

Mapmakers

by Carlos Andrés Gómez

On the far side of the city
in the furthest classroom
from the stairs on the 5th floor,

in the last row of a cluttered
throng of uneven desks and
broken chairs is a hand buoyant

as the first bud of spring:
a Latina girl with a gaze steady as
a summer skyline mesmerized by

the face at the front of the class—no,
not the teacher's—the Boricua
U.S. Supreme Court Justice

that looks down from the poster
on the far wall, seems to reach
down from the splintered brick, say:

Come with me, say: ¡Pa'lante!
say: *We are, each of us, made for*
something beyond the suffocating

boxes that too often try to contain us.
That little girl has no aspirations
to be a princess; asked for a science

kit for her 6th birthday, memorized
the Bill of Rights by her 9th.
Her bedroom is windowed with

women who reach down from
the lavender walls and helped her
construct a spine that is not capable

of collapse. She does not daydream
about movie stars or boy bands,
is obsessive in her study of maps:

where she came from, where she wants
to one day go. She looks at the women

above her window, traces their journeys

like maps: Dolores Huerta, Rita Moreno,
Michelle Obama, Sonia Sotomayor.

The only uncertainty is whether she will

get a PhD in bioethics or found her own tech
company, be a neurosurgeon or Chief Justice
of the Supreme Court. Latina, Latino, Latinx,

us: we are only as strong as the person next
to us: the calloused hands that held us up
when we were too small, on our own,

to stand up, the ones who pulled and still
pull us up: the mentors, the mothers,
the allies and comadres, the mavens –

each bright light who embodies it all,
becomes our safe haven: the colleague
or role model who becomes a doorway:

the way that little girl today visiting
the Obama residence recognizes what
is so clearly self-evident, with or

without precedent, and decides that
the next time she visits the White House
will be her first day as President.