



of the same flesh and blood as we. I see that they eat three times a day same as we — but only after being waited upon they enjoys it better because their digestion organ have had the rest while our body and minds work all the time.

After all, work would not be such a task if it was not for the ingratitude we get from our employers. But then all of the good boys and girls that can, find better works. You can get something to do that don't take all day and night; and you have parents that try to make something out of you.

Mary Johnson Sprow personified the determination that women workers brought to the eventual transformation of domestic work from near-slavery to independent contracting. Women such as Mary established and sustained support networks with other women who had left live-in service in the 1920s and 1930s. These networks provided role models for the transition into daily paid work, mentors who did not belittle the former live-in's desire for independence. These women shared their knowledge of how to operate in several households simultaneously. They also formed self-help groups, savings clubs, and burial societies, which augmented the region- or kin-based associations that also provided African Americans with some social security.

Mary Johnson Sprow died in Washington in 1981 after more than 80 years of work in domestic service. Her story is one of the very few first-person sources for understanding the feelings, experiences, and aspirations of members of this important social and economic group as they confronted life in the first generation after slavery and made the leap from live-in service to day work. Her diary [offers] a different view from historians who emphasize the victimization of

America's domestics; [Mary's writings] stress the power and autonomy of a working-class woman. She reveals how African-American women were simultaneously intricate and plain; overt and subtle; visible and veiled. She helps us again realize why the women who have been "domestics" will themselves write the correctives to this culture's misconceptions about them.

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Latinos and Human Rights

by Nilda Villalta

Last year in the midst of a discussion about the Latino Festival in Washington, D.C., Quique Avilés, a performance artist and writer, summarized the irony of the Central American migration to D.C.: "We came to D.C. because of a war that was supported from here, and now we are here to stay." Historical and social developments in Latin America have drawn Latinos to the U.S. capital. They represent a large community of people of different nationalities, educational levels, social status, races, and immigration experiences. Verónica DeNegri, a Chilean exile, illustrates the activism, search for justice, and political struggle within a community that has grown and diversified over the years.

In 1973 in Chile, Augusto Pinochet led a coup that removed socialist president Salvador Allende.



Allende and approximately 3,000 others were killed. Thousands more were imprisoned, tortured, and forced to leave Chile. Verónica DeNegri, an Allende partisan, was one of those imprisoned. After her release, the government harassed her until she left in 1977. With the help of the International Rescue Committee, she came to Washington, D.C., with her youngest son, Pablo. Soon her son Rodrigo joined them. During those years, Verónica worked in many jobs from chambermaid to housing activist with Adelante, a local Latino social agency. She and Rodrigo, a photographer with a growing reputation, were activists against South African apartheid and U.S. intervention in Central America. In 1986, 19-year-old Rodrigo went to Santiago, where he photographed city life and street protests. One morning, soldiers arrested him and a student. The army severely burned both youths, and Rodrigo died, having been denied proper medical treatment. In the following years, Verónica traveled widely speaking about human rights for Amnesty International. She now works as a tour guide in D.C. and continues her public speaking. Verónica discusses how readily she fit in as an activist in D.C.:

I was born into a troubled world and then got into another troubled world. I have advocated all my life for human rights in different capacities, as a student, a woman, a mother. When I arrived in Washington, I found an atmosphere of solidarity, and there I began at a time when young people's and immigrants' rights were just being recognized. The Latino community was very active, more integrated; it participated with the Black community and other communities.

In April of this year in a discussion about her participation in a community exhibit at the Latino Community Heritage Center, Verónica voiced the importance of Washington, D.C., in her life:

This city is the center of everything; you can demonstrate and express your opinions about issues that are important for people all over the world, and that is very important for me. I like to live here and be part of a community that has gone through so much and is full of life and willing to keep on fighting.

Nilda Villalta is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Maryland, working on a dissertation entitled "Testimonies, War, and Survival: Representation and Creation in El Salvador and in the United States by Exiled Salvadorans." She has conducted research and fieldwork in Washington, D.C., and in Central America.

We have
shared our
home with
more than
200 families.

Reflections on Nineteen Years of Service

by Sharon Murphy

Mary House opened its doors in 1981 with the belief that forgotten families have the right to shelter, food, medical care, and a safe place to tell their stories. Immigrant and refugee families bring their stories of family members left behind, struggles of new beginnings, and the same dreams for their children that all parents, of all countries and backgrounds, desire.