

## Dr. Grisel Y. Acosta



The first time I met Miguel Algarín, I was intimidated – he seemed so tall! With a cap of white hair, wherever he stood in the room it appeared he was its zenith, a snow capped mountain that everyone looked to for direction. He was simply supporting a mentee’s event, but it was clear that everyone was there because he wanted them to be. How was it possible that no one even mentioned the founder of the Nuyorican Poets Cafe to me in Chicago? Wasn’t my hometown the place that raised two Puerto Rican flags on Humboldt Boulevard, as a gateway of sorts, named its Northwest Side high school “Clemente,” and argued for an independent Puerto Rico for decades before it became a common conversation? In such an activist town, why hadn’t I heard his name before? The truth is, such information is overtly censored in the segregated city. I was already a teenager before I ever heard of the Chicago Defender. So when I found

myself in the same room as the Nuyoricans – Algarín, Pietri, Esteves, Mercado, Thomas – and learned about all their incredible work, I could not really believe they even found time to talk to me, let alone even listen to my work. The incredible warmth I received is indicative of their wisdom and power. They have never seen their work as something to use to intimidate. Instead, their work is an invitation, a thoughtful and loving guide. Subsequent meetings with Algarín, at the Nuyorican itself at my partner’s book party, and many, many Loisaida impromptu abrazos and chats, made me revise my initial idea about Miguel. He was so sweet to me, and probably a bit flirtatious, too. However, what meant most to me was that I always saw him alongside Carlos Manuel Rivera, the incredible writer and performance artist and my colleague at the City University of New York – Bronx Community College. The friendship I saw between these two men seemed sacred. I don’t mean reverence or anything associated with the seriousness of a temple, as they were always laughing and smiling and causing a joyful ruckus on the Lower East Side. No, I mean sacred in that they were clearly brothers, joined in an understanding of experience. I know that, ultimately, I was not someone who Miguel would even have remembered, but I remember him not only because of the roadmaps he created for all Latinxs, maps that will continue to guide us for centuries, but because of the genuine warmth I saw him share with his friends, his mentees, and with everyone he encountered.

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