

LATINO

ISSUES | POLITICS | CULTURE

WHY THE
CENSUS
MATTERS

MAKING
FRIENDS
WITH
MEXICO

Meet
A NEW GENERATION OF
LEADERS
LIKE **Julian
Castro**

¡Basta, Lou!

Hilda Solis
SI SE PUEDE

Ruben Hinojosa
CLOSING THE GAP

Soledad O'Brien
ON THE ROAD



JANUARY 2010 \$4.00

with strong research, writing and debate skills. He was shaped by the Chicano movement and says he viewed himself as an activist, too.

"That combination," he says, "has served me very well."

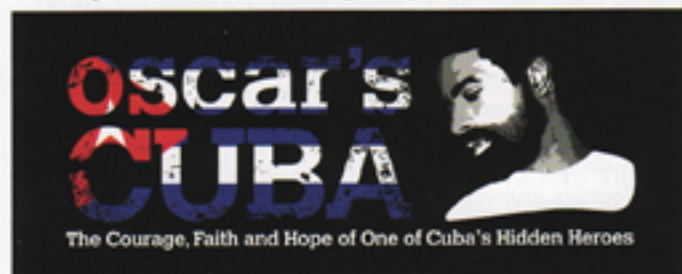
As Diaz begins his second year at the Latino Center, he's hopeful, pointing to the support of Latino arts champions such as Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and California Congressman Xavier Becerra. He says the Latino Center enjoys strong ties to Latino museums and arts groups across the country. Diaz says Smithsonian Secretary G. Wayne Clough and Undersecretary Richard Kurin back his leadership and that he adores his staff, describing them as a diverse group.

"I'm here for a reason," he says, to strengthen the Latino presence at the nation's premier cultural and scientific institution. Even though, some days, he misses a good breakfast taco.

Elaine Ayala

Prisoner of Hope

Day in and day out, hundreds of political prisoners in Cuba endure subhuman conditions without hope of freedom. This is the reality for men like Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet, a political prisoner at Combinado del Este prison near Havana, serving a 25-year sentence.



Biscet was born in Havana, Cuba and is the founder of the Lawton Foundation, an organization that peacefully promotes the defense of human rights. As a nonviolent activist struggling for democracy in his country, Biscet was detained 26 times in 18 months. He was expelled from the Cuban National Health System and his family was evicted from their home. In 1999, Biscet was arrested and imprisoned for three years for "disorderly conduct" for his work against the government. After being set free for just 36 days, he was once again arrested for peacefully protesting and sentenced to 25 years.

Currently, Biscet is detained in a cell without windows and a thin slit across the bottom of the door for food to be slipped in. He has no electric light and no ventilation. As in many Cuban prisons, his only source of water is a small tube which provides an insignificant stream of water when prison officials turn it on. And with Cuba's subtropical climate, the prisoners are exposed to conditions that lead to dehydration and possibly even death. Cells have a small hole in the back for prisoners' biological necessities. This lack of hygiene causes rats, roaches, and insects to overwhelm the small space. Allowed only a small towel, underwear, a thin sheet, a cup, toothpaste and a toothbrush, inmates don't have beds. They sleep on the floor or on a hard concrete block with a thin, dirty mat that is given to them nightly. Visitation is sometimes held back up to 60 days or arbitrarily denied. Some prisoners only get ten minutes of sunlight, twice a week. And many are deprived of their religious freedoms.

Biscet's enduring courage and moving story are brought to life in filmmaker Jordan Allott's *Oscar's Cuba*. The feature-length documentary takes viewers inside the lives of Cuban dissident groups and political prisoners, like Biscet, who have been held captive for encouraging freedom. But as *Oscar's Cuba* portrays, the freedom these individuals are fighting for is not to do as they please. It's a freedom of opportunity for their people and their country.

"*Oscar's Cuba* tells the story of a charismatic, well educated, and



A prison cell where Oscar Biscet was held.

powerful man," Allott explains. "The documentary is bringing forth a reality, a truth about a man who can connect with a wide variety of people living and fighting for a freedom movement in his country right this moment."

This is why an English-born filmmaker feels moved to shine some light on Cuba's story of its relentless toil for freedom. The film accounts the lives of Dr. Biscet and his wife Elsa, musician Gorki Aguila and his band *Porno Para Ricardo*, Cuban blogger Yoani Sánchez, Oswaldo Paya and many more. Throughout the story, Allott seeks to engage individuals to understand the denial of civil and political rights, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, and economic and social rights that the Cuban government forces on its people. A trailer of the film is available at OscarCuba.com.

"We are looking to raise public awareness about the plight of the Cuban people," Allott says. "We hope the film helps individuals of all backgrounds to stand and work in solidarity with those unjustly imprisoned and, ultimately, helping to secure the release of Dr. Biscet and all of Cuba's prisoners of conscience." Through inspiring footage of Biscet's public demonstrations, arrests, and accounts from family members and dissidents, *Oscar's Cuba* reveals how the government is trying to destroy the soul of the Cuban community outside the prisons and within its walls. To the filmmaker, his main character is a "fresh face" in the fight for human rights. He is a modern-day symbol of strength and faith that will move people with the change that he so thirsts for. He is a man willing to serve his term for the most heroic crime, a crime of longing and nonviolently fighting for his Cuba to enjoy democracy, for his Cuba to obtain basic human rights, and for his Cuba to enjoy social justice.

Biscet couldn't have put it better when he said, "Here, in this dark jail where they force me to live, I will be resisting until the freedom of my people is obtained."

Yohana de la Torre

JOURNAL CULTURE

Role Models

"Hispanics play an important role in moving America forward," says Antonio Tijerino, President and CEO of the Hispanic Heritage Foundation, "and our accomplishments undoubtedly contribute to the improvement of the nation."

That was evident at the 23rd Annual Hispanic Heritage Awards held recently at the Senate Russell Building in Washington, D.C. The Hispanic Heritage Foundation is a nonprofit with a mission of identifying, inspiring, and preparing Latino leaders in the classroom, community, and workforce. Their awards show, which began in 1987 as a small White House ceremony commemorating the creation of Hispanic Heritage Month, has grown into an annual celebration of Latino leadership.

"The Hispanic Heritage Awards highlight those individuals, whether students, senators, or celebrities, who are making a positive difference in the world," says Tijerino.

Among the honorees was Maná, the Grammy-winning rock en