



In Their Own Right: A History of Puerto Ricans in the U. S. A.

Virginia Sánchez Korrol

As if it were a halo, the gray hair frames the compassionate face. Sparkling eyes, not without a hint of sadness, have witnessed a historical panorama documenting the struggles of the community to which she has devoted her career. "Our history in this city is an extremely important history and one in which we can feel pride and strength," writes educator Antonia Pantoja, founder of ASPIRA, the Puerto Rican Forum, and, the Puerto Rican Association for Community Affairs. The community to which she refers planted its roots "long before a War on Poverty ever existed." A measure of its vitality is further illustrated by the development of "our own institutions and methods of teaching English long before Manpower Training or bilingual education programs ever existed." She concludes, "We developed an impressive array of service agencies in our short lifetime here in a new home city" (Pantoja 1989, 24; 1990, 48). In a moment of reflection, Pantoja places in perspective a balance sheet of the Puerto Rican experience in New York City. In the aftermath of carving out a place of their own, Puerto Ricans, along with their Latino counterparts throughout the United States, have changed forever the face of American society. But that is a story yet to be told.

Evolution of Puerto Rican Communities in the United States

The connections between Puerto Rico and the United States date to an act of U. S. foreign policy following the war with Spain in 1898. Some scholars trace its beginnings to the voyages of Juan Ponce de León, the Island's first governor, as he searched for the fountain of youth in 1521, but instead claimed Florida for the Crown of Spain. The governor's exploration of uncharted territory was sanctioned by his superiors in the spirit of the sixteenth century race to conquer, colonize and exploit the riches of the New World.

A flourishing trade based on the barter of Puerto Rican sugar, rum, molasses and tobacco for North American basic foodstuffs was prevalent throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Colonists in Puerto Rico and their compatriots throughout the Caribbean openly supported American revolutionaries in 1776, and trade relations intensified as the Crown condoned the harboring of vessels flying the Stars and Stripes (Morales Carrión 1974; González Vales; Santana). Throughout the next four decades, political changes or revolutionary unrest forced emigrants to flee from places like Louisiana, Florida, Hispaniola, South America, peninsular Spain and the Canary Islands. They sought and received refuge in the Spanish Caribbean.

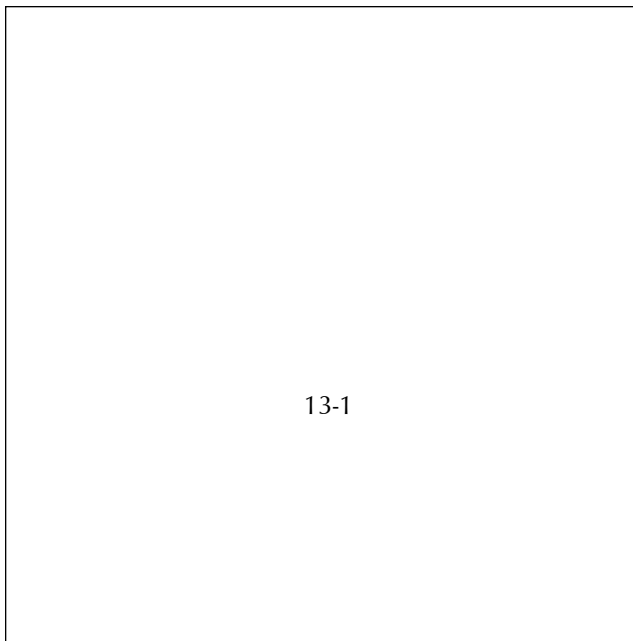
Legitimate trade networks reached large enough proportions by the 1830s to warrant the establishment of a Puerto Rican and Cuban Benevolent Merchants Association in order to expedite the trading of Antillean sugar, tobacco, and by then, also coffee (Sánchez Korrol 1983, 12). The nineteenth century witnessed an expansion of commercial interaction, and as the period came to a close Puerto Rican agrarian production, particularly sugarcane cultivation, depended heavily on United States' markets. In the last third of the century, the amount of colonial sugar purchased by Spain, failed to exceed the volume procured by the United States. Export markets for Island goods were found in Spain, the United States, Cuba, France and Germany, while close to 85 percent of the goods imported by Puerto Rico were Spanish, American or English in origin. The latter countries provided Puerto Rico with manufactured commodities that included cotton fabrics, furniture, leather products, iron and steel parts, hemp, jute, machinery and soap (A. López; History Task Force 1979, 70-71). At least 40 percent of the Island's imports consisted of commodities such as wheat, rice, flour and hog by-products vital for consumption. So it was that, as the century drew to a

close, Puerto Rico was already producing for a global export economy and dependent on the importation of basic foodstuffs (Scarano).

Almost from the onset of the relationship between the Island and the United States, the movements of people paralleled commercial interactions. The latter's attraction as a viable entrepôt for Puerto Rican emigration was augmented by trade dealings and opportunities. Students and businessmen came to learn or barter in the U. S. but from the 1860s to the 1890s many more came as political exiles or contract laborers.

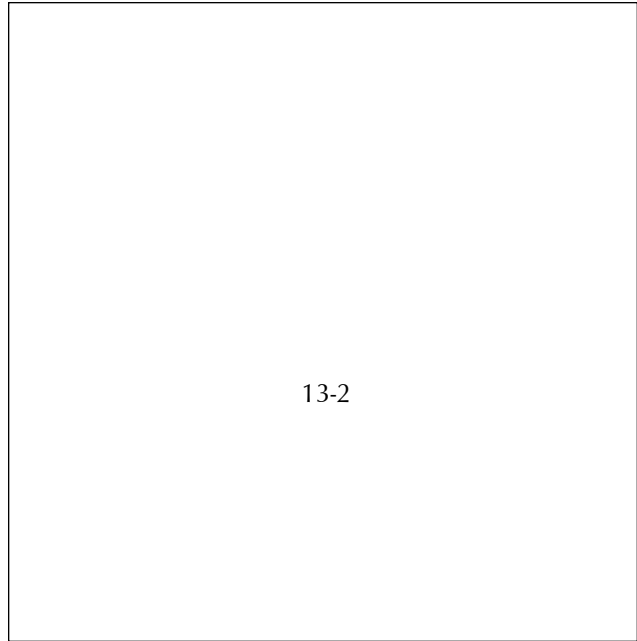
The aborted attempt to create an independent Puerto Rican nation climaxed in 1868, with the rebellion known as *El Grito de Lares*. Initiated also in the same year, the companion thrust for liberation in Cuba, *El Grito de Yara* sparked a ten-year war with Spain that devastated the Cuban economic and social fabric. Supporters of Antillean sovereignty—like the Puerto Ricans Ramón Emeterio Betances, Eugenio María de Hostos, Segundo Ruiz Belvis or Lola Rodríguez de Tió—were expelled from their homeland to other parts of the hemisphere. A choice site for expatriation was New York City. There the banished organized into political units and, with the backing of other Latin Americans and Cubans, also exiled in New York City, promoted the cause of Antillean liberation.

Who were the Puerto Rican rebels? They were men like Ramón Emeterio Betances, considered the father of the independence movement, who was born into a small Cabo Rojo landholding family of moderate



13-1

Eugenio María de Hostos.



13-2

Lola Rodríguez de Tió.

means. Educated in Paris and Toulouse as a doctor of medicine, Betances gained a reputation as a great humanitarian and was honored, both in Paris and Puerto Rico for his work in fighting cholera. A staunch defender of the abolition of slavery and complete separation from Spain, Betances came to the conclusion that the Crown would never extend political and social reforms to Puerto Rico as long as the colonial relationship continued. In 1868, in the company of Cuban expatriates in New York, Betances conceived the ill-fated *Grito de Lares*. Although the revolt failed to liberate Puerto Rico, it established a history of struggle for independence that would serve as a reference point in time to come (Jiménez de Wagenheim 1985; Sánchez Korrol 1992).

Rebels were also women like Lola Rodríguez de Tió, author of the Island's revolutionary anthem, *La Borinqueña*. Often held as the model of feminist activism, Rodríguez de Tió was indeed extraordinary for her times and celebrated for her creative accomplishments. However, she also represented, to a great extent, other women of her class committed to the struggles for liberation. Mariana Bracetti, for example, Eduvigis Beauchamp and the mulata Rosa Medina de Font figured prominently in the Lares uprising, joining the movement for an independent homeland alongside husbands, fathers, brothers and sons (Jiménez de Wagenheim 1985; 1990). Because her writings survive to proclaim her attitudes about nationhood, motherhood and independence, we have a clearer account of Doña Lola than of her contemporaries.

In 1863, Lola Rodríguez married the journalist Bonoicio Tió Segarra. In spite of a growing family that included four children, the young couple wrote and published political tracts in defiance of the insular government. Banished to Venezuela, the couple became friends and allies with other expatriates including their renowned compatriot, Eugenio María de Hostos. Exile did not temper their nationalist zeal and life for the family consisted of continual departures from their native land. Among the many sites of their exile, they lived in Havana, where they combined forces with the eminent Cuban *pensador*, José Martí, and in the city of New York at the height of Antillean political activity, 1892-1898. A striking figure in the organizational life of the exile community, Rodríguez de Tió further enhanced its cultural dimensions with piano recitals and poetry readings. Following the deaths of her husband and family, Rodríguez de Tió returned to the places where she had resided. She died in Havana in 1924 (Cuevas 1969; Ribes Tovar 1968; Iglesias 1984; Phelps de Córdova 1988).

Organizing, networking, writing and fund raising represented an extension of Puerto Rican Island politics for the handful of migrants living in New York before the Spanish-American War. By 1895, militant survivors of the ill-fated *Grito de Lares*—including Sotero Figueroa, José Julio Henna, Juan de Mata Terreforte, Francisco Gonzalo Marín and Antonio Vélez Alvarado—formed a Puerto Rican branch of the Cuban Revolutionary Party (History Task Force 1979, 83-84; Iglesias 1984; Sánchez Korrol 1983). The New York Community's Cuban and Puerto Rican political leadership were well established in this organization and in some eleven to fifteen others that had been formed around the cause of Antillean liberation. Although these groups functioned in New York City, the mecca for Antillean emigration at this time, the very names chosen for their affiliation reflect keen nationalistic concerns. *Hijas de Libertad*, *Los Independientes*, *Rifleros de la Habana*, and *Dos Antillas* were but a sampling of these.

Arturo Alfonso Schomburg, yet to establish his reputation as a distinguished Africanist, shared the directorship of *Dos Antillas* with another black Puerto Rican, Rosendo Rodríguez. Born and educated in Puerto Rico by the abolitionist and independence advocate, José Julián Acosta, Schomburg would extend his dedication to Antillean enfranchisement towards a life-long commitment for African-American equality. His collections on the history of Africa, the Caribbean and African-Americans would form the basis of the scholarly and most prestigious Schomburg Center in New York City (Piñeiro de Rivera).

Pre-twentieth century Puerto Rican organizations enjoyed vigorous, civic-minded patronage that cut

13-3

Arturo Alfonso Schomburg.

across class, race and gender lines. Chronicles of the initial migration experience, like Bernardo Vega's *Memoirs* or the essays of Jesús Colón, indicate a notable absence of color barriers among Puerto Ricans, not only in New York but in other urban enclaves as well (Iglesias 1984; Colón 1982). Black Puerto Ricans, including the aforementioned Arturo Alfonso Schomburg and the physician José N. Cesteros, for example, lived in non-Hispanic, racially segregated neighborhoods, but continued to interact and identify with the social, cultural and organizational life of the Puerto Rican community. *La Liga Antillana*, as another case in point, exemplified a racially mixed, working class women's group. Because of its interracial composition, the group's activities were restricted to those centers, like the Socialist Party headquarters or the Cigar workers Union, that were racially inclusive (Sánchez Korrol 1983, 167-168; Iglesias 1984, 66). In keeping with the proceedings of similar associations, the *Liga* set out to accomplish its socio-cultural and political agenda through fund raising, networking and informational dissemination. Other groups preoccupied with comparable concerns, such as the Club Borinquen, led by Sotero Figueroa, aimed to propagate the tenets of emancipation through the publication of newspapers like *El Porvenir* and *La Revolución* (Sánchez Korrol 1983).

Excluding the period of *El Grito de Lares*, these late nineteenth-, early twentieth-century alliances united an exiled population residing in small urban enclaves or *colonias*, as they were called, for less than a decade,

but it was clear that their visions were rooted in the affairs of the homeland and not in pioneering settlements in New York City. The end of the Spanish-American War, with its surrender of Puerto Rico into U. S. hands, triggered the demise of many of these associations but their leadership and modes of operation were communally internalized. Among the membership rosters of all of the associations were listed the names of individuals who would set the civic, cultural and political standards of the pre-Second World War migrant community. Many of them, like José Julio Henna, considered among the leading spokespersons for the Puerto Rican community and one of the deans and founders of French Hospital, would continue to lend their names and experience in support of dynamic organizational development. Inasmuch as they persisted in advocating Puerto Rican interests in the early decades of this century, such individuals stabilized and structured the most critical community within the North American setting.

Emigration Under the “Stars and Stripes”

At the dawn of the new colonial order, the migration of political exiles rapidly declined only to be replaced by a growing emigration of thousands of working-class men and women. Some continued a pattern of voluntary internal migration between the Island’s rural and urban sectors, and then opted for emigration in response to the Island’s chronic underemployment. Others were contracted directly to work in the United States, or its territorial outposts, in agriculture, manufacturing or mining. Although accurate figures on how many abandoned the homeland for foreign shores are not readily available, we do know that many were common laborers, casualties of the non-integration of a growing work force into the Island’s existing means of production (Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños 1977; History Task Force 1979; 1982).

Internal migration during the last third of the nineteenth century had incorporated the movements of people from coastal sugar regions to interior, or western coffee-growing sectors, and from rural to urban settings. But the general economic crisis of 1878-1879, combined with an uneven agricultural growth, jeopardized the Puerto Rican sugar industry. About this time, coffee cultivation, destined for European exchange, began to exceed the production of sugar with severe repercussions. These included an acceleration of the process of *latifundio*, in which land became increasingly concentrated in the hands of fewer families; the conservation of traditional patterns of work relations based on paternalism and credit; expropriation of small farms; and stimulation of internal and

external migrations (Quintero Rivera 1978; Bergad 1983; Picó 1981; Sánchez Korrol 1983; 1992). Prior to this, the joint eradication of slavery and the law restricting peasant mobility, known as *la libreta*, had encouraged contingents of workers to move between both agricultural sectors. Cane workers moved to the mountainous coffee regions during the sugar crop’s “dead season,” returning to the coast in time for harvest. However, by the decade of the eighties, the degeneration of the sugarcane industry released a pool of workers that could no longer be integrated into the smaller-scaled coffee sector.

Furthermore, the employment of women in “cottage” industries, needle trades and piece work escalated in the last decades of the century, a sign that indicated disaster for the working class since any sector relying on women’s work was known to be under valued. As a last resort, Puerto Rican workers flocked to the cities where a limited number of jobs were available, but only for skilled laborers, in manufacturing, transportation and communication (Azize Vargas 1985; García and Quintero Rivera 1982; Quintero Rivera 1978; Scarano 1984; Rivera 1986).

As the numbers of landless peasants multiplied, they began to regard emigration as a viable solution to the chronic, structural unemployment that had become a way of life. Internal motion soon gave way to external emigrations, but in the Puerto Rican case these expulsions were accommodated and carefully orchestrated within the existing political-economic structure. Workers were recruited by neighboring Caribbean plantation owners and ships expressly chartered for the purpose of relocating contingents of Puerto Rican laborers regularly left the Island’s southern ports bound for Santo Domingo, Cuba, Venezuela and Ecuador (History Task Force 1979; 1982).

All of these processes accelerated under the dominion of the United States. Protected and favored by the American government, the modernization of the Puerto Rican sugar industry brought about technological transformations in production and land ownership that augmented the corps of unemployed already defined in terms of a surplus working class. Composed of sugarcane workers displaced by machinery, these individuals joined the survivors of a coffee sector ravaged by the 1899 hurricane, San Ciriaco, and were encouraged to emigrate to wherever they were needed within American capitalist and hegemonic parameters.

The problem with Puerto Rico, according to United States policy makers, was overpopulation. The solution was clearly emigration. From the outset, the colonial government as personified by the Island’s Governor Charles Allen treated emigration rather lightly. As it was perceived to be numerically (and

morally) insignificant in proportion to the overall population, the governor wrote, "in the second place, the emigration of these people can do no harm to the island. Out of a population of nearly a million not more than 5,000 or 6,000 have emigrated—scarcely one-half of 1 percent. They will never be missed in making up the census returns of the next decade. Porto Rico [sic] has plenty of laborers and poor people generally" (History Task Force 1982, 15).

The result was, nonetheless, that emigration or migration, whether voluntary or on a contractual basis, with its repeated ruptures, anguish and renewals, would become a way of life for the Puerto Rican working class.

Recent scholarship in Puerto Rico and in the United States challenges the overpopulation thesis, rejecting the notion that migrants exercised free choice motivated by a desire to better their condition. Their investigations conclude that the colonial government actively channeled what they considered to be excess population with the result that workers were openly encouraged, as in the case of contract workers, to leave the Island in massive numbers (History Task Force 1979; 1982, 21). Excess population, summarized the Puerto Rican newspaper, *La Correspondencia de Puerto Rico*, may be handled in one of two ways. One was emigration; the other was the creation of agricultural centers where workers could be taught to grow the commodities needed for their subsistence. "Emigration is a temporary but valuable measure," they argued. "The existing population is too dense, taking into account the country's ability to provide for its people" (Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños 1977, 36-37). Following that rationale, Puerto Rican workers were contracted for Ecuador (1901), Mexico (1903), Colombia (1904), St. Louis, Missouri (1905) and Arizona (1926). The recruitment of workers by agents of foreign agricultural and industrial corporations continued. Contractual agreements between laborers and agents provided incentives like delayed payment for transportation, and specified seemingly adequate wages and living provisions. However, as early as 1900, the *San Francisco Chronicle* was already reporting unrest among Puerto Rican labor contingents, deserters from a New Orleans-San Francisco bound train. Forty Puerto Ricans refused to embark on a ship destined for Hawaii. Deposited instead on the San Francisco wharf, many of these men and women remained in California, employed as domestics in Alameda and Santa Clara counties (Hernández Cruz 1988). They, and others like them, would form the core of the Puerto Rican San Francisco *colonia*.

As contract workers emigrated to various countries and American states between 1900 and 1926, they set into motion a continuum of emigrations that persists to

this day. Eleven of these alone set sail for Hawaii between 1900 and 1901. The ordeal faced by these early migrants is recorded in the newspapers of the period.

PORTO RICANS GO TO HAWAII

New York Times December 7, 1900

EL PASO, Texas, Dec. 6—Two tourist sleeping cars, into which were packed 194 natives of Porto Rico—men, women, and children—arrived on the Southern Pacific Railway today from New Orleans, and stopped here a few hours. The natives came direct from their island home, and are on the way to Honolulu to work on the Spreckels sugar plantation. They were closely guarded by labor agents, and are due to ship at San Francisco on a certain date. To avoid affording them any opportunity for escape, the agents had the cars sidetracked at a way station in the great desert, 300 miles east of this point, and remained there three days, so as to reach San Francisco in time to make perfect connections with the ship. Among the natives were a number of intelligent men. They said they were decoyed from their homes aboard a ship ostensibly to land on the other side of their island. The ship took them to New Orleans, where they were hustled aboard a train and dispatched westward under close guard. The labor agents say they have a contract with Claus Spreckels to convey 2,500 Porto Rican natives to the Hawaiian Islands, to be worked on his sugar plantation.

The same newspaper relates a different situation five months later:

PORTO RICAN EMIGRANTS FOR HAWAII

New York Times May 22, 1901

SAN JUAN, Porto Rico, May 21,—Nine hundred emigrants for Hawaii embarked on the steamer California at Guanica today, leaving 400 more ready to sail. Joyous manifestations accompanied the departure of the emigrants. Fourteen weddings and forty-eight baptisms took place on Sunday. The emigration agents are, it is estimated, spending about \$10,000 in recruiting and maintaining the emigrants. Favorable reports from Hawaii have caused a continuation of the emigration.

Women were as important to the expeditions as were the men. Both the *New York Times* and the

Puerto Rican newspaper *La Democracia* noted the favorable gender balance among the emigrés, predicting an abundance of shipboard romances and future marriages. Because they were believed to provide stability and greater length of service, employers endorsed family groups. Still, contracts stipulated wage differentials that placed women and girls at a distinct disadvantage. As they were accustomed to work for less in Puerto Rico, females accepted the conditions imposed by Hawaiian pineapple or sugar growers and worked for lower wages than their male counterparts.

Social separation permitted Puerto Rican families to maintain and transmit values and traditions. "Living together in ethnically separated camps," writes the historian Ronald Takaki, "laborers found they could practice the customs and traditions of their homelands and speak their native languages." (Takaki 1989, 157). As early as 1903, 539 Puerto Rican children were enrolled in Hawaiian schools (History Task Force 1982, 59). By 1923, Puerto Ricans constituted 2.2 percent of the Hawaiian population. Driven by an extension of kinship networks that included outmarriage with Chinese, Japanese, Koreans and other Hawaiians, the community survives to the present (A. López 1980, 351-62; Carr 1990).

The dynamics of migration, inextricably linked to economic considerations, continues to play a major role in shaping modern Puerto Rican society, both in the United States and in Puerto Rico. Between 1920 and 1930, an estimated 52,000 Puerto Ricans lived in the United States and its territories (History Task Force 1982; Chenault 1970, 53; Sánchez Korrol 1983, 28-29; Fitzpatrick 1987; A. López 1980, 314-15). Forty-five states reported the presence of Puerto Rican-born persons and all forty-eight would do so in subsequent censuses.

Economic factors clearly drove the relocation of Puerto Ricans to the United States, and particularly to New York and its surroundings, which would draw over 80 percent of the migrant flow until the decade of the seventies. When work opportunities declined in Puerto Rico but flourished in the United States, migrants headed north in record numbers. A shift in the U. S. economy produced a return migration.

In the first decades of the century, a shortage of semi-skilled and unskilled labor during the First World War garnered 13,000 contract laborers from the Island for war-related industries (History Task Force 1982, 4). American citizenship, granted under the Jones Act in 1917 and contested by many Puerto Ricans in and outside of the Island, nonetheless, enabled and encouraged access to the United States. From 1909 to 1916, for example, only 7,394 persons left Puerto Rico for the United States compared with 10,812 in 1917 (Sánchez Korrol 1983, 31). As the nation shifted into a

peace time economy, a gradual demand for semi-skilled and unskilled labor ensued, coupled at the same time, with a worsening economic situation in Puerto Rico. Miserable living conditions, tumultuous workers' strikes and a series of natural disasters severely crippled the Island's sugar and tobacco industries. People left in droves and shortly found themselves concentrated in the lowest paying sectors of U. S. production. In urban centers migrants worked in manufacturing, light and heavy industry, hotel and restaurant businesses, cigar making, domestic service and laundries, while those who came as seasonal contract laborers were concentrated in rural agricultural sectors. Yet, during the period of the Great Depression, more Puerto Ricans left the United States than came. This decrease in the annual average net migration was attributed to the decline in employment opportunities in the States.

At another level, the extension to Puerto Rico under the Jones Act of U. S. military conscription also encouraged immigration. An overall 83,000 Puerto Rican soldiers saw action in the two World Wars (Morales Carrión 1983, 257-58). For many of them, military experience served as the springboard for life outside of the Island. So it was that as a result of their work experience or military service, Puerto Ricans began to remain in the places of their original continental destinations. Such enclaves in rural and urban settings became the core of the first communities in the United States. This was certainly the case with the Hawaiian experience, and it was repeated in San Francisco and New York.

In California, affiliations signalled the evolution of fledgling settlements. The Puerto Rican Club of San Francisco was organized as early as 1911, followed by the *Liga Puertorriqueña de California*, which was founded in 1923. These groups ascribed to an agenda for "progress and fraternity," and stood poised to unify and advance the vitality of the young communities (History Task Force 1982, 183-86). Reflecting the values and traditions of the homeland, such pioneer settlements consciously guarded their heritage, language and culture set within an informal and formal organizational and institutional structure designed to meet the needs of the new migrant environment.

Ultimately, the migration experience for Puerto Ricans should be viewed as a family affair. The migration studies of Clarence Senior, as a case in point, corroborate the appearance of substantial numbers of women and children in the contingents leaving Puerto Rico before the Second World War, with slight reductions in the decades thereafter (Sandis 1973, 127-49; Senior and Watkins 1973, 150-68). Granted, examples exist of early migrant feminists who were clearheaded

13-4

Pablo Vélez Rivera, a drilling machine operator at the Kennicott Copper Mine in Bingham Canyon, Utah, having coffee with his family. (Courtesy of the Departamento de Asuntos de la Comunidad Puerto-riqueña en los Estados Unidos.)

in their pursuit of greater freedom and personal liberation. But many more of the women who left were traditionally minded, destined to live with relatives, sharing households and expanding the resources of the extended family unit. As in the case of the Pacific immigration, the significance of this phenomenon was clearly understood. The Puerto Rican community contained the human resources to rapidly reproduce itself, initiating settlements prepared from their inception to extend their legacy to the new environs.

Puerto Ricans in New York, 1917-1948

Between the world wars, the men and women who came to New York City were in their most productive years; slightly more males than females; more with urban experience than rural; more whites than blacks; and more likely to be skilled or semi-skilled in a trade. Like Asian or European immigrants before them, Puerto Ricans made the journey seeking a better life than what the Island could provide. Each individual believed theirs was a personal odyssey and that they had made the move voluntarily. But the common ground in all of their stories bore marked similarities. Conditions on the Island, faced with steady deterioration since the American occupation, held little promise for the future.

Bernardo Vega, cigar maker and assiduous chronicler of the migration experience, carried such hopes when he made his crossing on board the ship *Coamo* in 1916. "The topic of conversation, of course, was what lay ahead: life in New York," he wrote. "First earnings would be for sending to close relatives. Years later the time would come to return home with pots of money" (Iglesias 1984, 6). According to one migrant woman, her rationalization was "My sister and her husband came to visit the Island and they talked me into going to live with them in New York" (Sánchez Korrol 1983, 43). Another declared, "We were eleven, six females and five males. My father always provided for us [by] selling fruit and vegetables at the Puente de Balboa. But we were poor and as the oldest female, I was like a second mother. The burden of caring for the younger children was always on me. In 1930, I was invited to go to New York to live with my cousin. I went and stayed. I was seventeen years old at the time" (Sánchez Korrol 1983, 43).

Others arrived as seasonal migrants contracted to harvest the crops along the eastern seaboard, and still others stowed away searching for adventure and good fortune.

I left home because I used to go around with other bigger fellows than myself and we used to run away; in those days when a child ran away from one town to another one, some people from the police department, they brought us home, no matter how far we were in the island, they brought us home. But this time I ran away to the capital of Puerto Rico which they call San Juan. Over there a fellow, a small fellow like myself, we got into a ship. I came to this country. (Sánchez Korrol 1983, 42)

Brooklyn docks received the early migrants, and the borough placed before them an array of sparse opportunities that, although meager, were abundant to them nonetheless. The community that they conceived soon spread beyond that borough across the East River into Manhattan and formed well-defined settlements called *barrios*. Among a Spanish-speaking population shared by Cubans, Venezuelans, Mexicans, Colombians, Dominicans and Spaniards, Puerto Ricans predominated. The New York Mission Society in 1926, placed the numbers of Puerto Ricans in the city at about 100,000 individuals. The *New York Times* and private organizations like the Porto Rican Brotherhood of America arrive at figures between 100,000 and 150,000 for the same period (Iglesias 1984, 146-47). But the social scientist, Lawrence R. Chenault indicates

13-5

Bernardo Vega, 1948. (Courtesy of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies Library, Hunter College, CUNY.)

in his early work that, as a group, Puerto Ricans totaled less than 2,000 in 1910, and that their numbers merely rose to 53,000 over the next three decades (Chenault 1970, 53). Exactly how many individuals from Puerto Rico populated the pre-World War II *colonias*, remains undetermined. We must understand, however, that as American citizens Puerto Ricans were not required to migrate under immigration quotas, and relocation between the Island and the United States was comparable to crossing state lines. Inasmuch as the migration did increase after 1917, and steadily thereafter, it is safe to assume that their numbers were probably greater than estimated in the social science literature.

Developed in proximity to work locations and access to transportation, the self-sustaining, tightly-knit, working-class barrios were neighborhoods where local merchants, politicians, clergy and some professionals exercised internal, and sometimes external, authority. *Bodegas* and other small businesses proliferated supplying the basic consumer needs of the community. Cul-

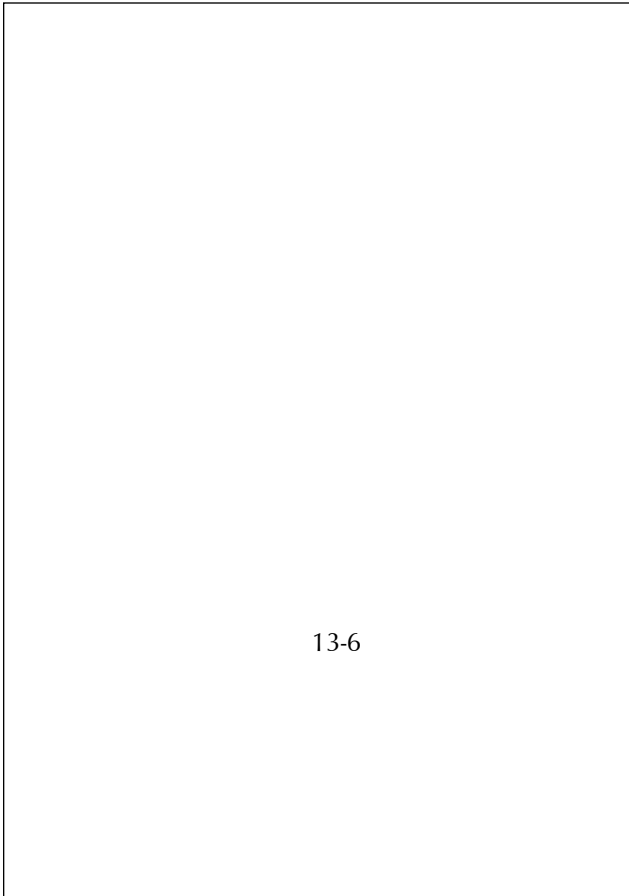
tural, political or economic concerns were expressed through a sophisticated associational structure that commanded the allegiance of the barrios to varying degrees. Information found dissemination through a network of Spanish-language broadcast and print media that included progressive newspapers like *Gráfico*, *Liga Puertorriqueña e Hispana* and *Liberación*, periodicals, newsletters, radio and cinema. These bonded the broader Hispanic community together regardless of country of origin.

It is particularly important to note that in the decades before World War II, a well-developed Puerto Rican/Hispanic organizational network structured the community, bringing to light germane issues and preoccupations. Whereas the focus of the earlier associations hinged on Antillean liberation, subsequent affiliations covered a wider range of interests that connected the migrant colonias to the native land and Spanish America, but also nurtured and defended the early settlements. The impetus for the first groupings came into New York harbor along with the first working-class individuals. Such divisions were work-oriented, mutual aid or self-help societies and trade unions that advocated better working conditions and wages, as well as workers' compensation.

Before leaving the Island, many Puerto Rican workers had encountered labor organizing or union formation, and commanded at least a basic understanding of their own situation as workers. Bernardo Vega believed the tobacco industry, which was among the most active trade in Puerto Rican labor organizing, garnered more than 60 percent of the pre-Second World War, New York Puerto Rican population. Practices like *la lectura* provided an excellent forum for raising consciousness and disseminating information (Iglesias 1984, 35). *La lectura* flourished in the New York cigar factories as it did among the Cubans in Florida, and in the Hispanic Caribbean. Both Bernardo Vega and Jesús Colón wrote about this custom whereby official readers were hired by the employees themselves to read aloud to them in the factories while they made cigars. In Vega's example, the morning session contained readings of current news and world events while the afternoon presentations dwelled on more substantive literary or political fare.

During the readings at "El Morito" and other factories, silence reigned supreme—it was almost like being in church. Whenever we got excited about a certain passage, we showed our appreciation by tapping our tobacco cutters on the tables . . .

At the end of each session there would be a discussion of what had been read. Conver-



13-6

A typical *bodega*, c. 1950-60. (Courtesy of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies Library, Hunter College, CUNY.)

sation went from one table to another without our interrupting our work. Though nobody was formally leading the discussion, everyone took turns speaking. (Iglesias 1984, 22)

At least 43 associations catered to the Spanish-speaking colonias of Brooklyn and Manhattan by the mid-twenties. From confronting the everyday problems of adjustment, to celebrating Puerto Rican or Hispanic heritage; from advocacy on the communities' behalf, to brokerage with the larger non-Hispanic society, these groups covered wide terrain. The annual reports of groups like The Porto Rican Brotherhood of America and the federation of organizations, *La Liga Puertorriqueña*, document intermediary roles that delved into politics, culture, civic and social issues. In one instance, the Brotherhood protected Puerto Rican interests in what was termed as "race riots" consisting of altercations between white residents and "Latin and West Indian negroes who describe themselves as Porto Ricans" (Sánchez Korrol 1983, 151; *New York Times*

1926, 29). In another, the Brotherhood conducted a study of the conditions in the Puerto Rican colonia that detailed social and demographic characteristics (Iglesias 1984, 146-47).

At another level, such organizations demonstrated a keen political awareness that transcended local concerns and included moral commitments towards democracy and progressiveness in Puerto Rico, Europe and Latin America. They protested U. S. intervention in the Caribbean, demonstrated against the Machado regime in Cuba, the Ponce Massacre in Puerto Rico and supported the Spanish Republic in that nation's civil war. Ultimately, the controversial political status of the Island under American colonialism was always of paramount concern.

The mission to advocate and promote *lo puertorriqueño*, that which is Puerto Rican, permeated throughout the organizations, and is best exemplified through the actions of their leaders. For instance, one such example was the case of Pura Belpré, considered the first Puerto Rican librarian in the city's public library system. She recognized very early in her career that there existed an intense desire to maintain traditional family values and cultural heritage against the pressures of Americanization. Active member or founder of numerous associations—among them the *Liga Puertorriqueña*, *Alianza Obrera*, *Puerto Rico Literario* and *Asociación de Escritores y Periodistas Puertorriqueños*—Belpré, also a story teller and folklorist, devoted her career to preserving heritage by incorporating folkloric tales into oral and written children's literature. Innovator of presentations on Puerto Rican culture for libraries, schools and community centers, Belpré designed programs for the Educational Alliance, the Union Settlement House, Madison House and the Hispanic center, Casita María. Ironically, her audiences consisted largely of Irish students preparing to work with Puerto Rican youth—a testimony to the growth and presence of the Latino community at this time. Belpré was instrumental in extending these programs to the YMCA where she initiated an informal equivalent of the modern-day Head Start program. Notable, talented Hispanics visited her programs performing as well for the *barrio latino* at her request. Belpré's intercession brought the cultural giants of the Spanish-speaking world, including the internationally known tenor Antonio Paoli, the scholar Federico de Onís and the Nobel Laureate Gabriela Mistral, to share the stage with community activists like Claudia Arán on their visits to *El Barrio* or the South Bronx, where large concentrations of Puerto Ricans were to be found (Sánchez Korrol 1986; L. López and Belpré 1974, 83-96).

An internal, grass-roots leadership network enjoyed a long history in the barrios dating to the nineteenth cen-

tury when students, workers and political exiles found safe havens on continental shores. The people's leaders, not always recognized as such outside of the communities, shared a commitment to work towards the cultural and physical welfare of the group. They articulated concerns for the preservation of their rich heritage while staking claims to their place in the city. A mark of their leadership abilities rested on their intimate knowledge of the neighborhoods and the local bureaucratic structure they confronted. Leaders came from the ranks of labor, politics, organizations and the small professional class composed of doctors, lawyers, dentists, teachers and social workers. But it also emerged among entrepreneurs, *bodegueros* (grocers), and owners of *botánicas* (religious materials, including medicinal herbs and plants). By virtue of their vocation, nuns and priests possessed leadership status, but so did protestant ministers, missionaries, *santeros*, and spiritualists. Some confined their labor to the community while others "performed the multiple bridging functions between Puerto Ricans and the city's overarching organizational structure . . . unstintingly doing a multiple of humble, mundane tasks, day in and day out" (cited in Maldonado 1984, xxvii).

Such a leader was the Reverend Leoncia Rosado Rousseau, or Mama Leo, as she was known to her constituents. Since the 1930s, this Pentecostal minister committed her life to pastoral services, but also organized an extensive campaign against drug abuse in the 1950s; that included the creation of a rehabilitation center within church the structure. Not only does the Reverend Leoncia deserve credit for her civic and religious ministry, but also for shattering gender barriers in what was then a closed profession (Sánchez Korrol 1990).

In similar fashion, Carmela Zapata Bonilla Marrero or Sister Carmelita, as she was known to the community, combined her training as a Trinitarian nun with advocacy and social issues in the borough of Brooklyn. Her earliest missionary work nurtured the poor multi-ethnic children of the borough, yet it was the plight of the Puerto Rican migrant that sparked personal compassion. For Sister Carmelita, the earliest years of the migration were particularly difficult because, "it was when they use[d] to put them out . . . dispossess them." She believed it was her duty to "save every Puerto Rican," that she found and her career bore testimony to those convictions (Sánchez Korrol 1990; Ortiz 1990b). At a time when social welfare programs were virtually non-existent, Sister Carmelita developed health, housing and educational resources through the auspices of the Catholic Church and her own private connections with influential persons in the community.

The reality of life for the bulk of the Puerto Ricans in New York City translated into a daily struggle to survive despite pitiful wages, poor health, housing and sanitation conditions. Crammed into crumbling tenements, the neighborhoods in which most Puerto Ricans lived compounded the inhospitable climate in which they found themselves. Restricted by their race, ethnicity and a paucity of occupational and English language skills, the group grappled with maintaining a sense of dignity while holding on to traditional family values. Inevitably, alterations in lifestyles impacted equally on men and women, but the latter bore a double burden for they were expected to continue to fulfill conventional roles even though they entered the ranks of labor in increasing numbers. Women remained conditioned to marriage and motherhood as expressions of their primary functions in life, while their male counterparts were fully expected to exercise authority in both the public and private spheres.

But the reality of life in the overwhelmingly working-class colonias dictated otherwise and women soon shouldered the burden of providing the household's supplementary, or often, primary financial support. They worked in the garment, light manufacturing or cigar industries, in restaurants, laundries and as domestics. In the home, women earned a living as piece workers, caregivers for the children of women who worked outside the home and by taking in boarders. That the community survived is due, in no small measure, to the work of its women. Through their participation in the formal and informal economy, women's enterprises enabled the cohesion of the community during its formative stages. As a by-product of their homebound wage-earning activities, women fostered the extension of ritual kinship networks, such as *compadrazgo* (godparenting), and the raising of foster children known as *hijos de crianza*. At a time when nuclear family compositions predominated over extended units, the many roles of Puerto Rican women in New York cannot be ignored (Sánchez Korrol 1983; 1984, 47-57; Bose 1986; Ortiz 1990b).

From the Great Migration to Present

In the decade between 1940 and 1950, the numbers of Puerto Ricans inhabiting the United States escalated from 69,967 to 301,375 (U. S. Census 1940-1970: *New York Times* 3-5-79). Excluding a tabulation for third generation Puerto Ricans, the next twenty years would witness an impressive growth to 1,429,664 (Rodríguez-Fracacelli 1989). By mid-century persons identified as Puerto Ricans lived in all the states of the union and while 80 percent of the migrant flow continued to head for New York and its metropolitan envi-

rons, that figure would stabilize at 60 percent within the decade. The Great Migration, as the massive displacement from the Island to the United States was termed, was well underway.

Reflecting the period of the inter-war years, the surge in the Island's exodus bore marked economic underpinnings directly related to Puerto Rican development under Operation Bootstrap. The plan to industrialize Puerto Rico saw the light of day under the Island's Commonwealth government. Its main thrust rested on the relocation of American corporate and manufacturing concerns to Puerto Rico in exchange for tax incentives and a cheap pool of labor educated and Americanized under the "Stars and Stripes" (Rivera 1986). Exempt from paying revenue to either government for a period of fifteen to seventeen years, factories received free land and buildings (Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños 1979; Morales Carrión 1983).

Laudatory socio-economic achievements attributed to industrialization and modernization attracted worldwide attention and, at a time when Castro's Cuba experienced its own Marxist political-economic transformation, Puerto Rico gained fame as a model for democratic development. This was particularly striking since the United States was locked into hegemonic competition with the Soviet Union over Latin America and the Caribbean.

During the first decades of its existence, industrialization indeed appeared to have worked miracles. From 1954 to 1964, socio-economic indicators signalled improvements at every level. Life expectancy rose, per-capita income doubled, labor shifted easily from agriculture to industry and school enrollments increased dramatically. But, as the '70s drew near, it became crystal clear that Bootstrap had its negative side as well. By eliminating agrarian production and expanding the importation of American goods, Operation Bootstrap fostered greater dependency on the United States. More significantly for the U. S. communities, the blueprint for economic development also spawned policies that actively promoted the emigration of tens of thousands of farm workers and small townspeople displaced off the land by technological changes (History Task Force 1979; Morales Carrión 1983, 242-308).

The combination of rapid population growth in Puerto Rico, chronic underemployment and the limitations wrought by industrialization reinvigorated the propensity to emigrate. Under the Commonwealth government, public policies both facilitated and encouraged emigration as an "escape valve" that would ease the structural pressures of industrialization. For the receiving North American urban enclaves, the impact of such massive dispersals was disastrous. In

New York, the city was confronting the challenge of urban blight, proposing its eradication through programs like urban renewal. As old buildings crumbled, replaced by projects, highways or middle-income housing, previously stable Latino working-class neighborhoods faced considerable dismemberment. The effect on the Puerto Rican *barrios* was decidedly inauspicious for, as its people were forced to scatter into diverse settings, the communal structure deteriorated. Affordable housing became virtually impossible to attain, businesses relocated taking their capital and leadership potential with them and the neighborhood schools became hard pressed to incorporate the steady stream of non-English-speaking newcomers that characterized the latest emigration wave.

In an effort to minimize the adjustment experience of new migrants, the Migration Division of the Department of Labor of Puerto Rico established an office in New York in 1948. Directed by the sociologist Clarence Senior at the national level, and the Puerto Rican scholar Joseph Monserrat in New York City, the office organized and monitored the general migratory flow from the Island, including the seasonal agricultural workers who had been coming to the states as contract labor for decades. This agency served as a clearing house and attempted to divert the non-seasonal migrants away from New York in a bid to lessen the strain on the city, encouraging them instead to seek employment in remote destinations like Wisconsin or California. Within a short time, the Division, subsequently known as the Office of the Commonwealth, was seen as the intermediary for U. S. Puerto Rican affairs, both inhibiting and displacing the role of grassroots organizational and political leadership (Lapp 1990).

On this note, the virtual exclusion of Puerto Ricans from city politics during the period of the '50s could be traced to three factors, one of which was the Migration Division. The first factor was the failure of the Democratic Party to extend itself to the Puerto Rican community as they had done for numerous immigrant groups in the past; second, the history of radical politics in the barrios, especially under U. S. Congressman Vito Marcantonio, who favored reforms for Puerto Rico; and third, the Migration Division's encroachment on the function that ethnic politicians traditionally served for other immigrant groups (Baver 1984). The Office of the Commonwealth further hindered the development of local politicians when, as Baver points out, it tended to bypass internal community leadership and consulting Island superiors on issues affecting the U. S. and New York Puerto Rican community.

On the other hand, it seemed perfectly logical to establish a government office for Puerto Rican employ-

13-7

Brooklyn Chapter of the Liga Puertorriqueña e Hispana, c. 1927. (Courtesy of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies Library, Hunter College, CUNY.)

ment and other matters since most migrants viewed their sojourn in the United States as temporary, fully expecting to return to the Island once they staked a claim on financial security. American society, in their eyes, was too ethnically and racially divided and the possibility of “making it” for Puerto Ricans did not seem like a viable option. By the decade of the ‘60s, moreover, a return migration became more pronounced and migratory patterns followed cyclical trends with Puerto Ricans epitomizing a classic example of the circulation of labor (Hernández Cruz 1982; 1988, 165-76; Campos and Bonilla 1981; Meléndez 1991a).

In general terms, migrant or ghetto life did not bode well for the community, as it was relegated to dismal social and economic prospects regardless of where it was located. In urban centers outside of New York, the scenario hardly differed. Many of the colonias to be found in urban and rural America were still in their pioneering phases, reflecting, as it were, the earlier organizational stages of New York (Padilla 1985; 1987; Jennings and Rivera; Morales 1986; Uriate-Gastón 1987). Nonetheless, marked similarities existed

between working class Puerto Rican enclaves in Brooklyn, the Bronx or Manhattan and Boston, Hartford, Chicago and Philadelphia. Historian, Adalberto López succinctly describes theirs “as a world of unsympathetic and bigoted social workers and teachers, brutal policemen, broken families, small children bitten by rats and young men and women driven by their surroundings and hopelessness to crime and drugs” (323). One of the consequences of this oppression, López laments, is the internalization of prejudice among significant numbers of Puerto Ricans against their own: “White Puerto Ricans who on the island had lived next to black Puerto Ricans, now avoided black Americans and often referred to them as ‘niggers’; black Puerto Ricans . . . emphasize[d] their Puerto Rican-ness so as not to be confused with American blacks” (323).

There was no doubt that mounting discrimination and prejudice compounded the migration experience permeating it so assiduously that Puerto Ricans would never replicate the European immigration/assimilation paradigm. As one sociologist stated, “Puerto Ricans entered a heterogeneous society that articulated an

13-8

Early rally in East Harlem in support of Puerto Rican independence. (Courtesy of the Jesús Colón Papers, Center for Puerto Rican Studies Library, Hunter College, CUNY.)

assimilationist, melting pot ideology, but that, in fact, had evolved a racial order of dual ethnic queues" (Rodríguez 49). Their racial and ethnic exclusion exploded into conscious expression through the literary contributions of first- and second-generation writers, artists and poets. The migration experience and the search for a national identity became the core of much of the literature of the period. Writers like Emilio Díaz Valcárcel (*Harlem todos los días*), Pedro Juan Soto (*Spiks* and *Usmail*) and José Luis González (*Paísa*) incorporate first-hand encounters in the continental barrios, detailing the frustration, discrimination and alienation shared by the migrant community. Island-born writers combined the themes of migration and nationalism by presenting the diaspora as an economic exile imposed upon Puerto Ricans as a result of the colonial reality.

René Marqués' classic, *La carreta* (1953) details the tragedy of one *campesino* family as they move from the rural countryside to San Juan and then to the slums of New York City "suffering the reversals of fortune occasioned by their uprooting and then finding their

identity in a return to their land" (Messinger Cypress 301). Marqués' central idea appears to be that migrants should not trade in their Puerto Rican values for U. S. illusions. In similar fashion, Pedro Juan Soto explores the humanity of the migrants in his collection, *Spiks*, as they attempt but often fail to transplant roots in the inhospitable northern terrain.

Almost twenty years later the voices of Nuyorican writers rang out loud and clear. Born, for the most part, in the U.S.A., Piri Thomas, Pedro Pietri, Tato Laviera, Nicholasa Mohr, Edward Rivera and Sandra María Esteves, among others, would indict America for failing to comply with its democratic principles. In ignoring the escalation of racism in U. S. society, "Amerika" had frustrated the Puerto Rican journey towards the proverbial dream. Thomas underscores a loss of innocence in a life riddled with crime, drugs and corruption in his autobiographical, *Down These Mean Streets*. Its pervasive theme is race. The tendency to identify along cultural rather than racial lines had been well honed during the Island's five hundred years as a multi-racial society. But now in the United States they were denied

13-9

José Luis González.

a separate identity, lumped together with African Americans and other non-whites, who, while they shared skin color and socio-economic conditions, did not share the Puerto Rican culture. It was precisely this struggle, that of the dark son within a rainbow family negotiating the color barriers of a black/white society that plagued Thomas.

I looked at Brew (Piri's black friend) who was as Black as God is suppose to be white. "Man, Brew," I said, "you sure an ugly spook." Brew smiled. "Dig this Negro calling out 'spook,'" he said. I smiled and said: "I'm Porty Rican." "Ah only sees another Negro in fron of me," said Brew. (cited in Fitzpatrick 1987, 81)

Pietri attacks institutionalized racism and class-based discrimination at every level of exploitation that ghettoized the group. In his *Puerto Rican Obituary*, Pietri delineates degraded lives of quiet devastation, powerless and futile, unable to transcend their condition. Laviera, on the other hand, recognizes hostility and

alienation in American society, but begins to advance the notion of biculturation in which the Nuyoricano represents a new breed: one that syncretizes Puerto Rican/Americans and who can identify with American blacks while feeling comfortable with their Puerto Rican-ness; one who is neither American nor Puerto Rican, but a combination of both. He further argues that the longed-for homeland has also changed in the intervening years and may no longer be the paradise so long awaited.

i want to go back to puerto rico
but i wonder if my kind could live
in ponce, mayaguez and carolina
tengo las venas aculturadas
escribo en spanglish
abraham in espanol
abraham in english
tato in spanish
"taro" in english
tonto in both languages
(*La Carreta Made a U-Turn* 17).

Similar concepts emerge in Nicholasa Mohr's *Nilda* and Edward Rivera's *Family Installments*. In both novels, the writers set forth the theme of cultural duality, presenting a more balanced portrayal of life in the New York Puerto Rican barrios. Conditions were harsh, yes, but they also generated a source of strength within an extended family setting that supplied useful tools for sociocultural mediation. As a case in point, the socialization process of Mohr's protagonist, Nilda, and Rivera's Santos in the city schools explores the children's reaction to the well-meaning but insensitive behavior of their teachers. The teacher's demands that the children in her class speak English rather than their native Spanish compromises Nilda's feelings about her first language and cultural values. In *Family Installments*, Santos is presented with a new suit of clothes by his teachers, in anticipation of receiving First Communion. The offer, made in good faith, is soundly rejected by Santos' proud father because the implications are that the family cannot provide for their own. A strong familial and communal support system in both cases provides an ambience for positive character development that enables the children to accept and understand their cultural duality. After all, this too, was part of the Puerto Rican heritage.

The psycho-social dimensions of the migration, now being expressed by second and third generation Puerto Ricans, adds another theme for consideration, that of the divided nation. As state-side Puerto Ricans resurrect incidents and events long dormant, the children of the migration question their reality, connec-

13-10

Tato Laviera. (Photo by Georgia McInnis.)

tions to Puerto Rico and the legacy they hope to leave for future generations. Such issues surface in the testimonies of in/migrants and in their writings and poetry, illustrated here by a selection from the work in progress of second-generation, Boston lawyer, Aura Garfunkel (Benmayor et al. 1988; Garfunkel 1990).

In exchange for a better life in a new,
uncaring city
She had bred strangers who spoke
reluctant Spanish
Who understood what she would
never understand
But who would never grow to know her
way of
Thinking, her way of being.
How could we, daughters of an urban slum
Understand the ways of a Borinquen mother?
Our clocks ticked much too fast for
her mañanas. (Garfunkel 1990)

Because the greatest portion of the migration concentrated in areas of New York, the city's school

authorities and other social service personnel in policy making positions were among the first to articulate concern about the alienation of Puerto Ricans from American institutions (Jorge). Alarmed by the tensions placed on the city's resources by hordes of non-English-speaking children, officials sought innovative solutions and new ways of coping. So it was that Puerto Ricans came to be among the most studied of ethnic minorities.

By 1947, a pictorial essay in *Life* magazine already depicted the migration to the United States as the first airborne diaspora in history. Investigative reports of various social service agencies highlighted the health, housing and employment problems of the city's newest migrants and, in less than a decade, monographs like the Columbia University Study, the Welfare Study and the New York City Board of Education surveys focused attention on the Puerto Rican "problem" in an effort to inform the dominant non-Hispanic society about the group. A modest array of books, including Clarence Senior's *Puerto Rican Emigration*, (1947), C. Wright Mills' *The Puerto Rican Journey: New York's Newest Migrants*, (1950), Elena Padilla's *Up From*

13-11

Nicholasa Mohr. (Photo by Phil Cantor.)

Puerto Rico, (1958), Oscar Handlin's *The Newcomers: Negroes and Puerto Ricans in a Changing Metropolis* (1959) appeared. More often than not, the studies highlighted the plight of the Puerto Ricans, failing to grasp the strengths, vitality and internal self-direction of the community.

Leadership and Legacy in the Tumultuous '60s

As the city's economic structure shifted to a post-industrial and service-based economy, the largest concentration of Puerto Ricans to arrive in the late '50s and early '60s, found themselves squarely in the middle of the transition. Between 1950 and 1970, the percentage of Puerto Ricans employed in white-collar classifications more than doubled, but, despite this progress, most Puerto Ricans remained locked into declining sectors of production. Manufacturing jobs, where 60 percent of the Puerto Rican labor force converged, relocated to the suburbs, the American south or to foreign countries with an abundance of cheap labor (Rosenberg 1974; Rodríguez 101). Suburban-based jobs posed additional hardships for most Puerto Ricans as they translated into costly transportation expenses, while in the informal economy the depreciation in manufacturing drastically reduced the opportunities for homebound piece work at a time when female-headed households increased significantly (Ríos; Petrovich and Laureano; Barry Figueroa 1988; Bose 1986; Santana Cooney and Colón Warren 1984).

Moreover, the forces that structured job-related entry and mobility, including protective and exclusionary union practices, limited, rather than accessed, skilled blue-collar employment. That is to say that Puerto Ricans continued to find ethnic discrimination, institutionalized racism, competition and inequality in the job market (Rodríguez; Hernández; Meléndez 1991a; 1991b; Ortiz 1990a). And while variations in labor force participation existed throughout the states with large Puerto Rican concentrations, they generally remained in lower-paying sectors of the economy. Ironically, in spite of the depressed position in which the Puerto Rican labor force found itself, it was indispensable for the proper functioning of the New York economy (Rodríguez 99). The result was a decrease in the migration flow by the mid-sixties, not because fewer people were leaving the Island, but because more were returning to Puerto Rico. The issue becomes, not solely the problems that characterized Puerto Rican neighborhoods, so often cited in the conventional studies and reports of this period, but, rather how the community managed to survive at all against such odds.

The fact of the matter was that Puerto Ricans were well aware of the problems plaguing their communities and set about to develop strategies for their solution. Long-term, stable communities did exist despite poverty, limited education, decay, urban renewal and gentrification. And these communities continued to produce writers, artists, professionals, leaders and ordinary productive citizens, who have since gone on to make positive contributions. (Rodríguez 111). Poor, but intact, barrios nurtured a bulwark of hometown clubs, religious associations, athletic teams, social clubs and beauty pageants, along with a more formal, leadership producing structure that dealt head on with the socio-political dimensions of the dominant society. "We played stickball with a broom handle, rode third- or fourth-hand bikes, walked to Crotona Park, exchanged bottles and lit stoves on the Sabbath for our Jewish neighbors, thus earning Saturday movie money," remembers community activist, Amalia Betanzos (cited in Maldonado 1984, xxiii). Her pre-Great Migration experience found reiteration in the post-war communities of Boston's Villa Victoria, Chicago's Division Street, Long Island's Brentwood or Manhattan's Lower East Side. In 1973, Chicago community leader Carmelo Rodríguez would write

summer's here, shining, burning
the litter on division street through which
I walk,
and illuminating the dirty tenement buildings
adding a new light to my 'barrio's' drabness
but nevertheless, the less, the less,
they laugh, they sing, they dance;
and toil, and work and try to exist
in the excrement of their poverty.
(cited in Padilla 1987, 93)

In the barrios of New York, Sandra María Esteves' "María Christina" exudes the stoicism and strength that forms the backbone of that community.

My name is María Christina
I am a Puerto Rican woman born in el barrio
I do not complain about cooking for
my family
because abuela taught me that woman is the
master of fire
I do not complain about nursing my children
because I determine the direction of
their values.
(cited in Fernández Olmos 1989, 96-97)

The move to maintain viable communities, that would inculcate positive values and attitudes among its

youth and advocate to eradicate inequality at all levels, traced its genesis to the original settlements, but was advanced in the '60s and '70s through grass-roots leadership and the formal and informal coping networks that they created. The pressures to transform the system on the educational front had always been part of the community's agenda. Now the battle between the schools and the community was enjoined by the first teachers to come into the system, veterans of the Great Migration and proponents of specialized methods to teach English to Spanish-dominant children. By mid-century, a handful of Puerto Rican educators, mostly women, holders of baccalaureate or masters degrees from the University of Puerto Rico, were well entrenched into the city's educational system.

In 1953, the Board of Education in New York City identified 40,000 non-English-speaking youngsters in the public schools, an increase of over 31,000 since 1948 (Cayce; Santiago Santiago 1978). That same year the Board published a four-year inquiry into the education and adjustment problems of Puerto Rican students that recommended an integration of several instructional methods to effectively educate Spanish-speaking students, along with the employment of Substitute Auxiliary Teachers, Puerto Rican Coordinators, School-Community Coordinators and Other Teaching Positions (OTPs).

The Substitute Auxiliary Teacher (SAT) became the specialist who bridged the chasm between the schools and the community. They formed their own organization, the Society of Puerto Rican Auxiliary Teachers, that served as a vehicle for support, solidarity and professional growth. SPRAT, and later PREA, Puerto Rican Educators' Association, were at the forefront of the movement for professional recognition and licensure that culminated in the creation of the position of bilingual teachers. Until those goals were accomplished, SATs were hired as substitutes since their specialization was not yet institutionalized, but they were denied access to positions as regular teachers.

The duties of the Auxiliary Teachers in the schools were loosely defined and, while some aided the principals and teachers in working directly with students and parents, others served as translators and interpreters. Most were required to design language programs and innovative learning activities that facilitated mastery of the prescribed course of study. This experience was responsible, in no small measure, for laying the philosophical framework for bilingual education as it is practiced today. As liaisons between the schools and community, bilingual teachers frequently empowered barrio parents with a wealth of programs and coping strategies so that they, too, could exert grass-roots direction.

In 1967, the Congress of the United States enacted legislation that mandated the schools to provide programs for children of limited English-speaking ability. Four years later, 450 full- and part-time bilingual and English as a Second Language teachers prepared to teach some 122,000 children of Hispanic backgrounds in New York City. The student-teacher ratios were woefully inadequate. Nonetheless, this struggle for professional licensure in New York and specialized methods of instruction was won, in good measure, by Puerto Rican teachers.

The emergence of urban neighborhood groups ameliorated the conditions of inner city life through coalitions formed at the grass-roots level. In an effort to address Puerto Rican issues and promote community interests, the Puerto Rican Forum was conceived in the mid-'50s. Focusing primarily on the negative experience and educational neglect of barrio youth, the Forum saw the need to energize the community into political action along the lines of civil rights, advocating for equitable representation in anti-poverty legislation. Their impetus gave birth to ASPIRA in 1961, and the

13-12

Sandra María Esteves, 1979. (Photo by Francisco Blasco.)

Puerto Rican Community Development Project in 1965.

ASPIRA, meaning to aspire, developed mentoring programs for capable students who lacked adequate counseling about the educational opportunities and financial resources to which they were entitled. Under the leadership of teacher/activist, Antonia Pantoja, ASPIRA chartered units in high schools throughout the city, and later on a nationwide scale, in which mentors identified and groomed students towards higher education. The Forum focused on bringing together the human resources of the community to assess its strengths and to devise strategies for its recovery (Puerto Rican Forum 1970). It represented Puerto Rican interests on city-wide and state committees, and through grantsmanship, encouraged the formation of local associations and coalitions.

The Puerto Rican Family Institute emerged in 1963, founded by licensed social workers to render professional services in facilitating the adjustment of new in/migrant families. The Institute followed an innovative approach in that it utilized a family "already integrated into the life of New York as a 'big sister' family to a newly arrived migrant family" (Puerto Rican Forum). The idea stemmed from the culturally familiar extended family system, but this was then infused with a support team of social service providers. The agency's services included programs in language, mental health and counseling.

By 1972, the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund, modeled after the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, directed pre-professional and educational guidance and counseling for urban youth. The organization gained wide recognition when it litigated against the Board of Education of the City of New York for failing to provide equal educational opportunity for linguistic minority children (Fitzpatrick). The result of this landmark class-action suit was the ASPIRA Consent Decree which required that the Board of Education implement a transitional bilingual program for all students of limited English proficiency (Santiago Santiago). The Puerto Rican Legal Defense Fund also filed an *amicus-curiae* brief in the Supreme Court case of *Lau vs Nichols*. The decision in this case also regulated nationwide reforms for linguistic minority children (Rodríguez 140).

Similar grass-roots associations coalesced around specific interests. One such group, United Bronx Parents, sprang into being under the direction of Evelina Antonetti. It monitored the public school experience, interpreting school policies for parents and advocating for a sound, equal educational experience. The Hunts Point Multi-Service Center, the Merchants' Association, Hispanic Action Council for the Elderly, the

13-13

March by the Concilio de Organizaciones Puertorriqueñas over the Brooklyn Bridge protesting the poor conditions in the public schools. (Courtesy of Departamento de Asuntos de la Comunidad Puertorriqueña.)

Hometown Clubs, the Committee for the Puerto Rican Day Parade and cultural groups like the Puerto Rican Travelling Theatre and the Puerto Rican Dance Company rounded out the organizational structure of the community.

On the political front, the militancy of the '60s in the wake of the Civil Rights movements gave rise to groups like The Young Lords, who sought to right the wrongs of the community through non-conformist social and radical politics (Guzmán 1984). Forming organizations like the Young Lords, the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP), *El Comité* and the Puerto Rican Students' Union, the second generation, intimately familiar with the barrios of their birth, introduced radical politics that challenged "establishment" Puerto Rican/Latino leadership.

Traditional party politics, with its emphasis on working through the electoral system, was essentially conservative and unresponsive to pressing community

needs. Some politicians rose to prominence through organizational connections. Schooled in negotiating through the bureaucratic system, their training ground had been the social associations, the Puerto Rican Day Parade Committee, the Congress of Puerto Rican Hometowns and others that had become part of an impressive array of programs made possible through War on Poverty funding. Others, of whom Herman Badillo is perhaps the best known, came from the ranks of the Democratic party's reform wing. Commissioner of the Department of Relocation in 1961, Badillo won the Bronx Borough Presidency in 1965, a congressional seat in 1968 and a New York City deputy mayor appointment ten years later. Sharing the political arena, Gilberto Gerena Valentín prided himself on representing a more militant stand which combined the community's struggle for justice and equality with the independence of Puerto Rico. Another politician, Ramón Vélez, drew his strength from the powerful Hunts Point Multi-Service Center, the Hunts Point Community Corporation and the Puerto Rican Day Parade (Baver).

The radical movements challenged that political hegemony which they perceived to be outdated and ineffective. They attacked the most basic and immediate concerns of the community by protesting poor sanitation conditions in East Harlem, and moving to secure free breakfast programs, day care, health clinics and clothing for the poor (Baver). While their political strategies and orientation may have differed, they supported the following essential points:

- Puerto Ricans in the States were children of the forced migration from Puerto Rico;
- Puerto Ricans in the States were victims of racism in North America;
- Puerto Ricans were also victims of capitalist exploitation;
- A radical socialist alternative was the only viable program for Puerto Ricans;
- Any solution that did not include independence for Puerto Rico could only be half-baked.

(Guzmán 1984)

As they spread throughout the Northeast and the Midwest gaining followers as well as notoriety because of their civil disobedience, such groups sparked the imagination of the community, in particular, the second generation. They were instrumental in developing the consciousness of the community at a highly important historical juncture. They took to the streets to protest police brutality, housing and health conditions, and advocated open enrollment in the universities, sup-

porting Puerto Rican Studies programs in higher education and bilingual education in the public schools.

Similar efforts took shape in other urban areas with large Puerto Rican concentrations. In Chicago, the grass-roots *Caballeros de San Juan*, advanced the development of their community, playing a key role in that city's electoral process. In Philadelphia, the Puerto Rican Alliance emerged as a federation of seven barrio groups committed to housing, educational and legal reforms. In Boston's South End, corresponding community struggles led to the building of Villa Victoria, a Puerto Rican/Latino housing project with streets named after towns in the Island (Uriarte-Gastón).

Finally, as we near the twenty-first century, it becomes clear that the mobilization and maturation of the Puerto Rican community over the past thirty years has secured positive gains. First, the persistence of bilingualism in all of its variations has transcended their original goals, to empower and enrich the schooling of *all* children. The current emphasis on curricular reform, rendering prominence to multiculturalism and global interdependence, stems in part, from the deparochialism engendered by Puerto Rican/Latino activism. Ethnic Studies brings new perspectives and interdisciplinary methodology into the intellectual discourse of the university. Most of what we know about Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, Cubans and other Latinos in the making of the United States of America comes from the scholarship produced in this field. This literature questions the formation and very foundations of American society and adds new historical dimensions to its interpretation.

The transformation or Latinization of America is well underway. The 1990 census figures point to dramatic gains, not only in the demographic expansion of that population residing in the U. S., but in its implications regarding the political, economic and social-cultural changes that lie ahead. As the Latino experience with its triple Amerindian, African and European heritage, becomes more pronounced, it will continue to transform the face of America.



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