

BETWEEN TWO FLAGS:  
CULTURAL NATIONALISM AND RACIAL FORMATION  
IN PUERTO RICAN CHICAGO, 1946-1994

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## Abstract

This dissertation traces the history of Chicago's Puerto Rican community between 1946 and 1994, a period of sustained growth and repeated transformations. Throughout this period, cultural nationalism proved itself a valuable tool to mobilize support for multiple and competing political projects, including both those that supported and those that rejected independence for the island of Puerto Rico. As such, I argue, cultural nationalism played a key role in shaping the racial formation of the local community and, eventually, the emergence of "Latina/o" as a novel racial category on a broader scale. Drawing on a wide range of archival sources, including newspapers, government documents, ethnographic field notes, and polemical writings produced within social movements, *Between Two Flags* sheds new light on the history of attempts by forces within Chicago's Puerto Rican community to define its identity in the face of external pressures. The first two chapters investigate three early efforts to deploy cultural nationalism on a local scale, all of which promoted (in different ways) the eventual assimilation of Puerto Ricans into whiteness. Chapters three and four examine the collapse of these early models, first by excavating in detail the pivotal three-day Division Street Riots of 1966, and then by looking at the gendered experience of poverty in the community. Chapters five and six track the emergence and eventual institutionalization of a militant anti-colonial cultural nationalism, focusing on the influence of black nationalism as well as the growing alliances connecting Puerto Rican and Chicana/o activists, who collectively influenced the emergence of *latinidad*. A brief epilogue draws lessons for the present moment.

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daughter Sofia. Thank you for consistently striking the right balance between radical scholarship and human connection.

I could easily tell stories just as memorable about each of the other members of my committee. Antoinette Burton has provided unstinting support and has treated me as a friend and colleague-in-training since she taught my first graduate seminar. Adrian Burgos stepped in as soon as it became clear I was focusing my research on the Puerto Rican diaspora, and offered both critical feedback on my work and a helping hand with the administrative and professional difficulties of graduate study; I remain sad that of all my committee members he is the only one with whom I never took a seminar. Kevin Mumford broadened my perspective on scholarship in an array of areas, including African American history and the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality. Jerry Dávila provided critical suggestions on this project, and he helped remind me that Latin American history has a place in my present and future; my hemispheric ambitions can be credited directly to his encouragement.

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Andrae is one of several people who deserve specific thanks for getting me on track as a teacher as well as a scholar. He secured my first position as an instructor of record and has

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Our three children keep me grounded in the real world when the archival and theoretical aspects of my research provide opportunities for isolation. I am immensely proud of what they have accomplished during the past five years: birth, crawling, walking, school, friendship, swimming, basketball, protest, struggle, love, and so much more. Sofia and Nico have become critical thinkers and budding organizers. And Malcolm is ready to join them at school this fall, with his own keen intellect, fearless nature, and infectious smile.

So, to Anne, Sofia, Nico and Malcolm: these five years have been hard on all of us, but I know we will continue to do amazing things. I love all of you more than you can imagine. This dissertation is dedicated to the four of you and to all our present and future struggles and successes.

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## Organizational Acronyms Used in this Dissertation

BLA	Black Liberation Army
CAPE	Council for American Private Education
CARC	Committee Against Racism at Clemente
CCCO	Coordinating Council of Community Organizations
CCHR	Chicago Commission on Human Relations
CPS	Chicago Public Schools
CYO	Catholic Youth Organization
DIVEDCO	Division of Community Education
ELA	Freely Associated State (commonwealth)
FALN	Armed Forces of National Liberation
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
ICP	Institute for Puerto Rican Culture
IUPAE	Independent Union of Public Aid Employees
LADO	Latin American Defense Organization
LSC	Local School Council
MLN	National Liberation Movement
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NCHA	National Commission on Hispanic Affairs
NCO	Northwest Community Organization
NEIU	Northeastern Illinois University
NWRO	National Welfare Rights Organization
PACHS	Pedro Albizu Campos Puerto Rican High School
PIP	Puerto Rican Independence Party
PNPR	Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico
PPD	Popular Democratic Party
PRCC	Puerto Rican Cultural Center
PSP	Puerto Rican Socialist Party
QOS	Que Ondee Sola
RNA	Republic of New Africa
SACC	Spanish Action Committee of Chicago
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SDS	Students for a Democratic Society
WSSC	West Side Spanish Civic Committee
WSO	West Side Organization
YLO	Young Lords Organization
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
YPO	Young Patriots Organization
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

Note: Acronyms used in footnotes to identify archival sources are listed in the bibliography.

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## Introduction: “You Don’t Know How Proud and Happy I Feel”: Unpacking Cultural Nationalism and Racial Formation

### September 10, 1999: *¡Bienvenidos Patriotas!*

Friday evening, September 10, 1999, was seasonably warm in Chicago, a nice evening to be out on Division Street in the heart of the city’s near northwest side Puerto Rican community. That night, several hundred people jammed into an empty lot, one of dozens along the one-mile stretch between Damen and California, the lingering result of a rash of arsons during the 1970s, which many local activists blamed on slum-lords eager to cash in on insurance.<sup>1</sup> In 1997, this particular lot had been repurposed as a small plaza known as the *Casita de don Pedro*. A *casita* is a small house typical of rural Puerto Rico, and this replica, adapted from a garage at the back end of the lot that had been spruced up and made to look authentic with a wooden front porch and a bright pastel paint job, was named after Pedro Albizu Campos, the most famous Puerto Rican nationalist of the twentieth century. In front of the building itself was a large patio designed in the shape of the Puerto Rican flag, with five alternating red and white stripes terminating in the center of the plaza. A life-size bronze statue of Albizu Campos himself stood in the star-shaped centerpiece of the “flag”, a compromise of sorts after a failed effort to place it on public land in nearby Humboldt Park.<sup>2</sup>

The hundreds who gathered at the *casita* ate typical Puerto Rican food and listened to popular contemporary and classic salsa and merengue songs, as well as more traditional *bomba* and *plena* numbers performed live by local folkloric groups, blast over a sound system. But

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<sup>1</sup> On the wave of arsons, see Gina M. Pérez, *The Near Northwest Side Story: Migration, Displacement, and Puerto Rican Families* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 87-88.

<sup>2</sup> On the *casita* and the statue of Albizu Campos, see Nilda Flores-Gonzalez, “Paseo Boricua: Claiming a Puerto Rican Space in Chicago,” *Centro Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2001), 7-23.

neither the weather nor the food nor the music was the main attraction. That day, eleven Puerto Ricans had been released from federal prisons in Pennsylvania, Indiana, Kansas, California, and elsewhere, after agreeing to a clemency offer made by President Bill Clinton.<sup>3</sup> Most of the eleven had been in prison for the better part of two decades, convicted during the early 1980s of a series of state and federal crimes related to bombings and other armed actions. These had been carried out, mostly in New York City and Chicago, by the *Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional* (Armed Forces of National Liberation, or FALN), which denounced the colonial control of Puerto Rico by the United States and demanded independence for the island. Several of those arrested declared themselves to be prisoners of war, though none admitted membership in the FALN specifically and none had been convicted of any specific acts of violence. Over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, activists had campaigned for the release of the prisoners, so on September 10, 1999, the success of the campaign was being celebrated in pro-independence and human rights circles across the island and throughout the diaspora.<sup>4</sup>

Four of the newly released prisoners traveled to Chicago immediately upon their release, including two who were merely in transit on their way to serve out their parole in Puerto Rico.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the *casita* was fitted with a temporary stage and a high quality sound system, and over the course of the evening, between the musical performances and speeches by local activists, the four former prisoners – staggered one after another to avoid violating the condition of their parole that prohibited them from associating with each other – arrived on

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<sup>3</sup> Dirk Johnson, "Puerto Ricans Clinton Freed Leave Prisons," *New York Times*, September 11, 1999, p. A1.

<sup>4</sup> For background on the campaign itself, see Margaret Power, "From Freedom Fighters to Patriots: The Successful Campaign to Release the FALN Political Prisoners, 1980-1999," *Centro Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2013), 146-179.

<sup>5</sup> Julie Deardorff and Teresa Puente, "Freedom and Anger: Celebration, Bitterness Greet 11 Freed FALN Members; Family, Friends Greet Four in City as Critics Seethe," *Chicago Tribune*, September 11, 1999, p. 1.

Division Street. Each was greeted with applause, and each spoke briefly to the crowd. Ex-prisoner Alberto Rodriguez expressed both joy at his return to freedom and sadness, since two other prisoners were not part of the clemency, including “my comrade, my friend, my family,” Oscar López Rivera.<sup>6</sup> Ricardo Jiménez similarly expressed support for those left behind, and then explained that “For 20 years I have dreamt of this moment. You don't know how proud and happy I feel.”<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, pride was perhaps the dominant theme of the evening, among the attendees as well as the prisoners themselves: pride in the successful campaign, pride in the self-declared patriots who had walked free, pride in the *casita* and the statue of Albizu Campos, pride in Chicago’s Puerto Rican community more generally. But most fundamentally, those present that evening felt a deep cultural pride in Puerto Rican national identity, which the community in Chicago had managed not only to maintain but also to reshape over many years. In this sense, the pride Jiménez expressed was reflective of a cultural nationalism that transcended his particular political commitments to the independence of Puerto Rico itself.

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<sup>6</sup> Johnson, “Puerto Ricans Clinton Freed Leave Prisons,” A9. One Puerto Rican prisoner arrested in 1980 with several of those released in 1999, Carlos Alberto Torres, had not been offered clemency, and in solidarity with him López Rivera declined his own offer from Clinton, which (had he accepted it) included a requirement to remain in prison until 2009 before exiting. Torres was subsequently paroled in 2010, while López Rivera remains incarcerated, having been denied parole in 2011. At the time of this writing, he is the focus of a massive campaign demanding his release by President Obama, which includes celebrity support from, among many others, Tony Award winning playwright Lin Manuel Miranda, author of the Broadway hit *Hamilton*, and Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders. See José A. Delgado, “Obama atiende pedido de Lin Manuel sobre Oscar López,” (Obama listens to Lin Manuel’s request on Oscar López), *El Nuevo Día* (San Juan), March 16, 2016, available online at <http://www.elnuevodia.com/noticias/politica/nota/obamaatiendepedidodelinmanuelsobreoscarlopez-2175040/> (accessed May 18, 2016); and Carl Campanile, “Sanders Wants to Let a Convicted Terrorist Out of Prison Scot-free,” *New York Post*, May 16, 2016, available online at <http://nypost.com/2016/05/16/sanders-wants-to-let-a-convicted-terrorist-out-of-prison-scot-free/> (accessed May 18, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Ana Mendieta and Lynn Sweet, “FALN 11 Go Free: Humboldt Park Rolls Out Festive Rally for ‘Patriots’,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, September 11, 1999, p. 1.

This dissertation takes a close look at Puerto Rican cultural nationalism in an attempt to understand why and how Chicago's Puerto Rican community eventually came to understand itself and be understood by others as an integral part of a broader racial category, "Latina/os," that quite simply did not exist when island-born citizens began migrating to the Windy City in large numbers shortly after World War Two. This extended and convoluted process of racial formation was, I argue, intimately connected to the many and varied permutations of cultural nationalism promoted, debated, embraced, and abandoned in Puerto Rican Chicago between 1946 and 1994. Puerto Ricans in Chicago utilized different versions of cultural nationalism to argue, at various points, for a series of contradictory positions: both for and against retaining the distinctive racial system commonly used on the island; both for and against embracing a white ethnic identity modeled on prior waves of immigrants from Europe; and both for and against adopting a sense of shared identity with African Americans and Mexican Americans.

In order to more clearly frame the complicated interplay between cultural nationalism and racial formation in Puerto Rican Chicago, this introduction first briefly discusses the extant scholarly literature on Chicago's Puerto Rican community. It then examines the two major themes of the dissertation, reviewing relevant scholarship with an emphasis on work specifically connected to Chicago, while defining terms and drawing key lessons that inform the overall project. After this, the introduction turns to a brief examination of the dissertation's title, "Between Two Flags," in order to clarify the stakes and the ambition of the research summarized here. Finally, it concludes by laying out the arc and trajectory of the dissertation itself, chapter by chapter.

## **Puerto Rican Chicago: A Very Brief Historiographic Overview**

Scholarship on the Puerto Rican diaspora has always centered on New York City, which since the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has consistently been the group's largest population center outside of the island capital in San Juan. In the period after World War Two, while scholarship on Puerto Ricans in New York was flourishing, the population in Chicago was new enough and small enough that it merited only very limited attention.<sup>8</sup> Thus while prior writers had referenced the presence of Puerto Ricans in Chicago, the modern era of scholarship on the community did not begin until the 1980s, with the work of sociologist Felix Padilla. His two monographs from this era, *Latino Ethnic Consciousness* and *Puerto Rican Chicago*, mixed original fieldwork interviews among long-time residents with an attentiveness to then-popular trends in academic discourse to produce a detailed picture of the community itself as well as the structural obstacles that had plagued its development. He also utilized a wide variety of non-traditional archives (mostly personal holdings of older Puerto Ricans in Chicago) to sketch the history of the community. Padilla initiated the attentiveness future scholars have given to questions of culture, arguing that "in effect, Puerto Ricans have relied on and converted their cultural traditions into weapons, however impractical, of social change."<sup>9</sup>

Little additional scholarship was produced in the 1990s, but the new millennium witnessed a flurry of important new research, inaugurated by a 2001 special issue of *Centro: The Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies* focused on Chicago. This issue featured early

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<sup>8</sup> For postwar scholarship on Puerto Ricans in New York, see, among others, C. Wright Mills, Clarence Senior, and Rose Kohn Goldsen, *The Puerto Rican Journey: New York's Newest Migrants* (New York: Columbia University Bureau of Applied Social Research, 1950); Elena Padilla, *Up From Puerto Rico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958); Oscar Handlin, *The Newcomers: Negroes and Puerto Ricans in a Changing Metropolis* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1959).

<sup>9</sup> Felix M. Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 16.

work by several scholars who would subsequently produce significant monographs, including Gina M. Pérez, Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas, and Mérida M. Rúa, among others. In 2003, Ramos-Zayas published *National Performances: The Politics of Class, Race, and Space in Puerto Rican Chicago*, a theoretically and empirically rich community ethnography focused on “how a diasporic nationalist project has fared under the racialization processes and ideological gambits of the United States.”<sup>10</sup> While *National Performances* opts for a meta-examination of the historical narratives promoted by 1990s-era Chicago-based independence activists, Pérez’s 2004 book *The Near Northwest Side Story: Migration, Displacement, and Puerto Rican Families*, presents archival research about the early years of the community as well as ethnographic examinations more focused on the 1990s. She argues that “the history of Puerto Rican migration is simultaneously a narrative of gender,” a category that had been totally absent from Padilla’s initial efforts.<sup>11</sup> Pérez expanded her focus beyond Chicago itself, attending to dynamics in a rural community on the island where many migrants had originated.

In 2010, Rúa edited *Latino Urban Ethnography and the Work of Elena Padilla*, which rescued from obscurity Elena Padilla’s 1947 master’s thesis from the University of Chicago, “Puerto Rican Immigrants in New York and Chicago: A Study in Comparative Assimilation,” the first scholarly treatment of the Puerto Rican community in Chicago. The book, which also featured a series of scholarly reflections, argued that Padilla’s work “is invaluable and fundamental to comprehensions of Latinos in the urban sphere,” and not only in Chicago.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas, *National Performances: The Politics of Class, Race, and Space in Puerto Rican Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> Pérez, *Near Northwest Side Story*, 7.

<sup>12</sup> Mérida M. Rúa and Arlene Torres, “At the Crossroads of Urban Ethnography and Puerto Rican Latinidad,” in Mérida M. Rúa, ed., *Latino Urban Ethnography and the Work of Elena Padilla* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 12. Elena Padilla is not related to Felix Padilla.



Two years later, in 2012, Rúa published *A Grounded Identidad: Making New Lives in Chicago's Puerto Rican Neighborhoods*, a monograph focused on the interplay between community and identity formation. Methodologically, it echoed Pérez's commitment to "a blending of historical and ethnographic research."<sup>13</sup> Her commitment to the proposition that "history [...] does not 'happen' to aggrieved communities; they take part in making it, but they do not make it alone" led her to unearth the powerful experiences of the young domestic workers whose arrival in Chicago in 1946 heralded the birth of a new diasporic community; it remains a guiding principle of this dissertation.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, 2012 also saw the publication of Lilia Fernandez's *Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Postwar Chicago*, the first monograph to treat jointly the intertwined experiences of the city's two largest Latin American (im)migrant communities. Deeply grounded in archival research supplemented by oral history interviews, it traces the labor migrations that generated the two communities, and follows the repeated experiences of oppression and resistance that followed. Centrally concerned with questions of race, Fernandez "complicates our dualistic understanding of race in the urban north" by showing how Puerto Ricans and Mexicans developed a common "ethnoracial" identity as "brown" people.<sup>15</sup> Since my dissertation directly addresses questions of racial formation, it in some ways tracks most closely with Fernandez's work, but I aim to position myself in conversation with all of these scholars. However, while all of them have proven attentive to questions of both

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<sup>13</sup> Mérida M. Rúa, *A Grounded Identidad: Making New Lives in Chicago's Puerto Rican Neighborhoods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), xviii.

<sup>14</sup> Rúa, *A Grounded Identidad*, xviii.

<sup>15</sup> Lilia Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Postwar Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 7, 20.

culture and race in various ways, none of them has directly addressed the historical relationship between the two.

### **Cultural Nationalism in Twentieth Century Puerto Rico and its Diaspora**

I argue that cultural nationalism was a major constant, possibly the only constant, in the social and intellectual development of Chicago's Puerto Rican community over the five decades after World War Two. Since the beginning of the city's postwar migration boom in 1946, almost every organization or social movement that emerged within the diasporic community has embraced and promoted, as Ricardo Jiménez did in 1999, a cultural pride in Puerto Rican national identity. The anthropologist Arlene M. Dávila has argued that "cultural identities continue to be salient mediums for political mobilization."<sup>16</sup> This has been true without regard to the political stances of the organizations and movements attempting to mobilize support. In the 1950s, for instance, militant pro-independence activists associated with the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico (PNPR) and long-distance supporters of the limited autonomy advocated by the Popular Democratic Party (PPD) of long-time governor Luis Muñoz Marín, were equally likely to utilize cultural nationalism in their efforts, though they drew opposed political conclusions.

While the influence of both the PNPR and the PPD in Chicago lessened substantially by the end of that decade, the mobilizing power of cultural nationalism within the community persisted throughout the second half of the century. Its strength waned only briefly in the mid-1960s, before surging again, in the years after the Division Street Riots, in the hands of a

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<sup>16</sup> Arlene M. Dávila, *Sponsored Identities: Cultural Politics in Puerto Rico* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 3.

militant pro-independence movement influenced as much by black radicalism as by the legacy of the Nationalist Party. By the 1990s cultural nationalism had become fully institutionalized as hegemonic to Puerto Rican identity in Chicago.

Cultural nationalism, as I use it in this dissertation, describes a framework for understanding the distinctive value of Puerto Rican identity in order to generate support for political strategies of various sorts. It draws on and promotes a flexible but limited set of rhetorical and representational motifs that has included, at various times: the preference for Spanish over English; the Puerto Rican flag; indigenous Taíno petroglyphs; significant island-based flora and fauna like the small frog known as the coquí; architectural flourishes like the look-out turrets on the eighteenth-century walls surrounding *Viejo San Juan*; typical foods like *pasteles* and *alcapurrias*; musical forms both folkloric and contemporary, from *bomba* and *plena* to salsa and reggaeton; the mythology of the “three roots” of Puerto Rican culture (European, African and *Taíno*); and admiration for a mythologized archetype of the supposedly typical Puerto Rican commonly called the *jíbaro*: a hardworking, self-sufficient, and European-descended (male) resident of the rural interior of the island.<sup>17</sup> Thus constructed, cultural nationalism presents itself as a strategic tool or weapon, one that can be and is routinely utilized by forces with competing and indeed contradictory social and political objectives. In each case, the hope is that deploying cultural nationalism will help mobilize deeper and broader support among Puerto Ricans, whether on the island or (as in this dissertation) in the diaspora.

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<sup>17</sup> On the origins and development of the *jíbaro*, see Francisco A. Scarano, “The *Jíbaro* Masquerade and the Subaltern Politics of Creole Identity Formation in Puerto Rico, 1745-1823,” *American Historical Review* 101 (1996): 1398-1431. For a detailed analysis of the cultural nationalist representation of the *jíbaro* in mid-twentieth century Puerto Rico, see Hilda Lloréns, *Imagining the Great Puerto Rican Family: Framing Nation, Race, and Gender during the American Century* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 45-51.

The conceptual framing of this dissertation, in which cultural nationalism is viewed as a tool that has been wielded by multiple actors with highly divergent aims, is somewhat idiosyncratic in contemporary scholarship on Puerto Rico and its diaspora. Many scholars of twentieth century cultural politics on the island have reserved the use of the term “cultural nationalism” solely to describe the PPD and its allied forces, counterposing the term with “political nationalism,” commonly associated with the independence movement of which the Nationalist Party was part. For instance, the anthropologist Jorge Duany draws on the work of political theorist John Hutchinson to distinguish the concepts as separate movements:

I approach cultural nationalism as a distinct type of political movement, characterized by the moral regeneration of a community imagined as a nation by its leading intellectuals, against the intrusion of foreign values and practices. Like political nationalists, cultural nationalists emphasize a unique history, culture, language, and geography as the essence of the nation, but unlike political nationalists they do not necessarily advocate the creation of a sovereign state to embody their ideals.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, while Dávila notes the broad impact of cultural nationalism, she still maintains that “nationalism in Puerto Rico has been characterized as a heterogeneous movement as it ranges from the more widespread cultural nationalism to a separatist nationalism that seeks political sovereignty for the island.”<sup>19</sup> In some ways, this usage correlates to the distinction commonly made in the study of the Black Power Movement between cultural nationalism and revolutionary nationalism.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Jorge Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 123. Duany credits this framework to John Hutchinson, “Cultural Nationalism and Moral Regeneration,” in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, eds., *Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 122-131.

<sup>19</sup> Dávila, *Sponsored Identities*, 11.

<sup>20</sup> For a thoughtful critique of this framing, which argues that the similarities between black cultural nationalism and black revolutionary nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s outweighed the differences, see Algernon Austin, *Achieving Blackness: Race, Black Nationalism, and Afrocentrism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 74-109.

It is certainly crucial to distinguish between broad political movements based upon their espoused objectives, but such distinctions should not confuse ends with means. In the case of Puerto Rico and its diaspora, both supporters and opponents of independence have drawn heavily from the same playbook of cultural politics. This dissertation is influenced by Ramos-Zayas' effort to "transcend dichotomizing definitions of political and cultural nationalism."<sup>21</sup> In describing the independence movement in particular, she maintains that

Puerto Rican nationalism in Chicago was both political, in that a significant group of residents and activists had engaged in various militant practices with the aim of turning Puerto Rico into an independent nation-state, and cultural, in that these practices were guided by the barrio's 'encyclopedic myth-makers' through grassroots educational projects.<sup>22</sup>

Something quite similar has been true of a range of other trends within the history of Puerto Rican Chicago. Vocal opponents of independence and explicit advocates for assimilation have both combined political ends with cultural means in various contexts. In chronological terms, this dissertation ends more or less when Ramos-Zayas' fieldwork began, and one of its key interventions is to historicize her conceptual framing, in order to demonstrate that community activists of all sorts had been drawing on cultural nationalism in political contexts for half a century before Ramos-Zayas arrived in Chicago in 1994.<sup>23</sup>

Duany is on more solid ground when he confronts the fundamental demographic reality of twentieth-century Puerto Rican history, arguing that "the emergence of cultural nationalism as a dominant discourse in Puerto Rico is partly the result of a growing diaspora since the

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<sup>21</sup> Ramos-Zayas, *National Performances*, 20.

<sup>22</sup> Ramos-Zayas, *National Performances*, 21. Like Duany, Ramos-Zayas credits Hutchinson for the phrase "encyclopedic myth makers." See John Hutchinson, "Moral Innovators and the Politics of Regeneration: The Distinctive Role of Cultural Nationalists in Nation-Building," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* Vol. 33, No. 1-2 (1992), 102-117.

<sup>23</sup> Ramos-Zayas, *National Performances*, 11. As a side note, shortly after my first arrival in Chicago in 1994, I was briefly interviewed by Ramos-Zayas as part of her fieldwork, though none of my comments made it into her book.

1940s.”<sup>24</sup> Puerto Ricans in Chicago have contributed in important ways to both the prominence and the content of cultural nationalism, including its practice on the island itself. Diasporic formulations have influenced discourse on the island, just as ideologies developed on the island have had a direct impact on those adopted on the mainland. This has been true both for variants of cultural nationalism that have linked themselves to the demand for political independence and for those that have implicitly or explicitly rejected any formal separation between the Puerto Rico and the United States. This dissertation centers Chicago as a key site of contestation over the meanings of cultural nationalism, while remaining attentive to the continuing relationship between the island and the mainland.

Cultural nationalism and the symbols upon which it depends are frequently made to appear mythic or essentialized, but they are in fact constantly subject to contestation and transformation in everyday life and in moments of crisis and struggle. Dávila has demonstrated that the *Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña* (Institute for Puerto Rican Culture, or ICP) helped promote much of the core iconography of cultural nationalism in the period after World War Two, as part of a political effort to reclaim national feeling from the independence movement.<sup>25</sup> The ever-growing diasporic population, so central to this dissertation, has long played a key role in such shifts. In the 1960s and 1970s Puerto Ricans in New York City and elsewhere in the diaspora challenged traditional notions of cultural nationalism in a musical context, developing the innovative hybrid genre now known simply as salsa. The Latino Studies scholar Juan Flores pointedly notes that through the 1970s, salsa was understood by many island-based intellectuals to be an affront to “nationally circumscribed tradition,” but that by the 1990s,

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<sup>24</sup> Jorge Duany, “Nation, Migration, Identity: The Case of Puerto Ricans,” *Latino Studies* 1 (2003), 426.

<sup>25</sup> Dávila, *Sponsored Identities*, 24-94.

salsa “came to be equated with Puerto Rican identity as such.”<sup>26</sup> Such rapid transformations have been repeated in multiple contexts over the past century of Puerto Rican history.

The broad embrace of cultural nationalism across the political spectrum did not emerge spontaneously or in a vacuum: cultural nationalism took Puerto Rico by storm in the decade before World War Two. As many scholars have noted, its emergence and trajectory were deeply influenced by the efforts of the so-called “Generation of 1930,” a group of intellectuals who wrote extensively on questions of Puerto Rican national identity and cultural heritage.<sup>27</sup> Dávila has argued that the broad consensus among the Generation of 1930 on promoting cultural nationalism was “a direct result of the limits imposed by colonialism on the development of a politically defined nation-state, which led to the emphasis on culture as Puerto Rico’s ‘domain of sovereignty,’ a realm wherein the local government could establish a degree of autonomy even under colonial control.”<sup>28</sup> While several of the most well known members of the Generation of 1930 made their peace with the limitations of colonialism, the group as a whole was politically diverse and included a number of writers overtly aligned with various anti-colonial currents that advocated independence for the island. Thus, by the time the PPD and the PNPR, under the leadership of Albizu Campos, began fighting a proxy war for the hearts and minds of Chicago’s small but growing Puerto Rican community in the early 1950s, as described in Chapter One, they were both calling on a common set of cultural nationalist tropes that were entirely familiar to most of the migrants whom they hoped to woo.

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<sup>26</sup> Juan Flores, “Creolité in the ‘Hood: Diaspora as Source and Challenge,” *Centro Journal* Vol. 16, No. 2 (2004), 283-293; quotations on page 287.

<sup>27</sup> For an overview on the Generation of 1930, see César J. Ayala and Rafael Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 117-135.

<sup>28</sup> Dávila, *Sponsored Identities*, 10-11. She traces the phrase “domain of sovereignty” to Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

The same motifs of cultural nationalism remained in the arsenal of every subsequent political tendency within Chicago's Puerto Rican community over the course of the twentieth century, regardless of political objectives.

The content and character of cultural nationalism has been the subject of extended debate among scholars of Puerto Rico and its diaspora, as in other fields. Many have argued that cultural nationalism is inherently regressive due to its reliance on the construction of a mythologized past that papers over intra-societal divisions in the service of some supposedly greater unity. Of particular concern for this dissertation is the specter of what the anthropologist Isar P. Godreau describes as “the social currency of *blanqueamiento* (whitening) and the erasure of African ancestry” common to many variants of cultural nationalism.<sup>29</sup> For the historian Carlos Pabón, this taints the entire conceptual framework, because it

reduces our nationality to a Spanish essence, either ethnic or linguistic. It postulates a homogeneous and hispanophile nationality in a national imaginary that erases everything else, eliminating difference and excluding the immense majority of Puerto Ricans. And if it recognizes social differences and diversity, it subsumes or incorporates them in a subordinate fashion into a meta-story of national identity. This is equally true of both autonomist [PPD] and pro-independence versions of the discourse.<sup>30</sup>

Certainly there is significant truth to this accusation when considered historically. Writings by many members of the Generation of 1930, for instance, were imbued with what César Ayala and Rafael Bernabe have characterized as “blatant racism and sexism,” and such attributes are all too common in the various episodes described in this dissertation.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Isar P. Godreau, *Scripts of Blackness: Race, Cultural Nationalism, and U.S. Colonialism in Puerto Rico* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 37.

<sup>30</sup> Carlos Pabón, *Nación Postmortem: Ensayos sobre los tiempos de insoportable ambigüedad* (Postmortem for the Nation: Essays on the Era of Unbearable Ambiguity) (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2002), 19. All translations from Spanish in this dissertation are my own unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>31</sup> Ayala and Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, 120.



Gender has been a frequent focus for those who criticize cultural nationalism, largely because of the ways in which, as the literary theorist Yolanda Martinez-San Miguel puts it in describing the Generation of 1930, “women are not only reduced to a reproductive function but are even effaced from the account of national reproduction.”<sup>32</sup> Even more radical variants have come under fire on issues of gender. Ramos-Zayas, for instance, argues that during the 1990s, “popular nationalism in Chicago claimed a higher moral ground in its conflation of women and the nation, in which traditional female roles – particularly motherhood – were deliberately subordinated to roles that masculinize the feminine.” The result was that “the imagery of the New Revolutionary Woman, conflating sexual prowess and anticolonial militancy, became the idealized representation of the national female body.”<sup>33</sup> In both cases, despite obvious differences, popular understandings of gender are derived from the imperatives of national identity, and implemented through cultural nationalist rhetoric and symbolism.

Notably, however, criticisms of this sort aimed at cultural nationalism are far more frequently brought to bear against approaches specific to the independence movement. Consider, for instance, the sociologist Ramón Grosfoguel’s description of “discourses warning against the threat of losing our ‘national’ identity and language” as “the political project of a minority seeking to become a national elite and/or bourgeoisie.”<sup>34</sup> Left unaddressed is the broad utility of cultural nationalism, which allows even the most fervent opponents of

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<sup>32</sup> Yolanda Martinez-San Miguel, “Deconstructing Puerto Ricanness through Sexuality: Female Counternarratives on Puerto Rican Identity (1894-1934),” in Frances Negrón-Muntaner and Ramón Grosfoguel, eds., *Puerto Rican Jam: Rethinking Colonialism and Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1997), 136.

<sup>33</sup> Ramos-Zayas, *National Performances*, 94, 95.

<sup>34</sup> Ramón Grosfoguel, “The Divorce of Nationalist Discourses from the Puerto Rican People: A Sociohistorical Perspective,” in Negrón-Muntaner and Grosfoguel, eds., *Puerto Rican Jam*, 74, 75.

independence to become equally ardent fans of Puerto Rico's Olympic teams every four years, knowing full well that the teams represent a global anomaly in the world of "international" sports considering the island's lack of sovereignty.<sup>35</sup>

The criticisms put forward by Godreau, Pabón, Martínez-San Miguel, Ramos-Zayas, Grosfoguel and others are of varying strength, but none is entirely misplaced. Nonetheless, they all tend to evade both the diversity of contradictory and changing political uses to which cultural nationalism has been put, as well as the absolutely crucial but quite complicated inter-relationship between island and diasporic mainland communities. As the cultural theorist Stuart Hall notes, these two issues are intimately intertwined. While not addressing cultural nationalism directly, Hall's conceptual framing of (Anglophone) Caribbean identity in the context of the British colonial diaspora is helpful:

The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.<sup>36</sup>

In a related fashion, Hall's former student and co-thinker Paul Gilroy has famously advocated for "the theorization of creolisation, métissage, mestizaje, and hybridity" and the study of "processes of cultural mutation and restless (dis)continuity that exceed racial discourse."<sup>37</sup> My intellectual approach to the study of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism, including its relationship to racial formation, has long been profoundly influenced by my readings of both Hall and Gilroy,

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<sup>35</sup> On the wide appeal of this sort of cultural nationalism, see Antonio Sotomayor, *The Sovereign Colony: Olympic Sport, National Identity and the International Politics of Puerto Rico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016).

<sup>36</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 235.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 2.

notwithstanding the latter's pointed criticism of black cultural nationalism's tendency to focus on "immutable ethnic differences." One key conviction of this dissertation is the notion that a historical framing of the experience of Chicago's Puerto Rican community can help expose and contextualize the hybrid and mutating character of cultural nationalism itself.

Echoing Hall and Gilroy, the sociologist Raquel Z. Rivera has documented a range of innovative cross-pollinations between Puerto Ricans and African Americans in the universe of New York City hip-hop. Rivera acknowledges the many pitfalls of any interpretive lens that relies on the contested conceptual framework of national identity in diaspora, but explains that

I am all for cultural nationalism's defense of Puerto Rican traditions and roots as long as the past is viewed with a critical perspective and not a delusional nostalgia. As long as patriarchy, class exploitation, racism, xenophobia, and homophobia do not keep being reproduced. As long as we acknowledge that contemporary culture is what it is, not what we would like it to be. As long as we recognize that culture is not static and that in order to grow and respond to a community's needs, it changes continually. And I am all for celebrating our Puerto Rican 'roots' as long as we accept that there has not been, there is not, and there will never be a homogeneous Puerto Rican culture.<sup>38</sup>

Rivera's effort to view cultural nationalism through a critical lens is compelling, and this dissertation aims to avoid "delusional nostalgia" and offer precisely the sort of "critical perspective" on the past that she calls for. The diasporic context is especially important in this regard. On the mainland, Rivera notes, "cultural nationalism – despite its shortcomings – has proved key to the ways in which *boricuas* [Puerto Ricans] have survived in the United States and made sense of their experiences."<sup>39</sup> This dissertation can be seen as a historical investigation of Rivera's key insight in the context of Chicago rather than New York City.

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<sup>38</sup> Rivera, "Will the 'Real' Puerto Rican Culture Please Stand Up?," 230.

<sup>39</sup> Raquel Z. Rivera, "Will the 'Real' Puerto Rican Culture Please Stand Up? Thoughts on Cultural Nationalism," in Frances Negrón-Muntaner, ed., *None of the Above: Puerto Ricans in the Global Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 223.

## Contested Issues in the Racial Formation of Puerto Rican Chicago

Cultural nationalism has profoundly influenced the racial formation of Puerto Ricans in Chicago, by providing a powerful tool to multiple groups and tendencies that have advanced contradictory racial projects. The sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant have defined “racial projects” as “efforts to shape the ways in which human identities and social structures are racially signified, and the reciprocal ways that racial meaning becomes embedded in social structures.”<sup>40</sup> It is thus impossible to fully understand the repeated transformations in the racial contours Chicago’s Puerto Rican community without attending to the ubiquitous impact of cultural nationalism. This task is made more difficult, however, by the fact that there is no scholarly consensus on how to understand the racial formation of Puerto Ricans in Chicago over the second half of the twentieth century. Felix Padilla, for instance, argues that even the first arrivals to Chicago were victims of racial oppression under the dichotomous black/white racial taxonomy common to the mainland. He approvingly quotes an early migrant who maintained that “We were always considered black. I remember this one time, I went to a tavern with a friend and the owner of the bar refused to serve us. I said to the guy, ‘We want two beers,’ and he said, ‘We don’t serve niggers here.’ I replied that we were Puerto Ricans and he just said, ‘That’s the same shit.’”<sup>41</sup>

Certainly such experiences impacted the racial formation of the growing community, but they appear to have been the exception rather than the rule. Pérez offers a somewhat different take, contending that through the 1950s and into the 1960s, Chicago’s Puerto Ricans

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<sup>40</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, third edition (New York: Routledge, 2015), 13.

<sup>41</sup> Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 59.

were widely understood to be “the city’s ‘model minority’,” a conceptual frame traditionally associated with immigrants from East Asia and their descendants.<sup>42</sup> Positive news coverage in particular, she suggests, fed a perception that Puerto Ricans conformed to properly American gender roles in a way that marked them as racially distinct from and preferable to African Americans. However, Pérez maintains, the 1966 Division Street Riots (the focus of chapter three of this dissertation) shattered the model minority status of Puerto Ricans, which, in any event, “had very little basis in lived reality,” given the diverse and frequently non-traditional gender dynamics within families.<sup>43</sup>

Like Padilla, Pérez assumes, with limited evidence, that Puerto Ricans arriving in Chicago were immediately and universally understood to be non-white. In fact, as Lilia Fernandez has pointed out, “when Mexicans and Puerto Ricans first arrived in the city they were racially unknown to most Chicagoans. Assigning them a place in the local social order became contentious, particularly in a city in the midst of racial turmoil.”<sup>44</sup> Importantly, this process involved the efforts of Puerto Ricans themselves, who as Duany points out, generally thought of themselves as “white,” within the much more complicated and fluid racial system in place on the island itself; in the 1950 US Census, for instance, almost 80% of all respondents were identified as “white.”<sup>45</sup> Migrating to a city where only two substantive racial categories were widely accepted, it is no surprise that Puerto Ricans overwhelmingly identified with the one that a) matched their own self-understanding, and b) limited their exposure to racist

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<sup>42</sup> Pérez, *Near Northwest Side Story*, 73. For more on the concept of the “model minority” myth in the context of Asian Americans, see, for instance, Timothy P. Fong, *The Contemporary Asian American Experience: Beyond the Model Minority* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall Press, 1998).

<sup>43</sup> Pérez, *Near Northwest Side Story*, 79.

<sup>44</sup> Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 8.

<sup>45</sup> Duany, *Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*, 247-248.

discrimination. Chapters One and Two of this dissertation examine the role of cultural nationalism in the initial, partially and only temporarily successful, attempt of Chicago's growing Puerto Rican community to be accepted into whiteness.

Nonetheless, by the time of the Division Street Riots, the failure of this effort was already clear to most in the community. In this moment, a number of other options came under consideration, including an affirmative embrace of blackness and the construction of what Fernandez calls "a distinct racial subject position, one that was admittedly flexible and fluid, neither black nor white."<sup>46</sup> In the end, the latter option prevailed with the development of the category now widely termed "US Latina/os." Chicago's Puerto Rican community, particularly in its interactions with the city's previously established and much larger Mexican community, proved pivotal in this process. Through most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Chicago's dual Spanish-speaking communities were unmatched either in urban centers with large Mexican-descended populations in the Southwest (such as Los Angeles) or in those in the Northeast with substantial Puerto Rican communities (like New York).<sup>47</sup> Felix Padilla was among the first to draw the lessons of the twin communities. He argued that in Chicago in particular, "the inequality experience shared by Spanish-speaking ethnics from different geographically located communities in areas such as education and employment" led Puerto Rican and Mexican activists in the 1970s to embrace and promote a shared identity as Latina/os as "a possible means of reducing these circumstances."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 7.

<sup>47</sup> For a close look at similar dynamics in the context of a mid-sized Midwestern city, see Delia Fernandez, *From Spanish-Speaking to Latino: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in West Michigan, 1924-1975* (PhD Dissertation, Ohio State University, 2015).

<sup>48</sup> Felix M. Padilla, *Latino Ethnic Consciousness: The Case of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 4, 12.

Subsequent scholars of US Latina/os, both in Chicago and elsewhere, have challenged Padilla's periodization. Fernandez, for instance, has tracked the ways in which "in postwar Chicago, Mexicans' and Puerto Ricans' parallel stories intertwined and resembled each other significantly," contending that they "therefore must be told together."<sup>49</sup> She argues that by the early 1950s, "joining together under a label that emphasized their shared characteristics became increasingly appealing to community leaders" of both Mexican and Puerto Rican background, though she acknowledges that "relations among the Spanish-speaking ebbed and flowed."<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Rúa makes a compelling case that the two communities interacted with each other extensively from the earliest days of Puerto Rican settlement after World War Two, through "common employment and in common social activities."<sup>51</sup> She points to both inter-ethnic romance and institutional collaborations like the helpfully titled *Vida Latina* magazine (1952-1962) to suggest that Padilla's focus on the 1970s is misplaced. While I accept the revised periodization advanced by Fernandez and Rúa, the focus of this dissertation on cultural nationalism means that Mexicans do not play a substantial role in my narrative until the mid-1960s, largely because the particular variants of cultural nationalism that predominated in the first two decades of the community's existence tended to orient Puerto Ricans either toward the island or toward white ethnics identified with immigration directly from Europe.

Other scholars, such as the historians Lorrin Thomas and Ramón Gutiérrez, push the clock back on Latino identity even further, though they generally do so in the context of the coasts. Thomas, in her history of Puerto Rican political activism in New York City across the

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<sup>49</sup> Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 16.

<sup>50</sup> Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 83, 88.

<sup>51</sup> Rúa, *A Grounded Identity*, 83.

twentieth century, notes that at least as early as the 1920s, working class radicals there “defined an identity for *latinos* that was internationalist, or at least panregional, and suggested a class-based belonging that was situated in both the United States and Latin America.”<sup>52</sup> Their usage even anticipated 21<sup>st</sup> century debates on terminology that pit “Latina/o” against “Hispanic.” On political grounds informed both by anti-imperialism and proletarian unity, they “explicitly embraced *latinidad*, or ‘Latin-ness,’ as a challenge to *hispanidad*, or ‘Hispanic-ness.’”<sup>53</sup> This would help explain the occasional appearance of “Latino” and “Latin American” in the Chicago context dating back to the 1940s

Gutiérrez, in a long and wide-ranging forthcoming essay on “Hispanic and Latino Panethnicities,” argues for an even longer timeline. He examines various formulations of identity in the Southwest dating back to the colonial era of Spanish rule, and tracks the competing usages among elite *californios* after the US defeated Mexico and imposed the annexation of what are now the southwestern states via the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848.<sup>54</sup> Of particular note is his claim that “*Hispano* and *Latino*, as abbreviated versions of *Hispano-Americano* and *latinoamericano*, flourished in California’s Spanish-language discourse during the second half of the nineteenth century, but had virtually disappeared by the 1920s,” due to “the increasing number of Mexican immigrants fleeing the violence and displacement of the 1910-1917 Mexican Revolution, and finding employment in California,” where, “in the face of this demographic increase, ‘Mexican’ and ‘Mexican American’ became the prominent way of

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<sup>52</sup> Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in Twentieth-Century New York City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 53.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*, 53.

<sup>54</sup> For background on the *californios* and the racial aftermath of the Mexican American War, see Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Faultlines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).



describing the numerically ascendant immigrants and *hispano, latino*, in all of its Spanish-language forms virtually disappeared, only to reemerge further east fifty years later, in Chicago in the 1970s.”<sup>55</sup> Here, Gutiérrez in fact returns to Padilla’s periodization, and further suggests that, since Latina/o has had multiple meanings in various times and places, local studies like this dissertation are important to the broader project of understanding the historical development of Latina/o identity.

No scholarly consensus, among these or other writers, has emerged to answer the question of exactly what *kind* of category Latina/o is. Padilla describes it as an emergent “ethnicity,” while Rúa and Thomas approach the question gingerly and without advancing firm positions. Fernandez offers a direct but ambivalent perspective. “In general,” she explains

because even today the term *Latino/a* is ambiguous in its boundaries and specificities, I deploy it here as an *ethnoracial* label, at times signifying a multivalent, heterogeneous ethnic difference (i.e., encompassing the collective *ethnic* and cultural distinctiveness of Latin Americans broadly) and at other times signifying a broad *racial* location – namely that of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, who were more numerous than other Latin American groups.”<sup>56</sup>

Cultural distinctiveness is clearly an important aspect of Latina/o identity, but the framing Fernandez uses appears to depend upon a an unexamined and unsustainable dichotomy of identity into a positive and/or self-chosen category of “ethnicity” and a negative and/or externally imposed category of “race.”

By contrast, this dissertation is based in significant part, on the premise that “Latina/o” is best understood as a novel racial category, one that emerged out of a complex but fairly

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<sup>55</sup> Ramón A. Gutiérrez, “What’s in a Name? The History and Politics of Hispanic and Latino Panethnicities,” in Ramón A. Gutiérrez and Tomás Almaguer, eds., *The New Latino Studies Reader: A Twenty-First-Century Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 19-53. Thank you to the author for providing me an advance copy of this essay.

<sup>56</sup> Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 20. Italics in original.

recent process of racial formation. Gutiérrez hints at this by approaching the category as one of “panethnicity.” Omi and Winant, in discussing panethnicity, note that

racial formation always involves ‘lumping’; racialization proceeds through a combination of centripetal and centrifugal forces. Despite the presence of different cultural orientations and sometimes long-standing antagonisms – this is the ‘centrifugal’ force – ethnic groups may be pressured into allying with and ‘bridging’ because of the common pressures they face: exclusion, discrimination, violence against them; such circumstances constitute the ‘centripetal’ forces.<sup>57</sup>

This framing echoes Padilla’s initial conceptualization of the emergence of Latino “ethnic” consciousness, and it reflects much of the dynamic described in the later chapters of this dissertation.

On a related note, the sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva has argued that “the bi-racial order typical of the United States, which was the exception in the world racial system, is evolving into a complex tri-racial stratification system similar to that of many Latin American and Caribbean nations.”<sup>58</sup> I do not utilize Bonilla-Silva’s specific racial taxonomy (“white,” “honorary white,” and “collective black”), opting instead for Omi and Winant’s emphasis on the historical process rather than the precise number or names of constituent parts of the taxonomy at any given moment. Still, I am drawn to the idea that Puerto Ricans in Chicago, who initially attempted, under duress, to adapt themselves to the dichotomous rule of hypodescent that has historically separated most residents of the United States into either white or black, eventually became important participants in a process that has helped implement a racial scheme on the mainland that is deeply indebted to the one they and/or their ancestors left behind upon migrating.

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<sup>57</sup> Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 44-45.

<sup>58</sup> Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, “We Are All Americans!: The Latin Americanization of Racial Stratification in the USA,” *Race and Society* 5 (2002), 4.

None of this should be taken to imply any inclination that a tri-racial system is either “better” or “worse” than a dichotomous one. All the divergent systems of racial categorization in the western hemisphere have for half a millennium served to reinforce white supremacy. Nonetheless, the historical study of the process of racial formation can reveal important evidence of resistance to white supremacy among those most deeply impacted by its negative consequences. Such is the case with the history of Puerto Rican Chicago. While the early chapters of this dissertation largely focus on (failed) attempts to end up on the “winning” side of white supremacy by identifying as white within the context of either the fluid and variegated system on the island or in the more rigid and dichotomous framework on the mainland, there are other elements to the narrative. Thus, for instance, Rivera describes a process among Puerto Rican migrants in New York that played out somewhat similarly in Chicago during the 1960s and 1970s:

Though the Eurocentrism of the first generations caused friction between them and African Americans, the effect has decreased over time. As the second and third generations of Puerto Ricans in New York came up, influenced by their interactions with African Americans and the larger US society, they largely spliced the Puerto Rican cultural nationalist discourses with the legacy of the civil rights and black power movements.<sup>59</sup>

The later chapters of this dissertation track the racial formation of the community within the context of a set of explicitly or implicitly anti-racist commitments. The overall project of this dissertation, then, is consistent with the ambition of David R. Roediger, in *How Race Survived*

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<sup>59</sup> Rivera, “Will the ‘Real’ Puerto Rican Culture Please Stand Up?,” 223.

*US History*, “to generate an account of the past in order to show the necessity of completely abolishing oppression based on racial categories.”<sup>60</sup>

### **What’s in a Name?**

The title of this dissertation deserves some attention.<sup>61</sup> Along with the release of the prisoners, perhaps the most powerful marker of the successful institutionalization of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism in Chicago in the 1990s was the construction of two gigantic steel sculptures over Division Street in the Humboldt Park neighborhood in 1994. Abstracted versions of the Puerto Rican flag, the sculptures stand as symbolic gateways for entering Puerto Rican Chicago. After they were formally dedicated in January, 1995, a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* described flags as follows:

Each has a sinuous, overhead network of steel tubes, weighs 50 tons and is 55 feet high. And yet they are beguilingly airy: buoyant fancies of the highway, high-tech crocheting in welded metal, civic art, ethnic imagery and proud gateways to a neighborhood hungering for its place in the sun. Their waves of red-painted tubing billow and ripple overhead in imitation of flag stripes, almost as though they were made of fluttery cotton thread. Auto traffic passes underneath. Wind slices harmlessly through their voids.<sup>62</sup>

The cost for their construction, estimated at nearly half a million dollars, was covered by the City of Chicago, in a sign that the political strength of the community had grown exponentially in the preceding decades. Apart from their artistic attributes, the importance of the flags was not lost on contemporary observers. Ramos-Zayas quotes local artist and activist Ramón López, who connects their construction to cultural nationalism in “a city that belongs to another

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<sup>60</sup> David R. Roediger, *How Race Survived US History: From Settlement and Slavery to the Obama Phenomenon* (New York: Verso, 2008), xiv.

<sup>61</sup> As a practical matter, the title was suggested to me by Aaron Barnhart, who clearly has a gift, as he also suggested the title of my first book, *Truth and Revolution*. I am extremely grateful to him for both.

<sup>62</sup> M. W. Newman, “Urban Gateway: Flag of Steel Symbolizes the Puerto Rican Community’s Rising Spirit of Hope and Renewal on Division Street,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 4, 1995, p. 1.

climate and whose rented walls we want to paint and ornament with our own footprint.”<sup>63</sup> The title of this dissertation is a deliberate play on the significance of these two steel giants, two decades after their construction announced, in López’s words, “that we have made history in Chicago and that we are going to continue to make it.”<sup>64</sup>

Another deliberate, if more subtle, reference in the title is to Benedict Anderson, whose writings on nationalism have been so influential over the past several decades, including on my own thinking. As hinted above, portions of Anderson’s theory of nationalism are undermined in significant ways by the history of Puerto Rico as a society whose embrace of nationalism (especially cultural) has been largely if not entirely severed from questions of political sovereignty. Duany, for instance, has noted that “although I agree with Anderson that nations are ‘cultural artifacts of a certain kind,’ I do not believe that they are necessarily imagined as sovereign or as limited to a particular territory.”<sup>65</sup> Certainly, many supporters of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism have demanded sovereignty for the island, but support for independence has always been a minority trend among Puerto Ricans. Duany is correct, in my view, to disaggregate the nation-state compound phenomenon.

However, and more to the point in terms of my title, I take significant inspiration from a later work by Andersons, *Under Three Flags*, which traces the transnational significance of anarchist and anti-colonial struggles in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and “attempts to map the gravitational force of anarchism between militant nationalisms on opposite sides of the

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<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Ramos-Zayas, *National Performances*, 214. Original citation is to Ramón López, “Paseo entre dos banderas,” (Promenade Between Two Flags), *Claridad*, January 1995, pp. 20-23.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Ramos-Zayas, *National Performances*, 214.

<sup>65</sup> Duany, *Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*, 15.

planet.”<sup>66</sup> This dissertation lacks the globe-trotting and polyglot ambition of *Under Three Flags*, but takes quite seriously Anderson’s suggestion that among the political ideologies developed during the past half-millennium, nationalism has “the highest valency of all.”<sup>67</sup> In the case of Puerto Rican Chicago, we can see the capacity of nationalism, and in particular cultural nationalism, to combine with and influence political models both separatist and assimilationist, with ideologies both revolutionary and reformist, with sensibilities drawn to both the first world and the third world, and with racial projects aimed both toward and away from whiteness.

In short, this dissertation attempts to reflect the complexity of a community that embraced multiple and competing variants of cultural nationalism. Living inside the United States while retaining an identity as Puerto Rican has generated a plethora of contradictions. Puerto Ricans in Chicago have thus continuously found themselves stuck between nationality and citizenship, between colonialism and migration, between black and white, and between two flags, that of the island and that of the United States.

### **The Structure of the Dissertation**

The six chapters of this dissertation, arranged in approximate chronological order, track the fortunes of Chicago’s Puerto Rican community through a series of transformations. Chapter One, “Torn Between *Muñocismo* and *Retraimiento*: The Emergence of Puerto Rican Cultural Nationalism in Chicago, 1946-1954” focuses on the first decade of mass migration from the

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<sup>66</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (New York: Verso, 2005), 2.

<sup>67</sup> Anderson, *Under Three Flags*, 1. “Valency,” or “valence,” is a term used in both chemistry and linguistics to denote the capacity of an object (element, verb, etc.) to combine with and influence other objects.

island to Chicago, when the character of the growing community was largely unformed. It tracks the efforts of both the PPD and the Nationalist Party to stamp their imprint on Chicago and the diaspora more broadly, with the former advancing *muñocismo* (a formula for cultural nationalism without sovereignty, named after the party's founder and long-time governor Luis Muñoz Marín) and the latter promoting *retramiento* (literally "withdrawal," a principled refusal to participate in the colonial system). Examining the rise and precipitous fall of that Nationalist Party in Chicago, it argues that the PPD's framework proved more compelling to the new arrivals in the McCarthyist context of the early 1950s.

The second chapter, "'A Means Rather than an End': The Rise and Fall of Liberal Americanization, 1955-1965," turns its attention to the efforts of Chicago's migrants to develop their own version of cultural nationalism. In so doing, I argue, the community attached itself to a framework sometimes called liberal Americanization, which posited that immigrant communities could most successfully assimilate into US society by actively embracing their own cultural distinctiveness. This approach mapped the *muñocista* notion of cultural nationalism without sovereignty onto the experiences of prior waves of European immigrants who had successfully staked their claim to whiteness in urban centers like Chicago. While the framework was appealing to many migrants, it ran up against the intransigence of the local police force, whose ranks were drawn heavily from descendants of the very same European immigrants. The resulting conflicts fatally undermined the process well before it could be completed.

Chapter Three, "'The Parade Gave the People Courage': Revelry and Rage in the 1966 Division Street Riots," focuses squarely on a mere three days and nights in June of 1966, when thousands of Puerto Ricans took to the streets in response to one of many incidents of police

brutality. What made this instance different, I argue, was its occurrence one day after a city-wide Puerto Rican parade, which heightened the sense of cultural pride and led to a series of riots that fundamentally altered the trajectory of the community. The Riots placed the final nail in the coffin of liberal Americanization, and produced a rethinking of the relationship between Puerto Ricans and other racialized populations, including African Americans and eventually Mexican Americans. At the same time, however, the Riots did not produce an immediate surge in cultural nationalism. With the old models (*muñocismo*, *retramiento* and liberal Americanization) having failed, there was no immediate alternative framework within which cultural nationalism could be quickly repurposed.

Chapter Four, “‘For One We All Pay’: The Nadir of Cultural Nationalism, 1966-1967,” investigates the void left in the community by the failure of prior approaches. The riots were a cathartic experience for many participants, but they did not solve the persistent problems of the community: extreme poverty, terrible housing conditions, and discrimination at the hands of local government officials including, especially, the Department of Public Aid. Many community members, particularly mothers on welfare, felt no meaningful connection to any variant of cultural nationalism, choosing to express their grievances in the rhetoric of race and gender. An analysis of their perspective, as expressed in a series of interviews conducted in 1967 as part of a War on Poverty research project, is followed by an examination of an effort to build a Welfare Union under the guidance of a newly-formed pan-Latino community group, the Latin American Defense Organization (LADO), which chose not to use cultural nationalism as a mobilizing factor in its early organizing efforts. Partly as a result, the Welfare Union proved unsustainable and LADO moved on to other projects in later years.



Chapter Five, “‘We Are Latins, We Are Different’: Building an Insurgent Anti-Colonial Identity, 1968-1980,” follows the efforts within the community to recombine the militancy of the Division Street Riots with the enthusiasm for cultural nationalism that had partly motivated the Riots in the first place, in the context of Third World anti-colonial triumph and the international New Left. These various efforts reflected the renewed vitality of cultural nationalism and signaled a new approach to racial identity, using a multi-tiered approach in which Puerto Rican, pan-Latin, and Third World categories all played a role. The appeal of black nationalism in particular prompted a move toward a pan-Latin radicalism that culminated in the 1977 formation of the *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional* (Movement for National Liberation, or MLN), which brought together anti-colonial militants from both the Puerto Rican and Mexican communities, in Chicago and across the US. Meanwhile, an armed underground movement kept militant nationalism in popular consciousness until the arrest of eleven alleged members of the FALN in 1980 marked the beginning of the end of the insurgent period.

Finally, Chapter Six, “‘We Visualize ... the New Society’: Institutionalizing Cultural Nationalism, 1981-1994,” addresses the extended and largely successful process of institutionalization that brought Puerto Rican cultural nationalism into the mainstream of Chicago’s civic life. If Chapter Five tells the story of a small movement making itself progressively more marginal, Chapter Six documents the reverse process. Community organizations and projects initiated during the insurgent period, like the Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos Puerto Rican High School, and political campaigns like the fight against the gentrification of the near northwest side, began to depend more and more upon the access to financial resources and electoral power gained by a relative handful of politicians, most

prominently Alderman, and later US Representative, Luis Gutiérrez. Institutionalization led to victories like the construction of the flags (1994) and the release of the prisoners (1999), but it also generated some significant, if less visible, defeats. While in the insurgent period Puerto Ricans in Chicago had contributed to a dramatic anti-racist reshaping of racial identity that threatened the survival of white supremacy, the institutional era reflected the acceptance by many in the community of the rise of what Omi and Winant have termed “center-left neoliberalism” that contained the challenge, in exchange for access to the levers of power.<sup>68</sup>

A final epilogue, “Toward a Second Great Migration: The Legacy of Chicago’s Puerto Rican Community in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” brings the narrative up to the present, when Puerto Rico and its diaspora suddenly and unexpectedly find themselves center-stage in the United States context. It does so by focusing on the extended economic crisis on the island that has, over the past decade, prompted outmigration on a scale not seen since the 1950s, when Chicago’s community became the second largest in the diaspora after New York City. The second great migration, however, has largely been received not by deindustrialized rust-belt cities like Chicago, Buffalo, or Milwaukee, but by Southern centers like Orlando, Houston, and even Oklahoma City, which have also seen surging populations of other Latina/os during the same period. In light of this shift, I justify and contextualize the focus of this dissertation on Chicago by noting my own (very limited) role in the period after 1994, when I first moved to Chicago and began working at Albizu Campos High School. I conclude by offering some tentative thoughts on the future of cultural nationalism and racial formation in the context of the Puerto Rican diaspora, whether in Chicago, Orlando, or elsewhere.

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<sup>68</sup> Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 230.

## Chapter One: Torn Between *Muñocismo* and *Retraimiento*: The Emergence of Puerto Rican Cultural Nationalism in Chicago, 1946-1954

### Introduction

In 1951, Chicago witnessed the first in what eventually became a long and still continuing line of Puerto Rican beauty pageants designed to bring together the city's island-born residents, of whom there were already several thousand. Clementina Souchet, a nineteen year old from the small town of Peñuelas who had arrived in Chicago the year before, was one of the contestants in this event, which crowned the first ever "Miss Puerto Rico in Chicago."<sup>1</sup> Like many other single women newly arrived from the island, Souchet lived with male members of her extended family who were tasked with watching over her. Her two uncles often confined her to their apartment, at the request of her parents, out of fear that exposure to urban life in the mainland would encourage her to assert her independence. Nonetheless, perhaps due to the explicitly Puerto Rican character of the contest, the uncles allowed her to participate. She did not win the pageant – "since I didn't know anyone and was not allowed out of the house I could not get votes" – but she was happy simply to have participated.<sup>2</sup> Her participant's capsule biography indicated "she feels proud to be Puerto Rican and does everything possible to help those she knows in Chicago learn more about the island, since so many here have very mistaken ideas about the island and its people."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Clementina Souchet, *Clementina: historia sin fin* (Clementina: Never Ending Story) (Chicago: NP, 1986), 54. For an overview of Souchet's life, see Maura I. Toro-Morn, "Souchet, Clementina (1932- )" in *Latinas in the United States: A Historical Encyclopedia*, eds. Vicki Ruíz and Virginia Sánchez Korrol (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 695-696. For background on Puerto Rican interest in beauty pageants, especially at the international level, see Manu Avilés-Santiago, "The Colonial Body Under Attack: Puerto Rican Pageantry and the Embodiment of Colonialism," paper given at Puerto Rican Studies Association conference, Hartford, CT, October 22, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Souchet, *Clementina*, 54.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Souchet, *Clementina*, 56.

Souchet's experience was in many ways quite typical among Puerto Rican women in Chicago during the post-war period, although it is true that she came from a somewhat more privileged economic background than many migrants. In contrast to those who left the island to search for employment, she first arrived for an extended school break vacation visiting her uncles, only to refuse to return to the island once the summer had ended. Still, like many others, she was young and ambitious and felt constrained by the limits imposed by the intersecting patriarchal traditions of Puerto Rican and North American cultures. She also used the distance created by migration to assert her independence from her parents, though she still had to deal with the uncles. Most importantly, like most new arrivals in Chicago, both men and women, she accepted both her Puerto Rican-ness and her American-ness, seeing the identities not as contradictory but as a coherent if messy dual identity. As she later recalled, "I remained the young Puerto Rican woman, very patriotic and a great admirer of this nation."<sup>4</sup> Although Souchet was not herself a supporter of the island's then-governing Popular Democratic Party (PPD), her embrace of a dual identity matched the PPD's formula for cultural nationalism without sovereignty, often called *muñocismo*, after party founder and long-time governor of the island Luis Muñoz Marín.

The "Miss Puerto Rico in Chicago" pageant had been organized by Gonzalo Lebrón Sotomayor, then a relatively unknown migrant also new to Chicago. Having grown up in a working class family in the town of Lares on the island, he went to law school in the mainland and stayed on after graduating. Eventually he made his way to Chicago, where he was living in 1950, when Puerto Rican farmworkers in nearby Michigan and their wives and family on the

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<sup>4</sup> Souchet, *Clementina*, 72.

island began protesting appalling labor conditions. Eileen Suarez-Findlay has detailed the “public uproar both on the island and in the US Midwest” that emerged in the aftermath.<sup>5</sup> From Chicago, Lebrón offered to assist the disgruntled farmworkers. According to *El Diario*, the biggest Spanish-language daily paper in New York City, Lebrón “offered his help to attempt to challenge in court the contracts of the Puerto Rican agricultural workers laboring in the sugar beet fields of Michigan.”<sup>6</sup> Many of these men subsequently moved to Chicago, finding work in factories, hotels, and elsewhere. Some no doubt attended the beauty pageant he organized mere months later.

Lebrón’s offer of assistance was motivated less by pure altruism and more by his deeply held political convictions about the relationship of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans and the United States. He was a leading member of the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico (PNPR), which explicitly rejected the dual identity embraced by Souchet. While helping disgruntled farmworkers and organizing a beauty pageant, Lebrón also worked to build a local branch of the Party and openly espoused the militant demand for the formal independence of the island he himself had left behind. His involvement in the beauty pageant, then, is best seen as one part of a political strategy to build a broad-based cultural nationalism among local Puerto Ricans who could subsequently be mobilized into action under a rubric the Party called *retramiento* (literally, “withdrawal”). On the island, *retramiento* included a refusal to participate in elections or other aspects of the colonial apparatus. For Party members who

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<sup>5</sup> Eileen J. Suárez-Findlay, *We Are Left Without a Father Here: Masculinity, Domesticity, and Migration in Postwar Puerto Rico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 4.

<sup>6</sup> “Puertorriqueños Abandonados a la Suerte en EE.UU. Entidades Particulares se Aprestan a Socorrerlos; el Gobierno Nada Hace” (Puerto Ricans abandoned to chance in the US. Private institutions prepare to help them; the government does nothing), *El Diario de Nueva York*, September 29, 1950. Copy in clippings file, Caja 2273, Fondo Oficina del Gobernador (FODG), Archivo General de Puerto Rico (AGPR).

migrated to the mainland, this sort of non-participation was either inapplicable, since there was no colonial apparatus per se in a metropolitan city like Chicago, or impossible, due to the reality of living and working in the heartland of the colonial power. As a result, *retramiento* in the diaspora served more as a set of cultural principles and behavioral guidelines to prevent the incorporation of dangerous North American lifestyles.

Despite obvious differences of perspective and experience, Souchet and Lebrón held at least one crucial idea in common: each was intensely proud of being Puerto Rican, and both associated this pride with an imagined cultural heritage, though they very likely had quite different understandings of which elements were most important in that heritage. Each had left the island believing in the value of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism, and both engaged in an active process of reconfiguring it to suit what they saw as the needs of the diaspora. Additionally, it should be noted, neither Lebrón and his Nationalist Party comrades, nor Souchet and other opponents of the Party, were interested in mapping the related and intersecting contours of cultural nationalism and racial formation. Given the tenuous position of Puerto Ricans in Chicago – and the city’s status as a highly segregated metropolis then on the receiving end of the second great migration of African Americans – their shared disinterest did not prevent their growing community from being profoundly shaped by debates about race, both historical and contemporary.

Souchet and Lebrón would cross paths several more times after their first encounter at the “Miss Puerto Rico in Chicago” contest, and their intertwined stories would make national news within a few years. Their joint narrative helps shed important light on the centrality of cultural nationalism to the initial post-war generation of migrants from the island and in

particular on the ideological battles between *muñocismo* and *retramiento* in Puerto Rican Chicago during the early 1950s. This chapter uses the rise and fall of Nationalist Party agitation in Chicago during the 1950s, in which both Souchet and Lebrón played key roles, as a lens through which to explain the eventual triumph of the PPD's model of cultural nationalism without sovereignty. This vision was compelling in many ways, especially in a national context that combined postwar faith in the American Dream with McCarthy-era fear of radical change. Souchet was part of a clear majority of the rapidly growing Puerto Rican population who either ignored or rejected movements like the Nationalist Party that rejected the United States and demanded the island's political as well as cultural independence. Still, this same majority ensured that Puerto Rican cultural nationalism in Chicago long outlived the Nationalist Party's local efforts. To understand why this happened, it is crucial to go back several years before either Souchet or Lebrón moved to Chicago, and begin with the initial arrival of large numbers of Puerto Ricans, shortly after the end of World War Two.

### **The DIVEDCO: Applying the Lessons of Chicago on the Island**

The very first experience of large-scale Puerto Rican migration to Chicago did not go well. As Mérida M. Rúa details in *A Grounded Identity*, the city's postwar Puerto Rican boom began with the arrival of several hundred female domestic workers brought to Chicago in September, 1946, along with a smaller number of men hired to work at a foundry in the far north suburbs, all under contract with the employment agency Castle, Barton, and Associates.<sup>7</sup> Media coverage was initially favorable, but many of the workers themselves quickly became

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<sup>7</sup> Rúa, *Grounded Identity*, 3-31.

dissatisfied with their new circumstances. Both the domestics and the foundry workers began to complain of poor working conditions, unexpected reductions in pay, and mistreatment by employers. Castle, Barton attempted to intimidate those who expressed dissatisfaction, threatening to have people arrested and even “deported” if they quit. While a number of the new arrivals did in fact leave their jobs, they struggled with limited resources and a lack of support in the city. Some were clearly aware that their US citizenship precluded forced return to the island, but others lived as fugitives, “hiding because they believed the police could take them and deport them.”<sup>8</sup> Some returned to the island on their own, but many more stayed and became the initial kernel of the city’s soon-to-boom Puerto Rican community.

The experiences of these newly arrived working women and men are widely acknowledged by contemporary scholars as pivotal in plotting the future direction of Puerto Rican migration to Chicago. They should also be seen as crucial determiners of subsequent efforts by the Puerto Rican government to manage its growing diaspora. Among the most important figures in the Castle, Barton incident was Carmen Isales, a social worker then working as an official in the island’s Department of Health. Isales had studied at the University of Chicago’s School of Social Work and when vacation time presented itself she chose to return and visit friends, despite the predictably nasty weather that greeted her that December.<sup>9</sup> As Rúa notes, Isales stayed in Chicago for three months, working with and through the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) to help the disgruntled former workers, especially the young women. She was also concerned with defusing any growing tensions caused by the

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<sup>8</sup> “Entrevista a Carmen Isales,” *Investigación en Acción* Vol. I, No. 1 (1993), 34. Thank you to Ana Helvia Quintero, one of the interviewers, for providing me a copy of this interview.

<sup>9</sup> See Rúa, *A Grounded Identity*, 18-24.



fiasco. Isales was not in Chicago in any official capacity, but she used her personal connections as a loyal member of the PPD to bring the crisis to the attention of powerful people on the island. Most centrally this included Muñoz Marín, the leader of the PPD and at that point President of the Puerto Rican Senate. Muñoz Marín was already the most important politician on the island; within two years he would become the first democratically elected governor in Puerto Rico's history. In the midst of the Chicago crisis, Isales traveled to Washington, DC to meet with Muñoz Marín and his wife, Inés Mendoza, at the beginning of 1947. When she subsequently wrote two reports on the situation, she made sure to direct copies to their attention.<sup>10</sup> In a letter to Muñoz Marín along with her final report, Isales laid out the stakes of the situation in Chicago:

Migrations, which can be one of the most feasible means to solve our problem, deserve the same dedication and study [as industrialization], because the errors that are committed fundamentally affect the hegemony of the Party. The frustrated worker who returns to the country without having reached his ambitions is a seed of displeasure and distrust of the Party.<sup>11</sup>

Isales was genuinely sympathetic to the plight of the Castle, Barton workers, but she was also determined to prevent social unrest on the island, especially because it might jeopardize the growing power of the PPD. While she played no further direct role in the management of the diaspora, a task left to Francisco Sierra Berdecía, Puerto Rico's Secretary of Labor, and his representatives on the mainland, Isales spent much of the next two decades on the island, helping develop and promote the PPD's model of *muñocista* cultural nationalism. Partly

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<sup>10</sup> Isales described her meeting with Muñoz Marín and Mendoza in "Entrevista a Carmen Isales."

<sup>11</sup> Carmen Isales to Luís Muñoz Marín, April 3, 1947, quoted in Rúa, *A Grounded Identity*, 23. (Translation by Rúa.)

through her efforts, the PPD's developing approach dovetailed nicely with the dual national identity embraced by migrants like Souchet.<sup>12</sup>

This compatibility was particularly important in the context of the PPD-led government's project of encouraging emigration of large numbers of Puerto Ricans. Despite public proclamations of neutrality on the subject of migration, Muñoz Marín's postwar administration was in fact deeply invested in population control via mass departures. It saw this as one part of what Gina Pérez calls "a comprehensive and integrated approach to 'modernization' characteristic of postwar development strategies throughout Latin America."<sup>13</sup> Operation Bootstrap, as the broader modernization project initiated by Muñoz Marín was commonly known, included a series of economic policies designed to boost industrialization. They also produced rapid increases in unemployment, especially in the rural agricultural sector that had dominated the entire previous history of the island. To avoid an explosion of extreme poverty amidst rapid urbanization, all of which might in turn have generated political unrest, the government developed a two-pronged plan. First, it was crucial to limit population growth, and while sterilization was widely utilized, emigration was widely understood to be far more effective in an immediate sense.<sup>14</sup> Second, the government began to more fully develop the cultural nationalist ideology of *muñocismo* in order to build a sense of national identity that was capable of stealing the thunder from militant groups like the Nationalist Party. These two projects were directly linked: to limit population growth on the island required that mass-scale

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<sup>12</sup> Carmen Isales, "Report on Cases of Puerto Rican Laborers Brought to Chicago to Work as Domestic and Foundry Workers Under Contract with Castle, Barton and Associates," March 22, 1947. Folder 277, Sub-series 9B, Series 2, Section IV, Archivo Luí Muñoz Marín, Fundación Luí Muñoz Marín (FLMM). Page three contains a list of 17 government agencies and social service agencies that assisted her research.

<sup>13</sup> Pérez, *Near Northwest Side Story*, 44.

<sup>14</sup> On the use of sterilization as a tactic in controlling Puerto Rico's population, see Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science and US Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

emigration to the mainland was permanent rather than temporary. Developing a coherent national identity that meshed with US citizenship became a crucial piece of the puzzle.

This complication made *muñocismo* a particularly enigmatic political construction. In the words of Catherine Marsh Kennerley, it “combined populist assertions of cultural nationalism and Puerto Rican autonomy with loyalty to the US government and Constitution.”<sup>15</sup> Where the Nationalist Party combined cultural nationalism with *retramiento*, the PPD took precisely the opposite position. It embraced for Puerto Rico nearly all the component elements of Benedict Anderson’s now-classic framework for constructing national identity, including the social glue provided by print media, museums as a way to institutionalize an imagined past, and standardized demographics in the form of the census. But there was one major exception. Notwithstanding Anderson’s claim that “the gage and emblem” of the nation is “the sovereign state,” the PPD not only rejected formal independence for Puerto Rico, it actively suppressed the Nationalist Party and other pro-independence voices.<sup>16</sup> It went so far as to criminalize any public advocacy for independence, under the so-called *Ley de la Mordaza* (Gag Law), passed in 1948 and not repealed until 1957. As Marsh Kennerley has argued, the *muñocista* project attempted “the rescue of ‘Puerto Rican-ness’ from traditional Nationalist discourse in order to complement the modernizing project.”<sup>17</sup> In effect, the PPD pioneered and promoted a dual national identity that could adapt and thrive both on the island and the in the mainland.

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<sup>15</sup> Cati Marsh Kennerley, “Cultural Negotiations: Puerto Rican Intellectuals in State-Sponsored Community Education Project, 1948-1968,” *Harvard Educational Review* 73:3 (Fall, 2003), 417.

<sup>16</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991 [1983]), 7.

<sup>17</sup> Catherine Marsh Kennerley, *Negociaciones Culturales: Los Intelectuales y el Proyecto Pedagógico del Estado Muñocista* (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2009), 71.

Isales was a significant if overlooked participant in the construction and dissemination of *muñocismo*. In 1949, along with her mainland-born husband, Fred Wale, Isales helped found the Division of Community Education (DIVEDCO) within the Department of Public Instruction. The DIVEDCO became one of several government institutions during this era focused on the construction of a cultural nationalism that could co-exist with the seemingly permanent absence of formal independence. Muñoz Marín himself helped design the structure of the agency, and in 1948 he personally recruited Wale to act as the Director of the Division in a letter that highlighted the populist goals and methods that framed the DIVEDCO's mission from the start: "to develop the people's wisdom through community study, community organization and action, using movies, radio posters, booklets, community tackling of specific community problems, etc."<sup>18</sup> The DIVEDCO was perhaps most famous for producing films, both shorts and feature-length dramas, that simultaneously entertained and promoted *muñocismo* for mass consumption on the island. It also produced a series of magazine-style *Libros para el Pueblo* (Books for the People) designed to disseminate cultural nationalism via adult literacy programs that focused on rural parts of the island.

While the DIVEDCO was centrally focused on the island itself, the initial difficulties of the Chicago migration in particular were a crucial part of the agency's back-story. Isales herself indicated that her experiences in Chicago dealing with the Castle, Barton fiasco – and in particular her meeting with Muñoz Marín and Mendoza – led directly to the development of the DIVEDCO. In an interview years later, Isales recalled that after she described the situation in Chicago to the two of them, Mendoza responded by asking "How is it possible that there are

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<sup>18</sup> From Luis Muñoz Marín to Fred Wale, November 23, 1948, quoted in Marsh Kennerley, *Negociaciones Culturales*, 37. Original in English.

Puerto Ricans who still believe they can be deported? How is it possible that there are Puerto Ricans who don't know their rights? They need an education, an educational force that can go beyond just instruction." Isales herself claimed that "I will always remember that moment because it was the first time I envisioned the idea of the program" that later became the DIVEDCO.<sup>19</sup>

At least two aspects of this encounter are notable. First, it places Chicago's initial Puerto Rican community at the very center of the origin story of the DIVEDCO, which in turn was central to the construction of *muñocismo*. Second, while Eileen J. Suárez Findlay has deftly noted the ways in which *muñocismo* both created and depended upon "discourses of fraternal fatherhood and respectable domesticity," the entire model might never have emerged were it not for a conversation between two women.<sup>20</sup> Mendoza and Isales both perceived that the initial migrants had suffered because they did not fully understand their collective capacity to resolve the problems that emerged during their time in Chicago. Isales and Wale, in turn, viewed this – through an undeniably patronizing lens that ignored both US colonialism and their own class bias – as a problem that originated on the island, where "people had scant experience at working together in groups towards the solution of a community problem."<sup>21</sup> The DIVEDCO thus focused significant effort on training community organizers who could work in communities across the island.

While the agency was overwhelmingly focused on those who stayed on the island, the massive outmigration eventually forced it to address those who were considering the move to

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<sup>19</sup> "Entrevista a Carmen Isales," 34. This encounter is also described in Mariam Colón Pizarro, "Poetic Pragmatism: The Puerto Rican Division of Community Education (DIVEDCO) and the Politics of Cultural Production, 1949-1968," PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2011, pp. 66-67 (note 32).

<sup>20</sup> Suárez Findlay, *We Are Left Without a Father Here*, 26.

<sup>21</sup> Fred Wale and Carmen Isales, "The Field Program," *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. IX, No. 3 (1953), p. 25.

the mainland. It produced a series of short films dealing with the phenomenon, and then in 1955, the DIVEDCO published its only major written work addressing the growing diaspora: *Emigración*, volume eight in its *Libros para el pueblo* series. Isales was not credited in the book, though her husband Wale was listed as one of the lead collaborators. Full of beautiful woodcuts depicting scenes of Puerto Rican life on the island and in the mainland, and containing a mixture of stories, poems, and textbook-style instructional narratives in oversized type, *Emigración* served both as a primer and as a how-to guide for those considering departure. While Marsh Kennerley has argued that its “implicit message is: do not emigrate,” this seems too narrow an interpretation.<sup>22</sup> The book did not pull punches in its depictions of the hardships that too often accompanied migration, including housing problems, the likelihood of culture shock, and the prospect of being on the receiving end of discrimination and prejudice. But it was also full of advice for those who do make the move, especially in terms of cultural differences. As Arlene M. Dávila notes, it “counseled potential Puerto Rican migrants to the United States to comply with the U.S. assimilationist policies of the time.”<sup>23</sup> *Emigración* strongly encouraged (though it did not attempt to facilitate) the acquisition of English language skills as a key aspect of any individual decision to migrate. Not coincidentally, the DIVEDCO also openly advocated for migration to places like Chicago, because “you find fewer problems in other American cities besides New York.”<sup>24</sup>

*Emigración* used an innovative historical argument to reinforce the *muñocista* idea of dual national identity and cultural nationalism without sovereignty. A lengthy section of the

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<sup>22</sup> Marsh Kennerley, *Negociaciones Culturales*, 160.

<sup>23</sup> Dávila, *Sponsored Identities*, 36.

<sup>24</sup> *Emigración*, 65.

book was devoted to a comparative discussion of US and Puerto Rican history. Skipping over a wide range of potential themes that certainly merited attention – economics, religion, wars, colonialism, and so forth – *Emigración* opted to focus on an examination of the two societies' divergent histories of slavery. Its approach echoed then-popular ideas exemplified by Tomás Blanco, a prominent Puerto Rican intellectual and central figure in the "Generation of 1930." In 1942 Blanco had published a major essay on the topic of race relations on the island, in which he argued that "racial prejudice as it is understood in the United States does not exist" in Puerto Rico.<sup>25</sup> The DIVEDCO used precisely the same logic, and eerily similar language, to claim that the peaceful nature of slave emancipation on the island (as opposed to the bloody Civil War in the United States) helped ensure that "in Puerto Rico there has not been prejudice against blacks as it is known in some parts of the United States."<sup>26</sup> As had Blanco, *Emigración* thus conflated racial prejudice as such with legal systems of formal segregation like Jim Crow in the US South. Since Puerto Rico had never systematically implemented anything like the latter, both Blanco and the DIVEDCO maintained, the former must not have existed. Notwithstanding the very different perspectives of Afro-Puerto Ricans, this sleight of hand provided yet more reinforcement for a cultural nationalism that supposedly unified rather than divided.

But *Emigración* went even further than Blanco, borrowing directly from the so-called Dunning School's reactionary analysis of Reconstruction after the Civil War, a topic that Blanco had left largely untouched. William Dunning, a professor of history at Columbia University in the early twentieth century, along with a number of colleagues and students, elaborated a

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<sup>25</sup> Tomás Blanco, *El Prejuicio Racial en Puerto Rico* (Racial prejudice in Puerto Rico), ed. Arcadio Díaz Quiñones (1942; San Juan, 1985), 138.

<sup>26</sup> *Emigración*, 47. See Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992 [1946]), and Blanco, *El Prejuicio Racial*.

racist and hyper-masculine interpretation of Reconstruction that blamed craven and corrupt white northerners for doing even greater damage to the South than the Civil War had already inflicted, forcing gentlemanly white southerners to come to the rescue and “redeem” the region’s (gendered) honor. As Eric Foner notes, this analysis “reflected, and helped to legitimize, the racial order of a society in which blacks were disenfranchised and subjected to discrimination in every aspect of their lives.”<sup>27</sup> The DIVEDCO turned this argument on its head, while accepting the Dunning narrative as simple fact. According to *Emigración*:

After its victory, the North did not have a good policy for the South. During those early years of confusion, bad politicians from the North sowed discord between whites and blacks in the South. This was one of the causes of the rise there in prejudice among whites against blacks.<sup>28</sup>

The DIVEDCO thus drew two distinct but related conclusions from the supposed tragedy of Reconstruction. First, Puerto Rican cultural nationalism actually implied moral superiority over the United States, insofar as the island was not tainted with racism. Second, the moral inferiority of the mainland was the result not of a legacy of slavery itself, but of the undeserved retaliatory oppression meted out against white southerners after the Civil War. For Puerto Ricans who chose to move to the mainland, there were two implied but unstated conclusions: settle in the northern urban centers like New York, or better yet Chicago, where (as in Puerto Rico) legal segregation had never been systematically implemented; and once there, do not align yourselves with African Americans, as to do so will make you a target for racism.

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<sup>27</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), xxi-xxii.

<sup>28</sup> *Emigración*, 44.



### **“Let Us Attain the Peak of our Aspirations!”**

The 1951 “Miss Puerto Rico in Chicago” contest was not, as it happened, Gonzalo Lebrón’s first experience with beauty pageants, nor was it his last. More than a dozen years earlier, in 1937, his sister, Dolores “Lolita” Lebrón, had won such a contest, being crowned “Queen of the Flowers of May,” in their hometown of Lares, Puerto Rico.<sup>29</sup> In February, 1952, the FBI reported that the Chicago branch of the Nationalist Party’s fundraising efforts at the moment included “the selection of a Puerto Rican queen to preside at a May dance, and each person contributing to the [Party] would be allowed to vote for the girl of their choice.”<sup>30</sup> Thus the contest killed two birds with one stone, promoting a gendered cultural nationalism while simultaneously bringing money into the Party’s coffers.

Gonzalo and Lolita Lebrón both migrated to the mainland in the 1940s, she to New York City and he to Chicago, and both joined the Nationalist Party. As we shall see, Lolita’s actions eventually had life-changing repercussions for Gonzalo, and vice versa. Her early experience as a beauty queen may well have influenced his decision to organize the Chicago pageant in 1951, but their shared ideological commitment to the Nationalist Party was also a significant factor.

Following Benedict Anderson’s now-classic formulations on national identity, a number of scholars have noted the ways in which beauty contests have historically been implicated in the

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<sup>29</sup> Irene Vilar, *The Ladies Gallery: A Memoir of Family Secrets*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: Vintage, 1998), 70.

<sup>30</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico (NPPR), SJ 100-3, Volume 22,” May 1, 1952, p. 11-12. FBI Files on Puerto Ricans Collection (FBIF), Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, City University of New York. Despite the obvious possibility for misleading or simply incorrect material, I remain committed to the careful and critical use of declassified FBI files as historical evidence regarding the objects of surveillance, in this case the Nationalist Party. For a recent set of thoughtful meditations on the use of state-owned archival material originally produced for the benefit of repressive police agencies, see the dossier “Spy Reports: Content, Methodology, and Historiography in Mexico’s Secret Police Archive,” edited by Tanalís Padilla and Louise E. Walker, *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* Vol. 19, No. 1 (2013), 1-102.

gendered construction of cultural nationalism. Sarah Banet-Weiser argues that “pageants create a national field of shared symbols and practices that define both ethnicity and femininity in terms of national identity,” and that “beauty pageants thus create imagined communities where nationalist discourse is produced as cultural tradition.”<sup>31</sup> Lebrón viewed this task as especially important for Puerto Ricans forced into the diaspora by colonial policies that advanced the United States’ interests both economically and psychologically. It was entirely impractical to encourage immediate return migration, so the promotion of a diasporic identity built around Puerto Rican cultural nationalism was an indispensable part of building an organized movement in Chicago demanding independence for the island from the United States.

By the time of the “Miss Puerto Rico in Chicago” contest, Lebrón was already on the radar of both the Puerto Rican insular police force and the FBI, and possibly local authorities in Chicago. Rúa indicates that the FBI questioned him as early as 1950.<sup>32</sup> An internal memo sent to Muñoz Marín’s office the next year described him as “the chief spark plug of Nationalist agitation in Chicago” and “a really smooth operator.”<sup>33</sup> Meanwhile, FBI informants were reporting that Lebrón was quite strict as leader of the local branch of the PNPR. One report late in 1951 indicated that Lebrón had been “unsatisfied” when a Party member submitted only \$5.00 during a fundraising drive, demanding that he “collect \$100 by the next day.”<sup>34</sup> Another suggested that divisions had surfaced within the Party due to a member’s drinking habits,

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<sup>31</sup> Sarah Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 6-7.

<sup>32</sup> Rúa, *A Grounded Identity*, 176 n. 87.

<sup>33</sup> From Clarence Senior to Gustavo Agrait, October 2, 1951, Caja 2279, FODG, AGPR. Special thanks to Aldo Lauria Santiago for sharing this document with me.

<sup>34</sup> FBI, “Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico (NPPR), SJ 100-3, Volume 21,” January 8, 1952, p. 9. (FBIF).

noting that Lebrón “does not approve of [Party] members drinking alcoholic beverages.”<sup>35</sup>

Whether or not these depictions of Lebrón were accurate, they reflected the federal and island-based governments’ concerns about his skills as an organizer and the risks of violence associated with the Nationalist Party.

Much of Gonzalo Lebrón’s political work as the Party’s local leader in Chicago focused on building broad, culturally-grounded networks among the rapidly growing Puerto Rican population. He had helped found the Spanish Cultural Club of the Bronx in the 1940s, and once in Chicago he sought out an equivalent organizational setting.<sup>36</sup> The best venue for this sort of activity in Chicago at the beginning of the 1950s was the *Gremio Puertorriqueño de Chicago* (Puerto Rican Guild of Chicago), the very first local organization set up by and for the new migrants. The group functioned as a mutual aid society, much like those set up by prior waves of immigrants from Europe. The *Gremio* produced what was likely the first Puerto Rican print publication in the city’s history, *Borinquen*. The title, a reference to the Taíno indigenous name for the island itself, clearly marked its commitment to cultural nationalism in an era where the mythology of the three roots had firmly taken hold in Puerto Rican thought. The lead editorial in the first issue of *Borinquen* normalized the tribulations of Puerto Rican migrants while highlighting the community’s potential to overcome adversity. “The Puerto Rican,” the group observed, “braves today what every newly arrived group always suffers in this country. [...] Success comes with struggle and sacrifice, with perseverance and moderation.”<sup>37</sup> A few months later, the *Gremio* focused its attentions on the Michigan farm worker crisis, writing

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<sup>35</sup> FBI, “Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico (NPPR), SJ 100-3, Volume 21,” p. 21. (FBIF).

<sup>36</sup> “Islanders’ Trial Hears Ex-Plotter: Former Puerto Rican Rebel Tells of Assignment to Kill Visiting US Official,” *New York Times*, September 11, 1954, p. 9.

<sup>37</sup> *Borinquen*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (May, 1950) reprinted in Manuel A. Martínez, *Chicago: Historia de Nuestra Comunidad Puertorriqueña* (Chicago: History of our Puerto Rican community) (Chicago: No Publisher, 1989), 116.

directly to Muñoz Marín to suggest that English language instruction be provided to future migrants:

An educational program for Puerto Rican workers coming to the Continent is a necessity. The absence of some knowledge of the English language as well as the absence of proper orientation to guide them in their personal problems are matters of utmost importance. We urge you therefore to put into effect through the Department of Labor a program which will warrant the protection of the civil rights of our countrymen.<sup>38</sup>

As a member of the Nationalist Party, Lebrón no doubt would have objected to any strategy that relied upon either linguistic assimilation or polite appeals to the governor they viewed as a colonial stooge.

Still, Lebrón shared *Borinquen's* commitment to a cultural nationalism built around "struggle and sacrifice," and early on, he began participating in the *Gremio*. By the spring of 1951, he and other Nationalist Party members had, according to the FBI, "gained control of the elective offices of the *Gremio* and were attempting to use it to further the interests of the [Party] rather than Puerto Ricans in general."<sup>39</sup> Although the precise dates are not clear, it appears to be the case that the "Miss Puerto Rico in Chicago" competition, in which Souchet participated, was organized by Lebrón during his time in leadership of the *Gremio*. Lebrón did not make a secret of his support for immediate independence, and in any event he was under government surveillance. Thus, forces opposed to the Nationalist Party's agenda quickly became aware of the changing politics of the *Gremio*. These included the Chicago Archdiocese's Catholic Youth Organization (CYO), which had sponsored the *Gremio*, and the group's original founder, Anthony Vega, a loyal member of the PPD who was born in Puerto

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<sup>38</sup> From *Gremio Puertorriqueño de Chicago* to Luis Muñoz Marín, August 26, 1950. Caja 2273, FOdG, AGPR.

<sup>39</sup> FBI, "Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico (NPPR), SJ 100-3, Volume 21," January 8, 1952, p. 8. (FBIF).

Rico but raised from age seven in New York City before moving to Chicago after World War Two.<sup>40</sup> Around the time of his electoral ouster from the *Gremio*, Vega began to work full-time for the Puerto Rican government's local office in Chicago, run through the Department of Labor's Migration Division. Given the animosity of both the local Archdiocese and the PPD to the explicit pro-independence stance of the Nationalist Party, it was predictable that the CYO and Vega opted to forcibly dissolve the *Gremio* rather than allow it to be left in the hands of militants. While the organization itself was thus destroyed, the rapid turn of events inside the *Gremio* demonstrated the favorable opportunities available to Lebrón and his comrades, due in large part to the similarities between their version of cultural nationalism and that espoused by PPD loyalists like Vega.

In the aftermath of the *Gremio* affair, Lebrón and the local PNPR established a new organization, the Puerto Rican Social Center, which proudly declared that it was "not affiliated with the office representing the Government of Puerto Rico in Chicago nor with the CYO."<sup>41</sup> The FBI described the Center as a "front group" for the Nationalist Party.<sup>42</sup> Designed, much like the *Gremio*, on the model of a fraternal or mutual aid organization, the Center was founded in the summer of 1951. In an early nod toward pan-Latina/o alliances, the meeting was held at a Mexican community center on the Near West Side, which in this period was home to the greatest concentration of new migrants from the island.<sup>43</sup> The invitation to the founding meeting offered a glimpse of the PNPR's organizing approach during this period:

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<sup>40</sup> "Migration and Placement: Report of Adrian P. Higgs, June-July, 1951 – Interviews, Observations, Conclusions," Caja 2276, FOdG, AGPR, 12.

<sup>41</sup> FBI, "Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico (NPPR), SJ 100-3, Volume 21," January 8, 1952, p. 9. (FBIF).

<sup>42</sup> FBI, "Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico (NPPR), SJ 100-3, Volume 21," January 8, 1952, p. 9. (FBIF).

<sup>43</sup> For more on the Puerto Rican community on the Near West Side during this era, see Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 57-129.

The time has come to defend our rights through the only effective means: the universal organization of every Puerto Rican with no distinction made by class, politics, religion, or race in this new organization. We cannot overlook the fact that the other races of this metropolis, with whom we live, are united – attainment of this same position is for the good of all.<sup>44</sup>

The invitation, widely distributed in the community as a Spanish-language leaflet, was grounded in a form of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism designed to unify people across traditional dividing lines. It ended with a series of exhortations that contained subtle hints of nationalist militancy: “Let us attain the peak of our aspirations! Let us unite, patriots! United we will win!”<sup>45</sup> Within a few months, according to the FBI’s unnamed informants, the Social Center had held multiple meetings, gained dozens of new members, and sponsored a series of dances that had raised several hundred dollars.<sup>46</sup> While the invitation did not mention the Nationalist Party and was not signed by Lebrón, the same informants claimed the money was used to support Party members imprisoned on the island.

The Social Center founding invitation offered a confused but suggestive take on race in migration. Like the PPD, the Nationalist Party almost never spoke in terms of racial categories, whether on the island or in the diaspora.<sup>47</sup> Both versions of cultural nationalism were indebted to Blanco’s conviction that race relations on the island had avoided the ugly conflicts that characterized the United States. This conclusion, in the words of Jorge Duany,

presupposes the harmonious integration among the three main roots of the island’s population: Amerindian, European, and African. ... The absence of racial prejudice in

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<sup>44</sup> FBI, “Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico (NPPR), SJ 100-3, Volume 21,” January 8, 1952, p. 9. (FBIF). The name of the Special Agent who translated the leaflet is redacted.

<sup>45</sup> FBI, “Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico (NPPR), SJ 100-3, Volume 21,” January 8, 1952, p. 10. (FBIF).

<sup>46</sup> FBI, “Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico (NPPR), SJ 100-3, Volume 21,” January 8, 1952, p. 10. (FBIF).

<sup>47</sup> For more on the PPD’s refusal, see Suárez Findlay, *We Are Left Without a Father Here*

Puerto Rico was supposedly achieved through the acceptance of interracial marriage and the progressive whitening of the local population.<sup>48</sup>

There were significant differences, however. The PNPR, in contrast to the PPD, adopted a particular Hispanophile tendency rooted in a nostalgic view of Spanish rule in the immediately pre-1898 “autonomy” period.<sup>49</sup> This maneuver offered historical justification for the Party’s opposition to US rule on the island, while the official stance of the PPD-led government on the island was the embrace of the three roots mythology, which in practice foregrounded a similar hispanophilia, albeit for fundamentally different reasons. Thus the racial politics (or lack thereof) of the two parties were difficult to distinguish from each other.

But the Social Center invitation included both a predictable repetition of and a striking departure from this standard commitment to the myth of racial democracy. The acknowledgement that Puerto Ricans were themselves a multi-racial group sat awkwardly alongside an aspiration to racial unity that other populations had supposedly already achieved. This apparent contradiction between a multiracial community and one identified in singular racial terms, reflected not only continuing ambiguity in popular discussions of race, but also, and more importantly, the broader contradictions all diasporic Puerto Ricans encountered while navigating the differences in racial taxonomy between the island and the mainland. The Social Center’s commitment to a “universal” organization that makes “no distinction” among the races is consonant with the three roots mythology. In the mainland, however, where the rule of hypodescent tended to divide the population into only two racial categories, the idea of

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<sup>48</sup> Jorge Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 25.

<sup>49</sup> On the transnational political context in which the Nationalist Party’s hispanophilia emerged, see Augusto Espiritu, “American Empire, Hispanicism, and the Nationalist Visions of Albizu, Recto, and Grau,” in *Formations of United States Colonialism* edited by Alyosha Goldstein (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 157-179.

a multiracial ethnicity was hard to conceptualize. The notion that Puerto Ricans were a single “race,” much like Italians prior to World War Two, was more familiar to both the migrants and their new neighbors.<sup>50</sup>

An additional factor may have been at play in this process: the apparently overwhelming phenotypic homogeneity of the Puerto Rican migrants to Chicago. In Chicago, by contrast with New York City, black-identified Puerto Ricans seem to have been a tiny minority within the community. When the Chicago Commission on Human Relations (CCHR) in 1958 examined the condition of Puerto Ricans in Chicago, investigators determined that only one percent of those sampled were “Negro,” although some others “have darker shades of complexion.”<sup>51</sup> This trend may have been influenced by the role family connections played in migration. Castle, Barton had deliberately if imperfectly selected for phenotypic whiteness; as the *Chicago Defender* noted, “white Puerto Ricans were brought north, blacks were shipped south.”<sup>52</sup> Since relatives of those workers were perhaps more likely to move to Chicago rather than New York or elsewhere, a pattern may well have been established from the beginning that influenced the racial formation of the entire community. The apparently small number of undeniably black Puerto Rican migrants must have had a very different experience of racial formation than the majority, but the overall trend seems to have been toward arguably-not-black Puerto Ricans predominating in Chicago, at least through the 1950s.

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<sup>50</sup> On the Italian case, see Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>51</sup> Chicago Commission on Human Relations, *Puerto Rican Americans in Chicago: A Study of a Representative Group of 103 Households of Puerto Rican Migrants on Chicago’s Northwest Side – And Their Adjustment to Big City Living* (Chicago: Mayor’s Committee on New Residents, 1960), 18. Though the study was published in 1960, the research had been conducted two years earlier.

<sup>52</sup> “Puerto Ricans Charge Exploitation in U.S.,” *Chicago Defender*, Nov. 30, 1946, p. 7.



The Puerto Rican Social Center appears to have lost steam fairly quickly, but Lebrón's activities on behalf of cultural nationalism were not exhausted. For instance, he appears to have made multiple speeches on Spanish-language radio stations in Chicago.<sup>53</sup> Over the next several years he also ran a grocery store, *Casa Progreso* (House of Progress) on the near west side.<sup>54</sup> The purpose of the store remains unclear. The FBI believed it either funded the Party's paramilitary activity or provided a way to launder illicit funds, but no clear evidence ever surfaced to support either claim. Lebrón's law degree would presumably have provided him with a better means to generate revenue for the Party's operations, more efficient at least than operating a corner store. Further, In light of his involvement in the beauty pageant, the *Gremio*, and the Puerto Rican Social Center, it seems more likely that the storefront was at least partially a base-building effort that created a public space within which community members could discuss topical issues of the day while gaining exposure to explicitly Nationalist perspectives. Lebrón was also reported by an FBI informant to have "made arrangements to reproduce pictures of Pedro Albizu Campos for sale to Puerto Ricans in the Chicago area as a method of raising funds for the NPPR."<sup>55</sup> Albizu Campos, the President of the Nationalist Party, had spent many years in federal prison on charges of sedition and was widely perceived as both a hero and a living martyr in Nationalist circles.

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<sup>53</sup> Souchet, *Clementina*, 87.

<sup>54</sup> The store is mentioned in at least three sources: "Bare Puerto Rican Terrorism in Chicago: Family Gets Threatening Phone Calls," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 3, 1954, 1; "FBI Seizes 11 Puerto Ricans; Six in Chicago: Plot Against US Laid to Nationalists," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 27, 1954, p. C12; and Souchet, *Clementina*, 76.

<sup>55</sup> FBI, "Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico (NPPR), SJ 100-3, Volume 21," January 8, 1952, p. 9. (FBIF).

## **“Long-Distance Nationalism” in Chicago**

Lebrón and Chicago’s Nationalist Party branch certainly undertook many activities beyond the cultural activities described above. The Party had frequently engaged in armed opposition to US control of the island, most famously in the fall of 1950, when it launched an ill-fated insurrection. This effort involved an assault on the governor’s mansion in San Juan and the establishment of a revolutionary junta that proclaimed an independent republic of Puerto Rico in the small mountain town of Jayuya on October 30. The rebellion was quickly put down, and hundreds of activists, including both Nationalist Party and Communist Party militants, were arrested across the island. While a related attack took place in Washington DC two days later when two Nationalist Party members attempted to assassinate President Harry Truman, no militant actions were undertaken in either New York or Chicago to support the uprising. Nonetheless, Chicago was hardly isolated from these events. Clarence Senior, a prominent figure in the island’s government during most of the 1950s, subsequently claimed that “a group of Nationalists left Chicago several days before trouble broke out and fought in Jayuya!”<sup>56</sup> Senior’s source for this claim was none other than Anthony Vega, who clearly would have had motive to disparage Lebrón and his comrades. Still, the unconfirmed accusation certainly demonstrates the seriousness with which the PPD took the threat posed by Chicago’s Nationalist Party branch, and more broadly the fears of the Puerto Rican government, both on the island and in a place like Chicago, regarding the potential for social unrest emerging from the diaspora.

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<sup>56</sup> Senior to Agrait, October 2, 1951, Caja 2279, FODG, AGPR.

The concern expressed by Senior and Vega was typical of what Benedict Anderson has called “long-distance nationalism.”<sup>57</sup> Anderson’s now-classic formulation of national identity as an imagined community has become so widely referenced as to have become something of a cliché, but in a later essay Anderson attempts to extend his theory to incorporate the persistence and growth of nationalism in diasporic settings. He begins with Lord Acton’s aphorism, “exile is the nursery of nationality,” adding that “exile,” broadly construed, is ubiquitous in the post-1492 history of the western hemisphere, where the twin experiences of European colonization and the trans-Atlantic slave trade began the modern process of mass global migrations so tied to the emergence of national identity.<sup>58</sup> But, he notes, this long history of exile has undergone a profound reversal of course in recent decades due in part to advances in transportation technology: “Hence migration has moved, not as in earlier centuries, outwards to peripheries in the New World or Antipodes, but inward towards the metropolitan cores.”<sup>59</sup>

This shift was exemplified by the post-World War Two experience of Puerto Rico. In 1955, Fernando Sierra Berdecía, the island’s Secretary of Labor, acknowledged that “what really expedited the culmination of Puerto Rican emigration after 1945 was the conversion of airplanes used in the war into the passenger traffic, acquired by regular airlines.”<sup>60</sup> Since Puerto Ricans arrived in the mainland as US citizens, those with financial means could simply return to the island at any point they chose, a not-uncommon phenomenon

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<sup>57</sup> Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (New York: Verso, 1998), 59

<sup>58</sup> Anderson, *Spectre of Comparisons*, 59.

<sup>59</sup> Anderson, *Spectre of Comparisons*, 65.

<sup>60</sup> Fernando Sierra Berdecía, “Puerto Rican Emigration: Reality and Public Policy,” Conference paper given December 10, 1955. Caja 1207, FODG, AGPR.

subsequently labeled the “*vaivén*” (literally, “coming and going”).<sup>61</sup> Such circular migration was especially likely to occur when new migrants failed to establish themselves promptly in jobs, homes, and communities that were demonstrably superior to those available on the island. Of course, problems with employment, housing and discrimination in Chicago or New York could also generate agitation against the government and the PPD for facilitating their departure in the first place, as had happened briefly during the Michigan crisis of 1950.

Anderson suggests that the diasporic setting is especially amenable to “uncompromising,” “fanatical,” and “extremist” versions of nationalism, largely because distance from the homeland makes them “radically unaccountable” to the populations in the homeland.<sup>62</sup> His examples, grounded in the tail end of the twentieth century are drawn from neocolonial rather than explicitly colonial contexts – Tamils in Canada and Britain actively supporting armed struggle against the Sri Lankan government, for instance. The case of the postwar Puerto Rican diaspora is undeniably rather different. Most centrally, birthright citizenship and the *vaivén* ensured that at least some Nationalist Party members could and did freely travel back and forth. This produced a close working relationship that represented a very specific form of accountability, in which the Chicago branch of the PNPR was for the most part operating under the direction of the island-based Party leadership.

Nonetheless, Anderson’s theory does help illuminate some key aspects of the role of nationalism in the Puerto Rican diaspora. For instance, the Nationalist Party, known from the 1930s for *retraimiento* and for the militancy of its paramilitary units (the “Cadets of the Republic”) had substantially more success in Chicago than did the Puerto Rican Independence

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<sup>61</sup> For more on the *vaivén*, see Duany, *Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*, 32-35.

<sup>62</sup> Anderson, *Spectre of Comparisons*, 73, 74.

Party (PIP), despite the latter's much larger size on the island. The PIP was much more moderate than the Nationalist Party, and yet an FBI informant noted in 1952 that "there were very few Independentists [PIP members] in the United States."<sup>63</sup> More centrally, Anderson describes "a kind of unstable negativity" in which diasporic populations experience a heightened awareness of their national identity through the process of attempted or enforced linguistic (if not social) assimilation:

Nothing, therefore, is less surprising than that the nationalist movements which transformed the map of Europe by 1919 were so often led by young bilinguals, a pattern to be followed after 1919 in Asia and Africa. How could a boy who learned Czech from his mother and German from his schooling unlearn a Czech that had left no contaminating traces on his German-speaking classmates? How could he not see his Czech as though in exile, through the inverted telescope of his German?<sup>64</sup>

Substitute Spanish for Czech and English for German, and the experience of Puerto Rican youth suddenly being taught in English in the Chicago Public Schools appear quite similar. This sort of diasporic nationalism produced in part by negative experiences with the educational system became particularly important in Puerto Rican Chicago in the following decades.

Anderson's analysis suggests the possibility that Lebrón's success in building local support for the Nationalist Party was at least partly a result of the PPD's own mass-scale promotion of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism in the diaspora. "Not least as a result of the ethnicization of political life in the wealthy, postindustrial states," Anderson argues, "what one can call long-distance nationalism is visibly emerging."<sup>65</sup> Thus, the Puerto Rican government's simultaneous promotion of both mass emigration and a cultural politics built around Puerto Rican national identity created an opening that Lebrón and his comrades attempted to exploit.

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<sup>63</sup> FBI, "Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico (NPPR), SJ 100-3, Volume 22," May 1, 1952, p. 14. (FBIF).

<sup>64</sup> Anderson, *Spectre of Comparisons*, 65.

<sup>65</sup> Anderson, *Spectre of Comparisons*, 73.

Before they could fully accomplish this task, however, he and Souchet would cross paths yet again, generating a crisis that would fundamentally reshape the future of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism in Chicago.

### **The Crisis of 1954: “As a Wife, a Mother, and a Good Citizen of this Nation”**

Some time after the “Miss Puerto Rico in Chicago” contest, Souchet fell in love with Angel Luís Medina, a young man she had met at a movie theater (another escape from her standard home confinement). After some significant negotiations with family in Chicago and on the island, they were married. At first, the marriage was incredibly liberating for Souchet, as it granted her relief from the stifling confines of her uncles’ custodianship. Medina was “the perfect man that every woman wants,” because he was “good looking, caring, and noble.” But more importantly, the shackles of her family had been broken: “Finally I was free!”<sup>66</sup> She subsequently gave birth to a son, and hoped to settle into a traditional family life. Coincidentally, around the same time that Souchet gave birth, Medina joined the Nationalist Party’s local branch. Lebrón visited her in the hospital and Party members sent gifts and cards after.

Souchet remained happy with her dual identity, and was deeply disturbed by the rhetoric of *retraimiento* and the reckless ambition to which she and her husband were now being exposed, including discussions about an assassination attempt targeting President Dwight Eisenhower.<sup>67</sup> But her husband was more receptive, which gave rise to an unexpected contradiction. Lebrón and the rest of the branch clearly treated both spouses as a pair, and at

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<sup>66</sup> Souchet, *Clementina*, 67.

<sup>67</sup> Souchet, *Clementina*, 75, 79.

least initially both attended the same meetings. While the Party embraced a level of gender equality that on some level exceeded Souchet's own traditionally gendered aspirations to live in a nuclear family – "I wanted the group to exclude my husband and leave us free to continue the marriage we had only just begun" – she claimed that the branch members nonetheless mocked her for holding opinions that differed from those embraced by her husband. Subsequently, Souchet pivoted from one traditional gender role (the weaker sex in need of protection) to another (the morally pure protector of her man) and decided to attempt to save her husband from his own naïve and potentially violent actions. From her perspective, questions of gender and nation came together in her decision, "as a wife, a mother, and a good citizen of this nation," to talk with Medina and try to convince him to leave the Party.<sup>68</sup>

Not only did Medina not quit, he began to take on increasingly central roles in the local branch, becoming "sergeant at arms in October [1953] and secretary-general in November."<sup>69</sup> Having failed repeatedly to convince him, Souchet then made a life-changing decision: she contacted the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Giving up hope of protecting her husband, she at the very least wished to protect the United States. By this point, as we have seen, the FBI was already tracking the Party's activity in Chicago, and its agents were quite eager to use Souchet's access to the local branch in order to gain more information. Thus, on orders from her FBI handlers, Souchet changed course and resumed her own engagement with the branch. Perhaps the male chauvinism of the branch helped ensure that no one raised any eyebrows at her sudden reversal. From then forward, Souchet met regularly with a pair of FBI agents,

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<sup>68</sup> Souchet, *Clementina*, 73.

<sup>69</sup> "FBI Seizes 11 Puerto Ricans; Six in Chicago: Plot Against US Laid to Nationalists," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 27, 1954, p. C12.

reported on Party branch meetings, and in the words of an FBI memo, “offered to provide the interviewing agent with all the information now in her possession, and to develop additional information in the future.”<sup>70</sup>

Less than a year after Souchet began informing to the FBI, her insights into the Party’s local operations in Chicago suddenly became much more valuable. On March 1, 1954, Lolita Lebrón and three Puerto Rican men travelled from New York City to Washington, DC and entered the gallery of the House of Representatives in the US Capitol Building in Washington DC armed with handguns. They opened fire, injuring five congressmen.<sup>71</sup> The attack on the Capitol predictably produced another round of arrests on the island, but this time mainland communities were also targeted. Given that Lolita and Gonzalo Lebrón were siblings, Chicago garnered specific attention. The information the FBI had received from Souchet aided in the arrest of multiple Party members during a coordinated series of raids, carried out in the midst of a major snowstorm early on the morning of March 4. Souchet and Medina’s house was among those raided. In Souchet’s recollection,

Luís, trembling with fear, looked around nervously, unable to speak. I waited for Luís, who had boasted that he was brave and willing, he said, to kill or die for his country, expecting him to grab his pistol and brandish it at the agents. But he didn’t do it, and I think he didn’t even remember that he had weapons close to hand with which he could confront these huge lawmen. He knew what would have happened to him if he had played the brave one.<sup>72</sup>

While Souchet opposed the Nationalist Party’s militancy, she was unable to hide her disappointment at her husband’s failure to live up to his masculine boasting. The raid on their

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<sup>70</sup> “Re: Clementina Souchet Medina,” reprinted in Souchet, *Clementina*, 86.

<sup>71</sup> Clayton Knowless, “Five Congressmen Shot in House by Three Puerto Rican Nationalists,” *New York Times*, March 2, 1954, 1.

<sup>72</sup> Souchet, *Clementina*, 80-81.



home resulted in the confiscation of “a quantity of Spanish literature,” as well as “a fully loaded revolver of foreign make.”<sup>73</sup> Medina and the others were arrested by local police, but their interrogators included FBI agents and even an investigator from the legislative branch of the federal government, representing the House Un-American Activities Committee.

Subsequent raids over the next several days led to arrests of many people who had no real connection to the Nationalist Party, sowing fear throughout the city’s Puerto Rican community. By March 9, things had gotten bad enough that even Vega, who on some level must have been pleased to see the local branch of the PNP finally facing the consequences of its subversion, spoke out publicly in his role as head of the local Migration Division office against “mass arrests of Spanish-speaking citizens.”<sup>74</sup> In another early nod toward pan-Latina/o alliances, Vega’s position was supported by a prominent figure in the local Mexican community as well. While the Police Commissioner rejected the criticism, insisting that the process was “orderly” and narrowly focused on the Nationalist Party, the pace of arrests did slow dramatically after Vega’s complaint.

Meanwhile, Gonzalo Lebrón managed to evade the police for two weeks before finally turning himself in on March 15. During this period, he agreed to an interview with a reporter for the *Chicago Sun Times*, conducted in a car that was being driven around the west side of Chicago by another Party member as part of Lebrón’s effort to avoid capture.<sup>75</sup> He professed ignorance of the specifics of the Capitol attack, asserting that he had not seen his sister in over a year, but he also vocally defended the overall project of the Nationalist Party and castigated

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<sup>73</sup> “8 More Seized in Roundup of Puerto Ricans: Police Report Little of Value Learned,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 5, 1954, p. 9.

<sup>74</sup> “Protest ‘Mass Arrest’ of Puerto Ricans,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 10, 1954, p. 3.

<sup>75</sup> Madelon Golden, “Sun Times Finds Girl Terrorist’s Brother,” *Chicago Sun Times*, March 3, 1954, p. 3.

Muñoz Marín as a “traitor.”<sup>76</sup> Much like the DIVEDCO would attempt the following year, Lebrón offered a comparison of Puerto Rican and US history. “We want to be free citizens,” he maintained, “like Patrick Henry, Nathan Hale, and George Washington. I have read a lot of US history.”<sup>77</sup> Where *Emigración* used a critical look at the Civil War and its aftermath as a way to contrast Puerto Rican cultural nationalism with the racism of the United States, Lebrón drew on the positive legacy of the founding fathers as a parallel to justify the masculine pro-independence militancy of the Nationalist Party. Any concern for historical or present-day racial inequity was conspicuously absent from Lebrón’s brief take on US history. Ironically, then, the PPD, as Puerto Rican allies of the United States, expressed a substantially more critical take on the history of the island’s colonial overlord than did its most militant opponents, at least in this instance.

In late May, a federal grand jury in New York indicted Lebrón, Medina, and four other Chicago-based Puerto Ricans along with nine New Yorkers, all charged with seditious conspiracy for supposedly aiding the Capitol shooters. With this move, the federal government had all but decapitated the Chicago branch of the Nationalist Party, sending almost the entire leadership core off to be held in jail in New York City pending their trial that fall. Souchet’s primary aim, stopping the Party’s local branch from committing any further acts of violence, had finally been achieved. Over the summer, Souchet moved to New York with her son and visited Medina daily. Even though he apparently never learned that she had been a crucial part of the investigation against him, her opinions as expressed in their conversations clearly had an impact on his thinking. Within a month of his arrest he had abandoned Nationalist politics and

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<sup>76</sup> Golden, “Sun Times Finds Girl Terrorist’s Brother.”

<sup>77</sup> Golden, “Sun Times Finds Girl Terrorist’s Brother.”

agreed to plead guilty and testify against his former comrades in exchange for a lighter sentence.

When the trial began in September, however, something unexpected happened: Medina was not the only person to cooperate with the government. Three others pled guilty and agreed to testify on behalf of the government; perhaps most shocking, Gonzalo Lebrón Sotomayor was one of them.<sup>78</sup> Apart from the possibility of indirect influence by Souchet via Medina, it is unclear what might have prompted this shift. While it is certainly possible that the men discussed the issues and made a decision collectively, Souchet maintained later that, after Medina announced his guilty plea, “we never again saw the other Nationalists or their wives.”<sup>79</sup> While Medina testified about the branch’s purchase of and training with firearms, Lebrón’s testimony focused on the connections among Party branches in Chicago, New York, and San Juan. He detailed the plot against Eisenhower, which apparently morphed into the more attainable project of attacking Congress, and claimed that when Lolita visited Chicago a few weeks before the attack he tried to dissuade her from participating in the impending operation. (This testimony clearly contradicted his earlier claim to the *Sun Times* that the two had not seen each other in over a year.) Lebrón’s cooperation with the government is difficult to explain, considering that his own sister was in charge of the attack, had already been sentenced to one lengthy term of imprisonment prior to this broader conspiracy trial, and as one of the defendants, was present in the courtroom during his testimony. Whether he made a simple self-interested calculation, or had a sincere change of political position in light of new

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<sup>78</sup> “Puerto Rican Trial Begins; 4 Plead Guilty; Three Are Chicagoans; 13 Deny Charges,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 8, 1954, p. 21.

<sup>79</sup> Souchet, *Clementina*, 83.

circumstances, Lebrón's testimony proved compelling, and his sister and her co-defendants were quickly convicted.

In the aftermath, the Chicago branch of the Nationalist Party shouldered on for at least another year, but the remaining members were clearly demoralized and the branch structure was in disarray. Lebrón testified that he had destroyed all internal records of the branch when he went into hiding in early March.<sup>80</sup> By the spring of 1955, FBI informants (no longer including Souchet, who by then was residing with Medina in upstate New York under a witness relocation program) described Lebrón's replacement as head of the local branch as "either lacking interest in promoting [Party] activity or failing to possess necessary leadership qualifications. The Chicago [Party] Board is inactive. Three active members are currently reported in the Chicago [Party] Board. No recruiting is occurring or contemplated."<sup>81</sup> The problem was not limited to Chicago, as the Nationalist Party was never able to recover from the prosecutions and generalized repression of 1954, neither on the island nor in the diaspora. The impact in Chicago, however, was even more intense than elsewhere, given the willingness of Gonzalo Lebrón Sotomayor, Angel Luís Medina, and others to testify against their former comrades. It would take more than a decade, and the unprecedented upheaval of the 1966 Division Street Riots, before any organized movement supporting the independence of Puerto Rico would re-emerge in the Windy City.

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<sup>80</sup> "Testifies Against Terrorist Party," *New York Herald Tribune*, September 15, 1954, p. 15.

<sup>81</sup> FBI, "Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico (NPPR), SJ 100-3, Volume 54," June 3, 1955, p. 27. (FBIF).

## Conclusion

Throughout the decade prior to the Capitol shooting, the Nationalist Party and the PPD disagreed utterly, with the former modeling *retramiento* and calling for immediate independence, and the latter embracing constitutional reforms and legislative efforts in Washington, DC and on the island and supporting the *muñocista* formulation of a “freely associated state,” or commonwealth. The PPD-endorsed passage of the *Ley de la Mordaza* precisely targeted the Nationalist Party, and, in turn, the PNPR-led uprising of 1950 targeted Muñoz Marín and other symbols of the PPD-backed Commonwealth system. The feud between the two parties bled over into the diaspora, manifesting in dramatic fashion during the attack on President Truman, and the 1954 Capitol shooting, but also via hundreds of lower-stakes disputes such as the struggle for control of the *Gremio*.

None of this, however, could fully obscure an uncomfortable reality: the cultural nationalist visions advanced by the two competitor organizations were strikingly similar. Both promoted an idealized vision of Puerto Rican identity, based around slightly different hispanophilic versions of the myth of racial democracy that pervaded the island’s mid-century intellectual culture. Blanco’s argument in this regard, that prejudice did not exist on the island because there were no cultural differences between white and black Puerto Ricans, validated both the Nationalists’ Hispanophilia and the PPD’s three roots mythology. In Blanco’s view, “our population of color is completely Hispanicized culturally and African contributions are very rare in our environment.”<sup>82</sup> Accepting this position allowed Lebrón Sotomayor to organize Puerto Ricans in Chicago while completely ignoring not only the substantial numbers of Afro-

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<sup>82</sup> Blanco, *El Prejuicio Racial en Puerto Rico*, 132.

Puerto Ricans arriving in New York and elsewhere (including Chicago) but also the simultaneous migration of huge numbers of African Americans from the deep south, even though the two migratory groups often lived in overlapping or adjacent neighborhoods in Chicago and further shared an experience of birthright citizenship that distinguished them from almost all prior immigrant groups. Both the Nationalists and the PPD argued that a sense of national identity and cultural pride was indispensable in the construction of Puerto Rico's future success, and yet both were effectively indifferent to the question of racial discrimination, whether on the island or the mainland.

The demise of the Nationalist Party's Chicago branch was largely the result of political repression administered by the Federal and local governments, but it was also in part a function of the Party's inability to sway a majority of the city's Puerto Ricans away from their support for the dual identity that motivated Souchet and thousands of other migrants. In the void left by the Party's disappearance, the PPD's efforts to fully separate cultural nationalism from demands for political independence were finally successful. Puerto Ricans in Chicago retained the full measure of national pride that the Nationalist Party had encouraged, but as the 1950s progressed, internal forces in Chicago's Puerto Rican community embraced a new variant on the *muñocista* formula of cultural nationalism without sovereignty. It is to this variation, aptly termed "liberal Americanization," to which we turn next.

## Chapter Two: “A Means Rather than an End”: The Rise and Fall of Liberal Americanization, 1955-1965

### Introduction: A Puerto Rican Gala

Two prominent Puerto Rican community organizers in Chicago sent a letter to Otto Kerner, the Democratic governor of Illinois, in the fall of 1962, inviting him to attend a gala event at the exclusive Palmer House Hotel in the loop. Reinaldo Rey and Israel Noboa were the President and Executive Director, respectively, of the Westside Spanish Civic Committee (WSSC), and they hoped that Kerner would attend “the most important cultural program of the year of our organization” on October 12.<sup>1</sup> This date was familiar throughout the United States as Columbus Day, but among Puerto Ricans and others in and from various parts of Latin America it was commonly known as *Día de la Raza*. One thousand people were expected to attend the banquet, Rey and Noboa told the governor, and those present would experience “a traditional fiesta in which the discovery of the New World is commemorated by Latin Americans.”<sup>2</sup> Luis A. Ferré, a successful businessman and politician from San Juan, flew in as the guest of honor and keynote speaker.<sup>3</sup>

The event as a whole was in many ways typical of a newly hegemonic self-understanding among Puerto Ricans in Chicago that bound them at least as much to the mainstream of urban American society and politics as to the island itself, while retaining much of the national pride that had loomed large during the struggles of the prior decade. The city’s Puerto Rican

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<sup>1</sup> Reinaldo Rey and Israel Noboa to Otto Kerner, September 12, 1962. Chicago Action Project Records (CAP), Box 100, Folder 3, Chicago History Museum (CHM).

<sup>2</sup> Rey and Noboa to Kerner, September 12, 1962.

<sup>3</sup> Handbill for “Latin American Festival – Día de la Raza,” October 12, 1962. CAP, Box 100, Folder 3, CHM.

community was by this point larger, more established, and more Chicago-focused than ever before. Almost a decade removed from the heyday of the Nationalist Party's local branch, hardly a hint of the Party's island-centered radicalism remained in public consciousness. Long-time Governor Luis Muñoz Marín's formula of cultural nationalism without sovereignty was still very much a palpable influence, but the actual power of his government and its representatives in Chicago was weakening noticeably. The planning committee's choice of Ferré, by then one of the most well-known supporters of making Puerto Rico the fifty-first state, over any of the PPD's leading lights was notable in this regard; just as Ferré sought integration for the island on equal terms within the United States, so did many Puerto Ricans in Chicago seek "acceptance and integration with all other groups in the community," in the words of the WSCC.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the decision to target Kerner as a potential attendee spoke to the local and state-wide political ambitions of the WSCC and similar groups, although it is unclear whether or not the Governor actually attended the event.

Community groups like the WSCC and religiously-grounded organizations like the Catholic Church-sponsored *Caballeros de San Juan*, among many others during the late 1950s and early 1960s, had incorporated the lessons of earlier conflicts and began to promote a two-pronged strategy for the advancement of the community, one that wedded the promotion of Puerto Rican culture to a broadly assimilationist attitude. Kerner's invitation, for instance, noted that attendees would be treated both to "an informal conversation about 'Puerto Rican Adjustment in the Chicago Area'" and to "folklorical numbers from Latin American countries."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> West Side Spanish Civic Committee, *A Summary Report and Proposal for Expansion, Submitted to the Illinois Federation of Women's Clubs*, May 9, 1962. Box 100, Folder 3, CAP, CHM.

<sup>5</sup> Rey and Noboa to Kerner, September 12, 1962.



In essence, many of Chicago's leading Puerto Ricans hoped to harness the cultural nationalism that had been fostered by both the PPD and the Nationalist Party in the early 1950s, and use it to incorporate the continuing waves of new arrivals from the island into the city's diverse ethnic mixture.

Ironically, while ethnic particularity was deemed productive, continuing ties to the island-based government were becoming less and less prized. This new generation deemed it far more advantageous for the community to collaborate with local church and community groups. From this perspective, cultural nationalism was a means, but definitely not an end. A 1959 WSCC internal document expressed its long term organizational goal in precisely these terms: "To help advance its peoples [Puerto Ricans] to a point where [our] function would become purely cultural, as has occurred in the case of other ethnical groups in the city."<sup>6</sup> In the context of postwar Chicago, the phrase "other ethnical groups" clearly referred to the Irish, Italian, and other white ethnic communities that had achieved substantial representation in the local political power structure.

The 1962 *Dia de la Raza* event was thus exemplary of what the historian James Henry Powell has labeled "liberal Americanization." This approach, which first gained popularity during the interwar period, "encouraged a period of cultural diversity and stressed the value of such a period for the immigrant and for American life," even as it "looked to the eventual cultural unity or more or less complete assimilation as the end of the Americanization process."<sup>7</sup> Puerto Ricans in Chicago and elsewhere embraced this framework in the decade

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<sup>6</sup> Westside Spanish Civic Committee, "Proposed Outline of Action," March 6, 1959. Box 100, folder 3, CAP, CHM.

<sup>7</sup> James Henry Powell, "The Concept of Cultural Pluralism in American Social Thought, 1915-1965" (PhD Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1971), 79. Although Powell does not acknowledge it, the term "liberal

after the 1954 Capitol attack. The WSCC and other like-minded groups used events like the Palmer House gala to “help the Spanish speaking people, as a minority group, to integrate in the community,” evincing a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between cultural nationalism as a means and assimilation as the ultimate end goal.<sup>8</sup>

Seen from this perspective, the lasting legacy in Puerto Rican Chicago of the struggles of the early 1950s was less the political victory of the PPD and its local allies over the local branch of NPPR, and more the near-universal acceptance within the local community of a dual identity as Puerto Ricans and Americans. Like Clementina Souchet before them, most Puerto Ricans in Chicago in the late 1950s and early 1960s embraced a world in which cultural pride in their Puerto Rican heritage was entirely compatible with full United States citizenship. And as with *muñocismo*, this project was widely understood to be the responsibility of what Eileen J. Suárez Findlay labels “modern, deracialized fathers.”<sup>9</sup> This chapter tracks the ascendance of the ideology of liberal Americanization within Chicago’s Puerto Rican community over the decade between 1955 and 1965, examining both its faith-based and secular variations. After describing the basic contours of the framework as articulated originally by Powell, I argue that groups like the *Caballeros* and the WSCC, among others, were initially quite successful at organizing within the Puerto Rican community because they accurately reflected and channeled the aspirations of most migrants. Nonetheless, while many within the Puerto Rican community supported the model, their experiences dealing with powerful whites, especially police, indicated that not everyone embraced it. By the 1960s, it became increasingly difficult for Puerto Rican advocates

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Americanization” appears to originate with John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988 [1955]), 250-254.

<sup>8</sup> “What You Should Know About the Westside Spanish Civic Committee,” no date, but c. 1962. Box 100, Folder 3 (CAP, CHM).

<sup>9</sup> Suárez Findlay, *We Are Left Without a Father Here*, 26.

of liberal Americanization to explain the worsening of housing and employment prospects, and particularly the persistence of discrimination and harassment at the hands of police. If, following Powell, pride in Puerto Rican culture was “a means rather than an end,” then the apparent foreclosure of the *end* by the middle part of that decade left the community with no clear outcome for what had been previously understood to be the *means*.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the logic of liberal Americanization had precluded the development of meaningful ties to other communities facing similar problems, including African Americans and Mexican Americans. Left without viable options, the Puerto Rican community in Chicago was primed for a fundamental shift in trajectory. The immediate catalyst for this shift, as we shall see in Chapter Three, was the Division Street Riots.

### **Liberal Americanization, at home in Chicago**

Powell, whose never-published dissertation was produced at the University of Notre Dame in 1971, traces the concept of liberal Americanization to the earlier discourse on cultural pluralism, as originally exemplified by the philosopher Horace Kallen. Kallen had written a famous two-part essay in *The Nation* magazine in 1915 with the title “Democracy versus the Melting Pot.” Kallen’s core argument, advanced at the moment when the Progressive-era wave of immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe butted up against the outbreak of World War One, was that the United States ought to be understood as “a democracy of nationalities, cooperating voluntarily and autonomously in the enterprise of self-realization through the

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<sup>10</sup> Powell, “Concept of Cultural Pluralism,” 79.

perfection of men according to their kind.”<sup>11</sup> The slow but largely completed incorporation of Irish immigrants and their descendants into the mainstream of American life served as a template based on the construction of a “positive nationalism of the loving care and development of the cultural values of the Celtic spirit.”<sup>12</sup> For Kallen, then, cultural pride in an essentialized national identity deserved center stage in the process of community development.

Though he conspicuously omitted any reference to African Americans or to immigrants from Asia, Kallen’s framework represented a real challenge to more powerful and long-standing assimilationist models for dealing with European immigrants, which had origins dating back as far as the eighteenth century. These were frequently identified with the metaphor of the melting pot, which Kallen explicitly rejected in his title.<sup>13</sup> Powell maintains that Kallen’s original conception was largely abandoned, or more precisely repurposed, by other writers after the passage of the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 shut off the flow of new arrivals from Europe. This context, he argues, “shaped or (perhaps more accurately) limited” “what little discussion there was of cultural pluralism” to “a liberal approach to the integration of the immigrant.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Horace Kallen, “Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot: A Study of American Nationality, Part Two.” *The Nation*, Vol. 100, No. 2591, February 25, 1915, p. 220. According to Philip Gleason (not coincidentally the advisor to Powell’s dissertation), Kallen’s original piece in *The Nation* did not include the phrase “cultural pluralism;” rather, he notes, “this essay was reprinted with very minor changes in 1924, at which time Kallen gave the name ‘cultural pluralism’ to his position.” Philip Gleason, *Speaking of Diversity: Language and Ethnicity in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 51.

<sup>12</sup> Kallen, “Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot: A Study of American Nationality, Part Two,” 218.

<sup>13</sup> Gleason, *Speaking of Diversity*, 5-6, offers a brief gloss on the pre-20<sup>th</sup> century intellectual history of the antecedents of “melting pot” rhetoric. He notes the entry of the phrase itself into US vernacular with the premiere of Israel Zangwill’s play *The Melting-Pot* in 1908.

<sup>14</sup> Powell, “Concept of Cultural Pluralism,” 79.

Powell uses the phrase “liberal Americanization” to label this set of novel re-interpretations of Kallen’s pluralist framework. Their defining characteristic was the rejection of traditional models of assimilation and the melting pot, on the argument that such approaches undermined full integration by generating frustration among both immigrants and the communities that received them. Proponents of liberal Americanization

believed that attempts to eliminate quickly the traditions and values of ethnic minorities, in addition to causing undue personal hardship, tended to engender a resistance to Americanization which impeded the assimilation process. Therefore, the most desirable approach to assimilation, in terms of both the welfare of the immigrant and the efficiency of the process, was to welcome the creation and development of ethnic cultures in this country. By doing so, the individual immigrant would have a secure base from which to learn about and participate in American life, and hopefully there would be a minimum of resistance to the forces which operated naturally to promote assimilation.<sup>15</sup>

This approach represented one way to resolve the contradiction between the melting-pot model (whose ultimate aim of integration was retained even as its mechanism was rejected) and cultural pluralism (whose stated goals were abandoned even as its method of promoting ethnic particularity was incorporated).

Chicago held a special place in the development of the liberal Americanization framework. Powell lists Robert E. Park, Horace J. Bridges, Ernest T. Hiller, and Lawrence Guy Brown, among others, as the framework’s key theorists. Park and Bridges both lived in the city for decades; Park taught at the University of Chicago for almost twenty years, while Bridges was head of the Chicago Ethical Society, which ran a settlement house on the near south side.<sup>16</sup> Hiller and Brown both received PhDs at the University during Park’s tenure, and Brown’s

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<sup>15</sup> Powell, “Concept of Cultural Pluralism,” 86.

<sup>16</sup> Barbara Ballis Lal, *The Romance of Culture in an Urban Civilization: Robert E. Park on Race and Ethnic Relations in Cities* (New York: Routledge, 1990); “Dr. H. J. Bridges Dies; Headed Ethical Group,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 9, 1955, p. B15.

dissertation specifically examined the services settlement houses offered new immigrants in Chicago.<sup>17</sup> As Powell notes, however, Chicago's role in the development of ideas about liberal Americanization was marked not only by academic ties but also by the significant influence of Jane Addams and other settlement house workers. Addams and her colleagues, in Powell's words, "had been aware of the hardship and personal tragedy which a too rapid Americanization often worked on the immigrant. Therefore they had sought to temper the harshness with which the process operated by encouraging a sense of pride in their heritages among the immigrants themselves."<sup>18</sup> Chicago was thus especially well-acquainted with and well-suited to the liberal Americanization model. Apparent success among immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe during the interwar period encouraged subsequent attempts to replicate the model after World War Two with Puerto Ricans.

Liberal Americanization (not to mention Powell's interpretation of it) falls squarely within a set of general commitments that Michael Omi and Howard Winant have labeled the "ethnicity paradigm." Adherents of this approach, committed to moving beyond older biologically-framed ideas about race, began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to substitute "ethnicity" for "race" in describing the differences among population groups migrating to the United States. In their words:

These assumptions are as much political as they are theoretical. They neglect both the institutional and ideological nature of race in America, and the systematic entrenchment of racial dynamics in such spheres as education, art, social policy, law, religion, and science. They focus attention on race as an irrational construct, a product of individual 'attitudes and prejudices' rather than a social structure deeply rooted, not only in ideas and beliefs, but also in institutions, fundamental patterns of inequality, social

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<sup>17</sup> E. T. Hiller, *The Strike: A Study in Collective Action* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928); Lawrence Guy Brown, "A Sociological Study of City Missions in Chicago" (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1928).

<sup>18</sup> Powell, "Concept of Cultural Pluralism," 80.

geography, and the exercise of political power. Such assumptions make it impossible to grasp the specificity of racism and racial conflict in the United States. They lead the analyst toward evolutionary models that optimistically predict the gradual absorption of racially identified groups into the (implicitly white) mainstream of American political, economic, and cultural life.<sup>19</sup>

Puerto Ricans in Chicago, through their embrace of liberal Americanization, became something of a limit case testing the validity of the ethnicity paradigm. As a result, while Powell's work has not been widely discussed in contemporary academic writing on immigration and ethnicity, it nonetheless resonates with much of the scholarship on the growth of Chicago's Puerto Rican community during the 1950s and 1960s. Felix Padilla, for instance, maintains that the *Caballeros* "combined some of the basic tenets of the assimilation and cultural pluralism theories often used by sociologists to discuss group adaptation and relations in American society."<sup>20</sup> Lilia Fernandez extends the argument to include the broader terrain of the ethnicity paradigm when she observes that the Catholic Church "approached Puerto Ricans similarly to European immigrants [...] in assuming that by assimilating and Americanizing, the newcomers would be accepted by American society and no longer encounter prejudice and discrimination."<sup>21</sup> While she acknowledges that the *Caballeros* were founded and led by Puerto Rican migrants, Fernandez tends to assign responsibility for the politics of liberal Americanization to the white-dominated Archdiocesan leadership. In practice, however, as we shall see, the framework was embraced much more broadly within the community itself. Puerto Ricans in Chicago, both groups of migrants themselves and the local representatives of

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<sup>19</sup> Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 129.

<sup>21</sup> Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 76.

the island-based government, actively utilized the discourse of liberal Americanization to promote their various ambitions for the growing community.

### **The Puerto Rican Government's Early Embrace of Liberal Americanization**

From early in the 1950s, the government of Puerto Rico under Muñoz Marín recognized the potential value of liberal Americanization in the mainland as a companion to the PPD's brand of cultural nationalism without sovereignty. The DIVEDCO, for instance, sought to highlight the connection as it pertained to outmigration from the island. The literacy textbook *Emigración* attempted to ease the transition of those who chose to move to the mainland by pre-conditioning potential migrants to the methodology of liberal Americanization. One of its many pieces of advice/warning read: "We can also keep many of our good customs while there. But we should do so without disrupting the way of life of the community in which we establish ourselves."<sup>22</sup> Unspoken was the hope of the island's government that those who migrated to the mainland would eventually come to accept and finally adopt the "way of life" of their new environs as part of the one-way migratory process, while still maintaining "good customs" that were identifiably Puerto Rican

While the DIVEDCO was focused first and foremost not on migration but on promoting *muñocismo* on the island, the government of Puerto Rico clearly had not forgotten the experiences of the many thousands who had moved to the mainland. In 1947, it established the Bureau of Employment and Migration, later known as the Migration Division of the Department of Labor, which provided direct assistance on the ground to new migrants via

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<sup>22</sup> *Emigración* (San Juan: DIVEDCO, 1955), 33.



offices in New York and Chicago. Especially after 1950, the Migration Division took on the task of supporting island-born migrants and encouraging them to engage in the process of liberal Americanization for which the DIVEDCO had attempted to prepare them prior to their departure from the island. Fernando Sierra Berdecía claimed the Migration Division set “a precedent in the history of immigration in the United States and possibly in the history of immigration in the whole world. I know not of a similar case,” he maintained, where a “sending” government serviced its own emigrants in their new destination.<sup>23</sup> As an investment designed to inoculate against potential negative outcomes from Operation Bootstrap, the Puerto Rican government under Muñoz Marín found the costs of operating the Migration Division in the mainland to be good money well spent. One important way to save on the associated costs, however, was to develop locally-based groups of Puerto Ricans who could, eventually, substantially replace the work of the Division itself.

Toward this end, the single biggest project of the Migration Division was the work of encouraging newly arrived Puerto Rican workers and their families down the road of liberal Americanization. This involved practical tasks, the bread and butter of the Division: helping unemployed migrants secure jobs, and helping those with jobs resolve other issues, ranging from healthcare to housing.<sup>24</sup> While such services were clearly meant to help migrants establish themselves on solid footing in their new home, the true impact on quality of life for those arriving from Puerto Rico was limited at best. As Lilia Fernandez points out, “much like the government of Mexico and its *bracero* contracts, however, the Puerto Rican government

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<sup>23</sup> Sierra Berdecía, “Puerto Rican Emigration,” 18.

<sup>24</sup> “Migration and Placement: Report of Adrian P. Higgs, June-July, 1951 – Interviews, Observations, Conclusions,” Caja 2276, FOdG, AGPR, 7-8, 12.

could not or did not effectively protect its workers against abuses, low wages, and poor working conditions.”<sup>25</sup> This fact made the work of local groups like the WSCC and the *Caballeros* all the more important, as such groups were able to call upon local sources of power rather than the distant presence of the island-based government.

On the flip side, whether or not the migrants themselves were assisted in truly meaningful ways, the attitudes of the neighbors of the new migrants also needed to be massaged. As Gina Pérez points out, “manufacturing and disseminating a positive public image of Puerto Rican migrants became one of the Migration Division’s most important functions.”<sup>26</sup> This involved convincing skeptical (and, especially, white) neighbors in a place like Chicago that the new Puerto Rican arrivals were destined for an ethnically proud but politically non-controversial assimilation modeled precisely on the prior experiences of Italians, Greeks, and other European immigrants. Exemplary of this effort was a pamphlet entitled *Know Your Fellow American Citizen from Puerto Rico*, published by the Puerto Rican government’s Washington DC office around 1950 and distributed to employers and co-workers of the new arrivals. It was full of photographs of light-skinned Puerto Ricans, alternately relaxing and industrious. The migrant to the mainland, according to the pamphlet, “says goodbye to a land where actually two separate cultures are fusing... In short, he leaves a land as Spanish as avocados and as American as ice cream.”<sup>27</sup> Combined with the job placement efforts of the Migration Division, and the local work of Puerto Rican-led groups in Chicago, this sort of propaganda was designed to set the diaspora on the path to liberal Americanization. And since, as Fernandez notes, the

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<sup>25</sup> Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 50.

<sup>26</sup> Pérez, *Near Northwest Side Story*, 49.

<sup>27</sup> Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, *Know Your Fellow American Citizen from Puerto Rico*, (Washington, n.d. but circa 1950), 9. Personal collection.

new migrants were “racially unknown to most Chicagoans,” there was every reason to believe the approach would be successful in aligning Puerto Ricans with ethnic whites and distancing them from African Americans.<sup>28</sup> Despite having distinct immediate objectives (promoting religious affiliation vs. preventing return migration) the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago proved to be on the same page as the Migration Division in this work.

### **The *Caballeros de San Juan*: Building “their new homeland, Chicago”**

As was discussed in the first chapter, the very first Puerto Rican community organization in Chicago was the Archdiocesan-sponsored *Gremio Puertorriqueño de Chicago* (Chicago Puerto Rican Guild), which focused on mutual aid and argued that Puerto Ricans ought to view themselves as the next in a long line of European immigrants to the United States. While the *Gremio* quickly succumbed to the Nationalist Party takeover and the resulting church-imposed self-destruction described in Chapter One, the idea of modeling Puerto Rican assimilation on the prior experience of European immigrants within a Catholic framework was by then well-established. The organization that most ably filled the shoes of the *Gremio* was the all-male *Caballeros de San Juan*. From a single group at one parish, the *Caballeros* grew dramatically over the course of the 1950s, and by 1961 no fewer than eight parish-based branches or councils included at least 1,000 active members, making it the largest Puerto Rican organization of Chicago’s postwar period.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Lilia Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 8.

<sup>29</sup> “The Cardinal’s Committee for the Spanish Speaking in Chicago, Report for 1961,” p. 6. Cardinal Meyer Collection, Archdiocese of Chicago’s Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Archives and Records Center.

The group's origins lay in an encounter, not long after the demise of the *Gremio*, between a group of young Puerto Rican men and Father Leo Mahon, then the assistant pastor at St. Clara Parish in the Woodlawn neighborhood on the south side of Chicago. Mahon later recalled that

there was a whole group of Puerto Ricans who moved in on 63rd Street, and some of them came to mass. I remember them standing there. I was greeting other people, most of them blacks, and this whole group of young men was standing there watching and waiting for me to finish my conversation. They come up, they could hardly speak English and I couldn't speak any Spanish at that time. And they said they needed help. They were Catholics and they didn't have anyone who could speak their language. I said I can't speak it either, but they said that doesn't make a difference; you've got to help us.<sup>30</sup>

With help from Mahon, as well as Saul Alinsky, the young men initiated a group that would eventually become the *Caballeros de San Juan*.<sup>31</sup> From the start, an acceptance of a Roman Catholic understanding of the gendered division of labor between public and private spheres ensured that only men could join the group, such that it persistently straddled the boundary between a fraternal society and an Alinskyite community organization. Thus, all four key organizers in the early years of the project were men; two – Juan Sosa and Gamino Moyet – were themselves Puerto Rican migrants, while the others – Lester C. Hunt, Jr. and Nicholas Von Hoffman – were white community workers trained by Alinsky.

Hunt and Von Hoffman were capable organizers sympathetic to the problems facing the growing community, but they condescendingly believed the new migrants to be ignorant and in need of outside leadership, especially from the Catholic Church. In a jointly-written essay first

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<sup>30</sup> Oral History Interview with Rev. Leo Mahon, by Steve Avella, July 15, 1989. Audiocassette. Steve Avella Oral History Project Collection, Archdiocese of Chicago's Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Archives and Records Center (AAC). (Transcription is my own.)

<sup>31</sup> For one recollection of Alinsky's role, see Nicholas von Hoffman, *Radical: A Portrait of Saul Alinsky* (New York: Nation Books, 2010), 4-6, 130.

published in 1956, they regaled their audience with the amusing tale of “a total stranger” who was nominated to be an officer of a newly-forming Puerto Rican community group solely “because of the expensive-looking suit he was wearing;” the punch line was that the well-dressed and ambitious man could not even speak Spanish!<sup>32</sup> Hunt and Von Hoffman asserted that Puerto Rican organizations in Chicago could only thrive if they had external supervision and intensive training on group process, since “democracy as we know it is a form alien to the Puerto Rican culture.”<sup>33</sup> In light of these concerns, it is unsurprising that Hunt and Von Hoffman objected both to the expansive role played by the Migration Division, and to the cultural nationalism it promoted: “Perhaps it might be better,” they wrote, “if the Commonwealth [of Puerto Rico] did *not* pursue a policy calculated to prolong those particular cultural patterns which impede their participation in continental democracy.”<sup>34</sup>

The *Caballeros* themselves, by contrast, vocally promoted their commitment to democracy. “Truly, it is an organization of the people,” wrote an anonymous member of the group in the Chicago-based, bilingual monthly magazine *Vida Latina* during the summer of 1957, evading the deliberate exclusion of half of all Puerto Rican migrants on the basis of gender. “All officials are elected by vote of the membership. All decisions are made in an open manner by vote of members present. The organization is led by the members and all the work of the organization is done by its members.”<sup>35</sup> Such rhetoric was likely produced in response to concerns from newly arrived migrants that the hierarchy of the Catholic Archdiocese would

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<sup>32</sup> Lester C. Hunt, Jr. and Nicolas Von Hoffman, “The Meanings of ‘Democracy’: Puerto Rican Organizations in Chicago.” In *Our Language and Our World: Selections from ETC: A Review of General Semantics, 1953-1958*, edited by S. I. Hayakawa (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 54.

<sup>33</sup> Hunt and Von Hoffman, “The Meanings of ‘Democracy,’” 63.

<sup>34</sup> Hunt and Von Hoffman, “The Meanings of ‘Democracy,’” 64.

<sup>35</sup> “Los Caballeros de San Juan,” *Vida Latina*, June, 1957, p. 6

maintain strict control over the activities of the *Caballeros*. Thomas G. Kelliher, whose dissertation examines Latina/o Catholics in mid-century Chicago, characterizes the situation as one that balanced the power of the Church hierarchy with that of the members themselves. He describes Mahon as the *Caballeros*' "catalyst and focus of unity," while noting that the latter's importance related largely to the collection and provision of monetary resources and the navigation of institutional networks toward that end.<sup>36</sup> He approvingly quotes one outside observer who identified Sosa as the "pillar" of the *Caballeros*, and another who noted in 1954 that "the Puerto Rican leadership in the group was, to a large extent, bilingual and represented small business people who had been in the country for some time."<sup>37</sup> Within an authoritarian and all-male structure like the Catholic Church, priests and Archdiocesan officials were predictably revered as leaders, but Kelliher's narrative reinforces Mahon's assertion that Puerto Rican men themselves initiated, developed and led the *Caballeros* throughout the group's decade and a half long existence.

The question of leadership is particularly important in considering the *Caballeros* embrace of liberal Americanization. Padilla argues that the group "attempted to bring the Puerto Rican migrants into the mainstream of the city's life while at the same time respecting and encouraging their cultural tradition."<sup>38</sup> This effort featured three distinct strategic orientations: building the organizational infrastructure to adequately serve the community; regularly scheduled cultural and social events, designed to reinforce the cultural nationalism inherited from the PPD's early inroads; and the provision of social services, specifically

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas G. Kelliher, "Hispanic Catholics and the Archdiocese of Chicago, 1923-1970," PhD Dissertation, Notre Dame University, 1996, p. 326. Perhaps predictably, Philip Gleason was also Kelliher's chair.

<sup>37</sup> Kelliher, "Hispanic Catholics and the Archdiocese of Chicago," 325, 133.

<sup>38</sup> Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 128-129.

regarding banking and employment needs. This last category included the inception in the 1950s of a credit union that helped migrants pool resources and support each other's efforts. In 2016, several decades after the demise of the *Caballeros* as an organization, a vestige of the credit union remains in Chicago, as the small "Caballeros Branch" of the much larger Credit Union 1. Organizational infrastructure was further developed via parish-based councils, though as Kelliher points out parishes in neighborhoods that suffered white flight (such as Garfield Park, on the west side of the city) were soon abandoned by the *Caballeros* as well.<sup>39</sup>

Still, the organization's bread and butter was the promotion of religious, social, and especially cultural unity among Chicago's Puerto Ricans. As Padilla notes: "By facilitating ongoing contact among Puerto Ricans, the organization helped perpetuate or reproduce the Puerto Rican culture, language and cohesiveness in an otherwise foreign society."<sup>40</sup> The *Caballeros* regularly hosted semi-public events, including dinners and dances, for specific branches at individual parishes scattered throughout Chicago, where men and women were able to interact in a social setting in ways that were normally precluded by the group's structure. The organization also promoted an annual city-wide St. John's Day Parade and Festival beginning in 1956. This was scheduled for late June, coinciding with the Catholic Church's Saint's Day for John the Baptist, patron saint of Puerto Rico and namesake of both its largest city and the Chicago-based organization itself. Mayor Richard J. Daley attended the first year, along with a lengthy list of prominent Chicagoans as well as church officials from the island. The day's activities included a mass service at Holy Name Cathedral, a parade, and a

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<sup>39</sup> Kelliher, "Hispanic Catholics and the Archdiocese of Chicago," 49, 335-336.

<sup>40</sup> Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 136.

carnival that included traditional games like climbing a greased pole.<sup>41</sup> Massive quantities of Puerto Rican food were prepared, including an awe-inspiring 3,000 pounds of *lechón* (roast pork).<sup>42</sup> The festivities also included yet another beauty pageant, crowning a “first annual” Queen of the Puerto Rican Festival.<sup>43</sup> While retaining the patriarchal cultural nationalism of Gonzalo Lebrón Sotomayor’s Nationalist Party, the 1956 contest was in no way tied to the political demand for immediate independence of the island. Finally, the evening concluded with a dance, featuring a live band headed by the popular New York-based composer and percussionist Tito Rodríguez.

This range of activities helped sustain exactly the sort of cultural nationalism that the advocates of liberal Americanization supported, especially because the good feelings were linked to Chicago at least as much as they were linked to the island itself. A reflection on the 1956 festivities, written the following year an anonymous *Caballero*, concluded that “When dusk finally arrived, 6,000 very happy Puerto Ricans returned to their homes, full of pride in their homeland, Puerto Rico, and in their new homeland, Chicago. Said one: ‘Now the whole world knows that we have arrived here.’”<sup>44</sup> The population of Chicago was nearly twice as large as that of the island in the mid-1950s, making it big enough to constitute a new “homeland” all on its own despite its vastly smaller geographic footprint. The success of the St. John’s Day Parade and Festival, which continued until the transition to the more broadly sponsored and

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<sup>41</sup> While this last tradition has been abandoned in Chicago, it persists elsewhere. Since 1970, the Puerto Rican community in Buffalo, NY, has hosted a Grease Pole Festival every summer. See Jordyn Reiland, “Grease Pole Festival Celebrates Tradition,” *Buffalo News*, July 12, 2015. Available online at <http://www.buffalonews.com/city-region/downtown-waterfront/grease-pole-festival-celebrates-tradition-20150712> (accessed May 2, 2016).

<sup>42</sup> “El Comité del Cardinal para los de Habla Hispana en Chicago,” *Vida Latina*, June 1957, 25.

<sup>43</sup> *Vida Latina*, June, 1957, p. 9.

<sup>44</sup> “El Comité del Cardinal,” 25.



generically-named Puerto Rican Day Parade in 1966, testified to the appeal of liberal Americanization within the city's still-growing Puerto Rican community.

### **Community Organizing and the Prospects for Americanization**

Not to be outdone by the *Caballeros*, secular groups like the WSCC pushed forward with neighborhood-based organizing efforts similarly aimed at promoting liberal Americanization. Like the *Caballeros*, these projects were typically run by men, though there was no formalized rule against female participation. Interestingly, the secular groups frequently gained funding from female philanthropists, such as the wealthy suburban members of the Illinois Federation of Women's Clubs. Antonio Irizarry was typical of the organizers employed through such funding arrangements. He worked during most of the 1950s and 1960s as a paid community organizer for multiple groups, both private and public, including the WSCC and the white-run Illinois Youth Commission.

Irizarry's initial work with "hard to reach youth" (what today's social service jargon more often labels "underserved" or "at risk" youth) gave him a direct window on problems of unemployment, poverty, and discrimination based in part on the language barrier that dogged the new arrivals, including teenagers. In 1957, for instance, he noted that despite their birthright citizenship, Puerto Ricans arriving in Chicago "feel like complete foreigners."<sup>45</sup> A 1959 report on Irizarry's work normalized the problems facing the new arrivals as typical of immigrants just beginning the Americanization process, noting that "these have the same elements as those of European immigrants who, in time past, came to the city. Such as:

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<sup>45</sup> "Irizarry," activity report for March 29, 1957. Box 111, folder 5, CAP, CHM.

housing; jobs; formal education and proper channelization of interests and activities for the young; adjustment to customs and mores of a dominant culture; development of leaders within the group; learning English.”<sup>46</sup> As was the case for the *Caballeros*, the WSCC’s model of liberal Americanization completely evaded the dual reality of colonialism and US citizenship that distinguished the case of Puerto Ricans from those of Italians or Greeks.

To assist and accelerate the presumably natural process through which these problems would dissipate (as they largely had for prior waves of European immigrants), Irizarry initiated a variety of efforts, again frequently targeting men and boys specifically. He helped organize baseball and basketball games, film screenings, and other community-building activities aimed at “pre-delinquent” young people.<sup>47</sup> His commitment to Americanization ensured that he routinely manufactured multi-ethnic youth groups and sports teams that included Puerto Rican, Mexican, Italian, and occasionally African American teenage boys. Athletics were especially helpful in this regard, since in spite of poverty and the language barrier, “the one thing that Puerto Rican children have in their favor is that the same sports (baseball, basketball, etc.) are played in Puerto Rico.”<sup>48</sup> Beyond Irizarry’s work on the west side, this insight led to the creation of boys baseball leagues in multiple neighborhoods where concentrations of new migrants emerged, including Humboldt Park and Lincoln Park. There is no record of Irizarry or others establishing any equivalent activities or structures for girls.

At the same time, Irizarry also understood the need to organize the Puerto Rican community as a whole, and to do so he drew upon by-now familiar tropes of cultural

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<sup>46</sup> West Side Spanish Civic Committee, “Proposed Outline of Action,” March 6, 1959. Box 100, folder 3, CAP, CHM.

<sup>47</sup> “Irizarry,” activity reports for March 28, and March 29, 1957. Box 111, folder 5, CAP, CHM.

<sup>48</sup> “Irizarry,” activity report for March 29, 1957. Box 111, folder 5, CAP, CHM.

nationalism. He deliberately spoke Spanish when working with nominally bilingual teenagers, despite reprimands from his white supervisors at the Youth Commission. In 1957, with the help of the local Migration Division office he organized a public screening of what was mostly likely a DIVEDCO film on community organizing on the island, accompanied by a presentation about the prospects for community organizing within the Puerto Rican community in Chicago.<sup>49</sup> As a follow-up to the film, Irizarry helped promote a series of meetings, including a bingo party, designed to found a Puerto Rican neighborhood organization that “could handle some of their mutual problems.”<sup>50</sup> Irizarry’s skill working with the new arrivals, especially youth, and his talent at striking the delicate balance required for liberal Americanization, earned him praise both from the President of the Illinois Federation of Women’s Clubs, who noted that “Mr. Irizarry is quite an artist” at working with young people, and from the youth themselves, who, in the words of one report, “view him as a sort of liaison with the American community... a person who knows what’s available and can make the arrangement.”<sup>51</sup>

But problems of discrimination and marginalization that seemed predictable and temporary in the mid-1950s were proving intractable well into the 1960s, despite all of Irizarry’s organizing skills. In 1964 as the civil rights movement neared its apex, the WSCC initiated a high-production-value magazine called *Latinorama* that reiterated the group’s commitment to liberal Americanization. Reflecting the dual character of the project, the contents of the magazine were entirely in Spanish, in order to appeal to a still growing and not yet fully integrated population, while the two-color cover featured nothing but the masthead and a

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<sup>49</sup> “Irizarry,” activity report. March 23, 1957. Box 111, folder 5, (CAP, CHM).

<sup>50</sup> “Irizarry,” activity report. March 28, 1957. Box 111, folder 5, (CAP, CHM).

<sup>51</sup> Mrs. Elmer H. Sager, “Puerto Rican Project,” late summer 1958. Box 93, folder 12, CAP Papers, CHM; “Weekly Summary Report,” November 7, 1957. Box 111, folder 5, (CAP, CHM).

large photo of the Statue of Liberty, symbolizing perfectly both the end goal of Americanization and the parallel that groups like the WSCC continued to develop between Puerto Rican migrants and prior waves of immigrants from Europe. Irizarry contributed a major essay to the issue that reflected on his long experience as an organizer and made his case regarding the needs of Chicago's Puerto Rican community. He began by invoking yet again the experiences of earlier immigrants: "Every migratory group experiences hardships and is the object of discrimination, prejudiced outrage, and all sorts of abuse that inspires rebellion and protest in search of recognition of its human rights. This is precisely the situation being experienced by Puerto Ricans in the City of Chicago and in the country in general."<sup>52</sup>

After more than a decade of organizing and promoting assimilation, however, Irizarry lamented the fact that "our residents continue to live in buildings infested with rats and cockroaches."<sup>53</sup> To combat these persistent problems, he lauded the use of pickets and rent strikes by residents demanding improvements, though he noted that such efforts were infrequent. Cultural nationalism also remained a part of the strategy, with Irizarry highlighting public events where "Puerto Rican culture and folklore" could be promoted.<sup>54</sup> One key piece of the puzzle was combatting the threat that urban living in Chicago posed to traditional family structures within the Puerto Rican community. Irizarry expressed particular concern that dependency on government welfare assistance and a failure to discipline rebellious children were undermining the patriarchal authority invested in husbands and fathers. Cultural nationalism in this sense was tied directly to masculine authority.

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<sup>52</sup> Antonio Irizarry, "Ya Era Tiempo," *Latinorama*, Vol. 1, Nov. 1964, p. 4. Box 111, folder 4, CAP Papers, CHM.

<sup>53</sup> Irizarry, "Ya Era Tiempo," 4.

<sup>54</sup> Irizarry, "Ya Era Tiempo," 10.

Rather than focus on structural barriers to the inclusion of Puerto Ricans in broader North American life, Irizarry used his *Latinorama* essay to chastise Chicago's Puerto Ricans for contributing to their own plight. "It bothers me," he wrote, "to see the resignation with which these people accept the mistreatment, the outrage, and the prejudice without making any attempt to defend their rights."<sup>55</sup> In an apparent reference to the Migration Division, Irizarry argued that "so-called leaders" in the local Puerto Rican community worsened the situation because they continued to "talk in terms of separation, when the only key to a solution to our problems is to adapt ourselves and fully join the community and contribute all we can."<sup>56</sup> This represented not so much a shift in the narrative of liberal Americanization, but rather an attempt to accelerate the timeline. Increasingly concerned about the negative consequences of delaying the process any longer, Irizarry concluded his essay with a renewed appeal to Puerto Ricans: "Therefore, join us in saying that it is good to recognize that it finally time to integrate ourselves with the community and that to identify ourselves with the whole mixture of the society in which we live is the best legacy we can offer to future generations."<sup>57</sup>

Irizarry's article contained no direct reference to the Civil Rights Movement, despite its national profile and significant local organizing in the very neighborhoods where Irizarry concentrated his own efforts. Indeed, the model of liberal Americanization embraced by the WSCC and other groups largely prevented any collaboration between Puerto Rican and African American community groups. For instance, the 1963 one-day boycott of the Chicago Public Schools, organized by the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations (CCCO) to protest

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<sup>55</sup> Irizarry, "Ya Era Tiempo," 4.

<sup>56</sup> Irizarry, "Ya Era Tiempo," 4.

<sup>57</sup> Irizarry, "Ya Era Tiempo," 10.

overcrowding and lack of resources in majority-black schools, which included over 200,000 African American participants, did not draw any reported Puerto Rican participation.<sup>58</sup> It is particularly striking that Irizarry's support for pickets and rent strikes among Puerto Rican tenants did not incline him to openly support the use of similar tactics by the CCCO and other black-led civil rights groups. In the end, however, the desire to claim the mantle of prior generations of European immigrants outweighed any awareness of the comparable experiences of discrimination facing domestic migrants from the US Caribbean (Puerto Ricans) and the US South (African Americans).

### **Conflicts with the Police and the Unraveling of liberal Americanization**

Irizarry was hardly the first community organizer to blame Puerto Ricans for their own problems, nor even the first Puerto Rican to criticize his fellow migrants. The issue was a recurrent motif among the crop of organizers who emerged as part of the early generation of local leaders, whether in the *Caballeros* or in secular groups like the WSCC. As early as 1955, Lester Hunt reported to Archdiocesan officials that "there are more [Puerto Ricans] in court than there should be for the percentage of the population."<sup>59</sup> Rather than investigate the possibility of prejudice on the part of the police, Hunt maintained "this is no doubt a result of [Puerto Ricans] not knowing the laws and running into police for minor violations due to ignorance."<sup>60</sup> Most Puerto Ricans themselves, however, remained adamant that the culprit was police bias, not their own ignorance. In surveys conducted in 1958 by the Chicago Commission

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<sup>58</sup> On the 1963 boycott, see Dionne Danns, *Something Better For Our Children: Black Organizing in the Chicago Public Schools, 1963-1971* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 25-60.

<sup>59</sup> Lester Hunt, "Work Report for the Month of July," August 1, 1955. Chancery Correspondence Collection, Box 1955C, Folder 12. AAC.

<sup>60</sup> Hunt, "Work Report."

on Human Relations (CCHR), an overwhelming majority of Puerto Rican respondents “felt that they are being discriminated against by the Chicago police;” the precise percentage is not indicated, but it is identified as “much higher” than the fifty-nine percent who believed that they were treated differently in general because of their status as new migrants.<sup>61</sup>

Puerto Rican community organizers like Irizarry did not always share their compatriots’ assessment of the problem. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, for instance, Jose Muniz worked (via funding from the Illinois Youth Commission) with Puerto Rican residents in the Lincoln Park Neighborhood. During the spring and summer of 1960, he filed a series of reports to his supervisors at the Commission detailing the problems and successes of the community. While heaping praise upon the work of two parish-based councils of the *Caballeros*, he also repeatedly noted that a major issue facing the community was difficult interactions with the police. The situation came to a head in July, when St. Michael’s Parish held its annual carnival. The prior year’s carnival had apparently been marred with ethnic conflicts between groups of teenagers. To avoid a repeat, men from the parish *Caballeros* branch volunteered to circulate in the crowd and attempt to defuse any potential conflicts, while Muniz and others decided that Puerto Rican teenagers, regardless of whether or not they attended St. Michael’s, would be kept away from the carnival and made to participate in “special programs all week to be sure that they behave themselves.”<sup>62</sup> As with Hunt’s response to the high rate of Puerto Rican arrests half a decade earlier, and with Irizarry’s admonitions against the migrants a few years later, Muniz’s approach highlighted ways in which, when push came to shove, liberal

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<sup>61</sup> Chicago Commission on Human Relations and Mayor’s Committee on New Residents, *Puerto Rican Americans in Chicago: A Study of a Representative Group of 103 Households of Puerto Rican Migrants on Chicago’s Northwest Side – And Their Adjustment to Big City Living* (Chicago, 1960), 52.

<sup>62</sup> Jose Muniz, “Community Project Report – Near Northeast Spanish-Speaking Area,” July, 1960, Box 93, folder 12, CAP, CHM.

Americanization placed the burden of the process on the people hoping to Americanize, rather than on the community into which they had moved.

Nonetheless, even with teenagers out of the picture, problems emerged at the carnival. On the second night, one of the *Caballeros* volunteering at the carnival was arrested after engaging in what Muniz labeled “a silly argument” with a police officer. Muniz subsequently reported that the remaining volunteers “got frightened of having the same bad luck” as the one who had been arrested, and as a result they backed out of their commitments.<sup>63</sup> Of course, it is entirely possible that Muniz’s report mischaracterizes as cowardice what may well have been a deliberate and coordinated protest against police misconduct. This prospect seems even more likely in light of a special meeting Muniz and the pastor of St. Michael’s held with the *Caballeros* of the local council a few days later. At that meeting, Muniz later reported, “I found out that at least 90% of this group had the idea that the police and the other neighbors hate and persecute the Spanish-Speaking people, especially the Puerto Ricans.”<sup>64</sup> Muniz himself firmly rejected this view:

My experience during the carnival indicates that many of the Puerto Ricans think they are always persecuted by the Police and according to my own experiences they are wrong. They think that because we are American citizens, we can have privileges among the other races. Many of the complaints from Spanish-Speaking people are against the police dept; even if they speak English, they try to be smart and not speak in English to the policeman; instead they get mad and start talking loud to attract the attention of other Spanish-Speaking people who always gather around the policeman and the Spanish-Speaking person involved and that is when the policeman, not being able to understand their Spanish, asks for help and arrests a few of them [...] I will say that the Police department did a wonderful job at the carnival and I am sure they want to be friends of the Spanish-Speaking people and they like them. It’s a shame that the

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<sup>63</sup> Jose Muniz, “Community Project Report,” July, 1960, Box 93, folder 12, CAP, CHM.

<sup>64</sup> Jose Muniz, “Community Project Report,” July, 1960, Box 93, folder 12, CAP, CHM.



Spanish-Speaking people do not realize it. But I am sure after we finish with our conferences, they will realize how wrong they are.<sup>65</sup>

Muniz's response to the conflicts at the carnival demonstrated that when the progress of liberal Americanization stalled, the contradictions of cultural nationalism as a means to an end would come into stark relief. Under pressure, some of the most committed proponents would opt to jettison the "liberal" aspect of the process. For Muniz, this was true both in terms of language – privileging English over Spanish – and in terms of believing major institutions like the police force over and above the migrants themselves.

As the contradictions heightened, Puerto Rican complaints about police misconduct became more rather than less frequent. A widely noted courtroom controversy in the spring of 1965 brought the problem to the attention of the entire city in an unexpected way. On October 26, 1964, two white police officers, Raymond Howard and Thomas A. DeSutter, had arrested two young Puerto Ricans, Jessie Rodríguez and Simon Suárez, on the near north side, supposedly because Rodríguez was holding a broken bottle. When the officers approached the men with guns drawn, the Puerto Ricans resisted, and in the ensuing melee DeSutter was both slashed across the face with the bottle and accidentally shot in the foot by Howard. Such injuries seemed likely to produce an open and shut case, and the men were charged with aggravated battery of a police officer. However, George N. Leighton, a newly installed African American circuit court judge, acquitted them, finding that Rodríguez and Suarez had acted in self-defense against an unprovoked assault by the officers. "The right to resist unlawful arrest is a phase of self-defense," Leighton maintained, declaring that DeSutter and Howard had "no

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<sup>65</sup> Jose Muniz, "Community Project Report," July, 1960, Box 93, folder 12, CAP, CHM.

business to pull a gun and attack the citizens.”<sup>66</sup> His ruling caused an uproar in the legal field and in the mainstream press, where prominent white-run papers like the *Chicago Daily News* and the *Chicago Tribune* repeatedly editorialized against Leighton’s ruling, ran news articles highlighting the angry response from the Police Chief, and claimed they were “deluged with protest calls from citizens in reaction to Leighton’s ruling.”<sup>67</sup>

By contrast, the Leighton ruling was widely embraced by Chicago’s African American community, in part due to the judge’s prominent status as one of the city’s few black jurists. The *Chicago Defender*, for instance, editorialized that “the instances in which the rights of non-white citizens have been brazenly trampled upon by racist-minded policemen are so numerous as to invite the conclusion that excessive and arrogant use of power was at play in the present case.”<sup>68</sup> Framing the issue as one of abuses against “non-white citizens” highlighted the ways in which liberal Americanization was doomed in the Puerto Rican case, even though many island-born migrants and much of the liberal white power structure in the city remained committed to the project. Regardless, the audacity of Leighton’s ruling placed the question of police bias against Puerto Ricans at the forefront of citywide conversations about the migrants, a reality that would only be compounded in the following months.

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<sup>66</sup> Edmund J. Rooney and Philip M. Boffey, “Court Probes Judge’s Ruling,” *Chicago Daily News*, March 8, 1965, p. 1; George N. Leighton, “Memorandum of Findings and Conclusions in *People of the State of Illinois v. Jessie Rodríguez and Simon Suarez*.” American Civil Liberties Union, Illinois Division Records, Box 538, Folder 1, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

<sup>67</sup> “Judge Produces Furor by Freeing of Two in Attack,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 7, 1965, p. 1.

<sup>68</sup> “The Leighton Case,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, March 11, 1965, p. 17.

## Conclusion: The Calm Before the Storm

The persistence of conflicts with the police was directly related to the nearly constant process of displacement and local migration that Lilia Fernandez compellingly depicts as perhaps the single most dominant facet of Puerto Rican life in Chicago in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>69</sup> As Puerto Ricans repeatedly found themselves in new neighborhoods, they confronted a police force that literally weaponized the fear felt by their new neighbors. The situation became so bad that even the *Caballeros de San Juan*, traditionally averse to both confrontational tactics and direct engagement in local politics, eventually objected. After yet another violent arrest, a few months after Leighton's ruling, the *Caballeros* publicly accused the Chicago Police Department of a pattern of harassment and brutality aimed against Puerto Ricans. The complaint alleged both "irresponsible beatings" at the hands of the police and "a complete lack of concern" on the part of the police for Puerto Rican residents victimized by crime.<sup>70</sup>

In the midst of this displacement and conflict, the all-male *Caballeros* remained the largest Puerto Rican organization in the city, reaching almost a dozen councils and close to 2,000 members by 1964.<sup>71</sup> At the same time, however, the secular organizations were also gaining steam, growing in number and in size, partly because they had begun to ally themselves with the Democratic Party's local machine, a move that the Archdiocesan-sponsored *Caballeros* had refused to make. In late 1965, a number of secular groups, including the WSCC, by now renamed the Spanish Civic Committee due to the rapid decline in Puerto Ricans on the now

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<sup>69</sup> See Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 91-172.

<sup>70</sup> "Chi P.R. Unit Charges Police Brutality," *Chicago Daily Defender*, Aug. 4, 1965, p. 12.

<sup>71</sup> "Report of the Cardinal's Committee for the Spanish Speaking," January 14, 1964, Albert Cardinal Meyer Collection, AAC.

overwhelmingly black West Side, gained control of the apparatus responsible for planning the now annual parade and festival.<sup>72</sup> This conflict set the stage for decades of similar conflicts over community leadership as crystalized in membership on an elected Parade Committee. Accusations of electoral and financial misconduct on the Committee have recurred repeatedly, as recently as 2015.<sup>73</sup>

In 1966, the parade would be staged on State Street in the heart of Chicago's downtown loop, rather than in one of the city's heavily Puerto Rican neighborhoods, although the festival would be held in Humboldt Park, where many had fled after multiple experiences of displacement. For the secular groups, this was a significant marker of the success of liberal Americanization; indeed, to this day most community members mark the June, 1966 Puerto Rican Day Parade as the first city-wide parade, rather than the eleventh. Cultural nationalism was alive and well in Puerto Rican Chicago. By this point, however, the damage to the model of liberal Americanization had already been severe, leaving the entire framework a house of cards. Just how unsustainable the project had become would be made clear in the immediate aftermath of the 1966 parade.

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<sup>72</sup> Kelliher, "Hispanic Catholics and the Archdiocese of Chicago," 317-320.

<sup>73</sup> Darryl Holliday, "Puerto Rican Festival Kicks Off as Planned After Power Struggle in Court," June 19, 2015.

Available online at: <https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20150619/humboldt-park/puerto-rican-festival-kicks-off-as-planned-after-power-struggle-court> (accessed May 5, 2016).



### Chapter Three: “The Parade Gave the People Courage”: Revelry and Rage in the 1966 Division Street Riots

The sponsors of Chicago’s Puerto Rican Day Parade, held on Saturday, June 11, 1966 heralded the event as proof of the success of liberal Americanization. Ethnic particularity allowed for cultural nationalism to bloom side by side with assimilation into the city’s mainstream. Mayor Richard J. Daley and the Chicago Police Department marching band provided the imprimatur of welcome, and the many Puerto Rican participants demonstrated the migrants’ commitment to respectability in their new home. Pro-independence sentiment, and in particular the local branch of the Nationalist Party, were at most just a distant memory. While the parade wound its way through downtown to maximize its impact on city-wide opinion, a week-long carnival was held at Humboldt Park, in the near northwest side neighborhood of the same name. This provided an outlet for the enthusiasm of Puerto Ricans themselves, who were increasingly concentrated here and in the adjoining West Town neighborhood after two decades of dispersal and displacement across many parts of the city.<sup>1</sup>

Both the parade and the carnival offered opportunities for Chicago’s Puerto Rican community to experience what the sociologist John Lofland has labeled “profane crowd joy.”<sup>2</sup> Lofland identifies “revelry” as an indispensable element of collective behavior in the context of festivals, dances, and other secular public gatherings, typified by the world-famous *carnaval* in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. Albeit on a much smaller scale, the festival in Humboldt Park generated a similar form of joy. As the carnival came to a close on Sunday evening, a collective sense of

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<sup>1</sup> On the process of concentrating the population, see Padilla *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 83-98, and Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 149-159.

<sup>2</sup> John Lofland, “Crowd Joys,” *Urban Life*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (1982), 355-381.

joy combined with the heat and humidity of a typical Chicago summer to make Puerto Ricans feel especially at home in the diasporic setting of the Windy City.

Exactly one mile due east of the carnival, this collective sense of joy collided head-on with the community's long-simmering resentment of abuse at the hands of the overwhelmingly white police force. That evening, two white police officers passed through the intersection of Division Street and Damen Avenue; one was Thomas Munyon, the other, incredibly, was Raymond Howard, who was already infamous for his participation in the violent arrest of Jessie Rodríguez and Simon Suárez the previous year. At about 7PM, Munyon shot Arcelis Cruz, a twenty-year old Puerto Rican man, in the leg. The events immediately preceding the shooting have always remained murky, as police and civilian witnesses disagreed about almost every aspect of the situation: Cruz may or may not have been in a fight with a Polish man; the fight may or may not have taken place in a nearby bar; the arrival of the police may or may not have been intended to break up the conflict; Cruz may or may not have fled; and perhaps most importantly, he may or may not have been armed with a pistol that he may or may not have brandished at Munyon just before being shot.

By contrast, there is total consensus on the events that followed the Cruz shooting: within an hour the most important instance of urban unrest in the history of Chicago's Puerto Rican community, commonly called the Division Street Riots, had begun. Over the course of three nights and two days, from Sunday, June 12<sup>th</sup> to Tuesday the 14<sup>th</sup>, the stretch of Division that connected West Town to Humboldt Park witnessed looting, targeted acts of arson, and repeated bouts of street fighting between police and residents. Participants and scholars have been unanimous in labeling the riots a uniquely pivotal point in the development of the

community. Nonetheless, the historical analysis of the riots has been surprisingly limited. Only two significant scholarly attempts have been made to narrate and analyze the events of this crucial moment. Both have been brief and have focused largely on the structural causes and consequences rather than on the subjective experience of the participants.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter re-examines the Division Street Riots primarily from the perspective of Puerto Ricans who participated in, observed, or attempted to contain the conflict. I draw on a range of unpublished interviews conducted during and immediately after the unrest, alongside contemporaneous press reports, to paint a detailed picture of the riots. In doing so, I argue that the riots signaled the final demise of the project of liberal Americanization that had characterized the previous dozen years of the community's development. The cultural nationalism that had been fostered in Chicago's Puerto Rican community, first in and through the conflicts between the local branch of the Nationalist Party and its opponents, and then through the organizing efforts of the *Caballeros de San Juan* and secular groups like the West Side Spanish Civic Committee (WSSC), was suddenly repurposed as part of a violent and cathartic sequence of events far different than had been imagined by any of its prior advocates. In an immediate sense, the riots emerged from a collective experience of the combustible interplay between rage and revelry that characterized the aftermath of the parade and the carnival.

At this moment, the contradictions internal to Puerto Rican racial identity in Chicago took on an even greater importance than the conflicts between community members and the

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<sup>3</sup> The two significant scholarly treatments are Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 144-155 and Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 163-170. Other brief assessments can be found in Perez, *Near Northwest Side Story*, 83-85, and Andrew Diamond, *Mean Streets: Chicago Youths and the Everyday Struggle for Empowerment in the Multiracial City, 1908-1969* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 295-296.



police. As Angelo Dominguez, the son of a prominent community leader, observed just after the riots ended, “we [Puerto Ricans] have within ourselves an interior struggle.”<sup>4</sup> For Dominguez, this struggle revolved around his suddenly no-longer-resolved dual identity as Puerto Rican and being American. The Riots concretized the contradiction in terms of legal versus illegal responses to oppression, but it also manifested in terms of racial formation. Over two decades of community development in Chicago, the stark differences between the racial system operative on the island and the one in place on the mainland had generated a variety of responses, including the aspiration to assimilation into whiteness that had characterized the project of liberal Americanization.

The Division Street Riots radically altered the racial calculus of Puerto Ricans in Chicago. The repeated actions of the white-run police force had made it clear that whiteness was off the table, but there was no clarity regarding what would take its place. Occurring in the midst of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s extended stay in Chicago (often called the Northern Campaign), and on the cusp of the Black Power era, the Riots raised the possibility of a black-Puerto Rican alliance. While some participants came to identify with African Americans based on a perceived similarity of experience in terms of racial oppression or viewed the Black Freedom Movement as a model for their own struggles, many others retained the disdain of such an alliance that had been characteristic of the previous two decades. Now neither “white” nor “black,” many Puerto Ricans returned to the less dichotomous and more fluid racial taxonomy that

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<sup>4</sup> Janet Parmalee, “Interview with Angelo Dominguez,” June 16, 1966. Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection, DePaul University Archives and Special Collections (JNC). Pursuant to the policy of the JNC, I have used pseudonyms for most people quoted in the collection, though I have made exceptions in the case of documents that had previously been made public, and for references to Janet Nolan herself, whose maiden name was Parmalee. For more on the JNC including questions of human subjects protections, see Michael Staudenmaier, “War on Poverty, War on Division Street: Puerto Rican Chicago in the 1960s Through the Lens of the Janet Nolan Collection,” *Centro Journal* Vol. 28, No. 2 (2016, forthcoming).

characterized the island and much of Latin America in search of a third, “brown” option. It would take years for this novel racial category to develop and take hold, but in the mean time the Riots laid bare the Puerto Rican version of the problem W. E. B. Du Bois had six decades earlier termed “double consciousness.”<sup>5</sup> Echoing Du Bois, Dominguez maintained:

We don’t know which side to take, and because of that I think there are many Puerto Ricans who act in a way outside the prescribed norms of the society is [sic] precisely because of this, because there it is not clear how they should act. At the same time that they feel oppressed socially they must know themselves. Each individual wants to identify himself personally as he is and have an individual personality, but the Puerto Ricans here in Chicago cannot have an individual personality. They push us from one side to the other – we have a different culture – and we never know who we are.<sup>6</sup>

Over the three nights of the Riots, two distinct emotions, rage and joy, allowed Puerto Ricans in Chicago to draw upon the legacy of cultural nationalism and generate collective responses to the uncertainties of racial formation in migration.

### **Riot Theory: “Mistrust of Government” or “Solidarity, Pride and Exhilaration”?**

While very little has been written about the Division Street Riots, much scholarly attention has been paid to the larger phenomenon of urban disorder in the 1960s. In this context, the most common frame of analysis has been a structural interpretation of the causes of civil unrest; in essence, the assignment of blame for what is assumed to be a tragic occurrence. This discourse has taken many forms, but the most prominent have involved either blaming the participants themselves or blaming the racist system in which the participants are forced to live. Kevin Mumford, in a helpful review of “Writings on Riots,” labels these options

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<sup>5</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1903), 3.

<sup>6</sup> “Interview with Angelo Dominguez,” June 16, 1966, JNC.

“riots as crisis” and “riots as racism,” respectively.<sup>7</sup> Still, he points out, these two have often overlapped in unexpected ways.

The roots of both perspectives go back to the era itself. The “riots as crisis” model found its footing in 1965, a year before the Division Street Riots. That year, the anthropologist Oscar Lewis published his influential ethnography *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty – San Juan and New York*. Lewis pioneered the concept of a “culture of poverty” that he said characterized economically marginalized communities of color. He was far clearer than most of the subsequent adherents to his theory in noting that the culture of poverty was caused primarily by poverty itself, rather than by the inherent flaws of any given racialized group of poor people. Still, he did maintain that the culture of poverty quickly became a self-perpetuating cycle of dysfunction and disadvantage. Lewis argued that those who participate it commonly display “a critical attitude toward some of the basic institutions of the dominant classes, hatred of the police, mistrust of government and those in high position, and a cynicism which extends even to the church. This gives the culture of poverty a high potential for protest and for being used in political movements aimed against the existing order.”<sup>8</sup> In this context, the riots of the mid-sixties could be seen to be the result of an urban crisis characterized by a culture of poverty among poor blacks (and Puerto Ricans) in the urban north.

Almost immediately, both activists and scholars began to challenge the “riots as crisis” view and to promote “riots as racism” as an alternative perspective. This involved shifting the focus to the legitimate grievances of the marginalized communities where civil unrest emerged.

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<sup>7</sup> Kevin Mumford, “Harvesting the Crisis: The Newark Uprising, the Kerner Commission, and Writings on Riots,” in Kenneth L. Kusmer and Joe W. Trotter, eds., *African American Urban History Since World War Two* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 203-218.

<sup>8</sup> Oscar Lewis, *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty – San Juan and New York* (New York: Random House, 1965), xlv.

It required a repudiation of the culture of poverty theory, but only a partial one. In place of Lewis's suggestion that the culture of poverty was self-perpetuating or affirmatively chosen, the alternative view maintained that the culture of poverty was quite real, but that it was continually enforced from the outside by the persistent exclusion of people of color from policy-making and the practice of government. Poor blacks and Puerto Ricans were, in essence, forced into illegal action (riots) by the intransigence of white-dominated municipal administrations. This view is exemplified by an oft-quoted line in a late speech by Martin Luther King, Jr.: "a riot is the language of the unheard."<sup>9</sup> Much subsequent scholarship on urban unrest in the United States, up until contemporary discussions of disorder in Ferguson, MO in 2014 and Baltimore, MD in 2015, has emphasized this interpretive lens: riots are a tragic but predictable consequence of white racist policies.

These two views, Mumford suggests, have much in common. First, both the "riots as crisis" and "riots as racism" discourses focus purely on blame, with the main difference focusing on who should shoulder the responsibility – the rioters or the system against which they riot. In Mumford's interpretation, King himself exemplifies the limits of the second position:

Yet to a certain extent, [King's] condemnation of white racists and the ghetto unintentionally diminished black political agency, invoking the deterministic argument that "the slums are the handiwork of a vicious system of the white society. Negroes live in them but do not make them any more than a prisoner makes a prison." For King, whites, not blacks, were the criminals, guilty of a "discrimination that is a hound of hell that gnaws at the Negroes in every waking moment of their lives."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Speech at Grosse Pointe High School, Grosse Pointe, MI, March 14, 1968. Available online at <http://www.gphistorical.org/mlk/mlkspeech/> (accessed May 10, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> Mumford, "Harvesting the Crisis," 212. The quotes from King are from his testimony before the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, commonly called the Kerner Commission after its chairperson, Otto Kerner, the governor of Illinois previously mentioned in the opening anecdote of Chapter Two. The Kerner Commission was established by President Lyndon Johnson in the aftermath of the 1967 uprisings in Newark, NJ, and Detroit. The Commission's report was published in 1968 and became a national best-seller. Mumford cites

In other words, King's oft-quoted apologia for riots served to convince liberal white Americans that the rioters themselves held no responsibility for their own actions. Second, Mumford notes that "almost everybody involved in writing on the riots shared a liberal outlook that appeared to legitimize capitalist society. [...] Nobody proposed economic redistribution or blamed the contradictions of capitalism for the riots."<sup>11</sup> Lost in the shuffle, then, was any possibility that African Americans could be the agents of their own liberation, alongside any awareness that this liberation might require a fundamental overhaul not only of race relations but of economic systems as well.

Both of the scholarly renderings of the Division Street Riots can be understood as examples of the "Riots as Racism" model. Felix Padilla made an initial attempt to describe and interpret the events of June, 1966 in his pioneering volume *Puerto Rican Chicago*. His narrative focuses blame on the police in particular, less for their brutality or for their failure to actually protect Puerto Ricans from crime, but largely for their symbolic status as representatives of "the despised invisible white power structure."<sup>12</sup> "In retrospect," argues Padilla, "the Division Street Riot was not merely a reaction among Puerto Ricans to police behavior and attitudes, but also to their total situation in the wider American society."<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Lilia Fernandez, in *Brown in the Windy City*, rejects culture of poverty explanations for the Riots, and opts instead for a "riots as racism" mode of analysis. She contextualizes the Riots as a predictable outcome of "the plight of Puerto Ricans" in Chicago: urban renewal and displacement of Puerto Rican migrants, who over the course of the 1960s were being progressively concentrated into low-

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King's testimony as being found on pages 2775-2777, box 5, series 1, Papers of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX.

<sup>11</sup> Mumford, "Harvesting the Crisis," 212.

<sup>12</sup> Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 149.

<sup>13</sup> Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 149.

quality housing in the West Town and Humboldt Park neighborhoods.<sup>14</sup> Fernandez points to a list of accumulated grievances regarding racist policing, favorably quoting Obed López, a Mexican American activist who maintained that the Riots “were a spontaneous reaction to the police brutality.”<sup>15</sup>

In many ways, both Padilla and Fernandez do highlight the political agency of Puerto Ricans in Chicago during the 1950s and 1960s, but in the specific context of the Division Street Riots they opt to emphasize the inevitability of the clash in light of the community’s long experience of oppression. Padilla references the insights of Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi on collective acts of violence as “the assertion of dignity and personhood,” and he argues that participants in the Division Street Riots “experienced a sense of solidarity, pride and exhilaration.”<sup>16</sup> Fernandez does not theorize this aspect of the Riots but her narrative includes references to protest marches and other organized interventions alongside vivid depictions of the violence of the police. Still, she places greater emphasis on the agency of the police, other city government officials, and local Puerto Rican leaders who “tried to quell the outburst and send people home.”<sup>17</sup> In doing so, she uses details that are strikingly absent from her description of those who actively participated in the riots.

While skeletal, Padilla’s references to dignity and exhilaration provide a way to concretize Mumford’s third interpretive lens, “riots as rebellion.” In Mumford’s essay, the character of this model is amorphous: it seems to include any analysis of urban unrest that focuses on the agency of the rioters, whether that be romanticized depictions of revolutionary

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<sup>14</sup> Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 167.

<sup>15</sup> Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 167.

<sup>16</sup> Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 151.

<sup>17</sup> Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 164.

insurrection or careful critical interpretations of the actors on the ground. Malcolm McLaughlin, in his analysis of the Detroit and Newark events of 1967, typifies the former variant, arguing that the urban conflict of the 1960s expressed “a popular mood that was defiant of authority and ready, if the opportunity came, to overturn established patterns of ownership and market exploitation.”<sup>18</sup> Amanda I. Seligman, by contrast, cautions against attributing such views too broadly; her defense of agency in the context of civil unrest focuses on “a multiplicity of actors who were not participating in the disorder.”<sup>19</sup>

This spectrum partially correlates to the longstanding debate among scholars on how to label such events: “riot,” “rebellion,” “uprising,” “disorder,” all have been advanced as preferable for various reasons. McLaughlin, despite his sympathetic rendering of the participants, still maintains that the term “riot” should be preferred over “rebellion” because it captures the “spontaneous, disorganized, and ultimately incoherent” character of events.<sup>20</sup> Seligman, who embraces an analysis of agency while focusing on those who chose *not* to participate in unrest, suggests that “historians who wish to respect the views of people at the grassroots and represent their ideas fairly in their scholarship should not assume a priori that either ‘riot’ or ‘rebellion’ embraces the sentiments on the ground.”<sup>21</sup> In the context of the Division Street events, the question of a name has been long-settled, with Padilla and all subsequent observers (both scholars and community members) adopting the word “riot.” Still, following Seligman’s lead, I have chosen to prioritize “the study of the actions of the crowd”

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<sup>18</sup> Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long, Hot Summer of 1967: Urban Rebellion in America* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 99.

<sup>19</sup> Amanda I. Seligman, “‘But Burn – No’: The Rest of the Crowd in Three Civil Disorders in 1960s Chicago” *Journal of Urban History* 37 (2011), 232.

<sup>20</sup> McLaughlin, *The Long, Hot Summer of 1967*, 15.

<sup>21</sup> Seligman, “‘But Burn – No’,” 247-248.

over the issue of labels, incorporating specifically Lofland's analysis of crowd joy and revelry.<sup>22</sup>

Taken together, Lofland, McLaughlin, Mumford, Seligman and Padilla offer an interpretive framework and a subjective lexicon that can help shift the equilibrium in terms of looking at the origins, experience, and legacy of the Division Street Riots. The study of structural causes can be quite illuminating, and certainly the "riots as racism" model tells us more than "riots as crisis," but both are needlessly one-sided. Understanding the perspectives of those who lived through the events described here must be central to any interpretation of the events on Division Street in Chicago's West Town and Humboldt Park neighborhoods on June 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, 1966.

### **Sunday Night: "Like the Second Puerto Rican Parade"**

According to many accounts of the inception of the Riots, the shooting of Cruz was not, in fact, their most crucial trigger. The warm weather and the weekend's festivities ensured that there were lots of people on the streets at the time of the shooting. When a large group gathered to ensure that Cruz received medical attention, the police became nervous and called in a canine unit to help disperse the supposedly unruly observers. In short order a police dog had bitten a young Puerto Rican man in the crowd. The police then retreated without either arresting or assisting the bite victim; instead, according to the *Chicago Defender*, "his friends carried him, his leg in a bandage, up and down the streets in front of the seething groups."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Seligman, "'But Burn – No'," 248.

<sup>23</sup> "Police, Leaders Huddle to Cool Riot Zone," *Chicago Defender*, June 14, 1966, 1. It is unclear whether this was done in order to enflame the crowd or in search of transit to a nearby hospital.



Neighborhood residents, in interviews over the course of the week, repeatedly identified the use of dogs against the crowd as the final straw that led irrevocably to rioting. One said, “They ought not to have used the dogs against the people.”<sup>24</sup> Another “insisted that the crowd would have dispersed of itself if the police dogs hadn’t been brought out.”<sup>25</sup> The use of police dogs was strikingly reminiscent of widely published photos from civil rights protests in Birmingham, Alabama three years before, where Public Safety Commissioner Eugene “Bull” Connor ordered the use of dogs against African American teenagers during a peaceful march.<sup>26</sup> As we will see below, the community’s ambivalent relationship to blackness no doubt exacerbated the response to the dog bite. A prominent local Puerto Rican nun, Sister Ana Cecilia, suggested that the police dogs cemented the shift in the crowd from the post-parade relaxation to anger at the police: “it just completely turned the attitude, the complete switch from one of joy to one of indignation.”<sup>27</sup> In the aftermath, the crowd became more confrontational and the police returned in greater numbers.

Still, joy remained mixed in with the rage. José Rosa, a prominent local activist who attempted to diffuse the conflict, later described the crowd as the angriest he had ever seen, but added that “there was sometimes pride in their faces.”<sup>28</sup> The lingering experience of the parade was clearly the linchpin here. Sister Ana Cecilia pointed out that the success of the

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<sup>24</sup> Angelo Dominguez, “First Day of Work as a Census-Taker,” June 13, 1966 (JNC).

<sup>25</sup> Janet Parmalee, “Division Street is Closed,” June 14, 1966 (JNC).

<sup>26</sup> The *Chicago Tribune* ran a front-page article after the Birmingham events, featuring four photos of protesters being attacked by police dogs. See “Dogs and Fire Hoses Turned on Negroes: Marchers Sent Sprawling,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 4, 1963, 1. For more on the Birmingham campaign, see Diane McWhorter, *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama, the Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> Janet Parmalee, “Interview with Sister Ana Cecilia, Cardinal’s Committee for the Spanish Speaking,” June 18, 1966. (JNC)

<sup>28</sup> Janet Parmalee, “Interview with José Rosa on Subject of Riot at Damen and Division,” June 17, 1966. (JNC).

festival and the parade had created a “carnival-like spirit” and a “continued spirit of joy, of unity, that proudness.”<sup>29</sup> Angelo Dominguez put it similarly:

[M]any people say it has nothing to do with the Puerto Rican Parade, but the parade did give the people some confidence that they didn’t have before [...] For example, this has been happening for a long time, that cruelty of the police against the people. But the people had never risen up in the way that they did on Sunday, and they rose up at the Puerto Rican Parade, which means that the parade gave the people courage, it gave them confidence, and then they felt like they could do something, so when the opportunity presented itself on Sunday night, they came out on the street to show their feelings.<sup>30</sup>

In this analysis, the sense of optimism generated by the parade and the carnival was a necessary ingredient in the transformation of long-standing resentment into unprecedented mass action. The cultural nationalism promoted by the advocates of liberal Americanization was thus turned toward a very different end in the (literal and figurative) heat of the moment.

This process was particularly visible in the early moments of the evening’s events. Janet Parmalee was a locally-based researcher employed by a War on Poverty program who along with Angelo Dominguez and others produced voluminous and detailed ethnographic field notes on the Riots and their aftermath.<sup>31</sup> She happened accidentally on the scene just after the police reinforcements arrived, around 7:30 PM, and described

a carnival atmosphere in the air. Women and children in summer play clothes lined both sides of the street. Windows along Division were full of spectators. Soft drinks were being dispensed from somewhere. And lovers were there in abundance.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Parmalee, “Interview with Sister Ana Cecilia.”

<sup>30</sup> Parmalee, “Interview with Angelo Dominguez.”

<sup>31</sup> For more on the research project and its resulting Janet Nolan Ethnographic Research on Puerto Ricans in Chicago Collection (JNC), see Staudenmaier, “War on Poverty, War on Division Street.”

<sup>32</sup> Janet Parmalee, “War on Division Street,” June 12, 1966. (JNC) Parmalee only went to the intersection in order to buy a newspaper.

Comments uttered on the street repeatedly compared and contrasted the street scene with the prior day's festivities downtown: "This looks like the second Puerto Rican parade," said one onlooker, while another pointed out that "there are more Puerto Ricans here than were at yesterday's parade."<sup>33</sup> Subsequent media accounts offered variations on the theme: "People were in a light festive mood," offered one report, "but the joy was a thin layer covering a deep raging within."<sup>34</sup> When police reinforcements made several arrests, the crowd surrounded the vehicle until "the police opened the doors of the police wagon and five men walked out, their arms raised in triumph. A cry of joy went up from the crowd."<sup>35</sup> At this point, yet again, the police retreated, leaving behind three empty patrol cars in their haste.

The retreat was something of a fiasco: Rosa helped negotiate the departure with the police and remembered that "we thought it was better to take them down [Division Street] to Humboldt Park to get them out of the street. That was a mistake. We kept going, and more people kept coming out" of their homes to join the crowd.<sup>36</sup> As the numbers grew, a handful of prominent Puerto Ricans attempted to calm the scene and encourage people to disperse. Rafael Dominguez, father of Angelo and the secretary of the committee that had organized the parade, used a megaphone toward this end, explaining to all who could hear him that "the police are going now. Let's us all go home too."<sup>37</sup> This suggestion drew a mixed response from the crowd, and before too long another pivotal event took place. In Parmalee's eye-witness narrative,

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<sup>33</sup> Parmalee, "War on Division Street."

<sup>34</sup> Monte C. Unger, "A Puerto Rican Who Didn't Riot," *Viewpoint*, Summer, 1966, 2. (JNC).

<sup>35</sup> Unger, "A Puerto Rican Who Didn't Riot."

<sup>36</sup> Parmalee, "Interview with José Rosa".

<sup>37</sup> Parmalee, "War on Division Street".

A dark Puerto Rican man in a blue shiny suit and hat was standing on the Police car, trying to tear off the hood and there were shouts through the crowd, "The police car! The police car!" Then a police ring notebook found in the car went flying two stories up into the air along with police pads and slips of paper which came fluttering down among the crowd. One youth turned over the refuse basket and gathered some of the papers to start a fire. Fire. Suddenly the police car was on fire. The crowd backed away and got strangely silent. There were muttered comments: "Now they've really done it." "We want freedom," a woman's voice said in English. "No policeman will ever ride that car again."<sup>38</sup>

Once the patrol car had been torched, the conflict escalated further. Police returned yet again, in even larger numbers, along with a fire truck to extinguish the flames. Perhaps thinking again of Birmingham and the use of fire hoses against African American protesters, or possibly just not ready to see the fire put out, neighborhood residents tried to commandeer the fire hose. Before the tug of war could be resolved, a true street fight began, with people throwing bricks and stones at the police, who threw them right back.

The demographics of the crowd on the first night deserve notice. Observers of postwar urban civil disturbances, beginning with the Kerner Commission, have frequently asserted that participation is bounded in terms of race, gender, and age: rioters in these contexts tend to be young men of color.<sup>39</sup> These generalizations appear to only have been partially true of the Division Street Riot's first evening. At least initially, those assembled at Division and Damen included many mothers with small children. The *Chicago Tribune* reported, in a sensationalistic tone, on "a screaming, jeering crowd of more than 1,000 formed rapidly after the policeman shot the youth. Many were women."<sup>40</sup> According to Malcolm McLaughlin, this dynamic was

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<sup>38</sup> Parmalee, "War on Division Street." Father Donald Headley, who worked extensively in Chicago's Puerto Rican community during the 1960s, witnessed this same event and has claimed that the man in the blue suit was a plainclothes police officer. See Bud Schultz and Ruth Schultz, *The Price of Dissent: Testimonies to Political Repression in America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 427.

<sup>39</sup> McLaughlin, *Long Hot Summer of 1967*, 14.

<sup>40</sup> "Burns Cops' Cars; 35 Held," *Chicago Tribune*, June 13, 1966, 1.

repeated in multiple cases of urban unrest during the 1960s: “In many cities, when riots began, men, women, and children of all ages gathered on the streets and took part enthusiastically in looting.”<sup>41</sup> In the case of the Division Street Riots, Parmalee observed that women tended to stay on the sidewalks while men were in the street, but after a certain point this distinction lost meaning. Sex workers were among the earliest women to take the streets, perhaps because they had more experience and thus less fear of police repression.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, according to several neighborhood residents, while many of the most confrontational participants were teenagers and young adults, “it was adults too. You have to say it. They were all mixed up in it.”<sup>43</sup>

In ethno-racial terms, certainly the vast majority of those present were Puerto Rican, but eyewitnesses like Parmalee reported that at least a few African Americans and some Polish American youth also participated. Obed López later maintained that several members of the Latin Kings street gang were in fact Polish.<sup>44</sup> One Puerto Rican teenager who participated in the first night of the riot may have been alluding to this situation when he claimed that “the Negroes are helping us. Some of the Polish people are helping us too. I mean, they are probably understanding why we are having a riot.”<sup>45</sup> The reality and extent of such assistance is difficult to discern. Everyone arrested appears to have been Puerto Rican, but since only 44 people out of a crowd of thousands were arrested, and since the police already had an established pattern of targeting Puerto Ricans, this may not be a representative sample.

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<sup>41</sup> McLaughlin, *Long Hot Summer of 1967*, 15.

<sup>42</sup> Janet Parmalee, “A Riot is Born,” September 13, 1966. (JNC)

<sup>43</sup> Santiago Colorado, quoted in Janet Parmalee, “The Taping Session,” June 14, 1966 (JNC).

<sup>44</sup> Mervin Méndez, “Interview with Obed and Caralee López,” October 17, 1995. Young Lords Collection, DePaul University Special Collections and Archives.

<sup>45</sup> “Batman,” quoted in Janet Parmalee, “Interview with Robin, Batman, and Zorro,” June 14, 1966 (JNC).

However, even assuming the demographics were overwhelmingly Puerto Rican, it was clear to most observers that this was not in any meaningful sense a “race riot.” The targets of violence on the first evening were precisely chosen, as José Rosa pointed out:

They attacked the police with rocks, bottles. When the CTA busses came around they attacked the CTA bus at one point. When they set the [police] car afire on Damen, when the fire department came, they wanted to take over the fire truck they were trying to hold them back from; they were only attacking government property, you know, CTA, fire department, police force. That was the enemy. There was nothing against any other race.<sup>46</sup>

Even the Chicago Police Department itself acknowledged roughly the same thing. After the first night, Assistant Deputy Police Superintendent John Hartnett “denied there was anything racial connected with the outbreak, saying ‘it was a battle against the police.’”<sup>47</sup> Hartnett’s statement was clearly self-interested, and it conveniently elided the fact that years of accumulated racist behavior on the part of the police force helped incite the “battle” against them. At the same time, however, it is notable that there is no record of any attacks against the substantial Polish population in the neighborhood.

### **Monday: “When the Puerto Ricans Began the Real Fight”**

The first evening of the Division Street Riots ended in a late night rainstorm around 3AM. By Monday morning, Rosa and a number of other prominent Puerto Ricans were strategizing how to prevent a recurrence of the previous night’s events. Apparently without exception, community leaders from both the *Caballeros* and the various secular groups opposed the riots and preferred the model of non-violent protest rallies – the rent strikes and

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<sup>46</sup> Parmalee, “Interview with José Rosa.”

<sup>47</sup> “Police, Leaders Huddle,” *Chicago Defender*, June 14, 1966.

pickets that had been lauded by Antonio Irizarry two years earlier.<sup>48</sup> As a result, they found themselves in a difficult position: while they were used to complaining to city officials about police misconduct, substandard housing, and a range of other social problems facing the community, they were not accustomed to collaborating directly with the police department in order to keep the community itself in line. Suddenly, civic and religious leaders in the community ran the risk of losing their claim to represent the community. Angelo Dominguez, who was working with Parmalee, expressed the dilemma succinctly: “I thought that if I should tell them to be quiet, they were going to say that I was not with them, that I was their enemy.”<sup>49</sup> There were ways to evade this contradiction, at least for a time. Some, like Sister Ana Cecilia, went to assist at the bail hearings for those arrested the night before, while others, like Rosa, remained in the community to deal with the aftermath of the night before.

Rosa worked at the Latin American Boys Club, just off of Division Street near Humboldt Park. By noon on Monday, he recalled, “there was people on the street complaining about ‘I got hurt,’ and ‘my son is in jail.’ You know, everyone was complaining about the police.”<sup>50</sup> By the time the arrestees had been bailed out around 3PM, many prominent local Puerto Ricans were meeting at the Boys Club to plan for the evening to come. At some point, a three-sided negotiation took place, with civic and religious leaders trying to convince the police to back off for the evening, while the police in turn were looking for local street gangs to fill the void. According to Sister Ana Cecilia, “The community leaders had spoken to Commander [William L.] Coesfield. He had said he had spoken to the gang leaders and had told them he would not

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<sup>48</sup> Irizarry, “Ya Era Tiempo,” 4.

<sup>49</sup> Parmalee, “Interview with Angelo Dominguez.”

<sup>50</sup> Parmalee, “Interview with José Rosa.”

allow his policemen to interfere in any way, that they [gang and community leaders] were to take care of the situation.”<sup>51</sup> The *Tribune* reported that Coesfield, the head of the nearby 13<sup>th</sup> Police District, hoped to “enable community leaders to restore the peace.”<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, some civic and religious leaders were meeting with Mayor Daley downtown, while others stayed in the neighborhood and developed a plan to disperse within the anticipated crowds and defuse any conflicts, calling in regularly to the Boys Club for coordination of their efforts.

The initial test of the community’s effort to self-police came during an impromptu rally in Humboldt Park, where up to 2,000 people gathered by mid-afternoon. Several civic and religious leaders gave speeches, but the crowd was restless. At some point, according to Rosa, a number of African American organizers showed up, “talking to the people and passing armbands and badges, you know, buttons around, and in about one hour they had 150 Puerto Ricans organized on their side.”<sup>53</sup> The armbands identified the organizers as part of the “Freedom Army.” While Rosa appears to have viewed them as militant nationalists eager to incite another night of rioting, they were in fact part of a committee set up by Reverend Al Sampson, one of the main organizers of King’s Northern Campaign, to attract local gang members to the non-violent model advocated by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and its local ally, the Chicago Freedom Movement.<sup>54</sup>

For Rosa, fear of black involvement in the conflicts on Division Street originated not only in his mistaken fear of radical militants (who were actually self-identified pacifists) encouraging

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<sup>51</sup> Parmalee, “Interview with Sister Ana Cecilia.”

<sup>52</sup> “7 Shot in New Disorder: 37 in Defiant Crowd Seized on N. W. Side,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 14, 1966, p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Parmalee, “Interview with José Rosa.”

<sup>54</sup> Thomas F. Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Struggle for Economic Justice* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 285; “Rally Drawing Many City Segments,” *Chicago Defender*, July 2, 1966, p. 2.



further violence but also in support for a demographic and ideological separation between black and Puerto Rican struggles:

The Freedom Army, whatever they call it – these guys are taking over. If you don't come up with something more attractive to them than what they offer, we are going to lose our people and they are going to be acting like these people and we are going to get into more trouble. If we fill this place up with Negroes, we are going to go *real* down deep in trouble with these people.<sup>55</sup>

Part of the problem Rosa saw with engaging the Civil Rights Movement was that, beyond alienating many Puerto Ricans, it would infuriate the large and presumably racist Polish population of West Town and Humboldt Park. The priority Rosa and others placed on relations with ethnic whites as opposed to African Americans reflected the continuing power of liberal Americanization as a political strategy that hoped to ensure smooth relations with white Chicagoans in order to make steady progress on resolving community issues.

Ongoing conflicts and transformations within the Black Freedom Movement no doubt conditioned Rosa's expression of concern. For instance, he expressed apprehension about the potential role of "black Muslims" during the Division Street Riots. Malcolm X had been dead a mere sixteen months, and the Nation of Islam was erroneously perceived by many in the United States as eager to incite riots.<sup>56</sup> The black-led urban unrest of the previous two summers had accelerated a growing challenge to the hegemony within the Civil Rights Movement of King's non-violent strategy of civil disobedience, while also bursting the geographic boundaries that had previously focused national attention on the South. The very same week the Division Street Riots rocked Chicago, Stokely Carmichael gave his famous "Black Power" speech in

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<sup>55</sup> Parmalee, "Interview with José Rosa." Emphasis in original.

<sup>56</sup> On Malcolm X and the role of the NOI in confronting potential urban riot situations during the late 1950s and early 1960s, see Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (New York: Viking, 2011), 127-129, 207-210.

Mississippi, providing a label to a tendency in the movement that had been developing for some time.<sup>57</sup> Partly in response to these challenges, King's Northern Campaign initiated an effort to reach out to Chicago's gangs, presumed to be responsible for instances of civil disorder, and convince them of the benefits of non-violent direct action.<sup>58</sup> The flip side of Rosa's fear of black radicalism, then, was Sampson's mistaken belief that the thousands assembling in Humboldt Park on Monday afternoon were all or largely gang affiliated and that the gangs would gravitate toward violence were it not for the Freedom Army's efforts. By contrast, as all contemporaneous observers agreed, the crowd was every bit as diverse as the one the evening before. In addition, a report on the Riots by a community social service agency indicated that local gang members actively prevented violence, for example by physically securing a vacant lot filled with rocks and other potential weapons and preventing access by would-be rioters.<sup>59</sup>

As the sun again descended toward the horizon, the impromptu rally in Humboldt Park transformed into a protest march headed toward the 13<sup>th</sup> District Police Station, a mile and a half away. Once in the streets, the same confluence of revelry and rage re-emerged for a second evening. According to Sister Ana Cecilia, "it was about 7 or 7:30 [PM] that things started to get out of control."<sup>60</sup> In a celebratory mood, protesters dragged newspaper boxes and other

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<sup>57</sup> See Peniel Joseph, *Waiting Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 141-142; Taylor Branch, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-1968* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 485-486.

<sup>58</sup> For background on the Northern Campaign's outreach to black street gangs in Chicago, see Diamond, *Mean Streets*, 265-272.

<sup>59</sup> YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago, "The West Town Streets Unit's Role in the Division Street Puerto Rican Incidents," prepared by Monte C. Unger (with help from Hank Bach and Tony DeMarco, YMCA Detached Workers), 4 pages, 1966. Box 93, folder 12, Chicago Area Project Papers, Chicago History Museum. For more on local gang structures and activities during this period, see Diamond, *Mean Streets*, 193-300.

<sup>60</sup> Parmalee, "Interview with Sister Ana Cecilia."

objects into the otherwise empty Division Street as they marched. Police responded to reports of property damage by re-entering the zone they had promised to avoid. According to one report, Coesfield himself appeared to speak to the crowd, and was pelted with rocks until he fled.<sup>61</sup> By this point, the crowd had grown even more massive: Coesfield subsequently claimed it reached 10,000, an astonishing figure if true, representing almost one-fifth of the estimated city-wide Puerto Rican population of 55,000.<sup>62</sup>

Street fighting began yet again, along with the most extensive looting of the week. Targets included an auto parts store and a grocery store, although the extent of looting and property damage was the subject of some disagreement. According to the *Tribune*, “virtually every store on Division Street in the area was damaged.”<sup>63</sup> At the same time, however, the *Defender* pointed to the role of revelry in preventing total destruction, even during episodes of looting. “In the midst of the melee,” noted one of the paper’s reporters, “a Puerto Rican restaurant on Division Street never stopped operating; it was jammed to capacity with happy patrons, eating and enjoying themselves, while across the street a liquor store had been broken into and robbed of all its stock.”<sup>64</sup>

As the violence worsened on the second night of rioting, firearms became part of the equation for the first time. Apart from Munyon’s wounding of Cruz, there had been little gunfire on Sunday evening. On Monday evening, by contrast, bullets flew far more freely. The police appear to have initiated this particular escalation, when “an angry, jeering group of 500

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<sup>61</sup> YMCA, “The West Town Streets Unit’s Role.”

<sup>62</sup> Coesfield’s crowd size estimate in “7 Shot in New Disorder.” Population estimate in Chicago Commission on Human Relations, *The Puerto Rican Residents of Chicago: Report on an Open Hearing July 15 and 16, 1966, and Community Response to Date* (Chicago: Mayor’s Committee on New Residents, 1966), 1.

<sup>63</sup> “7 Shot in New Disorder.”

<sup>64</sup> Thelma Hunt Shirley, “Confetti,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, June 20, 1966, 12.

youths started east in Division, where they were halted by 50 policemen who fired their guns into the air.”<sup>65</sup> Over the rest of the evening, while 37 more arrests took place, seven people were shot, including at least one injured by a police officer. Even this escalation was welcomed by many Puerto Ricans angry at the continued brutality of the police. According to one neighborhood resident interviewed the next day, the shift to the use of firearms indicated that “last night was when the Puerto Ricans began the real fight.”<sup>66</sup>

### **Tuesday: “A Carnival-Like Atmosphere Prevailed Along Division Street”**

By the morning of the third day, the City of Chicago was changing its approach to the continuing unrest in at least two ways. On the one hand, it attempted to placate some of the most basic Puerto Rican concerns regarding racist policing. Officer Howard was re-assigned out of the 13<sup>th</sup> district to the overwhelmingly white Jefferson Park neighborhood. He promptly resigned in disgust at this perceived capitulation.<sup>67</sup> On a broader level, the Police Superintendent mandated that effective immediately as many patrol cars as possible should be integrated, with one white and one non-white officer.<sup>68</sup> How broadly this directive could be implemented, given the overwhelmingly white police force, was unclear.<sup>69</sup> Still, the potential

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<sup>65</sup> “7 Shot in New Disorder.”

<sup>66</sup> Janet Parmalee, “The Taping Session,” June 14, 1966. (JNC) Neither this resident nor anyone else interviewed the week of the riots admitted any involvement in the gunfire or any other illegal activities, which should not be surprising considering the potential legal repercussions.

<sup>67</sup> “7 Shot in New Disorder.”

<sup>68</sup> Donald Moseby and Arnold Rosenzweig, “O. W. Orders Full Squad Car Integration,” *Chicago Defender*, June 15, 1966, p. 1.

<sup>69</sup> The criminologist William J. Bopp, in his biography of O. W. Wilson, Chicago Police Commissioner from 1960 through 1967, indicates that in 1960 there were only 700 African American officers out of a total of more than 9,000. No number is provided for Puerto Rican, Mexican, or Asian American officers. William J. Bopp, *O. W.: O. W. Wilson and the Search for a Police Profession* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press/National University Publications, 1977), 83-97.

impact in the Puerto Rican community was made clear by one report from the *Defender*, which noted that

In their attack on police authority, care was taken (even in the heat of battle) to differentiate between the white and the black cop. Hostile warriors would run up to the police personnel and scream, “You’re o.k., señor (or black brother) but you – white man – take off your guns.”<sup>70</sup>

The presence of black officers, normally assigned only to overwhelmingly African American neighborhoods on the South and West sides, was something of a novelty for Chicago’s Puerto Rican community. There were a handful of Puerto Rican and Mexican officers, and the Chicago Police Department soon expanded its recruitment of Puerto Ricans to the police academy via targeted advertising on Spanish-language radio. One radio announcer voiced his support for this effort: “You know we need Puerto Rican policemen so that there can be more understanding for us. Okay?”<sup>71</sup> The city also lowered its minimum height requirements from 5’8” to 5’7”, admitting officer candidates one inch shorter than had previously been allowed.<sup>72</sup>

Still, if some protesters reacted differently to police officers depending upon race or ethnicity, this feeling was by no means unanimous. In an extended interview on Tuesday, one group of longtime Puerto Rican residents agreed unanimously that there was no difference between Spanish-speaking officers and the rest. One of the interviewees opined, entirely without regard to the race of officers, that “No one can live in Chicago for 18 years and not have problems with the police. I assure you.”<sup>73</sup> In a different interview on the same day, several young protesters expressed consensus that a Puerto Rican officer commonly known as

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<sup>70</sup> Hunt, “Confetti.”

<sup>71</sup> Janet Parmalee, “A Call for Puerto Rican Police Recruits,” June 22, 1966 (JNC).

<sup>72</sup> City of Chicago Press Release, July 5, 1966. (JNC)

<sup>73</sup> Parmalee, “The Taping Session.”

“Chico” was “the worst cop around here.”<sup>74</sup> Another young man said he would never want to be a police officer because “I don’t like to push people around;” when asked if he couldn’t be a good cop, he replied, “You can’t find a good policeman in this world.”<sup>75</sup> Open advocacy of violence against the police was also commonplace: one man claimed he would like to run over a cop with his car (“It’s going to be his word against mine – if he’s still living, of course – which I doubt very much”), while on Tuesday Parmalee listened to a pair of nine-year-old boys arguing about who had thrown more rocks at the police the night before.<sup>76</sup> The *Tribune* reported another protester saying “They should shoot them all [the policemen]. They don’t care anything about us.”<sup>77</sup>

Recognizing the reality of widespread community support of violence against the police, the other approach adopted by the Department on the third day of unrest was a military-style show of overwhelming strength. Coesfield was sidelined and Captain James Holzman, newly named Acting Deputy Chief of Patrol, took command of the police response. The *Tribune* labeled Holzman’s approach: “Be tough with a smile.”<sup>78</sup> Newly implemented tactics included the use of police helicopters to track crowd movements, the forced closure of all taverns in the general vicinity of riot zone, and a march by several hundred riot-helmeted police down Division Street in late afternoon. This last effort seems not to have produced the intended consequences, at least not initially. Sister Ana Cecilia expressed both frustration and bemusement at the maneuver:

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<sup>74</sup> Janet Parmalee, “Interview with Robin, Batman, and Zorro,” June 14, 1966.

<sup>75</sup> Janet Parmalee, “Interview with Wilfredo, Batman, Zorro, and Dino,” June 16, 1966 (JNC).

<sup>76</sup> Parmalee, “The Taping Session;” Janet Parmalee, “On My Way to the Office,” June 14, 1966 (JNC)

<sup>77</sup> “Reporter Strolls Along Division Street,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 15, 1966, p. 2.

<sup>78</sup> “500 Police Keep Watch on N. W. Side: Clear Streets of Crowds,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 15, 1966, p. 1.

I think what really horrified me was when one of the captains decided to have a wave of policemen march down the block – they were ten abreast and they were ten deep – and they started walking down the block and when the captain gave the command, they would break off and all the people that were sitting on the stoops on either side of the street were pushed into the doors and it was ridiculous because as soon as they pushed them in and walked by and passed on to the next house, the people would come right back out on the stoops.<sup>79</sup>

The heavy police presence does seem to have limited the gunfire and looting that had erupted the day before, but it did not dampen the revelrous joy of the prior days. On Wednesday, the *Tribune* reported that “a carnival-like atmosphere prevailed along Division Street between Damen and California Avenues last night, almost masking the fact that this same area had been shattered by fighting Sunday and Monday.”<sup>80</sup>

One striking aspect of the continuing revelry was the contradictory impact of cultural nationalism within the context of the riots. A collective sense of pride as Puerto Ricans was visible, but only to a certain extent, possibly because it had been tainted by its association with the failed project of liberal Americanization. The *Tribune* commented on “a Puerto Rican girl” “wrapped in a Puerto Rican flag” who “seemed to symbolize the feeling of Puerto Rican nationalism which was felt throughout the area.”<sup>81</sup> Another report struck a more troubled tone, describing “an intense feeling of patriotism” as one of the two “problems” that led to the unrest.<sup>82</sup> Still, the lingering hegemonic influence of liberal Americanization meant that there were no active political organizations engaged in any analysis of imperialism or colonialism. No one interviewed that week referenced the Nationalist Party or Pedro Albizu Campos, who had died just one year earlier. Neither the civic and religious leaders nor the street gangs made

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<sup>79</sup> Parmalee, “Interview with Sister Ana Cecilia.”

<sup>80</sup> “Reporter Strolls Along Division Street.”

<sup>81</sup> “Reporter Strolls Along Division Street.”

<sup>82</sup> YMCA, “The West Town Street Unit’s Role.”

frequent use of the rhetoric of cultural nationalism, preferring instead the language of discrimination and ethnic relations. The Young Lords, whose turf, in any event, was two miles northeast of the epicenter of the Riots, had not yet made their turn toward becoming a revolutionary organization.<sup>83</sup>

The dozens of people Parmalee and others interviewed that week only infrequently discussed cultural pride in Puerto Rico as related in any way to the unrest. Further, they unanimously disclaimed radical, socialist, or “Communist” involvement. One long-time resident expressed profound concern because

many people have been saying that the Communists are involved in this, but the Communists really have nothing to do with it. This is a dispute between the Puerto Ricans themselves and the police, because Communism here in Chicago has only been active for four or five years, but this difficulty among the Puerto Ricans has existed for many years.<sup>84</sup>

Speculation about “outside agitators” and the role of Communists was rife in the media, and residents were eager to counter such accusations. Another interviewee explained that “there are a lot of lies in the newspapers now. The whole city believes that what we are looking for is Communism. None of them know really why the Puerto Ricans are against the police.”<sup>85</sup> The residents of West Town themselves struggled with the contradiction between liberal Americanization and cultural nationalism, as indicated in a conversation witnessed by Angelo Dominguez on Tuesday afternoon: “A boy came up and said in English: ‘What we have to do is

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<sup>83</sup> See Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 173-205.

<sup>84</sup> Parmalee, “The Taping Session,” June 14, 1966.

<sup>85</sup> Parmalee, “The Taping Session,” June 14, 1966.



get big posters saying “Yankee, go home,” and things like that.’ Another boy who was there said, ‘They ARE at home. We are the ones who are not at home here!’”<sup>86</sup>

Nonetheless, Puerto Ricans in West Town and Humboldt Park were at least as disconnected from the city’s mainstream politics, including the massive and powerful Democratic Party machine led by Daley, as they were from Communism or the island’s independence movement. Tuesday, June 14 1966 was primary day for the State of Illinois, but none of the people interviewed that week gave any attention to the local or state-wide races that captivated other communities.<sup>87</sup> No Democratic operatives were mobilized to contain the rioting, and no pro-Daley get-out-the-vote effort competed with the Freedom Army amidst the crowds on Division Street. In short, the Riots demonstrated the ways in which Chicago’s Puerto Rican community was unmoored from established political trends of all sorts.

### **Aftermath: “You Suffer ... Because You Are Darker ... We Are Dark Too”**

For reasons that remain unclear, there was no fourth day of rioting on Division Street. The community didn’t exactly return to “normal,” whatever that would have meant; instead, the violence of the previous days was replaced by a tense calm that was clearly a transitional phase into an unknown future. In the words of Sister Ana Cecilia, the conflict was far from resolved: “The only thing the city has done or anyone has done is simply suppress this situation.”<sup>88</sup> Still, the continuing attempts by city officials and prominent figures in the community to prevent further unrest finally proved successful. Wednesday morning a flyer

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<sup>86</sup> Angelo Dominguez, “Street-Corner Talk,” June 14, 1966 (JNC)

<sup>87</sup> George Tagge, “Bonds Win by Big Margin; O’Hara Beats Mikva; Dawson Victor; Percy to Face Sen. Douglas; Page, Rowe Are Nominated; Daley Machine Shows Strength in Test,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 15, 1966, p. 1.

<sup>88</sup> Parmalee, “Interview with Sister Ana Cecilia.”

appeared, signed by two prominent Puerto Rican protestant ministers, arguing that “this is the moment that we (Puerto Ricans) can demonstrate that we have the capacity to solve all the problems without violence.”<sup>89</sup> In a subsequent interview, Rev. Daniel Alvarez made specific mention of the influence of the Civil Rights Movement on their approach: “We need to learn the non-violent movement of Dr. Martin Luther King.”<sup>90</sup>

Alvarez was not merely speaking in the abstract. King and his team, still very much ensconced in the Lawndale neighborhood a couple miles south and west of West Town, reached out publically to the Puerto Rican community urging a united – and non-violent – campaign against racism. Sampson issued an official statement on behalf of King on June 14: “it would be a privilege and an honor to join hands with the fine citizens of the Puerto Rican community in striving for equality and freedom through the non-violent philosophy.”<sup>91</sup> James Orange, a young SCLC organizer who had helped build the Freedom Army alongside Sampson and voluntarily suffered repeated beatings from gang members eager to prove his commitment to non-violence, spoke to a gathering of Puerto Ricans a few days later, building a case for racial solidarity against white supremacy: “You face police brutality, we face police brutality. You have slum housing, we have slum housing [...] You suffer from the pressures and pains of prejudice because you are darker [...] We’re dark too.”<sup>92</sup>

Still, no meaningful coalition developed, whether at the grassroots level or across organizations. Anti-racist protests took place seemingly daily in Chicago during the summer of

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<sup>89</sup> “A Bulletin Published and Addressed to Puerto Ricans,” June 15, 1966 (JNC).

<sup>90</sup> “King Calls for Puerto Rican Meet,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, June 15, 1966, p. 3.

<sup>91</sup> “King Calls for Puerto Rican Meet.”

<sup>92</sup> Bill Van Alstine, “2 Sides Wooing Puerto Ricans,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, June 20, 1966, p. 3. On Orange’s interaction with gang members in Chicago, see Michael S. Lottman, “Alabama Rights Fighters Now in Chicago,” *Southern Courier*, May 28-29, 1966, p. 6.

1966, but they proceeded on parallel tracks, with mutual endorsements marking the limit of cross-pollination. King did make “a special appeal to Latin-American residents of Chicago to join me” at a major rally on July 10 at Soldier Field, but the only Puerto Rican speaker at the rally itself appears to have been Rev. Sergio Herrero, a protestant minister from a different neighborhood, and there is no evidence that substantial numbers of Puerto Ricans attended.<sup>93</sup> Meanwhile, the newly formed Spanish Action Committee of Chicago (SACC) led a march and rally on June 28 that ran from Humboldt Park to downtown and back to West Town. The event drew “some whites and Negroes” but no official representatives of SCLC or local black groups.<sup>94</sup> A follow-up march the following week was substantially smaller, but did produce a face-to-face meeting with Daley.<sup>95</sup> SACC acknowledged that SCLC had offered material assistance, but explained that “such aid has been declined ‘for the present’.”<sup>96</sup>

Almost exactly one month after the events on Division Street, a series of riots erupted in the African American community on the west side of Chicago, just a few miles from West Town. The first outbreak began the day after the big Soldier Field Rally, on the near west side, mere blocks from the old stomping grounds of the local branch of the Nationalist Party. A minor conflict with police, over the opening of a fire hydrant by local youth on an extremely hot day,

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<sup>93</sup> “Rev. King Asks Latin Leaders to Join March,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, June 16, 1966, p. 4; “30,000 Hear Dr. King at Soldier Field Rally: 98 Degree Temperature Fails to Prevent Huge Turnout,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 11, 1966, p. 3. Herrero was assistant pastor at the congregation that two years later was occupied as “the People’s Church” by the Young Lords Organization.

<sup>94</sup> Thomas Power, “Puerto Ricans Give Demands to Daley Aids: More than 200 Join Protest March,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 29, 1966, p. A2; “First Puerto Rican Rally, March Set Today: SACC Will Make Demands of Mayor at City Hall,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, June 28, 1966, p. 4.

<sup>95</sup> “Mayor Meets with Puerto Rican Group,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 7, 1966, p. 3.

<sup>96</sup> “Holiday Used for Rallies by Protesters: Rights, Anti-War Demonstrations Conducted,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 5, 1966, p. A12.

rapidly escalated into street fighting.<sup>97</sup> As unrest spread west and north over the next few days, the National Guard was called out, an action that had not even been contemplated in the case of the Division Street Riots. Still, there was no discernible response from within the Puerto Rican community, either supporting or opposing the militancy of the rioters. This was especially striking considering the experience of three Puerto Rican men who accidentally entered the riot zone on the first evening. They were initially assaulted by rioters, but were subsequently protected by black neighborhood activists from the West Side Organization (WSO).<sup>98</sup> In the end, despite obvious opportunities and relative proximity, no joint movement, whether reformist or insurgent, against the shared problems of police brutality, segregated housing, and white supremacy in general, emerged over the course of the summer.

Multiple factors contributed to this disconnect. In the summer of 1966, the appeal of King's movement was under assault from both right and left, with the Daley administration and newly emerging black radicals both criticizing the SCLC model of civil disobedience and mass protest. Notwithstanding Irizarry's pickets and rent strikes, there was no significant tradition of non-violent direct action for civil rights in Chicago's Puerto Rican community. Years of lobbying and similar efforts under the rubric of liberal Americanization, by the Migration Division, the *Caballeros*, and others had failed to produce significant results, particularly in terms of relations with the police. In stark contrast, the City's response to the Division Street riot was swift. Within a month, the Chicago Commission on Human Relations (CCHR) held hearings to "inquire

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<sup>97</sup> The most comprehensive description of the events on the Near West Side is Bernard O. Brown, *Ideology and Community Action: The West Side Organization of Chicago, 1964-67* (Chicago: Center for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1978), 49-59.

<sup>98</sup> Brown, *Ideology and Community Action*, 52-53.

into the conditions surrounding the disturbances,” and to remind the public that the City had already “generated many new programs for the Spanish-speaking.”<sup>99</sup>

The hearings held by the CCHR reflected an early but extremely limited manifestation of official endorsement for Mumford’s “riots as racism” framework, focused on identifying legitimate grievances in the community while marking out of bounds deeper or more fundamental issues (including, importantly, any discussion of racism itself). In a practical sense, they were a crucial part of an effort by city officials to contain the growth of Puerto Rican militancy and to prevent any coordination across riot zones. Ely Aaron, head of the CCHR and chair of the hearings, explicitly endorsed liberal Americanization, arguing that the hearing was aimed at “hastening the merging of all Spanish-speaking people into the general community with full preservation of their native culture.”<sup>100</sup> The hearings were widely lauded in the mainstream press, with the *Chicago Daily News* opining: “We congratulate the Puerto Rican spokesmen for a lucid, orderly, dignified presentation of the needs and hopes of their community. The contrast with the concurrent events on the Near West Side need hardly be stressed.”<sup>101</sup> Daley had appointed a prominent conservative Puerto Rican, Claudio Flores, to the CCHR immediately after the Riots. Flores owned *El Puertorriqueño*, then the only major Spanish-language print publication in Chicago, which also editorialized in support of the hearings, arguing they had “greater worth” than any march or rally.<sup>102</sup>

Even the government of Puerto Rico itself sent representatives (largely from New York) to testify at the hearings, which prompted a complaint from Parmalee regarding the surprising

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<sup>99</sup> Chicago Commission on Human Relations, *The Puerto Rican Residents of Chicago*, 1, 4.

<sup>100</sup> Robert L. Dishon, “Spanish Aides for Cops Urged,” *Chicago Daily News*, July 15, 1966.

<sup>101</sup> “The Puerto Ricans’ Case,” *Chicago Daily News*, July 18, 1966, p. 6.

<sup>102</sup> “The Importance of the Public Hearings,” *El Puertorriqueño*, July 15-21, 1966 (JNC); translator unknown.

dearth of participation by “unofficial little people with complaints of police brutality or discrimination.”<sup>103</sup> Instead, according to Parmalee, the hearings were dominated by prominent Puerto Rican institutions like the *Caballeros* and the Migration Division. This no doubt contributed to the fact that the official response focused almost solely on technical fixes rather than systemic changes. Thus, for example, the language barrier between English and Spanish was widely discussed, while police brutality, slum housing, and poverty received almost no attention. Paradoxically, then, the City’s response dampened Puerto Rican enthusiasm for non-violence while simultaneously pointing to the necessity of continued and militant direct action on the civil rights model.

Still, the general attitude of Puerto Ricans toward African Americans during and immediately after the riot was contradictory. Racially charged suspicion of blacks was widespread, but so was a sincere appreciation of their determination to struggle for justice and freedom. A few months after the riot, Parmalee noted a belief among Puerto Rican gang members that African American gangs “want to take over,” and “will force us to hang out somewhere else and they will take over our corner,” even though very few black people actually lived in the West Town neighborhood.<sup>104</sup> José Rosa held King and SCLC at arms length and remained skeptical of any collaboration, maintaining that “the particular problem that happened on Division Street didn’t have anything to do with civil rights.”<sup>105</sup> But some other leading figures, such as Alvarez and Herrero, were receptive to such overtures. Obed López recalled having been instrumental in bringing Sampson and Orange to meet with Puerto Rican

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<sup>103</sup> Jane Parmalee, “The Public Hearings on Puerto Rican Problems,” July 15, 1966 (JNC).

<sup>104</sup> Janet Parmalee, “Attitudes of the Puerto Ricans Toward the Negro,” November 7, 1966, (JNC).

<sup>105</sup> Parmalee, “Interview with José Rosa.” (JNC)

activists during and after the Riots. At the end of July, Parmalee interviewed two well-known men in the community, one of whom suggested that African Americans and Puerto Ricans “should get together and fight for our rights.”<sup>106</sup> In a sense, the diversity of views among Puerto Ricans regarding interaction with African Americans confirmed Angelo Dominguez’s insight regarding the “interior struggle” of Puerto Ricans, especially in terms of their racial status.

### **Conclusion: Looking Toward *Latinidad***

With the exception of Obed López and a few others, the story of the Division Street Riots is a story about Puerto Ricans, African Americans, Poles and other white folks, but it is not a story about Mexicans. A common language could not overcome differences in culture, citizenship status, and geographic concentration in the neighborhood-centered Chicago of the 1960s. If anything, the strength of Puerto Rican nationalism ensured separation rather than collaboration. But the Riots generated a rethinking of racial categories among Puerto Ricans, helping lead to the eventual embrace of a collective identity. Several terms jostled for support in the years before and after the Riots, not only in Chicago but across the United States: “Hispanic” (a translation of the Spanish “hispano”), “Spanish-speaking” (sometimes shortened simply to “Spanish”), “Latin American” (alternately “Latin” or “Latino”). Locally, groups founded in the immediate aftermath of the Riots included the Spanish Action Committee of Chicago (SACC) and the Latin American Defense Organization (LADO). Both, along with others, attempted to bridge the gap between the Puerto Rican and Mexican communities.

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<sup>106</sup> Janet Parmalee, “Interview with Juan Robert Sanabria and Adolfo López,” July 30, 1966 (JNC).

Lofland's analysis of revelry, paired with the emphasis on agency shared by Mumford, McLaughlin, Padilla and Seligman, helps explain why and how Puerto Rican cultural nationalism could be reframed as part of a broader project of *Latinidad*. The Riots were a joyous experience, notwithstanding the destruction and pain they necessarily generated, and over the next decade, a generation of activists would redirect Puerto Rican cultural nationalism in an effort to recapture the joy of that pivotal week in June, 1966. Groups like LADO, as we shall see in the next chapter, attempted to build bridges between Mexicans and Puerto Ricans on the basis of a common experience of oppression and resistance, and in this process the Riots struck an obvious chord as a collective response by "brown" people. Thus, the Division Street Riots themselves would become part of the lore of pan-Latino organizing in Chicago, which emphasized the righteous character of urban rebellion on behalf of Puerto Rican liberation. This was on display as early as September, 1966, when Parmalee noted a fundamental change in the consciousness of her neighbors in West Town. "The newspapers called it a riot," she wrote, "but the people who live on Division Street call it a revolution and still date recent events from before or after the 'revolution'."<sup>107</sup>

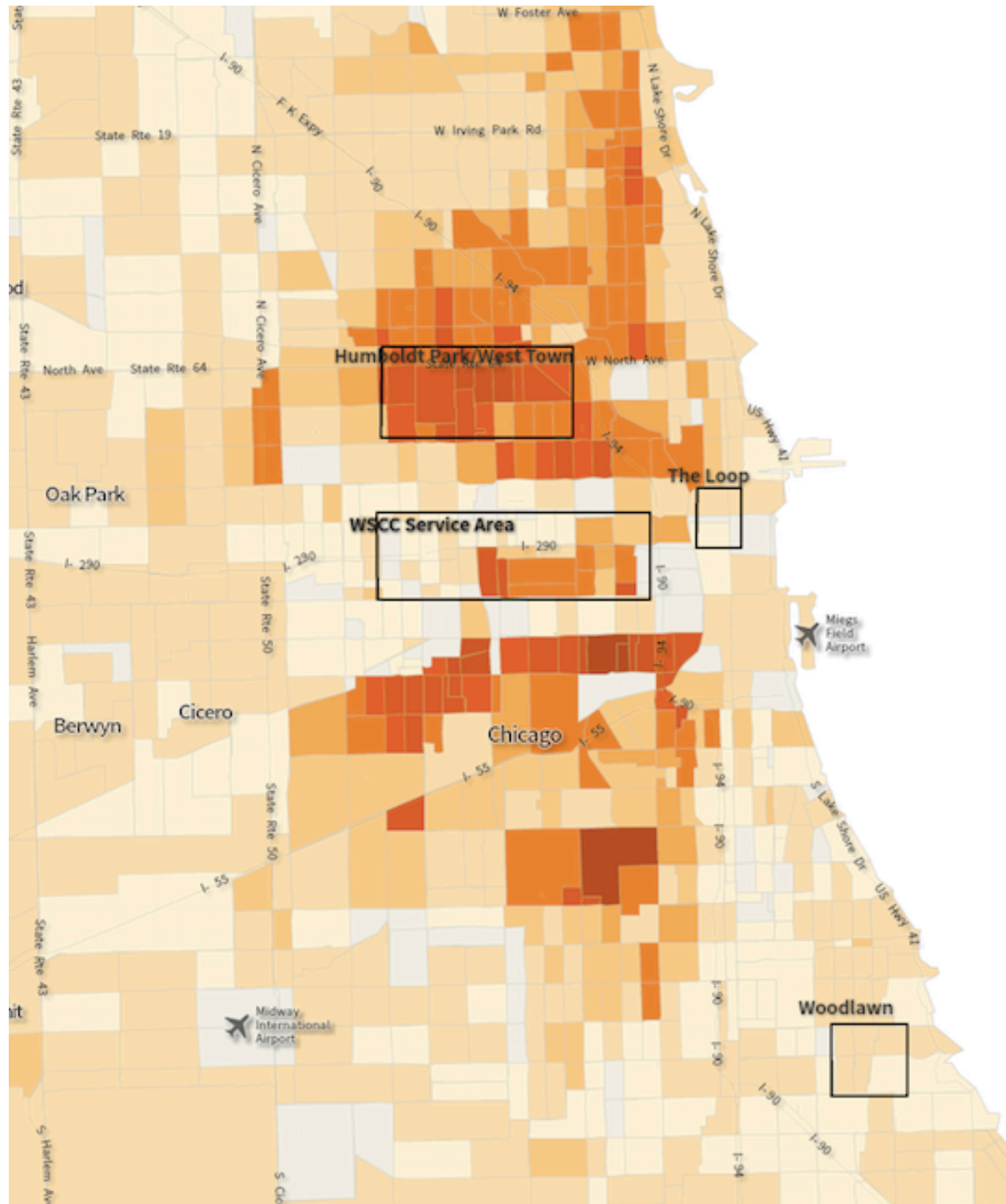
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<sup>107</sup> Janet Parmalee, "A Riot is Born," September 13, 1966 (JNC).



**Figure 2: Puerto Rican Chicago, 1970**

Color-coded census tracts: greater concentrations of “Spanish origin or descent” shown in darker shades. [Map via [sociaexplorer.com](http://www.sociaexplorer.com); available on the internet at <http://www.sociaexplorer.com/8b70c95c97/view> ]



## Chapter Four: “For One We All Pay”: The Nadir of Cultural Nationalism, 1966-1967

### Introduction: “They Didn’t Want Him to Talk”

The summer of 1966 was predictably tense in West Town and Humboldt Park. Conflicts between residents and the police never escalated back to the level of the Riots in June, but on at least one occasion they got close. On the afternoon of August 1, 1966, officers were called to a building on Division Street near Western Avenue, a half-mile west of where Arcelis Cruz had been shot by police in June, responding to what at least two press reports called a “trivial” dispute.<sup>1</sup> Wilfredo and Daisy Lebrón lived on the first floor of a two flat with their nine children, eight of whom were home when the police arrived. Several of the children watched as the police forced open the door and fired multiple rounds, hitting Wilfredo Lebrón in the chest, forehead, and limbs. According to Daisy Lebrón, at least one bullet went astray into the next room and penetrated the blanket under which the couple’s youngest child, then only a month old, lay asleep in her crib.<sup>2</sup> In her telling, the police continued shooting after he fell to the floor: “He tried to talk to me; his mouth was moving – but they didn’t want him to talk; they shot two more bullets into him.”<sup>3</sup> It appears that he bled to death almost immediately, though he was driven several miles to Cook County Hospital, where, the *Chicago Tribune* reported, “he was pronounced dead on arrival.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Wilfredo Lebrón Dies – Shot Five Times,” *Spanish Press*, Aug. 4, 1966 (JNC); “The ‘Coordinating Junta’ and Wilfredo Lebrón’s Case,” *El Puertorriqueño*, Aug. 5-11, 1966 (JNC). As indicated in Chapter Three, most names drawn from the JNC, including Wilfredo and Daisy Lebrón, are pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup> “Welfare Problem,” March 1, 1967 (JNC).

<sup>3</sup> “Welfare Problem,” March 1, 1967 (JNC).

<sup>4</sup> “1,500 Gather as Cops Kill Berserk Man: Police Disperse Crowd in Puerto Rican Area,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 2, 1966, p. A4.

The police subsequently maintained that Wilfredo Lebrón fired shots through the door of his apartment as they arrived, leading the *Tribune* to describe him as having “gone berserk.”<sup>5</sup> In an interview several months later, his widow – despite her anger at the police for having killed her husband – refused to rule out this possibility. He was armed, she acknowledged, saying only “I don’t know – everything happened so fast.”<sup>6</sup> Police reinforcements quickly came to help secure the apartment, leading to accusations that they were tampering with the scene to absolve themselves of blame for Lebrón’s death. Daisy Lebrón later claimed that she and the children had been held at gunpoint for several minutes, and that she had feared for her own life: “I don’t know what they were saying because they didn’t know any Spanish. There was nobody who could help us.”<sup>7</sup>

In fact, several members of a self-appointed community leadership group, calling itself the Coordinating Junta of Puerto Rican Affairs, had also arrived at the building, hoping to assist the family. Among them were Antonio Irizarry, formerly of the WSCC, and Rafael Dominguez, who had been chair of that year’s Puerto Rican Parade Committee. But for at least some period of time, Daisy Lebrón had no idea they were there. Irizarry was detained when he tried to enter the apartment building, as was a local representative of the Migration Division of the Puerto Rican Department of Labor. Both were briefly handcuffed and held in patrol cars, but then freed almost immediately. Irizarry later declared, “The policemen did not want anybody in the apartment in those moments. They were arranging the scene in their own way.”<sup>8</sup> In the meantime, the killing drew immediate attention in the neighborhood, coming, as it did, just six

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<sup>5</sup> “1,500 Gather as Cops Kill Berserk Man.”

<sup>6</sup> “Welfare Problem,” March 1, 1967 (JNC).

<sup>7</sup> “Welfare Problem,” March 1, 1967 (JNC).

<sup>8</sup> “Wilfredo Lebrón Dies – Shot Five Times,” *Spanish Press*, August 4, 1966 (JNC).

weeks after the Division Street Riots. A chaotic scene rapidly materialized on the street outside the building. According to the weekly Spanish-language newspaper *El Puertorriqueño*, another riot was only narrowly avoided by the efforts of Irizarry, Dominguez and the rest of the Junta. “The members of the Junta convinced the crowd of more than 1,500 persons [...] to go to their homes and that the authorities would conduct an investigation and demand justice in this case.”<sup>9</sup>

The story of Wilfredo and Daisy Lebrón, though uniquely tragic, is helpfully reflective of the extreme weakness of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism in Chicago in the aftermath of the Division Street Riots. Despite obvious and continuing anger in the community, Wilfredo’s death did not produce any coherent set of demands for better treatment of Puerto Ricans. The approach taken by the Coordinating Junta of Puerto Rican Affairs, at least as reported in the Spanish-language press, was surprisingly devoid of appeals to liberal Americanization, or to any other iteration of cultural nationalism, apart from a vague reference to “the interests our people;” instead, demands for “rights” and “justice” predominated.<sup>10</sup> Since no compelling alternative framing of cultural nationalism had yet emerged, protests like that around Wilfredo Lebrón’s death took on different approaches. At the same time, Daisy Lebrón was now a single mother who depended upon government assistance for survival. She borrowed money to have her husband’s body sent back to Puerto Rico, where they had both been born and raised, but when interviewed several months later she expressed no particular connection to the island or

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<sup>9</sup> “The ‘Coordinating Junta’ and Wilfredo Lebrón’s Case,” *El Puertorriqueño*, August 5-11, 1966. (JNC).

<sup>10</sup> “The ‘Coordinating Junta’ and Wilfredo Lebrón’s Case.”

its culture.<sup>11</sup> Cultural nationalism, in any of its previous manifestations, seemed to have little to offer someone in her shoes.

The narrative of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism in Chicago, which had proven flexible enough to be adapted both to the insurgent pro-independence activism of the Nationalist Party and to the anti-independence views of Muñoz Marín's PPD, not to mention the fundamentally assimilationist views of the local advocates of liberal Americanization, had finally hit its nadir. None of these variants spoke to the experiences, the frustrations, or the ambitions of a significant segment of Chicago's Puerto Rican population in the mid-1960s. This was the case in part because Puerto Ricans in the city had by now been thoroughly excluded from whiteness, while the community was still too distant – both geographically and culturally – from the larger and more stable Mexican community to establish the panethnic ties that in the following decades would come to define the shared racial character of both groups.

While the eclipse of cultural nationalism might well have occurred without the Division Street Riots, the reality was that the intensity of those three nights in June had shattered the old models before new ones emerged to take their place. This was especially true for the growing segment of the community that was mired in a fundamentally gendered experience of poverty. Precarious economic circumstances had been the primary impetus for many to leave the island in the first place, but as the 1960s progressed, Chicago seemed less and less like a panacea. Welfare-receiving Puerto Rican women like Daisy Lebrón experienced first hand what Lisa Levenstein calls the “gendered construction of racialized poverty.”<sup>12</sup> While their

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<sup>11</sup> “Welfare Problem,” March 1, 1967 (JNC).

<sup>12</sup> Lisa Levenstein, *A Movement Without Marches: African American Women and the Politics of Poverty in Postwar Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 23.

experiences clearly differed in significant respects from the African American women in Philadelphia profiled by Levenstein, Puerto Rican women in West Town and Humboldt Park were similarly confronted by the everyday struggle for economic survival in Chicago during the mid-1960s. They had little to nothing in common with the beauty queens who helped marshal celebratory Puerto Rican parades from 1956 through the first downtown parade that summer.

This chapter argues that poor Puerto Rican women found no meaningful value in the models of cultural nationalism available to them in the aftermath of the Division Street Riots. To begin with, it draws on recent literature on welfare rights struggles to examine the local specificities of life on welfare in West Town and Humboldt Park. It then shifts gears to an assessment of two different community-based responses to the problems facing them: a unionization effort by Public Aid workers themselves, and a welfare union backed by a brand-new activist group called the Latin American Defense Organization (LADO). Just as welfare recipients themselves did not draw on cultural nationalism, neither did the two most high-profile organized attempts to improve their condition. In the end, it would require a cross-pollination between Puerto Rican and black community struggles in the just-beginning era of black power to resurrect cultural nationalism in Puerto Rican Chicago.

### **Life on Welfare in Puerto Rican Chicago**

The Lebrón family's experience was extreme, but they had two important things in common with many other Puerto Ricans in Chicago: they were poor, and they received public assistance. As working class migrants to a high-cost urban environment, the city's Puerto Rican population tended to live precarious economic lives. One single mother of three children, for

instance, earned \$248 per month working full time in the spring of 1967, or \$1.55 hourly, well above the federal minimum wage of \$1.00 per hour. Nonetheless, her expenses included \$96 per month in rent and \$100 per month for a babysitter, leaving only \$52 for a month's worth of food, transportation, gas, electric, clothing and all other costs.<sup>13</sup> For many dealing with this sort of math, a single crisis might produce a situation where the only way to stave off homelessness or hunger was to obtain public assistance. Thus, when Wilfredo Lebrón's hand was severely damaged in an accident two years before he was killed, he was unable to retain the factory job that had previously supported the family financially, so the family had gone on welfare.<sup>14</sup>

The Lebrón family began receiving public assistance while Wilfredo was still alive, but their need was certainly not lessened after his killing. In general, female-headed households were far more frequently forced to rely upon the social safety net. This reality was vividly highlighted in a series of interviews conducted in March, 1967, by Janet Parmalee, who was still leading the same team of researchers in West Town as she had the previous summer. Parmalee interviewed nearly a dozen people that month, most of them women and most of them on welfare. The representativeness of the interviewees cannot be asserted with any precision, in part because the project was specifically focused on those in the most precarious circumstances, meaning that Parmalee's team paid little attention to Puerto Ricans who were economically stable. Still, their experiences do not appear to be atypical and, in any event, they provide deep insight into the experiences, perspectives, and consciousness of Puerto Rican women in Chicago dealing with financial struggles in the aftermath of the Division Street Riots.

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<sup>13</sup> "Alicia Valentín," March 27, 1967, (JNC).

<sup>14</sup> "Wilfredo Lebrón Dies – Shot Five Times," *Spanish Press*, August 4, 1966 (JNC).

The Cook County Department of Public Aid administered the welfare system in Chicago and its suburbs. The Department was funded through a combination of state monies and the federal Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program, which had been initiated during the New Deal. ADC was renamed Aid to *Families with Dependent Children* (AFDC) and expanded in the mid-1960s as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, just when Chicago's Puerto Ricans were beginning to concentrate in West Town and Humboldt Park. In this context, as the historian Felicia Kornbluh has argued, "the emergence of Latinos/as as recipients of public assistance was one sign of the so-called welfare crisis that politicians and journalists began to identify in the early 1960s."<sup>15</sup> In Chicago, where machine politics greatly influenced the administration of anti-poverty funds, and in the words of one contemporaneous observer "even token representation" of poor people themselves was lacking, the problem was exacerbated further.<sup>16</sup> Thus, Puerto Rican families routinely encountered delays and obstacles as they attempted to access the social safety net to which they were entitled.

The first difficulty facing many Puerto Ricans was the language barrier they encountered as Spanish-speakers, given the inability of most Public Aid caseworkers to speak any language other than English. One woman in West Town, Luz Valencia, described waiting all day in the office to begin the application process, only to be told at 3PM that she was expected to provide her own translator. "There was a [Spanish-speaking] janitor there but they did not let him help me," Valencia said in an interview, adding that she returned every working day for the next two weeks, each time with a different acquaintance who had volunteered to translate, before finally

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<sup>15</sup> Felicia Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights: Politics and Poverty in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), x.

<sup>16</sup> Seymour Z. Mann, *Chicago's War on Poverty* (Chicago: Center for Research on Urban Government, 1966), 39.



getting interviewed by a caseworker and approved.<sup>17</sup> Delays of this sort were a frequent complaint of welfare recipients, as were the various petty reasons given to deny assistance, and the complicated rules and regulations that governed continuing participation in the program. As Levenstein points out in the case of Philadelphia, “By constructing intricate and laborious application requirements that usually necessitated repeat visits, the welfare department sought to limit the number of women receiving assistance.”<sup>18</sup> For Puerto Ricans, the language barrier thus made a capricious policy more onerous still.

Language problems persisted well after approval, and were sometimes seen as a partial cause of the alternately withdrawn and invasive behavior of caseworkers. When asked what “type” of caseworker she would want to deal with, Raquel Crespo, a single mother in West Town, answered very simply, “I would like one that spoke Spanish so that I can usually explain all my problems to her. That is all.”<sup>19</sup> Of course the language barrier had implications that went far beyond welfare, and many new arrivals sought to learn English since it was clear that few of their new neighbors had any interest in learning Spanish. A Mexican man living in West Town suggested that “not knowing English is like not seeing. Everything you do needs an interpreter. Then the interpreter interprets in his own way not in the way you tell him to.”<sup>20</sup> In at least some cases, the Department of Public Aid would pay for English classes, but the language barrier continued to cause problems for many welfare recipients and increasingly came to be seen – both by caseworkers and by recipients – as a racial marker that connected ethnic Puerto Ricans and Mexicans while separating them from whiteness.

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<sup>17</sup> “Interview #5: Category A – Receiving Welfare (ADC) and Eligible,” March 10, 1967 (JNC).

<sup>18</sup> Levenstein, *Movement Without Marches*, 43.

<sup>19</sup> “Interview #6,” March 10, 1967 (JNC).

<sup>20</sup> “Interview #8: Category C – Not eligible, not receiving,” March 13, 1967 (JNC).

The eligibility question itself could produce equally Kafkaesque scenarios. By the mid-1960s, many Puerto Ricans had been living in Chicago for almost two decades, but there was still a continuing migratory stream, and new arrivals had only restricted access to public assistance due to residency requirements. Following a pattern typical to labor migrations, one family member – frequently a husband/father – would arrive first, secure work and residence, and eventually “send” for spouses and/or children. Predictably, however, these reunifications did not always work out in the new terrain of the mainland metropolis, and families fractured with some frequency. Thus, for instance, in early 1967 Alicia Valentín brought her young children from Puerto Rico with the intention of reuniting with their father after three years apart. Weeks later, however, he walked out on them, leaving her an unemployed single mother of three, including one with severe developmental disabilities. Enforcing a policy that had been in place at least since the early 1950s, the Cook County Department of Public Aid deemed her ineligible because she and her children had not yet lived in the area for a full year, even though her now-estranged husband would qualify. She was told that “only if she were living with her husband – only if the head of household is a resident – would the wife and children be eligible. Since she is separated from her husband, she is the head of household and therefore ineligible.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, the very factor that prompted Valentín to seek welfare – that she had been abandoned by her husband – became, in fact, the crucial barrier to her ability to access that aid.

Even for those who did manage to obtain approval, benefits could be rescinded at any time. Here yet another layer of indignity emerged, as caseworkers claimed the right to

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<sup>21</sup> “Alicia Valentín,” March 27, 1967, (JNC). On the extended history of the one year residency policy dating back to the early arrival of Puerto Ricans in Chicago in the 1950s, see Rúa, *Grounded Identity*, 38-45.

repeatedly examine the intimate details of recipients' personal lives in order to verify their continuing eligibility. This most commonly took the form of investigations into romantic relationships. Crespo, for instance, complained that her caseworker sent a detective to her apartment at 8:00 PM to see whether she had a man living with her.<sup>22</sup> The implication was that individual men, such as estranged husbands or fathers, should provide economically for women so that the state did not have to take on the responsibility. Ironically, many women expressed a similar preference, even as they chafed at the punitive enforcement model used by the County. Another recipient, Clara Sanchez, thus recalled a series of conversations with her caseworker regarding the man who had abandoned her months before:

She used to ask me about where my husband was. So I told her I don't know. He's not here. That's what I told her. So she used to tell me, "*You have to know where he is.*" But I told her I don't know where he is. Look, when the welfare was giving me aid all I wanted was for my husband to support my children because they were his children too. I am not saying that I am going to hide from my husband like others do so that I can live off of the welfare. I don't do things like that.<sup>23</sup>

Petty harassment by caseworkers went beyond relationship questions, with Valencia maintaining that "for any little reason they take you off welfare."<sup>24</sup> As Levenstein suggests, this was part of a comprehensive policy under which local welfare authorities "enforced policies that made life on ADC as unattractive as possible in order to ensure that only the neediest women would seek assistance."<sup>25</sup>

Men, whether frustratingly absent or dangerously present, were a frequent target of complaints from Puerto Rican women struggling with poverty. Sanchez, who under pressure

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<sup>22</sup> "Interview #6: Category D – Receiving welfare, not eligible," March 10, 1967 (JNC).

<sup>23</sup> "Interview #3: Category B – Eligible, not receiving," March 9, 1967 (JNC).

<sup>24</sup> "Interview #5," March 10, 1967 (JNC).

<sup>25</sup> Levenstein, *Movement Without Marches*, 32.

from her caseworker had reunited with her estranged husband and subsequently lost her benefits, maintained that “the biggest problem I have right now is my husband. ... He doesn’t help me here any. I have to do everything, cook, wash, iron, send the kids to school, take care of the kids, take them to the doctor’s, I am the only one.”<sup>26</sup> Crespo complained bitterly about an abusive ex-boyfriend (not the father of her children) who was stalking her: “The problem of that guy, that is problem number one. ... He has kept following and following me. He came in the house when I wasn’t there and he almost burned the house down.”<sup>27</sup> Another woman, after reflecting on her abusive father and absent husband, was asked about her desires for her daughter’s future. “Well,” she opined, “I would like for her to never get married, that’s what I wish.”<sup>28</sup>

Welfare recipients understood the causes of their predicament in multiple ways, variously assigning blame to caseworkers, those allegedly engaged in welfare fraud, absent spouses, and the system as a whole. Valencia maintained that some caseworkers are “repugnant:” “I don’t know,” she continued, “I guess they have no pity.” At the same time, however, she attributed caseworker cruelty to concerns about fraud: “And for that reason I say that all of us pay for one girl’s mistake. Because the good ones are treated like the bad ones.”<sup>29</sup> Crespo echoed this rhetoric, repeatedly uttering the phrase “for one we all pay,” meaning that the bad behavior of isolated individuals makes the system suspicious of everyone, though neither she nor Valencia claimed to know anyone who had actually engaged in fraudulent behavior. Crespo also challenged the gendered double standard under which men were

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<sup>26</sup> “Interview #3,” March 9, 1967 (JNC).

<sup>27</sup> “Interview #6,” March 10, 1967 (JNC).

<sup>28</sup> “Interview #1,” March 7, 1967 (JNC).

<sup>29</sup> “Interview #5,” March 10, 1967 (JNC).

expected to be absent while women were held to higher expectations as caregivers: “There are some of us who are just like the men. If they abandon their children there will be some women who will do it also.” However, like some others, Crespo sometimes expressed a more systemic analysis of the problems with welfare. As a welfare recipient, she noted, “I am not supposed to live like you, or you,” referring to presumably comfortable lifestyles of the two middle-class professionals interviewing her.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, one husband and father, who received public assistance for his family due to a debilitating injury, was asked whether he believed “welfare gives you enough to live well.” “No,” he responded, “all that welfare gives you is a misery so that people will not die.”<sup>31</sup>

Still, many recipients compared life under welfare not with an abstract concept of living well, but rather with their actual lived experiences before and/or after their time on public assistance. Seen from this angle, people sometimes had a more positive view. Crespo argued that despite the invasiveness of the process, the steady income helped her maintain her independence, particularly from the men in her life:

I’ll tell you the truth, I am better off with welfare than with my husband. Frankly when my husband felt like it he gave me \$60 but when he couldn’t he only gave me \$30 or \$40 so that is why I say I am better off with welfare. As for the condition of the house I am better off with welfare. And now even more that they raised my check. Why get married? For what? Now that I got a raise ... what for?<sup>32</sup>

Sanchez saw a silver lining living in Chicago when compared to her previous life in Puerto Rico:

“Life is better here to raise children. It is better, lots of people don’t think so but I do. I find that here you don’t have to go through so much trouble. I went through more trouble in

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<sup>30</sup> “Interview #6,” March 10, 1967 (JNC).

<sup>31</sup> “Interview #7: Category D – Receiving Welfare, not eligible,” March 13, 1967 (JNC).

<sup>32</sup> “Interview #6,” March 10, 1967 (JNC).

Puerto Rico.” Nonetheless, there were struggles in Chicago as well, and life was not perfect. Indeed, she said bluntly, “I was better off when I was on welfare than I am now living with my husband.”<sup>33</sup>

Despite the breadth and extent of these multiple interviews, some of which lasted several hours and included extensive autobiographical sketches, none of the women or men interviewed by Parmalee in the spring of 1967 expressed any interest in, or even awareness of, Puerto Rican cultural nationalism. They far more frequently framed their lived experiences, both on the island and in Chicago, around issues of class and gender. In many cases, Chicago was expected to be an escape not only from their financial difficulties but also from the limited options they (like Clementina Souchet more than a decade before) faced as women on the island. However, as Gina M. Pérez points out, “migration is often the source of tremendous gendered and intergenerational conflict.”<sup>34</sup> In this case, women receiving financial assistance from the government were clearly not conforming to acceptable models of femininity promoted by any of the three variants of cultural nationalism previously known in Chicago. As a result, it is no surprise that the organized attempts to respond to the plight of such women were no more influenced by cultural nationalism than were the perspectives of the women themselves.

### **Fighting for a “More Humane Welfare System”**

A critical embrace of welfare, as a flawed system that nonetheless had great potential, led many women across the country to fight for improvements in the system that would

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<sup>33</sup> “Interview #3,” March 9, 1967 (JNC).

<sup>34</sup> Pérez, *Near Northwest Side Story*, 18.

enhance their dignity and autonomy. Levenstein argues compellingly that welfare recipients, rather than being seen as exemplary of a sociologically defined “underclass,” should be understood as integral members of the working class: “Regardless of their employment status, women who sought and retained assistance from public institutions were workers, first and foremost, because they labored to care for their households and their families with few financial resources.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, it is unsurprising that many women receiving public assistance, across the country and in West Town in particular, chose to form unions to advance their interests as workers. They were not alone in adopting the framework of labor organizing during this era.

At the same time, if anyone other than welfare recipients had an eyewitness view of the problems of the system, it was the caseworkers themselves. While many were petty and cruel, others clearly held a political analysis of the oppressive nature of the system they helped administer. As Premilla Nadasen has argued:

Caseworkers were often a target of recipient discontent, but in the 1960s many people sensitive to clients’ predicaments entered the social work profession. Social work students radicalized on college campuses across the country rejected the traditional casework approach to social welfare as well as the overriding concern for professionalism of many social workers in the early postwar period.<sup>36</sup>

Chicago was no exception to this trend. In 1965, without any involvement from established mainstream unions, workers at the Cook County Department of Public Aid formed the Independent Union of Public Aid Employees (IUPAE). According to Russell K. Schutt, “the IUPAE first operated as a participatory democracy that relied on members’ voluntary contributions of

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<sup>35</sup> Levenstein, *Movement Without Marches*, 24.

<sup>36</sup> Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 36.

time and skills” before eventually becoming more bureaucratized.<sup>37</sup> Like most unions, the IUPAE was primarily designed to defend the economic interests of its membership, but in its early period many of those active in the organization also saw it as a space to advocate for the interests of their clients.

The union launched its first strike action in May of 1966 with broad support from within its own ranks. More than half of all Public Aid workers honored the picket line despite the fact that all who did so received immediate fifteen-day suspensions from the Department’s administration. Rather than breaking the union, this attempted intimidation had the opposite effect. The IUPAE quickly obtained statements of support for the strikers from mainstream unions like the United Auto Workers and the American Federation of Teachers, not to mention Martin Luther King, then residing in Chicago’s Lawndale neighborhood as part of his Northern Campaign. In a matter of days, the Department had abandoned its disciplinary efforts and conceded on-site organizing privileges and dues check-off to the new union, while further agreeing to begin negotiations toward a first contract.

In the midst of the strike, a caseworker and IUPAE militant named Douglas Cater, who was also a Presbyterian minister, wrote “A Manifesto for a More Humane Welfare System.” Cater laid out a series of criticisms of “an essentially INHUMANE welfare system,” focusing on many of the sort of complaints lodged by those Parmalee would interview the next spring.

- It is inhumane because its application procedure is a long, drawn-out process which keeps people in severe need for days or even weeks after they first apply for help.
- It is inhumane because it sends its police agents into the privacy of people’s homes in the dark hours of the night to see if there is any evidence that they are cheating

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<sup>37</sup> Russell K. Schutt, *Organization in a Changing Environment: Unionization of Welfare Employees* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 4.



- the public and finding means to supplement the miserably low welfare grants they receive.
- It is inhumane because it leaves helpless women and children at the mercy of emotionally sick men, under court order to support them, who may not decide to send some of the required money on schedule [...]
  - It is inhumane because it requires that its caseworkers spend far more time on pointless paperwork and statistical tabulations than on actual contact with and services to the recipients.
  - It is inhumane because it turns conscientious college graduates who are sincerely dedicated to the aim of helping the needy into police agents and clerical workers, and imposes on them such frustrations that they tend against their will to take out the frustrations on those very recipients who need their help.<sup>38</sup>

Cater deliberately connected two forms of paternalism, the form that the Department used when communicating with caseworkers and other staff, and that “same paternalistic attitude which perpetuates intolerable conditions for our recipients.” Notably, the Manifesto’s highly structural analysis limited the role of both the caseworkers’ and the recipients’ agency. That is, the system – rather than caseworkers – was deemed responsible for the “intolerable conditions” experienced by “helpless women and children,” who were seemingly unable to transform the inhumane system unless the IUPAE led the struggle. Welfare unions would not develop on a mass scale for another few months, but the Manifesto certainly did not anticipate their emergence, predicting instead that only caseworkers could force improvements in the system. Predictably, then, tensions between recipients and caseworkers continued even after the publication of the Manifesto and the union’s victory in its first strike.

In early 1967, advocates for welfare recipients claimed a victory as the newly elected president of the Cook County Board of Commissioners appointed William H. Robinson to head the Cook County Department of Public Aid. As Schutt notes, Robinson was a liberal Republican who “had also been a professional social worker, a welfare rights activist, and one of the few

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<sup>38</sup> Douglas Cater, “A Manifesto for a More Humane Welfare System,” May, 1966 (JNC).

black legislators in Illinois.”<sup>39</sup> Robinson had publically supported the IUPAE during its strike the previous spring and the union initially welcomed his appointment. But as Director of Public Aid, Robinson’s actions did not match his previous rhetoric, and the spring of 1967 was even more contentious within the Department than the spring of 1966. Negotiations over a first contract broke down in April, leading the IUPAE to declare a second strike. This time, however, the lines of demarcation were different. King had left Chicago, mainstream unions seemed less interested, and many of the community groups that had supported the union the previous year now backed Robinson instead. The black-led West Side Organization (WSO), which had built a large welfare union and had ties to Robinson, denounced the strikers as “lazy caseworkers with no feelings for aid recipients.”<sup>40</sup> With a divided community and a divided membership (far fewer people honored the picket than had done so the first time), the strike dragged on for over a month.

### **Building a Welfare Union**

Members of the Latin American Defense Organization (LADO), one of a new generation of activist community groups emerging within the Puerto Rican community, had seen the success of the IUPAE’s first strike, and rather than draw on the compromised legacy of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism they chose to utilize a union model in their own efforts to organize welfare recipients. LADO saw the crisis moment of the second IUPAE work stoppage as an opportunity to demonstrate the power of its own brand new welfare union, based in West Town and Humboldt Park. The group’s acronym – the Spanish word for “side,” as in, “We are

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<sup>39</sup> Schutt, *Organization in a Changing Environment*, 71.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Schutt, *Organization in a Changing Environment*, 73.

on your side” – was deliberately suggestive of its community organizing efforts. LADO, founded in the fall of 1966, was well-positioned to focus on welfare organizing and had spent the winter and spring of 1967 organizing Puerto Rican recipients.

One of LADO’s founders, Hilda Gamboa, had been a caseworker in the Cook County Department of Public Aid for almost a year. She knew the ins and outs of the approval system, and could help recipients prepare for the application process. Parmalee observed this approach in action, and emerged favorably impressed that “they know in advance that everything they demand from welfare is thoroughly checked through and is a legitimate claim even by the stringent rules of welfare.”<sup>41</sup> LADO activists would then accompany the recipients to the welfare office and apply pressure on the staff to quickly approve the application. Even before the IUPAE strike this tended to produce tensions, but with many caseworkers off the job in May and June, the remaining staff – and especially Department administrators – reacted negatively to the involvement of LADO. For instance, during one such encounter the director of the local office suggested, somewhat implausibly, “before LADO existed these people had no problems but then you came along and started trouble.” That same day, one of the few Puerto Rican supervisors working for the Department maintained that welfare recipients “should come to us with their complaints – not go to other agencies” like LADO.<sup>42</sup>

Examining Baltimore during the same era, Rhonda Y. Williams has argued that “although black women and poor people had to contend with onerous and intrusive regulations as public assistance recipients, numerous low-income black women did receive a political education

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<sup>41</sup> “Agency Walk-Through: Latin American Defense Organization,” June 1, 1967 (JNC).

<sup>42</sup> “Agency Walk-Through: Public Assistance General Office,” May 31, 1967 (JNC).

through their engagement with the welfare system.”<sup>43</sup> For LADO, prepping individual recipients and accompanying them on visits to the welfare office was one part of a broader strategy the group used to engage with welfare recipients in West Town, which focused specifically on transforming their consciousness. “Well,” said Gamboa in an interview with Parmalee in the spring of 1967, “one of the big obstacles is changing the attitude that the people have now. They are very, very discouraged. They do not feel that they can do anything to change their lives.” Gamboa thus explained the LADO welfare union as “a group of ladies that we have gotten together to work together on each of their individual problems” in an effort to gain small victories and grasp their capacity to win larger battles.<sup>44</sup>

Within a few months, this effort was starting to show signs of initial success. During one protest at the welfare office, a number of LADO members and welfare recipients successfully pressured administrators into giving a \$100 check on the spot to a woman whose claim for emergency assistance had been fully vetted by the group beforehand.<sup>45</sup> As a result of such victories, Gamboa overcame her initial pessimism about the independent agency of welfare mothers:

I’m really very optimistic. I didn’t think when I first came out here that Latin American women were going to go into picket lines. And they did and were excited about it, and they would like to take action. So this encourages me a lot. And then the other welfare unions around the city. It’s almost like an idea whose time has come, it really is.<sup>46</sup>

Indeed, LADO’s militant approach was hardly unique. Welfare unions were exploding across the United States during this time, and Chicago played a particularly central role in their

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<sup>43</sup> Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women’s Struggles Against Urban Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 6.

<sup>44</sup> “Interview with Hilda Gamboa, Formerly Caseworker for Cook County Public Aid, Now Employed with LADO,” no date but approximately May, 1967 (JNC).

<sup>45</sup> “Protest by Welfare Recipients,” May 18, 1967 (JNC).

<sup>46</sup> “Interview with Hilda Gamboa” (JNC).

development. In May of 1966, a conference at the University of Chicago brought together advocates for welfare rights from multiple states, who hatched a successful plan to stage demonstrations in twenty-five cities around the country on June 30. "In Chicago," according to Nadasen, "200 poor people marched to the city's downtown welfare office."<sup>47</sup> On heels of this successful effort, another national meeting was held in Chicago in August, drawing 100 representatives from seventy-five local groups to found the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO). LADO was founded after both Chicago meetings, and it is unclear whether anyone later involved in the group had participated in either of them, but the local prominence of welfare struggles no doubt influenced LADO's decision to focus on the Welfare Union project in 1967.

As Nadasen points out, NWRO and the welfare rights movement more broadly, was "overwhelmingly African American, perhaps eighty-five percent."<sup>48</sup> The WSO, which by the summer of 1966 had organized 1,500 recipients, mostly black, into one of the largest welfare unions in the city, was prototypical of the milieu.<sup>49</sup> Thus, LADO's Welfare Union, largely composed of Puerto Ricans, served as an exception to the demographic norm of welfare rights groups emerging both in Chicago and across the country. Here, however, Nadasen's interpretation of the political attitudes of poor women involved in welfare rights organizing is particularly apt: "Although I call theirs a black feminist perspective, white, Hispanic, and Native American women also subscribed to a form of the same perspective or standpoint."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, 42.

<sup>48</sup> Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, 28.

<sup>49</sup> On the origins and growth of the WSO Welfare Union, see Brown, *Ideology and Community Action*, 35-48.

<sup>50</sup> Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, xvii-xviii.

Apart from the question of racial demographics, LADO's Welfare Union fit most of the other characteristics of what was also sometimes called the relief movement. In particular, it chose to ignore cultural nationalism as either an organizing principle or a strategic approach.

As Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward argued a decade later,

the relief movement was in a sense the most authentic expression of the black movement in the postwar period. The many hundreds of thousands who participated were drawn from the very bottom of the black community. They were neither integrationist nor nationalistic; they were neither led nor organized. This movement welled up out of the bowels of the northern ghettos so densely packed with the victims of agricultural displacement and urban unemployment. It was, in short, a struggle by the black masses for the sheer right of survival.<sup>51</sup>

Diasporic Puerto Ricans, whether in Chicago or elsewhere, continued to have a fraught relationship with African Americans during this era, but it is no coincidence that Piven and Cloward's description was highly accurate in describing the people LADO attempted to organize. "Drawn from the very bottom" of the community; "out of the bowels of the northern ghettos;" "victims of agricultural displacement and urban unemployment," all capture the reality of Chicago's Puerto Rican welfare recipients in the second half of the 1960s. In the Puerto Rican context, however, none was more significant than "neither integrationist nor nationalistic." Although LADO acknowledged the inspiration it took from the Civil Rights Movement and Martin Luther King Jr., in particular, the group's welfare organizing efforts generally steered clear of broader ideological commitments, particularly those connected to Puerto Rican cultural nationalism.

While the work of Gamboa and others led to some significant successes, LADO's Welfare Union effort also highlighted a variation on one of the tensions Nadasen identifies as central to

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<sup>51</sup> Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 265.

the overall project of welfare rights activism: a gendered split between recipients (overwhelmingly women) and staff (mostly men), with the latter generally maintaining control over resources.<sup>52</sup> Felix Padilla argues that “staff activism” during the years after the Division Street Riots “provided the impetus for political activism among barrio residents,” in large part because of the increased flow of dollars to community-based social service organizations in poor communities like West Town under the aegis of the War on Poverty.<sup>53</sup>

Publicly, LADO criticized the rapidly growing use of full-time organizers. The first issue of their newspaper rebuked other community groups that rationalized their limited activity by saying that they were “waiting for money, for thousands of dollars for this and that project. ... LADO has no money – how is it that we can act while others wait?” Expressing a preference for participatory democracy, the same article continued: “Professional organizers may or may not help, but the real job is ours. That is the beginning. That each man decide and that we decide together. There are no ‘bosses,’ no ‘leaders’ in LADO.”<sup>54</sup> The group projected itself as holding to a higher standard than did those community organizations that allowed themselves to be influenced by outside forces that held the purse strings: “No one controls us and we don’t want control over anyone.” Indeed, the paper proclaimed, “No one at LADO has a salary. We must work, just like anyone else.”<sup>55</sup>

Except that this was apparently not entirely true. A month after the paper was published, a leading member of LADO explained to Parmalee that three of the group’s core organizers were paid (though how much was not indicated) through a War on Poverty program

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<sup>52</sup> Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*, xv.

<sup>53</sup> Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 162.

<sup>54</sup> LADO, June 12, 1967 (JNC).

<sup>55</sup> LADO, June 12, 1967 (JNC).

called Project Impact.<sup>56</sup> The YMCA used Project Impact to pay part- and full-time salaries to organizers at a range of local groups, from long-established settlement houses like Association House to Alinsky-inspired groups like the Northwest Community Organization (NCO). Despite its upstart status and bold rhetoric, LADO succeeded in securing multiple positions funded via Project Impact. Of the three positions, only Gamboa's was filled by a woman, even though the overwhelming majority of the Welfare Union's constituents were women. This tension was sometimes highlighted by arrests, which frequently targeted Obed López, one of the founders of LADO. Years later, he emphasized the centrality of LADO's staff efforts and his own role in particular: "They always wanted to arrest me, but this was what really developed the consciousness of the women. ... These were the kind of women who when they saw the struggle that we were going through just to defend their rights – this transformed them."<sup>57</sup> This staff-centered analysis stood in stark contrast to Gamboa's belief that the women in the Welfare Union were transformed by their collective action on their own behalf. The result was a set of tensions that would remain unresolved for the duration of the Union's existence.

### **A Tale of Two Unions**

In May, 1967, during the second IUPAE strike, LADO's Welfare Union organized a demonstration at the neighborhood office of the Department of Public Assistance, deliberately timed to coincide with an IUPAE picket at the same location. Approximately a dozen welfare recipients and activists wore "white arm bands with the initials LADO on them." Striking

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<sup>56</sup> "Community Action Programs," July 12, 1967 (JNC).

<sup>57</sup> Oral History Transcripts: Obed and Caralee López, Transcript #1, October 17, 1995, p. 23. Box 3, Folder 14, Collection on the Young Lords, Special Collections and Archives, DePaul University Library. (CYL)



caseworkers chanted “no contract – no work!” while the Welfare Union demonstrators carried signs reading, “Hunger knows no color” and “LADO wants justice!”<sup>58</sup> Multiple local news outlets covered the joint protest, and after television reporters had done interviews and filmed footage of the picketing, LADO activists and recipients entered the office, where at least one activist was arrested. Whether due to media coverage, the synergy with IUPAE, or for other reasons, LADO managed to obtain meetings during the next month with both Ed Marciniak, head of the Chicago Commission on Human Relations, and with Robinson himself, at which organizers and welfare recipients presented their complaints and proposals.

Marciniak was polite but unhelpful, suggesting that LADO’s aggressive tactics, characterized by mass visits to the Wicker Park office and sometimes including civil disobedience, were not “the most effective means of making friends at welfare.”<sup>59</sup> While he did not address the IUPAE directly, it was clear that he opposed the disruption their strike was causing in the normal administration of welfare. Robinson behaved similarly, mixing compliments with criticisms. According to one account, Robinson claimed that “he was very much in favor of Welfare Unions and he hoped theirs would be a success,” while denouncing the confrontational tactics that were a near-universal feature of such unions. In Robinson’s view, direct action could create “a riotous situation and disturb the whole office.”<sup>60</sup> After LADO members presented a lengthy list of complaints about racist comments and behavior by the Wicker Park office staff in particular, Robinson grew combative and said, “you have no

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<sup>58</sup> Gilberto Salgado, “Eye-Witness Report of Welfare Picketing and Demonstration by LADO, Wicker Park Welfare Office,” May 25, 1967 (JNC)

<sup>59</sup> “LADO Visits the Human Relations Board,” May 1967 (JNC).

<sup>60</sup> “Agency Walk Through: Public Assistance General Office,” May 31, 1967 (JNC).

intentions of helping your people, you just want to create a violent situation.”<sup>61</sup> He ended the tense meeting by explicitly prohibiting LADO from further action at the office, including leafleting and accompanying recipients to their appointments. Robinson seemed particularly disturbed by the apparent collaboration between LADO’s Welfare Union and the IUPAE, who were still on strike at the time of the meeting.

The IUPAE strike ended in mid-June. The union had won a first contract, but the victory was hollow. Many of the provisions the union had hoped to include in the contract were rejected by the Cook County Board of Commissioners, which even voted down the initial deal its own representatives had negotiated. “Overwhelmed by the experience of the strike’s defeat,” Schutt argues, “members’ involvement in the union dramatically declined.”<sup>62</sup> The long-term result inside the IUPAE, he demonstrates, was a shift away from militancy and toward a more conciliatory stance in future negotiating efforts. Still, the union did continue to collaborate with LADO for a time, and the following year the two groups pushed for more agency staff and emergency funds for recipients.<sup>63</sup> LADO’s Welfare Union, meanwhile, continued on for another year and a half, though it never reached the size or strength of the WSO. Interestingly, as we will see in Chapter Five, LADO itself survived the eventual demise of its welfare project, shifting gears to work more closely with the newly-politicized Young Lords Organization in nearby Lincoln Park, and ultimately edging closer to a cultural nationalist framework.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> “Agency Walk Through: Public Assistance General Office,” May 31, 1967 (JNC).

<sup>62</sup> Schutt, *Organization in a Changing Environment*, 75.

<sup>63</sup> Schutt, *Organization in a Changing Environment*, 93.

<sup>64</sup> Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 188-191.

## LADO's Backstory

To understand LADO's failure to utilize Puerto Rican cultural nationalism in the context of a Welfare Union that specifically targeted Puerto Rican members, it is helpful to trace the organization's backstory. The seeds of LADO were really planted the day of Wilfredo Lebrón's killing in August, 1966. Later that night, several hours after the crowd had dispersed, police arrested a handful of people a half-mile away, claiming they were making Molotov cocktails. One of them was Obed López, who, the *Tribune* made a specific point of mentioning the very next day, "is kept under close scrutiny by the FBI."<sup>65</sup> Born and raised in Mexico, López had been a community activist since his teenaged year and had been in direct contact with Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Northern Campaign at the time of the Riots. He had also been vocal in opposition to the Cuban embargo during the early 1960s, which apparently generated the initial attention he received from the FBI. In the aftermath of the Division Street Riots López had hoped to join the newly formed Spanish Action Committee of Chicago (SACC), but the criminal charges against López stemming from the night of the Lebrón killing, and the resulting red-baiting he suffered at the hands of the mainstream media, led SACC to deny him membership. The charges were dropped fairly quickly, but López's public profile as a radical and a militant had been established. In the aftermath, López later recalled, "when the Spanish Action Committee refused to let me join, my friends pushed me to form an organization. That's how I organized the Latin American Defense Organization."<sup>66</sup>

LADO was officially founded in September, 1966, by a small, mixed group of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. The clear focus was on the Puerto Rican community, even though the name

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<sup>65</sup> "1,500 Gather as Cops Kill Berserk Man."

<sup>66</sup> Obed and Caralee López, Transcript #1, October 17, 1995, p. 17 (CYL).

reflected the group's commitment to cross-ethnic organizing. From the start, LADO's strategic framework exemplified the community organizing model pioneered by Saul Alinsky, using picket-style tactics that had also been successfully employed by both labor unions and the mainstream Civil Rights Movement. The group's first campaign focused on boycotting major chain grocery stores in the community over their failure to hire more Latina/o employees, and buoyed by some limited success LADO moved on to create the Welfare Union in the winter of 1966/1967.

Puerto Rican cultural nationalism was strikingly absent from LADO's early political framework. In addition, despite the mistreatment of López and other members by the Chicago Police Department, despite the simmering anger in the community after the Riots, and indeed despite the crucial role of the Lebrón killing in the group's origin story, LADO did not focus its efforts on fighting police brutality. And notwithstanding the prominence of the word "Defense" in the group's name, it never advocated or carried out the sorts of armed patrols soon to be popularized in California by the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, which was founded a month after LADO. Indeed, the inaugural issue of the group's newspaper, published in June, 1967, argued specifically *against* literal fighting: "Fighting with your fists can make you feel good for a while but it does not change much, and ... the latest thing we're trying is fighting with our brains."<sup>67</sup> That month, fresh off the meetings with Marciniak and Robinson, and at the tail end of the IUPAE strike, LADO viewed the second downtown Puerto Rican Parade, as a chance to broaden its appeal beyond welfare recipients by marching and distributing its newspaper's first issue. Even here, however, it rejected the politics of Puerto Rican cultural

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<sup>67</sup> LADO newspaper (JNC).

nationalism, perhaps out of disgust with the parade's continuing embrace of liberal Americanization.

### **“He Just Did Not Accept this Thing”: LADO's Pan-Latin Cultural Populism**

The Parade itself was well attended, featuring nearly fifty floats, approximately 3,000 marchers and almost 50,000 spectators lining State Street from Wacker Boulevard to Congress Parkway. But there were hiccups in the effort to replicate the pre-riot successes of the year before. The highest-profile Spanish-language newspaper in Chicago, *El Puertorriqueño*, acknowledged that “the problems that have confronted the leaders of the Parade Committee this year have been numerous.”<sup>68</sup> While overall numbers were high, key figures were absent: almost no dignitaries came from Puerto Rico to march in the parade, and Mayor Daley did not show either, sending his Fire Commissioner as a representative instead. Even the weather failed to cooperate, with heavy rains literally dampening the procession.<sup>69</sup>

Meanwhile, in contrast to the previous year, no carnival was held in Humboldt Park. According to Parmalee, LADO had been told “the reason there would be no carnival this year is because the ‘euphoria’ generated last year was what sparked the riot the day after the parade.”<sup>70</sup> Even city officials, it seems, had belatedly come to understand the dangerous alchemy of revelry and rage. At the same time, rather than attempting to reduce the rage, they hoped to prohibit a return of the revelry. Partly as a result of the cancelation of the festival, the overall feeling in the community, according to multiple observers, was downcast. “Division

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<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Parmalee, “The Puerto Rican Carnival and Parade.”

<sup>69</sup> “Puerto Ricans Parade with Gusto in Rain,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 11, 1967, p. A10.

<sup>70</sup> Janet Parmalee, “The Puerto Rican Carnival and Parade,” June 6, 1967 (JNC).

Street is strung with a few forlorn red and blue banners and there are a number of cars with waving Puerto Rican flags, but the enthusiasm of last year seems generally to be lacking,” wrote Parmalee in early June, 1967.<sup>71</sup>

Even in this ready-made context, LADO’s newspaper made almost no mention of cultural nationalism, preferring instead vocal advocacy for pan-Latina/o collaboration designed to bring together activists based in Chicago’s large and growing – but geographically distant – Mexican and Puerto Rican communities. That spring, accusations of Communism and Nationalist extremism against LADO had become commonplace in West Town and Humboldt Park, but LADO itself always denied the allegations, and offered a more plain-spoken and populist explanation of their politics in the first issue of their newspaper:

[LADO] is people demanding building repairs from slum landlords; it is a welfare check instead of only delay and humiliation; a job; a man falsely accused and defended by a LADO lawyer; a boycott of stores which take out money but don’t hire our people; common understanding; and common problems of people (Latin American) – and also of black and white people who live as our neighbors and work at our sides. Or LADO is simply a visit to the office, a conversation, an exchange of ideas, a song.<sup>72</sup>

This somewhat lyrical description was fully consistent with two key components of LADO’s still developing politics: the refusal to engage with cultural nationalist frameworks, and the construction of a culturally inflected pan-Latina/o model of inter-ethnic and interracial solidarity. Indeed, LADO’s main interest in the Parade had to do with its commitment not to cultural nationalism but to “Latin” culture in general and without much regard to ethnic or national specificities.

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<sup>71</sup> Parmalee, “The Puerto Rican Carnival and Parade.”

<sup>72</sup> LADO Newspaper (JNC).

One of the most significant innovations in LADO's politics was conveyed immediately in the group's name. Unlike the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party or the *Caballeros*, both of which collaborated with Mexican activists while retaining a distinctively Puerto Rican character, LADO lived up to its billing as a broadly Latin American group. As Obed López recalled years later, "We saw ourselves as a Latin American organization, one that would encompass Latins in Chicago."<sup>73</sup> This goal was instantiated from the start, with five Mexicans (including both López and Gamboa) and three Puerto Ricans as founding members. López argued that his brother Omar López, another co-founder of LADO, exemplified this tradition. He was Mexican but as he "grew up and his friends were Puerto Rican, he just did not accept this thing of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans being apart."<sup>74</sup>

The group consistently projected this attitude in writing. An article in the first issue of LADO's newspaper, written from the perspective of a Puerto Rican tenant engaged in a rent strike, noted that "The biggest thing that impressed me in the [LADO] office was the presence of not only Puerto Ricans, but Mexicans, and Americans also."<sup>75</sup> This pan-Latina/o stance was in some ways skewed, with the group's target base being overwhelmingly Puerto Rican while its core group of organizers was, at least initially, majority Mexican. Organizing in heavily Mexican neighborhoods like Pilsen or Little Village might have stretched LADO's resources too thin and too far. Instead, the group's Mexican organizers, including López and Gamboa, projected the legitimacy of their leading role in heavily Puerto Rican West Town and Humboldt Park by

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<sup>73</sup> Obed and Caralee López, Transcript #1, October 17, 1995, p. 18 (CYL).

<sup>74</sup> Obed and Caralee López, Transcript #1, October 17, 1995, p. 18 (CYL).

<sup>75</sup> LADO Newspaper (JNC).

attempting to strengthen the Latin American identity they shared with those they hoped to organize.

LADO developed its argument for pan-Latina/o unity in part by relying heavily on music and cultural tropes that foregrounded the common usage of the Spanish language rather than cultural markers specific to Puerto Ricans. At the joint demonstration with the IUPAE, according to one report, “one of the LADO girls was carrying a guitar and led the singing – slogans and songs such as ‘Guantanamera.’”<sup>76</sup> In its later years, LADO began composing and performing its own songs, including “*Ahi Viene LADO*” (Here Comes LADO), and “*Ya Plantamos Flores*” (We Planted Flowers). The latter song’s lyrics dramatized the difficulties of Spanish-speaking migrants to Chicago: “*Cuando aquí llegamos/Nadie sonreia/Los padres lloraban/Los niños morian*” (When we arrived here/No one smiled/Parents cried/Children died). And they exhorted neighborhood residents, “*Unete a LADO/Que lucha y que triunfa/Unete a tu hermano/A cambiar el mundo*” (Join LADO/To struggle and win/Join with your brother/To change the world).<sup>77</sup> This was a level of investment in cultural politics that matched or exceeded anything that had come before it in the history of Chicago’s Puerto Rican community, though after the group’s demise the songs were largely forgotten. Notably, however, none of the content of the lyrics was identifiably Puerto Rican, relying instead on the generalized concept of Latin American-ness.

LADO also embraced the developing multiracial counterculture that characterized the second-half of the 1960s. Through 1966 and 1967, the group hosted a regular series of house

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<sup>76</sup> “Eye-Witness Report of Welfare Picketing and Demonstration by LADO, Wicker Park Welfare Office,” May 25, 1967 (JNC).

<sup>77</sup> *Rompiendo las Cadenas Nace la Esperanza: Dedicación del Mural*. (Chicago: Latin American Defense Organization, 1971), 8. Available online via the International Center for the Arts of the Americas, Houston, here: <http://icaadocs.mfah.org/icaadocs/THEARCHIVE/FullRecord/tabid/88/doc/840855/language/en-US/Default.aspx>



parties, largely designed to raise funds as well as consciousness, all while relaxing in a comfortable social environment. One particularly square observer who attended a LADO-sponsored party in the summer of 1967 described the attendees as “mostly all beatniks,” further clarifying that they were “marijuana smokers and hippies.” “They had a guitar,” he continued, seemingly scandalized, “which they kept passing from one guy to another. They sang folk and freedom songs. Beer and wine was served as they sang.”<sup>78</sup> These were not necessarily the populist pan-Latina/o cultural politics that LADO wished to project to Puerto Ricans in West Town and Humboldt Park. Indeed, the beatnik/hippy party was held a few miles away in Lincoln Park, home to many Puerto Rican activists, including those who would subsequently participate in the radicalization of the Young Lords Organization. But the neighborhood of Lincoln Park was also a favorite spot for countercultural white activists, including some who, a year later, would famously attempt to stage a Festival of Light in the park itself during the 1968 Democratic National Convention, only to be forcibly dispersed by the police. In this context, LADO’s countercultural engagement marked its connection with then-powerful trends among younger organizers in non-Latina/o contexts.

### **Conclusion: Back up from the Nadir**

Raquel Crespo’s powerful expression of frustration in dealing with Public Aid officials, “for one we all pay,” can be seen as a metaphor for the fortunes of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism in the aftermath of the Division Street Riots. The failure of liberal Americanization had been so total that no one was willing to publically advocate for any other version of cultural

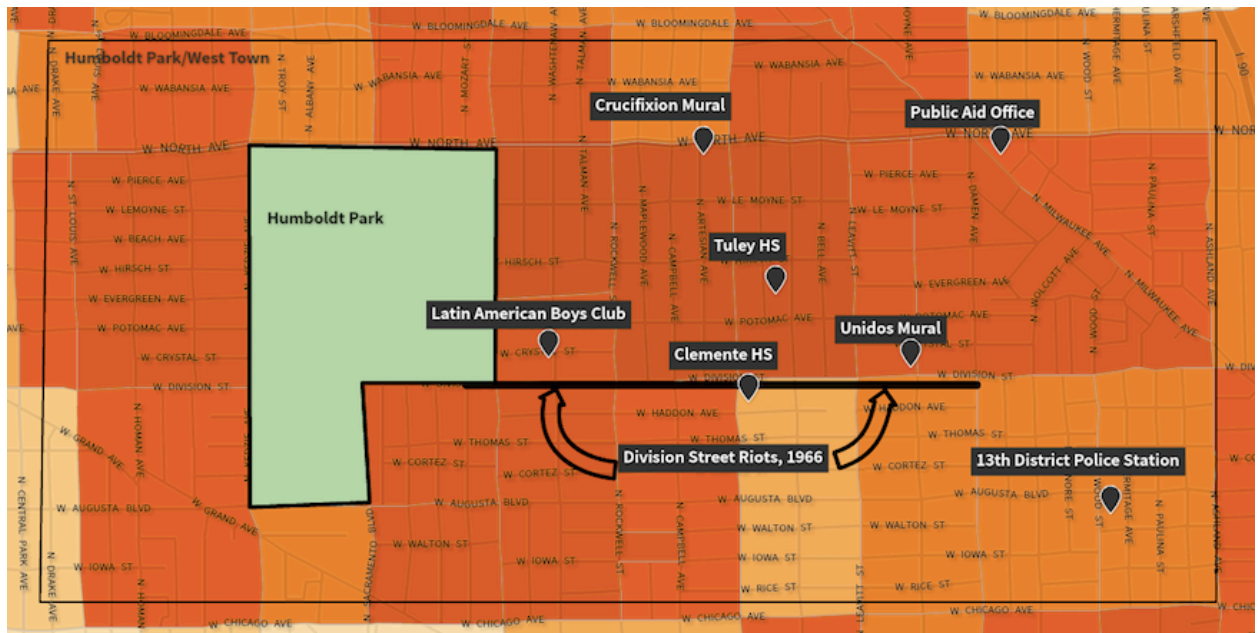
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<sup>78</sup> “A LADO Party at Caroline’s Apartment,” July 1, 1967 (JNC).

nationalism, no matter how distinctive or contrary to the old models. At the same time, the repression during and after the Riots (including extensive police surveillance and disruption of LADO and other groups) ensured that the police would target anyone expressing significant interest in direct action, for the betterment of the community or for any other reason. In such a context, Puerto Rican women on welfare were willing to engage in common struggle, but clearly preferred to do so through the populist framework provided by LADO's Welfare Union. LADO, meanwhile, was unwilling to pursue cultural nationalism, though it was clearly drawn to cultural politics in broad strokes that matched the breadth of its commitment to "Latin" identity. Meanwhile, in black communities both locally and across the country nationalist politics were on the rise. The next chapter takes this new reality as its starting point in trying to explain why and how Puerto Rican cultural nationalism was able to make a fiery comeback in the dozen years following the Division Street Riots.

**Figure 3: Humboldt Park and West Town, 1970**

Color-coded census tracts: greater concentrations of “Spanish Origin or Descent” shown in darker shades. [Map via [sociaexplorer.com](http://www.sociaexplorer.com); available on the internet at <http://www.sociaexplorer.com/faced9e68c/view> ]



## Chapter Five: “We Are Latins, We Are Different”: Building an Insurgent Anti-Colonial Identity, 1968-1980

### Introduction: Pallbearers at a Funeral

A few months after the Division Street Riots, with Puerto Rican cultural nationalism in Chicago at its nadir, a seventeen year old high school senior in the western suburb of Maywood, Illinois, set up a black cultural center with a focus on black history, while demanding more black teachers and administrators be hired at his school.<sup>1</sup> Within two years, Fred Hampton was Chairman of the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party, and had begun the process of developing political alliances with a range of other radical groups throughout Chicago, under the name the Rainbow Coalition.<sup>2</sup> Less than two years after that, Hampton was dead, shot twice in the head at point blank range by Chicago police officers during an early-morning raid on his home. At his funeral in December, 1969, the honor guard that carried Hampton’s casket from the church to the hearse included, alongside several African American militants, both the Puerto Rican radical José “Cha Cha” Jiménez and Obed López, the Mexican-born head of the Puerto Rican-focused Latin American Defense Organization.

The prominent participation of Jiménez and López in the Rainbow Coalition in 1968 and 1969 was indicative of a sea change then under way in the Puerto Rican community: a resurgence of cultural nationalism, this time tied to an anti-racist and anti-colonial radicalism that privileged local as well as continental connections among black, Puerto Rican and Mexican

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Haas, *The Assassination of Fred Hampton: How the FBI and Chicago Police Murdered a Black Panther* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2009), 28.

<sup>2</sup> On the Rainbow Coalition, see Jakobi Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot: The Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and Racial Coalition Politics in Chicago* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 125-166..

activists. This shift was the result of any number of precipitating factors, though the sudden rise to fame of the Black Panther Party, and its public commitment to a revolutionary black nationalism, was initially crucial. Hampton had been deeply invested in recruiting Puerto Ricans to the Rainbow Coalition, most prominently Jiménez, head of the Young Lords Organization (YLO) in Lincoln Park. As Lilia Fernandez points out in a detailed portrait of the YLO's peak period in Chicago during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the alliance between Hampton and Jiménez made sense because "the Black Panther Party's influence on the Young Lords and their affinities was unmistakable."<sup>3</sup> Both groups focused their efforts on fighting police brutality and promoting a nationalist form of pride in their respective heritages and cultures, even while both criticized other, more separatist forms of nationalism that, as one member of the YLO put it in 1969, "saw everything from a racial or cultural point of view."<sup>4</sup>

While the Chicago branches of both the Black Panthers and the Young Lords were in terminal disarray by the end of 1970, the stage had been set for a decade in which Puerto Rican cultural nationalism would become progressively more insurgent while repeatedly engaging in dialogue with black nationalist and anti-colonial radicalism of various forms.<sup>5</sup> Struggles that

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<sup>3</sup> Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 187. For more background on the Young Lords in Chicago, see Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 173-205, as well as Ángel G. Flores Rodríguez, "On National Turf: The Rise of the Young Lords Organization and its Struggle for the Nation in Chicago," *Op. Cit.: Revista del Centro de Investigaciones Históricas* 20 (2011-2012), 104-141.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 199.

<sup>5</sup> The Young Lords Party in New York City, originally conceived as a branch of the Chicago organization, survived longer, and is the subject of multiple scholarly treatments, including Johanna Fernandez, "Between Social Service Reform and Revolutionary Politics: The Young Lords, Late Sixties Radicalism, and Community Organizing in New York City," in Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 255-285; Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar, "Brown Power to Brown People: Radical Ethnic Nationalism, the Black Panthers, and Latino Radicalism, 1967-1973," in Jama Lazerow and Yohuru Williams, eds., *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 252-286; Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*, 200-243; Darrel Wanzer Serrano, *The New York Young Lords and the Struggle for Liberation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015).

emerged first in black communities, around educational equity and representation, cultural and artistic celebrations, and armed struggle, among others, found echoes in the work of Chicago's Puerto Rican community activist network over the next several years, whose approaches were then sometimes refracted among black nationalists. Dan Berger has argued that the context of responses to state violence, local independence activists of the 1970s took specific lessons from black radicalism: "The many influences on Chicago's Puerto Rican movement included more than a decade of black organizing on the same issues of conscription and curriculum reform, urban renewal, and hyper-policing."<sup>6</sup> Beyond the tactical lessons associated with particular struggles, I argue, a related process brought the lessons of black (cultural) nationalism and, in particular, left pan-Africanism, into the work of the militant wing of the local independence movement.

In important ways, this process exemplified what Omi and Winant describe as the "nation-based paradigm." In their words, "rooted in the resistance to empire and colonialism, insurgent nationalisms logically invoke racial criteria in their efforts to theorize and mobilize opposition to white supremacist rule."<sup>7</sup> The most high-profile advocates of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism in the 1970s viewed the situation in through just such a lens. Rather than leading them to identify with blackness, however, the influence of pan-African trends within black radicalism inspired Puerto Rican activists to develop their own panethnic ties with Mexican American radicals, both in Chicago and across the United States. The resulting

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<sup>6</sup> Dan Berger, "'A Common Citizenship of Freedom': What Black Power Taught Chicago's Puerto Rican *Independentistas*," in *Civil Rights and Beyond: African American and Latino/a Activism in the Twentieth Century United States*, edited by Brian D. Behnken (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016), 133. In the 1940s and 1950s, the term *independentista* referred specifically to members of the PIP and was contrasted with *nacionalista*, referring to members of the PNP. By the 1980s, *independentista* had (at least in the context of Chicago) come to refer to any supporter of independence for the island.

<sup>7</sup> Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 82.

connections across the two “Latin” communities, I argue, contributed in significant ways to the emergent racial formation of Latina/os during the decade that Felix Padilla, Ramón Gutiérrez and other scholars have highlighted as crucially formative. Not surprisingly, however, the range and intensity of insurgent organizing in Chicago’s Puerto Rican community also drew the attention of law enforcement, leading to a series of disruptions and arrests that had crippled multiple movements at the turn of the 1980s. The following decades would witness a turn toward a less intensely confrontational and more institutionally focused approach to Puerto Rican cultural nationalism, as described in Chapter Six.

#### **“The Problems that Our People Suffer”: Early Pan-Latina/o Muralism**

If LADO had initially distanced itself from older and failed models of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism, in favor of a culturally inflected but rather vague pan-Latin appeal, things had clearly changed by the time Obed López helped carry Fred Hampton’s casket. Obed’s brother Omar, who had also been a founding member of LADO, was by this point the minister of information for the YLO, though it is unclear whether this was more cause or effect of interaction between the Panthers, the Lords, and LADO.<sup>8</sup> The relationship between the latter two groups extended to joint protests and coalitional work, while both organizations became at least superficially attached to the cultural iconography of Puerto Rican nationalism. For example, Fernandez notes that by “Pedro Albizu Campos, the quintessential Puerto Rican nationalist hero, became perhaps the most celebrated figure in the YLO newspaper’s pages,

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<sup>8</sup> Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 193.

and his image was a constant presence at rallies and marches.”<sup>9</sup> By the same token, when LADO opened a community health clinic in 1971, it was named after Albizu Campos, though in doing so the group still chose to emphasize not his politics but his method: the militancy with which he had led a “fight to defend their rights” eclipsed any mention of his theories of colonialism or *retraimiento*.<sup>10</sup>

LADO also embraced the power of public art, organizing young people to work on murals that were painted throughout the West Town and Humboldt Park neighborhoods. Local muralist John Pittman Weber, a white man deeply influenced by the emergence of black muralism in the 1960s, worked with LADO to develop specifically “Latin” mural projects. Pittman Weber’s approach to murals had been inspired by the “Wall of Respect,” painted by a group of black artists, members of the Organization for Black American Culture (OBAC – pronounced “obasi,” a Yoruba word for “chieftan”) on the south side of Chicago in 1967.<sup>11</sup> In 1971, Pittman Weber noted that “the wall honors Black men and women denied recognition by the white media and portrays Black history as a heroic resistance struggle.”<sup>12</sup> The Wall of Respect became the focal point for a range of black cultural nationalist expressions, including poetry readings by Gwendolyn Brooks and Don L. Lee (later Haki Madhubuti), musical performances, and eventually protest rallies after the city announced a plan to demolish it

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<sup>9</sup> Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 194. For a collection of essays in Spanish on the life and legacy of Albizu Campos, see Juan Manuel Carrión, Teresa C. Gracia Ruiz, and Carlos Rodríguez Fraticelli, eds., *La nación puertorriqueña: ensayos en torno a Pedro Albizu Campos* (The Puerto Rican Nation: Essays on Pedro Albizu Campos) (San Juan: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1993).

<sup>10</sup> “Unlicensed Clinic on West Side Aids Latin Community,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 14, 1971, p. W6; Obed and Caralee López, Transcript #1, October 17, 1995, p. 5 (CYL).

<sup>11</sup> On the Wall of Respect and OBAC, see Eva Cockcroft, John Pittman Weber, and James Cockcroft, *Toward a People’s Art: The Contemporary Mural Movement* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998 (1977)), 1-12; and Jeff Donaldson, “The Rise, Fall and Legacy of the Wall of Respect Movement,” *International Review of African American Art*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1998), 22-26.

<sup>12</sup> John Pittman Weber, “Murals as People’s Art,” *Liberation*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (1971), 44.



under the auspices of urban renewal.<sup>13</sup> Local artists treated the Wall as a permanent work in progress, subject to repeated revision both politically and aesthetically over the next few years. As the politics of black power supplanted those of the classic period civil rights movement, portraits of Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, and H. Rap Brown were added to the Wall. Tragically, the building that hosted the Wall of Respect burned down under suspicious circumstances in the midst of the battle over its future, just before Pittman's glowing tribute was published.

That same summer, LADO sponsored the dedication of three murals in the West Town and Humboldt Park neighborhoods that "are important because they speak about our history and about the problems that our people suffer."<sup>14</sup> "Our people" represented an interesting phrasing. Coming from LADO, it clearly referred not only to the Puerto Ricans who dominated the surrounding neighborhoods, but to all "Latinos." In addition, however, given the inspiration LADO and Pittman Weber took from OBAC, it also symbolized the beginnings of the influence of pan-Africanism as a model for pan-Latina/o organizing. In any event, the "Latinos" are symbolized in one mural, "United to Overcome," by a brown hand giving the "brothers handshake" to a black hand that represented African Americans, while elsewhere in the mural "everybody is together marching with the flag of unity toward a better future."<sup>15</sup> Pan-Latina/o unity, then, was both necessary in its own right and crucial to developing inter-racial alliances with other people of color. At the same time, this emergent Pan-Latina/o framework was

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<sup>13</sup> "Wall of Respect: Artists Paint Pictures of Black Dignity in Heart of City Ghetto," *Ebony* Vol. 23, No. 2 (December, 1967), 48-50.

<sup>14</sup> "Rompiendo las Cadenas Nace la Esperanza", 6.

<sup>15</sup> "Rompiendo las Cadenas Nace la Esperanza," 6.

conceived as fully distinct from blackness, even though such a move erased the more complicated experience of Afro-Latina/os.

At the time of the mural dedications in 1971, LADO chose to describe the two pan-Latin murals in great detail, while glossing over the one mural – named “The Crucifixion of El Maestro Don Pedro Albizu Campos” – that expressed explicit Puerto Rican nationalist politics. Two stories tall and over sixty feet long, the mural remains a prominent fixture near the intersection of North and Western Avenues in the eastern part of Humboldt Park, having been restored twice, in 1990 and again in 2011.<sup>16</sup> The mural shows Albizu Campos hanging from a cross as Jesus, flanked by Lolita Lebrón and Rafael Cancél Miranda, who participated with Lebrón in the 1954 attack on Congress described in Chapter One. Former governor Luis Muñoz Marín is depicted as the Roman soldier who, according to the Gospel of St. John, pierced the side of Jesus to confirm that he was truly dead. The symbolism is striking, drawing on Christian imagery to suggest that Muñoz Marín, who into the 1970s remained a great hero to many Puerto Ricans both on the island and in the diaspora, was in fact a mere foot soldier for the (undepicted) forces of the United States government who had turned Albizu Campos into a martyr upon his death in 1965. The entire image is laid over a background featuring the flag of Lares, which originated in the 1868 rebellion against Spanish rule led by Ramón Emeterio Betances. Older than and even more nationalist-inflected than the traditional Puerto Rican flag, the Lares flag featured two baby-blue fields above two red ones, all separated by a white cross,

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<sup>16</sup> A description of the mural and of its preservation can be found in Roz Diane Lasker and John A. Guidry, *Engaging the Community in Decision Making: Case Studies Tracking Participation, Voice, and Influence* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2009), 156-159.

and a white star in the upper left quadrant. On the massive wall, the color scheme was, and remains, arresting.

In contrast to the enthusiastic explanations of the radicalism of the other murals, LADO's description of "The Crucifixion" is strangely depoliticized, asserting only that it features "a historical theme of Puerto Rico," while weakly noting that "we will not try to explain its meaning. The young artists who painted it can do it much better."<sup>17</sup> Despite LADO's apparent disinterest, the prominent placement of Albizu Campos on a massive mural in the heart of Chicago's Puerto Rican community in 1971 reflected the re-emergence of a new and insurgent Puerto Rican cultural nationalism. At least initially, however, it was only tangentially connected to the simultaneous rise of a model of Latina/o panethnicity influence in part by pan-Africanist trends in the black community. Efforts to bridge the disconnect between these two aspects soon emerged in the arena of educational struggles.

### **"Problems in Self-Identity": Building Educational Alternatives**

Many of the young artists who created "The Crucifixion" were likely students at or dropouts from Murray Tuley High School, merely four blocks away. With more and more Puerto Ricans concentrated in the side-by-side neighborhoods of West Town and Humboldt Park, local school student populations also came to be more heavily Puerto Rican, and Tuley was the only public high school in the vicinity. By the time young people reached high school, however, the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) were undeniably failing them. A 1971 investigation by the sociologist Isidro Lucas laid out the situation in a series of stark figures: the 26,000

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<sup>17</sup> "Rompiendo las Cadenas Nace La Esperanza," 6.

Puerto Ricans enrolled in CPS represented 4.5% of the total student population, but an estimated 71.2% of those entering high school dropped out before graduation.<sup>18</sup> That same year, CPS reported that there were exactly 54 Puerto Rican teachers, out of a total of 17,738 in the district, or 0.3 percent, meaning that there was one Puerto Rican teacher for every 481 Puerto Rican students.<sup>19</sup> Not surprisingly, Lucas observed, “twice as many [graduating] seniors than dropouts were found to have had Spanish teachers (Puerto Rican or other nationality).”<sup>20</sup> The problem went beyond language, however. Lucas also concluded that “many youngsters present problems in self-identity. Acutely aware of society’s discrimination against them, based on race concepts, the experience does not find in them a previous frame of reference. It clashes with their cultural traditions of self-worth and dignity.”<sup>21</sup> This framing echoed the experience of double consciousness noted by some participants in the Division Street Riots. Two years after the publication of Lucas’ report, and after more than half a decade of relative calm, problems at the community’s largest public high school led to conflict in the streets.

Tuley had been the site of protests by students and community members as early as 1968, demanding educational improvements and the construction of a new school building to replace the dilapidated, and terribly overcrowded, seventy-year-old structure.<sup>22</sup> By 1971, protesters began targeting Herbert J. Fink, the principal, pushing for his removal and

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<sup>18</sup> Isidro Lucas, *Puerto Rican Dropouts in Chicago: Numbers and Motivations* (Washington: US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1971), 6.

<sup>19</sup> Teacher statistics quoted in Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 209.

<sup>20</sup> Lucas, *Puerto Rican Dropouts in Chicago*, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Lucas, *Puerto Rican Dropouts in Chicago*, 7.

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed examination of the conflict around Tuley and its replacement school, Roberto Clemente Community Academy, see Mirelsie Velazquez, “Brincamos el Charco y Ahora Que: Historicizing Puerto Rican Education in Chicago, 1967-1977,” (PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign, 2010), 99-108.

replacement.<sup>23</sup> The next year, *El Puertorriqueño* editorialized repeatedly against the inadequate coursework and the indifference of white teachers at the school.<sup>24</sup> Demographics were part of the problem: one report, beginning to use the language and categories of Latina/o panethnicity, noted that “in a school with a population of 3,400 students out of which 75% are Latin there are only 2 Latin counselors, and out of 159 teachers only 9 are Latin.”<sup>25</sup> One of those two counselors, Carmen Valentín, was removed from the school by CPS administrators for encouraging a series of student protests early in 1973. Her departure helped trigger a series of walk-outs and street fights between students and police, making the conflict city-wide news. In a later round of protests, when Valentín eventually left CPS for good, the *Chicago Tribune* would contemptuously (but also presciently) editorialize that she “can look forward to a highly publicized career as a revolutionary.”<sup>26</sup>

Among the supporters of Valentín and the student protestors was a Puerto Rican Vietnam veteran and community organizer named Oscar López (no relation to Obed and Omar López). Years later, López recalled that his perspective on cultural nationalism was profoundly shaped by his experiences in Vietnam, where “the Puerto Rican flag became a symbol of important unity among the Puerto Rican soldiers. Recognizing the familiar common colors filled war-tormented soldiers with overwhelming pride and the flag became a physical symbol of powerful emotions.”<sup>27</sup> At the same time, like many other soldiers of color serving in the era of civil rights and decolonization, he began to question the role of the United States military in Vietnam. Upon his return to Chicago, López was trained in Alinsky-style tactics that he and

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<sup>23</sup> Aida Sanchez, “The Tuley Experience,” *Que Ondee Sola* (Chicago), Vol. 1, No. 12 (1973), 7.

<sup>24</sup> Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 210.

<sup>25</sup> “A Rising Consciousness,” *Que Ondee Sola*, Vol. 1, No. 12 (1973), 6.

<sup>26</sup> “Who’s Winning at Clemente,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 16, 1974, p. N16.

<sup>27</sup> Oscar López Rivera, *Between Torture and Resistance* (Oakland: PM Press, 2013), 22.

other community members began to use against slumlords and against employers who would not hire Latina/os.<sup>28</sup> In the early 1970s he worked closely with the Spanish Coalition for Jobs, which Felix Padilla has credited as among the very first organizational efforts to advance “the adoption and application of the idea of a Latino group identity by Puerto Rican and Mexican American leaders in Chicago.”<sup>29</sup> By this point, López would later recall, “cultural nationalism and anticolonial struggle” had become “two seeds” that would “ripen later in his life.”<sup>30</sup>

In the context of Tuley, López argued that the conflict was about “insensitivity”: “We are Latins,” he maintained, “We are different. We have a different language and a different culture. We need a principal in the school who understands that.”<sup>31</sup> As with the struggles of the Spanish Coalition for Jobs, the battles around Tuley were frequently framed as a panethnic question of justice and equity for “Latins” rather than simply for Puerto Ricans. A sympathetic report noted that “parents, students and teachers of the Latin community have fought a militant struggle against the inadequate educational system in this city,” of which the fight for Tuley was only one example.<sup>32</sup> Still, the demographics at the school were heavily Puerto Rican, leading to a set of cultural nationalist demands. For instance, the protestors proposed that the replacement school then under construction one block away be named after Roberto Clemente, the great Puerto Rican baseball player who had died in a plane crash weeks before.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> For background on López’s experiences as a community organizer, see López Rivera, *Between Torture and Resistance*, 22-24.

<sup>29</sup> Padilla, *Latino Ethnic Consciousness*, 117.

<sup>30</sup> López Rivera, *Between Torture and Resistance*, 22.

<sup>31</sup> Frederick Soll and James Jackson, “The Tuley Thing ... It Gave People a Chance to Win,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 18, 1973, p. 43.

<sup>32</sup> “A Rising Consciousness,” 6.

<sup>33</sup> On Clemente’s life and legacy, see David Maraniss, *Clemente: The Passion and Grace of Baseball’s Last Hero* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006).

The Board of Education, tiring of weeks of protests, fairly quickly met this demand, and agreed to the reinstatement of Valentín.

Nonetheless, some of the protesters, including both López and Valentín, decided that CPS was fundamentally incapable of offering the sort of education that they believed Puerto Rican teenagers needed. As a result, along with other community members and some of the students who had led the walkouts at Tuley, López and Valentín helped found a small alternative high school in the neighborhood, originally called simply the “*Escuelita*,” (the little school), as well as the related Puerto Rican Cultural Center. López noted that the primary objective of the *Escuelita* was “to develop leadership within the community which will remain in the community. In keeping with this objective the High School only admits students who are committed to community development. Community issues are explored in the classroom and students are encouraged to participate in community organizations.”<sup>34</sup> After “basic skills” in both English and Spanish as well as math, science and history, the second area of focus for the *Escuelita* was “Puerto Rican Studies – history, music, art, silk screening, geography.”<sup>35</sup> Before long, the *Escuelita* would be renamed in honor of Rafael Cancel Miranda, a member of the Nationalist Party who had participated in the 1954 attack on the Capitol led by Lolita Lebrón. Cultural nationalism was thus incorporated directly into the educational struggles of Chicago’s Puerto Rican community the 1970s.

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<sup>34</sup> Oscar López, “The Puerto Rican Organizers Training Center: A Proposal for Six Months Funding for Further Organizing Work within Chicago’s Barrio Community of West Town,” (1973), 6. Puerto Rican Cultural Center Collection (PRCCC), Daley Library Special Collections, University of Illinois at Chicago. Available online at: [http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/uic\\_prcc/id/829/rec/366](http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/uic_prcc/id/829/rec/366) (accessed May 20, 2016)

<sup>35</sup> López, “The Puerto Rican Organizers Training Center,” 6.

Something strikingly similar had taken place in the immediately preceding years a few miles south at the overwhelmingly black Farragut High School on Chicago's west side. As the historian Russell Rickford notes

Educational struggles of the late 1960s grew increasingly militant, with African American parents, students, and instructors seeking greater control over crowded schools with mushrooming black populations. Farragut was a locus of discontent, with an enrollment of 3,000 in a dilapidated building designed for half that number. While the school's student body was more than 90% black, its principal and four assistant principals were white, as was more than half its faculty.<sup>36</sup>

In 1968, Harold E. Charles (later Hannibal T. Afrik), an experienced civil rights activist and chair of the science department at Farragut, helped lead a series of disruptive protests much like those that Valentín was later to incite at Tuley, demanding increased hiring of black faculty and a program in black studies that included "African fashion shows and other cultural events."<sup>37</sup> Along with a group of recent graduates from Farragut, Afrik initiated a Saturday school for neighborhood youth up to 14 years old, and by the beginning of 1972 they had expanded to a full-week program. The organizers chose the name *Shule Ya Watoto* (Swahili for "School for Children"), and while the pan-Africanist school largely focused on preschool and elementary education it signaled the potential for independent non-public education guided by cultural nationalism.

While there is no clear evidence that Valentín, López, or other community organizers were aware of or explicitly influenced by Afrik's project, it was widely reported in the local media throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, as Berger notes, "the civil

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<sup>36</sup> Russell Rickford, *We Are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and the Radical Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 145.

<sup>37</sup> Rickford, *We Are an African People*, 146.

<sup>38</sup> See John F. Lyons, *Teachers and Reform: Chicago Public Education, 1979-1970* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 194-199.



rights and Black Power movements had long organized around school curriculum, from the freedom schools that civil rights workers established as part of their desegregation efforts in the South to the campus takeovers of the late 1960s that gave rise to black studies.”<sup>39</sup> In this context, it is notable that Valentín lived for much of her adolescence in a largely African American neighborhood on the west side, not far from Farragut, while López directly acknowledged the influence of black organizing efforts on the grouping that founded the *Escuelita*.<sup>40</sup> In any event, Afrik’s version of pan-Africanism, characterized by a cultural conservatism that, according to Rickford, rejected “everything from Blaxploitation to black feminism,” contrasted sharply with the growing embrace of feminism and Leninism among those involved in the *Escuelita*.<sup>41</sup> Still, as Rickford points out regarding similar educational efforts in black, Puerto Rican, Chicano and other communities during the 1960s and 1970s, “forged by nationalist movements, these institutions encouraged their students to speak indigenous tongues and regard native territories as proud homelands rather than degraded reservations.”<sup>42</sup> In the end, then, what the *Escuelita* and *Shule Ya Watoto* shared was an assertion that cultural and institutional autonomy for oppressed communities was an integral part of their respective nation building project.

### **Building an Ideological Pole for the Community**

Many of the activists most deeply involved in the Puerto Rican community’s educational struggles were also by this time firmly committed to their own specific nation-building project,

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<sup>39</sup> Berger, “A Common Citizenship of Freedom,” 135.

<sup>40</sup> “Carmen Valentín,” in *Can’t Jail the Spirit: Political Prisoners in the US*, Third Edition (Chicago: Editorial El Coquí Publishers, 1991), 149; López, “The Puerto Rican Organizers Training Center,” 3.

<sup>41</sup> Rickford, *We Are an African People*, 249.

<sup>42</sup> Rickford, *We Are an African People*, 8.

the cause of independence for the island itself. The Young Lords had helped reintroduce this idea into the community in the late 1960s, fifteen years after the demise of the Nationalist Party's local branch. The "Crucifixion" mural of 1971 signaled its rising profile, and by the next year a group of Puerto Rican students at Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) founded a magazine entitled *Que Ondee Sola* (May it wave alone). *QOS*, which from the beginning was distributed both on campus and in the broader community, continues to publish regularly as of 2016. Within months of its founding it became a central hub for independence activism among younger Puerto Ricans, including many graduates of the *Escuelita*.

The name *Que Ondee Sola* was a reference to the flag of Puerto Rico, with the apparent symbolism of a sovereign island free of the competing United States flag. In the second issue of *QOS*, a Puerto Rican student who identified herself as a supporter of independence wrote a letter objecting to the name, which she felt "is not the appropriate title for a newspaper whose objective is to reach all our fellow Puerto Ricans, and the rest of the Latin and North American public."<sup>43</sup> The editor replied by drawing a distinction between Puerto Rican cultural nationalism and the independence movement per se: "The name *Que Ondee Sola* (May It Wave Alone) is rather an expression of a sentiment that we are sure is imbedded [sic] deep in the hearts of every Puerto Rican."<sup>44</sup> Consistent with this, *QOS* published poetry in every issue during its first several years of existence, much of which focused on the cultural struggles of diasporic Puerto Ricans rather than on specific political solutions. Still, *QOS* remained a project run by, and largely for, independence activists at NEIU and in the broader community.

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<sup>43</sup> Evelyn Ayala, letter to the editor, *Que Ondee Sola* (Chicago), Vol. 1, No. 2 (1972), 5.

<sup>44</sup> "Reply," *Que Ondee Sola*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1972), 5.

Whether on campus or off, the pro-independence camp remained a minority trend in Chicago's Puerto Rican community through the 1970s and beyond, but by the middle part of the decade a critical mass at least had been achieved. Hundreds, possibly thousands, of local activists constituted the core of a newly resurgent movement, built around the combination of cultural nationalism and anti-colonial sentiments. Nor was the phenomenon in any way limited to Chicago. The withdrawal from and eventual defeat of the United States in Vietnam emboldened many Puerto Rican radicals, both on the island and in the diaspora, to consider Puerto Rican independence a practical objective that might be achieved within the immediate future, although there were significant differences about which strategy would advance this cause most successfully. The largest groupings in this milieu, the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP) and the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP), argued that independence would come through either elections or mass movements led by Puerto Rican workers.

A smaller trend, however, drew inspiration from the military success of the Vietnamese as well as the earlier triumph of Castro's guerilla forces in Cuba during the late 1950s. This faction rationalized its commitment to a set of highly unpopular ideas – Marxism-Leninism and the viability of armed struggle within the borders of the United States in particular – on the somewhat plausible basis that the global and domestic political terrain had shifted so much in the preceding decade alone. This made it easier to imagine that mass support for what Mao called "protracted people's war" might emerge very quickly.<sup>45</sup> Another factor was the emergence of the Black Liberation Army (BLA) in the early 1970s, composed at least initially of

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<sup>45</sup> Mao Tse-Tung, "On Protracted War," (1938). Available in English translation on the internet at [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2\\_09.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_09.htm) (accessed May 20, 2016).

former members of the New York branch of the Black Panthers. As the ethnic studies scholar Dan Berger puts it, members of the BLA were “loyal to traditions of revolutionary nationalism (including its emphasis on self-defense).”<sup>46</sup> Many members, such as Assata Shakur and Sundiata Acoli, took new names designed to honor their African heritage. As practiced by the BLA, this version of nationalism resembles what Rickford describes as a “left-oriented Pan Africanism anchored in anticapitalism and anti-imperialism.”<sup>47</sup> The persistence of the BLA’s military campaign during the early 1970s, despite multiple arrests and deaths in shootouts with police, convinced a core of Puerto Ricans in New York and elsewhere that armed struggle could succeed in the mainland United States. Beginning in October, 1974, a clandestine group calling itself the *Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional* (Armed Forces of National Liberation) claimed responsibility for a series of bombings in New York (along with others attributed to it in Puerto Rico).

In Chicago, such sentiments remained largely submerged for several more years, but the actions of the FALN ensured that the issue became a major topic of conversation within the local movement. Many independence activists denounced the organization as a fringe element that would undermine the mass organizing efforts of groups like the PSP, while others tended to support at least the abstract possibility of armed struggle if not the specific actions of the FALN. The January, 1975 issue of *QOS*, for instance, devoted its back cover to a full-page image of a Puerto Rican militant with a rifle, along with a quote from Albizu Campos, “*Si no se nos oye,*

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<sup>46</sup> Dan Berger, *Captive Nation: Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 249.

<sup>47</sup> Rickford, *We Are an African People*, 166.

*recurriremos entonces a las armas*” (If we are not heard, we will turn to arms).<sup>48</sup> Divisions within the local movement heightened exponentially after the FALN expanded its geographic range from New York to Chicago with the bombing of two banks on June 14, 1975. A communiqué released afterward denounced “Yanki imperialist institutions,” and expressed “our solidarity with the victorious people of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Their victory is our victory.”<sup>49</sup>

At that point, according to the *Chicago Tribune*, the FBI was confident that the FALN “had not been active in Chicago,” and that in order to carry out the bombings, the FALN “sent operatives to Chicago from either San Juan or New York City, where the group has been responsible for other terrorist attacks.”<sup>50</sup> This theory, though no doubt comforting to many local Puerto Ricans opposed to the FALN, had to be scrapped a year and a half later, when a Humboldt Park heroin addict was arrested while trying to sell undercover police officers several sticks of dynamite.<sup>51</sup> Once under arrest, he led authorities to an apartment that contained more than two hundred additional sticks as well as an FALN communiqué and other evidence of clandestine activity. Four local activists, including Oscar López, disappeared after the police raid, making it crystal clear that a segment Chicago’s movement was directly involved in the armed struggle for Puerto Rican independence.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Que Ondee Sola*, January, 1975, p. 8.

<sup>49</sup> “Comunicado No. 5,” (June 14, 1975), in *Toward People’s War for Independence and Socialism in Puerto Rico: In Defense of Armed Struggle* (Chicago: Committee in Solidarity with Puerto Rican Independence, et. al., 1979), 63. Puerto Rico Small Books and Monographs Collection, Freedom Archives. Available on the internet at [http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC29\\_scans/29.toward.peoples.war.1979.pdf](http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC29_scans/29.toward.peoples.war.1979.pdf) (accessed June 10, 2016).

<sup>50</sup> William Griffin, “Police Hunt 3<sup>rd</sup> Puerto Rican Terrorist Bomb in Loop,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 15, 1975, p. 1.

<sup>51</sup> Mary Breasted, “Three Year Inquiry Threads Together Evidence on FALN Terrorism,” *New York Times* April 17 1977, p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Neither López Rivera, as he is commonly known today, nor any of the other three fugitives, has ever publically acknowledged membership in the FALN specifically, though for many years after their respective arrests in 1980

The raid on the Humboldt Park apartment in 1976 also brought to light a different set of connections. Just as the BLA had embraced a pan-African approach to blackness in the early 1970s, so it appeared that sectors of the independence movement, in Chicago and elsewhere, were experimenting with both the theory and practice of pan-Latin identity. The 1975 FALN communiqué had called specific attention to government attacks on “our chicano brothers and sisters.”<sup>53</sup> But there also appeared to be a move beyond a merely rhetorical stance not too dissimilar to the one LADO had helped pioneer years before. Two of the fugitives, including López, had been members of the National Commission on Hispanic Affairs (NCHA) of the Episcopal Church, along with a number of other Puerto Rican and Chicano activists from across the United States. This led the FBI to theorize that Chicano radicals in the Southwest, also involved in the NCHA, had illegally obtained and then provided the dynamite used in the bombings in New York and Chicago.<sup>54</sup> In the aftermath of the 1976 raid, government surveillance and repression of local activists accelerated as the FBI attempted to locate and arrest López and his comrades. Federal grand juries were set up in New York and Chicago, and subpoenas were issued to several local activists deemed close to the fugitives.<sup>55</sup>

By the spring of 1977, above-ground supporters of the FALN, including a number of those who had been subpoenaed, helped found a political organization that could publically defend the armed struggle while developing a comprehensive approach to the situation of Puerto Ricans in the diaspora as well as the future of the island. Still, the *Movimiento de*

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and 1981 they claimed the status of prisoner of war on the basis of being armed combatants in what they identified as a war for Puerto Rican independence.

<sup>53</sup> “Comunicado No. 5,” *Toward People’s War*, 63.

<sup>54</sup> Breasted, “Three Year Inquiry.”

<sup>55</sup> For more on the grand juries and resistance to them, see Michael Staudenmaier, *Truth and Revolution: A History of the Sojourner Truth Organization, 1969-1986* (Oakland and Baltimore: AK Press, 2012), 162-164.

*Liberación Nacional* (Movement for National Liberation, or MLN) was not just another Puerto Rican independence organization. Instead, it embraced a bi-national membership structure for both Puerto Rican and Mexican American activists. As the group itself later noted, this made it “one of the most unique political experiments,” under which “Mexicans and Puerto Ricans have worked under one organizational structure” to promote “a clear revolutionary, anti-imperialist vision.”<sup>56</sup> As José López, brother of Oscar and a founding member of the MLN, put it years later, “the MLN was formed as a way to put together a unified face against the political repression of both the Mexican struggle and the Puerto Rican struggle.”<sup>57</sup> This unique bi-national structure represented a practical manifestation of the growing sense of shared identity among Puerto Ricans and Chicana/o activists.

The MLN in this sense represented a pan-Latin equivalent to the pan-African radicalism that characterized groups like the BLA and the Republic of New Afrika (RNA). The RNA, to which many BLA combatants eventually pledged allegiance, advocated a particular brand of Pan-African cultural nationalism, focused on black control of land. In particular, it aimed to establish an independent black nation-state in the deep south of the United States. As Berger has noted, the RNA “disaggregated nation from state: ‘nation’ characterized the position of all Black people in the United States; ‘state’ was a demand, consistent with the developmentalist approach of Third World liberation struggles at the time.”<sup>58</sup> The centrality of black cultural nationalism to the project of the RNA was indicated by the group’s decision to denominate

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<sup>56</sup> “On the Separation within the MLN,” *De Pie y en Lucha*, Summer/Fall, 1983, p. 10. Personal Collection.

<sup>57</sup> Mike Staudenmaier, with Matt Meyer and Dan Berger, “The Content of Our Character: An Interview with José López,” in Elizabeth “Betita” Martínez, Matt Meyer, and Mandy Carter, eds., *We Have Not Been Moved: Resisting Racism and Militarism in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 340.

<sup>58</sup> Dan Berger, “‘The Malcolm X Doctrine’: The Republic of New Afrika and National Liberation on U.S. Soil,” in Karen Dubinsky, ed., *New World Coming: The Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2009), 53.

twenty-five counties along the Mississippi River as “Kush,” calling to mind the ancient African kingdom that similarly straddled the Nile River in present-day Sudan.<sup>59</sup> Just as the RNA designated itself the revolutionary political home for people of African descent within the present mainland boundaries of the United States, so did the MLN attempt to unify radicals of Latin descent on the same geographic terrain. The main difference between the two projects was that the RNA deemed itself responsive to a single black nation, while the MLN accepted the existence of two different nations – Puerto Rican and “Chicano/Mexicano” as it often put it – that could work together on a pan-Latin basis.

The two nations also had different objectives, though both involved control of land in a manner similar to the RNA. The Puerto Rican goal was clear – an independent (and socialist) island, though the status of diasporic Puerto Ricans in this hypothetical future was never made fully clear. Meanwhile, the Chicano/Mexicano members of the MLN promoted an analysis in which the southwestern states (California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas) ceded to the United States in 1848 ought to be considered “occupied territory,” producing a demand for “the socialist reunification of Mexico.”<sup>60</sup> Both groupings saw themselves, along with New Afrikans and indigenous populations as “Third World peoples,” a term more traditionally used to describe the populations residing in what today is more often referred to as the developing world or the global south. Third World thus became a catch-all in certain circles that covered much the same ground as the eventually far more popular phrase “people of color.” In short, for the MLN and its allies, questions of nation took clear

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<sup>59</sup> Berger, “The Malcolm X Doctrine,” 49.

<sup>60</sup> *Towards Socialist Reunification* (Alamosa, CO: Movimiento de Liberación Nacional, 1980), 3. Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Collection, Freedom Archives.



precedence over those of race. During the decade after the group's founding, this national frame of reference, inspired by the successes of national liberation movements abroad, would limit the ability of the MLN and its supporters to visualize the panethnic unity of Latina/os in the way that would eventually become more common. Still, the organization laid early and crucial groundwork for Latina/o racial formation in the future.

### **"Our Festival Spirit": A Tale of Two Parades**

The downtown Puerto Rican Day Parade had continued to be an annual event since its first run down State Street in 1966 (following on prior iterations on the west side). It was one of the last remaining major projects of the old guard advocates of liberal Americanization. As early as 1972, however, complaints emerged from among the younger generation of radicals that the Parade was "an affront to the true dignity of Puerto Ricans," in the words of one writer for *Que Ondee Sola*. Two years later, another Northeastern Student described the Parade extravaganza as a politically conservative excuse for big businesses to market themselves more successfully to Puerto Ricans, while promoting the "farce" of "American assimilation."<sup>61</sup>

Somewhat ironically, one focus of ire for the younger independence activists was the growing prominence in the early 1970s of the local beauty queen contest, originally pioneered in Chicago's Puerto Rican community two decades earlier by Gonzalo Lebrón Sotomayor and the Nationalist Party. By 1972, the queen of the Puerto Rican Parade was an official honor bestowed in a public ceremony by Mayor Richard J. Daley himself.<sup>62</sup> Meanwhile, the younger

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<sup>61</sup> Hector Luis Rosario, "La Parada Puertorriqueña," *Que Ondee Sola*, August 5, 1972, p. 1; Alfredo Mendez, "Desfile Puertorriqueño," *Que Ondee Sola*, July, 1974, p. 6.

<sup>62</sup> "Parade Queen Crowned," *Chicago Tribune*, June 23, 1972, p. 15.

activists, so inspired by the Nationalist Party that they frequently wore the Party's traditional black and white colors at protests, were in this case at least more influenced the new emergence of Ramos-Zayas's "New Revolutionary Woman": a combination of second wave feminist sensibilities with a typically nationalist set of obligations and expectations placed on women in particular, under which participation in the beauty contest was an abdication rather than a fulfillment of one's womanly duties to the nation.<sup>63</sup>

By 1974, the local independence movement was strong enough to respond collectively to the parade and its perceived capitulation to United States imperialism. That year, at the height of anti-Vietnam-War sentiment, the parade was marshaled and led by representatives of the United States Army. This only added more fuel to the fire of independence activists, who were increasingly opposed to the US military. In response, the local branch of the PSP, along with other activists and "barrio people," organized a contingent designed to "protest against the colonialization imposed on the Puerto Rican being, by the yanki imperialist and to expose those who cooperate with the yanki."<sup>64</sup> This rhetoric echoed massive and frequently violent protests at the University of Puerto Rico over the previous several years against the presence of military recruiters on campus. Similar protest contingents were part of the Chicago Puerto Rican Day Parade for the next several years.

In 1975, the profile of the protesters was amplified by the FALN's first Chicago bombings, which were deliberately timed to go off the morning of the parade. The group's communiqué expressed its "solidarity with the protest contingent" and claimed somewhat extravagantly that the entire parade was a protest. "On Saturday, June 14, 1975," it noted,

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<sup>63</sup> Ramos-Zayas, *National Performances*, 91-97.

<sup>64</sup> Mendez, "Desfile Puertorriqueño," p. 6.

“thousands of Puerto Ricans will be marching in the Puerto Rican Day Parade on State Street. They will be protesting against poor education, bad housing, racism, police brutality, unemployment – in essence against the exploitation that they are subjected to on an everyday basis.”<sup>65</sup> The parade went on, deliberately unimpeded by the bombings, but protests now made bigger news than the parade itself; local press coverage highlighted “a group of 200 radicals” who “carried signs and banners in Spanish.”<sup>66</sup>

The 1976 parade was also accompanied by a bombing, but things really took a turn in 1977. Though the day began with yet another FALN bombing, this time of City Hall, the parade itself remained calm. That afternoon, however, in a sequence of events that was hotly disputed afterward, two young Puerto Rican men, Rafael Cruz and Julio Osorio, were shot and killed while celebrating in Humboldt Park. Police subsequently acknowledged killing Osorio, who they asserted was a gang member, but suggested Cruz (also supposedly in a gang) had been killed by a rival gang member, possibly Osorio himself.<sup>67</sup> Within hours, the park and the surrounding streets had once again erupted in violence, in a scene strikingly reminiscent of the 1966 Division Street Riots. Over the course of the next two evenings, multiple police cars were destroyed, several businesses were looted and a number of buildings were burned. At the height of the riot, according to the *Tribune*, angry Puerto Ricans “virtually took over Division Street in the area bordering the park.”<sup>68</sup> The riots, as a spontaneous response to yet another instance of

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<sup>65</sup> “Communiqué No. 5.”

<sup>66</sup> Griffin, “Police Hunt 3<sup>rd</sup> Terrorist Bomb in Loop.”

<sup>67</sup> Frederick Lowe and Derrick Blakley, “2<sup>nd</sup> Day of Humboldt Riots: 13 Police, 4 Civilians Are Injured,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 6, 1977, p. 1.

<sup>68</sup> Frederick Lowe and Derrick Blakley, “Humboldt Park Riot: 2 Die, 15 Cops Hurt, 3,000 on Rampage,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 5, 1977, p. 1.

police brutality, served as one more reminder of the potential impact of combining revelry and rage.

Chicago's independence movement, including the MLN and others in the radical flank, responded with public support for the rioters. As one community activist explained, "the riot was a spontaneous response to the everyday violence we face as an oppressed community."<sup>69</sup> Others, including the MLN, began to refer to the site of the unrest not as Humboldt Park but as Cruz-Osorio Park, in honor of the dead Puerto Ricans. An MLN document reflecting on the events characterized them as a "heroic" response to a pre-planned military attack carried out by the police against "three thousand people, peacefully enjoying a Puerto Rican holiday."<sup>70</sup> From the MLN's perspective, the spontaneous willingness of such peaceful people to fight back against the police constituted "a day of rejoicing for our people. The degree of unity demonstrated at Cruz-Osorio Park was a continuation of the festival spirit with which we awoke that morning. [...] Now the task is to organize our festival spirit into struggle."<sup>71</sup> Almost immediately, the MLN committed itself to going beyond the protest contingents of previous years and sponsoring a radical counter-parade in 1978, in an effort to renew the "festival spirit" of cultural nationalism that had animated the riots after the deaths of Cruz and Osorio.

Although the circumstances were clearly different, the conflict around the downtown Puerto Rican Parade echoed similar disagreements within Chicago's black community over the course of the 1970s. Beginning in the 1920s, the city's African American elite, originally under the leadership of the *Chicago Defender*, sponsored the Bud Billiken Parade through the heart of

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<sup>69</sup> "4 Humboldt Units Blame City, Slumlords: Call Gangs Scapegoat," *Chicago Tribune*, June 11, 1977, p. S3.

<sup>70</sup> *The Time Is Now* (Chicago: Movimiento de Liberación Nacional, no date but circa 1977), 1. Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Collection, Freedom Archives.

<sup>71</sup> *The Time Is Now*, 2.

the south side Bronzeville neighborhood.<sup>72</sup> Like the downtown Puerto Rican Parade, Bud Billiken was traditionally understood to be an expression of “Americanism” that could accommodate a level of cultural pride. Like the Puerto Rican parade of the mid-1970s, it demonstrated an ability to tolerate participation from nationalist forces and even radical critics, as when the Communist Party was permitted to march in 1938 under the slogan “Black and White Unite.”<sup>73</sup> As Black Power gained strength in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Bud Billiken Parade moved to incorporate such sentiments in a way not attempted by the Puerto Rican Parade. In 1971, for instance, Richard Hatcher, the black nationalist mayor of nearby Gary, Indiana, proclaimed the Bud Billiken Parade “one of the finest spectacles of black power I’ve ever seen.”<sup>74</sup>

By the next year, however, dissident black nationalists had initiated the African Liberation Day Parade as a national event, in which Chicago’s black activist community fully participated over the next several years. Don L. Lee, writing about the 1973 African Liberation Day Parade in Chicago, which featured thousands of participants, noted that “black people in the western hemisphere have finally realized that being black is more than just a color: it is a culture and a consciousness also. Our culture is that of Africa and our consciousness should emanate from our culture. Thus we recognize that the oneness and empowerment of Africa are in the best interests of black people world-wide, and Pan-Africanism must become a way of

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<sup>72</sup> Scholarship on the Bud Billiken Parade has been sparse; to date, the most detailed analysis remains Solomon Morrow, “The Bud Billiken Day Parade Among Chicago’s Black Community, 1929-2000,” MA Thesis, Morgan State University, 2008.

<sup>73</sup> St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993 [1945]), 737.

<sup>74</sup> Morrow, “The Bud Billiken Day Parade,” 44.

life.”<sup>75</sup> Gwendolyn Brooks, the comedian and activist Dick Gregory, and Ahmed Sekou Touré, the nephew of the president of the West African country of Guinea, were among the many speakers who promoted a pan-African vision of black cultural nationalism.

The African Liberation Day concept, including the parade, was promoted by a broad coalition of black nationalist forces, including larger groups like Amiri Baraka’s Congress of African Peoples and smaller outfits like the RNA. The RNA did not have a sizeable presence in Chicago, but its leadership maintained direct connections to MLN members in Chicago, and these connections further inspired the pan-Latin collaboration between Puerto Ricans and Mexicans/Chicana/os within the framework of the MLN. At a 1978 protest in Plains, Georgia (hometown of then-president Jimmy Carter), a leading member of the MLN demanded the release of eleven political prisoners aligned with the RNA and several others identified as members of the BLA, in addition to freedom for Lebrón, Cancel Miranda, and the other Puerto Rican Nationalist Party members held since the 1950s. As “revolutionary internationalists whose unity knows no boundaries,” the speaker also explicitly spoke “on behalf of the Chicano/Mexicano and Puerto Rican comrades within the MLN.”<sup>76</sup> In 1980, MLN leaders from Chicago (Puerto Rican) and Denver (Chicano) shared the podium with the Vice President of the provisional government of the RNA at a hearing of the United Nations Committee on Decolonization, in New York City. The RNA militant explained that “the support of the New Afrikan Nation for the independence of Puerto Rico reflects an understanding of its colonial status based upon our own experience of 400 years of colonial domination by United States

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<sup>75</sup> Don L. Lee, “African Liberation Day: Thousands of Black Americans March to Support African Freedom Fighters,” *Ebony*, July, 1973, p. 46.

<sup>76</sup> “Blacks, Puerto Ricans Denounce Carter’s ‘Human Rights’ in Plains, GA,” *De Pie y En Guerra*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1978), 6. Personal collection.

imperialism,” and expressed hope that just “as those oppressed colonies before us have gained their independence so too will we witness in the near future the independence of both Puerto Rico and New Afrika.”<sup>77</sup>

This perspective helps explain why the MLN, despite its deliberately bi-national structure, did not push harder for a pan-Latin racial project equivalent to the pan-African blackness of the BLA, the RNA and other groups. The frame of reference for almost everyone involved in the national liberation struggles of the 1970s was exactly that, national rather than racial. This had origins as far back as the Rainbow Coalition, which included as full members the Young Patriots Organization (YPO). The YPO was effectively a nationalist organization for poor white immigrants from Appalachia, even adopting the Confederate battle flag in the same way the Young Lords sported the Puerto Rican flag or some Panthers were already beginning to use the red-black-and-green tricolor as a symbol of pan-African radicalism. By the late 1970s, the YPO was gone but the general model of mutually reinforcing anti-colonial nationalisms had been solidified, and groups like the MLN were fully committed.

By the summer of 1978, it was clear that the riots of 1977 had fundamentally altered the future of the Puerto Rican parade. A range of left-leaning community groups collaborated to organize an alternative procession in the West Town and Humboldt Park neighborhoods, rather than participating once again as a protest contingent in the downtown parade. Calling the event the *Desfile del Pueblo* (People’s Parade), the organizers “aimed at exposing the annual Puerto Rican Parade, which has become a charade for the capitalists and politicians who exploit

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<sup>77</sup> Statement of Ahmed Obafemi, *De Pie y en Lucha*, Fall, 1980, p. 17. Personal collection.

and oppress our people.”<sup>78</sup> The route, in which 400 people marched along Division Street from Damen to California, called to mind not only the riots of the year before but also the 1966 riots that had transpired along the same stretch. The People’s Parade ended with a ceremony where marchers placed a sign at the entry to the park stating “The People Name this Park Cruz-Osorio.”<sup>79</sup> This too echoed an earlier action by local black radicals. Eleven years earlier, in 1967, south side community activists held a public ceremony to rename Washington Park Shabazz Park, after the slain leader Malcolm X’s ultimate name. At that time, supporters of the new name noted that “they didn’t ask anybody permission to name it Washington Park; why should we, who live here ask permission.”<sup>80</sup> The same principle was implemented at the end of the People’s Parade.

The stark contrast with the main parade downtown, viewed by an estimated 40,000 spectators, was an indicator that the independence movement had not made significant inroads in changing the perspectives of a majority of Puerto Ricans. Both parades drew on the rhetoric of cultural nationalism, though with very different objectives and vastly different budgets, given the substantial corporate and governmental support for the downtown parade. The People’s Parade continued as an annual event for more than thirty years; when it eventually merged forces with the downtown parade in 2013, the unified parade began using the longstanding People’s Parade route through Humboldt Park. But in the meantime, the decision to separate off from the main parade, as with the decision to found the *Escuelita*,

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<sup>78</sup> “National Briefs,” *De Pie y en Guerra* Vol. 1, No. 1 (1978), 14.

<sup>79</sup> “National Briefs.”

<sup>80</sup> Lorne Cress and Mimi Hayes, “Blacks Rename Park,” *The Movement*, June, 1967, p. 3.



reflected the willingness of the militant wing of the local independence movement to focus on smaller alternatives rather than battle for larger and presumably irredeemable institutions.

### **Conclusion: Prisoners of War**

While the militant wing of the local independence movement had suffered repeated attacks from both government investigators and local Puerto Rican activists who rejected socialism and armed struggle, it survived the 1970s more or less intact. Local members of the MLN were active on a variety of activist fronts, from anti-repression campaigns, to the Cancell Miranda High School, to cooperative housing efforts designed as a model alternative to slumlord housing in much the same way the High School was envisioned as a model alternative to the public school system. Many people during this period also became involved in transnational solidarity efforts. Valentín, for instance, was still very much part of the movement, though she had left CPS and gone to work for Central YMCA Community College downtown. While working at Central YMCA, Valentín acted as the faculty sponsor of the campus branch of the Iranian Students Association (ISA), a militant group opposed to the US-backed regime of the Shah in Iran. As she subsequently put it: “The members of this organization were active participants in the dethroning of the Shah. Those were years of struggles unequalled by any others!”<sup>81</sup> Indeed, anti-Shah protests on campus repeatedly turned

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<sup>81</sup> *Can't Jail the Spirit: Political Prisoners in the U.S., a Collection of Biographies* (Chicago: Editorial El Coquí, 1992), 144.

violent between 1977 and 1978, demonstrating that intense social struggles were by no means limited to the streets of Humboldt Park.<sup>82</sup>

On April 4, 1980, eleven Puerto Ricans were arrested in Evanston, a suburb just north of Chicago after a woman called the police to report the “suspicious” presence of several young Latina/os in an overwhelmingly white neighborhood.<sup>83</sup> Valentín, still working at YMCA College, was among the eleven, one of five women who made up almost half the group. Of the eleven people arrested that day, seven were residents of Chicago; four, including Valentín, had been publically associated with local Puerto Rican activism right up until the moment of their arrests.<sup>84</sup> Although they were heavily armed (it was later alleged that they were casing an armored car for robbery near Northwestern University in Evanston), the eleven did not resist their capture once the police arrived. When brought to the police station for processing, however, they claimed they were prisoners of war and refused to cooperate with local police or the FBI agents who arrived shortly thereafter. Everyone involved immediately recognized the arrests as a major blow to the FALN, since only one alleged member had been previously arrested in the six years the group had been setting off bombs.

Even here, the Puerto Rican movement followed the lead of black radicals. The historian Akinyele Omowale Umoja notes that as early as 1975, “two captured BLA members

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<sup>82</sup> “13 Iranians Arrested in College Sit-In,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 14, 1977, 3; “Three Policemen Hurt as Iranian Students Protest,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 29, 1977, A10; “3 Cops Hurt in Iran Student Protest Melee,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 17, 1978, B1.

<sup>83</sup> This narrative is based on Ronald Koziol and John O’Brien, “11 FALN Terror Suspects Seized with Arsenal Here: Suburb Cops Grab ‘Most Wanted’ Man,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 5, 1980, 1; Gary Marx, “Terrorism on Trial: Justice and the FALN,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 22, 1995, p. 1; and on Ronald Fernandez, *Prisoners of Colonialism: The Struggle for Justice in Puerto Rico* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1994), 8.

<sup>84</sup> The six with ties to Chicago were: Carlos Alberto Torres, Haydee Beltrán, and Ida Luz Rodriguez, the three besides López who had gone underground in 1976, and Alicia Rodriguez, Luis Rosa, and Alfredo Mendez, who were involved in local activism until their arrest. Mendez, a former NEIU student who had written regularly for QOS, would later become a prosecution witness and repudiate the armed struggle for independence. See Jerry Crimins, “FALN Member Aiding U.S.; Coercion Charged,” *Chicago Tribune* May 24, 1981, p. 3.

declared they were citizens of the RNA and that American courts had no jurisdiction over them.”<sup>85</sup> The stance of the eleven Puerto Ricans arrested in Evanston was only marginally different. Without claiming citizenship via some hypothetical independent Puerto Rico, they did identify themselves as prisoners of war, and demanded treatment pursuant to international treaties to which the United States was a signatory. Further, the prisoners and their supporters argued that United Nations resolutions in support of decolonization mandated “the immediate release of all persons detained or imprisoned as a result of their struggle for self-determination and independence.”<sup>86</sup> As Berger notes, “the FALN trial marked a new display of nationalist self-assertion in keeping with the transformations of New Afrikan politics,” which “brought the nationalism of the U.S. Third World Left to a new level: a total rejection of U.S. authority.”<sup>87</sup> In important ways, the antecedent for this decision was not so much the actions of a handful of BLA prisoners a few years before, but the longstanding Nationalist Party principle of *retraimiento*. If the Nationalist Party had been defeated in Chicago and elsewhere in the 1950s, perhaps the prisoners associated with the FALN could inspire greater successes on the cusp of the Reagan era.

The practical reality, of course, was quite different. At no point did the US government or the State of Illinois accept the legitimacy of the claim to POW status. The eleven were tried in state court in Illinois on effectively non-political charges of possession of stolen property.

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<sup>85</sup> Akinyele Omowale Umoja, “Repression Breeds Resistance: The Black Liberation Army and the Legacy of the Black Panther Party,” *New Political Science* Vol. 21, No. 2 (1999), 149.

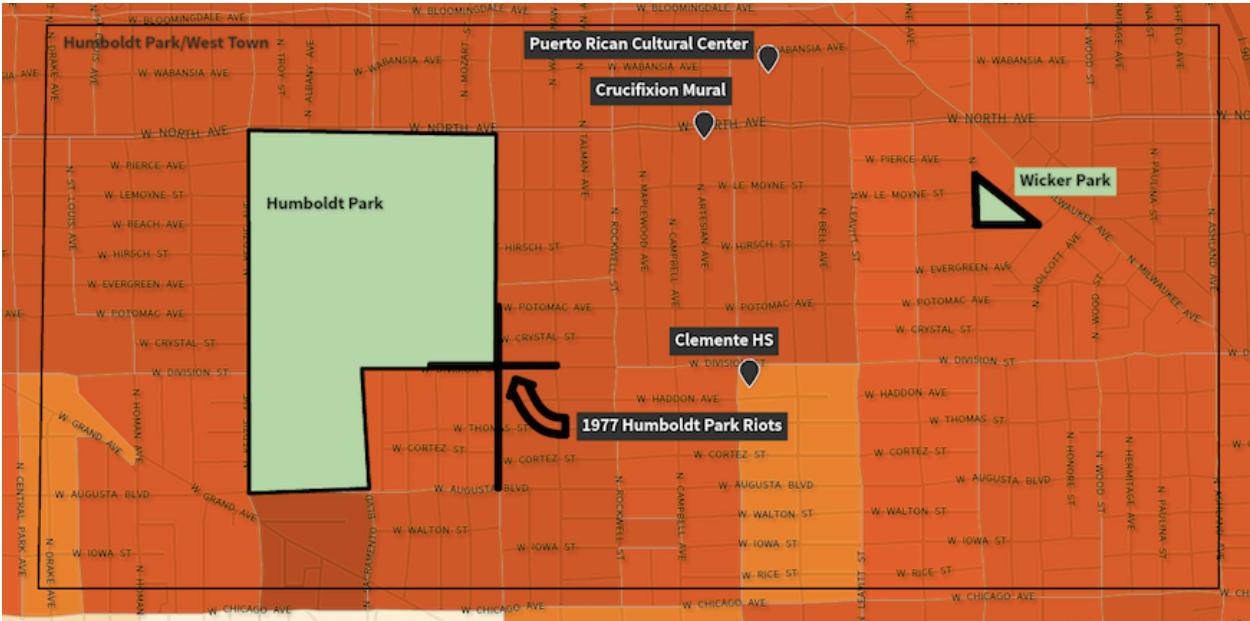
<sup>86</sup> United Nations General Assembly Resolution 33/24, December 8, 1978. Quoted in *Petition to the U.N. on P.O.W. Status, Submitted by Puerto Rican Freedom Fighters and National Committee to Free Puerto Rican Prisoners of War* (1980), 49. Free Puerto Rican POWs and Political Prisoners Collection, Freedom Archives. Available on the internet at [http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC33\\_scans/33.FreePOWPP.UN.PowStatus.Petition.pdf](http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC33_scans/33.FreePOWPP.UN.PowStatus.Petition.pdf) (accessed June 10, 2016).

<sup>87</sup> Berger, *Captive Nation*, 252.

Consistent with their self-proclaimed status as prisoners of war, they presented no defense at trial, and all were quickly convicted and sentenced to prison terms, after which they were tried, convicted, and sentenced again, this time in federal court on the charge of seditious conspiracy. While it was not immediately clear exactly how, the Evanston arrests and their aftermath permanently altered the calculus of the militant wing of Chicago's Puerto Rican independence movement. Moving forward, local activists would instead consolidate their approach to cultural nationalism around efforts to build and sustain a series of community-based institutions. Among these were the High School, the Cultural Center, and the People's Parade. This process would prove uneven and subject to reversals over the next two decades, but the movement's direction was clear: away from insurgency and toward institutionalization.

**Figure 4: Humboldt Park and West Town, 1980**

Color-coded census tracts: greater concentrations of “Persons of Spanish Origin” shown in darker shades. [Map via [sociaexplorer.com](http://www.sociaexplorer.com); available on the internet at <http://www.sociaexplorer.com/26c6b14250/view> ]



## Chapter Six: “We Visualize ... the New Society”: Institutionalizing Cultural Nationalism, 1981-1994

### Introduction: “I Have a History that Has Not Been Presented Here”

The Evanston arrests were not the last to target the FALN, nor were they the last in Chicago. Oscar López Rivera was arrested in a Chicago suburb on May 29, 1981, after being stopped for what police described as a “routine traffic violation.”<sup>1</sup> Like those arrested in Evanston, he refused to participate in his trial, generating a speedy conviction and a sentence of 55 years for the crime of seditious conspiracy. He did offer a statement to the court, in which he deliberately connected his earlier activist work around issues like Tuley High School with his eventual turn toward armed struggle:

I wish to add a simple additional remark. Mr. Margolis [the prosecutor] has said that there are democratic ways to struggle and get things done. He forgets to tell you that I have a history of precisely that. That I have marched. That I have taken part in demonstrations. I have begged and pleaded. I have a history that has not been presented here. I have marched alongside black people for their rights. I have marched in support of jobs. I have a history of that. I have marched against the war in Vietnam. I am a veteran of that war. And I have a history of that. [...] Mr. Margolis does not know how it feels to be a Puerto Rican in this country. Mr. Margolis does not know how it feels to be black in this country. He does not know the indignation one feels when the police, who supposedly represent law and order, call us ‘spic’ or ‘nigger’ and then spit in our face. I have had people spit in my face for being Puerto Rican. And I have been arrested for participating peacefully and legally in public demonstrations.<sup>2</sup>

This narrative served at least two purposes. First, it suggested that armed struggle had been a distasteful necessity, one that could have been avoided were it not for the intransigence of white supremacy and colonialism. Second, it implied that the objectives of the two different

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Tacket and John O’Brien, “Suburb Police Capture Fugitive FALN Leader,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 30, 1981, p. 1. Media coverage begins to refer to him as López Rivera at the time of his arrest, and I have accepted that periodization here as well.

<sup>2</sup> López Rivera, *Between Torture and Resistance*, 33.

strategic approaches had been the same, or at least consistent. In short, should conditions permit, it might be possible to return to a focus on legal forms of struggle, in pursuit of both the betterment of Chicago's Puerto Rican community and independence for the island of Puerto Rico itself.

At the same time, López Rivera certainly was not calling for an immediate end to armed struggle, and even if he had it is not clear it would have mattered. No fewer than a dozen additional bombings were attributed to the FALN in the three years after his arrest, though none of them took place in Chicago. However, on June 29, 1983, four more local activists were arrested in West Town and charged with secretly having been members of the group.<sup>3</sup> They would be the last people convicted of major crimes associated directly with the FALN. By that time, an overwhelming majority of all those whom courts had labeled members of the FALN had been publically active in Chicago's independence movement through the 1970s. Thus, even though they represented a minority faction within a minority movement, the local pro-FALN independence trend commanded a reputation and a level of influence that belied its small numbers.

Over the course of the next dozen years and beyond, militant independence activists would leverage this imbalance, alongside a series of changes in the local political sphere, to successfully build a power base in the community and in the city as a whole that would have been unthinkable at the time of López Rivera's arrest. Deploying cultural nationalism was particularly crucial to this effort. Much as the local branch of the Nationalist Party had attempted in the 1950s, activists centered around the MLN eventually managed to appeal to a

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<sup>3</sup> Ronald Koziol and William B. Crawford Jr., "4<sup>th</sup> of July Bomb Plot by FALN Charged: 4 Arrested," *Chicago Tribune*, June 30, 1983, p. B1.

broad swath of Puerto Ricans in Chicago who had not supported the FALN and had no particular attachment to the independence of Puerto Rico itself. The tendency to focus on smaller and smaller segments of the community was reversed, leading to greater engagement with ever-larger circles of Puerto Ricans in Humboldt Park and beyond.

One highly significant aspect of this process was a developing a sense of Latina/o identity that could be shared across the national boundaries separating the Puerto Rican and Mexican experience. In effect, the analysis that had privileged national over racial identity, began slowly but perceptibly shift toward a more balanced assessment of the two. By the early 1990s, despite many obstacles and setbacks, the twin projects of promoting Puerto Rican cultural nationalism and building a pan-Latina/o block in the city had produced a number of tangible gains for the community. At the same time, they had done so in part by reframing or even abandoning the insurgent Third World racial project that had characterized the previous period. In its place, a form of multicultural antiracism emerged that demanded a radical version of diversity in exchange for tacitly accepting the apparent permanence of a neoliberal racial structure. In the end, I argue, the outward-looking approach that characterized this period fundamentally involved accepting the proposition that revolutionary change was off the table for the foreseeable future.

### **The Decline and Fall of the FALN**

On February 28, 1982, the FALN claimed responsibility for four explosions in the Wall Street area of downtown Manhattan, which, like most of the organization's attacks, injured no



one and caused mostly cosmetic damage.<sup>4</sup> The communiqué issued at the time of the bombings was especially long and provided particular insight into the politics of the pro-independence underground. The FALN characterized the bombings as retaliation for statements President Ronald Reagan and Speaker of the House Tip O’Neill had made in support of making Puerto Rico the fifty-first state. All sectors of the independence movement understood that the legacy of the US Civil War made statehood utterly irreversible, so it was opposed even more vehemently than the hated semi-colonial commonwealth state pioneered by Luis Muñoz Marín in the 1950s. In typically dramatic language, the FALN communiqué explained the danger in terms of anti-colonial cultural nationalism: “Statehood for Puerto Rico means genocide. It is a life of servitude to the interests of a profit hungry, parasitic minority, the total destruction of our identity, language, values, nationality, culture and the plunder and rape of our land and natural resources for the benefit of the yankee capitalists.”<sup>5</sup>

The communiqué also contained a demand for the release of the prisoners captured in Evanston in 1980 as well as López Rivera, followed by a series of criticisms aimed at Latin American governments (such as Venezuela and Mexico) that had expressed support for the idea of Puerto Rican independence. More favorable attention was paid to the continuing solidarity among black and Latina/o revolutionaries, as well as indigenous militants: “The FALN supports the reunification of the Chicano-Mexicano lands in the Southwest and West with Mexico and the creation of a non-aligned and socialist Mexico; the legitimate right of Black people to the

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<sup>4</sup> Les Ledbetter, “At Least Four Bombs Rock Wall Street; Exchanges are Hit: Chase Manhattan and Merrill Lynch Main Office Blasted – FALN Suspected,” *New York Times*, March 1, 1982, p. A1.

<sup>5</sup> “Communiqué,” *Arm the Spirit*, Fall, 1982, p. 7. Anvil/Arm the Spirit/Outlaw Collection, Freedom Archives, San Francisco. Available online at: [http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC510\\_scans/Arm%20the%20Spirit/510.arm.spirit.Fall1982.pdf](http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC510_scans/Arm%20the%20Spirit/510.arm.spirit.Fall1982.pdf) (accessed May 21, 2016)

land area in the South and the creation of the nation of New Afrika; and the right of the Native-American peoples and nations to recapture their occupied lands.”<sup>6</sup> As had been the case for several years, the task of national liberation was placed ahead of any pan-Latina/o racial project, with Chicana/os earning the same level of support as black and indigenous radicals. The FALN, in contrast to the MLN, had never identified itself as a bi-national organization, the dynamite-procuring hypotheses of the federal government notwithstanding.

Finally, the communiqué ended with a suggestive criticism of those in the independence movement who rejected armed struggle: “Those independence organizations working within the framework of bourgeois legality because they have faith in the system, or because they feel the conditions are not right for the clandestine organization or because ‘they have nothing to hide’ are only fooling themselves. When they least expect it the enemy will annihilate them if it feels these organizations pose a threat.”<sup>7</sup> Not unlike López Rivera’s statement to the court the previous year, the FALN’s denunciation of “bourgeois legality,” however fierce, managed to leave a modest amount of space for those who chose to maintain a public front for the movement. On a certain level this was simply an acknowledgement that most of those now sitting in prison for FALN related actions had also engaged in local community activism. Their life histories showed it was possible to work legally not because they had faith in “the system” (their participation in the armed underground made it clear they did not) but because they realized certain particular victories could be won through open advocacy.

This analysis was shared by those who publically supported the FALN, most of whom were themselves engaged in activist projects where practical objectives were paired with an

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<sup>6</sup> “Communiqué,” *Arm the Spirit*, Fall, 1982, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> “Communiqué,” *Arm the Spirit*, Fall, 1982, p. 19.

assertion of cultural nationalism. The core focus of much of this work in Chicago was the old *Escuelita*, later renamed Rafael Cancel Miranda High School. After Cancel Miranda was released by Carter, he personally requested the school rename itself; the result was a third name: Pedro Albizu Campos High School (PACHS). PACHS shared space in a one-time factory building with the Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC). The Reverend José A. Torres, pastor of the First Congregational Church of Chicago, located in Humboldt Park, and his wife Alejandrina Torres, a youth counselor and long-time activist were founders and continuing supporters of both institutions. Carlos Alberto Torres, the owner of the building raided in 1976 and one of the prisoners arrested in Evanston, was the son of José and stepson to Alejandrina. Both publically supported him both during his years as a fugitive and after his imprisonment, even as they also engaged in community work grounded in Christian faith. For Alejandrina Torres, the PRCC was a place “dedicated to teaching the richness of our culture and history, one that many have forgotten or never knew about.”<sup>8</sup>

In a surprise move, Torres was herself arrested in by federal agents on June 29, 1983, along with three young Puerto Rican activists. The four were charged with the same federal crime as those who preceded them, seditious conspiracy. Things might have gone similarly were it not for the fact that one of the defendants chose to mount a legal defense, declaring his innocence on the specific charge while acknowledging his firm belief in independence. Thus, even though Torres and two of her codefendants claimed prisoner of war status and refused to even enter pleas, the court was forced to consider a series of pre-trial motions that would impact all four defendants. In one situation the judge ruled, on civil liberties grounds, that the

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<sup>8</sup> *The Indispensables* (Chicago: Editorial el Coquí, 1983), 8. Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional Collection, Freedom Archive, San Francisco.

prosecution could not use videotape surveillance as evidence, since the relevant federal law did not explicitly mention videotape. The government appeal dragged on almost a full year, with the result that the actual trial itself did not begin until more than two years after the arrest of Torres and her co-defendants.

The judge overseeing the case was George N. Leighton, who almost thirty years earlier had acquitted two young Puerto Rican men accused of assaulting two white police officers, as described in Chapter Two. Despite his concern for civil liberties and civil rights, Leighton clearly had no sympathy for the legal strategy of the accused members of the FALN, expressing in one “outburst” that “he didn’t want to hear lengthy testimony about Puerto Rico’s history, the revolutionary Sandinista government in Nicaragua or testimony challenging the US government’s right to prosecute the defendants.”<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, even the minimal legal defense put forward on behalf of the only participating defendant caused enough doubt in the minds of jurors that they deliberated for twenty-six hours over three days before finally convicting all four. At sentencing, Leighton imposed prison terms of 35 years on Torres and her two fellow self-declared POWs, while sentencing the fourth to probation; all the sentences were far lower than the prosecutors had requested.<sup>10</sup>

### **“Turning Defeats into Victories”: Finding a Viable Path Forward**

Despite its willingness to go further and further to the marginal left within Chicago’s Puerto Rican community, the pro-FALN tendency never existed in a political vacuum. It was responsive both to changes on the island, where multiple clandestine groups initiated even

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<sup>9</sup> William B. Crawford, Jr., “Lawyers Trade Charges in FALN Suspects’ Trial,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 26, 1985, p. C1.

<sup>10</sup> William B. Crawford, Jr., “3 FALN Members Get 35 Years,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 5, 1985, p. 5.

more extensive armed campaigns in the 1970s that grew through the mid-1980s, and to shifts in mainland politics, most of which it viewed through a negative lens.<sup>11</sup> But in 1983, the same year Torres and her co-defendants were arrested, Chicago bucked the rightward political trajectory of the Reagan era by electing Harold Washington as the city's first black mayor. Washington was a progressive career politician with a background in the original Rainbow Coalition led by Hampton and the Panthers.<sup>12</sup> He received support from many Latina/o community activists in both the Mexican and Puerto Rican communities, including José "Cha Cha" Jiménez, who had himself turned to electoral politics after the decline of the YLO in the early 1970s. The MLN, however, viewed even Washington as part of a right-ward trend within the left itself, an abandonment of the prior militancy of the Black Panthers, the RNA, and other groups. As a result, the MLN maintained its local version of *retramiento* and encouraged Puerto Ricans not to vote in the election.<sup>13</sup>

A number of progressives were also elected to city council the same year as Washington was elected mayor, including Bobby Rush, who had been the deputy minister of defense of the Illinois Black Panther Party under Hampton in the late 1960s. The electoral success of progressives in 1983, however, was dampened by the infamous "council wars," which featured a majority of white aldermen under the leadership of old-school machine politician Edward Vrdolyak, deliberately obstructing any proposals that emerged from Washington's camp.<sup>14</sup> In response, progressives sued in federal court to force a redistricting process, arguing in

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<sup>11</sup> On armed struggle on the island during the 1980s, see Ronald Fernandez, *Los Macheteros: The Wells Fargo Robbery and the Violent Struggle for Puerto Rican Independence* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1987).

<sup>12</sup> Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot*, 197-200.

<sup>13</sup> Staudenmaier, *Truth and Revolution*, 268-270.

<sup>14</sup> For more on the council wars, see Dick Simpson, *Rogues, Rebels, and Rubber Stamps: The Politics of the Chicago City Council from 1863 to the Present* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 210-218

particular that although Latina/os comprised at least 15 percent of Chicago's population, there was exactly one Latino alderman on the fifty-person city council. The suit was successful, prompting a remapping that led to the election of three additional Latino aldermen in 1986 and solidifying Washington's control on city government until his unexpected death shortly after being re-elected the following year.

One of the new Latino aldermen elected in 1986 was Luis Gutiérrez in the 26<sup>th</sup> ward, which covered much of West Town and Humboldt Park.<sup>15</sup> His opponent, in a race tight enough that it forced a run-off, had attempted to link Gutiérrez to the FALN, though the charges didn't seem to sway many voters. The basis for the charge was the published record of Gutiérrez's college years at Northeastern Illinois University in the mid-1970s. While there, he wrote periodically for *Que Ondee Sola*, including a front-page essay in 1975 on the problems of a racist educational system. "It is racist," argued Gutiérrez, "because it denies Puerto Ricans the opportunity to fulfill themselves as an independent cultural entity" and instead "teaches and perpetuates the concept that Puerto Ricans are an inferior race."<sup>16</sup> The article spoke positively of Albizu Campos (then Cancel Miranda) High School, where he later taught briefly, and advocated for an emphasis on what Gutiérrez called "functional" Puerto Rican Studies as a subject to be taught in schools.

What is meant by functional, is that Puerto Rican Studies must create a sense of Puerto Rican self-determination and self-identity in the Puerto Rican student body. Puerto Rican Studies must teach the culture, history, and social development of the Puerto Rican masses, which has been ignored by the present white educational system. Puerto Rican Studies if it is to be functional must not be just another academic discipline.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For a detailed take on the special election and runoff that brought Gutiérrez onto the council, see David Fremon, *Chicago Politics: Ward by Ward* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1988), 170-176.

<sup>16</sup> Luis Gutiérrez, "Puerto Rican Studies and Education," *Que Ondee Sola* Vol. 4, No. 5 (1975), 1.

<sup>17</sup> Gutiérrez, "Puerto Rican Studies and Education," 2.

While such sentiments were perhaps well to the left of much of the Puerto Rican community, both in the 1975 and 1986, they did not equate to support for the FALN, a topic on which Gutiérrez never expressed a written opinion. If anything, reinserted into the political context of the mid-1980s, such writings amplified the visibility of cultural nationalism in the community. Further, with Gutiérrez's election as alderman, the militant wing of the local independence movement could begin to see the possibilities associated with the electoral arena, even if they still chose not to participate directly.

By 1987, then, the political context within which groups like the MLN operated was quite different than it had been ten, or even four, years earlier. For the first time in almost two decades, neither the left in Puerto Rico itself, nor the black nationalist movement on the mainland provided the sort of ideological leadership and inspiration that Chicago's independence movement had come to expect. On the island, the remaining clandestine groups had been disrupted with a series of arrests that paralleled those in Chicago, while the once massive Puerto Rican Socialist Party collapsed in the midst of infighting regarding the island-wide elections of 1984.<sup>18</sup> On the mainland, the black nationalist movement, and especially its militant pro-armed struggle wing, was even more decimated, with dozens of one-time participants dead or in prison and all of its various groupings greatly reduced in size.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, Washington and Gutiérrez seemed to provide evidence that more could be accomplished in the electoral realm than previously anticipated.

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<sup>18</sup> For one partisan perspective on the collapse of the PSP, see Wilfredo Mattos Cintrón, *Puerta Sin Casa: Crisis del PSP y encrucijada de la izquierda* (Door without a House: The Crisis of the PSP and the Crossroads of the Left) (San Juan: Ediciones Sierra, 1984).

<sup>19</sup> On the attacks against the black nationalist left in the 1970s and 1980s, see Berger, *Captive Nation*.

The MLN held its first-ever official convention in Chicago in July of 1987, ten years after its founding meeting. The First Congress, as it was called, had as its lead slogan “turning defeats into victories,” and much of the proceedings were focused on the task of finding a viable path for the organization in the changed context. One of the conclusions was that the group should expand its efforts to institutionalize the successes of the movement. In what could easily be read as a tone of resignation, a document on “The Current Situation” read, in part:

The MLN has accepted the task of organizing Puerto Ricans in their communities, emphasizing the development of alternative institutions that serve as models of decolonization, providing services to a people who suffer the consequences of an economy in crisis – high levels of unemployment, mental illness, dropouts, and an alarming consumption of drugs and alcohol. [...] But at the same time, through our collective work and development of these alternative institutions, as well as our effort to organize our community’s radical base, we visualize – albeit in an embryonic form – the new society.<sup>20</sup>

Such alternative institutions were particularly well suited to the promotion of cultural nationalism to an audience that for much of the 1970s had ignored or rejected the politics of the militant independence movement.

While the MLN was responsible for alternative institutions of various sorts, usually cultural centers, in New York and other east coast cities, its strongest and most viable projects were in Chicago, specifically in West Town and Humboldt Park. The MLN would persist into the 1990s, but the success of its local projects combined with the impending doom of the socialist bloc to ensure that its organizational profile shifted in inverse proportion to that of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center and Albizu Campos High School. As the latter became more established,

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<sup>20</sup> “Program and Ideology of the MLN,” (July 3-5, 1987), pp. 4-5. Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Collection, Freedom Archive, San Francisco.



and at least somewhat less contentious in the broader community, the MLN would slowly cease to be a factor in the independence movement, much less in Chicago's Puerto Rican community as a whole. Still, the proceedings of its 1987 Congress provide a snapshot of a movement in the midst of a radical set of transformations.

In 1983 the MLN had ended its experiment in binational organization because the Mexican groupings based in the southwest were much smaller than the Puerto Rican concentrations in Chicago, New York and elsewhere. Nonetheless, due in part to Chicago's unique demographics, the city's MLN branch, though clearly the headquarters for the Puerto Rican organization, also counted a number of Mexican activists as members. The group's constitution, as outlined in 1987, allowed for anyone "from any nationality" to apply to join the MLN as long as they were married to or engaged in "an ongoing and profound relationship" with a Puerto Rican. This reflected the group's continuing belief in the priority of national over racial identity; the same section of the constitution concluded by noting that "we are not, and will not become a multi-national organization."<sup>21</sup> This did not prevent the MLN from repeating its traditional expressions of solidarity with Chicana/o communities, but the time for binational organizing was past.

One other example of the MLN's attempt to respond to shifting conditions in the 1980s dealt not with race but with sexuality. The group's constitution prohibited "racism, sexism, and homophobia in all its forms" among members, something it proudly (if vaguely) claimed made the MLN "the first to make sexuality part of a political program."<sup>22</sup> Coming almost twenty years after the Puerto Rican trans activist Sylvia Rivera helped lead the Stonewall uprising in New

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<sup>21</sup> "Program and Ideology of the MLN," (July 3-5, 1987), p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> "Program and Ideology of the MLN," (July 3-5, 1987), pp. 8, 63.

York City, the MLN's pronouncement might seem late to the game in terms of opposing homophobia.<sup>23</sup> Through the 1980s, however, there were shockingly few left nationalist groupings in the United States or in Puerto Rico that would even discuss, much less embrace gay rights.<sup>24</sup>

In Chicago, however, Washington had made gay rights a visible part of his winning platform in 1983, even as AIDS was devastating the city's gay community largely without regard to race or nationality.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the MLN's statement on sexuality paid specific attention to the epidemic, suggesting that "the US capitalist state uses AIDS as a way to combat sexual liberation and human liberation gains over the last two decades."<sup>26</sup> Further, the group argued, "AIDS is attacking the Puerto Rican nation in disproportionately high numbers and we must not let prejudice stand in the way of seeking a solution to the problem, or supporting our brothers and sisters who are suffering from it."<sup>27</sup> By 1988, the PRCC would open a health clinic with a specific focus on HIV/AIDS, and within a few years it would establish a specific program to fight AIDS and support LGBTQ Puerto Ricans.

When not meeting or writing, much of the effort the MLN and its allies could muster was put into a campaign to free the prisoners. As the historian Margaret Power observes, the initial efforts to secure their release involved appeals to the United Nations and other international bodies, aiming to put pressure on the United States government to accept the

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<sup>23</sup> On Stonewall, see David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution* (New York: St. Martins, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> For the situation as regards the Puerto Rican left on the island and in the diaspora see Ayala and Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, 236-237.

<sup>25</sup> On Washington's favorable stance on gay rights, see Timothy Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 153-185.

<sup>26</sup> "Program and Ideology of the MLN," (July 3-5, 1987), p. 63.

<sup>27</sup> "Program and Ideology of the MLN," (July 3-5, 1987), p. 63.

prisoners' self-proclaimed status as Prisoners of War. Through the 1980s, most activists in the community could still remember the successful campaign during the 1970s to compel Jimmy Carter to release the five Nationalist Party prisoners held since the 1950. This led some to hope that just as that first campaign had gone hand in hand with the surge in militant anti-colonial nationalism in Chicago and elsewhere, perhaps the new campaign to release Torres, López Rivera, Valentín and the rest would give the broader movement yet another boost.

By the late 1980s, however, it was clear that this strategy was a failure; the UN never took a decisive position on the question, and outside of the militant wing of the independence movement, not even most Puerto Ricans accepted the idea of POW status. Thus, Power notes, "it was increasingly apparent that in order to secure their release, a broader, more inclusive, political campaign that emphasized human rights and appealed to Puerto Ricans' nationalist identity would have to be developed."<sup>28</sup> In some ways, this process had begun, or at least been foreshadowed, with the battle to close the High Security Unit at the United States Prison for women at Lexington, Kentucky.

Human rights abuses – excessive isolation, sleep deprivation, abusive treatment by guards – were endemic at the facility, and a campaign to force its closure began shortly after it was first opened in 1986.<sup>29</sup> Alejandrina Torres was one of the first people incarcerated in the Unit, and supporters of the campaign to free the Puerto Rican prisoners deliberately connected her inhumane conditions to the broader question of whether she and the others should be incarcerated at all. Several mainline protestant churches as well as Amnesty International lent

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<sup>28</sup> Margaret Power, "From Freedom Fighters to Patriots: The Successful Campaign to Release the FALN Political Prisoners, 1980-1999," *Centro Journal* Vol. 25, No. 1 (2013), 161.

<sup>29</sup> Mary K. O'Melveny, "Lexington Prison High Security Unit: US Political Prison," in Elihu Rosenblatt, ed. *Criminal Injustice: Confronting the Prison Crisis* (Boston: South End Press, 1996), 322-333.

their support to the campaign to close Lexington, and a lawsuit eventually compelled the reassignment of Torres and other prisoners to less harsh conditions in other facilities.

Beginning in the 1990s, the success of this human rights approach was combined with an effort to portray “the prisoners as national heroes and patriots.” As Power explains:

Although both the prisoners and their supporters continued to define themselves/them as captured combatants and prisoners of war, as the 1990s progressed, the projection of the prisoners as national symbols unjustly imprisoned in US jails came to dominate the language of those who were attempting to obtain their release. This difference represented a shift from a more limited, political appeal to the independence movement and the Left to a broader, more humanitarian appeal to a range of Puerto Ricans and North Americans. In short, the campaign replaced a call for Left support with an appeal to nationalist sentiment and humanitarian understanding and solidarity.<sup>30</sup>

The role of cultural nationalism was particularly crucial in the re-branded campaign: images of the prisoners became fixtures at the People’s Parade and at other community cultural events.

While the campaign on behalf of the prisoners would not reach its ultimate (if partial) success until 1999, the shift in tone was clear by the beginning of that decade. In important ways, local struggles in Chicago took place in dialogue with the transformations in the national/international effort to free Torres and her companions.

### **“Proud to Be Puerto Rican and More Eager to Learn”: Broadening School Struggles**

The arrests of Torres and her codefendants in 1983 marked the approximate end of the FALN. The organization never issued another communiqué and only two additional bombings over the next ten months were attributed to the group, both at the Washington DC naval yards. At the same time, community activists in West Town and Humboldt Park were in the process of expanding their outreach efforts. In the minds of some supporters of Puerto Rican

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<sup>30</sup> Power, “From Freedom Fighters to Patriots,” 162.

independence, the prosecution of the four activists was really an attempt by the federal government to disrupt this trajectory toward the mainstream of the Puerto Rican community. The day after the arrests, the FBI raided the building that housed both the Albizu Campos High School and the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, as well as a child care center.<sup>31</sup> The government theorized that since Torres and her co-defendants had volunteered for the PRCC, which was in turn aligned with the MLN, the building might have contained evidence of criminal activity. Items obtained during the raid were touted by the US Attorney at a press conference but did not play a significant role in the trial itself.

The High School remained small throughout the 1980s, but it prospered in the small world of alternative education. In 1985, less than a month before Torres and her co-defendants went on trial, the US Department of Education, in collaboration with the Council on American Private Education (CAPE), honored a half-dozen private schools in the Chicago area for their “Excellence” in education. The only non-Catholic school to receive the honor was Albizu Campos High School.<sup>32</sup> The entire process was in fact an outgrowth of the ongoing campaign by William Bennett, then Ronald’ Reagan’s Secretary of Education, to undermine traditional models of public education. In 1987, Bennett visited Chicago for a forum on education and said, “I’m not sure there’s a [public school] system as bad as the Chicago system,” further arguing that CPS would “straighten up fast” if competition with private schools were increased.<sup>33</sup> While Albizu Campos High School was evaluated by CAPE on the basis of its own merits, the award system served to further undermine schools like nearby Roberto Clemente

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<sup>31</sup> Jose L. Rodriguez, “Guns, Explosives Found in FALN Houses: Arrests Called Best ‘Penetration, Infiltration of Terrorist Group,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 1, 1983, p. B1.

<sup>32</sup> Casey Banas, “Personal Attention Puts Underdog School on Top,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 21, 1985, p. B1.

<sup>33</sup> “Schools in Chicago Are Called the Worst By Education Chief,” *New York Times*, November 8, 1987, p. 38.

Community Academy, which had replaced Tuley High School and served a majority Puerto Rican student body.

After a series of sensationalistic stories on a local television channel linked the school and its building to the trial that had just concluded, the Department of Education rescinded the honor and ordered a re-evaluation by CAPE. The second assessment recommended restoring the award, but in 1986 the Department declined to do so. The dust-up over the award led to a local organizing campaign to force the TV station to amend its coverage. Students, teachers, parents and community members, supported by larger groups like the American Friends Service Committee and the Reverend Jesse Jackson's Operation PUSH, eventually compelled the station's general manager to meet with a delegation in the community in February of 1986.<sup>34</sup> The involvement of Jackson and Operation PUSH was an early indicator of the ways in which Gutiérrez's presence in City Hall and his participation in the Washington coalition could open doors for the High School that might previously have been closed.

In the end, the station offered a quiet apology and the issue was quickly forgotten. But the conflict itself produced additional media coverage, much of it positive. One long article noted that students responded favorably to the school's emphasis on cultural nationalism: "Even if they don't support independence, they say the fact that they are learning about their history and culture – in Spanish if their English isn't adequate – makes them proud to be Puerto Rican and more eager to learn."<sup>35</sup> Students at the school expressed similar sentiments: during the conflict with the TV station, one wrote that "the school makes us more conscious of our

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<sup>34</sup> "Major Breakthrough: Channel 2 General Manager Meets with Community Delegation," *El Fuego Estudiantil* Vol. 2, No. 4 (1986), 1. PRCCC, UIC Daley Library and Archives.

<sup>35</sup> Jane Juffer, "Reading, Writing, and Decolonization: Albizu Campos High School, a Controversial Alternative for Hispanic Youth," *Chicago Reader*, October 22, 1987, p. 5.

community, its people and our culture [...] We also discuss the problems of our community and how they can be resolved.”<sup>36</sup>

As the High School became more widely known in the Puerto Rican community it also developed ties with other alternative schools across the city, who pooled resources and applied jointly for grants from government and private agencies. These connections helped it gain accreditation, so that students no longer had to take the GED to guarantee their acceptance into colleges, as had been standard practice for the first dozen years of the school’s existence.<sup>37</sup> The school’s educational philosophy drew heavily on the writings of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, who had visited the school as early as 1974. The catalogue for 1989, for instance, used classic Freirean terminology when noting that “the fundamental premise” of the school was that “the students are active participants in the pedagogical process.”<sup>38</sup>

Cultural nationalism remained another “fundamental premise.” Alongside a standard list of course offerings in math, science, communications and social studies, the catalog included a section on community leadership, which noted that “activities outside the daily classes have been designed to build leadership and commitment to the process of liberation.”<sup>39</sup> Consistent with this effort to involve youth in the promotion of activist sensibilities, the school calendar included days of no school attendance for such non-traditional dates as International Women’s Day, the shared birthday of Ho Chi Minh and Malcolm X, and (rather than Thanksgiving) two “days in solidarity with Native American People.”

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<sup>36</sup> “Channel 2 Slanders School: Students Speak Out!,” *El Fuego Estudiantil*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (1986), 3.

<sup>37</sup> Banas, “Personal Attention.”

<sup>38</sup> *Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos Puerto Rican High School, Inc. Catalog, 1989-1991*, 2. Personal collection.

<sup>39</sup> *Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos Puerto Rican High School, Inc. Catalog, 1989-1991*, 24.

Despite the origins of Albizu Campos High School as an alternative to the public schools, the core of activists around the MLN and the PRCC eventually decided to directly engage with Clemente, which counted an enrollment in the thousands instead of the dozens. As José López, brother of Oscar, founding member of the MLN and head of the PRCC put it later, “we began to feel the need not only to go beyond the Cultural Center but to impact the life of the community in a broader sense. [...] Students at Clemente began to mobilize against racist teachers and the poor quality of the education they received. Representatives of the teachers and students came and asked us, and other community groups, to get involved. [...] Out of that situation we began to evaluate our own relationship to the wider community. We had a moral responsibility and a political obligation to get involved and we did.”<sup>40</sup>

### **Building an Oppositional *Latinidad* at Clemente and Beyond**

Clemente provided a vehicle for this sort of broadening of strategy in part because one of Washington’s last efforts before his death in the fall of 1987 was to push for comprehensive public school reform in Chicago. The final law, the Chicago School Reform Act of 1988, mandated the creation of an elected Local School Council (LSC) for every public school in the city, featuring parents, teachers and community members, as well as students at the high school level.<sup>41</sup> The struggle around Clemente, which would last into the 1990s, was always in part structured around the elections for the LSC. Over time, this helped weaken the

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<sup>40</sup> “Making the Impossible Happen: An Introduction to the Life of José López, in His Own Words,” *Tribute to José E. López, October 31, 1999* (program booklet), 15. Free Puerto Rican POWS and Political Prisoners Collection, Freedom Archives, San Francisco.

<sup>41</sup> For a detailed account of the effort that resulted in the Reform Act of 1988, see Mary O’Connell, *School Reform, Chicago Style: How Citizens Organized to Change Public Policy*, A special issue of *The Neighborhood Works*, Spring 1991. Available on the internet at <http://catalystchicago.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/files/archive/files/school-reform-chicago-style.pdf> (accessed May 23, 2016)



commitment of the MLN and its allies to *retraimiento* as it had previously been understood. LSC elections were a tolerable initial step because they were substantially more democratic than more traditional and legally circumscribed aldermanic, mayoral, or congressional elections: to vote you merely had to show that you lived in the right neighborhood or had a child at the school; questions of citizenship, voter registration laws, and the like, were left out of the process entirely.

By the early 1990s, having had some significant success in Clemente's LSC elections, the militant pro-independence core in Chicago began to take a cautious look at participation in other elections. One of the first real test cases came in 1992, and had huge implications for the relative weight activists assigned to national vs. racial identity. When the 1990 census results were released, it became clear that the overall Latina/o population of Chicago and the surrounding parts of Cook County had increased substantially since 1980, even though the Puerto Rican population had mostly leveled off; the growth during the period was overwhelmingly in the Mexican community. On the heels of the 1986 lawsuit that had helped Luis Gutiérrez gain election to the city council, activists now demanded the creation of a majority Latina/o congressional district for the United States House of Representatives. Once again, the courts sided with the activists, and the fourth congressional district was remapped in 1991 to become majority Latina/o.<sup>42</sup> And, once again, Gutiérrez was elected to higher office, winning easily in 1992.

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<sup>42</sup> Patricia Mendoza, "Latinos and the Growth of Political Empowerment in Illinois," in Gilbert Cárdenas, ed., *La Causa: Civil Rights, Social Justice, and the Struggle for Equality in the Midwest* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2004), 26.

The demographics and the geography of the new map were unusual: approximately two thirds of the residents of the redesigned district were Mexican American, while roughly one third were Puerto Rican. Since the largest concentrations of the two communities were separated by a several mile stretch of the overwhelmingly black west side (represented in Congress by a sequence of African Americans all the way back to 1970), the court decided to create what was sometimes called an “earmuff design” to the new fourth district. This used an extended series of narrow railroad corridors running in a “C” shape through the western suburbs of Chicago to connect the heavily Puerto Rican near northwest side neighborhoods of West Town, Humboldt Park and Logan Square with the heavily Mexican American near southwest side neighborhoods of Pilsen and Little Village, all without splitting the black west side into multiple districts. As a result, Gutiérrez, who is Puerto Rican, serves a majority Mexican American constituency, which likes him well enough that he has won re-election handily every two years since 1992.

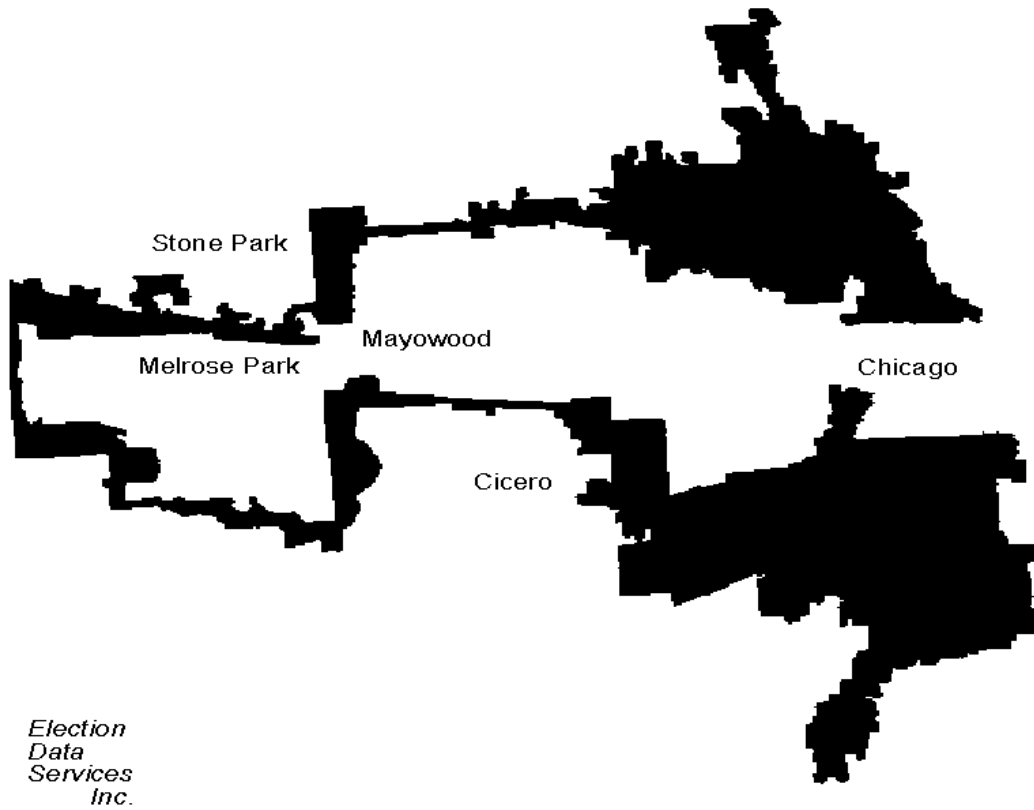
This shift in the electoral power structure raised a number of questions about both the power of cultural nationalism (which Gutiérrez continued to prize as his political career advanced) and the question of Latina/o racial formation. Two years after the redesign, a white resident of the fourth district sued in federal court, arguing the district was drawn on the basis of race and was thus unconstitutional. Ironically, to win his case, the plaintiff was compelled to argue that Puerto Ricans and Mexicans “have different cultural, social, political and economic concerns that serve to separate rather than unify the Latino community.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, the only thing that unified the two communities was a common racial identity as Latina/os.

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<sup>43</sup> Mendoza, “Latinos and the Growth of Political Empowerment in Illinois,” 26.

**Figure 5: Fourth Congressional District of Illinois, 1992**

[Map available on the internet at <http://www.senate.leg.state.mn.us/departments/scr/redist/redsum/ilsum.htm> ]



By the same token, Gutiérrez and his supporters had to argue that the two communities had more in common rather than less, from which the apparent legal conclusion would be that they were redistricted together on the basis of common interest rather than a shared racial identity. Thus, for instance, Gutiérrez maintained in his testimony that

since the 1980s he had worked on a number of coalition efforts by Latinos of different nationalities. The issues included immigration/citizenship workshops, working against school overcrowding, supporting bilingual education, adequate health care and anti-crime efforts. [...] All these coalition efforts were addressed from a Latino perspective, based on a common history, culture and language of the residents of both the north and south sides of Chicago that form the core of District Four.<sup>44</sup>

It is notable that “common history, culture and language” did not, in the eyes of the law, constitute a racial identity, notwithstanding Gutiérrez’s use of “Latino” as a collective label.

To compound the irony, one of Gutiérrez’s expert witnesses was the sociologist Felix Padilla, who had largely pioneered the idea that “*Latinismo*” constituted a shared identity across traditional ethnic lines. Padilla “testified at length about the historical as well as present-day solidarity and cohesiveness of the Chicago Latino community.”<sup>45</sup> In this case, then, Padilla’s scholarly decision, made almost a decade earlier, to label Latina/o identity an *ethnicity* rather than a *race* helped secure the permanence of the remapped fourth district. Still, within the framework of racial formation, Padilla, Gutiérrez and others were effectively arguing against their own position, demonstrating a common social experience that did in fact, if not in a court of law, result in a racially defined congressional district.

The remaining nucleus of the militant independence movement did not directly participate in the lawsuit over the redistricting, but certainly the evolving political connection

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<sup>44</sup> Mendoza, “Latinos and the Growth of Political Empowerment in Illinois,” 33-34n.46.

<sup>45</sup> Mendoza, “Latinos and the Growth of Political Empowerment in Illinois,” 27.

between the two communities helped change how local activists saw the dynamic between race and nation. Already by the late 1980s, the PRCC had developed an alliance with a Mexican-led community group called *Centro Sin Fronteras* (The Without Borders Center), led by Emma Lozano. Lozano's brother, Rudy Lozano, had been one of the first Mexican American community organizers to back Washington in 1983, but was murdered shortly after Washington's election. Both brother and sister had begun organizing with Chicana/o nationalist groups in the 1970s, and by 1987 Emma Lozano was leading a shift away from insurgent anti-colonialism and toward cultural nationalist community organizing within the Mexican community, paralleling the transformations under way in the Puerto Rican community.<sup>46</sup> After Gutiérrez's election to Congress, the collaborative efforts between these two groups, both of which deployed cultural nationalism while progressively abandoning the rhetoric of revolution, continued to increase.

In this context, a panethnic understanding of *Latinidad* became more prominent than ever before. The sociologist Michael Rodríguez Muñiz, examining the contours of collaboration between the PRCC and *Centro Sin Fronteras* a decade later, during the early 2000s, argues for "an oppositional vision of *Latinidad* that promotes Puerto Rican cultural and political distinctiveness while simultaneously establishing the grounds for movement-oriented Latino solidarity."<sup>47</sup> The beginnings of this shift were perhaps most clearly on display in the struggle around Clemente, a school that by the late 1980s was largely Puerto Rican but with a significant Mexican population as well. An article published in a local alternative weekly in 1988 quoted a

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<sup>46</sup> Virginia Martínez, "Lozano, Emma (1953-)," Ruíz and Sánchez Korrol, eds., *Latinas in the United States*, 411-412.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Rodríguez Muñiz, "Grappling with *Latinidad*: Puerto Rican Activism in Chicago's Pro-Immigrant Rights Movement," in Amalia Pallares and Nilda Flores-González, eds., *¡Marcha!: Latino Chicago and the Immigrant Rights Movement* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 239.

number of (anonymous) white teachers at the school making racist remarks about their students.<sup>48</sup>

The PRCC and its associated activists helped form the Committee Against Racism at Clemente (CARC), which conspicuously avoided explicit references to Puerto Rican cultural nationalism in its written materials.<sup>49</sup> CARC leaflets opposed racist actions against “Latino and Black students and their families,” using inclusive language that may have helped their slate sweep the 1990 LSC elections for the school.<sup>50</sup> Once in power, CARC and its allies, “resolved to transform the school as a whole.”<sup>51</sup> To do so, they successfully reintegrated Puerto Rican cultural nationalism within the broader context of Rodríguez Muñiz’s “oppositional Latinidad.” In 1992, for instance, students at Clemente collaborated with the island-based artist and former political prisoner Pablo Marcano García to produce a mural entitled “*La Unidad Latina*” (Latina/o Unity), which went beyond the dyad of Puerto Ricans and Mexicans to include “flags from all Latin American countries.”<sup>52</sup> In a way, this approach harkened back to the early efforts of LADO two decades before, while demonstrating that pan-Latina/o appeals could be amplified rather than undermined when combined with explicitly Puerto Rican cultural nationalism. While the struggles at Clemente featured a number of setbacks in the 1990s, the initial accomplishments set the precedent for continued efforts lasting up until today.

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<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth Blanchard, “Three Teachers Talking,” *Chicago Reader*, January 22, 1988

<sup>49</sup> Dan Weissman, “Clemente Plan Has Roots in ‘70s Protests,” *Catalyst* Vol. 4 No. 4 (1992), 8-10.

<sup>50</sup> “Boycott Racism!” flyer, no date but circa 1988, included in *Albizu Campos Puerto Rican High School and the Struggle for Public School Reform at Roberto Clemente Community Academy High School* (February 4, 1993). Personal collection.

<sup>51</sup> Weissman, “Clemente Plan Has Roots in ‘70s Protests,” 8.

<sup>52</sup> “Third Floor Murals Celebrate the Positive Elements of Our Community,” *5<sup>th</sup> Floor Newsletter*, November 23, 1992, p. 1. Included in *Albizu Campos Puerto Rican High School and the Struggle for Public School Reform at Roberto Clemente Community Academy High School*.

## Fighting Gentrification through Cultural Nationalism

When Gutiérrez was elected to Congress, his aldermanic seat was left vacant, and by law the Mayor, Richard M. Daley, was entitled to name a replacement to serve at least until the next election. Gutiérrez's early support for Daley, from the time of the latter's first election as Mayor two years after Washington's death, gave him some influence as to a successor, and as requested Daley appointed community activist and NEIU graduate Billy Ocasio to the post.<sup>53</sup> At the time, the issue of gentrification had emerged as a growing concern for many residents of the West Town neighborhood that constituted much of the core of Ocasio's ward. Beginning in the 1980s, real estate agents were drawn to the aging but high quality architecture, and set about re-branding the eastern half of the neighborhood as Wicker Park, after the small Park District property near Damen and North Avenues. Cultural production – music and art – for consumption by mostly white new college graduates (who were only just then coming to be known by the now-ubiquitous term “hipsters”) added to the draw. By 1994, even the Sunday *New York Times* ran a long profile on the neighborhood, which it described as “pleasantly dilapidated” with a visual feel of “determined glitzlessness.”<sup>54</sup> In the 1,400-word article, no reference was made to the still numerically predominant Puerto Rican population.

The experience of gentrification for Puerto Ricans in West Town during the 1980s and early 1990s was both similar to and different from the urban renewal efforts of the 1960s that had generated the Puerto Rican concentration in West Town in the first place. The two were similar insofar as displacement is displacement is displacement; they were different in that the

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<sup>53</sup> John Kass, “4 Departing Aldermen Pick Successors,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 31, 1992, p. S1; John Kass and Robert Davis, “Aldermanic Appointee Discloses Past Arrests,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 5, 1993, p. 1. Ocasio was not the appointee with an arrest record.

<sup>54</sup> Margy Rochlin, “Edgy in Chicago: In the Music Industry, the Neighborhood of Wicker Park is Being Hyped as the Latest Next Seattle,” *New York Times*, March 13, 1994, p. V1.

architecture and infrastructure of Wicker Park was deemed salvageable, so market forces were allowed to do the work that in prior waves of displacement had been the task of government agencies and demolitions. Among those who complained early on about gentrification was Clara Luz López Rivera, sister to both Oscar and José. According to the sociologist Jesse Mumm, Doña Clary, as she was known by friends and family, lived for much of the 1970s and 1980s in the part of West Town that was becoming known as Wicker Park, and she later recalled a feeling of “terror” when she realized “*que vienen los blancos*” (that the white people are coming).<sup>55</sup>

Thus, one of the first tasks of Ocasio’s tenure on the city council was to respond to the demands of his largely Puerto Rican constituents who were pushing back against gentrification and displacement. Community activists, including people affiliated with the PRCC, pushed quickly in the early 1990s for a proposal they called *Paseo Boricua* (Puerto Rican Promenade), in which the stretch of Division Street running east from the southeast corner of Humboldt Park would be given a facelift, producing a look and feel reminiscent of the distinctive architecture of San Juan’s colonial center while supporting locally-owned small businesses. By 1994, the combined leverage of Gutiérrez and Ocasio, as well as the broad grassroots support for the project, which went well beyond the core pro-independence movement, was sufficient to secure over \$2 million in public moneys to fund the concept.<sup>56</sup>

The entire project, implemented between 1994 and 1997, was suffused with cultural nationalism. As Gina Pérez notes

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<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Jesse Mumm, “When the White People Come: Gentrification and Race in Puerto Rican Chicago,” PhD Dissertation, Northwestern University, 2014, p. 156. Full disclosure: Doña Clary, from a family of bakers, helped her daughter make my wedding cake in 2005.

<sup>56</sup> “Division Street to Don Bit of Puerto Rico,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 16, 1994, p. 3.



In addition to its vibrant commercial life, Paseo Boricua is adorned with culturally significant objects that animate the neighborhood with a distinctive Caribbean flavor and, perhaps more importantly, deploy cultural symbols and images in order to claim a Puerto Rican space and resist encroaching gentrification. *Placitas* [mini-plazas] with beautiful benches and little square cement tables for domino games adorn Paseo Boricua's sidewalks. And black metal plates engraved with cultural symbols representing Puerto Rico's *tres raíces* (three roots) – African, Taíno, and Spanish – alternate with Spanish-style lampposts resembling those found in *Viejo San Juan*.<sup>57</sup>

On one level, the *Paseo Boricua* project was a logical continuation of the cultural nationalist approach taken by the PRCC and its related programs as far back as the 1970s. The People's Parade, for instance, had been using the same stretch of Division Street for its route since 1978. At the same time, the embrace of a business development model represented a stark departure from the MLN's insistence as late as 1987 that "the road to liberation will be paved by prolonged people's war."<sup>58</sup> Indeed, as Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas observed in 2003, "because the [Puerto Rican] Cultural Center is one of the organizations most invested in the community-building process, its activists have recently earned the appreciation of small business owners and residents who would otherwise reject the Center on the basis of its militant political stands."<sup>59</sup>

The ultimate achievement of *Paseo Boricua* was the construction of the two giant steel flag sculptures over Division Street, described in the Introduction to this dissertation. Their specific geographic placement was particularly important in light of the then ongoing (and still continuing) battles over gentrification in the area. The western-most flag landed on the north side of the street in Humboldt Park itself, marking the park as an integral part of the Puerto Rican community. The other flag, a half-mile east, almost to Western Avenue, stood as a

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<sup>57</sup> Pérez, *Near Northwest Side Story*, 154.

<sup>58</sup> "Program and Ideology of the MLN," (July 3-5, 1987), p. 17.

<sup>59</sup> Ramos-Zayas, *National Performances*, 263n4.

symbolic gateway in the path of the westward march of gentrification gaining steam in Wicker Park a half-mile further east. The solidity of the flags themselves was part of the symbolism, an indicator that the community was now permanently characterized as Puerto Rican, regardless of future changes in real estate or demographics. As the artist Ramón López (no relation to either José and Oscar, or to Obed and Omar) put it shortly after the sculptures were constructed, “here in Chicago the flag is planted in the most total sense: to reclaim space, to mark a point, to announce that our presence is much more than a transitory passage.”<sup>60</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The slow but dramatic transformation of the militant wing of Chicago’s independence movement produced a series of clear and in some cases permanent victories for the community. The achievements at Clemente, the placement of the flag sculptures on Division Street, and the eventual release of the prisoners (apart from Oscar López Rivera) were all important accomplishments that demonstrated the real power of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism in action. No previous instantiation of cultural nationalist politics in the history of Puerto Rican Chicago had managed to cement such gains, despite sustained efforts over multiple decades.

Several of the accomplishments of the 1980s and 1990s were also tied directly to the consolidation of a panethnic Latina/o identity, both in Chicago and across the United States. But in the context of the general rightward shift in US politics during the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton eras, the trajectory of Latina/o identity was also transformed. It no longer held the

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<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Ramos-Zayas, *National Performances*, 214.

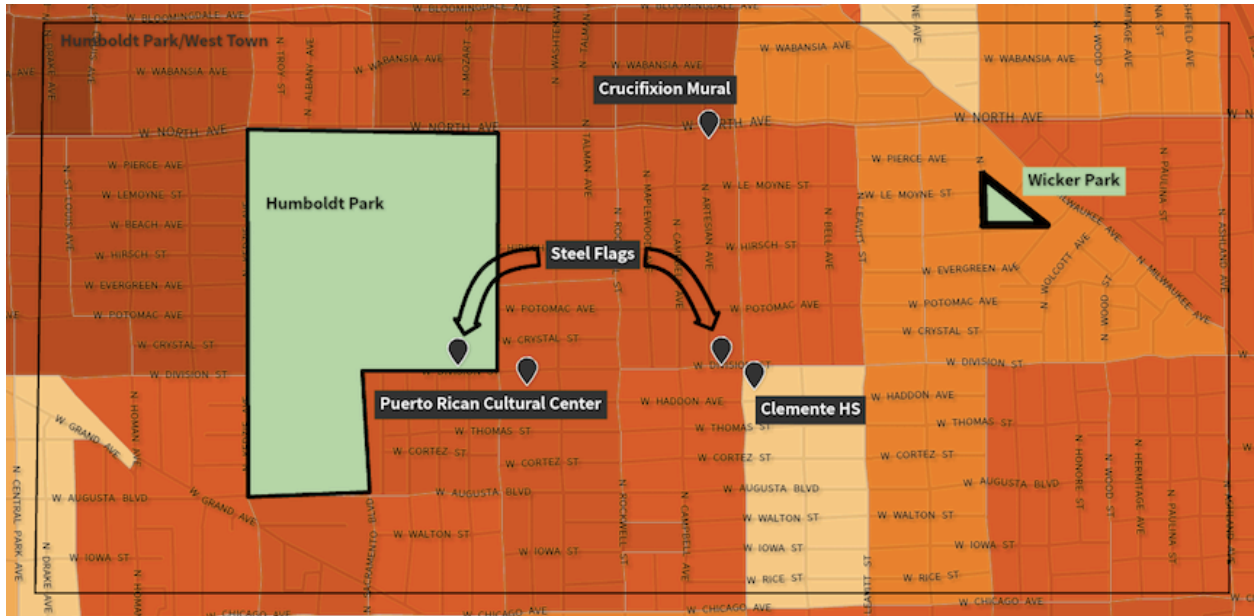
promise of an insurgent challenge to the structure of white supremacy, instead being slotted into a framework of diversity and multiculturalism. Instead, as Paul Gilroy argues regarding blackness in the age of Obama, Latina/o identity in the Clinton era had “begun to assume increasingly generic forms that correspond to the exigencies of consumer culture and the dictates of absolute identity that can be habitually specified as life-style.”<sup>61</sup> This conceptualization of race not only limited the prospects for radical change, it actively de-historicized questions of race by promoting multiculturalism as a static condition in which there have always been and always will be Latina/os alongside whites, blacks, Asian Americans, and indigenous peoples. While the new framing overcame some of the weaknesses of the nation-centric model previously central to Puerto Rican cultural nationalism, the price to be paid for this and the other accomplishments of the 1980s and 1990s was steep.

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<sup>61</sup> Paul Gilroy, *Race and Racism in “The Age of Obama”* (London: The British Library, 2014), 9. Available on the internet at <https://www.bl.uk/eccles/pdf/baas2013.pdf> (accessed May 20, 2016)

**Figure 6: Humboldt Park and West Town, 2000**

Color-coded census tracts: greater concentrations of “Hispanic or Latino” population shown in darker shades. [Map via sociaexplorer.com; available on the internet at <http://www.sociaexplorer.com/c315c3447d/view> ]



## **Epilogue: “But They Don’t Hear Me Though”: Nation and Race in Puerto Rico and its Diaspora, 1994-2016**

### **Arriving in Puerto Rican Chicago, 1994**

I was twenty-one when I first moved to Chicago in 1994 and met Marvin Garcia, then the Director of Albizu Campos High School. It was my junior year as an undergraduate at a small liberal arts college in Minnesota, and instead of pursuing a study-abroad opportunity, I had opted for an Urban Studies Program based out of Chicago, which included both coursework and an internship. I interned at PACHS, which I encountered as a small alternative school then housed in a former Walgreens film processing plant on the border between the near northwest side neighborhoods of West Town and Humboldt Park. Marvin extended me a warm and generous welcome in spite of my obvious ignorance of both urban education and the Puerto Rican experience.

When I arrived in Chicago, I literally did not know the difference between Puerto Rico and Mexico, at least in cultural or historical terms. Growing up in an overwhelmingly white suburb of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, I had absorbed as simple, fixed and unchanging common sense what was actually a novel idea of quite recent vintage: that there existed a group of people in the United States, known as Hispanics or Latinos, whose collective identity was shaped first and foremost by their shared heritage and a common ancestral language. Having very little previous experience with anyone who identified as Latina/o, I assumed that the category was homogeneous and flat, rather than diverse and full of contradictions. In addition, I certainly had no idea that PACHS itself had played a small but significant role in generating the very framework of Latina/o identity that I had taken for granted while growing up.

Puerto Rican cultural nationalism was an ever-present reality at Albizu Campos High School, inescapable even before walking in the door. The exterior of the building featured murals of indigenous Taíno petroglyphs and examples of the island's flora and fauna, alongside Spanish-language political slogans like "*La patria es valor y sacrificio*" (the homeland is courage and sacrifice). There were also portraits of more than a dozen political prisoners, including Carmen Valentín, Oscar López Rivera, and Alejandrina Torres, all of whom had been imprisoned for over a decade by the time I arrived on the scene. And, of course, Puerto Rican flags everywhere: the flag of Lares, but even more so the traditional flag, featuring a triangular blue field with a single white star alongside five stripes (three red alternating with two white). This latter flag had its origins in the Cuban independence struggle of the late-19<sup>th</sup> century, and it is no coincidence that the Cuban flag inverts the red/blue color scheme while retaining an identical design. While the Puerto Rican flag has commonly been produced using the navy blue of the United States flag, independence activists routinely use the same baby-blue as the Lares flag and the Cuban flag.

Inside, things were much the same, or, if anything, even more intense. There were relatively few classrooms, and they didn't have numbers; instead, they bore the names of various municipalities on the island. History and culture were at least as important as geography: students were required to take courses in Puerto Rican History and Latino Literature in order to graduate. Field trips included political rallies and community cultural events. Framed posters from prior Puerto Rican political struggles, both local and from the island, adorned the walls not already covered by additional murals. The school's name itself was a clear indicator of its cultural politics. A student from that era once quipped to me that

she had started at the school feeling proud of her Puerto Rican identity, but had graduated knowing *why* she was proud.

### **Cultural Nationalism and Racial Formation at PACHS: A Vignette from 2001**

I spent the better part of ten years working at Albizu Campos High School in various capacities, including English tutor, grants writer, history teacher, and bookkeeper. The whole experience was so powerful that to this day I frequently describe it as the most important educational experience of my life, multiple university degrees notwithstanding. It is no exaggeration to say that without those years of work and struggle in support of a community that was (at first) completely foreign to me, I would not have written this dissertation; in fact, neither history nor graduate school itself might ever have emerged as interests. To be concrete, my historical and theoretical understandings of the twin focuses of this project, cultural nationalism and racial formation, were more profoundly influenced by my years at Albizu Campos than by any of the many works of scholarship I have drawn insight from before or during my graduate career.

One exemplary moment among many can perhaps help contextualize the issues in play during my years at PACHS. In the summer of 2001, the New York-born Puerto Rican singer and actor Jennifer Lopez was hot. The previous winter, her second album, *J.Lo*, had had been a Billboard hit, and her film *The Wedding Planner* had been a box-office smash at the same time. The album was so successful that on July 24, 2001 it was re-issued, this time with a remix of its first single, "I'm Real." The remix featured the rapper Ja Rule, who contributed new lyrics for both himself and Lopez, including the following verse for her:

Now people loving me and hating me, treating me ungratefully  
But not knowing that they aren't making or breaking me  
My life I live it to the limit and I love it  
Now I can breathe again, baby, now I can breathe again  
Now people screaming what the deal with you and so and so  
I tell them niggas mind their biz, but they don't hear me though  
Because I live my life to the limit and I love it  
Now I could breathe again, baby, now I could breathe again

Lopez, who is phenotypically light-skinned, immediately drew criticism in some quarters for her use of the n-word, although Ja Rule defended her, noting that other Latina/os had used the word in hip-hop songs previously.<sup>1</sup>

Among the critics of Lopez's use of the n-word was the black scholar Michael Eric Dyson, then a professor at DePaul University in Chicago. At the time, Dyson had a regular local column in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, and on July 31, 2001 he denounced the use of the term by the "Latina pop princess." In his words, the controversy "shows just how tricky and painful it is to become familiar with black culture's internal linguistic cues and to use them outside its borders." "Whites and others," he concluded, "should know better than to use the word, even if they hear and see blacks using it as a term of endearment."<sup>2</sup> Dyson's repeated reference to "whites and other non-blacks" made it clear that he slotted Lopez and, by extension, all Latina/os, in the category "others," neither white nor black.

At the High School, Dyson's column was greeted by a general chorus of laughter, for a variety of reasons. First, many students at the high school, whether Puerto Rican, Mexican or

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<sup>1</sup> Shaheem Reid, "Ja Rule Defends J. Lo, Gets Stevie Wonder Seal of Approval for New Cut," *MTV News*, August 3, 2001. Available on the internet at: <http://www.mtv.com/news/1445967/ja-rule-defends-j-lo-gets-stevie-wonder-seal-of-approval-for-new-cut/> (accessed June 1, 2016). For a critical take on Jennifer Lopez and the role of Latina racialized sexuality in hip-hop, including a brief treatment of her use of the n-word, see Raquel Z. Rivera, *New York Ricans from the Hip-Hop Zone* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 130-135.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Eric Dyson, "Yo J-Lo, We're Not Down with That: Pop Diva Overstepped Bounds with Use of N-Word," *Chicago Sun-Times*, July 31, 2001, p. 26.



African American, frequently spoke in what linguists have labeled African American Vernacular English.<sup>3</sup> This was especially true of those who were third- or fourth-generation Chicagoans, many of whom made regular use of the N-word in ways that matched the broad range of standard black usages. Such utterances were generally not policed or censored by the Puerto Rican administration or faculty unless they were part of otherwise unacceptable personal attacks. Second, Dyson's implicit division of society into two racial categories, black and non-black ("whites and others"), echoed the old ethnicity paradigm that had been a mainstay of the advocates of liberal Americanization. For people in the orbit of the militant wing of the independence movement, however, the far more relevant division over the previous two decades had been the line separating whites and people of color (what had once been called Third World Peoples); this framework placed Puerto Ricans closer to blacks and distanced them from whites.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, Dyson's column never specified that Lopez was Puerto Rican, referring to her only as "Latina," and as "non-black." For teachers and students at PACHS, this demonstrated his apparent disinterest in two distinct but related areas of complexity and contestation. First, he ignored the internal diversity of Latina/o identity. This was especially troubling considering that by the turn of the millennium almost two-thirds of all Latina/os in the United States were of Mexican birth or parentage, with Puerto Ricans constituting a minority within the minority. The fact that Lopez's breakthrough film role was as Tejana singer Selena only highlighted the

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<sup>3</sup> On the use of African American Vernacular English by Puerto Ricans in New York, see Ana Celia Zentella, *Growing Up Bilingual: Puerto Rican Children in New York* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 45-49; and Walt Wolfram, *Sociolinguistic Aspects of Assimilation: Puerto Rican English in New York City* (Washington: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1974), 36-43.

<sup>4</sup> For a slightly different take on the relationship between Puerto Rican and black identity, see the discussion of a "nationalized blackness" among Chicago's pro-independence sectors during the 1990s, as described in *Ramos-Zayas*, 200-203.

internal complexities of ethnic or national particularity within *Latinidad*, but it was entirely unclear whether Dyson was aware of them.<sup>5</sup> Second, Dyson completely evaded any acknowledgement of the very different system of racial categories historically operative within Puerto Rican society, whether on the island, or in New York (where both Lopez and Ja Rule were born and raised), or in Chicago itself. Given that Dyson was then a professor at DePaul University, where 12.6% of all undergraduate students were Latina/o and the main campus was only a couple miles northeast of *Paseo Boricua*, this apparent lack of knowledge and interest was particularly frustrating for faculty, staff, and students at Albizu Campos High School.<sup>6</sup>

On a deeper level, however, both Dyson and his Puerto Rican critics took positions (however distinct and opposed) that demonstrated the resurgence of a variety of Omi and Winant's ethnicity paradigm, under the rubric of multiculturalism. While still largely overshadowed by the official (and by no means incompatible) ideology of colorblindness, multiculturalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century holds almost complete hegemony over left and progressive racial discourse, including both Dyson and his Latina/o opponents on the question of J Lo's use of the n-word. As Omi and Winant point out, "guided by ethnicity theory, Americans have come to view race as a cultural phenomenon. [...] It is conceptualized in terms of attitudes and beliefs, religion, language, 'lifestyle,' and group identification."<sup>7</sup> Blackness, for Dyson, is defined in part by a sort of linguistic entitlement, while Puerto Ricans opting to use the n-word are mostly indicating that they want in on the action. Cultural nationalism in Puerto Rican Chicago, then, has accommodated itself in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to a racial project once again defined by

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<sup>5</sup> On the complexities of having a Puerto Rican actor play the Tejana singer, see Frances Aparicio, "Jennifer as Selena: Rethinking *Latinidad* in Media and Popular Culture," *Latino Studies* 1 (2003), 90-115.

<sup>6</sup> Racial demographics for DePaul in 2001 drawn from *Fact File, 1997-2001: A Profile of DePaul University* (Chicago: DePaul University, 2001), Table 2-1.

<sup>7</sup> Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 22.

ethnicity and cultural difference rather than by the insurgent anti-colonial anti-racist project of the 1970s and early 1980s.

### **Latina/o Racial Formation in the New Millennium**

By the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Puerto Rico had once again begun hemorrhaging population, under the strain of a perpetually elevated unemployment rate. Around 2003, the total populations of Puerto Ricans (either by birth or ancestry) living on the mainland exceeded the island-based population for the first time ever. This process has only accelerated in the last decade and a half, rising to extraordinary levels in the past few years. Due in large part to emigration (and secondarily to a low birth rate), the island's population decreased by more than 300,000 between 2000 and 2015.<sup>8</sup> The deepening debt crisis of the past several years has accelerated outmigration, and the decade of the 2010s will almost certainly see more movement to the mainland than the previous high water decade, the 1950s.

Instead of focusing on New York, Chicago, and other industrial centers in the northeast and Midwest, however, this second great migration of Puerto Ricans away from the island has targeted the deep-south states of the former Confederacy. Florida, in particular, is expected to surpass New York State for the largest Puerto Rican population outside the island sometime in the next few years, with Orlando hosting a concentration three times larger than that in Chicago.<sup>9</sup> Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, Texas and Oklahoma all have rapidly growing,

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<sup>8</sup> Jens Manuel Krogstad, "Historic Population Losses Continue across Puerto Rico," *Pew Research Center*, March 24, 2016. Available on the internet at: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/24/historic-population-losses-continue-across-puerto-rico/> (accessed June 1, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> Jens Manuel Krogstad, "In a Shift away from New York, More Puerto Ricans Head to Florida," *Pew Research Center*, October 30, 2015. Available on the internet at: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/10/30/in-a-shift-away-from-new-york-more-puerto-ricans-head-to-florida/> (accessed June 1, 2016).

though still numerically small, Puerto Rican communities. Notably, these same regions are also home to rapidly growing populations of Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans, thus replicating in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the dynamic interplay between the two largest Latina/o groups that in the 1970s made Chicago exceptionally well situated to witness the emergence of a Latina/o panethnicity.

Meanwhile, the racial formation of Latina/os in the United States continues, full steam ahead, both at the level of government policy and popular consciousness. The continued growth of all Latina/o populations in the United States, estimated in 2014 at 55 million, or 17 percent of the total US population, has prompted the United States Census Bureau to consider the first major changes to the decennial form's approach to race and ethnicity since the question of "Hispanic" identity was first added in 1980.<sup>10</sup> For four consecutive decades, the Census has utilized a two-question format, in which people are first asked whether or not they are of "Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin;" they are then asked to choose a racial category from among white, black, Asian, or indigenous options. In this model, Latina/o identity is deliberately separated from the question of racial identity, on the assumption that in Puerto Rico, for instance, one may be Latina and black, or Latino and white, and so forth, but that this would be qualitatively different from being both black and white, or black and Asian.

Using a set of proposed alternatives currently under consideration for 2020, the Bureau in 2010 began testing a single question format. Under this framework, respondents would be asked to identify their "race or origin," checking boxes with options including "white," "black,

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<sup>10</sup> For a thorough analysis of the battles that eventually generated the "Hispanic identity" question on the census, see G. Cristina Mora, *Making Hispanics: How Activists, Bureaucrats, and Media Constructed a New American* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 83-118.

African American, or Negro,” “American Indian or Alaska Native,” and “Asian.” Here, for the first time ever, “Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin” is one possible answer alongside the other categories.<sup>11</sup> In each case, the alternative framework includes a space to write in a specific ethnic or national identity in addition to one’s racial identity. Respondents also have the opportunity to check as many racial boxes as suits their self-identity.

Of course, none of this means that Latina/o identity has consolidated itself in public consciousness. In *Latino Crossings: Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and the Politics of Race and Citizenship*, Ramos-Zayas and Nicholas De Genova draw on ethnographic fieldwork done in the 1990s to argue that inter-ethnic conflicts limited the extent of panethnic identification among Puerto Ricans and Mexicans. In their telling, the stark difference in citizenship status – with island-born migrants arriving already birthright citizens while large numbers of the city’s Mexican population not only lacked citizenship but were undocumented – helped produce a “divisive politics of race and citizenship.”<sup>12</sup> Certainly such tensions were on display at PACHS, where students of Mexican and Puerto Rican background not infrequently expressed stereotyped notions about the other group. But by the same token, collaboration, inter-ethnic relationships, and joint campaigns (both electoral and grassroots) generally overshadowed the conflicts.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Jens Manuel Krogstad and D’Vera Cohn, “US Census Looking at Big Changes in How it Asks about Race and Ethnicity,” *Pew Research Center Website*, March 14, 2014. Available on the internet at: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/03/14/u-s-census-looking-at-big-changes-in-how-it-asks-about-race-and-ethnicity/> (accessed June 1, 2016).

<sup>12</sup> Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas and Nicholas De Genova, *Latino Crossings: Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and the Politics of Race and Citizenship* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 30.

<sup>13</sup> For more on inter-ethnic relationships, see Mérida M. Rúa, “Colao Subjectivities: PortoMex and MexiRican Perspectives on Language and Identity,” *Centro Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2001), 117-133.

Regardless, the two decades since Ramos-Zayas and De Genova finished their fieldwork appear to have witnessed a significant shift, and not just on a local scale. When the Census Bureau experimented with the single-question model in 2010, it found that more than 80% of respondents chose only “Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin” to identify their race, even when presented the chance to check more than one box. This is consistent with a 2015 study by the Pew Research Center, which determined that “for two-thirds of Hispanics, their Hispanic background is part of their racial background.”<sup>14</sup> The results were roughly the same regardless of language preference, age and geography. It is thus increasingly clear that the process begun, in Chicago and elsewhere, in the 1970s has gained steam not only with federal bureaucrats but with a growing majority of Latina/os themselves.

### **Final Thoughts on the Future of Puerto Rico and its Diaspora**

When I first arrived in Chicago, Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans were rarely in the media spotlight, globally, within the US, or even locally. With a diasporic population dwarfed by that of immigrants from Mexico (newly devastated by NAFTA) and their descendants, the island itself remained a tourist destination whose internal politics, culture, and economics were of only marginal concern. That has all changed in the intervening two decades, though very little of the news has been unambiguously good. Today, the Puerto Rican debt crisis merits a lead editorial in the *New York Times* on May 31, 2016, which notes that “time is running out for

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<sup>14</sup> Ana Gonzalez-Barrera and Mark Hugo Lopez, “Is Being Hispanic a Matter of Race, Ethnicity, or Both?” *Pew Research Center Website*, June 15, 2015. Available on the internet at: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/06/15/is-being-hispanic-a-matter-of-race-ethnicity-or-both/> (accessed June 1, 2016).

Puerto Rico.”<sup>15</sup> The House of Representatives has already passed, and the Senate is expected to approve before the end of June, bipartisan legislation supported by President Obama that will allow the cash-strapped island government to reduce its bond payments in exchange for the establishment of an unelected, technocratic financial control board that almost all island-based commentators describe as a return to outright colonialism. The United States Supreme Court in June released decisions in two different cases that advance the constitutional argument that the island’s colonial status has never been in doubt. In *Puerto Rico v. Sanchez Valle*, most centrally, the majority maintained that Puerto Rico lacks the legal sovereignty granted to the fifty states because the “ultimate source” of political power in Puerto Rico is the federal government, which invaded the island in 1898. A more stark admission of US imperialism would be hard to imagine.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, public health officials are tracking the first domestic cases of Zika virus transmission, heavily concentrated in Puerto Rico, much to the dismay of the tourism industry. Already, Major League Baseball has cancelled (moved) two games between the Pittsburgh Pirates and the Miami Marlins that had been scheduled for Hiram Bithorn Stadium in San Juan out of concern for Zika infection among players; the games were instead played in Miami.<sup>17</sup> And the massacre of Latin Night patrons at Orlando’s gay dance club, Pulse, on June 12, in which almost half of those killed were Puerto Rican, is a global news event.<sup>18</sup> The tragedy highlighted ongoing transformations in attitudes on sexuality within the Puerto Rican diaspora.

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<sup>15</sup> “How to Save Puerto Rico,” *New York Times*, May 31, 2016, p. A22.

<sup>16</sup> For one among many think pieces produced in the aftermath of the *Sanchez Valle* ruling, see Garrett Epps, “The Legal Residue of American Empire,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, June 16, 2016. Available on the internet at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/06/american-empire/487232/> (accessed June 17, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> “Puerto Rico Games Moved as a Zika Virus Precaution,” *New York Times*, May 7, 2016, p. D3.

<sup>18</sup> Lizette Alvarez and Nick Madigan, “In List of the Dead, Puerto Ricans Hear Shattering Roll Call of their Kin,” *New York Times*, June 15, 2016, p. A14.

In Chicago, the Puerto Rican Parade was quickly rededicated to honor the memory of those killed in Orlando. While there is still a local Miss Puerto Rico pageant, sixty-five years after Gonzalo Lebrón Sotomayor's initial foray, far more prominent placement in this year's festivities went to the Cacica Queen, winner of a public competition for transgender members of the community, held at a local gay dance club the night before the parade.<sup>19</sup>

Puerto Rican cultural nationalism has hit the mainstream in Chicago. Luis Gutiérrez is a high profile supporter of comprehensive immigration reform, and regularly discusses issues of importance to Puerto Ricans and other Latina/os with President Obama. As noted in the Introduction, the campaign to free Oscar López Rivera has gained steam, though no official decision from President Obama is expected immediately. José López, formerly of the MLN and long-time executive director of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, was the focus of the lead article in *Chicago Magazine's* November, 2014 issue. "Jose Lopez's Last Stand" detailed in largely sympathetic terms the anti-gentrification efforts in Humboldt Park that López and others had helped spearhead two decades before. Just as in the early 1990s, these remain tied to efforts to defend community control of Clemente High School, this time via a project called "Community as a Campus." In the words of the article, "a better-educated, better-trained population, [López] reasons, is less likely to be displaced." A full-page photo that accompanies

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<sup>19</sup> "Cacica" is a feminization of the Taíno word "cacique," which means leader. For more on the Cacica Queen and changing attitudes toward LGBTQ Puerto Ricans in Chicago, see Erika Gisela Abad, "Humboldt Park's Summer of LGBTQ Solidarity," *Centro Voices*, July 21, 2015. Available on the internet at: <http://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/centrovoices/arts-culture/humboldt-parks-summer-lgbtq-solidarity> (accessed June 15, 2016).



the start of the article pictures López in front of one of the steel flag statues on Division Street, while one person interviewed describes him as “the cultural soul of Humboldt Park.”<sup>20</sup>

But the change goes beyond just López himself. PACHS and the Puerto Rican Cultural Center moved in 2003 from the rapidly whitening northwest corner of West Town to the heart of *Paseo Boricua*, between the two steel flags. The consolidated Puerto Rican Parade, now held in Humboldt Park, draws thousands every year to the stretch of Division Street that runs between the flags, as does *Fiesta Boricua* (Puerto Rican Festival), which closes the same stretch of road for a two-day music and culture extravaganza every year on Labor Day Weekend. Though both poverty and gentrification have persisted in Humboldt Park and the surrounding neighborhoods, no one can say the remnants of the militant wing of the local independence movement are in any way marginal, much less self-isolating.

For decades, Puerto Ricans on the island and on the mainland have debated what frequently gets called “the status question” using three basic options: should Puerto Rico win its independence; should it become the 51<sup>st</sup> state; or should it remain a semi-autonomous Commonwealth under the long-standing status quo model of the *Estado Libre Asociado* (Freely Associated State) pioneered by Luis Muñoz Marín? Today, in the midst of the debt crisis and the second great migration, it is clear that all three options must be considered non-starters, at least as they have typically been understood. An independent Puerto Rico saddled with \$72 billion in debt (plus \$46 billion in unfunded pension obligations) would immediately place the newly sovereign country among the ranks of the most destitute nation-states on the planet, not

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<sup>20</sup> Elly Fishman, “Jose Lopez’s Last Stand,” *Chicago Magazine* November, 2014. Available online at: <http://www.chicagomag.com/Chicago-Magazine/November-2014/Jose-Lopez-Humboldt-Park/> (accessed June 1, 2016).

to mention the fact that well more than half its potential citizens live in the mainland United States. Statehood, which had never found much favor in Washington DC, is a dead letter as long as the financial situation remains untenable. In addition, the stateside conservatives most likely to favor statehood for the island are almost universally those most opposed both to the sort of official bilingualism that would necessarily accompany the shift and to the financial price-tag associated with it. And everyone, including the highest-ranking members of the currently-ruling PPD, acknowledges that the ELA structure is both responsible for the crisis in the first place, and a non-starter in light of *Sanchez Valle*, which found the original vision of the ELA as a source of meaningful autonomy both unconstitutional and irrelevant. In late May, before the *Sanchez Valle* ruling was released, the president of the PPD, who is its candidate for governor this fall, publically admitted that the ELA status “is not an alternative for the future.”<sup>21</sup>

So, what comes next for Puerto Rico, and for its once again rapidly growing diaspora? The simple answer is, no one knows. However, if the history of Chicago’s Puerto Rican community is any predictor, we would do well to look at the nadir of cultural nationalism in the aftermath of the Division Street Riots. Much like today, the previous models all appeared untenable in the midst of a major crisis, and it was not immediately clear what might replace them. Within a decade, an entirely unanticipated series of innovations brought an intense renewal of cultural nationalism in Chicago. Without predicting the future of Puerto Rican politics, either on the island or in the diaspora, it seems likely that cultural nationalism will be the key to understanding whatever that future holds.

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<sup>21</sup> Frances Rosario, “Bernier Reconoce que el ELA no es una alternative” (Bernier Recognizes that the ELA is not an Alternative), *El Nuevo Día* (San Juan), May 27, 2016. Available on the internet at: <http://www.elnuevodia.com/noticias/politica/nota/bernierreconocequeelelayanoesunaalternativa-2203840/> (accessed May 29, 2016)

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