

# LATINO Pioneers

*in Boston* magazine

ALFREDO  
DE JESUS

CARMEN  
POLA

JAIME  
RODRIGUEZ

REGLA  
GONZALEZ

ALBERTO  
VASALLO

FRIEDA  
GARCIA

TONY  
MOLINA

MARIA  
SANCHEZ

# LATINO EQUITY FUND

## AT THE BOSTON FOUNDATION

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As the only Latino philanthropic fund in Massachusetts, our mission is to use our influence, platform, and partnerships to build power and equity for Latinos in the Commonwealth while amplifying the diverse voices and perspectives of the community.

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Photo by: Lisa Link

## **Greetings!**

I am excited to introduce you to the first of its kind "The Latino Pioneers in Boston Magazine", a complementary print/electronic edition of the larger project "The Latino Pioneers in Boston".

The Latino Pioneers in Boston is a documentary series featuring eight Latino Leaders and their journeys. The project includes the documentary (in process), this magazine and an exhibit. It is a tribute to the unheard voices of the Hispanic community that with "mucho sudor-a lot of sweat" paved the way for the next generations.

I am grateful to God for planting this seed of interest and determination in my heart and for guiding me on this quest to document a positive image of the doers of the Latino community.

A project of this magnitude is accomplished with the support of others. As such, I want to acknowledge these individuals who believed in this project and contributed to this piece of history: Lisa Link, Linda Nathan, Margaret Blood, Gabriel Serrano, Josefina Bonilla, Vanessa Calderon, Deborah Froggatt and Valeria Gerena.

In humbleness, I extend a big shout out to the pioneers who opened their homes and hearts to share their stories with us. And special recognition to all the sponsors for their support and commitment to the Latino Community of Boston. Enjoy!

Kindly,  
**Blanca E. Bonilla**

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**LATINOS LIGHTING  
UP THE CITY OF BOSTON**

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Photo by: Lisa Link

**Miren Uriarte** immigrated to the United States from Cuba with her family in 1961 and settled in Miami. She moved to Boston in 1973 to attend Boston College Graduate School of Social Work and worked as a clinical social worker in Boston. Uriarte earned a PhD in sociology from Boston University and began teaching at the College of Public and Community Service at UMass Boston in 1981. She is the founding director of the Mauricio Gaston Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy at UMass Boston.


I usually laugh when people talk about Latinos being a new group in the Boston area. We are not. Latinos have lived in Boston for more than a century. There was a strong presence of Puerto Ricans and Cubans in Boston from the late 1800's. In fact, Jose Marti mentioned in his writings that groups of Puerto Ricans and Cubans organized in Boston in support of the struggle for the Islands independence from Spain.

Puerto Rican migration has been the main story of the Latino community in Boston. In the 1950's when the Puerto Rican economy deteriorated - particularly the agricultural sector - farmers were recruited to work in the western part of Massachusetts. Puerto Ricans became the main group of people working on the farms. In the 1960's, industries in Boston began to actively recruit Puerto Ricans. There is evidence of

people getting paid to go to the island to recruit workers. The Puerto Rican population settled primarily in Boston's South End where IBA (Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción) is now located. But it was a very different neighborhood then; it was very poor.

In the 1980's and 1990's, we had an explosion of other Latino groups arriving in the city: Dominicans, Central Americans, Mexicans and Colombians. There was no single migration movement; there were many. Each group had their own reason for coming and their own experience as a group once they arrived. Economic transformations in the islands fueled the continued arrival of Puerto Ricans and Dominicans. Refugees came to Boston from Cuba and as a result of the wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua. Violence brought Colombians to our city. People had to make very difficult choices





personally, politically and economically. People never want to leave their country. They have a lot of pressure to do so for economic reasons, political reasons or war. People leave their countries for work, to make their lives better, and to provide a better life for their children.

For a longtime the Latino population in Boston was nearly invisible. People did not recognize just how big the Latino population was becoming. But as the population grew, Latinos have challenged Boston's racial and cultural perspective. Boston was used to seeing itself as a black and white city but now here was a new group with its own racial characteristics and its own language and culture.

Latinos are a multi-national and multiracial group. Among Latinos, along with the different nationalities and cultures, you have people who are black, white and native people all coexisting, all merging as part of our Latino families and our Latino communities. This long-term multiracial experience is quite different from the experience in the United States, where a Black/White dichotomy has been the predominant perspective. This polarity has had great consequences in Boston for multiracial groups such as Latinos, who may not easily fit this dichotomy. This was perhaps most evident, for example, during the school desegregation crisis in Boston in the 1970's, when some Puerto Rican children were bussed as "white" while others were bussed as "black" within the same family, without recognition of the multiracial within Latino families. I'm not saying that there is no racism among Latinos - there is - but intermarriage has been more frequent and long standing among Latinos. We have a mixture of races in our families that the United States is only recently beginning to experience in significant numbers.

In the 1960's, the Latino community of Boston was a poor community and more or less everybody was in the same boat. Now we have boats on many different paths. This makes it a lot more challenging to ensure that we're all pulling in the same direction. We now have some Latinos at high levels in government, in social institutions and in universities, but the fact is that the majority of Latinos continue to live in poverty in the Boston area. In Boston, the public schools have the worst outcomes for Latino children whether they are English language learners or not. The health disparities among Latinos in the Boston area make our community very vulnerable. We owe it to ourselves and to our community to keep those in high positions accountable, no matter who they are.

But we cannot forget that Latinos remain very underrepresented in decision-making in government and in social and economic institutions in Boston. I recently collaborated with a study of the representation of Latinos on boards and commissions in Boston and found that it was "minimal" across the board. There have been Latino mayors in Lawrence but not in Boston. It's not a welcoming place politically for Latinos.

When I think about the evolution of this community and the resilience of its people, I think about Maria Sanchez who went to the airport to pick up Puerto Ricans as they arrived, of Tony Molina and Carmen Pola who very early did so much work around the public schools. I also think of IBA as one of the greatest accomplishments of any community in the U.S. to get housing that is collectively owned by the community. It is really admirable.

People ask me, will there be young people willing to struggle in the same way or in different ways? There is no question in my mind that we have those future leaders in our community. I was a college professor for a long time. I love young people and the energy they bring regardless of who they are. I see movement and I see conscience in the young population of our community. Every generation has their own goals, their own struggles and their own accomplishments. We need to make sure that we're leaving behind a generation that is ready for the next set of struggles.

## **Boston is a great place.**

**What I admire most is the RESILIENCY and capacity for struggle across generations and across groups. It's really admirable and I'm hoping it will continue.**

# Alfredo DE JESUS

*"We played hard ball and got **known** for that. Then people began to notice there was a large number of Puerto Ricans in Boston".*

Photo by: Blanca Bonilla

DREAM

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In 1950, I was working on a farm in Puerto Rico where I met a lovely young woman who became my wife and the mother of my children. We moved to Boston in 1951 in search of a better life. It's hard when you move to a place where you don't know anyone.

In the South End, I met Mel King, who was a social worker, and he let us use the basement of a local community center to start the first Puerto Rican baseball league called the "Borinquen Stars." We played with leagues from other towns and we were good! We played hard ball and got known for that. Then people began to notice there was a large number of Puerto Ricans in Boston.

Back then there was a Greek gang, an Irish gang, an Italian gang and a Puerto Rican group. When we walked through Blackstone Park, we had to carry knives because otherwise we would get attacked. We would get beat up and the police wouldn't do anything.



**C**hico Muñoz and I went to the Puerto Rican festival in New York. We talked with Bobby Capo (a Puerto Rican musician) and from there the Boston Puerto Rican Festival was born. El Gallito de Manati was the first artist to perform in the Puerto Rican Festival in Boston.

Ever since I was a child in Puerto Rico, I loved listening to the radio. When I was in high school, my friend and I would report on baseball games. I loved following sports. When I moved to Boston, I was interested in becoming a radio broadcaster and found out about a school called Cambridge Broadcasting. I ended up paying \$2,100 for the classes and graduated with a solid understanding of radio and tv production.

I then went to work on a radio show in Medford with a friend of mine. The listeners liked my voice and asked for me a lot but my friend didn't like that so he fired me. So I went to Lynn where I paid \$60 an hour to rent time on the radio for a show I called, "Ritmos Latinos."

Since I was spending a lot of money on records, I decided to buy a record store for \$1,000 that I named Casa Noel. The store was full of merchandise and one or two good souls would come by each day and I worried about how I would pay my bills and support my family. I have always been a man of faith and I prayed. Then one day when I arrived at the store, I saw a long line of people outside and thought something horrible had happened. That day we made \$800. People had come to buy music and Corin Tellado novels.

When Radio Mundo Hispano opened its doors at the Bradford Hotel in Boston there were four of us: Tony Molina, Bobby Serrano, Hector Rivera and me. We conducted interviews and liked to help Puerto Ricans because we suffered from so much discrimination and still do.

Since we bought Latino food products in New York City, that's where we connected with the Goya company and they bought our first radio ad.

**I became a man and a father in Boston.**  
I found opportunities – and challenges – in this city.

## My Life Story

is an example for the younger generations that you don't need to be a millionaire or have lots of diplomas in order to be successful. Work hard and in earnest, and do good. Read the Bible for five minutes a day and it will help you.



# FRIEDA GARCIA

*"I want my LATINA MOTHERS to know they have overcome so many obstacles in Boston."*

I was born in Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. My mother migrated to New York City when I was eight years-old. I came to Boston in 1965 after I married someone who was going to attend Harvard University. I got my college degree from The New School in New York.

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I thought I would easily be able to get a job at the Welfare Department which is where I wanted to work. It was awful for Latinos to get jobs then. After a few months of trying, I finally got a job at the welfare office.

I got assigned to the Grove Hall office and I was disappointed because I knew that there were Spanish-speaking families in the South End and I was needed there. As I began reading the case records to learn about the families, I discovered the Welfare Department used to hire ex-seminarians when they dropped out of the seminary. These people had no idea what life was like for single mothers who were struggling. The prejudice was unbelievable.

**I** moved to the South End when I got separated and went to work at the Roxbury Multiservice Center. Hubie Jones, who was the director, mentored a lot of people and he mentored me. My first assignment was to identify agencies that were serving the Hispanic community as there were increasing numbers of Spanish-speaking people living in Boston. Hubie had grown up in Harlem and was concerned; he didn't want to see a repeat of the tensions

between Blacks and Hispanics that had existed in Harlem. When I conducted that survey, I found that the best organized agency that kept wonderful records was IBA (Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción).

I made a presentation of my findings to the Multi-Service Center Board. Spanish-speaking children were going to school hungry and not properly dressed for winter. Dennison House had begun to organize and hold meetings with parents at night and that's when the idea of starting another agency to serve Spanish-





speaking families emerged. We decided to put together a proposal to try to get funding through the Model Cities program. We ended up getting \$500,000 to open the Alianza Hispana.

At first, we operated out of a storefront on Blue Hill Ave. We provided social services and education for adults.

Mayor Kevin White was very supportive. He had hired a couple of bilingual people to work for his Administration. At one point, Kevin White told me that he identified a bit with the experience of Hispanic people because he was of Irish descent.

I left my position as the director of Alianza Hispana a year later to begin my journey at MIT in the Community Fellows program which was wonderful. Then I went to work for Governor Frank Sargent.



Somebody asked, "Excuse me, how do I get a park named after me?" I think it had something to do with the fact that I've been in Boston for many years and ended up on about 80 boards and committees. I tell young people to take advantage of the opportunities and join boards.

These days when there is so much negative talk about immigration, we don't stop to think about **what it takes for someone to leave everything that is familiar to them and move to a place where you don't know anyone.** That takes an incredible amount of courage and demonstrates individual strength.

**It should be applauded!**

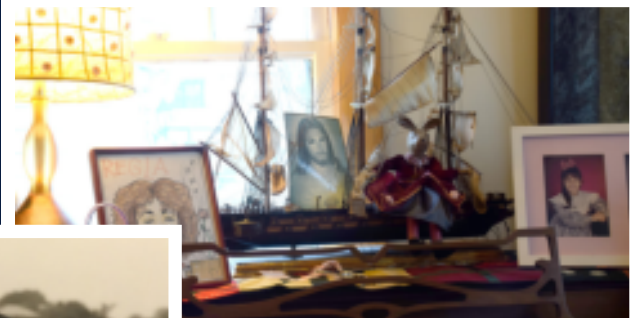


# REGLA GONZALEZ

*"I strongly believe that through your vote you can change the world."*

Photo by: Lisa Link

I was born and raised in Havana, Cuba. My family supported Castro and by the time they realized he was a dictator, it was too late. I was forced to work in the concentration camps.





# MOZART

I left Cuba for Miami in 1971 and went from Miami to Boston where my mother's cousin invited us to live with her. "Come and live with us. Reglita will learn English," she said. So that is what we did. I moved to the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston - across the street from Mozart Park.

It was the hippie era and young couples were making out on the Boston Common. I was horrified. Seeing so much freedom was a bit scary. But I came to this country for the right to express myself. I wanted to become a citizen the minute I set foot in this country and to exercise my right to vote. I immediately immersed myself in the culture, eager to learn the American "way." I also have preserved my heritage. I am proud to be a Cuban American.

During the winter, I missed Havana. Looking at Mozart Park

during the winter storms used to make me teary-eyed. I felt lonely. I missed my country (and still do). But I felt at home in Jamaica Plain as there were lots of Puerto Ricans and Cubans. I enlightened a lot of people who wanted to hear the truth about my country.

I got an administrative job at John Hancock and a month later became a supervisor. I also worked at the Brigham & Women's Hospital as an interpreter. I moved on because I could not stand the way Latinos were treated. We went through the busing era, but we all survived!

I started working at Boston City Hall for Mayor Kevin White's administration in 1982 as a district manager, lending money to Latinos who wanted to develop their own businesses. I respected Kevin White because he had a solid base in Boston. I remember being in Roberto Clemente Park working on community festivals and events

and registering people to vote. I strongly believe that through your vote you can change the world.

In 1983, Ray Flynn was elected Mayor of Boston. **He loved the Latino community and Puerto Ricans were respected.** They filled a variety of positions in city government.

In the late 1980's, I became involved with LULAC and Raising the Cuban flag at Boston City Hall. It is symbolic for us to have our flag raised in the land of freedom. I supported Charlie Baker for Governor. He has tremendous respect for us as a community.

I came to this country because I have always been a lover of the truth. I have always spoken my mind. I am very loyal to my beliefs and that is one thing that has not changed and never will. If I could have changed anything, I would have fought to come to the USA earlier in my life.

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I love the United States of America and am proud of what this country has offered us Latinos.  
Teach your children your language, about your heritage, and how beautiful we all are.

## If I could do it, anyone can.

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# PUERTO RICAN VETERANS Monument Square Association Inc.



**The Puerto Rican Veterans' Monument Association, Inc.**, a 501(c) (3) Massachusetts non-profit corporation, is an organization of US military veterans and their supporters who have come together to honor men and women of Puerto Rico origin, who have served in the United States Armed Forces since the founding of the United States. The PRVMSA is governed by a board of directors, whose president is Antonio Molina, a longtime Boston resident and a Purple Heart, Vietnam Veteran.

**In 1999**, a group of Puerto Rican veterans dedicated a memorial in Boston in honor of the 65th Infantry Regiment comprised solely of Puerto Rican soldiers. This memorial was hailed as the only in the entire continent of the United States to recognize the contribution of Puerto Ricans in all US wars.

**In August 2006**, the Puerto Rican Memorial project won the endorsement of Honorable Mayor Thomas Menino and City Council of Boston.

**On November 19, 2013**, a historical day in the city of Boston, the nation's first monument dedicated to Puerto Rican veterans was finally unveiled.



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*"We wanted to show  
the City of Boston  
who we were."*

I was born in Naranjito, Puerto Rico, a great little town in the center of the island. When I was 11-years old, we moved to Bridgeport, Connecticut and when I graduated from high school in 1962, I joined the Marine Corps. I was sent to Guantanamo Bay during the Cuban Missile Crisis and from there to Okinawa, Japan.

# Antonio Molina

Photo by: Lisa Link

**W**hile I was in Japan, I volunteered to go to Vietnam. Back in 1964 no one knew what Vietnam was all about, so we said, "Yeah, we'll go." I suffered a head injury. A sniper shot me in the head in 1965 and I was sent from Vietnam to Japan, then to California, and finally to Massachusetts for rehabilitation. I was in the hospital for about three months and my mother decided to move to Boston. I guess she wanted to be near me. We moved to Boston's South End in 1965 and we've been there ever since. The South End is where the first Puerto Ricans settled in Boston. My mother and I opened one of the first Puerto Rican restaurants in Boston, called, "Rincon Borinqueño."



Ivan Gonzalez, Chico Muñoz, Alfredo de Jesus and I organized a couple of baseball leagues. One day, Chico Munoz was in Mandela Park and he was picked up by the police. He was thrown into a wagon and taken to the station. Ivan Gonzalez, who had been a union president in Puerto Rico, went down to the station. He was upset and said he was going to burn down the city. So they locked him up and charged him with anarchism. We went to court and of course the case was thrown out. But we decided we needed to get more involved in the community. We wanted to show the City of Boston who we were.

In 1967, we wrote proposals and founded the first Puerto Rican organization in Boston, called the "Association Promoting Constitutional Rights for Spanish-Speakers." We also helped build the first health clinic

in the South End. We created the Puerto Rican Festival and the first one was held in 1967 in the "Parque de los Bones" (where a lot of people used to go to drink). There were just a couple of thousand people at the Festival then, but it was fabulous!

In 1972, there was a riot. For eleven days, a "war" ensued in Boston. I'll never forget when Mayor Kevin White called me and said, "Tony, they're burning down my city." So we gathered people together in the South End and worked with city officials which was not always easy. We were able to come together and demand respect from the police and other government agencies. Back then people didn't even know that Puerto Ricans were U.S. citizens.

Eventually I went to work for Mayor White as Deputy

Commissioner of the Department of Health and Hospitals. While I was there, we hired about 800 Puerto Ricans to work for the City with the help of the "Association Promoting Constitutional Rights for Spanish-Speakers."

People didn't know that Puerto Rican men and women were soldiers who fought for this country. Boston was the first city in the nation to dedicate a memorial to Puerto Rican veterans. It's located in the South End and I am so proud of this achievement.

## I love Boston. It is a great city.

If I could do it all over again, I wouldn't change anything. I will continue to be active. I just signed a contract for another 100 years!



My name is Carmen Pola. I was born in Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico and left the island in 1956. I first went to New York City and a few months later went to live with my aunt in California. That is where I settled. **You arrive in a strange country and even though they say you are an American citizen, you are not treated like one.**

**I** love Boston, but to tell you the truth, I disliked it when I first got here. I arrived at the beginning of school desegregation when they were bringing black and white students together. Notice that I'm saying black and white students because Puerto Rican students were not wanted anywhere.

I lived with my husband's family in Mattapan and didn't feel very comfortable there. The situation for my girls who were in the 3rd and 4th grades was difficult. The neighborhood was nasty and racist. We did not fit in so I went back to California. I told my husband that unless he found me a decent place to live, I would never return to Boston. Finally, my husband found a place in Mission Hill where I still live.

One day, I got a flyer under my door about a meeting at the Catholic church to discuss funding that was coming into the state. I went to the meeting and there were about 100 people, the majority of whom were white. There was one African American, a Puerto Rican young man and myself. **I learned very quickly that we Puerto Ricans were invisible.** A young man named Rafael raised his hand and said, "I would like a piece of this money to teach English to Puerto Ricans in the housing projects." A white man got up and called him a "spic." I didn't know what that was. I never heard that word before.

I had heard the word "greasers" which is what Mexicans were called in California but not "spic". Suddenly, the room got loud. I took off my shoe and hit the table very hard with it. The whole place grew silent for a few minutes and then people walked out.

The schools were unacceptable. I will never forget going to the Farragut School with my children. Because Massachusetts was the first state to make bilingual education the law, I became very interested in the topic. I love politics. I eat politics. I dream politics. I believe that politics is the way to solve people's problems, especially for poor people.

I personally had a positive experience with politicians like Mayor Kevin White and Mayor Ray Flynn, among others. In Kevin White's administration, I worked in a summer program where we brought arts to different neighborhoods. In 1983, Mayor Ray Flynn appointed me the Constituent Services Coordinator.

I was the first Hispanic to run for office in Boston. I did not win, but I opened doors.

I would like to see Hispanics in Boston with a better school system, better jobs, better housing and medical services. I am Hispanic and so proud of it. It's important for all of us to be proud of who we are. As a group, we Hispanics are so rich!

**I want my grandchildren to remember to never look down on anyone or think of making people feel less than they are.**





*"I believe that politics is the  
way to solve people's problems,  
especially for poor people."*

# CARMELA

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Photo by: Lisa Link

# JAIMÉ RODRIGUEZ

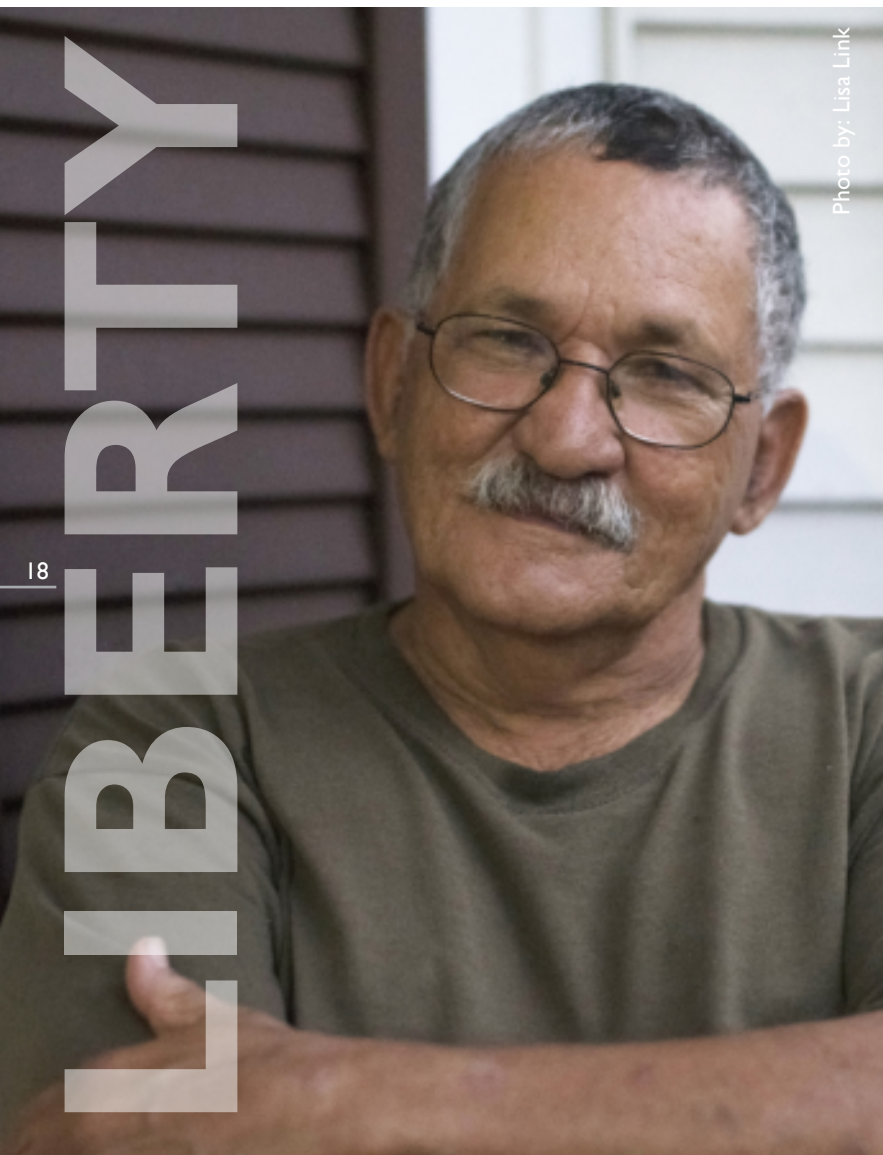


Photo by: Lisa Link

*"It is not necessary to be poor in our society. We must fight against poverty which is our biggest problem."*

I was born and raised in the Guayabo community of Isabela, Puerto Rico, a town they call the **"Garden of the Northeast."** To the north my neighbor was the Atlantic Ocean.

I came to Boston in 1973. It was a fluke because when I left Vietnam, I vowed to never set foot in the United States again. When I was 16, my parents sent me to work in a restaurant in Brooklyn, N.Y. I washed dishes for three years and told myself, "never again." Then I returned to the island, completed high school, graduated from the Universidad Católica de Ponce, enlisted in the Army and went to Vietnam.





**L**ike the vast majority of us who fought in the Vietnam war – red, black, Hispanic, white - the experiences were so horrendous that this country was not a very welcoming place for us after the War.

Back then, there wasn't much talk about PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). Nobody knew what it was. It was like a volcano. I came out of Vietnam angry and full of hate. When I left Vietnam, I returned to the island in search of work. There was none. In 1972, I became president of the Puerto Rican Independence Party. When I went for a job interview in San Juan, they asked me for a reference from the political leader in my town. Since I was not a member of the dominant party, there was no job for me. I told my father I needed to get out of Isabela. So he took out a loan to help me leave.

I located a friend of mine who was getting his master's degree at Harvard University. I arrived in Boston with \$21.00 in my pocket. God knows, I was lucky and got a job at the Cardinal Cushing Center as an Administrator supervising 67 employees. When they offered me the job

and the priest told me they were going to pay me \$10,000, I felt like I had died and gone to heaven.

I quickly found a little apartment in the South End and that was the beginning of my life in Boston. **I became part of a new generation of activists who ran the political, social and cultural scene.** They were the pioneers of this community: Tony Molina, Alfredo de Jesus and Chico Munoz.

I earned a master's degree from the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University. I made good friends and we would meet to eat rice, beans and meat at the San Lorenzo restaurant in the South End.

El Jolgorio began in 1979 so that the Puerto Rican community would have a "traditional" Christmas. At the time, I was president of the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights. People in the U.S. often think that when you come from Puerto Rico or Cuba or Latin America, you leave everything behind. **But when we come, we bring our poetry, our stories, our intelligence and our vulnerability with us.** We used El Jolgoiro to create an authentic Christmas experience with our traditional music and to raise funds to support cultural programs for our communities.

**Our community's struggle continues. My dream for Boston is an empowered community; a community that is not dependent on the "amo" (master).**

**It is not necessary to be poor in our society. We must fight against poverty which is our biggest problem.**

**Young people need to get educated and to face society with their heads held up high.**

**I have lived a good life and hope that my life has meant something here on earth.**





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## **IBA celebra los Pioneros Latinos en Boston**



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# Maria Sanchez

I came to Boston in 1973 to get medical care for my little girl. We stayed with my sister who lived in the Mission Main housing development. Sometimes things don't go the way you plan. In 1950, I had moved to New York City from Puerto Rico and kept my apartment thinking I would return from Boston. It didn't make sense to go back to New York once my daughter started her treatments because they took longer than we expected. So I registered my two children for school and I decided to go to college.

Between school and the treatments, everything fell into place. My husband asked me what I was doing because he didn't think Boston was the best place to raise a family. My daughter was getting better and I told him we couldn't run away. If there's a problem you have to try to fix it and not get stuck.



I moved into an apartment in Mission Main and began organizing a community group called the Mission Main Tenants' Task Force. It still exists. The first lawsuit we filed against the Boston Housing Authority brought us notoriety. What began as a local lawsuit became a federal case called, "Perez vs. Boston Housing Authority." There were two people who put their names on the case – Armando Perez and María Laboy (who has since passed onto a better life). The case went "viral" as they say today and it paid off.





Photo by: Lisa Link

*"If someone doesn't have what you have, and you can help, then help."*

# COMMUNITY

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You had to be there. We were constantly calling city officials to report the abuses and disrespect towards our people by the Boston Housing Authority. During the cold winters there were broken windows, no heat, vandalism, and cars set on fire. Sometimes people would move into the apartments without permission; there was no control over anything. If a good person moved into an empty apartment, it was set on fire.

We also launched a cleanup campaign, which was approved by the Boston Housing Authority, to clean and rent the apartments as there was such a demand for affordable

housing. I sent a letter to the Boston Housing Authority with a list of items we needed for the cleanup: trashcans, paper towels, plastic bags, brooms and shovels. I was thrilled because the big do-for-nothings that worked there didn't dare show up to clean. **We cleaned everywhere and were so happy working together to improve our community.** Thank God there is now a park for children that came out of the struggle. Previously, it had been a disaster!

When I became a probation officer, I always treated people well. I would put myself in the shoes of those who came

to Court. Who goes to court without getting nervous? I treated everyone with the respect they deserved.

My son Jeffrey grew up in Mission Hill and loves the community. When he ran for state representative, the community supported him because they knew him his entire life. I am proud of him.

## God has been very good to me

He has given me what I needed and the ability to express myself. If I had the chance, I'd do it all again, the same way. I have no regrets. I always say, "If someone doesn't have what you have, and you can help, then help."

*"Our youth need to know that by working hard they can achieve the American Dream."*

Photo by: Lisa Link



My name is Alberto Vasallo. I was born in Havana, Cuba and currently live in Boston's West Roxbury neighborhood.

Havana was a fantastic city. It was like a mini-New York with tropical flavor, bustling with activity and excitement 24 hours a day. In Havana, everyone knew each other and we all got along. It was like one big happy family. Cubans are known for being fun-loving and good dancers. Despite the fact that we were poor and my mother washed clothes for a living, we never lacked food.



# ALBERTO VASALLO

By the time I was 24 years old, Havana was no longer like it had been in my childhood. We were forced to escape in search of freedom. But my mother and I were caught and became political prisoners. The second time I escaped in a boat and made it to Key West where I was welcomed as a refugee.

For me, and many who knew her, my mother was a saint. She always shared whatever she had - a piece of bread or a meal. She often gave her food to someone else in need. I learned a lot by her example.

My brother was living in the Boston area and I wanted to be with him, so I ended up coming here in 1965. I lived in Cambridge, a city I grew to love. I found work in a textile factory and I knew it would be temporary; I had other talents and wanted to better myself. Whenever there were opportunities for advancement, I pursued them. I worked as a bank teller. After that, I began

selling gold jewelry, wigs, pots and pans, just about anything! I also worked as a summer program coordinator at SNAP, a community organization in Boston's South End.

In East Cambridge, I experienced discrimination by some of my neighbors, but I succeeded in changing many of my neighbors' attitudes. Every so often I would find my car antenna broken or flat tires and I would remain peaceful, like Mahatma Gandhi. My family wanted to explode, but I always stayed calm. One day after a snowstorm, I went out to shovel the snow in front of my house and an elderly couple came out with their little shovels to clear the snow in front of their house. I told them to take it easy, that I would shovel the snow for them. Meanwhile, the neighbors were staring out their windows. The couple wanted to pay me and I refused. They invited me to have coffee. That day, I went home with a great sense of

satisfaction because I knew that things would change. Sure enough, the next day the neighbors said "Good morning, Alberto."

**E**I Mundo newspaper began as a project with a friend in 1972. It was my idea. Alfredo de Jesus and Tony Molina had radio programs but there was no newspaper. Necessity drives one to do things, although I never thought I would make a living at it. I had the desire to help the community because I was born in a home where I witnessed humility; where there was giving without the expectation of receiving. I never imagined I would benefit from El Mundo. Whose objectives are to champion the Hispanic community, preserve our culture and our language, and set an example. **Our youth need to know that by working hard they can achieve the American dream.**

**My wish for Boston is to see its diversity represented in the local government.**

**I have not done enough and would like to do more. In this county, the sky is the limit.**





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