

READING

Two Names, Two Worlds

In the poem below, Jonathan Rodríguez reflects on his name. How does his name “place him in the world”? How is it a mask, shield, or container?

Hi I'm Jon.....No — Jonathan
Wait — Jonathan *Rodríguez*
Hold on — Jonathan Rodríguez
My Name, Two names, two worlds
The duality of my identity like two sides of the same coin
With two worlds, there should be plenty of room
But where do I fit?
Where can I sit?
Is this seat taken? Or is that seat taken?
There never is quite enough room is there?
Two names, Two worlds
Where do I come from?
Born in the Washington heights of New York City
But raised in good ol' Connecticut
The smell of freshly mowed grass, autumn leaves
Sancocho, Rice and Beans
The sound from Billy Joel's Piano Keys
And the rhythm from *Juan Luis Guerra*
I'm from the struggle for broken dreams
of false promises
of houses with white picket fences
And 2.5 kids
The mountains and *campos de la Republica Dominicana*
And the mango trees
I'm not the typical kid from suburbia
Nor am I a smooth Latin cat
My head's in the clouds, my nose in a comic book

I get lost in the stories and art
I'm kinda awkward — so talkin' to the ladies is hard
I listen to *Fernando Villalona* and *Aventura* every chance I get,
But don't make me dance *Merengue, Bachata*
Or *Salsa*— I don't know the steps
I've learned throughout these past years
I am a mix of cultures, a mix of races
*"Una Raz encendida,
Negra, Blanca y Taina"*
You can find me in the parts of a song, *en una canción*
You can feel my African Roots *en la Tambora*
My Taino screams *en la guira*
And the melodies of the lyrics are a reminder of my
beautiful Spanish heritage
I am African, Taino and Spanish
A Fanboy, an athlete, a nerd, a student, an introvert
I'm proud to say: *Yo soy Dominicano*
I'm proud to say, I am me
I am beginning to appreciate that I am
Una bella mezcla
I am beginning to see that this world is also a beautiful mix
of people, ideas and stories.
Is this seat taken?
Or is that seat taken?
Join me and take a seat,
Here we'll write our own stories¹

¹ Jonathan Rodríguez, untitled poem. Reproduced with permission of Jonathan Rodríguez.

Sancocho: a traditional Latin American stew

Juan Luis Guerra: a Dominican singer-songwriter

campos de la Republica Dominicana: fields of the Dominican Republic

Fernando Villalona: a Dominican merengue singer

Aventura: a bachata music group

Merengue, Bachata, Salsa: styles of dance

Una Raz encendida, Negra, Blanca y Taina: A race that is Black, white, and Taino

una canción: a song

la Tambora: Percussion instrument used in merengue

la guira: percussion instrument used in the Dominican Republic

Yo soy Dominicano: I am Dominican

Una bella mezcla: a beautiful blend