

# (Un)natural Languages, (Un)natural Identities: Decentering Spanish in a Curriculum for Puerto Rican Studies

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*Juan Sánchez, 1990*

*Enseñar a los niños. Teach the children.*

*medio mixto. Colección de la Compañía de Turismo de Puerto Rico*



# “Ode to the Diasporican” by Mariposa

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Some people say that I'm not the real thing  
Boricua, that is  
cause I wasn't born on the enchanted island  
cause I was born on the mainland north of  
Spanish Harlem  
cause I was born in the Bronx...

[...]

Mira a mi cara Puertorriqueña,  
Mi pelo vivo,  
Mis manos morenas.  
Mira a mi corazón  
Que se llena de orgullo  
Y dime que no soy Boricua.



[Mariposa on HBO Latino](#)

# Centro's New Curriculum (11-12/Undergrads)

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<b>Unit I</b> Rethinking Puerto Rican Identity	<b>Unit II</b> Untangling Puerto Ricans' Citizenship	<b>Unit III</b> Reimagining the Puerto Rican Family	<b>Unit IV</b> Reinterpreting Puerto Rican Signs	<b>Unit V</b> Reconfiguring Puerto Rican Borders
<u>What is diaspora?</u>	What does citizenship reveal about U.S. imperialism?	How is the "Great Puerto Rican Family" imagined?	How did Afro-Pioneros change national signs?	Are national borders real or imagined?
Are language and identity inseparable?	Are Puerto Ricans second-class citizens?	What is the relationship between family, wage labor, and migration?	What are Puerto Ricans' foundational immigrant narratives?	How is space related to race and racism?
Is Spanglish a language?	What does "having a voice without a vote" mean?	How did Puerto Rico's modernization challenge families?	Which are the main signs and symbols of Diasporicans?	How do Diasporicans challenge the center and periphery?
Have Puerto Ricans assimilated into the U.S.?	What do disasters reveal about Puerto Ricans' citizenship?	Are there other forms of kinship?	How did Nuyorican poetry transform Puerto Rican identity?	Could "real" Puerto Ricans be born and raised in any place on Earth?

# Developing a Diasporic Consciousness through Linguistic Stancemaking

The logo for CENTRO, featuring the word "CENTRO" in a bold, sans-serif font. The letters are stacked vertically, with "CEN" on top and "TRO" below it. The text is white and is set against a dark green background that is part of a white trapezoidal shape pointing to the right.

- Centro's new curriculum demonstrates the process of developing a new diasporic subjectivity through linguistic choices in four historical moments using Centro's archives.
- As we will see, this process entailed the gradual (de)centralization of standard Spanish and its decoupling from a Puerto Rican identity.
- In the end, I will show that by de-centering and de-essentializing Spanish, teachers are better prepared to challenge standardizing listening practices.

# A stance against language mixing (1940-1950s)

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Se está generalizando la costumbre de hablar, aquí en Nueva York, en un lenguaje que no es español ni inglés. [...]

No tenemos que recordar a lectores como los de este diario que el idioma es una de las características fundamentales de una nación. Si continuamos hablando en una mezcla de idiomas, terminamos por perder el dominio del español y por hablar un inglés deficiente.

No continuemos haciendo una mixture ridícula y malsonante del idioma español con el idioma inglés. Hablemos el español, si Ud. es boricua, tal y como lo hacemos en Puerto Rico, o el idioma español tal y como lo hablan en España, o en el país de vuestro origen si Ud. nació en un país de la América hispana donde se hable en español. [...]

TOYE, BORICUA :  
Por Jesus Colon  
Español o Ingles  
Se esta generalizando l la costumbre de hablar , aquí en Nueva York, en un lenguaje a que no es ni espanol ni ingles.  
Oimos personas bastante instruidas, hablando en espanol y.... de pronto cambian al ingles para mas tarde, en la misma conversacion, terminar hablando otra vez en espanol.  
Hemos llegado hasta el punto en que oimos pronunciar las palabra de l una sola oracoon, la mitad de ellas en ingles y la mitad en espanol.  
Otro defect que hemos observado es el de insistir hablando en ingles en una reunion dons la mayor parte de los alli presentes estan hablando en espanol y en donde varios de la concurrencia hablan poco o nada del idioma de Mike Gold y de Walt Whitman..  
No tenemos que recordar a lectores como los de este diario que el idioma es una de las caracteristicas fundamentales de una nacion. Si continuamos hablando en una mezcla de idiomas terminaremos por perder el dominio del ~~ex~~ espanol y por hablar un ingles deficiente.  
No continuemos haciendo una mixture ridícula y malsonante del idio y espanol con el idioma ingles. Hablemos el espanol . si

# A stance pro bilingualism (1960-1970s)

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ASPIRA OF NEW YORK, INC. Vs. THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

ASPIRA DE NUEVA YORK, INC. Vs. LA JUNTA DE EDUCACION

What is the consent decree?

PROGRAMA

To develop in the pupils the ability to understand, speak, read and write English.

To learn to Spanish the basic concepts such as mathematics, science and social studies.

To establish the qualifications of Spanish.

RESOLUTIONS, and for all the purposes of the above mentioned classes, and to make an equal treatment and distribution from 1967-1970, the participating students will spend neither time with other students.

¿Qué es el decreto por consentimiento?

PROGRAMA

Desarrollar en los alumnos la habilidad de entender, hablar, leer y escribir en idioma Inglés.

Establecer en español los conceptos básicos tales como matemáticas, ciencias y estudios sociales.

Establecer y mejorar el nivel de calificación en los alumnos del programa.

Las resoluciones arriba mencionadas tendrán efecto y plena vigencia el 1 de septiembre de 1967 y se aplicarán a los alumnos bilingües que hasta 1970, en sus cursos de estudio, participen en el programa bilingüe. La resolución "de todas las acciones de los estudiantes y no participarán en otros cursos.

Luis O. Reyes Papers. What is the consent decree?: LORe\_b06\_f07\_0001\_front.  
Center for Puerto Rican Studies Library & Archives, Hunter College, CUNY. Web.  
04 Jan 2025. <https://centroca.hunter.cuny.edu/Detail/objects/5757>

# A stance for embracing Spanglish (1980-1990s)

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9/30/86

1- There is A Spanglish phenomena on de loose — (Dead)  
Que has been around since pueblos became towns  
Infiltratingando el Americano vocabulario dream  
En los United States of multi-cultural reality,  
Whether el ghost of los founding padres (Porque  
Este pais no tiene madre) like it or not—baja!

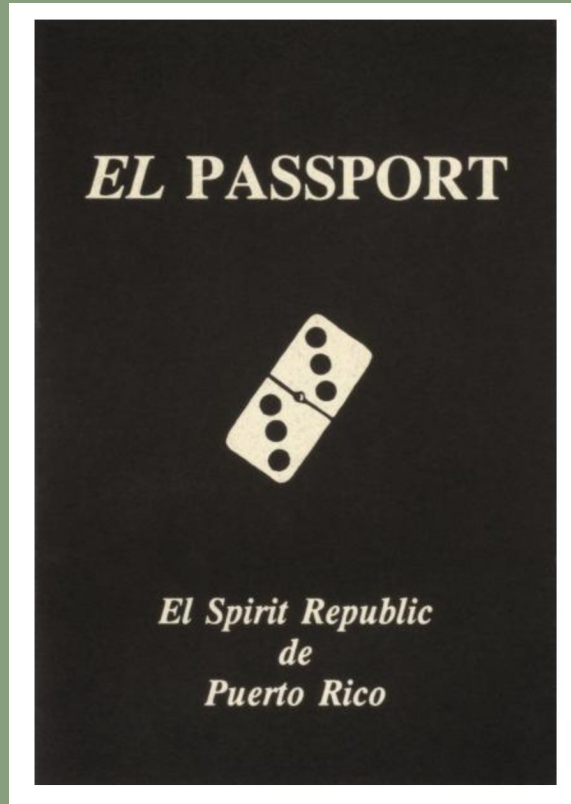
DONNA \* 4/

Spanglish is alive y well y spreading rapidly  
From city to city porque es very mind expanding  
Y demanding mas y mas y mucho mas attention,  
From el main-estream scheme of English only  
Que those human hicho beings have superimposed  
On nuestro fellow recent immigrants, cono carajo! AL



# A diasporic nation, language and identity (2000-)

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**“I humbly accept the position as the Head of State of El New Hybrid State de Nuyol, El Spirit Republic de Puerto Rico.** I would like to thank the Honorable Rev. Pedro Pietri, Adál Maldonado of El Puerto Rican Embassy and all my supporters for nominating me to be Head of State, **the state of unconfusion, the state of our subterraneo collective creative consciousness,** where we are free to rhyme anytime in any place, space and in your face for we form the power of a holy trinity race. Yes, our ancestors slaved, but there were those who prayed like the Hopi, who prophesized that there shall be a people, a rainbow people, who will help save humanity so we embrace our Boricua divinity today in the Nuyorican Café!”

—Maria Teresa “Mariposa” Fernandez



# Possibilities of Decentering Spanish

- A third-generation Puerto Rican teacher said, “I was born and raised in New York. [...] I don’t speak Spanish, although I understand some of it. Every time I visit the island, people tell me I cannot call myself ‘Boricua’ because I do not know the language. Yet, after learning about the concept of *diaspora* and reading Mariposa’s bilingual poem, I feel confident in claiming my Puerto Rican identity.”
- Similar to this teacher, I am a third generation Nuyorican, but my mother return to the island before having me. Thus, I have grappled with similar identity challenges, feeling discouraged from claiming my NuyoRicanness due to my Spanish-dominant speech and place of birth.
- By decentering Spanish, this curriculum prompted a moment of diasporic recognition through linguistic attunement. Aware of our common displacement and our “dislocated” linguistic practices, we built a sense of belonging to the Puerto Rican community of New York and to each other.

**CEN  
TRO** CENTER FOR  
PUERTO RICAN  
STUDIES  
**HUNTER** CUNY

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# Website Mock-up


CEN  
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LearnDash DEMO

Courses ▾ Quiz Assignments Profile Instructor Role Dashboard

Your Name ▾

## Rethinking Puerto Ricanness, Reframing Puerto Rican Diasporas

 **42% COMPLETE** Last activity on November 27, 2024 7:22 pm **IN PROGRESS**

 **Course**

 **Materials**

This unit of the Diasporican Ed Program will teach you:

- How to use vocabulary related to diasporas with emphasis on Caribbean and Puerto Rican communities in New York City and the Caribbean archipelago.
- To analyze the relationship between the development of cultural nationalism and the creation of a Puerto Rican identity.
- To identify the challenges and prejudices many Nuyoricans and other Diasporican communities face.
- To explain how Puerto Rican diasporas challenge essentializing notions of language,