



THE DISCOVERY OF SPAIN IN NEW YORK, CIRCA 1930

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“GREAT NATIONS IN THE LITTLE”

“There is a Spanish-speaking colony of size in New York. It is like Spain itself, with rivalries of old provinces still lingering. It is like all the Spanish-speaking world in the two hemispheres, great nations lying here in the little, keeping separate at home, yet mingling in common interests. Here are not Chelsea, nor old Peter Stuyvesant’s farm, but Estremadura and Leon: half across the town, Argentina lies next to Castile and Uruguay is near by, with Cuba in the offing.” A vivid portrait of a vibrant and diverse community of some thirty thousand “Spanish” in New York City, “half of them from Spain,” emerges from this March, 23, 1924, *New York Times* article.¹

In that same year, Konrad Bercovici devoted to the Spanish section of Gotham an entire chapter of *Around the World in New York*, a book built on the conceit that one could trot around the globe simply by taking a stroll in the city. “I walked through the Rumanian section, a corner of the Austro-Polish section, the Austrian, touched on the German section, edged the French one, and then arrived into Spain. Which only means that I went from Fourth Street to Eighth Street on foot, then walked along Second Avenue to Twenty-third Street, and followed Twenty-third Street to Seventh Avenue, the edge of the Spanish district. It extends from there southward to Abingdon Square and encompasses all that lies between Seventh and Eighth Avenues.”²

Both of these texts use the term “Spanish” as a synonym for “Spanish-speaking,” although they go on to recognize the international diversity of New York’s “Spanish” residents—Spaniards, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Chileans, and others. The texts illustrate how, in New York in the 1920s, significant numbers of people from diverse regions of Spain lived alongside Spanish speakers from other parts of the world, and how those different subnational and national groups would occasionally emphasize their differences, and at times would make common cause. Bercovici refers mainly to the Spanish enclave in the West Village/Chelsea section of Manhattan, while the *Times* article mentions other sites scattered around the city: for example,

Photographer unknown. Galician immigrants, Lower East Side, ca. 1920. Courtesy Dolores Sánchez and Manuel Alonso.



The Spanish Influence Upon Winter Fashions
Anticipated by
The Wanamaker Store

For many weeks we had heard rumors in Paris that some of the couturiers had turned to Spain for new inspirations. It seemed logical, as frequently Parisian fashion artists have been guided by current events.

Last Spring when His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales—made a long sojourn in the French Basque country there was a renewed interest in that exquisite and colorful land—and when thinking of it one does not stop at the frontier for immediately there looms in the imagination the lovely Basque country of Spain.

Then this Summer that exquisite and fascinating Spanish artist, *Raquel Meller*, has had a great success in Paris. When seeing and hearing her one cannot refrain from thinking of colorful Spain.

So We Went to Spain

Our own Fashion representatives went to Spain—to the source of this new inspiration—to get original documents of art that could be reproduced so that Wanamaker Spanish-inspired fashions might be authentic, and EXCLUSIVE—and more beautiful.

The important galleries, museums and palaces of Spain were visited. Then we searched for embroideries, unusual colorings and even costumes of the glorious past. We hurried with them to Paris, where we found beautiful materials with which to interpret the fashions for which Spain had furnished the inspiration.

And then these treasure trunks of old romance were hurried to New York—and immediately upon their arrival several of our best tailors and dressmakers collaborated with us so that we might first present the

Spanish-inspired Fashions for the Winter Season

The collection includes dresses, wraps and suits for women; also frocks for Miss 14 to 20—also negligees.

P. S.—Recent cables from our Paris House confirmed the early rumors—some of the leading couturiers have sounded the Spanish note in their Winter fashions.

Grey Fashion Salons, Second Floor, Old Building

Advertisement for Wanamaker Department Store, *New York Times*, September 9, 1924.

near the East River piers at the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge (around Roosevelt, Cherry, and Catherine streets), and “here and there in unexpected corners of Manhattan and Brooklyn . . . where the pimento is a staple or where women’s hands deftly pat-pat-pat as they flip tortillas into their pancake shape.”³

Both texts make reference to, and in some ways enact, what Richard Kagan has called the “Spanish craze”: a remarkable appetite for all things Spanish in New York and, indeed, throughout the United States in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The craze ranged from the country’s novelists, like Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, to its painters, like Joaquín Sorolla or Ignacio Zuloaga, who had been featured in New York’s first blockbuster museum shows at Archer M. Huntington’s newly inaugurated Hispanic Society of America (1909); from its playwrights, like Jacinto Benavente, to its femmes fatales, like Raquel Meller, the sultry *diseuse* who took the city by storm in 1926. Bercovici explicitly relates this Spanish craze to the mindset of the city’s Spanish residents: “a few years ago, when all America seemed to be at the feet of Señor Blasco Ibáñez, there was a great revival of interest in everything Spanish in this city. . . . It made the Spaniards of New York raise their heads with pride. It redeemed them from the position to which they had sunk after the Spanish-American War.”⁴

Taken together, these two contemporaneous texts investigate a number of issues of great interest to anyone attempting to reconstruct the contours and textures of the history of Spaniards in New York. Both texts illustrate how, in the decades immediately following a war between Spain and the United States, Spain and things Spanish had somewhat surprisingly become all the rage among non-Hispanic New Yorkers. And the texts powerfully convey a simple but often overlooked fact: by the early 1920s, there was a sizable colony of Spaniards in New York. “Here are its own churches and organized life and its functions, and it makes its way and grows into an important part of the American commercial scheme,” the *New York Times* declared.⁵

The period between 1898 and 1936 constitutes the apex of Spanish New York, in great measure because of the unique confluence of three related currents: the presence in the city of a commercial, professional, and academic elite from Spain, well positioned to contribute to, and benefit from, both the burgeoning presence of Hispanics in the city and the ever-stronger links between the United States and Spanish-speaking America; the presence in the city—for the first and only time in its history—of a critical mass of working-class immigrants from Spain, many of whom had reimmigrated from Latin America to New York and would live and work in New York alongside other Latinos; and the keen appetite among certain sectors of the city’s non-Hispanic population for things Spanish or Hispanic.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

“Spaniards in the Americas.” For many people, the phrase might conjure up images of the deeds or misdeeds, the exploitations or exploits, of the conquistadores, explorers, and missionaries who, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, carried out the conquest and colonization of the New World on behalf of the Spanish crown. The phrase “Spaniards in the U.S.,” moreover, is likely to evoke the portion of that same imperial story that took place on territory that would eventually become part of the United States, in the West, Southwest, and Southeast of the country: the explorations, for example, of Ponce de León, Hernando de Soto, Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, or Pedro Menéndez Avilés. The first presence of Spaniards in the Americas—and in what today is the United States—is, of course, bound up with the establishment and early enterprises of the Spanish empire. And the notions and stereotypes that make up the U.S. imagination about Spaniards can, for the most part, be traced to the early imperial period. A *New York Times* reporter, commenting on the dance culture of the city’s Spaniards in the 1920s, could not help but quip: “Cortez learns to fox-trot.”⁶

But in many ways, it was actually the dissolution of the Spanish empire that most strongly influenced the scale of the presence of Spaniards in the Americas, South, Central, and North. Mass immigration of Spaniards to the Americas was largely a postimperial phenomenon, and did not really take off until the last decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth—the decades that straddle Spain’s definitive loss of empire in 1898.

Accordingly, for most of the nineteenth century, the Spanish presence in the U.S. was primarily limited to small groups of representatives of trading firms or shipping concerns, import-export merchants, or the occasional independent entrepreneur, almost always related to the circuits and commodities of the Latin American trade. The violence and political unrest generated by the Latin American wars of independence in the first decades of the nineteenth century would force some Spaniards to relocate from Latin America to different spots in the United States. It has been estimated, for example, that three quarters of Mexico’s Spaniards left that country between 1827 and 1834. Most of them went to New Orleans.

But it was the final unraveling of Spain’s stronghold over Cuba and Puerto Rico (1868–98), its last colonies in the Americas, that would generate the most significant surge in the influx of Spaniards (and, of course, Cubans and Puerto Ricans), who relocated from the Antilles to the U.S. Political strife and labor unrest in Cuba, for example, were among the things that led the Spaniard Vicente Martínez Ybor to move his cigar business from Cuba to Key West in 1869 and to establish in 1885, in partnership with another Spaniard, Ignacio Haya, a vast cigar-making center in Tampa, Florida. New York’s first Spanish mutual aid society, La Sociedad Benéfica Española, would be established in 1868 by the city’s small and well-to-do Spanish colony, initially

to aid the many Spaniards who were arriving to the city in flight from the violence of what would eventually become known as the Ten Years War in Cuba (1868–78).

Martínez Ybor was supportive of the Cuban independence movement, but during these final three decades of empire, most of the leaders of the New York Spanish colony would defend Spanish sovereignty in Cuba and Puerto Rico, just as they would attempt to promote a positive image of Spain and of Spain's history—and future—in the Americas. Such efforts can be seen clearly in the Iberian-language press of New York at the time, such as *El Cronista*, founded in 1866 and directed by the unabashed apologist for slavery Ferrer de Couto; *La Lluana de Nova York* (1874–81), a Catalán-language monthly edited by Arturo Cuyás, a fierce defender of Spanish rule in Cuba; and *Las Novedades* (founded in 1876), whose editor, Enrique Muñiz, a former collaborator of Ferrer de Couto, promoted a more liberal defense of Spain's rights over Cuba. Even an enlightened, republican Spanish New York paper like *El Progreso*, founded in 1884 by Ramón Vereá, defended the legitimacy of Spanish rule in Cuba, though, for pragmatic reasons, the paper advocated the sale of the island to the United States. It is interesting to note that all four of these pillars of New York's late nineteenth-century Spanish colony—Ferrer de Couto, Arturo Cuyás, Enrique Muñiz, and Ramón Vereá—had come to New York after stints in Cuba, as did the businessman and inventor José Francisco Navarro and the sugar baron Manuel Rionda, arguably the wealthiest members of the colony at the time.

The major cultural initiatives of New York's Spanish colony during this period—such as the attempts to celebrate the figure of Cervantes as the epitome of a unified Spanish/Hispanic civilization, or to secure for Spain a major role in the celebrations of the fourth centennial of Columbus's first voyage (1892)—can be seen in this same light. Ana Varela Lago has demonstrated how virtually all the attempts of New York's Spaniards at identity formation and image promotion were both spurred and stymied by the Cuban lobby, who, with support from the Hearst press, tapped into the long-standing imagery of the Black Legend of Spain as part of their campaign to gain popular support in the U.S. for their independence movement. More than any other issue, the “Cuban question” would strongly condition the projects and lives of most Spaniards living in the United States during the final third of the nineteenth century.⁷

Few Americans—and few Spaniards, for that matter—are aware of a jarring fact: during the half-century from 1880 to 1930, more Spaniards emigrated to the Americas than in the almost four hundred years between Columbus's first voyage in 1492 and 1880. Thus, one could add up all the Spaniards who had crossed the Atlantic during almost the entire period of the empire (1492–1880), and that total would not approach the number of Spaniards who left Iberian shores for the Americas in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first three of the twentieth.

For a complex set of reasons worthy of careful analysis, Spain's participation in

the vast demographic revolution that reshaped both Europe and the Americas in this period has gone largely unacknowledged and unexplored. From a conventional nationalist standpoint, this is a largely “unheroic” immigration, not easily assimilated into the predominant national mythologies of Spain or the Latin American republics. Even though most of the immigrants in this massive wave were bound for the Spanish-speaking Americas, a significant number of them would end up in the United States, often after stints in Argentina, Cuba, Mexico, or Puerto Rico. But in the context of the immigration history of the U.S., these Spaniards would constitute a drop in the proverbial bucket. They have become, in many ways, invisible immigrants.

Be that as it may, the presence of hundreds of thousands of mobile and enterprising Spanish immigrants in Latin America, and the strengthening of the commercial, cultural, and transportation links between that part of the world and New York, together contributed significantly to the considerable reimmigration of Spaniards to the U.S. via Latin America—particularly Cuba and Puerto Rico—that took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. New York's strong links to three key components of the Antillean economies—shipping, sugar, and tobacco—must certainly have been a factor in shaping this process of reimmigration.

Direct immigration from Spain to the United States also became part of the picture around the turn of the century. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, several waves of recruitment-driven mass immigration developed directly from Spain to the U.S. Thousands of Basques passed through New York en route to the western states where there was a need for shepherds; thousands of *asturianos* came through Gotham on their way to prearranged jobs at coal mines or zinc plants in West Virginia or Pennsylvania; and thousands of *santanderinos* stopped over in the city on their way to work the granite quarries and stone sheds of northern Vermont. This direct immigration probably reached its high point during World War I, when Spaniards could find employment in any number of heavy industries whose workforce had been decimated by the draft at the very time that increased industrial output was most needed. Places like Akron, Ohio; Lackawanna (Buffalo), New York; and Bridgeport, Connecticut, were not uncommon destinations for Spanish workers passing through immigration control at Ellis Island between 1915 and 1922.

A good number of these thousands of potential transients, like Valentín Aguirre, probably ended up staying in New York. Aguirre arrived in New York in 1895 like so many Basques, planning to look for work in the West. But he liked what he saw in the city and ended up staying, eventually marrying another Basque immigrant and establishing a boardinghouse, restaurant, and employment and travel agency, as well as a niche for himself and his family as the New York greeter and placer of Basque immigrants in the U.S. Undoubtedly thousands of other Spaniards came to the city with the intention of staying, attracted, in many cases, by informal



Photographer unknown. Consuelo Suárez and Carmen Alonso, Wallkill, New York, ca. 1935. Courtesy Dolores Sánchez and Manuel Alonso.

Suárez emigrated directly to New York from Cuadroveña, in eastern Asturias, in 1920. One of her first jobs was as a live-in maid/nanny. Alonso (the author's grandmother) emigrated to New York from Sardéu, in eastern Asturias, the same year, and also worked as a maid/nanny for a Mexican family in Brooklyn. The women met their Asturian-born husbands in New York; both men were cigar makers who came to New York via Havana and Tampa.



Photographer unknown. Las Musas cigar store, Flatbush Avenue, Brooklyn, ca. 1915. Courtesy Dolores Sánchez and Manuel Alonso.

The store was owned by the Suárez family, who had come to New York from Asturias, via Cuba.

regional networks and employment opportunities in the tobacco and sugar businesses, construction, the needle trades, shipping and dock work, or, particularly in the case of women, in private homes as domestics. By the 1930s, certain diffuse patterns were discernible in the New York employment choices of Spaniards from different regions of the peninsula: *asturianos* and *gallegos* were strongly represented in the cigar and sugar trade; *gallegos* and Basques in shipping, heavy construction, and the operation of high-pressure machinery (boilers, steam turbines, and so on); and *valencianos* in the silk business. There is also some evidence that the more well-to-do Spanish-speaking families in New York—both Spanish and Latin American—preferred Spanish-born domestic help.

Thus, throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, the beginning of the end of the Spanish empire in the Americas, coupled with the concomitant thickening and strengthening of the ties between the U.S. and the Spanish-speaking Americas, would account for the presence in New York of a small colony of Spaniards. The final phase of the end of the empire—the end of the end—and its immediate aftermath coincided with and fomented an unprecedented episode of mass migration of Spaniards to the Americas. The U.S. in general, and New York in particular, received a modest but significant number of the protagonists of this process, either as reimmigrants

from points in the Spanish-speaking Americas, or direct immigrants, often recruited for specific forms of labor. The *New York Times* article from 1924 took note of the existence of two of the many immigrant associations being established in the city in the early decades of the century as a result of this process: the Sociedad Vasco Americana and Sada y sus Contornos, a group from a town just outside La Coruña.

The end of empire had a number of additional effects that would strongly influence the history of Spanish Nueva York. The end of Spanish rule in what would be called the “American hemisphere” eliminated the idea that Spain was somehow a threat to hemispheric security. It could be argued that the removal of this “threat factor” helped clear the way for a renewed “Spanish craze” in the U.S. It is almost as if once Spain had been expelled as a political player from the hemisphere, and once the U.S. had begun to imagine itself as the seat of a new kind of benign and enlightened empire, certain Spanish cultural forms—which before may have seemed backward or decadent—could be reinscribed or reappropriated as exotic or picturesque or even stately. The stage was set for Bercovici and the *New York Times* reporter to discover the charm and dignity of Spain on the streets of New York.

WHAT FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA SAW IN NUEVA YORK

From June 1929 to March 1930, the great Spanish poet and playwright Federico García Lorca visited New York. The main tangible legacy of that trip is a book of poems, *Poeta en Nueva York*, whose very title seems to name an almost ontological out-of-placeness. For in the capitalist and utilitarian wasteland that was García Lorca’s Nueva York, there was seemingly no room for poets and poetry—or, for that matter, Spaniards.

García Lorca’s Nueva York presents a strange, desolate, almost postapocalyptic landscape, and the singular, lonely, and out-of-place *poeta* of the title comes across like an Old Testament denouncer of the violence and emptiness of the fallen city. In a troubled and troubling representation, García Lorca seems to find the city’s only sign of authentic life in its African American community. This was a community with which he, as a poet, identified, and which he aligned with a primitivist, junglelike nature of monkeys and serpents, zebras and crocodiles: a telluric community that somehow seemed to predate and to have survived the apocalypse of numbers and right angles that was modern New York.

To be fair, *Poeta en Nueva York* is a brilliant work of experimental poetry, not a sociological treatise; it would make little sense on ethnographic grounds to find fault with García Lorca’s choice of subject matter or his sources of inspiration. Scholars and biographers have attributed Lorca’s peculiar and dismal view of New York in these poems to a combination of factors that are personal (he came to New York in flight from a series of profound personal crises); historical (he witnessed the stock

market crash and the deprivations of the Great Depression); and poetic (in the wake of the extraordinary success of his neo-traditional *Romancero gitano*, he was searching for a nonromantic and stridently vanguardist poetic voice). Notably, however, what is arguably the best-known book written about New York by a Spaniard is probably the work that most completely effaces the city's Hispanic presence; ironically, it was a book written precisely at a time when others (like Bercevic and the unnamed chronicler of the *New York Times*) were struck by the booming presence of Spaniards and Spanish speakers in the city. The naive reader of *Poeta en Nueva York* might be forgiven for thinking that García Lorca had been the first and only Spaniard ever to set foot in the city, and that the poet's time in New York was spent in painful and alienated isolation.

Nonetheless, García Lorca's letters from New York, and the painstaking research of his main biographer, Ian Gibson, allow us to piece together quite another story.⁸ When Federico disembarked from the SS *Olympic* on June 25, 1929, a group of distinguished Spaniards was there on the docks to greet him. If we were to trace on an atlas the trajectories that brought these men to that pier, we would see a recognizable, if dense, web of imperial and postimperial sojourns, with an already thoroughly Spanish/Hispanic Nueva York as the principal knot.

Among the people on the docks awaiting García Lorca was León Felipe. Born in the province of Zamora, Spain, in 1884, this pharmacist, actor, fugitive, poet, and adventurer had traveled to Mexico in the summer of 1923 with the intention of making his way to New York. While in Mexico, he met Berta Gamboa, who had a job as a Spanish teacher in New York and was, at the time, vacationing in her native Mexico. León Felipe accompanied Gamboa back to New York in the fall of 1923, and soon after, the couple married in Brooklyn. Felipe taught at New York's Berlitz School until he met Professor Federico de Onís of Columbia University, who convinced him to enroll in graduate school. After completing his studies at Columbia, he went on to teach at Cornell and to translate Walt Whitman and Waldo Frank.

Also on the White Star Line piers to greet García Lorca was Angel del Río. Born in Soria in 1900, del Río became a professor of Spanish at Columbia in 1926, after a stint at the University of Puerto Rico, where he had met and married the young Puerto Rican writer, critic, and Vassar alumna Amelia Agostini. Del Río, a distinguished scholar, later became a respected interpreter of the Hispanic world for an "Anglo" audience, and vice versa. Also part of the welcoming committee was an old friend of García Lorca's: the printer, graphic designer, and painter Gabriel García Maroto, who was born in Ciudad Real in 1889 and had moved to Mexico in 1927 with his Mexican wife, Amelia Narezo. Before coming to New York in 1929, García Maroto was an early critic of Diego Rivera and Mexican muralism. In a letter to his family, García Lorca would describe the effusive surprise encounter of these two old friends: "You'll never guess who was there! Maroto, who wildly hugged and even kissed me! He's just

arrived from México and is making good money as a painter and graphic designer."⁹

José Camprubí, the owner of *La Prensa*, New York's most important Spanish-language daily, also was there on the docks. Camprubí was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico, in 1879, the son of a Spanish engineer who at the time was working for the Spanish colonial government, supervising the construction of the Ponce-Coamo road. Camprubí was educated at the Jesuit School in Barcelona, the Hotchkiss School in Connecticut, and Harvard University, where he studied civil engineering. After a series of positions as an engineer in the United States and abroad, Camprubí purchased *La Prensa*, a struggling weekly publication, in 1918. He converted the newspaper to a daily, and by 1929, when García Lorca arrived in New York, the paper was thriving, having become the newspaper of record for the city's burgeoning Spanish-speaking community.

The head of this unofficial welcoming committee was Federico de Onís. A descendant of Luis de Onís, the Spanish foreign minister who oversaw the sale of Florida to the United States, Federico was born near Salamanca in 1885. A disciple of Miguel de Unamuno, de Onís had been tapped in 1916 by Columbia University president Nicholas Murray Butler (on the advice of Unamuno via Archer Huntington) to head up Columbia's newly formed Department of Hispanic Studies and the university's Spanish Institute in the United States. With Europe occupied in World War I, and with the Panama Canal just recently opened for business, the old pan-American dream of North-South hemispheric unity had reached a new pitch of intensity in the U.S. The result was an unprecedented boom in interest in the Spanish language and in the Spanish-speaking world. High school and college enrollments in Spanish classes skyrocketed. Although the engine of this boom was the prospect of hemispheric unity, for a complex set of reasons, Spain and Spanish literature and culture came to occupy a remarkably prominent place in the high school and college Spanish curricula.¹⁰ Spain had produced a young generation of brilliant linguists, historians, and philologists who were well positioned to lead the creation and expansion of Spanish departments in the United States. By 1929, Federico de Onís was at the helm of the flagship enterprise of American Hispanism at Columbia University.

There were three Spanish men of culture—Felipe, del Río, and García Maroto—who had traveled to Spanish America, married Spanish-American women, and converged on Nueva York in large part because of the opportunities generated by the remarkable Hispanic cultural effervescence that was brewing in that city. There was also the Puerto Rican-born son of a Spanish colonial official who now for over a decade had owned the most important daily newspaper of the city's Spanish-speaking community, and the descendant of a Spanish imperial official who was heading up the establishment and professionalization of Hispanic studies in New York and, in many ways, throughout the United States. As teachers, translators, publishers, and/or interpreters of cultural difference, and as Spaniards with extensive experience in

Spanish America, these men were perfectly positioned to operate as intermediaries in the Spanish/Hispanic boom in the city.

In many ways, and pace the *vox clamantis in deserto* pose of *Poeta en Nueva York*, Federico García Lorca and the distinguished members of his dockside entourage were both promoters and beneficiaries of the intense Hispanophile climate of 1920s New York. During his relatively short stay in the city, García Lorca attended concerts by guitarist Andrés Segovia and pianist José Iturbe; dance performances by La Argentina and Argentinita; and lectures by Dámaso Alonso and Ignacio Sánchez Mejías. Lorca himself, a charismatic and talented musician, gave impromptu piano and guitar performances of traditional Spanish music at many parties in the city, to great acclaim, according to his own immodest reports to his family.

In New York, moreover, García Lorca seemed constantly to “run into” or re-encounter friends he had made in Spain, like the young British stockbroker Colin Hackforth-Jones and the journalist and Hispanist Mildred Adams, both of whom García Lorca had befriended in Granada some years before. Adams and her family became assiduous companions of and hosts to García Lorca in New York; Mildred even threw a party to introduce the Spanish visitor to her American friends, where, he reported to his parents, “a rather good pianist played music by Albéniz and Falla, and the girls wore *mantones de Manila* [the bright shawls worn by Andalusian women, particularly flamenco dancers]. In the dining room—Oh, divine surprise!—there were bottles of sherry and Fundador brandy.”¹¹ (García Lorca was no fan of Prohibition.) Another of García Lorca’s closest New York friends was Henry Herschel Brickell, a literary critic and publisher who also had been to Granada where, according to Ian Gibson, he practically stalked the great composer Manuel de Falla, hoping to catch a glimpse of the maestro. Brickell and his wife threw a party for García Lorca on his Saint’s Day (July 18) and also organized a Spanish-themed Christmas Eve party in his honor. Before heading off to midnight mass, the guests made wishes while lighting candles set out on a kind of altar made of Talavera tiles. Many of García Lorca’s “New York” friends had made the Washington Irving pilgrimage to Granada; they collected Manila shawls and Talavera ceramics; in the midst of Prohibition, they had stashes of Spanish sherry and brandy; and they invited or employed musicians to play Spanish contemporary classical music at their soirees. These were not random run-of-the-mill New Yorkers; they seem more like the veritable priests and priestesses of New York’s Spanish craze.

In an oscillation somewhat emblematic of García Lorca’s entire stay in New York, on both Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Eve of 1929, the poet ate among his Spanish hosts at Columbia, and then rushed off to dessert and postprandial festivities with his well-to-do American friends the Brickells. Of these American friends García Lorca wrote to his parents: “they are very wealthy and influential, and in their house

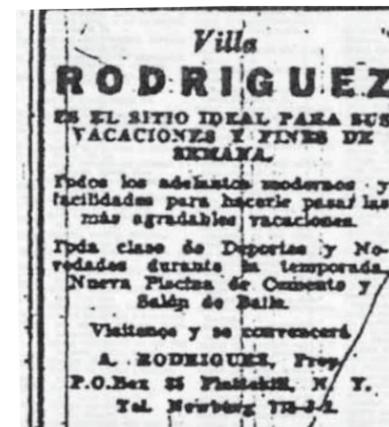
I’ve met people with high-profiles in art and literature and finance. . . . In their house I had an even better time [than with the Spaniards], because it’s a different society and I feel like a foreigner.”¹² García Lorca was undoubtedly a prodigiously talented, charming, and charismatic man, but surely his entrée into the drawing rooms of New York also had something to do with the Spanish craze that gripped the city and generated unprecedented interest in, and curiosity about, Spain and Spaniards. Be that as it may, the fact that in New York this Spanish poet and playwright could, in the space of a few hours, enjoy both domestic intimacy among a sizable group of compatriots and the adoring attention of Hispanophile New Yorkers who must have seen him as something of an exotic native informant tells us a great deal not only about the makeup of García Lorca but also about the fabric of the city in the late 1920s.

Even during his two summer escapes from the city into the American “wilderness,” García Lorca never fully left the orbit of Hispanophilia. He traveled to Eden Mills, Vermont, to visit a young friend he had met previously in Madrid’s Residencia de Estudiantes: the budding writer, translator, and Spanish teacher Philip Cummings. In Vermont, their primary activity seems to have been the English translation of García Lorca’s first book of poems. From there, García Lorca traveled to the Catskills in the mid-Hudson Valley, where he visited Angel del Río and Amelia Agostini in their rented cabin in Bushnellville, and then Federico de Onís in his house near Newburgh, on the Hudson. In Newburgh, García Lorca helped de Onís with the preparation of his vast *Antología de la poesía española e hispanoamericana (1883–1932)*, published in 1934. One of the goals of García Lorca’s parentally sponsored trip to New York was to learn English, and in his letters he frequently updated his parents with exaggerated reports of his progress in that language. However, judging from García Lorca’s itinerary, even in 1929, as now, it was quite possible to live in Spanish, from Vermont to New York.

WHAT GARCÍA LORCA COULD HAVE SEEN IN NEW YORK

Lorca’s voice would not have been the only Spanish-speaking one echoing through the meadows and apple orchards of the mid-Hudson Valley in the summer of 1929. The mid-to late 1920s saw the establishment in that precise area of a number of Spanish-owned farms and rural boardinghouses catering to the growing Spanish and Spanish-speaking population seeking fresh food and fresh air during the stifling summer months. The first of these villas had been established by *tampeños*: *asturianos* who had become cigar makers in Cuba and/or Tampa who then reemigrated to New York. While several of these original “Spanish villas” were just a few miles from where García Lorca visited Onís, no mention of them is made in García Lorca’s extant correspondence.

When one considers the remarkable Spanish/Hispanic boom in New York reaching its apex right around the time of García Lorca’s visit, it is interesting to consider



Advertisement for Villa Rodriguez, ca. 1929.

Villa Rodriguez was a mid-Hudson Valley “resort” for Spaniards established in the late 1920s by the Asturian Alejandro Rodriguez.

what the writer from Granada did *not* say in his poems or his letters to his friends and family. For example, his letters home contained several reflections on the various religious services he attended while in New York (Jewish, Russian Orthodox, African American Protestant, etc.), and almost every one of these reflections concluded with a reaffirmation of the superiority of Spanish Catholicism. He explicitly told his family that “the religious question” was very important in New York, and he went out of his way to describe scenes of Catholic New York. And yet Spain’s role in building the city’s first Catholic church, St. Peter’s, on Barclay Street in 1785, went unmentioned, as did the existence of two relatively new churches built specifically to serve the city’s growing Spanish/Hispanic colony: Our Lady of Guadalupe on West Fourteenth Street (1902) and Our Lady of Hope, built on property adjacent to Huntington’s Hispanic Society of America at Audubon Terrace (1912). There was one interesting and rare case in which the poet perceived a connection between Iberian history and current-day New York: in his account to his family of his visit to the Sephardic congregation at Shearith Israel, he remarked how some of the names and faces in the temple reminded him of friends and neighbors back in Granada, concluding, “In Granada, we are almost all Jews.”¹³

García Lorca’s silence on certain issues is intriguing. In his book *La ciudad automática*, Julio Camba, a Spanish journalist and humorist who visited the city in 1929, playfully remarked: “From 110th St. to 116th St., between Fifth and Eighth Avenues, you could say that we are in Spain. A somewhat black Spain for sure, but a true Spain nonetheless, based on language, character, and people’s general attitude toward life. . . . It is a poor neighborhood, inhabited mainly by people of color.”¹⁴ Given García Lorca’s avowed interest in Harlem, and in the Afro-Antillean culture he celebrated during his trip to Cuba, the absence of references to the city’s burgeoning Puerto Rican community, particularly in East Harlem, is another somewhat puzzling omission.

The years leading up to García Lorca’s stay in New York coincided with a number of major events in the city’s growing Spanish working-class immigrant community. In 1922, the Basque immigrants Valentín Aguirre and Benita Orbe opened Jai Alai, a restaurant adjacent to their hotel, the Santa Lucía, which had been in operation since 1910 on the corner of Bank and Bleecker streets in the West Village. In 1924, a Cuban impresario inaugurated a Spanish-language *varietés* theater in East Harlem called the Teatro San José (later known as the Teatro Latino), of which Julio Camba would write in 1931: “In the San José Theater, the audience laughs not only at the Galicians, Catalanes and *baturros* with their respective accents. Next to them on the stage are the *jibaro* from the Antilles, the *pelado* from Mexico, and the *atorrante* from Argentina.”¹⁵ In 1925, Benito Collada, a native of Asturias, Spain, opened El Chico, a major Spanish restaurant and nightclub on Sheridan Square in Greenwich Village. In 1927, a Galician immigrant opened the restaurant El Faro on Horatio

Street, a business still in operation in 2010. In 1928, the Centro Vasco Americano inaugurated their own building at 48 Cherry Street by the East River docks, in the heart of the city’s oldest Spanish neighborhood. In 1929, a group of Spanish immigrants, probably anarchists, bought a seventeen-acre plot of land on the south shore of Staten Island and created the Spanish Naturopath Society—a cooperative bungalow community aimed at providing its members a place to enjoy fresh air and relaxation during the stifling New York summer months. And in that same year, Carmen Barañano and Jesús Moneo inaugurated a Spanish grocery store on Fourteenth Street, Casa Moneo, that would be a fixture of the city’s *colonia* well into the 1980s.

Although none of this effervescence seems to have been recorded or mentioned by García Lorca, in one letter to his family, he does write of a meal taken at a Spanish restaurant that may well have been El Faro: “Yesterday I ate with two famous Spanish women, La Argentina [Antonia Mercé Luque], and Lucrecia Bori [Lucrecia Borja González de Rianebo] They are both delightful. They invited me and it was just the three of us eating at a small restaurant near the Hudson River. We drank Anís del Mono, and they were enthusiastic and pleased; but I noticed that we were being served a counterfeit liqueur —‘Anís del Topo’. When I told my hosts at the end of the meal, they made such a scene, I was afraid they were going to assault the owner, who was a very funny and sly gallego.”¹⁶ This minor anecdote involving an immigrant from Galicia serving a doubly illicit anise (both counterfeit and bootleg) to these three authentic performers of Spanishness offers a rare glimpse of García Lorca’s contact with working-class Spanish immigrants in New York.

One can only speculate why García Lorca seems not to have taken much notice of the bubbling world of Spanish working-class immigrants in New York or of the remarkable pan-Hispanic cultural effervescence that was brewing on the streets and in the barrios of the city in the late 1920s. Perhaps, since he traveled in different circles, he had little occasion to come across these people and phenomena; perhaps he did not find what he saw to be all that noteworthy. Or perhaps, like many figures of the cultural elite of his generation, Federico García Lorca was not disposed to perceive the interest, value, and “authenticity” of cultural forms produced by and for working-class immigrants in what he saw as a strange and rootless city. Then again, perhaps this is far too much significance to be distilled from a single bottle of counterfeit and bootleg anise.

IMMIGRANTS TO EXILES

The 1920s and early 1930s constituted the apex of Spanish New York. Although the anti-immigration legislation of 1922 had virtually slammed the door shut on the legal immigration of Spaniards to the U.S., by then there was already a critical mass of Spaniards living in the city. The tribulations of the Depression in some ways worked

to strengthen the community of immigrants in New York, who were forced to organize a remarkably dense web of associations in order to survive. Many enterprising Spanish-born immigrants—most of whom had spent time in Cuba or Puerto Rico—would establish businesses that would thrive, thanks in large measure to the patronage of the even larger and quickly expanding Puerto Rican population of the city. Such is the case, for example, with Prudencio Unanue's Goya foods, established in Lower Manhattan in 1936; or Bustelo's Coffee Roasting Company, founded in East Harlem around 1930; or Joseph Victori's Spanish food and wine import company, with headquarters on Pearl Street. All three of these firms still existed in 2010.

If during García Lorca's time in New York it seemed like Spain's cultural elites in the city could have little to do with the Spanish immigrant community, all of that would change dramatically on July 18, 1936. The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War would bring to the fore the vast network of working-class organizations that had been woven during the Depression. These organizations almost unanimously supported the republic, and they banded together to form a national umbrella organization, the *Sociedades Hispanas Confederadas*, to coordinate fundraising efforts on behalf of the republic. For the duration of the war, hardly a week would go by without several major dances, rallies, performances, or soccer matches being organized as fundraisers by these *sociedades*.

As in Spain, the Spanish intelligentsia in New York for the most part supported the legally elected government of the Second Republic and opposed the coup led by General Francisco Franco. The group of Spaniards that greeted García Lorca in 1929 is representative in this regard: León Felipe and Gabriel García Maroto returned to Spain during the war to help mobilize artists and writers on behalf of the republic; de Onís and del Río also cautiously supported the republic; and Camprubi's *La Prensa*, though circumspect, also sided with the Loyalists. Fernando de los Ríos, who had made the crossing to New York with García Lorca on the SS *Olympic* in June 1929, was appointed the republic's ambassador to the United States, and would routinely call upon and meet with the city's Spanish immigrant *colonia* to garner support for the beleaguered Spanish government. The liberal intellectual elite and the working-class immigrant *colonia* would, for the most part, make common cause during the war.

A number of New York Spaniards, either because they openly supported Franco or were considered insufficiently supportive of the pro-republican effort, were labeled Fascists and subjected to picketing and boycotts throughout the war. These were mostly members of the *colonia's* business elite, including, for example, the food and wine entrepreneurs Moneo, Victori, and Bustelo as well as Benito Collada, the owner of El Chico, the nightclub in Greenwich Village. Two distinguished Spanish musicians who were in New York at the time, Andrés Segovia and José Iturbe, were also blacklisted by the city's Loyalists, as was Dr. Ramón Castroviejo, the eminent

CLUB OBRERO ESPAÑOL, New York City.	CLUB ESPAÑOL, Barre, Pa.	UNION DE COCINEROS, L.A., N.Y.C.	TRABAJADORES (SECCION HISPANA), New York City.
ATENEU HISPANO, Brooklyn, N.Y.	FRENTE POPULAR DE FAIRMONT, Carolina, W. Va.	UNION DE TABAQUEROS 272, N.Y.C.	JUVENTUDES ESPAÑOLAS, Brooklyn, N.Y.
COMITE SOLIDARIDAD, New York City.	ACCION DEMOCRATICA ESPAÑOLA, Pittsburgh, Cal.	COMITE DE MONTPELLIER, Montpelier, Vt.	GRUPO LEONER DE AYUDA A ESPAÑA, New York City.
BURO HISPANO DEL PARTIDO COMUNISTA, New York City.	THE NEW ENGLAND COMMITTEE FOR DEFENSE OF SPANISH DEMOCRACY, Boston, Mass.	SPANISH AMERICAN CIT. CLUB, Bayonne, N. J.	COM. FEMENINO, Schenectady, N. Y.
COMITE ANTIFASCISTA ESPAÑOL, Elizabeth, N. Y.	GRUPO ESPAÑOL DE ISLAND PARK, N.Y.	COMITE FRENTE POPULAR, Waltham, W. Va.	FRENTE POPULAR ANTIFASCISTA "GALLEGO", New York City.
CIRCULO DE TRABAJADORES, Brooklyn, N. Y.	GRUPO ANTIFASCISTA DE Nemasola, Pa.	MUTUALISTA HISPANO AMERICANA, Brooklyn, N. Y.	AGRUPOACION IBERIA, Tarrytown, New York
CENTRO ANDALUZ, Brooklyn, N. Y.	COMITE DEMOCRATICO HISPANO AMERICANO, Galveston, Texas.	GRUPO ARTISTICO "TEATRO DEL FUERLO", Brooklyn, N. Y.	AGRUPOACION "TIERRA", N. Y. City.
GRUPO DE HELEN, Helen, W. Va.	LOS CAMARADAS DE LA IDRIA, Idria, Cal.	FRENTE POPULAR ESPAÑOL, Winterset, Mo.	AGRUPOACION SOCIAL, 23 de JULIO, New York City
COMITE PRO DEMOCRACIA, Niagara Falls, N. Y.	COMITE PRO AYUDA A ESPAÑA, Wharton, W. Va.	PLUS ULTRA DEMOCRATIC CLUB, Bayonne, N. J.	ATENEU DE EDUCACION SOCIAL, Newark, N. J.
GRUPO AMIGOS DE AZARA, N. Y.	GRUPO ESPAÑOL DE ANSONIA Y SHELTON, Ansonia, Conn.	CENTRO DE ESTUDIOS SOCIALES, White Plains, N. Y.	ACCION LIBERTARIA, Jersey City, New Jersey
COMITE ESPAÑOL DE AYUDA A ESPAÑA, East St. Louis, Ill.	COMITE PRO AYUDA A ESPAÑA, Bartles, W. Va.	COMITE S. H. C., Amsterdam, N. Y.	GRUPO "ATENEU DE CUENTAL", Newark, N. J.
GRUPO ANTIFASCISTA DEL BRONX, New York City.	ALLANEA OBRERA HISPANOAMERICANA, New York City.	COMITE DE DAMAS DE A. O. E., New York City.	CULTURA PROLETARIA, N. Y. City.
COMITE A. F. DE WESTCHESTER, White Plains, N. Y.	CLUB CUBANO JULIO A. MELLA, New York City.	SPANISH AM. CIT. CLUB "LADIES", Bayonne, N. Y.	AGRUPOACION LIBERTARIA, Yonkers, N. Y.
FRENTE POPULAR ESPAÑOL DE QUEENS, Astoria, L. I.	ALLANEA OBRERA ESPAÑOLA, New York City.	AMIGOS DE LA DEMOCRACIA ESPAÑOLA DE NEW YORK	GRUPO ACRACIA, Newark, N. J.
COMITE FEMENINO DE W. P., White Plains, N. Y.	COMITE FEMENINO DEL C. O. E., New York City.	CENTRO BALKAR, New York City	CLUB BENEFICO HISPANO, Bannock, N. Y.
ATENEU HISPANO AMERICANO, White Plains, N. Y.	COMITE ANTIFASCISTA ESPAÑOL, Canton, Ohio.	LOS INCANSABLES, New York	COLONIA LATINA DE WILLIAMS-PORT, Brooklyn, N. Y.
GRUPO ANTIFASCISTA, Glen Cove, N. Y.	COMITE CATALA ANTIFASCISTA, New York City.	AGRUPOACION DEMOCRATICA RUJOS DE GALICIA, Habana, Cuba.	SPANISH AMERICAN CIT. CLUB, Yonkers, N. Y.
AGRUPOACION OBRERA HISPANA DEL BRONX, New York City.	COMITE DE AYUDA A LOS NIÑOS DEL FUERLO ESPAÑOL, Tampico, Tamaulipas, México.	LA NACIONAL, Brooklyn, N. Y.	LOS PROGRESISTAS, N. Y. City.
SOCIEDAD NATURISTA HISPANA, New York City.	UNTED COMMITTEE TO AID THE SPANISH PEOPLE, Paterson, N. J.	COMITE DEL CENTRO CULTURAL ESPAÑOL, New Britain, Conn.	FRENTE POPULAR ANTIFASCISTA, Pittsburgh, Pa.
COMITE DE AYUDA A ESPAÑA, East N. J.	CENTRO ASTURIANO, N. Y. City.	VANGUARDIA PUERTORRIQUERA, Brooklyn, N. Y.	GRUPO SALMERON, N. Y. City.
CIRCULO VALENCIANO, N. Y. City.	COMITE DE AYUDA A ESPAÑA, Danbury, Conn.	GRUPO DE "LA ASTORLOID", New York City.	LA FRATERNAL, Philadelphia, Pa.
CENTRO MONTANES, New York City.	CLUB PORTUGUES "NOVA AURORA", Mount Vernon, N. Y.	COMITE PRO VICTIMAS, Brixy, N. Y.	COM. DE DAMAS, Perth Amboy, N. J.
FRENTE POPULAR ESPAÑOL, Philadelphia, Pa.	COMITE ESPAÑOL, Staten, Island, N. Y.	AGRUPOACION DE ESPAÑOLAS, Long Beach	COM. FEMENINO East St. Louis, Ill.
COMITE PRO DEMOCRACIA ESPAÑOLA, New York City.	COM. PORTUGUES PRO DEM. ESP., Rumfordville, Mass.	GRUPO ANTORCHA, Brooklyn, N. Y.	COMITE ESPAÑOL DE SOCORRO, San Louis, Mo.
COMITE PRO CRUZ ROJA ESPAÑOLA, New York City.	GRUPO VASCO, New York City	FRENTE POPULAR, Brooklyn, N. Y.	LA FRATERNAL SECCION ANTIFASCISTA "LISTER", Philadelphia, Pa.
CLUB COHURA, New York City.	GRUPO ESPAÑOL, Port Arthur, Tx.	CLUB "LA FISIONARIA", N. Y. City	ACCION DEMOCRATA ESPAÑOLA, Cicero, Cal.
COMITE ANTIFASCISTA FEMENINO, Brooklyn, N. Y.	CENTRO GALICIA, New York City.	SOCORROS MUTUOS "MUNDOS Y SUS CONTORNOS", Newark, N. J.	GRUPO ARTISTICO "MIJAJA", N.Y.C.
MUTUALISTA OBRERA MEXICANA, New York City.	COMITE ANTIFASCISTA, N. Y. C.	COMITE PRO DEMOCRACIA, Jersey City, N. J.	CALPE AMERICAN RECREATION CLUB, New York City.
SOCIEDAD ESPAÑOLA DE BENEFICENCIA, New York City.	SPANISH AMERICAN WOMEN'S CLUB, Niagara Falls, N. Y.	COMITE S. H. C. Schenectady, N. Y.	CLUB ESPAÑOL DEL PORVEIR, Brooklyn, N. Y.
AGRUPOACION SOCIALISTA ESPAÑOLA, New York City.		SEGURA F. C., Brooklyn, N. Y.	COMITE FEMENINO DE A. O. E., East St. Louis, Ill.
A. JUVENTUDES ESPAÑOLAS UNIFICADAS DE E. S., New York City.		SOCIEDAD DE AYUDA A ESPAÑA, Speller, W. Va.	EQUIPMENT COMMITTEE, New York City.
ESPAÑOL UNIDOS, Newark, N. J.		ORDEN INTERNACIONAL DE COMITE ANTIFASCISTA, New Kensington, Pa.	COM. FRENTE POPULAR Rome, N. Y.
COMITE DE LOGAN, Halden, W. Va.		ORDEN INTERNACIONAL DE	
GRUPO ESPAÑOL, Baynal, W. Va.			
COMITE FEMENINO, Baynal, W. Va.			

List of Spanish and Hispanic organizations in the United States, published ca. 1936 by the *Sociedades Hispanas Confederadas*.

The *Sociedades Hispanas Confederadas*, an umbrella organization whose goal was to coordinate pro-republican activities in the Spanish *colonias* of the United States, published this list during the Spanish Civil War. It provides a sense of the *colonias'* diversity and geographical distribution, and the remarkably large number of associations in the New York area.

ophthalmologist and eye surgeon based at Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital. The stakes of the taut ideological climate of the war years can be gauged by a curious event reported in the *New York Times* and two Spanish-language dailies, *La Prensa* and *La Voz*. When, in the summer of 1938, a Spanish-language cinema in East Harlem announced the premiere of *Morena Clara*, a film featuring the Spanish actress Imperio Argentina, pro-Loyalist New Yorkers picketed the theater because the star was known to be a supporter of Franco. The theater owner argued that the film had been made during the Spanish Republic, but the picketers were not convinced, and the theater was forced to withdraw the film from the program.

Some members of New York’s Spanish immigrant community in the 1920s and 1930s dreamed of someday returning to Spain. The establishment of the Second Republic in 1931 had raised the hopes of many; but the outbreak—and especially the outcome—of the war would dash those hopes. The flow would move in the opposite direction. Exactly one month after the start of the war, on August 18, 1936, Federico García Lorca was killed by Fascist sympathizers, his body dumped into an unmarked mass grave near his native Granada. In a cruel twist of fate, the poet’s brother and sister, parents and grandparents—the recipients of Federico’s buoyant letters from New York—would soon arrive in the city that their son seemed to love and hate, not as ambitious cultural diplomats or hopeful immigrants, but rather, like so many of their compatriots, as devastated exiles. So begins a new chapter of *españoles en Nueva York*.

NOTES

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1. “City’s Spanish Colony Lives in its Own Little World Here,” *New York Times*, March 23, 1924, XX18.
2. Konrad Bercovici, *Around the World in New York* (New York: The Century Company, 1924), 277.
3. “City’s Spanish Colony Lives in its Own Little World Here.”
4. Bercovici, *Around the World in New York*, 290.
5. “City’s Spanish Colony Lives in its Own Little World Here.”
6. Ibid.
7. Ana Varela Lago’s dissertation is the best source of information on and analysis of the links between the Cuban question and Spanish immigrants in the United States in the late nineteenth century. “Conquerors, Immigrants, Exiles: The Spanish Diaspora in the United States (1848–1948)” (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2008).
8. Ian Gibson, *Federico García Lorca: A Life* (New York: Pantheon, 1989).
9. Federico García Lorca, *Epistolario completo* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1997), 615.

10. For an analysis of this crucial moment in the history of Spanish studies and Spanish departments in the U.S., see my essay “Longfellow’s Law: The Place of Spain and Latin America in US Hispanism, circa 1915,” in *Spain in America: The Origins of Hispanism in the United States*, ed. Richard L. Kagan (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois, 2002).

11. García Lorca, *Epistolario completo*, 633.

12. Ibid., 672.

13. *Poeta en Nueva York* includes a poem titled “Cementerio judío,” though the Sephardic connection is not explicitly mentioned in the poem.

14. Julio Camba, *La ciudad automática* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1950), 56

15. Ibid.

16. García Lorca, *Epistolario completo*, 679.