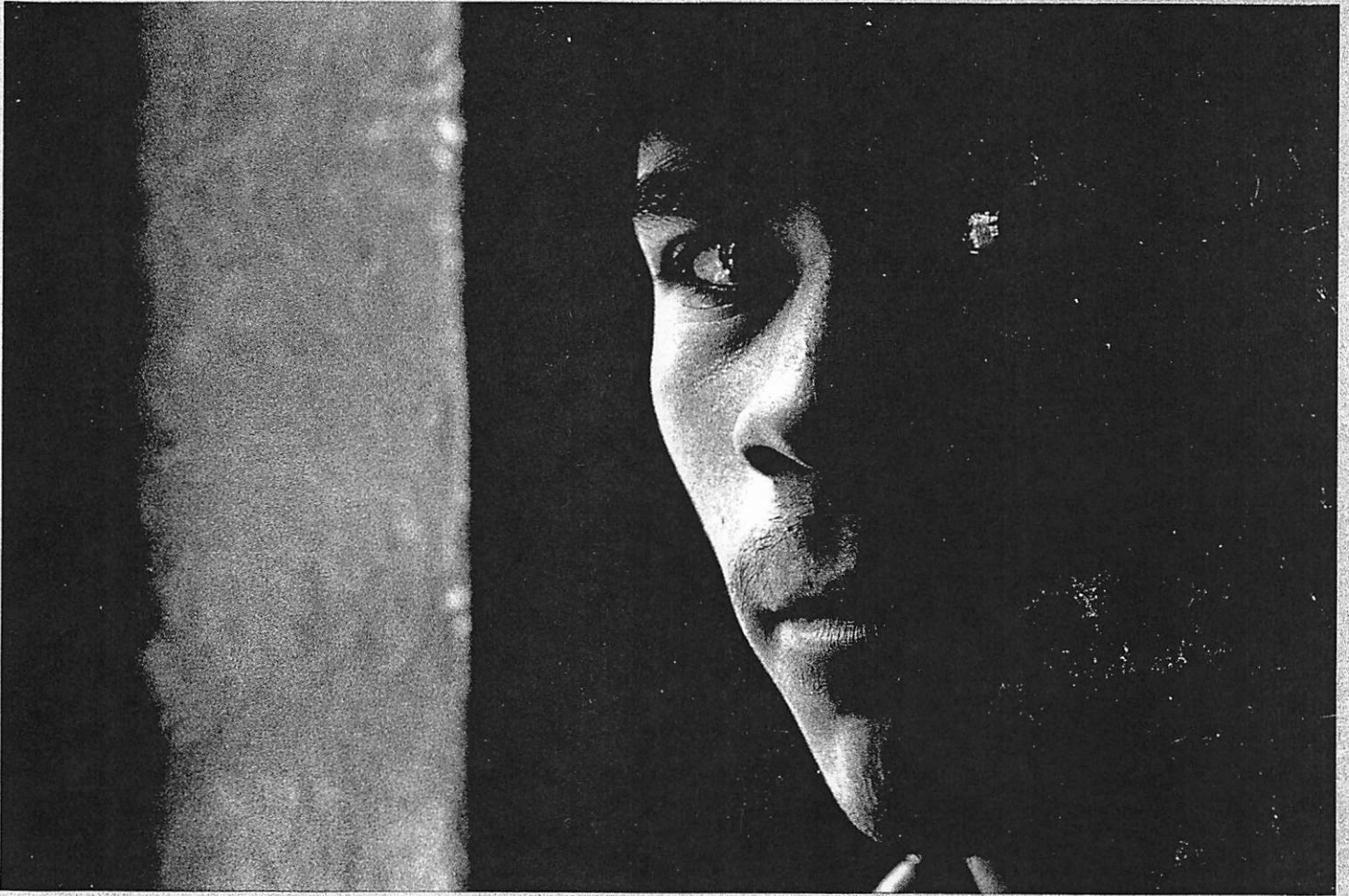


THE PUERTO RICAN DIASPORA
THEMES IN THE SURVIVAL OF A PEOPLE



*An Exhibition of Photographs
by Frank Espada*

EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO 1230 FIFTH AVENUE OCTOBER 21, 1983-JANUARY 8, 1984

THE PUERTO RICAN DIASPORA

One million, two million perhaps, uprooted people, Puerto Rican people from the *monte adentro*, the inner mountain, migrating to the airport, flying to the "North"; earlier, on the Marine tiger, for a week of seasickness, shipping to Brooklyn, recruited in the slums, railroaded across America to sail across the Pacific to cut sugar cane in Hawaii. Migrating from Brooklyn to Manhattan to the Bronx, to Chicago to Philadelphia — migrating, migrating.

Never in the history of man has there been a migration like the Puerto Rican migration. Never have so many exited their country of origin, not the Irish, not the Jews, not the Germans, no, not anybody, in such numbers, for so many decades.

What a project — to document this unprecedented migration with a camera, a tape recorder. Two of the toys of modern technology, two of the tools of modern scientists, two of the instruments of modern artists.

What a project! To document these dispersed persons in their quest simply to find what we thought they had by law — life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness.

Whom shall we send to document them? Please, not the Social Scientists nor a Presidential Commission — they "see" the Puerto Rican all too often like the blind men saw the elephant.

No — send a fine photographer and advocate who was born in Utuado, saw the coffee harvested, was forced to migrate north, has dedicated his life to the struggle against injustice, cried in the night when he couldn't do more.

Send Frank Espada — send him, because he is one of them, the chronology of this massive misadventure written in the lines of his face.

Send Frank Espada, because this is his story as well. He is one of them — through suffocation sees hope, through oppression sees humor, through dislocation and disorientation sees culture.

This catalog can only present a small sample of the 150 photographs in the exhibition it accompanies. As if in an ever growing geometric progression, the photographs exhibited are only a fraction of those of value, and they in turn are only a small part of those which were possible. Yet, what we publish here, and what we exhibit on this occasion represent the most ambitious photographic documentary project in the history of the Puerto Rican odyssey.

Frank Espada has produced a masterful portfolio.

We at El Museo del Barrio are proud to have joined with him in this great undertaking to preserve the history of the Puerto Rican experience in this century.

October, 1983

Jack Agüeros, Executive Director
El Museo del Barrio

PROJECT HISTORY

The National Endowment for the Humanities provided planning funds and a two-year grant to Boricua College, the Project sponsor, in 1979. During the life of these grants, the first phase of an ambitious effort designed to document the history of the Puerto Rican migration through various methods, we visited and documented in more than thirty communities from Puerto Rico to Hawaii. Drawing on the Puerto Rican *padrino* tradition of the extended family, we have developed a national network of Site Sponsor organizations (*padrinos*) and a representative National Advisory Board, who have joined and supported us in this locally oriented effort.

Endowment support ended in the fall of 1982, when we began the second phase of the Project. This has been primarily devoted to sharing our work, more than three years in the making, with our communities throughout the country. Local support, in the form of State or foundation grants to our *Padrinos* have allowed us to exhibit in seven cities (Harrisburg, Hartford, Honolulu, Chicago, Milwaukee, New York, Washington), with plans in progress to bring it to at least seven other sites, including Puerto Rico. In every case the exhibit is an integral part of a wider Puerto Rican cultural event. The present exhibit marks an important first in our history: for the first time we will be showing an adequate number of prints.

Future plans include the publication of a book of photographs with accompanying quotes and text; a radio series based on the Project interviews; and, ultimately, the Puerto Rican Collection, designed to preserve our collective diasporic experience, to be housed at Boricua College in New York.

BIOGRAPHY

Frank Espada, Director of the Diaspora Project, was born in Utuado, Puerto Rico, in 1930. He migrated with his family to New York City when he was nine, and has lived on the mainland since. He is a product of the Puerto Rican urban experience, of the barrios of New York. Two major themes have occupied him most of his life: the struggle for human rights and photography, which has always been an integral part of his movement-oriented activities. He once held positions of public responsibility, as an advocate for his community, which taught him a great deal about co-optation, false illusions and the mythology of social change. The Diaspora Project has allowed him, for the first time in his life, to fuse his ideology with his art, a condition which he regrets not reaching sooner and which he intends to preserve as long as he lives.

Besides continuing the documentary work of the Project, he is presently developing, with Boricua College, a National Puerto Rican Cultural Center, located in Washington, D.C. He is the National Coordinator of La Alianza Cultural Puertorriqueña, part of the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights. He has been married to Marilyn for 31 years and they have two sons, Martin and Jason, and a daughter, Lisa.