

Illustrious Awards Recipients - Leadership

The Illustrious Awards

Honoring Distinguished Latinos

Latino leaders in the United States have emerged and distinguished themselves in various fields: philanthropy, social work, politics, community organizing, labor movements, journalism and other areas. Historical accounts reveal that in 1886, Lucy Eldine González Parsons became the first female Hispanic US labor leader. She was an American labor organizer, radical socialist and anarchist communist. She is remembered as a powerful orator. Following her husband's 1887 execution in conjunction with the Haymarket Affair, Parsons remained a leading American radical activist as a member of the Industrial Workers of the World and other political organizations. Today, Latinos are making the difference in their communities. They have developed a reputation for being true advocacy champions for the socio-economic, humanitarian and political rights of US and Latin American diverse communities.



Laila Román-
Jiménez

Late Ramón
Jiménez, Esq.

Amílkar Vélez-
López, Esq.

Wendy Martínez



Zenaida Méndez
MPA

Julio Pabón

José Martínez

Illustrious Award In-Memoriam - Leadership

Civil Rights



Ramón Jiménez, Esq. is remembered today as a highly respected civil rights leader, who dedicated his entire life to community advocacy.

A black Puerto Rican man who lived down the street from Malcolm X, his father, Don Ramón, served in the military and came home with a debilitating mental illness.

Ramón Jiménez's mother, Alicia, worked tirelessly in garment factories, but everyone in the neighborhood knew she would feed the hungry regardless of condition and without asking any questions. When she was mugged in a park and drug addicts mercilessly pummeled her assailant, she begged them not to kill him. Those experiences shaped her son Ramón Jiménez.

A graduate from Harvard University with a law degree, Jimenez skipped his 1974 law school graduation, hopped on a bus and returned to New York City, where he worked tirelessly for the advancement and empowerment of Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and New York diverse communities. His South Bronx office became both, a place for progressive political action and a destination of last resort for the wronged, the injured and the falsely accused.

Over the decades, he led the fight to save Hostos Community College in the South Bronx; he railed against police brutality years before the emergence of the *Black Lives Matter Movement*; and he took on Ramón S. Vélez, the power broker denounced by former Mayor Edward I. Koch as a "poverty pimp." He took on Mr. Koch, too, over the closing of city hospitals.

He also led a campaign to remove the leadership that mismanaged the National Puerto Rican Day Parade.

Mentored by journalist Jack Newfield, and inspired by Puerto Rican nationalist Pedro Albizu Campos, Mr. Jiménez dedicated himself to write investigative pieces and political analyses. Throughout, he found time to represent the powerless: injured workers, single mothers facing eviction, and others who urgently required help to make ends meet.

After realizing he had cancer, he decided to run for New York State Attorney General on the Green Party ticket. He was motivated by the conviction that the masses needed a true advocate, a progressive leader who truly cared about them and forgotten and invisible communities.

He is survived by Laila Román Jiménez, his only daughter, in whose arms he passed away at a hospital in New York City.

Illustrious Award Recipient - Leadership

Laila Román Jiménez was born in New York City.

"My father passed away in my arms. I was there for him at the hospital bed...he trusted me. I heard his last words and breath," she revealed to Néstor Montilla, Sr. during an interview at Hostos Community College about her father's life story. The interview had to be postponed because both, herself and Néstor, tried in vain to hold back tears.

Laila has followed in her father's footsteps. Her immediate plans are to go to law school and become a civil rights attorney, exactly as her father did in 1974. As soon as she earns her law degree, she will return to the Bronx to keep fighting the good fight. Laila is fearless in her commitment to advocate for the youth, and for community empowerment. As a symbol of strength, she kept the lease on her father's office in South Bronx, and keeps the office open to continue serving the community.

Laila has emerged as a genuine public servant and true advocate for the underrepresented.

She is currently setting up the Ramón Jiménez *Foundation* and a global financial literacy curriculum geared to communities and school kids.

She lobbied the NYC Council and her neighborhood's Community Board for the naming of a street after her father. The resolution was approved unanimously.

Tonight, she is here, flanked by family and members of the community to receive an Illustrious Award in leadership In-Memoriam on behalf of her father, the unforgettable and relentless civil rights leader Ramón Jiménez, Esq.

She is also here to receive an Illustrious Award in Youth Activism as with her commitment to justice and her actions to right the wrong, she truly embodies the spirit and commitment of her beloved father.

"My leadership style is very different than other people's," Laila reaffirmed at the end of the interview. "When one looks at other leaders, one obviously sees they are on a different level than the people they are organizing and leading. I don't believe in organizing and being a leader that way. My father's favorite quote was "I want to raise with my people, not from my people." And that's what I keep close to my heart and that's how I lead; that's how I organize; I don't leave anyone behind; everyone is with me. And that's how you get people to be so passionate about different campaigns and different issues that we work on; we all have to come in together. So, I make sure that everyone knows that everyone is equally important."



Illustrious Awards - 2018

A NUESTRO QUERIDO PADRE,

TODOS LOS DÍAS LE DAMOS GRACIAS AL SEÑOR POR TU EJEMPLO,
CARIÑO, ENSEÑANZAS Y SABIDURÍA COMPARTIDA.

HOY TE CELEBRAMOS, Y COMPARTIMOS ESE SENTIR JUNTO A TUS
COLEGAS Y AMISTADES. MÁS ORGULLOSOS NO PODRÍAMOS ESTAR
AL SABER QUE LA COMUNIDAD RECONOCE DE TAN GRAN MANERA
LO QUE NOSOTROS, TUS HIJOS, SENTIMOS DÍA A DÍA.

PAPI
PAPAPA
BABU



(JUST ME, MY DOG AND MY GOAT... LOL!)

PAPI
PAPAPA
BABU

GRACIAS AL INSTITUTO DE ESTUDIOS LATINOS POR ESTE RECONOCIMIENTO,
ALGO QUE LA FAMILIA ENTERA SIENTE EN NUESTROS CORAZONES. Y
FELICIDADES A TODOS LOS HONRADOS.

WITH LOTS OF LOVE,
MYNET, MIKO & MADDY, KATILIA, SANTIAGO, BRENDA, SHEILA & RON,
AND A WHOLE ARMY OF GRANDKIDS AND GREAT-GRAND KIDS!

¡¡¡ FELICIDADES PAPI ~ TE QUEREMOS MUCHO!!!

AMÍLKAR VÉLEZ - LÓPEZ



Illustrious Awards Recipient - Leadership

Community Advocacy

Amílkar Vélez-López is a retired Newark Municipal Court Judge whose passion for the community has kept him motivated to always engage in community causes.

He has the distinction of being a prominent leader who has been a fervent advocate for the Puerto Rican community and partaken in the founding of grassroots organizations: he was a co-founder of *C.U.R.A.*, *La Casa de Don Pedro*, *The Newark Borinquen Lions*, *Hispanic Bar Association of New Jersey*, and *the Association of Puerto Rican Social Workers of New York City*.

Almost seventy years ago, América López de Vélez and Miguel Vélez, received their only son, Amílkar Vélez-López, in the picturesque town of Adjuntas, PR. In 1959 the family relocated to New York City.

While a student at George Washington High School in Manhattan he co-founded the Borinquen ASPIRA Society, in 1963.

He later attained a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from *Universidad Interamericana*, and returned to New York in 1968. He was accepted at Columbia University School of Social Work from where he graduated in 1970. At Columbia University, he became the first Program Director of ASPIRA of NJ in 1970.

While raising three wonderful children: Mynet, Miko and Katilia, along his wonderful and beautiful wife Norma Mutt-Vélez, and active in the Newark and NJ Puerto Rican community, he decided to study law and graduated cum laude from Seton Hall Law School. He was later appointed Newark Municipal Court Judge.

Today, he resides in Florida and continues to be engaged in advocacy for the benefit of all.

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Honoring Distinguished Latinos

Community Advocacy



Wendy S. Martínez is a professional services and resources specialist in the areas of public relations, media relations, political consulting, and media production in both English and Spanish.

Martínez spent several years working for the Bergen County Board of Chosen Freeholders as Director of Policy and Communications, Director of the Office of Multicultural Community Affairs, and as Special Projects Coordinator.

Her professional career also includes serving as Director of Public Programs and Communications for Union City, Chief of Staff to

New Jersey Assemblyman Brian Stack, Public Information Officer for the City of Newark, and Community Outreach Consultant for the Newark Museum.

Her community affiliations include participation in local and state advocacy organizations such as LUPE and the *Annual Conference on Dominican Affairs* spearheaded by the Institute for Latino Studies (ILS).

Her vast experience in the political, governmental, corporate, and media industries as well as her strong understanding of New Jersey's Latino political environment make Wendy Martínez one of the most sought-after political strategists in the state of New Jersey.

She is married to William Senande with whom she has two children.

Illustrious Awards Recipient - Leadership

Community Advocacy

Zenaida Méndez was born in the Dominican Republic and immigrated to the United States as a teenager with her family.

She earned a bachelor's degree in government and public administration from John Jay College of Criminal Justice and a master's degree in public administration from the City University of New York, Graduate School of Public Affairs.

Her activism began in the early 1980s in New York City, when she organized the tenants at Hell's Kitchen, around tenant rights advocacy organizations. About a decade later, Ms. Méndez founded the Dominican Women's Caucus in New York City, to incorporate Dominican/Latina women to civic life in the United States.

Her advocacy activities led Zenaida to serving in different leadership capacities.

An avid voice for tolerance, Ms. Méndez served as director of Racial Diversity Programs at the National Organization for Women (NOW), where she successfully spearheaded a diversity and inclusion training program; a woman of color and allies summit; and among other initiatives, the campaign to stop the femicide of the women of Juarez and Chihuahua, México.

In 2012, Ms. Mendez became the President of the National Organization for Women, the first woman of color to hold the position. Her frequent mainstream as well as public access television appearances make Ms. Méndez one of the most sought-after Afro Latina speakers and opinion makers in the United States and beyond.

Ms. Méndez is currently the director of Manhattan Neighborhood Network (MNN) El Barrio Firehouse Community Media Center, at the Public Access Cable Television facility in Manhattan.

She is the proud mother of three daughters: Dora, Clarissa y Rocio Méndez, and grandmother to: Naomi y Mateo Rogers-Méndez.



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Illustrious Awards - 2018

Congratulations to Amilkar Velez-Lopez on being honored with an Illustrious Awards

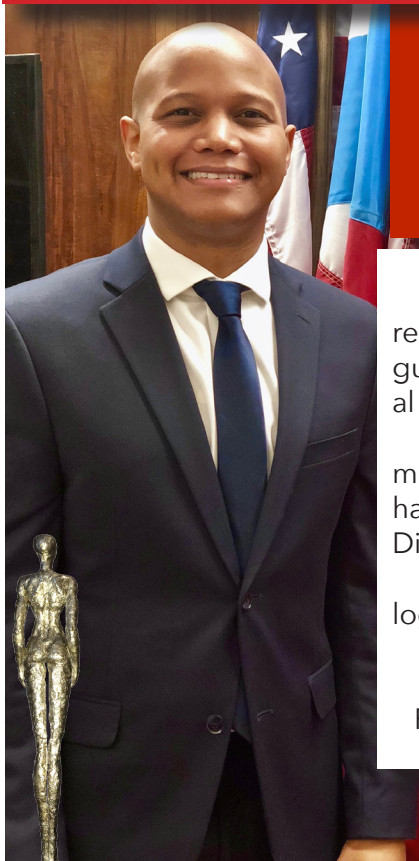
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En nombre de mis empresas, empleados y clientela felicito al Dr. Alberto Correa, la Honorable Claribel Martínez-Marmolejos, la Dra. Irma Nicasio Rodríguez, al Cantautor Danny Rivera, al Dr. Ramón Antonio Veras (El Negro Veras), al Dr. Victor Álvarez, y a todos los homenajeados en esta histórica ocasión.

Constituye para mi una alegría extraordinaria la oportunidad de expresarles mi más sincera admiración, valoración y respeto a esa gran trayectoria que los hace mercedores de uno de los reconocimientos más importante de nuestra Diáspora en los Estados Unidos: "The Illustrious Awards".

Ustedes son y representan lo que muchos jóvenes y adultos quisiéramos lograr. De corazón, gracias por su liderazgo. ¡¡MUCHAS FELICIDADES!!

Sinceramente,
Proprietor Leodany Inojosa Almonte

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Illustrious Awards Recipient - Leadership

Law Enforcement Advocacy

*J*osé Martínez is a law enforcement career man. Coming from humble beginnings in Puerto Rico, he settled in Newark, New Jersey with his family, and never lost sight of who he was and who he wanted to be: a police officer.

He moved through the ranks, and put his life in danger on many occasions in his mission to protect and serve the community. His story as a police officer tells of times when he faced imminent danger for his life, and saw colleagues fall.

He can tell of times when he was in a position to rescue, and rescued colleagues. He's a man of justice and righteousness.

Today, retired from the force, he continues to serve in different capacities: as a consultant, on boards of CBO's including as co-Chair of LLANJ Civil Rights and Public Safety Commission.



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CONGRATULATES

The Institute for Latino Studies

On its

“ILLUSTRIOUS AWARDS CELEBRATION”

We also commend all the Honorees, in particular

OUR VERY OWN

Mr. Julio Pabon

On being a recipient of

The Illustrious Award in Leadership-Activism

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Illustrious Awards Recipient in Leadership

Activism

Julio Pabón is a native of Guayama, Puerto Rico; he was raised in the South Bronx, NY. He is a community businessman and political activist since the early 1970s.

He has labored towards issues affecting the Puerto Rican/Latino community in human rights, education, employment, equality, economic and political empowerment and the future of every community.

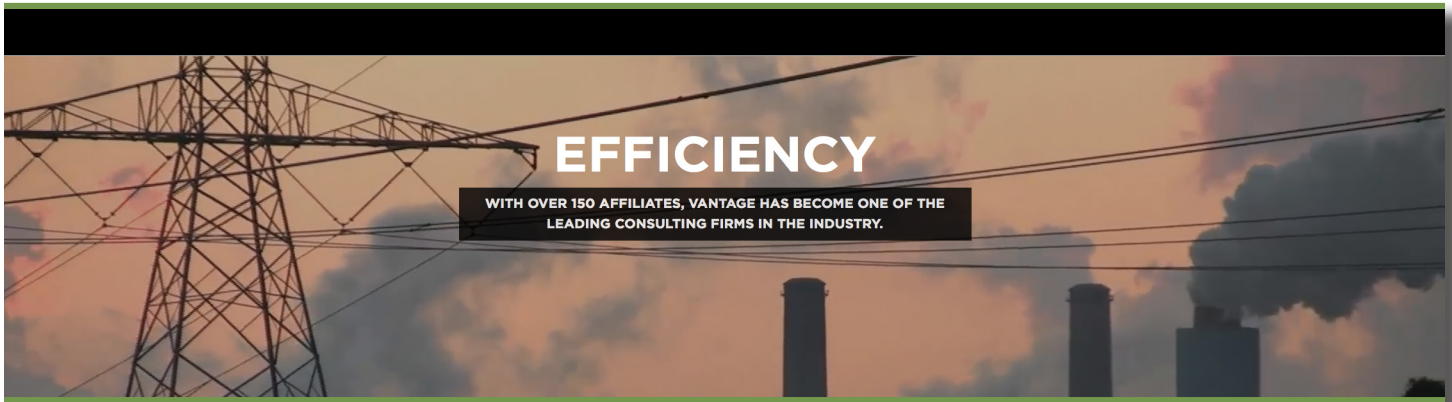
He has run for office, and founded and served on organizations such as Coalition in Defense of Puerto Rican & Hispanic Rights, Herbert H. Lehman College Latino Alumni Association, Young Caciques Youth Leadership Program United Bronx Parents, Bronx Museum of the Arts, Pueblo En Marcha, Promesa Foundation, Inc., Martin Luther King Health Center, NAICA, National Puerto Rican Business Council, Rainbow Push Latino Sports Project, La Hora Deportiva, first bi-lingual radio sports talk show in NY, Latino Sports Writers & Broadcasters Association, Retire 21 Campaign, South Bronx Congress, South Bronx Community Association, Morivivi Language Services, Mi Casa Tu Casa Guesthouse, Latino Sports and its popular sports portal: www.latinosports.com, which is recognized as a leader in promoting positive Latino role models and assuring equal coverage for Latino athletes. All this in his efforts for empowerment for Puerto Ricans and Latinos in New York.

Pabon dreams of a free Puerto Rico. Currently, he is summoning all leaders and mindful Puerto Ricans to join him in creating a movement to make Puerto Rico a stable and prosperous country.



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Illustrious Awards Recipients - Literature

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he tradition of book publishing, literacy and printing flourished in New Spain early on in colonial days. By the mid-sixteenth century, seven printers were operating in Mexico City, issuing everything from contracts and religious books to public notices and literary works. Among the first books printed were catechisms, religious works, grammars of the indigenous languages, dictionaries and some technical and scientific volumes. Two Hispanics have won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction: Oscar Hijuelos in 1990 and Junot Diaz in 2008. Many other Hispanic writers have achieved distinctions in the United States, such as Isabel Allende, Julia Álvarez, Daniel Alarcón, Sandra Cisneros and Cristina García.

This year, the Institute for Latino Studies at Berkeley College honors with an Illustrious Award a distinguished and beloved leading-author who has carved out a niche in the world of literature in the United States and Latin América.



Rhina Espaillat & her husband Alfred Moskowitz at the Annual Conference of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) in 2013 in Washington, DC at a forum about her literary work. Photo by Néstor Montilla, Sr.

Illustrious Award Recipient - Literature



The Illustrious Awards

Honoring Distinguished Latinos



Photo by Néstor Montilla, Sr.

Rhina P. Espaillat was born in the Dominican Republic under the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo. After Espaillat's great-uncle opposed the regime, her family was exiled to the United States and settled in New York City in 1939.

She began writing poetry as a young girl—in Spanish and then English—and has published in both languages.

Ms. Espaillat has published eleven full-length books and three chapbooks, comprising poetry, essays and short stories. Her work appears in many journals, anthologies, and websites, and has earned national and international awards, including the T. S. Eliot Prize in Poetry, the Richard Wilbur Award, the Howard Nemerov Prize, the May Sarton Award, the Robert Frost "Tree at My Window" Prize for translation, several honors from the New England Poetry Club, the Poetry Society of America, and a Lifetime Achievement Award from Salem State College.

She also published two poetry collections in English titled *Playing at Stillness* and *Her Place in These Designs*; a book

of Spanish translations titled *Oscura fruta/Dark Berries: Forty-two Poems by Richard Wilbur*; and a book of Spanish translations titled *Algo hay que no es amigo de los muros/ There Is something that Doesn't Love a Wall: Forty Poems by Robert Frost*.

Espaillat's most recent publication by the University of Pittsburgh Press is *the Once and Future Muse --The Poetry and poetics of Rhina Espaillat* by Nancy Kang and Silvio Torres-Saillant (2018). The editor listed is Frederick Luis Aldama from the *Latino and Latin American Profiles*.

On *Rehearsing Absence*, Robert Shaw wrote in *Poetry*, "To Rhina Espaillat the quotidian is no malady . . . it is the source of inspiration. Hers is a voice of experience, but it is neither jaded nor pedantic. She speaks not from some cramped corner but from somewhere close to the center of life."

She is a frequent reader, speaker and workshop leader, and is active with the *Powwow River Poets*, a literary group she co-founded in 1992.



