**May 2018**

To: Latinx Strategy Group

From: Olga Sanchez Saltveit, PhD candidate, Theatre Arts, UO

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Funding Request: ***Black Latina The Play* by Crystal Roman**

Playwright Crystal Roman was inspired to write *Black Latina The Play* out of frustration with the negative messages and rejections she received while auditioning:

When I would go to Latina casting calls for roles that I did find challenging, they would say, ‘Well you don’t sound Latina enough.’ Then when I would go to a Black casting call, they would say, ‘Wait a minute, we asked for a black woman.’ I’d say, I’m a black woman. I just couldn’t take it anymore.

Roman became so aggravated with this situation that she founded The Black Latina Movement, LLC, a production company which generates work specifically about the AfroLatinx experience. Her show, *Black Latina The Play* expresses not only Roman’s experiences of seeking work in the commercial entertainment industry but also the impact that prevalent media images have had on her day-to-day life. She is among the very few AfroLatinx playwrights in the US who have decided to write about their experiences for the theatre.

Empowerment is the intention behind Roman’s *Black Latina the Play*. To process her experiences, she decided to chronicle her feelings through writing. Four voices emerged representing anger, sadness, love, and empowerment, and the chronicle transformed into a one-woman show, which she is now available to tour to UO, ideally during Hispanic Heritage Month.

The performance begins with music and dance, and then launches into the encounters with a world unable to comprehend the complexity of AfroLatinidad; with those who ask whether she is Latina or Black; by those who appropriate her culture and physical attributes (via botox and bottom-enhancing undergarments) then recommend plastic surgery in return; and by the proliferation of light-skinned women on Spanish-language television.

The play culminates in acts of liberation with the chapter entitled *Empowerment* that outlines a three-step process by which this woman will not merely survive but flourish: self-acceptance, celebration, and representation. *Black Latina the Play* enumerates and celebrates the contributions of Afrodescendants in the US, taking on the challenge to represent the complexity of the (Afro)Latinx experience, with strength, grace, pride, and unity.

*Black Latina The Play* encapsulate a fundamental challenge for 21st century AfroLatinx residing in the US: to find acceptance for their holistic identity when forces within and without prefer the simplicity of binarism or the nuance of colorism, both oppressive strategies of social dominance. While the ideology of *mestizaje* strived to forge a homogenous identity from the diversity of heritages thriving in Latin America, it has not overcome the ingrained colonial social stratification inherited from Spain and its socioeconomic impacts. Afrodescendant and indigenous communities still struggle to overcome a history of obscurity while lighter-skinned, phenotypically European individuals remain the privileged representation and focus of Latin American narratives.

As more AfroLatinx immigrate to the United States, they will encounter mainstream United States culture, a society historically divided along a simplistic White-Black binary, discriminatory and worse, violently hostile to Afrodescendants. Here in the US, we do not live in a post-racial society; racism targets Black people, regardless of nation of origin. The lack of awareness and understanding in the US about the existence and experiences of AfroLatinx reinforces binary thinking that can be harmful for youth who are in the process of developing their sense of identity. Crystal Roman addresses the impact on young women seeing Latinx represented only by lighter-skinned people in the media:

When you present a face that only represents a portion of the community, it causes a ripple effect that has deep rooted scars. Self-loathing and hatred seeps in and dissatisfaction of underrepresentation in the media forces young girls to question their beauty and value.

Dramatic literature, the theatre, and other fields have the power to educate our audiences, artists and critics as well as provide opportunities for generations of AfroLatinx to see validating, empowering, intentional representations of their experiences.

At the UO, the performance of Ms. Roman’s powerful, meaningful one-woman show will be an illuminating experience by which our Latinx community might begin to acknowledge its own complicated and sometimes painful relationships with AfroLatinx; by which our whole community might also understand the particular experiences of the African diaspora in its Latin American and Latinx manifestations. For the UO community at large, this may very well be a unique experience ~ personally, I’ve not seen an interrogation of US AfroLatinx identity on campus in my three years of attendance.

I believe this production aligns with the following LSG short and long-term goals:

**Short term**: Strengthen relationships with LCC, by extending invitations to the performance

**Long term**: Create a Cultural Center, by demonstrating the wealth of creative cultural production available for presentation at such a Cultural Center

**BUDGET:**

*Black Latina The Play* (including travel, lodging) $2000

Unknown expenses: $ 500?

* Performance venue
* Publicity ($150?)
* Catering? Hospitality?

Request from the LSG: $1000

Balance left to raise: $1000 - $1500

Committed support from the LSG will permit Olga Sanchez Saltveit to request funding from other sources to cover the balance of expenses.

Potential co-sponsors include:

* Black Strategies Group
* Umoja Pan-African Scholars (ARC)
* Center for Latina/o & Latin American Studies
* Center for Multicultural Academic Excellence
* Center for the Study of Women in Society
* Cultural Forum
* MultiCultural Center
* Women’s, Gender & Sexuality Studies
* ASUO Women’s Center
* Theatre Arts Department
* Ethnic Studies Department
* Others?

**REFERENCES:**

* April 21, 2018

Absolutely! It is a powerful performance that deals with social issues through the lens of race, ethnicity and gender!

I highly recommend it!

Omar Eaton-Martínez

Office of Interns and Fellows Program Manager

Smithsonian National Museum of American History

Smithsonian Latino Working Committee, Deputy Chair  
Smithsonian African American Association, Program Chair

* April 23, 2018

I would definitely recommend her to go to any university! If you do, plan on creating a workshop around it to get your money's worth, and so that you don't solely rely on Q&A's. Some of her content may be a bit triggering for some people, so you might want to ask exactly what she plans on performing so that you can properly prepare.

Let me know if you have any specific questions.

Sincerely,

Rogelio Becerra-Ramirez, M.Ed.

Coordinator, Student Diversity & Inclusion

Columbia College Chicago

And, from Crystal Roman’s files:

"In a time when it is easier to find qualities that divide us instead of unite us, the Black Latina Movement Play provides an essential introspective look at intersectionality through the performer's lived experiences. Its poignant message should be heard by anyone, especially those looking to celebrate their own complex identity."

Rogelio Becerra-Ramirez, M.Ed.

Coordinator, Student Diversity & Inclusion

Columbia College Chicago

"As a Latina graduate student, I developed my feminism through education and in depth research. Watching the play, allowed me to experience my feminism as an audience member.  The performer powerfully delivered sacred monologues that invited audience members to laugh, cry, and feel. This play beautifully uncovers the realities that we don’t get to see in mainstream media. Crystal, the director, does an extraordinary job interweaving the personal and the political when it comes to theory in the flesh. I hope to watch it again as these are powerful testimonies."

Brenda Martinez- Lehigh University

* Website/Blog- <http://blacklatinamovement.com>
* YouTube- <http://www.youtube.com/user/BlackLatinaMVMT>
* FaceBook- <http://www.facebook.com/BlackLatinaMovement>
* Twitter- Business @OfficialBLMvMt Personal @MissBlackLatina