New CENTRO Journal Spotlights
“Migrants Who Never Arrived”

The morning of June 6, 1950, found Puerto Rico waking up to radio newsflashes and newspaper headlines about the crash of a plane carrying 62 Puerto Rican farmhands (the majority from Mayaguez). The aircraft, a converted C-46 belonging to a nonscheduled airline, Westair Transport, was en route from San Juan to Wilmington, North Carolina. Twenty-eight passengers lost their lives during the ditching of N1248N, many by drowning or to savage shark attacks, before a dramatic rescue involving the United States Navy, Coast Guard and Merchant Marines.

The passengers were contract workers hired to harvest beets in Michigan. In his essay “Migrants Who Never Arrived: The Crash of Westair Transport’s N1248N in 1950,” which is published in the new edition of the CENTRO Journal, Luis Asencio Camacho narrates the story of this fateful voyage. The cause of the N1248N tragedy was never fully disclosed, he wrote, and the disaster received little attention from the United States government. It essentially was “shoved under the table,” he said.

“The ditching of Westair Transport’s N1248N on June 5, 1950 stands out as a tragic event that has been reduced to a footnote, usually sandwiched between facts about labor/migratory/economic history of Puerto Rico,” said Camacho, who is bringing awareness of this group of migrants who never made it so they are never forgotten. The article also includes a photo from the author’s collection of the survivors on the deck of the USS Saufley on their arrival in Charleston, South Carolina, on June 7.

In addition to Camacho’s article, the fall 2013 edition of the CENTRO Journal features six other articles...
on a variety of topics. They are: Julia De Burgos’ Writing for Pueblos Hispanos: Journalism as Puerto Rican Cultural and Political Transnational Practice by Vanessa Pérez-Rosario; The Chicago Young Lords: (Re)constructing Knowledge and Revolution, by Jacqueline Lazú; The Latinization of Orlando: Language, Whiteness and the Politics of Place, by Simone Delerme; Enduring Migration: Puerto Rican Workers on U.S. Farms, by Ismael García Colón and Edwin Meléndez; Feeding the Colonial Subject: Nutrition and Public Health in Puerto Rico, 1926-1952, by Elisa M. González; and De claves, enfoques y heartbeats. Entrevista con Adál Maldonado, by Carlos Garrido Castellano.

The Journal also includes book and DVD reviews. They are: A Grounded Identidad: Making New Lives in Chicago’s Puerto Rican Neighborhood, by Merida Rúa, reviewed by Ana Yolanda Ramos-Zayas; Civil Rights in New York City: From World War II to the Giuliani Era, by Clarence Taylor, reviewed by Saulo Colón; Family Matters: Puerto Rican Authors on the Island and the Mainland, by Marisel C. Moreno, reviewed by Elizabeth García; José (Papo) Márquez: vida y obra del autor de Esquizofrenia Puertorricensis, edited by Gloria Waldman, reviewed by Carlos Manuel Rivera; Writing Secrecy in Caribbean Freemasonry, by Jossianna Arroyo, reviewed by Efraín Barradas; and Dialogando sobre independismos. Parte I (Entre votos, consignas y trincheras) & Parte II (La nueva lucha), 1890-1980, a DVD series produced by Mariel C. Marrero and directed by Freddie Rodríguez, which was reviewed by Víctor M. Rodríguez.

There is also a letters-to-the-editor section. One letter is a response by Tony Castanha to Gabriel Haslip-Viera’s review of The Myth of Indigenous Caribbean Extinction: Continuity and Reclamation in Borikén (Puerto Rico), and the other is a response from Haslip-Viera to Castanha.

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