





#### P U L S E 20

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#### Letter from the Editor

Hello.

We are so glad you are joining us for our third issue of Pulse Magazine! As the Editor-in-Chief of the 2018 issue, it was an honor to be able to work with Pulse since its inception in 2016. I would like to thank each member of our team for all of the

hard work, dedication and long hours they put into helping craft this edition.

This year, we have a multitude of sections including Campus and Community, The Border, Art, Español and Anonymous. I hope our staff succeeded in creating the third edition with the word "perspective" in mind. Pulse enjoys being an outlet that gives our student body and Valley community a voice and believes in the importance of personal point of view and perspective. We covered campus and community stories because of the great impact and influence that UTRGV and the RGV have on our magazine. The story "BSU Black Excellence" by Alexis Martinez, highlights the importance of education and conversations in relation to issues the black community faces in the RGV and the rest of the United States. "Cattle Fever" by Ashley Mathew, takes a dive into the USDA undergraduate training program in food security and climate change.

We felt that it was important to give border related topics their own section this year because of the overall impact they have on our area. We covered topics that are relevant to Valley residents and UTRGV students, such as the planned border wall that is projected to go through the Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge and the community wide fears of DACA removal.

Our Art section was a topic that we wanted to include in this edition because of our team's love and appreciation for the arts. We included "CH'I" a surreal portrait series created by Arael Meza as well a unique feature story "Day For Night Houston: The unorthodox music festival experience" by Alvaro Ayala.

Our last two sections are new to Pulse Magazine: Español and Anonymous. The Español section we felt was much needed; our campus, as well as our community, is constantly submerged and influenced by the Spanish language. We felt that it was important to provide students who feel more comfortable expressing themselves in Spanish with a creative outlet. The Anonymous section we had no original intentions of making, however, throughout the course of Fall 2017 and Spring 2018, we received several stories submitted with no name or a fake name. Instead of throwing out the 'anonymous' works, we decided to include them as a section because they corresponded with our theme of "perspective."

Last but certainly not least, this year's design was revised and crafted by our very talented Graphic Editor, Arael Meza. His idea to change the overall dimensions of the magazine was intended to give Pulse a more modern and sleeker look and feel. The use of white space accompanied with bright colors gives Pulse Magazine a much needed makeover.

I hope you enjoy reading our 2018 edition.

Sage Bazan



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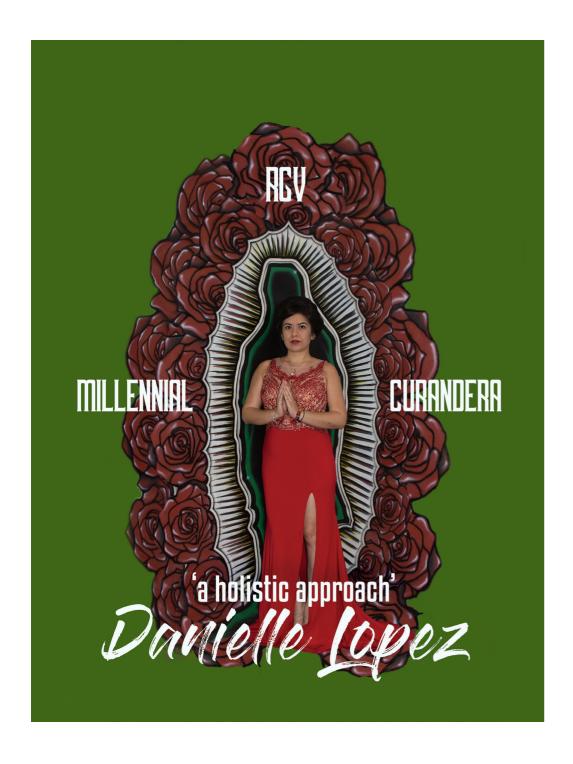
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By: J. Edward Moreno

Photography: Arael Meza

"Aqui no hay pena; aqui no hay dolor," Danielle López chants melodically as she burns copal-scented incense around an upscale home in Edinburg, Texas. Another house blessing going as usual. he 33-year-old is a full-time curandera, which directly translates to "one who heals." She goes by several titles such as healer, "Bruja," and her favorite, "Curandera Barbie." Curanderismo is a form of Mexican folk medicine, but you may recognize it by its more commonly and naively used alias: brujeria (witchcraft).

From rubbing an egg across your body to check for mal ojo, the evil eye, to prescribing herbs for common illnesses, López said she provides services to those who prefer a holistic approach towards health care. Those she treats vary widely in age, ethnicity and even species.

With no formal medical training, everything she's learned has been passed down by matriarchs in her family. During gatherings, the older women in her family noticed her unbound curiosity and would lure her in with a "mijita vente pa'ca" (sweetie come here), while the other children continued playing. This was probably the same tactic their predecessors used, and it was ultimately how López learned most of what she knows about healing. An ever-curious being, she said she continued to seek information about healing through books, school and talking to other healers.

She received her bachelors in English and a masters in multidisciplinary studies with a concentration in Mexican American studies at the University of Texas-Pan American. While earning her master's, she said she took a special interest in medical anthropology, studying the history and mechanisms of the medicine she and her family had practiced for generations. Around the same

time, she realized that her skills weren't as ordinary as she thought. López added that she also became subject to the stigma that surrounded holistic medicine once she began practicing it outside of her family.

"When I was younger, I thought every-body in the Valley did this [brujeria]," the Pharr native said. "We come from a generation where we trust biomedicine completely. We grew up knowing that we had to get certain immunizations by a certain time so you can go to school... you're kind of following a regimen, so you just trust biomedicine. But also, relying too much on it, we can forget how we can have a hands-on approach toward our medicine."

#### Medical Elitism

The history behind curanderismo, and folk medicine in general, can be looked at as an ancient, ongoing and oftentimes forced conversation between cultures. Before the creation of biomedicine, the scientific and research-based approach to healthcare, every culture had its own form of treating ailments using the resources around them. In the border regions of the United States, that exchange can be traced back to pre-colonial time periods in the Americas, Europe and Africa.

"In Spain, the Moors and Sephardic Jews brought much of their folk medicine to the Iberian peninsula," López explained. "Then, during Spanish colonialism, much of that was brought over and mixed with the pre-existing Indigenous medicine... There's even a huge library on herbal medicine that already existed with the Mayans and the Aztecs."

s time, technology and scientific based healthcare progressed, the number of holistic medicine practitioners began to decrease. The road hasn't ever been easy for those practicing folk medicine. Traditionally, women who practiced folk medicine (shamans, midwives, etc.) were often labeled as witches. The word actually translates to "wise woman" in old English, though, as rings true today, wise women are often met with resentment.

In fact, the negative connotation attached to the word "witch" can be attributed to the acts of several institutions across history, namely the Catholic Church. In the 15th century, Pope Innocent VIII accredited a book called Malleus Maleficarum (The Witches Hammer), which guided followers of the church in identifying characteristics of a witch.

Often, an accusation was enough for a woman to be considered a witch and consequently burned at the stake. Throughout the 250 years that the inquisition lasted, it claimed the lives of between 600,000 to 9,000,000 people, most of whom were women of marginalized minority groups.

"The easiest way to discredit a woman was by calling her a witch," said Servando Hinojosa, an anthropology professor at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

Hinojosa's work is focused on medical anthropology and folk medicine of southern Mexico and Central America. He said in recent years, since the establishment of formal medical institutions in the 20th century, there have been many attempts to discredit competing paradigms of care.



"If a system like folk medicine doesn't supply every answer to every problem, then it's in a way no different from formal clinical systems which do not supply every answer to every problem, and which actually have far greater and much more dangerous side effects," he said.

In today's healthcare system, fewer people have access to the services they need and those who do are often unsatisfied with the results. Even with insurance, an appointment at the doctor's can leave a patient waiting hours to receive a sped-up version of the care they were looking for.

"That may leave people feeling like they aren't being regarded as whole individuals when they approach the physicians," Hinojosa said. "People feel that they are more than their symptoms and they may feel that the medical establishment sees them more as a compilation of symptoms than as individuals who need broader approaches to care. Under those conditions, it stands to reason that there may be a segment of the public that may have the means to look at other options in addition to what they're utilizing now."

Ultimately, what López and other healers would like to see is a middle ground where folk healers and physicians can work together to treat illnesses holistically. The idea of integrative medicine in practice is quite uncertain and unexplored. In her own practice, López encourages her patients to let their doctors know that they're seeing her. This allows her to share notes and collaborate with physicians if desired. Some hospitals and clinics have pioneered

a similar ideology, but it has often received mixed results.

"They (employed folk healers) are not allowed to speak outside of certain parameters. They are told when to go, when they can't. They're told they're doing this as a volunteer when everybody else is getting paid a big salary or that they can only take their advice so long as it aligns with what the physician is saying. If not, then it's not relevant," Hinojosa said. "Allopathic medicine continues to set the terms in which such an engagement happens and it never favors the person who is not a clinician. So, I still think there can be more respect shown between different classes of practitioners."

Allopathic medicine is the mainstream blanket treatment of ailments through drugs and surgeries. Holistic medicine on the other hand looks at treating the underlying cause of symptoms and the



overall health rather than suppressing the symptoms as seen in an allopathic approach.

#### Client-Centered Care

Like an early 20th century doctor, López takes plenty of house calls. She thinks of her patients more as family and refers to them as her "godchildren."

"I go to them, because people can't usually make it to me because of their schedule," López said, adding that that's typically what prompts her visit in the first place--stress-induced ailments.

Her most surprising demographic is college students, she explained. They usually ask for a "barrida" (sweeping) to help relieve stress and identify mal ojo. She rubs them with an egg meant to soak up the bad energy, cracks it in a glass of water, and then observes the characteristics of the finished product. College can be particularly daunting

for first-generation college students, which can indirectly cause physical or mental discomforts, she said. She's also seen students from Mexico, other parts of Texas and around the world.

"You go through a lot of what we call imposter syndrome when you're a first-generation college student," she said. "Where you're going through the motions and the stresses of it and especially during midterms or finals, you start having these thoughts of 'Woah, can I accomplish all of this?'... A lot of students aren't told enough that their education is a personal journey to being the best version of themselves. Giving into imposter syndrome or feeding too much into it can be disastrous. I try to build their confidence, mark their milestones and most importantly, help them adopt their own regimen of selfcare. It's good to keep up with self-care because when you don't that's when you might start with self-destructive habits. Students often get dependent on different drugs, toxic relationships and unhealthy lifestyles."

Other patients come in with more terminal conditions. Unlike biomedicine, curanderismo aims at trying to make the treatment less complicated.

López said she once helped cure a cancer patient who was told she needed to make funeral arrangements. "They told her she was going to have six to seven months to live," López said. "She had a really aggressive cancer. When I met her, they had already decided that they were going to do away with chemo because it was really aggressive and they



wanted something more holistic. When we would meet we spent most of the time just talking... she was just letting go of this disappointment that

she had devoted so much time to her work and didn't devote a lot to her dreams. So once she released that disappointment we began to see her own empowerment. She began assessing her diet... She totally quit sugar, and as soon as she did the cancer started dying... So it was a mixture of the platicas and her holistic diet ... She just had her one year anniversary of being in remission... It was a really integrative process, because she was still seeing her doctor while she was seeing me."

Communication is also an integral part of López's work. Sometimes patients have to communicate with her in different ways. She said pets often have the most organic reactions to her work, but she had never experienced anything as directly as a case she had with one very special pup.

"I went to this home... I'm about two or three blocks away from the house and my throat starts killing me... It felt like somebody was choking me, like a crushing feeling and I started panicking because when I do the house blessing I have to sing," she said. "Then I was like 'No, this is supposed to tell me something.' So when I got to the house, I realized it wasn't for the woman who called me. It was for her dog who had gotten diagnosed with throat cancer. So somehow he knew that I was coming, and I feel like he let me feel what he was feeling... Because as soon I saw him--this beautiful elderly pug--I pet him and I picked him up and he just lay his head on my shoulder and let me pet his neck... [Now] he is doing well but is still getting monitored for full remission."

López said her friends have playfully dubbed her "bruja," and she encourages the reclaiming of the word "witch" in the correct context.

However, before you go around calling her a witch, remember

she is a white witch.

Although she tends to stick to white magic, she said it's important to know what lies across the spectrum. She's done some "grey" work in the past, but after receiving mixed results she remains hesitant.

"A good witch is not supposed to mess with the natural order," she said. "But, I have done it on at least two cases for immigration. I did what they call 'works'



or trabajos where I pray that their appeal case gets heard and they don't get deported. I had one family where it went to their head and the gentlemen in that family didn't get deported. But him and his wife got involved with selling drugs... The other family, the son didn't get deported. He went and he got a small job and he started the DACA process so he's going to finish that and finish school... I learned my lesson with those two different outcomes and now I just stick to white."

#### Breaking the stigma

One family sought López's help for their 5-year-old daughter, who experienced susto (fright) after being in a car accident. Like many children, she battles with frequent nightmares. When López entered their home in Edinburg, she said she was greeted with excitement by the young girl who couldn't wait for the house to be blessed. She enjoyed every part of the process, especially the setup.

The little girl rests her head on López's lap while playing games on her iPad, patiently waiting for López and her

mother to finish small talk so the fun can begin. Her mother tells her to lower the volume on her device. She refuses.

She wasn't initially so comfortable with López. The first time they met, she stared at her with disbelief, speechless for several minutes.

"She's like a curandera barbie," she murmured to her mother, whose leg she was hiding behind.

Her mother, Mary, asked for her and her family to remain anonymous because she is in the process of selling her home. She had trouble selling her last home after buyers saw her candles, incense and relics and decided not to purchase the home out of fear.

Mary does recall her family treating her with folk medicine at a young age, but "as she got older, those conversations got washed away," an experience shared by many in the Valley.

Mary first met López at a platica she hosted at Hinovations Art Gallery in McAllen. When a friend first invited her to an event, she was reluctant, but now she calls López a few times a month for house blessings, limpias, barridas or even just to talk and share food.

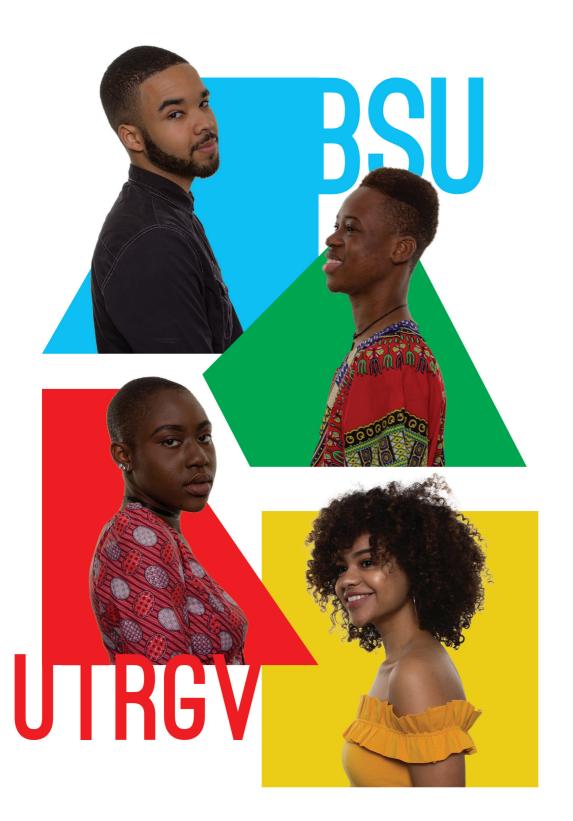
"I call her for protection," she said.

López has helped her daughter combat nightmares and helps keep the house blessed and clear of bad energies.

To close off her visit, López and her assistant light the copal-scented incense and makes sure to bless all of the doors and windows in the home.



"Aqui no hay pena; aqui no hay dolor," she sings.



he Black Student Union is an organization formed by Daniel Hayes, former President, and Jason Alce, former Vice-President, at UTRGV for black and African-American students. It started with Hayes voicing his disappointment to the UTRGV system during Black History Month in 2017.

"I was discontent with how under-represented our black and African-American students are here at UTRGV," said Hayes.

Based on Hayes complaints, it was suggested to him that he would need to sign up as a group and once that was formed, the university would have a group of students to talk to and give feedback. Alce, who is a recent UTRGV psychology graduate, expressed the same amount of disappointment at the beginning of his college career when UTRGV was the University of Texas Pan American. After Student Involvement spoke with Hayes, they got into touch with Alce.

"I was emailed by one of the administrators from Student Involvement saying that they remembered I wanted to start an organization for black and African-American students about four years ago," Alce said. "I had forgotten all about it, but I could definitely say it was an issue all throughout my college career."

Once the two students got into contact, BSU became an active campus organization as of Fall 2017; they plan to increase their members slowly as the semesters go by. Their goals and purpose for the organization is primarily for black and African-American students to have a place to feel welcomed, and voice their opinions and concerns.

"We're hoping to form communication that people can feel welcomed and not judged by what they say," Hayes said. "We want to inform other people of culture and actually give a different perspective other than the generalized perspective of blacks and African-Americans."

While the two founders and recent graduates retired their officer positions, club President, Aimaloghi Eromosele, and Vice-President, Peyton Poindexter, are paving the way for black education and empowerment at UTRGV. In order to give BSU an outlet to further express their opinions and aspirations for the student organization, I conducted an interview with the club presidents, Eromosele and Poindexter, along with BSU officers Yaw Sam [Secretary], Nana Afia Dankyiwaq Tufuoh [Treasurer] and Clemecia Duru [Public Relations]. In addition to the officers, I spoke with Micqauella Lopez, a BSU club member who embraces both of her African and Latin-American heritage.

#### As a member of BSU, what has your experience in the organization been like so far?

Lopez: It's been really interesting to say the least. I was initially hesitant to join BSU because I'm what you would call Afro Latina, and so when I was invited to join, I was kinda like you see me right? I'm about as light as they come. And I genuinely regret having that mindset because being in BSU has really shown me that there are so many shades of melanin and they all look amazing under the sun. I've learned that there are different types of black, and while they have different qualities they are wonderful in their own way. Being part of BSU has taught me that in order to make a difference, you have to know and understand what it is you're trying to get people to understand, so educating yourself to educate other people is important as well. I've become more aware of issues going on in our country right now and certain injustices that are constantly overlooked or dismissed. We want to make a stronger community that uplifts men and women of color and a safe space for students on campus.

Eromosele: My experience in the BSU has been everything I could have imagined and more. It has been a safe space for me to express my frustrations and fears as a young black woman. It has been a source of information when learning about black american history and important figures in our history, learning about the different experiences we all walk through life whether you're light skinned, dark skinned, mixed race, an immigrant, raised in the valley or outside of it, etc. The BSU has been a platform to educate those out-

side of the black community. It has been a place of comfort and creating new connections with people who I know understand me, inherently, but at the same time are getting to know me for all my individual aspects. I entered the BSU thinking it was just going to create a fun social circle for me, but it has truly been all of that and so much more.

#### 2. What advice would you give to potential new members?

Lopez: Come in with an open mind. One of the core purposes of BSU is creating a safe space for students of color on campus so that students can step away from the light of any stigmas or stereotypes that are shined upon them, which is another thing we're trying to educate people about. What they see on tv and the media usually isn't true, and education in our community is so important. Don't come in expecting living embodiments of stereotypes you see on mainstream media, nor should you expect us to be the spokespeople for black Americans everywhere. We are a collection of people with our own individual experiences coming together for a greater purpose.

Eromosele: Well, first I would just state the obvious: No, you do not have to be black as a requirement to join. However you most definitely need to respect black culture and history if you would like to be apart of the BSU. Join with the right intentions. I would implore new members to enter the BSU with an open mind. Be willing to learn and listen, but above all, be your authentic self and you'll be received warmly.

#### What are some goals you have as a member of BSU?

Lopez: I personally want to become more educated on the cultures that make up my identity, because like I said, education is important to remove stigmas and stereotypes. I also hope that we as a group have a positive impact on the community because the people of BSU are amazing and there's so much to look forward to this year.

Eromosele: My goal this semester would definitely be to create new connections, be able to reach out and unite even more of our black student population. Additionally, there will be open meetings this semester, so it is also a goal of ours to open up to the entire UTRGV population and get them involved with what we have going on, whether that be fundraising, community outreach, educational panels and more.

A lot of people, especially in the U.S., see natural hair or a shaved head as a fashion statement or political statement. Would you consider this to be true?

Poindexter: I feel like our culture makes it political because I know plenty of black women who've had dreads and afros have gone into a corporate workplace and get told "Oh, you need to do something about your hair." Even little girls at school, like I know my cousin, she's maybe nine or 10; she wore puff balls and her teacher was like "Oh no you can't come to school like that." She got sent home for it, like even children are made to seem like their hair isn't acceptable. [For example], you see a

white woman wearing cornrows and someone says "that's cultural appropriation," and they'll be like "well you guys straighten your hair, you wear weaves," and I'm like because we were forced to and we learned to like it. what's the issue? I feel like it was made political and now that we accept the fact that it is political, people try to throw it back in our faces. If other black people see people with natural hair like afros or whatever you know they'll just be like black power or something but I don't think we should have to. Like me I just do it cause it's literally me like this is the hair that grows out of me. If I wanted to change it, I can and that shouldn't bother any-

#### 5 How do you feel about individuals who believe Cultural Appropriation isn't a real thing?

Eromosele: If you don't think cultural appropriation is a valid concern then you should just read more into other people's culture. There are certain things that people find to be sacred or to be important and they value it within the community; if people take it [someone else's culture] and abuse it and profit off of it constantly, especially when you never give credit back to the origin of the roots, you know you're (original culture) going to feel some type of way, that's just like a natural instinct.

Duru: I feel like everybody has their own beliefs on it. I know a lot of people in the Black community feel like it is Cultural Appropriation because you know, everybody started from Africa. Our hair naturally locks this way, many people argue that everyone's hair naturally locks over time. I feel like it's more of a style for me, but some people feel like it's more of a

spiritual thing. I feel everybody should be able to wear their hair in anyway that they want, but if asked about it or if put in front of a camera just because of their hair and they're not black I feel like they should speak up and acknowledge the history.

Sam: With regards to what Meesh said, dreads come from Rastafarianism which is a culture on its own from Jamaica, so if you told me dreads is not cultural appropriation, what do you mean? It's directly from Rastafarians and that's a whole culture on its own, that's a whole religion. They have their own cultural songs, they have their own cultural things that they eat. If you do research on how Jamaicans live their lives, you will see that that is where dreads come from. Dreadlocks is not just like a fashion thing it has a whole culture behind it and a lot of people take it very seriously. It's something they really hold on to.

#### **6.** Do you think Africans are treated differently compared to African-Americans in the United States?

Sam: The way cops see African-Americans in the U.S. to the way they see Africans is different. My dad has told me when he's gotten pulled over by cops and they are cool with him. He's lived here for 15 years and hasn't had a bad encounter with cops. When they hear his accent and ask "where are you from?" he lets them know he's from Ghana and they'll just be like "oh okay." You know, they have a certain perception towards African-Americans. It's a stereotype. Once they hear the African-American accent, they behave differently towards them. I also realized

that a lot of Africans who come directly from Africa haven't really had bad experiences with the cops. They haven't been shot or you'll hardly hear on the news or anywhere of an African being shot by the cops or anything. It's mostly stereotypes and perceptions.

#### **7** Do you disagree with just anyone using the N-word? Why?

Poindexter: Disagree. I like to use the analogy like you know how girls call each other 'Bitch' all the time? If a guy called me a Bitch right now I'd probably slap him in the face. It's kind of like women taking the word back that was used against us and then using it for empowerment. And black people do that with the word N\*\*\*\*. Like I'm going to call you a N\*\*\*\* but the minute somebody else [not black or African-American] calls me a N\*\*\*\* or calls you a N\*\*\*\*, I'm going to get mad because they're not a N\*\*\*\*, they've never been called a N\*\*\*\*. And if you have by a friend, y'all both don't know the concept of it. I feel like I can say that word, I'm going to take it back and I'm going to use it to empower myself. If it makes you uncomfortable, good, it should make you uncomfortable. And if you say it, you're ignorant.





# USDA Undergraduate Training Program in Food Security and Climate Change TACFSA Program TACFSA Program

Dr. Teresa Patricia Feria, a University of Texas Rio Grande Valley science professor, is training the next generation of agricultural scientists to cope with food security and climate changes.

By: Ashley Mathew Photography: Erik Webster he Rio Grande Valley is one of the leading hubs in the cattle and citrus industries, but increasing global temperatures have created an epidemic of lethal predators.

Feria oversees the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Undergraduate Training Program in Food Security and Climate Change, TACFSA, as the principal investigator. She is one of the few applicants in the nation to receive this prestigious grant in partnership with the USDA and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Over a period of three years, the grant will support 30 undergraduate students to develop their research skills and aid in exposure to experimental learning. Selected students from various campuses engage in research both in the field and lab.

Feria moved from Mexico to the United States in 2006 to pursue her Ph.D. in biology at the University of Missouri. Using information systems and distribution models, her research efforts are focused on understanding the distribution of organisms in relation to climate change. What motivates Feria to pursue this type of research is not only having an impact on the community around her, but the ability to engage students.

"It is important that we are teaching the newer generation the importance of research and its methods," Feria said. "As a professor and faculty of the university, student success is the biggest goal."

One of the major threats to food security in the Rio Grande Valley is cattle fever. Cattle fever is a tick-borne disease that is thought to have originated in India. The disease is passed through ticks, specifically Rhipicephalus annulatus and Rhipicephalus microplus. These pinky sized ticks are capable of carrying a microscopic parasite called Babesia Bovis. Babesia bovis is a fatal disease that impacts the cattle's red blood cells causing a variety of symptoms like fever, jaundice, and acute anemia. A sickly cow is one that the industry is unable to sell thus a loss of revenue is noted. The cattle fever tick itself has genetically developed a resistance to chemical pesticides that was once used to eliminate the ticks. As each generation goes by, the ticks develop a stronger immunity against the pesticides. Elimination methods that were once used back in the 1900's are not as effective as they once were.

Once thought to be eradicated from the southern U.S. border, cattle fever has made a sudden reemergence. High temperatures paired with ideal precipitation patterns has caused a recent spike in tick populations all around the globe. Conducting climate change research at UTRGV for the USDA is a unique opportunity for both students and faculty. This type of research is one that is happening in real time. The threat is ongoing and the more information and data collected, the better.

"Real challenges regarding temperature and precipitation changes are affecting the distributions and density of tick populations, which in turn impact the natural vegetation and wildlife," Feria said.







In recent years, there has been a drastic increase in infestations to the north of the U.S.-Mexico Border past the tick eradication quarantine area (TEQA). Tick eradication efforts are currently being focused on cattle along the border, but climate change in the last suggests that a re-invasion in South Texas may be imminent. Over the past century, the approximate range of tick distribution has grown significantly past the quarantine zones created by the USDA. Quarantine zones can be found along the Texas-Mexico border and are used to stop any type of animal movement, and in theory, prevent the spread of ticks.

Currently, there is a 500-milelong stretch of grassland that serves as a permanent quarantine buffer zone between Texas and Mexico. State and federal officials are concerned over the intensifying threat due to the costly burden that it has imposed on ranches and the cattle industry. The billion-dollar animal agriculture business is not wasting any time in looking for new preventative methods on controlling the tick population.

Students under the grant are able to witness first-hand how the government deals with agricultural issues. Through this program, they are able to learn critical skills needed to create innovative solutions for major agricultural threats. At Moore Field Air Base in Mission, Texas, undergraduates work with re-

searchers from Brazil and Puerto Rico to analyze and detect possible gene amplifications related to resistance in the cattle fever tick. Also within the base, there are real-time experiments being led and created by students, pesticide resistance tests, and the breeding of the ticks themselves.

The grant has allowed students who had never been exposed to the research world to gain invaluable knowledge as well as hands-on experience. "Through this program, we hope that students acquire the skills to pursue a career in agriculture or graduate studies," Feria said.

Hannah Moreno, a junior biology and music performance major at UTRGV, has been working to publish her findings on gene amplification in regards to a specific gene or segment of DNA within the cattle fever tick. The molecular work that Moreno is involved in may help determine how the cattle fever tick is able to transmit rapidly and successfully. Moreno's interest in research started when she decided to volunteer at the USDA Cattle Fever Tick Research Laboratory after graduating high school. Her research is now being funded under another grant by the USDA in which she credits her growth as a scientist, student and an individual.

"This grant has allowed me to gain knowledge about the research world, improve my presentation and speaking skills, and give me the chance to collaborate with scientists all over the world," Moreno said.

Students accepted into the program are required to complete 10 hours a week during the fall and spring semesters,

and 25 hours during their summer term of research. The TACFSA program gives students involved a chance to develop their own hypothesis and present their research at various symposiums over the one year paid internship. Through mentorship, students receive handson training regarding food security and climate change issues in either animal or plant health. The time to create innovate solutions is now and the TACF-SA program is looking for students who are enthusiastic and driven about facing climate change challenges.

"As a Hispanic person, the opportunity to serve and give back to my community is something I am very proud of," Feria said. "This grant has allowed the university and its students to join forces and make a difference."

Together, Feria and her colleagues continue to pave the way for research methods regarding vectors, parasites and invasive species in the Rio Grande Valley. She continues to break barriers and prove that anyone can achieve their dream if they work hard.

Special thanks to Beto Perez de Leon, Ruby De La Garza, Donald Thomas, Jason Tidwell, Guilherme Klafke, Tamer Oraby, and all those involved in TACFSA.

Having been a participant of the program I have learned how important and impactful research is. Thank you for providing this opportunity to students from UTRGV, STC, and TSTC.



By: Sage Bazan and Veronica Gaona

Photography: Erik Webster

nk begins at the top of Ruben Saenz's shoulders and chest and runs down his arms, torso and legs; the multitude of designs and the varying levels of black and gray meet at the ends of his hands and feet.

"I just need the lower half of my back," Saenz said.

The grin on his face that extended from ear to ear didn't need an explanation. Saenz was proud of the 300 hours that were spent creating his personalized masterpiece. He is a living canvas, and the artist? Jesus Hernandez, a.k.a. Mr. Big Worm of Sagrado Corazon Tattoo Shop in Brownsville, Texas.

Saenz has been Hernandez's client for seven years, one year longer than the Tattoo Shop has been open. Like any long term relationship, theirs is built on trust. The Brownsville tattoo artist drew and inked Saenz's first tattoo when he was only 16-years-old; it was an armored samurai on



his left thigh. Hernandez recalled the reasoning behind the placement and laughed.

"It was because he was still in high school and we wanted to make sure that the tattoo wasn't visible," he said. "After we did that one, we just keep continuing on the legs and stayed with Asian style there."

While Hernandez gave Saenz his first tattoo, Saenz wasn't Hernandez's first customer. In fact, the artist's exposure to tattoos didn't begin until 1998. In a Browns-

ville neighborhood called La Parra, he would occasionally see friends and neighbors tattooing outside of each other's houses and always found it captivating.

"The thought of having something permanently on your skin and having people see it always fascinated me," said Hernandez. "It's a walking piece of art."



The business owner saved enough money and opened shop in 2012. Now with 20 years of experience and six years of professional knowledge, Hernandez is one of the most popular tattoo artists in Brownsville, Texas. His signature style of black and gray with neo-traditionalism, a modern and bold take on traditional tattoos, are what keep loyal customers like Saenz coming back for more.

"I have people from different parts of Texas make the trip down to get my tattoos," he said. "Today I had someone from San Antonio come visit me and it's just a wonderful feeling."

For Hernandez, tattoos are more than an image created with a needle and ink. They are a way of life; his work represents his artistic expression, his "cultura" (culture) and his personality. The artist explained that the art form is about connecting with yourself and with others who share the same love and appreciation for its boldness. He added that while the love is universal, the identity and meaning is individual; tattoos holders all have different emotions and motivations behind their ink.

The artist's personal tattoos are intended to represent the love he feels for his family, more specifically, his sons. On his chest and stomach, Hernandez has two portraits of his sons when they were babies. Alex Hernandez's portrait is on the top and Luis Angel Hernandez is on the bottom of the stomach.

"I decided to tattoo my sons because they are the loves of my life and because the tattoo culture allows me to represent what I love," Hernandez said. "And for me to have them tattooed on my body is really significant. When I did not have them, I felt like something was missing. But now I feel complete." For Saenz, Hernandez's 23-year-old client, he describes his ink as his identity. The different styles and designs distributed throughout his body not only give insight into his interests but work harmoniously towards a deeper meaning: a connection with his father. Saenz's father, who has his own extensive collection of tattoos, sparked Saenz's fascination with ink at an early age.

"When I was still in Pampers, I would walk around my dad's shop and color myself with marker so I could look like him," he said.

"I always wanted to be covered." Although the Brownsville native has now surpassed the amount of tattoos his father has, the meaning behind them is still very clear. For Saenz, the action of getting tattoos serves as a bond between him and his dad. However, when Saenz discussed what each tattoo meant on their own, he explained that they are just things and people he likes and has an interest in.

"My oriental style tattoos, I have them because I like Asian style art, that's all there is to it," he said. "I have tattoos of Bruce Lee and Bob Marley because they are people that I like and look up to."

On the last vacant portion of his skin, Saenz plans on getting a tattoo of a warrior holding a drawn bow and arrow pointed towards the sky; the silhouette will be illuminated by an outline of the Aztec Calendar.

"This is something that I have always wanted, and this guy is gonna make it happen," he said.







Growing up, so many people are taught to settle for less than their best. That just isn't acceptable in roller derby. That's the point Crystal Hernandez, a University of Texas Rio Grande Valley junior and communication sciences and disorders major, made clear when we first met after a cold, late-night practice back in February.

"I feel like our entire life, we're taught to settle for mediocrity," Hernandez said. "I want to do it all. I want to succeed in this. And I'm gonna push past what I think I can do!"

#### Pandamonium Doll

Hernandez, aka Panda, is part of the RGV Bandidas, a women's flat track roller derby club based in the RGV. I sat down with Panda on a cool, breezy night to get an idea of the sport and learn a little about roller derby culture.

Sitting Down with RGV Bandidas' Crystal Hernandez

35

#### So, tell me Crystal. What is the basic version of the game?

Hernandez: Well, the goal is to have your jammer score as many points as you can. The team that has the most points at the end of the game is an obvious win. You have got defense and offense happening from the blockers, so your jammers are trying to get through while so much is going on at the same time.

#### **2.** How many players are out on the track?

Hernandez: You've got five players from each team on the track. One player is behind the jammer line, the point where every jam starts. On the whistle, the jammer's objective is to get through and on the overlap, every person they pass from the other team is one point. The first lap doesn't count. It's the initial pass and everything after that counts. You want to get lead. Lead gets to call off the jam. You want to get your jammer out first in order to basically sway the way the game is gonna go.

#### **3.** You mentioned an overlap. What is that?

Hernandez: On the whistle, the jammer has to get through. So, when she gets through the pack, the pack is the group that consists of all the other skaters, the blockers. Once she gets through all the blockers and she comes around the track one lap, then she has the second try to get through the pack, and that second try to get through, that's when you get to score.

#### I know the game consists of a bout and jams. Can you explain the difference?

Hernandez: So, the bout is the game. Hey guys we have a game today, is like hey guys, we have a bout today. A jam would be, like in football, a play. So, in a game, you have many plays. Well, our plays are called jams that last two minutes or less. Two minutes or until the lead jammer calls off the jam. If there's no lead jammer, then you're obviously going for two minutes.



#### **6.** So, I take it you're usually the jammer then?

Hernandez: I'm usually a jammer. There were a good two seasons that they stripped me from my blocking and they were like, you're gonna jam. And, woooo, that's why my footwork has gotten a little crazy 'cause I was just stuck with that one thing, and you got four girls trying to attack you from the other team, and you gotta get through or you gotta get hit. So, it's like what are you gonna do? Are you gonna get through? Or are you gonna get hit!

#### You've been involved in that exact situation? Can you explain why it's not fun to be in?

Hernandez: It's so fun! I love getting hit and dying! [Laughs] No... I mean it's not fun because it hurts! I mean you have two minutes of just hits coming at you. People trying to knock you down. People trying to stop you. People trying to do everything in their power to not let you through. And you have to do one job... get through. So, you got four people fighting you from the one thing you gotta do and you're thinking this is not fun. But when you get through, it's like here's the challenge set before you and the second you overcome that challenge, then it's like, I did it! I can do it! I'm so cool! They're trying to keep you back but then you get to prove yourself.

How did you get involved with roller derby? I know you originally started with the Mactown Rebel Rollers, which merged with the South Texas Rolleristas to become the RGV Bandidas, but how did you get involved with the sport?

Hernandez: I was watching a movie called Whip It, which has roller derby in it. Ellen Page, awesome, she comes out in Juno and all that, so she's cool. So. I watched this movie with her, and she's playing the sport of roller derby and I thought if they had that here, that'd be amazing. And one random day at school, on my break between



classes, there was a group of women recruiting wearing skates, and I'm like yes, I'm gonna do this! So, me and a friend go and sign up and I loved it! It was either female football or this, and I guess roller derby caught my attention quicker. They were there at that perfect moment.

#### **9.** So, you really fell in love with it. What was it like when you first tried out?

Hernandez: When I first started attending, I would attend with a few friends, and just imagine being off to the side, and you had a trainer say, hey you're gonna work on how to walk with your skates without rolling, and you're like what? Why? Can I just roll and skate? And it's like no, if you can't even walk, what makes you think you can skate? So, you're there on the outside doing all these little random drills. And in your mind, you're just like aww man, I come from many sports and I feel like, a little [Growls]. You feel like "fresh-meat". And you see everyone over there doing

all these spins and stops and hits, and you're just like, I can't wait till I'm one of them.

#### **10.** Tell me about the positions in roller derby.

Hernandez: You got the jammer. Jammer is the one who has a helmet cover that has a star on it. We call those panties. You got a panty on your head. [Laughs] We call them the jammer panty. Then there's your blockers. On the track you got four blockers from each team, however, you'll notice that one of the blockers will have a pivot panty on. So, a pivot helmet cover. The pivot helmet cover is just a stripe. What!? I just mind blew you, right? Why do you have a panty on your head? Ok, so what the pivot does is, usually she's the one who gets to say where the pack is and what she wants her players to do. She has to be very in control of things. Sometimes you need to get your jammer out of a situation cause she's so tired. Remember how we were saying there's two minutes and the jammer is fighting? What can happen is, if a jammer can't get out, she can take off her panty and she can pass it to the pivot, and now the pivot puts the panty on her head and she is the new jammer. That's called the panty pass. A star pass... Roller derby just got a little different, didn't it?

There is definitely more to it than I expected! [Laughs] So, I noticed that you all have derby names. Tell me more about them. I know your teammates call you Panda.

Hernandez: Derby names! Ok, so it's like an alter ego you have. You know you have superheroes, Superman and stuff, right? He's so secret. And it's like I'm Superman. It feels like that when

you're on skates. I feel like Superman. It's like you guys don't know yet, but I'm about to mind blow you with some tricks here and then it's like you see it and you're like, oh my gosh! And it's like I've trained. I've trained to do this. So, I mean, with the derby names, it's like a little alter ego. Shockira, yeah, she's iust so much, and then all of a sudden. Shockira, that's a dancer's name. What can she do? And then you see her play, and you're just like those hits are pretty shocking! You got Hooligan, I would assume someone who just goes crazy. Or goes all over the place, and yeah, this girl is all over the place... protecting me. She is literally protecting me [Cheers]. Such a hooligan. You have so many crazy names out there. If you're a drinker, we got number seven, Jackie Daniels, who plays on team USA.

#### 12. What's your derby name?

Hernandez: Mine is Pandamonium Doll. They call me Panda because I spell it wrong on purpose, right, so I can have a little short nickname. Panda! So, Pandamonium Doll... why did I get this name is what a lot of people like to ask me, and I mean, I can't really give too much into that, but I just remember a player saying, "Hey, since you like pandas, why don't you just call yourself Pandamonium?"

What about derby wives? I don't really know much, but I know it was mentioned before our meeting.

Hernandez: I have a derby wife. Her name is BEAT-e Smalls. So, what do we call her? We call her Smalls... You're killing me Smalls! Get it? [Ba-dum-tss] That's my derby wife. I was even thinking changing my name to Squints, cause like Sandlot, right? So, I was

like I'll be Squints and you'll be Smalls. [Laughs] So, what is a derby wife? Some people are lesbians... I'm not, but what she is to me is like, like a best friend. I got her to join the sport. So, what I do is I like to protect my wife out there on the track. Best believe if you hurt my wife, I'ma come after you girl! So, we got each other's back.

#### So, it's a partner in crime kind of thing?

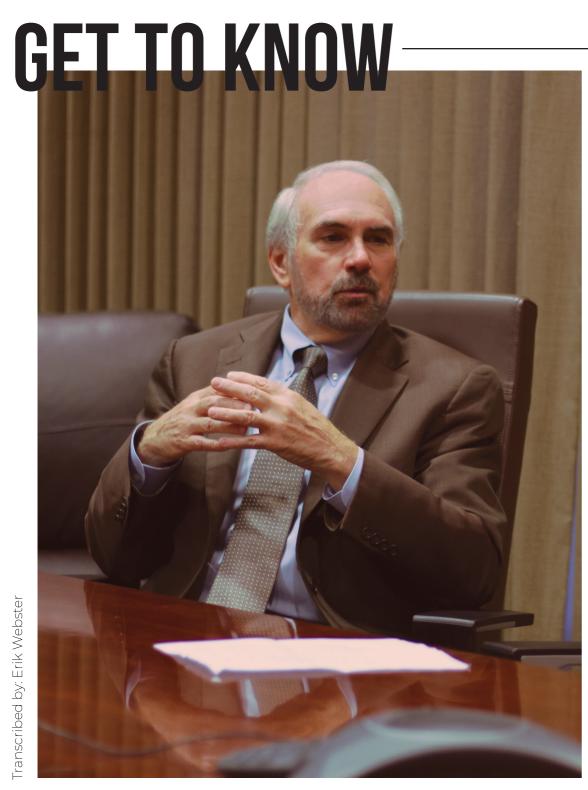
Hernandez: It's exactly that. You got your partners in crime. I just remember she would always be like, "Aww, you're not gonna wife me? Everyone has wives," and me, I was like I've been playing this sport a year longer, and I haven't wifed anybody, and no one's wifed me. It wasn't in my mind something that I was going to do, so then finally, I was like, I guess she really wants a wife, so I'll do it. Who is better than me because I got her to join! Why not? Let's do it! So, it was the day of her birthday at the rink, and I had the DJ hookup, so I was like, hey, I need you to invite her to

the middle of the track, and you're gonna bust out that disco ball. You're gonna play some good music, and I'm gonna have a Ring Pop, cause they sold Ring Pops. It was just a thing at Fantasyland that I remember. So, I had a Ring Pop and busted out on my knee and was like, will you be my derby wife? And everyone was like what's going on!? Is she a lesbian... [Laughs] And I'm like mom, this is totally no homo, I promise. Like we're totally just best buds for-ev's. So, I wifed her.

The RGV Bandidas are a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and welcome volunteers and anyone interested in playing to attend one of their three weekly practices. If you would like more information or are interested in attending one of their practices, visit:

www.rgvbandidas.com





PULSE 'S ALEXIS MARTINEZ SPEAKS WITH UTRGV PRESIDENT

Guy Bailey

#### What was life like growing up in Alabama during the 1950s?

**Bailey:** I remember a great deal of turmoil growing up there. It was almost all of the attention that Alabama got was negative because people saw riots in Birmingham. And you know you had civil rights issues throughout the state. So that's a lot of what I remember growing up in Alabama. Just in the '50s and '60s quite a bit of turmoil there.

#### You've held a variety of positions. What's been your favorite one so far?

Bailey: Well, I like this position because it's so challenging. And of all the positions I've had this one is by far the hardest. I mean when I was interviewing and talked to the Board of Regents I told them if this were my first presidency I'd run the other way. But it's my last one. You know I'm gonna do this for a while and retire. And so, I knew that it would be very challenging and very difficult. It's the thing I really wanted to do to kind of close out my career.

#### Why does it seem like we never see you walking around campus?

Bailey: It's not that I'm not here. It's that you're unlikely to see me because I'm not here a lot, but that's because we have three campuses. That's the first thing. But the second thing, if you see me very much there's a real problem and I'm gonna explain why. If you took your UTB and UTPA and you put them together, they raised about 6 to 8 million dollars a year in private funds and that private money is what creates scholarships and endowed professorships. The first year we were in existence we raised \$28 million. This year we raised \$34 million. And so, if you look my primary responsibility is off campus. It's raising money working with the legislature. So, if you see me here a lot, I'm not doing my job right. So that's the thing you have to keep in mind. You say this president is on our campus all the time. That president is not doing his job.

#### What do you think is the best way to bridge the divide between Edinburg and Brownsville?

**Bailey:** That's a great question and that there certainly is. And part of it is just Cameron County versus Hidalgo. You know, it's part of a bigger divide between the two counties. I think the most important thing we can do, as students start as UTRGV students. Remember that many of our students... Did you start here at UTRGV or UTPA?

#### Martinez: UTPA.

**Bailey:** So, actually you didn't start at UTRGV... and so many of the students we have, started at one campus or the other when they were separate universities. I think as those students graduate, and you have students who started at UTRGV, there will be some difference there.



outh Padre Island city officials, as well as the island's environmentalists, are working to combat the growing issue of pollution. Beach patrol and sand sweeps conduct daily cleanups in city regulated areas which help to effectively reduce pollution. However, the maintenance of the beach is divided between the city of South Padre Island and Cameron County. Areas that have entrance fees or parking lots are overseen by the county and tend to be more polluted, while walk-on beach accesses that are overseen by the city are typically cleaner. Pollution is not only an unsightly hazard for beach goers, but a threat towards the unique wildlife on the island. While the battle with debris and trash on the beach is constant, education and improvement is key.

Misty Porte, an employee and a presenter at Sea Turtle Inc., explained how pollution affects sea turtles on the island.

"Marine debris is a huge problem for us here at our facility and here on our beach...turtles brains are the size of their thumb, so they get confused very easily," she said.

According to Porte, they often find microplastics in the turtle's waste when they first arrive at the facility.

The sea turtle educator also explained that it's common to

find all kinds of plastic items on the beach with diamond shape bites from the turtle's beaks.

"We had a hatchling that just passed away and upon the necropsy, when we cut open the stomach, it was full of nothing but plastics," she said. "All plastics were consumed before they arrived at our facility."

Pollution is not only an unsightly hazard for beach goers, but a threat towards the unique wildlife on the island.

Most of the trash found on the beach is made of plastic and almost all the pieces that fall into the ocean are consumed by marine life. Plastic bags have been banned from the beach, but they are still often found floating in the ocean. Confusing these bags for jellyfish, turtles are left with severe damage to their organs. Beach clean ups are held each year by Sea Turtle Inc., but they alone cannot solve this issue.

Javier Gonzales, a Naturalist Educator at the SPI Birding Center, believes that fishing equipment is also harmful to the island's wild and marine life. When a fisherman is not able to retrieve a fishing line, it is typically cut and left out in the water. Birds trying to look for food in the ocean will find themselves wrapped in fishing line around their legs, bills and wings. The fish that birds consume also pose as a threat because they are often filled with pollutants and high levels of chemicals.

Much like Porte, Gonzales explained that the central source of pollution on the beach is plastic.

"As plastics break down into itty bitty pieces, I've seen the gulls poking at them, and wondering if they're food or not. Some of them swallow some down," Gonzales said. "As the plastic deteriorates, it makes it harder to clean up. You end up having little bits and pieces

left over everywhere...plastics don't decompose."

Recycling is one of the few solutions to make sure plastics and other materials don't end up in the ocean. Noe Guerrero, a SPI Code Enforcement Officer, explained that the the city provides a free weekly recycling service.

"We do everything we can to provide our residents with a place to recycle," Guerrero stated. "Every Saturday, residents are able to bring their recyclables from 8 a.m. - 11 a.m."

Materials that the city of South Padre Island recycles includes newspaper, plastics, office paper, plastic grocery bags, ink cartridges, flattened cardboard and rechargeable batteries. If residents would like their recyclables picked up, the city of SPI offers a service with a charge of \$100. However, most residents choose to take advantage of the free services rather than paying for pickup.

The city also has multiple campaigns that are in place at the moment including "Skip the Straw." The goal of this campaign is to convince business owners to halt purchasing straws because of the amount that are found on the beach each year. An alternative to banning straws has been switching to paper biodegradable straws, at least for the moment.

The committee that instituted the "Skip the Straw" campaign is a subcommittee of "Keep South Padre Island Beautiful." Gonzalez is also a member of this committee and explained that while their initiatives move at a turtle's pace, they are always steady.

"Everybody has full time jobs and kids, so things that get done can be slow, but we have made progress," he said.

It was only recently that South
Padre Island faced
massive scrutiny against
its yearly, "Lantern Fest."
Proprietors on the island
believed that the economic
gain of the event indefinitely
outweighed the environmental
damage. This idea didn't sit well with
San Antonio resident, Mario Giacalone,
who began a petition to stop the release of the lanterns in hopes of terminating this environmentally destructive
practice.

Recycling is one of the few solutions to make sure plastics and other materials don't end up in the ocean.

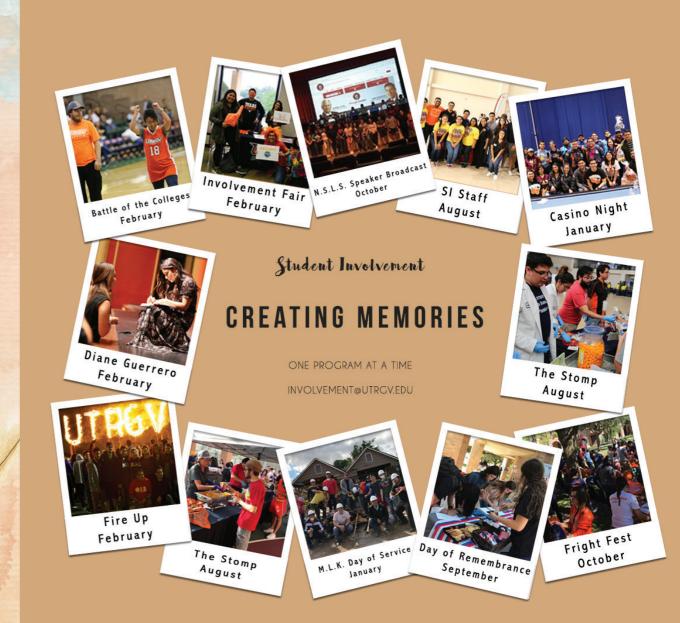
In an article written by Jeri-Lyn Thorpe of the San Antonio Express News, Giacalone said, "Basically people are lighting fires on balloons and letting them loose to fly away. A little fact on those balloons is they are designed to burn for 5 to 10 minutes. If it doesn't burn out and it hits the ground, which they do by the hundreds, now you have this liquid device soaked in a flammable material".

In response to the petition, the South Padre Island Shoreline Department conducted an 8-week intensive biodegradable experiment to determine the rate of degradation of sky lanterns in the Laguna Madre. The department found that it would take up to seven weeks before the bamboo ring and

#### "Keep South Padre Island Beautiful."

string making up the lantern started to deteriorate. Some beach goers had even stated they had found lanterns from last year's event months after it happened. While the fuel inside the lanterns pose a fire hazard, the dolphins, turtles and other marine life could easily become tangled within the strings and bamboo.

It was clear that the Lantern Fest wasn't just an amazing sight, but a deadly one. The city council and fire chief on the island eventually agreed that financial gain should never outweigh the hazards associated with the fest. The Lantern Fest was eventually canceled in light of the scientific evidence, a small step for Giacalone as he continues to educate the general public about the effects of lanterns on the environment. The community strives to make South Padre Island a better environment for the people and the animals to live, but they have a long way to go in succeeding. Although there have been steps in the right direction, the island still faces hardships when it comes to passing laws and educating the public about environmental awareness.





### RED US. BLUE

#### UTRGU STUDENT ORGANIZATION ATTEMPTS TO BRIDGE THE POLITICAL DIVIDE

By: Erik Webster

EDINBURG – She was told that she had betrayed her race. She was told that she wasn't a real Hispanic. She was told that she was allowing men to make decisions for her.

This was one of the experiences Adrienne Peña-Garza, a candidate for Hidalgo County Grand Old Party chair, shared after speaking to the College Republicans, Jan. 23, at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Edinburg campus.

"I've been told that I've betrayed my race. I've been told that I'm not a real Hispanic. I've been told that I'm a woman and that I'm allowing men to make decisions for me." Peña-Garza said. "That type of persecution only made me stronger and want to get involved more."

While she was in college, Peña-Garza said she identified as an Independent, rather than a Democrat or Republican. It wasn't until she took a political science class at the University of Texas-Pan American that she realized she was a Republican.

Illustration: Karely Gallegos

When it comes to the Rio Grande Valley, the Republican Party is often a taboo subject, as the South Texas region is typically considered a Democratic stronghold. During the 2016 presidential election, citizens of Hidalgo County produced 118,809 votes for candidate Hillary Clinton and 48,642 for Donald J. Trump, according to the Hidalgo County Elections Department. In fact, in Hidalgo County, Democrats won each race by more than 70 percent. But that doesn't mean there isn't a young generation of Republicans trying to change that.

Bianca Garcia, a 20-year-old political science major at UTRGV, is one of those young people. Garcia, a Donna native, is the president of the Campus Republicans, an organization dedicated to bringing Republican ideals and viewpoints to the students of UTRGV. Garcia swapped political parties when she was in the third grade.

"My faith definitely played a large part in that," said Garcia, referring to her radical political shift at such a young age. "I believe we should always have a strong military. I support our troops and law enforcement 100 percent. Absolutely!"

It wasn't until Garcia grew a bit older that she developed an understanding and appreciation for other common Republican ideals such as lower taxes and limited government. When asked what makes her a member of the GOP, Garcia said that it was her strong belief in freedom, limited government, and faith-based conservatism that made her a Republican.

Not all students on the university campus share her feelings, however. The College Republicans typically has a membership of 10 to 15 members, with visitors occasionally attending biweekly meetings. Garcia said that there is often a strong bias against anyone who publically identifies as a Republican on campus.

"Definitely just the rhetoric. The atmosphere around campus." Garcia said. "They took our flyers and wrote Republicanism equals fascism," referring to a vandalism incident that occurred last year.

"Honestly, I feel scared. Just wearing this shirt... I thought twice about it," Garcia said in reference to her Texas Federation of College Republicans T-shirt. "We're not fascists, as they like to call us. We're strong supporters of the constitution. We will always support the First Amendment, even if it's something going completely against us."

Still, most students seem to take a neutral stance when it comes to tipping the political balance scale.

"Did I vote? Yes. Am I a Republican? No," said Yvonne Fuentes, a UTRGV senior majoring in English and a future teacher. "But there's just a lot of stuff going on and it's frustrating because I don't understand the whos, and the whys, and the whats. At this point right now, I feel like everybody's in the same boat."

Perhaps Fuentes is on to something considering only about one in two eligible Texas voters cast their ballots during the 2016 general election, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. Worse yet, only a little more than 40 percent of eligible Hispanic voters in the state showed up at the polls on election day.

Nevertheless, the Campus Republicans are attempting to spread ideas and opinions that Valley area residents aren't typically exposed to. The organization's main goal, according to Garcia, is to be more involved in the local and university communities by performing volunteer work and holding events around campus. Last semester, the organization held an event called Free Speech, where students were able to write whatever they felt and thought about the government.

It was this desire to be more involved with the local community that prompted the organization to invite Peña-Garza to speak Jan. 23. After meeting with the organization, Peña-Garza shared that while she herself is a Republican, she doesn't think that everyone necessarily needs to be.

"I think it's OK to have a different opinion," Peña-Garza said. "I don't think that everyone needs to be Republican, but I think they should at least consider what it stands for."



Andrea, 14, brushes her hair. A man living across the railroad tracks offered up his house for people in the caravan to shower or wash their hair while the train stopped momentarily.

Asylum seekers travel to Tijuana on vans provided by Pueblo Sin Fronteras. On Apr. 9, a group of Central Americans from Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua joined to form the 2017 Refugee Caravan, or Viacrucis 2017, put together by organizations from México and the US. Among the reasons the Viacrucis was organized was to escape persecution, to seek asylum, to raise awareness about both the violence and the violation of the migrants' human rights as well as the legal challenges they faced during their journey. Being part of the refugee caravan offers a greater protection from kidnappings, rape, injury and deportation. Some say they are willing to take the risk of traveling on freight trains known as "La Bestia," The Beast, because staying in their country undoubtedly means death. A total of 78 asylum seekers turned themselves in to U.S. Customs and Border Protection, CBP, at the San Ysidro port of entry in California on May 7.

La Bestia: An interview with photographer Verónica G. Cárdenas and her experience traveling on 'The Beast'

By: Sage Bazan

Photography: Verónica G. Cárdenas

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Pulse: What was it like taking the journey on la bestia with the travelers? How did the experience personally impact you?

Cárdenas: This experience helped me have a much better understanding for what they go through. It is one thing watching it in a movie or seeing it in pictures, but living it... Although I did not join them the whole journey that they go through, and we were part of a refugee caravan, I think I got a pretty good idea. It sounds stupid to admit that I was wasting my phone battery in something so banal, but I think in a way it would make me feel more at home. As I was scrolling through my Facebook feed, I read posts where friends were complaining about their neighbors, or complaining about the t-shirt color that they got at work. Then I would look at the person in front of me on the train and realize they did not have neighbors because they had to flee. They did not have to complain about the t-shirt color because what they were wearing besides a change of clothes in their backpack was all they had.



Pulse: What brought you on that journey and what lead up to your decision to travel on one of the most dangerous freight trains in Central and North America?

Cárdenas: I decided to board la bestia because I was going to be joining a refugee caravan, so I knew I was far more protected than if I had traveled alone. A group of incredible activists and lawyers organized it. The organization is called Pueblo Sin Fronteras. Not everyone in the caravan was seeking asylum. Many of the people had also been deported from both México and the United States. Traveling as part of the refugee caravan also ensured that they were not going to be stopped by Mexican immigration.

A friend that was volunteering to screen the cases of some of the asylum seekers, whose is a lawyer here in the Valley, told me about the refugee caravan. It took me about two hours to make a decision whether I was going or not. Then it took me about two days to get everything ready at work so I could be out for a week. Never in my life had I done anything like that. I kept saying to myself,



"But you don't have all the equipment you need. You would need extra batteries, you need a solar panel, you need..." But then I said to myself, "Stop! You are never going to be 100% ready. You will always have excuses not to do it. This is a great opportunity you can't miss."

Pulse: La Bestia is known for the dangers that it puts and takes travelers through. What precautions did travelers take to try to avoid dangers on the freight train?

Cárdenas: Like they say, "safety in numbers." The first refugee caravan that I joined, most of the women would travel in two vans, the rest, approximately 200 people, travel on the train. Irineo Mujica, the organizer that always travels on the train, always makes sure that there is a security group of about 30 people. At night, there are always a few people overseeing the whole group whether it is when we are traveling on the train, sleeping in a park, or outside a church, etc. We also carry rocks.

There was a time when we were sleeping in the train station, which is exposed to anybody that wants to get in. Four intruders tried to steal from the ones sleeping closer to the street at around 2 a.m. Then we heard one of the security guys yelling, "Wake up! Wake up! Wake up everyone! Nobody is going to sleep!" Then I saw our security group called los perros, the dogs, chase the intruders. They said that they were carrying a gun and one of them was pointing at the group, but then decided to keep running.

Pulse: The goal of the travelers is to seek asylum and start a new life in Mexico or the United States. Do you think that Mexicans and Americans don't fully grasp the severity of their situations in Central America?

Cárdenas: I believe that more Americans compared to Mexicans do not understand why they migrate. It is very easy to say, "Just don't come" or "Come here legally. My parents waited for their turn." But the truth of the matter is that it isn't as easy as that. How can you wait your turn to come here legally when those opportunities aren't given to you? How can you wait if your life is at risk? México denies many asylum cases and that is why some people come to the United States.

While the train stops, José gets off la bestia, with his son Andrée, on their way to Tijuana.

#### Pulse: How do the travelers get access to basic necessities like food and water?

Cárdenas: Typically each person is responsible to carry their own food and water. There are times when we know that the train will stop for at least two hours, then the most agile men find a store nearby and buy water, juice and/or snacks for the other people. Irineo also makes previous arrangements to stop at migrant shelters or churches where they can sleep at night and eat.

José, 30 carries his one-year -old son Mateo as they arrive in Mazatlán. On Nov. 10, both father and son along with 35 others turned themselves in at the port of entry in San Ysidro seeking asylum. To prove that he was Mateo's father, he says he showed immigration officials his son's original birth certificate. José says that they threatened him saying that his process would take longer and that there would be issues if they didn't separate them. After the authorities' persistence, and fearing the repercussions, José says he had to give in. They were separated and now he is in a detention center in California while Mateo is in Texas. His partner Olivia and his other son Andrée are currently staying in Tijuana.

#### Pulse: Is there a particular traveler that you spoke with who's story sticks with you?

Cárdenas: I have kept in touch with several of the people that I met during both caravans. The one story that I am following is the one about Mateo, a one-year-old child who was separated from his dad in a detention center. Mateo was sent to a detention center for unaccompanied minors in Texas and the dad stayed in a detention center in California. Olivia, the mother, and Andrée, his four-year old brother sought asylum weeks later in late December of last year. They were released within days. Mateo was

just reunited with his family in February, but José, his dad, remains in the detention center. I went to visit them in March and as soon as I got close to reach to Mateo, he clinged to his mom. Olivia explained to me that he is very much afraid of strangers because he probably thinks that he is going to be taken away again. But after spending a few minutes with the family, he figured out I could be trusted.

This is a story I will be following for the next few years, maybe decades, as part of a photo essay.



Pulse: If you could say one thing to people who are unaware of the struggles and risks that migrants face, what would you say?

Cárdenas: This issue goes beyond the numbers. One must listen to their stories. It is not just thousands of migrants traversing every year, it is people like Andrea, that fled the country with her dad because they [gang members] had killed her grandmother and uncle for complaining about the trash from the neighbors after the rain. Some gang members started using their backyard to hide from police and that was another reason for the threats until

they went and killed them both [grandmother and uncle]. The surviving son [Andrea's dad] was not home at the time but he heard the gunshots a few blocks away, not knowing that was happening at his mom's house. The following day, he saw gang members pass by the house pointing the gun at him. After a few death threats, he decided to leave the country. It isn't simply moving to another state because the maras [gang members], depending on who wants to get you, could find you anywhere since they have international reach. So even fleeing to México isn't as safe.



Violence and scarce job opportunities are the main reasons for which over 300 Central Americans including men, women and children banded together to traverse México as part of a refugee caravan known as "Viacrucis Guadalupano," organized by activist groups from the US and México. Due to the limited funds from these organizations, everyone had no choice but to travel on freight trains known as "La Bestia," The Beast. Being part of the refugee caravan offers a greater protection from kidnappings, rape, injury and deportation. Some say they are willing to take the risk of traveling on La Bestia because staying in their country undoubtedly means death. The refugee caravan arrived to Tijuana on Nov. 2. Some of them will start a new life in México whereas others will seek asylum in the US.

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## On Patrol

By: Erik Webster

emocrats. Republicans. Politicians... For this select group of individuals, the Rio Grande Valley is more than just a place. It is a political cash cow raking in not just U.S. dollars and Mexican pesos, but also cashing in the votes of a primarily Hispanic, primarily Democrat society... Or, at least attempting to. But for many, the Rio Grande Valley, a conterminous group of four Texas counties located along the U.S.-Mexican border, is simply a place to call home.

Sure, maybe the food and culture is different from many other parts of the U.S. (I've never been to another area with so many delicious taco stands located within a few blocks of each other), but "The Valley," as the local populace has come to know it, is also uniquely American.

I recall many a time being invited to a family member's Fourth of July BBQ, trying to escape the 100 degrees "Valley" heat, sipping on an ice-cold Coca Cola while taking in the delectable aroma of beef fajitas sizzling on the grill. Memories of late-night firework lighting, while

trying not to lose any of my fingers, with friends and family are ones I will always cherish.

But, if you've read or watched the news lately, you might be led to believe differently. Whether it's the border wall, NAFTA, or the illegal trafficking of drugs or persons, the Rio Grande Valley has become a political hotspot. More often than not, I can't help but feel that the RGV is some kind of metaphorical stepping stone; utilized by politicians on both sides of the political spectrum to push their political agendas.



This is not to say that the RGV doesn't have its fair share of problems... it does! In fact, the RGV faces issues many other parts of the United States don't commonly experience, such as human trafficking and drug smuggling. But to say that this is all the Rio Grande Valley has to offer, would serve a great injustice to both the people and landscape located in this unique little corner of deep South Texas.

The small town of Los Ebanos, Texas serves as one of the most intriguing examples, perhaps, that this region has to offer. With a population of just under 200 people, according to American Community Survey estimates, a majority of the population lives within a few hundred feet of the Rio Grande. In some instances, property owner's backyards might lie only 50 feet from the river's edge.

Because of this close proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border, a continuous flow of Texas State Troopers and Federal Border Agents can be found; and yet, even while no other governmental structure exists within the village, one of the first things you will notice when you get to this incredibly unique place is its overwhelming sense of patri-

otism. Every Memorial Day, locals gather at the Los Ebanos Cemetery in honor of the deceased veterans who constitute at least a third of the plots there. The first thing you'll notice are the dozens of American flags lining both the cemetery fence and individual gravesites. Nearby, a wooden, painted cut-out of a WWII soldier stands saluting at attention, zip-tied to that same fence, while a sign next to him proudly reads, "America is #1 Thanks to our Veterans."

This isn't too surprising considering many of the streets are named after Los Ebanos veterans who served in various branches of the United States military in conflicts ranging from World War I to Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom.



So, yes, while there is no doubt that the region suffers from some extremely serious economic and legal issues, especially with regards to the corruption of its publicly elected officials, it is crucial to remember that there is much more to the Rio Grande Valley than what you just read in national headlines or watch on the six o'clock news. For the citizens of the small village of Los Ebanos, Texas, that includes having a tremendous respect for the region and nation they call home, and for the people who were, and still are, willing to defend it.





#### No soy de aquí, ni de allá.



#### The future of DACA and its recipients that are stuck in limbo

By: Rocio Villalobos

Illustrations: Cecilia Sierra

The future for nearly a thousand University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals students remains in question.

At 3 years old, UTRGV psychology student Cristobal Quintana was brought to the United States by his parents. He entered the United States without permission from San Luis Potosi, Mexico and by the age of 5 spoke English fluently.

When the DACA plan was announced, Quintana, 22, was a junior in high school and recalls seeing it as a

flash of hope that would allow him to get a job, as he was soon approaching graduation.

"You're supposed to start planning your life when you get out of high school," he said, and recalled having a different mentality from his peers throughout his education. "For me, the big picture was 'what am I going to do once I get out of school,' because after that I had no way of getting a legitimate job here."

His father works on a ranch and for a moment Quintana believed his options for work would be limited to something similar, but his parents encouraged him otherwise.

A piece of advice he received from his mother was to "take one day at a time," which he says he has been doing since.

After nearly six years of fear and uncertainty surrounding DACA and the programs recipients — the program may be coming to an end.

President Obama gave an executive order introducing the DACA program in 2012 as a temporary solution to avoid deportation of nearly a million students and workers.

These individuals are often labeled "illegal aliens," "undocumented persons," or more vaguely "DREAMers," and share a similar background, although each story is unique, of being brought into the nation illegally as children.

Quintana joined band in middle school and this passion has carried into his adult life. He now spends his downtime reading or playing piano or guitar. Education has always been a priority of his, he said, but the uncertainty of knowing that the opportunities the United States has granted may soon be taken away imposes a deep concern.

"I grew up here. I basically know this area like the back of my hand," he said. "To think you know this place so well but you can't work here, it's kind of like a big closing door in front of my face."

Once the act was passed, Quintana's family sought an immigration attorney to help him apply. He has since renewed his temporary residence three times. It expires October of this year.

Not to be confused with the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) ACT— which has been

proposed repeatedly since 2001 and could provide a pathway to citizenship — DACA does not offer a chance for legal permanent residency and is subject to renewal on a biennial basis.

In September of 2017, the Trump administration announced the rescission of DACA by March 2018.

Multiple government shutdowns have come about since, due to the lack of a satisfactory replacement for DACA. During the State of The Union address in January, President Trump laid out an immigration plan with requirements for "work, education and good moral character" that would lead him to sign a deal pointing to permanent residency for DREAMers.

One requirement is an allocation of \$25 billion in funding to build a wall between the United States and Mexico.

While Mexico accounts for around 77 percent of the DACA-approved population, the remainder of DACA recipients come from dozens of other countries, including the Philippines, Brazil, India and elsewhere.

Within the U.S., Texas hosts the second largest DREAMer population of roughly 300,000; about 900 of the nearly 28,000 UTRGV students are DACA recipients.

UTRGV Dean of Student Rights and Responsibilities, Douglas Stoves, said due to the "political climate" and an "increased level of concern" amongst students, the university has taken steps to ensure its faculty be aware how to best serve and advise undocumented students.

Shortly into the spring semester, he and Student Affairs Officer Aaron Hino-josa, introduced a three-session "Dream Zone" program to familiarize advocates for DACA with resources the campus has to offer; it is instructed at both the

Edinburg and Brownsville campuses.

"What we try to communicate in these sessions and even talking to students is regardless of their legal status, citizenship or not, whatever. They still have rights as students of UTRGV," said Hinojosa. "If someone's a student here, you're a student here."

In developing the program, Hinojosa and Stoves have consulted with other universities with a similar outreach program.

The first DreamZone session concentrated on facts, statistics and terminology to create a better understanding of undocumented students and the hardships they face.

"We're sticking with our lane," said Jones. "Our lane is in the support and the ability for our institution to help in that endeavor and whenever a student finds themselves in need of legal assistance, knowing equally where to send that person to."

After completion of the Dream Zone program, the attendees will be recognized on the university website as advocates so DREAMers will know who to turn to for support.

The office deals with violations of student code and assists during times of crisis; both Hinojosa and Jones attested to a fear undocumented students face if they report a wrongdoing, they run the risk of deportation.

"I'm a big believer any student can be successful in college, regardless of their status, creed, orientation, gender, anything," said Hinojosa.

"We support them and want them to succeed," added Jones.

DACA students of Texas are not eligible for federal aid, such as Pell grants, but may apply for TAFSA (Texas Application for State Financial Aid), which is oftentimes much less.

In doing so, their personal information and address is submitted to a government entity, which can instill further distress as residency permission nears expiration.

According to Jones, "twisted" narratives by the media often compound this fear. Students may feel illegitimate when their existence in the country they have for so long called home is vehemently opposed by many.

For the most part, said Quintana, he has felt welcome in the country through his interactions with the community. However, he recalls an instance that made him feel otherwise, while studying at the McAllen library, in which an "older gentlemen" set off on a rant.

"I remember his words exactly," said Quintana. "He said, 'I'm so glad Trump is doing what he's doing because he needs to get all the children of the devil back to where they're from because they're not good kids.""

This experience has never left him and this, he said, is why he is comfortable sharing his story.

"Who better to say what it's like (being undocumented) than somebody actually living through the process," said Quintana.

A study by the American Action Forum looked into the fiscal impact of these protected immigrants and found an annual net contribution of about \$3.4 billion to the federal balance sheet.

A closer look reveals an average economic contribution of \$109,000 to the US economy per each of the roughly 380,000 employed DACA recipients.

The estimated cost to deport these individuals back to their "home country" would fall anywhere between \$7 billion and \$21 billion, according to the report.

Since gaining work permission, Quintana has steadily held jobs, which he said have helped him along his journey of personal growth. At the moment he works as a supplemental instructor for Anatomy and Physiology at STC and a short-term goal of his is to become a research assistant for psychology.

Support for DREAMers is generally a split by Democrats and Republicans, with the left pushing for passage of the DREAM act to extend citizenship.

Concerns from the GOP in doing so include weakened border security, naturalization of their relatives and an incentivized amnesty to others who have entered the country unauthorized.

Various demonstrations have been held on campus expressing support for dreamers. Late into the fall semester, shortly after President Trump's announcement, nearly 100 students joined at the Edinburg campus for a walkout—some directly affected by DACA, others allies. But the message was clear: resolve a "clean" DREAM act and give DREAMers the rights of any American.

In March, a candlelit vigil organized by student groups Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA), La Union Chicanx Hijxs de Aztlan (LUCHA) and Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity (URGE) took place around the tree of life in Edinburg. Nine hundred paper monarchs— representing the student DREAMer population—were hung from connecting streamers.

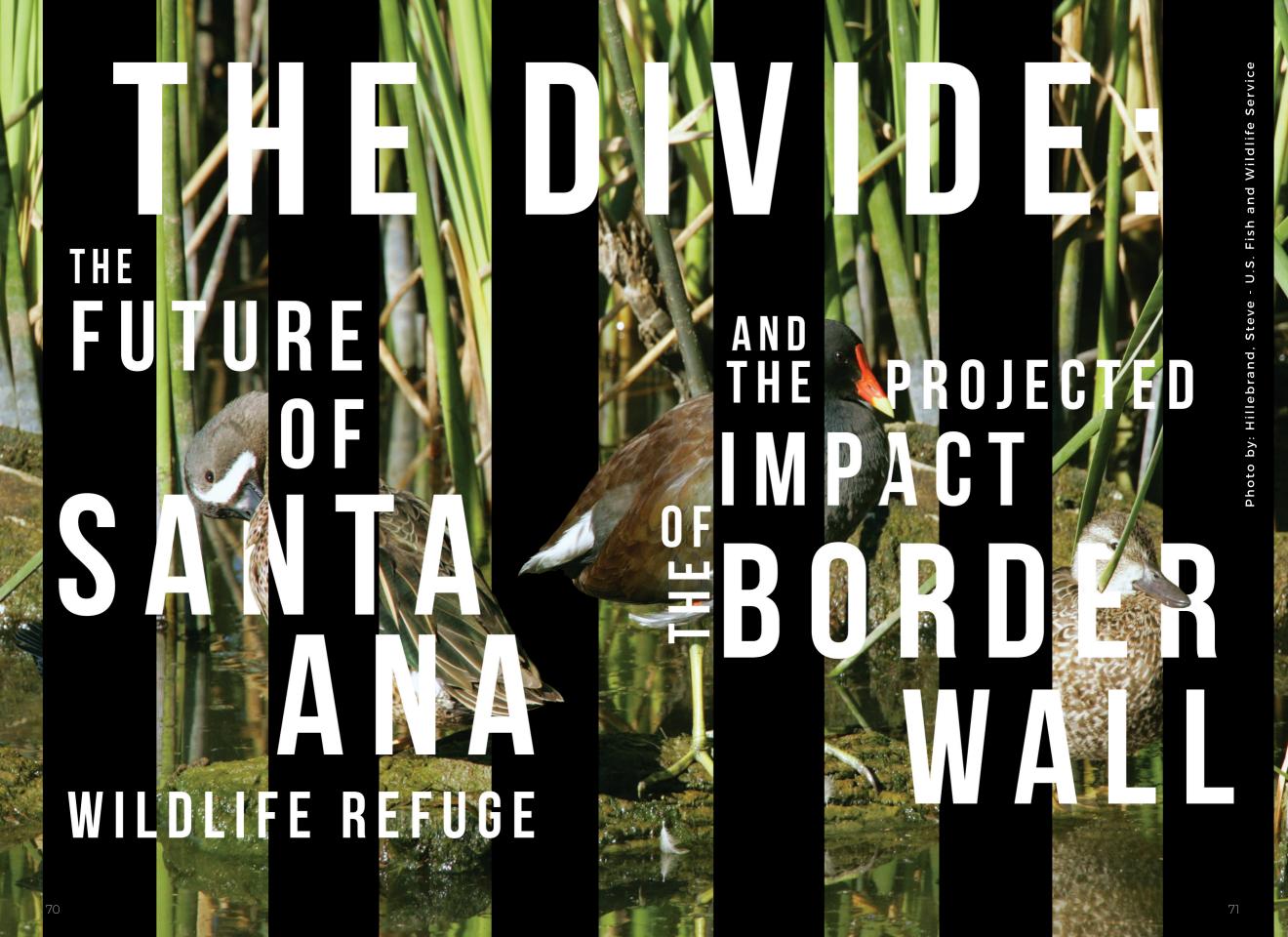
To keep up with the latest changes in the government, Quintana subscribes to newsletters and does online research. He shared a few words encouraging people to empathize with those in a similar situation.

"Really get to know somebody regardless of where they come from because in the end we're all from the same spot, which is this earth. And in the end we're all going to the same place," he said. "It's just this little particular section in between that we call life that separates us from what's really going on."

Injunctions issued by federal courts will, as of this moment, allow DACA recipients to continue renewing work permission. Still, until a permanent law is set in motion, the long-term future of more than 800,000 DREAMers remains uncertain.

Now the decision for what will ultimately be done with hundreds of thousands of students, athletes, performers and entrepreneurs lies in the hands of Congress and our president.





By: Axel Divino and Sage Bazan Photography: Arael Meza

side by side and hand in hand, with unbreakable gazes fixed on the horizon and voices loud enough to fill the national landmark, the protestors made it known that their wall of solidarity was stronger than one made of steel. Their message to our commander-in-chief was simple: do not destroy parts of the Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge with a border wall.

Along with the beautiful scenery that the Santa Ana Refuge offers to the eyes of its visitors, the vast array of vegetation and plants provides an ideal habitat for all of the animals that reside in the park. Fear and disappointment could be heard in protestor Kevin Brixby's voice as he looked out at the Santa Ana Refuge terrain. Brixby is an environmentalist from Austin, Texas who came to the refuge to warn locals about the true damage the border wall could cause.

"The reason we are here at this place [The Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge] is because this is one of the most important places in the state and in the country for wildlife refuge, and they are going to wipe out so many species of animals when they build that wall," he said.

The ocelot and the jaguarundi, two endangered wild cats, are currently protected in this refuge. Their sightings are closely documented by biologists with hopes that their numbers will increase and spread along the lower Rio Grande into other sanctuaries. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the refuge also offers sanctuary to 33 species of mammals, 400 species of birds and 300 species of butterflies; it is also home to more than 450 types of plants.

Brixby explained that the 30-foot high and 700-mile border wall will cut Santa Ana in half, blocking off all nature life on the other side. The construction process of the wall will also greatly contribute to the damage that the trees, vegetation, and wildlife will endure in the area. Although the border is being built on the assumption that it will increase safety in the United States, this agenda does not consider the living beings that cannot speak for themselves.

30-FOOT HIGH AND 700-MILE BORDER WALL WILL CUT SANTA ANA IN HALF, BLOCKING OFF ALL NATURE LIFE ON THE OTHER SIDE. The Sierra Club, an environmental organization based in San Francisco, shared its concern about the border wall's potential ecological. Sierra Club President, Loren Blackford, explained that instead of funding the wall, the money should be spent toward something more useful.

"They shouldn't fund this at all. It's a boondoggle. We should not fund the \$20 million that is being talked about now. There are so many other needs that could be fulfilled with that money," Blackford said. "Education and renewable energy desperately need money for infrastructure and this is the wrong infrastructure."

HOWEVER, THE ENVIRONMENTAL STATE OF THE PARK ISN'T THE ONLY OVERARCHING CONCERN. SANTA ANA WILDLIFE REFUGE IS ALSO CONSIDERED A MAJOR HISTORICAL LANDMARK IN SOUTH TEXAS.

Once part of the Mexican state of Tamaulipas and later purchased by the U.S. federal government in 1943, this wildlife natural reserve spans across the banks of the Rio Grande in a whopping 2,088-acres, 7 miles south of Alamo, Texas. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the federal government bought Santa Ana to protect migratory birds that annually stop in the Rio Grande Valley. The refuge also contains a small historical graveyard known as "Cementerio Viejo" which means, Old Cemetery. In it are graves that are more than 100 years old. One of the graves belongs to Thomas W. Jones, a land surveyor who was hired to survey the Texas border, spanning from El Paso to Brownsville. Unfortunately, in 1853 during his survey of Santa Ana, Jones drowned in the Rio Grande river. His story can be read on his gravestone at Cementerio Viejo.

While the border wall wouldn't damage or disrupt this area of the nature park, historians like Roseann Bacha-Garza believe that the overall construction process and presence of the wall may deter patrons from visiting Santa Ana altogether.

"I THINK PEOPLE WILL INITIALLY GO OUT OF CURIOSITY, BECAUSE THEY ARE GOING TO WANT TO SEE IT," SHE SAID. "BUT ONCE WE ALL FIND OUT HOW EASY IT IS TO VISIT ISANTA ANAI, I THINK THAT'S WHEN WE WILL SEE IF PEOPLE ARE STILL GOING TO GO OR NOT."

Garza, a history professor at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and one of the founders of the Community Historical Archaeology Project with Schools (CHAPS), co-developed the Rio Grande Valley Civil War Trail. Santa Ana is on this trail. Every year, the department of history at UTRGV holds a CHAPS class where history students learn about local history and visit Rio Grande Valley historical sites. Last year, Garza and the CHAPS class visited Santa Ana and learned how and where the border wall would be placed.

"They want to put the wall on top of the levee," Garza said. "Supposedly there is supposed to be a gate at the top of the levee that is going to let people through during day time hours so that visitors can see it [Santa Ana]."

The CHAPS director also explained that there are plans for a 150-foot buffer zone between where they put the wall and the other side of the levee; this area is designated for Border Patrol agents. The wall as well as the buffer zone are

going to affect some of the 2,088-acres of the property. While the plans for the wall have created an exuberant amount of disapproval, some believe that the wall going through Santa Ana is necessary.

Jason Breeden, a Border Patrol agent, explained that Border Patrol believes the wall will put fewer agents in harmful situations while decreasing the number of agent fatalities.

"The border wall will create a greater physical barrier than the Rio Grande river will ever be able to be," he said. "This barrier will help funnel potential undocumented immigrants towards a more effective way of being apprehended."

The projected construction and overall plans for the border wall are still being negotiated. Only time will reveal the true impact it will have on the Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge.









magine running, sweating and fending off bugs in the brush near the Rio Grande while combing the area for illegal immigrants in the company of U.S. Border Patrol agents and Office of Field Operations officers. Within a matter of minutes you are coming up on a multi-agency law enforcement operation that involves a failure to yield and a consequent bail out revealing that eight people have been stuffed in the back of a vehicle attempting to enter the United States illegally. The next morning you are at an international port of entry when a K-9 alerts Border Patrol to a shipment of produce coming from Mexico only to reveal, after secondary inspection, a valuable load of narcotics. Its destination? The interior of the United States to fuel this nation's demand for drugs. This is what I experienced for two weeks when I was given a first-hand opportunity to escort the crew of Fusion's

show Drug Wars: Season Five. The show presents the dangerous realities of drug trafficking and sting operations related to international anti-narcotics dealings. Season five of the show follows U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers and agents as they scour and trek to interdict narcotics and illegal products brought in the United States.

I worked with the crew for season three when I was a novice in the world of U.S. Customs and Border Protection(CBP). At the time it was all a wide-eyed experience since most of what I saw I had never witnessed before. Two seasons later, I was informed they would be returning to the Rio Grande Valley to film episodes for their upcoming Drug Wars: Season Five and of course, I was elated to find out that I would once again be with them.

This time, armed with more experience under my belt about CBP operations, I was paired up with producers Christine Fry and Mike Wech, and videographers Stan Eng, Nick Walker and Jack Winch, III. This is a top notch, end state focused crew that thinks on its feet and outside the box to get the most compelling storyline and imagery at every chance. The process to film a series or documentary with CBP was not a short one and required a significant amount of planning and scheduling of logistics once all was approved. It involved conversation and negotiations with legal teams of both sides, and required final vetting approval from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

During their time in the Rio Grande Valley, the Drug Wars crew was fortunate enough to document a season's worth of intense and dangerous situations, which included a K-9 alert that resulted in a multi-million seizure of narcotics, tracking a group of illegal immigrants

in the ranches of Brooks County after smugglers attempted to circumvent the Falfurrias checkpoint and going on aerial patrols with the Agents of Air and Marine Operations.

The videographers of this crew got a front row seat to border security in the Rio Grande Valley as they followed the officers from the Office of Field Operations (Laredo Field Office), the U.S. Border Patrol (Rio Grande Valley sector) and Air and Marine Operations (McAllen Air Branch and the Brownsville Marine Unit). None of the videographers had ever filmed in the RGV prior to this visit, let alone with a bird's eye view of U.S. Customs and Border Protection's border security mission. This was their first time working with CBP units tasked with protection and immigration enforcement on the Southwest border of Mexico. This season, myself and the crew were truly embedded in the midst of CBP and what they experience on a daily basis.





### How did you start working with Drug Wars?

Kise: I am a public affairs officer for U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Part of my job is to advise and assist TV outlets at the national and international level, which is how I got the opportunity to escort the Drug Wars crew. Initially, they reached out to the Department of Homeland Security and I got involved as the middleman.

## What is your position on the crew of the show or in regards to the show?

**Kise:** As a public affairs officer, I was an advisor to the crew and I also was a set photographer, which was also really cool because I got to incorporate my hobby into the job.

# Pulse: What is the most dangerous situation you and your colleagues have found yourselves in when filming?

Kise: Any situation we get into that involves apprehension of human or narcotic smugglers can turn dangerous without notice. If they get apprehended, they are hurting the bottom line which can carry consequences for them. Normally the agents are outnumbered so situational awareness is paramount. But, it's hard to name one. Every situation we put ourselves during filming is dangerous.

### What was the most exciting?

Kise: I would have to say the most exciting in this field for me, is conducting Air and Marine Operations on their helicopters from the McAllen Air Branch and aboard vessels from the Brownsville Marine Unit used in the Gulf of Mexico.

#### **5.** Would you consider yourself an adrenaline junkie outside of working with Border Wars?

Kise: I get plenty of adrenaline rushes in my daily job, I think you have to be an adrenaline junkie to do any of this. And before all of this I was in the military for a long time, and you have to be some kind of an adrenaline junkie to do that.

## 6. Drug Wars choose the border towns to visit/film?

**Kise:** They use location scouts before shooting begins. This area, the Rio Grande Valley, is a hot spot right now so that's why Fusion chose to bring the show back here.

## How do the border patrol agents get intel on who to look into or go after? Is it random?

**Kise:** There are many ways information is gathered. They can get it through technology, concerned citizens, confessions of stash house victims. Sometimes they get anonymous tips but like I said, there is more than one way they get this information.

## What cities in the Rio Grande Valley were filmed for Drug Wars? Are some cities worse than others?

Kise: We have filmed in McAllen, Mission, Rio Grande City, Pharr, Falfurrias, Donna, Roma, and Port Isabel. It really just varies. For example, in Roma we found an underground bunker in someone's house that was under their bathtub. In the bunker there were stacks of bricks of marijuana. In Falfurrias we would come across trucks that were packed with people in the backs of them.

## Are issues like drug trafficking and human trafficking truly as bad as they seem on the show?

Kise: They are worse, especially in larger cities a lot of locals don't grasp the full scope of what's going on down here because they don't see it and it doesn't really affect them. When the crew first came down here, they were especially surprised by the family units because it's something they haven't seen. They typically deal with drugs because you know, the show is Drug Wars. So that was something they were surprised about.

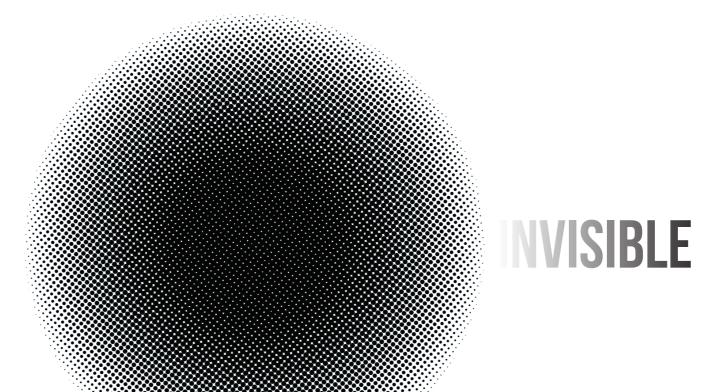
# 10 How does it feel to get up close and personally experience crazy situations that most Americans will only experience through television?

**Kise:** It is exciting and it opens your eyes to the real issues at ground level. It can be dangerous as well so you always have to be aware of your surroundings.

#### Pulse: What is your favorite thing about working with the show?

Kise: Watching all the phases of the puzzle. Planning, logistics, filming, which takes many hours, and then seeing the result. I can watch and say, I was there or I remember that scene.





#### A LOOK AT THREE UTRGV ASTUDENTS AND THEIR EXPERIENCE LIVING UNDER DACA

By: Gabriel Galvan

While hundreds of students across the United States are protesting for change, another group of students are facing a situation that requires them to speak from the shadows. At The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, almost 70 students are affected by the Trump administration's inability to decide the fate of immigrants who came to the United States as children. Those who registered under the Obama administration's Deferred Action are living in limbo.

"We currently have just under 900 undocumented students. Not all of these students would qualify for DACA and some who qualify will have chosen not to apply," Kristin Croyle, Vice President of Student Success said. "Since

DACA isn't directly relevant to education, but instead is more relevant to employment, we don't collect DACA information unless the student happens to work for us. We have just under 70 students that we are aware have DACA because they have voluntarily disclosed that as part of employment with UTRGV."

These students came out of the shadows with the promise of protections with DACA, but now with today's xenophobic, racist and American-elitist rhetoric, many are fearful of sharing their story. However, three students were willing to tell their stories as DACA youth, with a promise of anonymity.

Esteban, which is an alias provided for his protection, was the first student

who shared his story, with his father present.

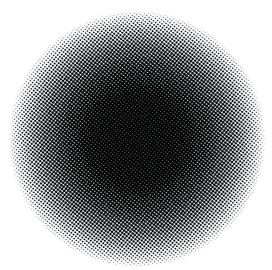
"I was born in Montemorelos. My parents worked at a fruit plant and moved to the States because of the scarcity of jobs in Mexico," he said. He said his father "was looking for any job he can get. Any job he could get, he would take."

Once they arrived in the United States Esteban's father found a job mowing lawns while his mother became a housemaid.

The UTRGV student was brought to the United States in 1998 when he was 2 years old. He spoke only Spanish, which was eventually diluted in public school. After living in the United States for three years, his parents applied for residency in 2001, but never received an update on their status. According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, to apply for a residency, applicants need to be eligible under Homeland Security guidelines and submit an I-485 form in addition to supporting documents. Eventually, USCIS will contact you and request an interview. The process can take years, but the time depends on the situation of the applicant.

If his family was granted residency, the burden of paying his college tuition could be alleviated with financial aid and scholarships.

"There are very few grants that are available to me, like the senate bill that grants aid. But right now I'm struggling because I do not qualify for them," Esteban said.



To pay for college, the UTRGV student has been using emergency loans and paying them off during the semester, while working multiple jobs. He is a sub-maker at Firehouse Subs, a web-developer at UTRGV and an assistant manager in a tennis store.

"Because of the situation that I'm in, I have to pay out of pocket, so I have to take off semesters," Esteban said. "I have to work a semester, then study another summer while working on the side. So my graduation has been delayed."

The DACA recipient should be able to graduate with honors in 2020. He said his biggest barrier as a non-resident is finding and keeping jobs, especially ones that require employees to be U.S. citizens. However, despite his struggles, he said he has never felt like he was treated differently from a social standpoint due to his appearance. Esteban has light skin and an American accent.

"Up to some point, I actually didn't even know that I was born somewhere else. I actually thought I was born here in the United States," he said.

Esteban explained that his parents finally told him that he was from Mexico in middle school. As he got older, the UTRGV student realized that not having a citizenship was going to be a heavy burden to bear.

"I had big dreams. I wanted to go to MIT or USC. I wanted to go to the big schools, but by that the time, I knew that dream wasn't going to be a reality, because of the situation I was in," he said.

Esteban said that the current political climate has had a significant impact on him. He explained that if he lost his DACA status, he would have to work the way his dad does by finding odd-jobs like as mowing laws or repairing computers.

"Obviously it wouldn't be as good as having a good paying job," Esteban said. "Just trying to do enough to make the money, someway, somehow."

Esteban is not alone in fearing for himself and his family. Valeria, another UTRGV student under DACA, was also willing to tell her story. "I am very scared for myself and my family. I drive and I have a license. I have plates from [the United States]. My car is registered and everything. I do have insurance. But I don't have an American license," she said. "If I get pulled over by one of these cops, there was a law in September that allowed cops to ask for your legal documentation, and if you're not in the system, you get deported. So I would be scared for myself and my family."

Valeria is a freshman Civil Engineering student at UTRGV. She was born in Monterey in 1997 and moved to the United States with her parents in 2003 when she was 6-years-old. Valeria's dad was a successful doctor in Reynosa who had his own clinic. Sadly, Valeria's family was forced to move to McAllen when cartels asked her father for money. It became life-threatening when the cartels threatened to kill their family if they didn't pay. While the 21-year-old's status is currently in limbo, Valeria explained how she hopes to obtain her residency in the future.

"I am planning on either waiting for my mom to get married with her boyfriend, which he is a US citizen, then [he can] ask for [a citizenship for] me, and that would be \$2000 I think, and it would be another \$1000 for like a pardon because I stayed here after I was 18," she said.

Like Esteban, both of Valeria's parents were able to find some work. However, she didn't want to get too specific about what her parents do for a living today, fearing for their safety.

"My mom is a manager of a place, but she has to take a lot of bullshit from a lot of people," Valeria said. "If she gets harassed or anything, she isn't able to say anything because of her status. She can't go to the police because the police can now ask for your documentation."

Documentation is also required to receive financial alleviation in college. Valeria has currently been paying for college by scholarships and loans through her TASFA. She has had a wide variety of jobs, from babysitting to cleaning that also contribute to her tuition. However, the DACA recipient said she only has access to jobs that do not require social security and like Esteban, Valeria also found paying for college very difficult.

"I wouldn't be able to get the full help [in terms of loans] that I would like, even though I have a good GPA, compared to some who do have full citizenship," Valeria said.

Valeria submitted her TASFA for the spring semester, but she was not eligible for any funding, despite her high GPA. In order to pay her classes, Valeria has to pay over \$700 a month, which is more than she is currently making.

She explained that her citizenship status has always affected her academically. The UTRGV student said she has had other missed opportunities, like attending UIL competitions in middle school and high school, because of her inability to pass checkpoints.

She said that ultimately she fears being deported, explaining that she would not know how to rebuild her life if she was sent back to Mexico.

"It is like starting all over. I don't feel like it's fair because we are all human, and most people who get here illegally, it's because they have life-threatening situations back home," Valeria said.

Liah, another individual who is here under DACA, is a Political Science Graduate. Through her degree, she was able to learn how immigrants specifically affect the economy. Liah believes that immigrants are often blamed unfairly for taking in welfare and government assistance.

"The thing is, undocumented immigrants, cannot by law, have access to these things, we pay into them, so we pay our taxes that go to it, but we cannot receive any of it," she said.

Liah believes people are unaware what benefits undocumented immigrants are and are not eligible to receive. She explained that undocumented immigrants are not eligible for Medicare, Social Security, Medicaid, CHIP and SNAP, even though they pay taxes such as income and sales tax.

"So I think when people say we are taking away something, I want to know, what am I taking away from you?" the UTRGV graduate said.

Liah was born in Nuevo Leon, Mexico. She lived there until 2001 and moved to Houston when she was 6 years old. Like Valeria, Liah's dad also struggled with his employment in Mexico.

"In Mexico, my father was an engineer. He actually had a 26-year career as an engineer," she said. "He decided to leave because corruption started to come to our state and the company that he was working for was trying to launder money. He is very by-the-book and he didn't want to get involved."

Liah said that her father quit his job because he was feeling pressured by the illegal activities happening in the company. The UTRGV graduate said that her father lost a lot by moving to the United States, since he was sacrificing his large income and retirement benefits by leaving Mexico.

"When we got to the United States my Father, since he was nearing 50, didn't want to go back to school for engineering, so he got a job in Houston fixing air conditioners." Now he works in a restaurant here in the valley, and makes in a year what he used to make in a month. Liah's family tried to apply for residency but inter-family issues hindered them from succeeding.

"They [Liah's other family members] were trying to apply for residency in 2007. My Dad when he was in Mexico, he was able to get residency for his family who was living over here. But once we were here it was difficult, and the family members that we had helped didn't want to help us, so we were basically not able to do it," she said.

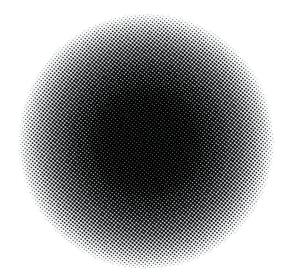
While the response from her father's family was heartbreaking, Liah has gained some hope while living in the United States. In December 2016, she graduated with a Bachelors of Arts in Political Science.

"I had a scholarship that covered all my tuition. I thought I was not able to go to school, but I got a scholarship that paid for my classes and books," she said.

During her undergraduate years, Liah also had the opportunity to take part in a congressional internship with Congressman Hinojosa.

I was able to do it with an outside program. People who have DACA are able to intern in Congress if they have an outside party that is hosting them. So we are not being paid through the government, we are being paid by this outside program."

Through this program, she was able to intern at the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute, where she was able to work personally with Congressman Rubén Hinojosa. However, Liah explained that while she was lucky to have been accepted for the internship, her lack of citizenship still makes employment and education opportunities difficult.



"The biggest barrier that is created by my lack of citizenship is the jobs I am able to get. I'm not able to work for the federal government. I'm not able to travel," she said. "I think that's the biggest barrier that I have. I want to go to learn in other countries, specifically Sweden, but I'm not able to do that."

Leah said that her lack of citizenship limits her personal academic goals. Being undocumented prevents her from taking the LSAT and applying for law school like she wants.

"I also cannot get federal loans, and private loans hesitate to give to people like myself, who are not permanent residents, because of the risk that they have on whether or not we can pay them back," Leah said. "For me, that is kind of hindering me from moving on in my life."

In contrast to Esteban, Liah believes she was treated differently because of her lack of citizenship.

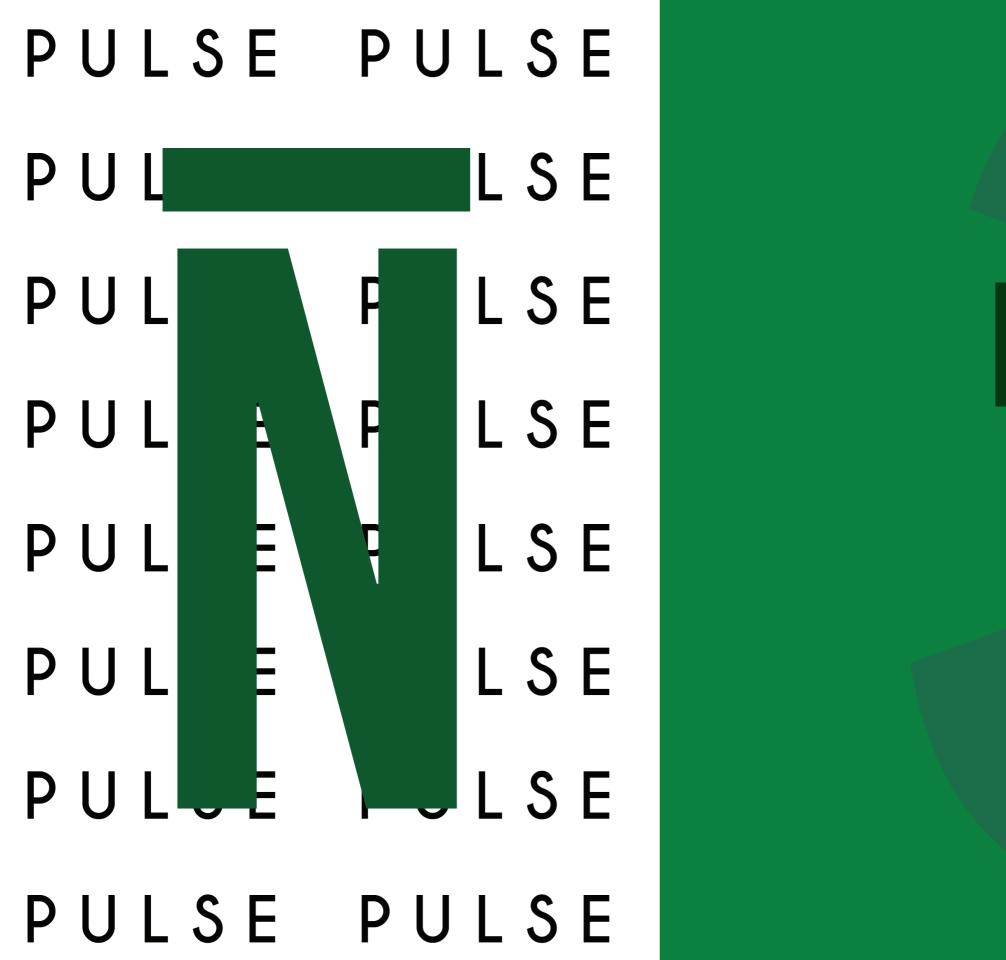
"Most of the time when I tell people [I'm undocumented] they're okay with it. But most of them are immigrants or know someone who is an immigrant," she said. "So for them, the immigrant situation is different.....Now you're hearing that [people] saying that immigrants are stealing all these resources from American citizens," Leah said.

She said that contrary to the administration's opinion, undocumented immigrants are hard working because they know that their opportunities are at stake.

"We'll work overtime. We'll do whatever we can to get a great job because we know that otherwise, we would not have the opportunity," Leah said. "I definitely think we are scapegoated."

Since the election in 2016 these three young dreamers, along with many more individuals whose stories remain untold, have been fearing for their lives and the lives of their families. It was their hope that by sharing their stories, Americans would be less afraid of letting people like them stay.

\*All three of these students wanted to remain anonymous and use aliases for their personal safety and the safety of their families.\*







En octubre de 2016, el fotógrafo mexicano Carlos Lang compartió una foto en su cuenta de Instagram portando una chamarra con la frase "México is the shit" escrita en la espalda mientras posaba frente a la Torre Trump en Nueva York. Inmediatamente, la imagen se volvió viral, llegando a sobrepasar los 9,000 likes. Debido a que la publicación coincidió con las elecciones presidenciales en Estados Unidos, muchos aseguraron que la prenda había sido creada en respuesta a los comentarios negativos del entonces candidato Donald Trump hacia México. Sin embargo, el diseñador de la chamarra asegura que ese no fue el motivo que lo inspiró a crearla.



nuar Layón, creador de "Mexico is the shit", es un joven mexicano con años de experiencia en la industria textil. Actualmente cuenta con más de 34,000 seguidores en sus redes sociales y ha presentado sus colecciones en el Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week de la Ciudad de México. En entrevista para Pulse, Layón nos cuenta un poco más a cerca de su carrera como diseñador y del gran impacto de la chamarra en redes sociales.

#### \* LEYENDA \*

Esto nos es sólo una chamarra, es una declaración, una oportunidad para recordar al mundo que ¡México es grande! Que todo lo hecho en México está bien hecho. Es un homenaje a todos aquellos mexicanos en todo el mundo que están cambiando la cultura global con sus hermosos corazones y mentes brillantes; es una manera de mostrar que somos muchos y estamos juntos; elevando los estándares, recordando al mundo que nuestra voz importa. "Mexico is the Shit" es una comunidad, un sistema de apoyo y un movimiento que inspira ¡amor, respeto y confianza! Y lo mejor es, no tienes que ser mexicano para ser parte de él. Solo hay que amar a México como nosotros lo hacemos.

#SPREAD THE WORD!

Me gustaría empezar por preguntarte un poco más acerca de tu trayectoria como diseñador. ¿Dónde creciste?, ¿dónde estudiaste?, ¿cuáles han sido otros de tus proyectos?, y ¿cómo fue que empezaste a trabajar para Mercadorama?

Bueno, empecé como diseñador textil hace ya más de once años y todo comenzó porque yo desde niño tenía mucha facilidad para el tema de las manualidades y de las artes gráficas. Desde muy pequeño, mi mamá me inculcó las artes y estudié desde clases de cerámica, repujado, vitrales, pintura, hice óleo mucho tiempo, y pues siempre fui muy afín al tema de lo artístico. En algún tiempo bailé, en otro tiempo hice actuación, entonces se me presentaron muchas cosas que tenían que ver con las industrias creativas. Estudié en la Escuela de Diseño del Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, en la calle de Xocongo en el centro de la Ciudad de México. Y bueno, trunqué mi carrera porque siempre fui muy inquieto para el tema de lo laboral y dejé la carrera por trabajar.

Trabajé en una agencia de publicidad durante mucho tiempo, y fue entonces cuando decidí crear mi primera marca de moda llamada FORMOSA, en alianza con una compañera de la universidad. Esa marca se fue modificando y fue cambiando su perspectiva comercial hasta que nos convertimos en una empresa que se llamó Fashion Marketing Solutions en la cual nos dedicábamos a crear uniformes corporativos especializados en publicidad y mercadotecnia. Esto lo hicimos durante once años y hace alrededor de hace seis conocí a Ahmed Bautista, quien es el dueño fundador de Mercadorama. Nos volvimos socios, primero teniendo una sociedad comercial en la cual yo trabajaba como proveedor y en septiembre del 2016 decidimos asociarnos formalmente, convirtiéndome en el director creativo y socio de la división Mercadorama Custom. Actualmente me encuentro en esa posición dentro de la compañía, pero en realidad ya veníamos haciendo cosas desde hace más de seis años con Mercadorama en el tema de moda.



2. Cómo fue que nació la idea de la chamarra "Mexico is the shit"? y ¿por qué decidiste presentar el mensaje en una chamarra y no en alguna otra prenda?

La idea de "Mexico is the shit" nació porque yo tengo muchos años produciendo moda con algún tipo de enfoque social, sobre todo con el tema de enaltecer a México como país. Muchos saben que soy el director creativo de una marca que se llama Prima Volta, y esta chamarra estaba diseñada para ser lanzada en una colección llamada "Proudly Mexican," y originalmente en vez de decir "Mexico is the shit," la chamarra iba a decir "Proudly Mexican."

Pero una de mis primeras acciones dentro de Mercadorama fue crear un uniforme para todos los artistas gráficos y colaboradores involucrados con la marca. El tema es que Mercadorama cuenta con muchos colaboradores internacionales y "Proudly Mexican" no iba a ser algo que los representara porque ellos no son ni mexicanos ni orgullosa-

mente mexicanos. Pueden amar a México y estar muy orgullosos de trabajar con el país, pero en realidad no son mexicanos. Por eso decidí cambiar la frase, y me fue muy fácil hacerlo en un lenguaje muy coloquial y entendible por todos estos colaboradores y gente de la industria poner "Mexico is the shit" ya que es un slang que tiene una repercusión importante en el mundo contemporáneo. En esta tendencia de personas cercanas a nosotros, la tendencia musical, artística, o gráfica, todos entendemos el slang "the shit." Decir "Mexico is the shit" es como decir "México es lo mejor." Es una chamarra porque venimos produciendo chamarras desde hace mucho tiempo y era una manera muy práctica de darles un artículo que tuviera más permanencia en su guardarropa.



#### **3** Al ser un producto mexicano, ¿por qué decidiste que el mensaje fuera en inglés?

Como ya te comenté, la chamarra no estaba pensada para sacarse a la venta. Era un producto que era única y exclusivamente parte del uniforme de Mercadorama y de todos sus colaboradores. El mensaje está en inglés porque viajamos a todo el mundo y porque es más fácil permear en todo tipo de público estando en ese idioma, a diferencia en español. Si viajas a Japón, por ejemplo, es probable que la gente no vaya a entender que significa "México es chingón;" y aparte, la historia se cuenta diferente.

## ¿Por qué es tan importante la leyenda al interior de la chamarra?

La leyenda es importante porque cuando decidimos sacar la chamarra a la venta no queríamos que fuera un producto que dijera "Mexico is the shit" nada más porque sí, sino porque verdaderamente contara una historia y lo que está detrás de nosotros como personas, de nosotros como compañía y de toda la historia detrás de Mercadorama, y el por qué creemos que México "is the shit."



El éxito de la chamarra no solamente se debe al patriotismo detrás de ella, sino a la controversia que ha llegado a causar en varias ocasiones. A pesar de que se hiciera viral en redes sociales, aún hay gente que considera la frase "Mexico is the shit" como un lenguaje ofensivo. Uno de los ejemplos más sonados de desapruebo a la chamarra es el caso de Tania Larios, quien el año pasado usó su cuenta de Twitter para manifestar su desapruebo por la chamarra cuando vio que era usada por huéspedes del hotel Condesa DF. "Cómo es posible qué un hotel mexicano reciba a este tipo de gente que insulta a nuestro país." escribió Larios.

De inmediato, cientos de usuarios se dieron a la tarea de explicarle a la joven el significado coloquial de la frase "is the shit." Sin embargo, ella siguió en su postura y se justificó al decir que le nombre de México no debería relacionarse con ningún slang. Recientemente, el usuario de Facebook EliUu Linho denunció por medio de un video haber sido corrido por el personal de la Cervecería Transpeninsular en Ensenada, Baja California por portar la chamarra.

"La sociedad que nos gobierna hoy en día, es la que nos destruye por su ignorancia. Te agradecemos por tu no "hospitality" Cervecería Transpeninsula," escribió en su perfil.

5. Cuál es tu opinión acerca de la viralización de la chamarra en las redes sociales, y qué opinas acerca de la polémica que ha llegado a causar debido al lenguaje que utiliza?

Creo que la viralización es algo que ha sucedido de manera muy orgánica en el caso de "Mexico is the shit." Las redes sociales son algo a lo que el mundo ha tenido que voltear a poner la mirada ya que las tendencias han cambiado. Me atrevo a decir incluso que la televisión tiene un impacto menor y la forma en la que investigamos hoy en día. Justo por lo mismo, si así te llegó esa información ¿por qué no utilizas el mismo medio para investigarlo? Es de sabios cambiar de opinión, y es de sabios equivocarse. Entonces, creo que es bien importante que la gente se replantee todos los días cuando algo no nos parece o cuando algo nos hace ruido en la mente e investigarlo a fondo. Meternos a Google o a Urban Dictionary a investigarlo y aprender a cambiar de opinión. O sea, si por error te metiste a tu cuenta de Twitter y pusiste "Qué pena que estén usando esta chamarra y estén ofendiendo al país," y llegan a decirte "Oye, cálmate. Te estás equivocando. Esto es realmente lo que significa," poder admitir que te equivocaste y apoyarlo. O bueno, también se vale tener una opinión negativa, pero que al menos tengamos bien un fundamento.

**6**¿Cómo es el proceso de elaboración de la chamarra? ¿Se impulsa la mano de obra y materiales mexicanos al fabricarla? ¿Cómo es que la chamarra promueve no solo un mensaje, sino también el comercio mexicano?

Es una chamarra 100% nacional, desde los materiales, la mano de obra, y todo el equipo de colaboradores y trabajadores dentro de la empresa. El volumen de chamarras que se venden mensualmente se agota no por un plan de marketing, sino porque es la cantidad de material 100% nacional que se alcanza a producir para que nosotros podamos procesarlo y fabricar la chamarra. En temas de fabricación y confección, elegimos talleres que produzcan a la economía familiar. Son talleres que regularmente lo trabajan miembros de una familia y que generan economía para toda esa familia y otros empleados. Básicamente, la cantidad de chamarras que salen mes con mes está basada en la capacidad de producción que tenemos con esta cultura y esta tendencia de producción que buscamos en cada uno de los talleres que trabajan con "Mexico is the shit."

7 ¿Llegaste a imaginarte los alcances que tendría esta chamarra? ¿Cómo es el proceso de venta de la chamarra y cuáles son las formas de adquirirla?

No, definitivamente fue algo que nos sorprendió. No era una prenda diseñada para venderse, ni fue en respuesta a los mensajes de Trump hacia el país. Simple y sencillamente la hicimos, se viralizó y decidimos venderla porque

era solicitud del público. Es por eso que detrás de la chamarra existe toda esta experiencia de compra a través del empaque y de la venta online. Venderla online, o únicamente online, no es solamente porque se nos haga fácil o por generar un plan de marketing que sea medio inalcanzable. Lo hacemos así porque creemos que en México es importante empezar a promover la tecnología, como existe en otros países, y forzar a que la gente entienda como funciona y que eso nos ayude a crecer como país en temas de tecnología. Además, es importante mencionar que se vende en una plataforma online 100% nacional que se llama Kichink. El link de la página es www.mercadorama.com. mx o www.kichink.com. Se vende una vez al mes y en cuanto se agota el producto se apaga la tienda y se vuelve a producir para el siguiente mes. Regularmente es entre el primero o los últimos días de cada mes, dependiendo de en qué día caiga. Si el último día del mes cae en viernes, se vende hasta el primer día laboral del mes siguiente porque la paquetería no hace entregas los fines de semana.



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# Como mexicano y como diseñador de la chamarra, ¿qué es lo que sientes al portarla?

Siento increíble, la verdad que es algo que no me ha aburrido en lo absoluto. Te puedo decir que es un orgullo impresionante que alguien te detenga en la calle para hacerte un comentario acerca de la chamarra. Hace unos días estuve en Los Ángeles, también he estado en Londres y en Israel, y siempre la portamos con mucho orgullo y con mucho amor porque no va a faltar una persona que se acerque y nos diga "claro que México is the shit," "claro que lo creemos," "claro que no apoyamos los mensajes negativos en contra de su país." La verdad es que es bien bonito. Y también es bien bonito cuando alguien se te acerca y te dice, "oye, ¿por qué dice eso tu chamarra?, ¿por qué odias a tu país?" y explicarles el verdadero mensaje detrás de ella. La verdad es que desde que empezamos con este movimiento nos hemos tomado el tiempo de acercarnos a la gente que nos pregunta cuando lo reciben como un mensaje negativo. Creo que es parte del amor por México, acercarte a la persona y decirle, "te estás confundiendo, pero esto es lo que realmente significa..." Es como una forma de evangelizar.

Qué sientes al verla alrededor del mundo? y ¿cuáles son las experiencias más gratas que te ha dejado este fenómeno?

Es divino verla alrededor del mundo, es impresionante y es muy gratificante. Algo que me ha dejado "Mexico is the shit" es que todos los días me replanteo si estoy viviendo mi vida como mexica-



no de manera correcta, si todo lo que me fue heredado en temas de forma de ser y de forma de pensar es la manera correcta de aportar algo positivo a mi país. Eso ha sido lo más bonito que me ha dejado este movimiento.

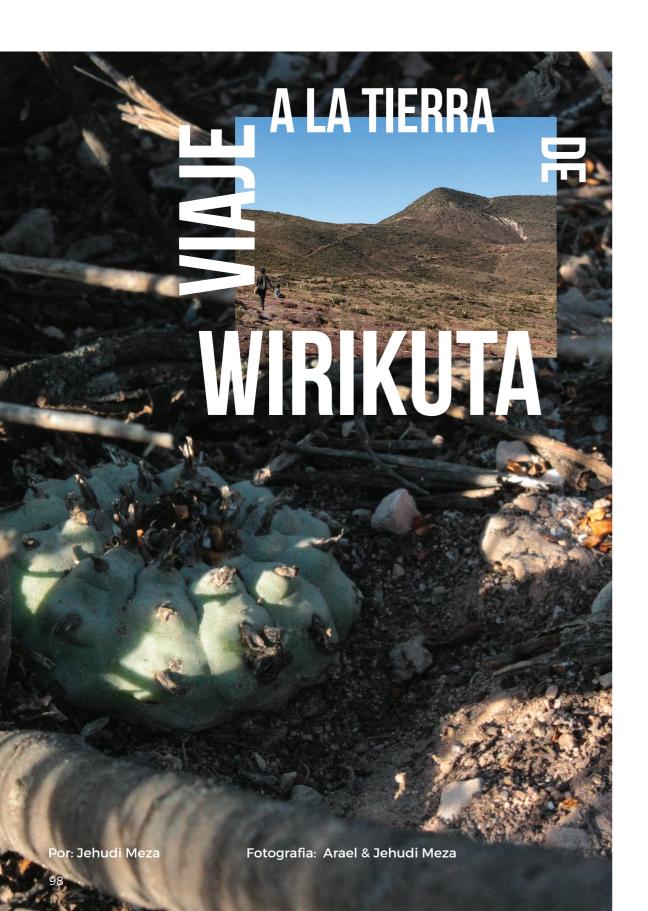
# **10** Después del gran y continuo éxito de la chamarra, ¿cuáles son tus siguientes proyectos?

Me parece que es importante seguir impulsando a la plataforma nacional, pero también empezar a buscar espacios en las plataformas internacionales para permear el mercado de la moda en las industrias a nivel mundial. Pero también es bien importante saber que yo no estoy haciendo esto solo por mi nombre, sino que, ya que "Mexico is the shit" me abrió una puerta, mi trabajo ahora es empezar a ver qué es lo que voy a desarrollar para que las futuras generaciones de México la tengan más fácil y que tengan la oportunidad de expandir el mercado, porque definitivamente hay muchísimo talento y muchísimo más talento del que yo pueda tener. Lo mío es circunstancial. Ya que se abrió esta puerta, creo que es importante mantenerla así y hacerla más grande para las generaciones que vienen y que necesitan expandirse para poder decir que en México si hay industria.

Por último, ¿qué mensaje le darías a otros •jóvenes que buscan alcanzar el éxito?, y ¿cuál es tu mensaje para todas aquellas personas que decidieron salir de México en busca de mejores oportunidades?

La verdad es que las grandes cosas están hechas a base de pruebas y de errores. No permitamos que un error nos lleve al fracaso y desertemos, al contrario, creo que es necesario replantearse que fue lo que salió mal y volverlo a desarrollar para hacerlo bien. Creo que esa es la clave del éxito, levantarse temprano todos los días, tener proyectos y objetivos fijos y saber que probablemente van a fallar, pero tener bien claro que el objetivo no es que ese proyecto salga bien, sino que salga excelente y que al final si no fallas no estas teniendo nada de aprendizaje y no puedes lograr hacer lo que estás buscando o lo que estás esperando perfectamente.

Creo que es increíble que la gente haya salido del país para hacer cosas impresionantes, parte de "Mexico is the shit" está inspirado en eso. Mi opinión es que lo sigan haciendo. Yo creo que es bien bonito cuando la gente emigra de nuestro país para poner su nombre en alto. Es importante saber siempre cuáles son nuestras culturas, cuáles son nuestras raíces y siempre enaltecerlas y exaltarlas, aunque sea de una manera contemporánea. "Mexico is the shit" no tiene nada convencional en la chamarra más que el amor con el que está hecha, pero no estás viendo un zarape, sabes? O sea, es salirnos de la zona de confort y de lo tradicional para volverlo contemporáneo. Eso no significa que lo otro esté mal, pero estamos en un momento en el que el mundo necesita poner los ojos no solamente en lo tradicional de México, que es divino, pero creo que es momento de empezarle a expresar al mundo que somos mucho, que hay tecnología, que hay diseño, que hay desarrollo, que hay emprendimiento, que hay una serie de cosas que de verdad nos representa como país y que mucha gente en el mundo no conoce.



espués de un viaje sin precedentes, lleno de pequeños incidentes que se impregnan como imágenes en la memoria de un rollo develado por el tiempo. Escribo para no olvidar el significado de pequeños eventos afortunados y desafortunados, que alumbran lo cotidiano de la vida, con una luz de sentido que por un momento flashea las piedras con vida.

Esta historia no es diferente a cualquier otra, que empieza con unos individuos viajando por una carretera de cierta numeración, en búsqueda de un lugar contemplado en los relatos de otros y visto con la rapidez con que la luz penetra los ojos de un errante en tierra ajena, que como extraño viaja sin volver atrás, bombardeado de mil imágenes que es imposible del todo recordar.

Lo poco que recuerdo es que después de haber manejado por horas, llegamos a una estrecha carretera paralela a unas vías del tren. Ellas nos guiaron a lo largo de antiguas estaciones con nombres foráneos como "Estación Wadley," y locales como "Los Catorce," que algun dia nacieron de una prosperidad minera que los lugareños cuentan con aires añorados. Entre los recuerdos se escuchan las historias de vagones llenos con toneladas de menas que viajaban por esas vías hacia las refinerías, para de ellas sacar el precioso metal que después sería exportado fuera del país. Enriqueciendo así a españoles que ya hace años partieron; dejando atrás pueblos abandonados, minas fantasmas, y pueblos arraigados a los costados de las vías férreas que solitarias se oxidan en el tiempo que nunca da marcha atrás.

Las vías se perdieron de vista, así como los pueblos que dejamos atrás; vías colonizadoras del desierto que solamente los Wixáricas, desde tiempos memorables, se atreven a atravesar. Tomamos la única ruta que nuestro carro podría transitar, no sin dificultad, pues era un camino empedrado, angosto, que prometía adentrarnos en el desierto hacia el mítico pueblo del Real de Catorce. El cual se encuentra al otro lado de un cerro gigantesco que daba fin a la empedrada serpiente que nos condujo hasta un antiguo túnel, que se atraviesa tal como los mineros lo hacían en antaño con el fin de encontrar riquezas del otro lado.



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Manejamos por más de ocho minutos en el túnel que parece extenderse por kilómetros. Y así arribamos a una pequeña villa con dos calles, pobladas con casas de piedra que fueron una vez habitadas por los españoles colonos. Ahora estas casas son hoteles, tiendas, locales de comercio, y restaurantes, los cuales todo aquel que llega a visitar Real de Catorce ve sin falta. Hasta el dia de hoy los pobladores de Real de Catorce viven a las afueras de esta villa empedrada, sus casas son humildes, y los senderos para llegar a ellas son casi imposibles de recorrer por el aficionado turista. Estas dos calles empiezan a empinarse y a dividirse al contacto con el terreno irregular que les acoge, hasta desaparecer desembocando en el desierto que rodea este pequeño oasis creado por el hombre. La blanca catedral, una fuente circular sin agua, y el quiosco se en-



rocan en tierra brindando familiaridad y el sentir que no se está en un sueño; aunque veamos las estrellas impactadas como piedras en el suelo: recordatorio que ya no caminamos más sobre la tierra.

Así nos dirigimos hacia el desierto de Wirikuta siguiendo el camino de piedras cuesta abajo, pasando por pequeñas y humildes chozas que son afortunadas de no encontrar su acogimiento entre las cuevas de las montañas. Un riachuelo seco acompaña nuestro sendero que se encuentra ser-

penteando entre majestuosas entradas antiguas con arcos gigantescos que dan lugar a paredes sin techos, ni ventanas. Lugares abandonados que nos recuerdan que nos dirigimos a la tierra del olvido donde el aire sopla con tal fuerza que habla con las montañas secretos que no entendemos.

En este viaje, el primer contacto espiritual que tuvimos es con la tierra.

Dejamos atrás el bullido de los "Willys" que invitan a una aventura descarada con sagrado sabor a tierra, donde décadas de crecimiento se imbuyen en una sentada. Espinoza verdad del desierto es el buscar el nutrimento, sin perder esperanzas, paciencia o conformarse con bocanadas de tierra que alimentan al cuerpo y al alma. En este viaje, el primer contacto espiritual que tuvimos es con la tierra. Los ancestros cultivaron una harmoniosa coneccion universal con el elemento sagrado que tocaba sus pies. El trabajo que conlleva vivir en la tierra ha sido transmitido al campesino actual, que aun en tierra árida siembra y cosecha; el comerciante legendario que viaja en su burro de pueblo en pueblo para intercambiar productos; y la vida en general que no se detiene y lucha para sobrevivir en la más árida tierra donde los árboles son



escasos y cuidados como la cosa más sagrada que conecta los cielos con la tierra. Para mi el sabor a tierra en mi boca, el polvo del desierto en mis ropas, y las fuerzas para dirigirme en medio del desierto por la tarde y sin parar en la noche me son suficientes para entender, qué es esta tierra la que me ha conformado -que tierra somos y nada más.

Durante el día el aire nos incita a buscar entre las piedras la belleza de la singularidad. Después de ver piedras blancas con incrustaciones brillantes como diamantes y pasar por entre las manos incontables simples otras, la escrutada búsqueda de perfecciones termina; las manos quedan llenas y los bolsillos empiezan a pesar, el aire entonces murmura --la belleza es la singularidad. Entonces nos pregunta: por qué buscáis aquello que todo lo que existe posee solo en piedras diamantadas? Acaso la piedra gris y gastada por el tiempo no tiene valor? Que no es existencia este singular valor? Ninguna piedra sería piedra sin primero ser. Así que paramos de buscar piedras y empezamos a entendernos a nosotros mismos un poco mas; pues asi como piedras somos y existimos nada mas, somos iguales a todos y a todas las cosas en lo singular.

Solamente dos árboles majestuosos encontramos en nuestro camino, parecen ser venerados. Nos acercamos y vemos un círculo que rodea el árbol cuya belleza estética he olvidado, descansamos bajo su sombra y no es hasta que lo tocamos con las manos que entendemos que es lo especial que irradia. La corteza es dura como roca, helada como el viento, desafiante contra el tiempo, no permite sonido externo. Lo sabemos porque después de acercar nuestro oído y abrazarlo por un momento no percibimos perturbación alguna. El árbol sin nombre está allí apacible, inamovible, como una eterna parte del paisaje; que como montaña se ensalza, para compararse con ella en fuerza, a pesar de haber surgido de una frágil semilla que sin agua no es nada. El otro árbol al pie del Cerro del Quemado se encuentra, como si observando la incambiable vista que montañas colindantes conforman, dando la bienvenida y el último lugar de descanso para aquellos que buscan la magia del sol, que besa la tierra de la cumbre del sagrado monte que no difiere en altura o semejanza alguna, pero cuya cumbre es diferente a cualquiera.

Nos encontramos a oscuras en búsqueda de este legendario cerro quemado, que cuya única diferencia es el árbol sin nombre a su costado. En este momento nada mas nos mantiene con fuerzas, solo la luz de luna en nuestras cabezas y el sabor a tierra que aún no nos abandona. La luz plateada nos alumbra por cerros y valles recién conocidos. Todo adquiere un color diferente que nos acompaña sin sombras de duda que encontraremos nuestro destino, aunque no tengamos fuerzas para andar. Nos tiramos al suelo mirando hacia el nublado cielo, respirando forzadamente, con ningún pensamiento en mente como si estuviésemos meditando. Las nubes danzan apresuradas por el viento, las estrellas estáticas nos miran de regreso y en esos momentos el tiempo se detiene y la noche se hace infinita. Tenemos tiempo de sobra para no movernos más pero queremos llegar a la cumbre a recibir a Tonatiuh al alba. Por fin después de un tiempo indefinido hemos encontrado el Cerro del Quemado, subimos y vemos en la punta la representación cósmica del universo en espiral en el cual entramos solemnemente y sin poder más dormitamos por un rato hasta que el sol nos levanta con sus primeros rayos de calor y luz; el aire deja de murmurar de repente para dejarnos en total paz y silencio, después nada pasa: es un dia mas pero nosotros no somos iguales.

El aire sigue su curso yendo entre ruinas olvidadas de ciudades edificadas a lado de hoyos en la tierra, que esconden riquezas que solamente el aire palpa. Ahí en la oscuridad donde el vacío es absoluto y el sol no alcanza, se encuentra el olvido de deseos enterrados, cual codicia secó los antiguos ríos que hoy como rosas se añoran, en el desierto que nos enseña a valorarlo todo. Real de Catorce recuerda los

ojos de agua perdidos, con un grifo de agua en la calle principal, a lado del quiosco, como indicación que en esta tierra nuestra agua, aire, polvo, y tierra más que oro y plata valen.

Tuvimos que partir, al final nada es para siempre, y nos faltaron tantas cosas más por aprender de la tierra y del desierto que espero tener la oportunidad de regresar nuevamente sin olvidar lo que los árboles, el aire, el agua, la tierra, la luna, y el sol nos mostraron en aquel contacto cotidiano pero sorprendente que es el vivir.

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### Cuál es tu nombre, donde • vives y a qué te dedicas?

Me llamo Irving de Jesús Segovia Pérez. Vivo en León, Guanajuato y soy estudiante de Cultura y Arte (Gestión Cultural) de la Universidad de Guanajuato.

## Podrias explicar qué es la gestión cultural?

Creo que la gestión cultural es una profesión que implica un proceso interdisciplinar donde se trata de enlazar lo artístico y lo cultural con la comunidad para que haya una transformación social por medio de proyectos culturales de diferentes ámbitos.

### **3** Cual es la labor que realizas dentro de tu profesión?

La carrera de Cultura y Arte me ha permitido desarrollar proyectos con diferentes perspectivas. He apoyado en actividades de investigación sobre los artesanos del estado de Guanajuato, las fiestas y danzas tradicionales de algunas comunidades rurales de Silao, y

también he desarrollado proyectos estudiantiles. De hecho, como parte de la organización del primer coloquio estudiantil de la licenciatura, que trató de Arte y Cultura Popular, tuvimos el honor de trabajar con la maestra Marta Turok, una de las grandes investigadoras de arte popular.

Me encanta coleccionar arte popular, especialmente la fotografía documental y artística, sobretodo si se trata de la indumentaria. Crear collages es una de mis grandes pasiones.



### Cómo defines tu trabajo artístico?

En muchas ocasiones lo defino como un proceso mental y visual heterogéneo ya que contiene parte de mi vida personal y académica. Para mí, el collage de "Irving Segovia" tiene un mar de conceptos que quiere y debe expresarse. Es como una terapia en introspección que me sirve para reflexionar sobre mi propia vida y lo que voy conociendo.

lo.El collage ha llevado un proceso un poco extenso, antes sólo hacía collage análogo, pero poco a poco y de manera autónoma aprendí a usar programas de diseño para las versiones digitales. En ocasiones me toma hasta dos meses en terminar lo que yo quiero lograr en una imagen porque hago y hago ensayos de cada una. Hasta que siento que la imagen tiene la composición y elementos que quiero lograr la doy por terminada.

## **5.** En qué encuentras tu inspiración?

En diversas cosas. México y parte de su cultura popular se ven reflejadas en mis imágenes. Algo que me inspira mucho es la cultura oaxaqueña, desde la música, el arte popular, los lugares, su flora y fauna. En ocasiones retomo lo que conforma la mezcla de la ancestralidad y la historia, para reflejarla como parte de lo que nos constituye como sociedad del siglo XXI. Las personas con las que hablo también me inspiran.

### **6.** En referencia al arte, como es tu proceso creativo?

Mi proceso creativo comienza con la inspiración. En muchas ocasiones me pongo a investigar el contexto que voy a realizar en el collage; busco que no sea una imagen llamativa solamente, sino que que cada obra tenga un trasfondo y un significado que pueda relacionarse con lo que voy leyendo y con lo que voy sintiendo. No soy diseñador gráfico, tampoco me gustaría llegar a ser-

### **7** Cuál es el mensaje que quieres transmitir?

La función de mi obra no tiene nada que transmitir, sólo muestra mi propia identidad, lo que yo soy como persona y todas las cosas que me conforman, mis gustos y lo que siento como Irving Segovia.

#### En un contexto contemporáneo, cómo lograr la armonía entre lo sagrado y lo profano, asi como ancestral y la influencia neoliberal?

Es un tema del que se puede desarrollar de distintas maneras. Nunca habrá armonía mientras el ser humano se encuentre, pero sí desde lo utópico. Actualmente somos culturas heterogéneas; si hablamos de la mezcla ancestral y neoliberal, esto se ve reflejado en nuestra cultura. Por ejemplo, las culturas indígenas no son puras, no vienen de un origen prehispánico ancestral en su totalidad sino que se han ido influenciado a través de los años por diferentes culturas.

La globalización siempre nos ha permeado como seres humanos, aunque ahora de una manera más extrovertida. Me quedo pensando tan sólo en la indumentaria indígena de nuestro país, México, que está influenciada de por indumentaria rural de países europeos, sobretodo de Salamanca tanto en colores, técnicas y significados. Por otro lado, la sociedad actual en ocasiones descalifica a los artesanos cuando entre sus obras ven un morral con un bordado en punto de cruz representando a equipo de fútbol, pero de lo que no nos damos cuenta es que todos en este mundo estamos corrompidos. Eso no significa que sea malo, al revés, es un proceso de cambio del cual debemos estudiar, porque a lo mejor en unos años ya no tendremos técnicas y significados de nuestro presente. Bien lo dijo Marta Turok "La tradición es Innovación. "Somos el reflejo de nuestros antepasados, pero eso no quiere decir que seamos iguales, estamos influenciados de distintas culturas y buscamos suplir otras necesidades.







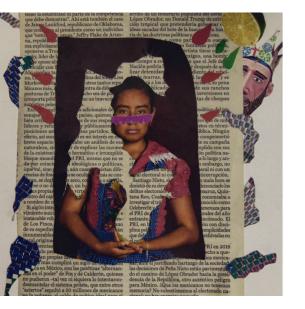




# **10** Cual es tu punto de vista sobre la apropiación cultural y cómo lo manejas dentro de tu propio arte?

Ese es otro tema del cual me he empapado bastante, porque en ocasiones yo mismo he pensado que se puede aplicar este término en mi obra. Mi función, no es apropiarme de los elementos culturales, a mí me gusta jugar con los ellos pero nunca digo que son míos o que yo lo hice, ni hago me beneficio económicamente con ellos. Solo busco mostrar lo que soy por medio de lo que aprendo, veo y experimento.

Mi punto de vista dentro de la apropiación cultural tiene que ver con las personas y empresas que se benefician económicamente de las obras de los artesanos. Debemos de repensar las políticas culturales de los artesanos y de los bienes culturales. Todos en este país estamos influenciados por distintas culturas. Nos apropiamos de lo que queremos que forme parte de nosotros. Hay dos formas de ver la apropiación en el intercambio de influencias culturales; una es de una manera interna, la cual no tiene beneficios económicos, no comercializa con los elementos culturales de un pueblo, y la segunda sí.



Cómo implementas cultura, tradición e identidad dentro de tu arte.

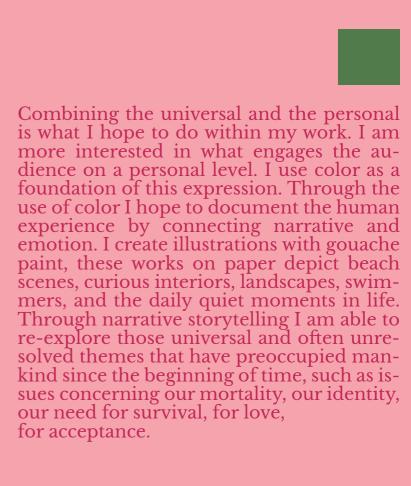
Aunque sea contradictorio, lo aplico bastante en mi obra, es parte de lo que voy leyendo y lo voy retomando y usando en mi collage; estos elementos forman parte de mi formación académica. Ahora que lo pienso, mi contexto se ha reforzado en estos tres elementos: cultura, tradición e identidad.Mi inspiración está en el ser humano, en lo que somos y en cómo nos representamos.

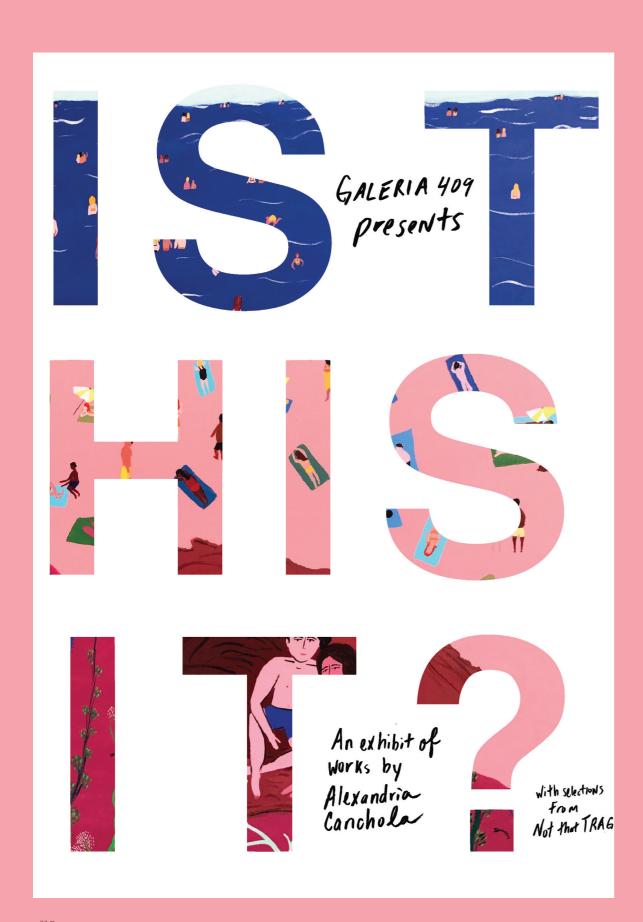


PULSE PULSE PULSE PULSE PULS E PULS E PULSE PULSE PULSE PULSE PULSE









aleria 409 will be hosting Alexandria Canchola's solo show, Is This It?, in which she will debut a newly completed series of gouache illustrations and lithography prints centering on storytelling and narrative.

The show will feature a selection of works ranging from interpretations of classical paintings to studies on loneliness, solitude, and voyeurism.

The pieces on display reflect a broad range of work: lithography poster design, book illustration, handlettering, as well as a series of gouache paintings.

The artwork created by Canchola was made as part of her continuing quest to document daily life through the use of narrative. These works on paper depict beach scenes, swimmers, curious interiors, landscapes, and the daily quiet moments in life.

"My artistic research is rooted in my interest in stories. Stories can be a form of escapism, a way of existential problem-solving, and more importantly they provide a way of connecting us to the human condition."

For the last year, Canchola has been working on a book project, Not that Tragic, that combines her love for narrative, illustration, design, and hand lettering. The exhibition will feature selections from Not That Tragic, that speak to the themes of

loneliness and voyeurism found in the book. Her work is driven by the power a narrative has in communicating emotion.

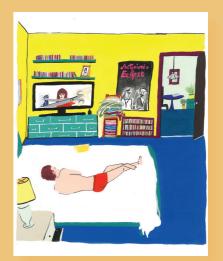
"Combining the universal and the personal is what I hope to do within my work. I am more interested in what engages the audience on a personal level emotionally," She said. "I use color as a foundation of this expression. I often abandon the conventional rules of drawing and proper perspective and instead use a burst of color so that I can express emotion. I feel things through color, it gives my illustrations a voice, it communicates a mood that at times I use to contrast with the actual narrative of loneliness, solitude, and/or melancholia. Through the use of color I hope to document the human experience by connecting narrative and emotion."

Canchola is a designer and illustrator, based in Edinburg, Texas, who loves drawing and painting as much as dragging and dropping. Her career in the arts was not quite a straight line path, but instead included detours in the fields of journalism and filmmaking. After earning a bachelor's degree in Government and Journalism from the University of Texas at Austin, she worked at an alternative weekly newspaper in Ithaca, New York. She is currently a Master of Fine Art student at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley studying 2D Design and Printmaking.





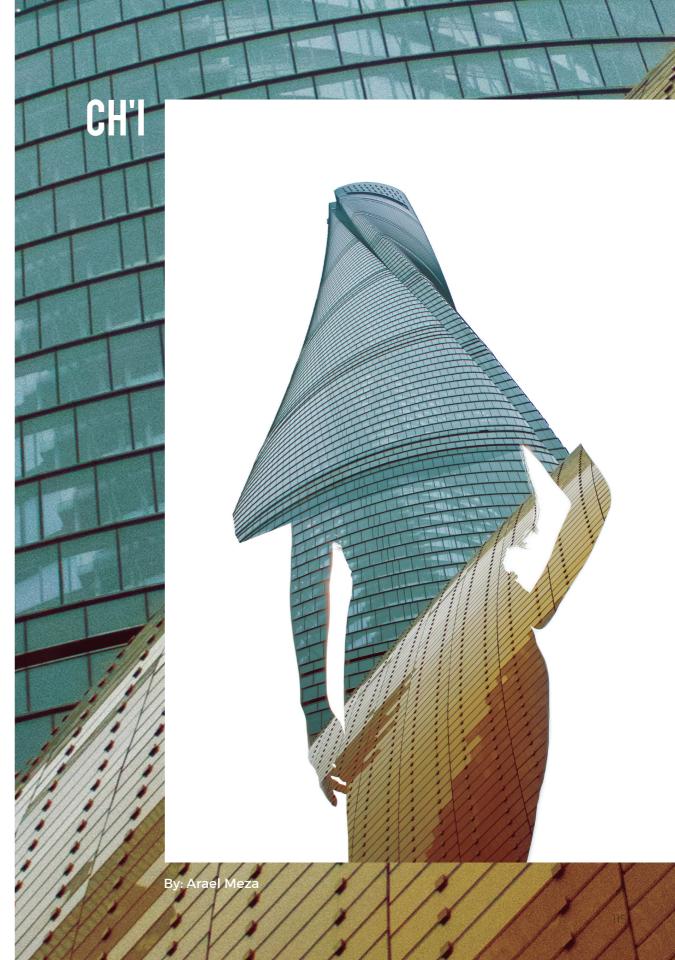
















## STARVED DESPERATION CELESTE STRANGE



WE ALL LEFT FROM MY HOUSE IN SEPERATE CARS TO THE SAME PARTY 30 OR SO MINUTES UP THE ROAD;



AND WHEN I GET THERE, I'M HIGH OFF MY ASS ON THE POT BROWNIES OUR FRIEND GAVE ME



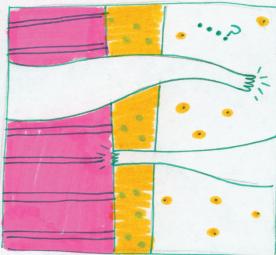
AND YOU'RE THE FIRST FAMILIAR THING I SEE.



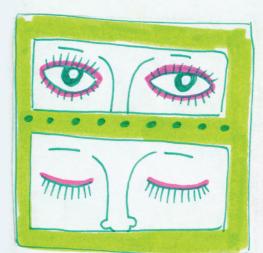
WANT TO HOLD YOU, AND TELL YOU I LOVE YOU



BECAUSE IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO DESCRIBE HOW GODDAMN EXCITED I AM TO SEE YOU AFTER BEING LOST FOR A WHILE.



YOU TOUCH ME, BUT SO HESITANTLY
THAT I FEEL MYSELF WORRYING
ABOUT HOLDING ON FOR SO LONG.



BUT DON'T.



BECAUSE 2 SECONDS OF YOUR FINGERTIPS ON MY HIPS GIVES ME ENOUGH HOPE TO LAST FOR A LITTLE LONGER.



Sunday, Dec. 17, 10:15 p.m., it was a solid 66 degrees. I was still processing and soaking up what I had just witnessed. I stood around the festival grounds contemplating life. Was everything I'd ever seen at music concerts, and everything I knew about the subject a lie? Where would I go from that moment on? What's next? All these questions were racing through my mind so fast, yet I was still there just trying to grasp what had just happened, and if it was all real.

I've always had this weird obsession with music, and I mean everything and anything about music...all of it. Classic rock music from the 70s, the storytelling and poetic aspects of hip-hop, and even the weirdest, loudest and most obnoxious of electronic music you find on the internet at 3 a.m. on a Thursday. Music has always been something I've had a passion for, especially when it's played live. There's an irreplaceable quality that live performances hold, whether the performance is a hit or a miss. If you are at the right place, with the right crowd and the right artist, a certain electricity is sparked within your body. It's an unexplainable feeling, one that allows you to appreciate the multidimensional beauty of sounds, colors and lights that you don't get to experience everyday. In the corniest way possible, there's something behind the fact that for a few hours, regardless of gender, race, religion or ethnicity, everyone joins in and unites for something greater than themselves.

With that said, I've honestly lost count of how many live performances I've gotten the chance to see, or how many music festivals and shows I've been to. I want to say Flea from the Red Hot Chili Peppers is to blame here. One of my earliest memories, and a defining

moment in my life, was seeing the Chili Peppers live in San Antonio, Texas with my best friend in 2013. I was a junior in high school. Flea gave a long speech about how we need to go support live music, no matter what genre, or place; what he said inspired me and my best friend to do so to this very day. I've traveled long distances, including out of state and the country because that's how intense my obsession for music has become. It has backfired on me a few times, especially in my college years. I missed a class because I was in Austin for "City Limits," and I had planned to come back the following Monday to attend class and figure out what I missed. Instead, I took a dirty greyhound bus to San Antonio to go watch M83, a French electronic post-rock band. In the end my last minute decision screwed me over. but it was worth it. I guess the thing to say here is "I learned my lesson," but would I do it again? You bet your ass I would (I didn't learn my lesson).

Because I've seen so many musicians, you would think I've had enough or that I'd be sick and tired of it by now. To a certain extent, I have felt like that. But there's always that damn bucket list. For years and years, I've always had this fantasy of seeing these two musicians from France. Some call them the godfathers of what electronic music is today. I'm not talking about Daft Punk, (which are on the list, but sadly won't be touring anytime soon.). They go by the name Justice. They were one of the first groups I listened to when it came to electronic music, and overtime, their work aged like fine wine. Even artists like Skrillex, Zedd and Porter Robinson have explained how Justice's music paved the way and influenced each of their careers. Justice released their third album, "Woman," in November of 2016,

the same night Daft Punk released their second collaboration with The Weeknd, "I Feel It Coming."

Their album release signified their decision to go on tour. Soon they were on almost every lineup of every major music festival across the United States and overseas. You'd figure they would've been on the "Austin City Limits" 2017 lineup, but unfortunately they weren't. I had accepted the fact that Justice wouldn't come near Texas for the remainder of their "Woman Worldwide" tour. That's when the unlikely festival in Houston dropped its lineup, and you guessed it, they were on that card. I flipped shit as soon as I heard the news and saw that the timing was perfect as well. It was slated after the semester was over. I knew somehow, someway, I had to be there and if I missed it. I would never get over it.

Long story short, the universe works in strange ways. I somehow won passes by tagging three random people on an Instagram post that was raffling "hipster" tickets. The first thing I thought when I saw the ad was "Pshht, no one ever really wins those things. It's either a sleazy marketing scheme, or they're rigged." In this case, it wasn't either of those, so was it too good to be true? I guess this whole time, it was meant to be. An early Christmas miracle. (Thanks, Texas Inked Magazine.)

Besides Justice, the lineup was stacked with a lot of great talent: Nine Inch Nails, Thom Yorke of Radiohead, Solange, Tyler, the Creator and St.Vincent were also headlining the festival, with a lot of extremely solid undercards you don't really see everyday as well. But enough with the sappy emotional backstory bullshit you've been reading. Let's get into the event itself.

#### Part I: Saturday

The third installment of the Day For Night festival was held in downtown Houston at a very unique location - an abandoned Post Office. The two-storied warehouse interior had enough space for two stages, which were set up on the first floor; a traditional stage one on one end, and a 360-conceptual stage on the other side. The second floor was filled with nothing but trippy and abstract art installments. The exterior contained two main stages on opposite ends that were reserved for the bigger acts. When you first go to an event like this, it's nice to get to know the place. In a typical outdoor music festival, everything is very straight forward. There's the bar, stages, food vendors, porta-potties, etc. However, this wasn't the typical music festival. There was so much more to see.

Inside the building, there was a variety of art installments that consisted of wall projections and 20 disco balls hanging from a net, to interactive red laser beams structured to look different at every angle. There was even an installation where two robots were fighting each other with lights as well as a plethora of photography/Instagram porn. You could've easily spent hours admiring the artwork. Visually, I felt that a lot of these pieces represented the clash between beauty and strangeness in people. But then again, this is how the art spoke to me and left me in awe.

In terms of music, there wasn't much really going on that Saturday afternoon. We wandered around a while to see what was going on. The first act we saw was Princess Nokia, an empowering female rapper who had a 2 p.m. crowd bumping. I knew none of her music, but I honestly enjoyed her on-stage pres-

ence. We decided to hang around that stage as one of the artistes I wanted to see that day, Lil B, was after her. Lil B. better known as the "Based God" NEV-ER does shows, and I love this dude. His unique twitter. His basketball presence. I couldn't miss this extremely rare and based performance. If you know the Based God and his work, it's not too hard to imagine how he would be live. Half of the hypebeast "Supreme" wearing folks in the audience were super confused and didn't know what was going on, but damn, if you know the Based God, you were having a blast just seeing him in human form.

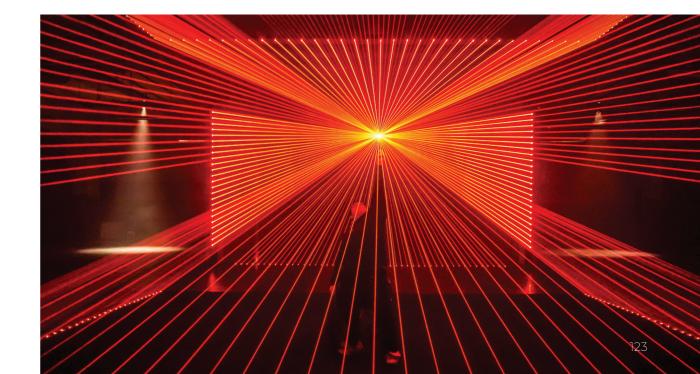
Ironically, right after Lil B, there was a two-hour gap, in which Cardi B was supposed to have an hour slot. We weren't really planning on seeing Ms. "Bodak Yellow," but there wasn't much going on and the other two artistes we wanted to see, Cashmere Cat and Tyler, played after her. We got there during the time that was supposed to be the last 15 minutes of Cardi B's hour long set, but as it turned out, she hadn't even gotten up on stage! The crowd was mad

as hell. According to people in the audience, her DJ tried stalling the crowd for 50 minutes until finally, during the last 10 minutes of her set, she finally decided to make an appearance. She performed the five songs she had on her discography at the time, including "Bodak Yellow."

"I don't know about y'all, but this hoe is getting cold! Imma have to leave after this song. Bye Houston," she said.

What an insult to her adoring fans who waited all day to see her. But this is normally the case with a lot of modern hiphop rappers. They just grab the "bag" and run with it. But, oh well, that's the culture nowadays I guess.

Besides Lil B, we hadn't been super impressed with any of the artistes we'd seen that day so we hoped Cashmere Cat could brighten up the music side of the festival. It's an urban legend that whenever Cashy plays in Houston, it always rains on his parade. Last time he played a Houston festival was in June of 2017. They had to shut down the festival midway through his set due to inclem-





ent weather. It was a dejavu moment for poor Cashy honestly. The same thing happened, only he managed to pull through playing the quirky and lovable DJ set he's known for. He comes off as a shy dude, very low-key type of guy. But with his unique producing skills, he crafts tracks for the biggest names in the industry: Ariana Grande, The Weeknd, Britney Spears, and even has production credits on Kanye's "The Life of Pablo."

At this point it starts raining hard. Houston is known for heavy rain. However, that didn't stop Tyler, the Creator from being the highlight the night. Over the years, Tyler has grown as an artiste. He started off with gruesome mixtapes and bloomed into the "Flower Boy" that he is today. I honestly wasn't expecting much from Tyler, but there was something about his genuine onstage presence, the way he interacted with all of the die-hard kids and how he managed to get fans to start moshpits in the heaviest of rain was captivating. The last 10-minutes of his set were cut due to safety concerns (which was the same for Nine Inch Nails across

the field) but before he was kicked off, he couldn't leave without having the crowd synchronize his biggest hit off of his latest album "See You Again."

Things started getting ugly when the rain started to pour down heavier. Security wasn't letting people back inside the building. People were pushing and shoving each other out of confusion. I started to get worried as well. What if they cancel this thing indefinitely and my 10-year wait to see Justice is thrown out the window? After a while, everyone calmed the fuck down and the indoor activities continued, thankfully.

During the final acts of Saturday night, there was someone I'd been trying to catch live for a while now, Jamie XX (of The XX, believe it or not, it took me a while to figure that one out.) There's always been curiosity surrounding his performances, what music he plays and how it translates to different crowds. He's one of the few DJs left who traditionally spins on pure vinyl and while he didn't play as much of his own material from his album, "In Colour," I felt like I was in an early warehouse rave in the late 90s, or early 00s. Something that is

hard to mimic now. Jamie took us along on his musical journey that felt organic and pure, and this crowd loved it.

### Part II: Sunday

Even if the day before took a toll on me, I couldn't sleep. Normally, I don't like to get too excited or nervous over this type of thing. I always say when the time comes, it comes. But in this case. how could I not be excited? The day I've been wishing for finally came. The forecast was nice, chilly and breezy. Everything seemed back to its regularly scheduled program. Compared to Saturday, the lineup for that day wasn't as "stacked" but that didn't really matter; my mission was to see the Frenchmen, that was the purpose of the whole trip. I didn't want to deal with Mad-Maxing my way to the rail (because I would have fought to the death for a good view), so we got there early. I camped out for a solid six and a half hours, front and center of that stage. Nobody could take that away from me. Justice wouldn't come out until later on at 8:30 p.m., but the talent beforehand was nothing to complain about.

New Zealand native, Kimbra opened up that day. She seemed so natural on stage, had the biggest smile on her face while performing her material and kept the crowd dancing for a solid hour with her pop and R&B mashup sound.

The most questionable time slot of the entire weekend for me was one of the biggest up-and-coming producers in the electronic music scene, Rez. She had a 3:30 p.m. timeslot on the main stage. Personally, I would've loved to see her later on at night on that 360 stage. Flashing lights and colors in pitch black would've been a better fit for her sound.

But who am I to complain? The dead-mau5 prodigy still managed to hypnotize a huge crowd in daylight. Her dark, mid-tempo bass is something that catches ears as she is quickly emerging as one of the biggest female producers. I've seen Rezz a couple of times prior, and if there's something I've always appreciated when seeing her on-stage, it is her ability to be herself and naturally grab the audience. She never fails to do that, so it was great to see her once again.

Phantogram had the sundown slot and while they gave a solid show, their set was interrupted by a number of technical difficulties, which raised a lot of concerns for the main event. They managed to work around it and jokingly stated that Cardi B was going to come back to the festival to make an appearance during their set.

Half of the people in that festival that day wanted to see the hometown princess in living flesh. Solange. Personally, I have only heard a couple of her records prior to seeing her live, and only knew her as Beyonce's sister and the chic that beat up Jay-Z in an elevator. Even if I wasn't an expert on her discography, expectations were obviously high based on her association with one of the most powerful musical super-pacs in recent history; we were in for something special and I wasn't wrong. That show was so impressive, starting from the red stage design and the choreography to her interactions with her hometown audience. I don't think I've experienced such a calm and civilized crowd before, which was surprising. You'd think if she came down to the rail to be up-close, everyone would lose their goddamn minds and squish each other, but no. She gave a speech about how good it felt to be back home and

how she loved growing up in Houston. That entire crowd left so satisfied, and genuinely happy. For some, it was their main event, but I was only 40 minutes away from what I've been dreaming about for 10 years.

#### Part III: The Service

As one of the longest 40 minutes of my life was ticking down, I made friends with my neighbors who were with me on the rail. At the worst possible timing, I had to make a quick run to the restroom. They knew that I'd been waiting, and were kind enough to hold my spot. I was on the clock and hustled my way in and out of those sweaty porta potties, bought a few water bottles and dashed back to my original spot, with time to spare. Normally the switchovers from one artiste to the next went by fast throughout the weekend, expect for this one. But I always get a kick when I see the crews setting up the stage. It was definitely fun to watch and kept the anticipation building.

I did some research on Justice's stage design before the show but didn't let myself see enough to spoil the reveal. There were two sets of three rows of Marshall amplifiers on each side, four giant rotating strobe lights hanging from the ceiling, three rows in the center for their equipment, one in the back for their synthesizers, and of course, their famous Cross logo.

Finally, the lights went off. I saw Gaspard first, wearing a Justice bomber jacket with his long goatee and 70's style hairdo. Then Xavier, with his straight, long shaggy hair and Oakland Raiders Starter jacket. They got right to business as they commenced the Sunday service with intense bass lines, fin-

ger-snap fills of "Safe and Sound" and teased in acapella of their most famous record, D.A.N.C.E. The thing about Justice is that they are precise when it comes to detail. Everything I saw on that stage lit up a certain way, with a certain color and at certain point. Giant rigs on the ceilings moved down towards the audience to create the illusion that you had stepped into their church, and they said welcome. Their light show was so intense, cameras couldn't keep up with how fast everything moved. We often tend to try to capture certain moments through a lens, but in this case, it served no point, nor purpose. This was something you had to live in the moment for, because it's something you will never experience ever again.

If there's something I came to realize, it was that no matter how many times you see a certain artiste live, you will never gain the same raw emotions as you did the first time. For that hour and a half, I saw things that I didn't know were possible and felt one of the most intense, emotional and nostalgic roller-coasters that is extremely hard for me to describe. As a fan, I've heard their previous live albums numerous of times, but it was a completely different experience in person. Midway through the set they made their way into "Waters Of Nazareth," where there was a synth breakdown that made both of them freeze for 90 seconds, grabbing the entire audience by the throat. Xavier and Gaspard in the back, waited to hit the keys on the synthesizer.

As the crowd intensely waited in anticipation, they dove into a powerful build-up and slapped into the lyrics of their first hit, "We Are Your Friends." They finished how they started, finally dropping the song that made me fall in love with them in the beginning, "Do



the D.A.N.C.E, 1 2 3 4 Fight..." The final crescendo was one giant mashup of their song into "Fire," and finally into the same song that they started with. With a finale that epic, they threw fireworks in the visuals until they reset everything in the same spot, landing their spaceship "Safe and Sound." Once that was done, the screens nicely washedout in white. Through that entire performance, not once did they grab a microphone.

The French godfathers came down, and greeted their audience for a solid 5 minutes. Xavier, in the most rockstar way, threw himself into the crowd and surfed through them, with a cigarette lit up in his mouth the entire time. Out of all the concerts I've attended, never have I experienced what I did in particular show. It was a rock show, mashed up with hard-hitting electronic and funk. It was everything I've ever loved about live music. It was a basically a big "Fuck You!" to a solid 80 percent of shows I've

experienced, and I mean that in a good way.

The "encores" in concerts are usually built-in already, it's not like all audiences really really want one. However, 10 minutes after it was over, the same crowd was still there roaring and chanting "JUSTICE! JUSTICE!" until security had to kick everyone out of the rail. I used to believe that there is no such thing as perfection, but that performance made me question whether or not I had just witnessed it.

I'm not a religious person and I haven't been to church for as long as I can remember. All I know is at 8:30 p.m. on that Sunday night I ended up attending a much needed, eye-opening service. By the time I left around 11:30 p.m., I felt like I had just gone threw a spiritual awakening. Something that I hadn't felt in a long time sparked inside me. I remember I once had plenty of it, but lost it. Inspiration.



## Seeking Arrangements: my summer as a SUCAR BABY



By: Aubrey

Illustrations: Jonathan Hernandez

he Spring of 2016 was when I completely lost any and all motivation. Depression had consumed me entirely, leaving me with an overwhelming need to just... disappear: take a sunny vacation away from the dark cloud that seemed to follow me everywhere I went, and live a new, happier, life where homework and obligations weren't constantly being pelted at me. But instead of a break from my depression, I trudged through the mundane details of weekdays as my depletion continued, only looking forward to partying on the weekends. It was a rare opportunity for me to get away from what I'd been feeling, and pretend like all those dark feelings weren't really there.

When summer came, I moved with three friends into an apartment that I mistakenly thought I could afford. After moving, I was left with a hoard of questions- How am I supposed to pay rent? How am I going to buy groceries? What the fuck was I actually thinking?! At this point, I was employed as a workstudy at one of the dorms on campus; the hours and pay were barely enough to cover my rent, let alone buy my food. I couldn't ask my parents knowing they were already struggling with money, and I didn't want to burden my friends by asking them to spare a few hundred for my living expenses. Instead, I nursed my pre-existing depression and empty wallet with a cocktail of anxiety, saltine crackers and bad decisions.

Seeking Arrangements (SA) is a popular app used to find men or women, willing to pay you in exchange for a "relationship", or what the people on the app prefer to call it, "a professional arrangement." To me, the app seemed to sugar-coat what really went on in these types of relationships, but nonetheless, I made an account. I received tons of messages from different men around my area, a waning majority of them, much older than I was. A lot of them seemed to want sex, and said that it "could be arranged professionally" (or as professional as sex for money could get.) One guy even offered me \$7,500 with a paid flight to his place in Alabama just to have sex with him, as long as I let him have full control.

SA makes it possible for any 20-yearold girl, like myself, to become an escort. Some of the men would stop replying after I'd tell them that I wasn't interested in selling myself in that way, and really just wanted someone to help me financially in exchange for more mild forms of contact. I'd let them know that I could make great company, go on dates and what not, but crossing the boundary into prostitution was never something that I was willing to do.

With no luck of finding anyone for weeks, I had almost given up hope, but then Keith appeared in my message box one day. He was 54 years old, a white man that wore glasses, and seemed to be very polite through his messages.

He kept repeating how he would be respectful to me, and maybe once we got comfortable enough with one another, I could travel somewhere with him. I told him what I needed, and he told me that he simply wanted my company. I assumed he might've been married, but I avoided asking that question. I still wondered, if he was married, why

would he seek someone else's company? Maybe he wasn't getting the attention he wanted at home? We communicated through email for about three weeks before we actually met in person because he thought that was the safest way to communicate.

"Anyway, you can clearly see that I am much older than you, and as I indicated before I'm not certain I would even feel comfortable having an "arrangement" with you even it is for innocent company. But, having said that: you seem really cute, sweet and so very adorable. And I really like that you're working hard in school to secure a better future for yourself. I almost feel like I want to adopt you more than anything. But, yea, let's meet. I would like to hear more about you."

He didn't want anyone from his job (managing a few health affairs departments) to become suspicious. That seemed strange to me, because why would anyone from where he worked get suspicious in the first place? Before meeting Keith, he asked me to send him a list of things I would like from Amazon, and so I did.

A nervous rush ran through my body before I first met him, and not knowing what to expect made me almost back out. We meet around noon by the sidewalk near the apartments I used to live at. He pulled up in a small grey car, and I could see his white hair from where I was standing. He got out of his car as

soon as he saw me, giving me a creepy ass smile. However, once we introduced ourselves, Keith didn't seem that creepy. It felt like I was talking to a sweet older man who was smiley and respectful. In his car, he had some gifts for me: a record player, a beautiful purple tapestry and a new backpack; items I had put on the list for him. As time progressed in our relationship, he shipped more items to my place: books I needed, a vinyl, shoes and a Woodstock shirt because he knew how much I loved oldies rock music. Music was one topic we would talk about often, because it was really the only thing we had in common.

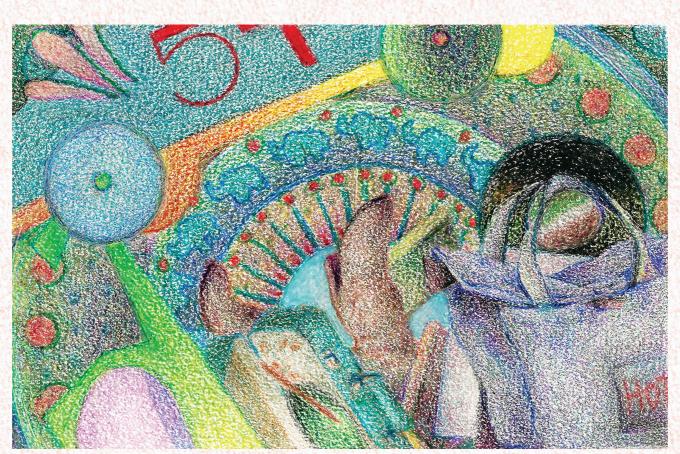
Keith would also ask me to send him normal pictures of myself; for the first one he sent me \$150 and I remember freaking out, but also feeling happy and relieved. I finally had money to pay for the things I needed. Throughout our arrangement I probably had sent him four normal selfies at about \$100 each.

"What a radiant smile you have, you are a very beautiful young woman," Keith said.

He appreciated talking to me and wanted to meet up again, this time to go out to eat. That seemed kind of risky for me to be with him publicly, I was scared people would notice something was off, and immediately begin to judge. We had arrived at an Italian restaurant and the hostess took us to our seats, already giving us a sketchy look. Obviously, we didn't look related in any way.

Keith began to talk about our arrangement, and what exactly would be expected from both of us. I made it clear that I didn't want anything sexual to go on between us, and he was quite understanding of that request. He did say that he would expect something of

me once I was more comfortable with him...I couldn't bring myself to ask what that expectation was. But part of me knew what he wanted, I was just too afraid to admit it to myself; After con-



templating my situation for a bit, I came to the conclusion that eventually, he would get tired of the current state of our relationship. He was trying to gain my trust, give me a few gifts, throw me some cash and hope that enough commodities would eventually convince me to take our relationship to the next level. Knowing this man was 54 years old, I knew he must've had kids. It turned out he had two, a boy and a girl; both whom are much older than me. I remember sitting there thinking, "I am young enough to be your daughter." Awkward, I know; and weird. Really weird.

uncomfortable about our arrangement; even angry. I never built up the courage to ask if he had a wife; I began to feel like I was doing something terrible. I wondered if I was a homewrecker. How could I allow myself to be a part of this destruction? But, how could I pay my bills without Keith's help?

He showed me pictures of his kids, and

the whole time, in my head, I'm think-

ing, "Shit! What the fuck am I doing

making this man my sugar daddy!?" If

his kids found out they'd probably feel

He asked me about my plans after graduation, and I went on for a while talking about them. I could see the ex-

citement in his eyes and... something else that made me wonder if he was thinking about something more than my future. I knew he really wanted me in a more intimate way. I began to see that he was just like the other men from the site who were seeking to fulfill their sexual desires. But I knew I wasn't ever going to give him that, no matter how much money was involved. I began to feel uncomfortable, so I asked him questions to distract me from my nauseating thoughts about him. At the end of our date, he asked if it would be okay to give me a hug. I said sure.

The third time we met he hugged me again, but this time he held on a bit longer, and weirdly rubbed my back. I think I made a face without knowing it, because he later apologized for doing that. He could tell I wasn't feeling it.

Although he gave me the creeps, I thought Keith was very wise and knowledgeable when we discussed academic topics or relationships. Most of our conversations were through email, and since I wasn't talking to him face to face, I felt comfortable enough to explain my past relationships and even my depression. I admitted to him how I had let drugs take a huge toll on my life for a bit. I was appreciative of Keith for always listening to me. Keith allowed me to open up about my feelings and emotions in ways that I never had. He always made sure I had what I needed, emotionally and physically.

In the back of my mind, there was always this ugly thought that I was taking advantage of this man, and I'd start to feel guilty. He was trying so hard for me, and I'm pretty sure it's because he

"Shit! What the fuck am I doing making this man my sugar daddy!?

truly wanted something out of our relationship. A couple months went by and we'd only met four times in person. Our conversations started to slow down and became less frequent. One day he finally emailed me this:

"Aubrey, I'm sorry, but things have gotten really bad at home. My wife discovered the things I purchased for you off Amazon, and it's really bad right now. I'm sorry for all of this. Please don't write me back unless I write you, OK?

I'm terribly sorry."

I immediately knew this had to stop. I couldn't stop thinking about his wife; what if she found my address and came to my apartment to strangle me? I didn't write to him for a while, and didn't think I ever should again. He later contacted me, but this time through a different email to tell me our arrangement was benefiting me more than him...

"I'm writing to let you know that I'm questioning whether this "art rangement" is actually working out. I believe it's been beneficial for you, but it seems your schedule is so demanding that there is little time left over for your company for even a regular lunch "date." Consequently, I believe there isn't truly a mutual benefit. Trust me, I've been thinking about this quite a bit over the last several days. I can also understand why I would be considered a lower priority relative to school, family, friends and other activities. I do get that, but, at the same time "arrangements" are set up, I believe, to alter those priorities a bit. To be blunt, arrangements set up through the SA site are very much like a business agreement. And I feel like my end of that business agreement / benefit is falling somewhat short."

We agreed to end our arrangement. He gave me a little over a thousand dollars throughout our relationship, not including all the stuff he bought me. I understood it was unfair because I never gave him what he wanted. I apologized for not being the sugar baby he had hoped for but thanked for him helping me when I truly needed it. Once in a while he will still send me an email to check up on me, and make sure that I am doing alright.



So, I'm curious. What do you do for the money...

**KANDI** 

We can fuck till you cum. With a condom of course 😘



What a way to start a story! Am I right? But before we get carried away, let me back up a bit. Back to the beginning of the new year... A few days after the start of the spring semester.

Being the generation of technological innovation, most of us have at least one social media account: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or Snapchat. And on these accounts, there are hundreds, sometimes thousands, of people we connect with. But how many of these people do we actually know? I mean, as more than just an acquaintance, or through a mutual friend? It's safe to say that many of us have probably received a friend request from someone we don't know. That's how this story begins.

Back in January, I received a friend request on Snapchat from a person I didn't know. This doesn't happen too often, but I figured what the hell, and added them. Within days I noticed that this person's Snaps were very different from the ones I had grown accustomed to. These Snaps were... dirty.

Instead of Snaps showcasing the worn-out dog face filter or shots of a fresh, sizzling hot meal recently delivered to the table, these Snaps featured nudity. Or at least pretty damn close.

Unbeknownst to me, I had inadvertently added someone who used some of the world's leading technology to perform one of the world's oldest professions... prostitution. Don't get me wrong. I have no problem with prostitution. In fact, I believe it should be legal, if it complies with some form of regulation. But, I was mind blown that something that used to occur in the shady alleyways of neglected parts of town, was readily available at any person's fingertips... and with selfie filters to boot.



WANT PREMIUM PICTURES? PAYPAL ME

Illustration: Celeste Strange

By: Leif Erikson

I actually didn't realize that this person was engaged as an "escort," as she liked to put it, until after about a month or so that we added each other. At first, I figured she was like the rest of the "Insta models" who pop up on a daily basis.

These "Insta models" showcase "lewds" or implied nudes – photo sets where the model is naked while covering up their naughty bits – on the daily. They often use these photos to entice willing men or women to continue on to some other website, such as Patreon, where users get charged a membership fee to access content that would otherwise be inaccessible.

And because these websites are private domains, posts that feature sexually explicit or violent content are totally kosher. In fact, according to Patreon.com's community guidelines, as long as a creator flags his/her page as having "adult content" and does not make said content available on the public portion of his/her page, creators can post pretty much whatever they want.

But back to the story... After about a month or so of seeing this UTRGV student (pictures in front of the Edinburg campus library gave it away) post nearly nude selfies on an almost day to day basis – often with the acronym HMU, which stands for "Hit Me Up", and dollar signs plastered all over – I finally worked up the courage to ask her about her sexually-oriented selfies.

"I'm curious...," I wrote. "What do you do for the money?" "We can fuck till you cum. With a condom of course [KIS-SY FACE EMOJI]," she responded.

Needless to say, I was a bit taken aback. This whole time I figured she was like the rest of those "Insta models." Wanting to sell nudes and "lewds" to turn a quick buck. But prostitution? I hadn't expected that.

Now, it should be known that I never engaged in any sexual act with this person, nor did I ever attempt to exchange money, favors or goods for sex. #legaldisclaimer.

But she had definitely peaked my interest and I did ask her the occasional question over the coming weeks. "How much for pix?" I asked curiously. Her response varied. The first time she wanted \$20 for a pic, and \$35 for video. The next time I asked, it was \$36 for a pic. I didn't bother to ask about video.

There was one question I still had, however, simply for the sake of curiosity...

How much for the whole shebang?!

It took three months before I finally got an answer. It turns out people trying to sell their bodies on Snapchat don't make the best pen pals.

When I finally got a reply, I was surprised by the answer I received.

"260," was all the Snap read.

Now, I'm not really sure if this is high or low, as I have no prior experience to draw from, but I was astounded that fewer than \$300, sans the price of a hotel, was all it would take to meet up with a beautiful 20-something-year-old college girl to have, as Anchorman's Brick Tamland would put it, a "pants party."

I never replied...

A few days later, I received a Snap from her that read, "So you wanna be my sugar daddy???"

At this point, I figured I had traveled deep enough down this tumultuous rabbit hole. Not wanting to metaphorically dig my own grave, I decided to pursue our conversation no further. We have not communicated since that final request.

So, what was the purpose of me telling this story? To be honest, there isn't any one easy answer. Mainly, I felt the need to share it to spread awareness. Social media has become a staple in our day to day lives and I find it incredibly fascinating to watch firsthand how it affects the way we interact with the people around us. In this case, extremely intimately.

But there is more than that. I wrote this real-life experience not out of judgement, or with any spite directed at the 20-something-year-old college student who has decided to use his/her body to make some extra cash. Rather, I seriously hope that this story inspires the reader to take a serious look at the world around you, and to ask yourself one deeply profound question... Has life simply become about achieving that next like, tweet, or view?

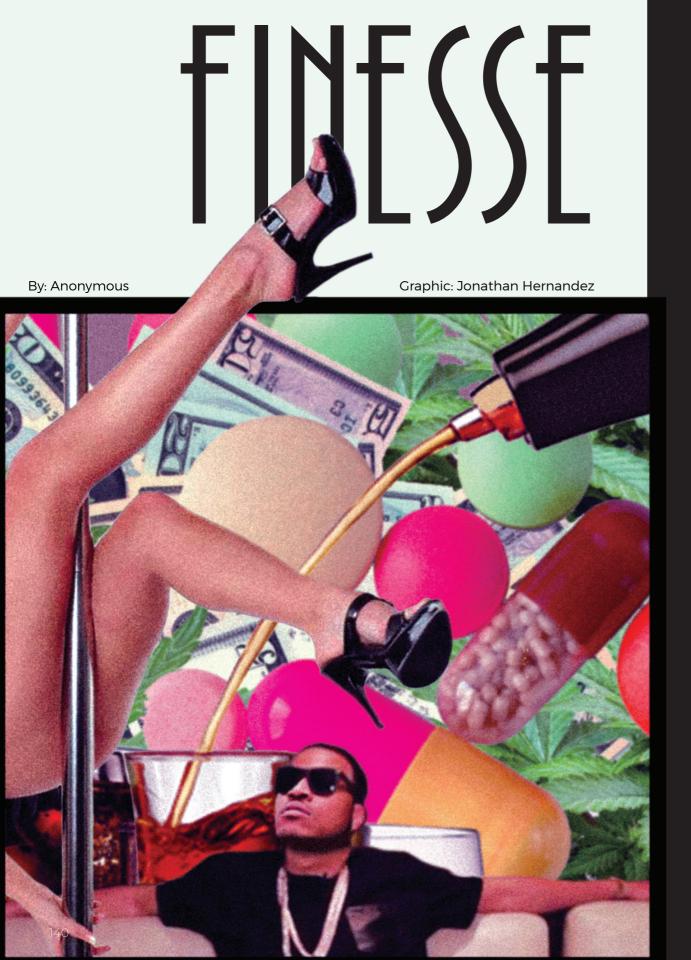
For the sake of humanity, I pray the answer to this question is no.

KANDI 260

138

ME

How much for pix?



ince I've began dancing almost a year ago, a feeling of wanting to share my story as an exotic dancer (stripper) has developed after meeting all kinds of female dancers, experiencing the rough club scene and interacting with men who long for female companionship. This is a story about getting by in the Rio Grande Valley.

he club is cold, colorful and loud as fuck. Customers sit by their drinks as their eyes glare towards dancers walking by in their 6 to 10-inch heels. Our official title is "entertainers," because we do more than just dance on the pole. When we aren't on stage, we converse with customers; which eventually lead to private dances at the VIP section.

n hopes of having him buy a dance from me, I approached a man sitting alone by his table at the strip club. We both found out we had a passion for sciences, and we talked about astronomy and biological evolution, but after a while he finally admitted to me that he felt uncomfortable buying a dance from me because of how educated I was. He attempted to compliment me by saying my IQ was most likely much higher than any other dancer at the club and confessed that he wanted some "ghetto, raunchy girl" who could dance for him.

requently, men would tell me that I am too beautiful to be dancing at all, to which I ask if they came to the club expecting ugly women? They tell me that I should be taken care of by some man or that I should be working towards something else as if that's not what I'm doing. However, I have received positive insights from other customers who support my decision in dancing. They will endearingly remind me to not get lost in the "club scene" and to get out of the business as soon as I can.

ancing is not easy, and the club scene is even harder to deal with. As a dancer, sexual harassment and sexual assault have been a part of my experience (yes, dancers can experience this). Some nights, you get the badass customers who know what's up and just "make it rain" on you or call you over ready to pay for a lap dance – no time wasted. Other nights, people come to the club feeling grandiose and want you to feed their ego. You can tell by their mannerisms and the way they speak; they want to feel special, but it comes off fucking creepy.

owever, the customers aren't the biggest problem. The management is. You have to know how to play it right, hustle smart, but don't make anyone upset. The club scene is all about sex, money and drugs. Hustlers included are: the manager, assistant managers, bartenders, waitresses, the DJ, the strippers, the security guards warning when there's cops, the tamale man who solicits every night and the random dude in the restroom selling cigarette boxes for \$12. Just as I told the

new waitress, who was confused about the method of making money, "we are all on our own."

anagement loves to take advantage of their dancers because they know we make a decent amount. We pay for so many damn fees; a house fee, a DJ fee, a promo fee, and "specials on dances" fees. They have created rules to conveniently charge us when we don't comply (even though we were just confused or unaware of the rule). At most, they protect us from disrespectful customers, but is that enough? No! Do they wonder what all the money stuffed in our thongs go towards anyway? School funds, emergency savings, a safe home from toxic parents, food for the kids, court fees from criminalization, a personal goal, etc...

ven though we may (hopefully) make good money in one night, the hustle doesn't stop. While some dancers only dance, others do prostitute themselves on the side. Some are the older, Spanish-speaking strippers; others are the young strippers who yell for their Snapchat viewers to come to the club and watch them shake their ass. The DJ will sell cocaine and rolled marijuana blunts, to which he will give dancers a cut of the money for the customers we find him. This is where we worry about cops. We make sure to always ask for wallet/ID and never bring up the drugs ourselves. Always charge for finding the fiends their fix.

ancers may team up to give lap dances together, as customers are very likely to pay for such a show. The hustle goes on, perhaps in many other ways that I don't know of.

very weekend I enter the fast paced strip club filled with colorful lights and dance for strangers who think L they can take me home. Gangs standing in the corner by their VIP tables with ice trays full of beers. Pussy, ass, and tits all over the place. Sometimes I slap the men for touching me, and sometimes I snatch their phone from their hands for recording me. Some nights I study for school in the dressing room when the club is slow or take a nap, clutching on to my money bag so no one steals from me. My voice usually becomes raspy towards the end of the night from yelling over trap and reggaeton music. Some days I wake up with pretty, but painful, shades of purple and pink on my legs, and my back and knees in shock from walking in 6-inch heels and climbing poles all night.

iving the life of a nighttime sex worker on weekends and being a full-time student during the week can be soul-draining. I make sure to have my Sunday morning rituals of selfcare after a night of dancing consisting of affirmations, yoga, meditation, and exposure to the sweet gift of nature. After my rituals, I pay a visit to my family and give my dog a walk. During the week, I attend all classes, attend my day job, go to my organization's leadership and general meetings, study, cook and clean, and care for my dog. I dance on the weekends, continue my Sunday rituals, and begin work on Mondays until the routine begins again.

ost importantly, I always have to keep reminding myself that my body is mine. To continue to be empowered by the power of my femme scent, curves, attitude and touch. Dancing is as professional as you make it, as tantric as you make it, but the emotional burden can take a toll.

AN AFFIRMATION: **SKIN** TITS AND ASS, DRENCHED IN CIGARETTE SMOKE AND STARES. THIS SKIN BROWN, "EXOTIC" PRINTED WITH **DOLLAR BILLS** AND FILTHY HANDS. MY SKIN, NOT YOURS. **SKIN** AND DUMB MEN WHD CHOOSE ME AND ALL OF THEM. JUST A REMINDER, THIS IS MY SKIN.

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