

Gilberto Oliver Campos: looking back 90 years

Last week, shortly after his 90th birthday, I interviewed architect and painter Gilberto Oliver Campos. What follows is a brief summary of the thoughts he shared with me that day.

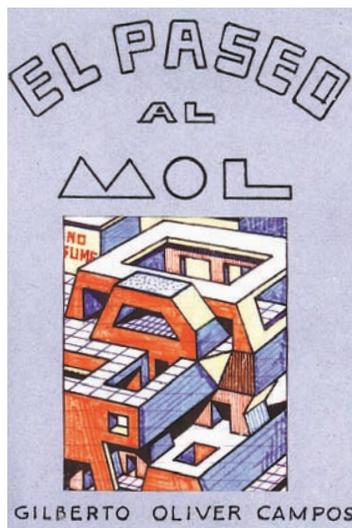
For some of us, the 1932 San Felipe hurricane is a footnote in some old history book. However, this hurricane changed my [Oliver Campos'] life; for you see, my family owned and operated the coffee producing Hacienda Gripiñas, and overnight, it ceased to exist.

My grandfather, Jaime Oliver Mayol was a banker in Ponce. He purchased Gripiñas along with its 1,400 acres in 1900. It became the largest coffee producing Hacienda in Puerto Rico. I remember that at the time, there were no roads leading up to Gripiñas, nor was there electricity or telephone service. However, there were plenty

of mosquitoes and snakes. After the hurricane, the bank took over the Hacienda as it was unable to pay its debts.

My father left Puerto Rico for Haiti, never to return. He settled in a small town by the name of Jacmel, and with the help of some friends, started exporting coffee to Europe. Fortunately, I was able to continue my education and pursue my interest in architecture. I was accepted at the Georgia Tech architecture program, where I commenced my studies.

As with most members of my generation, the World War II interrupted my studies. I was probably one of the few Puerto Ricans to be sent to India, as the Japanese threatened to invade that country. As this threat subsided, I was sent to Burma. Fortunately, I was used to the heat and the snakes, as in both India and Burma there were lots of them.



At the war's end, we were taken aboard a military transport that made stops at Saudi Arabia and Tripoli. Flying over the battle scarred Tripoli, we could see the

remnants of Rommel's Panzer Tanks which the British had destroyed.

The benefits provided to veterans, including the GI Bill, helped me complete my architecture studies at the Kansas State. Upon graduation, I returned to Puerto Rico. In 1953, I started to work at Ramey Air Force Base (formerly Borinquen Air Field) as a resident architect. I helped select the architects for the landmark Officers Club, and was responsible for the design and management of most construction programs. I worked at Ramey until 1970, the year the base closed. After 17 years of working at Ramey, I found myself with no employment!

Fortunately, architects were in demand during the early 1970s, as Puerto Rico was experiencing a construction boom. However, it would be short-lived. The 1973



José L. Bólvivar, Ph.D.
Commentary

OPEC oil embargo and the resulting calamity it caused the local and stateside economies stalemated most construction projects. Nevertheless, I was able to continue to work as an architect and take up my hobby of drawing. I retired at 75, but continue to draw and look forward to my next exhibition.

The author's book "Guerra, Banca y Desarrollo: La Historia del Banco de Fomento y la Industrialización de Puerto Rico" is due out in November. On the Net: www.joselbolivar.com.

VOICES

You're missing the point

Your mother of Juanita, Edna and María. Your letter "Please respond" (Daily Sun, May 28) had me in tears.

As I read your letter, I kept wondering when will your comments about the University of Puerto Rico strike include the role of the Fortuño administration, including the appointed political administrators at UPR. In this very long letter, you blame the entire mess on only the striking students. You never mention once the possibility of how the government is also responsible. In fact, as I think about your tear-jerking letter, I realized more and more that it is selfish. Your daughter was able to become a graduating senior because of all of the financial benefits she had received as a student in need at the UPR. Why has it not entered your mind that younger students, not in the graduating class, should receive all of the same financial benefits that Juanita received? Why have you refused to honestly consider that the student strike resulted because the Fortuño administration deceptively reduced for future students the financial benefits that your daughter received as a student?

You state that your Enda and María also look forward to receiving a college education at UPR — "the best value for the money in the entire world." Why do you refuse to be open-minded and astute enough to recognize that the students are now striking to keep these very values that Juanita and earlier graduates enjoyed and are being reduced by a shell game by the Fortuño administration. The striking students are protesting the reduction of financial benefits and cunning efforts by the Fortuño administration to control what is taught at UPR.

I go into rage when I hear pro-Fortuño citizens say: "These are 'UPR brats' trying to get something for nothing!" I know one dinosaur who got a free college education in a New York State teachers' college. He is now against these "UPR brats" striking

to get something (education?) for nothing. I also know a Canadian citizen, who joined the U.S. Navy and continues to receive all kinds of Navy benefits. He never became a U.S. citizen because he wants to keep open his option to return to Canada to participate in their medical care program. He thinks the UPR students are all communists and socialists wanting something for nothing. I have noted that everyone supporting Fortuño on this and other controversies, love Sara Palin, Glenn Beck, Rush Limbaugh and all the other obnoxious dinosaurs.

Also, not only are financial values being taken away. The government, power brokers also want to control by privatization what will be taught at UPR. Don't forget that it was at the very beginning of Fortuño's reign as governor that several brilliant books were banned and removed from Puerto Rico's public schools. Leading scholars and educators were outraged by Fortuño's sneaky efforts at thought control of students in public schools. These books were not banned from private schools on the island or stateside public schools. It also bothers me that LGBTT people and their families still support Fortuño, who does not support human rights for LGBTT people. I am wondering more and more if we want a 51st state that is controlled by homophobes. I support island gay groups giving support to the UPR strikers. They are not lemmings being led over the cliff to the sea by government shell games.

Robert McCarroll
Carolina

Artists care

To William Leffingwell:

Rather than all your psychobabble, I'd say artists support strikers because of what might've been. Realize most couldn't go to UPR themselves. They've had to stick it out badly and only a few of them make it and it's always precarious. They want others to have it better than they did. Higher education should be there for everybody, not just a snotty oligarchy.

Ana Montes
Las Lomas

Rise above it

In response to Samaria Salcedo,

If you knew me, you would know that although you may recognize my last name as one belonging to a Spanish province and royalty, none of that royalty and riches ever trickled down to my ancestors. Just to give you some reality so you do not write out of ignorance in the future, my family was dirt poor and I was raised before there was a welfare system and my five sisters, my brother and I had to earn our way through life. College was not something discussed in my home, and it was a great honor to just graduate from high school.

I started working when I was 15, and from age 16 I never again took a dime from my parents. I won't go into my entire life, as it is just an ordinary life, like millions of Americans, who rose from poverty, somehow got an education, and settled into the middle class, raising a family and finally retiring. So, your words of sarcasm are lost on me.

That does not change the fact that UPR striking students are born of a welfare state, are not about to give back to society, and are not about to sacrifice one iota to help their university out. There is no doubt in my mind that much of the fiscal mess is self-inflicted by both the UPR administration and the government, but it is a problem that everyone, including striking students, must help to solve. Any person with one iota of common sense knows that UPR tuition is ridiculously low.

Unless the UPR administration totally surrenders, I believe the strike will end when the silent majority of students take control away from the current leaders of the strike. And the silent majority are students, who, like me, are trying to rise above the low economic levels they were raised in and want to raise the standard of living for themselves and their families.

And, yes, to strive for riches, which in America (including Puerto Rico) is a dream that is possible and achieved by many.

J. D. Aragon
Old San Juan

War, crime and constitutionality

To Gerardo Francisco:

If I walk up to you and slap you in the face, unless I've the brawn of a Riot Squader, and I don't, you won't hesitate to beat the bejesus out of me. I only slapped you, I might later plead. But what if your 14-year-old slaps you? In terms of fairness, where's the difference?

War and law enforcement are played by different rules. You're an infantry commander and your men are shot at from a window, you blow up the building. You're not a court, your concerns are survival and victory.

Was the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico at war with the neighborhood where the chopper was downed? That and the presumption of innocence. That protects everybody, including the perp, and you can't even call him that, he's the suspect. For all you know, he might be legally nuts, valiantly defending Earth against a flying-saucer assault (Read "Attack of the statues" by Jean-Paul Sartre). Remember the armed might of the state is inexorable vis-à-vis the citizenry. We're not talking the uncertainty of war. Even Al Capone, who for a while appeared to be running his own sovereignty, ended up ignominiously penned in Florida for tax evasion.

If the above is unfair to cops, well, it comes with the uniform, if you can't take the heat, stay out of the kitchen. And sloppiness is what caused what happened. If you fly low toward armed antagonists, you won't make it, unless you're Schwarzenegger.

Law enforcement in Puerto Rico, nurtured by corruption at the top, has scarce respect for the Bill of Rights, to the detriment, not of gangsters, but of the law-abiding. You egging them on is hardly helpful.

Eleuterio Serpieri
Santurce

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