

Centro Teaching Guide

The Legacy of Frank Bonilla is a 53 minutes documentary that traces the life of a pioneer in higher education from his humble roots in New York City to his days in combat in World War II to the founding of Centro. Frank Bonilla was one of the few Puerto Ricans in academia stateside in the pre-civil rights era, concentrating his work on Puerto Ricans and Latin Americans from the start of his career. As the founding director of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies he took a leading role in shaping the field of Puerto Rican studies.

The DVD is available at the Centro store at

Two essential questions guide this teaching guide:

- 1) What are the contributions of Puerto Rican migrants to the cultural, intellectual and daily life of cities in which they settled, such as New York City?
- 2) How can we draw on the history of Puerto Rican social change to inform choices and decisions in the present? In other words, how can we tie the lessons of the past to the present?

This guide contains:

- Discussion Questions
- Activities
- Centro Teaching Resources
- Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Social Studies
- Curriculum Map for Leading a Unit on Bonilla in K-12 Settings
- Frank Bonilla Biographical Essay
- Background Historical Essay
- Bibliography

Discussion Questions

Grades 9 - 12 and College:

Before Viewing *The Legacy of Frank Bonilla*

- 1) What do we know about the Civil Rights Movement:
 - Where did it happen,
 - When did it happen,
 - Who was involved
 - What difference did it make in American society?

- 2) What difference did the Civil Rights Movement bring about in U.S. Puerto Rican communities?

- 3) What do we know about Puerto Rican migration to the continental U.S.? When did this great migration occur? What factors led to The Great Migration of Puerto Ricans to the States?

After Viewing *The Legacy of Frank Bonilla*

- 1) What values does Bonilla recall that his family members held? What values may have been passed down to him through his family?

- 2) What do we learn about Bonilla's coming-of-age experiences and early work experiences in the documentary?
 - What might be common experiences men had as they were coming of age in the period in which Bonilla lived?
 - What might have been unique to Frank Bonilla's experience?

- 3) Why was Bonilla's first research job on the status of New York's Puerto Rican population significant to the broader arc of his career as an academic researcher?

- 4) What topics interested Bonilla as he conducted advanced social science research?
 - What was his perspective on these topics?
 - Do your opinions agree or disagree with Bonilla's perspective?

- 5) What role did Bonilla play in developing Puerto Rican studies?

- 6) What can we infer about Bonilla's intellectual beliefs based on his leadership role in founding the Inter-University Program on Latino Research (IUPLR)?

- 7) Considering Bonilla's community activities and his leadership style do you see Bonilla as an idealist?

Activities

Grades 9 - 12:

Timeline

Create a timeline that incorporates significant dates from Bonilla's life and significant national and international events relevant to his experiences.

Show Us

Explain the following concepts:

- circular migration
- transnational migration
- dependency

Reviewing how these three concepts affected the Puerto Rican community in the Diaspora. Then, have student create a visual (poster, map, collage) showing how community organizing addressed these issues.

How it All Started

Have students research the connections between Puerto Rican activism and the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. Then, have them create an argument for or against offering Puerto Rican studies at the college level. Remind students to consider both Bonilla's case for the change and arguments opposing the idea.

Grades 10 - College:

Both Sides

Divide students into groups to study documents from both the postwar period of the 1950s and the period of the War on Poverty. Ask them to look for the continuity and the changes in American ideals. After small group discussions invite each group to present their findings to the class.

A New Culture

Frank Bonilla believed in reconstructing the university culture of research through:

- interdisciplinary research
- devaluing individual voices of researchers
- re-valuing a collective voice
- seeking direction from the community to guide research

Have the students draft a 1-2 page research proposal that addresses at incorporates least three of these concerns in their project.

Centro Teaching Resources

Frank Bonilla (1925-2010) was a university researcher and community activist. Educated at the City College of New York, Columbia and Harvard, Bonilla worked on research projects involving New York's Puerto Rican community, various Latin American countries and Latino/as nationwide. Bonilla was one of the few Puerto Ricans in academia stateside in the pre-civil rights era, concentrating his work on Puerto Ricans and Latin Americans from the start of his career. As the founding director of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies (Centro) currently located in Hunter College, he took a leading role in shaping the field of Puerto Rican studies. In studying Bonilla's life, we gain insight into Puerto Rican social movements that responded to chronic problems facing Puerto Ricans in the states and how they sought to build political power.

The Puerto Rican Heritage Poster Series

<http://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/research-education/education/puerto-rican-heritage-poster-series>

Timeline of Puerto Rican History Booklet

The Centro Puerto Rican Heritage Poster Series documents the history of Puerto Rican migration and the experiences and contributions of Puerto Ricans to U.S. society.

centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/events_2015/ChronologicBrochure_2015.pdf

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

For K-12 teachers, this teaching guide responds to the following Common Core State Standards (CCSS):

High School ELA/History-Social Studies:

-Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media in order to address questions or solve a problem.

Reading Standards for Informational Texts Grades 11-12

-Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

-Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Frank Bonilla Biographical Essay

Frank Bonilla was a community activist, an interdisciplinary scholar, an author, a father and a grandfather. He helped initiate the National Puerto Rican Forum, *Aspira*, and the Center for Puerto Rican Studies. His academic training was interdisciplinary and his published research grew from research methods in anthropology, sociology, political science and history. His research helped shape the priorities for study in the newly emerging field of Puerto Rican studies. Puerto Rican studies is an interdisciplinary field that focuses research and writing on the study of Puerto Ricans on the mainland U.S.A, the island of Puerto Rico and the economies and politics in Puerto Rican communities.

Formative Years [1925 –1946]

Frank Bonilla was born in New York City in 1925, the youngest of three children of Puerto Rican migrants Maria and Francisco Bonilla. His family lived in East Harlem, later known as El Barrio, and they eventually moved to the South Bronx where he attended high school. Bonilla's mother had hoped to attend college once she moved New York, however, she became a needle-worker, and, as her husband's health declined, the primary support for the family during the difficult economic years of the Great Depression. Bonilla was sent to the South to live with his mother's foster brother (hermano de crianza), who was teaching romance languages at a black college in Memphis, Tennessee. On this bus trip to Memphis there was a stopover in Richmond, Virginia. Frank was told to go to the back of the bus and he immediately understood that now he was Black. In Memphis he was exposed to another America. While witnessing the Black experience in the South, he also received an enriched educational experiences at a Franciscan school. From Memphis he traveled to Illinois to continue his high school education at a pre-seminary. Once there he excelled academically, studying Latin and Greek. Yet, his home in New York City beckoned.

Bonilla returned to the Bronx, completed his education at Morris High School and was drafted to fight in World War II in 1943. He was initially assigned to join the 290th Infantry Regiment, on the frontlines of the Battle of the Bulge. When Bonilla was subsequently injured he was sent for a brief hospital stay in France. Once he recovered he was part of a group of stateside Puerto Ricans that were invited to join the 65th Regiment – the unit with recruits from Puerto Rico that was then in the European arena. Once the war ended Bonilla returned with the 65th Regiment to Puerto Rico, visiting the island for the first time, and was honorably discharged from military service in 1946 with Bronze Stars recognizing his service in various European campaigns.

Emerging Scholar and Activist [1946 –1970]

The GI Bill held out the promise of a higher education, and upon his return, Bonilla began his undergraduate studies at City College. At the time, recently married and supporting a small family, Frank pursued his higher education and graduated in 1949. He earned an MA in Sociology at New York University in 1954, and a doctorate in Sociology at Harvard University in 1959. Bonilla had 3 children: Natasha, Sandra and Francisco. He was married and divorced twice.

One of his earliest research jobs was working on a large study contracted by the Government of Puerto Rico and considered the first full-scale study of the condition of the Puerto Rican community in New York. Another was a project based at Columbia University related to Latin America. While Frank's role in these projects was relatively minor – interviewing and coding surveys – each of these positions gave him access to a network of schools, invaluable experience in a field of study and in related ways to apply research tools, and finally exposure to investigating the conditions of different populations.

Bonilla was involved with these young professionals who met regularly to assess and discuss ways to help their compatriots. They were committed to finding ways to address the societal neglect, the gaps in services and to pave the way to better opportunities for the community. These organizers would become lifelong relationships that ebbed and flowed with travels, relocations and rifts. Other New York Puerto Ricans in this network included John Carro, Josephine Nieves, Jose "Pepe" Morales, Antonia Pantoja, Louis Núñez, Magdalena Miranda, Joseph Montserrat and Yolanda Sánchez, to name a few. These were the young men and women who joined forces and affirmed a commitment to those who came after them. Bonilla was to play an active role in discussing, debating and drafting ideas and solutions. He helped write the founding documents for what were to become the Puerto Rican Forum, the Puerto Rican Community Development Project, *Aspira*, and others.

Bonilla's life had already drawn him to this emerging field. His education at Harvard had provided an opportunity to explore interdisciplinary research as a means to view problems. The Harvard Program - entitled *Social Relations* – required that graduates of this new program demonstrate disciplinary expertise in four areas rather than the traditional one. The disciplines were – sociology, social psychology, clinical and anthropology. His dissertation, *Students in Politics*, was a case study that explored the role students played in formulating policy in Chile.

Bonilla's research in Chile opened research, teaching and writing opportunities in Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela. Bonilla's first position after completing his doctoral degree was as a researcher with American University's Field Service. In an early project he worked on in rural Brazil, Bonilla reported on the wide-scale disfranchisement of the rural population, noting that two-thirds of rural residents were illiterate and therefore were prohibited from voting. Further, he found that similar to much of Latin

America, there was a huge concentration of wealth and assets in rural Brazil: 8 percent of the farmers owned 75 percent of the farmland.

Bonilla taught in the political science department at MIT from 1963-1969 and at Stanford from 1969-1972.

Economic inequities, power relationships, dependency theory and the role of higher education within countries or across countries continued to be prominent themes in his writings. He was attentive to both the unique features of each country and to the problematic relationships with the United States. He collaborated with many Latin American scholars, mentored students, surveyed students, workers, and elites and addressed policy makers in the United States. However, stirrings from communities of color within the United States turned his gaze back home.

Centro's Rise, Launch, and Growth [1970 – 1993]

In the early 1970s, although living in California, he attended a Puerto Rican student conference at Columbia University sponsored by the Puerto Rican Student Union and the Young Lords Party. There he met Hildamar Ortíz, Emilio González Atilés, Margaret Martínez, Emerlindo Alvarez and Félix Cortés among others. All were leaders of a next generation who would play prominent roles in developing Puerto Rican studies as a field and in founding Centro.

Following this inspiring visit, Bonilla organized a seminar at Stanford University to consider dependency issues between communities of color in the United States and their countries of origin. He brought together a small group of students and scholars from his network in Latin America with a small group of students and scholars from Black, Chicano and Puerto Rican communities in the United States. Several students from the Puerto Rican Student Conference at Columbia University referenced above were brought to the West Coast. All were engaged in a series of sessions that included intense and contentious study, debate and writing. The result was *Structures of Dependency*, a compilation of articles -- edited by Bonilla and Robert Girling -- that captured different manifestations of Puerto Rican dependency, internal and external, on the United States. Embedded in this document was a chapter that was to become a foundational document for the ideas underlying the future design of Centro.

Bonilla helped write the first conceptual and funding proposal for the Center for Puerto Rican Studies and, once funded, he left his tenured post at Stanford University, uprooted his family and returned to assume the role as founding director in 1973. The first five years of Centro under Bonilla's leadership were chaotic and exciting as student leaders, graduate students and scholars took on roles as directors or members of task forces in areas aligned with the Puerto Rican community's expressed concerns and interests. Bonilla's style was to teach by example and to allow the collective to shape the group's actions and activities. This style of governance and leadership is often

referred to today as distributive leadership. This included an emphasis on collaborative activity, a critical review of existing knowledge and an energetic emphasis on new research.

Bonilla's work to build interracial and interethnic coalitions ultimately led to the 1986 founding of the Inter-University Program for Latino Research (IUPLR) – a collaboration of Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban and Dominican research centers. The IUPLR broke ground by fostering new comparative research experiences for the next generation of Latino scholars.

Post- Centro [1993 – 2010]

Bonilla retired as Centro's founding director in 1993. For the next 17 years he continued his work with progressive research groups and Latino research groups, among those the IUPLR, and the Race and Poverty Research Council. After his retirement from Centro, he returned to California to live close to his children. He passed away in 2010 while living in Escondido, California, at the age of 85. He was survived by his 3 children, 5 grandchildren and one great-grandson.

Created by Victoria Nuñez, PhD

Background Historical Essay

The history Frank Bonilla lived led him to his work as a researcher, an activist and a professor involved in cultural critique, and as an active participant and leader in the creation of new mutual assistance organizations in the Puerto Rican community. Bonilla, like many Puerto Ricans living in New York City, was an energetic social reformer, interested in bringing about a society with greater civil rights and more equal opportunities for communities of color.

The backdrop to Bonilla's childhood in East Harlem and the South Bronx was the Great Depression and the New Deal programs of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's presidency. New Deal programs meant that the government heeded the call to become more involved in job creation to help American families survive the Depression and to systematically create a social safety net for all Americans that included Social Security. The post-Depression years were a period when new immigrants in New York City sought to move up both residentially and in social status. Working-class Puerto Rican families who aspired to middle class status moved to the newly developing South Bronx, as Bonilla's family did.

Bonilla came of age during World War II, and was drafted and fought the Nazis in the Battle of the Bulge. Serving in the U.S. military was an experience that many generations of Puerto Rican men shared in common with all American men. Bonilla's generation was one of the last that were drafted into the military. The war in Vietnam was the first when large numbers of American men began to question compliance with

involuntary drafts and whether they wanted to serve in the military. Involuntary drafts have not been used in the U.S. since the Vietnam War and, as a result, military service is much less common as a coming-of-age experience for current generations of men in U.S. society.

After the end of World War II, Bonilla returned to a postwar America facing relative prosperity. Bonilla took advantage and earned his undergraduate degree with financial support through the GI Bill. This postwar period, from the late 1940s through the 1950s, was the period when the migration of Puerto Ricans to New York reached its peak. Many historians have concluded that the U.S. policy of industrializing Puerto Rico, Operation Bootstrap, encouraged hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans to leave the island and migrate to the states in the 1950s. The decision to migrate was undoubtedly also influenced by government policy, by the recruitment of Puerto Rican workers into various low wage work sectors stateside, as well as by Puerto Ricans' own beliefs and interests in new opportunities to be found in the States.

The early and mid-decades of the 20th Century also witnessed The Great Migration of African Americans leaving the southern U.S. and moving north and westward. Thus, Puerto Rican migrants were part of a double strand of internal migrations within the U.S. that rapidly changed the demographic makeup of New York City by mid-century. The migrations to New York were not uniformly welcomed, and many Puerto Ricans have left written records that chronicle the hostile treatment they experienced in New York during the great migration.

Postwar America witnessed a breakthrough nationally in bringing down Jim Crow segregation. That breakthrough, the Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* was a mandate to school systems around the country to end segregated schooling. New York's Puerto Rican community faced many challenges regarding the quality of life for recent Puerto Rican migrants, but the civil rights breakthrough on education galvanized attention from Puerto Ricans on the disastrous status of Puerto Rican students in NYC schools.

Bonilla discovered his career path and vocation through academic research projects, and simultaneously there was a movement of intense peer collaboration and learning that unfolded outside of the university in New York's Puerto Rican community. This was a period of a new, relatively small generation of youthful Puerto Rican leaders entering and graduating from colleges and distinguishing themselves by creating community institutions to address migrant civil rights and social welfare needs. Social networks were one means that like-minded Puerto Rican activists first met each other.

Social clubs were a common means of socializing in the early part of the 20th century for all New Yorkers. For Puerto Ricans, social clubs frequently were the precursor groups for organizing for social change that attracted many liberal Puerto Ricans. In New York City, social clubs were organized based on neighborhoods, shared

interests, common experiences and ethnic identities. One Puerto Rican activist of the time, John Carro, recalls organizing a social club of World War II veterans in the Bronx in the late 1940s, the Rovallies. A local under the charter of the American Veterans Club, the Rovallies club organized dances, trips to the beach in the summer, and included Carro's friend, Frank Bonilla. Both Carro and Bonilla went on to distinguished careers that included volunteer work in Puerto Rican community organizations.

The fast growing Puerto Rican migrant population became a focus of study for the social scientific research world in New York. One of Bonilla's first jobs was working on a research project on Puerto Ricans in New York, funded by the government of Puerto Rico and initiated based on concerns about the fate of Puerto Rican migrants. The resultant study, *The Puerto Rican Journey: New York's Newest Migrants* (Harper, 1950) was among the first sociological studies of Puerto Rican migrants and offered Bonilla training with famed Columbia University sociologist, C. Wright Mills. When Bonilla left New York to do his doctoral degree at Harvard in the 1950s, Latin American studies was gaining prominence with an increasing interest in promoting "area studies" on U.S. college campuses. Thus, Bonilla was able to step into a growing field of Latin American studies by studying Latin American politics and student activism.

In 1957 Antonia Pantoja convened a group of Puerto Rican volunteers to discuss the formation of a new civil rights organization, the Puerto Rican and Hispanic Leadership Forum. These individuals envisioned that the Forum would generate its own information and analysis of data on Puerto Ricans in New York without the discriminatory biases of mainstream institutions. Furthermore, the Forum planned to establish new, community-based organizations. Among the Forum's founding steering committee members recruited by Pantoja were academics (Frank Bonilla) and his wife, Esther Bonilla, lawyers (Maximino Gonzalez) and social workers (Antonia Pantoja herself). The Forum developed into an agency that prioritized workforce development issues, but its first major project was the organizational development of *Aspira*, a youth development agency.

The War on Poverty brought new funding to address the effects of poverty in New York City. This funding helped establish new Puerto Rican organizations like *Aspira* and the Puerto Rican Forum. Beyond concrete goals of desegregating schools and public accommodations, the Civil Rights Movement energized other ethnic-pride movements, particularly among youth and young adults. Black Pride inspired Brown Pride among Puerto Ricans and Chicanos.

Around the nation, college students were integral to civil rights activism and the late 1960s was a moment when Puerto Rican student activists highlighted their exclusion from the curriculum and intellectual life of universities. The Puerto Rican Student Union was developed and worked together with the Young Lords Party to create community services in ways that made the failure of government services visible.

New Puerto Rican Studies departments emerged on the campuses of the City University of New York in response to Puerto Rican students' demands for a more relevant college curriculum. Puerto Rican students and their allies joined with African American and white students in the fight for an open admissions policy for the coming generation of students. For a time, college access held the promise of greater opportunities for larger groups that were historically excluded, including women. These tactics, activities and experiences were being replicated in many parts of the nation and in different ways over a period of years as Blacks, Chicanos, Native Americans, Asians and others called for and created ethnic studies programs and new services for poor communities.

The groundswell of grassroots actions to engage the City University of New York attracted the attention of the foundation world – particularly the Ford Foundation. An invitation was extended to the City University to prepare a proposal for a Puerto Rican studies research center with a budget to be awarded over a five-year period that would gradually be reduced and correspondingly assumed by the university's general operating budget. A group of Puerto Rican academics undertook the task to generate the proposal, but it was immediately challenged by an alternative proposal put forth by student groups and their allies for fear of creating yet another traditional academic program. Bonilla worked on the alternative proposal which is the one that was ultimately funded. Since the 1950s, Puerto Ricans have suffered from high concentrations in low-wage labor force and high poverty rates in New York. However, this history shows that out of poor communities came Puerto Ricans with a strong interest in attending the city's universities and gaining the credentials that would allow them to acquire middle-class jobs. Puerto Rican activists like Bonilla dreamed of a better future; it would not necessarily lead to individual enrichment, but it would lead to more equality and social justice for the collective community.

Victoria Núñez's revision of Camille Rodríguez's essay "Frank Bonilla: A Reflection on a Life and His Work," 11/09/12.

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