COMITÉ NOVIEMBRE 2020
Puerto Rican Heritage Month Commemorative Journal

Member Organizations: ASPIRA of New York, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños Hunter College/CUNY, Museo del Barrio, Kasimba María de Hasta Community College/CUNY, Institute for the Puerto Rican/Hispanic Elderly, La Casa de la Herencia Cultural Puertorriqueña, Inc., Fundación Nacional para la Cultura Popular, Justice Committee: NUPER, Institute for the Development of the Arts (FRIDA)
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MESSAGE ON BEHALF OF COMITÉ NOVIEMBRE

In the last eight months, the world as we knew it has changed in ways that will leave powerful marks on all our lives. Many of us have lost loved ones to the COVID pandemic and many of us have been sick and have survived. We have lost our jobs, homes and are uncertain of our future. Yet our spirit of giving back and assisting the less fortunate has persevered. It is in this collective of undeniable courage, hope and love that Comité Noviembre, (CN), is moving forward.

Our theme this year, “Sin justicia nunca habrá cambio...Sin cambio nunca habrá paz! Without justice, there is no change...Without change there is no peace!”, speaks to the change that must happen in this country to achieve respect, equality and justice for all people of color but specifically the 8 million Puerto Ricans that live on the island and the mainland. It demands action from the Diaspora. Each one of us needs to be fully engaged and active in demanding and achieving justice for Puerto Rico.

The Diaspora must take action and keeping the situation in Puerto Rico, front and center in our daily lives. With the COVID pandemic all of us are worried about our families and loved ones and rightly so, but we need to stay steadfast to our commitment in Puerto Rico. We need to demand accountability and social justice for the equitable distribution of federal funds for the broken healthcare system in Puerto Rico, the LGBTQ+ community whose members are being killed and the murderers are not being brought to justice and the overturning of a law that would protect the LGBTQ+, for the release of all federal funds that three years after the hurricanes have still not been received to assist in the recovery of Puerto Rico as well as humanitarian aid to assist the survivors of the numerous earthquakes and the COVID pandemic.

This is, a very, important, election year for our country and Puerto Ricans are emerging as the deciding voice in many states but most importantly Florida and Pennsylvania. As one of the biggest portions of the Latinx community, Puerto Ricans play arguably one of the most important roles on election day. A recent survey released by the Center for American Progress Fund (CAP) in collaboration with Latino Decisions found that on average, 75% of Puerto Rican voters are “definitely” voting in the 2020 election. The survey targeted 1,000 people of Puerto Rican descent living in Pennsylvania, Florida, and New York, with an oversample of 200 in PA. While New York often falls firmly Democratic, both Florida and Pennsylvania are battleground states, where the Puerto Rican vote could be the decider. In this online journal we have reproduced the Biden/Harris comprehensive plan for Puerto Rico as well as what we found on what Trump has announced to do. Comité Noviembre urges each, and every one of you to go out and vote if you have not done so yet, and bring your family, friends and neighbors to the polls with you.

Comité Noviembre is excited that all, of its annual programs, will be conducted virtually on its YouTube channel. Event dates are as follows: Puerto Rican Heritage Month Kick-Off: Friday, October 30, 2020, National Puerto Rican Artisans Fair & Exhibit and Author’s Expo: Saturday, November 21, 2020 & Sunday, November 22, 2020: 24th Annual Day of Community Service and Social Responsibility: Sunday, November 22, 2020 24th Annual Benefit & Silent Auction: Friday, November 30, 2020 and Buscando Nuestras Raíces Educational Trip to Puerto Rico: Wednesday, January 6, 2021.

The virtual kick off will highlight the exceptional unsung heroes of our community. Our virtual gala will pay tribute to our essential workers and organizations that went beyond the call of duty during this pandemic. The Annual Artisans Fair and Authors Book Expo promises to be bigger than ever since we now have the capability of reaching Puerto Rican artists and authors throughout the country and beyond through the magic of technology and our commitment to feed the hungry will continue with our Day of Community Service. The virtual trip to Puerto Rico will highlight the humanitarian work that CN continues to do in Puerto Rico.

This commemorative journal includes the inspiring stories of our 13 Lo Mejor de Nuestra Comunidad award recipients, the profiles of our 27 scholars, synopsis of all of CN’s programs, our continued work in Puerto Rico, the crisis situation in Puerto Rico with violence towards women and the LGBTQ+ community, the 50th anniversary of El Comité.
It is important to understand that CN is a volunteer non-profit organization with limited resources. To be able to continue the work done in Puerto Rico as well as our annual programs is truly a testament to its members: ASPIRA of New York, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College/CUNY, El Museo del Barrio, Eugenio María de Hostos Community College/CUNY, Institute for the Puerto Rican/Hispanic Elderly, Inc., La Casa de la Herencia Cultural Puertorriqueña, Inc., La Fundación Nacional para la Cultura Popular, Justice Committee: NCPRR and Puerto Rican Institute for the Development of the Arts. Our members at large are the backbone of this organization Elba Cabrera, Suleika Cabrera Drinane, Lisa Rodriguez, Anita Rodriguez, Maria Diaz Santiago, David Galarza and Minerva Urrutia.

As a community we cannot let this historic election event go by without defining our power as a community. We can no longer be invisible! The Diaspora must continue to take action to achieve the changes that must happen in this country. We must demand respect, equality and justice for all people of color. Porque Sin justicia nunca habrá cambio...Sin cambio nunca habrá paz!

For Comité Noviembre

Teresa A. Santiago, Chairwoman

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Poster Artist
Juan Sanchez

Born in 1954 in Brooklyn, New York to working-class Puerto Rican parents, Juan Sánchez is an influential American visual artist, and one of the most important Nuyorican cultural figures of the latter 20th century. Maintaining an activist stance for over forty years, he establishes his art as an arena of creative and political inquiry that encompasses the individual, family, the communities with which he engages, and the world at large.

Sánchez emerged as a central figure in a generation of artists using diverse media to explore ethnic, racial, national identity and social justice in the 1980s and ‘90s. While Sánchez first gained recognition for his large multi-layered mixed media collage paintings addressing issues of Puerto Rican identity and the struggle against U.S. colonialism, his work has evolved to embrace painting, photography, printmaking, and video installations.

Sánchez’ work has been shown in several solo and group exhibitions throughout the United States, Latin America, Europe and Africa. His art is in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Modern Art, and El Museo del Barrio, The Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Washington, DC; El Instituto de Cultura Puerorriqueña, Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico and El Centro Wilfredo Lam in Havana, Cuba, among others.

He has been awarded grants and fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, the Joan Mitchell Foundation, New York Foundation for the Arts, the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

He is the recipient of the 2020 CUAA Augustus Saint Gauden Achievement in the Visual Art Award and is inducted into The Cooper Union Hall of Fame.

Juan Sánchez is Professor of Art at Hunter College, the City University of New York.
About the Poster

Our theme this year,

“Sin justicia nunca habrá cambio...Sin cambio nunca habrá paz!
Without justice, there is no change...Without change there is no peace!”

speaks to the change that must happen in this country to achieve respect, equality and justice for all people of color but specifically the 8 million Puerto Ricans that live on the island and the mainland. It demands action from the Diaspora. Each one of us needs to be fully engaged and active in demanding and achieving justice for Puerto Rico.

Poster Fundraiser

For 34 years Comité Noviembre has distributed the poster free of charge to the community and we have been proud to be able to do so. Unfortunately, because of the COVID pandemic our funding has been limited and we will not be able to offer the posters for free this year.

As a fundraising opportunity, we will be selling the posters for $30 each.

If you purchase 2 or more posters you will receive a 20% discount.

However, if you are a teacher, professor, or student you will be able to buy at a discounted price of $20.

Limited Edition Piece

A limited edition signed and numbered piece by renowned Puerto Rican social justice activist artist Juan Sanchez will be available for $250 on a first come first serve basis. Only, 40 limited edition copies are available. So please support Comité Noviembre and own one of these special pieces.

For more information contact Teresa A. Santiago at 914 263-6599/tascommunicationsllc@gmail.com
ABOUT COMITÉ NOVIEMBRE

For the past 34 years, Comité Noviembre, (CN), has celebrated Puerto Rican Heritage Month in the United States. A non-profit organization created to: commemorate and pay tribute to the contributions Puerto Ricans have made to this nation; support educational opportunities for youth through college scholarships; promote, acknowledge, create awareness and take ownership of our rich culture, language, and history, create open forums to discuss critical issues affecting the Puerto Rican community specifically in the areas of education, youth leadership development, health, politics and civic involvement and institutionalize November as Puerto Rican Heritage Month throughout the United States.

CN is the only collaboration of its kind in the United States that brings together the collective talents and resources of the oldest and most prestigious Puerto Rican organizations:

- ASPIRA of New York
- Estudios Puertorriqueños Hunter College/CUNY
- El Museo del Barrio
- Eugenio María de Hostos Community College/CUNY
- La Casa de la Herencia Cultural Puertorriqueña, Inc.
- Fundación Nacional para la Cultura Popular
- Justice Committee: NCPRR
- Puerto Rican Institute for the Development of the Arts, (PRIDA), Inc.

This coordinating body plans and promotes CN’s annual programs and events.

With the continued network support of past members like Casita Maria Center for Arts and Education, Centro de El Puente, Institute for the Puerto Rican/Hispanic Elderly, LatinoJustice:PRLDEF; Música de Camara, National Conference of Puerto Rican Women (NACOPRW); and National Institute for Latino Policy, CN has the combined network and outreach potential of over 800,000 people through its member lists and internet capabilities.

Comité Noviembre Program
Educational/Youth Leadership Development
Four Scholarship Programs
1. CN Scholarship Awards Program
2. The Richie Perez Scholarship for Peace & Justice
3. The Josefina Aguado Scholarship for Single Parents
4. The Ernesto Malave Scholarship for the Arts

Annual Leadership Development – Role Models Forum
1. Day of Community Service & Social Responsibility & Food Drive

Puerto Rican Artist Development
1. National Artisans Fair & Exhibit
2. Puerto Rican Authors Book Expo
3. Poster Traveling Exhibit

Cultural Development
1. Educational Trip to Puerto Rico, “Buscando Nuestras Raíces”
2. Three Kings celebration & Toy Drive
3. Cultural and health related workshops, forums and events.

Annual Puerto Rican Heritage Month Celebration
1. Commemorative journal
2. Annual Artist competition/Commemorative poster
3. Selection of a spokesperson

Annual Awards Events
1. Puerto Rican Heritage Month Kick-off celebration/Lo Mejor de Nuestra Comunidad Awards Annual benefit event/Puerto Rican Heritage Awards
Through LO MEJOR DE NUESTRA COMUNIDAD award, Comité Noviembre recognizes outstanding individuals who are the unsung heroes of our community.

Puerto Ricans whose pride in their heritage and strength of character have empowered themselves and inspired others to make a significant impact on the community.

Comité Noviembre chose 13 individuals from the nominations that were submitted by you, the community.
Maximo R. Colón
Photographer/Documentarian

Social justice, activism, and cultural expression through photographs

Máximo Rafael Colón is a New York based photographer who studied at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. Colón’s photography speaks to his concerns of social justice, activism, and cultural expression which encapsulates a wide range of interest in music, the human condition and making visible the people of our society who are often marginalized through discrimination and inequality. His primary medium is analogue photography. Colón also creates assemblages in the found object tradition “objet trouvé” His works have been exhibited in several venues throughout New York City and Puerto Rico, and a number of his photographs form part of the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños archives at CUNY Hunter College and of the permanent collection at the National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

In 2015, Colón’s photography was prominently featured in ¡Presente! The Young Lords in New York at The Bronx Museum of the Arts, El Museo del Barrio, and The Loisaida Center in Manhattan. His work have also been exhibited at the Museum of the City of New York, Bronx Documentary Center, New York Cultural Center and the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. He is currently editing My Upside Down World: Deconstructing Photography, a five-year digital project encompassing photographs from New York, Puerto Rico, Berlin, Mainz, Paris, Havana, and Toronto. His works can be found in numerous publications and film documentaries and are part of many private collections.

Colon’s life and activism reflects some of the best qualities of a Puerto Rican who has dedicated his life towards the betterment of his community. He is a photographer who has documented an especially important period in the history of the Puerto Rican community in New York. He is an artist who studied art but put it at the service of his community. He managed to pay his living expenses doing odd jobs -- from construction to being a chef. His photographs are recognized as works of art and he is currently taking them to every corner of the country.

Colon began to photograph his world in the early 1970’s when he joined El Comité, an Upper West Side tenants’ rights organization. He was very active in El Comité which eventually became one of the key organizations in the Puerto Rican “left” movement. El Comité is celebrating 50th years since its founding and Colón and his photographs are playing a key role in educating our community about one of the organizations that made important impact in the world we live.
Carmen Cruz

Founder, Silent Procession

Fervent fighter for human rights and justice for the disenfranchised

Carmen Cruz is a community organizer, an agent for change, and a movement builder.

After Hurricane Maria, Cruz was outraged at the disrespectful overtures of President Donald Trump towards our Puerto Rican nation, and his blatant neglect of the status of Puerto Ricans as American citizens. This is why, she created and organized the “Silent Procession”, where protestors are dressed in white, standing as testimony to the injurious offenses rendered by the United States government to a hardworking and peaceful nation. In unified silence what is glaringly articulated, is a message that reverberates, “Enough is Enough!” “Esto basta ya!”.

This procession is the platform and sounding board, the manifesto that no one can deny, of the past and present abuses and injustices endured by Puerto Rican Americans; stateside and on the island. The “Silence,” speaks louder than words, as the signs of protest against racism, capitalism, imperialism, and the ever-tightening yoke of The Jones Act. It is a demand and a call for change.

The silent message is illuminating, and powerful, filling on-lookers with recognition, that the time has come to reorganize, strategize, restructure, and rebuild Puerto Rico as a sanctuary of hope and freedom, free from colonialization, once and for all!
Carlos de Jesus  |  Cultural Historian Documentarian

Keeper of Afro-Puerto Rican Culture and History

Carlos De Jesus is a cultural historian, documentary producer/director, filmmaker, lecturer, and an insightful educator. He is a renaissance man; possessing a global spectrum of cultural and intellectual knowledge, which he transforms into palatable visual representations, via the mediums of film and photography.

His African lineage and Puerto Rican culture serve as cornerstones for all his inspirations and productions. They are the indispensable elements which he infuses and intricately weaves into the fabric of all his creations. These serve as the essence of respectability and appreciation for all the races that are generally ignored, by traditional visual historians.

De Jesus began his career by writing stories about Black Latino and Puerto Rican populations. He has highlighted cultures like the Garifuna Nation, by working on a film about the burial rituals employed by the peoples from the Ivory Coast of Africa. He was also a central figure in the formation of the First World Oder Project, a telecommunications endeavor focusing on traditional and contemporary African cultural practices in the Americas, Caribbean, Europe, India, and in the Pacific Islands.

Another noteworthy production centered around the suffering and sense of helplessness that most Puerto Rican/Latino family members experience, when family members are imprisoned.

His production of “The Picnic,” at Rahway Prison in New Jersey, dealt with the realities that these prisoners and their respective families deal with on a daily basis. This was the impetus that led to a host of discussions and voluntary work that ultimately paved the way for prison reform at Rahway.

De Jesus’ volunteerism and borough-wide work on the conditions of Puerto Ricans and other minority communities, resulted in his recognition as a Fulbright Scholar and being honored as a Tenured Professor within the Tish Film/Art Department of New York University. Through the Arts Partners Program, he has conducted photography workshops for children and lectured on Latino images in the media at Queens College. His book, “In The Knot of Times,” documents the Puerto Rican experience via photography and short literary expressions. De Jesus is the Documentary Producer/Director of “New Voice,” at PBS in Boston, MA. He is also the Producer/Director for PBS/NBC Series, “Watch Your Mouth” for WNET/Thirteen in NYC.

De Jesus has lectured on Independent Black American Film Production in Africa under the auspices of the United States Embassy. His 1996 documentary “That Old Gang of Mine “ was broadcast on Thirteen/WNET, screened at the Museum of Modern Art, El Museo Del Barrio, Port Washington Public Library, Cine Latino in San Francisco, and at Saybrook College at Yale, which won him CINE’s Gold Eagle Award in 1997.
For the past 15 years, Eric Diaz has been an active member and volunteer of the Loisaida community. His commitment to the Lower East Side has impacted hundreds of families, seniors, and young people. Diaz started volunteering in his teens, working with youngsters in after school programs, back to school events, local athletic leagues. Later, he became an articulate outspoken member of Community Board #3, appointed by Borough President Gale Brewer. He also became a member the Gouverneur Hospital Community Advisory Board.

Diaz’ commitment to the leadership development of the young people of the Lower East Side, has been exceptional. As a young high schooler, he volunteered at Loisaida, Inc. educating other local youth on STD prevention and teen pregnancy as part of the Loisaida Players, a youth theatrical group. Later, as Loisaida faced eviction and possible closure, he organized and banded together youth from the neighborhood and churches to support Loisaida. They attended community board meetings with placards and public testimony on behalf of Loisaida, which helped to save the organization, which is now thriving and celebrating its 42nd year.

Diaz was a summer group leader for organizations such as Henry Street Settlement, The University Settlement, and later Vision Urbana Inc., which he now directs. As a member of the Primitive Christian Church he volunteered in their mentorship program, Royal Rangers and their youth leadership development program called DESTINY working with and mentoring dozens of young men and women.

At Vision Urbana, Inc. Diaz established a model youth mentorship program called The Empire Mentorship Initiative, remembering Raphael Sadonte Ward, in memory of a local Puerto Rican young man who died, as a result, of gun violence. The program served hundreds of Latino youths between the ages of 10 and 21 years.

Diaz continues to volunteer his time on Community Board #3 where he now serves on its executive committee as board secretary, on the Health and Hospitals Gouverneur Community Advisory Board, as a board member of Casa Victoria-a senior development, as well as at his local church – working with youth. Most recently, since the start of the COVID pandemic to date, Eric has mobilized an incredible food security initiative serving thousands in the surrounding NYCHA developments while also providing access to bilingual COVID-19 resources and Census 2020 completion support targeting Puerto Rican/Latino residents.
Growing up in the Puerto Rican community of Los Sures in Williamsburg Brooklyn, David Lopez had to confront a world divided. Living in the middle of Orthodox Jewish and Italian/Polish neighborhoods which held all the levers of government access and power, he learned of the constructs of discrimination and racism at an early age.

As a result, his teenage and early adult years were invested in joining protest actions on behalf of community control in education, distributing the Young Lord’s Newspaper PALANTE in his neighborhood, supporting the rights of all students to a higher education, supporting the mission of the then newly instituted Williamsburg Legal Services, as well as supporting actions against the war in Vietnam.

At the New York Technical College, David joined student protest to demand the expansion of Puerto Rican and African American Studies Departments at the institution. Before graduating, he was able to garner student support and resources for 2 historic, Puerto Rican led community struggles: the all occupation of Hostos Community College in the Bronx, and the occupation of 500+ apartments pursuant to the violation of a federal court discrimination consent decree. Today these apartments are known as the Roberto Clemente Plaza in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

In the late 70’s, David led a successful tenant strike in his building. After two years, he was granted temporary administration. In 1991 the tenants purchased the building which today is a efficiently run tenant owned cooperative.

David as served on the board of directors of Los Sures, a vital housing development organization. For the past 15 years, he has served the organization in various capacities including as its executive director and board chair. Under his leadership and in partnership with Brooklyn Legal Services Corp A., Los Sures is responsible for turning over 1,000 apartments into tenant ownership. It presently owns and operates 40 buildings securing affordable housing to over 800 low income families. Los Sures continues to safeguard the rights of rent stabilized tenants. In the height of the COVID pandemic, Los Sures which operates two hydroponic farms, raised its food sustenance program from serving 300 families to 1,000 families weekly.

David is a co-founder of the respected youth empowerment program known as El Puente. This organization has been housed in one of the buildings owned by Los Sures for the past 40 years. He is a writer and recites poetry addressing the struggles of a people, and the human condition.
Esperanza Martell | Human and Social Justice Activist

Educator for Liberation and Healing in Communities of Color

For over 40 years, Esperanza Martell has been in the forefront of many human and social justice campaigns that have affected and benefited communities of color, women and specifically the Puerto Rican community both here and on the island. She has devoted her life towards the liberation of Puerto Rico and the release of Puerto Rican political prisoners.

She teaches community organizing and is an advisor at the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College, City University of New York, (CUNY). She is the founder of the Urban Atabex Network, co-founder of Casa Atabex Ache a Women of Color Self-Healing Center and has served as coordinator for the Pro-Libertad Campaign to Free Puerto Rican Political Prisoners/POW. Since the early 70’s, Esperanza has developed and facilitated workshops on diversity training, team building, and conflict resolution. Martell focuses her volunteer work on ending violence in the lives of women of color from a class, race, and gender prospective. She is a board member of the Brecht Forum, and the Marxist School of New York City.

Martell also facilitates healing circles and support groups using her own culturally based techniques for emotional self-healing and empowerment. She has been instrumental in the founding of many organizations that have had major impact in the Puerto Rican community as well as collaborating with many organizations bringing unity and justice among oppressed communities and nationalities.

She is a graduate of the Hunter College School of Social work and was a Revson Fellow at Columbia University (2003-2004). She has published essays and poetry, including “In the Belly of the Beast - Beyond Survival,” The Puerto Rican Movement: Temple University Press (1998). “Learning in Community: A Transformative Healing Educational Model for Teaching Community Organizing,” Holistic Engagement: Oxford University Press

Martell has been honored and recognized for her work in New York and Puerto Rico. Her awards include: the Puerto Rican Working Women’s Organization of Puerto Rico’s Peace & Social Justice Award and the Taino Awards’ Guatiao recognition. Her art is the expression of her politics, culture, and spirituality. Her Puerto Rican African/Taíno, ancestors used art magically for healing and to give meaning to their existence. She is inspired by the ocean, stars, every living expression of the Earth Mother and the struggles and victories of “Mi Gente.” As she puts it in her own words, “Sí, se puede.” “Hay amor.”
Nydia Ocasio | Music and Dance Educator

Preserving Puerto Rican culture through dance

Nydia Ocasio is one of the most experienced Latin/Afro-Caribbean dance instructors, performers, choreographers and music educators in New York. Her unique style seamlessly incorporates folkloric rhythms and dance movement techniques evolving from our Cuban, Puerto Rican and Brazilian roots.

As a professional teacher and performer for more than 20 years, she continues to share her vast knowledge and limitless passion with future generations. She has conducted countless dance workshops throughout the tri-state area and abroad. She has volunteered her time with various non-profits and New York City Public Schools and universities. Her artistic background has distinguished her as an outstanding teacher and performer in various Salsa/Afro-Caribbean cultural events.

Additionally, Ocasio has donated her time and expertise to many fundraisers dear to her heart including the Annual Winter Heat Fundraiser, the Harbor Conservatory Big Band, Harbor’s Big Band Orchestra, Schomburg Center and Manhattan School of Music.

Ocasio has performed with Orchestra Son De La Loma, Los Pleneros de la 21, Nestor Torres and Cachao, East Coast Salsa Congress, Collectors Festival and in concert venues including Madison Square Garden, the Beacon Theater, and one of her most memorable experiences at the Tito Puente’s 50th Anniversary celebration.

Ocasio owns two dance companies, “Latin Sensations” and “Fiesta Brava Dance Revue. She has been sought out by an array of dance companies such The Afro/Cuban Puerto Rican Dance Co, Roots of Brazil Dance Co and Patakín/Carambu Boy’s Harbor. She is the recipient of the prestigious Mambo Hall of Fame Award bestowed upon her by the Salsa Congress in 2002. Her passion and artistic abilities have impacted our community in the most profound and positive way.
Hector Pereira
Volunteer, American Red Cross

Giving freely and receiving more than imagined

Hector Pereira has been an outstanding volunteer with the American Red Cross of Greater New York for over six years. As a member of The Red Cross’s Bronx Disaster Action Team (“DAT”), he responds across the City year-round to help families and individuals who have been affected by fires and floods in their homes, unsafe buildings, and other disasters. DAT shifts are long, typically 6 hours, but can go as much as 12 hours if there is a large-scale incident, such as hurricanes, explosions, or transportation accidents. Members respond at all hours of the day and night, in extreme temperatures and across all NYC neighborhoods. DAT members do not judge persons impacted or discriminate because of race, class, religion or immigration status: they are there to help after disaster has struck. Pereira has consistently and repeatedly embodied the mission and values of the Red Cross as a DAT member. He continues to give his time and skills selflessly and with compassion as a volunteer to help persons who are very often experiencing the worst moment of their lives.

While the typical ask of volunteers is to fulfill as shift twice a month, Hector steps up to support whenever help is needed. He somehow balances his family and career obligations with what at times can be a steady stream of asks for support from the Red Cross. But Pereira always responds promptly to Red Cross requests, eager to find how he can help. His deep commitment to support his community is made clear by the fact that in addition to American Red Cross Greater New York Region volunteering with the Bronx DAT, Hector also volunteers with our Mass Care and Logistics team. It was in these roles that he stepped up to join the Red Cross mission and deploy to Puerto Rico in response to Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017.

During his deployment, Pereira initially served as a member of our Logistics team. Assigned to a warehouse in Juncos, he worked with the team that loaded and unloaded trucks with vital supplies that would be transported across the country. Eager to pick up new skills that would facilitate the response, Hector jumped at the chance to learn how to operate a forklift and became Red Cross certified. Quickly noticing his dedication, and bi-lingual skills, Pereira was soon tapped to assist with Mass Care. Assigned a vehicle and a specific region to support, each day, he and his team would load much needed water and food into vans and then head out to local towns to distribute these critical supplies. Thousands and thousands of people were profoundly affected after two category 5 hurricanes left much of Puerto Rico severely damaged. Pereira took this to heart. He and team distributed everything they were provided and then reported back to the District office with more insights and information on the communities in need.

Pereira is the ideal volunteer to carry out the humanitarian aid work of the Red Cross, a person that is compassionate, culturally sensitive, intelligent, caring and committed. Hector embodies all these characteristics and many more.
Soldanela Rivera is a communications executive and producer spanning the fields of dance, film, television, music, theater, and education, and has worked with emerging, established, and world-renowned figures. Rivera produces, Notes From A Native Daughter, an audio blog about arts, culture, and society with figures from the Pan-American experience. She self-published, “View For Death,” in 2018, and is currently Director of Presidential Strategic Initiatives at Hostos Community College of The City University of New York.

Rivera shares this extensive experience with cultural and educational organizations that are important to her. She is the Board Chair of the iconic Puerto Rican cultural institution Pregones/Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre and Board Member the Neighborhood Self Help by Older Persons Project, (SHOPP), a non-profit multiservice agency, serving over 10,000 older adults, caregivers and other Bronx residents a year. But her passion project is the blog, “Notes From A Native Daughter.” For the last four years, every Sundays, on her own time and expense, she writes about Puerto Rican and Latinx artists and cultural workers to uplift and empower underrepresented voices of our community.

As board member of Diaspora for Puerto Rico, Inc., Rivera helped many displaced Puerto Rican families with the transition from Puerto Rico to the mainland US after Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

Rivera earned a B.A. from Sarah Lawrence College with a concentration in dance and an M.A. from Teachers College, Columbia University in Arts Administration.
Wanda Salaman’s drive and dedication for community volunteerism, stems from her young years in el barrio SaintJust in the town of Carolina, Puerto Rico. There, her family gathered every Sunday, alternating households weekly, to cook, clean backyards, and to share familial triumphs and tribulations. Although Salaman was born in Rio Piedras, her paternal and maternal families hail from Carolina and Santurce, and are deeply rooted in their Afro-Puerto Rican ancestry.

The adage, “It takes a village to raise a child,” was an internal mantra which motivated Salaman to volunteer in the South Bronx soon after she arrived in 1975. Reportedly, her neighborhood was a far cry from her colorful, lush and verdant “island of enchantment.”

During her teenage years, Salaman became increasingly alarmed by the amount of buildings set on fire by greedy landlords, and the vermin infested vacant lots in her vicinity. Thus, she got involved with a Tenant’s Association on Garden Street; comprised of a cadre of youths, who guarded basements in attempts to deter drug abusers from stealing boiler parts. The Tenant’s Association strongly modeled the true meaning of community ownership, when several years later they fought legally in the courts to turn the building into co-op apartments. This experience launched Salaman into community volunteerism and community activism.

For more than two decades, Salaman has volunteered unselfishly to respond to community movement work on a local and national level. Prior to becoming Executive Director for Mothers On the Move (MOM) she volunteered at the Bronx Youth Community Organization, Laundromat Project- encouraging and promoting artists to get involved in tenant organizing and education. In 2016 they joined a group of Garifuna dancers in creating an annual Field Day, in the Hunts Point/Longwood neighborhood; to inspire intergenerational women and men to fight for change and better services at St. Barnabas Hospital and the surrounding communities.

Through her work with MOM, she began organizing around public housing and NYCHA. Salaman believes that one must begin with analyzing and researching a community’s needs then strategizing through community meetings and planned actions. This criteria helped, MOM to shut down The Organic Fertilizer Company (NYOFCO) who was paid by the City of New York, $20,000,000 annually while polluting the air in the South Bronx for many years.

Salaman’s tireless volunteerism, as well as her commitment and dedication to the South Bronx, has led her to champion many causes and win many victories in the arenas of housing, education, community development, and environmental challenges.
Inspiring his peers to do volunteer work

Since the age of 7, George Daniel Santiago has been serving his community through volunteer efforts. From volunteering with his parents at their church, to distributing turkeys and food during Comité Noviembre’s Day of Community Service and collecting funds and shopping for displaced Puerto Rican families from Hurricane Maria.

Santiago is part of the New York City Church of Christ Youth and Teen Family Ministry. For the annual CN Day of Community Service, he inspired the youth and teen group to volunteer with the distribution of food and turkeys. Going on 2 years come rain or shine in the crisp cold November air his group is there with smiles on their faces serving people of the community from the Hope Worldwide Church on 167th Street and Grand Concourse in the Bronx. But his service with this event goes back to when CN distributed the turkeys from El Museo del Barrio.

This past year he made the football team at Harry S. Truman High School, one of his dreams to play for his high school. It turns out that all games are played on Sunday during the time that his family goes to Sunday service. He had, a very, difficult, decision to make and his parents let him decide. His decision -- his volunteer work at church was more important to him. To compensate however, he re-established a Junior Flag football team with a youth leader for his group of friends which also led to a basketball team and other projects and activities.

Santiago is always ready to volunteer his time. In 2018 Comité Noviembre partnered with Diaspora for Puerto Rico, Inc., to assist with the donation of gifts, basic winter necessities, (coats, jackets, hats, gloves, boots, sweaters, scarfs, pants, blouses, underwear, toiletries, etc.), and celebrate our traditional holiday, the Feast of the Three Kings. George Daniel spent 2 days shopping and preparing the items each family needed. He was very thoughtful in picking out the items especially for the teenagers on the list. At this event 10 families and 150 individuals received needed items. Santiago saw firsthand the power of his actions and how his volunteerism transformed people’s lives.

Every time Comité Noviembre calls on him, he says YES! He built a shelving system in the basement of CN’s office to store all of its materials, he has carried boxes, distributed posters, helped set up and breakdown reception area for the CN kick-off event over the years and he serves as official security at the CN Silent Auction at the annual benefit. A responsibility he takes very seriously.

In his short 17 years, Santiago has volunteered more than many adults. He has proven himself as a compassionate, caring volunteer that has truly helped and inspired many people.
Vincent Torres

Board Member Positive Workforce & 
Vice Chair of Operation, National Puerto Rican Day 
Parade…

*Rebuilding Puerto Rico with love and compassion*

Vincent, “Vinny,” Torres, was born and raised in New York City and has been involved with the non-profit sector for over 25 years. As a board member and now executive director of Positive Workforce, a construction advocacy organization, dedicated to obtaining gainful employment opportunities for local and minority building trade workers, he has been responsible for over 10,000 placements in the construction industry.

This accomplishment alone is worthy of recognition, however his dedicated volunteer work with the National Puerto Rican Day Parade as Vice Chair of Operations has insured the success of this cultural icon. His work in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria as well as volunteering during this pandemic to distribute food has been exceptional.

Two months after Hurricane Maria, Torres collaborated with several partners to create a movement to provide generators to several towns around Puerto Rico the movement was called “electricity for Puerto Rico before Christmas!” Torres and his team of Positive Workforce volunteers delivered and installed hundreds of generators to the mountainous areas of Puerto Rico the most vulnerable the time. Torres knew that action had to be taken because our Federal government was failing the island. He stepped up to the plate, called on his resources, and made a concrete difference. He continues to volunteer and assist Puerto Rico whenever and wherever there is a need. He visited Puerto Rico several times to do volunteer work with non-profit organizations associated with the parade. Additionally, during this pandemic he has volunteered at several organizations throughout the City and specifically in East Harlem to distribute food in communities most affected by the COVID pandemic.

Torres currently is a board member of El Barrio/East Harlem Community Board 11. He has an important role in initiating and reviewing planning, land use and zoning matters, the City budget, municipal service delivery and many other advocacy matters relating to the welfare of East Harlem. With a number, of monthly public committee meeting covering a range of important community issues, Torres currently serves both the Economic Development and Land Use Committees.
Miguel Trelles | Executive Director, Teatro LATEA & Founder of Borimix

Advocate of culturally relevant arts education

Miguel Trelles is a Puerto Rican-Chinese visual artist from the Lower East Side of Manhattan and is presently the Executive Director of Teatro LATEA housed in the Clemente Soto Velez Cultural & Education Center. He wears many hats and is a jack-of-all-trades; both in the arena of volunteerism and employment.

For 45 years, Miguel has lived, developed as an artist, and provided pro-bono art education classes to residents of the Lower East Side. His level of energy and his ability to venture into uncharted waters has helped him to grow as an individual, as well as shape and strengthen his resolve to serve those in need.

Due to his innate desire to serve the underprivileged and to develop the arts in his community, Miguel has been able to establish long-standing alliances and collaborative efforts with community leaders and organizations on the LES. For five weeks annually, Miguel volunteers his time to Borimix, an arts festival he founded. Borimix is comprised of Puerto Rican artists whose mediums fall within the realm of film, theatre, dance, music, and in the visual arts.

Professionally, Mr. Trelles is an outstanding graphic designer and theatre administrator. He graduated from Brown University, majoring in Art and Art History. He began graduate studies at Yale and left to pursue his passion – painting. Neighborhood residents know him for his on-going Chinese painting series. Miguel derives his inspiration for these series from classic Chinese, along with pre-Columbian and Latin American Imagery.

During the past few years, Teatro LATEA has served countless community members by volunteering its staff and theatre for important benefits and charities, including fundraisers for Hurricane Maria, collaboration with neighborhood association “Why Not Care?”, and Puerto Rican, Dominican, and other Latino artists striving to assist our diasporic communities.

Mr. Trelles’ resume repletes with exhibitions and educational seminars across the continents, particularly in Asia and Europe. In the United States, Mr. Trelles has taught at Baruch College, Hunter College, ONPS International Summer School, Brown University, Fairleigh Dickinson University and Universidad Nacional Enrique Urena, in New York City.
Comité Noviembre Scholarship Program

Twenty-four years of youth leadership and educational excellence

For 24 years, over 330 Comité Noviembre (CN) scholars, have been making a difference taking action and changing the world! CN’s scholarships are firmly rooted in the belief that in order to succeed in life, you must pursue a higher education, give back to your community through volunteer efforts and know your cultural roots.

The 2020 scholars continue to honor this tradition of giving back to their community and making a clear impact and difference through their volunteer efforts. CN is extremely excited about the future of our community and our young people. The caliber of students who have received the scholarship, have demonstrated a desire to pursue their chosen fields to give back to the community in various ways that directly affect change. Many have shown a vision and maturity beyond their years; and others have already faced and overcome many challenges.

From cleaning the beaches and debris in Puerto Rico after the earthquakes, tutoring children, working on research projects in clinical studies, distributing food and feeding the hungry to spearheading humanitarian support for Puerto Rico, using music to create social action, seeking truth, and justice through writing these scholars are leaving their unique mark on our community. We have been inspired by these scholars and are learning from their community service.

Over the years, CN has selected leaders from various sectors of the community who through their professions as educators, mentors and education advocates have demonstrated interest in the educational excellence and leadership development of our youth, to serve on the selection committee. The scholarship selection committee is headed by co-chairs Lisa M. Rodriguez, MSW, education and youth advocate, and Elba Cabrera, community leader committee, Zenaida Muslin, Founder & Leader of Latino Educators in NY Schools, and Sandy Figueroa, Business Professor at Hostos Community College. CN is extremely grateful for their leadership, dedication and commitment to the success of this program.

For information on CN’s scholarship program please contact:
Lisa M. Rodriguez, lisamarierodriguez@msn.com, (347) 693-6893

2020 scholarship applications will be posted on Comité Noviembre’s website: www.comitenoviembre.org in January.
KIARRA ALDARONDO

Kiarra was born in Puerto Rico and now resides in Auburndale, Florida. Kiarra is currently attending Saint Leo University in Florida and majoring in English with an aspiration to attend Law School. Kiarra’s community service centered on volunteering through America Reads at Freedman Elementary School in Springfield, MA. Kiarra provided students that needed extra help with reading, writing, and mathematics.

“Thank you again for this privilege you have bestowed upon me. I also want to congratulate Comité Noviembre for helping youth push forward and fulfill their dream.”

DELIÁN COLÓN BURGOS

Delián Colón Burgos is from Cayey, Puerto Rico. Delián is currently attending Pennsylvania State University majoring in Meteorology and Atmospheric Science. Delian served as an intern in the “EcoExploratorio Puerto Rico Science Museum”, where she created and developed various interactive science-based activities intended for youth interested in the STEM field.

“I feel extremely honored and grateful to be one a 2020 Comité Noviembre Scholar and it fills me with joy that it is focused on celebrating Puerto Rican Culture. Receiving this scholarship supports all my efforts towards the Puerto Rican community at my campus and will enable me to focus on reaching my academic goals.”
RITZA JOLIE FALCON
SANTIAGO

Ritza Jolie Falcon Santiago represents New City, New York. Jolie is currently attending the State University of New York at Rockland Community College. Jolie aspires to a career in Journalism and News Analysis. Jolie volunteered at her school’s newspaper and represented on the Superintendent’s Advisory Council and Board of Education as the first Puerto Rican student to hold these roles.

“I am so thankful for Comité Noviembre for supporting our Boricua educational track and bringing us even closer to our Puerto Rican heritage.”

PALOMA GONZALEZ

Paloma Gonzalez represents the Bronx, New York. Paloma is currently attending Manhattan College in the Bronx majoring in Exercise Science with a concentration in Kinesiology. Paloma aspires to enter Sports Medicine. Paloma volunteers with the Children’s Aid Program as an after-school counselor providing meaningful peer tutoring and having significant discussions with the students concerning topics within the community and the world.

“I would wish to thank you for your recognition and your support in my future career in the medical field. I had to take out a loan to continue my education at Manhattan College. However, receiving this scholarship helped remove some financial barrier and made it easier to obtain expensive textbooks I needed for my courses.”
KATHERINE MARTINEZ MEDINA

Katherine Martinez Medina represents Vieques, Puerto Rico. Katherine is currently attending the University of Puerto Rico – Río Piedras Campus majoring in Social Work.

Katherine volunteers and fundraises with Vieques in Rescue, a non-profit organization that helps cancer patients in the Puerto Rican Community of Vieques through donations of medicines, transportation, and food.

“Upon receiving the news that I was a 2020 Comité Noviembre Scholar, I was proud. It is a great privilege that this scholarship will help me with my college expenses.”

ADRIANA MELENDEZ

Adriana Melendez was born in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico and presently lives in Jupiter, Florida. Adriana is currently attending Tallahassee Community College in Florida and will be attending Florida State University for the Spring semester majoring in Chemical Engineering. Adriana raised money for the Hogar de Niños Jesús de Nazaret in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico. The funds were used to purchase bicycles and toys for kids that needed emotional support from the many challenges Puerto Rico experienced such as hurricanes, earthquakes, and political unrest. Adriana and two of her friends were able to fly to the island and personally deliver all the bicycles and toys as well as spend time with the kids.

Thank you very much for this opportunity! I am very excited and proud to be a 2020 Comité Noviembre Scholar. This award will contribute to my academic and career advancement by helping to alleviate the economic cost of college.
YIHANA MELENDEZ
ALEJANDRO

Yihana Melendez Alejandro represents Vieques, Puerto Rico.
Yihana is currently attending the University of Puerto Rico – Rio Piedras Campus majoring in Biology. Yihana aspires to be a medical doctor to serve the community of Vieques, Puerto Rico. Yihana has volunteered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by reforestation, maintenance of green space, beach clean-up, and developed creative ideas for recycled materials collected on during environmental restoration.

“Being a Comite Noviembre Scholar is an honor and a great help. This scholarship contributes to my dreams of helping my island.”

ARGENYS MOJICA GOMEZ

Argenys Mojica Gomez’s hometown is San Lorenzo, Puerto Rico. Argenys is currently attending the Universidad Ana G. Méndez - Gurabo Campus, majoring in Chemistry. Argenys volunteered with the Matías González middle school in creating a homemade orchard to be used by the students. This initiative of the TU ERES Research & Development program addressed the need to increase Puerto Rico’s agricultural traditions to offset the high needs for imports.

“I am very honored and happy to be selected for the 2020 Comité Noviembre scholarship. This scholarship will help me pursue my goals of entering the Pharmacy field.”
Gabriel Alejandro Mojica Gómez

Gabriel is from San Lorenzo, Puerto Rico. Gabriel is currently attending the Ana G. Méndez University - Gurabo Campus majoring in Veterinarian Science. Gabriel’s service to his community center on the damages caused by Hurricane María in Puerto Rico. Gabriel continues to this day collecting and delivering needed supplies such as food, water, and clothes for the most vulnerable community members.

“Thank you again for this privilege you have bestowed upon me. I also want to congratulate Comité Noviembre for helping youth push forward and fulfill their dream.”

Carlos Omar Mojica Torres

Carlos Omar Mojica Torres is from Las Piedras, Puerto Rico. Carlos is currently attending La Universidad de Puerto Rico – Cayey campus pursuing a degree in Engineering. Carlos enjoys giving to the community by taking action in coast cleaning for a healthier environment, and food & plant distribution for community members in need.

“I am extremely grateful and excited to be selected to the Comité Noviembre Scholarship Award and for the opportunity to prove that I am a young Puerto Rican committed to community service and educational excellence. This award will contribute greatly to my academic career, as it will help me afford essential college expenses (it is a support and relief to my economic needs).”
JIANNA NIEVES

Jianna Nieves is from Clark, New Jersey. Jianna is currently attending The College of New Jersey and majoring in Computer and Electrical Engineering. Jianna volunteered by serving as a mentor with GIRLS WHO CODE by promoting computer science and engineering to young girls interested in the technology field.

“I would like to thank Comite’ Noviembre for selecting me as a scholarship recipient. This scholarship is very meaningful to me, I feel honored that I am representing my Boricua heritage in a positive way. I am thankful Comite’ Noviembre has acknowledged my academic efforts and is supporting me in realizing my dream of becoming an engineer.”

TYRONE OMAR NIEVES MARTINEZ

Tyrone Omar Nieves represents Las Piedras, Puerto Rico, and presently living in Rochester, New York. Tyrone is currently attending the University of Rochester in New York majoring in Biology and Psychology and minoring in American Sign Language. Tyrone aspires to become a medical doctor. Tyrone created a service project called “Estudiantes con Propósito”. This project educated young Puerto Rican students about alcohol, drugs, and sexually transmitted diseases with the help of the Administration of Mental Health Services and Addiction, also known as ASSMCA, and the past Miss Universe Puerto Rico, Kiara Ortega.

“Being selected as a recipient is such a great privilege and I am very honored. This scholarship confirms my potential and that the work I have done so far is being recognized; thank you.”
Darshan Rodríguez

Darshan Rodríguez is from Cleveland, Ohio. Darshan is currently attending Ohio State University pursuing a degree in Mechanical Engineering. Darshan’s community service centered on serving the homeless population by food and clothing distribution with his high school.

“I am grateful and blessed to have been awarded this scholarship. This award will allow me the capacity to pursue a career in mechanical engineering. Thank you once again.”

Imari Roque

Imari Roque represents the Bronx, New York. Imari is currently attending the State University of New York – University at Albany majoring in Political Science with a minor in Latin American Studies and Philosophy. Imari volunteers at her church Damascus Christian Church as a child caregiver, helps to organize church events and oversees the audio-visual management for church activities.

“Thank you for this scholarship! I am proud and honored to have received this scholarship from such an important organization.”
DESTINY RUIZ

Destiny Ruiz is from the Bronx, New York. Destiny is currently attending Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut majoring in Science in Society. Destiny served as a Middlesex Hospital Emergency Department Ambassador. As an ambassador, Destiny provided comfort and support for Spanish-speaking patients. Destiny was the only Spanish speaking person in the emergency room and felt a personal mission to ensure these patients received the best care by bridging the communication gap.

“I am beyond grateful to be selected as a 2020 Comité Noviembre Scholar! I am eager to become a part of a network of scholars who are passionate about spreading awareness about our Puerto Rican culture. As I pursue a career in public health, I will always carry my heritage with me as it shapes my morals in my professional career.”

MIRELYS TORRES GALARZA

Mirelys Torres Galarza represents Aguadilla, Puerto Rico. Mirelys is currently attending the University of Puerto Rico – Aguadilla Campus majoring in Biology with an emphasis in Biomedical.

“I am so grateful for being accepted as a participant of the Comité Noviembre Scholarship. The acceptance was received with much joy and gratitude for the amazing opportunity. This award will contribute to my academic expenses for the semester and the future so that I can keep my studies as a biology undergraduate student and as a medicinal student in the future.”
SEBASTIAN VELÁZQUEZ RODRIGUEZ

Sebastian Velázquez Rodriguez represents Yauco, Puerto Rico. Sebastian is currently attending the University of Puerto Rico – Mayaguez Campus. Sebastian aspires to be a medical doctor working with youth. Sebastian’s passion for animals led to his service with collaborating with the “Salvemos al Zoologico” foundation and helped on the reconstruction of the zoo in Mayagüez.

“I am so thankful for Comité Noviembre for supporting our Boricua educational track and bringing us even closer to our Puerto Rican heritage.”

LUIS A. VELEZ VELAZQUEZ

Luis A. Velez Velazquez represents Peñuelas, Puerto Rico. Luis is currently attending the University of Puerto Rico – Ponce Campus majoring in Natural Sciences with a concentration in Biomedical Science. Luis transmits service through music by bringing music to various centers and nursing homes in the town of Yauco. He also, brings music and warm socks to children and young people at the pediatric hospital in San Juan.

“I feel proud and honored to be chosen for this scholarship that honors community service and Puerto Rican heritage. Furthermore, I know that this scholarship will help me to continue with my university studies and advance towards my future goals.”
The Josefina Aguado Scholarship for Single Parents is awarded to single parents pursuing a college or a graduate degree. For the past five years, this scholarship has been possible by a generous donation from the husband and wife philanthropist team of Bill Aguado and Kathi Pavlick. The scholarship is named in honor of Mr. Aguado’s mother to recognize the sacrifices single parents make on behalf of their families. 

**ELENA ROMERO**

Elena is a proud Nuyorican from Brooklyn, New York. Elena is the first in her family to go to college and is now attending the CUNY Graduate Center pursuing a Ph.D. in Urban Education with a concentration in Leadership and Policy. Elena’s mission is to help solve education issues within the New York City public school system. Elena is the proud mother of three daughters: Gabriela (age 14), Gionna (age 9), and Grace (age 8).
In 2004, the Puerto Rican community lost an advocate and urban warrior.

Richie Pérez was an activist and leader in the fight for social justice and human rights. Richie believed greatly in the power and potential of young people to create social change.

In his memory, Comité Noviembre established the Richie Pérez Scholarship for Peace & Justice to recognize Puerto Rican young people for their commitment, activism, and achievements in the areas of human rights and social justice.

ANGELISE VERA

Angelise Vera’s hometown is Staten Island, New York and presently lives in Freehold, New Jersey. Angelise is currently attending Seton Hall University in New Jersey pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Nursing in the OB/GYN field. Angelise also plans to continue her studies in attaining her Ph.D. in Nursing. Angelise states, “It is important to stand up against racism and colorism, as it plagues our communities and refuses to be complacent in the atrocities committed against the Black and Puerto Rican community. Since raising her voice against Seton Hall’s complacency, Angelise has been inducted to the Diversity and Inclusion Committee at Seton Hall. As well as, contributed to the changes in curriculum which are currently being invoked for a more inclusive environment that explores the complexities of race and its burden within society.

I am so grateful for this opportunity! With this scholarship, it will move me closer to my community goals to ensure the equal treatment of my future patients regardless of color.
ANTONIO RICHARD LEE

Antonio Richard Lee was born in Vallejo, California and presently lives in Fairfield, California. Antonio is currently attending Los Angeles Community College District pursuing a degree in Music. As a social activist, Antonio uses his passion for the arts in addressing social justice issues within the Boricua community. Antonio led his high school in a Walk Out Protest addressing the new school administration’s policy centered around immigration, LGBTQ+ health, human rights, and lack of school empathy.

I am honored, proud, and grateful to receive this award. Thank you to Comité Noviembre for seeing the passion in my heart and for helping me to achieve my goals. Thank you for investing in my future and our culture.

Javier Santiago,
Founder and Executive Director

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La Fundación Nacional para la Cultura Popular, (The National Foundation for Popular Culture), is a non-profit organization incorporated in August 1996. The mission of the La Fundación is to advance the development of Puerto Rican popular culture through study, research, promotion and sponsorship of events specifically geared to cultural interest and performers.

La Fundación’s goals are to research, study, file, produce publications, catalogue, disclose, compete, conserve, produce, promote, exhibit, exchange and disseminate information, knowledge and the history of Puerto Rico’s popular, classical and folkloric culture.

La Fundación’s archives hold and preserve an extensive collection of records in all formats, including radio recordings, interviews, photos, negatives, videos in various formats, advertising propaganda, magazines, works of art, paintings and other popular culture collectibles.

In line with its objectives, the organization encourages and promotes the knowledge of popular culture, serving as a resource for research and source of information to artists, musicians, students, teachers, communicators in all branches (including journalists, publicists and public relations), writers, scriptwriters, producers of shows, historians, sponsors as well as governmental and educational organizations.
Ernesto Malave was the Vice Chancellor for Budget and Finance at The City University of New York passed away unexpectedly in 2009. His bottom line was keeping CUNY affordable for the most economically vulnerable of students.

Mr. Malave was instrumental in making the Annual Comité Noviembre Artisans Fair a reality by providing funding and resources. To commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Fair, CN established the Ernesto Malave Scholarship for the Arts for his contribution, support and commitment to making the Artisans Fair a reality. The award recognizes Puerto Rican students pursuing higher education majoring in the Arts.

Ayiana Taina Davis Polen

Ayiana Taina is from Washington, DC. Ayiana Taina is currently attending Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia majoring in Sociology & Anthropology, Music with a piano performance concentration, and a Spanish minor. Ayiana Taina shares “Aside from my artistic projects, I advocate in reforming how art is taught from a colonized frame and bring Puerto Rican Artists to the forefront.

“Being a 2020 Comité Noviembre Scholar means so much to me, not just because of the scholarship amount but having a connection with other young Puerto Rican scholars. This scholarship will help contribute to me graduating debt-free and I am extremely grateful for this opportunity.”
Gabriela Hernandez Hernandez was born and raised in San Lorenzo, Puerto Rico. Gabriela is currently attending Emerson College in Boston, MA majoring in Theatre with a minor in Communication. Gabriela uses music and art to help build the self-esteem and self-care for young girls via the lead role in the play Cinderella En Español.

“Thanks to Comité Noviembre for selecting me as a winner of this Scholarship which will help me pay for my studies. I am so grateful for being a 2020 Comité Noviembre Scholar, which makes me feel even more proud of being a Puerto Rican. In the past it seemed impossible to study abroad, but now is more possible than ever thanks to this opportunity.”

Nayeli Roman represents Pittsburg, California. Nayeli is currently attending San Jose State University, San Jose, California majoring in Theatre Arts. Nayeli ambition is to use her art skills by keeping her Puerto Rican culture alive by accurately representing her people on screen.

“I feel immensely honored and grateful to receive this scholarship from Comité Noviembre. This scholarship will enable me to meet the financial requirements of my college studies and continue my studies until I reach my goal by graduating. In addition, the scholarship monies will allow me the financial freedom to immerse myself in my college education and be the best that I can be.”
ALEX ROSADO

Alex Rosado represents the Bronx, New York. Alex is currently attending Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, New York majoring in Film & Media addressing the lack of representation of young queer people of color.

“I am deeply grateful to be a recipient of the 2020 Comité Noviembre Scholarship. This award will allow me to continue my education in film & moving image arts so that I can go on to create media with a meaningful representation of the Puerto Rican community.”

JOMAR SANTOS GONZALEZ

Jomar Santos Gonzalez represents Toa Baja, Puerto Rico. Jomar is currently attending Berklee College of Music in Boston, MA majoring in Music. Jomar is an up and coming young cuatristas within Puerto Rico and the United States. Jomar is ensuring that the cuatristas culture is alive and represented.

“I thank God for putting the right people on the path and thus making the dream of a young Cuatrista come true. Extremely grateful for selecting me as an ambassador for the “November Committee” and I will always carry you in my heart!”
THE ERNESTO MALAVE SCHOLARSHIP FOR THE ARTS

THALIA COLON GARCIA

Thalia Colon Garcia represents Manati, Puerto Rico. Thalia is currently attending the University of Southern California - Los Angeles, California, majoring in the Performing Arts. Thalia aspires to be a Master Director. Thalia calls on her art skills to create a service project called “Moment of Happiness” focusing on entertaining the elderly in their nursing homes and “Tutoring Around the Tropics” where Thalia tutored children from “Los Naranjos”, an impoverished community seriously impacted by Hurricane Maria.

“I’m beyond grateful to now be part of this non-profit organization that has the best intention of highlighting what it means to be a Puerto Rican and how beautiful it is. Our culture and accomplishments are something we should always be proud of and Comité Noviembre has done an outstanding job doing so during Puerto Rican Heritage Month.

Hostos Community College is an educational agent for change, transforming and improving the quality of life in the South Bronx and neighboring communities since 1968. Hostos serves as a gateway to intellectual growth and socioeconomic mobility, and a point of departure for lifelong learning, success in professional careers, and transfer to advanced higher education programs. The College’s unique “student success coach” program, which partners students with individualized guidance, is emblematic of the premier emphasis on student support and services.

Hostos offers 27 associate degree programs and 2 certificate programs that facilitate easy transfer to The City University of New York (CUNY) four-year colleges or baccalaureate studies at other institutions. The College has an award-winning Division of Continuing Education & Workforce Development that offers professional development courses and certificate-bearing workforce training programs. The Hostos Center for the Arts & Culture (HCAC) is one of the pre-eminent Latino arts centers of the northeast. The HCAC has distinguished itself for showcasing traditional art forms as well as emerging and internationally renowned artists. Hostos Community College is part of CUNY, the nation’s leading urban public university serving more than 500,000 students at 24 colleges.
Nearly 100 Artists from throughout the US and Puerto Rico participated in Comité Noviembre’s 14th Annual National Puerto Rican Artisan Fair & Book Expo last year. They came from all over the eastern part of the US. Aside from New York State, we had artisans from Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Illinois, Florida and Puerto Rico too.

Comité Noviembre transforms Hostos Community College into a haven for Puerto Rican art and literature. The Puerto Rican Authors Book Expo has been attended by some of the finest Puerto Rican writers in New York, who introduced and sold their books. Close to 40 authors participated last year. This event was coordinated by author, Yadhira Gonzalez-Taylor.

Comité Noviembre’s National Puerto Rican Artisan Fair was produced by the CN Artisan Fair Committee composed of: Luis Cordero Santoni, co-chair; artists Olga Ayala, Felipe Rangel, and Yadhira Gonzalez-Taylor, Hostos Center for the Arts and Culture Executive Director, John MacElwee, theatre manager Felix Arocho and many volunteers who help make the event the success that it has been for 14 years now.

The 2020 Artisan Fair and Book Expo will be the 15th annual event, and because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it will be a virtual event that will go live on Saturday, November 21st via: comitenoviembrevirtualfair.org

Photos by Ana Alicea.
2019 Artisans Fair & Book Expo Review
PRIDA is an organization dedicated to the preservation and promotion of Puerto Rican arts and culture.

- PRIDA supports Puerto Rican artists by establishing a membership program that will advocate, empower and service the member organizations and artists. Some of the goals of the membership program are:
  1. To open up markets for the sale of art by Puerto Rican artists
  2. Develop a database of galleries and art spaces
  3. Inform members about upcoming events and venues that welcome their participation as vendors through our newsletter, website and social networking resources

If you are a Puerto Rican artist or organization and want to join the movement to promote, preserve and protect Puerto Rican arts and culture then become a member of PRIDA today!

You can go to our website:  
WWW.PRIDA.ORG
fill out an application for a FREE or PAID membership!
YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
Community Service & Social Responsibility Event Highlights
Sunday, November 24, 2019
Twenty-fourth Annual Community Service and Social Responsibility

On the Sunday before Thanksgiving, last year, 1000 turkeys and bags full of potatoes, onions, sweet potatoes, apples, and peppers were distributed to communities in Yonkers, the Bronx, and East Harlem by a cadre of young volunteers. The day was raw, rainy, and cold but each one of these volunteers worked hard, were full of energy and had big smiles on their faces as they unloaded the turkeys and produce off trucks, greeted the people waiting and distributed the bounty.

The following non-profits benefited from this day: Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York, Westchester in Yonkers; the Charter School for Educational Excellence in Yonkers; Hope Worldwide, Inc., and the New York Church of Christ both in the Bronx and other organizations received turkeys at 114th Street and Pleasant Avenue in East Harlem.

For the past six years, CN and its partner Precision Concierge New York, (PCNY), has distributed over 5000 turkeys to families in need feeding over 25,000 individuals during the Thanksgiving holiday. PCNY is a high-end concierge service company which involves its clients in charitable activities. In total PCNY will donate over 1500 turkeys to families throughout the NYC metropolitan and Westchester County area.

This year the CN Day of Community Service and Social Responsibility will take place on the Sunday before Thanksgiving November 22, 2020 because this year more than ever our communities need the assistance. CN and PCNY have committed to distribute the same amount of turkeys and food adhering to social distancing and CDC rules. Each location will provide a specific safe distribution plan for both volunteer and community.
ESTOY CON PUERTO RICO IMPACT
SUMMARY REPORT
SEPTEMBER 2017 – SEPTEMBER 2019
(For complete report please visit www.comitenoviembre.org)

SUMMARY
Over two years ago, Puerto Rico was devastated by Hurricane María. It was a crippling blow to the island. From the very beginning, Comité Noviembre, (CN), worked quickly and diligently to provide assistance directly to nonprofit and business organizations in Puerto Rico at the grassroots level.

On September 28, 2017, Estoy Con Puerto Rico, (I am with Puerto Rico), a hurricane relief effort was launched by Comité Noviembre and its consortium of Puerto Rican leaders, organizations, business partners and Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York which served as fiscal conduit for this effort.

The Estoy Con Puerto Rico effort raised over half a million dollars and has provided much needed aid and services directly to over 70 nonprofit organizations and small businesses throughout the island. These organizations deal with issues ranging from health and mental health, education, solar energy, water shed projects, food insecurity, HIV/AIDS, homelessness, suicide prevention and many basic human need services. Grants were also awarded to 44 small businesses and micro-enterprises to stimulate the economy.

PROCESS
Comité Noviembre selected organizations from proposals received from organizations and businesses on the island and determined the amount of donations. The contributions were made in 7 waves of funding over a 24-month period November 2017 to September 2019.

In the first few waves of funding the contributions were distributed by devastation of area, loss of home/property, health issues and for basic human necessities. As the need in Puerto Rico changed to rebuilding and long-term solutions the Estoy Con Puerto Rico effort focused on organizations that were creating long term solutions in solar energy, water purification systems and health and mental health issues surfacing from post Hurricane Maria trauma. Additionally, the effort focused on stimulating the economy by funding non-traditional jobs for women, agricultural micro-enterprises and cultural and artisanal collectives.

Each of the organizations and businesses funded by the Estoy Con Puerto Rico effort provided proof of nonprofit status or business registration certificate, as well as a full written report on what contributions were used for and the impact it had on the community.
ESTOY CON PUERTO RICO

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

- The Estoy effort has funded 114 initiatives that have impacted 50% of the island.
- Aid and services were provided directly to over 70 nonprofit organizations and 44 small businesses/micro-enterprises throughout the island.
- Twenty-three initiatives impacting all of the island.

ESTOY CON PUERTO RICO IMPACT SUMMARY REPORT
SEPTEMBER 2017 – SEPTEMBER 2019

- Program areas funded included education, social services, the elderly, health and mental health, food insecurity, children and families, the environment, small businesses and micro-enterprises.

Individuals Served

- Over 122,000 individuals were served by the Estoy Con Puerto Rico Disaster Relief Effort.
- 51,325 individuals received non-perishable food as well as cooked meals and water.
- 31,000 received assistance for youth educational programs and materials
- 28,000 people received health and mental health services
- 6,755 people received housing assistance.

Breakdown of funds raised by program area

- 18% Hunger/Food insecurity $ 79,354
- 16% Health& Mental Health Services $ 66,000
- 15% Small Businesses/micro enterprises $ 60,392
- 13% Social Services $ 57,181**
  (**Includes services to elderly, children & families)
- 13% Education $ 56,486
- 9% Children & Youth $ 38,500
- 6% Elderly Services $ 25,642
- 3% Cultural $ 13,800
- 3% Housing $ 13,302
- 2% Women Services $ 10,000
- 2% Environment $ 9,500
- .003 Animal Services $ 1,500
Total 100% $431,657

HUMANITARIAN TRIPS TO PUERTO RICO

In addition to raising funds through the Estoy Con Puerto Rico Relief Effort, Comité Noviembre conducted 3 humanitarian missions to Puerto Rico. Please view the videos summarizing each mission.

Humanitarian Mission #1: December 11th – December 18th, 2017
View video of CN’s Humanitarian Mission #1: https://www.dropbox.com/s/8x3nt1twpftxjs/Com ite_Noviembre_Revisado_1.mp4?dl=0

HUMANITARIAN MISSION #2: AUGUST 1ST – AUGUST 9TH, 2018
View video of CN’s Humanitarian Mission #2: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gnMXNz26GuxEm3nqRx39bwCsp-9KWVOG/view?ts=5bd65c75

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ESTOY CON PUERTO RICO

TOTAL DONATIONS WAVE VII $19,157.00

GRANTS & DONATIONS (12/31/19) $431,657

FINANCIALS

GRANTS & DONATIONS (12/31/19) $431,657

ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS*
Catholic Charities (10%) $51,500.00
Comité Noviembre (5%) $25,750.00
BALANCE IN ESTOY ACCOUNT $3,500.00
**BALANCE CC NEEDS TO DISTRIBUTE $2,593.00
TOTAL $515,000

** Grants & donations distributed by CN $431,657
Amount that still needs to be distributed by CN $2,593.00
Catholic Charities Estoy grants & donation distribution $434,250

*The administrative costs for this effort are for a two-year period, approximately 7.5% per year. It covered the expenses incurred to administer an effort such as the Estoy Con Puerto Rico Disaster Relief Effort on the ground in Puerto Rico as well as personnel to conduct the financial and fiduciary responsibilities of the effort.

ESTOY CON PUERTO RICO CONTINUES ITS HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

On Tuesday, January 14, 2020 Comité Noviembre and its partners re-instated the Estoy Con Puerto Rico Disaster Relief Effort to raise funds to assist families affected by the earthquakes through non-profit organizations working directly with the community in the Southern region of Puerto Rico. The earthquakes further weakened the already fragile infrastructure of the island. Ten months later there continues to be great fear of more building collapses, personal and property safety, food and water insecurity and electrical outages throughout the island.

This call to action raised approximately, $15,000. The following organizations received donations in April of 2020:

- Ministerio Buen Samaritano Marc $3,000 Food
- Mesón del Amor $2,000 Food
- Puerto Rico Somos Gente $3,000 Emergency backpack/supplies (200 seniors)

The remainder of the funds will be awarded in November 2020 to health organizations in Puerto Rico to aid with the Coronavirus pandemic.

HOW TO CONTINUE TO SUPPORT PUERTO RICO

How to donate:
By Check or Money Order: Make payable to: Comité Noviembre & mail to: Comité Noviembre Managing Office, C/O: TAS Communications, LLC, 45 East Hartsdale Avenue, Suite 3L, Hartsdale, NY 10530 please state in memo section of check ESTOY CON PUERTO RICO

By electronic transfer:
Name of Account: COMITE NOVIEMBRE ESTOY CON PUERTO RICO
Name of Bank: Peoples United Bank
Routing #: 221172186
Account #: 6500897091
Donating directly to non-profit organization
Directory of Estoy Con Puerto Rico Funded Organizations and Small Businesses

To view the directory of all of the non-profit organizations and small business that received donations and contributions from ESTOY please view complete report on CN’s website: www.comitenovirembre.org.

Please feel free to contact us to get information on any of the organizations listed. You can donate directly to these organizations or send CN the donation and we will continue to make sure that aid is sent where it is needed.
We must overcome all forms of racism, of intolerance and of the instrumentalization of the human person.” July 18, 2017. (Tweet from @Pontifex).

We like to think that Pope Francis wishes his words could take flight and reach everyone with hate in their heart, but we know better, don’t we?

Unfortunately, as Puerto Rico struggles to recover from multiple turmoil, including an economic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, another crisis plagues the territory: rising violence against women and the LGBTQ+ community. As transphobia has reared its ugly head members of the Puerto Rican LGBTQ+ community are on high alert because hate, not love, is filling the minds and hearts of some Boricuas.

According to data from Puerto Rico’s Gender Equality Observatory, at least 37 direct and indirect femicides have been registered in the island from Jan. 2020 to Sept. 2020.

Remember their Names

Let’s say some of the names of the lives extinguished in just 2020: Neulisa “Alexa” Negrón Luciano, Layla Peláez Sánchez, Serena Angelique Velázquez, Yammi Méndez Arocho, Michelle “Michellyn” Ramos Vargas, Penélope Díaz Rodríguez, Nicole Pastrana. We must say their names tell their stories and never forget them!

Alexa Negrón Luciano, was a homeless, transgender woman who was brutally killed in the city of Toa Baja. Her murder sparked outrage and renewed a conversation on the island about transphobia and other issues that transgender and gender non-conforming people face.

“They killed Alexa, not a man in a skirt.” Those were the words emblazoned in Spanish on a T-shirt worn by Bad Bunny during his televised performance on “The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon.” The Puerto Rican rap star also donned a black skirt, in a clear effort to draw attention to a killing that has shocked his native Puerto Rico. The Human Rights Campaign called Luciano’s killing a horrifying crime, saying it is believed to be the second violent death of a transgender or gender non-conforming person in the United States and its territories this year.

Yampi Méndez Arocho, a 19-year-old transgender man killed in Moca, Puerto Rico, on March 5th. Yampi’s death is believed to be the third violent death of a transgender or gender non-conforming person in 2020 and the second in Puerto Rico. In an injus-
tice compounding this tragedy, Arocho was misgen-
dered in some media reports. Anti-transgender stigma is exacerbated by callous or disrespectful treatment too often seen from media, law enforcement and our highest elected officials.

Michelle “Michellyn” Ramos Vargas, 35, transgender woman, was been shot to death in Puerto Rico, making her the sixth trans person to die by violence in the U.S. territory this year and the 30th nationwide. Ramos Vargas’s body was found on the side of a road in the town of San Germán. She had been shot several times in the head. Police are investigating her killing as a hate crime. Ramos Vargas, who lived in the city of Mayagüez, near San Germán, worked as a bartender and was studying nursing.

Penelope Díaz Ramírez, 31, transgender woman, was killed at the Bayamon correctional complex in Puerto Rico on April 13th. Her death is believed to be the ninth violent death of transgender or gender non-conforming person violently killed this year in the U.S.

Serena Angelique Velázquez, 32, of Queens, and Layla Pelaez, 21, of the Bronx, were found burned and shot to death inside a vehicle under a bridge on a highway on the eastern side of Puerto Rico. Puerto Rican news outlet Primera Hora reported that Velázquez had traveled to the island in March and was slated to return home to Queens at the end of April. Two men have been arrested in connection with this act of violence in May 2020 and local police are continuing this investigation as a hate crime.

On May 3, 2020, En Primera Hora published the following: “The federal prosecutor’s office announced today that Juan Carlos Pagán Bonilla, 21, and Sean Díaz de León, 19, were indicted in federal court on charges related to the murder of two transgender women, (Serena Angelique Velázquez and Layla Pelaez), in events that occurred in Humacao at the end of April. If found guilty on the charges, the duo face life sentences or the death penalty.” But law enforcement and judicial action comes too late, as the rash of deaths continues. Unfortunately, the reign of terror for transgender individuals living in Puerto Rico has not ended. Each of these individuals had dreams, relatives, people they loved and who loved them.

Human Rights Activist Speak Out

Human rights activist from Puerto Rico and the mainland have condemned the action of the Governor in signing the new civil code and the careless inaction of Puerto Rico’s government, law enforcement and the community. Human rights activist Pedro Julio Serrano has been in the forefront of this human crisis in Puerto Rico for many years. He recently stated: “They are violating us, they are hunting us and they are murdering us while [Puerto Rico governor] Wanda Vázquez and her government chooses to look away,” and tweeted: “There is no plan to stop these hate crimes, a state of emergency for gender violence has not been issued, there is nothing.”

Omayra Toledo, one of the directors of the True Self Foundation, in Guaynabo shared in an interview that on October 8th another transgender woman was beaten attacked and sent to the hospital with multiple injuries. Toledo stated, “The LGBTQ+ and especially the trans community is a very discriminated community. The situation is intolerable and deserves immediate attention from the government and the community, as a whole. Education on these matters is vital. We need to eradicate stereotypes, learn about gender perspective and inclusive language. But most of all, society needs to learn that all humans are equal and deserve to be treated with respect and dignity.”

After the death of Penelope Díaz Ramírez, Tori Coo-
Community engagement director for the national organization the Human Rights Campaign’s Transgender Justice Initiative, said: “Never in my career have I seen so many reports of deaths of our transgender and gender non-conforming community in such a short time in one location. Penélope did not deserve to die. Transgender people do not deserve to die. Every single advocate, ally, elected official, and community member must stand up in light of this horrific news and say ‘No more.’ What we are doing is not enough.” “Transgender and gender non-conforming people, especially women of color,” she added, “are too often the victims of a toxic mix of transphobia, racism, and misogyny.”

New Civil Code Removes Language protecting LGBTQ+ Community

To add fuel to the fire, in early June, Puerto Rico Governor Wanda Vázquez signed a new civil code that removed language protecting LGBTQ+ persons. The action was met with outrage from experts and civil rights activists.

“Puerto Rico’s governor signed into law significant revisions to the island’s civil codes that shamefully ignore the urgent calls of local advocates to explicitly include vital, comprehensive non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ residents,” Human Rights Campaign President Alphonso David said in a statement. “The government has failed to carry out its primary duty of ensuring the safety and well-being of all Puerto Ricans, including LGBTQ Puerto Ricans.”

Protest for State of Emergency

On Sep. 28, hundreds of Puerto Ricans took to the streets demanding that the government, take action, urging Gov. Wanda Vázquez to declare a state of emergency. Protesters held signs in Old San Juan that read, “Estado de Emergencia YA,” (“State of Emergency Now,” in English) and “Ni Una Más Ni Una Menos,” (which roughly translates to “Not One More, Nor One Less”).

Activists, nonprofit organizations, community and state leaders and citizens are continuing to plead for change. Most recently, a movement against violence toward women erupted on social media.

“Before Hurricane Maria and Irma, we had denounced a call for a state of emergency because we had seen how all the institutions were not addressing the issue as a priority,” said Lourdes Inoa Monegro, the program director at Taller Salud, a nonprofit feminist organization that’s been helping women deal with the
ongoing violence against them.

Love Is Love is Love

In late October, Pope Francis voiced support for civil unions for same-sex couples. Even the Catholic Church is moving with the times and seeing and understanding that as Lin-Manuel Miranda famously said, “Love is love is love”.

Acceptance. Tolerance. Respect. Everyone deserves these. As a community on the island and in the diaspora, Puerto Ricans must reflect on how to come together to stop the violence being perpetrated against fellow Boricuas.

Photo #2: National Coalition of Anti-Violence https://avp.org/ncavp/
Photo #3: Ricky Martin twitter @ricky_martin Photo #3 Credit Ricardo Arduengo/AFP via Getty Images
People led by the activist group, Feminist Collective, protest to demand Governor Wanda Vazquez to declare a state of emergency in response to recent gender based femicides, assaults and the disappearance of women in San Juan, Puerto Rico on Sept. 28, 2020.

Article resources:
http://www.trueselffoundation.org/

La Casa de la Herencia Cultural Puertorriqueña, Inc.

La Casa de la Herencia Cultural Puertorriqueña, Inc. (The Puerto Rican Cultural Heritage House, Inc.), also known as “La Casa”, and located in El Barrio/East Harlem since 1980, has been a vital element in the cultural tapestry of New York City, representing the significant Puerto Rican Diaspora in all of its creative cultural force and art forms, and contributing to the vitality and development of the community. A historic, nonprofit cultural and educational institution, La Casa was incorporated in 1983 by Puerto Rican pioneers, as a Heritage Library and Resource Center, to: promote and preserve the culture, literary work and arts of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, within the multicultural context of New York City. La Casa provides essential structural supports for cultural and educational activities, serves youth and their families, students, professional and emerging artists, and works in collaboration with educational and non-educational institutions, and other community groups directly from El Barrio, the Tri-State-Area and Puerto Rico. La Casa houses the Puerto Rican Heritage Library, conducts a weekly Cuatro Music Instruction Program, and sponsors Violeta Galagarza’s KR3T’s Youth Dance Company, the Center of Living Light Reiki Circle and the Asociación de Poetas y Escritores Hispanos (AIPEH NY Chapter). Events are conducted in English and Spanish. For information about these activities or other events conducted on a monthly or yearly basis, contact La Casa at lacasahcp@gmail.com or at (646) 360 - 4126.

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www.Facebook.com/lacasapr
By Luis Cordero Santoni & Victor Quintana

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of El Comité—Movimiento de Izquierda Nacional Puertorriqueño, one of the main organizations of the Puerto Rican left in the 1970s in New York City.

The people’s struggles of the 60’s and early 70’s for civil rights and against the Vietnam War spawned many grass roots organizations. El Comité was one of those organizations.

El Comité was born on the summer of 1970 in Manhattan’s Upper West Side, what was then the Urban Renewal Area. In that summer, a group of 200 families took over various buildings slated for demolition on the West Side. The courageous action of these squatters to secure decent, affordable housing motivated a group of young people, led by Federico Lora, from the community to take over a storefront on 88th Street and Columbus Avenue. Their goal was to convert it into an office and establish a place to discuss how to become active in the community’s struggles. Their idea was to build an organization that would serve the community. They named this group El Comité.

The Squatters Movement

During its early period, El Comité’s activity was among the squatters and the surrounding community in the Upper West Side. Its objectives were to bring about social changes within this immediate area. This early community work played an important role in developing a different type of organization—one whose goals were broader than improving conditions in the immediate neighborhood. They knew they needed to struggle not only for the immediate issues of better housing, education and health services, but also for social changes that would change the conditions that created and perpetuated these injustices. For several years they published the newspaper Unidad Latina to educate the community about these injustices and the solutions.

El Comité matured into an organization that prepared parents in communities to fight for bilingual education programs in public schools. Its members organized workers and was active in unions to make them respond to the needs of the workers they represented and for access to quality jobs. Student members of El Comité were active in the CUNY colleges fighting for a free, equal and quality education. In low income communities it’s members led opposition to budget cuts in health care and other vital community services. The organization mobilized support nationally and internationally to end the US Navy’s occupation of the island of Culebra and later Vieques, throughout its history it denounced the US colonial rule in Puerto Rico, fought for the freedom of the 5 Nationalist Puerto Rican political prisoners and opposed US aid to authoritarian regimes in Latin America and Africa.

El Comité becomes MINP

An understanding and commitment to this work was influenced by the politics and experience with some

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of the other minority grass roots organizations of the period, such as the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords—who then openly called for a society organized on socialist principles. El Comité was inspired by them and by the heroic struggles of the Cuban and Vietnamese peoples and their victories against U.S. imperialist domination to gradually embrace socialism. Early in the process of politicization and study, they came across the slogan that “Women hold up half the sky.” Since its beginnings, women have participated in the development and struggles which led to the transformation of El Comité into MINP (Movimiento de Izquierda Nacional Puertorriqueño).

50th Anniversary Commemoration

This year as El Comité-MINP commemorates the 50th year of its founding, the former members pay tribute to the young people who formed El Comité-MINP and who were representative of the community they wished to serve. They were men and women, Puerto Rican and non-Puerto Rican, employed and unemployed. They were products of different experiences and had different skills; there were workers, housewives, students, ex-marines, ex-offenders. But they were all bound together by their determination—some more than others—to serve their community and to further El Comité’s goals. El Comité-MINP will be celebrated in a virtual event in December.

Members of El Comité-MINP have been present in every major struggle that the Puerto Rican community has been forced to wage. Members of El Comité-MINP have been honored by Comité Noviembre throughout the years and they include the late artist Ernesto Ramos who created 2 of the early posters; Julio Pabon twice recognized with Lo Mejor de Nuestra Comunidad Awards; Lillian Jimenez, filmmaker who created the documentary about Aspira founder Antonia Pantoja; Lourdes Lulu Garcia, community organizer; myself as an artist chosen to create one of the 1989 poster and in 2007 I was also honored with a Lo Mejor de Nuestra Comunidad Award for creating the Cemi Underground Bookstore. This year two former members of El Comité are honored with a Lo Mejor de Nuestra Comunidad Award, community organizer Esperanza Martell and photographer Maximo Rafael Colón whose pictures enhance this article.

Members of El Comité-MINP lived and were guided by the words of Don Pedro Albizu Campos, “La Patria es Valor y Sacrificio,” and by Che Guevara’s “The present is struggle. The future is ours.”

You can read much more about El Comité-MINP in the book Radical Imagination, Radical Humanity: Puerto Rican Political Activism in New York by Rose Muzio.
Joe Biden believes that Puerto Rico, and the more than 3 million American citizens who call it home, deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Whether you live in Reading, Pennsylvania; Kissimmee, Florida; or San Juan, Puerto Rico, you deserve a fair return for your work, an equal chance to get ahead, and a government that treats every American citizen equally and has your back when you get knocked down.

Yet, President Trump turns his back on the people of Puerto Rico again and again. He has not only not attempted to help, he has made things worse. After the island was devastated by Hurricane Maria, he failed to deliver the emergency supplies it needed and then suggested we should sell or trade Puerto Rico. In the midst of the coronavirus, he has again failed to provide Puerto Ricans with the support they need. Given Trump’s failure, it is no surprise that the coronavirus has hit Puerto Rico’s fragile economy harder than most U.S. jurisdictions.

Moving forward to a future of renewal and respect is not fully possible without addressing the issue of Puerto Rico’s political status, which has been debated for decades. As President, Biden will work with representatives who support each of the status options in Puerto Rico to engage in a fair and binding process to determine their own status.

Joe Biden will not wait, however, to address the current untenable situation in Puerto Rico, which has resulted in the unequal treatment of the American citizens who call the island home. As President, Biden will create a federal working group for Puerto Rico which will report directly to the President to work closely with Puerto Rico and municipal governments to ensure that federal funding is deployed efficiently, effectively, and in full compliance with appropriate laws and regulations. Biden will also partner with Puerto Rico’s 78 mayors to ensure their communities get the funds they need. His administration will also develop a dashboard similar to the one established by the Obama-Biden administration for American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding, in order to provide the people of Puerto Rico with accurate and transparent, up-to-date information on public expenditures.

Supporting a full recovery and infrastructure reconstruction to modern standards.
Investing in Puerto Rico’s future through economic development initiatives and support for families.
Providing relief from unsustainable debt.
Expanding access to education and workforce development.

SUPPORTING A FULL RECOVERY & INFRASTRUCTURE RECONSTRUCTION TO MODERN STANDARDS

In 2017, Hurricanes Irma and Maria inflicted grave damage to Puerto Rico’s infrastructure and economy, resulting in widespread deprivation and suffering for residents. The federal response to Hurricane Maria was inadequate and slow and likely contributed to thousands of subsequent storm-related deaths. And instead of calling for enactment of the bipartisan Puerto Rico earthquake supplemental appropriations bill in response to the recent earthquake, Trump first raided military construction funding, originally intended to repair facilities damaged by Hurricane Maria, for his border wall. Now, he’s signed a memorandum raiding disaster relief funding instead of making a deal with Congress on enhanced unemployment insurance.

Biden will ensure that Puerto Rico receives the federal disaster reconstruction funding that it urgently needs to support the long-term recovery of Puerto Rico and increase its ability to withstand any future storms. Specifically, he will:

Accelerate access to promised reconstruction funding while ensuring transparency and accountability for public funds. Biden will immediately instruct the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and all federal agencies involved in Puerto Rico’s reconstruction to work closely with Puerto Rico and municipal governments to ensure that federal funding is deployed efficiently, effectively, and in full compliance with appropriate laws and regulations. Biden will also instruct HUD to remove onerous restrictions unique to Puerto Rico that limit its access to Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) Disaster Relief funding.

And, he will partner with Puerto Rico’s 78 mayors to ensure their communities get the funds they need. His administration will also develop a dashboard similar to the one established by the Obama-Biden administration for American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding, in order to provide the people of Puerto Rico with accurate and transparent, up-to-date information on public expenditures.

Forgive disaster relief loans to Puerto Rican towns/municipalities so they can recover faster. FEMA has lent roughly $300 million to 76 Puerto Rican towns/municipalities under the Community Disaster Loan (CDL) program. While such loans are often forgiven for municipalities in U.S. states (as long as they meet certain conditions), such forgiveness for Puerto Rico can happen only at the discretion of the Secretary of Homeland Security in consultation with the Secretary of the Treasury. As President, Biden will work to have these loans canceled just as they would be for mainland recipients.

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Ensure that recovery funds benefit local businesses. As of September 2018, approximately 10% of federal relief and recovery spending was going to Puerto Rican businesses in the form of contracts and purchases. Biden will ensure that the Stafford Act’s preferences for local funding for local recovery are followed, and that federal agencies are giving additional incentives to provide contracts to Puerto Rican businesses, as called for in the Small Business Contracting Credit Act of 2019.

Rebuild Puerto Rico’s infrastructure. Puerto Rico’s infrastructure is significantly deficient and in need of major investments, which is having a direct impact on its economic growth and development. The American Society of Civil Engineers gives Puerto Rico’s infrastructure an overall grade of “D-“. A cornerstone of Biden’s economic plan is an infrastructure package that will rebuild our nation’s roads and bridges, schools, utilities, ports, public transit, and other infrastructure. And he will ensure that Puerto Rico’s infrastructure and coastal habitats are rebuilt in ways that increase their capacity and resiliency to withstand any future storms.

INVESTING IN PUERTO RICO’S FUTURE THROUGH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES AND SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

With appropriate federal support, Puerto Rico can get back on its feet and maintain a healthy, vibrant, self-sufficient economy. This means invigorating leading industries, including manufacturing. It also means providing steady employment and providing critical support to dramatically improve the living standards of residents in Puerto Rico. A Biden-Harris Administration will:

Strengthen and improve Puerto Rico’s power system. Providing low-cost, reliable, and clean electricity to Puerto Rico’s businesses and residents is critical to Puerto Rico’s long-term economic development. This includes modernizing PREPA’s power generation, transmission, and distribution systems through necessary infrastructure investments.

Improve access to affordable, quality health care. The federal government caps annual Medicaid funding for Puerto Rico and contributes at a far lower rate than if federal matching funds for Puerto Rico were determined the same way as for states. Puerto Rico’s Medicaid program, Vital, caps eligibility at one-third of the eligible income level in the states, provides only 10 of 17 essential services, pays providers less, and spends less per enrollee. Congress passed a short-term fix, but Puerto Rico will be in the same situation again after September 2021. As President, Biden will work to ensure that Puerto Rico is able to participate in the Medicaid program on par with other U.S. jurisdictions. Biden will also:

Direct the HHS Secretary to Propose Medicare Reimbursement Reforms to Address Chronic Program Underpayments. Biden will address historically low Medicare Advantage payment rates and their consequences to Puerto Rico’s health system by directing the HHS Secretary to develop and recommend payment reforms and enhancements to the program.

Expand investment in community health centers and increase the pipeline of health care providers. Community health centers are a critical part of the Puerto Rican health care system, serving almost 360,000 patients in 2017. Biden will double the federal investment in community health centers – translating to an investment of an additional $100 million per year.

Expand access to free COVID-19 health care services. Biden will lead a decisive public health response to COVID-19 and ensure the residents of Puerto Rico and all Americans receive the resources they need to address the public health crisis. He will ensure wide availability of free testing and eliminate cost barriers to preventative care and treatment for Covid-19. He will fight for the development of a safe and effective vaccine and the full production and fair distribution of necessary supplies, personnel, and facilities. And he will set national safety guidelines, empower local decision-making and provide emergency funding for public schools to support school reopening for in-person instruction.

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Provide families in Puerto Rico equal access to nutrition assistance. According to a 2015 study, an alarmingly high proportion – roughly 33% – of adults in Puerto Rico are food insecure, a share that likely increased in the aftermath of subsequent natural disasters. While those living in U.S. states who meet SNAP eligibility criteria are guaranteed food support, families in Puerto Rico must make do with an annual block grant program which does not automatically adjust in times of higher need. And, funding for the program is inadequate to meet the needs of Puerto Rico and is substantially lower than what would be spent were Puerto Rico treated the same as a state. As President, Biden will work to make Puerto Rico eligible for SNAP and ensure that families in Puerto Rico who meet SNAP’s eligibility criteria are given the same support that they would receive on the mainland.

Provide Supplemental Security Income benefits. A federal court recently ruled that residents of Puerto Rico should be eligible for the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program, but the Trump Administration has appealed the ruling. Biden will ensure residents of Puerto Rico have access to these benefits.

**PROVIDING RELIEF FROM UNSUSTAINABLE DEBT**

To assure Puerto Rico’s future, we must reduce its unsustainable debt burden; Puerto Rico’s annual debt service is 28% of revenues, more than five times that of the average state. The Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA) of 2016 aimed to address this crisis by providing tools to restructure Puerto Rico’s debt and lead Puerto Rico’s economic recovery. When PROMESA was passed, no one envisioned two devastating hurricanes, earthquakes, and a once-in-a-century pandemic. In light of current conditions, the Financial Oversight and Management Board (FOMB) needs a meaningful shift in approach. Biden will chart a new path for tackling Puerto Rico’s unsustainable debts that takes into consideration new challenges. Biden will support efforts to more effectively address the debt burdens hampering Puerto Rico’s economy:

Reverse the policy of fiscal austerity imposed by the FOMB. Faced with an economic crisis and the devastating consequences of hurricanes, the FOMB insisted on a damaging policy of fiscal austerity. Biden will support a review of these policies and will partner with the government of Puerto Rico to make investments to promote economic growth, including infrastructure, and protect essential services.

Ensure representatives of Puerto Rico have a voice. Biden will work to clarify the respective roles of the government of Puerto Rico and the FOMB so that they can resolve Puerto Rico’s financial challenges in a way that respects the author-
high school requires strengthening the connections among high schools, the University of Puerto Rico and community colleges, and employers; and giving every student the opportunity to earn college credit or a workforce credential in high school. A cross-agency Puerto Rico task force within the Biden-Harris Administration will provide guidance and technical assistance to help Puerto Rico leverage resources from the Department of Education, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Health and Human Services to support these goals. And, Biden will create work-based learning opportunities. Biden will also ensure that workers in Puerto Rico can access individual career services that help with finding a job, developing a career plan, or getting other forms of career coaching.

Invest in the University of Puerto Rico as an engine of economic growth. As part of his Plan for Education Beyond High School, Biden will commit over $70 billion to Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) like the University of Puerto Rico.

Increase mental health support. Trauma and disruption from hurricanes, earthquakes, and ongoing school closures have had a profound impact on Puerto Rico’s students. In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Maria, approximately one-third of children reported feeling that their lives were at risk. Rates of post-traumatic stress disorder among children were twice as high as the rate in the general population. Biden will dramatically increase investment in students’ mental health, doubling the number of psychologists, school counselors, nurses, social workers, and other health professionals in Puerto Rico’s schools.

THE BIDEN-HARRIS PLAN FOR PUERTO RICO

(continued from previous page)

Trump’s Plan For Puerto Rico – Is there a Plan?

On September 15, 2020, Biden outlined a comprehensive plan for Puerto Rico’s recovery. After searching many newspapers, media reports and even going to President Trump’s own campaign website, we could not find any plans for the island. However, just a few short days after the Biden/Harris announcement several media reported that President Trump would release $13 billion for recovery efforts and restore Section 936 tax law after bashing Vice President Biden for letting it expire on his watch. The Section 936 is a law that gave U.S. corporations tax advantages if they based some part of their company operations in Puerto Rico. The following are several articles on President Trump’s “plan” for Puerto Rico.

President Trump throws paper towels to residents impacted by Hurricane Maria in San Juan, Puerto Rico in 2017. Credit...Doug Mills/The New York Times
Trump’s Plan for Puerto Rico — Is There a Plan?  

OPINION

Trump Declares He Is Now ‘the Best Thing That Ever Happened’ to Puerto Rico

The New York Times, September 18, 2020  
By: Peter Baker and Patricia Massei  

In announcing long-awaited aid for the storm-ravaged island, President Trump seemed to have his eye partly on the Puerto Ricans who now make up an increasingly critical voting bloc in Florida.

President Trump throws paper towels to residents impacted by Hurricane Maria in San Juan, Puerto Rico in 2017. Credit...Doug Mills/The New York Times

WASHINGTON — After back-to-back hurricanes ravaged Puerto Rico in 2017, President Trump was so resistant to spending billions of dollars to restore the territory that he suggested simply getting rid of it instead. “Can we sell the island?” he asked aides, according to a cabinet member who was there.

Three years later, after repeated Twitter outbursts, angry recriminations, blocked aid and a paper towel-throwing visit that went over badly, Mr. Trump sought on Friday to present himself as a friend of Puerto Rico, announcing the release of $13 billion to rebuild its electric grid and repair schools a mere 1,095 days after the second of the hurricanes made landfall.

The most important date on the calendar, though, may not be the day the storms swept through the island but the day that islanders will render their judgment on the president’s leadership. Puerto Ricans who fled the island now make up an increasingly critical voting bloc in Florida, a must-win state for Mr. Trump as he seeks re-election in November. Mr. Trump’s abrupt aid announcement came just two days after former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., his Democratic challenger, visited Florida seeking Hispanic votes.

The president made no mention on Friday of his searing feuds with Puerto Rican leaders nor his eagerness to divest the United States of the territory. Instead, he said reconstruction of the electric grid was long overdue — “that should have been done many years ago” — without acknowledging that his administration held up aid for it. “I’m the best thing that ever happened to Puerto Rico,” he insisted with no trace of irony. “Nobody even close.”

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Trump only wants to aid Puerto Rico’s recovery from Hurricane Maria when it’s an election year

Sept. 21, 2020  
Think Newsletter  
By Susanne Ramirez de Arellano  
Journalist and cultural critic  

Hurricanes Irma and Maria shattered Puerto Rico, plunging the islands into darkness and caused the deaths of almost 3,000 Puerto Ricans three years ago; the islands’ residents and the Boricua diaspora remember it as if it happened yesterday. Hurricane Maria alone inflicted an estimated $90 billion in damage, for which Congress allocated only $42.5 billion in disaster relief. The Trump administration allocated a mere $26 billion of that money; much of it has yet to be disbursed.

On Friday, however, the president declared: “I have to say in a very nice way, very respectful way: I’m the best thing that ever happened to Puerto Rico,” even though 100 schools remain closed as a result of hurricane damage from 2017, thousands of homes have yet to be repaired and the physical infrastructure of the islands remains in disarray.

That was the nominal reason for his statement: He was promising nearly $13 billion in federal disaster funding to repair the electrical grid and educational infrastructure — only 1,095 days after the hurricane and years after Congress had appropriated nearly three times as much, which his administration has not yet distributed. “No one even close.”

He had, however, previously protested that the disaster had messed up his budget, saying during his only visit in 2017: “I hate to tell you, Puerto Rico, but you’ve thrown our budget a little out of whack. But that’s fine, because we’ve saved a lot of lives.”

Over the next three years, Trump consistently blocked disaster funding for the archipelago, saying Congress had “foolishly” spent $92 billion of aid money for Puerto Rico (it was less than half that amount), which had mostly been “squandered away or wasted.” And Miles Taylor, a former De-

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part of Homeland Security chief of staff, recently said Trump asked him and other officials whether the U.S. could swap Greenland for Puerto Rico, because, in Trump’s words, “Puerto Rico was dirty and the people were poor.”

So why did Trump suddenly come out as Puerto Ricans’ best friend forever and unblocked billions of dollars in federal disaster aid? Perhaps the fact that the election was then only 46 days away had something to do with it. A recent poll found that 49 percent of likely voters in Florida favor Joe Biden, while only 46 percent are likely to vote for Trump — and the White House needs Florida, and the Latino vote in Florida, to win.

And Puerto Ricans living in central Florida may very well decide the election. The region has one of the largest concentrations of Boricuas from the islands on the mainland — around 50,000 of whom are among almost 200,000 people who left the islands after first Maria and then Washington’s neglect tore their lives apart. Biden has a strong lead among the state’s almost 1 million Puerto Ricans.

Trump’s shameless backpedaling on Puerto Rico came just two days after Biden went to South Florida — for the start of Hispanic Heritage Month — and announced a comprehensive plan for Puerto Rico. He promised accelerated access to reconstruction funding, infrastructure investments, parity in health care and nutritional assistance, and “efforts” to reduce an unsustainable debt.

Puerto Ricans are not fooled by the president’s timing. As Kristian Bob, a singer from San Juan who is popular on social media, wrote in a new song: “You think you got it made / ‘Cuz you made us get paid / You bought us an umbrella three years after it rained.” Or, in more political terms, “this was a last-minute political move!” Nuria Sebazco, a well-regarded Puerto Rican journalist, told me. “It was probably motivated by Biden’s campaign to attract votes.”

Trump wants us to believe that he is doing something for Puerto Rico — but he is a bit late to the party. We Puerto Ricans are proud people with long memories — and both might help make Trump an ex-presidente.

Wouldn’t that be poetic justice?

ReTHINK the news cycle with timely op-eds, in-depth analyses and personal essays delivered weekly to your inbox.

Susanne Ramirez de Arellano is a freelance writer and journalist based in New York City. She is the former news director of Channel 11-Univision in Puerto Rico and has worked for ABC News, APTN in London and CNN International. She writes a blog for El Nuevo Dia digital. Her Twitter is @durgaone.

President Donald Trump on Friday announced a plan to boost pharmaceutical manufacturing in Puerto Rico

“We used to have pharmaceutical manufacturing at levels that few places had, and a lot of it has left Puerto Rico, and we’re going to bring that back,” Trump said, pointing to the growing movement to return drug manufacturing from countries such as China.

The president said that he had spoken to several companies who asked for a “little bit of help” but was willing to return manufacturing to the island.

Trump’s plan was announced Friday afternoon at a press conference at the White House concerning an overall $13 billion aid package allotted by the Federal Emergency Management Agency to the territory.

The package includes a $9.6 billion grant to rebuild the Puerto Rico electrical grid and a $2 billion grant to the Puerto Rico Department of Education to restore school buildings.

The president said that the power grid was long-suffering from salt damage and that Hurricane Maria devastated the entire electrical infrastructure.

The $13 billion combined with the existing Hurricane Maria recovery funds obligates the federal government with a total of $26 billion in recovery aid, according to the White House.

The president said that former President Barack Obama and his former Vice President Joe Biden were a “disaster for Puerto Rico” by allowing the manufacturing to leave the island.

“I have to say in a very nice way, a very respectful way, I’m the best thing that ever happened to Puerto Rico,” he said. “Not even close.”

The president’s tone toward the island was sharply different than his vocal criticism of the island’s corruption and mismanagement of relief funds in 2019.

“Puerto Rico is one of the most corrupt places on earth,” Trump wrote on Twitter in August 2019. “Their political system is broken and their politicians are either Incompetent or Corrupt. Congress approved Billions of Dollars last time, more than anyplace else has ever gotten, and it is sent to Crooked Pols.”

https://www.breitbart.com/
Fourteen years ago, through Comité Noviembre’s, (CN) trip to Puerto Rico: “Buscando Nuestras Raíces,” we embarked on an educational adventure into the richness of Puerto Rico’s culture, ancestral roots and history. Over the years, we have surpassed our expectations making this trip not only an educational and cultural experience but an opportunity to support, sponsor and empower many humanitarian, environmental, cultural and social justice organizations and issues.

Unfortunately, because of the COVID pandemic we had to cancel our 2020 educational trip to Puerto Rico.

But our humanitarian work in Puerto Rico continues. We have awarded Ministerio Buen Samaritano Marc, El Mesón del Amor and Puerto Rico Somos Gente a total of $10,000.

On January 6, 2021, to celebrate the feast of the Three Kings – el Dia de los Reyes, we will be conducting a virtual trip to Puerto Rico, that will include a tour of el Museo de los Tres Reyes in Juana Diaz Puerto Rico, reports from the organizations we have supported like the Hunger Corp. El Meson del Amor, Ministerio Buen Samaritano Marc, el Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico as well as many other surprises.

We look forward to returning to Puerto Rico soon, hopefully for August 2021!
The Justice Committee (JC) is a grassroots organization founded by social justice activist urban warrior, Young Lord Richie Perez, dedicated to building a movement against police violence and systemic racism in New York City and empowering low-income Latino/as and other people of color to address these issues. Recognizing that true power can only be exercised by unified communities we prioritize developing the leadership of both youth and elders and strive to make our organizing a multi-generational effort. By building solidarity with other anti-racist, immigrant and people of color-led organizations, we seek to contribute to a broad-based movement for social justice.

As our name suggests, the long-term vision of the Justice Committee is a world in which the voices and needs of all become the imperative, a world not governed by the most “powerful” and materially wealthy. We seek to contribute to a coordinated global movement that will attain this world by building a New York City in which people are not victimized by systemic racism and other forms of oppression and do not suffer or fear killings and abuse at the hands of the NYPD and other forms of law enforcement. The work of the Justice Committee will be complete when NYC’s marginalized communities have the power and mechanisms to hold the authorities accountable, are empowered to determine by what principles and methods the city is managed and kept safe, and have built meaningful ties to others communities organizing for justice throughout the United States and the

**PROGRAMS**

Case support & families organizing aims to provide to the families of people killed by NYPD and survivors of police violence. This support includes helping families navigate the system, training and skills development, direct action campaign’s, and healing and emotional release.

Community Defense and Training focuses on developing safety mechanisms and projects that decrease reliance on law enforcement and increases our skills and abilities to build sustainable communities. This includes all training and our Cop Watch project.

Training & Education provides a variety of internal and external trainings. It also engages in community art projects like our Know Your Rights and Cop Watch murals Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens and the South Bronx.

**ONGOING CAMPAIGNS**

The Justice Committee also has on-going campaigns seeking justice, these include Justice for Eric Gardner, Justice for Delrawn Small, Special Prosecutor, a successful campaign that made the Attorney Generals office special prosecutor by Executive Order; Repeal 50 A: The repeal of 50a would allow public discloser of police recorders relating to misconduct and Committees United for Police Reform, (CPR)

For more information or to become a member contact:

**Loyda Colon, Co-Director**
Loyda@justicecommittee.org

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Yul-san@justicecommittee.org

347.752.8070:
info@justicecommittee.org
Our Mission
The Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College-CUNY (Centro) is a research institute dedicated to the study and interpretation of the Puerto Rican experience in the United States that produces and disseminates relevant interdisciplinary research. Centro also collects, preserves, and provides access to library resources documenting Puerto Rican history and culture. We seek to link scholarship to social action and policy debates and contribute to the betterment of our community and enrichment of Puerto Rican studies.

Research
Our research department investigates, documents, and broadens the understanding of the Puerto Rican experience in the U.S. We heighten the impact of the data by sharing it in research-based conferences and publishing in original publications and refereed journals.

Library and Archives
The Centro Library and Archives is the only institution solely dedicated to collecting, preserving, and disseminating the story of the stateside Puerto Rican. Our collections include audio and video oral histories, photographs, original works by prominent writers and artists, papers of elected officials, early records of major community organizations, and other primary materials available nowhere else. A major strength of the Library collection is the history of Puerto Ricans in the United States, particularly in New York and the Northeast region, and in all the areas of the humanities, the social sciences and the arts. Live chat with a librarian or explore our collections at https://bit.ly/3m94keM

Education
Centro education programs focus on the development of curriculum and educational materials, such as videos, posters, and teaching guides, which disseminate and promote the use of historical and cultural heritage content for colleges, middle and high schools, and the general public. These tools help teachers and students learn about Centro’s vast archival collections and promote Puerto Rican studies. Our web-based open courseware, videoconferences, and other pedagogical resources provide the necessary supports for classroom success.

Centro’s Puerto Rican Heritage Cultural Ambassadors Program is a free, self-paced, multimedia online course in Puerto Rican history, culture, and traditions, with a focus on the migratory experience of the stateside diaspora. The goal of the program is to inspire the next generation of Puerto Rican leaders to become a driving force of change for themselves and their communities. To learn more visit https://bit.ly/37xeGRO

Visit us on the web at: https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu

Publications
Centro Publications engage in the fields of Puerto Rican, Latino, and American Studies. By taking advantage of our vast archival resources and connections in the Puerto Rican community, we disseminate crucial information about the Puerto Rican experience and contribution to the political, economic, and social cultures of the United States via the following products:

- Centro E-Store is where you can purchase books, art, DVDs and educational materials. Browse at http://www.centropr-store.com/
- CENTRO Journal is the leading peer-reviewed academic journal dedicated entirely to the field of Puerto Rican Studies. To subscribe, visit https://bit.ly/3jIyNv
- Centro Voices is an online magazine covering current affairs, history, arts and culture. Join Centro’s Puerto Rican Nation online community to receive Voices and invitations to events by registering at http://centropr.nationbuilder.com/
- Puerto Rican Voices is our award-winning TV series highlighting the contributions of Puerto Ricans across the United States. Watch on Centro TV at https://bit.ly/3ooBEk7

Data Center
The Data Center packages and disseminates the most current information about Puerto Ricans. This information is provided to present socioeconomic and demographic portraits of the Puerto Rican population. The purpose is to provide basic descriptive information to scholars, policy makers and the public in general. Download maps, data sheets and research briefs at https://bit.ly/2HnmJG0

Events and Webinars
Centro events examine our past, portray our present and explore our future with lectures, panel discussions, performances, art exhibits and more. The Puerto Rico, Puerto Ricans conference series brings together the Diaspora to gain a broader understanding of how the economic and humanitarian crises in Puerto Rico affect Puerto Ricans living stateside.

As a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic, all Centro events will be held virtually until further notice. Follow us on social media at @CentroPR for updates and invitations.
This year Comité Noviembre honors the men, women and children that lost their lives to the Coronavirus pandemic. CN pays tribute to the medical personnel and essential workers that lost their lives saving others. Additionally, CN is shedding light on the recent death of transgender individuals in Puerto Rico and arts activists.

PABLO FIGUEROA, (1938 – 2020), was an independent filmmaker, born in Santurce, Puerto Rico and raised in El Barrio, NY. His interest in film came from a love of theatre, writing and photography. Christina Pagan, the film he wrote, produced, and directed won an award at the American Film Festival. In later years, he wrote Dolores, a film about domestic violence. Figueroa produced documentaries for NY Illustrated and NBC and mentored and developed independent filmmakers at Robert Redford’s Sundance Institute. Figueroa was an activist who cared for his community. During the 70’s through the 90’s he worked with other activists such as Antonia Pantoja, Yolanda Sanchez; and was associated with the Caribbean Cultural Center and the Association of Hispanic Arts (AHA). PABLO FIGUEROA

In Memoriam

MARTA GARCIA (1945-2020)
Marta García was a committed activist, and journalist, who always used her considerable intellectual powers, creativity and passion to imbue her work full of liberating intention and a sense of service. Marta was central to the founding of The Clemente Center. She was a clear and lucid voice for the Puerto Rican and Latinx mission of the Center. A graduate of the CUNY system, Marta studied Spanish literature in Sevilla and later worked at El Diario/La Prensa; she was fundamental in the movement towards bringing more visibility to Latinx life in the media both here in New York City and at a national level. Marta was assertive, funny, biting, tough, caring, and collaborative in a spirit of uncompromising solidarity. Co-founder of LaTea Theater, she served on The Clemente’s board for a few terms, and was still serving as co-director of LaTea at the time of her passing.

SORAYA SANTIAGO, (1948-2020)
Renowned transsexual Soraya Santiago broke boundaries, lived free, fought like no one else. Long before

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anyone took steps to assert their identity, Soraya told her story and demanded dignity and respect for her life choices. Forty-six years ago, Santiago became the first transgender woman in Puerto Rico who in addition to performing her sex reassignment operation was able to change all her documentation with the gender that now belonged to her. At the age of 70, she wrote her autobiography: “Hecha a mano: disforia de género”, (Handmade: Gender Dysphoria), studied Political Science at the University of Puerto Rico, and was on her way to earn a doctorate degree at Harvard University. Nor mockery, nor injustice, nor aggression, nor discrimination eroded Soraya’s belief or desire to continue in the knowledge and acceptance of her human condition.

ALEXA NEGRÓN LUCIANO, was a homeless, transgender woman who was brutally killed in the city of Toa Baja. Her murder sparked outrage and renewed a conversation on the island about transphobia and other issues that transgender and gender non-conforming people face. “They killed Alexa, not a man in a skirt.” Those were the words emblazoned in Spanish on a T-shirt worn by Bad Bunny during his televised performance on “The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon.” The Puerto Rican rap star also donned a black skirt, in a clear effort to draw attention to a killing that has shocked his native Puerto Rico, The Human Rights Campaign called Luciano’s killing a horrifying crime, saying it is believed to be the second violent death of a transgender or gender non-conforming person in the US and its territories this year.

Serena Angelique Velázquez, 32, of Queens, and Layla Pelaez, 21, of the Bronx, were found burned and shot to death inside a vehicle under a bridge on a highway on the eastern side of Puerto Rico. Puerto Rican news outlet Primera Hora reported that Velázquez had traveled to the island in March and was slated to return home to Queens at the end of April. Two men have been arrested in connection with this act of violence in May 2020 and local police are continuing this investigation as a hate crime.

LAYLA PELÁEZ SÁNCHEZ, Twenty-three year-old Layla Pelaez Sánchez, was tragically lost to violence in Humacao Puerto Rico on April 21, 2020. In a heinous act, Layla was found dead alongside Serena Angelique Velázquez Ramos, 32, a fellow New York native and Puerto Rican transgender woman. Layla was an easygoing young woman who had been raised by her grandmother and was just beginning to explore the world.

SERENA ANGELIQUE VE- LÁZQUEZ RAMOS graduated from the Universidad del Turabo. She loved her pets, two cats and a dog. She also had a passion for exploring her spiritual side through tarot card readings; she maintained a YouTube channel where she taught audiences about her passion. Loved ones are mourning her death, calling her “full of life,” a “happy person” and a “sin-

YAMPI MÉNDEZ AROCHO, a 19-year-old transgender man killed in Moca, Puerto Rico, on March 5th. Yampi’s death is believed to be the third violent death of a transgender or gender non-conforming person in 2020 and the second in Puerto Rico. Arocho loved basketball and the NBA -- donning Miami Heat apparel. The biography line on his Facebook reads simply, “Humility Prevails.” Arocho was allegedly assaulted five hours prior to his death -- and his mother contacted the police in response to that assault. There is little information about what happened between this investigation and his eventual death. Local LGBTQ advocates called for authorities to thoroughly investigate
this crime, including an investigation into whether or not this was a bias-motivated crime. In an injustice compounding this tragedy, Arocho was misgendered in some media reports. Anti-transgender stigma is exacerbated by callous or disrespectful treatment too often seen from media, law enforcement and our highest elected officials.

PENELOPE DÍAZ RAMÍREZ, 31, transgender woman, was killed at the Bayamón correctional complex in Puerto Rico on April 13. Her death is believed to be the ninth violent death of transgender or gender non-conforming person violently killed this year in the U.S.

“Never in my career have I seen so many reports of deaths of our transgender and gender non-conforming community in such a short time in one location,” Tori Cooper, director of the Human Rights Campaign’s transgender justice initiative, said after the latest murder. “Penélope did not deserve to die. Transgender people do not deserve to die. Every single advocate, ally, elected official, and community member must stand up in light of this horrific news and say ‘No more.’ What we are doing is not enough.”

“Transgender and gender non-conforming people, especially women of color,” she added, “are too often the victims of a toxic mix of transphobia, racism, and misogyny.”

MICHELLE “MICHELLYN” RAMOS VARGAS, 35, transgender woman, was been shot to death in Puerto Rico, making her the sixth trans person to die by violence in the U.S. territory this year and the 30th nationwide. Ramos Vargas’s body was found on the side of a road in the town of San Germán. She had been shot several times in the head. Police are investigating her killing as a hate crime. Ramos Vargas, who lived in the city of Mayagüez, near San Germán, worked as a bartender and was studying nursing.

IN MEMORIAM

(continued from previous page)

For over 50 years, El Museo del Barrio, New York’s leading Latino cultural institution, has welcomed visitors of all backgrounds to discover the artistic landscape of Puerto Rican, Latino, and Latin American cultures. With over 8,000 objects in our permanent collection, El Museo puts forward cutting-edge exhibitions and provides free educational and public programs. An anchor of the East Harlem community, El Museo is a center of cultural pride on New York’s Museum Mile.

Join us for our exciting fall programs including Taller Boricua: A Political Printshop in New York on view in our galleries until January 17th and El Museo en Tu Casa, our new online bilingual initiative available via our website and social media channels.

Open Saturday and Sunday: 12 – 5pm
Visit us at www.elmuseo.org

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**Queens:**
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- Corona Senior Center: (718)639-2000

**Manhattan:**
- Carver Neighborhood Center: (212)289-2708

Acacia Network and our affiliates—such as the Institute for Puerto Rican/Hispanic Elderly (IPRHE)—provide integrated, culturally-competent, and trauma-informed services through: Primary Care; Mental Health & Addiction Services; Residential Treatment for At-Risk Populations; Affordable and Supportive Housing; Transitional Housing; Early Childhood Education; Afterschool Programs & Youth Development; Senior Services; Workforce Development; Arts & Culture, and more. For more info: acacianetwork.org
SAVE THE DATES

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2020
National Puerto Rican Artisans Fair & Book Expo
Visit ComiteNoviembreVirtualFair.org

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2020
Annual Day of Community Service and Social Responsibility
Visit ComiteNoviembre.org to learn more

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2020
Annual Benefit & Silent Auction
Visit ComiteNoviembre.org to learn more

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 6, 2021
Buscando Nuestras Raíces Educational Trip to Puerto Rico
Visit ComiteNoviembre.org to learn more.

Website: http://www.comitenoviembre.org/wordpress/
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Twitter: https://twitter.com/comitenoviembre
Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/comitenoviembre/
Comité Noviembre Virtual Fair: https://www.comitenoviembrevirtualfair.org
National Puerto Rican Virtual Artisans Fair & Book Expo

November 21 & 22, 2020
ComiteNoviembreVirtualFair.org