

12-2011

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### Citation Details

Schechter, Patricia A., "¡Adelante Hermanas de La Raza! Josefina Silva de Cintrón, Artes y Letras, and Puerto Rican Women's Feminismo in the 1930s" (2011). *History Faculty Publications and Presentations*. Paper 18.

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*¡Adelante Hermanas de La Raza!*  
**Josefina Silva de Cintrón, *Artes y Letras*, and  
Puerto Rican Women’s *Feminismo* in the 1930s<sup>1</sup>**

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The New York monthly *Artes y Letras* is a significant benchmark in the establishment of Puerto Rican women’s voices in the public sphere in the inter-war years. Published between 1933 and 1939, it has been described as elite-oriented but community conscious and historians of women have noted the accomplishments of the journal’s publisher, Josefina Silva de Cintrón (1884-1988).<sup>2</sup> This essay explores *Artes y Letras* through a decolonial and race-critical lens.<sup>3</sup> It describes how Silva de Cintrón advanced a transnational network of women’s feminist organizing and creative projects through its pages, revealing a rich and largely neglected heritage of arts advocacy, peace activism, and anti-white supremacist agitation.<sup>4</sup> *Artes y Letras* also fostered a vital and enduring organization of Puerto Rican women, *La Unión de Mujeres Americanas* (UMA), praised in 2006 by the Puerto Rican legislature for its historic achievements.<sup>5</sup> Attending to transnational issues—some state-centered, some less so—provides a

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<sup>1</sup> This article is an excerpt from *Exploring the Decolonial Imaginary: Four Transnational Lives*, published by Palgrave Macmillan, 2012 and is protected by copyright.

<sup>2</sup> “Misa Para Josefina Silva de Cintrón,” *El Diario-La Prensa* 18 November 1988. Edna Acosta-Belen, “Silva de Cintrón, Josefina “Pepiña (1885-1986)” in *Latinas in the United States: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), eds. Vicki L. Ruiz and Virginia Sánchez-Korrol, 682-83; Virginia E. Sánchez-Korrol, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City* (Berkeley: University of California, 1994), 113-14.

<sup>3</sup> Magali Roy-Féquièrre, *Women, Creole Identity, and Intellectual Life in Early Twentieth-Century Puerto Rico*, Puerto Rican studies (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004); Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), Eileen Findlay, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Lynn K. Stoner, *From the House to the Streets: The Cuban Woman's Movement for Legal Reform, 1898-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); Anna Macías, *Against all Odds: The Feminist Movement in Mexico to 1940* (Westport Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Resolución 2198, Senado de Puerto Rico, 9 May 2006. [http://www.senadopr.us/Archivo\\_Digital/2005-2008/Radicaciones/Resoluciones\\_del\\_Senado/2006/rs2198-6.pdf](http://www.senadopr.us/Archivo_Digital/2005-2008/Radicaciones/Resoluciones_del_Senado/2006/rs2198-6.pdf) (viewed on 4/3/09).

context for understanding how this seemingly apolitical and genteel culture magazine was literally stuffed with articles about women, feminism, and protest-oriented social organizing that reached readers in at least eight Spanish-speaking countries throughout the Americas. *Artes y Letras* fostered what Michelle Stephens has called a literary and activist “interculture” rooted in the Caribbean. Its participants advanced “a hemispheric discourse of race as a counter-narrative to nationalist narratives of Western modernity” and a “diasporic and resistant racial politics” hedged against strictly scientific and racial-nationalist formulations of modern identity.<sup>6</sup>

Modern nationalism involves public spectacles in which control over symbols, rituals, and images is essential. The women of *Artes y Letras* engaged this discursive field of activity in two ways. They focused on the public performance of art, on the display of flags and parades, and on circulating ideas and activism on behalf of mothers and children. They claimed their authority to do so based on their identities as mothers, as Puerto Ricans, and as U.S. citizens. They defined this cluster of rights and activities as *feminismo*, drawing on both pan American and what I term decolonial imaginaries within the Puerto Rican diaspora and beyond. Following theorist Emma Pérez, I describe the intercultural work of *Artes y Letras* as “decolonial” in function and intent. Pérez defines the decolonial as a politic resistant to dynamics of imperialism, especially racialization, but not exactly a conventionally independence-focused nationalist counterpoint. She labels decolonial that which disrupts the national-imperial binaries of colonizer/subaltern and citizen/alien, pairings that usually map on to a white-black racialized social imaginary in the United States.<sup>7</sup> Extending her paradigm, the decolonial names resistance to racialized categories of state and empire as deployed by *Artes y Letras* for a largely female readership. Though Silva de Cintrón never signed on to conventionally political anti-imperialist movements her ideological stance and accomplishments only become fully visible and comprehensible in the context of U.S. empire.

Silva de Cintrón’s *feminismo* drew additional strength from two sources. First was the flowering of Pan American feminist thought between the wars and its stepped up circulation

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<sup>6</sup> Michelle Stephens, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) and

<sup>7</sup> Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), xiii-xix. Irene Lara, “Goddess of the Americas in the Decolonial Imaginary: Beyond the Virtuous Virgin/Pagan Puta Dichotomy,” *Feminist Studies* 34, no. 1 (2008): 99-127; Walter D. Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 26 (2009) 7-8: 159-181.

through institutions like UMA and others, like the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, the Inter-American Commission for Women, and the Asociación Pan Americana de Mujeres de Puerto Rico.<sup>8</sup> Key Spanish-speaking thinkers in these arenas were Margarita Robles de Mendoza of Mexico, founder of the first branch of UMA, and Mercedes Solá, pioneer educator and feminist of Puerto Rico. A second resource for *feminismo* was a new symbol of Latin American identity in the 1930s, “*La Bandera de La Raza*.” This transnational emblem offered Silva de Cintrón and her colleagues some shelter against local race prejudice as well as a symbol of solidarity among Spanish-speakers in the Americas. “La Raza” also underwrote critiques of white feminists and various U.S.-based Pan-Americanists who advanced missionary- and colonial-inflected cultural agendas under the sign of “friendship” in the era of the FDRs Good Neighbor Policy in foreign relations.<sup>9</sup> In *Artes y Letras*, *La Bandera* flew over a range of standpoints on “race,” from whitening and civilizationist gestures, to self-orientalizing, to racist stances against white supremacy. Mostly, however, *La Bandera* waved away “race” in favor of non-discriminatory and inclusive social practice, a decolonizing gesture that refused to play the race game. Instead, the journal and UMA practiced the kind of solidarity imagined by Jose Marti in “Our America” back in the 1890s, one that resisted splitting the hemisphere into two, typical of U.S. official discourses in the heyday of scientific racism.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> On Suffrage in Puerto Rico, see: Gladys Jimenez-Munoz, “Deconstructing Colonialist Discourse: Links between the Women’s Suffrage Movement in the United States and Puerto Rico,” *Phoebe: An International Journal of Feminist Scholarship, Theory, and Aesthetics* 5 (1993): 9-34 and Allison L. Sneider, *Suffragists in an Imperial Age: U.S. Expansion and the Woman Question, 1870-1929* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), chapter 5. See also Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, “Enfranchising Women of Color: Woman Suffragists as Agents of Empire,” 41-56 in *Nation, Empire, Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998) and Kristin L. Hoganson, ““As Badly off as the Filipinos”: U.S. Women’s Suffragists and the Imperial Issue at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” *Journal of Women’s History* 13, no. 2 (2001): 9-33. In general see, Leila J. Rupp, “Constructing Internationalism: The Case of Transnational Women’s Organizations, 1888-1945,” *The American Historical Review*, 1994 (5) and her *Worlds of Women : The Making of an International Women’s Movement* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997). Megan Threlkeld, “How to Make this Pan American Thing Go?: Interwar debates on U.S. Women’s Activism in the Western Hemisphere, in Kimberly Jensen and Ericka Kuhlman, eds., *Women and Transnational Activism in Historical Perspective*. Dordrecht: Republic of Letters Publishing, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Fredrick Pike, *FDR’s Good Neighbor Policy: Sixty Years of Generally Gentle Chaos* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995); James William Park, *Latin American Underdevelopment: A History of Perspectives in the United States, 1870-1965* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> For two views of Martí see Laura Lomas, *Translating Empire: José Martí, Migrant Latino Subjects, and American Modernities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008) and Maria DeGuzmán, *Spain’s long shadow the black legend, off-whiteness, and Anglo-American empire* (Minneapolis, Minn. : University of Minnesota Press, 2005). On race and racism in Latin America see Nancy Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics : Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991) and Grace Miller, *The Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race: The Cult of Mestizaje in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004).

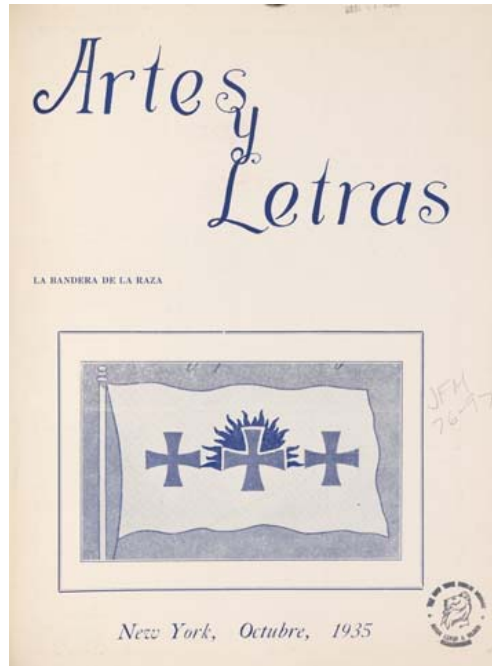


image courtesy of New York Public Library

Both *Artes y Letras* and UMA accented efforts for “el pueblo”--the people--rather than the “patria” or nation. As such, their work represents an important phase of “autonoma” (minimally state-centered) organizing, a hallmark of Latin American women’s activism usually attributed to indigenous groups, but here visible in a more bourgeois, transnational context.<sup>11</sup> Feminismo in *Artes y Letras* accented human dignity and a transnational sense of belonging; being a “ciudadano de america” in a hemispheric sense. After years of energetic talk and activity, however, Puerto Rican women’s ability to define and defend their identities met a significant setback at the New York World’s Fair of 1939-40. This event was saturated with eugenic racism, militaristic nationalism, and hostility to feminism. Local Puerto Ricans, like African Americans, came up against a rigid and unhearing white male establishment concerning their representation at the Fair. Black New Yorkers challenged their exclusion but Silva de Cintrón encountered insult and, outside the most narrowly decorative female spaces at the Fair, UMA was frozen out of influence.<sup>12</sup> This scenario is not quite captured by recent scholarly descriptors of New York’s

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<sup>11</sup> Breny Mendoza, “Unthinking State-Centric Feminisms,” in Cornell University, *Rethinking Feminisms in the Americas* (Ithaca, NY: Latin American Studies Program, Cornell University, 2000), introduction.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Rydell, *World of Fairs: Turn the of the Century Progress Expositions* (Chicago Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1993), chs. 3 & 6. See also Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), chapters 5-8.

Puerto Ricans as “invisible” nor is it adequately explained by the “elite-subaltern” dyad of colonial studies; nor does the women’s struggle exactly parallel the racist pitfalls of vote- and ward-based citizenship gambits playing out in upper Manhattan.<sup>13</sup> Instead, Josefina Silva de Cintrón critically engaged with feminism, the arts, and peace activism under the aegis of a popular Pan Americanism and in activities neither defined nor contained by the categories of “race” nor any state-centered rights agenda, yet not fully separable from them either. When Silva de Cintrón cheered UMA members “¡Adelante, hermanas de la Raza!” in the pages of *Artes y Letras*, she signaled the keynotes of her social organizing in New York and the transnational success of her journal: anti-racist consciousness and female solidarity including, but not restricted to, citizenship-based suffrage.<sup>14</sup>

### **Translating motherhood**

As a journal aimed at a migrating generation of literate women, *Artes y Letras* undertook a significant cultural project for its transnational community of readers: translating motherhood. The arts and modern feminism provided powerful vehicles for this project, and AL vested ideas about beauty and motherhood with special power. In this, Silva de Cintrón drew on the work of Margarita Robles de Mendoza, especially her 1932 pamphlet, “The Citizenship of the Mexican Woman.” Robles de Mendoza accented women’s special sensibilities around aesthetics, group solidarity, and political responsibility; her pamphlet’s opening lines hoped that her readers might “learn the poetry of rights, and the beauty of action.”<sup>15</sup> When Robles de Mendoza spoke in New York in 1934, Silva de Cintrón trumpeted the power of this approach or “mentalidad,” and linked its growth to the “attainment of the rights of woman in all America!”<sup>16</sup> While her own

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<sup>13</sup> On politics in Spanish Harlem, see Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in Twentieth-Century New York City* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010) and Thomas, “Resisting the Racial Binary? Puerto Rican’s Encounter with Race in Depression-Era New York City,” *CENTRO Journal* (Spring 2009) 21:1:5-35. On racism and migration, see Jorge Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> “‘UMA’ Unión de Mujeres Americanas,” *Artes y Letras* (September 1934): 7 (hereafter AL)

<sup>15</sup> Margarita Robles de Mendoza, *Ciudadanía De La Mujer Mexicana* (Morelia, Mich.: A. Obregon, 1932), frontispiece.

<sup>16</sup> Lidia, “Margarita Robles de Mendoza,” AL (June 1934), p. 4.

publication focused on the arts, Silva de Cintrón's feminist vision was inextricable from her impresario role, involving education, public mothering, and activism:

The plectrum that vibrates the string of the soul of life is in our hands. That is precisely why I am a feminist. Why I am pledged to lending my humble cooperation to the culture of woman; why I study; why I have wanted to teach my sisters to labor for the fair understanding of the progress of woman, because I believe that it is in our hands to provide a tonic: if there is so much disequilibrium in the world, so much disharmony; blame those before who impeded our better preparation; for fortune advances our women and already one will see or, better said, will hear "pleasing sounds," harmonies and sweetness for the happiness of society.<sup>17</sup>

What "my sisters" and "our women" looked like and sounded like, literally how they were heard and understood in the world, both in public and in private, underwrote the mission of the journal. Some of this mission was practical. Silva de Cintrón ran a clothing donation center from the periodical's office 2085 Lexington Avenue and publicized it and the work supportive women's groups, like the Damas Auxilaries of the Misión Episcopal, which her husband, Felipe Cintron, pastored.<sup>18</sup> Silva de Cintrón's "Sociales" column reported on clubs and group activities, on anniversaries and life cycle events, children's accomplishments like scholarships and graduations, and made for important community building work.

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<sup>17</sup> J. S. de Cintrón, "Vida Nueva," AL (July 1936): 12.

<sup>18</sup> "Doña Josefina s. de Cintrón, Ante Los Hispanos," AL (June 1935): 1 & 14. "Ropero de los Pobres," AL (August 1936): 18. Readers were directed to send donations to her attention at the paper's offices located at 2085 Lexington Avenue.



Josefina Silva de Cintrón, c 1930, *image courtesy of Roberto Cintrón*

Recuperative and oppositional agendas around gender, race, and sexism found expression in the editor's attention to icons of womanhood. Two cover images are especially telling. In October 1934, AL featured a photograph of a woman named Nemia Vicens in profile, captioned: "Tipo de belleza puertorriqueña" ("a type of Puerto Rican beauty"). In contrast to other widely circulated stereotypes like *la gitana* and the flapper, Nemia Vicens is a real woman with a real name. She appears in the portrait demure, composed, and refined for conventional effect: to convey moral worth through symmetry and harmony of features. While her name gives her individuality, the image is also offered to readers as a "representative type" in quasi-scientific fashion, framed and labeled. No accompanying article in the volume explains her life as frequently was the case for cover portraits of well-known performers. Instead, the profile shot accents the "facial angle" (line from forehead to chin) and allows Nemia Vicens's face to be read in opposition to racial classifications of the day. In the schema of the facial angle, a steep or flat angle denoted high degree of development or evolution, and a low, sloping angle denoted a more primitive, simian-like status. In this sense, the profile portrait of Nemia Vicens might be read as "claiming whiteness." However, given the overall "racial" politics of AL, another reading seems



more plausible: that no “race” or grouping of humans had an exclusive claim on a high facial angle.<sup>19</sup>

Another key cover image from *Artes y Letras* was the portrait by American expressionist painter James McNeil Whistler (1834-1903), entitled “Arrangement in Grey and Black: The Artist's Mother” (1871) that appeared on the cover of the May, 1935 issue. The painting toured the U.S. that year and was also honored in a postage stamp issued “in memory and honor of the mothers of America.” Such efforts recast this initially controversial painting as “Whistler’s Mother,” providing a comforting symbol for distraught readers during the Great Depression. The stamp and tour also recuperated expatriate Whistler, the echt (proto)modernist who advocated “art for art’s sake,” into more sentimental and palatable form for a mass audience.<sup>20</sup> *Artes y Letras* offered its own commentary in a few lines of verse:

The mothers with their comfort of poor humanity  
through which they teach the goodness that they learned in the sky

The editors’ words underscore the heaven-sent gift of mothers for humanity rather than of any nation or “race.” In so doing, they joined a burgeoning U.S. tradition of associating Whistler’s painting with Mother’s Day mementoes.<sup>21</sup> The painting and poem provided the keynote for AL’s Mother’s Day issue, which annually featured popular poetry from both famous and local writers in praise of motherhood, usually their own mothers. These lyrics accented a mother’s God-given gifts of faith, tenderness, and character and in so doing, contributors wrote their own mothers, by name, into the U.S. holiday calendar as well as “American” motherhood, broadly understood.<sup>22</sup> The Manhattan-based Spanish-language daily *La Prensa* heartily endorsed observing the holiday. In a land of “violent contrasts,” Mother’s Day in the U.S. stood out as “noble and humane” because it honored mothers “without distinction of creed or race,” and

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<sup>19</sup> Susan Currell and Christina Cogdell, eds., *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s* (Ohio University Press, 2006). Cover, AL (August 1934).

<sup>20</sup> Robert M. Crunden, *American Salons: Encounters with European Modernity, 1885-1917*, chapter 1.

<sup>21</sup> “For many years it has become the custom for Mother’s Day greetings to carry a reproduction of the famous ‘Whistler’s Mother.’” So read an advertisement for Hern’s Store on 14<sup>th</sup> street. *New York Times*, 11 May 1935.

<sup>22</sup> See “Celebración del ‘Día de las Madres’ en iglesias,” *La Prensa*, 25 April 1935.

sounding an upbeat, civilizationist note, *La Prensa*'s editors added that "all races of all civilizations" should do likewise.<sup>23</sup>

Rather than simply hold up Iberian culture as a model for emulation, typical of cultural work around San Juan's El Ateneo in these years, *Artes y Letras* looked broadly across the Americas. "We offer to our readers a selection of fragments of writings from notable authors of distinct hispanic countries, to sample the racial brotherhood that must unite us."<sup>24</sup> By 1936, *Artes y Letras*'s masthead listed an array of "*representantes*" based in seven countries in Latin America and two additional U.S. cities, San Bernadino and San Antonio. Of these nine representatives, five can be presumed to be female by their feminine first names. Women appear not merely in supportive, deferential, or symbolic roles, as in the work of *La Generación*, (or *La Prensa*, for that matter) but in vital and central ones. The activist and feminist components of AL under her leadership are impossible to miss, especially when compared to *La Prensa*'s "*Para las Damas*" page which kept exclusively to fashion and home décor.<sup>25</sup> In addition to the "Sociales" page, AL had both a "Pagina Feminina" usually carrying feminist debate and news, as well as a regular "Nuestras Mujeres" feature, specifically dedicated to women in the arts.

### ***La Bandera de La Raza***

Further enabling for Silva de Cintrón and a hemispheric rather than transatlantic orientation was the discourse of *La Raza* and the effort to create a *Bandera de la Raza* in the 1930s. The phrase "la raza" figured in oppositional racialization projects taking place across the Caribbean and Latin America, one of the most well known proponents of which was José Vasconcelos of Mexico.<sup>26</sup> *Artes y Letras*'s editorial policy on "racial" difference eschewed the category (literally the word) "white" in favor of referring to "norteamericanos," "anglosajones," or "sajones" and, occasionally, "yanqui." Self-identifying language frequently used the word

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<sup>23</sup> "El Dia de la Madre," *La Prensa* 7 May 1938.

<sup>24</sup> Editorial squib, AL, (October 1935), p. 4 .

<sup>25</sup> Beatriz Sandoval edited "Para Las Damas" which included "Modas de Paris" and "La Mujer y La Casa."

<sup>26</sup> Angel Cambor, *La Bandera De La Raza: Símbolo De Las Amricas En el Cielo De Buenos Aires* (Montevideo: Editorial Union Hispanoamericana, 1935). José Vasconcelos, *La Otra Raza Cósmica* (Oaxaca de Juárez, Oaxaca México: Almadía, 2010).

“hispanos,” encompassing a far flung and diverse “latinidad” that implied, as Kelvin Valles-Santiago notes, “Hispanization regardless of race.”<sup>27</sup> Overwhelmingly, however, the ambiguous but capacious phrase “la raza” predominated. And under *La Bandera de La Raza, Artes y Letras* moved toward an encompassing vision, one broader in sensibility than political nationalism, embracing “el pueblo hispano” (the hispanic people).

Under *La Bandera de la Raza*, AL expressed a decolonial consciousness, one that was forward thinking rather than nostalgic, dynamic rather than static, and broadly transnational rather than narrowly nationalistic. Rather than defend whiteness or Europeaness, the journal sought to “exalt our race” (“enaltece nuestra raza”) in a context of Anglo-American cultural domination and social segregation by skin color.<sup>28</sup> This view oriented the publication less toward a bounded, island-specific sense of Puerto Ricanness, and more toward “the good name of the hispanic collectivity” as a whole.<sup>29</sup> *Artes y Letras* palpably anti-white supremacist stance also opened up ideological and practical space for women and feminism in its pages. Racism was backwards, but equality for all meant modern, forward movement. *La raza* helped UMA women reimagine hemispheric solidarity by placing racial purity to the side and mediated the policing, privatization, and subordination typically demanded of women in the racist model of nationalism. And if Silva de Cintrón and her colleagues made no overtures to include neighboring African Americans under the *bandera*, neither did she nor her colleagues traffic in terms of imperiled womanhood with its implied racial chauvinism and hostility. “Woman wants, like the locomotive Progress, free passage,” declared on zesty declaration by editors. “We do not accept demarcations.”<sup>30</sup>

## Unión de Mujeres Americanas

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<sup>27</sup> Kelvin Santiago-Valles, “The Imagined Republic of Puerto Rican Populism in World-Historical Context: The Poetics of Plantation Fantasy and the Petit Coloniality of Criollo Blanchitude, 1914-1948,” in *Race, Colonialism, and Social Transformation in Latin America and the Caribbean*, ed. Jerome Blanche (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 78.

<sup>28</sup> “Mis Impresiones sobre el Círculo Cultural Cervantes,” AL (September 1934), p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> “Círculo Cultural Cervantes,” AL, (November 1933), 1. See also Carmen Teresa Whalen and Víctor Vázquez-Hernández, eds., *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> “No Aceptamos Demarcaciones,” AL (August 1939): 1.

A significant expression of *feminismo* in New York was the establishment of a branch of the UMA in 1934. Taking inspiration from Robles de Mendoza, Josefina de Cintrón and her colleagues built upon UMA's focus on peace and equality to include rights. New Yorkers modified the original motto: "Paz e Igualdad DE DERECHOS" with "DE DERECHOS" typed into the borrowed printed letterhead, graphically revising the Mexico-based organization's mission.<sup>31</sup> Reports on UMA in *Artes y Letras* struck several consistent themes: the progress of women toward liberty and women's broad and modern sense solidarity. Margarita Robles de Mendoza emphasized a great point at the founding meeting that the leadership and delegates from the new New York branch were properly voted upon and constituted legitimate representative status for their respective nations. "They receive formally the vote from her sisters of the South," she declared. "This is the only way to make respectable the cause of continental solidarity and the representatives of these causes."<sup>32</sup> UMA thus represents an important turning point in women's organizing since Latin American women's interests at international meetings in the preceding decade had been represented often by default, by the wives of diplomats, tapped on the spot to speak on behalf of the women of their respective nations.<sup>33</sup>

In terms of agenda setting, women in New York initially followed by lead of their Mexican feminist ally: "Peace and Equality is the motto of the institution," ran one short blurb. "We fight for peace first."<sup>34</sup> The reports on UMA meetings emphasize celebration, mutual respect, and building bonds through the arts and cultural activities. They simply, yet profoundly embraced "Te Familiar"--to get to know one another, to become like family and enact the bonds of "la raza."<sup>35</sup> Women from many parts of Latin America gathered and felt welcomed at UMA events—Peru, Ecuador, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Mexico, just to name a few. The *bandera*

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<sup>31</sup> Carmen Cordova to Frances Grant, 28 June 1938, Frances Grant Papers, Rutgers University.

<sup>32</sup> Shirlene Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940* (Denver Colo.: Arden Press, 1990), 103-05. "La Union de Mujeres Americanas Recibirá las Primeras Delegadas Iberoamericanas," *La Prensa* 17 October 1934. See also "Unión de Mujeres Americanas," AL (June 1936): 9 & 17.

<sup>33</sup> Isabel Keith MacDermott, "A Significant Pan American Conference," *Bulletin of the Pan American Union* 1922 July, no. 31: 10-35 and Donna J. Guy, "The Politics of Pan-American Cooperation: Maternalist Feminism and the Child Rights Movement, 1913-1960," *Gender & History* 10, no. 3 (1998): 449-469.

<sup>34</sup> "Unión de Mujeres Americanas "UMA," AL (October 1934): 8.

<sup>35</sup> "Actividades Hispanas," AL (March 1936): 13.

offered “transcendent symbolism” at gatherings that also featured national flags (and flowers and food).<sup>36</sup> In the “Sociales” pages of AL, readers kept up with the expanding social and mutual benefit societies in Manhattan: Sociedad Madres y Niños, Los Doce Pares, Club-Panamericano, and Pro-Humanidad, just to name a few. Among these, the UMA was notable for its proud claiming of *feminismo*.

Striking, too, is repeated reference to “la bandera de la raza” at all UMA events. The women claimed this image as the “insignia of the association,” describing it as the “beautiful flag of peace, imposing and majestic.”<sup>37</sup> The UMA stressed the inclusive potential of *la bandera*, describing their platform as “solidarity without distinction of creed, color, race, or nationality”<sup>38</sup> The use of the word “Americanas” recasts American-ness as the cultural property of the people, rather than of a particular nation or race. Reports from early meetings described a room bursting with enthusiastic supporters that accented both feminism but also accommodating conventional patriotism, especially through celebrations of independence days. UMA hung the national flags of Peru, Ecuador, and Cuba as symbols of the three countries represented in the organization’s International Council.<sup>39</sup> *La Prensa*’s coverage emphasized the hostessing and ceremonial roles the organization played in New York, feting the consul of Peru, for example, staging entertainments for Consul General of Mexico and honoring dignitaries from Columbia, (countries which each had their own UMA organization at home). *La Prensa* also accented the transnational dimensions of women’s activism and ascribed a bit of its own class consciousness to the group’s potential for “the emancipation of woman and the liberation of the proletarian classes.”<sup>40</sup>

As in the pages of *Artes y Letras* in general, UMA meetings gave poetry, recitation, theatricals, and musical performance pride of place. This agenda highlights both Silva de

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<sup>36</sup> “La Unión de Mujeres Americanas celebra el Segundo Aniversario de su fundación,” AL (July 1936), p. 9. See also “Doña Josefina S. de Cintrón,” AL (June 1935), p. 14.

<sup>37</sup> “Unión de Mujeres Americanas, ‘UMA,’” AL, (June, 1936): 17.

<sup>38</sup> “Unión de Mujeres Americanas, ‘UMA,’” AL, (October 1934): 4.

<sup>39</sup> “La Union de Mujeres Americanas celebra el Segundo Aniversario,” AL (July 1936): 9.

<sup>40</sup> “Homenaje al Peru de la U. de Mujeres Americanas,” *La Prensa* 25 April 1935. “ ‘La Ola’ Puesta en Escena por la Unión de Mujeres Americanas,” 29 April 1935 *La Prensa*. “Una Velada de la Unión de Mujeres Americanas. 17 & 24 May 1935. “Celebracion del Primer Aniversario de la Unión Mujeres Americanas,” 11 June 1935 *La Prensa*.

Cintrón's role as community arts impresario as well as the aesthetic, oral, and performative aspects of community building. Poetry and songs were shared and sung in group settings; Spanish language formed part of enacting and reimagining solidarity. Speaking aloud underscored listening, participation; hearing of self and others; harmonizing; and potentially being heard by the outside world. The poem written for UMA by Mercedes Luque and sung as the "canto civio" of the association is a case in point: "Woman of our race, defend your right!" Luque suggested that presumptions about female "nullity" and "male tyranny" were to blame for the long years of woman's sad servitude. Woman's redemption would come not by law-breaking or overt confrontation with men or the state but by unifying around the larger truth of woman's equality. "Unite sisters! Let us break the chains! But in the name of equals, compañeras, not serfs; as in our beautiful saying: Peace and Equality."<sup>41</sup>

The imprint of Margarita Robles de Mendoza on the Manhattan UMA is impossible to miss. She described herself as a "fighter in the feminist camp since 1918" and was widely known in Mexico as a writer and leading advocate of suffrage, with the UMA in that country claiming 200,000 members.<sup>42</sup> Robles de Mendoza attended the 1928 Pan American meeting in Havana which produced the Inter American Commission for Women and served as a delegate to that body for about five years, including attending the Montevideo gathering in 1933 which endorsed married women's citizenship.<sup>43</sup> She was also a regular presence in Manhattan, where she had an apartment on 135<sup>th</sup> street, near the heart of Spanish-speaking community.<sup>44</sup> She was something of a media figure as well, effusively praised in *La Prensa* as "without doubt the most spirited, cultivated, and enthusiastic propagandist of hispanoamerican feminism in the United States."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Mercedes Luque, "Unión de Mujeres Americanas," AL (September 1936), p. 13.

<sup>42</sup> Margarita Robles de Mendoza to Plutarco Elias Calles, 6 March 1932, document reprinted in Sarah A. Buck, "The Meaning of the Women's Vote in Mexico, 1917-1953" in Mitchell, ed., *The Women's Revolution in Mexico, 1910-1953* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Pub., 2007), 84. Francesca Miller, "Latin American Feminism and the Transnational Arena," in Emilie Bergmann, et. al., eds., *Women, Culture, and Politics in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 27-47.

<sup>43</sup> Flora de Oliveira Lima, "The First Conference of the Inter-American Commission of Women," *The Bulletin of the Pan American Union* (April 1930): 1-8. Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman*, 124.

<sup>44</sup> "Feminist Reviews Mexican Victory; Mrs. M. R. de Mendoza Played a Leading role in the 18<sup>th</sup>-year Fight for the ballot," *New York Times*, 8 September 1935.

<sup>45</sup> "De Nuestros Lectores," *La Prensa*, 16 July 1934.

Comparisons between U.S. white women's feminism and Latin American regularly note the former's accent on legal equality between men and women and the latter's accent on gendered rights for mothers, an aestheticized elaboration of Latin womanhood, and an enduring investment in the caretaking of husbands and sons.<sup>46</sup> Robles de Mendoza's thinking, though strongly maternalist, was also state-centered and transnational, technocratic and yet suffused with spiritual and aesthetic values. She insisted that weak, uneducated, disempowered mothers meant a weak nation state; that only informed, engaged mothers could rear appropriately patriotic sons. "The modern woman wants to be a mother in the fullness of responsibility and love, not as a victim of biological process," she argued.<sup>47</sup> To exclude woman from full citizenship was to create, as Luque also implied, population of parasites or slaves. Thus fundamental questions of existence were not matters of feeling or nature, but law. As Robles de Mendoza put it: "The problems of existence can not be resolved with sentimentality, nor left to [chance] because left unattacked. It is preferable, then, to valiantly analyze them and try to give a technical solution."<sup>48</sup> Such a demand for rights both encompassed and potentially critiqued an equality pegged to men's status or the historical integrity of the nation-state. The vote was just and necessary not from an opportunistic or retaliative point of view but from a general, abstract, disinterested one: "We desire to analyze the theme [of the vote] from a point of view much higher [than competition between the sexes], judging it solely as a social thesis." Nonetheless, she rooted the justice of women's equality in historical forces and human truths beyond the state and state-building, in a peoples' heritage of the Americas. "The movement for emancipation of women was born almost simultaneously in all America," she affirmed at Montevideo. "It is not a local phenomenon Cuba, Mexico, or Uruguay; it is the whole of America which is rising up."<sup>49</sup>

In New York, Carmen de Córdova was probably the most state-centered of *Artes y Letras* feminists. In the summer of 1937, she praised strides made in New York State toward obligatory jury duty for women, led by the League of Women Voters, National Woman's Party, and a few

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<sup>46</sup> Asunción Lavrin, *Women, Feminism and Social Change in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, 1890-1940* (Nebraska 1997); Mendoza, "Unthinking State Centered Feminisms," Stoner, "In Four Languages but with One Voice."

<sup>47</sup> Robles de Mendoza, *Ciudadanía De La Mujer Mexicana*, 19.

<sup>48</sup> Margarita Robles de Mendoza, *La Evolución De La Mujer En México*, ([México, Imp. Galas], 1931), 101.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in "How History was Made at Montevideo," *Equal Rights Magazine* (January 6, 1934): 382.

key white women state legislators. “The reclamation of the rights of woman is an untiring effort and a principle factor in the progress of the nation,” she wrote approvingly in the summer of 1937. Today, “[f]ree from prejudice, we recognize her historic attributes”<sup>50</sup> In the context of UMA, women tracked and compared progress in their respective countries, especially concerning the “progress and political status of women,” with Ecuador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica coming in for special praise for their constitutional provisions of sex equality.<sup>51</sup> Radio broadcasts spread their message of feminist encouragement. In August, 1938, a short talk by Silva de Cintrón entitled “Feminismo” again stressed the UMA theme of “peace and equality of rights.” Called upon to fight for social betterment at the side of men at a moment when women’s “suavidades femininas” (feminine soothing) needed while Europe behaved as if problems could be solved with grapeshot. Perhaps to quiet listeners’ unease about possible female usurpation of male roles, Silva de Cintrón pointed out that most women made their biggest impact at church and at home, where their primary duty resided. Nonetheless “cultivating knowledge” remained vital to “forming from our sons, great men.”<sup>52</sup>

Silva de Cintrón’s vision here of properly prepared and dedicated feminist mothers molding male citizens took a page out of the work of Puerto Rico’s Mercedes Solá, drawing especially in her important 1921 essay “Feminismo.” Solá’s text established important parameters for Puerto Rican feminism within island nationalist discourses and, as we shall see, in transnational ones as well. Like English and French women, affirmed Solá, “we have the same proud feeling of calling ourselves ‘puertorican women,’” a project intimately tied up with the identity of “our *criollo* type,” which she linked to European heritage.<sup>53</sup> Solá’s essay has been incisively analyzed by Roy-Fequiere, who points out the elitist and implicitly racist underpinnings of her basically conservative feminism (which did not include suffrage).

It is easy to imagine Silva de Cintrón and her readers nonetheless warming to Solá’s vision of making “the work of motherhood a work of art,” especially bearing in mind the

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<sup>50</sup> Carmen B. de Cordova, “Victoria Feminista en el Estado de Nueva York,” AL (August 1937): 5.

<sup>51</sup> “Union de Mujeres Americanas U MA,” AL (April 1937), p. 12. <sup>51</sup> “La union de Mujeres Americanas celebra la Independencia de Costa Rica,” AL (October 1936): 18;

<sup>52</sup> JSC, “Feminismo,” (August 1938), p. 10.

<sup>53</sup> Mercedes Solá, *Feminismo: Estudio Sobre Su Aspecto Social, Económico Y Político* (San Juan, P.R: Cantero, Fernández & Co, 1922), 29.



persistent invisibility and negation of Puerto Rican women's mothering in U.S. academic and media discursive fields. A clever kind of conservatism was foregrounded by Solá—and hinted at above in Córdova's praise for "la mujer anglosajona" regarding jury service—one that declared sex equality a kind of ancient norm. For Solá, feminism meant "rehabilitating [woman] to her legitimate condition of being human, intelligent, and worthy," neatly disarming the antifeminist bugbear of women desiring to stride past men and becoming masculine.<sup>54</sup> This was precisely how *Artes y Letras* defined "Authentic Feminism" as "the movement that reclaims for women the rights that for so many centuries have been infringed upon by men."<sup>55</sup> Feminism was, like "world progress" and the "universal democraticization of the people" simply one more enlightened step along the way to universal justice.<sup>56</sup> Restoring women's rights would guarantee harmony in the home rather than incite conflict. "In my humble opinion, antifeminism has no reason for being," Solá affirmed. She waved away opponents as simply uninformed purveyors of the "fantasm" that feminism would somehow cancel feminine beauty and endanger the home. She believed that an antifeminist must be a person who "has not studied or properly investigated this problem" and, anticipating Robles de Mendoza, aligned women's progress with technocratic, modern, rational embrace of modernity, rather than the release of unknown or troublesome forces.<sup>57</sup>

Probably the most energizing aspect of Solá's feminism that played out in the pages of *Artes y Letras* was her idea of "feminismo de acción." Like her soft modernization model of feminist development, Solá pointed to the inexorable movement of women into work and school and proclaimed these feminist victories, even if the workers involved claimed no feminist principles or consciousness. In *Feminismo*, she recounted querying young working women about whether they considered themselves feminists and to their protestations of "Oh, no!" Solá retorts: "But you work, you are a feminist of action." By framing new spheres of activity as inevitable, she affirmed the overall propriety and authenticity of Puerto Rican women's new presence and demands in public. "We all know that in our country, the feminism of action is

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 9.

<sup>55</sup> "Feminismo Autentico," AL, June 1937, p. 1

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 13, 24.

triumphant, rather than lamenting that our feminism is purely imitative.”<sup>58</sup> By closing her long essay with a section on the global sweep of feminism, Solá brought to bear another layer of momentum and legitimacy for her cause. When she pointed out that even the International Suffrage Alliance’s meeting in Madrid in 1920 failed to include any sessions in Spanish and absorbed the “Liga Social Suffragista de Puerto Rico” into the northamerican delegation, she identified on-going challenges for Puerto Rican feminists to be heard and respected in interwar feminist and international peace movements.<sup>59</sup>

Made broadly visible under *La Bandera de la Raza*, UMA women in New York focused on peace and antiviolence rather than the franchise for two reasons. First, Puerto Rican women migrants to the U.S. mainland could vote, even as they faced social discrimination and economic marginalization. Second, violence was on the uptick in Manhattan, in Puerto Rico, and the larger world in the 1930s. Like the biblical dove bearing an olive branch, UMA women could extend peace within and among all people and thereby help “our men” with the “progressive work of all America.”<sup>60</sup> While this rhetoric sounds mild, UMA’s focus on peace and antiviolence is striking for its consistent focus on anti-racism and anti-white supremacy in both local and global in framework, especially when compared to white women peace activists at the time.

UMA’s founding year of 1934 witnessed the high point of deaths (eventually totaling 80,000) in the Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay as well as the conspicuous failure of international mediation of the conflict through the League of Nations.<sup>61</sup> As reported in the U.S. and Latin American media, the Chaco conflict could be read as a worst-case scenario for violence in South America: neighbors shooting at each other with arms supplied by industrial countries in the interests of their most powerful corporations, namely Standard Oil.<sup>62</sup> Latin American feminists understood the Chaco conflict as a scenario that both underscored women’s stark marginality from halls of corporate and military power and at the same time, highlighted

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 37-40. Sola attended the 1922 meeting in Baltimore.

<sup>60</sup> “Unión de Mujeres Americanas,” AL (October 1934): 4 & 8.

<sup>61</sup> “League Body Fails to End Chaco War,” *New York Times* 13 March 1934. “La Inutil Hecatombe Del Chaco,” 20 November 1934; “La Guerra del Chaco sigue,” 5 February 1934 both in *La Prensa*.

<sup>62</sup> “La Mediación en el Chaco,” *La Prensa* 2 April 1935. “El Momento de la Paz,” 25 April 1935; “La Diplomacia en el Chaco,” 10 June 1935.

the urgency of alternatives war, evident in women's "Mandato Pro Paz" active in the southern cone.<sup>63</sup> In the name of UMA, Venezuela's Ana Esther de Trujillo petitioned for peace in the Chaco in a poem, reprinted in *Artes y Letras*, that blurred prayer to God with a shouted demand to an un-named "Sir" for an end to war.<sup>64</sup>

The New York UMA fused a peace agenda with independence-minded Puerto Rican activism for added cause: violence on the island reached an all-time high in the 1930s. The New Deal's patchwork of interventions—post-hurricane aid, educational mandates, agricultural reorganization—created more turmoil than relief. Protests in the form of labor strikes and nationalist demands for independence sharply increased. The U.S. government's response was, in turn, harsh, punitive and politically manipulative. Bureau of Insular Affairs head Ernest Gruening administer the Puerto Rican Reconstruction Administration with supreme liberal condescension. Then, in the middle of the reconstruction effort, Senator Millard Tydings attempted to spank the island for a police shooting in San Juan with an abrupt bill for independence.<sup>65</sup> Tyding's disdain blared across the national media: Puerto Ricans were not "grateful" for U.S. citizenship and indifferent to the teaching of democracy.<sup>66</sup> Pedro Albizu Campos and seven other nationalists were jailed for conspiracy against the United States, tried, found guilty, and sentenced.<sup>67</sup> Tydings's bill never came to a vote, but its airing opened the gate for venting prejudice against Puerto Rican people. The *North American Review* opined about the "foulness" and "rotting fungus life" of *jibaro* existence "fundamental menace" of over population on the island whose "bad elements" would soon be populating New York, already the world's second largest center of Puerto Rican population.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Miller, "Latin American Feminism," in Lavrin, *Women, Feminism and Social Change*, 282. "Gira de Buena Voluntad por Damas Latinoamericanas Auspiciada por el Mandato Pro-Paz," AL (October 1939), p. 30

<sup>64</sup> "La Paz de Chaco," AL (October 1934), p. 3.

<sup>65</sup> Frank Otto Gatell, "Independence Rejected: Puerto Rico and the Tydings Bill of 1936," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 38, no. 1 (1958): 25-44.

<sup>66</sup> Tydings quoted in "Puerto Rico Bill May Call 'Bluff,'" *New York Times* 26 April 1936. For ingratitude comments, see "Gruening Favors Tydings Plan for Free Puerto Rico," *Evening Star* [Washington DC] April 24, 1936, p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> "2 Kill Police and Shot Dead," 24 February 1936, *New York Times*.

<sup>68</sup> Eric M. Matsner and William Laidlaw, "Puerto Rico: Old Woman in a Shoe," *North American Review*, vol. 242: 2 (Winter 1936-37) quotations from 277-78; 280-281. Murray Paddack, "Puerto Rico's Plight," *Current History* 44:3

As bloodshed marred island life and the Harlem Riot of 1935 left New York community members shaken, Puerto Rican women's frustration at racist violence erupted in the pages of *Artes y Letras*. In March of 1936, nationalist advocate María Mas Pozo wrote an article critical of a petition drive spearheaded by a white U.S. peace activist, Heloise Brainerd (1881-1969) of the Pan American Union in Washington (and later of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom). Brainerd was organizing Latin American women for a signature drive, aiming for 50,000 supporters.<sup>69</sup> Mas Pozo began her article with a stinging critique of the signature campaign. What the peace movement needed was not a "wordy palaver" but "ACCIÓN," and Mas Pozo was full of ideas. First, women citizens should boycott the vote and thereby delegitimize government actions undertaken in their name. They also should withdraw from employment in war industries and forbid their sons to enlist in the army. The purpose and effect of these actions would be a general women's strike: "Woman declares herself universally on strike against everything implicating war." This strike would contribute to the "great work of humanity" and, in the case of mothers, activate their special responsibility and duty in the world. Mas Pozo rejected simply exercising equal rights with men in favor of female-centered and community-based action in everyday life. "Feminism does not [really] have the name without going to the roots of the ills that afflict humanity and [then] applying the remedy." Equal rights was not "feminism," in Mas Pozo's view, nor had it eliminated the great historic, human afflictions. "Feminism has not eliminated the PAIN OF DEATH," declared Mas Pozo. "Has not eliminated WAR. Has not eliminated prostitution. Has not eliminated crime or robbery. Everything proceeds like before..." Mas Pozo combined a more confrontational style of activism, like the strike and boycott, with a more protective stance *viz a viz* men and family life. For women to protect husbands and sons was to defend love itself, thereby defeating the "pain of

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(June 1936): 91-96; William H. Haas, "The Jíbaro, An American Citizen," *The Scientific Monthly* 43:1 (July 1936): 33-46; Harwood Hull, "Better Times for Puerto Rico," *Current History* 43:4 (January 1936): 367-372.

<sup>69</sup> Brainerd was a staff person at the PAU and a sometime communicant with *Artes y Letras*, writing a short verse for mother's day issue in May, 1935. Heloise Brainerd, *Intellectual Cooperation Between the Americas ...*, [Pan American union] Education series, no. 15; (Washington, D.C., Pan American Union, 1931); Heloise Brainerd, "Introducing Children to the Other Americas," *Parents Magazine* 9 (May 1934): p.15-16. The PAU's effort may have been subsumed by the end of 1936 in the "un millón de mujeres" peace petition presented in Buenos Aires at the Interamerican Peace Conference in December. See "Petición Contra La Guerra" *La Prensa* 5 December 1936, pp. 1 & 8.

death.” “Not with signatures, but positively with DOING,” she concluded, could other self-identified feminists “support our WORK of redemption.”<sup>70</sup>

In the next issue of AL, Carmen B. de Córdova responded in a “Carta Abierta” to Mas Pozo, taking a soothing if a tad patronizing tone toward her “fretful” friend. She argued that it was not the weakness of feminism that slowed the improvement of humanity since the last war, but the backward ways of men, “the resulting fault of masculine feudalism.” The gains of feminism, on the other hand, were substantial if not yet fully realized: the right to public expression, to organize, and to be heard in the halls of official power. Córdova had only admiring words for “la mujer norteamericana,” who prepared herself carefully and had “won representation and shared responsibility in all areas that were [formerly] the privilege of men” “Let us wait, then,” she concluded, “for the law of evolution to complete itself.”<sup>71</sup>

Mas Pozo responded with an even stronger critique of “la mujer yanqui,” specifically citing their conservative, bureaucratic tendencies that yielded little concrete change. “As soon as you speak of the feminist associations of this country, tell me: what have they DONE? Nothing. Absolutely NOTHING.” She challenged their authority to serve as models for others, citing their complicity with racial violence and “barbarie,” specifically the lynching of African Americans and even the invasion of Ethiopia by Italy. “What do you say about lynchings?” Mas Pozo demanded, with a knock on Spanish history. “Has the yankee woman done anything to stop this inquisition in the middle of the twentieth century?” Mas Pozo further cited American women’s silence in the struggle over federal anti-lynching legislation during which “not one woman mumbled nor supported the bill”<sup>72</sup> Mas Pozo referred to the Wagner-Costigian Act debated in Congress 1934-1938 which the Southern Association of Women for the Prevention of Lynching declined to support and which barely won the endorsement of WILPF’s New York branch in 1934.<sup>73</sup> Mas Pozo did not acknowledge either African American women’s antilynching activism

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<sup>70</sup> Maria Mas Pozo, “Recogiendo Firmas contra la Guerra,” Dedicado a mi culta amiga Petronilla Angélica Gomez, directora de “FEMINA” en Santo Domingo, R.D., AL, March 1936, pp. 12 & 14.

<sup>71</sup> Carmen B. de Cordova, “Carta Abierta: para Maria Mas Pozo,” AL (April 1936), p. 5.

<sup>72</sup> María Mas Pozo, “La Mujer y el Feminismo: A mi excellent amiga Carmen B. de Córdova,” AL (June 1936): 5 & 18.

<sup>73</sup> Alonso, Peace as a Women’s Issue, 103; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women’s Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Columbia, 1979), 237-249. See also Robert L. Zangrando, “The NAACP and a Federal Antilynching Bills, 1934-1940,” *Journal of Negro History* 50(April 1965): 111.

or those white southern Methodists women who pressed for the act's passage.<sup>74</sup> Her main point was to criticize U.S. pretensions to racial equality and establishing an anti-violence and anti-prejudice politics focused on women's everyday actions, one that could also respond to matters of the heart. She concluded her letter: "Refuse to cooperate in all acts of barbarism and remove from your soul all expressions that tend to form racial or religious prejudice"<sup>75</sup> Closing this dialogue, Carmen de Córdova again tried to smooth things out. She urged faith and patience and expressed confidence that "feminine sensibility" all over the world would eventually dissolve human injustice and pain, once women truly have hold of the issues of peace and the health and education of children. Referring to the situation in Ethiopia with cautious hope, Córdova opined that Empress Menen's radio broadcast appeal for women's prayers against war moved hearts in the right direction.<sup>76</sup>

Part of Mas Pozo's frustration stemmed from the changing status of women's international petition drives by the mid-1930s. These efforts, a heritage of international antislavery activism, were stunning successes as acts of social and intellectual mobilization (earning Jane Addams a nobel prize in 1935) but failed as concrete acts of policy or diplomacy. As described by Harriet Alonso, a generational and ideological rift emerged between feminism and peace as the U.S. suffragist generation aged and passed on, and attempts to outlaw war by amendment to the U.S. constitution petered out by 1930.<sup>77</sup> For Mas Pozo, a strong supporter of independence for Puerto Rico, Brainerd's long-time affiliation with the Pan American Union added a rub, as there was palpable restiveness in New York with its paternalistic style of

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<sup>74</sup> It bears further investigating whether Mas Pozo viewed "An Art Commentary on Lynching," the NAACP antilynching art exhibition at the Arthur U. Newton Galleries on 57<sup>th</sup> street in the winter of 1935. *La Prensa* carried the lynching of Claude Neal in Marianna, Florida, on page one on October 29 1934, and also described the NAACP efforts on his behalf.

<sup>75</sup> María Mas Pozo, "La Mujer y el Feminismo: A mi excellent amiga Carmen B. de Cordova," AL (June 1936): 5 & 18.

<sup>76</sup> Carmen B. de Cordova, "Cartas a Maria," AL (July 1936): 5 & 18. On conservative feminism, see Mercedes Luque, "Sobre Feminismo," AL, (May 1936): 10 & 14.

<sup>77</sup> Alonso, *Peace as a Women's Issue*, pp. 117-122. Harriet Hyman Alonso, *The Women's Peace Union and the Outlawry of War, 1921-1942*, 1st ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), especially chapter 6. Mary Ann Glendon, "The Forgotten Crucible: The Latin American influence on the Universal Human Rights Ideal," *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 16 (2003): 26-39.

operation.<sup>78</sup> In the summer of 1935, a Puerto Rican student disrupted the Bolivar anniversary event at the Central Park statue with sharply worded circulars protesting the “pan-American pageants of the imperialistic United States” and the “lackeys” who staged them. This outburst created “an uproar” that motivated the event leaders to request police protection at their evening events that celebrated, among other themes, “Bolivar, The Pacifist” (a stretch even for the expansive cult of The Liberator).<sup>79</sup>

As in the fine and performing arts, prestige and decorum expressed authority in matters of international peace and diplomacy. These rituals, conferences, and ceremonies were suffused with theatrics carefully staged and orchestrated for public consumption. Leading white women peace advocates in the U.S. took pride in their exercise of just this kind of prestige as part and parcel of advancing their antiwar agenda. As feminism waned as a unifying theme in the post-suffrage era, Democratic party women in particular were urged to “drop the sex line in politics.”<sup>80</sup> The 1935 volume *Why Wars Must Cease*, an eloquent and sophisticated expression of antiwar thought put out by the National Committee on the Cause and Cure of War, contrasts strongly with Mas Pozo’s perspective. A product of the NCCCW’s Book Committee (chaired by suffrage leader Carrie Chapman Catt), its goal was to foster understanding rather than to incite protest. Essays by Jane Addams, Mary E. Woolley, Emily Newell Blair, Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Dr. Alice Hamilton among others, offered incisive and highly readable syntheses of state of the art thinking in psychology, economics, and criminology concerning war—with gender analysis and feminism conspicuous by their absence. In her concluding essay, writer and educator Dorothy Canfield Fisher highlighted her civilizationist assumptions when she noted that “it is an honor to any civilized being to be allowed to testify against war.”<sup>81</sup> Fisher’s concluding vision of an ideal “imaginary symposium” to make the case against war might well have seemed

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<sup>78</sup> “Una Confederacion que Combatira a la union panamericana,” *La Prensa*, 9 march 1934.

<sup>79</sup> “Discord Arises at Bolivar Fetes,” *New York Times* 25 July 1935. AL’s report on the Roerich event did not note any unrest or disturbances. “Liga Internacional de Acción Bolivar,” *AL* (August 1935), p. 11. On the cult of Bolivar, see John Chasten, “Simon Bolivar: Man and Myth,” in Samuel Brunk and Ben Fallow, eds., *Heroes & Hero Cults in Latin America*, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006). 21-39. AL rounded up a wide range of scholarly and popular Bolivar opinion in their June, 1953 issue p. 5.

<sup>80</sup> Emily Newell Blair, “Why I am Discouraged about Women in Politics,” in *Major Problems in American Women’s History*, edited by Mary Beth Norton and Ruth M. Alexander, (Lexington Mass: DC Heath, 1996), 332.

<sup>81</sup> Rose Young and National Committee on the Cause and Cure of War, *Why Wars Must Cease*, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1935), 141.

a come down to activists looking for fresh approaches. Fisher lamented even finding a convener “wise enough, skilled enough” to pull off such a symposium. Fisher’s preferred choice, William James, had been dead for twenty-five years, and she wished aloud: “if anything could bring him out of his grave back to us who need him so, it would be this appeal.”<sup>82</sup>

In contrast to this maudlin wistfulness, writers in *Artes y Letras* tested out new ideas, and refurbished a few old ones, too. Articles on pacifism praised peace strikes by students and women. Some of this talk pushed beyond racial/raza conventions to more encompassing rhetoric about the human race. On the world stage, women could bond in one great “army of Pacifists,” who observed not the boundaries of nations but “only Humanity” (“unicamente Humanidad”). *Artes y Letras* approvingly quoted editors and commentators from Latin America who answered scientific racism with the idea that “there is but one race...the human race”<sup>83</sup> AL disavowed violence and projected a distinct Puerto Rican heritage of peacefulness compared to that of the more revolutionary-minded Latin American “brother” republics. Puerto Rico was a calming even feminine counterpoint, the “pretty boricuena daughter,” whose natural pacifism was crucial asset of its cultural heritage, having never fully embraced revolution and independence.<sup>84</sup> In its metaphorical location betwixt and between nations, “races,” and cultures, the island just might have a special role and perspective to offer the hemispheric peace movement. Manhattan-based writer Juan Pedro Labarthe advanced such a plan through *Artes y Letras*: an authentic “Liga de Naciones Americana” that could arbitrate the interests and conflicts of the hemisphere and thereby extend the authentic tradition of pan Americanism (which he attributed to Bolivar).<sup>85</sup> Ironically, at the New York World’s Fair, the island’s location would be targeted by U.S. officials for precisely the opposite reasons: the ease it allowed for making war.

### **The New York World’s Fair, 1939-1940**

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 149;

<sup>83</sup> Pedro Caballero, “Huelgas Pro-Paz,” *AL* (May 1936), p. 5; Angela Graupere, “Pacifismo,” *AL* (July 1936), 13; “raza humana” quoted from publication “La Nueva Democracia,” reprinted in “De Nuestros Canjes,” *AL* (March 1936), p. 13.

<sup>84</sup> “¡Aguarda!” *AL* (June 1936): 1; “El Dr. Mendoza Pronunció,” *La Prensa* (25 October 1934).

<sup>85</sup> Pedro Juan Labarthe, “Puerto Rico y la Liga de Naciones Americana: El Triunfo del Panamericanismo,” *AL* (February 1937): 12/18; and continued (March 1937) :14/18.



*Artes y Letras's* vision of a transnational feminist civic and cultural sphere dedicated to the arts, peace, and Puerto Rican aspirations for equality was difficult to implant in the World's Fair scientific and militaristic milieu. Instead, the figure of Puerto Rico got caught up in the overarching—and eerily complementary—economies of leisure and security. By 1940, plans for the largest Navy base in the world, the U.S. naval station at Roosevelt Roads, were in place for Puerto Rico (and completed in 1943). Island governor Blanton Winship's remarks at the Puerto Rican pavillion at the Fair declared the island “the keystone of our eastern defense” against “foreign aggression,” even as the same article in the *New York Times* burred on about the “charm of [this] tropic territory” and how “tourists get invitations” to visit.<sup>86</sup> The accent on Puerto Rican tourism at the fair belongs to the context of extended “governmental coloniality” on the island during the new Deal; that is, an extension of paternalistic and unequal structures pervading the economy and social life. The packaging of the island as a “Caribbean Playground” and the coining of the moniker “The Enchanted Island” (visible on the 2009 “state” quarter) went hand in hand with the New Deal spending during the decade. Politically, island-based Puerto Rican leaders used both the world's fair and militarization to raise the stakes for statehood. This agenda was symbolically abetted by Fair planners who located the Puerto Rican pavillion in the U.S. “Court of States.” Not only did this plan backfire, but in the process, the New York Puerto Rican community, especially its women, became marginalized.

The stage for conflict between New York and San Juan had been set a year earlier. In May, 1938, *La Prensa* reported that an investigation concerning the poor appearance of a float representing Puerto Rico in the much-ballyhooed motorized Fair “preview parade.” Josefina Silva de Cintrón, Remedios C. de Roman and Carmen B. de Córdova petitioned Fernando Geigel, mayor of San Juan (1939-41) and sometime fixture in the Manhattan Fair office with their complaints. The motorcade was the “first completely mechanized column” in the tradition of American pageantry and it traveled a long sixteen miles from the Battery to the Fair grounds in Flushing before at least a million spectators. Judged like a county fair, prizes were awarded for various divisions of the parade, including a section on “Foreign Participation,” and featured

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<sup>86</sup> “Puerto Rico to Mark its day at the Fair,” 24 July 1939; “Puerto Rico Astir Over Leahy Plan,” 26 July 1939. Blanton Winship to Maude Emery Lennox 2 November 1938, New York World's Fair Papers, New York Public Library.

“many floats containing bathing beauties.”<sup>87</sup> The parade was a major international spectacle in which modern technology and the idealized, sexualized female form mirrored each other as streamlined, pale, sleek, shiny, and alive with electric energy.

According to *La Prensa*, Puerto Rico’s float was a ramshackle cart pulled by a donkey, hastily hand-painted with botched lettering. This presentation “demonstrates the little interest or importance” given to the country by parade organizers and reflected unfairly on Puerto Rican’s true “aptitude and knowledge.” “What a shame that the lovely young women [traveling aboard] did not have another scenario more appropriate to showcase their attractiveness,” complained Silva de Cintrón. The petitioners described their pain for their country (“patria”) as “deep and indelible” and they invoked their “inalienable right” as “Puerto Rican women and American citizens” to “elevate the opinion of our country [so] prevalent in the foreigner.” They spoke not just in their own name but in the name of all Puerto Rican women engaged in education, cultural and social betterment work, claiming the Fair as their own (“nuestra Ferial Mudial”).<sup>88</sup>

In June, *Artes y Letras* recapped the protest and printed the responses of Fair officials, which were set pieces in condescension and avoidance. Geigel agreed to death, indicating his own “mortification” at the cart, adding a hokey twist to the drama: that the miserable float had been the result of some unnamed “deception” or “trick” on the part of parade organizers.<sup>89</sup> Then Geigel shook his finger at the women for publicizing their protest in the media. *Artes y Letras* retorted that “no one had intended to harm anyone, only to salvage the prestige of the country,” which had been unacceptably shamed by such a “ridiculous artifact” appearing in the parade.<sup>90</sup> Fair officials ignored Silva de Cintrón when she dropped her card at the mid town office in January of the next year. Anxiety over low turn out at the Fair by Spanish from speaking visitors came from Fair president Grover Whalen in late 1939 not to Silva de Cintrón but to the new

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<sup>87</sup> “Three-Hour ‘Preview’ Motocade Gives City Glimpse of 1939 Fair,” *New York Times*, 1 May 1938.

<sup>88</sup> “Carroza de Puerto Rico en el desfile de la Feria Mundial motiva investigacion,” *La Prensa*, 13 May 1938. “2,000,000 vieron el desfile de ensayo para la Feria Mundial el sabado aquí,” *La Prensa*, 2 May 1938. These reports made no mention of the cart.

<sup>89</sup> Most of the material under “parade protests” in the World’s fair papers concern controversy over the siting of the preview parade, rather than its content, though a few letters complained about Germany and Japan’s presence. For May Day coverage in *La Prensa* see, “En el desfile obrero de hoy participaran unas 20 organizaciones hispanas,” 30 April 1938.

<sup>90</sup> “La carroza de Puerto Rico,” *AL* (June 1938), p. 4.

editor Victor C. de Aragón, who purchased the magazine from her sometime in the preceding year.<sup>91</sup>

Initially, New York's Puerto Rican women had been optimistic. Readers of *AL* understood the Fair to be, in the words of Carmen Luisa Morales, "ultra moderna y ultra-scientífica" but encompassing various points of view, including artistic, educational, sanitary, religious, commercial and "feminino." Women's organizations were understood as providing the "indispensable key" for the Fair's success but had a hard time being heard as activists.<sup>92</sup> Emily Newell Blair, former Chair of the Consumers Advisory Board for the National Recovery Administration, quit the Fair's Consumer's Committee (along with her 21 fellow appointees). She accused the Fair Corporation of using their names "as window dressing" to advance the "commercially sponsored" exhibits and promotions rather than consumer rights and protection. *The New York Times* wryly bumpered their article on the consumer advocates' protest with references to the first "commercially sponsored television broadcast from the Fair grounds: an Amos and Andy radio survey of the setting and the application of Sally Rand, dancer, for a "girl show" venue at the grounds. Minstrelsy and strip tease expressed the commodification of sex and race typical of the event.<sup>93</sup>

In the space that remained, women's volunteer roles were tightly scripted and narrowly construed, thematically touching "social and cultural" dimensions of the Fair but as a practical matter confined to propaganda efforts. This work historically had accrued as paid labor to local "drummers" and publicity men in the past but now was expected to be secured on an unpaid basis from women, overseen by Madison Avenue advertising firms at the top of the Fair Corporation. It took much effort to keep organized women out of the "Hospitality Building" on the grounds. This space was reserved as a perk to all volunteers rather than offered to women's organizations in the tradition of Chicago and other major U.S. expositions. "This is *not* a women's committee," huffed Monica Barry Walsh, chair of the participation division, and "the

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<sup>91</sup> J.M. Killeen to Mr. Roosevelt 18 January 1939 with Silva de Cintron's card attached, New York World's Fair Papers. Whalen letter reprinted in *AT* (October 1939), p. 9.

<sup>92</sup> "Fundando el Mundo de Mañana," *AL* (September 1938): 8-9.

<sup>93</sup> "21 Fair Advisors on Consumer Quit," *New York Times* 28 February 1939.

Hospitality Center is *not* a Women's Building.”<sup>94</sup> Volunteer assignments were distributed by elite New Yorkers and wealthy club women, under the leadership of Mrs. Vincent [Brooke] Astor. This group assigned actual labor to local middle class club women who fanned out in a special “Panel of a Thousand Hostesses.” These Hostesses had access to the Fair's “service center” meeting rooms in Rockefeller Center in midtown.

Josefina Silva de Cintrón was named to Astor's “panel of hostesses,” comprising the central committee for organized hospitality. Her organization “Unión de Mujeres Americanas” was listed in the *New York Times* as both a local and “foreign” organization, in an echo of the island's in-between legal status as “foreign in the domestic sense.”<sup>95</sup> The leadership's reed thin access to women's spaces of the Fair pushed UMA to seek other routes to connection. President Evangelina Antey de Vaughan invited the Fair's head of “Foreign Participation,” Edward Roosevelt (TR's son) to a tea celebrating “Interamerican solidarity and confraternity” in midtown.<sup>96</sup> These faint traces suggest that Puerto Rican women of New York actually accessed the Fair's workings through “foreign” rather than “American” domestic channel; the colonial was not acknowledged so the decolonial did not therefore exist.

Puerto Rican New Yorkers took their own approach to the Fair through ambassadorship and promotional work. Through a special edition of *Artes y Letras*, editors promoted NYC residents, especially its young people, as tour guides for the Fair and experts on New York, not to anglos but to Spanish speakers from around the world. AL reported on the fine showing of Puerto Ricans as knowledgeable consumers of culture rather than official representatives of the island of Puerto Rico. Purchasers of the guide were enjoined to take a private tour of the Fair, lead by “cultos jovenes,” underscoring their sophisticated knowledge of the Fair and all that the city could offer to visitors “de nuestra raza.” Articles proudly announced the “elegant

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<sup>94</sup> Meeting Minutes, 23-29 December 1937, National Advisory Committee on Women's Participation, New York World's Fair Papers.

<sup>95</sup> “Fair to Have Aid of 1,000 hostesses,” *New York Times*, 7 February 1939. “Pan American Women's Association,” (October-november 1938), p. 9, describes an opening reception attended by UMA and PAWA women at Rockefeller Center “El Comité Consultivo de Mujeres en la Feria Mundial de New York,” AL (June 1939), p. 15. James S. Carson to Miss N. B. Walsh 31 August 1939 and Walsh to Carson, 1 September 1939, New York World's Fair Papers.

<sup>96</sup> Z. Evangelina A. de Vaughan to Mr. Edward Roosevelt 25 April 1939; E.F. Roosevelt to Mrs. Z. Evangelina A. de Vaughan 27 April 1939, New York World's Fair Papers.

neoyorquiñas” and “caballeros” promenading at the Fair among the “gente bien.”<sup>97</sup> The status and cultural competence of young people was crucial in answering scientific racism in the interwar period, especially given the eugenic undertones of the Fair, replete with baby contests, beauty pageants, fashion shows, and “typical American” contests which excluded non-whites. *La Prensa* performed similar work in its pages, offering “Guia de Touristas” and daily reports (“Hoy en La Feria”) to Spanish language readers.<sup>98</sup> These efforts fell far short of the aspirations of local women who had proclaimed the Fair’s purpose as uniquely their own: “She is constructing the world of the future.”

## Conclusion

The Puerto Rican flag eventually flew in the “Court of states” at the New York World’s Fair but it was under *La Bandera de la Raza* that Puerto Rican women in New York accomplished their most distinctive work. Their efforts drew together several threads within a vibrant pan American feminism, including a non-racialist notion of “our America” and an encompassing sense of belonging to the “american people” (“el pueblo Americano”) engaged in an *americanidad* not containable to a single nation state.<sup>99</sup> The work of UMA shines light on the continuum of pan-Americanisms circulating in the interwar years, from the missionizing stance of the Pan American Union in Washington, D.C., to Latin American traditions that took strength from Bolivar and Martí—then critically reshaped in women’s, especially mothers’ interests by Latina feminists active in the international realm. To be sure, some of their strategies map on to related hispanic solidarity projects premised, as Kelvin Santiago Valles has argued, on “some form of European culture as the ultimate depository of modernity and progress.” But contributors to *Artes y Letras* also called out prejudice and racism and organized themselves in opposition to racial exclusivity, though it was almost impossible to escape racialization in 1930s New York. “It is exceedingly unjust, this racial preoccupation, as many

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<sup>97</sup> “Espectaculo,” AL (June 1939): 7.

<sup>98</sup> See “Nuestros Pabellones en la Expo,” AL (29 April 1939): 2; “Consules hispano-americanas asistiran hoy al ensayo de la Exposición Mundial, AL (30 April 1938): 5.

<sup>99</sup> “El Problema actual de La Nación,” AL (March 1937): 8

cases of modest and amiable virtues in persons of color and one notes frequently the absence of these in others of the whitest skin,” an exasperated Luz de Selenia wrote in 1938.<sup>100</sup>

Most of the contributors to *Artes y Letras*, notably the women associated with UMA and *feminismo*, spent the 1930s balanced on the edge of a contradiction: fostering solidarity via a *raza* that refused to discriminate. In so doing they tried to trace out decolonized space, neither given over to materialism and scientific racism typical of the U.S. between the wars nor exactly part of the statist and revolutionary political traditions of Latin America. M. Flores Carrera of Venezuela applauded *Artes y Letras* for enunciating this space, as “creating a publication that vibrates effectively the rhythm of Our America and that reflects clearly hispanic culture in anglo-saxon land.”<sup>101</sup> Women’s activism and gender issues were signal features of this work, from constructions of feminized subjectivity for Puerto Rico as a haven of peacefulness and culture in the hemisphere to to UMA’s embrace of “igualdad de derechos” for women of the Americas, broadly put. When the name of Puerto Rico was besmirched in the public sphere it was Josefina Silva de Cintrón and the leading women of U MA who stepped to the front in defense of the community. This civic sense of right invoked by UMA grounds Silva de Cintrón’s self-identification as “no partidarista, sino feminista” (not partisan, but feminist). Unfortunately, few outside the Spanish-speaking community gave her a respectful hearing. Their efforts suggest that the “intercultural” spaces devised and sustained by Puerto Rican women were as dynamic as they were fragile. Though clear-eyed and inclusive in institutionalizing their decolonial sensibility, these women were all too easily ignored. Yet by remembering them and engaging with their ideas, their work gives our own efforts in the present added energy, continuity, and wisdom.

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<sup>100</sup> Luz de Selenia, “Prejuicio Racial,” AL (August 1938): 10.

<sup>101</sup> “Cartas a Nuestra Directora,” AL (October 1939), p. 19.