

The Tatcho Mindiola Jr. Collection: A Narrative

By Lisa Cruces and Carlos L. Cantú

In May 2015 Houston native Dr. Tatcho Mindiola, Jr., the long-time Chicano activist, sociology professor, and director for the Center for Mexican American Studies, retired from the University of Houston (UH) after forty years of service. Months later he donated his papers, over sixty boxes, to the Hispanic Collections at the University of Houston Special Collections. The papers will provide invaluable resources to researchers of sociology, history, education development, community formation, ethnic studies, Chicana/o studies, black and brown relations, and the Mexican American community in Houston.

Anastacio “Tatcho” Mindiola, Jr., grew up in a northern Heights neighborhood, where he and his family endured and overcame numerous racial obstacles faced by many in Houston’s Mexican American community in the 1950s. After graduating from high school in 1957 and briefly attending South Texas Junior College, Mindiola enlisted in the military. During his deployment overseas his interest in higher education and American political affairs increased, and his interaction with college-educated servicemen reinforced his ambition to return to school. Upon completing his tour of duty, he used the G.I. Bill’s educational assistance to enroll in the business school at the University of Houston. Before graduating, however, Mindiola realized he did not care for a business career; he was more interested in the study of human social relationships and institutions. Mindiola graduated from the master’s program in sociology at UH in 1970 and continued his education at Brown University, pursuing a doctorate degree in sociology and working at the University of Houston while he completed his dissertation. By 1974, the starting point of the Tatcho Mindiola Collection, he began his long career as a college professor, building a reputation as a champion of the Mexican American community and expert on the scholarship of race relations in Houston.¹

Mindiola, one of the first Mexican American professors hired at UH, entered the profession during a time of

social and political upheaval in the United States. Students of color throughout the country boycotted high schools, and college-aged students took over university buildings to protest and demand, among other concessions, the creation of ethnic studies programs, including Chicana/o Studies and the hiring of Mexican American professors. Students demanded courses that spoke to the concerns of Mexican American communities and to study relevant literature about people who looked like them.²

Mindiola began his career when the corpus of Mexican American scholarship was relatively small and Chicana/o Studies courses were first being introduced at UH. Guadalupe “Lupe” Quintanilla, the first director of the Mexican American Studies Program, had begun to develop courses and recruit Mexican American faculty in 1972. Mindiola built on Quintanilla’s efforts and expanded the number of courses UH offered, including The Mexican American Experience Through Film, Race Relations Through Film, Readings in Mexican American Studies, Chicano Social Issues, and Hispanics in Houston. Mindiola also worked with other Chicana/o and like-minded Anglo colleagues to produce sociological and historical works, such as “Chicanos and the Legislative Process: Reality and Illusion in the Politics of Change” (1982), “Voters and Non-Voters: A Case Study of Mexican Americans in Houston” (1983), “Higher Educational Needs of Mexican Americans and Blacks in Texas” (1986), and “Chicano-Mexicano Relations” (1986). Sources related to the development of these university courses, from the 1970s to 2010, and the hard-to-find publications can be found in the Teaching and Research Series of the Mindiola Collection.³

Initially designated the Mexican American Studies Program, the Center for Mexican American Studies (CMAS) at UH was formally established in 1972 by Dr. Quintanilla but truly expanded under Tatcho’s tenure, from 1980 to 2015. Years in the making, CMAS was the result of the 1960s and 1970s civil rights movement and



Tatcho Mindiola Jr. and his siblings in the 1940s.

students' demand for more representation at the university level. Correspondence, artwork, organizational records, and photographs in the Mindiola Collection as well as the UH Center for Mexican American Studies Records chronicle the Center's early years and significant accomplishments. These accolades include the creation of a visiting scholars program, a graduate fellowship program, and successful lobbying for line item appropriations. The Center also established the Academic Achievers program, intended to decrease high school dropout rates and increase admission to the University of Houston.

The Mindiola Collection also documents an infamous tenure dispute between Mindiola and the university through correspondence, litigation papers, and other documents. Late in the 1970s and shortly before Dr. Mindiola took over leadership of CMAS, he became involved in a battle for promotion and tenure, which eventually led to the filing of a discrimination lawsuit. After several years of legal back and forth, and multiple instances of steadfast refusal by University of Houston System President Ed Bishop to settle the matter out of court, Professor Mindiola was granted tenure with promotion to associate professor. The entire affair lasted from 1979 to 1985.⁴

In the midst of his struggles to obtain tenure, Mindiola persevered on another front, securing financial support for CMAS. Beginning in 1983, three years into his role as the director of the Center, Tatcho began lobbying the Texas State Legislature for a line item appropriation to sustain Chicano Studies at UH. Correspondence and other documentation within the collection reveal how the request underwent several challenges and at times wavering support from university leadership. Ultimately, with the help of two sympathetic state representatives, particularly Roman



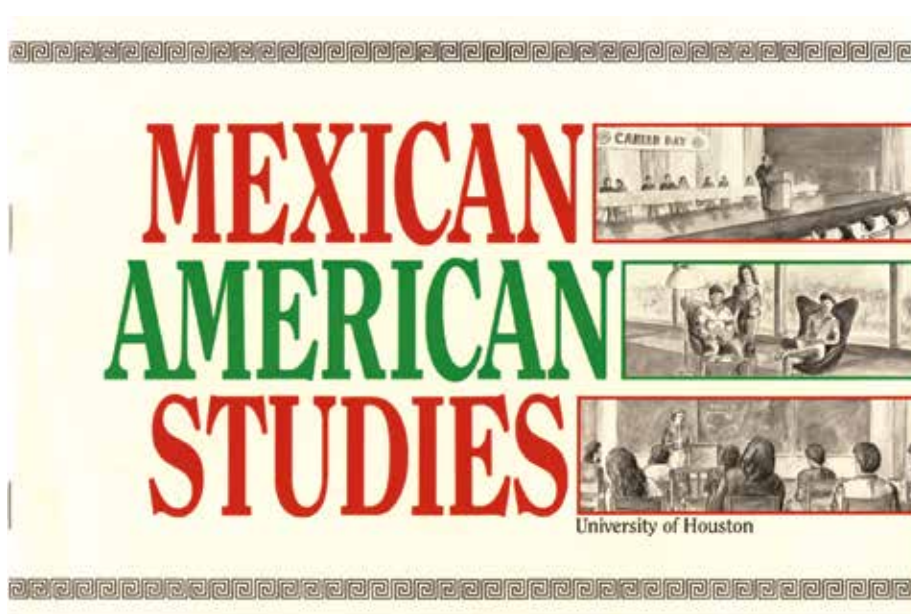
Photographs make up one of the many rich resources documenting Mindiola's career. Left to right are Professors Jorge Bustamante, Armando Gutierrez, and Tatcho Mindiola.

Martinez, Tatcho successfully secured the appropriation in the 1987 legislative session.⁵

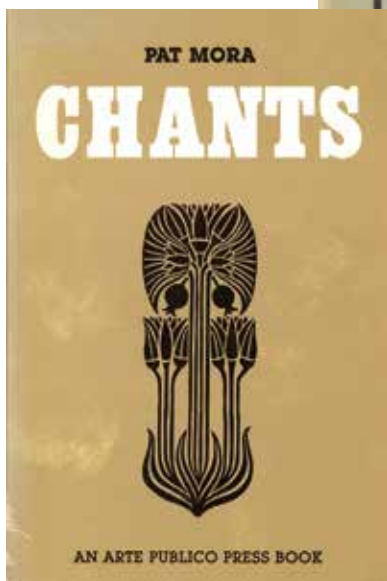
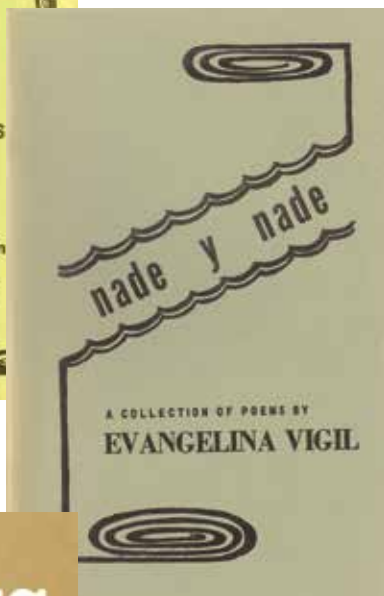
Inspired by his father's support of the civil rights movement and interest in local political affairs, Mindiola began his commitment to community activism in the late 1960s as he spent time on the UH campus and was exposed to the university's politicized climate. When he began teaching at UH in the mid-1970s, he served as chair of the Harris County La Raza Unida Party (LRUP), the Chicana/o-led third party, from 1974 to 1976. LRUP, established by members of the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO), emerged as part of the group's shift into Chicana/o political self-determination in Texas. MAYO, founded by college and barrio youth in 1967, led the forefront in educational and, later, political struggles in Texas. By 1970 MAYO redirected its strategy toward political power in Texas. By the time Mindiola chaired the Harris County LRUP, its political campaigns had spread to other parts of the Southwest and as far north as Wisconsin, Illinois, Nebraska, and Michigan.

Mindiola collected many important items related to the Movimiento, including Chicana/o newsletters, photographs, correspondences with Chicano and Chicana leaders, political buttons, and pamphlets – these items and numerous LRUP institutional papers and related correspondence are available in the Community Service Series of the Mindiola Collection.⁶

Dr. Mindiola's life has always been one of service and advocacy and this can be seen in the Community Service Series. Two national organizations prominently represented include the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), a nonprofit civil rights



An early pamphlet advertising Mexican American Studies at UH.



Select texts authored by Latina authors found in the Mindiola Collection.

All photos courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

organization formed in 1968 to protect the rights of Latinos in the United States, and the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS).

Involved in leadership roles with each organi-

zation throughout his career, Mindiola served as chair of NACCS for two terms, 1987-1988 and 1988-1989, and as a board member with MALDEF in the late 1990s. This series is rich with programs, correspondence, reports, and ephemera related to the activities of the organizations and Tatcho's contributions to them.

City, political, media, and business leaders consulted with Professor Mindiola because of his expertise on the Mexican American community and race relations in Houston. As part of his commitment to community service, the college professor pursued large-scale studies to better understand the concerns of the communities of color in Houston. From 1980 to 1985 Mindiola produced an in-depth homicide study

for the Houston Police Department, where he conducted research to examine the motivation of violence and the origins of Spanish-surnamed victims. In 1982 Mindiola conducted a year-long oral history project dealing with race relations at Houston's Maxwell House Coffee plant to find the sources of tension between Black, Brown, and White workers. From 1988 to 2003 Mindiola, with the help of his students, conducted exit poll surveys for Mexican Americans in Houston to analyze the Mexican American community and their political interests. And from 1981 to 1993 he produced several U.S. legislative studies to examine the role and productivity of the Mexican American Caucus, based on oral history interviews. The collection contains extensive sources for each of these studies, among others, in the Community Service Series. It includes raw data in the form of surveys, oral histories – some of which are already transcribed – and preliminary drafts of these studies.

Because Mindiola devoted much of his career to research and to the advancement of scholarship about people of color, his collection not only reflects this commitment but also includes an invaluable wealth of hard-to-find sources. He donated rare conference papers, limited-run studies and publications, short-run newsletters, ephemera, photographs, and edited drafts with marginalia. The collection includes countless demographic studies dealing with communities of color in the U.S., extensive memorabilia of famous singer Selena Quintanilla, and early drafts and research by Arnolde de León, former dean and now distinguished professor of history emeritus at Angelo State University. In addition, throughout his career Mindiola encouraged and supported the work of Chicanas and other women of color. This collection includes correspondence between prominent community leaders, like Maria Jimenez; academic colleagues, such as Angela Valenzuela; and rare copies of Chicana newsletters, pamphlets, and political flyers. This material, some of it previously available only at the UT-Benson Latin American Collection in Austin, Texas, and in out-of-state archives, can be found in the Community Service and Teaching and Research Series.

Professor Mindiola's life work continues. He remains active and engaged with the academy and greater Houston community. When asked how he feels about his collection finding a home and being saved for future scholars, Mindiola stated, "I'm flattered that my materials are being preserved and that they are contributing to the history and studies of Mexican American Studies. I remember a time when that was not the case."

"As an academic," Mindiola reflected, "I want the history of Mexican American Studies to be preserved."

Lisa Cruces is the archivist for the Hispanic Collection in Special Collections at the University of Houston Libraries.

Carlos L. Cantú recently received his Ph.D. in history at the University of Houston.

University of Houston Special Collections is located on the second floor of the M. D. Anderson Library. The reading room is open to the public 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. For more information or to set up an appointment, visit <http://info.lib.uh.edu/p/visiting-special-collections>.