

#PoetsforPuertoRico : Kweli Edition

*If suffering comes unabated,
if weariness weighs down your spirit,
do as the once barren tree:
flourish.
And like the planted seed:
rise.*

- José de Diego(1866-1918)

My Cuban mother-in-law has claimed many times that of all the people she has known from across Latin America, Puerto Ricans are the sweetest. I admit that I am sharing this anecdote with a fair degree of cultural pride, but I also share it with a sense of bewilderment. I have seen that sweetness my mother-in-law speaks of in my own family, and in so many of my fellow Boricuas both on the island and the mainland. It's true, Puerto Ricans are just all too ready to chat up strangers and dole out hugs, to cook for you and tell you a joke, to turn up the stereo and get everyone dancing. I love this about my gente. But if I am to be honest, I often find myself struggling to understand why we are this way.

See, for five hundred and twenty years our gorgeous little island has been occupied and controlled by outside invaders. In those five centuries, Puerto Rico has been autonomous for a mere three weeks. As colonized people, we have been subject to slavery and indentured servitude, imposed seizure of our lands, the forced sterilizations of women, military attacks on the island's civilian population, the assassination and imprisonment of our leaders, and the orchestrated destruction of the island's economy. Now...today... again... in the aftermath of Maria, we find ourselves having to deal with an occupier that has left our families to die and then lies about the impact of their own maliciousness toward us.

For Puerto Rico, these violent and insulting attacks by the U.S. regime "ain't no new thing," as Gil-Scott Heron used to say. Rather, these policies and exploits are just another dim-witted repetition of the same old oppressions outfitted with a new mask. In fact, the colonizers have tortured Puerto Rico and its citizens so often and for so long that it is not a stretch to categorize their abuses as a form of addiction. So if anyone has a reason to be hostile, to rebel, to exude consternation and bitterness, it is Puerto Ricans.

And yet for the most part, we aren't bitter. We are still just as quick to offer our friendship, our talents, our caldo and pan dulce; even our acts of resistance come packaged with warmth and wit. It leaves me awestruck to witness our resilience, our capacity for joy, and the love with which we build community. Hurricane Maria has only amplified these qualities inside us. As the colonizing government has exacerbated the crisis by implementing draconian neoliberal policies (Puerto Rico was struck by two hurricanes recently- the first being the PROMESA bill) while aggressively refusing to commit to relief efforts, Puerto Ricans from all over the world have come together to provide aid. We are sending supplies, donating, organizing, and hopping on planes to personally assist in the clean up and rebuilding process. A hurricane rattles us, a regime attempts to erase us along with our three thousand dead, the "suffering comes unabated," and our response is to "flourish," to "rise," with jubilation and fulgent intellect. *

I am not sure how we learned to confront oppression this way. Perhaps it is part of our inheritance from the Taínos, who were known as the most peace-loving of all tribes in the Caribbean. Maybe it is because the island has this almost mysterious way of making you feel beautiful. I think I'll probably never know

how we are able to maintain our felicity even when a boot is on our neck. But I have seen it again and again: Puerto Ricans rebel and rebuild with joy.

For evidence of this, look no further than #PoetsforPuertoRico. Very soon after Hurricane Maria struck, Boricua poets from the mainland took to organizing poetry readings to raise funds for relief efforts. Initiated by Willie Perdomo and Noel Quiñones, #PoetsforPuertoRico has already held two fundraising events, at the Poet's House in Manhattan and at The Bronx Museum. A third #PoetsforPuertoRico reading has been organized by Ana Portnoy Brimmer and Dimitri Reyes to held on September 29th at The Newark Public Library. In addition to poetry performances, these events have music, refreshments, and book sales, with all proceeds going directly to organizations doing relief work on the island. On full display at these readings is this distinctly Boricua blend of resistance with joy. The events raise money and awareness, but they also raise hope and offer light. I guess what I've been trying to say here is that for Puerto Ricans, joy IS resistance.

It is in this spirit that Kweli presents this feature of poets from the Puerto Rican diaspora. The poets included here all prove to be adept at brandishing a picket sign with one hand while drumming a guaracha rhythm con la otra. We selected some elder states-people, our tribe's literary caciques, as well as mid-career and emerging poets, so as to provide a fair sample of the history and legacy of Puerto Rican poetry. They, and we, hope you enjoy reading their work, but they also hope that you will lend your support by attending these fundraisers, by donating, and by committing your own revolutionary acts of joy.

Pa'Lante!

*My revolution is comfortable
hard-wearing
long-lasting
versatile!*

*I can wear it in the fields
I can wear it to go dancing
do the dishes
do the laundry
see the movie
do the marching*

My revolution is not cut from a pattern, I designed it.

-Rosario Morales(1930-2011)

Vincent Toro
Contributing Editor
Kweli Literary Journal

**I feel the need to add that it has been deeply moving for many of us to see so many non-Puerto Ricans generously donate time and money to help with relief efforts.*

Kweli #PoetsforPuertoRico Feature

Caciques

Sandra María Esteves

Jesus Papoleto Melendez

Rick Kearns

Caciques-in-training

Malcolm Friend

Denice Frohman

Raquel Salas Rivera

Ysabel Y. Gonzalez

Urayoán Noel

Ana Portnoy Brimmer

Dimitri Reyes

Bonafide Rojas

Sandra María Esteves

Hurricane America Slow-Motion Landfall

for Rosa Clemente

Post Hurricane María, September 20th, 2017
Feeling like a spoiled NYC brat on the Amtrak to DC and back
thinking about 3 million plus Puerto Ricans on the island
8 million plus Puerto Ricans on the mainland
some of us born and raised here
all of us daring to have a voice

Zooming over rails
absorbed by autumnal abundance
my mind travels elsewhere
fixed on tropical islands
leaves and trees fallen,
palmas, guineo, aguacate, piña, guava, mango
flamboyán flowers, all gone,
the ancient cieba ancestor elder, wounded
el Yunque broken brown,
decimated by hurricanes, real and metaphoric

Ten days in: no food, no phone, no electric, no gas, no cash
no job to do, but wait on lines full-time
no army, no helicopters, no boots on the ground
FEMA hold up in the cool convention center
3 million plus Puerto Ricans enduring 100° heat
without water, without relief

8 million plus Puerto Ricans in the states
taking notes on apocalypse unfolding
8000 plus containers sitting in port
no gas to power trucks
no hands to transport supplies
no leaders in charge, conspiracies of lies
no hospitals for the dying
roadways impassable, water undrinkable
siphoned from infected streams
sewage treatment out-of-order
boil the water they advise
health crisis pandemic waiting in the wings
genocide in progress ocean wide

Fifteen days in: 3 million plus island Puertorriqueños wondering

What's taking so long for help to arrive?
8 million plus stateside Puerto Ricans asking
What the hell is going on?
criminal negligence rights violations
FEMA waiting for military escorts
against unlawful disobedience
soon-to-be a nation occupied

3 million plus desperate Puerto Ricans
pleading for hands in the dark
from the angels of Saint Humanity
8 million plus enraged Puertorriqueños
evaluating the tweeting
from the belly of the greedy demon,
the Wall Street beast
a blood-thirsty flesh-eating bull
battling to the death for economic wealth
corporate temptations with untaxed incentives
unwilling to abolish the barbaric Jones Act

Twenty days in: 3 million plus Puerto Ricans there
trapped by conditions
on the sides of mountains
on endless lines for everything not available
at airports overnight waiting to escape
disaster capitalism holding them hostage
in a territory without votes or representation
100 plus years of being owned, pimped, exploited
slaves to debt
but privileged enough to battle, bleed, die in war
and neverending rebellions

8 million plus Puertorricans here
demanding justice and distribution of supplies
release the water, water is life!
who will not forget
generations of ancestors, blood sacrifices
sterilizations, sweat factories and school closings,
but empowered to cast votes and spells
to depose crooked calculating racists
junk bond-holders and bloodletting warmongers

Thirty days in: 3 million plus Puertorricans on their island
in battered houses, roofless, waterlogged, scattered debris
sleeping on floors and moldy wet mattresses
rat-infested garbage in front of every home
accumulating on the side of every road
chancletas scaling mudslides, navigating rivers

waiting for life-saving medical supplies
dying from thirst, hunger, disease and suicide—
overwhelmed by decomposing smells
bodies upon bodies hidden
in hospitals, morgues and back yards

8 million plus Puerto Ricans here on the mainland
scrambling for donations, collections, myriad contributions
the ordinary, everyday and critically needed
diapers, formula, water filters, generators,
solar panels, flashlights, batteries, cash
unable to sleep anxiety disorders
searching facebook and instagram for lost relatives
calling congressional representatives
cursing the devils running the ruckus
screaming into the universe of whoever will listen
the indifferent on golf courses and football fields
in shopping malls, casinos and bars
unnerved by the escalating death-toll
in unreported news
in denial of science and climate change
mass murders, fires raging
earthquakes ripping the landscape
global temperatures rising

Forty days in: 3 million plus Puerto Ricans there
8 million plus Puerto Ricans here
who will never lay down quietly
fighting to stay alive
water protectors healers
farmer campesinos artists teachers
social activists community
holding hands for each other

3 million plus Puertorriqueños there on the island
8 million plus Puertorricans here on the mainland
family united in spirit for the land, for the mother, for the earth
lifted by wind and solar power
Oya and Obatala en la tierra de Yemaya

surviving from the nothing as we have always done

Mainstream media dictates
this holocaust barely deserves attention
according to patriarchy advertising hierarchy

3 million plus Puertorriqueños on the island
8 million plus Puerto Ricans on the mainland

a nation sharing blood and destiny
determined to create the inevitable
intending to become self-sustainable
however as long as it takes

3 million plus Puerto Ricans there
8 million plus Puerto Ricans here
refusing to lay down quietly
who will not be silent until every Puerto Rican is free
release the water, free the land, cancel the debt
free Puerto Rico, free Borinquen
¡Que viva Puerto Rico libre!

Jesús Papoleto Meléndez

THE FLOOD CAME TO PUERTO RICO

The flood came to Puerto Rico/
unexpected/ unwelcome
like american tourists
& it left like american tourists:
taking all & leaving nothing.

the flood came to Puerto Rico/
& with it came geologists
/they are trying to find new names
for the many lakes & rivers
that now exist
where towns once were
where homes once stood
where people once lived
where children once played
in the warmth of afternoon suns
where the beautiful culture
that is mine once sang sang
its loveliness over the hills & mountains.

the flood came to Puerto Rico/
& american airlines are taking pictures
for their advertisements of their new lagoons
where the kennedy family will vacation
this summer/ next summer
all year round.

the flood came to Puerto Rico/
killing my people
drowning them in a new form
of oppression/
leaving them jobless/ homeless
to the mercy of american kindness
with begging hands in the air
with tears in their eyes
with crying & dying babies
in their arms/
leaving them with less
than what they were known
to ever have

lost/

separated from
their mutual loves.

the flood came to Puerto Rico/
& with it came the red cross
/after the flood
to search for *Donald Trump's** golf courses
& summer homes.

**The original 1971 version reads: "rockefeller's summer home."*

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Rick Kearns

The Big Houses Burn

Maria ripped
the leaves from the trees
the veil from the
face of the predator's
delight

the lights go out
the dialysis machines
the ventilators
the fans
in the nursing homes
stop

the lights go out in Puerto Rico
bodies roll into the sea
smoke rises from crematoriums

the lights go out in Borinken
the lights in the eyes of the predators
sparkle as they drool and scream

the lights go out on the island of my heart
the cost benefit analysis of dead and fleeing Boricuas
inspires toasts in florescent board rooms

the lights go out
the calculators hum
the flash of machetes
in the forest

the lights go out
the rage
comes on

the lights go out
the big houses
burn

Malcolm Friend

The Day María Touches Down I Listen To Cheo Feliciano Sing “La Borinqueña”

La tierra de Borinquen donde he nacido—

How amazing Cheo’s voice, how it gusts notes across el Caribe.

Can a voice sing with the wind sucked out of it,

vocal cords left to lash against nothing but each other?

—Un cielo siempre nítido—

Fashion un barco out of an anthem to carry whatever’s worth carrying
from this forsaken island? For a moment I’m lost

in the majesty of his voice. How all the air in his lungs

reverse funnels out his mouth. How una garganta whips its own hurricanes

with enough control. How what tears me apart aren’t the booming notes

but the way nearly every other line breezes in off his breath.

—Y dan arrullos plácidos las olas a sus pies—

If a hurricane could be more than the air lashing against itself,

could carry something other than shipwreck across the ocean.

—Es Borinquen la hija, la hija del mar y...

del mar y...

del mar y...

del mar y...

del mar y...

For a moment I’m glad. For a moment I’m guilty.

To only be drowning in song.

Denice Frohman

PUERTOPIA

*Puerto: port, from Latin "porta," meaning "gate, door";
Utopia: Modern Latin meaning "nowhere"*

the coquí don't sing anymore / they click / mosquitoes turned drones / metropolis of
crypto-bro / tax-deductible greed / a door opens / an island drowns / a playground
emerges / a boy / his toy // depending on the faith / the most dangerous part of a wealthy
man is his index finger / what he points to / who he lands on / a civilization disposable
income / pirate in cargo shorts / New World / Old Order // meanwhile we diaspora /
separated by sea / peel platanos & cut them on the same angle our mothers taught us to
clap / when the plane lands on either shore / now / the beaches are gated & no one
knows the names of the dead / now / investors clean their beaks in the river & this is how
a man becomes a flood // landlord of nothing / king of no good sky / watch paradise /
misbehave / watch the night pearl / into a necklace of fists / watch this / El Yunque / a real
god machine / unhinge her jaw / & swallow the flock / where are the Puerto Ricans?
/ cuchifrito ghost town / battery-operated citizenship / an island is not a tarmac / a
disaster is not a destination—

Raquel Salas Rivera

sinvergüenza sin nación

para José, Ana, Carlos y Helen

vi las mejores almas de mi generación
engullidas por el colonialismo,
anestesiando sus heridas en un pozo de alcohol
con un torbellino de no sé qué totalidad pendiente.
las vi hablar de la muerte con esperanza,
llevar los cementerios de anillos,
quemar cuanto mata y matanza nos prometieron,
ocupar tierras y edificios,
odiar los ojos azules de Rosselló,
escupirle en la cara a la justicia
por embustera,

estar mal y ser hermosos,

aguantar todo el dolor del mundo entre las cejas.

les toqué el pecho para que lloraran
y la ternura era un campo minado.

sin coordinación, los vi atropellar con un abrazo
el hormiguero defensivo del bienestar.

vi que, en sus manos, la supervivencia valía un trapo,
que el linaje no cree en sí mismo si la muerte brinca citas.

vi que eran ángeles que por más de 500 años
llevan preparando el vuelo,
sin saber si queda ya cielo ni trompeta.

vi las mejores almas de mi generación perder su generosidad.
el dolor les hizo una mala jugada.

las vi colgarle el teléfono a FEMA
y preparar palomas mensajeras con el papeleo.
entre agotamientos, las vi construyendo techos y cerrando riñas,
enfocándose en cosas como luz, agua y entierro,

deseosos de que la tierra fuese tierra:
antígonas enterrando con pala robá.

eran volátiles como países,
dominados como países,
degollados como países.

vi que a diario desaparecían en el vuelo estático de la soledad.

fui testigo de la quema del arroz,
el giro del yagrumo.

estuvo mal lo que les pasó,
que les dieran un rompecabezas
y dijeran *toma, recoge los escombros*
del dizque país.

le explicaban a los hijos que papá se fue a un lugar
donde las calles están llenas de donas y la lotería
llega todos los meses como cheque,

pero también mataron el miedo con un range rover dorado,
formaron fila para comerse un pescado con propiedades curativas,
la montaron en barras y panteones,

hicieron lo impensable: la gran gira
por todo puerto rico llevando, no la palabra de dios,
sino su carpintería,
para reconstruir un amor que aguante
lo torrencial.

también, transplantados y enormes,
eran murales sin pared a lo alto,
mejorándolo todo con la risa,
asegurándome que la lucha
nos dará pan para el pan de cada día,
que existe cierta forma de olvidarnos que
llevamos tiempo en el bolsillo,
no en la muñeca.

de noche me soñaban alegre
en casa, en bata,

segura del mar
y de un monte que sigue engullendo
las rutas e inventos de los colonizadores.

sinvergüenza with no nation

for José, Ana, Carlos and Helen

i saw the best souls of my generation
swallowed by colonialism,
anesthetizing their wounds in an alcohol well
with a whirlwind of i don't know what pending totality.
saw them talk of death with hope,
wear cemeteries as rings,
burn all the plants and killings they were promised,
occupy lands and buildings,
hate Rosselló's blue eyes,
spit in the face of that liar,
justice,

be wrong and beautiful,

hold(in) all the world's pain between brows.

i touched their chests so they could cry
and tenderness was a minefield.

without coordination i saw them, with an embrace,
trample the defensive anthill of well-being.

i saw that, in their hands, survival was worth a rag,
that lineage doesn't believe in itself if death skips dates.

i saw they were angels who have spent more than 500 years
preparing for flight,
who don't know if there will be heaven or trumpet.

i saw the best souls of my generation lose their generosity,
played by pain.

i saw them hang up on FEMA
and prep messenger pigeons using paperwork,
saw them between exhaustions construct roofs and end beefs,
focus on things like light, water, and burial,
wanting earth to be earth,
Antigones burying with a stolen shovel.

they were volatile like countries,
dominated like countries,
beheaded like countries.

i saw the daily disappearance of solitude's static flight.

i witnessed the rice burning,
the yagrumo flipping.

it was wrong what happened
when they were given a puzzle
and told *here, pick up the rubbish
of this so-called country.*

they explained to their children that their father went to a place
where the streets are full of donuts and the lottery
arrives each month like the check,

but they also killed fear with a golden range rover,
formed lines to eat fish with curative properties,
lit shit in bars and pantheons.

they did the unthinkable: the great tour
all over puerto rico spreading not god's word,
but his carpentry,
to reconstruct a love that withstands
the torrential.

also, transplanted and enormous,
they were murals without wall, up above,
making the world right with laughter,
making sure the struggle
gives us bread for the daily bread
because there is a certain way of forgetting
we keep time in the pocket,
not on the wrist.

at night they dreamt me into joy
at home, in a dressing gown,
sure of the sea
and of a mountain that keeps swallowing
the colonizer's routes and inventions.

Ricardo Alberto Maldonado

UN POEMA PARA RAQUEL

Un poema es un pájaro de colores: *de colores son los pajaritos que vienen de adentro.*

Cosa que en mí narra su asunto metafísico—

El cuerpo no es una metáfora.

El cuerpo no es una metáfora.

El cuerpo no es una metáfora.

El cuerpo no es una metáfora.

Veo. Me pasa. Me pasa—sucede a lo largo de la noche en cuerpo sucio, lleno de metáforas.

Y yo respondo, *Heme aquí*, porque me consumen las metáforas y su cuerpo

(y el de él, y el de ella, y el de ellx) todxs ardían pero no se consumían sobre brea espesa, desaseando de su calor

el Cuervo de su Cuervo: Patrón Cuervo, Santo Cuervo, Creador de Fruto, Corazón Blando.

Blando pulsa su paño contra el Cuervo de Blancura (Cuervo Alterno de policía que deshace con plomo).

Veo sobre zarzas los pájaros: vuela aquél, vuela aquél cuervo de nosotoros que desatamos de calor materno. Veo, pero yo no sé.

Yo soy padre de dios, dios del padre, porque tengo miedo de mirar, porque el cuerpo no es una metáfora,

pensé sobre el cuerpo de nuestro cuervo, curado de su carne viva por lo suyo.

Tuve un mar púrpura—camposanto de moriviví.

Bien, tenéis necesidad de todas estas cosas.

Heme aquí, el nitrato

de las axilas. Comed; esto es mi cuerpo

que por vosotros es partido;

hacedlo en memoria del cuerpo.

A POEM FOR RAQUEL

A poem is a bird of colors: *de colores son los pajaritos*
flying also within.

Which brings me to my metaphysical argument—

the body is not a metaphor.
the body is not a metaphor.
the body is not a metaphor.
the body is not a metaphor.

It happens suddenly, to me suddenly in night, I spot my body
in silt, replete with its own metaphors.

And I answer, *Here I am*, because metaphors consumed me
and the body

(his, hers, theirs) they all burned but
were not consumed in thickets of tar, praying from heat
a Raven of Ravens—Patron Raven, Holy Raven, Fruit of the Creator, Soft Heart.

Soft pressing of cloth against Raven of Whiteness (Other Raven of police undoing
with his lead).

I spot birds on the bushes: one of them flies, our crow we unleash flies away
from our maternal warmth. I spot it, but I don't know how.

I am father of god, god of the father, because I am afraid to look,
because the body is not a metaphor,

I thought over the body of our raven, healed of its flesh, living and living.
I had a purpling ocean—tombstones of flowers.
Well, you need all these things.

Here I am, the nitrate
of my armpits. Eat; this is my body
which is parted for you;
do it in memory of the body.

Ysabel Y. Gonzalez

Puerto Rico, Goddamn

after Nina Simone

A Harvard University study (May 2018) indicates that Hurricane Maria killed more than 4,600 people in Puerto Rico, 70 times the official toll, according to estimates.

Can't you feel it? It's in the air—
everybody knows about Puerto Rico, goddamn.
Slow rising water—
floods, broken dams,
hundreds of goddamns
our people mutter now
swallowing spit.

And everybody knows about the still water.
Collected rain high up
in the mountains.
Las montañas
shaped like breasts
whose milk have gone dry, goddamn.

And everybody knows about distance.
Calls which can't seep through hundreds of miles.
Oh the tiny space in the world this island inhabits!
Colony of second class citizens,
paying a price for skin bathed in brown, goddamn.

And everybody knows of the waiting.
Goddamn waiting.
Too slow.
Lines lengthen for all its people, waiting
to die sluggish,
in the heat
or under water
or without water
or in a hospital bed.

And everybody knows about La Isla raising
two flags. Still hopeful
it will be seen by a goddamn
shadow distracted by its own
beautiful wealth and power.

And everybody knows about the people.
The way a resilient island leans
into Mother Nature, refuses

to be cast out. The way we say
we will not give in, goddamn,
not today
not tomorrow
not ever.

And everybody knows about love.

The way my grandmother's ashes,
once planted in the Rio Nigua,
still flow through the island's rivers
like a school of fish, searching
for a way to swim through.
Mi gente waded in my grandmother
and that
is unconditional.
And everybody knows about Puerto Rico,
goddamn—
goddamn.

Urayoán Noel

GENERAL NELSON A. MILITIAMEN TO THE PEOPLE OF
PUERTO RICO ON JULY 28 1898, AFTER LANDING U.S. FORCES

IN THE PROSECUTION OF WAR AGAINST THE KINGDOM OF SPAIN BY
IN THE PROSTITUTE OF WARE AGAINST THE KIPPER OF SPAIN BY THE
THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES, IN THE CAUSE OF LIBERTY,
PERCH OF THE UNITED STATISTICS, IN THE CAVEMAN OF LICENSE,
JUSTICE, AND HUMANITY, ITS MILITARY FORCES HAVE COME TO
KAYAK, AND HUMORIST, ITS MILITARY FORECOURTS HAVE COME TO
OCCUPY THE ISLAND OF PUERTO RICO. THEY COME BEARING THE
OCCUPY THE ISSUE OF PUERTO RICO. THEY COME BEAU THE BAPTISM
BANNER OF FREEDOM, INSPIRED BY A NOBLE PURPOSE TO SEEK THE
OF FREETHINKER, INSPIRED BY A NODE PUSH TO SEEK THE
ENEMIES OF OUR COUNTRY AND YOURS, AND TO DESTROY OR
ENGLISHMEN OF OUR COUPLE AND YOURS, AND TO DESTROY OR
CAPTURE ALL WHO ARE IN ARMED RESISTANCE. THEY BRING YOU
CARBINE ALL WHO ARE IN ARMED RESPECT. THEY BRING YOU THE
THE FOSTERING ARM OF A FREE PEOPLE, WHOSE GREATEST POWER IS
FOSTERING ARMHOLE OF A FREE PERCH, WHOSE GREATEST PRAISE IS
IN ITS JUSTICE AND HUMANITY TO ALL THOSE LIVING WITHIN ITS
IN ITS KAYAK AND HUMORIST TO ALL THOSE LOB WITHIN ITS
FOLD. HENCE THE FIRST EFFECT OF THIS OCCUPATION WILL
FOLLOW-ON. HENCE THE FISSURE EGALITARIAN OF THIS OCTOPUS
BE THE IMMEDIATE RELEASE FROM YOUR FORMER RELATIONS, AND IT
WILL BE THE IMMEDIATE RELUCTANCE FROM YOUR FORMER RELICS,
IS HOPED A CHEERFUL ACCEPTANCE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE
AND IT IS HOPED A CHEERFUL ACCOMPANIMENT OF THE GRADIENT
UNITED STATES. THE CHIEF OBJECT OF THE AMERICAN MILITARY
OF THE UNITED STATISTICS. THE CHILL OBOE OF THE AMERICAN
FORCES WILL BE TO OVERTHROW THE ARMED AUTHORITY OF
MILITARY FORECOURTS WILL BE TO OWL THE ARMED AUTOCUE OF

SPAIN, AND TO GIVE THE PEOPLE OF YOUR BEAUTIFUL ISLAND THE
SPAIN, AND TO GIVE THE PEOPLE OF YOUR BEAUTIFUL ISLAND THE
LARGEST MEASURE OF LIBERTY CONSISTENT WITH THIS
LARGEST MEDALLION OF LICENSE CONSISTENT WITH THIS OCTOPUS.
OCCUPATION. WE HAVE NOT COME TO MAKE WAR UPON THE
WE HAVE NOT COME TO MAKE WARE UPON THE PERCH OF A
PEOPLE OF A COUNTRY THAT FOR CENTURIES HAS BEEN OPPRESSED,
COUPLE THAT FOR CERTAINTIES HAS BEEN OPPRESSED, BUT, ON THE
BUT, ON THE CONTRARY, TO BRING YOU PROTECTION, NOT ONLY TO
CONTROVERSY, TO BRING YOU PROTESTER, NOT ONLY TO YOURSELVES,
YOURSELVES, BUT TO YOUR PROPERTY; TO PROMOTE YOUR
BUT TO YOUR PROPOSAL; TO PROMOTE YOUR PROTÉGÉ, AND BESTOW
PROSPERITY, AND BESTOW UPON YOU THE IMMUNITIES AND
UPON YOU THE IMMUNITIES AND BLIPS OF THE LIBRARIAN
BLESSINGS OF THE LIBERAL INSTITUTIONS OF OUR GOVERNMENT. IT IS
INSURANCES OF OUR GRADIENT. IT IS NOT OUR PUSH TO INTERFERE
NOT OUR PURPOSE TO INTERFERE WITH ANY EXISTING LAWS AND
WITH ANY EXISTING LAYERS AND CUTTLEFISHES THAT ARE
CUSTOMS THAT ARE WHOLESOME AND BENEFICIAL TO YOUR PEOPLE
WHOLESOME AND BENEFICIAL TO YOUR PERCH SO LONG AS THEY
SO LONG AS THEY CONFORM TO THE RULES OF MILITARY
CONFORM TO THE RUMMAGES OF MILITARY ADOPTION OF
ADMINISTRATION OF ORDER AND JUSTICE. THIS IS NOT A WAR
ORGAN-GRINDER AND KAYAK. THIS IS NOT A WARE OF DEVIL, BUT
OF DEVASTATION, BUT ONE TO GIVE ALL WITHIN THE CONTROL OF ITS
ONE TO GIVE ALL WITHIN THE CONVECTOR OF ITS MILITARY AND
MILITARY AND NAVAL FORCES THE ADVANTAGES AND BLESSINGS OF
NAVAL FORECOURTS THE ADVERTISEMENTS AND BLIPS OF
ENLIGHTENED CIVILIZATION.
ENLIGHTENED CLAMOUR.

*[composed by running U.S. General Nelson A. Miles's 1898 proclamation to the people of Puerto Rico through the Spoonbill N+7 Generator:
<http://www.spoonbill.org/n+7/>. "Militiamen" is the noun 7-nouns-down from "Miles."]*

Ana Portnoy Brimmer

Last breath*

*All I can think of is the wind
and how I want it inside of me
rolled up in a tobacco leaf / long drag / slow inhale
a smoldering cigar of air filling my*

*lungs struggle to rise / like unleavened loaves
gasping for the tempest outside
puts my body to shame / the stillness in my
chest a field of burnt sugarcane*

*like the machine I'm connected to
I watch the light bulb above me
wonder how light flees glass
without shattering it*

*I hear thrashing beyond the sealed window
whirs of wasted gusts / lost blows
lace my fingers into holy patchwork
pray the wind finds its way in-*

*-to think my body capable of such betrayal
of collapse beneath sky's toppling
towers of tissue / clutch and claw at my
breasts bear one last breath / and I turn*

*gray / turn ghost / turn gone / turn
the switch on and on and
on / turn on for the love
of god / turn on*

**During hurricane María's passing over Puerto Rico, many elderly and bedridden individuals dependent on oxygen concentrators died as a result of extended power outages and/or oxygen depletion. Many of these deaths were not included in the official, government-issued death count of the hurricane, not being considered direct deaths, their stories and lives obliterated by faulty procedures, and inaccurate and false statistics and narratives.*

Dimitri Reyes

Channel

I reimagine my love when she first met me ironed in my finest campo clothes— when she told me I still smelled like the sea still tasted of Puerto Rico grasping my proud American beer my electric projected hands a pair of intoxicated children still pressing pants in my father's tailor shop holding love's waist when her Mamá was upstairs wasted where through love's eyelids now water stained and paper thin I remember in waves New York Metro maps with their blue and red veins all over our old Manhattan soda shops and malt shakes on 108th where we shared kisses across islands half an hour before her Mamá got home from the first job to leave for the second when Mamá was with those different men and love would call her *La Tormenta* when she threw shattering objects to push away love and the crackle in her voice then is like the tired sputter in her last breaths now marrying the spider veins of her thighs like the broken staircases of her childhood tenement that helps me re imagine the apartment where love lived as a tinderbox of bodies stuck to the internal lining of gypsum board and drywall turning to dry brush to become a Bronx burning a tiny death multiplying the veins in eyes a kaleidoscope of timbers where love now looks like her Mamá— scleras already red lips blue and smiling when their voices begin to blend into the sentence *every subway is underground* which tells me to wish back my MTA memories that saw love and I back on 108th between Amsterdam and Broadway my reckless hands like oceans holding in the storm of New York City and when she isn't there I'll continue to look for alternate routes returning to the street that can salvage love's wrinkled face

Bonafide Rojas

AT THE TOP OF EL MORRO

today we celebrate the death of the past
that has haunted us since the very beginning

we mourn the living & wash our hands
of all the names that tried to destroy us

we don't care about a puppet government
politicians, governors or presidential ventriloquist
that talk on stage because we can see the strings

the laws they pass rhyme with
eradication, annihilation & extinction
it all taste like rotten apples

these money grubbing bastards
are so scared of being bankrupt
& they owe billions to other countries
& say we owe billions to them
they're delusional, their heart is weak
their vision of the future is bleak
like an unnamed catastrophe
that has scourged the island to
a burnt-out cinder inhabited by
the corpses of dead corporations
& our skies are shrouded by toxic dust particles

a gold coin is placed on our tongues
we hold oil in our cheeks
we light candles for the people
who never came back from war

the puppet government
wears wood dentures
& poison the water we drink
chemically create the food we eat
they sharpen their silver spoons
& pour wine into the skulls of dead monarchs
& they stand there
hideous & forsaken
think of us as cattle, rattle,
profit, loss, consumer

we are not here for the slaughter

we are not here for the slaughter

so when you're facing down the barrel of a gun
hope they don't think you're an activist
hope they don't think you're a terrorist
hope they don't think you're a communist
hope they don't think you're an independentista

at the top of el morro
you can see politicians walking around
smelling like corruption & a massacre
they hold bone marrow in their glasses
bow before their own skeletons
eat the bark off dead cherry trees
take a casual walk in a cemetery
crushing the bones of dead nationalists
their mouths full of declarations smell like vomit
carry blood in their pockets
brush their teeth with scalpels
watch the closed circuit destruction
of palestine, chicago, baltimore & vieques
laugh at the death tolls
eat their own shit to survive
sacrifice babies for immortality
destroy the dignity of the poor
paint their self portraits with maggots
lay their soulless bodies on dead goats
waiting to be resurrected when the stockmarket
crashes so they can sink their teeth into
everything, everywhere & everyone

at the top of el morro
we wash our hands of their existence
we wash our hands of their name
& we walk into the ocean
& bathe ourselves in freedom.

CACIQUES

Sandra María Esteves was born and raised in the Bronx, New York. She is the author of *Bluestown Mockingbird Mambo* (Arte Publico Press, 1990) and *Yerba Buena* (Greenfield Review, 1980). A member of the Nuyorican movement, Esteves is a founding poet of the Nuyorican Poets Cafe and the former executive director of the African Caribbean Poetry Theater. She received a poetry fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts in 1985. She has served as a teaching artist for over thirty years and has conducted literary programs for the Bronx Council on the Arts, El Museo del Barrio, and the New York City Board of Education, among other educational institutions. She lives in the Bronx.

Jesús Papoleto Meléndez is recognized as one of the founders of the Nuyorican Movement. He is also a playwright, teacher and activist. Meléndez is the author of numerous volumes of poetry, including *Have You Seen Liberation* (1971), *Concertos On Market Street* (1994), and *Hey Yo! Yo Soy! 40 Years of Nuyorican Street Poetry* (2012). Meléndez is a NYFA Poetry Fellow and is recipient of the Pregones Theater's 2014 Master Artist award, the Union Settlement's "Innovation Award" (2011), The 1st Annual El Reverendo Pedro Pietri Hand Award in Poetry (2006), The Louis Reyes Rivera Lifetime Achievement Award from Amherst College (2004), and ACE Award from the Bronx Council on the Arts (1995).

Rick Kearns is the author of *Rufino's Secret*. He is the former poet laureate of Harrisburg, PA and was a finalist in the Split This Rock Poetry Contest for his poem "Everyday We Remember Oscar Lopez Rivera." His work has been published in the Chicago Review, Painted Bride Quarterly, PALABRA, The Paterson Review, and ALOUD: Voices from the Nuyorican Poet's Café. Rick has also been a journalist for 25 years, publishing over 400 articles about indigenous Latin America in "Indian Country Today Media Network".

CACIQUES IN TRAINING

Malcolm Friend is the author of the chapbook *mx d kd mixtape* (Glass Poetry, 2017), and has received awards and fellowships from CantoMundo, Backbone Press, the Center for African American Poetry & Poetics, and the University of Memphis. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in publications including *La Respuesta* magazine, the *Fjords Review's* Black American Edition, *Vinyl*, *Word Riot*, *The Acentos Review*, *Connotation Press: An Online Artifact*, and *Pretty Owl Poetry*. He currently serves as a Poetry Editor for *FreezeRay Poetry*.

Denice Frohman is a poet, performer, and educator from New York City. She is a CantoMundo Fellow, former Women of the World Poetry Slam Champion and National Association of Latino Arts & Cultures grant recipient. Her work has appeared in *The Adroit Journal*, *Nepantla: An Anthology for Queer Poets of Color*, *Women of Resistance: Poems for a New Feminism*. She has a Master's in Education and is co-organizer of #PoetsforPuertoRico. She lives in Philadelphia.

Raquel Salas Rivera is the author of *x/ex/exis* (poemas para la nación) (poems for the nation), which won the 2018 Ambroggio Prize and is forthcoming from Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe in 2019. Rivera is also the author of *lo terciario/the tertiary* (Timeless, Infinite Light, 2018), which was longlisted for the 2018 National Book Award in Poetry, as well as *tierra intermitente* (Ediciones Alayubia, 2017) and *Caneca de anhelos turbios* (Editora Educación Emergente, 2011). Rivera coedited *The Wanderer* and *of Puerto Rico en mi corazón*, a collection of bilingual broadsides of contemporary Puerto Rican poets. They

currently serve as the 2018–2019 poet laureate of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where they live.

Ricardo Alberto Maldonado was born and raised in Puerto Rico. He is managing director at the 92nd Street Y Unterberg Poetry and cohosts the EMPIRE reading series with Hafizah Geter.

Ysabel Y. Gonzalez has her Bachelors in Latino and Hispanic Caribbean studies from Rutgers University and is currently an MFA in Poetry candidate at Drew University's low residency program. Ysabel works for the Dodge Poetry Festival and is also a VONA alumna. She has been published in El Centro's Letras at Hunter College, phati'tude Literary Magazine's themed, "Writing Latin@ Identity in America" issue, APIARY Magazine, Kalyani Magazine, Huizache, and Waxwing Literary Journal.

Urayoán Noel is a South Bronx-based writer, critic, performer, translator and intermedia artist originally from San Juan, Puerto Rico. He is an associate professor of English and Spanish at New York University, and also teaches at Stetson University's MFA of the Americas. Noel is the author of seven books of poetry, most recently *Buzzing Hemisphere/Rumor Hemisférico* (University of Arizona Press, 2015), as well as the critical study *In Visible Movement: Nuyorican Poetry from the Sixties to Slam* (University of Iowa Press, 2014), winner of the LASA Latina/o Studies Book Award.

Ana Portnoy Brimmer holds a BA and an MA in English (Literature) from the University of Puerto Rico, and is currently an MFA candidate in Creative Writing (Poetry) at Rutgers University-Newark. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Huizache: The Magazine of Latino Literature*, *Anomaly's Caribbean Folio*, *Kweli Journal*, *Visual Verse: An Anthology of Arts and Words*, *Voces desde Puerto Rico/Voices from Puerto Rico*, *Puerto Rico en mi Corazón*, *Poets Reading The News*, *Project Censored*, *La Respuesta*, among others.

Dimitri Reyes is a SortaRican PuertoVegan poet born and raised in Newark, New Jersey. Through experience, his poetry becomes a meditation on veganism, well-being, Latinx culture, and growing up in the inner city. Dimitri is currently a candidate in the Rutgers- Newark MFA program and his poetry is published or forthcoming in *Acentos Review*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Radius*, *DrylandLit*, and others.

Bonafide Rojas is the author of four collections of poetry: *Notes On The Return To The Island* (2017), *Renovatio* (2014), *When The City Sleeps* (2012) & *Pelo Bueno* (2004). He's been published in numerous anthologies, journals & has appeared on Def Poetry Jam. Bonafide is the bandleader for *The Mona Passage*. He's performed at various stages: Lincoln Center, The Brooklyn Museum, El Museo Del Barrio, Bowery Ballroom, The Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, Rotterdam Arts Center, The Nuyorican Poets Cafe, *BusBoys & Poets*, *Festival De La Palabra* & has read poetry from Los Angeles to New York City to Puerto Rico to London to Germany.