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Three sons of Boriquén: Taso, Atabal and Benito, ¡Presentes!

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Within days, the people of Puerto Rico received the sad news of the passing of three of their beloved revolutionaries: Carlos “Taso” Zenón, Héctor “Atabal” Rodríguez and Benito Reinosa Burgos.



Carlos “Taso” Zenón, Viequense, testifies at the U.S. Crimes Tribunal in Puerto Rico.

Photo: Berta Joubert-Ceci

The last time this writer met Taso Zenón was in Rafael Cancel Miranda’s living room, recording his testimony for the International Tribunal on U.S. Colonial Crimes Against Puerto Rico, held in 2018. His strong voice brought vividly to life the terrible experience of the forced displacement of Viequense people to make room for the U.S. military’s rape of that tiny island. That displacement was in the 1940s and soon two-thirds of the island was occupied by the U.S. Navy, completely disturbing the lives of the residents.

Vieques would be used then as a military depot and a bombing range. The almost constant shooting and bombing in the pristine waters surrounding the island wreaked havoc on the livelihood of the fisherfolk, including Zenón’s.

But it also was the fuel that nurtured Zenón's activism against the U.S. Navy. The fierce determination to end the abuse and the presence of the invader led to one of Puerto Rico's most admirable chapters of struggle. Zenón organized his coworkers and with an amazing control of tactics, small fisher boats would surround the mammoth U.S. war vessels, with stones and magnificent tenacity as their only weapons.

In his 2018 book, "Memorias de un pueblo pobre en lucha" ("Memories of a Poor People in Struggle"), Zenón describes this struggle from the perspective of the fishers, the women and the youth of Vieques. As a master strategist, he wanted to make sure this experience was documented on behalf of the new generations. In fact, the book's subtitle is "Manual de lucha para los jóvenes que quieren transformar a Puerto Rico" ("Fighting Manual for the Young People Who Want to Transform Puerto Rico").

Zenón died of a stroke on Nov. 20, at 84 years of age.



Héctor "Atabal" Rodríguez

Hours later, another fighter died — Héctor "Atabal" Rodríguez, founder in 1983 of

the Afro Puerto Rican musical group Atabal. He had been battling cancer for the last few years.

His battlefield was the Puerto Rican culture, which has been under attack by the U.S.-imposed anti-Boricua assault in the hope of eradicating Puerto Rican nationalist expression. Atabal was a fierce defender of the culture and as such was a constant presence at pro-independence events.

But his solidarity extended far from his beloved nation. Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Venezuela are just some of the countries that were the object of his group's musical offerings.



Benito Reinosa Burgos

Shortly thereafter, Benito Reinosa Burgos, the gentle yet fierce activist with a long white beard and perennial smile on his thin and wrinkled, sun-kissed face, passed too.

In his late eighties, Benito, as he was known, was a noble and tireless activist seen in each and every action that defended Puerto Rican liberation and justice. His own

words perfectly illustrate it: “I always want to defend all just causes; that is being an activist. It could be for Vieques, for the University of PR, for the Federation of Teachers, for Paseo Caribe, for the beach.”

But the most moving homage is the lasting impression on the people who met him. Comments like “He always made me feel good,” “a loving person,” “always gave you a hug and said I love you,” “always helping,” “trying to bring peace and love to all of us,” “trying to make every demonstration he could,” “Benito, the indispensable one” and “Benito, the most loved.”

Taso, Atabal and Benito, ¡Presentes!

