

Julia De Burgos' Writing for *Pueblos Hispanos*: Journalism as Puerto Rican Cultural and Political Transnational Practice

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ABSTRACT

Julia de Burgos was a regular contributor to the Spanish-language weekly *Pueblos Hispanos* published in New York City during the 1940s. Early twentieth-century Hispanic newspapers played an important role in the development of the Puerto Rican community in New York. De Burgos' writing for the paper reveals that it helped to organize the community around political causes. It was created in defense of the community and facilitated the development of institutions serving Latinos. Her essays convey her interest and understanding of the development of transnational and fluid identities that were not bound to the geographical borders of the nation. [Keywords: *Pueblos Hispanos*; Julia de Burgos; transnationalism; early twentieth-century Hispanic press; migration; diaspora cultural expressions; New York City Puerto Rican community]

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JULIA DE BURGOS IS PART OF THE CULTURAL FABRIC OF PUERTO RICANS BOTH ON THE ISLAND AND IN NEW YORK CITY. She is recognized primarily for her poetry, while her writing for the Spanish-language newspaper *Pueblos Hispanos* in New York during the decade of the 1940s has not received much critical attention. In this essay, I demonstrate how de Burgos participated actively in the cultural, political, and social life of the Puerto Rican *colonia* in New York during the decade of the 1940s, where she lived mostly in East Harlem's El Barrio until her untimely death in 1953. This essay contributes to the understanding of how the early Puerto Rican community in New York, prior to the Great Migration of the 1950s, used journalism and the Spanish-language press as a form of cultural and political transnational practice.

Puerto Ricans have been migrating to the United States in increasing numbers since 1898. By the 1940s and 1950s, large numbers left for the States, especially New York City, in search of work and higher pay. The U.S. economy was expanding at that time and migrants had some assurance of finding work. Developments in transportation facilitated travel. The insular government did much to facilitate migration to help with the unemployment and overpopulation problems on the island and served as a transnational intermediary for migrants (Duany 2011). In 1947, the Migration Office of Puerto Rico was created, later known as the Migration Division of Puerto Rico's Department of Labor (1951), which facilitated work agreements between migrants and farming associations in some states along the eastern seaboard.

The Puerto Rican *colonia* in New York during the first half of the twentieth century developed dense social ties where ideas, people, money, and goods circulated between the island and city. Because of its ambiguous political relationship with the United States, Jorge Duany uses the term "transnational colonial migration" to describe the Puerto Rican diaspora in the United States. Duany's term allows for an understanding of Puerto Rico as "a nation, an imagined community with its own territory, history, language, and culture," while acknowledging that the island "lacks a sovereign state" and an independent government that "represents the population of that territory" (Duany 2011: 83). As colonial migrants, Puerto Ricans used the press to demand recognition as full citizens of the United States and remain involved in politics on the island.

Since the nineteenth century, editors and publishers of the Spanish-language press in New York City have acted as arbiters of culture between Latin America and

the United States. As cultural mediators, they arbitrated linguistic and cultural gaps between Anglo- and Hispanic cultures, they defended Spanish speakers, trained their readership in “high culture,” and shaped as well as reflected the tastes of their readers. These cultural mediators fostered a cosmopolitan identity among global Spanish speakers. Books by Kirsten Silva Gruesz and Rodrigo Lazo highlight the significance of trans-American writing or the multilingual press in the United States, produced mostly by the light-skinned Creole elites of the nineteenth century. Silva Gruesz describes the earlier generations of editors and writers as “ambassadors.” With few exceptions, these statemen and politicians did not see the dangers in imitating and extending racial hierarchies from the United States to their home countries in Latin America. José Martí and his generation would be the first to take a pro-independence, anti-annexation, and anti-racist stand against the imperial modernity of the United States and bourgeois, Anglo norms. As Laura Lomas has suggested, Martí’s readings move beyond the goal of equal rights within the boundaries of the United States. She reads Martí within the tradition of economic migrants and noncitizen workers who are American, broadly defined. She uses the nomadic and unsettling term “migrant” to refer to residents who come to the United States to protect their interests in the South, and also seek protections and rights in the place where they live and work (Lomas 2008: 35–7). The Spanish-language press that developed in the 1880s, beginning with José Martí, and those following in this tradition, took an oppositional stance to the pressures to assimilate to bourgeois Anglo, cultural norms.

The development of Hispanism reached one of its most productive stages during the 1930s and 1940s, at which time a large number of scholars and intellectuals were driven by the Spanish Civil War into exile to Latin America and metropolitan centers in the northeastern states, such as New York.

Hispanism, a concept that is multiple and varied, is one of the forms that this opposition took. It operated as a political, representational, and epistemological paradigm throughout the development of Spanish America’s and Spain’s cultural histories from the colonial period, to the consolidation of nation states and in the context of globalization. The development of Hispanism reached one of its most productive stages during the 1930s and 1940s, at which time a large number of scholars and intellectuals were driven by the Spanish Civil War into exile to Latin America and metropolitan centers in the northeastern states, such as New York. As a concept, Hispanism was fraught with

ideological tensions, some of which were linked to fascism, while others were concerned with the cultural and spiritual mission of spreading Hispanic culture to North and Latin America as a way to counter U.S. imperial modernity. Rooted in the Spanish language, Hispanism has an assimilationist impulse as it homogenizes Latin American countries, silencing the linguistic, cultural, and racial diversity of Latin America. It also reinforces cultural and linguistic ties between postcolonial Latin American countries and Spain. As Sebastiaan Faber notes, the problem with Hispanism is that it “ends up repressing or erasing most forms of internal otherness” as it attempts to vindicate cultural differences compared to the Anglo cultural norms of the north, it encodes an “erasure of difference in the name of difference” (Faber 2011: 89). Faber concludes, and I agree, that Hispanism “should be rejected precisely because it *assimilates* a reality whose main characteristic is its heterogeneity” (Faber 2011: 89).

The papers published from New York City during the early part of the twentieth century used Hispanism as a bulwark against the pressure to assimilate. The numerous papers that emerged in the city at the time represented various political and social interests, demanded rights and protections in the United States for members of the Spanish-speaking community, while also attempting to influence and defend the interests of writers and editors in their home countries to the south. Papers such as *Gráfico* (1926–31) promoted pan-Hispanic unity among the Spanish-speaking community in New York and transnational connections with Latin America. The mission statement published in the first issue reflects this goal:

El constante aumento de la colonia española e iberoamericana nos ha impelido a editar este semanario que viene a cooperar a la defense de todos los que forman la gran familia hispana. Haremos una labor tendente a buscar la mayor compenetración y bienestar de los que ausentes de la patria amada debemos en suelo extraño agruparnos bajo una sola bandera: la de la fraternidad. (*Gráfico*, 27 February 1927)

The above quote clearly promotes Hispanism, and the defense of both the Spanish and South American communities in New York whose interests, one might imagine, were quite different. With a focus on brotherhood, the mission of the paper ignores gender difference. The above quote erases both racial and gender difference as the mission of the paper, as articulated here, focuses on Hispanism and “fraternidad.” However, the paper published work by the Afro-Puerto Rican, Jesús Colón, and feminist, Clotilde Betances Jaeger, challenging this orientation of the paper (see Vera-Rojas 2010). Other articles and columns published in the paper demonstrate an incisive critique of the racialization that Latin Americans and Hispanophone Caribbeans experienced

as they migrated from South to North. Of course, *Gráfico's* first editor was the Afro-Cuban, Alberto O'Farrill. He was the chief cartoonist of the paper and a *cronista* who developed an immigrant character called "Ofa," a mulatto, first-person narrator whose main preoccupation was finding work and keeping it together in the big city. Jesús Colón began his career as a writer and political activist as a *cronista* for *Gráfico* (1926–31), then later wrote for *Pueblos Hispanos* (1943–44), and *The Daily Worker* (1924–58). He is remembered for writing insightful critiques of United States and Puerto Rican racism and made the transition into writing in English by the mid-1950s. His articles and those of other contributors to *Gráfico* do not have an investment in "whiteness" as the term Hispanism suggests.¹

In addition to promoting Hispanism as a way to unite the colonia in New York, writers and editors used the Hispanophone press as a way to demand their rights and challenge the notions of "foreignness" that shrouded migrants from Latin America and other parts of the global South and their children in the United States. While the newspapers of the time depicted the Puerto Rican colonia as criminals, lazy, and incapable of self-determination, the press defended the community. The sense of foreignness that the early community perceived is a part of the racialization process Latinos/as experience based on race, language, and culture. The editors of *Gráfico* published an English language editorial on 7 August 1927 that notes that their critics "forget that the citizens residing in the Harlem vicinity enjoy the prerogatives and privileges that American citizenship brings. We are almost all originally from Puerto Rico and the rest of us are naturalized citizens." The editor's choice to publish this editorial in English makes clear that the audience is the larger surrounding community that profiled Puerto Ricans as foreigners and not deserving of full citizen's rights. Yet the editorial has an assimilationist tone, as the editors argue that the Italian and Irish immigrants who arrived before Puerto Ricans to neighborhoods in Harlem were "no better than them before learning the customs and ways of this country." This language suggests that assimilation is desirable, and once Puerto Ricans learn the "customs" of the country they will also be part of the "melting pot." The editors did not conceptualize the growing members of the Puerto Rican colonia as racialized, minoritized, and marginalized because of their colonial migrant status.² In 1927, the editors of *Gráfico* did not see, or chose not to see, the differences that existed between Puerto Ricans as colonial migrants, and their Italian and Irish neighbors. This differs significantly from the way the editors of *Pueblos Hispanos*, approximately fifteen years later, understood their position within the U.S. cultural and political landscape, as we will see in more detail below.

In addition to concerns about race and citizenship rights, the Spanish-language newspapers of the early twentieth century were a place where ideas about Hispanic

women's gender roles and feminism were also discussed. Seen as the heartbeat of the family and the community, and preservers of the home culture and language, the predominantly male cronistas, writers and editors, used their influence in the press to attempt to tighten the reins on Hispanic women in the early communities. They were concerned about the influence American flappers, often characterized as having looser morals, might have on Hispanic women (Kanellos and Martell 2000).

Puerto Rican women contributed to the Spanish language press even before de Burgos' arrival to the city. In 1933, Josefina (Pepina) Silva de Cintrón founded *Artes y Letras* in association with the Grupo Cultural Cervantes made up mostly of Puerto Rican actors and writers. The monthly cultural magazine catered to the middle class Hispanic bourgeoisie, cultivating women readers who were involved in philanthropic and cultural undertakings. Enjoying an international readership, *Artes y Letras* was distributed throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. An illustrious group of women published essays, short stories, and poems in its pages, including Alfonsina Storni, Gabriela Mistral, Carmen Alicia Cadilla, Martha Lomar, Concha Meléndez, and Isabel Cuchí Coll. Virginia Sánchez Korrol notes that the educated Puerto Rican women who migrated to New York prior to 1930 chose to “civilize rather than liberate their working class sisters” (1986: 175). They clung to their domestic roles and this, Sánchez Korrol argues, is what “inhibited the spread of anything other than the most basic feminist consciousness” (1986: 175). The transnational ties these women maintained perpetuated the ideas of patriarchy in the new environment as these women concentrated on “influencing the transfer of a bourgeois Puerto Rican family model to the new environment” (1986: 175).

Through its director, Juan Antonio Corretjer, the paper was affiliated with both the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party and the Communist Party of America.

Other papers took a much more mainstream position such as *La Prensa*, which was conceived of as a business enterprise. Founded in 1913 by José Campubrí to serve the Spanish and Cuban immigrant communities in Manhattan, it adapted to the waves of Hispanophone migrants who made the city their home such as the Puerto Rican population that arrived in large numbers during and after World War II (Kanellos and Martell 2000: 58). This publication differed significantly from other papers. As a business enterprise, it took a more mainstream political position on Latin American affairs. For example, it favored Luis Muñoz Marín and common-

wealth status for the island of Puerto Rico, while also opposing Trujillo. The paper's politically moderate views and ability to adapt to the communities arriving in the city may help account for its longevity.

Pueblos Hispanos (1943–44) forged an alternative to some of the papers circulating in New York during the early part of the twentieth century. Like other Hispanophone papers of the time, it sought to build a sense of solidarity with the broader imagined community of Spanish speakers.³ It promoted solidarity among Hispanophone communities in New York and transnational relationships between the community in the metropolitan center and Latin America. Through its director, Juan Antonio Corretjer, the paper was affiliated with both the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party and the Communist Party of America. The idea for the paper was birthed in the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary where Pedro Albizu Campos, Juan Antonio Corretjer, and other leaders of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party were serving prison sentences for sedition and conspiring to overthrow the U.S. government in Puerto Rico. Albizu Campos sought to garner support for Puerto Rican independence in the United States (Rodriguez-Fraticelli 1991). The Communist Party of America was the only party at the time that supported Puerto Rican independence. While in prison, Albizu Campos and Corretjer met Earl Browder, the American Communist Party candidate during the 1940s Presidential election who was imprisoned after being found guilty of passport irregularities. He was released fourteen months later when the United States joined World War II and became allies with the Soviet Union, which led to more relaxed views and persecution of communists, at least temporarily. The paper took the anti-war position of the Communist Party, continued the struggle for independence of Puerto Rico, and supported liberation movements across Latin America as part of an agreement between Albizu Campos, Browder, and Vito Marcantonio. With the multiple and what seemed to be, at times, conflicting agendas, getting the paper off the ground appeared to be an insurmountable challenge until Juan Antonio Corretjer, released from prison that same year, met Consuelo Lee Tapia at a Joint Antifascist Refugee Committee meeting in December 1942 in New York.

Consuelo Lee Tapia appeared to be an unlikely partner for developing the paper because of her aristocratic and capitalist family ties. The granddaughter of the important literary figure, Alejandro Tapia y Rivera, she was born into a prominent Puerto Rican family. She joined the Puerto Rican Communist Party in 1937 after the trial and conviction of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Leaders, the Spanish Civil War, and the Ponce Massacre. She was forced to migrate after joining the Communist Party (Casa Corretjer). In New York, she sought out the Communist Party offices and began to work there as a volunteer. Initially treated with distrust because of her social class,

she soon became an integral part of the party working with Spanish-speaking communities abroad. Her work with the Communist Party led her to anti-Franco and anti-fascist groups. Working alongside each other, Tapia and Corretjer were able to get the paper started. Corretjer served as director and she ran the paper as its administrator. Her political activities turned away from the international Spanish-speaking communities to the Puerto Rican colonia in New York and Puerto Rico while working with the paper. *Pueblos Hispanos* was published weekly for 20 months. In 1945, after the paper folded, Consuelo Lee Tapia and Antonio Corretjer married and left the city for Cuba.

Julia de Burgos joined the staff of the paper from its inception as the art and culture editor and a regular contributor. de Burgos knew Corretjer from her participa-



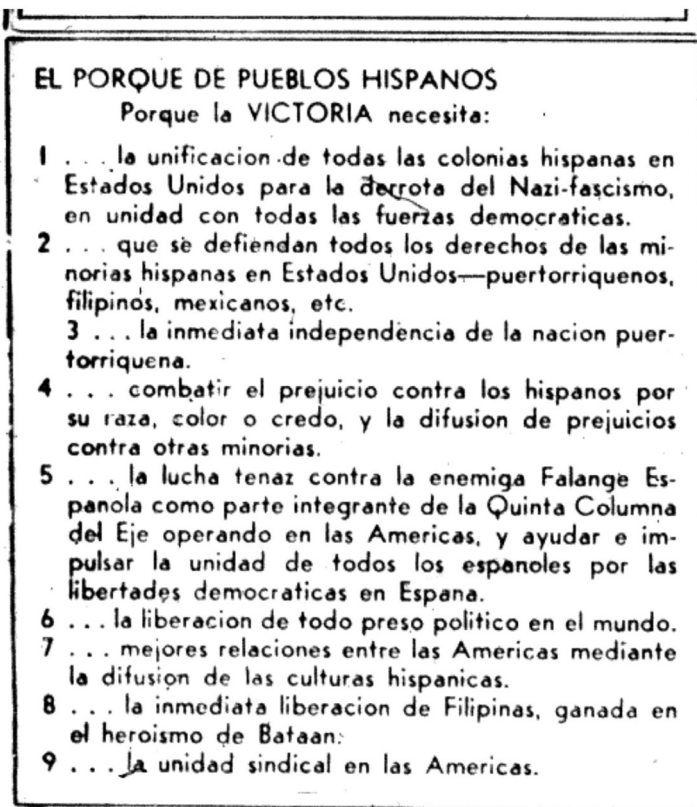
Pura Belpré Papers. Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, City University of New York.

tion with the Puerto Rican Nationalist Movement on the island from 1936–39. In *Pueblos Hispanos*, de Burgos published both poetry and essays supporting socialist causes, critiquing the United States for failing to live up to its democratic ideals, supporting Puerto Rican independence, and keeping the Spanish-speaking community in New York tied to Latin America by publishing news from south of the border. She furthered the mission of the paper by calling for support in New York and abroad for Puerto Rican independence. Her essays also promoted the integration of people of Latin American descent, Caribbean people, and African-Americans living in New York City. In

contrast to the women writing for papers like *Artes y Letras*, mentioned earlier, de Burgos rejected notions of bourgeois domesticity before leaving the island and in New York. Developing transnational connections with her home island through the paper allowed her the space to create more flexible and fluid notions of Puerto Rican identity.

***Pueblos Hispanos*: News from Latin America**

As noted above, *Pueblos Hispanos* promoted pan-Hispanism, the integration of Latin American countries, and socialist causes throughout the world, with a focus on Latin American countries such as Peru, Ecuador, Brazil, and Mexico. The paper covered



Pueblos Hispanos' mission, listed in nine points, was published in every issue of the paper. Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, City University of New York.

the politics of Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rican colonia in New York in detail. The newspaper encouraged solidarity in the struggle for freedom and justice in countries across Latin America with those who were ideologically aligned with its progressive mission. In sharing news from Latin America and specifically Puerto Rico, the paper kept Spanish-speaking residents in New York City informed, establishing transnational connections as they tried to influence local politics.

The paper's socialist mission and communist affiliations provided it with an international framework that facilitated the development of transnational ties. The ninth point of the paper's mission published on the first page of every issue was "la unidad sindical en las Américas." The paper's association with the International Labour Organization and other similar organizations facilitated the publication and circulation of news from Latin America. For example, *Pueblos Hispanos* welcomed in their offices on 6 June 1944 the delegate of Chile, Mr. Salvador Ocampo, and the Colombian delegate, Mr. Alberto Durán, who were on their way back to their respective countries after participating in the 26th International Labour Conference on 20 April–12 May 1944 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. A group of colleagues who represented various South American countries were present. Of course, 6 June 1944 was D-Day, marking the U.S. invasion of Normandy, France. De Burgos reported on the event and Corretjer's opening remarks commemorating this important day: "habíamos previsto que íbamos a tener un gran día en P.H. [*Pueblos Hispanos*] con la dicha y el privilegio de recibir en nuestra casa a dos grandes líderes de América Latina. Pero no habíamos previsto que nos íbamos a reunir en el día de la apertura del Segundo frente" (1944a).

As part of an international movement, the paper was a vehicle for disseminating news relevant to their cause of supporting international labor movements and freedom from oppressive governments in Latin America and the Caribbean. With their words, they fought fascism, colonialism and oppressive dictatorships. Representatives from Haiti and the Dominican Republic who both opposed the current administrations in their respective countries were also present at the gathering on that historic day. In support of democratic ideals, Max Audicourt, the General Secretary of the Haitian Democratic Party, accused the President elect of Haiti, Elie Lescot (1941–46), of voter intimidation. De Burgos recalls his speech "señaló la esclavitud en que por muchos años ha vivido el pueblo haitiano, que también forman parte de América y parte de la lucha por la redención de las masa sufridas del mundo. Prometió seguir luchando por la liberación de Haití, y por la Victoria de las naciones que luchan por esa misma libertad, dondequiera se encuentre usurpada" (de Burgos 1944a).

They struggled for the freedom from tyranny and coercion and for democratic ideals across borders using *Pueblos Hispanos* as a platform for social justice and liberation

struggles. In “Canción a los Pueblos Hispanos de América y del Mundo,” an original poem published for the first time in the paper on 11 March 1944 to commemorate its one year anniversary, de Burgos wrote: “Pero tu voz camina herida en cada brisa / y en cada suelo manso te reciben las lágrimas, / todavía reza un trueno de tiranos y dólares / sobre el vuelo tendido de tus tímidas patrias” (1944b). She highlighted the mission of freedom and justice which the editors and writers of the *Pueblos Hispanos* collective fought for. The poem suggests that the countries of América, with an accent, remain “tímidas patrias” having yet to fulfill their potential, which can only be realized through liberation from tyranny, education of the masses, and political independence. The stunted development of the countries, in her view, rests on the uneven relationship between the United States and economically dependent nations whose elite cooperate in various economic and political endeavors that continue to strengthen the dollar, with little regard for the impact of these policies on the non-elite. Their vision was an expansion of José Martí’s project of self-determination for the nations of Latin America.

The imperial United States that aggressively pursued greater political and economic influence in Latin America, and the one that José Martí cautioned against in his writings from New York, had reared its monstrous head. Martí’s untimely death prevented him from seeing his prophetic words come to pass. In de Burgos’ view, the independence of Puerto Rico is part of the continuation of Martí’s legacy. In her poem, “Canto a José Martí,” de Burgos invoked his spirit to complete the liberation project he began. Echoing Martí, she criticized the United States for betraying its democratic ideals of self-determination and freedom.

**Con una voz apenas comenzada,
Apenas recogida, apenas hecha;
Con una voz flotando entre horizontes
De ansiada libertad, sin poseerla,
De uniformes robustos, y de estrellas;
Con voz herida que se arrastra
Bajo el grito de América incompleta;
Con una voz de angustia desoída
Por donde pueda el alma de mi tierra;
Con una voz de suelo exasperado,
Vengo a decirte, santo, que despiertes. (1944c)**

In this poem first published in *Pueblos Hispanos*, de Burgos placed herself in the tradition of Martí. Just as he cautioned against the annexation of Cuba to the United States in the

1880s, de Burgos viewed with great suspicion a permanent relationship between the United States and the Puerto Rican colony in the form of a Free Associated State. That Puerto Rico would become one of the free and independent nations of America remained de Burgos' life-long mission.

The 1940s saw the rise of the Partido Popular Democrático, which was launched in 1938 and led by Luis Muñoz Marín. The party's motto was "Pan, Tierra, y Libertad" and its primary constituency consisted of workers, farmers and the middle class. An early supporter of independence, Muñoz Marín turned his campaign away from resolving the status question to focus on immediate social reforms. According to Cesar Ayala and Rafael Bernabe, the realization of political independence for Puerto Rico as economically unviable came gradually for Muñoz Marín (2007). By 1946, Muñoz Marín began to embrace U.S. capital as a way to industrialize the island.⁴ In response to the political situation on the island, de Burgos wrote the essay "Ser o no ser es la divisa" published in 1945 in *Semanario Hispano*, a short-lived Spanish-language paper, for which she won

the Premio de Periodismo by the Instituto de Literatura Puertorriqueña in 1946. Juan Antonio Rodríguez Pagán rightly notes that in this essay de Burgos "esboza su ideología político-social en relación con Puerto Rico y la América Latina" (1992: 21). He draws a parallel between her concerns in this essay and those she expresses in a letter to her sister written from New York, also written in June 1945, where she articulates "auténtica preocupación por el futuro de la Humanidad" (1992: 21).

De Burgos went beyond simply expressing her concern for humanity in this essay. She framed the debate



Jesús Colón Papers. Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, City University of New York.

around the independence of Puerto Rico in the language of human rights—the right of a people to govern themselves, rather than be pawns in capitalist and imperialist designs. She elevated the question of Puerto Rico’s status to the global struggles that were taking place at the moment, namely World War II, as well as the actions of the despotic governments of Trujillo, Somoza, and Carias in Santo Domingo, Nicaragua, and Honduras, respectively. In the essay, she described the question around Puerto Rico’s independence:

A esta hora de encrucijada a que ha llegado la humanidad, podemos llamar la era de las definiciones. No de las definiciones de carácter lingüístico, sino de las definiciones de carácter humano que tienen su tronco en el hombre, y se esparcen sobre las colectividades en una dinámica social que rige el destino de los pueblos por el bien o por el mal. Estamos en la era de la definición del hombre. (1945)

The concern for humanity in this essay is the right for people to develop, grow, and define themselves free from coercion and intimidation present in the colonial and imperial relationships in which Puerto Rico and other nations of Latin America found themselves with the United States. De Burgos’ insight into the colonial situation in Puerto Rico in 1945 echoes Albert Memmi’s understanding of colonialism: “revolt is the only way out of the colonial situation” and the colonial condition is “absolute and cries for an absolute solution; a break and not a compromise” (1965: 127). De Burgos argued that the only way to escape the colonial situation would be through a complete break with the United States; through independence: “en Puerto Rico hay sólo dos caminos. O exigir el reconocimiento incondicional de nuestra independencia, o ser traidores a la libertad, en cualquiera otra forma de solución a nuestro problema que se nos ofrezca” (1945).

The culture of the United States promoted amnesia of home cultures, and criminalized Puerto Ricans and Hispanics in the news. One of the goals of the early Hispanophone papers was to keep migrants in New York informed of newsworthy events in Latin America that did not make the mainstream papers in the United States. In so doing, the papers offered alternative images of Latin American peoples and countries that were deemed to be unable to govern themselves. Memmi argues that “the colonized’s liberation must be carried out through a recovery of self and autonomous dignity” (1965: 128). To counter the negative images of the global South, de Burgos featured Latin American icons in the paper such as Juan Bosch, José de Diego, Carmen Alicia Cadilla, and Marigloria Palma, among others. De Burgos’ writings for the papers provided an opportunity for self-study and self-knowledge. She offered an alternative

view of the world and a history of resistance to the greed of colonialism and capitalism, which threatened freedom around the world. Her account of the history of resistance in Latin America offered powerful counternarratives to those found in the mainstream media. She did this in her essay titled “Triunfa Juan Bosch en Concurso Periodista,” where she shared the news that the Dominican intellectual and statesman had won the prestigious “Hatuey” prize in Cuba named after the Taíno cacique who achieved legendary status for fighting against the Spanish colonizers in the early sixteenth century.⁵ De Burgos drew lines of allegiance across the globe for those who supported freedom from the greed of materialism, colonialism, and imperialism.

One of the goals of the early Hispanophone papers was to keep migrants in New York informed of newsworthy events in Latin America that did not make the mainstream papers in the United States.

Bosch had received his prize in Cuba as part of a celebration of the centenary of Dominican independence. De Burgos noted the irony of celebrating 100 years of Dominican independence while the cruelest dictator the nation had known, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina (1891–1961), was in power and had been for fourteen years when this essay was published in 1944.⁶ She described the dictator in this essay as “uno de los más sangrientos déspotas hispánicoamericanos, traidor a las esencias que hicieron posible el acto, es decir, a Duarte, a Sánchez y a Mella, y al gran pueblo dominicano que hizo posible tan gloriosa gesta” (1944d). Just two weeks before publishing this essay, de Burgos published her prophetic poem, “Himno de Sangre a Trujillo” in *Pueblos Hispanos* (1944e). The poem is haunting; de Burgos cursed Trujillo’s name for the blood of all of the innocent people whose lives were lost under his rule and were now on his hands. When de Burgos wrote this poem, Trujillo was about mid-point in his 30-year reign of terror. He was a meglomaniac who sought praise and re-named the capital “Ciudad Trujillo” during his dictatorship. De Burgos foretold that his legacy would be one of shame, death, and blood: “General Rafael, Trujillo General,/ que tu nombre sea un eco eterno de cadáveres/ rodando entre ti mismo, sin piedad, persiguiéndote” (1944e). She predicted that his legacy would be nothing but a shadow that would haunt the history of the Dominican Republic: “Sombra para tu nombre, General./Sombra para tu crimen, General./ Sombra para tu sombra” (1944e).

In two short essays published in *Pueblos Hispanos*, de Burgos brought news from Puerto Rico and Latin America to the *colonia* in New York while highlighting the

literary, cultural, and political contributions of two Puerto Rican women writers who followed similar migratory routes as de Burgos between Puerto Rico, Cuba and New York. She wrote the essay “Presentación de Marigloria Palma” to introduce Palma to her readers, as the author had recently arrived in New York (she later became a regular contributor to *Pueblos Hispánicos*). She noted that Palma had won the Premio de Literatura Puertorriqueña in 1941, the second woman to win this prize. De Burgos was the first to win this same prize in 1940 for her second collection of poetry, *Cancion de la verdad sencilla* (1939).

In these essays, de Burgos questioned the idea that culture emanates from the center to the periphery. She suggested that there are other traditions that challenge ideas of objectivity and reason that originate from the peripheries and the provinces. In de Burgos’ essay on Palma, she praised her for being “completamente subjetivo” (1944f). This subjectivity that defined Palma’s work comes through self-knowledge. Palma’s work, much like de Burgos’ own poetry, is frequently concerned with her own interiority and autobiography, leading to a sense of social justice that comes from within. Palma’s work, much like de Burgos’s own poetry, is frequently concerned with her own interiority and autobiography, leading to a sense of social justice that comes from within, “Rehuye formas objetivas de rebelión” (1944f), Burgos wrote in admiration of Palma. De Burgos further explored this idea in her poetry published in *Pueblos Hispánicos*. Her poem “Campo,” published just a year earlier in *Pueblos Hispánicos*, praises the provinces as the place from which ideas, traditions, and hope springs: “¡La tradición está ardiendo en el campo!/ ¡La esperanza está ardiendo en el campó!/ ¡El hombre está ardiendo en el campó!” (1943). By contrast, she described New York, the great metropolis, as “la ciudad del ruido y del cansancio” in her essay on Palma (1944f). The description of the city as a place of noise and exhaustion suggests that valuable ideas do not spring from the center; rather, they lack originality and are unintelligible.

De Burgos challenged the popular notion that Hispanophone women’s contributions should be limited to the realm of the home.


De Burgos challenged the popular notion that Hispanophone women’s contributions should be limited to the realm of the home. She acknowledged a legacy of Latin American women intellectuals that includes Gabriela Mistral and Carmen Alicia Cadilla as well. Cadilla, like Mistral, also published in *Artes y Letras* as noted above. Cadilla’s political and cultural contributions extend beyond the island of Puerto

Rico. She shared similar roots and routes with de Burgos and Palma as she migrated throughout the Hispanophone Caribbean and New York. In *Pueblos Hispanos*, de Burgos shared the good news with her readers that Cadilla was recently awarded a scholarship to study journalism in Cuba and would soon be taking up residence there. De Burgos praised Cadilla for her ability to distill the images of sugarcane from its association with U.S. exploitation of Puerto Rican workers in her essay titled “Carmen Alicia Cadilla” published in *Pueblos Hispanos* (1944g). She noted: “Se pegó Carmen Alicia a la tierra épicamente. Se pegó a su tierra puertorriqueña. Y vio en la zafra su mayor tragedia, su más amarga cruz. Destruyó la villana bandera de la caña dentro y fuera de Puerto Rico como pabellón de explotación, y ofreció la caña limpia de pecado, redimida, a la flora natural del mundo” (1944g). In her writing, Cadilla restored Puerto Rican symbols to the island free of the negative connotations they had been shrouded in because of U.S. influence on the island. Cadilla’s contributions were significant if the Puerto Rican people were to free themselves from oppression, as the “colonizer’s rejection is the indispensable prelude to self-discovery. That accusing and annihilating image must be shaken off” (Memmi 1965: 128).

The early newspapers were often used to lead campaigns for community action and raise funds for particular community crises (Kanellos 2007: 435–55). De Burgos’ article on Luis Llorens Torres’ illness is an example of this. In 1944, he was severely ill and was brought to the United States for surgery and advanced medical care. De Burgos went to visit the poet in the hospital with Corretjer. In the essay, she identified herself as a New York Puerto Rican and demonstrated the way the paper created a transnational community and solidarity between Puerto Ricans on the island and in New York: “La crisis de su vida lo ha tomado lejos del más hondo motivo de su existencia: Puerto Rico. Somos los puertorriqueños de Nueva York los que tenemos el deber de cuidar de esa vida preciosa. Unámonos todos, alrededor de PUEBLOS HISPANOS para homenaje de su vida” (1944h:5). De Burgos did not see the Puerto Ricans on the island and those in New York as two separate groups of people, but rather as one people who had been separated by U.S. intervention on the island and the harsh economic realities that led to the massive migration of Puerto Ricans to the States. The political and cultural transnational relationship de Burgos helped to establish between the island and the New York community through the paper allowed her to express a more fluid and flexible sense of Puerto Rican identity, something that she had already started to do in her earlier writing while living on the island. Juan Gelpí (2000) has asserted that de Burgos created a nomadic subject in her poetry that traces the river flows, waterways, and the natural landscape. In New York, the migratory subject in her prose moves along the cityscape and urban geography (Montero 2008).

Respalde Proyecto Marcantonio Independencia Puerto Rico

JUL 1948



5¢ **SEMANARIO PROGRESISTA** **5¢**

"Injérese en nuestras repúblicas el mundo, pero el tronco sea el de nuestras repúblicas." MARTÍ

VOL. I. NUEVA YORK, 3 DE JULIO DE 1943 No. 20

PH PRESENTA:

<p>Julia De Burgos J. Davila Semprit Cesar Andreu Lopez De Victoria A. Gonzalez Orona Gabriel Aracelis Milagros Ramos C. Soto Velez Leonard Lamb Jesus Colon Emeterio Montes</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">PARTIDO POPULAR DESCONTENTO CON MUNOZ MARIN</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Pag. 4)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ALBIZU CAMPOS: JUBILO Y DUELO</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Pag. 2)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">MANIOBRAS MONARQUICA EN ESPANA</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Pag. 8)</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>N. Y. Public Library 42nd Street + 5th Ave. N. Y. C. N. Y.</i></p>
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**Editoriales-Cuentos
 Cronicas Reportajes
 Antologia-Etc. Etc.**

Pueblos Hispanos. Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, City University of New York.

Sharing news from Latin America with the migrant community in New York was an important step in developing transnational relationships between the home country and those migrants living abroad. The circulation of news stories provided migrants the opportunity to influence local politics in their home countries. The cultural news that they read in the paper allowed them to retain a sense of cultural identity from the home country while combining their experiences in their new home to generate new knowledge and self-awareness.

Promoting Hispanic Culture in New York

In one of the most interesting articles that de Burgos wrote for *Pueblos Hispanos*, “Cultura en Función Social” (1944i: 9), she laid out the objectives of the newspaper and of the art and culture section, for which she was the editor. This essay demonstrates that the paper was created in defense of the community, and sought to facilitate the development of institutions serving Hispanics. As noted above, at the time many editors and writers wanted to promote Hispanic culture in the United States. De Burgos joined the staff of the paper and agreed to work with Corretjer because of their shared political beliefs: “es por coincidencia de principios y de posiciones frente a la batalla general entre las fuerzas reaccionarias y la justicia humana, y frente a la lucha específica que sostienen los pueblos hispanos en Nueva York por su supervivencia y superación” (1944i: 9). This demonstrates, once again, that editors of the paper had a clear understanding of themselves as part of a minoritarian identity within the United States and they framed their demands for justice in the language of human rights.⁷ This is quite different from the sense of identity Puerto Ricans described approximately fifteen years earlier in *Gráfico*.⁸

De Burgos promoted “culturas hispánicas,” while always acknowledging the heterogeneity and diversity of Latin America as one of its greatest assets.

United in vision and purpose, de Burgos and Corretjer endeavored to confront the challenges and discrimination that Puerto Ricans and Latinos in the United States faced by defining, preserving, and promoting the cultures of Hispanic America. As noted earlier, Hispanism was thriving during the decades of the 1930s and 1940s. Faber criticizes the Hispanism of the 1930s for being assimilationist, and denying the heterogeneity of Latin America. De Burgos promoted “culturas hispánicas,” while always acknowledging the heterogeneity and diversity of Latin America as one of

its greatest assets. Rather than praising *Hispanismo*, she strove for solidarity among Latin Americans, or “hispanoamericanos.” She focused on what she perceived to be authentically “Americano” and distinct from Spain: “Por razones de colonización la cultura, refrescada y enriquecida en la virginidad americana, aportó elementos determinantes en la estructuración de nuevas formas de cultura” (1944i: 9). In hiring de Burgos, *Pueblos Hispanos* hired an art and culture editor who had a sophisticated understanding of culture. De Burgos defined culture as “una proyección o manifestación directa del espíritu de una colectividad,” and argued that Latin America heterogeneity (“el mestizaje”) “ha sido la fuente máxima de nuestra expresión autóctona”(1944i:9).⁹ De Burgos saw the cultural identities of the home countries as a site of strength and resistance against the assimilationist culture of the United States. Her sense of Hispanism clearly focused on the Americas and acknowledged the cultural diversity and heterogeneity of Latin America as a source of power.

De Burgos believed that if “nuestra América,” referencing José Martí, was to free itself from the imperial grip of the United States, it would have to turn inward. The path to freedom, according to de Burgos in this essay, could be found in critical self-study:

Antes que nada, afrontar, con mente abierta y espíritu crítico, todos nuestros problemas; analizarlos, sin olvidarnos del marco limitado donde se presentan, con mente universal; someterlos desnudos al pueblo para concienzudo estudio, y fijarle causas auténticas y soluciones permanentes. [. . .] Ha sido una mano leal al pueblo que ha presentado abiertamente, en toda su tragedia y en todas sus posibilidades, los problemas mayores de nuestra América. (1944i)

The idea of sustained, critical study, according to de Burgos, was the key to finding permanent solutions to local problems. This would lead the countries of Latin America to be able to reject the solutions offered to them by an imperial U.S. project.

One of the manifestations of this self-study was educating Puerto Ricans and Latin American migrants in New York who were disconnected from their home countries about the history of resistance of Latin American people. De Burgos’ writing for the newspaper reminds the Puerto Rican people of the strong history of resistance on the island by sharing the stories of important historical and political figures. She wrote essays such as “El Hombre Transmutado” (1944j), a short article dedicated to the legacy of Puerto Rican poet, José de Diego, who fought for Puerto Rican independence from Spain in the late nineteenth century. The essay educates the community about the idea of Puerto Rican independence, an idea that dates back to the nineteenth century, and carries in it the belief in Puerto Rican self-governance. It lifts the morale of

the community and encourages solidarity, while providing the community with a positive Puerto Rican role model. Finally, de Burgos used this article to denounce the U.S. intervention in Puerto Rican politics as she did in most of these short essays.

As a cultural mediator, de Burgos educated her readers about cultural institutions, art exhibits, and important events taking place in the city. She created two characters, Paloma and Iris, and wrote vignettes about these two women's experiences as they explored New York City. Paloma is a young woman of Iberian descent whose family fled from Spain during the Spanish Civil War to Mexico, where they were taken in by Iris' family. Seven years later, the two women meet by chance at the Museo de Arte Hispánico in New York City. De Burgos enticed her readers to visit the museum with descriptions of some of the best paintings of the Hispanic world by Goya and El Greco (1944k). She drew attention to the museum's sculpture and ceramic collections, as well as the samples of old lace, brocades, fabrics and tapestries, which harked back to the "hispano-moriscos," again affirming the heterogeneity of the Hispanic world (1944k). She underscored the beautiful tiles, mosaics, and furniture from previous centuries. And, of course, she singled out a first edition copy of Miguel Cervantes' *Don Quijote*. When she sees it, Paloma exclaims in surprise, "¡Quién me diría que en tu América, iba yo a ver la primera edición del Quijote!" (1944k). De Burgos stressed for the reader the impressive history, arts, and traditions of the Spanish-speaking world, including the mention of works by many important figures from Latin America, such as early editions of books by Ruben Darío, Heredia, and Sor Juana. Some of the greatest treasures of Latin America and Spain are now housed in New York City, supporting her belief that important ideas and culture move from the periphery to the center. The fact that so many of Spain's and Latin America's treasures are now hanging on the walls of a museum in New York like trophies, also suggests the shift of power that occurred in the Americas in the late nineteenth century from Spain to the United States.

As art and culture editor, de Burgos served as mediator and promoter of Hispanic American culture. She used the paper to educate the Latin American migrant community in New York City and establish transnational connections between the metropolis and the home countries. Although she promoted Hispanic American culture as a way to fend off the assimilationist push coming from U.S. culture, her writings focused on what is uniquely "Americano." For her, this was culture of the indigenous people of South America and Africa, who were brought to this part of the world. In this way, de Burgos avoids the assimilationist drive within Hispanismo and celebrates the heterogeneity of Latin America as a source of strength.

Conclusion

It's not clear why *Pueblos Hispanos* folded so abruptly, yet it is certain that the climate that had nurtured the birth of the paper had changed. The Cold War delineated a very different political landscape for Communists, nationalists, and *independentistas*, both in New York and in Puerto Rico. Although the aims of the writers and editors were to open a printing press and operate a bookstore to promote books they felt genuinely revealed a sense of "Americanidad," the paper closed before the realization of these goals.

Regardless, the Puerto Rican press in New York during the first half of the twentieth century developed transnational ties between the island and the growing migrant community in the metropolis. It offered opportunities for people to remain connected to Puerto Rico and to influence local politics, while also integrating their experiences in New York into their understanding of themselves. In this essay, I have tried to show the importance of de Burgos' contributions to the Spanish-language press in New York during the 1940s. The analysis of this selection of essays demonstrates that de Burgos used her writing to convey feelings of bonding and connection to "la cosa latina" in the United States. The political and cultural transnational relationship she cultivated in the paper allowed her to continue to imagine more expansive and inclusive ways to be Puerto Rican, something she had already begun to express in her poetry written on the island during the 1930s. She embraced a more heterogeneous sense of identity, inclusive of racial and gender differences, that encouraged hemispheric bonds of solidarity with migrant Latinos in New York City from across Latin America and the Caribbean. It is precisely this more fluid sense of national identity that would draw later generations of writers to her work, particularly Puerto Rican women writers and artists and sexual minorities in the diaspora.

NOTES

- ¹ While Silva Gruesz (2002: 208) notes that most Hispanophone writers of the nineteenth century shared a “possessive investment in whiteness” and were not attuned to the differences of race, class and gender differences separating them from contemporary Latinos. José Martí would later supply the missing components of racial consciousness in the form of a critique of economic imperialism (2002: 192) in the way that writers and *cronistas* before him had not.
- ² Thomas (2010) notes that a shift occurred in the way that Puerto Rican community members demanded citizen’s rights in the 1920s and by the 1940s framed their demand for rights in the context of human rights.
- ³ Silva Gruesz (2002) notes that as early as 1850s, the Spanish language press in the United States established transnational connections. She gives the example of Rafael Pombo, a Colombian poet, diplomat and editor, who lived in exile in New York during the 1850s to the early 1870s as one of the first to identify New York as a centralized location where many Spanish speaking exiles can meet and note that the city should be used as a space to share and transmit ideas about Latin American countries, news, their cultures, concerns and their “race” (2002: 163–76).
- ⁴ See Ayala and Bernabe (2007) for more on Muñoz Marín and the PPD.
- ⁵ The story of Hatuey highlights local resistance struggles and the connections that tie the islands before the arrival of the Spanish. As the Hatuey legend goes, the cacique left Hispaniola to Caobana (Cuba) to warn the inhabitants about the Spanish. As Bartolome de Las Casas tells the story, Hatuey warned the inhabitants of Caobana saying that “They have a God whom they worship and adore, and it is in order to get that God from us so that they can worship Him that they conquer us and kill us” (De las Casas 2004). As he told this story, he held a basket of gold and jewels by his side.
- ⁶ Trujillo ruled the Dominican Republic from 1930 until his assassination in 1961. Today he is remembered as one of the cruelest dictators of Latin America. He was an anti-communist whose policies led to peaceful relationships with the United States during the earlier part of his presidency. However, many of his policies often caused friction with other Latin American countries. He maintained friendly relationships with Franco in Spain, Perón in Argentina and Somoza in Nicaragua.
- ⁷ Other examples of this can be found in *Pueblos Hispanos* mission statement printed in every issue. See Image 2 of this essay.
- ⁸ Thomas notes that politically conscious Puerto Ricans in New York shifted their language from a demand for equal citizenship to a request for human rights because “the languages of recognition and human rights were more elastic and capacious, and more precisely descriptive of the growing connections among worldwide justice movements” (2010: 14).
- ⁹ De Burgos uses the problematic concept of “mestizaje” propogated by the Mexican intellectual and statesman, José Vasconcelos in his book *La raza cósmica* (1927). While “mestizaje” was understood by some as affirming indigenous and African ancestry of Latin America, others, such as Juan Isidro Jimenes Grullón, de Burgos’ partner from 1938–1942, promoted racial mixing as a way to whiten the race particularly in the Caribbean where there is a large population of people of African descent (*Luchemos por Nuestra América*, 1927). In fact, José Vasconcelos wrote the Preface to Jimenes Grullón’s 1927 book of essays.

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