

# WritingLatinos\_S3Ep6\_MIX2

**gerry:** Hi, my name is Gerald Geraldo Cava, and I want to thank you for tuning into season three of Writing Latinos, a podcast from public books. We're back for more terrific conversations with Latino authors writing about the wide world of. As always, we aim to provide thoughtful reflections on Latino history, culture, politics, and identity, and how writing conveys some of its meanings.

**gerry:** Don't forget to like and subscribe to writing Latinos wherever you get your podcasts. And now for the show.

**gerry:** Albert Camarillo, whose friends call him. Al is a dean, maybe the dean of the academic field of Latino history. In more than 40 years of teaching at Stanford, he mentored generations of students who've written books that have taught us much of what we know about the history of Latinos in the United States.

**gerry:** He has a new book himself, a memoir called Compton In My Soul, A Life in Pursuit of Racial Equality published by Stanford University Press. Compton in my soul was recently awarded the Gold Medal Prize from the Independent Publisher's Book Awards in the category of autobiography slash memoir and the Forward Indies Award in the multicultural adult nonfiction book category.

**gerry:** We wanted to talk with him about growing up in the black and latino neighborhood of Compton, writing family history and the importance of building ethnically and racially diverse universities even when that pursuit is under attack. First, Al, I just wanna thank you so much for taking the time out of your summer day to talk to me.

**Al:** Well, always, always good to to see you, Jerry, and, and, and to talk with you whenever we get a chance.

**gerry:** Absolutely. So, uh, let's get right into it because the subtitle of your new book, Compton, in My Soul, is. A life in pursuit of racial equality. And I, I think that that is a very accurate subtitle for what your life's work has been.

**gerry:** And in some ways, your lifelong pursuit of racial equity and social justice in American higher education is under attack right now from the highest levels of American government. But as you demonstrate in your memoir, this is not the first time. That diversity in higher ed has been attacked and the first time

that those of us who write about histories of race in the United States have had to respond to those attacks.

**gerry:** So how do you compare what we're seeing right now with your experiences at Stanford since the 1970s?

**Al:** It's an important question for us right now, at this particular moment. As a historian, right? Uh, we, we look at change over time and we can mark those changes in the last 50 to 60 years in higher education with something that had really never been part of higher education curriculum or administration that is ethnic studies broadly defined, right?

**Al:** Or, or the inclusion, uh, of. People of color, students, staff, and faculty. So I think that that one, we can see that it's always been a struggle, right? Yeah. There's always been pushback. Uh, you, you understand that, uh, you try to navigate that, uh, the civil rights movement and the student, um. Movements of the 1960s laid a foundation as an opening so that people like me, my generation, really the first generation to enter higher education, and those of us that, that begin a career in higher education, as we become aware of what are the.

**Al:** What's the resistance? What are the issues, the pushback, and, and we understand that, right? Because it's historical and, and we know that the continuity of, of those historical, uh, forces and resistance, uh, are real. But this moment in time is unique in, in many ways because we have a full frontal assault coming from the White House on down and.

**Al:** In in concert with states and localities that would like to peel us back to a different time in American society, the 1940s or 1950s when there was no such thing as diversity equity. In conclusion, there was no such thing as ethnic studies, and there were no such thing as. For the most part, students of color and faculty of color, right?

**Al:** So this is unprecedented in, in, in the ways it's being. Proposed, implemented, orchestrated from the highest levels, uh, of American political power. And, and that's why this moment is different though. The pushback, as I, as I indicated, is part of a long thread of resistance to things that are other than.

**Al:** Wide Anglo-Saxon America.

**gerry:** One of the things that struck me is how perfectly the beginning and end of your career map on to so many fights over and fights for diversity and racial equity in higher education, like the Civil rights era, affirmative action,

multiculturalism, the rise and fall of DEI. You started at Stanford in the 1970s and retired just a couple years ago.

**gerry:** I just wanna hear you talk about whether or not you see, and I hope you do not see this recent period as. The dismantling of your life's work?

**Al:** Well, I, I, I'm hopeful. Uh, I, I don't think despite the assault on everything that you and I, and. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people, uh, consider important in American society.

**Al:** That's changed American society for the better. That despite the assault on almost every part of, of, of this changed society from 50 or 60 years ago, I don't think that it will be successful because we're here to stay. The attack on the universities, we see it left and right mostly. Right. Uh, and we see the resistance now of universities saying you can't interfere with academic freedom.

**Al:** We've built, we've built these institutions in a way that they're going to remain. So I'm hopeful that whether it be higher education or ethnic studies in, in the public schools that. We will be able to navigate and survive this most recent and most powerful onslaught, uh, against everything that ethnic studies and, and social equality, racial justice, what it stands for in the us.

**gerry:** Yeah. I've been thinking along similar lines. I mean, one of the things I noted in your book, um, and I don't remember the exact numbers, but when you started at Stanford, you were one of. A, a, a very small number of faculty members, but even the number of, uh, Chicano students who were at Stanford was very small.

**gerry:** And I remember you telling me recently, we had a conversation where I think you said that, um, Stanford at this point is a. If, if it's not majority minority as a student body, it's pretty close to that.

**Al:** It hovers around 50% for high forties.

**gerry:** Right. And so part of what I've been thinking about is that you, you can't unring that bell.

**gerry:** You know? I mean these are students whose histories I. They want to know the histories of their communities. You know, we live in a diverse America and that's just a fact. So, you know, even if the Trump administration wouldn't want us to teach Latino history or the history of racial difference or whatever, I mean, we just have a much more, I.

**gerry:** Diverse country. Our institutions are much more diverse now than when you started your career. And there's gonna be a demand. I mean, I see the demand for Latino history at Northwestern, and I'm sure you see it at Stanford too.

**Al:** Absolutely. And, and as you know, uh, cherry that, that in the state of California, uh, it's been mandated.

**Al:** Ethnic studies will begin next year for all California high school students and it's. It's an important development because it says that all of our children, all of our students in a state like California, arguably the most diverse state in the nation, maybe most diverse place in the world, that in order for us to have a, a democratic society where a diverse population can understand and appreciate and value the differences of so many differences that exist, uh, within our population, that ethnic studies.

**Al:** Despite all the critique, it's fundamentally about teaching us how to live together in a diverse society and in a diverse democratic society. When you boil it down, that's what it's about.

**gerry:** In the early chapters of the. Compton in my soul, you recount the experience of growing up in Compton, which is a, a black and latino suburb of Los Angeles.

**gerry:** And in your story, black and Latino families live in proximity to one another. A lot of recent writing though, has focused on tensions between black and Latino communities and the anti-blackness of Latinos. What do you make of this recent turn in the field to highlight, uh, tension between the two communities and anti-blackness?

**Al:** I think it not only reflects some of the, the scholarship and writing about black Latino relationships, but it's also so pervasive in the media. What grabs attention, what, what are the things that the, that are so. Stark that, that are, that seem to be so prevalent and that, that the media hooks on? Well, it's, it's spectacular.

**Al:** It's black gangs against Latino gangs. It's the tension, uh, that exists in neighborhoods. It's the, um, the problems that, that black students are having with Latino students in changing demographic areas of cities across the country. So that's the spectacular it. It deserves to be researched by academics.

**Al:** And I, I've done some of that myself, but what I know both from personal experience and from digging deeper in a place like Compton is you don't hear the stories about the cooperation, the intermarriage. Mm-hmm. We have, we have a term in California. Right. This is a, a, a substantial population of people that are marrying and forming relationships and partnerships across those two groups, and we don't hear much about it.

**Al:** So. And, and I know that personally, not only as I, as for this book, dug deeper and deeper and water interviewing dozens and dozens and dozens of people in Compton over the last, you know, 20, 25 years. But I knew it from personal experience, right? I, I knew that growing up in a segregated barrio in Compton, when it was predominantly white.

**Al:** But as I was going through primary school and, and uh, middle school, the demographics of Compton, at least West Compton, were changing dramatically. So. My growing up, my maturation, uh, as a student, uh, I was in, I got to see not only the segregated Mexican American community, but the interaction with white students.

**Al:** And by the time I'm in middle school, uh, interaction with the majority black students and I saw firsthand and experienced per. Personally, the ability to get along when you could understand one another and appreciate one another. And those friendships, uh. Can blossom. And as I did the research for this book, more contemporarily, all of those things, coexisted with those things that we read about in the Los Angeles Times or saw on, on CNN of the conflict between, uh, Latinx folks and black folks that they coexist, right?

**Al:** Uh, but that which we hear most frequently is about the conflict.

**gerry:** And part of what I loved about your book is how that story isn't just about the neighborhood you grew up in, but when you went to UCLA, like some of the first relationships you sought out were with other, the small number of African American students.

**gerry:** And then at Stanford, one of the ways in which you've navigated the institution is by forging relationships with African American professors there too. So it's kind of been a lifelong story as well.

**Al:** It wasn't until I was at UCLA as a student and exposed to the first ethnic studies courses that then, of course light a fire in me to pursue ethnic studies, American history with a focus on, on, uh, Mexican American Latinos, but then

comparative race and, uh, and ethnicity, uh, as, as, as my career at Stanford unfolds.

**Al:** It, it, it was, it was understanding these things that I. That existed in American society and it, and I had the privilege of having experienced it as a young person, but as a college student, beginning to understand what were the divisions, why were the divisions, how did the divisions exist? Why did they exist, and how can you ever overcome them?

**Al:** And. I and in effect, kind of fall, uh, I would fall back on that early Compton experience about attempting to forge those relationships across culture, race, religion. And some of 'em were not successful to be honest, but when they were successful, they were beautiful. And so I carried that with me as a part of who I am.

**Al:** Uh. As a person, but as a faculty member, uh, as an educator at Stanford and and beyond,

**gerry:** I really loved personally learning about your family because with you as one of the kind of most important founders of our field, I've always thought of you. I. As the kind of head of a family with, uh, kind of academic children like George Sanchez and Dave Gutierrez and, uh, you know, Stephen Pity, my own advisor, and Lori Flores, uh, a friend from Yale.

**gerry:** So, you know, I've thought of you as the, the head of a family, but it was really neat to get to learn about your ancestors who'd lived in Compton for, you know, a hundred years at least. And I'd love to hear. What your experience was of writing family history, you know, you sell, you tell such a richly textured story about your family's roots in Southern California from the late 19th century forward.

**gerry:** And how did you do this research? Were you, uh, well one, one thing you said you were just doing is conducting interviews over the course of 25 years, but were you also pouring through archives? Is there such a thing as the. Uh, Camarillo Family Archive. Did you use ancestry.com or were you really relying on stories you were told as a kid that, that you then had to confirm now as a historian?

**gerry:** So, uh, these are some of the things I'm curious about. Your process of writing family history.

**Al:** I. I had to use every skill as a historian to dig wherever you can, right, to unearth stories, to go to newspaper, the typical things that, that historians do. So the, the more traditional sources, but for the Latino experience, and it's the Chicano or Mexican American experience, uh, those archives, not until.

**Al:** Much more recently, uh, were, were they available. So my quest, I think, to dig deep into the, the Compton experience, goes back to family. Interestingly, though, uh, which is true of a lot of families, not until I was a student at UCLA and until I started to get interested in Mexican American Chicano studies and started to ask the questions.

**Al:** Uh, about, you know, stories, having elders tell stories, for example, that I may have heard a little bit about, but not until you're adult. Do the family elders tell you the detail about these things? Right. So, but it, when I was equipped to ask the right questions and for the elders to know that I was really sincere.

**Al:** To know about their past because no one had ever asked before, right? No one had really asked before. And so, um, I started out. With my first graduate, you'll appreciate. My first graduate student paper was on the History of the Body in Compton, and so I used those budding historical skills of research together with oral histories to lay a foundation for understanding the past, right, and, and talking with my mother, talking with my father, talking with S and the S and and aunts and uncles and others that would wanna share their stories with me.

**Al:** And for the, for the Compton piece, the more contemporary Compton piece, I, I continue to do that. Um, you, you mentioned by the way, ancestry, ancestry, uh, dot com, uh, provides you a lot of access to materials that you otherwise wouldn't know. For example, all of the Mexican birth and baptism and burial records, which I had not had access to prior to, so that allowed me to, to do some work about the family in Mexico.

**Al:** Right. But it, it, it, but I, again, even for, for the, for the book, I relied on oral testimony, oral histories, that, that historians use every possible primary source that historians, again, typically use census material. Um, the few archives that that have, that have material about Compton. The newspapers, uh, whatever I could get my hands on to, to put together as many sources as I could to tell, tell the stories.

**gerry:** Do you feel like you learned anything that was surprising or new about your family, or do you understand your family history, family's experience in any kind of different way than you did before you set out to write the book?

**Al:** It allowed me to reflect more on. For example, what my father went through as a 10-year-old, his father abandoned the family, at least temporarily in Mexico during the revolution.

**Al:** And he pleads with his uncle to take him to find his father because he know the, my, my tio, my, my aunt, my great uncle, uh, had gone with, with my grandfather, my dad's father to Compton and was working on a farm in Compton. And so to understand and reflect on. The amount of trauma that my father had to experience, you know, a kid that never stepped foot in a classroom, and that migration process of family dissolution, uh, of all the issues that he had to contend with.

**Al:** And that was part of over a million people that made that migration. Uh, between 1910 and 1930, he was part of that. Yeah. So yeah, it allowed me to reflect and with deeper, I think, deeper reflections about the family as they retold stories to me. Uh, some of the really difficult stories that, you know, brought tears to my eyes as they were recounted by in my elder siblings about, for example, the third child in the family.

**Al:** Second child in the family, A, a sister who died before I was born being refused service at it Turned out a segregated white hospital, which was the closest in Compton. Because they couldn't pay the fee. In other words, it was a segregated hospital that didn't take Mexicans. Yeah. And she died as a result.

**Al:** Right. So those stories that, um, enrich they, they hurt the soul, but they enriched the narrative because they tell you about people's experiences, trauma, and then all the other things about the happiness. Right. The happiness of the family. Mm-hmm. Somehow. It survives, it persists, it navigates all the difficulties.

**Al:** And for me, as the youngest of of six, um, I was, I benefited tremendously from that. And that was also part of the reflection.

**gerry:** Can you kind of represent some of the responses that you've gotten from family members who've read the book?

**Al:** It's been an interesting response because they, they love the stories, right?

**Al:** Mm-hmm. Um, and the stories that they had talked about and remembered and heard from elders, uh, are now public information. First of all, I should say, the motivation to write this book was both personal, right? Because I wanted grandchildren. As they're growing up, as they're growing up in a very different

experience, very with, with a privileged experience, for them to hear from their quote unquote papa.

**Al:** Uh, and, and for them to, to read these stories, right? But I was hoping too that it might resonate with a younger generation of Americans. Uh. All races, right? But especially the Latino kids growing up who formed the, the substantial majority of students in California schools these days that they might identify in some way.

**Al:** And one of the interesting responses, Jerry, was that I've, as I go to these high schools, uh, and talk with these students, how much they read into. The stories about my family a long time ago, right? Growing up in Compton and how it resonates with them today as most of 'em, the children, American born children of immigrants.

**Al:** So that immigrant experience, I. Is intergenerational, obviously. Right. Um, and then I, you know, I, I, I've heard from a lot of other people again, uh, not just, uh, Latinos, but others, uh, African American folks, uh, white folks who, who had been in, who had lived in Compton, some of 'em had gone to school with me and how much they appreciated.

**Al:** The storytelling right. Of, of Compton and, uh, and exposing the bad things, but as well as some of the good things, right? And, and so it's been a, it's been a, a heartwarming experience to, to hear people talk about the book.

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**gerry:** You can find us@publicbooks.org. That's P-U-B-L-I-C-B-O-O ks.org. To donate to public books, visit public books.org/donate. Maybe we should issue a warning to our listeners that they can tune out if we're gonna bore them to death by talking about academia. But dammit, I'm, I'm gonna take the opportunity to talk to someone who, uh, has been studying Latino history professionally as a job for as long as anyone else alive probably, and.

**gerry:** I want to take that opportunity to ask about, you know, how the field has changed over the course of your career. You know, so, so just first, what was the state of the field when you started your career and where is it today? I know that this is a huge question, but, um, you know, maybe you have a few takeaways about how the field has evolved.

**Al:** So as a young student at UCLA, so I started UCLA pre affirmative action in 1966. So there were almost no students of color at, at that institution with almost 28,000 students, 50 Mexican Americans, approximately when I started about a hundred black students, maybe a hundred, maybe 200 Asian American students.

**Al:** No such thing existed as Latino history or Mexican American history when I started there, but by the late 1960s. Ethnic, the infants infancy stage, if you will, of ethnic studies was just getting off the ground. I had the opportunity to study, uh, with a man at U-U-C-L-A, Juan Gomez Es who was there at the beginning.

**Al:** Right. He was a Latin Americanist, but beginning to shift his research orientation, his writing orientation to Mexican Americans, to Chicanos because of the Chicano student movement. Right. He was, he was part of that, and I. I became a part of it. And so by the time I meet him, uh, in 19 68, 19 69, he, he's teaching the first Chicano studies course ever offered at UCLA.

**Al:** And it may have been the first ever in the University of California system. And I was immediately attracted to it, right? Because it opened my eyes in ways that other history courses, because I'd already declared history as a major, uh, hadn't opened my eyes with the exception of a course on, on slavery.

**Al:** But it was that experience of taking that course and making a connection to Juan, and he immediately took me under his wing and I was there to see the origins of the field of Chicano history and to be a part of it. And. That was exciting. Uh, it was ominous because we didn't have much of a foundation.

**Al:** Right. But we knew at that time we were doing something creative and new and if we could pull it off, we could start a new field of Chicano history, of Chicano studies and in larger context ethnic studies. But it was. Not knowing whether we would be successful, right? We, we were giving, we were writing our articles and writing our books and hoping it would take effect.

**Al:** We knew, we knew we had a role to play as some of the very few people at these institutions of higher education developing this field. So for me it was. Always in the frontal lobe of let's prepare, let's teach our undergraduates across the board as much as we can. Those that seem to be catching on to this area of Chicano and Chicano studies.

**Al:** Let's mentor them. Let's see which of them have an interest and, uh, an aptitude to go on to PhD study. Um. And let's see if we can convince the history

department and other departments to start admitting these graduate students so that, that we would be working with them, uh, very closely as the next generation or the next cohort of historians doing this work.

**Al:** And I think within 10 years I realized we had a foothold. We had a foothold. And as I saw. The graduate students take flight with their peach, PhDs in hand. Vic Ruiz, Antonio Guanella, your mentor, uh, Steve Pity. Lori, uh, all of them, right? All of them going on to. Likewise teach at American universities and likewise train graduate students.

**Al:** That's led to the florescence of the field. At the same time as these books are written and as these articles are written and the, you know, so many excellent pieces that builds the confidence of the profession to say, Hey, we've, there's something happening here. Uh, a history about a people that simply had not been written by historians prior.

**Al:** For the most part to the 1970s, and it's growing and. It should be supported. Now that varies across the different institutions, but at Stanford, they understood that we were onto something. And though our numbers, uh, faculty of color and and Latino faculty never grew very large, uh, the institution responded in ways to allow us to become part of that institutional mission, uh, in ethnic studies and Latino history, Chicano history.

**gerry:** When I think about those early days of the field, I think, you know, when we hear about figures like Mario Barrera or, uh, Rudy aia, or even Juan Gomez quinone, we hear a lot about the internal colonialism paradigm. You know, that, think about it in, in terms of like the title of Rudy Una's book *Occupied America*, that the Southwest has been occupied by the United States, and it's an internal colony of the United States.

**gerry:** When I think of the early field that way, am I kind of overstating the importance of internal colonialism as a paradigm, and were there lots of other ideas as well, or was that really the main framework of seeing the field? I.

**Al:** The internal colonial model, uh, resonated with a lot of people. First and foremost, it, it allowed us an analytical framework to understand the nature of institutional societal inequality, uh, based on race and class, uh, and, and other factors as well.

**Al:** So, as an explanatory model, there was a lot of value to it, right? Uh, but. It was also part of several, uh, or it was among several other things that we were dealing with in terms of con not so much conceptual models, but analytical

frameworks. Yeah. To, to explain the group experience. And so I. Uh, it was all in response to reacting to the dominant paradigm of Americanization, right, of, of American amalgamation, of the assimilation model as it dictated, basically scholarship about ethnic groups and, uh, especially ethnic groups for 40 years prior to.

**Al:** The internal colonial model, but some people were bringing in, uh, Marxist analysis, right? Uh, other people were, were trying to reform, reframe it in terms of how can we use things like the internal colonial model, but not be hamstrung by it in terms of its ability to explain other things. Right? Uh, so for example, if you had.

**Al:** If, if there was emerging amalgamation integration, that there was penetration, uh, of class, class formations that were evolving by the 1970s, the internal colonial structure was difficult to explain that. So we were talking about the nature of institutional inequality, right? Yeah. Systemic, systemic societal.

**Al:** Problems that surface from both ideology of people, laws, the whole framework. So I think what, what we can see with the internal colonial model is that it was one of many. Analytical frameworks that a lot of us kind of picked and, and would choose what helps us explain the experience as we're starting to tell these stories.

**Al:** Right. And I think that's very important. What were the most effective tools for us as historians and social scientists and, and, and, uh, behavioral scientists? To tell the story, the experience, understand the experience of this enormous population, a very diverse population, uh, across the United States.

**gerry:** Well, one of the things I was talking with Lori Flores about recently, um, when we discussed her book, awaiting their feast is how, you know, one of the. The most important things that the field is doing right now is attempting to explain just the great diversity of Latinos in every way. Ideological, diversity, national background, faith backgrounds, everything you can imagine class backgrounds.

**gerry:** And when I think back to your first book, uh, Chicanos in a Changing Society about. Um, you know, Mexican, the Mexican community in Santa Barbara in the late 19th century. I think one of the things that it really opened up for me was thinking about the, the class diversity of class and racial diversity in different experiences of Mexicans in Santa Barbara.

**gerry:** And so, um, you know, I don't know if I was misreading that first book or if Stephen Pity gave me ideas about that first book, or this was my own reading, but. Did you think of Chicanos in a changing society and the ways in which it introduced us to a pretty complex community as a way of, um, you know, laying the groundwork for understanding the diversity of Mexican communities, the internal diversity of Mexican communities in a way that, you know, uh, that doesn't fully make sense if you have a rigid understanding of internal colonialism.

**Al:** You know, that's exactly right because as I was doing the research for that book, I was coming in with certain assumptions that Latino people, Mexican origin people, Spanish speaking people, uh, would have this kind of, um, the, this certain homogeneity to it so they could understand and appreciate one another.

**Al:** But one of the first things I encountered in doing that research in Santa Barbara, because it had one of the still largest. Spanish American populations that went back to the 19th century, right? And there were still the descendants of that, what I call Pueblo, the Santa Barbara Pueblo, uh, population, almost coexisting.

**Al:** Side by side with the influx of a new Mexican immigration population, right? So I went with the assumption, oh, these people would, would see each other, um, in commonality and joint hands and, and inter, but there, there were some tensions and there were differences, right? Uh, it didn't mean that there couldn't be relationships formed, but that showed me from the get go that the assumptions you come in with, you better be prepared as you do the research to be more facile about.

**Al:** Understanding complexity. Right. And it's the grow, it's, it's how a historian also grows in, in her or his analysis, using the skills and the resources to, to stay open to even contesting your own ideas going in. But that was, that was an introduction for me to, to understand the nature of this complex. And grow over time over the course of the 20th century, incredibly complex population we call Latinos and Latinos or Latinx people.

**gerry:** And that book was published in 1979, right?

**Al:** Yes.

**gerry:** And so that was, you know, again, you, it was just another way in which you were ahead of your time, Al, in that early moment when you were at

UCLA, were you thinking about, or in conversation with Puerto Ricans in New York who were kind of mounting. Similar, uh, similar efforts or in Chicago where you had early ethnographies of the Mexican and Puerto Rican community here, or was it really focused in Los Angeles and California at that time?

**gerry:** I.

**Al:** So for me and so many other people, the Latinos as uh, and the Chicano and Chicano scholars, as we began to form networks, and the first was the National Association of Chicano and Chicano Studies, which was formed in the 1970s, and I was on the ground floor of that. The first exposure was to understand the diversity that existed within the Mexican origin population across states.

**Al:** Mm-hmm. Because I had, I had never been to Texas. I had never interacted with the, I had never spent time much in Arizona. Understand those, those Mexican origin populations and there, there were differences among us. Right. But we came to appreciate that and that also gave us a, a better understanding of the diversity, uh, based on locality and state experiences, right?

**Al:** Because there were some real differences. The Mexican folks in Texas had to endure a type of. Racial exclusion that we saw in California, but never quite to the same extent. So it, that too was an eye-opening for me. I had never had contact with Puerto Rican or Cuban folks, uh, uh, Dominican folks. Uh, but that changed in the early 1980s and it was changed because of the Ford Foundation.

**Al:** And it was at a time when I was, uh, had I became the founding director of the Stanford Center for Chicano Research. And of course, one of the first things that a, a university, uh, office of development does is, oh, if you gotta raise money for your research, uh, the university will pay for your staff and other things, but you have to raise money for your research so you better go out and talk with the foundations.

**Al:** And I did that for the first time. And the one foundation that clearly. Was at that time, and this is the early 1980s, had already established a, an agenda from about a decade earlier supporting ethnic and racial studies programs. And when I went to the Ford Foundation, I think it was 1983, and this was to support research with, uh, an organization, uh, that, that.

**Al:** Well, it was the seed of the organization. I had talked with, uh, the directors of Mexican American or Chicano studies programs and research centers at the University of Texas at UCLA and at at Stanford. And we decided we were

gonna see if we could get the Fort Foundation to support our work. And when I met with the program officer in charge of what was really the first robust program area in Hispanic studies, it was clear.

**Al:** To me that he made it clear to me that, uh, have you reached out to any of the Puerto Rican scholars? You know, there's a, there's a center, the studio Puerto at Hunter College City, university of New York. I think you should speak with this guy named Frank Bonia. And that opened the door. And I'm so grateful that, that, that was recommended to me because I.

**Al:** I established, um, a strong relationship and created with with the Puerto Rican scholars, Frank Bonilla in particular, one of the really the fathers of Puerto Rican studies. And we established an inter university program for Latino research. And the Puerto Rican Study Center at City University of New York became one of the four founding institutions of this now inter Latino, pan Latino research, uh, network.

**gerry:** I, I want to end al by asking a kind of, um, more personal question. Maybe it's, it's even a, a personal advice question for me as a, you know, and probably many others as, um, you know, academics who are also trying to. Live a life as academics. And so I wanna know what your secret is to an academic life well lived.

**gerry:** One of the things you write in Compton, in my soul is that you made a decision early on in your career that above all you wanted to be the best father and husband that you could be. And then you wanted to build structures at Stanford and. Other institutions that would make them, uh, you know, believe in the commitment to racial equality that you have, and then you wanted to do your own research.

**gerry:** So all of this makes you, in my mind, and I think many others minds as well, a kind of model of, well-roundedness and humanity. And I'm wondering what the secret is.

**Al:** Well, no, thanks. Thanks for the, the compliment. I appreciate it, Jerry. And part of it, of course. S from having a rich family life growing up, right?

**Al:** We were poor. Um, we did the best we could. Uh, but the family, the family coherence and those relationships with siblings and, and mother and father, uh, set the foundation and, and I think what I realized early on, Jerry, is that. As one of the early academics to go into higher education, the demands on us were enormous.

**Al:** And I had already begun to see some of my colleagues, um, whose relation, whose marital relationships had fallen apart. Uh, that they, you know, that they lamented already, that they weren't spending time with their children. And I, I think it was clear to both me and Susan, my wife, uh, you know, we, I, we met as 19 year olds, 18 year olds that we had, both of us had demanding.

**Al:** Professions, but we want, as we made the decision to have children, and by the way, it was after the first book was published because things were too crazy before that, that we wanted to be there. We wanted to be a part of their lives and. Whether it was conscious in a lot of ways, unconscious, it's a juggling act as you well know, uh, that, uh, there's so many professional demands and you can let that overwhelm you, right?

**Al:** And mm-hmm. And you can forget or ignore or not spend enough time on the other side. But, so for me, it was. Spending the time with family as we had children, uh, to be a coach, uh, 'cause I love sports and, and to see that part of our children's development, uh, and to share responsibilities with Susan. Susan.

**Al:** So that was a partnership. And yeah, certain things dropped sometimes, right? I might not get a. Uh, an article done or the research was taking too long, but, uh, that juggling act, uh, as I look back, I'm, I'm glad we did that because it allowed us to have that rich family experience. And, and as your children mature, you see that they, they, uh, adhere oftentimes of the same values that are, that they inculcate in their relationships with their children now, our grandchildren and that.

**Al:** That's really the payoff to see the children become such wonderful professionals and parents at the same time. So whatever we did, whether sometimes consciously, sometimes not, it worked.

**gerry:** Yeah, it sure did. And we just all need more Alca Rios in the world. And thank you so much for joining us. I think our.

**gerry:** Listeners are gonna get a lot out of this. And listeners, if you haven't already, uh, picked up and read Compton and My Soul, make it the next thing You do. Thank you. And thank you so much for joining us, Al.

**Al:** My pleasure. It's always, uh, it's always great to see you, Jerry, and always, uh, wonderful to talk to you.

**gerry:** Thank you for listening to season three of Writing Latinos. We'd love to hear your suggestions for new books that we should be reading and talking

about. So drop us a line at [geraldo@publicbooks.org](mailto:geraldo@publicbooks.org). That's GERALDO@publicbooks.org. This episode is brought to you by public books. It was produced by Tasha Sandoval.

**gerry:** Our music is City of Mirrors by the Chicago based band, bill Santos. You can follow us on Blue Sky Instagram, and X to receive updates about season three of writing Latinos. I'm her Geraldo Cava and we'll see you again soon.