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Radical Contexts: Puerto Rican Politics in the 1960s and 1970s and the Center for Puerto Rican Studies
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Radical contexts: 
Puerto rican Politics 
in the 1960s and 1970s 
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Puerto rican studies 
Carmen Teresa Whalen

Rooted in the radical political context of the late 1960s and 1970s, this historiography suggests that the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, which was founded in 1973, created another radical context by providing a physical space, alternative approaches, and support for scholarship that laid the foundation for Puerto Rican Studies as a field of research today. The dialogue between these two radical contexts—the Puerto Rican movement and the Center for Puerto Rican Studies' early scholarship—suggests four critical dimensions for studying Puerto Rican politics: the historical trajectory of Puerto Rican politics in the States; the political context of the era; the continuing colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico; and groups' internal dynamics and broader identity politics. [Key words: Historiography, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Puerto Rican movement, Young Lords, diaspora, politics]
Nations, calling for independence for Puerto Rico and commemorating the Nationalist insurrection in Puerto Rico twenty years earlier. The march was organized by the Young Lords, a political group comprised primarily of second-generation Puerto Rican youth. On July 4, 1976, the Puerto Rican Socialist Party mobilized more than 50,000 people in Philadelphia and San Francisco, calling for “A Bicentennial Without Colonization,” and protesting the official versions of the United States’ bicentennial (1776–1976). These marches were very visible moments in the Puerto Rican movement, and independence for Puerto Rico was a central concern for many activists.1 The Puerto Rican movement, however, was not a monolithic entity, nor a hierarchically organized and synchronized political organization. Instead, it was a constellation of groups working on a variety of local and global issues, often intersecting. During the 1960s and the 1970s, the Puerto Rican movement was part of the social movements that characterized the era, globally and within the United States. Broadly defined, U.S. social movements sought civil rights, economic justice, and an end to U.S. imperialism and the war in Vietnam, as well as the elimination of bias and second-class citizenship based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class. Social movements addressed the multiple and overlapping structures of inequality. They also crafted identity politics based on pride, thereby challenging social constructions of inferiority. This was the “radical context” of the 1960s and 1970s.

The Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños (the Center for Puerto Rican Studies) was founded as a research center in New York City in 1973.2 This paper explores the radical context that surrounded the establishment of the Centro. Centro was not, however, just a product of the times. Instead, Centro created another “radical context” by providing a physical space, alternative approaches, and support for scholarship that laid the foundations for Puerto Rican Studies as a field of research today. Centro promoted interdisciplinary and collective scholarship through working groups or task forces, conferences, a newsletter, and working papers. By the late 1970s, Centro began to publish its own works, and in 1987 it launched its own academic journal, *CENTRO: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies*, which continues today.3 Centro’s scholarship provided an alternative to the pre-existing literature on Puerto Ricans in the United States, reclaimed community histories, and examined the radical politics of the era. This historiographical account explores the dialogue between these two “radical contexts”—the Puerto Rican movement and Centro’s scholarship.4

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ON OCTOBER 30, 1970, 10,000 PEOPLE MARCHED TO THE UNITED NATIONS, calling for independence for Puerto Rico and commemorating the Nationalist insurrection in Puerto Rico twenty years earlier. The march was organized by the Young Lords, a political group comprised primarily of second-generation Puerto Rican youth. On July 4, 1976, the Puerto Rican Socialist Party mobilized more than 50,000 people in Philadelphia and San Francisco, calling for “A Bicentennial Without Colonization,” and protesting the official versions of the United States’ bicentennial (1776–1976). These marches were very visible moments in the Puerto Rican movement, and independence for Puerto Rico was a central concern for many activists.1 The Puerto Rican movement, however, was not a monolithic entity, nor a hierarchically organized and synchronized political organization. Instead, it was a constellation of groups working on a variety of local and global issues, often intersecting. During the 1960s and the 1970s, the Puerto Rican movement was part of the social movements that characterized the era, globally and within the United States. Broadly defined, U.S. social movements sought civil rights, economic justice, and an end to U.S. imperialism and the war in Vietnam, as well as the elimination of bias and second-class citizenship based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class. Social movements addressed the multiple and overlapping structures of inequality. They also crafted identity politics based on pride, thereby challenging social constructions of inferiority. This was the “radical context” of the 1960s and 1970s.

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Creating a Radical Context and Reclaiming Community Histories: The Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños

Reflecting the era’s political activism, Centro defined its mission at the intersections of scholarship and activism. Celebrating their tenth anniversary, they reaffirmed, “Centro’s continued commitment to university based research and teaching, attention to practical community concerns and to the dissemination of the fruits of our research to the Puerto Rican community and to the general public.”

Centro began the scholarly task of reclaiming community histories and making these histories visible. The issue, however, was not simply a void in historical writings on Puerto Rican communities and Puerto Rican politics in the United States. Instead, the issue was that what did exist in print was often negative and even negating. Centro provided an alternative to the dominant, mainstream writings on Puerto Rican migration and Puerto Ricans in the States. Beyond this important historical recovery, Centro developed alternative approaches and analysis. Influenced by the radical context of the times, Centro’s scholarship entailed a radical critique of broad structural factors, as well as attention to everyday people and their lives.

CENTRO PROVIDED AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE DOMINANT, MAINSTREAM WRITINGS ON PUERTO RICAN MIGRATION AND PUERTO RICANS IN THE STATES. BEYOND THIS IMPORTANT HISTORICAL RECOVERY, CENTRO DEVELOPED ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES AND ANALYSIS.

As a graduate student in 1987, I discovered that the scholarship on Puerto Ricans in the United States was still limited and that literature produced during the 1950s and 1960s was still the most widely cited in mainstream scholarship. This predominantly social science literature, written during the peak period of Puerto Rican migration, was a school of immigration studies steeped in American exceptionalism, as immigrants came to take advantage of the land of opportunity. Comparing Puerto Ricans in the post-World War II era to European immigrants at the turn of the century, these scholars found Puerto Ricans lacking, particularly in culture and ambition. Deemed the “undeserving poor,” Puerto Ricans’ were blamed for their own poverty. This scholarship also maintained that Puerto Ricans had no communities, let alone politics. Writing in 1950, for example, sociologist C. Wright Mills, along with Clarence Senior and Rose Kohn Goldsen, concluded, “In the metropolis the migrant has no community, even in clusters of Puerto Rican
settlement” (Mills, Senior and Goldsen 1950: 92). In 1959 historian Oscar Handlin wrote that it was “in the character of their communal life” that “the Negroes and Puerto Ricans are the farthest removed from the experiences of earlier immigrant groups” (Handlin 1959: 106). Yet 1987 was also the first year that CENTRO was published. Puerto Rican Studies was taking shape and becoming more broadly disseminated. I positioned my research on Puerto Rican migration to Philadelphia between more recent trends in immigration history and the emerging field of Puerto Rican Studies.7 Initially avoiding the scholarship of the 1950s and 1960s as much as possible, I later returned to develop a critique of racial ideologies embedded in “culture of poverty” perspectives.8 I now return to explore explicitly how Centro’s early scholarship provided a striking alternative to this pre-existing literature, as well as a foundation for Puerto Rican Studies.


Centro’s contributions stemmed from the radical political context of the late 1960s and 1970s and from the radical institutional context created at Centro. Committed to collaborative and interdisciplinary research, Centro organized “task forces.” Early task forces included History, Culture, Higher Education, Language Policy, Puerto Rican Studies, and Oral History. Concerned with the pressing social and political issues of the day, research agendas were defined in conversation with the broader community. In 1974, Centro sponsored the Conference on Puerto Rican Historiography “to elicit from such a diverse group an approximate sense of research priorities [and] felt needs for new knowledge” and to search for “topics of strategic interest to Puerto Rican communities in the United States.” Migration emerged as a central concern, revealing “a rising consciousness of the systematic forces that define and reproduce a people’s disadvantaged and unsettled condition.” The impetus for Labor Migration Under Capitalism was born. The History Task Force set out to develop “a theoretical approach to migration that would be responsive to the totality of the complex and contradictory movements so fresh in their experience” and “to build on the basic insights and theoretical guidelines provided by Marx, chiefly in Capital, concerning population and labor force movements as essential components in the organization of production” (History Task Force 1979: 7, 9, 10). Working for four years, task force members held public meetings and internal study sessions, and produced a 1975 cuaderno titled after the conference, several conference papers, and articles. Frank Bonilla, Ricardo Campos, and Carlos Sanabria were core members of the task force, aided by Juan Flores, and others along the way.9 Indicative of their collective approach, the History Task Force is the designated author of the book.
Highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of the scholarship, most contributors were not historians, but rather political economists who played a key role in the “historical” recovery of Puerto Rican communities.

Published in 1979, Centro’s _Labor Migration Under Capitalism_ explored the creation of Puerto Rican communities within a fundamental critique of global capitalism and U.S. colonialism. Before the terms “globalization” and “transnationalism” were fully in vogue, the History Task Force analyzed the dynamics of migration as stemming from the interactions between the United States and Puerto Rico, more specifically from the U.S. military occupation of Puerto Rico in 1898, the continuing colonial relationship, and the impact of U.S. capital investment in Puerto Rico (History Task Force 1979; History Task Force 1982; Bonilla and Campos 1986). The resultant economic dislocation in Puerto Rico was coupled with active labor recruitment by U.S. employers in the States, who were seeking low-wage workers with the assistance, often, of government-sponsored contract labor programs.

Centro’s approach challenged the prevailing portrayals, which stressed Puerto Rico’s economic “success story” and then pointed to “overpopulation” as the cause of migration. Mills, for example, argued, “The population pressures upon the island are so acute and the need for adjustment so grave that these movements can be expected to continue.” For Mills, “There has been after all no drastic change in the life of the Puerto Rican, accustomed as he is to a chronically depressed economy. If anything, conditions there are continually improving” (Mills, Senior and Goldsend 1950: 21, 53).

In contrast, Centro insisted, “Demographic conditions—including, of course, ‘overpopulation’ are at all times seen as being relative to the level of productive development of society” (History Task Force 1979: 35). They turned to the shortcomings of Puerto Rico’s industrialization program and the colonial relationship, which reaped profits for U.S. corporations while failing to provide adequate employment for Puerto Rican workers. Migration stemmed from colonialism, global capitalism, economic displacement, and labor recruitment. Moreover, by focusing on the impact of the United States in Puerto Rico and the role of government-sponsored labor recruitment, Centro moved beyond immigration studies’ “push-pull” explanations and toward a critical analysis of the global economy.

While this analysis of the causes of migration and the historical overview of migration to the States was the core of _Labor Migration Under Capitalism_, three additional essays contributed to the critique of pre-existing literature and provided alternatives. One was a demographic overview of Puerto Rican emigration by José L. Vázquez Calzada, which aimed to provide demographic details and analysis in place of sweeping generalizations about “overpopulation.” The other two essays, one by sociologist Clara Rodríguez and one by Felipe Rivera, who was an activist with an MBA in corporate and labor relations, initiated a critical assessment of the challenges confronting the working class communities that formed as a result of this migration. Poverty was caused, not by Puerto Ricans’ presumed cultural deficiencies, but rather by economic exploitation, subsequent economic displacement, and discrimination.

The earlier literature had focused on Puerto Ricans’ “problems” and blamed Puerto Ricans’ culture for those problems. In 1963, Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan asserted that “Puerto Rico was sadly defective,” for “it was weak in folk arts, unsure in its cultural traditions, without a powerful faith…. Nor was there much strength in the Puerto Rican family.” They suggested that the “culture of public welfare” was “as relevant for the future of Puerto Ricans in the
city as the culture of Puerto Rico” (Glazer and Moynihan 1963: 53, 101, 122). In 1965, anthropologist Oscar Lewis argued that Puerto Ricans had a “culture of poverty,” encapsulating many of the prevailing perspectives on Puerto Ricans and increasing their academic and popular credence. Lewis considered “poverty and its associated traits as a culture... with its own structure and rationale, as a way of life which is passed down from generation to generation along family lines.” The “culture of poverty” was characterized by limited interaction with the larger society, little organization within the ethnic community, families that verbally emphasized unity but rarely achieved it, and individuals with feelings of insecurity and a high level of tolerance for pathologies. As Puerto Ricans migrated to New York City, they brought their “culture of poverty” with them, so that “many of the problems of Puerto Ricans in New York have their origin in the slums of Puerto Rico” (Lewis 1965: xi, xxviii, xliii, lii; 1973). By 1971, Joseph Fitzpatrick revealed that, for some, the “culture of poverty” had become a central feature of Puerto Ricans’ “traditional culture,” as he attributed Puerto Ricans’ problems to “traditional weaknesses in Puerto Rican families” and “traditional features of Puerto Rican culture (machismo, the practice of the mistress, consensual unions, the culture of poverty)” (Fitzpatrick 1971: 159). These works had longevity, as they continued to be cited and as their notions of the “culture of poverty” continued to infuse scholarly writings on and popular perceptions of Puerto Ricans. Although there were alternative voices during this era, they were unable to shift the dominant “culture of poverty” paradigm.

Sharing concerns about the economic conditions of Puerto Ricans in New York City, Rodríguez offered fundamentally different explanations for the causes, and providing an early structural assessment of economic restructuring and its impact. Seeking to understand “the root causes of Puerto Rican high unemployment, skewed occupational distribution and low income,” she pointed to “the particular dialectic at work between the successive waves of immigrants and the development of capitalism in the United States.” Low economic status persisted because “the historical role of immigrants in the United States has been that of low-wage workers whose exploitation has tended to increase the surplus value of capitalists while maintaining general wage levels in depressed conditions.” Yet “differences in material conditions” stemmed from “the stage of capitalism” when Puerto Ricans migrated, and “the colonial relationship.” She argued, “A severe problem of blue-collar structural employment arose. Because of racial and ethnic prejudice, restrictive union policies, inadequate educational opportunities, and the restriction of Puerto Ricans from government employment, Puerto Ricans bore the brunt of this blue-collar structural unemployment” (Rodríguez 1979: 197, 206). Hers was an early assessment of the deindustrialization that would devastate urban areas in the Northeast and the Midwest, and especially Puerto Rican migrants who had become concentrated in the manufacturing jobs that were now disappearing.

Taking a different approach, Rivera emphasized Puerto Ricans’ efforts to improve their working conditions, their lives and their communities—a far cry from the apathy and lack of community that permeated portrayals of Puerto Ricans in the earlier literature. Drawing on his own experiences as the chairperson of the Asociación de Trabajadores Agrícolas Support Committee, he linked the emerging scholarship in Puerto Rican Studies with activism. Charting farmworkers’ journeys from Puerto Rico to the States and “from exploitation to unionization,” he also linked the challenges confronting working class Puerto Ricans with the colonial relationship. Puerto Rican and other farmworkers shared “a lifestyle created by an
economic system that requires the exploitation of certain sectors of the population in order to benefit others.” What made Puerto Rican workers “unique” was “the unresolved question of the political status of the Island” and the connections between Puerto Rico and the United States. Pointing to the roles of the Puerto Rico and the U.S. governments in promoting the contract labor program that brought farmworkers from Puerto Rico to the States, he wrote, “Farm laborers from extremely depressed areas are shipped to farms to work for very low wages in an industry unprotected by national labor laws.” Without labor laws, the state then left workers vulnerable to exploitation through contracts that provided poor wages and conditions, that had no input from workers in their negotiation, and that the state failed to enforce. Workers and their union made the connections between the United States and Puerto Rico, as Rivera observed, “There is a growing demand on the part of the Puerto Rican agricultural workers themselves to negotiate their own contracts and a call for the passage of agrarian reform laws on the Island” (Rivera 1979: 238, 248, 250). Founded in 1973 and organizing in New Jersey, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, the Asociación de Trabajadores Agrícolas (ATA) demanded that Puerto Rico’s government support migrants’ legal actions, institute agrarian reform in Puerto Rico, end the farm labor program, and prohibit discrimination based on race, religion, or political belief.

HENCE, WITH CENTRO’S ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES, PUERTO RICAN COMMUNITIES WERE BUILT UPON STRONG CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS, NETWORKS OF FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS, VARIOUS COMMUNITY AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS, AND MULTIPLE EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THEIR LIVES AND COMMUNITIES.

While Labor Migration Under Capitalism analyzed the broad, structural causes of migration and the origins of Puerto Rican communities, other Centro publications turned to autobiographical writings and oral histories to uncover human experiences and human agency. Playing a critical role in reclaiming community histories, these works also offered a fundamental reinterpretation of Puerto Rican culture. The emergence of Puerto Rican Studies scholarship at Centro
and beyond paralleled the “new” histories that sought to retell dominant narratives by writing history from the bottom up, instead of from the top down, and sought to render valid the historical narratives of everyday life. The 1974 Conference on Historiography resulted in a second cuaderno produced by the Culture Task Force. By the 1980s, publications portrayed Puerto Rican culture as a source of pride and as a resource for survival. Two collections provided rich lenses to understand New York City’s Puerto Rican community between the world wars, the *Memoirs of Bernardo Vega* (Vega 1984 [1977]) and the collected writings of Jesús Colón (1961). *Divided Arrivals* added autobiographical fiction in a bilingual format. Juan Flores, a member of Centro’s Culture Task Force, translated Bernando Vega’s memoirs and edited and translated *Divided Arrivals* (Flores 1987).

The Oral History Task Force uncovered critical dimensions of Puerto Ricans’ experiences, as well. A 1984 conference explored the Puerto Rican diaspora, including Hawaii, New Jersey, Chicago, and Lorain, Ohio, as well as New York City. The resultant publication, *Extended Roots: From Hawaii to New York*, became the foundation for the first issue of *CENTRO*, a volume entitled “Community History” (Oral History Task Force 1984 [1986]). This task force then embarked on an ambitious project documenting Puerto Rican women’s lives and their work in the garment industry—a key component of the post-World War II migration experience (Benmayor et al. 1987). Hence, with Centro’s alternative approaches, Puerto Rican communities were built upon strong cultural foundations, networks of families and community members, various community and political organizations, and multiple efforts to improve their lives and communities.

With links to Centro, historian Virginia Sánchez Korrol and sociologist Félix Padilla, built on Centro’s work and wrote full-length community studies. They took another step in reclaiming community histories and in forming alternatives to the mainstream scholarship and its “culture of poverty” perspectives (Padilla 1985, 1987). In 1983, historian Sánchez Korrol explained, “Discovering materials on the early settlement to be practically non-existent, I was unable to reconcile the available writings on Puerto Ricans with my own memories of a colonia soundly structured by strict family values, concern for cultural heritage, and an identifiable organizational network, so I embarked on a search which led to the study of Latin American history and the writing of this book.” Centro “provided invaluable and consistent support,” as Sánchez Korrol participated in the History Task Force and relied on materials being collected for Centro’s archives. Her book, *From Colonia to Community*, chronicled the history of Puerto Ricans in New York City from 1917 to 1948, expanding the definition of community beyond formal political structures and community organizations to include informal networks of childcare and lodging that fostered the community’s infrastructure and survival. Within this broader definition of “community,” Sánchez Korrol explored Puerto Ricans’ political associations as a “rubric for interacting with the host society, for solidifying their identity as a community, and for addressing the relevant political issues of the period” (Sánchez Korrol 1983: xvii, xviii, 167).

Félix Padilla explored Puerto Ricans in Chicago in Centro’s 1986 *Extended Roots*. In explaining inter-ethnic tensions, he challenged the focus on “inter-group competition in the labor market.” He argued instead: “Since the employment of Puerto Ricans in noncompetitive sectors caused very little friction with ‘other ethnic’ workers, racial/ethnic antagonisms between Puerto Ricans and whites, in particular, became related to social, political, and community issues. From the outset, housing discrimination and police injustice became the leading forces
responsible for fostering an antagonistic group relationship between Puerto Ricans and whites" (Padilla 1998 [1986]). In his full-length community study, Puerto Rican Chicago, he criticized “the culture of poverty thesis,” noting that “inadequacies... stem from the fact that the colonization of Puerto Rico and its direct consequences on Puerto Ricans in the Island and mainland, for the most part, have remained unexamined.” Highlighting the parallels to classic colonialism, he turned to “internal colonialism,” defined as “a relationship of socioeconomic exploitation, subordination, and inequality within the borders of the imperialistic power, which enhances the position of the dominant group.” His use of “internal colonialism,” which was more prevalent in Chicano Studies than in Puerto Rican Studies, nevertheless provided another structural approach to examining Puerto Ricans' economic status (Padilla 1987; Saragoza 1990).

What emerged during Centro’s first decade was not a monolithic approach to Puerto Rican studies, but rather a series of approaches, driven by shared concerns. Scholars’ engagement with contemporary social and political issues fostered a focus on working class communities, the challenges they faced, and their strategies. Scholars grappled with balancing structural and cultural approaches. Some works were more theoretical, while others emphasized human dimensions. With varying degrees of success, some tried to combine the two approaches. What did emerge, however, was a clear alternative to the pre-existing writings on Puerto Ricans in the States—alternatives that provided an important foundation for the field of Puerto Rican Studies.

This scholarship, in reclaiming community histories, also uncovered the foundations for the political activism of the 1960s and 1970s. The post-World War
II era was the peak period of Puerto Rican migration to the States, and a period when Puerto Ricans settled not only in New York City, but also in communities throughout the Mid-Atlantic, the Midwest, and the Northeast. These postwar migrants gave rise to a second generation, who came of age during an era of social fervor in the 1960s and 1970s. This second generation, loosely defined to include those born in the States and youthful migrants, became activists in the Puerto Rican movement. In unearthing the underlying causes of migration and the working class communities that took root, this scholarship called attention to the challenges confronting Puerto Rican communities, especially the economic hardships wrought by economic exploitation and economic displacement. At the same time, the scholarship’s critiques of the capitalist economy, U.S. colonialism, and, more broadly, “the system” were echoes of those being made on the streets and in protests. Centro’s reinterpretation of Puerto Rican culture was echoed in activists’ bold assertions of their newly articulated racial pride. Hence, activists in the Puerto Rican movement, like Centro’s scholarship, confronted structures of inequality and the racism that portrayed them as inferior.


Radical Politics and Historiography: The Young Lords in New York City
As a result of shared political contexts and shared concerns, parallels emerged between the political activism of the era and Centro’s scholarship. In the radical context of the late 1960s and 1970s, the Puerto Rican movement shared many goals, tactics, and dynamics with other movements. The Puerto Rican movement confronted issues such as poverty, residential displacement stemming from “urban renewal,” housing discrimination, police brutality, inadequate health care, inferior and biased education, the war in Vietnam and the disproportionate casualties among the poor and people of color, as well as economic exploitation and racism in their many guises. The tactics of the era were confrontational, as people
took to the streets, took over buildings, and made demands of local and federal government authorities, of the military-industrial complex, and of society at large. The goals were ambitious, as “radical” here refers not only to the tactics, but also to the “radical” nature of the transformations that activists sought. Satisfied neither with reform nor incremental change, social movements promoted the fundamental restructuring of U.S. politics, the economy, and society, as well as power relations in their everyday manifestations. These movements included the Civil Rights and Black Power movements; Chicano, Asian American, and American Indian movements; Women’s Liberation and Gay Liberation movements; as well as Student, Anti-War, and Environmental movements. Globally, the era was marked by decolonization struggles in the Third World, student movements, and activism more broadly.

At the same time, the Puerto Rican movement drew on the historical legacies of Puerto Rican activism in Puerto Rico and in the States. The influences were many and varied—from the Nationalist Party in Puerto Rico to community-based organizations in the States. Activists looked to Puerto Rico as a source of racial and ethnic pride, as well as a source of political inspiration. As activists sought the causes of Puerto Ricans’ poverty in the States, the colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States became central. For many activists, the challenges that faced Puerto Ricans living in the States stemmed from the colonial status of Puerto Rico, and they called for independence. In addition to large protest marches, political groups sought to politicize, organize, and mobilize people in local communities and in their daily lives. Political groups addressed local issues through grassroots, community-controlled activism, often seeing these local issues as part of larger struggles and using community-based services as a tool for political education. In crafting identity politics based on pride, many groups looked inward to address issues of race, class, gender and sexuality in their midst, as well as in their communities and the broader society. Hence, placing Puerto Rican activism of the era and the Centro’s scholarship in dialogue, four critical dimensions for studying Puerto Rican politics emerge: the historical trajectory of Puerto Rican politics in the States; the political context of the era; the continuing colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico; and the groups’ internal dynamics and broader identity politics. Rather than mutually exclusive, these approaches enrich each other and the analysis of political activism.

The Young Lords provide a lens to both “radical contexts”—the political activism of the era and Centro’s continued production of alternative scholarship. With the cry of “All Power to the People,” the Young Lords were one of the many political groups that arose in the late 1960s and 1970s, as part of the Puerto Rican movement. Emblematic of the post- World War II Puerto Rican diaspora, the Young Lords originated in Chicago in 1967, and by 1971 there were branches in New York City; Philadelphia; Newark, New Jersey; and Bridgeport, Connecticut. The Young Lords advocated a socialist society based on meeting the needs of the people, grassroots community-controlled services, and independence for Puerto Rico, thereby “bridging homeland and barrio politics.” Although they were just one of many groups, the Young Lords captured the imagination of subsequent generations of activists and of scholars. Student activists, who occupied buildings on several campuses of City University of New York in the spring of 1989, referred to themselves as the “sons and daughters of the generation of 1969,” and as modeled after the Young Lords Party (Rodríguez-Morazzani 1991–1992: 97). Sociologist Agustín Laó surveyed revivals of the Young Lords as an inspiration for activism, and concluded,
“What became apparent is that the brief but powerful moment of Lords activism was inscribed in our diasporic political culture and has left a mark in our collective memory” (Laó 1994–1995: 34). As CENTRO became a forum for scholarship on the political activism of the era and attention focused on the Young Lords, the Young Lords left their mark on the historiography in Puerto Rican Studies.

ALTHOUGH THEY WERE JUST ONE OF MANY GROUPS, THE YOUNG LORDS CAPTURED THE IMAGINATION OF SUBSEQUENT GENERATIONS OF ACTIVISTS AND OF SCHOLARS.

In articulating their political analysis and their goals in their “13 Point Program and Platform,” the Young Lords emphasized the colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico, rooted themselves in the political context of the era, and asserted an identity politics with implications for internal group dynamics, as well as the larger society. Calling for Puerto Rico’s independence, their first point asserted, “We want self-determination for Puerto Ricans, Liberation on the Island and inside the United States.” Focusing on Puerto Rico and the States, they identified the “exploiters” as imperialism, capitalism, and racism, and elaborated: “First Spain and then the united states have colonized our country,” “billions of dollars in profits leave our country for the united states each year,” and “in every way we are slaves of the gringo.” Their solution—“We want liberation and the Power in the hands of the People, not Puerto Rican exploiters.” Simultaneously, the Young Lords positioned themselves in the political context of the era, identifying themselves as “a revolutionary political party fighting for the liberation of all oppressed people.” Other points expanded their struggle beyond Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans, as theirs was not a narrow cultural nationalism based on country of origin. Instead, calling themselves “internationalists,” they demanded the “liberation of all Third World people,” and the “immediate withdrawal of all u.s. military forces and bases from Puerto Rico, Viet Nam, and all oppressed communities inside and outside the u.s.” Similarly, their opposition to “racism” was linked with their class analysis and included poor whites: “The Latin, Black, Indian and Asian people inside the u.s. are colonies fighting for liberation.... Millions of poor white people are rising up to demand freedom and we support them.” Their platform also contained the seeds for an exploration of race and gender dynamics. Asserting a proud identity, they wanted “a true education of our Afro-Indio culture and Spanish language,” and an end to “racism.” Asserting, “Under capitalism, women have been oppressed by both society and our men,” they criticized the “doctrine of machismo,” and demanded, “We want equality for women. Down with machismo and male chauvinism.”(Young Lords Party and Abramson 1971: 150).
Ultimately, the Young Lords called for “a socialist society,” which they defined as “a society where the needs of the people come first.” They explained, “We want liberation, clothing, free food, education, health care, transportation, full employment and peace.” Pointing to “police, health services, churches, schools, housing, transportation and welfare,” they envisioned “community control of our institutions and land... to guarantee that all institutions serve the needs of our people” (Young Lords Party and Abramson 1971: 150). In New York City, the Young Lords’ major “offensives” revealed the challenges confronting their community, their political goals, and their tactics. In July 1969, the Lords launched their “garbage offensive.” Reminiscing, a former Young Lord recalled that the group had been studying socialism and nationalism. Yet when they asked the “people” what they needed, the people replied,
For several consecutive Sundays, the Young Lords cleaned up the streets. When the city failed to provide brooms and remove the collected trash, the Young Lords piled the trash in the streets, forcing the city to remove it. Their message was that the city should provide services to their communities and that people should not have to live surrounded by garbage. It was a dramatic message, especially when a trash heap was ignited. Their actions and determination resonated with the community, and their membership grew.

The Peoples’ Church offensive exemplified the notion of “community control”—that community institutions should be responsive to and meet the needs of the people. When a church in the community refused them space to provide children with a free, hot breakfast before school, the Young Lords took over and occupied the church for eleven days, from December 28, 1969 until the arrest of 105 members on January 8, 1970. In addition to their breakfast program, the Lords ran free clothing drives, “a liberation school,” a day care center, and health programs, as well as providing entertainment each night via poetry readings, music, or movies. Their evening activities reflected the importance they attached to cultural expression, as well as its intersections with the politics of the era. The Young Lords then took over Lincoln Hospital in the South Bronx in July 1970, collaborating with the Health Revolutionary Unity Movement (HRUM), a group of hospital workers. They ran lead poisoning and tuberculosis detection programs and operated a day care center. The Lords had already been active in health initiatives—going door to door to test for lead poisoning and “liberating” the city’s TB x-ray truck, which was underutilized. Like the People’s Church, the takeover of Lincoln Hospital represented the Lords’ vision of socialism in practice. Another takeover of the People’s Church focused on prison conditions and the number of reported “suicides” among incarcerated Puerto Ricans and African Americans. When Young Lord Julio Roldán was found hung in his cell, the Lords responded by occupying the church at the end of the funeral procession. The Young Lords also addressed drug addiction, education, and the war in Vietnam, as well as organizing the Inmates Liberation Front for men and women incarcerated in U.S. prisons. They promoted independence for Puerto Rico through ongoing political education and through demonstrations, including the march of 10,000 people to the United Nations on October 30, 1970.

The Young Lords captured the imagination of scholars, as well as of community members and future activists. In the CENTRO’s second issue, Winter 1987–1988, Juan González called attention to the Philadelphia Young Lords within the historical trajectory of Puerto Rican politics in the city (González 1987–1988). The next issue, Spring 1988, introduced one of the Puerto Rican Student Union’s historical documents, emphasizing the group’s connections with the Young Lords (Puerto Rican Student Union 1988). In 1989, two articles referenced the Young Lords in their overviews of the Puerto Rican community and its politics. Noting the Young Lords’ “very effective program,” Antonia Pantoja added, “These acts were so eloquent and so correct that parents and neighbors joined the group in their confrontations” (1989: 27). Carlos Rodríguez-Fraticcelli and Amilcar Tirado described the Young Lords as “at the forefront” of the “new radical leadership and mass movement” and their impact as “long lasting” (1989: 43). More recent scholarship on the politics of the era has continued to focus more on the Young Lords than on other groups of the era.23

In 1991–1992 and in 1994–1995, Roberto Rodríguez-Morazzani and Agustín Laó published CENTRO articles on the Young Lords that illustrate two distinct, yet overlapping, approaches to studying the politics of the era. Rodríguez-
Morazzani analyzed the Young Lords within the historical trajectory of Puerto Rican politics in New York City, treating the Young Lords as part of a “political generation.” Echoing Centro’s earlier emphasis on structural inequalities and the impact of racism, he argued, “The historic formation of the Puerto Rican political generation of the 60s was overdetermined by the experience of imperialism and colonialism, mass migration and the insertion of the Puerto Rican working class into the international division of labor.” Coupled with the “subordinate integration of Puerto Ricans into the labor market and dominant society,” this generation experienced “unbridled racism,” “a school system which miseducated, denigrated and oppressed them,” and biased attitudes when they served as intermediaries for their parents in social service agencies. Economic conditions were deteriorating, despite the postwar era’s rhetoric of economic prosperity (Rodríguez-Morazzani 1991–1992: 109–10, 98).

Rodríguez-Morazzani delineated three Puerto Rican political generations. The “pioneros” established community-based organizations that provided “political, social and cultural cohesion,” as well as the “means by which the community could access resources from the institutions of the dominant society and organize the defense of the community against the hostilities of a profoundly racist society.” By the late 1950s and early 1960s, a new generation of college-educated “Young Turks” founded Puerto Rican social service agencies. These agencies were “staffed by Puerto Ricans who would be particularly sensitive to the specific needs of the Puerto Rican community,” and who promoted “leadership development amongst the youth” through “cultural awareness and pride, the appreciation of education as a value, and community service.” Founded by Antonia Pantoja in 1961, Aspira “represented a benchmark in the organizational life of the community,” providing students with educational support and leadership development, as well as conducting research and advocacy. Managing to “provide greatly needed services and initiate many struggles for reform,” these agencies served as “important institutional sites within which the evolution of the radical political generation of Puerto Ricans was facilitated.” After all, “It was within the Puerto Rican social service agencies that Puerto Rican youth could and did go to find encouragement and respect for their language and culture,” and where they developed “pride in who they were” (Rodríguez-Morazzani 1991–1992: 101, 102–3, 106–7).

For Rodríguez-Morazzani, “The Young Lords Party was, more than all the other Puerto Rican organizations, to set the tone for militancy in the struggle.” Emphasizing the “rupture” between this “radical” generation and the previous one, he developed his own critique of the Puerto Rican social service agencies for relying on external funding and for their “hierarchically organized professional bureaucracies.” He questioned the founders for their “liberal outlook and commitment to the social elevation of the Puerto Rican community” via “individual self-development” and access to resources and the influence of public policy.” In contrast, “the decade of the 60s and 70s was unique,” as it was “the first time that youth as youth played a central role in the shaping of anti-systemic movements against exploitation, domination and subordination.” According to Rodríguez-Morazzani, in the universities “Puerto Ricans and other oppressed groups began to encounter emergent discourses which called into question the possibility, and indeed, the desirability of the political and economic integration into the mainstream that their predecessors had fought for.” In other words, the previous generation believed that “the interests of the Puerto Rican community
could be served within the existent structural arrangements of liberal capitalism” and through “reform.” The radical generation did not share these beliefs, as they mounted a fundamental critique of the system and called for revolution instead of reform. Indeed, “this break from the strategy of the by then middle-aged Turks should be seen not only as a rupture between generations, but of the ideological hegemony exercised by liberalism” (Rodríguez-Morazzani 1991–1992: 113–, 107, 108, 102, 112). Yet, as explored below, Rodríguez-Morazzani may have overstated the extent of “rupture,” particularly given the relative paucity of historical works exploring the earlier eras of Puerto Rican activism.

In the 1994–1995 issue, Agustín Laó studied the politics of the era, by analyzing the Young Lords within the political context of the times. Noting the limited scholarship on the Young Lords, he sought “to start drawing a theoretically informed and politically inclined historical analysis by highlighting selected elements of the practice (the performative) and of the theory and ideology (the discursive) of the Young Lords.” CENTRO provided a forum where “historical analysis” could be “theoretically informed and politically inclined,” as well as written by a doctoral student in sociology (Laó 1994–1995: 36). Hence, Laó focused “on the period between the late sixties and the early seventies... not only because that was the height of the Young Lords movement, but also because it was the climax of a world-historical revolutionary conjuncture.” The era was punctuated by the “Black Freedom Movement,” including civil rights and Black Power; “an anti-authoritarian/anti-liberal new left;” and the “growth of new social movements for gender and sexual liberation (Feminist, Gay and Lesbian Movements); ecological rationality; labor democracy; and anti-imperialist wars.” Beyond the United States, the era was marked by nationalist revolutions in the Third World and by “a global student movement.” For Laó, the sixties became “an analytical category to conceptualize the political-economic and cultural crisis of late capitalism.” The Young Lords’ ideology and discourse derived primarily from the political context of the era. Influenced by the Black Panther Party, especially their 10-point program and political style, the Young Lords were also affected by the theology of the Liberation Movement in Latin America. The Lords held their inaugural rally on July 26, 1969, in solidarity with the Cuban rebels’ assault in 1953, and with the participation of the Black Panthers, and Youth Against War and Fascism (Laó 1994–1995: 34, 36). Also critical for Laó was the Nationalist Party in Puerto Rico and the extent to which the Young Lords “perceived their party as the carrier of this tradition of uncompromising struggle for the constitution of a Puerto Rican sovereign nation-state.” Seeing themselves as a continuation of the anti-colonial struggles, they looked to Pedro Albizu Campos as inspiration. Yet when they turned their organizing efforts to Puerto Rico, “This shift in geographical center from the inner city to the Island, was homologous with a political turn from a street grounded experimentally-minded radicalism, to a party-centered search for ‘scientific’ correctness and ideological purity” (Laó 1994–1995: 38, 41). Indeed, the decision to open a branch in Puerto Rico increased internal divisions within the group over whether to focus on independence for Puerto Rico or on issues confronting Puerto Ricans in the States, and intensified surveillance by the F.B.I. In 1973, the New York Young Lords transformed into the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization, which signaled their loss of connection to the community and their ultimate demise (¡Palante, Siempre Palante! 1996).
indeed, the decision to open a branch in puerto rico increased internal divisions within the group over whether to focus on independence for puerto rico or on issues confronting puerto ricans in the states, and intensified surveillance by the f.b.i.

While emphasizing two differing approaches, both articles illustrate another approach to Puerto Rican politics of the era, by calling attention to the continuing colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. Although both authors noted the relationship between Puerto Rican politics in the States and in Puerto Rico, they did not fully explore the transnational dimensions of the Young Lords’ politics, a conceptual framework that was still emerging at that time. Instead, Rodríguez-Morazzani pointed to a historically specific moment—when the “Young Turks” challenged the Migration Division of Puerto Rico’s Department of Labor. In addition to the farmworker labor program, the Migration Division opened offices in New York City and other Puerto Rican communities to facilitate migrants’ adjustment. According to Rodríguez-Morazzani, Migration Division staff were viewed as “accountable not to the Puerto Rican community, but to the colonial government of Puerto Rico and, by extension, that of the United States,” and “the island-born leadership was viewed as elitist and racist, reflecting a class bias in their interactions with stateside Puerto Ricans.” The Young Turks asserted that “Puerto Ricans on the U.S. mainland be in control of their organizational life,” and they “were able to effectively challenge the old elite for leadership and within a few years establish themselves as the recognized representatives of the community” (Rodríguez-Morazzani 1991–1992: 102).

This argument emphasized a shift from island to mainland political leadership without fully exploring the connections between island and mainland politics or the continuing influence of the “homeland” in Puerto Rican politics. Laó’s approach paralleled the scholarship more broadly—with Puerto Ricans caught between being part of a “divided nation” and being a minority group in the States. Laó concluded, “Their notion of peoplehood oscillates in an ambiguity between the national subject and the colonized subaltern,” as the Lords simultaneously saw themselves as “a national minority” and as part of the U.S. multinational working class (Laó 1994–1995: 41). Similarly, while CENTRO focused
on the colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico in exploring the causes of migration and the emergence of Puerto Rican communities in the States, this did not translate immediately into an exploration of the ways in which those linkages shaped Puerto Rican politics in the States. Instead, CENTRO retained its focus on both Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans in the States and remained bilingual, while attention to transnationalism in Puerto Rican politics developed over time. An emerging transnational approach appeared in Frances Negrón-Muntaner’s two part essay, “Echoing Stonewall,” in CENTRO’s 1991–1992 issues. The Stonewall Rebellion, on June 29, 1969, in New York City, is often used to mark the beginning of the U.S. Gay and Lesbian Movement of the era. Negrón-Muntaner examined the role of Puerto Ricans in the Stonewall rebellion, and the influences of Stonewall on the movement in Puerto Rico (Negrón-Muntaner 1991–1992, 1992). More recently, I suggested that instead of an either-or approach, transnationalism is a useful framework for understanding the radical politics of the era. Yet the relationship between Puerto Rican politics in the States and in Puerto Rico has remained contentious in political activism and in the scholarship (E. Meléndez 2003).

MORE RECENTLY, I SUGGESTED THAT INSTEAD OF AN EITHER-OR APPROACH, TRANSNATIONALISM IS A USEFUL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE RADICAL POLITICS OF THE ERA.

Both authors also broached the group’s internal dynamics and broader identity politics. Rodríguez-Morazzani observed, “Puerto Rican women, active as leaders and members in many of the organizations…, would in the early 1970s raise the issue of the special oppression of women and of the male supremacy within the ranks of the Left” (Rodríguez-Morazzani 1991–1992: 112). Laó stressed that for the Lords, racism was part of the “master practice of domination that informs and justifies the multiple modes of oppression.” At the same time, the Lords “critically exposed the textures of Puerto Rican racism” that manifested in the denial and debasement of blackness. Similarly, the Lords anchored the oppression of women in colonial domination, in the exploitation of workers, and in the household. Here, the struggle became internal to the group, as women challenged the sexism within the Young Lords. Laó observed that this “politicization of everyday life (of lifestyle, the households, intimacy) and the adoption of a holistic ethics of emancipation” could point “toward new avenues of democratization”(Lao 1994–1995: 42, 43). Indeed, in the “politicization of everyday life,” the Young Lords shared much with the social movements of the era.

Yet devoting more attention to “sexual politics” opens the door for a more thorough discussion of internal group dynamics and broader identity politics, while simultaneously providing an opportunity to revisit the political context of the era and the historical trajectory of Puerto Rican politics. In the Young Lords, as in
other movements, feminists emerged from within their respective movements. Hence, although they shared the political context of the 1960s and 1970s and this parallel to other movements, the Young Lords’ feminism grew out of the particularities of their own experiences and activism. Women initiated a “revolution within a revolution,” as they demanded that the Young Lords confront sexism within the organization, within the Puerto Rican community, and within society. In 1971, Young Lord Denise Oliver observed, “When the Party got started, there were very few sisters.... We didn't have a chance to contribute politically.... We were relegated to doing office work, typing, taking care of whatever kids were around, being sex objects” (Young Lords Party and Abramson 1971: 51). Dissatisfied with these roles, they formed a women’s caucus to foster their own political development and to challenge the gender dynamics within the Young Lords. Shortly thereafter they pushed for a men’s caucus to meet at the same time as the women’s. As Richie Perez described it, “We have been having a weekly male caucus to discuss the oppression of our sisters not only in the Party, but in our community in general, because we recognize machismo as one of the biggest problems in making our revolution.” For Perez, “it was the first time I had ever talked to a big group of people about my personal life” (Young Lords Party and Abramson 1971: 54, 56). As they demanded that women be included in leadership positions, two women, Denise Oliver and Gloria Gonzalez, joined the Central Committee.


Women linked the need for their participation to the issues the Young Lords were addressing and developed a socialist feminism. Denise Oliver explained, “We saw that we really weren’t gonna be able to do any kind of constructive organizing in the community without sisters actively involved in the Party, because most of the people that we’re organizing are women with children, through the free-breakfast program and through the free-clothing drive and health care programs” (Young Lords Party and Abramson 1971: 51). The Young Lords revised their Thirteen Point Program. An earlier version had called for “revolutionary machismo.” When pushed to recognize that machismo could not be revolutionary, the Point was changed as follows: “We want equality for women. Down with machismo and male chauvinism.” Criticizing both capitalism and machismo, the Lords explained that “under capitalism, women have been oppressed by both society and our men.” With a reference to domestic violence, the Lords continued,
“The doctrine of machismo has been used by men to take out their frustrations on wives, sisters, mothers, and children.” The Lords asserted, that “sisters make up over half of the revolutionary army: sisters and brothers are equals fighting for our people.”

They linked their feminism to their critique of capitalism and to their vision of a socialist society free from economic oppression and based on meeting human needs.

Moving beyond class analysis, the Young Lords included a critique of gender constructions, revealing those that they had grown up with and were hoping to change. Iris Morales described her family as “a very strict, patriarchal type of family” (Young Lords Party and Abramson 1971: 26). Her father maintained “his role as an authority figure,” and her mother was “just one step above the children—she doesn’t question anything that the father does” (Young Lords Party and Abramson 1971: 25). Morales saw a change, “there used to be only four choices for the Puerto Rican woman-housewife, prostitute, or drug addict, and then, when the society needed more labor for its sweatshops, she would become a worker. Now there’s a new choice open to her that threatens the existence of the family and the state itself: The Revolution” (Young Lords Party and Abramson 1971: 28).

Pablo “Yoruba” Guzman explained the difference between sex and gender, “See, there is a biological division in sex, right—but this society has created a false division based on a thing called gender. Gender is a false idea, because gender is merely traits that have been attributed through the years to a man or a woman” (Young Lords Party and Abramson 1971: 47). For Guzman, it was the Gay Liberation movement that provided an alternative: “We’re saying that to be totally real, it would be healthy for a man, if he wanted to cry, to go ahead and cry. It would also be healthy for a woman to pick up the gun, to use the gun. The gun is not the sole property of the man, you see. That’s how you round people out. The Gay Liberation struggle has shown us how to complete ourselves, so we’ve been able to accept this and understand this.” He did not, however, underestimate the challenge: “We found out it’s a lot quicker for people to accept the fact that sisters should be in the front of the struggle, than saying that we’re gonna have gay people in the Party” (Young Lords Party and Abramson 1971: 46).

Hence, the Young Lords’ feminism emerged from their socialist analysis and incorporated a critique of gender constructions and racism. Denise Oliver made distinctions between those in the Women’s Liberation Movement who were “reformist” and “want to turn the tables and just be the capitalist oppressors of everybody else,” and those who were “revolutionaries” (Young Lords Party and Abramson 1971: 50).

For Oliver, the Lords’ awareness of “how genocide is practiced on Puerto Rican people and all Third World people through birth control programs, population control programs, and abortion programs,” meant their positions were different: “Yes, we support abortion under a system where abortion is not forced, under a system where there is community control of abortions, of health services, of all institutions” (Young Lords Party and Abramson 1971: 51). She continued, “The basic criticism that we have of our sisters in Women’s Liberation is that they shouldn’t isolate themselves, because in isolating yourselves from your brothers, and in not educating your brothers, you’re making the struggle separate—that’s again another division, the same way that capitalism has divided Blacks from Puerto Ricans, and Puerto Ricans from whites, and Blacks from whites” (Young Lords Party and Abramson 1971: 51; see also Nelson 2001).

The Young Lords’ discourse on the Gay Liberation and Women’s Liberation movements suggests the possibilities of exploring both interactions and comparative dimensions among groups and movements. Yet the relationships between movements, as well as comparative analysis, have been slower to emerge in the
scholarship, despite early attention to the broader political context of the era. Shared experiences, such as sterilization abuse, economic exploitation, and police brutality, shaped calls for “Third World Feminism.” For example, African American feminists raised the issue of the contraceptive pill as “genocide or liberation.” The commonalities raised by notions of “Third World Feminism” are as provocative as the contrasting dimensions. I have argued that Puerto Rican feminism was deeply influenced by socialism, and that the Cuban Revolution of 1959 figured as prominently as other influences. In contrast, Chicana feminists confronted the cultural nationalism that was central to the Chicano movement, along with its reassertion of “traditional” gender roles as the foundation for racial and ethnic pride. Many countered by rendering feminist interpretations of “traditional” culture and of Chicana/o history (Cade 1970; García 1997).
Gender also provides an opportunity to revisit the historical trajectory of Puerto Rican politics, as well as historians’ central questions of continuity and change. Like Rodríguez-Morazzani’s “rupture” between political generations, Laó stressed a lack of continuity: “More than a residual (or commonsensical) element of the social service attitude coming from the Aspira and Anti-Poverty Program background of a number of them, the focus on services in the early days was based on the search for developing organic links with the community to gain leadership in the struggle for decentralized institutions controlled by the people” (Laó 1994–1995: 39).

Yet the notion of “rupture” can obscure continuities, or worse, minimize the challenges and the activism of earlier eras. There is a relative absence of historical work on the postwar era in New York City, and a tendency to equate the void in the scholarship with a void in activism. Rodríguez-Morazzani argued, “As a result of the persecution and repression of the McCarthy era, the early left-wing Puerto Rican organizations had ceased to exist... The absence of a radical left would not only deprive the social service agency founders of a critical perspective, but also the political generation of the sixties would be deprived of a U.S.-based historical antecedent which could serve as a model or reference point for a radical U.S.-Puerto Rican political project” (Rodríguez-Morazzini 1991–1992: 101–2). While certainly correct in pointing out the repression of the domestic cold war and its anti-communist crusades, it remains important to fully explore its impact. There were links between Aspira and the Young Lords, as both groups emerged in various communities of the Puerto Rican diaspora. In Philadelphia, the Young Lords both grew out of and challenged pre-existing, community-based organizations, revealing generational, political, and sometimes class differences with the more established Puerto Rican leadership (Whalen 1998b). Still, many issues confronted by the Young Lords and the broader movement had been addressed earlier, particularly racism and discrimination, as well as education activism.

Without diminishing what was certainly distinctive about the politics of the 1960s and 1970s, a gender analysis suggests other continuities. Women in both eras played a key role in grassroots activism that sought to meet the needs of their communities. Women's grassroots, community-based activism evolved from the social networks that eased migration and initial settlement (Sánchez Korrol 1983). From networks came hometown clubs and informal committees. Arguably, this history of community-based activism provided the foundation from which the War on Poverty’s social service agencies took hold within the Puerto Rican community. A key component of the Young Lords activism centered on grassroots activism and the provision of needed services, and as Young Lord Denise Oliver contended, many of those services were directed at women and children. In addition, women’s struggles to address sexism within the Young Lords may have had important precedents. As the professionalism of social services occurred, women activists fought their displacement and struggled for recognition, rights, and equality (Pantoja 1989–1990: 80).

Hence, as a political movement and scholarship took shape, both activists and Centro employed alternative tactics or institutional frameworks to achieve their goals. In concrete terms, the Centro sought to produce socially relevant “knowledge” and to use scholarship to benefit Puerto Rican communities. Centro and political activists also shared concerns, especially with poverty that had its origins in economic exploitation and that was intensifying with the ravages of deindustrialization and economic restructuring. Centro’s early scholarship called attention to the impact of U.S. colonialism, capitalist exploitation, and racism on Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico and in the States. So did activists. In addition, both the movement and the scholarship explored linkages...
between Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans in the States, as explanatory factors and as a source of strength and inspiration. The movement and the scholarship shared a reclaiming of community histories, based on pride in Puerto Ricans’ racial and ethnic identities, as well as on the importance of history. Sharing the political context of the era, the movement and the scholarship mounted a critique of the “system” and of capitalism, as well as a simultaneous assertion of the importance of “the people.” It was a dual dialogue of structural considerations and human agency.

Although scholarship often evolves from broad strokes to more nuanced attention to internal dynamics, perhaps because of the radical politics of the era, scholarship in Puerto Rican Studies, and that reflected in Centro more specifically, incorporated gender and sexuality, as well as race, in the study of Puerto Rican politics. Both the Young Lords and the Centro turned their attention to class, race, gender, and sexuality, as systems of domination and as everyday power relations that shaped the position of Puerto Ricans, as well as internal community dynamics. Finally, both the movement and the scholarship embraced an optimism that characterized the era—there was hope that change was possible and that alternatives could be created.

YET THE SCHOLARSHIP FROM CENTRO AND IN PUERTO RICAN STUDIES MORE BROADLY SHIFTED TO A NEAR EXCLUSIVE FOCUS ON NEW YORK CITY.

The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Puerto Rican Politics and Puerto Rican Studies

The Young Lords, as well as the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, had branches in several communities of the Puerto Rican diaspora. The issues that activists confronted in their local communities and the ways that they addressed them raise comparative questions about the Puerto Rican diaspora, suggesting another approach to studying the politics of the era. Why did the Young Lords take hold in several communities? How similar or different were their branches? Why was Centro established in New York City? Was it the result of greater similarities or differences between New York City and other communities of the diaspora? Centro started important work on the Puerto Rican movement and the Puerto Rican diaspora in its early years. Yet the scholarship from Centro and in Puerto Rican Studies more broadly shifted to a near exclusive focus on New York City. Writing in CENTRO in 1994–1995, historian Ruth Glasser played with the title of an important anthology and suggested provocatively, “All the Minorities Are Black, All the Latinos are Chicanos, All the Puerto Ricans Live in New York City, and Few of Us Are Historians” (Glasser 1994–1995: 51).29 While there are still very few historians working on the Puerto Rican diaspora, the scholarship on communities other than New York City has increased since Glasser raised these issues. Rather than presuming New York City’s community as the center or the model, a comparative approach interrogates what New York City did and did not share with other communities of the diaspora (Whalen and Vázquez Hernández 2005).
Philadelphia Young Lords pointed out similarities and differences among the branches of the Young Lords. In 1970, Young Lord Juan Ramos anticipated the accusation that the Philadelphia Lords were “just trying to copy the Lords in New York.” He responded in Palante, the Young Lords’ newsletter, “These people must realize that the oppression of Puerto Ricans in Philly is the same as the oppression in New York. The conditions in both of there colonies are the same.... The struggle is the same.”30 Youth in Philadelphia had already organized when they decided to become a branch of the Young Lords because the Young Lords reflected their goals. While the Young Lords’ activism reveals important parallels in the challenges that were confronting Puerto Rican communities, political activism originated within the communities of the Puerto Rican diaspora, and the branches of the Young Lords reflected the particularities of their respective communities.31 Another Philadelphia Young Lord, Wilfredo Rojas, pointed to differences in who constituted the Young Lords. He reminisced, “If we can put labels on the different chapters, you would say that Chicago were like street Lords because they came out of a gang. New York were like college students who brought in some street people... And in Philadelphia you had a bunch of Catholics—Catholics who got together, brought in some junkies along the way, and dragged in a few students.”32

The distinctions between branches, articulated by Rojas, resonate in the scholarship. Sociologist Félix Padilla explored Chicago’s Young Lords. In 1966, when a white police officer shot and wounded a young Puerto Rican man, the Division Street riots ensued for three days. Puerto Ricans challenged the police brutality affecting their community. As the Young Lords emerged from a street gang in 1967, they faced continued police harassment, including the repeated arrest and trumped-up charges against their chairperson, Cha Cha Jimenez. In 1968, the Lords took over the Armitage Methodist Church, making it the People’s Church and their headquarters. The church became the site for their day-care program and then for a free health care clinic (Padilla 1987; Browning 1973; see also Jeffries 2003).

Chicago Young Lords fought urban renewal and displacement. In 1969, they took over and occupied McCormick Seminary, calling attention to the displacement of Puerto Ricans from Lincoln Park and to the Seminary’s role in their displacement. They demanded low-income housing, a children’s center, a cultural center, and legal assistance. Presbyterian ministers, convening in Texas, designated $600,000 for low-income housing. They also agreed to open their facilities to support community activities, to open their financial records, and to join community groups in addressing the impact of urban renewal. In another demonstration, the Lords marched to an empty lot that the city planned to develop as a private tennis club, and transformed the lot into a children’s park instead. As part of the Poor People’s Coalition, the Lords developed an alternative plan that provided housing for poor people and took it to the city’s Urban Renewal Board. Although they lost this battle, they saw it as part of an on-going struggle. These Young Lords worked closely with the Black Panthers and with the Young Patriots, a radical group of white youth (Padilla 1987: 120–1; Browning 1973).

In the 1987–1988 issue of CENTRO, Juan González placed the Philadelphia Young Lords within the historical trajectory of Puerto Rican politics in the city, emphasizing that the Lords “catapulted into the city’s awareness in a short time.” Arguing that the Lords “broke with the more mainstream, less confrontational approach of earlier social agencies,” he explained, “While those agencies sought assistance from the government for Puerto Ricans, the Young Lords demanded that assistance as a right.” González credited the Young Lords’ activism as laying the
foundations for the elections years later of progressive Puerto Rican politicians, including city councilman Angel Ortiz and state representative Ralph Acosta, in 1984 and 1985, respectively (González 1987–1988: 37, 41). As the Lords confronted the deterioration of their neighborhoods, poverty, racism, and police brutality, they were inspired, not only by Aspira and the social movements of the era, but also by Casa del Carmen, a Catholic social service agency. Young Lord Juan Ramos recalled, “We were part of that system over at Casa del Carmen, we participated in sports, we cleaned up, so we were into giving a little something back. We saw it in our parents... our fathers and mothers would give something back, some volunteer time.”

Initially, the director of Casa del Carmen, Father Thomas P. Craven, focused on their community programs, dismissing their radical ideology but nonetheless continuing to support them: “It is difficult to organize the whole community behind issues, and the Lords are trying to change that.... I think, recognizing their problematic ideology, that the Young Lords have a right to exist.... What I see in them are noble intentions.” He added a personal note, “Just because young people whom I’ve known for a long time—and whose families I know—have been radicalized by a different ideology, I see no reason to stop being their friend or to break off communication with them.” Casa del Carmen provided office space. For these Young Lords, their Catholicism remained important to them, even as they mounted a critique of institutionalized religion. Ramos criticized churches as “the biggest money-making organizations in the world,” but added, “I believe in what Christ built the church on, serving the people.” Their mottos insisted, “If Christ were alive today, he’d be a Young Lord,” and “Every Christian who is not a revolutionary lives in mortal sin.”

In the New York Young Lords, students played a prominent role. For Rodríguez-Morazzani, college students were a key component of the “radical generation” (1991–1992: 108). He posited the universities as where students encountered “emergent discourses which called into question the possibility and even the desirability of the political and economic integration into the mainstream” (1991–1992: 111). While some might question whether “emergent discourses” or continued obstacles inspired student activism, Puerto Ricans were entering New York City’s system of higher education, and student activists became Young Lords. Laó described the group’s origin as a merger between a group of college students, who had been meeting under the name Sociedad Pedro Albizu Campos, and “young street bloods,” and as “the unity of the street people with students of working class background.” Juan González was one of leaders of the 1968 Columbia University student strike (Laó 1994–1995: 36). Iris Morales was a co-founder of Puerto Ricans in Student Activities (PRISA) at City College in 1968, which preceded the 1969 takeover of the south campus and the closing of City College, as students demanded more admissions for students of color, the establishment of Black and Puerto Rican Studies, and course requirements in Black and Puerto Rican history and in Spanish for all education majors.

Founded in the same year, 1969, there were numerous intersections between New York City’s Young Lords and the Puerto Rican Student Union. In 1988, CENTRO introduced an excerpt from a Puerto Rican student union pamphlet by noting the development of a “higher level of political consciousness,” and explaining that “the Young Lords Party and the Puerto Rican Student Union were instrumental in this process and the cultural awakening which accompanied it” (Puerto Rican Student Union 1988: 60). During the initial two-day founding conference of the PRSU, students went to support the Young Lords’ church takeover, then under way. Basilio Serrano observed, “This encounter began a
lasting relationship between the union and the Lords—one that would have major consequences for the student group” (1998: 128). After much collaboration, the PRSU merged with the Young Lords in 1972 (Serrano 1998: 139).

The role of students, as Rojas suggested, may have differentiated the New York Young Lords from other branches. Differences in class and educational backgrounds between activists in Chicago and New York City may have contributed to the split between the two branches in July 1970. The previous year, New York activists had gone to Chicago to meet the Young Lords and decided to open a branch. With the split, Chicago remained the Young Lords Organization and New York became the Young Lords Party. The Chicago Lords were working class youth, and many were high school dropouts. Writing in 1970, Frank Browning noted, “The Lords, until 1967 just another gang, have become the most potent revolutionary organization of Puerto Rican youth in the United States…. That history sets them apart from the vast majority of radical organizations around the country” (1973: 231–2). Indeed, one of their first challenges was negotiating peace pacts with other gangs, “convincing them to fight, not against each other, but against the system which oppresses them” (Browning 1973: 231). Suggesting that New York Lords were too focused on ideological development, Chicago Young Lord Omar Lopez explained, “Here in Chicago we’re more concerned with the immediate needs of the people, but we still understand that the real struggle is not a local one… We’re better able to analyze when we’re out on the streets talking with the people. Ideas must come after actions, not just from reading Marx, Lenin or Mao” (Browning 1973: 244). The Chicago Lords conceded, however, certain shortcomings in organization and in follow-through.

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**TEXT CONTENT**: 

Education was a key issue during earlier eras and during the 1960s and 1970s in communities throughout the Puerto Rican diaspora.

New York Young Lord Pablo “Yoruba” Guzmán reaffirmed the students’ role: “Students, upon whom the hopes of the preceding ‘pioneer generation’ were pinned, were particularly active supporters of the radical movement” (1980: 145). Noting the shortcomings of “dogmatically applying theory, whether it ‘fit’ or not, onto immediate practical situations,” he concluded: “Rather than maintaining ourselves deeply in the midst of our people, providing living leadership, we grew more rhetorical, isolated, and ultimately passé” (1980: 147). Yet Puerto Rican students often came from working-class backgrounds, and Guzmán stressed that Puerto Rican politics were shaped by “our overwhelming preponderance in the working class” (1980: 149–50). Hence, these differences, while potentially significant, should not be oversimplified.

Education was a key issue during earlier eras and during the 1960s and 1970s in communities throughout the Puerto Rican diaspora.37 Put simply, parents wanted a quality education for their children and sought to get the educational...
system to meet the needs of their children. During the 1960s and 1970s, high school and college students demanded access to quality education and a curriculum that included rather than denigrated their histories and cultures. Hence, Centro arose out of this history of educational activism, as well as out of the political context of the 1960s and 1970s. Yet Centro also emerged within the specific context of New York City, where student activists including Young Lords may have intensified the challenges to higher education and strengthened the outcomes in ways that differed from other communities. Students gained admission to the City University of New York system, in part through the initiative and programs of earlier activists. A few Puerto Rican students made their way into other colleges and universities. Students then demanded more admissions and support for Puerto Rican students, and more Puerto Rican faculty and staff, as well as Puerto Rican Studies programs. Along with the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Eugenio María de Hostos Community College was established in the South Bronx as a bilingual school (Meyer 2003).

While a comparative approach to the Puerto Rican diaspora and to the politics of the era engenders great questions, it is here that the still limited historical work on Puerto Rican communities deprives scholars of the answers. Despite Centro’s early focus on the post-World War II era, this initial attention gave way to an interest in the period between the World Wars, as well as a continuing focus on contemporary issues.38 We still lack a full-length historical study of New York City’s Puerto Rican community after World War II (Haslip-Viera, Falcón and Matos Rodríguez 2004). The scholarship on Puerto Rican communities other than New York City has increased, and Centro has again played an important role, with recent CENTRO issues focusing on Chicago and Hawai'i. Both issues were edited by anthropologists, revealing that much of the work on Puerto Rican communities is still done by social scientists. This enriches interdisciplinarity, and many social scientists employ a historical perspective and/or parallel methodologies such as oral histories, yet few rely extensively on historical methodologies when it comes to archival research, for example. This contrasts with Centro’s early archival research, which resulted not only in Labor Migration Under Capitalism, but also in their 1982 publication, Sources for the Study of Puerto Rican Migration, 1879–1930.

Moving beyond answers that focus on the sheer number of Puerto Ricans in New York City, the largest Puerto Rican community, or that focus on the nature of New York City’s educational system, other questions remain. One question is the linkage between the Puerto Rican community in New York City before and after World War II. New York City had a much larger pre-World War II community than other communities of the Puerto Rican diaspora. Did generational differences, in the immigration sense, shape education and activism in the 1960s and 1970s? Had even limited social mobility created a class structure that differentiated New York City from other Puerto Rican communities and enabled some students to attend college? Another question remains regarding the impact of the rich organizational life in New York City in the post-World War II era. Too often portrayed as a lull in community life, and portrayed by a scholarship that still turns too often and too uncritically to the literature produced during the 1950s and 1960s, New York City’s Puerto Rican community and other communities of the diaspora require further historical investigation in order to answer these comparative questions and to fully address what was and was not distinctive about New York City.
Conclusions

Although it is commonplace to anchor the origins of racial/ethnic studies and women/gender studies in the political context of the late 1960s and 1970s, this essay attempts to tease out what that commonplace observation has meant for the field of Puerto Rican Studies. Puerto Rican studies remains largely bereft of historiographical interpretations, in part due to the paucity of historians and specifically historical works. While merely a preliminary and partial step, this essay sought to demonstrate, at the very least, that Centro’s early scholarship deserves to be reclaimed and re-read, and that much of it deserves the status as “classics” in the foundation of Puerto Rican Studies. Indeed, many of the scholarship’s early imprints have continued to shape the field of Puerto Rican Studies. Migration was posited as central, as was globalization, or more specifically the continuing political and economic ties between the United States and Puerto Rico. These dynamics created Puerto Rican communities in the States that were predominantly working-class, and the scholarship continues to explore various dimensions of these working-class communities. The impact of the Left was palpable, not only in Puerto Rican politics of the era, but also in the scholarship’s critique of colonialism, global capitalism, economic exploitation, and structural inequalities, as well as of persisting racism and discrimination. Although the field of Puerto Rican Studies arguably still has a long way to go, attention to internal differentiation and dynamics, especially gender, arose relatively early in the scholarship, as a result of the Puerto Rican political activism of the era and the influence of the Left. Not surprisingly, perhaps the earliest and most developed of this scholarship is that on women and work. Attention to race, sexuality, and class differences appeared, but to a lesser extent and more slowly. Finally, the early commitment to asking fundamental questions and answering them by all available means has persisted, keeping the field of Puerto Rican Studies an overwhelmingly interdisciplinary one. Implicit or explicit critiques of existing disciplinary boundaries or limitations started with the beginnings of the field and have persisted. Many scholars work at the margins of their disciplines or actively bridge multiple disciplines. The willingness to engage in discussions and debates across disciplines keeps the field intellectually vibrant and produces innovative scholarship.

While shared origins have created parallels with other social movements and other fields of racial/ethnic studies, this essay points to the possibilities of distinct trajectories, as well. For example, while Puerto Rican Studies focused on migration, early works in Chicana/o Studies focused on the implications of the conquest of half of Mexico’s territory in 1848. It was the border that moved, not the people, and for quite some time, continuing migration took a back seat, while borderland studies soared. Similarly, much of the early focus in African American Studies was on slavery, treated rightly as a “forced migration” in striking contrast to portrayals of European immigration. The scholarship increasingly encompassed the massive migration of African Americans from the rural south to urban areas north and south, with greater emphasis initially on the post-World War I rather than the post-World War II era. In both Chicana/o and African-American Studies, historians were much more prevalent than in Puerto Rican Studies, and a far more extensive historiography emerged, enriching interpretations of the earlier time periods. Similarly, while these fields of study shared a concern with contemporary issues, they differed in the approaches and theories used to explain persistent inequalities. Although a full exploration is beyond the scope of this paper, I will suggest that the early predominance of the Left and the critiques of global capitalism in the early scholarship in Puerto Rican Studies differed significantly from the “internal colonialism” approach.
in much of the early scholarship in Chicana/o Studies (Saragoza 1990). Although both fields were concerned with race and class, class took center stage in Puerto Rican Studies, while race was central in internal colonialism. As mentioned previously, different approaches in the Puerto Rican and Chicana/o movement, gave feminists in each group both shared and distinct challenges, which may have had parallels in the scholarship (Ruiz 2007). While these historiographical suggestions are hopefully provocative, perhaps the more compelling questions turn to the continued formation and evolution of Latina/o Studies. Inherently comparative and interdisciplinary, this field could draw on the strengths and trajectories of both Puerto Rican and Chicana/o Studies, as well as the more recent manifestations of Cuban, Dominican, Colombian, Studies. Despite many changes over the past thirty years, both Centro and CENTRO have remained critical contexts for the continuing evolution of the scholarship.

**NOTES**

1 The United States occupied Puerto Rico in 1898 at the end of the Spanish Cuban American War and has retained sovereignty ever since. The U.S. Congress declared Puerto Ricans U.S. citizens in 1917.

2 This paper was written in 2003 to commemorate the Centro’s thirtieth anniversary.

3 In this paper, Centro refers to the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, and CENTRO refers to the journal. Beginning in 1983, Centro published a mimeographed newsletter, with information on the task forces’ projects, events, and the expanding library and archival holdings. Newsletters increasingly included excerpts of the scholarship being produced. In the Spring of 1987, the first issue appeared in a journal format, as the Boletín del Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños. In 1995, its title was changed to CENTRO: Journal of El Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, and in 1999, its name was changed to the current one. My thanks to Xavier Totti for help in piecing together Centro’s early newsletters, conferences, and working papers, which are available in the Centro’s archives.

4 This chapter is inevitably my personal, as well as historiographical, reflection on the emergence of Centro’s scholarship in dialogue with my own work. I started graduate school at Rutgers University-New Brunswick in U.S. history in 1987, CENTRO’s first year, and finished with, Whalen (1994).


6 For a concise explanation and historical overview of a category of “undeserving poor,” see Katz (1993).

7 I first explored these contrasting approaches in Whalen (1994: 26–9, 42–8).


9 Other task force members included Américo Badilllo, Sonia Bu, Héctor Colón, José Angel Cruz, Gilbert de Jesus, Julio Luis Hernández, and Virginia Sánchez Korrol (History Task Force 1979: 10).

10 For an important early essay on the role of labor recruitment and contract labor
programs, see Maldonado (1979).

Although Frank Thistlethwaite challenged the “American-centeredness” of approaches that emphasized the “pull” or the attraction of the United States and called for attention to the country of origin and the interconnectedness of the Atlantic economy in 1960, push-pull models with their “laundry list of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors” proved resilient (1964: 84). On shifting trends in immigration studies, see Yans-McLaughlin (1990).

I argue that there are continuities between the “culture of poverty” and the more recent use of the “underclass,” in Whalen (2000; 2001a: Chapter 7).

For two different examples, see Padilla (1967) and Thomas (1997 [1968]).

On the “new histories,” especially the new social history and the new labor history, see Bernstein (1969); and Buhle and Buhle (1988).

The Oral History Task Force included Celia Alvarez, Rina Benmayor, Ana Juarbe, Félix Ojeda, Carlos Sanabria, Amílcar Tirado, and Blanca Vázquez, with aid from Frank Bonilla and Ricardo Campos of the History Task Force, and artists Cándida Alvarez and Néstor Otero.

Rodríguez and Sánchez Korrol (1980) is also illustrative. Both editors had participated with Centro.

The second edition includes a chapter on the post–World War II era (Sánchez Korrol 1994).

My primary initial dialogue with this scholarship focused here, on the causes of the post–World War II migration and the rapid growth of communities outside of New York City, specifically Philadelphia. See Whalen (2001a).

For an overview of the movement, see Torres and Velázquez (1998).

For an overview of international events and their impact on movements in the United States, see Elbaum (2002).

This discussion of the Young Lords draws on my own work on the Young Lords in Philadelphia (Whalen 1998b) and in New York City (Whalen 2001b).

The description of these offensives is based on Young Lords Party and Abramson (1971), M. Melendez (2003), and two films, Palante, Siempre Palante! (1996) and El Pueblo Se Levanta (1968), as well as Laó (1994).

In addition to the articles cited throughout this chapter, for examples, there is a documentary film on the Young Lords, Palante, Siempre Palante! (1996), and a recent dissertation (Fernandez 2004). The exception perhaps is Torres and Velázquez (1998) which focuses more on the Puerto Rican Socialist Party.

Their approaches were not mutually exclusive. Although not his focus, Rodríguez-Morazzani noted that the “radical” generation was also shaped by “external political developments,” and concluded, “For Puerto Rican radicals in New York, the legacy of Black Nationalist Malcolm X was to occupy a place equal in importance to the of Don Pedro Albizu Campos (leader of the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico)” (1991–1992: 107–8).

For an earlier discussion, see Whalen (1999).

This discussion draws from Whalen (2001b).

“Young Lords Party 13 Point Program and Platform.”

This discussion draws on Whalen (2002).

The title of the original anthology is All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave (Feminist Press, 1982).


Parallels seem to hold for other branches of the Young Lords. In Bridgeport, Connecticut, the Young Lords chapter formed as a splinter group from an earlier organization, the Spanish American Coalition. They confronted landlords’ abuses via
rent strikes, including a six-month strike in the building that housed their office, a building marred by the lack of repairs, heat, and garbage removal. Following an arrest and a riot in response, they won their rent strike. They challenged the local gas company’s discriminatory policies as they affected both consumers and workers. Like other chapters, they provided breakfast programs and lead poisoning testing, and confronted police brutality. See Glasser (1997: 151).


33 For a fuller discussion, see Whalen (1998b).

34 Wilfredo Rojas and Juan Ramos, interview by author, 3 January 1996, Philadelphia, PA.


37 On New York City, see Sánchez Korrol (1994—second edition), and a documentary film being made by Lillian Jimenez that focuses on educational activism, and the life and work of Antonia Pantoja. On other communities, see Whalen and Vázquez (2005: Chapters 5, 6, 9).

38 An interest in Left politics could have influenced this focus, as Puerto Rican politics in the interwar era was largely shaped by working-class socialists, especially cigar makers. Two critical figures in Puerto Rican politics, Puerto Rican Nationalist Pedro Albizu Campus and U.S. congressman Vito Marcantonio, had careers that barely bridged into the postwar era. For example, in 1991–1992 CENTRO’s two-part volume on “Puerto Rican History and Politics” included articles on Albizu Campos and Marcantonio. Articles addressing the 1960s and 1970s included Rodríguez-Moranzzani (1991–1992), Negrón-Mutaner’s two-part essay on “Echoing Stonewall,” and personal accounts of tours of duty in the Vietnam war. Other articles addressed politics in Puerto Rico and contemporary political issues, such as the plebiscite and the 1992 Los Angeles riots.

39 For an earlier assessment, see Sánchez and Stevens-Arroyo (1987).


42 An interesting gauge of the shift from internal colonialism in Chicana/o Studies is found in Rodolfo Acuña’s fourth edition of Occupied America (2000), where more emphasis is placed on a world systems approach.


REFERENCES


