THE AUDACITY OF HOPE

Stupid America (1969)

stupid america, see that chicano
with a big knife
in his steady hand
he doesn't want to knife you
he wants to sit on a bench
and carve christfigures
but you won't let him.

stupid america, hear that chicano
shouting curses on the street
he is a poet
without paper and pencil
and since he cannot write
he will explode.
stupid america, remember that chicanito
flunking math and english
he is the picasso
of your western states

but he will die
with one thousand masterpieces
hanging only from his mind.

Abelardo Barrientos "Lalo" Delgado (1931–2004)

We live in an era in which even the determination to hope – like the insistence on dreaming and on working toward making justice and equality a reality – is itself an act of defiance. It is not difficult to imagine that for the thousands caught up in the violence of war, the rut of unemployment, the despair of poverty, the unnecessary boredom – indeed, the irrelevance – of what passes for schooling today, it could seem and feel like everything militates against hope. In the midst of society's blatant indifference, their numbers are growing, they are everywhere, and visible for anyone who wants to see them.

We all know who they are. They are the ones whom the Puerto Rican poet, Pedro Pietri, evoked in his famous *Puerto Rican Obituary*, eloquently describing

how they “worked, worked, worked...and...died broke... owing... never knowing what the front entrance of the first national city bank looks like...”.

Julio Cortázar, the Argentinean novelist, once observed that every single emotion we experience in our daily lives belongs to us, as individual human beings – whether these be feelings of joy, love, peace, sadness, anger, frustration, despair. Only hope, he said, does not belong to us. *La Esperanza* belongs to life – *es la vida misma renovandose* – hope is life renewing itself.

In these days of unrelenting death and violence of war, of its patently destructive force in people’s lives, societies, dreams, it is imperative that we keep in mind that hope is not ours, either to give up or to lose. We need to do everything in our power to fight against a system and a regime bent on perpetuating war and the destruction of societies; we must do everything to mobilize against the government’s power to control our lives, to dismantle our communities, to continue to perpetrate injustices both at home and abroad. Today more than ever, we need to heed the words of Julio Cortázar – and to take responsibility for our present and our future, to bring hope back to the core of our thinking, our relations, our actions, our work.

For this, we can turn to our poets and writers, our scholars and activists, to those who have passed away in the last few months – Gloria Anzaldúa, Lalo Delgado, Richie Pérez, Pedro Pietri, Henry Trueba. For years, these poets, political activists, organic intellectuals, scholars, movement leaders, brought *esperanza* to thousands of Chicano/as and Puerto Ricans – indeed to many Latinos/as in the United States. Their spirit and their vision still do so today. Like many others, they help us find inspiration through their words and deeds; and they continue to provide us with their guidance and spiritual leadership. Indeed, their words, their dreams, actions, resistance and resilience will forever express what Illinois Senator, Barack Obama, recently called the “*audacity* of hope.”

This issue of *Latino Studies* is dedicated to each of them, and to their memory.

We begin the issue with a special section to honor the memory and pioneering work of Gloria Anzaldúa. The diversity of the essays we are publishing can only begin to suggest the breadth and depth of her legacy, both here and abroad. We also publish here, four articles whose substance reminds us – as Gloria’s work does – both that hope has to be made visible and that it does indeed require audacity. Juan Javier Pescador’s exploration of the role of soccer clubs in the migration history of Mexicanos in the US, for example, is proof positive of the creativity and resourcefulness resilience of migrant cultures. Pescador’s research locates the ways that soccer clubs have succeeded in creating a social place otherwise denied to Mexicanos in the Great Lakes region by persistent patterns of segregation and discrimination. It also points to the significance of sport clubs whether in shaping community leadership, or in constructing and affirming a Mexican identity based on their experience in the US and on the expression of civic and social needs.

For hope to be made – to become – tangible, it is essential that our reality be seen for what it is. Miguel de Oliver's essay discusses the marketing of ethnicity in San Antonio, showing that it is a new form of exploitation of cultural identity and of the Mexicanos it purports to honor. The result is the emergence of an urban multicultural landscape that is ideologically inclusive but materially exclusive – thus paying homage to a cultural diversity that maintains the existing disparities in material wealth. Similarly, Elizabeth García critiques the emphasis by critics to date on an assimilationist ideology in the work of Esmeralda Santiago. Rather, she argues, Santiago provides Puerto Rican women with a particularly gendered cultural paradigm. Nestor Rodríguez and Jacqueline Hagan take on the issue of immigration. Undoubtedly, immigration – the act of forcefully displacing oneself from one's homeland and sense of belonging – is one of the most audacious – and hence hopeful – expressions of the human experience. It is rarely an easy voyage – and certainly, like other immigration laws in the past, the anti-immigrant and anti foreigner legislation since the mid-1990s, has tested even the most resilient among those seeking survival and a better life for their families in this country. Nestor Rodríguez and Jacqueline Hagan's article documents the nefarious impact of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996, on immigrant households in Texas, Mexico and El Salvador. Their work shows that this law has created fear and stress among families and the communities in which they live, mobilized governmental and non-governmental agency involvement both for and against immigrants, and raised new issues of social identity among migrants in the United States and abroad.

Finally, our annual installment of *Páginas Recuperadas*, edited by Silvio Torres Saillant, focuses on a topic close to his heart: the omission, inclusion, and renaming of Dominicans by and within the Latino/a community. In arguing that Dominicans have no control over the way they are portrayed, Torres Saillant in effect invites us to air and discuss the question of (mis)representation as a problem that concerns us all – Dominicans and non-Dominicans alike.

With this issue, we complete 2 years of publication – three more issues in which we have worked, collectively, at a national level, toward making visible and affirming the presence as well as describing the experiences of the Latino/a population in the United States. This too is an accomplishment – another example of what audacity can hope to achieve. I want to take this opportunity to thank once again, the authors and reviewers, all of whom put much effort and commitment into creating each journal issue and ensuring its consistently high quality.

Saludos!

Suzanne Oboler

University of Illinois at Chicago