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Luis J. Rodriguez Papers at UCSB Library document life and work of the renowned author and activist

From early issues of “Lowrider” magazine to files on gang violence reduction initiatives in Los Angeles and El Salvador, and decades of photographs, audio recordings and video footage, the Luis J. Rodriguez Papers are now open for research in UCSB Library’s Department of Special Research Collections.

First acquired in 2019 and expanded through two recent additions, the collection documents the life, literary works and social advocacy of the renowned American author, poet, mentor, musician, artist and Chicano activist.

Born in El Paso, Texas, in 1954 and raised in East Los Angeles, Luis Javier Rodriguez is a pivotal artist and public figure whose life and work illuminate the modern history of Chicanismo – from the Los Angeles high school walkouts and the Chicano Moratorium to contemporary community advocacy. His experiences with gangs, drugs and urban hardships in his early life informed his classic 1993 memoir, “Always Running: La Vida Loca, Gang Days in L.A.” Written as a cautionary tale for his son, the bestseller became a seminal work of contemporary Chicano literature and a nationally recognized text on urban youth culture and gang intervention.

“The Rodriguez papers are open to the public and provide insight into the personal and social context for ‘Always Running,’ as well as over thirty years of creative output, political organizing and community activism,” said Angel Diaz, curator of the

collection for UCSB Library. “The papers have already supported the work of scholar Josephine Metcalf in her work alongside UCSB faculty member Ben V. Olguin in their book, ‘The Life, Literature and Legacy of Luis. J. Rodriguez: In the Long Run.’”

Transformative experiences leading away from his youth as a gang member, drug addict and petty criminal led Rodriguez to become a journalist, labor organizer, community organizer, poet, memoirist, independent publisher, gang mediator and youth mentor.

The Luis J. Rodriguez Papers provide scholars, students and community members with a rich resource for studying Chicano literature, grassroots activism and social movements. The collection includes personal and professional papers; literary and publishing archives, including submissions to his independent publishing house, Tía Chucha Press; materials from his community intervention and activism, including files on gang violence reduction initiatives; and political and media collections ranging from 1970s-era pamphlets to editorship files for the “People’s Tribune.”

The Rodriguez papers are part of the California Ethnic & Multicultural Archives (CEMA), a collecting initiative that aims to advance scholarship in ethnic studies through its varied collection of primary research materials. CEMA is recognized globally for its representation of visual, literary and performing arts collections, which include the records of Self Help Graphics & Art, El Teatro Campesino, Royal Chicano Air Force, and the Asian American Theater Company, as well as the personal papers of Iris Chang, Shifra Golfman and Sojourner Kincaid Rolle, among others.

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