

New Colonialism

Interview for Saturday's Drum Circle December 12, 2008

By

Fiera Monica Tenkiller and Pedro M. Rosario Barbosa*

Part A: Basic Information

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- Official Website: <http://pmrb.net>
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Age: 33

Ethnic Background/Identity: Puerto Rican

Home: San Juan, Puerto Rico

Birthplace: San Juan, Puerto Rico

Educational History/Degrees Earned or Held:

- 1993: Graduated from High School
- 1998: Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy

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- 1999: Certified as Computer Technician by Compu-Training de Puerto Rico
- 2002: A+ Certified by CompTIA
- 2004: Master's Degree in Philosophy

Special Interests/Hobbies:

- Reading
- Writing
- Spending time with Friends Online and Offline
- Contributing to Virtual Communities
- Promotion of Puerto Rico's Independence
- Promotion of Copyright Reform
- Creation of Free Cultural Content
- Promotion of Free Software, Especially the GNU/Linux Operative System and its Applications

Personal Dream(s) or Ambition: Become a Better Person

A Recent Accomplishment that You are Proud of: Having Published a Book, and Having Given Three Conferences. I am also Proud in Anything I have Done that Makes Society Better.

A Quote that You Think Sums Up your Personality or Personal Thinking Right Now: "This is the Exploration that Awaits You: Not Mapping Stars and Studying Nebulae, but Charting the Unknown Possibilities of Existence." Q to Picard in "All Good Things . . ." *Star Trek: The Next Generation*

Part B: The Interview

Fiera Monica Tenkiller (FMT): *How would you define colonialism simply in your own words.*

Pedro M. Rosario Barbosa (PMRB): It is the political domination of a territory or a people by another group of people.

FMT: *How would you make a distinction between modern economic colonialism as experienced in the developing world and old style colonialism as it is practiced by nations like England and Belgium in the nineteenth century? What are the connections?*

PMRB: I wish to make a difference between colonialism and neocolonialism. They are not the same. The latter consists in political coercion of one country over another mostly through economic means and indirect political influence, which is the predominant kind of form of imperialism today. Colonialism in all of its forms (modern and old) consists in the fact that the political-juridical sovereignty does not rely ultimately in the colonized territory but in another nation. At least in neocolonialism political sovereignty is indeed recognized by the dominating country. In the old style form of colonialism, the dominating country tends to be brutal and dominates local politics directly. The new kind of colonialism (and Puerto Rico is the case) is

milder, because the economic dependence from the people makes them *want* to be a colony. That does not mean, though, that there are no cases of brutality in such conditions.

FMT: Briefly outline the colonial history of Puerto Rico.

PMRB: First, we must realize that Puerto Rico was a colony of Spain for about four hundred years. By the fifteenth century Puerto Rico was inhabited by Arawak natives called Taínos. Christopher Columbus arrived at the shores of Puerto Rico in November 19, 1493, and called it San Juan Bautista (St. John the Baptist). However, the official colonial policies did not begin until Juan Ponce de León became Puerto Rico's governor. The initial policies included the *encomiendas*, a system of forced labor in exchange for Catholic teaching.¹ Taínos were forced to explore and work in mines to extract gold for the Spaniards. Soon these policies, the war with the Spaniards, and the diseases exterminated a great part of the Taíno population. However, according to Spanish census, Taínos seemed to persist as a race until the nineteenth century, when Spanish authorities decided not to count them anymore.

Since Puerto Rico was not so rich in gold, Spain decided to use Puerto Rico as a source for sugar, and bought African slaves to substitute and compensate the lack of labor force in Puerto Rico. As time went by, some Spaniards, Taínos and African slaves mixed racially, originating the mulattoes who were also racially discriminated. Later, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a national identity began to emerge from a sector of Puerto Ricans called "criollos", who assumed positions of power many times in history and who were in conflict with Spanish interests. This led to several efforts to rebel against Spanish rule and declare Puerto Rico's independence. The first genuine effort for independence was going to take place in Christmas Day 1811, which was frustrated by the presence of Spanish military forces on their way to Venezuela.² The second effort, which was carried out, but was almost immediately frustrated, took place in Lares in 1868. This event called "El Grito de Lares" was the scream for independence that was frustrated by Spanish forces.³

Even when this plan failed, there were two very important consequences of that event, especially in light of the fact that the Spanish empire was weak and was constantly threatened by the Great Britain and the United States. First, slavery was abolished in Puerto Rico in 1873. Second, there was a boost in the autonomic movement until the end of the nineteenth century. This movement sought to look for an autonomy with Spain, very similar to that of Ireland or Canada with Great Britain.⁴ During this time the leader was Román Baldorioty de Castro, but after 1888, there were two main leaders of the autonomic movement: Luis Muñoz Rivera and José Celso Barbosa (my great-grandfather). In 1897, Puerto Rico reached an autonomy where it was, for all practical purposes, a sovereign entity with political powers in a close relationship with Spain. By then, Puerto Rico had much more political powers than it has today under the present colonial relationship with the United States.⁵ This autonomy was ruined once the United States invaded Puerto Rico in 1898.

1 It is important to point out that Christopher Columbus was the author of this idea of *encomiendas*, policies that were favored by the institutional Catholic Church in Spain, but vehemently opposed by some eminent religious figures such as Fray Antonio de Montesinos and Fray Bartolomé de las Casas.

2 Moscoso, 2003, pp. 18-19.

3 Moscoso, 2003, pp. 42-72; Picó, 2006, pp. 192-195; Scarano, 2008, pp. 343-365. See also Jiménez, 1999.

4 Picó, 2006, pp. 230-232, 233-235.

5 Picó, 2006, pp. 233-235; Scarano, 2008, pp. 434-437.

The plans of invasion of the Caribbean by the United States go way back to the birth of the United States. As early as the 1780s, we know of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson expressing their interest to establish a political dependency of the Western Indies and the Caribbean in order to expand the market. Jefferson in particular spoke of it in terms of taking away Cuba and Puerto Rico from Spain's hands.⁶ This makes sense when you realize that the United States was founded precisely because the economic forces of the time wanted its power to expand. This is implied in its Declaration of Independence.⁷ During beginning the nineteenth century, the United States had ruined the first efforts of Latin American independence in North America: the Amelia Republic, the Galveston Republic, and the Baratavia Republic. Also, there were plans to take huge amounts of Mexican territory: Texas, California, New Mexico, and Arizona. By 1820, the United States had taken away the region of Florida from Spain's hands, and already had power over Louisiana. This pointed out the advance of the expansion of the United States towards the south.⁸ So, it was not strange that the United States' government sought to extend its power over the Caribbean.

This can be seen clearer when, in 1799, Francisco de Miranda sought the help of the United States and British forces to help him finance, and provide arms and men to the revolutionary forces in different regions in Latin America in order to help the colonies' wars for independence and diminish the Spanish empire in America. He reached a pact, known today as the Miranda Pact, where both powers promised Miranda to help in Latin America's independence from Spain. However, they established several conditions, one of them being that Puerto Rico was not going to be given independence.⁹ Simón Bolívar, the other major figure that struggled for Latin American independence rejected the pact, stating that if there were one part of Latin America that was still subject to any power, then Latin America would not be free.¹⁰

Unknown to many United States' citizens and Puerto Ricans is the first invasion of the United States on Puerto Rico occurred in 1824, which is what historians know today as the "Fajardo Affair". Captain David Porter was the first one to invade Fajardo, an eastern region of Puerto Rico. It was short lived due to the fact that such an invasion, by then, was not favored by Puerto Ricans, and the troops were going to be lynched by Spanish and Puerto Rican ("criollos") forces. The event became an embarrassment to the United States' government.¹¹

6 Cruz, 1965, pp. 169-170. See also Dávila, 2000, pp. 51-52.

7 According to the Declaration of Independence, among the "injuries" made by the King of England to the thirteen colonies we find: "He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions." Indeed, as a result of the end of the French-Indian War, and the Treaty of Paris in 1763, the King of England declared that it was forbidden for the English colonizers to live at the other side of the Appalachian Mountains. The English colonizers, who looked forward to expansion, did not like this idea.

8 Collado & Dávila, 2006; Dávila, 2000, pp. 57-68, 87-96.

9 Collado & Dávila, 2006; Dávila, 2000, pp. 54-55, 59, 94. It is clear that this was the official policy of the United States under Alexander Hamilton's influence. He was linked to the trade and naval interests established in New York, Boston and Baltimore, who were interested in trade expansion in the Caribbean (Dávila, 2000, p. 48). The journalist John Ward Fenno, who was practically Hamilton's "voice" of in American newspapers, said in the *Gazette of the United States* by the time of the Miranda Pact (1799) that it would be more convenient that Great Britain should guarantee Puerto Rico to the United States, for U.S. trade. (Dávila, 2000, p. 51). See Fenno, 1976.

10 Collado & Dávila, 2006; Dávila, 2000, pp. 93-96.

11 Collado & Davila, 2006; Dávila, 2000, pp. 21-42, 155-168.

The real invasion occurred in 1898 during the Spanish-American War. This was a war that many historians regard as the United States' aggressive move to end the presence of Spain in the Caribbean and the Pacific. This was not a coincidence. Since the 1890s, a renowned military figure Alfred Thayer Mahan outlined a plan of establishing military bases that the United States would need to guarantee its interests in the region and to protect the Panama Canal. Puerto Rico played a prominent role for those purposes.¹²

The person in charge of the invasion of Puerto Rico was General Nelson Miles, a military leader who participated in wars against Native Americans, such as the Red River War, the confrontations with the Nez Percés, and the Wounded Knee Massacre where hundreds of Sioux natives died.¹³ When he invaded, he proclaimed that Puerto Rico was free from Spain and that all Puerto Rican civil liberties would be respected by the United States' flag. Unlike the Porter case, Miles had the blessing of the United States' government to do that, and this time there was no mob to lynch the invaders. At the time, Puerto Ricans were so tired of Spanish rule that many saw in the invasion the prospect for a better future as either a state of the Union or as an independent republic.¹⁴

This, however, proved to be wrong. The United States had established a military rule from 1898 to 1900, and in 1900 the Foraker Act was passed in U.S. Congress creating a civil government in Puerto Rico under its rule. Basically, the policies of the Foraker Act had to do with the fact that Congress was not willing to grant statehood for Puerto Rico, nor its independence.¹⁵ Also, there were sugar companies in Boston and New York who thought that it would be convenient to establish their subsidiaries in U.S. territories to have cheap labor force, whose rights would not be recognized by the Federal government, and at the same time avoid paying the kind of taxes that they would pay if Puerto Rico ever became a state of the Union.¹⁶

12 For Mahan, the Panama Canal was key for these interests. It was necessary to dominate the Yucatán Passage (between Mexico and Cuba) where the ships coming from the Mississippi River, the Pass of Winds between Cuba and Haiti, the Pass of Anegada, and the Mona Passage between Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. These locations not only would enable the United States to control the area, but also it would take away any kind of power of the enemy in the area while maintaining communications (Estades, 1988, pp. 13-31; see Mahan, 1890 and Mahan, 1897). In 1897, strangely, he does not mention the importance of Puerto Rico except to point out its importance to the Anegada and Mona Passages. According to Livezey, Mahan's biographer, the omission has been deliberate for political reasons. In order to "free" Cuba from Spain, it would be necessary to take away the importance of the strategic nature which the United States would have in another colony in the Caribbean. Much later, Mahan would give constant strategic worth to Puerto Rico. (Estades, 1988, p. 32; Livezey, 1947, pp. 139-141)

13 Acosta, 2002, pp. 59-68.

14 Picó, 2006, pp. 243-246; Scarano, 2008, pp. 449-452. See the thorough research made by Picó (1987) on this subject.

15 Raffucci, 1981, pp. 61-107.

16 Puerto Rico was integrated to the United States' tariff and currency systems, and for the first time a free trade was established between the United States and Puerto Rico. See articles 2, 3 and 11 in "Ley Foraker" (2000). See Luque, 1999, 218-227 and Raffucci, 1981, pp. 62-89. The Foraker Act created the concept of "Puerto Rican citizenship" as a way to refuse the right of Puerto Ricans to be treated like United States' citizens. This new legal concept is essentially based on the concept of "subject" introduced by the Federal Supreme Court in *Dred Scott v. Sanford* (1856), and later elaborated to the concept of "nationals" which is applied to Native American nations to recognize that they are a separate people different from the people of the United States (*Santa Clara Pueblo v. Martínez*, 1978). The same has been true for the citizens of Puerto Rico, who belong to the body politic under the name "People of Puerto Rico" and not the body politic "People of the United States" (*Gonzalez v. Williams*, 1904). Even when Puerto Rico was not conceived as a foreign country for the ends of tax laws of the United States (*Lima v. Bidwell*, 1901), the Puerto Rican citizenship essentially meant that Puerto Rico was a territory that *belongs to*, but does *not form part of* the United States (*Downes v. Bidwell*, 1901). The Foraker

Also, the military saw the importance of Puerto Rico to protect the military and economic interests of the United States in the Caribbean, especially the Panama Canal, against European forces. Since then, until very recently, the main force that would dominate the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States would be the military branch of the federal government.

In 1917 some revisions were made to colonial rule, and the Jones Act was approved by Congress. This act created a new kind of United States' citizenship that was essentially different from the constitutional one.¹⁷ This act, unanimously rejected by all Puerto Rican leaders for being another colonial act, added diplomatic protection of the United States over Puerto Ricans in order to avoid a possible invasion of German forces during World War I.¹⁸

During 1900 to 1940, the economy of Puerto Rico was moved by an oligopoly of sugar corporations. By then, Puerto Rico's economic growth was one of the worst in the world, and the poverty rate was high.¹⁹

It was during the 1940s, especially during World War II, that Puerto Rican policy began to change in detriment to sugar corporations and in favor of the people. Since Puerto Rico was surrounded by German ships, and U.S.-Puerto Rico commerce suffered greatly, the military forces granted Puerto Ricans the right to some pieces of land expropriated from sugar companies to provide food. Also, the military promoted a degree of infrastructure for Puerto Rico, since they needed it for military purposes.²⁰

After the war ended, in 1946, under the leadership of Luis Muñoz Marín (then President of the Puerto Rican Senate), the advice Teodoro Moscoso, an industrial counselor, with the support of Governor Rexford Guy Tugwell, the economy took a different path: that of industrialization. A program called "Operation Bootstrap" sought to use Section 931 of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code and other government incentives to attract capital of investment from the continental United States. This was essentially a move to industrialize Puerto Rico.²¹ Later, in 1976, the policies of the United States would change towards Section 936, which included more benefits to U.S. corporations.²²

Act also required that trade between the United States and Puerto Rico should be through ships with U.S. flag. This made Puerto Rican products considerably more expensive. This "cabotage law" still exists today. By the way, much of the policies applied to Puerto Ricans were first applied to Native Americans. Quite often issues regarding Native Americans would be discussed along with Puerto Rican issues. See for instance that policies regarding education in Native American reservations were almost the same as in Puerto Rico during the first half of the twentieth century (see. Negrón (1976) for full details on Americanization efforts in Puerto Rico through education. For other studies on such similarities see Estades (1999) and Rosario (1999)). For this and other aspects of the Foraker Act see Gould (1969).

17 This situation created by the Jones Act regarding citizenship did not change. Contrary to what many in the United States and in Puerto Rico believe, Puerto Rican U.S. citizenship does not stem from the United States' Constitution, but from the Jones Act (1917), which essentially did not change the *status* of Puerto Ricans as belonging to the body politic of the People of Puerto Rico. This is a different U.S. citizenship for a very specific reason and that was *not to integrate Puerto Rico into the United States*, and still denied Puerto Ricans the right to a local trial by jury like every state of the Union (Balzac v. Porto Rico, 1922). Today, Puerto Ricans still constitute a body politic apart from the People of the United States, and, as such, we are a unincorporated territory.

18 Estades, 1988, pp. 180-202.

19 Picó, 2006, pp. 252-268; Scarano, 2008, pp. 472-499, 541-551, 557-559.

20 See Rodríguez (2007) for a thorough research on this interesting subject.

21 Dietz, 1989, pp. 301-308; Picó, 2006, pp. 278-282, 283-285; Scarano, 2008, pp. 581-583, 603-631.

22 While Section 931 provided U.S. corporations tax exemptions from the profits obtained from investments in

Also, when Muñoz saw that even when the independence movement became a majority at the time, the U.S. Congress would not grant Puerto Rico a viable independence, he sought for other options. He eventually favored Congress' approval of the 600 Act, which allowed for a referendum on a local constitution and a transition to a new local government. This "new" *status quo* was called "Estado Libre Asociado" (Commonwealth). In beginning of the 1950s, this constitution was approved by the Puerto Rican people, and ever since 1952, Puerto Rico is a Commonwealth. However, this new *status* did not change the political relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. The United States' Congress still retains the sovereignty over Puerto Rico, and all of what did not pertain to formation of the local Puerto Rican government was continued under the Federal Relations Act.²³

Today, Puerto Rico cannot establish treaties with other countries, has to transport its goods in United States' ships (the most expensive in the world), cannot compete effectively due to the fact that many other countries in Latin America have free access to U.S. market, it is unable to form part of free trade treaties, nor any other international measures to relieve its current situation, it cannot attract capital from other countries other than the United States, it does not have the power to control the currency, it does not control its communications, nor its immigration policies, and most of other aspects of Puerto Rican life.²⁴ For all practical purposes, the local government cannot establish effective policies in the globalized world, precisely because of Puerto Rico's colonial condition. As a result, it creates a population with low labor force rate,²⁵

territories, Section 936 that provided that the repatriation of profits and utilities would also be tax-free. This measure was adopted by Congress to solve two problems: First, the high costs due to conflicts in the Middle East and high-cost labor; and second, to be able to provide an incentive to repatriate invested capital that was "trapped" in the European market (Eurodollars). To prevent a decapitalization of Puerto Rico, the Puerto Rican government created a "tollgate tax" of 10% of the capital that was going to be repatriated by U.S. companies. (Scarano, 2008, pp. 660-664). After President Ronald Reagan created the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI), which let Caribbean products enter freely to the United States, Puerto Rico would be adversely affected. However, there were some advantages. The funds obtained from Section 936 could provide financial help to the Caribbean, and also would let products be exported through U.S. corporations. This made the economy of Puerto Rico grow dramatically during the 80s. With those funds, Puerto Rico would invest in "twin plants" which were subsidiaries of industries established in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. (Gautier, Rivera, & Alegría, 1990, pp. 124-136; Irizarry, 2001, pp. 233-236). However, due to tax abuses by U.S. corporations, and because the results were different from expected, President Bill Clinton legislated to eliminate the benefits of Section 936 (1993). During this time, the number of jobs in manufacture was about 155,700 by 1996, but by 1999 it was reduced to 137,200, and by 2001 it was reduced to 136,300 employees. During the first half of the year 2001, many manufacture industries announced permanent closings, layoffs, and decrease in operations. Because of the loss of the benefits of Section 936, the old industries that used to profit from this disposition began a "phase out" period that extended until the year 2005 (Irizarry, 2001, pp. 239-241). Today, more industries that used to be under Section 936 and now are profiting under Section 901 are now closing for lack of incentives and moving to Singapore and Ireland.

23 What made Commonwealth's *status* different from before was the fact that under the United States' rule, Puerto Rico became an organized territory, i.e. a territory which has an organized government by the local people.

24 Military service, forced expropriation, declaration of war, power over aviation, citizenship, bankruptcy laws, emigration policies, coast guard, military bases, patents, copyright, trademarks, trade secrets, salary, social security, labor unions, weather services, census (population, commercial, industrial), ports, environmental policies, internal security (FBI), the content of Puerto Ricans' constitutional rights, and more.

25 It was 40.6% by 2002. Puerto Rico's employment rate is considered one of the lowest in the world, which is equivalent to one third of the United States' employment rate (Collins, Bosworth, & Soto, 2006, pp. 83-84, 152).

high unemployment rate,²⁶ almost half of the population under official poverty level,²⁷ and more than 40% of the population depending on welfare in some way.²⁸ In other words, Puerto Ricans are in a situation of extreme dependence on the United States.

FMT: *When you were younger, you favored Puerto Rican statehood for a while. As you got older, you began to see that such a relationship with the United States was not desirable and you became independentista. Please, describe how your thinking evolved and why.*

PMRB: Well, I was pro-statehood in part because of my family. If you remember back in the interview I said that José Celso Barbosa was an autonomist leader under Spain. However, after the United States' invasion, he became the most prominent figure at the time in favor of Puerto Rico's statehood.²⁹ He is still an important figure in Puerto Rican politics, he has a holiday, and he is regarded very highly by the pro-statehood movement.

The other reason was that at the time I had a very low level knowledge of how politics and the economy works. It was obvious to me that if Puerto Rico became independent, much of the federal aids received by Puerto Ricans would be gone, that there would be no more U.S. investments in Puerto Rico, and that would mean a certain disaster for our economy. After the mid-eighties, I wanted to take politics a bit more seriously, and instead of being a pro-statehood fanatic, I wanted to see why people held other political beliefs, especially in the case of independence. Preaching the value of culture and nationality was beautiful, but what about the economic proposals for independence?

By then, the President of the Puerto Rican Independentist Party (PIP), Rubén Berríos Martínez, had published a book called *La independencia de Puerto Rico: razón y lucha*. I read to my astonishment several statements he made. One of them was that statehood was not only not desirable, *but impossible*. Congress would *never* grant Puerto Rico statehood:

26 The official unemployment rate by 2002 was 12.2%. Even when this percent is relatively high compared to the United States at the time (5.8%), it does not account for the 40.6% of employment rate (Collins, Bosworth & Soto, 2006, p. 84). This has an explanation. The criterion used by the Puerto Rican government to measure unemployment in Puerto Rico is how many Puerto Ricans are looking for a job. It does not measure, for instance, how many Puerto Ricans are capable of working but are living on welfare, or are working in the underground economy, or had to emigrate because of lack of job opportunities. Some of these are criteria used in the United States. Some economists speculate that if we apply these criteria to Puerto Rico, we would discover that Puerto Rican unemployment rate, is considerably higher, perhaps not lower than 35%. See article "Why Don't More Puerto Rican Men Work? The Rich Uncle (Sam) Hypothesis" by M. E. Enchautegui and R. B. Freeman in Collins, Bosworth, & Soto, 2006, pp. 152-188.

27 By 2006, 45.4% of the population was below poverty line (2006 U.S. Census). From 2006 to 2007 there has been a decline in economic growth and economists expect for this datum to increase significantly to more than a half of the population.

28 Since 1990, government transfers account for 25 to 28% of Puerto Rican incomes, which is about twice the equivalent in the United States (Collins, Bosworth, & Soto, 2006, p. 88). By 2003, Puerto Rico received about \$14.3 billion in federal funds and transfers, while Puerto Ricans paid \$4.4 billion largely in the form of Social Security and Medicare (Collins, Bosworth, & Soto, 2006, p. 163). This extreme dependence by individuals has also contributed to the low employment rate in Puerto Rico (Collins, Bosworth & Soto, 2006, pp. 94-116, 131-135, 136-151).

29 After the United States invaded Puerto Rico, Muñoz Rivera's political party became the Federalist Party, and Barbosas' party became the Republican Party. This was not strange if we take into consideration that Barbosas' decision to name his party that way has something to do with finding affinities between his party and President McKinley's party. Muñoz and Barbosa both favored statehood, but when colonial policies after the Foraker Act disappointed both of them, Muñoz created the Union Party, while Barbosa continued with his Republican Party and favoring statehood (Scarano, 2008, pp.466-469, 508-513).

- first, because we are culturally different from the United States, and it is unwilling to absorb another nation;
- second, because many of the benefits to U.S. corporations would be gone as soon as Puerto Rico is treated as a state of the Union, so corporations would not favor it;
- third, because Puerto Rico would have more access to U.S. budget than 25 (today 26) other states of the Union if we were to have representatives in Congress (about 6 or 7 representatives and 2 senators);
- fourth, because Puerto Rican statehood would mean a significant increase in access to U.S. individual transfers and federal funds, which would be significantly more costly to the average U.S. tax-payer as statehood would slow down the economy and increase unemployment;
- finally, the U.S. Department of State would not favor statehood because it would be regarded by Latin America like a U.S. trojan horse, with which the United States would extend permanently in the Caribbean to affect policies in the area.³⁰

On the other hand, Berríos claimed that under independence, we would have more means to attract capital from other countries, we would keep a free trade with the United States, and that earned Federal aids such as Social Security, veteran benefits and pensions would not be lost under independence. He even stated that during a transition there would be a Puerto Rican social security system financed in a transition period by the federal Social Security system.³¹

Because of my pro-statehood prejudice, I was skeptical about many of these claims until a process in the U.S. Congress from 1989 to 1991. Due to the end of the Cold War, President George Bush, Sr. favored that Congress would reevaluate Puerto Rico's position in the new international scenario. As a result, in 1989, Senator Bennett Johnston and Representative Ron De Lugo proposed different bills in the United States' Senate (S. 712) and House of Representatives (H. R. 4765) respectively in order to grant Puerto Ricans the opportunity to participate in a Congressional-sponsored plebiscite. Puerto Ricans would choose one of three alternatives: enhanced Commonwealth, statehood and independence.

To my surprise, I saw *everything* that Berríos predicted become true before my eyes. Congress was willing to concede an independence with free trade, dual citizenship, the U.S. dollar as official currency if we wished to, benefits to attract U.S. capital *and* capital from other countries, that Congress would not take away earned rights such as Social Security, veteran benefits and federal pensions, and a transition period of 9 to 10 years to create a local social security system financed by the federal Social Security system, and not take away all at once all the federal aids (grants) to individuals, and so on. This definitely blew me away.

The story was not the same for the pro-statehood option. It was obvious that Congress did *not* want statehood, period. They rejected every proposal made by the pro-statehood movement in order to make statehood a viable option from an economic standpoint.³² The determinations of

30 Berríos, 1983, pp. 259-265.

31 Berríos, 1983, pp. 334-346.

32 The proposals were: (1) Federal contributions would increase gradually on U.S. corporations and individuals of those to Puerto Rico during a transition period of 25 years; (2) a transition period of 25 years (10 years to preserve the benefits of Section 936, and the gradual elimination of these benefits for 15 years); (3) protection of Puerto Rican industry from federal taxes through exemptions to those who had tax exemptions before the date

Congress against statehood were of such nature, that the Congressional Budget Office in the best and worst scenarios predicted that statehood would slow down the Puerto Rican economy.³³ Integrating a culture, a different nation, to another nation as the United States was definitely a concern for Congress.³⁴ After these frustrated efforts, Governor Pedro Rosselló carried out several plebiscites (one in 1993 and another in 1998) without Congressional sponsorship or approval. Regarding 1993, there were still fears that Puerto Ricans were going to choose statehood, since it appeared as an option.³⁵ That option did not win the plebiscite to the relief of many congressmembers. In 1997, a second effort was made by Congress for a Congressional sponsored plebiscite (H. R. 856), it passed by one vote in the House of Representatives, but it died in the Senate, again because of fear of statehood.

Puerto Rico becomes a state of the Union; (4) preservation of federal tax exemptions on Puerto Rican bonds; (5) the legislation of an “Omnibus Act” in the future which would guarantee the same economic and social opportunities than all fifty states of the Union, and protection of native coffee; and (6) immediate extension of all federal transfer and welfare programs to individuals. Congress rejected proposals 3, 4, and 5 because that would be granting Puerto Rico special rights that the states of the Union do not have. Under these conditions, statehood would mean a gradual loss of jobs due to the absence of the benefits enjoyed by individuals and corporations and the lack of protection of Puerto Rican industry. Public debt would increase significantly because the applications of federal taxes would apply immediately. Also, Puerto Rico would lose jobs in the area of agriculture and no guarantee is offered to establish economic and social opportunities than all 50 states of the Union. Regarding to (1) and (2), Congress granted only a 5 years transition for the elimination of benefits of Section 936, which would mean the loss of jobs in that area also (Alegría, 1991, pp. 47-49). By 1990, Puerto Rico received close to \$6 billion, and, according to calculations made by the Finance Committee, Puerto Rico would receive an additional \$3 billion under statehood, when, under such a scenario, only 30% of Puerto Ricans would pay federal taxes. When the Johnston Bill was presented in 1991 (S. 244), there were talks about extending federal welfare to Puerto Ricans, but keeping the total amount of what Puerto Ricans received at the time the same after statehood (Alegría, 1991, p. iv). See Martin, (1998) for more details on this aspect of Puerto Rican dependency. See also “Altered States” (1990), and Weisman (1990).

33 García & Rivera, 1992, pp.143-210.

34 See Buchanan 1990a, Buchanan 1990b, “Altered States” (1990), and Weisman (1990). Moynihan (1993) talks about his experience as Congressman regarding the issue of Puerto Rico during the plebiscitarian process: “However, despite the urging of President Bush that Congress provide for a referendum which will enable the citizens of Puerto Rico to make such a choice [for statehood], Congress has not been willing to do so. Congressional resistance arises largely from the question of whether the island should have the option to choose statehood whilst retaining Spanish as an official language. In two centuries, the United States Congress has admitted thirty-seven new states to the original union of thirteen. But always a stated or unstated condition was that English be the official language. Louisiana, for example, might and did retain the *Code Napoléon*, but trials were to be in English. The position may seem arbitrary, but it is defensible. *E pluribus unum*. But arbitrary or not, it can be predicted that Congress will be seized on the issue, and the plebiscite delayed, for the simple reason that it suits the purposes of certain of the contending Puerto Rican parties [i.e. the pro-statehood party] *not* to have a plebiscite on the terms which they perceive they would lose.” (pp. 73-74).

35 Woodward (1995) tells us the following story: “The evening, April 27 [1993], the Clintons invited Pat Moynihan and his wife Elisabeth to the White House for a private dinner. Moynihan was not happy with the overall economic plan, and felt he had not been consulted enough about it. In effect, the White House had just handed it to the House and the Senate, saying, here, pass this.

“Moynihan wanted to introduce Clinton to sensitive real-world politics. For example, there was one item in the economic plan that would have to be dropped, a proposal to eliminate the tax subsidy for U.S. corporations doing business in Puerto Rico. Known by its title, section 936, the subsidy was, Moynihan granted, of course, indefensible. One company received a tax break of about \$500,000 per worker. Some pharmaceutical firms got \$150,000 per worker.

“But that wasn’t the point. Moynihan painted a doomsday scenario of what would happen if the tax credit were to be dropped. First, American firms would pull out of Puerto Rico, causing the unemployment rate to double to about 30% and creating an economic crisis. A political crisis would follow. Puerto Rico faced an upcoming plebiscite on statehood, and if the tax break were eliminated, the politicians would argue that it never

So, ever since 1991, I am an independentista. It is obvious to me that independence *has* to be the best option, not only for economic reasons, but also to preserve our cultural heritage (that became clear once I began studying Puerto Rican history in depth).

FMT: *How is colonial power from Washington D.C. and U.S. corporations experienced in Puerto Rico and what does that power relationship do upon the Puerto Rican psyche?*

PMRB: As stated above, it all began with military interests to protect U.S. businesses in the Caribbean. However, colonial policies were adopted because of U.S. corporations, specifically sugar corporations, and after the 40s, by those U.S. industries that wanted to invest here in Puerto Rico and make possible its industrial growth. Since then until 1993, Puerto Rico experienced a remarkable economic *growth*, but not economic *development*. There were two pillars that kept the *status quo* alive, and they were federal transfers to the individuals and the government, and also the benefits of Sections 931 (1946-1976) and 936 (1976-1993) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, whose benefits were eliminated by President Bill Clinton. Again, in both cases we find an extreme dependence on the United States government. This has made Puerto Ricans think that they would never survive in a free independent Puerto Rico, because those benefits would be gone eventually.³⁶ It is not a surprise that the independentista movement is a real minority.

Also, we must not forget that the structural colonial policies in Puerto Rico have promoted excessive consumerism in Puerto Rico, and companies such as Wal-Mart, K-Mart, GAP, Borders, and many others, have benefited immensely from this situation of extreme dependence. Economists have pointed out that this is a very serious problem, because it is not only socially harmful, but also economically bad in the long run.³⁷

FMT: *Do you favor U.S. withdrawal from its colonial holdings in the world only, or would you prefer to see the U.S. as an entity dismantled into something much smaller (such as a collection of smaller countries with little power in the world) and removed from the center of the world stage entirely?*

PMRB: I want to clarify that I am not against the United States as a country, and I do not want it dismantled or eliminated from the world. However, I am against it being an empire. That would not only mean to give its colonies, including Puerto Rico, their independence and freedom, but it also means that it should not intervene in much of the world affairs exclusively for its own benefit. I am not against the United States intervening in situations like Darfur, the whole world should intervene, but I do not think that it should intervene in situations like

would have happened if the territory had two U.S. senators. Statehood would then pass the plebiscite, Puerto Rico would apply for statehood, and Congress would of course reject the application. In all, it would be a political nightmare. How would the United States look in the world? So the tax, which would save some \$5 billion over four years, just couldn't be done, Moynihan said. He could never let such proposal out of the Finance Committee – for reasons, he noted, that couldn't be explained publicly.” (pp. 198-199).

Clinton did eliminate the benefits of Section 936, and the pro-statehood movement has grown to the point of now winning the elections for more than 50% due to Commonwealth's structural crisis. In 2008, the pro-statehood party won by 53%.

36 Memmi (1991) and Fanon (1961/2004) describe very well this behavior which can be found in any colony. Even when Fanon's reality was far more brutal, the colonial structures are almost the same, and the effects on the colonized psyche are almost the same. In the case of Puerto Rico, even when the reality is much less brutal, the structure of dependence on the U.S. is more than obvious.

37 In 2004, Puerto Ricans spent 98% of their income in durables, nondurables and services, and had poor savings performance (Collins, Bosworth, & Soto, 1996, p. 74).

Venezuela or establish a Cuban embargo. Such failed policies are not, in the end, for the benefit of those countries, but for U.S. internal policies or for corporate benefits.

FMT: *Has the U.S. become one of the most dangerous nations in world history (alongside Rome, the U.S.S.R., and the Third Reich) because of its colonial policies?*

PMRB: I cannot say that the United States is as dangerous as those regimes. In many aspects where corporate rule prevails, it does become a danger to many nations around the world. However, I would consider the rule under the U.S.S.R. and the Third Reich as being more dangerous than the United States'. As long as the United States wants to be an empire, it will be ruthless to some extent. But there are empires that are better than other empires.

FMT: *How has U.S. colonialism affected the environment? Promoted racism in the world? Exacerbated world poverty? Contributed to the spread of disease? Fomented war?*

PMRB: The establishment of sugar corporations in Puerto Rico created a huge harm for the environment because deforestation had to be carried out to sow thousands of acres of sugar cane.³⁸ Later, because of policies of the New Deal in Puerto Rico, much of the problems of deforestations were taken care of. However, the establishment of corporations like pharmaceuticals or oil refineries have done a lot of harm to the environment. Finally, one of the huge problems since the 1940s was the extreme dependence on the construction industry to somehow deal with the problem of unemployment. As a result, instead of building tall structures, they spread homes through vast areas of the city, which means more deforestation. The dependence on the construction industry is so great that they are building homes and expressways where they should not be built, placing in danger, not only the people who drive through the expressways or live those homes, but place much of the animals and plants in danger.

I see Puerto Rico being a mini-cosmos of what will happen to the world if it does not care for the environment and not control corporate externalities. I am not only referring to U.S. corporations, but corporations of any kind in the world.³⁹

FMT: *Why do you think the general citizenry of the U.S. seems either unaware or unconcerned about their own nation's colonial exploitation of other countries?*

PMRB: First, there is a sense of "Manifest Destiny" and Exceptionalism in the U.S. spirit that permeates practically every life of a U.S. citizen in some way.⁴⁰ What does this mean? That for the average U.S. citizen, even when he or she knows that the United States can harm to other countries, in the long run it is for those countries' benefit. This is a belief that is not only taught at homes or schools, but also by the media. The media, owned by corporations that do exactly this harm, will rather talk to us about Michael Jackson, Britney Spears, and O. J. Simpson, than, for instance, what has happened and is still happening in East Timor, or what is happening in Darfur. It is not a surprise that they do not know absolutely anything about Puerto Rico and the U.S. policies towards it.⁴¹

38 Picó, 2006, pp. 254-255.

39 For examples of how corporations externalize and create undemocratic forms of governments for their benefit, see Bakan (2004) and Klein (2007).

40 See Stephanson (1996) and Dawley (2003).

41 Unfortunately, news have become another form of entertainment, see Goodman & Goodman (2004), Goodman & Goodman (2007), and Kitty (2005).

FMT: *What effect has the U.S.'s, Chinese, and Russian colonialism and power mongering had on specific ethnic groups within the past 20 years?*

PMRB: The policies are almost the same when a power wants to dominate a country. Colonialism and neocolonialism are means to extract wealth from the dominated country, it is never to establish a relationship of solidarity and respect towards another people's right to sovereignty. All dominating countries have poor human rights records, including the past 20 years. The United States wants to dominate Latin America financially, and wants to eliminate the solidarity that is being created in Latin American nations such as Venezuela, Chile, Bolivia, Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, and Nicaragua. We just saw the invasion of Russia to Georgia. We see how the Chinese is in effect helping the genocide in Darfur. So, again, when one country wishes to be an empire, it does not matter how well intentioned these policies pretend to be, they will always end up harming society in very different ways, and often in brutal ways.

FMT: *Has the U.S. had any positive influence in the world, despite some of its colonialist tendencies? If so, how?*

PMRB: Yes, the United States had done positive things in the world. I do recognize, for instance, that in the case of Puerto Rico, we have made important economic and political advance thanks to the presence of the United States. Our local constitution, as colonial as it may be, is an example of this, since it is not only better than the United States', but the reason why it is better it is because we have learned a lot from our past *and* the past of the U.S., and have incorporated those lessons here. That does not mean that all of the Puerto Rican system is due to the presence of the United States. Much of it was already present before the United States invaded when we were in an autonomic relationship with Spain, and was eliminated when the United States established its colonial policies.

The United States has also made cultural contributions to the rest of the world in. Just think of its contribution to music, movies, literature, software, and science. This should not be diminished in any way, but recognized.

Also, the United States has defended the Western world of people like Hitler, had kept the U.S.S.R. at bay. We must consider also that along the United States' ideals there are those of freedom and democracy which have affected the world in positive ways, even when in some cases the U.S. has tried to repress it in other countries. Much of the constitutions in the Western world, and some countries in the East take the U.S. constitution as a model, which is not a minor thing. The creation of the United Nations. is also important as an international organization that at the beginning was there to guarantee U.S. interests around the world, but in a multipolar world, it is a key for maintaining diplomatic peace around the world. The United States' efforts under the Bush administration to challenge its own creature, the U.N., have proven that they are not good international policies.

FMT: *Getting back to Puerto Rico: in your vision, what should an independent Puerto Rico look like, and what relations could it have as a free nation with other nations in the western hemisphere? Do you see the possibility of Puerto Rico moving towards independence in your life time, and is there the potential for a healthy relationship between the U.S. and a free Puerto Rico, and if so, what should that look like?*

PMRB: Yes, there is a lot of potential for Puerto Rico under independence. The reason why the economy of Puerto Rico has been in recession long before the United States is due to the fact that

in the globalized world there is no place for dispositions like Section 936 to attract capital artificially. Today we have a whole world that competes without these dispositions.

Also, the amount of federal funds to individuals have begun to be reduced. Still, we thrive in trying to depend on the United States as much as possible. Independence (*non-dependence*) does not mean isolating ourselves from the United States. Instead, it helps us to establish a *better* relationship with the United States and be able to establish treaties with several other countries in the world. The best natural resource Puerto Rico has is its geographical position. If we eliminate the cabotage laws, we would be able to take huge advantages for international commerce in the Caribbean, which would lead to much wealth and income. The citizens of a Republic of Puerto Rico could even enter freely to the United States and vice-versa, and that would let capital flow between both countries.⁴²

Also, we would be free to offer our services much more easily to many other countries in the Caribbean and the rest of the world, including the United States. We could form part of PetroCaribe, an initiative by Venezuela to buy oil for 40% off the oil price. We could have access to funds in different international organisms such as the IMF, the World Bank, or the newly created Bank of the South. We could form part of free trade treaties, not only with the United States but also with other countries, hence we could have access to those markets. We could create incentives like those created by Singapore and Ireland (our present competitors), and also establish our own communication policies, and so forth.

This is the kind of independence I want. One that opens itself to the rest of the world. I do not know that I will see it in my life time. However, I think that I will either watch independence happen or a true form of free sovereign association with the United States. I see statehood light years away from us.

FMT: *President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela often points to the heavy handedness of U.S. policy in the western hemisphere as one of the reasons Latin American countries lag behind the rest of the world economically. Please give us an analysis of Señor Chávez, both positively and negatively because he is in the U.S. news so frequently with his denunciations of the U.S. and belligerent language. Is he simply a demagogue, or is he echoing the fears and frustrations of a many Latin Americans? Is his vision of a centralized, socialist state of Venezuela with a strong chief executive (or dictator) going to have a positive effect on the rest of Latin America, or do you think he has colonialist ambitions himself and seeks to dominate his neighbors in the region politically and economically?*

PMRB: Regarding Chávez, I have mixed feelings. I sympathize with socialist causes, but I want to be careful about favoring his policies. The internal problem of centralizing government in Venezuela the manner it is going, has its good side and bad side. The good side is that much of his policies are mostly beneficial to the poor in Venezuela, which is the reason why he is overwhelmingly elected every 6 years and wins every referendum to revoke his position as president. I love much of his programs such as providing funds to the creation of cooperatives, even the promotion of PROUT (an organization I am close to). The education standard has increased, and his literacy program has been very successful to the point of making the UNESCO recognize Venezuela as a country free of illiteracy. Also, the fact that Chávez has used Venezuelan oil to provide free health care to so many people who have never seen a doctor in

⁴² During the H.R. 856, the bill did accept the recommendation of the PIP to include the free entrance of Puerto Ricans to the United States as part of the definition of the “independence” option.

their lives is simply wonderful. There are other programs of expropriation of land used only for speculative purposes to hand them to people who might use them. I could continue on and on about it. In this sense, Chávez has been more beneficial to the Venezuelan poor than the United States.

On the bad side, though, the centralization of power means more repression from the part of the state, limits to freedom of expression in order to oppress the opposition (regardless of my feelings towards many sectors of the opposition). The representative of Human Rights Watch was expelled from Venezuela, for pointing out problems in Chávez's administration regarding this fact.

Regarding the influence of Chávez in Latin America, we have to remember that Venezuela is not the only power in South America, but we have Brasil, which now plays a very important part in the production of energy resources. Contrary to what is portrayed by the media, Chávez has respected always the sovereignty of the other countries in Latin America. Usually it is the U.S. allies that make the effort to affect the sovereignties of Ecuador and Venezuela.

Venezuela has been highly positive for other Latin American countries. These organizations such as ALBA (Latin American Bolivarian Alternative), the Bank of the South, PetroSur, PetroCaribe, among other unifying organizations (MERCOSUR, UNASUR) are a threat to U.S. interests because Latin America is now confronting the United States as an economic block that does not depend on the IMF or the World Bank, institutions that have not helped Latin America at all. The Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) is a way to undo such an economic block. The FTAA has not been implemented fully, but the CAFTA (Central American Free Trade Agreement + Dominican Republic) has been realized, and also other free trade agreements with other countries, such as Chile.

Venezuela has even paid part of the external debt of many countries, and has created through ALBA a system of solidarity among these countries to exchange resources, instead of the free trade treaties that are mostly beneficial for the United States, but harmful to the associates of those treaties.

FMT: *What is the most dangerous path to a world free colonialism?*

PMRB: Always opting for violence as a means to achieve freedom. I'm a pacifist and have Gandhi as a model of how to fight for freedom without the use of violence.

FMT: *Other thoughts you may have not raised by these questions:*

PMRB: ¡Viva Puerto Rico libre!

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