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**The Puerto Rican Campaign  
Revisited: "A Splendid Little War"**

by

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## ***THE AMERICAN PRESENCE IN PUERTO RICO***

*"The American Presence in Puerto Rico" is an interdisciplinary, multifaceted project created to study the influence of the United States and Americans in Puerto Rico in a systematic and comprehensive fashion. Research into almost any topic on 20th Century Puerto Rico eventually leads to an American connection--and to frustration, as the sparse bibliography in this area is quickly exhausted.*

*The project's researchers often note the more obvious impact of U.S. institutions or Americans as individuals on Puerto Rican society and culture. Equally important, however, is their exploration of the influence of American ideas, concepts, values and practices that permeate even in the absence of a direct U.S. institutional or individual presence. In sum, these three "i's"--institutions, individuals, ideas--constitute the focus of this investigative inquiry into the matter of the "American Presence in Puerto Rico."*

*Lynn-Darrell Bender, Ph.D.  
Project Director*



## **The Puerto Rican Campaign Revisited: "A Splendid Little War"**

**Luis E. González Vales**  
**Inter American University, Metropolitan Campus**

The Puerto Rican campaign, examined in the context of the Spanish-American War, was a minor episode overshadowed by Dewey's attack on Manila Bay and the destruction of the Spanish fleet of Admiral Pascual Cervera at Santiago Bay in Cuba. None of the major figures that captivated the imagination of the American people, General Nelson A. Miles excepted, was involved in operations in Puerto Rico. Nonetheless, the island's history has been greatly influenced by the outcome of the war, when sovereignty over Puerto Rico passed from Spain to the United States.

The two most important books on the war written by American scholars, David F. Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898* (1981) and Graham A. Cosmas, *An Army for Empire* (1971), provide rather modest accounts of military operations on the island. Puerto Rican sources provide much more detail. Angel Rivero's *Crónica de la Guerra Hispanoamericana en Puerto Rico* (1922), reprinted in 1972 by the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, is the classic on the Puerto Rican Campaign. Rivero, a captain of Artillery in the Spanish forces stationed in San Juan, combines an eyewitness account with a judicious use of American sources. It continues to be an indispensable reference. The two most important contemporary studies on the war are Carmelo Rosario Natal, *Puerto Rico y la crisis de la Guerra Hispanoamericana* (1975), the most thoroughly researched book on the subject, and Fernando Picó, *1898: La guerra después de la guerra* (1987), which deals with conditions in Puerto Rico immediately after the war, with particular emphasis on the problem of the *partidas sediciosas*.

There are, however, a variety of less frequently consulted works that offer fresh insights. Highly informative are both personal accounts from the pens of observers and actual participants and several unit histories, all published in the United States shortly after the war. There are also war correspondent dispatches and the official reports posted by the U.S. Army commanders. This paper delves heavily into these accounts, primarily Richard Harding Davis, *The Cuban and Porto Rican Campaign* (1898); Albert Gardner Robinson, *The Porto Rico of Today* (1899); Karl Stephenson Herrmann, *From Yauco to Las Marías* (1899); and the recently reprinted *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain* (1993), published by the Center for Military History, a reprint of the original 1902 edition. These sources are used to address the following issues: Why was Puerto Rico invaded and when was the decision made to do so? What reception was given by Puerto Ricans to the American troops and why? What impressions of Puerto Ricans did the American military have? Why did the Spanish resistance collapse as readily as it did? How can the campaign be assessed?

## The Invasion of Puerto Rico

United States-Puerto Rico relations date back to the last quarter of the eighteenth century. The first commercial agent in Puerto Rico was accredited in 1815.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, throughout the nineteenth century the United States extended its influence over the Hispanic Caribbean both commercially and politically.<sup>2</sup> Puerto Rico had already become one of the principal markets for American manufactured goods and the United States a principal buyer of the island's sugar production. This long-standing interest, coupled with the strategic value of Puerto Rico (recognized by, among others, Alfred Thayer Mahan), explains why the McKinley administration included the island in its plans for war with Spain.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike Cuba, Puerto Rico was at peace with Spain at the outbreak of the Spanish-American War. The concession of political autonomy by Spain in November of 1897 had fulfilled the expectations of the island's creole elite and the short-lived experiment in self-government was already underway.<sup>4</sup> Earlier U.S. plans (formulated in 1896) for a war against Spain had envisioned a naval conflict aimed at destroying the Spanish Navy and blockading Cuba. The idea of invading Puerto Rico by land did not surface until April 4, 1898, when, facing impending hostilities, a joint Army-Navy board suggested the tactic as a means of depriving the Spanish of a fleet base in the Caribbean. Seizure of the island would also provide the United States with a base from which to defend the approaches to the planned canal across the isthmus.

The proponent of an invasion of Puerto Rico was none other than the commanding general of the Army, Nelson A. Miles. His position was detailed in a letter to Secretary of War Russel B. Alger, dated May 26, 1898, followed by a confidential memo that expanded on the subject the next day.<sup>5</sup> If war with Spain was to be essentially a naval engagement, and Puerto Rico lay athwart the sea route from Spain to Cuba, its capture would cut the direct Spanish line of communication with Spain.<sup>6</sup> The proposal was promptly rejected: the president and the secretary of war had already given the expedition to Cuba a higher priority.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Important sources of information are the consular dispatches covering the period 1818-1868, published by the Centro de Investigaciones Históricas of the University of Puerto Rico: *Despachos de los cónsules norteamericanos en Puerto Rico 1818-1868*, Book 1, 1982.

<sup>2</sup>Luis Martínez Fernández, *Torn Between Empires* (1994) is an excellent study dealing with U.S. interests in the Hispanic Caribbean between 1840 and 1878.

<sup>3</sup>This aspect is extensively analyzed in Carmelo Rosario Natal, *Puerto Rico y la crisis de la Guerra Hispanoamericana (1895-1898)* (San Juan, 1975); Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Lessons on the War with Spain* (New York, 1970, reprinted from the 1899 edition).

<sup>4</sup>Pilar Barbosa de Rosario, *El ensayo de la autonomía* (San Juan, 1975); José Trías Monge, *Historia constitucional de Puerto Rico*, Volume I, 1980, pp. 90-134.

<sup>5</sup>*Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain*, Volume I. Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, United States Army, 1993; this is a reprint of the 1902 edition), pp. 261-264.

<sup>6</sup>Virginia Weisel Johnson, *The Unregimented General: A Biography of Nelson A. Miles* (Boston, 1962); Robert Wooster, *Nelson A. Miles and the Twilight of the Frontier Army* (University of Nebraska Press, 1993).

<sup>7</sup>*Correspondence*, Volume I, Alger to Miles, June 6, 1898, p. 264.

Two days before the rejection of his proposal on Puerto Rico, Miles received a telegram from the president asking him how soon he could have an expeditionary force ready to go to Puerto Rico "large enough to take and hold the island" without considering the force under General Shafter.<sup>8</sup> Miles answers in a communication to the secretary of war that 30,000 troops should be enough and insists on his original plan to take Puerto Rico first. Alger outrightly dismissed the latter proposal and denounced the general's insubordination.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, after the June 14 departure of the Cuban expedition under General William R. Shafter, Miles returned to Washington where he was asked to command an expedition to Puerto Rico, still considered essential to the overall strategy of the war.<sup>10</sup>

Spanish forces in Puerto Rico at the beginning of the war numbered over 17,000: 8,233 Spanish troops supplemented by 9,107 Puerto Rican volunteers. It was not until June 1 that President McKinley, Secretary of War Alger and General Miles agreed on a Puerto Rican assault force of 34,000 men. Miles was officially named commander of the expedition on June 26. Its organization was complicated by the fact that the forces had to be assembled from various ports on the eastern seaboard then rendezvous at sea near Puerto Rico. The 12,000 men who made up the IV corps were assembled in Tampa, Florida; 16,000 volunteers from the I Corps were at Chickamauga Park, Georgia; and 6,000 troops from the II Corps assembled in Newport News, Virginia. But, Miles was ordered to proceed first to Santiago with reinforcements for General Shafter. Dismayed by the situation in Cuba, the president directed him to do there whatever "might be required for the welfare and success of the Army."<sup>11</sup> But the high casualty rate cannot be attributed solely to General Shafter's poor leadership. Besides the thorny political and operational problems posed by General Calixto Garcia's forces, many American soldiers, unaccustomed to tropical warfare, simply became easy prey to the scourge of yellow fever.

Once in Cuba, Miles was anxious to get to Puerto Rico, but his departure was delayed for various reasons, including a misunderstanding with the Navy about the assistance to be rendered his expedition.<sup>12</sup> On July 18, a telegram from General H.C. Corbin, the Adjutant General (on whom McKinley depended for military matters), ordered him to proceed with the troops on the "Yale" and other transports already in Cuban waters to land "at such points in Puerto Rico as you may designate." He was given the "fullest discretion," but the determination of time and place of such landings had to be made with full knowledge that reinforcements would not reach him for five to seven days afterward.<sup>13</sup> The secretary of war further directed that "on your landing on the island of Puerto Rico that you hoist the American flag."<sup>14</sup> Peace negotiations were already being conducted with officials of the Spanish Government. Therefore, for political as well as military reasons, seizing Puerto Rico would show that Spain could no longer hold the Antilles and strengthen

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<sup>8</sup> *Correspondence*, Volume I, William McKinley to Miles, June 4, 1898, p. 263.

<sup>9</sup> Wooster, *op.cit.* p. 220.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, *op.cit.*, pp. 324-325.

<sup>11</sup> Johnson, *op.cit.*, p. 327.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 324.

<sup>13</sup> *Correspondence*, Volume I, H.C. Corbin to Miles, July 18, 1898, p. 283.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

U.S. claims to the island at the peace table.<sup>15</sup> Miles left for Puerto Rico from Guantánamo Bay on the evening of July 21, 1898.

### **The Landing**

The original landing site selected was Cabo San Juan, on the northeastern corner of the island, near the town of Fajardo. Albert Gardner Robinson, a war correspondent who accompanied one of the first detachments of the Army to invade Puerto Rico (and remained on the island after the conclusion of the campaign), was critical of the operation. He considered the Puerto Rican invasion was to be the work, not of an army, but an aggregation. "In a force whose numerical strength was somewhat less than the half of an army corps, four different corps were represented."<sup>16</sup> In his opinion, it was the "mercy of Providence," and not the foresight of man, which "kept that expedition from serious disaster" and concludes "but all's well that ends well..."<sup>17</sup>

One of the several decisions that ended well was a change in the landing site. Instead of Fajardo, Miles opted for the southern port of Guánica. He believed that the Spanish had been forewarned of the intended landing near Cape San Juan, because the cables notifying the decision had passed over foreign lines. He was also concerned that the lighters and tugs needed to disembark the troops had not yet rendezvoused with the fleet. After discussing the matter with the Navy task force commander, Captain Francis J. Higgins, he decided to make a show of force until dusk near Fajardo and then proceed under cover of darkness to Guánica, where deeper waters and harbor facilities would support a landing. The element of surprise would favor the invasion force and once Guánica was secured he would proceed to occupy Ponce.<sup>18</sup>

If the Spaniards were surprised, so was the Secretary of War and the War Department. On the afternoon of July 26, Secretary Alger sent a wire to Miles asking for confirmation of press reports that he had landed in Guánica. He was worried and wanted to know if Miles had left ships to support Schwan and Wilson, who were in route to Fajardo. He also advised him that General Brooke's division would depart from Newport News the following day.<sup>19</sup> Miles defended his decision as "advisable," and the results in Guánica vindicated his course of action. The landing caught the Spaniards by surprise, and took place with great ease and no losses. He praised Captain Higgins and the Navy, which "rendered able and earnest assistance," and advised Alger that "notification had been sent to transports going to Cape San Juan" and all transports and supplies were being directed to the port of Ponce.<sup>20</sup> His communication ends by indicating "troops in good health and best spirits. No casualties." As Robinson had so aptly put it, "all's well that ends well."

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<sup>15</sup>Johnson, *op.cit.*, p. 334.

<sup>16</sup>Albert Gardner Robinson, *The Porto Rico of Today* (New York, 1899), p. 7.

<sup>17</sup>Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>18</sup>Wooster, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

<sup>19</sup>*Correspondence*, Volume I, Alger to Miles, July 26, 1898, pp. 320-321.

<sup>20</sup>*Correspondence*, Volume I, Miles to Alger, July 26, 1898, p. 322.

The Spanish-American war has been called the correspondents' war, and rightfully so, considering the myriad reporters who covered operations in Cuba. But coverage of the Puerto Rico invasion was skimpy. Richard Harding Davis states that for three days there were only two correspondents with the Army and never more than eighteen.<sup>21</sup> This contrasts markedly with the Cuban campaign, which was covered by about a hundred. There are several reasons for this. The Puerto Rican campaign never had much appeal for the editors; little fighting was expected from the relatively few Spanish troops on the island; and "with the taking of Santiago and twenty-five thousand enemy troops, the end of the war seemed to be in sight."<sup>22</sup> Moreover, most correspondents had been detained in Cuba by sickness and quarantine.<sup>23</sup>

The 6th Massachusetts was the first U.S. Regiment to land on Puerto Rican soil. On July 26, the men of Company A had a lively skirmish with Spanish troops and sustained a casualty. Captain Gihon, commander of that company, was shot in the thigh near the hip. But, despite this "severe and painful wound," he refused to leave the front and stayed with his company until the Spaniards retired.<sup>24</sup>

### **What was the Attitude of the Puerto Ricans?**

The Puerto Rican response to the American invasion and invaders caused considerable resentment on the part of the Spaniards and the Spanish forces on the island. The attitude of the native population has been characterized as "friendly and decidedly helpful." Karl Stephen Herrmann, a Bostonian and a private in an artillery battery supporting the Schwan brigade in the southwestern section of the island, vividly describes the attitude of the people:

As we passed the occasional little hacienda, set in its grove of coconut palms or orange trees, dusky and wrinkled women came from the doors bearing upon their head huge jars, from which we filled our ever-parched canteens with cool, sweet water. They also brought us mangoes and other native fruits and queer cigars of most abominable flavor.<sup>25</sup>

The author of the *History of the Richardson Light Guard* reports that many of the natives from Yauco came to the unit camp "reporting that the Spaniards had gone" and adds that "during these first few days they were full of good will and overwhelmed the soldiers with presents; the poor offering mangoes and coconuts, the wealthy cigars and cigarettes."<sup>26</sup>

In a different passage of his account, Herrmann states that "where we were first on

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<sup>21</sup>Charles H. Brown, *The Correspondents War* (New York, 1967), p. 409; Richard Harding Davis, *The Cuban and Porto Rican Campaigns* (New York, 1898), p. 303.

<sup>22</sup>Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 409.

<sup>23</sup>Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

<sup>24</sup>*History of the Richardson Light Guard of Wakefield, Mass 1851-1901* (Wakefield, 1901), pp. 144-146.

<sup>25</sup>Karl Stephen Herrmann, *From Yauco to Las Mariás* (Boston, 1900), p. 28.

<sup>26</sup>*History of the Richardson Light Guard, op. cit.*, p. 146.

the island, there is no doubt that the mass of the population regarded us with acute distrust if not dislike and fear."<sup>27</sup> This attitude had indeed been fostered by information circulated by Spanish and sometimes local authorities. He attributes the measures taken by General Miles to ease their minds of any preconceived ideas of ensuing rape, robbery or desecration for the change in attitude of the "more ignorant and childish of the natives, while the intelligent and educated class needed no further assurance than that contained in the proclamation issued by the commanding general from Ponce on the 28th July..."<sup>28</sup> With a bit of irony, Davis states that the Puerto Ricans showed their friendliness by selling horses to the officers at three times their value, but then turns around to describe the attitude of the *ponceños* in glowing terms, calling them "the most friendly souls in the world."<sup>29</sup> Nothing could wane their "enthusiasm or shake their loyalty." Military authorities found it difficult to persuade Puerto Ricans to press charges against drunken soldiers who "entered the shop or home" of any islander.<sup>30</sup>

Describing the fall of Ponce and the reception given the troops by the *ponceños*, Robinson states that "the place had become ours almost without our asking for it." The city had been thrown open to the soldiers and the people had met them "with the hand-clasp" of a cordial welcome. The U.S. Army was regarded as a "sword-bearing deliverer."<sup>31</sup> Upper class Puerto Ricans opened a Red Cross Hospital at their own expense and contributed money, medicine, cots and doctors to minister to sick soldiers. They also placed two American Red Cross nurses in charge and "allowed then absolute authority."<sup>32</sup>

In Guayama, as the column pushed through the streets, "a black population in doorways stretched its neck like the countryside on circus day," and when the news of the end of the war reached the town the people wept with joy at the return of the Americans, "hailing them as deliverers."<sup>33</sup>

F.H. Richard, author of a *History of the Fourth Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers*, expressed the fact that the natives looked upon the establishment of American rule as a beginning of a new era and showed many manifestations of "will to the officers and men of the American Army."<sup>34</sup> Henry Barrett Chamberlain, from the *Chicago Record*, was stricken by the reverence shown for the U.S. flag. He states that "our own people have not shown greater reverence for the flag...." And referring to the Star Spangled Banner, he reports "it is for them the melody of liberty." Summing up the acceptance of American domination, he reports that proclamations enjoining the acceptance of American rule "are frequent and emanate from the civil authorities as well as political, social and commercial leaders. The

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<sup>27</sup>Herrmann, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>28</sup>Herrmann, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>29</sup>Davis, *op. cit.*, pp. 307; 825.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 325-326.

<sup>31</sup>Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>32</sup>Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 326.

<sup>33</sup>V.M Poster, *A History of Battery "A" and the Artillery Companies of Saint Louis*, Missouri Historical Society Collection, B12, no. 4, made 1905, pp. 39-40.

<sup>34</sup>F.H. Richard, *The American Volunteer: A History of the Fourth Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers in the Spanish-American War of 1898* (Allentown, PA., 1898), p. 131.

citizens have gone fairly delirious with joy."<sup>35</sup>

In his article "How Ponce Received Americans," Chamberlain includes a very interesting interview held with one of the Paulist fathers of the church in Ponce. The priest, identified as Father Janices, spoke fluent English and had delivered a memorial service eulogy in New York upon the death of Spanish Prime Minister Antonio Cánovas del Castillo in 1897. Speaking of the Church in Puerto Rico he said:

"We are neither cowards nor liars. We do not deny that we have always been loyal Spaniards, but we realize that the chief duty of the Church is to save souls, not mingle in international quarrels. With all our hearts we welcome the Americans. Your constitution protects all religions and we ask only for our church that protection which it has ever enjoyed in the United States."<sup>36</sup> He states that he will communicate with Cardinal Gibbons and "await his wishes."

In the meantime, he offered to minister to any American soldier in need, and concludes the interview by expressing the "determination to become loyal Americans."<sup>37</sup>

The local newspapers from Ponce rejoiced editorially at the peaceful capture of the city and declared that Spanish rule on the Western Hemisphere was at an end. The people and the soldiers also became most friendly. The shopkeepers, who at first thought their stores would be looted, found that they had better protection than ever before. They also entered an era of immediate prosperity, for the soldiers "spent with a recklessness never before witnessed on the island."<sup>38</sup> About a week after the Army landed, a German merchant arrived with a dozen bales of American flags and everybody in town "bought a bit of bunting." The American flag became one of the most sought-out items, since everyone wanted to show it as a symbol of acceptance of the new order of things. Herrmann provides an interesting description of the people's reaction to the American soldiers worth quoting: "It was the popular impression in Puerto Rico that every American soldier was a full-fledged millionaire, but even they expressed some disappointment at our evident disregard for the external superfluities of elegance."<sup>39</sup>

It is evident from the various sources quoted that the general attitude exhibited by the Puerto Rican population in the south and southwestern portion of the island was friendly. As Spanish resistance collapsed, local authorities came forward to greet the Americans and pledge their loyalty to the new regime. It may be worth noting that Ponce had been the birthplace of the Autonomist Party and that the region was the one that suffered most from the repressive regime of Romualdo Palacios and the *compointes*. The same is true for much of the southwest, so resentment there against Spain ran high. Indeed, the decision to land in the southwestern town of Guánica was based on Miles' prior knowledge that separatist

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<sup>35</sup>*The Chicago Record's War Stories by Correspondents in the Field, 1898*, p. 217.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>38</sup>*The Spanish American War: The Events of the War Described by Eye Witnesses* (Chicago and New York: Herbert S. Stone & Co., 1899), pp. 192-198.

<sup>39</sup>Herrmann, *op.cit.*, p. 70.

movements had traditionally originated in this region of the island.

### **The Puerto Ricans: First Impressions**

Robinson, who exhibits in his book a sympathetic attitude towards Puerto Rico, provides an interesting description of the islanders. The common people are "a mixture of all shades of color, from full black to yellow, with here and there a paler tint."<sup>40</sup> Concerning clothing and appearance, he states that "neither style nor cleanliness seems to be any consideration with the masses." He observed that many men and women walked around bare-footed and that small children generally went about naked.<sup>41</sup> For most of the Americans, "our new people and their ways, their little horses, and the products of the country were as new and strange and interesting as we and our ways were to them." The impressions received by Robinson were so distinctly favorable that after spending a few days in Ponce he "was almost tempted to modify my views on territorial expansion."<sup>42</sup>

Herrmann's observations on Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans are more varied and penetrating. For him the island is a paradise and "dwellers in paradise are not expected to labor." Life for both sexes and all classes in Puerto Rico is "a rose, a kiss and a cigarette; song, laughter and *mañana*."<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, he then turns around to say that the average island inhabitant is "not worthy of the immunities and blessings accorded him by his new rulers." He advocates dealing with them with a strong hand.<sup>44</sup> The author had accompanied Schwan's brigade through San Germán, Mayagüez and the southwestern portion of the island. Based on what he observed, he concluded that about one-sixth of the population, "the educated class, and chiefly of pure Spanish blood," might be considered as a valuable acquisition "to our citizenship and the peers if not the superiors of most Americans in chivalry, domesticity, fidelity and culture." Of the remainder, perhaps one-half could be molded by a firm hand "into something approaching decency." He states that the rest will give the new government a great deal of trouble, describing them as "ignorant, filthy, untruthful, lazy, teacherous, murderous, brutal and black." There is no doubt that these perceptions reflect personal racial attitudes. Once the American missionaries start converting people to their creeds he claims, "we shall have all the excitement we want in Puerto Rico."<sup>45</sup>

Curiously, Herrmann himself claims to detect a racial prejudice among the islanders "as rigidly... as it is in Kentucky." While in politics and business there was a certain mingling of skin colors, "the mixture ceases to exist across the threshold of home."<sup>46</sup> His attitude is more sympathetic when describing men and women of the upper classes, obviously closer to his own station in life. The women are either very pretty or extremely ugly, never plain, reared under constant surveillance and taught the essentials of being socially correct.

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<sup>40</sup>Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup>Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>43</sup>Herrmann, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 36.

(In contrast, Robinson describes lower class women as "very baggy, very slouchy and usually very dirty."<sup>47</sup>) As for upper class men, they possess many characteristics "which claim attention and deserve applause." They are never "drunkards, or wife beaters" and show greater interest in a sonnet "than in the price of pork."<sup>48</sup>

Herrmann's description of the troops' advance into Mayagüez casts some light on how people of different social backgrounds reacted to the presence of the American forces. He observes that prominent citizens greeted General Schwan at the *Casa del Rey* and placed themselves "subject to his orders." The sidewalks, balconies, windows, and rooftops were packed with people "of all ages and conditions, hues, sizes and degrees of beauty." At every streetcorner, and in every square, "great crowds of the lower classes rent the air with *vivas* and *bravos*, regulating their enthusiasm by the size of the guns that swung past them."<sup>49</sup> At one corner a richly dressed old woman threw small silver coins among the marching soldiers while in several places they walked over "flowers thrown in our path by peasant girls."<sup>50</sup>

It is evident from the examples presented that opinions on Puerto Ricans varied widely. One of the tendencies was to equate the white population with those of Spanish descent and the native Puerto Rican as primarily a mixed breed, with a strong presence of African blood. In short, he views only educated Puerto Ricans as worthy of becoming American citizens.

### **Miles' Proclamations and Their Effect**

On July 28, General Miles issued a historic proclamation (in Spanish) to the people of Puerto Rico in an attempt to justify the American action. It states that its immediate purpose was to end Puerto Rico's political relationship with Spain, and, it was hoped, to foster "the cheerful acceptance of the Government of the United States." But it was obvious that this was not to be a transitory military occupation; it was more akin to outright conquest. Miles said, in part:

We have not come to make war upon the 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, and to bestow upon you the immunities and blessings of the liberal institutions of our government. It is not our purpose to interfere with any existing laws and customs that are wholesome and beneficial to your people as long as they conform to the rules of military administration, or order and justice. This is not a war of devastation, but one to give to all within the control of its military and naval forces the advantages and blessings of enlightened civilization.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>49</sup>Herrmann, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>51</sup>The proclamation is found in the *Annual Reports of the War Department* (Washington, D.C., 1902),

Much has been made of the promises made by Miles and the fact that they were taken at face value as representing the position of the American Government. The truth is that the proclamation was, at best, an astute example of psychological warfare. The U.S. Government was not bound by its terms, since it was not within Miles' power to make such representations in the name of the McKinley administration. (In fact, a parallel can be drawn between Miles' action in Puerto Rico and that taken by Dewey in dealing with the Philippines revolutionaries.) The distance between promise and fact was unsurmountable. A second proclamation on July 29 told a different story. Military commanders were to insure that the inhabitants obeyed the authority of the United States, "the power of the military occupant being absolute and supreme and immediately operating upon the political conditions of the inhabitants." If the inhabitants obeyed, their property and the municipal laws were to be respected. If crimes were committed, jurisdiction was vested in military commissions; taxes were to be paid to the military occupant; and private property could be taken when needed, with compensation at fair market value. The rhetoric of freedom was one thing; the harsh realities of war were another.<sup>52</sup>

### **The Campaign: An Overall Assessment**

Private Herrmann gives a positive view of the campaign. While his greatest accolades are reserved for the Schwan brigade operations, he states that in the brief campaign that followed, "a large part of the island was captured by the United States forces."<sup>53</sup> General Miles' plan contemplated three columns marching through the eastern, western, and central parts of the island, diverging from Ponce and coalescing before San Juan. The entire success of the plan "was prevented only by the arrival of the order to suspend hostilities on the 13th of August."<sup>54</sup>

Richard Harding Davis compares the Cuban and Puerto Rican campaigns, depicting the Puerto Rico operation as a *fete des fleurs* after a 'nightmare' in Cuba. In his view, it was the effectiveness of the generals directing the campaign, especially Miles, that produced the contrasting result.<sup>55</sup> In Puerto Rico, the Army had advanced with the precision of a set of chessmen, due to more careful preparation and forethought. The American commanders "went about the task of setting up the new empire of the United States as though our Army had always been employed in seizing islands and raising the flag over captured cities." For Davis they played their role of conquerors "with tact, with power, like gentleman."<sup>56</sup> In contrast, Robinson had a critical view of the campaign, indicating that "few of the processes of the Puerto Rico campaign were not open to severe criticism." For him, it is difficult to deal with any of its phases without some censure for things done, and for others

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Volume I, pp. 13-15. Reprinted in *Documents on the Constitutional History of Puerto Rico*, 2ed. (Washington, 1964), p. 55.

<sup>52</sup>*Documents*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>53</sup>Herrmann, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>55</sup>Davis, *op. cit.*, pp. 228-229.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 329.

left undone.<sup>57</sup>

Finally, what accounted for the rapid collapse of Spanish resistance? First, with the loss of the war in Cuba and the destruction of Cervera's fleet, Spanish forces in Puerto Rico were left without any hope of receiving reinforcements and therefore doomed to fight the war by themselves. Second, the Spanish High Command on the island proved to be inept and did little to support the troops in the field. Third, the volunteers, a political militia comprised of Spaniards, proved ineffective from the very start of operations. In a report sent to the Secretary of War, Miles states that "volunteers are surrendering themselves with arms and ammunition,"<sup>58</sup> and 2,000 of them in one place even offered to serve in the U.S. Army!

Of all the U.S. forces that had taken part in the Puerto Rican campaign, it was the Schwan brigade that had faced the stiffest Spanish resistance. This brigade, the only one comprised entirely of regular troops, acquitted itself well and "met with a special degree of success." Robinson opines that no other unit matched its achievements. "No one of them saw so much of active service. No one covered so much territory, or covered so much in so short a time. No one raised the American flag in so many towns and cities."<sup>59</sup>

Robert Wooster, in a recent biography of Nelson A. Miles, concludes that the general was justified in taking pride in his Puerto Rican campaign. At this insistence his troops had been given adequate quarters aboard the transports; a strict quarantine and improved medical services had also protected the bulk of his command from yellow fever. He had matched the men with their equipment on the transports, caught the enemy off guard by landing at Guánica, and exploited his advantage before his foes could regain their balance<sup>60</sup>

The post Spanish-American War literature, particularly personal accounts and unit histories, is extraordinarily revealing. These sources highlight the initial contacts between two peoples with different cultures and values whose subsequent relationship is still far from settled. Puerto Rican history was decisively impacted by the war. The island had secured a degree of political autonomy from Spain just prior to its beginning. With the American invasion, Puerto Rico had to begin yet another process (now nearly a century old) in a continuing endeavor to find a satisfactory solution to relations with its metropolis.

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<sup>57</sup>Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-14.

<sup>58</sup>*Correspondence*, Miles to Alger, July 31, 1898, p. 341.

<sup>59</sup>Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

<sup>60</sup>Wooster, *op. cit.*, p. 229.