

Climate Chaos and the Need for Resilience

A Message from The Future with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

Alexandria Ocasio Cortez: “Politicians went to bat for fossil fuels and these massive corporations kept digging, and mining, drilling, and fracking like there was no tomorrow. [US] America became the largest producer and consumer of oil, in the world. Fossil fuel companies made hundreds of billions, while the public paid the lion share to clean up their disasters. We lost a generation of time we’ll never get back. Entire species we’ll never get back. Natural wonders, gone, forever. And in 2017, hurricane Maria destroyed the place where my family was from: Puerto Rico.

[thunder and rain sounds]

It was like a climate bomb. It took as many American lives as 9/11. And in the next year, when I was elected to congress, the world’s leading climate scientists declared another emergency. They told us that we had just twelve years left to cut our emissions in half, or hundreds and millions of people would be more likely to face food and water shortages, poverty, and death.

[clock ticking sound]

Twelve years, to change everything! How we got around. How we fed ourselves. How we made our stuff. How we lived and worked. EVERYTHING!

[bell ring]

As Michelle Comstock and Mary E. Hocks write, sound “is rarely considered a rhetorical resource for communicating to ongoing effects of climate change on human and nonhuman animals and ecosystems” (165).

“Puerto Rico’s Singing Newspapers tell a Story about Resilience”

Narrator: NPR’s Mandalit del Barco sent this report from Puerto Rico, about how people there are coping.

There are two quintessential Puerto Rican sounds that survived hurricanes Irma and Maria. One is the tiny coquí frog.

[coquí sounds: coquí... coquí]

The other is the improvised Afro-Puerto Rican call and response tradition known as plena.

[*plena musicians:* Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico, es mi tierra natal]

Del Barco: Last Sunday, a group of musicians gathered in Loíza, a small town known for its African inspired folklore. The annual Calle Loíza festival was canceled because of the hurricane, but that didn't let them stop them from parading down the streets with hand drums. Drumming and singing with them was Emmanuel Santana, from the band Plena Libre.

Emmanuel Santana: "It is very, very Puerto Rican. Every time a Puerto Rican hears the drums called *panderos*, you can have them come down in tears in a time like this. Of course, there is no electricity to even hear music. You don't have no MP3s right now, so we're back to basics."

As they travelled down the sidewalks from bar to bar they attracted followers who sang along. Leading them was Hector Matos, known as Tito Matos, a Grammy nominee and one of Puerto Rico's best known pleneros. He drums and sings plenas about the love he has for the island.

Hector Matos: "Love Mother Earth. Respect of nature. You know, environment. Trying to use the moment to also teach the young generation, these hurricanes are coming faster, bigger and stronger than ever, and that's because of... US!"

Del Barco: Matos is a member of the group Los Pleneros de la 21. He's recorded and toured with Eddie Palmieri, David Sánchez, and Ricky Martin. He also owns a restaurant in Loíza, a wooden building that was demolished by the hurricane. Then it was vandalized.

Matos: "I have to deal with the issues of the hurricane and also go back every day to try to salvage some stuff. But look at my face, *we're happy!* I mean, we are alive, all my family members are fine and well. And WE CAN REBUILD... with or without f*cking Trump."

Del Barco: Matos says he's not impressed by president Trump's declarations that hurricane relief is going well. Puerto Ricans continue to struggle without food, water, and electricity. He says he and his pleneros wanted to bring them a little joy with the music.

[*pleneros:* "Así somos los pleneros," as a güiro and panderos sound in the background]

Del Barco: Missy Adames is a chef at Matos' restaurant.

Adames: "Bueno, nosotros no sabemos todavía. Estamos ahí, en standby."

Del Barco: She says while they're on standby, trying to rebuild the restaurant, their homes, their lives, at least they still have their music.

Adames: "La música fué lo que encendió lo que había de muerto en Calle Loíza"

Del Barco: Music has brought to life what was dead on Loíza Street, she says. Plenas are known as sung newspapers, giving the latest updates on what people are feeling and the news of the day. The headline of this week's plenas was about the devastation of hurricane Maria.

[*pleneros:* "Está mas dura que tormenteras pa' María"]

Del Barco: Winding through the streets [in Calle Loíza] they sang about *resilience*. Emmanuel Santana translate:

Santana: “Our plena, our song, our music is STRONGER... Our Community is stronger than María”

Del Barco: Mandalit Del Barco. NPR News. [Calle] Loíza. Puerto Rico.

[Santana: “Yo que te lo digo, oyeme en mi melodía”]
[pleneros: “Está mas dura que tormenteras pa’ María”]
[Santana: “Nos estamos levantando, en la Calle Loíza”]
[pleneros: “Está mas dura que tormenteras pa’ María”]
[panderos sounding plena]