

Exploring Dominican Heritage with Justices Rosado and Ventura

John Caher: Welcome to Amici, news and insight from the New York Courts. I'm John Caher.

I'm pleased to welcome to the program two extraordinary women who serve on the Appellate Division of New York State Supreme Court. Llinet Rosado is an Associate Justice on the First Department bench in Manhattan and Lourdes Ventura is an Associate Justice on the Second Department bench in Brooklyn. Both have roots in the Dominican Republic, both were elevated to the respective Appellate Division Department by Governor Kathy Hochul in 2023.

Let me tell you a little bit about each of these exceptional women.

Justice Rosado has been a Supreme Court justice in the 12th Judicial District since 2019.

She began her judicial career as a judge for the Civil Court of the City of New York in Bronx County in 2013 and was designating Acting Justice of the Bronx County Supreme Court in 2016. Prior to her election to the bench, she served as a public defender and attorney for children and a court attorney for three judges.

Justice Rosado has been a commissioner of the Franklin H. Williams Judicial Commission, a member of the Gender Fairness Committee for the 12th Judicial District, the New York State Bench Book Committee and New York State Judicial Committee on Women in the Courts. She's a member of the advisory board of the Thurgood Marshall Jr. Mock Trial Competition and President Elect of the New York Women Judges Association. She co-chairs the Hon. Betty Weinberg Ellerin Judicial Commission on Women in the Courts.

Justice Ventura, previously a Justice on the Appellate Term, was elected to the New York City Civil Court in 2019, and just a year later was elevated to Supreme Court.

Before becoming a judge, she spent several years in private practice and also served as an Assistant District Attorney in Queens County and Assistant Attorney General in the Civil Rights Bureau and Deputy Chief of Staff and counsel to the New York State Senate. She has been the recipient of many recognitions including her achievements being read

into the United States Congressional Record during her practice. Having served as past president of the Latino Lawyers Association of Queens County and first Latina president of the Queens County Women's Bar Association, Justice Ventura is an inaugural member, and current board member, of the New York Woman Judges Association. She served as inaugural co-chair of the Equal Justice Committee in Queens Supreme Civil and is the immediate past president of Latino Judges Association. Justice Ventura is a member of the New York Pattern Jury Instructions Civil Committee, an officer with the New York State Bar Association Judicial Section, and a board member of the Judges and Lawyers Breast Cancer Alert. She had the honor of serving on the first ever all-woman bench of the Appellate Term.

Your Honors, thanks for coming on Amici. Let's go back to your roots if we could. Justice Rosado, you're an immigrant. You were born in the Dominican Republic. How, when, and why did you and your family come to the United States and New York City?

Justice Rosado:

I want to start with the "why" first. My parents were part of the large-scale migration from Dominican Republic that began in the 1960s in the wake of the economic and political turbulence that occurred when the Dictator Rafael Trujillo was killed. And so my mom, one of 11, came to New York. My oldest sister was born here, but because my mother was still tending to her parents and her siblings, she returned back and I was born in Santiago de los Caballeros in 1971.

At this point, she had to obtain immigration papers for me and she had to get me what was called back then a "green card," an "alien card" it was called actually. And it said the word "alien" on the card. And so we began our life here--my parents, my four sisters-- and we settled in the Lower East Side, Jacob Reis Tenement houses, and our life here began. She wanted to try to find that American Dream for herself and for her family.

John Caher:

So your parents were not yet American citizens when you were born?

Justice Rosado:

Absolutely not. She had begun the process, had obtained, I believe, her green card, her alien card. She's the first of the 11 to arrive to the United States. They found an apartment here, then she went back and had me, then she came back. Two of us were born there, two of us were born here. My mom actually got her citizenship maybe after 15 years of being here and I wouldn't get mine until my second year of law school.

John Caher:

Second year of law school before you got your citizenship?

Justice Rosado: Yes.

John Caher: So all that time, what is your status?

Justice Rosado: My status was a legal resident. And I want you to know that there are a lot of Dominicans like that still to this day who lived the fear of, "Am I going to make it? Am I not going to make it?" I had to walk the straight line. My mom wanted her girls to be very careful because any little thing could lead to us not getting it.

John Caher: Wow! That's quite a burden to carry. And what sort of work did your parents do? They're here, they're immigrants, what sort of work did they do raising this large family?

Justice Rosado: They went into manual labor because they didn't know the language, they didn't have higher education. My mother comes from farmers and my father comes from tobacco farms as well. So we get here and my father goes into the service hospitality area where he is in restaurants, and my mom went into the garment industry where she worked in factories and she would talk to us about how she put the zippers on the jeans.

And so that was their life. But like I told you, she was one of 11. She's the first one that arrived. One by one they came and our apartment became, Ellis Island is what I like to call it. And so one of the people that lived with us most of our time was my grandfather, my maternal grandfather, Don Ramon Elias Garcia, who I named my son after, and he worked as a dishwasher in the Rainbow Room and became part of the union and would pay union dues.

I have his union book, and at that point the union dues were \$2, but it's so amazing to me that my grandpa was so proud of the fact that he was a union worker and that he worked in the Rainbow Room. With time, her brothers and sisters would come. Everyone lived with us. We had to share our beds, our food, and they would work the bodegas and the liquor stores and they would leave before sunrise and come back late at night, and eventually they would move out and their kids would go to school.

At this point, I have 46 cousins. We have police officers. I'm the only judge. We have teachers, we have principals, we have social workers, directors of compliance. Not bad for that early start.

John Caher: More than “not bad!” What was life like for an immigrant child growing up? As you mentioned, you weren't a citizen until you were what, 24 years old, 23, 24 years old?

Justice Rosado: Yes. So the life of an immigrant child while challenging, and I'll touch that briefly. It was amazing because I am living my culture but also the identity of America. And so at any given time you have all your uncles in the house, you're listening to a merengue, you're listening to a bachata, and then they'll turn on the American TV to watch the American news, to hear what the president's saying.

What did Martin Luther King say? What is happening in the world? And the younger children once we learn English, because English for me is a second language and that's been a challenge for me in many ways. I think in Spanish. I dream in Spanish. Spanish is my first language. If I get excited, if I get angry, what occurs is a mixture of the two. That's happens to this day, John. So I have to slow down my mind. I used to be upset by it, but no longer. I embrace it. I have more than one language in my head. Once you learn English in an immigrant family, now you become a translator and you translate for everyone, not only for your family, but if the neighbor acts as your mother, "Can your daughter translate?" you translate.

And this is why I feel so connected to the interpreters, because as a young child sometimes I would see the disdain in the person that was speaking to my parent or the look of disgust and I didn't understand what that meant. I didn't understand why that person was looking at my parent in the way that they were.

And I didn't feel I could ask mom what that was about because I'm sure mom or dad felt the same way. And that's why I really talked to interpreters about vicarious trauma when they're interpreting for our litigants because it's something that you see and you feel, you can't really express, but you take it home with you.

And so the life of an immigrant was an amazing one, but it also had its challenges. For example, saying our names. I still have to correct people on my name. It's so important. Your name is your identity and it's important for me. I constantly ask individuals, "How do I pronounce your name? How do I say your name?"

My name starts with a double L, but it's pronounced “Yinette,” with a Y, just like rain and cry is in Spanish, lluvia and llorar, and I was bullied for

that. And I've been told throughout my life, "This is America, your name is Lynette."

It's so important for diversity that we get people's names correct. That was my life as an immigrant child.

John Caher: Do you recall when and why you decided to become a lawyer?

Justice Rosado: Well, I'm going to go back to those 11 siblings of my mother. Only one remains in Dominican Republic, and she became an attorney. And I got to tell you, John, it's cultural. Growing up, the men are in one room, the women are in another room. This aunt was always in that room with the men, debating on sports, on the law. My grandpa would look at her like, "Go to the other room." And I just thought that she was Wonder Woman. I just thought this woman is amazing. Add to that, my parents raised their four daughters on three principles: Family comes first; by serving others we serve God; and education is the biggest weapon in any girl's purse. That's what she raised us on.

So service was the second component to lawyering. So, first my aunt, then my mother's service and what sealed the deal was growing up in the Lower East side during the crack epidemic and witnessing firsthand police brutality. That sealed the deal for me.

I was going to law school and I was going to be a defense attorney, representing people that couldn't afford to represent themselves in a criminal action. That vision came to me in high school.

John Caher: Justice Ventura, so you're a first-generation Dominican-born immigrants. Tell me if you would, how, why and when your parents happened to come here?

Justice Ventura: Yes. And thank you so much for having me on this podcast. I really appreciate it.

My parents arrived to the United States from the Dominican Republic in the late-1960s, and prior to the arrival of my father to the United States, he was a police officer in the Dominican Republic. And my mom's education was limited to middle school.

When they both independently arrived in the United States, they actually met in New York through a gathering being held by a mutual friend. They married and they started a family to realize their respective dreams of building a better life, and are citizens of this country. And they added us

into this fold in the United States. They have a child as a judge, myself, they have a retired sergeant on the NYPD, and my younger sister is a bilingual education counselor in the school.

So we all ended up in service industries because that's really where their heart was. It was something that we had to do, always help others even when we didn't have all the means that other people had.

John Caher: What kind of work supported your household when you were growing up?

Justice Ventura: Well, both of my parents, again, were immigrants, Spanish speaking, and they worked in factories. My dad also drove yellow cabs and limos. My mom also worked in office cleaning. She actually also went to beauty school to train to do salon work. She never officially worked in a salon, but she knew how to do hair, which was great.

There were times that we fell on hard times and we had to turn to the government for financial assistance and we went through all those experiences that immigrants really share in common, but hardworking, strong ethics and helping others. That was always the three models in our household.

John Caher: I imagine Spanish was a primary language in your household?

Justice Ventura: Yes. Since I was the firstborn in that marriage, Spanish was my first language. And I was born and raised in Queens and I spoke Spanish. When I went to school, I actually started in a bilingual education class. So I was in a bilingual class and then we moved neighborhoods in Queens. And then I was placed in a class that was only English speaking.

And I remember just using my hands, a lot of non-verbals just to try to interact with the other students who only spoke English until finally I got comfortable speaking the language. There were times that I was so shy and I did not want to say a word because the kids would laugh. When it was lunchtime, my mom used to bring me mangu, spaghetti and different things that other kids were not eating. So they would laugh at that, too. So it was tough growing up, but that only made me stronger and, later on in life, appreciate all those things that my mom did for me growing up.

John Caher: Justice Rosado, you are nodding as if you have some familiarity with what Justice Ventura is talking about here.

Justice Rosado: Yeah. We all share similar experiences.

John Caher: Back to Justice Ventura. So how did you happen to become a lawyer? What inspired you to go that direction rather than any other direction?

Justice Ventura: The opportunity actually arose while I was in college. When I went to college, I went to the University of Buffalo in the SUNY system and I thought I was going to be an architect. The first year in, I was like, "I'm not going to be an architect." I changed my major to social sciences and Spanish. I double majored. When I was finishing up college, I was told I was nominated for a graduate fellowship called the Arturo Schomburg Fellowship at the university.

I had applied for early admissions to the Master of Social Work because I thought I wanted to be a social worker and help people and I was admitted in that program. And then I learned about the fellowship. It was a four-year fellowship, a four-year free ride to graduate school. And I learned that there was a JD/MSW program, the Juris Doctor with the Masters of Social Work, so I applied. And here I am! But that opportunity was in the making for a lifetime because I interpreted, I translated, I assisted not only my mom but neighbors, also in government offices, anytime we went somewhere I was the translator and the interpreter. I felt like a little advocate.

Today, when I go to speak to children at schools, at elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, when I speak to them and I tell them to raise their hands if this is what they're doing at home, I still see those hands going up and I tell them, "Look, I'm a judge today. At that time, I felt uncomfortable, I felt uneasy, I didn't know some of these people (that I)was translating for. Mom, 'Why are you putting me in this situation?'" Now, I thank God for those experiences because it really showed me, and today I appreciate everything she did for me. And now I use that in the courtroom too, to inform, make sure everyone feels comfortable, heard and that justice prevails.

John Caher: That's beautiful and fascinating and we'll follow up on that in a moment. But before we do, tell me about Street Law en Espanol, if you would?

Justice Ventura: I would love to. In 2004, when I became president of Latino Lawyers Association of Queens County, I was working at the New York State Attorney General's Office at that time in the Civil Rights Bureau and there was a colleague in the consumer fraud Bureau named Jose Perez, who's currently with Latino Justice. He approached me about a similar program that he had founded while he was a law student at St. John's University School of Law in the 1980s.

So we discussed the program and what it would look like and we founded together what became the Street Law en Espanol program in 2005. We enlisted students from the Latin American Law Student Association, LALSA, at St. John's, and we coupled them with attorneys from the Latino Lawyers Association of Queens County to present on issues affecting our Spanish-speaking communities in Queens County.

Our first presentation was held at my childhood parish, our Lady of Sorrows in Corona, Queens. And thereafter we continued to present at churches, libraries, schools, offices and other venues. And during my term as president, we even received an award from the New York State Bar Association as well as the Hispanic National Bar Association.

Jose and I could not be more proud of establishing a program for the Latino Lawyers Association of Queens County uniting the bar with law students to strengthen their advocacy skills while imparting vital information to our community on issues of housing, labor, finance, immigration and other issues of the time. And now we're here 20 years later and our program is still going strong and has expanded to other schools such as CUNY Law School, Hofstra Law, and others throughout the years.

It was a labor of love at the time when we started it, but to see that it's still here and still helping our community while helping our students coming up and into a pipeline, it's amazing.

John Caher: It sounds wonderful. Now I am a native of Buffalo and I'm curious as to how you ended up there. I've been gone for a long time, but I don't think there was a very large Dominican population in Buffalo, certainly not in the '60s and '70s when I was growing up there. What did you find in Buffalo and why did you end up in Buffalo?

Justice Ventura: So again, I wanted to be an architect and SUNY Buffalo offered the architecture program. It's far from New York City. I had never been to Buffalo. At first, it was difficult being there, but I found my community within the campus. I joined a Latina sorority at the school and became engaged in other clubs.

We were all along in the same hallway. It was the Caribbean Student Association, the Black Student Union and all the other organizations and all the affinity clubs. And that helped build community and helped me feel comfortable in that new environment that I was in. I was there for nine years in Buffalo, New York studying because I did my undergrad and then my graduate school there.

And my brother and sister are also alums of the school. So we build a community and a network up there. And I also was involved with the Lower West Side of Buffalo, which was primarily the Hispanic community as you know. I worked at Beecher's Boys and Girls Club. I worked at Hispanics United of Buffalo, and I was just engaged in the community in Buffalo, New York while I was there.

John Caher: I'm glad to hear what you have brought to my native community.

Justice Ventura: Thank you. Thank you. And we have another jurist that was my classmate, Betty Calvo-Torres. We studied for the bar together and here today, we're judges.

John Caher: I'd like to toss out a question to both of you. How has being a member of a Dominican diaspora shaped your experiences and identity in the US? Justice Rosado, why don't you start?

Justice Rosado: So as a member of the Dominican diaspora, I've experienced a rich blend of cultural heritage and American life. I want to say that growing up I saw the vibrant traditions of music and food in our community, which is a big deal. And it influenced my family's daily life.

This cultural identity has shaped my values such as the importance of family resilience and community. In the United States, I've navigated multiple identities and face challenges related to cultural assimilation and representation, I'm sure my sister has as well. However, my Dominican heritage has also provided a strong foundation for empathy, for understanding and connection with diverse communities.

I think that this dual identity has informed my perspective and approach to various aspects of life, including my role as a mother, as a judge, and as a member of my community. It has taught me the value of embracing complexity, promoting inclusivity, and advocating for justice and equality.

And just like Judge Ventura, I continue to serve my community by going to the schools. It's important to me for the young Latinas to see us, to have met their first judge at five years old, at six years old, and I want to share one of Judge Ventura's stories that she will probably not share.

She went to speak to an elementary school and she shared her experience with that class. And years later, a young lady that was in that class will become an attorney and ask to work for Judge Ventura. And to this day, she is on Judge Ventura's staff. And as I say this, it gives me

goose bumps because it shows the power that we have to go back to our communities and extend our hand backwards and propel them forward.

John Caher: What a beautiful story. So Judge Ventura, what's her name?

Justice Ventura: Carolina Frias and she is on my staff. Yes. When she approached me, I said, "What? I spoke to your first-grade class?" I couldn't believe it.

John Caher: That must have made you feel wonderful all those years later to know that you influenced what was then a little girl in that way, in that profound way. Where would her life have gone if you hadn't happened to come in there?

Justice Ventura: Sometimes you're speaking to this audience of a hundred kids, or less or more, and you don't know if you're touching or affecting these lives. So that was just a confirmation from up above, a confirmation that it's something that I needed to keep doing and still do to this day in mentoring our youth.

John Caher: Now the question that started this: How has being a member of the Dominican diaspora shaped your experience, your identity in the United States?

Justice Ventura: Well, I, like my sister, Justice Rosado, I live my life and in two worlds really. But there are specific experiences that show that I always bring who I am. I wear who I am on my sleeve. When someone sees me, I can't hide. I cannot hide the fact that I'm Latina, that I'm both a woman when they see me and that I'm Hispanic or Latina.

As soon as someone looks at me, there's a perception and it's only human nature. And we all have to understand that, even though you're told a million times over, do not judge a book by its cover, it's inevitable. As soon as an individual interacts with me, they will see and they will understand that there are so many more similarities than differences between us. And that's when it makes the conversation a better one and a respectful one, when we can understand that we do have some differences, but we have a lot more similarities.

When I was sworn into my office as a judge, I was sworn in with my great-grandfather's Bible, which is over a hundred years old. I can only imagine him in the Dominican Republic with his lantern reading his Bible. And that's the Bible I took in my hands to be inducted as a judge. It was a full circle moment. His sacrifices, my ancestors' sacrifices, I can never not acknowledge that, and I always do.

When I was sworn in as a judge, I did not do it in the courthouse. I actually did it at Queens Borough Hall. And the reason I did that was because in that building, I believe it was in the early 1970s, there was Housing Court. Queens Housing Court was in that building in Queens Borough Hall. I had actually appeared in Housing Court with my mother because there was a proceeding, a Housing Court proceeding, against us, against my mom. And I returned her to that place and she said, and I get emotional when I even think about it, but she said, "Oh my God. Housing court used to be here."

And she saw me get on a stage and raise my hand and take the oath to become a judge. And that was a 360 full moment that I had with her, with my family seated in the front row seeing that. When I took my oath, she was on the stage with me because I brought my parents, I brought my siblings and I brought my kids, my two sons, to be with me on the stage. So they were all there with me and my mom (and) My dad robed me, and I still have a picture of that moment, which is so great.

And then another moment that I think about is when I was invited to the Dominican Republic for International Women's Day. It was actually March of 2020, the first week of March. And I was given a Medal of Merit by the then-president of the Dominican Republic in their national palace, in their White House. And I flew in my parents because it was in their presence that this had to happen, because really this was as a result of their sacrifice in leaving everything they knew to come to a new country.

They saw their daughter being bestowed this honor, but it's really their honor. It showed that their struggles weren't in vain and that they raised a daughter that upheld their Dominican values, their culture and their traditions. And as a result of all of this, while my parents became citizens of the United States, I became a citizen of the Dominican Republic a few years back and I actually also passed that on to my sons. So they're also citizens, dual citizens with the Dominican Republic. That's how important it's to me.

John Caher: Now listening to the two of you, I feel exactly the same way as I did about a year or so ago when I walked through the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. And what we're talking about is the essence of what has made America great, I think.

Justice Ventura: Amen.

Justice Rosado: Absolutely, John. Absolutely.

John Caher: Now, judges are not computers who plug-in facts and law and then spin out the decision. There's more to it than that, obviously. And how has your respective background impacted the way you view things from the bench?

Justice Rosado: Being a member of the Dominican diaspora--I'm sorry, Lourdes made me very emotional when she was speaking. I can't even imagine what her mother was feeling in that Dominican White House watching her daughter--but I digress.

Being a member of the Dominican diaspora has shaped my perspective and approach to the law, allowing me to bring a unique viewpoint to the bench. My experiences have probably influenced my ability to empathize with diverse individuals and community in forming my decisions and ensuring that justice is served with fairness and impartiality.

As a judge, I recognize the importance of maintaining neutrality and avoiding bias, while also acknowledging the complexities of human experience that shape the cases that come before me. My background has taught me the value of resilience, hard work and community, which I draw upon in my role to uphold the principles of justice. I want you to know that in my decision making, I strive to balance empathy and objectivity, considering the individual circumstances of each case while adhering to the law.

This approach enables me to make informed, fair and impartial decisions that reflect the law and its application to the specific facts of each case. I want you to know, John, that my head isn't big because I'm a judge and I'm on the First Department. I consider myself a servant. And it's important for me when people appear before me that they see themselves in me.

And I like to tell students, when I am on the bench, I'm everyone. I'm Black. I'm white. I'm Dominican. I'm Puerto Rican. I'm Asian. I'm a lesbian. I'm a heterosexual. How else can I provide for justice if I don't try to be everyone that appears before me? And because of everything I've been in life, it's important for me to say, "Counsel, how do I pronounce your name? How do I pronounce your client's name? What name would your client want me to utilize?"

It's important for me to take a moment in Family Court when I was there to understand the significance of the case to the people before me. Not another job, not just signing a petition, but understanding that the person before me, to them is not just a case, to them it's their life.

I'm the only one of the siblings that went into public service; my sisters make money. And they often want to know, "Why can't you just call out? What's the problem? Why can't you just call out?" And I often have to say to them, especially when I was in Family Court, "My job is not a regular job. If I call out 60 families will have their cases adjourned for 45 more days, for what? Because I wanted a day off?"

I believe it is unique to the immigrant experience to understand that we don't know what any given person is going through before us. And sometimes, John, what I've learned as a judge is people are willing to settle and let go just if they're heard, just if they're heard. And many times I've been able to settle cases by saying this, "Mr. Interpreter, can you interpret what I'm going to say into English because I want to speak to this family in Spanish?"

And then I will speak to the family in Spanish, allowing the interpreter to translate into English for the good of the record and the attorneys. I cannot tell you how often litigants have left my courtroom saying in Spanish, "Wow. That judge spoke to me in my native tongue." And I'm currently taking sign language so that I can do that as well.

John Caher: And that is wonderful. Justice Ventura?

Justice Ventura: That's amazing, Sister Rosado. I always think back again to my mom who always said that there were two educations. She's like, "There's going to be education at home where I'm teaching you about values, morality, humility, and all these other things, and there's going to be the education at school where you're going to learn how to interact with other people, you're going to learn about different areas, math, English, and all your subjects. And those two integrated will make you a better person."

And I believe that my education, coupled with my life experiences, is what informs my work, from the first time appearing in a courthouse as a child of an immigrant, accompanying my mom to the Housing Court proceeding, to when I first had a meaningful interaction with my first lawyer. I was home from college and a neighbor needed help with translation for her child that had a criminal case and needed a translator.

To this day, I'm still in touch with that attorney because I do keep these relationships. They're long-lasting. And he also encouraged me to apply to law school when the opportunity came up with the fellowship. I've traveled to the Dominican Republic alongside with Justice Rosado and other judges from our court and engaged with jurists and the bar in the Dominican Republic.

And all of these collective experiences I feel have emphasized the importance and the need to ensure access to justice, fairness, and justice. I want to make sure when people leave my courtroom that they feel that they were treated with respect, with fairness and dignity, and not only our litigants, this even goes into our chambers and the courtroom, how we treat our interpreters, how we treat our court clerks, how we treat our officers, how we treat the cleaning staff in our office.

Everyone is a human. We're human first. That we all have in common and we start from there and then go up. It's just like what Justice Rosado said, she doesn't wear it on her sleeve about being a judge. That's not what's most important. What's most important is how the person leaves our courtroom, our chambers after interacting with us during a proceeding.

You can't make everyone happy with your decision, but I know that I have to feel I've made the right decision. I have to prepare, I have to see the facts, use the law, of course, and then come to a just decision that I feel is fair.

John Caher: Thank you for that. Now you've both been quite active with the Latino Judges Association, LJA. What is it and why does it continue to be necessary?

Justice Ventura: So thank you for asking about our beloved Latino Judges Association, which happens to be celebrating its 40th year anniversary. It was established in 1985. As soon as I became a jurist, I joined the LJA. I had heard about it being a place where you can receive guidance and also that it did community work throughout New York State.

When we have these opportunities, we should be holding the door open and bringing others up. And that's what LJA does. Individuals that are highly motivated and have the merit should be seen and heard and be placed in a pipeline. That's really the importance of the association, to ensure that those that come after us have a path and a seat at the table.

Justice Rosado: Just like Judge Ventura, I joined the Latino Judges as soon as I became a judge and I have held board positions. I'm no longer on the board, but I feel like I still am because I still assist in any way possible. And I want you to think about the fact that we're at 40 years. Forty years ago, 13 Latinos, none of which were Dominican, got together and felt the need to create this association. And here we are 40 years later. We've established credibility and respect from the legal community.

I'm a history major and it just astounds me what those 13 founders would think. Now, we have five living founders left and we just honored them, two of which include Judge Carmen Ciparick and Judge Luis Gonzalez. It just gives me chills and I think we have to continue to push forward for all the Latino judges that haven't even been born yet because we still have a lot of work to do.

John Caher:

You mentioned Judge Ciparick. Since Judge Carmen Beauchamp Ciparick became the first Latino judge on the Court of Appeals back in '94, almost a decade after the LJA was formed, there's always been a Latino judge on the high court, and now there are two, with Judges Jenny Rivera and Michael Garcia. The Latino community has been represented by you two and others on the First and Second Departments, but I don't know that there are or ever have been Latin judges on the Third or Fourth Department.

What are the challenges and goals of the LJA with respect to the appellate as well as the trial courts going forward?

Justice Ventura:

The year that Justice Rosado and I were appointed to the Appellate Division, I believe Mark Powers was also appointed and he's in the Third Department. So there is at least one Latino in the Third Department.

For this question, really what I highly recommend our listeners to do is to review the report called Overview of Latinos, Hispanics in the New York State Judiciary, which was first prepared by the Honorable Sallie Manzanet-Daniels of the Appellate Division, First Department. She did that in 2020 while she was president of the Latino Judges Association.

And just this year she updated the report and that report is available online at www.latinojudgesassociation.org. At that website, you could also see a history, a timeline, of Latino judges in the courts. This report highlights the fact that we, Latinos, represent under 5% of the jurists in the State of New York, even though we make up approximately 20% of the New York state population. The report also delves into data for each court, including the appellate courts and the trial courts.

Justice Rosado:

The challenge that we have is that there are many areas of New York State where we don't have a Latino judge, so therefore our community doesn't see themselves when they walk into the courtroom. So I just want to touch upon some of them. While we do have a judge of Latino heritage on the Third Department, Judge Mark Powers, we have never had an elected Latina in Albany, which I love because I went to SUNY Albany and Albany Law School.

There has never been an elected Latina, so there will never be a Latina in the Third Department, Appellate Division if we don't start from the lower courts. And when you go to the Fourth Department, where we have our amazing sister, Betty Calvo-Torres, who has been a judge for close to two decades, and she's the Coordinating Judge of problem-solving courts as well as the Supervising Judge of Genesee, Wyoming, Longtown and Village Courts.

She's not elected, John. She's not elected. And there is a Dominican/ Puerto Rican community in the Eight Judicial District. How does she get on the Fourth Department where we have no one? And then if you come into New York City, just had two Latinas come out of a panel and no Latina was chosen. The last Latina elected in Manhattan was 2018.

John Caher: And finally, there's a tendency to link all Latinos together, but each culture is, of course, distinctive. So I'd like each of you to tell me something unique about Dominicans or the Dominican Republic.

Justice Ventura: I love this question. We are warm, welcoming, and hospitable people. Our makeup is indigenous, African and Hispanic, intersecting, I say in hard work, humility and faith. We have a great love of politics and baseball. We also had the first university and first church of the New World, and we have great food.

Justice Rosado: I'm going to add to that. Those are the facts. We are a warm and welcoming country. Whether you were born there, were born of parents from there, or you're just visiting. When you get there, John, you feel like you're Dominican because we embrace you and we make you eat our food, and we're a welcoming, welcoming community.

We are the only country whose flag has the Bible in it. And I want you to know, I went and found my Dominican passport from when I was a kid, and right there is the logo and it reads "Dios, Patria and Libertad, which means God, country and liberty. I am very, very, very proud of that.

Justice Ventura: I hope that this interview reaches people's hearts and informs them a little bit more about the Dominicans and the Latinos here in New York State and the judiciary. And again, we are all one and we have to work together irrespective of our backgrounds.

John Caher: Well, you've certainly reached my heart and made my day, and I thank you both so much for coming on the program. Thank you.

Justice Ventura: Thank you.

Justice Rosado: Thank you, John.