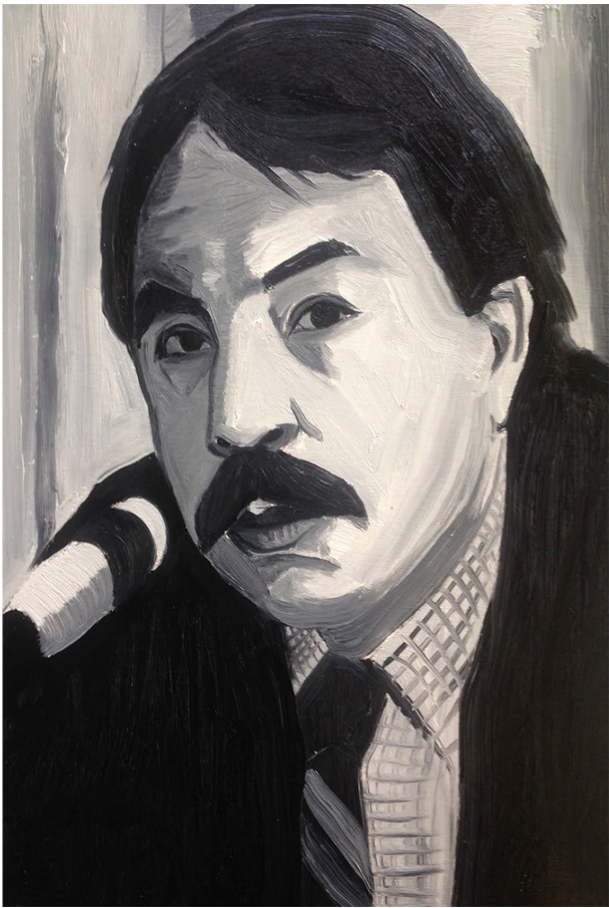


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Remembering professor Juan Gómez-Quíñones, Chicano studies scholar and activist

Juan Gómez-Quíñones, the co-founder and former director of the Chicano Studies Research Center, died Nov. 11 at the age of 80. He left a lasting impact on the Chicano community and was known for his activism.(Courtesy of Salomón Huerta)



By [Abigail Siatkowski](#) and [Shannon Park](#)

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Juan Gómez-Quíñones was a Chicano Renaissance man.

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This means the former UCLA history professor instilled Chicano pride in his students, said Gustavo Arellano, a former graduate student and a Los Angeles Times columnist.

Gómez-Quíñones, the co-founder and former director of the Chicano Studies Research Center, died Nov. 11 from congestive heart failure at the age of 80. He taught history at UCLA for almost 50 years. Gómez-Quíñones is remembered for his activism and empowering the Chicano community through his academic work.

He is the recipient of the 1990 Scholar Award from the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies and the 2003 Ann C. Rosenfield Distinguished Community Partnership Prize.

Gómez-Quíñones set an example for Chicanos who had aspirations in higher education, said Alvaro Huerta, a former student and colleague. He taught at one of the best universities in the country while maintaining a sense of pride in his Chicano culture, Huerta said.

Gómez-Quíñones frequently appeared in Spanish language news, spreading his knowledge and ideas, CSRC director Chon Noriega said in a statement detailing some of Gómez-Quíñones' life's accomplishments.

He was one of the first Chicano studies scholars to focus on Chicano culture, said Huerta, an urban and regional planning and an ethnic and women's studies associate professor at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. In the past, Chicano studies scholars focused on Mexican Americans' assimilation into the United States, Huerta said.

Gómez-Quíñones wrote a number of books on Chicano history, politics, labor and culture, including "Sembradores: Ricard Flores Magon y El Partido Liberal Mexicano: A Eulogy and Critique" and "Mexican American Labor, 1790-1990." He had more than 30 published pieces, including books and monographs.

Arellano was a Latin American studies graduate student when he first took Gómez-Quíñones' Chicano history course winter quarter 2002.

Arellano said Gómez-Quíñones challenged him and his classmates to recognize covert discrimination practices against Mexicans in the U.S. by analyzing popular films.

For example, a character in the Disney and Pixar film "A Bug's Life" expressed anti-Mexican sentiments – which Arellano said he did not expect would happen.

"It was a scene when a big grasshopper, played by Kevin (Spacey), (was) complaining about how one ant would do nothing to you but a million ants would take you," he said. "(Gómez-Quíñones) said it was coded language for Mexican invasion and Hollywood's fear zone of Mexican invasion in the United States."

Gómez-Quíñones' passion for various subjects was apparent in his teaching – Arellano said he remembers feeling the anger Gómez-Quíñones conveyed when discussing the injustices Mexicans experienced in the U.S.

Arellano said Gómez-Quíñones' class was not easy. But, Arellano added, Gómez-Quíñones constantly strived to be there for his students, engaging in conversations with them after class and offering thesis advice.

“It is rare that you have a great professor, not just a good professor,” Arellano said. “I was blessed to have him.”

Although Gómez-Quíñones focused on Chicano studies, he also cared about the histories of other communities, said Irene Vasquez, his wife and the Chicano and Chicana Studies chair at the University of New Mexico.

“(Gómez-Quíñones) spoke to the histories of African Americans and European Americans, Native Americans (and) Asian Americans,” Vasquez said. “He didn’t do it at the exclusion of others, he always spoke about inclusivity and relationality.”

Gómez-Quíñones supported students who were passionate about community service, Huerta said. As an undergraduate student, Huerta was an organizer for a hunger strike against a proposal to limit financial aid for undocumented students. His activist efforts caused him to miss class at times, but Huerta said he knew Gómez-Quíñones had his back.

As an activist himself, Gómez-Quíñones wrote the agenda for the 1996 National Immigrant Rightsmarch in Washington, D.C., and co-founded the Anahuacalmecac International University Preparatory of North America, East Los Angeles’ first public charter elementary school, for Indigenous students.

Beyond his academics and community work, Gómez-Quíñones enjoyed poetry and long walks on Will Rogers State Beach with his children, Vasquez said. Some of his favorite works were “Emplumada” by Lorna Dee Cervantes and Edgar Allan Poe poems, she added.

Despite his many obligations, Gómez-Quíñones always made sure to be home for dinner with his wife and children, Huerta said.

“He made it a priority to attend their parent conferences, their school assemblies, their plays,” Vasquez said. “He enjoyed when our children performed, whether it was in a concert or a school play.”

Huerta said he believes Gómez-Quíñones’ support for his family, friends and students came from his hometown: the Boyle Heights neighborhood of East Los Angeles, which is 93% Hispanic or Latino, according to [a 2017 demographics report of Boyle Heights](#) from the Los Angeles City’s Department of City Planning.

“One of the values of coming from the mean streets of East Los Angeles is this idea of loyalty, trust,” Huerta said. “In Spanish we say confianza.”

The Boyle Heights community was fond of Gómez-Quíñones, Vasquez said. He often hung out at the neighborhood’s grocery stores and businesses, mingling with the people of the community, she added.

“He was really an intellectual giant who enjoyed walking with everyday people to ensure that they experience dignity in all aspects of their life,” Vasquez said.