

FUERTO RICO'S ROLE IN INTER-AMERICAN RELATIONS\*Introduction

I am very grateful to the Center for Latin American Studies and to the Department of Spanish and Portuguese for the opportunity afforded me of visiting this great University. I must repay your kindness with a personal confession. I am a frustrated immigrant to this campus. Many years ago--to mention the number now would be highly indiscreet--I had cherished the idea of coming to this institution to study under that wise American, Dr. Herbert E. Bolton. I had also heard that there were the United States and California. I wanted to know what made this marriage tick.

But I had to stop midway in Texas. I could not study under Dr. Bolton, but did my work under one of his eminent disciples, the late and lamented Dr. Charles Wilson Hackett. I discovered that there were the United States and Texas, too. I discovered the friendly Texas rivalry with California. To make matters worse--and to add to my frustration--I taught for a year in Florida and there learned that rivalry with California stretched from oranges and grapefruits to the contest over climate, architecture, and the right for a place in the sun.

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\*Address by Dr. Arturo-Morales Carrión, Under Secretary of State of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, to the University of California, at Berkeley, On April 14, 1959.

I somehow modestly thrived among your rivals, but always kept hearing the call of the West. I am happy that at last the pilgrimage was undertaken. And in thanking you all, I take this opportunity to pay my personal homage to the memory of Dr. Bolton.

Dr. Bolton stood for a daring conception. At a time when U. S. nationalism thought of the history of the country in terms of the irresistible movement of the western frontier, he favored the enlargement of the historical perspective, and made the history of the United States but a chapter of the history of the Hemisphere. He patiently traced the ancient heritage of the borderlands and wove a pattern not only broad in its geographical setting, but deep and humane in its social meaning.

The frontier moved to the West Coast as an irrepressible human tidal wave. And the United States was now covered by a sea of surging, restless humanity. The borderlands were overrun and the Spanish influence remained as social atolls adding to the character of all this region, but surrounded--and sometimes eroded--by the wave from the East and the South.

The tidal wave felt a manifest destiny in its youthful nationalism. Its wealth and its industrial might, coupled with the growing success of its republican institutions, wanted to expand. The continental republic looked across the seas to assert its commerce and its influence and proudly establish its strategic interests. The penetration in Hawaii, the purchase of Alaska, and the taking of the Philippines and Puerto Rico were milestones in this new chapter.

Puerto Rico's Experience

Let us look at the experience of Puerto Rico, for this is the subject of the day. In reaching Puerto Rico, the continental republic did not come into contact with isolated Hispanic-American outposts surrounded by large, empty spaces as in New Mexico or California. It came into contact with one of the cradles of Latin America, with one of the old West-Indian fountainheads of the civilization which, settling first in the islands and trying there its institutions, its religion, its mores, later migrated to the mainland to colonize large segments of the Hemisphere.

Puerto Rico had not only been discovered, but also covered, by three centuries of Spanish effort. In the XIX Century it had also an expanding frontier within its very modest geographical bounds. Its population had climbed the mountainous interior and by the end of the century, the island was a compact community, poor, ridden by diseases, largely uneducated, but with a growing consciousness, with a sense of being itself--in other words, a people.

And Puerto Rico did not receive the human tidal wave, but only the representatives of its growing might: the soldier, the administrator, the teacher, the public health man, the trader, the investor. It received a well-intentioned but nationalistic bureaucracy, not that overwhelming mass of settlers and pioneers that proudly called themselves the people of the United States.

The experience of Puerto Rico, therefore, had to be different from the experience of New Mexico and California, or indeed, Hawaii and Alaska. The historical and the human problems were different and so had to be the solution, if a solution could be worked out which was not to be based on mutual distrust and antipathy and hate. The relationship was a relationship between two peoples, one grown mighty in wealth and power and the other a prey to hopelessness and despair as it struggled against adversity. The relationship came at a time when there were doctrines in the world that preached social Darwinism as the iron rule of historical life and proud, self-contained, and self-righteous nationalism as a creed of salvation for all countries, great and small.

This case of Puerto Rico has been a difficult test, perhaps a more difficult test for the United States than Puerto Rico. For what the United States had to prove in Puerto Rico--to prove to the people of Puerto Rico, to Latin America, but, above all, to itself--was the quality and true mettle of its spiritual greatness, and not the scope of its economic or political might. It had to begin to do this at a time when it collectively despised in many ways the old European societies, when it believed that the triumphant creeds of the United States were far, far superior to any other ideology, and when it looked down on Latin America, as a chaotic region playing at revolutions in a children opera-bouffe.

And, in the case of Puerto Rico, it seemed as if the people had either to admit that the United States represented the survival of the fittest in the grim struggle of civilization and hence that Puerto Rico's old Spanish culture was to be despised, rejected and buried for all time; or, in desperation, cling to nationalism, to a hostile, anti-U. S. nationalism, and join, therefore, those who had begun, in Latin America particularly, to hate the giant of the North.

In fifty years, a solution has emerged--a solution of hope and understanding, and not of hate and distrust. Let me draw first the spiritual design and then summarize the juridical. Here are its basic psychological features, as I see them. We, the United States and Puerto Rico, are two peoples, of somewhat different historical origins, but within the great and vital stream of Western culture. You in the United States have the continental perspective, the might of geography before you; we, the limitations of the insular. As a people, you have received the Western cultural heritage, heavily tinged with the Anglo-Saxon strain, and we have also received the Western legacy but with the Hispanic, Mediterranean strain. From a purely nationalistic standpoint, we obviously are not one people. We cannot wipe out the differences of history and geography and cultural self-expression. We accept these differences, but we build hopefully on them and we find our unity through other pathways. We can build--those of us who

This capacity to experiment without distrust, to strike new paths, to wed realism to understanding, is an invaluable asset of the relationship.

It is shown, for instance, in the juridical framework of our ties with the Union. Our basic link with the Union is not the Federal constitution; it is a law of the U. S. Congress--Act 600 of the 1950 Congress--which stated: "That, fully recognizing the principle of consent, this Act is now adopted in the nature of a compact so that the people of Puerto Rico may organize a government pursuant to a constitution of their own adoption."

The law was not a Congressional fiat. It had to be approved by the people of Puerto Rico in a free referendum. It was a device for a democratic partnership. It was a compact. It envisaged agreement by the people of the United States, through their elected representatives, and the people of Puerto Rico by the free and untrammelled exercise of their voting rights as to the peculiar type of association they wanted to establish. It also envisaged development, growth, creation, originality. And it demanded deep maturity, great breadth of vision, and the ability to test its usefulness. Significantly, it was a preparation for the great task now facing the United States of dealing with millions of human beings, like the Puerto Ricans of twenty years ago, anxious the world over to discard the shackles of want, ignorance, disease, colonialism, and despair.

Our link with the American Union lies in what we have called the Commonwealth status. That we respect its principle of growth and originality is shown by the fact that the Puerto Rican government has just proposed to the Congress a revision and a reexamination in the form of a bill which aims to clarify, develop, and perfect the terms of the relationship and categorically to establish what the bill calls "The Articles of Permanent Association of the People of Puerto Rico with the United States." We feel that the great majority of the people of Puerto Rico are not marching towards assimilation under statehood nor towards separation under independence. We are not breaking the continuity of our cultural development. But we believe in the American Union; we believe in its ideals; we know of its strength and its resilience in the spiritual field. We are not outsiders, but members of the family, however distinct we may at first glance seem to be. We have been won over, not by the kind of U. S. youthful nationalism, the pride of the emerging muscular giant that came to our shores in 1898, but by that deeper stream in American culture that believes in the rights of the common man, that shares its sympathy with the underdog, that is always willing to criticize itself, that constantly looks for its own shortcomings, and that, now that the United States has become a world leader, is searching with exemplary humility for a way to communicate to mankind its anguish and its compassion for the sorry trials of the human creature under the shadows of nuclear extinction.

Since we in Puerto Rico have been won over, since we have established a vigorous, solid partnership with the Federal Union, we have a job to do. We have to help in showing other peoples, particularly the peoples in this Hemisphere and the peoples of all areas in development, what the United States is all about. We have learned not to be foreigners in the United States, but neither are we foreigners in Latin America.

This is the unique, psychological fact about Puerto Rico--it is a place where people from the North and people from the South do not feel as strangers. It is a place where the Latin American feels at home, where he sees the great impact of U. S. industrial culture on a Hispanic land, and yet feels that the land and the people have retained their identity, their dignity and their valued traditions.

It is a place where the North American sees the old roots of Spanish civilization in the Hemisphere, where he suddenly comes into contact with an extension of the Mediterranean world and where he can have intuitive glimpses of an architecture, a society, an atmosphere as old as Greece and Rome and the springs of Western culture, and yet he feels that the people are his fellow-citizens, not merely juridically, but in the profound sense of believing in the same basic principles and ideas and values that sustain United States democracy. And he also feels at home.

Puerto Rico is a place for human communication. It is an agora built by history and the will of man. Not mighty, not proud, not



rich in anything, except in human warmth. It is an experiment in psychological coexistence. There are many of us who work in Puerto Rico to make this experiment successful, not only to the people of Puerto Rico but to the United States and to Latin America.

The principle of psychological coexistence is now being challenged in this Hemisphere of ours. The true image of the United States is being blurred by many factors. At a time when everything points to a basic reorientation of U. S. policies towards Latin America, we note an increasing estrangement, a revival of old clichés, a new harvest of distrust. The tragic fact is that this attitude is permeating the young generations in many places, from Cuba, through Venezuela, to Argentina. Sometimes it expresses itself in explosive words, in what seems to be an endless philippic against the United States, with no regard for distinctions and nuances. Sometimes the reaction is violent, with irrational attacks against any person or object which symbolizes the U. S. image. One must also note with sadness the continual deriding of the U. S. benevolent image which is the stuff of daily lectures and articles and conversations in circles where Latin American public opinion is formed. The crisis is political and economic, but it is, above all, a crisis in communication, an erosion in psychological solidarity.

From our search tower in Puerto Rico we see the clouds in the horizon. That is why we have started programs of our own, within our very modest fiscal resources, to use Puerto Rico as a partner, a

friend, a helper in getting together people from all the Hemisphere.

Our experience in the application of modern technology, especially U. S. technology, to solve basic problems in an underdeveloped area, is available through our Technical Cooperation Program, an enterprise now going full steam ahead with the vigorous support of the International Cooperation Administration in Washington. But we want visitors, above all, to see the operation of techniques in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect, where the image of the U. S. is a bright and inspiring one.

Our program of educational and cultural exchange seeks for the opinion-formers, the políticos, the professors, the journalists, the labor leaders, the intellectuals. We offer them a candid vision of Puerto Rico --an open society striving against difficult physical and material odds, but fully developing its potentialities, with the United States as a friendly, helpful partner--and no strings attached save the strings of growing affection and understanding. And we try, especially, to make Puerto Rico a conference site, a place of reunion, a town-meeting of the Western World, not because we have any special facilities, but because we strongly feel that a land where no man from the North or the South is a stranger, should be a fitting place to converse and debate on any subject pertaining to the New World community.

On our Caribbean island, we are toilers of understanding. We are certain that our role as partners of the United States in the stormy trials of our times will gain in effectiveness as our Commonwealth

experiment grows. We want to make it a permanent experiment within that margin of relativity that history affords to human beings and human institutions. It will continue to be a strenuous task, a worthwhile task, and a truly American task.