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Ramireza

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Ramireza

Nicole Clark-Ramirez

Nicole Clark-Ramirez' poem Ramirez raises questions of identity. It celebrates the assertion of her Cubanity through the reclamation of her name. [Editor]

"I'm Spanish from Spain,
my father's from Madrid!"
I used to say with pride,
"And you're 99.9% Spanish,"
my father would finish,
(even though I'm only half).
He changed his last name
from Ramirez to Clark
when he came to America.
But I knew that.

He told me stories about his childhood:
an alligator and hunting dogs for pets, the girls
he wooed, la escuela with los curas
wielding the rulers, the walk-in bird cage,
the wars, the CIA, and the cities he named
or never named.

Why did he enjoy watching documentaries
about Cuba?
Why did my mother buy him books
about Havana for Christmas?
When I was 17, I asked my mother
who I was.

My father was born in Havana.

I'm reclaiming my name,
taking back what my father gave up.
This pen will print Ramirez
instead of Clark, and I'll take
whatever Ramirez brings.
I'll change my birth certificate to represent

la chica cubana, the woman
I should have been.

Picadillo, plantains, black beans
and rice; soul food my father made.
After dinner, real espresso,
the muscle of the fast-speaking
cream & coffee-colored Cubans.
Cleaning my plate with my
new identity, I'm becoming
Cuban again.