. [Laughs.]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —you know, what's been going on for you, and the sort of—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Righto.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —in the 2000s and into the current last couple of decades basically, from the 2000s to now. How coming into retirement, continuing to make work—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yes. Oh, yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Do you want to just talk a little bit about that?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, is it—yeah, hold on. What I'm going to do, Jennifer—let me go get my cards because I can show my cards. And that's—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: I have them. I've seen them.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, you do?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Remember you gave me some.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah. Well, I'm not showing them to you, my darling. I'm showing them to the Smithsonian.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Okay. But they are not seeing this. It's not a video. They're just—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, that's right.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —hearing it.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, shoot, that's right! Okay. Oh, doggone it, okay. Ask me your question.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So really, just if you want to talk a little bit about what has been going on for you in the last couple of decades. You know, leading up to retirement and after retirement, you know, from your late 50s—you know, from age 57 to 77, what's been going on for you the last bit of time. Because your work has changed, you produce different kinds of work, and you produce less work. And so I just wondered if you wanted to talk about coming into age, coming into a certain kind of—where one of the amazing things too is, your work was very visible when it first came out and then it has continued on as a kind of touchstone for many people, generation after generation. And so what's kind of wonderful is that even if you're working and projects have changed over time, people still come back to you and they want to talk to you and they want to see the work, including the early work, as an elder. You know, as a person who's—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That's interesting, yeah.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —a mentor, as a person who's a kind of model. So if you want to talk a little bit about moving into that phase of your life.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: It's very interesting. I did not grow up in a household where there was kind of a definition of what a life is. So that retirement meant nothing to me. Even growing old, it's—I think just it's hard for me to sort of give form to the last 20 years for myself, in part because I have lived my life pretty selfishly, which I think most artists do anyhow, and did what pleased me, what suited me, what interested me at the time. And once my son graduated from college and he was independent—even though he left—we lived together until I was 72, so I became an empty nester, as it were, at 72, and that was about five or six years ago. And he's now married and has his own—he and his wife live in Oakland.

[00:25:47]

I didn't plan—it's very interesting because—I'm not sure. Because I think about, like, not necessarily what I did wrong, but why I ended up living alone, why I ended up on Medicaid, why I don't have a partner, you know? I would have liked very much to have had a man to grow old with, who I liked, who liked me. And I think in part, because I do think about this quite a lot, like, I really wanted to find somebody who liked me. And either I didn't see it when it came along or I was not aware of—or it's just, somehow, I missed finding a companion who liked me. And it's sort of part of this sort of loneliness that I feel now, you know, as a single woman.

I mean, I do get young people. I have to tell you this: It's quite satisfying to have young people just wanting to talk with me, or just wanting to talk to me, or have me talk with them. There's a great joy in that, because I feel like that they want to talk ideas. And there is not many where they could safely talk about ideas, so it gives me a great joy in that. But, you know, I don't have —you know, I miss—like my friends who have grandchildren, I get kind of horribly jealous of that. I never even became a godmother or a—when my friends started having children, I said, "Please make me a godmother!" And I never said that out loud, but just sort of waiting and wondering and wishing and a hoping, and it didn't happen.

I don't know. Saying "I don't know what I did wrong" is not necessarily the phrase that I'm looking for, but I don't know how I could've made it better. And growing old—and I had never considered myself good-looking, which is kind of interesting because putting out old pictures of myself in my youth, and all of a sudden saying, "Oh, Yolanda, wow, you look good!" Well, the thing is nobody ever told me at the time I looked good, so I never had the feeling that I looked good, you know? Because I really worked hard to groom myself to make myself, what I would call, presentable. That's what it was I worked for, was to look presentable.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: But you were so beautiful, and you still are. I mean, striking.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Well, [laughs] I don't want to get into that little—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: But anyway, never mind. Right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But I never felt good-looking or beautiful. I never felt good-looking, let's put it that way. I always felt a little bit odd and not conventional, because I traveled—I have to tell

you, I traveled in conventional circles with a lot of white people. And we were talking, Jennifer, about, you know, who I talk to as far as the other artists. Did I have conversations with other artists? Very rarely, seldom. But occasionally, and they were—we were all busy, you know?

In San Diego, I—most of my friends were social workers coming out of the Chicano Federation, and we joined—we made up a group. We created a group called *Trabajadores De La Raza*, but we were all—like, one of them was a psychiatric social worker. And I had fun with them. I mean, they were—and one of them was a director of a nonprofit organization, and it was just—but they had like, more or less, MSWs, you know?

[00:30:06]

It was fun to be with them, and one woman was just—was—her name is Maria Sardina, and she was absolutely one of the wittiest women—older woman—one of the wittiest women I've ever met, and just always smart and sophisticated and kept us laughing. We went out and—things I had never done before, like going out drinking, [laughs] clubbing, you know? I never danced because I just never really learned, but it was a sophisticated company, which I truly enjoyed. But they were not artists. They were not artists.

When I moved to San Francisco because I was sort of slightly shunned because I had stolen René away from this other woman who had been part of the Galería was—and then I had Rio—it was—the friends I made was—the friends I truly felt comfortable with was Juana Alicia, who's a muralist painter. Just fabulous, and plus, I understood her work. She came from Detroit, I think, at the time, but I totally understood conceptually her multilayered thinking of work. And I still think she's a genius. I think she's a genius, I really do. And on and off with Patricia Rodriguez.

And of course, Graciela Carrillo, who was René Yañez's great love but who organized the Mujeres Muralistas, who was just a wonderful, tender woman, and her story is really heartbreaking. You should find out about it one of these days, Jennifer, because it's really an interesting woman's artist's story and about—it's just—but extremely talented and just—anyhow. But she was a friend of mine, and I adored her. And there were other people, which I can't come up and I—forgive me for not remembering your name. [Laughs.]

And lately, I've had young men come to me and just want to talk, you know, in a sort of—how can I—in a safe environment, I guess, is—because I don't have any organizational pull or organizational affiliates, that they can talk to me about different things. They talk about politics, really, which I don't know what—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Are they mostly artists?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: They are—yeah, they are. Actually, the two that I'm thinking of—oh, the three that I'm thinking about—are artists, you know? They are accomplished young men, and so there's no fear on their part, there's no fear on my part. You know, we're all quite—occasionally—you know, they will occasionally either come by or we'll sit down and just have a nice chat.

And there is another young woman who is also not a visual artist, but she's also like head of a department, you know? She's a Latina but, you know, it's—they're—a lot of my friends are non-artists, but they're activists. You know, there's like, Nancy Pili who I don't very well, but I just adore her. You know, she's an activist. So that the—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So this past couple of decades, you've been having so many interesting relationships with people inside but mostly outside the art world that are part of your social circle, part of your social life.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Yeah. And one of the things that I did want to do and hopefully I still will be able to do is I want to have dinner parties, like once a month or maybe every six weeks. But just to have, like, a selected group of maybe four or five people and combine them in sort of fields and also do some networking, you know. But provide whatever—non-connected people that I think will be helpful that are—and that they're not in competition with, you know, up that career leader. But to have people who would know and be excited about meeting each other.

And I keep thinking of the Algonquin. Dorothy Parker, you know, at the Algonquin Hotel, where they had those weekly meetings or whatever, with Hemingway and all that, sitting around and chatting. And I keep thinking, That's what I want! I want this conversational, multi—not in the same field necessarily, but to talk and to enjoy each other and create a ferment.

[00:35:31]

Right now, part of my—what I'm thinking is that I want to create more street art because that was quite prevalent during the Los Siete days. And I've commissioned a young ukulele player who's quite young—but she's a composer, that's her job title, she's a composer—to compose what I call a ditty. Nothing expensive, nothing fancy, no opera, but a little song related to our time and to the Mission, if at all possible. Because she's quite talented. She's very, very talented, in fact. She comes from a very talented family on top of all that. But I want to sort of push her, because she talks about springtime, and it's lovely, and I said, "Okay, it's springtime and it's lovely. And?" [They laugh.] You know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right. "What else is going on," right?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: And so I actually gave her a little bit of money, you know, to make sure that she's seen as a professional, as a composer. But also that I want something local to come out of it. And I said, "Maybe we could—once you get it together, we'll organize a little group, like a little madrigal singers, and go from an organization down 24th Street and sing," you know?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: A great idea.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: You know, something like that. And I wanted to have—because I don't have birthday parties, and one of my friends who was—"You don't have a party?" "No." "Well can I"—because she wanted to put my name up on Facebook that it was my birthday today. I said, "Why would I do that? I mean, if they're going to send me presents, perhaps. [Laughs.] I don't know, who cares," you know? So I told her that I would have a birthday party, but we would not call it a birthday party. But it would just be sort of like a welcoming into spring or summer. I said, "I want a white cake with white frosting and little pink flowers on it, and I [laughs] want to have tea and coffee and maybe some food on the side. But I don't want a—we won't tell anybody that it's a birthday party, but that's what I want."

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: That's so great.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That would be my—that would satisfy her as far as me having a conventional birthday.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: When is your birthday?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, my birthday is November the first, Day of the Dead.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Oh, very good, very good.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: But it's also like why I was—[laughs]. You know, like Day of the Dead was also like what René and Rio worked at so—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: So if I wanted to be with them and my—anyhow, it's—well, you can imagine. Whatever.

So I feel like I'm trying to instigate stuff, you know, with the conversations with these young people and also give them a place to intellectually move about. And also because one of the things that kind of interests me too is that a lot of us don't understand that we have intellectuals among us, that we have a well-educated population of people. Most of them are unfortunately in academia like yourself, so you don't mingle. You know, you don't mingle here. You don't have a cup of coffee at the Sunrise Café with the editor of *Tecolote*, you know, or with one of the artists who's painting a mural, you know? And I really feel like there's this bank of really seasoned, now, secure intellectuals. I'm trying to sort of bring them—and because it's important for us as a general population to see that we have smart people. Smart, sophisticated, well-read people, you know?

And white people need to see that. Because part of that is, like, one of the things that I have bumped into in pursuing this stage IV cancer thing is that, in the past, I've had doctors walk in and I'm sitting there waiting for them to come in. And they just assume before I even say things that I am just this humble Mexican who probably can barely speak English and has a very limited vocabulary and has an attitude of great humility in the face of someone being a doctor, [laughs] you know? Because that in part is like our tradition, is the doctors as demigods. And to have a

woman—and this is like what my cards are about, my pocket posters, is that I'm trying to sort of articulate our thinking as to begin to talk to white people as equals. And especially for women to talk to men as equals. And it's very, very hard to talk to men as an equal. But that's my crusade right now, is to—

[00:40:41]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Great.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —begin to see us as—that we do have this wonderful pocket—and I'm really trying to bring in. We have enough academics. That's why I'm saying, like, when I run across a person who's going through ethnic studies and they're going to be social workers and—I said, "We've got enough practitioners! We need people who make policy, you know? If you're going to go into social work, just think about going into policy, you know? Go to graduate school, study urban whatever it is, development or whatever, psycho—whatever you want, but what we need are people who develop policy. We need to step up to that. We don't need any more practitioners. There's a lot of Latin American practitioners already going on." And to a certain degree it's—I sort of wonder about it, whether they're still maintaining sort of the humble, nonassertive—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: By practitioners, you mean—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: —immigrant population, you know? Pardon?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: By practitioners, you mean artists?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: No, I mean social workers.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Oh, I see, right.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Oh, I'm not even thinking about artists. Most of the artists who are sophisticated come from other countries.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: But we do—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: They come from South—a lot South Americans come, or Mexicans.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: So going back to your cards, you were saying one of the reasons you've been producing them and distributing them is to get people to think about these critical ideas, right? Like—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: It's in particular. It's very particular. They are from my own experience. The phrases are from my own experience about—they're specifically aimed at women. And they're to encourage women not to be victims. But the practice, what I'm trying to encourage, is the practice to speak to men as equals. It upsets men horrendously. They just absolutely do not know what to do with a woman who speaks to them as an equal. And there's a lot of hostility that comes up. It takes courage to talk to a man as an equal and for him to understand that you are talking to him as an equal, because they get offended. They get offended. And that's—there's nothing else, Jennifer. It's not any other—it's just, I want women to—so we don't become—to not become victims. And that is part of—

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: As you were saying.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: That is the exercise, is to talk to men in particular as equals. And I realize it's a very hard exercise to do. But to begin to think about it, you know, and to practice it in small ways.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Great. [Sighs.] Is there anything else you want to say in this wonderful—

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: [Laughs.]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: —in this wonderful wrap-up of wisdom about your work and your current, recent years? Or anything else?

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: No. I am—like I said before, I'm glad I'm a Mexican in dealing with stage IV liver cancer, because if I were a Western European, totally inculcated in that, I would probably be more miserable. [Laughs.] The cancer itself—I don't want to die. I don't want to die, and I

don't want to die soon. If I can figure out how to live with all my little marbles intact for another 10 or 20 years, I would do so, but I'm not optimistic. So it's just—right now, I'm trying to just eat healthy—I mean, eat healthy, and really trying to stay alive and viable, you know? And as a resource to my community.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Well, that's a beautiful, beautiful place to end. Right there.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Okay.

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: If you think of other things you want to be sure we include over the next couple of days, let me know. I'm going to be just taking out a few little bits of our recording that were errors on my part, like starting up and things like that. But I'll be sending this forward to the Smithsonian, and they will be transcribing it, and then you will be looking at the transcriptions.

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Great. On paper?

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: On paper, mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, I presume. I mean, it will be transcribed. I don't know if we'll get a digital file or if you want something on hard copy—

[00:45:23]

YOLANDA M. LÓPEZ: Okay, okay because it would be like a big—two or three reams paper. [Laughs.]

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ: Okay, I'm going to close this off now.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]