Volume 64–October 2026



Photo by Lona on Unsplash

Women Make History: Stories We Should Have Learned in School

"...Adolescents...know more, feel more, and understand more than some grown-ups realize."

Pura Belpré



Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College

Note: The first week of October marked the American Library Association's Banned Books Week. Librarians across the country preserve our shared histories, curate appropriate reading materials for our children, and create safe, inclusive environments. Thank a librarian today! Read more about banned books; click here.



Photo: Reforma.org

Pura Belpré: Pioneering Latina Librarian

In 1920, when the twenty-something Pura Belpré traveled from her home in Puerto Rico to New York for a wedding, she never imagined the visit would launch her into a career as the City's first Latina librarian, a puppeteer, and the author of eight children's books. Belpré revolutionized the New York library system by introducing bilingual storytelling, stocking Spanish-language books, and launching outreach programs to a rapidly expanding Latino community. She set a new standard of inclusion for other libraries.

Although some dispute whether she was born in 1899 or 1903, all agree that she grew up in the Puerto Rican tradition of storytelling, listening to her elders recount fables and

histories. When the U.S. granted Puerto Ricans citizenship in 1917, it opened the way for a large influx of migrants. In 1920, roughly 7,000 Puerto Ricans lived in New York City; by 1930, that number had increased nearly sevenfold to 45,000.

Belpré's arrival coincided with the New York Public Library's (NYPL) efforts to diversify as communities were undergoing a major cultural shift. Enamored by the city and its nascent African-American and Puerto Rican Harlem Renaissance, Belpré decided to stay. She took a job at an NYPL branch in Harlem and worked mainly in the children's area.

In 1925, hoping to connect Puerto Rican children to their cultural heritage, Belpré enrolled in a storytelling course at the Library School. There, she wrote her first book, *Pérez y Martina,* a tale she heard as a child about a romance between a mouse and a cockroach. Published in 1932, it was the first Latino children's book released by a major American publisher, F. Warne (later Viking/Penguin). It was the first of her eight books.



Illustrator: Carlos Sanchez, 1932

Importantly, it let Belpré tell her stories in both Spanish and English, something libraries had never done. She also incorporated puppets. Determined to break down the perception that libraries were only for English-speaking people, Belpré created outreach programs focused on the Latino communities.

In writing for children, Belpré later said: "Don't forget the magnificent sweep of the imagination and dreams of youth; when a boy comes only to a man's shoulders, his dreams are tall. Through all the hardships and heartbreaks, these dreams often become realities." In addition to the books she authored, she translated children's stories into Spanish including: *El cuento de Ferdinando* *(The Story of Ferdinand* by Munro Leaf), the *Little Bear* series (I Can Read books by Else Holmelund Minarik), and *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* (Lady of Guadalupe by Tomie dePaola).

Beyond purchasing Spanish-language books for the library and telling bilingual stories, she initiated activities centered on traditional Puerto Rican holidays such as Three Kings Day, a feast commemorating the visit of the three Magi to the Christ child. Belpré also became active in numerous civic groups, partly to serve as a liaison among them and with government organizations. She transformed the Harlem 115th Street branch into a cultural center and hosted international luminaries such as Diego Rivera, the Mexican muralist. Her message was clear: you matter, you belong.

In 1943, she married African-American composer and violinist, Clarence Cameron White. To focus on her writing and travel with her husband when he toured, she resigned from the library. When he died in 1960, Belpré returned to the NYPL as the Spanish Children's Specialist. She retired briefly in 1968 but was persuaded to work with a community outreach program in the Bronx promoting library use and services to Latinos.

Belpré died in 1982 at age eighty-three, assuming an 1899 birth year. Shortly before her death, she received the New York Mayor's Award for Arts and Culture. In 1996, the American Library Association established the Pura Belpré Award to recognize an outstanding children's book by a Latino author. Today, two additional awards recognize the

best Latino young-adult author and excellence in Latino children's book illustration. In the Bronx, a public school was named for Belpré, and in 2022, East Harlem renamed a road Pura Belpré Way. A few biographies about her life have been published for children and young adults.


Pura Belpré, Hunter College

Other books by Belpré are: *The Three Magi* (1944) in the anthology *The Animals' Christmas;* *The Tiger and the Rabbit and Other Tales* (1946); *Juan Bobo and the Queen's Necklace* (1962); *Dance of the Animals* (1972); *Oté* (1969); *Santiago* (1969); *Firefly Summer* (1996), and *The Stories I Read to the Children: The Life and Writing of Pura Belpré* (2013), co-edited by Lisa Sánchez-González.

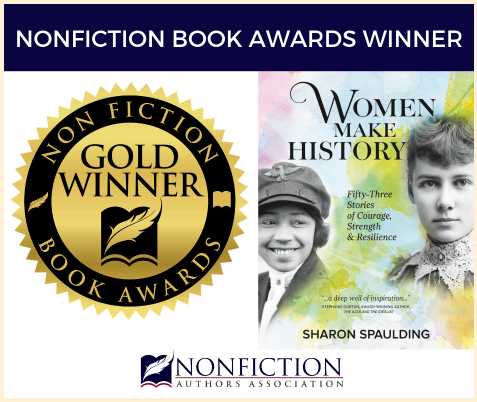
Bring it Home: Conversation Starters

Ask yourself: Is there ever a time when public libraries should exclude particular communities?

Ask a friend: Imagine not having books available in your own language or only authored by people who are different from you. What might be gained or lost?

Your Voices are Spreading the Stories of Trailblazing Women!

Thanks to your invitations, enthusiasm, and support, I've spoken with 27 civic, business, and women's organizations, schools, and book clubs from Maine to California, and more to come!



As a Thank-You: Newsletter subscribers will receive a special offer on November 3!

The Love Keeps Flowing: The book just received **the Nonfiction Authors Association Gold Award for nonfiction!**

I still need your help! If you purchased a book online, especially from Amazon, **please leave a few comments in the Reviews section. My goal is 50 reviews.** The more Reviews, (even a thought or two), the more the book gets promoted.

Upcoming Events:

2026

- **The Other Bookclub,** Sandy, Utah, Oct. 21, 6 - 8 p.m.

- **University of Utah, Osher's Lunch & Learn,** Oct. 28, 12 - 1 p.m., via Zoom.

- **Eborn Books, Utah Authors Day,** Sandy, Utah, Dec. 5, 2026, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. South Town Mall. Book sales and signing**.**

- **Waterford School Bookfair,** Sandy, Utah, Dec. 8 - 10, 9 - 5 p.m., 1480 E. 9400 South, Sandy, Utah.

2027

February

- **American Association of University Women,** Glenview, IL, Feb. 3, via Zoom

- **Booklovers Winter Festival,** Salt Lake City. Feb. 6, 9 a.m. - 8 p.m. Tickets On Sale! Bringing together book lovers, authors, and publishers for readings, trivia, and literary fun. I'll be speaking (time TBD), This Is the Place Heritage Park.

March

- **AWP Conference,** Chicago, March 17 - 20. **Panel discussion: "Now You See Her, Now You Don't: The Need to Amplify Women's Voices,"** at the largest literary conference in North America. Stay tuned for details!

- **Sausalito Books by the Bay,** Sausalito, CA. Date: TBD. Details to follow.

April

- **PEO & AAUW Combined Chapter Meetings,** Murray, UT, April 7, 11:30 a.m.

Now available at Target and Walmart, ***Women Make History: Fifty-Three Stories of Courage, Strength & Resilience***, is also at Indie Bookstores, **Barnes & Noble, Amazon, Kindle, BookShop,** and on my website.



I'm passionate about all things Mary Ware Dennett, a pivotal leader of the women's suffrage and reproductive rights movements. A grant from the Schlesinger Library forwarded my research on Dennett. My articles about her have been published in ***Ms.***, ***Smithsonian***, ***New Hampshire Magazine***, and more. My new book, ***Women Make History: Fifty-Three Stories of Courage, Strength & Resilience***, highlights trailblazing women who, like Dennett, achieved great things only to be swept aside by history or have their achievements wrongly attributed to men.

If you'd like a speaker, reach out! I'd love to speak to your business, school, women's group, book club, or civic organization in person or via Zoom.

Join the Women Make History Community!

Help reclaim the lives of remarkable women. Share the newsletter, book, and encourage others to subscribe:

www.SharonSpaulding.com

Sharon Spaulding | 40 Wanderwood Way | Sandy, UT 84092 US

Unsubscribe | Update Profile | Constant Contact Data Notice

Constant Contact

Try email marketing for free today!