

Resisting Anglicization: Irish and Puerto Rican Intersections in New York in the Twentieth
Century

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ABSTRACT

Eileen Anderson: Resisting Anglicization: Irish and Puerto Rican Intersections in New York
in the Twentieth Century
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When the United States entered into the conflicts in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippine Islands in the late nineteenth century, it was aligning itself politically with England, against Spain. The resulting ideological shift transformed aspects of the social structure and culture as well. The accompanying homogenization of identity and the new imperialistic role was problematic for many non-Anglo communities; however, for the Irish (Catholic)-Americans the reconfiguration would be more serious. They understood the liberation movements on these islands in the context of their own fight for independence. Many had come to the Americas to escape Anglo hegemony and believed that an anglicized country would hinder their ability to negotiate a place in the U.S power structure. After the invasion of Puerto Rico they felt that this resurgence of kinship was used to justify U.S. imperialism. They were strongly opposed to the U.S. becoming a colonizing nation due to their long history as a British colony. However, despite strong opposition from many communities, Puerto Rico became part of the United States and was not granted autonomy like Cuba. In 1917 the Jones Act (which granted U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans) was passed, and this set the stage for migration from the island to U.S. cities

Beginning in the nineteen thirties Puerto Ricans began migrating to the United States in large numbers. The large majority came to New York, which also had a large Irish population. The forced coexistence in these cities resulted in another

transformation of the dynamics of the relationship. The idea of being anti-Anglo would not be a strong enough factor to inspire unity on a consistent basis as the two communities struggled to meet their personal needs on a daily basis. These interactions, which continue throughout the second half of the twentieth century, are depicted in the literary output of both communities.

DEDICATION

To my family

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my directors who helped and guided me through the whole process.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	ix
INTRODUCTION	1
Historical Background: The Shared Dynamics of Colonization	2
Intersections	7
The Origins of the Diaspora	8
New York as the Contact Zone	13
An Overview of the Work	15
Chapter	
I. AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW TO THE PROPAGANDA: THE IRISH-AMERICAN PRESS AND THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR.....	20
The Threat of an Anglo-American Alliance	24
The Invasion of Puerto Rico	28
Reactions to the New Imperialism	35
Conclusion	41
II. DISCOVERING AMERICA IN NEW YORK	43
World War I, The Jones Shafroth Act, and the Easter Uprising	45
Irish and Puerto Rican Nationalism in New York	51
New York Politics	55
William Carlos Williams	61
Eugene O'Neill	66

Conclusion	71
III. LIFE WRITING AND THE INVENTION OF COMMUNITY	73
The Creation of the “Other”: Piri Thomas and Frank McCourt	76
Comparative Experiences: Edward Rivera and Judith Ortiz Cofer	86
Judith Ortiz Cofer	92
Conclusion	97
IV. THIS NEIGHBORHOOD IS MY HOME: DEPICTING THE SHARED SPACES OF THE CITY	99
The Nuyorican Movement—A Cultural Space	102
The Irish are Exiled to the Suburbs	108
Conclusion	123
V. IRISH-RICANS: TRANSCULTURATION AND HYBRIDITY	126
Miguel Piñero	127
Jimmy Breslin	134
Edgardo Vega Yunque	138
Conclusión	149
VI. CONCLUSIONS	151
WORKS CITED	159

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration

Spanish- American War Cartoon I	30
Spanish-American War Cartoon II	39
Spanish-American Cartoon III	40
Piraguero	124
Nuyorican Poets Café	125
Loisaida	125

Introduction

In 1849 Manuel Alonso¹, who is considered to be one of the first noteworthy writers in Puerto Rico, published *El Gíbaro*.² His stated intentions for the work were to (pay homage to his country) “en obsequio de mi país”. His country, of course, was Puerto Rico, which was one of the last remaining colonies of the Spanish Empire. The narrative pays homage to the Puerto Rican country farmers and their customs. It is a defense of the Island and its peoples against the persuasive negative stereotypes that the Spaniards and other Europeans had about them. In the beginning of the work, the narrator is in Barcelona where he confronts an Englishman who has just come back from the Island and is complaining about the living conditions. As the Englishman complains about the poor sanitation and other hardships he faced, the narrator agrees that life is difficult on the Island, but as a defense he points out that the suffering of the Irish is even more severe:

Dice usted muy bien ésa es una privación terrible, más valiera no tener una patata para entretener el hambre, como dicen que no tienen los irlandeses del país eminentemente civilizado que llaman Inglaterra” (10). (You say it’s a terrible deprivation; however, they say the Irish, who are from a country so eminently civilized as England, do not even have a potato to satisfy their hunger).

Alonso refers to the starvation of many Irish during these years (1845-1849) which occurred because of a potato (the most important crop) blight and the refusal of the English to provide

¹ Alonso was born in 1822 and died 1889.

² Now more commonly spelled Jíbaro

them with food. Alonso points out that Spain and England treated the people in the colonies unfairly, and this was the true cause of their sufferings. By comparing Ireland to Puerto Rico, he links the lack of infrastructure and poor living conditions stem to their long history of colonial rule. It is not surprising that a writer who was interested in promoting Puerto Rican cultural identity compares the Puerto Rican situation to that of the Irish. In highlighting the similarities of the Islands who are fighting for independence in the work that is considered the first work of Puerto Rican literature, he acknowledges that their struggles under colonial rule have been similar and numerous moments of contact and overlap among peoples from both islands have occurred.

Alonso was one of the first authors to recognize the connection and similar dynamics of the two Islands, but he is not the last. This shared history of colonialism and the movement of people are reflected in a great deal of Puerto Rican and Irish literature, particularly from those authors who belong to the respective diasporic communities. Even though part of the Ireland has been given sovereignty, the North still exists as part of the British Empire and as Agustín Lao-Montes notes: “Northern Ireland and Puerto Rico have had similar fates and are viewed only as colonial anomalies in a post colonial world” whereas they “should be analyzed as contemporary expressions of colonialism that as such are key to understanding the particular avatars of the colonality of power in late modernity”(44).

Historical Background: The Shared Dynamics of Colonization:

The main goals of colonialism in Ireland and Puerto Rico were to expand the territory, maintain military superiority and increase the wealth of the colonizing nation. The expansion of political, religious and cultural ideas became a necessary means of obtaining these goals. The oppression (sometimes extermination) of people and the suppression of

their traditions and way of life are inevitable consequences of the invasion of a dominant power. These policies of expansion and oppression have shaped all issues of identity, autonomy, language, and culture on the islands. As Frantz Fanon points out cultural dominance is necessary for preserving colonial power: “Colonialism is not satisfied merely with hiding a people in its grips and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts disfigures and destroys it” (Fanon 154). In both countries, the colonizing nations suppressed indigenous languages, set up educational systems that excluded the majority of people from learning, and exposed those who were “fortunate” enough to attend school to a version of history that denied their own cultures and traditions.

Puerto Rico has never been completely sovereign nation. It passed directly from being a colony of Spain to being dominated by the United States. For Spain, Puerto Rico existed for its financial gain, but the reasons for U.S. involvement were more complex. As political strategists in the administrations of Presidents Cleveland and McKinley studied the logistics of a war against Spain they realized that establishing military bases in the Caribbean would help maintain their ability to hold on to naval superiority and launch a response to possible future European aggression more quickly. In *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives*, Carmen Whalen quotes an article that appeared in the *New York Times* in July of 1898 which reveals the idea that the U.S. needed to control the Island despite claiming that it took control because the Puerto Ricans were incapable of governing themselves: “There can be no question to perplex the any reasonable mind about the wisdom of taking possession of the Island of Puerto Rico and keeping it for all time.” It would provide “a commanding position between the two continents” (5). In the 1940’s, the U.S.

Navy expropriated land on Vieques (one of the smaller islands off the coast of Puerto Rico) and turned it into a testing ground for weapons and military operations.

The English first began to become involved in Irish life in the twelfth century when an Irish nobleman, Dermot MacMurrough, went to England to find allies in his fight against a rival clan. He enlisted the help of a warrior called Strongbow who gathered troops to fight for MacMurrough. After MacMurrough's death, he became King of Leinster. This fighting among the noblemen continues for hundreds of years until the English began to consolidate their power. Their need to hold on to control Ireland was similarly strategic. They realized the need to control the Island after an important battle between France and England was fought off the Southern coast of Ireland in 1689. France was providing arms to the Irish rebels for an insurrection and the British Navy came to intervene. After the fierce battle ended, the English spent a great deal of time and money fortifying the Irish ports in south. The Cork and Bere Island ports were utilized by the British during World War I and remained under British control until 1938 when Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain agreed to cede control to the new Irish Prime Minister, Eamon de Valera.

Many of the ways that United States has tried to deal with charges of imperialism and colonialism in Puerto Rico are modifications of the manipulations that England had utilized in Ireland for hundreds of years to placate rebellious factions without losing power. The two imperial nations have invented new terms to justify the relation between the colonizers and colonized and have changed the structure of power in appearance only by granting limited autonomy to the islands. For instance, in 1798 the Irish rebelled against the English and fought for more political and economic control. They were struggling against a system which granted only limited freedoms, yet required financial support for the British

government. Parliamentary measures were being contested and many were fighting for independence. The rebellion was short-lived but the result was that the Act of Union was passed in 1800. With this act, National parliaments were abolished and a new country known as The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (which consisted of England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland) was formed. It meant that the Irish, Scottish and Welsh government representatives could not pass laws on their own. England was granting itself even more power, yet, they were taking away Ireland's colonial status by assimilating it into Great Britain — whether the Irish wanted to or not. According to Declan Kiberd, the Act of Union was to some “a benign offer of membership in one of the greatest organizations in human history to others it was the most insidious of all oppressive tactics” and it created “both bitterness and tolerances of unusual refinement”(251). After the Act was passed, emigration increased.

In 1897, after suffering the affects of the liberation of many of the its American colonies, the Spanish granted more control to their Caribbean colonies and established the *Carta Autonómica* in Puerto Rico which gave the Island representation in the Spanish government. However, in 1898, the United States took possession of Puerto Rico and the Philipines after the Spanish-American War. There was a great deal of outcry in the U.S. and in Puerto Rico; however, despite protests, the Foraker Act was drafted in 1900. This act, which was based on British Commonwealth power structures, utilized the same tactic of changing the legal status of Puerto Rico while still retaining power. In 1917, the Jones-Shafroth Act was passed which amended certain aspects of the Foraker Act and granted citizenship to Islanders. Many of the new laws mimicked those of the states, tariffs were abolished, but full legal representation was still not guaranteed. A governor (for whom they

were not allowed to vote) was appointed by the United States Congress and had no power in Congress. The U.S. government achieved, a hundred years, later what the English had in Ireland. In these two constructs the Irish and the Puerto Ricans were given an “Imperial passport” but with limited privileges. They were citizens of the two empires but second class ones, at best. These “privileges” were inadequate compensation for what had been taken away.

These incorporations incensed many nationalist leaders in Ireland and Puerto Rico, who would only be satisfied with complete political autonomy and legislative independence. In Ireland various rebellions were staged, the most important one being taking place on Easter of 1916. The guerilla campaign of murdering civilians (which later transformed into the Irish Republican Army) and civil disobedience began around 1918 as a result of watching the assassinations of the leaders of the Easter Uprising. After these events, the South of Ireland obtained limited home rule in 1922 and was deemed a Free State until it became a republic in 1948. It was also significant because it was the first country in the Empire to succeed.

This same year Puerto Ricans were able to vote for their own governor for the first time. The Island became a Free Associated State (*Estado Libre Asociado*) in 1952. Soon afterward a bloody campaign, which included an attack on congress where a Senator was wounded,³ was also waged and many people had the same attitude toward the neo-colonial relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico as those who wanted complete sovereignty in Ireland. According to Puerto Rican scholars Frances Negrón-Muntaner and Ramón Grosfoguel, this relationship is unsatisfactory for many reasons; primarily because it keeps Puerto Ricans dependant and deprives them of looking at sovereignty as a final goal. It also

³ Although not on the same scale as that waged by the Irish guerillas

fabricates an “illusory economy” which hides the fact that Puerto Rico hasn’t really gained any significant autonomy (12). The freedoms the island has been granted are merely superficial and as Kiberd mentions in the English/Irish context the power structure creates “enforced intimacies” which oblige the nations to stay dependant politically and economically. Puerto Rico and Ireland are not alone in the sharing these dynamics. As Fredric Jameson notes, “What any oppressed group has most vitally in common is just the shared fact of their oppression.” However, the uniqueness of their relationship lies in the numerous encounters –on and off the islands— that have resulted from these historical events.

Intersections:

The first encounters between people from the two communities occurred in the beginning of the sixteenth century when some Irish noblemen went to Spain to escape persecution by the English. Many joined the Spanish forces and frequently defended Spain in its colonial campaign in the Caribbean and other parts of the Americas. One such example, was Alejandro O’Reilly, who was born in Ireland and became governor of the Louisiana territory (which included the Caribbean islands), in 1769. Also, Tomás O’ Daly, who was O’Reilly’s protégé, supervised the refortification of *El Morro* fortress (which still stands in San Juan today) to defend Spanish interests on the Island. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the English were attempting to exterminate and exile Irish-Catholics from Ireland. Some Irish were settled by the English government in Puerto Rico (which was under Spanish rule) and throughout the Caribbean where they often worked as indentured servants or domestic workers. Spain encouraged the migration to its colonies because they felt that these Catholics would be loyal to the Spanish monarchy (due to the strong religious

and historical ties of both people). In most cases, the Spanish were correct in their assumption, and the Caribbean-Irish fought against the English colonizers as rebellions broke out among the indigenous populations, and the European wars (between the Dutch French and English) were brought to the colonies. Later, more Irish immigrated to Puerto Rico during the potatoes blights of the 1840's and today, surnames such as O'Neill, Murphy, and Sullivan exist on the island as part of this legacy.

The Origins of the Diaspora:

Part of the colonial legacy is the (forced and voluntary) exile of the colonized peoples. The Irish and Puerto Ricans have endured the massive migration of an enormous percentage of their citizens. For both communities, emigration from their respective Islands has been necessary for a variety of economic and political reasons. Puerto Ricans merchants came to conduct illegal trade (under Spanish law it was illegal to do business with anyone but Spain) along the Eastern seaboard. After they became a U.S. colony, programs such as Operation Bootstrap⁴ (Operación manos a la obra) were established. This program, which was aimed promoting the industrialization, encouraged the emigration of thousands workers to the U.S. The Irish began coming to the U.S. before the country established its independence, but the largest influx was due a series of crop failures in the eighteen forties and fifties which brought on a widespread famine. During these years, an estimated 1.5 million Irish entered the United States and emigration “continued to flow steadily through the nineteenth century and occasionally experienced large bursts in the twentieth” (Miller 137).

For each community the U.S. has been the most popular destination. The majority of Puerto Ricans have stayed within the borders of the U.S. mainland— settling in Chicago; Philadelphia; Boston; New Jersey; Lorain, Ohio; Tampa, Florida; Bridgeport, Connecticut;

⁴ It began in 1948.

and New York. In 1900, 5,000 Puerto Rican field workers were brought to Hawaii to help on the sugar cane plantations (López in Whalen 44). The Irish diaspora is even more widespread. There are large populations in Australia, Canada, England, and in several U.S. cities. Irish immigrants were also present in the southern states and their contributions to Southern music are undeniable. Recently, organizations such as the *Society for Irish Latin American Studies*⁵, has been exploring the Irish presence in the Caribbean and in Latin America.

Recent census data gives insight into the significance of the Irish and Puerto Rican presence in the U.S. “By the 2000 census, 3,406,178 Puerto Ricans resided in the United States and 3, 623,392 resided in Puerto Rico”(Whalen 1). The numbers which relate to Irish ancestry are even more surprising. 34.5 million U.S. citizens claim Irish ancestry. “This number is almost nine times the population of Ireland itself (4.1 million)”(<http://www.census.gov/>). Also, “by 1980, more than 10 million people in the United States claimed purely Irish ancestry and more than 40 million claimed to be predominantly Irish (Bayor Meagher 574). These figures demonstrate not only the scope of the migrations but also the significance of the ethnic identity in diasporic communities — despite the external pressures of the assimilation and conformity.

Identity on a personal and communal level is constantly being challenged in the diaspora and this narrative of defining and re-defining “national” identity and ethnicity is still being written today in different ways among the generations. Since both communities have a long history of displacement even the ways they refer to themselves have been altered. Since the 1960’s, hyphenate identity has become an integral part of self-identification in the U.S.

⁵ Their website for *SILAS* is <http://www.irlandeses.org/>.

This has not always been the case and the term Irish American has been written with and without the hyphen depending on the context. Also, some scholars, such as Lawrence McCaffrey, make the distinction between Irish –Americans and Irish (Catholic)-Americans in order to highlight this particular difference. For the Puerto Ricans the hyphen has posed its own particular challenge. Since they are U.S. citizens, “U.S.-Puerto Rican” or “Puerto Rican-American” seem unwieldy and even redundant. Jorge Duany, one of the most well-known scholars in Puerto Rican studies, refers to the residents of the continental U.S. as “Puerto Ricans on the mainland” and “Juan Flores⁶ uses Puerto Ricans in the United States”. “Nuyoricans”, which has been used to refer to all Puerto Ricans who live away from the island (not just in New York), is a term invented to disparage those who left and have been influenced by U.S. culture. Since this study focuses on the generations of Puerto Ricans in New York, the term “New York Puerto Ricans” is utilized. The same holds true for the Irish whom I refer to simply as “New York Irish” which eliminates the hyphen debate and specifies the subject matter.

The definition of “community” in this work stems from Benedict Anderson’s ideas that “communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined”(6). The parameters of communities that the authors depict are loosely delineated simply by a feeling of being Irish or Puerto Rican (or both) by family connections. Obvious cultural markers such as common foods, drinks, language, or music cause these feelings of belonging, and nostalgia for the Islands often “connects” people to each other. These connections are part of the process of creation (or imagination); however, community is not always clearly defined by birthplace or even longing to return to Ireland or Puerto Rico. Many of the authors have a vague connection which is related to Said’s idea of

⁶ professor of Africana, Puerto Rican/Latino Studies at Hunter College.

“affiliation.” Some authors write about their sense of exile, but others have conformed (and even thrived) to life away from their Islands while still recognizing the importance of being part of it. This often puts them at odds with those who have stayed on the island and causes conflict. The conflict often causes individuals to feel alienated on many levels:

The concept of diaspora offers a critique of discourses of fixed origin, while taking account of a homing desire which is not the same thing as a desire for a ‘homeland.’ The distinction is important, not least because not all diaporas sustain an ideology of ‘return.’ (Brah 181)

The narratives of many of the contemporary authors display ambivalence about returning to Ireland or Puerto Rico, but not about their “Puertorricanness” or “Irishness.” In many cases, they are part of both places and their feeling of community is derived from how they imagine and recreate their everyday lived experiences.

By comparing depictions of the Irish and Puerto Rican experiences of imagining their communities, the significance of their relationship becomes apparent. Diasporic communities are often compared to the hegemonic culture, but rarely to others who exist in similar circumstances:

What this means is that where several diaspora intersect— African, Jewish, Irish, South Asian, and so on — it becomes necessary to examine how these groups are similarly or differently constructed *vis-à-vis* one another. Such relational positioning will, in part, be structured with reference to the main dominant group. But there are aspects of the relationship between the diasporic trajectories that are irreducible to mediation via metropolitan discourse. (Brah 189)

Examining the interactions of New York Puerto Ricans and Irish leads to a more complete understanding of how identity is formed and community is constructed in the diaspora. One

of the most important ways communities are defined is by the negative depiction of the Puerto Rican/Irish “Other.” The antagonism between the groups becomes a point of comparison. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha asks the question:

How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable? (2).

Brah also points out clashes are not always based on cultural difference and are more often related to these other circumstances:

The emphasis on ‘culture clash’ disavows the possibility of that cultural encounters will invariably entail conflict. Conflict may or may not ensue and, instead, cultural symbiosis, improvisation, and innovation may emerge as a far more probable scenario. Indeed even cultural synthesis and transformation. Moreover, conflict is often a sign of the power relations underpinning cultural hierarchies rather than of ‘cultural clash’(41).

There are many examples of these conflicts in the works as the characters compete for jobs and power.

However, positive connections between the communities often occur, as well. As Juan Flores notes, being in the United States has of many Puerto Ricans “The cliché of Puerto Ricans as a ‘bridge between cultures ’was coined in a reactionary assimilationist spirit, to suggest the convenient marriage of that age—old mythical pair, Anglo-Saxon materialism and Latin spirituality”. Puerto Ricans have “generate[d] new linkages new linkages” with other Spanish speaking peoples, African Americans and “working class Americans of Italian, Irish and other European descent” (13-14). Certainly, the many manifestations of Irish nationalism in the U.S. have influenced Puerto Rican ideas about its own sovereignty. Afterall, “Irish American nationalism had become the standard by which all

other subversive nationalisms in the United States were to be judged”(Guterl 332). Much of the cultural material that has been produced by their national and transnational communities has been shaped by these issues.

New York as the Contact Zone:

Although it is not the only “contact zone,”⁷ New York is the most significant point of intersection of the two diasporic communities for many reasons. Historically, it was political, economic, and cultural center for exiles from many countries. As mentioned previously, Puerto Rican migrants settled in many destinations, however, the heaviest concentration was always in New York. “After World War I most Puerto Ricans settled in New York City, and by 1940, 88 percent of Puerto Ricans lived there” (Whalen 2). It was also significant for the Irish:

...[Irish] migration to America became so pervasive, so integral to Irish life, that one was as likely to meet one’s brother, best friend, and old sweetheart on the streets of Manhattan or Brooklyn as in Rineen Bán [a small Irish village]...Irish immigrants were more likely to wind up in New York than anywhere else in America. (Bayor 1)

These generations of immigrants became an important factor in many New York cultural and political institutions. They shaped New York history and were transformed by all the different literary, social, and cultural movements that were occurring in the city:

There was, as historians have suggested, a unique Emersonian –or postcolonial-quality to the civic culture of New York. In the aftermath of the Great War, with American innocence spoiled and "old stock" patricians

⁷ **Mary Louise Pratt:** *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London; New York : Routledge, 1992. She defines them as “Social spaces where disparate cultures meet class and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination- like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today.”

increasingly on the defensive, the battle waged in the 1910s—the battle of "the two generations" —seemed decided in favor of the younger radicals. As the "tide" of immigrants washed ashore at Ellis Island, the younger generation of American radicals, many of them children of immigrants or immigrants themselves, found their positions strengthened by sheer numbers, by the infusion of Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants into Jersey City and New York City. Moreover, Manhattan was never just the social and political stronghold of the Irish, it was also the home of socialism, communism, and zionism. (Guterl 335)

Both Irish and Puerto Ricans played important roles in the Socialist and Communist movements.

The revolutionary movements of both Islands were connected to New York from their inception. By the 1890's, there was a significant community (although not nearly as large as the Irish population) of Puerto Rican exiles in the City:

There were many reasons why New York City would indeed attract the bulk of the migrant flow. As the nation's financial and industrial hub, the port of the city had traditionally been the site of migrant disembarkation. Since before the turn of the twentieth century, the city served as a focal point for early migrants. Puerto Ricans and Cubans who engaged in liberation struggles found New York to be an excellent haven for expatriation. The exile community included banished Latin Americans as well as individuals from the Hispanic Caribbean. (Korrol 2)

Some of the more famous exiles were Ramon Emeterio Betances and Segundo Ruiz Belvis. They had been persecuted by the Spanish in Puerto Rico and forced into exile. In 1892, another famous *revolucionario*, Francisco Gonzalo (Pachín) Marin, became involved in the Cuban campaign for liberation from Spain. He went to the New York to enlist in the fight in Cuba and met Jose Martí who was personally recruiting volunteers. At this time many

Cubans and Puerto Ricans believed in an Antillean Alliance which united the two Islands in their fight against their colonizer. The city continued to be a meeting place for exiles/immigrants and center for “radical” ideas because of its diversity.

An overview of the work:

The historical dynamics that are portrayed reveal the ways which Puerto Ricans and Irish in New York view each other. By including historical context, I hope to partially explain the impact that certain U.S., Irish, and Puerto Rican political and social movements had on identity issues for those who were part of diasporic communities. Both Puerto Ricans and Irish faced discrimination in the U.S. (which was one of the factors that held them together as a community). The New York Puerto Ricans were struggling with U.S. imperialism inside the U.S. Thus, asserting their culture as distinct from U.S./Anglo culture was also a way of making a political and social statement. The English had taken away much of the Irish land and power, and many Irish saw the U.S. as a place to escape from Anglo hegemony.

Chapter 1 focuses on the politics of the Spanish-American War and the ways in which the Irish press differed from the mainstream press in its support for the Puerto Rican people. For instance, Randolph Heart and Joseph Pulitzer, the editors of *New York Journal* and *New York World*, often printed exaggerated reports of Cuban sufferings, and inspired their reporters to “create” news to increase sales. Before the war, both newspapers published anti-Spanish propaganda in an effort to encourage sympathy for the Puerto Ricans and Cubans. Their goal was to galvanize the U.S. government to send troops to fight Spain in order create more conflict and sell more newspapers. However, these newspapers did not dominant all the discourse on the War. The syndicated newspaper columns of Finley Peter Dunne and the

New York Irish press demonstrate how these Irish reacted to U.S. intervention to a rebellion against a European colonizer. The articles in *The Irish World and American Industrial Liberator* and the *Irish-American* newspaper show that because of their own colonial background they understood the significance of the U.S. becoming a colonizing nation.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the ways in which the anti-“ethnic” rhetoric of World War I, the 1916 Easter Uprising in Ireland, and the passing of the Jones-Shafroth Act (which granted U.S. citizenship to the Puerto Rican people) increased nationalist sentiments in Puerto Rican and Irish communities in New York. Irish and Puerto Rican activists and writers were influenced by these events. O’Neill’s Irish background and Williams’ Puerto Rican heritage helped them to counteract this dominant rhetoric and led them to explore alternative views of “Americanness.” I also examine works by Puerto Rican activists: Bernardo Vega, Jesús Colón, and Joaquín Colón Lopez, who came to the U.S. in the beginning of the twentieth century to fight for the rights of workers and support Puerto Rican independence from the U.S. Their experiences on the Island helped them understand the struggle for unionization and the fight against colonialism as part of a worldwide movement with New York as an important center for such activities.

Chapter 3 illustrates the connections between life writing and community building. In these stories by Frank McCourt, Piri Thomas, Ed Rivera, and Judith Ortiz Cofer there is a struggle to construct a feeling of belonging in the diaspora. Their stories of growing up create unity by showing the important manifestations of culture in the diaspora. They write about music, food and their everyday experiences in order to demonstrate the importance of these cultural markers in the formation of community. However, they also create their

communities by depicting the ways in which Irish or Puerto Rican characters become the “Other.” This negative delineation is an intrinsic part of belonging.

In chapter 4, space becomes the point of comparison for the poetry and novels written in the sixties and seventies. I examine the way New York Irish and Puerto Rican writers portray the spaces of the city and demonstrate the significance of the relationship between community and place. In many of these neighborhoods poverty and injustice is prevalent, yet the depictions are generally affirmations of the strengths of community affiliations. The poetry of Terence Winch and Pedro Pietri reflects on the importance of spaces for these diasporic people. For Pietri and this first generation of “Nuyoricans,” the Lower Eastside becomes an important center and they begin to identify this small part of New York as their home. For John Montague, Dennis Smith, and Alice McDermott, their identity is related to the New York neighborhoods, and as they leave they feel less connected to their community. For both Puerto Rican and Irish authors, the *barrios* represent positive source of identity, and as they converge the ideas home, space and identity are challenged.

In the last chapter, hybrid identity and Fernando Ortiz’s concept of transculturation are explored through the Irish-Rican characters in Edgardo Vega Yunque’s, Jimmy Breslin’s, and Miguel Piñero’s works. These protagonists are able to “fit in” with both communities because of their exposure to Irish and Puerto Rican culture. Vega Yunque’s characters come from Irish and Puerto Rican parents and are proud of their ancestry. Breslin’s grim view of New York in the late nineteen seventies features stereotypical depictions of Italian mobsters, corrupt politicians, and inept Irish police officers. His protagonist is drug-dealing Puerto Rican with an alcoholic Irish great- grandfather whose ruthlessness increases after he comes

to New York. Miguel Piñero's Irish character is also a drug addict who is capable of cultural "passing."

Puerto Rican and Irish literature in New York has a long rich history, and there are several anthologies that focus on the more well-known works.⁸ The essays, novels, poetry and plays in this work. were chosen because the depiction of the encounters of Irish and Puerto Ricans is the principle focus. Despite their colonial history, the Irish and Puerto Ricans respond to each other's presence on many different levels. When they come together in the city spaces they fight, form alliances, compete for jobs and city resources, and their customs and community awareness are transformed

The authors of the plays, novels, articles, and short stories analyzed are part of different social and economic classes. Most, but not all, of the writers were raised in Catholic families (which is not surprising since it is the predominant faith on both Islands) and the church and parochial schools have become a place of convergence for these two groups. Many of the important voices of New York Puerto Rican and Irish literature are

⁸Roberto Santiago. *Boricuas: Influential Puerto Rican Writings- An Anthology*. Random House: New York, 1995.

Nuestro New York: An Anthology of Puerto Rican Plays. Ed. John V. Antush. New York: Signet, 1994.

Aloud: Voices from the Nuyorican Poets Cafe. Ed. Miguel Algarín and Bob Holman. New York: Henry Holt, 1994.

Growing Up Puerto Rican: An Anthology. Ed. Joy L. De Jesús. New York: William Morrow, 1997.

There are also several Latino literature anthologies which include Puerto Rican literature including: *Growing Up Latino: Memoirs and Stories*. Eds. Harold Aguenbaum and Ilan Stavans. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993.

Private Histories: The Writing of Irish Americans, 1900-1935. Ed. Ron Ebest. Notre Dame ID: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005

Charles Fanning. *The Irish Voice in America: Irish-American Fiction from the 1760's to the 1980's*. Lexington KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1990.

Reading Irish-American Fiction: The Hyphenate Self. Ed. Margaret Hallissy. New York: MacMillan, 2006

female⁹, yet because of the strict focus of the work, only the works of Judith Ortiz Cofer and Alice McDermott are included in this work. They stand out because they provide concrete examples of the interactions explored.

⁹ Julia de Burgos, Esmeralda Santiago, Nicolasa Mohr, Mary Gordon and Mary McCarthy are some of the most well-known.

An Alternative View to the Propaganda: The Irish-American Press and the Spanish-American War

Introduction:

The New York press shaped the course of events related to the Spanish-American War. The fierce competition for readers which led Randolph Heart and Joseph Pulitzer, the editors of *New York Journal* and *New York World*, to print exaggerated reports of Cuban sufferings, and inspired their reporters to “create” news to increase sales has been well-documented. Before the war, both newspapers published anti-Spanish propaganda in an effort to encourage sympathy for the Puerto Ricans and Cubans and galvanize the U.S. government to send troops to fight Spain in order create more conflict and sell more newspapers. During the fighting, journalists such as Sylvester Henry Scovel, Stephen Crane, and Richard Harding Davis reported on the “heroic” efforts of U.S. Generals and Roosevelt’s Rough Riders and presented the War as part of an obligation to promote U.S. “values” even outside its borders. These newspapers played a significant role in shaping mainstream public opinion on U.S. involvement and imperialism in Puerto Rico and the Philippines; however, they did not dominant all the discourse on the War. One significant example of alternative opinions on War-related issues and U.S. imperialism can be found in the New York Irish press and in the syndicated newspaper columns of Finley Peter Dunne.

In the late eighteen hundreds, many new Irish immigrants were still arriving in the U.S., and by early 1900, there was a significant Irish population which amounted to nearly five million people (Miller 493). The two most influential Irish newspapers in New York

were *The Irish World and American Industrial Liberator* and *The Irish-American*. These two newspapers were also competing for readers and they reached many readers outside New York as well. *The Irish World* was run by Patrick Ford from 1870-1913 and was “the most influential radical paper in America and possibly even in Ireland” (O’Grady 75). By the eighteen seventies, *The World* was more widely read than *The Irish-American* (which had previously been the most popular paper in the Irish communities) and “by the eighteen nineties and early twentieth century the circulation was regularly listed at 125,000” (Rodechko 525). Patrick Meehan was in charge of *The Irish-American* from 1857-1906. Both editors believed that Ireland should be liberated from England, but they often differed on the methods of achieving liberation and connected themselves with different causes in the U.S. Ford supported the U.S. labor movements and believed that social mobility in the U.S. would empower U.S. Irish to fight England while Meehan was a Catholic who tried to reconcile Catholic doctrine with Irish freedom movements. In their newspapers both supported the idea that aligned Irish identity with the Catholic Church (although Patrick Ford did have some disagreements with Church leaders in New York) and reported extensively on Church events. They were primarily concerned with news related to Ireland, but also reflected U.S. Irish concerns about the consequences of a war with Spain, and their sympathy for the Caribbean and Philippine Islands is apparent.

Finley Peter Dunne was one of the most influential voices of the Irish community during these years. Dunne, who was the son of Irish immigrants, began his career writing about the relevant issues of the Irish in Chicago but later moved to New York to write about the War and other national issues. His Chicago columns had been enormously popular, but he gained national recognition with his satirical depictions of the events related to the War.

These columns featured as their protagonist an Irish bartender from a pub in Chicago called Mr. Dooley and “The opera bouffe character of certain aspects of the Spanish-American War in 1898 furnished Mr. Dooley with subjects for comment that increased his circle of admirers enormously” (Adams 35). Dunne wrote about many other topics but his parody of War reports gave him national success.

The cynical views of the bartender were all written in a phonetic Irish dialect because Dunne claimed that he wanted to “make Dooley talk as an Irishman would talk who has lived thirty or forty years in America, and whose natural pronunciation had been more or less affected by the slang of the streets”(Fanning xvi). In the sketches, one becomes *wan*, when-*whin* and the final “g” is dropped on words which end in “ing”. In the Spanish-American War columns, Spanish names are also transformed. Puerto Rico becomes Porthor Ricky (which is also the way Dooley pronounces the beverage). Cuba is also given an extra syllable (to sound more Irish) and turns into Cubia. Hiberno-English has a long tradition of subversion in the U.S. and Ireland. In the U.S. context, Fanning explains “Writers from the WASP mainstream throughout the nineteenth century made full use of the brogue to help create derogatory pictures of the alien immigrant hordes,” which “were part of the new wave of nativism that swept America in the nineties against the “new immigration”(xvii). However, he argues that Dunne’s mimesis of a working class Irishman is different because “he used the brogue in new and salutary ways”(xix). Adams also points out “Dunne’s subversion of English (along with his conversational style) undermines the serious content of the subjects written about and “the expression of social consciousness [...] would never have been printed unless they had been written in dialect”(Ellis, xxii). In many ways, Mr. Dooley’s humorous naïveté conceals the gravity of the issues he confronts.

Hearst and Pulitzer primarily viewed the war and the occupation of Puerto Rico and the Philippines as a way of promoting their publications; however, Ford, Meehan, and Dunne, and the Irish communities which they represented believed that U.S. imperialistic endeavors had important consequences which contradicted their ideas of what the U.S. should represent. Several generations of Irish and U.S.- born Irish (who came from a variety of backgrounds) coexisted in New York; and there was no single Irish viewpoint on all the issues involving the War. However, the majority of these Irish viewed U.S. Imperialism in the Philippines and Puerto Rico as an “Anti-American” idea. The sympathy that they had for the Cubans, Filipinos, and Puerto Ricans stemmed from their own history as a colony of England. However, the events leading up to the War and the resulting surge of U.S. nationalism which occurred during the battles divided Irish opinion and challenged the idea that Irish communities could to be U.S. citizens and still remain loyal to Ireland.

The traditional antagonism of these New York Irish communities towards England put them in opposition to U.S./Anglo opinion which supported intervention against Spain. Their first reaction was not to fight Spain because the Spanish government, (which was also Catholic) had traditionally been an ally of Ireland. However, because of their own experiences of colonialism they also understood these Islanders desired and fought for independence. As David Doyle notes, “The contradictory impulses in the hearts of Catholic Americans— of sympathy for Cuba’s insurgency, and identification with Spain’s Catholicity, —might [have] distance[d] them from the current of popular passion” (Doyle 165). Many of these Irish were loyal citizens who had fought for the U.S. army but also recalled their own fight for independence. Some of their resentment surfaced as the Irish saw support from the U.S. in Cuba, the Philippines and Puerto Rico not in Ireland. Thus, there were three

positions (that intersected and diverged on various levels) that these Irish-Catholics supported: pro-Spanish, pro-Islander (Puerto Rico, Cuba, Philippine) and/ or pro U.S.

The Threat of an Anglo-American Alliance:

As Hearst and Pulitzer were producing large amounts of anti-Spanish propaganda at the end of 1897 and the beginning of 1898, the Irish New York/Irish newspaper editors were torn. They were not eager to enter into war with Spain because Spain's decline might help maintain England's military supremacy and would give the appearance that the U.S. supported England's colonial policies. There was also a great deal of trepidation in the community that the United States would alienate its other European allies. Thus, the pre-War coverage of *The Irish Word* and *The Irish-American* primarily consisted of connecting the Spanish Caribbean problem with England. One of the links is explained in this letter to editor of *The Irish World* which appeared on January 15, 1898:

Employing her usual cunning arts, England is working hard through her agents here to defeat the settlement of the Cuban question by the establishment of home rule in Cuba. What does it matter to her that prolonging the insurrection means the prolonging of the hunger and nakedness and destitution of the poor Cubans, the continued devastation of the island and the further sacrifice of human life? With Cuba governing herself, developing her resources advancing on the path to returned prosperity, which has been opened to her by the liberal ministry of Spain discontented Jamaica seeing her Spanish neighbor enjoying the advantages of self-government might again attempt to shake off the English yoke [...] and the other British West Indian Islands might follow in her lead.

A Home Ruler

As this reader points out, pro-war advocates ignored the fact that Cuba and Puerto Rico had already been given limited autonomy by Spain with the *Carta Autonómica* since November of 1897.

Both newspapers also printed several small articles which described the Spanish warships coming to the Caribbean which counteracted the daily reports in *The New York Journal* and *The New York World* of Spanish troop build up. However, for the editors of these newspapers the threat of an Anglo-American Alliance was the issue that deserved daily front-page coverage. They were concerned about a U.S./British agreement that would tentatively facilitate the use of each other's ports and canals in Asia and in Central America in case of war.¹ The Irish editors feared that the U.S. government would align itself with the English and support colonial policy by linking it to U.S. interests. On January 15th *The World* referred to an editorial in *The London Spectator* "Boasting of American Alliance," which "threatens Europe with the 'Whole Anglo-Saxon Race, United and Resolved'" and began a series of articles strongly denouncing the Alliance. This agreement with England threatened the Irish on a cultural and political level because it also attempted to negate the importance of the Irish presence in the United States

The sinking of the U.S warship, the Maine, on February 15th was a turning point in the conflict and articles alluding to Spain's culpability appeared in *The New York World* and *The New York Journal*; however, the Irish newspaper editors were skeptical about Spain's role in the disaster. Ford remained convinced of English involvement in the campaign to discredit Spain, and on March 26th *The Irish World* quotes another article from *The London Spectator* that incites unrest in the Americas and defined the U.S. as primarily Anglo:

¹ It is also referred to in the Irish World as the British-American Treaty

The difficulties with Spain only served to increase latent sentiment essential to the unity existing among Anglo-Saxons. The possibility that the Spanish quarrel may bring them face to face with a continental coalition made the Americans realize that our race is not beloved on the Continent and that we may some day have to make a common cause. (8)

In “England helped Spain go Broke” (March 21st), *The Irish-American* also suggests ongoing concerns about English participation. However, supporting the Spanish and complete abstention from the War would have been perceived as unpatriotic. As a result, the articles printed in the *Irish-American* (and to some extent the *Irish World* as well) changed their anti-war tone. On February 24th the *Irish-American* published this opinion:

Until the result of an official inquiry is known, the proper thing, therefore, for everyone, is to keep cool and rest in the assurance that full justice will be insisted on by the President and congress. It would be premature to attempt to pronounce any judgment as to whether the terrible event was the result of an accident, or an act for which, in any way, the Spanish authorities can be held responsible. Should the latter prove to be the case, in the present state of feeling in the United States, war between the two countries would be inevitable. (4)

On April 2nd a small article appeared in *The Irish World* that made a more subtle argument which defended the United States without criticizing Spain:

The United States has always been most reasonable in its relations and dealings with other nations and its needs but plain and honest dealings on the side of Spain to have the present unpleasantness reach a satisfactory conclusion for both. The United States is neither a bully nor a grabbing nation. (6)

At this point, the writer still has faith in the U.S. legal system and believes that U.S. and Spanish diplomats can solve the conflict.

Mr. Dooley also gives his opinion on the idea of ‘The Anglo-Saxon Race’ and the Anglicization of U.S. in his column called *On the Anglo-Saxon*. He tells Hennessy that an “Anglo-Saxon is a German that’s forgot who was his parents” and “They’re a lot iv thim in this country.” He also informs his friend that he is “wan iv the hottest Anglo-Saxons that iver come out of Anglo-Saxony. Th’ name iv Dooley has been the proudest Anglo-Saxon name in the County Roscommon f’r many years” (Green 34). Also, in *The Decline of National Feeling*, Dooley claims that then President McKinley (Mack), was a Scots-Irish who was becoming more anglicized because he supported U.S./ English connections. In the column Hennessy, asks him about Mr. Dooley about his plans for St. Patrick’s Day and he responds:

‘Well, said Mr. Dooley, “I may cillybrate it an’ I may not. I’m thinkin’ iv savin’ me enthusiasm f’r th’ queen’s birthday, whiniver it is that blessed holiday comes ar-round. Ye see, Hinnessy, Patrick’s Day is out iv fashion now. A few years ago ye’d see the Prisident iv th’ United States marchin’ down Pinnsylvania Avnoo, with the green scarf iv th’ Ancient Order on his shoulders an’ a shamrock in his hat. Now what’s Mack doin’? He’s settin in his parlor, writin’ letters to th’ queen, be hivins, askin’ after her health. He was fr’m th’ north iv Ireland two years ago, an’ not so far north ayether, – just far enough north f’r to be on good terms with Derry an’ not far enough to be bad friends with Limerick... (Filler 467)

Dooley notes that McKinley used to behave like an Irishmen, but is now partial to England. Dunne is commenting on the ways which the colonization of Irish culture connects it to English tradition. Dooley calls himself an Anglo-Saxon and supplants the Catholic holiday of Saint Patrick’s Day which celebrates the person who brought Catholicism to Ireland for the Queen’s birthday and comments on how many Irish in the U.S. have become “assimilated” into similar Anglo traditions.

The Invasion of Puerto Rico:

Even after the U.S. had invaded Cuba and was preparing to invade Puerto Rico *The World* still dedicated much of its coverage to linking the push for U.S. involvement in the Caribbean to an attempt to by the English to increase their influence. The headlines in the summer of 1898 issues attacked Anglo ideas of hegemony more directly, supported a more multicultural approach to defining “Americaness,” and stated the urgent necessity of other Americans to fight against Anglicization. On June 11th, they published an article with the headline “Arrogance of the Anglomanic Gang” offering an alternative definition to a single U. S. identity:

What Binds Us as Nation is Not Community of Race, But a Community of Interests

Of all the Races Here That Which Calls Itself the Anglo-Saxon is the Only One That Attempts to Force the Entire Nation into its Allegiance [...]

It seems strange that it should be necessary to call attention to the fact that we are not a race, Anglo-Saxon, Teutonic, Latin or Celtic, or any other but a **nation made up of many races.** (their emphasis)

The article concludes with ideas about the ways of defining U.S. citizens and warns against defining them by language or race (8). On June 10th *The Irish-American* emphasized a parallel Anti-Anglo sentiment:

I would remind this self-complaisant “Anglo-Saxon: that there are a good many countrymen of the young Emperor of Germany in this country, and many more of this race— All American citizens—who would have a word to say in regard to a combination of the aforesaid “mother and daughter” against their fatherland. And then what about the Irish and their kindred? And what of the Franco-American element in our makeup, not to speak of the Russians,

Scandinavians and Italians, and last, though not least our colored brethren, who owe their former condition of slavery to British colonial institutions? (4)

The article equates involvement in the War as a complete change in U.S. policy. It negates the multiple versions of U.S. ethnicity.

However, as an article on March 28th demonstrates, the position of *The Irish-American* was becoming less inclined to question the logic of the war and began to support U.S. involvement. Neither editor encouraged the involvement but they attempted to convince their readers that their duties as Catholics were related to the responsibilities of U.S. citizenship:

We avail ourselves of this opportunity; however, to call to mind our Catholic brethren that should war break out between our Republic and Spain, we are obliged in our conscience to be loyal to the flag—the Stars and Stripes. It is the teaching of Catholic theology that the government has a right, binding on the conscience of its subjects, for their money and their arms in the war against their foe. We trust after God and the intercession of the Blessed Virgin in the well-known peaceable disposition of the American government and the American people, that war may be averted. But should it come— Catholics, you know your duty...(4)

The article displays a doublespeak that could be interpreted as pro-Spanish or pro-War and it is unclear whether their duty as Catholics is to the other Catholic nation or to U.S. interests.

By April the articles in *The Irish-American* completely supported the War and emphasize its loyalty to the U.S. On the front page of the April 4th issue they printed a cartoon of Uncle Sam straddling North and South America with a sign in South America that says ‘Keep off the Grass.’



Meehan is beginning to embrace the idea of the U.S. as a protectorate of the Americas. The article on page four of the same issue reads “When the struggle shall have been ended no Spanish flag should be found floating over a foot of territory in this hemisphere; and the world and humanity at large will be all the better for such a conclusion.” A few weeks later, they reflect lack of European intervention and lament that “the time for the [European] Powers to have intervened was when they had a chance to compel Spain to cease her

inhuman misrule in Cuba. They let the opportunity slip, so Uncle Sam is going it alone and all others had better ‘stand from under’” (April 18 p. 4). Also a new anti-Spain rhetoric replaced their previous sympathy as they call Spain “the wreck of a once great nation”(April 25 p.4).

The Irish World did not undergo such a transformation and was much more restrained in its support of the War. The journalists remained respectful to the Spanish people. However, like *The Irish-American*, they paid homage to the “Irish boys” such as the well-known sixty-ninth Infantry Regiment of New York and other regiments that were volunteering to go to war. On May 7th they dedicate an entire page to tell the history of the sixty-ninth² and report on the ovation the regiment received as they departed for Florida. Both newspapers emphasized that the Irish that were fighting for the United States and ostensibly for Cuban/Puerto Rican independence.

The Irish-American also highlighted the Irish presence in the War and emphasized ideas of race and blood and contended that Admiral Dewey, who played an important role in the Philippine conflicts, was an Irishman:

The Irish Strain in the American Blood appears to be again asserting itself as it did in the early naval combats of the Republic. The name of Admiral Dewey, of our fighting navy, may have an unfamiliar appearance to some people, but it is only the anglicized form of the old Irish Sept-name of *ODuaghtaigh* which was one of those described by penal law in the Old Land. The bearers of it were noted fighters against the English invasion, in former times and the characterization does not appear to be lessening in the present representatives of the old elements. (May 7 p.4)

² A regiment based out of New York that fought in the Revolutionary War and the Spanish-American War. Historically, the men in the unit were of Irish descent.

This emphasis on the Irish presence in the U.S. armed forces redefines the War as a U.S. endeavor and not an Anglo one.

Dunne parodies this way of promoting the Irish presence in the military and Mr. Dooley makes a more ironic claim about Dewey's Irish ancestry in his column called *On War Preparations*. He tells Hennessey that "Cousin George is all r-right" and when his friend questions him about his cousin George he says "Dewey or Dooley, 'tis all th' same. We dhrop a letter here an'there, except the haitches, –we niver dhrop thim, –but we're th' same breed iv fighting men. Georgy has th' traits iv th' family" (Green 14). He understands the irony of calling Dewey an Irishman.

Most of Dunne's satire of the battles was directed at U.S. generals and parodied the ideas of masculine bravery portrayed in *The New York Journal* and *The New York World*. Dunne's column on the invasion of Puerto Rico called *General Miles's Moonlight Excursion* ridicules the entire invasion of Puerto Rico and depicts a party-like atmosphere. Mr. Dooley pontificates on his own inadequacies compared to the "brave" soldiers fighting the war, comments on the velocity of the surrender of the Puerto Rican people, and implies that the real reasons that U.S. invaded the island was for capitalistic gain— not to promote democracy.

In the column, Mr. Dooley explains the valiant efforts of General Miles to his friend, Mr. Hennessey. He tells his friends that he would have liked to participate in the invasion and comments that the biggest decision that the General and his soldiers had to make was deciding where to eat, play croquette. They also had to be careful to dodge the bouquets of flower being thrown at them:

‘Dear, oh, dear,’ said Mr. Dooley, ‘I’d give five dollars— an’ I’d kill a man f’r three—if I was out iv this Sixth Wa-ard tonight, an’ down with Gin’ral Miles; gran’ picnic an’ moonlight excursion in Porthier Ricky. ‘Tis no comfort in being a cow’rd whin ye think iv thim br-rave la-ads facin’ death be suffication in bokays an’ dyin’ iv waltzin’ with th’ pretty girls of Porthier Ricky. (55)

Fanning notes that General Miles was one of Dunne’s favorite objects of satire because of his self-aggrandizing behavior and contends that “General Miles had been one of Mr. Dooley’s favorite targets” because “He had designed his own uniforms, which sported considerably more gold braid than the standard issue” (*Robert* 55).

The Puerto Ricans did not resist the invasion and in Dunne’s columns the officials appear as welcoming hosts, who ask to be taken into a “glorious an’ well-fed raypublic, and the young women throw flowers at the troops as they arrange a party” (57). The Puerto Ricans are portrayed as child-like and slightly effeminate, which were the stereotypes exploited by writers and statesmen in the United States to describe the Puerto Ricans in order to justify their denial of self-rule.³ This was a strategy that many colonizing nations have used to deny autonomy and was also utilized by England in the Irish context as well. Mr. Dooley is also critical of the Puerto Ricans who seem to have changed their alliance (from Spain to the United States) so quickly; yet, he remarks that it is a technique that all politicians utilize:

... but I know this, that there’s the makin’ iv great statesman in Porthier Ricky.
A proud people that can switch as quick as thim la-ads would have nawthin’ to

³ In *Boricua Pop* Frances Negrón-Muntaner makes the argument that shaming the elite class of Puerto Rico was a deliberate U.S. strategy.

larn in th'way iv what Hogan calls th' signs iv govern'ment, even from the Supreme Court. (58)

At the end of the "Excursion" sketch, Mr. Dooley reminds Hennessy that there are monetary advantages to be gained by the integration of Puerto Rico and again downplays any notion that the United States is a liberating force. The bartender also explains his view on the real results of war when he depicts his version of General Miles's first speech to the Puerto Rican people:

'I welcome ye into the Union,' he says. 'I don't know how th' Union'll feel about it, but that's no business iv mine, 'he says. 'Ye will get ye'er wur-kin-cards from the walkin' diligate. 'he says; 'an ye'll be entitled,' he says; 'to pay your share iv th' taxes an' to live awhile an' die whin ye get r-ready, 'he says; 'jus th' same as if ye was bor-rn at home, 'I don' know th' names iv ye; but I'll call ye all Casey, f'r short. (56)

In this speech the United States is transformed from a liberating force into an imperial one and General Miles tells the crowd that they have nothing to worry about because they will be able to work and pay taxes just like all other U.S. citizens. Then he negates their Spanish, African, and Caribbean ancestry by calling them all by an Irish surname. On the surface, Dooley appears to support the War and pay homage to the generals; yet, he is criticizing the real motivations of the Generals the U.S. government:

'An so th' war is over?' asked Mr. Hennessy.

'On'y part iv it,' said Mr. Dooley. "The part that ye see in the pitcher pa-apers is over, but the tax collector will continue his part iv th' war with relentless fury. Cal'vry charges are not th' on 'y wans in a rale war.'(58)

According to Dooley, the spectacle of the war is over, but the most important part has just begun. He knows that the island will be taken over by the U.S. and they will be forced to pay taxes to a government that will not grant them the same rights as citizens.

Reactions to the New Imperialism:

The Irish-American's support for the war continued after the invasion of Puerto Rico. On July 23rd they wrote:

It is semiofficially announced that Porto Rico will be held by the United States as a naval and military station, commanding the West Indies. Its possession will go toward making up the heavy expenses of the War to the United States. Our flag once run up will float over the islands permanently. (4)

The comparisons to Ireland continue and Meehan attempts to justify U.S. imperialism as a form of assistance not exploitation. He compares English and Spanish imperialism and claims that England has changed its tactics. England now adopts legal measures to control its subjects while Spain tries to bully them into submission. U.S. imperialism, on the other hand, will be neither brutal nor political because its principle goal is assisting the Islands:

The government of Spain, over her colonies, had been, like that of England over Ireland, under the Crommwellian conquest; and it produced naturally the same results— insurrections of the people, driven to despair against the irresponsible military tyranny to which they were being subjected. That condition of things has existed during the continuance of Spanish rule in Cuba, –even as it continued,—under one form of government or the other, since the landing of the first Norman freebooters in Ireland in 1169, **But** there is a difference. The wily Anglo-saxon has always adopted the legal and parliamentary method of robbing its victims of their rights; while the Spaniard true to his African instincts relies on his big guns, –and fails. [Now] we shall know whether our example, for the liberty of the human race has borne its

appropriate fruit. In the advocacy of human freedom the United States has always stood alone... (July 30 p. 4)

A similar opinion on U.S. imperialism is printed on August 20th. The argument states that this new kind of imperialism will not be not merely for profit:

We have an idea how they can be put to much better use, –not only for ourselves but for their inhabitants and for humanity in general. The experiment will take a little time; but then, the time, as well as the object to be experimented on belongs exclusively to us at the present moment...” (8)

In this framework, the U.S. must take over these Islands because of a moral obligation to help them.

Spain surrendered to the U.S. in October of 1898, and it forsook control of its colonies to the U.S. When it became clear that Cuba was to become independent and Puerto Rico was to remain under U.S. control⁴ the debate on the repercussions of the United States becoming a colonizing nation came to the forefront. *The Irish-American* maintained that the Puerto Ricans were better off with their new status than they were under Spanish control and continued to print articles that villainized Spain such as “The Porto Ricans hate the Spanish government” (November 19 p. 4). However by 1899, as the U.S. policies of control became more apparent, *The Irish-American* began to speak out against the Government policies regarding Puerto Rico. The paper felt that the government was putting unfair taxes on the Islanders which would hinder economic growth:

Under the lash of the most pampered of the trusts, the Republican majority in the lower House of Congress, last week, passed a tariff bill inflicting an

⁴ Even after the Treaty of Paris, there was still fighting in the Philippines.

almost intolerable and unnecessary revenue burden on the island of Puerto Rico. [...] If the Senate should so far forget the fundamental principles of our Government as to co-operate in this injustice, it will only add another to the weighty bill of indictment that is being formulated against the Republican party, and to be requited when a Democratic president takes charge of the White House, this time next year. (Mar 3, p.4)

In order to maintain the idea that the U.S. was helping the Puerto Rican people [.] the paper could not support these taxes. Meehan turned it into a partisan issue and blamed these policies on the Republicans.

In the spring of 1900 as the Foraker Act⁵ was being debated in Congress and *The World* increased its coverage of Puerto Rican and published an article entitled “Shall Porto Rico be our Ireland?”(4). The article implies that the Puerto Rico should be automatically granted the right to statehood. It was one of a number of articles and editorials in both newspapers that question the tariffs that were being levied on Puerto Rican products:

Our revolution was based on the idea that one community had no right to permanently to levy taxes upon another community and the prime motive which led to the establishment of the Constitution was a desire to do away with the barriers upon trade which were set up on the frontier of each State.

Both papers opposed the way the federal government was treating the Puerto Rican colonists and demonstrated empathy for them. They resented seeing the United States follow a British example, by incorporating Puerto Rico the same way they had seen Ireland become part of

⁵ This act established a civilian government in Puerto Rico and put into effect all federal laws of the United States on the island. It was based on the ideas of the British Commonwealth system. It gave the Puerto Ricans limited representation and no voting rights.

the British Commonwealth exactly hundred years before in the Act of Union⁶. However the *Irish World* was more strenuous in its dissent.

The World continued comparing the imperialistic endeavors of the U.S. in Puerto Rico to the Irish/English situation and their outrage is clear:

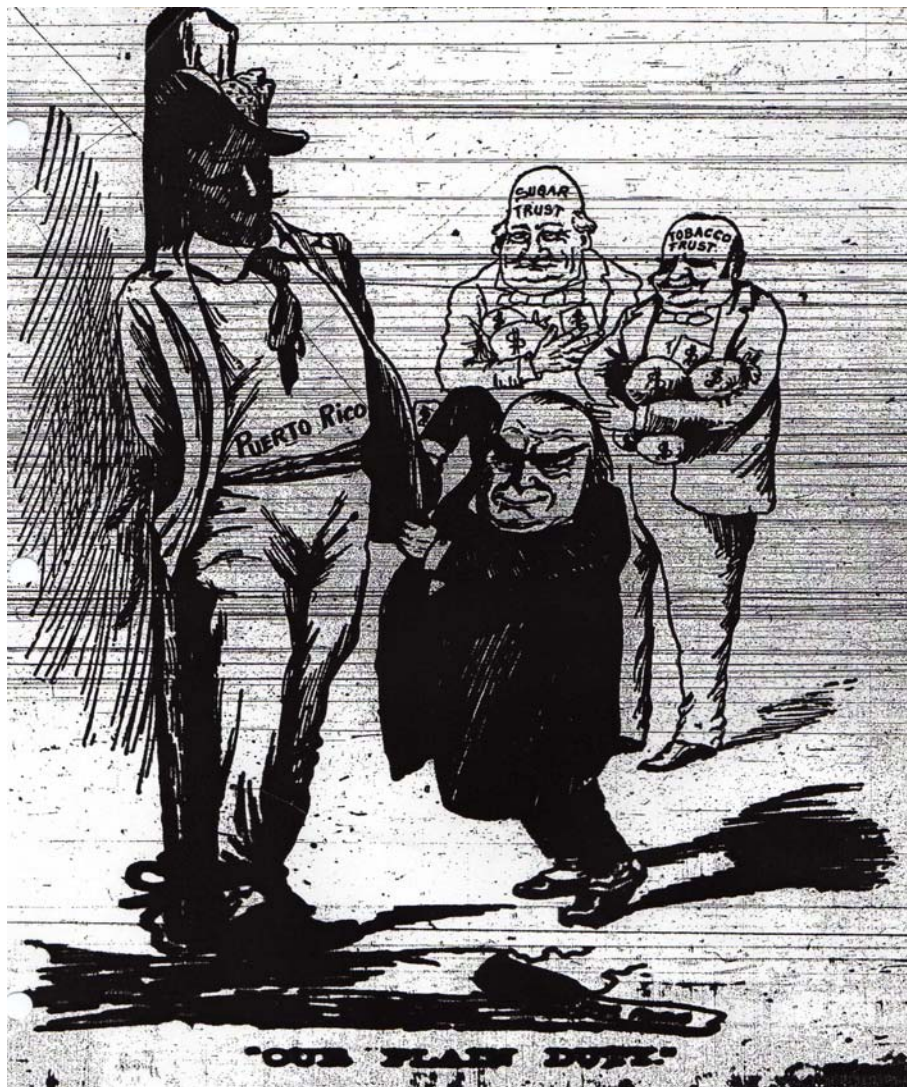
The Puerto Ricans may look forward to a gradual and sure decay of their industries under the “benevolent assimilation” process of President McKinley. The laws being inaugurated against the prosperity of the inhabitants are so dreadfully akin to those by which Britain killed all the industries of the Irish people that the same diabolical results must inevitably ensue. The whole course of the McKinley administration is British. The idea of the grand and noble American people having “slaves” and “subjects” in the shape of human beings is repugnant to all traditions of the nation. (April 14, 3)

Many of the other headlines referred to Puerto Ricans as “Colonists” (their quotes) and criticize the McKinley administration for denying the Puerto Ricans their rights: “Republicans Declare and Vote them Outside of the Constitution”(April 14,1900). Their depiction of the people of the U.S. as “grand” and “noble” shows their respect for the country and their disappointment with the policies of the McKinley administration. Their empathy and self-identification with the Puerto Rican peoples is evident and their prediction of what will occur in the island under U.S. occupation is dire.

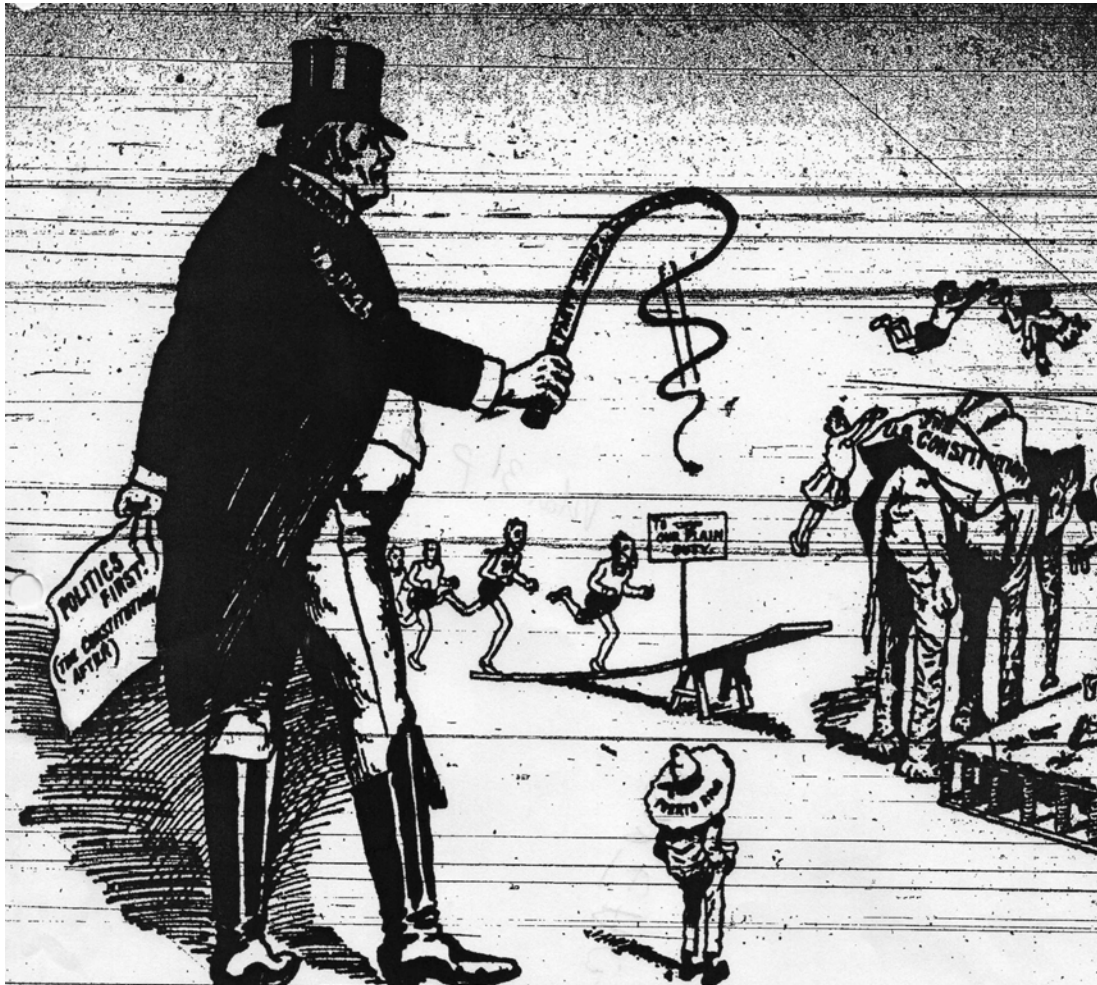
Two large political cartoons appear in *The World* during the congressional debates on the future of Puerto Rico. The first on March 10th, is a depiction of William McKinley reaching into the pockets of a Puerto Rican peasant as the Sugar and Tobacco trust look on greedily. The caption simply reads “Our Plain Duty.” This idea that it had been the U.S.’s

⁶ The Act of Union was passed in 1800. It officially made Ireland part of the Kingdom of Great Britain.

plain duty to enter into war with Spain and save the struggling Islanders was one of the most popular rhetorical strategies of the War. As María DeGuzmán illustrates in her book, *Spain's Long Shadow: The Black Legend, Off-Whiteness, and Anglo-American Empire*, “The Spanish-Cuban-American War marked the definitive material transition of the United States from nation to imperial power equal to that of the British Empire”(xxix). The War transformed the United States.



The second cartoon shows members of the U.S. Senate dressed up like acrobats and jumping over an elephant to show how they are creatively circumventing the Constitution in order to maintain Puerto Rico's colonial status.



In the cartoon, a tiny (powerless) Puerto Rican watches as they perform their tricks and pretend to decide what is best for him. It is clear he has not control over his own future and is simply a spectator.

In 1900 a debate formed around the question: Does the Constitution follow the flag? In other words, were the rights of the people in the territories the same as U.S. citizens born or naturalized? In response to this debate Dooley makes one of his most famous remarks. "That is [...] no matter whether th' Constitution follows th' flag or not, th' Supreme Court follows th' iliction returns." (Ellis 77) Dooley is referring to the fact that the Republican Party, who supported keeping the territories outside the constitution, had just won the last election and their win has influenced the Supreme Court's decision. They have won the right to continue taxing Puerto Rico and the Philippine Islands without giving them any say in their governance. Dooley "defends" this idea that the Constitution only covers the states and not the territories:

It's a home staying' Constitution with a blue coat and brass buttons onto it, an'it walks with a goold-headed cane. It's old and feeble an'it prefers to set on th'front stoop an'amuse the childher. It wudden't last a minyit in thim thropical climes 'Twud get a pain in th'fourteenth amindmint an'die before th'doctors cud get around to cut it out. (73).

Dunne draws the readers' attention to the fourteenth amendment which states that anyone born in the U.S. is a citizen and has certain rights. However, if no one pays attention to it then it becomes a worthless document.

Conclusion:

Under the Jones Act, the Puerto Ricans were granted U.S. citizenship in March of 1917. By that time, the New York newspapers had changed. Hearst's and Pulitzer's publications were still being printed (although Pulitzer died in 1911), but they were less sensationalistic. *The Irish-American* had ceased publication after Meehan's death in 1906 and Dunne had retired from writing the Mr. Dooley sketches. *The Irish World* was still

publishing was under the supervision of one of Ford's sons and maintained its liberal stance on issues relating to Ireland. However, its support of Puerto Rican independence became more understated. On April 7th it printed an extensive report on a rally held in New York to protest the tariffs still being imposed on Puerto Rico. Some of the speeches of prominent U.S. politicians are quoted in the article and the Puerto Ricans are referred to as "freedom loving peoples" who deserve the right to govern themselves," (6) but the significance of the citizenship debate is largely ignored.

The imperialistic role that the U.S. was taking on in the late nineteenth century was problematic for many people in the U.S. Irish discourse is particularly significant because it frames the debate by equating imperialism with Anglo identity and asserts the existence of many other ethnic communities that play a role in the formation of a more pluralistic U.S. identity. They viewed U.S. imperialism as one of the consequences of an assertion of Anglo traditions and an attempt to negate all other nationalities and ethnicities. The War brought issues of citizenship and human rights to the forefront and forced the Irish in the U.S. to align themselves with other ethnic groups in way that they had not been inclined to do previously.

Discovering America in New York

La asimilación absoluta no puede existir en una comunidad esencialmente cosmopolita como lo es la metrópolis neoyorquina. Esta se nutre, progresa y crece mas bien al influjo de las aportaciones de todas las razas que integran. Tratar de asimilarse sin aportar lo propio es parasitismo, renunciamento, regimentación. (Colón López 5)

Introduction:

In the early twentieth century, Irish and Puerto Rican communities in New York remained proud of their heritage and loyal to independence movements on their respective Islands, despite the pervasive anti-“ethnic” rhetoric in the U.S. This anti-immigrant sentiment resulted from the country’s involvement in World War I and its intended effect was to unify U.S. citizens and promote assimilation. However, in many cases, it caused the opposite response from these two communities. These diasporic Irish and Puerto Ricans refused to embrace the equation of Anglo and American and became an intrinsic part of the collective political movements based in New York, which offered alternative definitions of “America” and supported an anti-imperialistic agenda. After all, “Manhattan was a natural focal point for New World radicalism. As the seat of an emergent economic empire, New York City had various material and capital connections around the world that few other cities could match [and] many “Anticolonial activists saw in Manhattan a natural base of operations” (Guterl New 335). New Yorkers were not immune to War patriotism, but alternative ideologies flourished in the city during these decades. Irish and Puerto Rican nationalists had gathered in New York throughout the nineteenth century and this tradition continued well into the twentieth. John Devoy, Patrick Ford and Daniel Cohalan revived interest in Irish freedom among the many generations of Irish in the city. Bernardo Vega,

Jésus Colón, and Joaquín Colón López came to New York in the early 1900's and began to fight for their causes, and their writings were part of a tradition which began "where the late nineteenth century writings of Hostos, Betances and Pachín Marín left off..."(Colón xi).

Bernardo Vega's *Memorias*, Jesús Colón's *A Puerto Rican in New York and other Sketches*, and Joaquín Colón López's *Pioneros puertorriqueños en Nueva York 1917-1947* meticulously document issues related to the war, their problems in finding meaningful work, and their difficulties in preserving their culture while still being a part of the cultural and political life in New York. These chronicles give insight into the working life, the cultural activities, and political interests of many diaspora Puerto Ricans. Much of the focus is on dispelling the myths about Puerto Ricans and the discrimination they faced. They detail some of the typical experiences of those who came in the early years and demonstrate the effects of the identity debate and the resulting Jones-Shafroth Act (which granted citizenship to all Puerto Ricans). They also relate their experiences with people from the large Irish community which existed in New York during these years.

As we have seen in chapter one, during the Spanish American War, Patrick Ford, who ran the *Irish World and American-Industrial Liberator*, published numerous articles of support for the Puerto Ricans. Ford continued to promote an anti-imperialistic agenda until his death in 1913. He saw the beginnings of the surge of Irish patriotism in New York and worked as one of the principle participants in its revival, John Devoy. Devoy's newspaper *the Gaelic-American* was a mouthpiece for the movement and was one of the ways in which he promoted his political cultural agenda.

The Irish and Puerto Rican struggles in their respective homelands would occasionally encourage interactions and understanding. However, more often their loyalties

and strong support for their compatriots would cause them to alienate the Irish or Puerto Rican “Other.” Each community was fighting for similar causes; the right to support independence on their respective Islands and the ability to define “America” in more pluralistic terms. However, these goals it did not always bring them together. The Irish were a dominant force in New York. In 1910 1 in 5 New Yorkers were of identifiably Irish stock”” (McNickle 339) and they were not generally receptive to other ethnic groups. Vega, Colón and Colón López’s narratives demonstrate the pervasiveness of Irish influence and their depictions of the Irish they encounter vary greatly. On one hand, they understand that the Irish have faced discrimination in the past; however, they often feel that it does not completely justify their prejudices against Puerto Ricans and other “newcomers.”

New York was also a center of cultural movements which influenced New York Puerto Rican and Irish writers such as Eugene O’Neill and Williams Carlos Williams. Williams and O’Neill attempted to counteract the rhetoric by creating new and more inclusive definitions of America and Americans. Their perspective was that American society is transformed by immigrant traditions and the Anglo influences did not merit a dominant role. Williams was more overtly political than O’Neill, but they both sought inspiration from their Irish or Puerto Rican counterparts. Williams was interested in the Irish independence movement and O’Neill looked to Puerto Rico for a remedy to cure what he viewed to be the ailments of U.S. society.

World War I, the Jones Shafroth-Act, and the Easter Uprising:

The superpatriotic rhetoric that was created to justify U.S. involvement in World War I emphasized the country’s Anglo roots and attempted to portray all other “ethnic” identities as suspect. This had serious consequences in a multicultural society. For all non-Anglos,

nostalgia (or any other positive sentiment regarding their heritage) was viewed as a threat to a unified America. “Ethnicity” was deemed un-American and hyphenated identities were scrutinized. The promotion of a homogenous U.S. identity was a reaction to the uncertainty in Europe:

In the midst of a terrible war fought in the Old World, and riddled with doubt about the ability of the republic to assimilate its immigrant population, patrician Americans increasingly preached virtues of consensus. ‘No hyphens!’ they cried, arguing that loyalty and patriotism demanded an end to each and every manifestation of immigrant ‘difference’. Immigrants, many hoped, would lose themselves in a powerful state of patriotism... (Guterl *Race* 41-42).

For the Irish and the Puerto Ricans, the overt alliance with Britain and the assertion of “American” identity as an extension of Anglo/British culture was extremely problematic. It functioned as a justification for the continuation of colonial rule in Puerto Rico and was part of a cultural campaign to promote Anglo identity by suppressing Hispanic influences on the Island.

In Ireland, the War had serious political consequences. In 1916, Irish independence leaders, who were counting on English distraction (due to the War against Germany), staged a rebellion and declared an Irish republic. The Easter Uprising, as it came to be known, was a failure and many of its organizers were quickly executed. Initially, the use of force by these rebel leaders was not popular; however, England’s harsh treatment of the organizers helped to convert even more New York Irish into sympathizers of the cause. Many New York Irish had donated to the cause and supported it since 1915 when pro-independence leader Patrick Pearse visited on a lecture/fundraising tour, but the violent incarnation of the independence movement became more accepted by the mainstream. However, it was

problematic because overt displays of support for Ireland were considered by many U.S./Anglos as a threat to U.S. policy.

The position the Irish were put into at the beginning of the War was similar to the experiences at outbreak of Spanish-American War. They could either support a U.S. alliance with England or be judged as unpatriotic. All alternative opinions on whether the U.S. should intervene militarily in the War were considered unpatriotic. Many Irish-Catholics in the U.S. harbored anti-Anglo sentiment and became so heavily invested in Irish independence that they could not understand the reasons the U.S. should ally themselves with the English. As Charles Fanning notes, some Anglos in the U.S. felt that the timing of the rebellion was unfair since the English were already suffering in the War:

With the approach of World War I, Irish-American ethnic assertiveness became positively un-savory in the eyes of many non-Irish Americans. When the War began in August 1914, anti-British feeling surfaced again strongly in Irish-American nationalist circles. The Clan na Gael executive sent a secret message of support to the Kaiser, and less rabid Irish-American organizations also supported the Central powers. Moreover, in the context of increasing support for United States entry into the War, the timing of the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin was less popular in mainstream America. (238-239)

This was more than a cultural debate and Irish loyalty was put into question by many important people, including the President.

In his speeches, Wilson attacked the concept of being Irish and American as unpatriotic. He also protested against German-Americans and other European-Americans whose country of origin was directly involved in the war, but by referencing Irish-Americans, who were staunchly against the U.S. aligning itself with British forces even in

the fight against fascism, he began the hyphen wars. In a pre-war speech at a dedication to Irish Revolutionary War naval hero, John Barry, he pointed out the importance of Irish assimilation in the context of the European War:

Some Americans need hyphens in their names because only part of them has come over; but when the whole man has come over, heart and thought and all, the hyphen drops of its own weight out of his name. This man was not an Irish-American; he was an Irishman who became an American. (Stannard 109)

In 1919, Wilson addressed the League of Nations and argued against the idea that immigrants in the U.S. should hold onto the other part of their identities because it was a threat to national security. He famously threatened, “If I can catch any man with a hyphen in this great contest I will know that I have got an enemy of the Republic” (Di Nunzio 412). The debate was significant because it changed the way the Irish-Americans were viewed in the context of U.S. society. Many of these so-called hyphenated Irish resented this limited view of how the idea of “American” could be interpreted.

Wilson also connected the Puerto Rican citizenship debate to national security and the War. His concerns facilitated easy passage of Jones-Shafroth Act, which granted the Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship and was signed into law in 1917. As Pedro Cabán emphasizes in *Constructing a Colonial People*, Wilson informed the legislators that “our policy towards the Philippines and the people of Porto Rico” was a matter “very intimately associated with the question of national safety and the preparation for defense” (200). Wilson’s believed that citizenship would lead to complete loyalty and also placate independence leaders. The Act

was designed to convert the indigenous population into “Americans” who would support the country and work for the corporations:

Puerto Rico and the Philippines were the first densely populated overseas territories the United States acquired through war and conquest. Because these territories were so densely populated the United States did not have the option of relocating the indigenous people and replacing them with its own citizens. Instead colonial policy was designed to Americanize these people into loyal colonial subjects and convert the overseas possessions into large-scale producers and exporters of sugar and other agricultural products. U.S. officials presumed that the Americanized colonial subjects would form a cheap and disciplined labor force available for hire by corporations engaged in export productions. (Caban 4-5)

Consequently, the colonization of the Puerto Rico became cultural as well as political and since the Puerto Ricans could not be displaced, they would have to be converted by the suppression of their culture and language:

[This] learning process required a policy of political and cultural assimilation, which necessarily involved the extension of the United States laws, institutions, and language to the island; and living conditions should be improved. (Trias Monge 38)

This cultural immersion was part of the educational policy and English language instruction was instituted on the Island.

Additionally, after Wilson signed the Selective Service Act of 1917, Puerto Rican males were also subject to be drafted into military service. During the War, many Puerto Ricans were drafted and others were sent to labor camps and to work in munitions factories in the South where they faced a great deal of discrimination and hardship. Both Joaquin

Colón López and Bernardo Vega found temporary work in munitions factories. Colón López applied for a carpentry job at a factory in Pennsylvania, but was subsequently fired before he started. Vega, however, remained at his job in a New Jersey factory for a number of weeks and outlined the dangers of working with the explosives. He also illustrates the unbearable conditions to which the workers were subjected:

Fue aquél mi primer trabajo de Estados Unidos. La Guerra de Europa estaba en apogeo. Los alemanes acaban de sufrir el revés de Verdún. En Estados Unidos se producía material bélico en cantidades fantásticas. El trabajo en las fábricas de municiones era muy duro. Solamente hombres curtidos en faenas rigurosas podían soportarlo. En verdad, aquello era demasiado para las manos blandas de tabaqueros como nosotros. Se trabajaba ocho horas corridas. Hasta para las diligencias íntimas había que pedir permiso al capataz de brigada, y este sustituía a uno por solo breves minutos. Nunca antes había experimentado ni siquiera presenciado, una manera tan salvaje de trabajar. (Vega 55)

That was my first job in the United States. The war in Europe was at its height. The Germans had just suffered a setback at Verdun. In the United States, war material was being produced in enormous quantities. The work in the munitions plant was very hard. Only those hardened by vigorous labor could stand it. It was really too much for the soft hands of the tabaqueros like ourselves. They would work us for eight hours without a break. Even to do your private business you had to get permission from the lead man of the work crew, and he would only relieve you a few short minutes. Never before had I experienced, or even witnessed, such brutal working conditions. (Flores 18)

In the factory Vega saw many safety violations and emphasizes that the bosses' disregard for even the most basic regulations was the reason he was forced to quit the well-paid job. After his dismissal, he reads about a massive explosion in that factory. This experience caused him to become disgusted with the War.

Many Puerto Ricans and Irish fought in the War. Most were drafted, but some joined voluntarily. Joaquín Colón López notes that the Puerto Rican regiments were well-known for their loyalty and their marksmanship:

También ya los expertos militares yanquis consideraban al Regimiento de Puerto Rico como una de las unidades mejor disciplinadas del ejército nacional: muchas veces había salido triunfante en los torneos nacionales del tiro al blanco y había exhibido destrezas excepcionales en sus maniobras. (17)
Additionally the Yankee military experts considered the Puerto Rican Regiment as one of the best disciplined of the national army: they were often triumphant in marksmanship tournaments and have exhibited exceptional skills in maneuvers.

Although he did not completely support U.S. involvement with the War, his pride in these achievements is clear and the regiment's outstanding participation demonstrates their loyalty to the U.S. By highlighting their achievements, he is also refuting the stereotype of Puerto Ricans being weak and non-confrontational that lingered from the Spanish-American War.

Irish and Puerto Rican nationalism in New York:

Bernardo Vega was a cigar worker and he traces the roots of his activism to what he learned from his fellow "tabaqueros." In his memoirs, he consistently praises the community of cigar workers in New York City and in the Caribbean as hard-working, honest and intelligent. Jesús Colón's narrative also opens with a description of him, as a child, listening to a *lector* outside the cigar factory. The cigar workers usually paid a reader to entertain and inform them while they performed their repetitive tasks. Tobacco workers were among the first to arrive from Puerto Rico and they immediately became involved in politics. In his introduction to Colón's work, Juan Flores argues that one of the reasons for this high level of

political commitment was that those who came were artisans and cigar workers who had been active politically on the island:

The cigar workers— men and women— often came with more than just their trade. They were also remarkably educated, having been among the most militant and intellectually enlightened sector of the Puerto Rican working class. In Puerto Rico as in many other Caribbean and Latin American countries, the tabaqueros and other artisans formed the political leadership and the organizational backbone of the entire labor movement. (Colon IX)

In New York, they came in to contact with people from all parts of the world and developed strong feelings of solidarity with other colonized peoples. This led them to feel that the U.S. occupation of the Island was part of a larger class struggle:

In New York they came to understand even more clearly the international dimension of the struggle against that very system which held their beloved Puerto Rico in direct colonial bondage, the same system that was ultimately responsible for their own “decision” to leave their homeland behind. (Flores in Colón xi)

In *A Puerto Rican in New York*, Jesús Colón reflects on how he learned about oppression and colonial rule:

The workers and the cigar makers taught me— they gave me pamphlets and papers to read— they told me that we were a colony – a sort of storage house for cheap labor and a market for “seconds” (cheap industrial goods). That we Puerto Ricans were part of a great colonial system. And that not until colonialism was wiped out and full independence given to Puerto Rico would the conditions under which we were living be remedied. (199-200)

He notes that it was inevitable the progressive thinking Puerto Ricans came to New York because it was a relatively safe place where such ideologies could be explored. These Puerto

Ricans who came to New York in the first part of the twentieth century were extremely active politically:

... like earlier European immigrants, Puerto Ricans organized themselves to promote their social, cultural, economic, and political interests within American society. They also extended and adapted Island modes of association based on working-class solidarities and hometown origin. Local, regional and national allegiances were swiftly reconstructed in the diaspora. (Duany 184)

Bernardo Vega, Jesús Colón, and Joaquin Colón López participated in a myriad of social and political organizations.

Irish nationalists also viewed New York as an important center for Irish social and political activities. They used the City as a center for anti-imperialistic organization:

New York was an important center for planning and fundraising before the World War I. Before the outbreak of the Great War in Europe, nationalists from Ireland envisioned the United States—and Manhattan in particular— as their base of operations in the transatlantic struggle against the British Empire. (Guterl 68)

After the Uprising, New York Irish interest in Ireland was easily revived and fund raising began in earnest. The connections between the Irish community in the U.S. and Ireland were active, but through the work of John Devoy and Daniel Cohalan they were strengthened.

The Irish movements were revitalized around 1916....Between 1916 and 1921 Irish nationalism again became a mass movement. Other cities, such as Boston, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Chicago, also witnessed significant nationalist activity in these years, but New York remained the epicenter, the main locus of activities for constitutional home rulers and separatist alike. (Brundage 322)

These nationalists successfully converted the feelings of nostalgia into monetary support for the Independence movement.

In 1913 Patrick Ford's son took over the *Irish World* and the paper's coverage of Puerto Rico's situation decreased. For instance, the citizenship debate of 1917 was not given a great deal of attention. As Chris McNickle points out, "the way the New York Irish thought of themselves was in flux during this period. Their rise in stature made it hard for them to maintain a self-image as a downtrodden yet defiant group" (338). This is perhaps one of the explanations for their diminishing expression of support for Puerto Rican independence. One of the few exceptions was a small article from January 27, 1917 in which the U.S. government is criticized for its lack of initiative:

Those who represent the United States in the Island of Puerto Rico have employed many of the Puerto Ricans on Public Works and have distributed large sums of money to the poor. In fact, they have taken advantage of every provision of law which could be applied in favor of the people of the island. The island seems to have been converted into one vast poorhouse since it was taken over by the McKinley Administration.
(IW)

An extensive report a rally held in New York to protest the tariffs still being imposed on Puerto Rico in April of 1917 was printed. In March, *The World* reprinted a letter from *The Boston Pilot* which demonstrated the paper's affinity for blaming U.S. imperialism on its Anglo roots and reflects some Ford's sentiments. The letter was from an Irish-American soldier who had died in a battle of San Juan Hill in the Spanish-American War. In the letter he calls the Anglo-Saxons "that mongrel race" and England a "gobbling pirate nation" and he warns the U.S. not to succumb to "Anglomaniac papers" who promote U.S. imperialism. He

also links the Irish struggle to India and the Boer soldiers and “every weak nation on this broad earth” (1). However, any reference to the long-term significance of the Jones-Shaforth Act is downplayed.

As World War I progressed, many Irish wanted the U.S. to use its leverage to convince England to grant Irish independence after the War:

In the immediately following years, the New York Irish adopted wholesale the stand that radical Irish leaders had taken for decades. Strong support emerged for the Irish volunteers who fought against the British in the Anglo-Irish War of 1919-1921, and when Eamon de Valera [who was born New York] traveled to New York in 1920 seeking support for Sinn Fein and an independent Irish Republic, New York’s Irish population raised \$10 million for his cause. (McNickle 351)

However, their request was ignored by Congress and the ensuing years did not bring a peaceful solution to Irish independence. As a compromise, the country was divided. The Catholics were the majority in the south and the Protestants in the north as a compromise. The partition of the country was not supported by many in the U.S.:

The dispute erupted into a civil war that hardened political factions within Ireland for decades. [...] Choosing between brothers was a very different proposition for Irish Americans than siding with their relatives against the English. (351)

Since they did not have to deal with the devastation of the civil war on a daily basis they had the luxury to criticize any agreement which did grant complete autonomy to the Island.

New York Politics:

Immigration laws, which were supported by many New York Irish (who were afraid of the influx of people coming from other European nations and deflating their wages)

hindered new Irish immigration. Thus, the New York Irish were generally second and third generation Americans. Patrick J. Blessing sees 1920 as a turning point where "the story of the Irish in America had become the story of Americans of Irish descent" (2). These limitations imposed on immigration worked in favor of the Puerto Ricans. War politics cemented Puerto Rican colonial status and increased Puerto Rican immigration to the continental U.S. with the majority of people arriving in New York:

Between 1909 and 1916, for example the largest group of Puerto Ricans to leave the island for the United States consisted of 7,394 individuals. But in 1917, the year of the citizenship act, 10,812 Puerto Ricans left in almost all cases to North America. (Sanchez Korrol 31)

The Puerto Ricans who were immigrating took over the unskilled jobs previous held by European immigrants who were coming in smaller numbers due to the new restrictive legislation:

The second factor favoring immigration was the passage of the Johnson Act of 1921. Radically curtailing European immigration, this act contributed to the expansion of job opportunities during the post-World War I period. The laws indirectly resulted in job vacancies for unskilled workers, fostering a series of positions destined to be filled by available black and Puerto Rican workforce. (Sánchez Korrol 31)

Later, Puerto Rican immigration/migration would be more systematic and controlled. In the nineteen fifties and sixties as Operation Bootstrap was implemented¹. These first groups of

¹ A government program to reduce overpopulation and unemployment on the Island. It promoted corporate investment on the Island and facilitated the migration of factory workers to New York and other cities.

immigrants that came during the early years believed that New York was a place of opportunity.

These years were politically important for the U.S. Irish especially those in New York and the New Jersey. In many districts, the branch of the Democratic Party known as Tammany Hall dominated local races and had limited power in national elections. The organization was controlled by Irish politicians. Jesus Colón, Bernard Vega, and Joaquín Colón López encountered a city in which the political and social infrastructure was mainly controlled by those of Irish heritage. The Irish were present in all levels of local and state government and favored their own kind. The political machine known as Tammany Hall demonstrated that the Irish had achieved political power on a local level:

The Irish ruled New York from the end of the nineteenth century throughout the 1920's. They controlled its government and politics, dominated construction and building, moved into the professions and managerial class, and benefited, perhaps disproportionately, from the general prosperity of the times. (McNickle 337)

The communities were strong and they, ironically, exerted far more political control in New York than they did in their homeland. Also, many never forgot that in the national arena they were criticized for their ties with Ireland and lack of assimilation.

All three Puerto Rican authors compare their situation to that of the Irish. In the first essay of Jesús Colón's collection, he imagines that the Irish have achieved social status.

Years ago, it was the "brutal and uncouth" Irish; then it was the knife-wielding" Italians; later it was the "clannish" Jews with "strange ways; yesterday it was the Negro; today, it is the Puerto Ricans— and the Negroes—who are relegated to the last rung of New York's social ladder. (9-10)

In this context, it seems inevitable that the Puerto Ricans and the African-Americans will eventually achieve more power and status.

Vega's narrative is notable for his attempt to connect his story with the Puerto Rican revolutionaries who came before him and he integrates his personal story with the history of the Antillean revolutionary movements in the 1800's. However, by writing about an uncle who left Puerto Rico and came to New York during the years of the famine in Ireland, he also links the history of the two diasporas:

Mi Tío Antonio desembarcó en Nueva York a principios de 1857. Para este tiempo tenía lugar la gran emigración de Irlanda. Cerca de dos millones de irlandeses arribaron a los Estados Unidos en el breve período de quince años. El hambre los arrojaba de su país y venían dispuestas a todo. La miseria más espantosa asolaba las barriadas de los emigrantes de Nueva York, Boston y otras ciudades grandes. Reinaba el discrimen y la persecución policíaca. Fueron los años del “know-nothing”, del chauvinismo nacional, del atropello rampante contra los extranjeros... el tío Antonio comenzó a conocer en carne propia las realidades de la “tierra de promisión” para los desheredados del mundo. (83)

My uncle Antonio disembarked the time of the big migration from Ireland. Hunger had driven them from their homeland, and they came ready for the worst. [...] The most frightening misery wracked the immigrant neighborhoods in New York, Boston and other big cities. Discrimination and police persecution dominated. These were the years of the “Know-nothings”, national chauvinism and the rampant oppression against foreigners. Uncle Antonio began to learn with his own flesh and blood what cruel reality the so-called land of opportunity had in store for the disinherited of the earth.”(Flores 45)

By acknowledging that the Irish had also faced the same type of discrimination that Puerto Ricans now confronted, he explains the parallels of the situations.

Colón López notes that the Irish were also fundraising in New York. In the essay entitled “La loteria irlandesa” (The Irish Sweepstakes), he notes that the U.S. press publicizes

the lottery which brought in 5 million dollars into Irish and only returned 1.5 million in prize money². He believes that the Puerto Rican committees need to learn from this kind of organization which promoted patriotism and nostalgia (Colón López 317).

Joaquín Colón López also comments on other aspects of the far-reaching Irish influence. The chapter on Tammany Hall exposes his mixed feeling towards the Irish. On one hand he recognizes that they come from an Island which has been colonized by Anglos.

No olvidamos que la Inglaterra protestante de Oliverio Cromwell persiguió fanáticamente a la Irlanda intensamente católica, y que es persecución religiosa se unió a la persecución política. Irlanda era una colonia indómita de Inglaterra, junto a los antagonismos de las colonias holandesas y alemanes, también en pugna por sobrevivir; todo ese regateo fue fuente de rencores, prejuicios, apodos y de luchas cuerpo a cuerpo. La colonia irlandesa se impuso peleando y quedo bien unida y endurecida. (46)

Let's not forget that Oliver Cromwell's Protestant England fanatically persecuted intensely Catholic Ireland and that religious persecution was united with political persecution. Ireland was an indomitable colony of England, together with the antagonistic Dutch and Germans colonies also struggling to survive. All this bargaining was a source of resentment, prejudices, labeling, and hand-to-hand combat. The Irish colony imposed themselves by fighting and they stayed united and hardened.

The Irish need to control City politics is a direct result of their oppression.

Irish control has a negative affect on politics and is an unfair system to those who are not connected. Colon Lopez details the way in which elections are executed and the tactics that are used to ensure a candidate wins:

En las “elecciones” votaban los muertos y tenían un sistema de “floaters”, o sea, sufragistas profesionales que votaban varias veces “flotando” de un

² See *The Clean Sweep: The Story of the Irish Hospitals Sweepstakes* by Arthur Webb.

distrito a otro. También tenían un cuerpo de “gorrillas,” o sea, de hombres fuertes que “persuadían” a cualquiera sin ninguna argumentación. Huelga decir que estos guapos de barrio estaban respaldados por las autoridades. (48)

In the “elections” the dead voted and they had a system of floaters, what one could call professional suffragists that voted several times “floating” from district to district. They also had a group of sluggers, or strongmen that “persuaded” people without discussion. It is important to say that these neighborhood pretty boys were backed by the authorities.

Joaquín Colón López also comments on other aspects of the far-reaching Irish influence and the almost total control they exercise over New York, New Jersey, several other states, and even the influence they have had in national elections. He has experienced the Tammany Hall machine and recognizes its power:

Fomentaron la organización política que hoy conocemos aun por el nombre de Tammany Hall. La maquinaria política más formidable y terrible que han conocido los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica, sin exceptuar la maquinaria de Huey Long en el estado de Louisiana, ni la de Frank Hague en Nueva Jersey. (48)

They were promoting the organization that we today know as Tammany Hall. The most formidable and terrible political machine the United States of North America had known, excepting the Huey Long machine in the state of Louisiana and that of Frank Hague in New Jersey.

Colón López’s disgust for the machine is obvious and it negates his feelings of solidarity.

As a result of his distrust he became very active in the New York political and social activities. His impressive “vida cívica” included The Puerto Rican democratic Club, la Liga puertorriqueña, the Puerto Rican Hurricane committee and several more. In New York,

most immigrants who were interested in more mainstream politics joined the Democratic Party and Colón López mentions that he helped established the first Puerto Rican branch of the Party:

Mientras tanto, otras razas en minoría, obligadas a estudiar constantemente y a vivir una vida sobria para mejorar su situación [...] Los puertorriqueños organizaron el Porto Rican Democratic Club Inc., el primer club boricua, en el continente, incorporado acuerdo con las leyes del estado de Nueva York. (49) Meanwhile, other minority races were obliged to study constantly and live a sober life in order to better their situation. The Puerto Ricans organized the Porto Rican Democratic Club Inc., the first Boricuan club on the continent incorporating the laws of the state of New York.

He is part of the minority races which had to work hard to improve their lives because they couldn't depend on the system of Irish favoritism.

William Carlos Williams:

Since Williams lived all his life in the U.S., had an English father and primarily wrote in English his Puerto Rican roots and social connections have long been overlooked. His friendship with many of the well-known (English-Speaking) American authors of the time has also contributed to this oversight. He met Erza Pound while at university and maintained a lifelong friendship and collaboration which challenged and inspired both of them in different ways. These associations with literature in English led to the underestimation of the importance of Spanish-language literature and the use of Spanish language in his poetry and prose. As Julio Marzán's states in recent his work, *The Spanish-American Roots of Williams Carlos Williams*, "nothing I had read or taught about Williams had motivated me to associate him with anything other than mainstream Anglo American"

(X). He also points out that Williams' Puerto Rican mother later became the inspiration for much of his work and they worked together to translate Quevedo and other Spanish authors.

Although his biographer, Paul Mariani notes that he spent New Year's Eve in 1907 the Spanish-American club. William Carlos was not an overt activist and did not write about the Puerto Rican organizations or clubs. However, he was in the club as a guest of his parents' friend, Dr. Julio Henna. Henna was an exiled Puerto Rican who had known the Ramón Betances and other important activists who organized an uprising against the Spanish known as *El grito de Lares* in 1868. Williams describes Henna in his autobiography as "an old friend of my father's from the West Indian Days" (Williams Auto 71).

Williams became a well-known poet, critic, and prose writer in his later years but spent the most of his life dividing his time between his writing and practicing medicine. His medical career was encouraged and assisted by his Puerto Rican connections. Dr. Henna helped him at the beginning of his medical career. Henna was one of the founders of the Medical Board of French Hospital in Manhattan which catered to Spanish and French-speaking immigrants and helped Williams obtain an internship as he finished his last year of medical school:

[Dr. Henna] had been the first to propose that I try for an internship at the French Hospital when I was in my last year at Penn. He was one of three revolutionists whom the Spanish had made it hot for. Three young physicians, he, Betances [Betances] and one other had to leave Puerto Rico in the early 1880's. He was a big red-headed man, with long graying moustaches, who certainly had been very kind to my family. (Autobiography 71)

Henna was one of the founders of the institution and may have felt a particular affection for Williams because he also had an English father and a Puerto Rican mother.

Williams spent much of his life practicing medicine near his place of birth and writing about particular scenes of the life in the rural New Jersey suburbs; however, his experiences in New York City also played an important role in his life. As a high school student, he commuted to Horace Mann School in Morningside Heights and his internship in the French Hospital was in Midtown. Even after he established his private practice and residence in Paterson, N.J, he was still spending time attending cultural events in the City and working there part-time. On the cultural side, he became involved in publishing literary journals with Alfred Kreymborg and other artists and in his autobiography; he reminisces that “there was at that time a great surge of interest in the arts generally before the First World War—new york was seething with it”(Williams 135). He also looks back on the gatherings of friends discussing cubism and other emerging philosophies of art and poetry. “Our parties were cheap— a few drinks, a sandwich of or so, coffee— but the yeast of new york in the realm of the poem was tremendously stirring (Williams Auto 136).

Williams expressed his Puerto Rican patriotism in his poetry. In 1917 (the year that Puerto Ricans were granted U.S. citizenship), he published a collection called *Al que quiere*. His own translation was “He Who Wants it.” And the alternative title of the volume was “the Pleasures of Democracy.” The poetry is a reflection on those who want democracy in Puerto Rico.

In the context of the impending Jones Act and the major change it augers to his Puerto Rican half, Williams’ radical use of Spanish in an English-language book strongly suggests that he was taking the offensive against the “catalogue.” The public rhetoric surrounding the citizenship question doubtless encouraged Williams to force the issue, for once and for all, to openly inject his bloodline into the mainstream as the Jones Act was about to violate Elena’s [his mother] homeland and force a mingling. (Marzán 232)

In the collection Williams also references the French Revolution and translates the themes of *liberty*, *equality*, and *fraternity* into Spanish. He subtly connects his French (some of mother's family was born in France and Martinique and he studied in France and Switzerland for a year as a boy) and Spanish roots which shaped his ideas on democracy and gave him a more multicultural experience of America.

America and "Americaness" was an important theme in much of Williams's work. His methods of mixing of Spanish and English demonstrate the ways in which he was "redefining American letters" and moving away from "English literary conventions." This was significant since U.S. patriotism had been strongly associated with the country's English roots:

The American critical attitude! It is that we are seeking to establish. It is young. It is not necessarily inexpert. [...] Not that Americans today can be anything less than citizens of the world; but being inclined to run off to London or Paris it is inexplicable that in every case they have forgotten or not known that the experience of native local contacts, which they take with them.
(*Selected Essays* 34)

In *the Great American Novel* and *In the American Grain* he attempts to redefine not just American letters but expand the U.S. idea of "America" as well. He also subtly incorporates the non-Anglo part of his heritage as well. In the introduction to *In the American Grain*, he states his intention to redefine America and its places and look beyond the Anglo names and traditions. "In these studies I have sought to re-name the things seen, now lost in chaos of borrowed titles, many of them inappropriate, under which the true character lies hid" (*Grain* Introduction). He explores American history beginning with the Vikings, continuing into

Columbus voyage and later George Washington. He also includes a chapter on the destruction of Tenochtitlan where he chronicles Cortez's intrusion into the "New World" and another chapter called "The Founding of Quebec" where depicts the voyage of Champlain and the French influence in Canada. All these events are part of his idea about America.

Williams contact with the Irish was twofold; he was interested in the Irish independence movement and in his work as a doctor, he often treated members of the New York/New Jersey Irish community. He also met W.B. Yeats, and James Joyce through his literary connections. Arguably, his interest in the Irish nationalistic movement and the Gaelic Revival is interconnected with his ideas on redefining American letters and Puerto Rican identity. Williams admired James Joyce's work and published several essays in the Irish author's defense. He praised Joyce's work noted the author's ability to "unEnglish" the language. Williams felt that Joyce understood the importance of his Irish heritage as an author and his realized duty to break free from Anglo ties:

In Joyce it began not without malice I imagine. And continued, no doubt, with a private end in view, as might be the case with any of us. Joyce, the catholic Irishman, began with English, a full-dressed English which it must have been his delight to unenglish until it should be humanly catholic, never at least sentimental. Tis is purely my imagination of a possible animus. And again a broken language cannot have been less than affectionately fostered since it affords him relief from his tormenters. Admirably, of course, Joyce has written his words to neither face neither custom officials not church dignitaries, catholic or protestant, but the clean features of the intelligence.
(*Selected Essays* 76)

Williams praised Joyce's writings on several occasion and defended his works as important because of their anti-anglo sentiment. One of Joyce's most poignant themes was the "deanglicizing" of Ireland which endeared him the Williams who also felt that the new

“American” expression would only develop if American writers could break free from the English control of literature and criticism. He was critical of T.S. Eliot (who he felt had betrayed “American” letters) and also his close friend, Ezra Pound, whose pro-Anglo stance was hindering a new way. In *Al Que Quiere*, Williams includes Spanish into his “American idiom” in the same way that James Joyce incorporates Irish in *Finnegan’s Wake* and is arguing for the deanglicization of America.

Eugene O’Neill:

Eugene O’Neill is considered the U.S.’s most famous playwright. He enjoyed literary success and won four Pulitzer Prizes (1920, 1921, 1925 and 1957- posthumously). In 1936, he was awarded the Nobel Prize, like William Carlos Williams, his “ethnic” heritage was often ignored by those who analyzed his work during his lifetime. As Virginia Floyd notes:

He continuously stressed his identity as an Irish-American. His Irish heritage exerted the strongest single influence on him as a man and playwright. [...] In 1946, the playwright told his son Eugene that ‘the one thing that explains more than anything about me is the fact that I’m Irish and strangely enough it is something that writers who have attempted to explain me and my work have overlooked’. (Floyd xx)

Since his death in 1953, several works, such as Edward Shaughnessy’s *Eugene O’Neill in Ireland: The Critical Reception* and Harry Cronin’s *Irish and American: a study in cultural context*, have been published which recognize these influences. Most critics now acknowledge the ways his heritage shaped certain aspects of his writing and his understanding of family and that his Irishness also framed the way he conceptualized the U.S.

O'Neill's dramatic life began in a hotel room on Broadway and Forty-Sixth Street in New York City. His father, who was from Kilkenny, Ireland, was an actor who toured the U.S. and the family had no fixed address until Eugene was seven. His life experiences are often cited as the main source for his most successful plays and are often too striking to ignore. Certainly, the dysfunctional relationships in *A Long Day's Journey* and *The Iceman Cometh* resemble some aspects of his family dynamics. His plays touch on a variety of Irish and non-Irish themes and he shared William Carlos Williams' "obsession" with America. However, he was more pessimistic as to the future of the country:

The United States, instead of being the most successful country in the world, is the greatest failure because it was given everything, more than any other country. Through moving as rapidly as it has, it hasn't acquired any real roots. Its main idea is that everlasting game of trying to possess your own soul by the possession of something outside it. (Floyd 5)

This was an important theme for O'Neill and many critics relate him to other U.S. authors who also understood this negative side of the U.S.:

O'Neill [...] shared the conviction held by the New England Transcendentalists, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, writers who were the first to demonstrate how America had become alienated and lost its soul without knowing it. The poets and philosophers tried to awaken the country to the conventions that strangled society and left its members leading "lives of quiet desperation." (Diggins 2)

He wrote in order to show this "dark" side of America which in which each person exists. One of Eugene O'Neill's primary obsessions was with the deterioration of America as its people became obsessed with material things and ignored the spiritual aspect of one's existence.

After dropping out of Princeton (and getting married), he decided that he was not ready to settle down. Through his father's connections he got a job as a prospector in Honduras. He enjoyed working on ships and later joined another crew and sailed to Argentina. His only documented trip to the Caribbean was to Trinidad and Tobago. This short stay was clearly the inspiration for *Moon of the Caribees* which takes place on the "main deck of the British tramp steamer Glencairn, at anchor off an island in the West Indies"(O'Neill 455).

The Fountain, his other "Caribbean play", was not a critical success which is perhaps due to its bleak depiction of Juan Ponce de León's and the Spanish colonizers first forays into the New World. O'Neill did extensive research on the voyages of Christopher Columbus and the other explorers. He chose to invent a story which made Ponce de León the protagonist. Through his research he attempted to create a realistic representation of the era and not tell a factual story about the conquest. O'Neill saw Ponce de León as a composite character. "I want him a fine mixture of Columbus, Cortez, Las Casas, de Soto— in brief, the Spanish explorer of that epoch"(Diggins 89). Ponce de León, the protagonist, is portrayed as noble and just, according to the standards of the time.

At the beginning of the play, Ponce de León is a soldier fighting the Moors and he follows Columbus in order to fight more battles. His stated ambition is to find China because "I have Spain in my heart and ambition" (388). He is also a womanizer and does not believe in love or romance. His voyage to the New World is merely a way find adventure and his obsession with finding the mythical fountain of youth only begins when he falls in love with a much younger woman. She is the beautiful daughter of his friend Vicente and his ex-lover, María, and when she arrives in his life he realizes that he has lived a stagnant life without

meaning. He has been governing Puerto Rico for twenty years and after meeting her, he has an epiphany and finally understands the importance of beauty and love. “It was the one time Beauty touched my life. I wish to live in her memory as what she was to me”(445). However, by this time, it is too late for him and he is dying when he realizes that Beatriz is the “golden city” that he had been searching for and the “only one I have ever conquered” (445).

O’Neill traces America’s excessive of focus on materialism to the conquest of the Spaniards. Ponce de León’s lack of awareness of the importance of conquest and its consequences shows the lack of spirituality of the Spaniards. He makes it clear that many of the conquistadores were only interested in finding riches and not promoting religion among the indigenous peoples. Also, he emphasizes that the subsequent enslavement of this population was sanctioned by the Catholic Church:

For all the talk about the fountain, O’Neill, though he apparently never realized it, became less interested in the old legend than in the white man’s harsh and greedy invasion of the New World as the origin of a dark strain in the American character. Virtually all the better passages in the play touch on this theme. Indeed, *the Fountain is*, in some respects, a prologue to “A Tale of Possessors Self-Dispossessed,” a multi-play cycle O’Neill later worked on in which he aimed to show where, in his view, the country went wrong, how and why it betrayed its original ideals... (Son and Artist 53)

Nano, the indigenous protagonist who plots to kill Ponce de León, displays a deeper spiritual understanding than the conquistadores when he explains to his tribe members that the Spaniards are enemies because “They see only things, not the spirit behind things. Their hearts are muddy as a pool in which deer have trampled” (428). However, O’Neill does not

fall for the easy trap of portraying Nano, as the stereotypical “noble savage”. “As a playwright-historian, O’Neill is no sentimentalist about alien cultures. He is hardly suggesting that goodness resides with the simple and virtuous”(Diggins 92). Nano, is only interested in exacting revenge on Ponce de Leon and his men because they have killed his family and destroyed everything in his village. In the climax of the play, Nano escapes his captors and meets the other members of his tribe. He informs them that they must ambush the white men who come ashore and kill them.

Ponce de León’s awakening occurs as he watches his true love fall in love with his nephew (who is his namesake). When the protagonist finally understands this idea of a “the spirit behind things” it is too late. He laments “I come after— or before— but lost, blind in a world where my eyes deflect on surfaces” (414). After this realization, he loses his ability to lead his men and promote Spain:

To O’Neill, the Western explorer experiences everything and understands nothing. To grasp is not to conceive and to know but to acquire and accumulate, not to comprehend but to take. America would be the setting for the greatest land grab in history. [...] Yet O’Neill’s play helps us understand that the explorers missed the meaning of America because nothing is feared more than a new experience that compels the mind to think anew. (89)

The inability of the Spanish to comprehend what they really found in the “New World” led them to try to re-create the social systems that already existed in Spain and throughout Europe and this was their greatest failure.

Several years passed between the writing and the production of *The Fountain*. Several producers took on the play and never brought it to the state. The first production took place in 1925 at the Greenwich Village Theatre. It was not a critical or commercial success and it closed after a two-week run. Before its failure, O’Neill considered it one of his best

plays, but he later decided that the critics were correct in their condemnation. However, he always maintained the theme of belonging was an intrinsic part of the work that many overlooked.

Conclusion:

Through their literature and political activism these New York Irish and Puerto Rican communities were reacting to the limited definition of Americaness which was offered to them. New York was by no means perfect, but it was more open to foreign cultures than other parts of the country. In one of his essays on New York life, Joaquín Colón López tries to understand assimilation on a personal and community level. He concludes that “positive” assimilation consists of give and take where the dominant society is influenced by those who become part of it and that New York is one of the few places where this is possible.

La asimilación absoluta no puede existir en una comunidad esencialmente cosmopolita como lo es la metrópolis neoyorquina. Esta se nutre, progresa y crece mas bien al influjo de las aportaciones de todas las razas que integran. Tratar de asimilarse sin aportar lo propio es parasitismo, renunciamiento, regimentación. (Colón López 5)

Absolute assimilation cannot exist in an essentially cosmopolitan like New York. It really feeds, progresses and grows from the influence from the contributions of all the races that integrate. Trying to assimilate without bring one's own is being a parasite, it is renunciation and regimentation.

He feels that the city improves as each group brings its experiences and traditions.

New York was important place where Irish and Puerto Ricans could exercise the kind of political control that was often denied to them on their islands. As a reaction to the oppression they experienced in Ireland the Irish New Yorkers carried a system of favoritism to its highest level and excluded people from other communities. Puerto Ricans on the island

did not win the right to vote for the own governor until 1947, yet those who resided in the continental U.S. could vote in Federal elections and run for office. Jesús Colón finishes *A Puerto Rican in New York* with an essay about his reasons for leaving Puerto Rico and coming to the city. He admits to having dreamt of “a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow” but not realizing until later that colonialism was responsible for his exile. New York was a harsh place where he experienced “harsh pay, long hours, terrible working conditions” and “discrimination.” However, he notes that the “the Puerto Ricans in New York are [...] fast adapting themselves to the best fighting and democratic traditions of this country” (200-201). Americans also have a history of fighting for social justice and part of being an American is understanding the first line of constitution which reads “We the people...”. He connects all those who have been fighting for justice with those who wrote the constitution and invented America. This idea of America is one in which Puerto Ricans and Irish activists could find a point of contact.

Life Writing and the Invention of Community

It stands to reason [...] that immigrant autobiography may illuminate the meaning of being American as well as, if not better than, autobiography by the native born. Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong in American Autobiography (144)

The autobiographical stories written by the Irish and Puerto Ricans in New York about the nineteen forties, fifties and early sixties depict their protagonists' relationship to their own community as well as to their Irish or Puerto Rican counterparts. Narratives by Piri Thomas, Frank McCourt, Edward Rivera, and Judith Ortiz Cofer demonstrate that autobiographical stories can be understood as a dialogue that aims to create a community held together by culture. This creation of community corresponds to Benedict Anderson's idea that "communities are to be distinguished not by the falsity/genuineness, but by the style they in which they are imagined" (6). The stories are examples of the importance of community (and how it is imagined by the authors) in the diaspora. By writing about themselves (or about characters that exist in similar circumstances), these authors are creating a new type "imagined community" which is only vaguely related to the concept of nation. As these authors chronicle their experiences, they create their self/protagonist who exists in an imagined community that is held together by the shared dynamics of living outside the mainstream culture.

Traditionally, the scholarship relating to life writing asserts that the act of writing is connected to the process of creating a *self* and this *self* as protagonist of the story is an affirmation of the experiences of the individual. As John Paul Eakin notes in *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography*, "the notion that we all possess unique selves,

continuous identities developing over the course of a lifetime, has become an established article of faith for both autobiographers and their readers”(74). In the case of immigrant life writing (in the U.S.), the stories were usually understood as the formation of the self in relation to the process of assimilation, and the development of this self/protagonist is often viewed in terms of how he/she successfully assimilates into the hegemonic culture. However, the affirmation of self as part of a community outside the dominant culture is more significant. Eakin illustrates that “the autobiographical act is performed not in some wholly private, fictive realm of the isolated self but rather in strenuous engagement with the pressures that life in culture entails” (71). These immigrant writers construct the positive aspects of the Irish or Puerto Rican communities and cultures by depicting songs, recreating public spaces, people, food, music, historical events, and focusing on the use of language.

However, in these narratives they also create community by depicting an “Other” to define their community. This construction of ethnicity (or a communal identity) in the diaspora is an intrinsic part of community building:

. . . Ethnicity is understood as *relational* and it is constructed in terms of a *process*. What is central to ethnicity is not some objective criterion of cultural difference. Rather, it is the process whereby one group constructs its distinctiveness from another, of course processes of boundary construction, maintenance and dissolution vary over time. (Brah163)

Ethnicity is always created or imagined in relation to an “Other” and these stories of growing up contribute to the group’s biography. As Edward Said points out, this defensive position is a result of their precarious existence:

Because nothing is secure. Exile is a jealous state. What you achieve is precisely what you have no wish to share, and it is in the drawing of lines

around you and your compatriots that the least attractive aspects of being in exile emerge: an exaggerated sense of group solidarity, and a passionate hostility to outsiders, even those who may in fact be in the same predicament as you. (178)

The authors often conceptualize their community by drawing lines and making implicit designations of who belongs and who does not. As Stuart Hall notes, “Throughout their careers, identities can function as points of identification and attachment only *because* their capacity is to exclude, to leave out. To render ‘outside’ abjected” (*Questions* 4-5). In other words, identity (on a communal and personal level) does not denote anything unless it can define an “Other.”

The ways in which the authors depict their Irish or Puerto Rican counterparts in their autobiographical stories can be viewed as an assertion of group solidarity. The protagonists in novels exist in an environment of cultural flux, and writing about their relation to this particular “Other” is a method of defining themselves. The depictions of the Irish depend on whether the Puerto Rican characters understand them to be part of the white/U.S./Anglo society or whether they view them with solidarity as marginalized “Others.” From the Irish perspective, the Puerto Ricans either serve as reminders of the experiences of assimilation in their own family history or as racialized others with whom they compete for the limited resources of the city. The ways that the members of the two groups inhabit the shared spaces of the narratives and/or transcend boundaries is based on these perceptions.

In Thomas’ *Down these Mean Streets* and McCourt’s *‘Tis* the protagonists feel alienated and minoritized by U.S./Anglo/white culture. Frankie feels outside Anglo culture because he has been taught that the Irish-Catholics are radically different from Anglos, yet he

is not quite ready to admit that he is similar to the “Puerto Rican dishwashers.” In some instances, he dreams about being a part of Anglo society and other times he rejects it. Piri recognizes that he is discriminated against because of the color of his skin, and he refuses to accept it. The discrimination causes problems within his family and with all his other relationships. He realizes that because of the structure of Anglo/U.S./white society some of his siblings are capable of “passing” as white (but he is not), and he resents it. However, Piri and Frankie’s feelings of being an outsider do not lead to them embrace solidarity with their Puerto Rican or Irish counterparts and they maintain an antagonistic relationship with these “outsiders.”

In Judith Ortiz Cofer and Edward Rivera’s stories the idea of “Other is not as adversarial, but it is far from harmonious. For Santos and Ortiz Cofer’s protagonist, the Irish are part of the establishment that keeps them marginalized. They attend Catholic schools which are run by Irish clergy, and many of their fellow students are Irish or Italian. Rivera’s character has occasional feelings of solidarity on a personal level, but understands the difficulty of achieving unity on a communal level. Ortiz Cofer’s young narrator sees the Irish students at her school as part of the world to which she will never belong.

The Creation of the “Other:” Piri Thomas and Frank McCourt

In nineteen sixty-seven, Piri Thomas’s memoir, *Down These Mean Streets*, was published and became the first well-known literary work about Puerto Ricans in New York by someone inside the community. Thomas’s memoir, and its sequel, *Seven Long Times*, are set in the late nineteen forties and fifties. *Down* was the first best-seller that chronicles a young man’s experiences growing up on the streets of Spanish Harlem. As Edgardo Vega Yunque explains, “the success of this memoir “set the parameters for Puerto Rican Literature

in the United States” (Hernández 206). The work is always praised for its authenticity and gritty realism. The narrative contains numerous stories about his life on the street, his drug addiction, his involvement in street fighting, and basic struggle for survival. It finishes with his conviction for killing a police officer which lands him in jail and his struggle to stay clean after his release.

The depiction of the Puerto Rican and African-American *ganguitas* fighting over turf and constant conflict between the different ethnic groups are portrayed as inevitable. According to the narrative, these struggles are the unavoidable result of intersections of people of different cultural backgrounds. In Thomas’ own words:

There was a lot of violence on the streets because of racism. The Italians and Irish hated us with a vengeance. When we had to go to the store, we had to go with convoys of *la ganguita* for protection and if there was a fight, the police came out on the side of the Italians and the Irish and attacked us, who were still boys”(Hernández 175).

Throughout the narrative, the interactions of protagonist with other ethnic groups always results in verbal or physical confrontation and Piri is forced into defending his right to inhabit the shared spaces. At times, he looks for a connection between himself and these other communities, but it is futile. When he is beaten up by the Italian boys, he hears the other people on street and laments that “... the elders were all busy yakking away in Italian. I couldn’t help thinking how much like Spanish it sounded. Shit, that should make us something like relatives”(25). However, the Italians refuse to acknowledge that he is similar to them. They call him a nigger and throw gravel in his eyes which nearly blinds him.

Piri, who was a dark-skinned Puerto Rican, experienced racism on two levels [.] and his ability to be part of U.S./Anglo society is hindered not only because he is Puerto Rican but because of his skin color. His African ancestry is denied by his own father (who was

dark-skinned as well) and the rest of his lighter-skinned family. When Piri asks his father why he never acknowledges this aspect of his ancestry his father responds:

I ain't got one colored friend, [...] at least not one American Negro friend. Only dark ones I got are Puerto Ricans or Cubans. I'm not a stupid man. I saw the look of white people on me when I was young man, when I walked into a place where dark skin wasn't supposed to be. I noticed cold rejection turned into indifferent acceptance when they heard my exaggerated accent.
(153)

His father feels that associating with African-Americans will lead to even more discrimination.

Piri is discriminated against by white society (which for him clearly includes the Irish) which he feels oppresses him because they perceive him to be a black man. The importance of the Irish presence in Piri's subconscious is significant because his references to this community are manifested as a racial slur. Throughout the work, he dismisses all white people by using the derogatory terms which were commonly used. Piri uses the words *blanco/a*, *white* and *Paddy* interchangeably (he also incorporates the word *Charley* after his stay to the South), but *paddy* is the one that he uses most often¹ as an insult. For him the Irish were an important presence but were clearly inseparable from the Anglo community.

There are several incidents in the book where he uses the term *Paddy* to call attention to their racism and also to define what he is not. The first is when his parents decide to move out to a house in the Long Island suburbs. He does not want to leave Harlem and he explains his resistance to his mom by telling her that his friend Crutch had informed him that "there were a lot of paddies out there and they didn't dig Negroes or Puerto Ricans"(81). His mother resists the idea and responds "Caramba! What ideas!...What for you talk like that? Your Poppa and I saved enough money. We want you to have good opportunities. It's a

¹ He uses the term more than forty times throughout the narrative.

better life in the country. No like Puerto Rico, but it have trees and grass and nice schools” (82). Moving to the suburbs means new opportunities for the whole family, but Piri resists because he knows he will be rejected.

The second important scene where the word Paddy is used to represent all those who discriminate against him is Piri’s job interview with Mr. Christian. Piri lies when the interviewer asks him about his religious affiliation and his church attendance. Then when asked about his reasons for dropping out of school and the boy also invents an excuse. He tells Mr. Christian that he needed to help out his family, but he thinks to himself, “On account of all you funny paddies and your funny ideas in this funny world” (Thomas 100-101). After a few more minutes of questions, Mr. Christian quickly informs Piri that there are no positions currently available and affably tells him he will call when something becomes available. However, a short while later, he offers Piri’s friend, Lucky, (who is white) the same job. Piri realizes that he was not given an opportunity on account of his skin color. The third significant moment occurs when he decides to leave his family to join the merchant marines. He looks up at his brothers and sisters and ponders, “‘Maybe if I had come out the same kinda color as them’ –my eyes swept across my paddy-fair brothers– ‘maybe I wouldn’t feel like I do.[...] Maybe I hate them for what I am not–”(150). The word has been transformed into an adjective which clearly refers to the color of their skin and equates Irishness and whiteness.

Piri’s friendship with Brew, a black southerner, is significant because Brew’s has internalized the idea that community affiliation is based on skin color. He grew up in a segregated society and is understandably unapologetic about his suspicion of white people. He gets angry when Piri refuses to identify himself as black. He tells Piri, “say it like it is,

out loud-like, you hate all paddies.", but Piri can only respond, "Just their fuckin' color, Brew," I said bitterly. "Just their color-their damn claim that white is the national anthem of the world. You know?"(Thomas 122).

When Piri travels to the south with Brew they meet a young man named Gerald Andrew West who tells them of his pride in embracing his multiethnic ancestry. West is dark-skinned, yet he feels more affiliation with Spanish culture, then African culture. He tells Piri and Brew that he is often mistaken for a Spaniard or an Indian. Brew dislikes West immediately because he feels that he is just a black man trying to "pass" as a white man, but Piri's reaction is different. He understands what it means not to base identity on skin color and thinks "I found it hard to hate a guy that was hung up on the two sticks that were so much like mine" (Thomas 178). He does not tell Brew about his feelings because he knows that Brew will think of his indecision as a betrayal as well, so he laments to himself, "I wish I was one of them lizards that change colors. When I'd be with Negroes, I'd be a stone negro, and with paddies I'd be a stone paddy"(180). He wants to feel authentic and identifying himself as one thing or another does not satisfy his need to find an identity.

Piri's use of the word "Paddy" was very common in African-American communities and demonstrates how much they influence him linguistically and socially. However, it also shows how persuasive anti-Irish sentiment in the U.S. was. It is a common nickname for Irish men named Patrick and according to Michael de Nie, "the construction of the term intended to reflect the peasant nature and Catholicism of the Irish began around 1798 after a failed rebellion of the Irish people against the English".² This derogatory significance was prevalent in England throughout the 1800's and became a catchall phrase used to describe the supposed laziness, drunkenness and uncleanness of the Irish. The most common usage in

² See *The Eternal Paddy* by Michael de Nie about the depictions of the Irish in British media in the 1800's.

the United States which reflects these negative connotations is the term “paddy wagon” which refers to a police van used to pick large groups of out-of-control intoxicated individuals or other minor delinquents. Ironically, it began as a term that was used to highlight difference and call attention to the fact that the Irish were not part of English society. Thus, almost certainly without realizing it, Piri’s use of Paddy promotes the kind of historical ethnic discrimination against which he is rebelling.

Piri Thomas’s contemporary, Frank McCourt, was born in Brooklyn in 1930 and, although he spent most of his early years in Ireland he returned to New York in 1949. In his autobiographical trilogy: *Angela’s Ashes*, *‘Tis*, and *Teacher Man* he talks about his early years in New York, his childhood in Ireland, and his return to New York where he taught in the public school system. As in Thomas’s work, the idea of ascribing to one particular pre-determined identity is a concept that seems to hinder the protagonist. Frankie needs to come to terms with the fact that he will always be considered a Yank in Ireland and Mick in the U.S. in the same way that Piri must figure out how to be a dark-skinned *Boricua* in the U.S. As he was growing up in the lanes of Limerick he always felt a distinction because he was born in New York and dreamed of going back. However, once he arrives, he is categorized as an “off the boat Mick”(65) or a “Paddy- from-the-Bog” (43) and as soon as he opens his mouth, he cannot escape how others perceive his Irishness:

Why is it the minute I open my mouth the whole world is telling me they’re Irish and we should all have a drink? It’s not enough to be American. You always have to be something else, Irish-American, German-American, and you wonder how they’d get along if someone hadn’t invented the hyphen.”(Mc Court 91)

When Frankie first comes back to New York he is determined to leave his past behind him because he associates Irish identity with the poverty and oppression that he experienced. He

refuses to let that this past dominate his new life. However, he is drawn to the Irish bars, with the shamrocks “the likes of which you’d never see back in Ireland” (*Tis* 27) and later spends his free time singing the patriotic songs that his father had taught him.

Since the protagonist’s return to New York also coincided with what is known in Puerto Rican Studies as the Great Migration (1945-65), he is made immediately aware of the opinion that many New York/Irish had about the Puerto Ricans. In some ways, their low status determined his position as an Irish person in this city at that time. For instance, on his second day in the city he asks the doorman of the hotel (where he has just secured a job cleaning the lobby) for directions. The doorman is from Roscommon and cheerfully gives Frankie directions. He also warns him about the Puerto Ricans:

Good luck, stick with your own kind and watch out for the Puerto Ricans, they all carry knives and that's a known fact, they got that hot blood. Walk in the light along the edge of the sidewalk or they'll be leapin' at you from dark doorways. (McCourt 25-6)

The first warning does not influence his thoughts too much until his landlady also disparages the Puerto Ricans. She tells him not to eat outside on the stoop because “cockroaches will come running from all over and people will say we’re a bunch of Puerto Ricans who don’t care where they eat or drink or sleep.”(37)

From his Irish colleagues, Frankie quickly learns the epithet that is used to insult the Puerto Ricans – *Spics* and says “That’s a new word, spics, and I know from the way he says it that he doesn’t like Puerto Ricans” (38). As Piri’s use of the term *Paddy* it demonstrates the extent of anti-Puerto Rican sentiment in New York at this time. The exact origins of the term are contested. Puerto Rican writer, Juan Pedro Soto, who spent a great deal of time in New York in the nineteen fifties and sixties, explains the term as a derivation of how Puerto

Ricans mispronounced the English word “speak.” *Spiks*, his collection of short stories, begins with this explanation of the evolution of the term:

Su mala pronunciación, de esa *i* que en la frase correcta de “I don’t speak English” debe ser aguda, no gruesa, hará que le endilguen, como hispanohablante, el término peyorativo de spik.

The pejorative term spik was placed upon Spanish speakers because of their incorrect pronunciation of the “i” which in the correct phrase “I don’t speak English” should be acute, not grave.

He also says that it was possibly derived from the insult word used for Italians— spig (short for spaghetti). Another popular theory is that the term evolved as a shortened version of the word Hispanic. Currently, it has been transformed to insult anyone of Hispanic origin. In this sense, it is similar to Piri’s use of the label Paddy to define all white people.

Both protagonists, Piri and Frankie, use racial epitaphs as a way of defining themselves because of their own self-doubt. Frankie quickly incorporates the word into his vocabulary when it is associated with his concept of his place in the power structure. Like Piri he understands his position in the world based not only on his personal attributes, but how his community compares to others. Frankie’s “place” in the hierarchy is explained to him on his first day at the hotel. Firstly, he is told that he is not allowed to talk to the guests unless they speak to him. As soon as he begins to cleanup, the Greek waiters start shouting orders at him. They ask him if he’s drunk and insult him repeatedly. After a few days, he begins to lament his situation:

It’s shameful enough going around the Palm Court [hotel lobby] in the black houseman’s uniform which means I’m just above the Puerto Rican dishwashers in the eyes of the world. Even porters have a touch of gold on their uniforms and the doormen themselves look like admirals of the fleet.

Eddie Gilligan, the union shop steward, says it's a good thing I'm Irish or it's down in the kitchen I'd be with the Spics" (McCourt 38).

He knows that his job is difficult and thankless; thus, he takes comfort from those who are in a worse position.

Frankie's colleague, Eddie Gilligan, also tells the young protagonist to stay away from the Puerto Ricans in the kitchen "cause they wouldn't think twice about pissing in your coffee" (38). However, Gilligan has a brief moment of revelation about the Puerto Rican workers when he thinks about the coffee. He tells Frankie that the previous year "he saw them [the Puerto Rican dishwashers] pissing in the coffee urn that was being sent to a big lunch for the Daughters of the British Empire" and decides that this was a good idea after all because it could be seen as retribution for "what they did to the Irish for 800 years." At the next banquet he will also urinate in the urn and afterwards he will announce to them that "they have just drank coffee filled with spick-mick piss" (39). For this brief moment he places the Irish and Puerto Ricans on the same level, but it is only a limited solidarity. The narrator frames the discussion with Eddie's final conclusion:

He wouldn't want them marrying his daughter or moving into his neighborhood but you have to admit they're musical and they send up some pretty good baseball players, you have to admit that. You go down into the kitchen and they're always happy like kids. He says, – They're like the Negroes, they don't take nothing serious. Not like the Irish. We take everything serious. (McCourt 39)

He never realizes the irony that being musical and good at sports were what the Irish were known for when the first came to the U.S. He also infantilizes them and still compares them to the Irish whose relative "maturity" leads them to take themselves too seriously. The

daughters of the British Empire alienate the Puerto Rican dishwashers and the Irish shop workers in that same way because they represent a U.S./Anglo culture which discriminates against them. Gilligan understand himself as excluded by U.S./Anglo society, but cannot quite recognize his experiences as similar to those of other ethnic minorities.

Frankie's marriage to a woman of a different faith does not facilitate his assimilation. After the marriage, he spends his time drinking in Irish pubs and singing about Ireland. He constantly struggles with confused feelings of disconnectedness that are typical of immigrant life. He is proud of the Irish mythical stories and is comfortable singing old songs in the company of the expatriate community in New York. Since his *Irishness* is dependant upon his Catholicism he is betraying a part of his identity by marrying someone of another faith. When the marriage fails, he implies that it is one of the reasons is their cultural gap. The complexity of all these issues of assimilation becomes even more apparent when his daughter is born. His dreams are not that he will become a part of U.S. society and what he calls "the better class of people," but that his daughter will. He acknowledges his inability to be a part of this society and comes to a realization while he is looking at his newborn daughter:

No, my lovely daughter would spend four years in one of those sweet New England colleges so exquisite they find the Ivy League vulgar. She'd be blond and tanned, strolling the greensward with an Episcopalian lacrosse star, scion, of a Boston Brahmin family. His name would be Doug. He'd have bright blue eyes, powerful shoulders, and a frank direct look. He'd call me sir and crush my hand in his manly honest way. He and Maggie would be married in the honest stone Episcopalian church on campus, showered with confetti under an arch of lacrosse sticks, the sport of a better class of people. (McCourt 350)

As an Irishman and a Catholic he does not feel he can gain privileged status, though, he wishes it for his child.

Comparative experiences: Ed Rivera and Judith Ortiz Cofer

Edward Rivera, like his protagonist, was born in Puerto Rico, and went to New York City with his parents as a young boy. His *bildungsroman*, *Family Installments: Memories of Growing up Hispanic* depicts the formation of the protagonist, Santos, in the context of his journey from Puerto Rico to New York. The narrative begins in Puerto Rico with the story of Santos's grandparents and the poverty they endure in the small *pueblo* they live in during the years of the depression until Santos is old enough to narrate the story. Santos's part of the story begins school in the one room schoolhouse where his grandfather had taught. His family's is trying to survive without his father, who has already moved to New York and is trying to save enough money to bring his family over. By the fourth chapter, Santos is already enrolled at his new school in East Harlem where his encounters with the Irish are not violent, but they are occasionally antagonistic.

In New York, he struggles to learn English and understand his surroundings. His family (and his Puerto Rican roots) alternately make him proud and embarrass him. His Irish teachers and peers in the Catholic school he attends are his only source of Puerto Rican history and his personal and communal identity is being formed by these nuns who provide a prejudiced view of the history. In two of the vignettes, the narrator frames his definitions of Puerto Rican heritage in terms of what the Irish nuns and brothers teach him; "First Communion" and "Caesar and the Bruteses: A Tragedy." For instance, one nun tells the Puerto Rican students that their

ancestors were the Caribs, cannibalistic Indians from the jungles of South America ... [who] ate their enemies raw. She went on to tell us that they

hadn't even discovered friction – that's how primitive they were. It was the Europeans, the Spaniards, who had brought them friction, True Faith and other forms of Christian civilization.”(76)

The nun promotes the idea that the Spanish Empire was different from English rule (because they were Catholics) and justifies colonial ideology, which purported that the colonizers came purely for religious reasons. The indigenous people of the Americas were savages waiting for their enlightenment.

In these stories, Santos notes the awkwardness of the relations between himself and these educators. On some level, he respects and even admires some of his teachers; although, they frequently make him feel inadequate. The description the relationship between the nuns and their students is complex. He knows that the nuns like the children and “there was something cold-hearted and generous about our nuns that gave at least some of us reason to be grateful our parents had signed us up at Saint Miseria's”(74). He is grateful for their attention; however, when one of the nuns offers to buy him a suit for his the communion ceremony, he thinks:

It may have been a nice favor on sister's part [...] putting out all that money for a kid on ADC³. For one thing they were Irish, all of them, so why they should they give a damn for people like me? But they did sometimes. More confusion on my side. And a long time later, when I thought back on it, I was still confused.”(75)

Their cold sympathy is puzzling to the young boy especially when he reflects on their other actions – which included corporeal punishment, strict adherence to rule of the classroom, and a great deal of homework:

³ Aid to dependent children (part of the welfare program)

First they hit you and make certain embarrassing hints about your family habits and your man-eating ancestors, and then they treat you to a free purchase of clothes. The whole bunch of us had a lot to learn about these women, and a lot to be grateful for as well. Not that we had much choice, but still...”(78)

Santos’s feelings of appreciation and resentment become difficult to distinguish. They influence his views on Puerto Rican identity and their seemingly contradictory treatment of him leads him to conclude that they command some respect and admiration, but he doubts their motivation.

During the First Communion ceremony, the cultural differences and prejudices between the Irish brothers surfaces and Santos relates a different dynamic between the two competing nationalities. Through his depiction of Maestro Padilla, the choir director, he demonstrates how strong Puerto Rican nationalism was among some members of the community. Padilla is the church organist who repeatedly tells the children and the teachers that the only reason he isn’t a concert pianist is “because the concert halls were discriminating against him on account of his ‘national origins’”(92). Maestro Padilla avenges this discrimination by playing his own choice of music at the ceremony and his sacrilege upsets Santos, who knows that the Brothers won’t be pleased at Padilla’s outburst of patriotism.

Maestro Padilla had been booming his idea of music down on us: a combination of sacred sounds, the strictly prescribed stuff, with intermezzos of all four Puerto Rican national anthems, which I had no doubt was endangering his immortal soul, and possibly the soul of his number one enemy, Pastor Rooney who was [...] probably cursing the choirmaster under his breath in between snatches of Latin” (97).

The Irish Brothers repeatedly warn Padilla to stop playing secular music, but he intentionally antagonizes them and blasts everyone with the “La Borinqueña”⁴ and other patriotic tunes: “He was both an artist and a diehard patriot, and this organ racket was his way of both proclaiming his loyalty and protesting his wages he received from the ‘tied-fisted’ pastor”(92). The Brothers’ real objections; however, seem to stem from the fact that they do not appreciate the music. Santos overhears one brother complaining “Bejesus, will you just listen to man’s playing? [...] It’s just not my idea of music, Jerry. I wouldn’t pay him to grind me own organ on a street corner”(92). Their complaints are culturally biased not religious based.

In “Caesar and Bruteses: A Tragedy”, Santos’s personal insights on the Irish Brothers change as he realizes that they are not quite part of Anglo culture. In this humorous tale about an Irish brother trying to teach Shakespeare to his elementary school class, the protagonist depicts one of his favorite teachers, Brother Cassian O’Leary. O’Leary is a retired sailor who fought in World War II and was “in his thirties when he started teaching” (118). According to Santos, “the other ACB’s [American Catholic Brothers] most of them younger than he, were well ahead of him in their command of the ‘immortal thinkers and poets’”(117). Bro’Leary refers to Dante as Dandy and brings up Homer and Virgil out of context during class. Santos feels some form of pity for him when he imagines that the Brother stays awake at night worrying while his better-educated colleagues “snored in peace and held dreamy dialogues with the smarter angels and the Founding Fathers of the Holy Mother Church”(117).

Bro’Leary is liked by his students, who feel that he actually teaches them because he feels some affection for them and does not give preference to the Irish students. The boys

⁴ The national anthem of Puerto Rico. The original lyrics were composed by Lola Rodríguez de Tió.

give him his nickname – Bro’Leary because he plays handball with them and he does not use corporal punishment to control them– even in cases where “his colleagues would have doubled the shots to our outstretched hands” (121). He is over six feet tall and Irish – “just like the cops” that people in the neighborhood were “always threatening to call.” Santos notes that “the Irish always sided with the Irish and the Italians always sided with the Italians” and the law was that you always sided with “Your Own Kind.” Bro’ Leary was the one exception to the rule; however, “because he had no favorites in class” (118). Bro’Leary breaks these unwritten rules by not favoring his Irish students.

The main episode of the story focuses on how Bro’Leary decides to “bring up the level” of the class and to assign Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. The boys are not ready (many of them are still learning English) and the result is a complete disaster. Santos tries to read it over the winter break and is totally confused by the play. His frustration is amplified because he wants to learn and he knows that if he does not succeed in school then he will be a disappointment to his family. In his desperation, he hides the book under the bed and hopes the cockroaches will enjoy eating it. Their “specially ordered edition” is of poor quality and contains several errors– which makes it even more alien for the students. His frustration leads him to theorize that Bro’Leary is gay and has given them this play to read in order to fail the entire class so they could stay with him another year.

However, Santos has a revelation when he returns to school to take the exam and notices that Bro’Leary is not quite comfortable in his position of authority. He looks at the Brother’s test and sees that he is just as estranged by the English classic as his students. The exam has many spelling errors and contains a note at the bottom of the character identification section which says, “Try not to get these mixed up. I know they all sound

alike, but that's no excuse"(135). It also contains questions such as: "Could this tragedy have taken place in a Catholic country? E.G. Ireland? Italy? Porto Rico? Poland? Why not?" and "The narrative takes place in...?"(136). It has become vogue to re-read and reinvent Shakespeare from a colonial perspective and new readings have called into question the hegemony of British cultural imperialism, but Bro'Leary's application of Catholic values to an English play in a classroom full of Italians and Puerto Ricans denotes the incredible complexity of the cultural transference between these Catholic groups.

Santos's discovery that Bro'Leary English skills were deficient and that he was ignorant of important literature is a revelation. He notes that the brother often searched for the right words in class "and the more he fished the more meager his catches"(139). The brother makes a noticeable effort to use correct grammar in class because it does not come naturally for him. The young boy's father has instilled in him a desire to succeed in New York and has made it clear that "*el camino al exito*" is speaking correct English, and as a young man it weighed heavily on all his interactions. He says "I was timid in school (I was timid everywhere, in fact) and that my English, broken and mispronounced, was a disgraceful version of the real thing..."(85). Seeing his teacher struggle evokes feeling of empathy.

However, as the story progresses it becomes clear that his quest for revenge is stronger than his sympathy. After failing the Shakespeare test, Santos and his friend Virgilio go on the roof and launch water balloons at Bro'Leary. The boys commit their act of rebellion by embarrassing the teachers in front of the entire school, and they receive no punishment. Bro'Leary blames the public school kids and the faculty does not pursue the issue. After they come back from Spring break, Bro'Leary has disappeared and been replaced by Brother Fish. The students are told that he has gone up to teach in a school near

the Hudson River, but Santos doubts this excuse. His students hypothesize that he may have been put away in an institution and they all agree that he was better than their new teacher, Brother Fish, who came “fresh from Brooklyn” (146).

The interactions of these Puerto Rican students and Irish educators fluctuated between admiration, fear, respect and complete antagonism. With the exception of Bro’leary, the students are afraid of the brothers and their straps made of shoe leather (which they carry around in order to punish the minor offenses of the students), yet they admire their “perfect” English and respect their ideas. As for his Irish classmates he notes only ironically that their “genes were different” (88). They are clearly the “Other” and their differences cannot be recognized.

Judith Ortiz Cofer

As Rivera does in *Family Installments*, Judith Ortiz Cofer’ begins her collection of short stories about growing up, *Silent Dancing: a Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood* and *The Latin Deli: Women from the Barrio* and her novel *The Line of the Sun* in Puerto Rico. She also chronicles the family’s move to the U.S. where she attends a parochial school directed by Irish nuns. She has written several volumes (fictional and autobiographical) dedicated to the themes of childhood and the dilemmas of being Puerto Rican and growing up off the island. In many of her stories, she depicts the struggles of a shy bookish child and her feelings of displacement as she moves back and forth between Puerto Rico and Patterson, N.J. The resulting “cultural schizophrenia” and “education in the art of cultural compromise” (121), which she received, has shaped her work. These experiences also influenced her ideas about memory and its relation to the act of writing about one’s self, her family and her community. Her narratives are filled with descriptions of

the spaces in the small Puerto Rican town called Hormigueros and also of the urban areas of Patterson, N.J. (which is a suburb of New York City). She spent her adolescence moving back and forth between the two places and in many of her stories she depicts a young girl who exists in similar circumstances. This non-stop movement between the Island and the mainland is a significant part of life for many Puerto Ricans who live in both places for economic and social reasons and feel connected in some way to both places. Jorge Duany refers to this movement of people between Puerto Rico and other spaces as part of “la nación en vaivén” (the nation that comes and goes) or in his own translation a “nation on the move”:

the traditional criteria for nationhood— a shared territory, language, economy, citizenship, or sovereignty— are not fixed and immutable in Puerto Rico and its diaspora but are subject to constant fluctuation and intense debate, even though the sense of peoplehood has proven remarkably resilient. (3)

This “sense of peoplehood” is based on the concept of cultural similarities that maintain an idea of community with a shared idea of connections. The formation of community is about imaginary and real connections of people which result in a reinvention of Puerto Rican identity away from the island. By inscribing the Puerto Rican community’s presence in the physical places of New York neighborhoods, Ortiz Cofer challenges ideas about the ways that nation and community exist outside traditional geographical, social, and cultural spaces and also demonstrates the way in which the Puerto Rican community was transformed in Patterson. She depicts the ways that communities formed and created blended identities which exemplify the importance of this “sense of peoplehood.”

In her stories, there are three important spaces in Patterson: her apartment (casa), the apartment building (el Building), and her school. The young protagonist’s ability to compromise helps her survive in each of them. Each of the physical spaces represents

different cultural experiences. She depicts the difficulties of adapting to the conflicting social and cultural norms in each one of them. She compares the doorstep of her apartment to a political border which separates the New Jersey and Puerto Rican parts of her life and sometimes feels trapped in the insular world her mother creates in the apartment. In this small space, the mother is the dominant presence— since her father’s job in the navy prevents him from being home often and the mother is completely dedicated to “non-assimilation:”

In our apartment we spoke Spanish, we ate rice and beans with meats prepared in adobo, that mouth-watering mixture of spices, and we listened to romantic ballads sung by Daniel Santos. She read letters from her family in Puerto Rico and from my father. (*Silent* 127)

Santos was an important figure for many exiles and she is probably referring to his nostalgic songs such as “Despedida” and “El último adios”. [Period inside quotation marks] Daniel Santos’s music connects her family to the Puerto Rican diasporic community because Santos was such an important nationalist figure and his patriotic music has inspired generations of Puerto Ricans who reside on and off the island. Many of his songs reflect the lamentations of the people who long to return.

The mother refuses to make a life for herself in New Jersey because she considers her time in New Jersey as a temporary interruption to her life in Puerto Rico:

My mother carried the island of Puerto Rico over her head like the mantilla she wore to church on Sundays. She was “doing time” in the U.S. She did not know how long her sentence would last, or why she was being punished with exile, but she was only doing it for her children. She kept herself “pure” for her eventual return to the island by denying herself a social life (which would have connected her too much with the place); by never learning but the most basic survival English; and by her ability to create an

environment in our home that was a comfort to her, but a shock to my senses, and I suppose, to my younger brother's, both of having to enter and exit this twilight zone of sights and smells that meant *casa* to her. (127)

However, her mother's attempted isolation is futile because they are in a part of New Jersey where many Puerto Ricans are living. Avoiding contact with them is impossible and the other residents of *El Building* become a part of their life and they become part of this community:

At almost any hour of the day, El building was like a monstrous jukebox, blasting out salsas from open windows as the residents, mostly new immigrants just up from the island, tried to drown out whatever they were currently enduring with loud music. (Latin 7)

It was a place that is both harmonious and chaotic but creates a community because "it had vida" (Latin 8).

When thinking about this space she imagines it as part of the situation of exile in which her family and neighbors find themselves and comprehends the changing neighborhood in a historical context. She realizes that the Puerto Ricans are not the first immigrants to live there. "The immigrants had come in droves, and the monstrosities had been raised for them – the Italians, the Irish, the Jews, and now us, the Puerto Ricans, and the blacks" (Deli 14). She conceptualizes the arrival of the Puerto Ricans as part of an inevitable cycle of movement in the city; "...the demographics of the city were changing rapidly. The original waves of Italian and Irish immigrants, silk-mill workers, and laborers in the cloth industries had been "assimilated." Their children were now the middle-class parents..." (142). Even the Jewish families who "... had seen worse things happen than the influx of black and brown people that was scaring away the Italians and the Irish" (121) were beginning to leave.

El building is very close to the parochial school she attends; yet, the school is the completely different world which exists on the other side of the border. It is another example

of how the Irish have left evidence of their presence in the neighborhood. The young narrator reflects, “I lived only a few blocks away from the church and the school which had been built in the heart of the city by the original wave of Irish Catholics— for their convenience. The Puerto Ricans had built no churches” (126).

Her apartment and *el Building* represent part of the Puerto Rican identity, but school is her experience of “U.S” culture. The Irish and Italian children and the nuns dominate the narrator’s experiences in this space where the smells, sounds, and rules of behavior are different. It is a quiet place which smells like cleaner and the rules are made by the nuns:

[the] pine-scented parochial school where exquisitely proper behavior was the rule strictly enforced by the soft spoken nuns, who could, upon observing an infraction on their many rules, turn into despots – and never raise their voices – as they destroyed your peace of mind with threats of shameful exposure and/or expulsion. But there was order, quiet respect for logic, and there... (126)

This world was distinct in everyway from the noisy building and her mother’s apartment which are always filled with music and the odors of cooking food.

The narrator describes the other students as if they were creatures from another planet or as if she were an anthropologist reporting on the people he or she found in a world unlike her own. She lives in the U.S., but she is still only an out-of-place observer. These Irish and Italian inhabitants are the only “americanos” that she knows:

After school I would see several of the “popular” girls walk down the corner out of sight from the school, and get into cars with public school boys. Many of the others went to the drugstore to have a soda and talk loudly and irreverently about the school and the nuns. Most of them were middle class Italian and Irish kids. I was the only Puerto Rican student, having gotten in after taking a

rigorous academic test and after the priest visited our apartment to ascertain that we were a good Catholic family. (125)

The other girls that she watches from a distance are living a more typical U.S. teenager's life and she is jealous of their freedom.

In "American History," a story about the death of John F. Kennedy, a moment of understanding between the Irish and the Puerto Ricans occurs. The young girl who narrates the story is more interested in her love life than in the death of the president, but she recognizes the historical significance of the incident. She notes that the older Puerto Ricans admired the president:

President Kennedy was a saint to these people. In fact, soon his photograph would be hung alongside the Sacred Heart and over the spiritist altars that many women kept in their apartments. He would become part of the hierarchy of martyrs they prayed to for favors that only one who had died for a cause would understand. (*Latin 7*)

The president's popularity was based on his policies and his contributions to the Civil Rights movements, but his Catholicism allowed them to identify with him. They also identified with his ability to be American and Irish at the same time.

Conclusion:

Through their writings, these Irish and the Puerto Ricans in New York transformed ideas of community and ethnicity. These were years in which Puerto Rican migration reached its peak. "The community that grew from 60,000 in 1945 to 610,000 in 1960 shook up and reshaped Puerto Rico and New York and Spanish and English, creating strong but often disparaged blends of language and identity" (Zentella 23). U.S./Irish identity was also in flux as the multiculturalism and the hyphen were also becoming fashionable.

Community is created in negative and positive ways and both are equally significant. The protagonists of *'Tis* and *Down These Mean Streets* imagine their community in negative terms by using racial epitaphs to confirm the existence of the outsiders. Ed Rivera also sees the Irish as too radically different from the Puerto Ricans to feel solidarity with them. However, Judith Ortiz Cofer's manifestations of community are the most positive. Her depictions of the residents of *el building* demonstrate the positive methods of community building (which include music, food, and family) and her protagonist compares her experiences to the Irish – which leads her to understand Puerto Rican migration in its historical context.

As these authors create their self/protagonist they construct a community that is held together by a common idea of culture which helps them chronicle their personal experiences of living between cultures and depict others in the community. The affirmation of “self” – engaging in community experiences is significant precisely because the community is being constructed by these writings. This enunciation of ethnicity/community identity makes them “real.” As Stuart Hall also points out, “if such societies hold together at all, it is not because they are unified, but because their different elements and identities can, under certain circumstances, be articulated together” (*Modernity* 600). Demonstrating the ways in which the self/protagonist regards his/herself as part of the community reinforces its importance.

This Neighborhood Is My Home: Depicting the Shared Spaces of the City

It is in culture that we can seek out the range of meanings and ideas conveyed by the phrases belonging to or in a place, being at home in a place. Said in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*

Introduction:

Beginning in the late nineteen sixties and early nineteen seventies, New York Irish and Puerto Rican writers depicted the city neighborhoods as sites of culture and community. Works written by Pedro Pietri, Miguel Piñero, Dennis Smith, Terence Winch, John Montague and Alice McDermott focus on the way in which the cityscapes represent community and provide a sense of home. The link between community and space is tenuous because of their displacement from a “homeland” and home becomes a more localized space and the idea of neighborhood experience replaces that of nation:

Home is the site of everyday lived experience. It is a discourse of locality, the place where feelings of rootedness ensue from the mundane and the unexpected of daily practice. Home here connotes our networks of family, kin, friends, colleagues and various other ‘significant others’. It signifies the social and psychic geography of space that is experienced in terms of a neighborhood or a home town. (Brah 4)

Home refers to the “ownership” of space which is a matter of economics, politics and culture.

For the Puerto Ricans, these New York neighborhoods were becoming their site of “everyday lived experience” and Puerto Rico was becoming a place to they are linked by ancestry and family connections but not a place to which they necessarily aspire to return. This had long been true for the New York Irish who had viewed these neighborhoods as their home. Shared experiences in the city spaces give meaning to their everyday life and a strong

sense of community. As Brah also notes, “Diasporas are also potentially the sites of hope and new beginnings. They are contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure”(193). This dynamic is apparent in the works of these Puerto Ricans and Irish authors. They created spaces which encourage ideas of community and identity and allow alternative ideas to manifest themselves.

These New York/Puerto Rican writers portrayed some of the city spaces as home, albeit one with many imperfections. As Raúl Homero Villa points out in his study on Chicano spaces in Los Angeles, this kind of “barrio” experience is not always positive; it is a place where “poverty, crime, illness and despair”(5) exist. However, “the cultural practices produced and exercised in the *barrios* have tended toward positive articulations of community consciousness, which contribute to a psychologically and material sustaining sense of “home” location”(6). Although the Puerto Rican and Irish communities were more dispersed than the Chicanos in Los Angeles the same dynamic was present in the Puerto Rican *barrios* of New York City. These ethnic enclaves or *barrios* became a positive space that stood for the needs of working-class and poor in an ever-changing city. As Villa also points out, ‘barrios’ in their most positive form are places where ideas that are different from the hegemonic culture are supported:

Manifesting alternative needs and interests from those of the dominant public sphere, the expressive practice of barrio social and cultural reproduction—from the mundane exercises of daily round and leisure activities to the formal articulation of community defensive goals in organizational forums and discursive media— reveal multiple possibilities for re-creating and re-imagining dominant urban space as a community enabling place. (6)

The *barrios* provide immigrants a place to form community and resist assimilation and as the Puerto Ricans and Irish met in these places they were forced to re-negotiate their relationship with each other and with the U.S./Anglo cultures.

Writers and activists from the New York Puerto Rican community began to assert their right to inhabit these spaces as neighborhoods such as Harlem, the Lower East Side, and the South Bronx became the center of large populations of Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics. These Spanish-speaking peoples were establishing new social and cultural networks in their new space. Many first generation Puerto Ricans or those that came over as children were leaving behind the notion that Puerto Rico was their only “authentic” home. This generation of writers created the “Nuyorican movement” which created a physical space to construct and recite poetry, perform important plays and hold cultural events which focused on Puerto Rican identity in the diaspora.

The Irish sense of place was experiencing another transformation. Many were moving to the suburbs of New York, yet they still made a connection between their communal identity and the places of their former neighborhoods. The Irish were leaving their neighborhoods which included Woodlawn (Bronx), Woodside (Queens), Washington Heights, and Hell’s Kitchen. The Irish considered these spaces to be their “turf” and some viewed the insertion of Puerto Ricans into the city spaces with trepidation. Others left their communities and accepted the newcomers as part of the natural fluctuations of the city; although, leaving these places represented a certain loss of community.

The depictions are generally affirmations of the strengths of community affiliations. For both Puerto Rican and Irish authors, the *barrios* represent a positive source of identity and as they converge the ideas home, space and identity are challenged. For the Irish

community, the city was traditionally an important center of Irish diasporic identity and for the Puerto Rican community was also becoming a meaningful space to assert Puerto Rican identity. In these works, the spaces they describe are communal and these authors depict how their characters understand themselves in relation the other community as they meet on the streets, the cemeteries, the schools, and the churches. Some Irish felt threatened as Puerto Ricans because they could not recognize the Puerto Ricans as fellow exiles. In the poetry of Terence Winch and John Montague the convergence of the two communities led to violence and mistrust. However, there are also examples of the mutual recognition and often inhabiting these spaces harmoniously such as in Pedro Pietri's poetry and Dennis Smith's novel, *Report from Engine Co. 82*. In Alice McDermott's *At Weddings and Wakes*, the narrator is not content about the changes in the neighborhood but accepts them with resignation.

The Nuyorican Movement- A Cultural Space:

Although there were Puerto Ricans in all five boroughs of New York City, there are two neighborhoods that came to be associated with Puerto Rican culture and commerce. The first was East Harlem, which came to be known as "el Barrio,"¹ and the second was The Lower East Side,² which was renamed Loisaida. The cultural movement which began in the nineteen seventies and came to be known as the Nuyorican Movement was centered in the Lower East Side. The official beginning was the publication of an anthology entitled *Nuyorican Poetry* and the opening of The Nuyorican Poet's Cafe in 1975. The Café was constructed on the site of what was previous an Irish bar on East 6th Street by Miguel

¹ El barrio stretches from East 96th Street to East 125th Street. It stops at the East River on one side and the Metro-North Railroad tracks (along Park Avenue) on the other.

² The boundaries of the Lower East are often refuted. Most people agree that it begins at the East River and continues to north until 14th Street and west until First Avenue.

Algarín, Pedro Pietri, and Miguel Piñero. The Café became one of the important centers for culture for Puerto Ricans and other Hispanic communities in the city. The name was significant because it was part of a movement which empowered a term that originally had negative connotations. Algarín's definition of the term demonstrates its important relationship to place:

Nuyorican (nü yō 'ē kən) (New York + Puerto Rican) 1. originally Puerto Rican epithet for those of Puerto Rican heritage born in New York: their Spanish was different (Spanglish), their way of dress and look were different. They were a stateless people (like most U.S. poets) until the Café became their homeland. 2. After Algarín and Piñero, a proud poet speaking New York Puerto Rican. 3. a denizen of the Nuyorican Poets Café. 4. New York's riches. (5)

The Café was a physical space in which these poets could embrace their identity as Puerto Ricans in New York.

Loisaida was not just a physical space encompassing "the area between Houston and 14th streets and between Avenue A and the East River." It was a social movement that "did more than claim streets and services, it suggested a new and physical discursive place for Puerto Ricans and *puertorriqueñidad* in the postindustrial city" (Ševčenko's 293-294). Members of this movement describe these enclaves or "barrios" which they inhabit and establish it a new sense of home. There are several poems written about Loisaida that demonstrate this new vision of place. The first was written in 1974 by Bimbo Rivas. It is a love poem in Spanglish which creates an idea of community in this space which was falling apart. He compares the neighborhood to a female and it begins with the phrase "I love you/ You're my fair lady". However, the ending is a lamentation to terrible things that happen in the neighborhood:

Your buildings are

burning up
that we got to stop.
Loisaida, my love,
Te amo.

This echoes the Raúl Homero Villa's idea that despite the negative events which constantly occur these "barrio" it still invokes feelings of pride and community.

As a founding member of the Nuyorican Poets Café and Miguel Piñero was passionate about the power of poetry and about establishing a New York/Puerto Rican identity (which coincided with his attachment to Loisaida). Piñero was born in Puerto Rico and migrated to New York with his parents when he was four years old, but he identified himself as Nuyorican. In *A Lower Eastside Poem*, he shows his affection for the neighborhood and even asks to be part of it after his death:

So let me sing my song tonight
Let me feel out of sight
and let all eyes be dry
when they scatter my ashes thru
the Lower East Side.

From Houston to 14th Street
from Second Avenue to the mighty D
here the hustlers & suckers meet
the faggots & freaks will all get
high
on the ashes that have been scattered
thru the Lower East Side.

[...]

So here I am, look at me
I stand as proud as you can see

pleased to be from the Lower East Side
[...]
I don't wanna be buried in Puerto Rico
I don't wanna rest in long island cemetery
I wanna be near the stabbing shooting
gambling fighting & unnatural dying
& new birth crying
so please when I die . . .
don't take me far away
keep me near by
Take my ashes and scatter them thru out
The Lower East Side...

Many of Piñero's poems in the collection, *La Bodega Sold Dreams*, reflect on this themes of being at home on the city streets. After Piñero's death, Algarín and Piñero's other friends from the Café paid homage by following the wishes explained in that poem. They formed a procession and scattered his ashes around the neighborhood. Algarín noted that "Miky belonged to the streets" and "on the concrete and the asphalt of New York. [...] The streets were where he felt best" (3). He understood the poem to be a set of "instructions" to follow after his friend's death.

Pedro Pietri was also born in Puerto Rico and came with his family to New York as a young child. His most well known collection of poetry, *A Puerto Rican Obituary*, was published in nineteen seventy-three. Pietri spent a great deal of time living on the streets of New York. When he discussed the inherent advantages and disadvantages of growing up in the United States he positively reflects on how the personal and communal identities of the Puerto Ricans outside Puerto Rico have been transformed by their interactions with other communities. He acknowledges that he was "raised up with the Irish in Spanish Harlem" and

reminisces that: “We all got along with each other, but years later they all moved to the suburbs and we were left in the housing projects because they tore down the buildings and relocated everybody” (109). He understood that the cityscapes were changing as developers like Robert Moses³ were tearing down the neighborhoods to build highways that separated people who stayed in the city and his poetry depicts these changes. In Pietri’s poems the depiction of unity between the Irish and Puerto Rican communities is perhaps the most hopeful and unconditional although it is determined by spatial conditions.

In the collection called *A Puerto Rican Obituary*, many of the poems recall a kind of solidarity among the various cultures which he encountered. His poem called *The Old Buildings* is the clearest manifestation of these autobiographical experiences. Pietri saw that the large low-income housing projects were demolished with the supposed purpose of improving living conditions, but many of the residents had no place to relocate. In the poem, the communities of Irish and Puerto Ricans are being broken up along with the structures that created them. Before the demolition, the residence at “1422 Amsterdam Avenue” is described as a place where:

Everybody knew
Everybody else
Everybody respected
& loved everybody else
unity was happening

However, the voice of the poem feels that the authorities were frightened of the solidarity of the residents of the building:

³ Robert Moses was an influential urban planner who worked for the state of New York beginning in the 1930’s. By building expressways through neighborhoods, he displaced hundreds of thousands of people in the City. He favored building highways over public transit and created the suburbs of Long Island. He also designed many public beaches and parks.

(city hall
saw this harmony happening
and got intimidated
because there is nothing
that frightens
this government more
than seeing people
living and loving
and breathing together
so they decided to
demolish the buildings
that could have been
saved by renovation
& eliminate the unity)
(PRO,53)

The concept of unity is perhaps simplistic and utopian, but represents his experiences with his Irish counterparts.

For Pietri, like many of his contemporaries, poetry was political. His most well-known poem, “Puerto Rican Obituary”, was first read at a Young Lords⁴ rally. In the poem, which lends its title to the collection, the communities are still unified, but circumstances such as long-term poverty are breaking them apart. This epic poem recalls the wasted lives of five New York/Puerto Ricans, Juan, Miguel, Milagros, Olga and Manuel, who represent the unfulfilled dreams of the people in the community and the “immigrant” life which consumes them. The television and the outside world have taught people to desire things

⁴ The Young Lords was originally founded in Chicago by young Puerto Rican activists. The New York chapter (which later separated from the Chicago organization) was founded on in 1969. They focused on Puerto Rican liberation and local community issues (in New York) such as gentrification, healthcare for low income children, and police injustice. They were originally influenced by the Black Panthers.

and to be jealous of each other and the chance for living *el sueño americano* is linked to leaving the *barrio*. However, all hopes and dream have been reduced to the possibility of winning the lottery:

All died
dreaming about America
waking them up in the middle of the night
screaming: Mira Mira
your name is on the winning lottery ticket

These people died without realizing their seemingly simple dreams. However, this shattered dream is not only limited to the Puerto Ricans; it was shared by the Irish. The narrator uses the idea of the lottery to show how the two communities were linked because of the similar dynamics they had undergone:

Juan
died dreaming about a new car
Miguel
died dreaming about a new anti-poverty program
Milagros
Died dreaming about a trip to Puerto Rico
Olga
died dreaming of real jewelry
Manuel
died dreaming about the Irish sweepstakes (5)

Beginning in the nineteen thirties until gambling became legal at the end of the nineteen sixties the Irish Sweepstakes was very popular in the United States. The Irish government, who needed money, set up the lottery to make money for Irish hospitals and the tickets were sold clandestinely by Irish immigrants throughout the United States. For Manuel and all the others that had no hope except an improbable fantasy, it was a means of escape. Like many Irish before them, Juan, Miguel, Milagros and Manuel died dreaming about their far-away

island, but also of striking it rich in New York City and the Irish sweepstakes became part of their dreams of escape.

Loisaida was sometimes a place of suffering and pain, but it represented the only space where these Nuyoricans felt at home. The Cafe moved to a bigger location in 1980 in East 3rd Street. It has been turned into a non-profit organization which funds new artists from all backgrounds, but it retains its “Nuyorican” influence and contemporary New York Puerto Rican poets such as Willie Perdomo acknowledge its continuing importance.

The Irish are exiled to the suburbs:

Two important factors led to the decrease in immigration from Ireland to the U.S. in the nineteen seventies. The first was a change in U.S. immigration laws which removed the preference that had been given to Europeans and the second was an economic boom in Ireland in the seventies. The lack of newer immigrants to the community and the fact that many Irish were becoming more geographically dispersed as they moved to the suburbs meant that the sense of community that they had in the city was becoming less easily defined. However, despite their exodus, many Irish-Americans still felt a strong attachment to their former neighborhoods and still inserted their presence into the community in various ways. The most prominent example was (and still is) the Saint Patrick’s Day parade, which had been celebrated in Manhattan since the mid-seventeen hundreds. This display of flags, marching bands, and bagpipes was a way of claiming space and recognizing community. The poetry of Terence Winch and John Montague, and the narratives of Dennis Smith and Alice McDermott provide evidence of the importance of New York neighborhoods even to those who left them behind. Charles Fanning summarizes the important events that were forming their experiences during these years:

Shaping events for the Irish in these turbulent times included the Second Vatican Council, the civil rights and sexual revolutions, the ascendancy and tragedies of the Kennedy clan, the breakup of Irish ghettos and the old Catholic fortress identity, upward social and economic mobility, and the related move to the suburbs. This change and energy are reflected in the perspective of liberating doubleness that characterizes much Irish American literature since the 1960's. (511)

Many authors wrote about the Irish connections to the city as they moved away from it. The “doubleness” lies in exploring different ways of holding on to one’s Irish identity in these new spaces.

Many Irish were leaving the city to go to the suburbs, but others stayed or went to work there everyday. Dennis Smith’s work, *Report from Engine Co. 82*, illustrates that many of those who left still felt an emotional attachment to the neighborhoods and the new communities in it. He cedes the space to the Puerto Ricans and other newcomers because he has gone out to live with his family in a small town sixty miles away from the city. Yet, he as a fireman he spends his time protecting the people and the buildings. His mother, who he visits often, still lives in the neighborhood in which he grew up. The spaces he inhabits in the work are: his home in the Westchester (which he mentions infrequently), the tenement buildings, the streets, his mother’s apartment and the firehouse (where he finds the strongest sense of community). He watches how the firefighters, who are mostly of Irish and Italian descent, interact with the Puerto Rican and African-American communities and attempts to explain the historical and economic factors which cause the animosity.

His work is especially important in an Irish-American context because his experiences as a firefighter are representative of many New York Irish of his generation.

Beginning in the nineteen sixties many stories about the Irish cops and firemen of this generation appear.⁵ Many Irish became firefighters and police officers because it was the kind of job that offered economic stability to people with high school diplomas:

I only knew that it was a mark of success for a neighborhood boy to become a fireman or a cop. They were secure jobs, and much respected by our elders who lived through the depression. The nuns in the school I attended as a child never spoke to us about becoming doctors or lawyers, only about becoming President of the United States, or a fireman, or a cop. Any of us could become President, it was our birthright for we were all second generation Irish or Italian, but we could become firemen or cops only if we applied ourselves and managed in one way or another to get through high school— a great achievement in those days. (193)

Smith acknowledges the importance of these jobs for people in his communities and those in similar situations.

For Smith, politics, religion, and nationality are related and he is proud of all three aspects of his life. In the narrative, he sums up his own beliefs in equality and fairness by citing its source as his “Irish-Catholic-Democratic heart” (52). He feels a personal solidarity with the people of the neighborhood— especially those who are immigrants but realizes that the firefighters do not all share these feelings. He is alternatively pragmatic and sentimental about his life as a firefighter in the one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in city:

I am part of Engine Company 82. The firehouse I work out of is on Intervale Avenue and 169th St. in a ghetto called the South Bronx. Of the three biggest ghettos in New York City, the South Bronx is the least talked about. You’ve heard of Harlem— Adam Clayton Powell came from Harlem; and you may

⁵ Some of most well-known works are Jimmy Breslin’s *World without End, Amen*, and Joe Flaherty’s *Tin Wife*. Flaherty’s novel about the widow of a dead police officer illustrate how two Irish families come together to understand death and community in their Queens neighborhood.

have heard of Bedford-Stuyvesant. Shirley Chisholm comes from Bedford-Stuyvesant. Nobody you've ever heard of comes from the South Bronx. (11)

He mentions two famous African-American reformers that have come out of Harlem and other parts of Brooklyn, but contends that his neighborhood is more oppressed and treacherous than those places. He believes that the corruption in the Bronx is almost impossible to escape.

Smith feels affection for the Puerto Rican families in this neighborhood because they remind him of the people he grew up with in the tenements of midtown Manhattan. He still remembers his childhood and adolescent experiences in the tenement buildings and connects it to the place where he works to extinguish fires. During one fire he is attacked by cockroaches and ponders:

I'll never escape from tenements and cockroaches. The names and geography may change, but conditions are universal when people are without money. Mrs. Hanratty who lived down the hall is now Mrs. Sanchez; the O'Dwyer for Mayor sticker in the vestibule now reads Father Gigante for Congress and the cry "Tu eres animal Rodrego [Rodrigo?]" now airs through the courtyard in place of "Jesus, Barney, can't you ever come home to me sober? (133)

He sees very little difference between the experiences of the Irish and the Puerto Ricans except that at one point he acknowledges that "the truly sad thing about it is that I do realize how much easier it is if you're white" (65).

He is cognizant of the mixture of cultures that is happening around him and is an astute and sympathetic observer of the people of the neighborhood. During one of the first responses to an emergency call he notes that the "faceless voices of the crowd" are saying

“Someone tried to off ‘im, man. and thinks: “It seems strange to hear the black’s dialect spoken with a Spanish accent.” (149) He thinks that the emergency services should do more to reach out to these communities. It is also understandable that when the children go to call boxes and purposely make false alarms the Fire Department sees them a nuisance or even a menace. Also, he knows that the residents who throw garbage at the authorities do not represent everyone in the neighborhood. However, it does create a hostile environment.

He interacts with many Puerto Ricans throughout the narrative, but Tina de Vega is the most significant because of her tragic story. She is an eighteen-year-old Puerto Rican girl who Smith met a few years before when she came into the firehouse to show her little brother the bright red trucks. For a few months she visited the firehouse frequently to escape from her crowded apartment. However, when he sees her again after a fire she is a drug addict and a prostitute. He sadly reflects that she came to New York with her family (to look for a better life) when she was six. She now has “drooping eyes” and “needle-marked arms,” yet he says she has a “soft, natural class” and she is still beautiful with “unmarred dark skin and the delicate bones of a European aristocrat.” He admires her thin lips, graceful narrow nose, knowing eyes.”(136) He emphasizes her European-ness and laments her tragic fate. Her plight reminds him of his own decision to quit school at fifteen and get a job delivering flowers: “Like Tina de Vega I searched for, and found, my own way of survival. After a time I became unhappy in my job, but it is always better to have money in the pocket when unhappy than to be unhappy and broke” (140). He admits that even he had completely forgotten her until he saw her that day and guilty understands that he is not the only one who ignored the opportunity to help her.

However, his own feelings of solidarity are not reflected by all the others in his community. He realizes that not all firefighters feel this way and there is a great deal of prejudice against the people that they are protecting but explains it this way:

Firefighters know that one out of seven people are on welfare. They know that ninety percent of those are black or Puerto Rican. They know that half the people in this community are black and the other half are Puerto Rican. Like most lower middle-class people, firefighters cannot reconcile that so many are being subsidized for doing nothing while they work hard and can barely make payments at the end of the month. [...] What most firefighters do not know, however, is that a good case for economic determinism can be made to explain this prejudice, that those one rung up from the bottom of the status ladder traditionally resent those below them. (169)

This observation presents Dennis's understanding of the reason that there will always be a certain degree of animosity between the communities. For him, the intolerance is not racial or cultural; it is simply a result of economic factors.

Alice McDermott's *At Weddings and Wakes*, also reflects on the Irish connections to the city neighborhoods. McDermott never divulges too much information about her characters or allow one character take on the narration for too long. Thus, the spaces became as important as the people who inhabit them. The city and the suburbs are not only places to live; they represent lifestyles and the process of assimilation. The city is their homeland and the suburbs represent a new space of exile. The Puerto Rican presence in the neighborhoods is not threatening; the characters accept it as part of an inevitable process of change. In McDermott's novels the spaces in which the characters interact are described more fully than the characters themselves. As Richard Cooper points out, it's a novel:

told from a third-person-plural point of view, a narrative built on: The children saw..." and "To the younger girl it seemed that..." Yet the children's individual identities are strangely blurred; we barely learn their names..." (10)

The spaces which her characters move through give the reader a sense of community and relationships that define their experiences. The action of the novel generally revolves around the experiences of the three children, yet gives limited insight into their perspective. Although most of the narrative is told through the eyes of the children, for some important events the other characters' actions are highlighted. The city is the most important place even to the characters that were not born there.

The novel begins with the mother's symbolic journey from the suburbs into the city with her three young children. Lucy takes her children to see their grandmother and aunts who still live in Brooklyn and the trip requires a ten-block walk, two buses, and subway ride. Their early morning walk to the bus stop is through the suburban streets which are "fresh and full of birdsong" is tranquil and from the bus stop they can see "the grey steeple of the Presbyterian church" that was framed by a "sky that was blue and cloudless"(5). However, the scenery changes as the bus heads toward Brooklyn. In the bus, which emits grey exhaust fumes, the freshness of the morning turns into "a gritty breeze that rushed through the slices of open window"(5). The unnamed street where they transfer to the second bus is "where the large suburban trees fell away" and "the expanse of shadeless parking lots"(6) begins. Later, they descend the subway steps into the dark tunnel "where the long corridors echoed with their mother's footsteps and roared distantly with the comings and goings of the trains"(8).

After the ride, they emerge into the streets of Brooklyn. In this space the presence of the “newer immigrants” is felt immediately:

What greeted them first, despite the noise and the grit and the heat of the sun, was olfactory: diesel fuel and cooking grease and foreign spices, tar and asphalt and the limp, the dirty metallic smell of the train that followed beneath their feet as they walked, blowing itself across their ankles at every subway grate. Then the sounds: language too quick to be sensible speech, so that those who spoke it, women and children and men, Puerto Ricans, Lebanese and Russians, perspired heavily with the effort. (13)

The contrast of the calm shady streets with the constant movement and harsh noises of the place where they hear Spanish and other languages that are foreign to them is notable. As they walk to their grandmother’s apartment they also see many things that don’t exist in the secluded suburbs, such as a man “pushing a silver cart filled with bright red or orange or turquoise-blue water”(13). This *piragua* (snow cone) cart is typically Puerto Rican. Its presence is a symbol of the ways which the space is changing. The mother doesn’t find their presence threatening. To her this ‘barrio’ still represented home and “She hated being exiled from the place she had grown up in”(20). She, however, does not let the children go out in the neighborhood alone and they are forced to watch the other children playing on the street from the window without the possibility of participating. Lucy feels a connection to their family and their former neighbors who still remain in the city, yet her children feel like spectators at the places and rituals cherished by these older generations.

In the story, three generations of one family are represented. The only survivor of the older generation is Momma, who is an Irish immigrant from the countryside. At the beginning of the novel, three of her four stepdaughters still live with her. Momma came

over from Ireland to live with a sister who had immigrated seven years earlier. After her sister's death she married her brother-in-law and raised their four children. She is not at all sentimental about where she came from and tells the children (in one of the few conversations she has with them) Ireland is "an awful place [...] Just awful. Dirt and mud and dumb animals (sheep the worst of them, nothing at all in their eyes), nights black as pitch, and illness and accident as common as the cold rain"(149). When her other daughter's impending marriage and removal to the suburbs she responds, "Grass and flowers and trees [...] "Sounds like a cemetery to me"[..] No one has to tell me about the country"(149). Her sister and husband have died in the apartment where she still lives, and she has memories of an alcoholic son passed out in the stairwells or outside the front door, but she feels more at home there than she did in Ireland. She equates the suburbs with her small village in Ireland and does not want any part of it.

During one of their trips to the city the children's aunt tells them about how their grandfather constructed a wall to give 'Momma' her own space. The eldest daughter listens as she looks up at the wall and tries to imagine the apartment and the city when her mother was a young girl:

She imagined the city streets had been mostly empty then, rooms everywhere as underpopulated [...] How else would it be possible for a single family to afford four floors and all this space? She thought it a shame, actually, that the city had become so crowded, ships arriving day after day, as she had learned in school, spilling all kinds of people in the street and the apartment buildings so that walls had to be built, large rooms made smaller, just to accommodate them all. She thought it a shame that more of these immigrants hadn't simply stayed home, stayed where they belonged. Made the best, as her mother was always telling her to do, of a bad situation. (85)

She has no sympathy for the people who came in boats because they are just stories and she doesn't understand the connection between the boatloads of people and her own family. Her generation has no memories of immigration and she cannot recognize the similarities.

Frank, the aunt's fiancé, also reflects on how these Brooklyn neighborhoods have changed. He is a mail carrier and he chose the Brooklyn route over a suburban territory because the people on his suburban route knew him too well. After his mother's death he was overwhelmed by their sympathy. He prefers the city because he feels more anonymous. He notices the transformations the city spaces are undergoing with a cheerful resignation and views the newcomers as reminders of his own family's history:

Pausing to chat with old ladies and men on home relief and new immigrants whose speech he mostly pretended to understand. – nodding and touching a shoulder [they]... reminded him of what an ancient story the story of his mother's life had become (130).

For Frank, the story of Irish immigration seems to be a part of a forgotten history, even though he is only one generation removed and the death of his mother (who was an Irish immigrant) made him sympathetic to these people, but only in a superficial way.

The characters all have different reasons for preferring the city spaces to those of the suburbs, but their preferences are linked to their memories. They stay in the neighborhoods because of their feelings of nostalgia. Many of their families and friends have left and their community has spread out; thus they resign themselves to the influx of Puerto Ricans.

Terence Winch and John Montague, however, tell a different version of Irish/Puerto Rican interactions during these years. Their poems demonstrate the hatred and mistrust that existed between the two communities. In their works, the Irish are portrayed as xenophobic and clannish and the Puerto Ricans conform to the stereotypes portrayed in *West Side Story*

and other works written about gang violence. The young Puerto Ricans strut around in leather jackets carrying bicycle chains.

In Terence Winch collection *Irish Musicians American Friends*, he simultaneously confirms the existence of an Irish community in New York City while acknowledging its transformations. His work highlights the negative side of the interactions of the Irish and Puerto Rican communities in the city neighborhoods. The poem *Six Families of Puerto Ricans* relates how some working- class New York Irish felt as they saw Puerto Ricans move into “their turf” in the Bronx.

The poem begins as the narrator comes back from his summer vacation and finds out that Puerto Ricans have come into the neighborhood. The arrival of these families was the most important news in the neighborhood:

the first thing I heard when I got back
was the news that
six families of Puerto Ricans had moved
into nineteen fifteen Daly Avenue the Mitchells’
building (76)

The arrival of these six families causes the narrator to realize that a significant transformation of the space has begun.

The poem continues and outlines the animosity that the two communities felt toward each other and acknowledges that “as time went on/more and more pee ars moved into/the neighborhood” and “there was great hostility/on both sides.” It is clear that he is referring to the Irish community as opponents of the Puerto Ricans when he uses the derogatory term for Puerto Ricans (‘PR’s’) and gives it an Irish pronunciation “pee ars”. After establishing the two sides of the battle he provides a litany of vandalism and criminal behavior in which the

two communities were involved as they fought for their turf: “Martin Conlon threw some cherry bombs/ and ash cans through the window of some Puerto/ Ricans... and “I remember a Puerto Rican shooting at me and some friends with a bee bee gun/from his roof...” (76).

His section of the Bronx is being contested at the beginning of the poem, however, by the end it is 1968 and the Irish have become the minority:

when me and my father left the block
in the fall of nineteen sixty eight
we were among a handful of Irish still
in the neighborhood (76)

The Irish are leaving because of they no longer feel comfortable in the spaces and the community is changing. The narrator laments that “bodegas opened/ on Tremont Avenue...”and “Puerto Rican men/ played dominos on the sidewalk.” However, the worst offence is that these Puerto Ricans come to their church, which should be a place of unity and understanding. Instead the Puerto Rican presence at mass is just another threat.

...there was
A Sunday mass in Spanish in the church basement
this was worse than a potato famine
and the Irish started moving out (76)

For the narrator, sharing the church is the ultimate indignity that the Irish face. The ironic comparison of the influx of Puerto Ricans in the city to the Famine (which was one of the most important circumstances that brought Irish immigrants to the United States in the nineteenth century) implies that Irish are being pushed out of their rightful space once again by circumstances they cannot control.

The narrator also recognizes that the some of the Puerto Rican families were not involved in the violence and general decline of the neighborhood and says “things were so bad/ by then even the respectable Puerto Ricans/ like Mr. Zayas were long gone.” However, the last lines of the poem sum up the true nature of the opinions of the narrator’s perceived community, “we used to think Puerto Ricans/weren’t too far from being animals/even if they were Catholic”(76). The bitter conflicts of the Irish depicted in the poem shows the outright discrimination of some Irish.

John Montague was born in Brooklyn in 1929 and moved back to the Northern Irish countryside of when he was a young boy. Much of his poetry romanticizes the Irish countryside; however, some of his experiences around the United States and in the neighborhood where he was born are anthologized in a small volume called *Born in Brooklyn*. In this work, he alludes to the ways in which the Puerto Rican presence has changed the city spaces he knew as a young child. He views the Brooklyn streets from the perspective of an outsider. He is alienated in the same streets where he once felt at home.

The narrator of “A Flowering Absence” (which was first published in *The Dead Kingdom*) is someone who left the streets and tenements and comes back as visitor. The nostalgia for his parents brings him back to the neighborhood where he finds a “wild raunchier Brooklyn:/As tough a territory as I have known.” His subway ride leads him into “darkest Brooklyn” to visit the nuns that cared for his mother after his birth. However, he cannot find any trace of his parents or the places he remembers as a child and he realizes that coming back has lead him to “another cold trail.” In the streets he sees only the “flash of the blade” or “the bicycle chain” and he fears the people who he describes as “strutting young Puerto Rican hoods” (22). These images cause him to retreat into the memories of his

mother and his journey back to Ireland as a young boy. He realizes that his “neighborhood” exists only in his memory.

However, in his other poem about the search for something familiar in New York spaces, he finds a communal feeling and remembers that part of his heritage is there. In “A Graveyard in Queens,” he visits the cemetery where his father and uncle are buried and begins by ironically noting that death has joined people of many nationalities in a “true Catholic world”— which could be a reference the physical space of the graveyard or the metaphorical space of heaven in the afterlife.

We hesitate along
flower encumbered

avenues of the dead;
Greek, Puerto Rican,

Italian, Irish-
(our true Catholic

world, a graveyard)... (61)

As in Pietri’s “Puerto Rican Obituary” the narrator sees the unfulfilled dreams of the dead and the fear that the cycle of disappointment will be repeated. He reflects on these broken dreams as he looks at the tombstone of “his uncle and namesake” (61) and ponders the effects of seeing his own name written on the stone. He reflects how the Irish heritage endures in the American part of his family who are “far from/ our supposed home”(64) and as he stares at the grave he hears:

the creak of a ghostly fiddle
filter through
American earth
the slow pride

of a lament. (64)

His trip to the graveyard leads him to question the idea of home and place for himself and for his ancestors. The streets and the graveyard which he writes about are the places where he searches for memories of his past life with his father. In the streets he finds nothing familiar only this “other” who now inhabits the space. It is only in the cemetery that he feels some connection to his family and the city. This space is where memories endure as the living try to communicate with the dead.

Conclusion:

For these writers, these neighborhoods represent home in a more authentic way than Ireland and Puerto Rico. The connections to the Islands still exist, but the dream of return is not what dictates their lives. The spaces which the characters inhabit are important because of their need to connect their identity to as a sense of community. These New York Irish and Puerto Rican writers understood that community (apart from being imagined) has an aspect of physicality to it. Their daily existence is more significant than a faraway island and their interactions with other Irish or Puerto Ricans maintain their sense of Puertorricanness or Irishness.

In order to be a community one needs spaces to create culture. As Edward Said states, “It is in culture that we can seek out the range of meanings and ideas conveyed by the phrases belonging to or in a place, being at home in a place”(10?). These Nuyoricans were claiming their space to seek out the meaning of living between cultures. They were establishing a new home which was uniquely theirs because it connects the Puerto Rican and U.S. cultures. Since they were no longer living in these spaces, these Irish was afraid losing their shared experiences. They were part of a new diaspora— they were spreading out and losing their sense of community. Moving to the suburbs meant assimilation and loss of

identity. The Puerto Ricans into their neighborhoods served as a reminder of their loss became a scapegoat for their fears.



Piragüero



Loisaida



Nuyorican Café

Irish-Ricans: Transculturation and Hybridity

In *Short Eyes* by Miguel Piñero, *Forsaking All Others* by Jimmy Breslin, and several of Edgardo Vega Yunque's novels the Irish and Puerto Rican characters are no longer always a distant "Other." The protagonists of these works identify with both groups because of family relations or environmental factors. This process of transculturation,¹ or "cultural exchange" is a result of living in what Gloria Anzaldúa refers to as the borderlands— which exist "wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy"(Preface). In these borderlands or "liminal spaces," new mixtures of culture emerge and alternative ideas are demonstrated. Languages are altered and culture is transformed. As Homi Bhabha points out, these spaces "provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood— singular or communal— that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (1). In these New York borderlands the Irish and the Puerto Ricans are forced together and transform ideas about Irish and/or Puerto Rican identity by blending the cultures together.

This mixture of diasporic Irishness and Puertorricanness has different consequences. In Vega Yunque's stories, the merging of cultures has positive outcomes and the borderlands

¹ A term invented by Cuban anthropologist in his study *-Contrapunto cubano del tabaco y azucar* to describe the transference of cultures. It was made popular in literary studies by Angel Rama in *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* in 1982. Mary Louise Pratt also uses the term to describe what aspects of culture are absorbed by subjected ones in *Travel Writing and Transculturation*.

are positive places between Irishness and Puertorricaness (where both are given equal importance). He refers to these characters as Mickoricans, Irish-Ricans, and/or Paddyricans and with this mixture of previously disparaging nicknames he emphasizes the similarities of their colonial histories. However, for Piñero and Breslin, there is not always a positive result when these two cultures come together. Their characters exist in a “darker” borderland which Anzaldúa describes as a place whose inhabitants are the prohibited and forbidden (25). Breslin’s protagonist is Puerto Rican man with Irish ancestry who becomes a drug dealer in New York City. Piñero’s character, Longshoe Charlie Murphy, is an Irish conman who speaks Puerto Rican Spanish. The ethnicity of the characters is shaped by the people they come into contact with and they perform (and perhaps internalize) certain identifiers such as language, social customs, and affiliation. They live in these “contact zones” where Irish and Puerto Rican diasporic culture meet and are transformed. Life in these zones influences the food they eat, the mixture of languages they speak, and their ability to interact with their counterparts.

Miguel Piñero:

In *Short Eyes*, Miguel Piñero depicts the relationships of inmates in a jail and shows the ways in which the dynamics of jail mirror those on the street. *Short Eyes* was written while he was serving time in the Ossining prison and was first performed in 1974 by a group of ex-prisoners. The drama depicts how a small group of inmates take the life of Clark Davis, who is awaiting arraignment on child molestation charges. One of the guards facilitates the murder and even though his superior officers strongly suspect that Clark’s death was not a suicide, they do not try to charge anyone with the crime. Any kind of investigation would challenge the structure of the prison system and make their lack of effort

to protect Davis as a sign of their complicit behavior. The work, however, resists any kind of simple moralizing and tries to realistically depict the interactions between incarcerated individuals. The setting is the Manhattan Detention Center known as “The Tombs” where the cells are smaller than in most prisons because they were not designed for long-term use. The inmates are forced into extremely limited spaces which influence their interactions. In these spaces, cultural borders are broken down and borderlands are created.

In his introduction to the work, Marvin Felix Camillo emphasizes that, “prison is a society within a society...”(xiii) and this holds true for many aspects of prison life. However, Piñero also shows that the inmates cross cultural and social borders that they might not cross on the outside because of the need for survival in this limited setting. These small cells and common areas are places where borders become more flexible and interchange is unavoidable. All of these inmates (and the guards to a certain extent) inhabit liminal spaces. Piñero presents a view of the complex dynamics of how ethnic identifiers (such as language and choice of companionship) change when people from these communities converge. The Puerto Rican and Irish characters interact on many levels and form alliances which are not based on ethnicity. The actions of the characters demonstrate that although it is a place where racial epithets like *spic* and *quadroon* are used frequently, and certain characters preach about keeping away from other groups, many individuals easily move across these cultural borders. As a result of their background and experiences on the outside, ethnic and cultural identifiers become even less precise on the inside.

As Piñero demonstrates in this work, Puerto Ricans are ethnically diverse people and they cannot be categorized into the traditional U.S. black/white dichotomy. The Puerto Rican characters transgress this limited idea of ethnicity. Juan, the hero, is the peacemaker

who defends Davis and Julio (Cupcakes), the Puerto Rican mulatto, is coveted by all the inmates. Cupcakes allows all of them to objectify him by letting them speak to and about him in a sexually explicit way. Both inhabit a space that is neither black nor white and can in certain circumstances choose either (or neither) when faced with only two options. Longshoe Charlie Murphy, the Irish character, explains:

Ricans are funny people. Took me a long time to figure them out, and you know something, I found out that I still have a lot to learn about them. [...] They get a big-brother attitude about the whites in jail. But they also back the niggers to the T” (27-8).

They are not definitively part of either ethnic group so they easily change affiliation.

Murphy also transgresses ethnic and social borders, and Piñero’s depiction of his interactions with his Puerto Rican and African-American counterparts challenges ideas about Irish assimilation into white society. Murphy’s ethnicity is emphasized in the character list where he is described as a “hip, tough Irishman in his mid-twenties” while Clark Davis, the other white inmate, is described simply as “a frightened white man in his early twenties” (3). Murphy is cold-blooded killer who controls all the drug contraband in his unit. He becomes the leader and decision-maker and serves as intermediary between the guards. Murphy, like all the characters, uses racist language, yet, it is clear that his interactions with these inmates have transformed him. He speaks Spanish and resides comfortably in the borderlands with the Puerto Rican inmates.

Murphy identifies himself as white yet, at times, chooses to socialize with the Puerto Ricans and/or the blacks. Before Davis’s arrival, he listens to and participates in Cupcakes’s Spanglish rap (called a prison toast) about getting caught in a raid on Christmas Eve and is very comfortable conversing with the others. His first reaction is to view Davis as an outsider

and he speaks Spanish to hide his opinions from the newcomer and the guards. As Davis waits to be let in to the dayroom, Murphy assesses the young man's appearance and participates in the on-going conversation of the other characters about the attractiveness of Cupcakes: "no está bueno... anyway, no mucho... como Cupcake" *He is not good-looking... anyway, not as much as Cupcake* (25). However, since Davis is white, everyone immediately assumes that Murphy will help him out. Ice, a black inmate, says to him: "Look out for your homey, Shoe"(26) and as soon as Murphy finds out that it is his first time in prison he quickly explains "the program." "The program" is the unwritten rules of inmate interaction and are based on ethnic identity. "Yeah, Well, I'd better hip you to what's happening fast. I am the Don Gee² here. You know what that mean, right Good... Niggers and the spics don't give us honkies much trouble. We're cool half ass"(27). Longshoe's use of the word *honky*³ to refer to himself emphasizes how this culture influences him. His use of the word Don, which is a Spanish term for a respected person, also highlights the idea that his terms of self-definition have changed due to his interactions with Puerto Rican/Hispanic culture and it is their respect he seeks. During their introduction, Murphy goes on to explain to Davis "Blacks go on the front of the line, we stay in the back... It's okay to rap with the blacks, but don't get too close with any of them" (27). Yet, as he is lecturing about the separation— Ice, an African-American inmate, comes in and throws him a sandwich.

Mr. Nett, the guard, informs the group of the nature of Davis's charges by saying, "I got an eight-year-old daughter who was molested by one of those bastards..."(29). Paco (who is played by Piñero in the movie version) immediately realizes which crimes the guard is referring to and says "Short eyes"(29). This is a Puerto Rican expression which, according

² from the glossary at the end of the play as A big shot; gee is short for "gun". (124)

³ derogatory term used by African-Americans toward whites

to Piñero, is a mispronunciation of the expression “short heist” and refers to any “pornographic material in jail.” In an interview about the play Piñero explains that “Los puertorriqueños couldn’t say the “h” in heist so it became eyes” (Alarcón 56). Murphy is the first to interpret Paco’s meaning of short eyes and his reaction is the most violent. He abandons all feelings of kinship and identification with Davis and spits in his face while the others watch.

At first, this hatred of Davis is one of the factors that bring the main characters together and they taunt and push Davis while they are all locked in the dayroom together. When Davis becomes indignant and says, “I am not going to stand for this treatment” the others harass even him more. Murphy responds to him and tries to make it clear that he no longer supports the young man. At Cupcakes suggestion, they put Davis’s head in the toilet and Murphy takes his cigarettes. The Irishman also tells Davis that he should give him his gold chain and when he refuses, Murphy ironically reminds him that they should stick together because they are both white. Ice, who is enjoying the banter, breaks in with “I ain’t got nothing to do with it, Shoe, but I swore I heard the freak say that you were passing, Shoe.” Murphy is incensed by the suggestion and uses another Spanish term when he responds to the allegation. He says to Davis, ““You saying that I’m a quadroon⁴?””(51). When the guard arrives and finds Davis on the floor with all the inmates surrounding him, they defend Murphy by saying that Davis instigated the altercation.

Murphy’s relationship with Davis highlights his ability to change affiliation across ethnic lines and his decision to kill Davis betrays the idea that each group must protect its own. He proves that other factors besides race supersede his ethnic affiliation. For Murphy,

⁴ Spanish term used to describe people of mixed origins in Latin America and the Southern U.S. in the nineteenth century.

Davis' identity as child molester and homosexual overrides his "whiteness." The actual murder is a less "unifying" event. Murphy has already decided to conform to prison life and has no remorse, but for the others it is the moment where they decide if they are inmates without humanity or just temporarily serving time. Juan and El Raheem refuse to kill the man, even though they acknowledge the severity of his crimes. Juan had defended Davis from the beginning and refuses to be a part of it. El Raheem, who frequently refers to Murphy and the guards as white devils, defends his hesitancy. "I just couldn't kill a man looking at me helpless" (97). Murphy, however, quickly takes the knife and slits Davis's throat while simultaneously taunting the others about their inability to act. During the subsequent investigation, their cohesiveness and group identity remains stable and nobody tells the Captain the truth. When they are questioned, they all support the common alibi that they were watching television while the "suicide" happened. By protecting Murphy they are negating that group affiliation is always based on ethnicity.

For all the others, ethnic identity is important and they are reminded of their primary affiliations by the other characters. Murphy, on the other hand, is not concerned about ethnicity and identity. El Raheem preaches to the others about Black power and makes the comment that justice means "just us -white people" (16). Paco warns Juan that by defending Davis he is "going against his own people" (45). While the other inmates shout out the important slogans of the time such as "Pa'lante" and "Power to the People", Murphy shouts the meaningless slogan "Free the Watergate 500"⁵(10-11). Towards the end of the play, he pontificates on what is really important to him and it is clear that his own description of his identity it is not racially and/or ethnically based. He feels that it is in his power to become

⁵ An ironic slogan satirizing all the "free the..." slogans which also illustrate the amount of people involved in the Watergate scandal.

whatever he pleases. His loyalty is to his habit and that supersedes his ancestry and social class:

El, Let me tell you something. I'm a hope-to-die dope fiend... not because I'm black... or cause I have some personality disorder, but because I like being a dope fiend. I like being a dope fiend. And nothing is gonna change that in me... If Allah comes down from wherever he is...and he ain't doing good dope... I ain't gonna cop from him... [...] Cause I do as I please when the day comes that I wanna become a black god, a panther or a Muslim, the I will become one...(57-8)

His defining characteristics are his drug addiction and his lack of remorse. He is conman that believes he can change his identity to suit his needs.

Despite Murphy's assimilation to prison life and his friendship with inmates from other ethnic groups, he exploits his "whiteness" when necessary and denies his ability to cross ethnic barriers. Ironically, this negation of the truth may eventually get him released from jail. After bragging of his ability to speak like a Puerto Rican by telling Davis "I rap spic talk"(2) and translating Paco's warning "El que gana pierde" for Ice, he later denies his language skills in court. He is charged with assaulting a Spanish-speaking man and he explains his lawyer's defense strategy seemingly without irony:

Oh yeah, no doubt about it... Like when we was in court... he told the judge that I was Spanish... and that I spoke it when I was ripping him off. Cause the old man is South American. I told the judge I could hardly speak English, let alone some mira-mira language. The Legal Aid said we got one good chance behind that. (71)

He has shown himself to be a cold-blooded killer and the most comfortable in jail, but has the best chance of being released. During his interrogation the Captain mentions his long record

and many aliases. “Murphy ... alias George Reagan... Michael Potter... Julian Berger...etc” (109). It becomes clear that “Longshoe” is just another personality that he takes on in order to continue supporting his addictions. His goals are the short-term pleasures that his drugs provide him.

Jimmy Breslin:

In *Forsaking All Others*, the protagonist, Teenager, is also a character that lives outside the law. Although Teenager is slightly more interested in his ethnicity than Murphy, he is also a hardened criminal who kills without remorse. Whereas Murphy is only concerned about satisfying his addiction, Breslin’s protagonist also lusts after power and money. Teenager’s violent nature is apparent and “his search was for domination, his basic urge was to destroy; sexual conquest for the sake of humiliating a woman was the first duty of a man to himself” (10).

The narrator connects the story of Teenager to the Irish by providing his background. Teenager is the grandson of Michael Sullivan. Sullivan went to Puerto Rico to fight in the Spanish-American War and was “stationed in Ponce in 1916.” He stayed after the War ended and “married a local black Indian” (9). Teenager’s real name is Ramón Solivan. In the transcript of his parole hearing, which is provided at the beginning of the story, it is explained that this “hispanicized” version of the Irish name Sullivan comes from his great grandfather— whose “name was refined over the years to conform to community standards: at death, he was listed as Colon Solivan”(9). Teenager is heavy drinker (which is something that he inherited from Michael Sullivan) and coke-addict who becomes one of the most vicious dealers in the neighborhood. He is frequently compared to an animal by the narrator.

Teenager grows up listening to the stories of his uncle, Tito Solivan, who always talks about New York; even though, he had never been there. Due to his “New York Irish ancestry and blue eyes” Tito was considered to be the local expert on all things related to the States. Teenager eagerly listens to Tito’s stories of the riches he could obtain in the City, which include comments such as “In New York the priests are ashamed when they find out how poor the Pope lives”(10). These stories encourage his idea that it is his destiny to go to New York and become rich and powerful. His experiences in New York are not what make him greedy and cold-blooded. In fact, he is generally treated with respect and despite his lack of contacts, he finds a job quickly. When he arrives in New York an Irishman called John Cohalan helps him find a job and buys him food. Teenager is soon disillusioned by his maintenance job and quickly realizes that in order to become rich he must become a drug runner. His lack of options is made clear, but he is too calculating and misogynistic to produce sympathy in the reader. For instance, before he goes out to kill he listens to a song sung by Celia Cruz called “Toro Mata”: (*The Bull Kills*)

Toro mata ahí

Toro mata ahí

Rumbanchero toro mata

Toro Viejo se murió

Mañana comemos

carne... (119,123)

The bull is the symbol of Spain and is often used to portray male strength and domination. Teenager sees himself as the young bull that kills the old bull and brings the meat to everyone. He identifies more with the macho Spanish image than with his Irish ancestor.

Despite Teenager's Irish heritage, the underlying antagonism between the Irish and Puerto Ricans communities is clear in much of the novel. The police, who are Irish, are portrayed as racist and resentful of the Puerto Ricans. When Myles O'Brien, the inept officer, walks into the bar where Teenager spends his time, he is unable to gain anyone's respect. Teenager and his friends pretend not to understand English and cause O'Brien to become even more disgusted. He tries to control his anger and convinces himself that Teenager is just another "Spic in a saloon" (91). Yet, as he looks at him, he remembers that the bar used to be called County Cavan and when he was younger he watched someone beat up a Puerto Rican with a baseball bat from the front window. He is only bothered by this memory in a vague way.

The narrative is full of action and depictions of the brutal murders that Teenager's gang commit as he tries to control the drug trade in the neighborhood, but there are many discussions of race and ethnicity, as well. In "Short Eyes" Murphy's reference to the "program" explains how members of certain ethnic groups always stick together. In *Forsaking*, the emphasis on ancestry and race is brought out through the other Puerto Rican character, Máximo Escobar. Through his interactions, the narrator shows the discrimination that many Puerto Ricans faced in New York. Escobar has recently graduated from Harvard Law School, and he comes back to the Bronx neighborhood to help file class action suits against dishonest landlords. However, he is aware that no matter how successful he becomes he will always be regarded as a Spic by some people:

Nobody at Harvard openly patronized him; they were beyond that, and they had seen one or two live Puerto Ricans in the years before Máximo. But they did want him to know that he was different from his people, that he was better. This was done best at wine and cheese parties. [...] Máximo decided

that wine and cheese was the standard Protestant way to teach a Puerto Rican to dispose of his Spic-ishness.”(29)

He returns to New York because he identifies with the people in the Puerto Rican community.

The subject of ethnicity also plays an important role in his relationship with Nicki, the wife of a jailed Mafioso. She is a proud Italian- American woman who falls in love with Máximo while her husband is serving time for conspiracy. She is openly racist and calls Máximo a spic several times. Despite her behavior, Máximo falls in love with her, and it makes him feel like a traitor to his community. For instance, when a dark-skinned Puerto Rican girl invites him for a drink, he refuses because he is meeting Nicki. He thinks, “he had something that excited all his sexual energy, a white girl” [and] “he despised himself for it”(185), however, his passion for her supersedes all these negative feelings.

In order to demonstrate the hybrid nature of the characters, the English skills of Máximo and Teenager are often highlighted. Máximo has dominated English and has “corrected” his New York pronunciation which is made apparent in the scene where he meets Nicki. She listens carefully to the “R’s” in Máximo’s speech to make sure that he doesn’t say Jessey instead of Jersey. She looks at him and thinks “If there is one thing she could not stand about Spics, aside from nigger hair, it was that they said ‘thas’ and ‘New Jessey’”(46). Teenager, however, often speaks English with Spanish syntax and says things like “I go now”(44). Breslin tries to duplicate the complex method of code-switching of many New York Puerto Ricans, but the Spanish is often misspelled (*cuatro* becomes *quatro* and *coger* is *cojer*) (91). Thus, it loses its sense of authenticity.

Breslin always portrays a corrupt and miserable New York plagued by drugs and crime, and few of the characters have any redeeming qualities. The ending of the novel provides no comfort for the reader. After Teenager's arrest the police are unsentimental and acknowledge that jailing one drug dealer does not stop the crimes. They know there will be a fight for power and a new leader will take Teenager's place. Nicki is able to overcome her initial racist feelings and decides to leave her husband for Máximo, but he is murdered by one of Teenager's rivals before she can find him.

Edgardo Vega Yunque:

Edgardo Vega Yunque's vision also shows the violent side of the City, but in general it is a place of positive experiences. All of his characters embrace the multicultural experience of growing up in New York. They see transculturation as a positive experience and most feel that affiliation is not based on ethnicity. Their experiences coincide with Bhabha's idea that these borderlands are "innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation" and they embrace the idea of re-creating society.

Edgardo Vega Yunque's interest in Irish and Puerto Rican intersections in New York is also personal and is reflected in many of his works. There is a significant Irish presence in several of his novels such as *The Comeback* and *The Lamentable Journey of Omaha Bigelow into the Impenetrable Loisaida Jungle* (2004). Also, in *No Matter How Much You Promise to Cook or Pay the Rent You Blew it 'Cause Bill Bailey Ain't Never Coming Home Again* (2003) and *Blood Fugues* (2005), he creates protagonists who have claims to both traditions and explores in depth the interactions and shared history of the two communities in New York.

Ed Vega Yunque was born in Puerto Rico in 1936 and moved with his family to the Bronx when he was fourteen. He spent his adolescence in a Bronx-Irish neighborhood and

often emphasizes the similarities of the two communities. He acknowledges their similar history of colonization and diaspora which led them to New York. He recognizes that for many Irish their ancestry is important, but they are also committed to being a part of U.S. society:

My introduction to the United States was through Irish eyes. My inspiration comes mainly through my heritage. However, in understanding the United States, I also look to the Irish for inspiration since in many respects their pride in their ancestry is similar to ours as Puerto Ricans. There are other similarities. As in the case with us, their ancestral home has been invaded by a more powerful political entity. Our mutual love of language has impelled us to adopt the use of English as a way of combating the aggression. I have attempted to emulate this linguistic stance since English is not my first language. (*No Matter* 635)

He recognizes the historical parallels and similarities of Irish and Puerto Rican definitions of cultural heritage and identity in their diasporic communities.

Vega Yunque's interest in Irish culture also extends to the traditional Irish literature from the Island. In *Blood Fugues*, the narrator interrupts with an aside about the New York Bloomsday celebrations that "declaim the words of this strange and honored Irishman" (241). Additionally, one of the characters is named after the Irish playwright, Samuel Beckett because his mother, a Puerto Rican witch, admired the author. Samuel Beckett Salsipuedes writes absurdist plays in English with Puerto Rican characters (with Greek names). In *No Matter*, the protagonist becomes interested in Irish mythology. She is comforted by the story of an Irish King who marries a Spanish princess and identifies with Finn mac Cumhail eating the salmon of wisdom.

No Matter and *The Comeback* mainly focus on the New York Irish. *The Comeback's*, protagonist, Frank Garboil experiences of growing up mirror those of Vega Yunque. In the preface, Vega Yunque reminisces about playing street games “and explaining to Irish kids why I spoke with an accent and was not Catholic, a fact which they treated as a mystery” (xvii). Garboil also plays sports in a predominantly Irish neighborhood and feels comfortable among his peers. The narrative, which is a satire, depicts the relation between identity and ethnicity in a humorous manner. For example, the protagonist (whose ancestors are Eskimo, Albanian, and Turkish), poses as a Puerto Rican and easily fools all of his friends at college into believing that he is a New York Puerto Rican. He successfully imitates their use of Spanglish and eats typical Puerto Rican food. He even dates a woman who is involved in the *independista* movement. There are several Irish characters in the novel and Garboil's Irish teammate, Kevin O'Brien, is one of the few sympathetic ones. The Irish police officers are inept and racist. Even Kevin's father, who invites Garboil and his Puerto Rican girlfriend to dinner refers to them as Spanish and never bothers to understand his mistake. The message of the work is that heritage is not the only determiner of empathy and that ethnicity is also strongly influenced by one's surroundings. In many ways, ethnicity is merely treated as a performance in the work and not based on tangible attributes. The characters frequently “pass” and easily imitate people from other ethnic groups and their identity is heavily influenced by the context of being in a contact zone.

No Matter is a massive novel and the narration is sometimes clumsy and preachy, but Vega Yunque's examinations of the intersections of people from these cultural backgrounds sustain the interest of the readers. The author attempts to describe how all these characters from different backgrounds come to New York and his depictions of African-Americans,

Jewish Holocaust survivors, German, Puerto Rican, Southern, and Irish experiences results in more than six hundred pages of narrative that challenge traditional notions of race and ethnicity in the U.S. In the novel, Vega-Yunque's middle-class protagonist, Vidamía Farrell, discovers the ways in which her Irish and Puerto Rican heritages positively influence her life. Vidamía has a Puerto Rican mother and Irish father and the search for her cultural heritage allows Vega Yunque to explore U.S. paradigms of race and ethnicity. The narrative often digresses from Vidamia's story in order to provide the reader with background for each of the numerous characters. However, her efforts to understand her Irish and Puerto Rican heritage provide the framework for this "epic novel". By using this framework, Vega Yunque emphasizes the importance of documenting all different types of histories.

Many the characters reflect on their past experiences at some point in the novel. This self examination becomes an exploration of their cultural heritage which stems from the need to find out the ways in which it has influenced their politics and ideology. Vidamía's, boyfriend and her half-brothers and sisters understand that there are positive aspects of one's ethnic heritage and nearly all the younger characters fall in love with someone "outside" their ethnic group. In this "hybrid" environment, identity becomes a vague idea that is formed from one's environment and heritage. For Vidamía discovering her past brings her satisfaction and answers some of her questions about who she is. However, her father, Billy Farrell, and her half-sister, Cookie, also ponder the advantages and disadvantages of heritage and lived experiences and reach different conclusions. Billy Farrell, a Vietnam Vet who is constantly reliving his battlefield experiences, can only focus on the negative aspects of his Irishness and partially blames his constant depression on his ancestry:

Everyone had a fucking tag on his name, on his existence, as if just living wasn't hard enough. On top of your pain you had to carry the pain that your

people had brought with them to the country, and you had to wear the indignity –all the time. (490)

He cannot escape his culture which he sees only as part of the burden of his existence. For him, the tragedy of knowing where you come from is carrying the burden of history.

For his is daughter, Cookie (whose real name is Hortense), heritage is just a small part of one's identity. She does not share her father's regret and her ethnicity is merely a performance. Her father's Irish family and her mother's southern roots are only part of her cultural knowledge. Growing up in the Lower East Side she has friends of many different ethnicities and, depending on her surroundings, she comfortably switches from home-girl street talk, to an Irish accent, to a southern drawl without displaying any apparent feelings of an identity crisis. Towards the end of the novel, she decides to become an actress and changes her name to McAlpin Farrell and when Vidamía inquires whether her family can continue to call her Cookie she responds, "Sure, that still who I am" [...] "Cookie Farrell from the Lower East Side" (626). She makes no references to her ancestry only the site of her lived experiences.

However, for Vidamía her heritage is not just a vague sense of belonging. She is constantly compelled to try and understand the positive aspects of her ancestry. Her search begins with her seeking out her estranged father, although, even after she finds him, many questions regarding her "identity" are not answered. She is happy to be in touch with her Irish relatives and forms a strong bond with her Irish grandmother, Maude, who "brought her carefully in touch with her lineage, explaining, through family anecdote, fable and myth" (7). The young girl acknowledges the importance of their meeting. Her ability to find a new family where she "fits in" makes her realize that the meeting (between her and her

grandmother) “would sustain her forever as a moment that gave meaning to her life” (55). Her experience with this part of the family inspires her to write her senior thesis on the Irish in Puerto Rico and through her research she discovers the ways in which the histories of the islands are connected. She focuses her research on Ramón Power who was a naval captain in the eighteenth century and decides that “Vidamía Farrell wasn’t such a strange name for a Puerto Rican, then” (472). However, she still feels as if she is missing an important part of herself which compels her to look for her maternal grandfather.

Vidamía’s interest in family histories is originally inspired by reading Alex Haley’s famous genealogical novel, *Roots*. As she reads the novel she is horrified by this part of history that she had never learned about in school and is overwhelmed by her sympathy for the people in the story. As she begins to realize that she must have a relationship with her father in order to understand her own family history (despite her mother’s warning against it) she thinks back to the first time she read the novel and saw the mini-series. She writes in her diary, “I must figure out how to see my father again. I feel like a character in *Roots*, held in slavery and separated from her relatives. I must be brave and smart and not allow anything to interfere”(94). This miniseries was an important cultural event and “the roots trip was as much a national phenomenon as a familial or personal one” (Jacobson 42). Vidamía, along with millions of Americans, was given an example of a method of understanding one’s history:

Roots is important as a national phenomenon not only because the book and the miniseries were so eagerly devoured by millions across the country, but because, over time, the roots idiom revised the vernacular imagery of the nation itself. (Jacobson 42)

The book and show were part of a significant change which occurred in the second half of the twentieth century which focused on ethnicity as path to self-awareness.

Through her search she finds her father, grandmother, and several siblings and is rewarded with a supportive family. However, nothing prepares her for the issues that she is forced to confront when she meets her maternal grandfather, Justino “Tumba” Santiago. Through discussions with her African-American boyfriend, Wyndell, she has become aware of the parallel histories of the Africans slaves in the U.S. and those were sent to the Caribbean, however, despite Tumba’s “coca-colored” skin she refuses to consider him a “moreno.”⁶ She reasons that it is “because he spoke Spanish”, although, “he was certainly dark and African enough to qualify as one” (413). After their first meeting, she also begins to question whether she should consider herself as African-American She dismisses the idea as “ludicrous” and “her feeling of pride in her grandfather turned in confusion interspersed with anger” (419). Even when she remembers her *Roots* experience, and acknowledges that “nothing would give her greater pleasure than to be able to say to her mother that they were both related to Mr. Haley's ancestors, and to other great black Americans such as Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Martin Luther King, Jr.” (407), she cannot self-identify as black. She remains convinced that only being considered African will not satisfy her need to understand the scope of her heritage. She realizes that if she gives precedence to her African roots she is negating other parts of her Puerto Rican heritage and her Irish ancestry. After the meeting, Vidamía feels the need to reexamine all her views relating to her own identity.

Puerto Rican culture naturally encompasses many ethnicities and cultures and perceptions of race are different for Puerto Ricans since most families are a mix of Spanish, indigenous, and African ancestry. As Vidamía reads about racism in the Caribbean she

⁶ The Spanish word for dark skinned people.

realizes, “that race was swept under the rug, and everyone acted as if it didn’t matter” (471). However, she offends some part of herself because she cannot accept her blackness and thinks; “If she believed that everyone was equal, why couldn’t she give herself up to being black” (507). In the argument she has with her boyfriend he gets angry because he feels that she is denying her blackness- which throws Vidamía into an emotional turmoil. She cannot deny any part of her ancestry and still be herself, yet, she cannot consider herself to be Black because that is a U.S. perspective of color and race. She fights the rigid black/white binary that dominates such ideas about race. That night, she lies in her bed and tries to come to a meaningful conclusion. She thinks about her peers at school who told her that she got in to Harvard because of the Irish connection and that Harvard favored the Irish because of the “Kennedy influence:”

She’d felt pride when they referred to her as Irish. And she *was* that too, wasn’t she? These thoughts plunged her once again into an agitated state. Her Irish was up. No it was her Latin temper. Or maybe it was the savage African blood in her. For the first time in her life she didn’t want to be herself. (508)

In a conversation with her Puerto Rican stepfather, she begins to understand that a black/white dichotomy is something that has been invented in the U.S. to promote slavery and the oppression of black people but it has no scientific backing:

‘It’s like being Puerto Ricans is an antidote to this black and white stuff that is such a hang-up with Americans. Brilliant. Wow! That’s what I was trying to explain to Wyn when we were arguing about his wanting me to be black. In other words, being Rican means that you don’t have to decide whether your black or white.’

Her step-father agrees with her discovery. ‘That’s as good as explanation as any, and probably healthier than having to decide between black and white. That kind of crap damages this country’”(622).

Vidamía’s physical appearance is discussed frequently during the narrative. There are several allusions to her full lips and large chest. She is also an honor student with perfect grades and while she attending high school in Westchester County she manages a success video rental business with her siblings on the Lower East Side. The families’ discussions about her beauty are always related to her ancestry. Each side of the family wants to claim her attributes as a sign of their superior genetics. When her Irish grandmother first sees her she thinks, “As Irish a face as you’d want, same shape mouth as Billy’s...” (7). When she describes Vidamia to her friend she tells her about the girl’s “prominent cheekbones and full lips that gave Vidamía an exotic beauty which she couldn’t quite place as belonging to any group or race. Seeing her the first time she felt “as if she had met someone so different from anyone she had ever encountered”(31). Ironically, the narrator also notes in that when Vidamía visits her *güelita* she “observes her thin white face and high cheekbones which her mother said she had inherited” (406). When her father sees her for the first time he says to his mother, “She reminds me of the pictures of grandma’s sister when she was a little girl. The one who went into the convent” (69). Maud’s friend, who is African-American, also asks about Vidamía’s skin color and hair type and when Maude responds “She is sort of a golden color” and “its brown and wavy” (31). Her friend responds jokingly, “that’s what we call that high yella” (31).

Her looks are a combination of both worlds and the result of what the narrator calls “hybrid vigor.” The narrator stresses that Vidamía’s superior intelligence and beauty comes

from the combination of all her ancestry. Her superiority and its relation to genetics is frequently alluded to throughout the novel:

... we are referring to a no-nonsense kind of young gal, full of gumption, get-up-and-go, and many super-accelerating gray cells sprinting back and forth in her brain, all of them energized by hybrid vigor, which is a genuine biological phenomenon that comes when vastly different gene pools combine to produce an individual of superior capacities... (407)

This hybrid mixture is responsible for her accomplishments.

In *Blood Fugues*, this argument that hybrid mixtures result in “superior” people also comes across. As in *No Matter*, the protagonist, Kenny Romero, is a good-looking and intelligent young person and the offspring of an Irish/ Puerto Rican union. While he is alone in the woods and about to be attacked by ferocious coyotes (who have mated with wolves and become bigger and stronger) he remembers when his mother told him about the results of the mixture of two similar species: “Hybrid vigor when similar breeding species mated and produced stronger individuals” (121). Although he is referring to animals the idea is clearly related to his superior strength and intelligence since he survives the attack.

The Irish/Puerto Rican couple in *Blood Fugues* is happily married and there are several siblings (who also exhibit this slightly disturbing idea of genetic excellence). The novel primarily focuses on the story of a New York Irish family, the Boyles, and also relates their connections to the Romeros, who are Puerto Rican. However, except for Tommy, who marries France Ann Boyle, the Romeros are all secondary characters in the Boyle saga. The Puerto Rican father, Thomas Romero, is police officer and the mother, Frances Ann Boyle, is a stay-at-home mom, who studied Spanish in college and has a great respect for the cultures of Spanish-speaking countries. Neither family is pleased when the couple decides to marry,

yet, they are able to put their differences aside and get along— at least on a superficial level. There are scattered references to the underlying animosity, such as the uncle's exaggerated Irish pride. The Puerto Rican grandparents also teach the children to say “ *gringos hijos de puta* and *yanquis desgraciados*” (41), but nobody seems to take their differences too seriously.

Like Vidamía, the protagonist, Kenny consoles himself by remembering historic Irish and Spanish connections. As he is alone in the woods he reminds himself that his mother told him that Eamon de Valera “a one-time president of Ireland had a Spanish name” (195). His mother helps all the children learn about the island and even takes them to the Spanish bookstores to find books about Puerto Rico. She also teaches them how to say things in Spanish since their father is often away from home.

Vega-Yunque also connects the Puerto Rican and Irish history in New York and the violent liberation movements. Frances's brother, Jerry (who is Tommy's partner before they leave the police force) starts a moving business which becomes a front for smuggling arms for the Irish Republican Army. Tommy's role is transporting the merchandise in his truck to places in New York and Chicago. Jerry's summer house on Long Island becomes a covert center for these clandestine activities:

The house was also a meeting place of intrigue. This is where they made plans when something big was about to happen, It was rumored that Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, later to emerge as leaders of a political wing of the Irish Republican Army, had stayed there (74).

Jerry denies the connection but he is clearly involved in smuggling and other clandestine activities.

The Romeros also seem peripherally involved in Puerto Rican liberation movements. At one point, Tommy's father asks for help from his son and use of the infamous summer house as a drop off point. When Tommy questions the nature of the mission, the father responds that they need: "your kind of help, son. Like you help the Irish'" (77). Tommy has never mentioned Jerry's connection to his father, but the older man knows all about their business. As they organize the sale, even Jerry is surprised at the quantity of materials that are being delivered. He asks Tommy whether this group is related to the recent bombing of a restaurant called the Fraunces Tavern⁷, but they decide that they are safer if they don't find out.

By the end of the novel, Jerry Boyle, who often makes discriminatory comments against the Puerto Ricans, is cheating on his Irish wife with a Puerto Rican woman and learning some Spanish. He begins to comprehend the parallel histories of the islands more clearly than any of the other characters and like Billy Farrell in *No Matter*, he views his family's history as negative influence. When he sees his sister and brother-in-law, he comments "that no two people carried so much baggage. [...] No, not they themselves, he said. They're the innocents. I mean the island colonies'" (242). However, Kenny sees the positive influence that both cultures have had upon him and, like Vidamía, he is able to celebrate both cultures simultaneously.

Conclusion:

Vidamía, Kenny, Murphy, and Teenager cross over the cultural borders that have been created by the diasporic communities with varying degrees of success. They do not exist completely outside U.S. Anglo culture, however, the Irish and Puerto Rican influences

⁷ This incident, which occurred on Jan. 24, 1975, was carried by Puerto Rican separatists called the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (FALN- Armed Forces of Nacional Liberation). Four people were killed and sixty-three injured in the attack.

are more significant. Their experiences in the borderlands enable them to elaborate new strategies of selfhood, but they are not always positive affirmations. Murphy has given up his links to ancestry and does not acknowledge the ethnic identifiers of U.S. society such as skin color or ethnicity. He moves back and forth in the in-between spaces and pledges his allegiance to his addiction. Teenager is also unapologetic about his affiliations; he conducts business with Mexican growers, Italian Mafia bosses, and anyone else who will serve his purposes. He feels no remorse and is loyal to his friends regardless of their connections with Puerto Rico. The two protagonists abandon almost all affiliation to their “community” (as defined by their Irish/Puerto Rican ancestry) and they concentrate on materialistic needs. They are disconnected from all “society” which turns them into criminals. On the other hand, Vidamía and Kenny’s identities are firmly rooted in their traditions. Vidamía’s biological connections to both Islands are frequently stressed and they translate into national pride. Kenny’s conclusions are similar because he was taught by his Irish mother who “decried all sorts of prejudice” (41), to respect all cultures and to be proud of his ancestry. This emphasis on belonging to a community without the creation of “Other” is part of their ability to succeed. Their sense of being part of more than one culture provides them with a positive frame of reference for their sense of self worth.

Conclusions

The on-going story of the relationship between the New York Irish and Puerto Rican communities is not a simple history of collaboration or antagonism. These interactions exist in constant fluctuation between both states and the outcomes are dependent on location, individual experiences, and other circumstances. Their opinions about their counterparts change due to circumstances on the respective Islands, political and social movement within the United States, and are dependent on a series of daily interpersonal encounters. The ideas they form about this specific “Other” are an intrinsic part of their experiences in New York. Their opinions changed continuously throughout the more than one hundred years analyzed in this work.

Before the New York Irish had to confront the influx of Puerto Ricans into their spaces, they were able to clearly see the commonalities of the historical dynamics. Thus, they framed the debate for Puerto Rican independence in terms of their own struggle for liberation. The Irish strongly resisted the takeover of the island which they felt turned the U.S. into an imperialistic country. However, as these communities came into contact in New York City the relationship changed dramatically. The Irish had become more integrated in the political and cultural life of New York; thus, they often viewed the Puerto Ricans as outsiders who competed for jobs, spaces, and other resources. However, there were other instances of solidarity and understanding and the New York Irish were transformed by their interactions with the Puerto Ricans.

In nineteen twenties the Puerto Rican presence in New York was barely registered by Irish authors. Eugene O'Neill was one of the few who depicted the Island, but he was more interested in its history than any modern day issues. He depicted Puerto Rico as a magical place populated by religious people whose spirituality would counteract the pervasive spirit of materialism in the U.S. A few decades later, as Puerto Rican migration increased, New York Irish writers began to portray New York Puerto Ricans with more frequency and their depictions are varied. Frank McCourt, Alice McDermot, and Dennis Smith comprehended the similarities between the Irish and the Puerto Ricans, but felt that real solidarity was an impossible dream. Terence Winch and John Montague were less sympathetic and held the Puerto Ricans responsible for the deterioration of their old neighborhoods. Jimmy Breslin also felt that the Irish and Puerto Ricans were both corrupting influences in a City that was in the process of a breakdown.

The integration of the Puerto Ricans in New York was highly dependent on the Irish since they had a strong physical presence and wielded a great deal of political power¹. The far-reaching power of this political entity shows up in the works of Jesús Colón, Joaquín Colón, and Bernardo Vega. Each of these activists shows contempt for its corrupting influences, yet admires the Irish ability to form a cohesive community and provide assistance for one another. In Edward Rivera's *bildungsroman* the Irish are also part of the hierarchy—although in a much more limited setting. The Irish clergy who run the school simultaneously feel compassion for and criticize the Puerto Rican students. Judith Ortiz Cofer tells similar stories of her treatment by Irish nuns in her protagonist's school. She also depicts the Irish students who were popular and outgoing and made her jealous that they were having a more

¹ The political machine known as Tammany Hall controlled the political scene from 1790-1950 and was primarily an Irish institution.

typical American teenage experience. Pedro Pietri recognizes the moments of solidarity between the Irish and Puerto Ricans, but acknowledges that the Irish left the neighborhoods as soon as they were able. Edgardo Vega Yunque, on the other hand, recognizes the positive influence that the Irish have had upon him. For him, the Irish were his peers and his friends. He acknowledges that the preservation of Irish culture and nationalist sentiment provided him with ways of understanding Puerto Rican identity in the U.S.

Most studies of transculturation focus on how subordinate cultures relate to the dominant paradigm and never fully explore how “non-mainstream” communities relate to one another. However, this analysis of the poems, novels, autobiographies, short stories, and newspaper articles written by New York diasporic communities demonstrates the relevance of these types of mutual influences and illustrates the complex patterns of community formation and identity in the diaspora. Interpreting these influences provides a fuller understanding of the transformations that individuals and communities undergo as they integrate into new societies. Also, such an interpretation breaks down the idea that this integration of a “minority” is solely based on a relationship with the culture of the “majority.”

Both communities view themselves as culturally outside the mainstream Anglo culture although individuals within the communities have achieved political and economic power. The Irish were a minority in the United States; yet, they were majority in New York for several decades. Beginning in the twentieth century they represented a significant percentage of the city’s population and maintained a significant presence until the nineteen

forties.² Thus, the Irish simultaneously occupied minority and majority subject positions and held on to their political power even after the numerical majority was lost:

‘minorities’ are positioned in relation not only to ‘majorities’ but also with respect to one another, and vice versa. Moreover individual subjects may occupy ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ positions simultaneously, and this has important implications in the formation of subjectivity. (Brah 189)

This status greatly affected how they viewed themselves and consequently the ways the Puerto Ricans understood them to be part of the hierarchical structures. It affected all issues relating to identity and community.

Even in this modern age of movement and exile, one’s cultural heritage is still considered a defining characteristic of self. The use of the nation as point of reference for identity— while existing outside its borders is the paradox in which diasporic communities exist. For all the authors mentioned in the study, identity is an important concept and the direct relation between their ethnicity and identity is rarely questioned. Community building based on ethnicity is a reaction to assimilation into mainstream Anglo culture. The feelings of alienation from U.S. Anglo culture led the Puerto Ricans and Irish to construct their own ideas regarding community that connected them to their “homelands” whether they had been born in the U.S. or not. Thus, the representations of the Irish or Puerto Rican “Other” in these works are just another way of delineating community.

² In 1880 more than one-third of New Yorkers were of identifiable Irish stock, a higher proportion than any other group. By 1910 the proportion had dropped to less than 1 in 5. By 1945 it was fewer than 1 in 10”(Nickel in Bayor 339) still a significant proportion. The Puerto Ricans have also represented a significant percentage of the population of New York City. By the nineteen seventies the Puerto Rican community was more than 800,000 ²

In the beginning of the twentieth century, many of the Irish were recent immigrants who had strong family connections to the Island. Thus, for the New York Irish newspaper editors Patrick Ford and Patrick Meehan the Irish community was clearly defined as those who came from Ireland (or were first or second generation immigrants) and read their newspaper. They also defined Irishness in terms of religious upbringing and felt that Catholicism was one of the most important components of this ethnicity. Meehan and Ford used the term “Irish-American” comfortably— which demonstrates that they saw no conflict in displaying loyalty to both countries. Ireland played just as important a role in their life as the U.S. For Eugene O’Neill, a first generation immigrant, his Irish identity was important and many of his plays feature characters that cannot conform to Anglo society.³ The playwright tried to expand the definitions of American to include his personal and family experiences which were related to Irish.

Even in the more recent works of Frank McCourt, Dennis Smith, and Alice McDermott, the link between ethnicity and identity is only questioned at a superficial level. Frank McCourt’s protagonist protests that his accent automatically designates him as an outsider. This speech pattern is part of the reason he can never break free from the discrimination associated with not being part of mainstream Anglo culture. However, he accepts his Irish up-bringing as an intrinsic part of his identity. Dennis Smith’s Irishness is a source of pride which he associates with his liberal ideology. Alice Mc Dermott’s characters do not long for return a return but preserve Irish customs of marriage and death.

The association between Puertorricanness and identity is also an accepted truth for the Puerto Rican authors examined in this work. William Carlos Williams’ experiences of being Puerto Rican in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century reflect the importance of

³ Such as *Death of a Salesman* and *The Hairy Ape*

elaborating the definition of “America” and “American.” His idea are more akin to his Latin American counterparts such as Jose Martí and Alfonso Reyes⁴ because of its inclusion of both continents and the Caribbean Islands. In the second half of the century, the authors who address themes of growing up such as Judith Ortiz Cofer, Piri Thomas, and Ed Rivera all focus on the influence of the Puerto Rican community in their formative years. Thomas’s principle complaint is that he is labeled because of his skin color by white “Americans.” The multiplicity of his background, which includes a Puerto Rican mother and a Cuban father, is suppressed by this categorization. He is proud of his African heritage but feels that it is not his only source of identity.

For Piri Thomas, Miguel Piñero, Pedro Pietri, and Ed Vega Yunque these connections to their African heritage are important. Many African slaves were brought to Puerto Rico and most Puerto Ricans have some African ancestry. Puerto Ricans and African-American have also formed alliances in New York and other U.S. cities. Juan Flores, Ramón Grosfoguel, and Raquel Rivera⁵ have studied these transformations of Puerto Rican identity which result of to these interactions. The links are reflected in a great deal of contemporary literature. One of the most well-known examples of the types of transformative identities that emerge from the interactions of the two cultures is Willie Perdomo’s poem “Nigger-Rican Blues” which is a dialogue about the narrator’s attempts to reconcile his ideas on black identity (in U.S. terms) and his Puerto Rican identity.

⁴ Both authors (along with many other) wrote about America in these inclusive terms which included the indigenous peoples and cultures.

⁵ Juan Flores is Professor of Africana, Puerto Rican/Latino Studies at Hunter College. His book, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop*, explores the links between the two cultures through popular music and culture.

In New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone Raquel Rivera demonstrates Puerto Rican influence on contemporary music.

Ramón Grosfoguel’s *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* compares Puerto Rican experiences of migration to those of other Caribbean nations.

From the Irish perspective, the association with African-Americans has also been transformative. This relationship between the two communities in the nineteenth century was explored by Noel Ignatiev in his controversial book, *How the Irish became White*.⁶ More recently, Matthew Pratt Guterl has written about the Irish influence on Marcus Garvey's Pan-African movement and other aspects of Irish connections with this community. As Guterl points out:

So much of "American history" is either nationalist or exceptionalist in spirit, and only rarely does an American historian approach his or her topic with faith that the project will not reveal just national peculiarities, but also global similarities, connections, and dynamics. By discussing the occasional solidarity expressed by Irish Americans and African Americans, by being aware of the global anticolonial ties between various subject populations around the world, and by developing an interest in an evolving world economic system, [...] rarely discussed patterns of global interconnectedness – multi-leveled experiences in the history of the United States [are emphasized]. (310-311)

Studying the particularities of these relationship leads to a more comprehensive view of the ways in which nationalistic movements function in diasporic communities.

The Irish and Puerto Ricans also interacted with the many other groups in the New York and some of these connections are also explored in the contemporary fiction. For instance, Nicolasa Mohr and Aurora Levins Morales have written extensively about their personal experiences in the cultural cross currents of Jewish-Puerto Rican communities. Mohr's story, *Mr. Mendelson*, is a simple tale of how a Puerto Rican family takes care of a lonely Jewish man who lives in the same apartment building. In Levins Morales's poem,

⁶ Many Irish scholars felt this book presented a one-side view of the issue and only focused on the negative aspects of the relationship.

Double Allegiance, she consoles herself with “Yiddish-Spanish accents in our speech” and compares her experience with others. The Irish-Jewish connection and the mutual prejudices of each community were explored in the plays and movie, *Abie's Irish Rose* in the 1920's. The historical novel *The Gangs of New York: an Informal History of the Underworld* by Herbert Ashbury also depicted the Irish power struggles with Italian and Jewish immigrants.

People from many communities that reside in New York have shared backgrounds of oppression and economic hardship and each group imports its own set of internalized social norms and predispositions which impact their interactions with other communities. It is a relatively small geographical area and the shared space is constantly being altered; thus, transformations occur as small groups of individuals attempt to relate to each other. The interactions between the Irish and Puerto Ricans are just one small part the dynamics of the city, but are significant because of how they are connected to all the other movements in the space and beyond.

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