

January
February
2026



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About La Voz:

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

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

Sobre La Voz

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LOS SANTOS REYES MAGOS EN EL BARRIO BORIKÉN



by Jacob Diaz

January 6 marked the celebration of El Día de los Reyes, a cherished Puerto Rican tradition honoring the arrival of the Three Kings—Melchor, Balthazar, and Caspar—who, according to tradition, visited the infant Jesus bearing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Close to 2000 gifts were distributed.

Hosted by the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, this celebration marked the beginning of a full calendar of cultural and community events planned throughout the year.

Community members gathered between the Battle Bandera Boxing Gym and La Casita de Don Pedro and Doña Lolita on Division Street to welcome the Three Kings, receive gifts, and information highlighting the many programs offered by the Puerto Rican Cultural Center. The event brought families together in a joyful celebration of culture, history, and shared tradition.

Residents are encouraged to stay engaged and informed about upcoming programs and gatherings as the community looks ahead to continuing its traditions together throughout the 2026 calendar year as we look forward to continuing our traditions as a community.

BATTLING GENTRIFICATION BY SHOWCASING THE WINDY CITY'S RICH PUERTO RICAN ROOTS

How a creative entrepreneur and a community are securing the future of working-class families in a Chicago neighborhood.

By Lola Rosario, Jesús J. Montero, Patricia Guadalupe

Known for its eclectic charm as an urban oasis and cultural vibrancy, Humboldt Park in Chicago is home to numerous ethnic restaurants, cultural centers, and art galleries. It's no wonder many flock here. As in other big cities across the country, the Windy City has for many years experienced the harmful impact of gentrification. While geographic location varies, the recipe remains identical: while developers purchase/ remodel properties seeking skyrocketing rents, longtime residents are continuously displaced. Those negatively impacted are also usually the same: working-class Black and Brown communities.

But one creative entrepreneur is determined to keep the essence of his neighborhood alive and thriving. For over a decade, poet, gallerist, professional tour guide, and Chicago native Eduardo

Arocho has been enthusiastically sharing with visitors and locals alike his unconditional love and commitment to his rich Puerto Rican roots. As owner and founder of Paseo Boricua Tour Company, his is more than a "stop-and-drop-

names" excursion. Part of Paseo Boricua - the economic, political, and cultural capital of Chicago's Puerto Rican community - the tour is a culturally immersive experience where participants get to feel the warmth and sabor (flavor) of Arocho and his friendly people - even hav-

sands of others who, like him, are championing the vibrant cultura to keep Humboldt Park beautifully Latino.

A Look at the History of Gentrification



Fluttering Puerto Rican flag marking the entrance to the Paseo (Stroll) Boricua at Humboldt Park. Photo by Jesús J. Montero for palabra



Eduardo Arocho, owner and founder of Paseo Boricua Tour Company, gives culturally immersive tours that show the vibrant Puerto Rican culture in Humboldt Park. Photo by Jesús J. Montero for palabra



"Seeds from our Past," a mural in Humboldt Park honoring children living with autism, learning disabilities, and mental health challenges. Hearts represent belonging to the past with Puerto Rican ancestral motifs. Photo by Jesús J. Montero for palabra



Pedro Albizu Campos Apartments, a new building at the start of the mile-long stretch called Paseo Boricua in Humboldt Park. Photo by Jesús J. Montero for palabra

ing the option of adding lunch reservations to support one of the local restaurants featuring Puerto Rican cuisine.

This is his story. It is also the story of thou-

In the late 1940s, a joint U.S. federal government and island government initiative called Operación Manos a la Obra (Operation Bootstrap) - an industrialization program that steered the Caribbean archipelago's economy away from agriculture toward manufacturing - became the impetus for Puerto Rican mass migration to many cities on the U.S. mainland, including Chicago. The strategic plan, intended to lead to economic growth for the island, brought different consequences: the displacement of a portion of a population seeking a better life in the United States. It also brought the onset of the Industrial Incentives Act, encouraging U.S. manufacturing companies to build factories on the island, eliminating Puerto Rico's corporate tax.

Against this backdrop, Arocho shares how in the late 1940s/early 1950s, "As part of Operation Bootstrap, the displacement of Puerto Ricans began as they moved to Chicago en masse with roughly a

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Who knows the Land, Loves the Land

Digitizing the Barrio Visits Vieques

By Anissa Symone Camacho and Angelica Hernández

On November 23, 2025, members of Digitizing the Barrio participated in a new tour organized by the Archivo Histórico de Vieques, in collaboration with Memoria Decolonial. We were joined by other scholars and activists deeply aware and critical of U.S. imperialism and militarization, including University of Hawaii-Manoa scholar Kyle Kajihiro. It was powerful to see the continued solidarity between Hawaii and Puerto Rico in the struggle for demilitarization and decontamination of our islands.



As historian Marie Cruz Soto, board president of the Archivo Histórico de Vieques and our generous guide, explained, the history of Vieques is not fully contained within an archive; its afterlives are embedded in the landscape. During our tour, the island's flora evidenced the trauma endured. We saw trees that should have been full of life with wilted leaves. Some plants were a dull green as if they were struggling to survive.

The tour used key sites as launching points into specific moments in Vieques' long and complex history. We walked among abandoned bunkers that once housed ammunition, now covered with wheat-pasted images of sugarcane workers and the inhabitants of Vieques in the early 20th century. The archival photographs evidenced that Vieques was inhabited long before residents were dispossessed of their land by the United States military, and that they have carved out lives despite economic,

political, military, and environmental hardships.

As we traveled from site to site, we saw that this was not an abandoned island that colonial powers could manipulate and bend to their will. The people of Vieques have always resisted, from the 1915 sugar cane revolts to the 1978 fishermen's confrontation with Navy ships to the protest camps their descendants established on Navy territory and successfully expelled the U.S. military in 2003. Chicago's Puerto Rican community has stood by their side through many of these struggles, circulating testimonies from Viequenses in community



newspapers, educating the diaspora through political education, and mobilizing supporters to take part in acts of civil disobedience. Traces of this solidarity are currently housed at Digitizing the Barrio.

Our final stop on the tour was the entrance to the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge, formerly the entrance to Camp García. It was where protesters near and far came to protest the U.S. military and its bombing exercises. Together we stood under the shade of a tree as stories were shared. Activists who were present during the height of the *Paz Para Vieques* movement now lament the prospect of remilitarization, thanks to Trump's imperial ambitions. Marie Cruz Soto once again stressed the urgency of solidarity and mobilization, reminding us that Viequenses "have to because we have no other option."

At the tour's conclusion, Kajihiro asked if it would be possible to say a prayer and pour sacred water as an offering to the island. We walked under the shade of a ceiba tree, a symbol of ancestral wisdom, life, and resilience for both Puerto Ricans and Hawaiians. As we surrounded the tree in silence, Kajihiro held the sacred water to the sky and movingly recited in Native Hawaiian, "What's above will be brought down. What's below will rise up. The islands will unite. The walls of this foundation will stand."



Vieques' story does not begin or end with the U.S. military occupation. It is not a simple story captured in a single time period or struggle. It has many roots and branches. The Archivo Histórico de Vieques seeks to reclaim stories of a history that is still ongoing, for an island and a people who have endured the sugarcane industry, military occupation, contamination, gentrification, and forced displacement. Narrative sovereignty, they reminded us, is a method to heal and prepare for the struggles that still lie ahead. Digitizing the Barrio hopes to continue the solidarity established here in Chicago's Puerto Rican community, guided by the needs and aspirations of Viequenses.

For more information and ways to support the Archivo Histórico de Vieques, go to <https://www.ahvpr.org/>.

Photography by Miguel Landeros

New Year's Message from PRCC Executive Director

By José E. López, Executive Director, Puerto Rican Cultural Center

For those of us at the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, 2025 was another year marked by intense activity—filled with programs, events, activism, celebrations, as well as losses, setbacks, and hard-won victories. While we take time to honor and savor our accomplishments, we also continue our long-standing practice of transforming disappointments into learning opportunities, as we have done across so many decades of struggle.

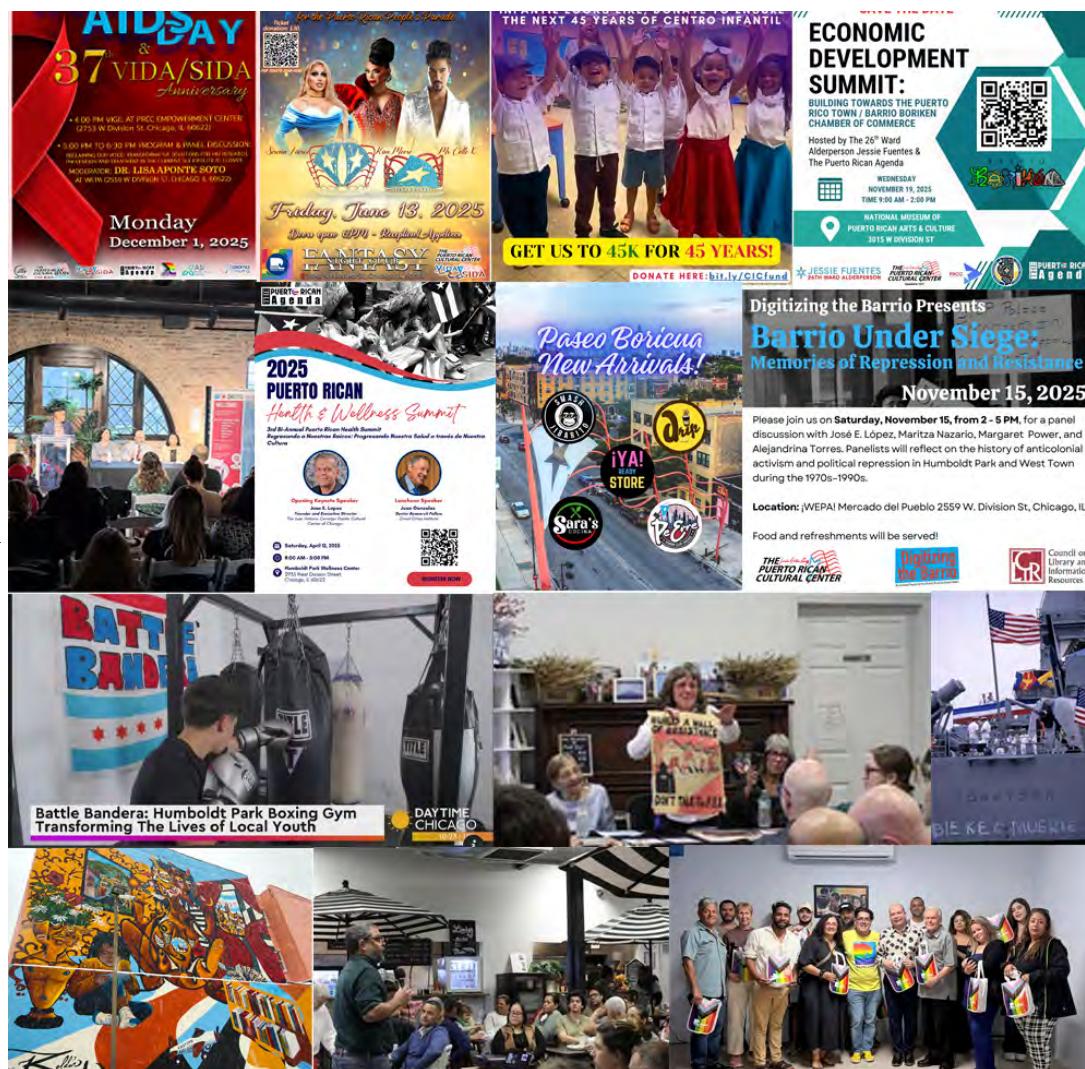
Confronted with new challenges ushered in by a shifting U.S. administration, we once again relied on our historical commitment to turning defeats into victories. Although our health and wellness initiatives—particularly those serving LGBTQ community members—were negatively impacted, we developed contingency plans to ensure continuity of care for our most vulnerable populations. Despite workforce challenges, we retained many staff members and reaffirmed our values through culturally rooted celebrations, including our unique *cacique* and *cacica* pageant and our traditional World AIDS Day events.

Even amid these pressures, many of our other programs experienced notable growth and generated visible impact. One such milestone was the 45th anniversary of Centro Infantil Consuelo Lee Corretjer. We commemorated its anniversary with a moving ballet performance of *Chocolat* that brought together parents, toddlers, youth, and alumni.

This celebration served not only as a moment of pride, but also as a reminder of our journey—from operating a non-recognized early childcare center created to meet urgent community needs to building a state-of-the-art early childhood education initiative centered on Spanish language and cultural immersion.

major television networks. In collaboration with the Economic Committee of the Puerto Rican Agenda, our economic initiative also convened a Barrio Borikén Economic Summit in hopes of establishing a Chamber of Commerce. The summit drew more than 80 participants, including over 50 small business owners. During this same period, our Public Health programming—

while navigating programmatic shifts—partnered with the Health Committee of the Puerto Rican Agenda to spearhead a Health Summit that articulated a collective vision for the health and wellness pillar of Barrio Borikén.



Our Economic Development initiative, including the Small Business Area, achieved major gains. For instance, it helped open six new businesses on Paseo Boricua. Two additional openings are planned for early 2026. These businesses received citywide visibility during Hispanic Heritage Month, with features across

Violence Prevention remained a cross-cutting priority throughout the year, with our programs actively integrated into all major community events, including Three Kings Day, the Puerto Rican Parade, Fiesta Boricua, and Haunted Paseo Boricua. This integration illustrates how our violence prevention is an organically driven, community-based practice rather than a standalone intervention. The breadth of this work was reflected in extensive media coverage, including features on WTTW and WGN. WGN, in particular, highlighted our Bandera Boxing program and its innovative integration of

sports and culture as a response to historical and intergenerational trauma. In addition, the Violence Prevention Initiative sponsored two major food distribution events during Thanksgiving and Christmas, serving thousands of families in collaboration with local small busi-

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PRCC Salutes Black Freedom Heroes



Emcee Monifa Bandele & Soffiyah Elijah



Herman Bell, Soffiyah Elijah, Sundiata Acoli and Luis Alejandro Molina

Last Sunday, Luis Alejandro Molina, the PRCC Board of Director's Treasurer, was invited to celebrate the birthdays of two legendary Black freedom fighters and former Black political prisoners, Herman Bell and Sundiata Acoli.

The celebration at Brooklyn's Redemption Hall, was emceed by veteran activist and educator, Monifa Bandele, and attorney Soffiyah Elijah poured the libation. A short cultural program featuring singer YahNé Ndgoand, poets Nasir Joseph and Steve Bloom followed, after which the crowd of over 125 was invited to partake of the delicious food.

Herman and Sundiata received many gifts, including Puerto Rican guayaberas on behalf of the PRCC, and many abrazos full of love and solidarity by all.

In the late 80s, Herman and Sundiata were featured in the collection of political prisoners biographies, *Can't Jail the Spirit!* published by the Committee to End the Marion Lockdown. It was published in several editions, the first one being printed in 1988 and available here: <https://bit.ly/CJSpirit>

Herman, accused of carrying out militant actions as part of the Black Liber-

ation Army, served 42 years and was released in 2018.

Sundiata Acoli, accused alongside Zayd Malik Shakur and Assata Shakur, of carrying out militant actions as part of the Black Liberation Army, served 49 years and was released in 2022.

It was especially fitting that the celebration, another victory for both movements during these dark times, took place in an environment of proud affirmation and the commitment to forge ahead in the struggle for self-determination.

HITN Participates in Reyes Magos de Vieques Anniversary

As part of its ongoing commitment to Hispanic audiences in the United States and Puerto Rico, HITN supports cultural initiatives that preserve long-standing traditions.

This year, Michael D. Nieves, President and CEO of HITN, attended the 27th anniversary of the Three Kings Festival in Vieques. The event took place on January 7, one day after the traditional observance of Epiphany. In Puerto Rican culture, Epiphany —El Día de los Reyes Magos— stands as one of the most significant celebrations of the holiday season, emphasizing family values, faith, and shared heritage.

Led by festival co-founders Ramón Figueroa Sorrentini and Irmgard Iglesias, the celebration was held at the local Parque Esperanza. For nearly three decades, the gathering has represented cultural pride and resilience on the island, sustaining the Three Kings tradition for younger generations.

The event also recognized individuals whose work has shaped Vieques' cultural



network were also acknowledged for their ongoing involvement and service. Mike, in return, presented Ramón and Irmgard with the Emmy Award plaque the station won for its submission on them and the Festival. The piece is available on the HITN YouTube channel.

Participants who have portrayed the Three Kings for more than a decade led children and teenagers in a traditional procession, "riding" wooden horses around the park before stopping at the stage for photographs.

Young residents remained the focus of the festivities. More than 500 gifts were distributed to children between six months and 14 years of age. In addition, a health corridor provided free diabetes and high blood pressure screenings, reinforcing the event's emphasis on wellness.

The festival concluded with hundreds of families celebrating together, reflecting HITN's mission to educate and entertain while supporting cultural continuity and community well-being.

During the official ceremony, Ramón Figueroa Sorrentini recognized Mike Nieves for HITN's consistent sponsorship since the festival's inception. Volunteers from the

WORLD AIDS DAY AND 37TH Anniversary of Vida/SIDA



by Dr. Lisa Aponte

On December 1st, in recognition of the 37th anniversary of Vida/SIDA—a project of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC)—the PRCC, Tanoma Consulting, along with the Puerto Rican Agenda, ASI Home Care, commemorated World AIDS Day. The evening began with a candlelight vigil at Paseo Boricua between the two Puerto Rican Flags to honor and remember those who died of HIV and those living with HIV. Afterwards, we hosted a panel discussion with community lead-

ers, healthcare professionals, advocates, and city and state representatives dedicated to fostering health equity and justice.

The panel

featured Dulce Quintero (Secretary of the Illinois Department of Human Services); Jorge Cestou, PhD, MBA (Chicago Department of Public Health); David Ansel, MD (Rush University); and Wilfred Labiosa, PhD (Waves Ahead, Puerto Rico). Lisa Aponte-Soto, PhD, MHA, founding President of Tanoma Consulting, led the panel discussion, “Reclaiming Our Voice: Transformative Solutions for HIV Research, Prevention, and Treatment in the Current Socio-political Climate.”



Given that Black and Brown communities, particularly Puerto Ricans, have been disproportionately affected by the relentless HIV/AIDS epidemic, the Puerto

Rican community in Chicago and across the diaspora has demonstrated extraordinary resilience. The panelists acknowledged the value of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center's presence in addressing community needs through programs such as VIDA/SIDA, El Rescate, and TransChicago. This is even more essential today, given the resurgence of anti-LGBTQ, anti-immigrant, and other discriminatory sentiments, mirrored by drastic reductions and terminations in HIV/AIDS funding.



For 37 years, the Puerto Rican Cultural Center and its VIDA/SIDA Project have exemplified community-centered public health. This panel reaffirms that the fight for HIV funding is ongoing; that health equity remains an unfinished goal; and that remembrance must be paired with renewed commitment. It is a declaration that every life affected by HIV deserves dignity, justice, and consistent investment—and that we will not stop until these are realized.

Digitizing the Barrio Presents at ASA in San Juan

by Daniel Strom

On November 20, Digitizing the Barrio (DTB) brought Paseo Boricua to the American Studies Association national conference held in San Juan Puerto Rico. Through a panel organized and moderated by former *La Voz* editor and current UC Berkeley professor Michael Rodriguez- Muñiz titled “Barrio Dreams, Diaspora Memories” Angelica Hernandez, Lead Archivist of DTB, Anissa Camacho former research assistant in the archive and current UC Berkeley Ph.D. student and Daniel Strom, currently a research assistant for DTB presented research informed by the archive and our communities

past, present and future.

Daniel presented his M.A paper “Fighting the Machine, Fighting the Empire: Puerto Rican Radical Politics in Chicago 1966-1983” sharing the history of the liberation movements that emerged in West Town/Humboldt Park. Anissa shared her research in “Mapping Humboldt Park: Climate Displacement of the Puerto Rican Diaspora of Chicago”. The paper utilizes her work with the Puerto Rican Agendas Climate Committee and ethnography as a tree ambassador to discuss the impact of climate change on the Humboldt Park community and people’s perceptions of these phenomena. Angelica closed out the panel with a moving

and powerful remembrance titled “Barrio Histories: Recovering Forgotten Voices From Puerto Rican Chicago’s Fight for Vieques”. She combined archival materials from DTB on the fight for Vieques with accounts of the people involved in that struggle, including many in the community.

Puerto Rican Chicago was well represented at the ASA, reminding attendees that our history and our present struggles contain important lessons on resisting US empire and new waves of repression. We’re excited for the future of scholarship in the diaspora that draws from the archive and the lived experiences of this neighborhood.

Community Building

Community Effort Brings Three Kings Day Tradition to Life



By Wesley Ordoñez

In the days leading up to Three Kings Day, the spirit of community was already alive and thriving on Chicago's West Side. Volunteers from the Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC), alongside neighbors and supporters, came together for an extraordinary effort to prepare gifts for local children in celebration of the beloved holiday. The preparation took place over several days at WEPA Mercado del Pueblo, where tables, floors, and storage areas were filled with generosity and purpose.

Under the leadership of Glenda Guzman, volunteers carefully wrapped and organized thousands of donated gifts. Boxes were stacked high, large storage totes overflowed, and numerous bags brimmed with wrapped presents ready for distribution. Each gift was thoughtfully sorted by age group

and by whether it was intended for a boy or a girl, ensuring that every child would receive something meaningful and appropriate. The donations themselves reflected a true collective effort, coming from individual community members as well as organizations committed to supporting local families.



All of this preparation led to the Three Kings Day celebration held on January 6 along Division Street, where children and families gathered to take part in a tradition deeply rooted in Puerto Rican culture. More than just a gift giveaway, the event served as a reminder of the power of community, cultural pride, and collective care. Behind every wrapped present was time, intention, and love—proof that when a community comes together, it can create moments of joy that last far beyond a single day.

Holiday Joy on “La Di 19th Annual Paseo



by Juanita Garcia
This year we celebrated the 19th Annual Paseo Boricua Parranda. Hundreds of people helped spread the joy of the season, keep us rooted in our culture, to appreciate each other, and to us, the restauranteiros in constant motion, that we belong to.

us, Alderperson Fuentes and Representative Jiménez for supporting the Division Street Bombera De Corazón and Ivelisse for saying presente and leading the Puerto Rican Cultural Center for their half century of advocacy and struggle to ensure the well-being of our patria on our beloved Division. A very special thanks to all the businesses that participated in the parranda and generously sharing a variety of treats with us.

Next year will be the 20th Paseo Boricua Parranda and we will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the 20th, email paseoboricuaparranda@gmail.com

VPI Program: Dope Drip Bears QB C



by Jacob Diaz

On December 20, Caleb Williams, the star of the game-winning touchdown at Super Bowl LVI, joined the Green Bay Packers. The following day, Williams continued to make an impact, joining forces with Lyrical Lemons to deliver meals to the Humboldt Park community on Division Street at Dope Drip Cakes.

Also in attendance was Chicago Bears quarterback Pete Crow-Armstrong, further highlighting the citywide support behind the event.

on Paseo Boricua

vision": Celebrating the Paseo Boricua Parranda

Cecilia Avilés

celebrated the 19th Annual Paseo Boricua. Hundreds of Boricuas joined this joyous event that brought so much holiday cheer. Traditions such as this are in our culture and community, and force us to reach out to each other, the organizations that help support us, the restaurants that feed us, the musicians that keep us moving and the community that reminds us we are here. Thanks to Hispanic Housing for hosting and promoting the parranda, La Escuelita for the parranda, and to the Puerto Rican Cultural Center that Boricuas in Chicago have a pedacito de ourselves on Paseo Boricua for welcoming the



brate with style. If you are interested in help-

hop hosts food giveaway with Caleb Williams

ons delivered a soldier Field against following day, Wil-

impact off the field, onade to distribute community along life.

o Cubs standout highlighting the ent. The joy and

gratitude were evident on the faces of everyone who attended, as the gathering brought together residents, athletes, and community leaders in a meaningful way.

From Chicago at large to the heart of Humboldt Park, this event served as a reminder of the power of giving back. Community members expressed appreciation and optimism for the years ahead, cheering on these individuals who continue to unite and uplift the city beyond the spotlight.

A Sweet Day Downtown With Reina's Cakes

by La Voz Staff

One afternoon, Reina sat at a table in her cakes shop, playing board games with the young people who had made the space their own. As they laughed and talked, she asked whether they would want to take a trip downtown to see the



Christmas lights—or to visit the Bean—and was struck by how many of them had never gone. The idea landed in her mind with quiet certainty: it would be more than an outing; it would be an experience they could carry, a bright memory to return to later.



Watching them, she felt the familiar pull of responsibility and community—the desire to make a difference, to give something back, and to remind them that they mattered and that their ideas deserved room to grow. She shaped the plan with them so they were invested in it.

The shop, in turn, had become a refuge: a safe place where the youth looked out for one another, encouraged each other, and gathered as if it were a second home. As a result of the trip, Reina began planning a spring car wash to help high school seniors manage expenses—especially those carrying the weight of large families—because she understood their challenges clearly. They had become family, and was a privilege to have a place in their lives.

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third of them working in the steel mills, particularly in the steel pipeline industry. Many worked as welders - not great paying, but good enough for them to raise their families." The native Chicagoan tells *palabra* of how Puerto Ricans were spread across Chicago, creating neighborhoods on the South Side, in the North Loop area, in Lincoln Park, and then Humboldt Park, which became the center of Puerto Rican art, culture, and cuisine. According to a 2019 report by Centro de Periodismo Investigativo (Center for Investigative Journalism) in Puerto Rico, "By the 1960s, Chicago was home to more than 32,000 Puerto Ricans." Currently, there are some 97,000 Chicagoans who identify as Puerto Rican.

As Arocho tells it, as early as the '60s, gentrification happened. "They would call it urban renewal. We started to be displaced from areas like Lincoln Park - the neighborhoods where



CAPTION 7: *La Casita de Don Pedro y Lolita*, a community garden in the heart of Humboldt Park. Photo by Jesús J. Montero for *palabra*

the Young Lords were created." The Young Lords was a political activist group established in 1968 by community organizer Cha Cha Jiménez in response to what residents and community activists said was a lack of action to address police brutality, racism, and local gentrification.

The Awakening

As often happens when a community is threatened, organizers and activists come together to rebel, resist, and confront those in "authority." In this case, it was the police shooting of Aracelis Cruz, 20, after Chicago's first Puerto

Rican Day Parade on June 12, 1966. Arocho refers to what happened in his city as "The Awakening" - the spark that caused the Division Street Riots (three days of unrest and protest in response to the shooting). He notes "the young people who either witnessed or participated in the riots then became the artists, activists, teachers, and [everyone] struggling for better housing conditions, [fighting] against police brutality, the struggle to get the Roberto Clemente School and for our community [to become] politically aware."

Arocho mentions two other impactful events in Chicago. "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. moving to Chicago, bringing the civil rights movement here in a big way, and the 1977 riots after two young men were killed by the police after the Puerto Rican parade - sparking another three days of rioting at California and Division (in the heart of Humboldt Park). [After this incident], there were significant changes in the Chicago Police Department (that) forced the police to change their height requirements, (and) the questions in the examinations to allow Puerto Ricans to become police officers. Prior to this, the police was very white."

Plantando Bandera & the Puerto Rican Agenda
"The gentrification that hit Lincoln Park, which used to be a working class, Puerto Rican neighborhood - Lincoln Park nowadays is one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in Chicago with million dollar lots - they were moved to the Lakeview area and then you have Wicker Park, which is where I grew up (on Damon Avenue) - now it's very gentrified, very wealthy area," Arocho told *palabra*. "The founders of Paseo Boricua realized that every time we get moved, we get poorer. Every time a new community moves in, they magically get wealthier, and it's not magic, it's good old-fashioned redlining. It's re-segregation of the city."

And it's exactly the kind of forced separation that the Puerto Rican community flipped to its advantage, Arocho explains. "So what they decided to do is try something different, and in Spanish, we call it *plantando bandera*, which literally means planting a flag to create a zone of stability where we can cure ourselves from the problems of poverty, like creating affordable

housing, and things like addressing our health care needs, education. [To this point], they didn't make Roberto Clemente High School just because we paid taxes, they made it because young people in the early '70s protested and fought with police on the streets just to get a new school!"

So their idea of "plantando bandera" became a literal and a figurative way of fighting gentrification - of saying we're here and we plan to stay here! Covering a six-block span along the main street in Humboldt Park, two steel flags standing at 55 feet by 56 feet representing "fluttering Puerto Rican flags" mark The Paseo



CAPTION 8: Eduardo Arocho with Reina Marcelle, owner of Reina's Cakes in the heart of Humboldt Park. Photo by Jesús J. Montero for *palabra*

Boricua - the economic, political, and cultural heartbeat of Chicago's Puerto Rican community. The flags pay homage to those first puerriqueños who worked in the steel mills upon arriving in this Midwestern city. "The pipelines on one side are meant to simulate roots in the ground, then they're tied to a wave connecting to the mast, which is pointing to the future, so it's connecting that past with the future," Arocho mentions.

A recent meeting in Chicago organized by the think tank National Puerto Rican Agenda of Chicago brought community activists, organizers, educators, and public policy advocates to discuss a number of issues affecting the community, including the issue of housing affordability. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development defines affordable housing

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VISIT THE COMMUNITY AS A CAMPUS WEBSITE

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Support Youth Sports in Humboldt Park! ⚽️⚾️



Humboldt Park
Community
as a Campus
Education Initiative

By La Voz Staff

Right now, we're urgently raising funds to keep the Humboldt Park Community as a Campus Sports Initiative alive—a vital program serving young people from CPS and the Barreto Boys and Girls Club. This initiative continues to be a cornerstone of our community, offering safe, structured, and sports programming that builds teamwork, leadership, and physical and mental wellness.

But we are at risk. Due to funding cuts, we've lost the majority of our financial

support, and without immediate help, we will be forced to reduce or suspend programming. Your donation—no matter the amount—will help us provide quality coaching and equipment, maintain safe and accessible play spaces, and keep sports free to every participant.

This initiative isn't just about sports. It's about keeping kids connected, active, and inspired in a time when they need it most. Please consider donating and sharing our campaign to ensure this essential program continues in Humboldt Park. Thank you for standing with us.

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May the New Year bring you
peace, prosperity, and
continued well-being to you
and your loved ones.



PART 1

GROWING OLD ALONE: How Puerto Rican Migration Reshaped Family Care

Mass migration and accelerated aging have transformed how older Puerto Ricans are cared for. Today, thousands of families split that responsibility between Puerto Rico and its diaspora in the U.S., with cities like Chicago becoming emotional and logistical extensions of the island.

By Vanesa Baerga | Centro de Periodismo Investigativo

Elías Carmona Alejandro never imagined that death would find him far from Puerto Rico. As terminal cancer eroded his cognitive abilities, the devoted admirer of Puerto Rican culture and jíbaro music spent his final three months in Chicago, where he died in 2024 at 79.

His adult children, Sandra and Elías Carmona Rivera, 50 and 52, said they were grateful that their father's condition kept him from realizing he had been taken to Chicago for treatment.

"He never knew he was outside the island. If he had been aware, he would have wanted to die in Puerto Rico. We would have wanted that transition to happen on the island," said Sandra.

Like many contemporary Puerto Rican families, Carmona Alejandro's immediate family network was shaped by migration, particularly during the last 15 years of his life.

While Sandra remained in Puerto Rico and settled in Loíza, a coastal town on the island's northeastern shore, his son Elías is among the more than 700,000 working-age Puerto Ricans estimated to have migrated to the United States over the past two decades, according to the U.S. Census. He settled in Humboldt Park, the heart of Chicago's Puerto Rican community and a major hub of the diaspora since the mid-20th century.

While Puerto Rico has lost a significant share of its working-age population, the proportion



Elías Carmona Rivera holds a photograph of his father, Elías Carmona Alejandro, on the balcony of his apartment in Chicago's Puerto Rican neighborhood. Elías and his sister, Sandra, reflect the challenges many adult children face as they care for aging parents in Puerto Rico and from the diaspora

Se estima que dos de cada tres hijos de un adulto de 65 años o más vive en la diáspora (2021)

Un estudio de proyecciones poblacionales encontró que en el caso de personas que tienen menos de tres hijos, con mucha probabilidad estos viven fuera de Puerto Rico.



Fuente: Estudio sobre estructuras de parentesco para adultos mayores dejados atrás en contextos de alta emigración: evidencia de Puerto Rico (2025) y el Estimado del Censo federal de la población de 2021 a cinco años



of older adults on the island has grown rapidly. According to U.S. Census data, that share rose from 13% in 2010 to 21% in 2019. This shift has created a reality in which nearly 70% of older adults' children live outside the island, said Puerto Rican demographer Amílcar Matos Moreno, a professor and postdoctoral researcher at Penn State University's Center for Healthy Aging. In his view, the combination of accelerated migration, a lack of accessible services and outdated public policies leaves many older adults alone or dependent on care coordinated from the diaspora, a phenomenon that is redefining aging on the island.

"If you have three children, two of them are expected to be living outside the island and one to be here in Puerto Rico," Matos Moreno said. "If you have one child, the odds that they live abroad are much higher. If you have two children, one — or perhaps both — are likely to be living outside the island."

The figures Matos Moreno cited come from the academic paper "Kinship Structures for Left Behind Older Adults in High Outmigration Contexts: Evidence From Puerto Rico," published in 2025 in *The Gerontologist*, a peer-reviewed journal on aging. The study focuses only on daughters of older adults, but Matos Moreno said the research team, which included Puerto Rican demographer Alexis Santos Lozada, is updating the model and has found the same patterns apply to children of all genders.

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nesses.

Education remained a cornerstone of our work through the Community as a Campus (CaaC) initiative. CaaC serves as the vehicle for the Barrio Borikén education pillar. Throughout the year, CaaC remained deeply engaged with 17 area schools, offering sports and extracurricular programming that has become a national model for grounded, community-led education. Building on this momentum, CaaC is currently exploring future funding opportunities with the National William Julius Wilson Foundation.

In the area of affordable housing, the PRCC served more than 50 families through access to affordable apartments, including the rehabilitation of a four-unit building completed with the active participation of youth from the PACHS YouthBuild program. The organization also acquired an additional property that will help guarantee housing opportunities for returning community members, further strengthening long-term neighborhood stability.

Our human services work further extended this commitment to safety and opportunity. Through the CPS-sponsored Safe Passage program, we maintained a strong adult community presence in and around local schools, employing nearly 50 community members to ensure schools remained safe and welcoming spaces for young people. Our Youth Employment Program also expanded significantly, adding offices in Melrose Park, Cicero, and Belmont-Cragin. At the same time, El Rescate Transitional Living Space continued to provide quality housing, educational, and employment services to unhoused youth—particularly LGBTQ youth within our community.

Grounding this work in memory and history, our archival initiative, Digitizing the Barrio, remained actively engaged throughout the year. The initiative included a presentation at the American Studies Conference in Puerto Rico, participation in an archival tour in Vieques, and

the sponsoring of multiple community history events focused especially on resistance to the political repression of independentista activists in Chicago.

Taken together, these accomplishments advanced the four pillars of Barrio Borikén. Throughout this work, we have remained committed to integrating arts and culture as a unifying force. This commitment was powerfully expressed this year through the creation of a three-story mural at our rehabilitation site at 2724 W. Division. Created by our own Cristian Roldán, the mural stands as a testament to historical memory and collective resilience.

Our policy and advocacy work also made significant strides in ensuring that the self-determination and self-actualization of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans remain at the forefront of public discourse. In collaboration with our Senior Policy Advisor, Luis V. Gutiérrez, we helped organize a series of meetings in Washington, D.C., bringing together 13 members of Congress and Juan Dalmau, president of the Puerto Rican Independence Party. Beyond federal advocacy, we supported and promoted Puerto Rico-focused resolutions across multiple states, including Florida, Illinois, Missouri, and Minnesota. These resolutions opposed gentrification and the Financial Oversight and Management Board and advocated for food sovereignty in Puerto Rico.

At the same time, the PRCC remained deeply engaged in solidarity work on the island. We provided financial support to Waves Ahead, Puerto Rico's leading LGBTQ organization, Otro Puerto Rico, which is confronting gentrification in Río Piedras, and the Ceiba Research Center at the Catholic University of Puerto Rico, particularly its summer high school workshops. We also supported the completion of a well for an alternative high school in Comerío. The well will deliver fresh water from an underground stream 300 feet deep. Additionally, we hosted a successful fundraising event for Casa Pueblo's

capital campaign, raising \$15,000 toward its \$100,000 goal.

We concluded the year with an educational eco-tour to Puerto Rico, bringing 16 community members—including PRCC staff—into direct engagement with grassroots partners across Utuado, Lares, Loíza, Adjuntas, Río Piedras, Ponce, Barranquitas, Comerío, Ciales, Jayuya, and San Sebastián. Highlights included meetings with the mayors of Utuado, Lares, Loíza, and Ciales, as well as profound encounters with Dr. Ché Paralitici, patriot Heriberto Marín Torres, Bishop Eusebio Ramos Morales of Caguas, Reverend Raúl Morales Berrios, and the leadership of organizations including Concilio Taíno, Claridad, Otro Puerto Rico, Cooperativa Agro Comercial, Amazar Inc., Tejedoras, Waves Ahead, the Ceiba Research Center, and Casa Pueblo.

This experience deepened participants' understanding of the long-standing relationships the PRCC has cultivated across eleven municipalities. It served as living testimony to decades of solidarity work linking the Diaspora and the island—work that is unmatched in both scope and depth among Puerto Rican organizations in the United States.

As we enter 2026, we do so with a clear-eyed understanding of the broader political moment. We are witnessing an alarming move in this country toward a culture of state terror in which Latinos are scapegoated—chased and arrested by ICE, or killed at sea in the Caribbean and the Pacific. In this context, the Puerto Rican Agenda convened an educational program featuring Juan González, author of *Harvest of Empire*, former Congressman Luis Gutiérrez, and me, to examine these realities through the lens of Latinidad—not as an identity, but as a political practice grounded in hemispheric solidarity. This analysis harkens back to Simón Bolívar's dream of a unified Latin America articulated at the Congress of Panama in 1824, a vision undermined by the Monroe Doctrine of 1823,

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which declared Latin America the United States' "backyard."



It is within this historical framework that we must understand ICE raids, the remilitarization of Puerto Rico—particularly Vieques—and the armed attacks on boats in the Caribbean and Pacific as part of a broader project of criminalizing our people. Just as Puerto Ricans courageously confronted ICE during two incidents in Humboldt Park—at the National Museum

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as "housing on which the occupant is paying no more than 30 percent of gross income for housing costs, including utilities." According to the real estate listing Zillow, a one-bedroom apartment in Humboldt Park starts at \$1,450, and a two-bedroom rents at nearly \$2,000. The median household income in Humboldt Park is \$39,464.

Arocho says he feels optimistic about efforts to combat gentrification. "We have more new buildings, including The Paseo Boricua Arts Building - a 24-unit living/workspace geared towards community artists, also affordable for families. Nearby is the Teresa Roldán Apartments, 60 units of affordable apartments for people 55 and over, helping to keep a stable population living here. We also have La Estancia: 60 units of affordable apartments, and across the street is Pedro Albizu Campos Apartments - a brand new 64-unit building."

of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture and Humboldt Health Hospital, led in part by Alderperson Jessie Fuentes—we must extend that same courage and solidarity across Latin America. As



the United States seeks to reimpose the logic of Manifest Destiny, we are reminded of Eduardo Galeano's enduring warning in *The Open Veins of Latin America*.

Looking ahead, we extend our deepest gratitude and warmest wishes to all our supporters for an inspiring 2026. We are especially thankful to

Arocho also spoke of an unexpected ally in the fight against gentrification: the state government. Illinois Governor JB Pritzker (along with other legislators) last year announced the es-



tablishment of 10 "cultural districts" across the state. Protecting ethnic enclaves like Humboldt Park with the government's initiative, Arocho says, is a big win for the community as it will "come with economic development dollars."

those who contributed resources—financial and otherwise—toward the fundraising campaign for the documentary on the PRCC and Chica-



go's Puerto Rican community, currently being produced by Rosa Emmanuelli and Gonzalo Mazzini. Through this effort, nearly \$30,000 was raised. We enter the new year grounded in struggle and guided by hope, and we invite all our supporters to join us in a campaign culminating in a major event in Humboldt Park on **July 4th: 250 Years Without Kings or Colonies**.

Eduardo Arocho and his community are keenly aware of what their beloved neighborhood of Humboldt Park is up against. He says he's seen a lot of changes throughout the years, but is actively participating in Humboldt Park's urban plan by working with local businesses, schools, and cultural centers. One initiative includes WEPA! Mercado del Pueblo, a small business incubator and pop-up market, and he was excited to share that the Hispanic Housing Developmental Corporation is building a 44-unit affordable housing complex, and that two more are "in the works, making over 235 additional affordable units."

He calls all of this the "repopulating of Paseo Boricua."

Battling Gentrification by Showcasing the Windy City's Rich Puerto Rican Roots was originally published by Palabra. and is republished with permission.

IN SOLIDARITY WITH OUR VENEZUELAN AND LATIN AMERICAN BROTHERS/SISTERS

We reproduce the statement below by Juan Dalmau and the Puerto Rican Independence Party, which we adopt, regarding the invasion of Venezuela. We wish to remind everyone that it was on January 3, 1961, that the United States severed diplomatic relations with the heroic Cuban people, and that it was on January 3, 1990, that the United States, after invading Panama, captured its president, Manuel Noriega. This is no coincidence; it is part of a policy articulated in 1823 through the Monroe Doctrine, which advanced the idea that Latin America was the backyard of the United States. Now, with the Trump Corollary, direct and absolute intervention in the region is being asserted.

"PIP Condemns the Unilateral Military Aggression by the Government of Donald Trump Against Venezuela, in Flagrant Violation of International Law and in Defiance of the United Nations.

lution of International Law and in Defiance of the United Nations.

San Juan, January 3, 2026. — In response to the U.S. military aggression against Venezuela, the PIP expresses its most decisive repudiation of this violation of the principle of respect for the sovereignty of peoples.

We reaffirm that respect for peace, self-determination, and the dignity of peoples are non-negotiable pillars of the global order. It is urgent to restore peace and an international order guided by diplomatic dialogue. As Pope Leo XIV has stated regarding the conflict between the United States and Venezuela, it is necessary to "seek dialogue in a just manner." The President of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, recently reiterated that "there is no solution for Venezuela outside diplomacy and respect for international law."

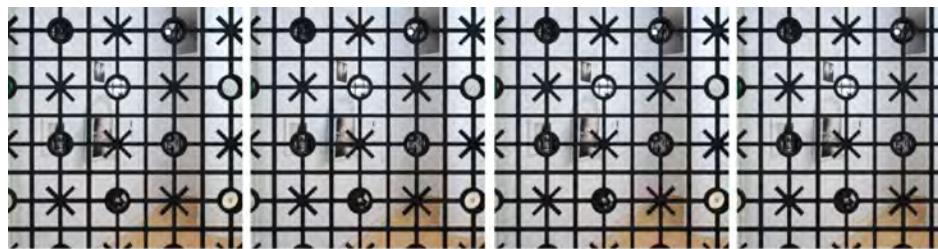


These voices converge on a universal principle: war is not the path forward.

Remaining silent in the face of unilateral military aggression not only betrays the democratic values we defend but also places regional stability at risk and, in particular, jeopardizes the security of the Puerto Rican people in the face of a conflict that could spread throughout the Caribbean and generate large-scale humanitarian, migratory, and criminal repercussions.

Today more than ever, the PIP — as a spokesperson for the unmistakable majority will of the Puerto Rican people — reaffirms its commitment to peace, diplomacy, and the defense of life throughout our hemisphere and the entire world."

José E. López



Edra Soto, 2024. Paint, Steel, finira, viewfinders, and inkjet prints,

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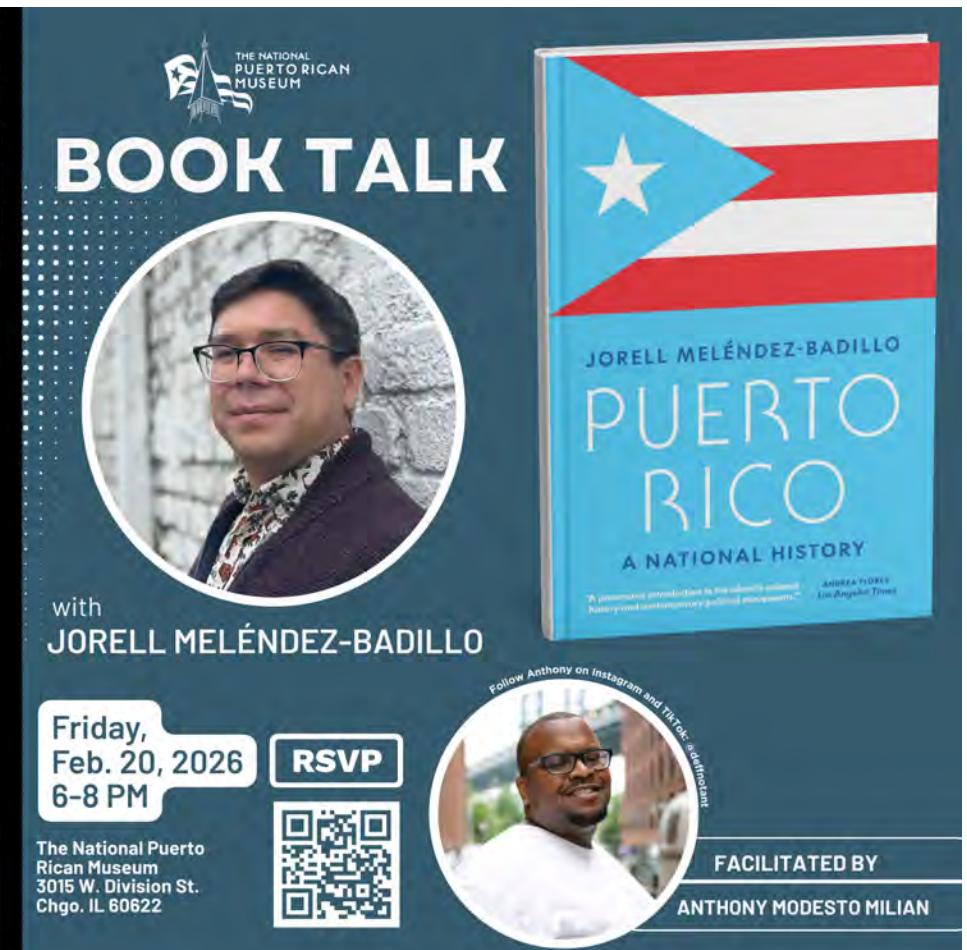
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