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### **Bomba and the Evolution of Puerto Rican Activism in New York**

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# **How Dance Became A Form Of Resistance In New York's Puerto-Rican Community**

**Dance has been a popular way to celebrate Latino culture in New York City. Now, one Puerto Rican dance style is being used to fight back against racism and to promote the education of Afro-Latino culture worldwide.**

Puerto Ricans have played an important role in New York dance culture. With over 817,712 residents living in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Brooklyn by 1970, Puerto Ricans were able to connect with other Latino Americans and developed new, popular forms of dance, like salsa, as a result.

However, while dances like salsa and reggaeton are widely known and associated with Boricua culture, there are some dancers in New York City that are trying to increase the visibility of Bomba, a traditional Puerto Rican style that celebrates the population's African and indigenous ancestry.

“It's about finding that and knowing our history, and being able to move forward, educated, with a more complete sense of self,” Milteri Tucker, the founder and artistic director of Bombazo Dance Company, said.

Bombazo is a community-based organization based in the South Bronx. Tucker, a Puerto-Rican native and an Afro-Latino resident, has lived in New York City for over a decade. After moving to the U.S. mainland and receiving a Master's degree in Dance from New York University, she decided that she wanted to use her education to elevate Afro Latinos in the city and to address social issues through movement.

“That’s where my work comes in, not only to respond to social justice and what’s happening in the world, but what’s happening with ourselves and in our community,” Milteri said.

While Bomba is still finding its place among a mainstream audience, Milteri’s decision to use the arts as a form of activism is not unique. She is part of a group of Afro-Latino activists throughout New York City’s history that used music, writing, dance, and theater as a way to celebrate their culture and to speak on pressing social issues affecting their communities.

Puerto Rican organizers were particularly active in the 20th century, paving the way for activists like Milteri today. One group, the Young Lords fought for civil rights and health, police, and education reform during the 1960’s.

At that time, migration from Puerto Rico to New York City had rapidly increased in the last two decades; by 1970, there were over 817,712 Puerto Ricans residing primarily in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Brooklyn, according to Brooklyn College professor Virginia Sanchez-Korrol. Within the city, the 1st and 2nd generation residents faced a host of challenges that included racial discrimination, over-policing, overcrowded schools, and hazardous housing and sanitation conditions in their neighborhoods.

However, many Puerto Ricans also faced difficulties within their own community. Acknowledging African heritage was discouraged, both socially and legally on official documents like the U.S. Census. Many Afro-Puerto Ricans were facing both a city and a community that regarded them as nonwhite and treated them poorly as a result.

The Young Lords challenged the discriminatory practices, both within and outside of their community. The leaders that formed the New York chapter were mainly Afro-Latino, and the organization itself was diverse. They were younger, unashamed of who they were, and willing to come together with both the Latino community and the Black community to fight for equality.

The organization continues to have a lasting impact on the city, according to Professor Johanna Fernandez, a Baruch College professor and author of *The Young Lords: A Radical History*.

“I think what was most important about the Young Lords was the affirmation of blackness and the importance of solidarity with Black Americans,” Fernandez said. “They struggled against the legacy of slavery and colonization, and this is something they did in the 1960’s as teenagers, that only recently became the subject of public discourse and academic study in university.”

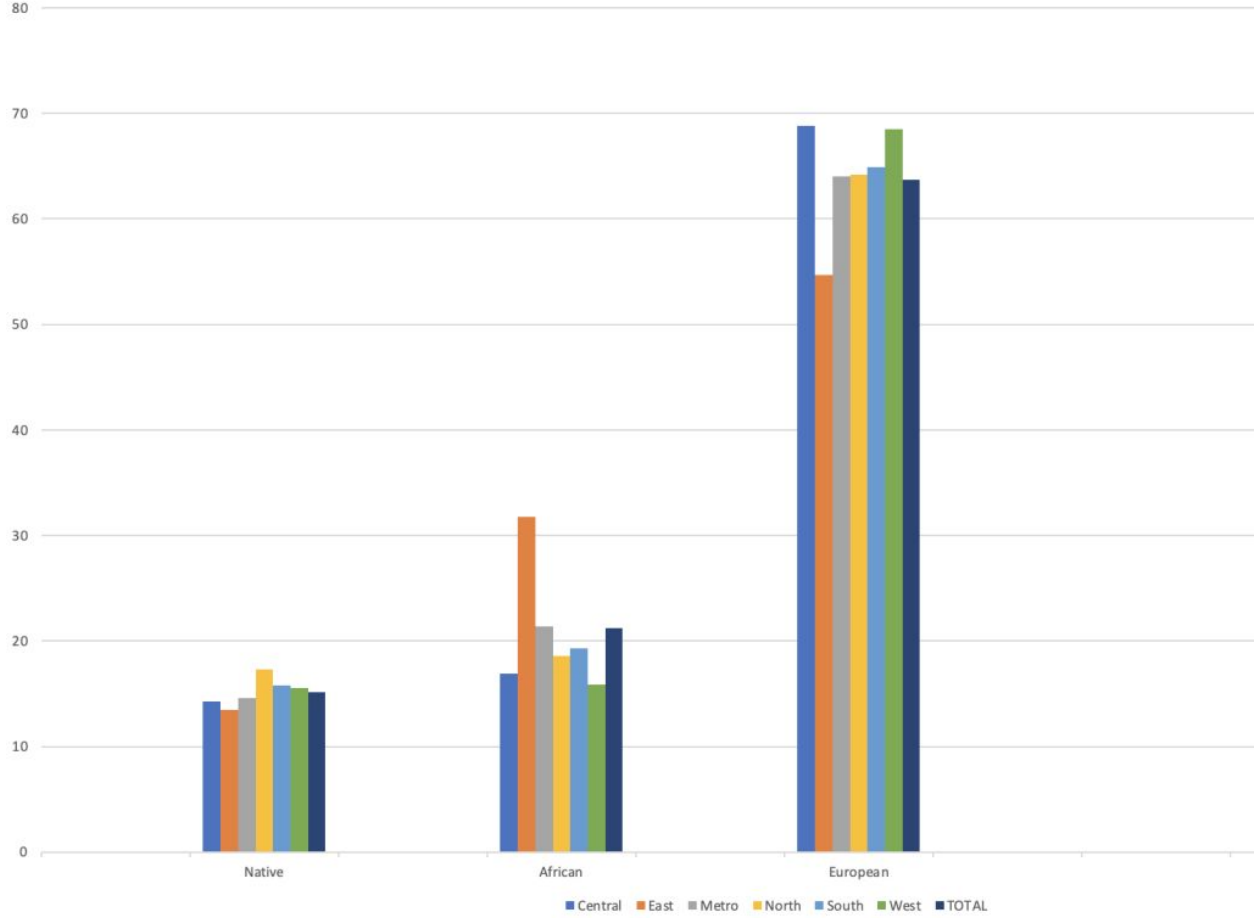
While the Young Lords organization had started to collapse by the 1970’s, the Afro-Latino focused activism did not end. The founders of the Nuyorican Movement spent the next decade creating art and public spaces in the city for poor and working-classes Puerto Ricans. They established places for Afro-Latino residents that continue to exist throughout New York City today.

Now, Milteri is following in their path by using Bomba as a way to celebrate afro-Puerto Rican identity and to establish connections in communities that are sometimes divided. She says that within the Latino community, there is still an existing divide based on race. She states that she say the erasure of “negura,” or blackness, in her culture for many years.

“We have so much in common, and sometimes the differences are the ones that separate us,” Milteri said. “We could be more united. Even though there are certain things that are different and there are different nuances, we all have similar history.”

The classification of race in Puerto Rico has varied throughout the century, due to both political and social factors influencing how residents identified themselves on the U.S. Census. Many Puerto Ricans began to self-identify as white, continuing the tradition of *gracias al sacar*, a colonial-era policy that allowed Puerto Ricans to pay to be classified as white and secure a higher social ranking on the island.

In the last U.S. census, more than three quarters of Puerto Ricans identified themselves as white. However, the genetic ancestry is a little more complicated, according to a [2011 study](#). Researchers found that the genetic data of Puerto Ricans varied greatly, especially according to geographical location. Despite the centuries of mestizaje, or miscegenation, modern-day Puerto Ricans contain an estimated 15.2% Native American ancestry, 21.2% African ancestry, and 63.7% European ancestry.



*On the eastern part of the island, where many of the sugar mill plantations were based, African ancestry was found to be higher among resident DNA. In Loíza, a northeastern city, the proportion of African ancestry is 47.8%.*

**According to Militeri, Bomba has been an effective tool in creating more connections with the Latino community, as it represents all three parts of**

## **Puerto Rican ancestry; the enslaved African people, Taíno natives, and Spanish colonizers that lived on the island together influenced the music and movement of the traditional dance style.**

The dance style was created as a way for various African tribes to communicate before they could understand one another through language. Four instruments were used to create it; the maracas, Buleador drum, Subidor drum, and Cua. They work to develop a rhythm and help the dancer interpret it through their movements. By following the sound of the music, the dancers were able to connect with the crowd and express a wide range of emotions.

Although the dance is primarily influenced by the African dancers that used it as a method of communication, Taíno instruments and Spanish-style steps are an integral part of Bomba as well. Milteri considers it a nuanced dance, one that pays respect to all aspects of her heritage.

“In every folk practice, you always want to honor those that came before you, and what they established,” Milteri said.

Because of this, it is important for Milteri to continue working on what she calls the the current “awakening” in New York City, where more and more people are embracing their African roots and are interested in finding out more from the company’s classes and annual performances.

“If other people find that they love it and see a connection, and that they love what this represents, then I welcome them,” Milteri said.

## CAPSTONE TRANSCRIPT

### HOW DANCE BECAME A FORM OF RESISTANCE IN NYC'S PUERTO-RICAN COMMUNITY

**LATIN DANCE IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF LIFE FOR MANY LATINO RESIDENTS IN NEW YORK CITY.**

**WHILE POPULAR STYLES LIKE SALSA AND MERENGUE ARE REGULARLY PERFORMED AND TAUGHT THROUGHOUT THE CITY, THE LAST DECADE HAS SEEN THE CREATION OF DANCE COMPANIES AND LOCAL PERFORMANCES FOCUSED SPECIFICALLY ON BOMBA.**

[BOMBAZO MUSIC]

**BOMBA IS A TRADITIONAL DANCE STYLE CREATED OVER 400 YEARS AGO IN PUERTO RICO, WHERE ENSLAVED AFRICANS FROM DIFFERENT TRIBES WOULD USE THE RHYTHM OF 4 INSTRUMENTS IN ORDER TO COMMUNICATE THROUGH MOVEMENT.**

**NOW, IN NEW YORK CITY, IT'S BEING USED AS A WAY TO FIGHT RACISM.**

INTERVIEW 1: MILTERI

As a dancer, I identify a lot with bomba because it serves as my self-identity as well as an Afro-Latina and a Puerto-Rican. Embracing all three parts of our identity as a Puerto-Rican.

**MILTERI TUCKER IS THE FOUNDER AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF BOMBAZO DANCE COMPANY, A NONPROFIT BASED IN THE BRONX. SHE GREW UP IN PUERTO RICO, WHERE BOMBA WAS A STAPLE AT FAMILY GATHERINGS. BUT IT WASN'T UNTIL MILTERI ATTENDED NEW YORK UNIVERSITY IN MANHATTAN THAT SHE REALIZED THE WAY SHE COULD HELP THE CITY'S LATINO COMMUNITY.**

INTERVIEW 1-MILTERI

I took bomba when I was still in college doing my thesis for my dance major, and fused it with contemporary modern dance. I liked it. I said, "this is something new, I can tell a story, I can develop a thought or idea or social issue through this way and utilize bomba."

**A DECADE LATER, MILTERI IS LEADING A GROUP OF DANCERS THAT COME FROM AROUND THE WORLD IN ORDER TO PRESERVE THE TRADITION OF BOMBA. THE COMPANY ALSO EDUCATES THE COMMUNITY AND CHOREOGRAPHS DANCES**

**AROUND VARIOUS SOCIAL ISSUES AFFECTING THE CITY'S AFRO-LATINO COMMUNITY.**

INTERVIEW 1-MILTERI

The dance company is to preserve the Afro-Puerto Rican culture, advocate for it, and educate because due to this day, a lot of people don't know about it. I always like to look for a way to continue to elevate the culture.

**ALTHOUGH SHE SAYS THE COMPANY HASN'T BEEN AS VISIBLE IN RECENT YEARS, THE PAST YEAR HAS RESULTED IN MANY NEW MEMBERS REACHING OUT TO THE COMPANY, INTERESTED IN LEARNING ABOUT BOMBA OR WANTING TO EMBRACE THEIR AFRICAN IDENTITY.**

INTERVIEW 1-MILTERI

A lot of people, with what happened over the summer-it was their outcry of support, of continuing to elevate the work that we are doing. Not just, "oh, this is bomba and this is the glitz and glamour," but it was "look at what they're doing," and that was very positive. The outcome of people just tuning in is really, really great.

[MUSIC]

**FOR MILTERI AND MANY OTHER RESIDENTS LIVING IN NEW YORK CITY, 2020 HAS BEEN A TIME OF GREAT POLITICAL CHANGE.**

**THE DEATH OF GEORGE FLOYD IN LATE MAY BROUGHT ABOUT PROTESTS ACROSS THE COUNTRY, WITH THOUSANDS IN NEW YORK ATTENDING MARCHES ORGANIZED BY BLACK LIVES MATTER AND OTHER LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS.**

[AP ARCHIVAL TAPE]

AUDIO OF NEWS CUTS/EDITS:

"Calls for police reform are growing."

(Crowd chanting) "What's his name? George Floyd"

"They're good for pulling stakes, they're good for smacking it across the floor. But we're not afraid, and we're not going anywhere." (Cheers)

"People are still protesting, so maybe this is the change."



**THE MOVEMENT ALSO STARTED MANY PUBLIC CONVERSATIONS ON HOW TO FIGHT DISCRIMINATION AND ADDRESS PROBLEMS WITHIN FAMILIES AND DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES.**

**MANY OF THESE CONVERSATIONS HAVE BEEN ABOUT THE LATINO COMMUNITY. IDENTITY CAN BE A COMPLEX TOPIC FOR MANY LATINOS, AS BELIEFS STEMMING FROM COLORISM AND WHITE SUPREMACY STILL REMAIN AN ISSUE AMONG A GROUP MADE UP OF DIFFERENT RACES.**

**IN ONE PEW RESEARCH STUDY, ONLY 18% OF AFRO-LATINOS IDENTIFIED THEIR RACE OR ONE OF THEIR RACES AS BLACK, WHILE ONLY 9% IDENTIFIED AS MIXED RACE. 39% IDENTIFIED AS WHITE ALONE OR WHITE IN COMBINATION WITH ANOTHER RACE.**

**AND ALTHOUGH MANY PUERTO RICANS HAVE AFRICAN ANCESTRY, THE NEW YORK TIMES FOUND THAT MORE THAN THREE-QUARTERS OF ITS POPULATION CHOOSE WHITE ON THE U.S. CENSUS.**

**THE ISSUES SURROUNDING IDENTITY HAVE BEEN PART OF THE ONGOING CONVERSATIONS FROM THE SUMMER. BUT WHILE THESE PROBLEMS HAVE BECOME A PREVALENT TOPIC, THEY ARE NOT A NEW ISSUE TO AFRO-LATINO ACTIVISTS LIKE MILTERI.**

INTERVIEW 2-MILTERI

Not only myself, but people like me who have done this work and have been doing this work, it's like saying 'we've been here, and it's great that you're now paying attention to us. But we've been here and we've been doing this.'

What happened in the summer, culturally, it was an eye-opening experience, some things have changed for the better and some things need work. The highlighting of peers and colleagues was great, but it's also saying 'we've been here. We've been doing this work. We're not doing this just because this happened.'

**SHE CREATED HER ENTIRE COMPANY IN ORDER TO NOT ONLY TO EDUCATE OTHERS ABOUT BOMBA, BUT TO ADVOCATE FOR HER COMMUNITY.**

INTERVIEW 2: MILTERI

What I feel in NYC or in general, is that it's an awakening of accepting your African roots, and a part of who you are....It's a thirst, of knowing each part of you, and wanting to know more. For years, and even within Hispanic culture, that part of our negra, our blackness, was kind of like, pushed aside or erased, although we had great leaders and great people and families who advocated for that. When I see the community coming, those that came to me, it's like a thirst of those who want to know more about their African heritage and how they're connected through that.

**WHILE THEY HAVEN'T ALWAYS BEEN VISIBLE TO A WIDER PUBLIC, AFRO-LATINO ACTIVISTS HAVE BEEN ACTIVE IN NEW YORK CITY FOR MANY YEARS, ORGANIZING AND WORKING TO CHANGE THE CITY'S COMMUNITY.**

**AND NOW, AS THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT HAS CAPTURED INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION ON RACIAL INJUSTICE, THE EFFORTS OF ORGANIZATIONS LIKE BOMBAZO ARE GETTING RECOGNIZED ON A BIGGER SCALE.**

**THE GROWING INTEREST HAS SHOWN MILTERI THAT IT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER IT IS TO CONTINUE, AND BUILD OFF OF THE WORK OF THE CITY'S PAST ACTIVISTS.**

INTERVIEW 2-MILTERI

We've been at it. Even when we were "invisible," we were still visible. I think this-everything that happened-just gave us more validity for the work that we do.

[MUSIC]

**HALF A CENTURY AGO, AFRO-LATINO ACTIVISM IN THE CITY WAS JUST AS IMPORTANT OF A TOPIC AS IT IS NOW. SIMILAR PROBLEMS OF RACISM, COLORISM, AND DISCRIMINATION LED TO THE CREATION OF THE YOUNG LORDS, A SOCIAL MOVEMENT FORMED IN THE 1960's BY PUERTO RICANS IN CHICAGO. IT EXPANDED TO NEW YORK CITY AT THE HEIGHT OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, AND WORKED TO FIGHT AGAINST CIVIL AND ECONOMIC INJUSTICES. THE GROUP ALSO WORKED TO CHANGE THE PERCEPTION OF IDENTITY IN THEIR COMMUNITY.**

**JOHANNA AUDIO**

The Young Lords helped a generation of Puerto Ricans situate themselves in the city and discover who they were. It's a quintessential question. "Who am I?" And the Young Lords helped answer that in a very complex way.

**JOHANNA FERNÁNDEZ IS A HISTORY PROFESSOR AT BARUCH COLLEGE. SHE IS ALSO THE AUTHOR OF “THE YOUNG LORDS: A RADICAL HISTORY,” A BOOK THAT DOCUMENTS THE BEGINNING AND OVERALL IMPACT OF THE ORGANIZATION.**

**IN HER BOOK, PROFESSOR FERNÁNDEZ EXPLAINS THAT BOTH COMMUNITIES HAD “COMPETING UNDERSTANDINGS OF RACIAL IDENTITY” DUE TO TWO DIFFERENT HISTORIES OF ENSLAVEMENT.**

**WHEN THE SPANISH COLONIZED PUERTO RICO, THEY ENGAGED IN MESTIZAJE, OR MISCEGENATION, WORKING TO ERASE BLACK AND INDIGENOUS CULTURE AS A WAY TO ELIMINATE ANY FORMS OF RESISTANCE.**

**BECAUSE OF THIS, PUERTO RICANS WERE TAUGHT TO IDENTIFY WITH THEIR NATIONAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY RATHER THAN BE CATEGORIZED RACIALLY, LIKE THE UNITED STATES.**

**JOHANNA AUDIO:**

Oppressed people internalize the mechanisms of oppression and the ideology of the oppressor. That is a very painful process of self-hatred.

**AS A RESULT, PUERTO RICANS MERGED THEIR POLITICAL INTERESTS WITH OTHER SPANISH-SPEAKING IMMIGRANTS. THEIR LOCAL LEADERSHIP PRIOR TO THE RISE OF THE YOUNG LORDS WAS ALSO PRIMARILY OLDER AND LIGHTER-SKINNED.**

**1ST AND 2ND-GENERATION PUERTO RICANS LIVED ALONGSIDE BLACK AMERICANS IN EAST HARLEM, ALMOST EQUALLY DIVIDED. ALTHOUGH PERCEPTIONS OF PUERTO RICANS HAD CHANGED OVER THE YEARS, BY 1960, THEY WERE CATEGORIZED BY MUCH OF THE PUBLIC AS NONWHITE AND DANGEROUS RESIDENTS.**

**PUERTO RICANS FACED MANY HARDSHIPS AS A RESULT. LIKE THE CITY’S BLACK POPULATION, THEY WERE FACED WITH WITH POOR HOUSING CONDITIONS, VIOLENT OVER POLICING, AND DISCRIMINATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLING.**

**BUT DESPITE HAVING SOME OF THE SAME CHALLENGES AND, FOR SOME PUERTO RICANS, SHARING THE SAME SKIN COLOR, A DIVIDE REMAINED BETWEEN BLACK AMERICANS AND THE LATINO COMMUNITY.**

**JOHANNA AUDIO:**

Even among lighter-skinned Puerto Ricans, there was a tendency to deny your ethnicity, because your ethnicity was associated with something inferior and lesser than the normalized American experience and identity. What you see happening is a denial of blackness within the Latinx community. For black Puerto Ricans, it’s painful to hear your family, friends denigrate blackness and certainly that played a role in the radicalization, the early emotional radicalization of the Young Lords for sure.

**WHEN THE ORGANIZATION EMERGED, THE CITY'S SPANISH NEWSPAPER, EL DIARO LA PRENSA, WROTE STORIES ON THE NEW, DIVERSE GROUP MADE UP OF YOUNGER, DARKER, ENGLISH-SPEAKING ACTIVISTS.**

**JOHANNA AUDIO:**

Joining the Young Lords was also about a reclamation of everything that they were. Puerto Rican and Black and working class and poor. But also American. And integrating those experiences.

**AS DISCRIMINATION AMONG PUERTO RICAN AND BLACK RESIDENTS INCREASED WITH THE ONSET OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, THE PERCEPTION OF MANY ACTIVISTS CHANGED. THEY RECOGNIZED BOTH THE SHARED EXPERIENCE OF RACISM IN NEW YORK, AS WELL AS THE COMMON GOAL TO FIGHT AGAINST OPPRESSION, POVERTY, AND WORKING-CLASS EXPLOITATION.**

[ARCHIVAL AUDIO]

**AUDIO CUT TAPE:**

"Our people are killed in the streets all the time. We say that it's all the same thing, that it's genocide against third world people, Black and Puerto-Rican people, so that's why we're charging the city with murder."

Crowds chanting, "Fuego, fuego, fuego"

**ONE OF THE FIRST JOINT ISSUES WAS IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF PUBLIC EDUCATION. DESEREGGATED SCHOOLS PRESENTED MANY PROBLEMS FOR BLACK AND LATINO STUDENTS, AS THEY FACED HOSTILITY AND DISCRIMINATION FROM FACULTY THAT OFTEN RESULTED IN POLICE INVOLVEMENT.**

**BY 1965, BOTH BLACK AND PUERTO RICAN ORGANIZERS CALLED FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLING AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO INTEGRATION. THEY ADVOCATED FOR COLLECTIVE CONTROL OVER CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AS WELL AS THE PROCESS OF HIRING AND REMOVING FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATIVE MEMBERS.**

**JUNIOR HIGH AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS REGULARLY DEMONSTRATED AS WELL, ADVOCATING FOR THE RIGHT TO FREE SPEECH AS WELL AS A SYSTEM IN WHICH THEY COULD HAVE THEIR CONCERNS HEARD BY SOMEONE IN AUTHORITY.**

**THE JOINT EFFORTS OF BOTH COMMUNITIES REFLECTED WHAT MANY CONSIDERED TO BE THE RADICAL, NEW MISSION OF THE YOUNG LORDS, AN ORGANIZATION THAT WELCOMED RACIAL DIVERSITY AS WELL AS RACIAL IDENTITY. IT IS A PART OF THEIR**

**LEGACY THAT PROFESSOR FERNANDEZ CONSIDERS TO BE ONE OF THE MOST IMPACTFUL CHANGES FOR THE CITY'S LATINO COMMUNITY.**

**JOHANNA AUDIO:**

The fact that the Young Lords theorized racial formation in Puerto Rico and Latin American was a tremendous intervention in the struggle for freedom. It was also a struggle against the legacy of slavery and colonization. I think this was one of the most important interventions of the Young Lords.

**OUT OF FIVE MEMBERS IN THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE, OR THE FORMAL LEADERSHIP FOR THE YOUNG LORDS, THREE WERE AFRO-PUERTO RICAN. THE LEADERS ALSO ESTIMATE THAT 25 TO 30% OF THE GROUP'S MEMBERS WERE AFRO-LATINO. THE INCLUSION OF BLACK LATINOS ENDED UP DRAWING MORE ATTENTION AND MORE ACTIVISTS IN THE ORGANIZATION DURING THE DECADE.**

**JOHANNA AUDIO:**

Compared to other organizations in the city, the Young Lords had a greater representation of Black members in membership and in leadership. That's a huge affirmation of the experience of blackness among Puerto Ricans. It's an affirmation among the experience of Blackness that's not tokenistic.

**DURING THE 60'S, THE GROUP ORGANIZED DEMONSTRATIONS TO DEMAND BETTER CONDITIONS FOR POOR RESIDENTS AND MORE SANITATION CLEAN-UPS IN HARLEM. THE ACTIVISTS ALSO SET UP FREE HEALTH CLINICS, COMMUNITY DAY CARES, CLOTHING DRIVES, FREE MEALS FOR CHILDREN, AND NEW EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM IN LOCAL COLLEGES.**

**BY 1973, TRACTION FROM THE MOVEMENT WAS FADING. OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE LIKE THE FBI, AS WELL AS INTERNAL CONFLICT AND REPORTS OF SEXIST TREATMENT BY MALE MEMBERS, LED TO ITS EVENTUAL DECLINE.**

**HOWEVER, THE ACTIONS OF YOUNG LORDS HELPED TO CREATE LASTING CHANGE IN NEW YORK CITY. THE WORK OF THE ORGANIZATION INSPIRED THE NEXT GENERATION OF ACTIVISTS, WHO CAME TOGETHER FOR A CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE FOLLOWING DECADE.**

**JOHANNA AUDIO:**

Because they emerged at the end of this period of radicalization, they reflect the best of this period. Its revolutionary openness and solidarity, which affirms the need for people of color to lead their own organizations, but also allows fluidity. It offered a sense of what the new society could look like in the country that is dominated by racial division and separation.

**THE NUYORICAN MOVEMENT BEGAN AS ANOTHER FORM OF RESISTANCE, WITH THE GOAL TO PROVIDE A SPACE FOR LATINO ARTISTS AND TO CELEBRATE CULTURE THROUGH MANY DIFFERENT MEDIUMS. THEY BOUGHT DIFFERENT SPACES ACROSS THE CITY TO SHOWCASE THEIR WORK. ONE OF THOSE SPACES, THE NUYORICAN POETS CAFE, WAS FOUNDED IN 1973 AND IS STILL A POPULAR SPACE TO SHOWCASE POETRY, THEATRE, AND MUSIC.**

**THE PREVIOUS ACTIVISM FROM THE PAST CENTURY CONTINUES TO INFLUENCE LEADERS LIKE MILTERI, WHO WANTS TO SUPPORT HER COMMUNITY THROUGH HER CHOREOGRAPHY. SHE WANTS TO MAKE SURE THOSE THAT COME TO DANCE HAVE THE ABILITY TO CONNECT WITH THEIR CULTURE, WHICH IS WHY SHE'S BEEN OFFERING FREE CLASSES THROUGH ZOOM.**

**INTERVIEW 1-MILTERI**

I wanted to connect more for the community and I know that as a dancer, sometimes you don't have \$20 to go take a one hour class. I wanted to make sure that for anybody who wanted to learn- not to take away from people that do charge that, there's nothing wrong-but I wanted it to be more open. I didn't want money to be an issue for why you couldn't come to our dances or activities. For me, it was important to reach out to people, and we have reached out to so many people.

**TODAY, THERE ARE SIGNS OF PROGRESS AMONG THE CITY'S LATINO COMMUNITY. WHILE ART-BASED ORGANIZATIONS LIKE MILTERI'S CONTINUE TO FOCUS ON HELPING THEIR COMMUNITY THROUGH SELF-EXPRESSION, OTHER ACTIVISTS HAVE OPTED FOR ARRANGING PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS.**

**IN JUNE, PROFESSOR FERNÁNDEZ WORKED ALONGSIDE THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT AND 60 OTHER LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS TO CREATE THE PUERTO RICAN PRIDE AND LATINO SOLIDARITY MARCH.**

**BUT THE CITY'S SUMMER MARCHES ALSO ENDED UP SHOWING THAT THERE IS STILL MUCH WORK TO BE DONE WHEN IT COMES TO CHANGING THE PERCEPTION OF THE CITY'S LATINO COMMUNITY. IN JUNE, THERE WERE SIGNS OF RESISTANCE FROM SOME LOCAL RESIDENTS AFTER A VIRAL VIDEO SHOWED A CROWD THREATENING PROTESTORS WALKING THROUGH THE STREET.**

[ARCHIVAL AUDIO]

AUDIO CUT: "Get out of here!" (yelling)  
"Chill, they're not doing anything." (yelling)

**HOWEVER, RESIDENTS LIKE MILTERI AND PROFESSOR FERNÁNDEZ AREN'T PREPARED TO STOP SPEAKING ABOUT ISSUES RELATING TO IDENTITY WITHIN THEIR COMMUNITY.**

**JOHANNA AUDIO:**

How do we combat that? We combat that with political education. And that's what we can learn from the Young Lords. That they were committed and serious about engaging the community in the grassroots. Ultimately they sought to bring people together through common interests. And that's what we need to be doing right now.

**THROUGHOUT THE EVENTS OF 2020, MILTERI'S FOCUS HAS BEEN ON CREATING A SPACE FOR HER DANCERS TO FEEL COMFORTABLE TO EXPLORE THEIR HERITAGE. ALTHOUGH IT IS DIFFICULT TO NAVIGATE CHOREOGRAPHY THROUGH A COMPUTER REHEARSAL, SHE BELIEVES THAT THE EXPERIENCE OF DANCING BOMBA CAN STILL RESONATE WITH EACH PERSON FROM THEIR HOMES.**

INTERVIEW 1-MILTERI

Even with something that is not so positive, I always tell my company 'turn these negative experiences into a positive one.' We became stronger as a unit, which is important because the energy needs to be right to do something as powerful and energetic and strong as bomba, and of course reaching out to other people they know.

**FOR MILTERI, ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT WAYS TO TRANSFORM THE LATINO COMMUNITY IS TO HAVE BOTH A WILLINGNESS TO LEARN ABOUT THEMSELVES, AND TO EDUCATE FUTURE GENERATIONS FROM THE BEGINNING. FOR HER, KNOWING WHO YOU REALLY ARE IS THE ONLY WAY THAT LATINOS CAN TRULY MOVE ON FROM A WAY OF THINKING THAT ACTIVISTS CONTINUE TO BATTLE TODAY.**

INTERVIEW 2-MILTERI

I see people come in because they want to learn about themselves. Their parents did not teach them or did not know, or it wasn't a part of their upbringing or cultural, societal focus. I also have people who are Puerto Rican that are also interested in seeing how they are connected and how it's connected to a part of who they are.

[MUSIC]

The African heritage experience is all over, really. Whether you have it in your blood or not, it's a beautiful culture and it's beautiful to express and know about it. It's a form of social justice as well, and knowing who we are. If we know who we are and where we're from, we know where we're going.

[BOMBA MUSIC]

[END]