

The NiLP Report

on Latino Politics & Policy

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LATINO POLICY

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Weekly Review: July 26, 2015

By Angelo Falcón

The Presidential Race at the NCLR Conference.

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) held its Annual Conference this year in Kansas City during July 11-14, which, as we pointed out last week, featured the three Democratic Party's Presidential candidates but only one of the Republicans --- Ben Carson, the only person of color running in that party's primaries (*¡Aye bendito!*). All the Republicans except Donald Trump were invited. Hillary Clinton., Bernie Sanders and Martin O'Malley all addressed the conference with the main theme being Trump, making The Donald, according to the media, the conference's *piñata*. However, what was more interesting were the reports that the candidate receiving the most enthusiastic response from this Latino audience was the self-styled socialist, Sanders, and not Hillary Clinton. Sanders had at one point declined to speak at the conference due to a scheduling conflict, but then changed his mind at the last minute.



The President of NCLR, Janet Murguia, a Kansas City native most famous for calling out President Obama as the "Deporter in Chief" gave the keynote address to the conference. To see a video of her speech, [click here](#). However, as interesting, is the long preface to her speech, a major tribute to Murguia by what can only be described as mainly the Washington, DC Latino Establishment and perhaps a bit overproduced. She is presented as a God-like figure to the point of making her speech a bit anti-climactic. However, using Trump as her point of departure, she outlined the major issues facing the Latino community as leader of one of the most influential Latino civil rights organizations in the United States. (Her best line: "He is higher than one of his towers!").

Speaking of Trump, it was fun to see HUD Secretary Joaquin Castro calling out The Donald for demonizing immigrants, mostly because of ultra-conservative Iowa Republican Congressman Steve King's response: "What does Julian Castro know? Does he know that I am as Hispanic and Latino as he?" King, of course, isn't Latino. Otherwise he would be suffering from a deep self-hate. So, according to King, being German-Irish-Welsh as he means that he is a real American while being Latinos does

not.

But even more amusing was Castro's reaction to Trump's recent visit this week to Laredo, Texas when he tweeted to Mayor Pete Saenz: "@MayorPeteSaenz Donald Trump just used you and the other council members to make him look good. Embarrassing for South Texas and Hispanics." Hmm, is Castro auditioning for the Vice President spot on Hillary Clinton's ticket? Also, how do we know this all wasn't done by his identical twin brother, Congressman Julian Castro? Because, *"But they are brothers, identical brothers all the way. One pair of matching bookends, Different as night and day"* (to be sung to the theme of *The Patty Duke Show* back in the 1960s).

The "Donald Trump Act." On Thursday, the Republican majority in the US House of Representatives passed the "Enforce the Law for Sanctuary Cities Act" with a vote of 241-179 that included six Democrats joining the majority. Pejoratively labeled the "Donald Trump Act" by Democrats, the bill would block federal funding for sanctuary cities and has been proposed in reaction to the killing of Kate Steinle allegedly by an undocumented immigrant in San Francisco. Five Republicans who voted against the bill: Reps. Carlos Curbelo (Fla.), Bob Dold (Ill.), Dan Donovan (N.Y.), Pete King (N.Y.) and Dave Reichert (Wash.). On the other hand, six Democrats voted for the bill, in a break from previous immigration votes in which the party voted unanimously: Reps. Ami Bera (Calif.), Jim Cooper (Tenn.), Henry Cuellar (Texas), Bill Keating (Mass.), Collin Peterson (Minn.) and Kyrsten Sinema (Ariz.). President Obama vowed to veto the bill.

Trumping Dominicans. Commenting on why baseball is not too complex to manage, ESPN radio host Colin Cowherd explained on air that : ". . . a third of the



sport is from the Dominican Republic. The Dominican Republic has not been known in my lifetime as having world-class academic abilities. A lot of those kids come from rough backgrounds and have not had opportunities academically that other kids from other countries have." After being widely criticized for remarks and apologizing, ESPN let him go and he will now be doing sports for, guess who?

Fox! First it's Trump with the Mexicans, now it is the Dominicans . . . who is going to be next? By the way, Dominicans make up about 10 percent of Major League Baseball players, not a third. Also note that today (Sunday), Pedro Martinez and Juan Marichal, both Dominican, are entering the Major League Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, putting the total of Latino Hall of Famers at 14,.

Cuba Update. On Monday, the Cuban flag was raised over the newly-designated Embassy in Washington, DC, the first time since 54 years ago when the US broke off diplomatic relations with the country. On the same day, the US Embassy in Havana was also opened, although it would have to wait until August 14th before Secretary of State John Kerry will preside over the official flag raising there. US Senator Ted Cruz lost no time introducing an inflammatory bill to rename the street the embassy in Cuba is on as "Oswaldo Payá Way," after Cuban dissident Oswaldo Payá, who was killed in a car crash in 2012. Now there is the question of where the first Cuban consulate in the US will be located --- there's much opposition in Miami, but Tampa seems open to it. It will be



interesting to see where it will wind up. However, there are rumors that New York Congressman José Serrano is thinking of pitching the South Bronx as the place, possibly in the same building that once housed Jimmy's Bronx Café.

The opening of the embassies has generated much discussion about the nature and future of US-Cuba relations. I found a couple of stories on NPR's July 24th On The Media especially interesting in this regard: "[A Custody Battle That Shaped Diplomacy](#)" and "[Inventing Fidel Castro](#)."



IN OUT

Hispanic Journalists Group Picks New Director.

According to Veronica Villafaña's July 23rd [Media Moves](#) blog, "Two months after parting ways with Anna Lopez, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ) has hired its new executive director. The journalism non-profit announced . . . it has selected Alberto B. Mendoza 'after an exhaustive search across the country.' He'll join NAHJ on a part-time basis on August 3 and begin full-time on September 1. He'll be based in Los Angeles." For more background, read Richard Prince's take in his [Journal-isms](#) blog.

The Dark Side of Jon Stewart? As August 6th approaches as Jon Stewart's last day on The Daily Show, an interview with what was once their only Black writer provides a surprising inside look at his racial sensitivities. Wyatt Cenac was interviewed by Marc Maron on his [July 23rd WTF Podcast](#) (relevant part begins 1:15:34 into the program).

In the Latino community, there was always a feeling that The Daily Show, despite its progressivism, never really had a good representation of Latinos as guests. I remember when Alex Nogales of the National Hispanic Media Coalition wrote to Stewart a few years back to discuss this problem, but never got a response. However, in 2011, 15 years since the show premiered, they brought on their first Latino on-air talent in the body of comedienne Al Madrigal who appeared from time to time as their "Senior Latino Correspondent." But what about Latino guests?



We turned to the crack NiLP Cable TV Analytics Lab for answers. The staff there had been complaining for some that they were unhappy with their health plan and told me they would only do a limited analysis of the last two seasons, 2014-2015 (and that I should be happy they would do anything at all). These are their findings:

In 2014, *The Daily Show* had 160 episodes with 164 guests, 9 (or 5.5 percent) were Latinos: Louis C.K., Pelé, Mariano Rivera, Sonia Nazario, Aubrey Plaza, Tia Torres, Joaquin Castro, Gael Garcia Bernal and Juan Zarate.

In 2015, up to July 23rd, *The Daily Show* has had 94 episodes so far with 56 guests, 3 (or 5.4 percent) were Latinos: Marco Rubio, Jennifer Lopez, and Julian Castro. We thought about including Ernest Moniz, the Secretary of Energy, but he is of Portuguese background and we decided not to.

So, after 17 years of being on the air, Latinos in the end made up only about 5 percent of their total guests. On top of that, a review of the show's topics in 2014-15

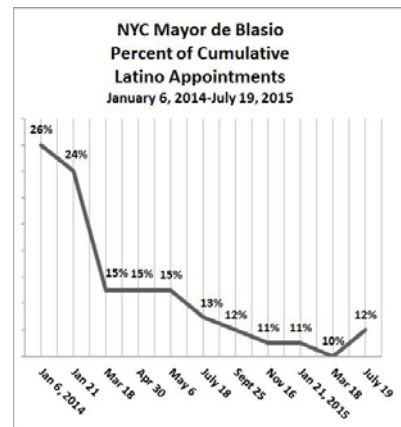
only comes up with two instances focusing on the Latino community, both covered by Madrigal.

There is no question that Jon Stewart's departure from *The Daily Show* leaves a major vacuum in serious social and political criticism in the United States. His show's poor record on Latino issues, however, makes his legacy, well, somewhat incomplete.

And did you see that study by Media Matters that found that Latinos made up only 4 percent of all the guests in the seven major English-language Sunday morning public affairs shows in the first few months of this year? Gee, maybe Jon Stewart's record here isn't so bad! To read the full report, [click here](#).

Latinos Most Underrepresented in NYC Mayor de Blasio Administration.

We at NiLP just released [our latest report tracking the level of Latino appointments](#) made by NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio since he took office last year. We found that despite Latinos making up over 29 percent of the city's population, they only comprised just under 12 percent of de Blasio's appointments in his first 19 months in office. This makes Latinos the most underrepresented group in his Administration, much more underrepresented than Blacks or Asians, but with White representing over 60 percent of his appointments while being only comprising 33 percent of the city's population. *The NiLP Latino Datanote* also looked at trends in Latino appointments, gender breakdowns, and other details.



The irony here is that Mayor de Blasio has campaigned pledging to eliminate income inequality and support diversity in the city's workforce. However, it appears that these issues are not including Latinos much, prompting us to characterize his politics in terms of our community as "trickle-down progressivism." Just this past week, NYC Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, who is Puerto Rican, lashed out publicly against the Mayor, referring to his actions on car congestion legislation as dissing her as a Latina and a woman! This was surprising since the Mayor was critical to her ascension to the Speaker's post and, up to now, they were viewed as being joined at the hip politically (kinda like a political hermaphrodite).

The Campaign for Fair Latino Representation, for which NiLP acts as a technical advisor, is a citywide coalition that has been pressing Mayor de Blasio on the need for more equitable Latino representation to his Administration. The group recently elected architect and former NYS Assemblyman Javier A. Nieves and civil rights attorney Norma Ramos as Chair and Vice, respectively. To date, the Mayor has refused to meet with these community advocates and even Speaker Mark-Viverito publicly defended the Mayor's Latino appointment record despite the criticisms. But now, apparently, she may be changing her tune on the matter. We will all wait and see what the Council Speaker's next move will be.



"Her Heart Was Enormous." This past week there were some deaths that really struck home. There was the passing of Univision co-founder Danny Villanueva, legendary entertainer Anita Velez-Mitchell, of Carmen Pietri, the sister of the late Nuyorican Poet Laureate Pedro Pietri, rapper Mexicano 777, and then this past Sunday word went out that Lydia Gonzalez-Colon passed away (1948-2015) in Philadelphia. Many times we recognize the deaths of famous people and the impact they had on our community, but then there are individuals like Lydia who was not so famous but touched so many young people both in New York City and Philadelphia. There was, after all, a reason more than 500 people attended her funeral. To her soulmate and my



longtime friend, Izzy Colon, and Wanda, Josie and the rest of the family, we extend our heartfelt love and appreciation for sharing Lydia with our community and for their own activism for the betterment of the Puerto Rican community. To view a video of the funeral and hear the many moving remembrances of Lydia, [click here](#). Hell, even former Philadelphia Councilman Angel Ortiz sounded eloquent at the funeral in his praise of Lydia. That is how inspirational memories of her are!

Puerto Rico Crisis Update. The Island's debt crisis lives on and the news continues to be mostly bad. The Congress hasn't been moving on any legislation to help Puerto Rico, the White House isn't doing much either, the bondholders are lawyering up, the Government of Puerto Rico is working on a "plan," and the exodus from Puerto Rico continues.



There were some interesting pieces by some stateside-based Puerto Ricans like Julio Ricardo Varela's "Politicians think Puerto Ricans are dumb. But we know the debt crisis is their doing" in the July 23rd [Guardian](#) and Ed Morales' "How Hedge and Vulture Funds Have Exploited Puerto Rico's Debt Crisis" in the July 21 issue of [The Nation](#), both stressing the colonial framework shaping events. On the challenges of the Puerto Rico outmigration, focusing on Florida, are Arian Campo-Flores' "Arrivals From Puerto Rico Strain U.S. Communities" in the July 20th [Wall Street Journal](#) and Marco Santana's "Professionals play big role in latest Puerto Rico migration" in the July 25th [Orlando Sentinel](#). There was also once-perennial US Supreme Court nominee and federal Judge José A. Cabranes' surprising "Let Puerto Rico declare bankruptcy" in the July 21st [Washington Post](#) since I remember him as being from the school that felt judges shouldn't take public positions on controversial issues' also see Gretchen Sierra-Zorita's "What a federal financial control board means to Puerto Rico" in the July 25th [Washington Post Congress Blog](#). Finally, there was the attempt to connect the situation in Puerto Rico with how it could affect those back in the metropolis, in "How Puerto Rico's Inability to Pay Debts Would Affect Americans and Investors" in the July 24th [Fox Business](#). Although this listing is not exhaustive, it will give you a general sense of some of the issues being discussed on Puerto Rico in the media.

And if you don't feel like reading, you can watch and listen to me pontificate on "The Puerto Rico Debt Crisis 101" in my mildly interesting interview on CUNY-TV's [July 22nd Eldridge & Co.](#) (and, yes, it's time for me to get a haircut).

The War Against The War Against All Puerto Ricans? The recent publication of Nelson Denis' book, "[The War Against All Puerto Ricans](#)" (The Nation Books) has made a big splash in terms of the issues it raises about Puerto Rico's

colonial relationship and in book sales. It has been some time since we have seen a non-fiction book about Puerto Ricans receive so much media and community attention. Besides the subject of the book, Nelson Denis, a former New York State Assemblyman, proved himself to be the consummate promoter of his book and ideas, making appearances in local and national media, and even making well-attended appearances in bookstores and other forums in Puerto Rico; his book clearly resonated with many.



Now it appears that Denis is experiencing a backlash, but not from the right as one would expect but from the Puerto Rican left on the Island! It began with a creative and critical reenactment of presentations of the book by Denis in Puerto Rico, written by the team of William García Medina, Rafael Acevedo-Cruz,

Jorge Román Ortíz and Omaris Zamora Reyes on the May 26th Latino Rebels website, "[Un caso de histeriografía: War Against All Puerto Ricans?](#)" This was followed by the scathing review by Pedro Aponte Vazquez, "[Guerra Contra Quien?](#)" in the July 13th issue of Claridad (see English translation by the author by [clicking here](#)). Then there was the equally critical review by University of Massachusetts Clinical psychologist Iris Zavala Martinez in the July issue of Compartir Es Vivir, "[Un Mirada Crítica a War Against All Puerto Ricans de Nelson Denis.](#)"

What does one make of this reaction? One explanation is that Denis, as a Nuyorican, crossed the line in writing on a subject seen as the sole purview of the left in Puerto Rico. Another is that it comes from envy given Denis' great success in promoting the book and its ideas so widely. Then there is the explanation that it is disciplinary in nature --- although Denis may have oversold his credentials as a researcher, the fact is that he isn't an academic and really has no published track record in studies



related to his book. A lot of the criticisms he got from academics had to do with inaccuracies in his facts and poor sourcing (questions were even raised of the accuracy of the quote that Denis used as the title of the book!). Some have also derided what they see as a naïve nationalism that informs Denis' worldview, which also provides for some an explanation for the popularity of his book (with some thinking that most haven't actually read it, they were just reacting to the dramatic title). I mean, I can see where a guy like Pedro Aponte Vazquez, who has written several books on Albizu and related subjects, all of a sudden wakes up to see some El Barrio lawyer like Denis get all this attention from his first try at the same subject!

In the end, it looks like Denis accomplished quite a lot in stirring some much-needed debate about the history of Puerto Rio's relationship to the United States. In the process, he got some *viejo* activists, and social critics reanimated and challenged a new generation of Puerto Ricans to take a critical look at their history. As Denis works on the Spanish version of the book, we'll see if he makes any changes based on the academic critiques presented, but I doubt if this will alter his main line of argument, or the right of Nuyoricans to interpret, as well as change, Puerto Rican history.

Forever Young? Young Lords Exhibited. It continues to fascinate me how the Young Lords, an organization that existed at its height only between 1968 and 1973 to this day (man, that's like more than 40 years ago!) inspires so many in the Puerto Rican community to be in awe of their historic fight for social justice. The exhibit, "*¡Presente!* The Young Lords in New York" is at the Bronx Museum of the Arts through October 18th; El Museo del Barrio, Manhattan, through October 17th; and at Loisaida Inc., Manhattan, through October 30th. It displays the work of a variety of artists, photographers, poets, performers and others that were a part of or inspired by the Young Lords. The coverage of this show was amazing, including major articles in the [New York Times](#) (July 23rd), [Al Jazeera American](#) (July 22nd), and [The Wall Street Journal](#) (July 14th). Not bad for a bunch of aging radicals!



Judith Escalona, the introspective publisher of the [Puerto Rico American Dream](#) website had this interesting reaction to the show on her Facebook page: "I had an insight (I think) after seeing the Young Lords exhibit and the masterful work of RoCa at El Museo del Barrio. The art world involves a fetishizing process -- as most of the way we live does. What is meant by 'post-modern' is really a fetishization of class struggle." So, does this mean that Felipe Luciano, Mickey Melendez, Denise Oliver, Iris Morales, Juan Gonzalez and the other surviving Lords have been reduced to commodities? Are they are now just a bunch of photos, artifacts, paintings, books, films and stuff like that? Scary *Das Capital* thought!

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