

Times piece in which writer Rosario Ferré openly endorses Puerto Rican statehood.

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Roberto Carlos Ortiz

Vega Yunque, Edgardo (Ed Vega)

(1936–) (novelist, short story writer)

Edgardo Vega Yunque is one of the most prolific Puerto Rican writers in the United States. He was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico, in 1936 and grew up in Cidra, a small northern town on the island. His family moved to New York in 1949, when his father became the Baptist minister of a Hispanic congregation in the South Bronx. After he graduated from high school Vega joined the U.S. Air Force in 1954. During this period Vega began reading the works of Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

In 1977 Vega published his first short story, "Wild Horses." He has taught at Hostos University, Hunter College, and the State University of New

York, Old Westbury. He has also worked in community projects such as Addiction Service Agency and Aspira. He was founder and president of the Clemente Soto Vélez Cultural and Educational Center in New York City.

His short story collections include *Mendoza's Dreams* (1987) and *Casualty Reports* (1991), but he is known mainly as a novelist. His novels include *The Comeback* (1985), *No Matter How Much You Promise to Cook or Pay the Rent You Blew It Cauze Bill Bailey Ain't Never Coming Home Again* (2003), *The Lamentable Journey of Omaha Bigelow into the Impenetrable Loisaida Jungle* (2004), and more recently *Blood Fugues* (2005).

Vega writes mainly in English, his language of education. Like many Latino writers, he has been influenced by Latin American authors such as Gabriel García Márquez and Jorge Luis Borges, especially in their use of MAGICAL REALISM. Vega portrays in his works the Puerto Rican experience of living on the mainland by using multiple voices and perspectives. He also explores racial relations with a critical perspective yet also with distinctly comic effects, as in his first novel, *The Comeback*, which is about a Gypsy–Eskimo–Puerto Rican hockey player who becomes a revolutionary. In *Mendoza's Dreams* Vega constructs different representations of barrio life and Puerto Rican versions of the success story. The main character, a barrio writer called Mendoza, writes about Puerto Rican dreams of overcoming the barrio's negative reality. In the story "Mercury Gómez," a small Puerto Rican black man who had always been "invisible" for white Americans and would never fit the image of the successful businessman, becomes powerful and rich by building an empire of media companies from a messenger service. He organizes a group of small black men who carry packages quickly, making the customer believe that only one black man makes the deliveries. Merc's success emerges from his own marginality; he subverts the system to benefit from his own social invisibility.

Vega's novels also present a biting vision on intercultural relations in the United States. In *No Matter How Much You Promise to Cook or Pay the Rent You Blew It Cauze Bill Bailey Ain't Never*

Coming Home Again, half Puerto Rican, half Irish Vidamía Farrel searches for a father she has never known. In a story featuring a full orchestra of characters, Vidamía discovers the roots of her ethnic identity. *The Lamentable Journey of Omaha Bigelow into the Impenetrable Loisaida Jungle* explores the complex issue of race through the use of a colorful characters and incredible situations. “Loisaida” is the Latino term used to refer to the Lower East Side of New York City. Vega humorously attacks xenophobia by making a political commentary on cultural stereotypes and combining unlikely ethnic personalities. Omaha Bigelow, a punk rocker, meets Maruquita Salsipuedes, a Nuyoricana girl with magical powers who can help him solve his sexual problems. Their love affair is explored through passages of magical realism and political digression. Meanwhile, *Blood Fugues* is a tale of action and mystery that narrates how family ties and secrets come back to the present in the stories of two characters, Kenny Romero and Claudia, and their Puerto Rican and Irish families.

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Antonia Domínguez Miguela

Vilar, Irene (1969–)

Irene Vilar was born in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, in 1969. She is the granddaughter of Lolita Lebrón, the famous Puerto Rican nationalist, who on March 1, 1954, walked into the U.S. House of Representatives with her comrades and opened fire and wounded five individuals. Lebrón spent the next 27 years of her life in a women’s prison in West Virginia; her granddaughter, Vilar, spent the first few years of her life in Puerto Rico. Vilar graduated from Syracuse University in New York. In 1996 she published the memoir *A Message from God in the Atomic Age*, the title making reference to a letter her grandmother wrote. The work was republished the same year as *The Ladies’ Gallery: A Memoir of Family Secrets* and was considered one of the best novels of the year by the *Detroit Free Press* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Vilar has since been a visiting university lecturer, a magazine managing editor, and an acquisitions editor. For the University of Wisconsin Press she created the America series, which seeks to explore the varied perspectives of the Americas in relation to borders and historical perspectives.

Vilar’s *The Ladies’ Gallery* is the family history of farmers, landowners, priests, mothers, wives, gamblers, and a famous revolutionary who fought for her belief that Puerto Rico should be free of U.S. domination. The memoir becomes a search for Vilar’s identity as she often questions and reflects upon who she is—“What was I” (44)—where and whom she is from, what homeland she belongs to, and her place in a world that defines her as the granddaughter of a great revolutionary, a suicidal mother, and a cheating