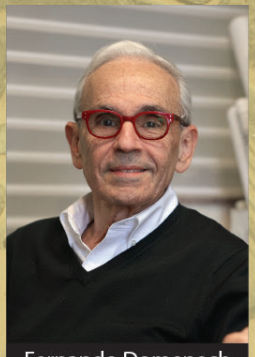
LATINO Pioneers in Boston

magazine #2


Rosalba Solis


Fernando Domenech


Jovita Fontanez


Felita Oyola


Consuelo Isaacson


José Massó


Lucia Mayerson-David


Micho Spring


Alex Rodriguez

2025 - 2026

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Greetings and Happy Holiday Season!

What an honor and such a joy it has been to complete Latino Pioneers in Boston #2! Getting to know this extraordinary group of individuals—people who opened their hearts and shared their inspiring stories—has truly been an experience close to my heart.

I thank God for planting this little seed in my heart and guiding me on this mission to celebrate the positive legacy of the "doers," those who lead the way with effort, courage, and passion. Our journey began on June 1, 2021, with Latino Pioneers in Boston #1, a project that reached universities, community organizations, Boston Public Schools, and public libraries—sparking meaningful conversations about heritage, experience, and Latino leadership.

I'm deeply grateful to my amazing team—Gabriel Serrano, Lisa Link, Abraham Valenzuela, Elex Reyes, Mandy Chan, Yesenia Milán, Luis Pacheco, and Valeria Gerena—and to our wonderful advisors and supporters: Linda Nathan, Vanessa Calderón, Evelyn Arana, Margaret Blood, Aixa Beauchamp, and Josefina Bonilla.

This project would not have been possible without the generous support of our sponsors: The Fellowes Athenaeum Trust Fund, Libman & Associates, Boston Public Library, IBA, Small Business Strong, Ahora Inc., MGH and Community Health, Bodega San Juan Inc., Tree of Light Initiatives, DHK Architects & Arts & Business Council.

From my heart to yours—may you enjoy it!

Blanca E. Bonilla

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Lorna Rivera

Historical context

Photo by: Lisa Link

Lorna Rivera, the director of the Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy and an associate professor of Latino Studies and Higher Education at the University of Massachusetts Boston, provides information about the historical patterns of migration in Boston.

Rivera says that for both Puerto Ricans and Cubans, their displacement experiences and arrival years in Boston differed. The historical roots of these communities can be traced back to the 1800s and the Spanish American war.

The United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit in Boston includes the Districts of Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Puerto Rico The solidarity between Puerto Ricans and Cubans was influenced by intellectual circles and institutions like Harvard.

The Puerto Rican migration movement in Boston began in 1950s and 60s when a substantial number of Puerto Ricans arrived and had left the island due to policies such as Operation Bootstrap. They initially were recruited to work in agriculture in western Massachusetts and the Connecticut River valley and in factories, but eventually settled in urban neighborhoods, including the South End.

Puerto Rican migration to Boston, primarily driven by programs such as Operation Bootstrap, focused on industrialization—addressing high unemployment rates by negotiating special contracts with corporations to bring Puerto Ricans to specific locations.

In the 1960s, a diverse group of Cubans and Dominicans began to establish themselves in the South End and Jamaica Plain neighborhood. Another wave of migration in the 1980s included primarily Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Colombians, who tended to settle in areas such as East Boston, Chelsea, and Somerville.

The 1980s witnessed a surge in the number of Salvadorans and Guatemalans due to various military interventions in which the United States played a significant role. This increased migration led the Massachusetts state legislature to establish the Gastón Institute at the University of Massachusetts-Boston. With the changing demographics and the presence of various immigrant groups, understanding the unique historical backgrounds of these communities became essential.

In the 1980s, a significant number of Dominicans arrived, and they followed distinct migration pathways compared to other groups. Notably, Central Americans, particularly Salvadorans and Guatemalans, played a unique role in shaping the immigrant landscape of Boston. For instance, Colombians settled and worked in the textile industry in Lowell and the Merrimack Valley. Common to all these immigrant groups was their pursuit of economic opportunities. As entrepreneurs and small business owners, they brought their social capital with them, enabling them to transfer their skills and find work, often through extended networks.

Motivations for migration varied and included the pursuit of financial stability, family reunification, and the need to survive, especially for those fleeing political persecution. Salvadorans, for example, sought asylum due to the violence and repression perpetrated by their own governments. The distinction between groups that arrived in the 1950s and 60s and those in the 1970s is notable. For instance, early Puerto Rican arrivals received fewer social services and had to establish their own support systems, organizations, businesses, and health care services. Bilingual education was scarce, and Puerto Ricans settled in predominantly Black neighborhoods, experiencing various challenges. Even though they were U.S. citizens, earlier generations faced significant difficulties.

Cuban immigrants exhibited variations between waves, with the first wave following the 1960 revolution comprising more upper and middle-class individuals and the Marielitos refugees of 1980 predominantly from lower-income groups. Similar patterns are observed among other immigrant groups, including highly educated Colombians and Central Americans.

After Hurricane Maria in 2017, there were multiple generations of Puerto Rican migrants representing different social classes. Even educated Puerto Ricans experienced occupational segregation, limiting their job prospects to certain types of work. The dynamics within Boston's Puerto Rican community are complex, with distinctions between island-born Puerto Ricans and the first generation. It's essential to recognize that Puerto Ricans are considered migrants rather than immigrants due to their U.S. citizenship status.

Family unification serves as a fundamental driving force for migration, alongside economic opportunities. Individuals often undertake the journey in pursuit of reuniting with loved ones, seeking to preserve familial bonds and strengthen relationships across borders. Additionally, economic considerations play a pivotal role, as migrants aspire to secure better lives and financial stability for themselves and their families. In many cases, people embark on migration journeys out of sheer necessity, driven by the innate human instinct to survive.

ALEX RODRIGUEZ

The Journey of a Shaker

In the bustling landscape of Boston, where the past and present converge, one name stands out as a beacon of advocacy and change: Alex Rodriguez, born and raised in the vibrant heart of Brooklyn, New York, Rodriguez's journey has been nothing short of extraordinary. From humble beginnings in a family of 13 siblings, Rodriguez emerged as the 12th child, carrying the resilience and determination that would shape his remarkable life.

Photo by: Lisa Link

Rodriguez's path to Boston took an unexpected turn after he completed his graduate studies at Indiana University. Having grown up in Brooklyn and attended college in Vermont, he faced a choice between two urban destinations: Montreal or Boston. The decision was clear: his English skills favored Boston. Little did he know that this move would mark the beginning of a lifelong commitment to the city.

Rooted in Puerto Rican heritage, Rodriguez's parents, born in the early 1900s, instilled a strong sense of community and activism in their children. Rodriguez's mother, despite coming from a challenging background, was a tireless organizer who supported Franklin D. Roosevelt during the war. She organized women in abandoned shops (sewing machines), transforming shops into centers of productivity. Her efforts extended to uniting Puerto Rican mothers to craft uniforms for soldiers, a remarkable feat that earned her recognition. His mother always told her son, "You are not like those kids who put you down. You are better than all of them."

Rodriguez's involvement in community organizing began at a tender age.

"By six, you realize that they, who you can't quite define, treat you different, and you don't know why they treat you different and you don't know what spic means," Rodriguez shared. "And then you get to seven and eight years old and you start figuring out that it's because you're Puerto Rican. Then you start feeling, 'They're right. I'm supposed to be less than them.' And then you say, 'Wait a minute. That's crazy. I'm not gonna be less than them.' My mother would say, 'You're not good as everybody else. You're much better.'

Rodriguez vividly remembers knocking on doors, rallying support, and being initiated into the world of grassroots activism.

Upon his arrival in Boston, he became acutely aware of the disparities plaguing the city.

"The South End was a neglected neighborhood with abandoned houses, dirty streets full of garbage, and the presence of prostitutes on every corner," Rodriguez said. "I was one of the first to recognize the potential for change."

Rodriguez's involvement in community development led him to Cooper Community Center, where he would later become the director. The center's mission was to address the needs of teenagers, parents, children, and the elderly. Under his leadership, it would go on to become a pioneer in its own right, receiving one of the first Head Start grants.

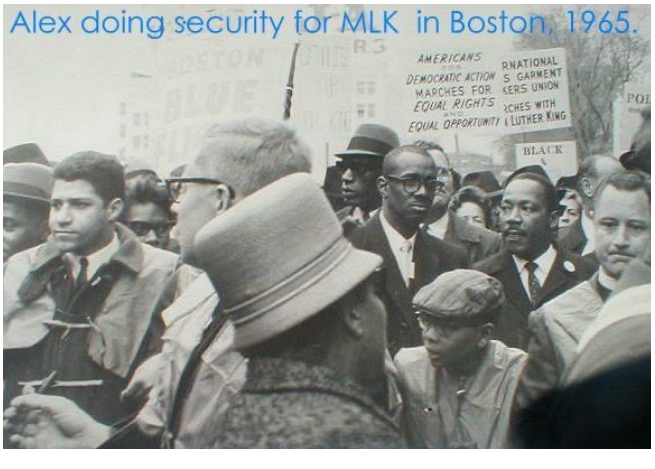
During the 1960s, a wave of economic development initiatives swept across the nation. Rodriguez saw the potential to create an Economic Development Corporation for the South End and Lower Roxbury, a vision that eventually materialized. This endeavor marked a significant turning point in the region's development.

Throughout his life, Rodriguez has been a tireless advocate for social justice, equity, and community empowerment. His career includes serving as one of the first commissioners of the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination, where he addressed countless cases of discrimination. His tenure as an administrative law judge helped him mediate and resolve complex issues, ultimately improving the lives of many.

A walk with Martin Luther King Jr. / In 1965, Rodriguez found himself in the company of Martin Luther King Jr. and other influential figures. As part of the team organizing a march to continue the legacy of the historic 1963 March on Washington, he had the privilege of contributing to a transformative event that would forever shape the civil rights movement.

Today, Alex Rodriguez's name graces several monuments and memorials, including The Embrace Memorial in Boston, a testament to his commitment to change and justice. His advice to the world is simple yet profound: "Be proud of your heritage." He reminds us that every family has a history and understanding that history is the first step toward advocating for a brighter future.

In a world where advocacy and change are essential, Alex Rodriguez's remarkable journey stands as an enduring example of how one person's dedication can shape the course of a community and a city. His legacy is a reminder that, in the pursuit of justice and equity, each of us has the power to make a difference.



FELITA OYOLA

A Legacy of Culture and Community

In the heart of Boston's South End, Felita Oyola made a profound impact on her community, not just as an artist and teacher, but as a beacon of culture and inspiration. Born in 1924 in Naranjito, Puerto Rico, in 1952 she ventured to New York, where she produced the famous song "El Bollo de Pan"—her first hit. Oyola moved to Boston in 1965 to follow her artistic dreams. Her journey was remarkable. She laid the foundation for a vibrant cultural legacy that continues to thrive today.

As it celebrates its 50th anniversary, Estrellas Tropicales stands as an enduring symbol of Felita Oyola's legacy along with her music and her unwavering commitment to the cultural enrichment of her community.

Oyola died in 2010 at the age of 86. Her daughter, activist Reinelda "Chickie" Rivera, and her granddaughter, Joselina Leon, a choreographer and dance teacher in Boston, pay tribute to Oyola's enduring influence.

ALCALDE DE BOSTON RECONOCE LABOR ARTISTICA DE FELITA OYOLA

Felita Oyola nació en Naranji- mostrado un gran interés y talen- 1948 comenzó su carrera co
Puerto Rico y por años ha de- to por las artes escénicas. En cantante, trabajando en club
centros de artes y radio. En 1
se mudó a Nueva York y a pe
de que tuvo que trabajar d
mente en un trabajo de tie
completo, nunca abandonó
verdadero amor: las artes.
Se involucró con un grup
músicos puertorriqueños que
taban en radio y durante esa
ca grabaron muchas de las
ciones que de ella conocemos.
En los años 60's, Felita se
dó a Boston, como resident
Jamaica Plain. Mientras tra
ba como maestra ayudante e
escuelas públicas, se dió c
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En 1974, Oyola fundó R
Teatral y Estrellas Tropica
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mueve la cultura hispana a
de la música, teatro y dan
klóricas. Dicho grupo ha
pado en diferentes activid
Nueva Inglaterra y el P
Puertorriqueño.

el año 1978, Felita Oyola, recibió el reconocimiento público del ex-
e Kevin White, recientemente fue ratificado por el alcalde Ray Flynn.

Leon reminisces about her grandmother's role in starting the famous group Estrellas Tropicales, which originally comprised musicians, singers, and dancers, in 1973. Oyola taught children the art of dancing to folkloric music from Puerto Rico, igniting a passion for their cultural heritage.

"She was a true artist who wanted to share her artist wealth with her people and other groups," Leon said.

One pivotal moment in the group's history was the introduction of baton twirling, a skill taught to the young performers. Three young girls, including Leon, were among the first baton twirlers who performed in the Puerto Rican Festival of Mass. Over time, the group expanded to include more girls, mothers, sisters, daughters, and even grandmothers, forming a close-knit community united by their love for Puerto Rican culture.

A Legacy of Leadership / Leon speaks of the invaluable life lessons she learned from her grandmother. These lessons included never giving up, pursuing one's dreams, and cherishing one's cultural roots. Her grandmother's dedication to preserving Puerto Rican culture resonated deeply with her, and she continues to pass on this legacy through her work.

A Woman of Many Talents / Felita Oyola was not just an artist and teacher but a source of guidance and inspiration for many in the artistic community. She was known for cantando rosarios, a practice of singing the rosary. Her daughter recalls her mother's strict upbringing, which instilled in her the drive to fight for opportunities and fairness in her community.

Oyola was a woman with a big heart, known for her love and acceptance of everyone she met. Leon describes her as someone who always sought positive solutions in every situation.

According to Leon, "We had Irish girls learning how to dance in our house. That is to tell you what a humble human being she was. She truly loved people."

Oyola's commitment to her community made her a proud activist, much like her daughter, and her spirit continues to inspire generations.

Oyola's dedication to preserving Puerto Rican culture is evident through the growth of Estrellas Tropicales and the expansion of the Dominican community's bonds with the Puerto Rican community in Boston. She was honored as the first Puerto Rican woman to be the godmother of the Dominican Festival, a testament to her commitment to fostering cultural unity.

Over the years, the group grew in size and stature, reaching a remarkable 164 girls in Boston.

"Felita Oyola's involvement extended beyond Estrellas Tropicales," Rivera said. "She played a vital role in the Puerto Rican Festival Committee, bringing folkloric music and dances to the forefront. This cultural infusion helped to shape the festival into the vibrant celebration it is today. Era especial (she was special)."

Oyola was not only a pillar of her community but an advisor to many artists in Boston, sharing her extensive knowledge of the artistic world.

The family's journey in Jamaica Plain was not without its challenges, as they were among the last groups to arrive in a diverse community. However, Oyola's unwavering determination allowed them to blend in and create opportunities wherever they could.

Passing the Torch / Today, Felita Oyola's legacy lives on through her daughter and granddaughter, who ensure that every new member of Estrellas Tropicales understands the importance of their cultural heritage. They are encouraged never to give up, to stay in school, avoid drugs, and always follow their dreams. For Oyola, preserving culture and heritage was paramount to moving forward, and her impact continues to be felt in Boston's vibrant Puerto Rican community.

Consuelo Arostegui Isaacson

Proud to be a Latino Woman

I grew up in Vedado, a neighborhood in Havana Cuba. We lived in a big old house with my parents, my sister, two brothers, and our aunt. It was a unique bond that extended next door to my great aunts through a connecting door. Life was filled with school, bicycle outings, and swimming. It was a wonderful life.

Photo by: Lisa Link

In 1960, two years after the revolution, we left Cuba and landed in Vero Beach, Florida. Despite a brief stay in Vero Beach, we returned to Miami—drawn by jobs, relatives, and friends. Though I couldn't help but miss my friends, cousins, and my big home, the familiar faces made the transition easier. It wasn't Havana, but fascination filled my days: dances in socks, the vibrant pop music, and grabbing hamburgers during the school day. It was a good time.

When I first came, I did not know that I was not going to return to Cuba. My whole family spoke English, so these transitions were easy for us. My grandfather, who was the son of Carlos Finlay, the man who discovered the cause of Yellow Fever, always insisted that we speak English at home.

After attending the University of Miami, I ventured to New York from 1960 to 1967 to explore the big city. From an early age, I doodled all the time. Since I did not have any money for canvases, I started to paint on tomato boxes from the grocery store nearby. Painting became a therapeutic outlet for me. Being an artist is another facet of my life, and I wish for more time to paint.

In 1969, I came to Boston, got married, and settled in Beacon Hill. It was a great place to live, yet the longing for family lingered. Although my sister moved with me.

My career journey led me through an advertising agency, the Department of Social Services, and later an accounting firm's consulting division. Eventually, I became the finance director for the state of Massachusetts. During this time, I welcomed two children, Morgan and Max, both working in LA's film industry, and two wonderful grandchildren, Jack and Harper.

A turning point in my life came in 1998 when my friend, Micho Spring, invited me to a meeting about Catholic Charities in Cuba. Together, Micho and I created Friends of Caritas Cubana, a nonprofit organization. Caritas in Cuba, the equivalent of Catholic Charities in the US, serves the most vulnerable populations: the elderly, children at risk, the sick, the disabled, and hurricane victims.

Going back to Cuba wasn't on the horizon; however, my first visit became a healing process for me and for members of the group. Tears rolled down our cheeks while we stood in familiar places. This marked the beginning of my journey, and it has been the most important thing I've done with my life. The organization has grown steadily since 2000, becoming the largest donor organization.

I am proud to be a Latina woman. This country offers great opportunities, so when you're young, it's the time to build. Be proud of your heritage, keep your language, and work toward your goals step by step.

I feel at home with Cubans, but I also feel at home with Americans. My husband is American. It's a gift to blend, to share, and to embark on a journey of possibilities.

Consuelo Arostegui Isaacson's story is one of resilience, purpose, and pride—a testament to the power of heritage and the boundless potential of the human spirit.

Photo by: Lisa Link

The Journey of an Architect:

Fernando Domenech Jr.

In the realm of architecture, where creativity and vision meet the tangible world of construction, few stories are as inspiring as that of Fernando Domenech Jr. His journey from the vibrant community of Miramar in San Juan, Puerto Rico, to the bustling streets of Boston is a testament to the power of passion, resilience, and a deep commitment to his craft.

Domenech reflects on his early days in Miramar with warmth and nostalgia.

"I grew up in a wonderful community. The neighbors were friends, school was just around the corner, and the church was a central part for all of us. Growing up in this close-knit environment instilled a sense of belonging and identity that would guide me throughout my life," Domenech said.

From Miramar to Harvard / In 1972, Domenech left his beloved Miramar to pursue his dreams of becoming an architect. His destination was Harvard University, renowned for its exceptional architecture program. The decision to leave behind his familiar world was driven by a passion that had been with him since childhood: his love for drawing and design.

In a world where computers have largely replaced drawing boards, Domenech's enduring passion for sketching and designing remains a rarity. He believes that architecture, at its core, is the art of assembling various elements into a magnificent structure. It requires not just creativity but a keen sense of organization and order. These skills are indispensable for an architect, and Domenech possessed them in abundance.

His years in Boston were a time of academic immersion and personal transformation. Domenech made friends from various backgrounds, fostering a deeper appreciation for the rich tapestry of cultures that is woven into the American experience. Domenech's architectural journey also involved navigating a changing urban landscape. He witnessed the effects of gentrification and the struggles of those who sought to prevent the displacement of communities.

"This period was a time of transition, with a growing population of college-educated individuals in the community. I moved to the South End where life was a bit more real. Cambridge seemed to be a bit of a fantasy world. Everybody lived in academia," Domenech said.

His commitment to creating positive change led him to work with the community through organizations such as IBA (Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción). This was the starting point of his involvement in the planning and development of housing projects, including the planning of the second phase of las viviendas.

One remarkable project that stands out is the design of the Whittier Health Center. Although he had never designed such a facility before, Domenech and his team embarked on the project with enthusiasm. With a generous budget, they explored new challenges, successfully delivering a project that combined form and function, thus contributing to the well-being of the community.

Domenech's architectural career has spanned more than 40 years, with a diverse portfolio that includes public transportation projects such as the MBTA's South Station, the Southwest Corridor, and various housing projects across different cities and states. He has contributed to major infrastructure projects, such as the rehabilitation of the main terminal of South Station, Tren Urbano in Puerto Rico, and many more.

Additionally, his firm was the architect for the new transit station that resulted from the relocation of Yankee Stadium.

The Joy of Creation / Despite the inevitable challenges that come with the profession, Domenech's passion for architecture remains undiminished.

"The satisfaction of seeing a project come to life, the joy of crafting something unique, and the sense of achievement at the end of a challenging journey continue to motivate me," Domenech said.

Perseverance / A story from his youth involving fixing a beloved car serves as a reminder of the importance of commitment even in the face of obstacles. That same perseverance has guided his architectural career, and he continues to yearn for opportunities to create bigger and better things.

Fernando Domenech Jr.'s journey is a testament to the power of passion and perseverance. From the streets of Miramar to the architectural wonders of Boston, he has left an indelible mark on the urban landscape. His story serves as an inspiration for all, illustrating the incredible heights that can be reached through dedication to one's craft and a commitment to creating a better, more beautiful world.

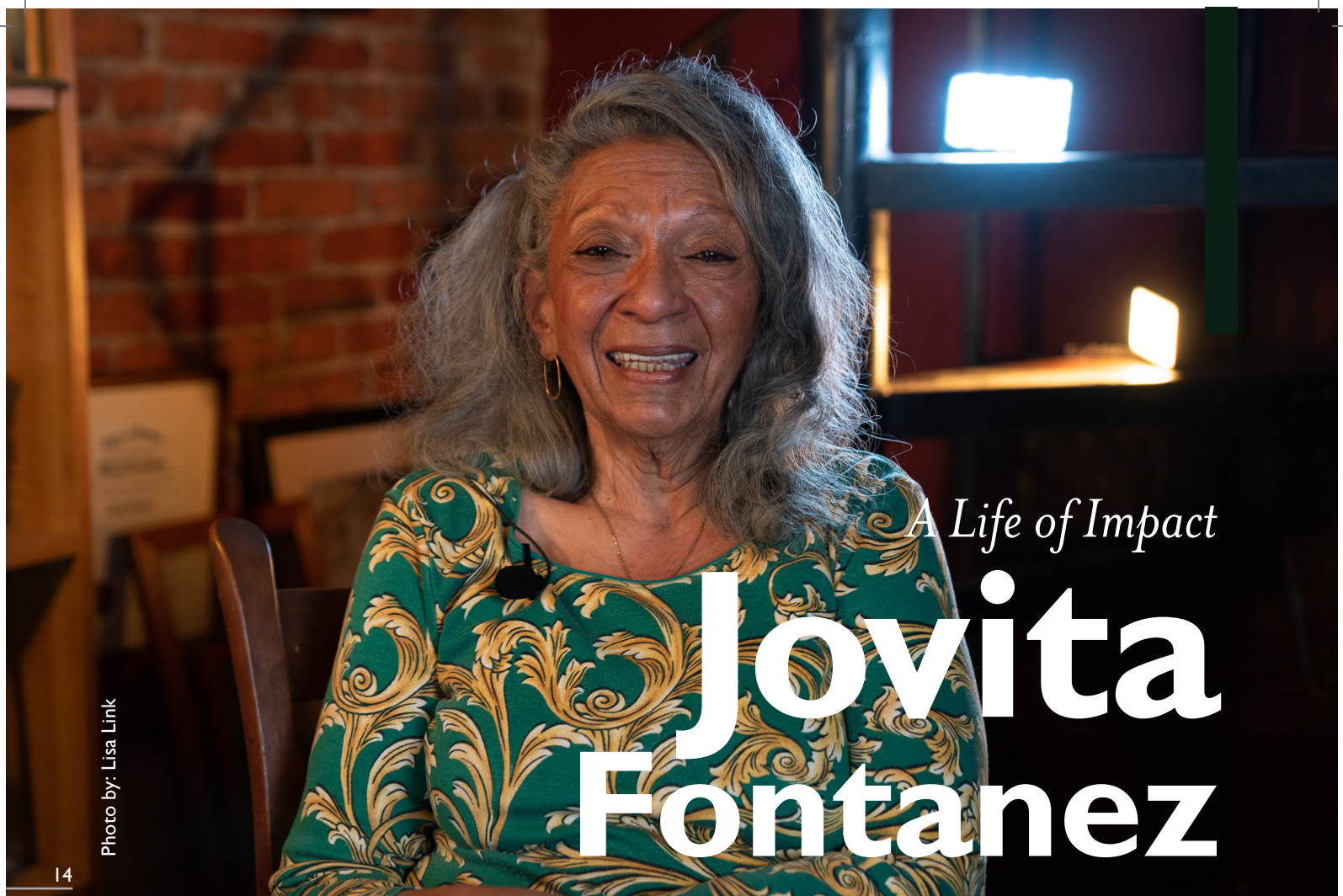


Photo by: Lisa Link

A Life of Impact

Jovita Fontanez

In the heart of Boston's South End, a vibrant and diverse community thrived through the decades, enriched by the stories and contributions of individuals like Jovita Fontanez. A true pioneer, Fontanez's journey from her roots in Puerto Rican Manhattan to becoming a driving force within the South End community is a testament to the power of perseverance, community engagement, and the enduring pursuit of positive change.

Fontanez's journey began in the early 1950s, when her family left the bustling streets of Manhattan for the inviting embrace of Boston. Escaping the mounting heat of New York, her family found a new home in the South End, a community that would come to define Fontanez's life.

"I think we need to be tuned to the fact that when we talk about Boston for the Puerto Rican community and the Latino community, we're talking about the South End," Fontánez reflected.

In those early years, the South End was a melting pot of cultures, from a long-established Black community to Greek and Lebanese-Syrian neighborhoods. The South End's diversity was nurtured by institutions such as the settlement houses, which aimed to welcome and embrace immigrants and migrants from around the world.

"We socialized there, we used the library—took arts classes and music lessons. It was a safe place—a place that I could go without a chaperone," Fontánez said, recalling the impact of Mel King, a director at multiple settlement houses who opened doors for the Puerto Rican community.

Fontanez's involvement with the settlement houses set the stage for her lifelong dedication to community service.

"Being an activist had always been part of my DNA," she said with pride.

Caseworker to City Hall / Fontanez's path to empowerment led her to become a caseworker at the South End Neighborhood Action Program, where she honed her organizational skills and offered support to women and families. Through the years, her determination and advocacy led her to roles with increasing influence, including the Fair Housing Commission for the City of Boston and the Metropolitan District Commission under Governor Michael Dukakis.

Her work extended to critical areas like health care, where she recognized the importance of accessible services and securing federal funding for community needs. Fontánez's efforts helped build bridges between diverse communities and essential resources.

Breaking Barriers / In a groundbreaking move, Jovita Fontanez became the first woman and the first Latina woman to lead Boston's Election Department. As the election commissioner, she focused on increasing voter registration and fostering civic engagement. Her efforts paid off, resulting in more women running for office and an evolving perception of the community's strength.

Fontanez recalls the challenges of holding a position of power as a Puerto Rican woman and an activist. Yet, her achievements became a beacon of change because she shattered stereotypes and paved the way for others to follow.

As she reflects on her journey, Fontánez acknowledges the changes that have transformed the South End and the broader workforce landscape.

"The workforce and job opportunities are very different today than they were 50 or 60 years ago," she observed.

But amidst the shifts, her advice remains steadfast:
"Be true to yourself. Know who you are and where you come from."

Jovita Fontanez's remarkable journey from a child in Puerto Rican Manhattan to a community leader in Boston's South End speaks to the enduring power of resilience, determination, and community engagement. Her legacy reminds us that change is possible, and the impact of a single individual can transform lives and communities for generations to come.

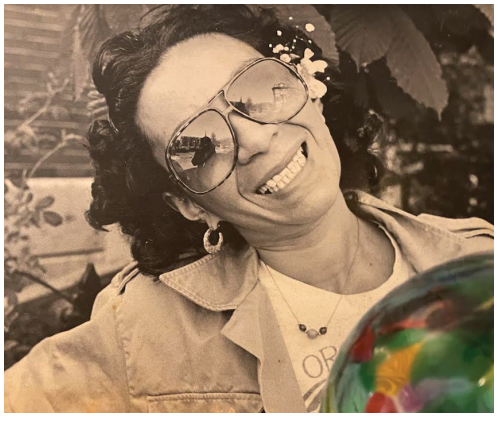


Photo by: Lisa Link

Micho Spring

You can bring about the change you want to make Boston yours

In a world marked by change, resilience, and community, this personal journey from Havana to Boston serves as a testament to the strength of a brave young woman.

I was born in Havana, Cuba, and had a very sheltered childhood that came to a sudden end with the Castro revolution. Our family left in August of 1960. Castro suddenly closed all the Catholic schools, expelled the nuns from the island, and announced all children were going to be sent to a pioneer school in the countryside to be retrained as revolutionaries. But that was not what my mother and father had in mind for us; I had a brother who was of army age, so we left very suddenly, thinking we were coming to the US for a few months.

We came with very little money and left everything we owned behind. It was a scary time. I remember the day before we left. I had to go to my best friend's birthday party. I was ten years old, and my mother said, "You cannot tell anybody we're leaving the next day." There were people being imprisoned and not allowed out, and we were hoping to get out. I had never been on an airplane, didn't speak any English, and suddenly, we're going to go to New Orleans, and I could not tell a soul. I learned the importance of discretion, which has served me well!

I went from that kind of glorious childhood to becoming a minority overnight, although we were warmly welcomed. I got a scholarship to Ursuline Academy, the same school I had attended in Havana. I remember one day being in class and I had no idea what was going on since I spoke no English, but they were passing around a hat, and everybody was putting money in. Finally, it dawned on me that they were collecting money so that I could join them on a field trip. I came home and told my mother- she cried.

For my parents, they went through all the pain of losing not only Cuba an all they had worked for, but also their identity. My mother got us through the first years of exile by telling us never to talk about Cuba at the dinner table.

We went to New York when it became clear we were not going back to Cuba and moved into a building with many other Cuban families. We had no money, but there was such a great sense of community. We were all borrowing from each other. And so I grew up in New York, close to my Cuban roots, but I became very much a citizen of this country. I got very involved politically partly because my whole life changed due to a political event, so I took politics very seriously.

In the 60s, cities were very much in crisis, and there was a very charismatic mayor in New York, John Lindsay, who attracted me to city politics. After the Lindsay Administration I came to the Kennedy School at Harvard. That's how I got to Boston. I watched Boston through the busing era, and I had great admiration for the Mayor Kevin White. He was part of that generation of charismatic mayors who were attracting new talent to city government. I joined his staff in 1976, and that was my first entry into Boston politics.

It was a very different Boston! It was a time when politics was really opening up for women and Hispanics. A time of change for sure. I became Kevin White's chief of staff, and then deputy mayor for policy. That's when I connected with the Hispanic community. There was a great generation of leaders who had already been scarred by the battle to preserve the South End: Frieda Garcia, Jorge Hernández, Angeles Rodriguez, Tony Molina—they were all well respected at City Hall.

I tell people, yes, we have a long way to go, but if you could only look at where I started—we've come a long way. I am deeply committed to Boston and am so grateful for the enormous opportunities I have had here.

In 1997, my husband convinced me to go back to Cuba while I still had people I loved there. I wanted to stand in front of my house and digest what had happened to me. We left in such a hurry—I never said goodbye to any of my familiar surroundings. We cried the entire time. It was incredibly emotional.

A year later, during the first Pope's visit to Cuba in 1998, I went back with a delegation from Catholic Charities, and on the way back, the Cardinal said to me, "You know we have to help Catholic Charities in Cuba because they're just starting out." I called my friend Consuelo Isaacson, and we founded Friends of Caritas Cubana. That little charity that we started is now the major funder of humanitarian services in Cuba. It's been very rewarding to see how we have been able to reach across ideology and politics and connect in such a meaningful way.

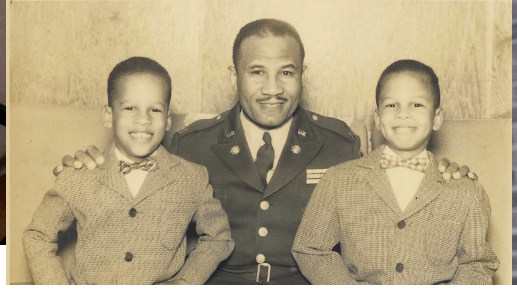
I have lived in a hurry. I have always been multitasking. I found a letter that my father wrote me at age 10 advising me to be more patient. I thought, "Oh my God, it was evident even then."

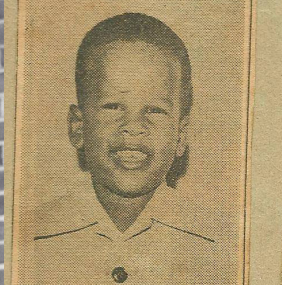
If you're a young Latino in Boston, you know it's your time. **You can bring about the change you want to make Boston yours.** Change this place to the way you want it. The opportunities are endless, and yes, there will be obstacles, but if you look at the barriers that have already been overcome, you will be inspired.

José C MASSÓ III

A Journey of Identity, Activism, and Political Movement

Photo by: Lisa Link





In the heart of Boston, a unique and inspiring journey unfolds. It's the story of a man who was born in Puerto Rico in 1950, who went on to carve his path in a land far from home: facing challenges, affirming his identity, and making a difference through his voice—his message of change. This is the tale of José Carmelo Massó Rodríguez III, a man whose life embodies the complexities of culture, activism, and the unifying force of music.

"Music is powerful!" Massó said.
"When the creator made His plan,
it was for us to have human beings
in the arts amongst us who are living angels.
Through them, we would understand
what love really is."

Born in the Rodríguez Army Hospital in Old San Juan, the son of a career U.S Army officer, Major José Carmelo Massó Colón, the younger José came from a proud Afro Puerto Rican family of history makers and barrier breakers. His father and three uncles, all United States Army veterans, served their country honorably and their parents left their mark in Puerto Rican history.

"My grandfather rode and trained a legendary Paso Fino horse, Dulce Sueño (Sweet Dream), further solidifying the Massó family's place in Puerto Rican history and is in the Puerto Rico Sports Hall of Fame," Massó said. "My grandmother Maria Anastasia Colón Aponte de Massó, who lived to be 112 years, six months and a day is also in the history books. As a matter of fact, they celebrate the festival Dulce Sueño in Guayama every September honoring my grandfather."

The younger Massó's journey began with an appreciation for experiential learning and early lessons in class and privilege. At just 14 years old, he ventured into the world of work, pico y pala, digging holes on construction sites to earn money for his passion—a drum set. It was during this time that he realized the stark difference in society's class systems, and economic and educational disparities as he witnessed many of his older co-workers struggle with illiteracy. This experience sowed the seeds of empathy, awareness and purpose that would shape his future endeavors.

In 1970, Massó's journey took him from the shores of Puerto Rico to the campus of Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Upon arriving, he encountered racial and cultural bias firsthand, challenging the notion of identity and belonging. These encounters, though painful, ignited a fire within him to fight for cultural understanding, social change, and equity. His experiences at Antioch College challenged his identity, but also provided him with the strength and conviction to stand up against injustice. As he found his place in a new world, he also found his voice, a voice that would echo through the halls of activism, fighting for a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable society. Massó's journey from Puerto Rico to Ohio is a testament to the power of resilience and the potential for positive change that exists within us.

sought to educate, inform, and serve as a bridge between races and cultures. José made it his purpose to emphasize the invaluable contributions of Afro-Latinos to history and culture, empowering his listeners with a sense of pride, unity, and collective strength.

A Purpose / The connection to education, community activism, and positions as radio host and later TV host of Aquí led Massó to groundbreaking leadership roles in education, media, government, politics, sports, entertainment, higher education, and philanthropy as an advocate for the Latino community in Boston and throughout the Commonwealth. His passion and steadfast commitment for social change led him to join Michael Dukakis on his presidential campaign trail, spreading his message of unity and progress.

¡Poco a poco, paso a paso! became a beacon of hope for those striving for a just and better world.

The Power of Music and Activism / Massó completed his bachelor's degree in 1973 and moved to the South End because he saw it as the epicenter of where the Puerto Rican community had settled.

"At that time, we had a new wave of Puerto Ricans landing in Boston. They were college-educated, bilingual, bicultural activists and change agents," Massó said.

It was the beginning of bilingual education and court mandated desegregation of Boston Public Schools through a system of busing students. Guided by his experiences, Massó embraced the role of educator and activist. Music became his vessel for educating his students at Copley Square High School and fostering pride and understanding. He utilized music as a tool for learning, a means of exploring history and culture. Responding to his students' advice, in 1975 he created the ¡Con Salsa! radio show, which still reaches thousands of people each Saturday night. The show's mission extended far beyond entertainment – it

For five decades, Massó has employed a pedagogy that fosters integrity, social justice, and liberation. His voice has become a call to action, inspiring others to engage in civic responsibility, strive for sustainability, and actively participate in community building.

The journey of José Carmelo Massó Rodríguez III is a testament to the power of identity, activism, music, and purpose. From his Puerto Rican roots to the bustling streets of Boston, he has navigated a path of challenges and triumphs, leaving an indelible mark on the hearts of those he has touched. His story reminds us that each step we take, each note we play, and each choice we make can shape a brighter future for ourselves and generations to come.

As Massó once said, "God's gift to you is life. What you do with your life is your gift to God."

The Latino Pioneers in Boston Magazine **http://quelindoboston.com/Magazine** was distributed throughout the Boston Public School system (Grades 6 to 12) and the Boston Public Libraries. We reached thousands of children, teachers and families.

The Exhibition https://lisalink.wordpress.com/portfolio/latino- was a great success! It was held at the Neighborhood Gallery at the Boston City Hall from September 1st to September 30th.

We had many people visiting the gallery as well as attending the event - student groups, community people, elected officials and the Pioneers. It was a moving celebration.

Rosalba Solis

A Journey of Music and Community Advocacy

Rosalba Solis, a Mexica woman hailing from Mexico, embarked on a transformative journey to Boston 45 years ago to pursue her passion for music at Berklee College of Music. Her story unfolds as a tapestry of resilience, cultural preservation, and community advocacy.

Photo by: Lisa Link

Upon her arrival, Solis faced the challenges of navigating a new language and culture. Undeterred, she embraced the opportunity to study at Berklee, a journey fueled by her love for the saxophone, an instrument she mastered during her years at a performing arts school in Mexico.

Berklee College of Music opened Solis's eyes to a diverse and inclusive musical community. Inspired by the array of musicians from different backgrounds playing various instruments, she found her place among saxophonists, trumpeters, trombonists, and more. This cultural melting pot fueled her determination to thrive in this artistic haven.

Facing financial hardships and the challenges of being in a new country, Solis's journey took an unexpected turn when she connected with kind-hearted individuals. A chance encounter with a Spanish-speaking maid from Guatemala led her to find a temporary home and support from a woman in East Boston, offering both a place to stay and English classes at her workplace, Cardinal Cushing Center.

Solis's passion for music extended beyond personal practice. She generously shared her knowledge, teaching classical music to fellow students while eagerly learning jazz from them. As a mother residing in Jamaica Plain, she seamlessly balanced her musical pursuits with teaching music and movement in private schools and eventually secured a position at the Curley School in Boston. She then transitioned to the Rafael Hernández School where she became the head of performing arts.

Community Empowerment through La Piñata / In response to the negative portrayal of Latinos in the media during the mid-80s, Solis and a group of like-minded individuals united to create La Piñata. This initiative aimed to counter stereotypes and provided a positive environment for Latino children. La Piñata celebrated the richness of Latin American cultures, fostering pride in their heritage through music, language and learning the history and richness of 23 Latin American countries.

Solis's involvement with community events flourished. She was inspired by Femke Rosenbaum, a community activist she met on the street in Jamaica Plain. They became good friends and Solis became an integral part of the Wake up the Earth Festival. This eventually led to the creation of the Lantern Parade in Jamaica Plain, a vibrant celebration that draws thousands together to honor their ancestors.

Healing / COVID brought challenges and grief.

> "Many of us couldn't connect with family or friends or say goodbye properly," Solis said."

A Voice for Indigenous Peoples / Solis actively participated in marches for indigenous peoples, the environment and advocates for gratitude and awakening among children.

> "You need to wake up your children," Solis said.

Solis's commitment to preserving traditions and empowering the younger generation reflects a deep understanding of the importance of cultural heritage.

"I am a Mexica woman from Mexico," Solis said. "We have 52 nations of indigenous people. I keep my traditions. My children, they all followed the traditions as well. They know who they are. I feel our children need to understand their history."

In a world undergoing profound changes, Rosalba Solis stands as a testament to the resilience, strength, and cultural pride that can flourish even in the face of adversity. Her journey, marked by music, community engagement, and advocacy, continues to inspire and shape the narrative of the Latino community in Boston.

Lucia Mayerson-David

A Beacon of Education and Empowerment

Lucia Mayerson-David's life journey is a remarkable tale of resilience, strength, and the pursuit of education and empowerment. Her story began in the heart of Bolivia, a world away from the bustling streets of Boston. Born in Oruro, Bolivia, Mayerson-David's life was deeply intertwined with her parents' history as Holocaust survivors from Poland. Her father's involvement in the Polish resistance and her mother's narrow escape from the Warsaw ghetto marked the indomitable spirit that ran in her family. The strength they derived from their shared experiences forged an unbreakable bond, with her family making a commitment to never be separated again.

Mayerson-David's family's journey led them to Oruro, a place hidden in the mountains of Bolivia, renowned for its breathtaking beauty and remarkable natural wealth. Her father, along with his brother in law and a close friend, embarked on a business venture in textiles, specifically selling fabrics. However, the high altitude of Bolivia posed a challenge, prompting Mayerson-David's uncle seek a new life in Chile. After 14 years in Bolivia, the family relocated to Santiago, Chile. Mayerson-David, completed her primary education in Chile, and then studied economics at the University of Chile

In the late 1960s, Mayerson-David met her future husband, Lloyd David. They married in 1969. Their journey soon took them to Boston, where Lloyd David found work at Harvard University. In pursuit of her own dreams, Mayerson-David decided to study economics at the University of Massachusetts Boston. She never left. After graduating in 1971, she worked at the university for four decades before her death in 2011 at the age of 64.

Despite their relocation to the United States, Mayerson-David and her family continued to visit Chile regularly, underscoring the enduring importance of family in her life. She and her husband welcomed two beautiful daughters, Paulita and Sari, into the world.

"The gift of a second language was one of the most precious legacies from my mother," Sari David said. "Speaking Spanish was a part of our daily life. This was a gift that transcended cultural boundaries."

Mayerson-David's impact extended far beyond her family. She saw the struggles faced by Latinx students in Boston Public Schools and was determined to make a change. She founded the Talented and Gifted (TAG) program at UMass Boston in 1985 to increase the graduation and college enrollment rates of Latinos in Boston. According to her daughter Paulita David, Mayerson-David genuinely believed that there was nothing "minor" about individuals from different cultures or those who spoke different languages. She believed that these students deserved recognition and support.

The TAG program provided essential support and guidance to Latinx students, empowering them to succeed academically and personally. Mayerson-David's dedication and unwavering belief in her students inspired many, including Karen Gonzalez, a former student who credits Mayerson-David and TAG for helping her overcome personal challenges, such as becoming pregnant during high school. Mayerson-David became not only a friend but also family, a guiding light in a tunnel. Thanks to her love and guidance, Gonzalez stands proudly today. Mayerson-Davd's work changed the landscape of education in Boston for children and families.

Mayerson-David's legacy also profoundly influenced her daughters. Sari David spent four summers working with the TAG program, witnessing firsthand the impact her mother had on the community and her students. Paulita David emphasized how her mother's unique perspective and passion for her culture influenced her work and interactions with others, leaving a lasting impact on the clients she served.

Lloyd David shared how his wife expanded the TAG program from high schools to middle and elementary schools. She recognized that in order to make a lasting difference, support and guidance needed to start at a younger age. The earlier students received such support, the better equipped they would be for success. Project Alerta, founded in 1988 to provide support to students in grades 3-5, was selected by the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities to receive one of 15 National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Awards—the highest honor for youth arts programs in the United States—in 2010. Today, Project Alerta and TAG serve all English Language Learners.

Mayerson-David's unwavering belief in her students and her high expectations for them made a profound impression. She instilled in them the importance of self-confidence and the power to overcome adversity. Mayerson-David's legacy continues to inspire her family and all those she touched, reminding them of the significance of self-worth and the potential to achieve greatness.

In the words of her daughters, Mayerson-David's legacy is a testament to the lasting impact that a dedicated individual can have on their community and the world. Her story serves as a beacon of education and empowerment, reminding us to fight for our place and worth in society, no matter the challenges we face.

Lucia Mayerson-David's life is a story of resilience, empowerment, and the enduring power of education. Her journey from Chile to Boston exemplifies the incredible impact one person can have on the lives of others and the communities they touch.

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