

Distinguished Author Is Department Guest

Students hear the minority perspective of a black, Latina woman

Author Loida Maritza Pérez was a guest on campus in spring 2000, sponsored by the Afro-Romance Institute and the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures. The MU lectures committee and the Black Studies Program participated in the event and provided monetary assistance.

Born in the Dominican Republic, Pérez came to the United States with her family at the age of 5 and grew up in New York City. Inspired by a creative writing course

she took at Cornell University with renowned scholar Henry Louis Gates, she decided to become a writer.

Her first novel, *Geographies of Home*, published in 1999 is enjoying widespread critical and popular acclaim. This fictional account explores the perspectives of three sisters whose experiences reveal the contradictions, superstitions, joys and pains of those caught between cultures and intent on finding "home."

While on campus, the writer held a public reading and spoke formally and informally with MU students about the difficulties encountered by triple minority writers—black, Latina, female—striving for success in the competitive arena of creative writing.

Pérez, who signed copies of her work for the University Bookstore, is part of a continuing group of visiting authors on campus.

The Afro-Romance Institute, which promotes languages and literatures of the African diaspora, has brought to campus some of the decade's most famous black and Latin-American writ-

ers, including Nancy Morejón of Cuba; Blas Jiménez of the Dominican Republic; Nelson Estupiñán Bass of Ecuador; Cristina Rodríguez Cabral of Uruguay; and Guinean writers Juan Tomás Avila Laurel and Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo.

Writing contest offers students cash prize and publication

In honor of the Pérez visit, the department sponsored a creative writing contest. Cristina Rodríguez Cabral, an

MU doctoral student and graduate teaching assistant, won \$200 for her entry and will have her poem published in a future issue of *Palara*, the journal of MU's Afro-Latin/American Research Association.

Pérez helped judge the contest. Students were invited to submit original poetry or short stories on any topic and in any Romance language. Submissions dealing with issues of race and ethnicity were particularly encouraged.

A faculty committee narrowed the submissions to a group of five finalists: two poems in Spanish, and two poems and one short story in English. All the authors read their works during a public reading to determine the winner.

Other contestants received an MU pen that lights up in brilliant colors to inspire future masterpieces. The prize money was provided by Associate Professor Flore Zéphir, who donated part of her 1995 Kemper

Fellowship Teaching Award to be used toward the benefit of an MU student.



Critically acclaimed novelist Loida Maritza Pérez presented a public reading, met with students and judged a writing contest in her role as distinguished visiting author for the department. Her visit was sponsored by MU's Afro-Romance Institute, the lectures committee and the Black Studies Program.

Communique

University of Missouri - Columbia Dept. of Romance Languages Fall, 2000.