



COLOMBIA

January 1-16, 2020



Human Rights and the Political Power of Music

This year's new delegation to Colombia focused on human rights through the lens of freedom of expression, particularly the political power of music. Five delegates from the U.S. and Canada participated in this 14-day program in three different Colombian cities, examining the topic of human rights and social justice in relation to freedom of artistic expression. The delegation delved into the political, historical, and ethnic forces that have shaped the music scene in Colombia.

The delegation visited Bogotá (a UNESCO-designated “City of Music”), Medellín, and Cartagena, with each stop forming a particular focus of study. In Bogotá the focus was a general introduction to music and politics, and orientation to Colombia, and backdrop for an introduction to human rights discourse and politics as they relate to Colombia.

Medellín focused on urban music and the conflict and how these forms of urban artistic expression are used to promote awareness of social injustices. Once dubbed the most dangerous city in the world, Medellín has undergone an unimaginable urban and social transformation, incorporating art and music into the fabric of its revitalization project. The city uses its approach towards politics, social innovation, and sustainability as weapons against violence and poverty.

Cartagena was the final destination. Located on the Caribbean coast, this bustling colonial city is home to many genres of music, but perhaps the best known is Champeta, a genre of music originating with Colombia's Afro-descendant population. To the artists who write the music and the people who listen to it, Champeta represents cultural liberation. Though long denigrated by politicians and non-Afro populations, it is now finding its place in mainstream Colombian music. Delegates met with a local Champeta dance group to learn the moves and hear the sounds of this once marginalized music.



Comuna 13, Medellín, Jan 8, 2020

MEET THE DELEGATES

Rashaunna Campbell (far right)

Rashaunna is currently a student at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, pursuing a degree in Communication Studies with a concentration in Public Relations and a minor in Spanish. She completed research on intergenerational trauma looking at how indigenous people frame their trauma using the hashtag #MMIW (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women) on the social media platform Twitter.

Scott Fenwick (second from left)

Scott graduated from the University of Alberta, Canada, in 2011, where he majored in political science. Over the years, he has been involved in various forms of human rights advocacy. From 2013 to 2015, Scott worked as a research analyst at the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and played leading roles on legislation to protect the rights of LGBTQ students and a campaign to boost funding to legal aid.

Sean Hansen (far left)

Sean is a second-year graduate student at Columbia University's School of International & Public Affairs where he studies human rights and sustainable development. As a student in SIPA's MPA-Development Practice program, Sean is examining links between humanitarian response, climate change, and economic development.

Connor Rainey (second from right)

Connor currently attends Belmont University in his hometown of Nashville, Tennessee. He is a psychology and political science major and plans to attend graduate school and pursue a doctorate in psychology with the hope of better understanding the world and its people. Connor aspires to help others as much as possible, specifically by working with groups that are marginalized and/or oppressed.

Xochi Sykes (third from right)

Xochi is a senior at Washington and Jefferson College in Pennsylvania. In May 2020 she will graduate with majors in International Studies and Spanish and a concentration in Conflict and Resolution studies. Xochi has worked in multicultural organizations for many years and she herself comes from a multicultural background. Because of this, she knows the importance of being open to others perspectives and understanding these different perspectives.

PROGRAM STAFF

COLOMBIA DELEGATION

JANUARY 2020

Christian Sinclair, Program Director

Christian is an international educator with more than 25 years of experience in the field. His particular interests and areas of teaching/research include intercultural communication, music and human rights, minority rights, and linguistic rights. He has worked and lived in eight countries and has traveled to almost sixty. He has taught courses such as “International Human Rights, Music, and Resistance” and “Intercultural Communication.” He has presented on issues of human rights in the US, Europe, South America, and the Middle East.

Paola Benavides Vasquez, Program Assistant

Paola is a human rights lawyer practicing in Cartagena, Colombia. She graduated from Colombo International University in Cartagena with an emphasis on international law. Her research addressed the involvement of indigenous communities in the peace process in Colombia. She has worked with several organizations advocating for the protection of the rights of children and minorities. Paola is now a lawyer for FEM (Fundación por la Educación Multidimensional) in Cartagena.



As this delegation focused on music as a human right, we met with several Colombian bands and music groups, most of whom performed for us.

Los Capitalinos

Los Capitalinos are four young men, two of whom rap, and whose families were displaced because of the political violence in the country. They arrived in Bogotá settling into the poorest neighborhoods outside of the city. Their music highlights poverty, internal displacement due to the conflict, and loss.



250 Milligrams

An all transgender male band formed in 2016, most of whom also work in gender advocacy. Their music and work is focused on reversing the invisibilization of the trans community in Colombia by creating social spaces for trans men. They push for LGBTQ rights in a society that is dominated by masculine norms and the Catholic church. A major focus of our conversation was their song “Military Utopia” which addresses the drafting of trans men into the Colombian military.



Los Gaiteros de San Jacinto

Los Gaiteros are a Colombian traditional folkloric cumbia group formed in the Caribbean Region of Colombia. Their folkloric music preserves the traditional rhythms and sounds and are a mixture of the Colombian Indigenous, Spanish and Afro-Colombian heritage. The name gaiteros comes from those who play the gaita flute and San Jacinto for the town the group originated in the north of the country. They played various tunes and rhythms, including cumbia, porro, bullerengue, and mapalé, explaining each one and demonstrating which instruments were used for each.



Kombilesa Mi

An internationally known group, Kombilesa Mi, hails from San Basilio de Palenque, the first free slave town in the Americas. Their name means “My friends” in Palenquero, the local patois. Palenquero is a mixture of Bantu, Portuguese, Spanish, and French. Much of their music is sung in Palenquero as a way to preserve this unique language. Their music, much like Palenquero, is a fusion. Made up of beats from champeta, sexteto, bullerengue, and hip hop their music was met with some resistance by the villagers, saying it corrupted the original sounds of the folkloric music of the region. The lyrics of their unique sound deal with social justice issues such as displacement, cultural preservation, racism, and the environment.



Batámbura

Batámbora is a group of young people struggling to preserve their land, their identity and the richness of their cultural features through drumming and music at the *Tambores de Cabildo* school for children and youth. La Boquilla, their community, is an Afro-descendant fishing village near Cartagena. At the school, drums are made by hand, and is the starting point of many initiatives that aim at social development and cultural preservation, particularly the music. While there, they demonstrated their drumming techniques and the delegation also learned some of the beats. One of the most important rhythms in their music is *mapalé*, an Afro-Colombian dance rhythm. Its name comes from fish and the music and dance were borne out of the ritual of the fishermen's bath, which was performed, accompanied by drums, as fun at night after finishing the day.



Other meetings & memories...

Grey Ceballos

Red de Tejedoras por la Memoria y la Vida

Director of research project at the University of Antioquia on the reincorporation of former FARC combatants, for which they use a textile-making methodology as a means to “weave” these former guerillas back into society. The pieces of embroidery tell the combatants’ stories. The delegation met with Dr. Ceballos who showed us samples of the embroidery made by ex-combatants and those who live in the communities/reconciliation camps with them. This is part of a grant to help victims and perpetrators explain their stories from over the course of the 52-year conflict.



Above: Dr. Ceballos shares one of the embroidery stories from a female ex-combatant.

Left: Delegation in meeting at Botanical Gardens near University of Antioquia (Medellín) with Dr. Ceballos.

Walking tour from first full day of the program, January 2, 2020. We walked almost 7 miles throughout Bogotá visiting historical neighborhoods, the Presidential Palace, churches, the Supreme Court, cloisters, and museums. This tour was fundamental in our understanding of the political and religious history of Colombia, putting the program theme of music into historical context.





Meeting with then-director of the Fundación por la Educación Multidimensional (FEM), Ana María Gonzalez. FEM is a non-profit organization based in Cartagena that seeks to make a daily difference in the lives of Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities in general, and local Colombian women in particular, by listening to their needs, connecting them to relevant stakeholders, and fostering a sense of community ownership over sustainable development projects.

In front of the statue of Benkos Biohó in San Basilio de Palenque, which became the first free African town in the Americas. Located south of Cartagena, the population is about 3,500, almost all of whom are direct descendants of slaves brought to the region by the Spanish and Portuguese. Benkos Biohó, from a royal family in what is now Guinea-Bissau, was enslaved by the Portuguese and taken to Colombia where he was sold to the Spanish. He escaped in 1599 with other slaves and founded San Basilio de Palenque. He was recaptured by the Spanish in 1619 and hanged in 1621. San Basilio de Palenque was declared “Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity” by UNESCO in 2005. It wasn’t until 2012 that residents of the town received titles to their land.



During these two weeks in Colombia, delegates gained a critical understanding of international human rights discourses with a focus on freedom of artistic expression through firsthand meetings with various music groups, social policy advocates, lawyers, academics, community members, and NGO leaders. They left with an understanding of the underlying political tensions between the state and minority groups, social and political actors, and the differences, based on power dynamics, of how each side views some of the major social justice issues in Colombia. In particular, these included land rights, discrimination, gendered violence, conflict, poverty, environmental sustainability, and gender equality.

Some museum highlights about the conflict



Museum at the Claustro de San Agustín

Here we visited an exhibition of photographs by Colombian photojournalist Jesus Abad Colorado. The exhibition deals with the history of Colombia's armed conflict and is entitled "The Witness." The photographs seek to "put into context what was happening in those years, when displacements and massacres took place" and, according to the curator, was not created to explain the armed conflict, but simply to "provide a testimony" and to help visitors visualize what happened. The delegation focused on the photographs from Comuna 13 in Medellín and the military operations that took place there. Once dubbed the most dangerous neighborhood in the world's most dangerous city, this "comuna" or neighborhood has transformed itself through music and art. The delegation then visited Comuna 13 during the trip to Medellín.



Museo Casa de la Memoria

The House of Memory Museum is a political, pedagogical and social project, inclusive and representative, which contributes to the transformation of the war logics towards more civilized practices, through construction and circulation processes of the armed conflict memories, the construction of cultural expressions and commemorations; pedagogies design for cultural and social transformation, advocacy strategies implementation and social mobilization, for human rights and non-repetition guarantees; and definition and implementation of knowledge management processes, oriented to the circulation and democratization of the same.