

Voces Unidas

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October 2006

Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month

Ashley Zurc

September 15 marked the beginning of celebrating what it means to be Latino. It also marks the anniversary of independence for five Latin American countries—Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. In addition, on September 16 Mexico declared its independence and Chile on September 18. Originally, a week was made official by President Lyndon B. Johnson, but twenty years later it was expanded. In 1988, September 15 to October 15 were declared National Hispanic Heritage Month.

For one month flags from Latin America and the Caribbean are put up, parties are thrown to celebrate, and our cultures are to be studied in classrooms if the teachers feel the need to incorporate them in their lesson plans. However, we should be celebrating our heritage all year long. As the fastest growing “minority” group in the United States, we should not be ignored for the remaining eleven months. Our people are always contributing to the growth and prosperity of the United States. Therefore, put your flags up all year long and be proud of your roots because we aren’t going anywhere.

Performance by Josefina Baez kicks off Hispanic Heritage Month

Janet Mendoza

Last week Nosotras collaborated with the Office of Multicultural Affairs with its first event of the year that correlated with Hispanic Heritage Month. Josefina Baez, a writer, performer, teacher, and director, was invited to share with us her work. At the event there was delicious Dominican food and a speech and video performance from Josefina Baez.

I enjoyed watching her multi-themed performance because I had never seen anything like it. Her performance varied and it was up to the audience to interpret it. I was able to conclude that she wanted to convey through her art the experiences she has encountered as a black Dominican woman.

The few times that I was able to talk to her, I realized how remarkable this woman really is. She is an avid performer of poetry and various forms of dance. Her work has reached many continents and touched thousands. She is passionate about her work and cares about the impact that her work can make in at least one persons’ life. That evening she was able to accomplish just that as a Smithie came up to her crying, telling her that her speech and performance had touched her in an unexpected way.

Upcoming Events

October is National Coming Out Month.

10/1

Nosotras General Meeting
Unity House
4:00pm

10/13

“Dismantling Monoculture:
Tales of Ants and Economics
in the Americas”
Beehive Collection
Look out for more info.

10/15

Nosotras General Meeting
Unity House
4:00pm

10/20-10/23

ECCSF Conference @
Columbia University
More info on website

10/29

Nosotras General Meeting
Unity House
4:00pm



Index In Your Words

Page 2 Essay

Page 3 Poetry

Page 4 Letter From Editor

Essay by Justine Gonzalez

Mi nombre: Justine Gonzalez. No es Justina ni es Justin. Justina es el nombre que mi madre usaba cuando me gritaba en español; Justin es el nombre de un muchacho americano. ¿No se puede traducir mi nombre sin cambiar su significado—así como mi identidad. No soy hispana pero tampoco soy americana. Cuando era más joven le decía a la gente que mi segundo nombre era María porque creía que María era más latina de mi propio nombre. Estoy buscando constantemente un sitio donde pertenecer.

Viví en Nueva York toda mi vida. Allí hay mucha diversidad... muchos Latinos. Hay un sentimiento común de crear una identidad americana. Los que vienen de Puerto Rico, en vez de distinguirse como puertorriqueños, se identifican como “Nuyoricans”. Si yo tuviera que identificarme, me identificaría “Nuyorriqueña” y me identificaría con la lengua de “Spanglish”.

Mis padres no me hablaban en español regularmente, pero a veces sí. Mi abuela fue la única persona que siempre trató de hablarme en español, para enseñarme la lengua. Recuerdo algunos momentos en su cocina chiquita, cuando me cocinaba avena o arroz y me cantaba en español. La única canción que recuerdo es la canción, “pollito-chicken”. Esta canción traduce algunas palabras de español al inglés. Creo que el hecho de que no puedo recordar otras canciones es importante, porque significa que mis memorias, mi ser, no puede existir sin estas dos lenguas juntas.

A veces me daba vergüenza decir que soy puertorriqueña porque, ¿cómo puedo identificarme así sin saber la lengua? También, cuando visité a mi familia en Puerto Rico, ellos me recharzaron: me llamaban “la Gringa”. En la escuela, mis compañeros asumían que yo sabía español, y cuando me pedían que traduciera algo y no podía, yo tenía que tragarme mi orgullo y explicar que no sabía, no más para recibir la pregunta: “pero no eres hispana?” Siempre he sentido que tenía que compensar por mis faltas con el idioma con otros aspectos de la cultura. A pesar de la lengua, sí soy puertorriqueña. Soy una salsera, soy una cocinera, soy una poeta, soy una historiadora. El problema eternal: debiera identificarme como la gente me ve, o como yo misma me identifico?

Please submit any essays or stories that you have. They may be written in English or Spanish.



Poetry

Letter from a Lost Mexican

By Nicole Diaz

I am from mamá, papá, mis abuelos, tíos y primos.
 I am from backyard barbecues, fajitas, tortillas, frijoles, and kids
 running wild.
 I am from New Years with the family playing chalupa and dominós.
 I am from "Yes Sir" and "No Ma'am".
 I am from respect your elders and don't talk back.
 I am from early Sunday morning services.

I am from enchiladas, carne guisada, and calabacita.
 I am from tamaladas.
 I am from drinking chocolate mexicano with Nana.
 I am from hot summers, la venta, and raspas.
 I am from loud guitarra music and spicy mole.

I am from the swaying hips of salsa and passion.
 I am from barking dogs, clucking chickens, and stampeding cows.
 I am from el rancho.
 I am from backwoods driving and vacations in the hill country.
 I am from Texas – but here is my home.

Written at the end of her first year at Smith College.

DEDICATION

By Gustavo Pérez Firmat

Cuban poet, fiction writer and scholar

The fact that I
 am writing to you
 in English
 already falsifies what I
 wanted to tell you.
 My subject:
 how to explain to you
 that I don't belong to English
 though I belong nowhere else,
 if not here
 in English.

Native's Song

By Ashley Zurc

I want to go home
 To an island that was never mine.
 I want to stop feeling alone
 In a continent filled with lies.
 I want the sounds of coquis
 Awakening my spirit inside,
 But my spirit can't be set free
 Because of my language that doesn't coincide.
 I can't hear their songs
 That are only reserved for the natives,
 That belong.

¡Hola!

I took the opportunity to make this newsletter possible because even though many people like to stereotype Latinas as being outspoken and loud, we all know that it does not matter what culture you derive from, a stereotype does not equal the truth. Some people are more willing to vocalize their opinions. However, there are others, like myself, that find comfort in expressing themselves through writing. The newsletter is where we can voice our opinions on all issues affecting all Latinas regardless of nationality and sexuality.

In spring 2007, it will be the 25th anniversary of Nosotras. I just want to take this opportunity to address that Nosotras is trying to revamp itself and this newsletter is just one example of many to come. We are striving to form a community in which we can share and discuss the issues that we encounter. Now instead of just discussing upcoming events at meetings, we would like to address specific topics that we can relate to. However, despite all the improvements we are trying to implement none of them will mean anything without the support from all of you. We can throw parties and hold meetings, but we need your attendance in order to inform us and confirm what you want.

I have committed myself to this newsletter and I hope there are others who are interested in contributing as well. If you happen to see a good movie or read a book by a Latino “artist”, let the rest of us know. Personal essays, poetry, and even drawings are encouraged. This newsletter will only survive by the submissions I receive. I would personally like to thank Nicole Diaz, Justine Gonzalez, and Janet Mendoza for their submissions and Maria Rendon for her assistance. They are contributing to the survival of Voces Unidas.

Con mucho amor,

Ashley

Index
In Your Words:

Page 2 Essays

Page 3 Poetry

Page 4 Letter From Editor