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ALDERMAN MALDONADO, L.A.M.A, AND PRCC CELEBRATE

# THREE KINGS DAY

HUNDREDS OF GIFTS GIVEN AT EL MERCADO DEL PUEBLO



Grand Opening ¡WEPA!  
Mercado Del Pueblo



Elizam Left a Legacy For Us to  
Continue to Ponder the  
Major Questions of the  
Human Experience



"Show Your Love for Cuca"  
Fundraiser: Huge Success!

100X35+13 VITUAL  
**OPEN HOUSE!**  
ON MARCH 3

**VICTORIA COMUNITARIA**  
HUMBOLDT PARK HEALTH OFRECE **VACUNAS**  
CONTRA EL **COVID**

SEE PAGE 4



### ABOUT LA VOZ:

The most recent manifestation of Puerto Rican journalism in Chicago, La Voz del Paseo Boricua proudly continues in the legacy of our community's previous newspapers. Founded in 2004, La Voz del Paseo Boricua, or simply 'La Voz' as it is affectionately called by our readers, is a grassroots bilingual periodical published by the Juan Antonio Corretjer Puerto Rican Cultural Center. We report on stories relevant to our community on a monthly basis, disseminating news about local events, programs, resources, and developments. As an alternative source of media, we seek to acknowledge the achievements of the Puerto Rican community at large and to advocate for the preservation of the heart of our barrio in Humboldt Park - our "pedacito de patria" in Chicago.

### SOBRE LA VOZ:

La más reciente manifestación del periodismo puertorriqueño en Chicago, La Voz del Paseo Boricua continúa orgullosamente el legado de nuestros primeros periódicos. Fundado en 2004, La Voz del Paseo Boricua, o 'La Voz' según se le conoce cariñosamente por nuestros lectores, es un periódico de pueblo, publicado de manera bilingüe por El Centro Cultural Puertorriqueño Juan Antonio Corretjer. Mensualmente, divulga historias relevantes de nuestra comunidad, diseminando noticias sobre acontecimientos, programas, recursos, y progresos locales. Como fuente alternativa de medios, intentamos reconocer los logros de la comunidad puertorriqueña al igual que abogar por la preservación del corazón de nuestro barrio Humboldt Park - nuestro "pedacito de patria" en Chicago.

### MEET OUR PRODUCTION TEAM



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## THE PRCC AND YATES ELEMENTARY BID ANGELA ACEVEDO FAREWELL: COORDINATED SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY

by Marvin Garcia



After serving two years as the Community Coordinator for the Sustainable Community Schools initiative, Angela Acevedo will be moving on to take on other challenges. Angela was hired by The Puerto Rican Cultural Center in conjunction with Richard Yates Elementary School as part of a school and community partnership initiative. As the initiative's coordinator, she brought highly-valued resources to the school that helped students and families. These resources included COVID-19 testing and flu shot events, Thanksgiving Turkey distribution, coat drives, and a Christmas Holiday toy give away. Angela also organized the after-school programs for students and programming for adults.

Working closely with Principal Israel Pérez and The PRCC liaison, Marvin Garcia, as well as other school staff; Angela organized the opening of a Community Resource room, a school store, and a sensory room for the school. We thank Angela for her hard work and commitment to the Yates students, families, and staff. Angela Acevedo served with great distinction and passion.

## CONGRATULATIONS GLENDA GUZMAN ON A NEW ADDITION TO OUR PRCC FAMILY!

On February 12, our very own Glenda and Fernando welcomed little Leean to the world weighing 7.15 lbs and measuring 21 in. On behalf of your Puerto Rican Cultural Center familia and Safe Passage, ¡Felicidades! Que Dios lo bendiga.



## PRCC AND CUCA'S FAMILY CELEBRATE VALENTINE'S DAY "SHOW YOUR LOVE FOR CUCA" FUNDRAISER"

by Xiomara Rodriguez

On the weekend of Valentine's Day, The Puerto Rican Cultural Center in partnership with Cuca's family sponsored a fundraising drive to assist Cuca with mounting medical bills, which she is acquiring after complications arose from the surgical removal of a brain tumor. Cuca has recently started rehab at a facility, and every day she is more alert and more capable of engaging in conversations. Physically, she is able to sit for longer periods of time and can now hold things in her right hand. Cuca is strong; she is on the path to recovery, however, she has more steps to go. This is why the fundraiser was crucial. No one should have to worry about medical bills piling up during the healing process.

For many Puerto Ricans in Chicago, Cuca's art has brought infinite joy and profound beauty into our homes and everyday lives. Her art is iconic; it captures and celebrates our culture in a powerful affirmation of our identity. It is a special moment to experience Cuca's art while eating a quesito at Café Colao or avena de coco at Nellie's Restaurant. Cuca's art loudly proclaims our African and Taíno roots, which is one of the reasons she is so beloved

by the Paseo Boricua community. The Show Your Love for Cuca fundraiser confirmed how cherished Cuca is to the community. Many scores of people came out to support her in spite of a snow storm and sub zero temperatures. The fundraiser raised \$9,000 dollars for Cuca's medical bills, sold eight of her art pieces, and made space for many community members to give generous donations and submit handwritten Valentine's cards that send messages of love and support to Cuca during her recovery.

Cuca's family expresses their deepest gratitude to all those who supported the fundraiser during this difficult time. It was beautiful to see the community turn out and show their love in such a big way. If you are still



interested in supporting Cuca, you can go to [cucas-strong.com/dontae](https://cucas-strong.com/dontae) to buy Cuca Strong shirts, bid on her art, and donate to her fundraising page.

### PRCC AND CITY OF CHICAGO PARTNER OPEN

## NEW HUMBOLDT PARK REGIONAL BUSINESS CENTER

### AT MERCADO DEL PUEBLO

by La Voz Staff

In 2020, the City of Chicago Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection announced an initiative to open eight Regional Business Centers throughout Chicago. The PRCC was awarded a grant to establish one of those eight centers in Humboldt

Park.

The new Regional Business Center will be housed inside the ¡WEPA! Mercado del Pueblo (People's Market), which is a business incubator for entrepreneurs that The Puerto Rican Cultural Center created in December 2020. This Regional Business Center

will provide local business information and resources such as licensing support, financing for underrepresented populations, professional services (including sector-specific guidance), and assistance in recruiting skilled and qualified labor.



# GRAND OPENING

## ¡WEPA! MERCADO DEL PUEBLO

By Nadya Henríquez

On February 6, 2021, The Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC) celebrated the Grand Opening of ¡WEPA! Mercado del Pueblo (the People's Market) Initiative and Incubator. The inaugural celebration included guests from the City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development, Aldermanic representatives, Main Street America, Somercor, and partner organizations like Sunshine Enterprises, BMO Harris Bank, Wicker Park Chamber of Commerce, and West Town Chamber of Commerce, among others.

The ¡WEPA! Mercado del Pueblo Initiative and Incubator grew organically when there arose the need to find indoor space for vendors who had been participating in the community pop ups. During the warmer months, these pop-ups were held outdoors along the Paseo Boricua. The PRCC took advantage of a timely opportunity when the space occupied by a former laundromat, which had sat unused for 10 years, began to undergo renovations - thanks to the City of Chicago's Small Business Investment Fund (SBIF), a program of the Department of Planning and Development. This former laundromat shares a parking lot with and abuts the Municipal Supermarket on the corner of Division and Rockwell. The SBIF funds were provided to Municipal owner Ziad Farhan so that he could renovate the space, after a decade of neglect.

The ribbon cutting ceremony was performed outside, in spite of the inclement weather. Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Planning & Development, Mary O'Connor; Managing Deputy Commissioner Bureau of Economic Development, Chip Hasting; son of Municipal Owner, Maher Farhan; PRCC's Business Initiatives Director and SBDC Director Carlos Bosques; and ¡WEPA! Mer-

cado del Pueblo Coordinator, Nadya Henríquez, all held the red ribbon while it was cut thus inaugurating the official opening.

Inside the new space, there was a palpable mix of excitement and euphoria among the 17 vendors who are part of the incubator. City of Chicago photographer, Walter Mitchell, captured people's elation in his pictures, as guests strolled through the aisles of socially distanced vendors, the "Wep-eros" as they are called.



Director Carlos Bosques addressed the attendees and described how "the project was born as a result of the needs of entrepreneurs and micro business owners especially during the COVID-19 pandemic." He continued, "The ¡WEPA! Mercado del Pueblo is an innovative project where startups can begin selling their products as they formalize and grow their businesses with the support of PRCC's business programs, like the Illinois Small Business Development Center (SBDC), and the Neighborhood Business Development Center (NBDC)."

Bosques added, "The Mercado is an example of

how the intersectionality of resources and programs can create projects like this that encourage economic development in our communities. We are developing an economy that is sustainable and self-perpetuating". The duration of the program is one year, after which, businesses will move into a brick and mortar or a coworking "retail" space.

PRCC's Executive Director, José E. López stirred the crowd as he described the history behind the "Mercados" found in every "Plaza" (public square) in Latin America. The mercados not only provide a marketplace to buy products but also are an intrinsic part of the culture and history of every town in Latin America and the Caribbean, and therefore, a vivid reminder of our countries. That is the vision Director López has for visitors who enter the mercado -- he hopes they will be transported to a different space, and learn more about Puerto Rican culture, art, gastronomy, and our identity.

Nonetheless, the mercado is not only for Puerto Rican vendors, as it is inclusive of other minorities like African Americans, Mexicans, and the LGBTQ community. "We want to maintain the Puerto Rican identity of our Paseo Boricua alive, but at the same time we want to support our fellow African Americans, Latinos, and LGBTQ participants in the achievement of their entrepreneurial dreams," said López.

Guests were able to savor delicious Puerto Rican "quesitos" made by Chucherias Tropical Creations, virgin "coquito" (coconut milk drink) from Anita's Coquito, delicious "empanadillas" (beef filled turnovers) from Janellies' Kitchen, and special Puerto Rican "mazamorra" (coconut pudding) made by our own Executive Director, José López.

*(Continued on page 5)*

# LÍDERES COMUNITARIOS EXIGEN: CONVERTIR HUMBOLDT PARK HEALTH CENTRO DE VACUNACIÓN

Credit for the image provided by Pat Nabong/Sun-



by Ambi Colon, La Voz Chicago

Líderes de la comunidad latina se reunieron virtualmente el miércoles para presentar su modelo de distribución de la vacuna COVID-19 a la alcaldesa Lori Lightfoot y al Departamento de Salud Pública de Chicago con la esperanza de que sirva en los esfuerzos para llegar a los residentes de la comunidad que sienten que se han quedado fuera de los planes de vacunación de la Municipalidad, especialmente porque las comunidades afroamericanas y latinas de la ciudad están experimentando las tasas más altas de muerte y positividad.

La Agenda Puertorriqueña, una organización sin fines de lucro que lucha por la autodeterminación de los puertorriqueños en Chicago, hizo una reunión virtual para abordar los problemas relacionados con el acceso y la educación de COVID-19 en las comunidades latinas de la ciudad, particularmente en Humboldt Park.

Más del 70 por ciento de las muertes relacionadas con el COVID-19 en Chicago son de personas negras y latinas, a pesar de que representan menos del 50 por ciento de la población de la ciudad, según datos del Chicago Data Portal.

Varios políticos locales, incluidos el senador Omar Aquino (D-Ill.) y la representante estatal Delia Ramírez (D-Ill.), y partes interesadas en la comunidad se presentaron en apoyo del modelo, que se desarrolló con la guía de profesionales médicos, como José. R. Sánchez, presidente y director ejecutivo de Humboldt Park Health (anteriormente Norwegian American Hospital).

*Nota explicativa: Bajo el hábil liderazgo de Jose Sanchez, Norwegian American hospital se transformó a Humboldt Park Health reflexionando mejor la comunidad.*

Se compone de cuatro metas que tienen como objetivo aumentar la educación, la concientización y la información para las comunidades que se han visto más afectadas por la pandemia y, que en algunos casos, han expresado dudas sobre las vacunas:

Abrir Humboldt Park Health como un centro de vacunación para las comunidades Gran Humboldt Park y latinas.

Ampliar los programas de vacunación y educación para asistir a los hogares multigeneracionales en los que reside la mayoría de las familias latinas.

Activar campañas educativas utilizando Promotoras de Salud, defensoras de la salud comunitaria bilingües enviadas puerta a puerta en los códigos postales más vulnerables con las tasas más altas de infección.

Ampliar el llamado del presidente Biden a establecer un equipo de salud pública en el país para movilizar a al menos 100,000 personas con el apoyo de organizaciones locales en las comunidades de mayor riesgo y realizar enfoques culturalmente competentes para el rastreo de contactos y la vacunación.

La copresidenta de la agenda, Jessie Fuentes, dijo que la organización reconoce que la oficina de Lightfoot está haciendo todo lo posible para mitigar la propagación, incluso con los recursos limitados disponibles, ya que la producción y la implementación de vacunas están ocurriendo mucho más lento de lo previsto. “Lo que estamos exigiendo es que escuchen a la comunidad. Exigimos los recursos para poder vacunar a los residentes de mayor riesgo en nuestra comunidad”, dijo Fuentes.

Reiteró el objetivo de la Agenda de que el recientemente renombrado hospital Humboldt

Park Health se convierta en un centro de vacunas, en particular para los 15 códigos postales mayormente negros y latinos que la ciudad ha identificado como afectados de manera desproporcionada por COVID-19.

Sánchez compartió los datos más recientes de Humboldt Park Health que muestran que las más de 22,000 personas que han sido evaluadas en la comunidad tienen una tasa de positividad de aproximadamente 16 por ciento, y la mayoría de las que dieron positivo son personas afroamericanas y latinas. Esta tasa es alta en comparación con la tasa de positividad actual del estado de aproximadamente 5.5 por ciento, lo que justificó una reapertura en muchos condados, incluido Cook.

En abril, mayo y junio, los datos de las pruebas mostraron que la tasa de positividad para COVID-19 en Humboldt Park eran de 36 por ciento, más de cuatro veces la tasa de positividad del resto del estado y la ciudad en ese momento, según Sánchez.

“No podemos tener un enfoque integral para vacunar a todos en el área de HP si no tenemos suficientes vacunas”, dijo Sánchez. “Tenemos la infraestructura, tenemos los médicos, tenemos las enfermeras, pero sin la vacuna no podemos hacer nada”.

Ald. Roberto Maldonado (26) dijo que ha hablado con miembros de la comunidad que están frustrados por la falta de información disponible sobre las pruebas para las personas que trabajan y tienen niños que cuidar; no tienen tiempo para averiguar qué existe incluso si saben cómo navegar los sitios web.

La información debe presentarse de una manera que funcione para nuestras comunidades”, dijo. “Lo que estamos pidiendo es que, dentro del

(Véase la próxima pagina)

(Viene de la página 4)

contexto del inventario disponible, se distribuya de manera más equitativa según las tasas de positividad. No nos hagan esperar recibir algo que obviamente no vamos a recibir”.

El senador Omar Aquino (D-Ill.) expresó su apoyo al modelo de cuatro metas de la Agenda, agregando que las comunidades latinas se ven afectadas por varios determinantes sociales de la salud.

“Los que viven en comunidades latinas tienen más probabilidades de ser trabajadores esenciales y viven en hogares multigeneracionales, a veces hogares de estatus mixto donde buscar atención médica adecuada presenta un mayor riesgo para los miembros de familia indocumentados”, dijo Aquino.

(HENRÍQUEZ continued from page 4)

Americans, Latinos, and LGBTQ participants in the achievement of their entrepreneurial dreams,” said López.

Guests were able to savor delicious Puerto Rican “quesitos” made by Chucherias Tropical Creations, virgin “coquito” (coconut milk drink) from Anita’s Coquito, delicious “empañadillas” (beef filled turnovers) from Janellies’ Kitchen, and special Puerto Rican “mazamorra” (coconut pudding) made by our own Executive Director, José López.

The Mercado offers a variety of

products from its permanent WEPA vendors: Rochy’s Art, Eco Boutique by Alejandra, Chucherias Tropical Creations, Jibarito Maker, Borincanias, El Rescate Limbers, El Conuco Sofrito by Glenda Guzmán, Batter Up by Bry, Dr. Herbal’s Organic & Vegan Hair Care, Butters RX, Chicago Honey Truck, Butterfly Cookies, Fasinarte Artesanias Mexicanas, Anita’s Coquito and Janellies’ Kitchen. From time to time, when there is space we bring other vendors to pop up at the market.

no.

De hecho, el 69 por ciento de los trabajadores indocumentados en los Estados Unidos también son trabajadores esenciales, lo que significa que no pueden trabajar desde casa y corren el riesgo de llevar el virus a casa a familiares vulnerables y/o ancianos.

“Dicen que somos los grandes esparcidos [del virus], ¡pues denos la vacuna!” dijo Emma Lozano, pastora del Centro Sin Fronteras en Pilsen, quien asistió a la reunión virtual.

Lozano quiere desacreditar el mito de que existe un sentido de desconfianza entre los latinos en torno a la vacuna, diciendo que es la falta de disponibilidad lo que está causando la desconfianza. Mal-

donado también quiso desacreditar esa afirmación, diciendo que no hay una forma real de medir la desconfianza.

“Estamos listos, pero las vacunas no están aquí”, dijo Lozano.

La alcaldesa y los funcionarios de salud de la ciudad anunciaron recientemente una campaña para vacunar a los residentes afroamericanos y latinos en Archer Heights, Austin, Belmont Cragin, Chicago Lawn, Englewood, Gage Park, Humboldt Park, Montclare, New City, North Lawndale, Roseland, South Deering, South Lawndale, Washington Heights y West Englewood.

# La Bodega del Barrio Food Bank Presents:

## The Winter Nutrition Class Series 2021

### La Serie de Clases de Nutrición de Invierno

**Thursday/Jueves at 12:00pm-1:00pm**

**February/Febrero 25, 2021**

**March/Marzo 25, 2021**

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Limited space available call to reserve your spot.

Meeting ID: 969 7895 0725  
Passcode: nutrition



Clase virtual vía zoom y presencial. Espacio limitado, llame para reservar su espacio.

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Stay tune for Spring Nutritional Class Series schedule, coming in March.

Esté atento al horario de la Serie de Clases de Nutrición de Primavera, que llegará en marzo.

2628 W. Division St. Chicago IL 60622

# ELIZAM PLANNED HIS WAKE AS HE PLANNED HIS LIFE

by Jan Susler

Elizam, as his comrade Alberto Rodríguez told *Claridad* - you only needed to say his first name, because we all knew there was only one Elizam and there will never be another - left this earth on January 15, 2021.

He was the first of his generation of Puerto Rican political prisoners to die. His comrades, all deeply affected by his death, marveled at his amazing strength over almost five years living with cancer. And live, he did, creating art up to his last breath. Aware that his body was failing and that his time on earth was waning, we convened what we all

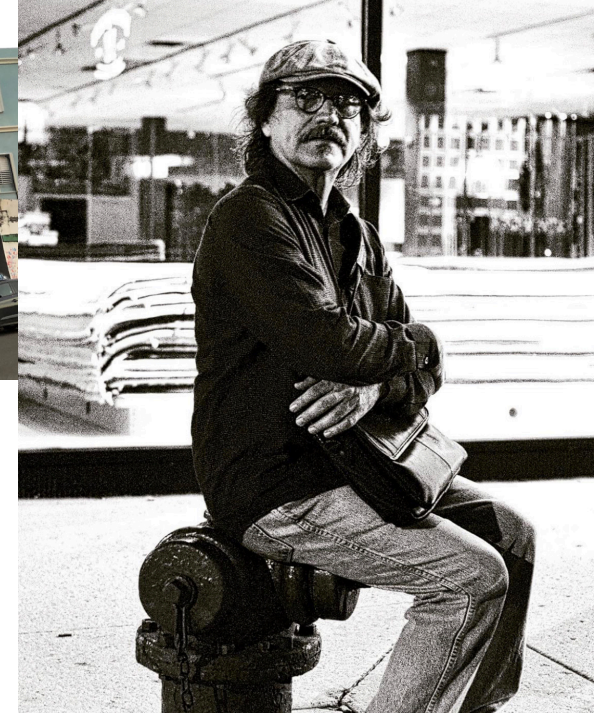
sort of knew was a *despedida*, in November. A get-together, safely distanced, in the *marquesina*. Even though he couldn't eat or drink by then, he insisted that Yolanda, his compañera, and I put on a real party, with food and drink and music, for a family who had formed over their love for their country, having served decades of their lives in prison, and who continued to share their lives after they came home.

Elizam was clear about his wishes: he wanted a wake at *La Casa de los Contrafuertes*, a collaborative interdependent art space in Old San Juan, run by dear friends Ana Rosa Rivera and Charles Juhasz Alvarado, where he had often collaborated and exhibited. With a team of experienced compañeras from the independence and feminist movements -



“las Bravas,” I called them - Rita Zengotita, Alida Millán and Marilú Carrasquillo, Yolanda and I worked to plan the send-off he wanted, which included obtaining an exception to the COVID rules prohibiting wakes outside of funeral homes, and working with dozens of *independentistas* who served to ensure everyone was safely distanced waiting in line and making their way through the space. Fulfilling his wishes about speakers and music, we put together a spectacle. His friends Tony Mapeyé, El Topo, Andy Montañez, Chabela, Violines and others played his favorite music, and family, fellow artists, poets, friends, and movement leaders spoke. His comrades served as honor guard. *Claridad* graphic designer Iván Figueroa prepared a beautiful

program to distribute, and *Claridad* photojournalist Alina Luciano prepared a slide show. The professional livestream, thanks to the Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico, meant that his son Elizer and his family in New York, and so many others, could “be there.” It meant so much to see the photos from Paseo Boricua, of people gathered to watch the



Credit for the image provided by Elias Carmona-Rivera

livestream.

Hundreds of people of all generations came to bid him farewell: former students; fellow art professors; artists and poets, actors, musicians and filmmakers from his days of hanging out in Old San Juan; independence activists; family and friends and neighbors. Some cried, some saluted, some even knelt.

At the end of the wake, as we sang one of his favorites, “*Mira la que linda viene... la revolución boricua, que no da ni un paso atrás*,” Alicia Rodríguez, standing at my side in front of the ferretro, looked at me smiling and said, “This is what Elizam sang when we were arrested!”

We then carried the coffin, draped - fulfilling his wishes - with the Puerto Rican flag and the flag of Lares, out to the waiting hearse, and sang *La Borinqueña*, as people shouted, “*¡Qué viva Puerto Rico libre!*” and “*¡Qué viva Elizam!*”

Elizam was clear about another wish: to convert his home and studio into a Casa Museo, a place for research, workshops, poetry readings - a sort of cultural center. We hope to make this wish come true.

¡Qué viva Elizam!

# Centerfold



# Centerfold

# CELEBRATION OF THE LIFE AND WORK OF EL MAESTRO AND PATRIOT ELIZAM ESCOBAR: THE NATION HAS LOST A VALIANT SON

by Jan Susler

Elizam Escobar Ortiz, painter, poet, patriot, intellectual, passed away January 15 after a long battle with cancer.

Elizam was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico, on May 24, 1948 to Eliphelet Escobar Torres and Deadina Ortiz de Jesús. Elizam participated in the anti-war and anti-draft movement at the University of Puerto Rico in the 1960s as well as the Puerto Rican Socialist League. He graduated from the University of Puerto Rico with a degree in Fine Arts. He later moved to New York where he taught art and became a member of the Progressive Labor Party.

In 1980, Elizam was arrested in Evanston, Illinois with other Puerto Rican patriots. He was convicted of seditious conspiracy and sentenced to 68 years in prison. In the 20 years he was incarcerated in U.S. prisons, he not only painted prolifically - exhibits of his art played a key role in the campaign for the release of the Puerto Rican political prisoners - but he also studied philosophy; wrote essays and poetry; maintained a vigorous correspondence with artists, poets and intellectuals; and exhibited his art throughout the

world. He and other Puerto Rican political prisoners were released in 1999, when President Bill Clinton commuted their unjust and disproportionate sentences. Elizam and many of his compañeros made their homes in Puerto Rico, where they received a hero's welcome. The School of Plastic Arts immediately recruited him to join the faculty, where he taught painting for 20 years, until his health forced him to step down. Among the many recognitions of his life and work are included: an honorary master's degree from the School of Fine Arts, the dedication of La Campechada in 2016, the International Association of Art Critics' award in 2013 for the best



world.

He and other Puerto Rican political prisoners were released in 1999, when President Bill Clinton commuted their unjust and disproportionate sentences. Elizam and many of his compañeros made their homes in Puerto Rico, where they received a hero's welcome. The School of Plastic Arts immediately recruited him to join the faculty, where he taught painting for 20 years, until his health forced him to step down.

Among the many recognitions of his life and work are included: an honorary master's degree from the School of Fine Arts, the dedication of La Campechada in 2016, the International Association of Art Critics' award in 2013 for the best

retrospective exhibit, and the Pen Club award in 1999 for the best anthology of essays - a book written and published while he was in prison.

He faced both cancer and his imprisonment with an incredible spirit, a contagious sense of humor, and a thirst for life and joy. His vast collection of hats and shoes is but a small manifestation of this spirit.

His dedication to and creation of art permeated his life to his dying day, and he left many projects unfinished. His dream was to convert his home

and art studio into a museum, cultural center, and center for research. The family is committed to fulfilling his wishes.

He is survived by his son Elizer Escobar (Abigail Talcott-Schlaifer and two grandchildren Raphael Francis and Beatrice James); his brother Eliud Escobar Ortiz, Eliud's wife Elizabeth Pérez and their two children Eliseliz and Elizaín, and his sister Rosario Escobar Ortiz and her three children Inamar, Eliphelet and Esther; his partner Yolanda Guerrios, Jan Susler, as well as an extended family of his compañeros the former political prisoners, the movement for the independence of Puerto Rico, and the arts community.

# ALDERMAN MALDONADO, L.A.M.A, AND PRCC CELEBRATE THREE KINGS DAY HUNDREDS OF GIFTS GIVEN AT EL MERCADO DEL PUEBLO

by Alicia Rivera

While much of the world has embraced the celebration of Christmas, Puerto Ricans both here in Chicago and on the island have kept alive the tradition of Los Tres Reyes Magos (Three Kings Day), which is celebrated every year on January 6th. This year our community gathered joyfully and safely in Humboldt Park despite great difficulties brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees and organizers from The Puerto Rican Cultural Center were determined to revamp the event under the CDC guidelines so that our cherished tradition would continue. After days of organizing, planning, and troubleshooting, we brought this event to fruition in a safe and healthy way.

more than 900 toys and games donated by Toys for Tots. On behalf of West Town Bikes, 75 bicycles were tuned up and ready to be gifted. Members of the Latin American Motorcycle Association went the extra mile and dressed up as the Three Kings. They handed out gifts to children waiting in line, and posed for photographs in between. In the midst of a pandemic and with uncertainty as to how many people would show, a great number of community residents did come and shared the joy of this beloved tradition.

As evening fell and or-



With less than a week to coordinate this ambitious event, The Puerto Rican Cultural Center collaborated with its community partners -- Toys for Tots, the Latin American Motorcycle Association, West Town Bikes, and Alderman Roberto Maldonado's Office. Volunteers from these organizations worked all week to wrap

young father approached one of our volunteers who was putting away the last bicycle. He asked if he could have that bicycle for his daughter. Having fallen on hard times, the young father was unable to afford gifts this year, but thanks to West Town Bikes he was able to take home a gift for his child on Three Kings Day. It is a

organizers began cleaning up, a

sweet reminder of why we do this work despite the challenges we face while organizing community events like these. This young man represents only one of the many families this community was honored to serve. We are grateful that we could launch this event with our community and for our community. It stands as an example of how people honor their culture and traditions while they collectively lift themselves.

# C.A.A.C CONNECTS: - MORE THAN 100,000 STUDENTS TO FREE INTERNET - CONNECTS COMMUNITY RESOURCES

by Marvin Garcia

Some Community Resources

The PRCC - Community as a Campus Initiative has partnered with the Chicago Connected Initiative and CPS to connect more than 100,000 students to free Internet for remote learning. Since September 2020, 60,000 families city wide have been connected. However, in the Humboldt Park area 5,500 families were identified as needing Internet in September. Since then, the number has grown to 7,500. Thanks to the work of Monica Lozada, Regisa Rosario and José Pagán, 3,600 families have been connected to this no cost internet service.

The PRCC - Community as a Campus team is working with all the local schools to connect families and is troubleshooting with Comcast when problems arise.

Below are important points to keep in mind when parents attempt to connect their children to the Internet.

1. You need a code from your school to get a connection with Comcast
  2. You cannot be denied the Internet if you have a bill.
  3. You can disconnect a current account to get a free account.
  4. We can call Comcast with the parents to assist in setting up service.
  5. If you are currently experiencing slow Internet - we can help with that.
  6. Finally, families will be provided a list of resources and referrals as part of our mutual aid support.
- Call us to get assistance at 312-838-3113 and see your School Principal for more information. Additionally, Community as a Campus will soon inaugurate a much needed resource -- a biweekly email (once every two weeks) that will be sent to participating school principals. This resource will provide information on rental and



Chicago families,  
you may be eligible for

## INTERNET AT NO COST TO YOU

We are delighted to inform you that your family may qualify for sponsored high-speed internet as part of **Chicago Connected**, a groundbreaking new program created by Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot and Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to narrow the digital divide in Chicago.

\* TO FIND OUT IF YOU'RE ELIGIBLE AND SIGN UP:

**CALL CPS AT (773) 417-1060**

Open Mon-Fri, from 7:30am - 4:30pm

\* TO LEARN MORE, VISIT:

**CPS.EDU/CHICAGOCONNECTED**

All participating internet providers offer 25MBPS Download and 3MBPS Upload



Scan QR code using phone camera or QR reader app to learn more.



utility support, food banks, mental health assistance, and how to connect to free Internet service.

The resource list will be continually updated and accompanied by a video of a contact person who will advocate for families to get the assistance they need.

Food Pantries, Shelters, Housing assistance, Utility payment assistance, Covid-19 testing sites

### Chicago Hope Food Pantry

2505 N. Kedzie Blvd., Chicago IL 60647  
(773) 499-9763, Contact Maggie Jordan  
HOURS: Monday: 4:00 pm - 6:00 pm and  
Thursday: 10:00 am - 12:00 pm

SERVICE AREA: N: Addison - S: Division  
St; E: Western Ave - W: Pulaski Rd

**Food Distribution Center** - San Lucas Church

(THIS LOCATION ALSO PROVIDES LIHEAP ASSISTANCE )

2914 W. North Ave., Chicago, IL 60647  
(773) 227-5747, Monday thru Friday  
8:30am - 1:00pm

### Open Arms Ministry

Location: basement of New Community  
Covenant Church

2649 North Francisco Ave Chicago, IL  
60647

Food distribution Every Wednesday from  
4:00pm - 6:00pm

### St. Marks Church Food pantry

1048 N. Campbell Ave., Chicago, IL 60622  
(773) 342-1516

### Covid -19 Testing Locations

PrimeCare Northwest Health Center  
Medical clinic · 1649 N Pulaski Rd · (773) 278-6868

COVID-19 Drive-Thru Testing at Walgreens  
Medical laboratory · 1627 N Pulaski Rd · (800) 925-4733

COVID-19 Drive-Thru Testing at Walgreens  
Medical laboratory · 4748 W North Ave · (800) 925-4733

Westside Medical  
Urgent care center · 4909 W Division St · (773) 832-7100

Testing for all patients  
COVID-19 Drive-Thru Testing at Walgreens  
Medical laboratory · 4817 W Fullerton Ave · (800) 925-4733

Free Covid Care  
Medical laboratory · 4817 W Madison St · (833) 219-7867

COVID-19 Drive-Thru Testing at Walgreens  
Medical laboratory · 2001 N Milwaukee Ave · (800) 925-4733

Erie Division Street Health Center  
Medical clinic · 2418 W Division St · (312) 666-3494

Physicians Immediate Care  
Urgent care center · 1702 N Milwaukee Ave · (773) 770-4056

Testing for all patients  
Instructions: Testing for COVID-19 is on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Due to limited supply please call (773) 770-4056 for availability.

Loretto Hospital  
Hospital · 645 S Central Ave · (773) 626-4300  
Testing for all patients  
Drive-through

AMITA Health Saints Mary and Elizabeth Medical Center  
AMITA Health offers drive-thru testing for eligible patients at five sites. Patients are required to be scheduled for an appointment and have an order from their doctor before they can receive drive-thru testing. Your doctor will also tell you when and where to go for your test. Bring your driver's license or photo ID. 2233 W Division St, Chicago, IL 60622 (312) 770-2000

AMITA Health Saints Mary and Elizabeth Medical Center  
Chicago: Enter the 1400 block of Oakley Boulevard and follow the signage leading you to the rear of Saint Elizabeth Hospital outside of the former Emergency Department.

To find additional public testing locations throughout Illinois, visit <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/covid19/covid-19-testing-sites> and for more resources contact your school principal!

## I.W.D TO HONOR ON MARCH 8<sup>TH</sup> POWERFUL PUERTO RICAN WOMEN IN OUR COMMUNITY

by *Xiomara Rodriguez*

To commemorate International Women's Day, I interviewed four powerful Puerto Rican women who are at the vanguard of policy and advocacy work for Puerto Ricans in the diaspora and on the island. Jessie Fuentes, Mariana Osoria, Cristina Pacione-Zayas, and Melissa Mark-Viverito have much in common, but what is most noteworthy and inspiring is that each one has been an advocate and activist for social justice nearly their entire lives. From protests with Mami and Papi, to student activists, to grassroots community organizers, to powerful politicians and policy advocates, these women have dedicated their lives to our community. Notably, in each conversation, one familiar topic independently arose: all discussed the frustration that although women and gender non-conforming folks have historically been the back bone of liberation movements, men typically become the face of the movements. Consequently, I write this as more than a celebration of International Women's Day, but as a call to action for us all to work everyday, and at all times to actively celebrate, honor, and center the voices and leadership of women and gender non-conforming people. As Jessie Fuentes responded to this point, "It starts by highlighting women outside of International Women's Day".

So let us celebrate the incredible work that these women continue to do! Just last year, Melissa Mark-Viverito became the Chief Policy Officer for The Puerto Rican Cultural Center following her eminent and long-lived career in New York politics, her elected position as the speaker of the New York City Council, and her successes working to free the Puerto Rican political prisoners, as well as her mobilizing efforts to get the U.S. Navy out of Vieques. In her current role, Mark-Viverito is working on the most pressing issues

now facing the Puerto Rican community in the diaspora and on the island, including the Self Determination Bill recently introduced by two other powerful Puerto Rican women, Nydia Velázquez and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Melissa Mark-Viverito has also been working with #Power4PuertoRico to create a national diaspora network and platform to promote collaboration, connection, and cohesion among Puerto Ricans in the diaspora. When Mark-Viverito was discussing the challenges she has been up against with the Self Determination Bill she explained that the movement for Puerto Rico's statehood is extremely well financed, which means they can move money around easily to get support from elected officials. Consequently, Mark-Viverito says the work she is doing to support a process of Self Determination for Puerto Rico must be much more creative and sensitive. For this campaign Mark-Viverito describes her strategy as a more thoughtful grassroots effort that is building education/awareness and relies heavily on coalition building with people like Reverend Al Sharpton and communities that have stood with us in struggle.

All of the women leaders I spoke with discussed the bigger picture of transformation through the work they do. These women are proud Puerto Ricans grounded in work to support the Puerto Rican community in the diaspora and on the island. This work for social justice has deepened their belief that we cannot create meaningful change without solidarity. When Jessie Fuentes and Mariana Osoria, the co-chairs of the



Puerto Rican Agenda, spoke of the larger vision for their organization, they spoke of the fight against global gentrification. They connected the fight on the island to the fight in Humboldt Park. They explained the necessity of establishing a sustainable cultural corridor through a bill introduced by State Representative Delia Ramírez. Fuentes believes the magnitude of the issues happening this moment requires our solidarity—such as racial injustice, the murder of our Black siblings at the hands of police and White supremacists, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Both Mariana Osoria and Jessie Fuentes discussed the importance of the Puerto Rican Agenda's guiding principle of Solidarity Not Charity, which informs their work in coalition building, and was powerfully solidified during their work to support the relief efforts after the devastation of Hurricanes Maria and Irma as well as the recent earthquakes that rocked the island. Both co-chairs of the Agenda also discussed how a big part of working to build relationships and coalitions with groups in Puerto Rico is to check our privilege as Puerto Ricans living in the diaspora, and with voting

(RODRIGUEZ continued on page 14)

(RODRIGUEZ continued from page 13)

privileges our families on the island do not have. It was moving to hear these women talk about the work they do to address the historical and current realities of colonialism on the island, and see how that informs the work they do in solidarity towards all peoples' liberation and self-determination.

The most beautiful stories I heard from these powerful women illustrated how they have been supported by other Puerto Rican women in their field, which has allowed them to get to where they are now. Cristina Pacione-Zayas replaced Iris Martinez and became the new State Senator in this area. When asked, Jessie Fuentes shared that she was inspired to take the role as Co-chair of the Puerto Rican Agenda because she wanted to co-chair with Pacione-Zayas and have a women led Puerto Rican Agenda. Melissa Mark-Viverito also discussed how important her work with the 2I in 2I campaign is to her, which works to get more women elected to the New York City Council. Mark-Viverito talked about how deeply she believed in mentorship and intergenerational organizing because that is how we ensure our work continues even after we are gone.

## PUERTO RICO'S WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT BOXER FRES "FAST FRES" OQUENDO CONTINUES LIFELONG FIGHT AGAINST INJUSTICE: TAKES ON W.B.A

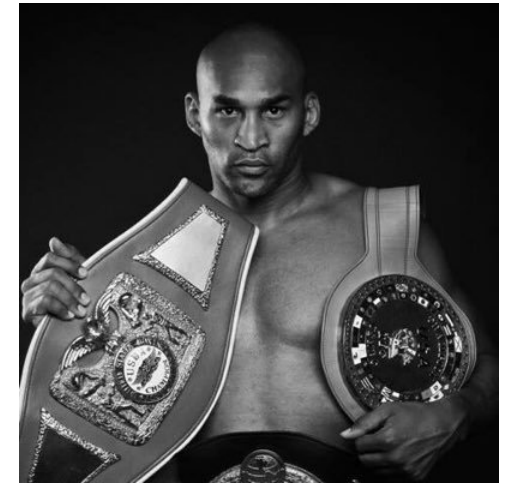
by *Xiomara Rodriguez*

The number one contender for the World Boxing Association's Heavyweight Title, Fres Oquendo, filed a new complaint for injunctive relief, declaratory judgement, and money damages against the World Boxing Association. Through his attorneys, Oquendo carries on his seven-year battle with the World Boxing Association (WBA) for his court-ordered World Heavyweight Championship and earned contracted purse payments never paid to him. This injunction was primarily filed to stop the Heavyweight Championship scheduled for January.

Fres Oquendo has never backed down from a fight, and he continues to combat the injustices waged against him by the World Boxing Association. The World Ranked Heavy Weight Boxer is no stranger to injustice. Oquendo's fight has always extended beyond the boxing ring, and beyond his own circumstances. At the same time that Oquendo has been fighting the WBA for his rightfully earned shot at the WBA World Heavyweight Title, he created the Fres Oquendo Boxing Academy, which is a nonprofit organization that provides at risk youth the unique opportunity to learn important life skills through the sport of boxing". Oquendo has deep roots in our community and has served as a role model to the youth of The Puerto Rican Cultural Center. We take this injustice against Oquendo as an injustice against all Puerto Ricans and Latinos. We demand that this be resolved, and that Oquendo receive his long-sought vindication.

Fres Oquendo was born in Puerto Rico and raised in one of Chicago's most infamous housing projects "Lathrop Holmes". He defeated the odds through boxing. As an underprivileged and at-risk youth, Oquendo faced the daily struggles of gang violence, drugs, and extreme poverty. He had a vision and was determined to create a better life for himself and his family. Understanding the struggles that many underprivileged inner-city youth continually face is what motivated Fres to open a boxing gym, not only to train the youth in boxing but also give them the life skills needed to be productive inside and outside of the ring.

Now Oquendo is utilizing the lessons he teaches the youth he works with to continue his seven-year battle with the WBA. This time Oquendo is fighting the heavyweight title fight between Manuel Charr and Trevor Bryan scheduled for January 29, 2021, because the WBA has breached their contracts with Oquendo and wrongfully passed him up to fight for his World Heavyweight Title four different times since 2014. Since 2014 Oquendo's Boxing career has been put on hold at no fault of his own, Oquendo already won a lawsuit which ruled an immediate rematch in 2014 against Ruslan Chagaev for the WBA World Heavyweight Title. Since that ruling in 2014, each time Oquendo was scheduled to fight for the WBA Heavyweight Title, the bout did not take place because each of his opponents failed his drug test. Subsequently, the WBA failed to order a new fight with Oquendo against the next available



contender. Instead, they approved title fights involving other top contenders and bypassed Oquendo completely. Moreover, the WBA disregarded its rules when it allowed Charr to remain heavyweight champion without a mandatory title defense (or any title defense) since his last fight more than three years ago. Lastly, The WBA has repeatedly disregarded its own rulings and agreements regarding Oquendo fighting for the WBA World Heavyweight Championship resulting in extreme hardship and financial loss to Oquendo. Oquendo argues that all of these injustices perpetrated by the WBA can only be rectified by an immediate injunction against the WBA and a mandatory title shot for Oquendo. Fres "Fast Fres" Oquendo has been fighting his whole life and he is more determined than ever. He has beat the odds before and he plans to do so again against his most recent opponent, the World Boxing Association. To support Fres Oquendo at his upcoming court case on 3/17/2021 at 9:15am call (888) 557-8511 and use access code 3547847.

# INDEPENDENCE IS THE PROGRESSIVE SOLUTION TO US COLONIALISM IN PUERTO RICO

by Margaret Power, Truthout

In his August 2020 eulogy to John Lewis, Barack Obama characterized Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C.'s lack of political representation on the federal level as a civil rights issue. The Democratic Party and some progressives have since called for statehood for Washington and Puerto Rico.

José López is the executive director of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center in Chicago. A long-time supporter of Puerto Rican independence, he also worked to secure the release of successive generations of Puerto Rican political prisoners, including his brother, Oscar López Rivera. In this interview, López refutes the idea that the 2020 plebiscite indicates majority support for statehood and explains why the solution to U.S. colonialism in Puerto Rico is independence. He also argues Puerto Rico's status is a human rights – not a civil rights – issue.

**Margaret Power: How do you analyze the November 2020 elections in Puerto Rico?**

**José López:** There were some very interesting outcomes to the 2020 general local territorial elections on the island. But first, some background.

Local elections have been held in Puerto Rico since 1900, when the Foraker Act established a civilian government following the United States' 1898 invasion of the archipelago. Since that time Puerto Rico has elected a resident commissioner to represent Puerto Rico in the U.S. Congress. However, the commissioner lacks voting rights. Although Puerto Ricans became U.S. citizens in 1917, they, too, lack voting rights as long as they live in Puerto Rico. They cannot vote for president, senator or congressman. If they move to the United States, they can vote in federal elections. In the November 2020 election, Puerto Ricans cast their ballot

ALEJANDRO GRANADILLO / ANADOLU AGENCY VIA GETTY



for local and municipal officials, in addition to a non-binding referendum on statehood (yes or no).

For decades, there have been two large parties in Puerto Rico, the pro-statehood Partido Nuevo Progresista (New Progressive Party, or PNP) and the pro-Commonwealth Partido Demócrata Popular (People's Democratic Party, or PPD). Almost every four years, they alternated as governors. After November 2020, this two-party system is literally gone because more than one-third of the electorate chose a third-party candidate. That hasn't happened in decades, probably not since the 1952 elections when the Partido Independentista Puertorriqueña (Puerto Rican Independence Party, or PIP) got 19 percent of the vote.

It shows that when people went to the polls last November they were really thinking about possibilities. Alexandra Lúgaro, who represented a new, emerging party, Movimiento Victoria Ciudadana (Citizen's Victory Movement, or MVC), ran for governor and [won] almost 14 percent of the vote. That is a huge amount. The PNP got 33 percent of the vote, the PPD got 32 percent and the PIP got 14 percent; two other candidates received far fewer votes. That means that roughly 35 percent of the electorate did not vote for one of what had been the two major parties.

Five different parties now have representatives in the Puerto Rican House of Representatives and Senate. This is a major change. As a result, there will have to be negotiations to determine who will be the leaders of the House of Representatives and the Senate.

One other important change is the sizable num-

ber of women candidates, especially at the levels of mayors and in the House of Representatives and the Senate. For example, Ana Irma Rivera Lassén, an Afro-descent lesbian from the MVC party, was elected to the Senate. And three gay men, from different parties, also won seats. They really changed the makeup of a mostly a heterosexual and male-dominated House and Senate.

**Many people have interpreted the non-binding referendum to be a vote for statehood. Do you agree?**

It was a non-binding referendum that had no real merit and a single yes or no question, "Should Puerto Rico be immediately admitted into the Union as a state?" That was the only option offered to voters. The statehood movement, which received 623,053 votes (or 52 percent of the vote), claimed it had won. But if you add up the real numbers, you will see that that simply is not the case. Thousands turned in a blank vote on the referendum, or didn't vote in the referendum at all, possibly because they did not recognize it as legitimate. There was a protest vote. 1,428,075 people voted in the gubernatorial election but only 1,190,399 voted in the referendum. That means that over 237,000 fewer people voted in the referendum than had cast their ballot for governor. If they were for statehood, they would have voted. Compounding it all, the voter turnout was lower than normal. Only about 32 percent of all eligible voters cast their ballot in the referendum, making it the "lowest voter count in history." So taking all these factors into consideration, we can say statehood did not win.

But 44 percent of Puerto Ricans consciously voted for statehood. To explain this, it's very important to underscore the fact that the statehood movement put incredible resources into the movement. They launched a blitz that hit the whole island calling for statehood based on notions of equality, civil rights and the idea that if Puerto Rico were a state, then Puerto Ricans would get parity in federal funding for health, education and welfare. The Puerto Rican people are desperate as a result of the 2017 Hurricane Maria and the continuous earthquakes that have plagued the island in the last year. In addition, the non-elected Oversight

*(Continued on the next page)*

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Board (junta) created by the U.S. Congress to oversee Puerto Rico's budget has imposed damaging austerity measures on the people. The real function of the junta has been to ensure the repayment of the unaudited debt to U.S. banks and financial sectors. It has done nothing to ensure the well-being of the Puerto Rican people. As a result, Puerto Ricans are dependent on federal funds, which are not dispersed equally in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico is ruled under the doctrine of separate and unequal. A lot of people who are dependent on this funding said, "Oh, we are going to lose it unless we become a state." The campaign for statehood appealed to a desperate population by telling people their livelihood was at stake. That was their prescription for getting approval.

The "no" vote had no physical presence anywhere. A group of people organized a grassroots movement, but it had no access to the local media, which boycotted it. So given that, it's impressive that statehood got only 48 percent of the vote.

**The independence movement in Puerto Rico has a very long history. It is deeply rooted in the 19th-century fight against Spanish colonial domination. The movement seeks total sovereignty from the United States with a vision of providing social and economic justice for the people of the archipelago. The vote for independence went up?**

Yes, the vote for independence went up a great deal. If you measure it according to who had the highest individual vote in Puerto Rico, it was María Lourdes Santiago. She's vice president of the PIP and she won a Senate seat in a national election, with votes from across Puerto Rico. She received 136,679 votes, while the two top vote getters from the PNP received only 81,863 and 80,139 votes respectively.

**Why did more people vote for independence in this election?**

The vote for independence was not at the level of the other two parties, but the PIP did very well. And the at-large candidates from MVC had a very good showing. This all demonstrates opposition to the current administration and current politics in Puerto Rico. It demonstrates that new developments are taking place in Puerto Rican politics.

This year, the PIP had a young candidate, Juan Dalmau for governor, who articulated a clear vision for Puerto Rico. Exit polls and a large number of political commentators show he drew most of his votes from the young people of Puerto Rico.

**You said that many of those who voted for statehood were people who felt that a vote against statehood threatened their livelihood. Who are these people specifically?**

People from a variety of sectors support statehood, including senior citizens and veterans. Puerto Rico has a huge veteran population. Puerto Ricans who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces don't get equal treatment as compared to U.S. veterans. There is also an elderly population that sees its livelihood linked to the United States. The statehood movement tells them you will lose this money if you don't vote for statehood. Their livelihood is put on the line and they don't see other possibilities. They are a sizable number of the population.

The upper crust of the Puerto Rican elite is pro-statehood while many lower-income people depend on support from food stamps, the Department of Housing and Urban Development and other U.S. agencies. But what Puerto Ricans are not told is that most of what they get back is what has been taken from them in taxes or profits. It's not as if they are getting these resources or funds as a benevolent act of the U.S. government. Puerto Ricans pay Social Security and Medicare. We don't get anything from the United States we don't deserve and, more importantly, that we didn't earn.

**What is the connection between this vote and the protests that occurred in the summer of 2019?**

The electoral outcomes and the political divisions show that people are looking critically at the political parties and corruption. The colonial situation of Puerto Rico is becoming more evident. It was very evident in the marches of July 2019 when literally one-third of the Puerto Rican population overthrew the governor. That's one of the largest percentages of people in the world that have gone into the streets. The protests had a consciousness raising impact on the Puerto Rican electorate.

**Some sectors in the Democratic Party have**

**pushed for statehood recently. Who is pushing it and why?**

In the last few years, the Democratic Party has been beholden to very wealthy statehood sectors in Puerto Rico, who have poured a lot of money into the Democratic Party. The election of Tom Perez as chairman of the Democratic Party was helped by money statehooders donated to support his bid against Keith Ellison of Minnesota. As people know, there is a clear political division within the Democrats. Ellison represented supporters of Bernie Sanders and the progressive wing, and Tom Perez represented the more conservative sectors. The wealthy statehooders, who are very connected to people and lobbyists in Washington, have donated a lot of money to the Democratic Party.

The other factor is the myth that if Puerto Rico became a state, the Democrats would get two Democratic senators and maybe up to five Democratic Congressmen and, as a result, Democrats would control both houses for years. This analysis fails to take into account that the pro-Trump candidate, Jennifer Gonzalez, who is a statehooder, won for resident commissioner in Puerto Rico. Donald Trump poured money into her campaign.

Some Democrats support statehood because the issue is framed in terms of civil rights. At John Lewis's funeral, Barack Obama said the next step to be taken in terms of civil rights is to guarantee statehood for the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. But they are two separate cases. Of course, I believe everyone should support statehood for Washington, D.C. It's an integral part of the United States and the people who live there have no representation in the legislative bodies. They should have the equal rights of any citizen.

Puerto Rico is different because it's a struggle for human rights. We need to distinguish between civil rights and human rights. The United States government has only one responsibility and that is to support Puerto Rico's right to self-determination. No political leader in the United States has the right to determine what is right for Puerto Rico. They can have an opinion, but their responsibility is to resolve a historical problem that is informed by colonial relations.

*(POWER continued on page 19)*



# ELIZAM ESCOBAR: EL SECRETO ENTRE NOSOTROS

By Antonio Martorell

El pintor, poeta, ensayista y prisionero político por casi veinte años Elizam Escobar no cesa de escarbar con su obra nuestra conciencia nacional escombrando siglos de encubrimiento hasta revelar el sepultado pentimento de una pintura inacabada, promesas traicionadas y pandemia moral.

Las máscaras que abundan en su legado pictórico y en la críptica sintaxis de sus escritos anticipan el virus que amenaza coronar nuestros días y eternizar la noche. Maestro de la subversión tan política como estética, Elizam desenmascara enmascarando el carnaval colonial. El travieso vejigante ponceño de su ciudad natal baila con la gallina ciega del Goya aragonés en embriagante ronda de abrazador tanteo.

Peregrino prisionero en cárceles de máxima seguridad y mínima justicia, el maestro Escobar elaboró con sus manos libertades sin límites

en lienzos, papeles, envoltorios, aparentes desperdicios y efímeros manifiestos. Pintó en la oscuridad, la luz y desde la estrecha celda gestó obras monumentales. Si resultan



alucinantes muchas de sus creaciones es porque era éste el único modo de adivinar la realidad en el misterio, la verdad en el cautiverio.

El sueño de la razón produce monstruos, reza el

epígrafe goyesco. Nuestro boricua, al pintarse infante difunto inspirado en Oller y velado por Goya, Gauguin, Diego, Frida y Carlos Raquel, tiene bien heredado y sabido que el despertar no aguarda la resurrección, que el arte es vida, la verdad belleza, la creación libertad.

Ahora que la muerte cerró sus ojos, su visión abre caminos que la razón no conoce, su reveladora línea en imágenes y palabras trazan un sendero, no por accidentado, menos emancipador. Lo que nos dice Elizam nunca es alarido estridente sino susurro apenas inteligible, secreto entre nosotros, íntima adivinación.

¿Cómo no ser conspirativa la revelación si

atenta contra la injusticia y el vasallaje? El arte de Elizam le sobrevive deslizándose como creció: entre rejas y redes, verdades pescadas al vuelo de la imaginación, armadas almas que al amor se deben.

## ELIZAM LEFT A LEGACY FOR US TO CONTINUE TO PONDER THE MAJOR QUESTIONS OF THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE



PRCC and political prisoners' floral arrangement delivered by Elizam's compatriots Luis Rosa, Lucy Rodríguez, Adolfo Matos, Oscar López Rivera, and Alicia Rodríguez.

By José E. López.

### In Memoriam,

Today, we mourn the physical loss of our beloved patriot and consummate artist Elizam Escobar: but forever we should celebrate his many gifts to our lives and most importantly that Elizam lived life to its fullest until his final moments. From the days of exposing the secret imperial project called Plan 2020 in 1976 along with his teacher Juan Antonio Corretjer, to his sacrificial feat of two decades of political incarceration, to his commitment to the political freedom of Puerto Rico, to his unique artistic expressions, to his riveting wordsmithing and poetry; from his amazing, engaging teaching skills, to his deep philosophical conversations, Elizam left so much for us to continue to ponder the major ques-

tions of the human experience. As he once said "Yo creo que el arte es una respuesta a la muerte porque es la forma de mantener vivo todas las pasiones, las contradicciones, los logros de la humanidad, el aprecio por todo, por la naturaleza, por el mar, por el universo".

There is no doubt in my mind that Elizam's epithet could best be expressed in the words of Corretjer "en la mesa del dolor del mundo, edité mi proyecto de vida"

Elizam was truly an iconic figure of Puerto Rican art, politics, and letters. In words and in deeds he lived the change that he struggled for. I am convinced that he could state as the great Mexican muralist Diego Rivera once said "por mi raza hablará mi espíritu".

## DR. AIDA GIACHELLO JOINS THE PUERTO RICAN CULTURAL CENTER



By Melissa Banerje

We are excited to announce that Dr. Aida Giachello will join our staff as The Puerto Rican Cultural Center's "Senior Advisor of Public Health Initiatives". Dr. Giachello has distinguished herself at the national level as an educator and a writer who deftly uses research to sound the alarm on health inequities and social justice matters as they relate to women and Latino and other marginalized communities.

Dr. Giachello's leadership was instrumental in the creation of various public health initiatives for Latinos in Chicago. As the Assistant to the Chicago Department of Public Health's (CDPH) Commissioner, she established the Office of Hispanic Affairs, and developed comprehensive policies to improve public health and

mental health services at CDPH clinics. After serving in the Mayor's Office (under the Harold Washington Administration), Dr. Giachello joined the University of Illinois-Chicago (UIC) faculty in 1993. During her tenure at UIC, she established the Midwest Latino Health Research, Training, and Policy Center, where she conducted health equity/health disparities research on chronic conditions. In 2010, Dr. Giachello retired from the University of Illinois-Chicago after 17 years of service, but soon thereafter joined the Northwestern University Department of Preventive Medicine as a Research Professor.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Giachello has been a compelling advocate for prevention and mitigation strategies to halt the spread of the virus in the hardest hit Latino and African American communities. She serves as a member of Illinois Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton's COVID-19 Health Equity Committee, the Illinois Department of Public Health's Health Equity Task Force, and she is a founding member of the

Illinois Unidos COVID-19 coalition, which formed in April 2020 to call attention to the highly disparate impact of COVID-19 in Latino Communities. She is also the Co-Chair of the Puerto Rican Agenda's Health and Wellness Committee. Dr. Giachello was named one of 25 most influential Hispanics/Latinos in America by TIME Magazine (2005); among other well-deserved awards and recognitions during her extensive career. Widely recognized for her distinguished service and her expertise, Dr. Giachello is a frequent guest on local and national mainstream English and Spanish media.

"La doctora Aida Giachello" is a well-known and respected figure in Humboldt Park and particularly among her colleagues at The Puerto Rican Cultural Center. She has distinguished herself as a selfless, hardworking, and authentic public health champion. We are all looking forward to years of collaboration and transformative work with this treasure of the Puerto Rican community. ¡Bienvenida Doctora!

## THE PRCC CONGRATULATES REP JESÚS "CHUY" GARCÍA: NEW VICE CHAIR OF HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

by La Voz Staff

In February Congressman Jesús "Chuy" García was appointed Vice Chair of the House Committee on Natural Resources for the 117th Congress. Congressman García, the only member of the Illinois Delegation serving on the committee, released the following statement: "I am honored to be appointed Vice Chair of the House Committee on Natural Resources under the leadership of Chairman Raúl Grijalva. I look forward to advancing a progressive agenda to deliver justice and economic empowerment for indigenous peoples, protect public lands, and ensure clean air and a healthy environment for families in Illinois and across the country," said Rep. Jesús "Chuy" García. "The work of the committee to dismantle environmental racism, restore and preserve the Great Lakes, and protect the rights of the people of Puerto Rico and the U.S. territories will have a significant impact on the lives of all Chicagoans. The health of our families is directly connected to the health of our environment. I look forward to making America a



better steward of our natural resources and intend to lift up the voices of my fellow Chicagoans, including the more than 55,000 individuals of Puerto Rican origin in my district, as the committee strives to ensure a safer, healthier, and more sustainable future for our children."

"The Puerto Rican Cultural Center congratulates our Congressman Jesús 'Chuy' García on being selected Vice Chair of the Natural Resources Committee. This is great news for Puerto Rico and the Puerto Ricans in the U.S. as we advance our case for self-determination. Chuy has a unique understanding of the problems and possibilities of the Puerto Rican reality. He has been one of the great champions of Puerto Rican causes for more than four decades."

(POWER continued from page 16)

We are a distinct people. A Caribbean/Latin American people. The United States does not treat us as even second- or even third-class citizens. In 1901, the Supreme Court ruled that Puerto Rico belongs to but is not a part of the United States. Puerto Ricans can never really hope to be full citizens. We are ruled by a doctrine of separate and unequal. The United States has used Puerto Rico as an experiment for so many of its policies: neoliberalism, Operation Bootstrap, reproduction. Puerto Rican women were experimented on and used as guinea pigs for the development of the birth control pill. The U.S. military used Puerto Rico as a military experiment station to practice bombings and conducted experiments in Agent Orange before it was used in Vietnam. When we look at all of these things, I don't know how anyone would want to be part of a country that has treated us like objects.

**Some forces in the U.S. progressive movement support statehood for Puerto Rico. What do you think about that?**

Europeans created colonialism 500-plus years ago to take people's lands, labor and resources. They justified colonialism through racism. When we talk about structural racism, in many ways we are talking about colonialism. We need to move away from the idea that Obama and others are putting out in the Democratic Party and address

the issue of colonialism and support the historical quest for self-determination.

**What would constitute the settlement of the Puerto Rico national question?**

Puerto Ricans' ability to achieve full self-determination so we can self-realize as a fully functioning people on the face of the Earth, so we can share this world with all peoples. The U.S. government needs to pay reparations for colonialism; this is true for Puerto Ricans just as it is true for Black people.

**How are Puerto Rican elected officials responding to the push for statehood?**

In August 2020, New York Congresswomen Nydia Velázquez and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez submitted a bill calling on the U.S. Congress to recognize the right of the Puerto Rican people to self-determination. This bill really begins to address the colonial situation of Puerto Rico and a campaign to build support for it is underway.

**What are the obstacles facing independence?**

The major one is the need for the independence movement to articulate a politics of self-actualization in Puerto Rico. We need to break with U.S. hegemony. As in all relations of subservience, a major problem of colonialism is the problem of internalized colonialism. You have poor people in Puerto Rico getting food stamps, Medicaid and Medicare. They see the

check coming from the U.S. Treasury, but they don't see this money as resources that were taken from Puerto Rico and then returned. The U.S. empire has been hegemonic in Puerto Rico.

**Do you see nationalism as a positive force?**

Yes. The most reactionary social movement in Puerto Rico is the PNP. It's homophobic, racist, misogynist. You heard all that in the Rossellógate, the leaked chats between former Puerto Rican Gov. Ricardo Rosselló and his cronies. They were full of profane, homophobic and misogynistic comments and sparked the massive street protests in Puerto Rico in the summer of 2019.

The most progressive politics in Puerto Rico come from those who support independence or sovereignty. When we look at politics that dignify his, her or their identities, it's the independence movement. My concept of nationalism validates all human relations and addresses issues of climate and environmentalism. If one understands human life as an expression of an ecosystem, then all things in the ecosystem must be healthy, and all of its members have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. This means that all expressions of human sexuality, all of the ecological responsibility and other forms of social justice define the nature of the ecosystem.



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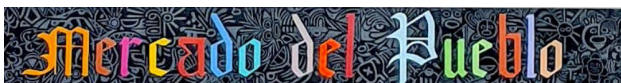
THIS YEAR THE PUERTO RICAN CULTURAL CENTER'S "100X35+13" OPEN HOUSE (WHICH WILL CELEBRATE THE 113TH BIRTHDAY OF JUAN ANTONIO CORRETJER AND THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS POEM "BORICUA EN LA LUNA") WILL BE HELD VIRTUALLY. IT WILL INCLUDE A SHORT VIDEO PRESENTATION OF OUR PROGRAMS AND A CONVERSATION BETWEEN AUTHOR OF *THE TASTE OF SUGAR*, MARISEL VERA AND THE PRCC'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JOSE LOPEZ TO BE MODERATED BY XIOMARA RODRIGUEZ.

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