

>> From the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

>> This is Kimberly Allen at the Library of Congress. This December the Librarian of Congress, Dr. James H. Billington, will offer the public an unprecedented American celebration of Mexico. The event will feature Mexico's diversity and cultural legacy. It will also explore what it means to be a Mexican American, an identity that is claimed by 10% of the population living in the United States today. The conference will serve as the stage for two premieres, the unveiling of the Martin Ramirez, Madonna, and the debut of a remarkable documentary film, filmed over the course of 30 years, The History of the Mexican Revolution. For this event the library has gathered a star studded group of speakers. Among them is Mexico's leading anthropologists, Dr. Miguel Leon-Portilla, who will be honored with the Library of Congress Living Legends Award. The two day celebration, which will take place in the Coolidge Auditorium on Thursday, December 12 and Friday, December 13, 2013, will be accompanied by an exhibit of the library's Mexican Treasures. Public hours will be from 9:30 am to 5:30 pm. For more details visit [www.loc.gov/celebration-of-mexico](http://www.loc.gov/celebration-of-mexico). And now it is my pleasure to introduce one of our featured guests, Sandra Cisneros. Sandra Cisneros is the prize winning author of many highly celebrated novels. Among them, The House on Mango Street and Caramelo and the story collection, Woman Hollering Creek. She has also written poetry and children's books. Her work has been translated into more than 20 languages. Beloved as a spokesperson for Hispanic American identity and for her tireless work on behalf of Chicano literature, Cisneros is the founder of the Alfredo Cisneros del Moral and the Macondo Foundation, which serve creative writers. Her most recent novel is, Have you Seen Marie, an illustrated book for grownups. Sandra, thank you so much for joining us.

>> Happy to be here. What an honor.

>> The first question, Sandra, you've lived in a number of places in this country and experienced firsthand what it means to be Mexican American. Please tell us a bit about how those perceptions have evolved over the years.

>> Well I'm going to try to give you my personal perception. I cannot speak and be the spokesperson for all Mexican Americans but I can give you my point of view. I grew up in Chicago and of course Chicago, the community there is very much a vital community of first generations and immigrants mixing together and second generations, so you have a group that has been there sometimes for several years and some that are just arriving and some who are, have no contact with Mexico. You have a real mixed community in Chicago, living alongside other Latin American groups so that makes it quite distinctive from the southwest where I moved 25, 30 years ago. I was always accustomed to traveling between Chicago and Mexico City where my father's family is from and these are two huge cosmopolitan cities so my viewpoint was one that I thought that everyone was aware of the cultural richness of Mexico. I thought everyone knew in the history of Mexico. As a child firsthand I grew up in my grandmother's garden and backyard was the basilica to the [inaudible] in Guadalupe which is the spiritual center of Mexico. So I would see the penitents walking on their knees to church and pilgrims coming from far off walking

days to the basilica and that was part of my summers as a child. So when I moved to the southwest when I was 30, I expected the community to have a very close relationship, an intimate relationship with Mexico, and I was startled that I was physically closer to the border but people that live in Texas consider themselves Texans first. Some of them have never been farther than Nuevo Laredo. Many of them consider themselves Americans and not Mexican. Some of them have been there for 13 generations before the pilgrims arrived. So you know a completely different viewpoint of what it meant to be Mexican American, different food, different culture. I was just startled and had no idea of this community until I went to live there. And then of course I've lived in New Mexico where people consider themselves Spanish and consider themselves directly descended from the Spaniards that conquered that part of the world. They even speak of Spanish, that is Spanish equivalent to that of Cervantes. And they have a completely different viewpoint than those of Texas. And I've lived in California too where their history forms them of a different reality. So I can't say that I can be the spokesperson for all Mexican Americans. You know there are the migrant populations that are flanked in the northwest and in the south. It's such a diverse community and it keeps changing historically. But I know that I'm lucky to be living in this time in history when we're seeing such rapid changes, conflicts that are being created from communities living next to each other that don't understand each other. And I really feel we're living in a sacred time as Mexican Americans to be able to serve as translators. We are the amphibians, I like to say, that can live both on land and water and can translate to the two communities that don't quite understand each other.

>> Very interesting, thank you for that. You know I live in Tacoma Park and we have a very high Hispanic population there. The second question, this year you moved to Mexico, purposefully I think, to feel what it's like to be Mexican on that side of the border. Can you tell us something about that?

>> Yes, yes, I was invited to central Mexico two years ago and I was very surprised when I came back and had really this epiphany that I can only explain as spiritual and if you've never had this kind of experience you think I'm nuts but if you have then you know what I'm talking about. And by that I mean an experience that when you're meditating that you feel a flood of light come into your heart and you understand something. And that happened to me here, which is a very spiritual part of the world, it's where I have my maternal roots, and I understood that I was supposed to move and I was supposed to move here to central Mexico, the land of my mother's family. Well you know when you go home and tell people that you've had a spiritual epiphany and you've been told to go to Mexico, people look at you like a Joan of Arc and say what are you talking about? You can't go to Mexico. What? You're going to get killed. This is not a time to go to Mexico. And of course it defies logic. But I have always lived intuitively. I had to tell everyone who loved me that they had to trust me on this and that I was just going to come and see what it was like. Maybe I wasn't going to be here long but I was supposed to come here. So I'm here right now in central Mexico in the city of Guanajuato. And I don't know if I'm supposed to be here longer. You know my GPS only told me to come here. I don't know what's next. But I find it's a great

place for me creatively, for the same reason that living in the southwest was at one time and that is I'm living between communities, communities that sometimes are conflicted, that don't always understand each other. I live in a town where there's many tourists and many Canadians and U.S. citizens and I'm a person that can talk to taxi cab drivers and the woman buying lunch at the market as well as be invited to the homes of people who are millionaires and feel very comfortable in all those places. So I feel as if I'm privy to conversations that maybe no one else is privy to. And of course that's a very rich place to be, to be in that in between place, as a writer, as a poet, to have the stories that people tell you, that they trust you with. And I just feel like I'm living in a sacred time.

>> Thank you. We've been hearing from the acclaimed writer, Sandra Cisneros, who will appear at the Library of Congress Celebration of Mexico which will be held on Thursday, December 12 and Friday, December 13 in the Library's Coolidge Auditorium from 9:30 am to 5:30 pm. Sandra, thank you so much.

>> Thank you for inviting me. I'm honored and thrilled.

>> This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress. Visit us at [loc.gov](http://loc.gov).