

Origins and Closure

An Interview with Ariel Dorfman

by Robert Siegel

notes contributed by NCLR staff

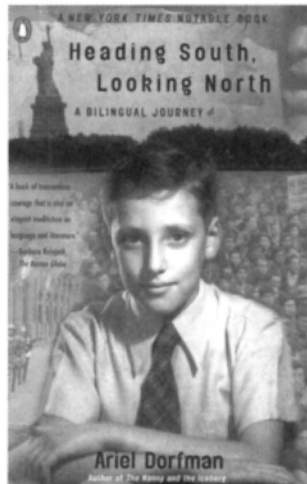
introduced by Stuart W. Sanderson, with Lorraine Hale Robinson

North Carolina is no longer just a state of tobacco farmers, textile mills, the Great Smoky Mountains, and the Ramp Festival. Where “diversity” used to mean discussions about which *style* of barbecue might be best, twenty-first century North Carolina’s diversity reaches far beyond issues of local cuisine. With its free trade zones, the Old North State is a leader in international commerce. With its system of public universities and Research Triangle Park, the Old North State is a leader in research in both public and private sectors. North Carolinians now often have surnames like Rodriguez or Patel.

As North Carolina has become home for people of more varied ethnicities, our essential fabric has been enriched by the many and varied contributions made by individual ethnic groups to state culture. Greek Festivals and Indian restaurants, the observance of Ramadan, Hispanic societies and African American sororities and fraternities enhance who North Carolinians are collectively.

With his multi-national heritage, Ariel Dorfman, Duke University’s Walter Hines Page Research Professor of Literature and Latin American Studies, exemplifies the new richness that characterizes the state today. Dorfman was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1942. When he was two years old, his father, an economist, took a job working for the United Nations, and the family relocated to New York City where Dorfman was educated until he was twelve. In 1954, Dorfman’s family moved back to South America, this time taking up residence in Santiago, Chile. Since Dorfman had used English as his primary language from the age of two until his return to a Spanish-speaking country at age twelve, he attended the Grange School. Here students whose primary language was English were required to speak Spanish while in school as a way to learn the Spanish language.

After graduating from the Grange School, Dorfman attended the Universidad de Chile where he participated in political protests. After graduation



“Early that morning, I had found myself approaching a picket line that stretched in front of the University Hall, where a wonderful class I was attending on late Shakespearean tragedy was supposed to meet. I can’t for the life of me remember the occasion for the boycott of classes called by student activists – it was something related to the Free Speech Movement or a Third World Studies Program – but I do remember that I hesitated at the picket line, fully aware that if I honored the strike I could not go to that Shakespeare class I so immensely enjoyed, aware that back in provincial Chile I would regret the loss of that intellectual space of free discussion . . .” (*Heading South, Looking North* 222)