



Centro Journal

ISSN: 1538-6279

centro-journal@hunter.cuny.edu

The City University of New York

Estados Unidos

Silver, Patricia

"Culture Is More Than Bingo and Salsa": Making Puertorriqueñidad in Central Florida

Centro Journal, vol. XXII, núm. 1, 2010, pp. 57-83

The City University of New York

New York, Estados Unidos

Available in: <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=37721077003>

- How to cite
- Complete issue
- More information about this article
- Journal's homepage in [redalyc.org](http://www.redalyc.org)

[redalyc.org](http://www.redalyc.org)

Scientific Information System

Network of Scientific Journals from Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal

Non-profit academic project, developed under the open access initiative



P
I

T
H
n
i
H
E
s
H
s
e
H
t
f
E
H
[
n

*While crossing multiple social spaces,
the writer ignites associations across time
not immediately visible at the site of
cultural activity, yet latent as meanings and
indispensable to its conceptualization.*

[FLORES 2000: 21]



THE PUERTO RICAN Studies Association conference held in San Juan in October 2008 took the geography of *puertorriqueñidad* as its theme, reframing the tensions between island and diasporic cultural production with a look to the blurred borders that underwrite attempts to locate authenticity. In the conference logo, Florida had prominent visual representation. In Florida, it is the area that surrounds Orlando and Kissimmee—reaching from Disney World to the west to the Space Coast to the east—that has come to be referenced as the new destination of the *guagua aérea* (Padilla 1999). Puerto Ricans in 2000 comprised over 50 percent of people in Central Florida who self-identify as “Hispanic” (U.S. Census 2000).¹ Data from the 2008 American Community Survey place the percentage of Puerto Ricans in regard to total population in the Orlando-Kissimmee area at 10.8 percent, greater than New York City at 9.4 percent. In Kissimmee alone, Puerto Ricans account for 22 percent of the total population (U.S. Census 2009).

Into this area, Puerto Rico-born and diaspora-born have arrived together, bringing with them distinct histories and imaginings of *puertorriqueñidad* and *Latinidad*, forged out of divergent experiences according to race, class, gender, and migration histories. Many of those who have come to Central Florida have done so to retire – some forced into an early retirement by the retracting economies of both New York and Puerto Rico. Others have been recruited as teachers, medical personnel, engineers, and students. Some have come for a Disney vacation, and then stayed to look for a way to make the magic last. Others have come to work in the Magic Kingdom and found that it takes more than believing to make ends meet.

Communities grow through social networks, and the recruitment of one Puerto Rican engineer, or teacher, or nurse, or Disney worker, or home buyer to Central Florida generally leads to others in the family following behind. The stories that have emerged from the research presented here tell of one person’s move from either Puerto Rico or New York or Miami leading to others. In a humorous reference to this, a Spanish-language radio announcement for the Festival of the Coquí at the Central Florida Zoo in Sanford in 2006 joked that not just one *coquí* was coming to Central Florida but that the cousins and aunts and uncles were arriving as well.

This article presents initial research findings on the history of this newest area of the Puerto Rican diaspora. Per the opening citation from Juan Flores’s *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity*, I look for “associations across time” by setting these findings into the context of other Puerto Rican histories—in Puerto



Photo 1: Sign at the entrance to the Sanford Zoo, 2006. Photo by Patricia Silver. Reprinted with permission.

Rico and in northern U.S. cities during the latter half of the 20th century. I argue for a research agenda that takes account of both the geography and the historical political economy of Central Florida in order to connect the heterogeneous relations and cultural reference points of Central Florida Puerto Ricans with the differentiated histories that they bring (Roseberry 1989: 88).

Efforts to trace and represent Puerto Rican experience in Central Florida can be unsettling if approached from the frameworks of other Puerto Rican diasporic histories. A comparative view of the Orlando area with Arlene Dávila's (2004) analysis of New York's neoliberal transformation offers a case in point. It seems at first that Dávila (2004: 9–10) could easily be talking about Orlando as well as New York, and it is tempting to look there for a model for examining *puertorriqueñidad* in Central Florida. Her detailing of Zukin's and Yudice's *culture* as a marketable and symbolic product of the entertainment industry reflects the emphasis on "marketable ethnicity" that underlies Puerto Rican / Latino(a) cultural representations in Central Florida. Her parallel detailing of Appadurai's *culture* as a socially and politically constructed "boundary of difference" is apparent in Central Florida in Puerto Rican / Latino(a) strategies for claiming cultural space in a social world that historically defined "difference" according to segregated worlds of white and black.

What's more, Orlando is a decidedly neoliberal city.² Its development has been underwritten by deregulation, privatization, and entrepreneurship, much like what Dávila (2004) has articulated for New York in recent decades. Indeed, just before the economic events of 2008 challenged the prevailing neoliberal model, *National Geographic* went so far as to label Orlando a "21st century paradigm" (Allman 2007: 29).

Dávila's insightful analysis from New York, however, rests on historic associations of space, community, and culture that are absent in the Orlando area. While the mid-century "Great Migration" and ensuing Civil Rights-era struggles have marked the ways in which New York and other northern diasporic Puerto Rican

communities have come to imagine themselves, Puerto Ricans in Central Florida have known a different history. In Central Florida, Jim Crow segregation and the historical frontier-style individualism of what is called “cracker culture”³ provided the backdrop to the 1960s and onward transformation of the area from cattle ranches and orange groves to theme parks and the aerospace industry. The emphases on entrepreneurship, privatization, and social discipline that have shaped neoliberal economic policies on a global scale in recent decades found easy supporters in the neoconservative ambiance of Central Florida, and Puerto Ricans have been present through the history of that development. This article argues that the development of a Puerto Rican presence in Central Florida has happened not on top of, but in lockstep with, this larger shift in the region’s economic and cultural identifications to those of a global destination bracketed geographically and metaphorically by Disney and the Space Coast.

How then are we to begin to analyze the making of *puertorriqueñidad* in this newest of Puerto Rican spaces? This article offers an answer to that question by outlining an analytic framework, and it urges future research in several directions. The title references what one person said to me about her efforts to build Puerto Rican community and solidarity in Central Florida. Her comment that “culture is more than bingo and salsa” parallels what Martínez Fernández (2010) has described as the predominance of stereotypical Puerto Rican cultural representations in Central Florida. Indeed, the fact that the area’s political economy rests on high-tech “Imagineering” does urge us, as suggested above, to situate the examination of Puerto Rican community formation in Central Florida into the specific historical dynamics of a place where cultural production and the creation of memories, both real and illusory, are the foundation to the local economy.⁴ In the following sections, I trace the differentiated but intersecting histories of heterogeneous Puerto Rican experiences in Puerto Rico, in northern diasporic cities, and in Central Florida, in order to bring attention to the issues that need further exploration if we are to understand how Central Florida is transforming Puerto Rican experience and how Puerto Rican experience is transforming Central Florida.

Mapping Central Florida

As with its particular history, Central Florida’s spatial relations also prompt a look for new models. This section will orient the reader to the area I am calling “Central Florida.” Although there are spaces where Puerto Rican presence is keenly felt, there is no one space offering historic links between community and culture as, for example, in El Barrio or Humboldt Park. The stories we collected were told to us by people whose daily lives play out in a five- or six-county area slightly larger than the mainland of Puerto Rico itself. Central Floridians live scattered around an expanse of ever-increasing highway intersections and toll booths, a space where a one-on-one conversation is as likely to take place on a cell phone or on-line as in the actual presence of one another.

Perhaps the longest-standing area in Central Florida marked by Puerto Rican cultural spaces, dating back to at least the 1940s, is Orlando (Orange County), stretching over areas once dotted by a variety of military recruitment and training centers and then converted into housing developments (see Figure 1). Heading north from Orlando, roads lead to Sanford (Seminole County), another 1940s home to a military base and the Puerto Ricans stationed there. Beyond Sanford is Deltona (Volusia County), built in 1962 by the Deltona Corporation, and marketed in Puerto



Figure 1: Central Florida counties.

Rico, as well as in New York, Chicago, and on military bases around the world. Due east is the home of the Space Coast in Brevard County and the home of Puerto Ricans recruited to NASA starting in the 1970s. Route 192 heads west from the Space Coast directly to Kissimmee (Osceola County), an odd mix of cow-town and Disney, where one can find the Sol de Borinquen bakery and a host of other Puerto Rican businesses. On the way back to Orlando from Kissimmee, roads lead through Meadow Woods

and Buenaventura Lakes, planned communities that straddle Orange and Osceola counties. Having grown from middle-class housing developments built during the 1980s, this area is now referred to by some as “Little Puerto Rico” (Ramos 2006: A1).

WHEN PRESSED, MOST PUERTO RICANS WHO SAY THEY HAVE BEEN IN CENTRAL FLORIDA “A REALLY LONG TIME” WILL REFRAME THAT AS 15 TO 20 YEARS, HAVING ARRIVED SOMETIME IN THE LATE 1980S OR EARLY 1990S.

Mapping Puerto Rican Oral Histories in Central Florida

The data I share have emerged from four years of living in Orlando, Florida, while teaching anthropology courses at the University of Central Florida’s (UCF) western region campuses. After a time of casual participant observation, more formalized research began in spring 2007, when, with funding from the Caribbean Exchange Program of the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, I was able to complete an exploratory research project. As I embarked on this project, the newspapers carried the news that Dr. Manuel Toro had passed away. Manuel Toro, together with his wife Dora Casanova de Toro, founded *La Prensa*, a weekly Spanish-language newspaper that began in 1981 (*La Prensa* 2007: 3).⁵ That is considered ancient history in the Puerto Rican spaces of Central Florida. When pressed, most Puerto

Ricans who say they have been in Central Florida “a really long time” will reframe that as 15 to 20 years, having arrived sometime in the late 1980s or early 1990s.

By chance, however, I met Glenn Vélez, who was born of Puerto Rican parents in Sanford in 1949. Soon after that, at an outdoor concert at the Café d’Antaño near downtown Orlando, I heard Puerto Rican musician Roy Brown tell the audience that he may have been the first Puerto Rican to be born in Orlando. He was born there in 1945, the son of a Puerto Rican woman and a North American serviceman. Aware that there was a deeper history of Puerto Ricans in Central Florida than is generally recognized and finding precious little in written histories and newspaper archives, I determined that an oral history project was important for recording Puerto Rican pathways to, and experiences in, Central Florida.

Together with Natalie Underberg, Director of the UCF’s Digital Ethnography Lab, I obtained funding from the Florida Humanities Council for a project using digital media to collect oral histories and photos and produce an exhibit to be titled, “Puerto Ricans in Central Florida from 1940s to 1980s: A History.”⁶ We limited the research to the decades prior to the start of this second “Great Migration” in order to learn about what was there already as large numbers of Puerto Ricans began to move to Central Florida. Despite the undeniable draw of Disney, the stories we heard have pointed us to other pulls and pushes for further research. They express the imaginings of Florida in general, and Central Florida in particular, that have contributed to making Florida a primary destination of people from what Jorge Duany has called the “nation on the move” (Duany 2002, 2006b).

AND EVERY OTHER PERSON TO
WHOM I MENTION THE CENTRAL
FLORIDA LAND SALES OF THE
1960S SAYS TO ME, “OH, YES,
MY FATHER BOUGHT A PIECE
OF LAND,” OR SOME SIMILAR
COMMENT AS THEY DIG IN OLD
PAPERS AND FIND A LAND DEED.

During much of the summer of 2008, UCF history graduate student Julio Raúl Firpo and I tried to find whatever historical documentation we could. In Puerto Rico, I consulted the Archivos Generales de Puerto Rico in San Juan, the Archivos Municipales de Ponce, and the Colección Puertorriqueña at the Universidad de Puerto Rico in Río Piedras. In Orlando, Julio consulted the *Orlando Sentinel*, on-line archives of the *New York Times*, and the *Florida Historical Quarterly*.

During the fall of 2008, with a team of student interviewers, we recorded altogether over 100 hours of oral histories. We met a woman who came to Rollins College in 1951 and never left, and a man who came for military service in 1955 and

returned to stay with a planeload of *paso fino* horses in 1973. Puerto Rican veterans, who were stationed in Central Florida in the 1960s and returned to retire, talked to us about the Cuban Missile Crisis and Orlando's air and naval training centers. And every other person to whom I mention the Central Florida land sales of the 1960s says to me, "Oh, yes, my father bought a piece of land," or some similar comment as they dig in old papers and find a land deed. Puerto Rican imaginings of Central Florida have emerged from these and other early Puerto Rican experiences there—some of them decades before Disney World and the subsequent number of theme parks came to dominate the landscape.

For the most part, the oral history interviews happened in the homes or workplaces of the participants; the logistics of coordinating interviewers and project participants drove home to us the spatial relations of Central Florida. This decentralized space—criss-crossed by highways and ever-present construction—has become home to over 250,000 people of Puerto Rican birth or heritage. They include workers and professionals, as well as first-, second-, and third-generation migrants. They prefer to speak Spanish; they prefer to speak English. They were born in San Juan and Santa Isabel, in Chicago and New York, in California and Miami, and on military bases around the world. Those who chose to make an oral history for this project identify themselves as Puerto Rican, and they bring divergent Puerto Rican histories into the ever-emerging local history of Central Florida.

Operation Bootstrap, Transnational Capital, and the Making and Re-Making of Diaspora

Much has been written about the mid-century political and economic transformation of Puerto Rico and of the accompanying Puerto Rican migration from the late 1940s through the 1960s to New York especially and to other northern cities.⁷ As has been repeated in later decades in other places, colonial capitalist arrangements fueled greater unemployment rather than trickle-down prosperity, and emigration became a financial solution for scores of people (González 2000: 249–50). The following overview is to highlight aspects of these histories that intertwine with those of Central Florida and Puerto Rican experiences there.

By the 1940s, U.S. military bases (later converted into housing developments) had become so ubiquitous around Puerto Rico that all of Puerto Rico at that time is sometimes referenced as "a landing strip."⁸ During war and peace, these bases (and those still in operation) sent and received personnel between the U.S. and Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico itself served the U.S. as a counterpoint to the Soviet Union's Cuba in the Cold War struggle between communist and capitalist development ideologies, and both Puerto Rico and Florida served as staging grounds for Cold War surveillance of Cuba.

Along with shifting from U.S. colony to U.S. commonwealth from the late 1940s into the 1950s, Puerto Rico embarked on Operation Bootstrap, an industrialization program based in various incentives to lure U.S. factory production operations to "off-shore" production in Puerto Rico. In the process, a Puerto Rican middle class took shape, whose economic reference point was ironically not private-sector entrepreneurship but rather an expanding state as the major employer. Others, who were economically displaced by Operation Bootstrap, left Puerto Rico for U.S. fields and factories. The Great Migration saw the exodus from Puerto Rico of over 500,000 people, mostly working class.

By 1948, the Commonwealth government had founded the Migration Division to smooth the migration process and mitigate problems in the northern cities so

that workers would not return to Puerto Rico and swell the numbers of unemployed there. At first, there was active discouragement of contracts with southern U.S. enterprises because of ongoing segregation laws in these states (Pagán de Colón 1956: 49). Central Florida has not been reported as a destination for Puerto Rican workers in these decades, and it is generally assumed that it was not. At least two people with whom I have spoken during this research, however, have remembered Puerto Rican workers in Central Florida fields in mid-century, and I am led to wonder whether independent-minded (and perhaps more light-skinned) agricultural workers may not have found their way to Florida, and to Central Florida, to try their luck.

Despite the stated efforts of the Migration Division in northern communities, in both farm and factory, there was reason to protest. Especially in New York and Chicago, Puerto Ricans defined themselves in struggles for social justice in often-hostile environments. The political and cultural movements that emerged from conflicts and violence in Chicago's Division Street and New York's El Barrio eventually marked these physical spaces with deep symbolic meaning and became reference points in imaginings of locally specific incorporations of puertorriqueñidad (Dávila 2004; Ramos Zayas 2003).

Ironically for those struggling to survive in New York and elsewhere, northern entrepreneurs in those cities were taking note of a potential new market in Puerto Rico itself, as the above-referenced middle class began to emerge. Noting that per capita income in Puerto Rico was all of \$511 (one-half that of the U.S. states at that time), this 1960 article in the *New York Times* was apparently written for those northern entrepreneurs eager to find new markets:

Doherty, Clifford, Steers & Shenfield, Inc., has just completed a comprehensive market study of Puerto Rico that should prove of considerable value to advertisers and potential advertisers in the country. . . . The island now offers a new market of consumers with increasing incomes, a growing middle class and a demonstrated desire for a better way of living. (Alden 1960: F14)

By the late 1960s and especially the 1970s in Puerto Rico, however, the cracks in the system were hard to ignore. Manufacturing jobs produced never caught up to agricultural jobs lost, and those produced often became part of political patronage schemes in Puerto Rico's colonial political economy. The extension of U.S. minimum wage laws to Puerto Rico led many firms to seek cheaper labor in other places; those remaining were most often large multinationals (González 2000: 248). The 1970s oil crisis hit Puerto Rico hard as the job market stagnated (Picó 2006: 290).

Social unrest in Puerto Rico, coupled with a re-energized independence movement and the U.S. need for peace and stability in this Cuban neighbor, contributed incentive to (1) the arrival of federal supports in the form of food stamps and (2) increased incentives to U.S. industry. Section 936 of the U.S. tax code, passed in 1976, ensured that U.S. corporations in Puerto Rico would continue to receive tax breaks in exchange for investing their funds locally. The result for U.S. corporate interests in Puerto Rico was an unprecedented growth in U.S. profits, while the higher paid jobs in research and development remained distant from Puerto Rican shores (González 2000: 249).

Throughout these decades, dominant explanations of poverty in Puerto Rico rested on overpopulation and the need for a better education system. As the system did indeed produce increasing numbers of college graduates, however, the expectations of these aspiring professionals were not met by the job structure

of Puerto Rico's off-shore economy. By the 1970s, recruitment of Puerto Rican college graduates to positions in the U.S. mainland took root just as mainland jobs were shifting to the U.S. South. Notable among recruitments in Puerto Rico was the decision by NASA in the mid-1970s to hire Puerto Rican engineers for relocation to NASA centers in Texas and Florida.

Along with these developments in Puerto Rico and the opening of Walt Disney World in Central Florida, the decade of the 1970s saw the collapse of the New York economy and the beginnings of a shift in Puerto Rican migration patterns. In 1970, over 80 percent of Puerto Ricans in the diaspora were living in New York, New Jersey, and Illinois (Acosta Belén 2006: 89). But post-industrial economic restructuring of northern cities—with white-collar jobs at one end, low-paying service jobs with no benefits at the other end, and little in between—led many to seek their livelihoods elsewhere. As U.S. migration patterns in general shifted southward, Puerto Rican migration patterns became multidirectional, with returns to Puerto Rico and subsequent moves to other locations stateside becoming a common practice for many (Duany 2002: 211; 2006b: 181).⁹

NOTABLE AMONG RECRUITMENTS IN PUERTO RICO WAS THE DECISION BY NASA IN THE MID-1970S TO HIRE PUERTO RICAN ENGINEERS FOR RELOCATION TO NASA CENTERS IN TEXAS AND FLORIDA.

The 1980s era of Reaganomics brought new contradictions to Puerto Rican experience as the U.S. moved toward neoliberal deregulation policies, and increasingly grounded economic decisions and political choices in a discourse that discredited the state and lauded the benefits of a “free market.” As U.S. and multinational corporate extractions of profit from Puerto Rico grew in the latter decades of the 20th century, the gap between rich and poor in Puerto Rico widened. Unemployment ranged from 11 to 20 percent, and federal transfers to Puerto Rico grew (González 2000: 250). Ironically, throughout all the above, the U.S. need for peace in Puerto Rico, the Puerto Rican state's need for legitimacy, and the dependence of the Puerto Rican state on U.S. investments combined to feed the *growth* of the Puerto Rican state just as neoliberalism increasingly became the mantra of U.S. economic and political discourses.

In the 1990s, employment in the Puerto Rican state became insecure for the first time in Commonwealth government history, when pro-statehood Governor Pedro Rosselló pushed through a series of privatization measures more in line with federal mandates for shifting responsibility for social services from the state to the private sector. Then beginning in 1996 (in the wake of NAFTA and simultaneous to negotiations for the Free Trade Area of the Americas), the U.S.

legislated a ten-year phase out of Section 936. Over ten years, some 40,000 jobs were lost across sectors. During the 1990s, Puerto Rican movement to Central Florida boomed (see Table 1).

In 2006, under pro-Commonwealth Governor Aníbal Acevedo Vilá, the Puerto Rican government shut down entirely for two weeks, while some 80,000 non-emergency government employees were temporarily laid off (Bernabe 2007: 15, 17). As school districts in Central Florida went looking for Spanish-speaking teachers, many Puerto Rican public school teachers relocated. In September 2009, pro-statehood Governor Luis Fortuño announced in one day the lay-off of almost 17,000 state employees, and in October announced 2,000 new “green” jobs to be financed by federal stimulus money (Hernández 2009: 3, 8).

AS THE PUERTO RICAN VAIVÉN
 (“BACK AND FORTH”) HAS
 BECOME INCREASINGLY MULTI-
 DIRECTIONAL, CENTRAL FLORIDA
 HAS EMERGED AS ONE OF THE
 PRIMARY DESTINATIONS FOR
 THOSE ARRIVING DIRECTLY FROM
 PUERTO RICO, FOR THOSE WHO
 HAVE LIVED AND STRUGGLED
 FOR DECADES IN NORTHERN
 CITIES, AND FOR THOSE WHO
 SEE THE BACK AND FORTH AS
 A WAY OF LIFE.

Throughout the decades and in response to economic pushes and pulls, Puerto Ricans have continued to move to stateside communities, but there has also been significant return migration and increasingly a circular migration.¹⁰ Jorge Duany (2002: 234) has argued that circular migration has become an effective economic strategy for Puerto Ricans and that those who have shaped their lives on that path have benefited economically more than those who have not. Transnational consciousness, as part of being constantly “on the move,” has long been a part of Puerto Rican experience, memory, and imaginings (cf. Aranda 2007; Pérez 2004).

As the U.S. has entered a growing number of “free-trade” agreements modeled after the mid-century arrangements with Puerto Rico, the U.S. states and Puerto

TABLE 1: Population of Puerto Rican Origin in Selected Counties of Florida, 1960-2000

1960	471 - SMSA=Orange and Seminole; Orlando available by census track
1970	808 - SMSA=Orange and Seminole
1980	9,158 - SMSA=Orange, Seminole, and Osceola
1990	51,847 - SMSA=Orange, Seminole, and Osceola
2000	136,920 - Orange, Seminole, and Osceola

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (1963, 1973, 1983, 2000).

Rico have become post-industrial economies, in which part-time non-union service jobs have replaced unionized factory production work. Puerto Ricans in northern cities, like many others, have found their way to southern states and Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico have continued to be “on the move.” As the Puerto Rican *vaivén* (back and forth) has become increasingly multi-directional, Central Florida has emerged as one of the primary destinations for those arriving directly from Puerto Rico, for those who have lived and struggled for decades in northern cities, and for those who see the back and forth as a way of life.

Puerto Ricans in Central Florida 1940s to 1980s: A History

It was over the decades from the 1940s to the 1980s that the Central Florida landscape and economy underwent the transformation from cattle ranches and orange groves to theme parks and the aeronautics industry. Though nothing of what lay ahead with the arrival of Disney World and the theme parks that followed, Orlando did market itself as a tourist destination in the 1940s for sunshine, fresh orange juice, golf, tennis, and perhaps a stop at Gatorland near Kissimmee. In 1949, President Truman designated Cape Canaveral as the site of the Joint Long Range Proving Grounds and the first rocket launch from the site came in July 1950.¹¹ As the designs for the U.S. Space Program grew, the Martin Company chose Orlando for its headquarters in 1956. Tupperware set up shop near Kissimmee in 1952, Minute Maid bought up large tracts of Central Florida in 1954, and Coca Cola bought Minute Maid by 1960 (Mormino 2005: 166, 201). Disney World opened in 1971, and Central Florida soon became a global tourist destination.

It was also over the course of these decades that the Puerto Rican presence in Central Florida took root. Although only partially helpful at ascertaining the extent to which Puerto Ricans were a part of this transforming Central Florida landscape, it is useful to look at what can be gleaned from census records. Table 1 gives a quick reference; it begins with 1960 because the data are not available for the 1940 and 1950 census years.¹²

The effort to count Puerto Ricans in the 1960 census was only a sample in selected areas, and self-identification did not begin until 1970. This, combined with the transient residence of military personnel and migrant farm workers, leads us to believe that real numbers at any given moment were greater than reported. Nonetheless, in Orange and Seminole counties, census takers identified only 471 Puerto Ricans out of a total population of 318,487.

The 1970 census was the first to use self-identification, and gives 808 people of Puerto Rican birth or parentage in Orange and Seminole counties. In the 1970 census, the question that identified Puerto Ricans was asked only after a question of whether the household spoke Spanish. If they did not, they were not identified as Puerto Rican. This would, for instance, have discounted Glenn Vélez, who in 1970 was living in Central Florida and speaking English after a lifetime of assimilation



Photo 2: Puerto Rican children on a visit to Disney World and Marineland. They are identified in the photo essay in *El Mundo* as Luis Rosario, Junito Cruz, and Francisco Villot. Photo by Juan Rivas. Proyecto de Digitalización de la Colección de Fotos del Periódico *El Mundo*, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Río Piedras. Reprinted with permission.

policies and practices. Earlier counts were also based on surnames; thus, the child of a non-Hispanic man (for instance, a serviceman like the father of Roy Brown) and a Puerto Rican woman may well not have been counted.

By the census of 1980, identification of Puerto Ricans in Central Florida was probably closer to reality than the previous numbers. Given the opening of Disney World, located between Osceola and Orange counties, it is no surprise that the 1980 census expanded the Orlando statistical area to include Osceola County as well as Orange and Seminole. In that year, the number of Puerto Ricans counted in that area totaled 9,158 out of a population of 700,055. This was about 35 percent of what the census designated as the total population of Spanish origin in these counties.

It is likely that Puerto Ricans in Central Florida in the early 1980s were arriving in balanced numbers from both island and other diasporic communities. The IPUMS-USA data indicate that 58 percent of Puerto Ricans in Orlando in 1980 had been born

in Puerto Rico. Twenty percent had been living in Puerto Rico 5 years prior to the census, and another 20 percent had been living in one of 11 different U.S. states, with Florida and New York taking the lead. Almost 18 percent had been born in New York, and as many as 9 percent had been born in Florida (Ruggles et al. 2008).¹³

The subsequent jumps in the count to 51,847 in 1990 and 136,920 in 2000 reflect the period of time during which Central Florida emerged as a primary destination for Puerto Ricans “on the move.” The 1990s saw a virtual transformation of Kissimmee in Osceola County from a small town with a predominantly white population to a multi-cultural secular Mecca for both tourists and workers in the entertainment-park-based service economy that now dominates the area. From a census count of 8,122 in 1990, the Puerto Rican population in Osceola County grew to 30,728 by 2000.

Among Puerto Ricans in Central Florida in 2008, it is commonplace to hear that someone came for a Disney vacation and stayed. And there is no doubt that Central Florida’s theme park industry has attracted Puerto Ricans to the area. The very year that Disney World opened, *El Mundo* ran a photo essay about the trip of some 100 Puerto Rican children to Florida (*El Mundo* 1971: 8A). A random selection of a copy of *El Mundo* in the 1985 revealed five separate Disney ads in one day.

But the dazzling lights of Disney are only part of the story. San Juan resident Johnny Rivera¹⁴ remembers vividly his experiences in 1974 as one of a group of adolescent Sea Cadets from Puerto Rico, who were selected to participate in that year’s two-week stay at a military facility in Orlando. At the end of their stay, they had one day at Disney, but the bulk of the trip was about their experience of daily exercises at the military training center.

In 1976, the Kennedy Space Center began to recruit engineers from the Mayagüez campus of the University of Puerto Rico. By the first launch of the Space Shuttle in 1981, some 25 Puerto Rican engineers were living with their wives and children anywhere from

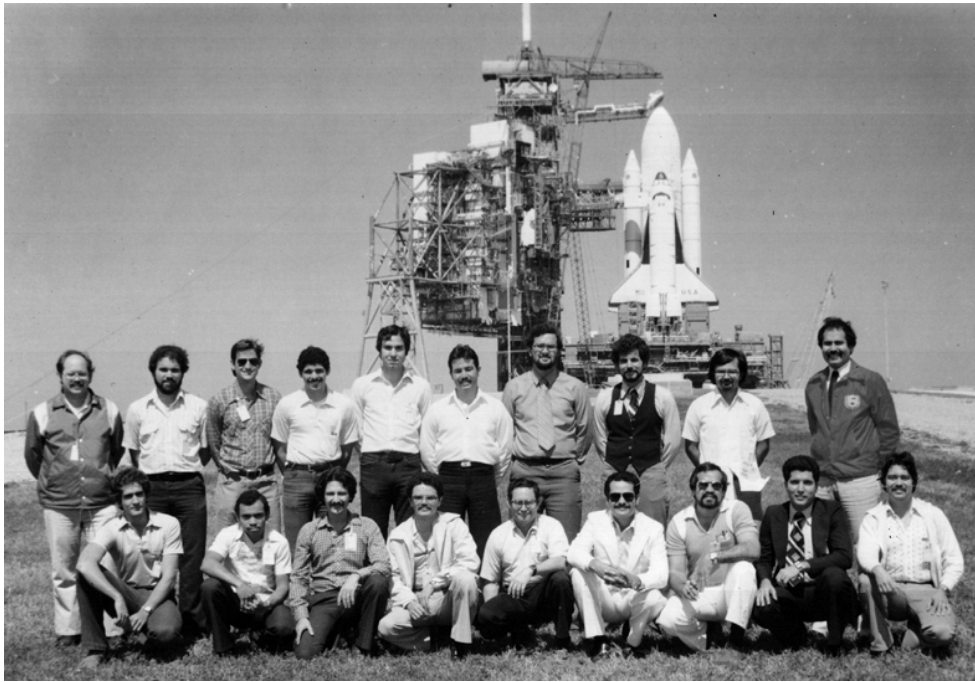


Photo 3: Kennedy Space Center engineers from Puerto Rico in front of the Space Shuttle Columbia, 1981. Standing: Iván Vélez, Roberto Tous, Gerardo Rivera, Héctor Borrero, Miguel Morales, José Ramírez, Rafael Gelpi, Miguel Rodríguez, Francisco Izquierdo, Juan Torres Vega. Front: Alberto Silva, Iván Seguinot, Andrés Huertas, Lucas Ferrer, Juan Rivera, Charles Gambaro, Pedro Juan Rosado, Pablo Auffant, Antonio Santiago. Photo donated to the archives for the project "Puerto Ricans in Central Florida 1940s to 1980s: A History" by Juan Pedro Rivera. Reprinted with permission.

Orlando to Merritt Island next to the Space Center. Others were working for places like Martin Marietta on contracts for NASA. The recruitment program has continued and represents an important tie between Puerto Rico and Central Florida.

The following sections will use the oral history data and the documentary evidence we have been able to obtain to flesh out the census numbers and look at the years preceding the opening of Disney World as well as those that followed. At mid-century, Puerto Ricans in Central Florida probably included at least migrant farm workers, military personnel, wives of North American military personnel, and college students. The stories we heard combine to give evidence of a diverse, and perhaps largely transient, Puerto Rican population in Central Florida in these earliest decades. Across the decades, Puerto Ricans from all walks of life and from both Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican diaspora communities have continued to come and make their home in Central Florida.

Military Pathways to Central Florida

In the decades before the 1970s, World War II, the Korean War, and Cold War competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union left their mark on, and brought Puerto Ricans to, Central Florida. During this time, the U.S. military inaugurated two Army airfields (Orlando and Pinecastle). The Naval Air Station in Sanford dated back to 1942; Patrick Air Force Base, still in operation and located on the Space Coast south of what is now the Kennedy Space Center, has been around since 1940. The Soviet launch of Sputnik in 1957 intensified U.S. ambitions for the Space Program. With Cape Canaveral as the designated launch site and with the Martin Company making Orlando home, the area saw the influx of hefty government contract money.

Central Florida began to see a demand for a new kind of workforce (Derr 1998: 337). By 1958, Brevard Engineering College (later Florida Institute of Technology) had begun to provide continuing education to NASA engineers on what would become the Space Coast. The year 1963 saw the founding of Florida Technological University, now the University of Central Florida, as the foundations of Central Florida's high-tech corridor were set.

During these years, Puerto Rican servicemen were stationed around Central Florida, and some of them and their families live there still. For instance, when Disney World opened in 1971, Puerto Rico-born Salvatore Felices, appointed in 1968, was head of the 306th wing at McCoy Air Force Base (*Orlando Sentinel* 1968: B-1). He remained in the Orlando area and his family followed. The oral histories we collected include references to his frequenting the popular Central Florida San Juan Restaurant in the 1980s. In his oral history, Ernesto Peña Roque talked about the 1950s, when he first arrived at Pinecastle from his previous post in Wyoming. He awoke on the first day, heard birds singing such as he had not heard since leaving Puerto Rico, and decided to make Central Florida home. In 1973, he came to settle in Orange County, bringing with him two *paso fino* horses. From his Central Florida home, José Santana told the story of flying rescue reconnaissance over the waters between Florida and Cuba in the 1960s. Isabel Ghigliotti remembers a fearful time of her childhood, when, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, her father was stationed at McCoy, and her mother took the children back to Puerto Rico for their safety.

WHEN DISNEY WORLD OPENED IN 1971, PUERTO RICO-BORN SALVATORE FELICES, APPOINTED IN 1968, WAS HEAD OF THE 306TH WING AT MCCOY AIR FORCE BASE.

North American soldiers were also stationed in Puerto Rico, and some of them met and married Puerto Rican women and brought them to live in Central Florida. When Petra (Patricia) González Durocher settled with her husband in downtown Orlando in 1951, she soon met a group of five other Puerto Rican women, all married to former and current U.S. servicemen and all living in Orlando. As was the case for the family of Patricia González, Puerto Rican military wives often served as a catalyst for other family members to come to Central Florida. The following stories of Fabiola Baerga Ramírez de Arellano, Monserrate Pou González, and María Ignacia Cristina Pérez give evidence of diverse early Puerto Rican experiences in Central Florida as well as of family members moving to be with a female member of their family.¹⁵

Fabiola Baerga Ramírez de Arellano was a teacher in Salinas in the early 1940s, when a job announcement in the Puerto Rican papers offered a civilian job with the U.S. Navy in Miami. She traveled to San Juan for the interview and was on her way to

Miami. By 1944, she met a young war veteran, Roy Brown, who had been sent to Miami for the period immediately following his war assignment in Africa. The couple married after a six-week courtship and moved to Washington, D.C., where he was stationed. But the cold weather did not sit well with Fabiola Brown, and she urged her husband to find a way back to Florida. He arranged a transfer to Orlando's Pinecastle Army Air Field. The couple was only there a few years, but Roy Brown, Jr., was born during that time, and Fabiola Brown's sister came to live with them for a while.

At about the time that Roy and Fabiola Brown were leaving Orlando, Monserrate Pou González was arriving in Central Florida from Ponce to live with her sister who was married to a North American military man stationed at the Naval Air Station in Sanford. Another sister also came from Puerto Rico and studied for a year at Stetson in 1948. Monserrate Pou had just completed her nursing degree, and her boyfriend, Modesto Vélez from Santa Isabel, was studying in Texas. They soon learned that Texas was far from Sanford, but he ended up coming to join her there. They married and remained in Sanford for some 10 to 15 years. Their two children, Glenn and Carmen, attended a Catholic school in Sanford and later traveled to and from Bishop Moore in Orlando for their secondary years. In the 1960s, the family returned to Puerto Rico, and the children struggled to learn Spanish. When Modesto Vélez passed away, the family returned to Central Florida, where Monserrate Vélez could earn better money to support her children as a single mother.

Also in the mid-1940s, 12-year-old María Ignacia Cristina Pérez, who would later be Orlando's first Hispanic City Commissioner, moved from New York to Miami. Her mother was Puerto Rican, and her father was Cuban. As a military wife in 1968, she would move to Orlando with her husband, Robert Johnson. Her brother and his family followed and their parents came as well. Other oral history data suggest that this family was not alone in following this path from New York to Miami to Orlando.

When the Johnsons moved to Orlando in 1968, it was largely because of the retired military community there. The former Army Air Base had been converted into the Naval Training Center (NTC), whose presence in Orlando became an institution until it was finally converted into a new-urbanist housing development in the 1990s. NTC had an active volunteer group called the Navy Wives Club of America, and María Ignacia Cristina Pérez de Johnson, now known simply as Mary I. Johnson, spent a decade immersed in volunteer community activities with them. She was the Southeast Regional President of the organization, a territory that included, among other places, both Florida and Puerto Rico.

Land Sales

As the Puerto Rican state continued to expand in the 1960s and 1970s, and northern Puerto Rican communities were engaged in Civil Rights era social struggles and state petitions, entrepreneurial land developers were coming into their own in Florida. Florida had entered the national consciousness as a place where it might be possible to own a piece of the American Dream, and Central Florida became a land speculator's and private developer's paradise.

This was not new in Florida. Florida historian Gary Mormino (2005: 44–5) describes Floridians' relationship to land and law as follows:

Self reliance, free enterprise, and a distaste for tax collectors and politicians bound Floridians philosophically in ways the state's long coastline and hinterland could never unite them geographically. . . . In a state where the sun was enshrined in optimism, the line between speculation and investment is very thin.

For Puerto Ricans, there were infamous land scams, but also legitimate opportunities for home ownership beyond the dreams of many. Most notably, the Mackle Brothers expanded from their Miami base and founded General Development Corporation (GDC) in 1954. They targeted not the wealthy, but the middle class, selling the American Dream at an affordable price (Mormino 2005: 54–57). In particular, they targeted the military, sending sales agents to U.S. bases around the world and especially to Puerto Rico (Hutnyan 1963: 2-F).

During the early to mid-1960s, Walt Disney was quietly purchasing vast acreage in Central Florida, where he had decided to build Disney World. To facilitate the process, the Florida legislature approved the establishment of the Reedy Creek Improvement District under Disney’s control (Foglesong 2001: 55–77). In essence a privatized state in the midst of Central Florida, this body has “sweeping powers to regulate the environment, to police, tax, seek federally subsidized municipal bonds, and zone with immunity from state and local land-use law” (Mormino 2005: 103). The 1960s also brought to both Florida and Puerto Rico the exodus of propertied Cubans fleeing Castro’s new regime. In Florida, Castro’s refugees and Disney’s marketing magic have been powerful forces for private enterprise.

FOR PUERTO RICANS, THERE WERE INFAMOUS LAND SCAMS, BUT ALSO LEGITIMATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR HOME OWNERSHIP BEYOND THE DREAMS OF MANY.

As land speculation grew, Central Florida developers were clearly among those who had taken notice of the class formations under way in Puerto Rico. In 1962, the General Development Corporation’s Latin American Director came to Puerto Rico looking to name a local representative (*El Mundo* 1962: 39). Around this time, the Mackles broke with the GDC and formed the Deltona Corporation in 1962.¹⁶



Photo 4: General Development Corporation building on Avenida Ponce de León in Santurce in 2007. The faded sign reads: General Development Corporation, Puerto Rico Florida Investors, Inc. Photo by Patricia Silver. Reprinted by permission.

Shortly after, in 1963, a new law from the Puerto Rican legislature protected people involved in land purchases outside Puerto Rico; the Mackle brothers were cited in *El Mundo* as long-time supporters of this law (Garcia 1963: 12).

Jorge Duany and Félix Matos-Rodríguez (2006: 14) found evidence that the Sentinel Realty Agency, representing Deltona Corporation in Puerto Rico, took a group of journalists to “visit the Deltona homes and lots

to reassure potential buyers” and offered buyers a four-day excursion at \$119 in order that they might come to Central Florida and see their lots for themselves. Much of this seems to have escaped the history books, but the faded sign of the General Development Corporation offices in Santurce, Puerto Rico, stood as evidence until wrecking crews cleared the space in 2007.

Demo models of Mackle tract houses were also set up in New York’s Grand Central Station and Chicago’s Mandel Brothers’ department store (Mormino 2005: 55). John Hernández learned about Deltona while working a booth at the New York World’s Fair in 1965. Born in Santurce, he had moved to New York in 1935 as a child. At the World’s Fair 30 years later, the booth where he was working was next to the Deltona booth. He took advantage a few times of the one-night \$50 New York – Deltona roundtrip that included hotel, meals, and a party, and decided not only to buy in but to work for the Mackles. For over 10 years, John Hernández sold for the Mackles, bringing planes of Spanish speakers, mostly Puerto Rican, from New York to Deltona.

To both encourage and accommodate the growing population of Central Florida, developers continued to buy up land and market new living. And the marketing continued to target Puerto Rican communities and draw Puerto Ricans from both island and mainland. In the inverse path of the earlier GDC, Landstar Homes began in Central Florida and used that as a springboard into South Florida. In 1978, Landstar Homes built its first house in Buenaventura Lakes (BVL) in Osceola County and followed that in 1982 with new construction in Meadow Woods just over the Orange County line.¹⁷ In 1985, Landstar signed a deal that gave TIRI Realty exclusive representation in Puerto Rico. Models of Landstar homes were available for viewing in the Guaynabo offices, and advertising emphasized the social and leisure activities available in BVL (*El Mundo* 1985: 37). Duany and Matos-Rodríguez (2006: 15) report that Landstar marketing targeted both Puerto Rico and New York. Other developments grew during the 1980s, and Puerto Rican spaces became increasingly evident around the airport in Orlando, in Kissimmee, and especially in BVL and Meadow Woods.



Photo 5: Mary I. Johnson with father Félix Pérez and husband Robert Johnson in their backyard making campaign posters, 1980. Photo donated to the archives for the project “Puerto Ricans in Central Florida 1940s to 1980s: A History” by Mary I. Johnson. Reprinted by permission.



Photo 6: Orlando City Commissioner Mary I. Johnson during a Martin Luther King Day parade in downtown Orlando, circa 1985. Photo donated to the archives for the project “Puerto Ricans in Central Florida 1940s to 1980s: A History” by Mary I. Johnson. Reprinted by permission.

From “Old Florida” to the “New Orlando”

A common reference from the oral histories we collected, as well as from casual conversations around Central Florida, is that as larger numbers of Puerto Ricans began to arrive in the 1980s, they found “there was nothing there” and that it was “still ‘Old Florida.’” I understand “Old Florida” as a way of talking about “cracker culture” and a social world divided between white and black. Those whose memories of Central Florida reach back to the 1960s and earlier include stories of a segregated society, and Puerto Rican experiences fell on both sides of that color line. Working as a nurse in Sanford in the 1950s, Monserrate Vélez had to deal with a white doctor angered by seeing a black patient in the waiting room. “What do you want?” she asked the doctor, “Should I put a broom in her hand?” Other stories include a class trip from Puerto Rico to the Space Coast in the 1960s during which a local restaurant tried not to serve a darker-skinned student.

Puerto Rican racial identification in Central Florida must be analyzed in reference to this history. The oral histories we have from those who were in Central Florida before the 1970s generally sidestep questions about race, and many clearly lived in white Orlando. When Mary I. Johnson ran for Orlando City Commissioner and won in the historic elections of 1980, a myriad of newspaper articles explained at the time that the elections were historic because the new Commission included African Americans and women for the first time. Newspaper accounts of Mary I. Johnson herself refer repeatedly to her as a housewife, but draw no attention to her as being Puerto Rican or Cuban or even “Latin.” By the elections of 1984, the story had changed and a major drive to register Spanish-speakers to vote was in place.

The oral histories we recorded for the 20 or so years before that repeatedly assert that the speaker was the only Puerto Rican there. Pedro Rodríguez,¹⁸ who has been in Central Florida since about 1980, remembers that the people he knew were all over; he would spend an hour driving to go see a friend. In the disconnected spaces of Central Florida, connecting with others was not easy. When John Hernández eventually came to live in Deltona in the later 1970s, he missed the Puerto Rican foods so easily accessible in New York. He helped form a group that traveled to Tampa on a weekly basis to get plantains, *yautías*, and other Puerto Rican foods for distribution in Deltona.

IN THE DISCONNECTED SPACES OF CENTRAL FLORIDA, CONNECTING WITH OTHERS WAS NOT EASY.

It was also difficult for Puerto Ricans in the Orlando area before the 1980s to find the foods they were used to, but they had it easier than those in Deltona. The few places where such foods were available in Orlando became gathering places for Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics; these were places to find others and learn about resources for getting by in Central Florida. By the opening of Disney World in 1971, there were already at least two Latin groceries in Orlando (Santos-Berry 1981: 1-A, 9-A). One of these was El Refugio, just down the street from the home of Patricia González Durocher, mentioned above. During the 1960s, people who came



Photo 7: Medina's Grocery, 1975. Photo donated to the archives for the project "Puerto Ricans in Central Florida 1940s to 1980s: A History" by Rafael and Luisa Medina. Reprinted by permission.

to El Refugio quickly learned that the Durocher family's door was open and that furniture and clothes were available for those in need.

Another of these was Medina's, a Cuban-owned grocery, restaurant, and all-around gathering place which opened in 1970. Stories about when it first opened say that it was so small that only a few people could be inside at once. The space outside the store apparently became a lively place for political discussion while people waited their turn to go in. Medina's is still there today, and long-time "Orlando-Ricans" point to Rafael Medina as someone who helped to open many doors for Puerto Ricans in Central Florida as they began to arrive in larger numbers during the 1970s. Medina added a space for lunch and through the 1970s and 1980s, lunchtime conversations at Medina's provided the basis for building a variety of Puerto Rican institutions in the Orlando area.

Efforts to formalize Puerto Rican institutional presence in Central Florida began in the late 1970s, just at the beginning of the dramatic growth of the Puerto Rican population in Central Florida that was to come. One of these was the Asociación Borinqueña, the oldest Puerto Rican social organization in Central Florida. It began in April of 1977, born out of the efforts of a group of Puerto Rican families in Orlando to lay claim to a cultural space. It is a place where you can find a game of dominoes every Tuesday and Thursday and bingo every Thursday. Fridays host the traditional Puerto Rican viernes social ("social Friday"). It is available to rent for the celebration of a *quinceañero*.¹⁹



Photo 8: The Asociación Borinqueña, 2008. Photo by Julio Raúl Firpo. Reprinted by permission.

In the past few years, it has hosted both George W. Bush and an Hispanic organizing meeting for Orlando4Obama. The building where all of this takes place was built at great expense and sports the replica of a garita, a watchtower of the Spanish fort El Morro in Old San Juan.

The special edition of *La Prensa* newspaper that came out on the occasion of the



Photo 9: A branch of Banco Popular at the heart of downtown Orlando, 2009. Photo by Patricia Silver. Reprinted by permission.

death of its founder, Dr. Manuel A. Toro, recounted the founding of the paper in 1981. With his wife Dora Casanova de Toro, Don Manuel set out to fill the need he saw for a Spanish-language paper. The first edition of the weekly paper came out in August 1981. It was 16 black-and-white pages and from there grew to a full-cover publication of 163 pages, with some 51,000 copies distributed from Daytona to Tampa (*La Prensa* 2007: 5).

As Benedict Anderson (1982) has argued, newspapers can be key instruments in the imagining of community, and that is very much what Don Manuel had in mind. Reports from the *Orlando Sentinel* in the early 1980s refer to the lack of a geographic center to Latin life in Orlando, but point to the social networks that people maintain in spite of that (Santos-Berry 1981: 1-A, 9-A; Smith 1982: 1, 5). *La Prensa* aimed to bring Hispanics in general, not just Puerto Ricans, together.

Orlando's paper, the *Orlando Sentinel*, has been frequently critiqued for its limited coverage representing the changing demographics of Central Florida. Perhaps in partial response to this, in 2005 and 2006, the paper ran an occasional series on the front page called "The New Orlando." Each article featured stories from one neighborhood or another in the Orlando metropolitan area whose residents are largely other than white Anglo. In February of 2006, the story from the "New Orlando" was about "Little Puerto Rico," which was identified as "the cluster of neighborhoods that combines Buenaventura Lakes with Meadow Woods in Orange County and some adjacent Kissimmee areas" (Ramos 2006: A1).

The "New Orlando" that emerged from the "Old Florida" has included a variety of Puerto Rican political, economic, and cultural institutions. Although highly visible, the bingo and salsa to be found at the Asociación Borinqueña are only one such arena, and each is a site where tense negotiations over the imagining of this community unfold every day. A Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce was formed in the early 1980s, merged into a Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and then formed anew as the Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce of Central Florida; Spanish-language churches dot the landscape, and the Spanish-language radio and television have a decidedly Puerto Rican flavor. Banco Popular, Cooperativa de Seguros Múltiples, botánicas with the fresh look of a new storefront, lechoneras and other restaurants, and campuses of Puerto Rican universities Ana G. Méndez, Interamericana, and Polytechnic are all part of the landscape of the "New Orlando."

Making puertorriqueñidad in Central Florida: Research Recommendations

At one point in my conversation with the woman who first referenced bingo and salsa, she talked to me about the post-9/11 days, when her co-workers asked her if she would be deported. This is the most recent echo of the many Puerto Ricans in Central Florida who have been asked for their green cards when applying for a job or whose banks have asked them how to convert the Puerto Rican dollar. As we talked, the woman leaned across the table with her hands held up to her cheeks in a mock football shout and silently and energetically mouthed, “We are not going anywhere!”

This is a comment that echoes other diasporic spaces where Puerto Ricans have struggled to stake their claim to a right to be there. For Puerto Ricans in Central Florida, however, there is as of yet no social memory of a historic moment of collective struggle. If there is to be such a moment, that moment is now, and it has been happening as part of a larger historic moment dominated by neoliberal economic policies, identity politics, and the production of “marketable ethnicities” (Dávila 2006).

This “New Orlando” has also emerged as a national focal point for political outcomes, and multiple stakeholders are negotiating their place. The stakes are high. For Puerto Ricans in Orlando and Central Florida, public representations of puertorriqueñidad are highly charged political events. Class and race emerge as major fault lines among Puerto Ricans in Central Florida. Puerto Rican status politics intertwine with Republican-Democrat battles for Central Florida.²⁰

One key fault line involves perceptions of Puerto Rican and “Nuyorican.” The tensions between island-born and diaspora-born persons are at times palpable. For example, we heard from one participant in the research: “When you’re attacked because you’re a New York Rican and you dedicated your whole life in protecting the Puerto Rican way of life . . . that’s pretty tough.” He thought of himself as a Nuyorican, and saw that as a good thing until he got to Central Florida. In a radio interview, a prominent member of the Central Florida Puerto Rican business community disparaged the “history of political activism” that New York Puerto Ricans bring to the area and suggested that they “grow up.”

ONE KEY FAULT LINE INVOLVES PERCEPTIONS OF PUERTO RICAN AND “NUYORICAN.” THE TENSIONS BETWEEN ISLAND-BORN AND DIASPORA-BORN PERSONS ARE AT TIMES PALPABLE.

In the contradictions and contestations of puertorriqueñidad in Central Florida, there is space to wonder if a new kind of solidarity could possibly emerge there. In Arlene Dávila’s analysis of El Barrio’s transformation in the neoliberal age of New York, she suggested that one positive aspect of uses of commodified ethnicity in the neoliberal city is the display of “its contradictions for all to confront and see” (Dávila 2004: 214). And Juan Flores’ (2000: 198) wrote: “The logic is that solidarity can only be posited

when the lines of social differentiation are fully in view, but the goal, nonetheless, is solidarity.” Puerto Ricans in Central Florida bring a tremendous diversity of experiences, made all the more complex by the divergent Puerto Rican histories of the past half-century. The following proposes several research directions that would help to make visible the “lines of social differentiation” with a view toward greater solidarity.

Race

Duany and Matos-Rodríguez (2006: 16) have reported that in the 2000 census, 63 percent of Puerto Ricans in Florida identified as white, and census forms from the 1930 federal census as well as the 1945 state census suggest that these racial identifications go much further back. Racial identifications of Puerto Ricans in Central Florida have profound implications for social relations among Puerto Ricans, as well as with whites, blacks, and other Hispanics.

Gender

As noted in this article, women have often served as the catalyst to a family’s move; explicit research in this area is needed. In addition, the role of women’s networks in Central Florida today is another place to examine lines of inclusion and exclusion. Several of the more recently arrived women we have met came as single women with children to get away from a difficult economic or domestic situation in Puerto Rico. Once in Central Florida, some have moved into existing social networks, and some have felt excluded. Intersections of race and class emerge as crucial to these understandings.

Puerto Ricans in Central Florida Tourism

The place of Disney and the other theme parks in Puerto Rican imaginings of Central Florida include both tourism and recruitment to employment. Efforts to specifically target a Latino(a) / Puerto Rican market need further research. Recruitment to employment may well hold disappointments; in 2002, the University of Puerto Rico’s newspaper *Diálogo* carried the report that college students and graduates from Puerto Rico are most often employed as garbage collectors, food-service workers, and costumed Disney characters (Hernández Cruz 2002: 29). Disney’s workforce and the other theme-park and tourist destinations also include many Puerto Ricans recruited from Central Florida as service and blue-collar workers, the employment sector that represents at least one-half of Puerto Rican employment in Central Florida (Duany 2006a: 81).

Language

Language abilities and preferences among Puerto Ricans in Central Florida and how this intersects with perceptions of self and of others as Puerto Rican or not is another rich topic for investigation. Luis Sánchez (2009: 75) found that most of the people he interviewed chose to communicate in English, yet ability (or not) to speak Spanish remains a powerful cultural identifier among many Puerto Ricans in Central Florida.

Farm Workers

A military wife who lived in Sanford told me she knew Puerto Rican fieldworkers. Further evidence of Puerto Rican workers in Central Florida fields comes from the oral history testimony of a now-prominent “Orlando-Rican” who grew up in Miami. The daughter of a truck driver, she frequently accompanied her father across the state in the 1950s; they encountered Puerto Rican workers along their routes. Yet there are

no data recorded about Puerto Rican farm workers in Central Florida that we have found thus far. Who they were and what sorts of relations they had historically with other Puerto Ricans and other farm workers is an area that needs research.

Regional Status and Relations

A comparative study of the different Puerto Rican spaces of Central Florida will point to all of the above and ground that in geographic relations as well. For instance, although Kissimmee and Osceola County have the densest Puerto Rican population of Central Florida, the most visible Puerto Ricans are in Orange County and specifically Orlando. Re-districting in Osceola has changed the equation on the County Council, and there is much to be done to follow these developments.

Associations and Churches

A large number of Puerto Rican associations and churches have formed around Central Florida. Community building and cultural production as carried on in these sites show a great deal about the lines of differentiation engaged in debates over cultural authenticity, linked as these are to political and economic stakes. The brief glimpse here at the Asociación Borinqueña hints at the importance of this research.

Cultural Identities and Social Relations

How does each of the above play out in Puerto Rican claims to cultural identities in Central Florida? Some whites and blacks from the “Old Florida” think that anyone who speaks Spanish is Mexican. In the “New Orlando,” Latinidad is often assumed to be puertorriqueñidad, and that sometimes breeds resentment among other Spanish-speakers.

MAKING PUERTORRIQUEÑIDAD
IN CENTRAL FLORIDA IS ABOUT
CONFRONTATIONS AS THEY
TAKE PLACE IN A CULTURAL
SPACE MARKED BY A HISTORY
OF “CRACKER” INDIVIDUALISM,
SOUTHERN RACE RELATIONS, AND
UNREGULATED OR EVEN STATE-
SANCTIONED, ENTREPRENEURIAL
GET-RICH-QUICK SCHEMES.

Making puertorriqueñidad in Central Florida is about confrontations as they take place in a cultural space marked by a history of “cracker” individualism, southern race relations, and unregulated or even state-sanctioned, entrepreneurial get-rich-quick

schemes. It is about staking a claim to space in and beyond this “New Orlando” – space in which forms of cultural, political, and economic capital emerge and intertwine in a complex field of force that entails “intersecting histories characterized by differentiation, heterogeneous cultural relations and values, and relations of power that encompass contradictions and tensions” (Roseberry 1989: 88). It is about how Puerto Rican experience is redrawing Central Florida and how Central Florida is redrawing Puerto Rican experiences.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to the Florida Humanities Council, the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, and to the Digital Ethnography Lab and CREATE at the University of Central Florida (UCF) for making possible the project “Puerto Ricans in Central Florida 1940s to 1980s: A History,” from which most of the data presented here are drawn. This research would not have begun without the encouragement and support of Tony de Jesús, Jorge Duany, Naomi González, Luis Martínez Fernández, and Natalie Underberg. I have also had the special opportunity of exchanging ideas with René Antrop-González, Diana Ariza, Annabelle Conroy, Fernando Rivera, and William Vélez as we have all pursued our research about Puerto Ricans in Central Florida. UCF Librarian, Rich Gause, has been invaluable to efforts to pull what we can from the census data, and Arlene Torres and Elayne Zorn gave insightful comments on early drafts. I wish also to thank the anonymous reviewers, whose suggestions have much improved this article. Julio Raúl Firpo has my thanks for his research assistance and desire to learn everything possible about Puerto Rican history in Central Florida. And I thank the following for their tireless work on this project: Emilia Blackwell, Lisa Cruz, Alia Diab, Megan Douglass, Jacquie Marte, Russell Moore, Cyndia Morales, Victor Randle, Juan Sánchez, Cheney Swedlow, and Keisha Wiel. Finally, and most important, I thank all the research participants whose generosity in sharing their stories has made it possible to begin to write a history of Puerto Ricans in Central Florida. Any errors of content are mine.

NOTES

¹ Although not addressed in this article, Polk County, in which the majority Hispanic population is Mexican, is also home to some 25,000 people of Puerto Rican birth or heritage.

² In brief, neoliberalism is a political economic theory promoting private property, free markets, free trade, and entrepreneurial freedom (Harvey 2005: 2). For more on neoliberalism, see Harvey (2005) and Maskovsky (2000).

³ “Cracker culture” refers to the white settlers who came to Florida from other southern states in the second half of the 19th century. They are described in Gannon (1996: 219) as “highly individualistic and mobile, fiercely dedicated to popular democracy, generally possessing antipathy toward Indians and African Americans, and quick to anger.” See also Ste. Claire (2006) for an alternate interpretation of the “myth of racist crackers.”

⁴ “Imagineering” is what the Walt Disney Company calls its unique brand of entertainment: “Walt Disney Imagineering is the master planning, creative development, design, engineering, production, project management, and research and development arm of The Walt Disney Company and its affiliates. Representing more than 150 disciplines, its talented corps of Imagineers is responsible for the creation of Disney resorts, theme parks and attractions, hotels, water parks, real estate developments, regional entertainment venues, cruise ships and new media technology projects.” [http://corporate.disney.go.com/careers/who_imagineering.html. Retrieved August 29, 2009.]

⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, the names in this article are the actual names, per the request of the research participant.

⁶ We also had supplementary funding from the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños. The end result of the project will be the start of a publicly available archive. In the spring and fall of 2009, three area libraries hosted an exhibit of photos, narratives, and digital stories from the research.

⁷ See, for instance, Acosta-Belén (2006), Duany (2002), Grosfoguel (1999), Pérez (2004), Whalen (1998), and Whalen and Vázquez-Hernández (2005).

⁸ Citation from confidential interview in Puerto Rico, October 2000.

⁹ See, for instance, Aranda (2007), Pérez (2004), Olmedo (1997).

¹⁰ During the summer of 2009, I had casual conversations with people in Puerto Rico who had lost their jobs in Florida following the real estate market crash and returned “home” to Puerto Rico in order to wait things out.

¹¹ <http://www.nasa.gov/centers/kennedy/about/history/story/chi.html>. Retrieved October 19, 2008.

¹² My thanks to Julio Raúl Firpo for extracting these numbers from the census data. SMSA refers to the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area, a census designation based in county population surrounding an urban area.

¹³ Data retrieved by Julio Raúl Firpo. The Florida percentage may well have already been in the Orlando area or may have arrived from some other place, such as Miami; 49 percent gave no answer and .5 percent had been living outside the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

¹⁴ Pseudonym.

¹⁵ Migration patterns following female decision-making has occurred through more than military connections. Olmedo (1997), for instance, has recounted the migration history of one part of her own family from Puerto Rico to New York to Puerto Rico and now to Orlando, all in response to one woman’s decisions.

¹⁶ GDC also continued to sell properties in Florida to Puerto Ricans. A 1990 *San Juan Star* article indicated that “since the 1960s, GDC has sold about 2,080 properties in Puerto Rico” (Bird Picó 1990: B1-2).

¹⁷ <http://www.landstarhomes.com/corporate/milestones.html>; retrieved October 30, 2008.

¹⁸ Pseudonym.

¹⁹ It is interesting to note that this celebration of a girl’s 15th birthday has also become a regular feature at Disney. After advertising in Puerto Rico and hosting the “dream of a lifetime” for a group of Puerto Rican girls, Disney has now gained the reputation as a quinceañero destination.

²⁰ As I write, the Asociación Borinqueña is emerging from bitter struggles over challenges to the leadership and expulsion of members. Closer analysis of this one highly contested arena would most certainly articulate the field of force in which the making of puertorriqueñidad is taking place in Central Florida.

REFERENCES

- Acosta-Belén, E., and C. Santiago. 2006. *Puerto Ricans in the United States: A Contemporary Portrait*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Alden, R. 1960. Advertising: Studies Aid Clients — Analysis of Puerto Rico Finds a Big Potential There. *New York Times* nd: F14.
- Allman, T. D. 2007. The Theme-Parking, Megachurching, Franchising, Exurbing, McMansioning of America: How Walt Disney Changed Everything. *National Geographic*. March. Interactive edition. Retrieved March 18, 2007.
- Anderson, B. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

- Aranda, E. 2007. *Emotional Bridges to Puerto Rico: Migration, Return Migration, and the Struggles of Incorporation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Bernabe, R. 2007. Puerto Rico's New Era: A Crisis in Crisis Management. *NACLA Report on the Americas* 40(6): 15–20.
- Bird Picó, M. 1990. Florida: When Is a Lot Too Much? *San Juan Star* 22 April 22: B1–2.
- Dávila, A. 2004. *Barrio Dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and the Neoliberal City*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Derr, M. 1998. *Some Kind of Paradise: A Chronicle of Man and the Land in Florida*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Division of Reports and Analysis. 1953. Puerto Rican Farm Workers in Florida: Highlights of a Study. Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor.
- Duany, J. 2002. *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- . 2006a. Más allá de El Barrio: la diáspora puertorriqueña hacia la Florida. *Nueva Sociedad* 201: 73–89.
- . 2006b. Puerto Rico: Between Nation and the Diaspora—Migration to and from Puerto Rico. In *Migration and Immigration: A Global View*, eds. M.I. Toro-Morn and M. Alicea. 177–194. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- . 2008. Geografía de la puertorriqueñidad. *El Nuevo Día*.
- Duany, J., and F. Matos-Rodríguez 2006. Puerto Ricans in Orlando and Central Florida. Policy Paper 1, no. 1. Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.
- El Mundo*. 1948. Fue Designado Para Carga EAL. *El Mundo* 24 noviembre.
- El Mundo*. 1962. Discuten Desarrollo Comunal. *El Mundo* 17 febrero: 39.
- El Mundo*. 1971. Una Visita que 100 Niños Nunca Olvidarán. *El Mundo* 21 noviembre: 8A.
- El Mundo*. 1985. TIRI Realty representa a Landstar en la Isla. *El Mundo* 28 septiembre: 37.
- Flores, J. 2000. *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Foglesong, R. E. 2001. *Married to the Mouse: Walt Disney World and Orlando*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Gannon, M., ed. 1996. *A New History of Florida*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- García, C. M. 1963. A compañías de EU le satisface ley regula negocio de bienes raíces. *El Mundo* 3 julio: 12.
- González, J. 2000. *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*. New York: Penguin.
- Grosfoguel, R. 1999. Puerto Ricans in the USA: A Comparative Approach. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 25(2): 233–49.
- Harvey, D. 2005. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hernández, J. A. 2009. Government Announces Creation of 2,000 'Green Jobs'. *Puerto Rico Daily Sun* 9 October: 3, 8.
- Hernández Cruz, J. E. 2002. La emigración puertorriqueña a Florida y el “Mundo maravilloso de Disney.” *Diálogo* 7: 29.
- Hutnyan, J. D. 1963. Over the Bounding Main for Buyers. *St. Petersburg Times* 1 December: 2-F.
- Martínez Fernández, L. 2010. La diáspora en la frontera: retos y oportunidades para el estudio del Orlando puertorriqueño. *CENTRO Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies* 22(1): 32–55.
- Maskovsky, J. 2000. “Managing” the Poor: Neoliberalism, Medicaid HMOs and the Triumph of Consumerism among the Poor. *Medical Anthropology*. 19: 121–46.
- Mormino, G. 2005. *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

- Olmedo, I. 1997. Voices of Our Past: Using Oral History to Explore Funds of Knowledge within a Puerto Rican Family. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*. 28(4): 550–73.
- Orlando Sentinel. 1968. New Commander Selected for 306th Wing at McCoy. 26 April: B–1.
- Padilla, M. T. 1999. Island Travel Soars in July – Visitors Return with Reminders of Homeland. *Orlando Sentinel* 20 June: K8.
- Pagán de Colón, P.. 1956. *Programa de trabajadores migratorios de Puerto Rico a los Estados Unidos*. San Juan: Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico, Departamento del Trabajo.
- Picó, F. 2006. *A History of Puerto Rico: A Panorama of Its People*. Princeton: Marcus Wiener Publishers.
- La Prensa. 2007. XXV, Ed. 21 special section Orlando: 1–8.
- Pérez, G. 2004. *The Near Northwest Side Story: Migration, Displacement, and Puerto Rican Families*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Roseberry, W. 1989. *Anthropologies and Histories: Essays in Culture, History, and Political Economy*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Ramos, V. 2006. Between 2 Worlds: Puerto Ricans Remember Their Roots as They Sink New Ones. *Orlando Sentinel* 2 February: A1.
- . 2008. A Puerto Rican Group Finds a Way To Refinance Its Clubhouse Mortgage. *Orlando Sentinel* 11 January.
- Ramos-Zayas, A. Y. 2003. *National Performances: The Politics of Class, Race, and Space in Puerto Rican Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ruggles, S., et al. 2008. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series : Version 4.0 [machine-readable database]. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor]. <http://usa.ipums.org/usa>. Retrieved 27 October 2008.
- Sánchez, L. 2009. *The New Puerto Rico?: Identity, Hybridity and Transnationalism within the Puerto Rican Diaspora in Orlando, Florida*. Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller.
- Santos-Berry, L. 1981. Latin Presence Grows in Orlando. *Orlando Sentinel* nd: 1A, 9A.
- Smith, H. 1982. Migrants Finding a Home in County. *The Little Sentinel* 7: 1, 5.
- Ste. Claire, D. M. 2006. *Cracker: Cracker Culture in Florida*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- U.S. Census Bureau. 1963. U.S. Census of Population: 1960. Puerto Ricans in the United States. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- . 1973. 1970 Census of Population. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- . 1983. 1980 Census of Population. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- . 2000. American Factfinder. Retrieved October 27, 2008. <<http://factfinder.census.gov>>.
- . 2009. American Factfinder. Retrieved on October 9, 2009. <<http://factfinder.census.gov>>.
- Whalen, C. T. 1998. Labor Migrants or Submissive Wives: Competing Narratives of Puerto Rican Women in the Post–World War II Era. In *Puerto Rican Women's History: New Perspectives*, eds. F.V. Matos Rodríguez and L. Delgado. 206–25. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.
- Whalen, C. T., and V. Vázquez-Hernández, eds. 2005. *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.