

Note of the editor. We are including this front page and the story that were published in our June, 2006 edition. We wanted to frame this month's story on the mural project at HCC within a historical perspective.

'Transformation' At Holyoke Community College By Manuel Frau Ramos



On May 10 the community in general, but especially the Puerto Rican community of Holyoke, witnessed the official unveiling of the long-awaited Latino mural at Holyoke Community College (HCC).

'Transformation', the 40-foot long canvas mural of the Latino Mural Collaborative Project that depicts daily life in the city of Holyoke, is the product of 16 Latino youth, most of the Boricuas residing in Holyoke that worked under the direction of author and painter Deborah Savage.

The mural's images and message undergo a transformation, from the negative to the positive. To the left, the intense colors, and the dark, poorly defined images appear to represent and transmit a negative message about the experience of growing up in Holyoke. The colors and the figures become

lighter and better defined as the transformation towards the positive unfolds. The transformation ends in a note of hope with an angelical figure, and Latino youth looking towards a better future.



Latino Mural - 2006

The inclusion of the Puerto Rican flag in the positive section of the mural highlights the message of 'transformation' with more than one interpretation: a better future for the city of Holyoke, and a new phase of Holyoke Community College as an educational institution for all.

It pleases us to see how the mural symbolically replaces what seemed to be an "invisible wall" that separated the college from the Puerto Rican community of Holyoke. The fact that the mural was placed in the Campus Student plaza, a highly visible place that represents the "common" or the "heart" of the building complex that makes up the college, reinforces the message of transformation and inclusion. The mural faces South Holyoke, where most of the Puerto Rican community resides; the "marginalized" are now part of the "center." The image of the Puerto Rican flag on the right sends a clear message to the Puerto Rican community. Just as the cultural symbols of other ethnic groups are displayed, it was time for the Puerto Rican cultural symbols to be visible in the Holyoke "landscape."

In the past, the political discourse of welcome and inclusiveness on the part of the administrators did not translate into realities. The lack of Latino students, faculty and administrators, especially Puerto Ricans, demonstrated this rhetorical abyss. As Heriberto "Herbie" Flores, HCC trustee, pointed out not too long ago, "As a Puerto Rican, I have to ask, where has the College been for years? This College at this point does not reflect the African American community or the Puerto Rican community."

We hope the Latino Mural Project marks the beginning of a real transformation at Holyoke Community College.