



Alliance for Puerto Rican Education and Empowerment, APREE



MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE

The Story of Puerto Rican Studies in Brooklyn College

Photo by: Antonio Nieves

Study Guide

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www.apree.org

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction and Film Synopsis	3
Message from APREE	4
Purpose of Guide	5
Selected People Featured in the Film	6
Objectives and Purpose of Guide	8
Suggested Standards	9
Key Words and Introductory Definitions	11
Discussion and Prompts	14
Links to Lessons about Puerto Rico & the Civil Rights Movement	16
Taking Action	17
Resources	18
Credits and Acknowledgments	19



Introduction and Film Synopsis

Making the Impossible Possible is about the successful movement to challenge institutional racism in higher education and to sustain that change. The story is focused on one of the first Puerto Rican Studies departments, (along with the Africana Studies Dept) in the United States.

The film begins with a focus on the Brooklyn College (BC) campus and depicts the involvement of students in community and the community in the movement. With the goal of diversifying the student and faculty body, as well as the curriculum, and making it inclusive, student activists worked in coalition with progressive faculty and student groups.

The context for the film is the mass opposition to the War in Viet Nam, the firmness of the commitment to open and equal access to the university (Open Admissions) and the ceaseless dedication to self-determination of the Puerto Rican and Black student activists of the late 1960s.

In addition, the film highlights students in the following decades who continue to fight to keep the university open, accessible and diverse. These accomplishments could not have happened without the organic relationships among the students of color who tirelessly continued to enroll in Puerto Rican, Latinx, and Black Studies, encouraging others to do the same.

This film could not have been told without the direction, skills and talents of Tami Gold, Pam Sporn and support from members and friends of APREE.

APREE counted on the generosity of Dr. Lisette Nieves, (B C alum) and her Foundation, Lingo Ventures. LLC.



Message from APREE

The *Alliance for Puerto Rican Education and Empowerment (APREE)* produced this short educational-film on the founding of PRLS with a focus on the struggle that led up to it, as well as the impact the department has had on the generations that came after.

The Alliance for Puerto Rican Education and Empowerment, APREE, is a nonprofit organization with a mission to advocate for social transformation through programs focused on education and the advancement of the Puerto Rican community. Participants of APREE have been and are engaged civically and socially in the local and broader community. Many of the founders of APREE are alumni of the City University of New York. All have benefitted from growing up at a time of great change and social awareness that included giving back to our communities.

To continue the legacy of giving back, they founded *APREE*.

As you may well know the current (2021) political moment is very charged and there is much to learn from our struggles during the time when we were most active in transforming education at CUNY, through the establishment of ethnic studies, bilingual education, and open admissions among many other victories. These victories, while continuously facing challenges have had a huge impact on our youths education; an impact that is often made invisible. This is one of the reasons this film is so important. It will serve to document the efforts and the commitment of so many in the struggle for ethnic studies and in particular Puerto Rican Studies, as well as to educate future generations.

Visit us: www.apree.org



Purpose of Guide

Designed to accompany Making the Impossible Possible, this guide provides a framework for viewing the film and discussing some of the responses it may evoke. The guide includes follow-up activities and approaches that align with the key concerns of the film, enrich the viewing experience, and encourage further learning and growth whether in a classroom or community setting. Additionally, the guide provides links to useful resources that mobilize the content of the film.

The film may be relevant to a variety of audiences, and grade levels. We encourage a flexible and asset based approach. The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet activity needs and interests. Be sure to leave time to consider what it means to take action. Planning next steps are important and can help people transition from the learning experience feeling energized and optimistic.

**This February 2021 edition of the guide is “sneak peek” of a larger Learning Guide being produced by the Alliance for Puerto Rican Education and Empowerment.*



Selected People Featured in Film

Crecensio Morales

Student 1968-1969, & 1972-1975

Co-founder of Puerto Rican Alliance, P.R.A.

Director, Student Support Services, The City College of New York, CUNY

Deputy Director for Programs/ASPIRA of NY

Antonio Nadal, A.B.D. Spanish and Latin American Literature

Student Activist 1965-1968

Instructor, Deputy Chairperson, Department of Puerto Rican Latino Studies,

Assistant Director, PRS Institute, Musician

Milga Morales Nadal, Ph.D., Developmental Psychology

Student 1967-1970

Co-founder of Puerto Rican Alliance, P.R.A.

Vice President for Student Affairs, Dean, Associate Professor of Education, SEEK

Counselor, Educator, Brooklyn College, CUNY

Esther Farmer

Student Activist, 1969-1974

Former Ombudsman New York City Housing Authority, Theater Director and

Playwright, Leadership team, Jewish Voice for Peace, NYC

Orlando Pile, MD

Student 1966-1972

First President of Brooklyn League of Afro-American Collegians, B.L.A.C.

Physician - Chief Communicable Diseases (HIV) Los Angeles Sheriff Department,

Medical Director Caribbean Health Organization

Antonio Nieves, R.Ph.

Student 1968- 1972

Liaison B.L.A.C. and P.R.A.

Pharmacist in Charge, Caribbean Health Organization

Askia Davis, Ed.D. Curriculum and Teaching

Student 1968-1972

Co-President B.L.A.C.



Executive Service Network of Nigeria, Former Superintendent of Schools, Harlem, New York City

The Rev. Baba Carlos Alejandro

Student Activist, 1974-1978

Board Certified Chaplain, ACPE Certified Educator

César Cardona

Student 1969-1974

Co-founder of Puerto Rican Alliance, P.R.A.

Attorney, Retired - Civil and Criminal Litigation

President, APREE, Alliance for Puerto Rican Education and Empowerment

María E. Pérez y González, Ph.D. Sociology

Associate Professor, Former Chair of the Department of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies at Brooklyn College-CUNY

Dr. María E. Pérez y González

Former Chairperson of the Dept. of Puerto Rican & Latino Studies, Associate Professor, Brooklyn College, CUNY

Virginia Sánchez Korrol, Ph.D. History

Former Chairperson of the Dept. of Puerto Rican & Latino Studies, Historian and Professor Emerita, Brooklyn College, CUNY

Vanessa Santiago

Student 1997-2006

Former President, Puerto Rican Alliance, P.R.A.

Director of Leadership and College Access Programs, Aspira of New York, Inc.

Adjunct Lecturer, PRLS department, Brooklyn College

Founder and CEO of VSL Education Consulting, Inc.

Daniel Vázquez Sanabria

Student 2016 – expected graduation May 2021

President of the Puerto Rican Alliance

Dr. Alan Aja

Chairperson, Dept. of Puerto Rican & Latino Studies, Professor, Brooklyn College-CUNY



Objectives and Purpose of Guide



Film Objectives

- Gain a familiarity with the student-led struggle to win Puerto Rican Studies at Brooklyn College, CUNY, in the late 1960s, and understand their significance in CUNY history.
- Recognize the social, cultural, and personal repercussions of the civil rights movement on a local and national scale.
- Acknowledge the deeply personal aspects of the struggles faced by students of color in education.
- Make connections between the student-led struggle to win Puerto Rican Studies at Brooklyn College, CUNY, in the late 1960s and the obstacles still faced by students of color today.
- Appreciate the highly individual responses to injustices and the resilience factors that provide pathways to recovery.

Educational Objectives

Content: Identify key events in the student-led struggle to win Puerto Rican Studies at Brooklyn College, CUNY, in the late 1960s, and evaluate the effectiveness of various tactics used.

Language: Discuss the effectiveness of civil disobedience, non-violent protest, and violent tactics in advancing goals.

Cultural: Make personal connections between students highlighted in the film and personal beliefs. (In the film _____, I connected most with _____ because I feel that _____, I have seen _____, from my experiences _____).

Suggested Standards

Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects 6-12

Grades 11-12

- Key Ideas and Details [RH]. 1. Cite specific evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole. 2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
- Integration of Knowledge and Ideas [RH].
 - 7. Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.
 - 9. Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects 6-12

Grades 11-12

- Text Types and Purposes [WHST].
 - 2. Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/experiments, or technical processes.
 - A. Introduce a topic and organize complex ideas, concepts, and information so that each new element builds on that which precede it to create a unified whole; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g, figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
 - B. Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete definitions, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.



New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) Curriculum, Passport to Social Studies.

- Civics for All: 9-12 Part 1. Lesson 4. Activism and the Vietnam War.
- Civics for All: 9-12 Part 2. Power and Politics. Lesson 2. Understanding Systemic Injustice and Oppression (two-day lesson).
- Civics for All: 9-12 Part 2. Active Engagement. Lesson 2. Hashtag Activism.
- Civics for All: 9-12 Part 2. Active Engagement. Lesson 3. Taking Action to Influence Decision Makers.
- Civics for All: 9-12 Part 2. Active Engagement. Lesson 6. Social Documentary Photography & Activism.
- Civics for All: 9-12 Part 2. Active Engagement. Lesson 7. Evaluating Efficacy of Civic Action.

<https://infohub.nyced.org/in-our-schools/programs/civics-for-all>



Key Words and Introductory Definitions

Black Panther Party: “The Black Panthers, also known as the Black Panther Party, was a political organization founded in 1966 by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale to challenge police brutality against the African American community. Dressed in black berets and black leather jackets, the Black Panthers organized armed citizen patrols of Oakland and other U.S. cities. At its peak in 1968, the Black Panther Party had roughly 2,000 members. The organization later declined as a result of internal tensions, deadly shootouts and FBI counterintelligence activities aimed at weakening the organization.”

Source: <https://www.history.com/topics/civil-rights-movement/black-panthers>

Colonial: “is a term commonly used to describe the dominance of a nation state over a people’s or another country through the use of social, political, military, and economic force.”

Source: When We Fight, We Win!, Podcast, S2 E1 by Agitarte Cultural Works.

City University of New York (CUNY): “A dozen years before the Civil War the city of New York made a unique commitment nationally. It embraced the concept of public, tuition-free, and municipal taxpayer-supported higher education for its citizens. Approved overwhelmingly by a referendum of NYC voters, the Free Academy opened its downtown Manhattan campus in 1847 (two decades later it changed its name to The College of the City of New York [CCNY]). Its mission, in the words of one of its founders, was “to educate the children of the whole people,” who were for most of CCNY’s first century solely white middle and working-class young men...The Free Academy was joined in 1870 by the Normal College of the City of New York (changing its name to Hunter College in 1914), which educated the city’s young women to become public school teachers....Two new city colleges were approved by the state legislature and launched in Brooklyn in 1930 and Queens in 1937.

The municipal college system entered the 1960s hemmed in by old structures and organizational attitudes that impeded its potential growth. By decade’s end a new and larger system, the City University of New York, had been created to challenge



these constraints...The governor and state legislature finally agreed in 1961 to aid the municipal system by combining the city's four existing four-year colleges (City, Hunter, Brooklyn, and Queens), and three community colleges (Staten Island, Bronx, and Manhattan), under the aegis of a single entity, the City University of New York (CUNY)." Today, CUNY has 25 campuses.

Source: CUNY Digital History Archive (www.cdha.cuny.edu).

Decolonial: "Is a central term in the conversation among theorists who think from the place of the oppressed. There is a relation to colonization. Decolonial marks or forms sites and methods of resistance to the colonization that dehumanized most of the people in the world."

Source: Lugones, M. (2017) in Vargas, D. R., Mirabal, N. R., & La Fountain-Stokes, L. (Eds.). (2017). *Keywords for Latina/o studies* (Vol. 6). NYU Press.

Open Admissions: "In the fall of 1970 The Board of Higher Education (BHE) accelerated its plan by five years to implement a policy of Open Admissions at the City University of New York. In response to spring 1969 student mass rallies and confrontations over several; months that culminated in student strikes and building occupations, Open Admissions allowed any New York City high school graduate to attend a CUNY college."

Source: CUNY Digital History Archive (www.cdha.cuny.edu).

Recommended: Fabricant, M., & Brier, S. (2016). *Austerity blues: Fighting for the soul of public higher education*. JHU Press.

Puerto Rican Studies: Is an interdisciplinary field of study, inquiry, and action that centers Puerto Ricans from the island and the diasporas around the world, as well as the archipelago island itself. The field discussed in the film is related to the founding of U.S. based Puerto Rican Studies.

Recommended: Puerto Rican Studies Association, PRSA www.ricanstudies.com



Social Movements: “A term first used in 1850 by the German sociologist Lorenz Von Stein. Herbert Blumer (1942)...defines them as ‘collective enterprises to establish a new order of life’. The phrase is most often associated with leftism, and within Latino/a studies it has been used to analyze labor movements of the 1930s and 1940s, the Chicano movement, the U.S. Central American sanctuary movement, and the immigrant-rights movement.”

Source: Ontiveros, R. J. (2017) in Vargas, D. R., Mirabal, N. R., & La Fountain-Stokes, L. (Eds.). (2017). Keywords for Latina/o studies (Vol. 6). NYU Press.

Young Lords Organization & Party: “The Young Lords Organization (YLO) emerged from two historical currents: the social justice movement in the United States, specifically the African American liberation struggle—from the [en]slaved rebellions to the Black Panther Party of the 1960s—and the struggle against colonialism in Puerto Rico. The Young Lords began in Chicago, a street gang turned revolutionary under the leadership of Jose “Cha Cha” Jimenez, the organizations chairman. In 1969, a group of young, primarily Puerto Rican activists founded a chapter of the Young Lords Organization in New York City.”

Source: Party, Y. L. (2011). Palante: Young Lords Party: Voices and photographs of the Young Lords, 1969-1971. Haymarket Books.

Recommended: Morales, I. (2016). Through the Eyes of Rebel Women, the Young Lords: 1969-1976. Smashwords Edition.

Iris Morales (1996) Palante, Siempre Palante! 48 min., Color, US (www.twn.org)



Discussion & Prompts

After viewing the film, it may be helpful to provide 5-10 minutes and ask the participants to write down or discuss their immediate reactions and reflections.

What parts of the film stood out to you? Was there anything particularly surprising, troubling, or inspiring?

Does the film raise any questions for you?

What did you learn about the students and faculty who were featured in the documentary?
How do you relate to their perspective?

How did the students and faculty change the face of higher education? What lessons were learned?

What difference did the Civil Rights Movement make in American society?

What were the underlying reasons that civil rights leaders chose to use civil disobedience, nonviolence, or violent protest to advance the movement—and how effective were these tactics?

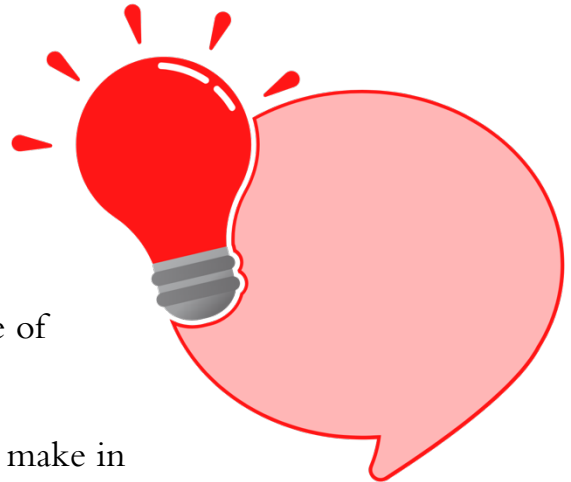
What were the major events and goals of the student-led struggle to win Puerto Rican Studies at Brooklyn College, CUNY, in the late 1960s and how are they related to other movements?

Why do you think there is this disparity in education?

In what ways was this struggle part of the Civil Rights Movement and other global movements?

What examples can you think of when people have used civil disobedience or nonviolent protest? Were these tactics successful? Did these tactics ever lead to violence? Explain/describe

If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, whom would you ask and what would you want to know?

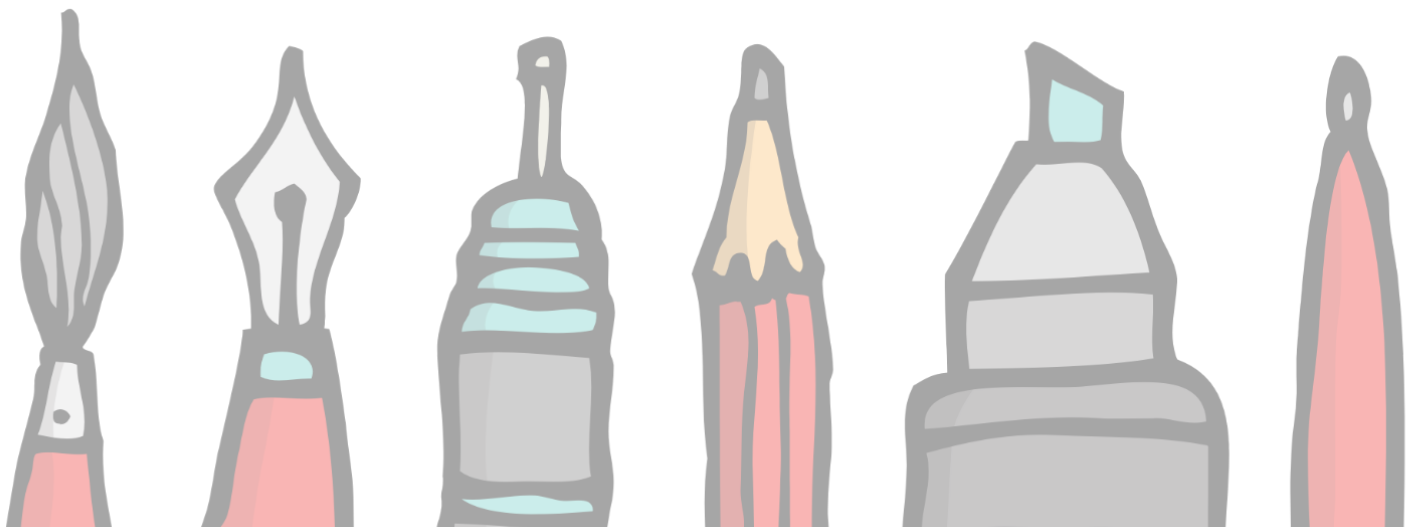


What did you learn from this film that you wish everyone knew? What would change if everyone knew it?

If you were among the students and faculty who led the protest, what would you have done, said? What message would you want to send?

“Those who tell the stories control the culture”

- The stories of African American, Black, Puerto Rican, and Latinx are consistently interrogated for their absence from history books.
- Have their stories been silenced?
- Why would it be important for people hear their stories?
- Who controls the stories that are included or excluded from your curriculum?
- How have those decisions shaped your culture or your understanding of who you are?



Links to Lessons about Puerto Rico & Civil Rights Movement

<https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/>

<https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/centrovoices/reviews/history-puerto-ricanblack-coalitions-new-york-city>

<https://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/12d2834f-0a67-4e28-926c-d993a2c7f01c/latino-americans-puerto-rican-perspectives-lesson-plan/>

<https://www.teachingforchange.org/puertorico>

<https://www.teachingforchange.org/lessons-on-the-civil-rights-movement>

Related Links

<http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/web/academics/schools/socialsciences/departments/prlstudies/history.php>

<https://www.ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/news/2020/10/14/hispanic-heritage--50-years-of-puerto-rican-studies-at-brooklyn-college>

<https://hispanicfederation.org/>



Taking Action

Join and volunteer for advocacy groups and organizations providing resources and services to those that need them within Latinx and other communities in New York and Puerto Rico.

Start a local club, or other socially connected and responsible initiative.

Write letters to local, state, federal politicians and educational leaders to reform educational curriculum and offer courses on African American, Black, Puerto Rican, and Latino studies.

Advocate for all schools (PreK- College) to offer more culturally diverse courses.

Advocate for the rights and support of Latinx and other underserved communities.



Resources

BOOKS:

Biondi, M. (2012). Chapter 4, Brooklyn College Belongs to Us: The Transformation of Higher Education in New York City in Biondi, M. (2012) *The Black revolution on campus*. Univ of California Press.

Davis, A. & Suleiman Ali Davis, A. A. (2013). *Coming of Age in the Hip Hop Generation: Warrior of the Void*. Askia Book Publishing.

Nieto, S. (2017). Chapter 9, An Activist in Academia in Nieto, S. (2017). *Brooklyn dreams: My life in public education*. Harvard Education Press.

Nieto, S. (2015) Chapter 6, The BC 44, Ethnic Studies, and Transformative Education in Colón-Muñiz, A., & Lavadenz, M. (Eds.). (2015). *Latino civil rights in education: La lucha sigue*. Routledge.

Ruiz, V. L., & Korrol, V. S. (Eds.). (2006). *Latinas in the United States, set: A historical encyclopedia*. Indiana University Press. (See: Rodríguez, Patricia (1922-1968).

PRIMARY RESOURCES:

CUNY Digital History Archive: multiple collections, including “SEEK”, “Oral Histories of Open Admissions”. <https://cdha.cuny.edu/>

Center for Puerto Rican Studies Box 167 folder 8-9: Brooklyn College, 1965-1971 & Box 168 folder 1: Brooklyn College, 1972-1978

Richie Pérez Papers, 1918-2006. Support the Struggle of Students for Democratic Rights: RiPe_b26_f01_0003_pg01. Center for Puerto Rican Studies Library & Archives, Hunter College, CUNY. Web. 17 Jan 2021.



Credits and Acknowledgements

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Tami Gold, and

Pam Sporn, Grito Productions

Film Distributed by, Third World Newsreel, www.twn.org.

APREE is comprised of long-time activists of critical, historical decades (60s-70s), as well as millennials and currently registered City University of New York students. We are a community of diverse seasoned as well as developing professionals.

APREE members are educators, theater artists, musicians, lawyers, pharmacists, private sector and government workers, students, writers, and activists. Come network with us to develop next steps in this 'fast growing' organization!

Visit our website www.apree.org to learn more about how to be engaged, and to read our published documents advocating for Puerto Rican, Latino and other Ethnic Studies disciplines.

