Excerpts

War Against All Puerto Ricans

Revolution and Terror in America's Colony

NELSON A. DENIS

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For my mother, Sarah, my grandmother, Salome,
and Migdalia, who holds them in her heart.

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There will be war to the death against all Puerto Ricans.

—E. Francis Riggs, Chief of Police of Puerto Rico

They were conquerors . . . They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a grand scale . . . The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much.

—Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

PREFACE

My mother was Puerto Rican. My father was Cuban. They worked very hard, and we lived in a small but spotless apartment in New York City's Washington Heights. I was eight years old when men from the FBI banged on our door at 3 a.m. No one understood what was happening: my mother screamed, my grandmother cried, and I hid behind a curtain. The FBI agents grabbed my father and took him away; we never saw him again.

It was October 1962, the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis, and someone had denounced my father as a spy. There was no trial or administrative hearing, no evidence or due process—he was simply deported to Cuba. A few months later, in June 1963, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy received his annual Immigration and Naturalization Service report, which stated, "Investigation of Cuban refugees increased during this year. Under this pressure, a number of Cubans alleged to be subversive departed prior to the completion of the investigations. These included . . . Antonio Denis Jordan, suspected Cuban G-2 agent in New York City."

My father was an elevator operator and a member of the janitor's union, 32BJ SEIU. He supported the Cuban Revolution and spoke in favor of it during the late 1950s. He even read *Bohemia* (a leftist magazine) and showed me the 1959 "Bohemia of Freedom" issue, with its gruesome photos of bodies massacred by Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista. He was a Cuban patriot, but he was not a spy.

This didn't matter to the United States, which never allowed him to return. My mother raised me by herself, working in belt factories for $50 a week, and I vowed to become a lawyer so that no one would knock on our door again and rip our family apart.

As a Harvard undergraduate, I noticed a strange thing in Widener Library: it had fifty-seven miles of shelves and 3 million books, but the 1973 card catalog contained not even a single volume about Pedro Albizu Campos, the principal figure in Puerto Rican political history. I responded with my own scholarship: a study of the fraudulent constitution of Puerto Rico, which became the cover story for the 1977 *Harvard Political Review*.

Over the subsequent forty years, I have continued to research the life and death of Albizu Campos. I visited my family in Puerto Rico dozens of times, particularly in Caguas, where they helped me meet members of the Nationalist Party, a political organization deeply committed to Puerto Rican independence. Some of these Nationalists served time with Albizu in the Atlanta federal penitentiary. Others were imprisoned with him in La Princesa, a prison in San Juan. Still others were tortured in Aguadilla. All of them had vivid memories of El Maestro (the Teacher) and the revolution he ignited.

I wasn't writing a book yet; I was recovering my own past and understanding certain quirks in the Puerto Rican personality. For example, we see so many huge, surrealistic flags during the New York Puerto Rican Day Parade because all Puerto Rican flags were illegal on the island from 1948 until 1957. Even a Nobel Prize nominee, Francisco Matos Paoli, was sentenced to twenty years in La Princesa for owning one.

Over time I became a lawyer, the editorial director of *El Diario/La Prensa*, and a New York State assemblyman. This enabled me to access more people and information, but I still wasn't writing a book. And then I saw the FBI files.

The bureau kept secret dossiers on Puerto Ricans for over sixty years. There are 1.8 million pages of files about Albizu Campos, the Nationalist Party, Puerto Rico's October 1950 revolution, and over 100,000 Puerto Ricans, most of whom had no idea that they were being followed.

These files contain surveillance notes, telephone taps, bank account information, criminal and medical records, tax returns, credit card numbers,

professional licenses, school transcripts, child support payments, home mortgage documents, job applications, voting and credit histories, wedding lists, sexual profiles, and neighborhood gossip. The FBI used them to monitor and control people. The bureau also used them to destroy careers. When I saw these files, I thought of my father. Infuriated, I finally decided to write this book.

I read thousands of FBI documents and hundreds of newspaper accounts; I scoured university, museum, and historical society archives. I tracked down oral histories, personal interviews, private correspondence, diaries, church registries, and old photos. I read amicus curiae briefs, congressional testimony, Senate committee reports, CIA manuals, and Defense Department contracts. I walked the streets of Puerto Rico where people had been murdered. I talked to their families. Then I started writing.

On October 30, 1950, a violent revolution swept through Puerto Rico: Nationalist assassins were sent to kill President Harry S. Truman; gunfights roared in eight towns; revolutionaries burned police stations, post offices, and selective service centers, representative of the US presence, to the ground.

A bloody shootout raged at the Salón Boricua barbershop—a three-hour gunfight between forty US National Guardsmen (armed with machine guns, grenades, bazookas, rifles, and carbines), the Insular Police, and one lone barber named Vidal. Puerto Rican radio stations covered the battle live and broadcast it over the entire island.

To suppress the revolution, the US Army deployed 5,000 troops and bombarded two towns—the only time in history that the United States has bombed its own citizens. They also arrested thousands of Nationalists and imprisoned their leader, Albizu Campos. While Albizu was in prison, evidence strongly indicates, the US government subjected him to lethal radiation—until it killed him.

This is not a pretty story. If it helps you to understand the world in which we live, then I have done my job. The rest is up to you.

Facts

CHAPTER 1

La Princesa

In 1808 it was a beautiful Spanish castle. In 1976, a US district court ordered it shut down forever, calling it "a notorious monument to man's inhumanity to man." By 1950 it was already a brutal prison where inmates were starved, tortured, and used for medical experiments. People called it La Princesa (the Princess), but it was actually a graveyard—designed to break men and women, to kill their spirits, to grind them into drones, then animals, then feces and ash.

The prison housed over six hundred souls; at least fifty were blind, crippled, lacked an arm, had elephantiasis, or were hunchbacked. Humans with every imaginable deformity walked about in rags, and none were excused from work of some kind or another.[1]

On the outside it looked like a quaint Spanish mission: wood and red-brick masonry and white-framed windows, nestled behind swaying palm trees and topped by a four-foot clock, a trim cupola, and a US flag. Inside it was a rectangular stone fortress, about one hundred by thirty feet, with a cement courtyard in the center ringed by cells on three sides. The fourth side was an eighteen-foot wall with a catwalk patrolled by guards with rifles and dogs.

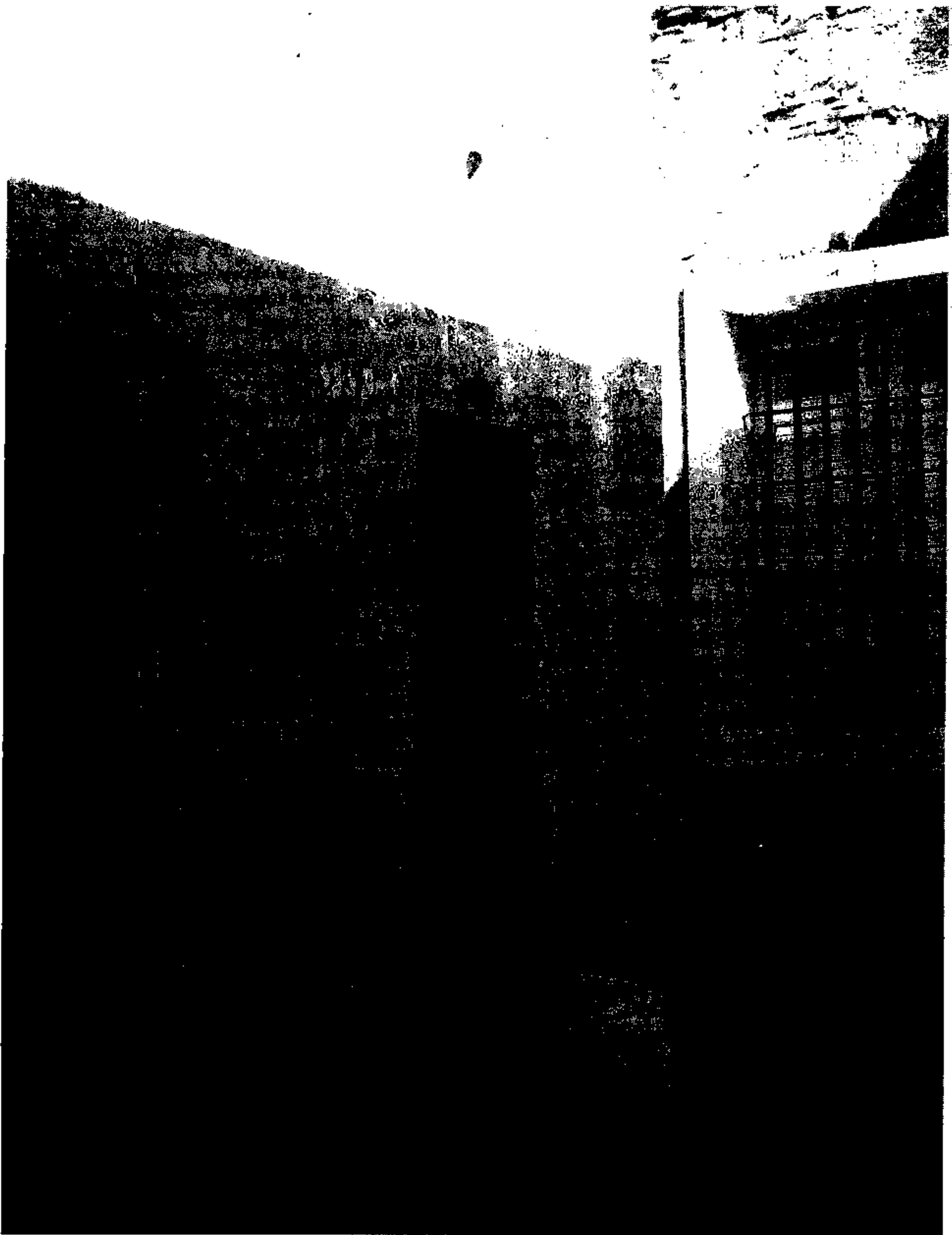
The prison's three *galerías* (galleries) totaled 7,744 square feet and held over 400 inmates (providing less than twenty square feet per inmate); three *galerítas* (little galleries) held another 150. A quarantine gallery held the mentally deranged, and thirty *calabozos* (dungeons) held the "difficult" prisoners.

After the Nationalist revolt of October 1950, the jail became so crowded that *galería* prisoners had to sleep on the floors and in hallways and bathrooms. In the *galerítas*, two or three men slept in every bed, some of which had no mattresses and most of which had no sheets. Many of the mattresses were old, dirty, worn, and torn. Even in the *hospitalíto* (the medical clinic), inmate patients had to sleep on the bare floor.

The dungeons—arranged along a hallway on the first floor, fifteen to a side, all divided by concrete partitions—were famous throughout Puerto Rico. This hallway was covered with filth, barely lit and poorly ventilated. Each row of fifteen cells shared a common roof of iron bars as thick as railroad tracks, topped with steel walkways. The guards patrolled them from opposite ends, stopping when they met in the middle to retrace their steps. It was a vantage point, like a captain's bridge: the guards could look down and see every occupant of every cell. They could also point their rifles at them.

Each dungeon held one inmate, one can of water, and one bucket for human excrement. That was all. There was no sink or toilet, no bed, mattress, or blanket, no other furniture. Prisoners slept on the floor and, after using the buckets, covered them with their shirts to combat the stink and the scarab beetles, which loved to eat from the buckets. The only air and light entered through the iron-bar ceilings, twelve feet over the prisoners' heads. A nauseating odor permeated the entire area. It floated up from the buckets, which were emptied only once every twenty-four hours.

Each morning, two forlorn prisoners and four armed guards went from cell to cell. The prisoners entered, lugged out the buckets, and emptied them into a barrel hanging from their shoulders on two wooden bars. The stench of crap and urine was suffocating. Sometimes, if they felt like it, the guards brought the inmates' breakfast at the same time the buckets were emptied.



Cell door in La Princesa

Photo courtesy of http://freephotooftheday.com/2011/12/06/
la-princesa-puerto rico-tourism-company-san-juan-puerto-rico/

Breakfast was short and simple: a cup of black coffee, *agua de arroz* (water in which rice had been boiled), and a lump of old bread. Lunch and dinner were rice and beans. Once a week the inmates received *carne molida* (ground beef) or *Spam frito* (fried Spam).

Even as they ate, the inmates fought off mosquitoes that flew down from the ceiling, rats that stole their bread, and bedbugs that migrated from cell to cell in search of warm bodies.

The dungeons were filled with sick men. After a few months in confinement—with little food, light, exercise, or fresh air—they became walking skeletons. They grew anemic, suffering from dysentery, hookworm, malaria, and scurvy. As their digestive systems shut down, they lost all desire to eat. Many inmates did not survive the dungeons.

The warden didn't care because the *calabozos* housed highly accomplished criminals: men convicted of theft, looting, arson, murder, and even cannibalism. But the most dangerous prisoners were the Nationalists, and these he did care about. The career of every prison official in La Princesa—from warden to guard—would be destroyed if the Nationalists caused any trouble, inspired prisoners to revolt, or attracted attention from the press. And so they had to be isolated. The Nationalists spent more time in the dungeons than any other group, including the murderers and cannibals.[2]

After the October 30 revolts, mass arrests filled all the prisons with 3,000 prisoners for the next few months. This number gradually diminished as trials were held, and some prisoners (generally the better financed) were found innocent. The week before Christmas 1950, the dungeons were still stuffed to capacity. One man was insane. He counted eternally, as he had for the past six months: "47, 48, 49 . . . 47, 48, 49 . . . 47, 48, 49."

Another man sat hunched in a corner. Had he risen, he would have stood six feet tall—but he was too weak to stand. He'd been in the dungeon for over a year, weighed 110 pounds, and was starving.

A third man was only twenty years old; he had a slender, boyish body and big brown eyes guarded by long dark lashes. Two inmates had died fighting over him.

A fourth man would make a cord out of his pants and hang himself on Thanksgiving Day.

A fifth man lived with a Puerto Rico Upland gecko. He fed it dozens of bedbugs every day and let it crawl all over him. He also talked and sang to it. This man was a murderer.

US Army doctors had convinced a sixth man, named Hector, to swallow "some new pills" for a few weeks. He started vomiting and developed bloody diarrhea, then liver cancer. Hector belonged in a hospital, but La Princesa didn't want any bad publicity, so he went into the dungeons. The army doctors never returned.

Hector's neighbor was insane and smeared feces all over dungeon number seven.

Deusdedit Marrero, a social worker in dungeon number eight, was in the process of losing his mind. He had played no part in the revolution. He was at work when it broke out on October 30, and he was not a Nationalist. Unfortunately, Deusdedit was a Socialist, which was close enough for the Insular Police.[3] They arrested him in his office and sentenced him to twenty years. While still in prison, Deusdedit would learn that his pregnant wife had committed suicide—and he would end his own life.

In the ninth dungeon, Francisco Matos Paoli was a Nationalist and a prolific poet. A few friends sent him cigarettes and cigars, which he bartered with the prison guards for pencils. Paoli wrote every day. Sometimes he snuck a poem out to his fellow Nationalists. Other times he unrolled a cigar, wrote a poem, rolled it back up, and smoked the poem.

He also wrote on the floor and on every wall of his cell. Every square foot had a poem on it. The warden heard about it and made Francisco paint over the walls—but two weeks later, he had covered them with poems again.[4]

Separated from everyone, in the fifteenth dungeon, was a small man with fiery brown eyes and wet towels wrapped around his head. For several days his legs had been black, and his gums were bleeding. Fifty-nine years old and exhausted beyond measure, he paced silently up and down, always the same five steps, back and forth. One, two, three, four, five, and turn . . . an interminable shuffle between the wall and door of his cell. He had no work, no books, nothing to write on. And so he walked.

One, two, three, four, five, and turn . . .

His dungeon was next door to La Fortaleza, the governor's mansion in Old San Juan, less than two hundred feet away. The governor had been his friend and had even voted for him for the Puerto Rican legislature in 1932. This didn't help much now. The governor had ordered his arrest.

One, two, three, four, five, and turn . . .

Life had turned him into a pendulum; it had all been mathematically worked out. This shuttle back and forth in his cell comprised his entire universe. He had no other choice. His transformation into a living corpse suited his captors perfectly.

One, two, three, four, five, and turn . . .

Fourteen hours of walking: to master this art of endless movement, he'd learned to keep his head down, hands behind his back, stepping neither too fast nor too slow, every stride the same length. He'd also learned to chew tobacco and smear the nicotined saliva on his face and neck to keep the mosquitoes away.

One, two, three, four, five, and turn . . .

The heat was so stifling, he needed to take off his clothes, but he couldn't. He wrapped even more towels around his head and looked up as the guard's shadow hit the wall. He felt like an animal in a pit, watched by the hunter who had just ensnared him.

One, two, three, four, five, and turn . . .

Far away, he could hear the ocean breaking on the rocks of San Juan's harbor and the screams of demented inmates as they cried and howled in the quarantine gallery. A tropical rain splashed the iron roof nearly every day. The dungeons dripped with a stifling humidity that saturated everything, and mosquitoes invaded during every rainfall. Green mold crept along the cracks of his cell, and scarab beetles marched single file, along the mold lines, and into his bathroom bucket.

The murderer started screaming. The lunatic in dungeon seven had flung his own feces over the ceiling rail. It landed in dungeon five and frightened the Puerto Rico Upland gecko. The murderer, of course, was threatening to kill the lunatic.

One, two, three, four, five, and turn . . .

The man started walking again. It was his only world. The grass had grown thick over the grave of his youth. He was no longer a human being, no longer a man. Prison had entered him, and he had become the prison. He fought this feeling every day.

One, two, three, four, five, and turn . . .

He was a lawyer, journalist, chemical engineer, and president of the Nationalist Party. He was the first Puerto Rican to graduate from Harvard College and Harvard Law School and spoke six languages. He had served as a first lieutenant in World War I and led a company of two hundred men. He had served as president of the Cosmopolitan Club at Harvard and helped Éamon de Valera draft the constitution of the Free State of Ireland.[5]

One, two, three, four, five, and turn . . .

He would spend twenty-five years in prison—many of them in this dungeon, in the belly of La Princesa. He walked back and forth for decades, with wet towels wrapped around his head. The guards all laughed, declared him insane, and called him El Rey de las Toallas. The King of the Towels.

His name was Pedro Albizu Campos.

CHAPTER 2

Four Hundred Years of Solitude

The King of the Towels was in jail for a serious reason. He was trying to reverse four hundred years of history.

In the sun-splashed paradise of Puerto Rico, you can lie on a beach in the morning, hike through a rain forest during the day, and spend the evening exploring the ancient walls of a colonial city. The white coastal sands glitter like sugar. The water is so pristine that, from an airplane, you'll see several shades of turquoise between the shore and the deep blue of the ocean. Through the middle of the island, the Cordillera Mountains form a series of misty ridges draped in thick sierra palm and pine forest, whose foothills taper gracefully into the Caribbean. Over a thousand silver streams and rivulets gush down the mountains and rush headlong into the sea.

The world's third-longest underground river, the Río Camuy, lies under a beautiful, vast cave system—ten miles of cool limestone caverns and 220 caves—packed with dripping stalactites, giant stalagmites, and flowstone walls.

El Yunque is the only subtropical rain forest in the United States. Wreathed in clouds or framed against a cobalt sky, it rises majestically

with a canopy of forest trees, plunging waterfalls, and natural swimming pools. Its 28,000 acres nourish over fifty species of orchids, as well as giant tree ferns, sierra plants, bamboo thickets, heliconia, ginger, and 225 native tree species, all thriving in an explosion of color and natural beauty. It also houses lizards, iguanas, the coquí tree frog, and seventy-nine types of birds, including the rare green-feathered Puerto Rican parrot (rarely seen outside the Puerto Rican legislature and Washington, DC).[1]

The entire island is volcanic, and its soil is very rich. It is strategically located between North and South America—the first major land mass that a Spanish galleon would encounter after a long and harrowing voyage.

For all those reasons, over four centuries, Puerto Rico became a military and political football.

The abuse of the island started early. In 1493, Columbus made his second voyage to the New World with seventeen ships, 1,200 men, horses, cattle, guns, and smallpox. When he finally reached a major island, it happened to be Puerto Rico. The Taíno Indians welcomed Columbus, but they made a big mistake: they showed him some gold nuggets in a river and told him to take all he wanted.[2] Naturally, this started a gold rush.

Spain named the island Puerto Rico (meaning "rich port") and invaded with embroidered bibles and African slaves. They enslaved the Taínos as well: every Taíno over the age of fourteen had to produce a hawk's bell of gold every three months or have their hands cut off. Since they'd never seen a hawk, a horse, an armored man, or fire-breathing muskets, the Taínos did as they were told.[3] To make matters worse, a strange plague (smallpox) was killing all the Taínos but sparing the Spaniards, which meant they must be gods or at least immortal. This didn't sit well with an old Taíno named Urayoán—and so, in 1511, he conducted a little experiment.

He told a lonely Spaniard named Diego Salcedo that a lake filled with virgins was waiting for him. Diego dashed right over but met a lakeful of Taíno warriors instead. After they drowned him, Urayoán

watched and poked and smelled the body for three days. When Diego began to rot, Urayoán spread the news. Riots broke out all over the island, and Ponce de León shot 6,000 Taínos in order to maintain public order and respect for the queen.[4]

Three centuries later there were no Taínos left, but the situation hadn't changed much. Puerto Rico was still a political football. In 1812 the first Spanish constitution, the Cádiz Constitution, was extended to Puerto Rico, and the island became a province of Spain with the same rights as other provinces. In 1814, the Cádiz Constitution was repealed; in 1820 it was restored, and in 1823 it was abolished. In 1824 the Spanish governor was again given absolute power over Puerto Rico.

On September 23, 1868, nearly 1,000 men rose up in the town of Lares to demand independence from Spain. By midnight they'd taken over the municipal seat of government, deposed the Spanish officials, arrested the Spanish merchants, and hauled them all off to jail. They hoisted a white flag with the inscription "Libertad ó Muerte; Vive Puerto Rico Libre; Año 1868" (Liberty or Death; Free Puerto Rico Lives; Year 1868). They took the town hall and forced the parish priest to celebrate a Te Deum for the establishment of the republic. Then they declared Puerto Rico independent, installed a provisional government, and offered freedom to any slave joining their cause.

The next afternoon, the Spanish militia from nearby Pepino routed the rebels, and troops pursued them from Aguadilla to Arecibo. El Grito de Lares had ended.[5] In response to it, however, a liberal constitution was adopted in 1869, which restored Spanish citizenship to Puerto Ricans, as well as the right to representation in the Cortes Generales (the Spanish parliament).

Thirty years later, in 1897, the Spanish prime minister signed the Carta de Autonomía (Charter of Autonomy), which granted Puerto Rico the right to its own legislature, constitution, tariffs, monetary system, treasury, judiciary, and international borders. After four hundred years of colonial rule, the charter created the free Republic of Puerto Rico.[6] Elections for the new legislature were held in March 1898, and the new government was scheduled for installation in May.

On May 12, cannon blasts awakened everyone in San Juan as twelve US battleships, destroyers, and torpedo boats bombarded the city for

three hours, turning the sky black with cannon smoke. Homes were hit. Streets were torn. El Morro lighthouse and La Iglesia de San José, a sixteenth-century church, were shelled repeatedly. The governor ran to Fort San Felipe del Morro to defend the island with three Ordoñez cannons, but San Juan became a ghost town as 30,000 residents fled the city, the world shattering all around them. The Spanish-American War, declared by the United States on April 25, had arrived in Puerto Rico.[7]

When US soldiers invaded the inner towns, the *New York Times* trumpeted, "Our Flag Raised in Puerto Rico."[8] As the war continued and US troops marched through the island, the Puerto Rican bourgeoisie were still buzzing about liberation, but the peasants—sick of politics, politicians, and promises, no matter what country they came from—couldn't care less. When the American soldiers passed by, local dogs barked at them and farmers kept plowing their fields. They accepted the change in sovereignty with the same fatalism with which they accepted hookworms, hurricanes, and tuberculosis.[9]

Americans were more upbeat about the matter. "Give my best love to Nannie, and do not make peace until we get Porto Rico," wrote Theodore Roosevelt to Senator Henry Cabot Lodge in 1898.[10] "Porto Rico is not forgotten," replied the senator. "We mean to have it."[11] The *New York Journal of Commerce* declared, "We must have Porto Rico," because when a "territory of that nature falls into our hands it must never be parted with."[12]

The *New York Times* noted "the commercial value of Porto Rico" and "the wisdom of taking . . . and keeping it for all time." According to the *Times*, it was "a charming winter resort," a fine naval station with "a commanding position between two continents," and "an island well worth having." In language akin to that of Rudyard Kipling's "The White Man's Burden," the *Times* concluded, "We need it as a station in the great American archipelago. . . . We are not pledged to give Porto Rico independence. . . . [I]t would be much better for her to come at once under the beneficent sway of these United States than to engage in doubtful experiments at self-government, and there is no reason to believe that her people would prefer it."[13] Even the poet Carl Sandburg, who saw active service in Puerto Rico with the 6th Illinois Infantry during the war, wrote, "For four hundred years this island had been run

by a Spanish government in Madrid. Now it was to be American and it was plain that the island common people liked the idea."[14]

On July 4, 1898, in the Central Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn, the Reverend J. F. Carson read from the Holy Bible, "And Joshua took the whole land, and the land rested from war." He sermonized that "the high, the supreme business of this Republic is to end the Spanish rule in America, and if to do that it is necessary to plant the Stars and Stripes on Cuba, Porto Rico, the Philippines or Spain itself, America will do it."[15] That same night, in the Presbyterian Church of Fifth Avenue, the Reverend Robert MacKenzie prophesied, "God is calling a new power to the front. The race of which this nation is the crown . . . is now divinely thrust out to take its place as a world power."[16] Senator Albert J. Beveridge also saw a divine plan. "God has not been preparing the English-speaking and Teutonic peoples for a thousand years for nothing," he declared. "He has made us adept in government so that we may administer government amongst savages and senile peoples."[17]

On July 21, 1898, the US government issued a press release stating, "Porto Rico will be kept. . . . Once taken it will never be released. It will pass forever into the hands of the Unites States. . . . Its possession will go towards making up the heavy expense of the war to the United States. Our flag, once run up there, will float over the island permanently."[18] On the floor of the US Senate, Republican senator Joseph B. Foraker declaimed, "Porto Rico differs radically from any other people for whom we have legislated previously. . . . They have no experience which would qualify them for the great work of government with all the bureaus and departments needed by the people of Porto Rico."[19]

Within a few years, Puerto Rico would be stuffed with "bureaus and departments," becoming a base for Roosevelt's "big stick" policy in the Caribbean.[20] In fact, nearly a decade before the Spanish-American War, US President Benjamin Harrison and Secretary of State James G. Blaine had already been considering the island's value as a navy coaling station, provision center, and stepping stone to the Latin American market.[21]

Eugenio María de Hostos, the great Puerto Rican educator, summed it up as follows: "How sad and overwhelming and shameful it is to see [Puerto Rico] go from owner to owner without ever having been her

own master, and to see her pass from sovereignty to sovereignty without ever ruling herself."[22]

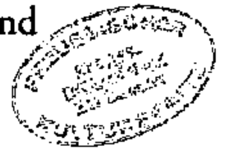
The United States told Puerto Ricans a very different story, however. On July 29, 1898, four days after the landing of American troops, Major General Nelson Appleton Miles issued a proclamation from his military headquarters in Ponce. It was the first official public statement from the US government explaining its plans for Puerto Rico:

> The chief object of the American military forces will be to overthrow the armed authority of Spain and to give to the people of your beautiful island the largest measure of liberties consistent with military occupation.
>
> We have not come to make war against a 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, to bestow upon you the immunities and blessings of the liberal institutions of our government . . . and to give the advantages and blessings of enlightened civilization.[23]

This "enlightened civilization" held some firm views about their neighbors. On February 22, 1899, the *New York Times* ran an article headlined "Americanizing Puerto Rico," describing Puerto Ricans as "uneducated, simple-minded and harmless people who are only interested in wine, women, music and dancing."[24] As late as 1940, *Scribner's Commentator* stated, "All Puerto Ricans are totally lacking in moral values, which is why none of them seem to mind wallowing in the most abject moral degradation."[25] In 1948, popular writers were still ranting that "Puerto Ricans are not born to be New Yorkers. They are mostly crude farmers, subject to congenital tropical diseases, physically unfit for the northern climate, unskilled, uneducated, non-English-speaking and almost impossible to assimilate and condition for healthful and useful existence in an active city of stone and steel."[26]

The most colorful (and color-conscious) opinions were voiced by the southern wing of the Democratic Party. Here are some choice words on the floor of the US Senate from Senator William B. Bate (D-TN), who had served as a major general in the Confederate Army:

> What is to become of the Philippines and Porto Rico? Are they to become States with representation here from those countries, from that heterogeneous mass of mongrels that make up their citizenship? That is objectionable to the people of this country, as it ought to be, and they will call a halt to it before it is done.
>
> Jefferson was the greatest expansionist. But neither his example nor his precedent affords any justification for expansion over territory in distant seas, over peoples incapable of self-government, over religions hostile to Christianity, and over savages addicted to head-hunting and cannibalism, as some of these islanders are.[27]



The national perception was clear: Puerto Ricans were ignorant, uncivilized, morally bankrupt, and utterly incapable of self-rule. The US would protect them, tame their savagery, manage their property, and deliver them from four hundred years of solitude.[28]

CHAPTER 3

Our Children Speak English and Spanish

Central Grammar School was a former military armory: a stone building looming over Calles San Francisco and Luna in the heart of Old San Juan. In 1908, it stood next to a chicken slaughterhouse and had a concrete yard enclosed by an iron-spiked fence, with heavy double doors that slammed shut as students walked in. Stuffed birds, monkeys, and other animals in dusty glass cages lined the long, dark hallways. No one knew how they got there or where they were going.[1]

The students wore green-and-yellow uniforms, sat in neat little rows with their hands folded, and called their teachers "Meester" and "Meeses." They started each day with the Pledge of Allegiance, then sang a patriotic ditty:

> Puerto Rico is a beautiful island
> It belongs to the United States
> Our children speak English and Spanish
> And salute our flag every day

Their flag was the Stars and Stripes, which hung in every classroom. The teachers wore starched blouses or crisp white shirts and wiped their foreheads with crumpled handkerchiefs all day. In the early 1900s, the most popular teacher was Mrs. Del Toro in Room 9 because she wore sweat pads under her arms. Every morning the strings holding them in place slipped out of the short sleeves of her starched white shirts, and she had to turn her back in order to adjust them. The children always loved that.

Then she would get down to teaching. On a given day, while displaying a chart of the major food groups, she might explain in barely comprehensible English the importance of nutrition and eating all the foods on the chart: broccoli and carrots, turnips and iceberg lettuce, plums, a large meatloaf, and other strange items. If a child remarked that none of the vegetables on the chart grew in Puerto Rico and the class laughed, Mrs. Del Toro would slam her pointer on the blackboard.

By way of punishment she might move on to mathematics, instructing the children to pull out books written entirely in English as she wrote an equation on the board: 1 / 2 = ? / 8. "Now remember, to change the denominator of a fraction, you first divide the first denominator by the second denominator," she would explain.[2] The children would look at each other and scratch their heads, not having the faintest idea what she'd said and unable to read the English-language math books.

After lunch, Mrs. Del Toro might settle the class down with a little song.

Pollito, chicken
Gallina, hen
Lapiz, pencil
y Pluma, pen
Ventana, window
Puerta, door
Maestra, teacher
y Piso, floor

With her ruler, she would point at the chickens in the slaughterhouse across the street, at the pencil on a student's desk, at the pen on her own desk, at the window, the door, herself, and the dull wooden floor.

"Very good!" she would exclaim, then unfurl a map at the front of the room. "Today we study the geography of the United States." For the next hour, the children might memorize the names of states, cities, lakes, and rivers 2,000 miles away that they had never seen or heard of. They might learn about an "American Progress" that brought railroads, electricity, telegraph lines, Christianity, and light to that far-flung continent and drove bears, bison, and Native Americans off the map.[3]

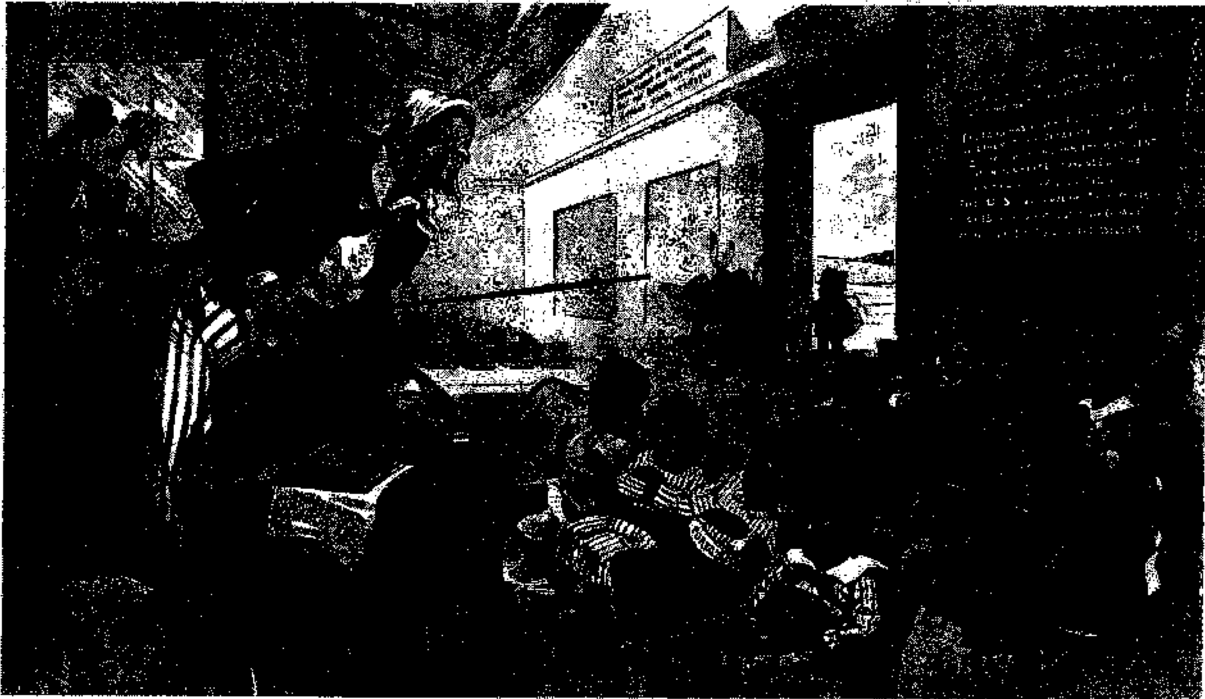
They might learn about "Teodor Ro-se-bel," the president of the United States, and how he led the Rough Riders up San Juan Hill and shot the Spaniards and risked his life to liberate Puerto Rico.

If the children behaved, the day would end with another fun song, albeit one that no one understood.

My bonee lie sober de o chan,
My bonee lie sober de sí,
My bonee lie sober de o chan
O breen back my bonee too mi

This unfortunate scenario was playing out all over the island. Within ten years of US occupation, every subject, in every class, in every public school was being taught in English. The textbooks were all written in English as well—even though none of the students and few of the teachers could understand them. Beyond the obvious plan to enrich a few well-connected US publishers and pedagogues, this represented a direct assault on four hundred years of language and culture under the guise of "civilizing a savage people."[4]

Educators like Paulo Freire, as well as sociologists and historians, have studied this "civilizing" dynamic in colonial relationships: "In the case of a colony—which by its very nature is the object of exploitation by the political power—the purpose of every colonial administration is



US pedagogy in Puerto Rico

Louis Dalrymple, *School Begins*; Illustration from *Puck* magazine, v. 44, no. 1142 (January 25, 1899), courtesy of the Library of Congress

and has always been to overcome, by all possible means, the resistance of the subjugated power. To accomplish this goal requires the active control by those in power of the cultural and educational systems."[5] The president of the Puerto Rico House of Representatives, Cayetano Coll y Cuchí, recognized it immediately. "We knew perfectly well that the soul of a people is incarnated in its language. We would have preferred being without a country, to losing our native tongue. On this issue we joined battle, and my friends and I threw ourselves into the fight."[6]

It was more like trench warfare. In 1902, the Official Language Act (a component of the US Foraker Act) declared that all insular governmental departments, courts, and public offices would use English as a "coequal language." Then the US-appointed commissioner of public instruction ordered that all school children must start the school day saluting the American flag, declaiming the Pledge of Allegiance, and singing the national anthem (in English).[7] Finally, in 1909, the commissioner decreed that speaking Spanish was "forbidden" in all public schools and that everyone—both teachers and students—could be disciplined for violating this rule.[8]

For a while, the English attack worked. On an island where most people lived and died within a twenty-mile radius, everyone struggled to learn a language spoken a thousand miles away.

Then something akin to *The War of the Worlds* occurred. In that novel, Earth is powerless to stop an alien invasion until the humblest creatures, bacteria, destroy the aliens and save mankind from extinction. In a similar fashion, the children of Puerto Rico got fed up with bad report cards and simply stopped going to school. Even under the threat of expulsion, they still refused to attend—anything was better than going home with a D in every subject and catching a beating from their parents. In this manner, children aged six, seven, and eight succeeded where the adults failed.[9] As of 1915, English was still the official language in Puerto Rico's high schools, but Spanish was restored in the grammar schools.[10]

Coincidentally, *The War of the Worlds* was published in 1898, the same year that the United States invaded Puerto Rico.[11]

CHAPTER 4

The Green Pope

From the air, the narrow coastal plain of southern Puerto Rico looks like an irregular green ribbon. It contrasts sharply with the blue waters to the south and the craggy mountains to the north. During the early 1900s, sugar cane, many miles of it in every direction, covered the plain. A railroad cut through the cane, running parallel to the sea and linking the towns along the southern coast.

Most people lived in shacks along that railroad, in barracks and houses around the plazas of the sugar haciendas, or in company towns built near the monster cane-grinding mills. The mills were the most conspicuous landmarks: their chimneys cast long shadows over the shacks and across the cane, exhaust plumes rising hundreds of feet into the air. From far away, the workers' shacks looked regular and neat. The thatched roofs, the waving palms, and the nearness of the sea seemed almost picturesque.

Up close, however, the villages told a different story. Tin cans, paper, coconut husks, and cane trash littered the hard and dusty ground. The houses were patched with old Coca-Cola signs, boards torn from packing cases, and cardboard. Only a few were painted. Inside, large families

crammed into tight living spaces. Curtains draped over laundry lines divided houses into two, three, or more sections.

These villages were all bunched around the *colonias*, the great farms of the corporations that controlled 98 percent of the cultivated land in the municipality of Santa Isabel.[1] The largest farm was Colonia Florida, with its own company store, thirty-six two-room shacks, a two-story house for the *majordomo* (overseer), and two barracks left over from the days of slavery.

In southernmost Santa Isabel a cluster of houses on the sea and along the Ponce and Guayama Railroad and the Central Canovanas Railroad link resembled hundreds of other "line" villages on the southern coast: it had six small stores, no church or post office, and no electricity or running water. Its residents' entire lives revolved around and depended on one thing: the cutting of sugar cane.

At 5 a.m., six days a week, Santa Isabel was still and barren. The roosters crowed, dogs barked, and the surf sounded softly a few hundred feet away. The shacks were shut against the night air, as an easterly breeze stirred the cane and rattled the Coca-Cola signs.

An hour later, the village came to life. Shutters swung open, and tendrils of smoke curled from outdoor stoves on which fresh coffee boiled. Men moved from the thatch shacks along the railway toward the old haciendas to get their daily work orders. Some worked as *macheteros* (sugar cane cutters); others were cultivators, seed cutters, *vagoneros* (oxcart loaders), or *fulgoneros* (railcar loaders). Every *fulgonero* hoisted more than 50,000 pounds of sugar cane onto a railway car every day with his bare hands.

Like many barrio elders, Don Tomás was a *palero* (ditch digger), the highest-skilled and best-paid job in the fields. Another old man, Don Daniel, liked to plant seed—a curious choice for such a tall man because seeding required him to bend over continuously, setting and trapping the seed (which was not a seed at all but a cutting of cane stalk) into place. Twelve-year-old Julio Feliciano Colón was a cutter, the most backbreaking work of all. Every dawn he set out to *defenderse*—to fend for himself and his family. Every evening he came home drenched from head to toe with sweat.[2]

Sugar cane cutter, also known as a machetero
Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Six days a week, Julio and a line of men stood before the cane like soldiers before an enemy. They seemed tiny but implacable, cutting fifteen-foot stalks with their machetes, each man cutting over 1,000 pounds of cane per hour. They lopped off the leaves, cut the stalks in halves or thirds, and dropped the pieces behind them. Every two or three hours, they'd load the cane onto the oxcarts. By the end of the day, the cane fragments would stick to their skin.

The cane choked off any breeze, and the soil radiated heat like an oven. Julio would sweat profusely all day as he grunted and strained alongside the oxen. Crane flies and gnats flew into his mouth when he spoke, and he spat them out like coffee grounds. Mosquitoes bit his eyelids, nostrils, lips, and gums and flew into his ears like buzzing jets. But Julio did not complain.

His father had been a *palero*, but he'd died four years earlier. Now Julio woke up and faced the cane to help feed his mother and younger brother. He hadn't planned it that way; he'd been a good student,

particularly in mathematics and geography. Every few weeks the schoolmaster would raid the cane fields, grab Julio and other truant boys, and haul them back to the schoolhouse. It didn't matter; the next day, Julio would be cutting cane again.

He worked for $4 a week and spent most of it at the Colonia Florida company store, where all the food was dispensed through shaded windows, so he couldn't watch it being weighed. He knew he was being cheated.[3]

Julio ate rice and beans, salted cod, and plantains. Sometimes he was able to afford *carne molida* (ground beef). Mostly he was glad that his mother and brother had food. That was the main thing. His mother took in laundry and sewed blouses every day in their one-room shack, but she earned only fifty cents a week for her needlework.[4]

Every man in the village of Santa Isabel worked in the cane fields. They learned to use a blunt machete as toddlers, to catch land crabs as children, and to cut cane as teens. The few who managed to escape either ended up in jail or were never heard from again, as if the earth had swallowed them up.

While sweating in the fields, the men spat out mosquitos and joked to keep their spirits up. The younger ones talked of revolution. One claimed that he would kill ten Yankees, then buy new shoes. Another dreamed of buying better rum. One joked that he planned to save his money and start a child labor factory. A fourth bragged that he would marry Greta Garbo. When asked his plans for after the revolution, Don Tomás replied, "I am a *platónico*. I grow too old for the señoritas." The older men threatened to report everyone to the *majordomo*.[5]

Don Tomás explained that their revolution could never succeed because of the Green Pope, a man who sits in an office with millions of green dollars at his command. He lifts a finger and a ship starts or stops. He says a word, and a republic is bought. He sneezes and a president, general, or Supreme Court judge falls. He rubs his behind on his chair, and a revolution breaks out. Puerto Ricans, Don Tomás admonished, had to fight this man. But no one knew who or where he was. And even if they did find and kill the Green Pope, a hundred others would replace him.

☙

Don Tomás was not far off. Shortly after the US invasion, Hurricane San Ciriaco, one of the largest in Caribbean history, destroyed thousands of Puerto Rican farms and nearly the entire 1898 coffee bean crop. Of 50 million pounds, only 5 million (10 percent) were saved.[6]

American hurricane relief was strange. The United States sent no money. Instead, the following year, it outlawed all Puerto Rican currency and declared the island's peso, with a global value equal to the US dollar, to be worth only sixty American cents.[7] Every Puerto Rican lost 40 percent of his or her savings overnight.[8] Then, in 1901, a colonial land tax known as the Hollander Bill forced many small farmers to mortgage their lands with US banks.[9]

But with no laws restricting usury, interest rates were so high that within a decade, the farmers defaulted on their loans, and the banks foreclosed. These banks then turned a diversified island harvest—coffee, tobacco, sugar, pineapple, and other fruits—into a one-crop cash cow. That crop was sugar.[10]

The very first civilian governor of Puerto Rico, Charles Herbert Allen, used his brief tenure to become the King of Sugar. When he returned to the United States in 1901, he quickly installed himself as treasurer and then president of the largest sugar-refining company in the world, the American Sugar Refining Company, later known as Domino Sugar. In effect, Allen leveraged his governorship into a controlling interest in the entire island economy.[11]

In 1922, the US Supreme Court declared Puerto Rico a territory, not a state, and as such the US Constitution did not apply there. This lay the groundwork for denying any rights to work, or a minimum wage or collective bargaining granted to US citizens.[12]

In 1926, President Calvin Coolidge appointed Frederick G. Holcomb, auditor for the United Fruit Company, as auditor of the entire island of Puerto Rico.[13]

By 1930, Allen and US banking interests had converted 45 percent of all arable land in Puerto Rico into sugar plantations. These bank syndicates also owned the insular postal system, the entire coastal railroad, and the international seaport of San Juan.[14]

By 1934, every sugar cane farm in Puerto Rico belonged to one of forty-one syndicates, 80 percent of which were US owned; the four

largest syndicates—Central Guánica, Central Aguirre, Fajardo Sugar, and United Porto Rico Sugar—were entirely US owned and covered over half the island's arable land.[15]

By itself, United Porto Rico Sugar owned over 16,000 acres of cane-producing land, four sugar-refining mills, warehouses, harbor facilities, port terminals, railroad cars, and more than one hundred miles of railroad.[16]

With no money, no crops, and no land, Puerto Ricans sought work in the cities. But when the island legislature enacted a minimum-wage law like the one in America, the US Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional—despite AFL-CIO president Samuel Gompers's testimony that "the salaries paid to Puerto Ricans are now less than half what they received under the Spanish."[17]

To make matters worse, US finished products—from rubber bands to radios—were priced 15 to 20 percent higher on the island than on the mainland. Again, Puerto Rico was powerless to enact any price-fixing legislation.[18]

US economic reports labeled this draining of resources from a starving population into the richest country on earth as "a favorable trade balance," and the transfer of wealth did not go unnoticed. Historian Bailey W. Diffie noted in 1931, "Land is passing into the hands of a few large corporations. . . . [T]he sugar industry, tobacco manufacturing, fruit growing, banks, railroads, public utilities, steamship lines, and many lesser businesses are completely dominated by outside capital. The men who own the sugar companies control both the Bureau of Insular Affairs and the Legislature of Puerto Rico."[19] Diffie, a professor at Yale University, also remarked that "practically every mile of public carrier railroad belongs to two companies—the American Railroad Company and the Ponce and Guayama Railroad Company, which are largely absentee owned. . . . Every trolley ride taken by a Porto Rican pays tribute to a foreign owner, about half the towns depend on absentee companies for their lights and power, and more than half the telephone calls go over wires owned by outsiders. . . . [I]t is the absentee capitalist who has made the profit."[20]

In 1929 the *American Mercury* magazine also noted, "The American economy, as introduced by the Guánica, Aguirre, Fajardo and other

great *centrales* was based on the million-dollar mill and the tight control of the surrounding countryside. . . . The development of large absentee-owned sugar estates makes Porto Rico a land of beggars and millionaires, of flattering statistics and distressed realities. More and more it becomes a factory worked by peons, fought over by lawyers, bossed by absent industrialists, and clerked by politicians. It is now Uncle Sam's second largest sweatshop."[21]

Back in the cane fields of Santa Isabel, Don Tomás didn't know any Yale professors or subscribe to the *American Mercury*—but he knew everything that mattered. He felt it deep in his bones. It was a tragic wisdom because he was powerless to do anything about it. His life and death, and everything in between, were controlled by the Green Pope.[22]

CHAPTER 5

A Good Career Move

Barceloneta is unique among the many Puerto Rican municipalities: it is the home of a Pfizer factory that produces all of the Viagra sold in North America. Known as Ciudad Viagra (Viagra City), the town reflects a larger relationship between the island and Big Pharma.[1] As of 2008 Puerto Rico was the world's largest shipper of pharmaceuticals, accounting for nearly 25 percent of total shipments. Sixteen of the twenty biggest-selling drugs in the United States are produced in Puerto Rico, and the profits are enormous.[2] North American sales of Viagra exceed $1 billion per year, with profit margins of roughly 90 percent per pill.[3]

Seventy years ago the town had a different industry. Every year, more than 1,000 women walked into the Hospital Municipal de Barceloneta carrying a little suitcase containing a bathrobe, underclothes, slippers, a rosary, and sometimes a Bible. Each woman would talk to a doctor, fill out a few forms, and be assigned to a bed. Two days later she'd walk out with her tiny newborn, the joy of her life.

She didn't know, however, that her tubes had been cut and that she would never have another baby. For decades the doctors in Barceloneta sterilized Puerto Rican women without their knowledge or consent.

Even if told about *la operación* (the operation), the women were not informed that it was irreversible and permanent. Over 20,000 women were sterilized in this one town.[4] This scenario was repeated throughout Puerto Rico until—at its high point—one-third of the women on the island had been sterilized and Puerto Rico had the highest incidence of female sterilization in the world.[5]

This campaign of sterilization stemmed from a growing concern in the United States about "inferior races" and the declining "purity" of Anglo-Saxon bloodlines. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Claude Fuess, a history teacher and headmaster of the prestigious Phillips Andover Academy, argued, "Our declining birth rate may perhaps indicate a step towards national deterioration. Among the so-called upper and leisure classes, noticeably among the university group, the present birth rate is strikingly low. On the other hand, among the Slavonic and Latin immigrants, it is relatively high. We seem thus to be letting the best blood thin out and disappear."[6] At its annual convention in 1934, the Eugenics Society of Canada (ESC) advertised the keynote speech by its president, Dr. William Lorne Hutton, as follows: "A Brief for Sterilization of the Feeble-Minded. Dr. Hutton and the ESC advocated the elimination of 'mental deficients,' and of races other than 'intelligent Anglo-Saxons.'"[7] In 1927, the US Supreme Court ruled that the state of Virginia could sterilize those it thought unfit, particularly when the mother was "feeble-minded" and "promiscuous."[8] Ten years later, US Public Law 136 legalized all sterilization in Puerto Rico, even for "non-medical" reasons.[9] In 1928, President Calvin Coolidge himself wrote, "We found the people of Porto Rico poor and distressed, without hope for the future, ignorant, poverty-stricken and diseased, not knowing what constitutes a free and democratic government."[10]

Within this context, Dr. Cornelius Rhoads arrived in Puerto Rico and made a brilliant career move. Born on June 20, 1898, the same year as the US invasion, and the son of an ophthalmologist, Rhoads attended Bowdoin College and Harvard Medical School, where he was class president and graduated cum laude in 1924. A somewhat ungainly man with a thick beard, short neck, and a Charlie Chaplin mustache, he had a brusque manner and spoke few words. After teaching pathology at Harvard, he eventually joined the newly formed Rockefeller Anemia

Commission to set up a "research laboratory" in San Juan Presbyterian Hospital. Shortly after his arrival in San Juan, on the night of November 10, 1931, Rhoads got drunk at a party. He emerged to find his car stripped and the tires flat. When he returned to his lab that night, in a foul mood and still drunk, he scrawled a note to a friend named Fred Stewart, who was a medical researcher in Boston:

> I can get a damn fine job here and I am tempted to take it. It would be ideal except for the Porto Ricans—they are beyond doubt the dirtiest, laziest, most degenerate and thievish race of men ever to inhabit this sphere. It makes you sick to inhabit the same island with them. They are even lower than the Italians. What the island needs is not public health work, but a tidal wave or something to totally exterminate the entire population. It might then be livable. I have done my best to further the process of their extermination by killing off eight and transplanting cancer into several more. . . . All physicians take delight in the abuse and torture of the unfortunate subjects.[11]

The letter was discovered and created an uproar throughout the hospital. An investigation by San Juan district attorney José Ramón Quiñones confirmed that of the thirteen recently deceased cancer patients at San Juan Presbyterian, eight had indeed been in Rhoads's care.

La Democracia and *El Mundo* published a photograph of Rhoads's letter. Copies were sent to the governor of Puerto Rico, the League of Nations, the Pan-American Union, the American Civil Liberties Union, newspapers, foreign embassies, and the Vatican. They were offered as evidence of systemic and lethal US racism toward Puerto Ricans.

Rhoads called his letter "a fantastic and playful composition, written entirely for my own diversion." His peers laughed along with him. Rhoads was never indicted and suffered no professional consequences for his actions. Throughout his long career, he supervised a staff of several hundred chemists, technicians, statisticians, librarians, and laboratory assistants. During World War II, he was commissioned as a colonel and assigned as chief of medicine in the Chemical Weapons Division of the US Army. He established US Army chemical weapons laboratories in Utah, Maryland, and Panama, for which he received the Legion of

Merit Award in 1945. After the war, Rhoads served as an adviser to the US Atomic Energy Commission, specializing in nuclear medicine. He directed the Sloan-Kettering Institute, where he supervised all research related to Department of Defense radiation experiments. In the early 1950s, his Sloan-Kettering team began a multiyear study of postirradiation syndrome in humans.[12] Many Puerto Ricans, to their astonishment, realized that "exterminating eight Puerto Ricans and transplanting cancer into several more" had been an excellent career move for Rhoads in the long run. It positioned him as a talented biological warrior and created a niche for him in US medical and military circles. In 1949, Rhoads was featured on the cover of the June 27 issue of *Time* magazine.

CHAPTER 6

Cadets of the Republic

Julio Feliciano Colón was not cutting sugar cane today. He was putting on a pair of white pants, black shirt, black tie, and white overseas cap with a Cross of Calatrava patch. He was going to march and drill today as a member of the Cadets of the Republic.

No one forced Julio to become a cadet. He joined because he was tired of cutting cane sixty hours a week for a salary of $4 and because four Yankee companies owned most of the farmland in Puerto Rico. He joined because he was trapped like a caged animal. He joined because a man who gets up at 4 a.m. every morning, climbs a mountain in rain or fog or killing heat, and sweats all day with mosquitoes in his mouth does not need an empire telling him how to live, which flag to wave, what language to speak, and what heroes to worship.

The Cadets of the Republic marched behind two flags: those of Puerto Rico and the Nationalist Party. The Nationalist flag contained a white Cross of Calatrava, used first during the Crusades and later by French revolutionaries. The black shirts were also symbolic, representing a *luto* (mourning) for the colonial condition of Puerto Rico.

Cadets of the Republic march in Lares, Puerto Rico

The Ruth M. Reynolds Papers, Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY

Founded in 1922, the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico quickly developed a clear and elegantly simple political platform: the complete and unconditional independence of Puerto Rico from the United States. The party rarely participated in the island's elections, and after 1932 it stopped altogether. Instead, the members devoted themselves to public education, international advocacy, and the development of the Ejército Libertador de Puerto Rico (Liberation Army of Puerto Rico), also known as the Cadets of the Republic.

The Cadet Corps was the official youth branch of the Nationalist Party, created in a public assembly on December 17, 1932, in the Victoria Theater in the town of Humacao.[1] The cadets underwent a full training program that included marching, field tactics, self-defense, and survival. Since they had no firearms, they trained and marched with wooden rifles.

The cadets set up recruiting stations in San Juan, Ponce, Arecibo, and a dozen other towns across the island. By 1936, over 10,000 cadets were marching and training in twenty-one towns.[2] They were divided into fifty companies of two hundred cadets, each with a command structure of sergeants, captains, colonels, and one commander in chief, Raimundo Díaz Pacheco. All of them reported to Pedro Albizu Campos, the president of the Nationalist Party.

The Cadets of the Republic and their mission were modeled on the six-day Easter Rising of 1916 in Ireland. Their objective was not outright military victory (impossible against the United States); rather, they aimed to focus international attention on the colonial status of Puerto Rico.[3] Cadets marched in parades, attended Nationalist, patriotic, and religious events, and drilled twice a week on private farms and in vacant lots. In Río Piedras they drilled on the property of the White Star Bus Company and behind an electric utility plant.[4] In Caguas they trained in the back yard of former Insular Police corporal Rafael Colón.[5] They even had an air force: one airplane owned by Horacio and Narciso Basso, Cadet colonels who hid the plane in plain sight: a Pan American airplane hangar in San Juan.[6] When four Nationalists were killed in Río Piedras on the orders of Police Chief E. Francis Riggs, the Bassos flew their plane over the funeral procession, dropping white lilies and a Puerto Rican flag.[7]

The Cadets of the Republic also had a female component, the Nurse Corps of the Liberating Army, also known as the Hijas de la Libertad (Daughters of Freedom). They dressed in white nurse's uniforms emblazoned with the Cross of Calatrava on the left shoulder. They did not drill or engage in military exercises but instead received instruction from registered nurses and participated in parades and other public events.

Nearly every cadet and nurse, except for the officers, was between fourteen and twenty-five years old. With their wooden guns, weekend drills, and one airplane hidden in a Pan Am hangar, the cadets posed no danger to the US regime. But they did represent a symbolic threat—and so, until the mid-twentieth century, many were shot and killed in police stations and at Palm Sunday parades, in town squares and dark alleys, in broad daylight and at dawn.[8]

SJ 100-3

SECRET

2. Origin

The following summary of facts concerning the origin of the Cadet Organization has been condensed from information provided by FAUSTINO DIAZ PACHECO, NPPR member from 1924 to 1939 and brother of RAIMUNDO DIAZ PACHECO (Commander-in-Chief of Nationalist Army in 1950); AGUEDO RAMOS MEDINA, described in sub-section one above, supplemented by reports from Insular Police and informants.

FBI document showing Faustino Díaz Pacheco to be an informant

The FBI followed them for twenty years and created hundreds of *carpetas* (surveillance files) sent directly to J. Edgar Hoover. The FBI also infiltrated the organization fiercely and with surgical precision, producing in July 1952 a thirty-page dossier covering its entire twenty-year history—including its origin, purpose, funding, command structure, membership, meeting venues, and activities. The dossier provided names, including those of six top leaders and twenty-six cadets, spread across eight municipalities. The in-depth report begins with a striking admission. In bold capital letters, it states that it contains information provided by two individuals: the first was Faustino Díaz Pacheco;[9] the second was Aguedo Ramos Medina.[10]

Faustino Díaz Pacheco was a fifteen-year member of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party whose brother, Raimundo Díaz Pacheco, was commander in chief of the Nationalist Liberation Army in 1950. In addition, as of 1948, both Faustino and Raimundo Díaz Pacheco were members of the Río Piedras Municipal Board of the Nationalist Party.[11] Aguedo Ramos Medina had been the first commandant of instruction for the entire Cadets organization in 1933.

In other words, the report demonstrates that for twenty years, from its very inception, the Cadets of the Republic (and therefore the entire Nationalist Party) had been infiltrated at the highest levels. The FBI knew almost every decision, every plan, every move that the Nationalist leadership tried to make.

SJ 100-3

C. CADET ORGANIZATION

1. Official names: "Cadets of the Republic"
"Liberating Army"

According to AGUEDO RAMOS MEDINA, Commandant of Instruction for the Cadet Organization in 1933, the first title given to this organization by PEDRO ALBIZU CAMPOS, upon its formation in 1930, was "Cadetes de la Republica" (Cadets of the Republic). This title persevered and has been used interchangeably with the name "Ejercito Libertador" (Liberating Army). The latter name for the Cadet Organization has been frequently used by ALBIZU CAMPOS and other NPPR leaders in official references to the Organization.

FBI document showing Aguedo Ramos Medina to be an informant

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In Santa Isabel a young sugar cane cutter, barely in his teens, stepped into a cadet uniform and stood proudly in his one-room shack. Julio Feliciano Colón knew his position in life. He was a *jíbaro*, an honest and hard-working countryman. He was the property of the Green Pope, a man he had never met who controlled every aspect of his life.

But for one day a week, Julio was free: a cadet, a liberator, a man with a higher purpose. He was marching toward a glorious future—or at least one without mosquitoes in a sea of sugar cane. After a few years in the Cadet Corps, he was filled with hope on March 21, 1937—the day of the great cadet parade in Ponce, Puerto Rico. It was Palm Sunday, and families from all over the island were invited.

It turned into a massacre.

CHAPTER 7

The Ponce Massacre

For two years after the inception of the organization, while Julio and the Cadets of the Republic ran up and down hills, marched with wooden rifles, and shouted "Que viva Puerto Rico libre!" no one in the US government could have cared less. Then, in January 1934, the Nationalist Party led an agricultural strike that paralyzed the island's sugar economy for a full month and doubled workers' wages to an average of twelve cents per hour. From that moment forward, the party was under a severe microscope.[1] The FBI initiated round-the-clock surveillance of the Nationalist leadership. An additional 115 Insular Police were armed with carbines, submachine guns, and grenades. Nationalists were imprisoned for "incitement to riot" against the United States.[2]

On October 24, 1935, police shot and killed four Nationalists (including the party's treasurer, Ramón Pagán) in what became known as the Río Piedras Massacre. The incident occurred one block away from police headquarters, in broad daylight, before several witnesses. A stray police bullet also killed an old man named Juan Muñoz Jimenez, who was out buying a lottery ticket.[3] On February 23, 1936, the police executed two more Nationalists—Hiram Rosado and Elías Beauchamp—in the

San Juan General Police Headquarters.[4] Then on March 21, 1937, Palm Sunday, the entire island witnessed the bloodiest event in its history.

Thirteen Minutes of Terror

It happened in the town of Ponce, on a pleasant corner of Calles Marina and Aurora, lined with trim two-story buildings and flowery poinciana trees. The Ponce town square, city hall, and several churches were just three blocks away.

The Nationalists had obtained parade permits, and many of them hurried with their families, from all parts of the island, to assemble outside the party's clubhouse in time. By 3 p.m. the street was full with nearly three hundred men, women, and children in their Sunday best, the men in straw hats and white linen suits, the ladies in flowery print dresses, and children playing all around. It looked like a festive afternoon in the park.

The crowd cheered when eighty Cadets of the Republic, twelve uniformed nurses, and a five-piece marching band arrived in support of the Republic of Puerto Rico. As they approached, bystanders commented on the bright white dresses of the Hijas de Libertad and the cadets' neat white trousers, black shirts, and small caps. Everyone smiled and waved palm fronds, in recognition of the Palm Sunday holy day. Julio Feliciano Colón marched proudly and saluted his cadet leader, Tomás López de Victoria.

Suddenly, the mayor of Ponce, José Tormos Diego, and Insular Police captain Guillermo Soldevilla jumped into the street and told everyone to go home; the parade was over. The permit had been revoked on the governor's orders. The governor had also instructed Police Chief Enrique de Orbeta to increase the police presence and prevent the demonstration by any means necessary.[5] Two other police captains and over two hundred police officers stood behind Captain Soldevilla. They all wore jodhpurs, riding boots, and Sam Browne belts, as if dressed for a cavalry battle. They also carried Thompson submachine guns, rifles, pistols, and tear gas.

The mayor, the captain, and a few Nationalists argued for a minute—until López de Victoria ordered the band to play "La Borinqueña,"

the Puerto Rican national anthem,[6] and everyone started to march—permit or no permit. The entire gathering sang along and proceeded joyfully down the street, smiling at friends and family, waving their palm fronds.

Then a shot rang out. Iván Rodriguez Figueras crumpled like a rag doll, blood spurting from his throat with each dying heartbeat. It sprayed a little girl next to him who started screaming. A second shot cracked, and Juan Torres Gregory, an eighteen-year-old looking out a window, fell down dead. A third shot dropped Obdulio Rosario, who was carrying a palm-leaf crucifix. Obdulio's eyes widened, his mouth flew open, and blood rolled down his chin onto his shirt. His gaze ranged wildly over the crowd for a moment; then he fell on his face and clawed outward with his fingers. Everyone stared unbelievingly at the squirming figure on the ground, as Obdulio lifted himself up with his arms, like a lizard, and then dropped for the last time. A thick stream of blood ran down the crushed rock of the roadbed.

Panicked screams and curses erupted as people ran in all directions, but they couldn't escape because Captains Guillermo Soldevilla, Pérez Segarra, and Antonio Bernardi, along with two hundred men with rifles and Tommy guns, were stationed all around them. They blocked every route and created a killing zone. Then they started firing.

A boy was shot on a bicycle. A father tried to shield his dying son and was shot in the back. An orange vendor hid behind a statue of Jesus until a cop ran over and shot him in the head.

Clouds of smoke covered the street as twenty submachine gunners set their feet and sprayed their ten-pound Tommy guns. An old man flew upward, still clutching a palm leaf in his hand, his body split almost in two. Another man raised a bible and started to pray until the shooters blasted off the back of his head in a bright red spray. The bible went flying, and the dead man dropped like a sack of cornmeal.

The flag bearer of the Cadets was killed. Carmen Fernandez grabbed the flag and was shot in the chest. Dominga Cruz Bacerríl, who was visiting from another town, grabbed it and managed to run away.

In a contagion of panic and savagery, the police kept firing. They shot into several corpses again and again. They fired over the corpses, as if they didn't exist. Bullets flew everywhere. They hit the pavement,

The Ponce Massacre begins

© TopFoto/The Image Works; photographer Carlos (Aguilita) Torres Morales; published in *El Imparcial*, April 2, 1937, 16–17

the buildings, the trees, and the telephone poles, filling the air with dust and grit. One could hear the dense, vibratory *whap* as the bullets tore into human flesh. The police climbed onto cars and running boards and chased people down the side streets, shooting and clubbing anyone they could find.

They shot a young girl in the back as she ran to a nearby church. They shot a man on his way home, as he yelled, "But I am a National Guardsman." They split a fruit vendor's head in two with a riot club. They beat a man to death on his own doorstep. They clubbed fifty-three-year-old Maria Hernández del Rosario on the head so hard that her gray matter spilled out onto the street, and people kept slipping on it. They shot men, women, and children in the back as they tried to escape. They kicked several corpses to see if they were really dead and

Cadet Bolívar Márquez Telechea, shot dead

Photographer Ángel Lebrón Robles; published in *El Mundo*, March 22, 1937, 5

shot them again if they weren't.[7] A policeman named Ortiz Fuentes shot four men who pleaded for mercy with their hands raised.[8]

The Tommy gunners kept firing, spurting .45s at full cyclic rate from a range of fifty feet. The guns overheated and started to smoke as people fell by the dozen and blood filled the street and spattered the walls.

Cadet Bolivar Márquez Telechea dragged himself to a wall. Just before dying, with his own blood, he managed to write, "Long live the Republic, Down with the Murderers," and signed it with three crucifixes. A few moments later, he stopped moving forever.

The police kept shooting and clubbing for thirteen minutes. By the time they finished, nineteen men, one woman, and a seven-year-old girl lay dead; over two hundred more were gravely wounded—moaning, crawling, bleeding, and begging for mercy in the street. The air seethed with gun smoke. Everyone moved in a fog of disbelief as policemen swaggered about and blood ran in the gutter.[9]

Julio, the young sugar cane cutter, made it home that night of March 21. He had crawled over dead bodies, dragged wounded women and children away from the machine guns, and walked carefully along the back roads between Ponce and Santa Isabel. When he arrived home around midnight, his mother screamed at the sight of his uniform, which was saturated with blood. But Julio had been lucky—he'd only been grazed by one bullet and sustained a flesh wound on his right arm.

Many others were not as fortunate. As the smoke cleared over Calles Aurora and Marina, the following all lay dead:

- Iván G. Rodriguez Figueras
- Juan Torres Gregory
- Conrado Rivera Lopez
- Georgina Maldonado (seven-year-old girl)
- Jenaro Rodriguez Mendez
- Luis Jimenez Morales
- Juan Delgado Cotal Nieves
- Juan Santos Ortiz
- Ulpiano Perea
- Ceferino Loyola Pérez (Insular Police)
- Eusebio Sánchez Pérez (Insular Police)
- Juan Antonio Pietrantoni
- Juan Reyes Rivera
- Pedro Juan Rodriguez Rivera
- Obdulio Rosario
- Maria Hernández del Rosario
- Bolivar Márquez Telechea
- Ramon Ortiz Toro
- Teodoro Velez Torres

Ponce Massacre victims, killed on Palm Sunday

Photographer Carlos Torres Morales, March 21, 1937; published in *El Imparcial*, April 1, 1937, 1

The Cover-Up

After it was all over, Puerto Rico's chief of police, Colonel Enrique de Orbeta, arrived on the scene. He walked calmly through the carnage in a bright white suit, issuing commands. When there was no one left to shoot, Orbeta looked at the corpses in a sea of blood and did some quick thinking. Although he took his orders from Governor Blanton Winship, he and his men had just killed seventeen unarmed civilians and wounded two hundred more.

In order to explain all this, the colonel made a cruel decision. He saw a cameraman from *El Mundo*, Ángel Lebrón, running through the street, photographing everything. He also noticed a police officer, Eusebio Sánchez Pérez, a victim of friendly machine-gun fire. Orbeta called over the *El Mundo* photographer and several of his men, and they choreographed a series of "live action" photos to show that the police were somehow "returning fire" from Nationalists who were, at this point, already lying dead in the street.

The photos were cynical and obviously staged. One of them appeared on the front page of *El Mundo* on March 23, 1937, showing Colonel Orbeta and two of his men scanning the rooftops for Nationalist snipers. Everyone was neatly arranged around the corpse of Officer Eusebio Sánchez Pérez—who had already been killed in the policemen's own crossfire—to suggest that Nationalist snipers had been shooting down at the police and that Orbeta's officers had only engaged in self-defense.

The ruse did not work. Every island newspaper reported that there was no one to exchange fire with; that the cadets, the Nationalists, and everyone in the parade had been unarmed; that their only weapons had been Palm Sunday leaves. In the pages of *El Mundo*, a doctor from a local hospital, José A. Gándara, testified that many of the wounded he'd seen had been shot in the back.[10]

Six days after the massacre, *Florete* magazine ran an illustration by popular cartoonist Manuel de Catalán. It was an exact re-creation of the staged photo with Colonel Orbeta and his two hapless policemen, staring up at the rooftops, looking for nonexistent snipers.[11] The caption under the cartoon read, "Now we can say that they fired at us from the rooftops."

Police Chief Orbeta poses for a photo, "searching" for nonexistent snipers

Photographer Ángel Lebrón Robles, March 21, 1937;
published in *El Mundo*, March 23, 1937, 1

On April 2, 1937, the photographer who took the panoramic shot of the massacre, Carlos Torres Morales, published his own account of what he'd seen that day. He described the massacre as a "mass assassination."[12]

In addition to the still photographers taking photographs, a newsreel director named Juan Emilio Viguié had filmed the entire slaughter from a dark window.[13] Over the next twenty-five years, Viguié would show his thirteen-minute movie clip to private, very carefully selected audiences. It became, in effect, the Zapruder film of Puerto Rican history.

Immediately after the massacre, Governor Blanton Winship blamed it on "Nationalist terrorists," and his Insular Police followed the wounded to Tricoche Hospital in Ponce, arresting them in their stretchers and hospital beds. The Ponce district attorney, R. V. Pérez Marchand, resigned

". . . y ahora podemos decir que nos dispararon desde las 'azoteas.'"
Caricature by Manuel de Catalán; published in
Florete magazine, March 27, 1937, 11

his post rather than carry out Governor Winship's order to indict the innocent survivors of the massacre, for "murdering" themselves.[14] But his successor, Pedro Rodriguez-Serra, pressured witnesses and family members to sign false affidavits regarding the events of that day.[15]

The island newspapers, especially *El Imparcial* and *El Mundo*, whose photographers had witnessed and filmed the entire massacre, were not so easily pressured. They ran photographs of the scene, showing the bullet holes from the machine guns.[16] Their front pages screamed about the Ponce Massacre and repeated the words of slain cadet Márquez Telechea, written in his own blood:

¡VIVA LA REPÚBLICA!
¡ABAJO LOS ASESINOS!

In El Norte, however, the US newspapers were telling a different story. The *New York Times* wrote that seven Puerto Ricans were killed in a "Nationalist riot" and that sixty-eight Nationalists had been arrested.[17] The *Washington Post* reported that "the battle started . . . when Nationalists fired on police."[18] The *Detroit News* headline read, "Puerto Ricans Riot."[19]

Of the fourteen articles that discussed the massacre in the *New York Times* in 1937, eleven used the word "riot" to describe the incident. Of the nine articles published in the *Washington Post* that year, seven used the same term.[20] Other frequent terms in the *Times* and *Post* were "outbreak,"[21] "battle,"[22] "disturbance,"[23] "political riot,"[24] "March uprising,"[25] "pandemonium,"[26] "liberty riots,"[27] and "lamentable affair."[28] None of the major newspapers—not one—called it a "massacre," "killing," "slaughter," or any of the other words used by the insular press. The largest and most authoritative US press organizations merely regurgitated an established narrative that Puerto Ricans had rioted on Palm Sunday and somehow shot, killed, maimed, and wounded themselves.

The Hays Commission

In the weeks following the massacre, it appeared that dozens of Nationalists would be prosecuted, though no one could explain why—perhaps for the crime of getting shot. Governor Blanton Winship told the public that his policemen had acted "with great restraint" and "in self-defense" and that his police chief had shown "great patience, consideration and understanding, as did the officers and men under him." Accordingly no police officer was fired, demoted, suspended, convicted, jailed, or otherwise punished.[29]

The insular press refused to let the governor get away with this charade. They hammered at him and called for his impeachment. Article upon article appeared about the massacre and its aftermath.[30] A political cartoon in *El Imparcial* showed *la mano del pueblo* (the hand of the people) pointing squarely at the governor.[31]

Two months passed. Winship stuck to his story and issued no apology. Finally, the American Civil Liberties Union, led by Arthur Garfield

Ponce Massacre funeral procession
Photographer Carlos Torres Morales, March 28, 1937;
published in *El Imparcial*, March 29, 1937, 5

Hays, conducted a ten-day investigation in Ponce and San Juan. Finally, on May 22, 1937, a throng of more than 4,000 overran the Plaza Baldorioty in the capital, awaiting the declaration of the Hays Commission's conclusions.[32]

Just before sunset, as the electric lights turned on in the plaza, the commission announced three findings:

1. The facts showed that the affair of March 21 in Ponce was a "MASSACRE" (caps theirs).
2. Civil liberties had been repeatedly denied during the previous nine months by order of Governor Blanton Winship, who had failed to recognize the rights of free speech and assembly and threatened the use of force against those who would exercise those rights.
3. The Ponce Massacre arose out of the denial by the police of the civil right of citizens to parade and assemble, a denial ordered by the governor of Puerto Rico.[33]

In its formal summary, the Hays Commission wrote, "When we began our investigation we objected to naming our committee the 'Committee for the Investigation of the Ponce Massacre.' Now that we have heard all the proofs we agree that the people of Ponce had given this tragedy the only title it can possibly have: The Ponce Massacre."

The island newspapers reported the findings immediately. Blanton Winship ultimately lost his governorship in 1939, the Nationalists were all acquitted, and the matter was soon forgotten up north. But the full meaning of the Ponce Massacre was never lost on the people of Puerto Rico, over 20,000 of whom attended the funeral ceremonies in Ponce and Mayagüez.

Seventeen men, women, and children had perished on Palm Sunday, nineteen if you include the policemen caught in their own crossfire. Dozens more had been maimed for life. Hundreds had been wounded. A tragic awareness would soon spread throughout the island: the United States cared more about Nazi war crimes in Europe than murder in broad daylight in Puerto Rico.

The police riot in Ponce, under the orders of Governor Blanton Winship, was an instance of state-sponsored terror intended to cow an entire population into submission—particularly those who wanted independence—with a show of deadly brutality.[34]

CHAPTER 8

It's Only Chinatown

> When you consider, Mr. Speaker, that these gentlemen are sent there to make laws for a country they do not know, for a people whose laws, customs, and language they do not know . . . you may imagine, Mr. Speaker, the probability of their doing well.[1]
>
> —**FEDERICO DEGATAU, the first resident commissioner from Puerto Rico, speaking to the US Congress in 1899**

The film noir classic *Chinatown* is filled with rape, incest, murder, police assassins, and a massive land grab. It all ends with one of the great lines in American film—"Forget it, Jake; it's Chinatown"—five words that capture the seamy underside of the American dream.

The line also encapsulates America's view of Puerto Rico throughout the early twentieth century. The island was "down there" somewhere. Over 1,500 miles of ocean separated it from Washington, DC; over 1,000 miles lay between it and Miami. There were no televisions or computers, commercial flights were few, and boat travel from New York to San Juan took five days. Even the US Congress took thirty-four years to spell the island's name correctly—as "Puerto Rico" rather than "Porto Rico." Separated by an ocean, a language, and four hundred

years of Spanish history, Puerto Rico and the United States existed on the same planet but in two different worlds. The concept of "what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas" was taken much further on the island. As far as the United States was concerned, what happened in Puerto Rico never happened at all.

This attitude was clear when the American press labeled the Ponce Massacre a "riot." It was clear when ownership of most of Puerto Rico's land was transferred to a few US banks. It was clear when a wave of carpetbaggers descended on the island like a plague of locusts.[2] For fifty years, Puerto Rico became the land of second chances: the place where poor relations, family embarrassments, Ivy League alcoholics, and political hacks could seek their fortunes with little or no oversight from up north. After all, it's only Chinatown.

This cavalier view of an entire people was most apparent in the choice of men sent to rule over them: the governors of Puerto Rico, appointed by the president of the United States.[3]

Charles Herbert Allen was the first civilian governor of Puerto Rico (1900–1901). Though he never served in the armed forces, he loved to dress in military regalia and have people address him as "colonel." He arrived like a Roman conqueror with a naval cannon salute, the Eleventh United States Infantry Band, and hundreds of armed men.[4] He marched through the heart of San Juan and into the governor's mansion.[5]

The mansion was gift-wrapped. Allen delivered his inaugural address behind the largest, most imperial flags that Puerto Ricans had ever seen.[6]

Allen had been a congressman, a US Navy bureaucrat, and commissioner of prisons for Massachusetts. During his one year as governor, he developed a passion for business. It started the moment he set foot in Puerto Rico on April 27, 1900.

Within a matter of weeks, and with little consultation or oversight, Allen created a budget for the entire island.[7] He raided the island treasury by raising property taxes, withholding municipal and agricultural loans, and freezing all building-repair and school-construction funds.

He redirected the insular budget to subsidize US-owned farm syndicates. He issued no-bid contracts for US businessmen and subsidized roads built by agents from his father's Massachusetts lumber business (at double the cost).[8]

Through his "dark room budget," Allen created new agencies, offices, and salary lines—all staffed by US bureaucrats. By the time he left in 1901, nearly all eleven members of the governor's Executive Council were US expatriates, and half the appointed offices in the government of Puerto Rico had gone to visiting Americans—626 of them at top salaries.[9]

But Allen had a larger plan. It was hidden in plain sight, like the purloined letter, within his first annual report to US President William McKinley. First, he wrote,

> Porto Rico is a beautiful island with its natural resources undeveloped, and its population . . . unfitted to assume . . . the management of their own affairs.[10]
>
> The soil of this island is remarkably productive . . . as rich as the delta of the Mississippi or the valley of the Nile.[11]
>
> With American capital and American energies, the labor of the natives can be utilized to the lasting benefit of all parties.[12]

Then Allen appealed to vanity and greed:

> The introduction of fresh blood is needed, and when the American capitalist realizes . . . that there is a supply of labor accustomed to the Tropics and . . . that the return to capital is exceedingly profitable . . . he will come here with his capital.[13]
>
> Porto Rico is really the 'rich gate' to future wealth . . . by that indomitable thrift and industry which have always marked the pathway of the Anglo-Saxon.[14]

Finally, the governor got down to business:

> The yield of sugar per acre is greater than in any other country in the world.[15]

> A large acreage of lands, which are now devoted to pasturage, could be devoted to the culture of sugar cane.[16]
>
> Molasses and rum, the incidental products of sugar cane, are themselves sufficient to pay all expenses of the sugar planters and leave the returns from his sugar as pure gain.[17]
>
> The cost of sugar production is $10 per ton cheaper than in Java, $11 cheaper than in Hawaii, $12 cheaper than in Cuba, $17 cheaper than in Egypt, $19 cheaper than in the British West Indies, and $47 cheaper than in Louisiana and Texas.[18]

This was no mere first annual report to the president. It was a business plan for a sugar empire, and Allen quickly staked his claim. A few weeks after handing in this report, on September 15, 1901, Allen resigned as governor.[19] He then headed straight to Wall Street, where he joined the House of Morgan as vice president of both the Morgan Trust Company and the Guaranty Trust Company of New York.[20] He built the largest sugar syndicate in the world, and his hundreds of political appointees in Puerto Rico provided him with land grants, tax subsidies, water rights, railroad easements, foreclosure sales, and favorable tariffs.

Charles Herbert Allen became the Green Pope. By 1907 his syndicate, the American Sugar Refining Company, owned or controlled 98 percent of the sugar-processing capacity in the United States and was known as the Sugar Trust.[21] By 1910 Allen was treasurer of the American Sugar Refining Company, by 1913 he was its president, and by 1915 he sat on its board of directors.[22] Today his company is known as Domino Sugar.

As the first civilian governor of Puerto Rico, Charles Herbert Allen used his governorship to acquire an international sugar empire and a controlling interest in the entire Puerto Rican economy. No one stopped him. Why should they? It's only Chinatown.

On November 20, 1921, the steamer *Tanamo* lurched into New York Harbor with several people screaming on board. A gangplank was hurried into place, and the governor of Puerto Rico ran out yelling, "There's a fire on the ship! They're trying to kill me!" According to the governor,

the fire had been caused by "an infernal machine" secreted in the bowels of the vessel by a Puerto Rican patriot with the intention of sending his honor to the bottom of the sea. Some stevedores rushed aboard and, lo and behold, there was a fire in the ship's hold—she sank at the pier the very next day.

It was tremendous news, making the front page of the *New York Times*.[23] No one ever found the machine or the Puerto Rican, but in all fairness, the governor was not delusional. E. Montgomery Reily was the most hated man in Puerto Rico. In four short months, Reily had managed to insult virtually every politician, journalist, farmer, teacher, priest, and bootblack in Puerto Rico. Almost everyone wanted to eliminate him—if not from the world at least from the island. His arrogance and contempt for Puerto Ricans hastened his downfall.

On April 30, 1921, President Warren G. Harding appointed Reily, a former assistant postmaster in Kansas City, governor of Puerto Rico as a political payoff. Reily took his oath of office in Kansas City, then attended to "personal business" for another two and a half months before finally showing up for work on July 30.[24] By that time, he had already announced to the island press that (1) he was "the boss now," (2) the island must become a US state, (3) any Puerto Rican who opposed statehood was a professional agitator, (4) there were thousands of abandoned children in Puerto Rico, and (5) the governorship of Puerto Rico was "the best appointment that President Harding could award" because its salary and "perquisites" would total $54,000 a year.[25]

Just a few hours after disembarking, the assistant postmaster marched into San Juan's Municipal Theater and uncorked one of the most reviled inaugural speeches in Puerto Rican history. He announced that there was "no room on this island for any flag other than the Stars and Stripes. So long as Old Glory waves over the United States, it will continue to wave over Puerto Rico." He then pledged to fire anyone who lacked "Americanism." He promised to make "English, the language of Washington, Lincoln and Harding, the primary one in Puerto Rican schools" (it already was).[26] And he repeatedly referred to Puerto Rico as "these islands."[27]

Reactions to Reily were prompt. *La Democracia* portrayed the speech as "the ridiculous pose of a schoolteacher, of things he doesn't know

about. He seems to think we're primitives."[28] *La Correspondencia* agreed that Reily showed "no knowledge of our manner or being."[29] *El Mundo* noted Reily's "hard and threatening tone."[30] *El Tiempo* wrote that Reily intended to "liquidate" the Union Party.[31] From that moment on, *La Correspondencia* lambasted Reily every week, in both English and Spanish. *La Democracia* carried a series of "open letters to Reily," some of them titled "Letter to the Emperor" and "Darling Caesar."[32]

Reily himself stated, "I received a number of letters threatening my life, others telling me to leave the island within 48 hours or else I would be killed, and that if I drove through the streets I would be murdered."[33] In long, rambling letters to President Harding, he wrote that "Porto Ricans are children,"[34] that they could not be trusted,[35] that "every Porto Rican professional politician carries a pistol,"[36] that his commissioner of immigration "is a half-blooded negro . . . the kind of man I cannot associate with,"[37] and that he had fired the treasurer of Puerto Rico because "he lived all the time with a negro woman."[38] In order to maintain law and order among all these children, half bloods, and Negroes, Reily reinstated the death penalty in Puerto Rico.[39]

The month after Reily's boat caught fire, things heated up again. A succession of Puerto Rican leaders steamed up to Washington, DC, demanding Reily's removal because he spent half his time outside Puerto Rico[40] and had recruited five carpetbaggers into the highest (and highest-paid) positions in his administration.[41] These included John R. Hull, the governor's own nephew and private secretary; George S. McClure of Kansas City, the chief of the Puerto Rican "Secret Service"; William Kessinger of Kansas City, auditor; Kessinger's son, an "inexperienced youth," assistant auditor; and a Mrs. Liggett of Kansas City, assistant commissioner of education. Reily had brought all of them down from Kansas City, and none of them had any knowledge of Spanish.[42] When the US Senate requested a record of Reily's appointments, he gave them an incomplete list showing none of these five individuals.[43] He then omitted the entire list of appointments in his annual governor's report for fiscal year 1920–1921.[44]

The fiasco continued when on April 7, 1922, a grand jury in San Juan brought formal charges of "misuse of public funds for private purposes" against Governor Reily, his secretary John Hull, and auditor William

Kessinger. The three men had used the fiction that "Puerto Rico owed the Governor $5,000" to withdraw this amount from the insular treasury. When Reily realized the investigation was serious, he sent a personal check for $1,449.03 to the auditor's office,[45] then fired San Juan district attorney Ramón Díaz Collazo to prevent him from filing the indictment. When the DA argued that he was being removed illegally, Reily had the police forcibly eject him.[46] Then, when the grand jury report was handed to Salvador Mestre, Puerto Rico's attorney general, Reily tried to get him fired as well.[47] The vice president of the Puerto Rico House of Representatives, Alfonso Lastra Charriez, wrote, "If revolution does not come soon, we shall die of nausea at contact with so much filth. . . . I accuse E. Mont Reily the Governor of Porto Rico, and J. R. Hull his private secretary, of obtaining money belonging to Porto Rico for their own benefit, using criminal means. I accuse them of being *thieves*."[48]

Congressman Horace Mann Towner, chairman of the House Committee on Insular Affairs, wrote to President Harding that the grand jury's report and Reily's subsequent actions were "most embarrassing."[49] US Secretary of War John W. Weeks forbade Reily from speaking publicly on political issues.[50] A *New York Times* reporter wrote of rumors of Reily's impending resignation.[51] Another reporter wrote, "The Governor chews gum. He is short, baldish, plump with a dimple. The boys who know him warn you to nail down the furniture."[52] The entire island joined in the fun and dubbed Reily "Moncho Reyes." Suckling pigs, called *moncho reyes*, were barbecued and devoured. Songs and plays about Moncho Reyes were performed throughout the island and caused great hilarity—because *moncho* is Caribbean slang for "congenital idiot."[53] When an entire island is laughing at its colonial governor, it is safe to say that he has outlived his usefulness. It is impossible to subjugate people who are laughing at you.[54]

Reily tendered his letter of resignation on February 16, 1923.[55] In less than two years' time, he'd gone from assistant postmaster to petty thief, caught with his hand in the till. This was the man the president of the United States had sent to govern Puerto Rico.

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The cigar, massive ring, waterproof "Oyster" Rolex watch, and colorful shirt and tie combo said it all. He landed in Puerto Rico with all the bluster and showmanship of P. T. Barnum and treated the island like a three-ring circus, and it all exploded in his face. He was forced to resign within six months.

Born dirt poor in the backwoods of Kentucky, Robert Hayes Gore Sr.'s early fortune was built on a gimmick. While working at the *Terra Haute Post*, he began to offer traveler's insurance for one cent a week to the newspaper's subscribers. Within one year, by January 1922, he was selling that same life insurance through 132 daily newspapers, and his 20 percent commission exceeded $100,000 per year (in 2014 dollars, that would be $1.4 million).[56] By 1930, Gore had purchased the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News* for $75,000, acquired newspapers in Daytona Beach and Deland, built a waterfront mansion (the old Angler's Club Hotel on Bontona Avenue), and was developing Florida real estate. In his spare time he wrote a children's fiction series called *Wampus Cat* and *Renfro Horn* young adult mysteries.[57] Life, for Gore, was good.

Then he entered politics. He gave $10,000 to Democratic Party leader James Farley and supported Franklin Delano Roosevelt's presidential bid through his newspapers.[58] In exchange, in August 1933, he received a convenient appointment. As governor of Puerto Rico he could shuttle back and forth to his Florida properties and develop further business around the Caribbean basin. It was a crude but workable political fix. There was only one problem: Gore was a brilliant businessman but one of the most inept governors in the history of Puerto Rico.

The *Nation* reported, "When he was appointed, Mr. Gore was not quite sure where Puerto Rico was. After a talk with him, it is clear that he is still confused on this point."[59] Before taking office he said to the president of Cuba, Gerardo Machado, of the anti-American sentiment and agitation there, "Unless you put an end to these outrageous goings-on here, the United States Government will send an army to do the job for you."[60] Machado telephoned President Roosevelt to inquire about this imminent invasion.

In 1933, Gore went to the Chicago World's Fair and told the press that Puerto Rico should become a US state.[61] The Department of War sent him a furious telegram, reminding him that "Puerto Rico is not

even approximately prepared for statehood" and that statehood "is a policy matter for the War Department, the President, and Congress. The whole point of naming an American as Governor, not a Puerto Rican, was precisely to avoid this kind of political pitfall."[62]

FDR appointed Gore on April 29, 1933. Upon arriving in Puerto Rico on July 23, Gore announced his political program. He proposed an international cockfighting carnival in order to boost tourism.[63] He wanted all "disloyal" teachers removed from the school system on grounds of treason.[64] He wanted less Spanish in classrooms and preferably none.[65] He wanted Education Commissioner José Padín removed immediately because he was too "pro–Puerto Rican."[66] He wanted political appointees to provide him with an undated letter of resignation so that he could fire them at will.[67] He wanted Puerto Rican workers to relocate to Florida, especially to Fort Lauderdale.[68] He wanted Puerto Rico to produce large quantities of rum.[69] He wanted to train nightingales to sing the "Star Spangled Banner" and sell them in Texas for $50.[70]

The reaction to Gore's program was less than enthusiastic. Two thousand students paralyzed the University of Puerto Rico and marched to the governor's mansion carrying a casket, demanding his resignation. A bomb went off at the governor's summer home in Jajomé Alto. Four sticks of dynamite were found in the governor's mansion. *La Democracia* wrote, "Mr. Gore will disappear from Puerto Rico as a liar, for his incompetence, for his vindictiveness, for his fantasy, for being useless, for his ineptness, for his stupidity," and a Puerto Rican senator published an editorial titled "Governor Gore You Are a Damn Liar."[71]

When an agricultural strike broke out in November 1933, Gore was utterly incapable of slowing it down. By January 1934, it had spread throughout the entire island. Alarmed US corporations and sugar syndicates formed the Citizens Committee of One Thousand for the Preservation of Peace and Order and cabled President Roosevelt that "a state of actual anarchy exists. Towns in state of siege, police impotent, business paralyzed."[72]

Gore announced that someone was trying to poison his family and demanded that the FBI investigate all of his detractors, including senators, editors, students, labor leaders, sugar cane workers, and the chef in the governor's mansion. The request was declined, but the

War Department sent the president of Dartmouth University, Dr. Ernest Hopkins, to make sense of the situation. Hopkins's report sealed Gore's fate: "Robert Gore is probably the worst blunderer that ever came along. . . . He has the genius for doing things wrong and has a feeling of hostility or suspicion towards anybody not connected with the political group with which he is working."[73]

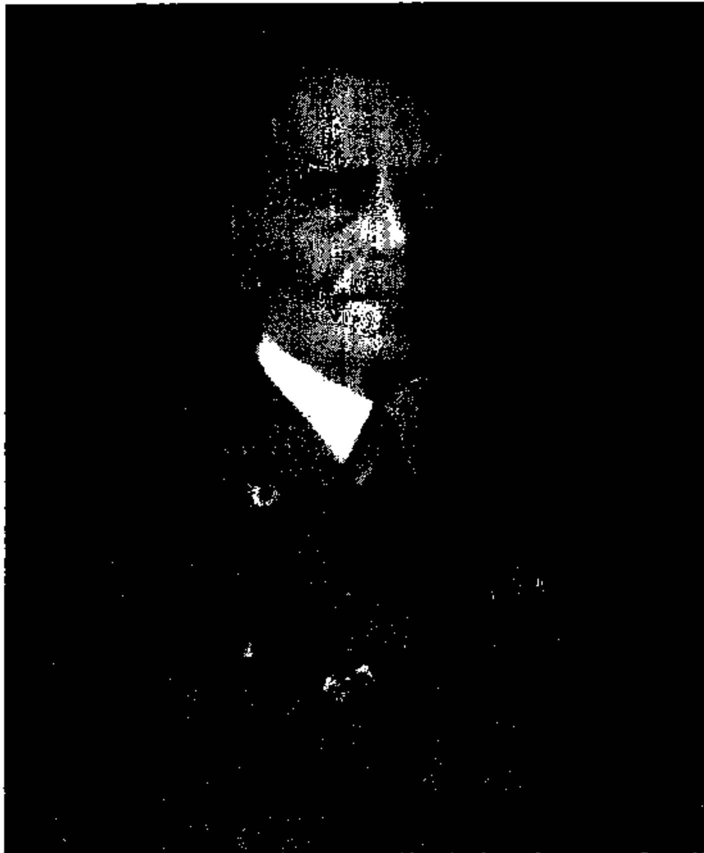
On January 12, 1934, President Roosevelt accepted Gore's resignation. He had lasted only six months and was physically and emotionally broken, but he did win one moral victory. Before he left the island, Gore uprooted the prized orchids from the inner patio of the governor's mansion, smuggled them back to Fort Lauderdale, and planted them around his house.[74]

While ex-governor Gore was pulling out the orchids at the governor's mansion, President Roosevelt was pulling out his hair over Puerto Rico. A new labor union, the Asociación de Trabajadores de Puerto Rico (Workers Association of Puerto Rico) was demanding twelve cents an hour for its workers. The island-wide agricultural strike wasn't slowing down. The Citizens Committee of One Thousand for the Preservation of Peace and Order was in a panic, sending endless telegrams to Roosevelt about "paralyzed" business and exploding "anarchy." Despite his New Deal program of "relief, recovery, and reform," Roosevelt took a different approach to Puerto Rico.

Roosevelt listened to the Citizens Committee and the people clamoring for a "strong" governor, a military man who could "straighten things out in Porto Rico."[75] To restore law and order, he appointed General Blanton Winship, a retired army general from Macon, Georgia. Unfortunately, in the words of one Puerto Rican senator, Winship was "the most disastrous governor that Puerto Rico has had in this century."[76]

Winship's two primary legislative proposals were to plant gardens throughout Puerto Rico and to reinstate the death penalty. The latter went nowhere. Capital punishment was abolished in 1929 and never reinstated.[77]

From the moment he arrived, General Winship proceeded to militarize the entire island. He urged the building of a $4 million naval air



Governor Blanton Winship
Courtesy of the Library of Congress

base,[78] the cost of which ultimately ballooned to over $112.5 million.[79] He created new, vigorous police-training camps and spent his weekends touring them, along with every US military installation.[80] He also added hundreds of men to the insular police force, equipping every unit with machine guns, tear gas, and riot gear, and painted their cars a suggestive new color: blood red.[81] Winship also conveyed power and authority through the adroit use of police uniforms, which resembled those of World War II military officers.[82]

The man FDR sent to solve "the Puerto Rican problem" was uninformed about economics and legislative procedure, but he clearly understood power, force, and fear. The general's solution was similar to Jonathan Swift's in "A Modest Proposal": to cure the Irish problem, Englishmen should eat Irish children, preferably with succulent sauces as the tots were rather bony.

General Winship was not sent to Puerto Rico to negotiate. He was sent to crush labor strikes, subdue Nationalists, and kill them if necessary.[83] It didn't take long before he did just that.

The Río Piedras Massacre

On October 24, 1935, University of Puerto Rico students held a meeting to discuss their relationship with Pedro Albizu Campos and the Nationalist Party. To ensure a "peaceful" gathering, General Winship's police surrounded the campus in Río Piedras and stationed themselves on every street corner with carbines, tear gas, and machine guns.

At 10:30 a.m., before the meeting started, several police cars intercepted a Willis-77 sedan, license plate 6268, with four Nationalists inside. Two policemen jumped onto the running boards and ordered the driver to proceed slowly to a nearby police station. One block from the station, on Calle Arzuaga, several more police cars pulled up, a squad of officers surrounded the car, and all of them started shooting.

A Cadet of the Republic named José Santiago Barea ran toward the car and was killed instantly. Three Nationalists, Ramón S. Pagán, Pedro Quiñones, and Eduardo Rodríguez, were gunned down inside the vehicle. An old man named Juan Muñoz Jiménez was also shot and killed. Jiménez wasn't a Nationalist; he was out buying a lottery ticket.

The entire island was outraged.[84] Speaking to 8,000 mourners, Albizu Campos accused General Winship and his chief of police, Colonel E. Francis Riggs, of "deliberately murdering the Nationalist representatives of Puerto Rico."[85] Since Ramón S. Pagán had been treasurer of the Nationalist Party and had recently exposed a plot to assassinate Albizu Campos, this was no hyperbole.[86] Four days after the massacre, Police Chief Riggs stated in several major newspapers that he was ready to wage "war to the death against all Puerto Ricans."[87]

On the quiet Sunday morning of February 23, 1936, Riggs got his war. As a Yale-educated gentleman, member of the Scroll and Key, and heir to the Riggs National Bank fortune, perhaps he felt invulnerable. But after engineering the Río Piedras Massacre, he was ripe for retaliation. As he returned home to the El Escambrón luxury resort, two young men approached. Hiram Rosado shot and missed; Elías Beauchamp killed him instantly.[88] The police arrested Rosado and Beauchamp, took them to the San Juan District Station, and summarily executed them within an hour.[89]

The newly militarized Insular Police,
armed and trained by Governor Blanton Winship
The Erasmo Vando Papers, Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora,
Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY

General Winship took immediate personal command of all Insular Police. Later that evening two more Nationalists, Angel Mario Martinez and Pedro Crespo, were shot and killed by police in the town of Utuado.[90] Other Nationalists "disappeared" and were never heard from again; these became known as *los desaparecidos*. The next day, thousands of mourners from all over the island flocked to San Juan in a massive outpouring of grief and support. Winship tried to stop the marchers, but there were simply too many of them.[91] *El Imparcial* ran a story and the headline read "Go Ahead and Shoot. Then You'll See How a Man Dies.":

DISPAREN PARA QUE VEAN COMO
MUERE UN HOMBRE

At the funeral services for Rosado and Beauchamp, Albizu Campos declared, "The murder at Río Piedras was his work . . . General Blanton Winship, who occupies La Fortaleza. Cold-blooded murder, to perpetuate murder as a method of government, is being carried out by the entire Police Force."[92] General Winship countered with his own front-page funeral for Police Chief Riggs. One of the pallbearers, Police Captain Guillermo Soldevilla, would later lead the police slaughter at the Ponce Massacre.

Police Raids

After the assassination of Police Chief Riggs and the four Nationalists, General Winship unleashed a reign of terror across the island.[93] The day after the bodies were buried, on February 25, he repeated his call for capital punishment in Puerto Rico. He even convened a press conference to promote this demand, announcing, "I have recommended the passage of a death penalty to the legislature of Puerto Rico. This is absolutely necessary, in order to combat the wave of criminality on this island. . . . I will enforce law and order in Puerto Rico no matter what the cost."[94] The next day, on February 26, those same newspapers showed full-page photos of bloody clothes recovered from the corpse of Elías Beauchamp.[95]

As a lifetime military man, Winship moved forward in the only way he knew how. He hired more Insular Police and instructed them to raid Nationalist homes and offices and to arrest Nationalists throughout the island. Albizu Campos received death threats and relocated to the town of Aguas Buenas, where he posted a round-the-clock guard that repelled four assaults by police and FBI agents. Eventually, documents and recordings of Albizu's speeches were seized by the Insular Police and submitted to a federal grand jury.[96]

Winship's policemen, National Guardsmen, undercover detectives, FBI agents, military intelligence personnel, and several attack dogs packed the José Toledo Federal Building when Albizu and six Nationalists were convicted of conspiracy to overthrow the US government.[97] Officers with blackjacks, tear gas, rifles, and Thompson submachine guns barricaded entire sections of San Juan.[98] General Winship got

what he wanted that day: the conviction of Albizu Campos and his removal from the island.

With the Nationalist leadership safely behind bars, Winship grew bolder. He prohibited all public demonstrations, including speeches at funerals.[99] At his discretion and without notice, Winship would declare martial law in random areas; the police would lay siege to those areas, conduct warrantless searches, break into people's homes, and prevent other residents from entering or leaving the zone.[100] Despite this police repression, or perhaps because of it, groups of students began to lower the American flag at public schools and to raise the Puerto Rican flag instead. At the Central High School in San Juan, the police arrested four students "standing guard" over their island's flag.[101]

President Roosevelt had gotten his expected result: the complete militarization of Puerto Rico and the establishment of a police state that could control the population. Then came the Ponce Massacre.

The Ponce Massacre

The Ponce Massacre, the defining event in Blanton Winship's brutal administration, is described in Chapter 7—but it deserves one final review. When the Insular Police gunned down seventeen men, women, and children on Palm Sunday, they were acting under the orders of Police Chief Enrique de Orbeta, who reported directly to Governor Winship. By prearranged placement, Orbeta's policemen completely surrounded the unarmed civilians before the shooting began. This was not "riot control" or "crowd management"; rather, the officers had set up a killing zone—using lethal tactics, manpower, and weaponry—with hundreds of innocents forced into the crossfire. The man who led the operation, Captain Guillermo Soldevilla, had been a pallbearer at the funeral of E. Francis Riggs, the slain police chief of Puerto Rico.[102]

To add insult to injury, Winship then tried to frame the victims, forcing the Ponce district attorney to create false evidence and testimony so that the Nationalists could be imprisoned for murdering . . . themselves.[103] If it weren't for one photograph, which enabled the Hays Commission to see what had actually happened, Winship would have gotten away with it.

A Time to Celebrate

Even though the Hays Commission exposed the Palm Sunday murder of Puerto Rican civilians, FDR did not immediately evict Winship from the governor's mansion. President Roosevelt had fired the last governor; to fire two in a row would be a blatant admission that US colonial policy was failing in Puerto Rico. And so the General stayed on, chasing Nationalists around the island, building FBI files against them, and visiting his military installations.

One year after the Ponce Massacre, however, he pushed the island too far. The United States had first landed in Puerto Rico on July 25, 1898. General Winship decided to celebrate the fortieth anniversary with a massive military demonstration—but instead of doing it in Guánica, the town where the invasion occurred, he decided to celebrate it in Ponce, the town that had suffered the massacre.

The reviewing stand was in Plaza Degetau, just two blocks from the site of the massacre, where bullet holes still pockmarked the battered walls. Winship chose this celebration site to "send a message" to Puerto Ricans, regardless of the personal anguish it might cause.[104]

On July 25, 1938, US Navy cruisers steamed into the port of Ponce, filled with landing forces that marched into the town. Air force planes maneuvered over the town. US infantry paraded past the Plaza Degetau rotunda, where American military officers and police bodyguards stuffed the reviewing stand.

In the middle of the festivities, a Nationalist student, Angel Esteban Antongiorgi, ran up to the platform and fired on General Winship. A National Guardsman leapt in and took a direct hit; he died immediately but prevented the assassination. Antongiorgi was shot down, his body was hastily removed, and the corpse was never seen again.[105]

Despite the assassination attempt, General Winship clung to his governorship for nearly a year with President Roosevelt looking the other way. Finally, on May 11, 1939, Congressman Vito Marcantonio shouted a speech on the floor of the US House of Representatives, listing in great detail "the tyrannical acts of the Governor in depriving the people of Puerto Rico of their civil rights, the corruption and rackets that existed and were made possible only by the indulgence of the

Governor, and the extraordinary waste of the people's money."[106] The next day, FDR removed Winship from the governorship of Puerto Rico.

A Parting Gift to the Island

Immediately after leaving the governor's mansion, Winship became a lobbyist for the US corporations and sugar syndicates that owned the economy of Puerto Rico. His job was to persuade the US Congress to exempt Puerto Rico from the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act. He was performing brilliantly until Congressman Marcantonio fired another fusillade on the floor of the US House: "In keeping with his five years of terror in Puerto Rico, he acted the part of the slimy lobbyist, and fought by means fair and foul to have the wage-and-hour law amended so that the sugar companies could pay 12 1/2 cents instead of 25 cents an hour, and thereby gain $5,000,000 a year . . . so that the system of abysmal wage slavery could be perpetuated in Puerto Rico. Up to the very closing days of Congress this kicked-out Governor fought to have Puerto Rican workers removed from the protection of the wage-and-hour law."[107]

Winship was defeated. The workers got their twenty-five cents per hour. Because they worked under brutal conditions, this was eminently fair. It was additionally so because in the years that followed, 62,000 of these workers would serve in World War II, and another 43,000 would serve in the Korean War.[108] They fought in the front lines, with Winship safely in the rear.

The general was never indicted for his deadly actions in Puerto Rico. He was given a comfortable command during World War II and finished his career as the oldest active soldier in the US military. He even prosecuted Nazi war criminals at the Nuremberg Trials for their crimes against humanity.[109]

The hypocrisy of this final assignment was a fitting coda to the symphony of sleaze and slaughter that the United States bestowed on Puerto Rico in the name of good government. Winship was walking tall, waving documents, pointing fingers, trying others for their atrocities. His own crimes had been committed in Puerto Rico, and therefore they didn't count.

After all, it's only Chinatown.

CHAPTER 9

Carpetas

By the 1930s, after a generation of corrupt governors and absentee landowners, Puerto Ricans started to question the motives of their northern benefactors. A 1929 article in the *American Mercury* stated it plainly:

> The American flag flies over a prosperous factory worked by slaves who have lost their land and may soon lose their guitars and their songs.
>
> Presto, the flag! The one and only. Puerto Rico is now a land of beggars and millionaires, of flattering statistics and distressing realities . . . a factory worked by peons, fought over by lawyers, bossed by absentee industrialists, and clerked by politicians. It is now Uncle Sam's second-largest sweatshop.[1]

This reexamination of American largesse prompted one of the largest police reprisals in modern history. The United States sent General Blanton Winship to "modernize" the Insular Police with machine guns, grenades, tear gas, and riot gear. According to *El Imparcial* and other newspapers, hundreds of FBI agents armed with Thompson submachine guns had deployed to Puerto Rico and fanned out across the island.[2]

Within one year of its opening in 1935, the FBI National Academy began to train hundreds of high-ranking police personnel from Puerto Rico. Five of these went on to become the island's chief of police,[3] who until 1956 was always an officer of the US armed forces with the rank of colonel.[4] On the island itself, Police Chief Colonel Enrique de Orbeta created a "military training program" in 1936 at Fort Buchanan for all Insular Police personnel. This program included "Tommy gun training" from FBI agents.[5] The Ponce Massacre followed on its heels.

The FBI and the Intelligence Division of the Insular Police also shared information. A confidential Intelligence Division document stipulated, "The Commander of the Intelligence Division shall maintain direct contact with the FBI offices in Puerto Rico. The Intelligence Division shall cooperate with all exchanges of information . . . and at all times, it shall cooperate fully with FBI agents in whatever actions these agents undertake."[6] This information was also shared with the US military: the Insular Police compiled 90 percent of the information sent by the FBI to US Army Intelligence.[7] The nature of this information was so invasive that it ultimately spawned a congressional investigation and thousands of lawsuits.

The information was organized into the infamous and universally reviled *carpetas*—secret police dossiers containing detailed personal data. A network of police officers, confidential informants, and FBI agents compiled them longitudinally, over years and decades. They contained a staggering amount of information on over 100,000 people.[8] Of these, 74,412 were under "political" police surveillance. An additional 60,776 *carpetas* were opened on vehicles, boats, organizations, and geographic areas.[9] Over 15,500 people had extensive police files for political reasons—a significant number on an island with a population of roughly 4 million. An equivalent level of political surveillance in the United States would require 10.5 million files for people, organizations, and property and over 1 million extensive files on "political subversives."[10]

The *carpeta* practice was so ubiquitous and widespread that it became a verb in Puerto Rico, as in *te arrestaron* (they arrested you), *te sentenciaron* (they sentenced you), and *te carpetearon* (they carpeted you).[11] A political cartoon from the era captures the public sentiment: A man is

"Yo se precisamente como cortar tu pelo . . . lo veo aquí en tu carpeta."
Cotham/The New Yorker Collection/
www.cartoonbank.com

getting a haircut. His barber says, "I know exactly how to cut your hair. I see it right here in your *carpeta*."

Over time, the *carpetas* eventually totaled 1.8 million pages. The average file contained roughly 20 pages, but others were more extensive: the file on Albizu Campos filled two boxes with 4,700 pages.[12] The information in *carpetas* included school transcripts, employment history, religious practices, political affiliations, club memberships, bank accounts, property holdings, taxes paid, family and marital records, travel history, auto registrations and license plates, meetings attended, and publications written or received. They also included personal information: friends, business partners, sexual partners, mistresses, gigolos, debtors and creditors, personal letters (intercepted at the post office), recorded phone calls, photos, wedding lists, laundry tickets, and "miscellaneous items."

With regard to Nationalists, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover was typically blunt. In memo after memo, he instructed his agents to uncover anything "concerning their weaknesses, morals, criminal records, spouses, children, family life, educational qualifications and personal activities other than independence activities."[13] According to one memo, Hoover argued this would enhance "our efforts to disrupt their activities and compromise their effectiveness."[14]

This "disruption" was not a passive or abstract affair. Hoover launched a forceful FBI campaign "directed against organizations which seek independence for Puerto Rico through other than lawful means." The marching orders from Hoover were clear: "The bureau . . . is not interested in mere harassment."[15]

His agents responded aggressively. A subsequent memo to Hoover outlines an FBI program of sowing "disruption and discord," "causing defections from the independence movement," and "exploiting factionalism."[16]

This latter memo recommends "the use of handwritten, anonymous letters directed to one group [of Nationalists and *independentistas*] in which the seed of suspicion is planted regarding the real motivation and goal of the other group."[17]

The *carpetas* were used to imprison people, get them fired or ruin their careers, terminate their educations, and permanently discredit them—even if they weren't members of the Nationalist Party. This was especially true after the passage in 1948 of Public Law 53, otherwise known as La Ley de la Mordaza (the Law of the Muzzle or Gag Law), which outlawed any mention of independence, the whistling of "La Borinqueña," or ownership of a Puerto Rican flag.[18]

Even if you didn't whistle or own a flag, you could still appear on a list of "known Nationalists." One FBI list compiled in 1942 contained sixty-three people, all of whom had extensive *carpetas*.[19] At the whim of the governor or FBI director, any of them could be imprisoned merely for appearing "on the list." These individuals included ten school teachers, three professors, a school principal, a jail warden, a tax collector, a justice of the peace, a district attorney, four city councilmen, the chancellor of the University of Puerto Rico, the Speaker of the House of

Representatives, a senator and law professor, the mayor of Caguas, the treasurer and assistant treasurer of Puerto Rico, and a coffee inspector.

For several decades, Puerto Rico's first elected governor, Luis Muñoz Marín, and other members of his Popular Democratic Party used this and other FBI lists to prosecute not only Nationalists but creditors, romantic rivals, annoying journalists, and candidates from other parties.[20] In effect, the *carpetas* became instruments of political and social control. As the next two chapters show, a one-page FBI report from over seventy years ago, which found Muñoz Marín to be "a heavy drinker and narcotics addict," proved the power of these files.[21] The United States used the report to control Puerto Rican politics for nearly twenty-five years.

Eventually the US Supreme Court declared Public Law 53 unconstitutional and struck it down in 1957.[22] A government fund was established in 1999 to assist some of the victims of the *carpetas*.[23] In 2000, FBI director Louis J. Freeh admitted in a House Appropriations Subcommittee hearing that "the FBI did operate a program that did tremendous destruction to many people, to the country and certainly to the FBI." Freeh then vowed to "redress some of the egregious illegal action, maybe criminal action that occurred in the past."[24] Unfortunately, by that time, the damage was incalculable. It extended beyond any individual or group and even beyond the issue of independence.[25] As befits a sun-kissed island with wonderfully fertile soil, Puerto Ricans had been an open, gregarious, cheerful people—but sixty years of *carpetas* and police informants had burned fear, secrecy, mistrust, dishonesty, and betrayal into their collective psyche. The wound may never fully heal.[26]