

JAIME BENITEZ

May 30, 1984

Mr. M. J. Rossant, Director
The Twentieth Century Fund
41 East 60th Street
New York, N. Y. 10021

Dear Mr. Rossant:

When you selected British scholar and writer Raymond Carr to research "what the relationship ought to be" between Puerto Rico and the United States, I thought you had made a wise choice. But I was wrong and so were you.

I have read attentively and with growing dismay Puerto Rico: A Colonial Experiment. Although it is a well-intentioned book, I find the scholarship careless, the approach condescending, the conclusions unwarranted, the recommendations unworkable. Carr may have no ax to grind. As you say, he spares no one. He grants equal time to all attacks, slurs, and insults against the leaders and the ideals of Commonwealth, statehood, and independence. Yet this does not guarantee his accuracy or his objectivity.

The problem is that while Carr chronicles extensively the 84 years of ups and downs in Puerto Rico and United States relations, he misses time and again the basic trends, the inner meaning of the events, the achievements and the misunderstandings that are crucial to that history. I'll give instances of all three.

1) Carr glosses over the 1940 election. He neither includes it among the 36 "MAIN EVENTS" in contemporary Puerto Rican history listed at the beginning of his book, nor does he discuss it at length in his text. Yet the 1940 election was the historical turning point leading to present day Puerto Rico. It was then that the wide-ranging platform of the Popular Democratic Party was first presented to the electorate, and met with a surprisingly favorable response. It was then that Luis Muñoz Marín began his triumphant career on behalf of the ill-housed, ill-clothed and ill-fed. It signalled the subordination of status politics to social justice which 12 years later brought about the Commonwealth status option. In Puerto Rican history, 1940 is a watershed year. Alas, Mr. Carr has chosen to ignore it.

2) Both in "MAIN EVENTS" and in the text Raymond Carr underscores a decisive set-back in United States-Puerto Rico relations: the Riggs tragedy. "In February 1936, Colonel Riggs, chief of police, was murdered by Nationalist gunmen" (p. 62) But Carr overlooks mentioning that the two assassins were immediately arrested, disarmed and taken to the San Juan Police Headquarters where they were killed by policemen that same Sunday morning. After that suppression of facts Raymond Carr goes on to say that

"Muñoz's failure to condemn outright the assassination by Nationalists of Colonel Riggs in 1936--for fear of losing political support in Puerto Rico--made him persona non grata with Secretary of the Interior Ickes" (p. 113). Earlier, Carr had stated that "But the hopes that Muñoz Marín held for support from the President and American liberals petered out in the aftermath of the Riggs assassination: well-intentioned Americans could not forgive Muñoz Marín for his failure to condemn the Nationalists" (p. 63).

Raymond Carr is completely off-base concerning Muñoz's motivation. The triple tragedy shook Puerto Rico to the marrow. It specially anguished Luis Muñoz Marín and those of us, then members of the Independentista wing of the Liberal Party--endeavoring to work out under the Chardón Plan a reconstruction program, in cooperation with Washington New Dealers. We deplored deeply the Riggs assassination. But we could not bring ourselves to ignore or to condone--as Federal officials would have us do--the killing of two young men unarmed and under arrest, at Police Headquarters.

Muñoz Marín, who was in Washington at the time, held to that position. His stand, contrary to Carr's assertions, was taken as a matter of principle. It cost Muñoz and all of us dearly both among Washington bureaucrats and at home. But it was worth it.

3) Puerto Rico: A Colonial Experiment centers on status politics, political parties, party leaders and intellectuals. It includes no sociological, economic or cultural analysis of change occurring within the Puerto Rican society from 1898 to 1982. It fails to differentiate between the feelings, regrets or rethoric of party leaders and their critics and the deep, unarticulated but controlling convictions of the large mass of the community and of the electorate. This inch-deep perception accounts for Carr's conclusion that: "Puerto Rico is a cultural hybrid, its inhabitants victims of an all-pervasive schizophrenia". (p. 290)

That the schizophrenia is less than all pervasive is reflected by the fact that problems of unemployment, crime, education, drug addition, corruption in government have taken priority over status in all political polls for the last 20 years.

Raymond Carr concludes that: "As it stands Commonwealth satisfies no one except the aging conservatives of the P.D.P." (p.410) Yet the youthful president and P.D.P. candidate for Governor in the 1984 election holds as his main campaign position that he will stand by Commonwealth. Status as it is and concentrate on the internal issues mentioned above.

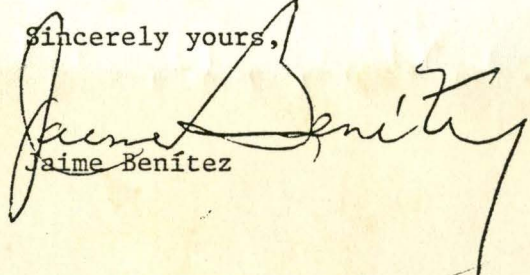
Somewhat in conflict with the above and with his earlier assertion that Statehood lacks majority support Carr adds: "It is an unescapable fact that 90 percent of Puerto Ricans wish to remain as part of the United States" (p. 410)

In the end Professor Carr gives up on his quest for a status solution. Given his approach the futility of the "colonial experiment" was inevitable. He signs off by quoting approvingly, but out of context, and reversing Muñoz true purpose. (I quote from page 412): "Status politics", as Muñoz Marín insisted in his political testament, "have always impeded the realization of the ideals of life and civilization." They still do". Thus ends Raymond Carr's "labor of love".

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That status politics by itself is a no-win proposition for Puerto Rico was amply documented by Muñoz Marín in his five leading articles on New Approaches to Old Objectives published in El Mundo between February and June of 1946. Neither he nor the people of Puerto Rico stopped at that point. Puerto Rico created a new relationship, a breakthrough, a political mutation, as Muñoz called it. It has to be improved, be brought up to date. But Commonwealth ended the Colonial experiment. It can be destroyed--like all human creation can be destroyed. But it is much more than an experiment. It is a contribution for the present and, hopefully for the future.

Sincerely yours,


Jaime Benítez

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