



¡El Coqui Libre!

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PUERTO RICANS TURN THE WHITNEY'S LOBBY INTO A DANCE FLOOR...

By Yara Simon, Remezcla

As Bad Bunny and El Alfa's "La Romana" blared through the speakers in the lobby of the Whitney Museum of American Art, protesters held signs that read "tear gas is deadly," "humanity has no borders," and "who profits from tear gas?"

The protesters – who belong to several different grassroots group – were led by Decolonize This Place, which launched a [nine-week protest](#) calling for the removal of Warren B. Kanders, vice chairman of the Whitney board of directors. Kanders is the owner of Safariland, a company that produces tear gas and manufactures defense weapons. This weekend's protest (the sixth installment of the nine-week series) took place just days ahead of May Day. On that same day in 2018,

Puerto Rican protesters on the island ended up sustaining [tear gas and pepper spray](#) injuries when speaking out against the US Fiscal Control Board and austerity measures passed. Police used the tear gas and pepper spray to break up the mostly peaceful protests.

That's why this weekends protest focused on Kanders and his role in the violence perpetrated against their community, but demonstrators also spoke out against Puerto Rico's colonial status and the \$72 billion debt. Members of Comité Boricua En La Diaspora helped coordinate the event,



All Photo credit goes to Hyperallergic.

which made the museum's lobby a dance floor.

"I come from a colonized land," said one of the group's members Andres Rodriguez in a speech, according to [Hyperallergic](#). "I don't have a nation. It was stripped away from me by force. As a Puerto Rican, I don't have power over myself. I don't have power of my land."

As different songs played over speakers, there were some museum attendees who complained, explaining that they don't expect to have to deal with this level of noise since they paid for admission.

But as The Whitney, which has historically shut out people of color (both through its programming and admission fees), supports someone who has hurt their community, protesters simply responded to complaints by getting louder and making sure that anyone who visited the museum understood their message.

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NEGLECT, DISRESPECT OF PUERTO RICO BY TRUMP ADMINISTRATION CONTINUES

By Barrington M. Salmon

NNPA Contributor

President Donald Trump reignited the antipathy he has towards Puerto Rico when, in a recent meeting with Congressional Republicans, he reiterated his desire to deny any but the most basic funds to Puerto Rico.

He told senators in a closed-door meeting on March 26 he thinks Puerto Rico got too much funding compared to mainland states like Florida, Georgia and Texas. In a CNN exclusive by Jim Acosta and Kevin Liptak, Trump said he is willing to supplement a shortfall in the island's food stamp program to the tune of \$600 million but refuses to do more.

This posture infuriated Gov. Ricardo Rosselló who reacted angrily to Trump's comments, calling him a bully and accusing him of ignoring the island's dire post-hurricane needs. Rosselló told CNN that he would not sit back and allow his officials to be bullied by the White House.

"If the bully gets close, I'll punch the bully in the mouth," he said. "It would be a mistake to confuse courtesy with courage."

In various media reports, Rosselló described the president's remarks as "irresponsible, regrettable and, above all, unjustified," and "below the dignity of a sitting president."

"I invite the president to stop listening to ignorant and completely wrong advice," Rosselló added in a statement last week. "Instead he should come to Puerto Rico to hear firsthand from the people on the ground. I invite him to put all of the resources at his disposal to help Americans in Puerto Rico, like he did for Texas and Alabama. No more, no less ... What I am aiming to do is make sure that reason prevails, that empathy prevails, that equality prevails and that we can have a discussion."

Trump has complained repeatedly that Puerto Rican government officials are wasting the money it has already received, a statement that Rosselló strenuously pushed back against.

"He treats us as second-class citizens, that's for sure," he said. "And my consideration is I just want the opportunity to explain to him why the data and information he's getting is wrong. I don't think getting into a kicking and screaming match with the President does any good. I don't think anyone can beat the President in a kicking and screaming match. What I am aiming to do is make sure reason prevails, that empathy prevails, that equality prevails, and that we can have a discus-

Both Rosselló and San Juan Mayor Carmen Yulín Cruz, have sought meetings with Trump for months but he has refused. Rosselló met with White House officials and was also on Capitol Hill last week discussing the prospects of Puerto Rican statehood with lawmakers.

Florida Sen. Marco Rubio said Trump supports the federal government offering \$600 million to Puerto Rico to bridge a food stamp shortfall caused by commonwealth officials slashing benefits, but the president is resistant to the US government sending disaster aid dollars and money to rebuild antiquated water systems and make them more resilient to future storms.

Overall, more than 580,000 people in Puerto Rico rely on the food stamp program and more than 40 percent of them live below the poverty line, Rossello said.

According to the Associated Press, the Government Accountability Office estimates that Puerto Rico will need about \$132 billion to rebuild from Maria. And so far, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has obligated almost \$4 billion in public assistance grant funding to the island and Congress has released \$11 billion.

The Democratic House pulled together an almost \$14 billion aid package that sat in the Senate for weeks, then Trump's stubborn refusal to approve additional funding led them to block a \$13.5 billion Republican disaster aid bill on April 2. The Dems argued that without more adequate aid for Puerto Rico they wouldn't support the bill.

Trump criticized Democrats via Twitter for "fighting" the disaster relief bill and he continues to argue that Puerto Rican officials are using federal funds to pay off its debts, an assertion the officials strenuously deny.

"I want to be very clear: Not a single federal dollar has been used to make debt payments," Rosselló said. "Mr. President: Enough with the insults and demeaning mischaracterizations. We are not your political adversaries; we are your citizens,"

According media reports, Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vermont), the ranking Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, said Trump was blaming Puerto Rico for failing to spend money that his own administration was refusing to turn over to the island.

"This administration cannot simultaneously hold up recovery dollars for Puerto Rico, and then point to Puerto Rico's failure to spend it as an excuse not to provide additional assistance," Leahy

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said during debate on the Senate floor.

“I’ve given them more money than they’ve ever got,” Trump told reporters at the White House. “Puerto Rico has been taken care of better by Donald Trump than by any living human being. I think the people of Puerto Rico understand it.

Since the storms, Trump has congratulated himself, claiming that the recovery efforts were ‘incredibly successful’ and he praised FEMA and law enforcement as well.

In a recent article in *The Independent*, a British publication, acting White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney is quoted as saying he believes Puerto Rico will need to find its own way out of the debt crisis. Those knowledgeable about what happens in the White House also say they believe he is encouraging Trump’s negative view of the island.

On April 1, Trump tweeted: “The people of Puerto Rico are GREAT but politicians are incompetent or corrupt. Puerto Rico got far more money than Florida and Texas combined, yet their government can’t do anything right, the place is a mess, nothing works.” San Juan Mayor Carmen Yulín Cruz, who has been trading insults with Trump since shortly after the storms, issued a statement last week saying Trump’s comments are a reminder that he “cannot lead.”

“When faced with a devastating human crisis, Trump augmented it because he made it about himself, not about saving our lives,” she said. “When expected to show empathy, he showed disdain and lack of respect; it seems to be too hard for Trump to know the facts, so he continues to lie about the aid sent to Puerto Rico and about the federal inadequacy towards Puerto Rico.”

As the politicians squabble, the 3.2 million residents of the island commonwealth are still struggling to cope with the crippling and devastating effects of massive back-to-back Category 4 and 5 storms in September 2017. Hurricane Maria destroyed the island’s electrical grid and cellphone towers. In addition, about 80 percent of transmission lines are down and 100 percent of the wires connecting homes and businesses were demolished.

Damage to the island’s infrastructure, especially in the interior and remote villages and communities, left many roads impassable and residents left to fend for themselves. Most affected were the elderly, people needing dialysis or operations for other illnesses, those suffering from asthma and other respiratory diseases, the poor, residents living in poverty, people living in mountain regions, near rivers and in the heart of the commonwealth’s rugged interior and those who live in the southeastern part of the island.

It is now acknowledged that more than 4,000 people died during and after the storms.

The entire ordeal is exacerbated by the fact that Puerto Rico has been in an economic tailspin for the past 12 years. A federally appointed Financial Oversight and Management Board reported last year that the Commonwealth had \$74 billion in bond debt and \$49 billion in unfunded pension liabilities as of May 2017. The Control Board has implemented draconian austerity measures which has led to demonstrations and unrest since the hurricanes.

Although Puerto Ricans are American citizens, they do not have a voting member of Congress and cannot vote for president. Puerto Ricans have chafed under America’s colonial yolk and that issue is again in plain view with a president who is unapologetic in his support of white nationalists and their agenda, and quite comfortable expressing his disdain for Puerto Rico, as he has towards other majority Black and brown nations.

Critics, pundits and academics say it’s impossible to ignore the role race plays in Trump’s treatment of Puerto Ricans.

In an interview on Tuesday, Rosselló reminded people that Puerto Rico’s population is almost entirely Latino and said that historically, there have been “ethnic undertones” to the treatment of Puerto Ricans by Washington.

“We don’t want special treatment. We just want equal treatment,” he said.

Dr. Lauren Lluveras said Trump has racialized the federal response and wonders in an article titled, *‘Is Racial Bias Driving Trump’s*

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Neglect of Puerto Rico? if racial bias fuels his behavior.

“The island is so crippled in part thanks to the federal government’s underwhelming early hurricane response,” said Dr. Lluveras, Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute for Urban Policy Research and Analysis, University of Texas in Austin. “The historic storm played its role, of course, destroying homes, triggering mudslides and rendering roadways impassible.”

“But the Trump administration delayed dispatching military personnel and material relief until after the hurricane made landfall, and let the Jones Act waiver lapse, reducing the number of ships that can bring aid to the island. These actions have slowed recovery considerably.”

Political Economist Pedro Cabán, an expert in Puerto Rican political and economic change, agreed, saying in a 2017 Jacobin Magazine article titled, *‘Catastrophe and Colonialism’* that Hurricane Maria brutally exposed the crisis of Puerto Rico’s colonial status.

“The Donald Trump administration’s response to the crisis reveals that Puerto Ricans are racialized as subordinate, despite their US citizenship, said Dr. Cabán, Professor of Latin American, Caribbean and US Latino Studies at University at the State University of New York in Albany. “Trump’s racially charged statements resurrected long dormant, degrading characterizations of Puerto Ricans as lacking the capacity and will to fend for themselves.”

FIU’s Dr. Danielle Pilar Cleland said the worst hurricane to hit Puerto Rico in more than 80 years has racialized Puerto Ricans.

“Puerto Rico occupied an elite position in the Caribbean and was considered one of the whiter Caribbean islands, but they’re being racialized,” said Dr. Cleland, assistant professor in the Department of Politics & International Relations at Florida International University’s Cuban Research Institute. “They’ve been racialized as non-whites in ways they haven’t before. This is causing them to change their perspective as it relates to who they are. That component is something to watch as people re-envision where they stand in the world.”

**SAVE THE DATE: SUMMER FREEDOM MARCH 2019
SATURDAY, JULY 27TH, 2019 at 1pm
IN THE SOUTH BRONX! CHECK www.ProLibertad.org
for more information!**





PROLIBERTAD RESOURCE PAGE:

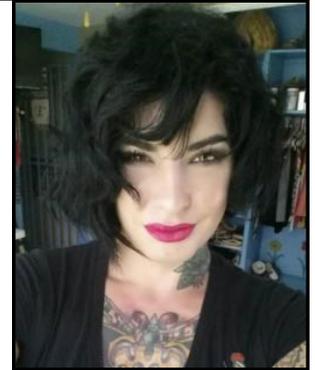
SIGN THE PETITION TO FREE NINA DROZ FRANCO:

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SEND A LETTER TO THE U.N. HIGH COMMISSIONER OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN GENEVA FOR ANA BELEN MONTES:

<http://www.prolibertad.org/u-n-campaign-for-ana-belen>

SEND NINA DROZ FRANCO A LETTER, CARD, OR POSTCARD:



Nina Droz-Franco
#50427-069
FCI Tallahassee
Federal Correctional
Institution
501 Capital Circle, NE
Tallahassee, FL 32301

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You have the power to free Nina and Ana.
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- Organize a community workshop;
- Put together a letter writing night;
- Dedicate a mass to the prisoners.

**Come to one of our meetings!
Contact us at 718-601-4751!**



ProLibertad Freedom Campaign

For over 25 years, the ProLibertad Freedom Campaign has been working for the release of the Puerto Rican Political Prisoners. With the release of 11 of the Political Prisoners in September 1999, we re-dedicated our efforts to securing the freedom of the remaining Puerto Rican political prisoners. Through educational events, lobbying and public pressure work and activities it is our goal to secure the freedom of these patriots whose only "crime" has been the love of their home land, Puerto Rico. We support the release of All U.S.

held Political Prisoners, oppose the U.S. colonial control of Puerto Rico, oppose U.S. imperialism throughout the world, and the U.S. military presence in Vieques. For more information **Contact us at:**
ProLibertad@Hotmail.com, at 718-601-4751, or visit our website www.ProLibertad.org