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## Fowler Museum exhibition explores 40 years of ethnic studies at UCLA

By **Stacey Ravel Abarbanel** | January 21, 2010



"Education Through Struggle" mural (1995)

Ethnic studies emerged as an intellectual movement in the wake of societal transformations associated with the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. In the later years of that decade, with civil unrest growing over the Vietnam War and the emergence of global and local struggles for self-determination and equality, UCLA faculty, students, staff and community members pressured the university to institute an ethnic studies program that would reflect the presence, history and contributions of underrepresented groups on campus.

In response, Chancellor Charles E. Young guided the establishment of four distinct ethnic studies centers in 1969 to foster study and research concerning African Americans, American Indians, Asian Americans, Chicanos and their respective communities. Since then, UCLA and the centers have played a key role in our nation's continual struggle with diversity, access and inclusion.

"Art, Activism, Access: 40 Years of Ethnic Studies at UCLA," on display at the Fowler Museum at UCLA from Feb. 28 through June 13, explores the campus's role in voicing the most significant issues of underrepresented communities within the fabric of American life. The exhibition's lively display of murals, graphic art, films, photographs and ephemera from the archives of UCLA's American Indian Studies Center, Asian American Studies Center, Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies, Chicano Studies Research Center and other campus collections captures key moments in this remarkable history and showcases the centers' four decades of campus and community activism.

The exhibition's four main sections explore the centers' roots, their vast and important archives, and their efforts in struggles for academic freedom, self-determination, justice, and civil and human rights. A wide array of art, film and seldom-seen artifacts tell these stories.

### Murals and drawings

Two large murals and a study drawing of a third, all of which graced the walls of the ethnic studies centers' home at UCLA's Campbell Hall, will be on display. The earliest, created for the Bunche Center for African American Studies in the late 1960s or early 1970s, suggests a communal protection of black youth that is both spiritual and physical. A 1970 drawing by Eduardo Carillo, Saul Solache, Ramses Noriega and Sergio Hernandez served as a study for a 12 x 30-foot mural at the Chicano Studies Research Center, which was credited with being the earliest Chicano mural painted anywhere in the United States. A third work, a mural painted by Darryl Mar and his students in 1995, was created to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Asian American studies at UCLA. Visitors can also observe the creation of a new, site-specific mural to be painted by famed Chicano artist Gronk beginning in April.

### Photographs

Also on display are original photographs from the series "Life in a Day of Black L.A.: The Way We See It." These 17 images, taken in 1992 by well-known African American photographers documenting their own

communities in the aftermath of the civil unrest in Los Angeles, portray the daily lives of residents and include portraits of some familiar personalities, including young tennis stars Venus and Serena Williams and Los Angeles journalist Pat Harvey.

### Films

A screening area presents a continuous sequence of films, including the experimental "Frontierland" by Jesse Lerner and Rubén Ortiz Torres, Marco Williams' personal documentary "In Search of Our Fathers," and "Hito Hata: Raise the Banner," a chronicle of the contributions and hardships of Japanese Americans from the turn of the last century to the late 1970s. Also included is the 1984 film "Bless Their Little Hearts," directed by UCLA M.F.A. graduate Billy Woodberry, which explores the life of a family in South Los Angeles driven to the breaking point by the father's shame at being unable to support his family.

### Publications

The exhibition's impressive compilation of hundreds of books and journals produced by the ethnic studies centers and/or written by their faculty includes many of the earliest and most important volumes published on the subject of diversity in America. These include the *Amerasia Journal*, the leading multidisciplinary scholarly journal in Asian American Studies; "Black Folk Here and There" by St. Clair Drake, arguably the single most important work published on the black diasporic experience in the 1980s; "Race, Class, and Power in Brazil" by Pierre-Michel Fontaine, the groundbreaking study on Brazilian race relations; and "Old Shirts and New Skins" by Sherman Alexie, which, when published in 1993, was one of the first books of poetry written by the now famous Spokane/Coeur d'Alene American Indian poet.

### Posters and other artifacts

A wide array of posters and handbills from each of the centers reveals an era of striking graphics tied to political action. These are accompanied by documentary photographs of events that galvanized the campus and brought student bodies across the nation into conflict with the status quo.

The early goals of the UCLA ethnic studies programs remain the foundation of the centers today: studying ethnic minorities in American society to provide a framework for research and community action, instilling racial pride, developing a community action program, building diverse holdings for center libraries and archives, and recruiting faculty in these areas.

### Additional Information

"Art, Activism, Access: 40 Years of Ethnic Studies at UCLA" has been organized by the Fowler Museum at UCLA, the UCLA Institute of American Cultures and UCLA's four ethnic studies research centers. Generous funding has been provided by the UCLA Office of the Chancellor, the UCLA Office for Faculty Diversity, the UCLA Office of the Vice Chancellor for Graduate Studies, the UCLA Graduate Division and the UCLA Institute of American Cultures.

UCLA Chancellor Gene Block has dedicated the 2009–10 academic year to the theme of "Celebrating 40 Years of Ethnic Studies at UCLA."

**The Fowler Museum at UCLA** is one of the country's most respected institutions devoted to exploring the arts and cultures of Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and the Americas. The Fowler is open Wednesday through Sunday from noon to 5 p.m. and Thursday from noon to 8 p.m.; it is closed Monday and Tuesday. The museum, part of the UCLA School of the Arts and Architecture (UCLA Arts), is located in the north part of the campus. Admission is free. Parking is available for a maximum of \$10 in Lot 4. For more information, the public may call 310-825-4361 or visit [www.fowler.ucla.edu](http://www.fowler.ucla.edu).

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