



WARNING CONCERNING COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies, other reproductions, and reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be “used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research.” If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction in excess of “fair use,” that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

- Brooklyn Historical Society is not responsible for either determining the copyright status of the material or for securing copyright permission.
- Possession of a reproduction does not constitute permission to use it.
- Permission to use copies other than for private study, scholarship, or research requires the permission of both Brooklyn Historical Society and the copyright holder. For assistance, contact Brooklyn Historical Society at library@brooklynhistory.org.
- Read more about the Brooklyn Historical Society's Reproduction Rights Policy online: http://brooklynhistory.org/library/reproduction.html#Brooklyn_Historical_Society_Reproduction.

GUIDELINES FOR USE

This transcript is hereby made available for research purposes only. These oral history interviews are intimate conversations between two people, both of whom have generously agreed to share these recordings with the Brooklyn Historical Society archives and with researchers. Please listen in the spirit with which these were shared. Researchers will understand that:

This transcript is hereby made available for research purposes only.

Padilla de Armas, Encarnación, Oral history Interview conducted by John D. Vazquez, October 21, 1974, Puerto Rican Oral History Project records, 1976.001.048; Brooklyn Historical Society.

1. The Brooklyn Historical Society abides by the General Principles & Best Practices for Oral History as agreed upon by the Oral History Association (2009) and expects that use of this material will be done with respect for these professional ethics.
2. Every oral history relies on the memories, views and opinions of the narrator. Because of the personal nature of oral history, listeners may find some viewpoints or language of the recorded participants to be objectionable. In keeping with its mission of preservation and unfettered access whenever possible, BHS presents these views as recorded.
3. Transcripts created prior to 2008 serve as a guide to the interview and are not considered verbatim. The audio recording should be considered the primary source for each interview. It may contain natural false starts, verbal stumbles, misspeaks, repetitions that are common in conversation, and other passages and phrases omitted from the transcript. This decision was made because BHS gives primacy to the audible voice and also because some researchers do find useful information in these verbal patterns.
4. Unless these verbal patterns are germane to your scholarly work, when quoting from this material researchers are encouraged to correct the grammar and make other modifications maintaining the flavor of the narrator's speech while editing the material for the standards of print.
5. All citations must be attributed to the Brooklyn Historical Society:
 - Padilla de Armas, Encarnación, Oral history interview conducted by John D. Vazquez, October 21, 1974, Puerto Rican Oral History Project records, 1976.001.048; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Oral History Interview with Encarnación Padilla de Armas
Puerto Rican Oral History Project records, 1976.001.048
Interview conducted by John D. Vazquez on October 21, 1974

VAZQUEZ: How did you get here?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: I came here by boat. At that time we didn't have airplanes and I landed in the pier, I watched my way to [unintelligible].

VAZQUEZ: To where?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: [unintelligible] where I went to school.

VAZQUEZ: How old were you then?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: I was 16 -- 16, 17.

VAZQUEZ: You came to live in Brooklyn?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: No. I came over here and spent two weeks in Brooklyn and then I went to Newark and from Newark I went to Philadelphia, and from Philadelphia I went to Washington D.C. and from Washington I went to Holy Trinity where I finished my high school. Then when I finished my high school in 1929--'28, I came back to Brooklyn. And I stayed with the missionary servants around 60 Street in Brooklyn.

VAZQUEZ: 60th Street?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Around Bay Ridge area.

VAZQUEZ: Yes, the Bay Ridge area.

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Bay Ridge, and there I got my first job. I went to work in the library, in the Fort Hamilton Library, putting the books in the shelves [unintelligible] and I was about 18 or 19 years old.

VAZQUEZ: What was the community like then? What year was this, about 1929?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: '29.

VAZQUEZ: What was the community in Bay Ridge, where you lived, like?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: In Bay Ridge where I was living at that time 90% of the community in the circle in the area where I was living, there were Italians and Irish and there were very few Puerto Ricans.

VAZQUEZ: Did you know any Puerto Rican families in that area?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: I know three families.

VAZQUEZ: Which were they?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: They were Calderon, Melendez and another family by the name of Rodriguez. I was very young. I was not in both -- in the "Puerto Rican movement" yet, as you could call it.

VAZQUEZ: How many years did you live there?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: I lived over there one year then I moved to Manhattan and I lived in Manhattan because I start in Columbia University and it was the--The commuting was terrible from--The BMT was open the year that I was living there and you have to change trains to go to the -- to Manhattan in the IRT. And I moved to 107th and I worked and I studied over there. In 1930, I returned to Cuba. I say I returned to Cuba because I had been in Cuba many times. Although being a Puerto Rican. My father was an agriculture engineer and he worked in the plants and they used to call him the doctor of the plants because he watched the diseases of the plants; especially in the sugar cane, tobacco, and coffee. And after there was a big cyclone in Puerto Rico and after the cyclone he went to Cuba and -- I think the cyclone was in 1929 or 1928. I don't remember exactly because I was not in Puerto Rico, and he went to Cuba to work in the Department of Agriculture over there. And he didn't want me to continue my studies here. I went to Cuba and finished my studies there. [unintelligible] stay in Cuba.

VAZQUEZ: What year did you return to the United States?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: 1945.

VAZQUEZ: And where in the United States did you return to, in 1945?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: --to New York. I lived in New York for a year in Manhattan--It was at the end of the war--the Korean War. It was very hard to find a house and we couldn't find nothing. We lived in a furnished room and they used to charge us \$22 for the furnish room a week.

VAZQUEZ: A week? What kind of work were you doing then?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: In the beginning when I worked--I worked in everything I could find because it was very hard for me. Then I got married by the second time and I started working with the McCalls Corporation. I would do translations for them and worked with the Bristol Myer Company. My husband was also a literary man and we prepared translations for Spanish-America. He used to work for RCA, La Voz de America. Then he worked with La Prensa and El Diario and I, in 1946 (at the end of '46) I started working for the Liberal Party as a steady job. I always stayed there.

VAZQUEZ: What did you do for the Liberal Party?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: I was the coordinator of the Liberal Party for the Spanish-speaking.

VAZQUEZ: Were you involved in any other political groups at the time or just the Liberal Party?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Just the Liberal Party. I have always been an Independentista and I have always been in the movement of Independentistas. I was the instrument to get the Liberal Party because when they invited me to work over there, they had in the platform that Puerto Rico should be a state, you know. And I said I'll come and work for you as long as you have that in your constitution because I believe in freedom and every human has the right to decide what they want and the Americans are not

supposed to tell us what we should be. We should have the right to decide. We are a democratic country we should decide even by the vote of the people.

VAZQUEZ: Were there any other Puerto Ricans in the Liberal Party at that time?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Yes, you know after my work when--

VAZQUEZ: How long did you work with the Liberal Party?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Sixteen years.

VAZQUEZ: And who worked with you?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: We formed the Spanish division of the Liberal Party and we became very strongly--We were the first political party that ever nominated a councilman for the--a Spanish councilman for East Harlem.

VAZQUEZ: Who was that?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: It was Manuel Velazquez. And we tried to run Spanish candidates and we forced the Democrats and the Republican to nominate because as you know politically speaking--the Republicans nominate the first Puerto Rican to office--that was Garcia Rivera. And after that nobody nominate -- the other political parties didn't nominate Puerto Rican candidates and we were instruments to nominate Puerto Ricans. I had the philosophy that being the Liberal Party, the balance of power in that time of the political movement, I thought that the Puerto Ricans register or affiliate with the Liberal Party we could be the balance of power of the government. You have to remember that I was a politician all my life and I see the work as a politician not as a--and I believe in scientific politics and my numbers--and I was not a political de barrio. I was a political person that talked politics at a high level. And when I leave-- there was a time when we were 15 percent of the Liberal Party vote was Puerto Rican. When you realize that the Liberal Party was almost 80-98% Jewish--

VAZQUEZ: 98 percent Jewish -- This was in Brooklyn?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: No, in all over the State of New York.

VAZQUEZ: Did you work with any other groups before this?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: In politics? In New York? In United States?

VAZQUEZ: In politics, in Brooklyn, primarily?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: I have always been an enrolled Liberal since I came. I never enrolled with Democrat because I thought that the Democrats were using us and not giving us the right time, politically.

VAZQUEZ: I believe that you mentioned that Brooklyn doesn't have the oldest Puerto Rican population, that there was another Puerto Rican population that was around in Staten Island. [unintelligible]

PADILLA DE ARMAS: What do you mean by "oldest?"

VAZQUEZ: What I mean by "oldest" is the first Puerto Ricans that came to the United States that settled in the State of New York.

PADILLA DE ARMAS: The first Puerto Ricans that came to the United States settled in Staten Island.

VAZQUEZ: What year was this?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: It was at the finish of the 1700s, after the revolution.

VAZQUEZ: After the revolution? You mean we had some Puerto Ricans come from Puerto Rico?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: No, the first Puerto Rican that came--in the records, in the studies that I'm making, in the survey that I did in Annapolis--they came with the Dutch, because if you remember in historical the Dutch took possession of the island and there were Puerto Ricans that went with the Dutch to Europe and they came. You know, we are the people that have traveled most.

VAZQUEZ: We travel the most in the world today.

PADILLA DE ARMAS: We are like gypsies, we don't stay put. When I was working in the Liberal Party I always say this anecdote because it is a very interesting thing. We had

an office of service at that time and it doesn't exist, and the anti-poverty or nothing like that. We opened an office to serve the Puerto Ricans.

VAZQUEZ: What year was this?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: In '46, '48 to '50. There was no other political party that gave this service we give. We didn't ask the person where they were registered or with whom they registered, if they registered, because that was the conditions in which I started working for them. My interest was to serve the Puerto Ricans--and they used to come from the Island. In that time they used the political situation, or the economic situation, whatever you like to call it--It was very bad in Puerto Rico and they used to come very often. And every time that the industry was prosperous here and they need workers they would send for my cousin, my brother, my--you know how it was-- [laughter] and then come a fellow. Which I always remember him, his name was Luis Rios. Luis Rios came from Utuado and he was what we called a true jibaro, a very intelligent man. He had a natural intelligence and he was proud. And Luis came to my office because somebody who used to work with me in politics who was from Utuado and went back to Puerto Rico and talked to Luis about me--and said, "Don't you worry. When you go you go to the Hotel Claridge in 44th Street and Broadway, the 14 floor, and you ask for Mrs. Armas. Everybody knows there Mrs. Armas and she will help you." Before Luis there used to come the letters of uptown and downtown to know where it was the subway. And he goes there and he asked for work and I tried to give him work and when he worked in a factory of pocketbooks and there was a machine that put things together and one day Luis came and said that he doesn't want to work there anymore. I said, "But Luis, you don't know anything else." [unintelligible] He said, "I am going to register in school and I am going to learn English." I said o.k. So I took him and registered him to learn English. So when he mastered the English, he became enrolled in the Liberal Party. Then he wants a new environment and he

moved to New Jersey. One day, in Election Day, they called me and it was Luis. He said, "Mrs. Armas, they have put me in jail." And I said, "But what have you done Luis." He's a very decent guy, you know. And he said, "You know I came to vote because – and they arrest me." I said, "But you can't vote here in New York because you live in Jersey." So this is the sense of loyalty that he had and so the years pass by and I was working for the United--no for the Spanish-speaking bishops of Texas, making a study for them of the Puerto Ricans--and I was changing train in Nevada, in one little town of Nevada very late at night, and when I was in that platform waiting for my train I hear a fellow say, "Doña Arma"--because that was the way he always called me--"Doña Arma que hase usted por estos montes." I said, "What is strange is what you are doing in this part of the world." [laughter] He said, "I am on my way to Alaska."

VAZQUEZ: To Alaska?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: To Alaska, and he worked his way through to Alaska -- in Fairbanks, Alaska, I saw him then, years after.

VAZQUEZ: What was he doing there?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Working.

VAZQUEZ: Working?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: He wanted to see the world. He wants this. And this I always say it because he got the idea that he had to see the world. And he surely did.

VAZQUEZ: I have an uncle called Matias Vazquez that traveled every corner of Puerto Rico, then came to the United States. Came to live in Brooklyn with us, my uncle. He couldn't read and write too much, but he wrote decimas, and he would sell decimas for anything that happened--the correa coto--President Kennedy's death in English and in Spanish--which he learned from reading comic books, during the war.

[Interview interrupted.]

PADILLA DE ARMAS: There is a very great immigration of Puerto Ricans in Australia.

VAZQUEZ: They are going to Australia?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Yes, it is very interesting. I think, you know, that we are very interesting. I am very prejudice because I think we are the best people on earth.

VAZQUEZ: Well, I know that for a fa-- I agree with that.

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Because--honest. I am so proud of when people ask me, "Where you are from?" Some people think that I am very sophisticated and they have a very poor idea of what is a Puerto Rican. They say, "Oh but you don't look Puerto Rican" and I say, "Thanks God I am a Puerto Rican. And believe me if I was not a Puerto Rican, then I go back to heaven and say to God, "Listen I don't want to be born in any other place but in Puerto Rico."

VAZQUEZ: That is very well put.

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Because you know when they say, "From where are you?" I always say, "From Puerto Rico." In Spain they always call everybody that was born in America. Which is true--is America, all these countries--they call, "la senora Americana" and one day I had a very interesting experience; I had to visit the Bishop of Cuenca and I called his office and his secretary talked to me and said, "Tomorrow I will let you know exactly at what time he is going to see you." I was working for United States Catholic Conference--it was visiting bishops. So I called and the secretary of the Bishop was not there but the--I think the secretary of the secretary of the Bishop in Cuenca--In Spain they are called "the deano," the assistant of the bishop--and his secretary said, "No, Mr. Don Salvador didn't leave a message for you. He left a message for una senora Americana." And I said, "But I am not an American, so that message is not for me. So you tell him when he comes that Encarnacion Padilla de Armas lo llamo, and he should call me at the Hotel Costado where I am at such a date and time." So I just reached the hotel and I received a call, and he said, "Why I left a

message and you are supposed to be there at such and such a time.” I said, “Your secretary said that the only message he has was for an American lady and I am not an American. And that message was not for me. I don’t want to hear it. I am a Puerto Rican!” [laughter]

VAZQUEZ: Tell me Senora Armas, have you worked with any groups in Brooklyn?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Yes. The most interesting thing that I found in Brooklyn--Many, many years ago there was a woman that lived in Columbia Street. Columbia Street was full of Puerto Ricans--

VAZQUEZ: What year?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: In the '40s. And there was a woman that had a parade; Dennis.

VAZQUEZ: Antonia Dennis.

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Antonia Dennis. And her sister used to know my father's family from Arecibo and her sister was a little senile. She was burned in a fire over there.

VAZQUEZ: In Puerto Rico or here?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Here in Columbia Street. And she used to visit me and I loved her spice. You know, I collect spice. I loved the mustard and peppers and all those things, and she always used to bring me -- almost every week she used to come to my house with a little pot like this, not more than 2 inches, and she had the garlic grown, and she would bring me the matita de ajos.

VAZQUEZ: Garlic? Who was this? Antonia Dennis.

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Antonia Dennis's sister and she wrote a book for me. I must have it around the papers. She used to have a parade for the children and we had it in Atlantic Avenue between Henry and Hicks a club and I worked with the children and we had a Christmas party.

VAZQUEZ: What was the name of the club?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: It was the Liberal Party Club. And we had a party for the children, and we had it in the Red Hook Stadium--and it--we got, that year, about 2 thousand Puerto Rican children and we would bring them toys and all. We got the toys from the Novelty Toys Workers Union and Oscar Otero who is now the secretary of the union used to be a worker over there.

VAZQUEZ: Oscar Otero?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: He was working in Brooklyn and now he lives in music.

VAZQUEZ: Was he around for a long time?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Oh, yes. And do you know Mario Abreu?

VAZQUEZ: Mario Abreu?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Have you interviewed him?

VAZQUEZ: I have not interviewed him but I know him personally -- He has been in Union 65.

PADILLA DE ARMAS: In District 65--He is an old timer. There are many old timers here. In 1950 I made a study for one San Francisco--for one of the university and it was based on housing. At that time I was living on my own home, on Congress Street--

VAZQUEZ: Downtown Brooklyn, Congress Street.

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Yes, that is my house; 150 Congress Street.

VAZQUEZ: That is near the highway?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Yes, it is between Hicks and Henry.

VAZQUEZ: Near St. Peters Church.

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Right in front of the Presidio de Christiana--and they were 118 and I am 150. I lived there since 1950. I bought the house until now and I retired. My son bought this house and convinced me to move with him because he said the house was too big for me. He always says, "Why do you need such a big house?"

VAZQUEZ: So you rented the house over at Congress Street. That house is rented now?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Yes, but it is my house. I will not sell it until I die, I feel very attached to that neighborhood.

VAZQUEZ: The Red Hook section?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: No, it's not the Red Hook section—Cobble Hill.

VAZQUEZ: Cobble Hill?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Yes, the Red Hook section is farther down.

VAZQUEZ: Did you work in any community organizations while you were in that area there?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: I was a member of La Casa Ayuda--that still exists.

VAZQUEZ: And what is La Casa Ayuda?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: It's a program that they have in Columbia Street, and I also--they have still--when they established La Casa Ayuda.

VAZQUEZ: What does La Casa Ayuda do?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Try to help people. That is the only thing that you can do. Try to--

VAZQUEZ: And what do they do for people?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: They help with orientation--Spanish lessons. They have a program for the children, for the parents.

VAZQUEZ: How long has La Casa Ayuda been in existence?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: I couldn't tell you. I think over 10 years and before I used to be very active with the Colony House that was on Joralemon Street.

VAZQUEZ: You were active with the Colony House that was on Joralemon Street. They use to give dances for teenagers?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Yes and they had a Head Start program on--

VAZQUEZ: --Know they have it on Pacific or Dean.

PADILLA DE ARMAS: A-ha.

VAZQUEZ: It's that the same Colony House?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: The same Colony House.

VAZQUEZ: That is where all the teenagers from the community used to get together in Columbia.

PADILLA DE ARMAS: And in St. Peters Church they did a very good job for me.

VAZQUEZ: Did you ever meet Sister Carmelita?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Sister Carmelita was the Sister that met me when I came from Puerto Rico.

VAZQUEZ: The first time. Did you do any work with her at all?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Not in Brooklyn, not in that area--I worked in that area when Sister Lucita was there. I worked with the people that happened to be there; the rehabilitation program.

VAZQUEZ: Did you ever meet or know anything about Carlos Tapia?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: I knew very well the Hernandez.

VAZQUEZ: You knew the Hernandez brothers.

PADILLA DE ARMAS: The Hernandez brothers --

VAZQUEZ: Luis, Miguel--

PADILLA DE ARMAS: No I am referring to the funeral parlor.

VAZQUEZ: Oh the Hernandez Funeral Parlor, how long have they been around? Which Hernandez is this?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: The Hernandez was the first Puerto Rican funeral parlor that we had in Brooklyn. When Mr. Hernandez died, his daughter took over the business and then she sold it and went to live in Miami.

VAZQUEZ: Where were the Hernandez [unintelligible] first?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: It was--you know when they build the Municipal garage in Atlantic Avenue, between Court and Boreum Place. They bought the brownstone and they was next to what is the Atlantic A & P in the corner of Clinton and Atlantic, is the A & P. It used to have a drugstore then after the drugstore--now they sell chicken delight--this

was a very old drugstore. Then after the drugstore was the A & P and after the A & P was the first club that was created to teach Spanish and it was paid by the Spaniards from Spain and they had a teacher that taught Spanish to the descendants of the Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans.

VAZQUEZ: What was the name of it?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: I don't remember. But it existed there for years.

VAZQUEZ: Did you ever hear of the Voters Club? By the Hernandez brothers?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Oh that is in the other part. I am talking about this. I have been and I have talked to Luis--the Sures--

VAZQUEZ: Yes I know. He lives on 15 Bushwick Avenue.

PADILLA DE ARMAS: And they used to call it the Sures.

VAZQUEZ: He has a club on Tompkins Avenue.

PADILLA DE ARMAS: And Celia Vice was with them always.

VAZQUEZ: Celia comes from this neighborhood too,

PADILLA DE ARMAS: No, no she came from the Hernandez—where Luis Hernandez and all that.

VAZQUEZ: No but I mean she lived downtown when she was a young girl, and Betty Villa.

PADILLA DE ARMAS: And the Olmedo, I know him.

VAZQUEZ: Luis Olmedo.

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Luz Olmedo and his brother was a member of the Liberal Party [unintelligible]. I used to campaign all over. And Mickey Hernandez too.

VAZQUEZ: Who?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Mickey Hernandez, the lawyer. And Felix Coss--

VAZQUEZ: Yes, Felix works for me now. Well he was-- [Interview interrupted.] The first Puerto Rican man that they had in the area.

PADILLA DE ARMAS: And I was involved in the movement when they had those first 13 Spanish teachers. Called SAT, S-A-T, that was in the time of Wagner--O'Dwyer--was the first one that I assisted.

VAZQUEZ: O'Dwyer, yes he ran off with some money.

PADILLA DE ARMAS: O'Dwyer was the first mayor that formed the Puerto Rican Community Committee.

VAZQUEZ: He was the first mayor. What was the Puerto Rican Community Committee?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: There was supposed to meet with O'Dwyer.

[Interview interrupted.]

VAZQUEZ: You graduated originally from Ford—from Fordham?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: No--was honorarium. [inaudible] I was the first Puerto Rican woman--the first Spanish woman to receive an honorarium from Fordham University. I am not with the liberation movement because I was born free. And I always patronize women from every type of things that are initiated by women.

VAZQUEZ: Were you ever in any organization of liberalization of women?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: I formed the Agrupacion Femenina Hispanoamericana in 1950. Still exists.

VAZQUEZ: A donde es esa organizacion?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: We function from Manhattan. But we have it all over and we--it belongs to--for all nationalities of Spanish woman and the idea was to help the people to be the woman to take the place that they represent in society. We went to Washington. We went to Albany for progressive law for women.

VAZQUEZ: [unintelligible]

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Si. How did you guess? [Interview interrupted.] Y Las fiestas patronales de los pueblos--used to be the following you know?

VAZQUEZ: A greasy pole.

PADILLA DE ARMAS: And the Puerto Rican style to climb that greasy pole. That in New York: It's very hard to break through. And the others instead of pushing them to get to the top, they pull them down.

VAZQUEZ: You say that there is no unity among the Puerto Rican community?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: There is no unity in the Puerto Ricans. One is trying to destroy the other.

VAZQUEZ: What do you think is the future of the Puerto Rican?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: I don't know the future because I am not a gypsy. I know the past and I know the present. The future belongs to God.

VAZQUEZ: You have no predictions as far as--

PADILLA DE ARMAS: I think it is going to be very hard because we don't have leaders. We have-- Everybody is a "chief"--from the unions--and nobody wants to be an "Indian." And this is the greatest problem. I hate in politics every time that I see in a district a Puerto Rican and see another Puerto Rican running against him. When we know how to close our hands and how, for example when I saw Luis Roman running against--

VAZQUEZ: Luis Olmedo?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Luis Olmedo and Luis Roman said you know are--and I said, "Listen, Luis Roman, I love you very dearly and I have helped you in politics but this first, I am retired of politics and second I will never in my life will help one Puerto Rican against the other." Because I think it is a dirty trick and shouldn't be done. I think we have to stick together. We have to join hands. We have to push up together. That is--I don't say that we are perfect. We are very much imperfect but if we don't stick together we will be destroyed. They say divide and you will conquer. And I say stick together. But they don't do it. 90% you ask to a Puerto Rican, "How is so and so?" and he will say, "Oh, he is very good but--" and don't listen after that "but" because the only thing they do then is cut them into pieces. And we have to say--you know the Cubans have a very

good saying that it was said by Marti, our—"Nuestro vino es agrio pero es nuestro vino--tenemos que aprender a tomar." And no matter with all our faults we have to stick together and in sticking together we better ourselves. And we have to, you know, when we study the greatest problem of the island—the greatest problem of the political situation of the island. We have survived 78 years. You know, what is 78 years of an imposition of a different culture, and we have survived to save our language.

VAZQUEZ: It takes a certain amount of stubbornness--

PADILLA DE ARMAS: No, it takes a certain amount of love for the island. And you see we have contributed tremendously to the culture of this country and they never count the contribution that we have done. We have brought children to the streets, we have brought the love of the children that they didn't have it--the American families were accustomed to two child and if they see you with another child they thought they saw a monster--they have learned to shake hands and love, and say good morning and good night. You listen here in the building and you live with your neighbor across the hall, and you don't even know who he is.

VAZQUEZ: Isn't that a phenomenon of an urban community?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: No, it is not, is a phenomenon of this big culture, because the American culture they need to have a government nominated to be united. And they thought that the only thing was to speak English and everything that was not English they tried to destroy—and they destroyed the Italian culture and they destroyed the French culture. And they destroyed the German culture. And the only culture that they have not been able to destroy is the Spanish culture. Because you have to consider when you feel that we are so many Spanish-speaking in this country and we have been here most of our lives, because you don't have to think only of New York, you have to think that every state of the United States has Spanish-speaking people. That the state that has less has two thousand four hundred or something--

VAZQUEZ: What state is that?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Maine. Is the one that has lest. And we have to join and we have to join with the Spanish people that are in the United States because we have two common denominators that can help us to join. One, that we speak the language (matao) como dicen los Mejicanos but we speak Spanish, and we are Christians. And those two things can unite us. And I think when you touched the point of the religion; I am 100% with you. The problem is that they don't understand because the church in the United States is an Irish church is not a Catholic church.

VAZQUEZ: Is an Irish Catholic church--

PADILLA DE ARMAS: Is an Irish church, with all the prejudice and all their things. And we have to renovate the church and we are in the renovating movement of the church. And make the church what it should be. Because they have created white God when God wasn't, doesn't have color. Now the women are asking what sex the Holy Ghost has because it might be that he might not be a he, it is a she.

VAZQUEZ: Well that's--

PADILLA DE ARMAS: That's jokingly.

VAZQUEZ: But that is true by the way they have asked that.

PADILLA DE ARMAS: And I think for example I am very proud of the bishop of Brooklyn and I think it has been a blessing for us Spanish-speaking people to have a mass bishop because when they have never had the interest that they have. Brooklyn has 45% of the Catholics that are Spanish-speaking people. And we have 72 churches with Spanish services.

VAZQUEZ: In Brooklyn?

PADILLA DE ARMAS: In Brooklyn. [Interview interrupted.] We were talking in the Senior Citizen program of the city in which we need a program in Spanish for the senior

citizens. You cannot reach them if we have thousands of programs; federal, state, city. But they come out in English, so they don't know and they don't get advantage of that.