

¡Venceremos! Harambee!: A Black & Puerto Rican Union?

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In November of 1969, 2,700 members of Newark's African American and Puerto Rican community assembled at the Black and Puerto Rican Political Convention to mobilize and strategize a plan to gain socio-political power. Unified through their discrimination in housing, employment, and police brutality, Newark's communities of color resolved that the election of the city's first Black mayor would provide a solution to many of their problems. Accordingly, the election of Kenneth Gibson validated the communities' unified efforts and symbolized one of the most successful multiracial coalitions in Newark's history. Although a monumental milestone, not all Newarkers remembered the convention as a symbol of hope and unity amongst Newark's marginalized. For many Puerto Ricans, Gibson's victory was the impetus for a major rift between Puerto Ricans and African Americans. While the history of the Black and Puerto Rican coalition is quite rich, it is largely unexamined within dominant narratives about the 1967 Newark Rebellion. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to excavate the details of the Black and Puerto Rican coalition in order to weave together a more complete, multiracial narrative about the Newark Rebellion that both includes and necessitates the legacy of Puerto Ricans within the long history of Newark community activism.

In November of 1969, 2,700 members of Newark's African American and Puerto Rican community assembled at the Black and Puerto Rican Political Convention. Sharing a history of disenfranchisement with Newark's African Americans, Puerto Ricans saw this alliance as a meaningful opportunity to gain socio-political power and combat police misconduct. With the mission of electing the "Community's Choice," the conference consisted of workshops on issues

such as education reform, urban renewal, and police brutality all for the purpose of mobilizing Newark's Black and Puerto Rican community towards brainstorming a strategic political platform. Among platform items were demands for more Black and Puerto Rican police officers and the establishment of a civilian police review board. Today, one of the most remembered scenes of the convention was the conclusion of the conference where "the black and Puerto Rican crowd chant[ed] together in Spanish and then Swahili: ¡Venceremos! Harambee!" meaning we will overcome.¹ As their motto prophesied, together the multiethnic convention successfully elected Kenneth Gibson as Newark's first African American Mayor.

For individuals like Puerto Rican activist and conference planning committee member, Hilda Hidalgo, "the Gibson campaign and the candidacy of Ramon Aneses in the Community Choice slate brought about the first meaningful successful coalition between blacks and Puerto Ricans."² However, although a monumental milestone in Newark's Black Power and civil rights history, not all Newarkers remembered the convention as a symbol of hope and unity amongst Newark's marginalized. For many Puerto Ricans, Gibson's victory was the impetus for a major rift between the Puerto Rican community and a newly established black political elite.³ Ultimately, these contested meanings of the Black and Puerto Rican Convention reveal the limits of this multicultural coalition. The similarities between Newark's African American and Puerto Ricans often clouded the important ethnic and cultural differences between the groups. Accordingly, one of the major pitfalls of the Black and Puerto Ricans coalition was the lack of an intersectional assessment of the power and privilege within their differences.

¹ Mark Krasovic, *The Newark Frontier: Community Action in the Great Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 227.

² Hilda Hidalgo, "The Puerto Ricans in Newark, NJ," *Aspira, Inc. of New Jersey, Newark* (1971), 14.

³ Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas, *Street Therapists: Race, Affect, and Neoliberal Personhood in Latino Newark* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 121.

While scholars and community activists have meticulously documented and preserved the African American struggle against Newark police misconduct and political disenfranchisement, the history of Puerto Ricans' socio-political role is fringed to the margins of dominant narratives about the 1967 Newark Rebellion.⁴ Consequently, Newark's Black and Puerto Rican Political Coalition is often portrayed narrowly as a racially harmonious success whereas the limits and racial tensions within the coalition remain largely unexamined. Remarkably, despite their marginalization within the historical discourse, Puerto Ricans are ever present within the archive. Many primary sources, such as Black nationalist community papers, ephemera, and administrative documents, utilized to construct histories about the Newark Rebellion include remnants and traces of the instrumental role of Newark Puerto Ricans and their coalition with Newark African Americans. For this reason, the major objective of this paper is to excavate and salvage these fragmented pieces of the historical record in order to weave together a more complete, multiracial narrative about the Newark Rebellion that both includes and necessitates the legacy of Puerto Ricans within the long history of Newark community activism.

Additionally, this study contributes to historical scholarship on the pivotal role of multiracial coalitions in the election of many of the country's first African American mayors. With both de jure and de facto practices inhibiting their political power, African Americans "had endured decades of political exclusion and public neglect."⁵ Consequently, in the late 1960s

⁴ Important Newark studies that provide brief discussions of the Black and Puerto Rican Political Convention include Robert Curvin, *Inside Newark: Decline, Rebellion, and the Search for Transformation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014); Mark Krasovic, *The Newark Frontier: Community Action in the Great Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Kevin Mumford, *Newark: A History of Race, Rights, and Riots in America* (New York: NYU Press, 2007); Brad Tuttle, *How Newark became Newark: The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of an American City* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009); and Komozi Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

⁵ Doug Gills, "Chicago Politics and Community Development: A Social Movement Perspective," in Pierre Clavel, and Wim Wiewel, eds. *Harold Washington and the Neighborhoods: Progressive City Government in Chicago* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 34.

through the 1970s, African American communities across the nation “organized politically, in both formal and informal ways, with nearly single-minded purposefulness” towards electing Black representatives.⁶ Yet, even with the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the tremendous efforts to mobilize the Black community alone could not overcome their lack of majority vote. Similarly to Kenneth Gibson’s mayoral victory, the successes of many Black mayors, like Tom Bradley in Los Angeles and Harold Washington in Chicago, were predicated on multiethnic alliances of their diverse metropolis’ constituents. Although the formation of such alliances were surely well-intentioned and meant to benefit all ethnic groups involved, in cases like Newark “the triumph against racism at the polls had not taught the black community how to reach out beyond the borders of race.”⁷

Since their arrival in Newark, Puerto Ricans have struggled to secure social, political, and economic inclusion within their new geographical space. Like many immigrants and migrants arriving to the United States during the twentieth century, New Jersey was the first stop for many Puerto Ricans.⁸ While a few groups of Puerto Rican exiles migrated to the United States during the nineteenth century, “it was not until after the North American occupation of the island in 1898 that critical social, political and economic transformations in Puerto Rico triggered an increase in the numbers of people leaving for continental shores.”⁹ Moreover, during the 1950s, the federally sponsored program Operation Bootstrap aided the first massive wave of Puerto Rican migrations to Newark.¹⁰ As an economic mutual aid program between the United States and Puerto Rico, Operation Bootstrap recruited Puerto Rican agricultural workers to farm throughout the state of

⁶ Gills, “Chicago Politics and Community Development,” 34.

⁷ Kevin Mumford, *Newark: A History of Race, Rights, and Riots in America* (New York: NYU Press, 2007), 213.

⁸ Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, *In Lady Liberty’s Shadow: The Politics of Race and Immigration in New Jersey* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2017), 2.

⁹ Virginia Sanchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City 1917-1948* (Westport: Greenport Publishing, 1983), 3.

¹⁰ Ramos-Zayas, *Street Therapists*, 95.

New Jersey.¹¹ In addition to agriculture, Newark's industrial industry served as another major pull factor for Puerto Ricans from the island and New York City seeking employment opportunities. Furthermore, in her quintessential 1970 sociological study "The Puerto Ricans in Newark," Dr. Hilda Hidalgo explained that the Newark Airports' offering of several daily flights from Puerto Rico made Newark a "port of entry" and bridge to life in the United States.¹² As a result, "between 1960 and 1970 the Newark Puerto Rican population had increased by 75 percent," making them 12 percent of the city's population.¹³

Moreover, many Puerto Ricans envisioned Newark as a supportive environment for the formation of a thriving and vibrant ethnic enclave away from the island. For Puerto Ricans already living in the states in communities like Brooklyn and the Bronx, "New Jersey represented the American dream of suburban (or suburban-looking) houses, rather than the crowded tenement building in which they had grown up."¹⁴ In Robyn Rodriguez's *In Lady Liberty's Shadow: The Politics of Race and Immigration in New Jersey*, she further explains the significance between immigration, New Jersey, and the American dream. According to Rodriguez, "the suburb has long been imagined as the place where the 'American way of life' or what many think of as the American Dream is lived out."¹⁵ Yet, for many Puerto Ricans arriving in Newark, this dream often fell short of reality. Unfortunately, by the late 1960s, the growing numbers of Puerto Ricans arriving to Newark did not correspond with the availability of housing and employment opportunities.

¹¹ Ramos-Zayas, *Street Therapists*, 95.

¹² Hilda Hidalgo, "The Puerto Ricans in Newark, NJ," *Aspira, Inc. of New Jersey, Newark* (1971), 11.

¹³ Ramos-Zayas, *Street Therapists*, 98.

¹⁴ Ramos-Zayas, *Street Therapists*, 99.

¹⁵ Rodriguez, *In Lady Liberty's Shadow*, 10.

Additionally, despite President Woodrow Wilson granting Puerto Ricans American citizenship in 1917 with the Jones-Shafroth Act, because of their preservation of their Latino culture and Spanish language, Puerto Ricans were often characterized as foreign within the American imaginary and “treated as strangers in their own country.”¹⁶ During the 1950s, the majority of Puerto Ricans in Newark settled in the Central Business District, making up thirty-three percent of the neighborhood’s population.¹⁷ However, by the 1960s, with the assistance of urban developments like Rutgers University, Puerto Ricans living in the Central Business District were displaced and moved to the North Broadway section of the city. Simultaneously to the displacement of previous Puerto Rican residents, more Puerto Ricans migrated to the Ironbound section of Newark alongside an influx of Hispanic and Latino immigrants.¹⁸ Because of its history as an immigrant enclave, the Ironbound provided a more welcoming and familiar cultural environment for the celebration and preservation of Puerto Rican culture and “colonias.” In her text, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City*, Virginia Sanchez Korrol describes “colonias” as geographically dense urban centers that enabled the creation of cultural institutions that “affirmed social identity and fostered internal activities while coping with problems stemming from contacts with the host society.”¹⁹ The creation of Newark Puerto Rican colonias helped sustain ethnic customs, traditions, and language while also enticing new migrants with a sense of home familiarity.²⁰ In spite of Puerto Ricans’ ethnic culture providing a link to their heritage and land across seas, it also served as a factor in their economic and legal discrimination.

¹⁶ “Puerto Ricans,” *Rise Up North: Newark*, accessed November 6, 2016, <http://riseupnewark.com/chapters/chapter-1/puerto-ricans/>.

¹⁷ Ramos-Zayas, *Street Therapists*, 97.

¹⁸ Ramos-Zayas, *Street Therapists*, 97.

¹⁹ Sanchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community*, 53.

²⁰ Sanchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community*, 53.

In 1962, as a representative of the Council of Puerto Rican Organizations of Newark, Hilda Hidalgo participated in public hearings before the United States Commission on Civil Rights. Hidalgo's testimony provides a glimpse of some of the issues Puerto Ricans dealt with in their relations with Newark city police and courts. In her testimony, Hidalgo argued that police cases of injustice that involved Puerto Ricans were not directly the result of racial discrimination but lack of communication. She made clear that although it was important for Puerto Ricans to learn English and American customs, the courts also must play a role in bridging the language and cultural barrier. In order to demonstrate her points, Hidalgo explained two powerful scenarios. In the first she explained, "I did a little bit of research this week: I walked around the areas of the city which have a lot Puerto Ricans, and I approached a couple of police officers and said, 'Help me,' in Spanish. Complete blank expression."²¹ Instead of critiquing the quality or training of the police officers, Hidalgo utilized this research to point out a larger issue about language. She continued, "I could hardly blame them but what I was trying to determine is- if I really needed help from a police officer, how was I able to get it if I didn't know English?"²² According to Hidalgo, at the time there was only one officer in Newark that spoke fluent Spanish. As a result, interpreters were needed often and their lack of availability caused further problems for Puerto Ricans. She explained, "the Puerto Rican is taken by the police to the prison, and...sometimes they just can't produce an interpreter in 1 hour or 2... so that person has to stay there without charges until an interpreter is available."²³ Hidalgo concluded that bridging the language barrier was important "because the role of police is not only to arrest somebody that does something against the law, but to help and prevent these situations."²⁴ In addition to language barriers, Hidalgo attributed cultural

²¹ "Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights," Newark, NJ (1962), 461.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ "Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights," Newark, NJ (1962), 466.

²⁴ "Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights," Newark, NJ (1962), 461.

misunderstandings to police misconduct. In her second scenario, Hidalgo explained why instances of disorderly conduct happen so often. She stated, “that many times Puerto Ricans gather in the street; they sing; maybe they have a bottle of beer in their hand. A police officer comes. This is considered disorderly conduct.”²⁵ As Hidalgo described, Puerto Ricans regularly socialized by gathering on their porches and streets as they did back home. However, many officers viewed these gatherings as loitering. Hidalgo continued that because of cultural differences, the subsequent responses to this situation by both police and Puerto Ricans reflected misunderstanding. She explained, because Puerto Ricans do not realize they are breaking the law in these instances,

“They start talking. Puerto Ricans- we like to talk with our hands, when we don’t understand somebody, the tendency is to speak louder, because we think if we raise the volume, then they can understand it. So they start speaking louder, the policeman gets nervous. They’re about 10 Puerto Ricans. He is one. He starts fingering his stick, and before he knows it, trouble starts, which is really a lack of understanding.”²⁶

There is great significance in the way that Hidalgo decides to narrate her scenarios. Often conversations about police misconduct portray a negative attitude towards police, yet she appeared to be more concerned with bridging cultural gaps between police, courts, and Puerto Ricans. As a result, this desire was reflected in the Puerto Rican list of demands she provided. According to Hidalgo, what the Puerto Rican community wanted from Newark were officers, court interpreters, and attorneys fluent in Spanish. In addition to these recommendations, Hidalgo concluded, “I think that the main thing we want now is to be a positive, giving factor in the community, and, therefore become fully integrated in the community.”²⁷ Hidalgo’s testimony not only demonstrated some of the Puerto Rican community’s personal needs but also revealed some of the cultural differences and attitudes that caused rifts as Blacks and Puerto Ricans decided to unite. Despite African

²⁵ “Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights,” Newark, NJ (1962), 462.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ “Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights,” Newark, NJ (1962), 463.

Americans making up approximately 9.5% of the Newark Police Department, their representation did little to protect the Black community from police brutality. “Incidents of excessive use of police violence were constantly in the public eye, as well as unnecessary stops, humiliating searches, and other racist misuse of power...left a perpetual mark of distrust and anger in the psyche of the [Black] people.”²⁸ As a result, while Puerto Ricans strived for integration, many African Americans began to adopt more nationalist and separatist attitudes.

Five years following the public hearings before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Newark’s predominately African-American population erupted in political protest in response to years of police misconduct and institutional oppression. After the events of the 1967 Newark Rebellion, members of Newark’s Black community strived to find a systematic solution to their systematic problems. One of the solutions was to gain political representation by electing the city’s first African-American mayor. As a result, in the fall of 1968 the United Brothers, a Black Nationalist organization, held the Black Political Convention to mobilize Newark’s African-American community for the upcoming election. Unfortunately, the resulting numbers failed to successfully elect a Black political representative. In the following year, with a new strategy the Black Political Convention expanded to the Black and Puerto Rican Political Convention in order to elect the “community’s choice” as the 1970 Mayor of Newark. This decision was made in part by a budding relationship between Black nationalist Amiri Baraka’s Committee for Unified Newark (CFUN) and Newark’s Young Lords. After recognizing a shared oppression as continuous victims of Newark police misconduct and white terror, CFUN and the Young Lords signed a mutual defense pact. Subsequently, “the mutual defense pact between CFUN and the Young Lords

²⁸ “Police and the Black Community,” *Rise Up North: Newark*, accessed March 4, 2017, <http://riseupnewark.com/chapters/chapter-3/part-1/policing/>

set in motion the dynamics that led to the alliance which took form in the 1969 Black and Puerto Rican Convention.”²⁹

With the goal of increasing majority support, “the 1969 steering committee for the Black and Puerto Rican Political Convention was far broader than the group that had sponsored the 1968 black assembly.”³⁰ By including Puerto Rican activist Hilda Hidalgo, Rutgers student leader Jennie Diaz, and Young Lords leader Ramon Rivera on the planning committee, the convention made great attempts at garnering support of the Puerto Rican Community. In his text, *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones) and Black Power Politics*, Komozi Woodard asserts that “laying the foundation for a black and Puerto Rican alliance was essential for the rise of the Black Power experiment in Newark; together African Americans and Puerto Ricans constituted some 65 percent of the city’s population.”³¹ Despite clear incentives for an alliance for Newark African Americans, there seemed a need for more justification on the benefits for Puerto Ricans. In a handwritten letter addressed to the community, committee member Hilda Hidalgo urged community participation in the convention. Although the document does not state whom exactly she was urging to participate, Hidalgo’s word choice and physical corrections lead one to believe that this letter was intended for hesitant Puerto Ricans. In her letter she wrote, “Please reconsider...”³² Pausing she crossed out the word “we” to state, “You must participate in the convention otherwise all the blood shed is wasted. Without attending the convention you will lose, Ken will lose, Blacks will lose, Puerto Ricans will lose, Newark will lose... we can afford to lose

²⁹ Komozi Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 139.

³⁰ Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation*, 140.

³¹ Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation*, 114.

³² “Letter from Hilda Hidalgo Urging Participation,” 1969, Junius Williams Collection, *Rise Up North: Newark*, <http://riseupnewark.com/chapters/chapter-3/part-3/the-black-and-puerto-rican-convention/>.

some white votes we can't afford to split the black community."³³ Hidalgo's final statement "we can't afford to split the black community" reveals a true unification of the Black and Puerto Rican community synonymously as one with the same goals and needs. On Election Day of 1970, the coalition proved to be effective and Kenneth Gibson was elected as the community's choice and first African-American mayor of Newark. Although this was a major success for the Black and Puerto Rican coalition, a closer examination of the conference helps reveal the steps towards a subsequent forgetting of the Puerto Rican community's role in Gibson's election.

A major flaw within the Black and Puerto Rican coalition was that ethnic differences were overlooked and Puerto Ricans were merely absorbed into the Black community rather than being integrated as a separate cultural group. This can be evidenced through historical documents and ephemera from the Black and Puerto Rican Political convention that primarily center ideas about collective blackness. In an invitation soliciting membership on the convention planning meeting, African American community leaders Robert Curvin, John Bugg, and James Pawley wrote, "We would like to include you and your organization in a significant unity movement which is seeking to consolidate the Black community for victory in 1970."³⁴ Citing consolidation as the goal, the men posited, "We seek to organize a broad coalition of forces in the Black community that will not be dominated by any one group or ideology."³⁵ Such a statement alludes to some of the divisions and competing groups within the Black community. In the first Black Political Convention, Amiri Baraka, the United Brothers, and Committee For United Newark were the central organizers of the event. Consequently, the conference placed the needs of Newark's

³³ "Letter from Hilda Hidalgo Urging Participation."

³⁴ Robert Curvin, John Bugg, and James Pawley, "Invitation to Attend a Meeting of the Planning Committee," 1969, Junius Williams Collection, *Rise Up North: Newark*, <http://riseupnewark.com/chapters/chapter-3/part-3/the-black-and-puerto-rican-convention/>.

³⁵ Curvin et. al, "Invitation to Attend a Meeting of the Planning Committee."

African- American community, via a self-determination attitude, at the forefront. Highlighting the importance of a strong unified Black body, such rhetoric celebrated African roots within the Black community and urged community members to think of themselves “always as soldiers, revolutionary advocates of a new life for African people, and eventually the world!”³⁶ Recognizing the hierarchy of racial needs in the initial Black Political Convention, the new organizers of the Black and Puerto Rican convention were careful with their word choice and presentation to ensure that the conference promoted inclusivity. Differentiating the two, Robert Curvin explained:

“While the first convention had been dominated by Baraka and the more separatist leaders of the Black community, the 1970 Convention was organized by a broad based committee headed by myself (Curvin) and leaders of the Urban League, ...the National Council of Negro Women, a representative of a Black doctors organization, members of CFUN, and a number of Black and Puerto Rican leaders.”³⁷

Following the same lines of Curvin’s statement, the invitation concludes promoting a sentiment of collective power explaining, “Remember that UNITY includes YOU.”³⁸ Although Curvin and other convention planning committee members were intentional with attempts to create an inclusive forum that would fairly facilitate the deliberation of the community’s choice of mayor, the decision already “was heavily tilted toward Gibson.”³⁹ Some factors that illustrated this were that Kenneth Gibson was the Black community’s choice the year prior, Baraka’s friend, and a member of the United Brothers, who were the majority of African-American participants at the convention. Additionally, it seems that many of the planning documents from the Black Political Convention were recycled for the Black and Puerto Rican Political convention. In the “Draft

³⁶ Committee for Unified Newark, “CFUN Newsletter- Words from IMAMU,” undated, Junius Williams Collection, *Rise Up North: Newark*, <http://riseupnewark.com/chapters/chapter-3/part-3/the-united-brothers-and-cfun/>.

³⁷ “Black and Puerto Rican Convention,” *Rise Up North: Newark*, accessed November 6, 2016, <http://riseupnewark.com/chapters/chapter-1/puerto-ricans/>.

³⁸ Curvin et. al, “Invitation to Attend a Meeting of the Planning Committee.”

³⁹ Robert Curvin, *Inside Newark: Decline, Rebellion, and the Search for Transformation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 133.

Proposal for Newark Convention Committee,” everything typed in print is geared towards issues affecting the black community, while the information related to Puerto Ricans is literally written in. On the title page of the document there is a note “Include date on Puerto Ricans.”⁴⁰ As the note suggested throughout the document there are numerous handwritten written additions of “and Puerto Ricans.” The most elaborate addition is about a sentence long and states “it is evident that Puerto Ricans hold no positions of power or influence in city government. Rather, the Puerto Rican community has been represented by appointed ‘Spanish speaking’ politicians often more loyal to the establishment than the community.”⁴¹ This document utilized for the planning and structure of the conference is illustrative of the limits of integration within this multicultural collaboration and were a precursor to some of the disconnect that would be revealed in Gibson’s mayoralty.

The election of Mayor Gibson and his appointment of Ramon Aneses as Deputy Mayor were major community victories for Newark Blacks and Puerto Ricans. It is important to note that while Ramon Aneses provided the Puerto Ricans with political representation, he was perceived by some Puerto Ricans as a concession or token representative. According to Robert Curvin, Gibson’s appointment of Aneses and subsequent filling of his position with other Puerto Ricans was “an effort to hold the alliance together and to show concern and sensitivity to the issues facing the growing Hispanic community.”⁴² Despite these efforts, many Puerto Ricans still wondered how Gibson’s subsequent actions would impact their community. In the same year of his election, Hilda Hidalgo wrote, “The Puerto Rican community has yet to see indications that the Gibson administration is going to deal with equity in reference to them. The attitude is one of skeptical

⁴⁰ “Draft Proposal for Newark Convention Committee,” 1969, Junius Williams Collection, *Rise Up North: Newark*, <http://riseupnewark.com/chapters/chapter-3/part-3/the-black-and-puerto-rican-convention/>.

⁴¹ “Draft Proposal for Newark Convention Committee.”

⁴² Robert Curvin, *Inside Newark: Decline, Rebellion, and the Search for Transformation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 175.

hope, and what the Gibson administration does or does not do will have tremendous impact on black and Puerto Rican relationships.”⁴³ Hidalgo’s words were great foreshadowing for the impact of Gibson’s actions, especially in regards to the 1974 Branch Brook Park riot. Although reports vary, it is believed that the riot commenced after mounted police intercepted a community dice game during the 1974 annual Puerto Rican celebration of Las Fiestas Patronales. The police’s intervention resulted in a great agitation of the crowd that almost led to a young girl being trampled.⁴⁴ “The incident served as the final straw [to repeated incidents] of police misconduct and ignited the Puerto Rican riots of 1974.”⁴⁵ Similarly, to the 1968 uprising of Newark’s African American population, the 1974 Puerto Rican riot incensed Newark Puerto Ricans to come together and mobilize against the continuous systematic injustices they faced over the years. “The riots resulted in some of the most violent interactions between Puerto Ricans and police and two deaths; Fernando de Cordova was fatally shot and a mounted officer clubbed David Perez to death.”⁴⁶ While Gibson invited Puerto Ricans to City Hall to discuss the incident and persistent issues of misconduct, he dismissed the longevity and relevance of distinct cultural problems facing Puerto Ricans in Newark. In response to the events at Branch Brook Park, Gibson concluded, “The reason we had a disturbance in Newark is because we had 10,000 people in a park. It had nothing to do with bilingual education, housing or any other socio-economic factor.”⁴⁷

For many Puerto Ricans, Gibson’s response to the Branch Brook Park incident solidified “that power and authority were unevenly distributed throughout society and revealed a larger disconnect between African-Americans and Puerto Ricans in Newark.”⁴⁸ Unfortunately, the

⁴³ Hilda Hidalgo, “The Puerto Ricans in Newark, NJ,” *Aspira, Inc. of New Jersey, Newark* (1971), 14.

⁴⁴ Exhibit Panel, *From Rebellion to Review Board: Fighting for Police Accountability in Newark*, Newark Public Library, Newark, NJ, 2016.

⁴⁵ Exhibit Panel, *From Rebellion to Review Board*.

⁴⁶ Exhibit Panel, *From Rebellion to Review Board*.

⁴⁷ Ramos-Zayas, *Street Therapists*, 100.

⁴⁸ Ramos-Zayas, *Street Therapists*, 102.

resulting hostility that manifested towards Mayor Gibson was directed equally at the larger black community of Newark, engulfing the city in a new racial conflict.⁴⁹ “Puerto Rican leaders came to recognize that while there might be efforts at coalition, ultimately they would have to organize, struggle, strategize, and work in their own behalf to gain respect and power as other groups have done over the years.”⁵⁰ Young Lords leader and Black and Puerto Rican Convention Committee member Ramon Rivera asserted that to effectively address the specific social and cultural conditions impacting Newark’s Puerto Rican community required separate nationalist institutions. Two years prior to the 1974 Riot, Rivera began to recognize the pressing need for a Puerto Rican nationalist strategy. In 1972 Rivera and several other community leaders founded La Casa de Don Pedro as a new grassroots agency honoring “Puerto Rican nationalist, Don Pedro Albizu Campos who advocated the twin virtues of self-sufficiency and empowerment.”⁵¹ Accordingly, following the footsteps of Albizu Campos and Young Lords’ initiatives in Chicago and New York City, La Casa has spent the last forty-six years serving Newark’s Puerto Ricans and the larger Latino community through a range of social and cultural services such as immigration services, educational programs, and home ownership workshops.

Nevertheless, as evidenced through the first Black Political Convention, the election of Newark’s first Black mayor could not have been possible without the assistance of the Puerto Rican community. Yet, although successful, the Black and Puerto Rican coalition is a quality example of the social tensions that often arise within interracial community action. While the coalition effectively disrupted white elite political power in Newark, it failed to produce true representation for the Puerto Rican community that would understand and address specific issues

⁴⁹ Hilda Hidalgo, “The Puerto Ricans in Newark, NJ,” *Aspira, Inc. of New Jersey, Newark* (1971), 14.

⁵⁰ Curvin, *Inside Newark*, 176.

⁵¹ “Overview,” *La Casa De Don Pedro*, accessed January 4, 2018, <http://www.lacasanwk.org/about-us/overview/>.

in their community separate from African Americans. Consequently, even under a mayor of color, Puerto Ricans continued to feel politically alienated under a new majority racial elite.⁵²

As Hilda Hidalgo explained, a major source of resentment for Puerto Ricans was that “they feel they lose their individual cultural identity when lumped under the “black and Puerto Rican” generic label.”⁵³ Despite African Americans and Puerto Ricans sharing a history of systemic oppression, their experiences and ideas on nationalism and culture have important distinctions. Instead of having an intersectional approach to equity, members of Newark’s Black nationalist community like Gibson often asked Puerto Ricans to overlook issues relating to their ethnic identity for the greater good of Newark’s marginalized communities. Ultimately, Newark Puerto Ricans wanted the opportunity to carve social and political space, but not at the expense of being absorbed and lost into the Black freedom struggle.

Lauren O’Brien is currently a PhD student in American Studies at Rutgers University-Newark. Her research concentration is in 20th century African American History with an emphasis on racial identity, museums, and public memory. She is particularly interested in African-American discourses on racial passing and the color line and the ways that families and communities remember and memorialize those “lost” to passing.

Furthermore, with a BA in Black Studies from UC Santa Barbara and a MA in History from Loyola University Chicago, Lauren understands the power, politics, and privilege within the collection, preservation, and dissemination of history. Therefore, as a public historian her goal is to interrogate silences within exclusionary narratives and create platforms that highlight, document, and share the histories of marginalized communities. Utilizing her historical practice as a vehicle for social activism, multicultural coalitions and peace building, Lauren has worked

⁵² Kevin Mumford, *Newark: A History of Race, Rights, and Riots in America* (New York: NYU Press, 2007), 212.

⁵³ Hilda Hidalgo, “The Puerto Ricans in Newark, NJ,” *Aspira, Inc. of New Jersey, Newark* (1971), 14.

in the education and curatorial departments of several museums and cultural institutions including the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, Casa Dolores: Center for the Study of the Popular Arts of Mexico, and the Grammy Museum at L.A Live.