

# *The Development of Pan-Latino Philadelphia, 1892–1945*

THE 2000 CENSUS CALLED ATTENTION TO THE GROWTH and increasing diversity of Philadelphia's Latino population. Yet a diverse Latino population has been evident in Philadelphia since the early 1890s. The oldest Spanish-speaking enclave in the city, Southwark, south of Center City and near the Delaware River, attracted many immigrants in the late nineteenth century. The western portion of Southwark, the basis for W. E. B. Du Bois's study, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), was also home to many African Americans. By the beginning of the twentieth century Southwark had also become Philadelphia's first Spanish-speaking enclave. Indeed, two pivotal institutions were established in Southwark within one year and two blocks from each other. The Spanish-American Fraternal Benevolent Association, La Fraternal, founded in 1908, was the city's first Spanish-speaking mutual aid society. In 1909 Vincentian priests from Barcelona, Spain, under the auspices of the Philadelphia Archdiocese, founded Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, La Milagrosa, the city's first Spanish-language Catholic mission. Together, these institutions were central not only to the evolution of the pan-Latino enclave of Southwark, but also to the later development of Latino enclaves in Philadelphia's Spring Garden and Northern Liberties neighborhoods. These institutions helped link the city's Spanish-speaking residents, and the enclaves that emerged in Southwark, Spring Garden, and Northern Liberties. Because of their longevity, these two institutions also provide a lens through which to examine the evolution of the city's pan-Latino community.

The period from 1892 to 1945 witnessed the formation of several of the pan-Latino organizations around which the Spanish-speaking enclaves of Southwark, Spring Garden, and Northern Liberties coalesced. During this time, Spaniards, Cubans, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and other Central and South American residents of Philadelphia initiated a process of community development that gestated throughout the 1920s and 1930s and came to fruition during the 1940s.

La Fraternal, La Milagrosa, and later institutions such as the First Spanish Baptist Church and the International Institute all helped shape the interconnected Spanish-speaking colonia that had begun to take form in Philadelphia by the early 1940s, a colonia characterized by common language, shared culture, and a growing organizational infrastructure across the three scattered enclaves. This essay explores the early development of that community in Philadelphia.<sup>1</sup>

### *Southwark Becomes Pan-Latino*

Southwark, one of the oldest ethnic communities in Philadelphia, was bounded by Pine Street on the north, Bainbridge Street on the south, Broad Street on the west, and the Delaware River on the east. The Spanish speakers who settled in the neighborhood, however, centered around Fourth and Pine streets.<sup>2</sup> During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Southwark's Spanish-speaking population was comprised of Spaniards, Cubans, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans, with Spaniards being the largest group. Over time, however, migration from the Caribbean and Latin America increased, and between 1920 and 1940 the enclave of Southwark evolved into a predominantly Puerto Rican neighborhood.

During the nineteenth century, the growth of the sugar and tobacco trade between Philadelphia and the Caribbean encouraged migration from Cuba and Puerto Rico, in particular. Ships from Spanish America docked in the ports that lay on the shore of the Delaware River in the eastern portion of Southwark. By the middle of the century Philadelphia had become an important center in the manufacture of tobacco products, and prominent among the early Spanish-speaking migrants to Philadelphia were Spanish, Cuban, and Puerto Rican cigar makers. Cigar makers, many of whom were political activists, were well known for their keen sense of organization.<sup>3</sup> They founded some of the earliest Spanish-

<sup>1</sup> For a more extensive discussion of the beginning of a Puerto Rican community in Philadelphia, see Víctor Vázquez-Hernández, "Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia: Origins of a Community, 1910–1945" (PhD diss., Temple University, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Jose Hernandez, telephone interview by author, Dec. 17, 1993; Juan Canales, interview by author, Feb. 20, 1999; "Report of Survey in re: Puerto Ricans who have moved into area," Nov. 2, 1948, p. 3, box 1, Friends Neighborhood Guild Collection, Urban Archives, Temple University, Philadelphia.

<sup>3</sup> Germán Delgado Pasapera, *Puerto Rico: Sus luchas emancipadoras, 1850–1898* (Río Piedras, PR, 1984), and César Andreu Iglesias, ed., *Memoirs of Bernardo Vega: A Contribution to the*

speaking mutual aid societies in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Cigar makers also played a pivotal role in the labor movement during the late nineteenth century in the United States, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. As early as 1877, cigar makers established a Spanish-speaking union in Philadelphia.<sup>5</sup>

As the last two Spanish colonies in the new world, Cuba and Puerto Rico continued throughout the century to produce insurgent movements. From the 1860s on, Cubans and Puerto Ricans worked jointly to wrest both islands from Spain's control. Both groups joined forces to establish the Republican Society of Cuba and Puerto Rico, based in exile communities in the United States, which helped launch revolutionary movements on the islands in 1868. One of the Republican Society's chapters was formed in Philadelphia in 1865. Throughout this period of struggle, cigar makers were a primary source of financial support for the insurgents.<sup>6</sup>

Many migrant cigar makers also became involved in the Cuba Libre movement based in the United States in the 1890s and were prominent in the movement's primary political organization, the Partido Revolucionario Cubano / Cuban Revolutionary Party (PRC), organized by Cuban revolutionary José Martí. The PRC was founded in Tampa, Florida, in 1892, and established its headquarters in New York City. Its

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*History of the Puerto Rican Community in New York* (New York, 1984) are two good sources on the collaboration between nineteenth-century Puerto Rican and Cuban revolutionaries, especially in the United States, and particularly in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and New Orleans.

<sup>4</sup> Several books and articles document cigar makers' organizational abilities and the many mutual aid societies they built in the United States. See Iglesias, *Memoirs of Bernardo Vega*, especially chaps. 6, 7, and 8; Gary R. Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885–1985* (Urbana, IL, 1987), chap. 6; Dorothee Schneider, *Trade Unions and Community: The German Working Class in New York City, 1870–1900* (Urbana, IL, 1994), chap. 3; Gary R. Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, "Spanish Anarchism in Tampa, Florida, 1886–1931," in *Struggle a Hard Battle: Essays on Working-Class Immigrants*, ed. Dirk Hoerder (DeKalb, IL, 1986), 178; Gary R. Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, "The Reader Lights the Candle: Cuban and Florida Cigar Workers' Oral Tradition," *Labor's Heritage* 5 (Spring 1993): 10; Susan D. Greenbaum, "Economic Cooperation among Urban Industrial Workers: Rationality and Community in an Afro-Cuban Mutual Aid Society, 1904–1927," *Social Science History* 17 (Summer 1993): 173; Nancy A. Hewitt, "The Voice of Virile Labor: Labor Militancy, Community Solidarity, and Gender Identity among Tampa's Latin Workers, 1880–1921," in *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor*, ed. Ava Baron (Ithaca, NY, 1991), 162; Durward Long, "La Resistencia: Tampa's Immigrant Labor Union," *Labor History* 6 (1965): 206; and Manuel Martínez, *Chicago: Historia de nuestra comunidad Puertorriqueña* (Chicago, IL, [1989]), 75.

<sup>5</sup> Patricia A. Cooper notes that the Dec. 1877 *Cigar Makers' Official Journal* "reported a union of Spanish and Cuban cigar makers in Philadelphia in 1877," in *Once A Cigar Maker: Men, Women and Work Culture in American Cigar Factories, 1900–1919* (Urbana, IL, 1987), 38.

<sup>6</sup> Pasapera, *Puerto Rico*, 105–6.

founding documents stated that the primary purpose of the PRC was to gain independence for Cuba and for Puerto Rico. The fact that the political platform of the Partido Revolucionario Cubano clearly committed the party to the fight for Puerto Rican independence prompted many islanders to join the cause. Local political organizing of the Partido Revolucionario Cubano in Philadelphia helped galvanize support in the region for the Cuban cause. More importantly, the breadth and depth of the PRC in Philadelphia energized the Spanish-speaking population and rallied not only Cubans but Puerto Ricans and other Spanish speakers as well.<sup>7</sup> Between 1892 and 1898 Cuban and Puerto Rican exiles based in Southwark formed six clubs of the PRC. Philadelphia thus became the third most important city in support of Cuban and Puerto Rican independence in the United States, just behind New York and Tampa.<sup>8</sup>

In December 1898, in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War, PRC officials disbanded the organization. By this time, however, a small but vibrant Spanish-speaking enclave had been established in Philadelphia. Veterans of the PRC campaigns in the city were leaders in this community's development.<sup>9</sup>

Continued immigration and the development of social networks and businesses contributed to the further evolution of pan-Latino Southwark in the early years of the twentieth century. The ongoing trade between the Caribbean and Philadelphia, especially in sugar and tobacco, drew many immigrants from Cuba and Puerto Rico to Philadelphia. Communication between Puerto Rico, Cuba, New York, Tampa, and Philadelphia among Spanish speakers helped consolidate this group. In addition, the recruitment efforts of companies such as the Bethlehem steel mills and the railroads attracted many Spanish-speaking workers, especially Mexicans, to

<sup>7</sup> *Patria* (New York), Jan. 18, 1898. For an excellent chronology of the Partido Revolucionario Cubano's (PRC) activities between 1892 and 1898 in Philadelphia, see the microfilm collection of *Patria*, the party paper, located at the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños / Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, CUNY. For a description of the role played by Puerto Ricans within the PRC, see Edgardo Melendez, *Puerto Rico en "Patria"* (Río Piedras, PR, 1995). For fine accounts U.S. intervention in Cuba, especially the role it played in the war between the Cuban insurgents and the Spanish colonial authorities, see the books by Cuban historian Louis A. Pérez Jr.: *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy* (Athens, GA, 1990), and *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (New York, 1988).

<sup>8</sup> See the list of members of the Partido Revolucionario Cubano published in *Patria*, Jan. 18, 1898.

<sup>9</sup> Many of the members of the PRC in Philadelphia formed organizations like the Spanish-American Fraternal Benevolent Association.

the region.<sup>10</sup>

In the early decades of the twentieth century, these Spanish-speaking immigrants and their descendants began to create the institutional structures of a community. La Fraternal and La Milagrosa were the most important of these institutions. Others included Boslover Hall, located at Seventh and Pine streets in Southwark, which became an important dance hall and social gathering place for Spanish speakers across Philadelphia. The Head House Market, which ran the length of South Second Street between Lombard and South streets, developed into a significant business center, especially for Spaniards in Southwark. The market not only provided fresh produce, including products from Spanish-speaking countries, but was also a source of income for those who owned and operated kiosks there.<sup>11</sup>

Smaller community institutions included a number of speakeasies that catered to Spanish-speakers. Though prohibition made the sale of alcoholic beverages illegal between 1920 and 1933, most Southwark men could still find a drink when they wanted one. Latino men, however, could only purchase beer through the back door of many establishments and could not sit down at the bar itself. Such exclusion encouraged the establishment of businesses like that of Carmen Ferrer, a Puerto Rican woman who used an apartment on South Street to serve drinks to Spanish-speaking customers. Ferrer had migrated from Puerto Rico and worked as a cook for Puerto Rican migrant workers on farms in southern New Jersey. She initially settled in Spring Garden, but moved to Southwark and established a business in the neighborhood in the early 1940s.<sup>12</sup>

Cigar-making firms located within the Southwark enclave, a few of which were owned by Spanish speakers, provided jobs for Spanish, Cuban, and Puerto Rican cigar makers from the neighborhood. Between 1910 and 1945, no fewer than twenty-eight such firms operated in or just outside the Spanish-speaking enclave of Southwark. The largest tobacco-processing factory in the city at the time, the Bayuk Brothers Cigar

<sup>10</sup> Paul S. Taylor, "Mexicans North of the Rio Grande," *Survey* 66 (1931): 140; Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Mexican Labor Colony at Bethlehem, Pa.," *Monthly Labor Review* 33 (Oct. 1931): 74-77; Saskia Sassen, "U.S. Immigration Policy toward Mexico in a Global Economy," in *Between Two Worlds: Mexican Immigrants in the United States*, ed. David G. Gutiérrez (Wilmington, DE, 1996), 216-17, 225.

<sup>11</sup> *La Prensa* (New York), May 8, 1929, p. 6, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños; Ms. Cynthia Alvarez, Luis Alvarez's granddaughter, telephone interview by author, Aug. 2000.

<sup>12</sup> Rosa Santiago, Carmen Ferrer's daughter, interview by author, Apr. 10, 1994.

Company, employed many Spanish-speaking men and women. Bayuk Brothers was within walking distance of the Southwark enclave. Many Spanish speakers also worked in a variety of jobs on the docks, which were also a short walk from Southwark.<sup>13</sup>

*Institutional Foundations of Pan-Latino Philadelphia:  
La Fraternal and La Milagrosa*

La Fraternal, founded as the result of a mass meeting in 1908, was a mutual aid society. Like similar institutions in many other immigrant communities, it provided a place for cultural and linguistic camaraderie. In addition, La Fraternal provided a place for social interaction among Philadelphia's multiple Latino groups.<sup>14</sup> It was an umbrella organization of Spanish speakers. Increasingly, the group served as a social center, celebrating annual events like El Día de la Raza (Day of the Race) on October 12, Columbus Day, and many other similar events. It sponsored dances and beauty contests. These affairs celebrated the Hispanic identity of the many Latin American nationality groups in Philadelphia. They also highlighted their common language (Spanish) and promoted a sense of connection to the mother country (Spain). But, more importantly, the celebration of la Raza allowed the diverse Spanish-speaking groups in the city to come together and celebrate their shared language, as well as shared aspects of culture and family.

The events organized by La Fraternal inevitably included a literary or cultural portion, usually in the form of a short performance (plays, vignettes, etc.). Programs always included keynote speakers. Oftentimes the speakers represented the diverse Spanish-speaking consulates residing in Philadelphia at the time. Events usually ended with a dance party and celebration late into the night.<sup>15</sup>

The headquarters of La Fraternal was at 419 Pine Street, in the heart of the Southwark Latino enclave. The group used several different locations for its events, but the two most frequently used were Boslover Hall and Garden Hall, both located in Southwark. The events held at these different locations brought together Spanish speakers from all parts of the

<sup>13</sup> Vázquez-Hernández, "Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia," 185, 217.

<sup>14</sup> Father Antonio Casulleras, C.M. *First Annual Report of the Spanish-American Colony* (Philadelphia, 1910), 1–2, pamphlet collection, Archives of the Philadelphia Archdiocese.

<sup>15</sup> See especially *La Prensa*, Oct. 12, 1923, p. 4; Mar. 19, 1924, p. 1; Jan. 8, 1926, p. 7; May 8, 1929, p. 6; May 13, 1930; Oct. 19, 1932, p. 6; and June 6, 1941, p. 8.

city.<sup>16</sup> For Puerto Ricans and other Spanish-speaking residents of Southwark, the formation of La Fraternal, with its many evening events, plays, discussions, dances, and festivals, marked a turning point in the development of a Spanish-speaking community in the city.

The leadership of La Fraternal reflected the diversity of the enclaves. Mostly led by Spaniards or persons of Spanish descent, the leadership group tended to be made up of professionals or small shop owners from the different enclaves. Yet the society's events seemed to gather persons of all classes, including cigar makers. By the later 1930s and early 1940s, La Fraternal's leadership passed into the hands of Cuban *tampeños*, who had migrated north from Florida in the 1920s and 1930s following the decline in cigar making in Florida, and Puerto Ricans, a reflection of the growth of these two groups in the city. Throughout the early twentieth century, the leadership of La Fraternal included people who lived in the three enclaves of Spring Garden, Northern Liberties, and Southwark.

La Milagrosa, too, brought people of different nationalities and from different enclaves in Philadelphia together. Established by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia as a mission church, La Milagrosa was viewed as a national parish, albeit a multinational one. The chapel was founded to meet the spiritual needs of Spanish-speaking Catholics but very soon established itself as a social gathering place for the residents of the growing pan-Latino enclaves of the city. La Milagrosa not only held several masses on Sundays in Spanish but also provided English classes for newly arrived immigrants and acted as an informal employment referral agency. Its records indicate that the largest number of members at this time were Spaniards, which reflects their predominance among Spanish-speakers. But La Milagrosa's membership lists, baptism and marriage records, as well as social gatherings all reflect the diverse Spanish-speaking groups that made up the colonia.<sup>17</sup>

### *The Consolidation of the Colonia in the 1920s and 1930s*

Just as La Fraternal and La Milagrosa were central to the emergence of a pan-Latino community in Southwark, other institutions were pivotal to the emergence of other enclaves. These institutions, too, were critical

<sup>16</sup> Boslover Hall was located at Seventh and Pine streets and Garden Hall was located at Seventh and Morris streets. *La Prensa*, Jan. 8, 1926, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> Vázquez-Hernández, "Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia," 214–15.

in forging links between the enclaves and in crystallizing the colonia. The consolidation of the colonia was particularly helped by the work of La Fraternal in Southwark, La Milagrosa in Spring Garden, the First Spanish Baptist Church in Northern Liberties, and the community-wide work of the International Institute.

While the Southwark enclave developed around the cigar-making shops and the piers and economic activity along South Street, a second enclave began to grow and expand in Spring Garden during the period from 1920 to 1940. Poplar and Vine streets bound the enclave on the north and south, and Twenty-third and Broad streets on the west and east. For many Spanish speakers, the allure of jobs, especially at the giant Baldwin Locomotive Works, was reason enough to settle in Spring Garden. But one of the most important reasons Spring Garden began to attract so many Puerto Ricans during these years was the relocation of La Milagrosa to the heart of this enclave.

In 1912 La Milagrosa moved from its location in Southwark to more permanent quarters in Spring Garden. The move was significant in the evolution and development of the pan-Latino enclave of Spring Garden. Almost immediately following its move to Spring Garden and Nineteenth streets, La Milagrosa began to expand its mission to include not only religious services but charity work as well.<sup>18</sup>

Between 1912 and the mid-1920s, La Milagrosa developed into a hub of activity for the community. The chapel organized an Association of La Milagrosa, which handled many of the social aspects of the services provided. The association organized English classes, recreational activities, and picnics, among other programs. By the end of the decade the chapel had become an important institutional center. The acquisition of an additional property at 1836 Brandywine Street, around the corner from La Milagrosa, known as the Spanish Catholic Club, helped the chapel expand its activities. This location was used primarily for social functions such as dances, however the facility was also rented out for weddings and baptism parties. Social functions at the club attracted many Spanish speakers from the other enclaves as well. La Milagrosa also organized a youth club, which was sponsored by the International Institute and func-

<sup>18</sup> Casulleras, *First Annual Report of the Spanish-American Colony*, 1; William Rickle, "Interethnic Relations in Hispanic Parishes in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia" (PhD diss., Temple University, 1996), 40.



tioned right in the neighborhood.<sup>19</sup> The growth of the Spring Garden enclave expanded the contacts between the Spaniards and other Latinos that lived in Southwark and the Puerto Ricans and Cubans that predominated in Spring Garden.

Non-Catholic Latinos also began to move to Spring Garden in the early twentieth century. The First Spanish Baptist Church, founded in 1946 in Northern Liberties, had its beginnings in Spring Garden in 1929. According to Puerto Rican theologian Dr. Edwin David Aponte, at this time there was little intense religious partisanship among Latino Protestants in Philadelphia. The absence of bickering among Protestant Spanish speakers contributed to the formation of a Bible study group in September 1929. Led by a student of the Philadelphia School of the Bible, this group evolved and began using space in the Fifth Baptist Church, located at Eighteenth and Spring Garden streets. The group was made up of Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Mexican families, some of whom had recently moved to Philadelphia from New York. They met more or less regularly, and in 1933 Oscar Rodriguez, a Puerto Rican student attending the Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, assumed the ministerial duties of the group and leadership of the mission; he pastored to Spanish speakers in Philadelphia until the late 1930s.<sup>20</sup>

The International Institute, a non-Latino immigrant support group, was established in Spring Garden during these same years. The institute had a major impact on the consolidation and development of Spanish-speaking groups in Philadelphia in the 1920s and 1930s, especially in Spring Garden and Northern Liberties. Part of a national network of groups initially started by local YWCAs in New York City, the International Institute supported both cultural and ethnic pluralism while at the same time seeking "a better integration of immigrants and their children in American society." These groups differed from other immigrant support groups of the period, which tended to favor the "Americanization" of foreigners.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *Polk's Philadelphia City Directory* (Philadelphia, 1935), 2004; Jesse Bermudez, interview by author, Feb. 6, 1999.

<sup>20</sup> Edwin David Aponte et al., *The Work of Latino Ministry: Hispanic Protestant Churches in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1994), 35–38; Joan Dee Koss, "Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia: Migration and Accommodation" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1965), 65; Carmen Teresa Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies* (Philadelphia, 2001), 209.

<sup>21</sup> Raymond A. Mohl, "Cultural Pluralism in Immigrant Education: The International Institutes of Boston, Philadelphia, and San Francisco, 1920–1940," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 1

The International Institutes served immigrants through education and with help in adjusting to the United States. The first institute was founded in 1910 in Greenwich Village in New York City, a major immigrant district at the time. By the mid-1920s there were more than fifty-five similar institutes operating in the United States, mostly in urban, immigrant-rich centers. The institutes remained part of the YWCA until the 1930s, when they severed connections and formed a national agency called the National Institute of Immigrant Welfare. According to historian Raymond A. Mohl, the International Institute of Philadelphia played a unique role in the city, as it did in Boston and San Francisco.<sup>22</sup>

The International Institute in Philadelphia was located in Spring Garden on Fifteenth Street near Mount Vernon Street. The Philadelphia International Institute emphasized its belief in cultural pluralism—which it understood to mean a “federation of nationalities”—which affirmed each group’s ethnic, religious, and cultural identity. This culturally pluralistic view meant that Spanish speakers in Philadelphia could turn to the institute for help with many of their social needs, including welfare services, job-search assistance, and even English classes. Though some of these services were meant to Americanize the migrants, participants found they could maintain and even affirm their respective languages and cultures. The Philadelphia International Institute’s nationality-based folklore groups led to the creation of dance and other cultural groups. Two in particular were the Mexican group Anahuac and a Puerto Rican group called the Club Juventud Hispana; other groups representing Cuba, Spain, and Venezuela were also organized. Once a year, during the month of May, these groups came together and held a folk festival at the institute.<sup>23</sup>

The physical presence of the International Institute in Spring Garden attracted many Spanish speakers to the area. The institute was located within four blocks of La Milagrosa. The ample services provided by the institute’s social workers to immigrants, particularly to Spaniards, Cubans, Mexicans, and Venezuelans, added to the organization’s attraction for Spanish speakers in the vicinity.

Northern Liberties became a third hub of Spanish-speaking activity in the 1930s and early 1940s. By the 1940s, Vine and Masters streets bound

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(Spring 1982): 37, 41; Eleanor Morton, “How the International Institute Operates to Bring about a Feeling of Friendliness among the City’s Many Foreign-born Groups,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 15, 1936, box 26, YWCA Collection, Urban Archives, Temple University, Philadelphia.

<sup>22</sup> Mohl, “Cultural Pluralism in Immigrant Education,” 37.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 39; Morton, “How the International Institute Operates.”

the enclave on the south and north, Broad and Front streets on the west and east. There were several key factors that led Spanish speakers to settle in Northern Liberties. One was the First Spanish Baptist Church, which, unable to find permanent quarters in Spring Garden, moved to Northern Liberties in the early 1940s. This move was pivotal to this neighborhood. Under the leadership of the Reverend Enrique Rodriguez, the First Spanish Baptist Church became an important religious as well as community center in its new location. Puerto Ricans attracted by the church to Northern Liberties eventually pushed north into the heart of North Philadelphia in the ensuing decades. Rodriguez frequently preached to Puerto Rican migrant workers on New Jersey's farms and to industrial workers at Campbell Soup in Camden, New Jersey, in their respective barracks. Many of these workers searched out Rodriguez once their contracts expired and moved to the Philadelphia neighborhood where his church stood. These new members of the First Spanish Baptist Church, once established in Philadelphia, oftentimes sent for their families, thus contributing to the expansion of the colonia.<sup>24</sup>

A second factor in the enclave's expansion was the presence of many cigar-making factories in the region. Northern Liberties was also the site of the Cigar Makers' International Union Local #165, which had its offices at 1334 Spring Garden Street. In the early 1930s, the Bayuk Brothers Cigar Company opened another factory at Ninth Street and Columbia Avenue in North Philadelphia. This factory attracted many cigar makers, men and women, to the Northern Liberties area. Antonio Malpica, who owned his own *chinchal* (small cigar-making shop) also freelanced at some of the cigar factories. A Spanish speaker known as El Jefe (the Chief) owned and operated another *chinchal*. His cigar-making shop was located on Marshall Street near Brown, in the heart of Northern Liberties.<sup>25</sup>

Another reason Northern Liberties attracted so many Spanish speakers was the Marshall Street market, the northern equivalent of the Italian Market located on Ninth Street in South Philadelphia. Between 1920 and 1960, the stretch of Marshall Street running north from Spring Garden Street to Girard Avenue was a hub of commercial activity that attracted many Spanish-speaking workers. The many Jewish-owned shops resembled the Orchard Street area of the Lower Eastside of

<sup>24</sup> Aponte et al., *Work of Latino Ministry*, 38; Koss, "Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia," 65.

<sup>25</sup> Juan Canales interview, Feb. 20, 1999; Jesse Bermudez interview, Feb. 6, 1999.

Manhattan. Marshall Street attracted many Spanish speakers because not only could they find many of the products they liked, including fresh meat and live poultry, but many of them found jobs with the Jewish merchants established in the area. Just like in New York, the area attracted Spanish speakers to work in the nearby cigar factories, garment factories, and consequently to live in the neighborhood. Socially, the Marshall Street area included a number of dance halls and movie theaters. The most prominent location for events sponsored by Spanish-speaking groups was Pannonia Hall, located on Franklin Street near Fairmount Avenue, the location of the current Council of Spanish-speaking Organizations, El Concilio. The core area of present-day Spanish-speaking Philadelphia is still physically connected to the Marshall Street hub.<sup>26</sup>

*Continuity and Change in Community Building:  
World War II and Beyond*

By the early 1940s, a Spanish-speaking colonia, which linked enclaves in Southwark, Spring Garden, and Northern Liberties, had taken shape in Philadelphia, supported and nurtured by community institutions such as La Fraternal, Spanish-language churches, and the International Institute. These institutions persisted into the World War II era and evolved with the changing composition and needs of the city's Spanish-speaking population. A significant increase in Puerto Rican migration contributed to demographic shifts in Philadelphia's Latino population as Puerto Ricans tended to settle in Spring Garden, Northern Liberties, and other North Philadelphia neighborhoods. During World War II, Spanish-speaking groups sponsored events that reflected the colonia's diversity. They also began to reach out to the larger, non-Latino community of Philadelphia.

As the city's Spanish-speaking community sought to establish both its patriotism and its own place within the larger Philadelphia community, Latino organizations began to hold events outside places like Boslover Hall (Seventh and Pine) and the Musical Fund Hall (Eighth and Locust) in Southwark. In 1943 the Spanish Committee, made up of three of the period's most prominent Latino organizations, La Fraternal, the Mexican

<sup>26</sup> By 1920 the 900 block of Marshall Street had become the major business area serving the greater Northern Liberties community. The area was home to many Russian and Polish Jewish immigrants who replaced the German Jews. Elaine Krasnow Ellison and Elaine Mark Jaffe, *Voices from Marshall Street: Jewish Life in a Philadelphia Neighborhood, 1920–1960* (Philadelphia, 1994), 14.

association Anahuac, and the Latin American Club, sponsored a Grand Rally Dance (promoted as a United War Chest Rally) at Ambassador Hall at 1701 North Broad Street, outside of the colonia. Highlighted in the program were the American flag and, in large bold letters, the words "Buy War Bonds." Events such as these reflected not only the coming together of members of the different Latino groups but also the establishment of the colonia as part of the larger Philadelphia community.

The use of English and American war symbols in promotional materials may have been intended to appease the larger Philadelphia society. The use of patriotic symbols at social events was commonplace during World War II. The use of them by Latino organizations served to demonstrate their support of the larger war effort and showed them to be pro-American. At the same time, events such as the Grand Rally Dance allowed Puerto Ricans and other Spanish speakers to maintain their cultural identity as they listened and danced to the music of Latino musical groups.

Spanish-speaking groups in the 1940s sponsored events ranging from the cultural (affirming national holidays like the commemoration of Mexican Independence) to the political (dances sponsored by the International Workers Order). Most social events organized by Spanish-speaking groups in Philadelphia during these years, however, featured theater and dance in Spanish. Despite the emphasis on war themes (the sale of war bonds, for instance), the main purpose of these events appears to have been the unifying of the colonia through entertainment that reflected the diversity of Philadelphia's Spanish-speaking population. The Queen Festival, a Spanish-speaking beauty pageant held in June 1941 at Ambassador Hall, perhaps the first of its kind in Philadelphia, was typical of these gatherings. This event was cosponsored by La Fraternal, the Mexican association Anahuac, and the Latin American Club. The festival featured three contestants, one representing each of the sponsoring organizations.<sup>27</sup>

Increasingly these types of mutually sponsored events led to a greater connection and camaraderie among the groups. These three groups, La Fraternal, the Latin American Club, and Anahuac, reflected the diversity of the Spanish-speaking colonia in Philadelphia during the Second World War. The offices of La Fraternal continued to be located at 419 Pine Street in the heart of Latino Southwark. Yet the president of the

<sup>27</sup> Vázquez-Hernández, "Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia," 230–31.

organization at the time, Santiago Feigor, resided at 5331 Addison Street in West Philadelphia. Anahuac, a group organized under the auspices of the International Institute, was made up of Mexicans. While its headquarters were located at the institute's building in Spring Garden, its president, Pedro Alvarez, lived on Ogontz Avenue in the Oak Lane section of Philadelphia. It is not clear where the offices of the Latin American Club were, if it had any, but this group seems to have been the most diverse. Its membership included Mexicans, Spaniards, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans. In 1941 the president of the Latin American Club was Julio Noval, a clerk who lived at 3301 Spring Garden Street, right across the Schuylkill River from the Spring Garden enclave. By the early 1950s a Puerto Rican, Dr. José DeCelis, was president.<sup>28</sup>

The main speakers on the program at the Queen Festival also reflected the diversity of the colonia. Speakers that night were Professor Octavio Diaz Valenzuela, who lived just a few short blocks away from Ambassador Hall and who taught Spanish at Temple University and served as vice consul for Colombia; and Ms. Irene Zarraga, who won the beauty contest and was the daughter of Tomás and Maria Zarraga, Spaniards who lived on Palmer Street in the Fishtown section of the city. The master of ceremonies was Juan Mulet, who owned a grocery store located on Pine Street in Southwark. The multinational diversity of this gathering indicates that while Latinos lived in several areas of the city, events such as this one could bring them all together.<sup>29</sup>

The International Institute persisted in its support of Spanish-speaking groups throughout the 1930s and 1940s. The Mexican association Anahuac was active long after World War II. When Spanish-speaking groups disbanded, the institute continued to invite former members, like those of the Club Juventud Hispana, to its events. In 1939 the youth of La Milagrosa reorganized the Juventud Hispana. They met until 1942, when some of the most active members married and moved away. The institute also sustained its relationship with more established Spanish-speaking organizations, such as La Fraternal, throughout this period.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *La Prensa*, June 6, 1941, p. 8; *Polk's Philadelphia City Directory*, 1935, 744.

<sup>29</sup> *La Prensa*, p. 8; *Polk's Philadelphia City Directory*, 1935, 171, 1954.

<sup>30</sup> Q. Fereshetian, "Spanish Community, 1951," in box 63, folder 13, Nationalities Services Center Records, 1923–1987, Urban Archives, Temple University, Philadelphia; Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community: A History of Puerto Ricans in New York City, 1917–1948* (Westport, CT, 1983), 18–19; Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, *Sources for the Study of Puerto Rican Migration, 1879–1930* (New York, 1982), 4–5. See also the invitation list of former members of the "Spanish Club" [Club Juventud Hispana], 1942; letter from Isabel Moreno, events secretary of La

The institute's support of cultural pluralism, which allowed immigrant groups to retain their ethnic identities through folklore and other means, helped Puerto Ricans and other Latinos both to assert their national pride and at the same time receive support from the agency in learning the English language and American customs in order to survive in their new environment. As a result, the institute's early work contributed to the organizational and institutional development of Philadelphia's Spanish-speaking enclaves. When Puerto Ricans began arriving in Philadelphia in even greater numbers after World War II, the International Institute, later known as the Nationalities Services Center, became one of the primary agencies which facilitated the new migrants' acclimation to the United States.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to La Milagrosa, La Fraternal, the International Institute, and the First Spanish Baptist Church, a few smaller organizations also played a part in the consolidation of the Spanish-speaking colonia during World War II. One of these was the Misión Evangélica / Fifth Street Community Center at 551–553 North Fifth Street, established by the Reverend Ralph Cardenas. Cardenas, who was originally from Spain, studied ministry in Philadelphia and graduated in 1926. Along with his Puerto Rican wife, Lucrecia, Cardenas ran the church and center. Cardenas was a full-time minister; he also helped his parishioners with their legal problems, find employment, or secure Home Relief.

The Friends Neighborhood Guild (FNG) was another organization that helped Puerto Ricans and other Spanish speakers during and after the Second World War. The guild, a settlement house established in 1890, was located at Fourth and Green streets, in the heart of the Northern Liberties enclave. The FNG provided space for Puerto Ricans to gather and socialize. The guild also provided space for city resources and services, such as the health department, which used guild space to serve the Spanish-speaking population in the area.<sup>32</sup>

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Fraternal to Marion Lantz, International Institute, inviting the agency to an event, Mar. 8, 1945; letter from Clarence Senior to Marion Lantz, Nov. 26, 1946, Spanish Historical Developments, 1940–1957 (selected years), box 63, Nationalities Services Center Records.

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed examination of the role of the International Institute / Nationalities Services Center among Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia in the post-World War II period, see Carmen Teresa Whalen, "Puerto Rican Migration to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1945–1970: A Historical Perspective on a Migrant Group" (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 1994), chap. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Letter from Mrs. Gloria Santiago (Lucrecia Cardenas's niece) to Mrs. Hilda de la Rosa, Dec. 12, 1999, copy in possession of author; "Día de las Madres," flyer of the Misión Evangélica, 1948, "Spanish in Philadelphia," Nationalities Services Center Records; Koss, "Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia," 70; Whalen, "Puerto Rican Migration to Philadelphia," 400.

The religious and social services of La Milagrosa, La Fraternal, the International Institute, the First Spanish Baptist Church, and, to a lesser extent, the Misión Evangélica and Friends Neighborhood Guild, made these institutions bastions of linguistic and cultural affirmation for Puerto Ricans and other Latinos in Philadelphia in the pre–World War II and World War II period. Their efforts also helped residents transform the Spanish-speaking enclaves of Southwark, Spring Garden, and Northern Liberties into an intricate web of cross-neighborhood relationships.

World War II was also a defining period in the evolution of the Puerto Rican community of Philadelphia. Puerto Rican migration to the United States increased dramatically during World War II. Despite limitations in transportation facilities during the war, the number of Puerto Rican migrants increased in each fiscal year between 1941–1942 and 1945–1946. More than fifty thousand Puerto Ricans, 47 percent of all Puerto Ricans who moved to the states since 1908, moved permanently to the United States between 1941 and 1946. Military service accounted for some of the growth, but it was wartime employment, which together with economic hardships on the island, that fueled emigration in this period. During 1943 and 1944, the inclusion of Puerto Ricans in the labor recruitment efforts of the War Manpower Commission brought thousands of island laborers to the Philadelphia region. Invariably a great many of these wartime laborers found their way to the increasingly notable Puerto Rican colonia in the city. Some of the laborers were drawn to the city by the ministerial work of the Reverend Enrique Rodríguez, others by the active and diverse cultural and social organizations.<sup>33</sup>

An influx of migration from New York City also contributed to an expansion of the city's Puerto Rican population. Ties between the Spanish-speaking communities in New York City and Philadelphia dated back at least to the 1920s, when the Spanish-language daily newspaper *La Prensa*, based in New York City, began to carry news about events in the Spanish-speaking colonia of Philadelphia. The connection between these colonias was further cemented by the numerous reports in *La Prensa* during the interwar period. By the early 1950s, *La Prensa* had established a regular column entitled "En Filadelfia," which was written by Philadelphia Puerto Rican community leader Domingo Martínez. Commercially, ships that traveled between New York and the Caribbean made stops in Philadelphia. In addition, Philadelphia and New York were

<sup>33</sup> Clarence O. Senior, *Puerto Rican Emigration* (Río Piedras, PR, 1947), 7.



important stops for ground transportation along the northeast corridor between Boston and Washington, DC. It was relatively easy to travel by rail between Philadelphia and New York. Family ties between New York and Philadelphia were also very important in connecting these cities. Puerto Rican migrants like Mary Rodriguez, Domingo Martinez, and Juan Canales all cited relatives in New York as their first point of contact on the mainland and as one of the reasons for migrating to New York and later to Philadelphia.<sup>34</sup>

Labor shortages in the United States during World War II brought thousands of Puerto Ricans to the area to work on south Jersey farms or at the Campbell Soup factory in Camden. Many migrants found the sociolinguistic and religious ambiance of Philadelphia a welcome relief to the doldrums of barracks-style living on the farm or in the factory. Puerto Rican workers cited plain living quarters, unfamiliar food, and a lack of Spanish-speaking personnel as reasons for leaving their employment and moving to Philadelphia. Some Puerto Ricans returned to the island when their contracts expired but many more were attracted to the *ambiente* in Philadelphia. A few, like Marcelino Benitez, turned their jobs at places like Campbell Soup into careers.<sup>35</sup>

Towards the end of World War II, Puerto Rican-born Samuel Freedman capitalized on the shortage of labor on the farms of New Jersey by establishing a company to recruit workers from the island. His knowledge of Puerto Rico's language and customs, as well as his relationship with the growers in the New Jersey region, made him particularly qualified to promote this endeavor. His role in bringing thousands more Puerto Rican laborers to the Philadelphia region has not been fully studied. His relationship with the Reverend Enrique Rodriguez, though, helped him channel many Puerto Ricans to Rodriguez's church in the immediate postwar years. Freedman's organizing efforts also led to the establishment of a division of the Puerto Rican Migration Office in Glassboro, New Jersey, in the late 1940s. Eventually this office was moved to Philadelphia and became a cornerstone of social services to Puerto Rican migrants and their families.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> See *La Prensa* throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Mary Rodriguez, interview by author, Mar. 7, 1999; Juan Canales interview, Feb. 20, 1999.

<sup>35</sup> Koss, "Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia," 64–65. In his ethnographic study on Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia, Koss found that sixty-five of the original one thousand Puerto Ricans who came to work at the Campbell Soup Company in 1944 were still employed there in 1961.

<sup>36</sup> Koss, "Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia," 66–67.

### *Conclusion*

By the end of World War II Philadelphia's diverse Spanish-speaking enclaves had been transformed. By 1945 the early pan-Latino enclaves had begun to give way to an identifiably Puerto Rican colonia, which grew in population and significance in the postwar years. The small but significant organizational network that sprang up within the Spanish-speaking enclaves of Philadelphia in the late nineteenth century became, by the end of World War II, a rich cultural mosaic representing Puerto Rican and other Spanish-speaking nationality groups in the city. Utilizing a combination of mutual aid, labor, social, and cultural organizations, Philadelphia Puerto Ricans and other Latinos established a colonia. It was this diverse colonia that served as a welcome mat for the large numbers of Puerto Ricans who arrived in Philadelphia during and especially after World War II.

More recently there has been a return to an increasingly diverse Latino population in the city. Does this change mean a return to pan-Latino communities? It is not yet evident. What is clear is that the former enclaves of Southwark, Spring Garden, and Northern Liberties developed a complex web of social, cultural, and religious activity that is poised to give birth to a new community in Philadelphia.

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