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# Advocating for Latino equity: Oral histories of Chicago women leaders

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## ABSTRACT

Although a number of scholars have studied the dynamics of migration from Puerto Rico to Chicago, which accelerated between the early 1950s and late 1960s, the story of Puerto Rican community leaders, in particular women, has been largely neglected by urban scholars. To fill this gap, oral histories utilizing the critical race theory lens were conducted with Puerto Rican women who were part of the Puerto Rican Agenda—a think tank of community leaders within the Humboldt Park area, where Puerto Ricans have concentrated historically. The oral histories covered topics from their migration story to their leadership development to their struggles creating a more just city. The counterstories of three Latina *pioneras*—Hilda Frontany, Aida Maisonet Giachello, and Ada Lopez—are told to highlight how their identity led them to “shape change” not only in their own lives and families but their communities and beyond.

## Introduction

While several academics have made efforts to research Puerto Rican urban migration patterns to the U.S. and Chicago (Alicea, 2001; Duany, 2002; Fernández, 2014; García & Toro-Morn, 2018; Rúa, 2012; Toro-Morn, 1999; Whalen, 2001), the experiences of community leaders and, specifically, women leaders have been largely neglected by scholars. In this article, oral histories are employed to bridge the historiographical gap by studying *pioneras* (female pioneers) who became highly influential community leaders and made significant contributions to social justice and advocacy in Chicago’s Puerto Rican and Latino community. Yin (2008) conceptualizes case studies within a particular time-space that gives shape to a unit of analysis (e.g., a cultural group). Chicago is a good case study because it is considered the mecca of urban community organizing in general (Green & Luscombe, 2019; Halbwachs, 1992; Lowenthal, 1998) and among the Puerto Rican diaspora (Cintron, 2019; García Zambrana, 2015).

In this particular article, three oral histories are presented not because they are “representative” or “generalizable” (Small, 2009) but as a way to discuss multiple dimensions of identity—race, ethnicity, and gender—that motivate female community leaders to improve the living conditions of Latinos in the city. Interviews were conducted as part of the Oral History Project from the Center of Puerto Rican Studies (Centro, for short), which interviewed 100 Puerto Ricans across the U.S. nominated by members of their communities. In

the tradition of ethnography and oral histories, this in-depth interview study chooses a small number of participants to make meaningful contributions to knowledge (Small, 2009). The researcher was hired as the Chicago oral historian after being recommended by a community leader to Centro. The author interviewed female community leaders from the Puerto Rican Agenda, a collective in Humboldt Park, Chicago. All participants were nominated as notable Puerto Ricans by other community members and vetted by Centro. The three women interviewed as part of the project represent different timeframes, demographic features, urban migration experiences, and activism.

Oral histories, when combined with critical race theory (CRT) is a method that allows us to uncover the perspectives of people of color (POC) who's voices have been whitewashed and placed in the space of subordination in history books (Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, 1993; Matsuda, 1991; Yosso, 2005). In particular, this research is based on the principle of feminist CRT practice in oral history, which draws from the interviewees' memory and reflections as a tool for feminist and POC intersectional scholarship (Gluck & Patai, 1991; Johnson, 2000; Matsuda, 1991). Collective memory studies are an essential method for urban sociology to construct a history of space and illuminate social inequalities (Hunter et al., 2018; Tota & Hagen, 2015). While research on female leadership exists, primarily in an urban context, there is limited research on the impact of racial-ethnic identity and activism (Hicks, 2010; Yoder et al., 1998; Yosso, 2005).

Research on female leaders, mostly White women, tends to concentrate on positive feminine leadership characteristics or personality traits such as assertiveness, competence, and team-building (Hogan et al., 1994; Werhane, 2007). In these studies, which predominately represent the dominant group, operational strategies associated with women's leadership are listening, non-threatening collaboration, and communal consensus in civic engagement (Rosenthal, 1998; Wilson & Boxer, 2015). Adding complex dimensions of identity, CRT feminist scholars have discussed race, discrimination, gender, family relations, education, resistance, and activism through the unique lens of women of color (Davis, 1983; hooks, 1981; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983; Yosso, 2005). Several feminist CRT oral histories have discussed the general experiences of women of color. Until now, there has not been a study that directly documents their experiences organizing in highly contested and segregated cities with visibly apparent racial and ethnic inequalities like Chicago. Perhaps an exception has been Dolores Huerta, who organized in rural communities across the U.S. and co-founder of what is today the United Farm Workers. Sill, her contributions have been obscured compared to fellow activist Cesar Chavez (Sowards, 2019).

In the case of Puerto Rican women, this research finds that their stories revolve around their racial-ethnic-gender vectors of identity and social activism in the city. These female community leaders work to address urban problems that could be seen as a specific spatial phenomenon that affects Latinos and other communities of color, such as over-policing, the lack of representation, barriers in employment, education, housing, and health care, to mention a few (Dávila, 2004; Enchautegui, 1997; Fawcett et al., 2018; García, 2018b; Garcia-Hallett et al., 2019; García & Rúa, 2018; Sorlie et al., 2010; Toro-Morn, 2001). Oral histories will help us understand how these women come to terms with and contest the dominant social groups' impositions in their communities.

The research findings show that, like many Latinas living in cities, female Puerto Rican leaders experienced urban inequality firsthand and developed a sense of personal obligation to serve their community. Women also discuss their migration stories linked to their

awareness of ethno-racial inequities as young women born in Puerto Rico who become adults in the United States. Oral history participants shared how they took challenges and risks as activists (e.g., getting involved in political and advocacy campaigns) and how that provided opportunities not only for them but for Latinos and Latinas in Chicago as a whole. Overall, participants practice community-driven strategies and leadership styles with a feminist, collectivist, and egalitarian approach based on different aspects of their collective social and political identity. Finally, female community leaders also discussed the value of popular education and career-related social justice mentorship and how much it meant and the support and encouragement of others in positions of political recognition or power to transform the city and its historical conditions effectively.

The rest of the article is organized as follows: first, it offers a literature review on gender and Puerto Rican migration to Chicago and the use of oral histories and critical race feminism as a methodology. Second, the methods employed are presented. Third, the oral histories of three extraordinary female Puerto Rican community leaders creating change in Chicago in various fields—that is, Hilda Frontany (community development, employment, education, and housing), Aida Maisonet Giachello (health), and Ada López (education)—are synthesized. Finally, in the discussion and conclusion, four key themes that emerged from the oral histories are discussed.

## Literature review

### *Gender and Puerto Rican migrants to Chicago*

Early historical work has privileged the accounts of European immigrants in the context of urbanization (Duany, 2002; Whalen, 2001). For example, the Chicago School of Sociology and its human ecology framework contributed to the social construction of race and ethnicity, which became the foundation of assimilation theory (Chavez, 1992; García, 2019; García & Toro-Morn, 2018; Macisco, 1968). African American migrants, who moved from the South, were thought to be unable to assimilate (Imani & Cullors, 2020). Latinos' ambiguity as not Black or White in the Windy City made them unassimilable too (Fernández, 2014; Rúa, 2012).

Sociologist Maura Toro-Morn, the most recognized Chicago contemporary feminist Puerto Rican scholar, has identified three themes in her work: (1) how the U.S. colonial relationships have led to the massive migration of Puerto Rican women, American citizens since 1917, to cities like Chicago, which became the third-largest U.S. Puerto Rican city after New York and Philadelphia (Toro-Morn, 1999; Toro-Morn, 2001; Toro-Morn & Alicea, 2004; Toro-Morn & García, 2017); (2) class relations also distinguished the migration of Puerto Rican women recruited to work in the city as domestic workers (Toro-Morn, 1995; Toro-Morn, 1999; Toro-Morn, 2001; Toro-Morn & García, 2017); and (3) gendered relationships were also at play as employers search for docile women, unlikely to protest unfair work conditions, as contract laborers (Toro-Morn, 1995; Toro-Morn, 2001).

Toro-Morn has also discussed two waves of female workers. First, in the 1960s and 1970s, working-class women found themselves employed in manufacturing and domestic work (Toro-Morn, 2001). Second, in the 1970s and 1980s, there was a slight increase in the number of Puerto Rican women employed in white-collar clerical jobs (Cintrón et al., 2012;

Toro-Morn & García, 2017). This shift is attributed to broader societal changes like more women entering the labor force and the growth of educated women (García, 2018a), like Aida Giachello, who migrated from the island to obtain an education in Chicago. As we can see from above, the feminist literature on Puerto Rican women has concentrated on women's work, not on community leadership—a gap that this article seeks to fill. Furthermore, even if not explicitly, an author like Toro-Morn has given visibility to Latinas and Puerto Rican women by using counterstories to break the presumptions of women of color as stay-at-home mothers, which was the dominant White and middle-class narrative at the time. The next section describes the link between critical race theory and counterstorytelling.

### **Critical race theory and counterstorytelling**

Tara Yosso, who is a Latina critical race theorist (LatCRT) scholar, employed “counter-storytelling” as a methodological strategy—that is, a recount of narratives, testimonies, and oral histories about “the experiences of racism and resistance from the perspective of those on the margins of society” (p. 2). In her book, Yosso lifts the voices of Chicana/o high school and university graduate students. Yosso asked her participants questions about discrimination, gender, family relations, education, and activism in these counterstories. She analyzes Chicana/o students' past struggles and their acts of resistance, and the practices that helped them be more resilient. Similarly, Delgado and Stefancic, when describing 10 themes that have characterized the CRT discourse, highlighted “storytelling/counterstorytelling” and “naming one's own reality” as the second theme (1993, p. 463).<sup>1</sup> Given that majority narratives dominate, the mere act of telling the stories of people who are often invisible can be a revolutionary act in Delgado & Stefancic's (1993) account.

Another important theme that has been discussed in CRT is “race, sex, class, and their intersections” (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993, p. 463). In particular, Angela Davis's work broadens CRT to be more intersectional by emphasizing gender and racial justice (Davis, 1983). Davis, a philosopher by training, discusses how many Black radical feminists were not recognized as feminists because they were mostly involved in the Black movement and not the feminist movement. She also explains how the movement started with Black women such as bell hooks,<sup>2</sup> Cherrie Moraga, and Gloria Anzaldúa in the early 1980s wrote and published the stories of their life and other women of color to preserve their lived experiences and claims for future generations (hooks, 1981; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983).

These stories are seen as a way of creating a record of the past and the present racial dynamics as well as breaking the silence by naming sexism and racism as a systemic problem. For instance, bell hooks, in her groundbreaking book *Ain't I a Woman?* makes a call to White feminists to raise their consciousness and act as actual allies. hooks and other Black feminists employ historical accounts and storytelling, or counterstorytelling to use Yosso's conceptualization, to show Black women's reality. Critical race-gender epistemologies see women of color as creators of knowledge (Bernal, 2002). In this view, oral histories are a tool that validates POC and feminist knowledge, urban experiences, and voices (Gluck & Patai, 1991; Johnson, 2000; Matsuda, 1991). The next section presents a more general overview of oral histories.

## On oral histories

Oral histories are the collection, compilation, and study of past events gathered directly from an eyewitness through interviews that may be recorded in audio and, increasingly, video (Portelli, 2010). In the context of the 1970s audiotape, Studs Terkel (precisely in Chicago) conducted the oral histories of ordinary people who lived in the city, including hundreds of immigrants, documenting how they lived, where they worked, and their everyday activities (Terkel, 2006). Although he did not interview Puerto Ricans specifically in his work *Division Street America* (1967), these interviews are valuable today to understand the context of the city that Puerto Ricans and other Latinas/os lived in—where they experienced urban renewal segregation and discrimination. Yin (2008) emphasizes that case study methodology (e.g., Chicago’s Puerto Rican community) is helpful when the relationship between a phenomenon and context are not evident.

Oral histories have many advantages, including serving as a dependable record of some historical events where documented history is deficient, like CRT and feminism (Davis, 1983; hooks, 1981; Yosso, 2005). Oral histories have been used to compile many migrants’ biographies, thereby helping us know more about their social backgrounds and urban migration experiences (Thomson, 1999). Over the years, many historical events related to Latinos and Latinas in the U.S. have been well documented through oral histories. Some of these events include the Farm Worker Movement (UC San Diego Libraries, 2017), the Bracero Program (Center for History and New Media, 2010), and the Young Lords Oral History Project (Grand Valley State University, 2020), to mention a few. Combining oral histories with LatCrit is vital to explore how Latinas who became leaders responded to their conditions. The Center for Puerto Rican Studies’ Oral History Project discussed below is one of such efforts.

## Methods

### *Centro’s Oral History Project*

The purpose of the Puerto Rican Oral History Project, spearheaded by the Center for Puerto Rican Studies (Centro) at Hunter College, is to honor distinguished individuals within the Puerto Rican community. The project seeks to document significant events that have occurred in the Puerto Rican community and the involvement of notable individuals. This study aims to add to the current knowledge about individuals’ contributions to the Puerto Rican community. The tradition of oral histories also provides details on the community’s evolution and its collective memory through personal accounts and individual experiences (Halbwachs, 1992). Although this study doesn’t try to understand the role of memory in constructing history, it is important to understand that living memories survive by telling stories verbally (oral histories), and when they are written they become history, which is a literary phenomenon (Eshel, 2002; Eshel & Rokem, 2013).

Centro recruited more than 100 individuals to participate in this study. Centro also recruited the author to conduct interviews in Chicago. This is why Chicago was chosen for this particular case study. Yin (2008) shows that case studies do not necessarily use control variables. Other researchers were recruited in Florida, Philadelphia, and so on. The author believes that stories similar to Frontany, Giachello, and López could be found in other cities, so in that sense, Chicago might not be unique. However, what is important is that academics

and popular writers alike have failed to tell Puerto Rican women's stories in Chicago, and this text seeks to fill that gap.

Each subject participated in a series of interviews where they were asked questions about their personal history, significant life events, involvement in the Puerto Rican community, and the meaning of the materials (i.e. newspaper clippings, photographs, writings, etc.) that they donated to Centro's archives. The time commitment of each participant was between 5 to 20 hours. The interviews were video-recorded to document essential stories and experiences that add to the current knowledge of the urban Puerto Rican experience. The purpose of obtaining all this data was to make it accessible to current and future researchers who wanted to tell the stories of notable individuals of the Puerto Rican diaspora and the community as a whole. Because of this, all recordings are being made available at the Center for Puerto Rican Studies's library and archives, which are publicly available here: <https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/digitalarchive/index.php/Detail/entities/953>.

### ***Chicago Oral History Project***

On methodological terms, the three participants were not chosen by convenience, and they are not representative. However, in the epistemological framework of oral histories and ethnography, three interviewees achieve our goal (Small, 2009). Participants were nominated by other community members and vetted by Centro. The process of nomination consisted of sending a survey to community contacts, accepting e-mails and letters as part of the comment process, having conversations with community leaders, and hosting a number of information and listening session to discuss the Oral History Project, share the stories of other nominees and honor all the local community leaders highlighting their contributions publicly. Frontany, Giachello, and López were chosen among other Chicago leaders after some level of community consensus was reached through these different methods. Centro hired the author to conduct oral histories upon community leaders' recommendation. The interviews were conducted between February and March of 2015 with Puerto Rican women who migrated into Chicago between the early 1950s and late 1960s. I solicited each interviewee's full life history while also asking relevant probing questions to unveil their long-forgotten/immigration memories. I knew the three participants relatively well, as we all organized together in the Puerto Rican Agenda for about 5 years—an activist and political organization that seeks to advance Puerto Ricans' cause within the City of Chicago. Although we had an interview guide from Centro, I chose to apply Michael Frisch's view of oral history: allowing each interview to take its unique form rather than following stereotyped steps (Frisch, 1990).

I employed life-story interviewing techniques of narrative analysis, which encourages paying great attention to the narrative's details to ask follow up questions (Atkinson, 1998). Like the work of Puerto Rican feminist Elena Padilla, I chose to use our shared experiences and engagement (membership of the Puerto Rican Agenda) as an anchor to understand their personal story as community leaders (Rúa, 2011; Seale et al., 2004). The interviews were not transcribed, but the researcher listened to all the video interviews, taking note of all the narrative usage of memory (Frisch, 1990; Green & Luscombe, 2019; Lowenthal, 1998). By considering what each narrator remembers, their order, and how they reflect on their past, through memory and stories, one can determine her life story (Green & Luscombe, 2019). However, while writing their biographies, I found that I had to ask some questions

again and re-write, as I misunderstood several points and the order of events. I was fortunate to have the participants help me with the editing of their biographies and this article.

I paid utmost attention to each narrator's autobiographical memory while listening to the videos because this tells us how and why a narrator still remembers specific events. As Penny Summerfield poses, an event that is of great importance to a person will always be in her memory and will most likely be retold at the slightest opportunity to do so (Summerfield, 2004). There is a very close relationship between memory and meaning; we remember because it meant something. Toni Morrison describes how enslaved Africans' individual and collective memories are remembered because they were traumatic experiences (Denard, 2015). Although traumatic events are remembered more vividly, people generally tend to remember life-changing events (Hunt & McHale, 2007). The next section discusses the life stories of three amazing women leaders for whom I conducted oral histories.

### **Findings: Three Puerto Rican women creating change in Chicago**

I met Hilda Frontany, Aida Maisonet Giachello, and Ada López at the Puerto Rican Agenda. In this collective, Puerto Rican leaders, institutions, and individuals discuss and address the needs and dreams of Puerto Ricans living in Chicagoland. There, I had the privilege of getting to know each one of these extraordinary women at a personal level. As a young woman, I came to deeply respect their work in bilingual education, affordable housing, public health, among other social justice issues.

The main themes we can summarize from the oral histories and subsequent biographies are that these three women leaders had: (1) an understanding and appreciation of their culture as Puerto Ricans and as Latinas in the U.S. paired with a sincere belief that one can live successfully without compromising one's cultural identity; (2) feelings of inequality and discrimination toward their racial, ethnic, and gender group paired with a desire of creating social change; (3) collaborative leadership styles that seek the empowerment of others as opposed to power; (4) being mentored and grounded with a well-developed social support network within Puerto Ricans, Latinas/os, and other allies. Below, I share the inspiring stories of Hilda, Aida, and Ada collected through oral history methodology. Through these counterstories, I highlight their experience in the city, dealing with social injustice and becoming involved to advocate for representation.

#### **Hilda Frontany**

When many Latinos and Latinas were afraid to fight for their rights, Hilda, as an organizer with the Lakeview Latin American Coalition, advocated for bilingual education and housing rights. At the local level, Hilda's strength and determination in pushing the Puerto Rican community forward resulted in the creation of numerous organizations that thrive today, including Open Door and *Universidad Popular* (The People's University). At the national level, she was a crucial player in the 1972 *Puerto Rican Organization for Political Action (PROPA) vs. Kasper* federal case, which guarantees to print voting ballots in several languages, including Spanish. Because of her many accomplishments, the Women's Center of Rincon Family Services was dedicated to her in 2013, and in 2014 she received a proclamation from the State of Illinois as a pioneer for social justice.



Hilda Frontany, which became a civil rights hero, moved from Arecibo, a rural town in the mountains of Puerto Rico, to urban Chicago in 1953, at the age of 10, with her mother and younger brothers. In search of the American dream, her father found an opportunity working in the hog-butchered yards in the earlier 1950s and sent for the family to come to live with him. Her family moved into the Lakeview community near Lincoln Park, a primarily Puerto Rican neighborhood, and next to Holy Name Cathedral. Hilda and her family soon found that the Puerto Rican community in Chicago faced racism, xenophobia, and much hardship, which brought her great anxiety. She recalls a particular traumatic instance of racial-ethnic discrimination when her father and others in the community had to throw large blocks of ice at Italian-Americans in self-defense,

I remember that Italians surrounded this community. There was a Goldman Dairy Company & Company there for coffee. When the Italians came around, they did not want us living in that neighborhood. My family would get ice from the dairy company and use the big blocks of ice to defend themselves from the rooftop.

Although, according to Frontany, Puerto Ricans were not necessarily welcomed in Lakeview, Puerto Ricans themselves were undeterred by the challenges they faced. If anything, it made the entire community stand firm in its efforts to carve a space for themselves. Hilda's very first taste of community work took place in the church. Hilda found strength in a strong mother who took on leadership roles. Her mother was very involved with the Roman Catholic Church, particularly in its efforts to help the city's Puerto Rican community. Her mother would take her to processions. She adds:

These processions were not all the time religious in nature; some of these processions were protests. So, I got very involved with what my mom was getting engaged in and with the community. She visited many people in the neighborhood that had problems with the landlords or issues with the clinic. I remember that in those days, many of the young children were being affected by lead poisoning.

However, the legacy of racism and segregation reigned supreme at Holy Name Cathedral, and Frontany recalls going to Spanish Mass in the basement of the building "because the church would not allow the services in the main sanctuary." The ambivalence of the church, and the social division between Whites and others, prompted Hilda and her family to look elsewhere for a church that would be "more accepting of who they were." This move landed them at St. Joseph's near Division Street, the heart of the Puerto Rican community at the time. In this new space, where Puerto Ricans concentrated, Hilda understood the importance of community organizing and mutual support. The church offered different support groups organized by age and gender to help newcomers transition into a new culture. Frontany spoke at length of the Puerto Rican Congress Mutual Aid system, which emerged in the 1950s. The church's groups sent their members for assistance in housing, education, and other services. Frontany often said, "solidarity, not charity," which is a value she believes is as important as ever.

After finishing high school, Hilda became more and more involved in several community organizing efforts in the Lakeview neighborhood. This included working with St. Sebastian Church, where she met Father Charlie Kyle, an influential community organizer. As Hilda casually refers to her mentor, Charlie was a primary organizer in the formation of the Lakeview Latin American Coalition. Together in this group, they fought for bilingual education rights in many schools throughout Chicago. As a community organizer with

the Lakeview Latin American Coalition, she began to tackle many issues relevant to housing. Hilda explains the conditions in which many Latino families were living:

They were running buildings that were criminal housing. Because many of these buildings had exposed lighting. Many of them did not have running water. So the committee met with the Cook County State Office because they had a unit where they try to prosecute the landlords that were found to be criminal of negligence.

One of the first and most important problems she dealt with was the treatment of tenants in the area. Wealthy and greedy landowners bought entire blocks “sometimes up to 18 or more buildings” and displaced the Puerto Rican families living there. Frontany would ensure that these displaced families were aware of their rights and given proper notice of eviction. Most times fighting for tenants’ rights was a losing battle, but eventually, they made a huge win. Hilda was part of a team that resulted in a deal with the local senator and the Department of Housing “so that some of these families could return to 10% subsidized housing once this development was finished.” Many of those who bought these buildings had no intention of gutting and rebuilding, and Hilda, along with her church, organized processions in which they “moved from building to building praying for owners and tenants.” At the end of these processions, the groups would assemble in St. Sebastian Church’s basement and meet with the landlords. Fighting injustice peacefully was critical for Frontany, who was formally trained in community organizing tactics.

At the request of her mentor, Father Kyle, Hilda, and other community organizers were fortunate to attend classes at the Industrial Areas Foundation, a national network of local faith and community-based organizations. There, she learned “how to organize these peaceful processions successfully.” She also learned “many different tactics and the strategies of Saul Alinsky, to organize and rally the community together,” and make their voice in the community clear and compelling. Hilda also learned from community organizer José Cha Cha Jiménez, who was the Young Lords leader. This Puerto Rican urban gang fought against police brutality and urban renewal and transformed itself into a human rights organization. While engaging most times in peaceful protest, Hilda was also trained in civil disobedience, strikes, and boycotts.

Frontany also fought for women’s rights. Under her leadership, the Lakeview Latin American Coalition started to work on women empowerment by making them aware of the “services available out there so they could bring them back into the neighborhood.” Women began to get themselves educated and led prevention and other health campaigns. Many people understood that “women did not want to approach the medical doctors because, in Puerto Rico, the midwives took care of them.” They formed an education committee to help expecting mothers understand that it was essential to go into a health clinic. This evolved into the “*promotoras de salud*” (promoters of health), a popular strategy for community-health outreach among Latina immigrants.

But for Frontany, like many Latino women of her generation, as Angela Davis (1983) points out, feminism was just part of her human rights agenda of broader equality in her community. Throughout the lifetime of the Lakeview Latin American Coalition, Hilda fiercely “combated many other issues, including bilingual education, landlords involved in criminal acts against Latinos, police brutality, and high Latino unemployment.” Ultimately, the coalition’s efforts inspired other organizations and foundations that would focus on specific issues. The Open Door, for example, was instrumental in providing

employment opportunities for the Latino community. One of the biggest challenges that the Open Door faced was recommending Latinos to employers who ultimately fired them due to a lack of English-speaking skills. As a result, *Universidad Popular* (The People's University) was formed by the coalition and taught "English as a second or survival language." She further explains:

When we began organizing Latinos to be employed, we found out that employers said, "We cannot employ you because you do not even have basic English to understand safety issues in the place you want to work." We said, what do we do with this now? Now we need to do something different. Do you go out and find a place, or do we create our own? As the Lakeview Coalition, we created what was called *Universidad Popular*. We chose a name because we wanted to think big, but it was an operation of one teacher and 14 students in a basement rented by a friend of ours. Then it became a recognized institution through city colleges in Chicago.

*Universidad Popular* still exists today over 40 years later and now offers a wide variety of classes. Through joint efforts and partnerships of these kinds, Chicago organizations empowered Latinos. After many years of working as a community organizer, Hilda realized that "for real change to occur, there had to be a strong political voice for the Latino community." This realization led her to develop a relationship with the Puerto Rican Organization for Political Action (PROPA) in the early 1970s. This not-for-profit organization seeks to involve Latinos in electoral politics. To vote, Spanish speakers, including Puerto Ricans, had to swear to an oath given in English. Hilda explains:

When we started to do the voter registration, we noticed that many of the newcomers coming to our community, were not able to exercise the right to register because of the language, they could not speak English. We concentrated our efforts, and PROPA met with the Lakeview Coalition, and we decided there was a need to do a lawsuit.

The matter was brought to the courts. The judge ruled in their favor, a ruling that has benefitted Spanish-speaking people more generally. Thanks to Hilda's organizing efforts and others like her today, ballots are printed in many different languages. This was a huge win.

Acknowledging the Latino vote's power, in 1975, Frontany ran Miguel Velázquez as her first political campaign, but it was a failure. "We did not win, but we advanced the discourse," Hilda explains. Many times Frontany referred to adversity as a natural part of community organizing, "you just have to be persistent." In the hopes of getting better, the coalition started an institute to teach people how to run for office or be a good organizer for a political campaign. Frontany was highly involved in the political campaigns of former Illinois senator Miguel Del Valle and U.S. Representative for Illinois's 4th District Jesús G. "Chuy" García. Both won. Though Hilda's roots are grounded in the Lakeview community, much of her life's work has been dedicated to the Humboldt Park area, where most Puerto Ricans are concentrated today after being displaced from Lakeview. Though there is still much work to do, primarily related to the displacement of the Puerto Rican community from Humboldt Park, Hilda has achieved leaps and bounds as a steadfast Latina activist. To this day, Hilda Frontany remains one of the most influential leaders of the Puerto Rican community in Chicago, fighting for human rights, working to end racism, and making sure that democracy works by making demands from decision-makers.

## ***Aida Maisonet Giachello***

Dr. Giachello is in the Department of Preventive Medicine at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. She is a respected educator and researcher who has been involved in community mobilization and action around health education, culture, and empowerment. Aida founded several organizations, including (1) the Midwest Hispanic AIDS Coalition, a nonprofit engaging in HIV prevention and education, training, and research and, (2) the Midwest Latino Health Research, Training, and Policy Center, a community-based research center at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) focus on health disparities. Recognizing the intersecting roles of race, ethnicity, age, class, gender, and sexual orientation, she was involved in countless grassroots efforts.

Because of her anti-racism work in health, Aida has received over 44 awards and recognitions throughout the years, including being honored in 2005 by *Time Magazine* as “One of 25 Most Influential Hispanics in America.” Later on, in 2010, Aida was named “One of Ten Persons Who Inspire” by the American Association of Retired Persons, together with Clint Eastwood, Raquel Welch, and others. In 2014, she received the “Health Equity Champion” award from the Centers for Disease Control.

Aida was born in December 1945 in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Her parents were Ramón Maisonet Seise and Hortensia González Cordero. At the age of 3, her parents moved to New York City, looking for better economic opportunities. When her family first arrived in New York with three other siblings in the late 1950s, they experienced financial hardship. They lived off welfare and in public housing for about a year until her parents could find jobs to support the family. Aida recalls,

I vividly remember that we had to live modestly because of the requirement to be part of the welfare system. My mother could not live with my father. My father needed to live separately in a bedroom somewhere with friends. We could not have a radio or any item that might place the family as not being eligible. I still remember when the social worker would come in the evening and at midnight to make sure that there is no man in the house. To make sure that we did not have any [luxury] items. But that period did not last very long, because my mother and father wanted to be together.

Both her parents worked in factory jobs. While living in Spanish Harlem, Giachello experienced childhood poverty and observed the severe problems of drug abuse and gang violence. Parents worked 7 days a week to save some money. When Aida was 10 years old, her family returned to Puerto Rico and open a small business, a restaurant in Santurce, San Juan, where her parents made her work as a server. She would do her homework in her downtime sitting at one of the restaurant tables. The reason, as Giachello explains, was that,

My parents decided that [NYC] was no way to raise children, so they wanted to go back to Puerto Rico. But this was meaningful for me because I was exposed to poverty in Puerto Rico, but the poverty there was different. Homes were clean, people have food, and the neighbors were friendly, while in NYC, there was hopelessness and despair. This gave me a sense of justice in our society. It helped me understand inequality. This gave me a desire to help others, and later it led me to get a degree in social work.

Aida’s childhood experiences in New York and Puerto Rico led to her commitment to an agenda of social justice addressing income, ethnic, and racial inequalities, mainly as they related to health care. Although at first, Giachello was not interested in going to college, mostly because she felt she was not good enough, she needed to go after being accepted:

I was the only one. It was mandatory to take an entrance exam to the University of Puerto Rico, and in my group of friends, I was the only one who passed the exam. I feel so bad because a lot of people wanted to go to college. I was the one not thinking about going to college, but now that I was accepted, I have to go!

In the above quote, Aida admitted guilt because she made it and her close Santurce friends did not. She first earned a bachelor's in sociology and psychology from the University of Puerto Rico (UPR). It was at UPR, after managing a team of researchers and training them to conduct interviews, the study investigators from Northwestern University made her a job offer to move to Illinois to assist in data analysis. This was a crossroad moment, as Aida explained:

They were so impressed with the work I did; they invited me to go to Chicago. I was 6-months married, and I already was expecting my first baby when they made the offer. My husband did not want to come because he heard about Al Capone and the cold weather, and he loved Puerto Rico. My parents the same thing! A lot of people against me. I made the decision to come because I knew this is where I needed to be. This is a great opportunity!

She had to convince her family of her decision. With her husband, Stelvio O. Giachello Pesqueira, originally from Uruguay, she relocated to Chicago in December 1968. Almost immediately, she met Silvia Herrera, then director of ASPIRA, Inc., one of the earliest community-based organizations encouraging Puerto Ricans and other Latino groups to complete high school and get a college education. Aida tells the story with great joy:

The rumors went out that there was a Puerto Rican, and Dr. Jeffrey Fox told his wife, who was Puerto Rican, Silvia Herrera. We heard at 7 p.m. someone singing "*Saludos, saludos, vengo a saludar*" [Hello, hello, we came to say hello]. We listen to it. We did not think it was for us. I told my husband, "It seems that there are other Latinos in here. Why else they would be singing a Puerto Rican song?" Then we realized it was them welcoming us to the neighborhood!

Silvia informed her of the availability of scholarships in social work and encouraged her to apply to the University of Chicago's School of Social Services Administration (SSA). At first, Giachello was hesitant to apply as she was expecting her first child and wanted to begin engaging in more "traditional roles, such as learning how to cook!" Aida applied to SSA and received the letter of acceptance with a full scholarship the same day she came home from the hospital with her newborn. Aida explains how this was another crucial moment in her life and how she would not have taken this opportunity without the continuous support of her role model and strong female mentor, Silvia Herrera.

After completing her MA in 1971, the family returned to Puerto Rico when she was pregnant with her second child. While in Puerto Rico, she first worked as director of a juvenile delinquency prevention program for the City of San Juan. Later on, she joined the faculty (first as an instructor and then assistant professor) in the Department of Social Sciences, Psychology, and Social Work at Interamerican University, Hato Rey, Puerto Rico. By that time, Giachello was pregnant with her third child. Other faculty members, most of whom were male, did not take her seriously because she only had an M.A. Feeling like an impostor and not being one of them, Aida realized that she needed to get a PhD if she wanted to be respected as a researcher working at the university.

In 1976, the family returned to Chicago as her husband was having problems getting a stable job. Aida describes her relationship with her husband as a passionate one, full of love and understanding, but it was clear she was the ambitious one moving the family

forward. By then, Giachello “had three small children and was convinced that she wanted to get a PhD and do research, my first passion,” she explained. At the time, Puerto Rico did not offer PhD programs. She immediately applied to the PhD program at the University of Chicago’s Sociology Department. While working toward her PhD, she started simultaneously working full-time as a medical social worker for the Chicago Department of Public Health, which opened a new clinic (the Lower West Side Neighborhood Health Center) in the Pilsen community. This community served as a point of entry to Mexican immigrants. Working there, she discovered “her second passion,” which was health care:

This was a critical time in my life. Because I fell in love with health care. I became aware of people’s problems to access health care, language barriers, cultural barriers, and financial barriers because they do not have insurance. The undocumented status, because pretty much everyone was undocumented in the area.

As Giachello explains, in this critical time of her life, she decided to specialize in health and illness sociology to address “social justice issues in the area of health through research and policy work.” Working as a social worker at the clinic also gave her “insight into racism, sexism, social discrimination in health and mental health services.” Giachello discovered that the health delivery system in the U.S. was not responsive to the needs of the poor, racial/ethnic minorities, women as a group, people who speak different languages, or different health beliefs and behaviors. Patients often did not receive quality care when exhibiting signs of severe health concerns. Diabetes, asthma, and other chronic conditions were redirected to social workers as if the problem was “in the patients’ heads” instead of conducting a complete physical examination and lab tests to determine the real source of the health problem.

As a result of her “increased awareness of these dynamics” and her “recognition of social policies’ role to change them,” she was instrumental in developing organizations such as the Chicago Hispanic Health Alliance in 1980. Aida became increasingly interested in politics and got involved in numerous political campaigns were Hispanics/Latinos, African Americans, and women were running for public offices. One of these campaigns was working as a volunteer during the primaries and the general elections for Harold Washington, the first Chicago Black mayor, who was elected in 1983. Giachello shared how her passion for community work was simultaneously a struggle to be able to finish her doctorate,

I took a lot of time to finish my PhD because I was always doing community work. One of the things that took my time was the election of Harold Washington. I worked during the primary. At that time, none thought that an African American man could ever be elected as mayor. There were very few people helping him in that primary.

Giachello assisted in organizing minority and women groups, developed speech remarks for Harold in health and human services, and assisted in developing concept papers to establish the Mayor Office for Latino Affairs and the Office for Women Affairs (which later became the Women’s Commission).

After the mayor was elected, she met the new health commissioner of the Chicago Department of Public Health, Dr. Lonnie Edwards, who offered her the position of special assistant for Hispanic Affairs after listening to her testimony about Chicago Latinos’ needs during citywide public hearings. In that position, Giachello launched a comprehensive

Hispanic health policy plan to address Latinos' health needs and improve the delivery of medical care to this population through the Chicago Department of Public Health's 44 neighborhood health centers and clinics.

In 1986, Giachello, who was working in the mayor's office, decided to return to academia and accepted an appointment as an assistant professor at the Jane Addams College of Social Work at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She applied for federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) funding during the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In the 1980s, she established the Midwest Hispanic AIDS Coalition, a six-state partnership of community, professional, and academic institutions engaging in community mobilization around HIV/AIDS. Aida explained with a cracking voice how, at a conference, she and her colleagues came up with the idea of applying for the grant and starting a new center,

There were a lot of people hurting in our community as a result of HIV/AIDS. The government was not being responsive. They were not listening to the problems. It was a very moving experience and something I get emotional when I think about it. We were holding hands and naming the people we knew who were lost. Many of our friends were dying!

It was clear that just thinking about it profoundly hurt Aida (my eyes also became watery as she spoke). In 1993, through CDC federal funding, Aida established the Midwest Latino Health Research, Training, and Policy Center at UIC. Her center focused on chronic diseases and maternal and child health issues. Giachello purposefully built upon Jane Adams's work and other great women of Hull House during the U.S. Progressive Era (1890–1910). Like Addams, Giachello has an affinity for “combining data collection with community education and policy change using a community empowerment approach.”

In summary, Giachello, through her research, policy, and advocacy work, has gained the respect of appointed and elected officials and the public health community. She has become a national leader and an expert on Latino health. Her opinions have been sought by the English media (NBC, ABC, CBC, WGN, CNN), the Spanish radio and T.V. networks (Telemundo, Univision, Azteca America, and Caracol). Aida has received invitations to participate in essential committees for the National Institutes of Health and the U.S. Surgeon General Hispanic Health Advisory Committee of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Giachello has been in meetings in the White House and has given testimonies during public hearings in the U.S. Congress. She is a strong advocate for increasing cultural proficiency and competency in health services delivery and reducing cross-cultural communications at the patient-doctor level and the health care delivery system level by changing organizational and cultural norms and policies. One of Giachello's work aligned with this mission is ensuring a more significant number of Hispanic health care professionals and researchers. Aida is determined to change the research paradigm from research on minorities to research with, for, and by minority groups. This requires researchers' specialized training to increase their cultural understanding and develop cultural competencies in studying the urban poor, women, racial and ethnic minorities.

### **Ada López**

Ada has dedicated her life to expanding cultural diversity in urban schools and providing access to bilingual education. She spent her early career as a community organizer for

ASPIRA, and, like Hilda, she worked closely with the Young Lords and other like-minded grassroots Puerto Rican efforts. As a student organizer at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), Ada was a crucial figure in developing the Latin American Recruitment and Educational Services (LARES) and the Rafael Cintrón Cultural Center, two organizations dedicated to promoting success for Latinos at UIC. López had been extraordinarily active in public policy, serving as a board member for the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) teacher's union in the early 1980s, the Mayor's Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs in the mid-1980s, and Illinois's Board of Education in the early 1990s. In 1993, she was the first Latina to run and win statewide elections to serve on the Board of Trustees in the University of Illinois system.

Ada López was born in 1947, and like Hilda, her family is originally from Arecibo, Puerto Rico, where she enjoyed playing hide and seek in the mountains. Thanks to an Indiana company's recruitment effort in Puerto Rico in the 1950s, her father found work in the steel mills of Indiana while providing for his family back home. Her father did not like Indiana, and at the recommendation of a very close Italian American friend, he moved to Chicago with his family a few years later. When she moved to Chicago, Ada had never been exposed to American culture or the English language and found herself having a hard time fitting in. She, thus, experienced "discrimination, bullying, and misunderstanding in the school setting." López attributes these first experiences as the beginning of her "cross-cultural communication training," which is part of Ada's academic field, trying to understand how people of different cultural backgrounds communicate in similar or other ways.

While a student of Chicago's community colleges, Ada became an activist and organizer. At this time, in the late 1960s, Ada and others were trouble to administrators, demanding a higher level of engagement in the form of involvement in the decision-making process from ASPIRA. This educational organization started in New York City and had recently moved to Chicago. Ada now talks about her feistiness, a little bit ashamed of it because she directly challenged Antonia Pantoja, which became her mentor. After questioning the intents of Antonia Pantoja and ASPIRA—in meeting the needs of college students like her—to her surprise, she was offered a job within the organization as a club organizer, which she accepted. Ada shared:

I was a teenager by the time I became active with ASPIRA. I was one of the first *Aspirantes* in Chicago, and I remember Antonia Pantoja and hearing about her in Washington, DC. I remember that Mirta Ramirez brought the organization to Chicago. Silvia Herrera was the first director, and these women were visionaries. They did a wonderful thing to institute ASPIRA. Because thought ASPIRA, we were able to aspire to go to the university.

Additionally, Ada received a scholarship from ASPIRA to attend UIC. This scholarship was intended to train teachers who would teach bilingual education. López ultimately earned a bachelor's degree and a master's degree from UIC. While at UIC, she helped develop various initiatives within the Latin American Studies Program. For example, Ada was vital in creating a group similar to ASPIRA at UIC called LARES, whose mission is to provide Latino students educational opportunities. To empower students by providing personal growth and educational opportunities and preparing leaders who will make individual and collective contributions toward the Latino community's cultural and social advancement. To empower students by providing personal growth and educational opportunities and preparing leaders who will make individual and collective contributions toward



Latino communities' cultural and social progress. Another important initiative that came out of her efforts was the Rafael Cintrón Ortiz Latino Cultural Center. This space hosts lectures, events, research, and community projects about Latino communities' cultural heritage.

Upon graduating in 1973, López established the Lakeview Alternative School, where she spent about 2 years as a director. In 1975, she started work with CPS as a bilingual teacher, and she worked there for about 7 years. Ada also became involved in the teachers union, promoting bilingual education at the picket lines and strikes:

At that time, I had been working on my master's degree, so I worked professionally in education, but I always maintain myself active in the community in some capacity. I was one of the few Latinos that was a member of the teachers union. I was a delegate. I was very active. I recognized that the union did not protect all the program and the vision that we as bilingual educators and us promoting bilingual education. In the community, we would raise money to hire a lobbyist to go to Springfield and defend bilingual education.

Ada had been in the classroom as a teacher for about 10 years when she received a letter from Aracelis Figueroa, the district supervisor of the Board of Education at the time, asking her to work with her as a bilingual coordinator and an auditor for CPS Sub-district 5. By the time that Aracelis Figueroa recruited her,

I have been organizing politically. I am growing as a professional and working but also working in the committee and fringing time to organizing when working with Aracelis Figueroa. I was already active in city politics. I have been part of an ad hoc committee we form to create a commission for Harold Washington, and at the time, we only had one alderman who was not effective because of the way he came to power. The Chicago machine supported him, so he was not effectively meeting the needs of Latinos. We met from any weeks before Harold Washington became mayor, in anticipation of him winning.

This is how the founding of the Mayor's Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs, a grassroots initiative dedicated to educational policy that eventually became embedded into Harold Washington's administration, came into being in the 1980s. She took a position as a commissioner, and they hired three more people for that office. Hence, her work with the commission gave her a new formal platform for continuing her work with the community.

As a CPS board member in the 1980s, López chaired the committee for reform. She noticed that overcrowding was one of the main issues. For example, she saw teachers in the West Side of Chicago teaching in hallways, under stairs, in the teacher's lounge, and so on. Ada recommended creating seven new schools, including Pablo Casals, Christine McAuliffe, and Cesar Chavez. In that role, she transformed CPS into an institution known for dealing more directly with cultural issues.

After her work on the Board of Education, Ada started working in the school reform office to implement the Mayor's Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs policies. In this role, she led many conflict resolution efforts that took her to different communities across the city. One of these communities was instrumental in her next leadership role. López had many meetings in the South Side with African American leaders and educators. At one of these meetings, leaders shared with Ada that there was a position on a Board of Trustees for the University of Illinois. The position piqued Ada's interest as she saw it as a way "to create public policy that would benefit communities that have been neglected for decades." Even

with all her self-doubt, in 1993, López ran and won the statewide election with 3 million votes, becoming the first Latina to do so. She remembers her deep frustration,

At the time cultural programs were under threat, I was able to increase the budget for them. I thought that when I was elected in 1993 that I will be doing more, and LARES could do more and expand. But it was not like that. It took a lot of energy to maintain what we had. I did increase the number of Latino faculty and chair the Affirmative Action Committee. And I was able to give arguments that would be sound to the institution.

Ada wanted to do more, and she could not. Her big dreams of change became more about maintenance. As a trustee, she saved the affirmative action program, which was about to be terminated at the state level. Additionally, the LARES program was also in jeopardy, and the professors' tenure was being questioned in all Illinois universities. But through her dedication and by building alliances in her role as an Illinois Board of Education Trustee, Ada increased the budget for all of these programs, ultimately preserving them.

López retired a decade ago from the Board of Education, but she hasn't slowed down her efforts to support her community. More recently, she founded the Strategic Alliance International, a consulting organization specializing in cross-cultural communication, corporate social responsibility, and educational partnerships. Currently, she is also a member of the board of the American Civil Liberties Union. In 2014, she published a book titled *Asi Somos (Who We Are)*, portraying Puerto Rican people's everyday values on the island and the diaspora. Ada's life in policymaking, education, and overall leadership has earned her a place as a well-respected member of Chicago's Puerto Rican community. López continues today in many different capacities speaking, educating, and championing the Puerto Rican community's rights worldwide.

## Discussion

Overall, this article shows that oral histories among women of color prove to be an essential tool for CRT epistemology, which seeks to broaden our collective understanding of the history, culture, and experiences of individuals, groups, and communities of color (Bernal, 2002; Davis, 1983; Delgado & Stefancic, 1993; hooks, 1981). These women, whose stories are at the margins, became leaders precisely because of their identity as Puerto Ricans and Latinas. They lived a diverse, dynamic, and highly contested urban experience that would not have been possible in rural Puerto Rico, where most Chicago Ricans come from.

One might rightly draw attention to the fact these women might have resisted assimilation into mainstream American culture. Although Lilia Fernandez (2021) contends that Latinos, like African Americans/Blacks, are thought to be unassimilable, like her, I think this framework misses the point. Frontany, Giachello, and López strongly identified with Puerto Rican culture and claims of distinctiveness to Anglo American culture in the community organizing world. Moreover, important institutions located in Humboldt Park, such as churches, schools, and other organizations, enabled and supported the use of Spanish and other Puerto Rican cultural practices for decades, with many descendants becoming bilingual and embracing Puerto Rican culture years after their mass migration. At the same time, Puerto Ricans are American citizens. These women's stories illustrate that being Puerto Rican is not incompatible with being American, mainly regarding civic and political engagement.

In the end, they all found fulfilling careers and meaningful lives, as opposed to “paying the price,” for becoming advocates for their communities. The aim in making the above observations is to explain from the outset that the story of Puerto Ricans and Latino/as is multifaceted and less absolute than assimilation theory would have you believe. We could see that these women supported social justice, ethnic, and gender equality in various domains, including political, economic, social, and legal. Other topics that we can derive from the above biographies are the importance of:

- (1) *Knowing oneself and doing something you believe based on their identity.* The feeling of otherness helped Frontany, Giachello, and López to gain racial and ethnic consciousness at a very young age. Because of the discrimination they experienced, these three women took on leadership roles and engaged in actions that align with their values and beliefs. These women created and followed their path of self-discovery by thinking about their identity as Puerto Rican women. In other words, they appreciated and were motivated by their identity and how it fits in an urban environment that, as young women, they experienced as unequal and discriminatory because of being a minority in the city. Their identity as women of color helped them offer a counterstory of being their authentic self and fight against injustices for people like them.
- (2) *Understanding community issues, having a vision, inspiring others to work on social change, and leading political movements.* Hilda, Aida, and Ada understood the community issue they could address, from language barriers to urban displacement to police brutality. They knew at a personal level that inequality, marginalization, and under-representation in academia, church, school, government, and other spaces were a reality in their lives and community, and they wanted change. Organizations like Lakeview Latin American Coalition, Open Door, Universidad Popular, the Midwest Hispanic AIDS Coalition, LARES, the Rafael Cintrón Cultural Center, and others became spaces for community organizing. These women believed that they must foster visions and inspire others to follow and act on that vision. Participants’ views concentrated on a deep commitment to social justice first in their local neighborhood and then in the city, which at times expanded to the regional or national scene like Aida’s participation on Illinois’s Board of Education, Ada’s leadership in the Midwest Hispanic AIDS Coalition, and Hilda’s involvement in PROPA lawsuit for voting ballots in Spanish. These women believe in social change and dedicated their lives to offer counterstories to the dominant story (e.g., quiet, passive, and patriarchal objects).
- (3) *Relational and collaborative leadership style.* Interviewees expressed that their leadership style reflected communal values such as listening, organizing, conflict resolution, running campaigns, networking, and education. Hilda, Aida, and Ada’s leadership style is centered on grassroots efforts, public policy, peaceful protest, team-building, consensus decision-making, and community engagement. For these women leaders, there was a de-emphasis on power yet a focus on empowerment. Organizations like the Chicago Hispanic Health Alliance and the Lakeview Coalition organized women to receive health care and other services. All three women were engaged politically to gain power for Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and African Americans/Blacks. Ada and Aida were instrumental in Harold Washington’s election, the first

Chicago African American mayor, who partner with López and Giachello to engage in the Mayor's Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs and the Mayor's Women's Commission. Ada was also the first Latina to run and win statewide elections to serve on the Board of Trustees in the University of Illinois system. Similarly, Hilda helped elect Miguel del Valle and Chuy Garcia. For them, politics was about social change and not about power. Hilda, Aida, and Ada spoke of relational and collaborative leadership styles that offer a counterstory that stands in opposition to the White and male leadership style.

- (4) *Education, mentorship, support, and encouragement as a way to raise critical consciousness.* To challenge inequities, one has to de-normalize inequities. All three women mentioned how crucial it was for them to support and mentor others. They want to pay forward the mentorship they received, for example, Hilda's mentorships of her church priest, Charlie Kyle, Aida's relationship with Silvia Herrera from ASPIRA, or Ada's close alliance with Aracelis Figueroa at the CPS Board of Education. All of these mentors socialized them to see the reality of power, privilege, and oppression and how they related to the conditions of their community. Mentors helped them to recognize opportunity gaps in their own lives and how they could raise critical race questions to create change. Similarly, Frontany, Giachello, and López chose to empower others by providing educational growth opportunities. Ada's LARES, Hilda's involvement in *Universidad Popular*, and Aida's Midwest Latino Health Research, Training, and Policy Center clearly show how education was a means to empowering Latino students, professionals, and the community.

These common themes are things that most community leaders do or experience regardless if they are Black, White, Asian, Latino, or Latina, especially living in the civil rights era. What is different is that Latina and, in this case, specifically Puerto Rican leaders, were invisible at the time. Perhaps they still are, which makes us think that they are less critical and, therefore, not worth writing about. All of these migrant women at a young age thought they could be part of Chicago's fabric as social changers and makers of the new American future.

These oral histories show that participants actively engaged in self-discovery and took charge of their lives, goals, and visions for themselves and their community. They also have a sense of obligation to serve their community, motivate others, and create social change among the larger society. Overall, participants had leadership styles with a collectivist and communal view, which other feminists such as Rosenthal (1998) and Wilson and Boxer (2015) have previously described. Still, for our participants, these were center to their own racial and ethnic identity.

## Conclusion

As Wilson and Boxer (2015), Werhane (2007), and Moraga and Anzaldúa (1983), previously found in their research, all women, but especially women of color, are perceived as quiet, passive, and objects of patriarchy. This perception remains mostly untested in POC academic research (Toro-Morn, 1995; Toro-Morn & Alicea, 2004; Yosso, 2005), despite that Latino women make up one of the fastest-growing ethnic groups in the U.S. and have made significant contributions to their cities and communities (Cintrón et al., 2012; Rúa, 2012). In

particular, this article has taken upon telling the stories of a group that has been ignored by scholars, thus filling a much-needed historiographical gap. Hopefully, the above “counters-tories,” in the form of oral histories (Yosso, 2005), take a bold step to show not only that these stereotypes are not accurate for Latina women leaders, but that *pioneras* have “shaped change” not only in their own lives and families but their communities and beyond.

The intersection of race, ethnicity, and gender-motivated these female community leaders makes outstanding contributions in housing, health, and education. Frontany understood place and fought to resist displacement as a Catholic woman, who saw her own Christian community reject her mother because she was a Latina. By forming a social connection to a historically Puerto Rican neighborhood, Hilda fought for equal rights in housing, education, health, and political representation—to mention a few of her long-standing community battles. Giachello wanted to assume the more traditional role of a mom, so she resisted getting an education, but mentors, like Silvia Herrera, continuously supported her. She sought out her passion for health research, and she was able to advance cultural competency among this group in local and national public health. Similarly, Ada was pushed forward by Herrera to take part in leadership roles in education, ultimately becoming the first Latina on the University of Illinois’s Board of Education.

To echo Angela Davis’s (1983) previous findings of Black feminists, it is important to note that none of these women talked a lot about feminism. They mostly spoke about the rights of Latinos and Latinas. Unlike the feminism of, say Jane Adams, all of these women were interested in issues affecting communities they were part of geographically, racially, and ethnically. Even when women like Aida and Ada achieved high education levels, these women were driven by working-class matters. In other words, their feminism was about “survival,” as Hilda put it—issues such as not being evicted, HIV prevention, and bilingual education. This is a specific type of feminism. It is not that women’s equal rights are unnecessary, but ethnicity and race took a front seat when furthering equity in their community.

Hopefully, these oral histories offer a glimpse of Puerto Rican women leaders’ complex experiences in urban areas like Chicago, highly segregated, and unequal, which inspired massive community organizing efforts. The participants’ unique experiences as *pioneras* made them exceptional leaders whose history deserves to be preserved for generations to come. More oral histories of female Puerto Rican leaders that integrate various and diverse dimensions of identity and document the history of community organizing and the social movements that they led will be necessary in the near future, so we understand that we stand on the shoulders of women of color who are giants.

Although there is not a lot written on the topic, in the 1960s, Latinas were on the ground level demonstrating in American cities, going to college campuses demanding equal access, fighting for health care, and leading battles against greedy landlords. Latina leaders thought they could make a difference and became advocates for their communities. Even 60 years after our three Puerto Rican Chicago leaders started to organize, racism, ethnocentrism, and xenophobia plague our society. In the sights of protests and rallies in the year 2020, these issues have been put at the forefront of national conversations today. As Dolores Huertas once said in a speech to the California legislature, “we say you cannot close your eyes and your ears to us any longer” (“NFWA March and Rally - April 10, 1966,” n.d.).

## Notes

1. The 10 themes are: (1) a critique to liberalism, (2) storytelling/counterstorytelling and naming one's own reality, (3) revisionist interpretations of American civil rights law and progress, (4) A greater understanding of the underpinnings of race and racism, (5) structural determinism, (6) race, sex, class, and their intersections, (7) essentialism and anti-essentialism, (8) cultural nationalism/separatism, (9) legal institutions, critical pedagogy, and minorities in the bar and, (10) criticism and self-criticism; response.
2. Gloria Jean Watkins chose bell hooks as her pen name and decided not to capitalize it as a way to call attention to her work and not her.

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