

COLLAZO, ROSA CORTÉZ (1904–1988)

Rosa Cortéz Collazo was a native of Mayagüez, Puerto Rico, but moved to New York City in 1925. Employed in a hat factory, hardships and difficult economic times led Collazo to become politically active. She joined the Club Caborrojeño; two years later she was a member of Club Obrero Español, a more radical labor oriented organization. She joined the New York cell of the Nationalist Party in 1937 following the Ponce Massacre in Puerto Rico. After one failed marriage, she wed Oscar Collazo one of two Nationalists who attacked Blair House in 1950 in an attempt to kill President Harry Truman. His compatriot and a White House guard died in the attack and Collazo was tried and sentenced to death. Accused of collaboration to overthrow the government, Rosa was sent to the Women's House of Detention. Upon release, she successfully campaigned on her husband's behalf, demanding that his sentence be commuted to life. In 1954 when Puerto Rican Nationalists opened fire in the U.S. House of Representatives, Rosa Collazo was again imprisoned, serving six years in the Federal Correctional Institution for Women in Alderson, West Virginia. Joined by Dolores (Lolita) Lebrón, one of four Nationalists convicted of the attack against the U.S. Congress, the women found spiritual comfort. In 1977 now living in Puerto Rico, Rosa was part of a campaign to free the Nationalists held in U.S. prisons. Two years later President Jimmy Carter pardoned them, and Rosa flew to Kansas City to greet Oscar. Their separation of twenty-nine years eventually eroded the marriage. Rosa Collazo remained in Puerto Rico until her death.