

PUERTO RICO
The Flame of
Resistance

PUERTO RICO The Flame of Resistance

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We hope this book will prove to be a useful tool, an educational contribution towards building support for Puerto Rican independence and self determination, and in helping to reach a clearer understanding of U.S. imperialism.

We would like to hear your criticisms, suggestions, and comments. Please write to us: Peoples Press Puerto Rico Project, P.O. Box 40130, San Francisco, California 94110.

The Authors

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO THE
PEOPLE OF PUERTO RICO WHO EMBODY
THE HEROIC FREEDOM SPIRIT OF
BETANCES, LOLA RODRIGUEZ DE TIO,
ALBIZU CAMPOS AND LOLITA LEBRON.
IT IS OFFERED AS A CONTRIBUTION
TO THE GROWING FRIENDSHIP
AND SOLIDARITY BETWEEN
THE PEOPLE OF PUERTO RICO AND
THE PEOPLES OF NORTH AMERICA.

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UNITED STATES

MEXICO

PUERTO RICO

CUBA

JAMAICA

HAITI

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

GUATEMALA

CRUZE

HONDURAS

EL SALVADOR

NICARAGUA

COSTA RICA

PANAMA

CANAL ZONE

BARBADOS

TRINIDAD

TOBAGO

VENEZUELA

GUYANA

COLOMBIA

BRAZIL



Prologue
EL GRITO DE
PUERTO RICO

There is an old Latin American legend about a foreign tyrant who tried to bury the truth. This tyrant used arms to conquer another nation. He enslaved the people and forced them to work for his benefit. This tyrant had a ceaseless drive for more wealth and more power. He was cruel and selfish, but he was not yet all-powerful because the truth stood in his way. The truth followed him everywhere and revealed his cruelty and selfishness. So the tyrant decided that it was absolutely necessary to bury the truth once and for all. Then he would seize all the wealth and power.

The tyrant ordered the people to give up the truth. He sent his soldiers into the land to gather the truth. Some citizens refused to surrender what was rightfully theirs and they were shot or jailed. When the soldiers returned the tyrant stored the truth in his brain, it made him dizzy. Late one night he crept into the jungle. When he was far away from the castle he dug a deep hole in the ground. It was hard labor because he had never worked before.

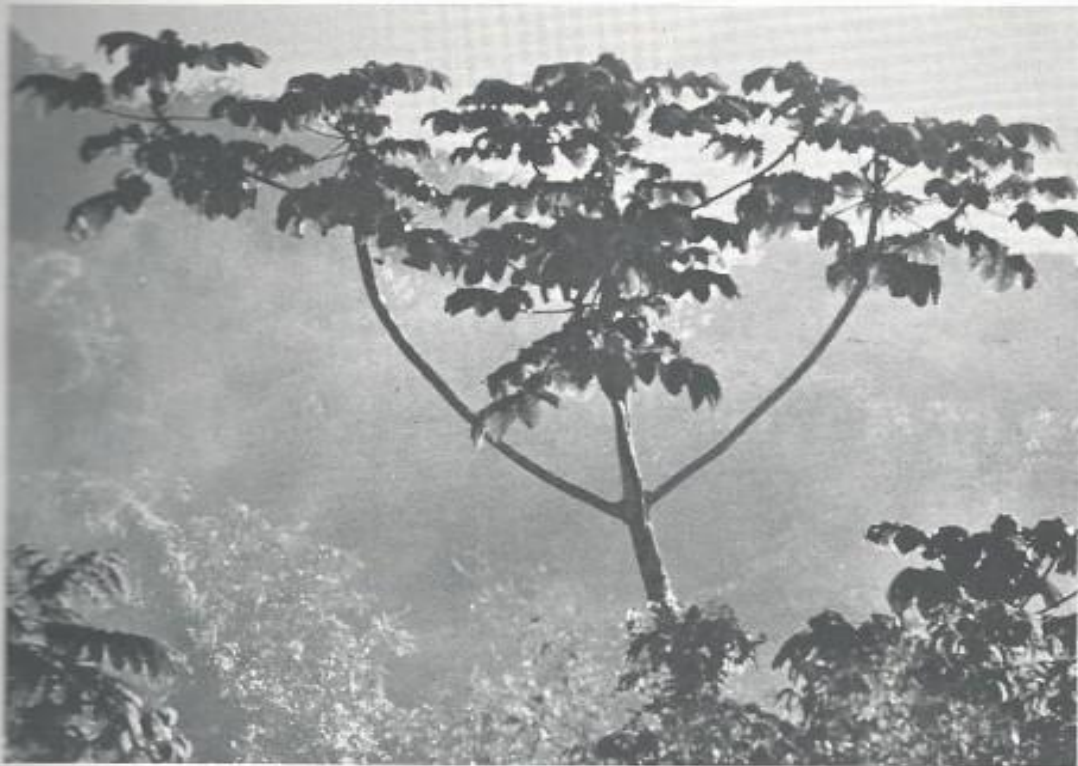
Then the tyrant cupped his hands around his mouth, and as loud as he could shouted the truth to the bottom of the dark hole. The tyrant could hear the truth rumbling at the very bottom of the hole. But before the truth could escape the tyrant threw earth into the hole as fast as he could. He packed the earth down and stamped on it with his boots.

"Now at last the truth is buried forever," he said, brushing the soil from his robes. He was very pleased with himself; on the journey back to the castle he planned new wars of conquest.

The foreign tyrant didn't know it, but two peasants watched him dig the hole and bury the truth. When the tyrant left the jungle they emerged from hiding. These two peasants got their shovels and began to work. The peasants had always worked hard, so they were soon at the bottom of the dark pit. However, all that remained of the truth was a small seed. Gently the peasants lifted the seed of truth and planted it as they would plant a corn seed. Then they went home to sleep.

That night the foreign tyrant didn't sleep well. At midnight he woke suddenly with a fear that the truth had emerged from the dark hole and that it was alive in the land. The first thing the next morning he walked into the jungle. From a distance he could see that on the exact spot where he had buried the truth there was a strong and beautiful tree. Moreover, there was a crowd of peasants with machetes, shovels and hoes. The tyrant's heart pounded against his chest. He was afraid. Even as he walked toward the tree it grew taller and taller. The peasants raised their tools and let out a cry. The tyrant could see that the roots of the tree went deep into the rich earth. The trunk of the tree was too wide to put his arms around, and its branches were long and powerful.

It was spring. There were millions of budding branches. Each one distinct and yet they were one and the same. The buds unfurled; they became bright green leaves. Suddenly the wind blew through the tree and together all the leaves sang an anthem to the truth. The people cheered. With the truth echoing across the jungle, they raised their shovels, machetes and hoes and drove the foreign tyrant from their native land.



This old Latin American legend has meaning for the island nation of Puerto Rico today. For hundreds of years foreign tyrants have dominated Puerto Rico. They have used every means possible to try to bury the truth about Puerto Rico. They have tried to bury the truth that Puerto Rico was and still is today an oppressed nation, a colony, a land imprisoned by foreign tyrants.

✦ From the late 15th to the late 19th century Puerto Rico was a colony of the Spanish Empire. The land, labor, and resources were controlled by Spain. Since 1898 Puerto Rico has been a direct colony of the U.S. U.S. corporations have exploited the wealth of the island and the labor of the Puerto Rican people.

Both the Spanish and the U.S. Empires tried to bury the truth about Puerto Rico. But the people of Puerto Rico resisted. They have never allowed the imperial powers to bury their island, their history, their culture, their land or their lives. They have fought to preserve the truth. The Puerto Rican people have denounced colonial control; they have shouted their national identity and proclaimed their independence. "El Grito de Puerto Rico," "The Cry of Puerto Rico," is heard around the world.

✦ *Puerto Rico, Puerto Pobre*—rich port, poor port, port of wealth and poverty, opulence and oppression, destruction and resistance, conquest and rebellion. The story of Puerto Rico is a story of struggle, change, and upheaval. It is a story of an unbroken drive for freedom.

The Puerto Rican people have resisted foreign domination from the 15th century until today. The tree of the Puerto Rican nation, the tree of life and liberty, the tree of liberation proclaims the truth: the people have been enslaved. The people will be free.



1

BORINQUEN LAND OF COURAGE

The Taino Indians

* The Taino Indians, the native people, called the island *Borinquen*, "Land of Courage." They were the first to be conquered and they were the first to rebel. The Taino Indians — they numbered 50,000 when the Spanish arrived — lived in tribes along the sea and along the rivers. The European invaders called them "savages," but for several thousand years they had a developed civilization and a culture.

The Tainos were mainly a farming people. They grew corn, *yuca*, and tobacco; they domesticated animals and hunted small game; they wove cotton fabrics and used the fibers of the rubber tree. Taino doctors used herbs and roots to cure illness and disease; their musicians played flutes and drums and their poets preserved their history in legend and song.

The Tainos were also a fishing people and their technology — hooks, nets, traps and boats — was highly developed. Land was communally owned and cooperatively worked. There were rich deposits of gold in the mountains, and though the Indians mined it in small quantities, they did not buy it, sell it, or use it in commerce or trade. The village *cacique* or chief wore a gold medallion to symbolize spiritual and political power, but the medallions were never used in payment for goods or labor. The Taino people fished and farmed, not to sell their crops and their catch, but for use in their daily lives.

In the social life of the Taino, political and religious organization was one and inseparable; democratic councils governed the tribes. The *caciques* — both men and women — were warriors and healers responsible for the physical and spiritual well-being of the people. They guided the rituals connected with birth and death, conducted meetings, led their people into battle and took council with all the island chiefs.

In Taino culture women were equal to men; they hunted, fished, farmed. They were doctors, generals, *caciques*. The story of Loiza, one woman *cacique*, has been passed down to us through legend. Loiza ruled the fertile lands at the mouth of what is now called the *Rio Grande de Loiza*, the largest river on the island.

In Taino legend the creator of the island and the source of all life was a woman, the Mother Goddess, the Goddess of Fertility. An evil male god *Juracan* (the root of the English word hurricane) lived in the sea and brought death and destruction; a good male god named Yukiyuku lived in the mountains and guarded the gold.

The Spanish Empire

In the middle of the 15th century a Taino *cemi* or priest prophesied disaster; in the quest for Yukiuku's gold the Taino people would be exterminated. The priest warned:

A CLOTHED RACE WILL COME
A CLOTHED RACE WILL COME TO RULE BORINQUEN
THEY WILL ENSLAVE AND MURDER OUR PEOPLE
THEY WILL STARVE AND TORMENT THEM TO DEATH.

✧ On November 19, 1493 Christopher Columbus and his crew landed on *Borinquen*. They brought the gun and the sword, the Christian cross and the Bible to the island. Columbus claimed the land for Queen Isabella of Spain. Soon Spanish *conquistadores* landed on *Borinquen*; they brought with them brutality and avarice, *machismo*, smallpox and syphilis. Across the Caribbean, Latin America and what is now California, Arizona, and New Mexico, Spanish *conquistadores* burned, tortured, crucified and destroyed in their search for gold. One Mexican Indian described the Spanish quest as follows:

"They lifted up the gold as if they were monkeys with expressions of joy . . . As if it were something for which they yearn with a great thirst . . . Their bodies fatten on it and they hunger violently for it . . . They killed so many Indians that it made a river of blood, and the day became red because of all the blood."

The cross and the Bible notwithstanding, gold alone was sacred to the Spanish conquerers.

✧ On the island of *Borinquen* two cultures, two civilizations met in bloody conflict. Spain was an Empire, an economic and political system based on conquest, exploitation, and theft. The Taino were a farming people; they had weapons and they defended their land but they did not conquer other nations. The Taino walked, the Spanish rode horseback; the Taino sailed in small canoes, the Spanish sailed in ships of war. One respected life, the other craved gold.

Gold is the most precious of all commodities; gold constitutes treasure, and he who possesses it has all he needs in this world, has also the means of rescuing souls from purgatory and restoring them to the enjoyment of paradise.
- Christopher Columbus

✧ The gods and the goddesses of the native people were banished and Jesus Christ, St. Paul and St. Augustine rose over the island to bless the conquest. The commercially valueless medallions of the Taino chiefs were stolen, and in the hands of the Spanish became valuable commodities that were bought and sold on the market. When no more gold could be taken from the *caciques* the Taino people were enslaved and forced to work 14 to 16 hours a day in the gold mines. Yuki-yuku's treasures were defiled; *Borinquen* became a Spanish colony. By royal decree the land and the Indians were "given" to Spanish colonists. The Indians worked the mines as slaves. This was called the *encomienda* system.

The King of Spain appointed Ponce de Leon, a leading conquistador, as head of San Juan, the major port on the island. Under Ponce de Leon's direction, a gold smelter was built in the early 16th century; by 1510 the first smelting yielded 100,000 pesos of gold. A year later, in 1511, gold fever ran so high that the Spanish settlement on the island of *Borinquen* was named Puerto Rico, or rich port.

hours. When at last they dragged his body ashore, the first conquistador was dead on Puerto Rican soil. Resistance to the Spanish Empire had begun.

Urayoan passed the news to Agueybana, the leading Taino chief, and together the tribes declared war on the Spaniards. The Indian warriors ambushed the soldiers, burned their forts, destroyed the hated mines, attacked Spanish homes, stampeded their horses and threw their guns into the sea. Initially the cocky Spaniards were taken by surprise and suffered defeats, but Ponce de Leon, the Spanish governor, rallied his forces and launched a reign of terror against the Indians.

* The Taino were hunted like wild animals; they were captured and massacred. Cannon balls were fired at random into the jungle, fields were burned and villages were destroyed.

* Hundreds of Indians fled from Puerto Rico in small boats and settled on other islands in the Caribbean; others retreated into the mountains of the interior, but Ponce de Leon and his army pursued them mercilessly through the dense jungle and from one island to the next. By 1514 only 3,000 Indians were still alive; in 20 years the Spanish exterminated over 45,000 people or 95% of the population. Seven years later only 600 Taino Indians were alive. Some managed to escape capture and survived in the mountains, but many were rounded up and held captive in villages. They were prisoners on their own island.

In 1521 Ponce de Leon arrived in Florida in search of more gold. There his crimes caught up with him. The Indians had their revenge. A Seminole warrior shot and killed Ponce de Leon with a bow and arrow. New conquistadors arrived to take his place. The Spaniards were the victors; but *Borinquen*, the island of the Tainos, lived in legend and song. As one Puerto Rican historian noted:

The Indians, defeated in combat, won the right to historical immortality; cowards do not fall as this people fell.

Black slaves and white sugar

Most of the Indians were exterminated, the gold mines drained of their wealth. But the Spaniards did not abandon Puerto Rico, their rich port. *El Morro*, an immense stone fortress and prison, was built at the entrance to San Juan Bay; Puerto Rico became a strategic outpost of the Spanish Empire. It was an important military base and also a vital trading center. The Dutch and the English — under Sir Francis Drake — attacked the island and tried to conquer it but the Spanish drove them into the sea.

* In the middle of the 17th century the economy of Puerto Rico shifted from mining to agriculture. Coffee, tobacco, ginger and sugar cane were almost as profitable as the gold mines had been. As the economy changed so did the class structure. The conquistadors, adventurers and miners moved on and were replaced by landowners, farmers, shopkeepers and artisans.

* The island was ruled by a colonial administration responsible to the Spanish crown, and by the wealthiest plantation owners and merchants. Most of these merchants, landowners, and administrators were born in Spain and returned to Spain wealthy men. Below them on the social ladder were the *hacendados*, the owners of large plantations and estates. They defined themselves as Puerto Ricans rather than Spaniards; they were on the island to stay. Their descendants became the island's doctors, lawyers, and government bureaucrats.

* Since 99% of the Indians had been exterminated a new, cheap supply of labor was necessary. The new laborers were Black slaves. Puerto Rico was locked into a world-wide commercial network that was called the "Triangle Trade." The three points of the Triangle Trade were New England, Africa and the Caribbean Islands.

Slave traders kidnapped millions of Blacks from the West Coast of Africa and brought them to the New World in chains. Hundreds of thousands of Black people died on the hellish Atlantic crossing, the "Middle Passage," and were tossed into the sea like so much spoiled cargo.

* In Puerto Rico and the West Indies, the New England ships exchanged their human cargoes for sugar. The same ships carried the raw sugar to New England where it was made into rum — "demon rum." On the last leg of the journey the ships carried the rum to Africa. One keg of rum bought dozens of Black bodies.

Slave labor was the foundation of the extremely profitable triangle trade. Spanish colonists in San Juan, British colonists in Boston, European bankers and traders in London, Paris, Amsterdam and Madrid made their fortunes on the misery and the suffering of the Black slaves who labored on the sugar plantations. Thousands of Africans died in the New World; they were buried in the rich dark soil beneath the fields of cane they worked from dawn to dusk.

* In 1553 there were 1500 Black slaves in Puerto Rico; by 1830 there were 30,000 Black slaves. In Puerto Rico, as elsewhere, the Spanish suppressed African culture. Slaves were forbidden to use their own names or speak their African languages; it was a crime to teach a slave to read and write. On breeding farms Black women brought the next generation of laborers into slavery. Black women were raped and beaten by their white masters; the children of these sexual assaults were raised as slaves.

* Black slaves were branded with the *carimbo*, the same tool that was used to brand cattle with a rancher's mark of ownership. It was not until 1784, eight years after the start of the revolution by the 13 North American colonies, that this barbaric practice was abolished in Puerto Rico, and then only because slaves rebelled and forced their masters to end it.



The first revolt of Black slaves was in 1527, one hundred and seven years before the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock. Though slaves were executed, tortured, and lashed if they were caught conspiring rebellion, they continued to rebel throughout the 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. Black slaves escaped to the mountains and lived with the surviving Taino Indians as free men and free women. These fugitives from Spanish tyranny were a threat to the plantation system; they were a beacon of liberation and they inspired other slaves to resist, rebel, and escape to freedom.

The work force in colonial Puerto Rico was also composed of *jornaleros* or day laborers. *Jornaleros* were Blacks or people of mixed race who were free in name but in fact were not far removed from chattel slavery. The Spanish authorities required that *jornaleros* carry a *libretta* or notebook on their person at all times. The *libretta* was a record of work, expenses, moral conduct, and was used to control the movement and the activities of the *jornaleros*. This system was also used in the southern states after the U.S. Civil War, and today is a cornerstone of the apartheid regime in South Africa. In 17th-century San Juan and Ponce, day laborers were arrested, fined, and assigned jobs if they could not show their *libretta* on demand to police authorities and judges.



* For four centuries the Spanish colonialists controlled Puerto Rico. They grew rich and powerful from the labor of Black slaves and day laborers, but they also brought into existence new social forces that eventually dislodged them. A new racial and social group — the Puerto Rican — was created on the island.

* In the countryside the surviving Taino Indians, the fugitive Black slaves, and poor farmers from Spain, mingled, married, mixed. The *jíbaro* was born. (In the Indian language *jíbaro* means "one who escapes to be free.") The *jíbaro* roots went back to Africa, back to the Taino tribes, and back to the villages of Spain, but the *jíbaro* — the poor country folk or peasants — were distinctly Puerto Rican. Puerto Rico was their land, their home, their nation. Out of oppression and exploitation, the colonized peoples developed a consciousness of themselves, their class, their language, and their cultural identity.



2

BIRTH
AT LARES

Cracks in the Empire

Signs of decline and fall cast a shadow across the worldwide Spanish Empire even as it appeared most confident and secure. The fall of Spain did not occur in a day, a month, or even a year, but step by step the imperial system cracked and decayed; Spain lost its colonies, its wealth and power.

At home the royal court was devoured by decadence and corruption; the crimes committed in the conquest of the colonies poisoned political and moral life at the center of the Empire. Internationally, rival nations challenged, then eclipsed Spanish power. As the Spanish Empire collapsed, the British Empire grew more powerful. In the 17th and the 18th centuries English pirates and buccaneers, often working as unofficial agents of the crown, attacked Spanish ships, hijacked their cargoes, and sunk them to the bottom of the Caribbean Sea.

* In the early 19th century, rebellious Puerto Rican pirates preyed upon the San Juan-Madrid trade. Roberto Cofresi, a Robin Hood of the seas, plundered Spanish ships and shared his booty with the poor of Puerto Rico. But the Spanish monopoly on Puerto Rico was broken, not by maverick pirates, but by wealthy U.S. merchants backed by the U.S. Navy. Increasingly throughout the 19th century, U.S. merchants came to dominate trade with the island.

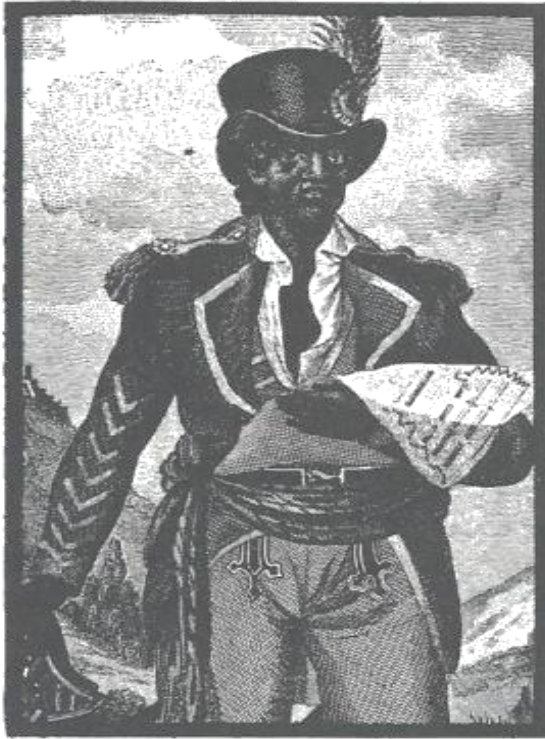
Revolution on Three Continents

Feudal Spain was economically backward, socially archaic. In the wake of the Industrial Revolution, Madrid, Cadiz, and Barcelona were left behind and London, Manchester, and Liverpool became the manufacturing and trading centers of the world.

It was an age of economic, political and social revolution. Feudalism was buried, capitalism emerged triumphant and the European ruling class expanded its interests around the globe. In 1776 the 13 North American colonies declared their independence from England, and after an eight-year anti-colonial war became a separate nation — a nation that in turn would become an Empire. In 1789 the French Revolution shook the foundations of Europe. In Paris angry crowds demolished the Bastille, the prison fortress that symbolized the oppression of the feudal regime. The cry "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!" rang through the cobblestone streets; the French King and Queen fled and the power of the aristocracy was broken.

Reverberations were felt in Puerto Rico, in Venezuela, and in Haiti. In Haiti, Toussaint L'Ouverture, an escaped Black slave, led an army of slaves against their French masters. The Haitians were successful; they won their independence, and their freedom and abolished slavery.

The French Revolution led to war in Europe, and Spain was forced to fight on two fronts — at home and in the colonies. In 1808 Napoleon invaded Spain and deposed King Ferdinand VIII. For six years French troops camped on Spanish soil. With the imperial center weakened and Spanish forces overextended, revolution broke out in the New World. In Mexico, Miguel Hidalgo, a radical priest, summoned his people to fight for freedom. In 1810 he led 80,000 Indians armed with machetes, rocks, bows



Toussaint L'Ouverture



Simon Bolivar

and arrows against a Spanish regime that had robbed and butchered since Cortez defeated the Aztecs in the early 16th century. Miguel Hidalgo divided up feudal estates, distributed land to the peasants, and decreed freedom for all slaves.

In South America, Simon Bolivar — the “Great Liberator” — rallied an army of ex-slaves, agricultural workers and patriots to drive the Spanish from the continent.

Simon Bolivar was born in Caracas, Venezuela in 1783 to a wealthy landowning family. At 16 he sailed for Spain; the new ideas about human rights, democracy, and the abolition of slavery captured his imagination. In his twenties he declared himself a revolutionary and vowed:

On my life and honor, I shall not rest until I have liberated America from its tyrants.

In the Liberation War against Spain, Bolivar’s army fought hundreds of battles, many of them in the sky-high, snow-capped Andes mountains. The Spanish retreated, then at last surrendered. In 1826, at the age of 43, Bolivar was the president of five liberated Latin American nations — Venezuela, Columbia, Peru, Chile, Equador, and the newly-created state of Bolivar.

Bolivar wanted to lead an expeditionary force to free Cuba and Puerto Rico from the yoke of Spanish tyranny, but the U.S. rattled its sabre and threatened war. Lacking support Bolivar was forced to back down. “The United States seems destined to plague America with misery in the name of liberty,” he observed.

* Spain sought desperately to isolate Puerto Rico from the Latin American, Mexican, and Haitian revolutions. Wealthy planters who were driven from South

America by Bolivar's liberating armies resettled in Puerto Rico and exerted a conservative influence on the island's social and political life. News of Bolivar's military victories was censored, his writings burned.

But the winds of revolution also blew across Puerto Rico. Bolivar's victories in Latin America inspired day laborers, Black slaves, planters, merchants, doctors and lawyers. Spanish authorities tried to recruit Puerto Ricans to fight against Bolivar but no one would sign up. "These people have suffered enough in tolerating their natural authorities," wrote one angry Puerto Rican patriot. "We will not tolerate being taken to fight against our brothers and sisters in Venezuela."

All across Puerto Rico — in cities, villages and countryside — there were popular insurrections and military rebellions, throughout the 1820s, then again in 1835, 1838, and 1867. In 1821 Puerto Ricans formed an organization called *Los Rayos y Soles de Bolivar*, the Rays and Suns of Bolivar. In 1822 Pedro Duboy, a mulatto, organized an uprising of Blacks, both free and slave. Two years later, Maria Mercedes Barbudo, a woman revolutionary, launched — with help from the Venezuelans — an insurrection against the Spanish authorities on Puerto Rico. She was captured, jailed in *El Morro*, and then deported to Cuba.

A campaign of ruthless terror was directed against the Puerto Rican independence movement. For four decades the island was ruled by a series of military dictators or "little Ceasars," as they were called, who outdid one another in acts of savagery.

Miguel de la Torre, the first of the dictators, was defeated by Bolivar in Venezuela in 1821. Transferred to Puerto Rico, he went on a rampage against revolutionaries, patriots, and liberals. Civil rights were abolished, travel severely restricted, curfews imposed. De la Torre and his successors intensified exploitation and the oppression of workers. The *Bando Negro* (1848) tied Blacks, both free and slave, to the plantations and imposed severe punishments; a Black who merely "insulted" a White overseer was automatically sentenced to five years in prison.

Rebels were arrested and executed on the spot — or if "lucky," like Maria Mercedes Barbudo, they were exiled to Cuba. One separatist leader was strangled to death in *El Morro*, the Spanish stone fortress; others were routinely executed by firing squads. The power of *El Morro* extended beyond its stone walls; tyranny was felt by workers on the docks, peasants on the coffee farms, and teachers in the classroom. All of Puerto Rico became a prison fortress.

Independence activities were outlawed and the movement was forced to meet secretly. Guerrilla activity rose. In the late 1830's in retaliation for the murders of political prisoners in *El Morro*, the Puerto Rican liberation forces tried and executed eight army officers.

Puerto Rican society was polarized; political lines were tightly drawn and antagonisms exploded in the open. The wealthiest plantation owners, merchants and government bureaucrats formed the *Incondicionales*, the party unconditionally in favor of the King and the Spanish Empire. The *Incondicionales* had direct ties with the Crown and received the best contracts and trading agreements; naturally they wanted no social change.

The *hacendados* (the smaller farmers), some merchants, lawyers and doctors belonged to the *Autonomista* movement. Economically and politically this group was caught between the San Juan commercial interests and the feudal landowners. The *Autonomists* wanted autonomy — more self-government, freer trade, the growth of the local economy — within the Spanish Empire. Though far from revolutionary, they listened sympathetically to more radical demands for liberty and equality.

"We agree
that the time
has come to
take up arms
to sanctify
the cause
of our rights,
and we
declare our
resolve to
die before
continuing
under
Spanish
domination."

~ Ramon
Emeterio
Betances



Ramon Betances

The third force on the island was the separatist or *independentista* movement. Drawing upon all sectors of Puerto Rican society, except the highest, and inspired by Bolivar, Hidalgo and L'Ouverture, the *independentistas* wanted independence, the end of Spanish colonialism, the abolition of slavery, and the destruction of the *libretta* system — the system of passes. Only then could business and trade, based on free wage labor, develop. With independence, markets would grow and trade with other countries would expand.

The separatist movement reached across the Caribbean and joined hands in solidarity with revolutionaries in Cuba. And in 1865 Puerto Ricans and Cubans in New York formed the *Sociedad Republicana de Cuba y Puerto Rico*, the Republican Society of Cuba and Puerto Rico.

Ruis Belvis, a lawyer, and Ramon Betances, a doctor — both members of the *Sociedad Republicana* — planned a military expedition and a mass uprising that would liberate Cuba and Puerto Rico from the Spanish Crown and establish a Federation of Caribbean Nations.

Betances, known as "the Father of his Country," was born to a land owning family in the town of Cabo Rojo. In 1827 he went to France to study; like Bolivar before him he was inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution.

Betances returned to Puerto Rico a doctor, and in 1855 battled a cholera epidemic that ravaged the land and took the lives of 30,000 people. At first hand he saw the wretched poverty, the ignorance, the hunger, and the sickness of his people. Like Che Guevara, the Argentinian doctor who joined the Cuban Revolution, Betances came to understand that the health and the well-being of the Puerto Rican people demanded a revolution, a fundamental change of social conditions.

For his role in combatting the epidemic of 1855 Betances won the respect and the admiration of the people. The Puerto Rican laborers and peasants called him the "father of the poor." But the San Juan government called him a traitor. Because of his *independentista* and anti-slavery activities Betances was sent into exile in 1856. For the next twelve years he was a wanted man with a price on his head, hunted and harassed, an outlaw and a fugitive in his native land.

Under these adverse conditions Betances' political understanding deepened. He fused the *hacendado* demand for independence with the Black demand for the abolition of slavery. Thus, Betances created a political alliance between the small planters and merchants, who were excluded from the most lucrative Crown contracts, and the most exploited workers — the Black slaves and *jornaleros*.

Betances also recognized the necessity to take up arms against Spain. Spanish power had to be confronted with Puerto Rican power; Spain would never surrender its rich port, Puerto Rico, without a fight. Betances and Ruis Belvis organized revolutionary committees across the island that were prepared to distribute arms and lead the masses in a popular rebellion.

In July 1867 Betances and Belvis arrived in Santo Domingo to gather arms for the rebellion. They organized a Revolutionary Committee and established a command post for the uprising. Belvis went to Chile to collect money and weapons. Alone in his

hotel room he died "mysteriously," perhaps at the hands of Spanish agents who had been on his trail.

Betances was deeply shaken by this news, but he and the Revolutionary Committees on the island proceeded with their plans for revolution and the creation of a Caribbean Community of Nations. From exile on St. Thomas, Betances issued "The Ten Commandments of Liberty," the first Puerto Rican *independentista* manifesto. Echoing the demands of Bolivar and L'Ouverture, Betances called for

- Abolition of slavery
- Right to reject taxes
- Freedom of Religion
- Freedom of Speech
- Freedom of the Press
- Freedom of Commerce
- Right to Assemble
- Right to bear arms
- Right to elect own Representatives
- Protection of citizens from search and seizure

In December 1867 Betances called upon the people of Puerto Rico to put "an end to Spanish domination;" on January 2, 1868 — still in exile — he wrote a "Provisional Constitution of the Puerto Rican Revolution."

El Grito de Lares

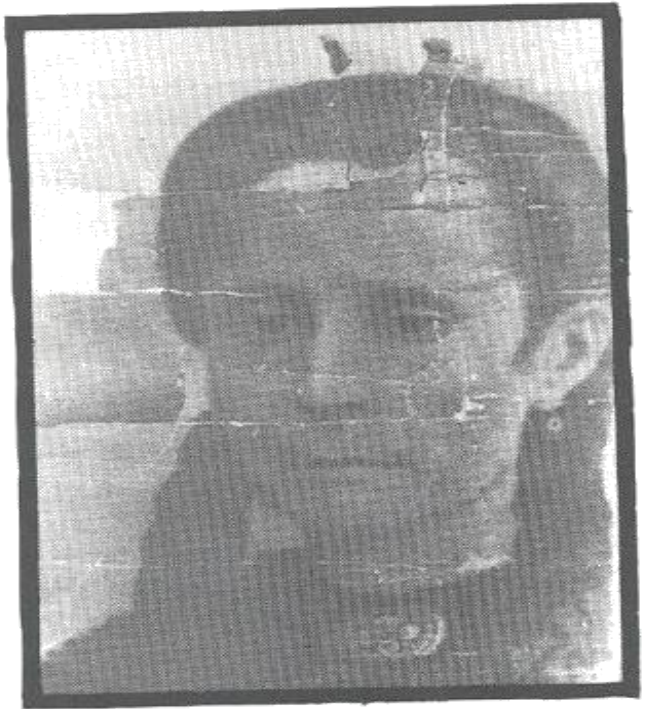
The exiled Betances and the Revolutionary Committees on the island fixed September 29, 1868, the Feast Day of Saint Michael, for the start of the insurrection. Slaves would have the day off and laborers would be celebrating. The rebels agreed that the best place to launch their attack was the mountain town of Lares. In Lares they would hold a tactical advantage over the Spanish authorities. San Juan was far away; the roads were in poor condition and would slow the arrival of government troops. In Lares too the rebels could count on support from the people, especially from the *jíbaros* who worked on the surrounding coffee plantations. In the mountains, fugitives from slavery were ready to take up arms. Finally, Lares was selected because the town judge and the commanding officers of the militia *belonged* to the Revolutionary Committee.

Revolutionaries from both North and South America joined with Puerto Ricans at Lares. Mathias Bruckman was from the U.S.A. Manuel Rojas was born in Venezuela where his father, a Puerto Rican doctor, fought side by side with Bolivar. Mariana Bracetti, known as the woman with the "Golden Arm," because of her bravery and her dedication to independence, was a leader of the Lares Revolutionary Council.

* Lola Rodriguez de Tío, known as "the daughter of the Islands," was a poet who used her pen in the cause of Puerto Rican independence. In the late 1860s she wrote the words to *La Borinqueña*, Puerto Rico's revolutionary national anthem. "I wanted the words to make people leave their homes and take up arms," she said. The song reflects her belief that freedom would be won through armed struggle, and that women would make important contributions to the independence movement:



Lola Rodríguez de Tío



Mariana Bracetti

Awake, Borinqueños, the signal has
been given,
Awake from your sleep, it is the hour of
struggle.
The Drum of war announces by its beat
That the thicket is the place,
The place to meet.
We want no more despots,
Let the tyrant fall.
Women, rising up angry
Know how to fight.
We want freedom, our machete will
gain it;
Let's go Borinqueños, let's go now,
Freedom anxiously awaits us
Freedom, freedom!
Freedom, freedom!

Week after week the *Independentistas* attended fiestas, mingled with the crowds and spread the word that the uprising was scheduled for Lares the 29th of September. Thousands of workers on the plantations were ready to strike. In Santo Domingo Betances purchases 500 rifles, six cannon and *El Telégrafo*, a small ship. He and his crew were prepared to sail for Puerto Rico and join the rebels in the mountains.

But on September 22nd, a week before the rebellion was scheduled to begin, Manuel Gonzales, a member of the Revolutionary Committee at Arecibo, was arrested on a tip supplied by a paid police informer. A search of Gonzalez's house yielded a list with names of rebels and plans for the revolt. Immediately the Spanish officials sent a message to St. Thomas. *El Telégrafo* was trapped in the harbor and Betances was held prisoner.

These setbacks reached the Revolutionary Committee at Lares; Mariana Bracetti, Mathias Bruckman, and Manuel Rojas took council and decided to attack at once. On September 23, 1868, six days ahead of schedule, 400 Puerto Ricans armed with knives, machetes and a few guns surrounded Lares and, after a short battle, marched triumphantly into the main square. The mayor and a few supporters of the Spanish Crown were arrested. Workers built fires and burned their *librettas*; prisoners were freed from the jail. Black slaves smashed their chains and rejoiced at their new freedom. Above the plaza two flags were raised — one made by Mariana Bracetti, the other a white streamer with the words

Muerte o Libertad, Viva Puerto Rico Libre
(Liberty or Death, Long Live a Free Puerto Rico!)

The patriots at Lares declared the "Republic of Puerto Rico." The Provisional Government issued four decrees:

1. All Puerto Ricans are duty-bound to fight for the revolution.
2. Every foreigner who voluntarily takes up arms on the side of the Republic will be considered a patriot.
3. Every slave who joins the Republic is free.
4. The *libretta* system is abolished.

The manifesto of the Lares Government declared:

We agree that the time has come to take up arms to sanctify the cause of our rights, and we declare our resolve to die before continuing under Spanish domination. And so that this will not be known as a riot or a mutiny of an evil kind, but will be considered as a patriotic movement leading to the overthrow of a heavy yoke and the creation of a free country, we declare this to the entire world.

Lares was a victory and a turning point in Puerto Rican history. The Puerto Rican nation was born. But the Republic at Lares was short-lived. Spanish troops armed with cannon overwhelmed the rebels and captured the town. Guerrilla battles were fought in the mountains and the insurgents were hunted down.

Mariana Bracetti was imprisoned in Arecibo prison where her new-born son died. Manuel Rojas and Mathias Bruckman were executed, hundreds of men and women were arrested and the cells of *El Morro* were packed with *independentistas*.

A few weeks after the Lares revolt, the Cuban people also rose against the Spanish. *El Grito de Yara*, the rebellion that began at Yara, lasted ten years. In the 1890s another rebellion erupted. It was led by Jose Martí, a Latin American patriot as extraordinary as Bolivar or Toussaint L'Ouverture. Martí founded the Cuban Revolutionary Party; throughout his life he fought for the freedom of the Caribbean and all Latin America. Martí also supported workers in the U.S. who were demanding an eight hour day. Martí was a poet, playwright, journalist and revolutionary internationalist. He noted:

The spirit of Lares and Yara are one, in the future, as they have been in the past. Cubans and Puerto Ricans are one in preparation today, as they were yesterday in prison and exile, and they must be one in action to hasten their common liberty through a double effort.

"When Cuba becomes independent, I will ask for permission to fight for the freedom of Puerto Rico."

~ Antonio Maceo



Betances was deeply saddened by the military defeat at Lares, but he, Lola Rodríguez de Tío, and other Puerto Rican patriots rallied to support their Cuban comrades. Lola Rodríguez de Tío worked with José Martí to plan the Cuban war of independence. In her most famous poem she wrote:

Cuba and Puerto Rico are two wings of the same bird.
They receive bullets and flowers in one heart.

The Cuban revolutionaries did not forget their sisters and brothers on Puerto Rico. Antonio Maceo, the Black general and leader in the Cuban war for liberation, promised:

When Cuba becomes independent I will ask for permission to struggle for the freedom of Puerto Rico because I should hate to put down my sword while that part of America remains in slavery.

In 1873, five years after the rebellion at Lares, chattel slavery on the island was abolished. But even this victory was bitter. The freed Puerto Rican slaves were required by law to work for their masters for three more years.

In 1874 the government created the Civil Guard, a special police unit empowered to attack independence forces. A repetition of Lares was the last thing that Spain and San Juan wanted. For 15 years a wave after wave of repression struck the people; public meetings were outlawed, the press was censored, the right to assemble was abolished. 1887 came to be known as "The Year of the Terror." The Civil Guard arrested hundreds of people, tortured and bludgeoned them to death. But Lares was not buried. Betances' "Ten Commandments of Liberty" were a hope for the future, and the words to "La Borinqueña:"

Let's go, Borinqueños, let's go now
Freedom anxiously awaits us
Freedom, freedom!

continued to inspire the Puerto Rican people.

*"The spirit of Lares
and Yara are one,
in the future,
as they have been
one in the past.
Cubans and
Puerto Ricans are
one in preparation
today, as they
were yesterday
in prison and
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liberty through
a double effort."*

—Jose Martí





3

UNDER
THE FOLDS OF
THE AMERICAN
FLAG

The Only Prime Minister

In 1897, 29 years after the Lares rebellion, Puerto Rico was granted autonomy within the Spanish Empire. Though the 1868 rebellion was crushed, and though there was intense repression through the 1870s and the 1880s, the revolutionary movement for independence was not defeated. From 1868 to 1890 there was an unbroken record of armed struggle (most of it carried out by underground groups) against Spanish power. Betances, and the Revolutionary Committees, continued to work for independence. Thus, the Puerto Rican independence movement forced Spain to pull back.

The crisis of its Empire forced Spain to grant Puerto Rico "autonomy." Spain was being defeated by liberation movements in Cuban and the Philippines. The Spanish army and navy were over-extended and it was increasingly difficult to protect and police the remaining colonial possessions. The military crisis was compounded by a deepening economic crisis in Spain. To prevent total collapse, the Spanish Parliament loosened the strings that bound Puerto Rico to Madrid.

In February 1898 the cabinet of the new autonomous Puerto Rican government was appointed; in March general elections for legislators were held. Muñoz Rivera, the first and the only Prime Minister of the government, was a liberal politician and journalist who wanted autonomy and limited reform; he was strongly opposed to revolution and to independence. In 1897 he informed the Spanish authorities about plans for a rebellion.

Muñoz Rivera's government offered very little to the Puerto Rican people, but some modest changes were made to suit the commercial interests. The banks, the customs, and the post office were no longer controlled from Madrid but from San Juan. Puerto Rico sent 16 representatives to the Spanish Parliament; no laws or treaties affecting Puerto Rico could be enacted without the consent of the Puerto Rican Parliament. Spain was still responsible for the military defense of the island, but Puerto Ricans had their own citizenship and were not obligated to serve in the Spanish army.

Conquest

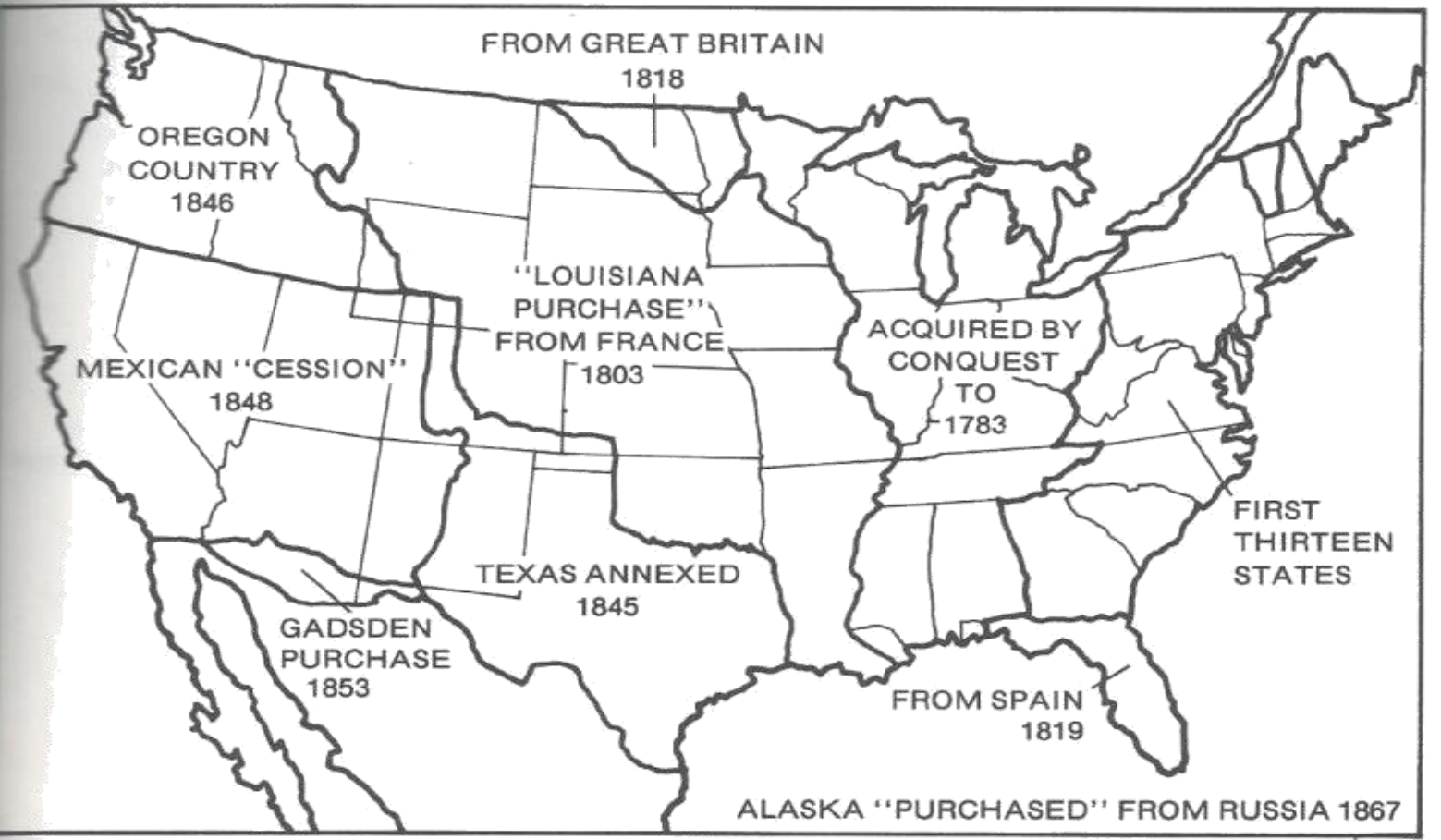
Hardly was the new state in existence than it was toppled. In July 1898 U.S. troops invaded and conquered the island.

The military invasion and conquest of Puerto Rico was the culmination of 100 years of U.S. expansion. From 1790, when George Washington became the first U.S. President, to 1890 when the frontier was officially closed, the U.S. conquered and bought 2,300,000 square miles of land. What began as a nation of 13 states on the eastern seaboard of the North American continent, was, by 1890, an immense Empire that extended from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean.

The U.S. government disguised this naked aggression and brutal conquest as "Manifest Destiny." Presidents, politicians, preachers and poets too claimed that it was the god-given *destiny* of the white people of the U.S. to expand their economic and political system to the "savages of the wild west."



INDIAN TERRITORIES BEFORE THE EUROPEAN CONQUEST



BEGINNINGS OF THE U.S. EMPIRE

Throughout the 19th century — the century of North American conquest — the U.S. government and U.S. business interests had their eyes on Puerto Rico. As early as 1820 President James Monroe announced that "Cuba and Puerto Rico are natural appendages of the U.S." Three years later the Monroe Doctrine staked out Latin America as U.S. territory. England and Spain were told in no uncertain terms:

PRIVATE PROPERTY OF THE UNITED STATES!
KEEP OUT!

Intervention by European powers in Latin America, President Monroe declared, *would be read as a hostile act against the U.S. itself.*

After the Civil War and the defeat of the Confederacy, triumphant Northern industrialists and financiers talked about annexing Puerto Rico. It was felt that direct *political control would make business even more profitable.* "The United States has constantly cherished the belief that someday she can acquire the island by just and legal means," Secretary of State William H. Seward noted in 1867. It was Seward's aim to construct "such empire as the world has never before seen." Ten years later Secretary of State James G. Blaine bluntly stated:

I believe that there are three non-continental places of enough value to be taken by the United States. One is Hawaii, the others are Cuba and Puerto Rico.

In 1898 Hawaii was annexed. Major U.S. sugar companies had invested heavily in Hawaiian sugar and they wanted direct political and military control over their plantations. The same sugar interests urged the U.S. government to invade Puerto Rico.

Imperialism

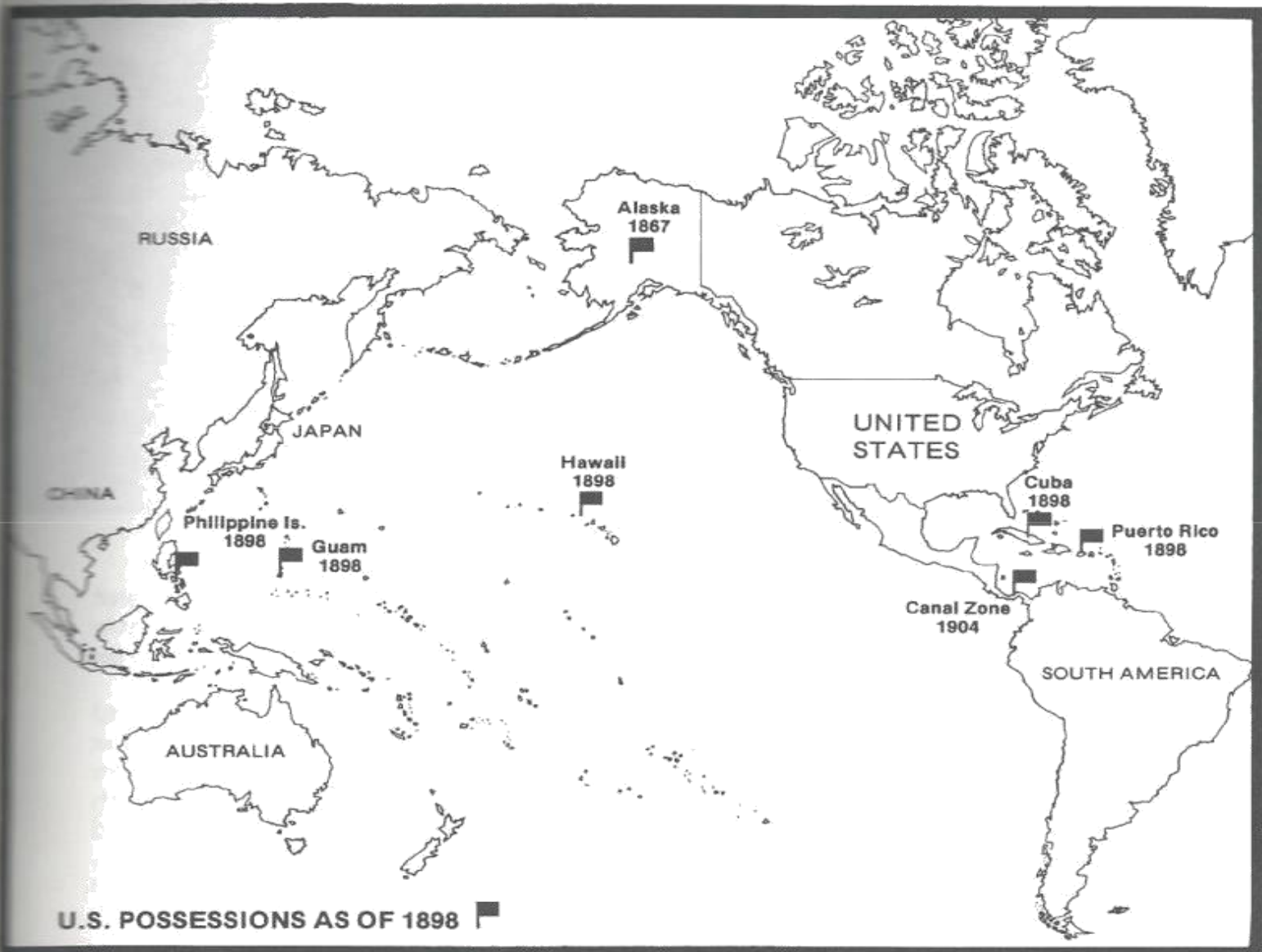
The 1890s were a crucial decade in U.S. history. In the 1890s the U.S. became an imperialist power. In 1898, on the eve of the Spanish-American War, the U.S. was a highly developed financial and industrial nation. The banks were concentrated in a few hands, and the super rich — the Rockefellers, Carnegies, and Morgans — seized control over the nation. Big capitalists devoured little capitalists and the monopolies grew larger and larger.

But the development of the monopolies also brought economic crisis. The Great Depression of 1893, the worst in U.S. history until the Depression of the 1930s, plunged the nation into a severe slump. Factories closed down, millions of workers were unemployed, manufactured goods could not be sold, and agricultural products rotted because people didn't have the money to buy them. The capitalist system ground to a halt.

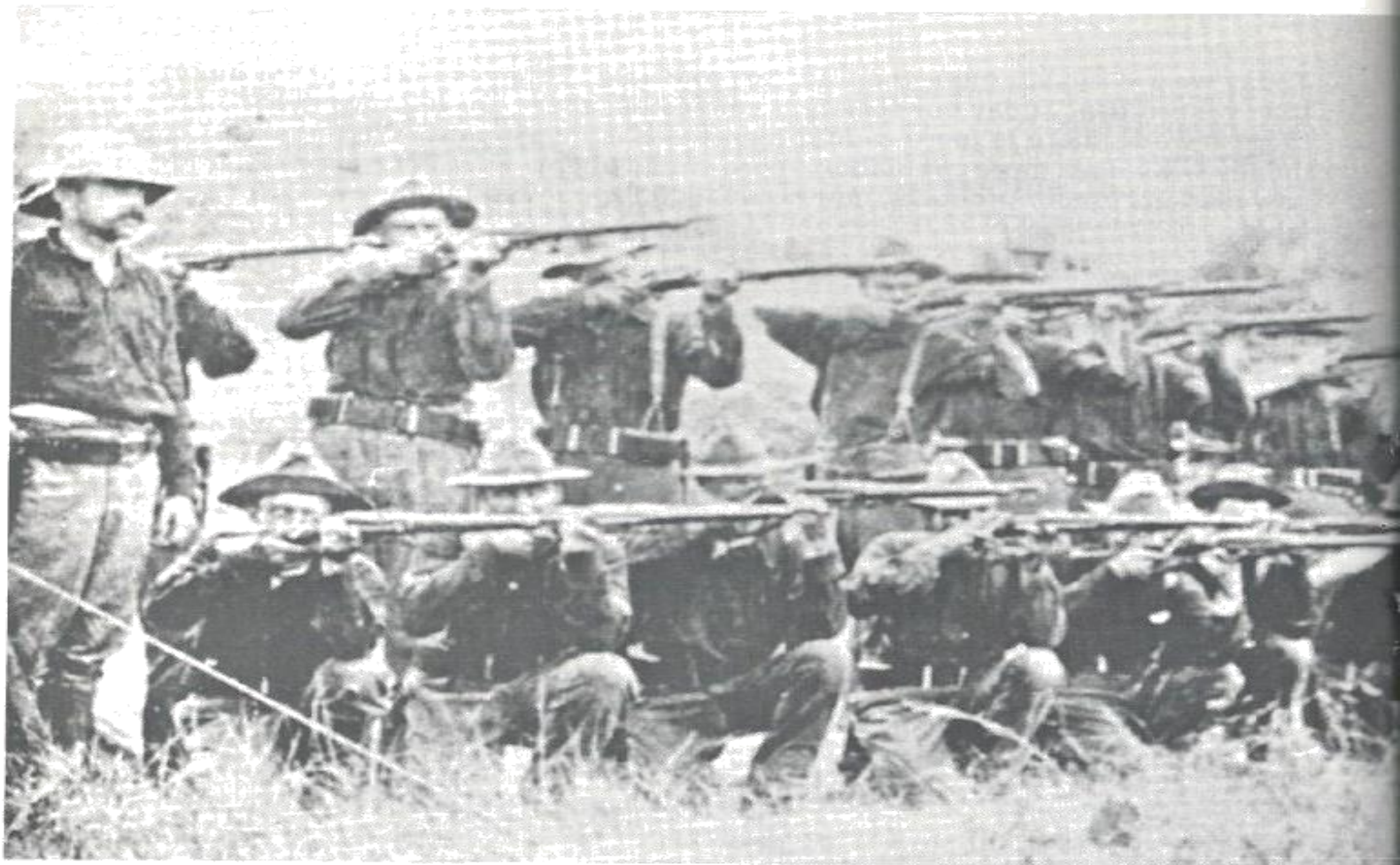
In the cities people rioted and demanded food. In rural areas poor Black and White farmers joined the Populist Party and demanded that the government take over the monopolies and run them for the benefit of the people. The power of the working class movement grew stronger. Radicals advocated socialism in North America.

Senator Albert Beveridge of Indiana offered another solution:

Today we are raising more than we can consume. Today we are making more than we can use. Today our society is congested; there are more workers than there is work; there is more capital than there is investment. We do not need money — we need more circulation, more employment. Therefore, we must find new markets for our products, new occupation for our capital, new work for our labor.



"I believe that there are three non-continental places of enough value to be taken by the United States. One is Hawai'i, the others are Cuba and Puerto Rico."
~James G. Blaine

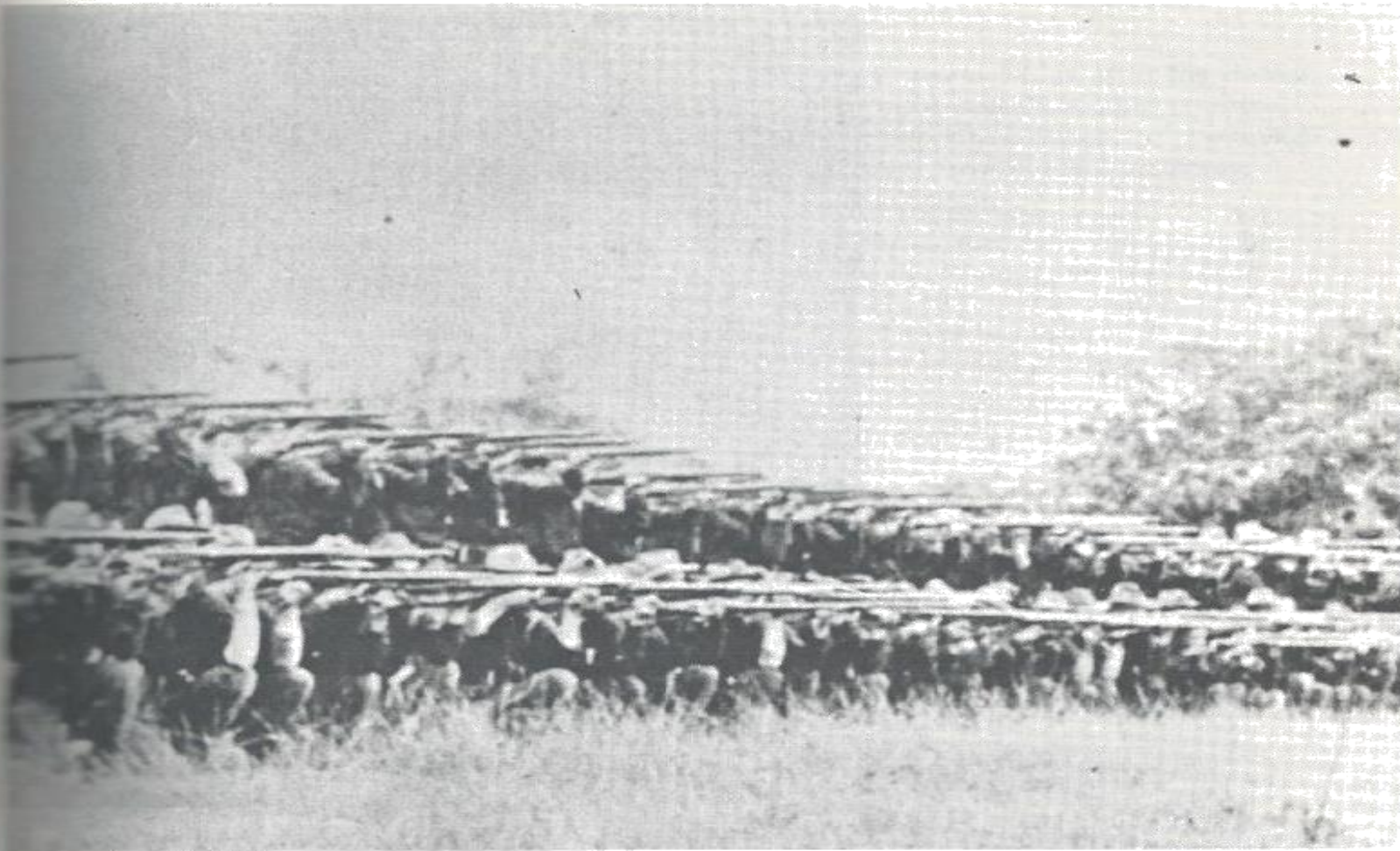


The U.S. economy had to expand overseas. The new markets, raw materials, and cheap labor were available in the colonial world, in Puerto Rico, Cuba, Latin America, in the Philippines and China. In the colonial world super-profits were to be made.

The Depression of the 1890s ended with U.S. invasions of Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines in the Spanish-American War of 1898. The Spanish-American War revived the sagging U.S. economy; the newly conquered territories in the Caribbean and in the Pacific yielded immense profits to the monopolies. A small group of North American workers benefited from imperialism. In the form of higher wages and better working conditions, they were "bribed" by the monopolies. Washington politicians fostered a false patriotism and an ugly hatred toward the darkskinned peoples of the earth.

"Remember the Maine"

The immediate pretext for the Spanish-American War of 1898 was the blowing up of the *U.S.S. Maine* in Havana harbor in April 1898. President William McKinley accused Spain of dynamiting the ship, but Madrid affirmed its innocence and offered to pay damages. Given the weakness of the Spanish Empire it is extremely unlikely that Spain wanted to provoke a war with the U.S. It is more than likely that the U.S.



blew up the *Maine* to provoke a war with Spain and seize Spanish colonies. Wall Street financiers and Washington politicians were deaf to Spanish pleas for peace; preachers, newspaper columnists, and the war Hawks of 1898 screamed for invasion.

On July 4th, 1898, three weeks to the day before the U.S. Army invaded Puerto Rico, the Reverend J.F. Carson told his congregation:

The high, the supreme business of this Republic is to end Spanish rule in America, and if to do that it is necessary to plant the Stars and Stripes on Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines, on Spain itself, the U.S.A. will do it.

Joseph Pulitzer, and "Citizen" William Randolph Hearst, the tycoons of U.S. journalism, whipped up hysteria against Spain in their newspapers. Circulation rose and Pulitzer and Hearst reaped the profits. There was not a shred of evidence to prove sabotage of the *Maine*, but that didn't stop Hearst from fabricating interviews and forging documents. He told his readers that "the *Maine* was destroyed by treachery," that the ship was "split in two by an enemy's secret infernal machine."

War with Spain would have come with or without the *Maine*, as North American imperialists frankly admitted. In 1898 Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge stated that "the island of Puerto Rico . . . had constantly been on the minds of the Army and Navy from the very moment the war had begun; and this war was to constitute the last step in a relentless movement begun by the United States a century ago to expel Spain from the Caribbean."



US Army buries Indian dead after the massacre at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, 1890.

General Nelson A. Miles—Indian Killer

The man who directed the invasion of Puerto Rico was General Nelson A. Miles, the commanding General of the U.S Army. North American imperialism could not have chosen a better man to represent its interests than General Nelson A. Miles. General Miles pledged "peace, democracy, and prosperity;" he delivered war, tyranny and ruin. So all colonialists and conquerors have operated since the ancient Roman Empire.

General Nelson A. Miles was a master of aggression, a specialist in the destruction of nations, and trained in the use of the BIG LIE. He spoke the revolutionary rhetoric of 1776. When U.S. troops invaded Puerto Rico General Miles proclaimed:

The people of the United States, in the cause of Liberty, Justice, and Humanity, have sent our armed forces to occupy the island of Puerto Rico . . . We have not come to make war upon the people of the country that for centuries have been oppressed, but on the contrary to bring you protection . . . to promote your prosperity, and to bestow upon you the advantages and the blessings of our enlightened civilization.

Even as he denounced Spanish oppression General Nelson A. Miles imposed Yankee oppression. In the mid- and late 19th century General Miles led a dozen military expeditions against the Sioux, the Cheyenne, the Apache, and the Nez Perce Nations. General Nelson A. Miles bears major responsibility for the capture and the death of Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Geronimo, and Chief Joseph, the major native leaders of the 19th century. General Nelson A. Miles directed the massacre of 400 men, women and children at Wounded Knee, South Dakota in 1890. To the native peoples of the continent General Nelson A. Miles promised Life, Liberty, and Prosperity, and he inflicted Death and Destruction.

Chief Joseph of the Nez Perces learned to distrust General Miles after his defeat and surrender. "General Miles promised that we might return to our country," Chief Joseph said from his captivity at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. "I believed General Miles, or I never would have surrendered." Chief Joseph went on to say:

Good words do not last long unless they amount to something. Words do not pay for my dead people. They do not pay for my country, now over-run by white people . . . Good words will not give my people good health and stop them from dying. Good words will not get my people a home where they can live in peace and take care of themselves. I am tired of talk that comes to nothing. It makes my heart sick when I remember all the good words and broken promises.

It was not long before Puerto Ricans made similar observations about General Nelson A. Miles's good words and broken promises.



Spoils of War

In the mid 1890s the revolutionary movements in Cuba (led by Jose Martí and General Antonio Maceo), and in the Philippines (led by Aguinaldo) were on the verge of defeating the Spanish Empire and winning their independence. In 1898 the U.S. entered the war and snatched victory from the hands of the native forces.

In Puerto Rico the Spanish-American War lasted 17 days. No less than four U.S. Generals led 16,000 well-armed soldiers in the attack on the island. Off the coast of Puerto Rico, near Ponce, North American battleships threatened to destroy the city unless the citizens surrendered immediately.

Some Puerto Ricans believed that the U.S. had landed to liberate them from Spanish tyranny. But most of them viewed the North Americans as conquerors. Manuel Rodriguez, a Puerto Rican guerrilla fighter known as the "White Eagle," led his armed band against the U.S. troops and disrupted their plans for an easy victory. Mariano Abril Ostalo, a Puerto Rican journalist, described the new status of Puerto Rico as a U.S. colony:

To think that the Yankees are going to give us all their freedoms and all their progress for our pretty face is to think blindfolded . . . We could indeed have . . . an unheard-of manufacturing and business activity; but all this would be in their hands, monopolized and exploited by them.

Another Puerto Rican patriot wrote in 1898 that the people "will spill their last drop of blood and will sacrifice everything to obtain the separation of our small island from the barbarous colonial power and prevent its annexation to the Great American Republic." From exile in France, just before his death on September 16, 1898, Ramon Betances said:

No quiero colonia, ni con España, ni con los Estados Unidos. Quiero mi Patria Libre, Independiente, Soberana. Que hacen los Puertorriqueños que no se rebelan?

(I don't want a colony neither with Spain nor the United States. I want my country to be Free, Independent and Sovereign. Why don't the Puerto Ricans revolt?)

On December 1, 1898 the U.S. and Spain signed the Treaty of Paris. Under this agreement Spain ceded the Philippines, Guam and Puerto Rico to the United States. Spain renounced its claims to Cuba and Cuba became a U.S. protectorate. In addition, the U.S. received \$20,000,000 from Spain. No representative from the Puerto Rican nation was in Paris for the negotiations and no Puerto Ricans were consulted.

Puerto Rico went to the U.S. as the spoils of the Spanish-American War. President William McKinley was clear and direct about U.S. intentions. In 1898 he wrote:

While we are conducting the war and until its conclusion, we must keep all we get; when the war is over we must keep what we want.

The U.S. wanted Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines because they were a source of valuable raw materials, cheap labor, and markets for U.S. goods. Puerto

Rico meant profits for the corporations, and Puerto Rico was an economic stepping stone for the penetration of Latin America, as the Philippines were an economic stepping stone for the penetration of Asia, especially China. Puerto Rico would also be an important military base for the growing U.S. army and navy, a base that would protect U.S. economic interests.

In short, Puerto Rico was essential for the growth and development of U.S. imperialism. Cuba and the Philippines were equally essential, as U.S. imperialists recognized. Shortly after the end of the Spanish-American War, Senator Chauncey M. Depew, a Wall Street banker, observed:

The American people now produce \$2,000,000,000 worth more than they consume, and we have met the emergency and by the providence of God, by the statesmanship of William McKinley, and the valor of Theodore Roosevelt . . . we have our markets in Cuba, in Puerto Rico, in the Philippines, and we stand in the presence of 800,000,000 people with the Pacific an American lake . . . *The world is ours.* (Emphasis added)

Now U.S. imperialism expanded around the world in quest of profit.

Under the Folds of the American Flag

To ensure its economic control of Puerto Rico the U.S. created a political and cultural structure — a colonial apparatus — that is still in effect today. In 1900 the Foraker Act (named for Senator Foraker of Ohio) labelled Puerto Rico a colonial possession and created a government on the island that was of, by and for U.S. economic and military interests. Puerto Ricans were neither U.S. citizens nor citizens of an independent nation, but subjects of the North American Empire.

Under the Foraker Act Washington D.C. replaced Madrid as the center of imperial power. The U.S. President appointed the governor and the heads of all government agencies. Most of these appointees knew no Spanish; all of them were ignorant of Puerto Rican life, history and culture.

Washington D.C. politicians regarded the Puerto Rican people as an inferior race. In 1900 Senator Henry M. Teller of Colorado frankly admitted, "I don't like the Puerto Rican. . . . Such a race is unworthy of citizenship." Senator Bate of Tennessee surveyed the new U.S. colonies and described the people of the Philippines and Puerto Rico as "savages addicted to head-hunting and cannibalism."

These racist attitudes underlie the colonial apparatus that was created in Puerto Rico. The judges on the island were appointed by the U.S. President. Judges' decisions were in effect irreversible because the Appeals Court for Puerto Rico was located in Boston, Massachusetts! All proceedings were, of course, conducted in English. The Chamber of Deputies, the only elected body on the island, represented a small elite; 87% of the population could neither read nor write and was therefore deprived of the right to vote. Moreover, the Chamber of Deputies was severely restricted in its powers. Any law it passed was subject to veto by the U.S. President, the U.S. Congress, the appointed Governor, or his Executive Council.

There was widespread protest against the Foraker Act and the colonial system it created. In 1909 the Chamber of Deputies denounced the law as "unjust" and called President William Howard Taft "openly and frankly imperialistic." A Puerto Rican



independentista noted that "one million souls are living in Puerto Rico in an unbearable state of tyranny under the folds of the American flag."

The military and political assault was supported by a cultural attack. The Puerto Rican people were injected with a large dose of North American values and the "American way of life." The colonial authorities tried to destroy the roots of Puerto Rican national identity, to bury Puerto Rico's history and twist its traditions. Under U.S. domination illiteracy dropped from 87% in 1900 to 50% in 1920, but education was not offered to the Puerto Rican people for purely humanitarian reasons. Industry needed a working class that could read and write the essentials of English. In 1903 Victor S. Clark, the U.S. Commissioner of Education on the island, noted that the "education system will give [the U.S.] a corps of young Puerto Ricans trained . . . in our industrial and commercial methods, who will be valuable pioneers in extending our commerce and in creating new markets for our manufacturers."

For hundreds of years Spanish was the spoken and the written language on the island; now suddenly all school classes were conducted in English — by U.S. law. Victor S. Clark justified these requirements on the grounds that:

English is the chief source, practically the only source, of democratic ideals for Puerto Rico. There may be little that they learn to remember, but the English school reader itself provides a body of ideas and concepts which are not to be had in any other way. It is the only means which these people have of communication with an understanding of the country of which they are now a part.

In 1917, two decades after the military invasion, the U.S. Congress tightened its political grip on Puerto Rico with the passage of the Jones Act. In hearings on the Act, Congressman Cooper of Wisconsin said, "We are never to give up Puerto Rico, for now that we have completed the Panama Canal, the retention of the island becomes very important to the safety of the Canal, and in that way to the safety of the Nation itself. It helps to make the Gulf of Mexico an American Lake."

The Jones Act was passed overwhelmingly by the U.S. Congress. It imposed U.S. citizenship on Puerto Ricans whether they liked it or not, whether they wanted it or not. To reject U.S. citizenship it was required by law to fill out extensive bureaucratic

forms. 288 Puerto Ricans went through this demeaning process; they were immediately labelled "subversives," denied their civil rights, and treated as aliens on their own island.

A month after the passage of the Jones Act, the U.S. entered World War I. As U.S. citizens Puerto Ricans were subject to the draft. On June 27, 1917 President Woodrow Wilson ordered the registration and recruitment of Puerto Ricans between the ages of 21 and 31. Denied democracy at home, 20,000 Puerto Ricans were pressed into service to fight on the battlefields of Europe in a war that President Wilson claimed would "make the world safe for Democracy."

Jose de Diego's "NO"

Jose de Diego, the President of the Puerto Rican Chamber of Deputies, revealed the fraudulence of Wilson's "democracy" and "New Freedom." He denounced the Jones Act in no uncertain terms:

Never was anything like this seen before . . . in the democratic nations of the world; one million, two hundred thousand human beings, who by law of the Congress of the Republic — which seems more like an order from the times of the low Empire — are deprived of their natural citizenship. . . . Puerto Ricans are reduced to the condition of foreigners in their own country, are exiled from their own land.

De Diego concluded that the Jones Act was "as cutting as a guillotine . . . an attack on the liberty and honor of the Puerto Rican people."

Jose de Diego was the main spokesperson for Puerto Rican independence during the first two decades of U.S. rule. Born in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico on April 6, 1866, de Diego was a legislator, lawyer, poet, patriot, and above all a brilliant orator in the cause of Puerto Rican sovereignty. Today his words arouse the Puerto Rican people:

The refusal to submit, the protest against tyranny, the *No* of the oppressed has been the word, the genesis of the liberation of peoples; and even when the impotence of the means and the virtues of the ends . . . remove the revolutionary fire from the vision of the ideal, *No* must be and is the only word which will preserve the liberty and dignity of the peoples in servitude.

De Diego defended Puerto Rican culture and heritage against U.S. assimilation. He valued the language and the literature of his people and warned against its corruption by North American commercialism. In the tradition of Betances and Jose Martí, de Diego advocated Caribbean Federation — the union of Cuba and Puerto Rico. To those North Americans who claimed that Puerto Ricans "lacked combativeness" he declared:

The Puerto Ricans made a Puerto Rican revolution and helped in three Cuban revolutions. We sent two militia companies to Santo Domingo in the seventeenth century to fight the British . . . in the nineteenth century more than 1,000 Puerto Rican soldiers fought for Cuban freedom.

In 1917, the year of the Jones Act, de Diego dedicated himself to "fight for restoration of Puerto Rican citizenship, and for the creation of our Republic." A year later he died, still a young man. The task he set for himself was left for others to take up.



4

THE WAR
BETWEEN U.S.
CAPITAL AND
PUERTO RICAN
LABOR

The Army of Capital

Shortly after General Nelson A. Miles led the U.S. invasion of Puerto Rico, the island was devastated by San Ciriaco, a hurricane of extraordinary force. Three thousand people were killed, a quarter of the population was made homeless, the coffee and the sugar crops were destroyed. The damage caused by the hurricane was indeed extensive. But when compared with the damage to Puerto Rico caused by North American industry and commerce over a 30 year period, San Ciriaco looks like a gentle wind.

From 1900 to 1930 an army of North American capital marched not only across Puerto Rico but across the Caribbean and throughout Latin America. U.S. corporations, banks, and import-export houses invested everywhere, extracted superprofits, and step by step developed a stranglehold on the political economy of a vast continent.

Under U.S. rule Puerto Rico became one big sugar plantation owned and operated by North American companies. The diversified agricultural economy declined and Puerto Rico became a one-crop economy. Over several decades the coffee and tobacco plantations were driven into bankruptcy and King Sugar reigned supreme.

The U.S. monopolies forced the Spanish and the Puerto Rican *hacendados*, or landowners, out of business. Where there had been many small farms, U.S. companies created a few large farms. As the soil was depleted by capitalist methods of agriculture, new lands were purchased and brought under cultivation.

Over a 30 year period U.S. corporations came to control the Puerto Rican economy. In 1899 Puerto Ricans owned 90% of the farms and estates; by 1930 North American monopolies owned 65% of sugar production; three-fifths of all sugar lands were owned by four U.S. companies. This control meant immense profits. From 1900 to 1930 U.S. monopolies extracted over \$200,000,000 in profit from Puerto Rico.

The island experienced tremendous upheaval and dislocation. For example, from 1896 to 1928, the percentage of land devoted to sugar cane increased 263% while the land devoted to food crops decreased 31%. The U.S. corporations not only bought the land but the mills, the refineries, the factories, warehouses, docks and shipping lines. Between 1901 and 1910 the sugar corporations built more than one thousand miles of railroad — not to serve passengers but to carry cane — in a country only 111 miles long and 36 miles wide.

Agricultural production before the U.S. invasion was not highly developed. Investment was limited, tools were rudimentary, and labor was done mostly by animals and by human beings, not by machines. Where the Spanish *hacendados* built small mills to process their individual sugar cane harvests, the U.S. companies built *centrales*, immense sugar cane plants.

The sugar economy dislocated the population. Agricultural workers and *jibaros* were uprooted from the mountain coffee plantations and relocated on the sugar plantations. Families that had lived and worked for years on one *hacienda* were forced to migrate from plantation to plantation in search of work.

Between 1910 and 1940 employment in sugar increased tremendously, but employment in other forms of agriculture decreased by almost half. In general unem-

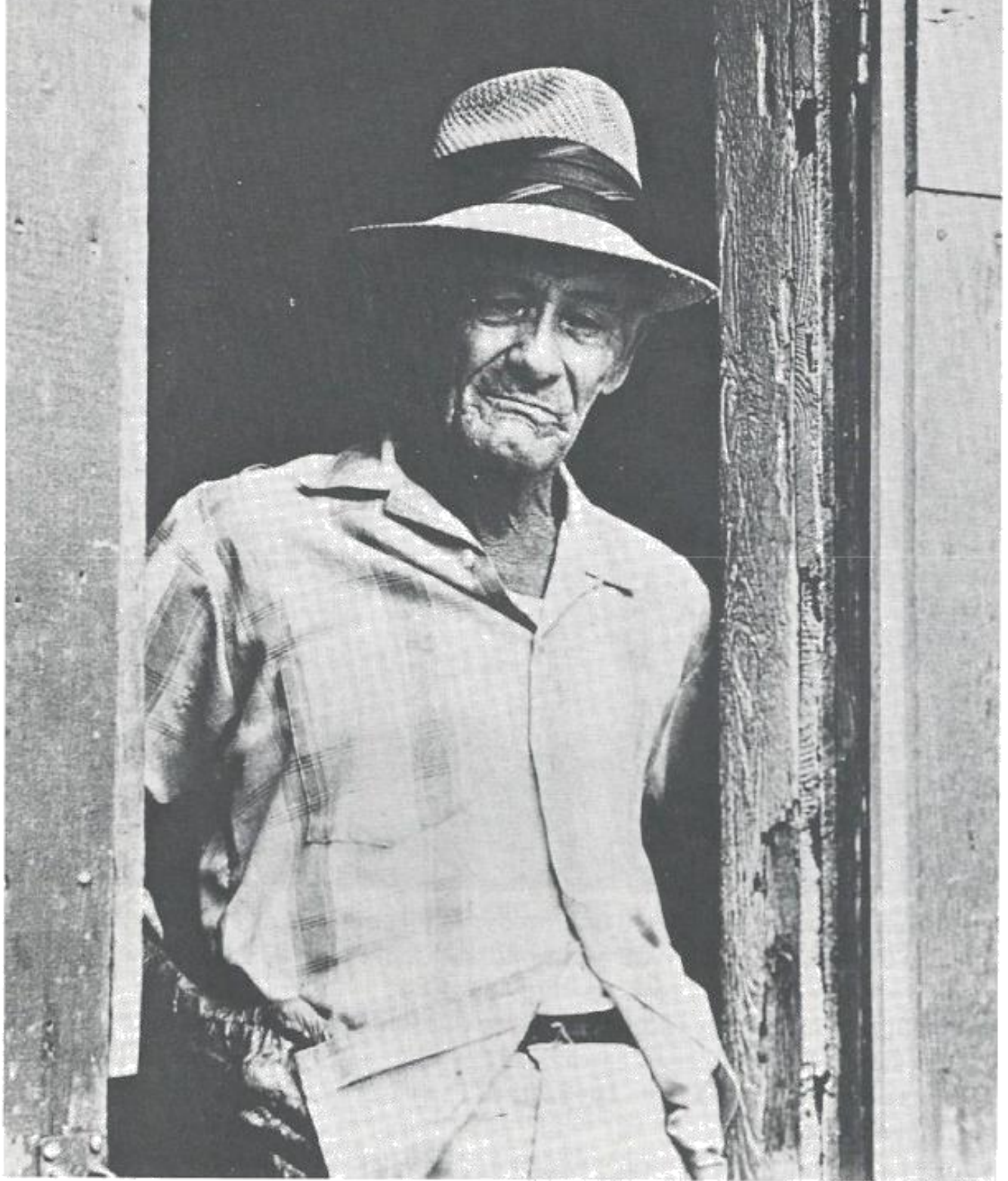


ployment rose. From 1899 to 1910 unemployment remained at a steady 18%. In 1920 it inched up to 20%. Then in 1926 it jumped suddenly to 30% and in the midst of the Depression of the 1930s it rose as high as 40%.

Puerto Rican wages were uniformly lower than the lowest wages in the U.S. In the mid-1920s sugar cane workers earned 75¢ a day. Low wages and unemployment drove thousands of families from the island. Puerto Ricans were forced to resettle in Hawaii, Cuba and the U.S. *why come US - make no B - easy to come*

But most Puerto Ricans couldn't leave. They became wage laborers dependent on U.S. corporations for their livelihood. They worked only a few months harvesting the cane and they were unemployed the rest of the year. The months that they didn't work the Puerto Ricans called *el tiempo muerto* (dead time).

Working in the sugar fields was brutal and exhausting. The men who worked in the cane fields spoke of "doing battle" (*bregando* in Spanish) with it; they felt that they had to "defend themselves" (*se defienden* in Spanish) against it.



Under the Spanish *hacendados*, workers were exploited but they were also helped through the off-season. This relationship was paternalistic — the landowner held all the power and treated the worker as a child, but he also provided jobs and food during *el tiempo muerto*. With North American rule Spanish paternalism was swept away and the cold cash relationships of capitalism were imposed. There was no relief from *el tiempo muerto*.

The Spanish Carpenter and the English Cigar Roller

The Puerto Rican working class was forged and grew, decade by decade, under the weight of U.S. imperialism. On May 1, 1900 the first Workers' Congress was held on the island. The 5,000 members of the *Federación Libre de Trabajadores*, the Free Federation of Laborers (FLT) worked in shipping, transportation, agriculture and industry. In the summer of 1900 the FLT called a General Strike after their demands for wages in U.S. currency, weekly pay, and the eight-hour day were rejected by the U.S.-owned companies. North American military authorities arrested 100 members of the FLT, including its fiery President, Santiago Iglesias. The U.S. governor denounced the Puerto Rican labor movement as a deranged mob of revolutionaries and anarchists. Four years later, in 1905, 4,000 sugar workers went on strike and won a 30% wage increase. In 1914, 40,000 sugar workers walked off their jobs and again won a raise. In 1917, 1920 and 1921 there were strikes by dock workers, tobacco workers and typographers. By 1920 the FLT had 28,000 members.

Much of the history of the organized Puerto Rican working class movement in the first three decades of the 20th century is embodied in the life of Santiago Iglesias and the FLT.

Iglesias was a Spanish carpenter and revolutionary anarchist. In 1888 he left Europe and travelled to Cuba. In Havana he was a leader of the trade union movement. In 1895 revolution broke out against the Spanish Empire. Iglesias was not directly involved in the Cuban War for Independence, but he was persecuted by the police because he was a labor leader. He fled from Havana and on his way to Barcelona stopped in San Juan. It was 1896, two years before the U.S. invasion. The Puerto Rican working class was largely unorganized.

Iglesias had little in common with the majority of Puerto Rican workers. Not only was he a recent immigrant, he was also a pure-blooded Spaniard. Unlike the majority of Puerto Rican workers he was neither Black, Mulatto, Mestizo, nor Creole; he was white. And he was a skilled artisan. Iglesias was in a relatively privileged position; he used it to organize the Puerto Rican working class.

In 1897 Iglesias was arrested and imprisoned for his trade union activities. He was still behind bars a year later when U.S. naval forces bombarded the island. Iglesias claimed that a wall of his prison cell was shattered by a U.S. artillery shell and that he was able to escape to freedom. Whether or not this story is literally true, Iglesias did regard the U.S. as a democratic nation that would liberate the suffering Puerto Rican people from Spanish tyranny. He expected the North Americans to aid him in his struggle against the powerful sugar interests.

But the U.S. military officers saw in Iglesias an anarchist, a revolutionary, a troublemaker. Iglesias was not discouraged. In the first year of North American occupation he led dozens of strikes and demonstrations. Finally, he was arrested and jailed. After a year in prison he was released and deported from the island.

Iglesias travelled to New York to find work; he found not only a job but a patron and a life-long calling. Samuel Gompers, the president of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the most powerful of North American unions, took Iglesias under his wing. The two men — the Spanish anarchist carpenter and the English cigar roller turned prince of labor — became close friends.

The AFL recognized Iglesias's talents. They named him their "General Organizer for Puerto Rico and Cuba." He was paid a big salary and provided with generous funds to create AFL unions in the Caribbean.

Before Iglesias returned to Puerto Rico, Samuel Gompers introduced him to President Theodore Roosevelt. Iglesias was honored. Gompers assured Roosevelt that Iglesias would devote himself to trade union activities, not revolutionary agitation. As a token of his gratitude to Gompers, and as a sign of his good intentions to the President, Iglesias voluntarily became a U.S. citizen.

Iglesias's new friends and his new credentials didn't impress the *hacendados*. Late in 1901 he was arrested and found guilty of having "conspired to raise wages." He was sentenced to prison and the FLT was outlawed, in accordance with an old Spanish criminal conspiracy law that the new U.S. rulers had not bothered to remove from the books.

Iglesias's arrest and imprisonment created a furor. Gompers provided bail and the AFL rallied to defend the FLT. Iglesias appealed his case to the U.S. Supreme Court and his conviction was overturned. That same year — 1902 — there were more victories for Puerto Rican labor. For the first time in the history of the island, trade unions were given legal recognition. Iglesias's faith in North America was renewed; he welcomed U.S. rule wholeheartedly. In 1902 he told the U.S. Governor that his mission in Puerto Rico was the "*americanización obrera*" — the Americanization of the Puerto Rican working class. While this meant building unions and going on strike, it also meant that the organized working class accepted North American rule.

Iglesias and the FLT launched a new labor offensive. With political and financial support from the AFL (Iglesias's salary came from the Gompers organization in the U.S., not from rank and file Puerto Rican workers), the FLT created new unions where none had existed; it initiated a vigorous campaign to organize unorganized sugar workers. FLT officials trekked to the countryside, held meetings, distributed literature and signed up new members. The power of the union grew.

In the midst of this campaign Samuel Gompers visited Puerto Rico. He travelled across the island and wrote a stirring denunciation of social conditions:

I have seen men working in the sugar mills of Puerto Rico fifteen and sixteen hours for forty cents a day. I have seen men toiling in the sugar fields virtually dragging themselves through fifteen hours a day for forty or forty-five cents . . . The workers are compelled to live bonded to the earth like the ancient serfs under the rule of their masters and at the disposition of any of those rulers who might want to expel them and destroy their huts.

I have never seen so many Human Beings showing so clearly the signs of malnutrition nor so many women and children with the marks of hunger in their faces. No, never have I seen such an accumulation of misery in one people, and understand that I know something of this mother earth, the conditions existent in Puerto Rico today reflect no honor or credit upon our country.

During his visit Gompers lent his full support to the FLT. But at the same time that he backed Iglesias's union he persuaded the FLT not to oppose the establishment of a U.S. Navy base on the island.

Gompers returned to the U.S. Then, during the harvest season of 1905-1906 the first major strikes of sugar workers erupted. The strikers were dedicated and disciplined, and the strike was long and militant, but few concessions were won from the sugar bosses. Iglesias demanded the right to collective bargaining, but the companies refused to negotiate or sign contracts with the unions.



The strike was broken. Many workers had joined the FLT, but no lasting, solid organization remained on the plantations. Agricultural laborers made little economic and political progress against the corporations. In this period (1900-1910) only the most skilled workers gained limited benefits. But in general repression intensified. In 1910 the Puerto Rican legislature was pressured by the sugar companies into passing a law that provided police protection to plantations where workers were on strike. The police were housed and fed by the sugar monopolies; the plantations became armed camps.

Meanwhile, the policy of relying on the U.S. led Iglesias and the FLT to ignore the struggle against foreign domination. By 1907 the FLT no longer observed May Day—International Workers' Day. In accordance with U.S. law the Union observed Labor Day, the first Monday in September.

When it was founded, the FLT favored Puerto Rican independence. The FLT membership delegated Iglesias to advocate Puerto Rican sovereignty at the 26th AFL convention. But in the U.S. Gompers and the AFL leadership persuaded Iglesias to abandon the independence cause.

Iglesias returned to San Juan and argued that Puerto Rico should continue as a U.S. colony. Later he wanted Puerto Rico to become a state of the U.S. He claimed that Puerto Rican workers were better off under U.S. rule than under the rule of Spain, or the Puerto Rican *hacendado* class. Furthermore, he believed that Puerto Rican labor would be powerful only as long as it was affiliated with organized North American labor.

In 1932 Iglesias and the FLT joined in an alliance with the Republican Party, the Party of Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover. Iglesias denounced President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal Government as a "sworn foe of free enterprise." The anarchist carpenter became a defender of U.S. big business.

In 1933 the FLT finally achieved the goal it set for itself three decades earlier — the signing of an island-wide agreement between sugar workers and the sugar corporations. But this concession was too late. Rank-and-file workers rejected Iglesias and the FLT and went on a wildcat strike.

In 1934 thousands of workers all across the island left the fields in a series of coordinated actions. They demanded an end to unemployment, and an end to starvation wages. (In 1934 sugar workers were paid \$3.34 for 60 hours of work.) The Puerto Rican Communist Party, formed in 1934, and the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico supported the sugar workers. The FLT and Iglesias condemned the workers and sided with the sugar companies. The island was a battleground. A cable sent by the sugar interests to President Roosevelt indicates the depth of the crisis:

State of actual Anarchy exists STOP Towns in Seige STOP Police Impotent
STOP Business paralyzed STOP

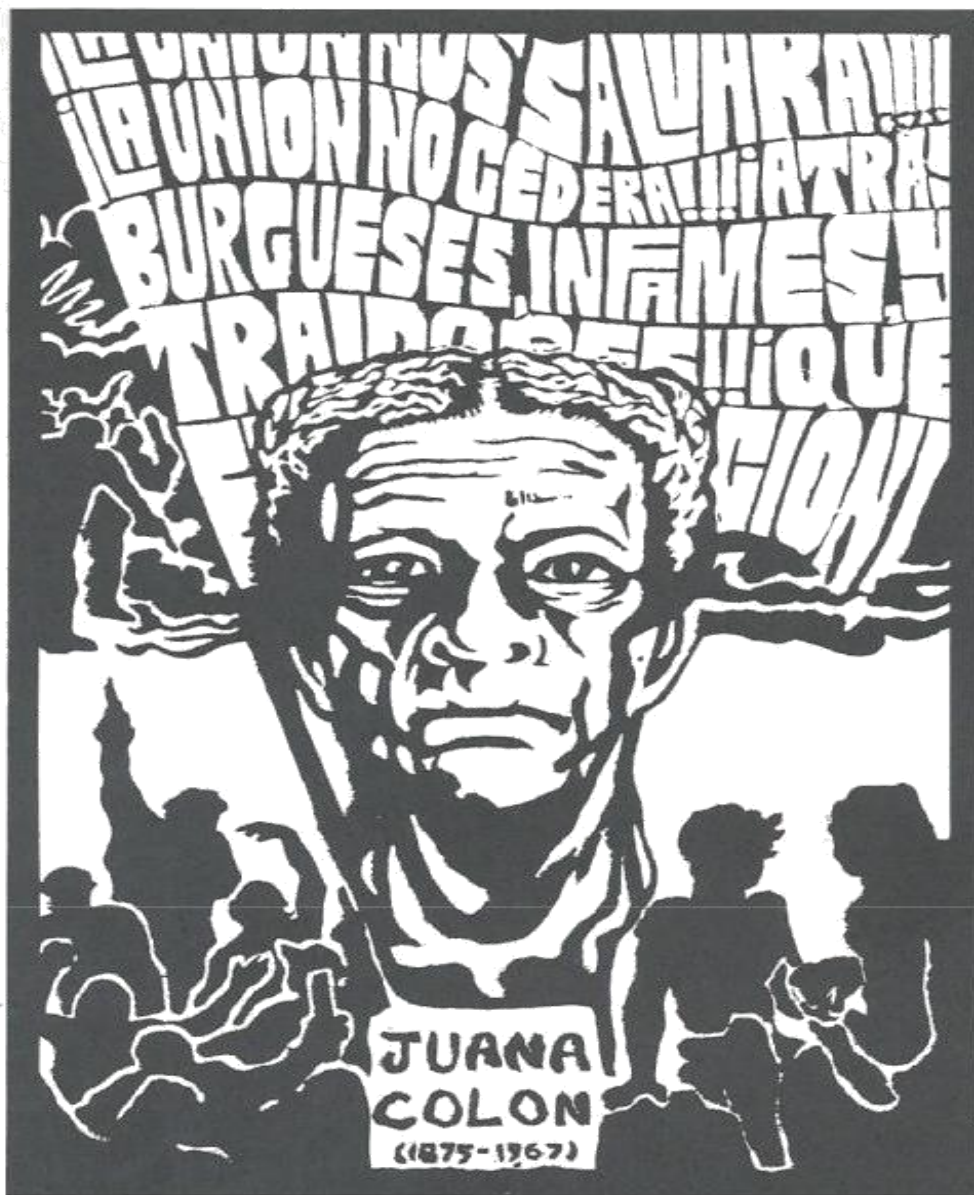
The U.S. Government responded immediately. Repression was brutal and the strike was crushed. Iglesias was rewarded for his stand against the workers and was appointed Puerto Rican Resident Commissioner in Washington D.C. To many *independentistas* this was the final, logical step in a long career of collaboration with U.S. imperialism.

"Our Struggle So Just and True"

Iglesias did collaborate with U.S. imperialism; he led the trade union movement astray, but the Puerto Rican working class was not destroyed. Throughout this period class consciousness developed and working class organizations grew. Socialist and anarchist ideas bloomed on Puerto Rican soil and a workers' education program developed.

Puerto Rican women organized unions in the tobacco industry. Juana Colon, known as the "Joan of Arc of Comerío," fought for the rights of workers, led strikes, and fought the police. In 1915 she joined with other working class people to form the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, a party that called for equal distribution of wealth and for workers to share in business profits. Later the Socialist Party, under Iglesias's leadership, betrayed the Puerto Rican people and favored statehood.

Carmen Rivera de Alvarado, a woman active in the contemporary Puerto Rican independence movement, recalls strikes in the tobacco industry in the decade 1910-20:



Taller Boriqua

Juana Colon was one of the many Puerto Rican women who fought for the rights of workers. Colon was a founder of the Socialist Party of Puerto Rico in 1915.

One of the most vivid memories is of a violent encounter between a crowd of women workers and the police. Those were certainly courageous women — experts at throwing rocks and other defensive weapons. Valentina Carreras, a fiery plump tobacco stripper, and also a socialist speaker, was their female leader. They did not only fight for their rights in the streets but were intent also at nurturing their minds. . . . Socialist ideas found expression in the organization of the workers' theaters where the performances of young actors and actresses always conveyed the message of socialism. Lenin was their hero. I will always remember the "Teatro Obrero" [Workers Theater] of Vega Baja, fully decorated in red. . . . The "bolshevist" women of my home town sang their revolutionary hymn:

*Acudid, indefensas obreras
A esta lucha tan justa y legal
Mirad, mirad que somos victimas
De esta infame sociedad
Que nos roblan el pan de nuestros hijos
Quen nos hace tanto que sudar,
La union nos salvara
Infame, vil, traidor
Que esta es una revolución
Que Causara grande horror
Al infame explotador.*

(Come in, defenseless women workers,
To our struggle so just and true.
See how we are the victims
Of this evil society
That robs the bread from
Our children's mouths and
Sweats us to death.
The Union will save us
From the vile traitor and
The revolution will
Destroy the evil
Exploiters of our labor.)

Half a century after the labor struggles of the 1920s Carmen Rivera de Alvarado noted:

Unfortunately, the revolution did not crystallize. The labor movement was absorbed by the Socialist Party which entered into an electoral coalition with the most reactionary and conservative of all the colonial parties in Puerto Rico — the Republican Party.

However, through women leaders like Carmen Rivera de Alvarado, Valentina Carreras, Juana Colon, Luisa Capetillo, and through rank and file resistance, the spark of workers' solidarity and militancy was kept alive even in the hours of betrayal and repression.

4

THE WAR
BETWEEN U.S.
CAPITAL AND
PUERTO RICAN
LABOR



5

**“TO TAKE
OUR COUNTRY
THEY WILL
HAVE TO TAKE
OUR LIVES”**

Life Expectancy: 46 Years

In the 1930s the world-wide capitalist economic crisis weakened U.S. domination of Latin America. In the United States there was a severe Depression. The Wall Street stock market crashed, banks failed, credit was withdrawn, mortgages were foreclosed and millions of people lost their jobs. In Puerto Rico and throughout the colonized world, the Great Depression was more severe than at the centers of Empire. In Puerto Rico there was starvation, unemployment, rampant disease. In the 1930s the average life expectancy on the island was 46 years of age.

The Depression brought an upsurge of nationalist movements, not only in Puerto Rico but in Mexico, Nicaragua, Cuba and Haiti. Supported by workers and peasants — those most oppressed by imperialism — the nationalist movements in the Caribbean and Latin America sought independence from U.S. economic and political control.

The Puerto Rican Nationalist Party was formed in 1922 from a split in the Unionist Party. That year Antonio Barcelo, the head of the Unionists, proposed that Puerto Rico become "*un Estado Libre Asociado*," a "Free Associated State." Barcelo hoped that a "permanent, indestructible bond" would tie the island to the U.S. *Independentistas* inside the Unionist Party were outraged. They broke from the ranks and formed the Nationalist Party.

Albizu Campos and the Arsenal of Revolution

In 1925 the Nationalist Party held a meeting in San Juan to celebrate the birthday of Jose de Diego, the Puerto Rican patriot. The Puerto Rican flag waved high above the speakers' platform, but many small U.S. flags decorated the handrail. When the last speaker stepped down from the podium a young man with a dark complexion leapt onto the platform. Calmly, he plucked the U.S. flags from the handrail and, except for one, stuffed them into his pocket. Then he turned to the astonished audience and explained that the Stars and Stripes had no place at a Puerto Rican meeting. "O American flag," he said, holding the last small flag in his hand, "if it is true that you represent liberty and democracy in the world, here in Puerto Rico you represent colonialism and plunder." Pedro Albizu Campos had made his dramatic entrance on the stage of Puerto Rican history. Under his influence the Nationalist Party became a major political force, a party that confronted imperialism and rekindled the spark of revolution.

Albizu Campos was born in Ponce on September 2, 1891. In July 1898, when he was seven, the U.S. army invaded the city and held it captive. It was a sight Albizu never forgot; soldiers from another nation occupied Ponce's streets, Ponce's town square; the Stars and Stripes was raised above the municipal building.

In those years Albizu also learned about North American racism. His mother was part Black, part Indian; Albizu inherited her dark complexion and felt the whip of discrimination. As a young man he attended college in the U.S., first at the University of Vermont, then at Harvard. He graduated from the Harvard College of Science and Letters and from the Harvard Law School. At Harvard Albizu was deeply influenced by representatives of both the Irish Nationalist movement and Mahatma



Albizu Campos speaks to sugar workers during a strike in 1934.

Chandi's Indian Nationalist Movement. He followed the Irish Nationalist uprising against the British Empire in 1916 and decided that Puerto Ricans would have to create a liberation army with the striking force of the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

For two years Albizu served in the U.S. Army — in a racially segregated Black regiment. Here again he saw racism at work; at the same time he developed a sense of military strategy and tactics that he later put to use. In 1921 he returned to Puerto Rico and practiced law among the poor.

In 1925 Albizu's fellow patriots in the Party sent him on a political pilgrimage through Latin America. Albizu met with nationalist leaders in Cuba, Santo Domingo, Haiti, Mexico and Peru; he saw that the U.S. pursued a policy of economic control, cultural domination and armed aggression throughout the Caribbean and Latin America. "Puerto Rico and the other islands of the Caribbean are the field of battle between Yanqui imperialism and Latin Americanism," Albizu wrote. "Our sad situation under U.S. domination is what North America is trying to impose on all the peoples of the Continent. Our cause is a continental cause."

Revolutionaries across the continent recognized the importance of the independence movement in Puerto Rico and gave political and financial aid to the Nationalists.

In the mid and the late 1920s Albizu began to formulate a strategy for the liberation of the homeland. He proposed that

The whole arsenal of revolution — guerrilla warfare, terror, sabotage, propaganda — be directed toward taking advantage of colonialism by means of work slowdowns, boycotting imports, inciting to revolt, withholding payment of rents to foreigners, destroying foreign industrial installations and increasing by every means the cost of exploitation and the policy of domination."

Furthermore, Albizu argued that

Puerto Rico must present a serious crisis to the colonial administration in order to have her demands attended to. A nation like the United States, with enormous national and international problems, does not have time to attend to a servile, submissive people. What is required is the formation of a rebel organization that represents all the people of Puerto Rico, that will break definitely with the regime of the colony, and will solicit from the free nations recognition of our independence. Thus we will achieve the concentration of the North American mind on our situation.

In 1930 when he returned to Puerto Rico from his travels in Latin America, Albizu assumed the leadership of the Nationalist Party. With his background and training as a lawyer, he used international law in the cause. The 1898 Treaty of Paris — the document that awarded Puerto Rico to the U.S. as the spoils of war — Albizu declared illegal. "The treaty was not negotiated by Puerto Rican representatives and was never submitted to our Parliament for approval," Albizu wrote. "It is null and void as far as Puerto Rico is concerned."

Albizu also made a concerted effort to bring women into the Nationalist Party. "We salute liberated women. The nation summons their force immediately," he wrote. In 1930, year after Puerto Rican women were granted the vote, he asked them to help "make Puerto Rico a free, sovereign and independent nation." Dona Ana Roque de Duprey, the founder of the Association of Women's Voters in Puerto Rico, threw the organization behind the Nationalists. Dona Ana was a teacher, novelist, and magazine editor. In 1917 she founded the Puerto Rican Feminist League and in 1924 she founded the Puerto Rican Association of Women's Voters. In 1931 Dona Ana Roque de Duprey told the annual convention of the Association:

Let us tell the American Congress: Listen to the voice of the women of this land whom you have made unhappy by permitting the exploitation of what we have! American Congress: we refuse to be a colony! When you took us away from the power of Spain we were not a colony! We are ashamed to be one. We want a status that would let us be the owners of our land; we want sovereignty to determine freely our actions and to work for the industrialization of our island according to our potentialities and our own judgment until we repossess it and make it fit for a people with four hundred years of civilization, to live happily in it.



In the mid-1930s Albizu and the Nationalist Party drafted a seven point economic program that stated:

1. The workers shall be organized so that they can demand of the foreign or invading interests the share in profits to which they are entitled, taking over their administration and appointing responsible men to manage them.
2. Every effort shall be made to see that the burden of taxation falls upon the non-residents, so as to eliminate absentee landlordism and divide real estate among the greatest number of landowners.
3. Every possible step shall be taken to reverse the effect of free shipping between the U.S. and Puerto Rico which now exclusively benefits the U.S.
4. The consumption of Puerto Rican agricultural products shall be favored exclusively.
5. Exports, and the creation of a merchant marine shall be encouraged.
6. Native banks shall be exclusively favored.
7. The island's finances shall be organized in such a way that national deposits shall be made exclusively in the native banks, and steps shall be taken to free the country of foreign loans, both public and private, so that agriculture, commerce and industry may redevelop in Puerto Rican hands.

The Party participated in the 1932 electoral campaign but lost to a coalition between the U.S.-backed Republican Party and the Socialist Party. The Nationalists learned from the campaign. "The electoral struggle is a periodic farce to keep the Puerto Rican family divided," Albizu declared in 1933.

The Nationalists did not want to debate the liberals; they did not want to plead on their knees for self-government. They knew that there could be no compromise with imperialism, that armed struggle was necessary to achieve independence.

"Nationalism is the only salvation," Albizu declared. "It causes to be reborn in each one of us the conscience of a free people for whom human dignity has no price and who cannot conceive why they do not have the right to rule the destinies of their children or their country." With passion and fervor the Nationalists committed themselves to the cause of sovereignty and nationhood. They took an oath

To defend the Nationalist ideal and to sacrifice our homes and our lives if that should be necessary for the independence of our country.

A State of War

Albizu and the Nationalist Party planned three co-ordinated actions. The first was to call world attention to the colonial situation; to expose the falsehood of President Roosevelt's promise to give all citizens a "New Deal" and to implement a "Good Neighbor Policy" in the Caribbean and Latin America. The second prong was to build a political organization that would unite all Puerto Ricans in the fight against



Cadets of the Republic

U.S. imperialism. The third prong in the strategy was to prepare for armed confrontation. The Party created a liberation army called the "Cadets of the Republic"; all Party members were required to serve in the Cadets and learn the use of arms.

Shortly after the Cadets of the Republic was formed there were several attempts to assassinate Robert H. Gore, the U.S. Governor of the island. In April 1933 the Puerto Rican legislature debated a bill that would eliminate the Puerto Rican flag as the national banner. The Nationalists stormed the Capitol. The police attacked the demonstrators and Albizu was arrested for incitement to riot. In 1934, when President Roosevelt visited the island the Nationalists staged demonstrations in protest of Puerto Rico's colonial status.

Thus, the Party created a political crisis on the island and forced the U.S. government to act. Colonel James Beverly, a former Military Governor of the island, sent a memo to the War Department in Washington D.C.:

I strongly favor an ex-army officer for the next governor . . . to be appointed at once, one who has sufficient experience . . . and one who has the courage to do his duty whether it is popular or not. Is not General Winship available for a position of this kind?

Indeed, General Blanton D. Winship was available; President Roosevelt appointed him the Governor of Puerto Rico.

Winship was a racist Southern General, probably the most repressive U.S. Governor in Puerto Rican history. Winship immediately launched an all-out campaign against the Nationalist Party. Governor Winship's first step was to appoint Colonel E. Francis Riggs, a North American expert in counter insurgency, to the office of police chief. Colonel Riggs armed his men with automatic weapons, created a corps of sharpshooters and issued the order

Habra guerra, guerra, guerra contra los Nationalistas
(Make war, war, war against the Nationalists)

The U.S. government did make war against the Nationalists. On October 24, 1935 the police killed four Nationalists and wounded 40 people at the University of Puerto Rico in Rio Piedras. Then, on February 23, 1936 two members of the Party — Elias Beauchamp and Hiram Rosado — assassinated the hated and feared Colonel Riggs on the streets of San Juan. Their armed attack was condemned by President Roosevelt and the U.S. Congress, but to many Puerto Ricans it was justified. It brought the colonial case of Puerto Rico to the attention of the world, and elicited solidarity and support from nationalist organizations throughout Latin America.

Elias Beauchamp and Hiram Rosado were immediately arrested, taken to police headquarters and a half hour later murdered. Albizu's eulogy at their funeral began with an outcry of sorrow —

We have here precious ashes that bear witness to the immortality of Puerto Rico,

and ended with a cry for renewed battle:

A tyrant has fallen who was named Colonel Riggs . . . The murder at the University of Rio Piedras was his work. Cold-blooded murder is being carried out by the entire police force.

While there are free men and women, brave men and women, the murderers will not remain unpunished. The Yanqui regime is doing us a supreme favor. The Yanquis seek to intimidate us with murder. They can kill Albizu Campos; it will solve nothing. They can kill 10,000 Nationalists. A million Puerto Ricans will rise up.

Throughout 1936 the police raided the homes and the meeting places of the Nationalists. U.S. troops were stationed in San Juan and the city was in a state of siege. Governor Winship took a personal interest in persecuting members of the Party; by the end of the year most of the leaders and many rank-and-file members were in prison.

Following instructions from President Roosevelt, Albizu was arrested and charged with conspiracy to overthrow the U.S. government. At his first trial the jury could not agree on a verdict: the North American jurors assumed that he was guilty and voted for conviction; the Puerto Rican jurors believed that he was innocent and voted for acquittal. At the second trial the jury — composed of ten carefully selected North Americans and two pro-U.S. Puerto Ricans — convicted Albizu and sentenced him to a prison term of 15 years at the Federal Penitentiary in Atlanta, Georgia.

The Ponce Massacre

In the late winter of 1937 the Nationalist Party protested the arrest and the imprisonment of Albizu. In most towns the authorities denied the Party permission to hold meetings and marches. But in Ponce, Albizu's birthplace, the Mayor granted a permit. The Nationalists planned a parade of the Cadets of the Republic and the Women's Auxiliary for Palm Sunday, March 21, 1937. On March 20, 1937 Governor Winship exerted pressure on the Mayor of Ponce, and the permit was revoked. 150 policemen armed with machine guns, carbines, tear gas bombs, hand grenades, and rifles arrived in Ponce and occupied the town. The Nationalists were not intimidated; they announced their intention to proceed on schedule with or without a permit. Members of the Cadets and the Women's Auxiliary had arrived from the countryside and were gathering at the parade ground.



At 3:15 pm 100 marchers — the men in black shirts and white pants, the women in white dresses and blouses — formed columns of three abreast. No one was armed. Police cordoned off the area, but worshippers, returning from mass with palm fronds, slipped through the lines and waited eagerly for the parade to begin. The band played Lola Rodríguez de Tío's National Anthem *La Borinqueña*. The marchers stood at attention. When the music finished the Cadets and the Women's Auxiliary began to walk down La Marina Street. As they neared the central square the police officer in charge ordered them to halt. The marchers stood silently, hands by their sides, waiting for instructions from their leaders. The flag bearer held the Puerto Rican flag high in the air.

At that moment a single shot rang out. Then several policemen opened fire, and suddenly bullets rained down on marchers and innocent bystanders alike. Bolívar Marquez, a wounded Cadet, dragged his dying body across the square, and before he collapsed he used his own blood to write on a wall

Viva la Republica! Abajo los Asesinos!
(Long live the Republic! Down with the Assassins!)

The flag bearer was shot and killed and the flag fell to the ground. Dominga Cruz Becerril, a young girl from Mayaguez, leapt from cover, ran to the flag, and raised it high. Later, when asked why she had endangered her own life she answered modestly, "Our teacher [Albizu Campos] has said that the flag should always be flying."

In the central square chaos descended on spectators and marchers alike. There were more shots and cries of fear and pain. For ten minutes there was uninterrupted police gunfire. When the shooting stopped 20 people were dead and more than 150 wounded.

President Roosevelt, his Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, and Governor Winship regarded the police attack as necessary for the maintenance of order. Governor Winship called the incident a "Nationalist riot." The colonial legislature in San Juan praised Winship as an "adopted son of Puerto Rico" and blamed the violence on the Nationalists. The American Civil Liberties Union investigated the massacre at Ponce and concluded that there was a "gross violation of civil rights and incredible police brutality."

"The Yanquis seek to intimidate us with murder. They can kill Albizu Campos; it will solve nothing. They can kill 10,000 Nationalists. A million Puerto Ricans will rise up."

~Albizu Campos



6

COLONIAL MASTER PLAN

Pan, Tierra, y Libertad

1938, the year following the Ponce Massacre, was a watershed in Puerto Rican history. In July, at a ceremony to mark the 40th anniversary of U.S. rule, the Nationalists opened fire on Governor Blanton D. Winship. Next to the governor was his military aide, Colonel Luis Irizarry. This man shoved the governor to one side and received the bullets meant for his chief. He died. Nationalists were rounded up and imprisoned, but still protests continued. With help from the Nationalists and the newly-formed Puerto Rican Communist Party, workers on the waterfront went on a general strike. After 42 days they won their demands for higher wages and improved working conditions.



There were equally important changes in the electoral arena. With Albizu and his Nationalist comrades in prison, the *Partido Popular Democrático (PPD)*, the Popular Democratic Party, stepped into the limelight. The PPD stole much of the Nationalist thunder; they supported independence and called for basic social reforms. But the PPD channelled Puerto Rican discontent away from violent demonstrations and into legal forms of protest. Led by Muñoz Marín, the son of Muñoz Rivera, the Prime Minister of the 1897 autonomous government, the PPD entered the 1940 campaign with force. Muñoz and his colleagues campaigned on the slogan "*Pan, Tierra, y Libertad*" (Bread, Land, and Liberty). Muñoz wore a *pava*, the broad, straw hat that was popular with *jíbaro* workers; he roamed the countryside, spoke the rural dialect, and shared coffee and *canita* (brandy) with the poorest country folk. Muñoz promised the people a program of land reform.



“Lend me your vote, and take it back in the next election if I haven’t deserved it.” he boasted. A great many Puerto Ricans weren’t persuaded by his rhetoric or the *pava*. Only 38% of the eligible voters cast ballots in 1940. However, the PPD collected enough votes to defeat the pro-statehood Republican Party; Muñoz Marin became the President of the island Senate.

In 1940 Puerto Rico was a rural society in crisis. The island was still trapped in the Depression. Sugar cane workers earned 15¢ an hour — when work was available. Tens of thousands of Puerto Ricans were unemployed, children were hungry, housing conditions were miserable. The U.S. stock market crash of 1929 and the economic crisis of the 1930s led to a decline in agriculture on the island. Plantations shut down; families migrated from the countryside to the cities, and from the island to the U.S. in search of work.

Confronted with these disastrous economic conditions, Puerto Rican workers became more militant. Many of them joined the *Confederacion General de Trabajadores* (CGT), the General Confederation of Workers. Founded in 1940, the CGT was a progressive, fighting union that represented 30,000 workers. CGT members advocated independence for Puerto Rico and battled the U.S. corporations. When the sugar interests tried to freeze wages at \$1.51 a day the CGT led a strike that paralyzed sugar production and forced the companies to raise wages.

The U.S. government watched these developments with alarm; Albizu was in prison, the Nationalists had been brutally repressed, but the conditions on the island were ripe for rebellion. In this light, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed Rexford Guy Tugwell, one of his closest friends and most trusted advisors, Governor of the island. Blanton D. Winship, his predecessor, was a reactionary Southerner who viewed Puerto Rico as one big plantation; in his eyes the Nationalists were “uppity” slaves who had to be kept in line with armed force. Governor Tugwell was an

Eastern intellectual with a different style. He too was a colonialist, but he was a liberal democrat who wanted to prevent rebellion without the use of arms, and develop modern industry on the island. Tugwell entered into a working alliance with Munoz Marin and the PPD. Muñoz believed that he could use Tugwell to bring capital to the island that was essential for industrial growth. Tugwell felt that he could use Munoz and the PPD to defeat the independence forces, and to strengthen U.S. economic and political power on the island.

“Strategic Pontoon”

The plans to industrialize the island and streamline its stodgy political apparatus were pushed forward by the Second World War. The U.S. government spent billions of dollars to construct and maintain an immense naval station as well as an air force base on the island. During World War II Puerto Rico was one of the major U.S. military centers in the Western Hemisphere. President Roosevelt and the Department of War regarded the island as a “strategic pontoon” or “bridge” in a global military system. The Roosevelt Roads Naval Station and the Ramey Air Force Base protected the U.S.-controlled Panama Canal, and U.S. investments in Central and South America.

The U.S. war machine provided some jobs, but the bulk of the Puerto Rican people suffered economic hardship. There was starvation in the countryside. German submarines patrolled the Caribbean and blockaded the island. U.S. ships were torpedoed. Food could not be imported and sugar could not be exported. The economy stagnated and anti-U.S. feelings rose sharply among the population. 60,000 Puerto Ricans refused to register under the Selective Service Law. Many Puerto Ricans rejected the image of the U.S. as a champion of freedom and the foe of tyranny. From his prison cell in the U.S., Albizu noted that the victory of the U.S. would not mean a victory for Puerto Rican independence and self-determination.

During the war the U.S. government launched a propaganda campaign on the island intended to maintain a loyal population. In 1943 President Roosevelt issued a classical statement of double talk:

It has long been the policy of the Government of the U.S. progressively to reinforce the machinery of self-government in its territories and island possessions. The principles for which we are now fighting require that we should recognize the right of all our citizens — whether continental or overseas — to the greatest possible degree of home rule and also of participation in the benefits and responsibilities of our federal system.

Many Puerto Ricans felt that “the principles for which we are now fighting” meant that the U.S. should and would grant Puerto Rico its independence. They travelled to Washington D.C. to speak with government officials and discovered the true nature of U.S. policy. In 1943 Abe Fortas, U.S. Undersecretary of the Interior, spoke for President Roosevelt when he told a delegation of visiting Puerto Rican politicians:

The U.S. government will continue to be supreme in Puerto Rico, and that is that. There just is not any question about it. We might just as well quit if we are not going to proceed on that basis, and you might as well all have that very clearly in mind that the U.S. under this scheme, will continue to be supreme in Puerto Rico.

Throughout the war the U.S. government blocked all attempts at Puerto Rican independence. The island was too valuable a military possession to surrender.

During the war the colonial apparatus grew at a tremendous rate. Governor Tugwell recruited a core of young men from the ranks of the PPD and brought them into his government. These men, or "boys" as he liked to call them — Teodoro Moscoso, Jaime Benítez, Rafael Pico, and Roberto Sanchez — came under the Governor's wing, and became the leading Puerto Rican administrators. With the aid of these men, the U.S. began to transform the island from an agricultural to an industrial colony.



Financiers from Drexel and Company and the Chase National Bank confer with leaders of the Popular Democratic Party of Puerto Rico in front of the unfinished Caribe Hilton Hotel in 1950.

The U.S. government drew up a "Master Plan" for Puerto Rico. This plan called for the development of finance and industry, the growth of commerce, communications, and transportation, the centralization of resources, the control of wages and prices, the construction of houses, offices, factories, and the creation of an educational system that would train administrators and technicians necessary to guide this profound transformation. In 1942, under the guise of a "wartime emergency measure," the Puerto Rican Industrial Development Company was formed. With federal funds, the U.S. government built a few small factories that produced glass, paper, cement, and shoes. At the end of the war they were sold to private enterprise. By 1945 there was still very little industry on the island, but the outlines of a political and economic system had been clearly defined. The stage was set.

Bootstraps and Multinationals

With the end of World War II the U.S. emerged as the most powerful nation in the world. The fascist countries — Germany, Japan, and Italy — were defeated, their economies devastated. The Western European capitalist nations — England, France, Holland, and Belgium — survived, but they were crippled economically and politically by the war and were forced to make concessions to many of their colonies in Asia and Africa.

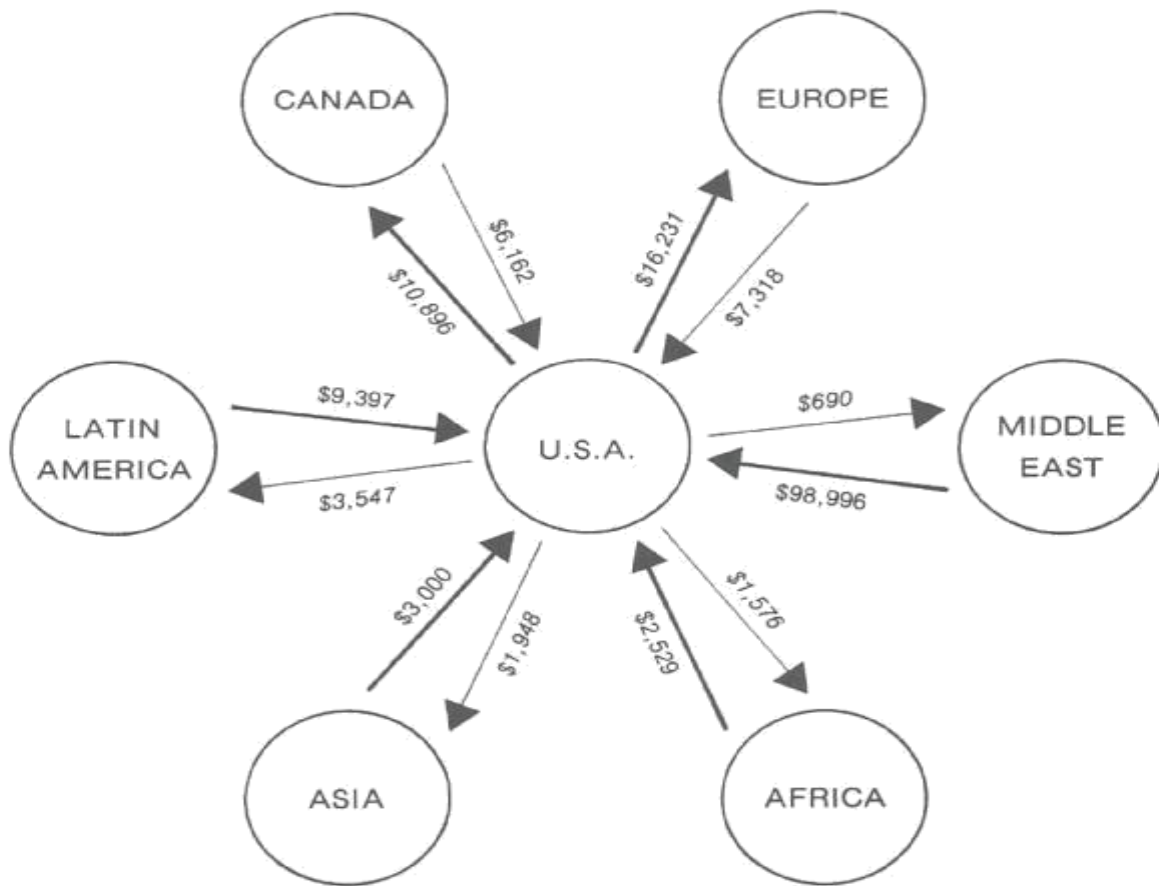
The Soviet Union, a socialist nation since the 1917 Revolution, delivered the most telling blows to defeat German fascism — most notably at the 1943 battle of Stalingrad. But the Russians were weakened by the war; 20 million citizens were killed, farms were a wasteland, and industry was disorganized. However, after 1945, the Soviet Union was not the only socialist nation in the world. The countries of Eastern Europe — from Poland and Czechoslovakia to Albania — joined the socialist camp. Furthermore, the Chinese, the Korean and Vietnamese peoples defeated Japanese militarism and imperialism and embarked on the road to socialism.

In 1945 the U.S. had only six per cent of the world's population, but controlled over 50% of the world's wealth, and enjoyed 45% of the world's annual income. However, the U.S. imperial system faced the growing power of socialism and national liberation. The socialist camp deprived U.S. corporations of valuable markets and sources of raw materials. Revolution in the Third World — the underdeveloped countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America — threatened to remove a crucial area of profit and investment from the multinational corporations. There was also the possibility of another Depression at home. The industrial and military machine created during the war needed to expand and harvest new profits, or the U.S. economy would be plunged into a new crisis.

U.S. imperialism developed a world-wide strategy, on the economic, military, political, and diplomatic fronts, to respond to these conditions. First, the Pentagon built military bases all around the world. Second, the U.S. State Department created a series of pacts (The Rio Pact of 1947), and organizations (the Organization of American States, OAS) that gave the appearance of democracy, but allowed the U.S. military to interfere in the internal affairs of other nations when U.S. investments were threatened. Third, U.S. propagandists launched an ideological attack on socialism, communism, and revolution, and presented the U.S. government and U.S. capitalism as a model for political democracy and economic progress. Fourth, and most importantly, the multinational corporations invested in Western Europe and the Third World. The multinational corporations rebuilt the ex-fascist powers so that they would serve as a bulwark against socialism. They invested in France and England and put monopoly capitalism back on its feet in Western Europe; they penetrated and exploited the colonial world.

Puerto Rico had a crucial role to play in U.S. strategy. The island was chosen as a "showcase" for the U.S. Puerto Rico was to be industrialized; it was offered as the alternative to socialist revolution and economic development along socialist lines. U.S. businesses began to invest in the island. Industry developed slowly at first and then with intensity. A market for U.S. goods was nurtured.

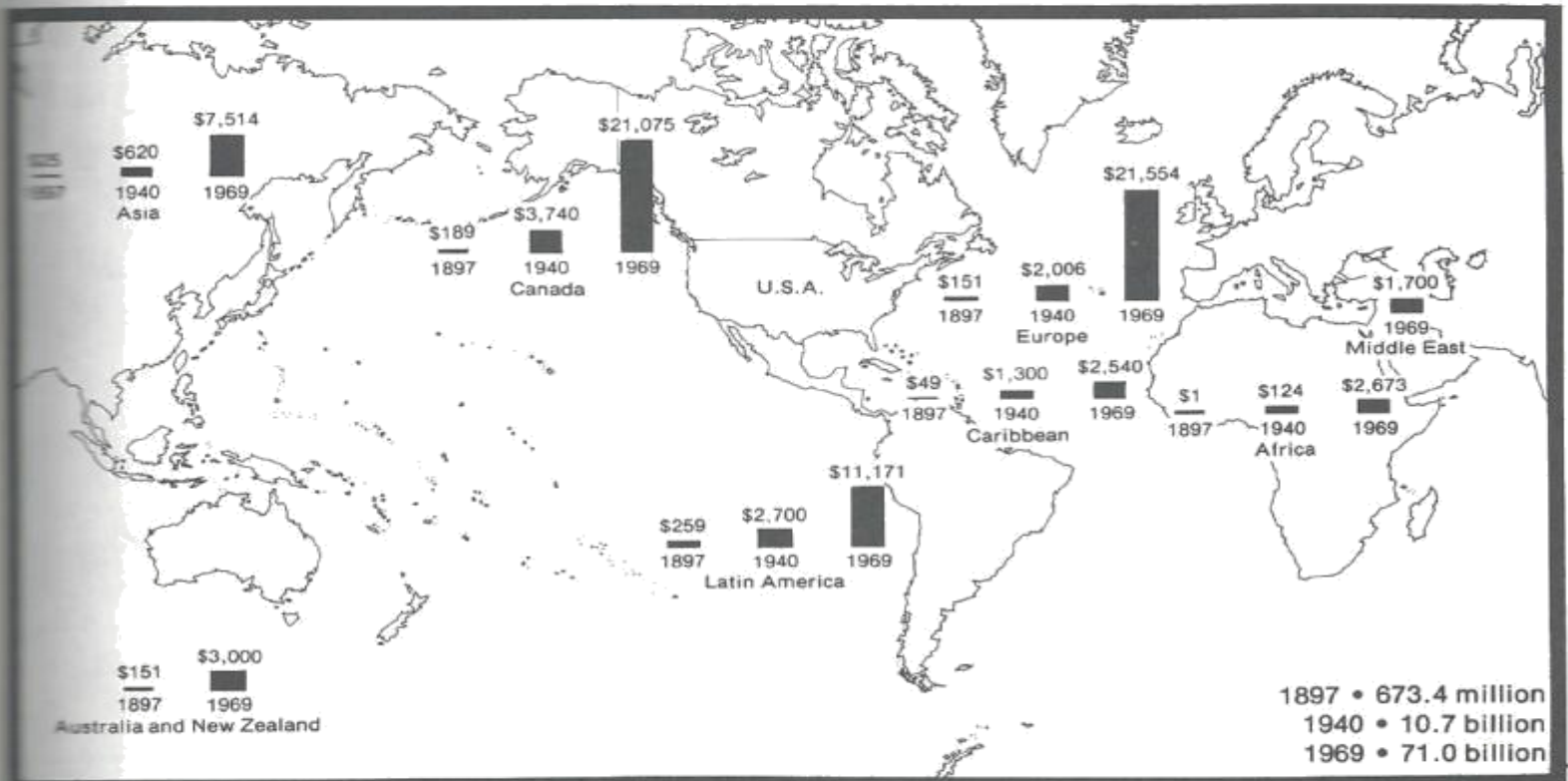
The industrialization of the island took place over several decades; in 1947 there were only 13 factories of U.S. origin on the island; they provided only 2,000 jobs.



U.S. CORPORATE INVESTMENTS AND PROFITS 1959-1969
(in millions of dollars)

Half of all profits to U.S. corporations come from Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Source: *America's Empire*, Claude Julien



VALUE OF CORPORATE U.S. INVESTMENTS ABROAD
(in millions of dollars)

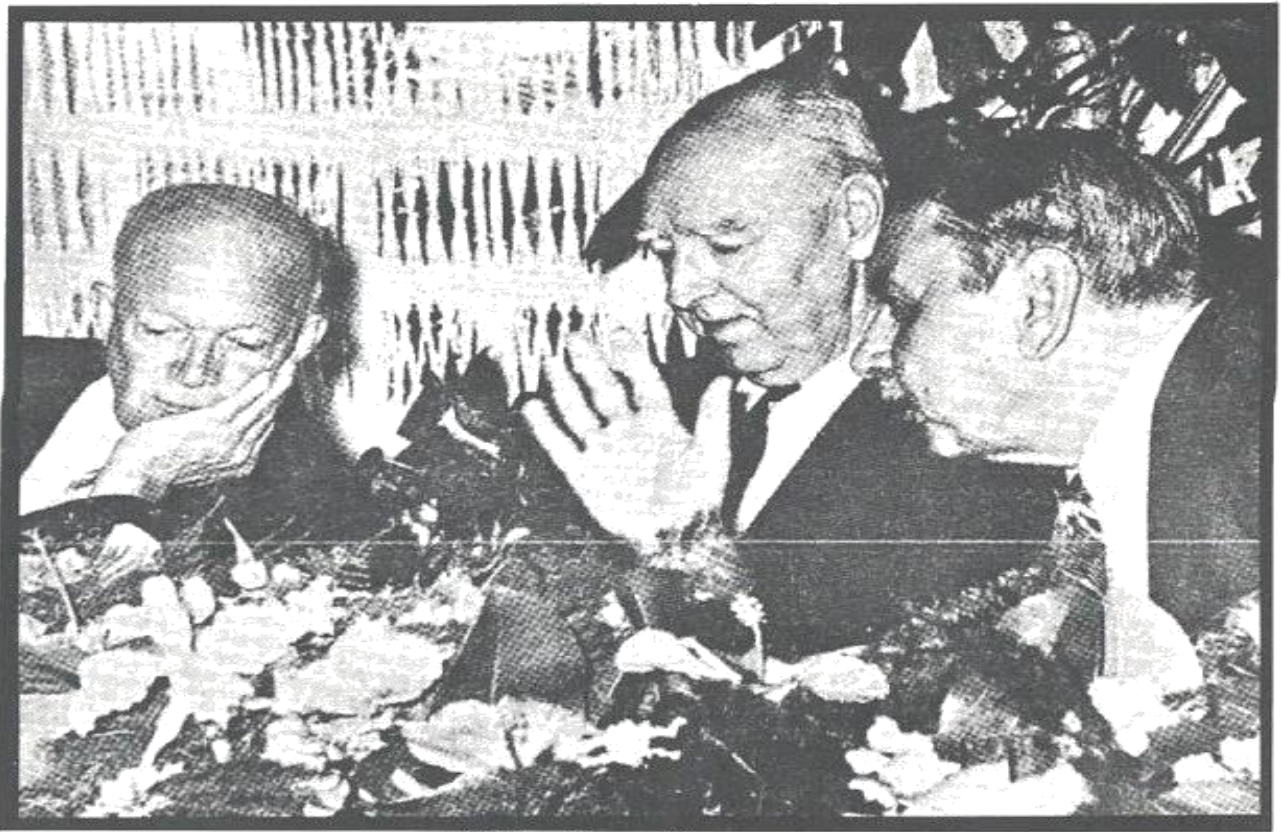
1897 • 673.4 million
1940 • 10.7 billion
1969 • 71.0 billion

Three years later, in 1950 there were 82 U.S. factories. Ten years later 717, and two decades later, in 1970, there were 2,000 U.S. owned factories. No colonial country in history was industrialized so quickly and completely as Puerto Rico.

The initial phase of this industrialization plan was called "Operation Bootstrap." It went into effect in 1947 and was sold to the Puerto Rican people on the grounds that it would help them to help themselves. North American politicians and financiers, aided by Muñoz Marín, Teodoro Moscoso and the PPD, told the Puerto Rican people that "Operation Bootstrap" would enable them to pull themselves out of poverty "by their own bootstraps." "Operation Bootstrap," it was said, would bring industry, industry would bring jobs, jobs would bring money. The Puerto Rican people, so the sales pitch ran, would generally become more independent of the U.S.

"Operation Bootstrap" sounded promising to many Puerto Ricans. In 1947 over 120,000 Puerto Ricans were unemployed. Income per inhabitant averaged \$159 a year. The cost of food was 27% higher than in the U.S. With unemployment and hunger rampant, 250,000 Puerto Ricans migrated to the U.S. in search of work from 1942 to 1952.





Luis Muñoz Marín (right) confers with Pres. Dwight D. Eisenhower (left).

Muñoz Makes a Deal

Before U.S. companies invested heavily in Puerto Rico they received guarantees from the U.S. government that their investments would be safe. U.S. companies were promised not only in word, but through deed as well, that there would be no independence movement, that factories would not be nationalized, that the trade union movement would not be militant, that the colonial government would cooperate to maximize profits.

After World War II, the U.S. government again blocked the Puerto Rican independence movement. In 1945 the Puerto Rican legislature asked the U.S. Congress that "the colonial system of government be ended," that "free and democratic elections" be held and that the status of Puerto Rico be resolved "by the free will of the people of Puerto Rico themselves." A bill for independence was submitted to the House of Representatives, but U.S. Congressmen, persuaded by the Department of War and the White House, killed the bill in committee meetings.

In 1945 Puerto Rican delegates took the case of Puerto Rican independence to the founding conference of the United Nations in San Francisco. On paper the United Nations Organization was pledged to support independence for all nations. The UN charter outlawed colonies; it required that the U.S. as well as all other imperial powers inform the UN Secretary General about economic, social and educational conditions in its possessions. But the U.S. did not abide by these guidelines. In 1945, at the San Francisco meeting, U.S. representatives condemned colonialism; at the same time they carefully maneuvered the issue of Puerto Rican colonialism off the UN agenda.

In the mid and late 1940s the Puerto Rican people again called for self-determination. However, the island was too important militarily, and potentially too great a source of profit, to grant independence. The U.S. chose another alternative intended to give the impression of independence. U.S. imperialism borrowed this strategy from the British Empire, and added new variations of its own. In the 1920s and 1930s British imperialists argued that by loosening the reigns of Empire they would be able to hold on to their possessions and continue to exploit their colonial territories. They created the "British Commonwealth" — a body that was supposed to bring "autonomous communities within the British Empire." The Commonwealth was to be "freely associated." At first it included only nations with a majority of white people — Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. But when the Indian independence movement, under the leadership of Gandhi and Nehru, threatened to create an independent nation, the British modified their plan and included nations with a majority of Black and Brown peoples. The U.S. borrowed this strategy directly from Great Britain. Slowly, step by step, the U.S. defined Puerto Rico as a "Commonwealth," or "Associated Free State." Along the way Puerto Rican resistance was crushed.

In 1946 President Harry S. Truman named Jesus T. Pinero Governor of the island. Now, for the first time there was a Puerto Rican, rather than a North American in La Fortaleza, the Governor's colonial mansion. But repression against the independence movement was to intensify. In 1947 President Truman signed the Crawford-Butler Act, permitting Puerto Ricans to elect their own governor. In 1948, 50 years after the U.S. invasion of 1898, Muñoz Marín became the first elected governor of the island. Now, at last, Puerto Rico had the appearance of independence. But by this time, Muñoz Marín and the PPD had dropped independence from the party platform. A note of anti-communism and religious faith entered Muñoz's speeches. He labelled nationalism as a "youthful error." In the 1920s and 1930s he had attacked U.S. corporations and trusts. In the late 1940s and early 1950s he praised the "good economic treatment" that the Puerto Rican people received from the U.S. He claimed that independence would lead to poverty, that only by affiliation with the U.S. would Puerto Rico "preserve the good economic conditions that are necessary for our survival as a people."



Juan Mari Bras, a young leader of the independence movement in the initial phase of "Operation Bootstrap" and the "Commonwealth," observed:

In 1945 or 1946 Muñoz made a deal with Washington. He traded his belief in independence for the promise of economic aid, capital investment and the industrialization of the island, not for our people, but for foreign corporations in the U.S. He betrayed the independence movement. He sold Puerto Rico to the highest bidders.

Indeed, throughout the late 1940s, Muñoz and the PPD created the conditions necessary for the arrival of North American industry. PPD agents infiltrated the General Confederation of Labor (CGT), wrested power from the militant leaders, and purged the *independentistas* from the union ranks. In 1947 Muñoz and the PPD helped to create a federation of labor that would be loyal to U.S. industry—the General Workers Front. In 1947 provisions of the U.S. Taft-Hartley Act, the most anti-union legislation in contemporary U.S. history, were applied to Puerto Rico. Secondary boycotts and the closed shop were outlawed. Muñoz promised U.S. corporations that the Federal Minimum Wage Law would not be applied to Puerto Rico. He looked to North American AFL-CIO unions as a force that would defuse Puerto Rican labor. In the 1950s and 1960s AFL-CIO unions invaded the island and worked closely with U.S. industry. At the negotiating table Puerto Rican workers were noticeable for their absence. They were signed, sealed, delivered to the corporations. Puerto Rican labor received low wages, the companies made vast profits, and the union leadership took a big slice of union dues.

With the labor movement under tight control everything was ready for U.S. industry to launch a full scale assault on the island. Only the Nationalist Party and Albizu Campos blocked the way.



7

**PRISONERS
IN A BATTLE
OF LIBERATION**

Albizu Returns

In December 1947, after ten years behind bars in Atlanta, Georgia, Albizu Campos returned to Puerto Rico, dedicated as strongly as ever to the cause of independence.

Immediately, Albizu mobilized the Nationalist Party to combat the new U.S. economic and political penetration. He denounced the illegitimacy of colonial rule and called upon the Puerto Rican people to reject U.S. laws, to boycott elections, and to take up arms against imperialism. Albizu declared:

Independence is not achieved with applause, it is won with actions. World justice is on our side, seeing in the slavery of the people a wound so deep that it affects the entire world. But already there are Puerto Ricans who will no longer permit it, and neither fleets nor the guns of the imperialists are strong enough to hold back the people in their determination to be free.

In the spring of 1948 students at the University of Puerto Rico invited Albizu to present the Nationalist political perspective and program. To greet him they raised the outlawed Puerto Rican flag. Jaime Benítez, the Rector of the University, and a close friend of Governor Munoz Marin, expelled the student leaders and banned Albizu from speaking on the campus.

Benítez's refusal to allow Albizu to speak on campus provoked a five month student strike; the normal academic life of the University was disrupted. The police invaded and occupied the campus; hundreds of students and teachers were arrested, jailed, and beaten. Hundreds more were suspended or expelled. The University was forced to close for the remainder of the spring semester. When it reopened in the fall students continued to demonstrate. On September 23rd they celebrated the 80th anniversary of *El Grito de Lares* and the establishment of the First Republic of



*"A people filled with
courage and dignity
cannot be
suppressed by
imperialism."*

-Albizu Campos



Puerto Rico. They lowered the U.S. flags that flew over the campus. Benítez regarded this as an act of sabotage. Violent confrontations flared and officials again used force to regain control of the University. The student rebellion was contained, but not before it revealed profound opposition to Muñoz Marín, and strong support for Albizu and the Nationalist Party.

In response to the University strike of 1948, the Puerto Rican Legislature, with strong pressure from the U.S. Congress, drafted and approved Law 53 — "the law of the Muzzle." This law adapted the Smith Act to Puerto Rico. Like the Smith Act, Law 53 made it a crime punishable by ten years in prison to "promote, advocate, advise, or preach voluntarily and knowingly the necessity, desirability, or suitability of overthrowing, paralyzing, or subverting the insular government or any of its political divisions by means of force and violence." Furthermore, the "Law of the Muzzle" made it a crime to print, publish, circulate, sell, or distribute publicly any literature that advocated the overthrow of the government by force and violence. It also outlawed all organizations and groups that advocated the violent overthrow of the Puerto Rican government.

Throughout 1948 and 1949 Albizu was followed wherever he went; everyone he visited was investigated and harassed by detectives and FBI agents. In turn, Albizu escalated his political activity. On September 23, 1949, the 81st anniversary of the 1868 rebellion, the Nationalists held a meeting in Lares. Albizu told the assembled crowd:

The struggle that began 81 years ago against Spain and for the independence of Puerto Rico continues today. The Nationalist Party is going to blast the U.S. and expel the North Americans from Puerto Rico. The Yankees have killed many Puerto Ricans. They want to destroy us by vicious maneuvers and, in all justice, we have the right to destroy them.

There have been greater Empires than the U.S., even more powerful, and today they are dust. The day comes when justice arms the weak and puts the giants to flight. Then another hymn will be sung. It is we who will sing that hymn, but it will be preceded by an armed struggle, with whatever is necessary to achieve the independence of Puerto Rico.

Five months later, on February 23, 1950 Albizu told a large rally of Nationalists and *independentistas* in Utuado:

The Yankees have no right to govern the people of Puerto Rico . . . Only courage and dignity are required; we do not need either money or arms. There are weapons at Police Headquarters. All those weapons belong to you, because they have been purchased with money collected by the insular government . . . All those arms are ours. And a people filled with courage and dignity cannot be suppressed by imperialism.

All of Albizu's speeches attacked the racist notion that Puerto Ricans were a docile people; he instilled a sense of national pride and dignity. He recovered a lost heritage and made it a living, growing movement.

In April 1950 President Harry S. Truman sent Louis Johnson, the U.S. Secretary of Defense, to Puerto Rico. Johnson met with Governor Muñoz Marín and insisted that the Nationalists were too serious a threat to the U.S. to ignore, that it was necessary to arrest and imprison them, or if that was impossible to have them killed. This meeting was secret, of course, but the intelligence network of the Nationalist Party learned of the discussions between Johnson and Muñoz. Albizu was informed of these plans, and in turn he warned Party members and the Puerto Rican people of the impending wave of repression.

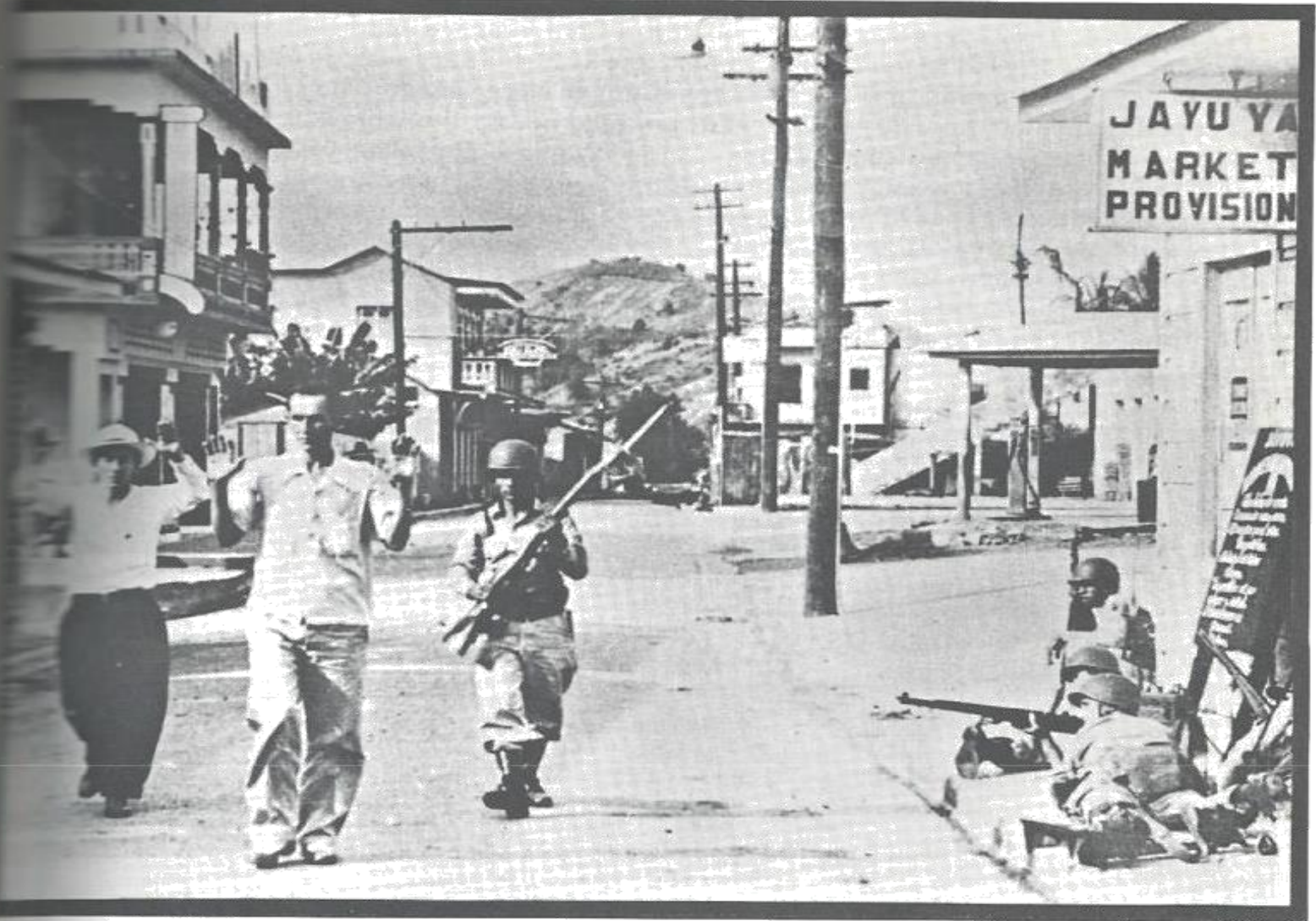
At the same time the Party prepared for an armed uprising against the U.S. and against Muñoz Marín's colonial regime. The Nationalists held militant demonstrations and rallies; they took the offensive. The Johnson-Muñoz plan was stalled briefly by the Nationalist tactics, but late in October police raided Nationalist homes and offices. Albizu's parents were attacked in their own home; when word reached Party Headquarters, four Nationalists rushed to their defense. Nineteen policemen, who had surrounded the house, opened fire and three of the four Nationalists were killed.

The U.S. Air Force Bombs Jayuya

Albizu and the Party evaluated the crisis and decided that the time was ripe to begin an uprising. Their plan was to draw the police into remote areas, disperse the government's military forces, and at the same time to liberate a mountainous region in the countryside that extended from Utuado to Jayuya. There the Nationalists would proclaim Puerto Rican independence, found a Republic, and demand recognition



Blanca Canales



from the United Nations. However, the FBI and the Puerto Rican police learned of these plans and began to arrest Nationalists. The timetable for the rebellion had to be speeded up. The Party decided to attack Jayuya at once. Blanca Canales, a native of Jayuya, and Carlos Irizarry led an armed band up the mountain roads. The Nationalists surrounded the town. On October 30, 1950, Blanca Canales gave the signal to attack; the Nationalists stormed and secured the Jayuya police station. Then they advanced to the plaza, raised the Nationalist flag over the post office, and proclaimed Jayuya the first free territory of the Second Republic of Puerto Rico. The Nationalist revolt spread across the island to Utuado, Arecibo, and Naranjito; in Ponce, Mayaguez, Aibonito, Cayey, and Penuelas there were popular uprisings.

In San Juan five Nationalists armed with machine guns stormed La Fortaleza, the Governor's mansion. The plan was to hold Munoz Marin hostage and to set fire to the building — the symbol of colonialism on the island. However, the Nationalists were unable to enter La Fortaleza. Gunfire lasted an hour; five Nationalists were killed. Two policemen were injured.

All across the island the insurrection raged — for six days, from October 30 to November 4. The U.S. government called it a Civil War — a feud between warring factions of the Puerto Rican family. In fact, the U.S. military was directly involved; the Puerto Rican nation and the U.S. government were at war. The U.S. Air Force dropped bombs on Jayuya. U.S. tanks thundered across the valleys, up the mountains, and patrolled the streets of Ponce and Mayaguez. Battalions of U.S.-financed and U.S.-trained National Guardsmen, armed with U.S. machine guns, attacked towns and villages. The Nationalists were poorly equipped and greatly outnumbered; they were shot, arrested, imprisoned. Carlos Irizarry was killed at Jayuya; Blanca Canales was arrested, tried, found guilty and sentenced to life in prison.

The police surrounded Albizu Campos's home and demanded that he surrender. For three days he held out. Then, on November 2nd the police attacked with tear gas. Albizu was arrested and taken to police headquarters.



Nationalist women and men held prisoner during the Jayuya uprising.

One-Way Tickets to Washington, D.C.

Two Nationalists in New York City acted in conjunction with the Nationalists on the island. Griselio Torresola and Oscar Collazo bought one-way railroad tickets to Washington, D.C. Their aim was to alert the people of the U.S. to the brutal repression against the people of Puerto Rico. Torresola and Collazo went to Blair House, President Truman's temporary residence. They opened fire. Torresola shot a security guard, but before the guard died he shot Torresola in the back and killed him. Collazo fired two shots and then his gun jammed. He was shot in the chest, captured and taken to a hospital. President Truman was upstairs on the second floor.

Washington D.C. politicians and newspapermen denounced Collazo as a "lunatic assassin." The truth was quite different. Collazo had a long history of political involvement. At 13 he was committed to the independence movement; in the early 1930s, inspired by Albizu Campos's ideas and his example of courage, Collazo joined the Nationalist Party. In the 1940s he migrated to North America and became President of the Nationalist Party in New York. Collazo explained that:

The 1950 action in Washington was a direct consequence of events taking place in Puerto Rico. The Nationalist Party was forced to fight for its life because the U.S. government was intent on its destruction. We in New York were constantly reading the newspapers to find out what was happening in our country. In all the articles we read, the U.S. involvement was never reported. Instead they tried to portray the revolution as a Civil War, a war between Puerto Ricans, and not a fight against U.S. colonialism. That made us decide that we had to bring about an action in the U.S. that would expose the direct U.S. involvement in the repression of 1950. We were also concerned about the massacre which was taking place in Puerto Rico and we thought the only way we could stop this slaughter was to expose the U.S.

Juan Antonio Corretjer, the Puerto Rican poet and patriot, wrote of Collazo and his dead comrade Torresola:

They who sacrifice themselves, they who turn their backs on the conveniences of life . . . to go on a mission, surely not to return — as Griselio Torresola and Oscar Collazo did — they have not lost contact with reality, they have made contact with the weapons of the enemy, they have realized that the sacrifice of their lives is the love of the nation.

Repression in Puerto Rico after the 1950 insurrection was brutal. People were massacred in the streets of Utuado. Thousands were jailed. The British scholar Gordon K. Lewis noted that "the list of abuses committed by the law enforcement agencies . . . can only be properly compared to the conduct of the police in the Union of South Africa."

The brutality of the police and the U.S. military was evident not only in Puerto Rico, but around the world and inside the U.S. too. U.S. corporations were threatened around the globe; national liberation movements were growing, socialism was becoming stronger. The U.S. multinational corporations had to fight to hold on to their investments, their sources of raw materials and labor.

In Asia, the Pentagon used chemical and biological warfare against the Korean people, while General Douglas MacArthur threatened to drop nuclear weapons on the Chinese people. At home the nightmare of repression was at its height. Racist attacks on Black people escalated. Not since the 1920s trial and execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two Italian-born anarchists, was there such a frenzy of anti-communism and law-and-order patriotism. In 1953 Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, two radical New York Jews, were framed as spies and murdered in the electric chair at Sing Sing prison.

A Model for the Whole World

With the 1950 revolution crushed, and Albizu back in jail, the U.S. government moved ahead rapidly to implement the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. In 1951 the U.S. Congress passed Public Law 600, authorizing Puerto Rican delegates to meet and draw up a constitution for the Commonwealth or "Associated Free State." Muñoz Marin campaigned hard for the Commonwealth. "If the colonial system were abolished in Puerto Rico," he said, "it would be a long step toward reaffirming the leadership of the U.S. . . . especially in Latin America." The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, he claimed, would be "a model of trusteeship for the whole world."

In 1952 the Puerto Rican people approved the constitution by a vote of 375,000 to 83,000. The Commonwealth was officially born. But Puerto Rico was still a U.S. colony. In case his colleagues in Congress were confused by the new terms and images, Representative Joseph Mahoney of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs explained:

The U.S. Constitution gives the U.S. Congress complete control, and nothing in the Puerto Rican Constitution could affect or amend or alter that right.

Adolph A. Berle, Jr., the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs noted that "Puerto Rico has independence in everything except economics, defense, and foreign relations."

In 1952 independence was not on the ballot. Voters could only choose between traditional colonial status, and the new disguised colonial status under the Commonwealth. Half the eligible voters stayed away from the polls because they refused to participate in any election run by the U.S. And some Puerto Ricans voted for the Commonwealth because they believed that it would bring an improvement in their lives.

The 1952 referendum was used by U.S. politicians and Commonwealth spokesmen to argue that the Puerto Rican people did not want independence. From his prison cell Albizu refuted this thinking:

There has not been one case in history where a referendum was used to determine the political status of an already constituted nation like ours. To consult the people on whether or not they want to be free is an insult since independence is the very life blood of nationhood. It is an attack on the nation's very existence.

After the 1952 referendum the U.S. representative to the United Nations demanded that Puerto Rico be removed from the UN's list of colonies and be declared a self-governing territory. By a narrow 22 to 18 vote, the UN General Assembly acceded to

of the attack on
President Truman~

Life Magazine said:

“the acts of
violence made
no sense....”

Oscar Collazo said:

“We had to bring
about an action
in the U.S. that
would expose
the direct U.S.
involvement in
the repression
of 1950.”



the U.S. Puerto Rico was removed from the list of colonial possessions. The U.S. used this vote to show that it was a defender of the Free World, a friend to the poor, colonial nations of the world. And Puerto Rico was presented as a "showcase" of democracy and economic progress.

Referendums, UN votes, and new names notwithstanding, Puerto Rico was still a U.S. colony. This colonial status was defined in testimony before the U.S.-Puerto Rico Commission on the status of Puerto Rico:

By virtue of that unlimited power the Congress [of the U.S.] recruits our young men and sends them off to war; it determines who can enter and leave our country through the laws of immigration and emigration; it maintains here a Federal Court which tries and judges Puerto Ricans under Federal laws; it controls radio and television, and without its consent a broadcasting tower cannot be built in our country nor can any message be sent or received through these means of communication. It censors books and works of art through its agents in the federal customs; it controls our commerce and our economy through monopoly . . . it maintains an absolute and incredible control over maritime and air fleets between the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

It intervenes with exclusive rights in the laws respecting bankruptcy, naturalization and citizenship. It maintains an unlimited power of expropriation over our lands and property . . . our territory and our wealth are at the mercy of and continue to be the possession and belonging of the U.S.

It controls the delegation of power in air and maritime matters. It directs foreign relations with exclusive rights. It forbids us to set our own tariffs . . . leading us to the paradoxical situation that a poor country buys at the prices of the richest country in the world. . . . It does not permit us to take part in commercial treaties which the U.S. negotiates with other countries . . . it controls the mails and currency and establishes the fundamental decisions on the norms which prevail in the banking business. It covers Puerto Rican land, sea, and air with its army, navy, and air force, without even asking for our opinion or our consent to cover up the appearance of a system which pretends to be democratic.

It can be sustained, in short, that almost everything that directly or indirectly affects the life of Puerto Rico is in the hands of the U.S. Congress.

An Out-Cry of Victory

The Puerto Rican people resisted this new colonial status under the Commonwealth, or Associated Free State. In 1954 four Nationalists — Lolita Lebron, Andres Figueroa Cordero, Rafael Cancel Miranda, and Irvin Flores — attacked the U.S. Congress. Lolita Lebron, the leader of the group, noted that "the concept of Commonwealth, or Associated Free State is nil before God's law and international law," that "no nation on earth that is not free and sovereign, or that is invaded and conquered by a foreign power, can by itself decide to make an association with the enemy, the oppressor, the invader."

The Nationalist attack on the U.S. Congress was carefully planned and executed. March 1 — the day of their armed action — was the 37th anniversary of the Jones Act, the law that made Puerto Ricans U.S. citizens. It was timed to coincide with a meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS) that was to discuss the case of Puerto Rico.



(left to right) Rafael Cancel Miranda; Andres Figueroa Cordero; Lolita Lebron; Irvin Flores.

The four Nationalists had a long history of participation in the independence movement. Lolita Lebron was born to a poor, working class family in Lares in 1919; "My classmates were very pale, sickly looking children, mostly all barefoot and in rags, with swollen stomachs, skinny bodies, nervous and uneasy," she wrote. "The meals at the school were bad, the sanitation horrible, the latrines flooded." The school was named "Mariana Bracetti" after the leading woman revolutionary at Lares in 1868, but neither Lolita nor any of the other students were taught a word about Bracetti, or the other Lares revolutionaries. "The classroom . . . taught two principles," Lolita wrote, "to do the will of God, and to do the will of the United States." The students were encouraged to celebrate, not the anniversary of Lares, or Betances's birth, but Columbus Day, and Lincoln's and Washington's birth.

Moreover, they were required to salute the Stars and Stripes and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. Lolita Lebron recalled,

As a little girl, I went to school where the first thing I learned was, after the bell rang and the line was formed, to place my little hand on my heart to salute and pledge allegiance to the flag. I learned afterwards that the flag was the

highest symbol of the nation and that the nation was not Puerto Rico but a faraway country named the United States of America. We were not taught the meaning of the words. Our education was taught in the English language by Puerto Rican teachers who had a strange sound or accent like this of mine.

In the town and the surrounding countryside, the lessons of exploitation and oppression were blatantly obvious:

Diseases were rampant among the people. The peasants' wooden homes belonged to the landowners and were very old and broken . . . The peasants and their families worked long hours for the landowners. For this they got a few cents.

In 1936, when she was 17, Lolita's father died. He was 42 years old; he had worked his whole life, but he had no savings, no home, nothing to leave his wife and children.

In the warehouse of *La Casa*, the landowner's *hacienda*, the peasants built her father's casket. "I still hear the sounds of the hammers," Lolita wrote forty years later. "At the warehouse . . . I saw caskets close to sacks of coffee and of vegetables and fruits — the produce that the dead peasants had produced. Yet they died very young because of lack of proper food, proper human care and attention."



"I have always dreamed of a better life for my people, especially the children."
~ Lolita Lebron

Yet there were also deep human affection and loyalties in Lolita's childhood community. She explained that

Love was the motivating force of the working people . . . The great poverty I saw . . . moved me to deep thought. I always have dreamed of a better life for my people, especially the children . . . One day I heard myself saying: if I could make another world, I would make a world where the hard working people would be able to live more abundantly, just like other people.

In the 1930s, Lolita was not yet an activist, but her political education was well underway. "It was the Ponce Massacre," she wrote, "that cultivated instantly my personal duty to the homeland." But this duty to the homeland was not fulfilled on the island. In 1940, at the age of 21 — "amid a very difficult life and suffering" — Lolita was "advised to do as the other poor women . . . were doing — to sail to New York." In New York City she encountered oppression, exploitation, negation. "There came a day," she wrote, "in which after having tried for three days looking for jobs, getting left in trains, walking under snowfalls, without lunch or shelter, I had to deny that I was a Puerto Rican woman in order to have a job."

Lolita found work, along with thousands of other Puerto Rican women, in the garment industry. She had children and raised a family. After the 1950 assault on Blair House she was active on Oscar Collazo's defense committee.

The 1954 attack on the U.S. Congress was, in Lolita Lebron's words, "conceived and ordered by our supreme leader, Don Pedro Albizu Campos." Congress was chosen because (again in Lolita's words) "there U.S. laws are legislated and directed against Puerto Rican national emancipation."

Working with Lolita was Rafael Cancel Miranda, a young man born on the island, a draft resister who had spent two years in prison. Rafael joined the Nationalist Party on March 22, 1937, the day after the Ponce Massacre. Rafael tells us:

I remember my parents and their friends who went to Ponce to participate in a peaceful demonstration. I knew where my parents had gone that day. I also understood why they had gone and that there was a good possibility they might not return. They did return, but many of their friends (my friends) returned in wooden boxes.

The next day I went to school. There I was told to salute the flag of the U.S. I refused. I could not understand how the same people who were responsible for massacring my parents' friends one day could turn around the next day and ask me to pledge allegiance to a colonialist power that was responsible for the domination and murder of my people. That was the day I decided on my own to be a Nationalist.

Early in 1954 Lolita Lebron sent Rafael Cancel Miranda to Washington D.C. He says:

I went first, like they say in the books, to 'case the joint.' When I returned, I decided that I was going to join the brigade . . . I wanted to do it for my people. Anything that would help the dignity of my people, helped my dignity. Upon my return I organized Andres and Irvin.

On March 1st, 1954, the four Nationalists arrived in Washington D.C. They went directly to the Capitol building and climbed the stairs to the visitor's gallery above the House of Representatives. The House was debating a bill to allow Mexican farm workers to enter the U.S. for temporary jobs. At 2:20 p.m. — at a signal from Lolita — Rafael, Andres and Irvin began to fire their guns. Lolita unfurled the Puerto

Rican flag and proclaimed the free and sovereign Republic of Puerto Rico. She took a piece of paper from her purse and read:

I state forever that the U.S.A. is betraying the sacred principles of humanity in its continuous subjugation of my country, violating its rights to be a free nation and a free people, in their barbarous torture of our apostle of independence, Don Pedro Albizu Campos.

Five Congressmen were wounded before guards overpowered Andres Figueroa Cordero, Rafael Cancel Miranda, and Lolita Lebron. Irvin Flores escaped down the stairs, but he too was soon captured and taken to police headquarters. Interrogated by the FBI and the Secret Service, questioned by TV, radio and newspaper reporters, the four Nationalists maintained their dignity. Lolita Lebron explained that she and the others did not intend to kill anyone, that they did not regret their action, and that they would do it again if it would help to free their nation. "I assume all responsibility before God and the world," Lolita wrote. "My blood cries out for the independence of my country. This is an outcry of victory."

The House of Representatives and the Senate were adjourned. Hundreds of policemen patrolled the Capitol grounds, and new security measures went into effect. Extra secret service guards were assigned to protect Vice President Richard M. Nixon and two Cabinet members, Douglas McKay (Interior) and Ezra Taft Benson (Agriculture), both of whom cancelled their scheduled visit to Puerto Rico.

U.S. politicians and reporters called the four Nationalists "terrorists." Lolita Lebron replied that the U.S. was waging "atomic terror." The U.S. government dropped atomic bombs on Japan in 1945, and threatened to use them again against any nation that sought independence and self-determination. Lolita noted that the Puerto Rican struggle would be "conducted according to the only means possible amidst the impossible circumstances in which we must fight to liberate ourselves."

At their trial, Andres Figueroa Cordero, Irvin Flores, and Rafael Cancel Miranda were charged and found guilty of five counts of assault with intent to kill, and were sentenced to maximum terms totalling 75 years. Lolita Lebron was charged and found guilty of five counts of assault with a dangerous weapon. She was sentenced to a maximum term of 50 years in prison. Of the trial she observed:

I think that the U.S. judicial system violated international law . . . We are prisoners of a battle of liberation; the enemy has no moral or political right in international law to judge us. Our case should be tried by a world court. The U.S. tried us as 'common criminals' in violation of all known national and international rights — to cover up the right and mandate of our Puerto Rican people to nationhood.

The 1954 action of the four Nationalists stands out as a clear signal; even during the most repressive years, the resistant flame of nationhood survived. But those years were difficult indeed for the forces of independence. By the mid-fifties many members of the Nationalist Party were dead or in prison, the trade union movement was under control, and the Commonwealth in operation. Puerto Rico was rapidly industrialized. The Puerto Rican people went to work for U.S. factories and corporations.

"I state forever that the U.S.A. is betraying the sacred principles of humanity in its continuing subjugation of my country, violating its rights to be a free nation and a free people."

- Lolita Lebron





8

**PROFIT ISLAND,
U.S.A.**

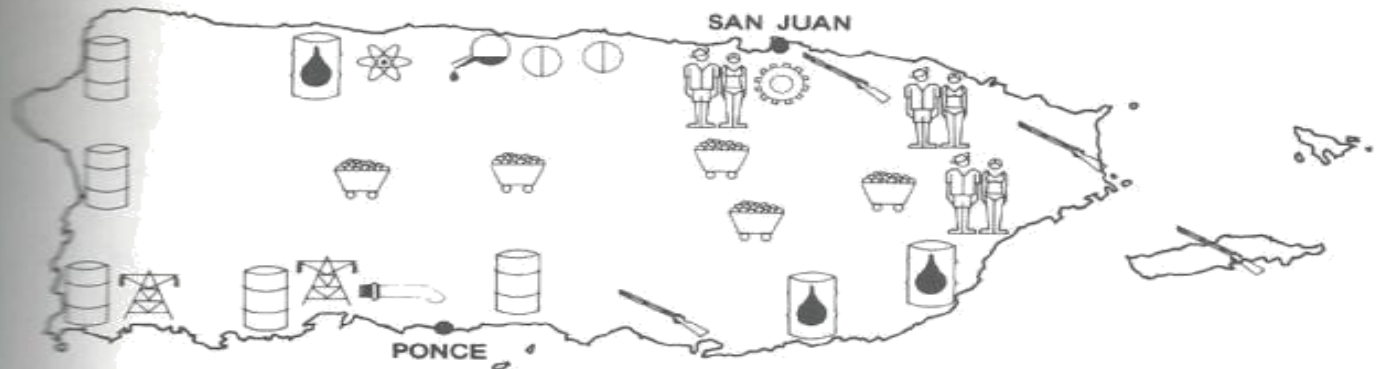
"Profit Island, U.S.A."

In 1950 the Puerto Rican Economic Development Agency changed the name of its industrialization plan from "Operation Bootstrap" to "Fomento," meaning to promote or develop. The Director of the Economic Development Agency was Teodoro Moscoso, one of the bright young men that Governor Rexford Guy Tugwell appointed to the colonial bureaucracy during World War II.












Together with U.S. government officials, Moscoso's agency developed an ambitious campaign to bring investment to the island. "Puerto Rico is the most profitable address in the U.S.A.," Moscoso told U.S. businessmen. And Governor Muñoz Marín proclaimed, "We want new and expanding industry. To get them we promise freedom from all taxes." Fomento guaranteed U.S. corporations freedom from taxes for periods ranging from 10 to 20 years, depending on the location of the plant.

Fomento built highways and roads for U.S. corporations — 3,000 miles of them — that linked offices to plants, industrial centers to seaports, and mines to factories. Fomento built warehouses, office buildings, mills and shops for U.S. companies. The agency provided technical assistance to U.S. corporations, trained employees for jobs, and created managers for the elite positions. Fomento granted loans and subsidies, rent-free space, and paid the cost of shipping machinery from the U.S. to the island. It delivered a large workforce. In every way the Puerto Rican Economic Development Agency paved the way for the development of U.S. industry and finance.





U.S. PENETRATION OF PUERTO RICO

	Chemical		Petrochemicals
	Copper Mining (In the planning stage)		Petroleum Complex
	Copper Refinery (In the planning stage)		Pharmaceutical
	Light Industry		Thermo-electric Plant
	Military		Tourism
	Nuclear Reactor		

In the 1950s hundreds of textile mills descended on the island like a swarm of locusts. Thousands of Puerto Rican women who had worked at home in the needle trades went to work in factories sewing jeans and slacks for the New York market. They were paid 25¢ an hour — one third to one half the wages paid to garment workers in the sweat shops of New York City in the early 1950s. They received few, if any, benefits and very little union protection. The rhythm of their lives was set by the timeclock, the assembly line, the sewing machine.

For ten years the textile industry boomed; North American businessmen became millionaires from the garment industry on the island. Then, in the early and mid-1960s, the factories began to move to the Dominican Republic. Wages were low in Puerto Rico, but in the Dominican Republic they were still lower, and profits for U.S. corporations were still higher.

Now, heavy industry, attracted by tax-exempt status and the absence of strictly-enforced environmental protection laws, settled in Puerto Rico. Moscoso and the Economic Development Agency carved up the island into industrial parks: the north coast was served to the pharmaceutical companies, the south coast handed to the petrochemical plants. New oil refineries were built over the old sugar cane fields; hundreds of thousands of barrels were processed a day. The oil was then shipped to the U.S. for use in North American industries and homes.

The petrochemical and pharmaceutical industries required sophisticated machinery and modern technology, but a very small work force. North Americans, rather than Puerto Ricans, filled most of the positions as technicians and engineers. Unemployment rose and Puerto Ricans were again forced to migrate to the U.S. in search of jobs.



In the 1960s the major U.S. corporations also flocked to Puerto Rico. Immense buildings of steel, cement and glass loomed over the old textile plants. Puerto Rican men and women found unskilled jobs for General Electric, the Ford Motor Company, the Radio Corporation of America, Westinghouse, Gulf Oil and Union Carbide.

In the 1960s dozens of hotels were built along the San Juan coast, including the \$20,000,000 Caribe Hilton. Puerto Rico was transformed into a major resort area for North Americans. The sun and the sand become commodities, the oceanfront a private beach. The tourist industry, owned and operated by multinational corporations like International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT) and by the Rockefeller interests, was, throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, a \$250,000,000 a year business. But here too, few Puerto Ricans were employed; only 1% of the work force found jobs in tourism, and then mostly in unskilled, low-paid positions.

By 1970 U.S. corporations had more money (14 billion dollars) invested in Puerto Rico than in any other country in Latin America. Ten percent of U.S. corporate profits around the world were taken from Puerto Rico. The rate of profit on the island was three to four times greater than the rate of profit in the U.S. Each year North American banks accumulated \$1,450,000,000 in profits from Puerto Rico. No wonder that Wall Street called Puerto Rico "Profit Island, U.S.A.."



Puerto Rico was discovered in 1959.

In 1493 Columbus discovered the beautiful island of Puerto Rico, and opened up a whole world to progress. 15 years ago Union Carbide discovered progressive Puerto Rico and the great potential it has for a company like ours. We started with an initial investment of 30 million dollars. Today that investment has grown to over 450 million dollars and it's still growing. What's behind this growth? People. Puerto Ricans have many traditions and strong family ties. Their way of living and their self-respect make them hardworking

and loyal. Their great capacity to learn and improve translates into bigger and better production for the industry and consequently into more benefits for the employee. In 1959 many Puerto Ricans started working with us, today most of them are still with Union Carbide. Over 97% of our work force is made up of people from the island. We're happy with what we have discovered about Puerto Rico. Maybe you'd like to make a discovery of your own.

**UNION
CARBIDE**

The Discovery Company



Cubans celebrate triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959

One Wing Is Free

In the 1960s the U.S. government used Puerto Rico as a "model" to show how a poor, agricultural people could move into the prosperous, industrial world when they cooperated with U.S. business. Indeed the U.S. government could point to a steady rise in the per capita income of the Puerto Rican people. In 1950 it was \$279, in 1960 it was \$577, in 1968 \$1313, and in 1970 \$2,000 — the highest in Latin America. If only the people of the Third World would work hand in hand with North American interests they would "progress" like the Puerto Rican people, Wall Street and Washington D.C. proclaimed. But the Puerto Rican people had a different story. Puerto Rico was "the most profitable address in the U.S." for U.S. corporations, but not for the Puerto Rican people. Development and progress North American style meant underdevelopment and poverty for Puerto Rico and all Latin America. Increasingly, the people of the Caribbean and Latin America sought independence from North American political and economic interests, as the only way to end underdevelopment.

In 1959 Cuba became the first Caribbean nation to break from the yoke of the U.S. Empire and to pursue the road of genuine independence. Cuba and Puerto Rico had a common history of struggle against both Spanish and U.S. colonialism that extended back to the 19th century. In 1868 Cuban and Puerto Rican patriots staged coordinated uprisings against the Spanish Empire at Lares and Yara. In the late 1890s Puerto Ricans fought side by side with the Cuban people in their war for independence. Lola Rodríguez de Tío, the 19th-century Puerto Rican poet and patriot wrote:

Cuba and Puerto Rico are two wings of the same bird
They receive flowers and bullets in one heart.

After the victory of the Cuban revolution a new line was added:

Now one wing is free, soon the other will be too.

The victorious Cuban guerrillas, led by Fidel Castro, turned to Marxist economics and to socialism as the only way to develop the Cuban economy and to end unemployment, poverty, hunger, illiteracy — the social and political ills of colonialism. The Cuban government developed an economy that benefitted the Cuban people, not U.S. corporations.

In 1898, after the Spanish-American War, Cuba became a U.S. colony. U.S. companies bought up Cuban land and monopolized Cuban agriculture. They made vast profits from Cuban sugar, tobacco, and rum. A small class of Cubans benefitted from U.S. economic domination, but the bulk of the Cuban people were poor, hungry, homeless. Their life span was one-third the life span of North Americans.

Throughout the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, Cuban patriots and workers combatted U.S. colonialism and the U.S.-backed Cuban dictators. In the 1950s the struggle for independence matured quickly. On July 26, 1953, Fidel Castro, a young lawyer from a well-off landowning family, led a band of guerrillas in an attack on the Moncada Fortress. The attack failed, many of the guerrillas were slain, and Castro was captured and put on trial. But in the courtroom, Castro put U.S. imperialism and the Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista on trial. The judge found Castro guilty, and sentenced him to 15 years in prison, but Castro succeeded in awakening a great many poor Cuban peasants and workers to the necessity for independence.

In 1956 Castro was granted amnesty. He left Cuba, sailed to Mexico, and trained in guerrilla warfare. Soon he returned to Cuba with a group of dedicated revolutionaries aboard a small ship, the *Granma*. Fidel, Che Guevara, and their armed band took to the Sierra Maestra mountains. They combatted the troops of the dictatorship. At the same time students and workers, often in underground groups, organized resistance in the cities. Finally, in 1959, the rebel army marched into Havana. Batista fled, and Cuba was at last independent.



Fidel speaks in the Plaza de la Revolución in 1964.



The new revolutionary Cuban government nationalized U.S. companies; workers and peasants took control of factories and farms, and reaped the fruits of their own labor. The government reduced rents, offered free health care and education to the people. Illiteracy was abolished. The Cuban people began the long, hard task of ending the underdevelopment that was imposed on the island by U.S. imperialism.

Cuban independence meant the loss of tremendous profits for U.S. corporations. It meant a weakening of the U.S. Empire throughout Latin America. Naturally, the U.S. government and U.S. businesses didn't accept Cuban independence and socialism, 90 miles from Miami. Immediately they planned to topple the Castro government with military force. In 1961 the CIA used Puerto Rico as a base of operations for its invasion of Cuba at Playa Giron (the Bay of Pigs). The invasion was defeated, but the CIA continued to direct military attacks against Cuba, and the U.S. government instituted an economic blockade against Cuba.

Throughout the 1960s Puerto Rico played a crucial military role in U.S. plans to prevent another "Cuba" from happening in Latin America. Atomic bombs and nuclear weapons were stored in ammunition depots on Puerto Rico, ready to be used when needed. The tropical rain forests on the island were used to train U.S. troops to combat guerrillas. In 1965 25,000 U.S. troops stationed in Puerto Rico were sent to the Dominican Republic. They toppled the democratically elected government of Juan Bosch because it was leaning away from the orbit of the U.S. Empire.

And of course, the U.S. wanted to prevent a revolution in Puerto Rico. Its military forces were used to intimidate and repress Puerto Rican *independentistas*. After the Cuban revolution Puerto Rico became a home for 30,000 Cuban exiles or *gusanos*. With the assistance of the CIA some of them formed "Alpha 66," a right-wing military group that carried out bombings and assassination, not only against the Cuban government but against the Puerto Rican independence movement too.

Showcase of Poverty

The U.S. military offensive in the Caribbean and Latin America was combined with a new political and economic strategy. Here too Puerto Rico played a crucial role. In 1961 U.S. President John F. Kennedy created the "Alliance for Progress." The Alliance was meant to prevent revolution in the Caribbean and Latin America, and to tighten U.S. control over the continent along the lines already established in Puerto Rico. At the first meeting of the Alliance for Progress, C. Douglas Dillon, a Wall Street banker and Secretary of the Treasury in the Kennedy administration, promised \$20,000,000,000 to Latin American countries that helped to isolate the Cuban revolution and embraced the capitalist way.



John F. Kennedy
and Luis Muñoz Marín

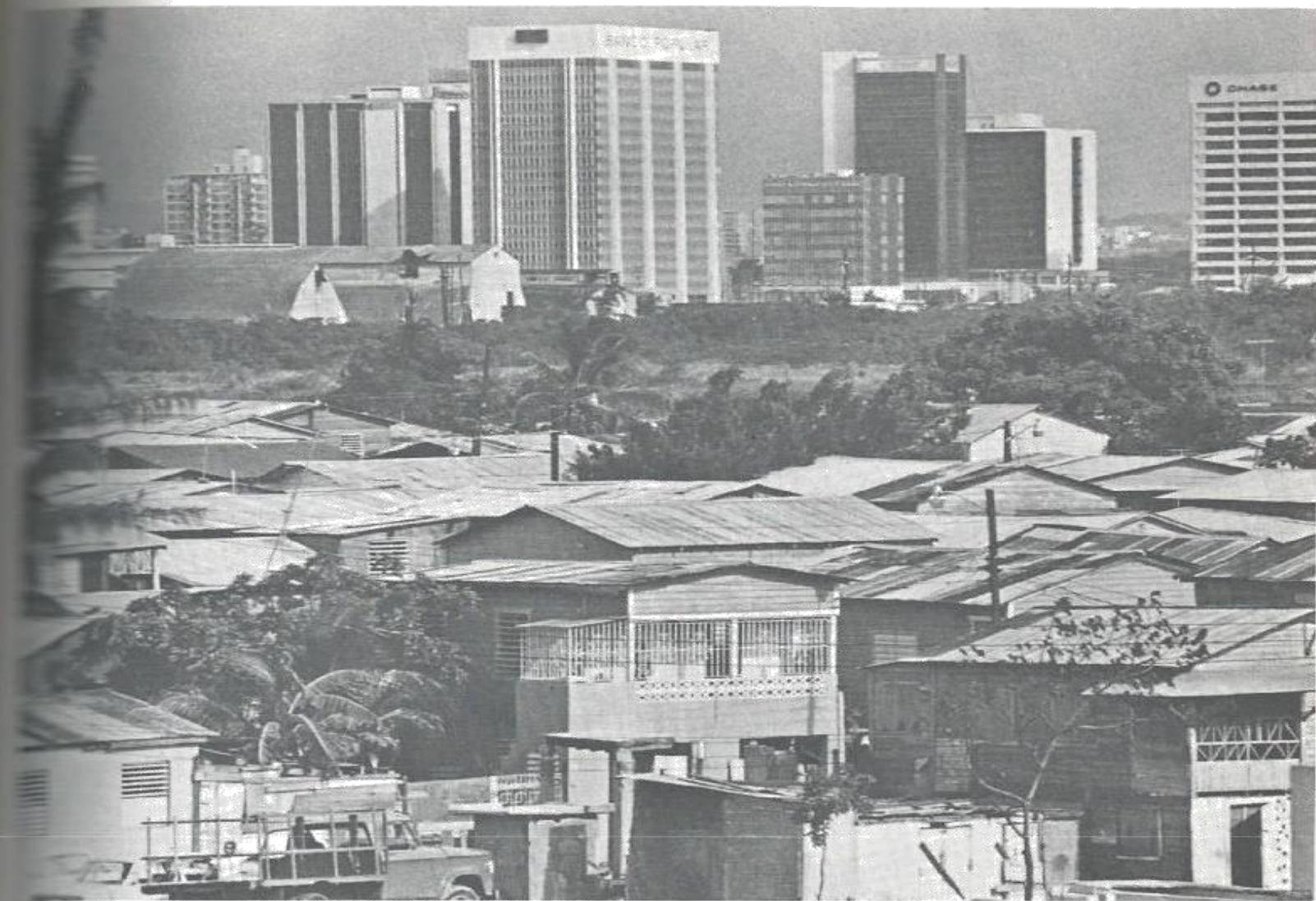
Dillon and other U.S. officials pointed to Puerto Rico as the "model" for Latin American growth and development. President Kennedy appointed many of the leading Puerto Rican statesmen to serve on the Alliance. Muñoz Marín joined with C. Douglas Dillon and the Kennedy advisors to map out an economic and political strategy for the entire continent. Teodoro Moscoso, the Director of Fomento, was appointed Director of the Alliance for Progress.

But at the first conference of the Alliance, held at Punta del Este, Uruguay, there was another choice beside "development" North American style, and the Puerto Rican "showcase." Che Guevara, the Minister of Economic Development in the new revolutionary Cuban government, told C. Douglas Dillon, Teodoro Moscoso and the other delegates that genuine progress for Latin America meant independence and socialism. He pointed out that the development of U.S. corporations meant underdevelopment for the Latin American people. Premier Fidel Castro explained the relationship between development and underdevelopment in "The Second Declaration of Havana" (1962):

The summary of this nightmare which torments America from one end to the other is that on this continent of almost two hundred million human beings, two thirds — the Indians, mestizos, and Blacks — are discriminated against. On this continent of semi-colonies, about four persons per minute die of hunger, curable illness, or premature old age; 5500 per day, two million per year, ten million each five years. These deaths could easily be avoided, but nevertheless they take place. Two thirds of the Latin American population lives briefly and lives under the constant threat of death. A holocaust of lives, which in fifteen years has cost twice the number of deaths as World War I — it still rages. Meanwhile, from Latin America, a continuous torrent of money flows to the United States; some four thousand dollars a minute, five million a day, two billion a year, ten billion every five years. For each thousand dollars which leave us, there remains a corpse, that is the price of what is called imperialism — a thousand dollars per death, four deaths every minute.



A "continuous torrent of money" flowed from Puerto Rico to the U.S. The wealth that was created on the island was taken from the island; the industry that was developed in Puerto Rico was used for the benefit of U.S. corporations. Fomento built roads for U.S. factories, not for the men and women who worked in the factories. International Telephone and Telegraph constructed hotels on the island, but not as vacation resorts for the farmers of Utuado or the fishermen of Mayaguez. The jeans and slacks that Puerto Rican women stitched in the Ponce sweatshops were not destined to be worn by Puerto Ricans. They were exported to the U.S. The oil that was refined on Puerto Rican soil was shipped to North America. Downtown San Juan was dominated by elegant, modern skyscrapers, but they mocked the poverty, the hunger, and the unemployment of the thousands of people who lived in the Martin Pena slum.



Independence leader Juan Mari Bras exposed the phony promises of "Operation Bootstrap" and "Fomento." He rejected industrialization Kennedy style, and development as outlined by the Alliance for Progress. Mari Bras observed that:

The false illusion of progress in Puerto Rico has been limited to the well-being of a small clique of bureaucrats and servants of North American capitalism. For at most it has enriched a minority of the middle class. The society of consumption . . . is the reality of a small minority. And the majority of the people have never tasted this consumption society . . . Puerto Rico is increasingly polarized between the poor and the rich.

The industrialization of the island created a class pyramid with a very few rich people at the top and a great many poor people at the bottom. At the top of the pyramid were the North American executives of the multi-national corporations. Then came a thin layer of Puerto Rican executives and managers for the U.S. corporations, the government bureaucrats, and the Puerto Ricans who owned hotels, banks and factories. This thin layer includes the 30,000 Cuban exiles who fled their country after the 1959 revolution. With a little help from their friends in the CIA they were soon back in the business of running gambling casinos, houses of prostitution, and drug syndicates. Next came a layer of Puerto Rican professionals — lawyers, doctors, and teachers.



Composing the fragile middle of the class pyramid were the Puerto Ricans who owned small grocery stores and shops and who more and more were driven out of business and into bankruptcy by the U.S. supermarkets and department store chains — Grand Union, Sears, and J.C. Penney.



At the bottom of the pyramid is the broad base of the Puerto Rican working class — underpaid, underfed, unemployed, poorly housed, poorly clothed — the economic reality that shatters the myth of progress and the “economic miracle.” By 1970 the Puerto Rican people lived better than most other people in Latin America, but they still lived in poverty. “The holocaust of lives” Castro described still raged in Puerto Rico. 10% of all Puerto Rican families had a yearly income of \$250; 35% of all families had a yearly income of less than \$2,000. 70% of the population was eligible for food stamps. Infant mortality was 45 per thousand (as compared with 25 per thousand in the U.S.).

The industrialization of the island burdened the Puerto Rican people with a double exploitation. As consumers of goods that were produced in the U.S. and imported to the island the Puerto Rican people paid 25% higher costs than the people of North America. As workers who manufactured goods that were exported to the U.S. Puerto Ricans received one-third to one-half the wages that North American workers received. In 1970, despite Teodoro Moscoso’s “Herculean tasks” as head of Fomento, unemployment was higher than it was in 1950 when he first took the job. By 1975 unemployment was 40% in the cities of Puerto Rico and as high as 95% in rural areas. 400,000 Puerto Ricans were unemployed every year. Those who had jobs worked as waiters, waitresses, janitors, bell-hops, chauffeurs, dishwashers, and as prostitutes. Puerto Ricans were beginning to say that their island looked more and more like underdeveloped Cuba before the 1959 revolution.





The industrialization of Puerto Rico impoverished the Puerto Rican people and enriched the U.S. corporations. It widened the economic gap between rich and poor, between the colony and the imperial power. "Operation Bootstrap" and "Fomento" tightened the noose of economic dependency around the neck of the Puerto Rican people. The island became a prisoner of the Rockefeller economic interests, a captive of the multinational corporations. The U.S. banks commanded the island; they demanded higher taxes, lower wages, assembly-line speed ups, lay-offs, and a higher level of productivity by a smaller number of workers. The economic and political crisis intensified. To more and more Puerto Ricans it looked like the only solution was genuine independence — a violent break from the U.S. Empire.

 CHASE





9

**THE PEOPLE
ARE THE
TARGET**

Emilia Mendez, a Woman of the People

In 1961 Emilia Mendez was 23 years old. She lived with her husband and her two daughters in a small house in Arecibo. "'61 was the worst year of my life,'" Emilia explained in an interview. "I got pregnant again and Pablo and I started to fight. I had a job and he didn't and with another child on the way we didn't know how we'd survive."

Emilia Mendez was born on a small farm near Utuado. In 1952 her father was injured in an accident on the job and was unable to work. Emilia's older sister Carmen left home and moved to Arecibo. She found work as a maid in a tourist hotel. Emilia was then 14 years old; she was a bright student and Carmen encouraged her to finish



her education. But with her parents unable to work, Emilia applied for a job in a button factory. The manager needed an employee who wrote English, and did simple addition. Emilia qualified.

Meanwhile Carmen left Arecibo and moved to San Juan. She worked in a hotel on the Condado strip, then moved again, this time to the U.S. She got a job in a hotel in Manhattan but then had to go on welfare. Emilia was tempted to join her sister, but she had to look after her parents, and then she met Pablo. They were married when Emilia was 18. At the end of the first year a daughter was born, then another. Emilia's mother helped her to raise the girls; she was able to continue working.

"The third time I was pregnant was the worst," Emilia said. "My mother and father had moved to the Bronx. Pablo lost his job in the restaurant, and we had to borrow money to buy food. I was sick mornings and I missed two days of work. I'd been with the button company for a long time but the manager told me 'You'll have to go if you lose one more day.' That's when I considered losing the child. Pablo was opposed to it. He wanted a son badly. 'I'll find work,' he said. For three weeks he looked. Then one day he came home and said 'Emilia, you'll have to go to the clinic.' I had the abortion the next day. It was painful. While I was still on the operating table the doctor sterilized me, though I didn't find out until my check-up a week later. After that Pablo and I fought again. Then he found a job. For a year we stayed on in Arecibo. Then we moved to the Bronx to be nearer Carmen and my parents."

The story of Emilia Mendez and her family is a common story in Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rican communities of the U.S. It is the story of unemployment, migration, sterilization, welfare, of attack on Puerto Rican culture, and the Puerto Rican family. U.S. colonialism drove the Puerto Rican people from the countryside to the cities. It turned peasants and farmers into unskilled factory workers, servants for the tourist industry, and clerks for the colonial government. It generated an unemployed population and forced the Puerto Rican people to migrate from the island to the U.S. in search of work. U.S. colonialism regulated material production in factories, and sexual reproduction in homes and hospitals. It governed the life span, the birth and death rates of the people.

As we have seen, Lolita Lebron was caught in this same web of colonialism. She was born in the countryside; she knew poverty, disease, and ignorance at first hand. In school Lolita Lebron was taught to deny her Puerto Rican identity and to accept North American values, traditions, and identity. Unable to find work on the island, she travelled to New York City and took a low-paying job in the garment industry. But Lolita Lebron broke through the colonial web; she gave political definition and focus to her experiences, and to the experiences of women like Emilia Mendez. Lolita wrote:

The U.S. has done everything scientifically and otherwise to destroy the Puerto Rican independence movement. It uses all kinds of weapons, psychological and of myriad forms, to kill the liberation spirit of Puerto Rico.

It is struggling very hard to destroy the Puerto Rican family, the Puerto Rican revolutionaries, the Puerto Rican would-be-born children. It sterilizes our young mothers and young women to avoid Puerto Rican human harvests, as it has killed almost all our agriculture and many of our men in its wars of conquest and aggrandizement.

U.S. colonialism imposed a total environment. The Puerto Rican people were attacked through their minds and their bodies. The rhythms of life itself were violently disrupted.

Education: Creating the National Inferiority Complex

When the U.S. army invaded Puerto Rico in 1898 all teaching in Spanish was abolished. English was compulsory in the schools and colleges. Puerto Rican children were taught to pledge allegiance to the U.S., to sing "The Star Spangled Banner," and "America the Beautiful." They were taught the dates, facts and names of U.S. history, not Puerto Rican history. In the 1920s, when Lolita Lebron was in school this meant lessons about George Washington, and Abe Lincoln, not lessons about Betances, or Mariana Bracetti. In the 1960s it meant lessons about Washington and Lincoln, as always, and also about Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Muñoz Marin, but not about Albizu Campos or Lolita Lebron.





Students in Puerto Rico, like students in the U.S. were not taught about Indian resistance to European conquest, or the insurrection of Black slaves. The history of Puerto Rico was rewritten to serve U.S. economic and political interests. Puerto Rico's true heroes and heroines were buried and false gods and goddesses were elevated.

The Puerto Rican people were told, in schools, factories, offices, and through the U.S.-controlled media, that they were docile, weak, small, helpless. David Perez, a young Puerto Rican writer and activist, noted:

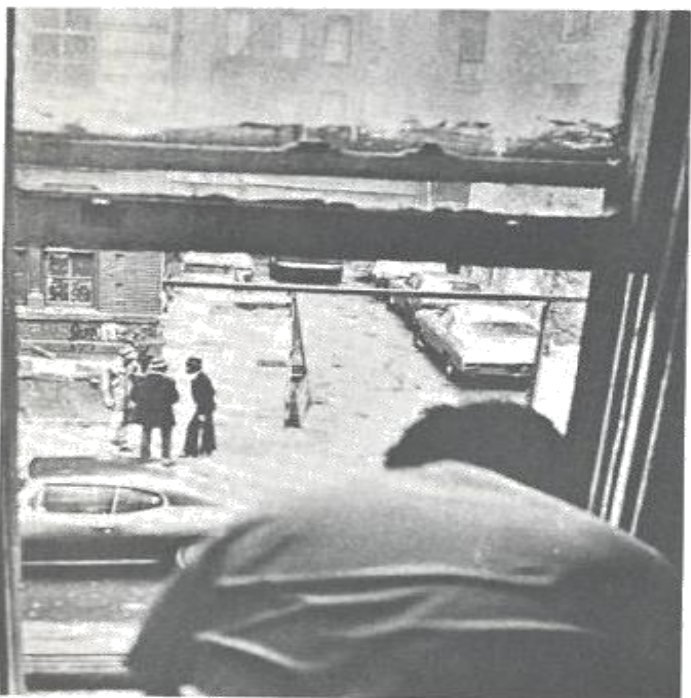
Puerto Ricans are taught three things: Puerto Rico is small and the U.S. is big; Puerto Rico is poor and the U.S. is rich; Puerto Rico is weak and the U.S. is strong. Sort of a national inferiority complex. These things are constantly put into our heads, and in this way people are conditioned to believe that independence is impossible because our country could never survive without the help of big brother U.S.

The U.S.-created education system aims at the destruction of the Puerto Rican peoples' awareness of themselves as a nation.



Migration: Broken English Dream

1941, the year Lolita Lebron travelled to New York, was the beginning of a major wave of immigration from Puerto Rico to the U.S. Between 1940 and 1970 one million Puerto Ricans travelled to North America. Puerto Rican life in North America was no romantic, West Side story with words and music by Leonard Bernstein. The forced migration of the Puerto Rican people divided the nation. It had a profoundly disturbing effect on the peoples' identity. Pedro Pietri, the New York-based Puerto Rican poet, wrote in "Broken English Dream;"



To the united states we came
to learn how to misspell our name
to lose the definition of pride
to have misfortune on our side
to live where rats and roaches roam
and sing a house is not a home
to be trained to turn on television sets
to dream about jobs you never get
to fill out welfare applications
to graduate from school without an education
to be drafted distorted and destroyed
to work fulltime and still be unemployed
to wait for income tax returns
and stay drunk and lose concern
for the heart and soul of our race
and the weather that produces our face.

Puerto Ricans began to arrive in the U.S. some 40 years before Lolita Lebron set foot on Manhattan Island. Shortly after the 1898 Spanish-American War sugar cane workers were imported to California, then shipped to Hawaii to work on U.S.-owned sugar plantations. In the 1920s, with starvation and unemployment on the island and the U.S. economy in need of cheap labor, 40,000 Puerto Ricans migrated to the U.S. and found jobs in industry and agriculture. In the 1930s, with unemployment acute in the U.S., there was little, if any, need for white North American, let alone Puerto Rican workers; migration slowed to a trickle. Then in the boom times between 1940 and 1970, when the U.S. needed a cheap, abundant supply of workers, one million Puerto Ricans travelled to the U.S. By 1970, 1,700,000 Puerto Ricans lived and worked in the U.S. In 1910 only 500 Puerto Ricans lived in New York. In 1930 there were 45,000, in 1960 600,000, in 1970 there were 1,125,000. Many of these Puerto Ricans travelled back and forth between the U.S. and the island; new immigrants arrived every day and old time residents returned to their homes in Puerto Rico.



On the island Puerto Ricans worked at low wages in unskilled jobs. In the U.S. they worked on the bottom rung of the economic ladder, with immigrants from Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and with Blacks from the Southern States of the U.S. Industry plugged the Puerto Ricans into the most undesirable jobs, or held them in reserve and employed them when needed. One Young Puerto Rican woman noted:



My father was a cane cutter in Puerto Rico . . . When things got rough [1947] he came over here to make some money to be able to send back to the family. He worked in a hotel when he first came here, as dishwasher. Then I guess he graduated to elevator operator — and he's been there ever since . . . He would leave the houe at about 5:30 in the morning and he wouldn't come home until four or five. He can be sick or whatever, but he's never missed a day of work — not even a day — because you've gotta support, you've gotta do it. He says 'In Puerto Rico I worked and got my money, and here I'm working and getting my money. But I can't make ends meet. I can't pay the rent.'

Puerto Rican men were hired for every menial task imaginable. Petro Pietri catalogues these jobs and the racist framework behind them in his book *Puerto Rican Obituary*:

As dishwashers porters
messenger boys
Factory workers maids stock
clerks
Shipping clerks assistant
mailroom
Assistant, assistant, assistant
assistant
To the assistant, assistant
dishwasher
And automatic smiling
doorman
For the lowest wages of the ages
And rages when you demand
a raise
Because it's against the
company policy
To promote SPICS SPICS SPICS

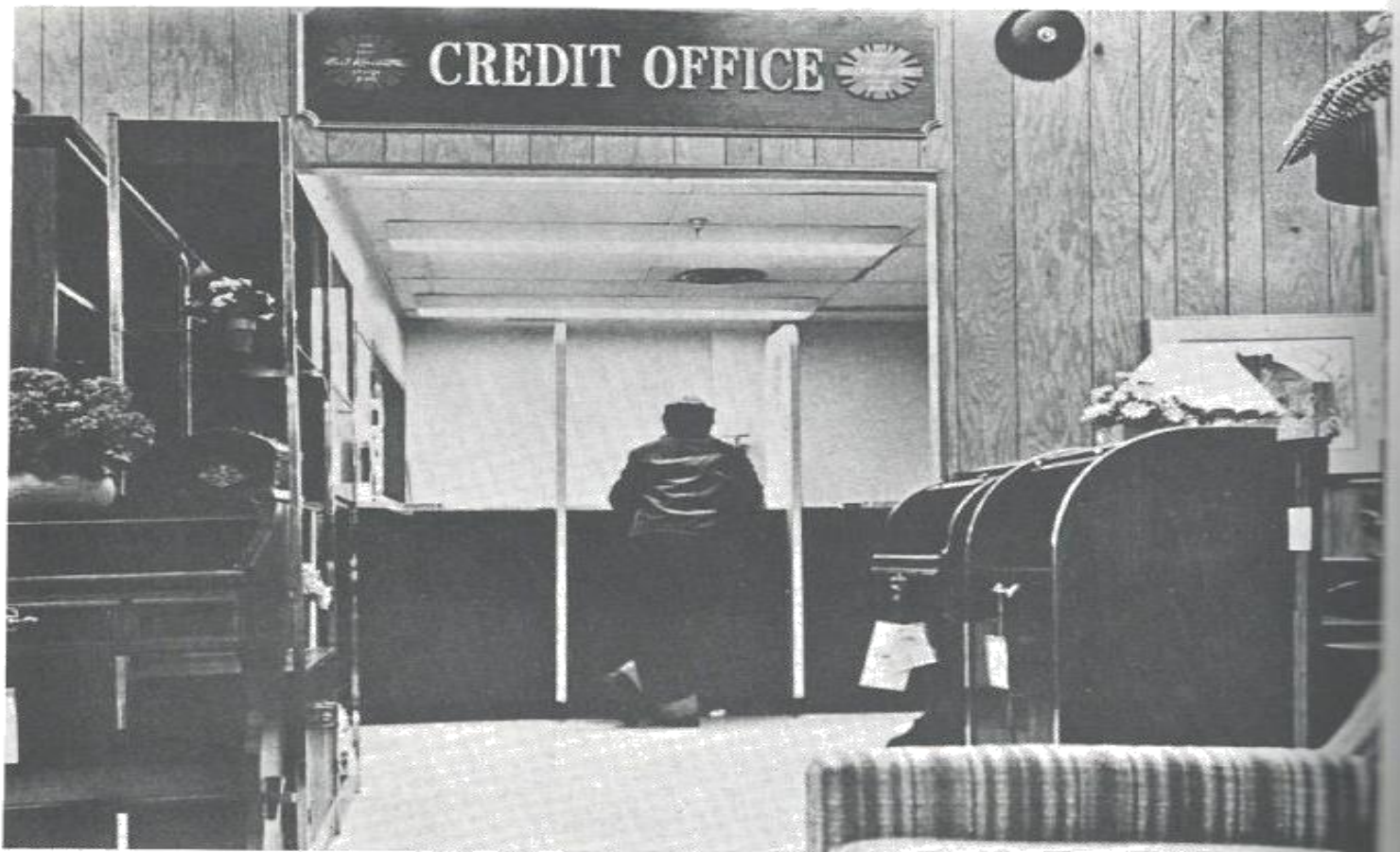


In the 1950s, 75% of all Puerto Ricans in the U.S. worked at blue-collar jobs or as migrant, agricultural laborers. Only 27% had desk or clerical (white collar) jobs. In 1975 75% of all Puerto Ricans *still* had blue-collar jobs. The average Puerto Rican worker in the U.S. earned less than \$100 a week before taxes. Under these circumstances families were left with little option but to borrow, go into debt, buy on credit, and go deeper into debt. As workers who were hired during good times and among the first to be fired during hard times, Puerto Ricans suffered especially during the recessions of the 1950s and the Depression of the mid-1970s.

Official statistics show that in 1975, 21% of Puerto Ricans in New York were unemployed—2.4 times the rate for the city as a whole. Official government statistics do not count the men and women who tried to find jobs and gave up when none were available. The under-employed constitute 22% of the men and 71% of the women in the U.S.-Puerto Rican community. When added to official unemployment figures the total adds up to a shocking 50% of the workforce.

In 1975 Puerto Ricans in New York lived in worse conditions than they did in 1959. In its 1976 study "Puerto Ricans in the Continental U.S.: An Uncertain Future" the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights reported that:

1. 33% of all Puerto Rican families subsist below the poverty level — compared to 11.3% of all U.S. families.
2. 25% of Puerto Rican families in the U.S. — compared to 5% of the total population — are forced to go on welfare.
3. \$7629 was the median income for Puerto Rican families in the U.S. in 1975; \$12,830 was the median income for all U.S. families.





In the U.S. thousands of Puerto Ricans were unable to find work. Some returned home, but jobs were even harder to find on the island. There was very little choice but to go on welfare. Welfare was defined as a charitable institution that helped a poor and hungry people, but in fact it was an essential part of the colonial system of oppression. Welfare maintained a large body of potential workers at the subsistence level — the bare minimum necessary to survive. In boom times industry drew these workers into production and paid them the bare minimum wage. During hard times the welfare system was especially important in controlling the surplus of workers that industrialization and migration created.

In the 1960s and 1970s half the Puerto Ricans excluded from the workforce were welfare mothers. Their allotments were so small that they, their daughters and sons, were locked on the edge of survival month after month, year after year. They were degraded by the miserable living conditions that welfare enforced — rooms in resident hotels, starchy diets, poor clothing, and shoddy medical care. In addition, the welfare system attacked the dignity and self-respect of women. Welfare officials questioned Puerto Rican, as well as Native American, Third World and poor White women, about their personal lives. They were spied upon, handed moralizing sermons along with their checks, patronized and abused. Welfare officials told women that they, and not the economic and political system, were to blame for poverty, hunger and unemployment. They made Puerto Rican women feel ashamed for not having a job, and humiliated for having children.

Sterilization: The Crisis of Production and Reproduction

Forced migration, and the welfare system did not “solve” the population problems created by colonialism. There was still a “surplus” of people. Migration flooded the U.S. labor market. The welfare system ate up funds that, from the point of view of government and industry, were better invested in businesses that returned a handsome profit. In this crisis situation the government developed a sterilization program. Sterilization was directed against all Third World peoples, but especially against the Puerto Rican people. By 1976, 24% of Native American women of child-bearing age were sterilized; 20% of Black women of child-bearing age were sterilized; 35% of Puerto Rican women and 20% of Puerto Rican men had been sterilized. The incidence of sterilization in Puerto Rico is the highest in the world.

From the point of view of the colonial system, sterilization gets to “the root of the problem” — the people. It disposes of future generations that would otherwise be forced to migrate, and that would form a permanent base of the welfare system.

Sterilization took the reproduction of the Puerto Rican people out of their hands and placed it in the hands of U.S. government and industry. It thereby “solved” the production problem of too many workers. Furthermore, it “solved” the potential problem of rebellion; a hungry and unemployed population, with political organization and leadership, could become a revolutionary force. Sterilization served a basic ideological function. It shifted blame away from the colonial system and placed it where it didn't belong — on the people. The sterilization campaign argued that the Puerto Rican people created their own poverty and hunger, that by “voluntary” eliminating of children they would “eliminate” their social problems.





Finally, sterilization was a direct attack on Puerto Rican women. It was both racist and sexist. The directors of North American corporations — ruling class men like the Rockefellers, and the Vanderbilts — decided how and when Puerto Rican women would give birth to Puerto Rican children.

Puerto Rican women were not forced into sterilization clinics at gun point, but forced they were. Like Emilia Mendez, many of them were faced with the impossible choice between work and survival or children and hunger.

Puerto Rico was one of the first nations in the world targeted for birth control. As early as 1925 pilot programs were set up in rural areas. By 1934, 67 birth control clinics were in operation. At first, U.S. laboratories and chemical companies used Puerto Rican women as "guinea pigs" to test birth control pills. When "the pill" was judged "safe" for use in the U.S. it was no longer available on the island, and sterilization became the chief method to prevent births.

In the late 1930s Governor Blanton D. Winship signed a bill that legalized sterilization for "health reasons only," but sterilization was soon the unofficial government method for limiting the population.

The extensive sterilization campaign began at about the same time that large numbers of Puerto Rican women entered the workforce. In the 1920s and 1930s many women worked at home in the needle trades. In the 1940s and 1950s they left their homes and took jobs in the textile and garment industries. U.S. factories did not provide maternity leaves or child-care centers to Puerto Rican women, often the only wage earners in the family. Faced with the impossible choice between job or child, hundreds of women resigned themselves to sterilization.

Made in Puerto Rico and proud of it.

In 1953, Searle & Co. began manufacturing its multinational San Juan is a modern building. Under the nearby community of Caguas is the site of one of Searle's most modern pharmaceutical manufacturing operations. The medicines we make here are sold all over the world. We are able to maintain our highest quality standards because of the pride, dedication and cooperation of our more than four hundred Puerto Rican employees. They are applying a tradition of quality established by Searle almost a century ago. We are proud of the pharmaceutical products we manufacture here, of our growth on this island and of the people who make it possible.

SEARLE Searle & Co. Division of G.D. Searle & Co.

By 1947, 7% of Puerto Rican women of child-bearing age were sterilized. By 1954, 17% were sterilized. In the 1960s and 1970s sterilization increased as the highly mechanized petrochemical and chemical industries expanded. By 1965 34% of all women of child-bearing age in Puerto Rico were sterilized.

**PLANIFIQUEMOS HOY
PARA EVITAR**

ESTE DESASTRE

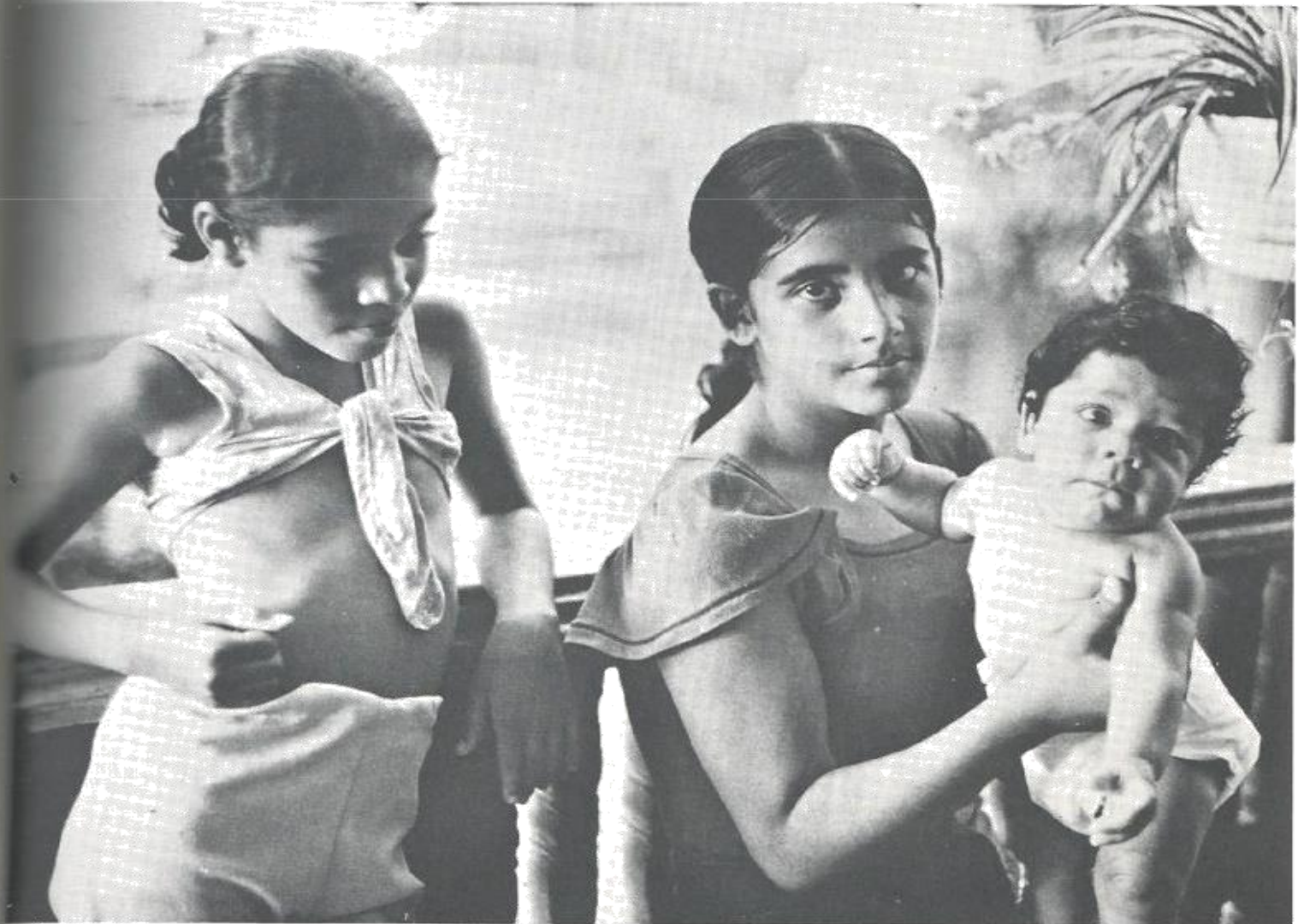
ASOCIACION PUERTORRIQUEÑA PRO-BIENESTAR DE LA FAMILIA

Let's plan today in order to avoid this disaster in the future.
Puerto Rican
Family Planning Association

An amply endowed propaganda campaign on radio and TV pressured women to become sterilized. The walls of San Juan and Ponce were covered with posters calculated to frighten women about the perils of over-population. Medical health officials issued dire predictions of an island so densely crowded that it would immediately sink into the Caribbean Sea if one more child was born.

Puerto Rican women were made to feel like criminals guilty of the crime of over-population. They were made to feel responsible for the poverty and hunger on the island. Doctors used their expertise, their status and power to threaten, and frighten pregnant women, prospective mothers and teenage girls. Puerto Rican women were lied to, and kept in ignorance about their own bodies. Doctors rarely explained the consequences of sterilization to their patients, and many women learned what had been done to their bodies months and sometimes years after the operation.

Puerto Rican women report that Commonwealth officials told them that their welfare payments would be cut-off unless they agreed to sterilization. Others were told that they had cancer, and that sterilization would save their lives. With still other women, the operation was performed in hospitals immediately after delivery. The mother, exhausted by hours of labor, would submit to the doctor's cold "logic."



U.S. education policies, forced migration, and sterilization are cloaked in a language of charity and friendship. Migration is supposed to benefit the "backward" Puerto Rican people by bringing them into an "advanced" society. Sterilization is supposed to help a hungry people. Education is described as a ladder to success. However, in the hands of U.S. government and industry these programs have consistently brought destruction. Sterilization robs the Puerto Rican people of their future, U.S. education denies them their past, and migration fragments the nation and divides the people. Together they add up to genocide, a deliberate and systematic attempt to obliterate the Puerto Ricans — their culture, identity, and nation.

The Puerto Rican people on the island and in the U.S. have resisted this attack. They resisted it at Ponce in 1937, at Jayuya in 1950, and in the dramatic action led by Lolita Lebron in Washington D.C. in 1954. Throughout the 1930s, 40s and 50s, the Puerto Rican people fought to preserve their heritage, their values, their families, their culture. They fought for the right to have Spanish taught in their schools. They fought to preserve their revolutionary past; they celebrated their national heroes and heroines. Year after year they marched to Lares to honor the 1868 insurrection. They sang *La Borinqueña* and raised the Puerto Rican flag. Decade after decade they demanded the right to be Puerto Ricans, not North Americans, to have their own nation and not to be a colony of the U.S.

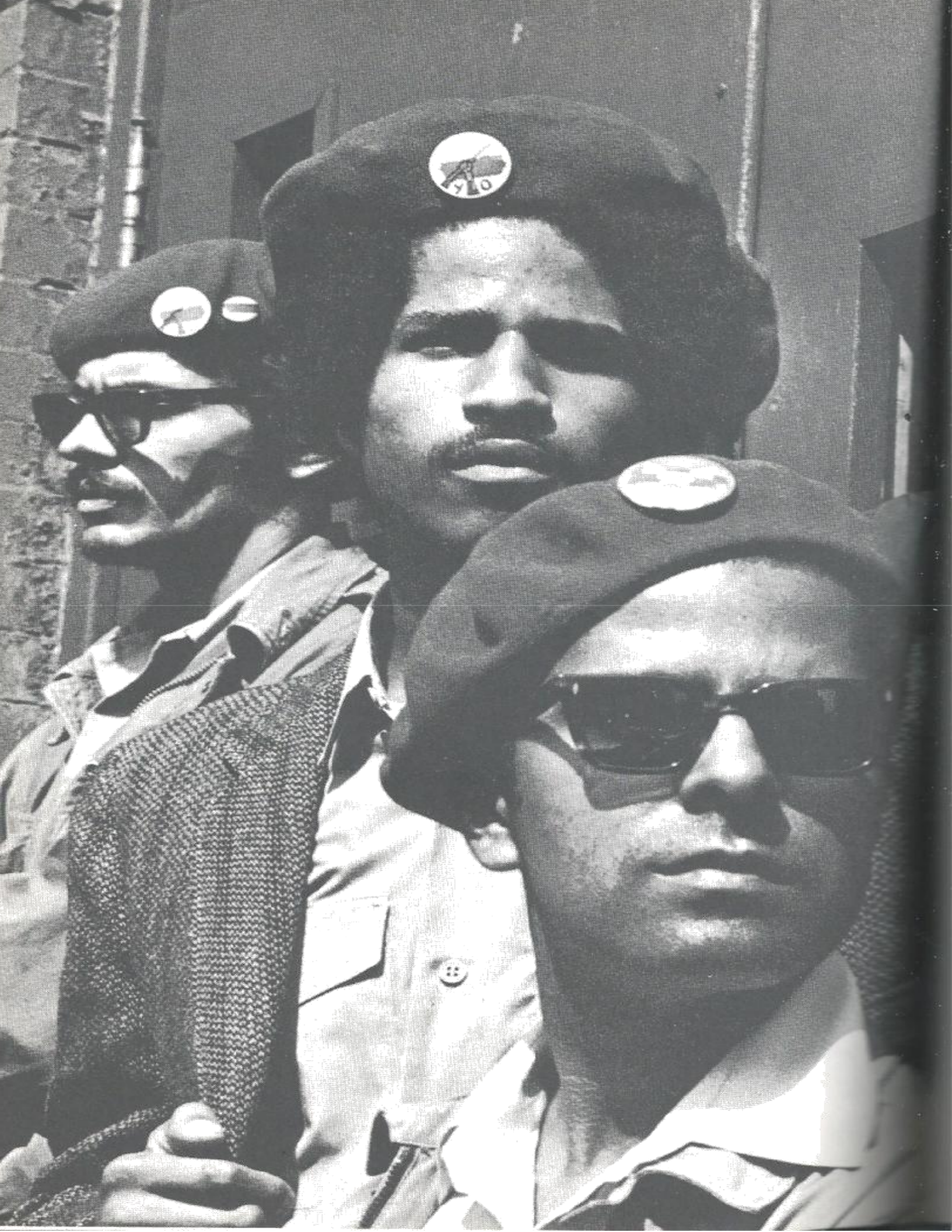
In the U.S. Puerto Ricans maintained their island roots, and at the same time created a new Puerto Rican culture of resistance. Puerto Rican poets, novelists, and musicians like Pedro Pietri, Piri Thomas, Roy Brown, and Tito Puente expressed the beauty, the anger and the outrage of the people in *los Barrios* of the U.S. Puerto Rican women joined with other Third World and poor White women to fight sterilization abuse. They fought for the right to determine their own futures and to raise their own families. They combated colonialism and male chauvinism.

Seven decades of U.S. rule did not destroy the movement for independence, or crush the national identity. As Lolita Lebron noted:

A great upsurge of Puerto Rican sons and daughters has lifted up for nationhood . . . As a Puerto Rican mother I rejoice in my prison for this celebration of what Puerto Rico heroes and heroines have fought for and died for, and been imprisoned and persecuted in the revolutions of 1868, 1950, and 1954.

In the 1960s and 1970s the Puerto Rican people again defied U.S. economic, political, and cultural domination.





10

JÍBARO SÍ
YANKEE NO

Ready to be Free

Decade after decade resistance to genocide and U.S. colonialism was led by the Nationalist Party, by Albizu Campos, Lolita Lebron, Oscar Collazo and by hundreds of unsung heroes and heroines. But the Nationalists were not alone. They were flanked by other groups and parties; each decade new organizations came into existence. In 1946 the *Partido Independentista Puertorriqueños* (PIP), the Puerto Rican Independence Party, was formed. Led by Ruben Berrios, PIP took part in elections, combatted Munoz Marin and the Commonwealth Government, and brought the issue of independence to hundreds of thousands of voters. "In Puerto Rico we have a very strong nationality," Berrios explained. "We have a very compact, well-defined, strong culture . . . After decades of economic, political, and cultural domination by the most powerful empire in the history of the world, we have tens of thousands of people fighting for independence. We are ready to be free. If ever there was a country in the history of humanity that was prepared for independence, it is Puerto Rico."

In 1956 Puerto Rican students formed the *Federación de Universitarios Pro Independencia* (FUPI), the University Federation for Independence, that agitated for Puerto Rican sovereignty, and for democracy in the university community. Through rallies, demonstrations, pamphlets, and leaflets FUPI educated students and teachers about U.S. control of the economy and the political arena, and of the need to break U.S. domination.

In 1959 Puerto Rican patriots created the *Movimiento Pro Independencia* (MPI), Movement for Independence. Led by Juan Mari Bras, the MPI revived the political ideas of native patriots — Betances, Lola Rodriguez de Tío, and Albizu Campos —



and brought the ideas of international revolutionaries — Lenin, Castro, Guevara and Ho Chi Minh — to the Puerto Rican struggle. MPI organized both on the island and in the U.S. Through mass protest the organization tried to create a crisis in the colonial government that would force the U.S. to grant independence.

In the 1960s and 1970s many new organizations sprang up — both on the island and in the U.S. There were several underground groups, including the Commandos of Armed Liberation (CAL), new trade unions, and women's organizations that both reflected popular discontent and gave it clarity and force.

There was also support for Puerto Rican independence internationally. Cuba provided the bulk of this support, but the Puerto Rican independence movement had friends and allies throughout Latin America, in the Socialist camp, and from Third World liberation groups. In the U.S., poor and working people and progressives aided the Puerto Rican nation.

Sixto Alvelo Refuses to Fight in Viet Nam

In the early 1960s young Puerto Rican students refused to participate in the compulsory Reserve Officer Training Corp (ROTC) on campuses. FUPI organized the first actions against ROTC on the Rio Piedras campus of the University of Puerto Rico. Students picketed, petitioned, passed out leaflets, sat-in, and went on strike. At a rally against the U.S. military, Bishop Antonio Parrilla, a Catholic and an *independentista*, declared:

Compulsory military service in Puerto Rico is illegal because the colonial status is illegal. Also illegal is the presence of armed forces in our country without our consent. The ROTC is illegal, as well as militarism and the use of force.

In the mid-1960s, as the U.S. launched total war against the people of Viet Nam, protests went beyond the issue of ROTC on the campuses. In 1964, Sixto Alvelo, a young Puerto Rican worker, refused to fight in Viet Nam. Soon other men followed his example. The MPI, and the Nationalist Party — long an opponent of the U.S. military — gave them full support. By 1966 over 1,000 Puerto Ricans on the island had refused to serve in the U.S. armed forces. On September 23, 1966, the 98th anniversary of *El Grito de Lares*, 1500 men burned their draft cards in a public protest.

The refusal of Puerto Ricans to join the U.S. Army deprived the Pentagon of troops it desperately needed. Puerto Ricans expressed their outrage against the U.S. invasion in Southeast Asia, against the napalm, the tiger cages, and at the same time affirmed their solidarity with the struggles of the Vietnamese people. Puerto Ricans recognized the National Liberation Front (NLF) as the legitimate representative of the Vietnamese people. The resistance of the Vietnamese people inspired the resistance of the Puerto Rican people to U.S. domination. From her prison cell in Alderson, West Virginia, Lolita Lebron wrote:

I thank the heroic Vietnamese people and their leaders with deep feeling and great admiration — men and women who support our effort and liberation struggle and with whom militant Puerto Ricans are identified, because we are victims of the same brutal political power that subjects us to its colonialist oppressive regime.



The U.S. government arrested and jailed young Puerto Ricans who refused to join the U.S. Army. In turn, the Puerto Rican people intensified their resistance. In 1967, the Commandos of Armed Liberation (CAL), an underground group, was formed. CAL took up arms against the U.S. military and corporate presence on the island. CAL bombed luxury hotels and the headquarters of the multi-national corporations, causing over \$25,000,000 in damages. In a communique CAL explained:

Our enemy is . . . yanqui imperialism, the monopolies who have evicted the Puerto Ricans from the land we inherited from our ancestors, who have seized commerce, banking and industry from us, reducing us to the category of outcasts in our own territory and forcing us to emigrate to the filthy slums of the U.S.

Our goal: to recuperate for our people everything that the enemy has stolen from us. We will return the land to our farmers and agricultural workers. We will put an end to monopoly control over commerce and industry in our country. Puerto Rico's wealth will be reconquered by our country. Our goal is national liberation. The method for reaching this goal is armed struggle, the highest expression of the people's discontent.

The movement for Puerto Rican independence accelerated side by side with the movement against the war in Viet Nam. In 1968, when North American students

demonstrated in Chicago against the war, thousands of Puerto Rican students demonstrated against the war and at the same time rallied for Puerto Rican independence. On September 23, 1968 tens of thousands of Puerto Ricans marched into the mountains to celebrate the 100th anniversary of *El Grito de Lares*. Juan Mari Bras and Ruben Berrios joined with a new, young generation of *independentistas* to denounce U.S imperialism, revive the flame of Albizu Campos and pledge to carry on the long struggle for sovereignty.

Lords in the Belly of the Beast

The resistance in Puerto Rico was paralleled by resistance among Puerto Ricans in the U.S. One of the most important organizations to emerge from *El Barrio* of New York was the Young Lords Party. The Young Lords Party (YLP) was formed on July 26th, 1969, the 16th anniversary of the Cuban guerrilla attack on the Moncada Fortress. In October the Lords issued a 13 point program:

The Young Lords Party is a revolutionary political party fighting for the liberation of all oppressed people.

1. We want self-determination for Puerto Ricans, liberation on the island and inside the U.S.
2. We want self-determination for all Nations.
3. We want liberation for all Third World People.
4. We are revolutionary nationalists and oppose racism.
5. We want equality for women. Down with machismo and male chauvinism.
6. We want community control of our institutions and our land.
7. We want a true education of our Afro-Indio culture and Spanish language.
8. We oppose capitalists and alliances with traitors.
9. We oppose the Amerikkkan military.
10. We want freedom for all political prisoners and prisoners of war.
11. We are internationalists.
12. We believe armed self-defense and armed struggle are the only means to liberation.
13. We want a socialist society.

The Lords opposed the war in Viet Nam, and the U.S. military presence in Puerto Rico. "No Puerto Rican should serve in the U.S. Army," they declared. "We demand the immediate withdrawal of all U.S. military forces and bases from Puerto Rico and Viet Nam." In New York City the Lords held demonstrations against the war. They chanted:

*Jíbaro Sí, yankee no
A Viet Nam yo no voy
Porque Yankee yo no soy
(Jíbaro yes, Yankee no
I won't go to Viet Nam
Because I'm not a Yankee)*



The Lords persuaded hundreds of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. not to serve in the U.S. military. They also awakened nationalist consciousness among Puerto Ricans in North America. They marched with the Nationalist Party in New York to commemorate the Ponce Massacre of 1937, and with 10,000 people demonstrated at the UN for Puerto Rican independence.

But the Lords did not neglect the immediate social and economic conditions that affected Puerto Ricans in the *Barrios* of New York. Their first major political action, the "Garbage Offensive," took place in the summer of 1969. The streets of East Harlem — an area housing thousands of Puerto Rican families — were filthy because the New York City Department of Sanitation never cleaned them. Late at night the Lords swept the streets and piled the garbage in a mound; traffic was blocked. In the morning the Sanitation Department was forced to remove the garbage. The "Garbage Offensive" dramatized the need of East Harlem residents for clean safe streets.



The Young Lords Party needed a community center. One of the main social institutions in the heart of *El Barrio* was the Methodist Church at Lexington Avenue and 111th Street—a Church, however, that contributed little to the Puerto Rican community. In October 1969 at a meeting of the church board the Lords asked for space. The Church called in the police. 13 Lords were arrested and jailed. In response, on December 28th the Party took over the Church. For eleven days the *Iglesia de la Gente*, the "Peoples' Church," was a center for the Lords Free Breakfast Program for children. *La Iglesia de la Gente* was a school, a concert and meeting hall, a place to share political ideas and express the culture of the community.



Thousands of people — Blacks, Whites, and Puerto Ricans — visited the church to express their solidarity, to provide food, clothing, and blankets, to listen to the Lords speak about Puerto Rican history, community and working class problems. One young Puerto Rican noted:

All my reading could not tell me what that week at the church made clear. In the words of one of the Lords: 'We're all part of something. It's a nation. It's been sleeping for a long time, hibernating, and now it's coming out.'

The police invaded *La Iglesia de la Gente* and arrested the Lords; the Methodist Church resumed control. But the Lords continued their political activity. They went from door to door in *El Barrio* and tested for lead poisoning — a disease common to children playing among the run-down buildings. In the spring and summer of 1970 the Lords worked with Lincoln Hospital doctors and nurses to open an addiction treatment center in the South Bronx — an area with one of the most severe drug addiction problems in the U.S. Patients were treated with the Chinese method of acupuncture, and educated about the political and economic causes of drug addiction. Many young people who might have become junkies joined the Young Lords Party.



The Lords were destroyed by both police repression and internal conflicts. But their example is still remembered. Their programs and their actions gave new significance to the struggle for national independence; the Lords developed the basis for strong ties between Puerto Ricans on the mainland and on the island.

Tengo Puerto Rico en mi Corazon
(I hold Puerto Rico in my heart)

the Lords proclaimed; they were a bridge between the people on the island and in the U.S.

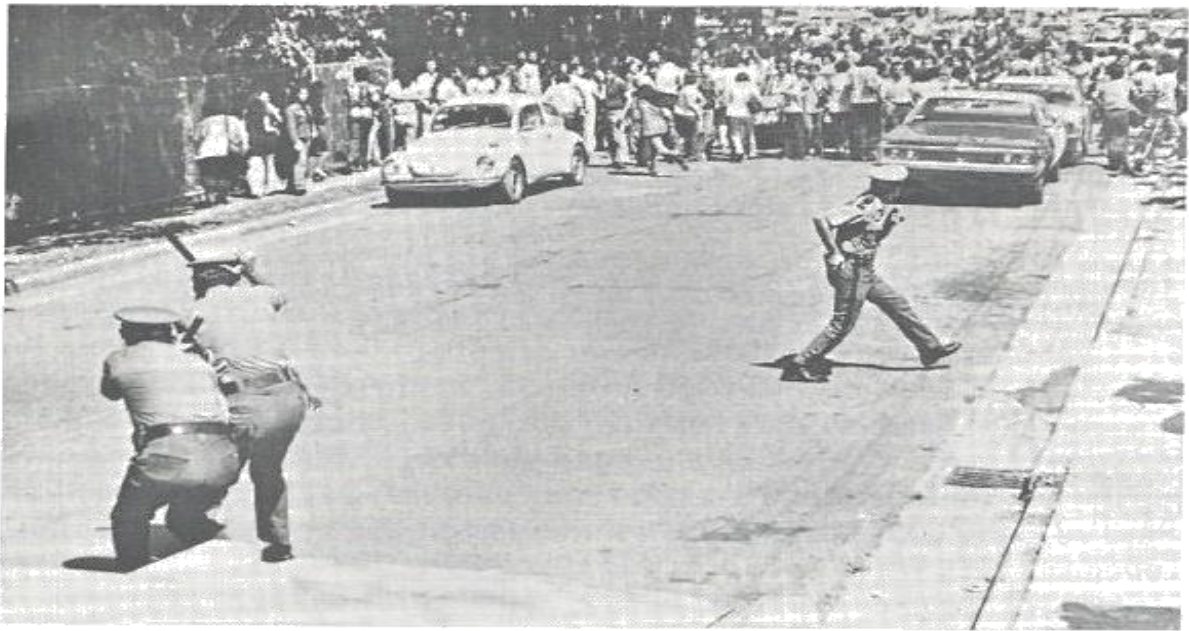
Imagine Manhattan as our Target Range

While the Lords were demonstrating in New York against the Viet Nam war, militancy rose on the island. In 1970 — the year that President Richard Nixon ordered the invasion of Cambodia, the year that anti-war demonstrations erupted across the U.S. and throughout the world — FUPI led an attack on the ROTC building on the Rio Piedras campus. Demonstrators battled the police; hundreds of students and teachers were beaten and arrested. Antonia Martinez, a 16 year old woman who was watching the confrontation from a second story window, was killed by a police bullet. That same year the U.S. National Guard massacred students at Jackson and Kent State colleges.

Thousands of people marched in the demonstration and attended Antonia Martinez's funeral to express their grief, anger and commitment to continue the struggle. Two days later, in retaliation for her murder, two U.S. marines were killed in San Juan. Antonio Caban Vale, known as "El Topo" ("The Mole"), wrote a popular song about Antonia:

*Antonia, tu nombre es una historia
de un pueblo que se busca
y se ha encontrado en tí.
Antonia, tu nombre es como un alba
Los pájaros desatan
La luz del porvenir.
Antonia, los pueblos no perdonan
Un día, esa ley se he de cumplir.
Tu muerte la juventud la canta
es bandera en sus labios
y es bala de fusil
Antonia aqui estamos presentes
para mostrale al mundo
la luz que nace en tí.*

(Antonia, your name is like a story
of a people who looked for
and found themselves in you.
Antonia, your name is like the dawn
the birds sing to the future
and announce the light to come
Antonia, the people won't forgive
one day the law of the people will prevail
Your death, a song sung by the youth
like a flag in their voices
a bullet and a gun
Antonia, here we are together
to sing and show the world
the light that's born through you.)



In 1971 — the year the U.S. invaded Laos, the year hundreds of Black, Latino, and White G.I.s went to Washington D.C. to protest the war — Puerto Rican students in Rio Piedras burned the ROTC building to the ground. A specially trained police riot squad, armed with the latest U.S. weapons and equipment, invaded the campus. Students resisted; battles were heated. Before order was restored the chief of the University police and an ROTC cadet were killed. A few months later the ROTC program was moved off the Rio Piedras campus.

One of the most dramatic confrontations with the U.S. military occurred on Culebra, a small island off Puerto Rico with a population of 800 people. On Culebra PIP and the Nationalists joined with residents to protest U.S. military occupation. The U.S. Navy used one third of the island as an artillery range; underwater mines were tested in the coastal waters. The shelling destroyed grazing land and the underwater mines destroyed lobster traps and fishing nets. Tons of dead fish washed ashore every month.

“Imagine if we had a navy and used Central Park, on the island of Manhattan, as our target range,” Juan Mari Bras said. The U.S. Navy ordered the eviction of all Puerto Rican families, but they refused to move. Instead they organized a committee and the Mayor of Culebra sent an angry message to the U.S. Navy:

You have mined, bombed, and torpedoed our fish and our fishing areas. You have fire-rocketed and bombed napalm over our birds and their nests. Human and computer errors have misguided your missiles to our harbors and private lands, exposing us to death. Knowing of the presence of a civilian population in the center of the area where you carry on your maneuvers, you continue and plan to intensify these activities on and around the island of Culebra. The intensity, the frequency, and the type of maneuvers carried out by the Navy of the U.S. has created a situation that passes the limits of human tolerance.

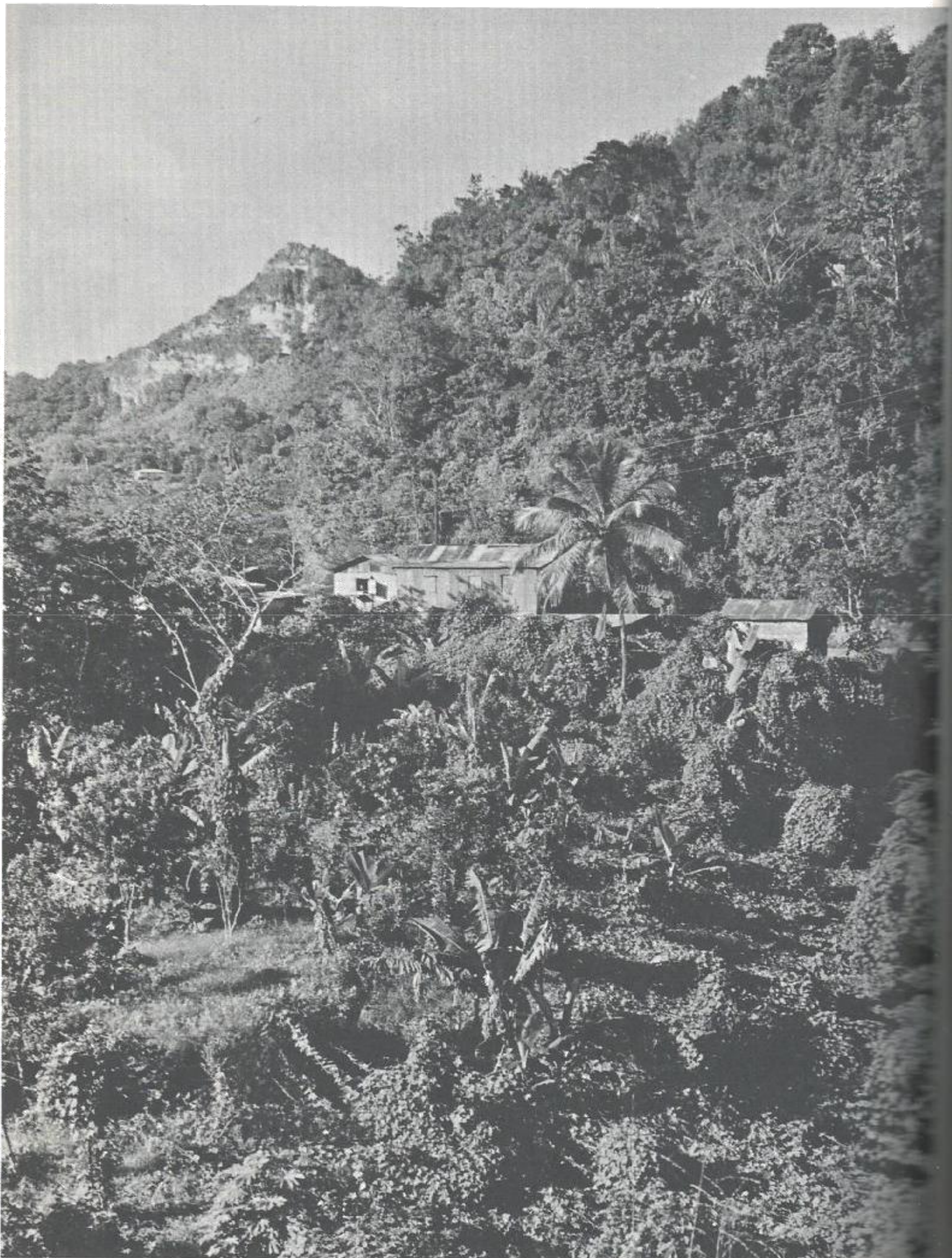
In August 1971 the U.S. Secretary of Defense, Melvin Laird, personally assured the Governor of Puerto Rico that the shelling would immediately stop. It stopped for a few days and then began again. Juan Mari Bras declared that Secretary of Defense Laird showed “an absolute lack of respect for the people of Puerto Rico, a complete disregard for international law and utter ignorance of the most elementary principles of human fellowship.”



The resistance of the people of Culebra intensified. Their new demand was "Force the U.S. Navy, not only out of Culebra but out of Puerto Rico too."

U.S. federal marshals descended on Culebra and arrested and jailed demonstrators, including Ruben Berrios of the PIP. But the arrests only brought more support for the struggle. Demonstrations were held in San Juan; month after month the struggle continued. Finally, the Navy removed its bases from Culebra and the people won back their island.



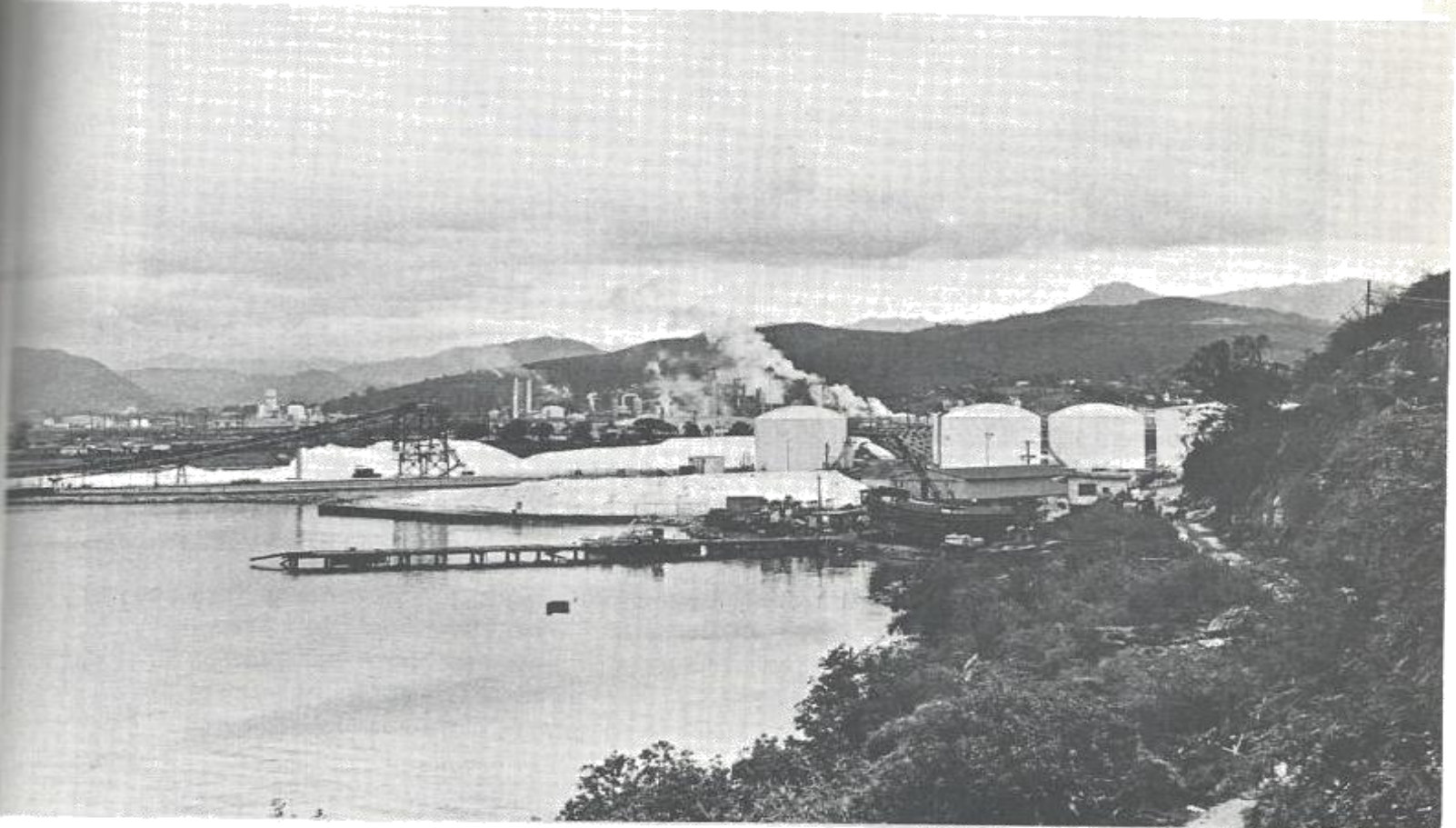


Villa Justicia

During this period of intense activity against the war in Viet Nam, and against the U.S. military presence in Puerto Rico, there were other crucial protests and political developments.

Even as the U.S. intensified its military and economic assault against Viet Nam, it intensified its assault against the people of Puerto Rico. In the mid-1960s Kennecott Copper and American Metal Climax held secret negotiations with the Commonwealth Government to build a gigantic mining and smelting complex at the center of the island. These negotiations were uncovered and publicized by *independentistas*. Students, radicals, members of MPI and PIP, went into the mountains and explained to the people that mining by the U.S. corporations would mean ecological disaster. The plans of Kennecott Copper and American Metal Climax meant the reduction of farm land, the erosion of mountain soil, the destruction of the natural beauty. Farmers from rural areas, and students and workers from the cities joined together to stop the plans of the copper corporations.

U.S. corporations also planned to build a Superport on the west coast of the island. Puerto Rico was selected as a site because the states of the northeast U.S. refused to allow a Superport to be built on their coastline. The Puerto Rican people saw that the Superport would displace thousands of families. It would pollute the air and the water; the entire west coast would be destroyed. There were meetings and demonstrations across the island and the Superport was stopped.



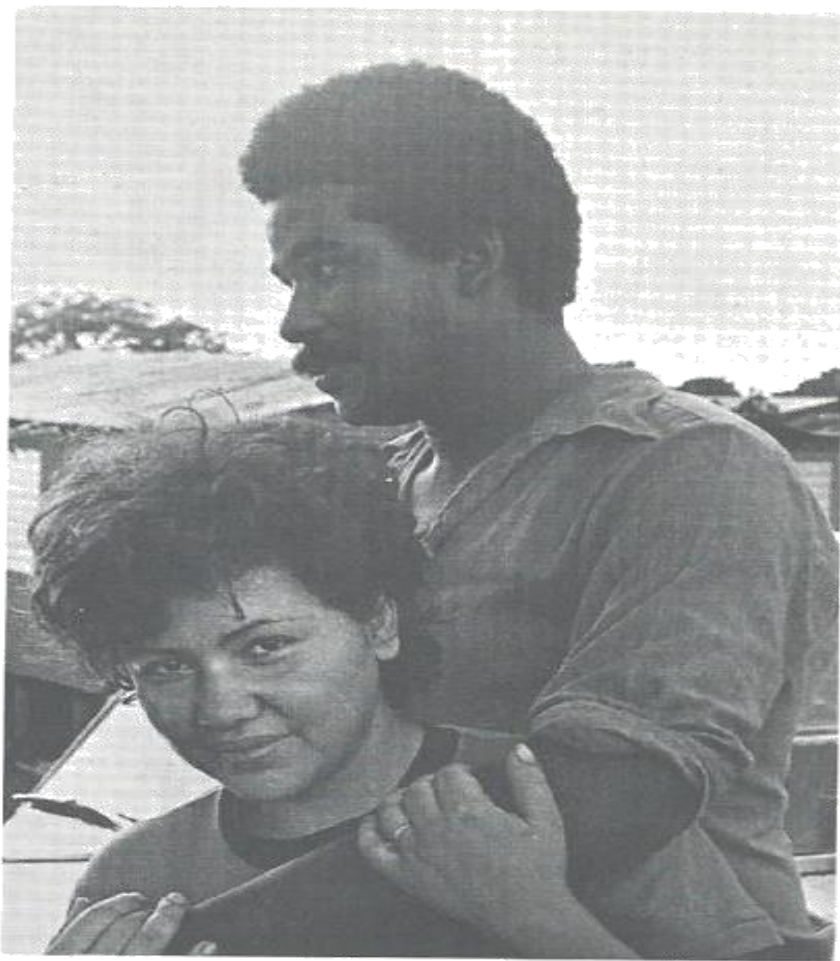
At the same time that the U.S. corporations intensified economic exploitation, there were cut-backs in the construction of low income housing, schools, hospitals, and reduction in social services. In housing the crisis was especially severe. 300,000 homeless Puerto Ricans seized government land and built their own houses. The "squatters" often built their houses at night; several families joined together to put up the frame and nail down the roof. When only two or three families squatted on government land it was relatively easy for the police to evict them. But when thousands became "squatters" the police were powerless.

Villa Justicia (Village of Justice) is one of the best known "squatters" communities. *Villa Justicia* sits on the outskirts of San Juan — between the ocean and the fields of sugar cane. "We arrived here in 1969," a woman noted. "My grandfather built this house from scraps of wood." "We moved in after he built another house next door," her neighbor added, "We had to fight the police with sticks and machetes to keep our homes."



The people of *Villa Justicia* received help from independence organizations. Together they blocked the streets that led into the community and fought the police. Moreover, *independentista* lawyers took the case of *Villa Justicia* to the courts. The colonial government backed down from a legal confrontation; today an uneasy truce exists between the village and the Commonwealth. Residents have not been evicted but they do not own the land or their homes.

Villa Justicia has its own mayor. The children attend the local school. It is a close-knit community because the houses were cooperatively built and defended. It is also united by national pride and by dreams of the future. The streets of the community, though unpaved, carry the names of Puerto Rican patriots and historical events. The main street is called *Calle Paz*, Peace Street. "We have seen much inequality and violence, but we envision a future of justice and peace," one resident said.



Grass roots resistance also led to an island-wide boycott of the Utility Authority, a corporation controlled by New York and Boston bankers, that charged the lowest rates for factories and hotels and the highest rates for poor and working households.

A few days after the boycott began, the utility company cut electricity to thousands of homes. But hundreds of families tapped into the main lines and by-passed the meters. Lights and radios went on again. The Utility Authority couldn't shut down the main lines. It was forced to turn on the current and to reduce rates. A special bill was passed in the Puerto Rican legislature authorizing a reduction in rates for home consumption of electricity. The people won another victory.



To lower the lights (prices), Don't pay! The boycott goes on!



We accuse
THE MEMBERS OF THE EMERGENCY
FINANCIAL CONTROL BOARD
of CRIMES against the COMMUNITY

...HOSTS Monday **MAY 10** 11AM
at 11th Street E.W. & 14th Street N.W. D.C.

11

**WE WILL
ATTAIN
VICTORY**

Throw Out the Capitalists

Probably the major political development in the early and mid-1970s was the rise of new, militant labor unions, and the decision on the part of *independentistas* to concentrate on working class struggles. In 1969 — the year workers went on a successful seven month strike against the General Electric Corporation — the MPI revised its strategy. It made working class organizing, and the fusion of the class struggle with the independence struggle its priority. Two years later in 1971, the MPI became the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP), a workers' party dedicated to national independence and to socialism. In the *Socialist Alternative*, the PSP declared:

True independence cannot be imagined without a break with the whole colonial-capitalist structure, which serves as a foundation for our so-called 'Free Associated State.' We do not want an independent *capitalist* nation, since that would mean only a change of masters for the great majority of our people.

The PSP has had a tremendous impact. It is an important force in the trade unions and workers' movement, in community struggles and the schools. The PSP maintains its visibility to the people through its newspaper, *Claridad*, published in San Juan and New York City each week. *Claridad* provides news and analysis on the workers' and independence movement not available in the U.S. owned daily newspapers of San Juan.



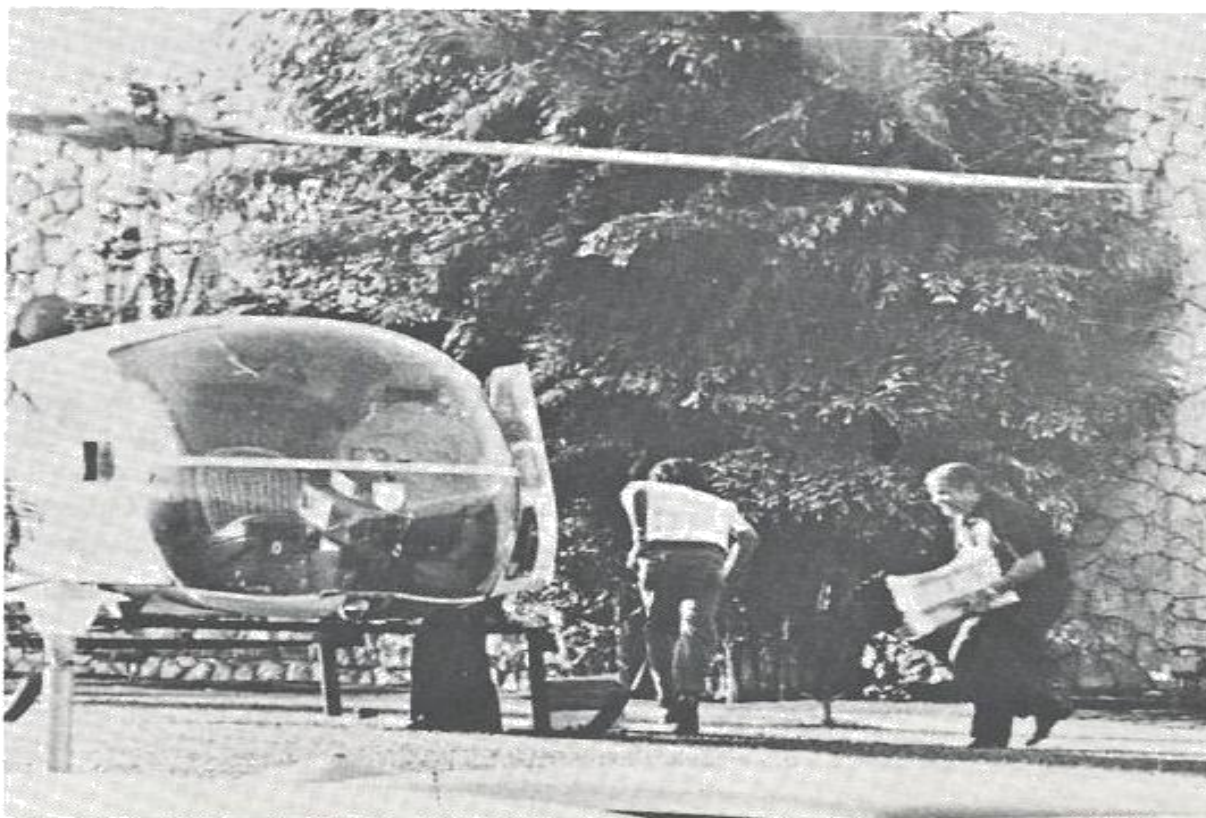
The PSP's success in reaching many people is due, in part, to its strategic commitment to support all forms of struggle including strikes, demonstrations, elections, international diplomatic pressure and armed resistance.

Juan Mari Bras, the leader of the PSP, explained that political independence would have to march hand in hand with economic independence, that there would have to be redistribution of wealth and that workers would have to control the machinery of production. "Every *independentista* must be a socialist and every socialist an *independentista*," he declared.

Strikes: Schools for Workers

The independence movement is supporting the workers movement and many of the most militant working class leaders are *independentistas*. From 1971 through 1976, there was an unbroken wave of strikes in Puerto Rico. They were a response to the political and economic crisis on the island — high unemployment, low wages, unsafe working conditions, poor housing, and poor medical care.

In 1972 workers at *El Mundo*, the U.S. owned newspaper, went on strike and closed down the building. Hundreds of *El Mundo* workers and *independentistas* marched and picketed. During the seven month strike there were repeated confrontations with both strike-breakers and the tactical police force. Dozens of workers were beaten and arrested, but the picket lines continued. The strikers blocked doors and exits, and made it impossible for the printed edition of the paper to leave the plant. *El Mundo* executives bought five helicopters and flew the paper over the heads of the demonstrators. But the *El Mundo* executives were outmaneuvered. Late one night all five helicopters were destroyed by sabotage. The strikers celebrated this victory; no one was ever accused of the bombing and no one ever claimed credit.





The strike wave grew; new sectors of the working class were drawn into the movement. In 1972 the United Workers Movement (MOU) was formed. Led by Pedro Grant, MOU grew into a federation of more than 40 unions and 100 locals that represented 18% of the organized workers on the island. MOU campaigned for workers' rights; it organized the unorganized, resisted laws against wild-cat strikes and open shops, and fought for the enforcement of the Federal Minimum Wage Law in Puerto Rico.

In 1973 the Independent Electrical Workers Union went on strike and shook the entire island. The Fireman's and the Sanitation Workers' Unions in San Juan also went on strike. In desperation, Governor Hernandez Colon called out the National Guard — the first time the Guard was called out since the 1950 rebellion. In 1974, for the first time in Puerto Rican history, the Teacher's Union went on strike for higher wages, and for a new curriculum that would celebrate Puerto Rican history and culture. The police occupied the schools, arrested and jailed union leaders.

In 1974 workers struck the Waterworks and Aqueducts Authority to demand not only higher wages but the right — outlawed by the U.S. Congress — of public employees to strike against city and federal governments. Again Governor Colon called in the National Guard; troops broke into workers' homes and arrested strike leaders.

In response, underground groups exploded bombs at International Telephone and Telegraph, Union Carbide, the Commonwealth Oil Refinery, Grand Union, CIT

Finance Company, and the U.S. Army Reserve Depot in Ponce. In communiques delivered to the press, the underground groups indicted U.S. corporations for the misery of the Puerto Rican workers.

In 1975 the Independent Union of Telephone Employees (UIET) went on strike against the Bell Telephone System. The UIET officials were representative of the new, militant Puerto Rican union leadership. When the UIET went on strike, President Jose Juan Hernandez explained:

We arrived at the conclusion that it was better for us to be killed fighting than to go down without fighting.



Striking workers of the Waterworks and Aqueducts Authority (AAA) demonstrate: "Our Sacrifice is Victory"



The UIET went on strike, not only for economic demands, but for an end to company repression, the end of supervision through closed circuit TV, an end to lay-offs, a halt in the firing of union organizers, and the removal of the police from the factory grounds.

During the strike, the Telephone Company fired union president Hernandez and dozens of other workers. The police riot squad attacked demonstrators, arrested and jailed them. But the union held its ground. Oscar Pintado, the Vice President of the UIET said:

The government is trying to eliminate the unions . . . The government claims that the workers should be blamed for the economic crisis.

We understand that in order to counter-attack, we must create an organization, a workers' federation that can confront this kind of repression. Part of the battle to forge this federation involves taking on those international unions which don't defend the interests of the Puerto Rican workers.

Pintado defined the importance of workers' solidarity, and explained the importance of strikes:

Strikes are a great school for workers. It is there that class struggle is molded and dramatized. There the lines are drawn, with the bosses and their allies lined up on one side. The workers experience repression directly and see the role of the commercial press and the police.

In 1975 the Cement Workers Union went on strike against the Puerto Rican Cement Company, owned by Luis Ferre, multi-millionaire and an ex-governor of the island. The strike against Ferre lasted over a year. The families of strikers rallied behind the cause. The Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP) threw its support behind the union; so did North American supporters of Puerto Rican independence.



Committee of the wives of striking Puerto Rico Cement workers rally in solidarity.

However, under the auspices of the AFL-CIO Seaman's International Union, scabs were hired to fill the strikers' jobs. The U.S. National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ruled in favor of the scab workers and against the Puerto Rican Cement Workers Union. The strike was broken. But the Ponce workers focused world attention on the exploitation of labor in, and the colonial status of Puerto Rico. They won new allies and inspired other workers across the island, and in the U.S. On May 1, 1975 — International Workers Day — the Ponce Cement Workers led a militant demonstration of 10,000 workers. Banners demanded independence for Puerto Rico and indicted the U.S. corporations. The union and the independence movements successfully combined forces.

Women Organize

In 1975 women on the island formed the Federation of Puerto Rican Women (FMP), an organization that defended working class women. Norma Valle, the Coordinator of FMP, explained,

In this country women have experienced triple exploitation. We are exploited as Puerto Ricans by the existing capitalist-colonialist system, as workers, and as women. This takes place in the home, in the workplace, and in the society at large in different, and numerous ways. Women's oppression is economic, social and cultural. Our full self-realization as human beings is obstructed.

The Federation celebrated the Puerto Rican women of the past:

The women's liberation struggle is not new in Puerto Rico. Toward the end of the last century, women started to integrate into social production, to gain consciousness of their oppression, and to struggle for their rights as workers and as women. . . . Heroines of the liberation struggle such as Luisa Capetillo, Juana Pagan, Rivera Franca de Armino, Valentina Carrera, Juana Colon, knew how to march on equal terms next to men in the struggle for a just society for all. Today, we recognize these women as the vanguard, the example to follow.

Moreover, the Federation joined with women around the world who were combatting imperialism. The women of the FMP—like the people of Culebra, like students who protested ROTC, and like the Young Lords—were inspired by the Vietnamese people. In 1975, Norma Valle noted:

The Puerto Rican women . . . express their solidarity with the Vietnamese women who played an unsurpassed part in the liberation war of their country; on the battlefield, in production, in education, and every place where their contribution was needed. Following their example, women in the world who are struggling against colonialism, capitalism, discrimination, and oppression will move forward with the conviction that we will also attain victory with our people.

The Nationalists: Patriotism and Valor

Another factor in the battle for Puerto Rican independence is the renewed activity of the Nationalist Party. In 1965, with the death of Albizu Campos, the Party was deeply wounded. Albizu spent 24 of his last 28 years in prison: from 1937 to 1947, from 1950 to 1953, and then again from 1954 to 1965. During his last years in prison, Albizu was tortured by his jailers; he suffered three strokes, was paralyzed and deprived of his capacity to speak. When he died in 1965 one hundred thousand Puerto Ricans attended his funeral—the largest demonstration of grief ever expressed on the island.

Carlos Feliciano, a participant in the 1950 Jayuya rebellion, and a leader of the Nationalists today, was in prison with Albizu for a short time. He wrote:

In *La Princesa*, the prison in San Juan under the city wall near La Fortaleza, I have the honor, the privilege, to live with Albizu Campos in the same cell. Here we live together for several months like brothers.

Oh, he was a beautiful man. He was the most beautiful man I ever know. Never in my life have I seen a man like Albizu Campos. You know, his sister used to come to the prison, once or twice a week, to bring him things. He used to give them away to people in the prison. Nothing he owned. Nothing he wanted. Nothing belonged to him. One day the prisoners, they make a party for Albizu Campos with music and things like that. 'No,' he said. 'This party is not for Albizu Campos. This party is for everyone here.'

I don't have words to say how Albizu Campos was. Never I saw a man like that. A sweet man. He was something sweet. There was something sweet inside him.

If I tell you this you won't believe it. I was in prison five years. But I never was so free as the time I spent with Albizu Campos. I feel free. That is the truth.

The five Nationalist political prisoners — Lolita Lebron, Oscar Collazo, Rafael Cancel Miranda, Irvin Flores, and Andres Figueroa Cordero — have demanded their freedom decade after decade; they have received support from individuals and organizations around the world. The U.S. government offered the five their freedom if they would promise not to participate in political activity. They have refused to make that deal. "If freed I will keep on fighting the best way possible, even to death. That is a duty," Andres Figueroa Cordero declared. "I will never abandon the principles that brought me here."



Recent photograph of Lolita Lebron at Federal Penitentiary, Alderson, West Virginia.

Independence Movement: Deepening Roots

Today there are many independence organizations that workers are joining. The largest are the Puerto Rican Independence Party and the Puerto Rican Socialist Party. Other organizations include the Movimiento Socialista Popular (the Popular Socialist Movement), the Socialist League, the Puerto Rican Communist Party, the Nationalist Party, and the Puerto Rican Peace Council.

Most Puerto Rican independence organizations consider themselves anti-imperialist and socialist. They want a society in which the wealth is produced and shared equally, a society in which workers run the government, the factories, and offices. However, they offer different methods for the achievement of an independent, socialist society.



"Socialism: Jobs for Everyone"

The Puerto Rican independence movement is growing on the island as well as the United States. Organizations such as the US Branch of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, the Nationalist Party, El Comite and the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization are organizing thousands of Puerto Ricans in defense of their civil rights, for community control of the schools, bilingual education as well as independence for Puerto Rico. An underground group, the FALN (Armed Forces of National Liberation), has claimed responsibility for a number of bombings in the U.S., to call attention to the independence struggle.



Day care centers and educational institutions were the first to go when the city of New York was hit by a financial crisis. Many Third World and working class communities were hit the hardest by the cutbacks in health, education and welfare. The Puerto Rican communities and many of its organizations were in the forefront of the struggles to hold the line against the cutbacks.



Members of El Comite march as a contingent in a New York demonstration. El Comite was started in 1970 as a community organization. During the last seven years the organization has become active in community and workers struggles as well as the movement for Puerto Rican Independence.

In 1976, students demonstrated against the closing of Hostos Community College, the only bilingual college in the U.S. Hostos students succeeded in reopening their college after a long struggle in which the entire Puerto Rican community in New York as well as supporters from other communities were mobilized.





The U.S. branch of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party is an active force in many U.S. cities, seeking to mobilize the Puerto Rican communities in support of independence and self-determination for Puerto Rico, and the rights of Puerto Ricans living in the U.S.

In addition, the independence movement has the support of the international community of nations. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s the Cubans aided the Puerto Rican struggle. In 1973 the UN Committee on Decolonization introduced a resolution on Puerto Rico that was approved by a majority of the nations in the General Assembly. The resolution affirmed "the inalienable right to independence and self-determination of the Puerto Rican people." It instructed the U.S. not to take any measures that would "obstruct the full and free exercise by the people of their inalienable right of self-determination . . . and in particular to prevent any violation of these rights by corporate bodies under its jurisdiction."

Carlos Feliciano, as a delegate to the Havana conference, summed up the sentiment of many independentistas who remembered past struggles of the Puerto Rican people:

I never dreamed the day would come where there would be so much international support as never before. You know, in years past, we were alone. We were in jail for many years and no one seemed to care. No one ever knew about us. But now it's all different.



12

AGAINST
THE COMMON
ENEMY

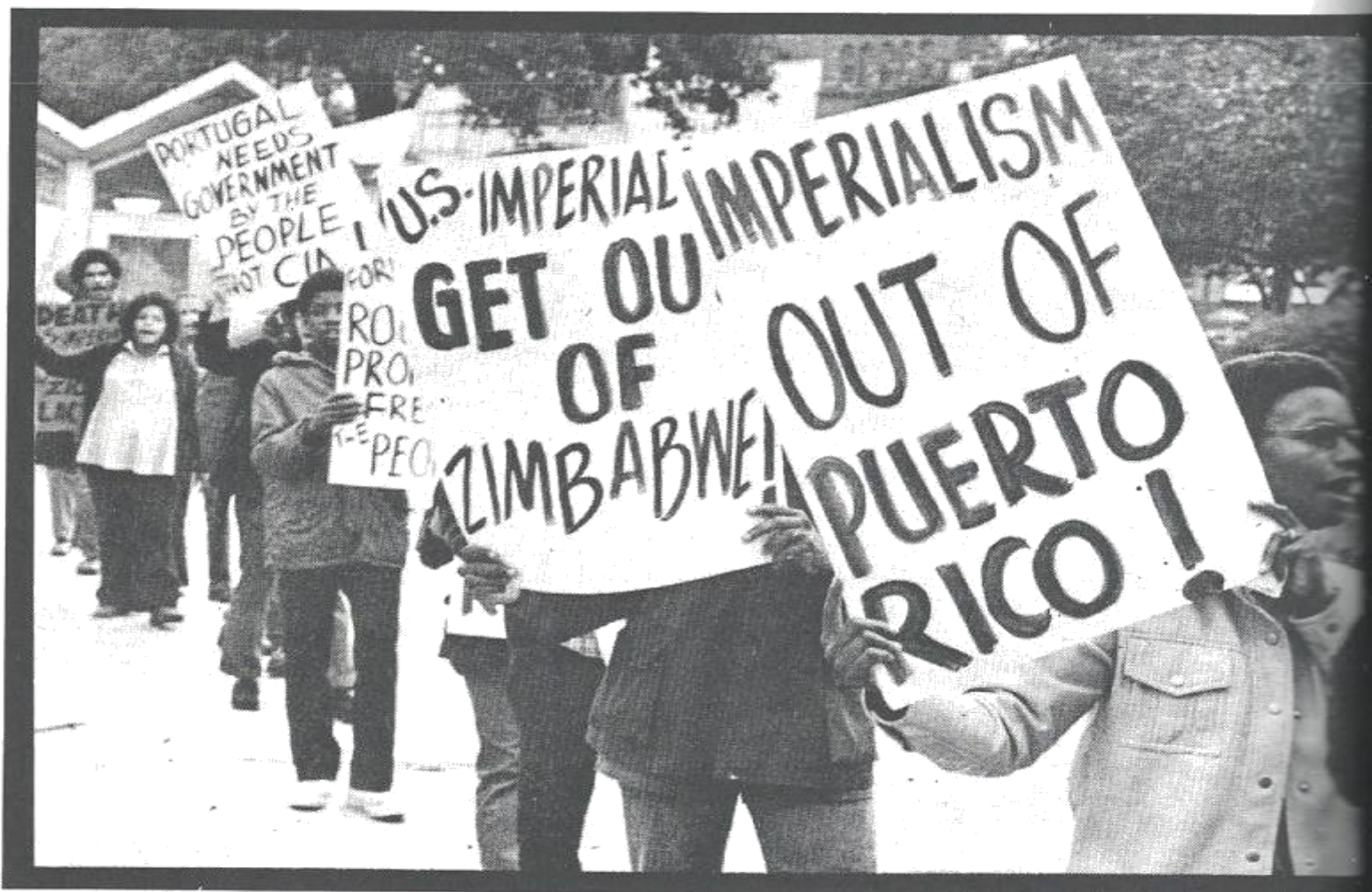
Noose and Neck

The U.S. Empire has tried to bury the truth about Puerto Rico. But the tree of Puerto Rican life and liberation proclaims the truth: the people have been colonized; they will be free.

As the Puerto Rican liberation movement intensifies, it becomes more important for people in the U.S. to learn the truth about Puerto Rico. Puerto Rican independence is a right that we should support; it is also a key part of our own struggle for economic and social justice.

Puerto Rico, like every nation in the world, has a right to independence. For four hundred years the Puerto Rican people have resisted foreign domination; they have fought to determine their own destiny. If the 1868 Lares uprising was the birth cry of the modern Puerto Rican nation, then today that nation, steeled in struggle, is reaching maturity. The independence movement is mobilizing against the deep exploitation and suffering caused by U.S. domination. At the United Nations Puerto Rico seeks its rightful place among the nations of the world.

The Declaration of Independence proclaims the right of a nation to take whatever means are necessary to throw off a colonial oppressor. School history books defend the right to independence because the 13 U.S. colonies defeated British colonialism in an independence war. Most people in the U.S. agree in principle that it is unjust for one nation to exercise colonial control over another nation.



But from the very beginning, the rulers of the U.S. conquered other nations; first moving west to fight the many Indian nations, and expanding their wealth with African slave labor, and land stolen from Mexico. Today the U.S. is a colonialist-imperialist power engaged in the exploitation of nations and peoples both around the world and inside the U.S. While proclaiming themselves the "champions of the Free World," U.S. rulers stand in the way of Puerto Rico's right to freedom and independence. Therefore, the people of the U.S. have an important role to play to help force U.S. imperialism out of Puerto Rico; they can help break the stranglehold the U.S. maintains over the Puerto Rican nation.

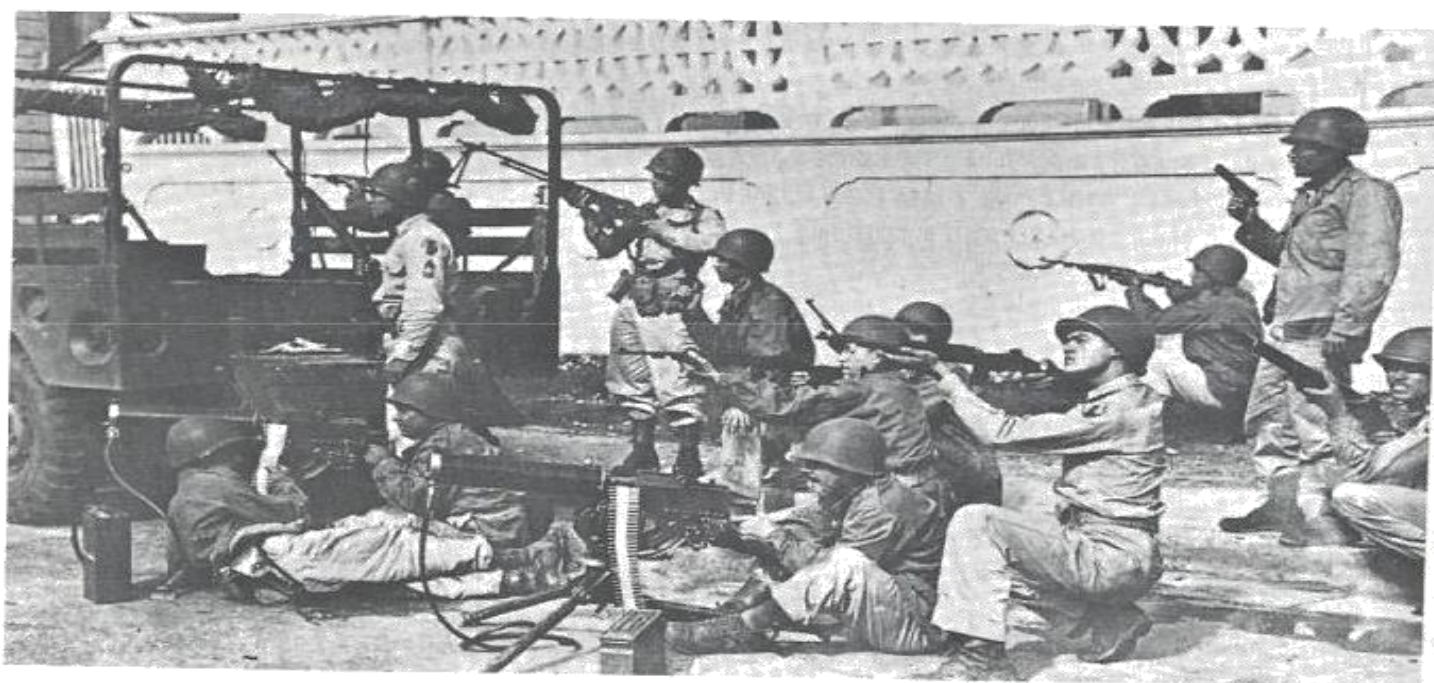
A stranglehold it has been for 100 years. When the Cuban poet Nicolas Guillen writes "Wall Street and Borinquen, noose and neck" he tells it like it is. The U.S. Army conquered the island; since 1898 the U.S. military has used force and the threat of force against the people and the independence movement. It has imposed North American culture and values. It has forced the use of the English language and denied the rich heritage and tradition of Puerto Rican national culture. It has sent Puerto Ricans to die in foreign wars. Imperialism has caused poverty, economic dislocation, and forced migration from the homeland. It engages in a genocidal sterilization campaign. It holds down a people who, like all peoples, want freedom and independence.

U.S. imperialism maintains total control over the Puerto Rican economy, the land and natural resources; it maintains almost total control of the government. All political decisions made in Puerto Rico are subject to final approval or rejection in Washington D.C. To insure its control, the U.S. denies Puerto Rico the right to have its own military, currency, commerce, and postal service. They are all under the jurisdiction of the U.S. government.



Puerto Rico is the most important U.S. colony. The domination of Puerto Rico means huge profits for U.S. imperialism. In the last decade 12 billion dollars in profits has been taken out of Puerto Rico, almost all of it tax-free. Puerto Rico is the fifth largest consumer of U.S.-produced goods in the world. Puerto Rican refineries produce 30% of the petroleum used in the eastern U.S. U.S. industry places profits above people, and contaminates the land and the water.

Puerto Rico serves a strategic purpose for the U.S. military. The island-nation stands at the gateway to Latin America. U.S. military bases usurp 13% of the best agricultural land. These bases exert force against the Puerto Rican independence movement; they threaten the Cuban Revolution, and help protect the U.S.-controlled Panama Canal Zone. The use of Puerto Rico as a military fortress helps to give the U.S. strategic control over Latin American nations seeking independence. It helps prop up U.S.-backed dictatorships from Central America to Chile and Brazil. Puerto Rico, like the Canal Zone, has been used as a staging area for U.S. military and CIA attacks on Latin America, including the U.S. Marine invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965.



Latin America is the continent most heavily exploited by U.S. imperialism. But the example of a socialist Cuba sets the stage for the liberation of all Latin America; an independent Latin America would signal the collapse of the U.S. Empire.

The Puerto Rican independence movement has its counterpart in the revolutionary traditions of Mexico, Central and South America and the other Caribbean nations. Latin America has given the world great liberation leaders: from Tupac Amaru, the Indian general who resisted Spanish conquest, to Chilean President Salvador Allende; from Bolivar and Marti to Che Guevara and Fidel Castro; from Emiliano Zapata to Augusto Cesar Sandino.

Despite setbacks, and the current wave of U.S.-sponsored repression, the Latin American liberation movement is destined to reach victory. Puerto Rico is above all a part of Latin America; its cause is the continental cause. Increasingly, Puerto Rican independence can count on the aid of Latin American nations.



*"Cuba points out
to Latin America
the road to
full freedom."*

~ Che Guevara

"If There is no Struggle There is no Progress"

Puerto Rican independence would be a major setback to U.S. imperialism. It would mean the loss of a large market and immense profits; the loss of a large pool of cheap labor. It would mean the loss of a military base that is vital for the control of Latin America. It is obvious, then, that U.S. imperialism will not give up its colonial control of Puerto Rico without a struggle. As Frederick Douglass, the 19th century Black Abolitionist, wrote:

If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation, are those who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.

The history of the Puerto Rican people is a history of struggle. Today, the Puerto Rican nation faces a powerful enemy, but it does not face that enemy alone. It can count on the support and solidarity of nations and peoples around the world; increasingly, it can count on the support of people inside the U.S.

U.S. imperialism is a world-wide system. The multinational corporations, backed by the Pentagon and the CIA, respect no national boundaries. They roam the world and reap profits from every continent. The struggle against U.S. imperialism is linked, interconnected. In the present era — since its defeat in Viet Nam — U.S. imperialism is in decline. Opposing forces confront each other. On one side are the great majority of the world's people; on the other side are the interests of a small minority who are determined to maximize their profits. Today, the balance of forces is in favor of the people.

Today, U.S. imperialism is on the defensive. Throughout the Third World, national liberation movements are on the rise. This development is a key factor in the decline of U.S. imperialism. From Viet Nam, Cambodia, and Laos to Palestine, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique and Angola, imperialism is suffering defeats.

Today, the continuing struggle against U.S. imperialism and white supremacy is manifested sharply in southern Africa. The Black majorities of Namibia and Zimbabwe are seizing control of their national destinies from the U.S.-backed, racist regimes that have held them captive for decades. In Azania (South Africa), the courageous Black resistance to *apartheid* is tearing apart the last bastion of white supremacy on the African continent.

A growing resistance to imperialism has also emerged among developing nations. The traditional looting of natural resources, super-exploitation of labor, and the unequal trade relations are being challenged by militant organizations and groups. We can see this in the movement of Non-Aligned nations, the Organization of African Unity, the United Nations, and in the strength of the oil-producing countries. The deterioration of U.S. imperial control has also intensified the competition among the capitalist countries. Japan, West Germany, England and France have accelerated the fight for markets, raw materials, and cheap labor; the U.S. has been wounded by this fight.

The development of socialist societies and their support for national liberation in the Third World has also greatly weakened U.S. imperialism by reducing its area of domination. As imperialist exploitation, and imperialist failure to meet the needs of the people becomes more apparent, the nations of the world are finding in socialism the way to build a better life.

Amilcar Cabral, the African leader, wrote:

The liberation struggle is a revolution . . . it does not finish at the moment when the national flag is raised and the national anthem played. A nation's national liberation is the recovery of the historical personality of that nation . . . National liberation exists when, and only when, the national productive forces are completely freed of all kinds of foreign domination.



"A nation's national liberation is the recovery of the historical personality of that nation."

- Amilcar Cabral

This point speaks directly to the Puerto Rican situation. Some nations have won political independence, but have not yet won true self-determination. Their economies continue to be dominated by foreign imperialism. These nations have thrown off direct colonialism, but have not prevented the penetration of imperialism in new and more subtle ways as oppressive as the old.

Statehood

The Popular Democratic Party (PPD) supports the Commonwealth or "Associated Free State" currently under revision. The U.S. Congress is debating a bill called the Compact of Permanent Union, a variation on the present Commonwealth status. The "Compact" would continue the illusion that Puerto Rico is autonomous. In fact, it would tighten the U.S. grip on the island. It would also give the U.S. a pretext to tell the United Nations that Puerto Rico is an internal U.S. affair and of no concern to the nations of the world.

The New Progressive Party (NPP) has proposed that Puerto Rico become the 51st state of the U.S. Commonwealth supporters have long opposed Statehood for Puerto Rico on the grounds that it would force corporations to leave the island; rather than pay the Federal minimum wage laws, they argued, U.S. business would close their shops in Puerto Rico and move to other nations where wages are lower.

Another factor in the situation is oil. Large deposits of oil have recently been discovered off the coast of Puerto Rico. Statehood would give the U.S. oil corporations total control over these deposits; the Puerto Rican people would again be deprived of valuable natural resources.

But Statehood would not end poverty and unemployment in Puerto Rico. Rather it would intensify U.S. economic, political and cultural control of the island. Statehood would annex a separate nation into the U.S. Empire; if successful, it would mean the destruction of the people, their history, culture and national identity. Albizu Campos recognized this long ago when he said:

Statehood for Puerto Rico would be the death sentence of our nationality.

More recently, Oscar Collazo, the Nationalist political prisoner, noted:

Those who back the idea of Puerto Rican statehood and think it could become another state of the union while maintaining its Hispanic identity must abandon this illusion; Yankee imperialism has not maintained the tradition of national pluralism. In spite of the fact that this nation is made up of many races, ethnic identity has never been allowed to develop in the U.S. They should look at the fate of the Indians and the Chicanos who 200 years after being conquered and deprived of what was theirs, are subjected to the culture and language of the ruling nation by means of an inhuman and criminal process. Indian children are sent to boarding schools far from their homes so that little by little they may lose their affection for their people and their preference for their language. Chicano children are given bad grades in school, are not promoted and are even punished physically if they speak the language of their parents.

I refuse to believe that ours will be the only people in modern history to voluntarily accept their ethnic suicide. I also refuse to believe that in the light of the inspiring and great examples of heroism of the peoples of Viet Nam, Angola, Mozambique, Cuba and Zimbabwe today, our people will choose the path of submission and union with the most decadent and criminal empire in history.



The Puerto Rican independence forces demand the complete and total end of U.S. domination, and the building of socialism. Independence and self-determination would allow the Puerto Rican people to define their own national identity and political system. A socialist economy would redistribute the wealth to the great majority of the people; a socialist economy would provide jobs, and diversify both the industrial and agricultural base so that Puerto Rico could become more self-sufficient. A long and bitter heritage of dependency must be overcome; the first and most necessary step is to break free from foreign domination, to establish an independent nation.

There is no precise timetable of Puerto Rican independence. The Puerto Rican people face an imperialism in decline, and imperialism in decline is desperate; that desperation leads to brutality and genocide. As Oscar Collazo explained:

It has already been demonstrated many times that imperialism only gives way when they see a people that is really united behind a purpose of freedom, and when that principle of freedom gets the backing of other peoples of the world.

A Piece of Bread When You're Hungry

Imperialism does give way. U.S. imperialism has been and can be defeated. Nowhere was this shown more clearly than in Viet Nam. There, a people with a long tradition of resistance to foreign domination were subjected to U.S. war crimes that were among the most vicious in human history. Yet even against the bombing raids, the napalm and the defoliants, the genocide, the invasion by over 500,000 U.S. troops, the united people of Viet Nam waged a peoples' war that defeated the most powerful empire on earth. The world will never again be the same.

The victory in Viet Nam is the clearest sign of the decline of U.S. imperialism. The victory in Viet Nam inspired national liberation movements and progressive people all over the globe; it spurred on the freedom struggle inside the U.S.

The Vietnamese people understand the importance of solidarity between the people of the U.S. and the people of Viet Nam. They always made a clear distinction between the U.S. government and the people of North America.

Ho Chi Minh was once asked if he had any special message for the people of the U.S. He said:

I would like to tell the American people that the aggressive war waged by the U.S. government in Viet Nam not only grossly violates the national fundamental right of the Vietnamese people, but also runs counter to the interests and aspirations of the American people. I wish to tell the American people about the determination of the entire Vietnamese people to fight the U.S. aggressors till complete victory. But as for the American people, we want to strengthen our relationship of friendship with them.

The Vietnamese people are strong because of their just cause, their unity and courage, and because they enjoy the support of all peace-loving peoples around the world, including the American people. It is because of their love of justice and humanity that many progressive Americans from all walks of life have courageously raised their voices and staged huge demonstrations. American youth have refused to be sent to Viet Nam as cannon-fodder for the U.S. imperialists. Our people highly value this struggle of the American people. I take this opportunity to extend our sincere thanks. U.S. imperialism is the common enemy of our two peoples. With our united struggle it can certainly be defeated. Our peoples will be victorious.





*"We want to strengthen our friendships with the American people. U.S. imperialism is the common enemy of our two peoples."
~ Ho Chi Minh*

Ho Chi Minh's words exemplify the importance which the Vietnamese national liberation movement placed on the support and solidarity of the people of the U.S. That solidarity played an important role in ending the war, in forcing the U.S. to withdraw from Viet Nam.

In 1972, Ly Van Sau, a representative of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of Viet Nam, said:

We understand what solidarity means, no matter how small it may be. Among our people there is a saying 'A piece of bread for you when you are hungry is more precious than a banquet when you are better.'

The example of the anti-war movement provides many lessons for other solidarity movements inside the U.S. — the movement in support of the liberation of southern Africa, the movement against the fascist dictatorship in Chile, the movement in support of the Palestinian people, and the growing movement in support of Puerto Rico's independence.

"U.S. imperialism is the common enemy of our two peoples," Ho Chi Minh said. This statement is the key to understanding why the people of the U.S. need to stand united in solidarity with Puerto Rican independence. U.S. imperialism not only exploits the people of other nations, it also exploits the people in the U.S., the land where it began.

Violence, colonization, exploitation and misery are the common experiences of peoples of color in the U.S. A long and vicious war of genocide was waged against Native American nations. Black people were kidnapped, enslaved, and lynched. Mexicans were robbed of a large part of their nation, their land and their labor. Chinese were worked to death building the railroads; Japanese were forced into concentration camps during World War II.

U.S. imperialism victimizes peoples within its borders. The many struggles of Third World people against this oppression — the civil rights/Black liberation movement, and the current resurgence of Native American resistance — are directed against U.S. imperialism — the same enemy that the Puerto Rican people are combatting.

Racism and subjugation of native peoples are weapons of imperialism. So is sexism and the exploitation of women. Women in the U.S. are underpaid, denied full access to democratic rights, assaulted by men, and deprived of jobs and control over their own bodies. Over 1.3 million women in the United States are sterilized each year. Sexism and male supremacy in U.S. society also mean continuing violence and discrimination against gay people. As the growing movement against sexism develops it targets U.S. imperialism as the main obstacle on the road to equality.

With the decline of U.S. imperialism, and the severe U.S. economic crisis, working people have demonstrated against their employers. There has been a sharp rise in strikes, increased militancy among rank-and-file laborers, and new efforts to organize the unorganized and the unemployed. While most of the trade union leadership and certain sectors of skilled workers enjoy a relatively privileged position, the majority of White and Third World workers have been hit hard by the economic crisis. As the decline of U.S. imperialism continues, as the Depression deepens, working class struggle is bound to intensify. It is bound to confront the big corporations, the monopolist, imperialist system.

A common enemy. The people of Puerto Rico and the people of the U.S. are exploited by the same small group of monopolies that make billions from the labor of working people. Colonial domination is heavier, workers in the Third World are paid much less than workers in the U.S. They are forced to live in much worse conditions. Still, it is the same monopolies who rob workers in both the developed and the underdeveloped worlds.

The same monopolies that exploit South Africa and Puerto Rico tell the U.S. people to accept lay-offs, unemployment, inflation, higher taxes, cutbacks in already inadequate social services like health care, child care, education, and care for the elderly. The same oil companies that cooked up the phony 1974 oil crisis to raise oil prices in the U.S. want to convert Puerto Rico into a petroleum factory. The same copper companies that robbed Chile of its valuable natural resources and who helped to engineer the CIA-sponsored coup against the Allende government exploit Chicano workers in the U.S. Southwest and strip mine the land in Kentucky. These copper companies plan to totally devour all the vast copper deposits in Puerto Rico's mountains.

The catalogue of crimes that the U.S. imperialists have committed against both the people of Puerto Rico and the people of the U.S. could go on and on. But the conclusion is already clear: our two peoples have a great deal in common, not the least of which is a common oppressor. It is in this common interest, this mutual resistance to oppression by the same enemy, that the deepest solidarity can be found.

Carlos Feliciano also defined the world-wide struggle against U.S. imperialism:

Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rican communities in this country are not the only ones suffering under the yoke of U.S. imperialism. Our Black sisters and brothers also live under the same conditions of terror and violence, and the same applies to those White people and organizations in this country that struggle against U.S. imperialism. The same violence is also applied in other parts of the world, wherever U.S. imperialism exists: Asia, Africa, Latin America. The situation is the same worldwide: U.S. imperialism is the most brutal form of domination and violence that the world has ever known.

It is time that we start extending our struggles, learning from each other, teaching each other, uniting always against our common enemy.

"I am an Anti-Imperialist"

Since the 1890s there has been solidarity between the peoples of Puerto Rico and the peoples of the U.S. Anti-imperialists like Mark Twain, and W.E.B. DuBois, the Black scholar, historian, and founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), condemned the Spanish-American War, and the U.S. conquest of Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Philippines. "I am an anti-imperialist," Mark Twain wrote. "I am opposed to having the eagle put its talons on any other land." Twain joined with others to form the Anti-Imperialist League. In January 1900, a few weeks after the Peace Treaty was signed in Paris, the President of the Anti-Imperialist League argued, "Allow Cuba, allow Puerto Rico, allow the Philippine Islands to setup governments for themselves free from any dictation by us."

In the 1930s, Vito Marcantonio, a Progressive Congressman from New York, denounced the U.S. colonization of Puerto Rico and supported the movement for independence. In the 1940s North Americans joined in solidarity with Albizu Campos and the Nationalists to form the American League for Puerto Rican Independence. In the 1960s and 1970s North Americans rallied behind the cause of Puerto Rican independence, both in the U.S. and on the island. Recently, California Congressman Ron Dellums introduced a resolution in the House of Representatives that stated:

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That all powers and authority presently exercised by the three branches of the Government of the United States, legislative, judicial and executive, and all its agencies and instrumentalities, including the Armed Forces of the United States, over the territory of Puerto Rico, are hereby relinquished and transferred unconditionally and without reservations to the people of Puerto Rico, in order to allow them to fully exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and independence, in accordance with their freely expressed will and desire.

The most dramatic expression of the new solidarity movement was at Madison Square Garden in 1974. Twenty thousand people — Puerto Ricans, Blacks, Asians, Latinos, Native peoples, and Whites — rallied in support of Puerto Rican independence and self-determination. The Garden overflowed with respect and love for the Puerto Rican people.



Javier Rodriguez, President of the Mexican Workers Organization CASA, told the audience that thousands of Mexicans were "forced to migrate to the U.S. to look for work." He concluded that "the struggle for Puerto Rican independence is linked intrinsically with the struggle of the Mexican people for our second independence."

Philip Deer, a representative of the Native American movement and a medicine man, described U.S. conquest of native nations from the 16th through the 20th centuries. "Today our eyes are upon the evidence of the Western Hemisphere," he said. "We are the living evidence here. We are the people of this country . . . and we are here to support the Puerto Rican people because our struggles are the same."

Owusu Sadukai, then Chairperson of the African Liberation Support Committee, noted:

Those of us who work daily in the Black liberation struggle . . . are here as the concrete expression of our will to struggle against the barriers that divide our peoples and our struggles.

We place H. Rap Brown, Jim Grant, Joanne Chesimard [Black political prisoners inside the U.S.] and countless others alongside Lolita Lebron, Oscar Collazo, Rafael Cancel Miranda, Irvin Flores, and Andres Figueroa Cordero. We place the Orangeburg massacre and the murder of the students at Jackson State alongside the Ponce Massacre. We place George Jackson alongside Griselio Torresola. It is clear that our solidarity with the Puerto Rican people is sealed in our blood, is sealed in our continuing contribution to the struggle against imperialism.

Barbara Schneider Reilly, a representative of the North American women's movement, declared:

As we understand it, the question of liberation for women is profoundly linked to the question of liberation for all oppressed peoples. As long as the actions of the exploiters and war-makers from ITT to Kissinger, from Gulf Oil to Rockefeller, are directed against people everywhere, our struggles are inextricably tied together. For it is their bombs, their racist laws, their sterilization programs for women, from Viet Nam to South Africa, Puerto Rico to Manhattan, that give our struggle its international character. But there is another link, a link more precious, more decisive for victory that connects us all: it is an idea. The idea of Freedom. The idea of Dignity. An idea that releases the best in us because it returns us to history. To making history. To living.

Solidarity can be expressed in many ways. Recognizing the truth about Puerto Rico is an important first step. Marching and demonstrating in support of Puerto Rican independence is a vital aspect of solidarity. On July 4th, 1976, tens of thousands of people demonstrated in Philadelphia, San Francisco and Los Angeles for "A Bicentennial Without Colonies," and to demand Puerto Rican independence.

Solidarity can also be expressed by combatting the sterilization campaign against women in Puerto Rico and the U.S. It can be expressed by supporting striking Puerto Rican workers. Solidarity can be expressed by demanding the release of the Five Puerto Rican Nationalist political prisoners. In the future, solidarity could well mean helping persuade the people of the U.S. to actively oppose U.S. military intervention against the rising Puerto Rican nation.

When the struggle in Puerto Rico advances, so too, the struggle advances at home. The powerful solidarity and support of the peoples of the U.S. is of crucial importance to the success of national liberation in Puerto Rico.





One of the foremost organizations in the US working in solidarity with the national liberation struggle in Puerto Rico is the Puerto Rico Solidarity Committee. Founded in 1974, the PRSC now has chapters throughout the country committed to the cause of self determination and independence for Puerto Rico.

The people in the U.S. who have the deepest ties to people on the island are the nearly two million Puerto Ricans who live and work in the U.S. Uprooted from their homeland and forced to struggle for survival in new and hostile surroundings, Puerto Ricans in the U.S. are among the most oppressed victims of the system. Some Puerto Ricans here view their struggle against imperialism as part of the national liberation of their country. Others see themselves primarily as part of the U.S. working class, also in solidarity with the independence movement in the homeland. In both cases, Puerto Ricans in the U.S. constitute a vital bridge between the struggle on the island, and the struggle of oppressed and working people in the U.S.

Flame of Resistance

The people of Puerto Rico have an inspiring history. Nothing can extinguish their desire for national independence. The tradition of resistance to foreign domination goes back five hundred years to the Taino Indians. Enslaved by the Spanish colonizers, the Taino resisted heroically, but were finally wiped out by the conquistadors. Spain then brought African slaves to Puerto Rico to work the mines and harvest the crops. As in many Caribbean and Latin American nations, as well as in the United States, slaves rebelled against their masters in Puerto Rico.

Following this tradition of resistance, African slaves, *jíbaros* and *jornaleros*, led by dedicated patriots including Ramon Betances and Mariana Bracetti, proclaimed the First Free Republic of Puerto Rico in 1868. The Spanish defeated the rebellion, but the Cry of Lares was not forgotten.

Under U.S. rule, workers in the cane fields, the coffee plantations, and in the factories organized against U.S. sugar monopolies. Their struggle was supported by the Nationalist Party under the leadership of Don Pedro Albizu Campos. The Nationalists fought an uncompromising war for independence and self-determination throughout the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, especially at Jayuya in 1950, when the Second Republic was proclaimed. Albizu's words, "Before they take our country they will have to take our lives" are the living soul of the Nationalist commitment.

Today, the island of Borinquen is stirring again. There is a growing force of workers, students, women, intellectuals and youth who — in the tradition of Lares and Jayuya — are battling the U.S. Empire. They are demanding their right to self-determination and independence. As Lolita Lebron tells us:

The fire of Puerto Rican liberation has been lit and it will never be put out. Now flames must grow, not just in flashes but in full rays of light.



A Brief Chronology of Puerto Rican History

- 1493: Christopher Columbus arrives on Borinquen (Puerto Rico) and claims it for the Spanish Empire. (Chapter 1)
- 1511: The Taino Indians of Borinquen launch a major rebellion against the Spanish. Gold production on the island at a peak. (Chapter 1)
- 1514: Only 3,000 Taino Indians, of 50,000 original inhabitants, still alive after Spanish massacre. (Chapter 1)
- 1521: Only 600 surviving Taino Indians on Borinquen. (Chapter 1)
- 1520s: Beginning use of Africans as slave labor on Borinquen. (Chapter 1)
- 1527: First revolt of Black slaves on Borinquen. (Chapter 1)
- 1776: War for American Independence. United States is established. (Chapter 2)
- 1790: Slave uprising in Haiti led by Toussaint L'Ouverture. Republic of Haiti is established. (Chapter 2)
- 1820s: Triumph of Latin American wars of liberation against Spanish Empire, led by Simon Bolivar. (Chapter 2)
- 1822: Uprising of Black slaves in Puerto Rico. (Chapter 2)
- 1824: Insurrection led by Maria Mercedes Barbudo. (Chapter 2)
- 1827: Birth of Ramon Emeterio Betances, leader of independence movement. (Chapter 2)
- 1845: End of slave trade in Puerto Rico. (Chapter 2)
- 1848: Slave rebellions lead governor of Puerto Rico to issue Bando Negro (Black Code). (Chapter 2)
- 1865: Cuban and Puerto Rican patriots in New York form pro-independence Republican Society. (Chapter 2)
- 1867: Betances issues "The Ten Commandments of Liberty." (Chapter 2)
- 1868: Rebellion at Lares — *El Grito de Lares*. (Chapter 2)
- 1873: Abolition of slavery on Puerto Rico. (Chapter 2)
- 1887: Year of Terror against *independentistas*, patriots, reformers. (Chapter 2)
- 1891: Birth of Don Pedro Albizu Campos, leader of the Nationalist Party. (Chapter 5)
- 1895: Cuban war of independence led by Jose Martí. (Chapter 3)
- 1897: Spain grants Puerto Rico autonomy within the Empire. (Chapter 3)
- 1898: Spanish-American War; U.S. invades Puerto Rico. (Chapter 3)
- 1899: Treaty of Paris; Puerto Rico "awarded" to U.S. as spoils of war. (Chapter 3)
- 1900: Foraker Act passed. First U.S. governor appointed to Puerto Rico. (Chapter 3)
- 1910: Free Federation of Workers founded under leadership of Santiago Iglesias Partin. (Chapter 4)
- 1915: The Socialist Party of Puerto Rico founded. (Chapter 4)

- 1917: Passage of the Jones Act; Puerto Ricans made U.S. citizens. U.S. enters World War I. (Chapter 3)
- 1922: Nationalist Party founded. (Chapter 5)
- 1929: Depression hits Puerto Rico. (Chapter 5)
- 1930: 40% of working population unemployed in Puerto Rico. Albizu Campos elected President of Nationalist Party. (Chapter 5)
- 1933-1934: Major strikes by sugar cane workers. (Chapter 5)
- 1934: Puerto Rican Communist Party founded. (Chapter 5)
- 1935: Police kill Nationalists at the University of Puerto Rico. (Chapter 5)
- 1936: Two Nationalists assassinate the chief of police, and are murdered by the police. Albizu Campos jailed. (Chapter 5)
- 1937: Ponce Massacre; police kill Nationalists. (Chapter 5)
- 1938: Muñoz Marin founds the Popular Democratic Party (PPD). (Chapter 5)
- 1940: General Confederation of Workers founded. (Chapter 6)
- 1941: U.S. enters World War II. (Chapter 6)
- 1947: Operation Bootstrap (industrialization plan) goes into effect. Albizu Campos released from prison. (Chapter 6)
Beginning of migration to U.S. from Puerto Rico. (Chapter 9)
- 1948: Students strike at the University of Puerto Rico. Muñoz Marin first elected governor of the island. Puerto Rican Independence Party formed. (Chapter 7)
- 1950: President Truman signs Public Law 600
Jayuya uprising.
Nationalists try to kill Truman in Washington, D.C. (Chapter 7)
- 1952: Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is established. (Chapter 7)
- 1954: Four Nationalists open fire in the U.S. House of Representatives. (Chapter 7)
- 1959: Triumph of the Cuban Revolution.
Movimiento Pro-Independencia (MPI) formed. (Chapter 8)
- 1960: Students launch campaign against ROTC. (Chapter 10)
- 1965: Death of Albizu Campos. (Chapter 10)
- 1966-1972: Intensive Puerto Rican political activity against the war in Viet Nam. (Chapter 10)
- 1969: Young Lords Party founded in New York. (Chapter 10)
- 1971: MPI becomes the Puerto Rican Socialist Party. (Chapter 11)
- 1972-1975: Wave of workers' strikes on the island; National Guard mobilized.
Students strike at the University of Puerto Rico. (Chapter 11)
- 1974: 20,000 people attend rally in support of Puerto Rican independence in New York City. (Chapter 12)
- 1975: Conference on international solidarity with Puerto Rican independence held in Havana. (Chapter 11)
- 1976: Tens of thousands march in the U.S. for a "Bicentennial Without Colonies" and independence for Puerto Rico. (Chapter 11)
- 1976: Nation-wide mobilization to free the 5 Puerto Rican Nationalist prisoners.