Ortiz Márquez, Maribel
Beginnings: Puerto Rican Studies Revisited
The City University of New York
New York, Estados Unidos

Available in: http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=37720842009
The essay, "Puerto Rican Studies Revisited," examines the inaugural texts that were written during the development of the programs during the seventies. Through the study of a short essay written by Frank Bonilla (along with Emilio González), it examines the organizational axes that configured the field of studies and how they shaped the future discussions by its practitioners. [Key words: Puerto Rican Studies, Frank Bonilla, Latino Studies, community, ethnic studies]
To identify a point as a beginning is to classify it after the fact—even if...this need not also mean that because one uses languages to study beginnings one is condemned to a useless exercise.


"WHERE, OR WHEN, OR WHAT IS A BEGINNING?" Edward Said asks in the second chapter of his book, Beginnings: Intention and Method. Not origins, which according to Said would imply the passivity of a "purely circumstantial existence of 'conditions'," but beginnings are the focus of reflection since they suggest an intention, a possibility, and a difficulty foreseen before taking up an endeavor. Beginnings suggest the birth of a discursivity (a concept from Foucault) and the possibility of authorizing what can be said about something, but at the same time intimate what is forbidden. Finally, beginnings suggest a sense of urgency due to the importance that we attribute to the present.

The history of the field of Puerto Rican Studies is extensive. Scholars like Jesse Vázquez, Clara Rodríguez, Pedro Cabán, and Federico Aquino Bermúdez, among others, have contextualized the origins of Puerto Rican Studies within other struggles that were occurring in New York City. They have demonstrated that the beginning of these academic programs marked the reaction to a general climate generated by a greater Puerto Rican presence in New York City. In a book in progress, I review that history and find causes and effects, turning points, momentos that need to be rescued. But in this essay I will not reflect upon origins, at least not their historic consequences. Instead, I am interested in searching for the beginnings of a discursivity, of a Puerto Rican diasporic discursivity, which is still considered vital to many of us. As the present poses questions concerning the future of these discursive practices, I return to the beginnings of the field of study in order to speak about an object, namely the Puerto Rican experience of the diaspora. Through its study, I analyze the novelty of the endeavor undertaken and the attempt to theorize the social experience of these communities.

Although I am aware that all recounts of the beginning of something could be useless, as Said's epigraph suggests, I am interested in examining the discursive practices that allowed Puerto Rican Studies to insert itself into the academic world and be considered as a legitimate area of academic knowledge.

The Creation of a Puerto Rican Studies
In 1969, when the first Department of Ethnic and Urban Studies (with sequences in Puerto Rican and Black Studies) was created in City College, it marked the birth of a field of study that examined the complexity of the “Puerto Rican experience" in the United States from an interdisciplinary perspective (Nieves 1979). Scholars have retold this moment in the history of New York City and its
institutions, asserting that the struggle for a space within the university “was not just part of a new vision that challenged northern European perspectives on race and ethnicity; it was also a reflection of changing political pressures” (Rodríguez 1990: 438—emphasis added). However, the Studies were still a proposal on paper, which was organized as it went along. Its appearance as an organization in the university provoked the development of a discursive apparatus, which embodied the desire of the program to make a space for itself in the university. This beginning responded to a community need: the Puerto Ricans who had settled in New York City since the 19th century claimed a space inside the city university as part of a broader struggle to improve their education.

During the 1970s and ’80s Puerto Rican Studies was formed, taking into account other interdisciplinary fields of study in North American academia; scholars proposed a global approach to a particular social experience. Even when Puerto Rican Studies was presented within the university panorama as a novelty, its composition was traceable to other fields, a circumstance that paved the way to the structuring of interdisciplinary programs, even though, as Frank Bonilla has stated, their motivations were basically different. Among these formations, I would like to mention two beginnings: the first is related to the logic of “area studies” begun during the Cold War; and the second is the creation of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies and its relationship to the Center for the Study of the Puerto Rican Reality (CEREP) in Puerto Rico in the 1970s.

**THIS BEGINNING RESPONDED TO A COMMUNITY NEED: THE PUERTO RICANS WHO HAD SETTLED IN NEW YORK CITY SINCE THE 19TH CENTURY CLAIMED A SPACE INSIDE THE CITY UNIVERSITY AS PART OF A BROADER STRUGGLE TO IMPROVE THEIR EDUCATION.**

Interdisciplinary studies were not new in American universities. Since the Second World War, universities and their curricula were transformed, resulting in a new field of study that corresponded to the geopolitical situation of a new world power. The United States emerged from the conflict worried by the possibility that new communist regimes, sponsored by the Soviet Union, might appear. It understood that the universities should develop new programs of study that corresponded to their new needs. As Immanuel Wallerstein indicated in his essay, “The Unintended Consequences of the Cold War Area Studies,” the development of “ethnic studies,” which grouped ethnic minorities in the United States as their national counterparts, was a part of the changes in the university (1997: 199–200).
Clearly, one aspect that distinguishes Puerto Rican Studies from other areas studies programs is that their proposal was not articulated by the government, as in the case of area studies, but by popular demand based on the struggle for the civil rights of ethnic minorities. This differentiation becomes clear in the *modus operandi* of the field of Puerto Rican Studies, in their objectives and in their discursive practices. The recounting of the first texts written on this subject, in particular during the ’70s, demonstrates how its beginnings affected the organization of the departments. The differentiation of ethnic studies program from area studies gave Puerto Rican Studies a distinct character that would permeate its intellectual practices for the next 30 years. However, as Lisa Lowe has stated in her article “Canons, Institutionalization, Identity,” one cannot underestimate the fact that the diverse field of ethnic studies was born of a paradox that accompanied all programs that emerged out of the ’60s, including women studies. The programs find in the institution a space from which other disciplines can be criticized, but, at the same time, “the institutionalization of any field or curriculum that establish[es] orthodox objects and methods submits in part to the demands of the university and its educative function of socializing subjects for the state” (1996: 41). Thus, as Frank Bonilla has stated, one has to remain skeptical about any attempt to make Puerto Rican Studies: 1

In 1973, almost at the onset of the establishment of the programs of Puerto Rican Studies, a short essay appeared which constituted one of the first texts to theorize about the program. Written by Frank Bonilla in 1972, as part of the seminar “Cultural Pluralism,” given at Columbia University and published along with Emilio González in 1973 as part of a book on dependence theory, “New Knowing, New Practice: Puerto Rican Studies” quickly became one of the most cited essays evaluating the contributions of the field of Puerto Rican Studies. 2 The 1973 article was one of the first texts that reflected upon the field itself. It established norms and considered the new field’s operations. It also established the discussion axis for subsequent essayists who rarely attempted other interpretative possibilities. 3 Finally, since Bonilla was a prolific essayist and belonged to the organizing committee of the Puerto Rican Studies’ Program in 1970 (Aquino Bermúdez 1975: 333), as well as being the first director of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies in 1973, the text carries importance. The institutional apparatus that preceded him gave his propositions a particular power and allowed him to institutionalize many of the proposals presented as constitutive of this new field. Furthermore, this essay allows us to examine what Said, quoting Foucault, called discursivity: “the possibility of, as well as the rule of formation for, subsequent texts” (1985: 34).

In general terms, the discussion in the essay, “Puerto Rican Studies: New Knowing, New Practices” by Bonilla (co-written with his student Emilio González) emerges in the university context as part of the structure of dependency theory. The question that runs throughout the text is whether
the possibility of creating spaces for intellectual production is worthy of a community that was just gaining access to the university. The text is about facing the material conditions that could make it possible for this new community to succeed in the university.

The thread that binds the discussion of Bonilla and González’s essay is cultural pluralism. In a seminar on this topic, the authors showed the insufficiencies of the term, considered a product of the liberal ideology of the academic world. In the unfamiliar atmosphere of the university, what could the term “cultural pluralism” mean to Puerto Ricans? In any of its meanings, the term could hardly account for the “sense of thrust for cultural reaffirmation among Puerto Ricans in the United States…” (1973: 229). The term truly exhibits its deficiencies in its aim to accommodate new university subjects without presupposing the material resources that would make such incorporation in the institution viable. The economic panorama emerging in New York City during the '70s, which Bonilla and González anticipated as part of the emergence of postindustrial societies, limits all social and economic redistribution projects, as was seen in the following years. The project of “cultural pluralism” was compromised from its very inception.

THE THREAD THAT BINDS THE DISCUSSION OF BONILLA AND GONZÁLEZ’S ESSAY IS CULTURAL PLURALISM.

How could Bonilla and González anticipate this situation? Their assertions anticipated other interpretations because they stemmed from an economic analysis of New York City in the 1960s and '70s. In texts written during the '70s and the '80s, Bonilla, along with Ricardo Campos and other members of the Center’s History and Migration Task Force, documented the impact of American capitalism in Puerto Rico. In a historical-materialist analysis of the transformation of Puerto Rican society from an agrarian to a manufacturing and, then, to a service economy in the lapse of 40 years, Bonilla and Campos established a connection between industrialization and working class idleness, in Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican communities in the United States. Furthermore, they studied the conditions that prevented an effective economic development geared toward the improvement of the material conditions of the working class. In these essays the university does not appear as a solution to the working class’s predicament—in fact, education was quoted as one of the many variables that did not have a significant impact in improving their conditions. Nonetheless, it is clear that Bonilla, along with González, conceived of the university as a space where projects of social equality should be pursued, regardless of the institution’s hesitations.

Indeed, in Bonilla and González’s essay, even in the taxonomy that they used, the approach to the university was tied to an assessment of the capitalist economic structure, which was seen as preventing the opening of social institutions to community needs. In other words, the university, as an “ideological state
apparatus,” could not structurally harbor the aspirations of those who were alien to its logic of inclusion (Althuser 1971). It was not a matter, as Bonilla and González stated, of accommodating the cultural differences of Puerto Ricans, but of provoking a radical transformation of the state and its institutions. Change would reaffirm the commitment to this community: “What is at stake is, of course, precisely the possibility of giving real content to the timid commitment by the university to meeting the new demands for a plural cultural approach to instruction, research and relations with outside groups” (1973: 230). And yet, the contradictions between “the existing practices and the unfulfilled ideals and the new demands” (1973: 230) provide a space where alternate projects, such as Puerto Rican Studies programs, could be thought and developed.

THE EMERGENCE OF PUERTO RICAN AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN PROGRAMS (PREVIOUSLY CALLED BLACK STUDIES), ALONG WITH THE “OPEN ADMISSION” POLICY, CREATED AN ATMOSPHERE OF GREAT OPTIMISM AND ANTICIPATION.

It is clear that City University in the 1970s was radically transformed by the Puerto Rican and other minorities’ movements. Particularly, the emergence of Puerto Rican and African-American programs (previously called Black Studies), along with the “Open Admission” policy, created an atmosphere of great optimism and anticipation. The arrival of thousands of Puerto Rican students, stimulated by those two initiatives, provided the critical mass that justified the establishment and continuity of these programs. Nowhere was this optimism more evident than in the essays written during that time. Most of these texts acknowledged the positive impact that such programs would have for the Puerto Rican community at large, particularly if they maintained an interest in the needs of the community (History Task Force 1979: 157–64). As in the beginning of Black Studies, the forces producing a space within the university were in no way ready to give up these programs, especially as the economic conditions of New York City deteriorated during the ’70s. Even so, Bonilla and González are aware of the challenges posed by institutional forces reluctant to legitimize any new curricular endeavor. Thus, one of the questions posed in the essay was how to legitimize the new spaces created in the university for the community. What are the axes that would organize the new knowledge created by the community? It is impossible to answer these questions without recounting the organization of the Studies.
Puerto Rican Studies and its Organizational Axes

Puerto Rican Studies, as well as African-American Studies, are distinguished by being “descriptive, corrective and prescriptive.”6 One of the most important issues discussed in Bonilla and González’s essay is the descriptive character of the Studies, whose impact would result from correcting the history of the Puerto Rican Diaspora and its participation in American political, economic, and civic life. The essays that followed Bonilla and González’s essay concur that this new field responded to the absence of a bibliography that would explain the socioeconomic and historical circumstances of the Puerto Rican diaspora, as well as the differences between this migratory movement and others established in New York City during the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century (1973: 225).7

In the ‘80s, the decade that followed the emergence of the programs, and in response to the lack of a substantial body of scholarship on the experience of the Puerto Rican diaspora, essays were written by sociologists, economists, historians, and political scientists. These articles documented the differences among migratory movements proposing a more dynamic reading of the Puerto Rican community in New York. Their content refused to identify the Puerto Rican community as a sick entity that needed to assimilate American values to overcome its negative experiences in the United States.8 As Flores (1988), Rodríguez (1990), Vázquez (1987), Whalen (2001), Ortiz (1998), and others have stated, Lewis’ La Vida. A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty (1965), Glazer and Moynihan’s book Beyond the Melting Pot (1970 [1963]), and Fitzpatrick’s Puerto Rican American: The Meaning of Migration to the Mainland (1971) constituted a textual corpus that framed the readings of the Puerto Rican community emerging from social workers, politicians, and policy-makers alike with “more political than scientific importance” (History Task Force 1979: 27, fn. 4). In general terms, these texts had concentrated on the mishaps and limitations of the community without an analytical framework to assess the migration phenomena and all its repercussions.9 In Jesse Vázquez’s words, their reading was motivated by “its prurient content and its sensationalist portrayal of those Puerto Ricans caught below the poverty line” (n.d.: 88, fn 9).

Indeed, the years preceding the establishment of the Puerto Rican Studies programs were characterized by the convergence of different pronouncements about the Puerto Rican community that contribute to their subjectification. Laura Ortiz, in her excellent dissertation (1998), has classified the various statements in four discursive formations: early statements about the Puerto Rican upon the invasion; “The Puerto Rican Problem”; “The Assimilation Problem”; and “The Culture of Poverty.” While some of these formations are more representative of particular times in the history of Puerto Rican migration to the United States, they are not limited to specific periods and can be found in later texts (1998: 40–1). As these enunciations flourished, counter-narratives were also produced addressing four significant issues concerning Puerto Ricans in the island and in the United States: the “overpopulation problem”; the inability to find work; the intrinsic cultural character of poverty; and the relationship between matriarchal order and the reproduction of poverty.10 In the case of the publications by Bonilla, Campos, and the members of the History Task Force, these four issues were addressed in an attempt to revise the Puerto Rican migratory “experience” as one linked to the new capitalist order imposed by the United States in Puerto Rico at the end of the 19th century and to the general experience of the working class in capitalist society.
The new productive forces resulting from capitalist development—not from population as in Malthusian thought—became the authors’ focus since they understood migration as a multilayered phenomenon that shaped Puerto Rican society from the 1950s to the end of the 20th century (History Task Force 1979: 34–6). Unemployment, or the increase of the “reserve industry army,” on the other hand, was addressed as an important component of capitalist development: a law activated by capitalist accumulation that exacerbates the contradictions encountered by the colonial government (Bonilla and Campos 1976: 84). The two factors, overpopulation and unemployment, were brought together to explain Puerto Rican working class idleness not as a cultural phenomenon but as a contradictory result of capitalist accumulation, which requires the disbursement of an enormous amount of federal money to avoid social conflict (Bonilla and Campos 1976: 84–6). Finally, women’s participation in the work force was documented to illustrate not the advancement of women’s rights but their
paradoxical incorporation in an attempt to cut production costs.\textsuperscript{11} It is important to indicate that, in the case of the Center papers, the reconstruction of this corpus differentiates itself from earlier paradigms by its Marxist imprint and its evident relationship to the new historiography. In Puerto Rico, the best examples of the essays were written by the members of the Center for the Study of the Puerto Rican Reality (CEREP).

CEREP, established in 1970 as a research center with several affiliates, was influential in the development of a “Puerto Rican working class perspective.” Its publications, heterogeneous in their outlook and initially uninterested in the Puerto Rican migratory experience, brought together documents, perspectives, and methodologies instrumental to the work of the members of the History and Migration Task Force, where Bonilla found himself during the 1970s and ’80s. As Bonilla himself has pointed out, along with Campos and Flores, the books published by the CEREP group “have not only brought to light events and processes neglected by early historians, but have also set forth basic guidelines for a materialistic approach to the reconstruction of the past, firmly grounded in the careful selection and use of primary sources.”\textsuperscript{12} One could argue that some collections, such as the \textit{Sources for the Study of Puerto Rican Migration: 1879–1930} (1982), were modeled after earlier collection of documents done by CEREP members.\textsuperscript{13} Also, the essays written by Quintero Rivera and Ramos Mattei (two CEREP members) were frequently quoted in the historiographical recount of the sugar industry. Despite their limitations, CEREP texts were indispensable in the interpretation of capitalist development in Puerto Rico, particularly the earlier stages, which were seldom questioned by Bonilla and others.

Notwithstanding the importance of Puerto Rican Studies’ corrective character, evidenced by the attempt to distinguish the new scholarship emerging from Puerto Rican Studies scholars from earlier pathological readings of the Puerto Rican diaspora, I would argue that one of the central points in the discussion was the relationship between the community and the university. As I stated before, the university was not receptive to the minority students’ claims in their attempt to obtain a college education. According to Bonilla and González, the university was acting based upon “scientific” studies that define Puerto Ricans as deviant subjects of the assimilation paradigm that the melting pot logic implied (1973: 225).

In this sense, the importance of the corrective character of the texts written by Puerto Rican Studies scholars is paramount. Bonilla and González’s essay is clear in stating that the formation of Puerto Rican Studies resulted from a politicization that occurred in the Puerto Rican community. This led to an increased participation in civil life in New York City institutions. This first defensive stage was followed by “significant changes in education,” which would reverberate throughout the sectors outside the university: “The community is, in short, caught up in a process of challenge, redefinition and construction of new forms of working, struggling and learning together” (1973: 227).

Certainly, the relationship between the community and the university was one of the primary points in the debates on Puerto Rican Studies, as it also was in the beginnings of African-American Studies.\textsuperscript{14} In both developments the relationship assumes that the previous studies on Puerto Ricans, as Ortiz (1998) has shown, as well as on African Americans, have not improved their living conditions. On the contrary, they have contributed to an increasing marginalization (Marable 2000).
The texts that were produced during the emergence of Puerto Rican Studies were emphatic about disentangling the community from former analyses. Two arguments are bound together in this discussion: the need to generate a corpus of texts that would serve the community in its struggle to improve the people’s living conditions; and a reflection on the academic work that exceeds their limits and that has served as a legitimating device:

The crucial need at present is to legitimate these new patterns of relationship within the university and to establish the conditions that will make them an effective foundation for the higher education of Puerto Rican youth and the performance of intellectual work of import to this Puerto Rican community. (Bonilla and González 1973: 231—emphasis added)

The formation of the Studies presupposed from the beginning that the student-community ties that had enabled the struggles to occur and the programs to be established should also structure these academic programs themselves. This aspect implied a re-conceptualization of academic programming to produce more representation of the community sectors involved and affected by the work. The 1973 essay, like other essays, was explicit in its attempt to formulate new forms of interaction in the university that detach it from its isolation and self-consciousness, and thus open it to the community and its needs."

Interestingly, contrary to the situation in African-American Studies, there was no split between advocates of the creation of a department that responded to the needs of the community and others who wanted to respond to the “academic dogma” in Puerto Rican Studies. That is, there was no split between an intellectual work that recognizes the political value of its enterprise
and another that requires “its immediate utility” (Gates and Marable 2000: 187). It is possible that the absence of institutional support, along with the absence of a “chair” in Ivy League universities, did not permit the development of an autonomous field of studies or an exclusively humanistic field; indeed, most academics were oblivious to the popular demands that framed the foundation of Puerto Rican Studies programs. The new practitioners of Puerto Rican Studies had entered other fields of study, unattended at first. They did so without articulating a debate about this relationship. Most everyone who has theorized about the discursive formation of Puerto Rican Studies agrees on the importance of helping the members of the Puerto Rican community through the creation of educational programs:

This drive to enter colleges, to create our own life-space in universities and to shape and build institutions expresses more than a drive for social ascent. Young Puerto Ricans are not only affirming their own character and needs but also unique and valued links to their community and commitment to a large purpose than self advancement. (Bonilla and González 1973: 231)

One could argue that the 1973 essay was emphatic about discarding those practices that were based on the organization of the university as a space for social mobility. The purpose of Puerto Rican Studies would then be “to create new knowledge and quickly and comprehensibly transfer it to a long denied community,” as Bonilla (1997: 8) stated later. A practical example of this transformation was the attempt to relate many of the research enterprises to policy centers. The El Barrio Popular Education Program could be mentioned as an initiative sponsored by the Center.

The “inaugural logic” that originated the Studies understood that the community was its raison d’être. As Jennings (1987: 116) stated, the purpose of the program has a social dimension that goes beyond the academic confines, and attempts “to mold the Puerto Rican communities”:

A major function for the Puerto Rican Studies in the 1980s is to develop concepts, models, and eventually programs which seek to eradicate inequality in American society. Other educational foci must still be pursued within this context. Studies in Puerto Rican culture, literature, history are vitally important for Puerto Rican and others; but the attempt to involve Puerto Rican Studies in the molding of Puerto Rican communities must be a major one for several reasons. (1987: 116—emphasis added)

The relationship between the community and the university would have, at the same time, two “unintended consequences” in the formation of the Studies, as it is evident in Jennings’ quote. First, due to the importance of documenting and registering the conditions of the Puerto Rican community to establish programs, the essays written during the 1970s and ‘80s documented the conditions of Puerto Ricans in the United States; that is, they gave priority to documentation over theorization. Second, because of the supremacy that documentation of the material conditions the Puerto Rican community acquires, the Studies would privilege political, economic, and demographic studies that would give all studies, even literary ones, a sociological/social dimension. This fact adds to the former observation that there would be no division in the field, since there would be no sector privileging a humanistic emphasis over a sociological one, as is the case in African-American Studies.
Rather, the majority of the essays written about the Puerto Rican diaspora privilege a “sociological vision.”21 This seems to confirm Liza Sánchez González’s observation that “though the humanities constitute a relatively minor area of mainland Puerto Rican studies, still the priorities of Boricua literary scholarship, which is almost entirely authored by scholars trained and/or teaching outside literary disciplines, tend to follow the lead of the social sciences” (2001: 17). Particularly, this paradigm will impose itself through the Centro publications, and will dominate most subsequent interpretations.22

The supremacy of the social mold is evident since the first essay written by Bonilla (1972) about the Puerto Rican Studies programs. The essay discusses the possibility of a future university within the new economic coordinates, the postindustrial society that Bonilla anticipated in 1972 and fully researched with Ricardo Campos as members of the History Task Force. However, the economic taxonomy that characterized the essay locates his arguments as a duel between “the liberal ideology” that animates the state through its institutions, and the Marxist analysis proposed by the intellectual sectors associated with Puerto Rican Studies, particularly affecting those, like himself, who were associated with the Centro.

From where is this community concept enunciated? How does it manifest the intention of legitimizing new inquisitive practices disentangled from the university? How does it specify a field, and delineate its margins? These are not easy questions.23 Bonilla asks himself:

Could a group of academics, however leavened by a few blacks and Brown presences, get to the heart of real issues over cocktail and dinner in the precincts of Columbia University? Weren’t the real sense of energy and insight behind the drive for cultural pluralism in the U.S. universities (i.e. students and community) being left out? (1972: 9)24

The question and its answer point to the absence of a majority representation in the university. Within the wide range of discourses that try to interpret the university as an institution, Bonilla acknowledged that he is marginal and a minority. But, he, at the same time, characterized himself as a carrier of an experience that would legitimize him, as well as others, to undertake this new intellectual enterprise. It is in this undertaking that a consciousness of beginnings clearly emerged.

Perhaps the formation of this new center allowed the creation of a new research policy that could not be implemented in other departments, bound to institutional practices such as tenure, rank, leave, etc.
The second axis that organized the field would be the emphasis in collective work. This aspect figures as one of the most important practical concerns, although it was seldom implemented in the departments that housed the programs. It is important to point out that the Studies’ proposal rested on a transformation of the university and its “ritual, secret and arbitrary” character (Bonilla and González 1973: 233). To emphasize that characterization, the Studies programs proposed a production of knowledge bound to other forms of academic interaction seldom found in the institution. It also proposed the possibility of experimenting with new methodologies that were more appropriate to the Puerto Rican student population (Vázquez n.d.: 80–1). It is clear that this type of work was implemented in the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, founded in 1973 and directed by Bonilla until 1993. Perhaps the formation of this new center allowed the creation of a new research policy that could not be implemented in other departments, bound to institutional practices such as tenure, rank, leave, etc. All those areas favor competition, individualism, and individual intellectual property. As it was stated in “Original Mandate,” the collective work, that is, the search for consensus and decision making, was an integral part of the development of the Centro (A Proposal for A Center for Puerto Rican Studies and Research at the City University Graduate Center 1971–1972: 8–9). This aspect could be documented in their publications, usually authored by a collective or two or more research affiliates in the five original task forces, which included “History and Migration”; “Film Task Force”; “Culture and the Arts Task Force”; “Higher Education”; and “Language Policy.” A later analysis by Bonilla would admit the proposal’s limitations since this aspect could not be reproduced in other institutional programs (Bonilla 1987: 18–9).

The third axis of the discussion found throughout the literature of the Puerto Rican diaspora is the representation of the intellectual production. Perhaps this aspect is one where the literature seems to be divided and start showing differences.
between two paradigms: one related to social class, which is tied to the analysis of historical materialism presented in most texts produced by El Centro affiliates; and another that has to do with a cultural paradigm, emphasizing cultural differences among Puerto Ricans beyond their social class. The social class paradigm imposes itself through the Centro’s publications, but also shares with other manifestations that come from professors from other programs in other Puerto Rican Studies departments in CUNY. It is important to point out that the texts written by Bonilla and Campos were particularly motivated by the belief that the working class was more likely to act against its subjugation if they were knowledgeable about the material conditions that determined their living situation.

Fourth, because of the unique position of Puerto Ricans in the United States, a population that lives, according to Bonilla, next to the two extremes of capitalist development (its beginning and final stages), Puerto Ricans enjoy a “privileged vantage point of view” to analyze the conditions experienced by the migratory population in the United States; this outlook combines the national liberation struggles in the Caribbean (as in the case of Puerto Rico and other nations) and the ethnic minority struggles in the United States. A similar line of argumentation, briefly discussed in 1973, was pursued in the essays written during the later 1970s and ‘80s, in which a more developed analysis of the Puerto Rican migration was undertaken. The study proposed by Bonilla, along with the History Task Force of the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, particularly Bonilla’s essays written with Ricardo Campos, stressed the paradigmatic character of the Puerto Rican experience due to its “duration and relative magnitude of population displacement, the depth and scope of related changes in the islands’ economy, class configuration and political organization” (History Task Force 1979: 9–10). All these factors made Puerto Rican migration illustrative of developments that would be reproduced in other countries. One could argue that the study of “Puerto Rican experience” did not only intend to produce theoretical knowledge about capitalist development in Puerto Rico and its repercussions on the Island and in the United States, but also aspired to be a model to analyze other nations in earlier stages of capitalist development:

Puerto Ricans uniquely stand at a historic intersection of both liberation movements—the struggle for autonomy of small territorially based nations and that of displaced and overrun ethnic peoples in the U.S. (Bonilla and González 1977: 230)

The historical placement situates Puerto Rico and its political destiny as a divided collectivity at a strategic intersection of social forces and processes. Puerto Rican Studies as a field emerges in this light as a crucial nexus for the study of economic, political, and cultural processes ranging far beyond the social problems of a single minority concentrated in one United States city. (Bonilla and González 1977: 227)

The supremacy achieved by the development of a “Puerto Rican perspective,” produced by its interstitial position between the Caribbean and the United States, gives the Studies an anticolonial zeal that would be found in other texts as well, even literary texts. This aspect manifests the abysmal difference between other migrations and the great Puerto Rican migration of the ’50s, since it was the result of the colonial relationship with the United States. The supremacy of the Puerto Rican perspective would be retaken later by Flores’ (2000) essays “Latino Studies, New Context, New Concepts” and “Pan Latino/Trans
Latino: the New New York.” Interestingly, the former essay seems to establish the decline of Puerto Rican Studies and the emergence of a new field of studies caused by the demographic transformations in the main cities in the United States, an emergence that resulting from claims of other minority groups trying to create a space in the U.S. Academy. In consequence, “the Puerto Rican experience,” its singularity and its possible contribution as a paradigm in the configuration of the new field were emphasized one more time. It is clear that, in both cases, the exceptional nature of the Puerto Rican colonial experience allowed the establishment and justification of this new field of study, at least in Bonilla’s argument. Juan Flores’ essays arise from an attempt to ground the historical struggles of the Puerto Rican community, when the said community is no longer a majority in New York City, due to the fragmentation experienced in the urban demographic landscape.

Finally, all these aspects presuppose the fiscal and academic autonomy of all concerned units of Puerto Rican Studies (departments, programs, or majors), an autonomy that would allow the establishment of policies related to academic programs, personnel recruiting, and non-contaminated ways of academic-social interaction by the institution. It would guarantee, as Vázquez (n.d.: 80) indicated in an article published years later, detailed attention regarding the Puerto Rican community and other minority groups that still experience oppression.

It would seem, then, that Bonilla and González’s essay of 1973, which coincided with the beginning of Bonilla’s term as director of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, opens a cycle and implies the beginning and the end of a field. His retirement as director closes this cycle and opens up another position, director of the Inter-University Program for Latino Research, a position that Juan Flores theorized about. I am not implying that an author—no matter whether an essayist or a researcher—could formalize a field. Nor am I suggesting that one person could trace its margins or anticipate its fissures.

Although it is true that enunciations are determined by the space from which they are articulated, the importance of the 1973 essay is not bound by what it says, nor by what the authors’ intention may be; its importance is related to the fact that his propositions are taken again and again by other essayists (Said 1985). One has to wonder if his propositions are accepted because they condense the fundamental axes of the debate, or, if they are accepted, do they portray a vision of Puerto Rican Studies that will reverberate in the new generation of researchers, so far from that initial moment? In this sense, it is possible to compare Bonilla’s gesture with what Edward Said has called the “inaugural logic,”

in which the creation of authority is paramount—first, in the requisite feat of having done something for the first time, an original achievement that gains in worth, paradoxically, precisely because it is so often repeated thereafter. (1985: 32)

The 1973 essay presents one of the greatest difficulties when one reflects upon the constitution of a field or, in Said’s words, when one tries to identify a point of departure, a beginning. This difficulty resides in the intention to name one author who condenses a vision of a field without recognizing the not always evident fissures and leaks that permeate all intellectual inquiries. If I have anchored my discussion in Bonilla and González’s essay, it is because I wanted to use the review to address the essays and authors who have contributed to Puerto Rican Studies. I believe that a review of the essays written during the 1970s, and those written
in the ‘80s and ‘90s could trace the most important lines of discussion in the development of the field and its debates, which helped to frame its limits. After all, there would be no way to approach what we call Puerto Rican Studies without exposing ourselves to the perspective given by its practitioners, their debates, and their legitimizing practices.

The research that has organized this study already anticipates its end. In other words, the writing of this text, rather than anticipating its end, takes it as a constitutive element. My initiation in the field starts as a reflection of its beginning. My beginning, as any beginning, establishes continuity (in its search for beginnings) and presupposes a rupture. It recognizes that what I study is no longer what it used to be. As Said has stated in his seminal book:

Formally, the mind wants to conceive a point in either time or space that marks the beginning of all things...but like Oedipus the mind risks discovering, at that point, where all things will end as well....Very frequently...the beginning implies the end—or rather, implicates it. (1985: 41)
NOTES

1 See the a posteriori evaluation about the institutionalization of the Studies in Cabán (1998). I refer the reader to page 213, where this issue is discussed.

2 The second part of the essay “New Knowing, New Practices: Puerto Rican Studies” has a clarification note indicating that it was written by one of the authors (Bonilla) in 1972 for the lecture “Cultural Pluralism” sponsored by Columbia University and City College of New York. The text “Cultural Pluralism and the University: The Case of Puerto Rican Studies,” written by Bonilla, was originally published in the Revista de Brooklyn College.

Emilio González was an undergraduate student working with Bonilla (see Bonilla 1997).


4 Bonilla’s essay anticipated the limits of the Open Admission Policy, which ended in 1976. For an analysis of said policy, see Nieves (1979), and Lavin and Hyllegard (1996).

5 I am referring to the collection of essays in Labor Migration Under Capitalism (1979), written with other members of the History Task Force (mainly, Ricardo Campos) as well as Industry and Idleness (1986), published with Ricardo Campos. I also consulted “Industrialization and Migration: Some Effects on the Puerto Rican Working Class” (1976), written with Ricardo Campos, which seems to be an earlier version of the essay published in 1979. This essay was published in a Latin American Perspectives journal dedicated to Puerto Rico. That issue was partially organized by Bonilla himself.

6 Here, I follow Marable’s (2000: 1–2) characterization of African-American Studies. This collection of essays has been particularly useful since it outlines the problems concerning Puerto Rican Studies, as well as African-American Studies. Both these programs share an institutional history that goes back to the ’70s, when Black and Puerto Rican Studies were established.

7 This discussion will be undertaken in a later essay—in Bonilla (1987). In this essay, Bonilla points out, “An immediate objective in the early period of Puerto Rican Studies was to clear the ground of allegedly scholarly and authoritative versions of Puerto Rican reality that could be shown to be shakily grounded in fact, shallowly supported by theory, and substantially ideological in intent” (1973: 18).


9 Although these texts are quoted in most of the essays reviewed, there are differences among them: the members of the History Task Force characterize these texts, with the exception of Lewis (1969), as having “peripheral interest” in Puerto Rico (1979: 27–8, fn. 4). Ortiz (1998) studied these texts as part of different discursive formations that contribute to the subjectification of Puerto Ricans since the beginning of the 20th century.

10 Whalen (2001: 199–201) highlights this relationship in her study of the “culture of poverty” paradigm.

11 In the essay quoted above, the analysis of female participation is limited to the characterization of workers and its relation to “industries which pay the lowest wages” (1976: 89).

12 Bonilla, Campos, and Flores (1984: 77) make the relationship between the researchers associated to the Center and the ones related to the CEREP clear. For a critical reading of this position, see the second chapter in González Muñoz’s (2000) dissertation.

13 I am thinking about the collection of documents Lucha obrera (Quintero Rivera 1971).
This collection was quoted by Flores and Campos (1993: 111) in their original 1978 version. Flores and Campos’s essay appears in Spanish in Quintero Rivera et al. (1979).


15 Interestingly, Richard Rivera, in an essay published in 1974, states that “The house of studies (Casa de Estudio) concept which would isolate schools, students and instructors from the realities of poverty, discrimination, exploitation, colonialism, etc., is irrelevant in today’s world. School does not exist in a vacuum; they are not oases. Students and professors alike are Society” (1974: 42). Although these propositions coincided with Bonilla and González’s essay, they are seldom quoted in the literature reviewed. This seems to confirm Said’s assertion that “inaugural texts” are such due to the repetitive character. Their propositions would be quoted again and again by others.

16 I refer the reader to the debate between Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Manning Marable (Gates and Marable 2000: 186–91).

17 Sánchez González (2001: 17) has identified the apparent “lag” in relation to other fields of study. In her opinion, such a lag responds to the absence of institutional support and the small number of Puerto Rican students (in the United States and Puerto Rico) with post-secondary studies.


20 It is important to point out that the “Original Mandate” confirms this observation. The scarcity of “data” is indicated in the section “Research and Field Study,” which does not allow for a systematic analysis of the “Puerto Rican situation.” One of the priorities of this committee, as it was phrased in the document, was the “Collection, preliminary analysis and storage of basic data on Puerto Ricans in the United States” (1971–72: 10). The document is titled “A Proposal for a Center for Puerto Rican Studies and Research at the City University Graduate Center.” I wish to thank Dr. Gabriel Haslip-Viera for giving me this document.

21 Curiously, in an essay written by Eugene Mohr (2002)—one of the first authors to write a book about the literature of the Puerto Rican diaspora (1982)—the essayist commented on the difficulties in creating literary criteria in the compilation of anthological works of women from minority groups. When reviewing the book *Latina Portraits: Interviews with Contemporary Women Writers* (Kevane and Heredia 2000), he pointed out that the difficulty lies in the development of literary criteria that are not exclusively sociological.

22 See, for example, Bonilla, Campos, and Flores (1984).

23 See Caban’s (1998: 213) *a posteriori* appreciation: “No doubt the demands of academia moderated the political activism inherent in many Latino Studies programs, while the requisites of tenure injected strictures unanticipated by young Latino scholars when they first appropriated a space in the university. These realities have weakened the community affiliation that was the hallmark of many Latino Studies programs.”

24 This introductory section was eliminated from the essay published with Emilio González (Bonilla and González 1973).

25 See Aquino Bermúdez (1975: 172). A concrete example of this discrepancy could be seen in the literary anthologies compiled during the ’70s.

26 The same argument was developed in the article written with Campos (1976: 92).
The emergence of Latino Studies or Dominican Studies was the result of the claims of other minority groups trying to create a space in the U.S. Academy.

It is important to remember that the Puerto Rican Studies Programs were implemented in various ways, according to the status of the institution. It is clear that those campuses where departments were established were more effective, since they could retain fiscal and administrative control. I refer the reader to Cabán (2003: 7–11).

REFERENCES


Quintero Rivera, Ángel G., ed. 1971. Lucha obrera en Puerto Rico: antología de grandes documentos en la historia obrera puertorriqueña. San Juan: CEREP.


DOCUMENTS
A Proposal for A Center for Puerto Rican Studies and Research at the City University Graduate Center, 1971–1972.
Centro Organization Chart and Areas of Work (Document B).