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Iniciales

A: 1^{er} Hon. Arturo Morales Carrión,

2^{do} (Subsecretario de Estado)

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4^{to}

DE: Sr. Francisco Collazo, Subsecretario

Corres.

De:

Corres.

Fecha:

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(Address presented by Mr. Francisco Collazo, Assistant Secretary of Education of Puerto Rico, at the 92nd Annual Meeting of the National Education Association, New York City, July 1, 1954)

THE EDUCATION OF PUERTO RICAN
CHILDREN IN THE SCHOOLS OF NEW YORK CITY

THE PUERTO RICAN CHILD IN HIS OWN HOME

The best way to present a picture of the background of the Puerto Rican child coming into the New York schools, it seems to me, is to answer the most frequent and important questions we are asked and which are probably in your own minds at this moment. What draws the Puerto Rican to the continental United States? What is there in common between him and his fellow American on the mainland? What is the background - political, economic, social, educational - of the newcomer? What are we in the Department of Education doing to alleviate the tensions and problems created by migration by trying to hold the potential migrant on the island and by preparing the inevitable migrant, especially the child, better for his new environment?

For the sake of you who may not be very familiar with the

situation, I am using about a third of the time to show the development of the close relationship between Puerto Rico and the continental United States; the second part will give you some idea of the notable progress made by our Commonwealth to improve its life; and the last part deals specifically with the work of the Department of Education of Puerto Rico for the migrant.

We hear and read about the Puerto Rican migration to the continental United States as if it were a movement of recent date, approximately the past eight or ten years. Actually, the pioneer in this move westward was Juan Ponce de León who, 425 years ago, lead a group of Spaniards from Puerto Rico into what is now Florida. And there is considerable similarity in the motives behind that first "migration" and the vastly larger one now. Captain Juan Ponce de León, first governor of Puerto Rico, voyaged to the unknown mainland because it was pictured to him as a land of promise. In his case, the site of a fountain whose waters wiped out the ravages of the years and restored youth's vigor so that a man, exhausted by hardship and struggles, could take up again his never-satisfied search for gold. To modern migrants the continental is still a land of promise; now, the attraction is not the will o'the wisp of eternal youth and gold but the more homely dream of better paying jobs that will make everyday life less of a struggle for mere existence.

During the centuries that Puerto Rico was under Spanish regime, there was always a small stream of migration to the mainland - young men sent for study or business, and others who came for political reasons. The number of students and business men would probably have been much greater, especially in the nineteenth century, had it not been for the unfavorable monetary exchange and the difficulty of travelling U.S.-ward. There were always those who chose the United States, and this group became much larger the latter part of last century. Most of these had moved from Puerto Rico to the continent for the same reasons that Puerto Ricans go now - better opportunities for work and to study.

Students returning from American schools over the years had brought back ideas about democracy - representative government, free public schools, and other institutions. They introduced these ideas into Puerto Rico and had considerable influence in shaping public opinion.

In the Spanish-American war of 1898, most Puerto Ricans greeted the occupying forces with friendliness and hospitality. A great many of those soldiers were so agreeably impressed that they remained on the island at the close of hostilities or came back shortly afterwards, set up businesses and, in most cases, married into Puerto Rican families. There has been a steadily increasing amount of intermarriage since then.

The ideal of publicly supported education was immediately put into practice. As a part of this move teachers were imported from the States to speed up the process. Each year a hundred or so young men and women came down to teach or supervise in the public schools. A majority of each year's importation stayed on for several years, some for life, and were a powerful cultural force. Some remained in the school system, others left the classroom to enter other fields of activity. Many married and established families.

Besides the soldiers and teachers who went into business, there was an inflow of investment capital from the United States. This capital, in fact, almost took over the whole sugar industry and built it up into really big business. Large state-side concerns set up sales agencies. All this brought in more continental Americans and added to the weight of cultural influences through business associations and intermarriage.

With the change in sovereignty there was an increasing number of Puerto Ricans going to the United States for work and study. In addition, the federal government paid the expenses for a great many children who seemed specially promising. As they finished their studies, these young Puerto Ricans, most of them thoroughly acclimated to American ways, returned home and added their share to the American political and cultural influences.

Slowly it became evident that in Puerto Rico the two great

cultures of the Western hemisphere, Spanish and American, were coming together, were, in fact, coexisting, and that from them there was developing a culture neither Spanish nor American but uniquely Puerto Rican. This dual cultural stream also made Puerto Rico a fertile field for creative endeavors springing from either North or South America. The democratic freedoms of the island encouraged such creativeness.

There were the many Puerto Ricans, however, who went to find work and were settling in a number of states. The Puerto Rican colony in New York became quite a bit larger over the years, but its growth was gradual and went unnoticed.

Then the depression of the 1930's hit the world. Economically, life for the majority of Puerto Ricans had always been precarious but at that time it became desperate. Sugar workers, the largest single body of Puerto Rican labor, tried to support families of eight and ten on weekly wages of \$2.50 to \$5.00, when work was to be found, during the approximately six-month sugar harvest and planting season. In the few centers of needle industries wages for homework began at the low of three cents the dozen for handhemmed handkerchiefs. Even at such low pay work was scarce and competition for employment fierce. What more natural than that Puerto Ricans, as American citizens, should look toward the continental United States as a land of opportunity and promise?

Family ties between Puerto Ricans in the states and those on the island have always been very close. As labor conditions improved on the continental, especially as defense industries opened up new fields of employment, sons, daughters, parents, other relatives wrote back urging their families to come. The terribly tight labor market during the war made employers welcome Puerto Ricans.

The history of the United States has been one of a series of westward migratory movements, each one the beginning of a new era and each created by the magnet of greater opportunities. So, now, in the 1940's and 1950's there has come the latest of these movements - the Puerto Rican moving from a small sphere of activities with limited opportunities to an infinitely larger sphere of activities with almost unlimited opportunities. In this most recent shift of population, there is a consciousness on the part of the migrant of having political, social and economic interests in common with his fellow citizens on the continent. The institutions of democracy - government by the people, respect for the individual, free public schools, the freedom of religion, speech - are an integral part of their lives. Standards of living, conduct, dress, are set by the same periodicals, movies, radio and, recently, television programs as set the standards on the continent.

In Puerto Rico, too, there was beginning a new era. Some of our perceptive leaders began to envision a government that would

strengthen Puerto Rico economically by increasing employment to absorb the annually larger group without work and politically by removing it from the status of a colony or territory into a wider political sphere.

They united under the leadership of a man who is dynamic and a practical visionary - Luis Muñoz Marín, our present governor. These men decided it was time the island did something by itself to improve conditions. They determined to change the agricultural economy to a combined industrial and agricultural economy. Concomitant with this ambitious program were better working conditions and more opportunities, better living conditions and higher standards of living, better and broader educational opportunities, and better standards of health. They resolved, moreover, that this could, and should, be accomplished for the most part by Puerto Rico through its own efforts.

The challenging name of Operation Bootstrap was coined for the overall program and Puerto Rico started forward on one of the boldest enterprises in modern history.

The most important, and probably the most outstanding, product of this vision for Puerto Rico was the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, established in July of 1952, a status entirely new in American thinking, perhaps in the world.

Nothing shows better, surely, how much Puerto Rico has come

to feel itself a part of and bound by the democratic traditions of the United States than the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, written entirely by and adopted overwhelmingly by Puerto Ricans. I quote from the preamble:

"The democratic system is fundamental to the life of the Puerto Rican community;

"We understand that the democratic system of government is one in which the will of the people is the source of public power, the political order is subordinate to the rights of man and the free participation of the citizen in collective decisions is assured;

"We consider as determining factors in our life our citizenship of the United States of America and our aspiration continually to enrich our democratic heritage in the individual and collective enjoyment of its rights and privileges; our loyalty to the principles of the Federal Constitution; the coexistence in Puerto Rico of the two great cultures of the American Hemisphere; our fervor for education; our faith in justice; our devotion to the courageous, industrious and peaceful way of life; our fidelity to individual human values above and beyond social position, racial differences and economic interests; and our hope for a better world based on these principles."

The change-over from a completely agricultural economy to a

combined industrial-agricultural economy is moving forward fairly rapidly. In the past decade more than 300 factories have been brought in, located over the island to utilize better our labor resources, giving employment to approximately 28,000 persons. It is hoped to bring an additional 100 industries to the island annually.

The agricultural agencies, Commonwealth and federal, are concentrating on methods and techniques for intensifying and diversifying agricultural production. Soil conservation, home production of food, better marketing methods and facilities, development or adaptation of new and better crops, more intelligent use of land and the very limited forest resources and other programs are brought to the farmers.

Standards of living are being greatly improved by increased work opportunities and better farming. Perhaps the most notable step directly affecting living conditions, however, has been the housing projects. The government - Commonwealth and municipalities - has set itself the task of clearing out slum areas, urban and rural, by building housing projects accomodating from fifty to two thousand or more families, who pay rent according to the size and income of the family.

All these improvements are making Puerto Rico a better place, more attractive to live, and one that in the future will offer

to everyone those things they go to find now in New York and other parts. However, no matter how good, or attractive, their homeland becomes there will always be migration, just as there has been over the centuries. You and we can no more prevent it than we Puerto Ricans could prevent continental Americans from coming to Puerto Rico, should we ever, most improbably, wish to, or a man's moving from Illinois to Pennsylvania or a Texan to New York, even though there may be the same or very similar jobs available at home. All of us, by the way, might as well face that indisputable fact. The policy of the Commonwealth Government is neither to encourage nor discourage migration.

The Department of Labor in Puerto Rico has, realistically, taken steps to control and direct migration in so far as it can be done. It is in close touch with labor needs on the mainland, ascertains where Puerto Ricans, especially unskilled or semi-skilled labor (the kind most likely to drift and create problems), can be used, investigates the situation to insure guarantees of wages, hours and living conditions, arranges for transportation and helps the migrant to adjust to the new job and environment.

Now let us turn to what the Department of Education is doing to mitigate this problem, both by trying to create forces to keep

Puerto Ricans on the island and to prepare the inevitable migrant better for assimilation into the new community. I propose, further, to explain the significant limitations under which our educational system works, so as to help you to understand better the average Puerto Rican child coming to New York.

In the continental United States there has been a tradition of free public schools since the Pilgrims first landed in the New World almost 334 years ago. With us the dream became a reality only 55 years ago.

How fundamental the educational aspirations are is best shown by the paragraph on education in the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico:

"Every person has the right to an education which shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. There shall be a system of free and wholly non-sectarian public education. Instruction in the elementary and secondary schools shall be free and shall be compulsory in the elementary schools to the extent permitted by the facilities of the state. No public property or public funds shall be used for the support of schools or educational institutions other than those of the state. Nothing contained in this provision shall prevent the state from

furnishing to any child non-educational services established by law for the protection or welfare of children."

Puerto Rico has made notable progress in the field of education in the last fifty-five years. This progress has served to confirm the faith of the people of Puerto Rico in their educational endeavor, since they now realize that they have constructed a firm foundation for the enormous task that still lies ahead.

Starting almost from scratch, Puerto Rico has attained a public school enrollment of half a million, served by 12,000 teachers, and with an annual budget of expenses of \$36,000,000 which constitutes one-third of the total annual budget of the Commonwealth Government. Illiteracy of the population ten years of age and over has been reduced from 80 per cent in 1899 to 24 per cent in 1950. Our present literacy campaign is expected to bring this down to ten per cent in the next six years. Our public elementary school now serves an enrollment of 387,000 pupils. Our secondary school, with 118,000 students in attendance, comprises a three-year junior high and a three-year senior high school. We have also developed the rural second unit, an intermediate type school (grades 7 to 9) which was established to satisfy the needs of the rural population; it offers an academic-vocational program.

The curriculum of the public school includes, in addition to the regular academic program, vocational education, school lunch,

social work, health education, art, music, guidance, vocational rehabilitation, and library services.

The University of Puerto Rico, with its various dependencies in Río Piedras, its School of Medicine, its Social Research Center, its College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts in Mayaguez, and its multiple cultural and scientific activities, has had a very outstanding progress. Its present enrollment is about 12,000 students. In addition to the State university, there are three private institutions which offer college level courses and prepare teachers to fulfill the needs of the system.

Since 1940 the greatest effort in the educational history of Puerto Rico has been to integrate education in the socio-economic setting of the island. It is during this period that the greatest educational progress has been achieved. This corresponds to the substantial accomplishments in the social and economic development of the island under Operation Bootstrap and has been truly remarkable. Nevertheless, the work to be accomplished during the coming years in order to satisfy the demands of our democratic society with respect to education must necessarily be even more effective than that accomplished so far. At present the public school system is facing serious problems with regard to the quantity and quality of instruction. The lack of classrooms and teachers is still acute. We are confronted, too, by a marked shortage of suitable textbooks

and other materials of instruction.

Approximately 80,000 of our children within the 6 to 12 age range are not in school. The system does not retain the children enrolled sufficient time to give them all a minimum of six years of schooling. As of 1950, the median school years completed by persons 25 years of age and older was 3.7. The per cent of the population in the same age range with less than five years of schooling was 64.9. For every 100 children who entered school in 1941, 54 stayed through sixth grade, 30 finished ninth grade or junior high, and 14 continued through graduation from high school in 1953.

Eighty-seven per cent of our elementary school enrollment does not attend a full-day session. In order to take care of the greatest possible number of children with our limited space and personnel, we have been forced to organize double shifts of pupils in the same room under one teacher in the primary grades, and under two teachers in grades above the third. The situation is more serious in the rural zone than in the urban.

Five out of every six elementary school teachers handle two groups, raising the teaching load at the elementary level to 63 pupils. Our teaching load varies in accordance with the type of organization, averaging 71 pupils for teachers under the double enrollment plan, 51 for those under interlocking plan, and 43 pupils

under the single enrollment (full-day) plan.

The limited school facilities has meant that many six-year old children could not be accomodated in the first grade and have had to wait their chance to enter school. This overageness in the primary grades has affected the whole system and has weakened the holding power of the school.

Most children in Puerto Rican schools come from homes in the lowest economic levels, because the majority of our people are in that group. Per capita income is about \$400, which is very much below the lowest in the continental United States. Half the wage-earner families have incomes of \$918 or less a year. From this group, also, comes the greater number of those shifting to the mainland, as it is they who are, logically, most attracted by the prospect of better pay. Almost half the families on the island live in homes of three or less rooms and more than half have five or more persons in the family, not counting other who might be living with them - relatives or outsiders.

Most of our population live in small towns or rural areas and are not well equipped for city life.

As industrialization and better farming practices increase family incomes, as housing facilities provide more adequate homes and as we overcome our educational deficiencies, there will be a greater incentive for children to stay in school to get the education

that will prepare them for better jobs. When we are able to give a high school education to at least 80 per cent of our children, then we shall have reduced the problem of migration to a minimum.

The overall educational program in Puerto Rico endeavors to prepare citizens who are well-rounded, mature individuals, capable of earning a competent living, at home in their environment and ready to assume their responsibilities in the community. Our efforts toward this end are in themselves one way of relieving the migration problem, for it means greater personal adaptability to new situations.

Cognizant, nevertheless, that the present circumstances require more immediate measures than the long range aims, the Department of Education of Puerto Rico is taking definite steps to help Puerto Ricans moving to New York towards a better adjustment, especially the children entering the public schools, and to give our own personnel and the New York school authorities and teachers a better insight into the nature of the problem and the background of the children.

We try to give special attention to those subjects, habits and attitudes, in so far as our local needs permit, that will lead to a more satisfactory adaptation in the new environment.

Aware that language is the greatest single obstacle to Puerto Rican adaptation to life in the United States, the teaching of English

has been intensified in every possible way, as part of the new linguistic policy adopted in 1947. In addition to the regular classes from first to twelfth grades, special English classes for adults, planned for those who expect to migrate to the continent, are offered. Recently, we began English classes by radio that have proved quite successful.

All our children in the public schools are taught English, but rare is the child who hears it outside the classroom. Consequently, they are not accustomed to the language as spoken by native speakers and, when they move to the United States, have to become used to the speech of their native English-speaking teachers. Through shyness and bewilderment in the face of such a flood of English, many appear at first to know no English, even when they really have a fairly good background.

The social studies courses in the elementary and secondary schools emphasize a study of life in the United States. Norms of living and living conditions, employment opportunities, particularly outside the New York area, and similar aspects closely related to the pupil's daily experience on the mainland are part of the program.

The Vocational Education Division of the Department of Education has expanded the training of future skilled and semi-skilled labor. Their intent has been primarily to supply the

increased demand for labor from the new industries coming to the island. In the long run, the migrants are better prepared for work in the United States.

Special attention is given the preparation of documents for children transferring to New York schools to make it easier to fit them into their new school life. Superintendents and principals of Puerto Rican schools have instruction to send without delay any information requested by corresponding stateside school authorities. Also they have been advised of the importance of sending a complete school record of each child with the child himself to avoid delays that might easily prove a handicap in the new school.

To promote a better appreciation of the difficulties of the Puerto Rican pupil going to New York, the Department sends its own members to see for themselves how the New York school system functions and what the problems of the Puerto Rican student are in the system. These on-the-spot observations have been very profitable.

In turn we have had the pleasure of receiving visits of individuals and groups from the New York schools. They have been given a chance to see our schools, the homes and living conditions of our children and to discuss with us their and our viewpoints on topics of mutual interest. We know our visits to New York and the visits of the New Yorkers to Puerto Rico have been a great help

to us in understanding the migration problem better and we believe they have promoted finer relationships between the two school systems.

As another means of fostering a closer acquaintance with aspects of the migratory problem, a great many bulletins, monographs, and other publications written in Puerto Rico and of particular value to the New York teachers and authorities have also been distributed and have contributed toward and improved comprehension of the Puerto Rican and his problem. All publications prepared on or for the teaching of English have been placed in the hands of the New York personnel.

We cooperate closely with other agencies of the Commonwealth, there being a constant exchange of information between all the departments and cooperation in planning, action and use of materials.

The Department of Education believes that, by raising our educational standards and building up our system to keep pace with educational systems in the states, it will have made a vital contribution toward reducing migration and alleviating the tensions and problems created by it. We are moving steadily forward toward the development of this aim.