



Raíces Africanas

The African Presence in Puerto Rican Culture & History

Que Ondee Sola

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For nearly 500 years since race as a concept and social construct found its origins, human beings, especially in the Western Hemisphere, have understood and acted upon the world in those terms. From systematic and institutionalized racism to subtle forms of prejudice and discrimination, race plays a central role in the actions and perceptions of *everyone*.

1967 was the year that my 18-year-old grandmother, Felícita Peña Delgado, arrived from her small community of Barrio Lirios Dorados, Juncos in the eastern mountains of Puerto Rico, to the growing metropolis of Chicago. That was the year that her perception of race shifted from a Puerto Rican context to that of the United States. While entering on a bus with her aunt, she made the mistake of sitting next to an older white woman, who quickly snapped with "Get away from me you nigger!" My grandmother sat bewildered, not knowing a world of English. Of course, her aunt, who had been in the city for nearly two decades, reprimanded the woman and as her and my grandmother left the bus, explained that things in the U.S. was a little different from Puerto Rico. "But *mami* is black and *papi* is white, and they're married!" my grandmother responded, still confused. This event would forever inform my grandmother's understanding of race. As opposed to standing in solidarity with her black sisters and brothers and affirming the beauty of her obvious African features, she, to this day, holds a strange prejudice. Nonetheless, it must be said that Puerto Rico is not a racial democracy and never was. Despite the racial dynamics being different and flexible, racism, especially internalized racism, does exist. As a child, I always thought that my grandmother's father was indeed "white" – but when I finally saw a picture of him, he was as dark as myself, just with blue eyes! However, for my family, that European feature allowed him to be closer to whiteness and a higher status in the social

hierarchy. In the U.S. that is, for the most part, null and void.

Nonetheless, every time my grandmother plays a song by Rafael Cortijo or Ismael Rivera, tells the story of her parents' practice of *Espiritismo*, or even speaks the distinctly Puerto Rican dialect, West Africa removes the *vejigante* mask and shows its face in her quintessentially *Boricua* identity. Denial or not, Africa is in her and in us. This has also simultaneously instilled in myself a sense of recognition and pride of the role that the descendents of African slaves on the island, runaway slaves from the other parts of the Caribbean, and maroons have played in constructing a Puerto Rican national identity. Reclaiming history is an important part of addressing historical problems. These are the reasons why my grandmother adorns the cover of this magazine, in the spirit of her 60th birthday.

In this edition of *Que Ondee Sola*, in honor of Black History Month, we pay tribute to the African Presence in Puerto Rican culture and history. From political figures, historical locations and events, to literary works and other cultural productions, we seek to offer the students of NEIU and our community a hidden history that is often not discussed or left out in the understanding of Puerto Rican identity. This is not to say that we seek to apply the black/white binary that is often times attributed, mistakenly, to the understanding of race in the U.S. to Puerto Rico, but to continue the conversation on what constitutes a Puerto Rican and to also tackle the idea that Puerto Ricans are the "whites of the Caribbean." As written by Juan Flores, a Puerto Rican sociologist, in his essay (presented here in an abridged version), *Cortijo's Revenge*, "Yes, there is a national [Puerto Rican] culture... it is grounded on the popular, African-based traditions of that culture"

An update on the Latina/o Cultural & Resource Center:

The staff of QOS, as well as other Latina/o students met with President Hah's on this issue in the Fall semester. The meeting, of course, was not highly productive. Nonetheless, our concerns and ideas were taken into account in the Intercultural Initiative Committee's official proposals to the President, released at the beginning of the Spring Semester. Some of the building proposals for a multicultural center with a Latina/o Cultural Center or "Casa Latina" are outright offensive, while others are workable. Stay tuned for a full analysis.

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Editor-in-Chief & Designer

Xavier "Xavi" Luis Burgos

Staff Writers/Artists

Ruthy Venegas

Jacklyn Nowotnik

Juan Morales

Miosotis Cotto Santos

Christopher Pérez

Joshua Cruz

Marcuz Erazo

Myra Rodríguez

Samuel Vega

Cover Art created by
Xavier "Xavi" Luis Burgos

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We appreciate and encourage suggestions and contributions.
Contact Que Ondee Sola
5500 N. St. Louis Chicago, IL 60625
Room E-041
(773) 442-4583
queondeesola@gmail.com

Misión

Que Ondee Sola was established in 1972 and remains the oldest Puerto Rican & Latina/o university student publication in the U.S. Our mission is to provide the NEIU community with a relevant and engaging publication that deals with student issues with a focus on Puerto Ricans and Latinas/os, our communities, and our patrias.

Que Ondee Sola continues to affirm the right of Puerto Rican self-determination, freedom for all Puerto Rican political prisoners, and support for a truly participatory democracy.

"In this Puerto Rican struggle, we do not cut ourselves off from the past, for it is all one. It began in Lares when the nation was formed, and Hostos and others continued it. It is a sequence, it is all one..." - Dominga Cruz, 1978

Each and every individual human being is an accumulation of the characters, context, and climaxes of the grand theater of life with every component intricately binding the players, with the winds of historical memory guiding their



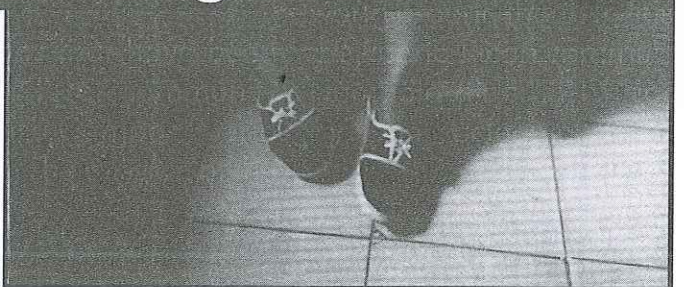
Xavier "Xavi" Luis Burgos

Afraid of neither Death nor Prison: The story of Dominga Cruz

actions. Although some narratives are told and retold more often than others, every once in a while, whether in the tales of a whispering grandmother or in the forgotten letters of a witness, a nearly lost story resurfaces, transforming ones understanding of an event. The context: a colonial Puerto Rico suffering extreme poverty and extreme oppression. The characters: the Nationalist Party members of the island and their leader by Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos. The climax: The Ponce Massacre, 1937. "...To ask me about the massacre is to ask me more or less about what is my life, because my whole life began again through it..." Tragedy and triumph, hope, and dedication defined the obra teatral of Dominga Cruz, the black revolutionary from Ponce.

Dominga was born into a life of poverty in 1909 in the seaport city of Ponce. That hardship was exacerbated by the early death of her parents, which resulted, at the age of 8 or 9, with the dislocation of her siblings to

many on the recently conquered island, she was also exposed to a world of literature, art, and theater under the guidance of her Godmother and her Spaniard Godfather who owned a coffee plantation. Unfortunately, this comfortable life would be quickly shattered with their financial ruin and deaths. She ended up on a pig farm with her brothers. Following the social norms and economic realities of the time, she married young and worked for \$1.50 a month at a factory that embroidered blouses until two in the morning by a dim light only to go home to a starving and tuberculosis-ridden community. Her own two children died young of hunger. For most in Puerto Rico, this was life to its



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fullest. Still, the early scene of Dominga curiously reading the many plays and poems in her godparent's home would resurface to provide her a new direction in life. Like many before, including the venerable Juana Colón, Dominga became a lectora or newspaper reader at a tobacco factory, informing the vigorous workers daily on the latest happenings on the island. It was there, in the midst of the tobacco leaves that she began to feel like a real fighter. Many of the reports focused on the struggles of Latin America and on the charismatic and controversial figure, Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos. It was one such report in 1933 that informed her that he would be speaking in the town square of nearby Mayagüez concerning the current sugarcane workers' strike. After hearing him speak about U.S. imperialism and economic dominance over the island she left profoundly changed, "he got ride of the myth we had that the yankee was some sort of God!," she later commented. She immediately went to the office of the Nationalist Party Council of Mayagüez to sign-up for membership.

Almost instantaneously, Dominga inserted her leadership and dedication to the party that sought the independence of Puerto Rico. "We weren't afraid of prison or death," she remembers. Although the Nationalist Party openly enlisted women and Albizu Campos was famous for having women body guards, Dominga sought to place women in a more central role in the party. With Albizu Campos' approval, she changed the symbolic title of the women of the Nationalist Party, "Daughter's of Liberty," to the cadet corps "Nurses of the Army of Liberation," which trained as nurses and with wooden guns. She also wrote poetic articles in the newspaper *El Sol* on behalf of the party. Another little known fact is

that it was she who coined the now famous term for Albizu Campos – "*El Maestro*" or "The Great Teacher." In 1933 at the party's national assembly in the mountain city of Caguas, Dominga was sent with other women to represent the Mayagüez council and it was there where she was first introduced to Albizu Campos. Nearly speechless, all she could say was "*Maestro, Maestro.*"

By 1936, all of the major party leaders, including *El Maestro* were tried in a Federal Court on the charge of trying to destroy the U.S. government in Puerto Rico. Their sentence: 10 years in an Atlanta, Georgia prison. After that, Dominga suffered persecution – her home was raided twice. Nonetheless, the Nationalist Party was determined to continue its work of defending a Puerto Rican nation under siege. On March 21, 1937, the party planned a demonstration in the city of Ponce, in honor of the abolition of slavery and to protest the imprisonment of their leaders. Despite their permit being revoked shortly after approval, influenced by appointed Governor Blanton Winship who tirelessly persecuted the independence movement, they decided to march anyway. One can almost envision Dominga's memory of the bus drive to Ponce, the hot countryside passing by her window and the image of red buses full of armed policemen following their path.

On that fateful day, only a few blocks away from the city's center on Marina Street, the cadets of the party stood in a few, well-organized files, dressed famously in their usual colors of white and black, with Puerto Rican flags in hand. One could imagine the sudden struck of fear as the police surrounded them and the hundreds of onlookers, with machine guns and bayonets in hand. However, fear

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did not dictate the actions of the Nationalist Party. After the singing of the revolutionary national anthem, La Borinqueña, the demonstration continued and they marched forward and of course that is when the shots began to swift through the air, filling the street with rivers of blood. Just as Dominga baptized Albizu Campos as *El Maestro* she too would be baptized on this day of death by her courageous and patriotic actions, forever becoming the "One Who Picked-up the Flag."



While running to safety as the bullets riddled hundreds of bodies - men, women, and children - Dominga spotted one of her compañeros, the one carrying the sky-blue Puerto Rican flag, get shot and killed. In a matter of seconds, she skidded towards the blood-soaked national symbol, picked it up, and carried it towards a mansion for safety. Unfortunately, the gate was locked, leaving her and another cadet scrambling to open it until they finally turned around towards the crowd, arms locked together, waiting for death to approach them. It was at that moment that another cadet jumped over their

shoulders and opened the gate from the other side. While in the mansion they took care of the wounded and the dying until the police surrounded the building and arrested all those inside. When the day came to an end, over 150 were wounded and 22 lay dead. Later, at hearings led by Arthur Hays of the American Civil Liberties Union, she would testify that she picked-up the flag, even in the midst of danger, "because Maestro taught me that the flag of the homeland should never fall on the ground."

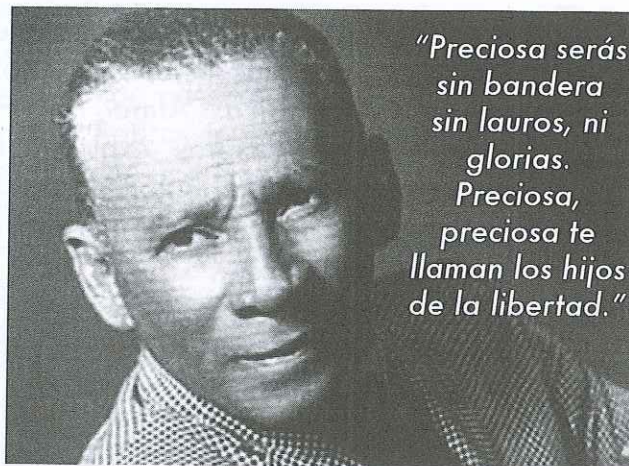
Later, Dominga would use her literary skills and love of poetry to recite the great works of the Spanish language in some of the greatest artistic venues of the island. It was at Central High School, 1942 that the wife of Albizu Campos, Laura Meneses, told her that she was destined for bigger stages and should go to Cuba and use her art to tell the story of Puerto Rico's struggles. She would return to her beloved island two years later, but the persecution was too intense, forcing her to return to Cuba, where she lived for most of her life, with a 10-year stint in Mexico.

The Ponce Massacre is now forever etched in the Puerto Rican historical memory, revealing the extent that the United States was willing to go to exert its hegemonic domination over the island. However, for those who survived to bare witness and for those who continued to struggle for freedom, those who were killed did not die in vain. Although, some of the figures of that intense period, like Dominga Cruz, go mostly unmentioned, the sense of consciousness that she provides, that Puerto Ricans, especially women, were not docile victims, but actively seeking to change their collective conditions, instills hope and possibility.

The facts and quotes presented in this piece is from an unpublished manuscript by Margaret Randall, "The People are More Than Witnesses," 1978

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Rafael Hernández was born on October 24, 1892 in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico. Born into a poor family, as a kid he would make cigars as a means of helping to support his family. At a young age it was evident that his heart was with music, therefore he asked his parents if they would allow him to study music. With his parents' approval, he went to San Juan to do exactly that. At the age of twelve he was studying with José Ruellan and Jesús Figueroa as his professors. While studying music in San



"Preciosa serás
sin bandera
sin lauros, ni
glorias.
Preciosa,
preciosa te
llaman los hijos
de la libertad."

Jackie Nowotnik

Rafael Hernández: La Música Preciosa

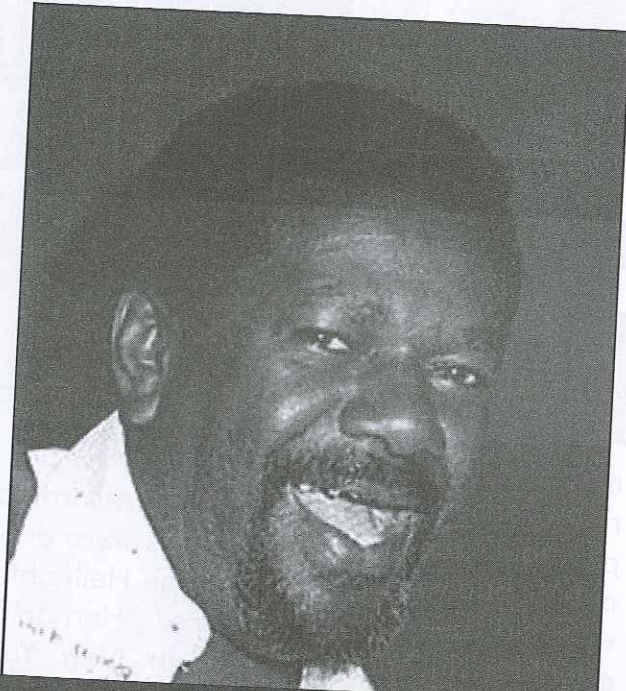
Juan, he learned to play the clarinet, tuba, violin, piano, and guitar. Then at the age of fourteen he was playing for the Cocolia Orchestra. Soon after playing for them he was playing the first violin in San Juan's Orchestra Sinfónica, and the trombone in the Banda Municipal of San Juan, which was under the direction of Manuel Tizol.

In 1917 Hernández was in the U.S. pursuing a career in music when he enlisted in the army. He thought he was going to be playing in the regimental band; instead he was assigned to the 396th Regiment, also known as "the Harlem Hellfighters." At this time discrimination and segregation was definitely apart of the Army's regiments (Sublette, Ned, 2007. *Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press.). Once the war was over, the Hellfighters came back to New York with a parade in their honor. Soon after they recorded "eleven sides for Pathé with Noble Sissle singing" However,

it was not until recently that the music they recorded was heard because of the recording's production. Once the recordings were done, many of the Puerto Ricans in the Hellfighters went back to Puerto Rico. Hernández on the other hand stayed in New York.

While in New York; Hernández started a trio called "Trio Borincano" with Pedro Flores. Once Trio Borincano split up, Hernández then formed a quartet called "Cuarteto Victoria". Cuarteto Victoria went to perform all over the United States and Latin America. In 1937 Hernández wrote a song called "Preciosa", which many would know now thanks to Marc Anthony's revised version of it. But his most famous work was "Lamento Borincano," which has been called one of the national songs of the island. In 1947 Hernández moved back to Puerto Rico to direct the Puerto Rican Symphonic Orchestra and advise WIPR-Radio. He died in San Juan, Puerto Rico in 1965.

The following is a portion of an essay written in *Centro Journal* of the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños at Hunter College, New York under the edition *Música: Alma del Pueblo, Spring 1991. Vol. 3, No.2.* In it, Professor Flores explores the themes of race, national culture and identity, and popular expressions through the prism of a battle to rename the Palace of Fine Arts in Puerto Rico after a black musician.



accomplí what was only a proposal by an aspiring political candidate, or actually not even a proposal but the threat of a proposal. "Vote for me and I'll propose it" was the message. And though within a few days the whole issue passed into hasty oblivion, for that week in mid-August 1988 el Centro Rafael Cortijo was the talk of Puerto Rico, filling the newspapers with rumors and recriminations in all directions and generating a debate which would have made not only Cortijo but Antonio S. Pedreira turn over in his grave.

And many, indeed, were the echoes of Pedreira's lofty concerns. As one commentator wrote in *El Mundo*, "This event makes us ask ourselves,

Juan Flores

Cortijo's Revenge

It was the best joke of the week. Imagine, naming the Centro de Bellas Artes after Rafael Cortijo. El Centro Rafael Cortijo para las Bellas Artes, the Cortijo Center for the Fine Arts! The very idea of it, our country's cultural palace, its halls bearing the venerable names of Antonio Paoli, Rene Marqués, Carlos Marichal and Sylvia Rexach, baptised in honor of the street musician par excellence, the unlettered, untutored promulgator of *bomba y plena!* And yet, far-fetched as it might seem, people began treating as a fait

once again, who we are, that philosophical exercise which has so long been a constant in our daily lives. If we can clear away all the triviality, opportunism and back-biting it has generated, this move to honor Rafael Cortijo serves to transform the Palace of Fine Arts from a majestic architectural structure into an ongoing metaphor and reminder of the path to take when it is clear exactly where we stand." Here we are, back again to that historic questionnaire initiated by the journal *Indice* in 1929, the provocative "who are we and

how are we?" (*¿qué somos y cómo somos?*) that led, after a flurry of responses from some of the Island's leading intellectuals and some years of gestation, to that most extended and influential of all reflections on Puerto Rican culture, Pedreira's *Insularismo* (1934). Not that we are just returning to that existential preoccupation some sixty years later, with the comfortable advantage of hindsight. For as dated and derivative as Pedreira's thinking may strike us today, the groping search which he undertook has never really abated and has remained with us, in modified versions and with changing emphasis, through the decades. Whether it was Vicente Geigel Polanco, Tomás Blanco, René Marqués, José Luis González, and Luis Rafael Sánchez or Rosario Ferré, writers of each subsequent generation have addressed the same issues as inhabited the pages of *Insularismo*, and have ultimately met with similar frustrations.

But the hubbub over the appropriate legacy of Rafael Cortijo signals the continuing relevance of *Insularismo* in especially sharp relief, and at a time when the very interrogation of culture and identity, the "master narrative" of any collective cultural history, has come under grave suspicion. It took the towering presence and symbolic passing of a black popular musician of the uncontested stature of Cortijo to force the questions of African and working-class culture onto the agenda of every day Puerto Rican life. It may have occasioned laughs and irony at the time, and exemplified partisan opportunism at its most cynical, but the threat to sanctify the name of Cortijo and the ensuing reactions from all quarters of the cultural establishment bring into rare focus the still unfinished business involved in exposing the theoretical confines of *Insularismo*.

And the rejoinders in the Cortijo crossfire were as telling as the seemingly outlandish suggestion itself. What about the other stellar figures in the history of Puerto Rican music, the first line of argument went, as the names of Juan Morel Campos and Rafael Hernández were quick to surface; isn't it after all, as Pedreira had claimed, the danza and the international standard *boleros* and *canciones* that represent the backbone of the national music? And if it's about memorializing illustrious black Puerto Rican artists, what about the great 18th-century painter José Campeche, or what about the renowned black singer Ruth Fernández, who has the added asset, in "affirmative action" terms, of being a woman, and is even alive to perform at the inaugural? And then, if the occasion is one of acknowledging the *plena* as the authentically national popular music, what about Manuel Jiménez ("Canario"), the first to extend the *plena*'s popularity through recording, or what about John Clark and Catherine George, those children of immigrants from the English-speaking islands who were the first known practitioners of *plena*? (Or, we might add, since his name went unmentioned, what about Joselino "Bumbún" Oppenheimer, who was instrumental in establishing the *plena* as a musical form and practice?)

But the cries of "why Cortijo" went further than the unveiling of other names, which extended from Manuel Alonso to Enrique Laguerre, and included Luis Palés Matos, Julia de Burgos, Juan Tizol, Felipe Rosario Goyco ("Don Felo"), Rafael Ithier, Juano Hernández, Carmelo Díaz Soler and Francisco Arriví. Beyond the catalogue of just-as-deserving, and of greater theoretical interest, objections were raised as to the anomaly of naming a center of "fine arts" after an exponent of the



"popular arts," no matter how unequalled a master. The "Centra de Bellas Artes," the thinking goes, "was built because of the need for theaters in which to hold concerts, drama, ballet, opera and *zarzuela*." Of course there may also be a need for a center for popular art, especially since "we now have to hold *salsa* and rock concerts in coliseums and stadiums with poor acoustics, unbearable heat, foul smells and a host of other inconveniences"; but to appropriate the space intended for the fine arts is not the answer. After all, and here the reasoning gets interesting, presentations of the fine arts tend to be very expensive, and because they are absolutely needed "for the greatest cultural good of the people," they require subsidy from the government and the public sector, "so as to keep prices reasonable for the audience." Sites catering to the popular arts, on the other hand, are generally "private

businesses that can only cover their expenses by enjoying the affluence of the public." The commentator acknowledges that "it's often not possible to draw a clear line between popular and fine arts," but his final thought, following from this rather convoluted account, is that "there's a right place for everything." The bottom line, it seems, and ultimate justification for assigning the popular arts to the business sector, is "quality"; as the then director of the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, Elias López Soba, reminded us, "this is a place of the fine arts. It is for those who have a contribution to make in the field of dance, theater, music, plastic arts, mime and pantomime."

Behind the aesthetic and fiscal objections, of course, lurk the moral ones. It is interesting that on these grounds the strongest position was voiced not so much by the upholders of

the "high arts," but by the prominent folklorist Marcelino Canino. In Prof. Canino's view, "though musicians of the stature of Mozart found inspiration in the dances and tunes of the common folk, Cortijo's music can only be described as 'vulgar' and 'lumpen.'" Rather than exalt the black race, he said, Cortijo's songs only denigrated it further. "It was music for the masses which never became folkloric because it has not lived on in the memory of the people." Such language has a sadly familiar ring to it, being typical of the early reaction to most forms of 20th-century popular music, from jazz and the blues to *samba*, *son* and calypso. The epithets "vulgar" and "lumpen" accompanied the *plena* for the first three decades of its existence, and here they are once again, in 1988, in the assessment of Cortijo. Not only is he excluded from the ranks of the country's fine arts, but even of the national folklore. He is also rejected ad hominem: the noted constitutional lawyer Federico A. Cordero, who spoke out immediately and vehemently against the renaming of the Centro, argued that Cortijo set a bad example for the country. "Puerto Rican society is today deeply concerned over the problem of drugs, so that to speak under these conditions of Cortijo, who was part of the drug subculture, is not a good example to follow."

The objections to the idea of a "Centro Rafael Cortijo para las Bellas Artes" thus amounted to a broadside, coming from many political and social quarters and especially from among the prevailing voices of the cultural elite. Which is indeed why they won out, squelching the threat long before it could become a proposal on the floor. When the dust settled a position prevailed which, despite all the disclaimers and quite beyond the issue of renaming the Centro de Bellas Artes, continues to deny the constitutive

role of African and popular expression in the national culture. In other words, it was a victory for racism, as members of the Cortijo family and countless other Puerto Ricans, including many intellectuals and musicians, were quick to point out. Not only did they clear the record of personal defamations, but they clearly identified the racist motives behind the political opportunism of the Popular Democratic Party (PPD). It seems that the Populares were trying to save face in the wake of an infamous remark made a few months earlier by Rafael Hernández Colón on a visit to Spain. There in the Hispanic "*madre patria*" the PPD governor took the occasion to refer to the African contribution to Puerto Rican culture as a "mere rhetorical adscription" (*una mera adscripción mónica*). Floating the idle threat of honoring Cortijo was thus a defensive maneuver which, ironically, could only result in still another mandate for that familiar Eurocentric mentality. Just how Eurocentric it was is clear even from Hernández Colón's effort to answer the resounding criticism of his comments. By considering Puerto Rican culture "essentially Spanish," he only meant to refer to "the racial integration of our people around its common Hispanic roots."

It was against this still dominant mentality—the mentality, we might add, of Pedreira in his time—that the most vocal proponents of Cortijo spoke out. While not necessarily bemoaning the defeat of the effort to rename the Centro, Cortijo's long-time friend and fellow musician Tite Curet Alonso argued strongly for the immense stature of Cortijo in Puerto Rican music. In direct response to the charges of Marcelino Canino, Curet Alonso states the key point: "Rafael Cortijo made our most vernacular rhythms, the *bomba* and *plena*, known throughout the world... And

if nobody remembers Rafael Cortijo, why such concern over him and why the idea of lending his name to the Center for Fine Arts according to law? No my dear professor, no sir! Cortijo was great and continues to be great, as you well know." Curet Alonso ends by calling attention to the seamy aftermath of the whole Cortijo affair: they actually went so far as to dig up his body, six years in the grave, for an autopsy. "Our poor friend! And after so many of our civic and political leaders come to mourn for you, with tears in their eyes, at the Cemetery of Villas Palmeras!"

In true *plena* tradition, it was Rafael Cortijo's funeral on October 6, 1982 as much as his musical breakthroughs in the mid-1950s, which marked a turning-point in Puerto Rican culture and its theoretical reflection. Thanks, in large measure, to Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá, whose brilliant chronicle, *Cortijo's Funeral (El entierro de Cortijo, 1983)*, anticipated in uncanny ways the whole uproar over Cortijo in 1988. At one point his narrator even muses whimsically about the eventual admission of Cortijo into the hallowed halls of the country's high culture: "Maybe some Leticia del Rosario will come along one day, in twenty years or so, and establish a Rafael Cortijo Theater, under the administration of González Oliver's son, and thereby enact a grotesque kind of poetic class justice." "The revenge of Cangrejos" ("*La venganza de Cangrejos*") is what this same inversion of the class hierarchy was called in the title of one article in 1988. (Santurce, where the Bellas Artes is located, was called Cangrejos in Cortijo's time, and the deepest irony of the whole case is that Cortijo was born and raised in a house at the very address where the Centro de Bellas Artes now stands.) On the occasion of his funeral, Rodríguez Julia built a real memorial

to Cortijo while his narrator with all due irony reflected on the meaning of immortality in the age of mediated popular culture: "But you will live on, Cortijo," he wrote, "even if nobody listens to you anymore; there will stand your monumental work, silent but patient, and always ready to spring back to life. To be immortal is not so much to go on living as to be sure of resurrection. Cortijo is for the 'cocolos' and the *salsa* lovers what Canario is for me—a daring leap over two decades. But don't worry *mi Cortijito*, you'll see that we won't forsake you even though this damned historical memory of ours only extends back as far as what we have forgotten." (p. 37)

Generation after generation, stage after stage in the history of the country, the concept of the national culture penetrates progressively deeper to its black, working-class roots. "This idea of class revenge," one commentator noted in 1988, "evokes a sense of pride in Puerto Rico. Here every one of us has a secret ancestor in the closet." The very idea of a "Centro Rafael Cortijo para las Bellas Artes" is part of "a long voyage toward the integration of our Puerto Rican identity in view of that key link which is our African heritage," another step in the unveiling of that ancestral secret.

The path out of and beyond "*insularismo*" has been first of all this extended journey inward, and deeper than Pedreira could have imagined in 1934. It began back in the 19th century, in the writings of Salvador Brau, Alejandro Tapia y Rivera and others, and gained further impetus from the lesser-known working-class writer Ramón Romero Rosa in his 1903 article "El Negro Puertorriqueño." In Pedreira's times it proceeded forward in the essays of Tomás Blanco, especially his In Praise of the Plena (*Elogio de La*



Plena, 1935) and in the poetry and poetics of Luis Palés Matos. A new juncture was marked off in 1954 with the release of Cortijo's "El Bombón de Elena" and the publication of José Luis González's story "At the Bottom of the Ditch There's a Little Black Boy" ("*En el fondo del caño hay un negrito*"). The mid-seventies saw the publication of Isabelo Zenón's two-volume *Narciso desucubre su tracero* the first extended exposé of racism in Puerto Rican culture and politics. But it was in the 1980s, most prominently in *El entierro de Cortijo* and in José Luis González's controversial essay "The Four-Story Country" ("*El país de cuarto pisos*" 1984, originally 1979), that the balance finally tipped, and the new, Afro-Caribbean horizon has come into full view.

For the long introspective quest leads not so much to some hidden "essence" of our identity, some primordial "*¿cué somos?*" but to a sharper understanding of the dynamic within Puerto Rican culture, and its place among the cultures with which it most directly interacts. If it is to be more than a "mere rhetorical adscription," the recognition of blackness

necessarily points beyond the shores of the Island to the rest of the Caribbean and Latin America and to the cultural dynamic in the United States. In this respect the Eurocentric, elitist view in the manner of Pedreira constituted the very intellectual insularity which his book called upon his compatriots to overcome. Discovering and valorizing African "roots" has comprised a second stage, after the first one marked off by *Insularismo*, in the theoretical definition of Puerto Rican culture, and the stage has only come to full articulation over the past decade. Yes, there is a national culture, as Pedreira did after all affirm with all his gloomy reluctance, but it is grounded on the popular, African-based traditions of that culture.

JUAN FLORES is Associate Professor in the Department of Latin American and Caribbean Studies at City College and in Sociology and Cultural Studies at the CUNY Graduate Center.

El Bronx, NY - How do you pay tribute to a person that meant so much and that will be missed by so many people? That was Chegüi Torres, a person who was the life of any conversation, or party. When we first started doing the LatinoMVP awards in 1989 for Latino baseball players we noticed that they were getting bigger and better. We, therefore, wanted to elevate them with some added value. We decided to include a Master of Ceremonies (MC) that was not just related to sports, but also to our mission of promoting positive values. We wanted someone that could also deliver a message of pride and hope while educating those in attendance that knew little about our community. The captive audience included players, executives and key community leaders.



Julio Pabón, 1/27/09

Tribute to José "Chegüi" Torres

That was a tall order and not everyone could deliver that type of message and appeal. Chegüi could, be all of that and more.

When I called to ask him to be our MC for one of our events he did not hesitate to say yes. He knew that we were a young Latino start-up company struggling in the world of sports and as a boxer who had to sometimes struggle in the early stages of his career; he understood and respected what we were trying to do.

Chegüi was a master with a microphone. He educated people with facts about the Latino community that even made some of us educators and activists feel like students again. I sometimes felt like I was in a lecture hall in college when I listened to Chegüi speaking. He also motivated us by his sheer

experience coming up the ropes as a Puerto Rican boxer in a racist and dirty business that could easily swallow the best of them. That was Chegüi, an asset to our community. A Boxer from Ponce, Puerto Rico in the cement jungle of New York who became the first Latin-American world light-heavyweight boxing champion, turned journalist, writer and author.

José "Chegüi" Torres was one incredible role model for anyone that took the time to speak to him. The fact that he was loved in the Puerto Rican communities of the 60's is a matter of record. He was an inspiration for every Boricua sweating in the factories of New York struggling in a city that did not understand our political plight.

The 1960's were a very rough period for the Boricua's living in this city. It was the

Que Ondee Sola

height of the struggles between Italians and Puerto Ricans that was manifested in many schoolyards, rooftops and parks in this city with casualties that would equal those of many undeclared wars that received no international attention. It was West Side Story in every community where Puerto Ricans were moving into and Italians were holding on to.

It was during that volatile period in our history that Chegüi Torres got his long awaited chance to fight for the World Championship that was being delayed for no other reason except that he was a dark skin Puerto Rican. Finally in 1965 Chegüi was given the opportunity to fight the reigning Champ, Willie Pastrano the pride of the Italian's.

What people might not know is that Chegüi not only negotiated for himself for this important fight, he also negotiated for the entire Puerto Rican community. Chegüi explained it to me this way: "I knew that every Puerto Rican who could afford it was going to go to Madison Square Garden to see this fight. I also knew that the other half of the Garden (sitting in the lower expensive seats) was going to be filled by Italians. I wanted to do something special for our community so I negotiated that I wanted the Puerto Rican national anthem to be played before the fight."

This might seem trivial today, however, historians would tell you that no other country's national anthem, other than the American national anthem was ever played in a boxing match, especially if both fighters were American citizens.

The fight had the promotional prestige of a Super Bowl Game. It was more than a World Championship fight. For Puerto Ricans it was

a fight to have a few days of bragging rights and perhaps achieve a level of respect and pride that would help overcome the abuses of being treated like second-class citizens. For the Italians it meant a chance to continue to prove that they were in control and that Puerto Ricans were not moving into their turf, in boxing or New York City real estate.

On March 30th, 1965 José Chegüi Torres walked into a packed Madison Square Garden. Just as he predicted, the Garden was almost evenly split. All the Puerto Ricans were filling up the middle levels up to the roof and the Italians were sitting in mid-level to lower seats.

Chegüi was anxiously waiting when finally they knocked on the locker room door to inform him that he would be coming out in approximately five minutes. "Oh and by the way, we will not be able to play the Puerto Rican National Anthem," one of the promoters stated. Chegüi opened the door and asked them to explain what was it that he heard about not playing the national anthem? The promoter explained that due to some added television coverage they were limited with the time prior to the fight and had to cut that part out of the program.

Chegüi told me he looked at the guy straight in the face and told him, "then you need to cut me out of the program because I'm not fighting." I could only imagine the face of the promoter when he heard this? Chegüi told me that he looked dumbfounded and thought that he was kidding. Chegüi repeated, "I was promised that we could play the Puerto Rican National Anthem and if we don't I'm not fighting."

Chegüi told me this story as only he could tell a story. I was intrigued; he had me in suspense when he told me they reminded

Que Ondee Sola

him that if he did not fight he would not get his big payday. He repeated the same thing, "no national anthem, no fight." He had me in stitches laughing when he described the scene. "It looked like if there was a fire in the old Garden. Everyone of the promoters and organizers were running around minutes before I was to be announced and I'm not leaving the dressing room," he stated.

Finally they came to his dressing room and told him it was worked out and that they could sing the national anthem. Chegüi smiled walked out of the dressing room and headed for the ring to make a little piece of history.

Chegüi called out to his Compadre, none other than singer, Felipe Rodríguez, one of the most popular Puerto Rican singers of all time. Felipe, who was sitting in the first row came up to sing the Puerto Rican National Anthem and thus it was the first time that a national anthem, other than the American national anthem was performed in a major boxing match and quite possibly in any sports event in this country.

Chegüi then went out to make history for the second time by knocking out Willie Pastrano in the ninth round and becoming the third

Puerto Rican to win a World title and the first Latino to win a light-heavyweight title. The next day after he won the fight he went to El Barrio's 110th Street, climbed onto a fire escape and told the admiring crowd how he had won the Championship fight for all of them.

That was my friend Chegüi Torres.

Other Chegüi tidbits:

Chegüi began fighting in the US Army as a teenager at the age of 18.

In the 1956 Olympics he won the Silver Medal for the USA in Boxing.

Started his professional boxing career in May 1958 and in 11 years as a fighter he won 41 fights (29 by KO), 3 losses and one tie.

After retiring he became a known author, writer and sports reporter. He was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1997.

He was a friend to every progressive cause and will also be in our memory as a friend and supporter to Latino Sports.





"...[José] the greatest painter of the island, one worthy of note, was the mulatto José Campeche of San Juan." Rafael María de Labra y Cabrada: Representative of Spanish-American Colonial Possessions in the Spanish Parliament, 1870 (The Latino Reader)

José's late twenties his father died leaving him as the music teacher in the Carmelite Chapel. Slowly but surely José began getting recognition outside of Puerto Rico for his artwork. Despite the growing recognition and comparison to "Correggio" [an Italian Renaissance painter] (The Latino Reader), there was still a lack of recognition within the island, but help was on the way. It is unclear when Luis Paredes [a Spanish painter] came to Puerto Rico after being exiled from Spain, but it is a good thing

Jackie Nowotnik

José Campeche: The Black Painter of Puerto Rico

José Campeche was born on January 6, 1752 in San Juan, Puerto Rico to Tomás Campeche and María Jordán. His father was a freed black slave born in Puerto Rico, and his mother was from the Canary Islands, therefore making him a mulatto. Not much is known about his parents, but his father is believed to have painted and decorated as a means of providing for his family. In José's childhood it was obviously that he excelled in the arts, whether it was clay modeling, painting, or chalk drawings on the sidewalk. He would also spend time drawing nature scenes in his notebook that would seem to come off the pages.

When he was older he attended the Dominican Convent where he studied Latin, philosophy, and grammar. As means of aiding his nude portraits, he studied anatomy as well. In addition to his academic studies, his father taught him music; which resulted in José becoming a skilled oboe player and organ teacher. In

he was. For it was with Luis that José perfected his artwork and became famous. Luis became so fascinated with José's work that he asked José to paint a portrait of him. Once the portrait was done, Luis sent the painting to the King of Spain. The King was so impressed with the portrait that he offered José to come to Spain and paint for him, but José declined the offer.

Since the King's offer, there were numerous offerings for José to go to Europe and paint. However, despite the growing numbers of offers José got, he declined them all because he did not want to leave his sisters. José took care of his sisters up until the day he died, which was November 7, 1809. Although José died poor; he lived a "clean and lovable life (The Latino Reader). Even though José Campeche did not get his rightful and deserved recognition while he was alive, there were two very important people who recognized him despite his dark skin.

Que Ondee Sola

Probably you are use to hearing bomba y plena together, in reality they are two very different genres. Bomba was created during 17th century in the sugar cane plantations in Puerto Rico. This genre of music is played with barrel-shaped drums with goat skin stretched over it. The barrel with the highest pitch is called *Primo*, as in *primero*, or first. The lowest sounding barrel is called *Seguidor* - you can have 20 seguidores but always one primo. The Seguidor will keep

is MY space and Do not cross it". This is very similar to break dancing, bboys/bgirls do the same thing in order to get that space they want. Before I start my relationship with the drummer I salute, telling him with a nod and a little bow, " you ready for me." And he responds with a "Tru PA" to say I have his/her divided attention. As I warm up, giving little slaps here and there just checking if he/she is really paying attention to what I have to say within the movements of my body. As soon as I felt confident that there was a connection

Bomba: Through the Eyes of a Dancer

Ruthy Venegas

a constant rhythm during the whole song. The greatest taíno influence in the music are the maracas, which fills in the in-between beats. And to finish the Bomba ensemble is the Cua. The Cua are two sticks, usually played on the side of the drum to keep the tempo. Bomba was used to both vent the oppressive experiences of the slaves and to communicate with each other.

As I go on stage and hear those Barriles going at full force and the Cua keeping its tempo and the Marracha doing chiiki chiiki Chiiki, filling the in between beats, it moves me. As the elements of bomba mix there is nothing else for me to do but dance. So I start to make my way to the stage doing my paseo to the lovely passionate beat to Cuembe from the south, while hearing " estoy buscando un arbol que me de sonmbra porque que tengo calor a mi me da." I continue to Paseo while hearing the call and response from the singers ,In the mean while telling everyone though my body movements "this



I break loose, but still going with the tempo, rhythm, beat and thinking about only of me and the drummer. Not the audience even though it is for them, but I know I do it for me. Remembering the meaning of some movements , and how my ancestors danced to express how they felt after a long grueling day of working the sugar canes plantations, I did it for them too. As I continue to challenge the drummer though my footwork and rapid



representation of a trickster. The *vejigantes* use masks made usually from coconut, but now many have started to use paper maché. The original *vejigantes* were painted with white, black, red, and yellow, but now days they are painted with every color that you can imagine. Other characters included in the fiestas are the *locas*, which are women impersonators with their faces painted in black and extremely big bosoms, and they walk around the streets pretending to clean them. The *viejos*, who symbolize the old men, and

Loíza Aldea: Capital of Tradition

Miosotis Cotto Santos

Loíza Aldea is a town located in the northeastern coast of Puerto Rico. The town was named after one of the two only women *caciques* or chiefs that lived on the island when the Spaniards arrived. Her name was Yuiza. Due to that, Loíza is sometimes called "*El Pueblo de la Cacica*". In the 16th century, at the start of Spanish colonization, Loíza was mostly populated by African slaves or ex-slaves that were either freed by their owners, or had escaped from them. Most of the slaves from Loíza were from the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria. Currently, Loíza is the town with the highest percentage of African descendants on the island, and its residents are called *loiceños*. One of the most important celebrations in Loíza is the "Fiestas Patronales".

The "Fiestas Patronales" is one of the most awaited events in the town, which lasts three days and is in honor of St. James, the patron saint of Loíza. During these three days you can find the best Puerto Rican cuisine on the island. The main attraction of the celebration is the *vejigantes*, an afro-caribbean

the *caballeros* (the knights), who represent St. James, the saint that helped with the Spaniard's victory against the Moors in the Middle Ages.

Another aspect of Loíza is its religious practices. Santería, a syncretization of Catholicism and the practices of the Yoruba people of West Africa. Santería was created by the slaves brought to the island, so they could hide their religion from their owners. What they did was pick an African deity and gave them the name of a Catholic saint, like San Lázaro or Santa Barbara. Olodumare is the creative and central force of Santería; everything comes from him and always come to him. Olodumare expresses himself in the world through the blood of cosmic life, called Ashe. Ashe is what gives Olodumare the power to life, strength and justice, and is the absolute base of reality. Olodumare also created the orishas (deities), that are the ones that protect the human race and they also give people guidance. An important and interesting fact about Santería is that not all the people that practice the

Even in the early 1500's african slaves began to escape from their Spanish and Portuguese owners; this was their form of resistance and they began, alongside the other "throw-away" people of colonial society (poor whites and the indigenous populations) to form "maroon societies." Maroon Societies had solidified the will to resist against oppression and challenged colonial exploitation. A yearning for liberty and freedom is what motivated

of ancient Egypt Greece, Rome, Persia, North Africa, Timbuktu, Asia, everything was bought out of morocco and the courts of Africa into Spain. At around the time of the Spanish Conquest of the Carribbean, a united Spain was established with the expulsion of the Moors.

The life of a slave was a difficult and systematic one. The land of a plantation was divided into four parts: one for the

Juan Morales

History of Resistance:

The Moors, Maroon Societies of the Caribbean, & Paseo Boricua

enslaved and oppressed individuals to resist. These maroon communities were also able to develop a unique sense of identity and history. The word *maroon* or *cimarrón* in *Spanish* derives from the term for Moor, the muslim civilization in Southern Spain. The word also means a wild pig. However, the Moors were nothing of the such.

The ancient Moors had helped develop Europe and Spain by bringing knowledge and order to the land. The moors had built cities in what is now known as Spain and there were more than seventeen universities in their territory. Scientific progress in astronomy, chemistry, geography, mathematics, physics, and philosophy flourished in Moorish Spain. They had formed learning societies to facilitate the spread of knowledge. When the moors moved into Europe they were able to established four dynasties while Europe had entered a dark age where they did not have a single library. The moors brought education with books entering from all over the world. Out

cultivation of sugar, yuca, plantains, and other foodstuffs for the leaves. Black slaves did the agricultural work and were supervised by their Spanish overseers, free mulattos, or other slaves who had earned the trust of their masters. Many male slaves learned to work as carpenters, ironworkers, boilers, boxers, and purifiers. In the early colonial period, the island of Hispaniola very large plantations had as many 900 slaves. Hispaniola had 35 plantations and sugar mills while Puerto Rico had 11. The continual importation of slaves to meet the rising demand of manual labor increased the black population. In Puerto Rico, blacks already outnumbered whites by 1530. Due to the demographic imbalance created by the importation and growth of the black population, Caribbean life, culture, and history was forever transformed. Another consequence was slave rebellions and the formation of communities of runaway slaves. By coming together they created communities to reconstruct their original African way of life.

"Freedom is nothing more than the possibility of human beings to understand the world around them, acting responsibly upon the world and most importantly, transforming the world. For freedom can take place within a human context". This statement speaks of the work and other potential possibilities of the Puerto Rican community. A great effort has been made by the Puerto Rican people to construct an ideal community that will allow us to transgress our realities. Connecting the meaning of the word *transgress*-to go beyond limits set- to a piece of literature written by Puerto Rican leader and national poet Juan Antonio Corretjer, "to live is to struggle," brings forward a great hope and responsibility to fully commit ourselves to social change, justice, and freedom.

One of the many institutions that have been formulated within the Puerto Rican community of Chicago is Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos Puerto Rican High School (PACHS). The mission of the

school is to engage students in a process of community building and critical thinking that will allow students to enter a world of amazing possibilities. The school engages students in an educational process where students can be active participants in their communities, by identifying real social issues, and then acting responsibly according to those issues. I believe the education that the school creates is a community of meaningful learning that redefines the term "education." PACHS' type of education equals empowerment towards the very soul of its students, and allows students to develop their potential and expand their capacity, gaining the ability to cope with and address the challenges of a dehumanizing world. Through this process students are able to redefine and heal their world around them. In this respect, PACHS and the Puerto Rican community of Paseo Boricua-Humboldt Park in Chicago is a modern day maroon society, a community of resistance.

Continued from page 18

movements with my magenta skirt, we soon became one instrument, the viola and bow. After getting many for my repiques right I decided to trick him, and that is when the audience claps and I realize I was on a stage. I give my respects to the drummer and finish

the battle with a undecided winner. As I paseo back to my place next to the cua and singers, my feet still burns as if my feet kept dancing, my soul was content, I can not wait till seis corrido comes the fastest rhythm of Bomba.

Continued from page 19

religion are called *santeros*, only the priests (or *babalaos*) are considered *santeros*.

People from Loíza have a strong sense of value for their African ancestry, and Puerto Ricans in general know how important

this town is for our culture, and history. If anyone ever wants to experience what Puerto Rico is really about, they should explore Loíza and if they have a chance go during the "Patronales" weekend in late July.

Born in a family of poet, from Vicente Palés Anes and Consuelo Matos Vicil on March 20,

1956, and it was published in 1957. Luis Palés Matos died on February 23, 1959.

Luis Palés Matos

Miosotis Cotto Santos

1898 in Puerto Rico, Luis Palés Matos is the figure considered to be the creator of the Afro-Antillano poetry genre. He started to write poems at the age of thirteen, and when he was seventeen he self-published collection of poetry, *Azaleas*. At that same age, Palés Matos had to drop out of school because of his family's financial situation, and started working different jobs to support himself.



At the age of 20, he married Natividad Suliveres, and had a son, Eduardo. A year later Natividad died. This event led him to write his second manuscript, *El Palacio en Sombras*, unfortunately this manuscript was not published. In 1921, with writer José T. de Diego

Padro on his side, they created a literary movement that they called "*Diepalismo*." That same year, the Puerto Rican newspaper *El Imparcial*, published the first collaborate written poem of the movement, *Orquestación Diepalica*. In 1926, with the publication of his poem *Pueblo Negro*, Palés Matos created a new genre called *Poesía Afro-Antillana* and in 1937, Palés Matos published *Tuntún de pasa y grifería*, a collection of the new genre. Most people considere Palés Matos the most important Puerto Rican lyric poet. His last publication was called *Poesía*, 1915-

Majestad Negra

Por la encendida calle antillana
va Tembandumba de la Quimbamba.
Rumba, macumba, candombe, bámbula,
entre dos filas de negras caras.
Ante ella un congo -gongo y maraca,
ritma una conga bomba que bamba.

Culipandeando la Reina avanza,
y de su inmensa grupa resbalan
meneos cachondos que el gongo cuaja
en ríos de azúcar y de melaza.
Prieto trapiche de sensual zafra,
el caderamen, masa con masa,
exprime ritmos, suda que sangra,
y la molienda culmina en danza.

Por la encendida calle antillana
va Tembandumba de la Quimbamba.
Flor de Tortola, rosa de Uganda,
por ti crepitan bombas y bámbulas;
por ti en calendas desenfrenadas
quema la Antilla su sangre ñañaiga.
Haití te ofrece sus calabazas;
fogones rones te da Jamaica;
Cuba te dice: idale, mulata!
Y Puerto Rico: imelao, melamba!

¡Sús, mis cocolos de negras caras!
Tronad, tambores; vibrad, maracas.
Por la encendida calle antillana.
Rumba, macumba, candombre, bámbula,
va Tembandumba de la Quimbamba.

NEIU Student Profile

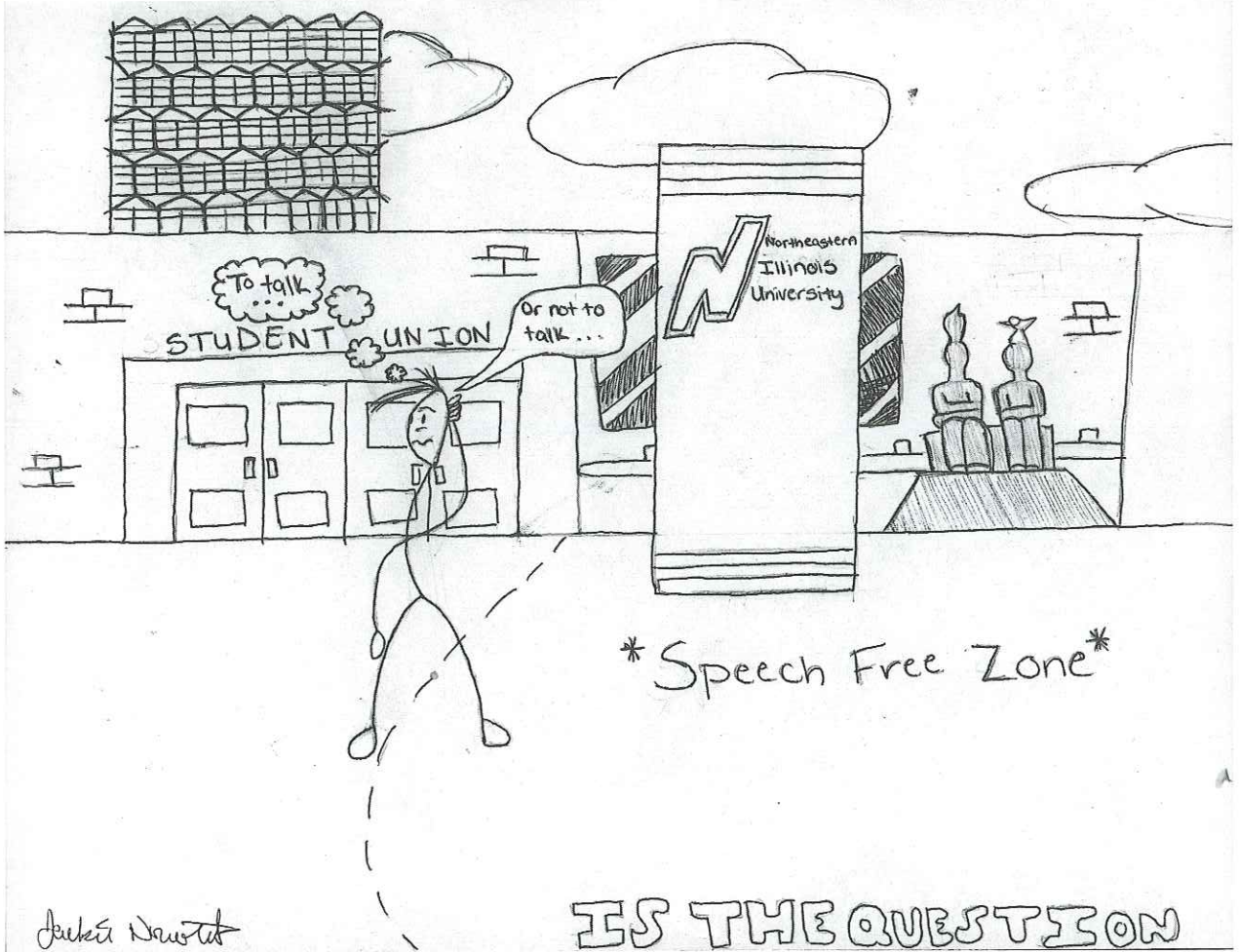
Christopher Pérez

Why did you choose to come to Northeastern?



Name: Maria Nichole Ocasio
Sex: Female
Age: 22
Nationality: Puerto Rican/ Honduran
Community of Residence: Oak Park
Major: History and Secondary Education
Year at NEIU: First Year Transfer Student

"Attending a big school, it's kind of hard to get resources and get in contact with the people you want to talk with. I like the good teachers here. They are a lot more willing to help you. They have more time. You get a lot more one on one meetings with people. I also chose this school to be closer to home, and it is really accessible. Another reason I chose this school is because I needed to join a good teaching program and NEIU has one."





Developing Academic Leadership through Engagement

Calendar of Events/Workshops

February

- 2/10** DALE Kick-Off
- 2/17** LLAS Faculty research Symposium, 9:25-10:40pm
- 2/19** Group Leadership Series:
Knowing what NEIU offers, 3-4pm
- 2/20** UIUC Conference
- 2/24** Latinos Avanzando Series:
Mario Gonzalez, Doctor, Clinica de Salud Integrada
- 2/26** Study Skills Workshop

April

- 4/2** Personal Commitment Skills Workshop
- 4/7** Group Leadership Series:
Understanding our role as students
- 4/8-4/12** NACCS Conference
- 4/9** Latinos Avanzando Series: Veronica Gonzalez,
Urban Developer,
East Lake Management & Development Corp.
- 4/13** Latinos Avanzando Series:
Teresa Ayala, Musician
- 4/14** DALE Movie, Food, and Discussion
- 4/14** Community Forum Lecture Series
- 4/16** Choosing a Major Workshop
- 4/28** Community Forum Lecture Series
- 4/30** DALE BBQ

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March

- 3/3** Group Leadership Series:
Knowing student organizations
- 3/3** Community Forum Lecture Series:
Rick Estrada Erie Neighborhood House
- 3/5** Application Skills Workshop
- 3/9-3/13** Revolutions Conference
- 3/10** DALE Job Conference
- 3/11** Latinos Avanzando Series:
Michelle Tellez, Professor in Women's Studies at
Arizona State University
- 3/12** Latinos Avanzando Series: Carolina Gaete,
Community Organizer, Blocks Together
- 3/17** Financial Management
- 3/17** **Matt Rodriguez (PRCC) Community
Forum Lecture Series**
- 3/19** Noche de Arte
- 3/31** Group Leadership Series:
Family & Education
- 3/31** Community Forum Lecture Series:
Salvador Pedroza
- 3/31-4/1** **Plantando Semillas Conference**

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(773) 442-4794

G-CORTEZ@NEIU.EDU

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