

The Evolution of Leadership within the Puerto Rican Community of Philadelphia, 1950s–1970s

IN HIS ARTICLE “From Pan-Latino Enclaves to a Community: Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia, 1910–2000,” Víctor Vázquez-Hernández describes an event in 1953 that signified the first public recognition of Philadelphia’s growing Puerto Rican population—a riot in the Spring Garden section of the city.¹ This incident prompted the city government, through the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations (PCHR), to conduct its first study of Philadelphia’s Puerto Rican community. To facilitate this study, the city turned to prominent individuals within the Puerto Rican community to help lift the veil on this rapidly growing ethnic group. Among them was José DeCelis, perhaps Philadelphia’s most prominent Puerto Rican community organizer during World War II. Trained as a dentist, DeCelis was president of the locally organized Latin America Club, chairman of the Health and Welfare Council’s Committee of Puerto Rican Affairs, and the first Puerto Rican to graduate from Temple University.² Through his participation in the 1954 PCHR study, DeCelis helped mold policy decisions that would affect Philadelphia’s Puerto Rican community in the years to come.

By the end of the 1970s, however, at least one member of this community observed, “There are too many people in the community who want to be chiefs, and not enough Indians.”³ Within a generation,

¹ Víctor Vázquez-Hernández, “From Pan-Latino Enclaves to a Community: Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia, 1910–2000,” in *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Carmen Teresa Whalen and Víctor Vázquez-Hernández (Philadelphia, 2005), 101.

² Víctor Vázquez-Hernández, “Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia: Origins of a Community 1910–1945” (PhD diss., Temple University, 2002).

³ “Phila. Hispanic Group Comes under Fire,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Nov. 26, 1978, Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Newspaper Clipping Collection, Urban Archives, Temple University Libraries, Philadelphia. All *Bulletin* articles cited below can be found in this collection.

Philadelphia's Puerto Rican population transformed from what Vázquez-Hernández describes as a "previously invisible" community to one that was visible but politically fractured. This transformation reflected a process that took place in other marginalized racial groups in American cities: a generational shift from integrationist community leaders who attempted to forge alliances with city government to more radical, culturally nationalist leaders who utilized confrontational tactics to achieve their goals. While this shift in community leadership tactics echoed what happened in other parts of the country, the tactical choices made in Philadelphia were a response to specific local political, economic, and social factors.

Historians and social scientists looking at the development of ethnic communities in the United States often examine the structural problems encountered by these groups, such as housing, education, and issues related to the justice system and economic development. Though important, a focus on these areas alone gives a limited view of a community. The development of the leadership cadre among ethnic groups in urban America is just as important in shaping the fortunes of a given community. This article examines the relationship between leadership strategies and political culture in the Philadelphia Puerto Rican community, tracing continuity and change during the key period of Puerto Rican activism in the 1960s and 1970s. By looking at two distinct generations of Puerto Rican community leaders—an earlier generation that favored a few select brokers to facilitate cooperative contact between the Puerto Rican community and city government, and a later generation of radical grass-root community leaders who were not necessarily embraced by city hall or the established Puerto Rican power brokers—one can more thoroughly understand not only the differences in ideologies and methods, but their effectiveness in achieving their goals.

This article endeavors to elaborate upon the few scholarly studies describing Philadelphia's Puerto Rican community. Carmen Whalen focuses on the issue of labor in *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies* and in her articles. Víctor Vázquez-Hernández examines pre-World War II community development in "The Development of Pan-Latino Philadelphia, 1892–1945" and "From Pan-Latino Enclaves to a Community." Juan González's "The Turbulent Progress of Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia" provides a brief look at the activism of left-leaning Puerto Rican organizations such as the

Young Lords.⁴ While these authors describe Puerto Rican community-based organizations in Philadelphia, a more elaborate discussion of the styles of leadership in the Puerto Rican community is needed, especially for the period of transition in the 1960s and 1970s. Evaluating the evolution of community leadership during this period is critical to understanding the lack of political progress for Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia at the end of the twentieth century. By analyzing the ways in which ethnic communities define their leadership, we can better comprehend how marginalized groups seek to participate more fully in the civic life of urban America.

Bienvenidos a Filadelfia

While the 1950s are generally thought of as years of political and social consensus, Thomas Sugrue points out that this period of American history was a time of great debate over the issues of civil rights for non-whites.⁵ The *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision in 1954 gave African Americans and political liberals cause for celebration and those opposed to integration cause for concern. The Cold War and McCarthyism reflected a distrust of the foreign. Like other cities in the North, Philadelphia was trying to come to grips with its growing non-white population, including Puerto Ricans and African Americans. This climate of political and social intolerance shaped the ways in which civic organizations in Philadelphia engaged these new ethnic and racial populations. The priority for governmental and community-based organizations in Philadelphia was to assimilate such groups into the existing American culture, beginning with their language.

Several push factors led Puerto Ricans to migrate to Philadelphia in the late 1940s and 1950s. Puerto Ricans had established a presence in Philadelphia by the turn of the twentieth century, but the number of

⁴ See Carmen Teresa Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economics* (Philadelphia, 2001); Whalen, "Bridging Homeland and Barrio Politics: The Young Lords in Philadelphia," in *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora*, ed. Andrés Torres and José E. Velázquez (Philadelphia, 1998), 107–23; Vázquez-Hernández, "From Pan-Latino Enclaves to a Community," 88–105; Vázquez, "The Development of Pan-Latino Philadelphia, 1892–1945," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 128 (2004): 367–84; Juan D. González, "The Turbulent Progress of Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia," *Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños Bulletin* 2 (winter 1987/88).

⁵ Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York, 2008), xxi.

Puerto Ricans living in the city steadily increased after the inception of Operation Bootstrap in 1947.⁶ This program was designed to boost the economic prosperity of Puerto Rico by bringing large-scale industrial employment opportunities to the island for the first time. Operation Bootstrap successfully industrialized the island but did not create a sufficient number of jobs to satisfy the demand for employment. The number of industrial jobs on the island increased, but the increase was not proportionate to the loss of jobs in the agricultural sector. This net job loss contributed to massive unemployment. Many Puerto Ricans turned to migration to the United States as an option to increase their chances at prosperity. Because they were US citizens, Puerto Ricans found emigration to the United States easier than most foreign groups.⁷

According to political scientist José E. Cruz, increased migration by Puerto Ricans to Philadelphia and other urban centers in the United States “coincided with the decline of machine politics and the emergence of government bureaucracies and community-based organizations as the leading providers to the poor.”⁸ During the early 1950s, Philadelphia’s municipal government was grappling with the transition from an openly corrupt Republican machine to Joseph S. Clark’s reform Democrat administration. The transition was not a smooth one. As soon as reform Democrats came to power in the city, they had to contend with ward politicians from their own political party who supported the age-old practice of patronage.⁹ Philadelphia was not alone in this regard. Heather Ann Thompson describes how Detroit’s New Deal political coalition was divided along progressive and conservative lines.¹⁰ This fragmentation would affect the ways in which each city government addressed changing racial demographics. In the case of Philadelphia, Puerto Ricans migrating to the city in the early 1950s found themselves in a political climate in which reform Democrats favored a policy of “restrained integrationism.”¹¹

One of the first studies conducted on the Puerto Rican population in Philadelphia was undertaken by the Institute for Research in Human

⁶ Arturo Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico: A Political and Cultural History* (New York, 1983), 269.

⁷ Puerto Ricans were granted US citizenship with the Jones Act of 1917.

⁸ José E. Cruz, “Unfulfilled Promises: Puerto Rican Politics and Poverty,” *Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños Bulletin* 15 (spring 2003): 166.

⁹ Carolyn Adams et al., *Philadelphia: Neighborhood, Division, and Conflict in a Postindustrial City* (Philadelphia, 1991), 126.

¹⁰ Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca, NY, 2001), 13–14.

¹¹ Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 121.

Relations for the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations in 1954. This study came about as a reaction to the riot which broke out in the Spring Garden section of the city and involved seventy-five police officers and three hundred residents of the growing Puerto Rican community.¹² The commission's report indicated that Philadelphia's Puerto Rican population numbered approximately 7,300. For the most part, they had migrated to the city from farms in southern New Jersey.¹³ The report described residential patterns, the average income of Puerto Rican households, the average age of Puerto Rican migrants, and the obstacles that members of this community faced in Philadelphia. Significantly, the report was prompted "at the request of planning and social agencies" within the city and was the first attempt to define the Puerto Rican community in the city.¹⁴ It found that this growing community "rarely used civic agencies for help. When they needed advice, they consult[ed] Spanish-speaking people."¹⁵ The timing of this report was important—it was released about a month after the attack on the House of Representatives by three Puerto Rican nationalists. It was only when the public in cities such as Philadelphia saw the increased number of Puerto Ricans in their own cities as a potential problem that cities attempted to learn more about this new ethnic group.

Two articles about the PCHR report were published on May 23, 1954. Their respective accounts of the Puerto Rican experience in Philadelphia in the immediate post-World War II period would shape not only mainstream views of this new community but also the political climate in which leaders of the Puerto Rican community were created. The *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* titled its coverage "Puerto Ricans Here Consider Philadelphians Unfriendly," and the *New York Times* article was headlined "Puerto Rican Unit Faces 'Prejudice.'" The *New York Times* mentioned that the 1953 riot occurred after a group of Caucasians confronted members of the Puerto Rican community with hostility and violence; the *Bulletin's* article did not. The *Bulletin* made no mention of how Philadelphians were receiving their new neighbors, nor did it com-

¹² "Puerto Rican Unit Faces 'Prejudice,'" *New York Times*, May 23, 1954, Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Newspaper Clipping Collection.

¹³ Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*, 183–88.

¹⁴ "Puerto Ricans Here Consider Philadelphians Unfriendly," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, May 23, 1954.

¹⁵ Arthur I. Siegel, Harold Orlans, and Loyal Greer, *Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia: A Study of Their Demographic Characteristics, Problems and Attitudes* (Philadelphia, 1954), vi.

pare the experience of the Puerto Ricans to other foreign groups that settled in the United States. Neither article attempted to explain that the increasing number of Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia was the result of economic dislocation, nor did either include any information about the cultural heritage of the Puerto Rican community. In downplaying the significance of racial and ethnic prejudice against Puerto Ricans, the *Bulletin* sent a signal to this growing community that its needs were unimportant to most Philadelphians.

As general awareness of the Puerto Rican community and its particular issues increased in the days after the Spring Garden riot, Philadelphia's civic institutions began an effort to more formally incorporate the burgeoning Puerto Rican population into the city's civic order. Mayor Richard Dilworth, a reform Democrat, continued many of the public housing initiatives of his predecessor, Joseph Clark. Dilworth's administration even approved a budget to hire two bilingual field agents to go into the Puerto Rican community and break down the social and linguistic barriers that separated this new ethnic community from the rest of Philadelphia.¹⁶ The Department of Licenses and Inspections began preparing pamphlets in Spanish "in an effort to orient Puerto Rican families to life in Philadelphia."¹⁷ City hall's response to the rapidly expanding Puerto Rican population was to overcome language as an obstacle to bringing this community into the fold.

Such nongovernmental groups as faith- and community-based organizations also participated in the effort to incorporate the growing Puerto Rican population into the larger American culture. The Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia began Casa del Carmen in 1954 to assist Puerto Ricans in their transition to the United States. By 1958, under the direction of Rev. Frederic Hickey, Casa del Carmen was able to offer a chapel, social facilities, and a medical clinic.¹⁸ High school students from Girl's High with a working knowledge of Spanish were asked by their principal to volunteer at Waring Elementary, a school in the Spring

¹⁶ "Mayor Proposes Hiring 2 To Help Puerto Ricans Here," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Aug. 17, 1958. In this particular article, Dr. Henry Wells, an associate professor of political science at the University of Pennsylvania, stated that the major obstacles for the field workers would be breaking down the language barrier and overcoming the natural inclination of Puerto Ricans to remain in their own community. He also noted that while the Puerto Ricans posed no problem at the current time, failure to integrate them into the community could create a problem in the future.

¹⁷ "City Housing Code Issued in Spanish," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Aug. 26, 1958.

¹⁸ "Groups Help Puerto Ricans to Life in Philadelphia Area," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Mar. 16, 1958.

Garden section of the city, in order to help these new Puerto Rican students learn English faster. This assistance was considered invaluable since, by 1958, 45 percent of the school's population was Puerto Rican and only three of the teachers knew Spanish.¹⁹

By 1958, the number of Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia had risen to twenty thousand. Elements within Philadelphia's mainstream society sought to assist and incorporate the growing number of Puerto Rican migrants, fearing this new population would become a serious problem. PCHR report author Arthur Siegel noted that whites living near Puerto Ricans in Spring Garden found their language different and strange: "Difference, to almost all of the respondents meant some unfavorable characteristic."²⁰ As political scientist Maurilio E. Vigil observed, "the call for ethnic Americans to forget their ethnic or cultural origin as a way of becoming 'American' has been clear and consistent."²¹ Language would be the first bridge of many that Puerto Ricans would have to cross in order to assimilate into the political and social fabric of Philadelphia.

Puerto Ricans Try to Solve Their Own Problems

While issues revolving around civil rights were being addressed on a national level during the 1960s with such milestones as the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, many of the key problems of the Puerto Rican community (such as discrimination, underemployment, poor housing, and police brutality) persisted. Individual community members who held positions with some degree of social clout (e.g., social workers, community organizers, heads of local organizations) were solicited for their opinions by city hall and the media. This group became the de facto leaders of this growing population. Unlike the cultural nationalists who dominated public attention in the mid-to-late 1960s, this generation of Puerto Rican leaders viewed culture as an obstacle to integration but also recognized its importance within their community. Their solution to the civil rights issues that Puerto Ricans faced was to work collaboratively with civic institutions so that both Puerto Ricans and their neighbors could live together harmoniously.

¹⁹ "High School Girls Teaching Puerto Rican Pupils English," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Feb. 2, 1958.

²⁰ Siegel, Orlans, and Greer, *Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia*, 53

²¹ Maurilio E. Vigil, *Hispanics in American Politics: The Search for Political Power* (Lanham, MD, 1987), 11.

James Tate, who served as the mayor of Philadelphia from 1962 to 1972, was a more old-style patronage politician than his reform-minded predecessors. The political fragmentation within the city's Democratic Party that began when it finally gained power in the 1950s did not abate during Tate's administration. Tate not only had to deal with internal party conflict (he had to battle with others in his party to secure the Democratic nomination) but with conflict on the streets of the city as well.²² Like other northern cities during the 1960s, Philadelphia experienced a debilitating race riot. The rise of militancy in the black community was becoming both a local and national concern. Thomas Sugrue has noted that the Department of Justice recorded 1,412 separate civil rights demonstrations throughout the country in 1963 alone.²³ President Lyndon B. Johnson responded to civic unrest and vast economic disparities in American society with the War on Poverty program. With federal funds streaming into Philadelphia to support antipoverty initiatives, Tate was able to use patronage to secure support from prominent individuals representing disenfranchised communities. It was in this context that emerging leaders in Philadelphia's Puerto Rican community collaborated with city hall.

While those outside of Philadelphia's Puerto Rican community were making efforts to understand and assimilate this new ethnic presence, Puerto Ricans were trying to cope with their new lives in their own ways. The Puerto Rican Civic Association was one of the first organizations created within the Puerto Rican community. Jose A. Fuentes, who founded the group and served as its president, performed a number of services within the community: tourist agent, public notary, wholesale grocer, president of a Puerto Rican merchants association, and correspondent for the island's largest newspaper, *El Imparcial*.²⁴ Fuentes felt that at the heart of the lack of understanding between Philadelphians and the recently arriving Puerto Ricans were the many problems his community faced despite the efforts of the reform-minded city government and community-based organizations that sought to incorporate the newly arriving Puerto Ricans into the fabric of American society.

Located at 631 Jefferson Street, the Puerto Rican Civic Association sponsored a school that provided English instruction and served as a

²² Adams et al., *Philadelphia*, 126.

²³ Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 302.

²⁴ "Language Worst Bar, Sports Biggest Help in Assimilating Puerto Ricans Here," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Mar. 22, 1959.

meeting place between Philadelphia's civic institutions and the community. This organization received funds from both the city and the state to support its activities. Fuentes hoped that Puerto Ricans would become better acquainted with the customs of American society and, in turn, that institutions such as the Philadelphia police department would learn more about Puerto Rican culture. One of the specific issues that Fuentes hoped to address was police harassment of Puerto Ricans. Fuentes described the Puerto Rican community as poor but happy-go-lucky. He felt that Puerto Ricans' habit of congregating outside their homes to socialize was misinterpreted by law enforcement: "the police think these are gangs and they know that gangs brew trouble—so they break them up."²⁵ Fuentes believed that conflict could be avoided by educating both Puerto Ricans and non-Puerto Ricans about each other's culture. This tactic was a far cry from the more militant civil rights demonstrations that were being covered in the media.

The efforts of individuals such as Fuentes to assist his community were important, but it became clear that culture was an obstacle that was not as easily overcome. An article from the *Bulletin*, titled "Puerto Rican Population Increases to 20,000 Here," stated that many Philadelphians found Puerto Ricans socially unacceptable because of their language difficulties and cultural background. Fuentes, however, insisted that the Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia were determined to maintain their culture and language.²⁶ The media coverage the Puerto Rican community received during the late 1950s and early 1960s was conceptualized in light of earlier media reports in which Puerto Ricans characterized people in Philadelphia as unfriendly. Indeed, in an earlier *Bulletin* article, Henry Darling wrote that "the stumbling block to complete harmony at this point is that Fuentes and many other Puerto Ricans do not want to integrate with their immediate neighbors."²⁷ Darling confused the desire to retain one's culture with hostility and maintained the belief that Puerto Ricans did not like whites. The negative portrayal of Puerto Ricans in the local media would serve as a message to future leaders of the Puerto Rican

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.; "Puerto Rican Population Increases to 20,000 Here," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, June 1, 1959. The June 1 article stated that Puerto Ricans must sacrifice their culture in order to become proper members of Philadelphia's social, political, and economic order. Fuentes disputed this point. In the March 22 article he stated, "We want to keep our own customs and traditions."

²⁷ "Language Worst Bar, Sports Biggest Help in Assimilating Puerto Ricans Here," Mar. 22, 1959.

community that the image of this growing community was shaped by its perceived failure to assimilate.

In the early 1960s, Puerto Ricans were viewed as a potential voting bloc by agencies such as the Puerto Rican Department of Labor and the Puerto Rican Voter's Association. Individuals within these agencies publicly encouraged members of their community to vote as they continued to develop community-based organizations to serve their growing needs.²⁸ While some register-to-vote campaigns were nonpartisan, others clearly sought the political allegiance of Philadelphia's Puerto Rican community. Hilda Arteaga, leader of the Puerto Rican Voter's Association and a Democratic Party committee member, was heavily involved during the early 1960s in registering Puerto Ricans to vote and securing their loyalty to the Democratic Party. Arteaga and others in the Democratic Party acknowledged that Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia were very aware of politics, were active in elections both in Puerto Rico and the United States, and were not easily influenced with respect to their vote. According to Arteaga and other Democratic committee members, the influx of Puerto Ricans helped to turn the tide in local elections and helped elect James W. Greenlee to the state legislature over a Republican candidate (the vote was 3,600 to 2,547). In addition, Francis Muldowney won his election in 1960 to the state legislature taking 69.2 percent of the 14,341 votes cast in his district.²⁹ Despite the problems of language and cultural discrimination, Puerto Ricans living in Philadelphia in the early 1960s took a more active role in civic life by voting and forming alliances with those inside the Democratic political machine. The prospect of a vibrant ethnic community wielding electoral power would spark city hall's interest in identifying individuals in the Puerto Rican community with whom it could collaborate.

The endeavor to participate as equals in Philadelphia's civic life was inspired by a sense of civic duty and the desire to combat growing social problems within the Puerto Rican community, such as substandard housing. In 1962, housing the rapidly growing Puerto Rican population was proving difficult. Emma Franceschi, a Puerto Rican community organizer for the Philadelphia Health and Welfare Council (PHWC), stated,

²⁸ "Look for Five New Voters, Each Puerto Rican Is Told," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Aug. 4, 1960, and "Puerto Ricans Hold a Fiesta to Push Voter Registration," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Aug. 28, 1963.

²⁹ "Spanish Frank Keeps Tabs on 15th Ward Puerto Ricans," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Sept. 4, 1961.

“Many of the homes and apartments in this area [Spring Garden] are in poor condition and the tenants [are] paying high rents.” Franceschi came to Philadelphia to work with the Friends Neighborhood Guild after being employed as a social worker in New York and Chicago. Her education (she earned degrees from both the University of Puerto Rico and the University of Pittsburgh) and her previous work allowed her to step into the PHWC in order to foster leadership in Philadelphia’s Puerto Rican community. According to Franceschi, many of the landlords who owned property in the Spring Garden area wanted more responsible tenants who would take care of their investments. She sought out other Puerto Ricans who could be groomed as leaders to “help their neighbors develop a sense of responsibility and impress upon them the need to work together.”³⁰ Franceschi’s approach to solving the issue of urban blight in Philadelphia’s Puerto Rican neighborhoods was to teach community members to be responsible.

Though praiseworthy, this approach would have no effect on institutionalized disinvestment in neighborhoods experiencing rapidly changing racial demographics. As a Temple University study reported, “Although exact data from this period are not available, the absence of home mortgage loans in large sections of the city, especially in black and working-class communities, made it appear that bankers had adopted a conscious policy of pulling money out of the city.”³¹ Like African Americans migrating to Philadelphia, Puerto Ricans were moving into neighborhoods where housing opportunities were limited and available houses were in poor condition. Many were willing to pay high rents for housing in poor shape because housing opportunities were inadequate. Contrary to Franceschi’s assertions, personal accountability did not change the practice of racial and ethnic redlining of neighborhoods.

In a five-part special report for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Stephen Sansweet revealed that people within Philadelphia’s Puerto Rican community were becoming impatient and frustrated with conditions in the city.³² The first PCHR report on the Puerto Rican community made it public knowledge that these problems had existed for some time and yet continued to be ignored by many in city hall. While the local government

³⁰ “Blight Foe Uses 2-Pronged Attack,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Nov. 5, 1962.

³¹ Adams et al., *Philadelphia*, 82.

³² “Big Gap Exists in Understanding with Fellow Americans,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 2, 1968, Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Newspaper Clipping Collection.

made token efforts to understand and incorporate this new ethnic presence, it was apparent that the needs of Philadelphia's Puerto Ricans were not deemed important enough to address. The challenge for Philadelphia's Puerto Rican leaders would be to address these issues and come to some level of understanding with the larger Philadelphia community.

Pascual Martinez moved to the United States in 1932 and became a member of the Democratic City Committee, serving as the chairman of its Spanish-speaking unit. He had close connections with city hall. Martinez sought to create an electoral bloc by registering at least twenty thousand Puerto Ricans. He hoped to legitimize and empower Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia by helping them flex their electoral muscles. While he acknowledged that his community faced discrimination, he urged reconciliation, recommending that members of his community meet with the PCHR. Described by his contemporaries as an asset to the Puerto Rican community, Martinez believed that any grievance could be handled by the mayor's office and the PCHR and frowned upon the kinds of civil rights demonstrations cropping up around the country, particularly in the American South.³³

Another individual named by the *Philadelphia Inquirer* as an outspoken "patron" of the Puerto Rican community was Moises Gonzalez, head of the Council of Spanish Speaking Organizations (Concilio), a conglomerate of smaller Puerto Rican groups and social clubs founded in 1962. Gonzalez sought to empower Puerto Ricans to solve their own problems. "We can do a lot for ourselves," he declared. "The politicians are only after the vote, and until they show more interest in the Puerto Rican community, I don't want anything to do with them."³⁴ While this rhetoric might seem antiestablishment, Gonzalez was not a political radical. As first president of Concilio, Gonzalez helped to establish the mission of this new umbrella organization. Concilio initiated programs in four areas: police/community relations, employment, housing, and social services. While Gonzalez differed from Martinez in rhetorical style, both men were members of a wave of community leaders who tried to work from within the system to help alleviate the social and economic obstacles that impacted the Puerto Rican population in Philadelphia.

³³ Carlos Morales, interview with author, 2002.

³⁴ "Patrons Seek Improved Conditions for Puerto Ricans," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 11, 1968, Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Newspaper Clipping Collection.

The hostility and misunderstanding that existed between racial and ethnic groups in the United States came to the forefront when racial tensions boiled over in the late 1960s with the assassination of Martin Luther King and the urban riots in Los Angeles and Detroit. In Philadelphia, emerging leaders such as Carlos Morales worked in the face of this kind of hostility to improve perceptions of the Puerto Rican community. Morales, a government accountant, became president of Concilio in 1968. In an attempt to gain access to federal funds under the War on Poverty program, he labored for a year to win federal approval for "Project Welcome," a program designed to "set up training classes in consumer education and develop leadership in el barrio."³⁵ Along with Gonzalez, Morales organized the Puerto Rican Day Parade in the early 1960s to present the positive aspects of Puerto Rican culture to the rest of Philadelphia. Today, Morales reflects on the level of police brutality and violations of civil rights as evidence that the Puerto Rican community in Philadelphia suffered from a poor reputation in the city: "During the 1960s our community was a victim of discriminatory practices by various city agencies. . . . Police brutality was the norm."³⁶

The issue of culture became highly politicized within the leadership of the Puerto Rican community by the late 1960s. In 1968, Pascual Martinez became the director of the Mayor's Office of Information and Complaints. While in this position, he pressed his fellow Puerto Ricans to adopt more "American" cultural practices. "We must assimilate and let people know we are Americans," he declared. Twenty-eight-year-old German Quiles, who won the Democratic nomination for state representative from the 180th House Legislative District earlier that year, challenged Mayor Tate's appointment of Martinez to the board of the Philadelphia Anti-Poverty Committee. "Martinez personally works for you and is not representative of our people," he charged. In Quiles's view, Martinez's affiliation with Mayor Tate compromised his political currency and cultural authenticity.³⁷

While minor skirmishes were occurring between Puerto Rican leaders vying for power, community leaders agreed on the need to show Philadelphians that their growing numbers would not threaten the polit-

³⁵ "Majority Seeks to Solve Own Problems, But Lacks Leadership," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 5, 1968, Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Newspaper Clipping Collection.

³⁶ Carlos Morales, interview with author, 2002.

³⁷ "Bickering of Leaders Hurts Effort to Raise Status of Community," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 6, 1968, Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Newspaper Clipping Collection.

ical, social, and economic fabric of the city. By 1968, the Puerto Rican population in Philadelphia was estimated at 45,000, up from just 7,500 in 1954.³⁸ Quiles reassured, "We don't want to move into white neighborhoods. We just want to stay by ourselves and get what is coming to us."³⁹ Despite his reassurance, however, Puerto Ricans were moving into neighborhoods that were already occupied by whites and African Americans.

Puerto Ricans discovered just how difficult it was to become elected officials. Candelario Lamboy, a twenty-eight-year-old entrepreneur, ran for the state senate in the First Senate District but failed to win the seat. As journalist Stephen Sansweet reported in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, "There are fewer than 9500 Puerto Ricans registered to vote . . . only about half bother to come out on election day." Pascual Martinez explained, "We don't have politics in the Puerto Rican community because people think it's corrupt."⁴⁰ This political apathy was a major reason why Lamboy, a self-identified leader of the Puerto Ricans and member of Concilio, failed to win in a district that was heavily populated by his own people. Lamboy never ran for office again.

The gulf between Puerto Rican professionals and unskilled laborers also hampered the effort to produce political unification among Puerto Ricans. As Braulio Lopez explained, "Too many white Puerto Ricans, when they make it, try to disassociate themselves from the community."⁴¹ The failure of more affluent and successful Puerto Ricans to engage with the more disenfranchised members of their own community revealed a certain degree of social apathy within the leadership itself. Dr. Carmen S. Garcia of the Nationalities Service Center acknowledged in a 1968 *Bulletin* article, "We professionals (including a fairly sizable group of Puerto Rican doctors) have a responsibility, but are not assuming our role in the community."⁴² Rafael Villafañe, then director of Aspira of

³⁸ Siegel, Orlans, and Greer, *Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia*, and "Drive Started to Develop Puerto Rican Leaders Here," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Nov. 21, 1968.

³⁹ "Bickering of Leaders Hurts Effort to Raise Status of Community," June 6, 1968.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Clara E. Rodríguez, "Puerto Ricans: Between Black and White," in *Historical Perspectives on Puerto Rican Survival in the United States*, ed. Clara E. Rodríguez and Virginia Sánchez Korrol (Princeton, NJ, 1996), 26. It is important to note here that the reference to whiteness is not a comment on skin color, since Puerto Ricans are a racially mixed ethnicity, but to cultural association with mainstream American society and socioeconomic achievement.

⁴² "Bickering of Leaders Hurts Effort to Raise Status of Community," June 6, 1968.

Pennsylvania, lamented that “the lack of effective Puerto Rican leadership here has been a definitive handicap in curing the community’s economic and social ills.”⁴³ This lack of cohesion among Philadelphia’s Puerto Rican elite created a vacuum that Puerto Ricans born and raised within the city would have to fill, but their methods would come into conflict with the older generation’s *modus operandi*.

Discontent and internal strife among Philadelphia’s Puerto Rican leaders began to receive publicity in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Headlines such as “Majority Seeks to Solve Own Problems, But Lacks Leadership” and “Bickering of Leadership Hurts Efforts to Raise Status of Community” began appearing in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 1968. Maria Bonet of the Puerto Rican Fraternity organized a protest march from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* building to city hall to demand more representation in city government and to object to comments made by Maria Mendoza, a social worker with the Philadelphia Anti-Poverty Committee who stated in a five-part series in the *Inquirer* that some Puerto Rican families in Philadelphia were so poor that they ate dog food.⁴⁴ The irony of this protest against Mendoza was that she tried to call attention to the plight of the Puerto Rican community by using a dire example of poverty. Bonet felt that Mendoza had impugned the dignity of the Puerto Rican community. The protest was tempered by a petition to Mayor Tate to remove Mendoza from office and expand municipal employment opportunities for other Puerto Ricans. This march not only reaffirmed the older Puerto Rican leadership’s commitment to the existing power structure in Philadelphia but highlighted the contested nature of political culture among Puerto Ricans in the city as well.

The older generation of Puerto Rican leaders began to seem inept and out of touch with the political, economic, and social realities of the situation in Philadelphia. In 1970, former state representative German Quiles pushed for a resolution in the city council to have Puerto Ricans officially labeled as “brown people.”⁴⁵ Quiles argued, “We find it hard to find jobs because we have no classification. If we are termed brown people, we’ll have equal opportunities.” Implementation of the Philadelphia Plan in late 1969 by the Nixon administration enhanced existing affirmative action legislation for programs and organizations that received federal

⁴³ “Drive Started to Develop Puerto Rican Leaders Here,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Nov. 21, 1969.

⁴⁴ “Puerto Ricans Picket Inquirer, City Hall,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, July 2, 1968.

⁴⁵ “Puerto Ricans Drive for ‘Brown People’ Label,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Dec. 27, 1970.

funds.⁴⁶ While Quiles may have felt, because of the racial dynamics of American society, that this plan warranted a new classification for Puerto Ricans, he failed to consider how the shift in Philadelphia's economy away from an industrial base was hurting his community.⁴⁷ And even if such a classification had been successful, it would not have changed the perception that whites had about the Puerto Rican community. Pointless political maneuvers such as this would contribute to the younger generation of Puerto Ricans' discontent with its own leadership.

Although such leaders as German Quiles, Jose Fuentes, Hilda Arteaga, Emma Franceschi, Pascual Martinez, Moises Gonzalez, Carlos Morales, and others were dissatisfied with the situation that most Puerto Ricans faced in the city, they were primarily concerned with bringing attention to the needs of their community in the hope that these issues would be addressed by the city. Their primary method of raising public awareness was communication with municipal agencies such as the PCHR and with the local media, as well as community development efforts such as voter registration drives and community education seminars. To ease growing racial tensions, the leaders of this generation felt that Puerto Ricans had to adopt more American practices and that non-Puerto Ricans needed to learn about Puerto Rican culture. They maintained these beliefs even as racial tensions around the nation were growing in many northern cities. Leadership within the community, however, was becoming increasingly complicated because of the growing number of individuals who spoke out on behalf of Puerto Ricans.

Rise of the Rebels

The change from integrationist attitudes toward cultural nationalism in the broader civil rights movement discouraged many whites from actively supporting expanded civil rights for racial and ethnic minorities. Nixon's "silent majority" emerged as many whites reacted to the race riots that occurred in several of the nation's cities. It was in this environment that a younger generation of Puerto Ricans, many of whom were born and raised in the United States, grew into political consciousness. This

⁴⁶ Jean V. Hardisty, "Affirming Racial Inequality: The Right's Attack on Affirmative Action," in *Mobilizing Resentment: Conservative Resurgence from the John Birch Society to the Promise Keepers*, ed. Jean V. Hardisty (Boston, 1999), online at http://www.jeanhardisty.com/essay_affirmingracialinequality.html.

⁴⁷ Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*, 206.

generation of emerging activists and radicals were profoundly influenced not only by the polarized civil rights movement in the United States but by the movement for independence in Puerto Rico. They saw no conflict in advocating on behalf of stateside Puerto Ricans as well as those on the island. The decade of the 1970s would alter the way in which Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia interacted with symbols of authority. Up until this point, Puerto Rican leaders were content to form alliances with city officials in an effort to bring more resources to the Puerto Rican community. Like their predecessors, these emerging leaders did not always work together to address the issues that concerned them, and they did not employ "radical" tactics. They were united, however, by a sense of distrust and contempt for the established Puerto Rican leadership and its connection to city hall.

These younger leaders were also united by a common political climate and nemesis. Tapped by Mayor Tate to be his successor, Frank Rizzo served as mayor of Philadelphia from 1972 to 1980. Like Tate, Rizzo was a patronage politician. Tate and Rizzo wanted to keep working-class whites still living in Philadelphia aligned with the Democratic Party rather than see those voters support the Republican machine.⁴⁸ Unlike many others in the local Democratic machine, Rizzo came out in strong support of Richard Nixon during his bid for reelection in 1972. According to Nixon, Rizzo was an exemplar of the silent majority. During his time as police commissioner in the 1960s, Rizzo saw that American cities were being divided by racial politics, and he was determined to use his power to stifle the efforts of groups such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). He utilized his power as mayor in similar ways.⁴⁹

In 1970, a local branch of the Young Lords Party (YLP) was created in Philadelphia. The Young Lords began in the late 1950s as a street gang in Chicago that became politically radicalized after an encounter with Fred Hampton, the leader of the Chicago Black Panther Party.⁵⁰ After reading about the Black Panther's collaboration with other street-level groups, such as the Young Lords in Chicago, a small group of college students with Sociedad de Albizu Campos (named after the leader of Puerto

⁴⁸ Adams et al., *Philadelphia*, 127.

⁴⁹ S. A. Paolantonio, *Rizzo: The Last Big Man in Big City America* (Philadelphia, 1993), 84–85, 135, 147.

⁵⁰ Iris Morales, "¡Palante, Siempre Palante!" in Torres and Velázquez, *Puerto Rican Movement*, 212.

Rico's Nationalist Party) created a branch of the YLP in New York City. After the takeover of a Methodist church in Manhattan in 1970, the Young Lords gained some notoriety among young Puerto Ricans in other parts of the United States.⁵¹ The Philadelphia branch started when Juan Ramos and Wilfredo "Hawkeye" Rojas formed a group called the Young Revolutionaries for Independence. After the church takeover in New York, Ramos and Rojas formally affiliated with the New York branch of the YLP.⁵² Rather than seek alliances with municipal institutions, the Young Lords of Philadelphia, in words if not always in action, challenged city hall and the leaders of the city's Puerto Rican community.

The political consciousness of the Philadelphia branch of the Young Lords was affected locally by their experience in the church and their participation in community-based groups such as *Aspira*, and also by such larger movements as Black Nationalism in the United States, the legacy of Puerto Rican nationalism of Pedro Albizu Campos, and, to a lesser degree, the Cuban Revolution and the Chinese Cultural Revolution.⁵³ Using rhetoric similar to the Black Panthers and the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico, the Young Lords supported armed self-determination for Puerto Ricans in the United States and on the island. Although the Young Lords admitted that they did not possess an arsenal, their militancy did not endear them to the generation of Puerto Ricans who had migrated here and struggled to find acceptance from Philadelphia's mainstream society.

Beyond radical left-wing rhetoric, the Young Lords actively engaged in developing a free breakfast program for Puerto Rican youth that combined practical social service with political education. Members of the Young Lords such as Ramos and Rojas educated themselves and others in Puerto Rican and Latin American history, organized local youths in high schools to distribute copies of the YLP newsletter, *Palante*, and addressed problems such as drug abuse in their community.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Pablo Guzmán, "La Vida Pura: A Lord of the Barrio," in Torres and Velázquez, *Puerto Rican Movement*, 156.

⁵² Whalen, "Bridging Homeland and Barrio Politics," 112.

⁵³ Roberto P. Rodríguez-Morazzani, "Political Cultures of the Puerto Rican Left in the United States," in Torres and Velázquez, *Puerto Rican Movement*, 33–40.

⁵⁴ Michael Kimmel, "¡You've Come a Long Way, Bebé!" *Philadelphia Magazine*, Oct. 1971, 91; "Young Lords Blamed for Unrest," "Unarmed Young Lords Seek to Boost Image of Puerto Ricans Here," and "Young Lords Declare War on Dope Pushers," all *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Aug. 13, 1970, Oct. 5, 1970, and Aug. 13, 1970.

Despite the fact that the Philadelphia branch of the Young Lords sought (according to Peter Binzen of the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*) to boost the image of Puerto Ricans in the city, they often came under attack from forces inside and outside of their community. Rojas was extremely vocal in his belief that the Philadelphia Police Department was attempting to shut down the Young Lords. "I've seen too many pigs cruising by here. . . . I know they're gonna pull something," he warned.⁵⁵ This suspicion of the local authorities was caused by the attention the Young Lords received from the police because of a disturbance in 1970 around Fourth and Berks Streets when a local establishment, Pete's Bar, was fire-bombed after a Puerto Rican patron was ejected and beaten by white patrons of the bar.⁵⁶ In addition, the Young Lords, with the Black Panthers, were involved in a federal lawsuit against the Philadelphia Police Department for excessive police brutality against their respective communities.⁵⁷ Ramos identified Councilman Harry P. Jannotti of the Seventh Council District as one of the sources of the police harassment against the Young Lords. When asked about the targeting of the YLP, Jannotti stated, "We haven't harassed them at all. But we're going to go after them."⁵⁸ The Philadelphia Young Lords also contended with opposition from within the Puerto Rican community.

The local branch of the Young Lords consisted predominantly of young Puerto Ricans born and raised within the confines of Philadelphia. Most of those who identified themselves as Young Lords were between the ages of seventeen and nineteen and met either in Catholic school or in programs run by *Aspira*.⁵⁹ These younger members of the Puerto Rican community and the older leadership in the 1970s differed in their expression of their cultural identity and political ideology. Ideologically, the Young Lords supported socialism and the national liberation of Puerto Rico. These positions clashed with the ideas of established leaders in the Puerto Rican community such as Maria Lina Bonet of the Puerto Rican Fraternity. "[A]nd those posters! I don't mind the Puerto Rican patriots," Bonet said, "but no one's putting Castro and Guevara on those

⁵⁵ Kimmel, "You've Come a Long Way, Bebé!" 88.

⁵⁶ "Young Lords Blamed for Unrest," Aug. 13, 1970.

⁵⁷ "Unarmed Young Lords Seek to Boost Image of Puerto Ricans Here," Oct. 5, 1970.

⁵⁸ "Young Lords Blamed for Unrest," Aug. 13, 1970.

⁵⁹ "Unarmed Young Lords Seek to Boost Image of Puerto Ricans Here," Oct. 5, 1970.

walls If the Lords ever really hurt this community, that's the day I'll go after them."⁶⁰

The Young Lords represented a generational break from the ways in which the older Puerto Rican leadership engaged the municipal authority of Philadelphia. Their radical image and antiestablishment rhetoric put them at odds with city administration and those allied with it. According to political scientist José E. Cruz, writing about New York City, "Never before . . . had the suspicion of political elites and the rejection of political hierarchies been stronger than during this period of normative dissent. Emerging Puerto Rican leaders were not only shaped by this *zeitgeist* but, in addition, saw themselves as distinct and even alienated from the more traditional leadership within the community."⁶¹ Community-based organizations such as *Aspira* and *Concilio* were seen as too closely aligned with people like Frank Rizzo. Angel Ortiz, a lawyer with Community Legal Services and member of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP), stated "[*Aspira* and *Concilio*] . . . were very much pro-Frank Rizzo at this point. They were beholden, he gave them a few anti-poverty grants and so on."⁶² The differences between the younger, emerging leaders and the older, established leaders in the Puerto Rican community reflected the ways in which Puerto Rican culture was being expressed in community politics in Philadelphia.

For many years, the objective of the established Puerto Rican leadership was to find acceptance by mitigating the cultural differences between Puerto Ricans and other Philadelphians. In stark contrast, the Young Lords utilized culture as a vehicle to galvanize their community against any threat. Father Craven, a Catholic priest who worked with Casa del Carmen, was one of a number of community members who supported the Young Lords and observed the differences in how generations of Puerto Ricans employed culture as a means of political mobilization. According to Craven, "Many older Puerto Ricans are distressingly docile . . . the Young Lords are trying to change that. They are eager to be proud of their

⁶⁰ Kimmel, "You've Come a Long Way, Bebé!" 168; Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*, 235.

⁶¹ José E. Cruz, "The Changing Socioeconomic and Political Fortunes of Puerto Ricans in New York City, 1960–1990," in *Boricuas in Gotham: Puerto Ricans in the Making of Modern New York City*, ed. Gabriel Haslip-Viera, Angelo Falcón, and Félix Matos Rodríguez (Princeton, NJ, 2005), 42. While Cruz focuses on a different city and a slightly earlier period, the experience of the younger generations of Puerto Rican leaders with the older generation is similar enough in both New York and Philadelphia to warrant comparison.

⁶² Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*, 236.

heritage and they are extremely articulate in contrast to their parents.” Mary Rouse of the Kensington Council on Black Affairs remarked, “Among Puerto Ricans, the old heads want to be white. Many of the younger Puerto Ricans, on the other hand, are proud of their [cultural] heritage.”⁶³ While some of the Young Lords had participated in such organizations as *Aspira* in their youth, simply learning about their cultural heritage was not enough.⁶⁴ The emerging leaders in the Puerto Rican community sought to carve out their own path rather than follow the model established by an older, more conciliatory generation of community leaders.

Other groups of Puerto Ricans were also battling for equal representation in grass-roots organizations that served their community. In 1971, Rafaela Colon, a supporter of the Young Lords, was one of five women who helped create a coalition of Puerto Rican organizations designed to put pressure on the Lighthouse to have “a voice in all phases of the Kensington agency.” The Lighthouse, a settlement house established in the Kensington section of Philadelphia that managed a number of different community programs, would eventually concede to these demands and expand its board of directors from twelve to sixteen “in order to provide a fair representation of the community.”⁶⁵ The political culture of the Puerto Rican community went through a metamorphosis in the early 1970s. While the old guard of Puerto Rican leaders was content to work quietly from within the system, this new generation of leaders was not content to simply wait for change to come but sought to be the catalyst for social change.

Other Puerto Ricans stood apart from both the old leadership and the younger generation of radicals and expressed their own brand of left-wing views about politics. Nelson Diaz, a graduate of Temple University’s law school who later became a member of its board of trustees, had a regular bilingual column in the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* in the early 1970s,

⁶³ Kimmel, “¡You’ve Come a Long Way, Bebé!” 93, 179.

⁶⁴ “Drive Started to Develop Puerto Rican Leaders Here,” Nov. 21, 1969. The article noted, “Besides counseling students and making contacts with colleges and universities, the clubs teach Puerto Rican history in an attempt to stimulate the students’ pride in themselves.”

⁶⁵ Colon is identified as a supporter of the Young Lords in Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*, 232. See also “Puerto Ricans to Demand Full Voice at Lighthouse,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, June 20, 1971; Nikki A. Greene, “Let the Lower Lights Be Burning: The History of The Lighthouse, 1893–2003” (unpublished paper, 2002), in collections of the Lighthouse. Point six of the YLP Program stated: “We want community control of our institutions and land.” Quoted in Kimmel, “¡You’ve Come a Long Way, Bebé!” 92.

through which he was able to share his views concerning the status of Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia. Unlike the Young Lords, Diaz favored the tactic of working from within the system to affect change. In this way, Diaz was more akin to the first generation of Puerto Rican leaders.

The issue of equal access to the voting booth for Puerto Ricans living in Philadelphia as the community grew in number and potential political power was particularly important to Diaz. In 1973 he wrote in his *Bulletin* column “¡Ahora! ¡Ahora!”: “Puerto Ricans . . . frequently cannot vote because ballots are in English only. . . . Puerto Ricans are granted citizenship by law, but its privileges are often denied.”⁶⁶ While earlier media articles had touched upon this subject, Diaz’s column provided a perspective from within the Puerto Rican community, but not aligned with its established leadership. Awareness of the potential power Puerto Ricans could wield at the polls inspired Peggy Arroyo and Petra Gonzales to file a class action suit against the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, claiming monolingual elections were an infringement of their civil rights. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 and its 1970 amendment supported their claim that Puerto Ricans were entitled to vote even though some had difficulty with the English language. In March 1974, the US District Court ordered that all districts where the population was more than 5 percent Spanish-speaking have all election materials available in both English and Spanish.⁶⁷ Opinion on Diaz was divided; while some such as Oscar Rosario expressed respect for Diaz, others distrusted him. “Diaz is seen as either a one-of-a-kind community resource or a shameless opportunist, depending on whom you talk to,” noted Rosario.⁶⁸ While Diaz could not be solely credited for this victory in the judiciary, mounting pressure from vocal young Puerto Ricans was beginning to have a significant impact on the dynamics of political culture within Philadelphia’s Puerto Rican community.

By 1975 the Young Lords had collapsed as an organization, and the local branch of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP) began to fill some of the void left in its wake. Jose Gonzales, Rafaela Colon, and Benjamin Ramos were all members of the PSP and had started meeting in Angel Ortiz’s house.⁶⁹ With political origins in the Puerto Rican political party

⁶⁶ “¡Ahora! ¡Ahora!” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Dec. 30, 1973.

⁶⁷ “Bilingual Vote Setup Ordered,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Mar. 27, 1974.

⁶⁸ Oscar Rosario, interview with author, 2002; “Caught between Two Worlds,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Dec. 14, 1980.

⁶⁹ Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*, 237.

MPI (Movimiento Pro-Independencia), the PSP was primarily concerned with the political independence of Puerto Rico and with addressing the political and social struggles faced by Puerto Ricans living in the United States. Pablo Guzman, a member of the New York chapter of the Young Lords, argues that there was a conflict in ideology and methods between these two groups in Philadelphia: while the YLP favored extra-legal methods, the PSP favored electoral methods to effect change for Puerto Ricans. Yet individuals such as Rafaela Colon were known supporters of both the Young Lords and the PSP. While there were political cleavages within the younger Puerto Rican leadership as there had been among the older leaders, the PSP and Young Lords shared similar attitudes regarding the situation of Puerto Ricans in the United States. The PSP in Philadelphia helped to organize a "Bicentennial without Colonies" event in 1976 to call attention to its displeasure with the relationship of Puerto Rico to the United States.⁷⁰ The PSP would continue to serve as a voice of radicalism in the Puerto Rican community.

As the rumblings of discontent grew louder within Philadelphia's Puerto Rican community, city and state government began to pay close attention. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's method of dealing with this radicalized generation of Puerto Ricans was to offer token assistance to the community. In 1972, the Pennsylvania State Committee on Civil Rights held a series of meetings to come to grips with the problems affecting the Puerto Rican community. The foci of these meetings were issues such as housing and education discrimination. Wilson Goode, then director of the Philadelphia Council for Community Advancement, attacked institutions such as the Federal Housing Administration and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. "These agencies issue rules which prevent building houses for minorities, the people who really need housing," he complained.⁷¹ The collaboration between Puerto Rican leaders and Goode in these hearings marked one of the first instances of formal coalition building with those outside of the local political machine. As a result of this process, Governor Milton Shapp ordered state agencies to begin seeking bilingual employees as HUD administrators, and HUD admitted that not enough was being done to serve the Puerto Rican community. Hearings of this sort had been held

⁷⁰ Pablo Guzman, "Puerto Rican Barrio Politics in the United States," in Rodríguez and Korrol, *Historical Perspectives on Puerto Rican Survival*, 148.

⁷¹ "Philadelphia Housing Cited as Problem for Puerto Ricans," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, June 7, 1972.

in 1954 and 1964 by the Commission on Human Relations, and while the order from the governor and the admission by HUD were important, the long-term impact of these hearings was minimal—inadequate housing was a problem that persisted in the Puerto Rican community throughout the 1970s.

Philadelphia's municipal government dealt with the issues facing the city's Puerto Rican community in its own way. During the ninth annual Puerto Rican Day Parade in Philadelphia in 1972, Mayor Frank Rizzo let it be known that he had given the order to issue all civil service exams in both English and Spanish in order to combat underemployment and bring the Spanish-speaking community closer to city government. "The growth [of the Puerto Rican community] has been so rapid that many have not yet found their place in the mainstream of our city," Rizzo explained.⁷² Just what place Rizzo intended the Puerto Ricans to occupy in mainstream society was unclear. His statements did not please everyone at the parade that day—twenty youths marched and spoke out on behalf of a free and socialist Puerto Rico. Although Rizzo did not address or deal with these youths at the parade, many members of the Young Lords accused the Rizzo administration of police brutality.⁷³ In 1976, Mayor Rizzo asked for fifteen thousand troops to handle demonstrations occurring in Philadelphia (among these the Bicentennial without Colonies demonstration).⁷⁴

As a counterbalance to the alleged police repression of dissident Puerto Rican youth, city government celebrated young Puerto Ricans who were perceived as shining examples of how their generation could become part of the mainstream. Councilman Harry Jannotti (the same man who stated publicly that he would go after the Young Lords) and the Philadelphia Crime Commission honored six Puerto Rican youths for assisting Patrolman Barry Bergman as he was being assaulted by a suspect he was trying to arrest.⁷⁵ It was clear that the role that Rizzo and others in city hall envisioned for the Puerto Rican community was one of docile collaboration with authority.

⁷² "Rizzo Orders Job Tests for City in Spanish," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Sept. 25, 1972.

⁷³ Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*, 234–35.

⁷⁴ José E. Velázquez, "Coming Full Circle: The Puerto Rican Socialist Party, U.S. Branch," in Torres and Velázquez, *Puerto Rican Movement*, 57–58.

⁷⁵ "Council Praises 6 for Aiding Officer," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Oct. 19, 1972.

The Old Guard vivito y coliendo (Alive and Kicking)

Although by 1975 the old Puerto Rican leadership's authority was being contested by younger emerging leaders, members of this first generation remained active within the local political culture. In 1975, Carmen Bolden, then executive director of Concilio, joined forces with the executive directors of other community agencies such as Aspira and Casa del Carmen to create a task force designed to function as a think tank for the Puerto Rican community. This task force attempted to establish a community-run jobs program based upon the model of Operation SER (a job placement program designed to combat unemployment in Houston's Mexican American community). SER had yielded positive results for the Mexican American community in Texas for ten years. The task force's application to the city for funds under the 1973 Comprehensive Employment and Training Act met with little success. The *Bulletin* reported that "Hugh Ferguson, Philadelphia's manpower programs director, told the task force the program would be placed at low priority."⁷⁶ Despite organizations such as Concilio having always supported Rizzo and the city's administration, city hall viewed the needs of the Puerto Rican community as a "low priority." It was becoming clear to all that the older generation's methods of acquiring assistance and support for their endeavors were no longer effective.

The press continued to identify individuals connected with both city and state government bureaucracies as the leaders of the Puerto Rican community. While prestige still went hand-in-hand with position, the effectiveness of men like Oscar Rosario, director of the Mayor's Committee on Opportunities for the Spanish-speaking, and Bolivar Rivera, director of the Governor's Council on Opportunities for the Spanish-speaking, was questionable. They began a highly publicized clash with the US Census Bureau over the true population of Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia. According to Rosario and Rivera, the Census Bureau undercounted the number of Puerto Ricans to prevent the community from fully participating in the electoral process. Rosario alleged, "Somebody is trying to stop us from being registered." Rivera added, "This is not an accident. This is planned."⁷⁷ It was ironic that two men so

⁷⁶ "Unemployment Rate Is Almost 44%," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Mar. 2, 1975.

⁷⁷ "Phila. Puerto Rican Leaders Clash with Census Bureau," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Aug. 10, 1975.

closely connected with municipal and state politics adopted the aggressive rhetoric of younger radicals in their effort to increase the Puerto Rican vote and thereby support the political mechanisms that had allowed them to acquire and maintain their positions.

Members of the old guard continued to curry favor with city administrators by working quietly with the political establishment. Candelario Lamboy of Concilio petitioned Mayor Rizzo to appoint a fellow Puerto Rican, Ramonita Rivera, as assistant to the mayor; to improve sanitation and lighting along the Puerto Rican shopping district on North Fifth Street; and to promote a number of Puerto Ricans allied with Concilio. Angel Ortiz characterized these demands as “bargain basement” and Concilio as “a discredited bunch of individuals” for their collaboration with a mayor whose civil rights record was suspect.⁷⁸ Oscar Rosario maintained during this period of publicized infighting that “The mayor has been the only mayor of this city who attempted to alleviate the needs of the Spanish-speaking population.”⁷⁹ While old guard leaders such as Lamboy and Rosario made requests to a mayor whom they perceived as being on their side, the mayor continued to deem the needs of the city’s Puerto Ricans a low priority. Promises from the mayor were exactly that—promises and nothing more. Ramonita Rivera discovered this after she did not receive the job promised by Rizzo.⁸⁰ When Rizzo attempted to change the law in Philadelphia that prevented mayors from serving three consecutive terms, the PSP united with white liberals and African Americans to block this effort. Rizzo had relied on his handpicked Puerto Rican leaders to deliver him votes in the past, but in this political battle more than 60 percent of the voters opposed this referendum.⁸¹ In this effort, the Puerto Rican community again demonstrated its ability to form alliances with other groups, this time with tangible results.

Conflict among the generational and ideological leadership camps in Philadelphia’s Puerto Rican community began to boil over in 1978. Concilio, arguably the most well known of all community-based organizations in Philadelphia’s Puerto Rican community, came under public attack from other Puerto Ricans. Along with Ervia Gonzalez of the Puerto Rican Fraternity, Carmen Bolden (who was fired from Concilio

⁷⁸ “Puerto Ricans Get Rizzo Pledge on Key Job,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Oct. 17, 1978.

⁷⁹ “‘Invisible’ Hispanics Fight for Recognition,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, June 12, 1977.

⁸⁰ “Lack of Interest Cuts Political Clout,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Mar. 26, 1979.

⁸¹ González, “Turbulent Progress of Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia,” 38.

under charges of forgery and theft) began circulating a petition calling for an investigation into the policies and practices of the organization. The groups aligned against Concilio also opposed the political ties between Concilio and Frank Rizzo. Candelario Lamboy, for his part, scoffed at these allegations, stating that the complaints came from “a bunch of radicals.”⁸² Lamboy’s characterization of Bolden as radical is odd, since she was, in effect, a member of the old guard. The public criticism of Concilio from within the Puerto Rican community highlighted the rift between these leaders. While the camps ultimately had a similar agenda—the improvement of living conditions for Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia—they had different ideologies and methods to achieve this goal. Personal conflicts threatened to derail efforts to achieve political empowerment in Philadelphia.

The public infighting had a detrimental effect upon perceptions of Puerto Rican leaders from both inside and outside of the community. An article in the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* by Stephen Franklin and Joe Sharkey titled “Lack of Interest Cuts Political Clout” described the growing apathy among the Puerto Rican electorate in Philadelphia. A desire to return to the island, a growing skepticism with public protest, and a distrust of Puerto Rican leaders were cited as the three primary causes of political apathy. Prominent members of the community publicly foreswore politics altogether. Nelson Diaz went on record saying, “In politics, I would be crucified every day. Who needs it?” while Ben Cuevas, the latest director of Concilio, said, “I stay as far away from politics as I can.”⁸³ The clash of generations, along with the ever-present obstacles of unemployment, poor housing, and ethnic discrimination, had begun to take its toll on both the old and new guard of Puerto Rican leaders.

Conclusion

By the 1980s, Philadelphia’s Puerto Rican community experienced two distinct waves of community leadership. The first originated with the generation of the Great Migration. This old guard’s strategy was characterized by collaboration with the city’s political apparatus and with a repression of their own culture. The leaders of the second generation, who came to prominence at the start of the 1970s, were notorious for rampant

⁸² “Phila. Hispanic Group Comes under Fire,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Nov. 26, 1978.

⁸³ “Lack of Interest Cuts Political Clout,” Mar. 26, 1979.

cultural pride and for their challenge to the city's administration and to leaders of their own community. By the end of the 1970s, it was apparent that the generation of Puerto Rican leaders that emerged during this turbulent decade was beginning to exert its influence upon the political dynamics of the Puerto Rican community. After Rizzo's election, various members of this new leadership group came together to form the Puerto Rican Alliance. The PRA elected Juan Ramos as its first president and Juan D. Gonzalez as its vice president—both former Young Lords. The PRA tackled issues such as police brutality and lack of housing and supported its own candidates within the Democratic Party to run for political office in the city. While the PRA, like the Young Lords before it, went through "a process of internal divisions that eventually weakened and destroyed it," it created meaningful inroads into electoral politics for this second generation. The 1980s saw the creation of Pennsylvania House District 180, with a Hispanic population in excess of 40 percent. This district gave individuals such as Ralph Acosta and Benjamin Ramos the opportunity to win seats in the state legislature. In addition, Angel Ortiz won election to city council during the early 1980s.⁸⁴ While competition and internal criticism remained a legacy of the old guard's leadership, the second generation was able to make the shift from protest politics to electoral politics despite its militant ideology.

The generation of Puerto Ricans that came to Philadelphia immediately after World War II adapted to life within the United States and defined their own leadership. While their attitudes towards city hall and mainstream society were mixed, this generation of the Great Migration generally sought to create positive change in their community by calling attention to the problems of the community from within the system. The generation of Puerto Rican leaders that emerged in the 1970s had similar objectives but used vastly different means to achieve them. The proliferation of community-based organizations within the Puerto Rican community during the 1960s helped to establish a diffuse power base. This diffusion carried over into the 1970s, when Puerto Ricans on the political left sought new avenues to express their frustration with the living conditions of the Puerto Rican community. Diffusion and competition led to internal disputes within this generation of leaders. Just as the old guard had unresolved issues, the generation of leaders that developed during the 1970s failed to take steps to resolve internal problems. The YLP

⁸⁴ González, "Turbulent Progress of Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia," 41.

gave way to the PSP, which in turn gave way to the PRA. While these groups all favored a confrontational style of civic engagement, they eventually dissolved due to internal pressures. The lingering apathy of registered voters in the Puerto Rican community, however, has frustrated the efforts of leaders of this community to wield enough political power to seriously challenge the municipal power structure and address the needs of their people. Whether its cause is the lack of political currency of the leadership with the rest of the Puerto Rican community or something else entirely, future generations of Puerto Ricans will need to address and change this pattern. The shift in the political culture from participation politics to protest politics and from a collaborative relationship with city government to a contested relationship has given succeeding generations of Puerto Ricans in the city a variety of tools with which to engage the municipal power structure. The question remains, however: Will there continue to be more chiefs than Indians?

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