

# Writing Latinos S2E6: Sarah McNamara

**Gerry:** thank you for listening to Writing Latinos. We are talking today with Sarah McNamara. She is a history professor at Texas A& M University, and she has a new book out. It's called Ybor City, Crucible of the Latina South.

It's one of the many excellent books on Latino history published by the University of North Carolina Press. I'm so glad to finally have had the chance to meet you here on the Zoom screen, Sarah. It was awesome to read your book. I learned so much and I can't wait to talk with you. So thank you for joining us.

**Sarah:** Thanks for having me. I'm excited to be here.

**Gerry:** It's clear right from the beginning of this book that this was a very personal story for you. So can you tell us about your connection to the story that you tell in Ybor City?

**Sarah:** Absolutely. So my family on my mom's side is from Ybor City. And my family, they're predominantly from Cuba, and there are a few members of my family who are from Spain.

So, it's a very Ybor story, if you think about the conglomeration. Um, so those who were, or who made up the community of Ybor City, they were predominantly of Cuban Spanish descent, and there was also a small community of Sicilians, um, who lived in the neighborhood. My family came to Ybor City during the early 20th century and they came to work in the Cuban cigar factories that were within the community and that made up the economic backbone that was Ybor City.

So to me, the decision to write the history of this history of Ybor City. It was a strange experience to be honest. the personal elements that you can see in the book were not in the book until probably the third time that I decided to rewrite the manuscript.

**Gerry:** Wow, that's surprising to me.

**Sarah:** I didn't feel comfortable for a really long time sharing my personal connection to the work that I had, and I think that that was more an internal process in many ways.

Ybor City is my first book, and if any of the people who listen to the podcast are scholars, we know that there is this internal debate of, is it scholarly if we're writing about the communities from which we're from? Are we able to analyze, um, Things fairly or the people fairly and I think that was a fear that I inculcated myself and it wasn't something that I was able to work through as a graduate student or even in the first few times that I tried to write the story, but it was a decision that I made.

after one of my mentors really pushed me and just said, I think you have a really distinct way that you work with memory and you need to explain it and make that clear, to people who are reading the book. and I'm very glad that I made that decision in the end, but it was something that was really difficult to do.

**Gerry:** Yeah, that's interesting. And you also had your kind of own family archivist, research assistant, uh, fount of stories. this is your grandmother, right? It's not your mom. It's your grandma, who's kind of the family historian. And, uh, she had been talking to you about the family history and the history of the place.

for such a long time since you were a girl. And so, uh, can you talk about that a little bit? How your, how your grandma kind of told you all of the stories that formed a lot of the basis for this book?

**Sarah:** Absolutely. So my grandmother, her name is Norma Alfonso. Um, she passed away when I was about 16 years old.

my grandmother was Among the generation who was born in the 1930s and grew up in Ybor City as it was transitioning into a place that was no longer the economic backbone of Tampa, but into a place that was fading, where economic security was not necessarily something that was going to be linked to the cigar industry in the future, but whose sense of self and identity was mired in Ybor City.

So she became one of these, um, community members who dedicated herself to making sure that Ybor City was remembered in whatever way they could. And one way that she did that aside from community work and museum work, um, was through, um, just making sure that the memory of Ybor stayed alive with me and my sister and my extended family members.

In some ways, Ybor City, it always just felt really near. It was the place where she took me, where she believed that if I got earrings from the Cuban jeweler in

Ybor City, that I somehow miraculously wouldn't lose them all playing on a playground. Or if we, you know, we're going down to, this is where all of my aunts and uncles lived.

There was a public housing project for Latinos from the community called La Hacienda, and that was where we would go and spend time and she would make me perform and entertain people during the day, but she would also clip any sort of news story out of a, um, out of the newspaper where she wanted me to remember or to be aware of certain things that happened.

So among those is a, I have this binder of clippings that she kept throughout her life, it's just this white three ring binder that she gave me when I was a teenager, and she used to make me give people tours of the Ybor City Museum with her because she was a docent, and she was always very clear that we didn't give people the tour that was written on the guide because it was Incorrect.

And what a museum professional wrote. Instead, we gave the tour that she and the other women from Ybor established. And they kept it and they'd written it on all these little pieces of paper in this binder. But alongside of it were clippings of moments that were important to her. And there's one that appears in the book that is just this sea of women who are all linked arm who are marching down the center of and I remember that she showed me this clipping.

I was a teenager, and at the time, I didn't think much of it. I just kind of thought, oh, my grandma's showing me another clipping from the Tampa Bay Times. Like, what do we have today? But as she pulled it out, she indicated the women in our family who were in this photo. And, She never explained to me the meaning of what I was looking at, which was a giant march and a protest that was protesting the rise of fascism in Spain and the way that people understood fascism is rising within the city of Tampa itself.

But she was showing me the members of my family who were part of this moment. And in my mind, that's the first time that something historical seemed really personal. Because many of the people who I write about in the book, they were alive when I was younger. my Aunt Mago, who I write about as being a member of, um, of the anti fascist movement, she was alive.

My Tia Dalia, who I mark, she was alive. And I could see different, um, people who felt as though they were living in that moment and within my memory as a part of history, and that was. Something that was rather transformative. So there were these big moments that she sought for us to remember. But I think at her core, she just wanted us to remember what it meant to be from Ybor City.

She made sure that we celebrated the holidays in a specific way, that we kept Noche Buena alive, that we knew how to make a piernilla, that we knew how to make mojo the way that she thought was correct, that we knew how to take all the shortcuts that she thought was necessary to make a good empanada.

Like all of those different elements were a part of who she was and that she wanted to pass down to us.

**Gerry:** it sounds like from a very young age, even if you didn't have the language for it in the museum, you were already learning about like counter history, revisionist, revisionist history, grassroots history versus the museum version of history.

**Sarah:** So it's so, so interesting. the photo you mentioned is one of my two favorites in the book, and the other is, of course, the picture of your mom, in the Miss America costume, uh, dress. It's just stunning. Oh, she made me perform in front of my, um, elderly, um, in front of my elderly, um, relatives.

So we would go to La Hacienda, which was, you know, like the, it was the public housing area where many people lived when they were getting older, where their apartments were, but we're still close to, um, Ybor City and this other area called the CTA building. but, um, she would have me go and like perform dance and those sorts of things.

But

**Gerry:** that's amazing.

**Sarah:** I know. Not, I mean, the things that at least as I'm thinking back, um, my decision to write about Ybor City in terms of scholarship wasn't something that was inevitable. When I was an undergrad, the thing that I loved writing about was indigenous history. I'd had Juliana Barr as a professor and I fell in love with indigenous women's history.

It was a professor who I had who I turned in a, um, a proposal and he must have really hated it. And he had me come in and he just said, tell me about where you're from. And there was one thing that I told him that growing up, my grandmother used to take me to this area, um, near your bore city where we would practice, where we would celebrate May Day.

And I would walk around a maple, and He stopped me and said, you know, that is a holiday associated with the communist party. And I had no idea as an

undergrad that that's what that was. And it was that question that made me think about all of, or at least kind of put together the stories that my grandmother told me and understand that this was something that was larger and something of historical importance and something that helped me make sense of.

While at the University of Florida and surrounded by other students who identified as Latino as well who had Cuban roots but a form of Cubanidad that I didn't recognize at all of what made that different and Those questions were critical in allowing me to put those things together in an analytic way.

**Gerry:** before we get too much further, let's clear up one thing. tell me about the relationship between Ybor City and Tampa.

**Sarah:** So within the book, there's three entities that I talk about.

There's Hillsborough County, which is the county that includes Tampa and Ybor City. There's the city of Tampa. That is the core city of, um, Hillsborough County. And then there is Ybor City. So Ybor City is located on the eastern outskirts of the city of Tampa. It is a part of broader Hillsborough County.

Ybor City was initially its own independent municipality when it was founded, but very quickly, within the first few years of Ybor City's existence, during the 1880s, Ybor City was, ended up being such a success, such an economic success, that the city of Tampa forcibly annexes.

What was once an independent municipality and makes it a part of the city of Tampa that has all kinds of wide ranging repercussions. But today, when we think about Ybor City and really, as we're thinking about Ybor City from the 1890s onward, we're really talking about a neighborhood, a portion of Tampa.

**Gerry:** Right. And who, who is it named after?

The community is named after Vicente Martinez Ybor, who was a Cuban cigar manufacturer. He and two other men named Ignacio Aya and Seraphine Sanchez were central to establishing what we know as Ybor City.

**Sarah:** Um, Vicente Ybor, he bought the first plot of, within Ybor City, and continued to buy initial, um, additional land. Ignacio Aya bought land adjacent to where Ybor had initially purchased, um, land. And it's Aya who has factory number one, whereas Ybor is technically cigar factory number two.

yes, I know.

**Gerry:** you and I know that Florida is an amazingly diverse and complicated place, um, and it's not all about Miami, it's not all about Orlando, but I, I still think that.

But observers who are non Floridians, when they think of Latino Florida, probably think first of Miami and maybe, maybe think of, Orlando after that and the kind of growing Puerto Rican population. But what you write about in your book is a place that you call the crucible of the Latino South. And so you kind of give Ybor City this.

place of primacy within Florida as a Latino place. So when you're talking about Tampa, when you're talking about Ybor City, the place that you're from, how do you describe some of the differences between Ybor City and Miami or Orlando, either in the past or in the present?

**Sarah:** So the, the title of the book, the portion that you referenced, it being the crucible of the Latina South or the Latino South, the reason that I referenced that is because Tampa or Ybor City or in the city of Tampa, the two interacting.

It's the first time within the within the history of Florida that making sense of what Latinidad means and what Latino people mean within the state, within a very southern context where, you know, Clan based politicians, where a reconstructed South is very much in development in the moment at the same time that there are high levels of migration and remaking of different areas.

Tampa had a population of roughly 780 people prior to Ybor City being established. And within a three year period of time, that population increases by 300%. And by the turn of the 20th century, you have a City in the U. S. South with a majority Latino population and that is populated by people of color that is run by a white municipal political party that has two different groups of people vying for influence.

So one where there are laws and extra legal forms of repression that are working to control. And the other one with a group of workers who very much know the amount of power that they have one just being in numbers and the other being the reality that you can't make Cuban cigars if you do not have people who know how to make Cuban cigars to roll them.

So, it was not necessarily the same as if you are in a place that is a textile mill, where you can bring in strike workers or you can bring in other people to just replace if people disagreed. And so, Those who were Cuban cigar makers and members of Ybor City very much knew and understood that, and they wielded

that power to do things like have influence in government, to do things like make sure that roads were built.

They would go on strikes not just for higher wages, although that was certainly one, but also treatment or different Forms of, um, influence within the factory itself that people wanted. one of the first major strikes occurred because the, um, management within the initial cigar factories were all Spaniards and Cubans refused to work solely for Spanish based ownership.

And so there were cultural elements and forms of work and representation that were as meaningful to work stoppages, just as things like road development.

**Gerry:** Oh.

**Sarah:** the first thing that I do in the book is lay out the history of Florida to kind of understand what people are migrating into.

So when we think about the ideas of what it means to be Latino and live in Florida, we will most readily imagine Miami. and I do think right to a lesser extent, Orlando, but I do hope that it is on everybody's mind, especially as we think about electoral politics, but we're talking about a history that very much sits within our collective national imagination because of the power of things like the cold war because of You know figures who are larger than life like filial castro all of these people in all of these moments They seem so indicative to the forming of our national imagination.

It's not that they're not But the point that I work to make in the book is that being Cuban American or being Latino and from Florida is not one singular experience.

**Gerry:** And

**Sarah:** that singular, the lack of that singular experience has led to different Latino communities throughout the state identifying in different ways.

It led to different decisions, even in the midst of, um, even in the midst of refugee policies that had to do with relocation, out of the Cold War when people were leaving Cuba. The height of resettlement does not happen in Tampa because of how different the political situation, um, was that you had a group of Cubans, some of whom were very supportive of Castro.

whereas Miami had a very different. population. So remembering those things in the context is what I work to do. And I hope that people walk away with the idea that migration patterns and migration timelines matter

**Gerry:** that

**Sarah:** you can have two groups of people with a shared national heritage who leave a place for different reasons and are part of different socioeconomic groups who immigrate into a place in a different period of time and have distinctly different experiences.

Thank you so much. It was a different experience to immigrate to Florida at the turn of the century at the height of the Klan in the midst of Jim Crow segregation and come as a working class person who was going to labor in a cigar factory than it was to come in the 1960s to Miami in the midst of Cold War politics.

Those are two very different moments.

**Gerry:** one of the things I loved about your book, you know, I teach Latino history all the time and I talk about Luisa Capetillo.

I talk about Jose Marti. I talk about, um, Luisa Moreno and Fidel Castro, um, all in their kind of respective moments between the late 19th and mid 20th century. But, in Ybor City, they were all there. They were all coming in and out of the city and That I think is one of the real virtues of focusing on a place, you know, writing a community study where you can see the connection between these broader themes in Latino history and particular places on the ground.

So what I'm wondering is when, when these people. Marti, Castro, Capetillo, Moreno, when they came to Ybor City, were they kind of giving their normal, usual stump speech about national and international affairs? Or were they talking about local issues faced by the community members of Ybor City? Listeners, Louisa Capetillo, Louisa Moreno, they were prominent labor organizers and activists and Jose Marti and Fidel Castro. I doubt need much of an introduction, but Marti was the kind of leader of Cuban independence and killed during the Cuban independence war and Fidel Castro.

Well, we know who Fidel Castro is.

**Sarah:** So the way that I write about in the moments that people like Apetillo and Moreno and Castro enter Ybor City is that they're all there before they are the Luisa Apetillo, the Luisa Moreno, and the Fidel Castro who we all know.

Especially in the case of Luisa Moreno, there are two examples of people where not only are they laboring and working in the community, but they are also learning from the community at the same time. So, Luisa Capetillo, She looms in local memory in a very active way. People in Ybor City still and continue to remember and talk about the one lectora who worked in the factories and she was at least document based, the only woman who we know of who was a lectora within the cigar factories in Ybor City.

But when Luisa Capetillo came to Ybor City, and one example of kind of the reciprocation between people who were there and also these larger than life figures, is that Luisa Capetillo, when she arrives in Ybor City, she had already written *Mi Opinion*. But while she is there from her work within the community, from being involved in local issues, especially issues connected to anarchism, um, and anarcho syndicalism, she revises, her feminist treaties to reflect the sort of communal base in women's activism that she saw within the community.

And I wish that we had more documents or more memory to know. What it is that she exactly touched because there's only so much that, you know, I'm able to say, although there's so much that I could imagine, but the impact that she had within the community, especially in terms of work and in terms of activism, it was enough to influence Louisa Moreno, at least in the beginning.

way in which she understood herself. Luisa Moreno, when she arrives in Ybor City, is not Luisa Moreno, who we know today. She is a person who had just worked in her first organizing capacity in New York City. She has her first appointment through a national labor organization that doesn't know how to get members.

So they take a stab and they send this woman Down to Tampa because Florida and Tampa all of a sudden has a majority woman workforce in an industry that typically had a majority male and these women are not joining the union and they don't know why. And they send Moreno down there to fix it. During her time there, she intersects all of these different spaces and you can track where she's moving and how she's working to understand, but it is The way that I wrote about or came to understand what Luis Moreno was doing was kind of becoming the organizer she sought to be thereafter, of somebody who blended politics with labor unionism, of understanding that the line of the union wasn't

necessarily going to yield the end result that communities needed and that they wanted to sustain themselves and to advocate for themselves.

You see Moreno Totally abandoning the AFL line the breaking point is over the Spanish Civil War, she wanted to take a stance and they wouldn't let her. So, From that point on, if we track Moreno's, you know, her life and her activism, we see that balance between politics and between lobbying,

And those are elements and things that people learned in Ybor. I do think Castro is a bit of a different story. There's this photo of Fidel Castro that was published in one of the newspapers that when I'm teaching I always use it.

And I call it the sad Castro photo. But there wasn't a high enough quality image for my press to approve to put it in the book. but it's basically this picture of Fidel Castro sitting at a desk and there are all of these crumpled dollar bills. Sprout. Yes. I describe it. Yeah, there's all these crumpled dollar bills sprawled across it and he's just looking down disappointed.

**Gerry:** It's like a hundred bucks, right?

**Sarah:** Yeah, it's like a hundred dollars. That's all that he gets and to like, he's there

**Gerry:** in 1955 kind of raising money for In part to raise money for the revolution.

**Sarah:** Exactly. So in part to raise money for the revolution. And I point to this in my book as a moment of how politics had changed within Ybor City and people not necessarily caring as much about international politics, but learning about or caring and investing more within themselves and their community because the, you know, connection to Cuba was a bit different by this point.

But, um, Castro is there and he's speaking and he's doing his stump speech and nobody, I mean, he has one heck of a time trying to book a room. People don't really want to come hear him speak. The local, you know, Spanish language newspaper is really having a cow about the whole situation. but. Castro is not the man of the fatigues with this.

the beard. He is a guy in a white t shirt and jeans who is walking around Ybor City kind of doing his best. So the way that at least those three figures enter the story is that they're people who become big and become these, large figures within Latino history before they are those large figures.

**Gerry:** Yeah.

**Sarah:** And look at how The interactions that they have on the ground and the interactions that they have with people within a war city, how it illustrates what the community thought of them, how they had to prove themselves to the community how some successfully did that, and others perhaps didn't, but how it also indicated the reciprocation and how those who become those big voices really do learn from the communities that they intersect and that they touch.

At least if they're brave enough to listen.

**Gerry:** just, uh, out of curiosity is Castro as viscerally hated in Tampa Ybor City as in Miami, I think to your point of like different migration waves coming at different times.

**Sarah:** No. So the legacy of Fidel Castro, I find quite interesting in Ybor City.

So, um, one of the things that I note in the book is that there was a 26th of July movement that was in Ybor City. there were people who indeed supported Fidel Castro, but they did so in a way that was not necessarily the same. As the way that they supported other political movements prior. And what I mean by that is that they didn't show up to rallies.

They didn't really put their money where their mouth was. Fidel Castro's rise to power comes on the edge of major who walk campaigns. Um, some of which brought people from Ybor city to trial, um, during the early 1950s, late 1940s, there was very much a strong memory. Of what it meant to be, accused of being a communist by the government,

so, when I look at the history of this and also what other people have written, um, there are You know, is this there is a small movement that's very much in support of him, but when he does rise to power it, there was a parade of thousands of cars that were going through Ybor City, you know, celebrating the success of the revolution and, you know, the rise of Castro in this new government.

but that was definitely an outlier during that period. Today, if you're in Ybor City and those who were and have been. um, stronger memory. It is as though everyone supported Castro, um, is the way that, um, many people talk about it. There's two different memories. There's one where everybody supported Castro.

There is another version where, uh, we didn't really care that much. which is more kind of what I find a bit.

So. It's not necessarily the same type of memory that you would find in South Florida, it's more a, this is a distinct politic and a different politic, and we are not conservative, and Fidel Castro and the memory of him very much becomes, sits at the heart of that, even if the memory doesn't necessarily align.

**Gerry:** That's so interesting. women play a really important role in your story. And I just saw that your book won an award from the National Women's Studies Association. That's very exciting. Congratulations. so I'm wondering, can you tell us about women as workers, political activists, members of families, and how their roles in each of those domains change over time?

**Sarah:** So my book, it really tells the story of three generations of people within Ybor City, and my book isn't the first story of Ybor City, but it is the first one to think about generational impact and change, and what that means. And most histories of Ybor, they really center on the earlier period because it is the heroic period, it's the one that Ybor wants to be remembered for.

the things that happen after are the things that allow us to make sense of Latinidad in different ways. And to me, gender and sexuality sits at the core of that story. So, my book begins in the 1880s and it ends in the 1960s. So we see the cigar industry that has such a prominent role in the book because work and labor is so central to what it meant to live in a Ybor City

during the earliest period, women worked within the cigar industry, they worked within homes, and they worked within politics, although in a different way in each of those settings. In the cigar factories during the earliest period, women did not have access to high paying jobs,

A cigar roller is how we would generally understand it, which was on the main factory floor. The majority of them instead would work in the basement as, what were called despedidores, or strippers. So the people who strip the stem from the center of the tobacco leaf. Others could be at times mojadores or mojadoras.

however, that was a broader category of people who were both, Afro Cuban. That was a, um, job that many Afro Cubans who were both, Men and women

would have in the basement. They would wet the leaf because when Cuban tobacco was shipped, it came dry because it is cheaper to ship dry tobacco.

So then you'd have to revive it by wetting it. So they worked in the basement particularly. And those jobs were the lowest paid within the factory. System men typically worked on the main factory floor. This remained the organization of how Ybor City operated until the 1920s. And because that was the primary organization that meant that women, they were, they made less money, but they still worked, which I think is one of the primary points.

They were members of the union, um, which was really important. the AFL and American based union systems sought to primarily uplift and uphold, right, the integrity of male, of men's based work. But the, um, pattern of unionism from Cuba included all people who were within the cigar industry, regardless of what their race or what their gender was.

And that type of a system was that was replicated in Ybor City. The AFL quickly learned that they weren't going to be able to have union members unless they replicated that system and they bent their rules, um, to match the needs in order to get people to join them. So women were active within unions and within politics in that capacity, but they were typically during that period, members of auxiliaries, right?

So Women's needs were not necessarily going to dominate what the next strike was going to be. It was not, women were not going to be the head of a political discussion within a political meeting. They were certainly, and in some ways, welcome in specific spaces, but they did not wield the same power.

For men during this earlier period, spaces like the Mutual Aid Societies, there were these five really large Mutual Aid Societies that operated differently, I think, than how we imagine Mutual Aid. gave health insurance, they provided, um, what was called at the time, death benefits, which is, you know, burial sites, um, but also, um, access to opera and education and, um, different things like that.

But men would go to the cantinas that were inside these mutual aid societies, or to bars, or to cafes, where they would debate, politics. Women talked about these things on their front porches. And these front porches became sites of socialization, but they also became sites of politics. They were places where women could do the portion of their work that included taking care of children and elderly parents and having these multi generational households, but also where the things that concerned them.

were, where they had a place where they could speak about it independently. So the front porches of these workers housing that were called casitas, they all look exactly the same, and many of them are still in Ybor City today,

By the time that we get to the 1930s, the shifts, because women, as I gestured a bit earlier, they become the primary laborers within Ybor City, because they're cheaper. The Great Depression kills the cigar industry. You go from 200 factories to roughly 20, and the ones that exist are those that shift to a different form of labor.

For some, that's mechanization. For others, it's still maintaining hand rolled processes, but employing women instead of men. So, Ybor City is this community with a massive amount of unemployed men, nearly overnight, and a large population of employed Latinas. And that shifts the structure of unions. It also begins to change how politics is debated, how it's protested, what the public elements of politics look like.

And by the time that we get to the latter portion, The 1950s. we're really looking at two different groups of people at the same time, looking at an aging population who stay within the cigar factory until the end of their lives because it's the work they knew how to do. Some members of my family rolled cigars until they were well into their 80s, um, in the factories that remained, whereas the majority, right, the younger generation, my grandparents generation, they look for something elsewhere, and the idea of Latinas and of beauty and of having some sort of a tourism based thing to sell, Tampa looked at Ybor City as latinidad that is being everything that Tampa wasn't by the time you get to the 1950s, the idea of Latina dad and what Ybor City is Tampa sees as a thing that it can sell.

It becomes a form of tourism and it. Opens its way to a form of whitewashing and kind of the centrality of what's being Spanish could mean rather than Cuban

**Gerry:** one of the things about your book that readers who are kind of tuned into Cuban history. present day politics, uh, that they'll find most surprising is this kind of radical leftist legacy of politics in Ybor City. And so the first thing I wanted to ask you about was the, activism against Francisco Franco.

first of all, the sections about the Spanish civil war were fascinating.

And now that I've read your book, I want to know so much more about Latino communities across the United States. and how they, engaged with activism around the Spanish Civil War. So interesting. Partly because, you know, I think

right now there's a lot of talk about anti fascist movements, like Antifa, for example.

**Gerry:** So first, I want to talk about, I'd like you to talk just a little bit about the Ybor City community's activism against the or or not against but aligning itself with a particular faction of the Spanish Civil War.

**Sarah:** So the story of the Spanish Civil War in my book, to be honest, I feel like everybody has a favorite chapter of their book. And for me, that is my favorite chapter. It's my favorite story. I think it's the first story that pushed me to think about Ybor City as a historical study. and it's also one that I think is so emblematic of that leftists that later became progressive tradition within Ybor City and Tampa that continues to remain today and to hold on in many ways.

so the Spanish Civil War in, um, in Ybor City, it loomed big and it loomed large. between 1936 and through 1939, the community almost in totality was openly aligned and very vocal about its support for anti fascist politics. The Spanish Civil War was the entree into the anti fascist movement for people within Ybor City.

And this was something that was so prominent. That one of my favorite portions of the Spanish language newspaper during this period of time is that it had a section that it printed daily of all of the addresses of anybody in the community and any business in the community that had not aligned itself or overtly stated that it was an anti fascist.

entity or anti fascist business. And so they were making very clear that you're either all with us or you're all against us. so between this period, the community, it established a, basically a political organizing group, that it used to mobilize and that it sought to lobby and support. they wanted national recognition of the anti fascist movement and they wanted, the Florida governor, and they wanted Washington to get involved and to be part of the anti fascist fight.

People from Ybor City, They fundraised for the anti fascist cause. I write about that they held, um, picnics, they held fundraising drives, they gathered thousands of pounds of clothing. They, Gathered enough money.

And I mean, we have to remember that this is during the Great Depression. There's people who are having a hard time making their rent. There's people who are leaving Ybor City because they can't get access to WPA funds, but they

managed to give enough money at the end of their workday. One day a week, all of these women gave one full day's pay to support the anti fascist cause.

They get enough money to buy two ambulances. They buy an x ray machine. And they send all of this to Spain to support the Republican government, right, the government that they align with, and that was elected to fight Franco, the Spanish Civil War, and the support of it within the community was basically Aligned with total mobilization.

the story of anti fascism in nationally, right? At least like Antipa, we think of like predominantly right. White Americans who are aligned with this movement. That is very much the memory of it, but it was a multi racial and multi ethnic movement, especially when we look at places like the south.

So, in Ybor City. As this movement is happening, people are also making connections to what's happening to them locally. The women in Ybor City start writing into English language newspapers, and this is the first time that they've ever done this, where they're accusing politicians of being fascist, where they are calling out the actions of the Klan.

Where they are saying that the alignment of city politicians with manufacturers and their refusal to employ men to give men WPA access, that these are all fascist actions, and they are making connections between what they see happening in Spain, right? And the rise of a pro union government and the repression of a pro union government as something that is being reproduced and happening locally.

As they are seeking to demand that their local politicians represent their ideas because still the most important economic force in the state, They demand that their voices be heard.

They have this petition where there are thousands of signatures where they want the the mayor of Tampa to communicate to the governor of Florida that the state of Florida wants the United States to support the Spanish Civil War.

they march from Ybor City to the front sets of Tampa City Hall, they shut down the city in support of anti fascism and they demand this. and they do this in May of 1937. The notable thing is that they continue to do this, not the same march pattern, but they continue to have the march from Ybor City to different parks to have public demonstrations throughout these years to support the Spanish Civil War.

And those politics and those ideas, they begin to mix with labor unionism and labor activism,

So, these ideas are very much alive, but it also has such a reverberating legacy.

there's many people who are many community members who thought about World War II where their service during World War II as being an extension of the fight during the Spanish Civil War.

There were over 25 people from Ybor City who fought in the Abraham Lincoln Brigades, um, who, so, who went abroad. There were other women who went abroad who, um, worked, for the Red Cross, um, also from Ybor City.

**Gerry:** you said this kind of like leftist radical activism cast a long shadow and you know, Latinos in Ybor City supported FDR, Henry Wallace, but what is, what is the, you know, political landscape of Tampa today?

Is it? Still more liberal than a place like Miami.

**Sarah:** If you look at it, just based on voting patterns or at least historical, historically based, um, politics, there has not been a mayor in the city of Tampa that was a Republican since the mid 1950s. So Tampa has a very different local legacy of politics, than a place like Miami

Tampa has remained, has remained blue during this period, and it Has still today that margin, is shifting. There are demographic changes that are happening within Hillsborough County, and I do think the next election will be quite interesting to see how that pans out.

it is a place with a dramatically expanding population, um, also with people from Miami who are relocating to Tampa, because Historically been more affordable, but it still has a Latino presence to where different elements that make people, you know, have a connection to community in Miami.

Those elements exist in Tampa, just half the price. those things are still there. So I don't know what that will mean. coming up in the next election,

**Gerry:** The last thing I want to ask you is kind of about, uh, Latino identity. you're an Ybor City girl now in college station, Texas, which is a different kind of Latino scene, you know? So, how have your, if at all, your thoughts about like Latinidad and the kind of points of connection between Ybor City and College Station?

How have those kind of shaped your ideas about being Latina?

**Sarah:** you ever read the work of Perla Guerrero? Sure. Yeah, she has this portion of her work where she says that place makes race and identity. And. I always think about Berla's work when I think about myself in College Station.

I have never felt more invisible in my life than I do in College Station. The cultural markers of what Latinidad means in College Station or within the state of Texas are so different from what I grew up with. And I went to grad school in North Carolina, but there was also such a there was a very different Latino population there as well, but they, it was also so much smaller.

So it's interesting being in a place like Texas where there is a large Latino population, Texas A& M just became an HSI. but the population is very different, right? Predominantly Mexican American. When I'm in Florida, I have such a different experience. I don't think anybody would look at me in the state of Texas and assume, my cultural background, but when I'm in Tampa, all I have to do is walk to my mailbox and somebody will walk by me and ask me a question in Spanish.

That's not an unusual experience. So I have two very different experiences of how people understand me externally. the way that I oftentimes, you know, explain myself, or especially when I'm in Texas is that I will say, you know, that, you know, I'm Latina and that I'm from Florida and I'm of Cuban descent.

I will rarely say that I'm Cuban American. And I don't have a great answer for that other than that when I do people assume I'm from Miami and in my mind that is just such a different heritage than what I am, but also than what I feel like I have the right to claim. when I'm in Florida and when I'm in Tampa, one of the things that people call themselves are Tampeño right?

in Tampa, people would call themselves people would say that they are of Cuban descent. And from Ybor City, the portion of and from is something that's very common.

So I feel like that's a very long explanation.

**Gerry:** No, it's great. And

**Sarah:** it's so messy. And there's no answer in the end.

**Gerry:** No. And you know, that Latinos can talk about this forever, you know, all the complexities and ins and outs and local variations of our identities. Um, So, yeah, it's all part of the wide world of Latinidad.

Thank you so much for your time. It was great to talk to you. And, uh, everyone go out and pick up Ybor City, The Crucible of the Latina South. It's a great story. I learned so much. And thank you for your time, Sarah. And thank you for writing the book.

**Sarah:** Thank you for having me.