

New Jersey Latinos

Then and Now

CELIA CRUZ Y
LA SONORA
MATANCERA
CIRCA 1950



Historically, Latinos have had a strong presence in the State of New Jersey spanning several generations. They have made an impact on the state's agriculture, business, social organizations, education, history, organized labor, demographics, recreation, religion, entertainment, government, politics, and more.

Spurred by the wartime and post-war demand for unskilled and semi-skilled workers, many of New Jersey's farms and manufacturing firms drew their labor force from agrarian societies in Latin America. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, some 12,000 Puerto Rican laborers came to the Garden State during the post-war economic boom. Today, Latinos comprise about 18% of the total population of New Jersey, making them the largest minority group in the state.

By the turn of the 21st century, Latinos in New Jersey have made countless social, political and economic contributions to our society. The Garden State has produced many influential Latinos who have played important roles in New Jersey, across the United States, and worldwide.

Latin American women have also made great strides, and played leading roles in the struggle against gender discrimination. Latinas such as Hilda Hidalgo were at the forefront of this battle. She wrote passionately about women's and LGBTQ rights during the 1970s.

Latinas also exercised their power to protest in the entertainment industry. Celia Cruz's song, "Toro Mata," was written in response to political issues in Perú. It is a parody of colonial *Peninsulares*, the Spanish-born rulers who resided in the New World and forced their customs on the native-born peoples. Perú's conquest and colonial subjugation by the Spanish Empire is a legacy that echoes in the historical memory of many Latinos.

Contemporary Latino figures differ in their cultural representation by emphasizing the struggle against social and cultural injustice rather than political suppression and historically distant acts of violence. Zoe Saldana, through her role in the film *Nina*, is an example of Latino influence through entertainment. She used the film as a platform to encourage discussion

on significant Latino issues of her time through her depiction of activist Nina Simone, whose struggles are more resonant with audiences of today's society. Celia Cruz and Zoe Saldana reacted to various issues using different platforms, but they both effectively tackled culturally prominent concerns within the society in which they lived and helped shape the discourse around those issues.

Immigrant rights and access to higher education are also issues that have re-emerged in the national discourse within the last decade. Giancarlo Tello, like Hilda Hidalgo, is an outspoken Latin American immigration activist who has worked tirelessly to ensure equal college and university admissions standards for students of all backgrounds.

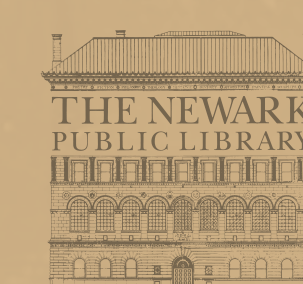
This exhibit highlights just eight public figures of the many from New Jersey that have inspired the community. They are prime examples of the profound political and cultural impact that Latinos have had on New Jersey.



GIANCARLO TELLO,
IMMIGRATION
ACTIVIST

Co-curated by:
Natasha Almánzar-Sánchez, Phil Napoli, and Ana Olivera

HILDA HIDALGO AND
PRESIDENT NIXON



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THEN

Throughout their history in New Jersey,

Latinos contributed significantly to the development of the state. Latinos established self-help grassroots organizations such as religious societies and social clubs, self-empowering organizations, political blocs, social service agencies, and, more recently, various kinds of professional organizations. Some of the most well-known agencies created by the Latino community are ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey (Newark, Camden, Trenton), Congreso Boricua (Trenton), FOCUS and La Casa de Don Pedro (both in Newark), PACO (Jersey City), Puerto Rican Action Board (New Brunswick), in addition to many others located throughout the state.

Since the 1980s, Latinos have formed a host of other associations from baseball leagues to political caucuses. Out of these efforts came the Hispanic Women's Task Force, Latinas United for Political Empowerment (LUPE), and the Roberto Clemente Baseball League. At present, there are also a variety of professional and business associations formed by Latinos. Among these are the Hispanic Bar Association of New Jersey, the Hispanic Firefighters Association of Newark, the Hispanic Law Enforcement Association of Essex County, and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey. To the right are some examples of those who have led the charge in the establishment of Latino influence in New Jersey.

RAÚL DÁVILA



PERFECTO OYOLA

DR. HILDA A. HIDALGO



Celia Cruz, born in Havana, Cuba, was one of the most popular Latina **SINGERS** in the 20th century. Her nickname was the "Queen of Salsa." She recorded over 20 gold albums, and was awarded the National Medal of Arts in 1994 by former President Bill Clinton. In Union City, they honored her by creating the "Celia Cruz Park."

Born: October 21, 1925, Havana, Cuba
Died: July 16, 2003, Fort Lee, NJ

Raúl Dávila is best remembered for being a Latino **ACTOR** and **PRODUCER** on many English and Spanish productions including the Broadway musical, *The Sound of Music*, and the American soap opera, *All My Children*. He was also a founding member of Channel 47, a

Spanish language television station in New Jersey.

Born: September 15, 1931, San Juan, Puerto Rico
Died: January 2, 2006, Belleville, NJ

Hilda A. Hidalgo, PhD was a prominent professor and **COMMUNITY ACTIVIST** who moved to Newark, NJ, in the 1960s. She made a meaningful impact on the Newark community by establishing various organizations including the Puerto Rican Congress and ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey. The City of Newark and Rutgers University-Newark posthumously dedicated New Street "Dr. Hilda Hidalgo Way" for her contributions to the Latino community.

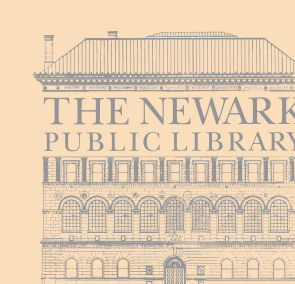
Born: 1928, Río Piedras, Puerto Rico
Died: November 10, 2009, Gainesville, FL

Perfecto Oyola was a **CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST** for Puerto Ricans and Latinos in Jersey City and Hudson County in the 1960s and 1970s. Oyola believed Latinos were being treated unfairly, especially in public education and political representation. He fought for bilingual classes, the inclusion of Latino teachers, and more Latino representation in the political process. Jersey City recognized Oyola by dedicating the Spanish section of the library in his honor: "The Perfecto Oyola Biblioteca Criolla and Cultural Center."

Born: July 7, 1940, Aguas Buenas, Puerto Rico



CELIA CRUZ



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NOW

Today, Latino influence has become mainstream in American politics and culture. However, the struggle for Latino recognition in the United States continues. Latinos continue to persevere, serving in prominent roles in the state legislature, representing the interests of their constituents in matters of bilingual education, access to legal representation, and social services. Activists have helped fellow Latinos by representing and advocating for them in cases of immigration, discrimination in housing, education, and other social services.

Latino culture on film, in music, and in art has become a central element of American culture. Latino music has topped Billboard charts, and Latino actors, producers, and writers are taking leading roles in the entertainment industry. All have helped to raise awareness about Latino culture and art as well as political and societal issues such as civil rights and the idea of citizenship.

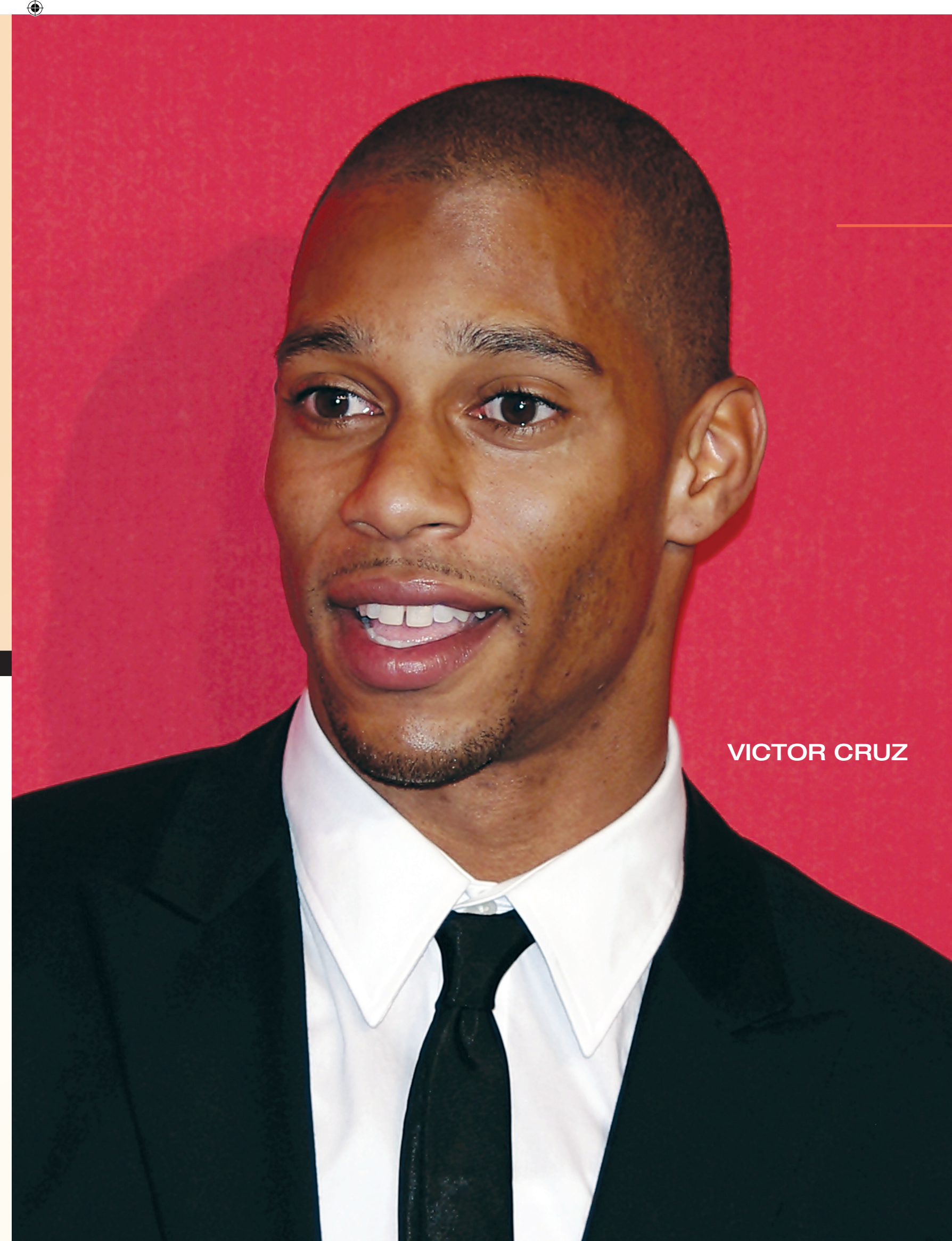
Latinos in sports, education, film, and activism are now inspiring a new generation of young Latinos. From the struggle of the mid-20th century to the ongoing battle over immigration today, the Latino community has shown incredible solidarity in response to the attacks on their civil rights. Although this new generation of prominent Latinos are faced with different types of struggles than their predecessors, they continue to advance their values and culture to help create a better and more understanding American society.

Giancarlo Tello is an **IMMIGRATION RIGHTS ACTIVIST** who has helped establish tuition equality through his role in the Tuition Equity for Dreamers Coalition. Through his efforts, the State of NJ passed a law that allowed undocumented college students in NJ to pay in-state tuition. He was given the “title” of the best undocumented organizer in the State of New Jersey.

Born: June 19, 1990, Belleville, NJ



GIANCARLO TELLO



VICTOR CRUZ

Victor Cruz

is a professional **ATHLETE**. He was a standout high school athlete who eventually became a star at the University of Massachusetts. In 2010, Cruz signed with the NFL's New York Giants. He set a club record and lead the franchise to a Super Bowl Championship against the New England Patriots in 2012. As of 2017, he is a free agent, which means he can join any team.

Born: November 11, 1986, Paterson, NJ

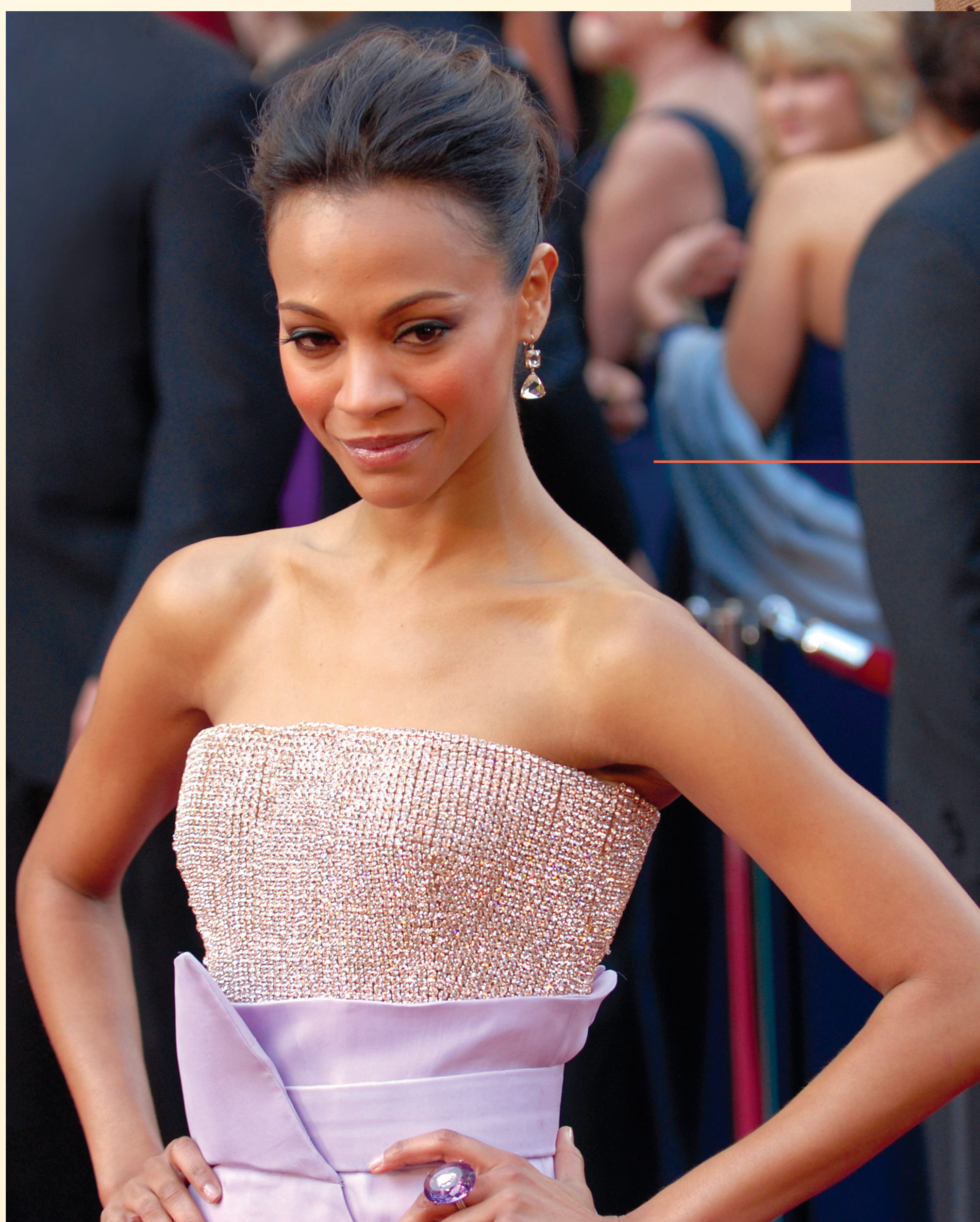
Maria C. Del Cid-Kosso

is currently **DIRECTOR OF LEGISLATIVE SERVICES** at the New Jersey Department of Health. Del Cid-Kosso recently established the “Del Cid Dreamers” Scholarship designed to help undocumented students pursue a college degree. She is currently a Board Member of Lupe Fund Inc., a Board Member of the Union County National Organization of Women, and President of the Union County Young Democrats. She has received numerous awards for her community involvement and was recognized on InsiderNJ's *50 under 30: The Millennial Up and Comers in New Jersey Politics*.

Born: December 18, 1991, Guatemala



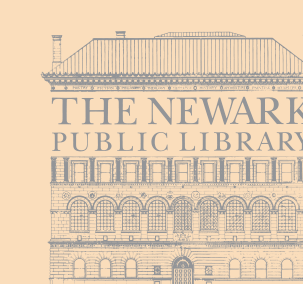
MARIA C. DEL CID-KOSSO



ZOE SALDANA

Zoe Saldana is an **ACTRESS** who grew up to star in some of the biggest movies in Hollywood. She played Neytiri in *Avatar*, Uhura in the Star Trek franchise, and Gamora in Marvel's *Guardians of the Galaxy*. Some of her awards include a Saturn Award for Best Actress in 2009 and an Alma Award for Favorite Movie Actress in Drama/Adventure in 2012.

Born: June 19, 1978, Passaic, NJ



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