

John Borrego

February 8, 1940–January 10, 2023



John Borrego, Associate Professor of Latino and Latin American Studies, died January 10, 2023 in Corralitos, CA. Though appointed assistant professor of Community Studies in 1973, he took up teaching on campus in 1974, after a year finishing up management of a large series of community building projects at the Architecture Department at the University of New Mexico. Born in a labor camp in southern California and trained for the building trades by his beloved father, John graduated from Berkeley, then took masters degrees from MIT and Washington University in St. Louis and a doctorate back at the School of Design at Berkeley. One of his contributions to architecture was his beautiful and useful book *Space Grid Structures* (MIT Press, 1969).

From architecture and city planning, John's interests turned to world systems theory. In nearly 40 years at Santa Cruz, he undertook to provide several generations of grateful undergraduates with understanding of the roots of the social inequalities they experienced in life. A large number of students benefitted from his close-in mentorship and committed teaching. He often bore an almost unbelievably heavy load, at one point overseeing 30 senior thesis students in Community Studies.

What John taught—the colonial relationships between core and peripheral societies, the effects of capitalist extraction not only on developing countries but also on people of color and immigrant communities within the core—was eye-opening for his students. And always better than up-to-date. A Community Studies major back from graduate school at UC Santa Barbara reported there she was being taught as "new" what she had learned from Borrego a decade earlier. The syllabi for John's world-systems theory courses were daunting, but students soon learned John would lead them through the ideas with great care and his own special ingenuity. From his background in design he could delineate complex theories in drawings on a blackboard. And he successfully employed autogestion or self-education through group learning.

His course *Global Capitalism and Community Restructuring* focused on the farmworker town of Watsonville where John lived. Unlike anything else in the university, the two-quarter course involved hands-on immersion, a true “community study” organized around presentations by people from all walks of life in the area. The required long final paper showed undergraduates how to move out of the passive "consumption" of education into active engagement with critical issues as researchers and problem solvers. John’s students went on to become educators (from K-12 to university professors) or to address social injustices as policymakers, legal advocates, and grassroots organizers.

John’s global perspective led him to research and profitable associations with other scholars on the international level. He ran the *UC Abroad Mexico* program for two years and made comparative studies of the organization of agricultural work in California, Mexico, and Spain. With Alejandro Álvarez Bejar and Jomo K.S. he edited the 2019 volume *Capital, the State, and Late Industrialization* (Routledge, 2019).

He is survived by his four children and one grandchild and by many loyal friends and former students.

This memorial was prepared by Carter Wilson, Professor Emeritus, Community Studies, UCSC and Marcos López, friend and former student of John Borrego.