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Cocke: I’m with Andrey Hernandez here, ASU. It’s, I think, the 17th. If you will just talk this direction.

Hernandez: This direction? Okay.

Cocke: That’s the little mike. I think it’ll pick you up.

Hernandez: Okay.

Cocke: Well, my question is, I want to know what this whole “Untold Stories” Festival—because you’ve been working on it now for how long? A couple of years?

Hernandez: A couple of years, two years. About two years. Almost two years the whole time.

Cocke: I want to hear a little bit about what it—sort of what it means to you personally, and how it fits in with your own—your life. What you’re searching for in it and that kind of thing?

Hernandez: Well those are really good questions because actually I’ve given a lot of thought to this, as far as personally. I realize—I think later in life, maybe in my twenties—well, no I think I realized through doing this, the significance of the stories and realized that I really didn’t grow up with the stories of my Mexican heritage, essentially, that for some reason, they were forbidden, for whatever reason. And realized how I felt—what a loss it was, essentially to me. To me personally, and to my family, that they were lost. I think through this experience I’ve learned really that significance of story,

the importance of it. Maybe something that I don't think I quite understood as much before—before this endeavor, this whole process. I think when I realized that I got angry. Got angry at the loss and I think certainly, that I am a better person for understanding—that's important to self, to heritage, to family, to culture, to community. And certainly it's something to be proud of, not to hide, and not to be ashamed of. And there's something—you know stories should be passed down from generation to generation. So in doing this, I've had the opportunity—or now I want to go back and discover what those stories are, so that I can pass them down to my children and hopefully they'll pass them down to theirs. But I think it's given my family a new beginning, more or less, through me, hopefully. And that these are things that won't die because with that last generation—with my parent's generation, I think a—especially my father, he tried to kill them, to end them, for whatever reason. Whatever his reasons were. But I see that I think that they'll go on through me and hopefully I'll be able to relay that to my brother and my sister and then to a new generation.

Cocke: Tell me a little bit about how you view... You know you said you were kind of angry when you realized that this whole piece of your history wasn't given to you and can you just say a little bit about how you imagined why that was within your family, the struggle that your folks were going through?

Hernandez: I think that as far as my father goes, coming to the United States at such a young age, he faced a lot of discrimination.

Cocke: How old was he?

Hernandez: I think about 10—9 or 10. He went into a predominately—he went into a predominately a Mexican area and just recently I learned that he and his brother were referred to as those Mexicanos—the new immigrants. You know, whereas I think a lot of people there maybe had lived there for awhile and their children were Mexican-Americans, but he was a new immigrant who—as much as he looked like everybody else, still couldn't speak the language. He had a very difficult time and because of that you

know, really wanted to fit in. So consequently, he had a very difficult time learning the language and try to become an American, whatever American is, and when he had children—pass that on, that type of thinking, thinking that that was going to help us survive. Unfortunately, it hasn't. It's just been kind of like the opposite, more or less. It's been real detrimental because my brother and my sister and I didn't really grow up with a good sense of self—a good understanding of who we are and where we come from which is really important. So I think those were the reasons why my father decided not to and then shame in who he was as well. Certainly there was a lot of shame surrounding—around his identity as a Mexican-American, the discrimination and shame. Consequently, he turned to drinking and after that I think everything's pretty lost once you go in that direction.

Cocke: Sort of, how did you—you were saying that you felt sort of a loss in self-image coming up because you didn't have that important kind of tributary of your history flowing into your being or whatever, but I mean, did you—I guess you didn't miss it at the time because you didn't know—?

Hernandez: Because I didn't know it existed, right. I had no idea that it existed. Although I personally—because of the way I look—you know I have green eyes, I have brown hair, I'm relatively light. I think people accepted me as part of mainstream whereas with my brother and my sister who are dark complected with dark hair and dark eyes, people take notice of that every single day. People ask—inquire, last name is Hernandez. I'm sure every day, they might have been spoken to in Spanish and they didn't understand that they—I don't understand. Mainstream assumes, at certain times. So I think actually, it was very much a part of their life. Whereas for me, I think because of the way I look, I just kind of blended in. In a different time zone, it did make a difference or it did—my heritage, I guess I became aware of it but just at different times. I remember in third grade when my teacher was taking a census—ethnic census of the class, more or less, and I made sure to tell her that I was Mexican-American. I didn't quite know what that meant but I wanted to make sure that she knew that. Then later on growing up, many people just assuming in Spanish class that I knew how to speak

Spanish because my last name was Hernandez. Always—when that was far from being true. Or little incidents, along those lines, made me very aware—at different times, made me aware of the fact that my heritage was different than my Anglo counterparts.

Cocke: So in a way, you knew you were going to get this—I mean you would have some people maybe out of thinking that it was a respectful thing to do to assume that you spoke Spanish or... And then I mean you were getting in some ways from both sort of ends, right?

Hernandez: Oh, definitely. I think actually I felt more—once people found out my last name was Hernandez, rarely did anybody think just by looking at me that I was or that I am Chicano or Mexican-American. But once they did find out the last name was Hernandez, Anglos would assume that I did, as did Mexicans. But the reactions in the end—the reactions after they found out after they found out that I didn't speak Spanish were very different. Anglos would—that was fine, "Oh, you didn't speak Spanish, you know, why not?" And you explain a few words, or a few sentences and then they understand whereas, Mexican or Chicanos here immediately thought that there was great shame—that I actually did and that I was just lying and that there was great shame—that I had great shame and consequently that's why I felt that I needed to lie, not that I really probably did, and then they would—and then, they would question my upbringing because they'd say, "Well, why don't you? You eat Mexican food all the time or why don't you have an accent? Why do you look the way that you do?" Or, "You must be half." Or, "You're white—." The labels thereafter, you must be white-washed or my favorite was coconut, brown on the outside and white on the inside.

Cocke: Did you get called that?

Hernandez: Oh, yeah. Definitely.

Cocke: What started when?

Hernandez: Starting when I was—a good question. Starting when I was 18, actually, when I was in high school and I didn't really get—you know I had gone through school K through 12, with basically the same people, more or less, and so that wasn't really an issue until I went away to college. For the first time—well, I landed on a hall that had like three other Mexican-American young women and I think I befriended them. And I realize now that I befriended them because I enjoyed them where I think they befriended me because they thought that I was like them essentially. And they introduced me to their friends, who were predominately Mexican-American, and for the first time in my life I had all these Mexican-American friends and Mexicano friends. And that's where I was bombarded with those types of questions. "Oh, you're from the valley, you're a valley girl." I'm not from East LA. "Oh, why don't you speak Spanish?" Had a very interesting and I'd say, terrible first semester trying to figure all this out. Calling my mother every other day, I don't understand what's going on. People questioning my identity. And me just not knowing. I didn't have any answers.

Cocke: What kind of question would you ask them and what would be a typical response?

Hernandez: I would ask her why—just first off, like the question why—why they raised me the way that they did? Why did they choose that way? And I would tell her that I didn't—ask her if I was supposed to feel a certain way against. Feel a certain way, whether Americans feel a certain way, you know essentially. Because I didn't think I felt that way. I didn't know. Was I supposed to feel differently? I really had no idea whatsoever, I was just completely confused. Because people were telling me that I was supposed to behave one way and obviously I was behaving differently.

Cocke: Well, what was the way you were supposed to behave? What did your mother say?

Hernandez: Well, there's a distinct—what I've learned there is really a—we hate when Anglo-American or mainstream Americans stereotypes us, but nonetheless we have our

own stereotypes of the way that we're supposed to behave. So there is a Chicano model that we're supposed to adhere to, essentially. And Chicano model is you speak Spanish, you're bilingual, you eat common Mexican food and you're parents speak Spanish. If you're from a predominately Mexican area, you know East LA, _____, you know, since I went to school in Santa Barbara. And you know I really didn't—that was it. I mean that's kind of the Chicano model. And maybe even speak with an accent, you know, when you speak English. Although a lot of my friends are Mexican-American's born in the United States, you grew up in East LA, and you're around apparently Spanish-speaking people, you do actually pick up an accent, even though you're born here.

Cocke: So what would your mother say to these questions?

Hernandez: I don't think she really had—it was more me venting and her just allowing me to vent, and that she would listen to me and just telling me that I was fine the way that I am. But there was no set model. I found myself, I think, when you begin something new, you find yourself at the extremes—just learning about the extremes so that's where I was at the time—the extremes. Rather than looking at all the great—or all the wonderful colors that are in the middle, essentially. It's like learning to understand and kind of recognize and celebrate because I find, myself, you know I'm right in the middle, I'm not one way or the next. So I think just telling me that there was no model—that there was no stereotype. I think she also provided—she provided some understanding of where these people were coming from because this was an entirely different type of upbringing that I didn't quite understand. So she provided some insight into that which made everything seem a little clearer, as to where they were coming from because I didn't understand at the time. Like I said, this was when I was 18, so I'm 32 right now, and I think it took me a good 10 years to fully—not completely understand but feel fully comfortable with that aspect of my life.

Cocke: So it was that sort of period of 18 to 28 when you were trying to sort this out and you were also, I guess at that time then that's when that sort of period of confusion and shame was most on you?

Hernandez: Confusion—yeah, right, just real confusion. At different times I would say after four years of college I thought I had a real good understanding but it reemerged in graduate school when I decided to do my thesis on Chicano artists and took about a year to fully understand—I questioned whether I was the right person to do it because I felt like I really hadn't had a Chicano experience, you know, that I wouldn't really understand them as well as I should. And it took me about a year to realize and really feel like I was the right person to do that. But that was—you know I was—actually maybe I was about 25 or 26. So it did—all that confusion and the shame of my father... Having to understand that and getting rid of it because that's something that he had given to me. It took a long time. I've done a lot of work on myself.

Cocke: Then what he'd given to you is sort of that rejection of that past?

Hernandez: A rejection and some how thinking that maybe I was different than them because that's forever what I had heard him say. That he always—when we were together he would always point them out—the Mexican national and that we were different somehow. That's what he gave myself, my brother and my sister. And it's taken us all a long time to get past that. My brother is still there, unfortunately. He hasn't worked it out. So it takes a long time. Generation affects generation. And I'm sure this is something that started with my grandfather, my dad's father, who was an alcoholic as well. I'm sure the shame of being who he was turned him to alcohol—an another immigrant. An older immigrant to the United States.

Cocke: So your father's father was in the U.S.?

Hernandez: Well, my father's father—when he brought my dad over at the age of 10, then right, then he came but he was much older of course at that time. He was a man set in his ways but otherwise no, he wasn't born here.

Cocke: Have you been back to visit any of your family in Mexico, any of your kinfolk in Mexico?

Hernandez: No. My father has never been back to the place where he was born and I don't even know if he wants to go back.

Cocke: How about you?

Hernandez: No, I haven't. I guess that would be the next thing on this journey, basically.

Cocke: You might have a great time.

Hernandez: Yeah. I know that, especially my father—my grandfather's family is there. They're in _____. Unfortunately, I think that just that part of my family, we never—they never really kept in touch with family, period. We regardless of whether it's here in the United States or in Mexico. Whereas my mom's family, my grandfather left—my other grandfather left when he was like 18 to travel to the United States and left all his family and he's never come back. So we have no idea—and they're all there still. But we have no idea—he's never—he had really bad experiences and he's never really wanted to go back and it's my grandmother's family—and my grandmother, actually, was the only one that kind of went back and forth, who would go visit her family. And my mother was the one who—as much as my father was such a negative influence, I thought my mother tried at different times in her life to not so much teach us the ways of being Mexican, but to teach us about our family. Which I'm extremely grateful for.

Cocke: Talk a little now about how then this whole “Untold Stories” Festival kind of is congruent with this presence and investigation of your own heritage. If there’s more you want to say about that, I mean maybe you want to talk a little bit about the (Pasterella?) project or whatever really seems especially congruent besides the general or specific fit.

Hernandez: I just really want to say I did kind of realize that quite simply that it’s okay to have a past, to have a culture. That’s something that’s wonderful, to put it quite simply. Which I don’t think—which I didn’t grow up. And not knowing them. And that’s okay to be different than mainstream America, essentially. That you don’t have to fit. That you don’t have to assimilate to be like them. That it’s okay to be of a different culture, essentially, to be of a different community. And that’s something that’s wonderful. I think—and I think working with yourself, and people like John and Adella, and you go and validate them for me every time I see you here because you’re very much—you’re all very much grounded into your specific communities and you’re very proud of it. So I think as much as it just seems so simple and everything, it’s such a wonderful concept. One that I certainly didn’t grow up with and I think a lot of people don’t in this day and age. Or haven’t for, since the founding of the United States, essentially, 1776. We’re all trying to be something else, essentially, other than what we really are.

Cocke: Be a good title for something—We’re All Trying to Be Something Else.

Hernandez: Yeah.

Cocke: You know a lot of times when I hear phrases like that if I spoke Spanish or you were extremely fluent in Spanish you could maybe give us the—there might be sort of an aphorism in Spanish that is analogous to that. It would be interesting to know. You’ve been working at Public Events now for like what two years?

Hernandez: Two years, full-time in December. But otherwise I was working for them as a graduate student.

Cocke: Well, two years full-time, I mean I'm interested in your kind of perspective on what arts presenting needs to become. Because you really are in—right now you're a professional arts presenter. You're one of the younger arts presenters in the U.S., really, if you look at it. So you're in a sense, a new generation, if you were to continue this as a profession and where would you like to see arts presenting go? I mean what's it need to do if you were to think of it as being your life's work for the next twenty years? Where would you like to go with it?

Hernandez: I think arts presenting are just arts, period. It just kind of needs to acknowledge other cultures. That other cultures are flourishing and cultivating arts themselves, essentially. That the Native American, the Mexican-American, the African-American cultures here are extremely rich and pretty—wonderful theater, wonderful music, wonderful dance. And I see that really lacking. I think Public Events is exceptional. Because I think Colleen is exceptional in her thinking, I think she knows that. She's aware of that. But when I venture out, whether it be to another theater or to the museum, I certainly don't see examples of that. Far from it. So I would like to see more people acknowledging the arts that we have here within the various ethnic groups. I think people are quick to bring in... You know, what I've seen they bring in the Mexicans from Mexico or people from Africa without really recognizing what we have here essentially and celebrating it. So that's—arts presenting I think is like any of the major art institutions, whether it be, I guess, at the museums or different schools of art at different universities. I still see predominately Anglo staff, faculty, and things along those lines. Who are very narrow minded even if though they don't think that they are. So I think that we need to probably also recruit—I'd like to see that the arts presenting—just the staff, the people on board change in color and in perspective as well. So I think just the—it's a two-fold. I think that just ideas need to change with regards to what is fine art and I think that just staffs kind of need to change because I still a predominately Anglo thinking, you know, an Anglo staff. As much as this is supposed to be the arts, it's still very narrow minded.

Cocke: Do you have a sense of yourself being in a particular generation, I mean, or there being a particular generational spirit of people your age, and if so, what is it?

Hernandez: You mean like generation X?

Cocke: Yeah, but you're not generation X.

Hernandez: Yeah, I'm just a few years older—actually, yeah.

Cocke: But do you—I mean with people your age—you know with say five, six, seven, eight years either side of you, or whatever it might be. Do you feel any sense of generational—a particular generational thing?

Hernandez: I think within the—who I surround myself with and the people I've met who are in my generation, I think there's a real affinity to give back to the community. But then a lot of my friends are ethnic minorities. I don't know with regards to any of the Anglo, my Anglo counterparts, how they feel about it. But what I've found as far as within my Chicano counterparts or my African American counterparts, there's a real need to want to get back to—to know our heritage, to know our culture. Those who are older, let's say my mother's generation, I see her friends. And for some reason, my father, there really isn't that need, that want of understanding of heritage or culture. My mother told me that—when I was kind of going through my identity crisis that I was teaching her a lot. She didn't understand. I mean I wasn't born to—I wasn't supposed to do all this questioning or this challenging in the least bit. And I started listening to Spanish radio and watching more foreign films from Mexico or Spain and I guess I got her kind of excited about it. Because before then my mother really didn't listen to a lot of Spanish music or go out and go to Mexican festivals or wanted to go see theatrical groups. So for some reason—with her generation I see—for some reason there was a real loss. That wasn't important. Yeah, I see that my friends are very—the people I've met who are my age, are very interested in that, are very committed to that.

Cocke: Do you have a sense that you have a—I'm not saying you should either, but a sense that you have a calling in your life at this point?

Hernandez: Yeah, I have for awhile.

Cocke: What is it?

Hernandez: It has to do with my culture and my community. I think that this idea of not fitting this Chicano model, essentially. Just being—deviating from that, you know being part of the spectrum, not on either end, not completely Anglicized or assimilated and not completely extremely traditional. I would like to see somehow get that in the forefront, you know, to my community. That we really need to—that there's all types of us. That, I think, we all have common goals. That we might not all be the same but we shouldn't alienate each other and we should work for a common goal, essentially, because I don't see us doing that now.

Cocke: What should be common goal be—or goals?

Hernandez: Quite simply I guess it's just for the betterment of our community. Not specifics, but I see that that's extremely lacking—that we're each other's enemies at different times, for whatever reason, jealousy and misunderstanding. But that is important to me as well as just this whole idea of showing people like myself or people in other cultures that the Chicano community or the Mexican community is something that is wonderful. That should be celebrated, quite simply. Because I certainly don't see that. A lot of that has to do through education of our young so that they grow up with a good sense of self. I'm not entirely sure how I'm going to go about doing this whether it's going to be through this or more political activism or through education specifically, or even psychology. I'm not entirely sure. But just having a good—having a good sense of self is very important definitely. Yeah, I don't want to think all this—I know—I think I've learned a lot certainly through all these experiences. The Festival certainly being

one of those wonderful—it's an extremely wonderful experience, but it's information that I want to pass on. I'm just not entirely sure how yet.

Cocke: Well, one of the things that happened down at Boys and Girls the other day, Judy had—you remember Maria the—she's got a—Anita's... They're both Chicano. Anita's the little and Maria's the older sister, different father, same mother. Maria's kind of older looking. And they were riding in the van and I a low rider pulled up beside the van. And Maria said to Judy. She said, "My Granny's going to get me one of those." Judy said, "Oh yeah." Said, "Yeah, Granny wants me to come back to Texas so I can be raised as a real Chicano." And you can sort of understand that.

Hernandez: Uh huh. Yeah.

Cocke: And so Judy said, "What are you going to do?" And Maria said, "I'm going to go back and be a real Chicano."

Hernandez: A real Chicano. Yeah.

Cocke: And I was thinking of this Black writer, thinker, and his name is _____ Shelby. And he said something that's really stuck in my mind. He said it came as quite a shock to him as a young African-American male to find out that just because he was an African-American male did not relieve him from the responsibility of also becoming an individual. Something really well put.

Hernandez: Yeah.

Cocke: That came as quite a shock to him. So you have these sort of two—what you're talking about—reminds me of that. Well, what else should we talk about? What else is on your mind around this. Is there anything else on your mind that you would want to record here? Thoughts about identity, Untold Stories.

Hernandez: Thoughts about identity. Thoughts about Untold Stories.

Cocke: Your own life in this project.

Hernandez: Yeah, fortunately, I've given this great thought so I was ready.

Cocke: Yeah, it was very articulate. I don't know what else to say because I think it's there.

Hernandez: Yeah, just... I'm just extremely happy to have this opportunity, definitely. I see it as being such an extremely worthwhile project and I wish that there were other people in my office that saw that, too, or understood that.

Cocke: Do you have any stories that you could relate—a sort of favorite story about this work where you just thought, “Now, that's neat.” Any sort of story of this work. Is there something you could tell us about that? Maybe even from the work that's very recent, like over in Guadalupe or any other work, where something just happened and you thought, “That's what this is about.”

Hernandez: Let's see... I guess actually, it doesn't have to do with Guadalupe. It has to do with Carver. And I guess it's more just my experience of going over to Carver. And...

Cocke: Tell us a little what Carver is.

Hernandez: Carver PCH Museum and Culture Center. PCH stands for Phoenix Colored High School, and actually it was the first all-Black high school in Phoenix. Closed down in the 1950's. And now they've created the space into—the school space into a museum and cultural center. And I think—I don't think there's one experience, but I think it's just a matter of—I just feel very privileged to be able to sit in story circles with the alumni, essentially, and to hear their stories and that they trust me. I just feel very honored to be

able to do that. I never feel like an outsider when I go over there. I always feel extremely welcomed. And I guess the last story circle that I was in a couple of Saturdays ago with John and Adella and some people from the theater company. We had about four or five people from Carver, not really too many. But I remember just relaying a story. I think the theme was what your mother—something that your mother shared. I was relaying a story that my mother had told me never to give up and if there was an obstacle in the road that I would essentially have to try to find a way around it, a way over it, and then just kind of get past it. But to continue on, you know, with whatever I was doing, essentially. And I just remember this one woman, Dottie, who's always there and who's been there at a couple of story circles, you know, just kind of, I could see her nodding her head and saying, "Yes, yes," and kind of egging me on, or urging me on to tell this story. I just remember just being so grateful that she was there and that she was kind of validating me and kind of encouraging me. I just kind of felt very warm. But I think with a number of the story circles, I just always am astounded. Right now, for some reason, I can't think of specific stories, but you know, just grateful to be here to hear other people's stories. Because it's made me certainly the more sensitive person. Not that I was not sensitive to begin with, but just even more so, just much more aware. But just that feeling of acceptance.

Cocke: And it sounds like community, too.

Hernandez: Yeah.

Cocke: It's a circle.

Hernandez: Right. Just a great feeling of community. I think have that more with the Chicano community, but again, something I didn't grow up with. So whenever I find myself in that situation I always feel extremely rich. I don't take it for granted. I thrive in it, because I realize I missed out on it when I was growing up.

What do you encounter in this work—in this “Untold Stories” project? Not so much, necessarily, in the project, but in the work in your professional life here that really makes you mad, that really gets you steaming.

Hernandez: When people don't take the time to understand it. When they have preconceived notions. And I think they're quite capable of understanding it, or maybe that's giving them too much credit, I don't know. But they don't take the time, because, I guess, they just don't care. The University as a whole—lack of funding. This is a great project and it hasn't been funded by the university. And that really—that really gets to me, because so many people are profiting from it in so many different ways that I would think that the university would want to—and just so many people out in the community—maybe you should just say community here and don't say ASU. But we'd want to back this community. But, you know, I guess that's part of my job as well, to get out there and to promote it, to educate people. You know, because people don't understand. And I think when people do take the time to understand it, I think they recognize that it's an extremely worthwhile project or work, period.

Cocke: That sounds good.