

# Cultural Daily

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## A Playwright's 'Theatrical Reckoning'

Evelina Fernandez · Wednesday, September 7th, 2016

I grew up in my grandparents' home in East Los Angeles, California, where three images in the living room watched our every move: Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and The Pope (which changed from time to time). My grandparents, Nana and Tata, fled Mexico during the revolution of 1910. Both of their families settled in a small mining town, Morenci, Arizona. They got married and moved to Jerome, Arizona, where my grandfather found work in the copper mine. They had five daughters: Dolores (Pain), Consuelo (Comfort), Amparo (Protection), Esperanza (Hope) and Antonia. They lived through the great depression and FDR was their hero because he came to their aid. They loved JFK, obviously, he was young, handsome and Catholic. And the Pope goes without saying... They were Catholic, what can I say?

My family has been in this country for over 100 years. I'm second generation Mexican-American and yet, many people assume that I was born somewhere else, that my first language is Spanish and a whole bunch of other stuff that isn't true. Yes, I'm Mexican by ancestry and take great pride in that, but I'm an American and there are millions of families just like mine all over the U.S.

The anti-immigrant rhetoric escalating today is frightening. The Latino community, and specifically Mexicans are being demonized, called criminals and non-tax paying, welfare grabbing low-lives. This hate speech is expressed freely, openly and without repercussions. When we read or hear comments like "go back to Mexico," "go back to where you came from," and "build the wall," we have to face the ugly truth that some people continue to regard all of us, regardless of whether we are born here or not, as "the other" or "outsiders" that don't belong or shouldn't have the same rights as other citizens.

So, *A Mexican Trilogy* follows the diaspora of Mexicans in the U.S. and tells the story of a family that came to the U.S. over a hundred years ago looking for a better life. It is our small effort to promote understanding, not only of the Mexican and Mexican-American experience, but the immigrant experience, their descendants and our contributions to the fabric of "American" culture. *Faith: Part I* begins during the Mexican Revolution, through the Great Depression and ends during WWII; *Hope: Part II* takes place in the 60's and ends with the assassination of President Kennedy; *Charity: Part III* takes place in 2005 during the death and burial of Pope John Paul II.

As a playwright you always hope that your work is and will continue to be relevant. Sometimes, you find your work to be necessary. *A Mexican Trilogy: Faith, Hope and Charity*, was produced as three separate productions. Now, we are producing it as one six-hour (including a dinner break) durational event. The previous productions were relevant. Telling the whole story at this historical

moment, has become necessary. For me, it has become a theatrical reckoning, if you will.

We had African-American friends in town from New York to see *Hope: Part II* when we produced it in 2011. In the play, 60's music, JFK and the Cuban missile crisis are the backdrop for a story about a Mexican-American family and deals with universal themes of love, infidelity, poverty and more. The comment from our friends after seeing the play was that it was the first time they had seen Latinos within an American context. In other words, it was new to see us as Americans who were part of the same social, political and cultural experiences as everybody else in the country. So, the question is, "Do most people see us as being outside of the American experience?" A similar reaction came from other non-Latino theater friends who came to see the play. We were collaborating with them on a musical and in previous discussions we attempted to describe our work which is primarily about the U.S. Latino/a experience. Before seeing *Hope: Part II* I'm not sure that they understood what we meant. But, afterward they said, "Okay, I get it." That spoke volumes and confirms my belief that art and, in our case, theater, can help us understand each other. That is why we do it.

***A Mexican Trilogy: An American Story plays at the Los Angeles Theatre Center September 8-October 9, 2017. Information and tickets [here](#).***

*Image: Charity, Part III of A Mexican Trilogy (2012 production). From Left, Lucy Rodriguez, Geoffrey Rivas, Rudy Ramos, Esperanza America, and Evelina Fernandez. Photograph by Ed Krieger.*

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