

# **“I Was the One Percenter”: Manny Diaz and the Beginnings of a Black-Puerto Rican Coalition<sup>1</sup>**

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## **INTRODUCTION: THE DILEMMAS OF A NEW ALLIANCE**

On the morning of February 3, 1964, Manny Diaz woke up wondering how many Puerto Rican students would not go to school that day. Puerto Ricans were known for having the highest high school drop-out and suspension rate in New York City, but the reasons for students' absences that day were deliberate, premeditated, and voluntary. For more than two decades since urban renewal projects segregated them into increasingly poor and racialized neighborhoods, hundreds of thousands of Puerto Rican migrants had witnessed their children's schools deteriorate under the leadership of racially prejudiced white teachers and administrators. By 1964, however, their moral indignation ripened, and they were ready to publicly voice their anger. Diaz, who had been leading a juvenile delinquency program with Puerto Rican youth in the Lower East Side, and Gilberto Gerena-Valentín, who had been organizing Puerto Ricans in the city through labor and community organizations, decided to join hands with black educators who had been fighting racial segregation in the city for many decades.<sup>2</sup> They allied with black civil rights leader Bayard Rustin, who aimed to dramatize black children's inferior education in the city by boycotting the entire public school system one day.

Diaz and Gerena probably wondered about the political ramifications of making such an alliance with black Americans. Would black Americans treat Puerto Rican migrants any better than white Americans had? Were they friends to be trusted or enemies to be feared? To their surprise, and the surprise of many others, the boycott was very successful. Despite the stigma of engaging in civil disobedience, 464,361 students stayed out of New York City's public schools on that morning. More than three-fourths of the students from the heavily black-populated neighborhoods of Central Harlem and Washington Heights, as well as the Puerto Rican-dominant Lower East Side and East Harlem neighborhoods did not go to school.<sup>3</sup>

The rest of the city had various responses to such an interracial demonstration of grievance. “When East Harlem turned out for the integration boycott, it was the first time in the community's history, or the city's, that Puerto Ricans joined with Negroes in protest and pursuit of a common goal,” proudly claimed Patricia Cayo Sexton, a social worker in East Harlem. Bayard Rustin boasted that the most significant fact in this protest was that “Negro and Puerto Rican communities had joined together to work for common objectives.”<sup>4</sup> Many Puerto Rican leaders, however, did not share Sexton and Rustin's enthusiasm. A month later, when Gerena organized a subsequent march from City Hall to the Board of Education office to focus attention on the plight of Puerto Rican children a month after the boycott, numerous Puerto Rican leaders denounced his decision. Pentecostal ministers from East Harlem declared, “Politics and Christ don't mix,” while others claimed that Gerena was a “Communist.”<sup>5</sup> Gerena later confessed that he “received vicious attacks by some of our racist Puerto Ricans” for his collaboration with blacks, while Diaz revealed that some Puerto Ricans told him that “he was too close to blacks.”<sup>6</sup>

If so many Puerto Ricans felt that joining black protest would jeopardize Puerto Ricans' own precarious status in the city, why did Diaz pursue alliances with black leaders so eagerly? Did his darker skin make him more prone to identify with black politics? Or did his working-class background lead him to identify with blacks because they held the most politically radical voice in the 1960s? Why was he so successful? Despite the political risks involved in imitating black protest, more than 1,800 Puerto Rican parents showed up to march to the office of the Board of Education in March of 1964. Whether it was Diaz's physical features or class politics which drew him to the black civil rights movement, he became a dynamic Puerto Rican leader at the height of the civil rights struggle in New York City because he appealed to a sentiment common to many other Puerto Ricans—kinship with working-class black Americans.

The life and career of Manny Diaz embodies the multiple ways in which Puerto Ricans related and identified with black Americans in the postwar era. To many who look back on the history of the civil rights struggle, it may seem obvious that Puerto Ricans would join black Americans in the struggle toward racial equality because they were poor and most of them were nonwhite. Puerto Ricans' self-identification as a minority group alongside black Americans rather than an immigrant group, however, was the result of a deliberate decision. There was nothing

“natural” about their decision to coalesce forces; rather they came together through a common belief that a coalition would strategically serve the interests of both groups.

The most significant barrier that separated black and Puerto Rican communities initially was the difference between their racial consciousnesses. Black racial consciousness taught them that the world was strictly divided between whites and blacks. Puerto Rican racial consciousness, however, provided a much more fluid system of social hierarchy. As political scientist Mark Q. Sawyer and others argued, Puerto Ricans, as well as their neighboring islanders, such as Cubans and Dominicans, developed a system of “inclusionary discrimination,” in which a *real* system of discrimination based on shade gradations functioned in tandem with a *perceived* system of inclusion.<sup>7</sup> Puerto Ricans made differentiations between “light” and “dark” physical complexion, such that the majority of the Puerto Rican upper class was “*blanco*” (white) and the majority of the lower class was “*negro*” (black) or “*mulato*” (mixed). The perception, however, that one could “whiten” oneself through interracial marriage or social mobility, led all of them, whether “*blanco*” or “*negro*,” to believe that they belonged to a racially inclusive, democratic society.

Puerto Ricans who migrated to New York City in the postwar realized that they could no longer hold onto their Puerto Rican racial sensibilities once they confronted the more binary system of American racial segregation. As sociologist Samuel Betances argued, lighter Puerto Ricans saw that their privileged status as “*blanco*” (white) in Puerto Rico became uncertain among white Americans who might now view them as belonging to an inferior “Puerto Rican race,” while darker Puerto Ricans saw that their social stigma as “*negro*” in Puerto Rico would deteriorate if they became “black” in the U.S.<sup>8</sup> As a group of migrants with a racially ambiguous identity, they realized that they could harness the social privilege of whiteness as Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants did—or at least attempt to do so—or they could forge a coalition toward racial and economic equality by identifying with and allying with black Americans.<sup>9</sup> Diaz chose the latter and successfully led many other Puerto Ricans to follow him. He chose to form friendships and alliances with black Americans and adopted their political strategies because he found Puerto Ricans’ best allies among civil rights activists. By doing so, he shaped Puerto Ricans’ positioning within the terrains of U.S. politics, which would affect many generations to come.

### FROM ISLAND BOY TO COMMUNITY ACTIVIST: THE FORMATION OF A POLITICAL AND RACIAL IDENTITY

Born in 1922 in Humacao, Puerto Rico, Diaz felt comfortable socializing with light and dark-skinned Puerto Ricans since his childhood. Son of Filomena Zoe Velazquez, a seamstress, and Manuel Diaz Gomez, a musician and bodega owner, Diaz was born in a family that had experienced generations of interracial mixing. Diaz’s hometown, Humacao, was an



Manny Diaz with parents on Harlem rooftop c. 1934.

important sugar cane growing area of the island since the nineteenth century, and as a result, it had been populated by a large number of African slaves. Having grown up in an area of the island with an especially heavy African presence, Diaz claimed that, "at the age of five, my mental set was already . . . there's nothing wrong with being black."<sup>10</sup>

It was not until he joined the U.S. Army Signal Corps in 1942, however, that he began to understand that he might be "black." Ironically, by fighting for his own country, he began to realize how different he was from other Americans for the first time. Puerto Ricans from the island were drafted into the 65th Infantry Division during World War II, but Puerto Ricans from the mainland were conscripted into white and black units arbitrarily.<sup>11</sup> As Diaz explained, "As a Puerto Rican, they never knew how to classify us. It depended on who looked at you behind that desk whether you went into one army or the other army. I have some blonde, blue-eyed cousins who went into the black army. I was put into the white army." Whether his selection into the white army was a sign of good or ill fortune, he began to experience anti-black racism for the first time in his life by training in a white platoon in the South.

We were sent to Camp Shelby, Mississippi. That was the hellhole of the universe. . . . They decided to give us a furlough, so myself and four other guys went into a bar in Biloxi. We ordered five beers. The bartender placed a beer in front of all my buddies, but not in front of me. So I asked him, where is my beer? He said, "Back there, boy." He had a beer for me at the end of the counter of the bar, so I said, "No thank you." I told my buddies I'd wait for them outside.

This was the first time Diaz had been publicly humiliated due to his skin color. After such an experience, Diaz vowed, "I never wanted to go back to Biloxi again."<sup>12</sup>

This incident, however, would not be Diaz's last encounter with white racism in the South. During a dress parade, Diaz got into a fight with a white soldier from Texas who had stepped on his heel repeatedly. "Hey, watch it!" Diaz warned him. "He stepped again a third time, and I just whirled around and punched him on the nose." When the two of them were summoned by their captain, they both were sentenced to two weeks on kitchen police duty, which meant that they had to peel potatoes everyday for a couple of hundred soldiers. Such experiences made him aware that, though he was not as dark as some African Americans, he was not white.<sup>13</sup>

Surprisingly, however, Diaz's experience with whites was never absolutely hostile. In his memories, at least, he preserved the stories of whites who humiliated him, but also of those who genuinely befriended him. In Biloxi, Diaz recounted that he was partially protected from the trauma of such an experience because his four white friends, who had come from the North, showed their disapproval of the bartender's racism. When they came out of the bar, one of his friends, an Irish man named Shortly Dolan, "threw the bottle on the window of the bar, the window shattered, and we started running." The shattering of a window may have cost the bartender little damage compared to Diaz's humiliation, but in a small way, his friends had protected Diaz's dignity. The soldier from Texas also broke down his barriers once they began to work with each other in the kitchen. "Lo and behold, after two weeks, this guy and I became good friends. That was unexpected. For the first couple of days, I wouldn't even talk to him. But I guess the hardship of being a KP (kitchen police) brought us together."<sup>14</sup> Such were the contradictory experiences of a Puerto Rican man caught in the midst of an arbitrary system of racism—he was humiliated and protected, belittled and befriended. He experienced racism first hand, but still recognized the fear, ambivalence, and humanity of his enemy. Diaz saw that he had been unjustly kept from certain opportunities—for example, he knew that he had never been able to reach a rank beyond a corporal because he was caught drinking beer in the barracks, an act overlooked for many of his white peers. Even so, he was able to go to the white PXs (Post Exchange stores) in England where he passed as white. "While I am Puerto Rican, I could pass," he explained.<sup>15</sup> As Diaz traveled through the American South and Europe, he realized that his racial identity was geographically contingent—he was a Puerto Rican in New York City, a black man in the South, and at times a white man in England. As he began to understand how arbitrary the system of racial hierarchy was, however, he began to feel a "kinship toward black people."

His identification with black Americans solidified when he entered the City College of New York (CCNY). At CCNY, Diaz met Kenneth B. Clark, a black psychologist who would soon become his mentor and the scholarly architect of the *Brown v. Board of Education* court decision of 1954. "He just opened my eyes and opened my mind in terms of racism. . . . I knew it was bad, I knew I was being discriminated against, but I had never seen it in a context, a societal context as Ken Clark put it," explained Diaz.<sup>16</sup> While taking all the classes that Clark offered at CCNY between 1946 and 1951 and later writing a master's thesis under

his supervision, Diaz began to understand the meaning of his experiences in the context of the larger political forces that determined his choices.

As a college student interested in understanding class and racial oppression, Diaz also joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) chapter at CCNY. Diaz explained that, even though he was not black, "The NAACP was my first choice because there was no other choice."<sup>17</sup> In the late 1940s, Puerto Ricans did not have effective structures through which they could voice their political opinions. The Puerto Rican *Alianza Obrera* (Workers' Alliance) and the *Liga Puertorriqueña* (Puerto Rican League) had organized Puerto Rican socialists in the 1920s, but they were no longer active after the 1930s.<sup>18</sup> Vito Marcantonio, congressman of the 17th District in East Harlem from 1936 to 1950, represented Puerto Ricans' most loyal political advocate in the years previous to World War II. The onset of the Cold War and McCarthyism, however, effectively destroyed his political strength since he was seen as having too many "communist political tendencies."<sup>19</sup> When a large number of Puerto Rican migrants came to New York City following World War II, the Migration Division of the Office of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico helped them deal with the primary issues of housing, jobs, and education.<sup>20</sup> The Commonwealth Office, however, could not provide a means of expression of the most politically radical Puerto Rican voices since it was an institution constrained by the U.S. and Puerto Rican governments.<sup>21</sup> Lacking networks with powerful Puerto Rican political groups, Diaz sought for alternative places where he could further his own intellectual development. He found his home at the NAACP chapter at CCNY.

As a graduate student at Columbia University's School of Social Work, Diaz met Malcolm X in the early 1950s and forged a friendship that would enlarge his role as a civil rights activist. When he heard Malcolm X speak for the first time, Diaz said, "I was awestricken, I really was. [I felt] admiration, reverence, all of these things. I was surprised he would even talk to me." Upon Malcolm X's invitation, Diaz was able to share a cup of coffee and his own life story. "He was asking me about the Puerto Ricans in New York, and what were our problems, and how do we feel about racism and so forth . . . so we kind of hit it off. I felt more relaxed and more able to share on a friendship basis, not just an awesome figure that happened to walk through my life."<sup>22</sup> To a young man who was looking for inspiration, Diaz's personal encounters with Malcolm X left a deep imprint on his political views.

Having had a personal experience of racial discrimination while serving in the U.S. army and having contextualized such experiences through

the teachings of Kenneth Clark and Malcolm X, Diaz became deeply committed to pursue racial and class equality by the end of his formal education in the late 1950s. His first experiences as a social worker, however, proved very challenging as he was thrown into the thick of ethnic battles between Puerto Ricans and white ethnic immigrants in East Harlem and the Lower East Side. He first began to work as a social worker at the Union Settlement in East Harlem in 1953. William Kirk, the Settlement's director, hired Diaz not only because he had all the right credentials, but also because Diaz was Puerto Rican and a former gang member. As a young boy, Diaz had belonged to the Dukes, the most notorious Puerto Rican gang in East Harlem in the 1930s.<sup>23</sup> He had joined the gang simply for self-protection because "if you didn't belong to a gang, you were defenseless."<sup>24</sup> This experience, however, would prove invaluable to him in the late 1950s since city social workers were desperately trying to solve the problem of juvenile delinquency among Puerto Ricans.

The city had seen an enormous emergence of youth gangs since the 1940s. Although Irish and Italian gangs previously were viewed as commonplace and reflective of a healthy level of male adolescent boisterousness, youth gangs became a social menace when they became racially charged and more violent in the postwar era.<sup>25</sup> As the number of black southern and Puerto Rican migrants coming into the city increased, Irish and Italian youth gangs began to defend their turfs. Simultaneously, as World War II veterans returned to their old neighborhoods, they introduced youth gangs to more sophisticated weaponry, allowing the youth to substitute knives, homemade revolvers, and rifles for sticks, stones, and bottles.<sup>26</sup> The use of more sophisticated weaponry was prevalent among Italian, Irish, black, and Puerto Rican youth alike, but the media began to focus its attention on the violence of black and Puerto Rican youth gangs.

Movies, novels, and newspaper articles recounted stories after stories of young black and Puerto Rican young males, who had dropped out of high school, depended on welfare, engaged in criminal activity, and had psychological problems. In movies such as *Knock on Any Door* (1949), white urban missionaries, such as teachers, doctors, nuns, priests, and police officers, were portrayed as those who would save these urban savages. They were initially rejected, often raped, assaulted, and denigrated, but eventually they delivered the delinquents from their miserable lives.<sup>27</sup>

In reality, juvenile delinquency had resulted largely from the social disruptions caused by urban renewal. Since the 1940s, urban renewal projects displaced poor New Yorkers into new neighborhoods that lacked social cohesion. Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 created the Urban Redevelop-

ment Agency and gave the federal government the authority to subsidize three-fourths of the cost of local slum clearance and urban renewal. A desire to revive the city with modern technology led politicians and business leaders in New York City to replace slum buildings with new luxury apartment buildings, offices, medical hospitals, and research universities. Although poor whites and non-whites alike were displaced, non-whites bore the brunt of the instability brought by urban renewal. Once displaced, they had more difficulty finding alternative housing and often ended up paying more for rent than white residents.<sup>28</sup> Hence, civil rights activists often referred to "urban renewal" as "Negro removal."<sup>29</sup> Moving from neighborhood to neighborhood and transferring from one school to another, the children of poor black and Puerto Rican migrants became the most helpless victims of urban renewal and structural racism. Boys often tried to regain their dignity and masculinity within the sub-culture of youth gangs, but in turn they became increasingly marginalized as social outcasts.<sup>30</sup>

The white leadership of the Union Settlement in East Harlem understood that both structural injustice and the individual choice of youth gang members caused juvenile delinquency, but they desperately lacked the know-how to effectively reach out to the youth in their neighborhood. The influx of Puerto Rican migrants and the out-migration of Italians and Jews into the suburbs had significantly changed the face of East Harlem in the 1940s. Jewish synagogues became Pentecostal churches, and Italian groceries became bodegas.<sup>31</sup> Yet, the old residents did not know how to adjust to the newcomers. In 1952, settlement leaders expressed some of their concerns with the Puerto Rican community in East Harlem in a report titled "New York City's Puerto Ricans: Asset or Liability?" They were alarmed that Puerto Ricans' influx into the city had overloaded the city's relief rolls. They also could not understand why "the juvenile delinquency rate is higher in East Harlem than in any other part of the city . . . [and] the narcotics problem has never been as serious as it is today." Given that Puerto Rican migrants made up more than 30 percent of East Harlem, they seemed to be quite a liability for the neighborhood.<sup>32</sup> The settlement house leaders, however, did not blame them completely. They acknowledged that language and color barriers, along with lack of skills and housing problems, aggravated the social problems of the Puerto Ricans. Despite their suspicion about their new neighbors, the report concluded that it was the Settlement's role to help Puerto Ricans assimilate into American society: "the task of assimilation is . . . gigantic. To the Union Settlement, which has aided generations of newcomers to avail themselves of the possibilities

of the new land, the Puerto Rican influx offers a great challenge."<sup>33</sup> Their determination seemed honorable, but how exactly would they overcome this challenge?

Diaz was the perfect solution to their problems—he had both the official credentials and the social intelligence to deal with gang members. A year after the report, William Kirk hired Diaz as the teenage supervisor. Two weeks into the program, Diaz's credibility already was tested. Three members of the Rebels, an Italian gang, had vowed to "get rid of the blacks and spics before Christmas." At the time, the Union Settlement had a meager number of black and Puerto Rican members, but Diaz recognized that this was "a power struggle as to who was this new guy who's taking over our program." After Diaz issued a two-week suspension to gang members for bringing weapons into the settlement, one of the Rebel leaders dressed in a "zoot suit, and a long chain below his knee," came up to him and said, "Don't you live at 1062 Colgate Avenue? Don't you have a wife named Alice? Don't you have a daughter named Lisa?" Familiar with such intimidation tactics, Diaz responded, "Motherfucker! You'd better pray that my wife and my daughter don't fall down a flight of stairs or get run over by a taxicab . . . but if anything should happen to them, I'm going after your throat. And it's you and me." Surprised and perhaps pleased by Manny's familiarity with his street language, the Rebel member then laughed and said, "Ok, I'll come back in a couple of weeks." As Diaz explained years later, "that was the point at which I earned my Master's in Social Work, because I dropped all my school training, and I went to being a little gangster in the streets of East Harlem."<sup>34</sup>

It was also the turning point for the Settlement. After this incident, black and Puerto Rican gang members joined the Settlement. By opening up the Settlement to black and Puerto Rican youth, Diaz was able to shape a larger racial transformation of East Harlem as a neighborhood. Settlement organizations, churches, schools, and public housing in East Harlem opened up for blacks and Puerto Ricans, such that by 1960, it became 40 percent Puerto Rican, 30 percent black, and 10 percent Italian.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, during his six years of work as a program director at Union Settlement, Diaz strategically used his leadership to train many other Puerto Ricans. In 1954, he brought Toni Pantoja into the Settlement. Through the Settlement's resources, such as telephones and mimeograph machines, Pantoja, Diaz, and many other Puerto Ricans formed the Hispanic Young Adult Association (HYAA).<sup>36</sup> Through HYAA, Puerto Ricans such as Maria Canino, Josephine Nieves, John Carro, Herman Badillo, and Marta Valle came to learn the basics of community organizing and formed the

Puerto Rican Forum and ASPIRA, an education advocacy group for Puerto Rican youth.<sup>37</sup> Many of them followed the footsteps of Diaz by pursuing degrees in social work and engaging in community organizing through the Settlement. The Settlement's role in organizing them was so crucial that Diaz later claimed that, "if anybody ever writes the history of the development of the Puerto Rican community in New York in accurate terms, the Settlement would have to play the central role, not in the leadership, but in the facilitation."<sup>38</sup>

### JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AND NATIONAL CIVIL RIGHTS: FORGING NEW ALLIANCES TO FIGHT POVERTY

Diaz had successfully trained local Puerto Rican leaders through the Settlement, but by 1960, he became involved in a larger, national movement that aimed to eradicate poverty and racial discrimination. The decade brought a new wave of activists and thinkers across the country who as-



Manny Diaz touring Robert F. Kennedy around the Lower East Side of New York City, c. 1963.

pired to create new modes of political resistance and transformation. By engaging in sit-ins in 1960, black and white college students in Greensboro, North Carolina, introduced a new form of non-violent civil disobedience to a nation hungry for change. That same year, sociologists Richard A. Cloward and Lloyd E. Ohlin proposed a new way to understand juvenile delinquency. By arguing that juvenile delinquency was the result of a "discrepancy between aspiration and opportunity" instead of psychological and cultural pathologies, they called for a "reorganization of slum communities."<sup>39</sup> Cloward and Ohlin's theory became known as the "opportunity theory" since it argued that juvenile delinquents lacked not intelligence or culture, but rather opportunity. When John F. Kennedy became the president in 1961, such a theory led the new administration to create programs that would tackle juvenile delinquency in sixteen locations across the country by solving the problems of poverty rather than cultural pathology. Instead of providing youth with rehabilitative programs, they would offer them jobs and education. By 1962, a group of sociologists, social workers, and public officials in New York City, funded by the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency and the National Institute for Mental Health, decided to launch Mobilization for Youth (MFY) in the Lower East Side, the first experimental anti-poverty program in the country.<sup>40</sup> Having met Diaz through the Columbia University School of Social Work, Richard Cloward referred Diaz to MFY, where he was hired as the director of community affairs and special projects. As the only Puerto Rican staff to be hired full-time in a program located at a predominantly Puerto Rican neighborhood, Diaz would play a crucial role in the organization.

Initially, MFY leaders did not know how to organize Puerto Ricans. Puerto Rican migrants had just become a significant enough presence in the city that public officials began to pay attention to them in the 1950s, but it was not clear whether they should be treated as black or white. The President's Committee Executive Director David Hackett and Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy originally selected the Lower East Side as the first testing laboratory for an anti-poverty program because it was seen as a neighborhood of white immigrants, including Europeans from Poland, the Ukraine, and Italy. According to Herbert Krosney, author of *Beyond Welfare: Poverty in the Supercity* (1966), "the fact that there were whites in the neighborhood made good propaganda and a good public image." Neighborhoods such as Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant, which were known as black neighborhoods, would not get federal funds for their youth programs until the government tested its juvenile delinquency program with a safer, "whiter" neighborhood, argued Krosney.<sup>41</sup>

In reality, however, the Lower East Side's racial and ethnic demography was much more complex than "white." According to Harold Weissman, an MFY director, the Lower East Side was "27 percent Jewish, 26 percent Puerto Rican, 11 percent Italian, 25 percent white, and 8 percent black." The fact that Jews, Puerto Ricans, and Italians were noted at this time as distinct from the 25% *white* population indicates that Puerto Ricans' racial standing may not have been too different from that of poor Jews and Italians—they were not fully white. Union settlement activists and community leaders who self-identified as immigrant or descendant of immigrants hoped that Puerto Rican migrants would follow their own families' path toward assimilation. Despite the presence of darker Puerto Ricans, many of them believed Puerto Ricans' experience of migration was not dissimilar to their own. Leonardo Covello, an Italian school principal of Benjamin Franklin High School, for example, claimed that, "except for the fact that these newcomers [Puerto Ricans] were American citizens by right of birth, there was no difference at all between them and early immigrants."<sup>42</sup>

As MFY workers began to target their work among Puerto Rican youth, however, they discovered they differed drastically from white ethnic youths. Puerto Rican youth formed the majority of the MFY clientele at 67 percent. During the first two years of the program, MFY staff workers initiated various employment training, social action, and community development projects in order to develop leadership among Puerto Rican youth, but none of them had sustaining power. Community development programs fizzled out as soon as staff workers left the organization, and the youth left the jobs as soon as they had satisfied their immediate financial needs.<sup>43</sup> Lacking a common political goal that could tie the interests of staff and youth together, MFY functioned like a mere employment agency.

Then, in the summer of 1963, national political shifts turned the tides for local Puerto Rican communities. Diaz met Bayard Rustin through his wife, Sharon Daniel, who had befriended Rustin through Quaker-sponsored events and civil rights activities. Rustin was at the time organizing the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. When Rustin asked Diaz to bring Puerto Ricans to this national event, Diaz began to recruit people from MFY and other settlement houses throughout the city. He also received help from his friend Gilberto Gerena-Valentín, union organizer of District 65 Retail, Wholesale, and Department Stores Union, who recruited many Puerto Rican union members. Together, they were able to bring more than 2,000 Puerto Ricans to join the march on August 28, 1963.<sup>44</sup>

Diaz and Rustin's collaborative work in organizing the March on Washington bore the first fruits of what became a friendship marked by mutual admiration. By working with Rustin, Diaz observed his outstanding planning skills. Rustin planned the event, which was attended by more than 200,000 peaceful demonstrators, by issuing four memos: the first declared the event and said "hold the date"; the second identified the issues, organizers, and the methods of non-violent protest; the third indicated means of transportation (church buses, trains, etc.); and the fourth detailed a safe return home for the protesters. Diaz later marveled at Rustin's organizing genius: "This guy organized this event off index cards in his back pocket!"<sup>45</sup> Rustin reciprocated Diaz's admiration. As the head organizer of the event, he valued Diaz's contribution to ensure the event was a truly multi-ethnic collective protest. He affectionately termed Diaz the "one percenter" because Diaz "was the one percenter that took one percent [2,000] of the 200,000 people to Washington on the bus."<sup>46</sup>

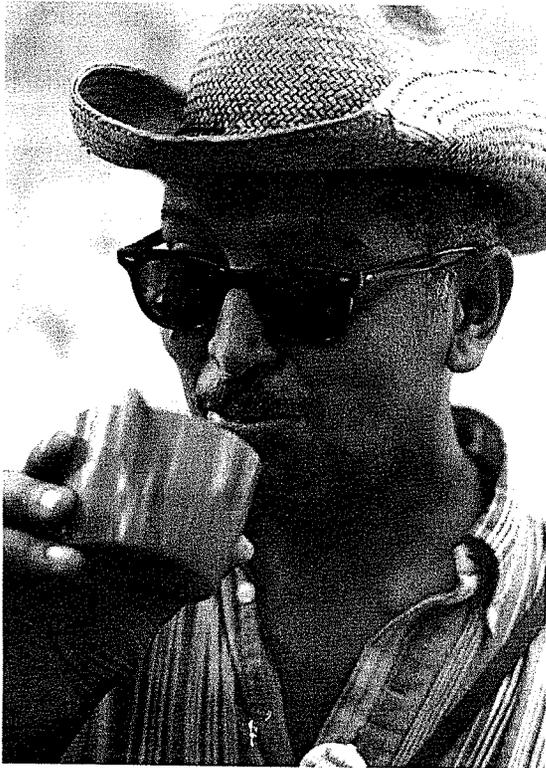
The two thousand Puerto Rican marchers may have seemed insignificant at the rally in Washington, DC, but their participation had a deep impact upon their return home. As one of the directors of MFY, Daniel Kronenfeld, recounted, "as [Puerto Ricans] began to see how the Negro had organized on the East Side and more broadly in the community," they began to "listen to the Negroes because of this collective involvement," and to think that, "it was important for Puerto Ricans to do likewise." Between the winter of 1963 and the summer of 1964, a group of thirty to forty Puerto Rican families met regularly to discuss welfare rights, rent strikes, and paraprofessionals' power. The leadership of the group shifted from the original MFY community organizing staff to a number of "articulate Puerto Rican women."<sup>47</sup> When President Kennedy was assassinated in November of 1963, Diaz gathered Puerto Ricans to a street rally on East 4th Street, inviting emerging Puerto Rican leaders Gerena and Ramón Vélez from Newark to discuss the significance of Kennedy's death.<sup>48</sup>

By the end of 1963, Diaz began to see that he was a part of a social revolution much larger than himself, and even much broader than the goals of MFY. When Puerto Rican mothers from MFY began to protest against the lack of school textbooks, and when Puerto Rican tenants began to organize rent strikes, Diaz recognized that they were reaching for a much more powerful source of help than simple social services—they were laying the foundation for a more permanent community and political infrastructure. By taking on the issues that mattered to them instead of relying on the leadership of white principals, mayors, and teachers, they were following the footsteps of black New Yorkers who had been

organizing rent strikes and parent committees in Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant for much longer. Puerto Rican political activism began to challenge not only the political establishment of the Lower East Side, but also the system of racial discrimination that aimed to keep all “non-whites” under the control of whites.

**FROM THE SCHOOL BOYCOTT TO THE PUERTO RICAN  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT:  
CREATING COALITIONS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**

As Puerto Ricans began to adopt black political tactics, Diaz solidified their political relationship once again by partnering with Rustin in 1964. This time, however, black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers would join hands by focusing on a local problem, which proved to be much more



Diaz at Puerto Rican Community Development Project cookout, c. 1965.

dangerous to the local establishment. Following the March on Washington, Rustin began organizing a citywide school boycott to protest the city's slow progress in desegregating its public schools. Puerto Rican parents in general had not expressed as much interest in school integration plans as black parents, but this would still provide a way for them to express their own grievances against the city's education system.

As Diaz embarked on another joint action with a black civil rights leader, however, he carefully chose his platform of negotiation since he was conscious of Puerto Ricans' lack of political power in comparison to black Americans. Puerto Ricans, as the smaller and newer minority group in the city, possessed much less political clout than blacks.<sup>49</sup> Diaz wanted to ensure that the Puerto Rican perspective was adequately heard within the civil rights leadership. When Rustin invited him to join the twelve-member organizing committee for the school boycott, Diaz predicated his acceptance upon the condition that his Puerto Rican friend Gilberto Gerena-Valentín also be invited to join. When Rustin offered Diaz and Gerena two seats within the twelve-member organizing committee, Gerena and Diaz demanded that the two of them have equal representation as the twelve black members of the committee. Wary of subjecting Puerto Ricans under black control, Gerena claimed, “There are two armies to do battle—one is the black army, one is the Puerto Rican army . . . each army should be able to veto any activity of the other army. The two of us should have the same power as the twelve of [you].” To both of their surprise, Rustin agreed. “You call the shots, all right, you call the shots. Come on in,” he told them. To Diaz, Rustin's decision to grant them such power meant that he was an astute negotiator. “Bayard didn't give a shit as to how we got it, he just wanted us involved. That was the beauty of Bayard—he knew how to negotiate.”<sup>50</sup>

Once Diaz joined the Committee, he delineated the specific interests of the Puerto Rican community that distinguished it from the black community. Along with his friend Roland Cintrón, he presented Puerto Ricans' position in regard to school integration during a meeting with members of the Board of Education on January 13, 1964. He declared that, “it is . . . our contention that, in the heat of the existing dialogue on integration and quality education of the past few years, the center of the stage has been assumed by issues directly affecting the Negro. The Puerto Rican has been a buried statistical appendage to the Negro, the two having been merged into one gross digit.” He argued that this misconception was somewhat “understandable” because up to 20 percent of Puerto Ricans themselves are “identified as Negro through their dark skins.” Blacks were

numerically more significant than Puerto Ricans in New York City, and Puerto Ricans “certainly do share a unity of purpose and goals with the Negro on all these fronts.” Nevertheless, there were “special and unique dimensions to the solution of problems which affect the Puerto Rican in his pursuit of full education.”<sup>51</sup>

First, he emphasized that Puerto Ricans’ needs as a Spanish-speaking migrant group demanded different pedagogical solutions. Second, as recent migrants, Puerto Ricans also lacked blacks’ rich history in the city and therefore needed to be taught Puerto Rican history in order to gain “a positive self-image.” Third, and most importantly, Diaz asserted that Puerto Ricans were not interested in school integration. The Open Enrollment plans and the Free Choice Transfer plans, which were school integration plans, “have no meaning to the Puerto Rican parent.” He explained that, “the Puerto Rican looks at himself as being wholly integrated racially. He rejects the notion he has to seek out white or Negro classmates when within his own culture you find the full range from rosy pink to ebony black.”<sup>52</sup> Not having experienced the history of strict racial segregation as Americans had, Puerto Rican migrants did not share an interest in school integration with black leaders. Why should they bus their children to schools far away from their homes? Why should they harden the segregation of poor quality schools by sending their children to schools outside of their poor neighborhoods? Instead of calling for school integration, Diaz called for an improvement of schools within Puerto Ricans’ own neighborhoods—he asked for more Puerto Rican teachers and more Puerto Rican parents to become involved in parent committees.<sup>53</sup>

Having made clear Puerto Ricans’ unique perspectives, Diaz and Gerena forged a coalition with black educational leaders by leading Puerto Rican parents in the school boycott on February 3, 1964. They also organized a second march to highlight Puerto Rican children’s distinct needs a month later, on March 1. The boycott called for school integration; the march simply called for better education for Puerto Ricans without any reference to race.<sup>54</sup> Despite limited participation by black leaders, Puerto Ricans came out in full force. When Gerena and Diaz saw that Puerto Rican parents responded so positively to such a mass social protest, they took the opportunity to form Puerto Ricans’ first civil rights group, the National Association for Puerto Rican Civil Rights.<sup>55</sup> In its preamble, Gerena explained the specific relationship that Puerto Ricans aimed to adopt with black Americans as a civil rights group alongside blacks, but not of blacks:

We, the Puerto Rican people, in our way of life, do not practice separation of race either by law, by custom, by tradition or by desire. Notwithstanding this and suspectedly because of this, in the nomenclature of race relations on the Continent, we are designated neither White nor Negro, but a special group denominated Puerto Ricans. This objectivity, aggravated by our distinctiveness of culture has made us the victims of the same type of discrimination and social persecution that is visited upon the Negro group of this Country. The result has been to make us more conscious of the justice and righteousness of the cause of the Negro in America today. We therefore, feel impelled to identify ourselves with the Negro’s struggle and lend him our support, while at the same time conserving our own cultural integrity and our own way of life. We, therefore, launch ourselves into the arena of today’s struggles for a full and complete education alongside the Negro with the full knowledge that, by so doing, we are advancing our own cause.<sup>56</sup>

By identifying directly with black Americans, Gerena and Diaz proposed a distinct explanation for the problem of Puerto Rican poverty. Recent immigration, language handicaps, and cultural unfamiliarity all hindered Puerto Rican advancement, but these two leaders believed that racial discrimination was the primary cause of this poverty.

Many Puerto Ricans disagreed with Gerena and Diaz. To them, racism was an inevitable part of their culture. If it was considered a problem at all, it was an individual one that could be solved by each dark-skinned Puerto Rican marrying a lighter-skinned person. By doing so, they would reinforce the myth set out by individuals such as José Celso Barbosa, the most prominent black political leader in Puerto Rico’s history, who advocated that one could “*mejorar la raza*” (better the race) by marrying lighter.<sup>57</sup> In the mean time, while they tried to “whiten” the “Puerto Rican race” generation by generation, they hoped slowly to move up the social ladder like many other Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants had. They did not believe that the established structures of power in the U.S., such as the Board of Education, political parties, labor unions, and housing administrations, were prejudiced against them. In the words of a Puerto Rican leader in the 1960s, “their reaction to a poor school is, when I can earn a little money, we’ll move to a better area or go back to Puerto Rico . . . a little education, a better job, and you’re equal.”<sup>58</sup> Such were the hopes of an

assimilationist Puerto Rican—individual hard-work would guarantee them a way up, so there was no need for an organized social protest.

To Diaz, however, such hopes were foolish dreams. He had given them up after experiencing white racism in the World War II army and, most recently, in the Lower East Side. As soon as Puerto Rican mothers from MFY began to organize themselves and demand better housing and education, newspapers such as the *New York Times* began to denounce the group as “red-infested,” “ridden by scandal,” and hopelessly inefficient. MFY leaders pleaded with public officials in the city to be given a fair chance to “stage orderly protests against unfavorable conditions” and simply to practice democracy, but their actions were dismissed as “communist” and “subversive.” Like many other civil rights organizations stifled by anti-Communist hysteria, the MFY became subject to vicious attacks by those who felt that they brought too much change too rapidly. Paul Screvane, chairman of the Mayor’s Poverty Council and the Anti-Poverty Operations Board, had come to the conclusion that the group was too unpredictable and thus that it needed to be brought under city officials’ examination and control.<sup>59</sup> Such experiences taught Diaz that Puerto Ricans’ advancement constantly would be stifled by more powerful white leaders and that they would perpetually be treated as second-class citizens. Identifying with blacks’ *de facto* status as second-class citizens, Diaz began to see that adopting black political tactics actually might help Puerto Ricans form political cohesion as “Puerto Rican” in a white-dominant world.

By 1964, several other Puerto Rican leaders began to reach similar conclusions. Antonia Pantoja, who was working at the Commission on Intergroup Relations (COIR), also began to see that the plight of Puerto Ricans and black Americans might not be too different. Although she previously had worked exclusively with Puerto Rican groups such as ASPIRA and the Puerto Rican Forum in the early 1960s, she began to understand the nature of racism in the U.S. by working with members of the NAACP, the Urban League, and the American Jewish Committee through the Commission. She realized that in the U.S. it did not matter whether she was as dark as a *negra* (dark-skinned with kinky hair) or as light as a *grifa* (light-skinned with kinky hair). As she worked closely with COIR directors, she confessed, “for the first time, I understood that I was a black woman.” She began to meet with black leaders of the Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited-Associated Community Teams (HARYOU-ACT), who were organizing an anti-poverty program in Central Harlem. By working with them, she began to envision how Puerto Ricans could develop a similar plan to attack poverty within their community.<sup>60</sup>

When President Lyndon B. Johnson announced his ambitious “War on Poverty” agenda in the summer of 1964, he inadvertently opened up the civil rights agenda to Puerto Ricans. During his first State of the Union address on June 8, 1964, he called for “an unconditional war to defeat poverty” and proposed the “maximum feasible participation” by poor people themselves to determine their path out of poverty. Although most Americans understood that the War on Poverty was a program designed to alleviate *black* poverty, Puerto Ricans seized the racially neutral language of the legislation to fight against their own poor conditions. Following the President’s announcement, a group of black, white, and Puerto Rican civil rights activists in New York City gathered to discuss Puerto Ricans’ need to create independent structures of power. The designers of the HARYOU-ACT’s program, Cyril Tyson and Kenneth Clark, and Director of MFY Richard Cloward met with Pantoja, Diaz, and Gerena. Together, they concluded that the power base of Puerto Ricans in New York City was severely limited. Because the only institution that represented their needs was the Office of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Puerto Ricans had limited access to lobby for change. The Commonwealth Office’s mandate was to ease adjustment issues for incoming Puerto Ricans, but not to challenge discriminatory practices. Puerto Ricans did not have any civil rights organizations equivalent to black Americans’ National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Urban League (NUL), or the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), all of which had extensive national networks. Furthermore, Puerto Ricans lacked a physical space that they could control, such as black Harlem, because they were scattered throughout seventeen different neighborhoods in New York City.<sup>61</sup> The absence of a Puerto Rican neighborhood meant that they could not apply for federal funding based on neighborhood affiliation like black leaders in Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant had done. If Puerto Ricans were scattered throughout the city, how would each cluster of Puerto Ricans apply for funding separately?

Cloward offered them the perfect solution—he called it the “holding company.”<sup>62</sup> He suggested that a core group of Puerto Ricans apply for federal anti-poverty funding through a holding company, which would then develop contracts with different groups of Puerto Rican organizations scattered throughout the city. The holding company would offer a salary for the director and would pay for rent and telephone services, but the rest would be left to the devices of each organization in East Harlem, the South Bronx, Williamsburg, and other neighborhoods. Diaz, Gerena, and Pantoja all agreed.<sup>63</sup> Under the leadership of Pantoja, the Puerto Rican

Forum submitted a proposal and received \$42,000 from the city's administration.<sup>64</sup> Through Gerena's hometown groups, which were Puerto Rican groups organized by the island hometowns from which they came, a hundred Puerto Rican community leaders signed up to head anti-poverty programs in their neighborhoods. Through Diaz's work experience with the MFY, these Puerto Rican leaders began to learn the basics about community development and youth leadership programs. After six months of training, these Puerto Rican leaders, along with several Puerto Rican social workers from the Puerto Rican Forum, officially formed the Puerto Rican Community Development Project (PRCDP).<sup>65</sup> Of the PRCDP, Diaz later explained, "that was the first time these organizations were able to breathe. It was starters. It worked beautifully."<sup>66</sup>

A year later, Diaz was able to secure additional funding to the PRCDP by talking directly to Sargent Shriver, director of the Office of Equal Opportunities in Washington, DC. Diaz had met Shriver while working for the MFY, and was thus able to secure an appointment with him. He took along with him four of his good friends: lawyer Joe Erazo, Reverend Ruben Dario Colón, businessman Luis Hernandez, and labor organizer Gerena. When they stated the case of Puerto Ricans in New York City to Shriver, he responded positively, but demanded an immediate proposal: "Get thee a hotel, get thee a secretary, and get thee a proposal on my desk by 9 am tomorrow morning." After staying up all night, they submitted a proposal to Shriver the following morning, and received \$3.5 million for the PRCDP. This was an incredible feat—\$3.5 million was more than they had ever expected. It was ten times less than the \$40 million that black anti-poverty groups in New York City had received, but they knew that Puerto Rican New Yorkers were insignificant to most Washington officials. Filled with great excitement and hope, Diaz and others returned to New York to launch the nation's first Puerto Rican anti-poverty program.<sup>67</sup> As Robert de León, another anti-poverty leader, recounted, "I was convinced we were going to end the War on Poverty. Because there was so much money, we thought, my God, we cannot go wrong. We're gonna do this."<sup>68</sup>

### CONCLUSION: A LEGACY OF CROSS-ETHNIC ALLIANCES

As many U.S. historians have shown, León was wrong. They could not do it, and they did not do it. As many came to see after the years of great hope and anticipation, solving the problem of poverty required much more than simply giving the poor an "opportunity" for a job—they needed real jobs. Anti-poverty leaders themselves came to see that they needed much

more than money to organize their communities; they needed sustained relationships of trust and a common vision that would help people overcome petty competition for money or positions of power.

For black and Puerto Rican anti-poverty leaders in particular, they needed a much broader vision than a simple call for "minority" rights or a common "white" enemy in order to work with each other—they needed to understand how racism worked differently among their particular communities, and how they themselves perpetuated racist patterns of thought with one another. They needed to see that black xenophobia was no less damaging than white xenophobia, and Puerto Rican racism was no less traumatizing than white racism.

Nevertheless, many of them came to see each other as common victims of racialization and colonization. Puerto Ricans and blacks both were U.S. citizens, but they were accorded a second-class status and treated as a racial "Other." In many ways, the discrepancy between their official and actual status led both groups to feel more resentment regarding the inferiority imposed upon them, at the same time that it provided more freedom to voice their grievances. Unlike typical immigrants, Puerto Rican protesters did not have to fear deportation. As Puerto Ricans began to see that they were being racialized in the same way as black Americans, and as black Americans began to view themselves as subjects of "internal colonialism," they found a common identity as colonial and racial subjects.<sup>69</sup>

The lives of Diaz and his allies thus left a deep legacy of cross-racial coalition building for many blacks and Puerto Ricans who began to see both groups through a common lens. Diaz insisted that it was always "issues" that made strong coalitions possible. To him, a coalition-builder needed to ask four questions before committing to an issue: 1) is it relevant? 2) is it understandable and accessible? 3) is it of critical importance and 4) is it feasible or workable?"<sup>70</sup>

Cross-ethnic alliances were not merely professional. Diaz's three marriages to women of Jewish, Scottish, and Puerto Rican ancestry illustrated Diaz's choice to trust people across ethnic lines. His public reputation as somebody who was "tight with everybody" demonstrated that creating relationships of trust was a way of life to him. For Diaz, having a racial or ethnic identity entailed defending the rights of their group whenever such rights were trampled upon, but it did not create circles of absolute inclusion nor exclusion. Diaz allowed people of all shades and ethnicities to enter his circles of friendship and alliance, but he constantly tested which of them he could trust. He argued that healthy coalitions were built not as a

result of “progressive and enlightened humanitarianism,” but rather as a result of “conflicting and contending social movements reflecting different philosophies, value systems, programmatic strategies and political constraints.”<sup>71</sup> Understanding that conflict is a necessary component of coalition building, Diaz protected himself from the interracial bickering that came to poison many black-Puerto Rican alliances in the late 1960s and 1970s.<sup>72</sup> He did not believe that being “black” and being “Puerto Rican” were mutually exclusive, neither did he believe that having trust and conflict were antithetical to each other. His flexibility ultimately allowed him to create lasting coalitions with both communities.

With such personal and political lessons, Diaz and other leaders continued to fight for justice even after their anti-poverty programs folded.<sup>73</sup> Despite their limited access to established forms of influence, Puerto Ricans established independent structures of political power in New York City and throughout the Northeast region in the 1960s and 1970s. Organizations such as the PRCDP also paved the way for the next generation of Puerto Rican activists to fight for their place. In the late 1960s and 1970s, young Puerto Ricans formed the Young Lords, Taller Boricua, the Center of Puerto Rican Studies, the Nuyorican Poets Café, and many others, in part because they had grown up watching their mothers, fathers, uncles, aunts, teachers, and community leaders fight for justice.

Diaz was an “*abuelo* of the revolution,” a grandfather of the revolution. An elected state congresswoman, Nydia Velázquez, who was one of the Puerto Rican leaders who followed Diaz’s generation, stated after his death in 2006 that, “From his involvement in the civil rights movement, to his work on behalf of gang prevention, and advocacy for higher education—Manny has given scores of Hispanic Americans the tools they need to empower themselves, their families, and their communities.”<sup>74</sup> Americans, both native-born and immigrant, everyday are still testing whether these tools promote better democratic practices. That we have not arrived at a good, satisfying answer points perhaps to the imperfection of their vision, but also to its power in capturing the human desire for justice and equality.

## NOTES

1. The authors express their appreciation to Lillian Jiménez, José Morales, José Morales, Jr., and Blanca Vazquez for their commitment to chronicle the life of Manuel Diaz, Jr., and for their generosity in sharing their materials with us; Professors Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Lizabeth Cohen, and James Jennings for their scholarly support in the development of our academic interests and Peter Park and Steven Schapiro for inspiring early sharing of this work and for their thoughtful critiques; as well as the readers

from the *Journal of American Ethnic History* for their encouragement and thorough review of the manuscript.

2. Gilberto Gerena-Valentín will be referred as “Gerena” in this paper since this is the name that most of his Puerto Rican compatriots used to refer to him. In Spanish surnames, the first surname (i.e., Gerena) is received from the father and the second (i.e., Valentín) is from the mother.

3. Leonard Buder, “Boycott Cripples City Schools; Absences 360,000 Above Normal; Negroes and Puerto Ricans Unite,” *New York Times*, February 4, 1964.

4. Patricia Cayo Sexton, *Spanish Harlem* (New York, 1965), 50; Buder, “Boycott Cripples City Schools.”

5. Fred Powlidge, “1,800 Join March for Better Schools for Puerto Ricans,” *New York Times*, March 2, 1964; “Civil Rights Leader Denies Link to Reds,” *New York Times*, February 20, 1964.

6. Correspondence with Gilberto Gerena-Valentín by Sonia Lee, September 12, 2005; conversation with Manny Diaz, José Morales, and José Morales, Jr., by Sonia Lee, January 21, 2005.

7. Mark Q. Sawyer, Yisilernis Peña, Jim Sidanius, “Cuban Exceptionalism: Group-Based Hierarchy and the Dynamics of Patriotism in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba” *Du Bois Review* 1, #1 (2004): 98.

8. Renzo Sereno as quoted in Samuel Betances, “The Prejudice of Having No Prejudice in Puerto Rico,” *The Rican* (Spring 1973): 25. According to psychiatrist Renzo Sereno, who conducted interviews with 160 white and non-white Puerto Rican veterans of World War II, white Puerto Ricans who claimed that Puerto Rico had no racial discrimination were motivated by a desire to protect themselves from American racism: “It was the uncertainty of their social position that caused the white Puerto Ricans to voice opposition to race prejudice in the United States. It was that same uncertainty, according to Sereno, that caused white Puerto Ricans to exclude blacks and non-whites from their fraternities in order to reassure themselves that they were white.” See Renzo Sereno, “Cryptomelanism: A Study of Color Relations and Personal Insecurity in Puerto Rico,” *Psychiatry* 10 (1947): 266.

9. A century earlier, Irish immigrants had faced a similar dilemma as that of Puerto Ricans since they too had been rural, poor immigrants who worked in the bottom of the economic system as domestic servants and farm laborers alongside blacks. The Irish eventually became “white,” but this process was carefully orchestrated by the Democratic Party as well as the Irish themselves. See David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York, 1991); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York, 1995); Matthew Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA, 1998).

10. Interview with Manny Diaz by Blanca Vazquez, October 3, 2002.

11. To this date, there has been little significant historical attention paid to the Puerto Rican participation in the U.S. army during World War II. There are a few works that mention it briefly. In Jorge Rodríguez Beruff, *Política militar y dominación: Puerto Rico en el contexto Latinoamericano* (Río Piedras, Puerto Rico, 1988), Beruff notes that more than 75,000 Puerto Ricans enlisted to serve in the U.S. army in World War II. Acosta-Belén et al. argue in Edna Acosta-Belén . . . [et al.], “Adiós, Borinquen querida.” *The Puerto Rican Diaspora, Its History, and Contributors* (Albany, NY, 2000), 52 that Puerto Rican soldiers who fought for the U.S. suffered a similar kind of racial subjugation as black American soldiers since they were allowed to exercise leadership only as non-commissioned officers during World War II and did not participate in active combat until the Korean War in 1950.

12. Interview with Manny Diaz by Sonia Lee, August 18, 2005.

13. Interview with Manny Diaz by Sonia Lee, August 18, 2005.

14. Interview with Manny Diaz by Sonia Lee, August 18, 2005.

15. Post exchange is a service mark used for a store on a military base that sells goods to military personnel and their families or to authorized civilians. From the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition (Boston, 2000).
16. Interview with Manny Diaz by Blanca Vazquez, October 3, 2002.
17. Interview with Manny Diaz by Blanca Vazquez, October 3, 2002.
18. Virginia E. Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City* (Berkeley, CA, 1983), 195; César Andrew Iglesias, ed., *Memoirs of Bernardo Vega: A Contribution to the History of the Puerto Rican Community in New York* (New York, 1984) [first edited as *Memorias de Bernardo Vega* by César Andrew Iglesias and published by Ediciones Huracán in 1977, translated by Juan Flores in 1984].
19. "Puerto Ricans Get Campaign Warning," *New York Times*, October 17, 1949.
20. Operation Bootstrap, an industrialization program designed by New Deal administrators in the 1930s and implemented through the U.S. Labor Department and the *Partido Popular Democrático* (Democratic Popular Party) in 1948, replaced U.S. investment in the sugar industry with a new plan for modernization and industrialization. Although new industrial jobs were created, they did not compensate for the jobs lost in the sugar industry, which created a high unemployment rate on the island. Simultaneously, the establishment of air links between Puerto Rico and New York City after the war facilitated the migration of Puerto Ricans to the mainland. Consequently, Puerto Rican migration to New York City skyrocketed in the 1940s; between 1940 and 1950, the Puerto Rican population in New York City jumped from 61,463 to 187,420. See Sherrie L. Baver, *The Political Economy of Colonialism: The State and Industrialization in Puerto Rico* (Westport, CT, 1993).
21. As historian Michael Lapp has argued, the Migration Division of the Office of the Commonwealth benefited Puerto Rican workers by offering counsel and referrals to employment agencies, but it ultimately failed to build an ethnic constituency because, unlike organizations that served black and Jewish minorities, such as the Urban League, the NAACP, or the American Jewish Congress, the Migration Division had no members. Individual Puerto Rican migrants thus had no voice in formulating the agency's policies. By remaining as a government agency that took orders from San Juan rather than responding to grievances from Puerto Ricans in New York, the Migration Division failed to provide a vehicle for political expression for Puerto Rican migrants in the city. Read more in Michael Lapp, "Managing Migration: The Migration Division of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans in New York City, 1948–1968" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1991), 145–46, 334–35.
22. Interview with Manny Diaz by Blanca Vazquez, October 3, 2002. More than ten years later, their paths continued to cross. While Diaz was organizing black parents from Baden Street Settlement in Rochester, New York, in the early 1960s, he was able to invite Malcolm X to speak to a crowd of more than one thousand persons.
23. Interview with Manny Diaz by Gene Sklar, May 19, 1994, in Box 3, Folder 7, Union Settlement Association Records (hereafter USAR), Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University.
24. Interview with Manny Diaz by Lillian Jiménez, Latino Educational Media Center, February 16, 2006.
25. Eric C. Schneider, *Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings: Youth Gangs in Post-war New York* (Princeton, NJ, 1999), 25.
26. Schneider, *Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings*, 71.
27. Richie Pérez, "From Assimilation to Annihilation: Puerto Rican Images in U.S. Politics" in *Centro Journal* 2, #8 (Spring 1990): 16. Pérez has an extensive list of films that stereotyped Puerto Rican boys as juvenile delinquents and young criminals in the post-war era. They include, among many others, *City Across the River* (1949), *Knock on Any*

- Door* (1949), *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), *Rock, Rock, Rock* (1956), *Cry Tough* (1959), *The Young Savages* (1961), and *West Side Story* (1961).
28. While blacks and Puerto Ricans comprised only 13 percent of the city's population in 1950, they made up 37 percent of the displaced. A survey of Puerto Rican tenants in the mid-1950s revealed that Puerto Ricans paid more in monthly rents (\$49 on average) than non-whites (\$43) and whites (\$37). From Schneider, *Vampires, Dragons, and Egyptian Kings*, 42–44.
29. Jewell Bellush and Murray Hausknecht, "Relocation and Managed Mobility," in *Urban Renewal: People, Politics, and Planning*, ed. Jewell Bellush and Murray Hausknecht (Garden City, NY, 1967), 371.
30. Richard A. Cloward and Lloyd E. Ohlin, *Delinquency and Opportunity: A Theory of Delinquent Gangs* (Glencoe, IL, 1960).
31. Dan Wakefield, *Island in the City: the World of Spanish Harlem* (Boston, 1959), 16.
32. Sexton, *Spanish Harlem*, 9.
33. "New York City's Puerto Ricans: Asset or Liability?" A Statement Relating to the Program and Needs of the Union Settlement, 1952, 237 E. 104th St. in Box 10, Folder 10, USAR.
34. Manny Diaz, "Gangs—An East Side Story," in Box 3, Folder 6, USAR; Interview with Manny Diaz by Gene Sklar, May 19, 1994.
35. "Metro North Moves Mountains," *The Reporter*, 1966, Box 13, Folder 20, James Weldon Johnson Community Center Records, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture; Wakefield, *Island in the City*, 16. In the 1960s, a racial gradient paralleled the geography of East Harlem: going from east to west, Italians resided between the East River and Third Avenue, then Puerto Ricans lived between Third Avenue and Fifth Avenue, and finally blacks lived west of Fifth Avenue and into Central Harlem.
36. The initial members of HYAA included, among many, others José Morales, Louis Núñez, Antonia Pantoja, Josephine Nieves, Maria Canino, and Yolanda Sanchez. Conversation with Manny Diaz, José Morales, and José Morales, Jr., by Sonia Lee, January 11, 2005.
37. ASPIRA took its name from the Spanish verb "aspirar," to aspire.
38. Interview with Manny Diaz by Gene Sklar, May 19, 1994.
39. Cloward and Ohlin, *Delinquency and Opportunity* 108, 211. In addition, Cloward co-authored, with Frances Fox Piven, the influential book *Regulating the Poor: The Function of Public Welfare* (New York, 1971).
40. Herbert Krosney, *Beyond Welfare: Poverty in the Supercity* (New York, 1966), 3–8.
41. Krosney, *Beyond Welfare*, 19.
42. Leonardo Covello with Guido D'Agostino, *The Teacher in the Urban Community: A Half-Century in City Schools* (1958; Totowa, NJ, 1970), 260.
43. Harold H. Weissman, "Overview of Employment Opportunities," in *Employment and Educational Services in the Mobilization for Youth Experience*, ed. Harold H. Weissman (New York, 1969), 27–28; Beverly Luther, "Negro Youth and Social Action" in *Individual and Group Services in the Mobilization for Youth Experience*, ed. Harold H. Weissman (New York, 1969), 151–53.
44. Interview with Manny Diaz by Sonia Lee, August 18, 2005.
45. Phone conversation between Manny Diaz and Ande Diaz, September 30, 2005.
46. Interview with Manny Diaz by Blanca Vazquez, January 29, 2003.
47. Daniel Kronenfeld, "A Case History of a Block Association," in *Community Development in the Mobilization for Youth Experience*, ed. Harold H. Weissman (New York, 1969), 35.
48. Conversation with Manny Diaz, José Morales, and José Morales, Jr., by Sonia Lee, January 29, 2005.

49. By 1960, blacks comprised 14 percent of the city's population, but Puerto Ricans made up a little over half of that amount at 7.9 percent. Lighter-skinned Puerto Ricans may have had an easier time getting jobs than black Americans, but Puerto Ricans as a community lacked blacks' national political influence.

50. Interview with Manny Diaz by Sonia Lee, July 28, 2005; correspondence with Gilberto Gerena-Valentín by Sonia Lee, September 12, 2005.

51. Manny Diaz and Roland Cintrón, "School Integration and Quality Education," January 13, 1964, Microform 11, Bayard Rustin Papers, 194-1987, (Frederick, MD, 1988), Government Documents and Microforms, Harvard University.

52. Diaz and Cintrón, "School Integration and Quality Education."

53. Diaz and Cintrón, "School Integration and Quality Education." Diaz's statement that Puerto Ricans were not interested in racial integration has been echoed by several other Puerto Rican community leaders and scholars, such as Sonia Nieto. As a former teacher in P.S. 25, New York City's first bilingual school, Nieto claimed that "integration was viewed as a largely black and white issue, and Puerto Ricans and others who did not fit neatly into these categories were often excluded from consideration. Language was also becoming a much more central issue to most Puerto Ricans. As a result, bilingual education became the cornerstone of educational quality for Puerto Ricans and other Latinos." See Sonia Nieto, ed., *Puerto Rican Students in U.S. Schools* (Mahwah, NJ, 2000), 20.

54. Fred Powledge, "1,800 Join March for Better Schools for Puerto Ricans," *New York Times*, March 2, 1964.

55. Other Puerto Ricans involved in the National Association for Puerto Rican Civil Rights included Mario Abreu, Herman Badillo, Rev. Rubén Darío Colón, Rev. Pablo Cotto, Antolín Flores, Monserrate Flores, Rev. Father Walter Janer, Ramón Martínez, José Monserrat, José Morales, Jr., Carlos Ríos, Irma Vidal Santaella, Paul Sánchez, George Santiago, Robert Winston, and Marty Gold. From "National Association for Puerto Rican Civil Rights Meets for First Annual Convention on April 3rd, 1964," in Box 2, Folder 3, 5206P Series, National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees (Local 1199) Records, School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Kheel Center, Cornell University.

56. "National Association for Puerto Rican Civil Rights: Draft Resolution on the Education of the Puerto Rican Child in New York City, February 6, 1964," in Microfilm 11, Bayard Rustin Papers; Sexton, *Spanish Harlem*, 48.

57. Betances, "The Prejudice of Having No Prejudice in Puerto Rico," in *The Rican* (Winter 1972): 51.

58. Puerto Rican leader as quoted in David Rogers, *110 Livingston Street: Politics and Bureaucracy in the New York City Schools* (New York, 1968), 125.

59. Krosney, *Beyond Welfare*, 31; Clayton Knowles, "Screwane to Scan Poverty Budget," *New York Times*, July 2, 1964; "Is Democracy the Answer?" *New York Times*, November 6, 1964.

60. Antonia Pantoja, *Memoir of a Visionary: Antonia Pantoja* (Houston, TX, 2002), 86.

61. Diaz conducted a study in which he pointed out Puerto Ricans' wide distribution throughout the city's seventeen neighborhoods. In 1960, they composed 44.2 percent of the South Bronx, 35 percent of East Harlem, 28.8 percent of Williamsburg, 23.2 percent of Brownsville, 20.9 percent of South Brooklyn-Red Hook, 18.8 percent of Hamilton Grange-Washington Heights, and 12.1 percent of Manhattan Park West. From Peter Khiss, "Puerto Ricans Plan Self-Help Program," *New York Times*, March 16, 1964.

62. According to HARYOU-ACT designer Cyril Tyson, PRCDDP founders wanted it to be a non-profit organization that would receive grants for various programs. Cloward was well aware of the then use of "holding companies" as a business tool to amass and control companies from a central structure. Diaz hoped it would be used as a tool for non-

profit organizations to spin off new structures. Email correspondence with Cyril Tyson by Ande Diaz, January 17, 2007.

63. Interview with Manny Diaz by Sonia Lee, July 28, 2005.

64. Pantoja, *Memoirs of a Visionary*, 111-19.

65. Interview with Manny Diaz by Sonia Lee, July 28, 2005; Puerto Rican Forum, *The Puerto Rican Community Development Project: Un Proyecto Puertorriqueño de Ayuda Mutua para el Desarrollo de la Comunidad* (New York, 1975). Puerto Rican leaders who headed PRCDDP included Francisco Trilla, Joseph Erazo, Erasto Torres, Maria Canino, Pablo Cotto, Monserrate Flores, Julio Hernandez, Luis Quero Chiesa, Max Sanoguet, and Josephine Nieves.

66. Interview with Manny Diaz by Sonia Lee, July 28, 2005.

67. Conversation with Manny Diaz, José Morales, and José Morales, Jr., by Sonia Lee, January 22, 2005.

68. Interview with Robert de León by Sonia Lee, July 21, 2005.

69. Robert Blauner, *Racial Oppression in America* (New York, 1972); Ramón Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (Berkeley, CA, 2003), 146, 153; Suzanne Oboler, *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (RE)presentation in the United States* (Minneapolis, MN, 1995), 42. Blauner was one of the first scholars to argue that black Americans were "internal colonial" subjects. He made the primary distinction between different forms of incorporation of diverse ethnic/racial groups within the United States by arguing that European "immigrants" were incorporated as wage labor, while "internal colonial" groups such as African Americans suffered coerced forms of labor. Grosfoguel expands on Blauner's observation by arguing that both African Americans and Puerto Ricans can be considered "colonial subjects" if we broaden the definition of "colonial situations" as "cultural, political, and economic oppression of subordinate racialized/ethnic groups by dominant racial/ethnic groups with or without the existence of colonial administrations." Oboler echoes a similar argument by claiming that blacks and Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans/Chicanos all have been treated as second-class citizens.

70. Interview with Manny Diaz by Ande Diaz, March 18, 2006.

71. Manuel Diaz, "The Shaping of Social Welfare Policy," paper commissioned on State/Local Relations by Cesar A. Perales, Commissioner of the New York State Department of Social Services, and presented at the Tarrytown Conference, November 13-15, 1983. The paper was published in a report by the same name with a subtitle of "One Year Later" in 1984.

72. Ramón Vélez, director of the Hunts Point Multi-Service Center, was the most famous Puerto Rican leader in New York City who advocated Puerto Ricans' civil rights at the expense of blacks' civil rights, but black and Puerto Rican competition for anti-poverty money was prevalent in the late 1960s and early 1970s. See Fred Barbaro, "Ethnic Resentment" in *Black/Brown/White Relations: Race Relations in the 1970s*, ed. Charles V. Willie (New Brunswick, NJ, 1977); Julio Morales, *Puerto Rican Poverty and Migration: We Just Had to Try Elsewhere* (New York, 1986), especially chapter 3 on "Black-Puerto Rican Competition in New York City: The Inevitable Systemic Outcome"; Angelo Falcón "Black/Latino Politics, Black/Latino Communities" in *Puerto Rico Libre 7* (Summer 1985); Angelo Falcón, "Black and Latino Politics in New York City: Race and Ethnicity in a Changing Urban Context," in *Latinos and the Political System*, ed. F. Chris Garcia (Notre Dame, IN, 1988); José E. Cruz, "Inter-minority Relations in Urban Settings: Lessons from the Black-Puerto Rican Experience," in *Black and Multiracial Politics in America*, ed. Yvette M. Alex-Assensoh and Lawrence J. Hanks (New York, 2000).

73. Diaz later served as the Northeast Regional Director of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Senior Vice President of the Urban Coalition, and Associate

Professor of Social Policy at Fordham University School of Social Service. Pantoja founded Boricua College and the Puerto Rican Research and Resource Center in Washington, DC, in 1973, worked as Associate Professor at the School of Social Work at San Diego State University, and received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1996.

74. Nydia M. Velázquez, Congresswoman (D-NY), Press release upon learning of the death of Manuel Diaz, March 27, 2006.