

## Mural History of the Puerto Rican People

Artwork and Essay by John Rivera-Resto

The mural painting is a visual narrative of the history of the people of Puerto Rico that begins with the arrival of Europeans to the island in 1493 and concludes with a vision of their future. In its first incarnation as a mural, the artwork was approximately 14 ft. high by 50 ft. wide.

The background story of the mural's creation in 1986 is posted in the website Muralmaster® (<http://www.muralmaster.org>).

Its second incarnation, the one presented in print form, was done in 2004. The creator of this work is Puerto Rican-American master muralist John Rivera-Resto. His artworks and career are featured in the educational art website Muralmaster.

### Design and Composition



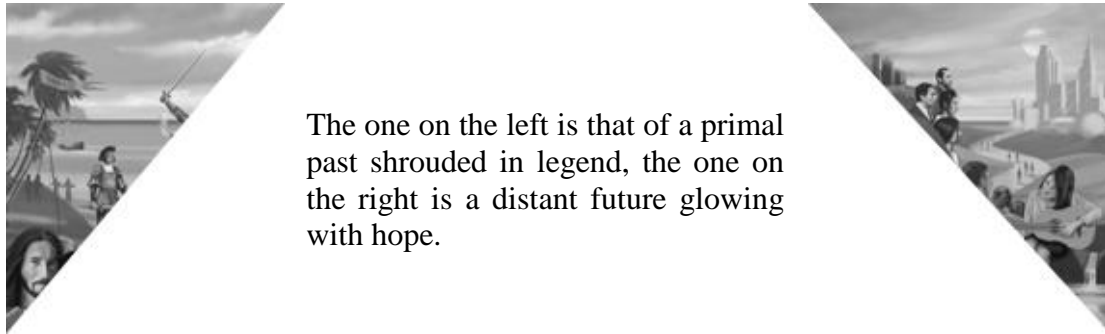
The painting “reads” like an unfolding visual narrative presented from left to right. The “wind” movement of the clouds further reinforces direction and change. The piece is divided into two opposite segments. They are arranged in a symmetrical composition, occupying mirror-image positions in the design. The visual elements in each segment have been organized into the shape of a pyramid, an artistic compositional arrangement that evoked a reassuring sense of solidity and stability.



The placement of the two pyramidal segments side by side creates a third compositional space between the two at the centre: an inverted pyramid –evoking instability and tension. This third segment is the keystone of the mural. The first deals with the history of the island of Puerto Rico and the forging of the Puerto Rican nation

from 1493 to about 1952; the second tells the story of the Puerto Rican Diaspora into the United States of America after the Second World War.

The horizon line, seen as the stripe where the distant ocean meets the sky, runs across the width of the composition providing constant and unifying visual glue to all the elemental shapes in the narrative. Enclosing like bookends at each end of the mural are two scenes.



Spanning the space between the outer contour of the left pyramidal segment and the outer contour of the segment on the right also creates the curved compositional shape of an arch -a final symbolic device capable of containing the great expanse of time while supporting the significant weight of history.

### **Use of Colour**

This is a mural about people living in the Caribbean; the mural reflects the Caribbean taste for bright tropical colours. However, the colour saturation or intensity is kept low in order to avoid visual distractions from the narrative. And since this use of saturation control is evenly applied throughout the entire painting, colours seem more vibrant than what they actually are. Placing a colour object over the print will attest to this fact.



The most intense colour in the painting is red. But notice how it was used in the composition. Since the eye tends to focus on this particular colour, red was applied in such a way as to further move the viewer's eye from point to point and accentuate the central themes of the composition.

## Part One

### From Columbus to the Spanish American War



The mural begins with the native inhabitants of the island –the Taino Indians. The tropical Caribbean island of “Boriquen” (from the old Taíno language *Borikén*) and its past history is shrouded in mystery. What is known today comes from archaeological findings and from early Spanish accounts. But there is evidence that the area had been populated for three and a half millennium before the arrival of the first Europeans.

An archaeological dig in the island of *Vieques* in 1990 found the remains of what is believed to be an *Arcaico* (Archaic) man (named Puerto Ferro man) dated to around 2000 BC. Between AD 120 and 400 another tribe of hunter and fishermen, the *Igneri*, a tribe from the Orinoco region of South America, arrived. It is believed that the Arcaicos and the Igneri coexisted and developed between the 7th and 11th century into the Taíno culture, which became the dominant society of the island approximately 1000 AD. This lasted until *Christopher Columbus* arrived to America in 1492.



When Christopher Columbus landed on to the island during his second voyage on November 19, 1493, it marked the beginning of the end of the Tainos. This event is represented in the mural by a pennant with the year ‘1493’.

Another important event represented below the waving pennant is the arrival of the Christian faith. This was significant to the history of the island since Puerto Rican culture, like the cultures of the rest of what became known as “Latin America”, has been fashioned and transformed by the beliefs of the Catholic religion of the Spanish conquerors.





Within a decade, the Spaniard's treatment of the Indians resulted in an unsuccessful revolt in 1510 and their final enslavement. When their numbers were reduced through abuse and disease, African slaves were brought in to work the fields. It is an interesting historical note that the first recorded black Africans to come to the New World were Christianised freemen, original from Angola, in the service of Juan Ponce de Leon. One of them was named Juan Garrido, who also with de Leon when he landed in Florida in 1513, thus becoming the first black man in the United States of America.

Juan Ponce de Leon (ca. 1471 – July 1521), the first to earn the title of “conquistador” (conqueror), pacified the island and became its first governor. Before coming to Puerto Rico he had become a wealthy man in La Española (present day Dominican Republic and Haiti) not by mining gold but by supplying ships on the return trip to Spain with “casaba” bread, an Indian food staple that had the unusual characteristic of lasting about a month without spoiling. In a time before refrigeration and modern methods of food preservation, casaba bread became a must for ships sailing the month-long return route from the New World to Spain.



Years later Juan Ponce became the first European explorer to land on what today is the State of Florida, USA (though this claim is disputed by the English who believe explorer John Cabot arrived first). During this expedition, he discovered the Gulf Stream current, which soon became used as the primary return route from the Caribbean to Spain. It was during his lifetime that the island's name was changed from “la Isla de San Juan Bautista” (the Island of San John the Baptist) to Puerto Rico (Rich Port). Juan Ponce de Leon died from an arrow wound during his Florida expedition and his remains were eventually entombed in the Cathedral of Old San Juan in Puerto Rico.



The Spanish overlords and the local militia had to fight hard for the next few centuries to keep control of the island. Its strategic geographical and military position in the Caribbean made it a coveted prize by the Dutch, the French, and the English. After several failed invasions, the English Crown offered to trade dominion of Puerto Rico for the Rock of Gibraltar! The Spanish refused. Today Old San Juan boasts some of the most impressive colonial fortifications in the New World –and the first paved street in the Western Hemisphere!

One important element in Spaniard colonial policies that differed considerably for other European counterparts was the concept of intermarriage between the races. The first Spanish settlers to arrive into the Spanish American colonies were mostly single men in search of riches and adventures. The Catholic Church, an integral component in Spanish colonial policy, was concerned with the saving of souls. And since many of the Indian chiefs were women, the Spanish Crown encourage the men to marry them thus achieving two goals, the loyalty of the tribes and the dissemination of the Catholic Christian faith.

The Spaniards, who unlike English settlers left their families behind, took this new approach to “civilisation” to heart and the intermarriage of the European with the indigenous population began almost as soon as they landed on dry land. When the

Africans slaves arrived, the pattern of marriage and co-habitation persisted. And considering the great distance between the Spanish centre of power and her supervision of colonial affairs, the focus was more on economic policies than on social customs.

The European ruling elite in the larger Caribbean colonial powerhouses of Jamaica, Cuba and La Española (later divided into the nations of the Dominican Republic and Haiti) maintained a more traditional stance on racial segregation. But in Puerto Rico the interaction of the races developed in a different way due to the island's geography, it's lack of mineral resources, and as a result, that way its economy evolved.



With new European arrivals settling in the most prosperous colonies, Puerto Rico remained less populous and developed. Time settled into a simple fashion of live and let

live, and a lifestyle where racial lines became less distinctive emerged.

It was once believed that the indigenous population of the island had been reduced to extinction through war and disease. But in fact, a recent study conducted in Puerto Rico suggests that over 61% of the population possess Taíno mtDNA (which is passed through the maternal line). This testifies to the fact that the races intermingled since Ponce de Leon initiated the European settlement of the island. This fusion of races and cultures is prominently represented in the mural.

Here is a note of interest: John Rivera-Resto used his likeness as the Spanish conquistador at the extreme lower left side corner of the piece. John's European roots are mainly from the Canary Isles, northern Spain, and northern Italy. But he also counts among his ancestors a native Taino great-grandmother and one of African origin.



Puerto Rico's situation on slavery was also unique in the Caribbean, in that not only did the white population out-number the people of colour, but the slaves constituted an infinitesimal part of the total population and free labour predominated during the regime of slavery when compared to the other colonies. Since the island had no demand for large work levies and was mainly mountainous, large levies of slaves were not needed to support mining or large plantation economies. The mostly mountainous island was more suited for the production of coffee and tobacco which were cultivated by mostly small farms and farmers of European descent.

Both legally owned enslaved Africans and runaway slaves continued to arrive until 1873, when slavery was officially abolished. But runaway slaves from other countries had been admitted to Puerto Rico as free and allowed to earn a wage since 1750. By the time Puerto Rico banned slavery, free Africans outnumbered enslaved

ones and lived mostly in larger town centres, particularly in the cities of San Juan and Ponce. Puerto Rico's situation with regard to slavery and race relations was thus unusual.

During his stay in Puerto Rico while supervising the construction of fortifications in San Juan for the Spanish Crown, Field Marshall Alejandro O'Reilly (and later the second Spanish governor of colonial Louisiana), writing in 1765 comments: "Each soldier (of the garrison) settled down with a black or colored woman who was call a housekeeper..." and, about the population of the island in general: "... the white people show no disdain at being mixed with the colored..."

The native-born and racially mixed Puerto Ricans, called "criollos", who wanted to serve in the regular Spanish army, petitioned the Spanish Crown to this effect. In 1741, the Spanish government established the 'Regimiento Fijo de Puerto Rico' (Puerto Rico's first permanent regiment). Many of the former slaves, now freeman, either joined the Fijo or the local civil militia. So much so, that Puerto Ricans of African ancestry played an instrumental role in the defeat of Sir Ralph Abercromby in the British invasion of Puerto Rico in 1797.

In fact, Puerto Rican militia forces fought under General Bernardo de Galvez, then governor of Spanish Louisiana (an area that encompassed the territory of 13 present states), against the British in the American Revolutionary War and were instrumental in winning the war. But United States history textbooks seldom mention the important contributions by their "forgotten allies," Spain and Hispanic America, during the American Revolution. It should be noted the General Galvez multinational forces (made up of regiments from Spain, Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Hispanola, and other Spanish colonies such as Venezuela) never lost a battle and, according to several noted historians, General Galvez' campaign broke the British will to fight five months before Yorktown.

They also forget to mention that long before any formal declaration of war, General Galvez sent gunpowder, rifles, bullets, blankets, medicine and other supplies to the armies of General George Washington, and that throughout the war Spain provided to the colonists credit totalling 8 million 'reales' (over \$100 million) for military and medical supplies and food. And foremost, U.S. textbooks ignore that Hispanic America helped in the establishment and growth of the first democracy in the modern world. The neglect in reporting Hispanic contributions extends to all periods of American history. Textbooks also fail to mention the role of 10,000 Hispanic soldiers who fought on both sides of the Civil War.

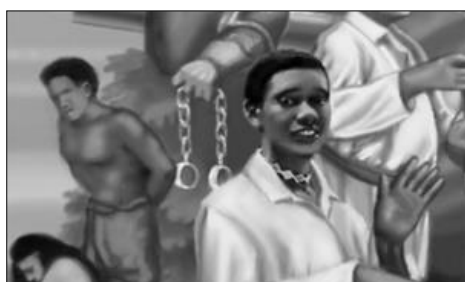
The British were the first to attempt to abolish slavery in the Caribbean during the early 1800s, but complete emancipation took a lot of time and effort to achieve. While the slave situation in Puerto Rico was not as desperate as that of other European colonies in the West Indies –and in the United States, this is not to say those slaves were content and submissive with their status. And even in Puerto Rico –a Spanish colony with more whites than blacks and more free blacks than slaves, there were rumblings of discontent.

An uneasy government took brutal measures to keep blacks and suspected revolutionaries under control, but slaves plotted and revolted. Between 1795 and 1848

there had been over 18 incidents of slave revolts in the towns of Isabela, Aguadilla, Guayanilla, Vega Baja, Toa Baja, Ponce, Bayamon, Naguabo, Humacao, Fajardo and Guayama. Note that all these were flat coastal districts where the sugar mills and plantations operated.

During the mid-19th century, a committee of abolitionists was formed in Puerto Rico that included many prominent Puerto Ricans. Dr. Ramón Emeterio Betances (1827–1898), whose parents were wealthy landowners, believed in the abolition of slavery, and together with fellow Puerto Rican abolitionist Segundo Ruiz Belvis (1829–1867) founded a clandestine organization called "The Secret Abolitionist Society". This group petitioned the Spanish crown for the abolition of slavery. At long last, probably fearing continued slave revolts like the one that expelled the French whites from Haiti (1804), the Spanish crown conceded freedom to the slaves of Puerto Rico and Cuba, its two remaining American colonies.

On March 22, 1873, slavery was officially abolished in Puerto Rico. Slave owners were to free their slaves in exchange of a monetary compensation. The majority of the freed slaves continued to work for their former masters with the difference that they were now freeman and received what was considered a just pay for their labour.



The freed slaves were able to fully integrate themselves into Puerto Rico's society. It cannot be denied that racism has existed in Puerto Rico since bigotry is a personal quality. However, racism in Puerto Rico did not exist to the extent of other places in the New World, possibly because of a unique combination of cultural and geographical factors. As a result, Puerto Ricans of African descent have made invaluable contributions to music, art, language, cuisine and heritage, thus becoming instrumental to Puerto Rican culture.

During 19<sup>th</sup> century, other settlers had joined the population mix. Fleeing the revolutionary wars of independence in South America, Spanish loyalists fled to Puerto Rico -a fiercely conservative Spanish colony during the early 1800s. French families also flocked here from both Louisiana and Haiti. As changing governments or violent revolutions depressed the economies of Scotland and Ireland, many farmers from those countries (later joined by others in great numbers from the Canary Isles and Corsica, and to a lesser extent from and Sardinia) also journeyed to Puerto Rico in search of a better life. Having a common religion was their entry visa.

The new immigrants mostly settled into small farms in people of the island developed a small-farm in the mountain regions. They soon adopted the island's casual attitude toward race and developed a diversified economy, producing coffee and tobacco for trade, along with sugar, livestock and subsistence crops. By the end of the century it appears that residents had a strong sense of national identity, represented in the mural by musicians singing the songs that express the rich culture of a people. This basic unity existed despite obvious political frictions and class divisions. They considered themselves "criollos", that is, natives of Puerto Rico.





Eventually, an image of themselves began to emerge as a national symbol for future generations, that of the poor but fiercely independent and proud mountain farmer known as “jíbaros”. Because of industrialization and migration to the cities, few jíbaros remain today. But this image of what it meant to be a “boricua” (from the island of Borinquen), remains our strongest national myth. The image in the mural is an interpretation of the iconic representation of the jíbaro by Puerto Rican artist Ramón Frades in his painting *El Pan Nuestro* -our daily bread.

Puerto Rico, by the conventional standards of the final quarter of the nineteenth century, ranked as a backward sector of the Caribbean economy, but in intellectual perspective it was head and shoulders above its neighbours. Puerto Rican political development blossomed. Its intellectual elite had produced a flourishing of political, musical, literary and cultural traditions recognized not only in other nations in Latin America, but also the capitals of Europe. These “founding fathers” of Puerto Rican nationhood are represented in the mural by four significant figures of the time –and a flag.

Eugenio Maria de Hostos (1839 –1903) known as "El Ciudadano de las Americas" (The Citizen of the Americas), was a Puerto Rican educator, philosopher, intellectual, lawyer, sociologist and independence advocate. Born into a well-to-do family in the town of Mayagüez, he received his early education in San Juan and then completed his studies in Spain and became interested in politics. But when Spain adopted a new constitution in 1869 and refused to grant Puerto Rico its independence, Hostos left and went to the United States.



In the U.S. he joined the ‘Cuban Revolutionary Committee’ and became the editor of a journal called *La Revolución*. Hostos believed in the creation of an Antillean Confederation ("Confederación Antillana"), between Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Cuba. This idea was embraced by fellow Puerto Ricans Ramón Emeterio Betances and Segundo Ruiz Belvis (a dedicated abolitionist). But one of the things that greatly disappointed Hostos was the realization that in Puerto Rico and in Cuba there were many people who wanted their independence from Spain, but who did not embrace the idea of becoming revolutionist. Instead they preferred to be annexed by the United States.

To further promote the independence of Puerto Rico and Cuba and the idea of an Antillean Confederation he therefore travelled to many countries. Among the countries he went promoting his idea were: the United States, France, Colombia, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, Cuba and the former Danish colony of St. Thomas which is now part of the United States Virgin Islands. During his travels he soon became an international celebrity by advocating many noble causes, and making significant contributions to each country.

In Peru he helped to develop that country's educational system and spoke against the harsh treatment given to the Chinese who lived there. He taught at the University of Chile and gave a speech titled "The Scientific Education of Women." In his speech



he proposed that governments permit women in their colleges. Soon after, Chile allowed women to enter its college educational system. In Argentina proposed a railroad system between Argentina and Chile. His proposal was accepted and the first locomotive was named after him. In the Dominican Republic he founded the countries first Normal School (Teachers College) and introduced advanced teaching methods, although these had been openly opposed by the local Catholic Church.

De Hostos returned to the U.S. in 1898 and actively participated in the Puerto Rican and Cuban independence movements; his hopes for Puerto Rico's independence, after the Spanish-American War turned into disappointment when the United States government rejected his proposals and instead converted the island into a U.S. Territory. Finally, in 1900, de Hostos returned to the Dominican Republic, where he continued to play a major role in reorganizing the educational and railroad systems. He wrote many essays on social-science topics, such as: psychology, logic, literature, rights and is considered as one of the first systematic sociologists in Latin America. He was also known to be a supporter of women's rights.

On August 11th, 1903, de Hostos died in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. He is buried in the National Pantheon located in the colonial district of that city. Per his final wishes, his remains are to stay permanently in the Dominican Republic until the day Puerto Rico is completely independent. Then and only then, does he want to be reinterred in his native homeland. Eugenio Maria de Hostos wrote his own epitaph:

"I wish that they will say: In that island (Puerto Rico) a man was born who loved truth, desired justice, and worked for the good of men."



In 1938, the 8th International Conference of America celebrated in Lima, Peru, posthumously paid tribute to de Hostos and declared him "Citizen of the Americas and Teacher of the Youth". Puerto Rico declared his birthday an official holiday. There is a monument honouring de Hostos in Spain. For his achievements and his vision for the future of Puerto Rico and the people of the Americas, Eugenio Maria de Hostos has the place of prominence and the first portion of the mural.



Dr. José de Diego y Benítez (1866 – 1918) was a statesman, journalist, poet and advocate for Puerto Rico's independence from Spain. He is also known as the *Father of the Modern Puerto Rican Poetry Movement*. He was also knighted by the Spanish Crown and was the founder of the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez. His efforts helped gain the short-lived period of autonomy for Puerto Rico prior to the American Invasion. After his struggles for Puerto Rican autonomy from the United States, and his disillusionment with the American imperialist brand of “democracy” for Puerto Rico, he became known as the *Father of the Puerto Rican Independence Movement*.



José Gautier Benítez (1848-1880). He is widely regarded as Puerto Rico's best poet of the Romantic Era and the principal force behind the creation of the *Ateneo Puertorriqueño*, Puerto Rico's pre-eminent cultural institution. During his short life he penned the poem “a Puerto Rico” which perfectly captures the romantic idealism of the time as well as the Puerto Rican national sentiment –“*Borinquen! Name that's a soothing thought like the recollection of the deepest love...*”



Luis Muñoz Rivera (1859-1916). He was known as the best politician in Puerto Rico. Also a distinguished poet, journalist and publisher, he helped pen the ‘Treaty of Ponce’ which granted Puerto Rico in November of 1887 an autonomic government from Spain. After the American invasion, he fought in vain for a free trade agreement for the island, opposed the military governorship and pushed for greater self-government. His son Luis Muñoz Marín would become Puerto Rico's first democratically elected governor.

Ramón Emeterio Betances y Alacán (1827-1898) is considered the *Father of the Puerto Rican Nation* (note: he is not portrayed in the mural). Because of his many donations and help to people in need, he also became known as *The Father of the Poor*. He was awarded the French Legion of Honor (Légion d'honneur) in 1882, 87. Also a diplomat, abolitionist, public health administrator, poet and novelist, Betances was born to a wealthy landowner, received his medical degree from the University of Paris in 1855.



Upon his return to the island, he founded a hospital and worked to save Puerto Ricans from the ravages of a cholera epidemic. He was exiled from the island for his revolutionary ideals. He joined several revolutionary movements (noted also Cuban revolutionaries) seeking independence from Spain. He helped plan the abortive insurrection in Puerto Rico known as “*El Grito de Lares*” in September 23, 1868. His design for the first Puerto Rican flag, as shown in the mural, was knitted by Mariana Bracetti. Its colours were inspired by the French flag. Unlike many of his fellow countrymen, he fought for full independence. His last words: -“*I don't want a colony status, neither with Spain nor with the United States.*”

By the closing of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Puerto Ricans saw themselves as an island nation with unique and distinct cultural traditions. The local economy was in reasonable good health and, its middle class industrious and growing. And while its population was illiterate and poor, it was self sustained, content, peaceful and probably better off than their counterparts in the Caribbean, and other peoples in European countries such as Ireland, Italy or Spain. It also had cultured, intellectual and increasingly influential elite which was beginning to tackle the problems of health and education as well the liberal ideas of democracy.

During the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Puerto Ricans managed to negotiate through peaceful means and skillful political manoeuvring with Spain, the rights of self autonomy and free trade. In November of 1897 autonomy was granted by Spain. There was great hope and optimism for the future of their island and their national prospects as the century came to a close. But within six months of inaugurating their first governing cabinet, the Spanish American War broke out and Puerto Rico became a prize of war. All the rights and liberties that had been granted by the autocratic Spanish overlord were taken away by the new democratic overlords –The United States of America.



The turn of the century marked the beginning of American intervention in Puerto Rican affairs that still continues unabated a hundred years later. This long and chequered history has witness profound changes in Puerto Rican cultural, economic and political affairs –which continue into the future, as their American overlord became the supreme power of the world in a century that historians have called –“The American Century”.



For Puerto Rico the war began on May 12 with the bombardment of San Juan by heavily armed American ‘dreadnoughts’ (all-big-gun battleship) and their Armed Forces landing on a south western shore near the small town of Guánica on July 25, 1898. With the destruction of the Spanish fleets in Cuba and Manila and the surrender of Spanish military forces in Cuba, the war had been all but over. But the Americans postponed peace negotiations to officially end the war so that American forces could invade the island and claim it as a war prize.

In fact, the invasion of Puerto Rico had been considered fifteen years in advance. With the completion of the Panama Canal the United States was seeking to consolidate its strategic position in the area to safeguard their commercial interests. For this purpose the island of Puerto Rico offered the perfect military base. Not only was it in the middle of the Caribbean Sea but it also was perfect to control the ancient trade routes in a time when the lifeline of commerce was sea trade.

The invading American Forces that landed in Puerto Rico were under the command of General Nelson A. Miles. General Miles had been a Civil War hero who later won more renown as an “Indian fighter” during the Indian Wars in the American South West. He took credit for capturing the Nez Perce band led by Chief Joseph - though this credit was disputed General Oliver O. Howard. Later on he took over the

fight in Arizona against the celebrated Indian Chief Jeronimo until their final surrender –once again, the credit for Jeronimo’s surrender was under dispute since it was First Lieutenant Charles B. Gatewood, who had studied Apache ways, and succeeded in negotiating the surrender.



After the Indian Wars, General Miles was brought again to the field during the last uprising of the Sioux on the Lakota reservations. His efforts to subdue them once more led to Sitting Bull's death and the massacre of 200 Sioux, which included women and children at Wounded Knee on December 29, 1890. Miles reacted to these fights by asserting U.S. authority over the Indians, believing that all Lakota should be placed under military control.

He was named Commanding General of the United States Army in 1895, a post he held during the Spanish-American War. Miles commanded forces at Cuban sites such as Siboney, and after the surrender of Santiago de Cuba by the Spanish, he personally led the invasion of Puerto Rico, landing in Guánica. The American troops were enthusiastically received by a peaceful populace and by the new Puerto Rican government as the progenitors of liberty and democracy in the Western Hemisphere.

As a matter of fact, this was the promise Puerto Ricans heard during General Miles’ first official proclamation and the beginning of a successful propaganda campaign in favour of accepting the Americans “as deliverers” from the Spanish tyranny instead of enemies. The following is an excerpt:

*“...in the cause of liberty, justice, and humanity, its military forces (the United States) have come to occupy the island of Puerto Rico. They come bearing the banner of freedom... and bestow upon you the immunities and blessings of the liberal institutions of our government.”* (See Appendix A for the entire text of the proclamation).



Save for the resident Spaniards, the clergy, and elements of the upper and middle classes, the war had not been popular. The lower classes were largely indifferent; the intellectuals were more or less nationalistic; and much of the middle class largely inclined to independence or American annexation. Many naively hoped to become a sovereign island nation with binding treaties of free trade and cooperation with their powerful neighbour of the North after the end of hostilities.

When the ‘Treaty of Paris’ was finally signed on December 10, 1898, the Spanish-American War ended. As an outcome of the war, Spain ceded Puerto Rico, along with Cuba, the Philippines, and Guam to the United States. In retrospect, it had been a war conducted to gain colonial possessions, similar to other wars of colonization being conducted by European nations during the nineteenth century. More importantly, it was the beginning of America's emergence as an international power, and with it, Puerto Rico began the 20th century under the absolute military rule and control of the United States of America.

## Part Two

### From the American takeover to the Present

When the United States acquired the island in 1898, American influence was added to the Puerto Rican culture. But from the American perspective, this influence came at a price, that of rising Puerto Rican nationalism. It did not take long for Puerto Rican leaders to understand that the United States had no intention of giving them the promised freedom nor the “blessings of their liberal institutions.”



Leaders like Hostos, Betances, de Diego and Muñoz Rivera had assisted the United States because they expected it to help liberate Puerto Rico from Spain. But these “*independentistas*” were extremely disappointed and disillusioned when it became clear that the United States would not grant the island neither greater autonomy nor independence.

The United States did not hide its intentions for the island as they felt it was their “manifest destiny” to “enlighten” the inferior “brown” people. In essence, Spain’s “last colony” in the New World, became the United States “Spanish colony”. The new masters made Puerto Rico both politically and economically dependent.

Puerto Rico immediately experienced dramatic changes after a series of ill advised economy policies aimed at the commercial exploitation of the island natural and human resources. This long period of hardship and uncertainty, and its consequences, is represented in the mural by the dark clouds of smoke spewing from the stacks of the warships darkening the sky like a bad omen of things to come.



To assure a rapid commercial control of the local markets and the island’s resources, a second invasion took place. Two weeks after the American Armed Forces landed in Guánica Bay, an army of businessmen and speculators landed on the island like an eagle lands on its prey. Soon after the local market was flooded with cheap American goods until most local merchants were driven out of business. Then new prices were imposed with impunity.

To obtain absolute dominance of the economy, trade of Puerto Rican goods with other nations other than the United States, was abolished by a Congressional decree. Furthermore, this trade had to be conducted only through American ships -and the payment of arbitrary tariffs (still in effect to the date of this writing). The importation of commercial products –and foodstuff, was at the mercy of the American overlords. Puerto Ricans had to comply or starve.

The rapacity of the American commercial interests is represented in the mural by an eagle, symbolic of the United States, sinking its talons on a harmless white lamb,

the symbol of Puerto Rico's Coat of Arms. The lamb on top of the biblical Book of Revelations, holding the banner of peace, represents 'San Juan Bautista' -John the Baptist, the original name given by Spanish settlers to Puerto Rico (later referring only to island's Capital City –San Juan).



After the local economy was taken over, the land was taxed and many small farmers, the nucleus of a self supporting economy, lost their lands -in many cases for less than twenty dollars. Then the worse imaginable economic policy was imposed on the island. The economy went from a diversified, subsistence economy with four basic cash crops produced for export (tobacco, cattle, coffee and sugar) to a sugarcane economy with 60 percent of the sugar industry (and two thirds of the best land) controlled by absentee American owners.



With so many destitute hungry workers, a sharecropping seasonal style of dependence living was instituted on the population. By the 1920s, with the decline of the cane-based industry, combined with no reinvestment and continued population growth, resulted in high unemployment, poverty and desperate conditions in Puerto Rico. Decades later, Luis Muñoz Marín, Puerto Rico's first elected governor wrote:

*“The United States found us poor but happy; now we are poor and miserable.”*

The United States carried out a program of “Americanization” for the purpose of turning the people of Puerto Rico into docile and submissive subjects. Americanization was the derivative policy that came out the “Manifest Destiny” proclamation at the end of the nineteenth century, a philosophy that stated that the United States had an obligation to export the benefits of its ideas to “inferior” peoples of the world –particularly those of their newly acquire possession in Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico. So beginning in 1898, the United States sought to remake Puerto Rican society into something akin to its own, to remodel islander's attitudes and institutions to more closely resemble those of the sovereign power.



The remodelling of Puerto Rico was not simply a matter of appropriating the resources of the land. U.S. leaders also sought to replace Spanish institutions. They had a clear agenda for the Americanization of the island, a requisite for the eventual rule and integration into the United States of a population they perceived as politically immature and unequipped for self-government. One of the causes for their political immaturity (quoted by a senator from Louisiana) was that *“the hot sun of the tropics affected the reasoning faculties of the brown people”*.

In the mural, Puerto Ricans are represented as a young man with his hand tied behind his back, draped with an American flag symbolizing the complete American control of the Puerto Rican people. The U.S. soldier standing behind him is one of the

famed “Buffalo Soldiers” that served during the Spanish American War. Buffalo Soldiers originally were members of the U.S. 10th Cavalry Regiment of the United States Army, formed on September 21, 1866, at the end of the American Civil War. The nickname was given by the Native American tribes they fought. Buffalo Soldiers were the first peacetime all-black regiments in the regular U.S. Army. During the Spanish American War they earned many service awards, including five Medals of Honor.

The Buffalo Soldiers, they also served in the Philippine-American War in 1916, a dark and bloody conflict that resulted from the Philippines struggle against United States annexation of the islands in the aftermath of the Spanish American War. It has been noted these soldiers who were the instruments of American policies in the former Spanish colonies, were often confronted with racial prejudice from other members of the U.S. Army and violence and abuse back home.



The process of Americanization was imposed without consulting the people of Puerto Rico or its political leaders. Historian *Arturo Morales Carrión* has described the process of Americanization from the Puerto Rican point of view: *"Americanization as a creed did not simply involved embracing the principles of American Federalism or establishing the political institutions of republican America, but of accepting American tutelage with the notion that one belonged to a decadent and inferior civilization, that the new tutors were the benevolent masters, that one had to undergo not simply a civic but a psychological transformation"*.

This self-conscious belief in the superiority of everything from the United States drove the extensive reforms implemented by U.S. military administrators. The feeling of inferiority has been one of the most damaging aspects of American propaganda. This helped perpetuate a colonial mentality of political vacillation and uncomplaining submissiveness.

Puerto Rico's 400 years of history as a people was being systematically erased. *"American heroes"* would replace their own national heroes, American holidays were to replace Spanish holidays, and Protestant missionaries would convert the people to Anglo-Saxon values. The children were taught in school to sing the *"Star Spangled Banner"*, *"America"*, *"Hail Columbia"*, and other patriotic songs of its conquerors. They had to salute the flag each day. In some schools they *had to dress in red, white and blue*. The Puerto Rican flag was no more; displaying one carry a jail sentence. The print media, later radio, and then television continually served a diet of propaganda news and patriotic symbols.

Then the United States reinforced that sense of inferiority by making Puerto Rico an incorporated territory (not a state, not a nation, not free, a land in political limbo). The native Puerto Rican's rights were not and still are not *constitutionally guaranteed*; rather, they are *congressionally determined*. During its first 17 years of American rule, the island citizens were called *"the people of Porto Rico"*; the islander was not a citizen of any place.



An excerpt from a speech delivered by Puerto Rican poet and statesman, *José de Diego*, clearly reflects their collective sense of frustration and betrayal. - "*We request American citizenship with all the rights inherent to the great title of American citizens. This is citizenship with autonomy. And if one of these two, one independent of the other, which is absurd, is offered to us, we prefer self-government to American citizenship, rather than citizenship without self-government*" (July 1, 1907).

How Puerto Ricans became U.S. citizens is the central theme of the mural. Today, after more than a century of American domination, most Americans are surprised to learn that Puerto Ricans *are* citizens of the United States. But unlike most immigrants into the United States, Puerto Ricans never had the "Ellis Island" experience, nor had they to swim across rivers or climb over barriers into the United States. In fact, Puerto Ricans never had to leave their island to become citizens. They simply went to sleep one day as Puerto Ricans and wake up next day to find out that they were now "*Americans*". This is because Puerto Ricans are the only Latin American people *forced* to become U.S. citizens.



This happened in 1917 by an act U.S. Congress, which was voted into law by President Woodrow Wilson. The Jones Act, as it was called, gave U.S. citizenship to the natural habitants of Puerto Rico, and established an elected Senate. However, the governor of Puerto Rico continued to be named by the president of the United States and his cabinet had to be confirmed by the U.S. Senate and not the Puerto Rican legislature. It would take another thirty years to make the governorship an elected post.

In the mural, a Washington politician reads the new proclamation giving the "new ward" the gift of U.S. citizenship. The young Puerto Rican draped with an American flag represents Washington's view that Puerto Ricans were immature to take control of their own destiny and therefore needed American guidance and tutelage. The U.S. army's "defence force" was there to protect Puerto Rico against "foreign enemies". The youth has his hands tied behind his back to represent Puerto Rico's powerless position to do anything but accept the new masters. The rising sun in the horizon represents the dawn of the Puerto Rican experience under American rule and the uncertainties of their new destiny.

Receiving U.S. citizenship did not mean that Puerto Rican would receive the *full rights* of American citizenship. To begin with the Jones Act made certain that all political power stayed in Washington. Neither were the Puerto Rican people truly consulted in any decision-making. They were given "*a choice*" to become U.S. citizens, or to reject U.S. citizenship by leaving the Island (preferably for Spain). The option of being Puerto Ricans in their own free nation was not even considered.

To make things even more demeaning was American determination to deny its "*new citizens*" the right of representation in Congress, or the right to vote in presidential



elections (they still do not have this rights unless they migrate to the U.S. mainland). To all intents and purposes, Puerto Ricans did not have any voice or vote in deciding their fate.

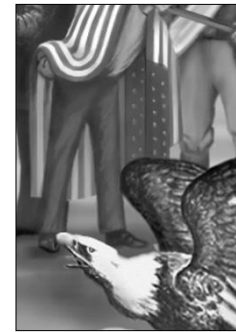
By making Puerto Ricans "*U.S. citizens*" Washington now had the excuse it needed to "*legalize*" their actions before the world (in a time of great global turmoil) and to maintain its new "*colony*" under control, just in time to enter World War I. It also gave the U.S. a pretext to enlist Puerto Rican men to fight in their wars and the privilege to die protecting their "*liberties and freedoms*".



Leaders of political parties favouring independence or some form of autonomy have vigilantly demonstrated their unwillingness to acquiesce to the island becoming essentially American in its language and customs. The overt coercive pressure to Americanize in the early

decades of U.S. sovereignty (1898 to 1953) was not without effect, particularly on Puerto Rico's legal, educational and military structures.

The U.S. influence on Puerto Rican society is undeniable, and a covert program of mass propaganda continues to maintain a positive perception towards American policy of political and economic dependence. But in spite of all this, the symbols of Puerto Rican identity have not given way to U.S. replacement. Puerto Rican leaders generally welcomed the United States take-over of the island because it represented democracy and they thought, the self-rule they had been seeking. But the reluctance of the United States to bestow self-rule and the attempt by the United States to impose its language and institutions engendered resentment and fierce adherence to Puerto Ricanness. In this way, the U.S. pressure in



Puerto Rico may have strengthened Puerto Rican identity and Puerto Rican nationalism.



The greatest exponent for the Puerto Rican independence movement in the first half of the twentieth century was Pedro Albizu Campos (1893 – 1965). In the mural he is portrayed next to the flag of “El grito de Lares”, Puerto Rico’s unsuccessful revolutionary uprising against Spain. Don Pedro was the leader and president of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party from 1930 until his death.

For his political beliefs, he was imprisoned for many years, on several occasions, in both United States and Puerto Rico. In fact, his remarkable life is indeed worthy of a Hollywood movie.

Don Pedro, also known as “el maestro” –the teacher, because of his unique oratory skills, was a genius fluent in English, Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, Italian, Latin and Greek. He was also a graduated from Harvard University, obtaining

a Law degree while studying Literature, Philosophy, Chemical Engineering and Military Science. At the outbreak of World War I, he volunteered in the United States Infantry where he was assigned to an African-American unit and was discharged as a First Lieutenant. During this time he was exposed to the racism of the day which left a mark in his beliefs towards the relationship of Puerto Ricans and the United States.

After the war, Albizu returned to Harvard University in 1919 and was elected president of Harvard's Cosmopolitan Club. He became interested in the cause of Indian independence and also helped to establish several centres in Boston for Irish independence. Albizu met Éamon de Valera (one of the dominant political figures in 20th century Ireland) and later became a consultant in the drafting of the constitution of the Irish Free State.

In 1922, Albizu married Dr. Laura Meneses, a Peruvian whom he had met at Harvard University, and after refusing some prestigious job offers –including clerkship to the U.S Supreme Court and an appointment to the University of Puerto Rico, he settled in a poor sector of Ponce to practice labour law.

On May 11, 1930, Albizu Campos was elected president of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party and formed the first Women's Nationalist Committee, in the island municipality of Vieques, Puerto Rico. The election of Pedro Albizu Campos as president of the Nationalist Party radically changed the political organization and tactics of that party. Under the slogan "*the fatherland is valor and sacrifice*" (*la patria es valor y sacrificio*) a new campaign of national affirmation was carried out. Philosophically Pedro Albizu Campos was neither a communist nor an anti-American. In fact, he was a deeply religious man of the Catholic faith.



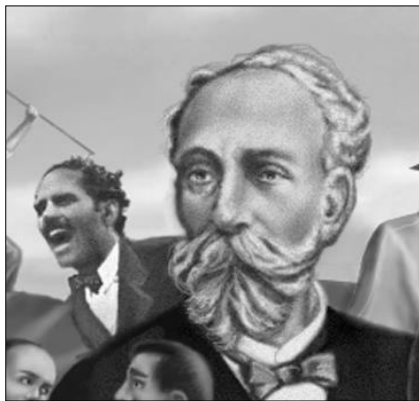
These are his words: -"The good people of the U. S. are not to be blamed for the shameless conduct of certain government officials." He argued in court and at the podium, that the U.S. occupation of Puerto Rico was illegal. His legal argument was based on the question of the USA being awarded proprietary rights over Puerto Rico by virtue of the Paris Peace Treaty of 1898. The island was handed over by Spain along with Cuba and the Philippines as spoils of war to the U.S.

He claimed that the treaty was nullified by the fact that Spain had previously granted Autonomy to Puerto Rico in 1897. By the time of the Treaty, Puerto Rico had its own coin, its own postage stamps, mail and custom service and was therefore a sovereign independent nation under international law. Spain, he claimed, had no rights to give away another sovereign nation. Furthermore, Puerto Rico per se had never participated at the treaty nor even been consulted..."

In 1933, Albizu led a strike against the Puerto Rico Railway and Light and Power Company for alleged monopoly on the island. The following year, he represented sugar cane workers as a lawyer against the U.S. sugar industry. He was instrumental in winning an island wide sugar cane strike and exposing secret medical experiments sponsored by the Rockefeller Institute.

A powerful speaker, thousands would gather to listen to his passionate discourses of freedom. He urged the Puerto Rican people to reclaim their cultural history and national symbols such as the flag and the national anthem. He developed the theory of non-collaboration (*retramiento*) with the colonial structures, i.e. boycotting elections and military service. He soon became a target of the colonial forces and was arrested and charged with seditious conspiracy.

From the mid-thirties to the early sixties, Pedro Albizu Campos would be in and out of U.S. prisons (25 years). During his incarceration, he repeatedly charged that he was a target of human radiation experiments. In 1994, under the administration of President Bill Clinton, the United States Department of Energy disclosed that human radiation "experiments" had in fact been conducted without consent on prisoners during the 1950s and 1970s. Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos was among the subjects of such experimentation.



When Pedro Albizu Campos died on April 21, 1965, more than 75,000 Puerto Ricans carried the remains of his body to the Old San Juan Cemetery. The mural also pays him homage by placing Albizu Campos next to Eugenio Maria de Hostos, two of the greatest exponents of Puerto Rican nationhood.

The second section of the mural is about the Puerto Rican emigration into the U.S. mainland. One of the most significant themes in the history of Puerto Rico during the twentieth century has been the constant emigration of its people. The economic policies that arose from Puerto Rico's dependent relationship to the United States and the government's restructuring of the economy create an "overpopulation problem" that was controlled through emigration and sterilisation. The mural's narrative follows the emigration story of Puerto Ricans moving into the continental U.S. and does not comment into the program of sterilisation the was carried out in the island.

In less than two decades of U.S. rule, Puerto Rico's economy became absorbed into that of the United States. An important development that drastically altered Puerto Rico's economic structure, and contributed to the so-called overpopulation problem, began with the arrival of North American corporations soon after colonization (as mentioned earlier in the essay). These corporations took the land from peasants and replaced subsistence crops with profitable sugar commodity agriculture. This changed Puerto Rican agriculture from subsistence farming to a one-crop economy. The cultivation of a single crop disrupted land settlement patterns and uprooted thousands of peasants from their land.

The shift from a subsistence to a mono-crop economy led to seasonal internal migration, because the peasants could no longer live off the land they had no choice but to find work in the emerging commercial and industrial businesses. The internal migration of an uprooted rural population to urban areas led to big unemployment and the rise of urban poverty. Between the First World War and the crash, Puerto Rico was turned into an enormous agro-social sweatshop; during the Great Depression, its

workers suffered, while the sugar corporations, both Puerto Rican and North American, prospered.



Natural disasters, including a major earthquake, a tsunami and several hurricanes, the decrease in the death rate due to advancements in health care, the monopolistic policies of U.S. corporations and the Great Depression further impoverished the island. Perhaps the best expression for the hardships and desperation of Puerto Ricans during this period is the song “*Lamento Borincano*” (Puerto Rican lament) by Rafael Hernández (1892 –1965), the greatest composer of Puerto Rican music. This song is still as popular throughout many Latin American countries as it was in Puerto Rico when it was first heard in 1937 because it captures the emotions of millions of labourers still experiencing hardship and despair in their daily lives to this very today.

The dire economic conditions of the famished and desperate Puerto Rican peasantry during the 1930’s and 40’s precipitated a migration into the large urban in the island. One solution to having too many unemployed workers was emigration, a policy promoted by government agencies as a remedy to the alleged chronic overpopulation problem. The granting of U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans in 1917 helped bring this about. During the 1940s and 1950s almost one million Puerto Ricans left the island and came to the continental United States.



The emotions of leaving the island in search of employment and a better life, is represented in the mural by the peasant worker next to a “garita” (a sentry box from el Morro fortress in Old San Juan). He stands alone, looking across the sea toward an uncertain future. Two songs express the anxiety of having to leave your home and everything you love due to conditions beyond one’s control: “*En mi Viejo San Juan*” by Noel Estrada (1918 – 1979), and “*Qué Será*” (*Che Sarà* in its original Italian), interpreted by Jose Feliciano (b. 1945). “*En mi Viejo San Juan*” (in my Old San Juan) is considered a second national anthem by many Puerto Ricans, especially the Puerto Ricans who live far away from Puerto Rico. The City of San Juan adopted the song as its official city anthem.



The airplane between the two halves of the composition represents this Puerto Rican period of emigration. But its greater significance is the fact that Puerto Ricans did not arrive to the Continental United States in refugee boats, or by swimming across rivers, or by climbing wars, or by crawling under barbed wires. They arrived in the comfort of passenger planes. And when the planes landed, they stepped out as full U.S. citizens. It is also worth noting that Puerto Ricans felt they “never left” their island to become “Americans”. They simply “move away for a while” to return later when things got better. To this day, planes filled with Puerto Ricans

travel back and forth from Puerto Rico to the continental United States as families maintain strong bonds on both sides. Even after decades of living away from their island, Puerto Ricans nationalism persists; Puerto Ricans have never let go their cultural roots.



During the first half of the twentieth century, Puerto Rican families migrated to the United States, the bulk of which went to New York, in search of a better way of life (Hawaii had been another destination of government sponsored emigration of Puerto Rican workers). In a sense, New York City became the personification of the United States to Puerto Ricans in the island. The Statue of Liberty took another meaning for the new immigrants from Puerto Rico. They did not see it as the "Mother of Exiles". To them it became synonymous with New York City and the hope of a better life.

Since 1917, when Puerto Ricans were made U.S. citizens thus requiring to passport to enter the country, there had been a gradual emigration of Puerto Rican families to New York City. These families began to form their own small "Barrios", in the Bronx, Brooklyn and in East Harlem (which would become known as Spanish Harlem).



Many found employment in the garment industry and other jobs for low salaries in factories. Those that could not find employment had the option of joining the United States Military. One of the most renowned military units at that time was New York's 369th Infantry. Rafael Hernandez, the renowned Puerto Rican composer, served in the almost all Afro-American unit. The unit fought against the Germans in France and became known as the "Harlem Hell Fighters".

Several factors contributed and led to what became known as the "The Great Migration" of Puerto Ricans to New York City during the 1940s and 1950s. These were the Great Depression, World War II and the advent of air travel. But in New York, they faced the same hardships and discrimination that earlier groups of immigrants, such as the Irish, the Italians, and the Jews, had faced before them. It was difficult for them to find well paying jobs because of the language barrier and their lack of technical working skills.

Discrimination was then rampant in the United States and it was no different in New York City. In the mural the city is depicted as a cold gray city enveloped in dark clouds of soot. This grime represents discrimination. As stated by Lolita Lebrón (an active advocate for Puerto Rican independence), there were signs in restaurants which read "No dogs or Puerto Ricans allowed". The Puerto Rican Nationalist Party established an office in New York in the 1950s and attracted many migrants.



Leaders of the party conceived a plan that would involve an attack on the Blair House with the intention of assassinating United States President Harry S. Truman and an attack on the House of Representatives to attract attention to the plight of Puerto

Rico's political status. These events had a negative impact on the Puerto Rican migrants. Americans viewed Puerto Ricans as anti-Americans and the discrimination against them became even more widespread.



In the mural, three judges dressed in black robes stand at the top in a position of power. The one at the centre holds a scroll. They represent the justice system and government institutions that failed to protect the rights of the Puerto Rican emigrants; the scroll represents the rights that all citizens are guaranteed in this country but were withheld from the new arrivals. Thus Puerto Ricans became victims of economic exploitation, discrimination, racism, and the insecurities inherent in the migration process on a daily basis.



Finding good jobs and being able to provide for their families created hardships that threaten the foundation of the home. To help provide for their families, Puerto Rican women left their homes for the factories in record numbers and did fared better than did men in the job market. Many soldiers who returned after World War II made use of the GI Bill and went to college. But the great majority remain uneducated and unskilled in a market that had begun to evolve and move away from manufacturing jobs.

Education had always been considered the way to upper mobility in Puerto Rican society. Education meant better jobs and a way out of the vicious circle of poverty. But for the children Puerto Rican emigrants, the public educational system failed them. Confronted with a different culture and norms of behaviour, and unable to fare well in schools while struggling to master a new language, over 40,000 Puerto Rican students were marked as mentally retarded by the New York City public school system. A child not being able to understand became bored, isolated and taunted in the classroom.



As a result, the school dropout rate became endemic and achieving a piece of the American dream through education became a closed door for a new generation of Puerto Rican youth. Hindered by poverty and a lack of opportunity, many Puerto Rican emigrants and their offspring became involved in gangs and in illegal activities such as drug dealing.

As the numbers grew in the 1950s, Puerto Ricans were increasingly portrayed as unwilling to work, welfare leeches, drug addicts and juvenile delinquents. As a consequence of this public view, business and government leaders were able to get away with policies and practices that exploited and demeaned Puerto Ricans in jobs, housing, and education. To the thousands of Puerto Ricans that had fought for the United States in every American conflict since the Spanish American War, being marginalized, discriminated and ignored was a bitter betrayer of their sacrifices and what America stood for.





During the 1960s and early 70s, a new leadership inspired by the civil rights movement of the era began to emerge in the Puerto Rican community. They established organizations to help their fellow countrymen reach their goals and aspirations, and gave new voice to their grievances in the public eye. As new opportunities began to open, Puerto Rican migrants who gained economic success began to move away from the "Barrios" and settled in Queens and Long Island or moved to other cities in other states.



As conditions in the Puerto Rican community improved and it gained a stronger political voice, divisions and factions in the leadership elite, each expressing their own political (or personal) agenda, began to erode and slow down the reform process. In the mural, this conflict is illustrated as two politicians embracing with a false mask of friendship while stabbing each other in the back.



The 1970s saw what became known as reverse-migration. Since the 1950's, when Puerto Ricans and not Americans were in control of the island's internal affairs, Puerto Rico had seen an economic turnaround that transformed the island from a rural agricultural society into an industrial powerhouse. Taking advantage of this "economic miracle", many Puerto Ricans returned to the island to buy homes and to invest in local businesses.



The person credited for Puerto Rico's transformation was José Luis Alberto Muñoz Marín (1898 –1980). He was a poet, journalist, and politician, widely regarded as the "father of modern Puerto Rico". In 1949 he became the first democratically elected Governor of Puerto Rico, and held the post of Governor for sixteen years until his voluntary retirement. Muñoz Marín was the son of Luis Muñoz Rivera, the renowned autonomist leader who had fought hard for Puerto Rican autonomy from Spain. Both, father and son, have a prominent place in the mural, each representing two different and significant eras of Puerto Rican history.



Early in his political career, Muñoz Marín was in favour of Puerto Rican autonomy. But by the 1930s, Puerto Rico's political scenario had changed, and the only party that was actively asking for independence was the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party, presided by Pedro Albizu Campos. Muñoz Marín occasionally visited the nationalist leader and was impressed by the substance of Albizu's arguments, but their styles to achieve autonomy and social reforms were different.

Unable to reconcile their differences as to how to achieve independence –and incurring the wrath of many political leaders, Muñoz Marín decided to set the independence issue aside to concentrate instead on solving the country’s socioeconomic ills: poverty, lack of health, education, and food. In 1938, Muñoz Marín would help in the creation of the Popular Democratic Party of Puerto Rico (*Partido Popular Democratico*) -PPD.



It should be noted that, according to findings by recent scholars –as well as FBI records now made public, Muñoz Marín’s change of heart on the question of Puerto Rican independence was due to American machinations that threaten to expose compromising information of his private life.

The PPD ideology promised to help the *jíbaros*, regardless of political belief, promoting the creation of minimal wages, initiatives to provide food and water, cooperatives to work with the agriculture and the creation of more industrial alternatives. He reasoned that once the amount of illiteracy and other social problems were reduced, the party could begin again debating how to establish an autonomous government.

Muñoz's tenure as governor saw immense changes in Puerto Rico. The island was shifted from mainly rural to an urban society. His policies for the most part proved so effective, that post war countries, such as Germany, Japan and the new state of Israel, send over 1000 delegates to study “the Puerto Rican miracle”. During his years in office, second-generation Puerto Ricans in the United States outnumbered those from the island and Puerto Rico achieved degrees of autonomy it never had seen. During these decades of growth, Puerto Ricans made -and continue to make, many important contributions in the fields of entertainment, the arts, music, industry, science, politics and military.

During his lifetime, Muñoz Marín received many worldwide accolades, among these, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, awarded on December 6, 1962 by United States President John F. Kennedy. He was featured twice on the cover of *Time* magazine. The articles called him "*one of the most influential politicians in recent times, whose works will be remembered for years to come.*"



Puerto Rican achievements and those of all Hispanics in the United States had always been a source of pride that has nourished nationalist sentiments. As more and more Puerto Ricans rose to prominence during the 1980s and 90s, a rediscovering of the Puerto Rican history and cultural roots took new meaning for the millions of Puerto Ricans which had by then spread into every state of the union. Five hundred years of a rich and vibrant heritage, in the increased awareness of Puerto Rican contributions and sacrifices to protect American ideals could no longer be completely ignored by the American community at large and the media apparatus that feeds it.





This new awareness is illustrated in the mural by a Puerto Rican couple raising a Puerto Rican flag over a book, except that the single white star in the flag has been replaced by the number 500. This number represents a Hispanic culture twice as old as that of the United States. The title of the book upon which the flag is being raised, is “untold truth”. This book signifies

Puerto Rican and world scrutiny on the lies and half truths that American propaganda used to control public opinion about Puerto Rican issues. It also represents a re-evaluation of Puerto Rican history in a century of American control as well as the consequences of United States policies toward its Spanish colony.



Also portrayed in the mural is the opposition, both in the island and in the continental United States, to changes in the status quo. They are rendered as group of angry individuals with raised hands and fists oppose the assertion of Puerto Rican nationalism and its growing political power within regional centres in the United States. They represent the interests groups –public, private and religious, lobbyist, corporate conglomerates, academia,

the media, and politicians from the right and the left that have for over a century interfere in Puerto Rican affairs to bring forth their own agendas. Unfortunately most of these plans have not benefited the Puerto Rican community. For the most part they have only helped to sustain negative stereotypes and the ignorance, mistrusts, and fears Americans have about Hispanics in general.



But the Puerto Ricans of today have had the experiences from their fathers and forefathers to build upon and find their place in American society. Puerto Rican resiliency when confronted with adversity has never failed throughout its long history. It have never forgotten their cultural roots nor failed to take pride of who they are. What’s more, the forces grinding the Puerto Rican migrants down to the bottom of ladder of success, made them stronger by continually reminding them of who they were.

This ability to spring back quickly into shape after being bent, stretched, or deformed by hardship is represented by a young boy, with arms crossed and hat slightly tilted to one side, looking ahead defiantly. He is a survivor and he will adapt. And even while his parent’s generation were down beaten by the weight of adversities and injustices they did not deserve, he will find a way to adapt and carry on without losing sight of whom he is or where he came from.





This same spirit has been preserved in the current generation of Puerto Ricans, now imbued with the power of being confident of their own identity, proud of their heritage, aware of their history, educated and better prepared to carve their own place in the fabric of American life. And while the Puerto Rican community in the United States and the Puerto Rican community in their ancestral home of Puerto Rico have evolved in ways related to local conditions, they have never lost sight of each other. The Puerto Rican flag has never been displayed with more defiance and pride as it has today.

The nature of Puerto Rico's political relationship with the U.S. is the subject of ongoing debate in Puerto Rico. Many want the fulfilment of the promises the United States made to Puerto Rico on the eve of the American invasion in 1898. Others would like to see a further development of the current status with the strengthening of autonomic powers for greater control of its own affairs. The rest would like Puerto Rico to become the 51th state of the union. But even those in the latter would be hard pressed to give away the identity they fought so hard to retain and preserved.



Presented in the mural is a yellow road. Its symbolism is clear to all who have seen the Hollywood film 'the wizard of oz'. "Follow the yellow brick road" is the upbeat song of hope for those who seek fulfilment. It is a road all human beings must walk, though its colour may not always be yellow. Puerto Ricans are also following this road. The road leads to a distant city of the future –the mythical promise land, a place of happiness, equality, justice and harmony.



In the mural, this city has recognizable features. The two tall skyscrapers were copied from the Cleveland skyline. Since the mural was originally painted in this city, it served as the model. But the rendering can be that of any city. What is important is not the skyline, but what the image represents: a bright new future being built on the next horizon.

Unlike the foreboding image of the gray city we have seen before, this is a city built on green gentle slopes and clearing skies. A full moon is giving way to a new sunrise. It is a city both welcoming and inviting. It is a future that is bright, full of hope, cheer and optimism.



Taken as a whole, the elements on this section of the mural try to convey a Puerto Rican nation being involved as equals in the building of a collective future for all Americans. This is future were they can be who they are but still belong to the greater whole, just like the full moon that reflects light to everyone from above.



The distance along the path that must travelled is not far, and the road is not narrow. It is an idyllic and idealistic image. That's what art and artists do. But the image is not one that suspends belief; it is one that suggests a way.

One final image remains, that of a young lady casually playing her guitar while seating next to a gentle brook. She seems oblivious to everything that's taking place around her. Her bare feet enjoy the cooling pleasure of the pool. This is the same pool of water that flowed since the beginning of time. It is the pool visible behind the couple at the other end of the mural when this visual narrative of the people of Puerto Rico began.

The pool in fact represents the flow of time and the melody the young lady plays is the language of time. Her musical notes carries the moods, emotions, thoughts, impressions; the philosophical, the sexual, the tangible and the indefinable that make up everything that we are, have been, have failed to be and hope to become. It is a melody full of meaning and worthy of reflection.



The mural history of the people of Puerto Rico is a visual representation of a melody created by a unique group of people from before Christopher Columbus to the present and beyond. And the artist's hope is that this melody will play as long as the waters of time flow.



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Written by John Rivera-Resto, 2008

## APPENDIX A

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### TO THE INHABITANTS OF PUERTO RICO

In the prosecution of 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 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.

Major-General,  
Commanding United States Army, 1898

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Note: A copy of the Proclamation is on display at the Arecibo Lighthouse (el Faro de Arecibo), in Puerto Rico.

