

# Latin America

*Guardian of the 21st Century*

Que  Ondee Sola

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In a fiery speech at the advent of the new century, the controversial populist President of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, proclaimed that the 21st century will be the century of Latin America. As a key representative of the “New Left” in Latin America, Chávez was symbolically foreshadowing the important role Latin America will play in reshaping the world.

If one is to understand the modern world, one only needs to look over 500 years ago, when feudal Europe shook of its medieval cloak and entered into a new stage of development. This was no accident. As Columbus landed onto the shores of the Caribbean, it was the subsequent brutal enslavement and genocide of the indigenous populations and the squandering of their natural resources that made that new stage possible. Furthermore, it was the devastation of Africa and the mass deportation and bondage of its peoples to colonial Latin America that also propelled Europe onto the pathway of modernity. In the midst of all this, began the composition of new peoples, new identities, and new strategies of resistance. Most importantly, alternative societies (to the rigid colonial system imposed by Europe) were created, most notably the maroon societies.

Even though Latin America has partially shrugged off the overt colonial enslavement of Europe, the United States has entered the scene under the banner of divine intervention and destiny. From the occupation of Puerto Rico and México, to the multiple interventions in Panamá, Dominican Republic, and Haiti, the U.S. rose to a superpower on the strained backs of its “backyard,” explicit in the Monroe Doctrine of 1823.

Nonetheless, with multiple revolutions, such as the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and the

Sandinista Rebellion in Nicaragua in 1979, Latin America has told the U.S. to get its hands off of the region. However, the 20th century was the self-proclaimed “American Century” and the noose from the North tightened, as the policies of neoliberalism became *à la mode*. Through deals with México, Chile, and Central America, poverty was exacerbated and forced millions into a diaspora to work in the Northern metropolis. Puerto Rico was its experiment station.

After the often failed urban and rural guerilla movements that spread across the region during the 1960s, 70’s, and 80s, many put down their guns and thought of a new way to build an equitable society: electoral politics. Thus began a wave of left-wing presidencies, from Hugo Chávez in Venezuela to Evo Morales in Bolivia, to the return of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua under Daniel Ortega. These leftist presidencies and governments continued the work to insert their nation’s marginalized who live in the *barrios* and *favelas* in a process of self-determination so they can build a bright collective future. The U.S. still looks on with great caution, meddling its dirty fingers once in a while.

From music to literature, art to language, those at the margins of colonial and post-independence Latin America have produced a different vision of the world. From reinventing education through the writings of Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, to re-imagining the future city through the “metrobus” system in Colombia, Latin America looks back at the abuses of the past and sees the future as a challenge full of possibilities. When late last year the Brazilian city of Río de Janeiro was chosen as the host city of the 2016 Summer Olympic Games – the second in Latin America and the “Third World” and the first in South America – the words of Hugo Chávez never echoed so true.

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## 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.

## Que Ondee Sola

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Venezuela, like a large part of Latin America, stands in ugly poverty. Many Venezuelans are left homeless, jobless, and hungry. Hugo Chávez is the President of Venezuela



# Hugo Chávez's

# Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela

as of February 2, 1999. As the leader of the Bolivarian Revolution, he promotes a political doctrine of participatory democracy, socialism, and Latin American and Caribbean cooperation. "The Bolivarian philosophy named for [Simón] Bolívar is a form of democratic socialism that repels perceived imperialism and rewards nationalism while promoting economic self-sufficiency of the nation as a whole," wrote Bridget Johnson from About.com. The United States media, most notably the New York Times, perpetuates the idea that he has been lazy, and over the last 11 years, he has done nothing, but sit on his chair. Chávez has been criticized by the United States for being Fidel Castro's ally and promoting left-wing causes in Latin America.

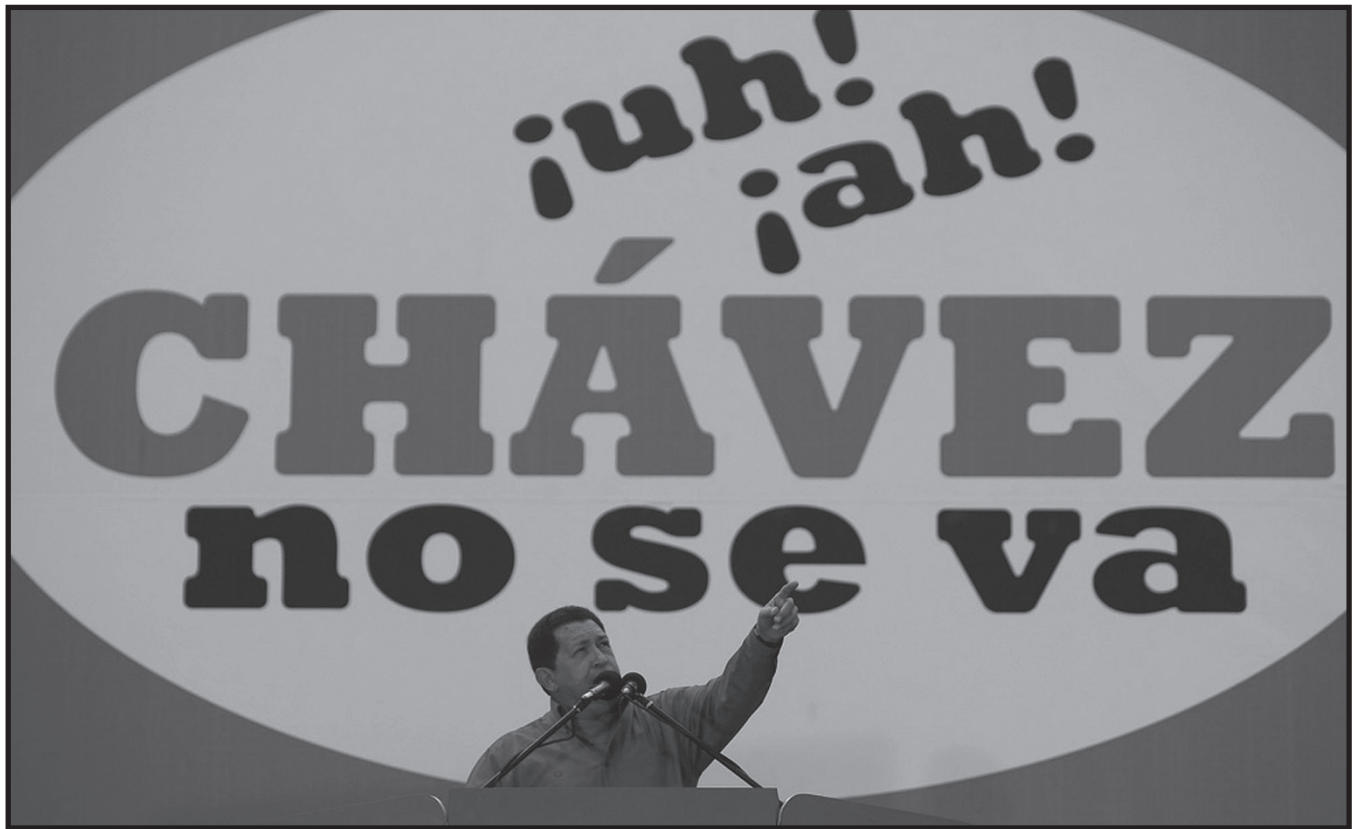
For the last 11 years Chávez has been known to speak for the poor and no one else. The Venezuelan President, just like everybody



else is far from perfect, but a man with goals and a vision for his country. He says he is first a revolutionary and a Bolivarian second. After Chávez came to power in 1998, a year later a new constitution was adopted that replaced the country's 1961 constitution. The country was officially re-named the "Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela." Chávez has support to push the Bolivarian Revolution. "The Bolivarian Alternative for the People of

Our America (ALBA) was launched in 2004 by Venezuela and Cuba as an alternative to the U.S.- backed Free Trade Area of the Americas," says Johnson. In 2009, when the membership of the group grew, they changed

by Richard Gott, recently updated and reissued, is the first account in English to place Chávez into an historical and intellectual context. Chávez has a magnetic personality of the Clintonian type, "a genuinely original figure



the name to Bolivarian Alliance for the People of Our America. It is a trade bloc that advances economically through government involvement, welfare, trade, and social reform.

Chávez is genuinely a popular figure in Venezuela and throughout Latin America. Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution

in Latin America," a radical left-wing nationalist and a pragmatic improviser, and certainly no dogmatic socialist. Chávez's program for Venezuela seems to be somewhat vague but his concern for the country's poor and marginalized is sincere and his practice is essentially democratic.





and the wealth associated with those resources from Latin America. Today this continues with neocolonialism through the multi-national corporation.

Poverty in Latin America has been attributed to many factors including the extraction of resources by foreign powers,

# Poverty & Neoliberalism in Latin America



and following economic models like neoliberalism. A combination of the three can be seen as the cause of the social inequality and ultimately the poverty in Latin America.

Latin America seems to be a favorite of multinational corporations in large part

How is it that Latin America, a region so rich in natural resources, has continually struggled with poverty? The current situation in Latin America can be traced back five hundred years to the beginnings of colonialism. Colonialism occurs when a foreign power maintains political, social, economic, and cultural domination over a people for an extended period of time (Schafer Pg. 225). Colonialism is the disturbing history of Latin America; foreign powers extracting resources

because of the deregulation of working conditions and wages and anything else that could stifle profits of these corporations in Latin America. There are very few solid worker's unions and even fewer worker's rights. The largest and most consistent problem is probably the redistribution of any wealth garnered. Failure to redistribute the wealth is felt the hardest in the rural areas of Latin America. There is no investment placed

into the infrastructure of these rural parts. In some areas clean water is scarce and running water is non-existent. México, for example, is one of the most severely stratified countries in the world. The World Bank reported that in 2006 20 percent of México's population survived on 2 dollars a day while the wealthiest 10 percent of the nation accounted for 39 percent of the entire nation's income. This gap is astounding, especially because México is so rich in natural resources. This was only perpetuated with the implementation of NAFTA.

The North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was created by the leaders of the United States, México, and Canada. NAFTA passed under the presidency of Bill Clinton and went into effect on January 1, 1994. The

of the neo-liberal model implementation in México, including privatization, there were 22 new billionaires in México after NAFTA.

In contrast, Chile has been used a relatively successful example of the neo-liberal model. The model was constructed by 25 Chilean economists to stop inflation and prevent collapse and included sharp reductions to government spending and the money supply, privatization of state-owned companies, and the elimination of obstacles to free enterprise and foreign investment. At the time inflation topped-out at an annual rate of 1,000% and foreign-currency reserves were totally depleted. The model was successful in reducing inflation, however it did nothing to alleviate the social or economic inequalities in Chile.

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**“This free market capitalism had intended to alleviate poverty and lessen social and economic inequality. This has not been the case. Inequality has widened.”**

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2,000-page document eliminated foreign tariffs and opened up México to foreign trade. Then-President Carlos Salinas of México, said the new agreement would help México become a first rate country. The agreement also served as a way to reduce wages paid to Mexican laborers. The new deregulation and lower wages had an intense effect on the U.S.-Mexican border; sweatshops began to pop-up and soon became a norm in those towns. The agreement was essentially a method of exploiting Mexican workers. The sweatshops or *maquiladoras* are notorious for exploiting women's labor; they follow almost no environmental regulations, and the one that are in place are not enforced. As a result

Neo-liberalism has also been blamed for the current economic state in Latin America. It is an economic policy that promotes free trade, deregulation of the multinational corporations, and privatization of state-run resources. This free market capitalism had intended to alleviate poverty and lessen social and economic inequality. This has not been the case. Inequality has widened.

Following the neo-liberal model, the state does not interfere in free market trade and therefore some multinational corporations have behaved like children in a candy store. These corporations blatantly exploit workers where they reside. The effects of these specific

factors have had long lasting results in Latin America, including forced migration, increased crime and violence, and a thirst for revolution and change in Latin America.

In terms of forced migration, using Puerto Rico as an example, after the initial occupation of the island by the United States, it transitioned from a diversified economy that depended on a hand-full of crops to a monoculture economy that was based on sugarcane. Eventually the population began to grow and the demand for sugar began to drop. This change in circumstances led to a high unemployment rate, poverty, and desperate conditions in Puerto Rico. This in turn led the mass migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States. This is just one instance when imperial interventions lead to the worsening of conditions in other countries and this can be seen throughout Latin America. Even worse, forced migrants run the risk of being criminalized as well as entering into even worse conditions.

Crime and violence as a result of poverty can also be seen in several Latin American countries. Impoverished people desperate to get ahead often turn to crime as a way to achieve some sort of upward mobility. A blatant example of this is the drug trade in Latin America. Several countries are havens for the drug trade. The poor in Latin America often fall into the hands of drug cartels, participating in these illicit activities serves as a means to leave the *barrio*.

The most historically significant reaction to poverty and inequality is revolution. The history of Latin America is peppered with instances of revolution from initial independence of Spain and Portugal to more contemporary examples like the Cuban Revolution. Once the masses cannot bear the situation in their respective countries they seek change. Revolution almost definitely destabilizes a countries political structure and also leads to a destabilization of social and economic systems. This transition period is important because it sets the beginnings of a new regime and new infrastructure. These revolutions are often frowned upon by imperial powers because they serve to disrupt the status quo.

Implementing a series of social and economic policies that address the current poverty in Latin America is essential. Serious efforts need to be made to efficiently redistribute the wealth and resources made from Latin America back into to Latin America. Investing in the infrastructure by developing sewer and water systems and other basic human necessities—which are non-existent in some part of the region. It is important that we do not, as we do with so many other things, become complacent and accept poverty in Latin America as a normal or natural occurrence. Latin America cannot be destined to live in poverty. These issues needs to be at the center when discussing the status and future of Latin America.





# The Cuban Revolution After Fidel



Peter Ashton, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/peamasher/3835110071>

The Cuban Revolution culminated on January 1, 1959 when then-President Fulgencio Batista was forced to flee Cuba after a series of armed military movements led by Fidel Castro. Though Castro was successful in taking Cuba, the Cuban Revolution continued as a series of social and economic reforms. Fidel Castro or *El Comandante* as he is also known, as the country's new president was a nationalist and anti-imperialist, which led him to rebel against the then neo-colonial state of Cuba.

The series of reforms set in motion by Castro included: redistribution of wealth, riding the island of homosexuality, and revamping the

country's healthcare and education systems. Like almost every other newly formed socialist government, the first act of the new Cuban government was the Agrarian Reform Act, which redistributed private land—including those of Castro's family, to the workers of Cuba. This first step towards socialism took place in January of 1969. It was a way to make Cuba a more egalitarian society and lessen the gap between the have and have-nots. The new government also went through a process of riding the island of deviant sexual activity. Fidel saw homosexuality as an undesirable concoction of the bourgeoisie and agents of imperialism. In the early years of the revolution homosexuals were frequently jailed

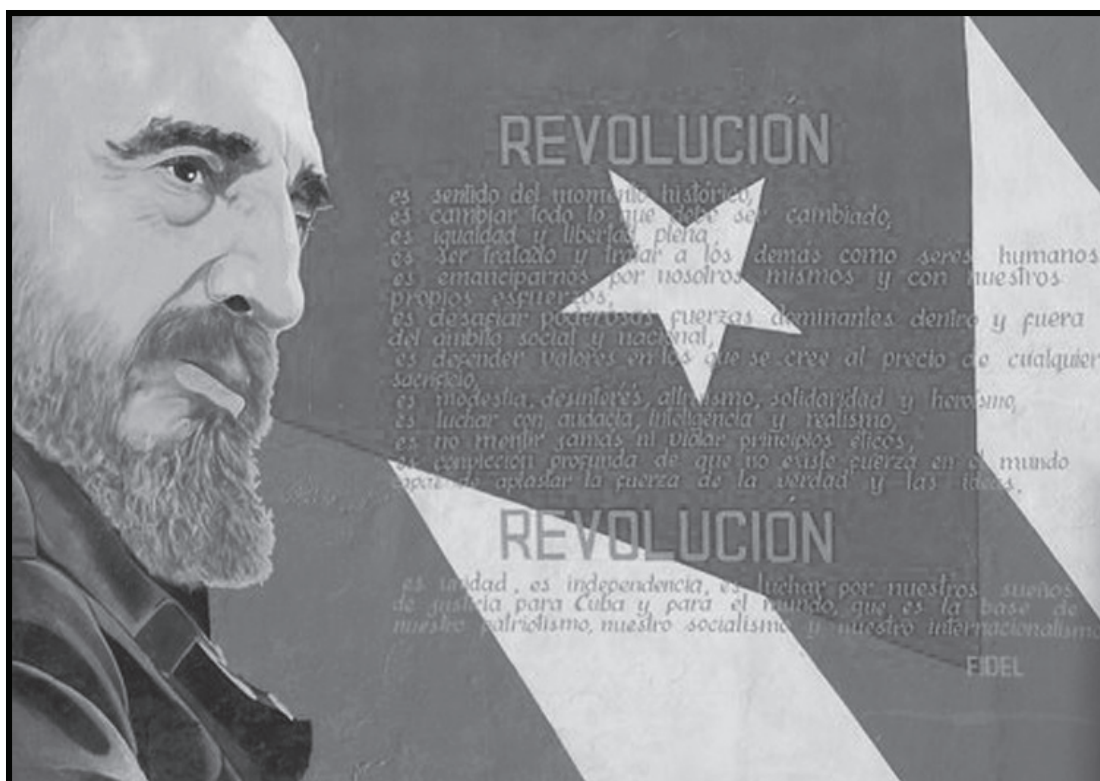
without cause. There were even instances of men and boys being sent to forced labor camps to be “reeducated” as well as undergoing aversion therapy.

A more positive aspect of the revolution was the change in the education and healthcare systems. Before the revolution in Fulgencio Batista’s Cuba there were huge social inequalities. Some statistics from the 1953 census show that 25% of Cuba’s population was illiterate and 70% was functionally illiterate. Also, 60% had less than a third grade education and only 1.1 % of Cuba’s population had graduated from a university.

Moreover, with the new regime change came changes in policy between the United States and Cuba. The United States and Cuba had a tense relationship since the late 19th century but only since Fidel Castro took power did these relations take a dramatic turn. Since Castro’s ascent to power five decades ago, the United States has held Cuba in a virtual economic chokehold. The trade embargo, also known as *el bloqueo* in Spanish, was enacted in October of 1960

after Fidel had nationalized all United States companies in Cuba. Currently, as part of his plan to address key issues dealing with Latin America, Barack Obama has tried to open relations with Cuba by easing restrictions on travel and remittances by Cuban family members. Although steps have been taken toward a better policy in regards to Cuba, the Obama administration has made it clear that the United States has no intention of lifting the embargo until Cuba embraces democratic and human rights reform.

On February 24, 2006, in a statement released through the state run newspaper, *Granma*, Fidel Castro announced he would not return to power as President: “I communicate to you that I will not aspire to or accept — I repeat not aspire to or accept — the positions of President of Council of State and Commander in Chief.” With this statement Fidel Castro



Jeremy Bergin, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/jburgin/2960766873/>

ended his 49-year term as President of Cuba. Subsequently, the Cuban National Assembly named Raúl Castro the new President. In his first speech as president, Raúl Castro emphatically stated that his brother Fidel was one and only and he was irreplaceable.

Shortly after coming to power Raúl Castro began enacting a series of changes that hinted towards the partial abandonment of socialism and adoption of aspects of capitalism. This was denied in a statement released by the Cuban government. The initial acts of the series of "revisions" included lifting bans on Cubans staying in hotels and the effort to make Cuba more consumer friendly by allowing residents to purchase personal computers, cell phones, and household appliances. Though some say

barbershops and beauty salons over to its employees. Castro is permitting barbershops and beauty salons with fewer than three chairs to begin renting out chairs. This is important because it is the first time Cuba has turned over a state run establishment over to its employees since they were nationalized in the late 1960's. In terms of dealing with sexuality on the island today, Mariela Castro, director of Cuba's National Center for Sex Education and daughter of Raúl Castro, has called for homophobia on the island to end. She has also said the policy of the past needs to be examined and recognized as an error.

Today Cuba continues to exemplify what can be done if serious investment is placed into a country's infrastructure. Cuba still boasts one

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that these changes are positive steps towards a democratic Cuba, they serve a latent function. These changes help to highlight and promote economic inequality on the island. The fact is that the only ones who can afford to stay in a hotel or activate a cell phone are those individuals who are either working within the tourist industry or those who receive remittances from families members outside of Cuba. Owning a cell phone has become a status symbol and being able to afford to use one evermore so.

A more recent example of change in Cuba came in April 2010. Raúl Castro turned

of the highest literacy rates in the world.

What can be interpreted as a indicator of the current relationship between Cuba and the United States is the recent statement by U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton that Cuba's leadership did not want to "normalize" relations between the two countries, because they would lose their excuses for the country's economic stagnation. The comments made by Clinton provoked a harsh response from Cuba's state radio, which stated that Clinton's comments were "mixed ignorance and falsehoods at an infinite level."





# Fortuño *The Terrible*

from 27 seats to 17. According to McClintock, “It’s a lot bigger than it needs to be. Every seat represents at least half a million in expenditures” (Centre Daily News). However, there was already an island-wide vote a few years ago regarding this issue and the

proposal to create a one house legislative system or “unicameralidad” won. This vote was boycotted and its results subsequently ignored by Fortuño’s party, *Partido Nuevo Progresista* (PNP).

The proposal puts Fortuño’s pro-statehood party against disagreeing lawmakers who favor keeping Puerto Rico’s commonwealth status - two camps that rarely agree. A handful of House Representatives from Fortuño’s party claim not to be eager about the bill. Fortuño earlier this year laid off 17,000 workers. These laid off workers include civil servants like educators, transportation workers, engineers, traffic planners. Union officials questioned Fortuño’s plan and argued that the substantial layoffs would destroy Puerto Rico’s fragile economy. Subsequently, the unemployment rate increased from 15% to 17%.

Puerto Rican Senate Minority Whip Eduardo Bhatia proposed an alternative plan to cut the daily workday of all government employees by 30 minutes to try to save their jobs. Bhatia asserted that about 40 percent of government employees are “single mothers and couples going through the loss of both

At the start of his second year office, Luis Fortuño, Puerto Rico’s governor, turned in a bill that would cut 30 percent of the seats in the U.S. territory’s legislature. A constitutional referendum would be required if the bill gets approved. Governor Fortuño’s administration claims the reform could cut \$11 million from annual operating costs while improving government competence. Kenneth McClintock, Puerto Rico’s Secretary of State, said the proposal would cut the House from 51 seats to 39 and the Senate

incomes” (DeMelle, 10/9/09: Huffington Post). This was ignored by Fortuño’s government.

With the unemployment rate higher than any state in the United States, Puerto Rico also struggles with a \$3.2 billion budget shortage. Bhatia invited the fired workers to go to the Senate session on October 1 with the hope

The group waited in a hallway outside of the Senate visitor’s gallery for three hours. The Senate Vice-President then announced that he would not be letting the group enter the visitor’s gallery. In an email, Bhatia wrote, “They were never allowed into the gallery, violating the Constitution of Puerto Rico which clearly states that all sessions of the Senate are



that the government will have sympathy for the unemployed workers. When 150 workers attempted to attend with their pink slips (given to those who were waiting to be laid off) in front of the Senate building, the police blocked the doors. Along with other legislative members, Bhatia tried to convince the police to let the workers into the building.

public. Some majority senators expressed later that ‘public’ means that they should be televised” (DeMelle, 10/9/09: Huffington Post). In the end, Fortuño fired the thousands of employees, which prompted a massive one-day strike participated by over 200,000 people.





# To Study & To Struggle:

A Massive Student Strike Paralyzes the University of Puerto Rico



Some say that the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) was founded in 1903 in order to produce a local intelligentsia subservient to the demands of the United States, which only five years earlier ripped the island from Spain. In the 107 years since, the exact opposite has taken place.

In 1948, pro-independence students invited the president of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party, Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos, as a guest speaker, who recently had been released after serving ten years in a U.S. prison. The then-chancellor of the UPR's Río Piedras campus, Jaime Benítez, refused to allow Albizu Campos to enter, prompting student protests. In response, a group of student leaders who held Puerto Rican flags, which was illegal

during the time, were expelled.

In 1970, a massive student struggle emerged in the midst of the Vietnam War, calling for the removal of the ROTC from the Río Piedras campus. During the conflict, a policeman killed a young student, Antonia Martínez Lagares, who subsequently became a symbol of the Puerto Rican student movement.

On April 21, 2010 a new student movement commenced in response to the austerity measures proposed by the UPR President, José Ramón de la Torre, and the Governor of Puerto Rico, Luis Fortuño, spawning an indefinite strike that is paralyzing the UPR system and brought international attention to the island.



Entering his second year in office, the right-wing and pro-statehood governor has proven to have little respect for Puerto Rico's institutions. From firing nearly 20,000 government employees that provoked a massive one-day general strike to cutting the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture's budget in half to getting rid of the membership requirement for lawyers to one of the island's oldest institutions, the Puerto Rican Bar Association, Fortuño is reshaping the island, as many believe, in order to prepare it for statehood.

The UPR is no exception to Fortuño's reign of terror. A new proposal, Certification 98, passed by the university's Board of Trustees, eliminates fee exceptions for student athletes and university employees and their families. Furthermore, there is a proposed budget cut of up to \$100 million. In response, a student-driven Negotiating Committee of 16 members were created and a list of demands were composed, which includes alternative measures to the massive budget cuts. These measures include the budget

reduction of the burdensome Office of the President and a call for payment of multiple private and public entities that owe the university millions of dollars. The UPR president and the Río Piedras chancellor, Ana Guadalupe, refused to meet with the committee and washed their hands of the issue by transmitting their demands to the Board of Trustees, which are dragging their feet to review them.

Thus, on April 13 over 3,000 students from the Río Piedras campus assembled in an auditorium and the majority of those present voted in favor of a 48-hour strike. The UPR administration still refuses to meet with the students.

Now the UPR is experiencing an indefinite strike, which has expanded to include eight of



the 11 campuses throughout the island.

Hundreds of students and staff even occupied, for a time, the Río Piedras campus until Riot Police, at the insistence of the Chancellor, forcefully removed them. Then she officially closed down the university's operations, locked the main entrance, and ordered police to guard the campus. This prompted a student lawsuit and the Puerto Rican Supreme Court ordered the university to re-open its gates by May 3. Meanwhile, hundreds of students have congregated at the gates, holding theatrical performances, discussions, and even clean-ups and beautification projects of the surrounding area.

The response of support for the UPR strike

Nonetheless, the opposition has remained firm. Fortuño himself, a day before the concert, spoke directly to the strike in his yearly "State of the Commonwealth" address. In his incendiary speech, which received massive applause by the pro-statehood controlled Congress, he chastised the students for abusing their "privilege," especially in the face of such a gracious government system. Reminiscent of a national speech by Mexican President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz when confronting massive student protests on the eve of the 1968 Olympics, Fortuño said that the people of Puerto Rico are of law and order and believe in democracy. At the conclusion of his address, he said "...we are here, ready and willing to offer the help... to protect the rights of all the students – both

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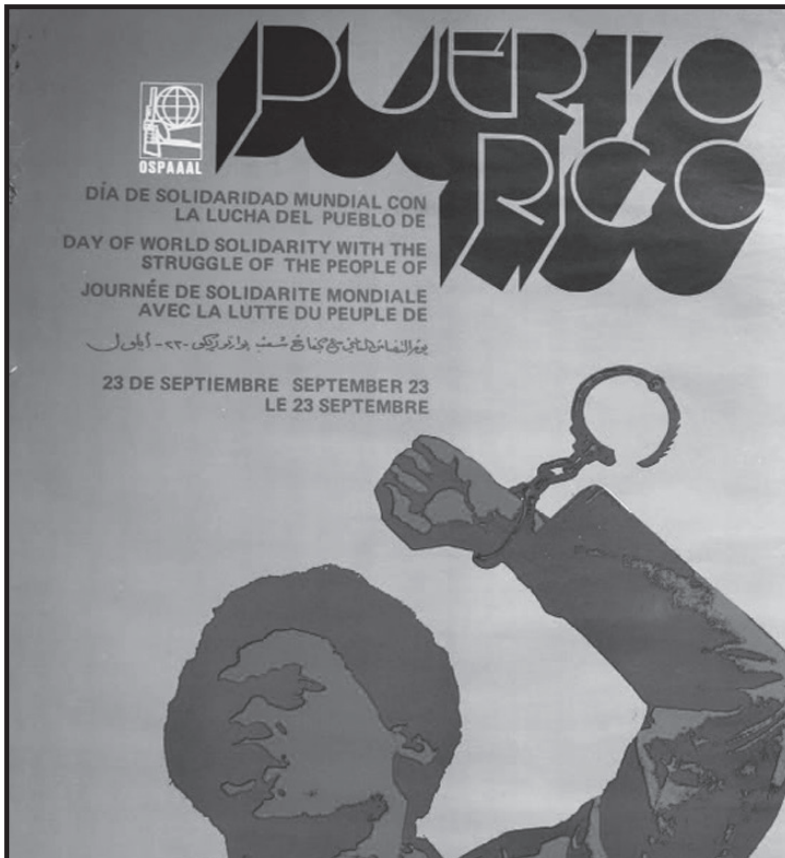
**“Hundreds of students and staff even occupied, for a time, the Río Piedras campus until Riot Police, at the insistence of the Chancellor, forcefully removed them.”**

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has been major. The official Student Council of Río Piedras initially opposed the action but soon joined the Negotiating Committee. The Puerto Rican Association of University Professors and the Committee of Students of Private Universities have also joined the strike. Moreover, on April 27, a huge concert with thousands of students, called “¡Que Vivan Los Estudiantes!” - “Long Live The Students!”, was held in front of the locked gates of the Río Piedras campus. Musical artists from the island and around the world, such as Calle 13, Ricky Martin, Rubén Blades, and Juanes, offered their support.

to the miniscule group that protest to the immense majority of those who want classes to continue.”

As mentioned earlier, there is a long trajectory of student struggle at the UPR, proving that one of the most important institutions in Puerto Rico is producing minds eager to reshape the challenge with a fair dialogue and open arms or continue a tradition that left the Plaza of Tlatelolco in México City stained with blood in the summer of '68.



referendum was held. The option, “None of the Above” won. Twelve years later, another pro-statehood regime, now under auspices of Governor Luis Fortuño and his right-hand man, Resident Commissioner Pedro Pierluisi, who is the island’s only representative to the House, is pushing for another Congressional referendum. This time though, it passed the House by 273 votes, with 169 in opposition. Is this bill really providing democracy to Puerto Rico?

One problem: Puerto Rico has never, ever, in the entire 112-year history of the U.S. occupation of the island, has been allowed self-determination. Every organic act by the U.S. Congress

## There is **No** Democracy in *Puerto Rico* The Farce of the Puerto Rico Democracy Act of 2009

On April 29, the United States House of Representatives approved the Puerto Rico Democracy Act of 2009 or Bill 2499, leading the push for a nonbinding referendum on Puerto Rico’s status with the U.S. Nothing is new and certainly, nothing is certain.

In 1998, the Young Bill passed through that branch of the U.S. legislature by one vote and stalled in the Senate. In response to the inaction of the U.S. government, under the pro-statehood regime of then-Governor Pedro Rosselló, an island-wide and nonbinding

has been without the full consultation of the Puerto Rico people.

The Foraker Act of 1900 removed the martial law inflicted on Puerto Ricans since 1898 and established a governor for the island – handpicked by the U.S. President, of course.

The Jones Act of 1917 imposed U.S. citizenship onto Puerto Ricans just in time to draft its men into World War I.

In the 1922, U.S. Supreme Court case, *Balzac v. Porto Rico* (the U.S. changed “Puerto” to



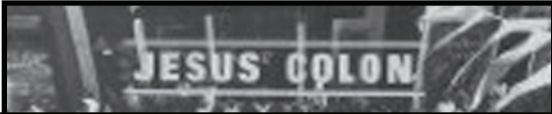
“Porto” to fit its linguistic needs after the 1898 invasion), the island legally was defined as “belong[ing] to, but...not a part of” the United States.” That legal standing of being an unincorporated territory has not changed, even with Public Law 600 signed by then-President Truman in 1951, allowing for the island to have a constitution. The only vote of that era was whether Boricuas wanted not to have a constitution or to have one. There was no option for a constitution as an independent or sovereign republic or any other status option for that matter.

By July 25, 1952 (the anniversary of the U.S. invasion) when Puerto Rico officially became the “Estado Libre Asociado” or “Freely Associated State,” and the Puerto Rican flag, which was illegal until then, became the official (and redesigned) symbol of this new “autonomous” territory, some believed that the island reached a new era. Though it was officially removed a year later from the list of colonial positions (at the request of the U.S. government, not the Puerto Rican people) from the United Nation’s decolonization committee, the U.S. Congress still is the dominant force on the island. The Puerto Rican Constitution itself says that *all* Federal Laws supersede island laws. Thus, there is no “free association.” That is a bold face lie!

What is an even greater lie is the idea that Bill 2499 will provide democracy for Puerto Rico. The U.S. Congress has never granted a legally binding (meaning they are obligated to follow through) referendum for the Puerto Rican people to decide our future, despite having full constitutional authority on the island. Bill 2499

does not even provide a binding referendum for the island. It provides a two-step symbolic nonbinding vote. First, whether Puerto Ricans are content with the present status or not. If not, a second vote will be held with the options of Statehood, full Independence, Associated Republic (independence with some matters in the control of the U.S.), or, yet again, “Commonwealth.” To the lament of Fortuño, the “Commonwealth” option was tagged on last minute, which clearly contradicts the first vote, but is a clear message that the U.S. Congress is afraid that people will vote for statehood. Even the *estadistas* recognize that the U.S. is conducting a colonial enterprise on the island, benefiting through millions of dollars the Social Security benefits that Puerto Rican workers feed into the system, the billions of dollars spent on U.S. consumer products, and the multiple military installations.

Furthermore, what the pro-statehood movement is not telling the Boricua people is that the United States Congress, even if Puerto Ricans one day go insane and vote for statehood by an immense majority, does not have to grant it. It’s a nonbinding referendum! Moreover, even if the path to eventual statehood is made by the U.S. Congress, it could take nearly 100 years, as it did to states like Alaska and New México. Just like the 1922 Supreme Court case, Puerto Rico is like a T-shirt, to be taken off or buttoned up when convenient; it is just property that happens to have 4 million people. True democracy is allowing the Puerto Rican people to decide. Democracy is self-determination, not lies.



Penniless, Colón arrives in Brooklyn in 1917 and experiences a double consciousness

# A Puerto Rican in **New York** *and Other Sketches*



*A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches*, by Jesus Colón, is his metamorphosis from an ignorant immigrant to a politically-savvy, culturally-conscious communist. As the title suggests, his trajectory begins in Puerto Rico and ends (or starts) in Nueva York. More than an introspective journey, it chronicles the imposed diaspora of millions of Puerto Ricans from their native island to New York's concrete jungle a la Oscar Handlin's *The Uprooted*. Through this series of sketches and vignettes, the reader sees the subtle ways in which Colón's political enlightenment unfolds juxtaposed with the enlightenment of an entire people. This is not to say that Colón's ideas, which gradually become more extreme and leftist, reflect those of the Nuyorican population, but rather that the newly experience of living in the United States changes every Puerto Rican's social perceptions in one way or another.

not unlike that which plagues the narrator of *Invisible Man*: he is black and Latino. Discriminated against by both whites and fellow Latinos, he quickly takes it upon himself to learn English, to master the language, and to found a series of communist newspapers. Colón is unique in that he makes it a point to only write and speak in English—his way of fending off against the discrimination. He is also unique in that he openly defies the U.S.' two Red Scares (1917-1920 and 1947-1957). The second Red Scare, notoriously orchestrated by Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy, was particularly tough on Colón and his newspapers. He was constantly harassed and threatened with death and his newspapers were essentially run into the ground by McCarthy and company. Despite it all, Colón continued to fight for his socialist ideals.

Many sections of this book read like run-of-the-mill communist propaganda. These sections can be brutal, and I advise skipping them. Dive into the poetry of his work, for example, entitled "Little Things Are Big," in which he's in a subway station pondering whether he should help a white woman with a baby in her arms descend the long, steep stairway leading into Atlantic Avenue.

The book is filled with illustrations that

highlights the poignancy, and *alegría*, of his life as a “Puerto Rican Negro,” as he jokingly called himself. Even the cover is illuminated by an overhead photograph of a salsa band playing in an overcrowded New York street; the type of photograph any Puerto Rican can expect to find in old family albums.

The book is a good read for anyone who wants to find out more about, or downright discover, the Nuyorican experience. It is one man’s history, self-magnified and scrutinized and—most painstakingly—told for the benefit of our people.

by Jazmine Zúñiga

Each town in Puerto Rico, in honor of their Patron Saint, annually celebrates “*Las Fiestas Patronales*.” As a Catholic tradition, these festivals include religious processions and have adopted elements of African origin.

*Las Fiestas Patronales* displays



# Las Fiestas Patronales

## in Puerto Rico

many colors of pride and joy and also includes parades, games, rides, arts and crafts, comida criolla, and live musical shows. These activities and entertainment are held on weekdays during the evenings and all day on the weekends. All types of individuals from children to elders attend these festivals.

The town of Loíza Aldea, which has a large African-descent population, has one of the most known and attended festivals. During the celebration, the main attraction is the *vejigantes*, an afro-caribbean version of a trickster or jester. The mask is the most important part of the costume and is usually

made out of coconut, but many people are now using paper maché. Other characters included in the festivals are the *locas*, the *viejos*, and the *caballeros*.

In San Juan, the capital, “*La Noche de San Juan Bautista*” or Saint John the Baptist, who is the Patron Saint of the island, is celebrated with a gathering of people on the beach. At midnight, the people walk backwards and jump three times to wash away any bad luck and to bring fortune, good luck, and health.

The San Sebastián Street Festival or *Festival de la Calle de San Sebastián* is an annual street



party in Viejo San Juan, the colonial part of the city, with live music from local artists, and people dancing to *salsa, plena, merengue*, etc.

With months of preparation and anticipation, arrangements are made to make the Patron

Saints Festival possible and enjoyable. In many occasions, with the support from those who migrated from other cities and the U.S., also attend these festivals to encourage connections with the community and strengthen their identities.

## The Day that Governor Fortuño Forgot the Definition of “**Democracy**”

Celebrating a mass at the Puerto Rico governor's mansion on April 25, in honor of a group of anti-Castro Cuban women who protest the Cuban government's detention of anti-government militants, pro-statehood governor Luis Fortuño told the press it was disrespectful to compare the situation of the Puerto Rican political prisoners with those detained in Cuba, I because, “contrary to Puerto Rico, Cuba does not enjoy a democracy where citizens can speak freely.”<sup>2</sup>

The governor seems to have forgotten that the platform of his pro-statehood New Progressive Party argues that U.S. colonial control over Puerto Rico is the antithesis of democracy, as articulated by former governor Carlos Romero Barceló, one of its most fervent advocates, at a 1998 congressional hearing:

The unresolved dilemma of Puerto Rico's status is the single most important long-term issue of concern to all Puerto Ricans; it permeates every aspect of our political and economic life and it holds our future hostage. 1998 marks the centennial

anniversary of the end of the Spanish-American War and the beginning of Puerto Rico's status as an unincorporated territory of the United States. It marks one hundred years of Congressional indifference to the Puerto Rican dream of political equality; and it marks a century through which the democratic rights of the people of Puerto Rico have been ignored; unhappily I may add, as a result of our acquiescence and our inaction and acceptance of *a relationship which denies democracy to almost 4 million U.S. citizens.*<sup>3</sup>

Democracy cannot exist in a colony; a colony is the antithesis of democracy. Indeed, the Republican governor also seems to have forgotten the 2005 and 2007 findings of Republican U.S. president Bush's Task Force on Puerto Rico that Puerto Rico remains a juridical colony, a non-self-governing territory, subject to U.S. Congress' plenary authority under the Territory Clause.<sup>4</sup> Under this power, the report says, Congress could even cede Puerto Rico to another nation.<sup>5</sup>

And this colonial administrator also seems to

have forgotten that for close to three decades, the United Nations Decolonization Committee has annually adopted resolutions reaffirming the inalienable right of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination and independence in conformity with General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV) and the applicability of the fundamental principles of that resolution to the question of Puerto Rico, and calling upon the U.S. to expedite a process that will allow the Puerto Rican people fully to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and independence, as well as to release the long-held political prisoners serving sentences in U.S. prisons for cases related to the struggle for the independence of their nation.<sup>6</sup> Did the governor forget that the Puerto Rican political prisoners were in prison because of their struggle for those very democratic rights so lacking in their... and his... nation?

The governor, it seems, did not recall that they were convicted of seditious conspiracy— a thought crime— and that the presiding judge instructed the jury that whether or not they actually took action “or whether they were successful in doing so, is really not the substantive charge of the conspiracy.”<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps the governor also forgot that the U.S. is virtually the only country in the world that holds political prisoners for as long the 29 and 30 years it has held Oscar López Rivera and Carlos Alberto Torres.

Finally, the governor apparently forgot that the founder of his pro-statehood party, Luis A. Ferré, supported the release of the Puerto Rican political prisoners... including Carlos Alberto Torres and Oscar López Rivera.

It's not too late, governor, to recoup your memory, and join in the nation's widely held belief that the U.S. should at long last release Puerto Rican political prisoners Carlos Alberto Torres and Oscar López Rivera from prison.

*Jan Susler*  
*Lawyer for the political prisoners*

*Lcdo. Eduardo Villanueva Muñoz*  
*Spokesperson of Comité de Derechos Humanos*

*National Boricua Human Rights Network:*  
*Alejandro Molina*  
*Michelle Morales*

*28 de abril del 2010*

## Que Ondee Sola Briefs

**On Thursday, March 4 from 5:30-6:30pm**, the Union for Puerto Rican Students (UPRS) hosted a panel discussion during “University Day” called **Free Speech at NEIU: A Noble (and Charged) History**. The discussion was on the History, Mission, & Activism of UPRS. We were invited to participate by former UPRS member and now Director of University Outreach and Equal Employment, Dr. Roberto Sanabria.

The powerpoint and discussion was organized and presented by UPRS members, Jessie Fuentes,

Jazmine Zúñiga, and Ashley Arce. Our moderator was Prof. Kingsley Clarke, Justice Studies.

**On Thursday, April 1 from 1:40-2:40pm**, *Que Ondee Sola* organized a discussion with world-renowned Puerto Rican fine artist, Richard Santiago for our event **Arte Boricua**. At the event, Santiago discussed his art, island politics, and showed the audience a brief preview of his new documentary on the boxing phenomena in Puerto Rico and its impact on national identity.

# 5th Annual Plantando Semillas

## The Effort to Make LLAS into a Major at NEIU

On March 30, *Que Ondee Sola* (QOS) magazine and the Union for Puerto Rican Students (UPRS) organized our 5th annual Plantando Semillas event. The educational gathering was done in collaboration with the Latino and Latin American Studies program (LLAS), the Movimiento Cultural Latino Americano (MCLA), and members from Alpha Psi Lambda.

Plantando Semillas was first introduced to Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) in 2005 by QOS and UPRS in order to support and bring awareness of the LLAS program to university students.

Latina/o students, like myself, find it important to support the minor so that we could be able to get more in touch with our roots and bring this awareness to other Latino/a students at this university. However, not only is this minor important for the Latino/a students, but also for non-Latinos/os. A growing number of the population, not only at NEIU, but also across the nation, is Latino/a. As our population grows, so does our importance. While in High school I received no knowledge of Latino/a history and culture, despite going to a public school that was in a Puerto Rican community. I was taught more European-focused studies and forced to learn the U.S. Constitution in order to graduate. Having Latino and Latin American studies will enable me to make up for what I did not learn in high school and to be able to mentor those like me

who know nothing of their culture and history.

This year's Plantando Semillas was dedicated to educate on and support the LLAS program in its quest to become a major at NEIU. At the event Dr. Kimberley Sanborn presented a slide show stating the goals of the program and details of the major proposal and answered important questions from the audience regarding the process. LLAS program director, Víctor Ortíz, presented the process of how to make the LLAS minor into a major, which will be going through multiple hierarchies of the university, including the university president, Sharon Hahs (who briefly attended the event), and the Board of Trustees. One of the members of the Board of Trustees, Carlos Azcoitia, attended the event, where he also made a powerful speech.

As for student support, some members of Alpha Psi Lambda spoke on the importance of LLAS become a major, not only to them personally but how it will benefit the entire university. This point was reiterated by the members of MCLA, who called-upon Latina/o students at NEIU to assist in making this a reality. As of now the proposal for the LLAS major is going through the process, and *Que Ondee Sola* will be sure to continue to support it and provide information on it through our magazine and events.



**Puerto Rico NO SE VENDE**

