

Pura Belpré Lights the Storyteller's Candle: Reframing the Legacy of a Legend and What it Means for the Fields of Latino/a Studies and Children's Literature

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ABSTRACT

Pura Belpré's life and literary works continue to gain critical attention, yet a main hindrance restricting Belpré's critical assessment is the lack of scholarly inquiry into the cultural role of children and the place of children's literature within the Puerto Rican Diaspora. Puerto Rican, Latino/a, and children's literature studies have yet to fully understand Belpré within U.S. children's literature. As a storyteller, combining both literary and performance traditions, Belpré presented children with representations of the Puerto Rican "nation." Studying her legacy exposes the tensions among literature, performance, the past, and the present. Her subversive "archive of repertoires" provides children with revolutionary tools for resisting U.S. colonialism. However, we must still examine how Belpré represents Puerto Rican culture for children and how she locates her characters within an imagined Island of dreams. [Keywords: Pura Belpré, subversive, children's literature, Puerto Rican childhood, storytelling, performance studies]

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THE FIELD OF PUERTO RICAN STUDIES, AND SUBSEQUENTLY LATINO/A STUDIES, HAS RECENTLY TAPPED PURA BELPRÉ AS A HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT FIGURE WORTHY OF RECOVERY. Her ascent will perhaps gain further momentum as efforts like the documentary, *Pura Belpré: Storyteller* (2011) and Lisa Sánchez-González's recent book, *The Stories I Read to the Children: The Life and Writing of Pura Belpré, the Legendary Storyteller, Children's Author, and New York Public Librarian* (2013), continue to circulate.¹ Even the recent picture-book by Lucia González, illustrated by Lulu Delacre, *The Storyteller's Candle* (2008), has memorialized Belpré as a heroine in her own American fable. Considering the seminal, though scarce, scholarly work on Belpré, including Julio Hernández-Delgado's "Pura Teresa Belpré, storyteller and pioneer Puerto Rican librarian" (1992), Sánchez-González's chapter "A Boricua in the Stacks" in *Boricua Literature: A Literary History of the Puerto Rican Diaspora* (2001), and Victoria Nuñez's "Remembering Pura Belpré's early career at the 135th New York Public Library" (2009), it seems that the greatest hurdle when approaching Belpré is attempting to historicize her sixty-year career while also juggling her seemingly innumerable roles (i.e. librarian, author, folklorist, etc.). What we have established is that Belpré is a woman whose revolutionary efforts in children's literacy and activism directly influenced Puerto Rican and Latino/a culture from the 1920s to 1980s. What we have yet to do, among many things, is theorize the role of children's material and performance culture within Belpré's cultural and literary project.

Belpré's consideration within any literary canon, Mainland Puerto Rican or otherwise, has been limited for several reasons, though perhaps the greatest handicap has been our inability to credit the role of children's materials within the Diaspora. Certainly, as Sánchez-González emphasizes, we understand that with the exception of a young adult novel, *Firefly Summer* (1996), Belpré's children's books and papers have been out-of-print or unpublished for at least thirty-years--until recently.² As Nuñez has argued, Belpré's status as a black Puerto Rican during the 1920s and '30s in Harlem also contributes to the perplexity surrounding her legacy, since Belpré complicates traditional approaches to studying race and the Harlem Renaissance (2009: 54).³ Yet scholars also seem to imply that Belpré's use of children's materials has complicated her critical assessment. Jose L. Torres-Padilla writes that though "Belpré's work should interest scholars of Puerto Rican diasporic literature," children's literature "is not usually included among the more traditional literary canon and rarely, if ever, within ethnic literary studies" (Torres-Padilla and Rivera 2009:93). Even within the growing conversation on Belpré, there is a hesitation to categorize Belpré's writing as "children's," preferring perhaps the more adult, and inclusionary label

“folklore,” possibly out of fear that “children’s” may mark her legacy as uncritical and/or pedantic.⁴ Indeed, there is a long history of the academy seeing children’s narratives and writers for children as “juvenile,” which is what triggered interventions like the founding of a separate section of the Modern Language Association and academic journals dedicated to children’s literature as literature proper.⁵ Children’s and young adult literature, in general, has fallen off the radar within Puerto Rican and Latino/a studies despite the prevalent use of this medium by key authors, including Julia Alvarez, Sandra Cisneros, Rosario Ferré, Nicholasa Mohr, Esmeralda Santiago, etc. Within Latin American and Caribbean literature, Ann González has said that because children’s literature is often marginalized within literary studies, the children’s literature of a marginalized group constitutes “the periphery of the periphery of the periphery” (2009: 3). Within this periphery of peripheries we find Belpré, and there she will remain, without purposely addressing Belpré’s conceptualization of the child and children’s literature within her construct of the Puerto Rican “nation.” Indeed, we need to move beyond seeing Belpré’s use of children’s material and performance culture as a kind of isolated incident or endearing motivation. When Pura Belpré first lit the storyteller’s candle at the New York Public Library, she actually took up and then imparted a tradition of writing and performing to children as means of explaining and building nationhood, a trend that continues with Mainland Puerto Rican writers and artists like Nicholasa Mohr, Ferré, Judith Ortiz-Cofer, Sonia Manzano, and Manuel Moran. The child, as both a participant and object within the reproduction of culture, often serves as a symbol of the nation within literary works, something that has recently gained the interest of American studies scholars. As Caroline F. Levander writes, “the child is a rich site of cultural meaning and social inscription” (2003: 16). The child, as a cultural construct, encodes various notions of national belonging, development, disenfranchisement, and independence within the Mainland Puerto Rican narrative, which joins with the broader discussion on children within American studies.⁶ Actually, Belpré’s writings purport a particular kind of child, which I call the displaced child. She marks an imagined progression from the rural Island jíbaro to the hybrid (though perhaps reluctant) Nuyoric child found in her final children’s book, *Santiago* (1969). This child is a construction that suggests Belpré’s view of the Puerto Rican child as one in exile.

The critical conversation on Belpré within children’s literature studies represents another challenge for scholars eager to ascertain Belpré’s contributions. Children’s literature is a field divided among librarians, literary critics, teacher-educators, and publishers, all with a different skill set and research agenda. These divisions rarely converge in scholarly spaces, nor do they necessarily build off of each other’s research.

For example, those in the field of multicultural education may emphasize Belpré as providing a helpful framework for introducing bilingual children's literature into a classroom. I represent a group of literary scholars who examine children's literature as a diverse site of inquiry within cultural studies, and American and American literature studies. Belpré is surprisingly absent from children's literary scholarship despite her position as the namesake of a children's literature prize and her work in NYPL children's rooms under renowned Anne Carroll Moore at a critical moment during advances within American children's publishing. Belpré belongs within discussions of U.S. children's literature, yet the study of children's literature and childhood and even the term "children's literature" in English departments is nearly synonymous with the study of Anglo children's literary traditions. Anything outside such lines is usually labeled "ethnic" or "international" — two problematic terms when considering the U.S.'s relationship to its colonies.⁷ Belpré develops our understanding of multilingual children's literature and media and the role of children's material and performance culture within U.S. colonialism.⁸ She opens up avenues that highlight the U.S. as both an empire and, as Nicolás Kanellos writes, "a mestizo or mulatto nation" (2012: 372). Indeed, studying Belpré requires one to uncover layers of contradictions within a legacy that displays the tensions among the literary establishment and the role of performance, the competing languages of Spanish and English, and the rival values within multicultural education of universalism and cultural specificity. This essay explores how Belpré participated within U.S. literary traditions while also using them as a means of subversion. I emphasize Belpré's role as a storyteller (with a lit storyteller's candle) at the NYPL, her desire to preserve a "repertoire" of Puerto Rican folklore, and her belief that her sowing of folktales within Puerto Rican children resembled the activity of U.S. folk hero, Johnny Appleseed.

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Belpré the storyteller, a role she occupied as a kind of weaver of history, encouraged children to defy assimilation along with the textual and national boundaries created by the dominant culture. She emphasizes a multi-modal approach against U.S. colonialism and the literary establishment, the importance of both the archive and the repertoire. As Belpré writes, "One does not uproot the foundations solidly laid by the mere stroke

of a pen” (Hernández-Delgado 1992: 432). The stories she re-told offer children tools for routing the colonizer through trickery as well as non-violent protest, all the while reproducing notions of exile that I analyze as revolutionary though problematic. Her vision of storytelling and folklore as a process of seed-sowing, the very definition of diaspora, provides an invaluable context for understanding how Mainland Puerto Rican and Nuyorican ideology evolved, perhaps as a result of her planting, into the kinds of defiant, dual-identity expressions asserted by Nuyorican authors during the 1960s and ‘70s. Belpré accomplished the admirable feat of endowing children with relics of the past in order to “dream” about the present and future, but ultimately I suggest that her legacy needs critical consideration, especially when generations of Puerto Rican and other Latino/a still supposedly don’t “see” themselves in books (Rich 2012: 1; Diaz 2013: 1).

The Archive versus the Repertoire: Belpré and Storytelling as Cultural Preservation

Children’s literature is often at the forefront of nation and empire building.⁹ Belpré’s location within children’s literature is no coincidence. Belpré entered the NYPL’s literary scene when the library promoted storybooks and folktales as symbolic fixtures within an imagined global community for children. Yet, as early as 1899, only a year after the U.S. acquisition of Puerto Rico after the Spanish-American War, U.S.-produced children’s texts had already taken the lead in introducing Puerto Ricans as a new, curious group of “American” citizens.¹⁰ Indeed, children’s books were among some of the first media to reach the U.S. public about the acquisition of Puerto Rico (Matos-Rodríguez 1999: 1). Such books often took the form of field guides and explorer stories in which the Island and its people were often portrayed as an exotic backdrop for American adventurers. This tradition of children’s literature also asserted the view of Puerto Rico as void of history—a theme that continues in children’s books about Puerto Rico both after the U.S. acquisition and after the subsequent migrations in the 1920s and 1940s. Similarly, Islanders and later migrants were depicted as culturally deprived vagrants. One children’s book, *Island Boy* (1966) actually claims that the Puerto Rican community’s history of colonialism resulted in a group with a “no past-no future way of life” (Rambeau et al: 44). One way to approach Belpré within children’s culture is to see her work as initiating a U.S. Puerto Rican children’s culture that “writes back” to a tradition of U.S.-produced texts and rhetoric about Puerto Rico and its children. She begins a conversation that continues through writers like Mohr, Ortiz-Cofer, Delacré, and Carmen T. Bernier Grand. In particular, Belpré’s brand of children’s culture provided a virtual (and sometimes actual) theatre for acting out a deeply nationalist project, which proved the existence of Puerto Rican history prior to the U.S. invasion in 1898.

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Belpré's interventions within U.S. children's literature constitute an attempt at cultural preservation, and even further, as an attempt to establish historical memory within the U.S. for Puerto Rican children. Yet such historical memory constitutes a (re) creation of Island texts and iconography, which should be understood both separately and in relationship to the Island. The 1920s through the '30s, as Juan Flores, Virginia Sanchez-Korrol, and Efraín Barradas have written, coincide with the first phase of Puerto Rican migration and the forming of a *colonia* within Harlem, which later progressed into other neighborhoods within Lower Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. Hernández-Delgado and Nuñez establish that Belpré's rhetoric on Puerto Rican childhood and folklore occupied a prominent place within a strong Harlem network of cultural, literary, and civil liberties organizations which upheld "lo puertorriqueño."¹¹ In this setting of "renaissance," Belpré's efforts can be compared with her compatriot and contemporary, Arturo Schomburg with whom she was introduced at her first post, the 135th Street Library. Both Schomburg and Belpré viewed historical preservation as a means of disproving cultural inferiority. The NYPL hired Schomburg in 1926 as the curator of his collection of cultural artifacts, which he believed refuted notions of African inferiority. The collection, similar to the cultural activities associated with the Harlem Renaissance, created a space within the U.S. for the celebration of black culture and a more unified black identity. By contrast, hired by head librarian Ernestine Rose in 1921, Belpré possessed a repertoire of word-of-mouth Puerto Rican folktales, which, as written and published tales, would later become a kind of archive within the library and, today, literally within the Centro Archives in Spanish Harlem. However, I also call attention to the play scripts, puppets, and props that form part of Belpré's legacy—a treasure trove of objects which she hauled around New York. For Belpré, the creator of a traveling puppet theatre, it was not enough to just publish stories. They had to be told, re-told, and performed in places where children and families congregated. The tensions between the archive and the repertoire, between written and embodied practices, as John Beverly, Diana Taylor, and Robin Bernstein have argued, are usually discussed in terms of power. These scholars have established a sense that while the archive (entrusted with the wealth of "literate" societies) houses power, the performance-based repertoire symbolizes a more accessible, flexible

space outside the center. While Taylor demonstrates that the two are not necessarily opposed, Bernstein shows how objects and props, as “scriptive things,” can form part of both the archive and the repertoire. Bernstein calls this an “archive of repertoires” (2011: 8–11).¹² For example, Belpré’s *Perez and Martina* puppets are housed in the Centro Archives, yet they denote what Bernstein calls “physical practices,” such as the puppets dancing or falling (as Perez does at the end of the tale). The puppets, and the physical practices associated with them, preserve a kind of embodiment of national mythologies of race and nationhood, which were performed during storytelling hours, specifically the cultural superiority of the Spanish. Martina, a “pretty” and “very refined” Spanish cockroach as described in the published tale, represents a type of prim and proper Spanish dame, who spends most of the time cleaning and keeping a proper home (Belpré 1932: 8). Carlos Sánchez’s illustrations within the published *Perez and Martina* picture book depict an “exceedingly proud” Martina in traditional Spanish dress—black lace shawl, red flamenco dress, and black fan. Sánchez based his illustrations on the puppets built by Belpré. Belpré sewed both a red flamenco dress and a black mourning dress, complete with a pinned-on guitar, for the puppet Martina.¹³ Both the puppets and the illustrations suggest Belpré wished for children to associate Martina with typical Spanish costumes. Since child actors performed in yet another play version of this tale, children would have dressed and acted out these traditional Spanish nuances as a source of cultural pride.

The story, costumes, and puppets, as scriptive things, inspire a performance that marks language as a source of anxiety within the Island’s hierarchy of status. Specifically, “Martina” uses language and dialect as a marker for pure Spanish heritage; in fact, the tale itself represents a defense of the Spanish language as a refined language of royalty. For Martina, each suitor must prove his worth by “telling her how they will talk to her in the future.” Each suitor seems to represent a native, non-pure Islander. Martina scorns the sound of their speech calling it “noise” and “tiresome” (Belpré 1931: 26–33). Her favorite, the “gallant little mouse” Perez, a type of Spanish courtier, vows her with his skill in music, dancing, and manners: “No one else could bow as Perez could. No one danced as he danced and talked as he did and many wondered if Perez had not come from royal descent.” Perez’s possible royalty becomes a theme throughout the story; he is a gentleman with a royal mansion in Spain. Perez even sings a song celebrating his ties to Spanish royalty: “De España un raticito soy...a veces veo al Rey y la Reina / I am a little mouse from Sunny Spain, In Royal Mansion’s halls is my domain. / At night I watch the sun set in the sky, And sometimes see the King and Queen pass by” (1932: 37). However, considering the setting of 1920s through the 1940s in New York, on the heels of the U.S.’s rise to colonial power in the Caribbean, the song

becomes a subversive act on the lips of a Puerto Rican child actor asserting his alliance to Spain and Latin American, within Harlem.

Belpré's archive of repertoires, as Schomburg's collection did for Black Americans, created a space in the library for newly arrived Puerto Rican migrants who, unlike Black Americans, had no tangible artifacts within reach that gave them a sense of history or identity. In terms of fixtures evoking cultural memory, the Puerto Rican migrant arriving in New York City did so with a virtual blank slate of history and a nebulous racial identity, making assimilation, even into a minority culture, tempting. Efraín Barradas writes that Schomburg's "entry — [his] assimilation — into the culture of U.S. blacks represented the road many other Caribbean emigrants would see, much later, as a solution to the identity crisis with which they were confronted in the United States" (1998: 11). Belpré's decision to identify as Puerto Rican and support the development of a colonia meant she denied this temptation but also took on the daunting task of filling in history. As she understood it, creating a Puerto Rican identity within the U.S. meant bridging a gap in history.

Although Belpré is clearly the champion for children within this early community and beyond, it is important to note that Jesús Colón also participated in organizing children and young adults into drama and music groups during his time with the International Workers Order (IWO).

Schomburg and Belpré's professional roles within the NYPL also help contrast the Black and Spanish Harlem communities with regard to age and gender. At the 135th Street Branch Library, Schomburg dedicated his efforts to preserving literature and artifacts as means of instilling cultural pride within adult communities. Belpré was hired to assist Spanish-speaking adults and children, generating cultural pride mainly from the children's room. Belpré's designation as a child librarian reflects a tradition within both U.S. and Puerto Rican societies that women should work with children. Interestingly, this "women's work" created opportunities for Belpré beyond those of her male, Puerto Rican contemporaries, enabling her to publish with major companies like Harper & Row and Frederick Warne, since, at the time, women like Anne Carroll Moore and Mary Gould Davis, both influential in Belpré's publishing and library career, expanded children's librarianship into a powerful role within the children's literary world (Eddy 2006: 7). Belpré's librarianship showcases the capacity for influence and resistance within this gendered sphere.

While Schomburg's collection might inspire a sense of cultural pride within black children, the collection was mainly an adult space for scholars and writers. Yet, outside of Schomburg's collection at the NYPL, as Kate Capshaw Smith observes in *Children's Literature of the Harlem Renaissance*, Harlem Renaissance thinkers and writers such as W.E.B. DuBois and Hughes valued children's literature as a means of "training...a generation of 'New Negroes'...[and part of] community galvanization, militancy, and racial pride" (2006: xvii). DuBois, for example, published a children's literary magazine, *The Brownies Book* (1920–1921), which "spotlighted the special role of the child to the movement for black social progress and artistic distinction" (Smith 2006: 1). Certainly, black children in Harlem also had a children's librarian, Augusta Baker, hired at the 135th Street Branch in 1937, who built a professional friendship with Belpré and wrote the foreword to Belpré's first collection of folklore, *The Tiger and the Rabbit* (1944).¹⁴ Smith, however, asserts that other influential Harlem writers shared in the project of writing for children as well as adults. Although Belpré is clearly the champion for children within this early community and beyond, it is important to note that Jesús Colón also participated in organizing children and young adults into drama and music groups during his time with the International Workers Order (IWO).¹⁵ However, perhaps due to gender, we tend to categorize Belpré's work as specifically for children and overlook Colón's efforts for children, assigning him perhaps a more "adult" label. Yet it seems that the African American community was more successful at building a published group of children's artists and writers than the Puerto Rican within this early community. Indeed, given the lapse in book publication between Belpré and Colón (exactly 30 years), Belpré, as one of the only Puerto Rican authors to publish during this period under a major label, is the exception among her contemporaries, highlighting children's literature's significance as a literary forum for a relatively disenfranchised community.¹⁶ Moreover, the open door granted to Belpré within children's literature, as opposed to her "radical" compatriots, uncovers children's literature as a subversive medium for nationalist and even revolutionary rhetoric.¹⁷ Belpré's "archive of repertoires" opened up spaces within the community in which children and young adults could act out constructs of cultural memory. Yet, in terms of physical space, today's imposing Schomburg collection continues to memorialize black solidarity and history within an urban space for young people.¹⁸ Without overly romanticizing the role of objects in history, this should make us think about how Puerto Rican children and young adults interact with Belpré's "archive of repertoires" even at the Centro Archives. Though it is clearly a space for scholars, Belpré's collection is one associated with physical practices often associated with childhood, such as improvisation, dramatic play, and games. Her props for acting out

a particular kind of Puerto Rican childhood are not without problems—this includes her published tales that constitute a kind of script—yet, we might ask ourselves if these props should be in the view of those perhaps Belpré intended most to reach.¹⁹

What symbols/embodiments of Puerto Rico's past does Belpré's "archive of repertoires" preserve for children? Belpré's retellings reproduce at least two core mythologies of origin—the *jíbaro* farmer and the Taíno. The *jíbaro*, with his straw hat, rural *casita*, machete, and *güiro* emphasizes a kind of rustic, Puerto Rican Adam who eludes racial and class hierarchy. A Taíno revival is particularly associated with strong nationalism on the Island, resisting the Spaniard and the North American, even as it often denies the influence of African cultures on the Island.²⁰ Belpré's fostering of *jíbaro* and Taíno mythology postures Puerto Rican children as displaced children, that is, children whose origin and final destination, regardless of birthplace, is not the U.S. but the Island. Her stories built a safe haven for celebrating Puerto Rican culture and language in the U.S., yet this haven existed in an imagined Island universe. The *jíbaro* and Taíno both symbolize ties to the land and imagined, rural past. Although stories like those found in *The Rainbow-Colored Horse* (1978), *Santiago*, and *Once in Puerto Rico* capitalize on this myth, one of the strongest examples of Belpré's commitment to *jíbaro* mythology comes in her final work, *Firefly Summer*, a novel published posthumously. Considering that Belpré's stories often contain animal characters, we should pay special attention when she creates a child character, as she does in *Santiago*, the play, *Tropical Remembrances*, and *Firefly Summer*. Teresita, the 13-year-old protagonist, dreams of returning to farm life after an extended period in a San Juan school.²¹ Belpré suggests a critique of the lack of schools in rural areas; something Teresita seems to believe disrupts the natural order of things:

Teresa's real home was a finca in the highlands between Cayey and Cidra...The finca! How she missed it. Gone were the hours she spent watching the preparations for the planting of tobacco, but clear in her mind was the picture of the cool foothills, mountain slopes with carefully laid out plots...looking to her like clouds dropped from the sky. (14, 24)

Teresita finishes her school exams earlier than the other students so she can return to her beloved finca. As she leaves San Juan, landmarks like La Fortaleza and La Plaza Cristóbal Colón fail to charm the teenager: "Someday there will be enough schools for all the children of the fincas. I would rather teach at a finca than anywhere else..." (Belpré 1996: 22). As Teresita celebrates "The Feast of the Cross" and learns of the financial troubles threatening her family's home, *Firefly Summer* reinforces a vision

of the Puerto Rican child as belonging only in the foothills of his/her native land, regardless of the luxuries of the metropolis, whether Puerto Rican or U.S.

In Taíno legends, Belpré reproduces an ideal of the land as the indigenous inhabitants once named it: Borinquen. Taíno legends often portray the race as dignified victims of the oppressor's lust for the land. Moreover, these stories emphasize the Taíno as a noble, lingering presence residing within the earth, which seemingly causes the rocks to cry out. For example, in "The Legend of the Royal Palm" from *Once in Puerto Rico* (1973), young Milomaki transforms into a tree in order to save himself from an attacking tribe. The narrator tells the reader that Milomaki's voice still resides in the Island's royal palms. Similarly, in "Amapola and the Butterfly," a teenaged Amapola learns that many of Borinquen's stones are actually victims of a witches' spell (1973: 6, 33). The Taíno, then, is represented as a kind of monument of the past preserved within the Island's resources. Belpré's retellings of this legacy in the English language reconstructs these "monuments" within a U.S. urban center, simultaneously making this folklore a part of U.S. heritage while always keeping a child's gaze on the Island as a place of origin. She suggests that no economic or political circumstance should disrupt the Puerto Rican child's tie to the native land.

Storytelling without a Storybook: Lighting the Candle, Breaking the Rules, and the Politics of Space on the Children's Bookshelf

Another way to approach Belpré's legacy is to recognize her skill at the art of subversion. Belpré's own story of how she outwitted the story-hour criteria at the NYPL offers us insight into the kind of tools and roles she might have hoped children would practice. The role she perhaps enjoyed inhabiting the most was that of storyteller. Again, without romanticizing orality as somehow superior to literature, scholars should consider what this performance-based role says about Belpré rather than just seeing her as a folklorist/author. Belpré first lit the storyteller's candle, a NYPL-wide tradition at the time, at the 135th Street Branch within the context of the Harlem Renaissance.²² I consider Belpré's candle lighting at the 135th Street Branch a symbolic ritual that signaled the birth of Puerto Rican narratives within the United States. The candle symbolizes the beginning of a literary tradition that from the beginning reflects a commitment to the idea of literature even as it resists the literary establishment and dominant language. Belpré's candle lighting also underlines some presumptions about the role of storytellers in an urban metropolis. As a role, the storyteller highlights the tensions between orality and textuality, between rural and industrial life. In Belpré's case, we see how she inhabits this role as a means of challenging notions of child literacy (e.g., NYPL storytelling required a published

text) and even history. Belpré's duties as librarian (shelving books, translating for patrons, etc.) placed her on the frontlines of the emerging *colonia*, an ideal location for surveying the lack of Puerto Rican and other Latino/a literary representations. Again, she possibly encountered texts such as *Greater America* (1900) or *The Motor Girls on Water's Blue* (1915), both of which represent the Island as a U.S. commodity. Given her outrage over "racist" illustrations appearing in an edition of one of her Juan Bobo publications, Belpré likely experienced a similar outrage while viewing the demeaning portrayals of Puerto Ricans in such U.S. children's texts.²³

Belpré's desire to tell children stories at the NYPL, however, and her ability "to do it were two different things," as she explained in an oral history interview: "[I]n the New York Public Library no one tells a story unless the book from where the story comes is on the table with your flowers and your wishing candle...the children look for it" (Lopez n.d.). The library's preference for storybook-telling clearly promoted its mission as a text borrowing institution, but also, as Nuñez writes, downplayed any other forms of literacy outside of published texts. Actually, the NYPL considered storytelling so integral to their mission that the area had a separate director, Mary Gould Davis, also an instructor in the New York Public Library School. In 1925, Belpré enrolled in Davis's storytelling course, which taught principles of storytelling and writing for children. The class led Belpré, as a prospective storyteller, through an almost audition-like process, requiring her to lead a story-hour observed by Davis. In her "Folklore of the Puerto Rican Child" speech, Belpré explains that she originally wanted to use a "Puerto Rican folktale" as her selection for this observation; however, she "did not have a book to place on the table along with the bowl of flowers and the wishing candle" (Belpré n.d.: 2). Instead, Belpré performed a tale from Anna Cogswell Tyler's *Twenty-Four Unusual Tales for Boys and Girls* (1921). Although Belpré does not disclose the tale she read by Tyler, also a NYPL librarian and storyteller, the book features a collection of European and "American Indian" folklore.²⁴ Belpré might have chosen Tyler's volume as a "safe" text since Tyler's preface concurs with the NYPL's preference for written folklore. Tyler's preface suggests that the NYPL believed written texts allowed children outside the library the enjoyment of the same stories presented at story-hours and provided non-NYPL storytellers with the texts as resources for other community story-hours. Tangible books offered accessibility and preservation beyond the children's room; however, this notion competes with the belief in oral culture that proliferation of culture depends on interpersonal relationships or "word of mouth." Belpré's own career, in a sense, proves that cultural and literary legacies occur without immediate access to a writer's publications: Belpré's children's books have been out-of-print for over thirty-years, yet she established an undeniable,

continued literary legacy within the greater Puerto Rican community and beyond. The 1996 founding of the American Library Association's Pura Belpré Medal for Best Latino Children's Literature occurred without extensive scholarship on Belpré's merits as a writer and with little to no distribution of her writing.²⁵

Belpré's own career, in a sense, proves that cultural and literary legacies occur without immediate access to a writer's publications: Belpré's children's books have been out-of-print for over thirty-years, yet she established an undeniable, continued literary legacy within the greater Puerto Rican community and beyond.

Though she ultimately became a published author, Belpré's legacy testifies to an impression made on literary history without books. Indeed, an archive photo reveals an older Belpré in full form: her hands up, the storybook shut on her lap, and surrounded by an audience of mesmerized black, white, and Latino/a children (Pura Belpré Papers). Sánchez-González identifies "paperlessness" as "the narrative predicament of the Puerto Rican diaspora." She writes that "while [scholars] revel in rescuing paperwork, we must realize that what literacy and papers signify cannot and should not stand in for people themselves" (2001: 8). Belpré's story emphasizes the inability of texts to supplement speech acts and the predicament of accounting for literary activity that, without a traditional text, seems unaccountable. Her insistence on performing unpublished tales also highlights her belief that Puerto Rican culture would persist even without textual evidence or any official recognition. In "Folklore de El Niño Puertorriqueño," a speech for Spanish-speaking audiences, Belpré includes a brief history on the persistence of uniquely Puerto Rican folklore despite more than 300 years of Spanish rule. She emphasizes that the Island possessed no printing presses during the majority of Spain's colonial reign, and yet "el pueblo" (the people) managed to preserve a unique folklore generationally through oral tradition. Belpré, interestingly, does not include this example within her translation of this speech for English audiences; this implies she reserved this subversive critique on colonialism for Spanish-speakers. Actually, her props and speeches do not always allow us to know when Spanish or English was introduced or how; something that I believe also needs further critical attention. Belpré implies that, even if U.S. presses never acknowledge Puerto Rican culture, the culture will continue thriving as it did under similar colonial conditions. Belpré emphasizes storytelling as a subversive activity that de-centers narrative histories. The storyteller professes the dangerous (for children's

education purposes) admission that stories are not fixed, but belong to a community and could change depending on the person retelling it. As Belpré emphasized during another lecture, “[S]torytelling is a living art, and each teller embellishes, polishes and recreates as she goes along without losing the thematic value” (3). No one, in a sense, could claim a story as his or her own. The storyteller as a kind of “artisan” was free to leave his/her handprints on a story as evidence of the version’s originality and, by consequence, its subjectivity. Although literary texts are idealized in terms of preservation, the storyteller’s role is perceived as existing outside the literary establishment by empowering *el pueblo* with a sense of authorship.²⁶

Anne Carroll Moore’s philosophy for librarianship and storytelling presented Belpré with a model for resisting dominant ideologies, including U.S. nationalism and child education. Throughout her essays, Belpré credits Moore, along with Rose and Gould, with a “vision” of the library and children’s storytelling as a gateway into U.S. culture. In “New York Public Library and Folklore,” Belpré carefully specified that this “vision” allowed “the convergence, and mutual respect for the two cultures” (Belpré n.d.: 1). Librarianship, as Belpré learned, could provide a community with forms of resisting assimilation and prejudice. Belpré received extensive training, including an internship organized by Moore that developed “interbranch familiarity” and a required written research paper (Eddy 2006: 45). She learned Moore’s criteria for selecting the “best books” for children: creative, imaginative texts promoting internationalism as opposed to informational or moralizing literature. Ideal books included fairytales and folklore that introduced children to world cultures. Moore’s book selection and institution of a NYPL-wide storytelling program opposed several children’s education trends during the 1920s, such as post-World War I U.S. nationalism and the scientific, psychology-centered “child guidance” movement.²⁷ Moore avidly refused scientific approaches to children and their literature, claiming instead that fairytales, folklore, and poetry nurtured the child’s humanity along with their “intellectual honesty and spiritual clarity” (quoted in Eddy 2006: 114). Through the proper literature, the child learned to approach society as a member of a global community. The female librarian, possessing a “natural,” as opposed to scientific, knowledge of children, nurtured a wonder and love for reading in children. Moore’s preference for storytelling and folklore as naturalistic remnants of the past, as Jacqueline Eddy writes, suggests a “critique of modernity” (2006: 92). NYPL storytellers literally drew the curtains on the outside world. By lighting the candle, a symbol of antiquity and imagination, the storyteller defied the structured, utilitarian “school room” (quoted in Dain 2006: 70).

Through Moore, Belpré could also learn that NYPL children’s room activities and philosophies had an influence beyond Fifth Avenue, particularly with regard to the

preservation of children's folklore. Moore's promotion of internationalism through children's books sparked publishers' interests in international children's books during the 1920s, a trend Belpré possibly benefited from given that *Perez and Martina* was published close to this time, possibly because Frederick Warne & Co, acquaintances of Moore, saw the Puerto Rican folktale as a contribution to international children's literature (Eddy 2006: 92). Moore's influence created opportunities for Belpré, within and outside the children's room, for counteracting the lack of Puerto Rican-authored narratives. Given Moore's reverence for fairy tales and folklore at the NYPL, it is no surprise that Belpré's duties at the library included "reading" the fairy tale shelves (Belpré n.d.: 1). In Belpré, Rose gained a lively woman with trilingual skills (she also spoke French), an interest in children, and an unwritten archive of repertoires based on Puerto Rican folklore, a tradition Belpré always touted as combining Spanish, Taíno, Indian, and African heritages. Such an archive, told and re-told, resurrected an Island of dreams.

Folktales and storytelling instilled heritage and ideals, and Belpré envisioned these practices as reinforcing this sacred tie to family, land, and nation in New York children. Belpré often prefaced her stories and speeches with a short illustration about folklore as instrumental to the Puerto Rican child's upbringing. As she writes in her preface to *The Tiger and the Rabbit*:

Growing up on the island of Puerto Rico in an atmosphere of natural story-tellers was fun: a father whose occupation took him all over the island; a grandmother whose stories always ended in a nonsense rhyme or song, setting feet to skip or dance; elder sisters who still remembered the tales told by their mother....No one ever went to bed without a round of stories. (1944: x)

Within this picture of folklore and child-rearing, Belpré represents Puerto Rican culture as one in which the average person practically lives in verse. The people in this passage (much like Belpré also portrayed herself) possess an internal repertoire of stories. Her description also refutes notions of the Puerto Rican child as "culturally deprived," a common theme which, again, she may have encountered in U.S. children's texts.²⁸ Belpré's strong associations with folklore, home, nation, and child-rearing may explain her feeling of "loss" upon noticing Puerto Rico's absence from the NYPL's fairy tale shelves: "I searched for some of the folktales I had heard at home. There was not even one. A sudden feeling of loss rose within me" (Belpré n.d.: 1). Belpré equates a sense of home with her ability to locate a place for her nation within the library, in this case, a space on the bookshelf.²⁹ If, as Moore believed, folklore cultivated in children the notion of a global community, then shelf space could also signify representation

and influence within that community. Absence signaled nonexistence. In the early 1920s, Belpré's search for Puerto Rico on the fairytale shelves, about thirty years into the Island's status as a U.S. colony, and five years after the U.S. made Puerto Ricans American citizens, revealed the Island's symbolic absence from the world.

The politics of space on the children's bookshelf is a theme that runs throughout the history of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, and reverberates when we consider the persistent absence of Latino/a characters in children's books. Education scholars such as Sonia Nieto, Maria José Botelho and Martha Rudman, and Carmen Martínez-Roldán have written extensively about the lack of minorities, especially Puerto Rican and Latino/a characters, in children's books as well as the stereotypical representations of such characters.³⁰ Some would say Latino/a characters are absent, others might say there are not enough books, while others would say there is little awareness of existing titles (Rich 2012: 1; Diaz 2013: 1). Regardless, educators and writers for generations have esteemed the children's bookshelf as an important place for negotiating national identity. The children's bookshelf is revered almost as kind of miniature United Nations, a place where each country and people group should have its voice heard in a quest for sovereignty and peace. Belpré, as many still do, rationalized that no stories meant no history and, perhaps, no hope for the present or future. "To appreciate the present, one must have a knowledge of the past...to know where we go, we must know from where we came," she asserts in the essay "Folklore of the Puerto Rican Child" (n.d.: 1). Moreover, in tandem with her beliefs about child-rearing, in "New York Public Library and Folklore, Belpré cites "stories" and "poetry" as "natural" ways of "dreaming about the future." Dreams of the past and future were ceremonially sanctioned when children were invited to blow out the wishing candle at the end of the story-hour (n.d.: 1-2).

Belpré recalled her confrontation with Puerto Rico's apparent nonexistence as the inspiration for her literary intervention and preservation effort on behalf of Puerto Rican migrants. In the speech "Folklore of the Puerto Rican Child," she credits her concern with children as her strongest motivation: "I wished to preserve the folktales I knew for the Puerto Rican child in this new land. I knew that the knowledge of his folklore would develop a sense of pride and identification in him" (n.d.: 1). Here, Belpré refers to the Puerto Rican child as an exiled child, while still acknowledging that a new identity, apart from the Island, had been born. She wished to give this child tools for resisting humiliation and the dreaded Americanization (loss of Spanish language and Puerto Rican traditions). Belpré, on the verge of creating some of the first U.S. Puerto Rican narratives, decided that a revival of Island culture grounded this emerging identity.³¹ Although the Island had become a distant reality for Island-born patrons, and the States

would serve as the birthplace for subsequent generations, Belpré's stories could cause the Island to be "born in [them]."³² As in her description of her family of storytellers, Belpré again suggests stories as satisfying an innate hunger for origin.

Several of the tales in her archives of repertoires offer children a model for overcoming dominant ideologies and oppression through the strength of *el pueblo*. *The Tiger and the Rabbit* (1944) and *Once in Puerto Rico* (1973) contain several tales that portray colonial oppression as a battle of wits more than a battle of force. The strength and dignity of a community could route the colonizer. The titular story from *The Tiger and the Rabbit* features a typical Latin American trickster tale:³³

Long, long ago all the animals were friends and lived in peace with one another, except the Tiger. For the Tiger had promised himself to eat small animals, especially the Rabbit if he ever crossed his path.

But the Rabbit was very clever and known for his quick wit. He knew that the Tiger wanted to eat him, and though he considered the beast stupid, clumsy, and a fool, he managed to keep away from his path and thus avoid trouble. But this was not always possible, since both of them liked to roam about. (1944: 1)

Within an allegory of colonial hierarchy, the Tiger represents the colonizer, the highest animal on the food chain who refuses to play nice.³⁴ The Tiger's brute force and greed would seemingly overpower any "small animal," yet the narrator reveals the Tiger's faults from the perspective of the "very clever" and "quick witted" Rabbit. The Rabbit discerns "the beast's" intentions so as never to mistake the Tiger for a friend. The Rabbit's low opinion of this "fool" ("stupid and clumsy") never causes him to forget the Tiger is a threat. Interestingly, Belpré's description of the Tiger parallels with her rhetoric in "Library Work for Bilingual Children," when she describes the dominant group's view of the Puerto Rican child as "culturally deprived" (i.e., "those who lack the knowledge...and the respect"). "The Tiger and the Rabbit" describes a colonial relationship typical of Latin America and the Caribbean in which the colonizer and the colonized live in such close proximity ("both liked to roam about") that they are practically partners. When the Tiger threatens to eat the Rabbit, the Rabbit convinces the Tiger that both need to defend themselves from a "terrible hurricane." The Tiger envies the Rabbit's small size and fears his own enormity will make it difficult to find shelter: "He shivered at the thought of the howling of the wind, the crashing of the trees, and the downpour of the rain" (2). The Tiger's fear of the storm suggests the colonizer's own displacement

within a land not rightfully his. He must depend on the native Rabbit's hurricane survival skills. The Rabbit convinces the Tiger that his best option is to remain still while the Rabbit ties him (with the same cord the Tiger previously used as a threat) to a tamarind tree. The Rabbit essentially puts a leash on the colonizer, as the other small animals gather to poke fun at the harnessed beast.

The tale ends when, after a series of maneuvers tricking the Tiger, the Rabbit rides off on the Tiger's back in order to escape a pack of foxes. This action demonstrates the dysfunctional use and abuse within colonial relationships, such as using the colonizer's strength as protection against internal community injustices. The Rabbit always remains one step ahead of the Tiger. He must simply work around his threats. I would suggest that *Perez and Martina*, another example of Belpré's animal fables, also issues a similar warning to the colonizer. The genteel Perez eventually marries Martina, who is quite the cook, yet there is certainly no happy ending:

[Perez] peeped in. "If it tastes as good as it looks," said Perez, "I am certainly going to have a great treat."

He then stuck in his paw and tasted it. When he did so, he knew he had never tasted anything like that before.

He peeped in again. Then he noticed a fat almond getting brown all over.

"Oh, if I could only get it," said Perez.

"One good pull and it will be mine."...He gave it a good pull but unfortunately he lost his balance and fell into the kettle.

He screamed and called for help. But who could help him? (1932: 44-50)

Sánchez-González reads Martina's kitchen antics and Perez's death at the end of the tale as sexual, implying his genteel, Spanish ways were no match for the too-hot, Islander Martina (2001: 90). However, as Perez's dainty, high-heeled feet hang out of the boiling kettle, as seen in Sánchez's illustrations, he also represents a sense of greed for the delights and riches of the Island, whether women, land, or other forms of "capital." This is a greed the narrator severely punishes. Also, like the Tiger who fears the oncoming hurricane in "The Tiger and the Rabbit," Perez the pure Spaniard, though somewhat celebrated, meets his tragic fate precisely because he is unaccustomed to native ways and a colonizer.

Other tales such as *Once in Puerto Rico's* "Ivaiahoca" (a Taíno legend) and "The Rogavita" (a Spanish legend) illustrate the community's strength to persuade the colonizer or route his attack. Again, such a tale encourages a child's identification with the indigenous Taíno race's struggle against Spanish colonialism.³⁵ Ivaiahoca, a Taíno woman, pleads for her son's life when he is taken captive by the Spanish. Instead of the trickster tradition, Ivaiahoca's speech to General Salazar illustrates a kind of civil disobedience founded on sacrifice and empathy:

Señor Salazar, I know you must have a mother. Because of her you can understand my suffering. My son is young and loves his liberty. He should live to enjoy it. I am old. If he were in captivity, my last remaining days would be in agony. But if I knew he was free, I could pass those days in peace, whatever tasks and trials might come to me. Take my life and my services for his liberty. Heaven will reward your good deed. (1973: 39)

Ivaiahoca wins her son's freedom through this speech. She then risks her life for General Salazar by delivering a letter to Juan Ponce de León. Her bravery leads to Salazar's praise of Ivaiahoca's "nobility" rather than deterring him from the war on the Taínos. Belpré's retelling of "The Rogativa" combines trickster and civil disobedience tactics. In the story, thousands of Puerto Ricans assemble in the streets, curiously enough with lighted candles to deter British fleets in San Juan Harbor, as Belpré narrates:

The English spies on watch sent an urgent message to Abercrombie's headquarters. Great movement could be seen within the capital. They heard a loud ringing of bells and could see strange glimmering lights toward the west.

"They must be getting reinforcements from the country," said the English general. (1973: 70)

The British interpret the lighted candles as symbols of conglomeration and resistance. The mass of people, each with a candle in hand, symbolizes the importance of each protester.

Perhaps in her own embodiment of "The Rogativa," Belpré outsmarted the NYPL's rules concerning published texts during her early career, earning her the right to tell her unpublished stories to children, lit candle in hand. Davis only gave the condition that she "[t]ell the children that they were the first children to hear the stories before they were in book form" (n.d.: 2). Nuñez writes that Davis's insistence that children understand that Belpré told unpublished stories contains a "humorous...ethnocentric assumption that children would expect to see a book when hearing a story" (2009:

70). Indeed, Davis' concern seems more for the children's comprehension of a kind of sanctioned literacy encompassed by published narratives.

Belpré's resurrection of Island culture underlined her belief that stories could provoke the Island's continual rebirth within the imagination of Puerto Rican children throughout Spanish Harlem.

Belpré's initial lighting of the candle, without a published text, began a Puerto Rican literary tradition within the U.S., a narrative characterized by a sense of existing outside established cultural, national, and racial boundaries. As a storyteller, already a subversive figure, Belpré transformed an U.S. tradition into an act of resistance. Just years after the U.S. invasion of Puerto Rico, Belpré persuaded U.S. society, represented by the NYPL staff, to acknowledge the birth of a new cultural identity within the United States. The candle's flame evidenced that, even without an official political or legal status as an independent nation, the Puerto Rican cultural nation had claimed a position within the global community represented on the children's bookshelf. This early stage of Belpré's career at the 135th Street Branch established within the NYPL and Harlem that a Puerto Rican identity within the U.S. existed. Belpré's resurrection of Island culture underlined her belief that stories could provoke the Island's continual rebirth within the imagination of Puerto Rican children throughout Spanish Harlem. Indeed, Belpré continued telling her unpublished tales outside the children's room "in English and Spanish, throughout the library system, as well as in schools and PTA meetings" (Belpré "Folklore" 2). As I explore in the next section, her storytelling contributed to a cohesive sense of Puerto Rican identity necessary for subsequent generations of Puerto Rican children "in this new land."

Another Johnny Appleseed:

Folklore, Seed-sowing, and the Harvests of the Diaspora

Juan Flores writes that "the creation and perpetuation of diasporic conditions" requires a proliferation of ideology and culture," a reality I believe Belpré understood and actively pursued in her storytelling career (2009: 20). In "I Wished to be Like Johnny Appleseed," Belpré draws a comparison between her work and the legacy of Johnny Appleseed, an American folk hero famous for planting a formidable crop of apple trees still visible today.³⁶ She wanted her legacy remembered as that of the "Puerto Rican Johnny Appleseed" in the United States (Hernández-Delgado 1992:

436). Her imagined kinship with Applesseed, although endearing, also reveals her subversive approach to storytelling and folklore. Belpré's adoption of this American hero resembles her participation within the NYPL's candle lighting: transforming a U.S. tradition into a statement about Puerto Rican identity. The image is that of Belpré, on a lone path through the New York wilderness, hands in the soil, planting a harvest for the coming generations of both Puerto Rican and American children. With this comparison in mind, I want to examine some of the possible harvests that Belpré may have desired through her figurative planting. Essays such as "New York Public Library and Puerto Rican Folklore," "The Reluctant Reader What Makes Him" and "Library Work with Bilingual Children" provide further insight into Belpré's planting in children's literature. The first harvest I believe she implied was a harvest of subsistence brought about by the figurative story-seeds. For example, "New York Public Library and Puerto Rican Folklore," written further into her career, contains the concerns of an older Belpré, who by this time had witnessed the immense need of two concurrent migrations (1920s post-citizenship; 1940s-'50s post-Operation Bootstrap) of Puerto Ricans to New York.³⁷ She implies in her analysis of the two migrations that the second group of migrants arrived less prepared for the realities of big-city, American life: "The possibilities for continuing the work were great, the need even greater. The City schools were filled with new arrivals from Puerto Rico with little or no knowledge of English" (n.d.: 4). No doubt Belpré confronted the overwhelming poverty and social struggles prevalent within this community of new "Americans" who left a vastly rural Island for industrial city life. However, a revival of stories and Island culture could provide temporary solace:

In the present struggle to fight poverty, hunger and fear, to bring a semblance of peace and security into the home, the need for serenity and beauty seem to be forgotten. Food alone cannot accomplish the task; it needs an elevation of the spirit. Through the power of a story and the beauty of its language, the child, for a while, at least, escapes to a world of his own. He leaves the room richer than when he entered it. (n.d.: 7)

Belpré draws clear parallels between storytelling and food and storytelling and security. The story-seeds satiated a need within the child beyond physical hunger. More than physical hunger, story-seeds satiated a child's thirst for cultural identification. Further in the paper, she illustrates this point through the example of a Cuban mother who, "discovering a collection of Spanish books exclaimed, 'Come my children, quench your thirst!'" (n.d.: 5). Child and parent could find security, even in social or economic unrest, in the children's room with Belpré, a woman who provided them with a kind

of “certainty in their moves,” as she writes: “They realized there was some one now, who not only could interpret for them and offer entertainment, but some one who understood their psychology and to whom they could discuss their problems” (quoted in Hernández-Delgado 1992: 429).

The second harvest Belpré suggests is a harvest of resistance where story-seeds produce resistance against Americanization. Belpré believed her planting, like Appleseed's, produced a distinctly Puerto Rican crop within American soil. Indeed, Belpré viewed a combination of literary (publications) and performance (storytelling, puppetry, festivals) as a more effective strategy for group mobilization and pride rather than literary work alone, something evident in her 1945 letter to Frances Clarke Sayers, NYPL superintendent of Work for Children: “One does not uproot the foundations solidly laid by a mere stroke of a pen...there cannot be a resignation from children's work for me. I will still be carrying on, in my efforts to contribute, through my future writings something which the children will enjoy” (quoted in Hernández-Delgado 2009: 432). How very typical of Belpré to blend a sense of endearment with a rhetoric of revolution. To illustrate, Belpré's folklore and speeches defended the Puerto Rican child's right to Spanish within the U.S. Many of her publications, including her most popular text, *Perez and Martina*, contain Spanish words and phrases. In “The Reluctant Reader, What Makes Him,” Belpré openly criticized teachers who considered bilingual children incapable of learning proper literacy skills, suggesting that teachers, in order to properly instruct children, required an education in a child's culture – a remarkable argument given that she made these statements at least thirty years before advents in multicultural education. Belpré maintained that the Puerto Rican child, as “the latest immigrant to create a new foreign speaking community,” required “special care.” Considering her argument about teacher education, “special care” may actually refer to educating teachers about the “special” colonial relationship of Puerto Rico to the United States, which made the Puerto Rican child different “from all other migrants in that they are American citizens.” Indeed, the children demonstrated a “tendency to cling to their native language and traditions even through their process of assimilation” (quoted in Sánchez-González 2001: 76). Sánchez-González notes that, although Belpré saw Puerto Rican children as part of a “universality of childhood,” something I would add coincides with Moore's view of the global community, she still reminded society that these U.S. citizens learned and would continue to learn Spanish as a first language. As Sánchez-González writes, “Belpré prefers to call attention to the unique cultural and linguistic syncretism that Boricuas experience in the States, a syncretism that does not preclude ‘assimilation’ but rather nurtures the child's development in unique ways, with its own built-in rhythms and tendencies” (2001: 77). I disagree

with Sánchez-González to the extent that she writes that bilingualism, for Belpré, “does not preclude ‘assimilation.’” Belpré’s career, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s, overlaps with trends in children’s education in which educational policies interpreted the onslaught of immigrants as an “invasion.” Efforts to assimilate, or Americanize, immigrant children during this time included discouraging children from speaking their native languages (Tyack 1974: 229). In addition, U.S. educational policy on the Island included the enforcement of English as the official language of instruction, though this policy was later revoked. By defending the Spanish language as a part of the Puerto Rican child’s American experience, Belpré indeed defies total assimilation.

In addition to defending the Puerto Rican child’s right to language, the third harvest Belpré suggests is a harvest of nationalism through the nationalist themes invoked in her retelling of Island folklore. Her work combines a sense of upholding Spanish colonialism as an affront to the North American while also reinforcing the nativist Taíno movement that resists the Spaniard. Indeed, folklore as a genre propagates some of the most beloved national myths within any country. Folk traditions assured that the Puerto Rican child in “this new land” received the same education in Puerto Rican national mythology as children on the Island. Belpré’s arguments against the notion of Puerto Rican children as “culturally deprived” contain nationalist sentiment and mythology. Belpré continually identifies Puerto Rico’s pre-U.S. history under Taíno and then Spanish rule as the true origin of the Puerto Rican child, regardless of birthplace. She reveals further nationalist sentiment in “Folklore of the Puerto Rican Child” when, in retracing the history of Puerto Rican folklore for U.S. audiences, she quotes Puerto Rican folklorist Rafael Ramirez de Arrellanos’ preface to *Puerto Rican Folklore* (1926):

Firmly believing that the best preparation for the future is a complete and exact knowledge of the past, we present this collection to our people, so that in these pages he may see his life, his feelings, his habits, his customs, his sorrows, his joys, his songs and games—all the activities of those who left behind a country already formed, with a dignified and noble history, with hope and ideality. (n.d.: 1)

Belpré’s statement, through Arrellanos, upholds folklore as the creative and popular work of a people and a “country already formed.” She also maintained that the folklore she recounted served as the “foundation” of Puerto Rican literature. Here, I note that Belpré believed her work as a folklorist participated in a literary project that joined with the Puerto Rican national canon or the insular canon. This differs with Sánchez-González since part of her goal is to present Belpré within a U.S. literature independent from Island literature (2001: 19). Certainly, we need to consider Belpré

as forming part of American literature; however, I do not believe Belpré saw her literary work, at least not her folklore, as forming part of a U.S. canon. Indeed, Belpré is catalogued in one of the only official Island bibliographies of children's literature, a volume in which she writes the preface.³⁸ Her assertions resemble the early group of "temporary sojourners," which Flores catalogues in the history of Puerto Rican literature, and not the latter group of writers, such as Nicholasa Mohr, who wrote about the U.S. as her home (1993: 144-146). In fact, she may have desired to perpetuate this attitude of "temporary sojourner" within children. In addition, because folklore represented the "collective psychology" of "a country already formed," endowing the generations of Puerto Rican children with that collective psychology formed part of Belpré's objective (n.d.: 1). Folklore assured that the Puerto Rican child's collective psychology concurred with the Island's national myths. Further, Belpré also opens and closes her version of "The Three Magi" in *The Tiger and the Rabbit* with poetry by Manuel Fernández Jucos, author of the "La Borinqueña," the Puerto Rican national anthem (1944: 105-11).

Here, I note that Belpré believed her work as a folklorist participated in a literary project that joined with the Puerto Rican national canon or the insular canon.

Stories like *The Rainbow Colored Horse* contain nationalist themes fostering a child's love of *la patria*. A child could imagine herself as forming part of a Puerto Rican national ancestry rather than as a subject of a U.S. colony. *The Rainbow-Colored Horse* depicts the Island as a magical wonderland where adventure awaits at every turn. New York children hearing the tale step into the world of the traditional, agricultural *campesino*. The story about a magical, multicolored horse that helps a young farmer win the heart of a rich, young lady, contains distinctly Puerto Rican scenery and pastimes: farmer Tano and his sons rock on hammocks and play the *cuatro*. Even second-generation children can envision the land they "left behind" was a place of dreams. Island memories of a majestic paradise would haunt future generations of Nuyoric writers who either never returned or returned only to find themselves rejected as "gringos." Her story-seeds nurture children's recognition of Puerto Rico's position as a Latin American country under U.S. rule. Ultimately, the story features anti-colonial, nationalist themes which emphasize Puerto Rican rather than Spanish or U.S. pride. Children at Belpré's story-hours, celebrating *la patria*, may have begun to question the Island's status as a U.S. territory. Furthermore, Belpré may have sought to reproduce nationalist rhetoric within

children, a choice that coincided with her belief in Puerto Rican independence.³⁹ In tandem with her perspective of “temporary sojourner,” her folkloric project may have also carried the mission of educating children, who perhaps as adults, would return to the Island and carry on the cause for independence.

The Children of the Diaspora

As a Puerto Rican Johnny Appleseed, Belpré’s planting of story-seeds, with harvests of subsistence, resistance, and nationalism, undergirded the formation of a Puerto Rican colonia in New York. Sánchez-Korrol credits Belpré’s “leadership” with “preserv[ing] the customs and cultural traditions of the Puerto Rican people, setting them apart as a distinctive group” (1983: 69). This colonia eventually developed into a unique American group of color known as the Nuyoricans, whose presence within New York captured American imagination in the 1950s to the ‘70s through a proliferation of pop culture, including Broadway musicals, salsa, and poetry readings at the Nuyorican Poet’s Café. Although Belpré held fast to Island folklore throughout her career, her final, original, published children’s texts, entitled *Santiago* (1969), captures her conception of this new Puerto Rican or Nuyorican. Though still upholding Island culture, the story represents an admission that the Nuyorican child, embodied in the character of “Santiago,” would enact his future on U.S. soil. Santiago is a little boy whose teacher notes “lives in two places” (1969: 29). Santiago, just arrived from Puerto Rico, spends his time looking at pictures of his pet hen that he left behind on the Island. He wants his best friend Ernie to see Selina’s picture; he fears his best friend will not believe his stories about her. He constantly refers to the hen, Selina, both at home and in the classroom; every moment he believes he sees her out of the corner of his eye. When Santiago asks two grown men whether they have seen the hen, one of them replies, “Look, Sonny, this is a parking lot, not a chicken coop.” As the Puerto Rican child of Belpré’s imagination, Santiago breaks the established barriers of what is expected and wanted in his New York City classroom. He sits in his class while longing for the Puerto Rico of his past. Santiago contrasts the modern city against the jíbaro farmer. With all the modernization and sophistication of the city, Santiago still insists on a piece of rural island memory. Belpré seems to acknowledge how a continual desire for the Island blocks total acclimation, and in turn assimilation, to city life, a sentiment echoed in Piri Thomas and Mohr’s Nuyorican novels. The story ends when Santiago takes his teacher and classmates to his apartment to see the pictures of Selina and a carved gourd made by his grandfather on the Island. The gourd depicts the history of Puerto Rico with carvings of “the Indians, Columbus, Ponce de León.” It is then that Miss Taylor “understands why Santiago lived in two places” (1969: 28–9). He can never forget his native land.

The case of Pura Belpré exposes some of the contradictions within the study of Puerto Rican and children's literature—even what is construed as literature and what is not. We see how Puerto Rican and Latino/a children's writers have been left outside of academia, a reality that affects critical inquiry, college syllabi, teacher training, and ultimately, the U.S. classroom. In the children's literary world, libraries and bookstores often practice a kind of ghettoization of children's spaces. Harlem children and beloved storytellers like Augusta Baker and Belpré may have rarely ventured to Fifth Avenue's main children's room nor would patrons likely find African American or Latino/a children's texts within the main branches' shelves. The NYPL and influential "bookwomen" like Moore pioneered this by-neighborhood approach to children's library services. Though somewhat ideal in terms of internationalism and personalization, neighborhood specificity also meant that the children's rooms, the librarians, and the children's texts were divided by race and socioeconomics. Considering that the NYPL and Moore's policies, as Eddy writes, set foundational trends in the emerging American children's literary world of the 1920s-'30s, it is interesting that even today, specialized children's literature and activities, including special prizes for black, Asian, and Latino children's literature like the Belpré Medal, repeat a similar pattern that signals inclusiveness though not necessarily equality. And even as we celebrate Belpré and personalities like her, reports continue circulating about how Latino/a children register their communities as non-existent on the ever-revered children's bookshelf. In light of Belpré and past studies done by educators like Sonia Nieto, we see that this problem has endured for at least 90 years. How could this be? In addition to the lack of scholarly inquiry on Latino/a children's literature and the segregation of children's media, we might consider how folkloric representations of Puerto Rican culture are presented to young people. Even as we see Belpré tirelessly lighting the storyteller's candle throughout New York, children's writer Nicholasa Mohr's complaint in the 1970s was that she "never found a book [at the library] that included Puerto Ricans or, for that matter, other Latinos. My family, my friends, and all of us in my community did not exist..."⁴⁰ As I emphasize, most of Belpré's stories take place outside the U.S. landscape. Might children be searching for characters reflecting their lives within the U.S., as opposed to animal fables and tales of the past? Is it even possible to fulfill the subjective longing for an accurate reflection of one's culture on the children's bookshelf?⁴¹

Harlem children and beloved storytellers like Augusta Baker and Belpré may have rarely ventured to Fifth Avenue's main children's room nor would patrons likely find African American or Latino/a children's texts within the main branches' shelves.

So, what then is Pura Belpré's legacy for Puerto Rican children? What of her story-seeds planted in a community seemingly void of history? In the case of Piri Thomas, Nuyoric author of *Down These Means Streets* (1967), Belpré's librarianship had a direct impact. Thomas remembers Belpré as "the librarian" who always let him walk out of the NYPL's Aguilar Branch, her final library post, with more books than the quota. Thomas stuffed the extra books into his shirt and pants, leaving the library "pregnant with books." Thomas, attending Belpré's NYPL retirement ceremony in 1980, was surprised to learn that Belpré always "noticed [his book sneaking] but since he returned them she made no complaint" (NYPL Honors Pura Belpré 1980: 14). Of course, Belpré encouraged children's transgression of societal rules throughout her career, such as claiming national pride even without legalized nationhood. Rules and boundaries could always be outsmarted. Belpré's own story is one that breaks proscribed rules in literature; such as that you must have a published book before you can have a literary legacy. An initial glance at Belpré's rhetoric, and her more-than-40-year storytelling career throughout New York, leads one to the conclusion that the figurative seeds she planted were the stories themselves. However, although I do believe she likened stories to seeds, and believed in the possible harvests that they would grow, I suggest that she also viewed the children as seeds. As she grew older and the number of children at her story-hours grew, Belpré found it more difficult to have a close relationship with her patrons. In "New York Public Library and Folklore," Belpré contemplates the expansiveness of her project:

When one wonders at the great distances that have been covered over these decades, there is also a long for the intimacy of the first Children's room in which this work became a reality and where the children were close by. But this is a fleeting thought, for, as Frances Spain consoled us: "It is not the room, but the child. Think how many more you can reach this way."

It seems a very long time since the first vision of Ernestine Rose; but the seeds she planted have taken roots, grown and the harvest has been good. (n.d.: 8-9)

The solace Belpré finds within Spain's statement, "It is not the room, but the child," and the possibility of reaching as many children as possible highlights the true drive and pursuit behind her colossal undertakings: the Puerto Rican child. It is her pursuit of the child, her interest and concern for this new type of Puerto Rican living in U.S., which she credits as the impulse behind her publications and storytelling in the figurative New York wilderness. It is this pursuit of the child that seemingly plucked

her from a life of obscurity and transformed her into “the most accomplished woman of the *pioneros* generation” — a fabled Puerto Rican Johnny Appleseed whose face graces medals honoring Latino/a children’s literature (Sánchez-Korrol 1983: 58). Belpré pursued the child because the child was the figurative seed of the coming generations. If she could nurture children as seeds, then these children would secure a remnant of Puerto Rican culture in the U.S. Belpré’s legacy teaches us that the regulations within a field should be challenged, but that for those who labor in those fields, the work never ceases.

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NOTES

¹ At the time of writing, the monograph was not available. Lisa Sánchez-González's comments are taken from the documentary produced by Centro, *Pura Belpré: Storyteller* (2011). The monograph will provide readers a more in-depth look into Belpré's repertoire of unpublished stories and papers, something few would see without a trip to Centro's Spanish Harlem archives.

² *Firefly Summer* (1996) was recovered from Belpré's personal archives; it was probably written around World War II, but was never published because of a "paper shortage"—according to the book jacket.

³ One of Nuñez's greatest achievements in her article is her ability to analyze what she calls "interracial cooperation" between Harlem's African-American and Puerto Rican community (2009: 54). As Nuñez writes, Belpré, at different times, participated in theatrical productions and readings that could be designated within the African-American and/or Puerto Rican communities.

⁴ In the documentary, *Pura Belpré, Storyteller* (2012), Victoria Nuñez says that "Originally, folkloric stories tales were for entertainment for people of all ages. And...in the present, in writing down those stories and trying to hold on to them as a form of the heritage of a community or of a people, they have been received as children's literature, which is fine, but that is not what their origin is." Nuñez implies that folklore through a kind of process of translation has been semi-demoted as a genre for children. Once again, my purpose is to move away from thinking that children's literature is a purely pedantic medium and begin seeing it as an experimental, artistic medium. Also as scholars like Alison Lurie and Julia Mickenberg have shown, children's literature is a subversive medium, indeed, a key for examining a community's political ideology.

⁵ Beverly Lyon Clark examines the marginalization of children's literature within the academy and the movement within literary studies to promote children's literature as scholar-worthy in *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature* (2003). Leonard Marcus also chronicles the development of U.S. children's literature as scholarly field within the humanities in *Minders of Make Believe: Idealists, Entrepreneurs, and the Shaping of American Children's Literature* (2008). During the 1970s and '80s, a great deal of work was done by Francelia Butler, a University of Connecticut professor, as a means of advancing children's literature as a subject within the humanities, mainly English departments, including the founding of the Children's Literature Association (ChLA) and a section of the Modern Language Association (MLA).

⁶ Carol J. Singley analyzes images of childhood and kinship within U.S. narratives in *Adopting America: Childhood, Kinship, and National Identity within Literature* (2011). Singley, in particular,

focuses on the literary portrayal of adoption and illegitimacy as a symbol for national anxiety about national belonging and origins. For other works on childhood and nationhood within American studies, see Karen Sanchez-Eppler's *Dependent States: The Child's Part within in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (2005), Caroline Levander's *Cradle of Liberty* (2005), Julia Mickenberg's *Learning from the Left* (2005), Caroline Steedman's *Strange Dislocations* (1995), and Robin Bernstein's *Racial Innocence* (2011). This sub-field of American Studies is sometimes referred to as childhood studies.

⁷ I am not the first to suggest that the study of children's literature is largely based on monolingual, Anglo traditions (see O'Sullivan 2005). Clearly, more work is being done on "ethnic" and "African American" literature, but as I mentioned, categorizing Latino/a experiences as "ethnic" is counterproductive to certain discussions within empire.

⁸ The use of postcolonial theory within conversations about Puerto Rico is also a controversial topic. Flores, for example, writes: "The insights of theorists like Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak are no doubt of great explanatory value, as is the critique of [Benedict] Anderson's 'imagined communities' by Partha Chatterjee and others" (2000: 214). Flores specifies that for U.S. Latino/a communities such as U.S. Puerto Ricans, Dominican-Americans, and Chicanos, "the economic and political domination of their home countries" makes "postcolonial" an inadequate term. Likewise, Jorge Duany insists that a postcolonial critique such as Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities" cannot explain constructions of national identity within the greater Puerto Rican community. Anderson writes that people "imagine" nations as "limited," "sovereign," and "as a political community" (2002: 7). Duany argues that "Anderson's formulation of nationalism presupposes that communities are imagined from a fixed location, within a fixed, bounded space" (2002: 7). He suggests, as do I, that it is possible to imagine yourself as part of a "nation" without thinking of that nation as fixed in a particular geographical location. With regard to the U.S.'s political and legal relationship to Puerto Rico and its Diaspora, I have decided to use the term "colonial" and "colonization" within my study as opposed to neocolonial or even "commonwealth," the official title of Puerto Rico, a title that masks the Island's colonial position considering it is also used to refer to states like Massachusetts. Puerto Rico is politically and legally, however, very much a colony of the U.S. Those writers living and working within the Island and the U.S. represent a literature that exhibits colonial repercussions. Indeed, Puerto Rico has never politically or economically risen above the level of colony, first of Spain and then the U.S. It still remains an acquired possession without annexation governed by U.S. federal laws and economic policy. The study of U.S. Puerto Rican children's culture disrupts the traditional pedagogical approach to U.S. history as a narrative of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness with justice for all.

⁹ My dissertation focuses on this notion much more; however, for more information on the tie between children's books, nation, and empire, please see works such as Ann González's *Rituals of Survival: Children's Narratives of Latin America and the Caribbean*, Clare Bradford's *Unsettling Narratives: Postcolonial Readings of Children's Literature* (2007) and Herbert R. Kohl's *Should We Burn Babar?* (2007).

¹⁰ In my dissertation "Every Child is Born a Poet": The Puerto Rican Narrative within American Children's Culture (2012), I review such U.S.-produced children's texts such as *Greater America:*

Our Latest Insular Possession (1899) by Anonymous, *Young Hunters in Porto Rico or the Search for Lost Treasure* (1900) by William Stratemeyer, and *The Motor Girl's in Waters Blue* (1915) by Margaret Penrose. These texts tend to emphasize the Island as an exotic backdrop for adventure and/or as a promising land of riches for U.S. investments.

¹¹ Edna Acosta-Belen and Virginia Sanchez-Korrol's introduction to Jesus Colon's *The Way it Was and Other Writing's* describe "lo puertorriqueño" as "the Puerto Rican character." This community's investment in building a strong network served as a means of asserting identity and protecting civil liberties (16).

¹² A 'scriptive thing,' as Bernstein denotes, is an object or prop from a story that invites audiences and readers to take part in culturally specific behaviors and postures. Bernstein gives the example of a handkerchief, which is meant to imply an actor's crying or nose-blowing (2000: 11).

¹³ The care with which Belpré made these outfits is truly a work of artistry worth noting for those in theatre production or puppet design. The casing containing the puppets in the Centro Archives also contains swabs of fabric that may have been used for other projects.

¹⁴ Augusta Baker's role in Belpré's career is worth noting, as Baker and Belpré trained together and maintained a working relationship throughout their career. Baker later became the Coordinator of Children's Services at the NYPL and re-hired Belpré later in life.

¹⁵ Jesús Colón's *A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches* (1961) is also studied among the first accounts of Puerto Rican life in the United States. Like Bernardo Vega, Colón writes about the early Puerto Rican settlement, but his work was not published until 1961. Colón was a friend and fellow community activist of Belpré. For more information on his work with the International Workers Order (a communist organization) and drama and music groups, see the Jesús Colón Papers at the Centro Archives. More research needs to be done on Colón's, as well as other writers from the Diaspora, work with children and young adults. However, I note again the performance aspect of his efforts with young people.

¹⁶ Schomburg and Colón published essays in newspapers before Belpré published with Warne in 1931. Also, William Carlos Williams published his poetry in the early '20s; however, Belpré is the first to publish a book in English in the United States dedicated solely to Puerto Rican culture during this period. Colón's newspaper writing (*Justicia, Gráfico*, etc.) exemplifies other writing outlets for this community during this time.

¹⁷ Schomburg was an avid socialist while Colón, a member of the communist party, was under investigation by the House Committee on Un-American Activities during the 1950s. Belpré, a proclaimed nationalist though not a professed socialist or communist, avoided these investigations although the "American-ness" of her project in children's literature is certainly questionable. Lillian Lopes, also a librarian who worked with and supported Belpré (the South Bronx Project) during her later career, also maintained records of Belpré's traveling puppet theatre. Within the Lillian Lopes Papers, a "political puppetry manual" by Eddie Hayes can be found. The manual lists recommendations for how to use puppets to inspire political ideals as part of the "American social change movement" (11). More research needs to be done on the political nature of Belpré and Lopes' work in political children's theatre and puppetry; however, it appears that both were aware of the subversive use of this medium. For more on children's

literature as a politically subversive medium, see Alison Lurie's *Don't Tell the Grow-ups* (1990) and Julia Mickenburg's *Learning from the Left* (2005).

¹⁸ The Schomburg Center for Black Culture features several activities where young people (sixth through twelfth grade) are invited to use the facilities for meetings. For more information: <http://www.nypl.org/locations/tid/64/node/65981/>.

¹⁹ Kenneth Kidd calls scholars to consider what, if any, difference there is between an archive and a "children's [] archive" in "The Child, The Scholar, and the Children's Literature Archive," *The Lion and the Unicorn*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (January 2011): 1-23. Some considerations include what if any access children should have and what materials constitute as "children's." For example, how should we compare texts or objects produced by children as opposed to for children?

²⁰ Jorge Duany, in the *Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*, writes that the "quest for ancestral origins is a common discursive practice to narrate the nation by excluding certain autochthonous ideological elements and excluding foreign ones" (2002: 261). Duany writes about the struggle to define a "native" culture and how this has largely meant the exclusion of African heritage. He writes: "In Puerto Rico, the nativistic movement has historically faced several challenges. First, the Island's original inhabitants were decimated during the first half of the sixteenth century, although their cultural and biological characteristics influenced the local population. Second, Puerto Rico changed colonial masters in 1898, from Spain to the United States, so that nationalists first turned to Spanish, not indigenous, culture as a form of resistance against Americanization. Third, the massive importation of African slaves throughout most of the Spanish colonial period complicates any search for the pure pre-Columbian or European origins of Puerto Rican culture" (2002: 262). Interestingly, Belpré reproduces both types of nationalist rhetoric and leaves out African heritage. An example of this "leaving out the African" can be seen in her version of "Yuisa and Pedro Mexias" from *Once in Puerto Rico*.

²¹ Belpré's full name was Pura Teresa María Belpré, and she was from Cidra, Puerto Rico. Given Teresita's name and her hometown (Cidra), it is possible that she is a somewhat autobiographical character.

²² Sánchez- González's (2001) chapter on Belpré contains a detailed discussion of Belpré's storytelling activities at the 115th Street Branch; however, like Nuñez, I emphasize that Belpré began her storytelling career at the 135th Street branch and then carried her experiences eastward into Harlem.

²³ In "Letter to Margaret Bedan" (1961), Belpré complains about the artwork depicting Puerto Ricans in one of her books. Her comments suggest she saw the drawings as racist.

²⁴ Tyler's preface reads: "It has been suggested that the boys and girls who have so often listened to these stories in the clubs and story-hours of the New York Public Library, might like to have a few of their favorites in one book; that other boys and girls might be interested in reading them; and that the storyteller, in search of stories for special occasions, might find this little volume useful."

²⁵ The founding of the Belpré Medal also suggests how Belpré has been celebrated within certain aspects of children's literature, such as librarianship or child advocacy, while still left out of literary conversations within the study of children's literature in the humanities. Again, I think this shows the division within the field of children's literature scholarship. The prizing

of children's literature is also a complex discussion. For an introduction on children's literature medals, see Kidd (2007).

²⁶ Moore and Belpré's conception of the storyteller's role overlaps with some critical notions about this "archaic" activity in a postmodern world. Again, during the 1930s era in which Belpré began her public storytelling career, European theorists such as Walter Benjamin had begun reflecting on the importance of oral culture, and consequently children's narratives, within local histories. In Latin America and the Caribbean, José Martí, toward the late-nineteenth century, and Juan Ramón Jiménez, toward the beginning of the twentieth, began writing for children as a way of building up notions of Latin American nationhood, perhaps another trend Belpré reflects and speaks to. Walter Benjamin reflected on his ideal storyteller, an "artisan," who related valuable, "mouth-to-mouth experience" as opposed to the masses of information arising from an increasingly, mechanical world (1969: 84). Benjamin mourned the modern world's loss of "wisdom" and "truth," which he suggests caused a decline in personal, relatable experience within communities: "After all, counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding" (1969: 86). As in Island folklore's celebration of rural life, Benjamin associates his ideal of storytelling and oral culture within images of the rural, which seemingly subvert the influence of industrialization and mass media: "the man who has stayed at home, making an honest living, and who knows the local tales and traditions" and "the resident tiller of the soil" (1969: 84). This view of storytelling might extend into subaltern groups and their desires to maintain local histories and cultures. The modern, mechanical world encroaching on personal "counsel" with the so-called arts of civilization strikingly resembles the image of the colonizer subduing native culture. Colonialism carries the goal of erasing a sense of local history as part of nation and empire-building, a process that connects with marginalized groups' emphasis on children's culture. The sense of fleeting local histories and nation-building is a theme traceable to the nineteenth century at least when, as Island theorists like Flor Piñero de Rivera demonstrate, children's poetry and written folklore were seen as part of a project preserving typical oral, "national" traditions (1987: 17). In terms of preservation, however, the storyteller, even as Benjamin implies when he refers to him as a craftsman and artisan, also highlights the many revisions and reinventions--"the web" spun by such a storyteller relating (his)stories (1969: 91).

²⁷ Eddy writes that "Recalling prewar America with more nostalgia than reality warranted, many Americans embraced '100% Americanism' during the 1920s" (2006: 92).

²⁸ In "Library Work with Bilingual Children," Belpré tackled this stereotype head-on:

Often the term "culturally deprived" is used with bilingual children [specifically Puerto Rican children], as it is also used for all children residing in sections of the city considered "underprivileged." One can't call a culture that is 400 [years] old, culturally deprived. The fault of the term lies with those who lack the knowledge of the background, and the respect for the culture of these children.

...A child will be better prepared to understand the value of another culture when he knows the value of his own. (quoted in Sánchez-González 2001: 77)

Belpré cleverly reverses the rhetoric by characterizing the dominant culture as ignorant rather than the child.

²⁹ In the picture-book *The Storyteller's Candle*, Delacre's illustrations demonstrate this relationship between cultural belonging and space on the library bookshelves when depicting "La Señora Belpré," the children, and the parents during the story-hour. The desire for a place on the shelf may have been associated with a desire for cultural capital and influence. In a scene picturing Belpré, the children, and the parents, Delacre lines the library shelves with original clippings of 1930s stock exchanges (González 2008: 20–1). "La Señora Belpré" is also pictured holding the lit storyteller's candle in front of a fire place lined with original clippings of name registries of immigrant arrivals into New York.

³⁰ Within the field of education, there is an extensive list of scholars working in multicultural and culturally relevant literature. For an early overview of stereotypical Puerto Rican characters in children's literature see Nieto (1992). More recently, Jamie Campbell Naidoo has an edited book *Celebrating Cuentos: Latino Children's Literature and Literacy in Classrooms and Libraries* (2011), which contains important research by scholars like Carmen Medina and Carmen Martínez-Roldán.

³¹ I am not the first to include Belpré within a foundation for U.S. Puerto Rican narratives. Sánchez-González also includes Belpré within a group of distinguished writers, including Schomburg, William Carlos Williams, and Luisa Capetillo, as "sett[ing] the epistemic foundations for an entire century of Boricua literature" (2001: 102).

³² Hernández, Mariposa. "Ode to a Diasporican: Pa' mi gente" (2001). "No nació en Puerto Rico / Puerto Rico nació en mi" or "I was not born in Puerto Rico / Puerto Rico was born in me."

³³ The trickster is a type found in other forms of literature by marginalized groups such as Native American and African-American traditions. González writes about the prevalence of the trickster character within Latin American culture, a character whose marginal position causes him/her to create alternate "avenues" of success within the dominant culture: "[T]rickster characters and the texts that portray their deceptions in Latin America all find ways to cover their tracks and hide what they do; they speak on multiple, sometimes even contradictory, levels to multiple audiences: children, adults, colleagues, and peers. Yet the message is always fundamentally the same. How to get what is necessary without direct confrontation or open resistance (2009: 8). A tale such "The Tiger and the Rabbit" might be read alongside a text such as Uncle Remus's "The Tale of Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby."

³⁴ Ann González analyzes a tale from Costa Rica about a fat Lion and a monkey as representative of the U.S.'s relationship, or rather interference, with Costa Rica. The United States in Latin American tales is often represented as a tiger or lion. Belpré's *Dance of the Animals* (1972), a picture-book, also contains a story in which a group of lions organize a feast for all the animals. Only a pair of dogs realize that the lions are actually inviting the smaller animals so they can later eat them.

³⁵ Duany writes about the trouble with indigeneity in Puerto Rico and how Puerto Rican folktales adhere to the practice of preferring to celebrate Taíno heritage in lieu of African. As far as I have read, Belpré does not include African folklore.

³⁶ I did not have access to this unpublished paper, but only have seen it listed within Centro's Archive and within Hernández-Delgado's essay on Belpré. Belpré's reference to herself as "the Puerto Rican Johnny Appleseed" also appears in her author's biography within *Perez and Martina*.

³⁷ This was the name given in the United States to then governor of Puerto Rico Luis Muñoz Marín's economic and political restructuring of the Island, including the creation of the Free Associated State (Estado Libre Asociado).

³⁸ *Un siglo de literatura infantil puertorriqueña / A Century of Puerto Rican Children's Literature* by Flor Piñero de Rivera (1987) includes Belpré's folklore within a list of authentically Puerto Rican children's literature representing the Island. Belpré was also invited to write the preface for this volume, a matter I discuss much more in my dissertation and book manuscript.

³⁹ Within Belpré's essays, there is a paper ("Statehood/Commonwealth") on the political status of the Island. This paper reveals that she supported independence.

⁴⁰ See "Nicholasa Mohr." *Scholastic*, "Meet Our Authors and Illustrators." Scholastic.com.

⁴¹ I am not saying we should get rid of folkloric representations for children. As a professor in children's literature, I understand the importance of having texts that are relatable to students. However, in addition to considering issues such as the ideal reader, we should consider introducing literature that is both relatable and relevant. Folklore provides relevant materials for evaluating the history of a group. They might be examined for how they contain symbols of community's ideals—ideals which may have changed. However, young people may not see themselves in such texts. At the same time, we need to be mindful that we don't teach student-writers and readers, whether elementary, secondary, undergraduate or beyond, to read/study only for how "relatable" a text may seem. Such emphasis on "relatability" often produces unproductive conversations that steer students away from the artistic, social, and critical issues within a text. Again, I am emphasizing children's literature here as a mode of artistry as well as pedagogy, two things that need not be in opposition.

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