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Nationalist organizations expected to participate in the discussions about conditions in Harlem. Jesús Flores, head of Unidad Obrera (Workers' Unity), wrote to the MCCCH two days after its appointment requesting that his organization be allowed to testify about the concerns of its members. He explained, “We have in our possession several cases of discrimination, denials of relief, deaths due to the carelessness of the officials representing the different aid societies, police terror against Spanish-speaking workers, corruption of police by using gangsters to provoke workers and especially the workers’ organizations.”

In a second letter, this time representing the Comité Pro–Puerto Rico, Flores reiterated, “So that you may hear the different slights and humiliations to which the Puerto Ricans are subjected, we expect . . . that you allow this Committee, which is composed of more than 60 organizations, Spanish-speaking and in their majority Puerto Rican, to testify.” Since the majority of the hearings held by the Mayor’s Commission were public, Puerto Ricans were free to testify about their grievances along with all other residents of Harlem, although they were never included by invitation, as many African American leaders were.

Several other Puerto Rican leaders protested Puerto Ricans’ exclusion from the MCCCH. “We believe that excluding the Puerto Ricans from that committee was unfair if you will take in consideration the great number of Puerto Ricans not only unemployed but antagonized with so much prejudice against them,” wrote Antonio Rivera, secretary of the Liga Puertorriqueña e Hispana. Isabel O’Neill, a Nationalist activist, wrote to the mayor as a representative of the Junta Liberal Puertorriqueña de Nueva York with a harsh indictment of his treatment of Puerto Ricans:

What is most displeasing—and . . . unwarranted—is not only the discrimination shown in the selection and/or appointment of members to the investigating committee, but also the complete ignorance [sic] of Puerto Ricans; of them, whose interest in Harlem and the betterment thereof is a vital factor . . . in their lives and general social welfare and being.

It seems that we have been omitted from every civic activity that has presented itself . . . and the omission is even more flagrant in this instance, an act of political and civic indifference and unmindfulness at which we feel aggrieved.

There is no record of how La Guardia’s office responded, if at all, to such charges. What is clear, though, is that Puerto Ricans’ specific grievances—despite their similarity to those of black American Harlemites—failed to make it into the commission’s reports.

In the months following the Harlem riots, Puerto Ricans became the primary victims of a new “anti-Hispanic campaign” in Washington Heights, where middle-class Puerto Ricans had begun to settle earlier in the thirties. The Jewish and Irish landlords in the neighborhood had begun raising rents sharply in an alleged effort to “drive out” their Puerto Rican tenants. Spanish-speaking observers saw the landlords’ coordinated action as a reaction to two perceived threats: first, that more and more of their Hispanic tenants were recent arrivals of the “lower classes” and, second, that these “brown-skinned or darker” new tenants would bring with them the kinds of problems that might turn Washington Heights into “a second Harlem.” These observers saw a specifically racial prejudice against dark-skinned Puerto Ricans. “The situation in Washington Heights is not simply a situation of nationality, it is purely and unjustly a question of race,” asserted one reader to La Prensa. Even the lighter-skinned among them should not feel immune to this kind of discrimination, he warned, since no clear line existed, here, between light and dark complexions; the only line was between white and dark. “If it could happen to them, it could happen to you,” he warned. That is, any Puerto Rican, no matter his or her complexion, could be discriminated against as a person occupying the nonwhite side of the binary—the black side. In spite of the growing public concern about race-based discrimination against Puerto Ricans, there remained a firm impulse, among all but the leftists in the colonia, to avoid complaining about the same injustices that African Americans objected to and, still, to avoid talking about the Harlem riot as a Puerto Rican issue. When the New York State legislature voted to assemble a “Temporary Commission on Urban Colored Populations” two years after the riot, La Prensa editors applauded the move. “[It is] certain that there are many thousands of persons of the colored race living in Harlem under the saddest of social conditions,” announced the editorial, skirting any mention of Spanish-speaking residents, especially Puerto Ricans, in the area.

The “Subnormal” Puerto Rican Child

Sometime between the Harlem riot in the spring and the Washington Heights disturbances in late summer, the New York State Chamber of Commerce’s Special Committee on Immigration and Naturalization
commissioned two New York City psychologists to administer intelligence tests to Puerto Rican children in the city's schools. In December 1935, Dr. Clairette Armstrong and Dr. Edith Achilles released a report of their study of 129 Puerto Rican students at P.S. 57 in East Harlem. Based on their results, they argued that the children's poor performance on the Army Individual Performance Test and the Otis Group Test signified the basic intellectual inferiority of the Puerto Rican migrants settling in New York. The investigators also concluded, ominously, that "Puerto Ricans are adding greatly to the already tremendous problem of intellectual subnormal school retardates of alien parentage, whence are recruited most delinquents and criminals," meaning, in their judgment, that "the majority of Puerto Rican children examined betray a family mentality which should not be permitted admission here." Furthermore, these Puerto Rican children would "deteriorate standards already so seriously impaired by mass immigration of the lowest levels of populations of many nations."  

Apparently, this was a pet topic of Dr. Armstrong's, a staff psychologist for the city's Children's Court. A year before beginning the study, she had described with frank xenophobia the dangers of immigrant children in a letter to the editor of the New York Times: "Juvenile delinquency on the whole results from the clash of civilizations. Low-grade, intellectually dull immigrants thrust into our complicated, highly organized civilization are unable to adjust their likewise intellectually dull offspring to the exigencies of such environment." Although Americans' obsession with eugenics and scientific racism had peaked in the 1920s, Armstrong was not exactly an outlier in the thirties. Discourses about the racial basis of intelligence, with immigrants and African Americans situated at the bottom of the hierarchy, lingered well into the postwar era. Mexicans in the west also were subjected to IQ testing throughout the twenties and thirties, with nearly identical pronouncements about their intellectual deficits and their undesirability, therefore, as permanent residents of their new communities. Where there was a Harlem riot and earlier media representations of Puerto Ricans' blackness forced them to confront the pitfalls of being categorized with African Americans in New York, the controversy over the IQ tests represented a different kind of assault, one framed around their biological inferiority not as Negro but as foreign and "other," and articulated via the anti-immigrant language of the earlier twentieth century. One of the most notable aspects of this attack on Puerto Rican "immigrants" was its goal of scaring other New Yorkers and white Americans into lobbying for Puerto Ricans' exclusion. Since Puerto Ricans were colonial citizens who could enter the United States without restrictions, this objective—pushed by Armstrong and other policymakers who should have understood the legal context—was irrational and futile. On the other hand, though, their arguments make more sense if they are interpreted as simply a goad to the folk logic of racist xenophobia, the goals of which were symbolic as much as actual exclusion.

The first media reports on the study addressed this most basic—if logically flawed—inspiration: to make a case for limiting the Puerto Rican migration, using the biological language of racial inferiority that bolstered anti-immigration arguments in the 1920s. The New York Sun's headline announced, "Puerto Rican Pupils a Problem," and noted that the study was commissioned "principally in connection with its consideration of immigration problems, and only incidentally to ascertain the conditions in the public schools." The Sun's only coverage of the study was provided by its sports commentator, Julio Garzón, who addressed it so far as a part of a discussion about the prejudice that Puerto Ricans confronted in the world of sports in the United States. While Garzón's objection to the study's methodology (particularly the testing of the children in English) was in line with those of other critics, his major complaint about its report was unique, placing the migration question in the political context of colonialism. Garzón argued that it was the colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico—not the intellectual capacity of the island's children—that created a migration problem. He said that if, during the years of "American domination," Puerto Ricans had been able to profit in proportion to the "profits taken from [Puerto Rico] by American industrialists and businessmen," Puerto Ricans would not have had to use their "INARGUABLE RIGHT to emigrate to the country that exploits them," if the Chamber of Commerce viewed the immigration of Puerto Ricans as a problem, it was a problem of their own—and other American exploiters—creation. A number of Harlem activists lodged more banal protests against the Chamber of Commerce report, including the Spanish Welfare League and Leonard Covello, a prominent East Harlem activist and educator who was the principal of East Harlem's progressive and multi-racial Benjamin Franklin High School. Covello organized a "Racial Committee" following the release of the report, whose members prepared a thorough analysis of the methodological flaws of the IQ study. These educators and defenders of Puerto Rican children did not explicitly take issue with the idea of assessing immigrants' suitability as "Americans" on the basis of their intelligence; they simply defended the right of immigrant children to be given tests that fairly measured their abilities. Covello pointed out that Italian immigrant
Rican students tested in New York were "colored," Puerto Rican society in general, according to the 1930 U.S. census, was 74 percent white and 26 percent "colored." This discrepancy, he argued, was "evidence of the absolute disregard of the principle of "representativeness"" on the part of the researchers; the overrepresentation of "colored" students in the study led to a real drop in the average score of the Puerto Rican children, since—according to one "expert" on intelligence he cited—"all results show the negro decidedly inferior to the white on standard intelligence tests." The Racial Committee evidently shared its report with Covello's close friend Vito Marcantonio, who was discriminated against by East Harlem's Puerto Ricans and Italians and served as their U.S. congressional representative through much of the 1930s and 1940s. Marcantonio stood before the House of Representatives in June 1936 and made an impassioned speech condemning the discriminatory and irresponsibly drawn conclusions put forth by the Chamber of Commerce investigators. Particularly given his later record in Congress as a staunch anti-imperialist, it is notable that Marcantonio failed to comment on Armstrong and Achilles's misapprehension of the political status of the island and Puerto Ricans' U.S. citizenship.

One official who responded to the controversy interpreted it not just as an attack on Puerto Rican migration—this time from a stakeholder perspective as opposed to the nationalistic stance of La Prensa reporter Garzón—but also as an attack on the racial identity of Puerto Ricans. Puerto Rico's assistant commissioner of education, Pedro Cebollero, first made the obvious point that because Puerto Ricans were citizens, the study was "useless as a measure of the desirability of immigration control," which was the authors' most explicit argument concerning the implications of their findings. More to the point, Cebollero said, to measure the merits of the inclusion of Puerto Rico in the United States according to the intelligence of migrants was "as absurd as if a psychological test of the immigrant Italian were to be taken as a measure of the ability of the Roman citizen generally." Most galling to Cebollero was the fact that, while 76 percent of the Puerto

Wartime Change and Continuity

During the fall of 1941, just before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the entry of the United States into the Second World War, New York dailies spent several weeks covering a new crime wave that rippled through Harlem. Observers unanimously identified the neighborhood's youth as the culprits but disagreed about their racial profile. Some presumed they were mostly Puerto Rican, while others said they were African American. As the incidences of looting, muggings, and vandalism died down,
The "Puerto Rican Problem" in the U.S. Congress, 1940–46

At the turn of the twentieth century, members of the U.S. Congress certainly had been aware of the depth of the problem presented by the U.S. colonization of the island. Countless debates over how to define this "territory" and its legal relationship to the United States were recorded not only in the Congressional Record but also in major legal journals throughout the early years of the century. These issues were put to rest, at least officially, with the passage of the Jones Act in 1917, and resurfaced only briefly in Congress when Senator Millard Tydings proposed his retaliatory independence bill in 1936. During World War II, however, federal lawmakers were forced to contend with an increasingly troubling "Puerto Rican problem," as Senator Tydings called the various issues surrounding the island's sovereignty and political status in 1943. The "Puerto Rican problem" became a useful shorthand to describe the increasing number of discussions among politicians, policymakers, and journalists about how to approach the unresolved colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. Several books written about the problem of Puerto Rico in this period, with titles like Dynamite on Our Doorstep and The Puerto Rican Paradox, testified to the political intensity of the issue.

The problem of Puerto Rico's sovereignty became an escalating if little-publicized political problem for the United States during the war for several reasons. Rexford Tugwell, in his memoir of his years as Puerto Rico's governor during the 1940s, The Stricken Land, recalled that by 1939, Puerto Rico had been identified by lawmakers as both "an important location in the grand strategy which must govern our defense" and as "something of a testing place for American professions of democracy." Since the United States was fighting for liberty abroad, many observers assumed the nation should also strive—never—to guarantee liberty in its own hemisphere. The nation's continuing failure to address this disconnect in the realm of domestic race relations spurred black civil rights activists to inaugurate a "Double V" campaign during the war, promoting victory abroad and victory for racial justice at home. And domestic pressure was not the only problem. The United States allegedly supported the scores of anticommunist movements that were gathering steam around the world, as the Allies fought for democracy against their Axis enemies in Europe, Asia, and Africa, so wouldn't the United States also have to grant self-determination to its colony?

Roosevelt administration officials were beginning to map out some policy changes to address Puerto Rico's sovereignty, but they equivocated on
on the island just a few months before. It was “faith in the democratic process,” she said, that inspired “poor farmers from the hills” to line up in droves to vote—just the kind of faith that educators needed to instill in the nation’s youth. There was a certain irony to her rhetorical strategy that was, no doubt, unintentional: the keynote speaker at an event driven by triumphant liberal nationalism holding up the United States’ only colonial citizens as a shining example of democratic engagement. On the other hand, it was probably not unintentional that Studebaker celebrated Puerto Ricans’ fine citizenship at a point in the late forties when Puerto Rican youth were presumed to be the most dangerous citizens in New York City.

Indeed, at the moment Studebaker was delivering her speech, East Harlem was still struggling to accommodate the massive migration from Puerto Rico, and Leonard Covello and his cohort of progressive educators and activists found that the sparkling ideals of “tolerance” had faded to almost nothing. Overshadowed by postwar conformity and paranoia, and by the problems of educating a group of poor, disoriented children, most of whom did not speak English upon arrival in New York, the hope that Puerto Rican children would be “appreciated” without having to assimilate fully seemed naïve. Even in the view of many progressives, intercultural democracy programs now seemed both less effective and less necessary than bilingual teachers and parent education. Inspired by Covello’s work at Benjamin Franklin, New York’s Board of Education published a committee report in 1947 on Puerto Rican children’s adjustment problems and the impact of the “undesirable socio-economic influences” in their communities. Above all, the committee asserted, “with the Puerto Rican pupil ... the most important objective of education is the development of good citizenship.” But they saw this as a “real challenge,” because of the prevalence of broken homes and the behavioral problems that often resulted from such situations. The school board’s approach to educating Puerto Ricans in the postwar years had come a long way from its “Americanizing” notions thirty years before, which the report’s authors remarked on sanctimoniously: “There is a danger in confusing good citizenship with 100% conformity. In this process of adaptation, an attitude of respect and appreciation for other cultures and other races is encouraged.” Nevertheless, the preponderance of educators’ reports and policymaking in this era would continue to focus on coping with “the usual delinquencies,” with an implicit presumption about Puerto Ricans’ particular susceptibility to them.

While the postwar emphasis on rehabilitating delinquents and training citizens to fight the cold war dominated the city’s education agenda, Covello and Benjamin Franklin faculty quietly if less optimistically persisted in their intercultural programming and bolstered support of Puerto Rican students, whose numbers increased every year between 1947 and 1955. By the time the first big wave of postwar migrants began settling in East Harlem in 1946, Covello and other BFHS staff had modified most aspects of the school programming to include issues concerning Puerto Rican children and their families. Club Borinquén continued to sponsor regular dances and cultural events, and by 1948, it had established the annual “Latin American Festival,” which quickly attracted high-profile artists, writers, and performers from El Barrio, who donated their time “for the aid of the poor Puerto Rican student.” Covello was probably one of the few principals who actually used some of the educational films created by the Migration Division, like A Girl from Puerto Rico, which the accompanying literature described as “portray[ing] the difficulties of a Puerto Rican girl who is snubbed by a classmate on her first day of school. The film shows the reaction of other students and the progressive measures suggested by them and the teacher to make the girl feel more at home.” The Migration Division suggested that teachers use Puerto Rico as the subject of a social studies unit. “Student interest and understanding are increased and, through Puerto Rican music and dances, a friendlier atmosphere is created,” one of its pamphlets read, echoing the intercultural education ideas of Covello, who would retire from Franklin and become the education director at the Migration Division in 1956. His progressive advocacy notwithstanding, Covello never rejected traditional postwar educational ideals. He noted proudly, for instance, that “we are interested in preparing these [Puerto Rican] boys for active participation and useful citizenship in the U.S.”

Their agenda was not limited to Franklin. Partly due to Covello’s advocacy on the issue, by 1951 there were ten bilingual teachers in the handful of schools with the highest Puerto Rican concentration. Of course this was inadequate: a Mayor’s Advisory Committee on Puerto Rican Affairs (MACPRA) report from that year insisted that “the need for teachers who can speak Spanish is urgent. If ... increased proportionately to the Puerto Rican school population, we should need approximately 1000 real Spanish-speaking teachers.” As early as 1936, following the controversy over Puerto Rican children’s IQ scores, Covello also argued that the standard IQ testing practices in the United States were not valid for “foreign-born” children, including Puerto Rican migrants. In 1947, Covello was still demanding that current tests of academic achievement and mental ability for Puerto Rican students be reevaluated, and “appropriate instruments of
measurement should be developed for [them].” By 1951, with input from Covello, the MACPRA recommended that tests should be given in Spanish and “standardized according to our knowledge of their background in Puerto Rico and the emerging cultural pattern in their new environment”; or, alternatively, “non-language tests” should be given to determine grade level and aptitude.28 It also recommended that a full-time staff person be hired to “cope . . . with the Puerto Rican orientation and assistance program.” This report made it clear that assimilation of Puerto Ricans was the goal, but with an explicit call for cultural sensitivity and inclusiveness: “The Puerto Rican parent must be made to feel that his child is being accepted with the same status as that of the Continental child . . . that his home life is not being held up to criticism.”29

During these first years of New York’s anti–Puerto Rican backlash, Leonard Covello was second only to Vito Marcantonio in terms of actively fostering the “mutual respect” that so many white liberals talked about. Covello addressed other New York City school principals on what he saw as their obligation to the city’s Puerto Rican families: “The post war world requires of citizens and teachers more than mere understanding of their neighbors—immediate or distant. It demands, in addition, an understanding, mutual respect, and a mutual sharing of our cultures. [We have] an opportunity for gaining such an understanding of our fellow Americans—the Puerto Ricans.”30 During the summer of 1947, Covello traveled to Puerto Rico to deliver a series of lectures at the University of Puerto Rico and to meet with colleagues there about a proposed training program for Puerto Rican teachers on the island to prepare them to work with migrant students in New York. During the ten-day tour of the island, Covello visited twenty or so towns in a quest to “get to know” the island from which so many of his students had emigrated, hand-delivering scores of letters written by Benjamin Franklin students to their friends and family.31 Upon his return, the New York Herald Tribune praised the principal who “walked the walk” of progressive educators. As far away as Pittsburgh, the Courier proclaimed, “There’s a Far Brighter Story about New York’s Puerto Ricans,” touting the school’s “fine program for Puerto Ricans,” which offered a “new approach” to educating “foreign youth.”32

It was no surprise that the nuances of Covello’s work, his progressive and pluralist approach to “education for citizenship” that challenged the orthodoxies of traditional assimilationism, were absent from the discussion of what he was actually attempting to do in East Harlem. Although his vision of Puerto Ricans as “just like other immigrants” was in many respects similar to the liberal social service ideal of training the migrant to become “Juan Q. Citizen,” Covello’s advocacy on behalf of Puerto Rican youth—as in the case of the aggrieved students in 1951, among countless others—helped foster their leadership skills independent of the social service establishment. Ultimately, this generation of young leaders would contribute substantially to the challenging of the old liberal orthodoxies via new discourses of group rights in the 1960s.

Aspiration: “New Leaders in New York”

In 1952, the Mayor’s Advisory Committee on Puerto Rican Affairs established a scholarship fund for Puerto Rican students, explaining its primary goal as “to promote maximum integration of our citizens of Puerto Rican background into the general New York citizenry in the shortest possible time.”33 Their publicity materials did not actually use the “Juan Q. Citizen” phrase that the Migration Division included in at least one of its pamphlets in that era, but the idea was the same: assimilation facilitated by a shared national citizenship. In its first year, the scholarship provided ten students with $300 toward the cost of college. By 1955, the program had expanded enough to offer nineteen students a grant of $500. In 1955, the State University of New York [SUNY] colleges cost about $450 per year, and private colleges in the region ranged from $800 to $1,000.34 Emphasizing that the scholarship was about more than just educational achievement, a 1953 press release explained the committee’s vision of the “next steps” of the scholarship fund: housing, “integration,” focusing especially on English-language proficiency, “mutual understanding” and civility; employment; and building a Puerto Rican leadership base in New York.35

Around the same time, the Riverside Neighborhood Assembly, a liberal organization on the Upper West Side, established a more experimental leadership program, involving exchanges of promising youth between Manhattan and Puerto Rico. Upon their return, the “Goodwill Ambassadors” would write a weekly newsletter on issues in the Puerto Rican community and speak to New York–area youth groups about their experiences on the island. The program was described by the Herald Tribune as an “anti-bias plan,” though its less publicized goal was to encourage Puerto Rican children to become community leaders, in part by providing them with extra educational support.36 The Board of Education’s experimental “Higher Horizons” program was part of the same constellation of initiatives geared toward supporting minority children, and it received praise from Puerto
55. Interview with Pi Santos, conducted by Celia Álvarez, Aug. 30, 1983, Cos- 
turers Project.

56. Birth certificates were not standardized from town to town; some listed the 
race of the mother or of both parents, and some did not. The parents’ or, more of- 
ten, the mother’s) racial designation did not automatically define that of the 
child, since the ascension of racial identity in Puerto Rico often depended on criteria 
other than color itself.

57. Lapp, “Managing Migration,” 151–52. Lapp cites an interview with Joseph 
Montserrate, director of a later incarnation of the Office of Employment and Identi-
fication, who recalled emphasizing to his employees the need for respectful treat-
ment of their clients, many of whom were “darker skinned” and “less educated” 
than the office staff. Montserrate noted that these tensions between employees and 
clients had been an issue as well in the office’s earlier days. Unfortunately, there 
are no data in the records of the Migration Division to corroborate this anecdotal 
evidence. See chapter 1 for a general discussion of issues of class and color in the 
colonial era in the 1920s.

58. Lawrence Chenault, The Puerto Rican Migrant in New York City (New York: Co-
olumbia University Press, 1938), 151.

77–79.

60. Greenberg, Or Does It Explode?, 3; Robert Fogelson and Richard Rubenstein, 
eds., The Complete Report of Mayor LaGuardia’s Commission on the Harlem 
Telephone Operator’s Ambulance Call Report,” Mar. 19, 1935, La Guardia papers, reel 
76, folder 5. Greenberg does not mention that Rivera is Puerto Rican.


62. Claude McKay, Harlem: Negro Metropolis (New York: Harcourt Brace 

63. Fogelson and Rubenstein, Complete Report, 5.

64. Ibid., 8.

65. “Graues resultados de simple incidente,” La Prensa, Mar. 21, 1935, 1; and Fo-
gelson and Rubenstein, Complete Report, 10. “1 Dead, 7 shot; 100 Hurts as Harlem 
Crowds Riot over Boy, 16, and Hearse,” 1, and “Disturbance in Harlem,” 6, New 
York Herald Tribune, Mar. 20, 1935; and “Mayor Plans Own Riot Inquiry,” New York 
Sun, Mar. 20, 1935, 1.

66. Fogelson and Rubenstein, Complete Report, 11.

67. Red-baiting was also an issue in the selection of members of the Mayor’s 
Commission on Conditions in Harlem, established by Mayor Fiorello La Guardia in 
the days following the riot. The Sun pointed to the radical activities of black ap-
pointees A. Philip Randolph, Countee Cullen, and Arthur Garfield Hays (“Four 
Indicted for Losing at Result of Riot,” New York Sun, Mar. 22, 1935, 1).

68. See Reid, Negro Immigrant, 201–13 and passim; and, generally, Mary C. Wa-
ters, Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities (Cambridge, 

69. McKay, Harlem: Negro Metropolis, 207.

70. “1 Dead, 7 Shot, 100 Hurts,” 1, 9; “Police Shoot into Rioters; Kill Negro 
in Harlem Mob,” New York Times, Mar. 20, 1935, 1; “Mayor Pays Riot to Violent 
York Sun, Mar. 22, 1935, 1.

71. “Tropas para Harlem pedidos ayer; centenares de policías patrullaban ano-
che el barrio,” La Prensa, Mar. 21, 1935, 1.

72. This was a reference to the church of Father Divine.


74. “Numerosos establecimientos hispanos apedreados y saqueados por la 

75. “Tropas para Harlem pedidos.”

76. “Rivera, causa involuntaria del choque racial de Harlem, deplorlo que 
se produjo,” La Prensa, Mar. 22, 1935, 1.


78. Vega, Memoirs, 180.

79. Fogelson and Rubenstein, Complete Report, 122.


81. See population map, “Street Map Shows Distribution of Harlem’s Popula-
tion,” accompanying article “Idleness, Harlem’s Chief Threat,” in New York Sun, 
May 23, 1935, 23 and Welfare Council, Population in Health Areas: New York City, 

82. Walter White, “Suggestions of Problems Which Might Be Investigated by 
the Commission Appointed by Mayor La Guardia . . . .,” Mar. 26, 1935, La Guardia 
papers, reel 76, folder 5.

83. Jesús Flores, Unidad Obrera, Committee to Investigate Conditions in Har-
lem, Mar. 25, 1935, La Guardia papers, reel 77, folder 8.

84. Jesús Flores, el Comité Pro-Puerto Rico, to Committee to Investigate 
Conditions in Harlem, Mar. 25, 1935, La Guardia papers, reel 77, folder 8.

85. Antonio Rivera, Liga Puertorriqueña e Hispana, to Mayor Fiorello La 
Guardia, June 4, 1935, La Guardia papers, reel 77, folder 8.

86. Isabel O’Neill, Junta Liberal Puertorriqueña e Hispana, to Mayor Fiorello 
La Guardia, June 4, 1935, La Guardia papers, reel 77, folder 8.

87. Rafael W. Carreras, “De nuestros lectores,” La Prensa, June 26, 1935, 4. Other 
letters and articles on the “anti-Hispanic campaign” include J. M. García Casanova, 
“De nuestros lectores,” La Prensa, June 13, 1935, 4; “El ‘anti-hispánismo’ en Wash-
ington Heights,” editorial, La Prensa, June 13, 1935, 4; Richard F. Martin, “De nuestros 
lectores,” La Prensa, July 2, 1935, 4; and Cosmo Aida Wahl, “De nuestros lectores,” 
La Prensa, July 10, 1935, 4.

88. “Las condiciones de vida en Harlem bajo estudio,” editorial, La Prensa, 

89. Dr. Armstrong was affiliated with the Children’s Court of the City of New
York, and Dr. Achilles was employed by the Psychological Corporation in New York City. See Vito Marcantonio, "Puerto Rican Children in New York Schools," 74th Cong., 2nd sess., Congressional Record 80, part 10 (June 19, 1936): 10340.

90. Quoted in Pedro A. Cebollero, assistant commissioner of education, San Juan, "Reactions of Puerto Rican Children in New York City to Psychological Tests: An Analysis of the Investigation Conducted by Messrs. Armstrong, Achilles, and Sachs under the Auspices of the Special Committee on Immigration and Naturalization of the New York State Chamber of Commerce" (San Juan: Bureau of Supplies, Printing, and Transportation, 1936), 11. I have not been able to find a copy of the actual report by Armstrong and Achilles. Extensive passages of the report are quoted in Marcantonio, "Puerto Rican Children in New York Schools," in a New York Sun article, "Puerto Rican Pupils a Problem" (Jan. 6, 1936, p. 3); and in a typed page labeled "Summary" and "Conclusions" from Leonard Covello's files on the report, Covello papers, series VI, box 51, folder 15, and series X, box 115, folder 2.


93. Historian George Sánchez cites similar interpretations of IQ tests done on Mexican children in California in the 1920s and 1930s (though he says the primary objective of those debates was to justify the segregation of Mexican children in separate schools). See Sánchez, Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900–1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 259.


97. Minutes of the Racial Committee Conference, Feb. 7, 1936, Covello papers, series VI, box 51, folder 15. See also "The Intelligence of Negro Children," editorial, Opportunity 5 (Mar. 1927): 66. As the principal of Benjamin Franklin, Leonard Covello himself organized the administration of intelligence tests to incoming students, but his methods remained consistent with the critiques generated by the Racial Committee; when Covello and other Benjamin Franklin educators administered the Hennon-Nelson Test of Mental Ability to incoming students in 1936, they did not divide the results of the students’ performance by race or ethnic background. "Results Based on the Hennon-Nelson Tests of Mental Ability," Feb. 1936, Covello papers, series VI, box 48, folder 30.

98. The committee argued that the test procedures used by the investigators placed the Puerto Rican children at a disadvantage: they were given less time than the "control group" was given (twenty minutes as opposed to thirty) and had to respond to the questions in English, which for the majority of the children was their second language. "An Analysis of and Comments upon A Report of the Special Committee on Immigration and Naturalization of the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York Dated December 31, 1935, Submitting a Study on Reactions of Puerto Rican Children in New York City to Psychological Tests," n.d., Covello papers, series VI, box 51, folder 15, and series X, box 115, folder 2.

99. Marcantonio used the text of this report, verbatim, in his presentation to Congress on the subject on June 19, 1936. The two had become friends after Covello served as Marcantonio’s mentor while the latter was a student at DeWitt Clinton High School (Marcantonio later dubbed Covello "Pops"); over the years, they worked closely together on a variety of community issues and political campaigns. See Gerald Meyer, Vito Marcantonio, Radical Politician, 1902–1954 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 12–13.


101. Cebollero, "Reactions of Puerto Rican Children," 3. Cebollero explained: "An agitation now on foot to include Puerto Rico as a state in the Federal Union suggested that an investigation of the quality of immigration from Puerto Rico would be a valuable contribution to our knowledge." As a New York Times article, "Mentality Report Angers San Juan," put it: "Inasmuch as much of statehood can never be rescinded, the investigation conducted by Dr. Armstrong and his associates certainly suggests that the proposition to incorporate Puerto Rico as a State in the Federal Union should be held in abeyance." Feb. 11, 1936, 5.


103. Chernault describes the report as the first published academic research on Puerto Ricans in the United States; in my research, I never came across any earlier published work (aside from journalism) on Puerto Ricans in the United States. Chernault, Puerto Rican Migrant, 38.

104. A number of New Yorkers, most of them African American or Hispanic residents of Harlem, wrote to Mayor La Guardia to express their concerns and resentment about the "crime wave." Letters to Mayor Fiorello La Guardia from Dr. E. N. Bocanegra López, Nov. 7, 1941 (folder 1); Thomas J. Curtin, Nov. 7, 1941 (folder 1); Felipe S. Amezaga, secretary of the Hispano American Lodge, Nov. 14, 1941 (folder 3); and Douglas M. Payne, Oct. 15, 1941 (folder 10). La Guardia papers, reel 76. La Prensa also covered the incidents. See Augusto Kurland, "De Nuestros Lectores," La Prensa, Nov. 14, 1941, 3; and "Otra oliva de atrasos en Harlem," editorial, La Prensa, July 28, 1942, 4.