**Culture Shock**

**Alexandra Balsalobre**

 A different culture, language, and social environment are just some of the factors anyone who comes from outside the United States faces as soon as he or she gets to college. As a Latino, I must admit that one does not truly experience this culture shock until after actually living with it. Even after years of traveling to the United States for different reasons be it to visit family members or simply for vacation, it is very different to be within the culture for a week or so and enjoy the good things it has to offer than living with it as if it were slowly but surely forming a part in my identity. For this reason, I have decided to dedicate my website to explaining this perspective only a few of us, here at Emory, are able to experience. Through this website I also dedicated a few pages to describing my identity as a Puerto Rican since, in my opinion, this is what truly defines me. Before starting to talk about my experience here at Emory, I am going to introduce myself through my culture. Puerto Rico is an island, about 100 miles wide by 40 miles long, in the Caribbean. In my opinion, Puerto Ricans are probably one of the most prideful people when it comes to defending or simply talking about their culture and roots. How can such a small island be able to maintain so much pride? Well, this answer dates back to when the island was first colonized by Spain. Puerto Rico, never really having been independent, has always suffered from an identity crisis of not really knowing who we are. The island has been passed from the hands of the Spanish to the hands of the United States without having the capacity to come together and decide what we are. I, as a Puerto Rican, feel that right now Puerto Rico, being a territory of the United States, feels the need to exhibit a sense of pride to create a sense of reassurance. Now that you understand the reason behind Puerto Rican pride, I am going to introduce the key aspects of what this culture is all about: Food, dance, festivity and family. All these usually come together during family gatherings, especially during Christmas, which is a very lively holiday in the island. A typical Christmas party includes, *lechón*, or pig, *arroz con gandules,* or rice with pigeon peas, and *amarillitos,* or fried plantains. Apart from this, it includes music usually made with *el* *cuatro*. The *cuatro* is the typical instrument in Puerto Rico. Its features resemble those of a guitar and a violin. Although it could potentially be heard anywhere in the island, this instrument is usually integrated in Christmas music. It not only contributes to the joyful and festive atmosphere throughout the island, but it also brings family and friends together. It is very typical for a group of friends to bring the *cuatro* and even the *güiro*, which is another typical Puerto Rican instrument, to a party and give a small live concert. I used to play the *cuatro* when I was a child and I still remember all the joy and conviviality that would arise by playing typical Puerto Rican music during Christmas parties or even family gatherings. In my opinion, this object is much more than an instrument, it is part of the Puerto Rican identity and I must say that simply hearing it play generates a great sense of pride and unity among all Puerto Ricans. I think that one cannot talk about Puerto Rico and its culture without mentioning probably one of the largest festivals throughout the island: *Las Fiestas de la Calle San Sebastián.* This festival lasts four days, from Thursday to Friday, and is held during the month of January. It is the perfect embodiment of the true identity of the Puerto Rican culture since it not only offers authentic Puerto Rican foods, but one can also sense the music, the dancing, and the way people interact during such an animated festivity. I would definitely recommend attending it since it basically paints a picture of the complete Puerto Rican experience. During my senior year in high school, I could not understand how I was going to be able to leave all this behind and go to the United States. I viewed the United States as a mixture of so many cultures without really being able to identify with any one of them. After arriving though, I was able to understand the beauty behind having such diversity, which I once simply found as cold and unattached. I made friends from all over the world and was able to obtain new ideas and perspectives towards looking at the world, or more specific for our current situation, Emory. I have already spent about 6 months living among the American culture and I must admit that it has definitely helped me grow as an individual. Before starting the interviews for my website, I explained my desire to make the interviews as casual as possible because my purpose was to start a conversation on the topic and slowly build on it. For this reason, since all my interviewees are Latinos, I decided to conduct the interviews in Spanish and then translate them to English. Although they are based on specific questions, the interviews were full of casual conversations, which sometimes led us to get off track. For this reason, I decided not to put my entire interviews on the pages, but only the relevant contributions, be it from the interviewer (me) or the interviewee. I believe that by asking the three interviewees a set of specific questions, I was then better able to compare their thoughts and opinions on my topic. I also decided to choose three Latinos that have experienced the American culture at different extents; one that has only been living within it for about 6 months, another that has been living within it for half of his life, and then another that has been living within it for most of his life. I, personally, was better able to connect and talk more about my experience here at Emory with the Puerto Rican. Not only has he been living within the American culture for the exact amount of time I have, but he also shares my same background and ethnicity. Living in the same island and same house for 18 years while attending the same school with almost the same people since pre-kinder, makes one perceive the idea of change as something very abstract and distant. Even a week before my time to leave the island, the idea that so much change was about to occur in my life simply did not fit in my head. Although I tried to play it cool with my family and friends, transitioning to Emory was definitely something I was very afraid of. I was not used to change at all but I knew I was in desperate need of one. One is never truly ready to take a step as nerve-wrecking as this one was for me therefore I never really gave myself the option of simply staying in Puerto Rico living in my house and studying in the UPR. I was very set in what I wanted although I was also very afraid of it, but my interest and curiosity definitely beat my fear. After leaving Puerto Rico and finally arriving at my new home, Atlanta, GA, I realized that coming here might have been one of the best decision I have taken in my life. It not only opened my eyes to a new world of diversity and opportunities but it has helped me grow so much as a person. Through this experience, which in my case is just starting, I have learned that the only way to evolve as a person is to embrace change and all the opportunities it brings along with it.