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Daynali Flores-Rodriguez and ISU student Stephanie Rodriguez, January 18, 2018

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WGLT Sound Ideas Interview with IWU Professor Daynali Flores-Rodriguez and ISU student Stephanie Rodriguez, January 18, 2018

Daynali Flores-Rodriguez: My mom still doesn't have any power. Two days ago, the Secretary of Energy over there said that people can expect power is going to be re-established in June.

Judith Valente: And so that's going on more than five months now that she has been without power. How has your mother been living?

Flores-Rodriguez: She is depressed. She –she was telling me that she just wants to prepare her morning coffee in her own house rather than going out and buy it every day. Same thing with her groceries, cleaning her clothes- so all of the little things that we take for granted she cannot do on a regular basis. She's depressed. She says that she wants to get to her normal routine but there is no normal routine anymore.

Valente: What about healthcare and things like that? I assume your mother is of a certain age.

Flores-Rodriguez: Thank God, my mom eats healthy. She hasn't had any problem. But there is definitely... not all the hospitals are working at capacity... there are still places without electricity, without energy that depend on generators.

Valente: You're here with Stephanie Rodriguez who is an ISU student and editor of the Vidette newspaper. Stephanie, do you have relatives in Puerto Rico who have been affected?

Stephanie Rodriguez: Yeah, actually my father lives there. Him and most of my family from both sides of my family so I live here with my mom and my grandma from her side and my brother but most of our extended family and my father's family lives down there and it's been a hard time for them. Some people- one of my cousins, actually- she was fortunate enough to be able to move to Florida recently because she's just – it's too much! My dad... he just bought a house down there, like a month before the hurricane hit, so he is kind of stuck there, 'cause he said otherwise he would also move to Florida, so it has been a hard time for them. He also doesn't have power right now.

Valente: What about the roads and things like that? What do you hear, Stephanie?

Rodriguez: I remember in the beginning he said it was just horrible... like to get gas it was like you had to take a whole day out. It was like 10 hour lines to get gas, to do this, to do that. Everything is bad, you have to conserve what you have and be careful about how you do it and how you spend your time and things like that.

Valente: Well for both of you, people in Houston and Texas who are affected, and even Florida, don't have these problems... that seems that things were able to be cleared up pretty quickly. What has been your reaction to the fact that the people in Texas and in Florida have been able to

recover much more quickly than the people in Puerto Rico. Stephanie, what do you see the situation is? Is there some sort of a double standard about how Puerto Rico has been treated versus how US mainland citizens have been treated?

Rodriguez: Puerto Rico, honestly, before this hadn't really been in the news that much because people don't know about it. Most people didn't know that we're US citizens, that we're American citizens so that's probably one of the problems as well, and it's... it was clear that Irma did destroy part of Florida but Irma wasn't as strong as Maria and that's just a fact. It was a category 5 hurricane and 3 million US citizens on the island were left without power, were left without food, were left without water. And then after a while people stopped caring because it's not in the news, it's... it's ... wild to me that that happened because they are American citizens and just because we aren't a state, we are under the power of the US. We depend on the US for so much. We have US currency, we're citizens... so for them to basically forget about it compared to how ethno... with Harvey and with Irma, it's insane and I just think it has a lot to do with the fact that... because we aren't a state, it's not seen as important.

Valente: Both of you are helping to organize what is being called 'The Puerto Rico Teach-in'. What are you hoping to teach, who are you hoping to teach about Puerto Rico, Dr. Flores?

Flores-Rodriguez: Well, one of the things that we're going to touch base on is what is the relationship between the US and Puerto Rico, what are the points in common, what are the points in ... the differences, how are we treated, and I think that's – that's important for people to know. We have a long history with the United States and the fact that right now we have, after the hurricane crisis, Puerto Rico is the largest blackout and the longest blackout in US history. Puerto Rico has more citizens than 21 states in main... in the United States and we are not taking that into account. I mean, if we compare that with any other state, with any other situation in the United States, these would be news over and over and over and we are fading out and we cannot fade out, so that's one of the things that – that we hope to accomplish, that we hope to convey to the attendance.

Valente: You're listening to Sound Ideas. I am Judie Valente. I'm with Daynali Flores Rodriguez of the Hispanic Studies department at Illinois Wesleyan and an ISU student, Stephanie Rodriguez. We're talking about the upcoming Puerto Rico teach-in. Stephanie, you're obviously interested in getting students more aware of the situation. What do you think their awareness level is at this point and what are you hoping to accomplish?

Rodriguez: Well, I mean, I have been here for four years at ISU. I know kids aren't watching the news or things like that. Everything is on your phone. So it's really what you're seeing on your phone so I think events like this- they really help to bring awareness and like, my story from my family or Dr. Flores-Rodriguez's family, you get that personal feel. You see people that are actually affected by this crisis, it's not just, "Oh, it's them. It's them." It's people here and we're real-life people with stories.

Valente: How will you be reaching out to the students to let them be better informed in this teach-in?

Rodriguez: Well, I mean I'll talk about my father and the things that they're telling me and things like that and just also how hard it was to be here and be so far away and not be able to- to feel like you couldn't really help them at that moment as much as I wanted to. Also, my grandmother lives with me here at home. She was visiting her sister during that time and my mom was just going crazy wanting to bring her back but the airports weren't working and everything was just crazy and just... that sense of turmoil and not knowing, I want people to understand that. It's hard and it's real and I want students to see that. It – it affects them because we are a part of the US.

Valente: It is not just college students you're reaching out to. In fact, as I understand it, this teach-in was instigated by high school students in the community who wanted to know more about what's going on with Puerto Rico. How did that come about, Dr. Flores-Rodriguez?

Flores-Rodriguez: Well, there is a Sociology class in one of – in one of the local high schools and two students who are not Puerto Rican, who are- who don't have Puerto Rican family actually- the project started during the time of the hurricane and they decided that it would be good to create a benefit concert. They contacted Dr. Mauro Toro-Morn-

Valente: -of Illinois State University, of the Latin American Studies program here?

Flores-Rodriguez: Yeah, and she contacted us and it has been a joint effort ever since.

Valente: What do you hope to tell the high school students?

Rodriguez: I just wanna—what I hope to let them know is... just that... we need help. We still need help. Even after all of these months, they're not gonna get power until June. That's incredibly unfair. That's not livable. It's not right. So I just want... them-high school students, college students, community members, anyone who will listen- just to know that we need help. It's really it.

Valente: There is a teach-in that you'll be doing but then there's also a component of this that's a concert. Let's talk a little bit about what the concert will be about, when, where.

Flores-Rodriguez: So the concert is going to be dancing, it's gonna be singing and it's gonna be instruments. So all from local community members, so that's what we hope to – for people to enjoy, to become aware, to become aware of how this affects them 'cause that's one part that ...that we hope to address as well in the teaching. Right now, there is a crisis in the hospitals all over the mainland because basic medical supplies such as IV bags, mini IV bags are scarce because those are produced in Puerto Rico which is one of the biggest pharmaceutical hubs in the States. What affects us affects the mainland and it... it... everything is tied together. So come, learn a little bit about how it affects us, what you can do here and enjoy.

Valente: Daynali Flores-Rodriguez is an assistant professor in the Department of Hispanic Studies at Illinois Wesleyan. Stephanie Rodriguez is a senior at Illinois State University. She is the president of the Spanish club and editor of the Vidette student newspaper and involved in the upcoming Puerto Rico teach-in. Thank you both for coming in and talking about this.

Flores-Rodriguez: Thank you so much.

Rodriguez: Thank you.

Valente: I'm Judie Valente.