

In Memoriam: Mark Q. Sawyer, UCLA Professor of African American Studies and Political Science



Dr. Mark Q. Sawyer was an internationally renowned scholar whose work on race and racism in Latin America, and racial attitudes in the United States earned him multiple awards and recognitions. Sawyer was a member of the American Political Science Association (APSR) editorial board (2007-2012), the APSA Task Force on Political Science in the 21st Century (2006-2011) and served on numerous APSA committees including the Committee on the Status of Blacks in the Profession (2006-2009) and the development committee (2011-2014), among others. He was an alumnus of the APSA Minority Fellowship (1994-1995) and served as an APSA Mentor, and was a supporter of APSA Centennial Center and Diversity Funds. In 2007, Sawyer received the APSA Ralph J. Bunche Book Award and the W. E. B. DuBois Award from the National

Conference of Black Political Scientists for his book entitled *Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba* published by Cambridge University Press in 2006. This book analyzes the triumphs and failures of the Castro regime in the area of race relations, and places the Cuban revolution in a comparative and international framework and challenges arguments that the regime eliminated racial inequality or that it was profoundly racist. Through interviews, historical materials, and survey research the book maintains that Cuba has not been a racial democracy as some have argued. Hence, also, the book argues that Cuba has done more than any other society to eliminate racial inequality, although the book demonstrates how much of Cuban racial ideology was unchanged by the revolution as the implementation of market reforms and in particular tourism has exacerbated racial inequalities, and finally, the book holds that despite these shortcomings, the regime remains popular among Black people, because they perceive their alternatives of the U.S. and the Miami exile community, to be far worse.

Sawyer was a member of the faculty at UCLA since 1999, and co-founded the subfield of Race, Ethnicity and Politics (REP) in the UCLA Political Science department in 2006, thus, the program has since attracted large numbers of graduate students, especially African-Americans and Latinos. He was a co-founder the Center for Race, Ethnicity and Politics and helped create the African American Studies department at UCLA in 2014. Sawyer also mentored many graduate students and urged people to express their identities instead of conforming to the traditional image of how an academic presented themselves.

Professor Sawyer made numerous important contributions in research, teaching, and mentoring students in both Political Science and African-American Studies. His areas of teaching and research included race, ethnicity and politics, race and politics in the Caribbean, comparative politics, American politics, international social movements, immigration and citizenship, African American political thought among others. Beyond his excellence as a scholar, Mark was loved and admired by countless students and colleagues at UCLA and across the country for his friendship, loyalty and commitment to racial and social justice. A fierce and consistent advocate for civil rights, justice and equality, Sawyer began teaching at UCLA in 1999 after receiving a doctorate in political science from the University of Chicago.

Mark Sawyer spoke Spanish with a Cuban accent, despite growing up in the United States. While leading study abroad programs in San Juan, Puerto Rico, locals would call him “El Cubano.” He also served as a visiting associate professor at Harvard and a Rockefeller African Diaspora Post-Doctoral Fellow at the University of Texas, Austin. He taught at the Stanford Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Sciences Summer Institute as well. He was named mentor of the year in 2007 by the UCLA Academic Advancement Program. Most recently, Sawyer taught a graduate seminar on the politics of mass incarceration. Sawyer died March 26 in Los Angeles, California. He was 45, and is survived by his wife, UCLA visiting scholar in Chicana/o studies Celia Lacayo, and their daughter, Nina.

