CHAPTER 6

HOW A FEW STUDENTS TRANSFORMED THE IVORY TOWER: PUERTO RICAN STUDIES AND ITS (R)EVOLUTION AT BROOKLYN COLLEGE

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Legend has it that in the Spring of 1969 Milga Morales stood on the desk of Brooklyn College’s Vice President of Student Affairs and raised the Puerto Rican flag declaring, “Viva Puerto Rico!”—a rallying cry of unity for representation in the ivory tower.¹ She was a founding member of the year-old Puerto Rican Alliance, an organization consisting of a few first-generation college students, that actively demonstrated for inclusion of Puerto Ricans, their history and culture in the City University of New York (CUNY). This is just one moment in the struggle for Puerto Rican Studies during the tumultuous 1960s that successfully established the nation’s first Institute of Puerto Rican Studies in September 1969, leading to a full-fledged department in 1970. Less than three decades later in 1998, sitting behind that same desk and in that same office, Morales became the first Puerto Rican/Latinx² Brooklyn College Dean of Students and in 2010 the Vice President of Student Affairs. Some might call that poetic justice. Activists call that vision, courage, audacity, sacrifice, and solidarity.
Alongside and inspired by non-Latinx Black activists, Puerto Ricans rose up in the midst of the Civil Rights movements in response to the dire situation their communities were experiencing. Teetering on despair, they found the inner power to declare, ¡Basta Ya! (Enough Already!). It was time to mobilize, organize, and push back against the abuse, neglect, racism, and injustices that were simultaneously obvious and obfuscated. Their luchas (struggles) brought forth historic achievements in U.S. academia, including the creation of the Brooklyn College (BC) Department of Puerto Rican Studies (PRS), preceded by the Institute of Puerto Rican Studies.4

THE BIRTHING PANGS OF PRS: CHALLENGES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

When a few Puerto Rican students joined the campus anti-Vietnam War demonstration on April 27, 1968, it marked the beginning of numerous actions that ultimately resulted in PRS at BC. In May, student members of the W.E.B. DuBois Club; Brooklyn League of Afro-American Collegians (BLAC); a handful of Puerto Rican students (some who identified as Black); and the mostly white middle-class Jewish Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), including the President of the Student Government (College of Liberal Arts and Sciences), Michael Novick, disrupted the Faculty Council meeting and later engaged in a 16-hour sit-in at the Registrar’s Office, demanding an increase in Black and Puerto Rican student enrollment, faculty, and courses. Numbering nearly 31,000 students, “1,002 were Negroes [a term used at the time referring to Black people] and 204 were Puerto Ricans”; there were “24 Negroes of the 767 full-time faculty”; no numbers were provided for Puerto Rican faculty members (Kihss 1968). Protesters were jeered and occasionally attacked by their counterparts. Although students were arrested and suspended in both incidents, they made some inroads. For example, Dean George Peck instructed academic departments to create such courses immediately. During this time, the Puerto Rican Alliance (PRA) was formed with a handful of Puerto Rican students, many of whom had entered college a few years earlier via the NYS-sponsored SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge) and Educational Opportunity Programs. The Puerto Rican activists became aware that other student groups were demanding an Afro-American Studies Department and Institute and they
became involved in similar efforts for Puerto Rican students. By Spring 1969, they joined BLAC, W.E.B. Dubois Club, and SDS in formulating and advocating “18 Demands”—opportunities and equity for Black and Puerto Rican students—to redress the status quo at Brooklyn College. Antonio “Tony” Nieves participated in the Central Committee of both BLAC and PRA, consisting of six men and two women who designed a definitive platform for the allied students (Nieves 2019). The “18 Demands” had two guiding principles—“If Brooklyn College does not function for Black and Puerto Rican students, it should not function,” and “These demands are non-negotiable” (Brooklyn College Department of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies Archives, n.d. circa 1969; Puerto Rican Alliance, n.d. circa 1970). The demands went public in April 1969 with 150 Black and Puerto Rican students and 40 white students occupying Acting President Peck’s office. In May, the activist campus groups engaged in various demonstrations: sit-ins, takeovers, the burning of a pig’s head on the quad, minor vandalism, pulling fire alarms, and small fires (Nieves 2019). As a result, in the pre-dawn hours of May 12th, 17 students were arrested in their homes across four boroughs plus two others shortly thereafter (Nieves 2019). They spent four days at Riker’s Island, were each charged with 18 felonies and five misdemeanors that carried a cumulative sentence of 228 years and $15,000 bail (Biondi 2013, 168). The “BC 19” bail was reduced to $6,500 since the students did not have any previous arrests, and only students of color were arrested even though there were white students from SDS involved. U.S. Representative Shirley Chisholm, a Brooklyn College alumna, helped raise money from local community and religious leaders (Biondi 2013, 169); some BLAC and PRA women also rallied to raise bail monies, and some supporters put up their homes as collateral (Nieves 2019). A year later, due to lack of evidence and with a letter from the newly appointed President John Kneller stating that he considered the case against the BC 19 closed and would rather have the students complete their educational goals, a deal was made to expunge the records after a short probationary period (Brooklyn College 1970). The heavy-handedness of law enforcement galvanized much fervor among the student body that continued to advocate for the 18 demands, as well as dropping the charges against the BC 19, and demanding that the NYPD vacate the campus (Biondi 2013, 170).
Students rallied for social and educational justice across CUNY and several emergency meetings of the CUNY Board of Higher Education (BHE) were held that May, calling upon the presidents of Borough of Manhattan Community and Bronx Community Colleges, and Brooklyn, City, and Queens Colleges to report on activities at their respective campuses, including lockdowns. It was during this time that a thorough review of university policies addressing admissions and university-wide faculty and student governance structures were undertaken (CUNY Board of Higher Education 1969a, 74–8). On July 9, 1969, the BHE sweepingly approved and called for the creation of Black and Puerto Rican Studies at the senior colleges “as interdisciplinary degree programs, institutes, or departments” (CUNY Board of Higher Education 1969b, 186).

In response to ongoing student activism, the creation of the Department of PRS at BC was announced at the Faculty Council meeting on March 17, 1970, by President Kneller and approved by the CUNY BHE in June effective September of that year (Brooklyn College Faculty Council Minutes 1970; CUNY Board of Higher Education Minutes 1970). Nonetheless, on April 30, 1970, about 50 PRA members took over a meeting between President Kneller and several deans to insist on 12 demands, three of which were non-negotiable. These spelled out the admission of an additional 1,000 students, the Black students to be new non-CUNY students, and no repercussions for demonstrators; all of which were ultimately agreed to (Horowitz 1981, 165). By spring commencement in 1970, many of the Brooklyn College graduates wore a defiant fist of struggle or a peace sign on their gowns. Among them was PRA founding member Milga Morales, who was holding up a Puerto Rican flag (in itself an act of defiance because the flag was outlawed for nearly a decade in Puerto Rico). A funeral march proceeded, and “Taps” was played by a bugler, sounds that mimicked shots fired echoed, and “Revolution” by The Beatles was played as part of the commencement exercises; families applauded, argued, or walked out in response to the actions (Horowitz 1981,189; Milga Morales Nadal 2020, pers. comm.). Morales had experienced a college education the likes of which could not be found in textbooks. The tenacious activism of PRA had yielded fruits that would be harvested by those who would walk through the Brooklyn College gates for decades to come.
THE NASCENT DEPARTMENT OF PUERTO RICAN STUDIES

Both the Department of PRS and the Institute of PRS (IPRS) were led by Josephine Nieves. She and subsequent hires were appointed as faculty members in the Department of Sociology, and the majority on full-time lines were granted a Ph.D. waiver equivalency. Nieves was an alum of City College (CUNY), held a Master of Social Work from Columbia University, and was the highest-ranking Puerto Rican in the federal government. She was appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson as regional East Coast Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity during the War on Poverty (Gil de la Madrid 1970; Nadal 2014). Nieves recruited Julio Morales as Deputy Chairperson/Assistant Director, and together they led and developed a cadre of programs and faculty that served students and the community. The challenge they faced, to create in academia that which was unprecedented, loomed large. The Puerto Rican Alliance, consisting also of Dominicans and Panamanians, remained active participants in PRS and students like Angel Delíz served from 1969 to 1973 as part of the Curriculum Committee to develop the courses for the new major (BC Department of PRLS Archives). During this period, faculty from Puerto Rico came as visiting professors, e.g., Blanca Córdova-Anderson, Luis Nieves Falcón, Francisca Pesquera Cantellops, and Juan Rodríguez Cruz. Many found refuge and employment in NYC because the anti-independence repression was in full force. Numerous Puerto Ricans from the U.S., who would later become well known, also lent their expertise, e.g., Miguel Algarín, Antonio Alvarado, Frank Bonilla, Sonia Nieto, Felipe Pedraza, Eduardo Seda Bonilla, Juan Angel Silén, and Herminio Vargas (BC Department of PRLS Archives).

Public engagement and place-based, experiential learning were key components of PRS. It was culturally expected that one could climb the proverbial social ladder but only while remaining committed to the advancement of one’s community. Hence, the Adult Education Center, which offered a Spanish language high school GED program (General Equivalency Diploma) and the Escuelita Infantil Bilingüe (Bilingual Pre-School for Children), were formed in IPRS. Although the IPRS could not offer courses because it was not a department, it did so via the Departments of History, Sociology, Political Science, Economics, and Modern Languages, along with graduate courses beginning in the Fall of 1971 for use in the School of
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Education. A six-credit community organization course was created that incorporated a theoretical framework similar to a conventional course plus an internship component partnering with community-based organizations. A six-credit study abroad summer course was also created offering students opportunities to travel to their heritage country, many for the first time, to encourage educational and cultural linkages with Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. Although short-lived, two other significant initiatives for IPRS were the bilingual Revista del Instituto de Estudios Puertorriqueños de Brooklyn College, published in spring 1971 and fall 1972,\(^{13}\) that included academic, literary, and news pieces; and the Teatro Jurutungo,\(^{14}\) a theater group dedicated to Puerto Rican culture founded and directed by Herminio Vargas. These served as vehicles of creative expression and knowledge.

Nieves’ leadership was crucial during this nascent time in PRS. She knew departmental status was vital for autonomous decision-making within PRS to influence and vote in personnel actions and policymaking, thereby solidifying its future. Nieves also called on counterparts in CUNY and beyond, forming a “think tank” to respond to the need for resources in English about Puerto Ricans, to address a void in academia and consequently create teaching materials for the newly created PRS units. As Chairperson of the Committee on Puerto Rican Studies and Research (Colón López 2019, 24), Nieves presented the group proposal for the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños (Center for Puerto Rican Studies), a university-wide research center,\(^{15}\) to Chancellor Kibbee that was approved by the CUNY BHE. Brooklyn College’s Department of PRS was “thus identified as the locus for the Centro’s creation” (Josephine Nieves 2020, pers. comm.). Frank Bonilla, a prolific political scientist, became the Centro’s Founding Director in February 1973. Shortly after working to develop Centro programs, and perhaps in response to internal departmental issues, differing agendas and a faction that wanted a clear separation between the Institute and the Department,\(^{16}\) Nieves took a special leave of absence and accepted a full-time research position at Centro,\(^{17}\) thus closing one chapter and beginning another for Brooklyn College’s Department of PRS.

In August 1973, Juan Rodríguez Cruz, a tenured professor on leave from the University of Puerto Rico, former Acting Director of the Institute of Caribbean Studies and Editor of the Caribbean Review, assumed the
position as acting chairperson of PRS. In November, a search committee was formed consisting of Dean Thomas Birkenhead and Professors Hyman Sardy, Sonia Nieto, Ricardo Pérez Shapiro, and Carmen Dinos, a former PRS faculty member who transferred to the School of Education. In July 1974, the committee made its determinations known to the president; their choice was María E. Sánchez (Dinos, Pérez Shapiro, and Nieto 1974). However, on October 3, 1974, President Kneller appointed Elba Lugo de Luis Deza as Professor of PRS and Chairperson effective immediately. This was deemed illegitimate by the PRS students and faculty since a majority of the search committee had voted for Sánchez. The president’s appointee served as chairperson in name only as the students and allies, among them Vietnam War veterans Alex Boxill (Afro-Panamanian who coordinated the Veterans Organization) and Carlos Alejandro, physically stood watch around the clock and blocked her entry into the 1205 Boylan Hall department office. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that the faculty and staff of PRS refused to work with her. The only chairperson they recognized was Sánchez, who had been teaching and working in PRS since the Fall of 1972. She was a well-respected educator with a stellar reputation among her peers and in the Puerto Rican community. As Co-Coordinator for what would soon become New York City’s first widely acclaimed Bilingual Teacher Education Training Program, Sánchez held teaching licenses in regular and bilingual Spanish-English education and administrative supervisory certificates. She served as a principal with formal training in conflict resolution, which would be a fortuitous requisite for her career at Brooklyn College.

The refusal to appoint Sánchez as chairperson in July because she did not have a Ph.D. mobilized a whirlwind of protests, initially via unproductive formal institutional protocols and soon thereafter through a massive campaign of petitions and letter-writing to inform the Puerto Rican community of the denial of departmental autonomy to choose its own leadership. It did not end there; demonstrations, strikes, rallies, and takeovers were the order of the day for over a year. To orchestrate these actions for a prolonged and concerted effort, while taking doctoral classes and running a department, was no easy feat for Sánchez. The protesters strategized via a PRS Department Steering Committee headed by the “General”—Sánchez—with point persons to handle critical aspects of a collective operation; its
public face was the Committee for Self-Determination of the Department and Institute of PRS. Up to 25 people would gather every Tuesday evening, among them, faculty, staff, students, and community members, as well as representatives from Puerto Rican Alliance, Movimiento Estudiantil Dominicano, Veterans Organization, Partido Socialista Puertorriqueño (PSP),
Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization (PRRWO), Puerto Rican Student Union, and Federación Universitaria Socialista Puertorriqueña (FUSP).

Just two weeks after the Lugo de Luis Deza announcement, 100 students took over the president’s office in Boylan Hall on a Friday, peacefully vacating early Monday morning after President Kneller agreed to meet with them later that day (Kalech 1974). At the meeting, the president declined to dismiss the security guards, and the students walked out chanting “Blacks, Latins, Asians, Whites, all the students must unite!” Over 50 students and faculty took over the Office of the Registrar and computer keypunch office. While the occupation was under way, there were rallies held on the quad in support of the students. Student Government was meeting to discuss whether they would lend their support. News articles appeared about Puerto Ricans fighting for self-determination and students’ rights, and PRS put out a press release regarding administrative abuses and racist attacks against the Department, students, faculty, and staff—”We will not be coerced into accepting their puppet chairperson, because even worse than a lackey is a lackey of a lackey. We are not afraid of the Administration nor of their threats or tactics because we are organized and disciplined and do not bow to insane, authoritarian repression” (Brooklyn College: Puerto Rican Students Fight for Self-Determination 1974, 3–4, 21). The occupation lasted three days—students utilized the phones to make calls to their unsuspecting parents about their whereabouts and relative safety, assuring them they were acting in a sane manner; veterans would escort occupiers to the restrooms; food prepared by students’ mothers made its way to protesters; and the premises were kept impeccably clean to avoid any excuse to characterize the takeover as anything other than a just cause (Antonio Nadal 2020, pers. comm.).

On October 24, 1974, the student-run WBCR-Brooklyn College Radio station issued a statement opposing the actions of the protesters, stating that President Kneller was within his rights to make academic decisions as these
were not based on race. Nonetheless, they noted that peaceful demonstrators left the premises without damaging anything, no files or records had been tampered with, and that they had respected the confidentiality of student records. President Kneller resorted to using the legal system, ordering an injunction to vacate the office against the occupiers, subsequently calling in some 20-40 deputy sheriffs and 100-200 NYC police officers who ended the standoff at 4 am. They arrested those who remained behind after the leaders encouraged individuals who had any kind of criminal record to leave. As they were escorted to the police vehicles, they chanted “Blacks, Latins, Asians, Whites, for our rights we must fight!” They became known as the BC 44 (41 students of diverse backgrounds and three faculty) although the Supreme Court of the State of NY County of Kings record indicates that there were 53 charged, including pseudonyms John and Jane Doe as well as Richard and Roberta Roe.24 The student strike was deemed limited in scope. Some news accounts indicated that the issues of race/racism had muddled the issue of student rights, causing a loss of support. Other news stories indicated it was successful, with an estimate of 75 percent of classes not held that day. A crowd of 2,500 gathered on the quad at midday to listen to those who had been arrested and released just that morning. The activists marched onto campus with the rallying cry of “BC 44! We’ve come back to give you more!” Their cause garnered support letters from the CUNY University Student Senate, University of Puerto Rico, Veterans Organizations on many CUNY campuses, and outside organizations and universities including Yale, Rutgers-Livingston, Harvard, Radcliffe, SUNY Stonybrook, and the Interracial Children’s Books in NYC (Slater and Scalf 1974, 1). The New York Times, New York Daily News, New York Post, City Star, Maceta Newspaper of the Puerto Rican Student Union, and the Kingsman and Spigot Magazine student newspapers covered the story. After negotiations, the BC 44 were given a sixty-day suspended sentence as they all had clean records (Rodríguez 1974).

At the BHE meeting of November 1974, about 75 students took over the speaker’s podium to demand the suspension of Lugo de Luis Deza pending an investigation into her qualifications and eligibility to serve as chairperson of PRS, including documentation that she had misinformation on her curriculum vitae and was on sabbatical leave from the University of Puerto Rico and expected to return the following summer (Siegel 1974). Chairman
Giardino indicated he had ordered President Kneller to investigate and ended the meeting abruptly. It was the first time the BHE had experienced such a disruption since the meetings went public in February of that year (Kline and Matthews 1974). At the December meeting, the PRS Steering Committee provided the BHE with the evidence they had collected, and Chancellor Kibbee was to follow up.

While peaceful activities continued in support of Sánchez’s appointment as the official chairperson, in mid-April 1975, the Committee for Self-Determination called for a CUNY-wide demonstration to protest the fact that no PRS courses were listed in the summer schedule and in response to reports of pending personnel and programmatic cuts across PRS units due to NYC’s fiscal crisis. On April 16th, during registration time, 60 members of the Committee for Self-Determination marched into the Registrar’s Office and politely asked the staff to depart with their personal belongings as the students would be occupying the space. They wanted to meet with President Kneller and put forward 13 demands, including no reprisals against faculty, staff, and students; reversal of the administration’s denial of tenure of Josephine Nieves; settlement of the renowned Puerto Rico historian Loida Figueroa’s grievance regarding non-re-appointment in PRS; and implementation of the Justice Committee’s demands, a broader-based coalition of the campus community to “combat racist administrative actions against members of the third world and poor white working class students” (Siegel 1975). The U.S. Department of Justice had an interest in the BC situation stemming from their Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO). An FBI agent had attempted to make his way into the office to retrieve the students’ records for those who applied for federal jobs. This encounter was familiar to those involved in the PRS struggle since they knew there were undercover agents posing as students to keep track of their activities. The agent was quickly pushed back, causing the Kingsman student newspaper to claim “that flying karate kick at a man who carries a gun and a badge told you just how determined the protesting students are to get an education more substantial than a piece of paper” (Steier 1975a). The action was well planned with those willing to be arrested and those who supported them via security measures, food resources, and spokespersons to address the press and public. One of the students, José Ojeda, was quoted as saying, “We have
so far been non-violent...we don't want a bloodbath in the Registrar’s office...but you keep pushing our backs against the wall. I don't like sleeping in the Registrar’s office, but we will sleep there, we will fight the police, we will do whatever is necessary to survive” (Steier 1975b).

ASPIRA's national President Luis Alvarez was asked by Brooklyn College to mediate the dispute between PRS and the administration; he ultimately sided with PRS, stating this was an outright attempt to divide the community (Siegel 1975). The newly renamed Africana Studies Department was also called in to help resolve the issue; after assessing the situation, they fully supported the right of self-determination for PRS over the objections of the president (Colón López 2019, 31). The New York Daily News and New York Post, as well as student newspapers covered the story; Spigot Magazine, a Student Government newspaper, had it on the front page plus a centerfold spread with numerous articles covering the varied aspects of the struggle (Seigel 1975).

The occupation lasted two nights until a written and signed agreement of 16 points was reached in the presence of constituencies from various interest groups—administrators, PRS, Student Government, the press, and community organizations. Overall, President Kneller reaffirmed his support of the Department and Institute of PRS regarding budgets and personnel; upheld Lugo de Luis Deza as Chairperson of PRS but conceded authority to Jorge Hernández, Assistant Director of the Institute of PRS, to sign off on any Department-related matters and would include PRS courses in the summer session; approved Figueroa as Professor for the following year; would make a decision regarding the tenure of Nieves; agreed that all photos taken of the demonstrators filed in CUNY central would be returned to the Committee for Self-Determination with no copies and that any alleged misuse of the photos would be investigated. Dialogue would continue in good faith on both sides, and the Committee would “continue to demonstrate peacefully and without disrupting the normal functions of the college” until their demands had all been met (Brooklyn College Department of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies Archives 1975).

Nieto would go on to pen an open letter, part of which she read during the April 28, 1975 meeting of the CUNY BHE, regarding the chronology of events, the wide-ranging support of their case, and the ensuing inaction of President Kneller on various significant issues, mainly the investigation of
Lugo de Luis Deza and the naming of Sánchez as the legitimate Chairperson of PRS. She indicated that while Lugo de Luis Deza initially supported the actions of PRS, she subsequently denounced them and was asking for early tenure and a letter of recommendation in the event that she had to leave BC: “The responsibility is yours. In order to avoid a very critical situation or even a dangerous clash in the near future, you must vote against the reappointment of Elba Lugo as Professor and Chairperson of the Puerto Rican Studies Department at Brooklyn College” (Brooklyn College Department of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies Archives 1975b). Despite the fact that 500 protesters gathered outside to show their support for PRS and condemn SEEK cutbacks, the Board unanimously reappointed Lugo de Luis Deza as a faculty member in PRS; the decision regarding the position of chairperson would be discussed by the Committee on Self-Determination and President Kneller in a forthcoming meeting.

In July 1975, Vice Chancellor David Newton announced that in the matter of Sánchez v. President (Brooklyn College), initially filed by PRS in December 1974 regarding the decision to appoint Lugo de Luis Deza over Sánchez, the Step Two grievance was denied on the basis that it was “a dispute over the correctness of academic judgment of the President and Board of Higher Education” (Brooklyn College Department of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies Archives 1975c).

In early October, the Department of PRS sent a detailed letter to President Kneller with 11 (some multi-part) demands in the interests of students, including the appointment of Sánchez as chair and her vacated position to be filled by another instructor; cessation of disciplinary charges against Carlos Alejandro and José Ojeda plus those arrested at the September 22, 1975 meeting of the BHE.25

The last documented actions for autonomy occurred on October 29, 1975, when PRRWO put forth its position paper, “The Fight to Defend PRS at BC,” which addressed the attacks on PRS, SEEK, Africana Studies, and Open Admissions.26 It also revealed internal ideological strife among supporters of PRS with the Maoist PRRWO stating the Marxist-Leninist PSP, FUSP, and other supporters were compromising too much (Brooklyn College Department of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies Archives 1975e). Simultaneously, the “BC Veterans Organization Urges You to Demonstrate”
flyer was circulated decrying budget cuts during the time of a U.S. economic slowdown that resulted in a NYC fiscal crisis; violations of students’ rights; and due process of law. That was witnessed by 200 students who attended the court hearing of Ojeda and Alejandro. The flyer condemned reprisals against students and faculty who dared to struggle for their democratic rights, ending with the familiar phrase of “Dare to Struggle! Dare to Win!” (Brooklyn College Department of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies Archives 1975f). Ideological differences aside, the supporters of PRS would continue to resist repression by presenting a public united front despite accusations of being willing to “sell out” or destroy the Department in the process (Fiske 1975); ultimately, this strategy proved effective.

On November 10, 1975, President Kneller officially named María E. Sánchez as Acting Chairperson, which was renewed annually through 1978 when she was finally appointed as Chairperson of the Department and Institute of PRS, four long and arduous years after her original selection for that position. Despite a myriad of campus and student issues, such as cutbacks to programming and the imposition of undergraduate tuition, PRS continued to serve as a critical mass for campus-wide mobilization and coalition-building against these measures, winning its greatest battle over self-determination.

Sánchez soon demonstrated that her capacity-building skills would engage PRS with the campus-wide community. This was made possible through much diligence and a weekly Friday three-hour meeting of faculty to plan and strategize. The results would bear the fruit of that labor.

In 1981, the Department organized a major international conference at Brooklyn College in honor of its tenth anniversary with a focus on the field of PRS—“Toward a Renaissance of Puerto Rican Studies: An Agenda for the Eighties,” which resulted in Toward a Renaissance of Puerto Rican Studies: Ethnic and Area Studies in University Education (Sánchez and Stevens-Arroyo 1987), a classic in the field (see Sánchez Korrol and Pérez y González in this volume).

PRS served as part of the initial task force to create “Core Studies 9: Studies in African, Asian, and Latin American Cultures” (a comparative study of those parts of the world in a triad modular, multidisciplinary course via team teaching) through the curricular development efforts of Anthony Stevens-Arroyo. Virginia Sánchez Korrol, who served among its first rotat-
ing coordinators, taught the course, as did Nadal and Stevens-Arroyo, alongside faculty from other departments. The Caribbean Studies Program was created by Africana Studies along with PRS27 (Proposal for Caribbean Studies Program 1982, 6; Department of Puerto Rican Studies Self Study Report 1988, 11; Brooklyn College Department of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies Archives n.d., 20). It was approved as a co-major, originally with no courses of its own. Sánchez Korrol served as its rotating coordinator (1982-1984), and Stevens-Arroyo remained an avid proponent of the program. The Spanish-English bilingual teacher education concentration was strengthened and grew with Antonio Nadal and Héctor Carrasquillo. PRS continued to work closely with the School of Education to develop grant proposals to support teacher training, create social studies paired courses, as well as some graduate courses for use in teacher education degree programs.

“Dubbed the ‘plug and play’ concept by curriculum planners in the early 90’s, the Department of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies pioneered in the application of this practice since the department originated,” but Sánchez helped solidify this during her leadership (Department of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies Self Study Report 1999, 17). PRS became an integral part of the campus-wide curricular offerings. It nestled itself into varied spaces of social institutions, where it helped to serve the Puerto Rican community and opened externship opportunities for students, aiding with career readiness. Its main vehicle for achieving this was through the Institute for PRS, later renamed the Center for Latino Studies (CLS).28 Through the efforts of Carrasquillo, a sociologist, the Hispanic Young Peoples’ Chorus was founded in 1981 as a community and student resource; it expanded in 1991 to a multi-service non-profit organization called Hispanic Young Peoples’ Alternatives in Sunset Park, Brooklyn (Pérez y González 2000, 47).29

Sánchez’s collaborative leadership model resulted in various important accomplishments. The formation of the PRS Alumni Association was a key vehicle for galvanizing much needed community support for the department.30 It was through the close-knit collaborative network of alumni that PRS was able to move ahead and survive very difficult times after she was officially named Acting Chairperson. In the challenges of pursuing tenure and promotion to Associate Professor, she garnered strong support from alumni, fellow chairpersons, and faculty members whose respect and admiration she
had earned because of her tireless work ethic in leading a team of faculty who had woven themselves into the fabric of campus life to advance the mission of BC. PRS was successful on both counts—the struggle for Sánchez to be tenured from 1976-79 and for Associate Professor from 1985-1986.

By the time Sánchez stepped down as PRS Chairperson in 1989, the students, faculty, and staff had adeptly handled the fight for self-determination and internal ideological conflicts, while carving out disciplinary niches within the Core as well as other areas of the BC curriculum. Also, as noted in a PRS self-study report, “The idea was to foment a symbiotic relationship between our commitment to academic excellence and its translation into direct involvement in community issues” (Department of Puerto Rican Studies Self Study Report 1988, 2). Sánchez led the way in fulfilling that goal. She retired in the Spring of 1990 and was bestowed the honorary distinguished rank of Professor Emerita by President Hess. A $4,000 fund was set up in her name in the Center for Latino Studies (Sánchez Korrol 1990, 1-2). Under her leadership, a clear path was set for the department to build on a foundation of academic achievement.

The challenges regarding tenure and promotion, as well as a huge drop in student enrollment, and cutbacks to full-time faculty of PRS (and across CUNY) in response to the NYS and NYC policies implemented during the fiscal crisis were forthcoming, but the era for self-reflection and how the new interdisciplinary field would make its mark on and survive within the larger scheme of higher education would become the focus of PRS over the next decade (Department of Puerto Rican Studies Self Study Report 1988, 22).

ACADEMIC STRIDES AMIDST FISCAL AUSTERITY (1989-2004)

In the late summer of 1978, Virginia Sánchez Korrol interviewed for an adjunct position and was convinced by Sánchez to apply for the recently vacated full-time position, which she began immediately. Sánchez Korrol then took up the mantle of chairing PRS in 1989. At the time, she had published her dissertation-turned-book, From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City, 1917-1948 (1983, 1994), which would become essential reading in the field of PRS, and had served as Co-Director of the Center for Latino Studies. Shortly thereafter, she spearheaded the formation of the Puerto Rican Studies Association (1992) which
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convened at a founding conference in White Plains, New York, where she became its Founding President. In 1994, she organized the first international biennial conference in Waltham, Massachusetts; BC remained intimately involved with PRSA, hosting it in 1998 (Department of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies Self Study Report 1999, 12). The PRSA was created as an academic organization that would bring together scholars, students, professionals, and community members studying and engaged in the Puerto Rican diasporic experience, including its deep-rooted connection to Puerto Rico.

There was a tenor of stability with the burgeoning of scholarship and curricular innovations. By then, PRS had experienced a measure of maturity and exercised its autonomy. It had become part of the academic landscape at all levels of the college despite its small number of five full-time, tenured faculty and a handful of adjuncts. While there was no ongoing battle with the administration per se, there were four CUNY-wide retrenchments during the 15 years with Sánchez Korrol at the helm. That meant joining PSC-CUNY union demonstrations at City Hall and at the State Capitol, while engaging in on-campus advocacy, and championing the stellar accomplishments of PRS to avoid dissolution and departmental mergers. This was the decade that PRS, and Ethnic Studies in general, at CUNY experienced numerous setbacks, including eliminations, consolidations, and departmental status reductions with no authority in personnel and curricular actions. These decisions made by those in power were bolstered by an anti-multipcultural, and often racist, demagoguery at the national level to eliminate the academic gains of underrepresented communities. Despite the quality of Ethnic Studies units, administrators chose to eliminate or drastically reduce them due to budget shortfalls. It was under these threats that PRS at BC decided to grow and institutionalize the inclusion of Latino Studies.

In Spring 1996, PRS was set to meet with a Faculty Council Subcommittee on Departmental Restructuring charged with assessing and recommending next steps for the college considering the fiscal crisis. It was a stressful time for faculty across the campus, especially for PRS as rumors of consolidation or elimination spread, and PRS’ only untenured Assistant Professor, María Pérez y González, was susceptible to retrenchment. Seizing the opportunity to showcase its numerous accomplishments, PRS readied itself for the scrutiny of its academic publications, achievements, and events
by committee members, some of whom had voiced support for its merging. In military-like fashion, Sánchez Korrol and the faculty marched into the meeting venue with publications and event flyers from 1993-95, spreading the contents on tables for the committee’s review. The material represented 25 works highlighting the numerous contributions of five full-time faculty.

Simultaneously, to the Department’s credit, President Vernon Lattin co-hosted two of a five-day major international conference on Public Policy in Higher Education: Puerto Rico, Cuba, Dominican Republic, and NYC, which included administrators from CUNY, State University of New York, State University of New Jersey, and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. The students rallied in support of PRS via silent protests, petitions, and vociferous demonstrations. At a widely attended academic presentation on campus, at which the work of Sánchez Korrol was being shared, PRA President Juan Ocasio and students from the various Latinx student organizations carried signs supporting PRS as they silently processed through the aisles and filed along the walls of the auditorium for the duration of the event. When the final retrenchment decisions were made, PRS was spared. The faculty would continue making advances in research and scholarship while practicing its student-centered educational philosophy and strengthening its community and political alliances.

In 1998, after a ten-year practice of including the various Latino/a communities in the content of the PRS courses and the large influx of Dominican students resulting from changing NYC demographics (Department of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies Self Study Report 1999, 3), the Department renamed itself Puerto Rican and Latino Studies (PRLS). In the spring of 1993, soon after the first Dominican Studies Institute in the U.S. was established at City College of NY, PRS created, among the first Dominican Studies courses in CUNY, a seminar titled “Puerto Ricans and Dominicans: Comparative Perspectives and Contemporary Issues.” U.S. Cuban and Mexican studies courses were created to boost the formation of the PRLS and Business major in 2001. Additionally, beginning in 1993, the goal of obtaining permanency for an innovative Latino Culture Media Studies Program was proposed in consultation with the Department of Television and Radio (TVR). In 1999, D. Irene Sosa, a filmmaker, was hired in TVR and assigned one course per semester in PRLS. With the support of the Department of Political Science,
a five-year CUNY Distinguished Lecturer position was secured in 2004 to launch the program. Unfortunately, the distinguished individual selected to lead the initiative did not ultimately assume the position.  

Fiscal battles continued to overshadow PRLS, but there was some comfort in the knowledge and lessons learned during its first 20 years of navigating academic structures and avoiding or outwitting some of its pitfalls, creating top-notch events on a shoestring budget, forging alliances, and strategic planning. This was doable through the experience of the faculty. Antonio Nadal became a key faculty member in the PRLS-Bilingual Education concentration. He served as a confidant and political advisor to the chairpersons, occupying the role of PRLS’ long-standing Deputy Chairperson plus two years as Acting Chairperson. As a pillar of unyielding commitment and continuity with an unparalleled institutional memory, Nadal remained indispensable to Sánchez, Sánchez Korrol and her successor, Pérez y González, until his retirement in 2015 after 44 years in PRLS.

PRLS housed several illustrious visiting faculty, garnered competitive external research grants, and gained international academic and news recognition. Sánchez Korrol secured grants from the Ford Foundation, Wells Fargo, and the National Endowment for the Humanities for the development of the award-winning co-edited three-volume *Latinas in the U.S.: A Historical Encyclopedia* (2006) and accompanying CD-ROM and On-line resource. As a writer, she gained much acclaim with at least 16 books and numerous journal and news articles. Her expertise was sought by the U.S. Department of the Interior, the NY State Department of Education, and various prestigious museums and historical societies. Stevens-Arroyo received much-coveted funding from the Ford Foundation, The Lilly Endowment, Louisville Institute, Henry Luce Foundation, and Anne E. Casey Foundation for the Program for the Analysis of Religion Among Latinos (PARAL) National Survey of Latino Parishes and Congregations, and for establishing the Office of Religion in Society and Culture at BC. As co-founder of PARAL, he brought together international multi-disciplinary scholars of religion to collaborate on research focused on Latin@s. These expansive undertakings resulted in a four-book series and numerous publications on the Latin@ religious experience—Roman Catholic; Protestant; Pentecostal; African, Indigenous, and European-based ancestral and popular practices, including

PRLS maintained its connections to student organizations with Carrasquillo and Nadal as the faculty liaisons for Familia Latina—the conglomerate of Latinx clubs, including Puerto Rican Alliance, Movimiento Estudiantil Dominicano, Hispanic Society, Panamanian Student Organization, Latin Women, Student Union for Bilingual Education, South American Student Association, Graduate Association for Bilingual Education, and, occasionally, the Graduate Student Organization when the board members were PRLS alumni. The students served as the engine for PRLS faculty to thrive as educators, scholars, and practitioners. It was in the late 1990s, under the presidency of Vanessa Santiago, that PRA began its annual Day of Dignity protest regarding Columbus Day with a silent demonstration to honor and mourn the Indigenous lives lost to conquest in the Americas. About a hundred students came together marching through the quad lifting signs, waving Caribbean/Latin American flags, and donning black armbands while they were spat upon and called racist slurs by onlookers. It was often a contentious event, particularly since Christopher Columbus is revered in U.S. history books. Santiago also spearheaded its annual Areyto\(^{43}\) ceremonial rite of passage where executive board officers are inaugurated, candles are lit, and new members recite an oath.

Overall, during this stage, a small yet productive team of PRS faculty and staff,\(^{44}\) with the support of students, expanded into Latinx Studies despite persistent financial woes to build a strong foundation of academic achievements and laudable recognitions. Sánchez Korrol recalls Chairperson Sánchez telling her, “You’ve got to put this Department on the map!” (Virginia Sánchez Korrol 2020, pers. comm.). By the time Sánchez Korrol retired, PRLS had solidified its place in the academy.

In Spring 1992, María Pérez y González\(^{45}\) interviewed for an adjunct lecturer position with no college teaching experience. She was coaxed by a recommendation from Carrasquillo and interviewed by a somewhat skeptical Sánchez Korrol. As Nadal exited the interview to meet with students, he said, “Virginia, hire her already—she speaks Spanglish like we do and has
to start somewhere!” Upon completing the doctorate, a year later, Pérez y González was hired on a tenure-track position. Hired at BC during a time when positions were scarce, it came unexpectedly when Sánchez Korrol asked her to serve as Acting Chairperson in Fall 2001, a time of crisis for the nation, especially New York City. Accepting the position, Pérez y González again served as Acting Chairperson from 2002-03 and was subsequently elected Chairperson in 2004, beginning a new era in PRLS.

A year earlier, Sánchez Korrol had been approached by a member of the Faculty Council Steering Committee (Executive Board), about authorizing Pérez y González’s nomination to serve as a member. Astutely, Sánchez Korrol inquired about who else was being nominated; she negotiated, insisting that she would only authorize the nomination if Pérez y González was the sole nominee. They agreed, and she was elected with broad support. It was the first time PRLS had ever reached that position of influence at BC; it was a strategic move that would help PRLS prepare for and weather many turbulent situations regarding the Core Curriculum, creation of the five-school structure with deans, CUNY Pathways general education curriculum, faculty lines, student concerns, and college-wide policy.

In the academic year 2006-07, three esteemed senior faculty members retired—Sánchez Korrol and Carrasquillo in Fall 2006 and Stevens-Arroyo in Spring 2007. Anticipating this with a plan in hand, PRLS prepared by meeting with the administration to discuss the future. The retirements represented 75 percent of the faculty, instantly making PRLS more vulnerable than ever, yet Provost Roberta Matthews and President Christoph Kimmich saw the significance of immediately restoring PRLS to a minimum of five full-time faculty (tenure-track), commonly accepted as the minimum for any department to fulfill its main functions. PRLS successfully hired three faculty members in Fall 2007—Alan Aja, trained in public and urban policy, had served as an adjunct lecturer since 2004; Miranda Martínez, a sociologist; and Vanessa Pérez Rosario, trained in comparative literature (Spanish) with a background in second language acquisition. Due to the failure of a counteroffer from the BC administration, Martínez left in 2013. This was followed by the retirement of Nadal in 2015 and the unexpected administrative transfer of Pérez Rosario to the Department
of Modern Languages and Literatures in 2018. This drastically reduced PRLS’ teaching power and increased its need for adjuncts and a reliance on external faculty members to fulfill its obligations.48

In 2016, Reynaldo Ortiz Minaya was hired as an Assistant Professor on a tenure-track line; a socio-historian, his hiring was enabled through faculty, student, and alumni advocacy—letters, petitions, demonstrations, and many meetings. Upon his arrival, Ortíz Minaya organized two townhall events on immigration in response to anti-immigrant executive orders from the White House, a critical time for many of our students. He founded and organized the PRLS Faculty Speaker Series, where faculty shared their life-career trajectory and research; spearheaded the November 2017 day-long conference on the effects of and responses to Hurricanes Irma and María, “Weathering the Storm: The Caribbean, Puerto Rico, and the Diasporic Communities,” bringing esteemed guests to our campus, such as then Mayor of San Juan, Puerto Rico, Carmen Yulín Cruz Soto, as the keynote speaker.49 He further promoted the interdisciplinary, inter-school eight-event semester-long collaborative project with multiple speakers and community members as a kickoff to the 50th anniversary of PRLS featuring the work of social documentary photographer, Máximo Rafael Colón, “Puerto Rican Migration Then and Now Through the Lens of Contemporary Art, 1950-2019.” Each of these initiatives garnered much positive exposure for PRLS and showcased Ortíz Minaya’s networking, mentoring, and organizing skills.

In 2017, after Hurricanes Irma and María ravaged Puerto Rico and the Caribbean, PRLS filed a grievance with the Professional Staff Congress-CUNY union (PSC-CUNY) stating that “there was a failure to act pursuant to the CUNY Policy on Equal Opportunity and Non-Discrimination, and contractual workload provisions,” the result of being kept under five full-time faculty for four years, unlike any other senior department and while other departments/programs and the School of Business were receiving faculty lines for newly created departments. President Michelle Anderson never responded to the grievance, and it automatically went to the CUNY Central office where the previous BC head of Human Resources and Legal Services, under which the grievance was filed, had recently been hired.

Ironically, BC’s representative countering PRLS was the recently hired Chief Diversity Officer, a person of color, whose office collaborated with
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PRLS annually to sponsor its major event, The Possible Dream Encuentro (Encounter). PRLS was not successful in its grievance. Meanwhile, various intense demonstrations, protests, media coverage, and direct challenges to the administration by students from PRA, MEDo, Mexican Heritage Student Association, BC Dreamers, Students for Justice in Palestine, and Young Progressives of America took place around various social justice issues, including the understaffing of PRLS and Africana Studies, NYPD surveillance of Muslim students, and inflammatory statements made by BC professors.50 There was an online open letter and meeting with President Anderson by the Alliance for Puerto Rican Education and Empowerment (APREE), an organization of mostly BC alumni and founding members of PRA and PRS. A line allocated in Spring of 2018 was cancelled that summer due to a CUNY hiatus on faculty hires and a line was transferred from PRLS to another department. Allied faculty independently created and signed a petition with various large departments also signing on, inclusive of union leaders, calling the administration to task at Faculty Council regarding the case of PRLS. This led to a successful search in 2019 allowing for the return of a former popular outstanding adjunct/substitute instructor, Carla Santamaría, with expertise in Spanish and Latin American, Caribbean, and Latinx Studies. Santamaría came to PRLS as a tenure-track Assistant Professor with community college teaching and administrative experience to fill the most enrolled program in PRLS—the Bilingual Education sequence.

While diversity remains at the forefront of the BC Strategic Plan, as of 2021, the situation remains dire for PRLS. Since 2014, the Faculty Council Committee on Master Planning, Education Policy, and Budget had prioritized PRLS to restore it to five full-time faculty. Although PRLS more than doubled its seat enrollment from 2013 to 2016, reaching 800 per semester, suggestive conversations with administrators about departmental consolidations are often revisited. Additionally, austerity measures, worsened by the current pandemic, are creating a vicious cycle of enrollment suppression that works against the formulae used to determine faculty lines. In the summer of 2021, a tenure-track line was finally approved for PRLS; simultaneously, Ortiz Minaya resigned to take a faculty position at another university.

During this stage, PRLS faculty began participating in specialized areas of the academy, such as teaching at the CUNY Graduate Center, CUNY
Macaulay Honors College, and the Universitat de Barcelona, Catalunya, Spain. They received numerous awards/grants/fellowships—from among, the Fulbright Scholar Core Research/Teaching Grant, Whiting Fellowship for Outstanding Teaching in the Humanities, Instituto de Puerto Rico-NY, Woodrow Wilson Career Enhancement Fellowship, Phi Beta Kappa honorary membership, Harvard Management Development Program, Scholar-in-Residence at New York University, Mellon Transfer Student Research Program, Kellogg Foundation for Leadership Alliance, CUNY Academy for the Humanities and Social Sciences, Feliks Gross Award, National Endowment for the Humanities, and CUNY Mellon Faculty Diversity Career Enhancement Initiative. PRLS also received national recognition through Aja’s public intellectual work via television and print news outlets, including his highly acclaimed race-economics policy reports; his role as Production Assistant on the Emmy-award winning documentary, The Sentence (Valdéz 2018); Miami’s Forgotten Cubans: Race, Racialization, and the Miami Afro-Cuban Experience (2016) was mentioned in a review of the Academy Award winning film Moonlight (2016); and his work used as part of the U.S. Congressional legislation on African-American slavery reparations and the Green New Deal. In 2020, Sánchez Korrol received the prestigious Herbert H. Lehman Prize for Distinguished Service in New York History awarded by the New York Academy of History while serving as historical consultant for the 2021 remake film West Side Story co-produced by the legendary Puerto Rican actress, Rita Moreno, Steven Spielberg, and Tony Kushner, making use of her broad expertise on the Puerto Rican diaspora in the early to mid-twentieth century.

PRLS successfully shepherded three junior faculty members through tenure and promotion to Associate and Full Professor ranks; completed seven searches; hired the first Cuban- and Dominican-Americans as tenure-track faculty; undertook a departmental self-study; became an integral part of the college body politic; and resisted the pressure to eliminate “Puerto Rican” from its title. Despite setbacks regarding understaffing, PRLS grew in enrollment and engaged in curricular revisions, such as new PRLS-Education majors and courses on Dominicans, Afro-Latinxs, and digital humanities. Additionally, a first for PRLS, D. Irene Sosa produced digitized short documentaries about the mission of the Department upon its 35th

Multiple PRLS majors made advancements in academia. In 2015, Reubén Pérez became the first PRLS major to be inducted into Phi Beta Kappa53 Rho of New York chapter, followed by Maya García Fisher and Daniel Vázquez Sanabria (President of PRA54). Pérez is now doing a Ph.D. in Sociology at University of California, Berkeley. That same year Gisely Colón López became the first Puerto Rican/Latinx salutatorian in the history of BC and is now in a Ph.D. program in Urban Education at the CUNY Graduate Center (see Colón López in this volume). PRLS students have earned the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship, entered the CUNY Pipeline Program for Careers in College Teaching and Research, received a Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities National Internship, were inducted into the Chi Alpha Epsilon SEEK National Honor Society, and earned numerous graduate degrees.

Under the leadership of Pérez y González, PRLS undertook several important initiatives to concretize its service to students and create visibility. In 2005, BC celebrated its 75th anniversary, and the Latino Faculty and Staff Organization (LFSO)55 decided it would participate by highlighting the Latinx alumni of BC in a Latino Showcase event and a commemorative booklet. Its momentum led the way to the yearly celebration of The Possible Dream: Latin@ Arts, Communities, and Leadership Encuentro by the BC Comité Noviembre—a planning committee consisting of PRLS, the Latinx student organizations, LFSO, alumni, and a coordinator.56 It became a multi-day event featuring academic and student panels; alumni-led career sessions; distinguished keynote speakers; a Latin American music recital; an art exhibit, and other cultural activities, culminating with a Don Quijote Leadership Awards Reception.57

A key question asked by students time and again over the years was, “What can I do with a degree in PRLS?” Yader Alfredo Bravo, then President of Puerto Rican Alliance, also asked Pérez y González the question, which prompted a direct response in the form of the *PRLS Career Booklet: What Can You Do With a Major, Concentration, or Minor in PRLS?* (2008, 2010, and 2015) that provided a comprehensive look at PRLS curricular offerings, resources, career skills and trajectories, faculty, and alumni.58
While serving on the Faculty Council (FC) Steering Committee, Pérez y González was elected to serve on the Presidential Search Committee and unanimously elected FC Chairperson, becoming the first Puerto Rican/Latinx person to occupy the post. It was a long way from the time of the 1970s; now, instead of being at the fringes of BC, PRLS was at its core. One major challenge BC and PRLS faced was how to deal with the Pathways Curriculum general education mandate passed by the CUNY Board of Trustees (BOT). Initially, there was great resistance to its implementation, but BC eventually adopted its own version by 2013. PRLS favored one aspect of Pathways—its inclusion for every student to take at least one course in the U.S. Experience in its Diversity category, for which PRLS and others had long advocated. With access to first-year students, PRLS would finally be able to grow its enrollment numbers and cultivate new majors. Membership on the Steering Committee provided PRLS with access to critical information and the administration.

With the election of Alan Aja in May 2019, PRLS took a historical half century turn. The first male chairperson-elect, Aja is the first Cuban-American to head the Department. In 2020, he became the first PRLS faculty member since 2007 to become a Full Professor.

The future seemed more promising until the COVID-19 pandemic took center stage in mid-March of 2020; all instruction and work quickly went virtual. Some economic austerity measures had already been put into place at BC and CUNY before the pandemic hit due to NY State’s $15 billion budget shortfall. Governor Andrew Cuomo’s decision to reduce CUNY’s funding and the BC administration’s fiscal restraints resulted in PRLS spearheading a Declaration of Equity for Diversity letter addressed to BC and CUNY administrations advocating no further budgetary reductions. The Department became a part of the BC Anti-Racist Coalition (ARC) of students, faculty, and staff formed out of a common struggle to establish a Black life-affirming and anti-racist campus agenda. PRLS is bracing for the looming economic challenges resulting from the pandemic that threatens to change CUNY, and Ethnic Studies in particular, in very uncertain ways.

LEGACY OF PRS
Puerto Rican Studies at Brooklyn College accomplished much over half a century, through positively affecting students’ lives via teaching, retention,
and graduation rates, as well as leadership and public engagement skills; producing excellent scholarship in the fields of humanities and social sciences; and making significant inroads in all aspects of college life involving students, faculty, staff, and, occasionally, administration. Advocacy for Latinxs on campus and creativity in multiplying extremely limited institutional resources into effective programming remain strong components of its activities. Its linkages to student organizations are critical for ensuring accountability and continuity for future generations.

The far-reaching impact of PRS began from the conviction of a few first-generation Puerto Rican college students that their history, culture, and experience were just as worthy of study as that of their Euro-American/Anglo counterparts. Their joint struggle alongside largely non-Latinx Black, Latinx, and white radical students literally changed the face of BC and CUNY overall and helped to influence academia in general (Arenson 1996; Biondi 2013, 178).

Upon the 50th anniversary of the Department of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies in 2020, some of its founders and activists have documented its history in an APREE-commissioned film, Making the Impossible Possible: The Story of Puerto Rican Studies in Brooklyn College (Colón López, Gold, and Sporn 2020). The legacy of Puerto Rican Studies at Brooklyn College reflects the tenacity, perseverance, and accomplishments of Puerto Rican students, professors, and allies responsible for transforming an educational environment and creating a Department that, while its mission is more expansive today, continues to affirm the history, culture, and scholarship of the Puerto Rican diaspora. It was no easy feat, but Brooklyn College became a more inclusive place, all because a few Puerto Rican students dared to transform the ivory tower.
NOTES

1 The “ivory tower” refers to an attitude of aloofness from practical affairs, usually used in regard to the university.

2 The “x” denotes gender neutrality and inclusivity.

3 The BC Department of PRS is the third in the nation, established after Lehman College’s Department of PRS (approved by the CUNY Board of Higher Education [BHE] on June 30, 1969) and Hunter College's Department of Black and Puerto Rican Studies (approved on July 22, 1969). The BC Department of PRS is one of only two CUNY Departments that continues to retain “Puerto Rican” in its title; the other is Hunter College's Department of Africana and Puerto Rican/Latino Studies. Reconfigurations, beginning in the 1990s, turned PRS academic units into varying combinations of Latinx, Caribbean, Latin American, and Ethnic Studies (see Pedro Cabán's essay in this volume).

4 The BC Institute of PRS is the first of its kind in the nation, approved by the BHE on July 22, 1969.

5 This was a chapter of the mostly Black national youth organization sponsored by the Communist Party U.S.A.

6 BLAC was homegrown and coined by a student named Peter Sherwood (Pile 2019).

7 The author acknowledges that the term Black can also refer to Puerto Ricans, but as it is commonly used in the U.S. to refer to a non-Latinx Black person, that will be its usage herein unless otherwise indicated.

8 Other Puerto Rican members of BLAC were Maxine Rodríguez (Treasurer), Radames Aviles, and María Vargas (Pile 2019).

9 They ranged from the specific, such as the admission of all Black and Puerto Rican student applicants and the recruitment of 25 Black and 25 Puerto Rican teachers beyond those to be hired in the newly approved Afro-American and Puerto Rican Studies Institutes, to freedom for the 21 Black Panthers who were arrested.

10 Peck was referred to by protesters as “Pig Peck” (Horowitz 1981, p. 156).

11 They were as follows: Ray Aviles, BLAC and PRA; Ed Bradly, BLAC; Cassandra Chisholm, BLAC; Bennet Cook, BLAC; Askia Davis, Sr., BLAC; Frank Fernández, PRA President; Sherman Fogg, BLAC; Linda Freeman Williams, BLAC; Cynthia Gumbs (Umakhair Muhammed), BLAC; Clyde Johnson, BLAC; Bruce La Roche (Wali), BLAC; John Lee (Dubaca), BLAC; Cy McClean, BLAC; Larry Murphy, BLAC; Antonio Nieves, BLAC and PRA; Ronald Outlaw, BLAC; Orlando Pile, BLAC President; David Powell, BLAC; and Larry Sparks, BLAC.

12 Several CUNY colleges suspended commencement exercises in response to nationwide large-scale anti-Vietnam War and human rights protests; these included student strikes involving over 450 colleges, universities, and high schools. At CUNY, the BC situation was deemed the worst in that classes were disrupted from May 5th through the end of the school year (Horowitz 1981, 189).

13 The Revista included editorial staff, José Hamid Rivera and Marie Ferrer Iturrino, and authors, such as Frank Bonilla, Billy Cajigas, Américo Casiano, Enid J.
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Cruz, Emilio Díaz Valcárcel, Loida Figueroa, Michael Godreau, Wilfredo González, Víctor Hernández Cruz, Alfredo Matilla Rivas, Etnairis Rivera, Francisco Matos Paoli, Angel Luis Méndez, Pablo Navarro, Luis Nieves Falcón, Pedro Pietri, Juan Rivero, Rafael Rodríguez, Iván Silén, Juan Angel Silén, and Iris Zavala.

14 This theater group was revived in the late 2000s by Vargas and performed at the 2009 Possible Dream Encuentro at BC, where they received the Don Quijote Leadership Award.

15 On February 24, 1970, the BHE approved the creation of the Cultural Puerto Rican Center at Lehman College effective fall of that year to serve educational programs that teach Puerto Rican-focused courses, to translate materials from Spanish to English, and develop curricular materials. It is unclear whether this came to fruition; however, Aquino-Bermúdez states that at a special meeting of the Lehman College Faculty Council on March 21, 1969, it approved a University Puerto Rican Research Center, which he indicates is what led to the CUNY Center for Puerto Rican Studies in 1973 (1975, 123, 337–9).

16 Various activist movements, with differing ideologies and priorities, publicly presented a united front to establish PRS. But in private, there were significant differences among the groups. Some were politically ideological in terms of bringing about a revolution and identifying cohorts instrumental in that change; others were concerned about strategies in dealing with an administration that fostered high levels of mistrust and suspicion; still others prioritized a focus on women’s issues and the lesbian and gay community, which many felt warranted a separation of the Institute from the Department in order to work independently and expediently.

17 Among her laudable contributions to PRS, Nieves wrote a seminal Puerto Rican Studies Task Force Centro report Puerto Ricans in United States Higher Education (1979) focusing on Puerto Ricans in U.S. higher education, PRS as a new discipline, and how to survive in institutions such as CUNY.

18 Julio Morales did not serve in this capacity because of a planned special leave from 1973-75 to complete his doctoral studies.

19 He was commonly known as Richie Pérez.

20 This information is in the BC Department of PRLS Archives under Roseann González Ramírez, who served as PRS Provisional College Secretarial Assistant, but was among the many who did not acknowledge the legitimacy of Lugo de Luis Deza as PRS Chairperson, and eventually resigned in protest on October 27, 1975.

21 He was commonly known as Charlie and Indio.

22 Sánchez was enrolled in the doctoral program at Fordham University at the time.

23 The PSP established chapters on various CUNY campuses and major cities (Velázquez, Rivera and Torres 2020).

Maldonado, Montero Martinez, Paul Massas, Jessie Matthew, Cresencio Morales, Joe Morales, Ms. Elainie, Angel Muniz, Beladee Nahem, Gregory Nahen, Violet Nieves, Jose Ojeda, Gerardo Perez, Nydia Quinones, Antonio Ramos, Victoria and Mario Rivera, Ramon Riveria, William Rodriguez, Anthony Sabino, Gilbert Salgado, Joseph Sexton, Daniel Siegel, Mimie Smith, Ricardo Soler, and Jose Torres. The three faculty members were Antonio Nadal, Sonia Nieto, and Herminio Vargas. Note: There were several names repeated, in differing forms, and some were misspelled; the author kept the original spelling that appears on the legal document. Also, Pablo “Paul” Massas was the first Puerto Rican to be elected Student Government President in the spring 1972; he was a candidate of the Third World Federation student group.

25 These demands included immediate restoration of funds for Africana, Italian, and PRS Institutes (including those promised in the April 1975 Agreement) and the Women’s Center; no cutbacks to the Department of Educational Services, including continuous support for Open Admissions and the SEEK program; implementation of all demands made by the Committee for Justice; no tuition; and no financial aid cuts (Brooklyn College Department of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies Archives 1975d).

26 An overwhelming majority of white middle-class students were the beneficiaries of Open Admissions at BC, and CUNY in general (Horowitz 1981, 166-167).

27 The Departments of History and Political Science formed part of its initial curricular offerings.

28 As a result of the fiscal difficulties experienced by CUNY, it converted all institutes to centers, which would be locally supported by the campuses. In 1986, the Department decided to rename its Institute of Puerto Rican Studies. In 2008, PRLS renamed it the María E. Sánchez Center for Latino Studies (MESCLS) in honor of its former Chairperson. It continues to sponsor special lectures and houses a library with archival materials. In 2008 and 2015, materials were received from Donald Watkins, BC Professor Emeritus, who served on CUNY’s Affirmative Action Committee and was active in NYC Puerto Rican community circles. In 2018, a book collection was received from Samuel René Quiñones, a poet and journalist with El Diario-La Prensa. The MESCLS would go on to host the Undergraduate Latin@ Research Assistantships with grants from the CUNY Diversity Program Development Fund for several years to work on PRLS faculty research projects.

29 Carrasquillo also initiated and coordinated the Brooklyn Borough President Howard Golden’s Hispanic Advisory Council co-chaired by Golden and President Vernon Lattin, who was the first and, thus far, only Mexican American/Latinx President of BC (1992-2000). Carrasquillo remained actively involved in community and religious affairs as well as campus service, receiving the Brooklyn College Award for College Citizenship and Murray Koppelman Professorship.

30 Key members included Angel Delíz, Herminia Ramos Donovan, and Joaquín Denis Rosa.

31 Letters from Dennis Spinninger (Chairperson of Comparative Literature);
Chrysie Costantakos (Home Economics and Consumer Studies); Herminia Ramos Donovan (President, PRS Alumni Association); Osman David Mat (President, BC Graduate Student Organization); Lourdes R. Torres Sánchez (Coordinator, Puerto Rican Council on Higher Education—later known as the CUNY Discipline Council of Puerto Rican, Latino, and Latin American Studies); Sonia Nieto (faculty, University of Massachusetts-Amherst); and Josephine Nieves (Director, Department of Community Development, Community Service Society) are in the PRLS Archives.

32 She was a BC alumna of the Class of 1960.

33 This essay will use various era-appropriate terms to reference the group that is currently known as Latinx: Hispanic, Latino, Latino/a or Latina(o), Latin@, Latine, and Latinx.

34 Initially, the proposed renaming was the Department of Puerto Rican, Latino, and Latin American Studies to provide a home base for the floating set of Latin American Studies (LAS) courses. There were several traditional, large departments that offered courses in LAS, and thus a titular and academic turf battle ensued led by the Modern Languages and Literatures Department. PRS eventually withdrew “Latin American” from its proposed title; in 2006, it created an interdisciplinary social science-based Latin American Studies minor, which continues to date.

35 Faculty Council approved the name change on February 3, 1998.

36 The course was created by then-adjunct María Pérez y González.

37 Meetings with Acting Provost Laura Kitch resulted in support for the concept; the faculty line was granted to TVR to diversify its predominately white and male faculty.

38 Juan González, the co-founder of the New York chapter of the Young Lords and renowned *NY Daily News* journalist, was the selectee.

39 He was an alumnus of the Classes of 1968 and 1972.

40 Beloved by students, he was voted favorite professor of the year numerous times over the decades and was recipient of Brooklyn College’s Tow Award for Excellence in Teaching and the Eric M. Steinberg Award for College Citizenship.

41 The exchange faculty from the University of Puerto Rico were Linda Colón, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales; Carlos Alá Santiago, Facultad de Planificación; and Norma Rodríguez Roldán, School of Social Work. Other faculty included Bettina Schmidt from Phillipps-Universitat Marburg in Germany, Juan González while he served as the 2000-02 Belle Zeller Professor in Political Science, and David Badillo who went to the University of Notre Dame.

42 She would gain local and international recognition for leadership and academic work, such as the 2005 “21 Leaders for the 21st Century” from Women’s E-News; the 2018 naming of the Puerto Rican Studies Association Virginia Sánchez Korrol Dissertation Award; the 2018 National Puerto Rican Day Parade Lifetime Achievement Award; and the 2020 Herbert H. Lehman Prize for Distinguished Contributions to New York History.

43 An areyto is a religious dance and song ceremony used as a form of communal
education and oral history among the Indigenous Tain@o/s of Puerto Rico and the Caribbean.

44 The College Office Assistant, Mildred Nieves Rivera (alumna of the Classes of 1998 and 2001), served from 1980-2000 in PRS/PRLS and was indispensable to Sánchez, Sánchez Korrol, and the faculty. She also initiated the annual PRLS/Familia Latina Commencement/Awards Reception, which continued for 35 years through 2015, ending when tax levy monies could no longer be used for this purpose.

45 At the time, she was a 26-year-old ABD doctoral candidate with a National Institute of Mental Health Fellowship in Sociology.

46 The member was Bill Gargan (Library).

47 Her father, Ernesto Martínez Sierra, was an activist in East Harlem and founder of Casabe Houses for the Elderly as well as Taíno Towers and worked on the Lower East Side’s Pedro Albizu Campos Plaza and Mariana Bracetti Houses.

48 Since 2006, external faculty members have formed part of the departmental personnel action committees due to restrictions placed on non-tenured faculty. Faculty who have served are Gastón Alonso (Political Science), D. Irene Sosa (Television, Radio, and Emerging Media and PRLS), Peter Weston (Psychology), and Carolina Bank Muñoz (Sociology). Also, Alonso, Tomás López Pumarejo (Economics, now Business Management), Joseph Entin (English), and Bank Muñoz served as the Promotion and Tenure Divisional/School-wide PRLS representatives. Recently, on a couple of occasions, external members constituted the committees’ majority, putting at risk departmental autonomy were it not for their commitment to the mission of PRLS. All who committed their time and energy to ensure PRLS could move forward, except one, were faculty of color, and all required authorization from their respective chairpersons. Support from allies is essential to understaffed and under-resourced departments.

49 It also featured panelists such as Jodie Roure from the Department of Latin American and Latinx Studies at John Jay College of Criminal Justice (CUNY) who founded the humanitarian aid medical relief effort Hurricane María Assistance & Relief Institutional Alliance, Inc.

50 The statements regarding Latinxs and women were posted on the web and featured in BC student newspapers, Kingsman and Excelsior, and in news outlets such as the New York Times, Inside Higher Ed, ABC-News, Telemundo, and CNN in October 2018.

51 This was possible due to Nadal; PRLS and allied faculty; College Office Assistant Matilda Nistal; Sánchez Korrol; Puerto Rican Alliance and the Latinx student organizations; and APREE, the founders’ intent on protecting their legacy.


53 Phi Beta Kappa, the oldest academic honor and first Greek-lettered society in the
USA, was founded on December 5, 1776.

Puerto Rican Alliance is the oldest, continuous student organization of its kind in CUNY. Vázquez Sanabria graduated in 2021 earning the Donald D. Harrington Ph.D. Fellowship at the University of Texas, Austin, the most prestigious fellowship offered to any student enrolled therein.

It was previously the Puerto Rican Staff and Faculty Organization established around the time of the Department of PRS. LFSO was headed by Nadal and Anselma Rodríguez (alumna of the Classes of 1973 and 1985, staff member).

The coordinators included mostly students, some faculty, and staff: Lenina Nadal; Sonia Valentín; María Pérez y González, Antonio Nadal, and Anselma Rodríguez; Barbara Pimentel; Gisely Colón López; Angélica Lima; Tabatha López; Julía Fernández; Nicole Rojas; Daniel Vázquez Sanabria; and Matilda Nistal as general supervisor.

César Reyes (alum) led the Latin American music recital; María Catalano Rand curated the art exhibit. Active staff members were from the Graduate Dean’s Office, Veterans’ Affairs and Counseling Center, Center for Academic Advisement and Student Success, and the Office of the Vice President of Student Affairs. Attendance ranges from 400-600 participants; it is primarily sponsored by the Office of Diversity and Equity Programs, the Magner Career Center, Core Curriculum, and BC Alumni Association.

Funding was secured from the administration, career assistance from Natalia Guarín Klein in the Magner Career Center, and editorial support from College Office Assistant Matilda Nistal, Marylu Espinosa, and Gisely Colón López.

She served from 2009-12 and then resumed her position as an at-large member through 2017. The current Chairperson of PRLS, Alan Aja, serves as a member.

African and Judaic Studies Departments as well as the interdisciplinary programs of American Studies, Caribbean Studies, Women’s and Gender Studies, and Studies in Religion were signatories. Over 40 departments, programs, faculty, professors emeriti, the PSC-CUNY union chapter, and the Latinx student organizations—PRA, MEDo, and MeHSA also supported it.

Among the students were Yvette Aguirre, Ray Aviles, Frank Fernández, Natalie Martínez, Cresencio “Joey” Morales, Milga Morales, Antonio Nieves, Irma Ortiz, Felipe Pedraza, Juan Pérez, Rosario Román, Joaquín Denis Rosa, Federico “Freddie” Vélez, and José Villegas.

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