

The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Center for Basque Studies

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Marc Johnson, president of the University of Nevada, Reno, passed me the microphone after having offered his praise and appreciation for UNR's Center for Basque Studies. It was then that I began my "mission impossible"—the task of summarizing in a few minutes the accomplishments (and failures) of a vast collective enterprise over the last fifty years. Whew!

It was November 16, 2017, and we were about a hundred people gathered together in the Center's magnificent quarters within UNR's relatively new Mathewson Knowledge Center (or University Library). For me, it was a surreal moment. It had been a half-century since a recently graduated recipient from the University of Chicago of a doctorate in social anthropology (myself), travelled back to his hometown to accept the challenge of establishing a Basque Studies Program for the nascent Desert Research Institute of the University of Nevada System. The fifty years had passed like the proverbial blink of an eye. As I surveyed the public, I was struck by the many presences, as well as the significant absences.

Those present included many officials of the University of Nevada, Reno, as well as Rick Trachok, member of the University of Nevada System's Board of Regents and, until recently, its chairman. Dean Kathlin Ray, head of the Knowledge Center in which both the Center for Basque Studies and the Basque Library are housed, beamed approvingly. Then there was Mark Dawson, the retired former chancellor of UNS, who had travelled from his home in Henderson (near Las Vegas) to be with us. It was a pleasant surprise, given that he was a dear personal friend and key supporter of the Basque Studies Program during its early years. Ginny Kersey, the retired financial controller of UNR, had made the physical effort with her walker and oxygenator to be with us. I recalled how Ginny contacted me at the end of each fiscal year over a couple of decades to ask if I had a legitimate use for the thousand or so dollars that remained uncommitted in UNR's annual budget. I could give the remainder of this talk about the many initiatives that those crumbs off the table made possible.

Also in attendance, of course, were Center staff members; indeed, more than one generation. The current director, Xabier Irujo, had already spoken, as had Sandra Ott, the former one. My immediate successor when I retired some seventeen years ago was Joseba Zulaika, and he contemplated the proceedings with my same look of wonder and bemusement—no doubt lost in his own recollections of our many victories and defeats. The newest professional staff member, Mariann Vaczi, was given an encapsulated taste of where we had come from and was probably awash in thoughts about where the Center might be heading. Kate Camino, the Center’s administrative assistant, scurried about, as did Iñaki Arrieta, the Basque librarian and photographer of today’s event. Jill Berner, my former office assistant, reminded me of our daily travails together over a couple of decades. Dan Montero, editor of the Center’s many publications’ series, circulated among the seven or eight members of our far-flung Advisory Board who were in attendance. Professor Larraitz Arizabarreta represented the Basque Studies Program of Boise State University. There were several of my family members and personal friends, and was I overwhelmed by their love. Their presence made me feel like the most fortunate person alive.

Absent were Gorka Aulestia and Linda White, collaborators in the Center’s longest research and publication project (or the decade that they worked together to produce the monumental Basque-English, English-Basque Dictionary). Missing was Harold Morehouse, the ex-director of UNR’s University Library, and my former boss. “Hap” had agreed to house and loosely administer the Basque Studies Pro-



Robert Laxalt and sculptor Nestor Bastarretxea.

gram at a critical and delicate juncture when it was transferred in the 1970s from DRI to UNR. Also absent was Joe Crowley, president of UNR over the several decades of existence of the Basque Studies Program before it was rechristened as the Center for Basque Studies in 1999. Both were among our strongest supporters. Hap had died a year ago and a hospitalized Joe would pass away a few days after our event.

I won't go on, as I could write a paragraph of two about every person in the room that day and many others who weren't. Also, no doubt I missed several key people in the foregoing and apologize for that.

I would now consider the two most critical absences that hovered like ghosts over our ceremony—reference, of course, is to Robert Laxalt and Jon Bilbao. I am often treated as the founder of the Basque Studies Program, but in reality I consider myself to be but one of its three co-founders. Bob recruited me and I recruited Jon, but working together the three of us founded the Basque Studies Program and its library—today's William A. Douglass Center for Basque Studies and Jon Bilbao Basque Library. As the surviving member of the founder trifecta, I am often asked to speak about our history and accomplishments, after which I receive the kudos for them. It always makes me a little uncomfortable. For, in addition to underscoring the importance of Bob and Jon, I always acknowledge the relative insignificance of all three of us in the grand scheme. The Center for Basque Studies, in particular, was the result of the collective efforts of literally hundreds, if not thousands, of interested persons over the last fifty years. I would invoke the students in our courses (without whom there would have been none), the purchasers of our publications (without whom there would have been none), and the private donors whose gifts ranged from a few dollars to hundreds of thousands (without which the Center would be a very different animal than it is today). I applaud and thank all of you—our unsung heroes.

While I was engaged in anthropological fieldwork regarding the causes and consequences of emigration from Etxalar, Navarra, and Murelaga (Aulestia), Bizkaia, Robert Laxalt was living in St-Jean-Pied-de-Port during a year's sabbatical leave from his role as founder and director of the University of Nevada Press, intent upon writing a novel about the Basque Country as a sequel to his highly-successful first book—*Sweet Promised Land* (1957). I believe that the year was 1963 and we were in correspondence. At Bob's invitation, I drove to Iparralde and spent a day and night with him. I knew that he was working as a consultant for the Desert Research Institute, assigned to ascertain the reaction in the Basque Country to the possibility of establishing a Basque Studies Program in the United States. I was also aware that such had been the recommendation of a team of three consulting American anthropologists, who were convened in 1961 by the nascent Desert Research Institute to configure the research agenda of the Center for Western North American Studies—its division for research in the humanities and social sciences. Bob was collecting Basque bibliography and books. The French bascophile, Philippe Veyrin, became an enthusiastic supporter of Nevada's Basque Studies initiative. On his deathbed, Veyrin would give the University of Nevada the first right of refusal to purchase from his estate his professional Basque library.

During our conversations, Bob startled me with a question. Would I be willing to let him recommend me for the position of director of the future Basque Studies Program? He had been offered that appointment by DRI's president, Wendell Mordy, and was not interested. "Bill, I am not a Basque scholar, I am a Basque who writes." Bob was also committed to the University of Nevada Press that he had fathered. I had my own ambivalence. I had not yet even finished my field research, let alone written my dissertation. So my answer was that I might be interested in the future, but not until after I had completed my doctorate. That would take years.



Members of San Francisco Basque Club touring the library of the Basque Studies Program. (Second from left Jon Bilbao; third from left Jill Berner).

In the event, DRI searched for another candidate, but could find no suitable one (the world was not awash in English-speaking Basque Studies specialists). Mordy had become quite frustrated with the delay and even asked me to come to Reno before completing my work at Chicago in order to launch the BSP. I demurred, and so it was that I travelled across the country in June of 1967, a week after graduation from the University of Chicago, to accept my position at DRI. I was excited by the challenge, but did not expect to be in Reno for very long—maybe a couple of years—before moving on to a teaching post at some more prestigious university. In the event, I would retire thirty-three years later from the only academic position that I ever held—Coordinator of the Basque Studies Program.

It was that autumn that I first met Jon Bilbao at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association being held that year in Washington D.C. He

was a tenured professor teaching Spanish at a small college in nearby Maryland. Noted Basque linguist Koldo Mitxelena felt that Jon and I should meet, and had arranged for us to do so. That would prove to be providential. I was trying to imagine a Basque Studies Program (there were no real models to follow) and Jon had spent a couple of decades trying to interest an American Institution (including Indiana University, Vassar College and the American Museum of Natural History in New York City) into starting one. He agreed to come to Reno the following spring to give a lecture and to brainstorm with me. His visit coincided with the arrival of the Veyrin library collection that we had managed to purchase. As the world's leading Basque bibliographer, he was very impressed that the University Library at UNR now had 750 Basque books and journals when Harvard or Princeton had maybe thirty. He expressed his willingness to come to Reno if given the opportunity.

Several months later, I submitted my resignation to Wendell Mordy. I had been on the road for more than a year engaged in fundraising for the BSP, largely without success, and I was tired of fronting for a one-man Basque Studies "Program." Mordy asked what it would take to keep me, and I replied: "hire Jon Bilbao." As it turned out, DRI was willing to commit to a nine-month contract for Jon, but with no further guarantees. Clearly, he was expecting us to generate grant proposals for projects that would fund themselves (and our salaries). DRI was a soft-money, self-funded institution that survived on the indirect cost recovery from the grants of its investigators. If it hired people (like me), it was always in the anticipation that they would generate their own support. I was skeptical that Jon would relinquish his current tenure track position for such a flimsy offer, but I was wrong. He was committed to teaching the fall semester for Washington College, but then he would join me.

In retrospect, ours was an ideal collaboration. Jon's presence brought us instant respectability in the Basque intellectual world. He was in the final stages of completing his widely anticipated magnum opus, the eleven-volume *Eusko-Bibliographia*. He had contacts throughout the world with Basque bibliophiles and book dealers. Most authors on a Basque topic sent him their publications for inclusion in his bibliography as a matter of course, and he sometimes received clandestine material as well (generated by exiled or underground Basque nationalists and ETA—given that the Franco dictatorship was still in power). It was only natural that Jon would combine his contacts with the Veyrin collection and annual budget provided by UNR's Library for the purchase of Basque books in order to create one of the world's best Basque libraries—the very best regarding the many Basque diasporas around the globe. At present, the Jon Bilbao Basque Library has nearly 45,000 volumes and journals. It services Basque scholars throughout the world, many of whom come to Reno for varying periods of residency in order to research a particular topic.

Jon was also a beehive of possible new initiatives—some practical and others not. I used to joke that we complemented each other—he was the BSP's throttle and I was the brake. His two best visions that come most to my mind were the idea of starting a study-abroad initiative in the Basque Country that would expose Basque-American university students to their cultural roots while forming the fu-



Landagoyen, Ustaritz 1970. (Left to right Eloy Placer, Julio Caro Baroja, William Douglass and Jon Bilbao).

ture leadership of the Basque-American diaspora and the creation of an association that would overarch and link together the dozens of Basque clubs in the United States. I was initially skeptical about both efforts. Jon viewed them as a means of fomenting and preserving Basque culture in the United States; I did not think that it was our mission to do so. In my view, we were an academic research entity that studied Basque and Basque-American cultural reality, rather than its promoters *per se*. Nevertheless, I supported Jon (albeit cautiously) in both undertakings. I helped him organize a summer program in Ustaritz and Oñate that would one day eventuate in the semester and academic-year-long offerings of USAC (University Studies Abroad Consortium). I also convened at UNR the heads of the Basque clubs in Boise, Elko, Reno and San Francisco for what proved to be the first organizational meeting of the future NABO (North American Basque Organizations, Inc.).

In retrospect, I marvel at Jon's vision when I contemplate both of those initiatives today. USAC, under Carmelo Urza's excellent direction, became one of the world's most important studies-abroad enterprises. It currently has 52 programs in 28 countries, an annual budget of more than \$30 million and 350 employees.

There are 33 associated American universities in USAC and it has ties with 200 more. In 2017-2018 USAC sent abroad 4,220 students from 336 universities—including to its three destinations in the Basque Country. NABO has had 53 member associations (mainly Basque clubs, but also cultural associations, including UNR's Center for Basque Studies) and interfaces with both the Basque Government in Europe and other Basque associations around the world. It sponsors the American tours of Basque performing artists, an annual summer camp to expose Basque-American children to their heritage and an annual music competition to select the North-American representative to the world music championship. The Center's administrative assistant, Kate Camino, edits and publishes *Astero*, NABO's newsletter. USAC and NABO were both born in Jon Bilbao's fertile imagination.

Robert Laxalt's role was far more passive and focused, yet critical. His priority was creation of a Basque Book Series within his University of Nevada Press. He asked me to edit it and appointed me to his Editorial Board. I would serve in both capacities for the next three decades. On my watch, the Basque Book Series produced somewhere between fifty and sixty titles. They ranged over the gamut of Basque topics—anthropology, history, linguistics, folklore, diaspora, photo essays, cuisine etc. The Basque Book Series continues to function to this day, producing about one new Basque title each year. However, the true mantle of Nevada's Basque publications has shifted to the Center itself. Over the past fifteen years or so it has launched no fewer than twelve different series. The most notable include Basque Politics (13 titles), Basque Classics (13 titles), Basque Diaspora (12 titles), Basque Literature (11 titles) and Basque Conference Papers (11 titles). The combined output stands at no fewer than 135 books to date, with annual production in the neighborhood of a dozen new ones each year.

The combination of the University of Nevada Press's Basque Book Series and the Center's many publishing initiatives have provided Basque Americans with their cultural heritage. When its Basque-American organizers, including Robert Laxalt, met to "invent" the first national Basque festival (held in 1959 in Sparks, Nevada) they had to look up the entry on Basques in the *Encyclopedia Americana* to glean enough information on Basque history and culture to be able to write their publicity. This post-dated publication of Bob's seminal *Sweet Promised Land* that had thrust the Basques and Basque Americans into national awareness. At the time, the only general overview in English on the Basque people was British folklorist Rodney Gallop's *A Book of the Basques*, published in 1930 and out of print in 1959 (I reprinted it in 1970 as the initial title of the Basque Book Series).

All of the foregoing publications also raised the Basques' profile throughout the Anglo world. When I first assumed my post as head of the Basque Studies Program, the most frequent question to me was: "Who are the Basques?"—possibly followed by the refinement: "Are they Spaniards or French?" Today, those questions are seldom asked. I credit Nevada's nearly two hundred publications in English on Basque topics with having made that critical difference. I would also note that we have made a concerted effort to intrude Basque scholarship into the Anglo academic world. With financial support from the Basque Government, the Center distributes gratis a copy of its scholarly publications to the three hundred most important research libraries throughout the English-speaking world.

Robert Laxalt was also the key factor in securing State of Nevada support for the Basque Studies Program. During the early years of our existence, Bob's brother Paul was governor of Nevada (1967-1971) and then a prominent U. S. senator (1974-1987). Bob had his personal relationship with several influential members of the Nevada State Legislature and regularly lobbied them successfully for state support of the budget of the University of Nevada Press. So, at critical junctures over the years, Bob intervened on our behalf (his efforts proved key in securing State of Nevada funding of both Jon Bilbao's and my salary).

Throughout its fifty years of existence, there has been a certain tension within the BSP/Center between research and teaching. We began as the research initiative of a soft-money research institute that discouraged its faculty from teaching. We were expected to write successful grant proposals, conduct their proposed research and publish the findings while our new proposals for subsequent projects were under consideration by funding agencies. And so forth. From DRI's standpoint, teaching was a distraction that it tolerated only when one of its professionals insisted on presenting a course through some academic department at UNR. This was my case, since I wished to teach a few courses through the *Anthropology* Department. I wanted teaching experience should I decide to seek an academic appointment at some other university. I also desired to teach a course on Old World Basque Culture as a small contribution toward assuaging the ignorance about Basques among Americans, including professional academics who should have known better.



Robert Laxalt, director of the University of Nevada Press.

From the outset of his time in Reno, Jon was motivated to teach. For many years, he had been a major advocate and designer within Basque Nationalist circles of a future public Basque University. He now offered courses at UNR on the Basque language and Basque history—both directed more toward helping Basque Americans to understand their heritage than to inform a wider American audience about Basques.

Jon's pedagogical thrust culminated in the creation of our Basque Studies Summer Session Abroad (first held in 1970). Sandra Ott became its co-director after a couple of years. The second one was held mainly in Arantzau (1972) and involved a graduate level linguistics seminar co-directed by Koldo Mitxelena, Rudolf De Rijk and the BSP's linguistics coordinator William H. Ja-

cobsen, Jr. It was also attended (both as students) by Carmelo Urza, a Boise high school instructor, and Professor Patrick Bieter of Boise State University. It prompted Pat to establish a Boise State year-round study program for American students at Oñate. It would employ both Carmelo Urza and Jon Bilbao in its first year. Pat recruited Jon to help with organizational details and contacts, and I approved his leave of absence from Nevada so that he could teach in Oñate. The Boise State Oñate program operated between 1974 and 1980.

A few years later, all of the aforementioned efforts eventuated in USAC. Pat and I convinced UNR and Boise State to enter as founding members (UNLV joined shortly thereafter). Jon and I signed the agreement for the siting of USAC on the campuses of the University of the Basque Country on the back of a napkin at the kitchen table of its rector, Gregorio Monreal. I then recruited Carmelo to become USAC's first director, based in Reno in the quarters of the BSP, while Sandra Ott served as the field director of its first session (1983) held in Donostia. Jon Bilbao, by then retired from the BSP and residing in the Basque Country, taught for USAC on several occasions.

By the time that Jon joined me in Reno, I had submitted several grant applications and had recently received funding from the National Institute of Mental Health for a year's study of identity maintenance among the Basques of Elko County, Nevada. It included money for a research assistant. He arrived for the winter semester of 1969 and I was teaching a Basque culture course in Elko through the University Extension Division. I travelled there every two weeks to give a three-



Attendees at the Fiftieth Anniversary Ceremony of the William A. Douglass Center for Basque Studies, November 16, 2017. (From left to right: Mateo Francoia, Advisory Board member Bart Mowry, Advisory Board member Annette Bidart, former PhD student Dr. Joxe Mallea, former USAC director Carmelo Urza, former PhD student Dr. Lisa Corcostegui, Center publications editor Dan Montero, Center professor and former director Sandra Ott, PhD student Ziortza Gandarias, bertsolari Jesús Goñi, former PhD student Dr. Amaia Irazoz, PhD student Edurne Arostegui, Center administrator Kate Camino, student worker Mariah Connell, Center director Xabier Irujo, Advisory Board member Anita Anacabe, Basque librarian Iñaki Arrieta and Center professor Mariann Vaczi.

hour seminar on a Friday night followed by another on Saturday morning. I invited Jon to accompany me as a guest lecturer on the Basque language. It was snowing and the poor road conditions doubled the travel time of the normal five-hour trip. As we crept across the desert, we discussed my project. By the time we reached Elko he had agreed to become my research assistant. One of the side benefits would be funding for him for about a year beyond Mordy's nine-month commitment.

Again, the collaboration would prove providential. Jon was a trained historian now partnering with an anthropologist. I would do field research, including residence in one of Elko's Basque hotels, as well as on ranches and in the summer and winter camps of Basque shepherders, Jon would conduct archival research in public records and newspaper files. It quickly became apparent that we could not posit why some Basques chose Elko as their destination without understanding their decision to rule out Buenos Aires or Boise—both well developed alternative destinations of Basque emigration. We decided to write an introduction addressing that question. In the event, it required us to expand the scope of our investigation throughout the American West and Latin America. After three years of research and another three of writing and editing, we published the book *Amerikanuak: Basques in the New World* (1975) as the third title in the Basque Book Series of the University Press. Ironically, the introduction had expanded into a lengthy book and the Elko study *per se* has never been published.

In retrospect, it is fair to say that *Amerikanuak* not only fulfilled the Center's initial research goal, it became iconic in its own right. In its English version the book sold thousands of copies and it subsequently appeared in Spanish translation (1986). The timing was propitious and conjunctural, given that the Basque Country in the immediate post-Franco era initiated its own university system that began to produce the new generation of Basque scholars. At about the same time, the academic world as a whole was anticipating the celebration of the 500th anniversary of Columbus's first voyage to the New World—in part by launching a plethora of research on the subject of European migration. Jon and I had been the precursors in investigating its Basque dimension, and our book became the theoretical and methodological beacon for a number of newly-minted Basque historians and social anthropologists, not to mention migration specialists from other countries with an interest in Basque emigration. Indeed, there has emerged a sub-field of Basque Diaspora Studies. In 2015, a number of its scholars organized a commemoration of *Amerikanuak* on the fortieth anniversary of its initial publication—with events at several Latin American, North American and European universities, as well as Iceland.

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Our successful research collaboration notwithstanding, by the early 1970s it was becoming apparent that the Desert Research Institute was not a good fit for either Jon or the Basque Studies Program. He had finished the course work for his doctorate, but never wrote his thesis. He therefore lacked the academic credential to qualify as a principal investigator on a grant proposal to most funding agen-

cies. It was also apparent that the magnitude of funding available in the humanities and social sciences (as opposed to the physical sciences that predominated at DRI) was simply incapable of ever making the Basque Studies Program self-sufficient. Nor were our teaching, bibliographic and library activities compatible with DRI's mission.

In 1971, I obtained a Research Scientist Career Development Award from the National Institute of Mental Health for five years of salary support and research expenses. However, my proposal called for field research on emigration in South Italy and the collapse of the mining economy in Tonopah, Nevada. My grant would subsequently be renewed for an additional five years with the added element of field research among those Basques of Australia who had been recruited to cut sugar cane in North Queensland. None of these projects could possibly involve Jon. So, if I was personally self-funded for the decade of the 1980s and therefore secure at DRI, Jon was not and was unlikely to be.

It was then, with the concurrence of the presidents of both UNR and DRI, that I initiated formal negotiations regarding a transfer of the Basque Studies Program (and Jon Bilbao to be sure) to UNR's University Library. They were successful and in 1972 the BSP became a part of UNR's Statewide Programs, housed within the University Library and reporting to its director. I remained at DRI for a number of years. However, as I approached the end of my NIMH support, I decided that I no longer wanted the pressure and insecurity of the DRI *modus operandi*. I had far too much unpublished data on several topics without initiating grant proposals for yet additional research. The alternative at DRI was to join a research team working on a topic that was no particular interest to me. So it was then that I, too, crossed the bridge to UNR. For my first couple of years at UNR, my salary was still paid by NIMH. When the grant terminated in 1981, thanks to Bob Laxalt's lobbying, there was a state-funded position awaiting me. The BSP now had two professional positions and our DRI days were over.

So, after the first decade and a half of its existence, the BSP had an established international reputation that rested upon its extraordinary Basque library collection, its unique Basque Book Series, Jon's bibliographic research, the aura of *Amerikanuak* and the successful foray into study-abroad that was culminating in USAC. We were also now ensconced at UNR, but within the rather nebulous administrative category of "Statewide Services." That arrangement had its joys and sorrows. We were pretty much left to our own devices, which gave us the latitude to expand our activities as we saw fit. I continued to insist that the BSP was fundamentally a research program that might engage in some voluntary teaching for some of UNR's academic departments. However, we were not to be pressured or evaluated in terms of our pedagogical activities. There was another strategic imperative, given that our activities required various of our staff to spend considerable time in Europe, Latin America and Australia as a matter of course, depending upon their research interests. We differed in this regard from the remainder of UNR's faculty. It is my belief that, had we been subjected to the same criteria as standard academic departments, the BSP's history would have been very different.



Sandra Ott introducing UNR President Marc Johnson (to her right) at the Fiftieth Anniversary Ceremony.

The downside of being in Statewide Services was that we had no real advocate within the university's budgetary process. The director of the library was both proud and supportive of us, but with the proviso that we would not enter into competition with his library budget. So, in the final analysis, he was unwilling to expend political capital on our behalf. Throughout the remainder of my thirty-three years as coordinator, our only State of Nevada funding came in special appropriations of the Nevada State Legislature thanks to Bob's contacts therein.

The question of politics was both delicate and unavoidable in other fundamental ways. Given the confrontation between some Basques and the Spanish State since the birth of Basque nationalism in the late nineteenth century, exacerbated by the Spanish Civil War, the Basque political exiles and refugees from it, and the emergence of ETA as a violent response to the violence of the Franco dictatorship, our creation of a Basque Studies Program was viewed by many as a political act. Indeed, in some respects it was. Jon Bilbao was a dedicated member of the Basque Nationalist Party and was prohibited from entering Spain by the Spanish Government at the time I met and then recruited him. I was personally sympathetic to the Basques' right of political self-determination, including the demand of some for independence from Spain. While I was less so to ETA's violence, I certainly understood the frustration of those who felt it was the only resort given the dictatorship's repression. It is accurate to say that the majority, albeit not all, of the professionals and visitors to the Basque Studies Program over the years were proponents of Basque nationalism.

The foregoing notwithstanding, I was convinced that the Basque Studies Program should remain politically neutral in its official posture. If we wished to

maintain academic credibility, it could not be perceived as partisan and propagandistic. It was all a matter of degree, of course, and no matter how much we tried, we were dismissed by some as a mere stalking horse for Basque nationalism. On a couple of occasions, I even received anonymous death threats from extremist Spanish nationalists, appalled as they were by our very audacity in creating such a program. I also had to defend our efforts with some of my American academic colleagues. I was particularly bemused by those teaching in Spanish or French departments who regarded their efforts as “universalistic,” while dismissing creation of a Basque Studies Program as an exercise in narrow-minded “particularism.”

In any event, as the Center itself became its own attraction for visitors, our response in the trenches was to maintain the doors of the BSP open to all comers irrespective of their politics. We hosted Txillardegí, one of the founders of ETA, and Jaime Mayor Oreja, arguably ETA's (and Basque nationalism's) greatest opponent. Basque Nationalist Party stalwarts Xabier Arzalluz and Lehendakari José Antonio Ardanza came, as did Socialist Party Lehendakari Patxi López. For many years, the U.S. Department of State ran a visitors' program that sponsored the stays of foreign academics, journalists and politicians interested in experiencing the United States. The visitors specified their own itineraries. We were included in those of many Basque and Spanish persons ranging across the political spectrum. We received every one of these guests with hospitality and respect. That legacy continues to inform the Center's policy.

Of greater significance, perhaps, was the attraction that the Center posed for Basque academics throughout the world. Over the years literally dozens have spent time in residence here in Reno for periods ranging from a few weeks to a few years. Examples of the latter are two of the former rectors of the Basque University System, Gregorio Monreal and Pello Sallaburu, both of whom came to the Center for its tranquility, library resources and excellent working conditions in order to complete longstanding book projects.

I believe that there was another, albeit subjective, factor in the Center's success—namely, the intense personal ties among its staff. We were like the proverbial family. Jill Berner, our office manager, and Linda White, our assistant coordinator, were more than employees. To this day, we share the sorrows and joys of one another's personal life. Jon Bilbao and Bob Laxalt were more than my colleagues, they were my best friends. Jon asked me regularly for financial advice and he married his second wife, Gayle Carlson, in the living room of my house. Bob rarely came to the Basque Studies Program (I would estimate he set foot in its premises maybe ten times over thirty years), but I frequented his office at the University of Nevada Press. We had lunch together every couple of weeks and discussed a wide range of topics—particularly politics. He was a speechwriter and political strategist for Paul, and liked to try out his Republican ideas on a trusted Democrat (at the time) confidante. He also trusted my judgment on his own financial affairs and that most intimate of enterprises—his writing. He asked me to both edit and critique every one of his manuscripts while it was still a draft.

I have similar feelings about my colleagues (and fellow anthropologists) Joseba Zulaika and Sandra Ott—both of whom I recruited. I hired Carmelo Urza as

the first director of USAC and provided him with his first office space. We worked closely together for three decades as he took our modest little initiative to unimagined heights. To this day, we are next-door neighbors with a personal relationship that falls somewhere between the fraternal and that of father and son. We are both now retired, single and very mindful of one another's welfare. Our contacts are practically daily, and we take turns frequently cooking one another's dinner at which we solve the problems of the world.

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Toward the end of my tenure with the Center, it experienced another realignment within the University System, becoming a part of UNR's then College of Arts and Sciences (today the College of Liberal Arts). That meant enhancement of our pedagogic mission. By then, we had a most unusual teaching arrangement. As in the DRI days, individual staff continued to offer Basque history, anthropology and language instruction through one of UNR's relevant departments. In order to service the continuing Basque interest of returning USAC students who had studied for a semester or year in the Basque Country, we offered an undergraduate minor in Basque Studies. And then we had a tutorial PhD program in which one could earn a doctorate in Basque Studies with an emphasis in history, anthropology, political science or human geography. To date, it has awarded eighteen degrees and only five of the recipients are of Basque descent and from the Basque Country. The ranks of the remainder include a student from Poland, Hungary, Mexico, Finland, Scotland and Indonesia, in addition to those from the United States. There are currently five students in the doctoral program.

Then, too, there was the impact upon us of the Internet revolution in pedagogy. Its potential for specialized interests such as Basque Studies cannot be overstated. We are always concerned about attracting sufficient students on campus for our UNR courses (although, in fact, enrollment in them continues to grow largely due to the curiosity within our non-Basque student body). In any event, for the last decade or so, we have offered our courses on-line and published textbooks for them. The latter are employed by other institutions, such as Boise State University and the University of California, Santa Barbara in their Basque courses. They are also sold to the public as well, and are among the Center's most popular publications. Today, anyone on the planet can enroll in one of the Center's on-line courses and complete it without ever coming to Reno.

I think that our research and publications speak for themselves. In addition to *Amerikanuak*, *Eusko Bibliographia* and the dictionary project, I would cite the following as but some of the research published by Center staff. We have Joseba Zulaika's internationally-renowned publications on terrorism, as well as his extraordinary analyses of the Guggenheim Museum project and the city of Bilbao that houses it. There are Sandra Ott's ethnography of a shepherding community in Iparralde and her more recent books and articles on the role of Basques in the Resistance, the German Occupation and the subsequent trials of collaborators during it. Gloria Toticagüena produced many monographs on Basque diasporas



Attendees at the Fiftieth Anniversary Ceremony of the Center for Basque Studies.

around the world. Then there are Jose Mallea's consummate work on Basque sheepherder arboroglyphs of the American West and Xabier Irujo's books on both diasporic topics and Basque political history—particularly the bombing of Gernika.

Over the years, our staff has been in demand to provide lectures and courses in a wide variety of circumstances. Since the Basque Government began convening a Congress on Basque Collectivities in the World, held somewhere in the Basque Country every four years, all of its inaugural addresses have been given by either Gloria Toticagüena (when she was the Center's director) or myself.

Unsurprisingly, all of our professionals have participated regularly in conferences and coursework in the Basque Country. We have been instrumental in helping other American institutions develop their own Basque Studies initiatives—notably Boise State University and the University of California, Santa Barbara. Other examples would be the semester-long courses on Basque culture that Gloria Toticagüena presented at Stanford University and Joseba Zulaika gave at the University of Chicago. Xabier Irujo taught a course on Basque politics at the University of Liverpool and, in a few days, Joseba Zulaika leaves for England to teach there as well—thereby deepening the Center's budding relationship with a British university.

Another manifestation of our outreach is the many conferences that we have organized in Reno and elsewhere. The Center regularly sponsors conferences on a particular topic and usually publishes their results. For a while this happened on an

annual basis. After my retirement, the Basque Government funded a William A. Douglass Visiting Professorship. Several noted Basque intellectuals, including Bernardo Atxaga and Javier Echeverria, were the visiting professor. One of their duties was to organize a conference in their specialty to which they invited experts from around the world. The organizer then prepared the proceedings for publication in the Center's Conferences Series. I could also cite the examples of the conference on the Basques in Mexico that we held in Reno (1995) at the request of its organizers in Mexico City or the one that I organized in Havana on the Basques in Cuba (2015). It is fair to say that the published results of both have becoming the iconic baselines for further research into the Basque presence in both countries.

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I retired on December 31, 1999, and Joseba Zulaika became the Center's second director. He was followed by Gloria Totoricagüena. After her departure from Reno, Joseba and Sandra co-directed the Center (2009-2012), followed by co-direction of Xabier Irujo and Joseba Zulaika (2012-2013), then Sandy and Joseba again served together from 2013 to 2015 until handing over the sole directorship to Xabier Irujo last year. When I retired, the Center had three professional staff and two classified positions. It was funded almost entirely by the State of Nevada. Under its subsequent leadership, it developed closer ties with the Basque Government, the Basque University System and the Diputación of Bizkaia. All three have provided funding for some of the Center's activities. Zulaika had the vision to found both the *Amigos de Reno*, consisting of Basque academics who had spent significant amounts of time in residence with the Center, who were prepared to



The Naming Ceremony of the William A. Douglass Center for Basque Studies (2015) (From left to right: Center Advisory Board member John Echeverria, Nevada governor Brian Sandoval, USAC director Carmelo Urza, William Douglass, former UNR president Joseph Crowley).

advocate its activities and budgetary requests with institutions in the Basque homeland, and the Advisory Board whose primary purpose is to raise funds from private sources for the Center's endowment. The value of the latter has grown to approximately \$1.5 million.

During the economic recession, beginning in 2007, State of Nevada budgetary cutbacks for UNR resulted in the Center losing two professional and one classified positions. The Basque Library also lost its librarian. I am pleased to report, as we celebrate this fiftieth anniversary, that the Center's budget is well on the way to recovery. One of the professional positions has been restored, as has the Basque librarian.

Another politically-tinged development at the Center was simply the result of our success and growing notoriety. American, indeed international, English-language media outlets came to view us as their prime source of information on the Basques whenever they needed one for a breaking news story. Over the years, I spoke multiple times with outlets like CNN, the BBC, the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Company), the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and so forth. It almost always regarded ETA. Indeed, after "Who Are the Basques?" my least favorite query was to sum up in a few words the history and reasons for the violence between ETA and the Spanish State. Nevertheless, it was a unique opportunity to inform the Anglo world about Basque affairs.

Probably the most telling occasion was when terrorists attacked the Madrid subway system the weekend of Spain's national elections in 2004, killing 192 persons and wounding nearly 2,000. Incumbent Prime Minister Aznar and his Popular Party had been running an anti-Basque campaign, alleging that all Basques were either ETA collaborators or sympathizers. The official line of Spain's desperate ambassadors throughout the world immediately became that the regime had incontrovertible evidence that ETA had carried out the Madrid bombings. They called for a condemnation of the Basque terrorists by the United Nations and the European Union, as well as important governments like that of the United States. The volume of calls from the international media to the Center asking for our opinion was so great that my successor, Joseba Zulaika, asked for my assistance. We both worked the telephones and Internet throughout the weekend; our message being that the bombings did not fit ETA's *modus operandi* at all, so Spain's claims should be regarded with caution. Such became the story line of much of the Anglo world's media, and there was no immediate condemnation of ETA by the world's governing bodies. As it turned out, ETA was not involved and the Aznar administration suffered a stunning defeat in the election. I have no way of gauging our impact on the events, but I feel certain that there was one.

The Center's reputation involved two other political initiatives—both, as it turned out, unsuccessful. In the late 1990s, the Carter Center, founded by the former president of the United States to foster peace in the world, was considering moderating negotiations between ETA and the Spanish State. The founder of *Elkarri*, Jonan Fernández, was involved and came to Reno, in part to discuss our possible involvement. We agreed that the BSP and *Elkarri* would form an International Committee for the Basque Peace Process. Ultimately, the Carter Center declined and the International Committee languished.

The second development was after my retirement; although I was (and still am) based in the Center as a Professor Emeritus of Basque Studies. It was in 2003 that the Henri Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, in Geneva, contacted me to serve as its consultant as moderator of peace negotiations between ETA and the Spanish Government. I provided the HDCHD with a possible framework for the negotiations and placed it in touch with ETA. While our initiative proved abortive, I believe that it laid the groundwork for the subsequent successful peace negotiations, facilitated by an international mediation, that ended the Basque violence.

Given all of the foregoing, it is scarcely surprising that Eusko Ikaskuntza has decided to join our commemoration by awarding the Center its 2017 ENE Saria as recognition of: “the tremendous work that this American academic center has done during its half century of history” on behalf of the Basque culture and language. Indeed, the jury giving us the prize declared that: “The Center for Basque Studies (CBS) of the University of Nevada (Reno) has become an important symbol of Basque culture.”

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Returning to the moment, I was giving my little talk in the magnificent quarters that the Center shares with the Basque Library in UNR’s state-of-the-art Knowledge Center. There had been a time when the Center was my office at the former Stead Air Force Base (closed and donated by the federal government to the University of Nevada System) eight miles from Reno. When we transferred to the UNR campus, we had two small rooms in the basement of the Getchell University Library; expansion meant a corner of Special Collections on its second floor. When we moved into that space it was already too small to accommodate our offices, library and USAC. So, the majority of our books and journals had to be warehoused at Stead and retrieved from there on demand. Getchell Library has since been demolished, and we have become the “crown jewel” (the librarians’ words, not mine) in the new facility. There, the Center’s thirteen offices, reception area and class room are intermingled with the Basque Library’s archives and book collection—the latter now housed on robotically moveable shelving that allows display to the user of most of the holdings.

Contemplating all of this luxury and technology prompted me to muse about the founding triffecta’s antiquarian techniques. Jon Bilbao used 3x5 cards (by the thousands) for his hand-written bibliographic entries that eventuated in his massive *Eusko-Bibliographia*. By the time he retired, the Basque collection had about 15,000 titles (compared to the nearly 45,000 at present). If today’s catalogue of our holdings is now entirely on line and cross-linked with other Basque library collections around the world, under Jon’s aegis we had 15,000 handwritten 3x5 cards and the books were arranged in their chronological order on the shelves. Modern cataloguing groups works by topic, which permits browsing a collection to discover other works on the same subject. Jon’s memory served that function as he could remember where every book in our collection was located. He would

guide the user up and down the aisles, pulling out titles of relevance to his or her project. I don't recall Jon even owning a typewriter or whether he knew how to use one.

For my part, back in the pre-computer era, I wrote my books and articles in long hand on legal yellow pads. Some of my manuscripts filled entire cardboard boxes of the supermarket variety. I killed many trees and exhausted hundreds of ballpoint pens. I now do all of my writing on a computer. However, it is only a few years ago that, by necessity (having lost daily access to secretarial assistance after my retirement) I learned to compose on a computer screen.

Bob Laxalt, as a former newspaperman, was more technologically advanced. He wrote his novels on a mechanical Royal typewriter. He used only two fingers, but with lightning speed honed by years of meeting the tight deadlines of his time-sensitive news stories.

So there we were, three scribblers and/or primitive hunters and peckers on mechanical devices, working away with technology appropriately characteristic of a bygone millennium, crafting (when not outright inventing) a Basque Studies Program, a Basque Library, a Basque Bibliography, and a Basque Book Series—not to mention a plethora of literary and scientific works that resulted from our individual research interests and imaginations. None of us was current with the technology of our own age, let alone capable of imagining today's cyber realities and potentials. In this regard, the Basque Studies Program/Center for Basque Studies was truly an antediluvian undertaking!