



Ralph C Guzman 1925–1985

Associated Press announcement

“Ralph C. Guzman; Latino Educator,
Carter Aide”

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SANTA CRUZ — Ralph C. Guzman, deputy assistant secretary of state in the Carter Administration and one of the nation's leading Latino educators, is dead at age 60 after a stroke.

Guzman suffered the stroke last Sunday and died Thursday, after he was taken off life-support systems, according to daughter Christine D. Guzman.

"I think he's a remarkable example of a Mexican-American who utilized the facilities of public education and made a considerable contribution (to society)," said Dean McHenry, former chancellor of the University of California, Santa Cruz, who hired Guzman to teach at the school and who knew Guzman since he was a UCLA graduate student.

Guzman rose from working as a field hand to his State Department post, where he was responsible for formulating and implementing much of the nation's policy in Central and South America.

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Obituary by David Sweet

Ralph Guzman 1924-1985

Politics; Community Studies: Santa Cruz

Professor Ralph C. Guzman of the Boards of Study in Politics and Community Studies at UC Santa Cruz died of a stroke on October 10, 1985. He was only 60, and although he had previously been through a period of illness, he seemed to friends to be full of life with new plans and projects for both scholarship and teaching.

Ralph Guzman's life in the United States spanned half a century of the experience of Mexicans and Chicanos in this country, and he was an influential participant in their struggle for a place in the sun. He lived on terms of intimate familiarity with both poverty and prosperity, failure and success, bitter humiliation and savored prestige. A winsome man of gentle character and modest self-appraisal, a loving friend to small children and green plants, he was moved and sometimes handicapped by an overwhelming desire to be of service to others. When most other educated Mexican-Americans were opting for assimilation into an admittedly inhospitable North American society, he chose the path of a hopeful but determined public advocacy of political and cultural pluralism--of a society which would respect the rights (and fast-growing numbers) of the Chicano community, while at the same time allowing itself to be enriched by the culture and values, as it had already been enriched by the labor, of Mexican immigrants like himself. Never comfortable with angry confrontations, he was nevertheless a loyal ally willing to extend a hand to those less patient than he with the slowness of our political processes. Professor Guzman was proud on the one hand to be the bearer of a Mexican cultural heritage, a fluent speaker of Spanish, a man with a warmer and more spontaneous style of interpersonal relations than that which prevails among us; and at the same time he took pride in being a respected and responsible American citizen who could make himself heard as an advocate of social and economic justice for the disadvantaged. His infectious enthusiasm for both ideas and people made him a warm counsellor and a beloved teacher to hundreds of young Californians of all ethnic backgrounds over a period of nearly three decades.

Born in Moroleon, Guanajuato, Rafael Cortez Guzman spent his early boyhood there and, as he liked to recall, narrowly escaped being groomed for the priesthood by pious relatives. As a youthful immigrant to the U.S. during the Depression, he worked for several years with his family in the fields of the Southwest before settling in East Los Angeles. There he resisted peer pressures and made a

good record in elementary and high school, coming to young manhood in the era of the “Zoot Suit” riots. He served with distinction in the Merchant Marine and Navy during World War II, participating in the final assault on Okinawa, and returned to complete an A.A. at East Los Angeles Junior College under the G.I. Bill in 1949.

During the 1950s, Ralph Guzman contributed substantially to the political mobilization of the Los Angeles *barrio* as an organizer for the Community Service Organization (CSO), crusading reporter and editorialist for the *Eastside Sun* and the *Los Angeles Free Press*, and close associate of political hopeful (now Congressman) Edward R. Roybal and progressive journalist Carey McWilliams. A social democrat by political inclination, he worked hard for Helen Gahagan Douglas in her campaign for the Senate against Richard Nixon; and he was an outspoken early opponent of the McCarran/Walter Act with its provisions for the summary deportation of both “aliens” and naturalized citizens suspected of “un-American activities,” which he perceived as a threat to the civil liberties of all Americans. In the early 1960s, before the appearance of the Chicano power movement, he was a leading spokesperson for the Mexican-American community nationwide, and a vigorous supporter of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Workers' Union.

It was in this context that Ralph Guzman decided in mid-life to pursue an education for service as a scholar-activist and university professor. While completing his B.A. (1958) and M.A. (1960) in political science at Cal State Los Angeles, he acquired his first experience as a researcher on foundation-funded studies of the origins of the CSO and on the loss of citizenship by the native-born Mexican-Americans under the McCarren Act. Then he served for three years as Associate Director of the Peace Corps contingents in Venezuela and Peru, and returned home to become one of the few Chicano graduate students (and first to receive a Ph.D. in political science) at UCLA. There, while completing his studies, he collaborated full time with Leo Grebler and Joan Moore on the five-year study project which produced the pathfinding work, *The Mexican Americans: Our Second Minority* (NY, 1970), viewed critically at that time by the merging anti-assimilationist school of Chicano scholarship. That book was followed by his *The Political Socialization of the Mexican-American People* (NY, 1976), and a great number of articles on diverse aspects of the participation of Mexicans and Chicanos in North American life. In later

years, his research interests expanded to include population policy issues (especially regarding Central America), and what he called the “human factor” in the formulation of American foreign policy towards Latin America.

Ralph Guzman first taught at Cal State Los Angeles, and Mt. St. Mary's College, but in 1969 he was invited by his old professor, Dean McHenry, to join the politics faculty and help build programs for minority students at the new UC campus in Santa Cruz. There he was a co-founder of Oakes College and later Provost of Merrill College, a contributor to the Educational Opportunity Program, the Latin American Studies Program, the Third World Teaching Resource Center and the Merrill Field Program for Experiential Learning, and a very popular teacher. Most recently, he had taught an experimental course on Mexican immigration which had him accompanying his students as they entered the U.S. illegally from Tijuana. During the Santa Cruz years, he was also perpetually in demand as a speaker, consultant, expert witness and member of commissions appointed by the local, state and national governments on a wide range of affairs of concern to the Chicano community and to society at large--education, human rights, immigration, housing, and drug and alcohol abuse.

Late in the Carter administration, Professor Guzman served two years in Washington as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State of Latin America (the highest position yet attained by a Hispanic in the Department of State)--in which capacity he was instrumental, among other things, in helping design the policy of respectful coexistence with the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, later overturned by President Reagan. He later reflected deeply on this experience close to the seats of power, and at the time of his death he was planning a trip to Central America during which he hoped to see how he might contribute to preventing the outbreak of a new Vietnam War there. Such a war, as his own research and personal experience had taught him, was certain to count among its victims on the U.S. side many sons of that Chicano community whose well-being was the primary concern of Ralph Guzman's too-short but productive and well-lived life.

By David Sweet