

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

CASA DRA. CONCHA MELÉNDEZ RAMÍREZ

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Casa Dra. Concha Meléndez Ramírez

Other Name/Site Number: Casa Biblioteca Dra. Concha Meléndez Ramírez

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 1400 Vilá Mayo

Not for publication:

City/Town: San Juan

Vicinity: X

State: Puerto Rico County: San Juan Code: 127

Zip Code: 00907

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: ___

Public-Local: ___

Public-State: X

Public-Federal: ___

Category of Property

Building(s): X

District: ___

Site: ___

Structure: ___

Object: ___

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

1

1

Noncontributing

1 buildings

___ sites

___ structures

___ objects

1 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing:

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
- Determined eligible for the National Register
- Determined not eligible for the National Register
- Removed from the National Register
- Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: DOMESTIC

Sub: single dwelling

Current: EDUCATION

Sub: library

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Spanish Revival

MATERIALS:

Foundation: concrete

Walls: concrete

Roof: concrete

Other: wood

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.*Summary*

The Casa Dra. Concha Meléndez Ramírez is nationally significant under NHL Criterion 1 for its association with major trends in Puerto Rican literature, in particular the legacy of the *Generación del Treinta* (Generation of 1930), a 1930s middle-class creole literary movement that, in response to US control over the island, shaped Puerto Rico's twentieth-century national cultural identity. This property is significant under NHL Criterion 2 because it served for forty-three years as the residence and workspace of Dra. Concha Meléndez Ramírez (1895-1983), a prolific literary critic and one of the most prominent female voices in the *Generación del Treinta* and subsequent twentieth-century Puerto Rican literary criticism.

Historic and Present Physical Appearance

The Casa Dra. Concha Meléndez Ramírez remains essentially unchanged since its period of significance as the residence and workspace of Concha Meléndez Ramírez. No major alterations have been made to the house since Meléndez's death in 1983. Though now owned by the Puerto Rican government, the house retains a strong sense of place as a single dwelling occupied by a prominent writer. Dra. Meléndez's numerous books remain on the shelves, and her typewriter still stands on the desk in her upper-level workspace.

Location and Setting

The building is located at 1400 Vilá Mayo in El Condado, one of San Juan's oldest and most prestigious suburbs. The house is located a few blocks south of Puerto Rico's northern shore and San Juan Beach, and just east of the *Laguna del Condado* (Condado Lagoon) and the *Bahía de San Juan* (San Juan Bay). El Condado is located a few miles east of Old San Juan.

Exterior

The Casa Dra. Concha Meléndez Ramírez consists of a two-story square layout. Designed in a sober Spanish revival style, the most significant architectural elements in the building's adobe-colored concrete exterior façade are the narrow metal gate that leads into the main entrance of the home, the second-story balcony in the northern main façade, and two wooden windows and a double-hung door, each crowned with concrete canopies and roofed with clay tiles. Similar windows roofed with clay tiles can be found along both sides of the house. Two palm trees stand prominently at either side of the main façade, and smaller trees complement both sides of the structure.

The building is surrounded by a rustic garden trail of stone chips and decorated with native plants and geometric planters. There is a covered terrace annexed to the southeastern core of the house accessible from the yard and from the house's interior. The terrace is twelve feet square with a flat concrete roof supported by five Corinthian columns, with clay tiles at the roof edges. Directly south from the terrace, a quarter-turn concrete staircase provides access to the house's flat concrete roof.

In 1940, a separate one-story, two-sectioned rectangle building, measuring forty-three feet long and ten feet wide, was erected south of the main house within the property lot. This building has been used as a garage and small living space with a bathroom for employees. The employees' quarters have two wooden doors that lead into the garden and into the kitchen in the main house.

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Interior

The house's interior layout retains the feeling of a personal residence. A wooden door at the northern façade, the main entrance from Vilá Mayo Street, leads into a hall; a portrait of Concha Meléndez hanging in the front foyer is a reminder of the home's most important inhabitant. On the east side of the hall, two arched-entrances lead into a long open room made up of a living room and dining room. The kitchen is through a wooden door at the southern end of the dining room. At the western side of the entrance hall, the space is divided between a balcony, a studio, and a half bathroom.

Directly south of the main entrance, a quarter-turn stair leads to the upper floor. The foyer stands in front of a double-sided wooden and glass door that opens into Dra. Concha Meléndez's office and work area. This space, as revealed in photos, has remained unchanged since Dra. Meléndez's death in 1983. Her library, desks, typewriters, diplomas, medals, personal photos, official photos depicting moments of public recognition, and other memorabilia remain on display. Two bedrooms and a full bathroom complete the upper level.

Concha Meléndez Ramírez died in 1983 leaving the house by testament to the *Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña*. The building has been used as a library since the 1990s, but the ICP has not made any alterations to the building.

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.*Summary*

The Casa Dra. Concha Meléndez Ramírez is nationally significant under NHL Criterion 1 for its association with major trends in Puerto Rican literature, in particular the legacy of the *Generación del Treinta* (Generation of 1930), a 1930s middle-class creole literary movement that, in response to US control over the island, shaped Puerto Rico's twentieth-century national cultural identity. This property is significant under NHL Criterion 2 because it served for forty-three years as the residence and workspace of Dra. Concha Meléndez Ramírez (1895-1983), a prolific literary critic and one of the most prominent female voices in the *Generación del Treinta* and subsequent twentieth-century Puerto Rican literary criticism. The period of significance for this property begins in 1940 when Concha Meléndez moved into the house and ends in 1962 to comply with the NHL program's fifty-year rule.

The Casa Dra. Concha Meléndez Ramírez represents vibrant social and political developments in twentieth-century Puerto Rican literary culture. Such events are critical to understanding the broad historical trends associated with Puerto Ricans, the second largest Latino group in the United States. Concha Meléndez came of age during the first decades of the island's transition from Spanish to American rule, a period characterized by economic, social, and political turbulence. During this period, American-implemented trade liberalization, rapid industrialization, and a cultural Americanization program resulted in dramatic changes for Puerto Rican elites, the working classes, and women. The *Generación del Treinta* emerged as a conscious effort by Puerto Rican writers and intellectuals like Concha Meléndez to define Puerto Rican national identity in the face of these changes. Together, these writers imagined a Puerto Rican national cultural identity built upon a literary canon of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Puerto Rican literature, a history firmly rooted in a romanticized Hispanic past, and the *jíbaro*, or country peasant, as a symbol of the essence of Puerto Rico. For the remainder of the twentieth century, and even today, this identity looms large in Puerto Rican culture.

Concha Meléndez was one of the *Generación del Treinta's* most prolific literary and cultural critics, as well as one of the few female voices in what was an almost exclusively male movement. After the peak of the *Generación del Treinta*, she continued publishing literary essays consistently until her death in 1983, tirelessly exploring and advocating Puerto Rico's place in Latin American and Spanish-language literature. The overwhelming bulk of this work was written at the Casa Dra. Concha Meléndez Ramírez, her residence and workspace from 1940-1983.

Introduction

In 1898, during the Spanish-American War, the United States invaded and took control of Puerto Rico, beginning a complex relationship between Puerto Ricans and the US government. Puerto Ricans were governed by US-appointed politicians for much of the first half of the twentieth century, and were granted limited US citizenship in 1917. The island gained commonwealth status in 1952, allowing Puerto Ricans home rule while also fixing Puerto Rico as a seemingly permanent, dependent territory of the United States. Over one hundred years after the US invasion, Puerto Ricans on the island and the mainland are intimately woven into the US social fabric.

Today, most observers agree that Puerto Rico is an anomaly, a colony that persists long after all others have gained independence or integrated politically with their metropolis.¹ This confusing legal status has spilled over

¹ César J. Ayala and Rafael Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898* (Chapel Hill: University of

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into US popular understanding of the island and its people. Despite being one of the nation's largest Latino groups with long-standing communities in New York, Chicago and other cities, throughout history many Americans have thought of Puerto Ricans as foreigners.² As a result, since the 1920s the Puerto Rican experience in America has been defined by a clamor for social equality accompanied by the reality of limited citizenship rights.³ Indeed, Puerto Ricans are legally and popularly conceived of as "foreign in a domestic sense."⁴

Such ideas have kept Puerto Ricans and other Latino groups outside the broader narrative of American history. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar wrote that American Latinos have "fallen through the cracks as we have written history books for our children, formed our national monuments and parks, and, in many ways, developed a national identity for the future of America."⁵ Including Puerto Rican history in the national narrative adds complexity to our understanding of the American experience, and reveals a poorly understood and often neglected aspect of American history. Because this island colony has a deep-rooted history with citizens who have lived on the boundaries of American citizenship historians have increasingly understood that American Latino history is transnational.⁶ Understanding Puerto Rican history allows us not only to understand the role of Puerto Ricans within the broad national patterns of America history but also the complex history of ethnic and racial groups which have been caught in the nexus between national and cultural boundaries.

The works of Doctora Concha Meléndez Ramírez, one of Puerto Rico's most important and prolific literary critics, played a significant role in the island's history by helping shape Puerto Rico's conception of itself. Meléndez was one of the few female voices in the *Generación del Treinta*, a literary movement that, amidst the turmoil of the 1930s, criticized Federal government plans to "Americanize" Puerto Ricans and impose English as the island's primary language. In response, Meléndez and the young writers of the *Generación del Treinta* sought to create a communal identity by asking the island's inhabitants to reflect on the aspects of *la personalidad puertorriqueña* (the Puerto Rican personality). Together, these writers imagined a Puerto Rican national cultural identity built upon a literary canon of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Puerto Rican literature, a history firmly rooted in a romanticized Hispanic past, and the *jíbaro*, or country peasant, as a symbol of the essence of Puerto Rico. Even today, this identity looms large in Puerto Rican culture.

The Casa Dra. Concha Meléndez Ramírez is nationally significant as Dra. Meléndez's home and residence during her most productive years between 1940 and 1983, and is intimately linked with her work and identity as one of Puerto Rico's most important intellectual figures.

Puerto Rico in American History

Centuries before the United States took control of Puerto Rico in 1898, the island was part of the Spanish empire and the site of many important historic developments. Christopher Columbus's second voyage to the New World included a landing in Puerto Rico in 1493, and in 1516 a passenger stepped onto a Puerto Rican

North Carolina Press, 2007), 1.

² Puerto Ricans have long been the second-largest group of US Latinos after Mexicans. "Country of Origin Profiles," Pew Hispanic Center, accessed May 24, 2012, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2011/05/26/country-of-origin-profiles>.

³ Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in Twentieth-century New York City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

⁴ Christina Duffy Burnett and Burke Marshall, eds., *Foreign in a Domestic Sense: Puerto Rico, American Expansion, and the Constitution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

⁵ Ken Salazar. "Uncovering the American Latino Story," Office of Public Engagement, accessed May 14, 2012. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2012/02/14/uncovering-american-latino-story>.

⁶ For a detailed discussion of this issue see Adrian Burgos, et al., "Latino History: An Interchange on Present Realities and Future Prospects," *Journal of American History* 97, no. 2 (September 1, 2010): 424–463.

shore with the western hemisphere's first guitar. The earliest period of the bloody Spanish Conquest began in Puerto Rico with the imposition of a brutal and abusive system of forced labor and cultural assimilation that had, within approximately thirty years, almost completely destroyed the Taino and Carib indigenous societies that had inhabited the island for 20,000 years. Dominican friar Antonio de Montesinos, who reacted in horror to the enslavement and violence he saw on the island, was the first Spaniard to question the morality of the Conquest. Friar Bartolomé de las Casas heard Montesinos and launched his famous defense of native peoples and damning critique of the Conquest.⁷ Despite such early critiques of Spanish barbarism, the Spanish Crown ruled over the island for most of the following four hundred years, from the early sixteenth century until the final years of the nineteenth century.

American troops invaded Puerto Rico in 1898. This invasion occurred during the peak of a decades-long Cuban independence movement. After declaring war on Spain, the United States quickly emerged as victors in the Spanish-American War. As a result, the United States gained control over Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines and other former Spanish colonial possessions. Puerto Rico's status was legally codified in the 1900 Foraker Act, which defined it as separate from the United States, but nevertheless firmly under US control. The law installed a civilian government consisting of a governor, a cabinet and a five-member supreme court, all of which were appointed by the American president. One house of the bicameral legislature consisted of an eleven-member council that was also appointed by the president; the other was a thirty-five member House of Delegates elected by male Puerto Ricans every two years.⁸

Puerto Ricans, especially the creole elite, energized by the Cuban independence movement and tired of Spanish rule, initially celebrated American governance with celebratory parades and fireworks.⁹ However, many quickly became critical of this governance. The Foraker Act fell far short of the expectations of island elites, providing a toothless citizenship and fewer self-governing powers than the autonomous government granted by Spain in the late 1890s.¹⁰ Puerto Rican observers also noted that American policies in Puerto Rico were heavily influenced by beliefs that the United States would bring progress and modernity to an island populated by a racially inferior people held in backwardness by an antiquated Spanish Empire. At best, such beliefs were well intentioned, at worst, blatantly eugenicist and white supremacist.

Puerto Rico's Economy Under US Rule

The Federal government implemented—and Puerto Ricans experienced—dramatic economic shifts in the first three decades of the twentieth century.¹¹ The Foraker Act eliminated trade barriers between the US and Puerto Rico, leading to a major growth in American investments on the island and a rapid expansion in Puerto Rico's raw sugar, tobacco and needlework industries. Before the American invasion, coffee had accounted for 41% and sugar 15% of Puerto Rico's cultivated land.¹² After the invasion, Puerto Rico quickly became part of the United States' rapidly expanding global sugar empire that also included Cuba, the Philippines, and Hawaii. Many American sugar corporations saw cheap production in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and other new possessions as

⁷ Mario J. Valdés and Djelal Kadir, eds., *Literary Cultures of Latin America: a Comparative History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 392-4. See also Carlos Alberto Montaner, *Las Raíces Torcidas De América Latina* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janés Editores, 2001), 23-25.

⁸ The legality of the Foraker Act was challenged in the so-called Insular Cases decided by the US Supreme Court in 1901. The decision in *Downes v. Bidwell* said that although the US government could create law governing territories under US control, like Puerto Rico, the US Constitution did not necessarily apply to those territories. Ayala, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, 26.

⁹ Luis Martínez-Fernández, "Puerto Rico in the Whirlwind of 1898: Conflict, Continuity, and Change," *Organization of American Historians Magazine of History*, Vol. 12, no. 3 (Spring 1998): 26.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹¹ Ayala, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, 2.

¹² Martínez-Fernández, "Puerto Rico in the Whirlwind," 25.

their last hope in an industry that had tottered on ruin since an 1873 economic downturn.¹³ As a result, American corporations came to dominate a large portion of raw sugar production on the island, with most sugar being produced for consumption in the United States. As early as 1901, a new tariff system that favored sugar caused Puerto Rican coffee exports to fall to 20%, while sugar rose to 55% of all exports. By 1910, coffee had fallen to 10% and sugar rose to 64%.¹⁴ And by the 1930s, 15% of all American raw sugar had been cut and processed in Puerto Rico. Indeed, the sugar market reflected a larger shift in Puerto Rico's economy towards an export-oriented model mainly focused on production for the American market. Rising sugar profits and early twentieth-century industrialization in Puerto Rico enriched a sector of the local Puerto Rican populace, forming a native bourgeoisie that occupied a privileged place in the *Generación del Treinta's* ideas of Puerto Rican culture.

The growth of an export-oriented economy was dependent on the creation of a new wage labor force that would cut sugarcane, process tobacco, and do needlework. Workers left small plots of subsistence agriculture in rural areas and flooded into coastal municipalities to join an army of around 100,000 workers swinging machetes in the intense heat of the sugar cane fields. The smaller tobacco industry also attracted workers who produced the leaf for the American market. However, the industry experienced a gradual decline as most of the aspects of cigar-making and tobacco production were mechanized in the early decades of the 1900s. Tobacco production was also feminized as it was mechanized. In 1910, 30% of tobacco workers were women. Twenty-five years later, 73% of the workforce was female.

Needlework also drew women out of the home and into wage labor. The new industrialized Puerto Rican economy shifted away from coffee exports, leaving the island's traditionally coffee-producing western and interior municipalities out of the profit boom enjoyed by the sugar industry. It was in these municipalities that needlework grew after World War I disrupted American access to European textiles. By the 1930s, tens of thousands of women were employed in this sector. Though some worked for good pay in large urban factories, most, along with their families, did needlework for larger businesses out of their homes. Around 90% of the textile output during this period has been attributed to work done by families in the home.¹⁵ Such economic shifts had significant effects on the social lives of working women as well as Puerto Ricans of all social classes.

Puerto Rican Society Under US Rule

American rule in Puerto Rico also had important social effects among the diverse classes on the island. Creole elites, the working classes, and women of all classes experienced upheaval as pre-1898 social roles shifted and were accompanied by simultaneous expansions and retractions of social possibility, laying the foundation for the *Generación del Treinta's* call in the 1930s for a renewed exploration of Puerto Rican identity.

The first three decades of Federal rule threatened the status of Puerto Rico's predominantly white creole class as the island elite. The American invasion put an abrupt end to the Parliament and limited political autonomy Spain had granted landowners and professionals in an attempt to calm sympathies for independence. In fact, US troops invaded the island only six days after the new autonomous government took office.¹⁶ It also halted calls by other sectors of the island elite for complete independence.¹⁷ However, some creole elites, as previously mentioned, benefitted from the economic changes brought on by industrialization, while others came to occupy important roles in the colonial administration.¹⁸ Democratization and an emergent, increasingly

¹³ Ayala, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, 35-36.

¹⁴ Martínez-Fernández, "Puerto Rico in the Whirlwind," 28.

¹⁵ Figures from Chapter 2 in Ayala.

¹⁶ Martínez-Fernández, "Puerto Rico in the Whirlwind," 25.

¹⁷ David William Foster, ed., *Handbook of Latin American Literature*, 2nd ed. (New York: Garland, 1992), 562.

¹⁸ Ayala, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, 76.

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militant Puerto Rican labor movement made many such elites uncomfortable, as most subscribed to the belief in the innate superiority of an elite class of cultured aristocracy. Exemplified in Uruguayan writer José Enrique Rodó's popular 1900 essay *Ariel*, many Puerto Rican creoles believed that the elite classes should maintain high culture and cultivate a transcendent spirituality rather than succumb to the crass and mediocre democracy represented by American industry and materialism.¹⁹ Elites were troubled by labor reforms like the eight-hour workday, trial by jury, and a reduction in the voting age.²⁰ They were also suspicious of changes in the post-1898 law, society, and economy that helped women conceive of rights that had previously been inaccessible, including increased labor participation, legalized divorce, new access to education, and potential suffrage.²¹

For the Puerto Rican working classes life changed even more drastically. Despite record industry profits and an expanding island budget, poverty, inequality, and dependency on unstable wage labor relationships increased for many Puerto Rican workers. One scholar has dubbed the period's impoverishment of the Puerto Rican working class "pauperization."²² The island's first elected governor, Luis Muñoz Marín, writing about the early decades of US rule, called the island "Uncle Sam's sweatshop."²³ Indeed, Puerto Rican workers, newly dependent on wage labor that produced for export to the US, also became dependent on US imports for their daily survival. Prior to 1898, most Puerto Ricans subsisted from locally-grown foods. Thirty years later, importation of vegetables increased 1,200%, meats 500%, and rice and beans 300%.²⁴ The seasonal nature of sugar production also meant long bouts of unemployment during the *tiempo muerto* (down time), often lasting six months or more.²⁵ Though many women entered the labor force at this time, it was often out of economic necessity. Children also spent more time working despite increased access to schooling under US rule. In fact, literacy rates among children dropped during this period.²⁶ Lillian Guerra sums up the experience of the Puerto Rican working class during this time, calling it "a struggle against the rigors of landlessness, bouts of long and arduous labor, and the desperation of unemployment."²⁷ However, the Puerto Rican working classes' experience in waged employment also led to the creation of an active labor movement organized by the *Federación Libre de Trabajadores* and the *Partido Socialista* in the early twentieth century.²⁸

Women of all social classes experienced dramatic social changes in the early twentieth century. Elite women found new educational opportunities open to them at the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) when it was established in 1903. Significantly, of the 2,700 students on campus that first school year, 74% were women.²⁹ Women's access to education under American rule also expanded their professional opportunities as teachers, nurses, and clerical workers. Between 1899 and 1930, women such as Concha Meléndez came to dominate the teaching profession rising from 30% to 75% of the teaching force. Female clerical workers rose from comprising 50% of the profession to 66% by 1930. That same year, women constituted 94% of all nurses.³⁰ Women employed in the needle trades and tobacco production also began to occupy important roles in the new

¹⁹ Juan Flores, *Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity* (Houston: Arte Público, 1993), 37-38.

²⁰ Martínez-Fernández, "Puerto Rico in the Whirlwind," 28.

²¹ Eileen Findlay, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

²² Lillian Guerra, *Popular Expression and National Identity in Puerto Rico: The Struggle for Self, Community, and Nation* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 26.

²³ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 31-2.

²⁵ Ayala, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, 35, 39.

²⁶ Guerra, *Popular Expression*, 36.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁸ Ayala, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, 53.

²⁹ Isabel Picó de Hernández, "Los estudiantes universitarios y el proceso político puertorriqueño," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1974), cited in Acosta-Belén, 58, note 16.

³⁰ Edna Acosta-Belén, ed., *The Puerto Rican Woman: Perspectives on Culture, History, and Society* (New York: Praeger, 1986), 50.

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labor movement. One now-canonical example is labor agitator and feminist Luisa Capetillo, who got her start in the labor movement reading the daily news and literature to cigar-rollers. A prolific writer on themes ranging from free love to women's suffrage, Capetillo was jailed for being the first woman on the island to wear pants in public.³¹

The first decades of the twentieth century also saw intense mobilization and lobbying for women's suffrage and rights in the United States and Latin America. In the US, women used "every strategy imaginable" to gain voting rights, which they finally achieved in 1920.³² Hundreds of women from across South America convened at an international congress on women's rights in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1910. Latin American women's groups organized another meeting in Mérida, México, in 1916.³³ Puerto Rican women took inspiration from women's rights movements in both Spanish-speaking countries and the United States, at one point testifying in front of a Congressional committee side-by-side with American activists on the question of Puerto Rican female suffrage in 1928.³⁴

Separate women's movements emerged among Puerto Rican bourgeois and working class circles between 1900 and 1930. Working-class women tended to participate with the *Federación Libre de Trabajadores* or the *Partido Socialista*, and exhibited a more radical feminism that advocated for equal rights for all women. Militant working class feminists like Capetillo challenged class and gender-based privileges, spoke against marriage and patriarchy, and argued that all women deserved the vote. After women on the American mainland won suffrage in 1920, union activist Genara Pagán attempted to register to vote in the 1920 Puerto Rican elections, causing a "state of emergency" in Puerto Rico.³⁵

Upper and middle class women, on the other hand, organized themselves into groups such as the *Liga Femenina*, a group of professional women suffragists that included Concha Meléndez as a founding member.³⁶ The *Liga* was organized in 1917 in response to a provision of the Jones Act that granted limited US citizenship to all Puerto Ricans, but only gave Puerto Rican men the right to vote. Unlike working-class feminists, however, conservative feminists like Meléndez and members of the *Liga* argued that creole women were not a threat to male dominance or traditional Puerto Rican culture, but simply deserved the chance to share power.³⁷ The woman with the vote was, in the words of middle-class feminist Mercedes Solá, "an excellent collaborator" who, if granted suffrage, would continue to serve as loyal wife, mother, and caretaker of the nation.³⁸ In fact, *Liga* members later advocated for suffrage limited only to literate women, a detail that would have essentially left hundreds of thousands of working-class women disenfranchised, and the *Partido Socialista*, seen as suspect by most creole elites, without a voting base. As a result, literate women were allowed to vote in Puerto Rico in 1932, with all women granted suffrage in 1936.³⁹

³¹ Norma Valle-Ferrer, *Luisa Capetillo: Pioneer Puerto Rican Feminist* (Peter Lang, 2006).

³² "Women and Equal Rights," National Park Service, accessed June 10, 2012, <http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/pwwmh/equal.htm>.

³³ Magali Roy-Féquièrre, *Women, Creole Identity, and Intellectual Life in Early Twentieth-century Puerto Rico* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 271, n. 2.

³⁴ Gladys M. Jimenez-Muñoz, "'A Storm Dressed in Skirts': Ambivalence in the Debate on Women's Suffrage in Puerto Rico, 1927-1929," (PhD diss., State University of New York at Binghamton, 1993).

³⁵ Asunción Horno Delgado, *Breaking Boundaries: Latina Writing and Critical Readings* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 148.

³⁶ Roy-Féquièrre, *Women, Creole Identity, and Intellectual Life*, 77.

³⁷ Scholar María Barceló refers to this version of middle-class feminism as "*feminismo social*" (social feminism). See *La Lucha Por El Sufragio Femenino En Puerto Rico, 1896-1935* (San Juan, P.R.: Río Piedras, P.R.: Centro de Investigaciones Sociales; Ediciones Huracán, 1997) and Ayala, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, 68.

³⁸ Roy-Féquièrre, *Women, Creole Identity, and Intellectual Life*, 66.

³⁹ Ayala, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, 69.

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Changes to public education, particularly the imposition of English as the only language of instruction, provoked the most protest among Puerto Ricans and helped them define a Hispanic identity vis-à-vis Americans. Puerto Ricans complained that the Federal government, in control of the island's public education, had no educational philosophy in Puerto Rico. Rather, the public school system simply sought to Americanize Puerto Ricans, teach them to speak English, and become loyal American citizens.⁴⁰ Scholarship has shown that Americanization was, indeed, at the center of educational policy in Puerto Rico.⁴¹

The language of instruction in public schools was one hotly contested issue throughout the first half of the twentieth century and the subject of intense debate.⁴² As a result, the language of the Puerto Rican classroom oscillated between English and Spanish. English was made the official language of public instruction in all grades in 1904. In response, early nationalists like creole literary figure Jose de Diego battled for linguistic control with mixed success. By 1916, Spanish was allowed in grades 1-4 and bilingual instruction was allowed in grade 5. By 1934, Spanish was expanded to grades 1-8. The following year, English was reinstated as the only language of instruction for all grades. In 1946, Spanish was made the language of instruction for all grades, with English as a mandatory subject.⁴³ The law has basically remained, excepting a brief debate in 1991 over a law that made Spanish the official language of the island. That law was overturned the following year.⁴⁴

In the context of serious efforts by the American government to impose mainland culture and language on the island, Puerto Rican intellectuals began to intensify their reflections on why the Spanish language should be conserved on the island. In fact, by the 1920s Puerto Rican intellectuals—most of whom had been educated in American-run, English-only schools and had no memory of a pre-1898 Puerto Rico—began to seriously tackle the question of the identity of Puerto Ricans as a people.

The boundaries and characteristics of a Puerto Rican identity would be defined in the 1930s by Concha Meléndez and other writers of the *Generación del Treinta*, who crafted a distinctly Puerto Rican nationalism that would privilege the island's Hispanic past, establish a literary canon, use the symbol of the *jíbaro* in an attempt to smooth out racial and class differences, oppose US intervention, and construct a national identity.

La Generación del Treinta

Concha Meléndez compared the writers of 1930s Puerto Rico to a boat adrift in the ocean. "It is the generation that looks at both shores in the sea and asks itself what has been lost in the shore left behind and what can be hoped for on the shore in front of it."⁴⁵ After three decades of American political rule and cultural imposition on the island, this group of middle-class essayists, novelists, short story writers, and poets established a Puerto Rican literary canon, questioned the cultural imperialism of the United States, and solidified the creole elite's position as arbiters of a national identity that, in many ways, continues to resonate today. As such, the literary works of the *Generación del Treinta* and the enduring Puerto Rican national identity they established parallel vanguard literary movements in Latin America and the US, such as the interwar Harlem Renaissance.

⁴⁰ Juan José Osuna, *A History of Education in Puerto Rico* (New York: Arno Press, 1975).

⁴¹ Aida Negrón de Montilla, *La Americanización De Puerto Rico y El Sistema De Instrucción Pública, 1900-1930* (Río Piedras: Editorial Universitaria, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1977).

⁴² Epifanio Fernández Vanga, "La Palabra y las Palabras," and Antonio Sáez. "El Problema de la Lengua," in Ateneo Puertorriqueño, *Problemas De La Cultura En Puerto Rico: Foro Del Ateneo Puertorriqueño, 1940* (Río Piedras: Editorial Universitaria, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1976), 219-227.

⁴³ For a timeline of US education policy in Puerto Rico, see Appendix in Melvin C. Resnick. "ESL and Language Planning in Puerto Rican Education." *TESOL Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (Summer 1993).

⁴⁴ Nancy Morris, *Puerto Rico: Culture, Politics, and Identity* (Praeger/Greenwood, 1995), 58.

⁴⁵ "Es la generación que mira dos costas en su mar y se pregunta lo que ha de perder en la que deja atrás y lo que puede esperar de la que tiene delante." Concha Meléndez, *Obras Completas, Vol. IV* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1970), 526. Translation by the author.

¿Qué somos? ¿Cómo somos?—What are we? How are we?—were the first questions posed to readers of *Indice*, a literary journal published between 1929 and 1931 by the mostly male vanguard of the *Generación del Treinta*. Educated in English-only US schools, young writers like Antonio Pedreira, Samuel R. Quiñones, Vicente Geigel Polanco, and A. Collado Martell looked to oppose the US government’s attempts to culturally Americanize Puerto Ricans by defining *la personalidad puertorriqueña* (the Puerto Rican personality) as historically, linguistically, and culturally distinct from the US and, importantly, as essentially Spanish. These writers looked to Spain as an alternative to American cultural hegemony and constructed a national literary canon made up of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Spanish and Puerto Rican literature. Their writings romanticized the Spanish colonial past, promoted public school instruction in Spanish rather than the government-imposed English, and referred to Puerto Rico as *el país* (the country), an entity deferent to Spain, or *la nación* (the nation).⁴⁶

Borrowing from previous pro-Hispanic creole writers like Jose de Diego, Luis Lloréns Torres and Nemesio Canales, the *Generación del Treinta* believed that a socially and economically fragile Puerto Rico, bombarded by a deliberate American cultural imperialism, would be made coherent and independent by the creation of an island identity by “conscious intellectual endeavor.” This project would allow the Puerto Rican people to understand themselves as products of a Hispanic legacy yet culturally distinct from Spain, as well as separate and thus resistant to American cultural influence. Similar attempts to forge a national identity were seen across Latin America in vanguard literary movements during the interwar period. The economic impacts and social disillusionment with the promises of European civilization after World War I, the rise of the United States as a world power, and growing emphasis on export-driven, industrialized economies led to middle-class reformist movements that challenged old oligarchic power across Latin America, and the writers of 1930s Puerto Rico were no exception.⁴⁷

Like Puerto Rico, the mainland United States was also undergoing dramatic economic and social shifts, and men like Theodore Roosevelt were also reimagining the national identity during the early twentieth century. Responding to rapid industrialization, urbanization, shifting gender norms, and a massive influx of “new” immigrants from southern and eastern Europe and Asia, Americans like Roosevelt hoped to “establish a definition of ‘us,’ an ethic and narrative of belonging by which Americanness could be established, transmitted, maintained, and judged.” And as in Puerto Rico, much of this work was done in national literature. In America, Roosevelt promoted a national literary project that encompassed a group of writers who reflected on the immigrant. He himself used the “Rough Riders” as a symbol of appropriate American rugged individualism, masculinity, and race.⁴⁸ In early twentieth-century New York, the Harlem Renaissance also paralleled the *Generación del Treinta* as a group of writers and intellectuals who consciously defined the place of African Americans in US society through essays and literature. Indeed, historians now recognize that, rather than existing as separate entities, literary movements like the Harlem Renaissance in New York City and the Caribbean literary world were intimately tied, mutually influential, and more usefully thought of as making up a single “US-Caribbean world.”⁴⁹ Indeed, Puerto Ricans, many of them women, were sent by the island’s insular government to study at Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute in the early 1900s, while other Caribbean writers and intellectuals, particularly those of African descent like Arturo Schomburg, forged intimate intellectual and personal ties between New York and Caribbean intellectual circles.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Ayala, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, 75.

⁴⁷ Vicky Unruh, *Latin American Vanguard: The Art of Contentious Encounters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

⁴⁸ Aviva F. Taubenfeld, *Rough Writing: Ethnic Authorship in Theodore Roosevelt’s America* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 2-4.

⁴⁹ Frank Andre Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 7-8.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 43. Also see Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, “The World of Arturo Schomburg,” in *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and*

Similarly, in Puerto Rico the *Generación del Treinta* saw the *jíbaro*, or country peasant, as a useful symbol of the core of Puerto Rican historical identity. A solitary, self-sustaining, white male farmer, the *jíbaro* was unique to Puerto Rico, and also linked to a Hispanic past. Scholar Aníbal Gonzalez explains:

The figure of the jibaro fulfilled this harmonizing symbolic role perfectly. As codified by Llorens, Davila, and others, the archetypal Puerto Rican was the peasant from the mountainous coffee-growing region of the interior, the free-living, impoverished white descendant of the Spanish conquistadors, with deep roots in the land, yet also linked by his language and folklore to his Peninsular past. That this picture was hardly that of the real Puerto Rican peasant, who was often of mixed blood and subjected to the exploitative labor of the coffee and sugar plantations, did not seem to matter. It also did not seem to matter that a large sector of the Puerto Rican population is black or mulatto. What mattered was that now these writers had an apparently coherent notion of Puerto Rican culture with which to oppose the Americanization policy imposed by the United States colonial regime.⁵¹

Like Roosevelt's "Rough Riders," symbolically rugged individuals like the *jíbaro* have been used across Latin America and the US as cultural markers that, by romanticizing the past, historically root the present and shape the future. The Castillian labriego, the gaucho of the Argentinian and Uruguayan pampas, the Cuban *guajiro*, and the American "Rough Riders" and cowboys (whose origin in the practices of the Mexican *vaquero* is often forgotten) are all examples of figures that "crystallized and transmitted a system of values, beliefs and practices which, though promoted in the present, were intended to preserve tradition as well as unify and energize the new versions of cultural and national aspiration."⁵²

The most important writer of the period, and one of the *jibaro*'s celebrants, was "the father of Puerto Rican letters," Antonio S. Pedreira. His book *Insularismo* "stands, since its publication in 1934, as the watershed and germinal source of thinking about Puerto Rican culture."⁵³ *Insularismo* proposed a historical reading of Puerto Rico's colonial trajectory. Passed from one colonial power to another and doomed by insular island geography, Puerto Rico and its people had been isolated from the rest of the world, wrote Pedreira. And this situation could only be remedied by the affirmation of a latent Puerto Rican national identity, an identity Pedreira and his colleagues had set out to define in the journal *Indice*. "It is this affirmation, however conditional, of national identity... which account for the germinal significance of Pedreira's books for subsequent cultural study," says eminent Puerto Rican scholar Juan Flores, concluding that "*Insularismo* put Puerto Rico on the intellectual map."⁵⁴

The importance of 1930s texts like *Insularismo*, the literary journal *Indice*, and others to Puerto Rico's national identity in the twentieth century cannot be understated. Most of the literary journals that followed *Indice* also sought to explore *la personalidad puertorriqueña*. Pedreira and his colleagues were so successful in "setting the agenda for the 'legitimate' parameters of Puerto Rican literature that their disciples would... follow their directives into the sixties."⁵⁵ Subsequent literary generations, like the Generation of 1950 (first identified by

Culture in the United States, edited by Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

⁵¹ Foster, *Handbook of Latin American Literature*, 566.

⁵² Malena Rodríguez Castro, "Asedios Centenarios: La Hispanofilia en la Cultura Puertorriqueña," in *Hispanofilia: Arquitectura y Vida En Puerto Rico, 1900-1950 = Hispanophilia: Architecture and Life in Puerto Rico 1900-1950*, edited by Enrique Vivoni Farage (San Juan: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1998), 288. On vaqueros see Lawrence Clayton, James F. Hoy Lawrence, and Jerald Underwood, *Vaqueros, Cowboys, and Buckaroos* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2001).

⁵³ Flores, *Divided Borders*, 15-17.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵⁵ Roy-Féquièrre, *Women, Creole Identity, and Intellectual Life*, 88.

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Concha Meléndez) built on the *Generación del Treinta*'s call to define a national identity.⁵⁶ Even the 1960s and post-1960s Puerto Rican scholarship, which has sought to trouble traditional ideas of Puerto Rican national identity, still in large part centralizes and writes against the national identity established by the *Generación del Treinta*. Indeed, most contemporary scholars acknowledge that the project of the white, middle-class members of the *Generación del Treinta* was to articulate a new nationalist identity that sought to reassert its intellectual control and reinforce class, social and racial structures that favored the Puerto Rican elite. In fact, much of the post-1970s literature on Puerto Rican nationalism has contested this anti-labor, anti-black, masculine vision of Puerto Rican nationalism.⁵⁷

Despite these criticisms, members of the *Generación del Treinta* spent the 1920s, '30s and subsequent decades establishing and participating in critical Puerto Rican cultural institutions like the *Ateneo Puertorriqueño*, the *Departamento de Estudios Hispánicos* at the *Universidad de Puerto Rico*, the *Instituto de Literatura Puertorriqueña*, and the *Biblioteca de Autores Puertorriqueños*, many of which still exist today. Put simply, the "Puerto Rican personality" as defined by the *Generación del Treinta* was the foundation of today's Puerto Rican national identity.

Doctora Concha Meléndez Ramírez

If Pedreira is the father of Puerto Rican literature, Dra. Concha Meléndez is arguably its mother. Meléndez played a consistent, though less acknowledged, role alongside Pedreira throughout the late 1920s and 1930s, and continued to contribute to the Puerto Rican literary canon for decades after his death.

Concha Meléndez Ramírez was born in Caguas, Puerto Rico on January 21, 1895.⁵⁸ Seven years later, Meléndez moved with her family to San Juan, Puerto Rico's largest city and the center of island cultural and political life. Meléndez would remain in San Juan until her death almost a century later. She graduated from the University of Puerto Rico's (UPR) high school in 1915, completed a bachelor's degree at the UPR Normal School in 1922 and became a teacher at University High School. The following year, she published her first and only collection of poems, *Psiquis Doliente* (1923). Meléndez would go on to teach some of the most important twentieth-century Puerto Rican writers. For the rest of her life, teaching remained at the center of her work and contribution to Puerto Rican culture.

In the early twentieth century, Meléndez's urban life, education and employment as a teacher made her part of the island's small social elite class. Before the American invasion in 1898, Puerto Rico was largely a rural society. By the 1930s, however, 30% of the island's population and the majority of Puerto Rico's elites lived in cities. Despite the Federal government's heavy involvement in education on the island, 40% of the population remained illiterate and only 39% of youth in the ages between 5 to 20 attended school by the 1930s. In a country of almost 2 million, one census put professionals—lawyers, librarians, university staff, writers and journalists—at only 913 people. The UPR's student body numbered less than 3,000, though many of the students were women.⁵⁹ Like Meléndez, many women graduating from UPR became teachers, a profession that

⁵⁶ Acosta-Belén, *Puerto Rican Woman*, 125.

⁵⁷ Jorge Duany, "Imagining the Puerto Rican Nation: Recent Works on Cultural Identity," *Latin American Research Review* 31, no. 3 (August 1, 1996): 248–267.

⁵⁸ Basic biographical material is from Juan Llanes Santos, "Casa Dra. Concha Meléndez Ramírez, San Juan, San Juan, Puerto Rico," National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) Nomination Form (NR #11000414) (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2011); *Gale Biography In Context*, accessed June 12 2012; and "Concha Meléndez," Puerto Rico Encyclopedia, *Fundación Puertorriqueña de la Humanidades*, accessed May 15, 2012, <http://www.encyclopedia.pr.org/ing/article.cfm?ref=08111201&highlight=%2Bconcha>. Some sources indicate Meléndez was born in 1893, but most agree her birth year was 1895, used here.

⁵⁹ Luis Angel Ferrao, "Nacionalismo, hispanismo y élite intelectual en el Puerto Rico en los años treinta," in *Del Nacionalismo*

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rapidly expanded and feminized during the first three decades of the twentieth century. In 1899, women were 30% teachers on the island; by 1930, they made up 75% of all teachers.⁶⁰ With newfound access to employment and self-sufficiency, female teachers and university graduates like Meléndez formed the vanguard of struggles for women's rights and recognition in the 1920s and 30s through organizations like the *Liga Femenina* (of which she was a founding member) and later the Association of Women Graduates from the UPR.⁶¹

In 1926, Meléndez obtained a Master's Degree from Columbia Teacher's College in New York City where she studied, along with Antonio Pedreira, under the famed Spanish scholar and founder of Columbia's Spanish Department, Federico de Onís. Onís was recruited to Columbia by Archer Huntington, a philanthropist and founder of the Hispanic Society of America, recently recommended for National Historic Landmark status.⁶²

Onís accompanied Meléndez and Pedreira back to Puerto Rico in 1926, where all three played important roles in the construction of Puerto Rico's most important national cultural institutions. Both Meléndez and Pedreira helped revive the *Ateneo Puertorriqueño* in 1927, a center of creole thought founded on the island in 1876. Onís became the first director of the UPR's Department of Hispanic Studies, a "center of education, research and discussion of what the Puerto Rican intellectual movement would be like in the following decades," while Pedreira and Meléndez jointly headed the Department's first permanent faculty. Pedreira later headed the Department as well.⁶³

In the early 1930s, Meléndez obtained a doctorate from the prestigious National Autonomous University of Mexico, becoming the first woman ever to graduate with a doctorate from the school's prestigious Department of Philosophy and Letters. Her 1934 doctoral thesis, *La novela indianista en Hispanoamérica, 1882-1889*, was a study of the post-independence literature of Latin America and its connection with social struggles.⁶⁴

The publication of Meléndez's doctoral dissertation in 1934 coincided with the release of Pedreira's *Insularismo* and the peak of literary activity identified with the *Generación del Treinta*. Though the *Generación del Treinta* was a chorus of almost exclusively male voices, Dra. Concha Meléndez's prolific scholarship and teaching played a critical role in its formation. Concha Meléndez's work was published several times in *Indice*, the journal where the *Generación del Treinta* explored the essential nature of Puerto Rico, despite the fact that other female contributors were almost completely absent from its pages. Historian Magali Roy-Féquièrre argues that, although they were allowed a limited textual presence, women scholars of the *Generación del Treinta* like Concha Meléndez were "instrumental in delineating the Puerto Rican literary canon, while also providing rigid interpretations and canonical readings that would influence future critics and

Al Populismo: Cultura y Política En Puerto Rico, eds. Silvia Alvarez-Curbelo and Maria Elena Rodríguez Castro (Universidad de Puerto Rico : Ediciones Huracán, 1993), 40.

⁶⁰ Acosta-Belén, *Puerto Rican Woman*, 50.

⁶¹ Magali Roy-Féquièrre, "Contested Territory: Puerto Rican Women, Creole Identity, and Intellectual Life in the Early Twentieth Century," *Callaloo* 17, no. 3 (September 1, 1994): 916-934. See also Yamila Azize, *Luchas De La Mujer En Puerto Rico, 1898-1919* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Litografía Metropolitana, 1979).

⁶² Howard Young, "Federico De Onís (1888-1966)," *Hispania* 80, no. 2 (May 1, 1997): 268-270. On Archer Huntington and the Hispanic Society of America, see Alexandra Lord and Roger Reed, "The Hispanic Society of America Complex, New York City, New York," National Historic Landmark Nomination (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2011), in "Spring 2012 NHL Nominations," National Historic Landmarks Program, accessed June 14, 2012, <http://www.nps.gov/nhl/Spring2012Nominations.htm>.

⁶³ Andrea Navarro, "Concha Meléndez: Una Perspectiva Pedagógica Sobre Su Contribución a La Literatura Puertorriqueña e Hispanoamericana" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1995), 45.

⁶⁴ Héctor Oscar Ciarlo, *El Escritor y Su Obra: Al Encuentro De Concha Meléndez y Otros Ensayos* (Río Piedras, P.R.: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico), 93-94.

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readers for decades to come.”⁶⁵ Indeed, extended study of Dra. Meléndez has revealed her to be one of the most important literary voices of 1930s Puerto Rico.⁶⁶ Female scholars also founded and edited two of the longest-running literary journals in Puerto Rican history, *Sin Nombre* and *Asomante*.⁶⁷

Dra. Concha Meléndez’s influence in the Puerto Rican cultural realm extended for decades after the 1930s. As a literary critic, Meléndez wrote continuously from the 1920s until her death in 1983, publishing around 200 essays. In 1970, the *Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña* published her collected books and essays, a series totaling fifteen heavy volumes.⁶⁸ Meléndez’s studies of canonical authors were especially respected for their comprehensive, rigorous style, simplicity, and attention to detail. She published definitive studies of Mexican writers Amado Nervo and Alfonso Reyes. Her work also includes detailed analyses of well-known Latin America writers such as Pablo Neruda, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Jose Martí, Rubén Darío, Miguel Angel Asturias and Rene Marqués.⁶⁹ Indeed, Meléndez’s lasting contribution to Puerto Rican literature was her belief that it belonged firmly within the bounds of what she called *Hispanoamérica*, or the long tradition of Latin American and Spanish literature. In 1975, the national Secretary of the Academy said that if Pedreira’s contribution was to link Puerto Rico and Spain, then Concha Meléndez’s contribution had been, from her post at the University of Puerto Rico, to initiate and maintain important intellectual links between the island and the writers and thinkers of Latin America.⁷⁰ And none other than Antonio Pedreira himself dramatically declared Meléndez the ultimate representation of Puerto Rico’s role within Spanish-speaking literature:

Among us, and without any type of exception, Hispanoamérica’s best intellectual advocate is Concha Meléndez. Attentive to its symbols, with trips to Venezuela, Cuba, Santo Domingo and other smaller islands, with a precious tour of Argentina, with useful stops in Brazil and Uruguay, and after living many months in Mexico where she along with friends and classmates earned a doctorate in Philosophy and Letters, and with correspondents and collaborators in all South American countries as Department Chair in Hispanic Literature, founded by her long ago at the University of Puerto Rico, no one, that I know of on this island (and few outside of it) can dispute that she is the most qualified person here—because of her love and dedication—in Hispanic literature.⁷¹

Observers also consistently cite Meléndez’s decades of influence in Puerto Rican literary education as one of her major accomplishments. After Pedreira’s sudden death in 1939, Meléndez was appointed head of the Department of Hispanic Studies at the UPR, a position she would hold for twenty years. Meléndez went on to influence generations of Puerto Rican authors and essayists, including many that profoundly influenced island literature for much of the twentieth century.⁷²

⁶⁵ Roy-Fequiere, “Contested Territory,” 931.

⁶⁶ Navarro, “Concha Meléndez,” abstract.

⁶⁷ Foster, *Handbook of Latin American Literature*, 580.

⁶⁸ Concha Meléndez, *Obras Completas* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1970).

⁶⁹ Daisy Carballo Abreu, “El ensayo de Concha Meléndez,” in *Sin Nombre* 14, no. 2 (January-March 1984): 79-82.

⁷⁰ Navarro, “Concha Meléndez,” 53.

⁷¹ Entre nosotros, y sin ninguna clase de excepciones, Hispanoamerica tiene su mejor difusora intelectual en Concha Meléndez. Atenta a sus señales, con viajes a Venezuela, a Cuba, a Santo Domingo y a otras islas menores con un precioso recorrido a la Argentina, con paradas provechosas en Brasil y en Uruguay y con vida de muchos meses en México, en cuya Universidad se doctoró en Filosofía y Letras con amigos y compañeros de letras (corresponsales y colaboradores) en todas las repúblicas del Sur con una cátedra de literatura hispanoamericana, fundada por ella hace ya mucho tiempo en la Universidad de Puerto Rico, nadie, que yo sepa, puede disputarle en nuestra isla (y pocos, fuera de ella), ser aquí la persona más capacitada—por afición y por dedicación—en letras hispanoamericanas.” Cited in Navarro, “Concha Meléndez,” 57. Translation by author.

⁷² See “Testimonios” section of *Sin Nombre* 14, no. 2 (January-March 1984): 91-98, for testimonies of Concha Meléndez’s former students.

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Meléndez also participated in literary circles in the mainland United States, sharing her knowledge of Puerto Rican and other Spanish language literature. She taught a course on the Puerto Rican short story at Vermont's Middlebury College that had a lasting effect on students there.⁷³ She also studied at the influential Kenyon School of English in 1942, working under professors such as Herbert Read and Phillip Roth. As part of her study, and in keeping with her consistent posture as advocate of Latin American literature, Meléndez presented an analysis of Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral.⁷⁴

The broad body of work Concha Meléndez created over more than fifty years of writing did not go unnoticed in Puerto Rico or abroad. Some of the finest Spanish language writers, including Mexican writers Mariano Azuela and Alfonso Reyes and Guatemalan writer Miguel Angel Asturias, praised her work.⁷⁵ Meléndez was also granted an impressive amount of awards and distinctions, including the following: Institute of Puerto Rican Culture Prize for *Signos de Iberoamerica* in 1926, *Asomante* and *Moradas de poesías en Alfonso Reyes* in 1943, *La inquietud sosegada* in 1946, and for *El arte del cuento en Puerto Rico* in 1961; the "Eugenia Maria de Hostos Medal" in 1939 at the centennial of this eminent Puerto Rican writer's birth; an honorary diploma from the *Real Academia de la Lengua Española* in Mexico in 1940; the *Golden Medal* from the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture in 1955; Professor Emeritus status from the University of Puerto Rico in 1957; an honorary diploma from the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico's Department of State in 1963; first woman to be invited to lecture at Mexico's *Real Academia de la Lengua Española* for the centennial celebration of famed writer Amado Nervo in 1970; first woman member of the Puerto Rican Academy of the Spanish Language; first non-Venezuelan woman to receive that government's prestigious "Andres Bello Award" in 1971; declared "Humanist of the Year" in 1971 by the Puerto Rican Foundation for the Humanities; and selected in 1979 by the Library of Congress to be recorded reading her own work as one of the most prestigious Spanish-speaking writers.⁷⁶

Casa Dra. Concha Meléndez Ramírez

Concha Meléndez built and resided at the property at 1400 Vilá Mayo Street in the El Condado neighborhood of San Juan for forty-three years, from 1940 until her death in 1983. Meléndez conducted the bulk of her writing there, writing among the hundreds of books she called "my children." Indeed, almost every interview conducted of Meléndez took place on the grounds, including the recording for the Library of Congress.⁷⁷

In fact, Meléndez and her home are often portrayed as inseparable. For example, Wilfredo Braschi, a former student of Meléndez's at Middlebury College, recounts reuniting with Meléndez at the door to her home:

We hadn't seen her for years. When we knocked on the door of her...expansive ancestral home in El Condado—she arrived, as always, with the smile that she used to begin her lectures at the university.⁷⁸

In "My First Impression", a chapter in one of the most complete studies of Meléndez and her work, author Hector O. Ciarlo goes further, describing his first meeting with Meléndez in terms of her house, "full of light and flowers, its entrance a canary yellow arch," before even talking about the writer herself. Ciarlo tells of

⁷³ Angela B. Dellepiane, "La amiga," *Sin Nombre* 14, no. 2 (January-March 1984): 96-97.

⁷⁴ Navarro, "Concha Meléndez," 74.

⁷⁵ *Sin Nombre*, 18, 19, 31.

⁷⁶ Llanes Santos, "Casa Dra. Concha Meléndez Ramírez," NRHP Nomination Form; *Sin Nombre*, 15.

⁷⁷ Llanes Santos, "Casa Dra. Concha Meléndez Ramírez," NRHP Nomination Form.

⁷⁸ "Hace años que no la veíamos. Cuando tocamos la puerta de su...amplio rincón solariego en el Condado—llega, como siempre con la sonrisa que solía iniciar su cátedra en la universidad." Cited in Navarro, "Concha Meléndez," 47. Translation by the author.

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Meléndez leading him throughout the house, pointing to wooden shelves of books and signed portraits of famous authors. For Ciarlo, Meléndez and her house are one and the same:

The ‘library house’ is, in all of its details, an exteriorization of the personality of Concha Meléndez. Its order and good taste exist alongside the exquisite indiscretion of the light that exposes and illuminates everything. Just like her. [...] Coming here, in our tour from the garden fountain to her study, we have not only penetrated a place but a soul.⁷⁹

Even today, the Casa Dra. Concha Meléndez Ramírez continues to be a center of Puerto Rican literary culture. Upon her death, Meléndez left ownership of the house to the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture (ICP), the home is a museum and library that hosts literary workshops and readings in an attempt to preserve the island’s literary traditions. In 2002, the ICP awarded the first *Premio Concha Meléndez de Crítica Literaria* (Concha Meléndez Prize for Literary Criticism), an honor bestowed on Puerto Rican literary critics to “highlight the life and work of the notable Puerto Rican woman of letters, and teacher of teachers, Concha Meléndez.”⁸⁰

Other Historical Sites Associated with Twentieth-Century Puerto Rican Literature

Currently, there exist only four Puerto Rican sites that have been designated as National Historic Landmarks. None of them are associated with the twentieth century or with Puerto Rican literature. One is a shipwreck, two are pre-Columbian archeological sites, and one is a sixteenth-century Spanish fortress.

Other historic sites in Puerto Rico associated with twentieth-century literary figures, the *Generación del Treinta*, or subsequent literary movements are mostly commemorative. Upon his death in 1939, an elementary school was named after Antonio S. Pedreira, although the property is in no way associated with his life or work.⁸¹ The main library of the Central University of Bayamón was named for the other prominent female voice of the *Generación del Treinta*, Dr. Margot Arce de Vázquez, but this property was also designated only in commemoration of her place in Puerto Rican history.⁸²

Even working-class writers and activists who have been central to recent scholarship on Puerto Rico have no historical sites associated directly with their lives or work, perhaps because many of them lived transiently between the island and New York. Two examples that have received recent scholarly attention are the early twentieth-century feminists, writers and activists Luisa Capetillo and Julia de Burgos. However, there are no historic sites that preserve spaces where they wrote or engaged in activism.

Conclusion

Understanding the life and work of Dra. Concha Meléndez Ramírez will help uncover broader trends in Puerto Rican and American history. Meléndez was a central figure, and the most prominent female, in the *Generación*

⁷⁹ “La ‘casa biblioteca’...es, en todos sus detalles, una exteriorización de la personalidad de Concha Meléndez. El orden y el buen gusto, conviven con la exquisita indiscreción de la luz que todo lo muestra e ilumina. Tal como ella es.” “Al llegar aquí, en nuestro recorrido desde el jardín de la fuente hasta el gabinete de trabajo...no solo hemos penetrado un lugar sino también un alma.” Ciarlo, *El Escritor y Su Obra*, 22, 26. Translation by the author.

⁸⁰ “Fue creado para resaltar la vida y obra de la insigne puertorriqueña, mujer de letras y maestra de maestros, Concha Meléndez.” “ICP anuncia premio Concha Meléndez,” Wapa.TV, accessed July 20, 2012, http://www.wapa.tv/noticias/entretenimiento/icp-anuncia-premio-concha-melendez_20110209151226.html. Translation by the author.

⁸¹ “Escuela Dr. Antonio S. Pedreira,” Directorio de Escuela Públicas de Puerto Rico, accessed June 25, 2012, <http://www.escuelasdepr.com/escuela/dr-antonio-s-pedreira-1221.html>.

⁸² “Centro de Recursos de Apoyo al Aprendizaje y la Investigación, Dra. Margot Arce de Vázquez,” Universidad Central de Bayamón, accessed June 25, 2012, <http://www.ucb.edu.pr/biblioteca2.php>.

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del Treinta, a literary movement that outlined a Puerto Rican national identity that enjoyed prominence throughout the twentieth century. She was a prolific literary critic and teacher, penning hundreds of essays that contributed to the Puerto Rican literary canon, teaching the next generation's most important writers, and explicating Puerto Rico's place within larger trends in Latin American and US literature.

The Casa Dra. Concha Meléndez Ramírez was her residence and workspace for forty-three years, from 1940 until her death in 1983. It was a property that was intimately associated with her life and work, and continues to be an important location for the promotion of Puerto Rican literature. As such, it is nationally significant to Puerto Rican, Latino and American history.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

Previously Listed in the National Register.

Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.

Designated a National Historic Landmark.

Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #

Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

CASA DRA. CONCHA MELÉNDEZ RAMÍREZ

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Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other (Specify Repository):

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: less than one acre

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	19	809770	2042815

Verbal Boundary Description: Rectangular lot of four hundred and thirty seven (437.50) square meters, as recorded at the Centro de Recaudaciones de Ingresos Municipales (CRISM), under number 18-040-050-044-0001. The property is bordered on the west by Calle Manuel Rodríguez Serra, by Calle Wilson to the south, by Calle Vilá Mayo to the north, and by an adjacent lot to the east.

Boundary Justification: The nominated property includes the entire lot historically associated with the building.

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NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS PROGRAM
September 5, 2012

CASA DRA. CONCHA MELÉNDEZ RAMÍREZ

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Photos

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Main façade, looking south. Photograph by Juan Llanes Santos, Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office, September 3, 2010.



Terrace, looking north. Photograph by Juan Llanes Santos, Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office, September 3, 2010.

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Gardens, west wing of house, looking north. Photograph by Juan Llanes Santos, Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office, September 3, 2010.



Dra. Meléndez's studio/library (workspace), looking east. Photograph by Juan Llanes Santos, Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office, September 3, 2010.

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Main living area, looking south. Photograph by Juan Llanes Santos, Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office, September 3, 2010.



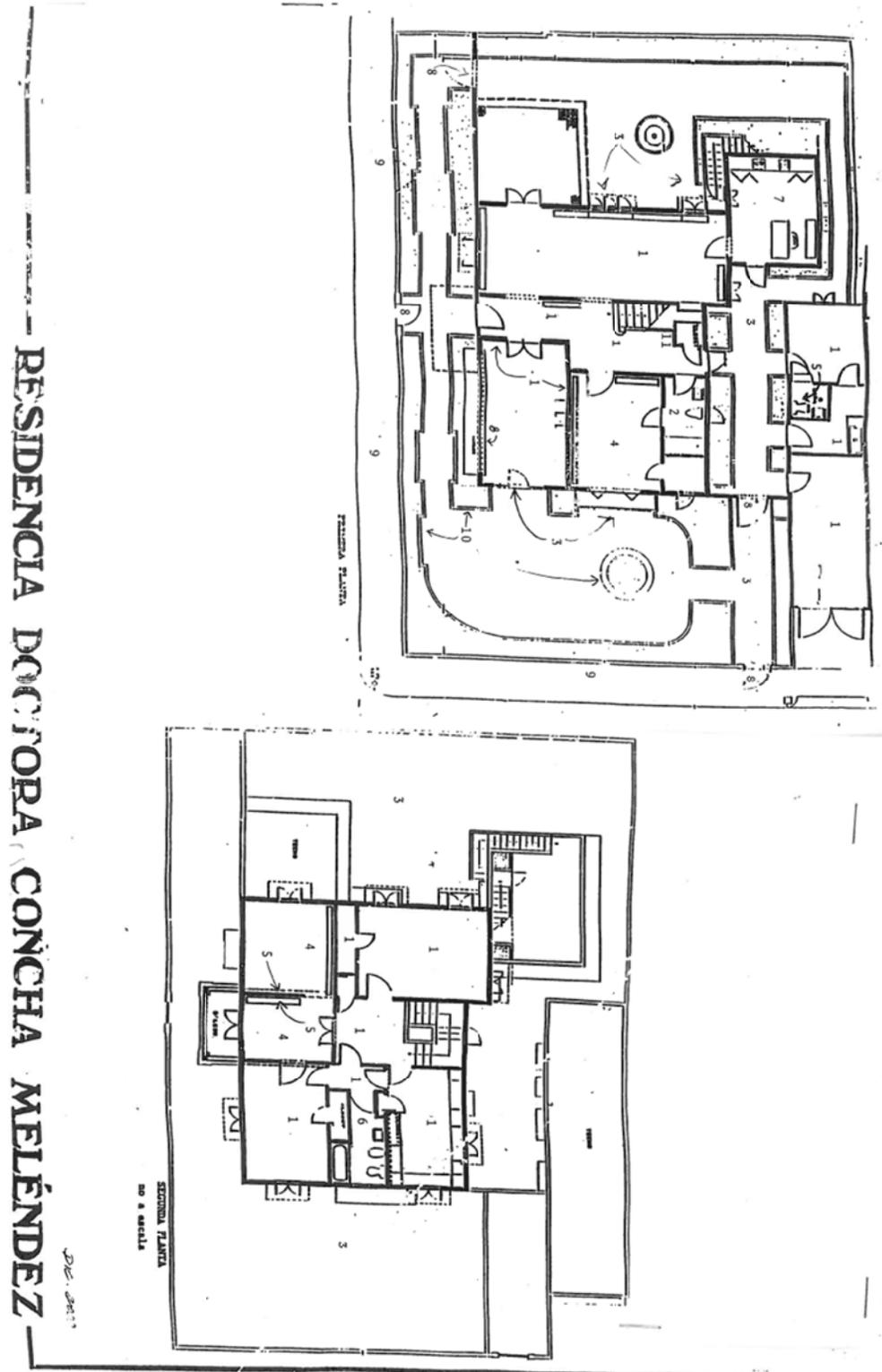
Foyer, second floor, looking north. Photograph by Juan Llanes Santos, Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office, September 3, 2010.

CASA DR. CONCHA MELÉNDEZ RAMÍREZ

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RESIDENCIA DOCTORA CONCHA MELÉNDEZ

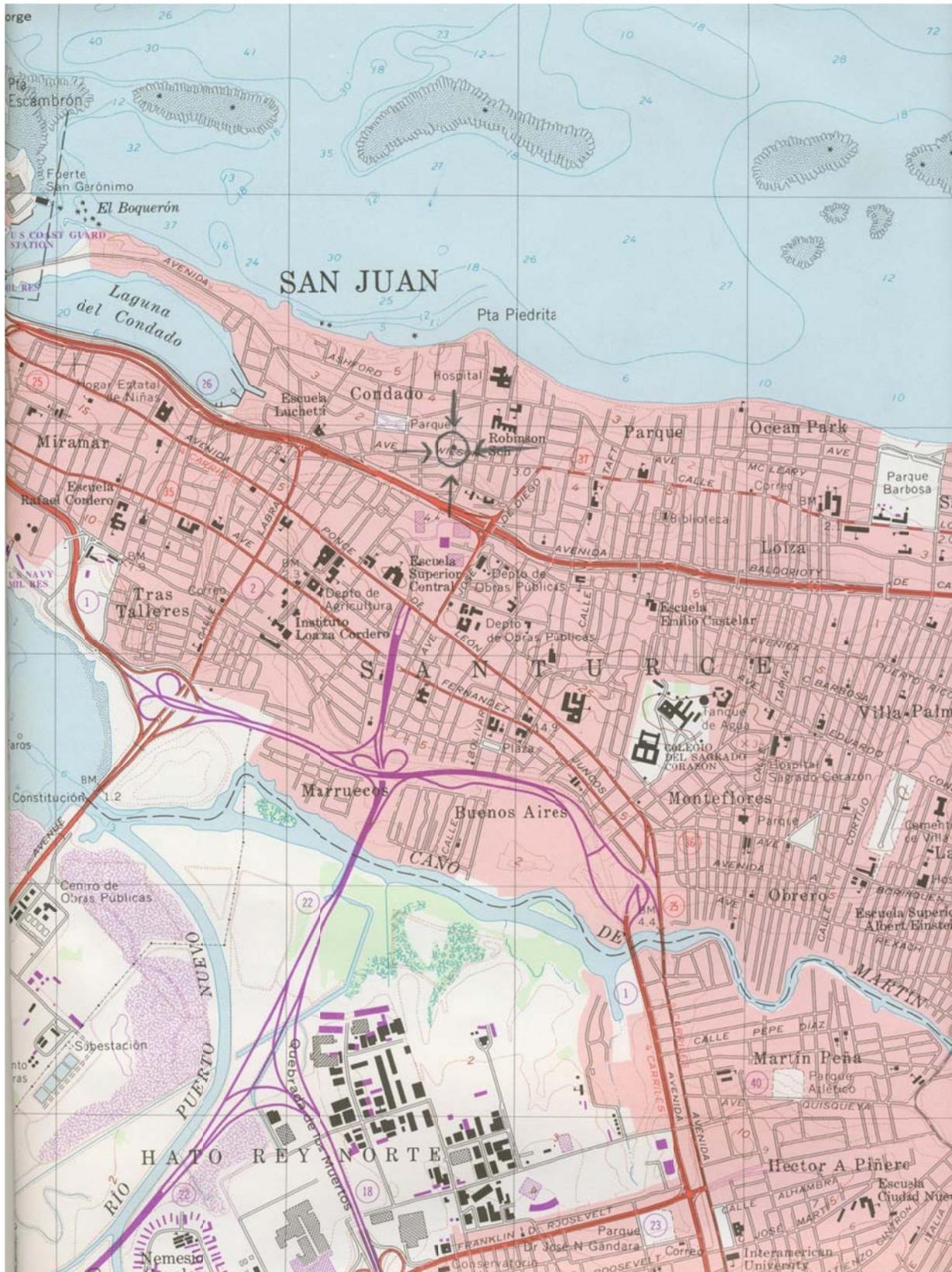
Floor Plans. Courtesy of the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (ICP).

CASA DR. CONCHA MELÉNDEZ RAMÍREZ

USGS Map

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Zone Easting Northing

19 809770 2042815

San Juan, Puerto Rico

