

Abstract

Puerto Rico and the United States:
how the political relationship led to a humanitarian crisis in the island

Katie Méndez

Director: Sarah W. Walden, Ph.D.

Former governor Alejandro García Padilla's announcement that Puerto Rico could not pay its 72-billion-dollar debt prompted debates regarding the role the United States should play in Puerto Rico's ability to restructure and pay the debt. Throughout the presidential election, when debate surrounding the issue increased, the predominant argument was that the United States did not play a role in creating the financial crisis. This thesis directly examines this argument through an interdisciplinary study of the role of the United States in Puerto Rico's political and socioeconomic status. More specifically, this thesis analyzes policies surrounding women's reproduction, race issues, the establishment of democracy and citizenship in Puerto Rico, acts of violence in the island, and economic policies to explain their effect in the creation of the debt crisis. Lastly, this thesis ends by analyzing the modern implications of the political and financial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States and how the two sides can move forward.

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS:

Dr. Sarah Walden, Baylor Interdisciplinary Core

APPROVED BY THE HONORS PROGRAM:

Dr. Elizabeth Corey, Director

DATE: _____

PUERTO RICO AND THE UNITED STATES:
HOW THE POLITICAL RELATIONSHIP LED TO A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN
THE ISLAND

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty Of
Baylor University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Honors Program

By
Katie Méndez

Waco, Texas

May 2018

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Sarah Walden, for her support throughout the research, writing, and editing process. Dr. Walden provided the perfect balance of guidance and freedom, making room for my creative process while ensuring that I met the requisites and guidelines. I am forever indebted for her academic and personal support throughout my undergraduate career.

I would also like to thank Dr. Cooper and Dr. Turpin for serving as readers in my committee. Dr. Cooper's guidance throughout his Philosophy of Latin America course was exceptionally helpful in understanding the policies discussed in this thesis and how they were perceived within the Latin American culture of Puerto Rico. Dr. Turpin's expertise on American women's history is unmatched and provided a lot of useful insight in understanding the intersection of gender and politics.

I would also like to acknowledge the Baylor Interdisciplinary Core and the Honors Program for providing me with the skills necessary to undertake this project. Most importantly, I am grateful to these programs for sparking my interest in world cultures, and in doing so, reviving my passion to understand the culture and history of my home.

Last but not least, I must express my profound gratitude to my parents for their encouragement throughout my research and writing process. I am thankful for their listening ear and for their effort to push through many of the struggles discussed in this thesis; without their effort, I would not have gotten here.

Sincerely,

Katie Méndez

PREFACE

The Beginning of U.S. – Puerto Rico Relations

On June 28, 2015, then-governor of Puerto Rico, Alejandro García Padilla, declared that the island's 72-billion-dollar debt could not be paid. With that declaration, Puerto Rico became a subject of discussion in multiple newspapers and some debates during the 2016 presidential primaries. Questions regarding how the United States should act arose, with two major points of view predominantly surrounding the conversation: Puerto Rico was solely responsible for its debt and needed to handle it on its own; or, the United States needed to take responsibility for the fiscal issues in Puerto Rico and provide a way for its government to declare bankruptcy and restructure the debt. The first camp of thought will often mention instances of political corruption and substantial borrowing from the Puerto Rican government; the second camp relies on Puerto Rico's territorial status and lack of voting rights as the main reasons for the United States' need to assist Puerto Rico. Yet, neither analyzes the intricacies that led the island to its current crisis and how both governments have contributed to the creation of debt.

Debates surrounding the United States' role in the crisis are complicated because, due to its relationship with the United States, Puerto Rico's political status is a mystery, unknown to many. This affects Puerto Rico politically, economically, and socially, positively and/or negatively, particularly in times of crisis. Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States has placed it in a liminal space that has resulted in its invisibility within the United States—Americans may consider Puerto Rico to be too Hispanic to be

American while the Hispanic and Latin American community often consider Puerto Rico to be too American. High school-level history courses may only focus on the United States' acquisition of Puerto Rico as a consequence of the Spanish-American War and Latin American Studies departments in universities often choose not to focus on Puerto Rico because it is a territory of the United States. It is this lack of Puerto Rican history in the United States that has resulted in the majority of Americans being ignorant of the citizenship status of Puerto Ricans.¹ The lack of awareness that Puerto Ricans are American citizens have contributed to the first camp of thought mentioned, as Americans fail to see why the United States should concern itself with issues in Latin America. Meanwhile, Latin American countries may not be too concerned with Puerto Rico's crisis because of its territorial status and decide not to offer any aid or advocate on its behalf.

While growing up in Puerto Rico, I heard the island being referred to as a colony of the United States—some people refer to the island as *La Colonia*, literally, “the colony”—or of the island's greater democratic status resulting from the United States' interference. When my family relocated to Texas and I encountered racism (often in the form of “illegal immigrant” comments), the lack of knowledge about the island's commonwealth status, and the lack of history available in my Latin American studies courses, I realized that Puerto Ricans are virtually invisible, not completely belonging within Latin America or the United States. The rise in the familiar racist rhetoric that surrounded debates on the debt crisis, made personal by the loss of the family business

1. Ariel Edwards-Levy, “A Lot of Americans Don't Know That Puerto Ricans Are American, Too,” *Huffington Post*, September 20, 2017. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/puerto-rico-america-polling_us_59c2891be4b0186c22075059.

due to a law passed in Congress removing Section 936 of the tax code, and my awareness of American unawareness regarding the political status of the island inspired me to research the multifaceted factors that brought Puerto Rico to the crisis it faces today.

My personal experiences and academic background have led me to the conclusion that Puerto Rico's current situation and political status is one that should not exist within a democracy. The purpose of this thesis, however, is not to address what Puerto Rico's political status should be. Rather, the purpose is to examine the factors that led to its current status and crisis through an interdisciplinary examination of gender and race issues, democracy and citizenship in the island, and acts of violence between the mainland and the island since its acquisition of the United States in 1898. Examining these factors will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the United States' role in fostering the economic crisis afflicting the island today. These issues will also set the foundation upon which the economic policies established by the United States can be judged more thoroughly, since studies have found that bad government and violence cause a poverty trap, not the inverse, as it is often taught.² Analyzing early American policies and how they violently targeted Puerto Ricans will allow for a more exhaustive evaluation of the effect of social and economic policies on the island. To do this more effectively, this introduction will serve to provide a concise historical background of how the United States acquired Puerto Rico.

2. "The Economics of Violence," *The Economist*, April 14, 2011, <https://www.economist.com/node/18558041>.

In 1898, the United States declared war against Spain and invaded lands under its control stating they would liberate Cuba, Guam, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico. This was not the first time the United States had sought out the attainment of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and other Caribbean islands; the United States had been seeking out Puerto Rico as a sugar empire as early as the Civil War era.³ When the United States arrived at the shores of Puerto Rico, it found the island celebrating their grant of a semi-autonomous government guaranteed through Spain's *Carta Autonómica de Puerto Rico 1897*, or the Autonomous Charter of Puerto Rico 1897, which in many ways mirrors the current political status of Puerto Rico under American control. The Autonomous Charter declared the following:⁴

<p style="text-align: center;">ARTÍCULO 2</p> <p>El Gobierno de la Isla se compondrá de un Parlamento Insular, dividido en dos Cámaras, y de un Gobernador General, representante de la Metrópoli, que ejercerá en nombre de ésta la Autoridad Suprema.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">TÍTULO II. DE LAS CÁMARAS INSULARES</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ARTÍCULO 3</p> <p>La facultad de legislar sobre los asuntos coloniales ... corresponde a las Cámaras insulares con el Gobernador General.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ARTÍCULO 4</p> <p>La representación insular se compone de dos Cuerpos iguales en facultades: la Cámara de Representantes y el Consejo de Administración.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">TÍTULO III. DEL CONSEJO DE ADMINISTRACIÓN</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ARTÍCULO 5</p> <p>El Consejo se compone de quince individuos, de los cuales ocho serán elegidos en la forma indicada en la ley electoral, y los otros siete serán designados por el Rey ...</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ARTICLE 2</p> <p>The Government of the Island will be composed of an Insular Parliament, divided into two Houses, and a Governor General, representative of the Metropolis, who will act on its behalf with Supreme Authority.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">TITLE II. ON THE INSULAR HOUSES</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ARTICLE 3</p> <p>The power to legislate with regard to colonial matters ... corresponds to the Insular Houses and the Governor General.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ARTICLE 4</p> <p>The insular representation will be composed of two Bodies with equal power: The House of Representatives and the Board of Administrators.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">TITLE IV. ON THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ARTICLE 5</p> <p>The Board will be composed of fifteen individuals, of which eight will be chosen as indicated in electoral law, and the other seven will be designated by the King ...</p>
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3. Becky Little, "Puerto Rico's Complicated History with the United States," History.com, September 22, 2017, <http://www.history.com/news/puerto-ricos-complicated-history-with-the-united-states>.

4. "Carta Autonómica de Puerto Rico 1897," *LexJuris Puerto Rico*, translation mine. <http://www.lexjuris.com/lexlex/lexotras/lexcartaautonomica.htm>.

In addition to the electoral power enacted through the Board of Directors, a House of Representatives was created, which would be composed of men of Spanish descent. They had to be island-born or a Puerto Rican citizen for at least four years, have no criminal record, and be of age, a number not specified in the text.⁵ The proportion would have been one representative per 25,000 citizens and the representatives would be elected every five years. Further, the Insular House would be in charge of deciding the functions of the Representatives and conditions for reelection.⁶

By the time the United States had invaded the city of Guánica, Puerto Ricans had already held their first election and were celebrating their newly given rights. However, the speech General Miles' gave upon his arrival provided some Puerto Ricans hope for full independence. The speech declared the following liberation clauses:

In the prosecution of the war against the kingdom of Spain by the people of the United States, in the cause of liberty, justice, and humanity, its military forces have come to occupy the island of Puerto Rico. *They come bearing the banner of freedom, inspired by a noble purpose to seek the enemies of our country and yours, and to destroy or capture all who are in armed resistance.* They bring you the fostering arm of a free people, whose greatest power is in its justice and humanity to all those living within its fold. Hence the first effect of this occupation will be the immediate release from your former relations, and it is hoped a cheerful acceptance of the government of the United States. The chief object of the American military forces will be to overthrow the armed authority of Spain, and to give the people of your beautiful island the largest measure of liberty consistent with this occupation. *We have not come to make war upon the people of a country that for centuries has been oppressed, but, on the contrary, to bring you protection, not only to yourselves, but to your property; to promote your prosperity, and bestow upon you the immunities and blessings of the liberal institutions of our government.* It is not our purpose to interfere with any existing laws and customs that are wholesome and beneficial to your people so long as they conform to the

5. Carta Autonómica de 1897, art. 12.

6. Ibid., art. 13.

rules of military administration of order and justice. This is not a war of devastation, but one to give all within the control of its military and naval forces the advantages and blessings of enlightened civilization.⁷
(Emphasis mine)

In the beginning of the American occupation, General Miles' speech inspired Puerto Ricans to turn against the Spanish, but this sentiment and loyalty swiftly faded as the United States left the island's status in limbo. Now ruled by the United States' military, Puerto Ricans had less rights than they had under Spanish power, even if that power had only recently been established. It would not be until two years later, in 1900, that some gubernatorial institutions would be created through the Foraker Act of 1900. The Foraker Act established that the president of the United States would appoint the governor, a secretary, an attorney general, a treasurer, an auditor, a commissioner of the interior, and a commissioner of education, with five additional members whose positions within the council were unspecified.⁸ Of those in the executive council, only "five ... shall be native inhabitants of Porto Rico."⁹ The Act also established two houses – one being the Executive Council and the other being the House of Delegates, for which Puerto Ricans could vote on a date decided by the Executive Council.¹⁰ The Foraker Act was also the beginning of multiple financial policies that resulted in extreme poverty in the island, particularly by exchanging Spanish currency with American currency; the full extent of the impact this policy had will be discussed in more detail in chapter five.¹¹ It would take

7. Karl Stephen Herrmann, *A Recent Campaign in Puerto Rico by the Independent Regular Brigade Under the Command of Brig. General Schwan* (United States, 1907), 32-33.

8. The Foraker Act, Pub.L. 56–191, 31 Stat. 77, §18.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., §27.

11. Ibid., §11.

another year for Puerto Rico's political status to be addressed through a set of Supreme Court cases known as the Insular Cases, which established that Puerto Rico, and the other territories acquired through the Spanish-American War, were inhabited by alien races and, as such, could not be governed to the extent and with the full rights given to states and North American citizens. Puerto Rico was, therefore, "a territory appurtenant and belonging to the United States, but not a part of the United States."¹² This decision set the precedent for all future colonial policies and is the center of many contentions between the United States and Puerto Rico.

To this day, all decisions made by the House of Delegates in Puerto Rico can be vetoed by the Congress of the United States, which has one non-voting Puerto Rican representative referred to as the "Resident Commissioner." One important example of Congress' veto power took place in 1914, when the Puerto Rican House of Delegates voted unanimously in favor of independence, a vote that was then rejected by the United States Congress on the grounds that it was unconstitutional and a violation of the Foraker Act.¹³ The government established by the United States was not very different from the one established by Spain in the Autonomous Charter, but the acquirement of the island meant that Puerto Ricans had to once again fight for the rights that Spain had already guaranteed.

Since 1898, the additional rights secured for Puerto Ricans have been the granting of citizenship in 1917—which many believe was granted with the intention that Puerto

12. *Downes v. Bidwell*, 182 U.S. 244 (1901).

13. Joel Morales Cruz, *The Histories of the Latin American Church: A Handbook* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 518.

Ricans would then be able, and required, to enlist for the military draft and fight in the First World War—and the granting of commonwealth status to Puerto Rico in 1952. These rights, however, were not granted peacefully. On the contrary, many laws were put in place with the explicit purpose of suppressing the independence movement in the island: the national anthem was criminalized, the flag was outlawed, massacres took place, and nationalist leaders were arrested multiple times before the island was granted its commonwealth status. The creation of the commonwealth forced the international community to be less involved and outspoken on the issues Puerto Rico faced since the Treaty of Westphalia had established a “live and let live” policy that was central to international relations.¹⁴

Although Puerto Ricans have raised many questions regarding the island’s political status, one question has yet to be answered: why were Cuba and the Philippines granted independence while Puerto Rico retained a colonial status? One possible answer lies in the United States’ use of women’s reproductive system and Protestant morality. The first chapter of this thesis will address this possibility by arguing that the United States used Puerto Rican women’s sexuality and reproduction to claim the need for an American, Protestant authority in the island. Specifically, the United States relied on Social Darwinism and the eugenics movement to garner support for American intervention—and it worked. It was through women’s bodies—and the racial arguments it relied upon—that the United States was able to create its empire.

14. “Treaty of Westphalia: Peace Treaty between the Holy Roman Emperor and the King of France and their respective Allies,” October 24, 1648. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/westphal.asp

The second chapter will focus on race issues in the island, focusing primarily on how Puerto Ricans—who are predominantly of European heritage—came to be identified as racially inferior through the creation of a homogenous race and use of rhetorical devices that mirrored those used to subjugate African Americans and other minorities in the United States. Then, the third chapter will examine the implications of gender- and race-based policies and rhetoric on the democracy and citizenship status of Puerto Ricans. To fully answer how violence has affected the economy of the island, the fourth chapter will focus on acts of violence directed towards the Nationalist movement and civilians at different times in Puerto Rico’s history. Once the sociological framework surrounding the economic crisis has been outlined, the fifth chapter will focus on the economic policies that caused the breaking point for the economy of the island. Lastly, this thesis will conclude by examining the effects each of these factors has had on the fabric of Puerto Rican society and how both the United States and Puerto Rico can seek to move forward.

CHAPTER I.

Colonization through reproduction

It is not women who have a colonial status, but the colonies that have a woman's status.

—*Maria Mies*

Although the United States used liberation and democracy as a way to arrive at the shores of Puerto Rico, it used reproduction and women's sexuality to prove that the United States' long-term intervention in the area was necessary. Women's bodies have served as one of the biggest battlegrounds in the political debate between Puerto Rico and the United States, as it provided the United States with a justification for the island's colonial status and the Nationalists with a reason to form an independence movement. In fact,

For feminists, nationalists, the U.S. military, the federal government, philanthropists, and academic scientists and social scientists, it has been important to 'know' Puerto Rican women's bodies, and to rescue, condemn, or defend working-class women. This fact has been important to the U.S. imperial project on the island.¹⁵

Issues of race, religion, and sexuality were the focal points of the rhetoric the United States employed in the face of growing anti-imperialist organizations that sought to halt the acquisition of territories after the Spanish-American War, such as the Anti-Imperialist League, which counted on the voices of people such as Mark Twain.¹⁶ To counter the

15. Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico*, (University of California Press, 2002), 15.

16. Patrick Dooley, "Twain on War and William Jones on Peace: Shoring up the Platform of the Anti-Imperialist League," *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 1, no. 1 (2009).

possibility of opposition, the United States forged a campaign founded on “Puerto Rican sexuality ... defined by its deviance,” which resulted in the idea of the tropical prostitute “seductive but brimming with disease,” the overlarge family stemming from ignorance and brainwashing by the Catholic Church and its ideologies, overpopulation, and “the notion of the ‘culture of poverty,’” which juxtaposed the image of the African American welfare queen.¹⁷ Because of this, the United States would argue, Puerto Ricans needed to be saved from themselves. By using religious morality as a way to establish and justify its rule, the United States proclaimed its mission as being one of a higher power, making it less acceptable to question its actions. Colonial policies focused so strongly on women’s sexuality that the Nationalist movement in Puerto Rico made feminism foundational to its political agenda, making the need for women’s liberation equal to the liberation of the island as a whole. Mies’ quote regarding the treatment and policing of women’s bodies encapsulates why the Nationalist movement saw the establishment of feminism as the center of its ideology and a necessary factor in the fight for independence.

This chapter will focus on dispelling misconceptions regarding the connection between sexuality and colonialism in Puerto Rico, focusing largely on research presented by Laura Briggs—professor and chair of Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and an internationally known historian of reproductive politics—in *Reproducing Empire*. Through Briggs’ landmark research connecting Puerto Rican reproduction to American colonialism, this chapter will primarily dispel the idea that the United States’ colonial policies on the island were an accidental by-

17. Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, 4.

product of benevolent motivations; in fact, it will show that colonialism was the goal, one that was first established through the regulation of women's bodies and reproduction. Further, it will discuss prostitution policies and how they helped spark the nationalist movement, the rise of tropical medicine, the eugenics movement, birth control experiments, and forced sterilization in the island. In all, this chapter will prove that women's bodies and sexuality were used as the battleground both for colonialism and independence and laid the foundation upon which the use of violence in the island could be excused and supported, setting off a chain of events that lead to the economic crisis.

Establishing the “Puerto Rican difference” through families

Because the island's differences have been established through religion, race, and gender, which form part of the basis of the family unit, it is essential to examine how each of these areas were redefined after the acquisition of the island and how they are interrelated. By highlighting Puerto Rico's Catholicism, the intermingling of African, Spanish, and Taíno races, and the extent of single mothers in the island, the United States was able to place Puerto Rico into the category of an “*other*” that could be redeemed with the guidance of the more enlightened Protestant, Anglo-Saxon ways of North America.

An example of this re-framing is seen through a study conducted by Linda Chavez, a neoconservative who wrote *Out of the Barrio*, and examined the assimilation of Mexican and Cuban American immigrants and Puerto Ricans into the mainland United States. She termed the Hispanic group that was not assimilating as quickly the “Puerto

Rican exception.”¹⁸ Chavez established this “exception” on the grounds that Puerto Ricans were eligible for welfare, whereas Mexican and Cuban American immigrants were not unless they had received citizenship, and specifically placed the blame on their cultural views of marriage stating, “their growing propensity to form families without benefit of marriage — a tradition with roots on the island but which has transmogrified into welfare dependency in the United States ... saw many Puerto Rican fathers abandoning responsibility for their children to the state.”¹⁹ Chavez’s arguments incorporate the prevailing theme of the “welfare queen” ascribed to African Americans and Puerto Ricans, blaming Puerto Rican culture for what she believed was a Puerto Rican propensity to abuse the welfare system.

In *Reproducing Empire*, Briggs indicates that Chavez’s attempt to re-frame the Puerto Rican family and the burden she believed they created fell victim to a pitfall that is all too common in American discourse surrounding Puerto Rico and its citizens: she speaks of Puerto Ricans as immigrants, completely ignoring the fact that any federal welfare program available in the United States mainland would have been made available in the island to some degree. If the welfare system had a different result in the mainland than it did in the island, looking to Puerto Rican culture instead of the extraneous factors Puerto Ricans faced on the mainland only provided a myopic perspective of the sociological factors at play.

18. Linda Chavez, *Out of the barrio: toward a new politics of Hispanic assimilation*, (NY, New York: BasicBooks, 2002).

19. *Ibid.*, 142-43.

As the shortcomings in Chavez's argument proved too obvious, the argument of the Puerto Rican difference was then shifted to single mothers. Don Feder, a conservative newspaper columnist, provides a good illustration of the rhetoric used to accomplish this through his argument that Puerto Rico is a Dogpatch ridden with poverty because of the predominance of "women with children but no husbands."²⁰ Feder's statements in his column sum up the "Puerto Rican difference" and America's reception to its Puerto Rican citizens well: "We need more non-English speakers in this country like we need more welfare recipients, higher crime rates and an alien culture."²¹ According to Chavez, Feder, and those who relied on their rhetorical analyses, what made Puerto Ricans different from North American citizens — their ethnicity, culture, religion, and language — made them more than just different; it made them sub-human. Welcoming in people who possessed these differences would therefore worsen the condition of the United States, not improve it. The most effective way to establish this difference was proven to be through the Puerto Rican single mother, as they could be portrayed as the result of the lack of morality that accompanied Catholicism and being "outside" of the Anglo-Saxon race. Using single mothers as the justification for American intervention allowed the United States to continue denying its imperialist role, which went largely unquestioned by citizens and other governments.

20. Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, 7.

21. Don Feder, "No Statehood for Caribbean Dogpatch," League of United Latin American Citizens, November 30, 1998, https://lulac.org/advocacy/issues/caribbean_dogpatch/.

Myths of colonialism

The denials of imperialist actions by the United States have resulted in the development of certain myths surrounding the issue of colonialism. In *Reproducing Empire*, Briggs argues that there are three commonsense assumptions regarding the significance of sexuality in the colonialist history of Puerto Rico's political status. These three assumptions are: that colonialism is not an incident in which larger powers strategically and opportunistically abuse smaller powers; denials that "the 'private' sphere is and was fundamentally political, that ways of organizing sexuality structured imperial armies, labor forces, public policy, and debate about reform"; and, that colonialism only affects the colonized country and people.²²

The political actions of the United States have often been interpreted as anything other than colonial, since the United States had declared itself a "major anti-imperialist force in the world, the nation that insists upon the integrity of the national boundaries ... the protector of victimized nations within national boundaries," ideologies Briggs argues are fundamental contradictions (a country cannot be the protector of nations without interfering within those nations) but nevertheless form a part of the American mythos, the intrinsic ideologies that form and shape American society.²³ The idea that colonialism is not a series of isolated incidents where a powerful country takes advantage of a smaller country has contributed to the belief that any colonial actions on behalf of the United States are an unintentional consequence of well-meaning actions. This assumption is

22. Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, 22.

23. *Ibid.*, 2.

particularly dangerous, as when it is combined with formal pronouncements and statements of liberty—such as General Miles’ speech provided in the preface—do not allow a path through which the crises that result from imperialism can be addressed. When debating possibilities for Puerto Rico to move forward from its debt, this myth has been particularly detrimental, as it shuts down any conversation asking the United States to take responsibility for its role, leaving the island without a route for repayments or bankruptcy declarations.

Briggs further argues that the “private” sphere, although it is meant to be private and, therefore, isolated from political affairs, is not so in action. This affected the prostitution policy imposed in the island, which was enforced by many facets of society, including the military, the medical profession, labor force, and political debate. As a result, the prostitution policy expanded beyond a simple idea, theory, or rhetorical instrument used to address sexuality in a way that accentuated the difference between American values and Puerto Rican values, and instead became a powerful and well-structured imperial technology that laid the groundwork for colonialism and the nationalist movement alike.

The third myth, that colonialism does not have an effect on the colonizing power, has allowed Puerto Rico to quietly fall into the liminal space. As Briggs herself mentions, “one of the things that allows and perpetuates the scholarly neglect of the history of Puerto Rico is the belief that it is important only to Puerto Ricans, or North Americans visiting the island.”²⁴ While scholarly neglect has a powerful and negative impact on its

24. Laura Briggs., *Reproducing Empire*, 22.

own, the impact that it has on political debate and reform, and social and economic issues, makes the liminal space even more dangerous for Puerto Ricans who have to abide by the rules of a government that hardly recognizes its existence.

Prostitution policy and tropical medicine as colonial technologies

Because “discourses of domesticity, family, and sexuality ... lie at the heart of colonialism,” the United States was able to effectively begin the colonization of Puerto Rico through the creation and enforcement of prostitution policies that allowed for the creation of tropical medicine.²⁵ Prostitution policies and the use of tropical medicine were not new colonial technologies; a study of different imperial powers and their prostitution policies shows that controlling sexuality and prostitution is vital to establishing control over its newly acquired territories. Such policies had already been established in Puerto Rico through Spain, and other examples can be found in prostitution policies in India during the era of British colonialism.

Prostitution policy subordinated Puerto Rican women in order to allow American men²⁶ to act as they wanted while making sure their wives would be none the wiser about their husbands’ rendezvous, putting the responsibility of protecting men from venereal diseases on Puerto Rican women. This had a two-fold negative effect on Puerto Rican society by normalizing the idea that Puerto Rican lives could be sacrificed and subjugated for the benefit of North Americans and subjected women to violence that Puerto Rican men did not have to experience. Discourses and policies surrounding prostitutes in the

25. Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, 27.

26. Although Puerto Ricans are also American citizens, the distinction in this thesis is made, to accentuate that they may have not received citizenship during the time period discussed; or, in order to distinguish between North Americans and Puerto Rican citizens.

island made it obvious that the United States was actively and purposefully utilizing imperialist tools, as international discourses surrounding the maternal health and venereal diseases characterized the interests of mothers “as endangered by the prostitutes.”²⁷ Puerto Rican women were caught in a double-bind that condemned them for being prostitutes while it simultaneously considered prostitution to be a necessary evil in the maintenance of a stable society by protecting noble, or white, women from the uncontrollable sexual urges of men. American prostitution policies resulted in the imprisonment of innocent women, forceful, painful and invasive medical exams and treatments, and the starvation of jailed women for acts that were seen as upholding and protecting decent, North American women. Although it claimed to differ from Spanish prostitution policies, the policies established by the United States did not differ in their mission, as they still sought to protect the wealthy from the poor Puerto Ricans, and even more importantly, the exotic Puerto Rican Jezebel.

Prostitution policy and the rise of nationalism

Between 1905 and 1917, prostitutes in San Juan were forced to undergo weekly examinations while prostitutes outside of San Juan had to register with their local police station. The Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in Puerto Rico, led by Edith Hildreth, organized a meeting with Governor Arthur Yager and Attorney General Howard Kern “and persuaded them to begin enforcing mainland laws requiring the suppression of prostitution within five miles of training-camp cantonments.”²⁸ Because of

27. Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, 30.

28. *Ibid.*, 47.

the severe crackdown on prostitution, such an exorbitant amount of women were being jailed that local officials had to clear the jails of male prisoners to make room for the women.

The WCTU, local police force, and government ironically received support from the Catholic Church, which framed the movement as one seeking to protect matrimony. The reproductive and sexual practices of the working class were now open to the scrutiny of the United States and Puerto Rican elites who had nothing to lose by siding with the new American government.

This shifted in August of 1918 when “some Puerto Ricans began to represent [women] as having been victimized by North American colonial excesses.”²⁹ Stories of innocent women who were falsely accused, and the mistreatment and abuse of those who were righteously accused, began to spread around the island. One such story was that of Susanna Torres, a woman who had been accused of prostitution and infecting a man whose advances she had rejected but was revealed to be a virgin upon physical examination.³⁰ Newspapers also began to question the sexism of the law by continuously posing questions of whether or not men would be jailed for having a venereal disease. The reality, of course, was that they were not since prostitution was seen as a necessary evil to protect decent women from the uncontrolled and unfulfilled sexual urges of men; venereal diseases were considered to be the fault of the woman who spread it, not the fault of the man’s promiscuity.

29. Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, 49.

30. Eileen J. Suarez Findlay, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870–1920*, (Duke University Press Books, 2000), 180-81.

In the town of Ponce more than three hundred imprisoned women staged a series of riots as a response to the treatment they were subjected to in the jails. They reported “daily aggressive and painful treatments for venereal disease: repeated blood tests and pelvic exams, vaginal irrigations, and treatments with ... mercurials and arsenicals.”³¹ It was not until an earthquake destroyed the jail in Mayagüez that arrests stopped altogether, as the disaster depleted the financial resources of Attorney General Kern’s office, forcing them to discontinue arrests. This was not seen as a victory by Puerto Ricans, as it was perceived that concerns regarding the treatment of Puerto Rican women were only considered valid when it affected the economic resources of American offices.

Attorney General Kern’s actions were so despised that the insular House of Representatives called for the United States Senate to recall him. As a response, Kern “cut appropriations for food ‘to the very minimum consistent with life’” and refused to release the prisoners.³² The Ponce protests and the House of Representative’s petition to the United States government to recall Kern, and its success, set the stage for the Nationalist movement and its decision to make the feminist movement central to its political agenda. The struggle for Puerto Rican women’s suffrage was a juxtaposition to the widespread fight over the nature of the Puerto Rican civic body in relation to the United States. Gladys Jiménez-Muñoz, an associate professor of sociology and director of undergraduate studies in Binghamton University, best explained this relationship between women’s rights and the overall political relationship with the United States when

31. Eileen J. Suarez Findlay, *Imposing Decency*, 50.

32. *Ibid.*, 51.

she argued that “women’s suffrage [blurred] the distinction between the Puerto Rican social body and Puerto Rican sexual bodies, thereby en-gendering chaos with the Island’s political body.”³³ The fight for women’s bodily autonomy was both a symbolic and accurate representation of the overall fight for the island’s independence. If nationalists could liberate women’s bodies, they could liberate the colonial stronghold the United States held in Puerto Rico.

Malthusian economics and the eugenics movement

The rise in Malthusian ideology worsened the treatment of women in the island. Thomas Malthus was a clergyman and professor of history and political economy at East India College, Hailerbury who anonymously published *An Essay on the Principle of Population as It Affects the Future Improvement of Society, with Remarks on the Speculations of Mr. Goodwin, Mr. Condorcet, and Other Writers* in 1798.³⁴ Malthus’ main argument, which came to be known as the Malthusian Theory, was that material resources, such as food and water, could not compete with population growth. The reason for this, he argued, is that material resources increase at an arithmetic rate—1-2-3-4-5-6—whereas population growth increases at a geometric rate—1-2-4-8-16.³⁵ He further argued that some form of population check had to be employed to compensate for the disproportion in population growth and resource availability. Malthus went as far as to suggest the rich were genetically superior to the poor and that God sent plagues, famine,

33. Gladys M. Jimenez-Muñoz, “Literacy, Class, and Sexuality in the Debate on Women’s Suffrage in Puerto Rico During the 1920s,” *Puerto Rican Women’s History*, edited by), 144.

34. “Malthusian Theory of Population Growth,” *Encyclopedia of Death and Human Experience*.

35. Ibid.

disease, and pestilence as a way to rid the world of the poor.³⁶ His ideas went beyond theory and he “viciously fought against the poor laws in England that offered hungry workers a bit of relief.”³⁷ In all, Malthus “argued that poverty stemmed from the proliferation of the poor,” which meant the poor had to be exterminated.³⁸

In 1899, just one year after the United States annexed Puerto Rico, the Malthusian theory encountered a revival in its popularity. The Malthusian theory, coupled with the Darwinian theory of evolution, resulted in a neo-Malthusian movement that sought to tackle issues of population and economic development in the beginning of the twentieth century through eugenics. The combination of the Malthusian theory and Social Darwinism propelled the eugenics movement against African Americans, Native Americans, and other minorities in the United States and the imperialist actions in the island. In Puerto Rico, these theories led to anecdotes of attempts to exterminate Puerto Ricans.

35. “Malthusian Theory of Population Growth.”

37. Iris Ofelia López, *Matters of Choice: Puerto Rican Women’s Struggle for Reproductive Freedom*, (Rutgers University Press: 2008), 4

38. *Ibid.*, 3

In 1931, a Rockefeller Institute pathologist named Cornelius Packard Rhoads wrote what was meant to be a confidential letter in which he complained that Puerto Ricans were “beyond doubt the dirtiest, laziest, most degenerate and thievish race of men ever inhabiting this sphere” and stated his belief that the island was in need of a total extermination of the people.³⁹ Most importantly, he claimed that he had done his best to exterminate at least eight people and that he had injected other patients with cancer cells.

This letter was published in *Time* magazine when Pedro Albizu Campos, the leader of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party, publicized it.

An investigation was conducted by the government and the Rockefeller Foundation but no evidence proving his claims was uncovered. However, Rhoads’ claims and nonchalant attitude about the extermination of Puerto Ricans is indicative, albeit

"Presbyterian Hospital
San Juan, P.R.

Dear Ferdie:

The more I think about the Larry Smith appointment the more disgusted I get. Have you heard any reason advanced for it? It certainly is odd that a man out with the entire Boston group, fired by Wollach and as far as I know, absolutely devoid of any scientific reputation, should be given the place. There is something wrong somewhere, probably with our point of view.

The situation is settled in Boston. Parker and Nye are to run the laboratory together and either Kenneth or MacMahon to be assistant; the chief to stay on. As far as I can see, the chances of my getting a job in the next ten years are absolutely nil. One is certainly not encouraged to attempt scientific advances when it is a handicap rather than an aid to advancement. I can get a damn fine job here and am tempted to take it. It would be ideal except for the Porto Ricans - they are beyond doubt the dirtiest, laziest, most degenerate and thievish race of men ever inhabiting this sphere. It makes you sick to inhabit the same island with them. They are even lower than Italians. What the Island needs is not public health work but a tidal wave or something to totally exterminate the population. It might then be livable. I have done my best to further the process of extermination by killing off 8 and transplanting cancer into several more. The latter has not resulted in any fatalities so far. The matter of consideration for the patients' welfare plays no role here - in fact all physicians take delight in the abuse and torture of the unfortunate subjects.

Do let me know if you hear any more news.

Sincerely
Dusty"

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Figure 1. Cornelius P. Rhoads' letter

39. Susan E. Lederer, “‘Porto Ricochet’: Joking about Germs, Cancer, and Race Extermination in the 1930s,” *American Literary History*, Vol. 14, No. 4, Contagion and Culture (Published by: Oxford University Press, 2002), 721.

much more blunt and drastic, of the American sentiment towards the Puerto Rican population at the time.

Birth control experiments and claims of forced sterilization

Another way the United States, this time through private enterprises, sought to colonize the island by controlling women's reproduction was through forced birth control experiments that masqueraded as a feminist attempt to honor women's reproductive choices in the island. However, the rhetorical devices used to garner support for the birth control movement in the continental United States demonstrate the colonial nature underlying the movement. Even when limited to the continental United States, the birth control movement used women of color as props through which they could gain approval for more controlled reproduction.

The early birth control movement in the United States sought much of its support through film, since it was the only outlet in which women could speak about a "lewd subject" without facing legal consequences; film was too new a technology to be covered under the purview of the Comstock Law of 1873, which outlawed pamphlets and other forms of birth control information.⁴⁰ These films sought to portray both positive and negative aspects of birth control in order to assuage those who were not in favor of it. It accomplished this by portraying the white, elite women who used birth control to fulfill their own desires as being irresponsible and selfish while portraying the lack of birth control provided to poor women of color as dangerous, since they were the women whose

40. Manon Parry, "'Pictures with a Purpose': The Birth Control Debate on the Big Screen," *Journal of Women's History*, (The Johns Hopkins University Press: 2011), 108.

reproduction needed to be controlled. Because women of color were used as the catalyst for societal approval of birth control, the birth control experiments performed on Puerto Rican women were not protested, as it was widely accepted that this was the appropriate group of people to experiment on. The idea that the Puerto Rican woman's inferiority made them the appropriate population to experiment on mirrored the line of thinking that the Puerto Rican prostitute had to be free of venereal disease to protect North American women.

Stemming from the pro-birth control movement are two types of eugenicists: moderate and conservative. The moderate, or progressive, eugenicists—defined as those who sought to lower the birth rate to better the living conditions of the working poor, not because they believed Puerto Ricans to be genetically inferior—began their movement in the island in the early twentieth century. Dr. José Lanauze Rolón and other prominent citizens organized The League for the Control of Natality in 1925 and challenged the Comstock Law.⁴¹ Progressive eugenics was founded on the belief that having less children to take care of would help women and families living in poverty and that repealing laws restricting birth control for women would allow women to lift themselves out of poverty. This argument is one that is still widely used in movements seeking women's empowerment and is not believed to have its roots on racist ideology. Conservative eugenicists, on the other hand, were those in the Malthusian and Social Darwinist camps who believed that inferior races needed to be eliminated to allow for race betterment.

41. Iris Ofelia López, *Matters of Choice*, 4.

While the credibility of forced sterilization on Puerto Rican women is debated, it is hard to deny that the Comstock Law and resulting lack of reliable contraceptives pressed sterilization on Puerto Rican women. By interviewing Puerto Rican women of three generations (mothers, born between 1914-1922; daughters, born between 1934-1952; and, granddaughters, born between 1959-1981), Lopez found that “Puerto Rican women accepted sterilization on the island in large numbers because they wanted to control their fertility and there were no other reliable methods of birth control available there in the early part of the twentieth century.”⁴² The government also sanctioned sterilization as part of its population control program, contributing to its easy accessibility. The movement gained traction in the 1970’s, around the same time that many women of color were being sterilized in the United States mainland, and “by 1982 39 percent of the female population on the island was surgically sterilized.”⁴³ The average age of the women sterilized was 26. This leads to the belief that the United States actually benefitted more from the lack of birth control, even as it sought to control the population, because it led to permanent sterilization of women, rather than a temporary avenue through which population control could be enforced. Though birth control was accessible through the unsanctioned birth control experiments in the island, it was not reliable and caused many painful side effects the women were largely unaware of; this made sterilization the only dependable and trusted form of birth control, but many women were led to believe that sterilizations could be undone, or the implications were

42. Iris Ofelia López, *Matters of Choice*, 20 and 7.

43. *Ibid.*, 9.

not explained in their native language, causing confusion that led to nonconsensual sterilizations.

Although sterilization increased during the 1970's, the wave began in 1936, when the era of progressive eugenics ended and conservative eugenicists who believed Puerto Ricans were genetically inferior took over. Clarence Gamble was the leader in the birth control studies that plagued Puerto Rican society for decades. Instead of promoting reliable diaphragms, Gamble pushed his own spermicide jellies on women because he believed they were better suited and easier to use for the poor and uneducated. He used Puerto Rico as his own personal laboratory, conducting birth control studies on fifteen hundred women without the approval of the Federal Drug Administration.⁴⁴ Both Gamble and renowned feminist Margaret Sanger played a significant role in the treatment of Puerto Rican women as laboratory experiments for different birth control methods, adding to the forms of violence Puerto Rican women were exposed to.

The largest birth control experiment in Puerto Rico began in 1956 and involved poor women in Río Piedras who did not speak English. The experiments were highly unethical and took unnecessary health risks the women were unaware of due to language barriers. Many women became sick and some even had to be hospitalized as a result of the experiments. Instead of putting the control in the hands of Puerto Rican women—which would have allowed for true empowerment of Puerto Rican women—North American women were responsible in the promotion of birth control experiments in the

44. Annette B. Ramírez de Arellano and Conrad Seipp, *Colonialism, Catholicism, and Contraception: A History of Birth Control in Puerto Rico*, (The University of North Carolina Press: 2011).

island. Puerto Rican women had no allies, even within the liberal, feminist movement in the mainland United States. On the contrary,

For liberals, she was victimized by her endless children, and they longed to rescue her from her own ignorance and “macho” Puerto Rican men who proved their virility through her suffering maternity; for conservatives, she was a “demon mother” whose dangerous fecundity could only be halted by strong measures—sterilization, high doses of hormones, perhaps a contraceptive agent in the water.⁴⁵

Puerto Rican women, for both conservatives and liberals, served as guinea pigs through which they could prove the nobility of their policies to other nations around the world during a time when the United States sought to prove to communist countries that democracy and American policies were the best way to improve the citizenry. Liberal feminists and conservatives alike took advantage of the Puerto Rican woman’s desire to have accessible birth control as a way to promote their own agendas. Although it is true that many Puerto Rican women wanted birth control, Americans promoting birth control in the island failed to provide Puerto Rican women with the opportunity to access it on their own terms. Rather, they provided birth control as a way to govern the rowdy, lowly population or to find the flaws in birth control methods so it could be improved for white, North American women.

Conclusion

While many more individual actors, pharmaceutical companies, private corporations, and nonprofits were involved in the birth control and sterilization movement in Puerto Rico, this chapter focuses solely on the ones mentioned above, as

45. Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*, 110.

they prove how government policies, political rhetoric, American citizens, and public and private organizations have contributed to the oppression of Puerto Rican women. The policies and actions outlined in this chapter show that the oppression of women and racist ideologies were not mutually exclusive events. Lastly, these policies prove that American intervention in the island was not the result of an attempt to liberate the island but was instead founded on oppressive ideals of the Puerto Rican race that Americans believed manifested, first and foremost, through women's reproduction. While shrouded in language suggesting noble intentions, American policies surrounding women's reproduction were merely the beginning of a long history of violence at the hands of the United States. Because violence began with the policing of women's bodies, the policing of women was the catalyst for an economic disaster that had been brewing for over a decade.

CHAPTER II
Constructing a homogenous race in a racially diverse island

I am not African.
Africa is in me, but I cannot return.
I am not Taína.
Taíno is in me, but there is no way back.
I am not European.
Europe lives in me, but I have no home there.
I am new. History made me.
—Aurora Levins Morales, *“Child of the Americas”*

Since the racial makeup of Puerto Ricans is incredibly diverse due to the intermarriage of Spanish conquistadores, Taínos, and Africans transported to Puerto Rico, they had to find a way to re-define their culture and ethnicity within the context of a society that interpreted race through a black-and-white dichotomy and privileged whiteness. This was accomplished through the creation of a homogenous race. As Levins Morales’ poem illustrates, for Puerto Ricans, this was executed by mixing the three ethnic and cultural heritages that defined the island. North Americans created a homogenous race through a different tactic, that of establishing all Puerto Ricans as “negroes,” which was the only way Puerto Ricans could be situated within the racial dichotomy that prevailed in American society without being afforded the privileges of being white Spaniards. This creation of a homogenous race proved deleterious to Puerto Ricans, who would soon find themselves facing violence in a manner similar to African Americans, particularly during the Civil Rights era.

Additionally, Levins Morales’ poem is an illustration of the way race is taught in the Caribbean, where it is often spoken of as a spectrum in which black and white serve

as end points, not as the only options.⁴⁶ Since it is not uncommon to have a racially diverse family, it is easier for this spectrum to be applied in social interactions. Many Puerto Ricans will argue that racism, prejudice, and white privilege does not exist in the island as the result of prevalent racial intermingling. This has been proven to be false. On the contrary, whiteness is privileged, as it was equated with being Spanish, which in turn was equated with wealth and power. This furthered the attempts to create a homogenous race in the island, as Puerto Ricans who had originally held some power during the Spanish reign tried to use their whiteness to gain advantages within American society. Those who dispute that racism and its socioeconomic effects are common in Latin America may point out that not all Spanish people in the island were wealthy. This is true. However, it dismisses the fact that, while not all Spanish people were wealthy, most the wealthy people in the island were Spanish.

Because whiteness was a sign of power and social privilege, the United States pursued a way to eliminate the social rank of Spanish elite while Puerto Ricans fought to identify as Spanish elites in the hopes of attaining more rights. As mentioned above, within the realm of American politics, the United States created a homogenous race by establishing all Puerto Ricans as “negroes” who deserved the same treatment as the rest of the African American community. This changed during the 1960’s, when the “U.S. state agencies began to disseminate the ethnic label ‘Hispanic’ as the proper term for identifying all people of Latin American and even Spanish descent.”⁴⁷ This resulted in

46. Nancy S. Landale and Ralph Salvatore Oropesa, “White, black, or Puerto Rican? Racial Self-identification among Mainland and Island Puerto Ricans,” *Social Forces* 81, no. 1 (2002), 233.

47. Linda Martín Alcoff, “Is Latina/o Identity a Racial Identity?” *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century*, eds. Jorge J.E. Gracia and Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 319.

the erasure of African and Taíno culture within the island as Puerto Ricans attempted to preserve and reestablish the power of the Spanish elite. For Puerto Ricans living in the mainland, it resulted in the establishment of Hispanic, Latino, or Puerto Rican as a race in order to create distance from the black-and-white dichotomy that eliminated the struggle of Puerto Rico and its identity as a racially mixed Spanish-speaking people. In seeking to create a singular, Spanish race, many Puerto Ricans hoped the United States would begin to view them and treat them as white and grant them the rights it did to white North Americans.

Through an analysis of racial classifications before the arrival of the United States, a study of the racial dichotomy of the United States, and the erasure of African and Taíno culture, this chapter will demonstrate the ways in which the Puerto Rican race was purposely or accidentally redefined by the American racial lens. Understanding the racial re-identification that took place in Puerto Rico will explain the lack of democracy and constitutional protections granted to Puerto Ricans and the motivations behind the acts of violence. In all, understanding the racial politics at play between the United States and Puerto Rico, and why they promoted and/or excused the use of violence in the island, will add to the multifaceted factors underlying the debt crisis.

Racial classifications in Puerto Rico before American intervention

Social status and physical characteristics have historically affected the racial classifications of Puerto Ricans in the island. For example, if someone's skin color falls in the middle of the spectrum—if they are considered *trigueño(a)*—and wealthy, they may be identified as white, or Spanish, and tanned; if they are poor or live in

predominantly black neighborhoods, they are immediately identified as black. At the same time, when asked to identify their race, most Puerto Ricans feel confused, as it is not necessarily something they consider until they directly face the racial categories of the United States. An example of this is seen in Alcoff's article, where she details a student's experience identifying his race while taking an American standardized test:

before he could even take the SAT in Puerto Rico he was asked to identify himself racially. "I was caught off guard," he says. "I had never thought of myself in terms of race." Fortunately, the SAT included "Puerto Rican" among the choices of "race" and Oquendo was spared what he called a "profound existential dilemma."⁴⁸

This is exemplary of the difference in racial perceptions between Puerto Rico and the United States. The United States focuses primarily on the color of someone's skin when ascribing race, whereas Puerto Ricans focus on skin tone, facial features, and socioeconomic status to define their race. Further, race is equated more with ethnicity in Puerto Rico than in the United States.

To understand the scope of racial issues in Puerto Rico, it is essential to delineate and define colloquial terms used to define skin tones. Terms such as *trigueño(a)*, *moreno(a)*, *mulato(a)*, *negro(a)*, and *mestizo(a)* are used to describe those with darker skin tones and, depending on the context and the person using the term, can mean different things and point to different attributes. Generally, *mulato* is used to describe a person of mixed Spanish and African descent; *negro* is used to describe a person of African descent; *mestizo* is used to describe a person of mixed Taino and Spanish descent; and *trigueño* and *moreno* can be used to describe a person with tanned skin, but

48. Linda Martín Alcoff, 314.

whose physical characteristics do not necessarily “fit” within a specific racial category. It should be noted that even though terms like *negro* may be considered highly offensive in the United States, this is not always the case in Puerto Rico; family members, friends, and romantic partners sometimes refer to loved ones as *negro(a)* as a way to show affection, regardless of the person’s skin color. The use of the term will not be taken kindly in contexts where it is clearly meant to be derogatory, but the term is not by nature derogatory. *Negro(a)* can also be used as a matter-of-fact classification of skin color.

The term *criollo(a)* was and continues to be used to refer to people of full Spanish descent living within Latin America and the Caribbean, while the terms *jabá/jabao*, *cano/a*, and *rubio/a* are used to describe other people with light skin tones. Afro-Latinos in the island have argued that the term *criollo* has been used to whitewash Puerto Rican history by blending the Taíno and African heritage with Spanish heritage, with the Spanish heritage becoming the foundation around which everything else is formed. This is evident in the fact that Puerto Ricans will often answer claims of racial issues in Puerto Rico by stating pride in the Spanish, Taíno, and African heritage, in that order. While subtle and possibly not intentional, it shows that Spanish is seen as the first—and, therefore, most influential—aspect of Puerto Rican culture, even though Taínos lived in the island for centuries before the Spanish mistakenly arrived. This casual whitening of African and Taíno heritage is also seen in the use of the term *comida criolla* (literally translated as creole food). Most of the food listed under the umbrella of creole food has Taíno and African roots but is described with the term ascribed to the Spanish who lived in the island, thereby attributing its existence to the Spanish.

While the whitening of Puerto Rican culture is a real issue, the claim that all Puerto Ricans have Taíno and African ancestry, as well as Spanish, has been proven to be true through multiple DNA tests of Puerto Ricans, with “the average Puerto Rican individual carr[ying] 12% Native American, 65% West Eurasian (Mediterranean, Northern European and/or Middle Eastern) and 20% Sub-Saharan African DNA.”⁴⁹ This partially explains why Puerto Ricans often have a difficult time fitting within the racial categories established in the United States census, as this blend of races means that Puerto Rican physical features often do not lend themselves to one category over another. It is this racial mixing that has ironically allowed Puerto Ricans—through the United States Census—to slowly “become” whiter in an attempt to fit within the classifications provided by the United States and gain more political equality within its social structure.

Blanqueamiento (“whitening”) of Puerto Rico

As discussed in the first chapters, Americans believed Puerto Ricans were inferior to Anglo-Saxons when they arrived in the island. Because of this, they concluded that Puerto Ricans needed to be addressed and treated as African Americans, as race in the United States was generally based on a dichotomy in which the opposite of Anglo-Saxon (white) was African American (black). When Puerto Ricans realized that economic status and wealth would not grant them favors with Americans to the same degree it had with the Spanish crown, they began to identify as white, realizing that fighting for the right to be “white” may grant them more rights than their current status as “black.” Puerto Ricans

49. Miguel Vilar, "Genographic Project DNA Results Reveal Details of Puerto Rican History – National Geographic Blog," National Geographic Blog. July 25, 2014. Accessed February 13, 2018. <https://blog.nationalgeographic.org/2014/07/25/genographic-project-dna-results-reveal-details-of-puerto-rican-history/>.

that moved to the mainland United States sought to avoid the dichotomy to a greater degree. A study conducted by Landale and Salvatore Oropesa found that,

In Puerto Rico, women defined as black on the birth certificate are more likely than their U.S. counterparts to self-identify as black (20% vs. 8%) and less likely to self-identify as Hispanic (5% vs. 25%) or Latina (6% vs. 16%). In addition, about 10% of islanders classified as black on the birth certificate self-identify as *trigueña*.⁵⁰

These statistics demonstrate that islanders were less likely to identify with the racial classifications the United States provided because they were less exposed and less likely to witness the effects of the dichotomy. Since the only treatment they had experienced was that of a colony, Puerto Ricans in the island were less likely to be afraid of the classification of black, whereas those who moved to the mainland were more likely to avoid being classified as such. However, the rate of those who identified as black in Puerto Rico is still lower than when the United States first arrived in the island.

Another article published by the *American Sociological Review* reported that in “a census taken by the U.S. Department of War in 1899 ... 61.8 percent of Puerto Ricans were classified as white.”⁵¹ As American influence in the island increased, so did the number of people who classified themselves as white and “by 1950, census enumerators classified 79.7 percent of the Puerto Rican population as white.”⁵² Changes in the racial make-up of Puerto Rico increased quickly, with a 7.5 percent increase happening just

50. Landale and Salvatore Oropesa, “White, black, or Puerto Rican?” 243.

51. Mara Loveman and Jeronimo O. Muñiz, “How Puerto Rico Became White: Boundary Dynamics and intercensus Racial Reclassification.” *American Sociological Review* 72, no. 6 (2007), 915.

52. Ibid.

between 1910 and 1920, “more than twice that of any other single decade in the twentieth century.”⁵³ Loveman and Muñiz argue that the instability of racial classification between the 1910 and 1920 census could have been a result of changes in processes involved in producing official statistics. To test the validity of this argument, Loveman and Muñiz challenged three possibilities that might have caused a change in racial categories, namely: “change in the official categories, modification of enumerators’ instructions for assigning individuals to racial categories, and post-enumeration edition of census forms.”⁵⁴ They dismissed the first possibility using Duany’s research, which suggests the removal of the mulatto category is what imposed the black-and-white lens on Puerto Rico’s multiracial society.⁵⁵ Loveman and Muñiz reject this argument, however, stating:

The fault in this argument ... is that Puerto Rico’s population whitened much more rapidly between 1899 and 1920, when mulatto was still an official category, than it did in the decades thereafter. Between 1899 and 1920, U.S. censuses of Puerto Rico registered over an 11 percentage point increase in the white share of the population, compared with a 6 percentage point increase recorded in the census between 1930 and 2000.⁵⁶

The second attribute listed is the enumerator instructions. They debate whether a change of definition in the mulatto category affected the racial whitening. This argument is also dismissed through the conclusion that any change in the instructions on classifying black from mulatto is likely not the source of surplus whites in Puerto Rico. The third possibility is also rejected on the grounds that,

53. Loveman and Muñiz, “How Puerto Rico Became White,” 916.

54. Ibid., 921-922.

55. Jorge Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States*, (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

56. Loveman and Muñiz, “How Puerto Rico Became White,” 921-22.

the direction of post-enumeration of Puerto Rico's 1920 census forms speaks against the idea that top Puerto Rican census officials deliberately altered results to make the island's populations appear whiter. Instead, the special agents actively intervened to police the boundaries of whiteness.⁵⁷

While Loveman and Muñiz reject Duany's argument regarding the de-classification of mulatto, I believe they have fallen prey to the same criticism presented in their research—that “when U.S. imperial rule replaced Spanish imperial rule after 1898, a black-and-white racial lens was superimposed on a society that also privileged whiteness, but that drew myriad racial distinctions along a continuum from lighter to darker.”⁵⁸ Their conclusion, that Puerto Rico whitened due to a change in the definition of what it means to be white, imposes the same black-and-white lens it criticizes, and even tries to reject, on an island that draws its ethnic, racial, and cultural background first and foremost from the Taíno population. While it is possible that a redefining of what it means to be white caused the *blanqueamiento* of Puerto Rico, I believe that an equally important factor is the lack of a Taíno option beyond a fill-in-the-blank “other” option. Many Puerto Ricans who consider themselves *trigueños* do so because they claim primarily Taíno and Spanish descent, not African and Spanish descent. Therefore, when Taíno is not an option presented in American censuses, many Puerto Ricans are caught between choosing “other,” which feels diminutive to many, or the remaining option: Spanish, or “white.” Lastly, one point that Loveman and Muñiz's research does not address is whether the number of people who classify themselves as white increased because the number of Americans living in the island increased as well. In fact, certain

57. Loveman and Muñiz, “How Puerto Rico Became White,” 923.

58. *Ibid.*, 919.

municipalities in Puerto Rico have a primarily American population; for example, the municipality of Rincón is jokingly known as “gringolandia,” literally “gringo land,” because of the number of Americans living there.

It is true that privilege afforded to white people, and the existing preference for whiteness that resulted from Spanish and American colonialism, plays a factor on the whitening of race in Puerto Rico. But I believe the research presented above only represents one side of the story, a highly Americanized one, that completely erases one-third of the cultural heritage in Puerto Rico.

Erasure of Afro-Puerto Ricans

Many Afro-Puerto Ricans have spoken out on the issue of black erasure and social and systemic racism in the island, with some stating that they do not perceive themselves as African or black, just Puerto Rican, and others stating that their African heritage is part of what makes them Puerto Rican. Regardless of the way Afro-Puerto Ricans choose to identify, it is clear they experience racism two-fold, as they suffer from racism within the island as well as from the American government that oversees and controls the Puerto Rican government. While white Puerto Ricans may endure systems of oppression resulting from presidents and Supreme Court justices defining them as *other* than Anglo-Saxon, they are free from the prejudice Afro-Puerto Ricans face even within the island.⁵⁹

59. Philip A. Klinker and Rogers M. Smith, *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press: 1999), 292.

Debates on whether there is systemic racism and segregation in the island have consistently taken place, where the more European Puerto Ricans tend to lie on the side that believes there is no segregation. Yet, the towns of Loíza, Carolina, Fajardo, and San Antón in Ponce, predominantly black towns in the island, have connotations of paganism and being riddled with crime attached to them. For example, Loíza is known as the town where Santería is most practiced, a religious practice that is frowned upon by the majority of the island, which is predominantly Catholic (53% of islanders) and Protestant (30% of islanders).⁶⁰ Meanwhile, San Antón in Ponce is a housing project developed specifically “with the public intent to preserve the Afro-Puerto Rican traditions of a community.”⁶¹ Whether or not this is done with the intent to isolate black communities *because* they are black, or whether it is a way for black communities to come together and preserve their heritage is an issue Isar Godreau seeks to shed light on. Like many Puerto Ricans, Godreau describes her experience and understanding of race in the island as,

... fluid dynamics I experienced growing up in Puerto Rico among family members who described themselves as *black*, *white*, *mulato*, and *trigueño* ... and who sometimes called me *jabá* (high yellow), *rubia* (blond), or *colorá* (red), with no apparent intention of creating boundaries among us.⁶²

Godreau states that she chose to research this community as a way to examine whether “Puerto Ricans who live in poor black communities also describe ‘race’ as fluid and

60. Jens Manuel Krogstad, Kelsey Jo Starr, and Aleksandra Sandstrom, “Key Findings about Puerto Rico,” *Pew Research Center*, March 29, 2017. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/29/key-findings-about-puerto-rico/>.

61. Isar P. Godreau, *Scripts of Blackness: Race, Cultural Nationalism, and U.S. Colonialism in Puerto Rico*, (University of Illinois Press: 2015), 11.

62. *Ibid.*, 2.

unessentialized.”⁶³ However, she also keeps in mind that the issue of race in Puerto Rico extends beyond racial issues within the island, due to the colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. With this in mind, Godreau forms two main ideas of race for Puerto Ricans:

First, that “race” is a key idiom through which institutions and people construct, interpret, and “defend” Puerto Rican identity in the context of U.S. intervention. And, second, that the selective manner in which blackness gets construed as part of this process is informed by the different formulations of “Puerto Rican nationhood” developed in the context of that colonial relationship.⁶⁴

Godreau further claims that “the fact that communities or regions are designated as black by outsiders, intellectuals, government officials, cultural educators, or even some community representatives is not tantamount to ... residents in such communities adopting such labels.”⁶⁵ In fact, through her research, she found that many did not in fact identify as being primarily or solely African but felt that the town had a responsibility to honor the heritage that brought about its existence.

On the other side of the debate are Afro-Puerto Ricans that have spoken out against arguments stating that racism does not exist because everyone is proud of their multicultural and multiethnic heritage. Maritza Quiñones Rivera, for example, details her experiences dating white Puerto Ricans in the island whose parents believed she was uneducated and sexually promiscuous because of the color of her skin. Instead of arguing that the racial diversity that composes the Puerto Rican identity is inclusive, she states,

63. Isar P. Godreau, *Scripts of Blackness*, 2.

64. *Ibid.*, 6.

65. *Ibid.*, 5.

“Afro-Puerto Ricans have to negotiate their blackness silently, while protecting their Puerto Ricanness, their common denominator, in an often antagonistic racial environment.”⁶⁶ She lists some examples of stereotypical African portrayals in Puerto Rican art and culture, such as the image of Mamá Inés, a clear depiction of the “mammy” stereotype, which was beloved by many Puerto Ricans and is extensively used to advertised the local coffee



Figure 2. Yaucono advertisement featuring Mamá Inés

brand, Yaucono. To this day, comments about Mamá Inés are generally met with nostalgia, not disdain over the popularity of a demeaning caricature. Quiñones Rivera’s experience negotiating her blackness to protect her Puerto Ricanness begs the question: are Afro-Puerto Ricans interviewed by white Puerto Ricans, such as Godreau, stating that they identify primarily as Puerto Rican because they truly believe it or because they feel the need to?

Based on Quiñones Rivera’s personal narrative and research, it should be considered that the people of San Antón may have felt the need to answer questions about their racial self-identification in terms of their nationality, rather than their race, due to racial antagonism in the island.

66. Maritza Quiñones Rivera, “From Trigueñita to Afro-Puerto Rican: Intersections of the Racialized, Gendered, and Sexualized Body in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Mainland,” *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* vol. 7, no. 1 (Smith College: 2006), 163.

Erasure of Taínos

While Afro-Puerto Ricans have faced questions regarding their lived experiences with racism, the question surrounding Taínos is entirely different: whether or not Taínos still *exist* is the issue that has been contested by scholars. Many believe that



Figure 3. Taínos in Puerto Rico

Taínos were completely killed off by the Spanish by the 15th or 16th century, through violence or disease, especially in Puerto Rico since it is the smallest of the Antilles where Taínos lived. The majority of Puerto Ricans who claim to have Taíno descent claim only mixed descent as a result and DNA tests conducted on Puerto Ricans support the claim that full-blooded Taínos did not survive the Spanish conquest. However, there are a few groups in the island that identify as fully or predominantly Taíno, advocate for more Taíno rights, and are trying to find ways to revive an unspoken and unrecorded Taíno language.

Some of the groups that advocated for the preservation and revitalization of Taíno culture in Puerto Rico include: the Taíno Nation and Movimiento Indígena Jíbaro Boricua, which attempt a long-term reconstruction of the Taíno language; Guaka-Kú and Liga Guakía Taína-Ké, which “focus on creating discrete writing systems to encode what counts as Taíno;” and the General Council of Taíno, which argues that anything spoken

by a Taíno is Taíno, regardless of the actual language spoken.⁶⁷ Another way Taíno groups are seeking to reestablish themselves is through prophesy, which is in a sense considered a Taíno language on its own.

The most notable prophesy is one that addresses the fact that some Puerto Ricans deem the claims of a homogenous or predominant Taíno identity in the island laughable. The prophesy, given around the year 1511 by Aura Surey, the daughter of the Cacique (Chief) Jayuya, whose village was raided by Ponce de León in 1513, states that “for twenty-four generations the Taíno would live quietly and invisibly in their own lands before again becoming aware of their connection to their earth and taking a stand.”⁶⁸ According to Taíno calculations, those 24 generations amount to approximately 500 years; this means the reconnection would take place around the year 2011.

Taíno identity in the island, according to some groups, is based primarily on spiritual components, not genetic ones. During her time researching the prophesy of Aura Surey,

Feliciano Santos was told that if she “found

the *cemí blanco* within [her], [she] would find and reconcile with [herself], bringing



Figure 4. *Cemí blanco*

67. Sherina Feliciano Santos, “How *do you* speak Taíno? Indigenous Activism and Linguistic Practices in Puerto Rico,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, vol. 27, no. 1 (2017), 5.

68. Sherina Feliciano Santos 2, “Prophetic repairs: Narrative and social action among Puerto Rican Taíno,” *Language and Communication* vol. 56 (2017), 21.

about [her] rebirth as a Taíno woman.”⁶⁹ The *cemí* is the three-point sculpture, made of rock or wood, that is believed to house ancestral deities; the *cemí blanco* (white *cemí*) is intended to represent the quality of the spirit housed within. According to the General Council of Taíno, Liga Taína, and Guaka-Kú, the way to be reconciled with the Taíno identity is through the *cemí blanco*, the spirit housed within each of us, not the language or genetics we hold.

This belief voids the importance of genetic ancestry and empowers the Taíno groups to fight for more Taíno visibility and equality. In addition to trying to find ways to revive, reconstruct, or redefine the Taíno language, these groups have fought for Taíno rights by fighting for the preservation of sacred sites. Regardless of where one falls on the subject of the existence of Taínos in the island, the preservation of sacred Taíno sites is important to the history and equality of the island. If the Taíno exist—whether they are defined spiritually or genetically—it ensures that they are given more visibility in a world that has long sought to silence and exterminate Native tribes, languages, and cultures. If they don’t exist, it ensures that the story, works, and culture that remained are honored. Both of these are important in order to ensure that Puerto Ricans today do not do to the Taíno as many Americans have sought to do to the general Puerto Rican population.

In addition to these Taíno activist groups, Taíno heritage lives through words adopted into the Spanish Puerto Rican dialect but that have their roots in the Taíno language: *Borikén* and *Borinquen*, which are the Taíno names for Puerto Rico, and

69. Sherina Feliciano Santos 2, 23.

Boricua, a derivative term that many Puerto Ricans still use to identify themselves. Other words include: *barbicú*, *choreto*, *inagua*, *guacara*, and even *Caribe*.

Downes v. Bidwell and voting rights

The introduction of this thesis presented the Insular Cases, a set of cases that sought to answer questions regarding Puerto Rico's political status. One of the most defining cases for Puerto Ricans has been the *Downes v. Bidwell* case, which established that the Constitution did not follow the flag in lands where "alien races" were predominant. This resulted in a lack of voting rights and other Constitutional rights in the island, a subject that will be examined further in a later chapter of this thesis. What has most tangibly affected Puerto Ricans is the section in which the Supreme Court of the United States decided that government, as defined by the United States, was impossible to carry out in Puerto Rico due to racial differences:

If those possessions are inhabited by alien races, differing from us in religion, customs, laws, methods of taxation, and modes of thought, the administration of government and justice, according to Anglo-Saxon principles, may for a time be impossible; and the question at once arises whether large concessions ought not to be made for a time, that ultimately our own theories may be carried out, and the blessings of a free government under the Constitution extended to them. We decline to hold that there is anything in the Constitution to forbid such action.⁷⁰

Although this decision was rendered in 1901, it continues to be the law in Puerto Rico, since it has not been reversed. To this day, Puerto Ricans cannot vote in federal elections, except for presidential primaries, despite their citizenship and requirement to register with the Selective Service. It is only after enlisting in a military branch or moving to the

70. *Downes v. Bidwell*, 182 U.S. 244 (1901).

United States that Puerto Ricans are allowed to vote. However, family members of those who enlist in the military still cannot vote if they live in the island, leaving them without a voice in the election of the Commander in Chief who decides to send their family member to war.

Conclusion

While the information regarding the whitening of Puerto Rico and resulting erasure of African and Taino heritage addresses the social impacts of the establishment of Puerto Ricans as a homogenous race, *Downes v. Bidwell* shows the systemic effects of such a creation. Further, it is the most impactful of the Insular Cases because it shows that Puerto Rico's colonial status was established due to a belief that they were beneath the Anglo-Saxon race. Any lack of protections of human rights is founded primarily on this Supreme Court decision, which is blatantly based on racist ideology. Additionally, the racism behind the construction of the homogenous race is not necessarily as overt in other governmental documents as it is here. It is this case that sets the foundation for all the human rights violations that would propel the General Assembly of the United Nations to declare Puerto Rico a colony as early as 1946.⁷¹ Establishing Puerto Rico as a Commonwealth of the United States in 1952 did not deconstruct the homogenous racial classification that placed Puerto Ricans and their human rights below those of white North Americans. On the contrary, it prevailed and grew stronger with the rise of the Civil Rights Movement. President Nixon went as far as to use "Negro-Puerto Ricans" as

71. Lisa Napoli, "The Legal Recognition of the National Identity of a Colonized People: The Case of Puerto Rico," *Boston College Third World Law Journal* vol. 18, no. 159 (1998), 162.

an example of the need for more order and less lawlessness caused by civil rights figures; such rhetoric resulted in the over policing and abuse of communities of color and civil rights leaders.⁷² Lastly, these comments were the driving forces behind Puerto Ricans and other Hispanic nationalities seeking to identify by their nationality instead of the color of their skin.

Whether in the island or on the mainland, the way the United States identified the Puerto Rican race resulted in the creation of a homogenous race: in the mainland, as Hispanic or Latino, which did not necessarily erase the diverse racial identities that comprised those nationalities; in the island, it resulted in the erasure of African and Taíno roots driven by a desperation to gain more rights, actions excused by the colonial attitudes that embodied the island's history.

72. Philip A. Klinker and Rogers M. Smith, *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press: 1999), 292.

CHAPTER III. Defining citizenship and democracy

“At the time of the American occupation, a very liberal régime of government had already been granted by the Crown of Spain. There are many able lawyers and statesmen who opine that the organic law in force in Porto Rico and approved by Congress in 1917, 19 years after the American occupation, cannot be favorably compared with the autonomy granted us by the Crown of Spain in 1897.”

—Cordova Dávila

As mentioned in the preface of this thesis, the Spanish Crown had granted Puerto Ricans a more autonomous form of government after years of insurrections and fights for independence. When the United States military arrived in Guánica, Puerto Ricans anticipated that it would result in full independence. Yet, when two years passed without the institution of a gubernatorial establishment, Puerto Ricans became frustrated at what was perceived to be a repetition of colonialization. This is best illustrated through Dávila’s quote. Politicians and lawyers in the island argued the former regime established by the Spanish was more favorable than the lack of a democratic government and military occupation they were now confronting. Among the lawyers and politicians who felt this way was Pedro Albizu Campos, who was inspired by his military experience and legal studies to lead the independence movement in the island.

Although the Foraker Act of 1900 established a form of government that mirrored the one established by the Spanish in the *Carta Autonómica*, this chapter will expand on the governmental provisions and rights granted to Puerto Ricans through the Jones-Shafroth Act. First, it will analyze the granting of citizenship as defined through the Jones-Shafroth Act, and what it meant for the political and social rights of Puerto Ricans.

Secondly, it will expand on the Insular cases and their effects on voting rights in the island, which were influenced by the way the Puerto Rican race was defined through them, with particular attention given to the stipulations in *Downes v. Bidwell* and *Balzac v. Porto Rico*. Further, this chapter will end by evaluating the effects of the expansion of government through the Jones-Shafroth Act, the grant of citizenship, and the Insular cases had on the Nationalist movement, gag laws, and the eventual commonwealth status of the island. These factors legitimized the acts of violence that will be discussed in the following chapter, and the limitations of political representation that are currently at the heart of the debate regarding the debt crisis.

The Jones-Shafroth Act and the granting of citizenship

The United States granted Puerto Ricans citizenship through the Jones-Shafroth Act, also known as the Jones Act, passed by the sixty-fourth Congress of the United State in 1917. This act served to establish a government in Puerto Rico mirroring that of the mainland United States through the provision of a Bill of Rights, giving Puerto Ricans American statutory citizenship, and creating three branches of government reminiscent to the United States.⁷³ Although the act was portrayed as providing Puerto Ricans with rights akin to those North Americans were privy to, it failed to provide equal rights. The principal example of this failure rests in the executive office and the governor, “[who] shall be appointed by the President, by and with the advise and consent of the Senate, and hold his office at the pleasure of the President,” taking away the right of Puerto Rican

73. The Jones-Shafroth Act, Pub.L. 64-368, 39 Stat. 951 (1917), §2, §5, §12, and §40.

citizens to vote for their own representatives, in the island or on the mainland, and providing Congress and the President full control of civil government in the island.⁷⁴

Further, it failed to establish term limits for governors, allowing the governor to rule with impunity as long as the President of the United States allowed it. In addition, the Jones-Shafroth Act provided the governor of Puerto Rico the right to

call upon the commanders of the military and naval forces of the United States in the island ... or call out the militia to prevent or suppress lawless violence, invasion, insurrection, or rebellion, and he may, in case of rebellion or invasion ... suspend the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus, or place the island, or any part thereof, under martial law until communication can be had with the President....⁷⁵

This provision of the law would allow the governor to suppress any independence movements in the island with military violence, suspending the *independentistas*' right to a proper trial until he could communicate with the President and convene about what course of action to take. Unfortunately, the governor's communication with the President often turned out to be futile for Puerto Ricans, as he generally reinforced the suspension of a trial for *independentistas*. The United States government would eventually go so far as to implement Gag Laws that outlawed conversations on independence, owning a Puerto Rican flag, and the Puerto Rican national anthem. Two decades after the implementation of the Gag Laws, the government used the Federal Bureau of Investigation to suppress

74. Jones-Shafroth Act, §12.

75. Ibid., §13.

independence movements, adding nationalists on to the COINTELPRO project that also blacklisted Civil Rights leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr.⁷⁶

Many Puerto Ricans have been skeptical and cynical about the Jones-Shafroth Act's granting of American citizenship, as it did not provide the full extension of rights granted to Americans in the continental United States, though it claimed to. Yet, in conjunction with the Selective Service Act of 1917, the Jones-Shafroth Act forced Puerto Ricans to enlist in the military, just in time for them to fight in the First World War; the Jones-Shafroth Act was passed on March 2, 1917 and the United States declared war on Germany just over a month later, on April 6, 1917.⁷⁷ This, coupled with the fact that the Jones-Shafroth Act failed to overturn the rulings of the Insular cases, which undermined the civil and constitutional protections given to Puerto Ricans in the island, made many Puerto Ricans cynical about the intentions behind the grant of citizenship to Puerto Ricans.

While the Foraker Act of 1900 had established a governmental body in the island, the Jones-Shafroth Act was passed to serve as an extension, outlining a more extensive, tripartite government composed of the executive, judicial, and legislative offices. This system was created in order to appease those who sought independence, since the establishment of an executive branch provided a sense that ultimate authority rested in the island, even if the elected officer was an American elected by the President of the United States.

76. "Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts. Subject: (COINTELPRO) Puerto Rican Groups," Federal Bureau of Investigation, <https://vault.fbi.gov/cointel-pro/puerto-rican-groups/cointel-pro-puerto-rican-groups-part-1-of-11/view>.

77. "U.S. Entry into World War I, 1917," Office of the Historian. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1914-1920/wwi>.

Within the executive branch, the act created a Department of Justice, Department of Finance, Department of Interior, Department of Education, Department of Agriculture and Labor, and a Department of Health, of which the attorney general and commissioner of education would be appointed by the President of the United States with the approval of the United States Senate; the remaining heads of office would be appointed by the governor with the advice and consent of the Senate of Puerto Rico.⁷⁸ Additionally, the legislative branch would henceforth consist of two houses—the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Senate of Puerto Rico was to have 19 members for a term of four years; the seven districts outlined in the act would elect two members and an additional five members would be added.⁷⁹ Meanwhile, the House of Representatives would consist of 39 members elected every four years, with each of the 35 representative districts electing one representative and four additional representatives being elected afterwards.⁸⁰ Section 26 of the act divided the island into seven senatorial districts, “each composed of five contiguous ... representative districts.”⁸¹ Though the executive system changed with the creation of the Commonwealth, the legislative system remains active in the island.

Although numerous Puerto Ricans celebrated the conditions of the Jones-Shafroth Act, interpreting it as a pre-condition to eventual statehood, the citizenship provided in the act proved to be naturally unequal. Such is the argument of Venator-Santiago and Meléndez, who posit that Puerto Rican citizenship is statutory, not constitutional, as the

78. Jones-Shafroth Act, §13.

79. *Ibid.* §26.

80. *Ibid.*, §27.

81. *Ibid.*, §28.

island remains an incorporated territory that belongs to, but is not a part of, the United States.⁸² Most importantly, the United States' ability to strip Puerto Ricans of their citizenship through a Congressional decision creates an unequal citizenship that was granted for the purpose of "enabl[ing] the US government to limit the extension of civil, political, economic and social rights."⁸³ With their newly given citizen status, Puerto Ricans could be more easily employed as contractors for American businesses, but their constitutionally "foreign" status did not provide them with the Constitutional protections granted to North Americans ensuring fair employment, with the exception of government employees.⁸⁴ This lack of constitutional protection is exacerbated by the communities that employed them, as they were afraid that Puerto Ricans would try to overstay their welcome, resulting in discrimination that involved the use of racial slurs, such as *spik*, and employment and housing discrimination.⁸⁵

The inequality permeating the 1917 grant of citizenship is best understood by examining a series of legal questions and decisions that were brought about shortly after the Jones-Shafroth Act became law, stemming primarily from Puerto Ricans who were not living in the island at the time of the enactment and were not granted citizenship as a result. Among these was Manuel Olivieri Sánchez, a Puerto Rican who had lived in Hawaii for years and sought to register to vote shortly after the enactment of the act.⁸⁶ However, a

82. Charles R. Venator-Santiago and Edgardo Meléndez, "U.S. Citizenship in Puerto Rico: One Hundred Years After the Jones Act," *Centro Journal* vol. 24, no. 1 (2017), 17.

83. *Ibid.*, 18.

84. Charles R. Venator-Santiago, *Puerto Rico and the Origins of US Global Empire*, (Routledge, 2015), 89.

85. Emilio Pantojas-García, "The Puerto Rican Paradox: Colonialism Revisited," *Latin American Research Review* vol. 40, no. 3 (2005), p. 170.

86. *Ibid.*, 25.

Honolulu city clerk refused to register him, prompting a legal dispute that resulted in the First Circuit Court of Honolulu upholding the decision on the grounds that “the Jones Act had naturalized only Puerto Ricans residing on the island at the time that the law was enacted.”⁸⁷

The confusion caused by this and other similar cases eventually prompted the United States to enact the Nationality Act of 1940, which established that birth in Puerto Rico would be the same as birth in the mainland United States.⁸⁸ Yet, while it cleared confusion on which Puerto Ricans were considered citizens, it did not fix the primary issue of citizenship as granted through the Jones-Shafroth Act—that is, the statutory nature of citizenship. Because the citizenship granted to Puerto Ricans relies on a Congressional act, it could be as readily forfeited as it was granted. The premise of the birthright citizenship granted through the Nationality Act of 1940 relies on the idea that “United States” refers to the continental United States, Alaska, Hawaii, and the territories, granting those born in any of these geographical areas citizenship as defined in the Fourteenth Amendment: “All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.”⁸⁹ Although it would be highly uncommon and likely reprimanded, if the United States can be defined so as to include the territories through this law, it could also be defined as only applying to territories annexed as states with the passage of a different law, voiding the birth right citizenship granted to Puerto Ricans.

87. Emilio Pantojas-García, “The Puerto Rican Paradox,” 25.

88. Charles R. Venator-Santiago, *Puerto Rico and the Origins of US Global Empire*, 74.

89. U.S. Const. amend. XIV. Sec. 1.

Race, the Insular Cases, and voting rights

As discussed briefly in prior sections of this thesis, the Insular cases are a series of legal opinions from the Supreme Court that examined the political and constitutional status of Puerto Rico and its citizens. The key purpose of these cases was to legitimize the territorial status of the island in a way that allowed it to retain its colonial status, while stripping the use of the term from being applied to the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. The cases relied on *Dred Scott v. Stanford*'s precedent that the United States "could not colonize and perpetuate its colonization in the new territories," a legal precedent that allowed for the justification of Manifest Destiny.⁹⁰ The Insular cases began as a response to the Foraker Act of 1900, which imposed taxes on the island to allow the United States to fund its operations in the new territory. At the center of the cases was answering whether or not the taxes "contradicted the Uniformity Clause of the Constitution, which required that 'all Duties, Imposts, and Excises ... be uniform throughout the United States.'"⁹¹ The answer was dependent on whether or not the Constitution of the United States follows the flag; in other words, "was Puerto Rico, after it was acquired from Spain, excluded from the term 'United States' simply because it was a territory rather than a State?"⁹² Although the Insular cases have been the defining factor in the political and civil relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States, the individual cases do not directly address political or civil rights issues; instead, they were

90. José M. Atilés-Osoria, "The criminalization of anti-colonial struggle in Puerto Rico," *Counter-Terrorism and State Political Violence: The 'war on terror' as terror*, eds. Scott Poynting and David Whyte (New York: Routledge, 2012), 163.

91. Juan R. Torruella, "Ruling America's Colonies: The Insular Cases," *Yale Law and Policy Review*, 32, no. 1 (2013), 66.

92. Ibid.

brought about through commercial issues, which required that the constitutional relationship between the United States and its territories to be questioned. One of the most important aspects surrounding the decisions made by the Supreme Court is that, “with the exception of *Huus v. New York & Puerto Rico Steamship Co.* ... these issues were decided by five-to-four-pluralities,” indicating that, even at a time when McKinley was President, and the Vice-President was Theodore Roosevelt, both staunch supporters and proponents of the Spanish-American War, the questions brought up in these cases were significantly controversial.⁹³

Downes v. Bidwell and *Balzac v. Porto Rico* are two of the primary cases that defined the colonial status of Puerto Rico, specifically affecting the issues discussed in the purview of this thesis. *Downes v. Bidwell* effectively eliminated the possibility of voting rights and a sovereign polity from Puerto Ricans through the racist ideology it promoted against anyone *other* than Anglo-Saxon. *Balzac v. Porto Rico*, on the other hand, established that Puerto Ricans were not protected by the United States Constitution because of their location and eradicated the hope that Puerto Rico might become a state of the United States or a sovereignty, relegating its status to permanent limbo. *Balzac v. Porto Rico* reached the Supreme Court after Jesús Balzac, editor of a newspaper in Arecibo, Puerto Rico, was charged and convicted of criminal libel, a misdemeanor crime in the island. Since jury trials were only guaranteed for felony crimes in the island, and the Jones-Shafroth Act had recently granted Puerto Ricans citizenship, Balzac requested a trial jury as guaranteed by the Sixth Amendment of the United States Constitution. When

93. Juan R. Tortuella, “Ruling America’s Colonies,” 68.

he was denied this trial, he appealed to the Supreme Court, which concluded that Balzac was not entitled to the rights guaranteed in the Sixth Amendment of the Constitution due to Puerto Rico's territorial status.

More specifically, this case undermined the civil protections of Puerto Ricans by: establishing that the Constitutional rights guaranteeing a trial by jury in criminal prosecutions was not granted to a territory belonging to the United States that has not been incorporated; Puerto Rico had not been incorporated into the Union with the Foraker Act of 1900; Puerto Rico had not been incorporated into the Union by the Jones Act of 1917, and the section 5 provisions that granted citizenship did not extend the jury system into the island.⁹⁴ Chief Justice Taft defined the citizenship granted to Puerto Ricans as secondary in his opinion, stating,

What additional rights did it give them? It enabled them to move into the continental United States and becoming residents of any State there to enjoy every right of any other citizen of the United States, civil, social and political In Porto Rico, however, the Porto Rican can not insist upon the right of trial by jury The citizen of the United States living in Porto Rico can not there enjoy a right of trial by jury It is locality that is determinative of the application of the Constitution, in such matters as judicial procedure, and not the status of the people who live in it.⁹⁵

Downes v. Bidwell, particularly the provision of the case outlined in chapter two, and *Balzac v. Porto Rico*, legitimized Puerto Rico's colonial status by concluding that the Constitution did not apply in the island and effectively declaring that Puerto Ricans are secondary citizens. The impact of these cases is sustained by the fact that they have not

94. *Balzac v. Porto Rico*, 258 U.S. 298 (1922).

95. *Ibid.*, 308-09.

been reversed and continue to serve as the legal precedent that inspires laws and Supreme Court decisions made today.

The cases, though doubtfully decided as seen in the vote plurality, largely remained unquestioned until the end of the Second World War, when they were faced with the scrutiny of international law in the aftermath of the Holocaust.⁹⁶ Right before the end of the war, however, the United States implemented Gag Laws in the island with the intent of suppressing any and all independence movements, an endeavor that proved successful. Therefore, due to the veto power the United States was granted by the United Nations, it was able to suppress any questions about Puerto Rico's political status both in a domestic and international scope.

Nationalism, Gag Laws, the Commonwealth, and COINTELPRO

As the independence movement began to gain traction, the United States initiated a series of laws outlawing the movement, which was spearheaded by Pedro Albizu Campos, leader of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party. After transferring from the University of Vermont to Harvard University, Albizu Campos, the son of an African Slave and Creole, served in an African American infantry during the Great War, an experience that engendered the foundation for his nationalist ideals. During his time at Harvard Law, he learned to speak English, French, German, Portuguese, Italian, Latin, and Greek, which allowed him to work with world leaders seeking independence for their countries, such as Indian leaders Gandhi, Sudas Ghandra Gose, Rabindranath Tagore, and

96. Sherrie Baver, "Puerto Rico: Colonialism Revisited," *Latin American Research Review* vol. 22, no. 2 (1987), 229.

Irish statesman Éamon deValera.⁹⁷ Albizu Campos was offered posts on the United States Supreme Court and diplomatic corps but denied these positions, choosing instead to return to Puerto Rico and meet with neighboring Latin American countries to establish an independence delegation.

As stated in chapter one, the colonization of women's bodies in Puerto Rico served as a catalyst for the Nationalist Party in the island; as such, when Pedro Albizu Campos was elected President of the Nationalist Party, he formed the Women's Nationalist Committee, making feminism and the freedom of women's bodies central to the freedom of the island as a whole.⁹⁸ Albizu Campos' struggle for his life began when, in 1935, Colonel E. Francis Riggs commanded police officers to kill four nationalists; in retaliation, nationalists Hiram Rosado and Elias Beauchamp killed Colonel Riggs.⁹⁹ Using the United States' Code 18, section 2384, outlawing seditious conspiracy, Albizu Campos and other prominent leaders of the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico were arrested for the murder. This is not the end of violent acts against Nationalists or *independentistas*; chapter four will delve in detail about other acts of violence that stemmed from these events.

Albizu Campos and the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico became so prominent in the island that the United States executed Gag Laws in 1948. Predominantly enforced in 1950 and 1951, when nationalist uprisings increased as Albizu Campos sought to stop the establishment of the Commonwealth, the law decreed the following acts as felonies:

97. Victor Villanueva, "Colonial Memory and the Crime of Rhetoric: Pedro Albizu Campos," *College English* vol. 71 no. 6, Special Topic: Writing, Rhetoric, and Latinidad (2009), 634.

98. *Ibid.*

99. *Ibid.*, 635.

1. Promoting, advocating, advising or preaching the necessity, desirability or advisability of overthrowing, stopping or destroying the Insular Government, or any of its policies, by means of force or violence.
2. Printing, publishing, editing, moving, selling, distributing or publicly displaying any writing or publication which promotes, advocates, counsels, or preaches the necessity, desirability or advisability of defeating, crippling or destroying the Insular Government.
3. Organizing or helping to organize any society, group or assembly of persons who promote, advocate, advise or preach the abolition or destruction of the Insular Government.¹⁰⁰

Though the largest and most active, the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico was not the only threat to the colonial institution the United States had created in Puerto Rico. As the United Nations and the rest of the international world sought to quell conflicts after the Second World War, colonies were brought to light and colonial policies were questioned in a relatively new realm of international politics. The first Puerto Rican-elected governor in the island, Luis Muñoz Marín, who, prior to his election in 1948, had been an *independentista*, suddenly abandoned his stance. In fact, he “succeeded in leading the island’s population to approve a ‘home rule’ constitution that also included a vote in favor of the status quo in the island’s relationship to the mainland.”¹⁰¹ The protests that had erupted throughout the island subsided for a time during the vote and Puerto Rico and the United States informed the United Nations of the discontinuation of the island as a non-self-governing territory, yet Muñoz Marín and the United States government continued to disagree on the terms outlined in the report.¹⁰² Muñoz Marín believed that Puerto Rico ceased to be a territory of the United States and that laws made by the Puerto

100. José M. Atilés-Osoria, “The criminalization of anti-colonial struggle in Puerto Rico,” 166-67.

101. Nelson D. Hermilla, “Puerto Rico 1898-1998: The Institutionalization of Second Class Citizenship?” *Dickinson Journal of International Law* vol. 16 no. 2 (1998), 293.

102. *Ibid.*, 294.

Rican legislature could not be amended or repealed; the United States advised Muñoz Marín to change the language of the report and eliminate any use of the word “colonial,” terms he complied with.¹⁰³ The vote for home rule established the Commonwealth status in the island by 1952, which made Puerto Rico’s affairs and nationalist movements a “domestic affair” as opposed to an international affair under the UN Decolonization Committee. Although the subject of Puerto Rico’s status continued to be brought up in the United Nations, the creation of the Commonwealth proved problematic for Puerto Ricans and the *independentistas*, particularly during the Civil Rights Era.

COINTELPRO, a program established by the FBI with the intent to collect information on people classified as terrorists, gathered information by infiltrating the Civil Rights Movement in the mainland and the independence movement in the island. The files retained by the FBI range from “the Puerto Rican Independence Party (still active and known as PIP) to student demonstrations and workers' strikes to bomb explosions and assassination attempts as part of an armed struggle.”¹⁰⁴ COINTELPRO received assistance from the Police Department in Puerto Rico to track radical groups from 1936 to 1995. Radical groups, however, were not the only ones under surveillance; legal groups and political parties were also observed. Those infiltrating these groups used improper tactics and “some of the violence attributed to *independentistas* was, in fact, the work of infiltrators trying to destroy the movement.”¹⁰⁵ No case demonstrated this

103. Nelson D. Hermilla, “Puerto Rico 1898-1998,” 294-95.

104. Mireya Navarro, “New Light on Old F.B.I. Fight; Decades of Surveillance of Puerto Rican Groups,” *The New York Times*, November 28, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/28/nyregion/new-light-on-old-fbi-fight-decades-of-surveillance-of-puerto-rican-groups.html>.

105. Ibid.

violation as well as the Massacre of Ponce, which will be examined in detail in the following chapter.

Conclusion

These events prove that the federal government of the United States has not kept the interests of the Puerto Rican people at the center of their policies; rather, it has usurped their concerns in favor of retaining its colony, to the detriment and death of many Puerto Ricans. Since its report to the United Nations, the United States has failed to adequately provide Puerto Ricans with the right to self-determination with the use of Gag Laws and COINTELPRO, prompting the United Nations to reconsider Puerto Rico's political status as early as the 1970's, when the "Committee voted to keep the Puerto Rican question under continuous review, thereby implying that Puerto Rico's government had been categorized as non-self-governing or colonial."¹⁰⁶ Puerto Rico continues to be absent from conversations regarding its political and economic development, prompting spokespersons from all political parties in Puerto Rico to go before the UN Decolonization Committee and protest the status quo.¹⁰⁷ Today, the United States continues to be involved with the United Nations in discussions surrounding the political status of Puerto Rico, focusing almost entirely on the argument that Puerto Rico is a domestic affair of the United States and blocking Cuban-sponsored resolutions declaring the island a colony and demanding independence.¹⁰⁸ Until the United States allows Puerto Ricans the right to self-determination to its full extent, creates a position within a

106. Nelson D. Hermilla, "Puerto Rico 1898-1998," 303.

107. Sherri Bayer, "Puerto Rico: Colonialism Revisited," 228.

108. Alfred Stepan, "The United States and Latin America: Vital Interests and the Instruments of Power" *Foreign Affairs: America and the World* 1979 vol. 58, no. 3 (1979), 675-676.

federal office that promotes the interests of Puerto Ricans in the island, and/or allows islanders to vote in general presidential elections, the system at play in the island will continue to be a colonial, not a democratic, one.

CHAPTER IV

Massacres and bombings at the hands of the United States

Inside the base, you could feel the ground — the ground moving. You can hear the concussions. You could feel it. If you're on the range, you could feel it in your chest. That's the concussion from the explosion. It would rain, actually rain, bombs. And this would go on seven days a week.

—Hermogenes Marrero

Thus far, this thesis has examined how women's bodies were used as the foundation for colonialism in Puerto Rico, how the United States directly and indirectly created a homogenous race in Puerto Rico, and how it distorted democracy and citizenship in the island. These factors have been part of a larger foundation upon which the debt and resulting crisis in the island has been built by removing women's opportunities to work and study as they suffered from the side effects of birth control resources about which they were uninformed on; creating a homogenous race that allowed for the subordination of Puerto Ricans through racist rhetoric, which resulted in their enrollment in the military during times of war as soldiers and scientific experiments used to test chemical weapons; and, by providing a secondary citizenship status that did not protect them to the full extent of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights that resulted in discriminatory employment practices in the continental United States.¹⁰⁹ Yet, these

109. Caitlin Dickerson, "Secret World War II Chemical Experiments Tested Troops By Race," *National Public Radio*, June 22, 2015. <https://www.npr.org/2015/06/22/415194765/u-s-troops-tested-by-race-in-secret-world-war-ii-chemical-experiments>.

factors are not an exhaustive list of American actions that have contributed to the predicament of the island.

Another factor contributing to the crisis has been the violence employed by the United States, and Puerto Rican elites who had nothing to lose by working with Americans, to shut down any and all independence movements. The secondary citizenship status conferred on Puerto Ricans allowed for the subversion of the freedom of assembly for the Nationalists. In fact, the government of Puerto Rico assumed that Nationalists were “gangsters, and [were] likely to use force, and with the assumption that they have military weapons,” employed a set of precautions to prevent the escalation of violence.¹¹⁰ Included in these precautions “seems to be the prohibition of public meetings, parades, and assemblies, not only of Nationalists but of others as well.”¹¹¹ More than denying Puerto Ricans their civil rights as protected by the Puerto Rican government—and as they would be protected were they granted full Constitutional rights—these precautions resulted in multiple massacres in Puerto Rico.

It was this rhetorical device of portraying Nationalists as militant gangsters that resulted in the use of violence against those who sought independence in the island. The most well-known act of violence is the Massacre of Ponce, where 19 civilians and 2 police officers were killed and 200 others were injured. This was not the only massacre that took place in Puerto Rico, nor the only event that violently targeted the Nationalist movement, but it was the one that resulted in the most casualties and, therefore, the

110. Arthur Garfield Hays, “Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Civil Rights in Puerto Rico,” 7.

111. Ibid.

strongest public outcry from Puerto Ricans. The tragedy was worsened by the fact that newspapers, such as the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, portrayed the Nationalists killed during the massacre as gangsters who incited the violence instead of victims of the indiscriminate use of violence. This was not the first time the American media had portrayed Nationalists in a negative light, though in the past this portrayal was brought about by actions that were actually violent; the massacre of Ponce was the first instance in which Nationalists were portrayed as gangsters, even as they were the victims of one of the most violent crimes in the history of the island.

The Massacre of Ponce remains a stain in the history of the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico, one that citizens of Ponce remember each year through ceremonies that often begin with speeches proclaiming independence. Because this massacre has remained such a defining moment in the way Puerto Ricans identify themselves in relation to the United States, it is included in this thesis both to honor those who suffered and show how the events of this massacre have crushed the spirit of a community, the result of which can be measured in part through the socioeconomic status of the municipality.

The remainder of this chapter will focus on the bombing of the island of Vieques, a phenomenon that took place in the island for decades, unquestioned by anyone except Puerto Ricans for the majority of the time during which it took place. The United States Navy began acquiring land in the island of Vieques around the 1930's, solidifying their presence in the island in 1941.¹¹² Since the 1970's, the island was used for bombing

112. Russell Baruffi, "Environmental Conflict and Cultural Solidarity: The Case of Vieques," 4.

target practice until 2003, when the Bush administration removed the military from the island in response to protests that had been ongoing for over a decade. The quote from Hermogenes Marrero provided in the beginning of this chapter embodies what it was like to be a resident of the island of Vieques during those 33 years the Navy used the island of Vieques for bombing practice. The Navy's acquisition of the island has resulted in a plethora of negative events, including the death of a security guard during a target practice, when military officials failed to follow target practice protocol; the rise of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, as residents were forcibly moved out of the island; the destruction of the geology of the island, making it impossible to use the land for farming and crops; and, the increase of cancer rates of those who live in the island.

This chapter focuses on the Massacre of Ponce and the bombing of Vieques to highlight how the United States has caused poverty in the island by assassinating Puerto Ricans who would have otherwise been part of the workforce, destroying the ecological systems that had once been the backbone of the economy in the regions affected, and lowering the property values of the surrounding areas—areas that would otherwise attract more tourists, adding to the main source of income for the island.

Ponce Massacre

On March 21, 1937, a Palm Sunday, Nationalists took to the streets to protest the arrest of leaders of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party for the assassination attempt of a police officer. Although the assassination attempt was the work of an individual who associated himself with the party, the government of Puerto Rico punished the leaders associated with the party. The notation of this day as Palm Sunday is of particular

importance because Puerto Rico was, and continues to be, predominantly Catholic, making the tragedy that ensued two-fold for Puerto Ricans. The following re-telling of the events that transpired on this day is taken from what is commonly known as the Hays Commission Report—specifically, the “Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Civil Rights in Puerto Rico”—which was an independent investigation conducted to prove or disprove claims that the shooting was started by Puerto Rican Nationalists and that police officers were acting in self-defense. It is the conclusion of this investigation that officially classified the events that transpired as “the Massacre of Ponce.”

After announcing their desire to march, partially in commemoration of the day when slavery was abolished in 1873, Nationalists sought out permission from Mayor José Tormos Diego, who was out of the island at the time, and had left Dr. William Gelpí as acting mayor.¹¹³ This they did even though no permit was required under the municipal regulation of Ponce, as it was decided, in *Pueblo v. Alonso*, that it was “an extra-limitation of power that cannot prevail” to allow the government to prohibit access to the plazas, since they were created for the people.¹¹⁴ When the mayor returned to Puerto Rico on Saturday, March 20th, he decided to grant the permit, on the condition that “there should not be a military parade.”¹¹⁵ Here, it is important to distinguish between a marching band-style parade and a military-style parade, which have similarities in style (i.e., military-style uniforms, musical procession, etc.) but are purposefully different. Marching bands, historically a type of military march, exist for entertainment purposes;

113. Marisa Rosado, “The Ponce Massacre (1937),” *Enciclopedia de Puerto Rico*.
<https://enciclopediapr.org/en/encyclopedia/the-ponce-massacre-1937/>.

114. Hays Commission Report, 8.

115. *Ibid.*, 9.

military parades, however, are done with the explicit purpose of demonstrating the range of weapons available to the military. Since Nationalists did not have weapons, their march was by definition not a military march. Thus, they were not violating the orders originally given to them by the Mayor of Ponce.

Colonel Enrique de Orbeta, Chief of the Insular Police, arrived that Sunday morning to warn government officials and police officers of the dangers of allowing the procession to take place. He warned the local Chief of Police, Captain Blanco, who had written a letter to the Nationalists, advising them to not continue on with the parade on March 20th.¹¹⁶ Governor Blanton Winship ordered the Chief of Insular Police to order reinforcements to assist the local police in Ponce.¹¹⁷ Due to the governor's orders, on March 21st there were 150 to 200 police officers in Ponce, armed with "rifles, carbines, sub-machine or repeating guns ..., gas bombs, revolvers and clubs"; the local police force in Ponce is about 35 men.¹¹⁸ The Chief of Insular Police imprinted on the Mayor of Ponce that the procession would be dangerous (he would later change his testimony to say that he only advised that the procession would be scandalous). Following the Chief's advice, the Mayor decided to revoke the permit. However, as mentioned prior, this revocation was irrelevant, as it was not needed to legally assemble in the plaza. Nationalists marched down the streets in military style, donning black and white corps uniforms that matched the colors of the nationalist flag. When the national anthem

116. Hays Commission Report, 9.

117. Katherine Rodríguez-Pérez, "Reports on the Ponce Massacre: How the U.S. Press Protected U.S. Government Interests in Puerto Rico in the Wake of Tragedy," (honors thesis, Wesleyan University, 2010), 12.

118. Hays Commission Report, 10.

played, the “command to march was given to the cadets and the nurses,” and, as the police reported, “from the corner of Aurora and Marina Streets, where the Nationalist Club is, a civilian who appeared to be an observer, fired a shot aimed at Chief Soldevilla,” which sparked the tragic events of the day.¹¹⁹ Nationalists and civilians who had simply been observers in the march were shot without discrimination; the children and women who were present were killed or injured as well.

To understand a possible motivation against Nationalists during the march, this paragraph will provide a succinct history of the National Anthem of Puerto Rico. There are two versions of the National Anthem, one of which was outlawed by Spain and once again upon the secession of Puerto Rico by the United States. The first was written in 1868 after the *Grito de Lares*—a revolutionary uprising against the Spanish in the town of Lares—inspired Lola Rodríguez de Tió to write a revolutionary anthem.¹²⁰ This anthem was rejected both by the Spanish and Americans, on the grounds that it incited violence against the ruling government. The anthem, known as *La Boriqueña*, is sometimes played and recorded as a song, though it has been denied as the official anthem. The official anthem, known by the same name, was adopted in 1952 when the island was granted Commonwealth status but uses the lyrics written by Manuel Fernández Juncos, a Spanish man from Asturias, in 1903.¹²¹ The lyrics written by Rodríguez de Tió speak of the revolution of the Cubans and call upon Puerto Ricans to wake up from their dream

119. Hayes Report, 32.

120. “Lola Rodríguez de Tió,” Library of Congress. <https://loc.gov/rr/hispanic/1898/lola.html>.

121. Valérie Vézina, “Puerto Rico: The Quest for a ‘National’ Anthem,” *Shima Journal* vol. 12, no. 12. (2017), 225-26.

because it is time to fight.¹²² Fernández Juncos lyrics, by contrast, simply marvel over the beauty of the island. Which of these anthems was played during the march is not clear; what is clear from the history of the anthems is that if Rodríguez de Tió's version was played, it likely would have been taken as a threat or challenge by the Nationalists.

Police officers and American newspapers claimed that Puerto Ricans had fired first. Among the arguments were statements that a man in the crowd fired the first shot. The Hays Commission Report disproved this with the following witness account:

Perez-Marchand identified for us the civilian who was under suspicion. He was a man ... who had a son among the Nationalists. The story was that, fearful that the police would harm his son, the father shot at the police. Why he should have done any such thing, if he wanted to protect his son, is beyond our comprehension

Mr. Rodriguez met his death while engaged in what is ordinarily the innocent pastime of watching a demonstration. The photograph shows that Mr. Rodriguez was in the midst of the crowd of civilians, and that a dense group of men separated him from the police.... Secondly, appears the curious fact that the man who fired the first shot was killed and yet no weapon was found near him on the street; in fact, no weapon was found anywhere on any of the streets.¹²³

The police officers, under the advice of governor Winship, laid the blame on a dead man who could not defend his honor. Additional evidence uncovered by the Hays Commission found that police officers surrounded the Nationalists. This begs the question "as to why the police took such a formation, if their endeavor was to disperse the cadets.... simple common sense would seem to suggest that plenty of room be left for escape."¹²⁴ The formation of the police officers implies that it was done with the explicit

122. Valérie Vézina, 227.

123. Hays Commission Report, 21.

124. Ibid., 16.

purpose of trapping the Nationalists. Further adding to this conclusion is the fact that “those who were not Nationalists, were kept off Marina Street between Aurora and Jobos Streets, and that only the Nationalists were let through police lines,” implying that police officers purposely targeted Nationalists, though the rampage would later be directed to civilians as well.¹²⁵

Pictures taken that day by journalists standing on balconies further prove that police officers initiated the acts of violence. The first image provided, before a shot rang out, shows armed police officers walking towards the Nationalists



Figure 5. Police officers flanking Nationalists (dressed in black and white)



Figure 6. Police officers running towards civilians after first shot rang out

125. Hays Commission Report, 13.

(dressed in black shirts and white pants). The second photograph, taken after a shot was fired, shows police officers running towards the on-looking civilians, who are seen running away from the march, not the Nationalists they claimed were the threat from the beginning.

The following are stories of individuals who were targeted and killed or injured by police officers and may include graphic details. Among the civilians who were killed during the massacre was a 13-year-old girl. Her story was told by Jenaro Lugo, the messenger of the Mayor of Ponce, who saw the scene from the balcony of the convent, situated directly across from the Nationalist Club:

To that balcony he had gone when the police ordered him off the street, apparently for the reason that he was not a Nationalist Our witness of the balcony did not remain in quietude after the shooting began. He rushed down the steps of the balcony in Marina Street starting to flee towards Aurora Street. As policemen were at the place, he turned back, just in time to see a policeman approach and riddle the little girl with bullets.¹²⁶

Others present sought refuge inside the Nationalist Club headquarters, where men used shirts for bandages on those wounded. They hid in the headquarters for a long time, with no ambulance arriving during that time. At one point, “trying to get help for a wounded and apparently dying woman, they opened

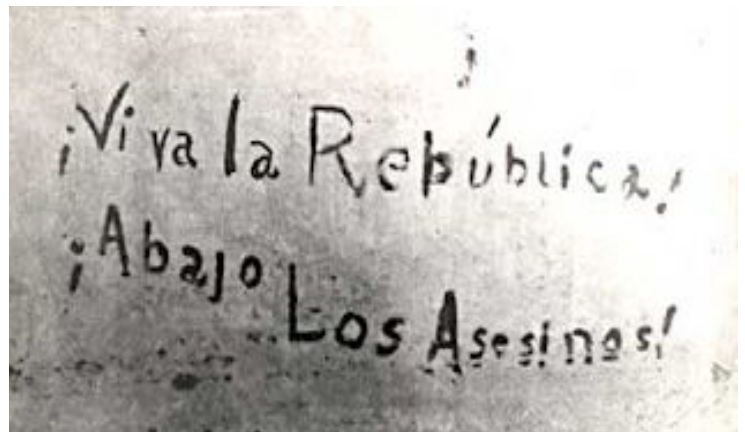


Figure 7. Writing in blood stating, "Long live the republic! Down with the assassins!"

126. Hays Commission Report, 20.

the door, and held out a white handkerchief as a flag of truce. They were met by a fusillade of shots.”¹²⁷ A dying Nationalist wrote “Long live the Republic! Down with the assassins!” on a wall with his blood.

Two policemen were killed during the massacre, and the government and police officers used these casualties to stage images that made it seem as

though they were shot at by Nationalists from the crowd and from the rooftops. One such image shows the Chief, dressed in white, alongside two officers standing by the corpse of one of the two police officers killed during the massacre. All of the police officers are looking up, as though they are trying to spot the sniper in the rooftops. The image, however, was taken after the height of the massacre had passed. This picture was used in American newspapers, among which were the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*, and used to support the narrative of the Nationalist gangsters threatening the safety of the government and civilians. The section to follow will study initial reporting on the Massacre of Ponce in Puerto Rico and the United States.



Figure 8. Chief of Insular Police standing next to the corpse of a police officer, looking towards the rooftops

127. Hays Commission Report, 22.

Initial Reporting: a brief analysis of American and Puerto Rican newspapers

Adding to tensions in the aftermath of the massacre was the way the United States' media reported the incidents of the massacre by portraying the Nationalists as the provocateurs of the violence. In her honors thesis, Katherine Rodríguez-Pérez studies the way the United States' press protected the country in the midst of Puerto Rican accusations that what took place on March 21st was a mass assassination. She states, "U.S. reporters labeled the incident a 'riot' and a 'clash,' and blamed Nationalists for the violence. Puerto Rican reporters used terms like 'massacre' and 'mass assassination' and blamed Governor Winship as chief of insular police."¹²⁸ Because American journalists were not working in the island, most of the information they received came from the governor, who was explicitly involved in the crisis and had motive to protect his reputation. While American newspapers described the massacre as a "riot," Puerto Rican newspapers, the most influential at the time being *El Mundo* and *El Imparcial*, featured more dialogue and criticism of the crisis and the ensuing American response. Through her research, Rodríguez-Pérez found that, "of the fourteen articles that discuss the Massacre in the *New York Times* in 1937, eleven of them included the use of the word "riot" Of the nine articles published in *The Washington Post* that year, seven of them used the same term."¹²⁹ Rodríguez-Pérez makes no mention of finding similar terms in Puerto Rican newspapers.

128. Katherine Rodríguez-Pérez, "Reports on the Ponce Massacre," 63.

129. Ibid., 66.

One of the disparaging American articles, published in the *New York Times*, is titled, “Puerto Rican Riot Seen as Planned,” further laying the responsibility of the massacre on the Nationalists with the statement, “Evidence Is Said to Indicate Nationalists Were Prepared for Trouble Over March,” although the Hays Commission Report would later find the opposite to be true.¹³⁰ Further, the article claimed that both civilians and police officers agreed the first shot was fired by a Nationalist after they were warned not to march. This claim was also found to be untrue by Hays Commission. Lastly, the article argued that Nationalists sniped from the rooftops and balconies, an account many witnesses contradicted, as those who lived in those houses were of high repute. In fact, through Hays’ investigation, it was found that,

The suggestion that men fired from the house tops so enraged Mr. Sanchez Frasqueri, that he was impelled to testify against the police from the beginning When [the first shot] was followed by another report, they ran to the balcony of the club By the time they arrived at that balcony the fusillade of shots had stopped.¹³¹

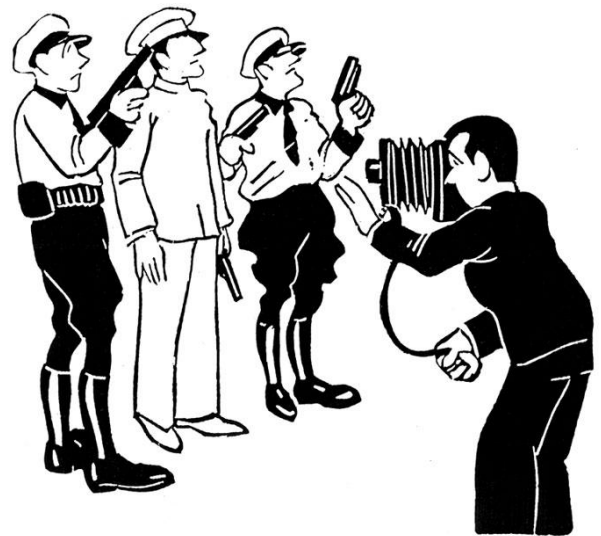
Most importantly, Mr. Sánchez Frasqueri reported seeing dead and mutilated bodies in surrounding streets, insinuating that “the police ran amuck lusting for blood,” disproving any claim that Puerto Rican snipers caused most of the turmoil that took place.¹³²

130. “Puerto Rican Riot Seen as Planned,” *New York Times*, March 22, 1937, accessed <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1937/03/23/99517650.html?action=click&contentCollection=Archives&module=ArticleEndCTA®ion=ArchiveBody&pgtype=article&pageNumber=9>.

131. Hays Commission Report, 24.

132. *Ibid.*, 25.

In contrast to the reports provided by the *New York Times*, Puerto Rican newspapers analyzed the situation primarily by providing witness accounts directly from those who were present. A political cartoon drawn by Manuel de Catalán in the magazine *Florete*, six days after the massacre, mocked the hypocrisy behind the picture in which the Chief of Insular Police looks for a sniper on the rooftops along with two police officers. The line on the cartoon states, "...and now we can say that they shot at us from the rooftops."¹³³



—... y ahora podemos decir que nos dispararon desde las "azoteas".

Figure 9. Political cartoon drawing attention to Insular Police's claims

Long before the Hays Commission Report declared the event as a massacre, Puerto Rican journalists were declaring it one, asking for an investigation that would hold Governor Winship and the police officers who followed his command responsible for their actions. American newspapers, however, continued to use terms that insinuated a battle between both sides took place, even after the Hays Commission declared that the affair was a one-sided massacre.¹³⁴ The contrast in language used between the newspapers demonstrates the colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States—one that exacerbated the grievances of *independentistas*. Further accentuating the colonial relationship and suppressed status of

133. Manuel de Catalán, *Florete*, March 27, 1937, 11.

134. Katherine Rodríguez-Pérez, "Reports on the Ponce Massacre," 66.

Puerto Ricans is the fact that Governor Winship would not be removed from his position of power for another two years, in 1939, although he was found guilty of denying civil rights on May 22, 193, when the Hays Commission Report was released.¹³⁵ Thus, the massacre of Ponce has remained as a reminder that the United States does not take the grievances of Puerto Ricans seriously, even in cases where lives are tragically lost.

Today, the massacre of Ponce serves as a constant reminder of the unequal relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, when combined with the birth control movement, forced sterilizations, racism, lack of democracy in the island, and the bombings that will henceforth be discussed, this event laid the foundation for the debt crisis in Puerto Rico by eliminating the work force in the island, lowering property values, driving up the cost of healthcare, and causing the government to spend thousands on trials.

Vieques as a bombing practice range & its effects on the island

In addition to the Ponce Massacre, the bombings in Vieques have been one of the most significant acts of violence in Puerto Rico caused by the United States. The bombings in Vieques have also been a significant contributor to the debt crisis by damaging the ecological systems the financial industry depended on, increasing the need for healthcare resources available only on the main island of Puerto Rico, and removing the majority of the population in the island to create more space for the Navy. Perhaps the most important factor is how recent the Navy's influence is, as these events took place as recently as 15 years ago and continue to spark outcry from residents.

135. Hays Commission Report, 64.

The United States Navy began to acquire land in Vieques in the 1930's by purchasing sugar plantations that faced financial hardships, expanding from 1941 onward by seizing private property from the residents in exchange for a small sum of money. By seizing private property, the Navy created a crisis of "landless, homeless peasants on the island," as it "confiscated 21,000 acres at ... an average of about \$50 per acre."¹³⁶ Those that remained in the "civilian area were denied the legal titles of their homes so that the military could readily relocate them."¹³⁷ The Navy did not begin the bombing practice until the 1970's, which included napalm and depleted uranium, though the Navy would deny this for years.¹³⁸ Even when it admitted to using those chemicals in the island, "it denied any link between their presence and the health conditions of the people who live there," even though the people in Vieques are "eight times more likely to die of cardiovascular disease and seven times more likely to die of diabetes than others in Puerto Rico [and] cancer rates on the island are higher than those in any other Puerto Rican municipality."¹³⁹

The high rates of cancer on the island of Vieques were not acknowledged until 1997, when "Nazario ... noticed a high incidence of cancer cases in Vieques and filed a

136. Russell Baruffi, "Environmental Conflict and Cultural Solidarity," 4.

137. Ibid., 5.

138. Valeria Pelet, "Puerto Rico's Invisible Health Crisis," *The Atlantic*, September 3, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/09/vieques-invisible-health-crisis/498428/>.

139. Ibid.

public grievance against the Department of Health.”¹⁴⁰ However, “the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry ... released reports that found no causal link between the high rates of sickness and decades of weapons use on the island.”¹⁴¹ The conclusion of the study was criticized on the grounds that it relied on negative data—a lack of evidence—to support its hypothesis, rather than concrete facts, or positive data.



Figure 10. Bomb found in a beach in Vieques, Puerto Rico

Island residents eventually sued the United States for causing the high rates of cancer and illness in the island, as the island remains contaminated by bombs that continuously leak into the oceans, contaminating the fish that are consumed by the inhabitants. Yet, because “the U.S. military is often protected under the notion of sovereign immunity,” a district court, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit, and the Supreme Court have dismissed and/or denied to hear the case of Vieques citizens.¹⁴² Marrero, the man quoted earlier in this chapter and a veteran of the U.S. Marines, receives few disability and medical benefits from the Department of Veteran Affairs

140. Valeria Pelet, “Puerto Rico’s Invisible Health Crisis.”

141. Ibid.

142. Ibid.

because the Navy has denied any connection between the pollutants it left behind and his medical illnesses. At only 57-years-old, Marrero “is nearly blind, needs an oxygen tank, has Lou Gehrig’s disease and crippling back problems, and sometimes needs a wheelchair.”¹⁴³

Following anti-Navy protests—in which well-known figures, such as the Reverend Jesse Jackson, Robert Kennedy Jr., and Reverend Al Sharpton participated in and were arrested for—the United States Congress disbursed \$180 million to clean up the island.¹⁴⁴ The amount of money disbursed has been insufficient and has delayed the projected finalization by nine years, from 2020 to 2029.¹⁴⁵ Though “the accords that paved the way for the ceasing of military operation in Vieques ... stated that the federal government would assume the whole responsibility for the cleanup and restoration of those



Figure 11. Military tank left behind in Flamenco Beach in Culebra, Puerto Rico

143. Abbie Boudreau and Scott Bronstein, “Island residents sue U.S., saying military made them sick,” *CNN*, February 1, 2010, <http://www.cnn.com/2010/US/02/01/vieques.illness/index.html>.

144. Juan González, “Gonzalez: 10 years later, devastation in Vieques waters,” *New York Daily News*, May 1, 2013, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/gonzalez-10-years-devastation-vieques-waters-article-1.1332740>.

145. Carlos “Johnny” Méndez Nuñez, “Congress must act to clean up Vieques and Culebra,” *The Hill*, July 31, 2017, <http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/energy-environment/344678-congress-must-act-to-clean-up-vieques-and-culebra>.

lands, as well as for the economic development of the island,” both Vieques and Culebra remain contaminated and face significant poverty rates, even when compared to those of the main island.¹⁴⁶ While Vieques was the island used for bombing practice, the shores of the beaches of Culebra most frequented by tourists remain riddled with military tanks.

Adding to tensions with the U.S. Navy was the bombing of David Sanes Rodríguez, who was killed when “two bombs struck on either side of him, 50 feet away.”¹⁴⁷ The error was reportedly due to the fact that a “marine who was not identified, became disoriented at dusk and picked the wrong target, an observation post, killing David Sanes Rodríguez”; additionally, the “ground control officer at the Vieques bombing range cleared the pilot to drop his 500-pound bombs even though he did not make visual contact with the plane, as required by Navy rules.”¹⁴⁸ The names of the soldiers and any consequences they may have faced as a result of their negligence were never made public. Further, only 4,000 acres were returned to the citizens of Vieques after protests and national and international scrutiny developed.¹⁴⁹ It would take another four years for the Bush administration to agree to pull the Navy out of the island. This adds to the tension and invisibility Puerto Ricans have felt since the Massacre of Ponce.

Conclusion

The Massacre of Ponce and bombing of Vieques have been two of the most decisive violent events in the history of the relationship between the United States and

146. Carlos “Johnny” Méndez Nuñez, “Congress must act to clean up Vieques and Culebra.”

147. The Associated Press, “Navy Attributes Fatal Bombing to Mistakes,” *The New York Times*, August 3, 1999, <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/08/03/us/navy-attributes-fatal-bombing-to-mistakes.html/>.

148. Ibid.

149. Staff, “De Víctima inocente a héroe póstumo,” *El Nuevo Día*, April 18, 2010, <https://www.elnuevodia.com/noticias/locales/nota/devictimainocenteaheroepostumo-687729/>.

Puerto Rico. While the Massacre of Ponce occurred over 80 years ago, it remains a central point in the grievances of Puerto Ricans against the government of the United States and the independence movement in the island. Both events have significantly altered the economic prospects in the main and surrounding islands through its significant elimination of Puerto Ricans who could have contributed to local businesses, lowering property values, creating a mass homeless population, diaspora of Viequenses to islands neighboring Puerto Rico, and increasing the economic burden on the local government through the need for litigation and increased health resources.

CHAPTER V.

Economic policies and their implications

The American flag found Porto Rico penniless and content. It now flies over a prosperous factory worked by slaves who have lost their lands and may soon lose their guitars and their songs.

—*Luis Muñoz Marín*

The aspects of Puerto Rican society examined in the prior chapters of this thesis examine how policies affecting the re-construction of society under American influence had indirect or direct impacts on the economy of the island. There were, however, policies in place that directly and negatively impacted the economic situation in the island. The economic policies discussed throughout this chapter had disastrous results in the local industries of the island and were created for the explicit purpose of benefitting North American society without consideration to its effects on the island. While it cannot be denied that the Crown of Spain had laid the foundation for the faulty economy in Puerto Rico, it was American-established policies that left the people of Puerto Rico feeling hopeless. As it is illustrated in the quote by Luis Muñoz Marín, Puerto Ricans lost the hopeful spirit they held when the United States first stepped on the shores of Puerto Rico as the policies established shed more light on the intentions of the American government. What was once a deleterious situation that had hope for improvement was now an impossible situation no Puerto Rican citizen could control or affect since they had no voting rights or representation in Congress.

Adding to the disillusionment felt by Puerto Ricans was the fact that Spain had finally ceded more liberties to the citizens and allowed for the establishment of a more

independent government, which sparked hope that full independence was attainable. The United States' arrival signified a stronger possibility for independence, but this hope dwindled when the United States began to change the Spanish government left by Spain and replace them with American policies without input from the Puerto Rican citizenry.

Establishing the foundation for the economic crisis under American control was the change from Spanish currency to American currency. Although the Spanish peso was worth as much as the American dollar, with five Spanish *pesetas* being the equivalent of one American dollar, the "United States currency was exchanged for Porto Rican money at 60 cents American money for one peso Porto Rican money," devaluing the currency by forty percent.¹⁵⁰ This change in currency greatly crippled the economy in Puerto Rico, as wages were cut and food became more expensive. More specifically, this change resulted in "laborer[s] who had received 50 centavos Puerto Rican coin now receiv[ing] 30 American cents, but whereas rice had only cost him only 4 centavos (2 2/5 American cents), it now cost him 4 American cents."¹⁵¹

This policy benefitted the American public because it resulted in the forfeiture and closure of farms and coffee and sugar plantations by Puerto Ricans who had sustained themselves through those industries during the Spanish reign and had no other form of sustenance under American control. Additionally, undervaluing the Puerto Rican currency served American interests by strengthening the rhetoric of the welfare queen it was using to justify its intervention in the island, as discussed in the first chapter of this

150. Bailey W. and Justine Whitfield Diffie, *Porto Rico: A Broken Pledge*, (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1931), 34.

151. Ibid.

thesis. With the closure of farms and plantations, the land rested in the hands of American entrepreneurs who took advantage of the situation by instituting sugar companies in the island, increasing the range of the sugar industry by nearly 30 percent from 1899 to 1930.¹⁵² These companies included: the South Porto Rico Sugar Company, incorporated under the laws of New Jersey; the Fajardo Sugar Company of Porto Rico, incorporated in New York; the Central Aguirre Associates, which was organized in Massachusetts and launched multiple partner companies in the island; and, the United Porto Rican Sugar Company, incorporated in Maryland.¹⁵³ There were additional Puerto Rican- and Spanish-founded companies, though these were not as sizeable as those established by American interests. This increase did not improve the economic situation in Puerto Rico, particularly during the Great Depression, as the bulk of the profits and the sugar produced was shipped off to the continental United States and Puerto Ricans never reaped the fruit of their labor.

In addition to the war, the continuous and worsening colonial policies in the island, and the loss in local commerce, Hurricane Ciriaco—one of the worst hurricanes in the history of Puerto Rico—stunted the economy further in 1899. Moreover, the economic implications of the Jones Act, the abolition of Section 936 of the tax code, removal of Chapter 9 bankruptcy rights, the PROMESA bill, and the recent Hurricane María have been the most pivotal influences in the continuing destruction of the economy in the island. While the events discussed earlier throughout this thesis had negative

152. Bailey W. and Justine Whitfield Diffie, *Porto Rico: A Broken Pledge*, 45.

153. *Ibid.*, 46-49.

economic impacts on the island through their sociological impact, this chapter focuses on more specific developments whose economic effects can be more directly measured. Among these, the Jones Act and the abolition of Section 936 have been identified and discussed as the two most directly catastrophic decisions for the economy of Puerto Rico. The removal of Chapter 9 bankruptcy rights has been pivotal to the island within the context of the recent debt crisis, though it did not directly impact the economic trends of the island. Lastly, the PROMESA bill and Hurricane María, both taking place after the bankruptcy announcement, have been more destructive to the island, making repayment virtually impossible.

Though the government of Puerto Rico is not inculpable in the economic catastrophe that plagues the island, this thesis does not focus on examining the role of the Puerto Rican government in the creation of the debt. The Puerto Rican's governments actions and their role in furthering the crisis are public knowledge: the constant theft of government funds by elected officials has been discussed by American and Puerto Rican newspapers alike, and many politicians, including a former governor, have faced trial and/or been arrested for their alleged and/or proven crimes.¹⁵⁴ Additionally, the United States government did not hesitate to expose the Puerto Rican government's responsibility during Congressional hearings; it has, however, consistently neglected to focus on its own responsibility in the matter during Congressional hearings, presidential elections, and through the media. Since the United States' role in the financial crisis is the

154. Manuel Ernesto Rivera, "Gobernador de Puerto Rico acusado de corrupción," *NY Daily News*, March 27, 2008. <http://www.nydailynews.com/latino/gobernador-de-puerto-rico-acusado-de-corrupcion-article-1.288593>.

crux of this thesis, this chapter will focus solely on American economic policies in the island and their effect.

Economic consequences of the Jones Act

The Merchant Marine Act of 1920, also known as the Jones Act (not to be confused with the Jones-Shafroth Act of 1917), was passed for the purpose of protecting the maritime industry and national security during the Great War.¹⁵⁵ Specifically, it was created to “modernize the principle of cabotage to Puerto Rican shipping,” where cabotage is defined as, “the idea that the provision of certain services within America is reserved exclusively to American companies.”¹⁵⁶ The Jones Act was not created with the explicit purpose of crippling the Puerto Rican economy in the way that devaluing the currency had been. Rather, it was created within the context of the First World War “to ensure that the government had American ships and personnel to mobilize in case of emergency or war.”¹⁵⁷

The idea of cabotage was not a new concept when the Jones Act was passed. On the contrary, it “dates back to the founding fathers and was incorporated as part of the second law passed by Congress, the Tariff of 1789.”¹⁵⁸ The Jones Act simply modernized this concept and expanded it to the territories the United States had recently acquired, effectively turning the idea of cabotage into a colonial law for territories far from the

155. Merchant Marine Act of 1920, Pub. L. No. 66-261, 41 Stat. 988 (1920).

156. Aaron Klein, “What everyone got wrong about the Jones Act, hurricane relief, and Puerto Rico,” *Brookings*, October 25, 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2017/10/25/what-everyone-got-wrong-about-the-jones-act-hurricane-relief-and-puerto-rico/>.

157. Niraj Chokshi, “Would Repealing the Jones Act Help Puerto Rico?,” *The New York Times*, October 24, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/24/us/jones-act-puerto-rico.html>.

158. Aaron Klein.

continental United States. Although states, with the exception of Hawaii and Alaska, have not suffered enough under this law to make it a topic of contention during elections, the economies of Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands have been greatly afflicted as a result. The law has been criticized by economists because of the limitations it imposes on American business, continental or not, as it “makes it cheaper for livestock farmers to buy feed from grain farmers in Argentina and Canada than from Americans,” and slows any response to crises, including the BP oil spill and Hurricane María.¹⁵⁹ The Jones Act has proven to be so detrimental that its continued legal standing has been criticized by politicians and economists across the political spectrum, from “liberal Paul Krugman, to free-market libertarians at the CATO institute, to centrists at The Economist magazine,” because it restricts competition, raising the costs and prices of goods.¹⁶⁰ Though the Jones Act is clearly unpopular among experts, it was not until the public announcement of Puerto Rico’s debt crisis that its existence would be hotly debated among citizens of the United States who otherwise had no idea of the law’s existence. Puerto Ricans on the island, however, have known about and felt its existence for decades before García Padilla informally declared Puerto Rico bankrupt.

In 2012, two University of Puerto Rico professors in the Mayagüez campus conducted a study to assess how the Jones Act impacted Puerto Rico’s economy yearly. Drs. Jeffry Valentín Mari and José Alameda-Lozada submitted their findings to the U.S.

159. Capital Research Center Staff, “The Sinking Ship of Cabotage: How the Jones Act lets unions and a few companies hold the economy hostage,” *Capital Research Center: America’s Investigative Think Tank*, April 7, 2013. <https://capitalresearch.org/article/the-sinking-ship-of-cabotage-how-the-jones-act-lets-unions-and-a-few-companies-hold-the-economy-hostage/>.

160. Aaron Klein.

General Accountability Office in April of 2012, stating that a repeal of the Jones Act would result in a net saving of \$100 million out of a total of \$961 million on freight charges.¹⁶¹ Further, they found that “repealing the Jones Act would have an annual positive welfare effect of \$656 million on the overall U.S. economy,” and that it had cost Puerto Rico an additional \$426 million in the fiscal year 2003. On average, the act costs Puerto Rico \$537 million per year.¹⁶² Additionally, the Jones Act impacts the cost of living in Puerto Rico. In 2015, the same year the former governor announced the debt, the Institute of Statistics in Puerto Rico was able to compare the cost of living in Puerto Rico to similar areas in the United States. Through its research, it announced that in the Metropolitan area of San Juan, Carolina, and Caguas, the cost of supermarket items was 23 percent more expensive in Puerto Rico than the United States.¹⁶³ Moreover, the cost of public services in Puerto Rico, energy services in particular, was the fourth most expensive in all of the United States, falling behind Alaska and Hawaii.¹⁶⁴ Alaska and Hawaii are the two incorporated states most impacted by the Jones Act due to their geographic location. Lastly, it was found that Puerto Rico is ranked 41st out of 325 urban and rural cities, falling behind New York, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., among other

161. Jeffrey Valentín-Mari, Ph.D and José I. Alameda-Lozada, Ph.D., “Economic Impacts of Jones Act on Puerto Rico’s Economy,” (working paper presentation, U.S. General Accountability Office, Washington, DC, April 26, 2013). <http://docplayer.net/494027-Economic-impact-of-jones-act-on-puerto-rico-s-economy.html>.

162. Chris Isidore and Madison Park, “Puerto Rico Crisis: What the Jones Act controversy is all about,” *CNN Money*, September 28, 2017. <http://money.cnn.com/2017/09/27/news/economy/jones-act-puerto-rico/index.html>.

163. “Informe de Resultados 2014-2015,” (Instituto de Estadísticas de Puerto Rico: Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico, San Juan, 2015), 19.

164. Ibid.

cities whose expensive cost of living is well known.¹⁶⁵ Yet, even as Puerto Rico's cost of living is among the most expensive in the United States, its per capita income is "about half of Mississippi's per capita income" and the poverty rate is above 50 percent.¹⁶⁶

Although it is not clear if a repeal of the Jones Act would result in a rapid improvement of the economy of Puerto Rico, it is still one of the most significant identified contributors to the crisis. Additionally, the negative impact of the Jones act continues to rise, as the number of American ships declines; the "domestic commercial shipping industry has largely vanished and today American built ships carry only 1/3 of 1 percent of total cargo."¹⁶⁷ By costing the island over a hundred million dollars a year and increasing the cost of living, the Jones Act contributes significantly to a "brain drain" in the island, which negatively impacts the economy. The Jones Act and the resulting brain drain were particularly impactful to the recovery efforts in the island post-María, an effect that will be analyzed later on in this chapter.

Section 936 abolished

Though the Jones Act slowed the economy for decades before the removal of Section 936 of the tax code, it was this removal that spearheaded the recession that still plagues the island. Section 936 was enacted through the Tax Reform Act of 1976, when Congress combined the special tax provisions of the Revenue Act of 1921 "with the development of possessions' economies."¹⁶⁸ The Revenue Act of 1921 provided U.S.

165. Instituto de Estadísticas de Puerto Rico.

166. "How Mississippi is Catching up – and Puerto Rico Is Not," *Puerto Rico Report*, August 2, 2017. <https://www.puertoricoreport.com/how-mississippi-is-catching-up-and-puerto-rico-is-not/>.

167. Aaron Klein.

168. "Report to the Chairman, Committee on Finance, U.S. Senate: Puerto Rico and the Section 936 Tax Credit," (General Accounting Office, Washington, DC, June 8, 1993), 2.

possessions with special tax provisions to allow American corporations to compete with foreign firms in the Philippines. Beginning in 1948, “Puerto Rico adjusted its tax policies with the Industrial Incentives Act of 1948,” a local law created to incentivize more private American capital to move to the island and resulted in “most U.S. subsidiaries in Puerto Rico [to be] completely or partially exempt from Puerto Rican taxes as well as from the U.S. income tax.”¹⁶⁹ The Industrial Incentives Act of 1948, coupled with the exemptions provided through Section 936, helped boost the economy in the island and “over 99 percent of the benefits of this section [had] gone to companies operat[ing] in Puerto Rico,” in the ten years between 1983 and 1993, though the provision was not without its faults.¹⁷⁰

The exemptions provided through Section 936 were meant to offset the colonial policies that had defined the island’s economic history and shift the economy from predominantly agrarian to industrial through Operation Bootstrap, which had begun with the Industrial Incentives Act of 1948.¹⁷¹ It resulted in a boom of industrial companies, at one point bringing as many as 300 companies to the island, of which 40 were pharmaceutical companies with their headquarters in the United States (not including locally-based pharmaceutical companies).¹⁷² In fact, the tax breaks provided through Operation Bootstrap made Puerto Rico the pharmaceutical capital of the world. Even

169. “Report to the Chairman,” 2.

170. Ibid.

171. Nick Brown, “How dependence on corporate tax breaks corroded Puerto Rico’s economy,” *Reuters*, December 20, 2016. <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-puertorico-economy/>.

172. Larry Rohter, “Puerto Rico Fighting to Keep Its Tax Breaks for Businesses,” *New York Times*, May 10, 1993. <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/05/10/business/puerto-rico-fighting-to-keep-its-tax-breaks-for-businesses.html>.

after the removal of Section 936, about 50 pharmaceutical companies have remained in the island, a matter that has complicated the healthcare resources of Americans in and outside of the island after the devastation caused by Hurricane María.¹⁷³

Although the Section 936 tax breaks resulted in a tenfold growth of per capita gross national product, and “disposable income shot up 1,600 percent” between 1950 and 1980, it was not a long-lasting economic reform.¹⁷⁴ Section 936 failed to increase the local economy in the same way the advancement of the sugar industry failed to improve the economic situation in the island, and unemployment rates continued to rise.¹⁷⁵ The unsustainability of Section 936 is due to the fact that it “made foreign investment in Puerto Rico artificially attractive,” making it susceptible to an economic crisis if the bubble it created burst.¹⁷⁶ These fears were proven in 1996, when a proposal to abolish Section 936 that had been ongoing since the early 1990’s, became reality. Criticisms of the results of Section 936 were not unfounded; it cost the United States Treasury a significant amount of money, but Puerto Rico retained an “18 percent unemployment [rate] and a per capita income of just over \$6,000 a year.”¹⁷⁷ Still, the abolition of Section 936, which was meant to take place in a span of ten years to allow for new economic measures, caused a significant recession in the island when the phase-out was fully

173. Katie Thomas, interviewed by Robert Siegel, “Idle Pharmaceutical Factories in Puerto Rico Raise Concerns of Drug Shortages,” *NPR*, October 6, 2017. <https://www.npr.org/2017/10/06/556230499/idle-pharmaceutical-factories-in-puerto-rico-raise-concerns-of-drug-shortages>.

174. John W. Schoen, “Here’s how an obscure tax change sank Puerto Rico’s economy,” *CNBC*, September 26, 2017. <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/09/26/heres-how-an-obscure-tax-change-sank-puerto-ricos-economy.html>.

175. *Ibid.*

176. Scott Greenberg and Gavin Ekins, “Tax Policy Helped Create Puerto Rico’s Financial Crisis,” *Tax Foundation*, June 30, 2015. <https://taxfoundation.org/tax-policy-helped-create-puerto-rico-s-fiscal-crisis/>.

177. Larry Rohter, “Puerto Rico Fighting.”

finished by January of 2006. Even with all its imperfections, Section 936 fostered a growing labor force that sunk quickly when its repeal was completed.

The Puerto Rican governor at the time, recently elected Dr. Pedro Rosselló, and business groups lobbied for the retention of Section 936, citing the loss of and destruction of the island's manufacturing industry, which at the time employed 165,000.¹⁷⁸ Further, they argued that the removal “would also deprive the local government of a big revenue source: a tax of up to 10 percent on profits that mainland companies send home from their Puerto Rico operations.”¹⁷⁹ Views on the repeal of Section 936 were split even among pro-statehood citizens, where some—such as the governor—insisted that a repeal would cripple the economy and others believed that the cost to the United States Treasury were not worth the few improvements, as they believed they would soon be able to gain statehood and Section 936 would be moot regardless.

The Congressionally approved repeal was signed into law by former President Bill Clinton, who agreed with the claims that the tax breaks were a form of corporate welfare, akin to “parking profits offshore to avoid taxes.”¹⁸⁰ President Clinton and the United States Treasury estimated that the United States “would raise \$7.3 billion over

178. Larry Rohter, “Puerto Rico Fighting.”

179. Ibid.

180. John W. Schoen.

five years from Puerto Rico,” as companies who had worked in Puerto Rico to avoid taxes would return to the United States and be required to pay federal and local taxes.¹⁸¹ Instead, the pharmaceutical industry moved to Ireland, “another island known for its low corporate tax rates, favorable treatment of intangible assets and, in recent years, pharmaceutical

manufacturers.”¹⁸² The \$7.3 billion President Clinton had hoped to acquire by eliminating Section 936 were never accrued and “the Puerto Rican government borrowed heavily to replace the lost revenue,” a debt that is held by Wall Street hedge funds and investors, further adding to the American control over the financial crisis in Puerto Rico.¹⁸³ In all, the repeal of Section 936 was the final factor in the creation of the debt crisis in Puerto Rico by destabilizing the economy of the island and causing a need for heavy borrowing to offset the results.

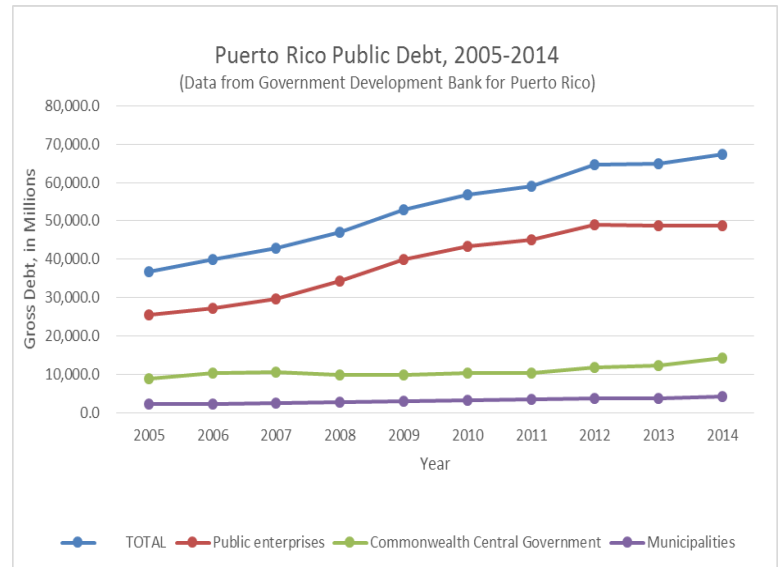


Figure 12. Chart showing the increase in debt after 2006, when Section 936 was complete removed

181. Larry Rohter, “Puerto Rico Fighting.”

182. Justin Fox, “Puerto Rico’s Economic Disaster Was Made in Washington,” *Bloomberg*, October 5, 2017. <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2017-10-05/puerto-rico-s-economic-disaster-was-made-in-washington>.

183. John W. Schoen.

Removal of Chapter 9 bankruptcy rights and the PROMESA bill

Worsening the debt crisis in Puerto Rico is the fact that it cannot claim Chapter 9 Bankruptcy rights, which makes it impossible to restructure its debt. Puerto Rico's inability to restructure the debt through Chapter 9 of the U.S. Bankruptcy Code is due to the fact that it is not a state; the code applies to municipalities of states, not territories. Yet, Chapter 9 bankruptcy rights were allowed for Puerto Rico from 1983-1984 until they were revoked for reasons unknown.¹⁸⁴ In an episode of *Last Week Tonight* dedicated to raising awareness about the financial crisis Puerto Rico faces, John Oliver introduced short clips of three Congressmen discussing Puerto Rico's sudden and unexplainable removal from Chapter 9 protections. Senator Bob Menendez, a democrat from New Jersey, stated that "a provision [to exempt Puerto Rico from Chapter 9] was stuck into a larger bill with no explanation or debate"; Senator Dick Durbin, a Democrat from New Jersey and the minority whip, stated that "there is no legislative history to explain why Puerto Rico was singled out."¹⁸⁵ What is known about the provision exempting Puerto Rico from bankruptcy rights, however, is that it was proposed by Strom Thurmond, a former Senator who holds "the Senate's record for the longest individual speech," which was a filibuster against the 1957 Civil Rights Act.¹⁸⁶ Given the information, and lack of information, surrounding the proposal to exempt Puerto Rico, the best conclusion that can

184. John Oliver, *Last Week Tonight*, performed by John Oliver (April 24, 2016; New York: CBS Broadcast Center, 2016), YouTube.

185. Ibid.

186. "Strom Thurmond: A Featured Biography," United States Senate, accessed April 7, 2018. https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/Featured_Bio_Thurmond.htm/.

be drawn is that it was a racially-fueled decision that went unquestioned by Congress as it was hidden in the text of a larger bill.

Puerto Rico has tried to regain Chapter 9 Bankruptcy Rights since the debt was announced, with former Resident Commissioner Pedro Pierluisi seeking to address the fact that only municipalities of states can declare bankruptcy by “amending the code to allow Puerto Rico’s utilities to enter Chapter 9.”¹⁸⁷ Unfortunately, allowing utilities to enter Chapter 9 is not enough to restructure the debt, as most of it is owned by the government of Puerto Rico. Adding to the complexity of the situation is a provision in the Constitution of Puerto Rico, which states that,

In case the available revenues including surplus for any fiscal year are insufficient to meet the appropriations made for that year, interest on the public debt and amortization thereof shall first be paid, and other disbursements shall thereafter be made in accordance with the order of priorities established by law.¹⁸⁸

It is this provision that has added to the lack of governmental aid for Puerto Rican families who were living below the poverty line before the inability to repay the debt was broadcasted. Since constitutional law calls for the government to pay off any outstanding debts before other gubernatorial offices receive funding, government assistance programs, public schools, and other offices that provide a safety net for underserved populations are given last priority, fueling the brain drain in the island.

187. José A. Cabranes, “3 main reasons why Puerto Rico can’t declare bankruptcy,” *Business Insider*, July 22, 2015. <http://www.businessinsider.com/3-main-reasons-why-puerto-rico-cant-declare-bankruptcy-2015-7>.

188. P.R. Const. art. VI, §8.

The government of Puerto Rico went as far as to take their case to the United States Supreme Court, which denied their request with a 5 to 2 vote, claiming that “the law was at odds with the federal bankruptcy code, which bars states and lower units of government from enacting their own versions of bankruptcy law.”¹⁸⁹ Without Chapter 9 protections, Puerto Rico was instead left with the PROMESA (Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act) bill, which many democrats promoted as the only way to help Puerto Rico restructure its debt. While touted as hopeful in the continental United States, the PROMESA bill (named to imply that it is a fulfillment of the United States’ *promise* to protect Puerto Rico) was widely protested by Puerto Ricans, particularly those of college age. College protests increased when the Federal Oversight Board requested the government reduce subsidies to the University of Puerto Rico by a minimum of 450 million dollars, a figure that increased in the face of protests.¹⁹⁰

Among the factors that made the PROMESA bill highly controversial in the island is that none of the members of the board could be elected officials or candidates for a position in the territorial government.¹⁹¹ Moreover, the members may only be appointed by the President, who chooses members from a list of two nominees provided

189. Adam Liptak and Mary Williams March, “Supreme Court Rejects Puerto Rico Law in Debt Restructuring Case,” *New York Times*, June 13, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/14/us/politics/supreme-court-rules-against-puerto-rico-in-debt-restructuring-case.html>.

190. Juan C. Dávila, “Students of Puerto Rico Lead Resistance Against PROMESA,” *Huffington Post*, April 10, 2017. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/students-of-puerto-rico-lead-resistance-against-promesa_us_58e851c1e4b00dd8e016ec0e.

191. H.R. 4900, 114 Cong., §101, 14.

by the Speaker of the House of Representatives; two from the list provided by the Majority Leader of the Senate; one from a list provided by the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives; and one from the suggestions provided by the Minority Leader of the Senate.¹⁹² Only one of the members from the list provided by the Speaker of the House has to reside in the island or have a primary place of business there.¹⁹³ Another provision in the bill that caused controversy in the island was allowing the board to “designate a time period not to exceed five years during which employers in Puerto Rico may pay employees ... a wage which is not less than \$4.25 an hour.”¹⁹⁴ Although the bill protects the island from being sued if it cannot make the payments on time, it is largely perceived to be another tool of colonialism due to the provisions outlined above and additional provisions that make the governor an ex-officio member. Additionally, the Federal Oversight Board can veto any bills and propositions made by the government of Puerto Rico, determine which projects get funded, and they cannot be prosecuted for any actions committed while serving as a member of the board. Though they only serve three-year terms, only the President of the United States can remove them from their position.¹⁹⁵ There is not a single provision in the PROMESA bill that gives Puerto Ricans autonomy in the restructuring of the debt, placing all the power in the hands of citizens who are elected by officials that insular Puerto Ricans could not vote for.

192. H.R. 4900, 114 Cong., §101, 14.

193. Ibid.

194. Ibid., §403, 76.

195. Gillian B. White, “Puerto Rico’s Problems Go Way Beyond Its Debt,” *The Atlantic*, July 1, 2016. <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/07/puerto-rico-promesa-debt/489797/>.

Conclusion

Although the money owed was borrowed by the government of Puerto Rico, it was the American policies outlined above that drove Puerto Ricans to the only options left—acquiring debt. The American government is also responsible for the borrowing of the debt because “Congress ... tacitly encouraged the widespread purchasing of Puerto Rican debt, by permitting Puerto Rico to market its bonds as triple-tax-exempt in all American states and cities.”¹⁹⁶ The colonial socioeconomic practices the United States had employed in Puerto Rico for decades since its arrival and the dismantling of Section 936 left the island believing there was no hope to build a strong and sustainable economy in the island, making borrowing seem like the only hope.

The impact of Hurricane María and lacking federal response has served as additional proof of the United States’ lack of concern for Puerto Rico and its economy. The lackadaisical attitude of the United States federal government towards recovery efforts and revamping the economy in Puerto Rico affects Puerto Ricans and American citizens, as the island still holds many pharmaceutical companies. Among those are companies that create 13 of the 40 drugs that are in short supply since the hurricane struck the island. These drugs are made only in Puerto Rico and are drugs ““for which there are [no] therapeutic substitutes.”¹⁹⁷ In addition to medications, 30 of the 50

196. Mary Williams Walsh, “Puerto Rico Fights for Chapter 9 Bankruptcy in Supreme Court,” *New York Times*, March 22, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/23/business/dealbook/puerto-rico-fights-for-chapter-9-bankruptcy-in-supreme-court.html>.

197. Chris Isidore, Tal Kopan, and Julia Horowitz, “Closed Puerto Rico factories are the sole source of some critical drugs,” *CNN Money*, September 29, 2017. <http://money.cnn.com/2017/09/29/news/companies/puerto-rico-drug-makers/index.html>

pharmaceutical plants in the island make medical devices that account for “about 75% of the goods shipped off the island.”¹⁹⁸ The economic policies implemented in Puerto Rico by the United States have negatively impacted both Puerto Ricans and Americans in the United States socioeconomically and medically, though the policies have not impacted Americans as negatively as Puerto Ricans.

198. Chris Isidore, et. al, “Closed Puerto Rico factories.”

CONCLUSION: MOVING FORWARD

This thesis has focused on analyzing different factors that have contributed to Puerto Rico's crisis, including the treatment of women, the racial classification of Puerto Ricans, the secondary citizenship afforded to Puerto Ricans, the acts of violence directed towards Puerto Ricans and the island, and the direct economic policies that have stagnated the economy in the island. Because the economic and humanitarian crisis Puerto Ricans face is directly tied to their political status, it is important to address it if we are to analyze ways to move forward. Though answering whether Puerto Rico should become a state or seek independence is not within the purview of this thesis, this conclusion will exclusively focus on presenting the arguments and issues surrounding this conversation. In order to explain the grievances Puerto Ricans hold against the United States, and the issues presented in this thesis, I will use Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* pamphlet, the Declaration of Independence, and the Declaration of Sentiments to compare the grievances of Americans with those of Puerto Ricans. The purpose of this is to demonstrate the double-standard and disconnect between American values and human rights and those granted to Puerto Ricans by the United States' government.

On January 10, 1776, before the United States declared independence, Thomas Paine anonymously published his pamphlet, *Common Sense*, outlining the grievances the thirteen colonies held against the kingdom of Great Britain. The grievances outlined strongly mirror those of Puerto Ricans in the island, grievances I have often heard while living in the island and in the United States. Among those is the boasting of protection from the United States, a protection many Puerto Ricans challenge, as the United States

has required that Puerto Ricans enlist with the Selective Service. Since then, Puerto Ricans have died on behalf of the United States, sometimes being used as experiments for chemical weapons in the military. Likewise, Paine wrote,

We have boasted the protection of Great Britain without considering that her motive was *interest*, not *attachment*; and that she did not protect us from *our enemies* on *our account* but from *her enemies* on *her own account*, from those who had no quarrel with us on any *other account* and who will always be our enemies on the *same account*.¹⁹⁹

Many Puerto Ricans have likewise believed that they have been placed in more danger by being a part of the United States than by being independent, as some perceive that the likelihood that an island as small as Puerto Rico would be attacked is virtually nonexistent. The United States' influence and international affairs, they ascertain, is the reason Puerto Rico would ever be violently threatened.

Particularly in light of the Massacre of Ponce and bombings of Vieques, Puerto Ricans also held the belief that relating to the United States was a betrayal to the island and dishonored the memory of Puerto Ricans whose death the United States was responsible for. Specifically, the Nationalist Party would have likely identified with Paine's sentiment that Americans could not righteously identify with Britain:

Has your property been destroyed before your face? Are your wife and children destitute of a bed to lie on or bread to live on? Have you lost a parent or a child by their hands, and yourself the ruined and wretched survivor? If you have not, then are you not a judge of those who have. But if you have and can still shake hands with the murderers, then are you unworthy the name of husband, father, friend, or lover....²⁰⁰

199. Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, January 10, 1776, 3.

200. *Ibid.*, 4.

Although many Puerto Ricans believe that the way to right the wrongs committed in Puerto Rico is by attaining independence from the United States, many others believe that peace can be achieved through government and the enactment of laws that grant more rights. This is not unlike citizens living in the United States during the Revolutionary period, who were split among the Patriots, who sought independence, and the Loyalists, who believed the colonies should remain a part of the British Crown.

Nowhere are the grievances of Puerto Ricans better described than in the Declaration of Independence, which was used by the Anti-Imperialist League to argue against the intervention in former Spanish colonies. Among the enumerated grievances found in the Declaration of Independence is that the King, “has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant.”²⁰¹ This has become a particularly poignant objection to the Federal Oversight Board established by the PROMESA bill, even among Congressional representatives in the United States, including Representative Luis Gutiérrez, a Puerto Rican Congressman serving the fourth district of Illinois.²⁰² Additional grievances that have been discussed throughout this thesis and can also be found in the Declaration of Independence include:

He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the
Consent of our legislatures....
For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:
For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders
which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States
For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:

201. Thomas Jefferson et. al, “Declaration of Independence,” July 4, 1776.
<https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>.

202. Luis V. Gutiérrez, “Ahead of First Meeting of Puerto Rico Control Board (In New York), Gutiérrez Sees ‘A Very Bad Omen’,” September 28, 2016. <https://gutierrez.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/ahead-first-meeting-puerto-rico-control-board-new-york-guti-rrez-sees>

For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:
For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury....²⁰³

When the United States first arrived in Puerto Rico, it consistently retained its military in the island, continuing to do so in the islands of Vieques and Culebra until President Bush agreed to remove the military amidst protests, as discussed in chapter four. The United States also protected the officials who massacred the Puerto Ricans on the Palm Sunday of 1937 in the town of Ponce, removing certain officials from their post but allowing them to work in other areas of government, as was the case of Governor Winship. Further, it has limited Puerto Rico's ability to trade by enacting the Jones Act of 1920, going as far as refusing to remove it for longer than 10 days after the crisis caused by Hurricane María.²⁰⁴ Another decisive grievance colonists held against Great Britain was that of taxation without representation, which Puerto Ricans also experience. Though islanders do not pay federal income taxes, they do pay all other forms of federal taxes, although they lack a federal representative with true decision-making influence. Lastly, the United States has also denied Puerto Ricans a trial by jury while they live in the island through *Balzac v. Porto Rico*.

Using the Declaration of Independence to compare the grievances of Puerto Ricans with those of American revolutionaries is not meant to be a promotion of independence for the island of Puerto Rico. On the contrary, its purpose is similar to that of the Declaration of Sentiments, which was written by feminist pioneers who imitated

203. Thomas Jefferson et. al, "Declaration of Independence."

204. Melanie Zanona, "White House lets Jones Act waiver expire for Puerto Rico," *The Hill*, October 9, 2017. <http://thehill.com/latino/354561-white-house-lets-jones-act-waiver-expire-for-puerto-rico>.

the style of the Declaration of Independence to outline the usurpations they protested.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott wrote, “He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise. He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education”²⁰⁵ These, once again, are similar to the injustices suffered by Puerto Ricans. Puerto Ricans are not allowed to vote for the President nor the members of Congress that have full veto rights over local laws and who passed the PROMESA bill and elected the members of the Federal Oversight Board. For this reason, they are also subjected to submitting to laws they had no hand in creating or deciding. Moreover, Puerto Ricans are being denied the facilities to obtain an undergraduate or graduate education through the significant reduction of funds that are used for the University of Puerto Rico campuses.

The Declaration of Sentiments mirrors and makes use of the discursive devices used in the Declaration of Independence to make the grievances of women more relatable to the male audience they were hoping to reach. Likewise, this conclusion is employing the devices and structures found in *Common Sense*, The Declaration of Independence, and the Declaration of Sentiments to demonstrate that American grievances at the time of the American Revolution and first wave of feminism are not unlike those of Puerto Ricans. Further, the comparison between them demonstrates a double-standard among Americans, who decided that these usurpations were worth starting a war over but have

205. Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Declaration of Sentiments,” 1848, 2. Accessed through the Baylor Interdisciplinary Core.

massacred Puerto Ricans for the simple act of assembling against the same usurpations Americans had sought freedom from. Most importantly, this conclusion employs the use of the Declaration of Independence in the same spirit as the Declaration of Sentiments; women did not seek full independence from men through the Declaration of Sentiments, only actions that led to more equality and the securement of more rights and freedoms for women, culturally and politically.

That most Puerto Ricans are not necessarily seeking independence from the United States—but a forum in which they can discuss their concerns and the ability to politically, socially, and economically change those concerns—is best proven through the two dominant political parties in the area: the Popular Democratic Party (*Partido Popular Democrático* in Spanish), which wants to continue the status quo, although they have more recently become outspoken on the political status of Puerto Rico; and the New Progressive Party (*Partido Nuevo Progresista*), which seeks statehood. After the debt announcement, Ricardo Roselló and Jennifer González, both members of the New Progressive Party, were elected as Governor and Resident Commissioner, respectively. This may indicate that most Puerto Ricans want to become a state, though recent referendums have not resulted in a high enough voting rate to accurately represent the majority.

The human rights violations present in the United States' actions against Puerto Rican women, the Massacre of Ponce, and the bombing of Vieques have proven that the United States has a moral responsibility to provide aid for the island as it struggles with the debt crisis. Further, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, the Declaration of

Independence, and the Declaration of Sentiments, provide an American voice to the injustices and economic grievances that Puerto Ricans suffer due to the island's political status as a colony. If the United States does not allow Puerto Ricans to vote in presidential elections, have a voting member in Congress with more representational power, more trading power, and better education, the cycle of economic instability will continue to worsen and result in more rampant poverty.

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