

LUISA MORENO

1907 – 1992



During the 1930s and 1940s, Luisa Moreno was a champion of civil rights for Spanish-speaking workers and communities in the United States.

Luisa Moreno was an instrumental labor organizer of Latino and African American workers who helped unify Spanish-speaking communities across the United States.

She was born Blanca Rosa Rodríguez López in Guatemala City, Guatemala, where her father was a wealthy coffee grower. After graduating from boarding school in California, Rodríguez López advocated for women to be allowed to attend universities in Guatemala.

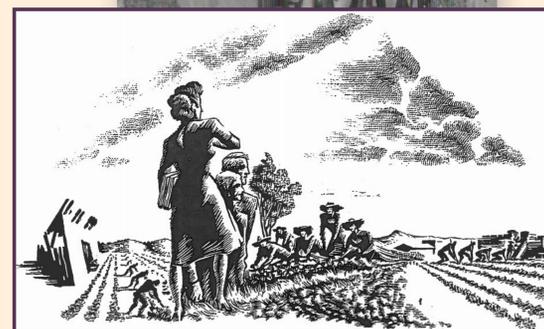
In 1926, Rodríguez López moved to Mexico where she married. Two years later, she moved to New York City. Supporting her unemployed husband and infant daughter, López De León worked as a seamstress at a

factory in Spanish Harlem. Witnessing sweatshop conditions, López De León organized her coworkers into a union to advocate for better conditions.

In 1935, hired by the American Federation of Labor, López De León negotiated a contract for cigar workers in Florida. There she changed her name to Luisa Moreno, distancing her activities from her family. In 1938, Moreno spearheaded the inaugural meeting of the Congreso del Pueblo de Habla Española, where delegates developed a platform addressing discrimination.

Named international vice president of an arm of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in 1941, Moreno organized labor at food-processing plants in California. She was later elected to the CIO council, becoming its first woman and first Latino member.

In 1950, facing deportation proceedings on the grounds of having joined the Communist Party in 1930, Moreno returned to Guatemala.



(Above) Rosa Rodríguez De León in Mexico City shortly before she arrived in New York.

(Below) A woodcut illustration from "The Case of Luisa Moreno Bemis." Labor Committee for Luisa.

Courtesy of Vicki L. Ruiz Distinguished Professor of History and Chicano/Latino Studies, University of California, Irvine.