

The Advocate

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Mighty Vieques Has Stirred!

First they ignore you, then they ridicule you, then they smite you. Then you win. - Mohandas K. Gandhi

By Ruben Ortiz

Puerto Rico has been in the news a lot more than a lot of people would like recently, and sadly it has been for the wrong reasons.

A very highly anticipated boxing match gets fixed in favor of the Puerto Rican fighter. That was bad enough, but then the citizenry gets a little too involved, and two Mexican immigrants are now dead.

Then the president does something for which I still don't understand his reasons: he grants clemency to 16 Puerto Rican political prisoners, (11 of whom accept it and its draconian parole conditions), freeing them from jail to a chorus of wails and gnashing teeth from every political and law-enforcement faction in the country. I still can't figure out what part of his agenda this action fulfilled. I think it backfired. But I digress.

The one issue of real, lasting, (in its lessons), righteous, and justified interest as far as Puerto Rico is concerned is the Vieques tragedy. It has finally become untenable, even to those Puerto Ricans who want U.S. statehood for Puerto Rico, and would normally side with the invader, even at the expense of their motherland. It's about time Vieques had its day in court.

A little background: Puerto Rico has known about evil empires all through its history. I wish I could tell you about the hardships the island's original inhabitants native Arawak people (commonly and erroneously known as "Tainos", which is simply a word in their lexicon that meant "good") suffered at the hands of the invading Caribes (who lent the sea its name). But the Arawak didn't keep very good records. Well, they didn't keep any record that any historical authority figure today will lend any credence to. So, we start from where there is consensus about the start of Puerto Rican history. And what do you know: the first time Puerto Rico is

mentioned in history, it is already a colony. An island at the corner of the Antilles row, the one at the very corner of the turn to lee- or windward; the door to the Caribbean. For a sea-going nation on this hemisphere, its strategic importance is paramount.

Vieques is a very much smaller island to the east of Puerto Rico. The United States won Puerto Rico from Spain in a high-stakes poker game called the Hispano-American War. And it was immediately put to use. And the people living there? Well, they were dealt with by force or through gifts and concessions, so that they wouldn't interfere with the smooth running of the island as a naval base and never thinking of how it affected these people to live on a military base.

There was one instance in which the Puerto Ricans were made to feel appreciated: as all other colonizing empires have since roman times, the U.S. inducted Puerto Ricans into its armed forces. Why, they were even made U.S. citizens-without consultation, never mind consent to make it nice and proper for Puerto Ricans to die for "their country." (That's a dirty little secret the U.S. doesn't like publicized. It galls me that prospective employers ask me for my green card because my name isn't Applegate or Rutherford.)

In 1938 the U.S. Navy begins to hold training exercises on Vieques. The Viequenses were herded and bunched up close to the center of the island. The Navy kept the sides as its playground (well, they're the ones who called it "wargames.") The tragedy starts here: the Navy's playground takes up 75% of the island, and the parts of the island they play hold land with the most potential, for farming and building.

Since then the Navy's abuse of Vieques and its people has continued, and worsened. The Viequenses are left with a dear few acres of arable land. This land isn't capable of producing enough crops to meet the demand, in either quantity or variety. And working in construction or on mainland Puerto Rico at a pharmaceutical plant pays much better, with less toil. So, it's up to the fishermen to try to fill the food

Escape From Park Ave: The Tragic Saga of One of CUNY's Own

by Frank Benjamin

CHAPTER III: The Road Scholar Begins His Education

After a seemingly endless ride to Cambridge High School, in which Ashley directed her entire conversation solely to Frank about the great summer she had had slumming it in Nantucket as a part-time waitress at the Blue Dog, Frank was now returning across the 96th street crossway through Central Park on his way to pick up Mr. Applebee. The phone rang.

"Hello Frank. It's Donald. Where are you?"

"Well, I was a bit delayed getting Ashley to school, but I should be by the building in about 10 minutes."

"Well, make it as fast as you can. I've got a big client with me this morning and I don't want anything to go wrong. I'll see you in ten." The phone hung up before Frank could complete the words "will do."

Mr. Applebee and a man much taller than him dressed in a pinstriped blue suit were waiting under the green awning. As Frank pulled up alongside the curb, Watson scrambled over to open the car door, as the two businessmen climbed into the back seat.

"Frank, I want you to meet Mr. Carson. He's the President of Carson Cola. We hope to be doing some great work with his company for many years to come. Mr. Carson, this is my driver Frank Benjamin. Frank just graduated from college and is living with us while help-

ing to tutor my daughter Ashley get into Yale. He came strongly recommended from the tutoring service."

"Pleased to meet you sir," Frank said turning his head to acknowledge the King of Cola, whose face Frank had often seen on t.v. starring in his own company's commercial.

"Good Morning," Mr. Carson replied.

"Frank here is thinking about what he wants to do now that he's graduated from the top of his class at college. Which college was that again, Frank?"

Frank reminded Mr. Applebee the State University from which he held a B.S. in communications.

"Ah, Virginia," Mr. Carson, apparently impressed, commented. "We have one of our most up-to-date bottling plants in that state. It's going to end up saving us a great deal of money if the strike ever ends."

"I hear that it only requires two people to run

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The World Rules

By C.M. Daley

The planet would run more beautifully if the world were my classroom. I'm not talking about the world being a place where I learn, because I have extensive life experience and accumulating graduate degrees for that. I'm talking about a world where I am the teacher and as a citizen of the world, you follow the rules I've constructed because deep down inside, everyone wants an "A". You may claim a "C" is good enough because you passed, or a "B" is splendid because we all know that letter infers "good," but if you search within yourself, you'll admit that an "A" fills you with its shape until that pointy little top makes you hold your head a little higher. Now all you have to do is follow a few rules.

1. Respect me, yourself, and others. Of course, this is my fantasy, so respecting me comes first, but I guarantee that keeping me happy releases my generosity, good will, and the gate behind which hide all those "A"s that are yours for the taking. Respecting others - hearing what they may have to say and not laughing when they say something that betrays their naivete or ignorance, directing your comments in response to theirs as if they are worthy of the dialogue whether you believe that or not, and taking something you don't understand as a challenge rather than an opportunity for rebuke - will make the world a fete of constructive critical growth. Now if you respect others and me, why do you also have to respect yourself? Isn't that getting a little pushy? No. Don't come to class if you can't look yourself in the eye, because in this world, active participation is worth a hefty amount of your grade, and that requires a self present to participate.

2. Pay attention. This simplest of rules is also the most complex. Where does casual listening (not acceptable) cross the line

into paying attention? The financial metaphor inherent in the phrase should not be ignored; you give something of yourself - compassion, ire, disgust, understanding - when you make a deposit in this world. Paying attention is not an action, but a reaction. I expect my students to absorb what their classmates, readings, or I say, take that information, and give it back (or keep it for later) in another form colored by their reaction. I tell my students that all they know of the world is what they filter through their senses. If you filter nothing, if you leave the money on the steps of the credit union, you live a little less in the world. Bankruptcy is not an option.

3. Do the reading. In my ideal world, are we all well-versed in Dante, Shakespeare, Dickinson, Woolf, and Morrison? Sure, but I'm an educator, not a tyrant. Every situation has its own reading list. If you wish to be a great lover, read Casanova. If you wish to be a great gossip, read Hedda Hopper. If you wish to be a great sadist, read de Sade. By not reading, you're depriving yourself and your situation the potential it deserves. All these writers have volunteered to do the dirty work for you. If it makes you feel better, think of it as choosing to be lazy. But above all, just think of it. Be prepared. Do your homework. Come to the world knowing more rather than knowing less.

I want you to take a minute and imagine the ramifications if everyone in the world showed respect, paid attention, and did the reading. I'm not saying these are the only rules for a better world, but too many rules become a list - like the top 50 films of 1999, or the best quotations about cats - that you skim to get the general gist rather than taking it to heart. I don't ask a lot of the world, but I'm prepared to give an "A" to anyone who shows the effort. Get that little pointy top to do its thing in your head.

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The Thing About Columnists...

By Dave Gerardi

You ever have one of those lucid moments of consciousness when the spin of the world grants you a perfect understanding of the chaos of being? Me neither. And neither does anybody else. Yet, read any newspaper column, read any editorial, and you'd have thought they bought Truth wholesale from the local warehouse. This, of course, is ludicrous. You can't buy Truth wholesale. Retail price is \$19.95 at a little bodega in downtown— . . . but I've said too much.

Why columnists think they're so damn special escapes me. They do. That's not at issue. They type inches and inches of fervent sentiment. Paragraphs of anecdotes. Pages of opinions.

For naught. After all, it's just their opinion, educated or otherwise. Leaves of thought on the floor of an autumn forest. Ready to burn.

And when they're not conjuring brilliant and insightful metaphors like the one above, they're already stressing about next week's deadline. When they'll have to come up with some more lofty nonsense to save the human race. Again.

You begin to see the difficulty. As such, columnists utilize certain . . . 'tricks of the trade' to sound slightly more perceptive than your usual, garden variety preceptors. One such trick is to occasionally mix in words from a foreign language. Latin is terrific for this purpose and works ad infinitum. See? It's that easy.

German is also effective. How stupid, after all, would U2 look if they called Achtung, Baby! 'Look Out, Baby!' Pret—ty lame, Milhous.

Statistics are the next best tool to convince someone of the value of your words without actually saying anything. The reason being that if you can't remember an appropriate one, you can make it up. Suppose you're arguing for the abolition of the Twinkie as a viable nutritional supplement. You could add in support of your thesis, "well according to the Patterson Study in the Mineola Journal of Gastrointestinal Science . . ." Sure there's no Mineola Journal of Gastrointestinal Science, but your readers don't know that.

The capper, naturally, is name-dropping. "If you've read Neuhausen, you'd know . . ." and "Steinermann agrees that . . ." are all valid techniques. Fortunately, it doesn't matter that you've never read, heard of, been privy to gossip about, or slept with either of them. What counts is that the columnist uses these names with utmost conviction. German ones seem to work particularly well.

If desperation seeps in, cite Heidegger as an authority. No one understands him (I'm beginning to think 'dasein' is the philosophical equivalent for baby talk), but certain folks seem to think Being and Time holds the answers for nearly everything (except maybe that Twinkie argument).

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