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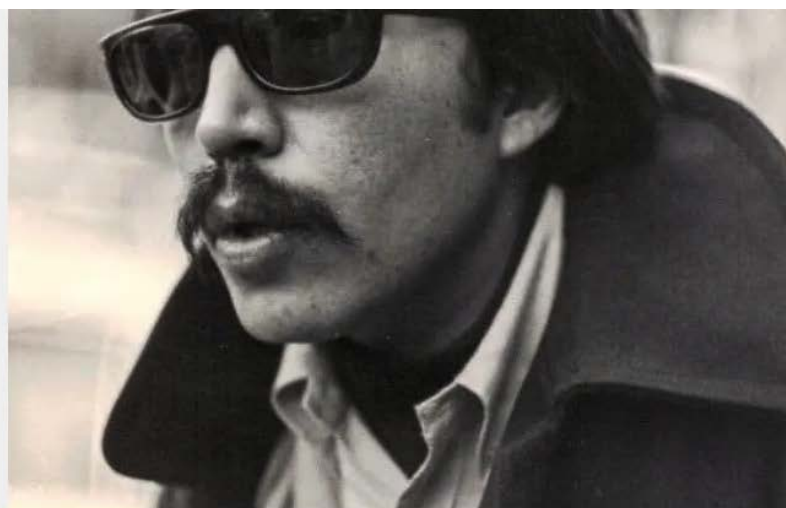
ESPAÑOL



Tribute to Juan Gomez Quiñones: Jan. 28, 1940—Nov. 11, 2020



BY ARMANDO VALDEZ
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Juan Gomez Quiñones was that once-in-a-generation intellectual giant, visionary, scholar, poet and activist. He died peacefully at his home surrounded by his family on Nov. 11, 2020. He was 80 years old. He was born in Parral, Chihuahua on Jan. 28, 1940. His family moved to California when he was an infant and was raised in East Los Angeles. Juan's poetry collection, *Fifth and Grande Vista*, is a tribute to Boyle Heights, the East Los Angeles neighborhood where he grew up. *Canto al Trabajador* from that work speaks to the social conditions and historical forces that shaped and continue to influence the lives of our working-class communities. A few lines of the *Canto al Trabajador* reflect an underlying theme in his poetry.

*What I know I learned
from my father's worker's hand
who is we and who are they of right and wrong
who has built the cities
and wherefrom came the riches*

Working as a teamster to cover tuition, Juan earned bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees at UCLA. He started teaching there in 1969 and was a professor there for 50 years. He played a major role in laying the foundation for Chicano Studies. His seminal writings, *On Culture*, on aesthetics, culture and politics, and *Chicano Politics: reality and promise, 1940-1990*, are among a long list of his works that laid the foundation for the study of the history and politics in academia.

In 1969, Juan was co-founder and later the director of the Chicano Studies Research Center at UCLA. He was co-founder in 1970 of the Chicano journal, *Aztlan*, the premier journal of Chicana/o Studies. He was instrumental in the creation of the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies at UCLA, which today has 17 full-time faculty members and about 1,000 majors and minors. He inspired an entire generation of Chicana/o, and other students and trained a cohort of graduate students who advanced the field of Chicano history as a new field of study. He was recognized in 1990 as Scholar of the Year by the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies for his contributions to the field.

Juan was one of the organizers of UMAS (United Mexican American Students), a student organization across Southern California college campuses. He advised and inspired the UMAS leaders of the LA Blowouts in Spring 1968 when about 15,000 Chicano students walked out from the high schools in East Los Angeles to protest the poor quality of their education and lack of Chicano faculty and classes that reflected their community. He was also instrumental in the creation of MECHA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanos de Aztlan) in 1969. He was also a key member of the committee of Chicano scholars who wrote *El Plan de Santa Barbara*, the foundational document for the development of Chicano Studies.

Juan's community advocacy was deep and significant. He actively supported the United Farm Workers, was Chairman of the East Los Angeles Poor People's March Contingent, board member of the Mexican American Legal Defense, co-organizer of the Chicano Council of Higher Education (1969–70) and member of the Board of Trustees of the California State Colleges. He wrote the agenda for the National Immigrant Rights march in Washington, D.C.. He was a member of the Board of Directors of the Los Angeles Urban Coalition and co-founder of the Anahuacalmecac International University Preparatory of North America for Indigenous students, East Los Angeles' first public charter elementary school.

Above all, Juan was a solid family man. Despite his busy schedule, he made sure to be home for dinner with his wife and children. His wife, Irene Vasquez, chair of Chicana/Chicano Studies at California State University, Dominguez Hills, notes that he made it a priority to attend their children's parent conferences, school assemblies, concerts and school plays. Juan is survived by his wife, seven children and granddaughter.

Most readers of El Tecolote may not have known about Juan Gomez Quiñones, but his life mattered to all of us. In some way, his efforts touched us all. His was a life of service, of inquiry and of love. His was a life well lived. The notice of his death had these poetic lines:

"I fly toward the future, which comes at the dawn." — Juan Gomez Quiñones