

Enfoque

The Center for
Latin American &
Caribbean Studies

At Indiana University Bloomington

Spring 2003

Professor Jeff Gould was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship

Professor of History and Director of the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, Jeffrey Gould was recently awarded a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship.

The awards are presented on the basis of distinguished achievement in the past and exceptional promise for future accomplishment.

Since its creation in 1925, the Guggenheim Memorial Foundation in New York City has awarded more than \$200 million in fellowships to some 15,000 individuals. More than 100 have been IU faculty members.

Sharon Stephens Brehm, chancellor of the IU Bloomington campus, said, "These prestigious awards are highly sought after, and the campus takes great pride in Professor Gould's achievements. They are out-

standing examples of the extraordinary level of academic excellence that characterizes the Bloomington faculty."

Gould said the Guggenheim award will help him publish a book with a new perspective on the 1932 rebellion and mass repression in El Salvador involving a massacre of some 10,000 people.

His research on this project has included interviews with approximately 150 survivors of the massacre as well as 15 months of field research.

"This book will be of direct relevance to students of peasant and indigenous movements, the politics of collective memory, and the formation of modern Latin American political culture," Gould said.

Gould, an IU faculty member since 1988, specializes in Central American history and has published two previous books on Nicaraguan history.

He has been the Director of the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies since 1995 and has finished a documentary film entitled *Scars of Memory: El Salvador, 1932* that is based on this research project [see page 8].

Since the purpose of the Guggenheim Fellowship program is to help provide Fellows with blocks of time in which they can work with as much creative freedom as possible, grants are made freely.

Also in 2002, Rosemary Lloyd, a Rudy Professor of French at IU, was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship.

CLACS offers a three year dual degree with SPEA

The School of Environmental Affairs (SPEA) and the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CLACS) are offering a dual-Master of Public Affairs with Master of Arts in Latin American and Caribbean Studies (MPA/MA) degree.

This program addresses the demand for specialists who combine expertise in public policy and management and area studies expertise in Latin America and the Caribbean. Graduates students will command a variety of domestic and interna-

tional professional opportunities in public, non-profit, and private organizations.

"I chose the dual degree program because I wanted to gain a more thorough understanding of Latin American culture, history, and language from a Masters of Arts while also gaining specific skills in public policy and administration with a degree in Public Affairs," said Caitlin Houston, a first-year student of the program. "Most schools do not offer a dual degree program

between these two areas of study, and I was impressed with both the CLACS and SPEA programs separately, so it was nice to be able to combine them."

As part of her program, Caitlin is now taking a course on Latin American nationalism at the History Department. David Cunningham, a second-year student of the dual degree program, is also taking this class.

When asked about the reasons

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Reports from the field: Saving an endangered language in El Salvador

By Pablo García

Graduate Student in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese

Don Eusebio Ramos still gets up every morning before dawn in order to go work in the cornfields, but soon he won't be able to; he is eighty years old. His wife of forty five years Doña Juana Cortés de Ramos can no longer make pottery or even get around much because of the crippling arthritis that has taken the feeling from her legs; she's seventy three. They are two of the old people who are still fluent in Nahuatl (also known as Pipil) in Santo Domingo de Guzmán, a very small town in western El Salvador that I visited in early January. Don Eusebio, Doña Juana and a few other elders were kind enough to welcome me into their houses so that I could record as much of their disappearing language as possible as part of Indiana University's Center for Latin American Studies effort to revitalize it.

This will not be an easy task. For one thing, it is a race against time. The really fluent speakers are mostly in their seventies and even in their case, in part from age and in part from lack of constant practice, there is considerable interference from Spanish. The words for sky and for rabbit, for instance, have disappeared from the Santo Domingo Nahuatl lexicon. The oldest children of these elder speakers, now in their fifties, can still speak some of the language, but those I met hesitate often and have to pause and search for words. With few exceptions, the next generation can still understand it well but has very little vocabulary. Most people under twenty have practically no knowledge of it. Once the old speakers are gone there will be hardly anyone who can transmit a working version of the Nahuatl language that used to be the common tongue in Santo Domingo.

On the one hand there is the five hundred year old prejudice against the *indios*, the Native Americans, who are still seen by many as backward, even lesser, people. According to this view, one of the distinguishing traits of the *indio* is the knowledge of Nahuatl. Most people only speak it at home and many won't even admit to knowing it. Even Doña Juana, who turned out to be one of my better informants, was mistrusting at first. The first time I climbed the road to her house, she initially said she no longer remembered the old language. It was only when I began taking digital pictures of some of her grandchildren who were there—and of the many others who then began coming out of the woodwork, and even of one little girl apparently bathed and dressed for the occasion—and showing them around to a surprised and laughing audience that she agreed to let me interview her.

On the other hand, as one of Doña Juana's sons in his early thirties told me, Nahuatl does not seem to offer a concrete material benefit as opposed to English that appears more valuable to the young people who want to go work in the city or try to come to the United States.

As bad as the odds may seem, my stay there and my long conversations with my host Margarito Vásquez, make me think bringing back Nahuatl to Santo Domingo is a battle worth fighting for. Margarito, a mason by trade, is the driving force behind the *Escuela Nahuatl* school project in which the elders I talked to are also involved. He told me about how they managed to get funding from European foundations in order to buy some land and get the materials for the school building, a simple one room structure with large grated windows that was built with the help of the town's people. Margarito is very aware of the value that the Nahuatl language and the old traditions have for the life of a community faced with the escalating pressures of capitalist development. Symbolic of this is the fact that the old dusty road to Sonsonate, the nearest city, that was sometimes impassable for months at a time during the rainy season, is now being widened and paved. While this seems advantageous for the town and the people who increasingly depend on the city for their livelihood, it also means losing the very isolation that has allowed the Nahuatl language to survive in Santo Domingo up until now, at one point even by keeping at bay the violence that wiped it out together with other indigenous communities.

The old people tell the story of how, in the 1932 popular uprising, when the 'communists' threatened to run over the

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Students from Santo Domingo de Guzmán

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town, they were stopped by a man in a white horse who warned them that anyone trying to cross the town's boundaries would die, and who was none other than the town's patron saint, Santo Domingo himself. And so the 'communists' left the town alone and a massacre was avoided. More likely, what saved it was the fact that the small town was hard to access; it still has only one main road to and from it and the houses and fields that make it up are literally perched on the sides of steep hills.

Now the threat to Nahuatl and the old ways is of a very different kind. Besides the fact that working in the often slanting cornfields is not easy, the yield is not high, and the price of corn, the staple crop that used to be Santo Domingo's main source of income, has declined steadily. Another traditional source of revenue, the pottery made exclusively by the town's women, can hardly compete with the cheaper and more durable metallic cookware. I was amazed that a large handcrafted ceramic *comal*, the traditional cooking plate for making tortillas, sells for only four *colones* or fifty cents of an American dollar. All this has driven the younger town-folk to look for other means of supporting their usually large families. Several new houses are being built with money sent from the United States by people who have relatives that have managed to secure a job in this country. Margarito is also aware that in order to maintain the old traditions it's necessary to keep up with the demands of present-day reality.

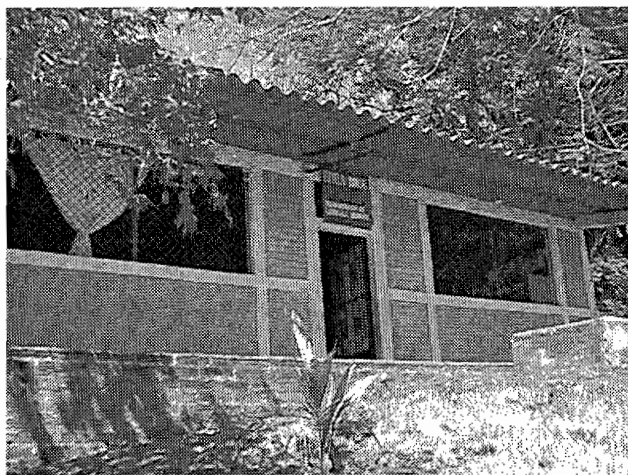
I went to Santo Domingo thinking that my main objective was to interview as many of the Nahuatl speaking elders as I could for the purpose of preserving their words; words that would then be used to create interactive teaching materials for the Nahuatl School. But once I was there Margarito's main concern was setting up the computers that had been sent some time before by the Center for Latin American Studies and that were still in their boxes for lack of someone with the expertise to install them.

Margarito's idea was that the computers would make it attractive for the children to attend the voluntary school where they would also be able to acquire some ever more sought after computer skills while learning Nahuatl. But here again the circumstances are challenging. There are recurring fluctuations in the electrical current, caused in part by the welding shop down the street from the school. Then there is the dust. During the hot dry season, the *Norte*, a persistent wind that can vary from a slight breeze to violent and continuous gusts, blows up the pervasive dust that covers everything with a fine yellowish film in a matter of hours. It is no wonder that the main reason for visits to Santo Domingo's health clinic is acute respiratory infection. Under these conditions the machines will not last long without proper protection and care. Then there is the lack of even the most basic computer knowledge of the people involved with the Nahuatl School project.

These difficulties notwithstanding, with the help of Antolino Ramos, a carpenter and the son of Don Eusebio and Doña Juana, we proceeded to build a table and a little enclosure within the school building for the computers. Once that was finished, we went to Sonsonate to buy a printer, a couple of power surge protectors, and some plastic bags to cover all of the equipment.

Finally, on my last day there, I set up two of three machines and turned them on while Margarito's children looked on with curiosity. Most of them had never seen a real computer before. Only one of Margarito's daughters, who has had some lessons at her high school, had some idea about how to work one. I am hopeful that the curiosity of the children and the drive of Margarito will soon allow the Nahuatl School to take full advantage of their newly acquired technology.

The material I managed to collect still has to be transcribed and carefully sifted. Because of the interference from Spanish, decisions have to be made about what exactly is the Nahuatl language of Santo Domingo de Guzmán in its present state; what is it that should be taught, and how. Teaching materials must be designed taking into account for their intended context and then tested at the school to see if they are really adequate. Another very important thing to consider is how to promote real interest in this project within the community itself; how to make it clear that the Nahuatl language is a part of the original identity of the town and that once it is gone Santo Domingo de Guzmán becomes just another marginal and voiceless village among many. Perhaps the best way to do this is to continue showing the people of Santo Domingo that their Nahuatl language is not just the local interest of a few old men and women. In the meanwhile Don Eusebio, Doña Juana, and the other elders are not getting any younger.



The Nahuatl school of Santo Domingo