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A Decade of Change: Puerto Rican Politics in Hartford, Connecticut, 1969–1979

JOSÉ E. CRUZ

IN THE HISTORY of Hartford's Puerto Rican community, the dates 1969–1979 bracket important markers of political development. While the year 1969 was significant in terms of political action, 1979 must be remembered as one of political accomplishment. These years are important as markers not just because of the saliency of the events that transpired then. Also, what took place was unprecedented. Never before 1969 had Puerto Ricans been the protagonists of disturbances such as the riots that occurred in that year. Collective action was neither arbitrary nor malicious but it was perceived as “trouble” and for the first time Puerto Ricans were seen as its agent. The 1969 riots had no explicit or intentional political purpose. Yet they represent an important moment in political development. Collective action transformed personal anger into social action and this in turn prompted a political response—both from the community and the establishment.

The claims articulated in 1969 set the stage for the accomplishments of 1979. This is not a teleological assertion; instead it is meant to highlight the significance of that year. While representation was obtained earlier, in 1973, *political* representation came about in 1979. Moreover, in that year Puerto Ricans went beyond the model of brokered representation that organized their claims up until then. Before 1979 their political fate was largely in the hands of Hartford's preeminent power broker, Nicholas Carbone. In 1979 and thereafter, they showed they were ready and willing, if necessary, to twist Carbone's arm.

By 1980 Puerto Ricans had been a part of the city's social and political landscape for over thirty years. During that time their presence had been sporadically felt, at times with wonder, sometimes with well-intentioned concern, often with dread but never before 1979 with the sense of possibility that political representation brought about.

This article pieces together key testimonies and events within this period to provide a portrait and analysis of Puerto Rican political devel-

opment in the city. What we find is a community that, although economically poor and de facto disfranchised, was able over time to develop sufficient political capital to articulate successfully its interests in the political arena. Our story begins on the streets and ends with access to the corridors of power: collective action eventually led to brokered representation; brokered representation in turn foreshadowed the emergence of a new model for political action. The elements that made the transition possible were demographic growth, leadership development, and a history of organizational efforts. And the coherence of the process can be found in the connections made by Puerto Ricans between ethnic awareness and power awareness. In other words, an identity as Puerto Ricans correlated with a sense of disadvantage that was explainable in terms of differential access to political representation.

During the 1969 riots Puerto Ricans were quick to recognize the opportunity to articulate social and political claims. Their reach was local as well as national. There was no unanimity in their appraisal of the situation nor in their strategy, but there was a significant measure of unity nonetheless. In part, the hostile reaction of outgroups helped galvanize the leadership, thus offsetting the centrifugal pull of disagreements over strategy. Also, increased visibility in the context of "trouble" forced institutional responses that contributed to the arsenal of resources that were used to gain political access a decade later.

This is a story of limited success but one that shows how knowledgeable and capable agents constantly assess their status and their opportunities hoping, at some point, to alter the course of recurrent political patterns. It is not a story of accomplishment based solely on the effective use of resources accumulated over time but rather one in which the happy coincidence of capability and feasibility—the coincidence of what political actors can do with what the systemic setting allows—took place with difficulty, often without the benefit of foresight, and over a long period of time.

Furthermore, there are lessons in this experience that go beyond Hartford. Contrary to the conventional wisdom about Puerto Rican politics in the United States, the history of Puerto Rican political mobilization in the insurance city provides further evidence of a politically engaged rather than apathetic community. Moreover, Hartford is a good model of what mobilization must look like in order for political action to be effective. Lastly, to those who decry the intrusion of ethnicity into the political process as dangerous, the Puerto Rican experience in Hartford suggests that their concern is largely unfounded.

1969: A SIMMERING KETTLE EXPLODES

For two decades Puerto Ricans in Hartford were invisible to the United States Bureau of the Census. The city's newspapers had offered estimates of the Puerto Rican population since 1954 and by 1969 they figured those numbers had reached the 20,000 mark. Reports on Puerto Ricans had also been a regular feature of the *Hartford Courant* and the *Hartford Times* during the 1950s but 1969 began with no news about them. It was not until July that they made their way into the daily papers, on a positive note. A month later, everything had changed.

On the evening of Sunday, August 10 rumors circulated through Hartford's South Green neighborhood that the Comancheros, a white Hells Angels-type motorcycle gang, had assaulted a Puerto Rican elderly person the night before at Friar's Restaurant on 165 Main Street.¹ Combined with the ill-feeling between Puerto Rican residents of this neighborhood and the motorcycle gang, the rumors became the first sign of a gathering storm.

At the time "there was a lot of police brutality to begin with," recalled Antonio Soto, a neighborhood resident and community organizer who later went on to head *La Casa de Puerto Rico*, an anti-poverty agency. "The Comancheros was just a group that we used to throw bricks at because they would be kicking Puerto Ricans in the ass all the time. So when we had the incident at the Main Street bar, all hell broke loose."²

The Comancheros's club was on Lawrence Street but Friar's was their regular hangout. According to their account, the victim had been slugged by a stranger after a bout of pushing and shoving. They alleged that the assaulted man was not elderly and a few days after the incident a newspaper story reported that the victim was "apparently 35 years old."³

That night, however, Puerto Ricans were not confused by conflicting stories or troubled by doubts. "The rumor was enough to knock the top off the steam kettle that has been simmering for years," goes an account of the events.⁴ Nightly invasions of the Puerto Rican neighborhood by the Comancheros and the bricks that residents would hurl at them were the salient elements of their mutual hostility and dislike.

Crowds gathered, fights broke out, rocks and molotov cocktails flew. The first arrests were all Puerto Rican and this incensed the already angry rioters. Cars were set ablaze. A motorcycle shop was firebombed and around 1 a.m. someone broke into a mattress company setting between twenty and thirty mattresses on fire. The motorcycle gang was

seen in the area throughout the night but no members were arrested. This led to charges that the police were singling out Puerto Ricans while looking the other way where gang members were concerned.⁵ Antonio Soto saw it precisely that way: "The cops turned their dogs on us," he recalled, "and the Comancheros had started the [incident], so we realized even further that the cops were more against us than the Comancheros were and it just got totally out of hand."⁶

On Thursday, August 14, after four days of bottle-throwing and window-smashing marked by tear-gassing and arrests, María Sánchez, a pioneer in the city and the only Puerto Rican member of the Democratic Town Committee at the time, requested a meeting with city officials to resolve the tensions underlying the rioting. Earlier, she had placated a crowd of about 150 angry young men. City Manager Elisha Freedman was not convinced that a meeting was needed. "This seems to be a problem that can best be resolved through existing neighborhood organizations," he told a *Hartford Times* reporter.⁷

After some equivocation on the part of the concerned parties, a meeting was finally held that night.⁸ As the proceedings unfolded, Sánchez, Nicholas Carbone, a recent appointee to the city council, and Freedman listened patiently. The residents complained that although they had been attacked, only Puerto Ricans had been arrested. Some mentioned unreasonable searches and arrests. In one case, a man was detained after a police officer found a chain, baseball shoes and gloves, and a baseball bat in the trunk of his car. Another explained that he had been arrested while telling people, in Spanish, not to throw rocks at police cars. This prompted police chief Thomas Vaughan to promise that interpreters would be hired to work full-time at the front desk of the police station, and that more Puerto Rican policemen and civilian aides for investigative work would be hired. Near the end of the meeting, councilman George Athanson, a candidate for the Democratic nomination for mayor, urged the Puerto Rican community to run a candidate for city council. That was a good idea, thought many, but it would not happen for some time.

The day after the meeting, police once again used tear gas to break up groups of Puerto Ricans.⁹ In a ghastly, although downsized, reminder of incidents elsewhere in the country, dogs were unleashed on the small crowd. Disgusted with what they saw, José Garay and José Rivera, two of only four Spanish-speaking officers in the city's police force, refused to obey orders to tell people to disperse. That evening they placed a call

to the patrol captain, Theodore Napper, to express their protest, and subsequently filed a complaint.

A week later, on Tuesday August 19, 150 Puerto Ricans met in a local church to charge police brutality and sadism during arrests.¹⁰ Four councilmen—Carbone, Athanson, Collin Bennett, and Allyn Martin—bore the brunt of people's anger at the absence of Chief Vaughan and City Manager Freedman. Garay and Rivera were present but declined requests to relate their complaints.

During the previous week, fifty-three arrests had been made and a number of those charged claimed that it had been for unjust reasons.¹¹ At the meeting, two men displayed wounds inflicted by police dogs and twenty Puerto Ricans who had suffered arrest were lined up at the head table to give their names to the Human Relations Commission's Director, Arthur Johnson. To Johnson's embarrassment, it quickly became apparent that most of them had already filed complaints about which nothing had been done yet.

The meeting ended shortly after James Frazier, treasurer of the Hartford branch of the NAACP, admonished Puerto Ricans with words that none took to heart. "If you don't think you're colored like me," he told the group, "you've got something to learn." He exhorted Puerto Ricans to join the NAACP but, without waiting for a response, proceeded to walk out.

Two days after the meeting, the press announced that Garay and Rivera faced disciplinary hearings for refusing to obey orders. A week later, Elisha Freedman announced that a full investigation into the disturbances—including citizen's complaints—would be conducted and reported to the city council by the end of September.¹² This consoled the Puerto Ricans; they had no way of knowing that the investigation would never take place.¹³

By the end of August, the community was confronted with an unexpected assessment of the riots. According to Bill Ryan, a reporter for the *Hartford Times*, until 1969 Puerto Ricans had caused Hartford no trouble.¹⁴ But suddenly the South Green was "a place of broken store windows and police throwing tear gas and people screaming defiance." A conflict with a motorcycle gang had turned into an event of social and political significance and "after years of inaction, the Puerto Ricans were angry and making their presence known."¹⁵

Resentment of Puerto Ricans came to the surface with Ryan's article. The expressions in which it was couched were particularly hard. A

fireman from the South Green was quoted as saying: "They are pigs, that's all pigs. A bunch of them will be sitting around drinking beer and when one is finished . . . he just throws the bottle anywhere. . . . They dump garbage out of their windows. They live like pigs." An unidentified South End resident said: "They insult women on the street. They ought to go back to hell where they came from."¹⁶

Ryan probably did not think that these harsh words would bring much in their trail. But Puerto Ricans were highly offended. The day after the story ran they responded, once again, with violence. This time the reaction was not entirely spontaneous. Two community leaders, Alejandro LaLuz and Ramón Quiroz, began to stir things up, enticing the community to protest. In the process they accused María Sánchez of collaborating with the *Hartford Times* simply because her profile was the promised feature of the story's sequel.¹⁷

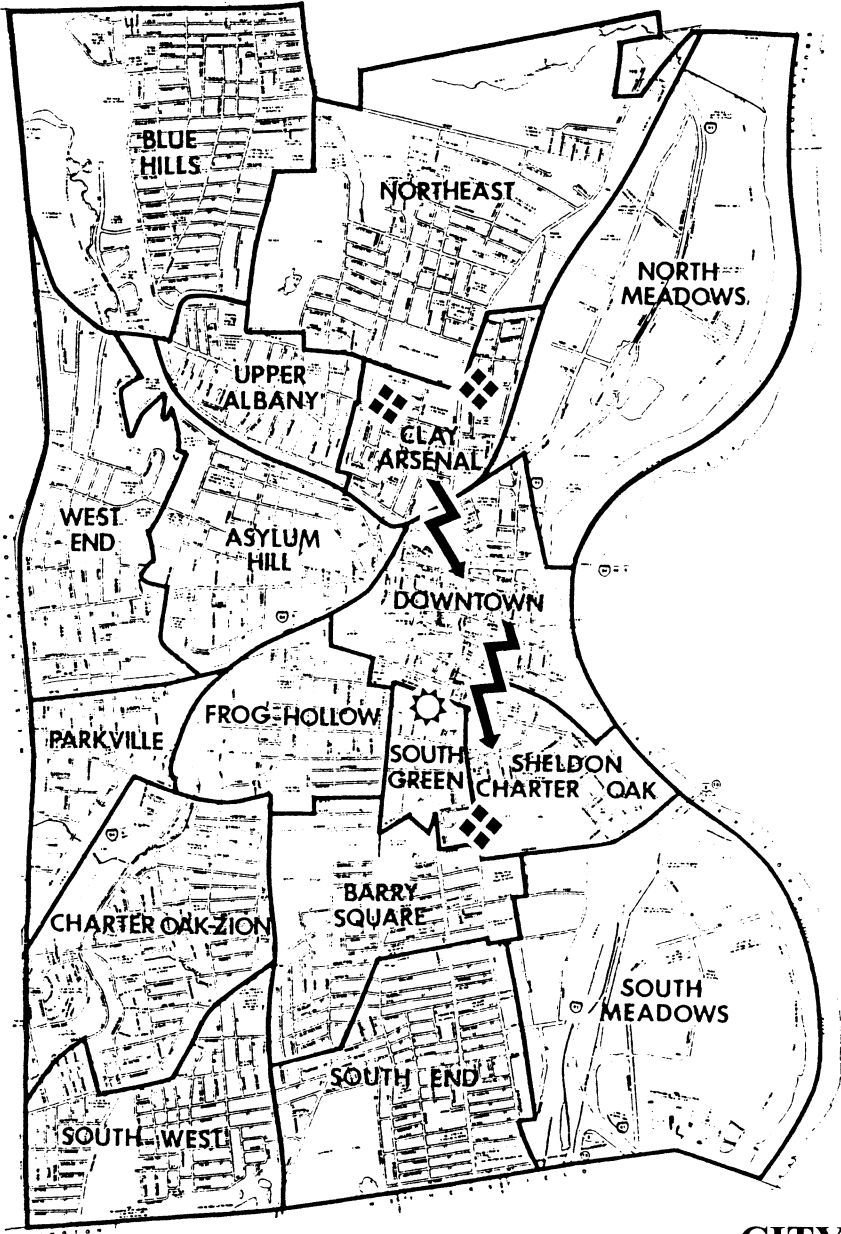
Two days before Ryan's story, on Friday, August 29, Dennis Jones, a sixteen-year-old black youth was shot by a West Hartford police officer.¹⁸ Two days after the killing, just as the *Hartford Times* ran its story about Puerto Ricans, a tenement fire in a black neighborhood killed three residents.

A week of looting, arson, and widespread violence followed. Once again Puerto Ricans, this time along with blacks, commanded center stage. Events now led to the imposition of a state of emergency. A 12-hour mandatory curfew was imposed. In the end, at \$1.17 million, damages were more than double the losses during the disorders following the assassination of Martin Luther King.¹⁹

Violence was so intense that at the end of the first day and a half of rioting, hundreds of blacks and Puerto Ricans had ravaged a 40-block area of the North End throwing fire bombs and bricks and sniping at police and firemen from rooftops and windows. Sixty-seven stores were looted, one policeman was shot, and 133 individuals were arrested. Forty-seven percent of those arrested were Puerto Rican, mostly charged with breach of peace or failure to disperse.²⁰

Violence was random. This was particularly evident in the extensive damages suffered by a branch of the Hartford Public Library and the attacks inflicted upon the Hartford Board of Education headquarters. The day after the riot broke out, witnesses were already declaring that it was the worst Hartford had ever suffered. Ann Uccello, the mayor of Hartford, concurred,²¹ not knowing that there was more yet to come. Somehow, the scenario of overturned cars, electrical appliances left be-

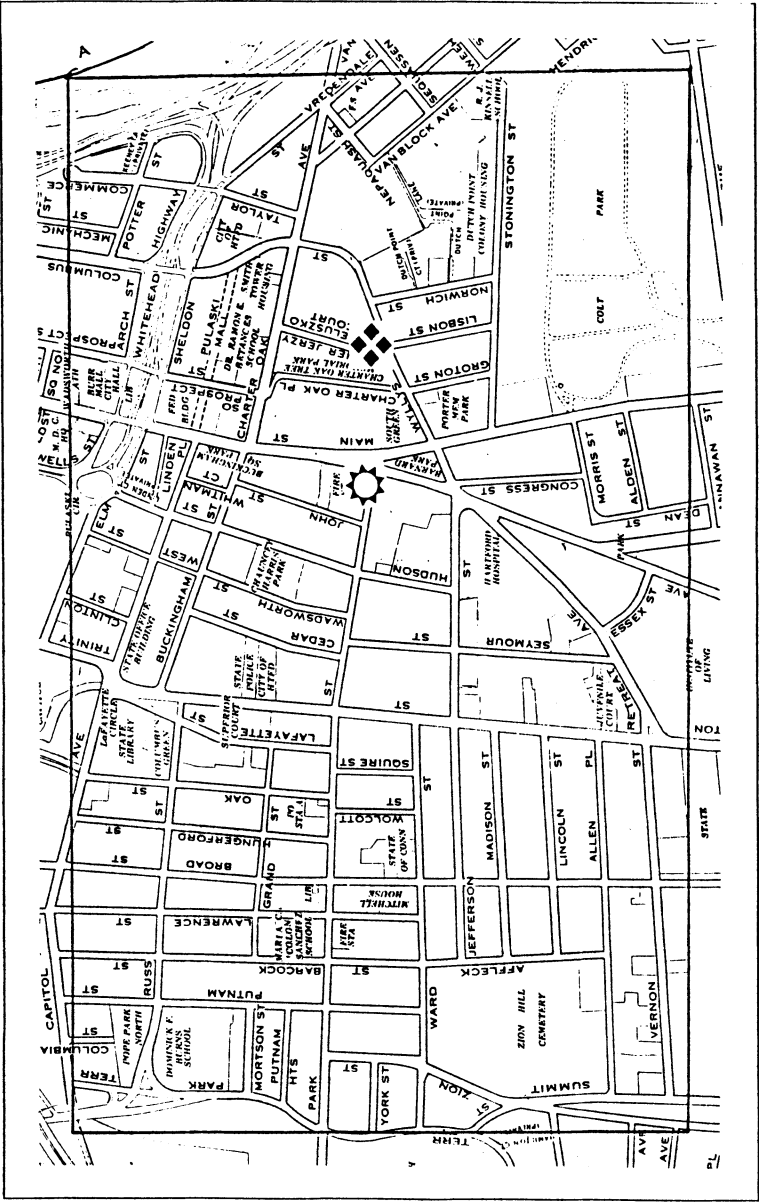
MAP 1
The City of Hartford



- ⊙ Comanchero riot, 10 August 1969
- ❖ Labor day riots, 1969

CITY
NEIGHBORHOODS

MAP 2
The City of Hartford (Detail) Frog Hollow, South Green, and Charter Oak Neighborhoods
● Comanchero Riot, 10 August 1969 ♦ Labor Day Riot, 1969



charges such as violation of curfew, breach of peace, attempted arson, breaking and entering, and loitering. Almost half of those arrested were Puerto Rican.²³

On Thursday night, 70 more arrests were made. By Friday, September 5, over 500 people had been arrested and the curfew was revoked.²⁴ Four people had been shot. The following Monday, Mayor Uccello lifted the state of emergency with a plea for help from the suburbs. "The suburbs must absorb some of the population of the inner city," she said. But the plea was not helped by her analysis of the disturbances: "This activity was instigated by agitators and carried out by hoodlums . . . who would steal no matter what the social conditions."²⁵ Then she proceeded to echo the words of Wilber Smith, an NAACP officer and mayoral candidate, who earlier had cautioned the white community not to issue a "blanket indictment of all Negroes and Puerto Ricans."²⁶ Blanket indictments, however, were not easily resisted. Even María Sánchez had angrily generalized, calling Puerto Rican rioters hoodlums. To some extent she was right. Her newsstand on Albany Avenue was attacked shortly after her remarks.

According to Uccello, the lawbreakers were not representative of the Puerto Rican or black community. It was never clear who the suburbs should welcome, law-abiding blacks and Puerto Ricans or those who would break the law anywhere. Republican Councilman Collin Bennett explained the events differently. The riot was evidence of a "poor relationship and lack of communication between the city government and members of the Spanish-speaking community. This segment of our society feels that there is no one to represent their interests in city hall, and this has been partly responsible for the increased tension . . . between the Spanish-speaking community and our city government."²⁷ Yet another assessment was offered by Father Segundo Las Heras, a Spanish priest with close ties to the Puerto Rican community. In a newspaper interview, he combined elements offered by Mayor Uccello and Councilman Bennett, recognizing that agitation had played a role, referring to the bitterness and disgust of ghetto dwellers over their living conditions, which had turned anger into violence, and adding the language barrier as the main cause of Puerto Ricans's inadequate education and lack of integration.²⁸

During the crisis, the Puerto Rican leadership and its allies scrambled to get outside help and attention. The Rev. Charles Pickett, a former head of the Spanish Action Coalition (SAC), a group that had formed in late 1967, called Puerto Rico's Resident Commissioner in Washington,

Jorge Luis Córdova Díaz, and asked for a local appearance. His hope was that Córdova would unite the leadership and bring appeasement within the community.²⁹ Córdova demurred. He was following the debate in Congress on electoral reform and did not want to miss it, he said. Also, he indicated that the governor of Puerto Rico had not asked him to go to Hartford. And further, he was concerned that his visit might be construed as interference in local affairs by the government of Puerto Rico.

Later that day Pickett joined others at a meeting at the South Arsenal Neighborhood Development Corporation (SAND), a black agency, to discuss community unity. City officials had been asked to attend but none responded. There were about forty people in attendance, mostly Puerto Ricans. The central disagreement revolved around strategy. Some felt that more militant action was needed, others decried militancy.

The group agreed to call for a halt of federal funding to the city until an investigation of the disturbances was conducted. The following day, Alejandro LaLuz, President of Puerto Rican Action for Progress, announced that all funding agencies would be wired, including the Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Labor, Health, Education and Welfare, and the Office of Equal Opportunity as well. Telegrams would also be sent to Connecticut's Governor, John Dempsey, and Mayor Uccello.

"The needs of the Puerto Ricans in Hartford are not being fairly or adequately served," read the telegram. Signed by the Spanish Action Coalition, Puerto Rican Action for Progress, the Spanish American Association, the *Comerieños Ausentes*, and the *Hijos de Santurce*, the telegram claimed that, compared to other cities in the state, Hartford was not acting in good faith towards Puerto Ricans. The city's leadership as well as the federal government were warned that inaction would lead to more violence. "We demand that all funds be suspended pending an impartial investigation by your office," the signatories declared.³⁰

Mayor Uccello had no comment on the telegram. But Reverend Las Heras, upset by the use of the word "demand" rather than "request" in the telegram, resigned as Chair of SAC. "I certainly think we're getting a younger, very vocal group in SAC," said Reverend Pickett, commenting on the resignation, "and their attitude is that they are just not going to be pushed around anymore."³¹ This was a familiar syndrome, earlier experienced by a generation of urban-born blacks who, dissatisfied with the strategies of their elders, had resorted to confrontational methods to back their demands for political and socioeconomic equality.³²

A spokesman for the signing group explained that Puerto Ricans were tired of playing games. "We are all trying to keep things cool but there's only so much we can do," he said.³³ Peacekeeping efforts were made more difficult by out-group reactions. For example, a call from the Greater Hartford Chamber of Commerce for tough measures against those arrested during the disturbances struck a sensitive chord among Puerto Ricans. They felt that looters and arsonists should be punished but "at the same time we would like to hear the mayor be as strong for the punishment of others who violate the law, such as slumlords."³⁴

The same day these complaints were heard, the Greater Hartford Community Council announced a membership meeting for September 23 in which the program title was "Our Puerto Rican Fellow Citizens." The field representative of the Puerto Rican Commonwealth's Office in Hartford, Gilberto Camacho, was scheduled to speak about the "Puerto Rican Heritage and the Shock of Mainland Living," and Antonio Soto about "Organizing the Puerto Rican Community."³⁵ Ten days later the President of the Puerto Rican Parade Committee, Feliciano Martorell, announced that the parade would bring Puerto Ricans from more than ten towns in the state to march on September 28 from West Avon to a rally on Bushnell Park.

The theme of the parade was "Register and Vote" as it had been since 1964, when it was instituted. But in the context of the recent disturbances and the claims of disfranchisement that had surfaced, the old theme acquired a freshness and urgency that it had not had before. This was felt in Martorell's pronouncement: "From now on we are going to show the administrators throughout the state that we want improvements in the areas of housing, employment, education, health and civil rights."³⁶ This was a comprehensive agenda, and it was articulated with an emphasis that meant serious business.

The meeting on September 23 gave Puerto Rican leaders an opportunity to reiterate the main points in their social agenda. Once again, longstanding grievances were aired. Tales of rejection and misunderstanding were offered. Complaints about inadequate education, poor medical care, and expensive housing were also heard. In his talk, Camacho deplored mainland ignorance of Puerto Rican culture. He also referred to the barriers to progress Puerto Ricans faced. "We migrate to Hartford to better ourselves," he said. "We are told of a lack of skilled labor. A Puerto Rican comes here with \$100 in his pocket. Where can he find an apartment?" Soto's presentation emphasized the relationship between

the well-being of Puerto Ricans and the city's welfare. "If we have problems, you have problems," he told the leaders of the Council, and then blamed the Labor Day week disturbances on lack of support of Puerto Ricans from city and state officials.³⁷

These themes were further hammered into the city's consciousness the day of the parade. To a reporter, Feliciano Martorell said that it was time to make the political establishment more responsive to Puerto Rican needs. Since 1964, the parade had reminded the city that Puerto Ricans were physically there. "From now on," he said, "we are going to show [everyone] that we are not only here, but that we want improvements. . . . We plan to follow through with our plans of bettering and upgrading the whole concept of the Puerto Rican around the state."³⁸

That statement best summarized how Puerto Ricans connected ethnic awareness with power awareness—a sense of self correlated with a sense of relative disadvantage to suggest the need for change. It was clear that the "concept of the Puerto Rican" was firmly established since it was no longer sufficient to show that they were "there," and that just as native-born Americans they too were an integral part of the city. Now what was needed was "bettering and upgrading" that concept through improvements in socioeconomic status. Thus the community was called upon to "register and vote" and the mayor and the bureaucracy were called upon to bring about equity.

After the dust of the riots had settled, Resident Commissioner Córdova Díaz made his appearance. At the parade's closing rally, he explained the riots as a confrontation between two cultures but then corrected himself. "Actually, what I think we have seen is not a confrontation between Puerto Ricans and other Americans but an outbreak of the same conflict that is troubling this entire country." The rioting, protests, and unrest afflicting the nation, he said, were signals of conflict "between the young, the poor, the black—and the more experienced, perhaps the more affluent."³⁹

In his own way Córdova Díaz intimated that the Puerto Ricans's problem was one of power rather than ethnicity; yet the riots can be understood as a crossover point between ethnic awareness and power awareness. Ultimately, they would attain progress through politics, not society. In other words, group characteristics and individual initiative were certainly important to the effort but not any more than acquiring political power. "It is the weight of our votes that will gain us respect,"⁴⁰ he concluded. But the obvious corollary to a concept of politi-

cal action was the concept of community and community meant ethnic-based needs. For Puerto Ricans legal citizenship was an anomaly; they were not aliens but many were excluded from voting *de jure* by a literacy requirement. They were not completely marginal to politics but the prevailing perception was that their interest in the political process was nil. Speaking to a reporter, Camacho, in a reversal of attitude, downplayed characterizations of Puerto Ricans as transient. The Puerto Rican community in Hartford was still young; yet according to Camacho their roots were already firmly planted.⁴¹ Puerto Ricans were in Hartford to stay and, as Martorell put it, their presence was no longer an issue. The crucial question now was how to command the attention of the political society, how to move from social visibility to political access.

CONSEQUENCES OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

After the riots, visibility was one gain that was apparent to many. The press was accessible and anxious to help rebuild the image of Puerto Ricans. This was explained, in part, out of a sense of guilt, given the role that Bill Ryan's story in the *Hartford Times* had in triggering the Labor Day riots. But also, historically, the press had been largely sympathetic and willing to portray Puerto Ricans in the best possible light.

The frequency of press coverage was good even if the stories did not always report on matters of substance. A sample of headlines between August and December 1969 suggests the mixed character of the issues covered: "PARADE QUEEN CHOSEN"; "PUERTO RICANS TO MARCH"; "PUERTO RICAN IDEALS SAID MISUNDERSTOOD"; "PUERTO RICANS NAME MARSHAL FOR PARADE"; "PUERTO RICANS TO PARADE TODAY"; "NEED FOR UNDERSTANDING PUERTO RICAN DAY THEME." Yet the underlying message in every single one of the stories was this: Puerto Ricans exist, they wish to incorporate, and they will do so come what may.

Press coverage in 1970 was also mixed, with front-page reporting in six out of the ten stories written that year. These articles continued to stress the incorporation message, but they also analyzed the difficulties encountered by the Puerto Ricans in the process. "PUERTO RICANS PLAN TO ORGANIZE"; "JOBS, FRIENDS DRAW PUERTO RICANS TO 'DESIRABLE' HARTFORD"; "AMERICAN DREAM SUFFOCATING"; "ETHNIC NEED: POLITICAL MUSCLE," are some of the headlines of stories written during this time.

Aside from visibility, collective action stimulated unity and formal organization. Community improvement, institution-building, and electoral political mobilization were some of the goals that began to be highlighted with renewed intensity by local activists, Democratic party members, and organizers.⁴² Criticism of the riots within the community was scant and mostly private.⁴³ In most cases, the disturbances were seen as a “movement for recognition.” Out-groups continued to portray Puerto Ricans “as savages” but this only solidified their unity and fueled their anger.⁴⁴

The riots had two other notable consequences. Three days into the disturbances the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving announced that it would give \$78,640 to the Greater Hartford Community Council to hire a full-time community organizer to work with Puerto Ricans. It is not entirely clear what actually caused the award but its announcement was, at the very least, very well timed. The three-year grant would allow the organizer to be the liaison between the council and community residents. This provided seed money to later establish *La Casa de Puerto Rico*.⁴⁵

From Puerto Rico, Gov. Luis Ferré declared that his government would study the possibility of sending representatives to Hartford to assess Puerto Rican needs and to work with the state’s governor to deal with those needs. For years Gilberto Camacho had been pleading with his superiors in New York for more resources for the Commonwealth’s office in Hartford to no avail. As recently as August of 1969 he had written to them with a request for an assistant, claiming to be under enormous pressures and feeling unable to handle them on his own. In response, he was curtly told that no assistance was forthcoming and to put a stop to his requests.⁴⁶ Camacho, however, did not desist and used the riots to bolster his argument. When the Republicans captured the governorship in 1970 he shifted his focus. In a letter to Gov. Thomas J. Meskill he said:

The time has come for the Office of the Governor to be staffed with a Special Assistant knowledgeable in background, experience, an[d] academic education of the idiosyncrasy of the Puerto Rican Americans.⁴⁷

Meskill did nothing. But the idea was planted and the position was created four years later by Ella Grasso, his Democratic successor.

MOVING AROUND THE MARGINS

There was no single cause but rather many factors that explained why, at the beginning of their third decade in the city, Puerto Ricans continued to be marginal. In 1970, the community was still young, not just in a demographic sense, but in terms of acculturation, skills, political strength, and experience. The prejudice many felt against Puerto Ricans was also a factor. This was substantiated in 1972 in a report commissioned by Nicholas Carbone. The authors found that perceptions of Puerto Ricans in the South Side of Hartford were largely negative and that a significant number of residents favored limiting their numbers in the area.⁴⁸ But the most significant liabilities were endogenous: Puerto Ricans lacked resources and, despite a higher level of power awareness, were not united. During a crisis the leadership would rise to the occasion, but these moments of unity tended not to last.

In her 1970 analysis of the state of the Puerto Rican community, Janet Anderson of the *Hartford Courant* wrote about the divisions among the Puerto Rican leadership, noting that at least thirty individuals lay claim to such title, each one with a differing viewpoint. "We don't have leaders, we have speculators," said Alejandro LaLuz to Anderson. True leaders, he added, must come from the community "with intellectual honesty and in the spirit of sacrifice." Pedro Meléndez, from the Department of Community Affairs, declared: "We should organize for one common thing—to solve the poverty in our community." And Julio Quiñones, a businessman, said: "Our leaders are not united now, but this doesn't mean they cannot be. We're going to break out of this hole in the next two years."⁴⁹

With all the issues that divided the community, it is not surprising that this did not happen, at least not within the timeframe predicted by Quiñones. And as more Puerto Ricans came to the city, a new enclave—and new divisions—developed. Displacement due to willful neglect of properties and redevelopment also contributed to the formation of this new enclave by bringing Puerto Ricans from the Clay Hill area to Park Street and its surroundings.⁵⁰ Juan Fuentes, a Hartford resident since 1963, witnessed this transformation.

Our people lived in the North End. They began to move to Park Street when housing displacement began in the North End. That began to happen around the 1970s when they started demolishing buildings. Some buildings burned and others were burned on purpose.⁵¹

Max Fernández, a director for over fifteen years at TAINO Housing, a community and housing development agency, agreed that displacement had been a force shaping enclave formation, moving Puerto Ricans around the city from the North End to the South Green, from Congress Street to Frog Hollow, out of Main and into Park Street. Developers would promise to include low-income housing in their projects and then, citing changing economic conditions, would change their plans. “Development, when it’s done,” concluded Fernández, “doesn’t include our people.”⁵²

Residential fragmentation resulted in cleavages between North End and Park Street residents. María Sánchez, for example, was unhappy when *La Casa de Puerto Rico* moved from Albany Avenue in the North End to Wadsworth Street closer to the South Green and Frog Hollow enclave. To her mind the move meant that South End Puerto Ricans would benefit, leaving the North End forlorn. Politically, this meant that Puerto Ricans from different neighborhoods would eye each other with suspicion making electoral coalitions more difficult to effect.

The militant/moderate split that provoked the resignation of Rev. Las Heras from the Spanish Action Coalition in 1969 also began to be felt within the community between militant and moderate organizations. Sherrie Baver has distinguished militant and moderate political orientations within the Puerto Rican community in New York in terms of the class alignment, strategies, and goals of Puerto Rican leaders. In her view, moderates emphasize crossover strategies that privilege middle-class values and constituencies by focusing on good government goals. Militant leaders, on the other hand, emphasize Puerto Rican/Latino identity, their strategy highlights grassroots organization, and their short-term goals are linked to the goal of independence for Puerto Rico.⁵³ These distinctions hold in Hartford, except that moderates and militants alike emphasized a Puerto Rican identity—what I have called ethnic awareness. Furthermore, moderate organizations were for the most part nominally apolitical in the sense of not being linked to movements to reform and/or to capture positions within the Democratic party.

On the moderate side, organizations such as Services for Puerto Ricans, created during the summer of 1970 with the blessing of Councilman Collin Bennett, proposed a strategy of government and foundation fundraising to provide services.⁵⁴ The militant tendency never proliferated, but the People’s Liberation Party (PLP) illustrates it well. This was an organization of Puerto Rican youth, modeled after the Young Lords Party (YLP),⁵⁵ which was created in late 1969. Another group was the

Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP), which emerged in 1972. The PLP and the PSP were oriented towards the working-class and relied on a strategy focused on “demand-protest” activities.⁵⁶

Another source of division was generational and the creation of the PLP was its most extreme example, with a younger and more impatient group of activists challenging the older leadership. These Young Turks were eager to be “part of the action,” while professing to being tired of “playing games.”

Lastly, and cutting across divisions between militants and moderates, young and old, were differences in strategy—with some arguing for alliances with African Americans, others pressing for the creation of a Puerto Rican pressure group, and a three-way split over the solution to the status of Puerto Rico.

ACCUMULATION OF POLITICAL CAPITAL

Demographic Growth

To bolster their claims Puerto Ricans could count on growing numbers. According to local estimates (see table 1), by 1970 the Puerto Rican population had almost tripled in one decade. Twenty years after settlement, the census bureau counted 8,543 Puerto Ricans, a figure well below the estimate of over 20,000 provided by the *Hartford Courant*.⁵⁷ By the census count, Puerto Ricans were 5.4 percent of the city’s population in 1970; by local estimates they were 12.6 percent. But even if the census count is accepted, it is clear that during the 1970s Puerto Rican numbers grew significantly. In 1980, 24,615 Puerto Ricans were counted in the city, a number almost three times the 1970 figure. This signaled a dramatic jump from 5.4 to 18 percent of the total population. In contrast, the census count for blacks showed a small increase from 44,091 in 1970 to 46,186 in 1980 for an increase of 6 percentage points (from 27.9 to 33.8 percent) in their proportion of the population at large.

But sharp population increases did not occur just during the 1970s. Population estimates indicate a 300 percent increase by 1956, 50 percent growth between 1956 and 1957 and between 1957 and 1958, and a 186 percent jump between 1961 and 1970. Using census figures the 1960-1970 increase comes down to 22 percent, still a respectable change.

The increase in numbers during the 1970s coincided with a new national migratory pattern of Puerto Ricans. Between 1965 and 1980 their so-called “revolving-door” migration to the United States resulted in

TABLE 1
Population Growth
Puerto Ricans in Hartford
1954–1980

Year	U.S. Census	Local Estimate	% Change
1954	—	500	
1956	—	2,000	300
1957	—	3,000	50
1958	—	4,500	50
1959	—	6,000	33
1961	—	7,000	17
1969-70	8,543	20,000	186 ^a /22 ^b
1980	24,615	—	23 ^c /191 ^d

Sources: The *Hartford Courant*; The *Hartford Times* (1958 only); U.S. Bureau of the Census. Census figures before 1970 not available.
^aPercentage change based on estimates.
^bPercentage change based on 1961 estimate and 1970 Census count.
^cPercentage change based on 1969-70 estimate and 1980 Census count.
^dPercentage change based on 1970 and 1980 Census counts.

fluctuating rates and high numbers of return migrants. But in 1969, when the Puerto Rican population in Hartford appears to have had the highest increase since 1956, Puerto Rican migration to the mainland also registered its highest level since 1955.⁵⁸

Demographic growth had economic and social consequences that strengthened the community. For example, by 1970 there were over forty Puerto Rican-owned businesses and supermarkets in the city. Social life in the community indicated a new sense of self—an ethnic awareness—distinct yet integrated, which was expressed and signified through the broadcasts of a Spanish radio station, two Spanish theaters on Main and Park Streets, and dances at the Lyric Club on Park Street.⁵⁹ Connecticut had no Spanish newspapers, but two national dailies—*El Diario-La Prensa* and *El Tiempo*—circulated locally.⁶⁰ In 1973, Hartford welcomed the first bilingual community newspaper in New England, *La Prensa Gráfica*, and Puerto Ricans throughout the state were able to enjoy the Spanish broadcasts of Dinorah Maldonado and Yolanda Carrera, hosts of the local TV programs *Adelante* and *Barrio* respectively.

The implications of growth for politics, especially during the 1970s, were not immediately apparent to everyone in the city. Only some of Hartford’s most astute politicians were able to figure out the conse-

quences of demographic trends. They knew that, to survive politically, they needed to integrate and co-opt the newcomers.⁶¹

Leadership Development

The second tool that helped increase the political capital of Puerto Ricans was leadership development. The institution that took the earliest interest in Puerto Ricans in the city was the Catholic church. It was through the church that the first cadre of Puerto Rican leaders asserted themselves. There were political involvements at this stage but the main concerns of these early activists, most of whom were women, were cultural.⁶²

Baseball also played a strong role in the political socialization of Puerto Ricans and the development of political leadership. For many, the activities of the various teams provided cultural solace away from the home country. Baseball tournaments were structures of dissociation: from the rigors of work, from economic preoccupations, from the melancholy of nostalgic feelings. One of the earliest sports associations, the Julián Vargas League, also served as a social network that brought party regulars and ordinary citizens together to exchange views on issues, fostering their involvement in civic and partisan activities.⁶³

Community agencies also were a source of leaders.⁶⁴ Long before landing a position at Aetna Life Insurance, Mildred Torres, the first Puerto Rican to serve on the city council, had been involved with the city's social service agencies; before his election to the council, Gerardo "Jerry" Zayas had been the director of the Spanish American Center, an agency he helped establish in the mid-1970s to provide social services to Puerto Ricans. Yasha Escalera, the first Puerto Rican Executive Director of the first community agency established to serve Puerto Ricans, the San Juan Center, began to develop his statewide political network through his work as president of the Connecticut Association of United Spanish Administrators (CAUSA), an association representing Hispanic agencies established in 1974. According to Escalera, "in the early seventies [Puerto Ricans had] an emerging political presence not only in Hartford but in most of the small towns. What was more developed were the civic organizations and nonprofit organizations. So whatever political activity [there was] took place via that route."⁶⁵

A teacher recruitment program that Perry Alan Zirkel, a professor at the University of Hartford, and María Sánchez put together became a source of leaders; Edwin Vargas, Jr., the first Puerto Rican to challenge

the Democratic machine, was brought to Hartford by Sánchez under this program. Other participants, like Edna Negrón and Calixto Torres, also went on to assume positions of prominence within the community. In 1977, Torres played a role in the organization of what later crystallized as the Puerto Rican Political Action Committee of Connecticut (PRPAC); in 1990 Negrón took over Sánchez's Assembly seat after her death in 1989.

In their attempt to co-opt promising individuals, machine politicians nurtured their eventual challengers. They could not foresee that co-optation could succeed only partially. Initially, Puerto Ricans played the protégé game; eventually, they would challenge and displace their mentors.

Similarly, dissatisfaction with the work of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico's Hartford office encouraged the emergence of new leaders. According to Gilberto Camacho, since his arrival in the city in 1959 the Puerto Rican leadership had more than multiplied. This was, to him, a sign of political maturity, a reflection of the increasing number of agencies serving the community in Hartford and elsewhere in the state. It was also a sign of what he called "resentment on the part of many of our initiatives on behalf of the community."⁶⁶

An unintended consequence of leadership development, however, was increased factionalism as the emerging cadre of activists competed for pre-eminence within a growing but still small community. But elite competition had a positive side: recognized leaders had to prove their mettle and in the process new activists emerged.

Organizational Efforts

Formal organizing built upon and expanded existing resources. Institutionally, the budding presence of Puerto Ricans could be best appreciated in the community groups and agencies. In the 1950s, political action was not absent but they organized mostly for religious and cultural purposes. The San Juan Center provided a mix of social services but it did not become a Puerto Rican-controlled organization until 1974. During the 1960s, cultural concerns combined with heightened political concerns. These were blended in the Puerto Rican Parade Committee. For a number of years Gilberto Camacho tried to transform the parade organization into a federation of community groups but was not successful. In 1969 the first umbrella group incorporating Puerto Ricans, the Spanish Action Coalition, gradually gave way to *La Casa de Puerto*

Rico. The impetus for organizing *La Casa* preceded the 1969 riots but, as suggested above, collective action gave mainstream institutions a powerful cue which they noticed and followed by providing funding to support its establishment. *La Casa* in turn generated a number of spin-offs, such as TAINO Housing and the Hispanic Health Council. The network that these developing entities formed became a source of leaders and contacts that buttressed political action.

The first strictly political Puerto Rican group was formed in 1965. But all along it was difficult to draw the line that separated politics from social services. The record suggests that service groups were more successful than political organizations; the former had more resources, clearly defined short-term objectives, and more stable leadership. But all in all, Puerto Rican efforts to organize politically were marred by the uneven ratio of issues to resources. Political and social issues competed for the attention of a limited number of activists who often found themselves spread rather thinly.

This notwithstanding, groups proliferated. Between 1952 and 1964 the Commonwealth's office in Hartford assisted in the formation of nearly twenty-five groups, providing leadership seminars and direct organizing. Between 1952 and 1960 the office spent over 50 percent of its time organizing the community. In part due to the number of self-generated initiatives and partly due to its lack of resources, by 1965, six years after Camacho had promised to step up the office's efforts in that area, it dedicated no more than 30 percent of its time to such activities; by 1969 no resources were devoted to organizing except for assistance provided to existing groups after the 1969 riots. Yet by 1970 the number of groups in the office's service area numbered in excess of fifty, although it is impossible to tell how many were social, political or how many were based in Hartford.⁶⁷

Proliferation was indicative of another key feature of the process of group formation: frequent and troublesome starts and stops. Factionalism was ideologically benign—mostly personality conflicts—but organizationally deadly. And groups that were small to begin with often had overcommitted members who divided their time between several community organizations. Thus, some groups would often last more than a year but most were not able to become coherent or effective.⁶⁸

During the 1970s the efforts of Puerto Ricans to organize politically in Hartford flourished but were either short-lived or weak. According to Yasha Escalera "there have been [many] Democratic clubs but they would flash at the election and go away . . . whenever there was an

election there would be no real follow-through, the political effort was very disorganized, once the campaign was over there was no documentation of what the vote was.”⁶⁹ In many cases the would-be organizers were not able to even get beyond discussing what to do, with the result that failed attempts at organizing also abounded.⁷⁰

Paradoxically, these multiple initiatives, false starts, flashes in the pan, and so on, while a symptom of the difficulties, incoherence, and precariousness of organizational efforts, also kept the organizing momentum. And even unpopular groups, such as the PSP, contributed with resources and strategic insights.⁷¹

STRUCTURE OF CHOICES: BROKERED REPRESENTATION

In Olga Mele’s view, Puerto Ricans were shortchanged by the Democrats. Political candidates would seek Puerto Rican support but would use their office to benefit their own group, themselves personally or both.⁷² Antonio Soto had similar thoughts about how the Democrats treated Puerto Ricans in the 1960s. Dissatisfaction with the Democrats led him to join the Republican party in a bargain that made him a town selectman.⁷³ Soto quickly discovered, however, that it had been an unequal trade. Had his bargain been struck in the nineteenth century when selectmen controlled Hartford town, it would have meant something. But this was the 1960s. Selectmen simply registered voters, one of the few town functions that the Act of Consolidation of 1896, which brought together Hartford town and city, did not transfer to city commissions. Two years after his appointment, Soto was elected and then resigned, after making sure that another Puerto Rican got the seat.

The bargain that gave Soto his seat among Hartford’s selectmen constitutes the earliest example of a structure of choices based on brokered representation. Interestingly, despite their strong identification with the Democrats, Puerto Ricans were first put in the political spotlight by the Republicans. In 1966 Dolores Sánchez, a Puerto Rican businessman, ran for the State Senate to represent the second senatorial district encompassing the northern half of Hartford. According to fellow Republican José Garay, this nomination showed that Republicans were more responsive to Puerto Ricans than the Democrats,⁷⁴ but to others this was just an effort to co-opt rather than cater to them.⁷⁵

Puerto Ricans did not support Sánchez; they also failed to use his candidacy as a bargaining chip to wrest concessions from the Democrats. In retrospect, Sánchez’s defeat by Boce W. Barlow, Jr., the first

black to be elected to the upper house of the state legislature, was seen by some as a double loss.⁷⁶

The first successful instance of brokered representation involving a post of significance did not come until 1973. In November of that year, the Democrats were seeking reelection to the city council on their record. They had a 4 to 1 voter registration lead. Nicholas Carbone had completed a second term in office and was the council's majority leader and recognized Democratic power broker.⁷⁷

By 1973, María Sánchez had been a Hartford resident for twenty years and was the owner of Henry's Newspaper Stand at 246 Albany Avenue.⁷⁸ She had wanted to be in the city council for some time. But in that year she ran for a seat on the board of education with support from the Democratic organization. This support did not come easy. Carbone's initial choice had been Edna Negrón. Negrón, however, bluntly told him to go to hell when he suggested that she was better than María Sánchez. According to Negrón "the community stood solidly behind [María] and we forced Nick to accept her."⁷⁹

During the campaign, Sánchez was recognized as an experienced advocate of bilingual education. Her endorsement by the Democratic party was emphasized and juxtaposed to the greater political, administrative, and educational experience of other candidates. Her candidacy was considered a gauge of partisan influence and strength as well as a symbol for a community with no political representation.⁸⁰

Aided by the resources of the Campaign Committee of the Bilingual Task Force, an advocacy group organized by *La Casa de Puerto Rico*, she became the first Puerto Rican elected to public office in Hartford.

BROKERED REPRESENTATION AND BEYOND

By 1977 brokered representation had not produced any increases in Puerto Rican elected officials. In that year, due to the sustained pressure exerted by teachers, parents, students, and community leaders, led by María Sánchez and Edwin Vargas, who at the time was treasurer of the Hartford Federation of Teachers, the board of education declared January 6, Three Kings Day, an official holiday.⁸¹ During the summer Governor Ella Grasso made bilingual education mandatory in all school districts with twenty or more students whose primary language was not English.⁸²

In September, *La Casa de Puerto Rico* filed suit in United States District Court claiming job discrimination against Puerto Ricans by the

Hartford Fire Department.⁸³ Almost two years later, firefighters left the scene of an accident twice before knowing there was a boy under a collapsed roof. Several neighbors had tried to tell them, but their broken English was not up to the task and the firefighters spoke no Spanish; by the time the firefighters figured it out the boy had died.

The death of Julio Lozada prompted *La Casa* to push harder to increase the number of Hispanic firefighters in the city. As a result, the Fire Department agreed to recruit and train Hispanics and to give preference in hiring to those passing the qualifying exam.⁸⁴ This was a small but important victory. Yet it was almost ten years after the 1969 riots and this and other accomplishments did not seem to measure up to the problems still facing the community.

The 1977 Synthesis

The year 1977 offers a ripe moment in the history of the Puerto Rican community in Hartford. At that time, several strands of political development came together in a strategy that synthesized several models of political mobilization and leadership. Although the process was not entirely coherent, one can appreciate its integrity in the end result: actions that shifted their focus from island to mainland driven by leaders that combined militant and moderate styles of action.

By 1977 Puerto Ricans had begun to develop a political agenda that went beyond the indirect benefits of federal grants. This had become patent after the 1969 riots, when they decided that the programs that served the community should be run by Puerto Ricans themselves. Now the issue was not just programs but power. Programs had been in existence since 1956. The War on Poverty had expanded that arena. Thus access to power seemed the next logical step. Power also held the promise of redistribution either through patronage, public policy or radical change.

Initially, the strategy was to join the Democratic party and work from within to exact programs and services. María Sánchez was the embodiment of this alternative. A second alternative was to work outside the party, challenging the city council, mobilizing the community to demand services. The 1969 riots were a spontaneous expression of this strategy, the PLP was its initial articulation, and the PSP embodied the most sustained attempt to put it into practice. A latter group, the Committee of 24, also followed this approach even though within a few months of its appearance its leader, Eugenio Caro, was proposing to

dissolve it into a coalition for an independent and progressive Hispanic vote.⁸⁵

The intersection of these two strategies, these versions of insider and outsider politics, was made possible through an alchemy of demand-protest and compromise. Open challenges to the Democratic party were used as a point of entry and a platform without relinquishing confrontation on the streets nor bargaining.

This blend of strategies animated the 1977 electoral campaign of Edwin Vargas. Initially a personal attempt to challenge the hegemony of Nicholas Carbone, this campaign concluded as a model for future political action. Carbone and his slate of Democrats ran on a record of increased state and federal aid, while as an Independent Vargas ran as the advocate of a state income tax to increase aid to local schools.⁸⁶ Carbone was reelected with 11,845 votes while Vargas ran a distant thirteenth in the sixteen-candidate race with 2,547 votes. Of the elected councilmen, the lowest vote—getter—also an Independent—received twice as many votes as Vargas, and even José Garay, the competing Puerto Rican Republican, outdid him with 2,809 votes.⁸⁷ But no matter. For the first time Puerto Ricans had run independently. In doing so, they began to use the tools that would later help them bypass the party and succeed: resort to the media, pressure exerted through extra-partisan alliances, and grassroots mobilization.

A Promise Fulfilled, A Will Bypassed

On 7 November 1978, Hartford councilperson Barbara Kennelly was elected secretary of state by a margin in excess of 150,000 votes. At the December 11 meeting of the city council, Councilman Robert Ludgin introduced a resolution calling for public hearings so that candidates interested in filling the council vacancy could be “interviewed publicly regarding their background, their attitudes and their inclinations and so that the public may have an opportunity to express their ideas concerning said appointment.”⁸⁸

In June 1978, shortly after rumors that Kennelly’s seat might become available began to spread, Edwin Vargas began discussing with community leaders and councilmembers his interest in filling the possible vacancy. A newspaper account reads: “Edwin Vargas, who ran as an independent last November, is optimistic about filling one of the vacancies.”⁸⁹ Between 4 December 1978 and 2 January 1979, five additional

Puerto Ricans expressed their interest in the vacant seat, along with three non-Hispanics.

For his part, Carbone publicly acknowledged that there was a commitment to fill the vacancy with a Puerto Rican, bluntly stating that the applications of non-Puerto Rican candidates would be filed for future reference.⁹⁰ From my interviews with Carbone, Vargas, and Mildred Torres it is apparent that three *types* of players approached Carbone vying for the seat. María Sánchez represented the Puerto Rican party regulars and wanted the seat for herself. Torres, who at the time was about to change employment, with Carbone's help, from the non-profit to the corporate sector, was the figurehead for Puerto Rican Democrats who were within Sánchez's sphere of influence but, on this issue, not completely within her camp. A mixture of radicals, populists, and activists, some of them marginal to the party but longing to be on the inside, rallied around Edwin Vargas.

After Carbone told him that the right to determine who would fill the vacancy was not his⁹¹ but the Puerto Rican community's, Vargas, in consultation with fellow activist José LaLuz and Hartford's Catholic bishop, Peter Rosazza, decided that the best way to force Carbone's hand was to take him at his word. That was the genesis of a community forum held on 7 January 1979, which gathered over three hundred Puerto Ricans in the basement of Immaculate Conception Church.⁹² By then, only four candidates were in the running: Vargas, Sánchez, Torres, and Andrés Vazquez, an assistant to Gov. Ella Grasso. When Carbone learned about the forum, he accepted it for what it was—an attempt to force his hand—knowing that it would not change his mind.⁹³

After a lengthy debate, the forum ended with a straw poll in which Vargas received 157 votes to 100 votes for Torres, 17 votes for Vázquez, and 15 votes for Sánchez.⁹⁴ The results were delivered to the chair of the Democratic Town Committee's selection panel. The chair and the forum's organizers had agreed to keep the results of the vote secret but to the astonishment of many they were trumpeted the next day in the *Hartford Courant*. The community press denounced the *Courant* not knowing that the results had been leaked by José LaLuz.⁹⁵

Afterwards, there were claims of manipulation, of packing the church with people from Bridgeport and other outsiders in order to tilt the vote in favor of Vargas.⁹⁶ "I can't say that's true," said the forum's moderator, Calixto Torres. He recognized that perception as valid, however, given the mobilization of many people who previously had not been

publicly involved.⁹⁷ In any event, the forum achieved its purpose: to reduce Carbone's standing among ordinary Puerto Rican citizens and, once he made his decision, to provide ammunition for the charge that the democratic will of the community had been bypassed.

Before the Town Committee's panel made its selection, Carbone told its members that Mildred Torres was his candidate. He met with them for two hours making his case, but to no avail.⁹⁸ On January 10 the panel announced its endorsement of María Sánchez, who was recognized as community oriented, having a good record as a board of education member, and enjoying the support of the three Puerto Rican Town Committee members.

By January 22, however, Carbone had gathered the five council votes needed to ratify the appointment of Torres. On 25 January 1979, she became the first Puerto Rican to occupy a seat in the city council with five votes in favor, two absences, and one abstention. For Vargas and his supporters this was a sour defeat; but even within this camp there was a sense that an important threshold had been crossed, that first-time council representation was a milestone in Puerto Rican political development that would be foolish to dismiss.

A NEW MODEL FOR POLITICAL ACTION

After 1979 brokered representation insured a Puerto Rican presence in the council in each and every subsequent term. But since 1977 the system was not the same. The power brokers were not sidestepped but now they could no longer dictate their choices without some effort. The change was not in the result, as the Torres's case indicates, but in the process. It is not clear whether by 1979 Puerto Ricans realized that they could be bold, that they could challenge the party; that even if they could not get exactly what they wanted they could still achieve something by resorting to power assertions of their own. Yet this is what they objectively accomplished. A dress rehearsal took place in 1973 when Carbone was forced to accept the candidacy of María Sánchez for the board of education. In 1977 Edwin Vargas flaunted a challenge and failed but in the process helped water the seedling of what later became the most effective political action group in the community's short history, the Puerto Rican Political Action Committee of Connecticut (PRPAC).⁹⁹ In 1978–1979 he tried again and at least made it impossible for Carbone not to honor a commitment to appoint a Puerto Rican to the council.

Puerto Ricans did not act monolithically; Carbone was not subject to strategically clear and unified pressure. Although there was an empowerment impulse within Carbone that favored Puerto Ricans¹⁰⁰ this did not mean that he would share power out of the kindness of his heart. Puerto Ricans had to exert pressure; challenges were necessary to access power. Puerto Ricans were faced with strategic differences and factionalism. Paradoxically, these divisions worked in their favor as they translated into a multiple set of pressures bearing on Carbone. Unity was provided by the goal. The factions involved represented the elements of what eventually became a new model for political action. “Eventually” is the key word here because as the process unfolded what was apparent was that Puerto Ricans still could not avoid the reach of Carbone’s long arm.

In 1985, a threat to what came to be known as the Puerto Rican seat in the council, then held by Nancy Meléndez—who alternated between being a white-collar worker and welfare mother—served to unite Puerto Ricans behind the efforts of an invigorated PRPAC. It was not the type of unity that many seek as they enter the political arena, but a unity fraught with conflict. For Puerto Ricans in Hartford 1985 was a Machiavellian moment,¹⁰¹ a time in which their leadership was forced to reconcile the tension between *fortuna* and *virtú* by crafting a political response that met the demands of a serious political challenge. It is at this point that a new model for political action crystallized, a model whose features correlated with the style and approaches of the 1979 factions: backroom negotiation, of which María Sánchez was the ultimate practitioner; extra-partisan alliances, represented by Torres and Vargas, and community pressure, which was the contribution of the motley crew of populists, socialists, and community people that were active in the city since 1970 and in 1977–1979 came out in support of Vargas.

BEYOND HARTFORD

The Hartford experience raises two important questions and, by way of conclusion, I would like to briefly explore them in turn. First, how does the experience of Puerto Rican political mobilization in this mid-size city compare with the Puerto Rican experience elsewhere in the United States? The Hartford story explodes the myth of Puerto Rican political participation. A decade of sustained elite- and grassroots-level political activity belies the notion of an apathetic community. The same is true of Boston, Chicago, New Haven, and New York City at various times in this century.¹⁰² While at the national level Puerto Rican voter registra-

tion and voter turnout is low,¹⁰³ a characterization of Puerto Rican political participation based on those criteria is bound to be narrow. On the other hand, a political mobilization model that combines intra-partisan wheeling and dealing, extra-partisan alliances, and community pressure has not been a feature of Puerto Rican politics in the United States. Puerto Ricans have a long history of political activism but specific communities have either relied on one of these approaches or have been divided. What the Hartford experience suggests is that in a context of significant demographic density, capable leadership and adequate organizational resources, the combination of these approaches within one organization or as part of a coalition effort increase the likelihood of success.

Second, does this story have any implications for ethnic politics? Recent analyses of the role of ethnicity in the political process emphasize its noxious and even pathological effects. According to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., the politicization of ethnicity in America in the post-Civil Rights period signals an emphasis on elitism rather than popular mobilization.¹⁰⁴ In his view, ethnicity has also become a cult, the rallying cry of "minority spokesmen—less interested in joining with the majority in common endeavor than in declaring their alienation from oppressive, white, patriarchal, racist, sexist, classist society. The ethnic ideology inculcates the illusion that membership in one or another ethnic group is the basic American experience."¹⁰⁵ Milton Esman similarly relates ethnic politics with ethnic conflict, especially at the institutional level. It is at this level that ethnic politics becomes particularly problematic, disrupting and even challenging the social order.¹⁰⁶ This view is shared by Donald Rothchild and Alexander J. Groth who consider ethnic identity as "one of the well established political fault lines of the modern world."¹⁰⁷

The Puerto Rican experience in Hartford suggests an alternative view of the politicization of ethnicity. Political mobilization emerged out of the interaction between elites and masses. The notion of followerless ethnic entrepreneurs that manage to thrive despite the absence of grassroots support does not jibe with the Puerto Rican case. Ethnicity was an important trigger to group mobilization, from the response to the Comancheros in 1969 to the 1979 forum. The emphasis, however, was on integration. In other words, while prejudice, disadvantage, and inequity were correlated to membership in a specific group, these correlations were used to promote political incorporation rather than to emphasize alienation. This integrationist impulse notwithstanding, for Puerto

Ricans in Hartford membership in an ethnic group was indeed their American experience.

Did ethnic politics challenge the political order of the insurance city? To the extent that Puerto Ricans mobilized to achieve representation it did. But this challenge bears no resemblance to the type of disruption typically associated with ethnic politics. Despite the episodes of violence, their case did not involve unmanageable tensions. Collective action occurred only twice in a decade and in one instance Puerto Rican claims merged with the grievances of blacks.

Esman argues that ethnic politics is likely to degenerate into civic or violent conflict because the values that divide ethnic communities are unmistakably real.¹⁰⁸ For their part, Rothchild and Groth identify internal and external variables—such as economic decline and the international environment—that magnify the “intrinsic” pathological tendencies of ethnicity.¹⁰⁹ The Puerto Rican case, however, shows that the violence associated with ethnicity was defensive rather than offensive. Associated with ethnicity, disfranchisement did not degenerate into violent conflict in any kind of prolonged or systematic way; instead, ethnicity made disfranchisement vivid, thus energizing the quest for representation. If there were pathological tendencies tied to the politicization of ethnicity they cannot be found at the group level. On the contrary, ethnicity fostered solidarity and organization and it was a corrective to political inertia.¹¹⁰

Rothchild and Groth argue that the breakdown of the political order is a most significant magnifier of the pathologies of ethnicity.¹¹¹ Drawing from the experience of the former Soviet Union and other Eastern European and African countries they paint a portrait of exacerbated tensions and violent conflict in which ethnicity run amok plays a crucial role. This is not the experience of Hartford nor, for that matter, is it the American experience. Yet much of the contemporary sentiment about the politicization of ethnicity in the United States is based on the experience of Canada, at best, or the former Yugoslavia, at worst. This is inappropriate. For better or worse Hartford is more relevant to the American experience and to its prospects than Canada or Eastern Europe. My point is that the politicization of ethnicity does not necessarily entail a balkanization process and a consequent threat to economic and social stability and/or to the viability of an integrated yet diverse polity.

The Puerto Rican experience in Hartford is ironic because by mobilizing conflict ethnicity helped a disfranchised group achieve incorpora-

tion. But this took place in the context of demographic density, leadership development, and a history of organizational efforts. Most importantly, while ethnicity wrought conflict, its use as a springboard to action was not only permissible but widely encouraged. This point suggests that the alleged pathologies of ethnicity are symptoms rather than causes; therefore, when ethnic conflict becomes unmanageable and degenerates into violence we should be talking instead about the pathologies of the political order.

NOTES

1. "Youths Hurl Rocks, Bottles At South Green; 10 Nabbed," *The Hartford Times*, 11 August 1969. This address became an empty lot next to the offices of Jorge Simon, the first corporation counsel of Puerto Rican background appointed, in December 1990, by Hartford's city council.
2. Interview with Antonio Soto, 5 August 1991.
3. "Cycle Gang: The Storm's Eye," *The Hartford Times*, 13 August 1969.
4. Bill Ryan, "City's Puerto Ricans Ask: Who Speaks for Us, Señor?," *The Hartford Times*, 15 August 1969.
5. Barry Wanger, "More Help Pledged for Puerto Ricans," *The Hartford Times*, 13 August 1969.
6. Interview with Antonio Soto, 5 August 1991.
7. "Puerto Rican Leader, City Trying to Ease Tensions," *The Hartford Times*, 14 August 1969.
8. Bill Williams, "Success of Talks to Officials Pleases City Puerto Ricans," *The Hartford Times*, 15 August 1969.
9. "2 Officers to Face Duty Quiz," *The Hartford Times*, 21 August 1969.
10. Edward Rudd, "Angry Meeting Airs Complaints On Police Tactics in Disorders," *The Hartford Courant*, 20 August 1969.
11. Bill Williams, "Rights Unit: Probe City Force, 'Unjust' Arrests Claimed by Board," *The Hartford Times*, 20 August 1969.
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13. Interview with Nicholas Carbone, 30 July 1991.
14. Bill Ryan, "Puerto Rican Trek to Hartford Began in 1945 with Farm Jobs," *The Hartford Times*, 31 August 1969.
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25. "Mayor Asks Suburbs' Help," *The Hartford Times*, 8 September 1969.

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28. "Ghetto Priest: Let's Bring People Together," *The Hartford Times*, 11 September 1969.

29. "Top Puerto Rican Invited to City," *The Hartford Times*, 10 September 1969.

30. "Coalition Loses Ally Over Wire," *The Hartford Times*, 11 September 1969.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Herbert F. Janick, Jr., *A Diverse People, Connecticut 1914 to the Present* (Chester, Conn., 1975), p. 88

33. "Coalition Loses Ally . . ."

34. *Ibid.*

35. "'Puerto Rican Citizens' To Be Council Subject," *The Hartford Times*, 11 September 1969.

36. "Puerto Ricans to March," *The Hartford Times*, 21 September 1969.

37. "Puerto Rican Ideals Said Misunderstood," *The Hartford Times*, 24 September 1969.

38. "Puerto Ricans to Parade Today," *The Hartford Times*, 28 September 1969.

39. "Need for an Understanding Puerto Rican Day Theme," *The Hartford Times*, 29 September 1969.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*

42. Interview in Spanish with Gerardo "Jerry" Zayas, 10 August 1992.

43. Interview in Spanish with Olga Mele, 6 August 1992.

44. Interview in Spanish with Juan "Johnny" Castillo, 14 August 1992.

45. Juan Daniel Brito, "Cumplió Años La Casa de Puerto Rico," *Qué Pasa* (Hartford, Conn.) June 1986, p. 5.

46. Letter of Gilberto Camacho to Francisca Bou, 25 August 1969; Letter of Francisca Bou to Gilberto Camacho, 28 August 1969. Department of Puerto Rican Community Affairs, Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, New York City. Archival Collection, Box 10.

47. Letter of Gilberto Camacho to Thomas J. Meskill, 5 December 1970. Department of Puerto Rican Community Affairs, Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, New York City. Archival Collection, Box 10.

48. Morton Coleman, "Interest Intermediation and Local Urban Development" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1983), p. 210.

49. Janet Anderson, "Ethnic Need: Political Muscle," *The Hartford Courant*, 19 March 1970.

50. See "Vecinos Denuncian Desalojan Puertorriqueños," p. 1; "Inseguridad Para los Puertorriqueños," p. 3; and "La Destrucción de Las Areas Hispanas," p. 5, *Qué Pasa* (Hartford, Conn.), September 1978.

51. Interview in Spanish with Juan Fuentes, 1 August 1991.

52. Interview with Max Fernández, 6 August 1991.

53. Sherrie Bayer, "Puerto Rican Politics in New York City: The Post-World War II Period," in *Puerto Rican Politics in Urban America*, ed. James Jennings and Monte Rivera (Westport, Conn., 1984), pp. 46–47.

54. "Puerto Ricans Hold Meeting," *The Hartford Courant*, 9 July 1970.
55. The Young Lords Party was itself modeled after the Black Panthers. See Pablo "Yoruba" Guzman, "La Vida Pura: A Lord of the Barrio," *The Village Voice*, 21 March 1995.
56. Demand-protest: "mobilization efforts including violent and nonviolent protest (. . .) and more traditional demand-articulation tactics such as mass turnouts at city meetings, press conferences, neighborhood meetings, petitions, and formal and informal exchanges with city officials." See Rufus P. Browning, Dale Rogers Marshall, David H. Tabb, *Protest is not Enough, The Struggle of Blacks and Hispanics for Equality in Urban Politics* (Berkeley, Calif., 1984), p. 90.
57. See Janet Anderson, "Ethnic Need . . ." Kernstock offers an estimate of about 18,000 by multiplying the Puerto Rican school population in 1969 (4,441 children) by four, the size of an average Puerto Rican family. See Elwyn Nicholas Kernstock, *How New Migrants Behave Politically, The Puerto Rican in Hartford, 1970* (New York, 1980), p. 106.
58. Clara Rodríguez, *Puerto Ricans Born in the U.S.A.* (Boston; 1989), pp. 3–4.
59. Janet Anderson, "Jobs, Friends Draw Puerto Ricans to 'Desirable' Hartford," *The Hartford Courant*, 15 March 1970.
60. Letter of Gilberto Camacho to Carmen Cortes, 30 August 1971, Department of Puerto Rican Community Affairs, Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, New York City. Archival Collection, Box 10.
61. Interview with Nicholas Carbone, 30 July 1991.
62. Interview in Spanish with Olga Mele, 6 August 1992.
63. Interview with Eugenio Caro, 14 August 1992. Interview in Spanish with Juan "Johnny" Castillo, 14 August 1992.
64. A point first made about Puerto Ricans in New Haven by Lloyd Rogler, see *Migrant in the City: The Life of a Puerto Rican Action Group* (New York, 1972) and about Puerto Ricans in New York by James Jennings, see *Puerto Rican Politics in New York City* (Washington, D.C., 1977).
65. Interview with Yasha Escalera, 21 February 1993.
66. Memo from Gilberto Camacho to Manuel A. Casiano, Jr., 21 May 1970, Section 8, p. 5, Department of Puerto Rican Community Affairs, Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, New York City. Archival Collection, Box 10.
67. Memo from Gilberto Camacho to Manuel A. Casiano, Jr., 21 May 1970, Section 4, p. 4, Department of Puerto Rican Community Affairs, Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, New York City. Archival Collection, Box 10. The division's service area included Connecticut and other states.
68. Interview in Spanish with José Cruz, 27 January 1993. Interview with Sydney Schulman, 15 January 1993. Interview in Spanish with Juan "Johnny" Castillo, 14 August 1992. Interview with Yasha Escalera, 21 February 1993.
69. Interview with Yasha Escalera, 21 February 1993.
70. Interview with Mildred Torres, 1 August 1991.
71. I explore and elaborate on the contribution of militant groups to Puerto Rican political development in the city in "Pushing Left to Get to the Center: Puerto Rican Radicalism in Hartford, Connecticut," paper presented at the American Political Science Association meeting, 1 September 1996, San Francisco, Calif.
72. Interview in Spanish with Olga Mele, 6 August 1992.
73. Interview with Antonio Soto, 5 August 1991.
74. Interview in Spanish with José Garay, 25 January 1993.
75. Interview in Spanish with José Cruz, 27 January 1993.
76. Ibid.

77. David S. Barrett, "Democrats Expected to Retain Majority on Council," *The Hartford Courant*, 5 November 1973.

78. Sánchez advertised her business for the first time in the community press in the premier edition of *El Observador-The Observer*, 16 July 1976, as "María's Newsstand."

79. Interview with Edna Negrón, 29 January 1993.

80. Laurence Cohen, "Race for Board of Education Appears to Be a Question of Personalities," *The Hartford Courant*, 3 November 1973.

81. "Día de Reyes," xerox of news clipping, 1977. Courtesy of Edwin Vargas, Jr. On Three Kings Day Puerto Ricans celebrate the visitation of the Magi to the baby Jesus.

82. "Gobernadora Firma Ley Educacion Bilingüe," *El Observador-The Observer* (Hartford, Conn.) 15 July 1977.

83. Michael Regan, "Hispanics Claim Job Bias By City Fire Department," *The Hartford Courant*, 14 September 1977.

84. Interview with Sydney Schulman, 29 January 1993. See also Paul Frisman, "Boy's Death Stresses Need for Minority Officers," *The Hartford Courant*, 1 July 1979.

85. "Nueva Coalición," *Qué Pasa* (Hartford, Conn.), February 1979, p. 9.

86. Michael Regan, "3 Mayoral, 16 City Council Candidates Running for Election," *The Hartford Courant*, 30 October 1977.

87. "Hartford Results," *The Hartford Courant*, 9 November 1977.

88. *Journal of the Court of Common Council, 1977-79*, vols. I-II, p. 1432.

89. "Posible Vacante en el Consejo Municipal," *Qué Pasa* (Hartford, Conn.), June 1978, p. 1.

90. Juan Fuentes, "Carbone En Espera Decisión de Líderes Puertorriqueños," *El Observador-The Observer* (Hartford, Conn.), Xerox of clipping, day and month missing, 1979, p. 4.

91. Vargas argued that Carbone's commitment to fill the next council vacancy with a Puerto Rican was made in exchange for his running as an Independent in 1977 and that the 2,547 votes he received entitled him to the appointment. Carbone denied that the commitment was with Vargas. Interviews with Edwin Vargas, Jr., 31 July 1991 and Nicholas Carbone, 4 March 1993.

92. It is impossible to establish the precise number of people who participated. Estimates range from 300 to 600 but all sources agree that the forum was surprisingly well-attended.

93. Interview with Nicholas Carbone, 30 July 1991.

94. David S. Barrett, "Selection Unit Backs Sánchez for Council," *The Hartford Courant*, 10 January 1979.

95. Interview with José LaLuz, 6 July 1989.

96. Interviews with Mildred Torres, 1 August 1991; 2 March 1993.

97. Interview with Calixto Torres, 7 August 1991.

98. Juan Fuentes, "Concilio Tiene Ultima Palabra," *El Observador-The Observer* (Hartford, Conn.) 20-30 January 1979, p. 6.

99. See José E. Cruz, "Consequences of Interest Group Political Mobilization. A Case Study of the Puerto Rican Political Action Committee (PRPAC) of Connecticut" (Ph.D. diss. Graduate Center, City University of New York, 1994).

100. Some of it is revealed through his record, noted in Harry C. Boyte, *The Backyard Revolution: Understanding the New Citizen Movement* (Philadelphia, 1980), pp. 159-163; Pierre Clavel, *The Progressive City* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1986), *passim*; and Eve Bach et al., "Running the City for the People," *Social Policy*, 12,

no. 3 (Winter 1982): 15–23. It also comes through in my own interviews with him and in the opinions of him of some in Hartford.

101. J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton, N. J., 1975), p. viii.

102. See respectively, Carol Hardy-Fanta, *Latina Politics, Latino Politics* (Philadelphia, 1993); Felix Padilla, *Puerto Rican Chicago* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1987); Rogler, *Migrant in the City*; Rosa Estades, *Patterns of Political Participation of Puerto Ricans in New York City* (Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico, 1978) and Jennings and Rivera, eds., *Puerto Rican Politics*.

103. See Rodolfo O. de la Garza, Louis DeSipio, F. Chris Garcia, John Garcia, and Angelo Falcon, *Latino Voices* (Boulder, Colo., 1992), pp. 121–127.

104. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Disuniting of America* (New York, 1992), p. 110.

105. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

106. Milton J. Esman, *Ethnic Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994), p. 22.

107. Donald Rothchild and Alexander J. Groth, "Pathological Dimensions of Domestic and International Ethnicity," *Political Science Quarterly*, 110, (Spring 1995): 69.

108. Esman, *Ethnic Politics*, p. 23.

109. Rothchild and Groth, "Pathological," pp. 73–81.

110. In this regard the Hartford experience is not exceptional. In his study of group formation among Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago Padilla shows how a pan-ethnic identity emerges through purposive contact between two or more Spanish-speaking groups. This enhances the ability of both groups to articulate social and political claims. See Felix M. Padilla, *Latino Ethnic Consciousness, The Case of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1985).

111. Rothchild and Groth, "Pathological," p. 76.