When I Was Puerto Rican

Debunks the pervasive and self-congratulatory myth that our country is proudly founded by and for immigrants, and urges readers to embrace a more complex and honest history of the United States. Whether in political debates or discussions about immigration around the kitchen table, many Americans, regardless of party affiliation, will say proudly that we are a nation of immigrants. In this bold new book, historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz asserts this ideology is harmful and dishonest because it serves to mask and diminish the US’s history of settler colonialism, genocide, white supremacy, slavery, and structural inequality, all of which we still grapple with today. She explains that the idea that we are living in a land of opportunity—founded and built by immigrants—was a convenient response by the ruling class and its brain trust to the 1960s demands for decolonialization, justice, reparations, and social equality. Moreover, Dunbar-Ortiz charges that this feel good—but inaccurate—story promotes a benign narrative of progress, obscuring that the country was founded in violence as a settler state, and imperialist since its inception. While some of us are immigrants or descendants of immigrants, others are descendants of white settlers who arrived as colonizers to displace those who were here since time immemorial, and still others are descendants of those who were kidnapped and forced here against their will. This paradigm shifting new book from the highly acclaimed author of An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States charges that we need to stop believing and perpetuating this simplistic and a historical idea and embrace the real (and often horrific) history of the United States.

Punctuated by marches across the United States in the spring of 2006, immigrant rights has reemerged as a significant and highly visible political issue. Immigrant Rights in the Shadows of U.S. Citizenship brings prominent activists and scholars together to examine the emergence and significance of the contemporary immigrant rights movement. Contributors place the contemporary immigrant rights movement in historical and comparative contexts by looking at the ways immigrants and their allies have staked claims to rights in the past, and by examining movements based in different communities around the United States. Scholars explain the evolution of immigration policy, and analyze current conflicts around issues of immigrant rights; activists engaged in the current movement document the ways in which coalitions have been built among immigrants from different nations, and between immigrant and native born peoples. The essays examine the ways in which questions of immigrant rights engage broader issues of identity, including gender, race, and sexuality.

Using an interdisciplinary approach, Healing Memories analyzes the ways that Puerto Rican women authors use their literary works to challenge historical methodologies that have silenced the historical experiences of Puerto Rican women in the United States. Following Aurora Levins Morales’s alternative historical methodology she calls “curanderita history,” this work analyzes the literary work of authors, including Aurora Levins Morales, Nicholaas Mohr, Esmeralda Santiago, and Judith Ortiz Cofer, and the ways they create medicinal histories that not only document the experiences of migrant women but also heal the trauma of their erasure from mainstream national history. Each analytical chapter focuses on the various methods used by each author including using the literary space as an archive, reclaiming memory, and (re)writing cultural history, all through a feminist lens that centers the voices and experiences of Puerto Rican women. One of “The Best Memoirs of a Generation” (Oprah’s Book Club): a young woman’s journey from the mango groves and barrios of Puerto Rico to Brooklyn, and eventually on to Harvard In a childhood full of tropical beauty and domestic strife, poverty and tenderness, Esmeralda Santiago learned the proper way to eat a guava, the sound of tree frogs, the taste of morcilla, and the formula for ushering a dead baby’s soul to heaven. But when her mother, Nami, a force of nature, takes off to New York with her seven, soon to be eleven children, Esmeralda, the oldest, must learn new rules, a new language, and eventually a new identity. In the first of her three acclaimed memoirs, Esmeralda brilliantly recreates her tremendous journey from the idyllic landscape and tumultuous family life of her earliest years, to translating for her mother at the welfare office, and to high honors at Harvard. Twenty-five celebrated Latino writers delight and move us with their recollections of Christmas in this splendid holiday extravaganza. From Julia Alvarez’s tale of how Santiól delivered a beloved uncle from political oppression to Junot Diaz’s story of his own uneasy assimilation on his first Christmas in America, to Sandra Cisneros’s poignant memories of her late father’s holiday dinners, Las Christmas gives us true stories from writers of many traditions—memories of Christmas and Hanukkah that vividly capture the pride and pain, joy and heartbreak, that so often accompany the holidays in the Americas. Richly illustrated and embellished with songs and poems, along with recipes for an unforgettable Christmas dinner--from traditional sweet tamales to Puerto Rican asopao (stew) and coconut (coconut eggnog)--this is an enduring treasury of Latino writing to read again and again. A heartwarming holiday gift.

Drawn to the exotic island of Puerto Rico by the diaries of an ancestor who traveled there with Ponce de León, Ana Cubillas becomes involved with enamored twin brothers Ramon and Inocente before convincing them to claim a sugar plantation they have inherited. By the end of the novel, Ana has lost one of her lovers and is engaged to another man. Now, the dashing Dr. X is moving to Charlotte, North Carolina, and Zadie and Emma must brace themselves for a meeting with the man who had such a devastating impact on their personal and professional lives and who was at the epicenter of two tragedies that almost derailed their careers. As buried secrets are unearthed, these two women will test the limits of friendship once more, with unforeseen and far-reaching consequences”--

FINALIST FOR THE NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE AWARD From prize-winning author Bobbie Ann Mason, a brilliantly wrought novel about the first woman to give birth to quintuplets in early 1900s America. Set in the apocalyptic atmosphere of 1900—a time when many Americans were looking for signs foretelling the end of the world—Feather Crowns is the story of a young woman who unintentionally creates a national sensation. A farm wife living near the small town of Hopewell, Kentucky, Christanna Wheeler gives birth to the first recorded set of quintuplets in North America. Christie is suddenly thrown into a swirling storm of public attention. Hundreds of strangers descend on her home, all wanting to see and touch the “miracle babies.” The fate of the babies and the bizarre events that follow their births propel Christie and her husband far from home, on a journey that exposes them to the turbulent pageant of life at the beginning of the modern era. Richly detailed and poignant, Feather Crowns focuses on one woman but opens out ultimately into the chronicle of a time and a people. Written in beautiful, lyrical prose, the novel is a lyrical ode to a farming community to a fire-and-brimstone revival camp, from traveling shows to the nation’s capital. Moving through the center of it all is Christie, a charming, headstrong, loving woman who struggles heroically to come to terms with the extraordinary events of her long life. Feather Crowns is an American parable of profound resonance. Spellbindingly readable, it is a novel of classic stature that confirmed Bobbie Ann Mason as one of America’s most important writers. Seminar paper from the year 2011 in the subject American Studies - Literature, grade: 1,3, LMU Munich (America-Institut), course: Ethnicity and American Identity in Contemporary Fiction, language: English, abstract: Esmeralda Santiago’s When I Was Puerto Rican was her first autobiographic novel and it was the precursor of two following memoirs: Almost a Woman and The Turkish Lover. In When I Was Puerto Rican Santiago tells of her early childhood during the 1950s and ’60s. The story told in the novel starts in Puerto Rico at Santiago’s age of four up to the age of thirteen when she immigrates with her mother and her then six siblings to the US to live in Brooklyn, New York. Her memoir does not only show the difficulty of switching between two different cultures and mentalities, American and Puerto Rican, but it also portrays the coming of age process of a girl who has to find a balance between her individual desires and expectations of her surrounding
world. The novel reveals the Santiago family's dealings with the pitfalls of poverty and their dreams of a better life. This family experiences life in all varieties: they are moving from the rural town of Macún to the urban area of Santurce, a district of Puerto Rico's capital San Juan. The family's destiny as a whole unity is yet only a framing plot. The novel illustrates the struggle of understanding the world from a child's perspective. In the case of young Esmeralda it is especially hard to understand the dynamics of her unmarried parents' relationship. For her it is a challenging rethinking process to learn how to tell from her parents' behavior, who is right and who is wrong. She also longs for appreciation called forth by sibling rivalry and the maternal responsibility for her younger sisters and brothers make Esmeralda question woman- and manhood, which eventually leads her to an inner rebellion. In When I Was Puerto Rican Santiago shares the beginning of her search for the intricate question of her own sexuality. She unveils her solitary way to find femininity, how she had to find the answers to her questions all by herself, due to the omnipresent secretiveness about sexuality. Santiago explains how her younger self tried to unfold the mystery of her mother's constant but unexplained warning of being casi señorita—almost a young lady. This memoir illustrates the transformation from an inexperienced girl to a teenager, who tries to define herself and figure out what she wants and expects from life. Transgender indie electronica singer-songwriter Rae Spoon has six albums to their credit, including 2012’s I Can’t Keep All of Our Secrets. This first book by Rae (who uses "they" as a pronoun) is a candid, powerful story about a young person growing up queer in a strict Pentecostal family in rural Canada. The narrator attends church events and Billy Graham rallies faithfully with their family before discovering the music that becomes their salvation and means of escape. As their father's schizophrenia causes their parents' marriage to unravel, the narrator finds solace and safety in the company of their siblings. In their nascent feelings for a girl at school, and in their growing awareness that they are not the person their parents think they are. With a heart as big as the prairie sky, this is a quietly devastating, heart-wrenching coming-of-age book about escaping dogma, surviving abuse, finding love, and risking everything for acceptance. Rae Spoon lives in Montreal, Quebec. Coach Papa Bear wants his team to play fair. But the other coach just wants to win. The Berenstein Bears Play a Good Game shows that players and coaches should act in a way that pleases God. Magic, sexual tension, high comedy, and intense drama move through an enchanted yet harsh autobiography, in the story of a young girl who leaves rural Puerto Rico for New York's tenements and a chance for success. MANY CULTURES * ONE WORLD "Boricua is what Puerto Ricans call one another as a term of endearment, respect, and cultural affirmation; it is a timeless declaration that transcends gender and color. Boricua is a powerful word that tells the origin and history of the Puerto Rican people." --From the Introduction From the sun-drenched beaches of a beautiful, flamboyan-covered island to the cool, hard pavement of the fierce South Bronx, Puerto Rico's remarkable journey through the years is one of rich struggle, courage, strength, fierce passions, and dangerous politics—and it is a story that continues to be told today. Long ignored by Anglo literature studies, here are more than fifty selections of poetry, fiction, plays, essays, monologues, screenplays, and speeches from some of the most vibrant and original voices in Puerto Rican literature. "Jack Agüeros * Miguel Algarin * Julio de Burgos * Pedro Albizu Campos * Lucky CienFuegos * Judit Cofe * Jesus Colon * Victor Hernández Cruz * José de Diego * Martín Espada * Sandra Maria Esteves * Ronald Fernandez * José Luis Gonzalez * Migene Gonzalez-Wippler * Maria Graniela de Pruetzel * Pablo Guzman * Felipe Luciano * René Marqués * Luis Muñoz Marín * Nicholasa Mohr * Aurora Levins Morales * Marita Morales * Rosario Morales * Willie Perdomo * Pedro Pietri * Miguel Piñero * Reynaldo Poledov * Freddie Prinz * Geraldo Rivera * Abraham Rodriguez, Jr. * Clara E. Rodriguez * Esmeralda Santiago * Roberto Santiago * Pedro Juan Soto * Piri Thomas * Edwin Torres * José Torres * Joseph B. Vasquez * Ana Lydia Vega Hispanics comprise one of America's largest business-minded, faith-based, culturally-conservative entities—and their numbers continue to grow. Long assumed to be aligned with the Democrats, Hispanics have been ignored by many Republicans. Noted Hispanic marketing expert and political commentator Leslie Sanchez passionately argues that Hispanics, after years of watching Democrats fail them, need to shift their bets to Los Republicanos or risk gambling away their political future. In her book, Sanchez debunks the cultural and political myths about Hispanics and Republicans alike. She also offers a look at today's changing Hispanic mindset and the new dynamic force that is rising. The coming-of-age story of Verdicta Ortiz-Santiago, who is desperate for change after 11 years in her sleepy Puerto Rican mountain town and dreams of moving to the United States to live the perfect life exemplified by Dick and Jane. Reprint. When I Was Puerto RicanA MemoirDa Capo Press "Lyrical [and] haunting, América's liberating epiphanypress will have readers . . . on their feet and cheering."—Washington Post Deftly written and fiercely resilient, América's Dream explores the ever-shifting definition of what it means to be American and exemplifies the spirit of every immigrant who has dared to realize the American dream. Ámérica González is a hotel housekeeper on Vieques, an island off the coast of Puerto Rico, cleaning up after wealthy foreigners who don't look her in the eye. Her alcoholic mother resents her; her married boyfriend, Correa, beats her; and their fourteen-year-old daughter thinks life would be better anywhere but with América. So when América is offered the chance to work as a live-in housekeeper and nanny for a family in Westchester, New York, she takes it as a sign to finally make the escape she's been longing for. Yet, even as América revels in the comparative luxury of her new life—daring to care about a man other than Correa—she is faced with the disquieting realization that no matter what she does, she can never really escape her past. By the end of the 1920s, just ten years after the Jones Act first made them full-fledged Americans, more than 45,000 native Puerto Ricans had left their homes and entered the United States, citizenship papers in hand, forming one of New York City's most complex and distinctive migrant communities. In Puerto Rican Citizen, Lorrim Toronto for the first time unravels the many tensions—historical, racial, political, and economic—that defined the experience of this group of American citizens before and after World War II. Building its incisive narrative from a wide range of archival sources, interviews, and first-person accounts of Puerto Rican life in New York, this book illuminates the rich history of a group that is still largely invisible to many scholars. At the center of Puerto Rican Citizen are Puerto Ricans' own formulations about political identity, the responses of activists and ordinary migrants to the failed promises of American citizenship, and their expectations of how the American state should address those failures. Complicating our understanding of the discontents of modern liberalism, of race relations beyond black and white, and of the diverse conceptions of rights and identity in American life, Thomas's book transforms the way we understand this community's integral role in shaping our sense of citizenship in twentieth-century America. This book is a collection of short stories by third generation feminists, covering major issues in a young woman's life: awakening sexuality, biological and psychological landmarks, family rejection and rebellion, child abduction and abuse, gender identification, and sexual harassment. Following the enacted story recounted in When I Was Puerto Rican of the author's emergence from the barrios of Brooklyn to the prestigious Performing Arts High School in Manhattan, Esmeralda Santiago delivers the tale of her young adulthood, where she continually strives to find a balance between becoming American and staying Puerto Rican. While translating for her mother Mami at the welfare office in the morning, starring as Cleopatra at New York's prestigious Performing Arts High School in the afternoons, and dancing salsa all night, she begins to defy her mother's protective rules, only to find that independence brings new dangers and dilemmas. In 1950, after over fifty years of military occupation and colonial rule, the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico staged an unsuccessful armed insurrection against the United States. Violence swept through the island: assassins were sent to kill President Harry Truman, gunfights soared in eight towns, police stations and post offices were burned down. In order to suppress this uprising, the US Army deployed thousands of troops and bombarded two towns, marking the first time in history that the US government bombed its own citizens. Nelson A. Denis tells...
this powerful story through the controversial life of Pedro Albizu Campos, who served as the president of the Nationalist Party. A lawyer, chemical engineer, and the first Puerto Rican to graduate from Harvard Law School, Albizu Campos was imprisoned for twenty-five years and died under mysterious circumstances. By tracing his life and death, Denis shows how the journey of Albizu Campos is part of a larger story of Puerto Rico and US colonialism. Through oral histories, personal interviews, eyewitness accounts, congressional testimony, and recently declassified FBI files, War Against All Puerto Ricans tells the story of a forgotten revolution and its context in Puerto Rico’s history, from the US invasion in 1898 to the modern-day struggle for self-determination. Denis provides an unflinching account of the gunfights, prison riots, political intrigue, FBI and CIA covert activity, and mass hysteria that accompanied this tumultuous period in Puerto Rican history.

“The Cruel Country is a memoir centered around the author's journey to Puerto Rico after her mother had been diagnosed with late stage lung cancer. The story takes us through Cofer's journey as she sits by the her mother's hospital bed during the last moments of her life, through the grieving process and Catholic funereal rites that follow her mother's death and her return to her life in the U.S. Cofer's writerly talents richly inform this narrative meditation on her family's life in Puerto Rico and the States, her frantic research on cancer, considerations of Catholicism, family, and culture, and much more. The book at the same time is very much a study of cultural differences and the balance that the author must find as a Puerto-Rican American, not wholly part of her mother's culture. We see this come to a head as she communicates with doctors, participates in funeral arrangements and sacraments, and recollects her Anglo husband John's father's death. This very personal story about the author's life will resonate with Cofer's legions of fans including students and those interested in memoir, ethnic and cultural crossings, spirituality, loss, grief, and reconciliation”—Suggests activities to be used in the classroom to accompany the reading of When I was Puerto Rican by Esmeralda Santiago.

Adam Silvera reminds us that there's no life without death and no love without loss in this devastating yet uplifting story about two people whose lives change over the course of one unforgettable day. New York Times bestselling author Adam Silvera, whose debut, More Happy Than Not, the New York Times called “profound.”

Esmeralda Santiago's story begins in rural Puerto Rico, where her childhood was full of both tenderness and domestic strife, tropical sounds and sights as well as poverty. Growing up, she learned the proper way to eat a guava, the sound of tree frogs in the mango groves at night, the taste of the delectable sausage called morcilla, and the formula for ushering a dead baby's soul to heaven. As she enters school we see the clash, both hilarious and fierce, of Puerto Rican and Yankee culture. When her mother, Mami, a force of nature, takes off to New York with her seven, soon to be eleven children, Esmeralda, the oldest, must learn new rules, a new language, and eventually take on a new identity. In this first volume of her much-praised, bestselling trilogy, Santiago brilliantly recreates the idyllic landscape and tumultuous family life of her earliest years and her tremendous journey from the barrio to Brooklyn, from translating for her mother at the welfare office to high honors at Harvard.

Enthralled admirers of Esmeralda Santiago’s memoirs of her childhood have yearned to read more. Now, in The Turkish Lover, Esmeralda finally breaks out of the monumental struggle with her powerful mother, only to elope into the spell of an exotic love affair. At the heart of the story is Esmeralda's relationship with “the Turk,” a passion that gradually becomes a prison out of which she must emerge to become herself. The expansive humanity, earthy humor, and psychological courage that made Esmeralda’s first two books so successful are on full display again in The Turkish Lover.

Stories about the experiences of Puerto Ricans in New York.

Pura Belpré Award Winner Ruth Behar's inspiring story of a Jewish girl who escapes Poland to make a new life in Cuba, where she works to rescue the rest of her family. The situation is getting dire for Jews in Poland on the eve of World War II. Esther's father has fled to Cuba, and she is the first one to join him. It's heartbreaking to be separated from her beloved sister, so Esther promises to write down everything that happens until they're reunited. And she does, recording both the good--the kindness of the Cuban people and her discovery of a valuable hidden talent--and the bad: the fact that Nazism has found a foothold even in Cuba. Esther's evocative letters are full of her appreciation for life and reveal a resourceful, determined girl with a rare ability to bring people together, all the while striving to get the rest of their family out of Poland before it's too late. Based on Ruth Behar's family history, this compelling story celebrates the resilience of the human spirit in the most challenging times.

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