Francés Colón



Francés Colón is a Puerto Rican neuroscientist, senior director for international climate policy at CAP, and sits in the president's council of advisors on science and technology. Colón grew up in San Jaun, PR where she also attended the University of Puerto Rico. Although, initially interested in medicine, Colón saw a gap in science and policy and shifted her career focus. With an AAAS fellowship, Colón's first government projects focused on improving K-12 STEM education in Muslim-majority countries. During the Obama administration, she became deputy of science and technology advisor for the US SoS. Colón also advocates for women in STEM, taking part in the White House's "Untold History of Women" project. Her work has earned her multiple fellowships from Yale-OpEd and for government leadership.

"I love the fact that I can use science to directly make people's lives better" – Francés Colón

Rebeca Gerschman



Rebeca Gerschman was an Argentinian biologist and physiologist who earned her Ph.D. from the University of Buenos Aires. After receiving her doctorate, she began research on oxygen poisoning and soon became the first person to link the presence of oxygen free radicals to cell death and aging (1953). Unfortunately, this theory was not widely accepted by the scientific community until 1969, when another group's work on superoxide dismutase enzymes confirmed her theory. In addition to scientific achievements, Gerschman was also a significant advocate for women's rights in the scientific field. In her honor, the Rebeca Gerschman Award was set up for women researchers in Argentina who have made significant contributions towards advancing science and training human resources.

The first person to discover the effects of oxygen free radicals on cell death and aging.

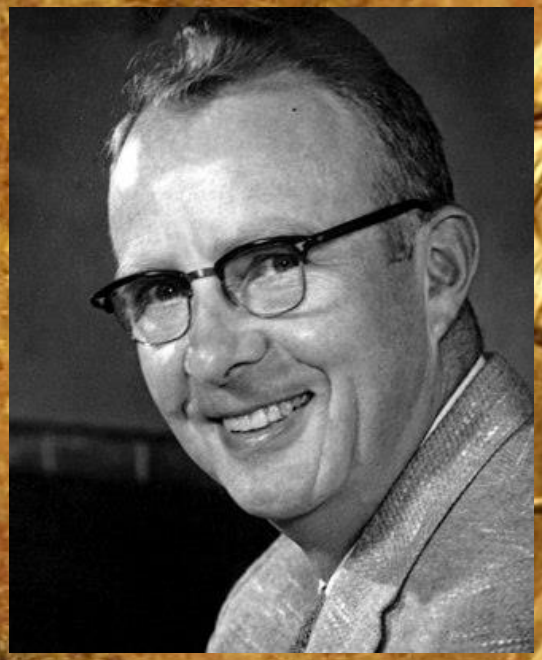
Helen Trías



Helen Trías (1929-2001) was an American pediatrician, educator, and women's rights activist. Although she was born in New York, her family moved to Puerto Rico shortly after her birth and moved back to NY when she was 10 years old. Unfortunately, she experienced discrimination in America within the society and education system, gaining limited access to opportunities simply because of her background. Choosing to pursue a medical career path because she loved working with science and people, she earned her medical degree from the University of Puerto Rico in San Juan (1960). Further, she was a strong advocate for women's rights throughout her career. Trías founded multiple committees focused on abortion rights and drafting guidelines to end non-consented sterilizations targeting minority women. For her work, she was awarded the Presidential Citizen's Medal for her work on behalf of women, children, low-income families, and people with HIV/AIDS (2001). In 2019, New York City commissioned a statue to be built to honor all her contributions creating equitable health care systems.

"We need health, but above all we need to create a grounding for healthy public policy that redresses and salvages the growing inequities. We cannot achieve a healthier us without achieving a healthier, more equitable health care system, and ultimately, a more equitable society."

Luiz Alvarez



Dr. Luiz Alvarez (1911-1988) was an American physicist, inventor, and professor. Earning his bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degrees from the University of Chicago, he went on to work at the Radiation Laboratory in UC-Berkeley post-graduation. Alvarez designed experiments to observe K-electron capture in radioactive nuclei and produced the isotope tritium using a cyclotron. In 1940, he contributed towards scientific efforts involved in WWII at the MIT Radiation Laboratory. Here, Alvarez made improvements to technology used in radar beacons/transponders. Post-WWII, he continued scientific efforts in the field of physics by helping with the design of a liquid hydrogen bubble chamber that helped scientists take photographs of particle interactions. The ability to take this photos and analyze them computationally earned him the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1968. Further, in 1980, he and his son developed the Alvarez hypothesis detailing that the extinction event wiping out the non-avian dinosaurs was the result of an asteroid impact. Apart from the Nobel Prize, he has received numerous honors from NASA and DOE and awards such as the National Medal of Science (1963).

"[My father] advised me to sit every few months in my reading chair for an entire evening, close my eyes and try to think of new problems to solve. I took his advice very seriously and have been glad ever since that he did."

Ynés Mexía



Ynés Mexía was born on May 24th, 1870 in Washington D.C. She had a turbulent youth at boarding school but grew to enjoy her time alone with science and nature. After her studies, she took over her family business. However, after her father's death and 2 troubling marriages, Mexía moved to California to seek mental health care. She soon became a member of the early environmental movement. Impassioned by preservation efforts, at the age of 51, Mexía enrolled at UC-Berkeley to study botany. After graduating, Mexía joined a specimen collection expedition group at Stanford, but decided to pursue her own studies. She secured her own funding and collected plants in unstudied regions of the Americas alone. She collected near 150,000 specimens and discovered over 500 species over 13 years in Alaska, Mexico, Brazil, Peru, Chile, Ecuador, and Argentina. For her work, Mexía became a member of the Sociedad Geographica de Lima, Peru and the California Academy of Sciences.

"In all my travels I've never been attacked by a wild animal, lost my way or caught a disease… I don't think there's any place in the world where a woman can't venture."

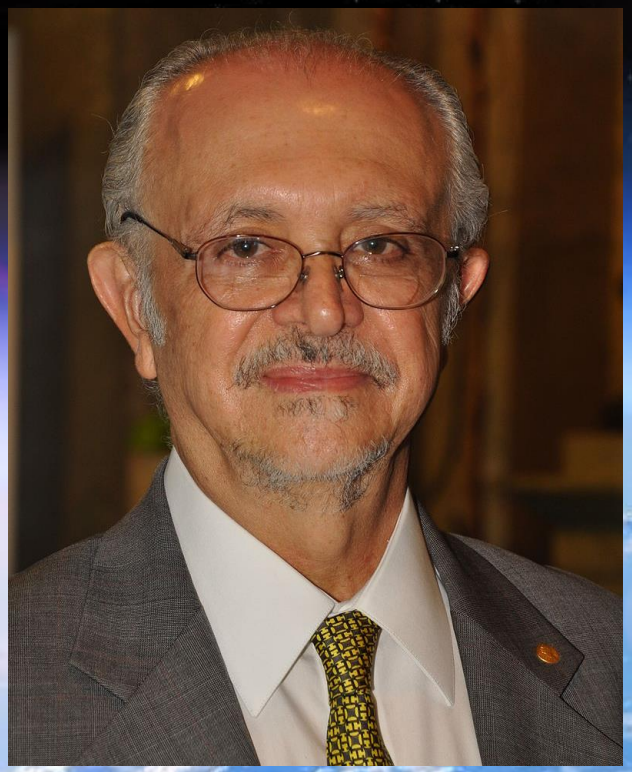
Baruj Benacerraf



Baruj Benacerraf was born in Caracas, Venezuela in 1920. Benacerraf moved to the U.S. at the age of 20 to pursue a college education. He got his B.S. at Columbia University School of General Studies in 1942. Benacerraf obtained his M.D. from the medical college of Virginia. During his medical studies, Benacerraf was drafted to the U.S. military and served for 3 years. After his military service, Benacerraf began his career of research at Columbia University. He would also research in Paris, at New York University, and at the National Institute of Health before establishing himself as an immunologist professor at Harvard University. He primarily researched immune system hypersensitivity, allergies, and autoimmune disorders. In1980, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for discovering over 30 genes which control the bodies immune response. He discovered this by observing the differences in antigen responses from various animals with similar heredity. Benacerraf was also awarded the National Medal of Science, the Rous-Whipple Award, the Gold-Headed Cane Award.

Nobel Prize laureate for his pioneering studies on histocompatibility complexes.

Mario Molina



Mario Molina was a Mexican chemist who earned his B.S. in the National Autonomous University, his M.S. from the University of Freiburg, and his Ph.D. from University of California, Berkeley. Soon after obtaining his Ph.D., he joined the University of California, Irvine as a postdoctoral researcher. Here, he used hot atom chemistry to study the effect of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) on the atmosphere. Molina, along with his postdoctoral advisor, developed the CFC ozone depletion theory, which was pivotal in understanding the environmental impacts of CFCs. For this research, he received numerous awards and honors such as being elected to the U.S. National Academy of Sciences (1993) and being co-awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry (1995).

"Scientists can depict the problems that will affect the environment based on available evidence, but their solution is not the responsibility of scientists, but of society as a whole." – Mario Molina