



Clockwise from top left:  
 Rancho Jamul, Mexican land grant ranch owned by Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton, Rancho Jamul Ecological Preserve, California [Rancho Jamul Ecological Preserve]; The West 135th Street Branch Library building, home of the Arturo Schomburg Collection from 1926-1980. The building is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, New York, New York. [New York Public Library]; Statue of Father Felix Varela, Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine, St. Augustine, Florida [Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine]; Painting of Luisa Moreno, the Great Wall of Los Angeles mural, Los Angeles, California [City Project]; Edward R. Roybal Learning Center, High School named for Congressman Roybal, Los Angeles, California [Creative Commons by Robert Garcis, 2008]



## The American Latino Heritage

Stephen Pitti

*We Americans have yet to really learn our own antecedents.... Thus far, impress'd by New England writers and schoolmasters, we tacitly abandon ourselves to the notion that our United States have been fashion'd from the British Islands only ... which is a very great mistake.*

Walt Whitman, 1883<sup>1</sup>

The Latino past is as important to United States history, and as rich, as that of any group in U.S. society. As historian Vicki Ruiz has noted, “From carving out a community in St. Augustine in 1565 to reflecting on colonialism and liberty during the 1890s to fighting for civil rights through the courts in the 1940s, Spanish-speaking peoples [have] made history within and beyond national borders.”<sup>2</sup> Relevant scholarship on these and other topics has exploded since the 1980s, mirroring the demographic growth of the Latino population – which now stands at some 50 million U.S. residents – with important histories about Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Central Americans, Cuban Americans, and South Americans published every year. As those books and articles demonstrate, no brief summary can distill the diversity of this Latino population; the many ways in which these groups have shaped national institutions, American culture, or U.S. cities and towns; or the heterogeneity of their perspectives and experiences. From the arrival of the Spanish in the 15th century into the early 21st century, Latinos have built missions and presidios; developed ranching, agricultural, and high-tech industries; written poetry, novels, and songs; preached on street corners and from pulpits; raised families; built businesses and labor unions; and supported politicians and critical national and international initiatives. Some trace their residency to Spanish-

***“We Americans have yet to really learn our own antecedents....”***

speaking or indigenous forebears who arrived in New Mexico or elsewhere prior to the establishment of the U.S. Others arrived more recently as immigrants or refugees in the 19th, 20th, or 21st centuries. Deeply embedded in economic and political life across many decades, Latinos have played instrumental roles in the development of the U.S., and public recognition of the Latino past is long overdue.

The essays included in “American Latinos and the Making of the United States: A Theme Study” collectively demonstrate that Latinos have shaped U. S. courts, military, and educational institutions, the identification and treatment of disease, and much more. They illustrate that Latinos’ impact has been felt in all

regions of the U.S., from the Southeast to the Pacific Northwest, and from California to the Upper Midwest and New

England, and that their visibility and involvement has increased exponentially in many of these areas over the last 50 years. They trace how the integration of hemispheric economies, the development of trade and movement of working people, the investment of U.S. businesses in Latin America, the economic demands of U.S. employers, and instances of political conflict and violence in the hemisphere have shaped Latino demographic growth and influenced communities already resident in the U.S. And they portray the daily struggles of everyday people alongside the achievements of influential residents, low-wage work experiences combined with prescient economic investments, encounters with segregation, and struggles to improve American democracy.

This introductory essay surveys this long and varied history through a focus on five individuals, many of them rarely remembered today,

whose lives trace major historical developments from the early 19th century into the contemporary era. Ranging across historical periods, places of origin, and area of professional expertise, these figures embody themes discussed in detail in the accompanying essays, and they make the case that Latinos have played critical roles in the United States since the early 19th century. They include the Cuban priest Félix Varela, the Mexican author María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, the Puerto Rican bibliophile and collector Arturo Schomburg, the Guatemalan civil rights organizer Luisa Moreno, and the Mexican American politician Edward Roybal.

### **Félix Varela**

Among the most important Latino intellectuals and religious leaders of the Jacksonian era, Félix Varela would become a well-known figure in the U.S., Europe, and his native Cuba by the time of his death in 1853. Born in Havana in 1788, Varela engaged with a North American society that had long been connected to Latin America – from the 1565 founding of Saint Augustine, Florida, to the establishment of Spanish colonies in New Mexico in the 16th and 17th centuries, to the establishment of presidios and missions along the Pacific Coast in the 18th and 19th centuries; to the extensive commerce that connected the U.S. to the Caribbean and Mexico in the 19th century.<sup>3</sup> The son of a *criollo* mother and an Iberian army captain, Varela was born into a Cuban society shaped not only by Spanish imperial rule, but also by close attention to the politics of the recently-established U.S. to the north. As a Catholic priest, a writer and translator, an educator, and a proponent of Cuban nationalism, Varela became one of the first Latinos to use his exile in the U.S. to argue for broader democratic change in Latin America.

Recent calls for his canonization as a Catholic saint underscore his importance in North American religious history.

Orphaned as a child, Varela lived an international life during an era of revolution. He moved to live with his grandfather in the Spanish colony of Saint Augustine, Florida for several years before resettling in Havana in 1801. There he entered the seminary, became a deacon and then a priest, and finally took a philosophy professorship that allowed him to pursue his interests in the natural sciences, education, and above all, national identity. Well regarded, Varela's fellow Cubans elected him to a government position in 1821, and he spoke out against slavery, and in favor of Latin American independence. Those comments, however, coincided with a conservative turn in imperial governance, making it impossible for him to stay in Spain or return to Cuba. In 1823 Varela departed instead for the U.S. Taking up residence in Philadelphia and then New York City, he encountered other Cuban exiles who had

also fled political repression, many of whom saw the U.S. as a new base for organizing on behalf of a free Cuba.

As a priest in a changing New York, Varela ministered over the next 24 years to the city's growing

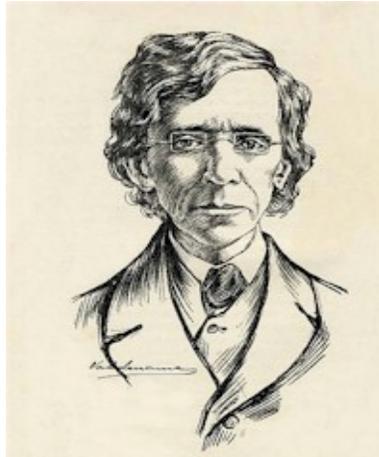
Catholic population, including many Irish and Italian immigrants, founded a nursery and parochial schools, and served at Saint Peter's Church, Christ's Church, and at the Church of the Transfiguration. His diocesan superiors recognized his success in appointing him vicar general in 1837, a position that gave him oversight of all of New York state and parts of New Jersey. Varela spent the last few years of his life in Saint Augustine, which had become part of U.S. territory in 1819, and he died in that city in 1853, some 15 years prior to the 1868 out-

***“To be considered a philosopher one must be someone who pursues the truth exclusively ... (who) submits his own ideas to others for approval, not because they are his, but because he believes them to be true ...”***

*Felix Varela. Lecciones de Filosofia, 1818*

break of a long war between Spain and Cuba that would eventually lead to Cuban independence.

Like other Cuban Americans in the 19th century, Varela had remained connected to both the Caribbean and the U.S. throughout his adult life, engaging with diverse, fellow New Yorkers in churches and neighborhoods while promoting Cuban nationalism as a writer and publisher. Inspired by the American Revolution, able to write and speak more openly as a resident of the U.S., and eager to see Latin America throw off the yoke of Spanish rule, he had translated Thomas Jefferson's *A Manual of Parliamentary Practice* into Spanish for readers in the Caribbean and elsewhere in the hemisphere interested in political reform. His commitments as a priest advanced a politically-engaged form of religiosity that anticipated the efforts of future generations of Latino Catholics and Protestants. Just as important, Varela's work as a writer, translator, and journalist connected him to the 19th-century world of Latin American and American letters, and they placed him within an intellectual tradition that extended before and after his lifetime. Describing Cuban poets and pamphleteers in 1840s and 1850s New York City and New Orleans, one literary historian notes that "these writers believed that the United States offered an opportune setting for publishing tracts that would persuade the Cuban population to rise against the colonial government on the island. Writing to Cuba, they also simultaneously tried to reach English- and Spanish-language readers in the United States."<sup>4</sup> In similar ways, other 19th and 20th-century novelists, poets, and journalists from Latin America wrote for San Antonio, Los Angeles, Miami, or Chicago newspapers or publishing houses,



Félix Varela  
(Patria)

keeping their eyes on both domestic and international audiences.

In the final years of his life, Varela witnessed the geographic expansion of the U.S. and the declining power of Spain, as the Florida society that he had known as Spanish in his youth became U.S. territory. Varela's death in 1853 coincided with the Gadsden Purchase, a territorial acquisition in southern Arizona and New Mexico that marked the last major expansion of U.S. territorial borders within the continental U.S. The redrawing of U.S. borders, and U.S. diplomatic and military engagements with Latin America, therefore also shaped his life, just as it defined the broader experiences of many Latinos in the 19th and 20th centuries. Many exiled Cuban writers in 1850s New York promoted the

U.S. annexation of their island as a way to eliminate Spanish rule and bring American democracy to the Caribbean. Some held different views, just as ethnic Mexicans in the Southwest expressed conflicting opinions about U.S. westward movement, 20th-century Puerto Ricans debated one another about their island's ideal relationship to Washington D.C., and other Latinos – Dominicans, Salvadorans, Mexicans, Nicaraguans, Chileans, and others – have responded in various ways to U.S. military interventions in the hemisphere.<sup>5</sup>

### María Amparo Ruiz de Burton

Born in Baja, California in 1832, nearly 50 years after Félix Varela's birth in 1788, the writer and social critic María Amparo Ruiz de Burton registered her own views of U.S. territorial expansion, American politics, and Latin American relations. As the granddaughter of a prominent military commander and former Governor in the Mexican north, Ruiz de Burton

hailed from a privileged family that had held large tracts of land in what is today Los Angeles, Orange, and Riverside Counties, as well as in the area around Ensenada in Baja California.<sup>6</sup> Growing up in La Paz, she enjoyed private tutors in French and Spanish, and the eminent Californio Mariano Vallejo would later call her a “learned and cultured lady, concerned with the honor and traditions of her land...”<sup>7</sup> But her life – and the experiences of hundreds of thousands of others throughout the region – experienced inexorable change as a result of the U.S.-Mexico War of 1846. While that conflict brought Alta California and other regions of northern Mexico under U.S. control in 1848, it also introduced María, then just 15-years-old, to Henry Stanton Burton, a Lieutenant Colonel more than 10 years her senior who led the invading U.S. Army in Baja California.

Many details of this love story are unavailable in the historical record, but we know that the romance was an unlikely match. While most Baja Californians rejected the presence of the U.S. army and military occupation in 1846, María and other members of her family were among the small number of Mexicans who boarded refugee transport ships bound for Alta California at the conclusion of the war, becoming U.S. citizens in the process. In July 1849, she married Henry Burton in Monterey, California over the protests of both Catholic and Protestant church officials who protested the ceremony. While Burton and other U.S. troops accommodated to the Mexican-majority environment in Monterey, Ruiz de Burton went to school to learn English, became enmeshed in Gold Rush society, and gave birth to two children over the next three years. Her struggle to make a new life in the post-1848 California resonated with the efforts of

other Latinas in this period, according to recent historians.<sup>8</sup> Eager to settle down, her family purchased the Rancho Jamul near San Diego, a property once held by former Californio Governor Pío Pico. But in 1859 the Army summoned Burton back to the East Coast, and María and her family spent the following decade, including the Civil War years, far from Southern California, taking up residence in New York, Rhode Island, Delaware, Virginia, and Washington D.C., where she became close friends with First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln and others in government circles.



*María Amparo Ruiz de Burton*  
(Arte Público Press)

After twenty years of marriage and the trial of the Civil War, Henry Burton died of complications related to malaria in 1869, leaving María with heavy financial debts. She returned to California the following year to protect her property from the creditors, lawyers, and squatters who were seeking to take ownership of her land – an overwhelming problem for many Californio landholding families in the 1860s and 1870s.<sup>9</sup> Ongoing legal battles further drained her assets, but María directed her frustration into new business efforts, and into her writing career. As a businesswoman, she managed agricultural and ranching operations on her San Diego County property, creating a cement company that depended upon limestone quarried from Rancho Jamul, produced castor beans for commercial sale, and organized the construction of a reservoir. María came to know the law in great detail, as she fought to retain her property holdings in both Alta and Baja California in the courts. She published articles and letters about her land claims in San Diego newspapers, and traveled extensively, but she ultimately lost most of her rancho by the time of her death in Chicago in 1895.

While property loss was a common experience for 19th-century Latinos, Ruiz de Burton's work as a writer made her unique among her contemporaries. She left behind a pioneering literary legacy that captured many of the cultural and political concerns of her generation. Building on plays she had written in the 1850s, she released in 1872 what may have been the first English-language novel written by a Latina in the U.S., inaugurating a tradition of women's writing that accelerated in the 20th century. That first book, *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872), published by J.B. Lippincott in Philadelphia, satirized the racial politics and hypocrisy of New England abolitionists, drawing attention to the effects of U.S. expansion on Mexican Americans in California. Subsequent writings continued to draw attention to issues of racial discrimination, economic justice, and political governance. Some readers have interpreted her 1876 rewriting of *Don Quixote*, performed and published in San Francisco as *Don Quixote de la Mancha: A Comedy in Five Acts, Taken from Cervantes' Novel of That Name*, as Ruiz de Burton's effort to link Californios to a more glorious Spanish past; others have seen it as a critique of Spanish-Mexican mishandling of its Alta California settlements. Finally, *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), her best known novel, this one published under the pen name "C. Loyal" ("Loyal Citizen"), employed a story about a romance between a Californio and a squatter to draw attention to the depredations of Anglos in Southern California, the dangers associated with railroad monopolies in post-Civil War society, and the false promises of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that ended the U.S.-Mexico War.<sup>10</sup>

These concerns about race, conquest, and similar themes make Ruiz de Burton's writings, in the words of literary scholars Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita, "clearly a precursor to Chicano/a literature, as her novels investigate issues at the core of Chicano/a history and literature." *The Squatter and the Don* stands as "the

first published narrative written in English from the perspective of the conquered Mexican population ... a narrative space for the counterhistory of the conquered Californio population."<sup>11</sup> Ruiz de Burton's literary work reflected conditions of economic and political struggles that were common for many 19th-century Mexican Americans, and her work, like that of Félix Varela, owed a great deal to the territorial expansion of the United States in the mid-19th century. Arriving in California during the Gold Rush, her circumstances were shaped by the U.S.-Mexico War, by the Civil War, and by the changing California economy in the 1860s and 1870s. As they would for others in U.S. history, wars brought major changes for Ruiz de Burton and members of her family, changing Latinos' relationship to U.S. citizenship, and the aftermath of those conflicts presented both challenges and opportunities to vulnerable members of American society.

### **Arturo Schomburg**

If María Amparo Ruíz de Burton's experiences encapsulated many of the major issues facing Latinos from the 1820s into the post-Civil War years, Arturo Schomburg's work resonated with key themes in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Born in Santurce, Puerto Rico in 1874, Arturo grew up in a family of mixed ethnic and racial background, with a mother who hailed from the Virgin Islands and a Puerto Rican father who claimed partial German ancestry. Like thousands of other contemporary Caribbean migrants, Schomburg made his way to New York City in the late 19th century, drawn to the economic opportunities in that metropolis as well as its cosmopolitan character. From the time he arrived in 1891, Schomburg joined fellow Puerto Ricans and Cubans in pressing for Latin American independence, following the lead of Félix Varela who had pushed a similar program prior to the Civil War. But now, living among working-class New Yorkers, many of them Spanish speakers, Schomburg became active in new social and political or-

ganizations – including the Cuban Revolutionary Party, a recently-founded group called Las Dos Antillas [the Two Antilles], and a Masonic Lodge that welcomed African American, Afro-Cuban, and Afro-Puerto Rican members.<sup>12</sup>

In taking up residency in late-19th century New York, Schomburg joined a diverse and growing community of the city’s Latinos who maintained strong ties to the Caribbean and the politics of anti-imperialism. His residency in New York from 1891 until his death in 1938 coincided with major changes in the composition and orientation of that population. Working together across national lines during the 19th century, Puerto Rican and Cuban immigrants had long organized meetings, run newspapers, lobbied U.S. policymakers, and helped raise money for the fight against Spanish control. During Schomburg’s time, the inspirational leadership of this movement fell to the Cuban poet, journalist, orator, and organizer José Martí, who spent considerable time among Cuban and Puerto Rican exiles in the U.S., and who helped to inspire the founding of the Cuban Revolutionary Party in New York City in 1892. Martí’s efforts gave shape to the late-19th century Cuban revolution against Spain and subsequent U.S. entry into that conflict, and he became an important symbol of Cuban nationalism, hemispheric solidarity, and anti-imperialism after his death.<sup>13</sup>

Schomburg was intimately connected to those developments, and he watched as new circumstances unfolded in New York and other mainland cities following the outbreak of war in Cuba in 1895. As a defining historical moment for U.S. Latinos, that conflict, and U.S. intervention in 1898, proved a catalyst for new migrations, and new transnational ties, between the mainland U.S. and the Caribbean basin; it created an independent Cuba in 1902 and the establishment of Puerto Rico as a U.S. colony (and later commonwealth); it led the U.S. Congress and Supreme Court to affirm that

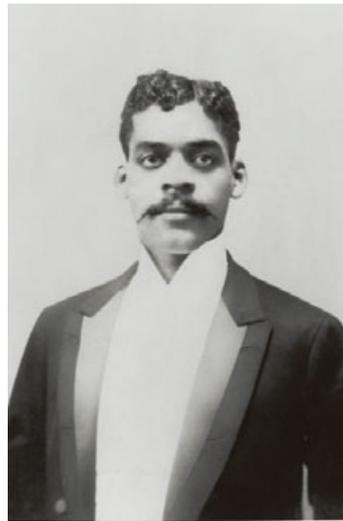
Puerto Ricans were U.S. citizens; and it inaugurated an era of more aggressive U.S. interventions into Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and other former Spanish colonies that in turn prompted new groups of Latinos to migrate into the mainland U.S. from the early-1900s forward.<sup>14</sup>

Schomburg’s involvement in anti-colonial, exile politics, and in his Masonic community, put him in touch not only with those developments, but also with other working-class Latino New Yorkers who redefined Brooklyn, Manhattan, and other boroughs throughout his lifetime. More than 60 percent of Puerto Ricans who lived in the mainland U.S. made their homes in New York City by 1920, and that proportion rose to 85 percent by 1940. According to Virginia Sánchez Korrol, “the attraction of New York City was largely economic. Job opportunities, above all, loom as the single most important factor encouraging potential migration.”<sup>15</sup> Many of Schomburg’s Puerto Rican compatriots found jobs in the construction or garment industries, while many Cubans took employment in cigar factories, an international enterprise that employed workers up and down the Atlantic seaboard. Other Latinos found work in different manufacturing operations, in railroad industries, or in low-wage agricultural labor. Throughout the U.S., Latinos and Latinas worked in those sectors and others during a time in which American capitalism depended more heavily on low-wage work by immigrants and people of color, and during a period in which U.S. economic investments in Puerto Rico and Mexico were destabilizing rural economies and prompting outmigration to the U.S.

Schomburg and other Latinos often faced stark discriminatory obstacles during this period. By the late-1930s, many found themselves clustered in racially defined barrios located near low-wage factories, meatpacking plants, or farms. Signs reading “No Mexicans Allowed”

appeared in early-20th century Texas and other parts of the Southwest, and marriages between Latinos and whites were not allowed in some parts of the U.S. Race-based arguments in the U.S. Congress had kept New Mexico from achieving statehood until 1912, and residents of that region faced new struggles for equality in the World War I era, and in strikes by coal miners in Gallup, New Mexico during the early-1930s. In many workplaces and neighborhoods, organizers and everyday residents struggled to improve their circumstances, launching important organizing efforts in the rural Southwest, in midwestern cities like Chicago and Detroit, and up and down the East Coast.<sup>16</sup>

Like many contemporaries, Schomburg aspired to middle-class status, but he proved more talented, more determined, or more fortunate, than most. Frustrated in his efforts to become a lawyer, Schomburg taught Spanish, worked as a messenger and a clerk, and finally settled for a mailroom job at the Bankers Trust Company, where he rose to supervise its Caribbean and Latin American mail section. As racial segregation increased in New York and throughout the U.S., Latino urbanites like Schomburg often found themselves living in close proximity to African Americans, and sharing schools and other institutions with other low-income communities of color. Recalling the 1930s, Evelio Grillo noted that Afro-Cubans in Tampa, Florida “enjoyed larger and larger places in black American life, as teachers, as social workers, and some as leaders in the black American community. They chose black American spouses almost exclusively. Many of them attended college, with the largest number at Florida A&M, the public university for blacks.”<sup>17</sup> Others in New York instead iden-



*Arturo Schomburg, c. 1896  
(Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library)*

tified themselves, and at times organized themselves, by national group or more broadly as Afro-Latinos. Born in Cayey, Puerto Rico in 1901, the writer and activist Jesús Colón “identified as a black man who happened to be Puerto Rican”, according to one scholar, and he came to “represent[t] the voice of those Puerto Ricans who have made their lives in the United States metropolis” prior to his death in 1974. Cubans and Puerto Ricans in the Bronx, on the other hand, created El Club Cubano Inter-Americano in 1945 as one of the 20th century’s first racially inclusive Latino organizations that brought Afro-Latinos together with African Americans for political and social events.<sup>18</sup>

In the decades prior to World War II, Schomburg was among the most influential Puerto Ricans in the U.S., and it was his interest in scholarship, in history, and in collecting that made him famous. Throughout his life, Schomburg maintained a broad interest in black culture and history, inspired to research and write in part by past Cuban and Puerto Rican independence struggles, by the 19th-century example of the Afro-Cuban fighter Antonio Maceo, by the leadership of Rafael Serra and fellow Latinos in 1890s New York, and later by the Harlem Renaissance. Committed to uncovering the contributions of “Negroes” to world history, he collected documents, books, and stories that defied contemporary arguments about black intellectual inferiority. Those efforts made him one of the most prominent cultural figures of the Harlem Renaissance, as W.E.B. DuBois and many other writers consulted his archives in pursuing their own work from the 1910s onward. His collecting efforts were the foundation of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, housed at the

Harlem Branch of the New York Public Library, and his legacy is felt, also, in the annual Schomburg Symposium organized by the Taller Puertorriqueño in Philadelphia “that each year explores a different theme or aspect of Africa and its diaspora and its connection to the [Latino] heritage.”<sup>19</sup>

Schomburg’s efforts as an historian resonated with the broader intellectual work of Latinos during the early 20th century. Newspapers were critical to this historical period, and these years saw the establishment of key organs such as *La Prensa* in New York (1913); San Antonio’s *La Prensa* (1913); and Los Angeles’s *El Herald de México* (1915) and *La Opinión* (1926). Latin American social scientists such as José Vasconcelos, Manuel Gamio, Jovita González, and Martín Luis Guzmán spent time in California, Texas, Illinois, and New York. Finally, novelists published important works of literature. Writing in New York City, for example, the Colombian immigrant Alirio Díaz Guerra authored *Lucas Guevara* in 1914, perhaps the first Latino immigrant novel in U.S. history, while Mexican author Conrado Espinosa published *El sol de Texas* (Under The Texas Sun) in San Antonio in 1926.<sup>20</sup>

Schomburg’s life therefore reminds us of many important developments in the late-19th and early-20th century experiences of Latinos in the U.S. As an Afro-Latino, he experienced discriminatory treatment from fellow Latin Americans as well as from others in U.S. society, and he aligned himself with other Spanish speakers from the Caribbean – Puerto Ricans and Cubans – but also with African Americans in turn-of-the-century New York. Race limited his economic advancement during this era of Jim Crow, but

Schomburg joined other Latinos nationwide in developing community organizations, political clubs, and social groups through which he found like-minded New Yorkers, expressed his own views, and contributed to city life. With an international vision and strong sense of history, he made uniquely valuable contributions to African American intellectual culture in New York as a writer, archivist, and bibliophile, providing just one example of how 19th and 20th-century Latinos contributed to other groups in U.S. society, and how their intellectual commitments have given shape to modern American culture.

### Luisa Moreno

The experiences of Luisa Moreno, one of the most influential labor and civil rights leaders in the mid-20th century U.S., differed markedly

from the work of Schomburg and encapsulated critical developments between the late 1920s and the early 1950s. She was one of the relatively small number of Central Americans who made their way to the U.S. in the first half of the 20th century, a number that would increase a great deal in the 1970s and 1980s. Born Blanca Rosa Rodríguez López in Guatemala in 1907, she grew up, like María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, in a privileged Latin American family. Intending that his daughter become a nun, her father, a powerful coffee grower, sent nine-year-old Blanca to a convent in California for four



Luisa Moreno, c. 1920s  
(University of California, Irvine)

years. The rebellious teenager, however, rejected her parents’ authority upon her return. Aspiring to a university education, she left home for Mexico City where she found work as a journalist, published a volume of poetry, and mingled with artists in that capital city. After marrying an artist who was considerably older, she moved with him to New York City in 1928

and gave birth to a daughter just weeks after the 1929 stock market crash.

As an immigrant and young mother in New York, Moreno was privileged to speak perfect English (thanks to her schooling in California), and to be highly educated and light-skinned. She nonetheless lived in Spanish Harlem alongside working-class Puerto Ricans and Cubans of the sort whom Schomburg knew well. There she experienced a downward economic mobility not uncommon among Latinos in the 20th century, living as a poor seamstress in circumstances far different from those that she had known in her native Guatemala. Like others in the 1930s, she found her way to radical politics during the Depression decade, joining the ranks of the Communist Party, working to organize a small union for fellow Spanish-speaking garment workers, and then taking an American Federation of Labor job in 1935 to organize cigar workers in Florida. Concerned about poor housing, dangerous living and working conditions, discrimination and low wages paid to women and immigrants, she began a new life dedicated to social justice and more democratic involvement by poor people in the U.S. Other Latinos and Latinas shared Moreno's interests in the 1930s, prompted to join union and civil rights campaigns by the new hardship facing their communities, by New Deal legislation that inspired some hope for change, and by new leadership in the U.S. labor movement.

Thoroughly transformed from the young woman who had left her Guatemala home nearly a decade before, Blanca Rosa ("White Rose") Rodríguez renamed herself Luisa Moreno ("Dark") in the mid-1930s, adopting a surname that signaled her new affiliation with the working-class people of color she sought to organize. Her first name connected Moreno to the famed Puerto Rican feminist Luisa Capetillo who had been active several decades earlier.<sup>21</sup> Working among Latinos and African Ameri-

cans, she proved a very successful organizer of Florida cigar workers, negotiating a contract that covered 13,000 employees before abandoning the American Federation of Labor for the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), a new labor organization that affirmed a commitment to organizing racial minorities, women, and unskilled workers.

As an employee of the United Cannery and Packinghouse Workers of America (UCAPAWA – an affiliate of the CIO), Moreno was sent first to San Antonio, Texas to assist striking Latinas in the pecan shelling industry. Those women, who played a critical role in the Texas economy, were led by Emma Tenayuca, a young orator and organizer whose first labor activism had centered on changing San Antonio's cigar industry a few years earlier. Raised by a mother descended from Spanish settlers and a father who claimed indigenous heritage, Tenayuca later reflected that "I think it was the combination of being a Texan, being a Mexican, and being more Indian than Spanish that propelled me to take action."<sup>22</sup> Tenayuca and other civil rights proponents focused their efforts on San Antonio's West Side, a four-square mile section in which 80,000 ethnic Mexicans endured low wages, sub-standard housing, and the highest infant death rate in the U.S. Despite opposition from the Catholic Church, city officials, and some Mexican American organizations, the city's pecan shellers organized marches, rallies, and strikes that helped to transform the politics of that critically important Latino neighborhood.<sup>22</sup>

Eager to see West Side residents and others gain a voice in American politics, Moreno next set off to establish the first national Latino civil rights organization. Meeting in April 1939 in Los Angeles, she brought together more than a 1,000 delegates from more than 100 organizations to form *el Congreso de Pueblos de Habla Española* (The Spanish-Speaking Peoples' Congress). No such event involving representatives

of Puerto Rican, Mexican, Cuban, and other communities had ever taken place in U.S. history, and Moreno's efforts at once carried forward the pan-ethnic political organizing of Martí, Schomburg, and others, even as it anticipated by more than 30 years the creation of national Latino organizations that emerged in the 1960s and 1970. That conference therefore proved a milestone in Latino political history, as delegates from across the country, and from different Latino groups, committed themselves to fair housing, an end to educational segregation, unionization campaigns targeting low-wage women and immigrants, a ban on police brutality, and other demands. Just a few years removed from massive repatriation drives targeting ethnic Mexicans in Southern California and other parts of the country, the organization courageously demanded an end to such deportation pressures, with Moreno speaking eloquently about deportation trains as "caravans of sorrow" that looked eerily like the vehicles then being used to round up Jews and other "aliens" in Europe.<sup>23</sup>

As an organizer in Southern California before and during World War II, Moreno worked with a broad group of individuals and organizations concerned about democracy and inequality, including liberals and leftists on the West Coast, members of the Hollywood community, and working-class, often immigrant, Californians of scarce means. The number of Latinos in the Los Angeles area had grown exponentially over the course of Moreno's lifetime, thanks in part to the Mexican Revolution (1910-1921) and Cristero Revolts (1926-28) that helped to drive hundreds of thousands of rural and urban people north across the border.<sup>24</sup> With few Central Americans in the region until the 1970s, Moreno worked with or-

ganizers such as Josefina Fierro, whose father had fought in the Revolution under Francisco "Pancho" Villa, and whose mother had been a follower of the Mexican anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón. Fierro had worked on immigrant rights campaigns in Southern California since the mid-1930s, and she and Moreno distinguished themselves as among the most important advocates of women's rights in the U.S. during the Depression and World War II years, providing leadership that would lay a foundation for later advancement. Many of their efforts centered on social equality for women of color. In December 1939, for example, El Congreso passed a resolution in California on "The Mexican woman" that criticized the "double discrimination [she suffers] as a woman and as a Mexican," and that called "for women's equality, so that she may receive equal wages, enjoy the same rights as men in social, economic, and civil liberties, and use her vote for the defense of the Mexican and Spanish American people, and of American democracy."



*Josefina Fierro, c.1940's  
(Creative Commons by cindylu)*

As El Congreso struggled to improve American democracy, their concerns, like those of most Latinos, changed with the outbreak of World War II. On the

East Coast, Bernardo Vega recalled that after Pearl Harbor "the war absorbed the attention of everyone, and the Puerto Rican community in New York concentrated most of its energies on the war effort. For my part, I too was disposed to do all that was in my power to contribute ... to the defeat of fascism."<sup>25</sup> Young people rushed into military service, and many Latinos and Latinas gave their labor to war industries throughout the U.S. World War II was a transformational time for many, as men and women took up arms or entered defense industries, Puerto Ricans traveled to New York City

in larger numbers, new immigrants arrived from Mexico to take railroad and agricultural jobs, rural residents moved to cities, and cultural life in Florida, the upper Midwest, New York, Texas, and California changed quickly.<sup>26</sup>

During these same years, U.S. civil rights organizations defended young Latinos, African Americans, and others who were attacked for wearing zoot suits, and often derided as anti-American, during wartime rioting. Moreno had rebelled against her own family 15 years before, and she understood the 1930s and 1940s as years of tremendous youth creativity in Latin America and the U.S. Barrio residents in California, Arizona, and Texas – often fiercely patriotic – had developed styles of dress and linguistic expressions that challenged their parents’ conservatism, celebrated African American jazz, and flaunted ducktail hairstyles, tall pompadours, pegged pants, tight skirts, and other exaggerated fashions. Faced with anti-Latino violence in Los Angeles and elsewhere, and newspaper headlines that announced that Mexican youth were inherently violent and intellectually inferior, civil rights leaders such as Moreno, Fierro, and Alice McGrath pushed the federal government, military officials, elected city and state representatives, and West Coast journalists to defend Latino communities during wartime.<sup>27</sup>

Despite new violence and the persistence of older challenges to their advancement, Latinos certainly saw some social and political progress during and after World War II. In Texas, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) effectively used frequent reminders about Mexican American contributions to the Allied war effort, and Good Neighbor rhetoric of inter-American cooperation, to attack educational discrimination and the denial of public accommodations to Latinos. Leaders such as Alonso S. Perales and Carlos Castañeda pushed the state Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) to end discrimina-

tion in hiring and wages. Returning veterans in Chicago and elsewhere took advantage of the G.I. Bill and federal housing assistance to attend college, purchase homes, and secure middle-class employment in the postwar economy. After years of struggle, residents of Puerto Rico established their right in 1952 to elect a Governor and adopt a constitution of their own as a Commonwealth, rather than a formal colony, of the U.S. The large number of Puerto Ricans moving to New York City and other mainland locales, including some 151,000 between 1940 and 1950, and 470,000 between 1950 and 1960, formed new community organizations and participated in religious, civic, and other groups. Landmark court cases, many argued by Latino lawyers, challenged racial discrimination in education, in fair housing, and in jury selection during the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>28</sup>

Latinos also became more visible in the U.S. cultural sphere during and after the war, affirming their place in American society by excelling as artists and performers. Actors such as Rita Moreno, Ricardo Montalbán, and Desi Arnaz took more influential roles in theater, film, and television. Postwar journalists accelerated the growth of Spanish- and English-language media, driving up the circulation of newspapers such as Los Angeles’s *La Opinión*, and the merger of *El Diario* and *La Prensa* in New York in 1962. Musicians such as Mario Bauzá, Beny Moré, Celia Cruz, Miguelito Valdés, and others played to packed houses on both coasts and in the upper Midwest. Latino writers published new fiction and memoirs, including Pedro Juan Soto’s *Spiks* (1956), which explored Puerto Rican struggles in New York City, and José Antonio Villarreal’s *Pocho* (1959), which sought to represent Mexican American experiences in the 1930s and 1940s. Latinos became more visible in American sports, as well, thanks to boxers such as Kid Gavilán, and to baseball players such as Mike García, Orestes (Minnie) Miñoso, Ozzie Vigil, and Vic Power. Moreover, they authored im-

portant works of scholarship, including studies of Puerto Ricans in Chicago by the pioneering sociologist Elena Padilla, work in labor economics by Ernesto Galarza, and explorations of South Texas folklore and border conflict by musicologist Américo Paredes. These trends accelerated during the postwar period, as new groups of Latin Americans arrived in the U.S. seeking opportunities, or fleeing the Cuban Revolution or political turmoil in the Dominican Republic, throughout the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>29</sup>

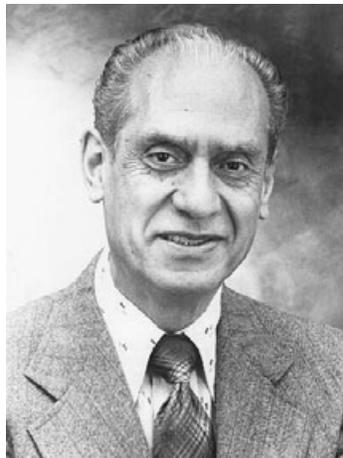
Although they applauded these cultural efforts, activists associated with El Congreso and similar groups found that World War II and the immediate postwar years also presented new obstacles to Latino civil rights. Violence directed at zoot suiters had put gendered and racialized hostility towards working-class Southern Californians on display. Both unionists and middle-class Mexican Americans saw the postwar renewal of the Bracero Program, a wartime contract labor agreement between Mexico and the U.S., as an effort to flood labor markets with low-wage, temporary workers from Latin America. Latinos in New York and other cities found themselves competing for scarce industrial jobs during a time in which that sector failed to expand, and in which many garment factories and assembly plants relocated to the South in search of cheaper labor. By the late-1940s, Cold War-era concerns about communist infiltration, and a common desire to avoid the sort of labor and civil rights conflicts that had defined the 1930s, led to new surveillance of Moreno and other suspected radicals. As a result, in this time of new challenges for organized labor, El Congreso, a broad-based civil rights organization, never managed to convene after World War II. Fear-

ing police surveillance and possible deportation, Fierro left the U.S. for Mexico in 1948, and Moreno did the same in 1950.

### **Edward Roybal**

The postwar period witnessed the development of Chicano and Puerto Rican civil rights efforts in the 1960s and 1970s, and the formation of influential organizations such as the United Farm Workers, the Puerto Rican Association for Community Affairs, ASPIRA, the National Council of La Raza, the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, the Puerto Legal Defense and Education Fund, and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. These organizations drew from the experiences, the resources, and the energies of

Latinos who had been involved in civil rights efforts since the 1940s and 1950s, including Puerto Ricans in New York such as Antonia Pantoja, and they often used celebrations of Latino culture to help galvanize Americans as neighborhood residents, workers, or citizens.



*Edward Roybal  
(Library of Congress)*

In Los Angeles County, it was neighborhood organizers, some of them connected directly to Moreno and El Congreso, who helped to elect Edward Roybal, one of the most influential Latino

politicians in the late 20th century, to elective office in 1949. In so doing, they launched a political career that would lead Roybal to the U.S. Congress in 1963. Roybal's political career stretched from the 1940s into the early-1990s. Like the other historical figures reviewed here, his biography connects with key themes of his time such as the emerging power of Latino voters, the Latinization of Los Angeles and other major cities, and the institutionalization of Latino politics on the national scene. Born only a few years after Moreno, he made his impact on

American life just as she was stepping away from her labor and civil rights organizing, and only months before she left the U.S. for Mexico.

Edward Roybal became a longtime Southern Californian, living in Los Angeles at a time in which the region became home to the largest number of ethnic Mexicans in the U.S. Like most others, however, he was a transplant, not a native, of that city. Born in New Mexico in 1916 to a family that traced its roots in the region back to Spanish colonization, Roybal moved with his parents to Los Angeles in the early 1920s during the height of pre-World War II Mexican migration to the West Coast. His native New Mexico had recently achieved statehood in 1912, and Roybal had spent his first years in a bilingual region in which Hispanics enjoyed some representation in local politics, and from which voters later sent Dennis Chávez to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1930 as the first Mexican American elected to that body. Many residents of the state suffered economic hardship after World War I, however, and Mexican Americans – including the families of soldiers who had fought in that conflict – sought jobs outside the state as shepherders in Wyoming, mine workers in Colorado, agricultural laborers in California, and more. In 1922, when his father lost his job in a railroad strike, the Roybals left Albuquerque seeking new opportunities in Boyle Heights, a growing Mexican American neighborhood area on the east side of Los Angeles. He graduated from Roosevelt High School 12 years later, took a job with the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC – an important New Deal Program), worked at times in the low-wage garment industry during the Depression, and then returned to school to study business at the UCLA and law at Southwestern University.

In a time when few Mexican Americans entered colleges and universities, Roybal had been able to secure more education than most Latinos in the U.S., and he hoped to put that schooling to

good use. Concerned about public health, he took a position with the California Tuberculosis Association and rose to direct education programs for the Los Angeles County Tuberculosis and Health Association. In that capacity, he combated diseases that preyed upon poor residents of the area's barrios and colonias. Like many other Latinos nationwide, Roybal also served in the armed services during World War II, utilizing what he had learned at UCLA as an accountant for an Army infantry unit. A proud veteran, Roybal was well positioned at war's end to become a member of the American middle class, and he considered moving to the suburbs and pursuing a more comfortable life. However, his interest in advancing the cause of Latino electoral representation, civil rights, and equality of opportunity won out. He spent his vacation time in 1945 and 1946 in Chicago studying community organizing under Saul Alinsky, and when other politically active Latinos urged Roybal to run for office, he agreed to put himself forward as a candidate in 1947.

Working with like-minded Southern Californians, Roybal lost that first bid for Los Angeles City Council, but his friends and colleagues maintained their campaign organization with an eye to the next election. Over the following months that group gained the support of Alinsky as well as prominent members of Los Angeles's Jewish community, Hollywood liberals, city and county officials, Catholic clergy, and labor unionists. Multi-ethnic coalition building in fact proved key to many postwar Latino political movements. Members of Roybal's group called themselves the Community Service Organization (CSO), and they set out to register new voters for the next election through small house meetings that gathered together neighbors and friends. These were years of high political expectations for Latino voters in California, New York, Illinois, and other states, an era that saw the establishment in 1949 of critical new organizations such as

the American G.I. Forum in Three Rivers, Texas. CSO organizer Fred Ross Sr. noted the large number of potential Mexican American voters in places like East Los Angeles, that “in the past ten years practically the entire United States-born second generation has come of voting age.” In his view, “sizeable segments of this second generation, particularly the veterans, are possessed of a strong social will to bring about basic improvements in the neighborhoods so that at least their children can have a better life, a better place to live it.” In just over three months, the CSO registered 11,000 new voters in East Los Angeles, assuring that on election day in 1949 Edward Roybal would not only win his city council seat, he would also double the number of total votes cast in the 1947 election.<sup>30</sup>

With Roybal’s victory, Los Angeles had elected its first Mexican American city councilman since 1878, and news of the CSO’s success spread throughout Latino communities in California and Arizona. Buoyed in part by the African American civil rights movement, CSO organizer Fred Ross, Sr. identified and trained young leaders throughout the state such as César, Helen, and Richard Chávez; Dolores Huerta; Cruz Reynoso; and Herman Gallegos. Through tireless organizing and hundreds of house meetings, they shaped the most important Latino civil rights organization on the West Coast during the 1950s. Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the Central Valley, the San Francisco Bay Area, and colonias from San Diego to Monterey organized for neighborhood improvement or labor campaigns, made arguments before city council meetings, and ran naturalization classes for elderly immigrants. From 1949 until the early-1960s, the organization brought tens of thousands of California and Arizona voters – most of them Latinos – into the electoral process for the first time, and activists pressed politicians and candidates to pass a minimum wage for agricultural workers in the state, and to approve an old-age pension

system for non-citizens who had worked in California for decades.

Latinos elsewhere worked on similar projects related to economic justice and political empowerment during the 1950s, and that decade laid a foundation for Latino electoral representation from coast to coast. In Los Angeles, Roybal pressed for Fair Employment Practices, an end to police brutality, and similar issues of concern to many ethnic Mexicans, running unsuccessfully as the 1954 Democratic candidate for California Lieutenant Governor. In 1956, Denver made Bert Gallegos the first Latino on its city council, and voters in El Paso, Texas elected Raymond Telles as the 20th century’s first big city Latino mayor in 1957. Arizona’s Alianza Hispano-Americana joined with Texas’s LULAC and American G.I. Forum, and with California’s CSO, to form an umbrella network of Mexican American political groups, the American Council of Spanish-Speaking Organizations, in the early 1950s. Electoral campaigns involving Latino organizers escalated towards the end of the decade thanks to the establishment of Viva Kennedy! clubs during the 1960 presidential campaign. Overseen by campaign staffer Carlos McCormick, their mobilization of the Latino electorate in California, Colorado, and elsewhere played a key role in John F. Kennedy’s narrow electoral victory. In New Mexico, for instance, Kennedy claimed a victory margin of just 2,000 votes, while his win in Texas by just 46,000 ballots is often credited with winning him the national election.

The 1960 presidential election galvanized many Catholic voters, and the Viva Kennedy! campaigns brought recently-elected Latino politicians together for the first time. In October 1960, the campaign met in New York City’s Waldorf-Astoria Hotel with both Mexican Americans from the Southwest and Puerto Ricans from New York.<sup>31</sup> Kennedy’s election energized new Latino political efforts, as voters elected Henry B. González the first Mexican

American Congressman from Texas in 1961, and residents of Los Angeles in the following year made Philip Soto and John Moreno the first Latinos in the California Assembly for more than 50 years. In 1962, Southern Californians also sent Edward Roybal to the U.S. Congress as the first Latino elected to the House from that state in the 20th century.

Roybal served in Congress from 1963 to 1993, an era defined by Latino demographic growth throughout the U.S. thanks in part to new migrations from Cuba and the Dominican Republic. By 1962, the Cuban Revolution of 1959 had already prompted an enormous upsurge in that population in Florida, New York, New Jersey, and other states. As a community that traced its residency in the U.S. to the late 18th and early 19th century, the era of Félix Varela, the number of Cubans had grown steadily since World War I – with 16,000 arriving in the 1920s, roughly 9,000 arriving in the 1930s, 26,000 during the 1940s, and some 80,000 in the 1950s. Their numbers rose sharply after 1959, however, and U.S. government programs, including the Cuban Adjustment Act, gave that population special preference in immigration law. Some 300,000 Cubans immigrated between 1965 and 1973; another 125,000 “marielitos” entered the U.S. around 1980; and a large group of “balseros” arrived in the mid-1990s.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, the 1960s and 1970s saw a dramatic upsurge in the Dominican population of the U.S., as well. Prompted by political turmoil and repression, economic challenges in their home country, and U.S. military intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1965, the number of immigrants from that country increased from fewer than 10,000 in the 1950s to more than 90,000 in the 1960s; nearly 150,000 in the



*Congressional Hispanic Caucus, 1984  
(United States Congress)*

1970s, more than 250,000 in the 1980s; and more than 330,000 in the 1990s. While most settled in the New York area, Dominicans moved in significant numbers to Florida and other parts of the U.S., as well.<sup>33</sup> During the 1970s and 1980s, new groups of South Americans, including Chileans, Argentinians, and Colombians, also moved to the U.S. in growing numbers, drawn by economic opportunity as political violence created dangerous instability in their home countries.<sup>34</sup>

Roybal’s term in Congress also coincided with changes in the mainland Puerto Rican population, and with the arrival of large numbers of Central Americans to California and other parts of the U.S. after 1980. Thanks in part to more convenient air travel linking New York and San Juan, Puerto Ricans continued to move to that city and other parts of the U.S. during the 1960s and 1970s, building communities that had developed dramatically during the 1940s and 1950s when island industrialization programs had actively encouraged outmigration. Moreover, it was not just New York’s barrio that grew, as the Puerto Rican presence spread and became more visible after 1960 in Hartford, Boston, Worcester, and other Northeastern cities; in Newark and Trenton and Philadelphia; in Cleveland and Chicago; in Los Angeles and San Francisco; and in Tampa and Miami.<sup>35</sup> During the presidency of Ronald Reagan (1980-1988), immigration from Central America, especially from El Salvador and Guatemala and Nicaragua, developed as residents fled civil wars, U.S. military involvement, and economic hardship in the hope of securing work and security in the U.S. The number of Central Americans increased from 331,219 in 1980 to 1,323,380 by 1990, with many moving to California, Texas,

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Louisiana, Florida, Washington D.C., and Illinois. Many considered themselves temporary refugees, eager to return to their home countries after the cessation of hostilities, but the duration and extent of violence in Central America, and the possibilities seemingly available, encouraged many Central Americans to settle permanently in the U.S.<sup>36</sup>

Most important to Roybal's California Congressional district, the number of Mexican migrants to the U.S. grew after the conclusion of the Bracero Program in 1965. Arrivals from that country comprised 25 percent of the total number of immigrants admitted legally to the U.S. between 1960 and 2000, and hundreds of thousands of other border crossers entered the U.S. without documents in order to work in agriculture, industry, or the service sector. As the scale of Mexican migration increased in the 1970s and 1980s, thanks both to demands for low-wage workers in the U.S. and to economic restructuring in their home country, migrants hailed from regions of Mexico that had sent few emigres in the past, braving new and more militarized regulations at the U.S.-Mexico border, and they moved in larger numbers to regions of the U.S. such as the rural South and Midwest.<sup>37</sup>

Throughout Roybal's term in Congress, immigrant- and U.S.-born Latinos drove U.S. economic growth, their remittances bolstered Latin American economies, they joined the U.S. military in large numbers, and they played critical roles in shaping American literature, film, radio, and other cultural productions. Many also joined Roybal in winning election to influential political offices. Maurice Ferre became mayor of Miami in 1973, the first Puerto Rican to lead a major city in the mainland U.S.; Henry

Cisneros and Federico Peña, both Mexican Americans, became mayors of San Antonio and Denver in 1981 and 1982. Born in Cuba, Xavier L. Suárez became the first Cuban American mayor of Miami in 1985. Moreover, voters elected Latino governors in several states, including Raúl Castro and Jerry Apodaca in Arizona and New Mexico in 1974, and Bob Martínez in Florida in 1986. Some of these gains were due not only to the growing number of Latino voters, or to the political skills of individual politicians, but also to Congress's extension in 1975 of Voting Rights Act protections to Latinos and other "language minorities," which mandated bilingual election materials, and a key 1982 amendment to the act that shaped voter redistricting in areas with large numbers of Latinos.<sup>38</sup>



*Puerto Rican Day Parade, New York  
(Creative Commons by asterix611)*

Just as important to Roybal's time in office were the social movements emerging after 1960 in which Latinos mobilized to change American politics, U.S. cities, educational institutions, workplaces and job sites, and more. These efforts built upon, but also departed from, already established Latino mutual aid organizations and neighborhood improvement associations, church-based groups, and efforts associated with the Democratic Party. Members of the League of United Latin American Citizens in Texas helped to create the Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations (PASSO) based on Viva Kennedy! clubs, for instance. In 1962, former leaders of the Community Service Organization in California started the labor and civil rights organization that became the United Farm Workers of America. New York's Puerto Rican Day Parade, which had begun in 1956 as the Desfile Hispanoamericano de Nueva York, took on a new activist cast by the late-1960s, and the Puerto Rican Forum in New

York, established in 1957, while continuing to develop community leaders, established groups such as ASPIRA and the Puerto Rican Family Institute over the following decade. Other political and cultural responses challenged the U.S. political system, and some adopted more confrontational engagements with officials, employers, and American institutions.

The 1960s and 1970s were years of political urgency, scholars contend, when Puerto Ricans and other Latinos “came to embody that famous line from the Langston Hughes poem: ‘Nothing lights a fire like a dream deferred.’”<sup>39</sup> As one recent study of Chicago’s 18th Street suggests, “Some local activists worked in social service agencies, formed community-based organizations, and began building coalitions with other groups across the city. Others had more radical critiques of American society and envisioned revolutionary social changes that struck at the root of inequality.”<sup>40</sup> By the early 1970s, Latinos had formed organizations such as the Young Lords Party in Chicago and New York, and the Brown Berets in California and Texas; students were arguing for better schools in California and Texas, and for the establishment of programs teaching Chicano Studies and Puerto Rican Studies; and young and old expressed growing concern about the death tolls paid in the Vietnam conflict by Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and others. Immigration reform became a key feature of the national political agenda, as well, with some Latinos arguing for greater restrictionism during the 1970s and 1980s, and most seeming to value a pathway to citizenship for undocumented U.S. residents.<sup>41</sup> Latinos debated the merits of legislation that sought to make English the official language of states like California or of the entire nation, while other immigrant- and U.S.-born residents became involved in a revived labor movement during the 1980s and 1990s in the hope of addressing the deep structural disparities in employment, living conditions, and education le-

vels that dogged cities and rural areas into the late 20th century.

Congressman Roybal and many other Latinos in elected office responded to these concerns and others from the early 1960s into the early 1990s. Serving on important House committees, he became the first to introduce a bilingual education bill to the U.S. Congress, promoted public spending on AIDS and Alzheimer’s research, worked to expand veterans’ benefits, proposed national health care legislation, and voted to establish a cabinet-level Department of Education. Roybal also built dialogue between Latinos serving in the U.S. Congress, and between Latino government officials throughout the U.S. In 1976 he co-founded the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), a legislative service organization that initially brought Roybal together with fellow representatives Kika de la Garza (D-TX), Baltasar Corrada del Río (Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico), Herman Badillo (D-NY, and the first Puerto Rican elected to serve in the House), and Henry B. Gonzalez (D-TX), but that welcomed many more representatives in the 1980s and 1990s across a widening ideological spectrum, including Manuel Lujan (R-NM), Bill Richardson (D-NM), Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R-FL), Esteban Torres (D-CA), Robert Garcia (D-NY), Nydia Velásquez (D-NY), José Serrano (D-NY), Robert Menendez (D-NJ), and others. In the same year of the founding of CHC, Roybal also established the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO), serving as president of that large body until 1991.

### **Conclusion**

President William J. Clinton recognized the critical historical contributions of Congressman Roybal awarding him a Presidential Citizens Medal in 2001. In addition, the work of other influential Latinos such as Antonia Pantoja, César Chávez, and Dolores Huerta, along with a long list of Congressional Medal of Hon-

or winners, has come to greater national attention in recent decades. The U.S. has too often ignored the centrality of women like Luisa Moreno and María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, or men like Félix Varela or Arturo Schomburg, who also shaped our collective past, served and educated fellow Americans, advanced the democratic political process, or helped to define American culture. Perhaps, following the logic of Walt Whitman's argument in 1888, some have remained so "impress'd by New England writers and schoolmasters, we tacitly abandon ourselves to the notion that our United States have been fashion'd from the British Islands only ... a very great mistake." Such abandonment, such insistence, now requires a steady and determined affirmation of the most narrow descriptions of national belonging, and a turning away from all of the evidence that shows Latinos as key historical participants, collaborators, and leaders in many fields throughout the U.S. In fact, the first consideration of Latinos' place in North America was authored more than 400 years ago in 1610, well before the Pilgrims named Plymouth Rock, with the publication in Spain of Gaspar Pérez de Villagrà's *Historia de Nuevo México*. That text, considered "the first published history of any American state," should remind us again of the longstanding presence of Latinos in North America, of the critical histories we miss when we ignore those subjects, and of the many important paths that Latinos have explored since the colonial period.<sup>42</sup>

As the previous pages suggest, individuals such as Félix Varela, María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, Arturo Schomburg, Luisa Moreno, Edward Roybal, and others must be our guides if we are to understand how and why people have long moved between Latin America and the U.S., the democratic struggles linking U.S. residents to other countries, the importance of religiosity in

everyday life, the work of our best writers and artists, and the extent to which Latinos have built this national community, and other communities, over more than two centuries. The essays that follow, authored by some of the nation's most distinguished scholars, delve more deeply into these and other critical aspects of our nation's past.

***"To that composite American identity of the future, Spanish character will supply some of the most needed parts."***

*Walt Whitman, The Spanish Element in Our Nationality*

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Walt Whitman, "The Spanish Element in Our Nationality" in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman*, 2 vols. (New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1948), 2:402.
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- <sup>3</sup> David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).
- <sup>4</sup> Rodrigo Lazo, *Writing to Cuba: Filibustering and Cuban Exiles in the United States*, Envisioning Cuba (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 2.
- <sup>5</sup> Frances Negrón-Muntaner and Ramón Grosfoguel, eds., *Puerto Rican Jam: Rethinking Colonialism and Nationalism* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); and Cary Cordova, "The Mission in Nicaragua: San Francisco Poets Go to War," in *Beyond El Barrio: Everyday Life in Latina/o America*, eds. Gina M. Pérez, Frank A. Guridy, and Adrian Burgos, Jr. (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 211–231.
- <sup>6</sup> For an introduction to the Mexican period in Alta California, see David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982).
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