

Newark's 1974 Puerto Rican Riots Through Oral Histories

By Nicole Torres

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This article includes contents of recorded oral histories from Sigfredo Carrion, William Sanchez, Gustav Heninburg, and Raul Davila recounting the events that took place in Branch Brook Park in 1974; events also known as the Puerto Rican Riots. These events were witnessed by members of the Puerto Rican community living in the city at the time, as well as respected members of the city council and leaders of social activist groups. These oral histories were carefully read and analyzed in order to construct a brief and comprehensive retelling of those events for those unfamiliar with the subject. Much of the evidence used was found in the New Jersey Hispanic Research and Information Center located at the Newark Public Library. This article also examines the frustrations and concerns facing the Puerto Rican community as told by those who experienced them firsthand, and explains the breaking point that led the community to finally come together and demand their voices be heard. The results of this uprising led to the creation of local organizations, such as La Casa de Don Pedro, and the construction of a more visible Puerto Rican identity within the city.

In 1974, the Puerto Rican community experienced a breaking point in their frustrations involving social injustices within the city of Newark, New Jersey. A riot broke out in Branch Brook Park during the annual *Fiestas Patronales*, the biggest festival of the year for the Puerto Rican community in New Jersey and New York.¹ The riots began when a mounted police officer attempted to break up a dice game, which escalated and resulted in a little girl almost getting tram-

¹Interview of William Q. Sanchez by Karlha Matta, 2012; Hispanic Reference Collection of the NJ Hispanic Research & Information Center at The Newark Public Library.

pled by the horse. The days that followed consisted of mass protests, negotiations and communication between Puerto Rican community leaders and the mayor's office, and the establishing of a more visible political and social identity for Puerto Rican Newarkers. The Puerto Rican Riots of 1974 are a relatively unexamined part of Newark's history; few historians have made it a point of interest in their articles/books centered on social protest. Kevin Mumford's account, *Newark: A History of Race, Rights, and Riots in America*, directly relates to the roots of the racial injustices and the beginnings of a civil rights movement in Newark. His analysis of Newark's "urban growth and economic change" gives us background into what eventually triggered the black community in Newark to mobilize but does not discuss in detail the role of Puerto Ricans within that mobilization. Much of the reasoning behind the Puerto Rican or Latinx lack of inclusion in urban history has to do with the "anachronistic construction of race in the United States as 'black' and 'white' has proved entirely inadequate in describing the history of 'nonwhite' and 'nonblack' people."²

This unexamined part of Newark's past is an important part of understanding its history of rebellion and the issues that are still very much a part of life there today. As noted in one of the oral history interviews, "There are people still today who say there were no riots in 1974. Obviously, no one wants to—or can explain the trampling of people by policemen and horses, the people who died in the streets. The magnitude of the Latino community coming together."³ Much of the existent research from the Latinx perspective was only recently done by Newark Public Library archivist Yesenia Lopez and associate archivist Elizabeth Parker in the exhibition entitled, "Newark '74: Remembering the Puerto Rican Riots – An Unexamined History." This was on display at the Newark Library in 2014 and drew upon oral histories of those who experienced the riots

² Lilia Fernandez, "Introduction," *Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Postwar Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014) 17.

³ Interview of William Q. Sanchez by Karla Matta, 2012; Hispanic Reference Collection of the NJ Hispanic Research & Information Center at The Newark Public Library.

firsthand. When the exhibit came to Rutgers University-Newark in 2015, I began work on a related project that used (with their blessing) much of the research done by Ms. Lopez and Ms. Parker. This led to, in 2016, an exhibition at the Newark Public Library entitled “From Rebellion to Review Board: Fighting for Police Accountability in Newark.” It detailed accounts of police in-



**Newark '74 Exhibition Teaser Case at the John Cotton Dana Library,
Rutgers University-Newark, 2016.**

teractions with the urban population in the city. One instance included in this public exhibition was the Puerto Rican riots of 1974, again drawing extensively upon oral histories.

This article builds off of both of the aforementioned exhibits. In writing it, I analyzed the oral histories of community leader Sigfredo Carrion, award-winning executive producer William Sanchez, actor Raul Davila, and civil rights activist Gustav Heninburg to piece together evidence

about this unexamined part of Newark's history. Since there is not much of the history detailed by other historians, the oral histories offer the best way to provide an understanding of these events. Each of these narratives contains a piece of the story that is missing from the others and together, they form a complete account of the Puerto Rican movement. There are other texts and accounts that tell us how life for Puerto Ricans was throughout the 1960s and 1970s around the country, but these oral histories give us first hand insight of daily life and the struggles they faced within the city of Newark from the perspectives of those who witnessed, took part, and influenced the events as they unfolded. From the voices of these histories we have learned of the internal struggles facing the Puerto Rican community, the events that took place in the summer of 1974, and the aftermath. Eventually, these factors led to the establishment of Latinx social organizations, unity within the community, and political visibility; all of which continue today. By using the information given in these interviews, I can connect the Puerto Rican experience to issues that have been already been documented in accounts pertaining to Newark's civil rights history.

Rising Tensions within the Newark Community

Throughout the 1960s, whilst widespread civil rights movements and social turmoil were taking place, the city of Newark was undergoing a political and social transformation that would impact its social structure for years to come. By this time, three groups had been continuously vying for political visibility and struggling to overcome racial marginalization within the city: the Italian, African American, and Puerto Rican communities. It appeared a truce between the various communities would be achieved when Hugh Joseph Addonizio, who had campaigned on a platform of inclusion and reform, won the mayoral election of 1962. However, this victory was short lived when it became apparent that promise of political visibility for African Americans and Puerto

Rican Newarkers was not going to result in changed treatment under the city's new Italian-American mayor, as shown in the 1967 civil unrest.

The documents on the "Committee of Concern," stated that in 1967 Mayor Addonizio submitted an application for federal funds to the Department of Housing and Urban Development under the Model Cities program.⁴ The "riots" were a direct consequence of years of built-up racial tension, poverty, and the prospect of a city-wide urban renewal project. The project would displace the people living in the neighborhood located in the Central Ward, home to one of Newark's largest African American and Puerto Rican communities, in order to make room for the New Jersey College of Medicine and Dentistry. Following the civil unrest of 1967, Newark's African American and Puerto Rican community began an alliance that would hopefully aid them in gaining social and political spaces within the city; the first Black Power Conference took place in Newark in 1967, just a few days after the "riots" subsided. The Black and Puerto Rican Convention was formed in November of 1969 to create recommendations that would meet the needs of not only the African-American and Puerto Ricans citizens of Newark, but all the citizens of the city. In attendance were over 2,000 members of Newark's Black and Puerto Rican community, who came with the intention of creating a strategic political platform to address both community's institutional problems.

In the 1970 mayoral elections the city's first African American mayor, Kenneth Gibson, was elected. The African American and Italian populations had overcome the struggles of visibility through political platforms and activism, but the Puerto Rican community was still left without a proper voice within the city's changing political structure. Much of the reason for this lack of socio-political representation had stemmed out of the lack of assessments made about the Puerto

⁴Louise Epperson, *New Jersey College of Medicine and Dentistry Site Hearings Concerning Newark Campus* (transcripts). February-March 1968. Rutgers University, History of Medicine.

Rican community's cultural and ethnic differences. Since the passing of the Jones Act in 1917, migration from the island to the United States had been steady and had created a unique experience for its people. Puerto Ricans are one of the few groups that migrated as American citizens with a language barrier, different cultural practices, and economic motivations. As a result, though citizens, Puerto Ricans were seen as foreigners for those already living in the United States. Puerto Ricans came from a country that had always been racially mixed and they did not see racial relationships in the way those in the United States had.

Since Puerto Rico is made up of peoples from multiple backgrounds, to include African, Indigenous, and Spanish, "the Puerto Rican people were formed by a complex set of both foreseen and unforeseen circumstances that resulted in the weaving together of an intricate cultural fabric."⁵ Puerto Ricans did not cling to the idea of whiteness or reject blackness altogether, like many groups did, they held onto their Puerto Rican identity, which slowed their process of assimilation. In the words of sociologist Samuel Betances, "blacks see Latinos as honorary whites and whites see Latinos as honorary blacks, and that leaves Latinos in a racial no man's land."⁶ However, it was slowed by other factors as well, such as political and social detachment from reasons that other groups had come to the United States for. A notable example was the migration of Puerto Ricans and Mexicans to a post-war Chicago. When they arrived, the city was undergoing a massive social and geographical change leading to a struggle of finding their own place within it. Chicago was a highly segregated city, in which whites "fought pitched battles to maintain their racial borders."⁷ Those Puerto Ricans and Mexicans who could "pass" as white would gain access to better housing

⁵ Maria Perez Y Gonzalez, *Puerto Ricans in the United States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2000), 13.

⁶Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 17.

⁷Ibid., 27.

or job opportunities, but those who were darker-skinned were often left to find housing in deteriorated neighborhoods that would eventually be considered targets for urban renewal.⁸

Historians James Jennings and Monte Rivera link Puerto Ricans' migration to provocation by the United States in order to provide cheap labor for industries located in New York. As Joseph P. Fitzpatrick writes, "Unlike the black migrants from the South, Puerto Ricans never saw American cities as the place for social mobility and great economic opportunities—they just wanted a job."⁹ However, William Sanchez and Raul Davila rebut this theory with their own experiences and reasons for leaving the island. Davila recalls moving to the United States to broaden his acting career after feeling like he had reached his peak in Puerto Rico, stating, "I decided to move to the States and start all over here where it was competitive and it was more of a challenge."¹⁰ Puerto Ricans believed that the streets in the U.S were "paved with gold and you make money just walking down the street. So they saw that as an opportunity to improve their families."¹¹ When they arrived in New Jersey, many of the jobs available were menial, on farms in South Jersey. "I went to see where my father worked and they were basically old barracks, old shacks, and they were sleeping on top of another. Sanitation was not good."¹² Sanchez remembers the suffering of people from many social classes in Puerto Rico due to the economic crisis, sharing, "It was not just the very poor from the coastal side, there were also educated men who came because they had no jobs."¹³ Some Puerto Ricans did see American cities as a means for economic growth, but also believed they might one day return to the island.

⁸Ibid., 32.

⁹Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, *Puerto Rican Americans; the Meaning of Migration to the Mainland* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 1.

¹⁰Interview of Raul Davila by Evelyn Mejil, April 5, 2000; Hispanic Reference Collection of the NJ Hispanic Research & Information Center at The Newark Public Library.

¹¹Interview of William Q. Sanchez by Karlha Matta, 2012; Hispanic Reference Collection of the NJ Hispanic Research & Information Center at The Newark Public Library.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

The temporariness of living in the United States is attributed to the lack of established political organizations before the 1970s. The growing sugarcane industry only offered employment for 5 to 6 months out of the year and the coffee industry was considerably suffering, which meant that by World War II migratory numbers would increase as the United States recruited Puerto Rican workers for war production activities. Puerto Ricans did not see American cities as their permanent homes at first; the perspective changed once they began to settle in New York City. Lorrin Thomas describes the transition from this view, to the view that eventually led to a formation of identity, and gave birth to the term “Nuyorican” in New York. Thomas traces this transition to the end of World War II, when Puerto Rico was left waiting with the promise of emancipation. The Puerto Rican population in the United States became defined as a minority, which “entailed exclusion from full participation in the life of the society.”¹⁴ The African-American population in Newark had made strides in their fight for civil equality by having one of their own at the top of the city administration. As Raul Davila notes, “I think Gibson was one of the first, if you look back, that started implementing Blacks in important positions and Hispanics going into different agencies even if they were not at the time in higher positions.” Davila believed that whether many of the Puerto Ricans’ demands were met or not, Mayor Gibson had at least tried more than the previous administration had.¹⁵

However, these feelings of frustration and isolation quickly shifted from the Black community toward the Puerto Ricans in the city, who “different not only in appearance, but culture and suffering the additional disadvantage of language, feel stung that equal opportunity is leaving

¹⁴Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in Twentieth-century New York City* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2010), 11.

¹⁵Interview of Raul Davila by Evelyn Mejil, April 5, 2000; Hispanic Reference Collection of the NJ Hispanic Research & Information Center at The Newark Public Library.

them less than equal.”¹⁶ Davila described these frustrations as a combination of “prejudice, rejection on every aspect of everyday life, lack of jobs, and lack of representation in most government agencies.”¹⁷ Racial tension in Newark finally unraveled in 1974 when the Puerto Rican community reached a breaking point during their largest celebration of the year.

Struggles for Puerto Ricans in America and the Newark Uprising

Puerto Rican actor Raul Davila, who served as a liaison between the Latino Community and Mayor Gibson’s administration, believed the issues that made up much of the Puerto Rican community’s frustration were due to non-representation in government positions, lack of jobs, and a sense of rejection. These were all struggles now facing Puerto Ricans attempting to make a life in the United States.

When Puerto Ricans began migrating stateside, they faced discrimination from the American people. William Q. Sanchez recalled, “you wouldn’t really tell someone you were Puerto Rican. You called yourself Spanish. And the reason you did that is because in those days, if you were Puerto Rican you were considered a bad person.”¹⁸ At the time, negative images of Puerto Ricans dominated the media and aided in the spread of these ideas; “When the Puerto Ricans first came here, *West Side Story* was how people recognized Puerto Ricans. They’re the ones with the knives. Then another movie called *Young Savages* all related to how Puerto Ricans acted, and the non-Latinos, that’s how they recognized the Puerto Ricans, by being gang members.”¹⁹ One of the

¹⁶ “In Newark, NJ: Trouble,” *The News Journal*, 6 September 1974.

¹⁷ Interview of Raul Davila by Evelyn Mejil, April 5, 2000; Hispanic Reference Collection of the NJ Hispanic Research & Information Center at The Newark Public Library.

¹⁸ Interview of William Q. Sanchez by Karlha Matta, 2012; Hispanic Reference Collection of the NJ Hispanic Research & Information Center at The Newark Public Library.

¹⁹ Ibid.

most notable Latinx stereotypes in films is *el bandido*, the bandit. He is dirty and unkempt, “behaviorally, he is irrational and quick to resort to violence.”²⁰ One form of the *bandido* character is the inner-city gang member; for example, if the story takes place in New York he would most likely be Puerto Rican and his “inability to speak English or his speaking English with a heavy accent was Hollywood’s way of signaling his feeble intellect; a lack of brainpower.”²¹ Not only did these images perpetuate negative stereotypes, but they may have also influenced the way in which authorities monitored the community’s movements throughout the country and of course, in the city of Newark. The issues facing the Puerto Rican community were deeper than just race-- they were cultural. Davila recalled frustration from the Latino community because of language barriers; “they were not highly educated people and their children, if they knew English, they had picked it up from the streets and suddenly that’s not enough; they cannot progress in school because of language difficulty.”²² Images like *el bandido* only reinforced the notion that Puerto Ricans were not only highly uneducated, but also dangerous.

The navigation of spaces also played in a role in the treatment and perceptions of Puerto Ricans in an environment they were still adjusting to. Geographers have taught us that “space is not only the physical or discursive terrain on which social relations occur but it shapes those relations as well.”²³ As the number of Puerto Rican residents grew in Newark, the negative racial characteristics that were associated with them by whites intensified because they all congregated in the same social spaces. The ways in which certain groups navigate social spaces varies based on race, location, and, in the case of Puerto Ricans, cultural factors. Willie Sanchez remembered

²⁰Charles Ramirez Berg, *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, Resistance* (University of Texas Press, 2011), 68.

²¹Berg, *Latino Images in Film*, 68.

²²Interview of Raul Davila by Evelyn Mejil, April 5, 2000; Hispanic Reference Collection of the NJ Hispanic Research & Information Center at The Newark Public Library.

²³Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City*, 38.

police becoming agitated with Puerto Rican citizens for standing around on steps to socialize as they did back home, but this was considered loitering in America.²⁴ Tim Cresswell offers an important analysis of racial mobility within the black community in the United States, but also gives insight into the issues Puerto Ricans and other Latino communities were facing. He points out that the term “Hispanic,” or “Latino” can often act as a category of “not white,” due to the definitions of race and ethnicity that have transformed over time. “Mobility is an amalgam of forms of physical movement, the meanings attached to those movements, and movements as experienced and embodied forms of practice. All of these facets of mobility – movement, meaning and practice – are produced by and productive of power,”²⁵ which highlights the issue that although many Latinos, Puerto Ricans in this case, identify themselves as white, their culture was the factor being used to separate them from white mainstream norms, not their skin color. Although Puerto Rican citizens were not technically taking part in any kind of mischief by loitering on stoops and socializing, this was not a practice commonly seen within white neighborhoods and was a distinct characteristic of Puerto Ricans. Often, building owners would grease the railings of their front steps in order to keep Puerto Ricans from “loitering” on their property.²⁶

Newark police did not recognize this sort of socialization positively and instead began associating it with social deviance among Puerto Rican neighborhoods, similar to the practice of stop-and-frisk procedures presented by Cresswell in his article, *Black Moves*. He presents the case of *Floyd vs. New York City*, in which Latino and black citizens accused NYPD of racial profiling during stop-and-frisk procedures and argued that these practices should be enacted without regard

²⁴Interview of by William Q. Sanchez by Karlha Matta, 2012; Hispanic Reference Collection of the NJ Hispanic Research & Information Center at The Newark Public Library.

²⁵Tim Cresswell, “Black Moves: Moments in the History of African-American Masculine Mobilities,” *Transfers*, vol. 6, no. 1, Jan. 2016.

²⁶Interview of William Q. Sanchez by Karlha Matta, 2012; Hispanic Reference Collection of the NJ Hispanic Research & Information Center at The Newark Public Library.

to race. During the trial an officer stated that the procedures were based on what they called “furtive movements,” which included “someone hanging out in front of [a] building, sitting on the benches or something like that.”²⁷ This explains why many cultural norms, like hanging out near storefronts, of Black and Puerto Rican citizens were so often seen as “suspicious activity.” The ways in which Latinos navigated their spaces reminded people how culturally different they were from the rest of Newark’s population.

The cultural differences between the Puerto Rican community and rest of Newark were also apparent in the ways they clung to their heritage. Bringing Puerto Rican culture from the island to the United States was one of the most important things in keeping tradition alive. One of the most notable aspects of Puerto Rican life in America was the celebration of *Las Fiestas Patronales*, the biggest festival in New Jersey for the Puerto Rican community, which is still celebrated to this day. The festival was a celebration of culture, bringing in some of the top performers in the area, playing traditional salsa music, and eating delicious Puerto Rican foods.²⁸ *La Fiestas Patronales* are held every year in Puerto Rico; there, each town celebrates on a different day in honor of its patron saint. Usually held in the town square; these events have adopted elements of African descent over the years as well, and include games, food, live music, and displays of pride.²⁹ Although every town in Puerto Rico held their festival on different days of the year, it was only logical that the festivities be celebrated once a year by Puerto Ricans in America, in order to promote solidarity between the people of all parts of Puerto Rico and keep a small piece of their traditions

²⁷Cresswell, “Black Moves.”

²⁸ This is only one of the many celebrations held in Puerto Rican culture, among others are Noche Buena (Christmas Eve) and Día de Los Reyes (Three King’s Day). González, *Puerto Ricans in the United States*, 20.

²⁹González, *Puerto Ricans in the United States*, 19

alive in their new homeland. As Mr. Sanchez recalled, “It was on that one day, a celebration of Puerto Rico in essence. You didn’t have to go to the island; you went to Branch Brook Park.”³⁰

Las Fiestas Patronales were celebrated every year in Branch Brook Park, a large park in the North Ward, where the Puerto Rican community was given special permission to access the park for the elaborate weekend festivities. The Puerto Rican community was allowed to access the park for the large festival once a year under the surveillance of mounted park police; their presence at a sanctioned event can be seen as a reflection of “institutionalized racism and white mainstream assertion of the right to interpret and control behavior.”³¹ Even though Tim Cresswell, in that quote, was referring to African American navigation of space, it can also explain the between the city allowing Puerto Ricans to use the park under the condition of using mounted officers as well. William Sanchez tells us that after the 1967 uprisings, neighborhoods became extremely divided; “after the riots, cabs would not come to our neighborhood, they would drop you off at the luxury homes and you would have to walk from there.”³² This was due to the location where many Puerto Ricans at the time were living: Springfield Avenue and Seventh Avenue; these streets were in the direct crossfire when the 1967 “riots” exploded. For the other citizens of Newark, the ‘67 uprisings were probably still fresh in their minds and had opened up the possibility of other marginalized groups to rebel in the same manner.

The annual festival in Branch Brook Park is also significant because it is where my analysis begins. Sigfredo Carrion, the leader of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, and William Sanchez provide us with firsthand accounts of the events that took place immediately following the incident

³⁰Interview of William Q. Sanchez by Karlha Matta, 2012; Hispanic Reference Collection of the NJ Hispanic Research & Information Center at The Newark Public Library.

³¹Cresswell, “Black Moves.”

³²Interview of William Q. Sanchez by Karlha Matta, 2012; Hispanic Reference Collection of the NJ Hispanic Research & Information Center at The Newark Public Library.

on September 1st, 1974. On that day, Sigfredo Carrion had been at the beach with his family; upon his return back to Newark, he was received by a friend who informed him that there was a protest taking place outside of City Hall due to the arrest of eight Puerto Rican citizens after an incident at Branch Brook Park. *Information*, a local bilingual newspaper at the time, and the oral transcript of Sigfredo Carrion tell us that the incident broke out after mounted police officers watching over the annual Puerto Rican Day festival in Branch Brook attempted to stop a dice game. *Information* and *The New York Times* say mounted police flipped over the table where the game was taking place. This caused some of the festival-goers to become agitated, and they began to yell and throw things at the mounted officers. It was during this time that one of the horses almost trampled a little girl.³³ However, William Sanchez's transcript explains that it was actually a game of dominoes being played, a popular game in Puerto Rican culture, and according to people who were there, "the horse came in pretty much charging" and that the horse was already startled when the little girl was knocked over.³⁴ Following the initial outburst at Branch Brook Park, the citizens banded together and decided to march towards city hall and protest in front of the mayor's office.

While protesters gathered outside of City Hall, the Field Orientation Center for the Underprivileged Spanish (FOCUS) found itself at the center of the Puerto Rican rights movement. Tony Perez, the director of FOCUS, and Jose Rosario, the president of the organization, were among the first group of Puerto Rican community leaders to meet with Mayor Gibson to make negotiations. After the 1967 uprising by Newark's African American population, it seemed as though there would finally be some long-awaited changes made within the racially divided city, but this was

³³Raul Davila. "Puerto Rican Upheaval--Why?" *Information*[Newark] Oct. 1974. Newark Public Library Archives.

³⁴Interview of William Q. Sanchez by Karlha Matta, 2012; Hispanic Reference Collection of the NJ Hispanic Research & Information Center at The Newark Public Library.

unfortunately not the case. By the 1970s, Newark was already running under its first African American administration and for the first time, the black community felt they had some political power. In the *Newark Frontier*, Krasovic mentions that “if community action’s greatest success in Newark was its contribution to black political unity, its biggest failing may have been that it largely excluded the city’s growing Puerto Rican community.”³⁵ It was out of this issue that FOCUS was created; the organization’s goal was to provide members of the Spanish community with help in coordinating programs aimed at their needs.

When Sigfredo finally arrived at the mayor’s office he was greeted by frustrated members of his community eager to make their voices heard. Amiri Baraka also made himself present to show solidarity between the black community and Puerto Rican citizens. This was especially important since Krasovic tells us that tensions had developed between the black and Latino political communities in Newark due to a lack of political representation. Some of the Puerto Ricans were worried that Baraka’s presence would shift the attention away from their concerns and complaints onto the black community. Kevin Mumford provides some context to this by writing that although Newark had elected a black mayor, they still felt “as alienated as black Newarkers under Addonizio on issues of access, responsiveness, and conflict with the police.”³⁶ With the arrival of Baraka and Carrion at the protest, the Puerto Rican community felt it was necessary to elect a group of officials to represent them in an attempt to negotiate with the Mayor. It was then that the People’s Committee Against Repression and Police Brutality was formed, which included Sigfredo Carrion and Amiri Baraka, along with approximately 12 others.

³⁵Mark Krasovic, *The Newark Frontier: Community Action in the Great Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2016), 281.

³⁶Mumford, *Newark*, 212.

Up until the incident in Branch Brook Park, there had not been an interaction between the Puerto Rican community and the Newark police as violent as the one that took place on 1 September 1974. At some point during the clash, several Puerto Rican men were arrested and two others were killed: Fernando de Cordova was fatally shot and David Perez was clubbed to death by a mounted officer. Anger soon turned into rage when the officer that was accused of shooting de Cordova was acquitted by the grand jury. According to Gustav Heninburg, over 100 officers testified under oath that they hadn't seen anyone shoot their weapon and without physical identification on police gear, the jury could not "verify a policeman."³⁷ The result was the writing of a presentment from the grand jury expressing their ideas on the case, but not indicting anyone for murder. Among the things printed in the presentment was a statement of belief that the 100 officers who testified had lied under oath in order to protect their comrade. The reason for this belief came from a video shown by the prosecutor that was taken from the 6 o'clock news, showing the officers firing their weapons during the "riots." However, since the police gear did not indicate any form of identification for the officers, they were unable to assign actual shooting of the victim to a specific officer. What is most interesting about this case was the new protocol that came as a result of the verdict: officers were now required to wear name-tags on the outside of their gear and file a report every time a weapon was fired on duty, which was not required at the time, but is now mandatory to this day.³⁸

The aftermath of the rebellion within the Puerto Rican community was significant and changed perspectives for the better; "for all intents and purposes—politically, economically, and

³⁷Interview of Gustav Heninburg by Paola Panteleon, March 22, 2000; Hispanic Reference Collection of the NJ Hispanic Research & Information Center at The Newark Public Library.

³⁸Interview of Gustav Heninburg by Paola Panteleon, March 22, 2000; Hispanic Reference Collection of the NJ Hispanic Research & Information Center at The Newark Public Library.

socially—the Puerto Rican community had been invisible. Until Sunday, nobody had taken them seriously.”³⁹ Both, Gustav Heninburg and William Sanchez, also mention *La Casa de Don Pedro* as one of the most significant organizations formed after the 1974 Puerto Rican rebellion. The non-profit organization was co-found by Ramon Rivera, one of the most prominent leaders of the Young Lords and geared towards community development for Latinos in Newark. *La Casa*, as well as FOCUS, aided in improving the most important aspect of living conditions in the city—homeownership, by constructing affordable homes for Latino citizens, providing healthcare information, referrals to helpful government agencies for Latinos, and daycares for children. It was after the rebellion that the Puerto Rican community seemed to realize what needed to be done in order to improve conditions for themselves in the city and made changes accordingly. Another positive outcome of the events of 1974 was the newfound sensitivity towards the Puerto Rican community from the police. Williams Sanchez believes that the rebellion made things happen faster, such as the inclusion of more Latino police officers in the Newark force and made “policemen that were there before the Latino policemen more sensitive to Latino culture and their issues.”⁴⁰ After the “riots,” Puerto Ricans still held celebrations after the Puerto Rican Day parade and played the same games at Washington Park, except the festivals were now more respected by police and no longer had mounted officers patrolling the park. A notable difference was the ban on the Puerto Rican festivals at Branch Brook Park, which would be in place for the next ten years.

Nicole Torres received her Master’s Degree in History from Rutgers-Newark in 2017. During her time there, she had the opportunity to participate in several public humanities projects. These projects included: a traveling exhibition entitled States of Incarceration by the Humanities

³⁹“In Newark, NJ: Trouble,” *The News Journal*, 6 Sept. 1974.

⁴⁰Interview of William Q. Sanchez by Karlha Matta, 2012; Hispanic Reference Collection of the NJ Hispanic Research & Information Center at The Newark Public Library.

Action Lab; We Were Here, a memory project focused on acknowledging the history of the site where the Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences Campus now stands; and Newark '74: Remembering the Puerto Rican Riots. Her time working on Newark '74, as well as being a member of the Puerto Rican community, was what inspired her to want to help convey this unexamined part of Newark's history to the public. She hopes to continue working on projects to educate others on critical aspects of history that have shaped modern society, and also focus on how to view popular culture in a historical context to reshape the way we think about and teach history. Nicole is currently working full-time at the National September 11 Memorial and Museum, doing research on the stories of Latinx victims.