

PUERTO RICO: SEVEN DECADES OF AMERICANIZATION

THE UNITED STATES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PUERTO RICAN STATUS QUESTION, 1936–1968. By SURENDRA BHANA. (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1975. Pp. 290.)

PUERTO RICO AND THE UNITED STATES, 1917–1933. By TRUMAN R. CLARK. (Pittsburgh, Penn.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975. Pp. 238.)

PUERTO RICAN POLITICS AND THE NEW DEAL. By THOMAS MATHEWS. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1976. Pp. 345.)

According to Antonio Fernos-Isern, Puerto Rican resident commissioner in Washington in 1951, on the eve of the establishment of the Puerto Rican Commonwealth in association with the United States: "A Commonwealth is any area subject to the sovereignty of the United States but not incorporated into the United States as an integral part thereof, whose people shall have organized themselves under a constitution of their own adoption, into a free body politic in accordance with a law adopted by Congress in the nature of a compact with said people." This accepted technical description of Puerto Rico's relationship with the U.S. exemplifies the complexity, uniqueness, and confusion surrounding a colonial relationship. The germination of this contradictory tie had its origin with the North American ouster of Spanish power in 1898 and, over the ensuing half century, has gradually been institutionalized through a series of congressional measures.

The books in question attempt to flesh out the thoroughly interlocking connection developed between the U.S. and Puerto Rico since early in the twentieth century. Truman R. Clark's book takes us to 1933, Thomas Mathews' continues the story through the New Deal, and Surendra Bhana completes the picture to 1968. Essentially what we have here are three carefully written, dependable diplomatic histories of bilateral relationships between the U.S. and Puerto Rico. Specifically, they present us with a blow-by-blow account of initiatives and responses of the appropriate North American governmental authorities to Puerto Rican political leadership over the several generations since World War I.

The books approach the Puerto Rican question in much the same fashion. All focus on documented presidential papers and official memoranda concerning stated positions and counterpositions vis-à-vis the island. Clark uses the papers of Presidents Wilson, Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover and appointed governors of Puerto Rico such as Arthur Yager, E. Mont. Reily, and Theodore Roosevelt Jr. Mathews and Bhana employ the papers of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Bhana those of Harry S. Truman as well as Governor Rexford G. Tugwell. Among many others, Clark, Mathews, and Bhana all rely on the archival documents of the U.S. Bureau of Insular Affairs (BIA), which later became

known as the Division of Territories and Island Possessions (DTIP) within the Department of the Interior. In addition, Clark utilizes the papers of North American labor leader Samuel Gompers and makes extensive use of *La Democracia*, the Unionist-Liberal Party newspaper, as well as the various public messages of the U.S. governors of Puerto Rico before the island legislature. Mathews avails himself of U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration files, and has benefited enormously from the Ruby Black Collection at the University of Puerto Rico. Ms. Black, a Washington newspaperwoman and personal friend of Puerto Rican governor Luis Muñoz Marín, left an extensive nonofficial file of personal correspondence. Bhana extracts detailed information from the files of Secretary of Interior Oscar L. Chapman during the Truman years.

Clark describes the familiar Puerto Rican political evolution from the Foraker Act of 1900 to the Jones Act of 1917. The former established the anomalies of U.S. congressional veto over Puerto Rican affairs and the situation of a resident commissioner in Congress who can speak and propose bills but who cannot vote. Clark summarizes two decades of opposition to Puerto Rican citizenship based on their "social inferiority" and the assumption of statehood. When the Jones Act made Puerto Ricans citizens just in time to be drafted into World War I, it was reiterated that statehood was not implied. Puerto Ricans could assist in the nomination of U.S. presidents but not their election. Clark depicts seriatim Puerto Rican politics as it mirrored the key North American mainland issues of the twenties. Prohibition, for example, was in place in Puerto Rico two years before it finally became a constitutional amendment in the U.S. Women's suffrage in the U.S. (1919) also became an imported policy despite island attitudes toward women involved even tangentially in politics. Congressional pressure forced a decision by 1929. It demonstrated congressional implied powers in conflictual arenas.

One of the interesting pieces of information we glean from Clark's account of the 1920s is his basic discounting that Pedro Albizu Campos, famous Puerto Rican nationalist leader, developed his rabid pro-independence position mainly because of racist experiences while serving in a segregated Puerto Rican regiment during World War I. As Clark shows, as late as 1923, Albizu Campos was a member of the Unionist Party and made speeches in favor of some kind of associated state status for Puerto Rico and argued against the formation of a Nationalist party. Rather Clark supports Robert Rexach, in his biography of Albizu Campos, who attributes his conversion to a more personal set of factors: his struggle to be admitted to the bar in Puerto Rico despite his Harvard law degree and passing the examination. Rexach also points to Albizu Campos' failure to be nominated by the *Alianza* (alliance of Partido Unión de Puerto Rico [Unionists] and the Partido Republicano Puertorriqueño) as a senatorial candidate and his marriage to a fellow law student from Peru, thoroughly grounded in the Marxist literature.

Mathews continues the Puerto Rican story through the New Deal days. The author depicts Muñoz Marín as Liberal party leader and his early issue orientations. He clarifies Muñoz's position that independence would necessitate

gradual tariff revisions and concessions to allow Puerto Rico to convert from sugar to other agricultural products. He describes Muñoz's changing position on the nonapplied 500-acre provision of the Foraker Law. He felt land division should not be implemented as long as Puerto Rico depended upon the efficient commercial sugar production for export to the U.S. market.

Through Mathews' account we get a sense of Puerto Rican political life in the 1930s. He portrays, under U.S. Governor Robert H. Gore in the early New Deal period, the politization of teachers, doctors, engineers, lawyers, and the dependence of their careers upon which political party determined public patronage. The Puerto Rican tradition of purges of public positions had its major beginning during this period of accelerated United States assimilation of the island. Most influential jobs depended upon political party affiliation. Until Muñoz Marin led the *Populares* (Partido Popular Democrático—Popular Democrats) to power, the major battle line was drawn between the *Coalición* (Partido Socialista and Partido Republicano Puro) and the *Alianza* and its successor groupings (Unionists and Autonomous Republicans and later Liberals, etc.).

In the mid-1930s Muñoz, as co-leader of the Liberal party, was instrumental in pushing forward Puerto Rican concern for rehabilitating a diversified agricultural economy (destroyed by U.S. sugar corporations just a few years after the U.S. invasion in 1898), efficiency in the sugar industry, development and protectionism of local light industry to insure adequate employment, and increased food production for local consumption. The policy initiatives of the young Muñoz were greatly fertilized by the then U.S. Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Rexford Tugwell and by Carlos Chardon, chancellor of the University of Puerto Rico and one of the key Puerto Rican reconstruction leaders under Roosevelt's New Deal programs.

Throughout this heady period of liberal policymaking on the island, Mathews relates various perceptions of guiding U.S. officialdom. Perhaps most telling is a letter written by Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes to a United States Senator:

Puerto Rico . . . has been the victim of the *laissez-faire* economy which has developed the rapid growth of great absentee owned sugar corporations, which have absorbed much land formerly belonging to small independent growers and who in consequence have been reduced to virtual economic serfdom. While the inclusion of Puerto Ricans within our tariff walls has been highly beneficial to the . . . corporations, the benefits have not been passed down to the mass of Puerto Ricans . . . they have been gradually driven to import all their food staples paying for them high prices. . . . There is today more widespread misery and destitution and far more unemployment in Puerto Rico than at any previous time in its history. (P. 215)

In Bhana's study, we are taken through the appointment of the first native Puerto Rican governor in 1946, the passage of the Elective Governor's Act of 1947, and the enactment of Public Law 600 in 1950 which allowed Puerto-

Ricans to formulate a constitution and support the commonwealth status in 1952 (Estado Libre Asociado). The author describes the crucial role of Ernest Gruening, Roosevelt's director of the Puerto Rican Reconstruction Administration (PRRA) and director of the DTIP under Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes.

Bhana narrates the innovative public policies in the latter Franklin Roosevelt administrations during World War II: the Puerto Rican Land Authority is initiated, which distributed 3 percent of the land area mostly into small plots to individual farmers; a Water Resources Authority (on the model of T.V.A.) expropriates three island utility companies; a Puerto Rican Housing Authority funnels aid for low-income housing projects; and the Puerto Rican Development Corporation (modeled after the Chilean CORFO) fosters light manufacturing development in such industries as glass, cement, leather, and shoes. Later these were sold under "Operation Bootstrap" and the beginning of the "privatization" of the island.

Bhana depicts the Tydings Bills for Puerto Rican independence of 1936, 1943, and 1945. The first measure was a rapid response to nationalist uprisings in 1936. Later bills were more procedurally phased legislation promoting independence while maintaining more favorable ties to the island. For example, the Tydings Bill of 1945 provided for a period of duty-free exemptions on certain Puerto Rican exports, a guaranteed market for sugar, and a temporary continuance of federal grants and other aid until island activity filled the vacuum of United States interests. Despite the assurances of the Tydings Bill, Muñoz Marin found the bill too precipitous, with insufficient guarantees for the economic well being of Puerto Rico. As leader of the newly formed Populares, an offshoot of the Liberals, Muñoz had expelled the pro-independence faction (the Congreso Pro-Independencia—CPI) after the victorious elections of 1944. The CPI was to found its own independence party in 1946, the Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño. Muñoz's influence had the impact of shifting public opinion away from statehood or independence toward a commonwealth solution. Seventy-seven percent of the Puerto Ricans voting in the plebiscite of 1951 supported Public Law 600 (Puerto Rican Federal Relations Act of 1950) which cleared the way for the adoption of a commonwealth constitution.

Bhana shows clearly the paternalistic climate in which the U.S. Congress debated the Puerto Rican Commonwealth Constitution of 1952. Congress emphasized that the promulgation of the Puerto Rican constitution did not impair the legitimacy and enforcement powers of the Puerto Rican Federal Relations Act of 1950, which in itself had in no way contradicted the Jones Act of 1917. Thus the account makes evident that the commonwealth had not significantly altered its basic colonial relationship to the mother country despite certain distinguishing institutional features that marked internal political life in Puerto Rico. The unequivocal nature of the reality of North American rule became patently obvious during these congressional hearings. Congress obliterated Section 20 of the Puerto Rican constitution as being incompatible with the U.S. Constitution. Section 20, borrowing from the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, had explicitly formulated human rights in such areas as secondary education, obtaining work, attaining adequate living standards, health care,

food, clothing and shelter, unemployment compensation, age and disability insurance, and mother and child care assistance. Another section mandating public education was voided because of its implied threat to private education.

This then was the thrust of the Bhana book (1937–52). In the last chapters, in more summary fashion, he completes the picture through 1968, including the plebiscite of 1967 in which two-thirds of the Puerto-Rican people voted, supporting the present commonwealth status by 60 percent to 39 percent for statehood and 1 percent for the independence alternative.

The Clark book presents excellent descriptions and insightful anecdotal contributions but presents no overriding thesis and the reader often loses the author's focus. Though there is much circumstantial evidence, the author carefully avoids a conceptual framework, content to be both eclectic in what he discusses and noninvestigatory about what he finds. He dismisses the Harding-Coolidge-Hoover administrations as the policies of "no policy." He may be right. But the absence of legislative-administrative initiative is not tantamount to a nonexistence of policy toward Puerto Rico. Benign neglect is a significant form of policy both in domestic and foreign affairs. Little social legislation gave U.S. corporate sugar interests maximum space on the island. Clark's antinationalist bias is also evident as he writes that "Pedro Albizu Campos was responsible for bringing bloodshed to the island that had prided itself on being peaceful" (p. 87).

Clark emphasizes political intervention and skirts the equally fundamental lack of Puerto Rican autonomy in cultural, intellectual, and economic matters. When he does speak of unemployment, inflation, and a monocultural export economy he makes no apparent attempt to relate these symptoms to a particular type of overseas monopoly capital structure very typical of budding colonial economies. During Clark's span of analysis, the incipient North American empire had not as yet flooded Puerto Rico with capital investments and the island's people had not as yet emigrated in vast numbers to the U.S. mainland in search of work. Nevertheless, there were certainly signs, as seen by the diversion of Puerto Rican agriculture from a multicrop economy to its highly monopolized sugar economy dominated by four overseas U.S. corporations.

Clark pungently portrays the degree of vacuousness of the early U.S. governors of Puerto Rico. Their ignorance of the Puerto Rican culture, language, institutions, history, and customs was sublime. The constant threat of their untutored vetoes reduced the Puerto Rican legislature to a "debating society," as Resident Commissioner Córdoba Davila coined it way back in 1928. From the Samuel Gompers papers of the Library of Congress, Clark presents us with a fascinating view of the paternalistic relationship between the North American labor leader and Santiago Iglesias, head of the Puerto Rican labor confederation. The AF of L made final strike decisions, holding out strike benefit funds as its ultimate weapon.

Mathews' book is more focused on the New Deal period but suffers somewhat from the same disinterestedness in ideology, social structure, and economic development issues of a broader theoretical nature. The study is a little too controlled by the characters it describes and his point of view is very

much influenced by the personalities who enter and leave his book. Thus his thesis, too, seems to be managed by the events themselves. Too many of the issues are presented one by one without giving the reader a sense of priority or differentiation. Often he seems to move from incident to incident with little apparent effort to relate. He moves headlong, from the period of nationalist rebellion, the sedition trial of Albizu Campos, the Tydings independence bill, the purge of Liberals in the PRRA, the teaching-of-English controversy in public schools, the application of the 500-acre law, with substantial dependence upon the basic chronology inherent in the exchange of documents and letters between U.S. agencies and Puerto Rican political leadership. Mathews' last chapter is by far his finest. In it he clarifies Liberal party politics and depicts the political evolution of Muñoz Marín. He follows Muñoz's break with Antonio Barceló, co-leader of the Liberals and his founding of the *Acción Social Independentista*, the nucleus of his eventual major political party vehicle—the *Populares*.

Mathews adds significant information regarding the so-called "vindictive independence" bills thrust on Puerto Rico. The author makes clear that Millard Tydings, as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Insular Affairs, perceived an essential analogy between the Philippines and Puerto Rico, but discovered a lack of equal will to carry off a concerted effort toward that end among Puerto Rico's dominant politicians. Mathews demonstrates the steady absorption of Muñoz into Washington circles as a youthful Liberal envoy, apparently coming to realize that the island's problems were immense and could only be resolved by technocratic Washingtonian initiatives. Previous to the New Deal, independence seemed to be a prerequisite to socioeconomic reform. Now, under Muñoz's leadership, socioeconomic reforms could be considered *first*, deferring the basic question of status until Puerto Rico had achieved a certain level of economic growth. As Mathews puts it: "The association with the planners and economic intellectuals of the New Deal was a heady experience for Muñoz" (p. 148).

In the course of his book, Mathews manages to "defrock" Ernest Gruening's liberal image, as head of PRRA, in his role as prime advocate of the civil sedition trial of Pedro Albizu Campos in a U.S. Federal Court. This venue was chosen since the previously contemplated criminal charges for the 1936 slaying of Colonel E. Francis Riggs, island police chief, would be much harder to prove in criminal court. The author also somewhat demystifies Governor Rexford Tugwell, last U.S.-appointed governor, despite Tugwell's foreword to the book. In a letter to Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace in 1934 he wrote:

There will be something like a crisis here soon . . . with the pressures that are accumulating. There must be either an increase in our charity or a mass movement outward of population . . . I rather dislike to think that our falling fertility must be supplemented by these people. But that will probably happen. Our control of the tropics seems to me certain to increase immigration from here and the next wave of the lowly . . . succeeding the Irish, Italians, and Slavs . . . will be these mulatto, Indian, Spanish people from the South of the U.S. They make poor material for social organization but you are going to have to reckon with them. (P. 159)

Many would say that this exactly represents the Liberal credo for the third world: private ethnocentric prejudice combined with public concern and paternalistic policy.

Bhana's book is a good, though dry, introduction to the development of the Puerto Rican status question from the end of the New Deal to the Puerto Rican plebescite supporting the Estado Libre Asociado in 1967. Bhana contends, and I would agree, that Puerto Rico has never developed a strong enough independence movement to which Congress might react. Interspersed with a spare and straightforward account, Bhana contributes numerous interesting insights. For example, Benjamin Thoron of DTIP once said of Muñoz Marín in 1945: "He wants to avoid making the choice between divorce without alimony and a wardship with generous maintenance allowance" (p. 81). Bhana also cites evidence that Teodoro Moscoso got his idea for "Operation Bootstrap" from leading newspaper and magazine advertisements placed by several southern states to induce the relocation of northern industries. The advertised enticements recount the advantages of cheap labor, availability of raw materials, tax abatements, and aid in plant location and construction. Muñoz is shown as consistently opposed to statehood over the years—as he said forcefully in a memorandum to Secretary of Interior Ickes in 1937: ". . . perpetual quality of statehood should be enough to terrify both the people of the U.S. and the people of Puerto Rico. After all, even independence can be taken back with the consent of the Puerto Ricans. Statehood cannot be taken back even if the Puerto Ricans should ardently desire to have it taken back and the American people should desire to take it back with equal ardour" (p. 218).

These three histories mainly emphasize official papers and directives, especially information from the Departments of War and Interior files of the BIA and the DTIP. Thus, though all the authors attempt to be evenhanded, the books are somewhat subject to being considered North American apologies for liberal, incremental change that has resulted in the present development of, what one could call, a type of *associated exploitation*. As in the U.S., the New Deal made Puerto Rico safe for post-laissez-faire capitalism. In the foreword by Rexford Tugwell to Mathews' book, Tugwell recounts a return to the island ten years after his governorship: "I was taken to lunch at the Bankers Club—something that would not have happened when excoriations were so popular. While we were talking at a round table, an elderly banker, a Puerto Rican came up to me, shook my hand and said, 'Mr. Tugwell, what was it we were so mad at you about?'" (Mathews, p. ix).

Reading these three important contributions to North American-Puerto Rican relations one comes away with certain strong impressions concerning U.S. imperial policy vis-à-vis the island. The studies show just how heavy has been the weight of congressional tyranny over Puerto Rico. The island, in its neither-fish-nor-fowl situation, has been overseen by House and Senate Insular Affairs committees almost unanimously isolated from the insular intellectual cross-currents, and woefully ignorant of political sentiment in Puerto Rico. All U.S.-appointed governors through World War II were outsiders, patronage appointees, none spoke Spanish to any degree, and almost none developed a love

for the island and its people. One governor, E. Mont. Reily, delivered his inaugural address two and a half months after taking the oath of office; another governor, Robert Gore, did not know where Puerto Rico was located; most had hoped for a better appointment.

A modicum of Puerto Rican autonomy has taken a torturously slow path over seventy years: over forty years for a Puerto Rican appointed governor, almost fifty years for an elective governor, and over fifty years for minimum local jurisdictional and appointive powers. Puerto Rican legislators lack control over much of their domestic funding; Puerto Rican governors seem more responsive to Washingtonian political circles than to Puerto Rican public opinion. Historically no attempt was made to woo the Puerto Rican resident commissioners as potential future congressmen as was done with representatives of the United States *incorporated* territories of Alaska and Hawaii.

The blatant form of this colonial relationship had a deleterious impact on major Puerto Rican political party leadership. Many were absorbed with patronage positions and personal gain and contacts. This often led to an equally venal U.S. disregard for Puerto Rican government leadership. In Washington, most Unionist, Liberal, Republican and Socialist partisans were considered unreliable and suspect, whereas the Nationalist and Independence parties were perceived as pernicious, lunatic-fringe elements. From the beginning, the U.S. federal bureaucracy and our "colonial" offices in the Departments of War and Interior consummated a dependent marriage with most "autonomous" and some independence groups that probably set back the independence of Puerto Rico for at least several generations. Muñoz Marín was really only the chief victim of this marriage of convenience.

The original culprit in the dependence scenario was Santiago Iglesias, founder of Puerto Rico's earlier Socialist party and trade union federation. He was the first major, potentially revolutionary, national leader who *divorced* socio-economic reformism from the political issues of the independence struggle and began the well-known Puerto Rican process of deferring the hard decisions of integration or separation, preferring a slow move toward eventual statehood—as Muñoz would later approve of a slow move toward independence.

The role of Muñoz in contemporary Puerto Rican history has been crucial in orchestrating Puerto Ricans to see their future as in the hands of the U.S. Congress and president and legitimizing the fact that key policies would emanate from Washington. The momentum for federal leadership got its major impetus from the Tugwell-Muñoz-Gruening axis and has shaped much of Puerto Rican/U.S. relations ever since, despite increasing Puerto Rican domestic autonomy. There seem to be few Puerto Rican defenders for outright cultural, political, and economic independence. Most influential Puerto Ricans with large followings still see a basic need to work in a conciliatory fashion with Capitol Hill, the White House, and the Pentagon. The seeds of Muñoz Marín's conversion are evident in a 1934 article published in *El Mundo* and quoted in Mathews (p. 152): "There is no necessary economic difference between autonomy and independence . . . The issue . . . lies between statehood on the one hand, and independence or autonomy on the other. This is the issue which the U.S. is

called upon to resolve in harmony with the people of Puerto Rico, as soon as possible." With this thinking, Muñoz apparently confused the eventual goals of autonomy and independence as well as laying the framework that Puerto Ricans must always work in harmony with Washington's interests. Upon these two altars, it is difficult to construct an authentic independence movement struck between co-equal sovereign peoples!

As a child of the New Deal, Muñoz gradually took on the world view of his nation's benign oppressor and began to associate independence with "hunger" and "despair." He adopted the view of progressive, reform capitalism through New Deal type social policies and rejected more radical transformations of values and culture, income, and property. Muñoz's main self-deception seems to have been to see *independence* as *divisible*, something that could be indefinitely shelved until economic conditions warranted a turn to its demands and urges. The primacy of socioeconomic growth criteria rather than social justice, economic redistribution, and cultural autonomy forced Puerto Rico to accept the mainland "trickle-down" theory of economic development. This provided basic support for the upper middle class and foreign capitalist sector in the eventuality that they would create jobs and incomes for the working and lower classes. This continues to be the bankrupt policy of the two majoritarian political parties of Puerto Rico.

In all fairness to Muñoz Marín, Puerto Rico had the misfortune to weigh seriously the independence alternative after World War II when the U.S. was the international colossus. The U.S. was not a defeated nor weakened power as were Germany, Japan, Italy, France, Holland, and Great Britain but the major imperial nation to emerge from the conflict. Thus, for example, the Indian, Indonesian, Indochinese, and Algerian struggles are not typically analogous to the Puerto Rican situation. Much of the Puerto Rican leadership in the Statehood (Partido Estadista Republicano, later Partido Nuevo Progresista) and Popular Democratic parties felt and feels well served under the U.S. military-political umbrella and U.S. economic expansionism. Anti-imperialist consciousness was, of course, muted during the New Deal and World War II, and, subsequently, U.S. economic penetration of Puerto Rico became a model for multinational advances in the Third World (Puerto Rico now represents the fifth largest overseas market for U.S. corporations abroad and the first in Latin America).

Muñoz Marín once, some forty years ago, viewed Puerto Rico as a slavish North American colony. His words, then, are more than ever applicable now:

In spite of all these advantages [democratic, stable, peaceful tradition], we may still establish bad governments. It seems to me that the establishment of bad governments by the people of Puerto Rico or the appointment of bad governments by the government of the U.S., is largely in the hands of fate. *We must take our chances . . .* (my emphasis).

Colonial government tends to develop an attitude of bootlicking, toadying, proclamation of a 100% Americanism. . . . Imagine your children brought up in that atmosphere and you will sense how I

and many other Puerto Ricans feel about it. I certainly do not want my children to grow up and live their lives out in the spiritually corrupting atmosphere of a colony. (Muñoz Marin quoted in Bhana, p. 223)

PETER RANIS
York College, CUNY