

CAREERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

PHOTO BY: NATASHA LANE



"[Samora] was very deliberate in what he did — he trained leaders."

— BARBARA DRISCOLL

share their thoughts about one of America's first nationally recognized Chicano scholars.

Refugio Rochin, JSRI director, says the institute expects to compile those thoughts and include them as part of a book that Samora was working on before he took ill. The book, called "Mestizaje" — which means racial and cultural mixture — is a historical account of four families living in the Southwest from the 16th century to the present. Scheduled for publication next year, it will consist of three parts: an introduction by Rochin — a background on the life and accomplishments by Samora; the letters from his students and

colleagues; and Samora's work on mestizaje.

"Through this book, people will know who he is," says Rochin.

Chicano Studies Pioneer Praised

Colleagues, Former Students Pay Tribute as Julian Samora Struggles with Terminal Illness

by Roberto Rodriguez

At 75, scholar Julian Samora, one of the giants in Chicano history and academe, is suffering from progressive nuclear palsy — a terminal illness that attacks the nervous system.

In tribute to a lifetime of scholarship, officials at the institute that bears his name, the Julian Samora Research Institute (JSRI) at Michigan State University (MSU), have sent a call out to his colleagues and former students to

Pioneer Scholar-activist

Samora, born in Pagosa Springs, CO, is considered one of the earliest Chicano scholars and the first Chicano sociologist in the country. He received a doctorate in sociology and anthropology in 1953 from Washington University in St. Louis and is best known for his work at Notre Dame, where he taught from 1959 to 1985. Prior to this, he taught at Adams State College in Colorado and at MSU.

Richard Navarro, former JSRI director, says Samora is credited with being a pioneer in three fields: medical sociology, border studies and Chicano Studies. In developing the field of medical sociology, he analyzed the medical delivery systems in the Mexican-American communities of Colorado and New Mexico. He examined why some people rely on modern medicine, whereas others tend to utilize folk medicine. In border

Samora Held in High Esteem

Mary Pardo, sociology professor, California State University-Northridge: "Because of the racism we have internalized, it was important to see Samora referenced when I was a graduate student."

Herman Gallegos, co-editor (along with Samora and Galarza) of Mexican Americans in the Southwest: "Samora was always interested in helping families in the barrio and helping [economically] barrio organizations."

Adaljiza Sosa-Riddell, senior lecturer and

coordinator, Chicana Latina Research Center, UC-Davis: "His books should have been used in both high school and college. His contribution has been greatly under-appreciated."

Esteban Flores, professor at the Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicities, who studied under Samora: His book "Los Mojados" is a landmark study in the field of immigration. For many years, it was the only book of its kind. It was in-depth and covered the human aspect. It put [immigration] into another intellectual realm."

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studies, he was one of the first group of scholars to view both sides of the border as one region — as integrated communities — not separate, says Navarro.

Barbara Driscoll, who studied with and was mentored by Samora under the Mexican American Graduate Studies Program, says Samora believed that to understand the border, you have to understand the people from the border region. "He was very intelligent and very practical.... His vision was that the study of the border was important to the United States, not just the Southwest."

Navarro says that as far as Samora's scholarship is concerned, "His name is synonymous with leadership and Chicano studies in the Midwest. The values of the institute reflect his life's contributions."

Samora was one of the early scholars who broke the barrier of being able to study "our own people," says Navarro, but he did it not just in the field of Chicano Studies but in sociology and anthropology. Chicanos, says Driscoll, don't have the same tradition of African-American scholars who have long studied their own community.

Rather than create an interdisciplinary program, Samora brought in graduate students through a Ford Foundation grant into the disciplines of sociology, history, psychology, economics and law. Pointing out that it is easier to secure a job if a scholar specializes in one field, Driscoll says, "He was farsighted."

Under Samora, graduate students convened once a week for their Chicano seminar. There, students were exposed to the giants in the field of Chicano, border and immigration studies, including scholars Carey McWilliams, Paul Taylor, John Garcia and Ramon Ruiz.

Cordelia Candelaria, a professor in the English Department at Arizona State University who attended Notre Dame between 1970-1975, says that she was taken under Samora's "wing" even though she was not part of his project. She, as well as all Latino students at Notre Dame, was befriended by both him and his wife, Betty. "The Samoras had a tradition of welcoming new students," she says.

Samora was not content with simply being an intellectual, says Candelaria. He fought for the rights of migrants that came through the Midwest. "He was active in the community and advocated for better wages and living conditions for the farm workers. He was a good role model."

Prolific Author

Samora's most important publications include: "La Raza: Forgotten Americans" (1966), "Mexican Americans in a Midwest" (1966).
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"We were in the Southwest. It was an intellectual desert. It was a colonial situation...we were the enemy."

— RODOLFO ACUNA,
CHICANO
HISTORY
SCHOLAR

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SAMORA, from pg. 35

Metropolis" (1967), "Los Mojados: The Wetback Story" (1971), "A History of the Mexican American People" (1977) and "Gunpowder Justice: A Reassessment of the Texas Rangers" (1979).

In 1968, Samora was one of the founders of the Southwest (now National) Council of La Raza, a civil rights organization which has more than 200 affiliates nationwide. He was also instrumental in the founding of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund and the Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project.

All those accomplishments notwithstanding, Rodolfo Acuna, who is today considered the foremost scholar in Chicano history, considers Samora's greatest legacy

to be his role of mentor over the years to so many scholars.

Students trained under Samora include such well-respected Chicano professors as Gilberto Cardenas, director of the Mexican American Studies Center at the University of Texas at Austin, Esteban Flores at the Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America at the University of Colorado at Denver, Alberto Mata at the University of Oklahoma, Miguel Carranza, associate dean at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln and Jorge Bustamante, director of the Colegio de la Frontera (College of the Border), based in Tijuana, Mexico.

"Because of Samora's efforts, a critical mass of students went through Notre Dame," says Acuna. "He opened up a space for them." It is believed that at least 50 scholars were trained by Samora.

Many academics say Samora, alongside folklorist Americo Paredes and the late Ernesto Galarza, are the three principal scholars who literally laid the foundation for Chicano Studies. Driscoll says there were only one or two other Chicanos with Ph.D.s in the country in the 1950s. "Dr. Samora participated in the maturation of the Mexican-American community. He was very deliberate in what he did — he trained leaders."

In 1993, Samora, Paredes and the late labor leader Cesar Chavez were honored with the Order of the Aztec Eagle — the highest award given by the Mexican government to non-Mexican citizens living outside of Mexico.

Samora, Paredes and Galarza not only trained but greatly influenced the 1960s and 1970s generation of Chicano intellectuals, many of whom today are senior scholars at today's major universities.

And while it is accurate to say that the three were early and pioneering Chicano scholars, there was another generation of scholars who preceded them, says Mario Garcia, professor of history at the University of California at Santa Barbara. The other three were George Sanchez and Carlos Castaneda who taught at UT Austin and Arthur Campa, a folklorist at the University of New Mexico.

Sanchez, Castaneda and Campa were pioneers, especially in the fields of the Mexican-American condition and Mexican immigration, but because there were so few Chicano scholars attending universities in the United States, their influence in academe was very limited, says Garcia. Their influence was primarily in the community. Each of them can be characterized as scholar-activists, he adds.

Garcia notes that Samora, Paredes and Galarza were embraced by Chicano Movement scholars because they were seen as more in tune with the radicalism of the

1960s than the three earlier scholars, who were seen by some as assimilationists. "But if you put all the six scholars together, they all laid the foundation for Chicano Studies."

An 'Intellectual Desert'

From 1848, when the United States seized half of Mexico, until World War II, the Mexican-American community did not have a tradition of university-based scholars. The reason was race and class discrimination, says Antonio Rios-Bustamante, a researcher at the Mexican American Studies & Research Center at the University of Arizona.

The Mexican American community developed a rich tradition of community-based scholars — primarily writers, editors and publishers, says Rios-Bustamante.

While both *de jure* and *de facto* discrimination were established in many parts of the Southwest and Midwest against Mexicans in K-12 education after the Mexican-American War, *de jure* discrimination in higher education was not necessary against the Mexican population because discriminatory policies virtually ensured that no Mexicans got out of elementary school.

The Mexican population was seen as a working population, and the U.S. government never had a sense of obligation toward the Mexican population, says Acuna. "We were in the Southwest. It was an intellectual desert. It was a colonial situation...we were the enemy." As such, unlike the effort to create Black colleges and universities, no effort went into the education of the Mexican American, he says. "We were out of the consciousness of the mainstream."

This is the reason given for the fact that there were so few scholars prior to Samora. The other reason offered by scholars is class discrimination. Even if one managed to get out of elementary school and finish high school, lack of money precluded Mexican Americans from continuing on to higher education. The exceptions were the wealthy class of Mexicans who were light-skinned and who intermarried with Anglos, says Rios-Bustamante. It is likely that in the future it will be discovered that, since 1848, there have been other Mexican-American scholars who "passed" for white.

Says Rios-Bustamante: "Chicanos have not studied the subject of passing. It's very painful."

Some early Mexican-American scholars may be discovered in Spanish departments, but even that is unlikely, because historically those departments have been anti-Chicano, says Acuna and Rios-Bustamante. Traditionally, those depart-

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ments have had Spaniards, Argentinians or other Latin American "elite" scholars, they say, especially prior to the 1960s.

A Man Ahead of His Time

Marta Sotomayor, president of the National Hispanic Council on Aging, says that Samora was "ahead of his time." She recalls that during the early 1970s, the Southwest Council of La Raza only had two women on its board. After one of the women board members (Graciela Olivares) demanded more representation for women, Olivares was ousted. As a result, Samora resigned to make room for another woman.

Sotomayor, who was on the board at the time, eventually became the first woman chair of the organization. "He personifies everything that is good... values... there are few people like him in the world."

Navarro says Samora's actions in that instance and throughout his life stemmed from a basic sense of justice. "What drove Samora was his desire for justice, whether it was about color or gender."

When the institute interviewed Samora to document his life's work, he spoke of growing up in Southern Colorado, exposed to signs which read, "No Mexicans, Indians or Dogs," says Navarro.

In high school, Samora lost a lead role in a play because the rest of the cast walked out. He lost a student body election by one vote in college because his roommate refused to vote for a Mexican.

Candelaria points out that many people don't realize the extent of the discrimination toward Chicanos during the time when Samora grew up. "Pegosa Springs was a segregated town with separate fountains for Mexicans and whites. The theaters were also segregated. The discrimination was overt," she says.

Martin Ortiz, director of the Center for Mexican American Affairs at Whittier, CA, remembers the days of segregation. A contemporary of Samora, he says that when he enrolled at Whittier College in 1946, he was the only Mexican American on campus. "We were conspicuous by our absence."

Ortiz, who collaborated with Samora on various studies, says that throughout his life, "Samora challenged discrimination...and this was way before the Chicano Movement. He was a great, great man. He was one of the great pillars of American education."

Samora now lives in downtown Albuquerque with his daughter. Colleagues, friends and former students often stop by to visit. He still receives phone calls and cards from well wishers. That, Samora says, is what keeps him going. ■

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