

Puerto Rican Feminists Confront the State
Photo Essay by Mafer Vacca (Class of 2027)



In spring 2024, the Jan Cohn Annual Lecture in American Studies was held at Trinity College. This is an annual lecture dealing with topics relating to American studies, culture, and history. The lecture honors the memory of Jan Cohn, G. Keith Funston Professor of American Literature and American Studies and the first woman to serve as dean of the faculty at Trinity College.

Dr. Marisol Lebrón, Associate Professor of Feminist Studies and Critical Race and Ethnic Studies at UC Santa Cruz, was the invited speaker. She was selected by Assistant Professor in Anthropology and the Center for Caribbean Studies (CCS) co-director, Dr. Amanda Guzmán.



CCS Co-Director, Professor Amanda Guzmán and 2024 Jan Cohn Speaker Marisol Lebrón

In a lecture, entitled, “Puerto Rican Feminists Confront the State,” Lebrón's discussion centered on the significant role of women's organizing in Puerto Rico post Hurricane María, a devastating 2017 natural disaster with a continued legacy of implications for lived island realities.

Introducing the campus community to her broader trajectory of academic scholarship which broadly engages with themes of state policing and community organizing, Lebrón situated her presentation as largely stemming from her 2021 publication, [Against Muerto Rico: Lessons from the Verano Boricua](#). This is an accessible bilingual text staged as a series of lessons from the Puerto Rican collective, Editora Educación Emergente.



She evoked the term, [Muerto Rico \(Dead Rico\)](#), coined by island artist, [ADÁL](#) (1948-2020), to describe a territory under the control of a colonial capitalist state whose government has repeatedly failed to meet basic social and structural needs.



[Verano Boricua](#) (Puerto Rican summer) is a reference to the summer of 2019 which saw major, unprecedented [island-wide protest](#) in response to a series of [leaked private chats](#), often described as #Rickyleaks on social media, between then Governor Ricardo Rosselló and a group of his political allies. The island's collective response which led to the governor's ousting was especially notable for the way in which it represented a moment of solidarity [with shared cultural values](#) across diverse communities and experiences from major pop stars to the working class.



LeBrón traces women's organizing efforts with a focus on their advocating for a more transparent democracy and resource distribution – for a life with dignity free of the threat of violence.

An important aspect of the presentation was the highlighting and valuing of non-traditional, performative ways in which Puerto Rican women empower themselves, such as by using dance and music as a form of protest.

The popular phrase “Ricky Renuncia” calling for the governor’s resignation in the summer of 2019 emerged as an activist tag line in physical public spaces and a hash tag in digital forums.

LeBrón is one of a group of project leaders of an open-access, digital curriculum around the study of Puerto Rico, [Puerto Rican Syllabus](#), which has a section entitled, [“Verano Boricua/#Ricky Renuncia”](#).





Earlier in the day, ahead of her lecture, Lebrón met with students in the more intimate setting of the Joslin Family 1823 Room in the library for a conversation and workshop on public writing considering issues of target audiences, writing style decision-making, and public impact scope.

CCS co-director, Prof. Guzmán hosted his event in collaboration with the inaugural iteration of her cross-listed Anthropology and American Studies framed course, “Communities in/of Practice” with the provocation: What is the ethical role of research in our contemporary society?

The course critically interrogates the relationship between the researcher and the researched; and explores the broader, more creative possibilities of scholarly practice beyond traditional forms of writing.