

Puerto Rican Nationalism in Chicago

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ABSTRACT

This article explores Puerto Rican nationalism in the Humboldt Park neighborhood of Chicago. It analyzes how, why, and by what means activists, born and raised in the diaspora and working with the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, define themselves as members of the Puerto Rican nation. These activists' identity embraces their reality in Chicago and reinforces their familial, socio-economic, cultural, historical, and political ties to the island. Their experiences, identities, choices, and realities expand and update the possibilities and conception of Puerto Rican nationalism in the twenty-first century. They define the Puerto Rican nation as territorially based on the island and including the now majority Puerto Rican population living in the diaspora. [Key words: Chicago, nationalism, diaspora, Puerto Rican Cultural Center]

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On June 14, 2014, thousands of people lined Paseo Boricua (Division Street), the main street that runs through the traditional heart of the Puerto Rican community in Chicago, to cheer the thirty-fifth annual Puerto Rican Day Parade.¹ The parade halted at the intersection of Division and California Streets at Humboldt Park.² As the lyrics *¡Despierta, boricueño, que han dado la señal, ¡despierta de ese sueño, es hora de luchar!* filled the air, the noise of the crowd dimmed and those who knew the words of the revolutionary song joined in. When the song reached its defiant and haunting climax, *¡Ámonos, boricueños, vámonos ya, que nos espera ansiosa, ansiosa la libertad. ¡La libertad, la libertad!*, people thrust their fists triumphantly into the air and the surrounding throng of people burst into enthusiastic applause.³

What does this expression of nationalism in the Puerto Rican community of Chicago mean? Does it translate into support for Puerto Rican independence or is it primarily the assertion of a shared cultural, historical, and linguistic identity? Jorge Duany points out, "the vast majority of Puerto Ricans—on and off the Island—imagine themselves as part of a broader community that meets all the standard criteria of nationality, such as territory, language, or culture, except sovereignty (Duany 2002: 4). Yet, he asks, "how can most Puerto Ricans imagine themselves as a nation even though few of them support the constitution of a separate nation-state?" (Duany 2002: 5).

In this article I hope to contribute to the ongoing debate about what Puerto Rican nationalism means by exploring how, why, and through what means a group of activists who work with the Puerto Rican Cultural Center in Chicago understand and project themselves as members of the Puerto Rican nation. Born and raised in the diasporic mainland, they nonetheless imagine and define themselves part of a larger national community. These activists are engaged in asserting or in some cases awakening their and others' Puerto Rican identity, one that embraces their reality in Chicago and rediscovers or reinforces their familial, socio-economic, cultural, historical, and political ties to Puerto Rico. They simultaneously root themselves in the Puerto Rican community of Chicago, define themselves as part of a broader "translocal"



Figure 1. PACHS float in Puerto Rican Day Parade, 2013. PRCC Archives. Reprinted by permission.

Puerto Rican community, and advocate “the constitution of a separate nation-state.”³⁴ In the process they redefine for themselves, their families, and the Puerto Rican nation on the island and in the diaspora what they believe it means to be Puerto Rican. Their experiences, identities, choices, and realities expand and update the possibilities and definition of Puerto Rican nationhood in the twenty-first century as one that is territorially rooted on the island but simultaneously includes the now-majority Puerto Rican population living in the diaspora.

Puerto Rican nationalism is thriving in Chicago, where it provides people an ideological framework to pursue their political agendas and address the needs of the community. As Ana Ramos-Zayas pointed out, “Puerto Rican nationalism in Chicago has followed a considerably different route from that of nationalism in Puerto Rico. In Chicago, Puerto Rican nationalism has become the instrumental political and cultural ideology formulated in community-building efforts among barrio activists and residents” (2002: 4).³⁵

In this article I argue that nationalism plays a progressive and liberating role in the lives of the activists involved with the Puerto Rican Cultural Center as well in those of the surrounding community. This assertion runs counter to the thinking of some scholars who have concluded that, far from being a force

for liberation, Puerto Rican nationalism has served to oppress Puerto Ricans. Negrón-Mutaner and Grosfoguel suggest that one reason Puerto Ricans reject the emergence of an independent nation-state is because nationalist discourse (and practice?) rejects “heterogeneity,” and, perhaps, seeks to define the nation along a limited and repressive axis (1997: 13). Or, as Duany articulates, “nationalist thinking and practices have tended to embrace an essentialist and homogenizing image of collective identity that silences the multiple voices of the nation, based on class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and other differences” (Duany 2002: 20).

This article counters these interpretations of nationalism and shows that in Humboldt Park nationalism and the affirmation of a positive Puerto Rican identity have created spaces and programs in which dropouts have not only completed their high school degree at the Pedro Albizu Campos High School, but gone on to obtain a college degree; homeless LGBT youth have found a home and community in El Rescate, a shelter for homeless LGBT youth; artists working in a wide variety of mediums have displayed their work in the National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture; and women have assumed leadership roles in numerous institutions and programs.³⁶ It has also contributed to the self-realization and personal development of the seven individuals whose stories I present below and the hundreds of young people who have studied at the Pedro Albizu Campos High School.

The seven activists with whom I conducted extensive interviews are representative of the broader Puerto Rican population living in the Humboldt Park area in that they come from poor, working class, or lower middle class backgrounds.

I explore the understanding and expression of Puerto Rican nationalism in the Puerto Rican community of Chicago by drawing on interviews with activists who work in the various programs of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC). The seven activists with whom I conducted extensive interviews are representative of the broader Puerto Rican population living in the Humboldt Park area in that they come from poor, working class, or lower middle class backgrounds. Although each person's story is different, they share some similarities. None has a well-off or professional family and they all work hard, even scramble, to make ends meet.³⁷ All but one of them grew

up in Chicago, and all of them either live or have lived in the Humboldt Park community. They range in age from the mid-twenties to the mid-forties. Four of the interviewees are heterosexual, two are gay men, and one is a lesbian. Two have a parent who is of European descent, one has a Mexican mother and Puerto Rican father; one has a Puerto Rican mother and Cuban father; the other three have Puerto Rican parents from diverse parts of the island. The heterogeneous characteristics of these seven reflect, at least in part, the range of identities and possibilities subsumed in the words "Puerto Rican."

This article does not attempt to determine the extent of support for Puerto Rican nationalism in the community at large, nor does it offer an assessment of the impact the Puerto Rican Cultural Center has had on the community. What I can say is that every year thousands and thousands of people participate in and benefit from one or more of the numerous projects the Puerto Rican Cultural Center operates, and that figure does not include the tens of thousands of people who flock to the community during Fiesta Boricua or attend the Puerto Rican Day parade. Nor does this article analyze to what extent the work of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center has affected the image of Puerto Ricans in Chicago, although both of those issues would be important studies to undertake. Instead, it focuses on how those who define themselves as nationalists or supporters of an independent Puerto Rico, comprehend, explain, and employ the meaning of nationalism to define themselves, interpret the community and their own lives, and incorporate these understandings into their work to improve the neighborhood and assert a positive identity for Puerto Ricans.⁸

The Puerto Rican Cultural Center

In 2010, 102,854 Puerto Ricans lived in Chicago, a significant percentage of whom are poor. The median Puerto Rican household income in Chicago is \$35,638, compared to \$44,776 for Chicago as a whole. The rate of poverty among Puerto Ricans in Chicago is 19 percent (Cintrón et al. 2012: i, 11, 17). Twenty-seven percent of Puerto Rican households receive food stamps as compared to 17 percent for Chicago overall. Unemployment in 2015 stood at 17.3 percent in contrast to 12.9 percent for Chicago as a whole (Fishman 2014). Close to one-third of Puerto Rican high school students drop out, compared to 20 percent for non-Latino African Americans, 8 percent for whites, and a whopping 48 percent for Mexicans. Only 13 percent of "Puerto Ricans age 25 and older held an advanced degree [any degree beyond high



Figure 2. Puerto Rican Cultural Center (2739 W. Division Street, Chicago). Photograph by Margaret Power. Reprinted by permission.

school] in 2010." Most Puerto Ricans (64 percent) rent their living space and of that number 62 percent spend close to one-third of their income on rent. One other indicator of an impoverished community is the fact that 72 percent of Puerto Rican adults and 67 percent of Puerto Rican children are overweight or obese (Cintrón et al. 2012: ii, 14, 27).

The Puerto Rican Cultural Center is located in the Humboldt Park neighborhood of Chicago. As a recent study of Puerto Ricans in Chicago noted, roughly 50 percent of Puerto Ricans living in Chicago inhabit Humboldt Park; in addition, "[m]ost Puerto Rican institutions and organizations are located there," and "the area stands as a symbol of Puerto Rican identity and history" (Cintrón et al. 2012: 14).

As Rachel Rinaldo wrote in the early 2000s, the Juan Antonio Correjer Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC) "is a bastion of support for Puerto Rican independence and barrio autonomy. Nationalist ideology permeates the Center's practices of cultural resistance and community building" (2002: 135).⁹ Community activists, including José E. López, who is currently the center's

Executive Director; Oscar López, who is currently imprisoned in Terre Haute Federal Penitentiary; Reverend José A. Torres, now deceased; and former political prisoners Alejandrina Torres, Lucy Rodríguez, Carlos Alberto Torres, Haydee Torres, and Carmen Valentín, among others, helped found the PRCC in 1973.

Today the PRCC houses a variety of programs and sponsors an impressive number of activities. PRCC programs include a bilingual day care center, an alternative high school, a health care clinic that focuses on the prevention and treatment of AIDS and STDs, obesity, and diabetes; El Rescate, a transitional living space for homeless LGBT youth; Batey Urbano, a youth-focused space; and a young women's literacy program. Additionally, the PRCC sponsors four annual events, all of which reflect and construct Puerto Rican history and culture. The PRCC begins the year with the distribution of roughly six thousand presents to children in the community on Día de los Reyes in January. In June it holds the Puerto Rican Day Parade, a description of which opens this article.¹⁰ Fiesta Boricua, an outdoor festival that features Puerto Rican music, culture,



Figure 3. El Rescate (2701 W. Division St., Chicago). Photograph by Margaret Power. Reprinted by permission.

and food and attracts thousands and thousands of people (organizers claim 250,000 people attend the festival) from throughout the Midwest takes place during the Labor Day weekend (López 2015). In October, Haunted Paseo, a safe Halloween activity for children, attracts hundreds of neighborhood youngsters and their families.

The PRCC finances itself and its multiple programs and activities through a variety of sources. It receives grant money from federal, state, and local institutions, as well as a number of local and national foundations. It also obtains money and donations from supporters and the numerous fundraising activities it conducts, such as dinners, raffles, and rummage sales. The annual Puerto Rican Day Parade costs about \$25,000 and the price of Fiesta Boricua is \$150,000. Much of the money comes from corporate sponsorship, ad books, and different fundraising endeavors (López 2015). Despite being based in a poor community, the PRCC manages to raise the money needed to finance these two major events, as well as the myriad of other programs and activities it sponsors.

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To inform the community of its multiple activities, the PRCC has published and distributed the free monthly newspaper *La Voz del Paseo Boricua* since 2004. *La Voz's* stated goal is "to acknowledge the achievements of the Puerto Rican community at large and advocate for the preservation of the heart of our barrio in Humboldt Park – our 'pedacito de patria' in Chicago." The newspaper's mission statement reflects the vision that infuses the work of the PRCC: to advance and defend the interests of the Puerto Rican community, which it defines as being a part of the homeland, Puerto Rico (*La Voz del Paseo Boricua* 2015).

La Voz reports on the programs the PRCC is involved in, relevant city and national events, news from Puerto Rico, and political activities, such as the campaign to free Oscar López Rivera. For example, the February 2015 issue covered a rally and press conference organized by thirty Illinois agencies that provide services to youth to protest Republican Governor Rauner's funding

cuts, a Queer Fest fundraiser for El Rescate, the groundbreaking ceremony for the construction of the Borinqueneers Veteran Housing project, named after the Puerto Rican 65th Infantry Regiment; and the opening of an art exhibit, "That's Puerto Rican," in the National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture, to list only a few of the articles (*La Voz del Paseo Boricua* 2015).

These various programs and undertakings reflect the PRCC's multi-layered mission and the reality of the largely impoverished and struggling community in which it operates, a snapshot description of which I opened this section with. On one level, it offers services to meet the needs of a poor community. However, the PRCC is much more than a social service agency. As PRCC Executive Director José López said, "Our main mission is to provide those social services and to provide consciousness, based on the Freirian notion of conscientization. That's what really drives our work."¹¹ Through its various programs and activities the PRCC works to promote an appreciation of Puerto Rican culture and history, maintain and build political ties and networks between Puerto Ricans in Chicago, across the United States, and on the island; encourage and assert a Puerto Rican identity, and create or strengthen a progressive understanding of puertorriquenidad. "The cultural center is our attempt to say we need to take ownership of our own community and ... formulate our own initiatives that answer some of our needs" (*La Voz del Paseo Boricua* 2008: March).

The activists I interviewed for this article all work in programs connected with the Puerto Rican Cultural Center. Although they are all Puerto Rican, prior to coming into contact with the PRCC their sense of what it meant to be Puerto Rican was somewhat amorphous. Some grew up speaking Spanish, some have learned it more recently as a result of their involvement in the community. Most knew very little of the island's history, and none come from *independentista* families. Most of the individuals I spoke with have or have had one or more family members in jail at some point or who are or were involved in drugs.

For many, being Puerto Rican carried with it a negative connotation, the idea of being inferior, marginalized, second- or third-class citizens. Their work with the Puerto Rican Cultural Center has helped to generate a new, positive identity and definition of what it means to be Puerto Rican. As members of the PRCC, they see their work as helping to instill a similar pride in other members of the Puerto Rican community, as well as working to meet some of their most pressing needs.

Becoming Puerto Rican in Chicago

"I became prouder of being Puerto Rican when I worked with the Puerto Rican Cultural Center" (Díaz 2014).¹² When I interviewed her, Judy Díaz was the Dean of Students at the Pedro Albizu Campos High School in Chicago. Her Judy grew up in the West Humboldt Park neighborhood of Chicago. Her parents emigrated from Puerto Rico in the 1980s and she was born and raised in the community she works in today. She grew up speaking Spanish and did not learn English until she went to second grade. Judy pointed out that many Puerto Ricans living in the Humboldt Park/WestTown neighborhood do not need to learn English since they "can function for all practical purposes in Spanish" in the neighborhood. "If you just go to get what you need, the Laundromat, the grocery store, etc. you don't need English." Her mother learned English along with Judy and her siblings watching "Sesame Street, TV, doing our homework." Her father learned English at his job as a mechanic (Díaz 2014).

Judy grew up as a member of the Pentecostal church in which her father was the pastor. The congregation, which was primarily Puerto Rican, partially shaped much of her identity as a Puerto Rican female in Chicago. She joined with other women in the congregation to make pasteles to raise money for the church. As a member of the church, she welcomed other new arrivals from Puerto Rico or other countries in Latin America and drew them into the closely knit religious community. Her experiences in the church cemented what to her were key aspects of being Puerto Rican: hospitality and a strong sense of family (Díaz 2014).

When she went to the counselor's office to discuss her plans after graduation, he said, "You're not considering the military?" since he assumed that she, as a Puerto Rican woman, would not or could not consider college as her next step.

As a Puerto Rican woman, Judy Díaz also noted the gendered aspects of what growing up meant. "Being female, you are supposed to be a J-Lo kind of person and being male you have to be a stud like kind of person. If you're not, you're not macho enough to be Puerto Rican and if you're not feminine like J Lo, you're not feminine enough to be a real Puerto Rican woman" (Díaz 2014). When Judy ventured beyond the Humboldt Park community and outside

the Pentecostal congregation to go to college at the University of Illinois at Chicago, she realized that being Puerto Rican meant something else. She became aware that being Puerto Rican in Chicago also meant “being cheated.” Judy thinks that she was cheated because the high school education she received as a working-class Puerto Rican woman did not adequately prepare her for the challenges of college. When she went to the counselor’s office to discuss her plans after graduation, he said, “you’re not considering the military?” since he assumed that she, as a Puerto Rican woman, would not or could not consider college as her next step. Once she was in college she had to “work [her] ass off” to catch up with the other students and she had to work to cover the costs of her education. The experience made her realize that she, like many other Puerto Ricans in the neighborhood, “had been cheated from access to opportunity because of who I was” (Díaz 2014). However, when she began to work with the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, “I began to learn and understand the historical context of the conditions I experienced. And with a greater understanding, I decided to do more about it” (Díaz 2015).

Roberto Sanabria did not grow up in Humboldt Park, but he now lives on Paseo Boricua. His father is from San Germán and Mayagüez and his mother’s background is Finnish. He grew up speaking English and only learned Spanish when he went to college. Every summer his uncles, who spoke Spanish, traveled from Chicago to Puerto Rico. When they came back, they told jokes that Roberto did not understand, which made him feel bad. About half the kids in his grammar school were white and the rest were Puerto Rican. He remembered, “my perception was the white kids did better academically and the Puerto Ricans were more athletic. So there were fights and the Puerto Ricans always won. So my perception was that being Puerto Rican meant kicking ass and being brutal. And I felt like I didn’t embrace either [culture]” (Sanabria 2014).

When he was a junior, a Mexican man who worked at his high school took him to hear José López speak. He remembers that López spoke about colonialism, the resilience of the Puerto Rican people, and that “there is nobility in their resistance.” López’s words presented Roberto with a new, positive image of what it meant to be Puerto Rican. Roberto recalls, “I remember my back straightening, my chin going up, and [I thought], ‘that’s my people.’ That was probably the first stage of me becoming a ‘born again Puerto Rican’” (Sanabria 2014).

While he was still in college, Roberto got involved in Vida/SIDA, a

community-run, alternative health clinic to deal with the AIDS epidemic in the late 1980s. Vida/SIDA emerged at that time “because AIDS was hitting the [Puerto Rican] community very hard.” The philosophy of the clinic was, “in order to serve the Puerto Rican community you need to understand the Puerto Rican culture.” Some of the Vida/SIDA staff went door-to-door in the community “with condoms and information” to educate people about AIDS and how to prevent it (Sanabria 2014). To illustrate why Roberto thinks that community-based Puerto Rican activists were more likely to connect with local residents, he contrasted his work going door to door with that of two Mormons, whose path he happened to cross. Although they spoke Spanish—“a lot of Mormons speak good Spanish”—he observed that the Puerto Rican woman who the Mormons were talking to was leery about opening her door to them and did not invite them into her house. However, when Roberto and a friend approached her and asked if they “could talk about AIDS transmission in Puerto Rican Spanish. She said, ‘yes, this had happened to her cousin’” (Sanabria 2014).

Juan Nito Morales was born in Chicago in 1988 and grew up on Division Street (now Paseo Boricua). His mother grew up in Caguas and his father in San Lorenzo. Nito’s parents did not speak Spanish to him, his older brother or his three older sisters. Nito (the name he goes by) assumes they wanted him to assimilate and “develop[] a different identity” than the “traditional” one he would have had, had he grown up in Puerto Rico (Morales, Juan Nito 2014).

Neither Nito nor his siblings had a clear idea of what it meant to be Puerto Rican. “It’s sad, very sad,” but there was “very little, if not to say nothing at all” that he learned in terms of his identity as a Puerto Rican. “We had arroz con habichuelas, my mother used to cook it and it’s still one of my favorite dishes today.” He remembers that since he was young he wanted to learn more about who he was and what it meant to be Puerto Rican. “I always had a struggle of dealing with my identity, trying to make sense of who I am and where I come from” (Morales, Juan Nito 2014). He remembers first being interested in the work of the PRCC at an early age,

I was twelve and we moved on top of Batey Urbano¹³ [at the time when] the Casita¹⁴ was being built. I saw people in the community building and planning and putting the concrete and I had a natural interest in wanting to help. So I ran across the street and my father came from nowhere and grabbed me and told me not to get involved with those communists. So I was like, what does communism mean?

Life was difficult for Nito when he was growing up. His father drove trucks and was not around the house much and when he was, he often drank. His mother worked in retail and got involved in drugs. As a result, his older brother often had to take care of the younger siblings. He, in turn, was a leader of a local gang and is now in jail (Morales, Juan Nito 2014). Nito was expelled from Clemente High School, the main Chicago public high school in Humboldt Park "for being involved in things that I wasn't supposed to be involved in . . . like fighting." He ended up enrolling in Pedro Albizu Campos High School (PACHS), the alternative Puerto Rican high school (see below).

Nito believes that going to PACHS positively transformed him, his life, and his beliefs. Before he went to PACHS "I thought things were the way they were just because it was just the way of the world." He didn't really understand "why such things were taking place as far as poverty, violence, police brutality." At PACHS he developed a close relationship with Matt Rodríguez, the principal, and began to read about Puerto Rican history. One of the first things he learned was that "there are three cultures that make up Puerto Rico: the European, African, and Taino." Nito was so excited to find that out that he "went back to my parents and sisters and told them" (Morales, Juan Nito 2014).

After he graduated from PACHS, Nito enrolled at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago. He joined the Union of Puerto Rican Students and became editor of *Que Ondaé Solá*, the Puerto Rican student newspaper.¹⁵ Today he works with the campaign to free imprisoned nationalist Oscar López Rivera and lives on Paseo Boricua (Morales, Juan Nito 2014).

To him, nationalism is not fighting just for the self-determination of the island, but also for the self-determination of Puerto Ricans living in Paseo Boricua and throughout the United States.

Nito links his identity as a Puerto Rican with his work to improve conditions in the Puerto Rican community of Chicago and for all Puerto Ricans. To him, nationalism is not fighting just for the self-determination of the island, but also for the self-determination of Puerto Ricans living in Paseo Boricua and throughout the United States. He defined Puerto Rican nationalism as "having a space where Puerto Ricans in the United States and

also in Puerto Rico have the right to be able to express their hope for a better experience and life. And to be able to self-govern" (Morales, Juan Nito 2014).

Michelle Morales was born in Yonkers, New York. Her mother was from Mayagüez and her father was from Guayama. Michelle was bilingual in English and Spanish until her kindergarten teacher had her sent to speech therapy and informed her parents "they were confusing me by speaking both languages." Her parents had "had a tough time acclimating to the U.S. education system." When her mother came to New York she was in the seventh grade, but the school system "put her in first grade, and that traumatized her." As a result, they accepted the teacher's point of view and stopped speaking Spanish to Michelle. Today, Michelle says, "I speak broken Spanish and I have been told I sound English and I am pretty embarrassed by that" (Morales, Michelle 2014).

Her father was in the U.S. military, so the family moved around quite a lot. When Michelle was eleven, the family settled in Indianapolis. Not only were there no other Puerto Ricans in her school, when she went to high school in the late 1980s she was the only Latina out of 1,250 high school students. Students frequently asked her "What are you?" and when she told them she was Puerto Rican, they said, "What's that?" (Morales, Michelle 2014).

Michelle's story reveals her evolving understanding of what being an "authentic" Puerto Rican meant. She did not learn much about Puerto Rican history as a child, but she knew "that Puerto Rico belonged to the United States and . . . that was a good thing. That you wanted Puerto Rico to stay with the United States." Her ideas about what it meant to be Puerto Rican and Puerto Rico's relationship to the United States began to change when she went to De Paul University in Chicago. "I realized there were more things to being a Puerto Rican than just about grandma and my aunts and uncles. It was also about music, language, traditions, and cultural idiosyncrasies that my parents never overtly taught us. We just weren't raised with the history." So at first, Michelle's Puerto Rican "identity crumbled." She thought, "I am not really Puerto Rican, because this is what it means to be Puerto Rican" (Morales, Michelle 2014).

However, in her senior year (1996–1997) she got involved with the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, attended Fiesta Boricua, and discovered a different interpretation of what it meant to be Puerto Rican, one based on a progressive interpretation of nationalism and one that affirmed her as a woman, an activist, and a leader. It was

amazing to see so many Puerto Ricans in one place, to hear Spanish, to smell the food. During the evening concert at the main stage, everyone whips out their Puerto Rican flags and I started crying. We just didn't grow up with that. To see a river of people down the street waving the flag, to see the music. I felt at home when I hadn't felt at home for a long time. I felt at peace. I felt pride. I thought, this is it. This is where I want to be. (Morales, Michelle 2014)

Michelle worked at the PACHS for five and a half years. First she taught science and math; she then became the co-principal of the high school. She left that job to work in the Alternative Schools Network, where she works today. Since 2002 she has been involved with and helps to lead the National Boricua Human Rights Network (NBHRN). Michelle believes that both the PACHS and the NBHRN promote a sense of nationalism. "The PRCC, with its vision of being Puerto Rican-centered, pushing a Puerto Rican agenda, educating about Puerto Rican history and politics, lends itself to Puerto Rican nationalism." It was also at the PRCC "that I learned that nationalism is okay and that it's okay for Puerto Ricans to carve out their own space" (Morales, Michelle 2014).

I asked her if she thought that the PRCC has had an impact on the identity of Puerto Ricans in the community. She replied,

I think that everything the Puerto Rican Cultural Center does is steeped in Puerto Rican identity. The issue of Puerto Rican identity is enmeshed with the PRCC's programs. All of the programs have some level of Puerto Rican symbolism in their marketing, their branding, the brochures. I have always felt that what [the PRCC] does for this community is entrench and enforce Puerto Rican identity in a country and city that may not want that. (Morales, Michelle 2014)

And it has had an impact on her identity. Instead of questioning where she belonged or whether or not she was Puerto Rican enough, the PRCC has given her a safe space and helped her to dispel any doubts as to what it means for her to be Puerto Rican. "What became [for me] Puerto Rican was a Puerto Rican willing to fight for Puerto Rico. Are you willing to fight for your country and for your community? I mean fight in the sense you will be loyal to it, you believe in it, and your practices follow it (Morales, Michelle 2014).

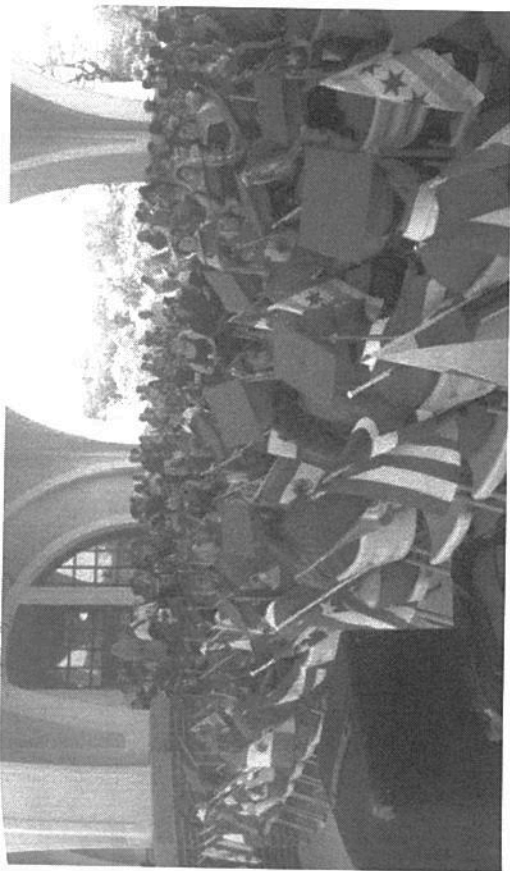


Figure 4. PACHS Graduation, 2013. Photograph by Eliat Carmona. PACHS Archives. Reprinted by permission.

Pedro Albizu Campos High School

As the stories of Judy Diaz, Nito Morales, and Michelle Morales illustrate, the Pedro Albizu Campos High School (PACHS) plays a central role in the formation of nationalist sentiment and a positive and inclusive definition of what it means to be Puerto Rican. The PACHS originated in 1972, when a group of community activists decided to overcome the high dropout rate of Puerto Rican youth—71.2 percent in 1971—by starting a school.¹⁶ Sixteen students attended classes taught by seventeen teachers in the basement of a church. Then, as now, the organizers saw the school as "a place where the Puerto Rican student can increase his knowledge and, more important, increase the knowledge of himself and of being Puerto Rican," as Norma Reyes, one of the founders said (Jackson 1973).

In 2015 182 students attended PACHS. Of that number, roughly 86 percent are Latino, 12 percent are African American, and the remaining 4 percent include Whites, Native Americans, and one Jamaican (Rodríguez, Matt 2015).

Matt was born in 1981 and grew up in Oak Park, a suburb immediately west of Chicago. His father is Puerto Rican from Comerio and his mother is of German and Irish ancestry. Although his paternal grandmother spoke only Spanish, the family mandated that his father speak only English, so as to "not hold himself back." (Whether delivered by one's family or the school system,

the message of such statements is that English, not Spanish, is the language of progress and modernity.) As a result, Matt grew up speaking English, not Spanish. In fact, although he knew he was Latino, he did not have a clear sense that he was Puerto Rican, so at times he assumed he was Mexican (Rodríguez, Matt 2014).

At the University of Illinois at Chicago he enrolled in Latino Studies classes, did his own research, and began to learn about Puerto Rican history and that of his family.

By the time he was in middle school, he knew that he was Puerto Rican.¹⁷ When he was in college, he remembers he primarily associated being Puerto Rican “with negative things. My Puerto Rican family was involved in drugs. One of them was in jail, [they were] involved in some not so great things. [They were] in and out [of jail], [but] not for an extended period of time. That’s how I formulated my identity as a Puerto Rican.” At the University of Illinois at Chicago he enrolled in Latino Studies classes, did his own research, and began to learn about Puerto Rican history and that of his family. He learned “about [his family’s] poverty and how it was not just their own but a people’s poverty.” He also learned “how a system was organized so certain groups would be more poor than others” (Rodríguez, Matt 2014). And he became politically active.

He joined the Puerto Rican Student Association on campus, participated in activities at Batey Urbano, and attended anti-war marches. In 2006 he volunteered at PACHS, working as a janitor. Keeping the high school clean was one of the Batey Urbano’s commitments to the community. Today he speaks Spanish, knows a lot about Puerto Rican history, which he taught for several years at the school (Rodríguez, Matt 2014).

Matt has found that most students know very little about Puerto Rican history. They define themselves as Puerto Rican, but much of that identity reflects a negative perception of what that means.

If you sit down and talk with a student and there’s a conflict in the school students will say things like well, ‘Puerto Ricans are just loud, and that’s how we are. You can’t look at me like that because Puerto Ricans, we’ll go off on you.’ There’s a sense of the Puerto Rican self that is situating the Puerto Rican self within [the] volatile, gutter,

hood, violent, dirty, but uniquely not in a yuck way, but in a tough way. (Rodríguez, Matt 2014)

Matt understands their attitude, because it was one he once had.

My work here connects me back to what I did in high school and the identity I created around being Puerto Rican and getting drunk off my ass. I would drink anyone under the table. That’s who I was and that’s what it meant to be Puerto Rican. I can smoke this and smoke that and that’s just what it is. The connection of an identity of a people to things that are harmful. That’s how hegemony works. (Rodríguez, Matt 2014)

Both the school’s mission statement and the philosophical framework with which it operates challenge that negative definition of Puerto Rican. They do so by presenting students with an alternative, positive image of what it means to be Puerto Rican. This image encourages students to respect themselves and others and to view themselves as people who have something to contribute to their community and their nation. “The school’s mission is to provide a quality educational experience needed to empower students to engage in critical thinking and social transformation, from the classroom to the Puerto Rican community, based on the philosophical foundation of self-determination, a methodology of self-actualization and an ethics of self-reliance” (Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School 2015).

For three years the staff of PACHS debated wording for the school’s framework. They tried to figure out how different people in the community would understand and respond to the terms and concepts. In the end, they created the RESPECT framework, which encapsulates the school’s values and goals for the students.¹⁸

One way to gauge the school’s success in imparting its values and achieving its goals is to examine the stories of two students whose lives turned around because they went to PACHS. Juan Calderón exemplifies what difference going to PACHS and working with the PRCC can do for some young Puerto Ricans who had previously found themselves alienated from their school and family and adrift in the world. For Juan, the experience has been one of liberation and empowerment.

Juan was born in 1986 in Chicago and grew up in Humboldt Park. His mother is from Puebla, Mexico, and his father is from Luquillo and Fajardo, Puerto Rico. He is from a working class family, as are most Puerto Ricans in

the Humboldt Park area. His mother worked in a factory and his father worked in construction when he was growing up. He spoke Spanish until seventh grade, when the school transitioned him into English (Calderón 2015).

Although Juan was raised Mexican, he always identified himself as both Mexican and Puerto Rican. His mother sent him to Puebla, Mexico, every December, and every other summer he went to visit family in Puerto Rico, along with his twin brother and younger sister. As a young person, Juan did not like going to Puerto Rico because his grandmother, with whom he stayed, wouldn't let the kids go out to play, "except for church," and the house "didn't have air conditioning." But now he and his partner go to Puerto Rico every year. Now, "I feel connected, it's part of home" (Calderón 2015).

Juan first went to a Chicago public high school and it was during that time he became more aware of his sexual identity as a gay man. For a long time he thought "there was something wrong with me." When he was in elementary school Juan's father used to yell at him because Juan liked to "be in the kitchen with my mother, watching novelas and helping her with the dishes and [because of] my feminine touch." His father would yell at him and say, "I don't want no faggot son, I'd rather have him dead." In high school, Juan began to find friends on the Internet who "had a similar sexual preference" but he never went to a LGBT center "because I didn't want anybody to know" (Calderón 2015).

Juan dropped out of public school in his junior year and he left home because "I was kicked out when I was sixteen." He went to PACHS after a teacher encouraged him to go to school there. The atmosphere was much better for him as a gay man: "the case managers were more tolerant," and he felt a "higher level of acceptance." He also learned a lot about Puerto Rican history from a gay teacher, Roberto Sanabria. "I learned about Puerto Rican history and culture from Albizu and it gave me a sense of pride. I understood a lot more, but I was still in the party mode. When I went to political activities [in the community] I learned more." By the time he was eighteen Calderón had firmly established his gay identity, and he had also developed a stronger identity as a Puerto Rican who felt "connected" with other Puerto Ricans. In 2007 he began to work part-time at Vida/SIDA and in 2008 he became the full-time director. In 2014 he became the Chief Operations Officer of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center. "I oversee the entire day-to-day operations of the entire organization, including all of our programs, all the directors, everything from strategic planning to development to overseeing all of our

current programs" (Calderón 2015).

Jessie Fuentes is a twenty-five year old Puerto Rican lesbian who has lived all her life in Humboldt Park, except for three years when her family moved to a different neighborhood. Her father is Cuban, but she did not meet him until she was twelve. Her mother, whose family is from Ponce and Caguas, worked two, sometimes three, jobs to support Jessie and her younger sister. The family spoke both English and Spanish at home because Jessie's mother, unlike her grandmother, wanted her daughters to be bilingual.¹⁹ To earn enough money to support the family, she held two jobs, running a restaurant and managing a Bubbleland laundromat.

Jessie has always identified herself as a Puerto Rican. When I asked her what that meant to her she said,

In the simple sense Puerto Rican meant when I come home my house smells the same way, like rice and beans and pork chops. And fabuloso because my mom mopped the floors. It sounded like Marc Anthony, like salsa and bachata when my mom was cleaning the house. It sounded like my mom yelling at me in Spanish when I didn't do something right. It looked like me going outside and seeing a bunch of Puerto Ricans playing baseball in empty lots. It looked like that one day in June when you get to go to the parade and there are thousands of Puerto Rican flags. It felt good to be a Puerto Rican in a Puerto Rican community. (Fuentes 2015)

However, when she was twelve, life at home took a turn for the worse. Her mother became an alcoholic and "every year it became worse." Jessie blames the conditions at her work for this.

The people she worked with "were extremely racist. They didn't pay her well. They made fun of her. This shows the ignorance of it all. They would call her an immigrant or stereotypical names and say they would deport her if she didn't work enough or produce enough, not knowing she was a citizen of the United States. She was raised by a single mom and she was repeating the cycle. And I am sure she didn't know how to grasp that. So she escaped from it all through alcoholism. (Fuentes 2015)

Because of her alcoholism, her mother was fired from the one job and barely held on to the other one. Jessie got involved with the gangs, attacked a boy from a different gang who insulted her mother, and was expelled from high school. Then she went to Pedro Albizu Campos High School and moved

in with Judy Díaz, the dean of students, because she had no place to live (Fuentes 2015).

When she was at Albizu High School, "I learned that I was an independentista while my family is straight for statehood."

The school changed her life for the better. "Albizu Campos is definitely a life changer. They helped me grapple with all the things I had going on." Far from being hard to be a lesbian at PACHS, "it was the most normal thing to be" since all the students at the school were "students who didn't fit into the Chicago Public Schools. No one fit the norm. We were all like one big family." When she was at Albizu High School, "I learned that I was an independentista while my family is straight for statehood." Jessie graduated from PACHS and

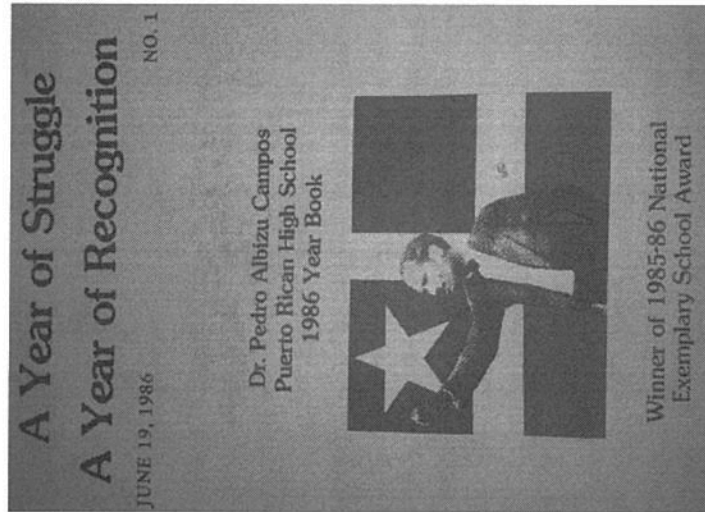


Figure 5. Cover of PACHS Yearbook. Photograph by Margaret Power. Reprinted by permission.

from Northeastern University in Chicago. Today Jessie works at Roberto Clemente High School where she is a student advocate and the community liaison for the school (Fuentes 2015).

One other method to determine the impact the school and the PRCC have had is to see what students who graduated from PACHS have said about the education they received there. To do that, I looked at PACHS yearbooks from 1987 to 2008/09.²⁰ The yearbooks contain pictures and an individual story written by each graduating student. Some of them are funny and some irreverent. All of them are deeply sincere testaments about how their enrollment at PACHS has transformed their lives. They also speak of the deep bonds of love and respect that exist between students, teachers, and staff.

Just before he graduated in 1987 Roberto Medina reflected on what he had learned by going to PACHS.

One thing I am very grateful for is that this school has taught me to think, I knew before, but never really developed it quite good enough. . . . In this school the first thing we as students are taught is to think, and at the same time our Puerto Rican heritage. . . . This school has opened my eyes to the problems of the world. . . . Then I started questioning why Puerto Ricans live the way they live. I also began to question why my mother has to suffer the way she does. If I hadn't come here then I would just have accepted it. But because I know how it really is, I have the moral authority to change the way this system functions. (Medina 1987)²¹

Milagros Rodríguez graduated from PACHS that same year. Before enrolling at PACHS she had attended Madonna High School, but she was not happy there. She felt the "people there didn't really care if I learned or not." Her decision to attend PACHS was a difficult one, because of the school's political profile.

I was really scared because my friends and family really disagreed about having Puerto Rico be independent. Me coming to this school would have been a bad influence on my family and friends. . . . But now my family, friends and I finally learned to understand the philosophy of this school, and respect it, even though there are things I still disagree with. I disagree about fighting for the independence of Puerto Rico.

Despite her disagreements with the school's advocacy of independence, Milagros learned a lot. "At the High School I found out who I really was by

finding out my Puerto Rican heritage" (Rodríguez, Milagros 1987).

Many of the students attribute their ability to finish high school, something most of them never thought they would do, to the teachers at PACHS. María Ramos, class of 2008 and nineteen years old, expressed feelings that echo what most of the students wrote. She used her testimony to thank all the teachers who helped her get through school.

Judy [Díaz], thank you for always being on my back and making sure that I was always doing what had to be done. We have been through thick and thin for the past three years and not once did you give up on me. Matt [Rodríguez], what can I say about you? Thank you for always making sure that I was at events no matter what I was doing; you made sure that I was out of trouble. I was able to learn about the community and I found myself. (Ramos 2008)

As Michelle Morales, the former PACHS teacher recalled, "When graduating students leave the high school they walk a little taller. They came in thinking Puerto Rican was bad. It meant poor, poverty, drug abuse, parents who abandoned them, teachers who treated them badly, I'm stupid" (Morales, Michelle 2014). Mike Staudenmaier taught at PACHS from 1994 to 2004. He still remembers the words of one graduating student: "I came to high school being proud of being Puerto Rican, now I know **why** I am proud of being Puerto Rican" (2015).

Relations with Puerto Rico

Most of the Puerto Rican activists who work with the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, and all of the ones I interviewed, were born in the United States. They are the children of parents who came to the mainland looking for better jobs and a higher standard of living. Not only did most of them not learn Spanish as children, few of them learned much about Puerto Rican history. They have all experienced racism, received the message that they, as Puerto Ricans, are inferior to white Americans; and had to struggle to overcome a variety of obstacles to get to where they are now.

As diasporic Puerto Ricans, their identity as Puerto Ricans and their definition of nationalism are very rooted in their experiences in the United States. At the same time, they see themselves as linked to and part of Puerto Rico. As Duany points out, "Puerto Rican communities in the United States are an integral part of the Puerto Rican nation because they continue to be

linked to the Island by an intense circular movement of people, identities, and practices, as well as capital, technology, and commodities" (2008: 5).

Several of the activists I interviewed stressed that not only has their work with the PRCC given them a positive identity and a sense of empowerment, it has helped them redevelop or develop their relationship to the island. When Judy Díaz was growing up, her mother would take her and her siblings back to Toa Alta and Bayamón for the summer. She remembers that she often felt out of place or different from her family in Puerto Rico. "I am the only light-skinned girl on my father's side of the family, and [my cousins] would say, 'she's Americana,' and I would have to defend myself and say, 'no I am Puerto Rican too.'" Her cousins would laugh at her because "I didn't know Puerto Rican jokes, or shows, or food, or plants, I wouldn't know those things" (Díaz 2014). But today, she no longer feels out of place or defensive. Her work with the PRCC and her own self-awareness have helped her to redefine what it means to be Puerto Rican. "You don't have to be a Puerto Rican from Puerto Rico to be Puerto Rican because it's *Boricua en la luna*." Because the very same things that have been done against our people to oppress us. . . have made us recreate our identity outside of Puerto Rico" (Díaz 2014).

Matt Rodríguez had never even been to Puerto Rico until he started working with the PRCC. "Check this out. I only visited Puerto Rico once I got involved with the PRCC and the high school. I went to Puerto Rico as part of the work on the Oscar [López] campaign. I drove around to radio stations and [I went] to . . . manifestaciones, the teacher's strike." Not only that, he took his family with him. "I organized with my father, brother, and uncle, my brother who had never been, my uncle who had not been since he was twelve, and my father who had not been since he was twenty" (Rodríguez, Matt 2014).

The PRCC has spearheaded efforts to fortify, rebuild, or create connections between Puerto Ricans in Chicago and on the island. This work has increased the circularity of engagement between Puerto Ricans living in Puerto Rico and in Chicago. One concrete expression of this has been the various visits and interchanges between Puerto Ricans in both locations. Every year since 2010 (with the exception of 2012) the annual Fiesta Boricua has been dedicated to a different municipality in Puerto Rico. In 2010 it was Comerio, in 2011 Hormigueros, in 2013 Jayuya, in 2014 San Lorenzo, and in 2015 Cayey. Once the PRCC extends the invitation and the municipality accepts it, residents and officials of the municipality dedicate efforts to raising money so that they can attend the festivities. On the Chicago end, family members from the invited

municipalities plan activities to welcome their relatives and friends, some of whom they have not seen for years (López 2015).

Former residents of the selected municipalities and members of the PRCC offer the visiting residents of the municipalities a warm welcome to Chicago. They take them on tours of Paseo Boricua and Chicago and hold receptions, dinners, and luncheons in their honor. When seventy-five people from Jayuya traveled to Chicago in 2013 to participate in the Fiestas Boricuas, the Jayuya Barbershop sponsored an event that the guests and former Jayuyenses living in Chicago attended. Similar activities greeted the hundred visitors who came from Comerio, seventy-five from Hornigueros, and one hundred from San Lorenzo during their visits (López 2015).

Being part of the diaspora does not mean you stop being Puerto Rican, but it does mean that your identity as a Puerto Rican is shaped in and by the specific world and community you inhabit, which is necessarily different from the world and community that Puerto Ricans living on the island inhabit.

These visits do much more than just reunite friends and family members who have not seen each other in decades. They also affirm the bonds that exist between Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico and Chicago. They encourage each group of people to examine the varied realities they live in and to accept that though they are different, they are both expressions of what it means to be Puerto Rican in the 2000s. Being part of the diaspora does not mean you stop being Puerto Rican, but it does mean that your identity as a Puerto Rican is shaped in and by the specific world and community you inhabit, which is necessarily different from the world and community that Puerto Ricans living on the island inhabit.

The PRCC-sponsored interchanges that occur during activities such as Fiesta Boricua accomplish three goals. They introduce Puerto Ricans from Puerto Rico to the Puerto Rican reality in the diaspora. They connect Puerto Ricans in Chicago to their families and their roots on the island. And they confirm the existence of a shared Puerto Rican identity that simultaneously respects and transcends the very real differences that exists between the two groups.

Conclusion

This article explores how and why Puerto Rican nationalism has affirmatively affected the lives, identities, and work of diasporic Puerto Rican activists in the Humboldt Park neighborhood of Chicago. It argues that they and the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, of which they are part, offer an emancipatory understanding and practice of nationalism, one that embraces and encourages a diversity of experiences, sexualities, and interpretations of what it means to be Puerto Rican.

Concretely, this article analyzes how seven Puerto Rican activists growing up or living in Humboldt Park connect nationalism with being Puerto Rican in Chicago. It also discusses the constructive difference Pedro Albizu Campos High School has made in the lives of the hundreds of students who have attended it. In all these cases, nationalism has meant the assertion of a positive definition of *puertorriqueñidad*, the creation or strengthening of ties with the island, and the determination to improve the health, education, and quality of life for Puerto Ricans living in Humboldt Park.

For many of these activists and students, being Puerto Rican had held a negative association. It meant you were not as smart as the white kids; instead you were physical: loud, aggressive, and defiant. If you were a girl you were supposed to be feminine and sexy, like J-Ló. Boys were supposed to be tough, ready to defend themselves, and violent.

Few of the seven activists spoke Spanish as children; instead, they learned it as adults. Their parents believed that to get ahead in U.S. society their children needed to speak English. This was just one of the many ways that they were told that being Puerto Rican or speaking Spanish is backward and should be discouraged. Further, most of those I interviewed knew little about Puerto Rican history and culture, beyond the foods, music, and importance of family.

Their involvement with the Puerto Rican Cultural Center or Pedro Albizu Campos High School transformed them. The activists I spoke with and the high school students whose testimonies I read developed a more affirmative, informed idea of what it means to be Puerto Rican. They discovered who they are, where they came from, and why they are here. They have learned and since taught others about their history and culture. Instead of being a victim of the society that “cheated” them, they are working to change society and make it better, not just for themselves but for others as well. They take Doña Consuelo Lee de Tapia’s saying, “Live and Help to Live,” which is the motto of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, very much to heart. Many of them

devote much of their lives to improving the conditions of the people in the community; some of them work to achieve an independent Puerto Rico. They all have a heightened self-esteem and a deeper awareness of the diverse racial, sexual, and gendered identities encompassed in the words Puerto Rican.

In the process, they have contributed to the development of a positive definition of what being Puerto Rican in the diaspora means. The work of the activists contributes directly to the forging of self-reliance and self-actualization that they believe are essential building blocks for both their community and their nation. Far from feeling oppressed by nationalist politics, they have come to a deeper, more optimistic realization of who they are and can be as a result of them.

They take Doña Consuelo Lee de Tapia's saying, "Live and Help to Live," which is the motto of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, very much to heart.

The activists' involvement with the PRCC has led them to build or rebuild ties with their families and communities in Puerto Rico by traveling there and by inviting Puerto Ricans from the island to come to Chicago and to learn about their work here. They have challenged the all-too-often held image of Puerto Ricans who live in Humboldt Park as nothing more than a bunch of loud-mouthed, violent druggies, and gangbangers. They have contributed to replacing that negative perception by building a number of successful institutions, such as Pedro Albizu Campos High School or Vida/SIDA, by sponsoring annual community events such as Fiesta Boricua or Haunted Paseo Boricua that thousands and thousands of people attend, and by offering young people an alternative to dropping out of school, taking or selling drugs, being in the gangs, feeling like an outcast because of their sexuality, or living on the streets. They have forged new identities as Puerto Ricans who are grounded in their community in Chicago and are also part of the Puerto Rican nation. They envision a future in which Puerto Rico will be free.



Figure 6. Jessie Fuentes.
Photograph courtesy of Jessie Fuentes.
Reprinted by permission.

Jessie Fuentes described what working with the PRCC and being an independentista mean to her.

To be self-reliant, to be able to be who we are without our culture being watered down. To be able to be a people and a place, not the property of anything. We are a property of the United States. We are not partners, we didn't ask for this. We are a colonial property. And colonialism has destroyed generations of people. I refuse to repeat that cycle or support it. (Fuentes 2015)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to Andrac Marak, Teresa Prados-Torreira, Michael Staudenmaier, Ellen Walsh, Neici Zeller, and the three anonymous readers of an earlier draft of this article. Your comments strengthened the article.

NOTES

- 1 For history of Paseo Boricua see Flores-González (2001: 16-7); Ramos-Zayas (2003: 212-3); Rinaldo (2002).
- 2 Humboldt Park is the name for both the neighborhood and the park that is at its center.
- 3 The crowd sings the 1868 version of "La Borinquena" written by Lola Rodríguez de Tió. This is the original version that was replaced in 1952 with new lyrics after the formation of the Free Associated State.
- 4 Although they support independence for Puerto Rico, these activists have not drawn up a blueprint outlining the political, economic, social, or relational contours and structures of such a nation-state. The point I wish to make here is that these Chicago activists not only advance cultural nationalism, they also envision the future formation of an independent nation.
- 5 Although her book is based on research she conducted in the early 2000s, her conclusions are just as valid today as they were fifteen years ago.
- 6 The Pedro Albizu Campos High School is an affiliate program of the PRCC. It is a not-for-profit institution that has its own fiscal identity.
- 7 Rinaldo also noted the class background of PRCC activists and the connection they drew between class and nationalism: "Popular discourse in Puerto Rican Chicago associated nationalism with grassroots activism, authenticity, and living in the barrio, and antinationalism with professional status, assimilation, and suburban lifestyles" (2002: 118).
- 8 For studies of the Puerto Rican community in Chicago see Fernández (2012), Rúa (2012) and Toro-Morn (2005).
- 9 The Ateneo named Juan Antonio Corretjer the national poet of Puerto Rico. He was also a major ideologue of the left-wing of the independence movement.
- 10 In 2013 the "official" Puerto Rican Day Parade, held in downtown Chicago since 1975 and the People's Parade, held in West Town/Humboldt Park since 1979 merged and now proceeds down Paseo Boricua (Nix 2013: 16).
- 11 López refers to the Brazilian Paulo Freire and his notion of the connections to conscientization, or developing awareness of the world and one's situation in it in order to gain empowerment and end oppression (Freire 1970, 1975).
- 12 The Puerto Rican Cultural Center is located in East Humboldt Park.
- 13 A group of Chicago-area college students founded Batey Urbano in 2002 to bring together Puerto Rican and Latino youth to "develop self-awareness, social awareness, and global

awareness" (Flores-González et al. 2006: 182).

- 14 Nito refers to La Casita de Don Pedro, which opened in 1997 on Paseo Boricua. It is named for Pedro Albizu Campos, a statue of whom stands inside the gates along with a "Puerto Rican country house," a garden, an inlaid tile mosaic of the Puerto Flag. For La Casita's history and significance see (Flores-González 2001: 16-7).
- 15 Nito sent copies of the newspapers he edited to his brother in prison. Nito's older brother was so proud of his little brother that "he felt like a Super Boricua and wanted to run down the hall [of the prison] with a [Puerto Rican] flag" (Morales 2014).
- 16 In 1971 Dr. Lucas Isidro published a report that analyzed why "the current dropout rate for Puerto Ricans in Chicago is 71.2% of starting classes" (1971: 8). One of the study's conclusions is "Chicago schools attended by Puerto Ricans are not geared for the most part to them" (1971: 61).
- 17 Rodríguez can't remember how he realized that, but he does recall that when he was in fifth or sixth grade he was "trash talking" with his friends and one of them said, "I'll blow your little island up" (Rodríguez 2014).
- 18 Rodríguez explained what each letter stands for: "R = students take responsibility for their own actions; E = Ethics, students become their brother's keepers; S = [they develop] a sense of self to understand who they are and where they come from; they develop a sense of pride in who they are ethnically, nationally, or sexually; P = Puerto Rican, no matter where they come from they are able to build bridges and understand connections with the Puerto Rican reality. E = extended education, they are equipped with the skills to continue their education beyond high school. C = community oriented; and T = transformation" (Rodríguez 2014).
- 19 Her grandmother believed that "to survive in the United States you had to be Americanized and that meant giving up everything you knew and learning the American way" (Fuentes 2015).
- 20 I thank Michael Staudenmaier for suggesting I look at the yearbooks.
- 21 "Robertoico Medina," Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos Puerto Rican High School, 1987 Year Book, No. 2, p. 10.
- 22 Juan Antonio Corretjer wrote the lyrics for "Boricua en la luna" and Puerto Rican singer Roy Brown put them to music and popularized the song.

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