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THE NEW DEAL IN PUERTO RICO: PUBLIC WORKS, PUBLIC HEALTH, AND THE PUERTO RICO RECONSTRUCTION ADMINISTRATION, 1935-1955

by

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Abstract

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Advisor: Laird W. Bergad

During the 1930s, Puerto Rico experienced acute infrastructural and public health crises caused by the economic contraction of the Great Depression, the devastating San Felipe and San Ciprián hurricanes of 1928 and 1932, and the limitations of the local political structure. Signed into law by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1935, the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRRA) replaced all other New Deal activity on the island. As a locally-run federal agency, the PRRA was very unique and yet very representative of the “Second” New Deal in the United States—which attempted to move beyond finding immediate solutions to the most critical problems of the day and make permanent changes to social and economic life for all U.S. citizens.

As the first archival analysis of the PRRA, this dissertation argues that the PRRA actively shifted federal policy in Puerto Rico from a paradigm of relief to one of reconstruction focused on the island’s specific needs in the wake of the hurricanes and Depression. This shift mirrored the larger change from the laissez faire individualism of the 1920s to the more prominent use of federal power to intervene in socioeconomic life during the New Deal. By building the island’s first truly public works and establishing its first public authorities to administer them, the PRRA constructed a new public infrastructure capable of addressing three interrelated goals: increasing life expectancy through concrete interventions in public health; providing more egalitarian public
access to a safer and more permanent built environment; and limiting the private corporate control of Puerto Rico’s natural resources. Designed by Puerto Rican engineers and built by Puerto Rican workers, PRRA public works projects made concrete contributions to the physical security of millions of Puerto Ricans through the construction of hurricane-proof houses, schools, hospitals, roads, sewers, waterworks, and rural electrification networks. These projects not only made lasting contributions to local social and economic life, they also had a transformative effect on Puerto Rican politics during the 1940s and the meaning of U.S. citizenship for Puerto Ricans in the twentieth century and beyond.
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Introduction

On Thursday morning, September 13, 1928, Puerto Ricans living on the southern coast of the island awoke to a suspicious wind coming onshore from the southeast. For some residents, such as Don Taso, the narrator of Sidney Mintz’s *Worker in the Cane: A Puerto Rican Life History*, the swirling wind did not alter their daily routine. While San Juan received repeated radio reports that a well-formed tropical storm had been located about 1,000 miles southeast of Guayama by the *S.S. Commack*, a cargo ship sailing from Bahia, Brazil to Philadelphia, residents of the rural south coast received no warning that the deadly San Felipe hurricane would reach land around 11:00 or 11:30 that morning. But as the wind increased and the warm tide rose, workers like Don Taso were sent home to brace themselves and their families for what was to come. Few could have realized how dramatically the coming storm would affect nearly all aspects of social, economic, and political life in Puerto Rico during the 1930s.¹

San Felipe (also called Okeechobee) was the most powerful hurricane to ever strike Puerto Rico. Having ravaged the island of Guadalupe the day before, the storm continued northward across the Bahamas on Friday and Saturday and struck the south coast of Florida somewhere between Jupiter and Boca Raton on Sunday, September 15—where it killed nearly 2,000 people when the waters of Lake Okeechobee flooded. By September 20, a week after it

struck the southern sugar cane fields of Puerto Rico, San Felipe had moved up the Atlantic coast and crossed New York State before disappearing into Canada over the cool waters of Lake Ontario.\(^2\)

For Puerto Rico, a small Caribbean island and unincorporated territory of the United States since 1898, the storm’s destructive force was exacerbated by its timing. Not only did it arrive one year before the collapse of the New York Stock Exchange and beginning of the Great Depression in the U.S., the “once in a lifetime” storm also struck just four years before the devastating San Ciprián hurricane of 1932. Together, the two storms leveled many parts of the existing infrastructure and caused considerable environmental damage—combining to create a growing crisis in public health. By inflicting damage on nearly all aspects of the agricultural sector, the hurricanes also compounded the economic contraction of the global Depression and influenced local political life for the rest of the 1930s. As studies of natural disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean have shown, environmental phenomena such as the San Felipe and San Ciprián hurricanes become human events that require historical study of the ways in which local political structures are tested and reshaped by the long-term impact of natural catastrophes. Not only did the hurricanes expose the weaknesses of existing political parties and relationships, they shaped the available strategies of response to the Great Depression as well.\(^3\)

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The 1930s were a critical time for Puerto Rico, a decade in which local political structures and external political relationships were in flux. These political changes were part of broader socioeconomic transformations associated with Puerto Rico’s recovery from the Great Depression. This recovery, like nearly all other aspects of life on the island during the decade, cannot be discussed without reference to the scale of the 1928 and 1932 hurricanes.

Like most people affected by the Great Depression, Puerto Ricans struggled to find the appropriate response to the social, political, economic, and environmental crises of the decade. As elsewhere, their decisions were conditioned by external factors, such as the collapse of the U.S. stock market, the sharp decline of international trade, and the rise of totalitarianism in Europe and Japan. Their choices were also shaped by internal factors, such as local political concerns and environmental conditions. Though these factors presented numerous challenges and limitations to the island’s response to the Depression, the story of Puerto Rico in the 1930s is a story of the ideas, decisions, and labor of Puerto Ricans in constructing and securing a lasting and widespread recovery from intertwined global and local crises. As elsewhere, these ideas and decisions were not always achieved with an easy or complete consensus. Despite numerous disagreements, however, a cross-section of Puerto Rican engineers, teachers, doctors, farmers,

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and workers found common ground on pragmatic solutions, and shared a vision of permanent recovery made possible by new alliances, choices, and compromises.

Among these new choices, Puerto Ricans invested intellectual, physical, and financial capital in an alliance with the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRRA), the second major New Deal program to operate exclusively on the island. The PRRA, which replaced the Puerto Rico Emergency Relief Administration (PRERA) and coordinated all other New Deal activity between 1935 and 1955, was made possible by the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932 and his reelection in 1936. Through a variety of economic programs, the New Deal attempted to provide lasting recovery from the Depression while, at the same time, enhancing the power of the federal government to more directly influence the daily lives of U.S. citizens. Through direct legislative and executive action, the New Deal created new long-term federal commitments to the public welfare. These commitments included new regulations of economic activity, new security through the creation of a federal safety net for workers, and new large-scale public works projects designed to make lasting changes in social and economic life.

Together, these changes redefined the relationship between the public and the government, and embodied the beginning of a more fair and democratic understanding of U.S. citizenship. As Marlene Park and Gerald Markowitz have argued, although its “goals were inadequately pursued and implemented, the New Deal . . . broadened the concept of democracy and based it in the economic sphere.” This concept of a more publicly experienced democratic economy contrasted

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4 A note on pronunciation: In Puerto Rico, the PRERA and PRRA were not referred to by their initials, but rather pronounced as one word—the PRRA was called “la pra” on the island.

sharply with the policies of his three Republican predecessors in the White House: Warren G. Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover.

During the New Deal, this new and more democratic understanding of citizenship also applied to Puerto Ricans, who had been U.S. citizens since 1917, and the PRRA proved to be a pivotal turning point from three decades of previous federal policy. Coinciding with the growth of New Deal liberalism, an economic policy that believed the federal government had a unique responsibility to reconstruct and manage the economy, the PRRA sought to relieve the most critical daily hardships of the Great Depression while attempting to make permanent democratic changes to social and economic life in Puerto Rico.

The most significant component of the PRRA in addressing these twin aims was the Engineering division. Coordinating the type of work performed by a host of New Deal “alphabet soup” agencies in the United States—such as the Public Works Administration (PWA), Works Progress Administration (WPA), Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), Resettlement Administration (RA), and Farm Security Administration (FSA)—the Engineering division of the PRRA made a lasting contribution to the physical security of millions of Puerto Ricans during the Great Depression and after through the construction of hurricane-proof houses, schools, and hospitals and modern water supply and waste disposal systems. From a public health standpoint, this publicly-built infrastructure contributed to one of the largest increases in life expectancy and opportunity in the island’s history. At the same time,


6 As the World Health Organization has argued, “housing and built environments have a profound impact on human health.” World Health Organization, “International Workshop on Housing, Health, and Climate Change: Developing a guidance for health protection in the built
improved transportation and communication networks built by the PRRA—ranging from hiking trails to connecting roads to electric service wires—expanded the physical mobility of Puerto Ricans in both rural and urban areas. Combined with the vastly improved public health infrastructure, the expansion of transportation and communication networks produced one of the most long-lasting contributions to the overall social mobility of Puerto Rican citizens in the island’s history.

By building the island’s first truly public works, the Engineering division constructed a hurricane-proof infrastructure capable of addressing three interrelated goals: increasing life expectancy through concrete interventions in public health; providing more egalitarian public access to the built environment; and limiting the power of private corporate holdings on the island’s natural resources. Led by a predominantly Puerto Rican staff of engineers and administrators, and built by Puerto Rican workers, PRRA public works projects included the establishment of the Cataño cement plant, the construction of thousands of concrete houses, schools, and medical care facilities in both rural and urban areas of the island, and the building of seven major hydroelectric power projects designed—for the first time—to bring electric service to residents of the rural interior of the island. Officially operating until 1955, the PRRA made its most significant infrastructural and public health contributions in Puerto Rico between 1935 and 1945.
Conceived, planned, and built largely by the Engineering division, these large-scale construction projects would not have been possible without an alliance between Puerto Ricans and the New Deal.

As in the U.S., the alliance between Puerto Ricans and the New Deal was shaped by conflicting and contested decisions. The reason for this is that the New Deal was not a monolithic government program imposed from the top down, but oftentimes shaped by local control of federal resources. Demonstrating the New Deal’s creative, flexible, and experimental nature, FDR continually moved capital and human resources from one agency to another to negotiate the many ups and downs of his administration’s policy. Often, administrative and policy changes were the result of serious challenges to New Deal policy from FDR’s left and right, ranging from: Huey Long, the populist “dictator” of Louisiana who stood poised to challenge Roosevelt in the 1936 Democratic primary with his “Share Our Wealth” campaign; to breakaway conservative liberals, mostly Southern Democrats such as Senators Carter Glass (D-VA), Thomas P. Gore (D-OK), and Millard Tydings (D-MD); to the 1935 and 1936 Supreme

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7 By the turn of the twentieth century, the term “public health” was understood to include the “protection of the community against communicable diseases and sanitation of the environment.” George Rosen, *A History of Public Health*, Expanded Edition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 320. Global concern for public health was shifting from community to state-level intervention and combined a mixture of ideas such as sanitary reform, bacteriological discoveries, and the training of a professional class of public health practitioners and educators. For a much needed discussion of how new ideas and concerns for public health in the United States were articulated with foreign and territorial policy during the progressive era, see Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) and Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano, eds., *Colonial Crucible: Empire and the Making of the Modern American State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), particularly 273-326, Part 5: Imperial Medicine and Public Health.
Court decisions that struck down the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) and Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), two seminal pieces of legislation from FDR’s “First Hundred Days.”

In Puerto Rico, popular alliance with the PRRA negotiated the fluidity of FDR’s policy through the many changes in and challenges to the New Deal. While historical scholarship on Puerto Rico has long acknowledged the New Deal, however, there has been little critical examination of the PRRA by historians of Puerto Rico or by historians of the New Deal. As the first archival analysis of the most important New Deal agency to operate on the island, this dissertation will argue that the PRRA was a locally-run New Deal agency that made possible the shift from a paradigm of relief to one of reconstruction. Both discursive and physical, this shift signified one of the most important changes to the overall relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States during the 1930s. Contrasting the overwhelming focus on the island’s “colonial” status in the historical literature, this dissertation will also argue that the actions and ideas of average Puerto Ricans—such as the engineers and teachers mentioned above—have been obscured by theoretical and political concerns that have overshadowed the substantial historical changes in Puerto Rican daily life since the Great Depression.

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9 This dissertation seeks to contribute to the expanding discussion on the “mutually transformative nature” of the U.S. empire since 1898. See Alfred W. McCoy, Francisco A. Scarano, and Courtney Johnson, “On the Tropic of Cancer: Transitions and Transformations in the U.S. Imperial State,” in Colonial Crucible: Empire and the Making of the Modern American State, eds. McCoy and Scarano, 6, 33. In grappling with the contested vocabulary of empire,
The transition from a paradigm of relief to one of reconstruction created a new focus on long-term economic development through capital investments in public works and new interventions in public health. These changes were not imposed on Puerto Rico from above, but rather designed and developed on the island. Key to this transition was the creation of federally-funded but locally-owned public authorities established by the PRRA between 1935 and 1943 to assure local control of the island’s natural resources regardless of current or future political status. The two most important public agencies created during the Great Depression were the Puerto Rico Cement Corporation (PRCC) in 1939 and the Puerto Rico Water Resources Authority (WRA) in 1941. Designed to combat the conditions of hurricanes and Depression, each was a direct product of the mass-based alliance between Puerto Ricans and the New Deal that helped foster a new understanding of public power on the island.

The creation of these publicly-owned agencies paralleled similar developments in the U.S., as the “Second” New Deal featured considerable new federal investments in public works and interventions in public health. In the U.S., public works were constructed through the Public Works Administration (PWA) run by Harold Ickes, and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) run by Harry Hopkins—which were consolidated into the Federal Works Agency (FWA).

McCoy, Scarano, and Johnson remind us that through direct colonial rule or indirect influence (such as economic leverage or cultural hegemony), empires have perpetually existed. Taken as a whole, the 44 essays collected in this volume suggest the difficulty of using a static model of colonialism or imperialism to describe U.S. extraterritorial expansion (either direct or indirect) over the past century, and the futility of using this model as an analytical framework. The relationship between Puerto Rico and the U.S.—like that of the U.S. and the world since 1900—has been one of constant change. Because the Great Depression was such a pivotal moment in global history, the New Deal in Puerto Rico was one of the most pivotal moments of change in this relationship. For a more theoretical discussion of the problems with both colonial and postcolonial academic research, see Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 3-4, 17, 24-26.
under the Reorganization Act of 1939. Under these agencies, federal spending on infrastructure was not only increased but transformed into public works by the creation of public authorities and corporations such as the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), which served as a model for the WRA in Puerto Rico.

During the 1930s, as Puerto Ricans recognized the pronounced differences in federal administration during the transition from Hoover to Roosevelt, new public works included: the construction of hurricane-proof houses; the development of a new public health infrastructure including concrete storm drains, water supply, and sanitation systems; and the creation of publicly-owned hydroelectric facilities. Toward the end of the decade, as the U.S. began preparing for a potential war with Nazi Germany, public works included the construction of new military bases, landing fields, and naval docks in Puerto Rico and, after the Destroyers for Bases

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11 There is an important distinction between infrastructural building and public works, as during the twentieth century public works became identified by their quasi-independent status as state owned but autonomously run agencies. In the most widely accepted definition of public works, Ellis Armstrong wrote that they are “the physical structures and facilities developed or acquired by public agencies to house government functions and provide water, waste disposal, power, transportation, and similar services to facilitate the achievement of common social and economic objectives.” Ellis L. Armstrong, ed., History of Public Works in the United States, 1776-1976 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 1. The same definition is used by Jason Scott Smith in his recent analysis of the PWA and WPA. See Smith, Building New Deal Liberalism: The Political Economy of Public Works, 1933-1956 (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2n3. On the use of public authorities during the New Deal, see Robert Caro, The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 615-636. As Gail Radford has recently warned, however, the over-reliance on public authorities in the twentieth century contributed to the growth of a fragmented, semi-secretive bureaucracy that is largely unaccountable to the electorate. See Gail Radford, The Rise of the Public Authority: Statebuilding and Economic Development in Twentieth-Century America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 14-15.
Agreement of 1940 and Lend-Lease Act of 1941, throughout much of the British Caribbean as well. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the Philippines in December 1941, which resulted in a nearly complete pan-hemispheric alliance against fascism, Puerto Rico was transformed into a primary center of the Caribbean defense against Nazi U-boat and Luftwaffe air attacks through increased military spending on public works.  

The construction of these public works during both the Depression and WWII was made possible by the pragmatic alliance between Puerto Rican New Dealers and the PRRA, which also helped legitimize the expanded role of the federal government in Puerto Rico. As in the U.S., where increased spending on public works underwrote public acceptance of the New Deal by “intellectually and physically” justifying the turn toward Keynesian liberalism, the social and economic impact of PRRA public works construction had dramatic consequences on both local political structures and external political relationships.  

By the end of the 1930s, as the world’s most intractable depression gave way to its most deadly war, all four major political parties in Puerto Rico had ruptured; the Republican, Socialist, Nationalist, and Liberal parties were depleted or torn apart by a unique combination of partisan differences, ideological compromises, and/or state repression. Into the vacuum created by the breakdown of party politics stepped the

12 By January 1, 1942, much of the western hemisphere had declared war on the Axis Powers. These included the U.S., Canada, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Panama, Honduras, and Nicaragua. By 1943, Bolivia, Brazil, and Colombia had joined the Allies, as had, by 1945, Peru, Chile, Paraguay, Venezuela, Uruguay, Ecuador, and Argentina. Non-independent islands of the Caribbean and North Atlantic also contributed to the Allied war effort, including: Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Antigua, the Bahamas, Bermuda, British Guyana (Guyana), British Honduras (Belize), St. Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, and Newfoundland. Though much of the U.S. defense system was geared to defend against Luftwaffe attacks, German activity in the Caribbean was composed mostly of submarine warfare.

13 For an analysis of how PWA and WPA patronage helped shaped the political development of the “New Deal coalition” in the U.S., see Smith, 3.
only political faction capable of continuing the PRRA public works programs. Indeed, even though Luis Muñoz Marín and his *Partido Popular Democrático* (PPD) had very little connection to the PRRA after 1937, he was able to position himself as the leader of a populist political coalition that was formed around the basic program of PRRA public works and land reform.\(^{14}\) This coalition, officially brought together under the banner of “*pan, tierra, y libertad,***” was also united by the increased federal spending but substantial local control over patronage and public works. While previous analyses have tended to mythologize or criticize the electoral success of the PPD in the 1940s, this dissertation will examine the role of New Deal liberalism in the emergence of Puerto Rican “populism” between 1937 and 1940, paying special attention to the active participation of Puerto Rican professional and working classes in conceiving and constructing PRRA public works.\(^{15}\)

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\(^{14}\) The study of populism in Latin America and the Caribbean differs considerably from the study of populism in the United States. While in the U.S., “populism” refers to a series of late nineteenth-century agrarian reform movements that aligned under the banner of the People’s Party in the 1892 and 1896 elections, “populism” in other areas of the western hemisphere generally refers to several distinct state-led political movements during the 1930s and 1940s that were urban based, and often supported by military rule. Puerto Rico’s experience with populism after 1940 shared some elements with other regional areas, but differed sharply from the ostensibly “democratic” dictatorships that held power in many areas of Latin America between the 1930s and 1980s. For contrasting views on Populism in the United States, see Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (1955; repr. New York: Random House, 2011) and Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

\(^{15}\) A large number of works have addressed the rise of the PPD and the 1940 elections. For a positive assessment of the PPD, see A.W. Maldonado, *Luis Muñoz Marin: Puerto Rico’s Democratic Revolution* (San Juan: La Editorial, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2006). For critical views, see Emilio Gonzalez Diaz, “Class struggle and politics in Puerto Rico during the decade of the 40’s: the rise of the P.D.P.,” *Two Thirds* 2, Iss. 1 (1979): 46-57 and Emilio Pantojas-Garcia, “Puerto Rican Populism Revisited: The PPD during the 1940s,” *Latin American Studies* 21, no. 3 (Oct. 1989): 521-522. For a more nuanced analysis of the PPD and its relationship with the federal government, see Rafael Alberto Bernabe, “Prehistory of the ‘Partido Popular Democratico’: Munoz Marin, the Partido Liberal and the crisis of sugar in Puerto Rico, 1930-
For Puerto Rico, the success of Muñoz Marín and the PPD in the 1940 election ensured the continuity of New Deal public works at the local level while, at the same time, altering the larger political relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. While the political status of Puerto Rico remains heavily debated today, the transformation of the unincorporated territory into the *Estado Libre Asociado* (Free Associated State) or Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in 1952 was a product of the 1940 election. The following year, as Muñoz Marín was sworn in as President of the Senate, FDR appointed Rexford Guy Tugwell as the Governor of Puerto Rico. Not only was he the first New Dealer to serve as governor, but he was the last American-born governor of the island as well.

Rex Tugwell was important not to the creation of the New Deal in Puerto Rico in the 1930s, but in its continuation by local public agencies in the 1940s. By 1941, Tugwell had been virtually run out of the Roosevelt administration as his public image devolved from a lightning rod to a political liability, despite his continuing close ties to FDR and the progressive wing of the New Deal, which included Henry A. Wallace, the Secretary of Agriculture and Vice President from 1941-1945, and Harold Ickes, the Secretary of the Interior and director of the PWA and PRRA (after 1937). Tugwell had been the original director of the Resettlement Administration (RA), which had led a “spirited attack on rural poverty” that aimed to “enable destitute and economically distressed farm families to achieve a measure of economic independence.” Tugwell was so unpopular, however, that the Resettlement Administration was

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replaced by the Farm Security Administration (FSA) in part to distance the idea of rural rehabilitation from Tugwell after his departure. His appointment to Governor of Puerto Rico in 1941 reflected both the popularity of New Deal public works on the island and the depth of local support for continuing the PRRA through the newly-elected PPD. Rejuvenated by his appointment, Tugwell hoped to expand the progressive elements of the New Deal on the island. As he wrote, at the time “there seemed to be no place in the Federal Government where I could be effective, considering my accumulation of enmities. But the Puerto Rican situation seemed to be one of those fortunate opportunities which sometimes join personal desires with convenient circumstances. I could bring the New Deal to an island where its coming had been delayed for a decade.”  

Between 1941 and 1945, Muñoz Marín and Tugwell supported laws that enhanced the role of New Deal liberalism on the island and made Puerto Rican public works permanent by creating a series of new public agencies modeled on the PRCC and WRA, including the Puerto Rico Transportation Authority, Development Company of Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico Agricultural Development Company, Puerto Rico Aqueduct and Sewerage Service, Puerto Rico Land Authority, Development Bank for Puerto Rico, and the Puerto Rico Communications Authority.

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17 Michael Namorato, ed., The Diary of Rexford G. Tugwell: The New Deal, 1932-1935 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 312. Tugwell also took pride in assisting in the transition to self-rule in Puerto Rico, writing that he “could also have a part in the great events now shaping up. So I responded to the suggestion of Harold Ickes and became Puerto Rico’s war-time Governor. I also became her last appointed outside Governor. It was my last public post. I still held it when President Roosevelt died.”

The creation of these numerous public agencies highlights the ambiguous ways in which the rise of “populism” in Puerto Rico corresponded to both the mass-based support for New Deal liberalism in the U.S. and to contemporary political developments throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. To demonstrate how unique political changes in Puerto Rico coincided with and contradicted the many manifestations of “colonialism” and “populism” in other parts of the region, this dissertation will employ a comparative analysis of the ways in which other areas of Latin America and the Caribbean responded to the continuing crisis of the Great Depression and onset of World War II. Of particular interest will be how recovery efforts in other areas of the Spanish Caribbean operated in relation to the U.S., as the entire region attempted to recover from the Depression, provide security from future hurricanes, and brace for the coming war.\textsuperscript{19}

There has been little scholarly analysis of the New Deal in Puerto Rico. There are two reasons for this. First, historians of Puerto Rico have largely focused their work on the external explanations for the island’s many problems during the global crisis of the 1930s. Not surprisingly, Puerto Rico’s “colonial” relationship with the United States has been cited as the most distinguishing aspect of the island’s social and cultural life and most decisive cause of its political and economic dependency.\textsuperscript{20} Over the last four decades, the study of colonialism in

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{19}] Surprisingly, little comparative work has been done on this subject. Two of the best recent works are Antonio Gaztambide-Geigel, \textit{Tan Lejos de Dios... Ensayos sobre las relaciones del Caribe con Estados Unidos} (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2006) and McCoy and Scarano, eds., \textit{Colonial Crucible}.
\item[\textsuperscript{20}] For a thorough examination of Puerto Rican historiography from the age of Spanish conquest to 2005, see Fernando Picó, “Historiography of Puerto Rico,” in \textit{General History of the}}
Puerto Rico has produced several theoretic models, ranging from a world system’s approach that divided the world into hegemonic core and dependent periphery regions, a class-based analysis of the island’s political elite as a colonial bourgeoisie, and an examination of the island as part of a global neo-liberal and neo-colonial “subalternality.” While these models have provided a series of provocative questions about the external conditions and theoretical dimensions surrounding Puerto Rico’s geopolitical and national status, they have obscured the internal aspects of the island’s many problems during the Great Depression, such as the breakdown of party politics in the 1930s and the infrastructural, environmental, and public health effects of the San Felipe and San Ciprián hurricanes of 1928 and 1932.

The focus on external explanations has, at times, reduced the complexities of the Great Depression into a narrow understanding of U.S. “colonialism” that has slighted the intellectual and physical participation of Puerto Ricans in articulating a secure and lasting recovery. However, as a growing number of new works on Puerto Rico during the Great Depression and


World War II have argued, the relationship between Puerto Rico and the U.S. has displayed a greater complexity than was previously assumed, and has been marked by fluid and not fixed boundaries of federal citizenship and national identity. As César Ayala and Rafael Bernabe have argued, the focus on colonialism cannot explain all aspects of Puerto Rican history in the “American Century.” To be sure, the territorial or “colonial” context of U.S.-Puerto Rican relations should be near the heart of every historical question we ask about the relationship between the island and mainland. What has been missing, however, is analysis of how that context has changed over time. In seeking to demonstrate the social and economic impact of public works in Puerto Rico and the political consequences of public authorities, this dissertation will contribute to a better understanding of Puerto Rico since the Great Depression.

The second reason for the lack of academic attention to the PRRA is the nearly total lack of analysis of the New Deal in Puerto Rico by historians of the United States. While knowledge of the New Deal is widespread on the island, where its long-term interventions in public health and hurricane-proof construction remain a tangible part of everyday life, awareness that the New Deal even existed in Puerto Rico is slim in the United States. As a sampling of the extensive

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historiography of the New Deal reveals, there has been a nearly complete lack of study on any component of the New Deal in Puerto Rico. Some of the most important works do not mention the island at all.23 Neither colony nor state, Puerto Rico is generally viewed in the academic literature as a liminal space, existing both outside and within the historiographic borders of Latin America, the Caribbean, and the United States. As both a Puerto Rican story told in U.S. archives, and a U.S. story told in island politics, the New Deal in Puerto Rico transgresses some of the disciplinary spaces we are familiar with and accustomed to.24

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24 It is impossible to analyze the history of Puerto Rico since the 1930s without using U.S.-based archival sources. The vast majority of New Deal-related archives are located in the National Archives at New York City, including the complete archive of the PRRA. Microfilm copies of these documents—in full or in part—are located at other locations in other archives.
The New Deal helped shift local and federal policy away from a paradigm of relief to one of reconstruction, which began a series of remarkable social and economic changes spurred by new investments in public works and other physical interventions in public health. With the rise of new public authorities such as the PRCC and WRA, these public works contributed to a growing concept of economic citizenship. Supported by a broad alliance of Puerto Rican engineers, teachers, doctors, and workers, the PRCC responded to the uniquely Caribbean exigencies of Puerto Rican life by allowing for the construction of hurricane-proof houses, schools, and hospitals made of locally-produced cement. Similarly, the WRA was designed and constructed by Puerto Rican engineers and workers who had long fought to break the corporate control of local water and electric power resources, which had been previously harnessed primarily to the benefit of large and (in part) absentee-owned sugar mills.

Public agencies such as the PRCC and WRA cannot be understood through a narrow focus on the “colonial” status of Puerto Rico and the hegemonic influence of the United States. Rather, these developments must be placed into the historical context of the sweeping changes in U.S. social and political life brought by the election of FDR in 1932, the enhanced power of the federal government to intervene in the daily lives of U.S. citizens during his presidency, and the increased federal commitment to public works that began during the New Deal. While the legacy of these changes has been sharply debated by U.S. historians, most have agreed that their

While important documents are also located on the island at the Archivo General de Puerto Rico in Puerta de Tierra and the Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín in Tujillo Alto, for example, it is telling that nearly every single archivist I spoke to in Puerto Rico during my various research trips told me to begin my research in New York. What I have found is that the archival trail of Puerto Rican social, economic, and political life during the twentieth century’s greatest crises—the Great Depression and World War II—is intimately woven through locations in both Puerto Rico and the United States. As in so many other aspects of the daily experience of citizenship under U.S. empire, Puerto Rican life continues to be distinguished by a bilingual, bicultural, and bi-national character. The story of the New Deal in Puerto Rico displays this same character.
emergence was made possible by a combination of pragmatic and popular-based alliances that created the New Deal’s tenuous and, at times, patronage-driven political coalition. In Puerto Rico, popular alliance with the PRRA was also a pragmatic response to the Great Depression that recognized the unexpected and unprecedented changes within the U.S. government during the New Deal, and took advantage of new opportunities and new capital to radically alter Puerto Rican society. These changes, in turn, transformed many aspects of the local and “colonial” political systems as they had previously existed.

The New Deal was a break from all previous federal policy. One of the oldest and longest-held Spanish colonies in the “New World,” Puerto Rico has been a “possession” of the expanding U.S. empire since December 10, 1898, when the Treaty of Paris ended the Cuban-Spanish-American War.\textsuperscript{25} The small island, measuring about 3,500 square miles, had been invaded by U.S. troops nearly five months before, when the \textit{U.S.S. Gloucester} harbored in the bay of Guánica and raised the American flag on Puerto Rican soil for the first time.\textsuperscript{26} As Arturo Morales Carrión has noted, the invasion of Puerto Rico was little more than an “offshoot” of the larger war in Cuba, as the island was not the initial object of U.S. imperialist desire. Rather, its value from the U.S. perspective lay mostly in its strategic location as a gateway to the Caribbean.

\textsuperscript{25} The Cuban-Spanish-American War, often referred to as the “Spanish-American War” in the United States, is better understood as two separate wars: one between Cuba and the U.S. versus Spain during 1898, and one that began as the U.S. and Philippines versus Spain during 1898 and continued as the U.S. versus the Philippines from 1899-1902 (or 1913). When the Treaty of Paris was signed between Spain and the U.S. on December 10, 1898, officially ending the war, Puerto Rico and Guam were ceded as territories subject to U.S. military control, Cuba became independent of Spain, and the U.S. purchased control of the Philippines for $20 million. Not part of the treaty with Spain, Hawaii was annexed to the U.S. in the same year.

\textsuperscript{26} Morales Carrión, 129.
and Isthmus of Panama. As Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. later wrote of U.S. interests in Puerto Rico, “…we had no definite ideas, for when we declared war we had not thought of them.”

Initially governed by military rule, Puerto Rico was transferred to U.S. civilian control by the Foraker Act (or Organic Act), which was signed into law by President William McKinley on April 12, 1900. Under the new law, the Puerto Rican government was controlled by Washington, as the President had the power to appoint most of the local leadership without popular consent, including the Governor, cabinet, executive council, Supreme Court and U.S. District Court justices, and the non-voting Resident Commissioner in Congress. The only exceptions were the 35 members of the House of Representatives, who were directly elected on the island. The Foraker Act also established the primacy of federal law over the island, and gave the U.S. Congress the right to veto Puerto Rican legislation.

Acquired via purchase, treaty, or annexation, new U.S. island possessions in the South Pacific and Caribbean were subject to wide-ranging interpretations of Constitutional and legal status. The Insular Cases—a series of Supreme Court rulings during and after 1901—changed U.S. policy regarding its territories in significant ways, as previous policy dating to the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 had put continental territories on a path to eventual statehood. By contrast, the Insular Cases created a new legal division between “incorporated” and

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29 Text of the Foraker Act can be found at http://www.rohan.sdsu.edu/dept/polsciwb/brianl/docs/1900 ForakerAct.pdf.
unincorporated” territories. As an unincorporated territory, Puerto Rico was not placed on a path to statehood.  

This unincorporated status was unchanged by the Jones-Shafroth Act of 1917, which was signed on March 4, 1917, just as President Woodrow Wilson sought to build moral consent for entry into the Great War by arguing that the U.S. must “make the world safe for democracy.”

Replacing the Foraker Act, the Jones Act of 1917 extended U.S. citizenship to all Puerto Ricans and restructured the local government. While the President still appointed the Governor, cabinet, and all federal judges, the act created a popularly-elected Puerto Rican Senate and made the position of Resident Commissioner subject to popular election as well. Significantly, the Jones Act also exempted the sale of Puerto Rican bonds from federal, state, and local taxes.

During the New Deal, the alliance between Puerto Ricans and the PRRA marked the beginnings of a new brand of mass-based politics that shared similarities with and expressed clear differences from developments in other areas of Latin America and the Caribbean. By comparing Puerto Rico’s experience in the 1930s and 1940s with the rest of the Spanish


Caribbean, we will gain an appreciation for the uneven ways in which the rise of Puerto Rican populism corresponded to other political developments throughout the region. Examination of these similarities and differences, however, is not an exercise aimed solely at Latin American and Caribbean audiences. For historians of the U.S., the New Deal in Puerto Rico offers three new ways to examine the Great Depression and New Deal.

First, the study of the PRRA offers a unique opportunity to connect local and regional experiences of the New Deal to broader national developments. Demonstrating the regional variability of New Deal policy, the substantial amount of local control over the shape and scope of New Deal projects, and the participation of local actors as both workers and administrators, PRRA engineering projects also demonstrate the significance of federally funded public works beyond the immediate need for relief from the employment crisis of the Depression.

Second, the study of the PRRA provides a new understanding of the effect that New Deal policy had on the relationship between the U.S. and the world. Initially conceived as a part of the Roosevelt administration’s Good Neighbor policy with Latin America, the PRRA refocused its energies on long-term economic development as federal perspectives about Puerto Rico changed from diplomacy to development. Originally run by Ernest Gruening, a leading U.S. diplomat to Latin America, the PRRA was viewed by FDR as a diplomatic gesture that could help sell the administration’s nonintervention and noninterference policies to the rest of Latin America. When Gruening was replaced by Harold Ickes in 1937, however, the PRRA was reoriented toward public works construction. As will be discussed below, this was largely due to Ickes’ nearly complete lack of day-to-day involvement in running the PRRA; swamped with more pressing matters closer to home, Ickes delegated most administrative duties to Miles Fairbank and Guillermo Esteves, the Assistant and Regional administrators, who ran the PRRA directly from
San Juan. Interestingly, the new emphasis on public works and public health drew considerable attention from other areas of Latin America and the Caribbean in ways that fulfilled many of the original diplomatic aims of the Gruening administration.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, PRRA public works became essential to the defense of the Caribbean region and the waging of the Battle of the Atlantic. As the United States became the leader of the Western Hemisphere’s nearly complete alliance against fascism in the 1940s, the New Deal in Puerto Rico was imbued with a new global significance. By drawing attention to the relationship between FDR’s domestic and foreign policy, this study may help highlight the New Deal’s role in building a hemispheric alliance against fascism during World War II.

Third, the study of the New Deal in Puerto Rico also poses the question of whether the emergence of New Deal liberalism altered the overall legacy of U.S. imperialism. Many historians of Puerto Rico have argued that the PRRA is best understood as a kind of colonial reform project that conserved and enhanced U.S. control of Puerto Rico. If this is true, and the PRRA was indeed a “velvet glove” that balanced the “iron fist” of repression, then what does this mean for our understanding of the New Deal as a whole?33

As anyone who has spent any amount of time on the island knows, the New Deal continues to have a living presence in Puerto Rican daily life. Thanks to the considerable amount of scholarship on Puerto Rican politics over the last four decades, we know that the New Deal had long-lasting political ramifications—this is one point that is agreed on by the critics and champions of U.S. policies in Puerto Rico alike. This analysis of the PRRA, which hopes to

33 Pantojas-García, Development Strategies as Ideology, 34.
strengthen our understanding of how federal policy was articulated in Puerto Rico during the Great Depression, will examine the role that Puerto Ricans from different class backgrounds played in intellectualizing, administering, and constructing the New Deal in Puerto Rico. To do this we must not read Caribbean history backwards from the Cold War to the Cuban-Spanish-American War, or assume that the trajectory of U.S. policy in the region followed an unbroken arc from Theodore to Franklin Roosevelt, or from the New Deal to the present. For Latin American, Caribbean, and U.S. historians alike, a more nuanced understanding of how public works helped transform Puerto Rico’s “colonial” status—and thus the nature of U.S. imperialism—during the 1930s and 1940s will hopefully provide a stronger understanding of the complexities of the U.S. role in the Caribbean region and world, and a more sound footing to either critique or support that role in the future.

While this dissertation will not analyze the concepts of colonialism, imperialism, and populism on an abstract level, it will embrace some of the conceptual frameworks and theoretical dilemmas that have marked previous scholarship on the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. In searching for a lexicon of colonialism that can incorporate the kinds of socioeconomic and political changes that Puerto Rico experienced during the 1930s and 1940s, this dissertation will resist the temptation to refer to Puerto Rico as a colonial puzzle or paradox. Instead, it will concentrate on how the internal aspects of Puerto Rico’s problems during the Great Depression conditioned Puerto Rican response to the many challenges of the decade. As one of the most complex and sometimes contradictory episodes in U.S. history, the New Deal introduced a series of profound social, economic, and political changes that reshaped many aspects of American life during the Great Depression and WWII, including the role of the federal government in everyday life and the concept of economic citizenship. Similarly, the changes in
public health engineered by New Deal public works construction produced widespread, unanticipated, and long-lasting changes in social, economic, and political life in Puerto Rico during the 1930s and after.

At the same time, however, it must be noted at the outset that the New Deal did not “transform,” “modernize,” or completely “solve” the crisis of the Great Depression in Puerto Rico. Like other New Deal programs, however, the PRRA represented a decisive break from laissez faire federal policy and established a new commitment to public works and public health in Puerto Rico that outlived the lifespan of the New Deal. While addressing the critical and immediate realities of the San Felipe and San Ciprián hurricanes and the Great Depression in Puerto Rico, the PRRA also attempted to make permanent changes to social and economic life—embodied discursively in the change from relief to reconstruction. Federally financed but locally controlled, the PRRA helped produce a creative and significant new understanding of the “public” in Puerto Rico.

The emergence of New Deal liberalism—in many ways symbolized by public works construction—helped create a pragmatic popular alliance with Puerto Ricans who shared a collective vision of permanent recovery. This recovery, while incomplete, made lasting contributions to the lives of millions of Puerto Ricans who have been U.S. citizens for nearly 100 years since the passage of the Jones Act in 1917. While we may not always be satisfied with how these developments played out over time, the actions and opinions of Puerto Ricans living through the series of infrastructural, agricultural, environmental, and public health crises of the Great Depression deserve closer examination.

This dissertation is divided into three parts: Political Transformations—an overview of the political landscape of Puerto Rico during the 1930s; Engineering a New Deal—a detailed
analysis of the PRRA’s massive public works program; and Caribbean Contexts—a comparison of the New Deal in Puerto Rico with other areas of the Spanish Caribbean. This organization is designed to underscore the extent to which the New Deal was a reaction to the social, political, economic, infrastructural, and environmental crises of the Great Depression. It was not an ideology, but a pragmatic and experimental alternative to what currently existed. Because the New Deal was most effective in areas where private capital was absent and local politics were hindering recovery, it is important to establish the local conditions that worsened the Depression and obstructed reconstruction in Puerto Rico. Part one, Political Transformations, will analyze the scale of the 1928 and 1932 hurricanes, the failure of existing political parties to lead recovery efforts, and the emergence of the New Deal in 1933 and 1935. Part two, Engineering a New Deal, will feature a close archival study of the creation of the Cataño cement plant, the construction of hurricane-proof public works, and the extension of hydro-electric power to the rural Puerto Rican countryside. Part three, Caribbean Contexts, will examine the political consequences of the New Deal in Puerto Rico by comparing the rise of populism in Puerto Rico during the 1940s with the rise of populism in Cuba and the Dominican Republic during the 1930s and 1940s.
Part 1: Political Transformations: Puerto Rico During the Great Depression

The Great Depression left a large imprint on Puerto Rican politics. While the following three chapters are not a traditional history of Puerto Rico in the 1930s, they will serve to highlight three political developments that have had dramatic effects on the daily life of millions of Puerto Ricans in the years since World War II. These developments greatly shaped the ways in which Puerto Rico recovered from the Great Depression and the ways in which New Deal policy was implemented and experienced on the island.

Rather than retrace previously documented aspects of Puerto Rican politics such as the “colonial” governorships of Robert Gore and Blanton Winship, or changing conditions of the global sugar industry, these chapters will focus on three interconnected political developments that produced long-term changes in Puerto Rican society and politics: 1) the devastating San Felipe and San Ciprián hurricanes that magnified all aspects of the Great Depression and resulted in the shift from a political economy of relief to one of reconstruction after 1935; 2) the breakdown of party politics in Puerto Rico between 1932 and 1940, during which time the four largest political parties fell apart and were replaced by new political parties and movements; 3) the emergence of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration—a locally-run New Deal agency that operated on the island from 1935 to 1955 and worked to build Puerto Rico’s public infrastructure and transfer its natural resources away from corporate control to permanent local ownership and administration.

Perhaps no aspect of the Great Depression placed more stress on the political structure in Puerto Rico than the San Felipe and San Ciprián hurricanes of 1928 and 1932. The hurricanes ravaged the infrastructure of the island, severely depressed the agricultural economy, and
increased some of the island’s most dangerous threats to public health. Beyond these social and
economic effects, the hurricanes had important political ramifications as the local government
struggled to provide immediate relief or long-term recovery from the storms.

In the course of the struggle to provide immediate relief or recovery, the existing
structure of partisan politics went through a serious transformation as the four major political
parties—Republican, Socialist, Nationalist, and Liberal—each lost popular support and viability
in local elections during the 1930s. There were several factors contributing to this political
transformation, including the successful but unsustainable “Coalition” of the island’s two leading
pro-statehood parties, the Republicans and Socialists. Although the Coalición won narrow
victories in the 1932 and 1936 elections, the Republican and Socialist parties were each unable to
sustain political momentum into the 1940s. In contrast, the Nationalist Party lost electoral
viability during its violent rise and rapid repression under the leadership of Pedro Albizu
Campos, who foreswore electoral politics and called for armed resistance (including the
assassination and attempted assassination of various U.S. and Puerto Rican officials) between
1935 and 1937. Finally, the Liberal Party collapsed between 1936 and 1938 during the island-
wide debate about political violence and police repression, and due to its divided response to a
surprise bill for complete independence proposed by conservative Democratic Senator Millard
Tydings in Washington.

Even while this collapse of party politics was occurring, a third major political
development was taking place as well: the emergence of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction
Administration (PRRA) in 1935, which represented the island’s “Second” New Deal by
replacing the relief-minded Puerto Rico Emergency Relief Administration (PRERA) that had
existed during the “First” New Deal from 1933 to 1935. Referred to derisively by political
opponents in the Coalition and Nationalist Party as a “super government” or “colonial super government,” the PRRA was a locally-run New Deal agency that radically transformed Puerto Rican society through the construction of a federally financed public health infrastructure designed to secure the island from future hurricanes, increase life expectancy, and improve transportation and communication networks. Far from a “colonial” imposition, the PRRA was planned and run by a mostly Puerto Rican administrative and working staff. All projects, land acquisitions, infrastructural projects, and other capital investments were handed over in perpetuity to the “People of Puerto Rico” to be locally owned and administered—regardless of future political status. Put another way, these large transfers of properties and public works were not dependent on any future political or economic relationship with the United States, particularly significant given the uncertainty of island politics during the 1930s.

Social changes profoundly influenced Puerto Rican politics, and by the end of the Depression, when New Deal liberalism had replaced laissez faire individualism in Washington, local politics entered a period of transition toward the mass-based political coalition formed and maintained by the Partido Popular Democrático (PPD) the 1940s. This new coalition—referred to at the time as a New Deal-type coalition—was, in part, held together by the pragmatic alliance between the PRRA and the Puerto Rican public that circumvented many of the corporate and partisan bulwarks against socioeconomic reform that had been cultivated during the previous three decades of United States territorial administration.
Chapter 1: The Political Economy of Relief:  
The San Felipe and San Ciprián Hurricanes of 1928 and 1932

The San Felipe hurricane cut northwestward across Puerto Rico on September 13, 1928, striking the island with 150 mile per hour winds and torrential rain. Measured by the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale, in use by the National Hurricane Center since the 1970s, San Felipe was a Level Four major hurricane. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, which struck the Louisiana coast in 2005, the San Felipe was officially considered the deadliest natural disaster in U.S. history. The storm’s exact death toll in Puerto Rico is unknown; the official report was 300 killed and between 500,000 and 700,000 homeless. Aside from the human toll, the storm’s sustained winds and intense rain—about 10 inches fell on the coast and more than 25 inches in the interior mountains—caused catastrophic infrastructural damage across the island: flooding Ponce and the southern coast of the island; demolishing wooden-framed houses; disorganizing radio, telephone, and telegraph systems within the island and to the outside world; interrupting railroad service; destroying 1,000 rural school houses and at least 20 larger schools; tearing the roof away from the tuberculosis clinic and destroying the leper colony quarters. In all, the storm


damaged at least 70% of the houses and 30% of the business structures in greater San Juan and caused between $40 million and $85 million in property damage island-wide, or between $547 million and $1.2 billion today. In rural communities such as “Jauca,” the fictional home of Don Taso in Sidney Mintz’s *Worker in the Cane: A Puerto Rican Life History*, residents received no advance warning of the approaching hurricane. In areas where the wooden houses and zinc roofs were no match for the storm, the destruction was nearly complete. As Taso recalled:

> After that I stopped outside the store, and from there I watched the hurricane as it unfolded. I saw the first-grade school tumble to the ground, and I watched the way the houses were going down . . . and by 9 P.M. many houses had fallen to the ground. From the steps of the Moras’ store there I watched our house. It was moving backward and then swayed forward again with the force of the wind. I waited from moment to moment for it to fall to the ground, and I could see from there when all the front part, of galvanized iron, tore loose from the rest and was carried off.

In addition to the infrastructural damage, the storm disrupted the rural economy of the island, as all major agricultural industries were severely hurt—with sugar, coffee, tobacco, and citrus crops uprooted and/or completely destroyed. A recent study of the losses suffered by tobacco farmers paints a particularly grim picture, with 6,316 tobacco ranches destroyed and

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37 Mintz, 112. See also Fassig, 352.
over 25% of all tobacco seedbeds washed away in the uncompromising wind and rain. For tobacco, coffee, and citrus farmers, the 1928 storm amplified the existing financial strain and created severe restrictions to long-term recovery. In tobacco, San Felipe compounded the disastrous 1927 crop, when the price paid to tobacco farmers had decreased by 48% due, in part, to an increased amount of acreage planted in 1926 and 1927 that the market could not absorb. In coffee, the millions of dollars in losses incurred by planters were multiplied by the fact coffee bushes take 4 to 5 years to mature. Citrus farmers, who had exported over one million crates of fruit in 1927, lost at least 150,000 fruit-bearing trees in the 1928 storm—as 35,000 trees were uprooted and approximately 125,000 more permanently damaged by the furious winds and mud slides.

Recovery from San Felipe was far from complete when the San Ciprián hurricane moved horizontally across the northern length of Puerto Rico on September 26-27, 1932. The four years separating the two hurricanes had been especially difficult, as two major banks failed during the onset of the Great Depression and a large number of private commercial and industrial businesses on the island were forced into bankruptcy between 1929 and 1932.

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38 Levy, 62-63.


41 Puerto Rico Emergency Relief Administration (PRERA), *Second Report of the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration, from September 1, 1934, to September 30, 1935* and *Report of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration for Puerto Rico, from October 1, 1935 to*
killed hundreds, left at least 400,000 people homeless, and like the San Felipe caused extensive damage to the infrastructure and agriculture of the island. While San Ciprián destroyed over 90,000 houses and 1.6 million farm buildings, it also killed nearly 500,000 livestock animals and inflicted staggering financial losses in all major agricultural industries: $11.5 million in sugar, $3.7 million in coffee, $1.9 million in citrus, $11.5 million in coconuts and palm trees, $750,000 in tobacco. Touching nearly every community on the island, the twin hurricanes affected nearly all aspects of daily life in Puerto Rico during the Great Depression. The combined damage of the two storms was over $175 million—nearly $3 billion today. The daunting tasks of providing immediate assistance and long-term recovery were further hindered by a political economy of relief that sustained an older model of politics in Puerto Rico.

When the San Felipe hurricane struck the southern coast of Puerto Rico in September 1928, federal politics was dominated by laissez faire individualism, the prevailing economic philosophy of the Warren G. Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover administrations. For U.S. citizens—American and Puerto Rican-born alike—the social safety net was comprised of a variety of private community, charity, and corporate organizations. This safety net, stitched

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43 Beverly, 157-159; Dietz, 137-139.

together by churches, charities, unions, settlement houses, community organizations, immigrant societies, fraternal orders, agricultural associations, and “welfare capitalist” employers, worked in tandem with local, county, and state governments to provide for temporary assistance in times of environmental crisis. Before the New Deal, it was to these local and private institutions that public welfare was entrusted.45

When natural disasters struck, such as the Mississippi flood of 1927 or the San Felipe hurricane of 1928, the private safety net was usually expanded to include some federal coordination. As Secretary of Commerce from March 1921 to August 1928, Herbert Hoover had enlarged the role of the federal government as a kind of economic umpire, skillfully managing the relationship between corporations, local governments, and voters. In times of environmental crisis, this form of business “associationalism” relied heavily on the financial support of corporate philanthropy and the tireless work of the American Red Cross.

In Puerto Rico, this model of disaster relief echoed the type of hurricane relief that had existed in the Spanish colonial system during the nineteenth century. The key difference between the Spanish and federal relief model was that under Spanish rule, there were no private corporations as in the United States. Instead, royal concessions were given to local entrepreneurs who became “government contractors” and established “mercantile associations” that the Crown could seize in the event of military or other necessity.46 Despite this difference, the Spanish and

45 The Republican economic policy of the 1930s was combination of welfare capitalism, business associationalism, private charity, localism, and laissez faire individualism. For one of the best explanations of how the private safety net operated on the local level, see Lizbeth Cohen, 221-226.

U.S. models were quite similar. Each relied on a mixture of philanthropic, religious, and private cooperation that strengthened the power of large landowners and failed to produce long-term interventions in public security or health.47

Before analyzing relief efforts following the San Felipe and San Ciprián hurricanes of 1928 and 1932, it will be helpful to examine previous relief efforts on the island. Hurricanes were not new to Puerto Rico, but rather an annual occurrence. The San Narciso hurricane, for example, came ashore near Fajardo on October 29, 1867. By that year, the Spanish royal government had extensive experience with hurricanes in the Caribbean, with storms of various sizes striking major Spanish Caribbean settlements in Santo Domingo, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Florida every year between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. In Puerto Rico, at least 25 major hurricanes were recorded during this time, including San Narciso of 1867.48 As Stuart Schwartz has argued, relief efforts following San Narciso revealed both the Spanish colonial system’s negligent infrastructural program and its vulnerability to popular resistance. Despite


their long experience with hurricanes, Schwartz found that the Spanish spent only 3% of its colonial budget on building a basic infrastructure that could buffer the destructive fury of tropical storms.\(^{49}\) By distributing all royal relief funds through local estates and giving large landowners the power to make essential decisions regarding the distribution of these funds, nineteenth-century relief efforts enhanced the influence and power of the landed elite.

Three decades later, when the San Ciriaco hurricane struck Puerto Rico on August 8, 1899 with 100 mile per hour winds, the storm presented the same dilemmas and opportunities to the U.S. military government and large local landowners.\(^{50}\) The storm struck the southern third of the island in an almost straight horizontal line from Humacao to Mayagüez leaving nearly 250,000 people homeless and without food on top of an island-wide $20 million in estimated property damage.\(^{51}\) The coffee sector was hit hardest, totaling about half the damage; coffee exports in 1899 were only 10% of their average in the five years from 1894 to 1898.\(^{52}\) Brigadier General George W. Davis, who had served in the Cuban-Spanish-American War and was the last military governor of Puerto Rico, oversaw relief efforts that were modeled on the Spanish

\(^{49}\) Though no direct evidence exists linking the hurricane, Schwartz notes that the *Grito de Lares*, the first uprising of Puerto Rican independence, occurred the following September. Schwartz, “The Hurricane of San Ciriaco: Disaster, Politics, and Society in Puerto Rico, 1899-1901,” 319; Schwartz, “Hurricanes and the Shaping of Circum-Caribbean Societies,” 402.

\(^{50}\) When the San Ciriaco struck, the U.S. military had been in control of the island for one year following the occupation of Puerto Rico in 1898, during the first part of the Cuban-Spanish-American War.


colonial system and combined philanthropic, humanitarian, and political motives. General Davis, who later served as chairman of the Central Committee of the Red Cross from 1906 to 1914, pressed President William McKinley and Secretary of State Elihu Root for food supplies. In addition, Root led a campaign to promote charitable relief directed at the U.S. public to be coordinated through mayors of large U.S. cities. Relief aid from the U.S. was coordinated on the island by the Board of Charities, which was established in San Juan by Davis and John Van Renselaer Hoff, a Major and surgeon in the U.S. Army.

Like the nineteenth-century Spanish colonial system, U.S. military hurricane relief efforts in 1899 strengthened the position of large local landowners—as Davis and Hoff sought alliances with local elites to maintain order while coping with the disaster and rebuilding the island’s economy. These alliances were solely between the Board of Charities and the planter class, which handled all applications for relief on behalf of their tenants and workers. In fairness, there were not many alternative options, as the basic infrastructure of the island had not been constructed to facilitate direct relationships between tenants and the government—much less developed for public ownership. In the aftermath of the hurricane, which flooded rivers and left


muddy, impassable roads, Hoff requested extra pack mules, wagon trains, and schooners to
deliver relief supplies to the interior mountains and coastal areas.57 Other U.S. officials, such as
Lieutenant Colonel Camillo Cassatti Cadmus Carr, who commanded the west coast military
district of the island centered in Mayagüez, complained that hurricane relief work was
complicated by the long “years of misgovernment, unequal taxation, and official neglect” during
the nineteenth century.58 In addition, the hurricane exacerbated partisan tensions on the island, as
the Liberal and Republicano parties both politicized all aspects of the relief effort, including
basic food delivery.59

In the days and weeks following the San Felipe hurricane of 1928, it was clear that
relatively little had changed regarding disaster relief from the Spanish colonial or U.S. military
strategy. After the “Great Mississippi Flood” of April 1927, President Coolidge had actually
decreased federal involvement in coordinating disaster relief. That spring, the Mississippi River
and much of its vast tributary system overflowed its banks and levees from Cairo, Illinois to New
Orleans, flooding an area 500 miles long by 50 miles wide, killing hundreds, and forcing the
evacuation of millions of people in nine states, including Illinois, Missouri, Oklahoma, Arkansas,
Kentucky, Texas, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Louisiana.60 Initially, as the nation listened to


radio reports and watched newsreel footage of the devastation, Coolidge refused to intervene in relief and rescue efforts. A week later, finally relenting to the pleas of state governors, Coolidge appointed Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover to liaison with the Red Cross and coordinate a federal plan for relief among five cabinet departments and the Army and Navy.\textsuperscript{61}

Politically, the flood allowed Hoover to distinguish himself from the president, and position himself once again as both the “Great Engineer” and the “Great Humanitarian” of the WWI years, when he had successfully organized food relief for 10 million Belgians, guided the Food Administration’s “Food Will Win the War” campaign, and coordinated famine relief in postwar Russia. He used the national spotlight to launch his successful presidential campaign the following year.\textsuperscript{62} Hoover’s plan for flood relief was twofold. On one hand, he attempted to turn refugee camps into sites of economic rehabilitation that included education in agriculture, personal health and hygiene, and home economics. On the other hand, Hoover sought to rebuild the flooded region through credit provided by a series of private nonprofit corporations that could loan money to indebted cotton planters and sugar growers on easier terms than private local or regional banks.

Throughout May of 1927, Hoover’s greatest contribution to flood relief efforts was in fundraising for the private relief loan corporations. In perhaps the finest example of how he viewed the role of the federal government in the face of disaster, Hoover raised over $13 million


\textsuperscript{61} Barry, 240, 262, 272.

for his relief loan program by personally appealing to senior executives at major corporations such as General Electric, Standard Oil, Ford, General Motors, Dodge, Sears, Marshall Field, Proctor & Gamble, Allied Chemical, U.S. Steel, the New Orleans Cotton Exchange, and the Pennsylvania and Illinois Central railroads. This loan money would supplement the $17 million in direct relief provided by the Red Cross. \(^{63}\) Envisioning a type of business-charity-government partnership, Hoover “blended the [American Red Cross] and government relief . . . and sought to make the [American Red Cross] an unofficial extension of the federal government after he took office as president” in 1929. \(^{64}\)

When the San Felipe hurricane struck Puerto Rico in 1928, Calvin Coolidge was still in office. The coordination of government and charity functions started by Hoover during the Mississippi flood had already begun, and the Red Cross led all immediate relief efforts in Puerto Rico. Here, however, rather than work directly with the federal government, the Red Cross coordinated relief efforts with the locally elected legislature, which had chosen civil engineer Guillermo Esteves Volckers to head the relief campaign. For Esteves, who was Commissioner of the Interior at the time, relief efforts reflected the legacy of the Spanish colonial, U.S. military, and welfare capitalist models, and were clearly focused on providing charitable relief. Influenced by a progressive era willingness to both victimize and blame the disaster-struck population by implicitly questioning their moral and political aptitude, Esteves, like previous relief administrators, established a hierarchical system of disaster relief following the 1928 storm. Instead of the large landowning class, however, that had been propped up in the Spanish and

\(^{63}\) Barry, 365-369.

\(^{64}\) Marian Moser Jones, *The American Red Cross from Clara Barton to the New Deal* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), iix-ix.
U.S. military models, Esteves insisted that the *colono* class of small family farmers was of the highest moral character and could be trusted with the distribution of relief loans and supplies.\textsuperscript{65} The tenant farmer and urban poor were contracted by the local government to labor on construction projects with meager wages that were paid only 10\% in cash, and 90\% in food rations.\textsuperscript{66}

Born in Aguadilla, and educated as an engineer at Tufts University in Massachusetts, Guillermo Esteves is an important figure in this story beyond his coordination of relief after the 1928 hurricane. As one of the most central figures in Puerto Rican civil engineering, Esteves served in a variety of government positions, including the Head Engineer of Puerto Rican Municipal Works, Superintendent of Puerto Rican Public Works, and Commissioner of the Interior of Puerto Rico. In the decade following the San Felipe hurricane, Esteves served as the Regional and then Assistant Administrator of the PRRA. During the New Deal, Esteves helped reorient hurricane relief efforts toward programs for permanent reconstruction through the construction of cement-based houses, schools, hospitals, and other infrastructure.

As for the 1928 hurricane, we do not know if the relief system implemented by Hoover, Esteves, and the Red Cross was satisfactory to President Coolidge, because he remained rather silent on the issue. For Coolidge, Puerto Rico existed as both a symbol of what was right about


U.S. territorial policy and as a potential stepping stone to closer diplomatic relations with Latin America and the Caribbean. Unconcerned with the plight of the depressed agricultural economy or the lag in basic utility services as compared to urban areas of the U.S., Coolidge had celebrated the goodwill flight of Charles Lindbergh to Latin America earlier in 1928 as a peaceful attempt to blunt growing criticism of U.S. foreign policy in the region. Landing in Puerto Rico on February 3, 1928, Lindbergh was enthusiastically greeted by Horace Mann Towner, the 72-year-old governor of Puerto Rico who had served under both Warren G. Harding and Calvin Coolidge. Even as the Puerto Rican legislature used Lindbergh’s arrival as an opportunity to express dissatisfaction with federal policy, Towner called Lindbergh the “prophet of a . . . better day.”67 This message contrasted with that of José Tous Soto, the Speaker of the House, who ambiguously requested that Lindbergh convey the message of “Liberty or Death!” to the American public while, at the same time, asking for the “right to a place in the sun of this land of ours, brightened by the stars of your glorious flag.”68

To Arnold G. Dana, a retired statistician who published Speaker Tous Soto’s message in the U.S. in 1928, it was not a request for independence but rather one of many “impassioned appeal[s] for consideration and assistance” in the face of extreme economic hardship that had

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been “often reiterated in vain in recent years.”

In 1931, three years after the San Felipe hurricane struck the island, Luis Muñoz Marín celebrated the expansion of the relief efforts coordinated by Hoover, Esteves, and the Red Cross, writing that Governor Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. deserved credit for obtaining increased federal aid to Puerto Rico. That year, Roosevelt, Jr. secured over $18 million in hurricane relief aid for food and basic supplies, relief loans to small farmers, and education programs to combat disease and malnutrition. Despite the increased amount of federal aid, hurricane relief under Hoover and Roosevelt, Jr. still reflected the individualist economic policy of the 1920s. Dismissing the idea of other types of federal intervention, Hoover declared, “we cannot exorcise a Caribbean hurricane with statutory law.”

The increased aid, which Muñoz Marín applauded as a “palliative, based on philanthropy,” was only part of the relief equation.

In addition to direct aid, hurricane relief also included federally supported loans, mostly directed to small farmers and cooperative associations. These loans were made possible by the creation of the Porto Rico Hurricane Relief Commission (PRHRC), which was established three months after the hurricane, on December 21, 1928, and dissolved into the PRRA in 1935. Composed of the Secretaries of Agriculture, War, and Treasury, the PRHRC was administered on the island by a collection of local offices, including the Collector of Customs at San Juan, the

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69 Dana, 7. Writing in 1928, Dana cautions readers that he is an established authority on financial matters, having formerly worked for the New York newspapers The Commercial and The Financial Chronicle, and he is not in any way a “Socialist or crank reformer.” Dana, 3, 6.

70 Leuchtenburg, Herbert Hoover, 115.

Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.\footnote{72} Just over one year after the PRHRC was created, as the U.S. sunk further into the Great Depression, President Hoover urged Congress to make an additional $3 million available to the hurricane relief loan fund, writing that Puerto Ricans were “still suffering from the effects of the disastrous hurricane of September 13, 1928. There exists a real and immediate need for appropriating these funds in order to alleviate the distress due to unemployment on the Island and to enable the Commission to continue its farm rehabilitation program.”\footnote{73} Although the resolution became law in January 1930, the appropriation was defeated in the House of Representatives.

Funding issues aside, the PRHRC was deeply influenced by Puerto Rican farmers who closely followed federal relief activities. In nearly all agricultural industries, various \textit{ligas agrícolas} (agricultural leagues) had been established to represent farmers’ interests in the local legislature. Many of these organizations participated in the \textit{Asociación de Agricultores Puertorriqueños} (AAP), an island-wide association founded in 1924 that published information in \textit{El agricultor puertorriqueño}, (the official publication of the AAP) and lobbied for agricultural interests in several industries.\footnote{74} In 1931, for example, AAP representatives traveled to Washington to lobby for additional relief funds. Their efforts swayed federal policy, and they...

\footnote{72} “History,” Records of the Puerto Rican Hurricane Relief Commission (PRHRC) and its successor, the Puerto Rican Hurricane Relief Loan Section (PRHRLS), Records of the Office of Territories, RG 126, NARA, accessed August 20, 2013, http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/126.html#126.4.2.


\footnote{74} Levy, 164.
returned home to Puerto Rico with over $8 million in relief loans—$6 million for agriculture, $2 million for infrastructure (schools and roads), and $100,000 for the purchase and distribution of seed—as well as temporary tax reductions for farmers still affected by the destruction of San Felipe. The successful participation and growing influence of the AAP suggested the increasing desire for greater participation in relief and recovery efforts from both the hurricanes and, after 1929, the economic downturn of the Great Depression as well. As Teresita Levy has argued, these “examples suggest that farmers were not only involved at all levels of the island’s governmental structure, but had learned how to skillfully lobby and influence the policies of the U.S. government which directly affected their interests.”

Of course, this was not unique to Puerto Rico, as the Great Depression was a global event that was experienced at the local level. As Lizabeth Cohen has written, the reduction of the Great Depression to a series of external and “impersonal events—the stock market crash, unemployment, mortgage foreclosures, bank failures—obscures the reality of these disasters as people experienced them.” While most people initially turned to private social and local political structures for help, there was a gradual and then rapid appeal to the federal government as the social safety net frayed and then tore away during the long summers and bitter winters between 1929 and 1932. In communities all across the country, Hooverism was put on trial as, in state after state, city after city, the network of private charity and local government organizations


76 Levy, 170.

77 Cohen, 214.
proved unable to cope with the growing demands of the crisis. While U.S. citizens increasing
looked toward the federal government as a potential ally in relieving the stress of the Depression,
Hoover initially refused to intervene and continued to call on private charities and local
governments to provide relief, as he maintained an ideological faith in the ability of private
welfare and free markets to bring about the “New Era” of permanent prosperity and final triumph
over poverty. As conditions worsened, however, the Hoover administration sought a more
direct role in recovery efforts, particularly through the Reconstruction Finance Corporation
(RFC). Created on January 22, 1932, the RFC was designed to provide aid and loans to both
public and private institutions, including state, county, and municipal governments and private
corporations such as banks, railroads, insurance companies, and home lending agencies.

Following the San Ciprián hurricane of September 26-27, 1932, the RFC took a
pronounced role in relief and recovery efforts in Puerto Rico. Because the RFC was essentially
an expansion of the types of loans made available by the PRHRC, the ability of the RFC to loan
money in Puerto Rico was complicated by the fact that the local government had nearly depleted
its legal borrowing capacity during the first three years of the Great Depression. By that time,


79 Badger, 48. Less than one year into his term in office, FDR was convinced that the
laissez faire model of the federal government known as Hooverism was defeated. In 1933,
responding to the claim that that the New Deal “represented a giant step away from philosophy
of laissez faire individualism, the president replied, ‘If that philosophy hadn’t proved to be
bankrupt, Herbert Hoover would be sitting here right now.” Richard Polenberg, “Introduction:
Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Liberalism,” in The Era of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1933-

80 PRERA, Second Report of the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration, 2.
the growing discrepancy between Hoover’s New Era of laissez faire capitalism and the American public’s increasing demand for direct federal intervention had all but assured the certain defeat of Herbert Hoover and the Republican Party in the 1932 elections.\(^8\) In his place, voters elected Franklin D. Roosevelt, the 50-year-old Democratic Governor of New York. Though his campaign was often vague on details, FDR had promised a “New Deal” for American citizens; in addition, voters could look to his gubernatorial record to see the outlines of several New Deal policies ranging from emergency relief to public works to hydroelectric power. Through a combination of policy and politics—through bold legislative experimentation and shrewd coalition building—the New Deal came to represent a clear break from previous federal policy.\(^8\)

In many ways, however, it was not an immediate break from past policy and much of FDR’s “First” New Deal policy built on the existing RFC and has been called, in retrospect, little more than “Hooverism in high gear.”\(^8\)

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\(^8\) Leutenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, 3.

\(^8\) While Michael Bernstein and Anthony Badger have made the argument that this break from previous federal policy did not end the Depression, and that the New Deal is best understood as a “holding operation” that kept American society functioning until the more decisive changes of World War II, Ira Katznelson has argued that, legislatively, the New Deal was shaped by the southern Democrats in Congress who used the enhanced powers of the federal government to extend the reach of Jim Crow and increase racial inequality in the U.S. during the 1930s and 1940s. As Jason Scott Smith has recently argued, however, the most significant aspect of the change in federal policy was the long-term economic impact of the public works projects constructed by the Public Works Administration (PWA) and Works Progress Administration (WPA), which reshaped the public infrastructure and built new political relationships in every region of the United States. Whether viewed as a holding pattern, a bulwark of segregation, or a tool of state-sponsored economic development, the New Deal’s public support drew from both the failures of welfare capitalism and the promises of the welfare state. See Michael Bernstein, *The Great Depression: Delayed Recovery and Economic Change in America, 1929-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 21; Badger, 10; Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White*, x; Smith, 2, 19, 84, 88, 118.
As for Puerto Rico, FDR did not stray very far from Hoover’s relief model, and the hurricane relief program of the First New Deal continued many of Coolidge and Hoover’s individualistic relief policies. Even though the creation of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) in May 1933 and the Puerto Rico Emergency Relief Administration (PRERA) in August 1933 signaled a new course, relief was still shaped by the kind of philanthropic voluntarism that had marked earlier periods.\footnote{Hawley, \textit{The Great War and the Search for Order}, 188-189. Other historians have argued that Roosevelt represented an immediate break from past policy. For example, see Leuchtenburg, \textit{Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal}, 71; Wells, 114-115.} Although relief spending was greatly increased from earlier eras, the PRERA was seen—even by its own administrators—as a “stopgap” measure that fell short of long-range economic development or the creation of truly public works on the island.\footnote{There has been very little academic analysis of the PRERA. See Mathews, \textit{Puerto Rican Politics and the New Deal}; Manuel Rodríguez, \textit{A New Deal for the Tropics: Puerto Rico During the Depression Era, 1932-1933}.}

Throughout the remainder of 1933 and 1934, as excitement over the New Deal and PRERA increased, the older model of charitable relief came under increased scrutiny on the island. For even as the PRHRC, PRERA, and American Red Cross continued the process of providing shelter, distributing food and clothing, and making emergency loans to farmers, it became increasingly clear to Puerto Rican engineers, doctors, academics, and workers from all class backgrounds that the scale of the current crisis was too large for the individualistic model of charitable relief. Not only did existing relief agencies fail to relieve the immediate calamity, they actually made the crisis worse in three ways. First, by relying on a model of charitable fundraising that had existed under the Spanish colonial and U.S. military rule, hurricane relief

\footnote{Bourne and Bourne, 131; Fairbank, \textit{The Chardon Plan and the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration}, 10.}
efforts prior to the New Deal strengthened fundamental inequalities in Puerto Rican society by enhancing the power of large corporate landowners. During the Coolidge and Hoover administrations, large landowners, such as international sugar corporations, were essentially in charge of the allocation and distribution of relief supplies—just as they had been during the nineteenth century. These policies, however, should not be associated with the Republican Party alone, as the basic model of charitable relief was extended by FDR during the First New Deal. Second, philanthropic charity and relief loans were not enough to make the necessary interventions in constructing a permanent recovery through hurricane-proof public works. Third, and most crucial to Puerto Rican doctors and engineers, the political economy of relief after the San Felipe and San Ciprián hurricanes had actually increased the three deadliest public health crises confronting the island during the 1930s: malaria, hookworm, and malnutrition (which included dietary related gastro-intestinal disorders such as chronic diarrhea and enteritis). As we will see, these basic public works and public health interventions did not begin until the formation of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration in 1935.

86 Progress Reports, Box 3, Engineering Division Construction Projects, “Swamp Land Filling and Draining for Malaria Control” folder, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed by the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC; General Records Relating to the Cement Plant Project, RG 323, NARA-NYC.
Chapter 2: The Breakdown of Party Politics in Puerto Rico: The Fracturing of the Coalition, the Nationalists, and the Liberal Party, 1932-1940

The failure of the hurricane relief model played a part in the political chaos that unfolded in Puerto Rico after the onset of the Great Depression. During the 1930s, the inability of existing political structures—external or internal—to provide timely and lasting relief from the twin forces of hurricanes and economic depression had serious consequences for each of the four major political parties. These consequences shaped the limits and possibilities of local politics. This chapter will consider the electoral success of the pro-statehood Coalition in the 1932 and 1936 elections; the rise and decline of a revolutionary wing of the Nationalist Party led by Pedro Albizu Campos; and the breakup of the Liberal Party during the debate that consumed island politics following the assassination of Police Commissioner Francis E. Riggs and the introduction of the Tydings Bill in 1936, and the Ponce Massacre in 1937. Taken together, the collapse of the Coalition, the Nationalist Party, and the Liberal Party during the 1930s paved the way for a puertorriqueño form of populist politics that emerged during and after World War II. By the time of the 1940 elections, the Republican, Socialist, Nationalist, and Liberal parties had each experienced too many internal fractures to stem the challenges to the old political order set in motion by the New Deal. Capitalizing on these fractures, a new form of mass-based politics was led by Luis Muñoz Marín and the Partido Popular Democrático—or Popular Democratic Party—which not only won the 1940 elections, but also dominated Puerto Rican politics through the 1960s.
The Coalition

On November 8, 1932, the same day that Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected president, the Coalition won control of the Puerto Rican legislature in a close election. Made up of an alliance between the Republican Party and the Socialist Party, the Coalition governed the Puerto Rican Senate and House of Representatives for the rest of the 1930s. Occurring just six weeks after the San Ciprián hurricane tore across the island, the election united the political party of large landowners with that of the organized labor movement, and created a legislative majority that captured 6 out of 7 seats in the Puerto Rican Senate, and 28 out of 35 seats in the House of Representatives. Individually, neither the Republican nor Socialist party had nearly the same popular support (as defined by number of votes) as the Puerto Rican Liberal Party; combined, however, the Coalition won 54.3% of the vote compared to 44.3% for the Liberal Party. The election made Socialista Santiago Iglesias Pantín and Republicano Rafael Martínez Nadal the two most influential politicians in Puerto Rico. As the Resident Commissioner in Washington and President of the Puerto Rican Senate, respectively, Iglesias and Martínez Nadal wielded considerable local power for the rest of the decade, from 1933 to 1941.87

87 A variety of polling data has been compiled by El Archivo de las Elecciones en Puerto Rico. For Resident Commissioner, see “Escrutinio de las Elecciones Generales del 8 de noviembre de 1932: Resultados para Candidatos a Comisionado Residente,” accessed August 23, 2013, http://eleccionespuertorico.org/archivo/1932.html; for Senate and House results, see Elecciones en Puerto Rico: Mapa Electoral – Elecciones Generales 1932: Distritos Legislativos,” accessed August 23, 2013, http://electionspuertorico.org/mapas/legislativos/1932.html. For two of the most comprehensive analyses of the party politics surrounding the 1932 elections, see Morales Carrión, ch. 11-12; and Ayala and Bernabe, ch. 4-7. For a sound but strictly class-based analysis of the era, see Pantojas-García, Development Strategies as Ideology, ch. 1-2. The 1932 election is also discussed in Mathews, Puerto Rican Politics and the New Deal.
Like their leaders Iglesias and Martínez Nadal, the Socialist and Republican parties were united in their support of statehood, and their Coalition mounted strong opposition to nearly all other political parties during the 1930s, including the independence movements of both the Liberal and Nationalist parties. Importantly, their Coalition was also the most formidable critic of the New Deal in Puerto Rico, and its rise to power the same year as the election of FDR had direct consequences for how the Puerto Rico Emergency Relief Administration (PRERA) and the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRRA) operated during the decade. The Coalition’s opposition to the New Deal emerged despite its early and vocal support for Roosevelt, which included organizing a parade of nearly 8,000 supporters in San Juan through streets lined with thousands more in October 1933. Carrying banners that pledged support to “Roosevelt y el Nuevo Trato!” and that declared to Roosevelt that “1,500,000 Puerto Ricans Support You!,” the parade ended at the governor’s mansion of La Fortaleza where Martínez Nadal read a “spirited speech” before turning to Governor Robert H. Gore and giving him “a typical Puerto Rican embrace.” 88 Within a year, however, it was clear that rather than representing the New Deal in Puerto Rico, the Coalition’s victory had instead put “markedly conservative interests in power” on the island. 89

Though far from united on every issue, Iglesias and Martínez Nadal formed a strong political partnership that pushed the agenda of statehood on behalf of the international and locally owned sugar companies, and the Federación Libre de Trabajadores (FLT)—the major labor organization in Puerto Rico at the time. The Coalition was not opposed to New Deal policy


89 Mathews, 20.
on an ideological basis, the way that conservative Republicans were opposed to FDR in the United States. Rather, the Coalition’s opposition was driven primarily by local partisanship as Republican and Socialist leaders attempted to drive a wedge between liberal New Dealers in Washington and the *Liberales*, the political party which represented many of the small family farmers and coffee growers of the interior highlands. Ironically, even though the Liberals were against statehood—falling somewhere between partial independence and increased political autonomy within the territorial system—they shared many of the New Deal’s goals of social and economic reform and forged lasting alliances with the new actors and new agencies of the FDR years. The Coalition, which openly campaigned for statehood, repeatedly looked to thwart the implementation of New Deal reforms. The reason was clear: local partisan politics and the Coalition’s desire to control all federal funds and patronage.90

On the outside of this picture was the *Partido Nacionalista*, led by Julio Medina González and Pedro Albizu Campos. Receiving only 1.4% of the vote in the 1932 elections, many Nationalists transitioned away from the electoral politics of the elderly Medina González (first elected to public office in 1905) and gravitated toward the politics of non-participation and the call for direct action articulated by the younger Albizu Campos.91 As Albizu Campos moved

90 The Coalition preferred the PRERA to the PRRA, as the PRERA was run through the local legislature and Governor’s office. On the “utter ideological sterility of the anti-Muñoz, anti-New Deal coalition . . . which Pagán was representing in Washington,” see Robert W. Anderson, *Party Politics in Puerto Rico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), 35.

the Nationalists further away from electoral politics, the party became increasingly identified as an “anti-colonial” independence movement that employed violent tactics in its struggle with the federal government, particularly after 1936.\footnote{Ayala and Bernabe, 108. \textit{Partido Nacionalista} activities between 1936 and 1940 and the state repression that followed will be discussed below. The emergence of a younger generation was not unique to the Nationalist Party, as inter-generational politics caused tensions within each of the major parties during the 1930s.} Despite their anti-colonial ambitions, however, the emergence of Albizu Campos as the leader of the Nationalists must also be seen in the context of local politics—particularly as a reaction against the electoral success of the Republican and Socialist parties and the new push for statehood that the Coalition represented.\footnote{Wilfredo Mattos Cintrón, “The Struggle for Independence: The Long March to the Twenty-First Century,” in \textit{Colonial Dilemma: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Puerto Rico}, edited by Edwin Meléndez and Edgardo Meléndez (Boston: South End Press, 1993), 203.}

Despite its success in the 1932 and 1936 elections, however, the Coalition was unable to sustain its base of support and did not outlive the Great Depression. Indeed, so strong were the crises of hurricane and Depression that, by the end of the decade, no political party had survived the 1930s intact. There were at least four internal factors that contributed to this decline of the party system during the Depression, beginning with a generational shift in leadership in the parties—underscored by the death of Liberal leader Antonio Barceló in 1938, Socialist Iglesias in 1939, and Republican Martínez Nadal in 1940.\footnote{A.W. Maldonado has referred to the 1930s as an era of a “generational sea change” Puerto Rican politics. See Maldonado, \textit{Luis Muñoz Marín}, 93.} Second, there was an unprecedented wave of strikes and labor mobilization during the decade that, as in other parts of Latin America, galvanized new bases of popular support. Third, there was a series of spectacular confrontations between a small number of nationalist protesters and the local police, as Albizu Campos and his nationalist cadets began a campaign of political violence directed at U.S. and Puerto Rican
administrators. This campaign was met with an unsympathetic response from officials in the U.S. and on the island. Fourth, and perhaps least appreciated in the political historiography of Puerto Rico, was the emergence of the New Deal. As the PRRA replaced the PRERA in 1935, it became clear that FDR’s New Deal was now committed to attacking a wide range of public health issues in Puerto Rico, constructing a new public works infrastructure in all parts of the island, and developing a new political alliance centered on New Deal liberalism—which helped foster the transition from a paradigm of relief to one of reconstruction.

As the Depression worsened, a growing number of Puerto Ricans from across class backgrounds and party loyalties questioned the hurricane relief system and began to make new demands on a variety of local social and political organizations. While some asked new questions about the external colonial structure, many, like people elsewhere, directed their demands at local political structures. Tested by the fury of the hurricanes, however, local politics in Puerto Rico broke apart in the second half of the 1930s and all four of the major political parties fractured amid a series of compromises, bargains, and alliances, each discredited as unable to provide lasting recovery and security from the devastating storms of 1928 and 1932.

In 1932, however, it was the Coalition that carried the day during what Arturo Morales Carrión has called the “kaleidoscopic era” of Puerto Rican politics.95 Neither component of the Coalition was a new party. Both the Republican and Socialist parties were products of an earlier generation of Puerto Rican politics that emerged after 1898, when the Treaty of Paris officially ended the Cuban-Spanish-American War and Puerto Rico was ceded from Spanish to U.S. jurisdiction.96 Following a brief period of military rule, Puerto Rico was transferred to U.S.

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95 Morales Carrión, 209.
civilian control by the Foraker Act of April 12, 1900. Though not—by itself—the object of imperialist desire, Puerto Rico became an economically desirable territory as a major sugar producer during the first 30 years of U.S. rule—as the Foraker Act liberalized economic relations between the island and mainland by allowing for free, untaxed trade. The primary four export industries after 1900 were sugar, tobacco, coffee, and needlework. Until the New Deal, most infrastructural developments such as major roads and electric power were built primarily to benefit these large export industries. Sugar cultivation, the largest of all, was led by a mix of both local and international corporations and became the “decisive” sector of the Puerto Rican economy, with cane grown in the lowlands that form a ring around the entire island, totaling about 1/3 of the island’s cultivated land. In all, sugar production for export markets in the U.S increased from $4.7 million at the turn of the twentieth century to $54 million two decades later.97

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97 Ayala and Bernabe, 33-35; Roosevelt, Jr., 96. Although the sugar industry has been widely discussed in the historical literature as if it were the only sector of Puerto Rico’s socioeconomic life, Ayala and Bernabe caution that sugar was one of several sectors of importance. On the important economic history of Puerto Rico during 1900-1930 outside of the sugar economy, see Levy. For a perspective that Puerto Rico was not the object of imperial desire, see Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., The Colonial Policies of the United States (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1937), 84; Morris, 23-24. Closer examination of U.S. policy during this early era needs to be done, as U.S. political and economic policy were at odds—seemingly torn between enhancing corporate growth and expanding U.S. markets on one hand, and implementing progressive reforms against monopolies on the other. An apt case study of this dual nature of U.S. policy can be seen in the 500-Acre Law—an amendment to the Foraker Act that limited corporate landholding in Puerto Rico to 500 acres. Seen today as a symbol of Puerto Rican nationalism, the law was actually introduced by progressive U.S. politicians concerned about the rapid pace of vertical integration and spread of monopolies during the early years of the 1900s. Rexford G. Tugwell, “Investigation Into the Administrative Responsibilities Under the Five Hundred Acre Limitation on Land Holdings in the Organic Act of Puerto Rico,” in The Changing Colonial Climate (1942; repr. New York, Arno Press, 1970), 14-23.
Despite being just one of several important economic sectors, sugar came to have a large bearing on both colonial and local politics after 1900. This influence reached its zenith when the Coalition won control of the Senate in 1932, and placed Republican Martínez Nadal in the presidency. Sugar’s influence on local politics was a development of the island’s legal status as an “unincorporated” territory of the United States. From the turn of the twentieth century to the end of World War II, all Puerto Rican governors, top cabinet officials (such as Attorney General, Secretary of Commerce, Secretary of Education), and members of the Supreme Court were appointed by the U.S. President without popular consent. All other executive government positions, however, were appointed by the Governor on the advice and consent of the local Senate. Because most governors knew very little about Puerto Rican politics and society, they came to rely on the Senate for both personnel recommendations and public support. The Coalition victory of 1932 thus offered large landowners a key partisan ally during the Depression.98

By this time, the connection between corporate landowners and the Republican Party was long established. Because there was no strong pro-independence movement during the nineteenth century, the formation of political parties after 1900 occurred within the context of the new political and economic relationship with the U.S., as outlined by the Foraker Act, and the

98 The influence of the Coalition was magnified during the 1930s as FDR did not appoint a New Dealer to be governor until 1941, when Rex Tugwell took office. Roosevelt’s appointments of Robert Gore, Blanton Winship, and William Leahy are discussed in Dietz, 168; Fernández, 115-116; Maldonado, Luis Muñoz Marín, 112-113; Jorge Rodríguez Beruff, “From Winship to Leahy: Crisis, War, and Transition in Puerto Rico,” in Colonial Crucible, eds. McCoy and Scarano, 431-440; Jorge Rodríguez Beruff, Las memorias de Leahy (Río Piedras: Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín, 2002).
massive expansion of corporate power in the U.S. between the 1880s and the 1920s.\textsuperscript{99} From its inception in 1899, the Republican Party positioned itself as the leading pro-statehood party on the island. For Republicans, statehood was viewed as a pragmatic choice. As Edgardo Meléndez has argued, this position was not the result of a cynical “opportunism” or evidence of an “assimilationist” cultural mentality, but was rather a reaction to the lack of social and economic mobility during Spanish era and the expression of new goals for the “transformation of Puerto Rican society through the absorption of American social, economic, political, and cultural institutions,” particularly modern corporate strategies, democracy, and progressive politics.\textsuperscript{100} During this period, as U.S. policy in Puerto Rico centered on a program of “Americanization” through the implementation of English in all Puerto Rican schools, the early Republicans came to be seen at the time as an “auxiliary of the American government in Puerto Rico.”\textsuperscript{101} As Pedro Cabán has argued, these early Republicans “expressed a fervent devotion to the colonizing mission of the United States” and hoped to prepare Puerto Rico for eventual statehood.\textsuperscript{102} Building on the annexation movement of the late-nineteenth century, the Republican Party was originally comprised of Spanish-educated businessmen and professionals living in small urban areas. Casting their economic platform on a closer relationship to the U.S., these businessmen

\textsuperscript{99} On the lack of an independence movement, see Ayala and Bernabe, 15; Grosfoguel, 53.


\textsuperscript{102} Cabán, 169-171.
and professionals took advantage of increased educational opportunities in U.S. prep schools and colleges available to the sons of the privileged classes.  

Over time, Republican politics became closely identified with the expanding sugar sector, which was made up of a collection of local and international agricultural corporations that sought to strengthen the economic ties between Puerto Rico and the U.S., and believed that a cultural Americanization project would help lead the island to eventual statehood. By 1924, however, as it became clear that the U.S. Congress was not actively considering Puerto Rican statehood, the Republican Party began to fracture—with one wing supporting José Tous Soto and seeking an alliance with the liberal Unión Puertorriqueña, and another wing rallying behind Rafael Martínez Nadal and seeking an alliance with the Socialists. For the Tous Soto wing, the desire to align with the Union Party and its leader Antonio Rafael Barceló meant a wavering on the statehood issue, as Barceló and the Unionists had led the struggle against the expansion of international corporate interests in Puerto Rico and the cultural Americanization program associated with the Republicans. Founded in 1904 by Luis Muñoz Rivera and Antonio Barceló, the Unión Puertorriqueña walked the line between cultural independence and political autonomy, and drew its largest support from small landowners and younger professionals in medicine, law, engineering, and academia. In 1924, the Tous Soto wing of the Republican Party formally merged with the Union Party, and their newly formed Alianza won the elections of 1924 and 1928.

103 Matthews, 14-15; Ayala and Bernabe, 20, 143; Grosfoguel, 53-54. As elsewhere, professional and educational opportunities for Puerto Ricans were largely limited to men from privileged backgrounds.

104 Cabán, 182-183.
It was, however, an uneasy alliance that disintegrated when Barceló withdrew his support from the Alianza and formed the Partido Liberal just before the 1932 elections. Frustrated with the limitations of partisan politics within the existing “colonial” structure, Barceló and younger members of the Liberal Party such as Luis Muñoz Marín increasingly campaigned for political independence. This stance, which Barceló and Muñoz Marín had both publicly and privately articulated by the Spring of 1932, was too strong for their pro-statehood Republican partners in the Alliance. On March 13, 1932 the Liberal Party released its official political platform, publicly declaring that “its purpose is to demand the immediate recognition of the sovereignty of Puerto Rico and make it effective by the most rapid, most practical, and most direct methods, thus establishing the absolute independence of Puerto Rico.” That December, a month after losing the 1932 elections to the Coalition, Muñoz Marín privately wrote to Ruby Black in Washington that the Liberal Party was “for independence” and retains a “special tenderness for the Democratic party in spite of its having statehood in its platform.”

For the Martínez Nadal wing of the Republican Party, the split with Tous Soto in 1924 resulted in an alliance with the Partido Socialista, the political arm of the Federación Libre de Trabajadores (FLT)—the oldest labor union in Puerto Rico that was founded during the first years of U.S. rule and remained closely connected to the “bread and butter unionism” of Samuel Gompers and the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Led by Santiago Iglesias Pantín, a Spanish born journalist and labor organizer, the FLT had been originally composed of Puerto

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105 La Democracia, March 14, 1932, quoted in Mathews, 27 and Ruby Black Collection, Puerto Rico Correspondence, Letter of Luis Muñoz Marín to Ruby Black, Dec. 13, 1932, quoted in Mathews, 30.

106 The Partido Socialista was not connected to the Socialist Party in the U.S. or the Industrial Workers of the World.
Rican artisans and craftspeople (men and women employed in a variety of professions, including as painters, carpenters, cigar makers, and dock workers) who participated in a wide array of political societies, agricultural societies, and cooperative associations. For these workers, the transfer of political organization from Spain to the U.S. offered a multitude of new possibilities, as the U.S. intervention in Puerto Rico was infused with a progressive era focus on expanding literacy, education, and the embrace of applied scientific techniques while, at the same time, including Puerto Rican industries into the U.S. system of tariff protections. Though never totaling more than 7% of the overall population of the island, this artisan “class” of Puerto Rican workers saw the post-1900 Puerto Rican political economy not as a “colonial” takeover, but as the basic common ground of a strong working alliance. Not surprisingly, these workers viewed the hope of eventual statehood as the best possible avenues for extending Constitutional protections to Puerto Rico, and formed a lasting affiliation with the AFL to serve as a platform to campaign for increased labor rights and progressive reforms.

For Gompers, the FLT was a chance to expand its influence across international waters and into U.S. territorial policy, particularly important in the age of the “New Freedom” in which President Woodrow Wilson rearticulated Theodore Roosevelt’s Corollary to the Monroe

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109 Quintero-Rivera, 19, 30.
Doctrine to state that the U.S. had a moral imperative to make the world “safe for democracy.”¹¹⁰ At a time of increasing hostility towards radical labor groups such as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), Gompers sought to portray the AFL as a patriotic and loyal American organization. Part of this loyalty and patriotism included the spread of democracy and capitalism to U.S. territorial possessions. As Gompers testified before the Senate Committee on Pacific Islands and Porto Rico in 1916, there was “no factor” more valuable to “Americanizing the people of Porto Rico as the American labor movement,” which, as he reminded Congress, was by 1916 synonymous with the AFL.¹¹¹ Labor leaders in Puerto Rico agreed, and Iglesias Pantín wrote to Gompers that “if the people of Porto Rico should really become Americans, the AF of L would be the only institution to be held responsible for it.”¹¹²

Like the early Republicans, Gompers and Iglesias Pantín both promoted cultural assimilation, and each felt that the FLT was central to the process of Americanization. Following a series of strikes organized by the FLT (and supported by the AFL) in the tobacco processing, sugar, truck driving, railroad, baking, dock working, carpentry, printing, and other industries, the FLT broke ties with the Unión Puertorriqueña and began searching for new political allies, resulting in the formation of the Socialist Party in 1915. Though the FLT and Socialists were

¹¹⁰ President Wilson made this case explicitly to Congress during his 1917 appeal for a declaration of war against Germany. See “Making the World ‘Safe for Democracy’: Woodrow Wilson Asks for War,” History Matters, American Social History Project / Center for Media and Learning (Graduate Center, CUNY) and the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media (George Mason University), accessed October 2, 2013, http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4943/.


¹¹² Quoted in Cabán, 240.
technically separate, they were in fact run by the same leaders. From this time until the 1932 election, the FLT and Socialist Party had consistently criticized the dominance of corporate agriculture in Puerto Rico and pushed for “bread and butter” economic reform aimed at improving workers’ lives. As the Liberal Party campaign for independence grew in the late 1920s, however, the Socialists increasingly looked to the Republicans; although they previously agreed on statehood and assimilation, the political glue that now bound them together was a new “unified opposition to the independence movement.” In 1932, as the Socialists and Republicans formally united on the issue of statehood, their Coalition had to overcome extreme class tensions between the sugar and corporate elite and the organized workers. Put another way, the Coalition’s electoral success hinged on the ability of the “Republican bourgeoisie [to] accept the political alliance with the working class,” which was made easier by the non-radical approach promoted by Gompers and the AFL in the U.S. and Iglesias Pantín and the FLT in Puerto Rico. Their alliance would last as long as a) they could convince the mass of voters that cultural Americanization was the best pathway to fuller inclusion into U.S. politics and eventual statehood, and b) they were able to deliver permanent reconstruction from the devastating economic and environmental catastrophes of the Great Depression.

The Coalition, however, could not accomplish either, as its unwavering position on statehood forced it to oppose two major new political developments of the 1930s: the rise of the

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113 Ayala and Bernabe, 63-64; Meléndez, 35; Quintero-Rivera, 35-36; Cabán, 243-244. It is important to stress that the Socialist Party was an AFL-based party, and was not connected to the Socialist Party of America, which formed in 1901 and was led by Eugene V. Debs—who unsuccessfully ran for President in 1904, 1908, 1912, and 1920.

114 Mathews, 32. For Iglesias’ critique of corporate agriculture, see Córdova, 147.

115 Meléndez, 62.
Nationalist movement and the coming of the New Deal. The Nationalists and the New Deal each presented a more radical vision of social reform than the Coalition could tolerate—with Albizu Campos and the Nationalists increasingly seeking full political independence, while Puerto Rican New Dealers pushed for social and economic reform via the PRERA from 1933 to 1935 and the PRRA from 1935 to 1955. Representing the large sugar interests, the Coalition was the only sector in Puerto Rico to move against the PRRA.116 While it was effective in curtailing its full implementation, the Coalition’s opposition to New Deal reform undermined its popular basis of support at the polls. Although it defeated the Liberals in the 1936 election by a 54.1% to 45.9% margin, the Coalition’s inability to lead the recovery from the San Felipe and San Ciprián hurricanes combined with their increased obstruction to Nationalist and New Deal reform signaled the end of its political dominance and control of the statehood movement in Puerto Rico.117

The political vacuum created by the collapse of the Coalition, combined with the fracture of the Liberal Party in response to the Nationalist uprisings, established the conditions for the success of the Partido Popular Democrático (PPD) in the 1940 elections. This new popular-based political party, led by former Liberal Senator Luis Muñoz Marín, introduced a form of Puerto Rican populism that oversaw the transfer of New Deal public works—and eventually the

116 Ayala and Bernabe, 103. While the Coalition had initially supported the PRERA, which operated through the local legislature, it moved determinedly against the PRRA which attempted to operate independent of local partisan politics. Córdova has disagreed, and argued that the Coalition’s reaction to the PRRA was positive, but that the program was not run impartially, and Iglesias told Gruening he could not work with Chardón. See Córdova, 359.

colonial government itself—to Puerto Rican control in the 1950s. Although the PPD campaign featured a simplistic slogan of “Pan, Tierra, y Libertad” (“Bread, Land, and Liberty”), Muñoz Marín worked to establish close ties to the PRRA and WPA during his first few months in office. Seeking to continue a wide range of PRRA programs under the banner of the PPD, Muñoz Marín’s government introduced a series of legislative proposals including the Land Authority Bill that would, among other provisions: a) continue the low-cost hurricane-proof home construction programs of the PRRA; b) continue and expand the PRRA parcelas program of distributing land seized from large agricultural corporations to agricultural workers and farmhands now living in slums; c) focus on PRRA projects of land rehabilitation and road construction; d) build new sanitary facilities in these areas; e) construct sports and recreation facilities; f) continue PRRA construction of medical buildings in rural and municipal areas; g) experiment in high-protein fisheries (now possible due to the construction of man-made lakes as part of the PRRA’s rural electrification program); h) fund adult literacy education; and i) support civics and democracy classes.118

118 See Manuel A. Perez to Luis Muñoz Marín, May 19, 1941, re: Living Conditions Among Small Farmers, Sub-series 39, Work Progress Administration (WPA), Sub-Section 1, Datos y Estadísticas, Serie 1, Gobierno Federal, Correspondencia, Sección 4, Presidente del Senado, Archivo Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín (hereafter FLMM), Trujillo Alto, San Juan, Puerto Rico; H. Noble Baker to Luis Muñoz Marín, March 24, 1941, Sub-series 39, Work Progress Administration, Sub-Section 1, Datos y Estadísticas, Serie 1, Gobierno Federal, Correspondencia, Sección 4, Presidente del Senado, FLMM. The correspondence between Baker and Muñoz Marín is particularly interesting. Baker, who was appointed by President Roosevelt as the head of the WPA for Puerto Rico and the Virgin Island and confirmed on February 13, 1941, responded favorably to Muñoz Marín’s request for greater cooperation between the WPA and the Puerto Rican Senate on a number of economic and social projects, and to call WPA attention to number of new legislative proposals such as: Land Authority Bill which would a) build low-cost home construction ala PRRA; b) continue and expand parcelas program given to agregados and farmhands now living in slums (ala PRRA); c) land rehabilitation, road construction in these areas ala PRRA; new sanitary facilities in these areas ala PRRA; d) constrution of sporting facilities and recreation and cultural facilities; short connecting roads;
The Nationalists

While the 1932 election elevated the Coalition to local political power, it also signified the inability of the Nationalist Party to generate enough votes to win elections or even influence electoral politics. That year, after Julio Medina González received just 5,257 votes for Resident Commissioner and Pedro Albizu Campos received 13,000 votes in a losing Senatorial bid, many Nationalists followed Albizu Campos’ subsequent call for direct action and the politics of non-participation.119 Born in 1891, Albizu Campos came of age in the era of U.S. rule in Puerto Rico. Graduating from high school in Ponce, Albizu Campos attended the University of Vermont before transferring to Harvard, from which he received his law degree in 1921.120 Like others of his generation, he benefitted from new educational opportunities in the U.S. and used them in the struggle to improve the island’s living conditions and economic prospects. These educational opportunities were largely limited to the wealthy sons of Puerto Rico, as enrollment in elite universities in the United States (as elsewhere) was overwhelmingly comprised of wealthy, male students. In the case of Puerto Rico, this group of students has been referred to as the “reformist elite” of the island—a young, educated professional class that became public servants or ran for political office.

low-cost construction of medical buildings; distribution of small farms to be paid for over long period of years; municipal hospital construction; experiment in fisheries; adult literacy education; civics and democracy classes. See also Meléndez, 59. These and other programs will be discussed below.

119 See “Resultados para Candidatos a Comisionado Residente,” and Ribes Tovar, 47. For more on Medina González, see Bosque Pérez and Colón Morera, 69-71.

120 Ribes Tovar, 19-23.
Interestingly, however, there seems to be no direct correlation for this generational “class” of Puerto Ricans between education in the U.S. and political ideology. Certainly, there were members of this generation on all sides of the status question and other political issues.121 Among the other elite sons of this generation who took advantage of the new educational opportunities in the U.S. were Antonio Lucchetti, born in Ponce, Puerto Rico in 1888 and graduated from Cornell University with a degree in electrical engineering in 1910; Guillermo Esteves, born in Aguadilla in 1890, educated at Tufts University in Massachusetts; and Luis Muñoz Marín, born in San Juan in 1898, educated at Georgetown University Law Center (unlike the others, Muñoz Marín never completed his degree).

This generation—some of whom, like Albizu Campos, served in the U.S. Army during World War I—rose to political prominence during the 1930s. The emergence of a younger generation of supporters gravitating around Albizu Campos was not unique to the Nationalist Party, as inter-generational political tensions occurred within the other major parties during the decade as well. By the end of the decade, in fact, the leaders of the Republican, Socialist, and Liberal parties were replaced by a younger generation of politicians. In these other cases, the death of the party head was a key cause of this shift: Barceló died in 1938, Iglesias in 1939, Martínez Nadal in 1940.122 While these parties struggled to find dynamic new leaders, the emergence of a new generation of political leaders had moved the Nationalist movement away from electoral politics. At the center of this change was Albizu Campos. Eloquentily described by

121 For more on the phrasing of the reformist elite, see Villaronga, 17, 25; Ismael García-Colon, Land Reform in Puerto Rico: Modernizing the Colonial State, 1941-1969 (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2009), 41.

122 A.W. Maldonado has referred to the 1930s as an era of a “generational sea change” in Puerto Rican politics. See Maldonado, Luis Muñoz Marín, 93.
Ronald Fernández as *una rafaga*, or a violent gust of wind, Albizu Campos self-consciously blended cultural nationalism and political independence. Fernández argues that Albizu Campos’ experience with Jim Crow segregation during the war (like other enlisted men in the Puerto Rican Expeditionary Forces, Albizu Campos served in a segregated regiment and was stationed in the Panama Canal Zone to protect the canal from German submarine attacks) transformed his conception of Puerto Rican nationalism to include an anti-racist and anti-imperialist vision.

Albizu Campos’s idea of Puerto Rican nationalism was also largely based on the glorification of Spanish rule during the nineteenth century, and on a conception of Spanish Catholicism that was largely influenced by the intersection of Irish nationalism and Irish Catholicism during the 1920s. The era of Spanish colonialism was glorified because in the August 1897, desperate to retain control of Cuba and Puerto Rico (its two remaining colonies after nearly 400 years of colonial control), the Spanish Crown had offered an Autonomic Charter

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123 Fernández, 96-98. Although the Nationalist movement figures into nearly every book about Puerto Rico in the 1930s, historical scholarship on Albizu Campos is surprisingly thin. Paradoxically, even though he appears ubiquitous in histories of Puerto Rico, an academic biography of Albizu Campos’ political life is sorely needed. For a view of his outsized place in Puerto Rican historiography, see Federico Ribes Tovar, ed., *Enciclopedia puertorriqueña ilustrada: The Puerto Rican Heritage Encyclopedia* (San Juan: Plus Ultra Educational Publishers, 1970).

124 Fernández, 95; Maldonado, *Luis Muñoz Marín*, 140.

to Puerto Rico that extended local self-rule and provided limited representation in the Spanish Parliament.\textsuperscript{126} Disrupted by the U.S. occupation of Puerto Rico the following year, Puerto Rican autonomy never came to be. Three decades later, following the election of 1932, Albizu Campos and the Nationalists argued that the Treaty of Paris, which had ended the Cuban-Spanish-American War in 1898, was null and void because the newly autonomous Puerto Rico was not included in the negotiations and, therefore, the U.S. had illegitimately replaced Spanish colonial rule at the turn of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{127}

Another aspect of the glorification of Spanish rule in the nineteenth century was the embrace of Spanish Catholicism, which offered the Nationalist Party followers a cultural platform after their withdrawal from electoral politics. Couched in an idealization of Hispanic culture, the Nationalists articulated a modern vision for Puerto Rican society based on the conservative and traditional views of the Catholic Church, including those about women’s roles in the family, in politics, and in education.\textsuperscript{128} This conservative vision was at odds with gender politics of the 1930s, particularly at a time of increased agitation for universal women’s suffrage by the \textit{Liga Social Sufragista}—which was supported by the Socialist Party and the Coalition—and the call for limited suffrage by the \textit{Asociación Puertorriqueña Sufragistas}—supported by the \textit{Unión, Alianza,} and Liberal parties.\textsuperscript{129} Nonetheless, the Nationalist Party infused its idea of

\textsuperscript{126} Morales Carrión, 118-125.

\textsuperscript{127} Ribes Tovar, 179.

\textsuperscript{128} Ayala and Bernabe, 105.

\textsuperscript{129} Ayala and Bernabe, 68-39; Cabán, 210-216. For an analysis of the connection between women workers in the cigar industry (particularly leaf-strippers) and the Socialist Party, see Quintero-Rivera, 24-26. The women’s suffrage movement had been a part of the Socialist Party’s official platform since 1915. See Quintero-Rivera, 26n8.
nationalism with a male-oriented, Hispanic Catholicism based on “courage, culture, chivalry, and Catholic civilization” and the exaltation of paternalism and personal honor in the face of the rampant individualism associated with capitalist, Protestant society. Although not all members of the party shared his views on Hispanic Catholic nationalism, by the 1930s Albizu Campos’ name was almost synonymous with the nationalist movement for independence. Eventually, after a failed attempt to raise $200,000 in bonds on the U.S. stock market in 1931 and the miserable showing at the polls in 1932, the Nationalists began to call for the armed defense of “true liberty” at the “price of blood.” Calling all elections in Puerto Rico “colonial,” Albizu Campos implored his followers to abstain from voting. In December 1932, the Nationalist Party met in Humacao, Puerto Rico to write a new constitution and form the Army of Liberation, whose members adopted the black shirt uniform associated with both European and South American fascism at the time. While no historical consensus exists on the exact role of fascist ideology on Albizu Campos’ understanding of Puerto Rican nationalism, it is clear that the symbols of

130 Ribes Tovar, 17-18.

131 Ribes Tovar, 15. For the Nationalist Party’s (presumably) fraudulent sale of bonds in the name of the “Republic of Puerto Rico,” see Ribes Tovar, 47; Maldonado, Luis Muñoz Marín, 118-119; Mathews, 32-33. A.W. Maldonado puts the attempted bond sale in larger perspective, contending that Albizu Campos had spoken of himself as the “president” of the Puerto Rican “republic” and appointed José Vasconcelos to the position of “Nationalist Party Plenipotentiary Delegate to Europe.” Maldonado also claims that while the Bureau of Insular Affairs and War Department each sought legal opinion on the sale of “nationalist” bonds, Governor Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. advised them to “simply ignore it.” See Maldonado, Luis Muñoz Marín, 118-119.

132 Ribes Tovar, 47-49. No historical consensus exists on the role of fascist influences on Puerto Rican nationalism.
nationalism and fascism in Mussolini’s Italy and Franco’s Spain highly influenced the Nationalist Party in Puerto Rico.\textsuperscript{133}

The same underlying problems that doomed the Nationalist Party’s ability to win political elections still plagued the party during its turn toward political assassination and armed revolution: the inability to cultivate and win mass popular support for its cause. While public interest in the independence movement grew, the Nationalists consistently failed to attract serious interest from important public sectors, including students, workers, women, parents, or college educated professionals such as doctors, nurses, teachers, and engineers. While Ribes Tovar asserted that the Nationalist Party attracted “vast crowds of people” to its speeches in the mid-1930s, and was especially effective and mobilizing Puerto Rican youth through radio and the press, Ayala and Bernabe have described the party’s limited organizational structure and warn that it is nearly impossible to quantify how many supporters the party actually had during the 1930s.\textsuperscript{134} As for the connection between Albizu Campos’ nationalist movement and working class Puerto Ricans, there appears to be very little.\textsuperscript{135} Despite a near ubiquitous reference to Albizu Campos’ support for several strikes that overtook the island in the early 1930s, there was very little organizational connection between the Nationalist Party and the major strikes of the

\textsuperscript{133} Ayala and Bernabe, 109; Stevens-Arroyo, 13. In defending Albizu Campos’ campaign for political independence, Stevens-Arroyo has asserted that historians should overlook the extraordinary presence of right-wing and fascist symbols in the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party of the 1930s, stating that we we should not “falsely [convert] the accidentals of black shirts, banners, paramilitary activity, etc. into the substance of a political philosophy.”

\textsuperscript{134} Ribes Tovar, 45-46; Ayala and Bernabe, 112.

\textsuperscript{135} Meléndez, \textit{Puerto Rico’s Statehood Movement}, 203-204.
decade, including those by sugar workers, tobacco workers, dockworkers, needle workers, and students.\textsuperscript{136}

Whereas the connection between Albizu Campos and the labor movement was ambiguous, the role of Nationalists in the decade’s greatest political crisis is clear. Between 1934 and 1936, Albizu Campos’ rhetoric turned increasingly violent as he began to position himself and his loyal soldiers as \textit{martyrs} to the cause of Puerto Rican independence. As local and federal police agencies began monitoring Nationalist speeches and demonstrations, Albizu Campos advocated armed struggle through a war of vengeance against both the local and U.S. governments. Although many on the island viewed his rhetoric as a “sideshow” to the real political debates between the Coalition and Liberal Party, the reality of Albizu Campos’ words became increasingly clear in July and August 1935 when a series of bombs exploded in San Juan.\textsuperscript{137} At first, the targets were “U.S.” government buildings: on July 4, 1935, the headquarters of the PRRA was dynamited; a few weeks later, the U.S. Court Building in Puerta de Tierra; in August, a local police station in Barrio Obreo.\textsuperscript{138} While no one was hurt in these explosions, a

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\item\textsuperscript{136} Ribes Tovar 55-56; Ayala and Bernabe, 109; Fernández, 16-117; Lisa Pierce Flores, \textit{The History of Puerto Rico} (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 91; Dietz, 167; Ayala, \textit{American Sugar Kingdom}, 238; Angelo Falcon, “A History of Puerto Rican Politics in New York City: 1860s to 1945,” in \textit{Puerto Rican Politics in Urban America}, edited by James Jennings and Monte Rivera (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 33. Some important scholars have taken a “what if” approach to the issue of the Nationalist Party’s connection to organized labor. For example, Emilio Pantojas-García has argued that the large 1934 sugar strike “represented the juncture at which two \textit{potentially} revolutionary forces established a significant political collaboration . . . [that] had the potential of becoming a strong anti-imperialist alliance.” See Pantojas-García, \textit{Development Strategies as Ideology}, 34.
\item\textsuperscript{137} Maldonado, \textit{Luis Muñoz Marín}, 119.
\item\textsuperscript{138} Maldonado, \textit{Luis Muñoz Marín}, 137.
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gun battle between Nationalists and police resulted in the death of four Nationalists and one bystander in October 1935. The confrontation, which began when Nationalists attempted to disrupt an anti-Nationalist Party rally by students at the University of Puerto Rico (UPR), marked the beginning of two years of violence, confusion, and bloodshed.

Four months later, in February 1936, the Police Commissioner of Puerto Rico Colonel Francis E. Riggs was shot and killed by Hiram Rosado and Elías Beauchamp—young followers of Albizu Campos who were themselves killed while detained in police custody. Like Governor Blanton Winship, who was appointed by Franklin Roosevelt in 1934, Riggs was a military man, and Albizu Campos interpreted his appointment as the return of military rule in Puerto Rico. Placing armed guards at his house in Aguas Buenas, Albizu Campos argued that Puerto Rico was now governed by tyrants who were “only interested in crushing the nationalism of the invaded country” and that insular police power represented a “government by murder.” Speaking at the funeral of Rosado and Beauchamp, Albizu Campos sought to inspire the crowd of young nationalist soldiers. By mixing Catholic fatalism with militant discourse, he declared that there was “only one gateway to immortality: the gateway of valor, which leads to sacrifice for a sacred cause. We must sacrifice ourselves for the independence of our country.” Arguing that the “Yankees seek to intimidate us with murder,” Albizu Campos declared that for every Nationalist killed, an American (or Puerto Rican working for the U.S. government) would be

139 Ayala and Bernabe, 110; Morales Carrión, 234; Maldonado, Luis Muñoz Marín, 139-141.

140 Maldonado, Luis Muñoz Marín, 120, 138.

141 Ribes Tovar, 58-59.

142 Ribes Tovar, 58-59.
targeted. Transforming himself into a symbol and martyr, Albizu Campos told the crowd that “they can kill Albizu Campos. They can kill 10,000 Nationalists [but] a million Puerto Ricans will rise up” to avenge their deaths and defend the honor of the Puerto Rican fatherland.\(^{143}\)

Response to the quickly growing crisis came from many sides at once. Operating on orders from Governor Winship, who placed a temporary ban on all public demonstrations, local police began a swift repression of the Nationalists by raiding the party’s headquarters and the homes of several leaders. Simultaneously, the FBI built a case against Albizu Campos—eventually charging him with conspiring to overthrow the U.S. government. After a jury composed of seven Puerto Ricans and five Americans failed to reach a verdict, Albizu Campos was convicted by a separate jury made up of two Puerto Ricans and ten Americans and sentenced to ten years in federal prison.\(^{144}\) When a federal appeals court in Boston upheld the verdict in February 1937, political violence against U.S. and Puerto Rican officials escalated, and Governor Winship, Puerto Rico District Court Judge Robert Archer Cooper, and Socialist Party leader (and Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico) Santiago Iglesias all survived assassination attempts. In June 1937, Albizu Campos was transferred to Atlanta Federal Penitentiary.

Meanwhile, a bill for immediate Puerto Rican independence was being discussed in Washington throughout 1936. Written by Millard E. Tydings, a Democrat from Maryland and Chairman of the Senate Committee on Territories and Insular Affairs, and Ernest Gruening, the Director of the Division of Territories and Island Possessions of the Department of the Interior and head of the PRRA, the Tydings Bill was introduced in the Senate two months after the Riggs


\(^{144}\) Morales Carrión, 235-236; Ayala and Bernabe, 110-112; Ribes Tovar, 63-66.
assassination. It was both punitive and vindictive. Referred to as a political ambush by *El Mundo*, the bill was written in response to the political chaos that followed the Riggs assassination and would have destroyed the Puerto Rican economy by abruptly ending all relief assistance and tariff protections. Rightly seen as a seminal event in Puerto Rico during the 1930s that has had long-lasting political implications, the bill has received considerable attention in the historiography of U.S.-Puerto Rican relations and has come to be understood as part of a personal vendetta by Tydings against the rebellious nationalist movement of the decade. Historians have focused on Tydings’ friendship with Riggs and his claim the “American system was not functioning adequately in Puerto Rico.”

Several aspects of this argument are convincing, particularly considering that the Philippine Independence Act, which Tydings co-sponsored with Alabama Democratic Representative John McDuffie in 1934, was a “gradual” independence act designed to ease the economic burdens of independence. Nevertheless, the personal dimensions of the Tydings Bill have been overstated in the historical literature, as they ignore the larger context of Tydings’ opposition to the New Deal in *both* the U.S. and in Puerto Rico. Like nearly all other aspects of

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Puerto Rican political history, the Tydings Bill has been viewed too narrowly through the lens of U.S. “colonialism.”

This view has obscured the fact that the animosity between Tydings and Roosevelt (as well as between Tydings and Harold Ickes) was so strong that FDR once threatened to punch Tydings in the nose. On taking the battle against Tydings directly to the public, Ickes wrote that if he “seems bent on smearing us all he can, we ought to fight back day by day through the newspapers, which is the only means available to us to meet the vague charges that are being produced” by Tydings’ complaints. While these incidents were not about policy in Puerto Rico, they illustrate the need to put Tydings’ relationship with Ickes and FDR into broader perspective. A closer analysis of Tydings reveals that the conservative Southern Democrat was not only the most “uncompromising” and “troublesome” Democratic critic of the New Deal in the U.S., but also the most strident critic of the New Deal in Puerto Rico. As Jo Ann Argersinger has written, FDR denounced Tydings as a “betrayer of the New Deal.” Not only did Tydings oppose the NIRA, AAA, Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act), and Social Security Act (SSA), but he also moved against the PRERA and PRRA and criticized the escalating federal expenditure in Puerto Rico. The 1936 bill, written during the


context of the Riggs assassination, was a move to eliminate the increasing federal spending on the island by way of offering Puerto Rico complete and immediate independence. It was an attack on Ickes and the New Deal as much as it was an attack on Albizu Campos or Puerto Rican nationalism.

By the end of 1937, the Nationalist movement began to lose viability as a mass political movement. While it had already foresworn electoral politics following its convincing defeat in the 1932 elections, its turn toward violent resistance resulted in the swift repression of party leaders in the immediate aftermath of the political crisis caused by the assassination of Riggs and discussion of the Tydings Bill. In addition, as the movement of armed resistance became more narrowly focused on Albizu Campos and his young, armed, possibly fascist-influenced “soldiers,” the movement drew further and further away from the aims and aspirations of many important sectors of Puerto Rican society, including students, women’s rights advocates, professionals, and organized labor—who each looked to local politics to bring economy recovery from the Depression and hurricanes. Although the Tydings Bill was not adopted by Congress, it had opened up new and serious debate over the merits and of abrupt political independence without a period of economic transition. With Pedro Albizu Campos imprisoned in the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, the Nationalists ceased to be a force for political change on the island for the rest of the Great Depression.

The Liberal Party

Just as the intense debate over the Tydings Bill undermined the Nationalist position on immediate independence, it also drove a wedge into the previously unified Liberal Party. By the midterm elections of 1938, the party was in disarray due to a political fracture between Luis
Muñoz Marín and Antonio Rafael Barceló that resulted in over half of the party’s base of support following Muñoz Marín out of the party. Born 30 years before the U.S. occupation of Puerto Rico during the Spanish American War, Barceló was a contemporary of Luis Muñoz Rivera—the father of Muñoz Marín. Together, they had led the Unión Puertorriqueña during the early years of the twentieth century with a platform that revolved around the concepts of cultural independence and political autonomy. Following an uneasy alliance with the Republican Party in the 1920s, Barceló refashioned the Union Party as the Partido Liberal in time for the 1932 elections around a platform of cultural and political independence.¹⁵⁰ For example, on March 13, 1932 the party declared in its official platform that its purpose was to “demand the immediate recognition of the sovereignty of Puerto Rico and make it effective by the most rapid, most practical, and most direct methods, thus establishing the absolute independence of Puerto Rico.”¹⁵¹ In private correspondence, party leaders echoed this official platform. That December, a month after losing the 1932 elections to the Coalición, Muñoz Marín wrote to Ruby Black that the Liberal Party was “for independence” and retains a “special tenderness for the Democratic party in spite of its having statehood in its platform.”¹⁵²

Even though they had lost the 1932 elections, the Liberal Party had received the most total votes of any single party in the election, and the one Senate seat awarded to the Liberals in

¹⁵⁰ Muñoz Rivera had died in 1916, and Barceló was the established leader of the party.

¹⁵¹ La Democracia, March 14, 1932, quoted in Mathews, 27.

¹⁵² Luis Muñoz Marín to Ruby Black, Dec. 13, 1932, Ruby Black Collection, Puerto Rico Correspondence, quoted in Mathews, 30.
1932 was won by Muñoz Marín. Viewed by supporters and opponents as the “New Deal’s golden boy,” Muñoz Marín’s spent much of his time in the Senate working on the social and economic reforms of the New Deal agencies that were opposed by the Coalition. Using his bilingual and bicultural skills to his party’s advantage, Muñoz Marín turned the personal friendships cultivated during his time in Washington and New York into strong political alliances and relationships. Declaring his support for the New Deal, Muñoz Marín wrote to President Roosevelt in January 1934 that he was a Puerto Rican New Dealer, committed to working within the local legislature to assure that the “economic implications of the New Deal” were fully implemented on the island. Although Muñoz Marín and the Liberal Party were essential to the early successes of both the PRERA and the PRRA between 1934 and 1937, the close relationship between Muñoz Marín and New Deal officials (in both Washington and San Juan) broke apart during the political crisis caused by the Riggs assassination and Tydings Bill of 1936. These events not only distanced Muñoz Marín from allies in Washington, but marked the beginning of the end of the Liberal Party as well.

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153 As of 1933, The Liberal Party held 5 Senate seats, 8 Representatives, and 26 mayors compared to the Coalition’s 14 Senators, 30 Representatives, and 51 mayors. See Pedro A. Malavet, America’s Colony: The Political and Cultural Conflict Between the United States and Puerto Rico (New York: NYU Press, 2004), 66.

154 Morales Carrión, 230. A poet and social critique before his political career, Muñoz Marín had spent many years in Washington and New York pursuing an unfinished law degree.

155 Luis Muñoz Marín to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, January 17, 1943, Box 46, Puerto Rico, Appointments, Official File #400, FDR Library, quoted in Mathews, 30.

156 Morales Carrión writes that by the end of 1936, the “honeymoon” between Muñoz Marín and New Dealers in Washington “was over.” Morales Carrión, 230; Ayala and Bernabe, 115-116, 136-138; Maldonado, Luis Muñoz Marín, 141-149, 154-155.
While the Riggs assassination and Tydings Bill frayed the Liberal consensus, the Ponce Massacre of 1937 permanently ended the Liberal Party’s ability to win elections or exert substantial political influence over local Puerto Rican politics. On Sunday March 21, 1937, Puerto Rican police shot into a crowd of unarmed Nationalist demonstrators and terrified bystanders in Ponce, the Southern “capital” of the Nationalist movement. Police actions killed 19 people (17 citizens and 2 police officers) and wounded hundreds.\textsuperscript{157} The confrontation was precipitated by Enrique de Orbeta, the Puerto Rican Chief of Police, who had revoked a permit to demonstrate that had been previously given to the Nationalists by the city of Ponce.\textsuperscript{158} Even in the context of the escalating tensions between Nationalists and the local government, the shooting of unarmed men and women (and one child) in Ponce was a shock that reverberated throughout the island and further disrupted Puerto Rican politics. The Liberal Party, which immediately called for a “thorough investigation” of what had occurred in Ponce, quickly divided over what position to take in the aftermath of the massacre. Like the debate over the Tydings Bill the year before, this divide crystallized around the two towering figures of Liberal Party politics, Barceló and Muñoz Marín. While Barceló tempered his anger over the police murders in Ponce while investigations were underway, Muñoz Marín took a much more direct approach in his criticism of Governor Winship, Ernest Gruening, and other U.S. officials.\textsuperscript{159}


\textsuperscript{159} “El Partido Liberal Pide ‘Una Investigacion Minuciosa Que depure toda la verdad de lo ocurrido’ el domingo en Ponce,” \textit{El Mundo}, March 24, 1937. For other sources on the Ponce Massacre, see Maldonado, \textit{Luis Muñoz Marín}, 151-153; Mathews, 312; Ayala and Bernabe, 116;
Seizing the chance to regain control of the Liberal Party, Barceló blamed Muñoz Marín for the deterioration of the *Liberales’* relationship with key U.S. figures such as Gruening, Ickes, and Roosevelt.¹⁶⁰ In the first few days after the Ponce Massacre, Barceló reaffirmed the Liberal Party’s faith in the original tenets of the Union Party—which he had founded with Muñoz Rivera. By highlighting the Liberal Party’s origins as the party of cultural independence and political autonomy, Barceló contrasted his younger political rival with Muñoz Marín’s own father.¹⁶¹ In May 1937, less than two months after the Ponce Massacre, Barceló’s looked to permanently undercut Muñoz Marín’s standing in the Liberal Party by associating him with Albizu Campos and the Nationalists in the minds of liberal voters, and by the end of the month, Muñoz Marín and his followers were officially expelled from the Liberal Party.¹⁶²

Barceló could not have played his hand any worse. Over the next few months, as Muñoz Marín attempted to establish a new political party—experiments ranged from the Acción Social Independentista (ASI) to the Partido Liberal Neto, Auténtico y Completo (or New, Authentic, and Complete Liberal Party)—Barceló’s control of the Liberal Party was enhanced (until his death in October 1938) but the overall strength of the party was decimated by the loss of Muñoz Marín. With the formation of the Partido Popular Democratico (PPD) in 1938, Muñoz Marín

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¹⁶¹ Barceló claimed that *his* program was modeled on “los principios de evolución aconsejados por nuestro “lider” máximo y maestro Luis Munoz Rivera.” See “Barceló Declara Que Una Asemblea Debe Eliminar Todos los radicalismos que had pertubado la marcha de nuestra partido,” *El Mundo*, March 24, 1937. See also Maldonado, *Luis Muñoz Marín*, 157.

rekindled his vision for a mass-based or popular alliance of Barceló’s reform-minded “middle class” followers with Santiago Iglesias’ “working class” followers. Combined with the collapse of the Coalition and withdrawal of the Nationalist Party from electoral politics, the fracturing of the Liberal Party between 1936 and 1938 signaled a new era in Puerto Rican politics. Over the course of the next decade, this new era was dominated by the PPD, whose new platform merged a populist call for “Pan, Tierra, y Libertad” (Bread, Land, and Liberty) with support for the emerging paradigm of permanent reconstruction embodied in the large-scale public works projects of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration that aimed at providing long-term economic recovery from the Great Depression and hurricanes of 1928 and 1932.

Short of financial assets and burdened with the bureaucratic difficulties of starting a new political party, the PPD nonetheless had some powerful resources in its favor, including control of the liberal newspaper La Democracia the support of several key Liberals who worked for the PRRA such as Benigno Fernández García, Guillermo Esteves, and Antonio Lucchetti. Hoping to attract a broad popular base of Socialists, Liberals, workers, unionists, small farmers, civil employees, and reform-minded professionals, the PPD published a small newspaper called El Batey and a series of pamphlets outlining its platform for the upcoming 1940 elections. When the PPD won a surprise victory in the election, Muñoz Marín was elevated to President of Senate—a position held by Republican Rafael Martínez Nadal since 1933. Noting the importance of this transition from the Coalition to PPD-led control of the local government,

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163 Ayala and Bernabe note that in 1926 Muñoz Marín had articulated the need for such an alliance to jointly combat the forces of plutocracy on the island. See Ayala and Bernabe, 99-100.

164 Ayala and Bernabe, 136-138; Maldonado, Luis Muñoz Marín, 174-175.
Muñoz Marín declared that he led a New Deal-style party that would seek to make permanent the many social and economic gains of the PRRA reconstruction projects, particularly on the issues of land reform and public ownership of natural resources. Skillfully positioning himself as a critic of U.S. policy and leadership in the aftermath of the Ponce massacre, and yet heir to the New Deal, Muñoz Marín consolidated his leadership of the PPD and the Puerto Rican Senate based on the continuation of New Deal public works, liberalism, and patronage.

165 Maldonado, Luis Muñoz Marín, 194-195; García-Colon, 41. The 1940 election was won largely through the splintering of the Coalition, rather than as a clear mandate for the Popular Party. In fact, Muñoz Marín and the PPD won the election with 38,000 less votes than the Liberal Party had received in losing the 1936 elections, thanks largely to the “defection” of 60,000 Socialists and 35,000 Republicans to the newly-formed Unification Triparty. Just as Rafael Martínez Nadal had done in 1932, Muñoz Marín took office as President of the Senate as the head of a minority party. See Maldonado, Luis Muñoz Marín, 197.
Chapter 3: From Relief to Reconstruction: The New Deal in Puerto Rico from La PRERA to La PRRA

The third major political development of the 1930s was the emergence of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRRA) in 1935, which was made possible by the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932. The PRRA brought new and unprecedented changes to U.S. and Puerto Rican political life. Unlike the collapse of the private relief model invoked in the wake of the 1928 and 1932 hurricanes and the breakdown of partisan politics during the second half of the decade, the success of the PRRA was contingent on the close collaboration of Puerto Rican and U.S. New Deal officials and the popular support of the residents of the island—the workers, farmers, and professionals who actively designed, labored on, contested, and benefitted from PRRA programs. The PRRA—despite a general consensus in the historical literature that has argued otherwise—should be seen as a remarkable success in combatting the worst aspects of the infrastructural and environmental crises of the Great Depression while initiating a program of long-term economic reconstruction.166

Like the New Deal in the U.S., the PRRA had many shortcomings. It was underfunded; it went through several administrative changes; it did not accomplish all of its goals; it had many failures; it was susceptible to corruption; it was used as political fodder; it was short sighted; and it overreached. As this and the following chapters will demonstrate, however, the public works programs of the PRRA radically transformed Puerto Rican society through the construction of a federally-financed and publicly-owned infrastructure that made the most serious intervention in

166 During the late 1960s, a historical consensus had begun to form on the overall “failure” of the New Deal in Puerto Rico; this consensus was shared by the New Deal’s champions and critics alike. For example, see Wells, 116-117; Lewis, Puerto Rico: Freedom and Power in the Caribbean, 127-129; Dietz, 155-158; Trias Monge, 96-97.
public health in the island’s history. Far from a “colonial” imposition, the PRRA was planned and run by a mostly Puerto Rican administrative and working staff and supported by an increasingly devoted popular base of Puerto Rican citizens. Legal title to all projects, land acquisitions, infrastructure, and other capital investments were transferred in perpetuity to the people of Puerto Rico to be locally owned and administered. The New Deal in Puerto Rico was divided into two clear eras: that of the PRERA from 1933 to 1935, and that of the PRRA from 1935 to 1955.

The Puerto Rico Emergency Relief Administration, 1933-1935

The Puerto Rico Emergency Relief Administration (PRERA), which was created in August 1933, coordinated emergency relief from the San Felipe and San Ciprián hurricanes from 1933 to 1935.\(^{167}\) During this time, which can be considered the “First” New Deal in Puerto Rico, the PRERA was run by James Bourne, who, along with his wife Dorothy, was a close friend of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt.\(^ {168}\) The PRERA’s operational budget was funded through the Federal Emergency Relief Agency (FERA), which had been established during the First Hundred Days and run by Harry Hopkins (who later directed the Works Progress Administration and negotiated the Lend-Lease Act of 1940).

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\(^{167}\) Although the PRERA and PRRA are oftentimes linked in the public and historical imagination as one entity, these agencies were as organizationally distinct from one another as the Federal Emergency Relief Agency (FERA) and the Public Works Administration (PWA) in the United States.

\(^{168}\) Mathews, 127; Dietz, 146; Rodríguez, A New Deal for the Tropics, 56.
The PRERA was regarded as a temporary measure designed to provide both food and clothing to hurricane victims and work relief through limited infrastructural building projects. As Manuel Rodríguez has warned, however, a narrow focus on the PRERA’s relief work has obscured the transformative ways in which the PRERA “reached all sectors of the island and had a considerable impact on Puerto Rican society.” The numbers seem to back up this claim, and by the end of 1933 the PRERA had received an initial grant of $770,000 from the FERA to combat the most pressing effects of the San Felipe and San Ciprián hurricanes. Although Puerto Rico was originally required to provide $300,000 to supplement the money from FERA, this stipulation was later withdrawn when the Coalition-led legislature refused to allocate any local funds to match the federal dollars. During the entire 25-month period of its existence from August 1933 to September 1935, the PRERA spent nearly $20 million (about $260 million today) allocated from FERA plus an additional $190,000 supplied by Puerto Rican municipal governments. An additional $1.6 million was transferred from FERA to the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation (FSRG) in exchange for $4 million of surplus non-perishable food supplies, which was distributed by PRERA.

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169 Bourne and Bourne, 131; Fairbank, The Chardon Plan and the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration, 10; PRERA, Second Report of the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration, 4-5.

170 Rodríguez, A New Deal for the Tropics, 38.

171 Mathews, 131; Dietz, 146-147.

172 Dietz, 146.

While these funds represented a serious improvement to the inadequate model of relief during the Coolidge and Hoover administrations, the overall focus on emergency services continued to confine the relationship between Puerto Ricans and the PRERA into a progressive era paradigm of relief that precluded direct public participation in building a lasting recovery and continued longstanding traditions of waiting on aid from above. Puerto Rican participation under the PRERA was limited to waiting in line for emergency supplies. Between August 1933 and September 1935, the PRERA received 339,125 applications for aid. Operating in each of the island’s seventy-six municipalities, PRERA distributed 120,000 pounds of surplus pork and spent over $3 million in federal funds on milk distribution.\(^{174}\) To move around the opposition of the Coalition, and in response to new ideas about Puerto Rico emerging from the island, the PRRA was formed to replace the PRERA in 1935.

**The Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration, 1935-1955**

Signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as Executive Order #7057 on May 28, 1935, the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration reoriented the New Deal in Puerto Rico away from the paradigm of relief towards one of permanent reconstruction by constructing a new public health and public works infrastructure on the island. For the next twenty years, the PRRA dedicated itself to the construction of public drinking water and sewer systems, rural

\(^{174}\) PRERA, *Second Report of the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration*, 5, 7; Mathews, 130-131. At the same time, the PRERA was beset opposition from the Coalition, the complete incompetence of the Gore administration, and the desire among the PRERA’s own administrators to utilize the relief program as a means to reconcile thirty years of ambiguous colonial policy on the island. See Mathews, 128-131; Rodríguez, *A New Deal for the Tropics*, 53-55.
electrification, agricultural rehabilitation, and the building of affordable hurricane-proof houses. In bringing the “Second” New Deal to Puerto Rico, the PRRA replaced all other New Deal activity on the island. It was the first effort on the part of any U.S. administration to directly confront the social and economic policies that had led to increasing poverty, landlessness, unemployment, and ill health in Puerto Rico.¹⁷⁵

Operating within the Department of the Interior, which was led by Harold Ickes, the PRRA was organized in accordance with the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of April 8, 1935, and funded through a series of additional Emergency Appropriation Acts between 1935 and 1938. From its inception, the PRRA’s primary focus was on the construction of capital-intensive construction projects in both rural and urban Puerto Rico that would alleviate the Depression’s most severe effects while providing for long-term social and economic growth. While the PRRA made important forays into rural rehabilitation by establishing agricultural cooperatives and beginning extensive programs in agricultural resettlement and forestry management, its most significant and lasting contributions came out of the Engineering division, which oversaw the construction of the Cataño cement plant, the slum clearance and hurricane-proof housing program, and the rural electrification of the island. Initially headquartered in Washington, the PRRA was a Puerto Rican designed, run, and staffed New Deal program. It was not the handmaiden of the U.S. professional class nor of the U.S.-educated “colonial” professional class on the island. Indeed, as we have already seen, the younger generation of Puerto Rican leaders that emerged in the 1930s came from all different sides of the political spectrum. In fact, it is impossible to fully appreciate the ways in which the PRRA was a local

¹⁷⁵ “Progress Report” folder, General Records Relating to the Cement Plant Project, RG 323, NARA-NYC.
institution without understanding how much the New Deal operated on a local level in the U.S. as well.176

Highlighting the failures of the previous hurricane relief model, Roosevelt remarked that the change from the PRERA to the PRRA represented a new focus towards public security from hurricanes and diseases caused by an inadequately built physical environment. Arguing that the PRRA intended “not merely immediate relief but permanent reconstruction for the Island,” FDR outlined a bold vision that combined agricultural and rural rehabilitation with “cheap and available electric power, good roads, reforestation, and adequate housing.”177 These goals, which reflected a major break from the goals of all previous administrations, were dependent on three things: substantial capital outlays from the federal government, effective local administration, and widespread popular support.

As for capital, the PRRA spent over $82 million between 1935 and February 15, 1955, when the New Deal agency was formally liquidated. The bulk of this money, which equates to over $1.36 billion today, was spent between 1935 and 1943.178 As a locally-run New Deal agency, over half of this figure was spent on labor and personnel; direct employment by the PRRA reached a peak of 58,238 in November 1936 and was sustained through July 1937. As of October 31, 1938, the PRRA had furnished approximately 108,658,865 man-hours of work. Like

176 On the possibilities and limits of local control of the New Deal, see Patterson, *The New Deal and the States*; Grey; Katzenelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White*; Smith.


many New Deal programs, the PRRA was officially designed as a job creator tasked with
attacking what FDR saw as the most pressing problem of the Great Depression: the
unemployment crisis. By 1940, however, PRRA payroll had been slashed by more than 50% to
23,258 personnel. 179

Puerto Rican men and women overwhelmingly performed this work in positions ranging
from unskilled laborers to engineers, architects, and administrators for projects largely
conceived, designed, and supervised by Puerto Ricans. Between 1935 and 1943, for example, at
least 90% of all administrative, supervisory, and clerical personnel and 99.9% of all other
workers were native-born Puerto Ricans. In all, roughly 98% of the entire PRRA payroll was
Puerto Rican. Without overemphasizing this point, it is necessary to remark on the uniqueness of
this federal agency that operated out of San Juan with an essentially Puerto Rican staff. 180

After payroll, which accounted for between 50-57% of the PPRA’s total budget, the vast
majority of the $82 million was spent on large-scale capital projects constructed by the
Engineering division. As part of a larger New Deal strategy to displace corporate monopolies in
electric power and water utilities and remove the control of public works from local partisan
interference, PRRA public works were transferred out of federal control and administered by

179 “Facts About the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration”; “Para el 16 diciembre
23,258 trabajaban en la Administración de reconstrucción de Puerto Rico,” El Pais, December
23, 1939, A.D. Personnel - Employment Record” folder, Box 2, General Records Relating to
Administration, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

180 “Federal Agencies Operating in Puerto Rico,” Investigation of Political, Economic,
and Social Conditions in Puerto Rico, Hearings Before the Subcommittee of the House
Committee of Insular Affairs, Part 19, Pursuant to HR 159, 78th Cong., 2nd sess., 1944
publicly-owned authorities and corporations after completion. These capital investments, which included land acquisitions as well as capital-intensive projects in infrastructure, utilities, roads, sewers, and buildings, accounted for $32.6 million or approximately 40% of the PRRA’s total budget, which equates to over $543 million today. These projects—which ranged from soil conservation and cattle tick elimination to rural electricity and the construction of the second cement plant ever built in the Caribbean—made lasting contributions to personal and collective well-being in Puerto Rico. Like the many large-scale public works built by the Public Works Administration (PWA) and Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the U.S., these federal interventions were not “colonial” projects designed to tie local economies to the “imperial state,” but were rather linked to some of the basic goals and accomplishments of the New Deal in terms of reforming and expanding the role of the federal government in the lives of citizens.

The extension of massive public works projects to the territories has been little explored in the historiography of the New Deal, but the $543 million (in 2014 dollars) spent on capital investments in Puerto Rico seems to warrant examination. Between 1935 and 1955, the federal government allocated, spent, and transferred ownership to Puerto Rico projects that totaled (in 2013 dollars): $153.2 million on rural electrification; $56.5 million on reforestation; $39.3 million on roads, streets, and highways; $32.1 million school construction; $31.3 million on

181 In both Puerto Rico and the U.S., the New Deal innovated and expanded the use of self-financing public authorities and corporations as a means to displace corporate monopolies in electric power, water utilities, and public works. The significance of the Puerto Rico Cement Corporation and Puerto Rico Water Resources Authority on Puerto Rican society and politics will be discussed below.


183 For a complete list of PRRA public works projects, see Appendix A.
health care facility construction; $29 million on eliminating the cattle tick that had plagued and depleted Puerto Rican livestock for decades; $28.9 million on infrastructural malaria control, such as swamp drainage and fill; $27.8 million on soil conservation; $23.9 million on the construction of the Cataño cement plant; $13.6 on public utilities; $12.6 million on public buildings.¹⁸⁴

Although the New Deal as a whole was inconceivable without the election of FDR in 1932, the origins and energy behind the shift from relief to reconstruction were conceived and developed in Puerto Rico. By 1933, at a time when few in the U.S. general public or Washington knew or cared about the social and economic damages wrought by the hurricanes and Depression in Puerto Rico (particularly in the context of the expanding social, economic, and environmental crisis in the U.S.), Puerto Rican intellectuals, agronomists, and public officials began formulating ideas and strategies for the mounting agricultural and urban crises. This group included Carlos Chardón, the Chancellor of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) with a background in mycology; Rafael Menéndez Ramos, an agronomist at UPR and the Agricultural Experiment Station (AES); and Rafael Fernández García, the Commissioner of Agriculture and also associated with the AES. Their work originally focused on the agricultural damage of the hurricanes, and sought to find solutions to the seemingly impossible task of resurrecting the coffee, tobacco, and citrus industries most severely impacted by the storms of 1928 and 1932. Clustered around the half-built campus of the UPR, this group (sometimes referred to as the Chardón group) also directed their attention toward reforming the sugar industry. Though not

explicitly political, the Chardón group was mostly comprised of members of the Liberal Party who stood at odds with the new Coalition government that was elected in 1932 to, in part, uphold the violation of a decades-old law that had been designed to limit corporate and absentee landholding on the island.

This law, which was known as the “500-Acre” law, was the single most important political issue facing the Coalition after the statehood issue. In some ways, the law was as important than statehood—particularly to the Republican Party, as the party’s platform called for statehood in order to protect and enhance the political and economic position of its constituency which included the owners and overseers of large corporate-owned plantations. The 500-Acre law, which had been adopted as part of the Foraker Act of 1900, was added to the Foraker Act by Representative William Atkinson Jones of Virginia, a Democrat whose career in Washington spanned from the era of Populism to that of Progressivism during the World War I years. Expressing his fear that “syndicates” in corporate agriculture were “being organized to buy up practically all the rich sugar, coffee, and tobacco lands,” Jones sought to add the 500-Acre amendment to the Foraker bill.185 Seen today as a symbol of Puerto Rican nationalism, the law


William Jones was later the co-author of the Jones Act of 1917, the law that extended U.S. citizenship to all Puerto Ricans and expanded Puerto Rican participation in the local government through the creation of a bicameral legislature composed of a House of Representatives and Senate. The Jones Act, which was written by Jones and Senator John Shafroth of Colorado and signed by President Woodrow Wilson on March 2, 1917, was seen as an extension of Wilsonian Progressivism to the territories in a dramatic contrast to the “imperial”
was actually introduced by progressive U.S. politicians concerned about the rapid pace of vertical integration and spread of monopolies during the early years of the 1900s.\textsuperscript{186} The law, however, was never enforced.

The need for land reform was magnified by the environmental and economic crises of the Depression years, and the Chardón-led group focused much of their discussion to the enforcement of the existing 500-Acre law. In 1934, Eleanor Roosevelt, Undersecretary of Agriculture Rexford G. Tugwell, and James A. Dickey of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) made personal tours of Puerto Rico and provided detailed reports on the socioeconomic conditions to President Roosevelt. Following these reports, the Roosevelt administration established the Puerto Rico Policy Committee to merge with and expand the work already being done by the Chardón group. Composed of both U.S. and Puerto Rican intellectuals and policy makers, the committee included Carlos Chardón, Rafael Menéndez Ramos, Rafael Fernández García, Rex Tugwell, Oscar Chapman (Assistant Secretary of the Interior), Jacob policies of Wilson’s political opponents from the Republican and Progressive parties, such as former presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft. As part of Wilson’s vision of an era of “New Freedom,” the Jones Act also had global implications as it was passed exactly one month before Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war on Germany in order to help make the world “safe for democracy,” and two months before the passage of the Selective Service Act of 1917, which required all male citizens aged 21-30 to register for the draft. On the Jones Act, see Dietz, 97-98 and Ayala and Bernabe, 57-58. On Wilson, see “Making the World ‘Safe for Democracy’: Woodrow Wilson Asks for War,” History Matters, American Social History Project / Center for Media and Learning (CUNY Graduate Center) and the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media (George Mason University), accessed October 22, 2013, http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4943/.

Baker (FERA), and William I. Meyers (Farm Credit Administration). In June 1934, the Chardón group—officially called the Inter-Departmental Committee for the Economic Rehabilitation of Puerto Rico—released its much anticipated report, which was soon labeled as the “Plan Chardón” in the press.

The primary goal of the Chardón Plan was to break up large, corporate-owned sugar plantations through enforcement of the 500-Acre law. Acknowledging that there were a “myriad of interlocking problems which together with natural disasters, formed a background for the Island’s dilemma,” however, there were 20 other major subjects covered by the Chardón Plan outside of the “sugar question.” These were: coffee rehabilitation; citrus fruit rehabilitation; tobacco rehabilitation; creation of subsistence farms; development of the coconut industry; forestry; agricultural credit; development of sea-island cotton; industrial development; transportation; tourism; tax reduction and public debt reduction; canning industry; fresh water fish industry; eradication of bovine tuberculosis and cattle tick; soil erosion; hurricane research; cooperative hurricane insurance; slum clearance; crop, price, and statistical reporting.

Enforcement of the 500-Acre Law was difficult, as the court system and local legislature each supported the existing landholding arrangements. Not surprisingly, due to the large presence of Liberals and Democrats on the Policy Commission, Rafael Martínez Nadal of the Republican Party quickly emerged as the strongest critic of the Chardón Plan by the end of 1934. In order circumvent local resistance from the Coalition government, and to move faster than the

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legal system would allow, FDR created the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration by Executive Order in May 1935. The flexing of executive power—seen by some as one of the Roosevelt administration’s great political strengths—was met with a tepid response from the plan’s own creators, including Chardón, who originally wanted more direct influence within the local government. As Coalition opposition to the Chardón Plan mounted, however, Chardón and other Puerto Rican officials pragmatically decided to align with Roosevelt; Chardón served as the PRRA’s first Assistant Administrator from May 1935 to November 1936.

The first task of the PRRA was to replace the relief-minded PRERA, as the New Deal as a whole shifted away from the policy of relief during its “Second” stage. As in the U.S., the Second New Deal in Puerto Rico was less concerned with immediate job relief and more focused on long-term legal reform and economic reconstruction. Concluding that the “primary need for Puerto Ricans is not a direct dole-like service from the Federal Government, but a carefully developed economy,” Roosevelt changed course in Puerto Rico from the First New Deal to build lasting public works “upon which in years to come the people can erect a stable trade and draw therefrom a measure of self-sufficiency.”

This shift from relief to reconstruction was both discursive and physical, and the long-term effect of large-scale public works construction was closely followed in the Puerto Rican press. In 1935, for example, El Día: El periódico de Ponce called for direct action to address the public health crisis in Ponce, where residents of the newly constructed slums in the Mameyes swamp near the Ponce Aqueduct had relocated following the 1928 and 1932 hurricanes. Seeking

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access to the new federal resources, the newspaper argued for the PRRA to hire a team of competent engineers and allocate $500,000 to the rehabilitation of Ponce through the construction of new housing and sanitation infrastructure.  

The executive maneuver around the local government was crucial to the reform and reconstruction projects of the PRRA, as the Coalition attempted to control all new federal activities on the island—proposing that the PRRA be led by local political forces, including the Governor, several cabinet members, and two “at large” citizens. As these were the very groups that were already in charge—and had some control over the PRERA—these Coalition attempts to control the PRRA were seen by the Roosevelt administration as a means to halt any movement on the 500-Acre issue and to personally harness federal dollars into local political patronage to enhance Coalition power. Much to the Coalition’s dismay, however, FDR and his advisors saw through its attempt to coopt the New Deal. The PRRA—which needed to negotiate political opposition in both Washington and San Juan—would require a careful combination of local and federal administrators that could insure both its loyalty to the larger reform program and its independence from opposition politics.

With this political reality in mind, FDR appointed Ernest Gruening as Administrator, Carlos Chardón as Assistant Administrator, and Benigno Fernández García as Regional

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190 *El Día: El Periodico de Ponce: Absolutamente Independiente*, Frida October 4, 1935, Newspaper clipping, Folder 1, Slum Clearance Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC. The text reads “Pedimos quinientos mil dolares para eliminar el barrida de Mameyes, situada cerca de los depositos de Acueducto de Ponce, y construir en otro sitio casas higiencias para la gente pobre,” and describes Mameyes as the “la barrida más antihigiénica y miserable de la ciudad. . . Pedimos, pues, a los directores de la PRRA, que imediatamente ordenen a ingenieros competentes que realicen en estudio del mal que ahora señalamos y si lo creen justificado y necesario a la salud y al bienestar de esta comunidad, dediquen la cantidad de $500,000 para realizar cuanto sea menester a este humano y necesario deber. Esperamos confiados en que no habrá de tardar la acción de los señores Gruening y Chardón, en lo que ahora solicitamos para bien de nuestro pueblo.”
Administrator. The PRRA was designed to be a locally-run New Deal agency, and its leadership structure was intentionally decentralized to handle both the scope of its program (it would consolidate all other New Deal functions in Puerto Rico—a task no other local jurisdiction in the U.S. faced), and the many logistical and political complexities involved. As Administrator, Gruening was ostensibly in charge, but nearly all daily functions were to be handled by the Assistant and Regional administrators, who were to coordinate and keep in touch with every aspect of the organization, and to “originate plans or policies that affect the organization as a whole... and execute his authority in keeping the various parts adjusted, and in regulating their efficiency and rapid operation.” 191

However, Gruening and Chardón never really agreed on the purpose and direction of the PRRA’s actual work. While the link between the Chardón Plan and the PRRA has been extensively noted in the historical literature, the fact that Gruening and Chardón’s tenure lasted less than two years has not been fully recognized, and the administrative in-fighting between local and federal officials during these two years have colored historical analysis of the PRRA as a whole. 192 Whereas Chardón and Fernández García were deeply committed to using the PRRA as a weapon against the violators of the 500-Acre law, Gruening—a diplomat and journalist with long ties to Latin America—envisioned the PRRA as a sort of ambassadorial tool in implementing Roosevelt’s “Good Neighbor” policy across the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean. Chardón and Benigno Fernández García—who was the brother of the Chardón Plan’s

191 Memo from Chardón to Gruening, re: Administrative Coordination of the PRRA, “Administrative Coordination in the PRRA” folder, General Records Relating to the Cement Plant Project, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

192 Jorge Rodríguez Beruff is one of the few to comment on the importance of this change. Rodríguez Beruff, xi.
co-author Rafael Fernández García—were primarily focused on enforcing the 500-Acre law, which they interpreted as the key to solving Puerto Rico’s economic problems. In January 1936, Benigno Fernández García was appointed by Roosevelt as the Attorney General of Puerto Rico with an aim to directly counteract the Coalition’s resistance to the enforcement of the 500-Acre law.¹⁹³

In contrast to Chardón and Fernández García, Gruening’s interest in Puerto Rico stemmed from his role as one of the earliest and strongest critics of U.S. foreign policy in Latin America and the Caribbean. A progressive liberal and Democrat, Gruening combined a critique of imperialism with a career-long focus on utilities regulation. He brought both of these causes to his leadership of the PRRA, he saw as a both a “bold . . . alternative to the political and economic nationalism adopted by many other Latin American states during the depression” and the key to a revised and revamped Good Neighbor policy.¹⁹⁴ As with other New Deal appointments, Roosevelt hoped Gruening could fulfill multiple objectives at once—transforming it into both a formidable economic reform project and a notable showcase for illustrating a new direction of U.S. foreign policy. Under Gruening, however, the PRRA was often stalled by its inability to move in these two separate directions at the same time.


Aligning himself with young Liberals such as Chardón and Luis Muñoz Marín, Gruening faced entrenched opposition from Governor Winship, Santiago Iglesias, and Rafael Martínez Nadal—who launched a campaign against Gruening’s “despotic” and “arbitrary” leadership in the Puerto Rican press. Although Gruening shared some of their goals, he differed in both style and strategy from the Liberals, and his time in the PRRA was plagued by three factors: his international focus that distracted his attention from the nuances and details of the PRRA’s actual work in Puerto Rico; his strained relationship with Harold Ickes, his direct supervisor in the Department of the Interior (and who, as director of the PWA envisioned a broader public works program for Puerto Rico); and his inability to handle the political fallout from the Riggs assassination and Ponce massacre, which tore apart his relationship with Muñoz Marín and, by the middle of 1936, forced Gruening into a new working alliance with Governor Winship and Martínez Nadal.

By summer 1936, Ickes, Chardón, and Fernández García were disillusioned with Gruening, whose move towards Winship and the Coalition threatened to undercut any effort at enforcing the 500-Acre law or sustaining the PRRA’s nascent public works program. That fall, Ickes moved against Gruening. While he could not convince FDR to fire him, Ickes was able to get the President to amend an executive order to give himself (Ickes) more control over the PRRA in November 1936. When Ickes learned that Gruening had accepted the resignations of Chardón and Fernández García without informing him, he interpreted the move as not only personal insubordination but as a direct attack to the PRRA. Fed up, he reached an agreement for

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195 Johnson, 121.

Gruening’s resignation in January 1937, although it was not made official until months of delay as Gruening seems to have clung to the job in the aftermath of the Ponce massacre that March. Though Ickes had no personal stake in Puerto Rican politics, he recognized that the Ponce massacre “was a cold-blooded shooting by the Ponce police and that those who were killed were shot by policemen themselves. Of course, Governor Winship and Gruening have been on the other side.”

In June 1937, the PRRA officially entered a new phase with Harold Ickes as Administrator. Under his administration, the PRRA was transformed almost entirely into a public works agency. Although the engineering projects had been part of the PRRA’s emphasis since 1935, it was between 1937 and 1943 that the most active and energetic work of the PRRA was constructed in the areas that most directly impacted the daily lives of Puerto Rican citizens and most directly relied on their participation. During these years, the PRRA built new public works in cement construction, hurricane-proof housing and sanitation systems, and publicly-owned rural electricity and water supplies. These were the areas that most impressed Ickes during his own tour of the island in 1936. According to Ickes, the island contained the:

worst slums that I have ever seen. The dwellings looked as if a breath would blow them over . . . Open sewage runs through the streets and around the buildings and there are no sanitation facilities at all. The children play in this sewage, which in many cases is covered with a thick, green scum. The houses appear to be dirty and unkempt. The cooking is done on little charcoal stoves, and the furniture is of the simplest and scantiest. . . . Such slums are a reflection not only upon the [Puerto Rican] Government but upon that of the United States. It is unbelievable that human beings can be permitted to live in such noisome cesspools.

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198 Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes: Volume 1*, 504. See also General Records Relating to the Cement Plant Project, RG 323, NARA-NYC.
The massive construction projects—which will be discussed in the following chapters—directly paralleled the extensive program of public works that was underway in the United States. The Engineering division of the PRRA, which directly addressed the conditions described above, is best thought of as a combination of the “prime the pump” public works of the PWA (run by Ickes) and the direct hiring public works of the WPA (run by Harry Hopkins). Together, the PWA and WPA transformed the built infrastructure of the U.S. and put millions of people back to work during the Great Depression. As Jason Scott Smith has argued, the large-scale public works projects of the PWA and WPA were also “the New Deal’s central enterprise” and have proven to be “extraordinarily successful method[s] of state-sponsored economic development,” and should be regarded as one of the most significant and long-term reforms of the New Deal era.199

The most important thing Ickes did for Puerto Rico was to move the offices of the PRRA from Washington to San Juan—a move that transformed the PRRA into a locally-run federal program shielded from political tensions in Washington and obstruction from the local government. Immediately following Gruening’s (delayed) resignation, Ickes promoted Miles H. Fairbank as Assistant Administrator and Guillermo Esteves Volkers as Regional Administrator to manage the administration’s daily operations and coordinate its long-term plans. Ickes primary concern was to get the PRRA moving with as little interference from Washington as possible. Busy with the PWA and other business with the Department of the Interior, Ickes—despite his

199 Smith, 19, 84, 88, 118. See also Robert Leighinger, Long-Range Public Investment: The Forgotten Legacy of the New Deal (Charleston: University of South Carolina Press, 2007). Geographers at the University of California, Berkeley are currently working on a digital project to map all New Deal public works projects in the United States and related areas. For more information, see the Living New Deal Project at http://livingnewdeal.berkeley.edu/.
reputation as a hands-on administrator—delegated the work of the PRRA to his subordinates. This suited Puerto Rican New Dealers fine. Indeed, the unlikely team of Fairbank, a mid-level farm bank administrator from Baltimore who had stumbled into the New Deal by accident, and Esteves, one of the most respected civil engineers in Puerto Rico, accepted their positions only on the condition that the Washington headquarters of the PRRA be closed and moved to Puerto Rico.

In terms of large-scale infrastructural building, the promotion of Esteves proved to be significant—as Esteves helped reorient the PRRA to meet Puerto Rican public works and public health needs in areas outside of the “sugar question.” Together, Fairbank and Esteves helped numerous Puerto Rican engineers, teachers, doctors, nurses, and parents make a substantial difference in the public health of the island, which had a positive effect in people's daily lives for years to come.

Calling for greater cooperation between various parts of the federal and local governments, Fairbank held a series of conferences in August 1938 to coordinate intra-governmental relations. In October 1938, the PRRA established the Program of Coordinated Activity, which included the Puerto Rican Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce, the Director of the Puerto Rican Agricultural Extension Service, the Director of the Agricultural Experimental Station, Dean of the College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, Vocational Director of the Puerto Rican Department of Education, Director of the Puerto Rico Tobacco Institute, and the Director of the Puerto Rico Experiment Station of the United States Department of Agriculture. Notably, these were mostly positions out of the control of the Coalition. Out of this increased cooperation, the PRRA was able to assist in the expansion of a variety of already-existing local projects, ranging from 4-H Clubs to soil conservation, commercial and subsistence
crop development, livestock and poultry farming, and farm management education and organization programs.  

At the same time, the PRRA was a distinctly political agency. Similar to public works programs in the U.S., the PRRA helped construct a new mass-based coalition of Puerto Ricans frustrated with the limits of local partisan politics and the relief-based economy. While the PRRA built a substantially new public infrastructure and assisted in the creation of public authorities and corporations, which assured lasting security from future storms and local control of natural resources, it also commanded a patronage program that dwarfed the budget of the local government, contributed to the breakdown of party politics during the late 1930s, and paved the way for a particularly Puerto Rican form of populist politics during and after WWII. This, too, paralleled developments in the United States. As New Deal historian Morton Keller argued, the New Deal was both a practical and political machine that attenuated the formation of the New Deal political coalition even as it concentrated on the more celebrated relief, reform, and recovery. According to Keller, the New Deal “established the precedent of continuous governmental responsibility for the wellbeing of the economy; it instituted broad social welfare programs; and it worked major shifts in national political allegiances.”

On the island, it was not national political allegiances that were at stake but rather Puerto Rican ones. As Emilio Pantojas-García has argued, the public works program of the PRRA “went beyond their immediate effect in terms of aid to the population. In the long run, they


———. Keller, I.
would constitute the basis for the mobilization of the political forces that could provide a solution to the crisis while preserving the interests of the United States.”

This mass political mobilization, led by Puerto Rican Liberals like Guillermo Esteves and Antonio Lucchetti, depended on ties to “elements within the U.S. government connected to the executive branch” (such as Ickes) “who were aware of the need for structural reforms,” and “provided . . . the material basis to organize a [new] political machine based on a system of patronage.”

Coming into power in the 1940 elections, Muñoz Marín was able to maintain and manipulate the new patronage machine of the PRRA through the political program of the PPD, which “was patterned along the lines of the Chardón Plan” and threatened the immediate interests of the sugar sector through implementation of the 500-Acre law and other programs initiated by the PRRA between 1935 and the early 1940s. The PPD not only elaborated on New Deal programs in land reform, public works, hurricane-proof housing construction, and control of natural resources, but it was “the most successful of the [political] groups in capitalizing on the enormous political support” of the population.

Although they faced substantial obstacles at implementing the 500-Acre law, including

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202 Pantojas-García, Development Strategies as Ideology, 35. Although this dissertation disagrees with Pantojas-García’s conclusions that these programs represented the “velvet glove” which masked the “iron fist” of repression, perhaps no one has made the connection between PRRA patronage and the rise of the PPD as clearly or succinctly.

203 Pantojas-García, Development Strategies as Ideology, 36-37.


205 García-Colon, 40-41.
legal restrictions and political opposition from the Coalition, the PRRA attacked the issue from a variety of angles—from helping to secure the appointment of PRRA Regional Administrator Benigno Fernández García to Attorney General of Puerto Rico to arguing (and winning) 500-Acre law cases before the Puerto Rico Supreme Court in 1938 and the U.S. Supreme Court in 1942. In addition, the PRRA “developed the first strategies of community organizing among landless working families” and through its action forced new initiatives from the resistant local legislature.  

The 1940 election played a significant role in the transition from the PRRA to the PPD, as it occurred precisely as the FDR administration was beginning to brace for war in Europe. Facing a highly isolationist Congress—which passed official and binding Neutrality Acts in 1935, 1936, 1937, and 1939—Roosevelt began two separate processes designed to coordinate and facilitate U.S. intervention against Nazi Germany. On one hand, the two massive public works agencies, the PWA and WPA, were consolidated into the Federal Works Agency (FWA) by the Reorganization Act of 1939.  

This move not only freed up personnel that FDR wanted to utilize in other areas (Harry Hopkins, for example, became one of FDR’s closest military advisors after 1940), but also coordinated public works with necessary military construction and reduced the overall budget for domestic public works.  

The transition from a peace to war

206 García-Colon, 40-41.


208 Hopkins was FDR’s primary liaison between Churchill and Stalin, and has been credited with helping to “create and preserve” the alliance between Great Britain, the U.S., and the Soviet Union during World War II. See David Roll, The Hopkins Touch: Harry Hopkins and
The economy, which began two years before Pearl Harbor, would have most likely resulted in the complete end of New Deal activity in Puerto Rico without the election of the PPD in 1940, which took over and carried out many of the PRRA projects and public authorities.

On the other hand, Roosevelt began maneuvering around Congress to supply aid to the Allies without technically breaking the Neutrality acts, which usually featured “cash and carry” provisions, passed by the isolationist Congress. The Destroyers for Bases Agreement of 1940 and Lend-Lease Act of 1941, for example, shifted public works construction (and the capital, resources, and labor) toward the construction of new military bases, landing fields, and naval docks the British Caribbean, Newfoundland, and (though not directly connected to the agreements with Great Britain) to Puerto Rico as well. Engineering projects such as the Cataño cement plant and the construction of hydroelectric facilities in the rural interior of the island came to play a central role in the “militarization” of Puerto Rican public works and in the broader defense of the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, Panama Canal, and coastlines of North and South America against Nazi U-boat attacks, which escalated rapidly after U.S. entry into the war in December 1941.

Although the work of the PRRA was beginning to be replaced by 1940—first by military spending and second by the election of the PPD—it continued to operate on the island until 1955. During these remaining fifteen years, the PRRA was run by Guillermo Esteves who replaced Miles Fairbank as Assistant Administrator in 1941 and oversaw the New Deal agency to its end. Working closely with the local government during the 1940s and 1950s, Esteves oversaw the completion of every single PRRA engineering project underway. By the time of its final

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liquidation, the PRRA had invested over $1.36 billion (in 2013 dollars) and directly transferred at least $543 million of this figure to Puerto Rico in the form of completed public works projects. It also left with a balanced budget. As we will see in the following chapters, the PRRA’s most far-reaching accomplishments were the construction of hurricane-proof houses, schools, hospitals, roads, and sanitation systems and the completion of the capital-intensive rural hydro-electrification projects.

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Between 1935 and 1943, the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration constructed a large number of hurricane-proof public works in urban and rural areas of Puerto Rico. These public works differed from previous infrastructural projects built during the Spanish colonial (1508-1898), U.S. military (1898-1900), or U.S. “insular” (1900-1933) periods in that they were island’s first truly public works—state-built construction projects administered by publicly-owned agencies or authorities. Part of a local response to the devastating hurricanes of 1928 and 1932, these public works were designed to both secure the island from future storms and protect its natural resources from private corporate control. These projects fostered a new long-term relationship with the United States—one based on the emerging political economy of the New Deal which, by the time of the PRRA’s creation in 1935, was transitioning from the “First” New Deal’s emphasis on emergency relief and regulation to the “Second” New Deal’s commitment to structural reform and long-term economic development.

The new relationship that formed between 1935 and 1943 was based on mass popular support for the PRRA’s public works projects—support that temporarily existed outside the partisan lines of the statehood versus independence dilemma. By operating independently of the local legislature, the PRRA fostered entrenched political opposition from within local government—from both the Coalition majority of the legislature and from Governor Blanton Winship, each of whom sought to control the massive budget and job-creating potential of the PRRA engineering programs. By moving its headquarters to San Juan in 1937, however, the PRRA’s top administrators had greater access to local civic engineers and agronomists and
closer ties to the Puerto Rican public unmediated by the local political leaders, which provided a bulwark against direct attacks from the Coalition and Governor Winship.

The San Felipe and San Ciprián hurricanes played such a large role in the popular imagination of the 1930s that recovery from the storms came to be one of the most central political issues of the decade. The failure to provide long-lasting recovery from the fury of nature contributed to the loss of electoral support of all existing political parties during the Great Depression. Although this idea has been marginalized in the historical imagination, which has focused much more on Puerto Rico’s “colonial” status and the violent uprising and strong-armed repression of Pedro Albizu Campos and the Nationalist movement, the twin hurricanes were far more disruptive and had more far-reaching economic implications than the uprising or repression of Puerto Rican Nationalists.

Part of the problem for local political leaders in addressing the infrastructural, agricultural, and public health crises of the hurricanes was that the scale of the problems was unknown and un-quantified. Upon its formation in 1935, the PRRA collected a series of important data including the “Special” mid-decade population and housing census of 1935, the first census of school-aged children, the first door-to-door survey of the island’s semi-urban and urban slums, the first aerial map of the island’s topography, a countless collection of forest and non-forest geographic and infrastructural surveys, various investigations of rural working and living conditions, hurricane and oceanographic research, and a wide range of environmental and

health data collected in collaboration with the University of Puerto Rico and the School of Tropical Medicine. 211 These surveys helped the PRRA focus its reconstruction efforts more directly on the structural economic problems exposed by the hurricanes than other government or private agencies and departments.

Thanks in part to these surveys, the island’s civil engineers who worked for the PRRA had a better understanding of the public demand for permanent security from the violence of the annual storms. Massive changes within the federal government after FDR’s election made possible a shift from the kind of temporary relief provided by the Red Cross and the PRERA towards the more enduring infrastructural and agricultural reconstruction of the PRRA. Some Puerto Rican engineers, like Guillermo Esteves and Antonio Lucchetti, had been working in public service for decades by the time of the PRRA’s formation. Others, such as the large staff of junior engineers, architects, white collar workers, clerical staff, farmers, teachers, nurses, doctors, drivers, skilled construction workers, and unskilled laborers, gained invaluable professional skills and hands-on work experience (not to mention weekly income during the depths of the Great Depression) through their employment in the PRRA. In terms of both the

211 Some of these surveys were joint efforts with other federal and local agencies such as the Census Bureau, Forestry Service, Works Progress Administration, Federal Works Agency, Civilian Conservation Corps, and Puerto Rico Department of Labor. Allusions to these data collection projects are located throughout federal and local archives. For examples, see: Inventario de Expedientes de la PRRA, Archivo General de Puerto Rico (hereafter AGPR), San Juan, Puerto Rico; Manuel A. Perez to Luis Muñoz Marín, May 19, 1941, re: Living Conditions Among Small Farmers, Sub-series 39, Work Progress Administration (WPA), Sub-Seccion 1, Datos y Estadisticas, Serie 1, Gobierno Federal, Correspondencia, Seccion 4, Presidente del Senado, FLMM; H. Noble Baker to Luis Muñoz Marín, March 24, 1941, Sub-series 39, Work Progress Administration, Sub-Seccion 1, Datos y Estadisticas, Serie 1, Gobierno Federal, Correspondencia, Seccion 4, Presidente del Senado, FLMM; “Problems in Connection with Slum Clearance in Puerto Rico: With Special Reference to the San Juan Area,” 2-3, 1939, Box 1, “Slums” folder, Records of the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC; Construction Projects, Box 3, School Building Program folder, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed by the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.
physical infrastructure built during the New Deal and the skills and experience gained by its workers, the public works projects constructed during the late 1930s and early 1940s assured that the net effects of the PRRA reverberated across generations of Puerto Rican family life. The following three chapters will discuss some of the large and small engineering projects of the New Deal in Puerto Rico—from opening of the Cataño cement plant in 1938 to the construction of hurricane-proof public works to the rural electrification of the island between 1935 and 1943.

Puerto Rican civil engineers envisioned the construction of a lasting “hurricane-proof” infrastructure, and labored to build houses, schools, roads, hospitals, sanitation and water delivery systems, and rural electricity facilities that were engineered _para permanencia_—for permanence. Central to their efforts to build a permanent hurricane-proof infrastructure was the construction of Puerto Rico’s first cement plant, which transformed local natural resources into new forms of security, stability, and physical mobility for local residents. Built by PRRA engineers between 1936 and 1938, ownership of the Cataño cement plant was transferred to the local government, which had created the independently run Puerto Rico Cement Corporation (PRCC) to operate the plant. The locally produced cement was vital to the slum clearance and hurricane-proof public works projects of the PRRA.

The opening of the cement plant was one of the most important milestones in the island’s recovery from the Great Depression, and should be regarded among the most significant contributions to political change in 1940s. Although it is rarely mentioned in political histories of Puerto Rico, the Cataño cement plant contributed to key advances in public health that had a

212 On the discursive concern for constructing “hurricane-proof” houses, see J.C. Hitchman to Miles Fairbank, August 19, 1938, Farmers Houses - General Memoranda folder, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed by the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC. The phrase “para permanencia” was later used as the official advertising slogan of the PRCC.
considerable effect on local politics at the end of the 1930s and the emergence of a mass-based “popular” coalition during the 1940s. Not only was the plant filling a demand for cement products, but it was creating new markets for them as well by helping to revive a moribund construction industry on the island. As a direct and indirect job creator, the cement plant was a model of New Deal efforts to combat unemployment by utilizing both the direct employment strategy of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the indirect employment strategy of the Public Works Administration (PWA) in the United States. Officially headed by PWA chief Harold Ickes after 1937, the PRRA should be regarded as a local version of both the WPA and PWA on the island.

The Cataño cement plant was not just a link between Puerto Rico and the United States. It also helped create stronger ties between Puerto Rico and other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean, and its construction was watched with considerable interest by regional neighbors who inquired about purchasing Puerto Rican cement during the early 1940s. Not only did these neighbors view Caribbean-produced cement as a cost efficient means to building their own infrastructural projects, but Puerto Rican cement also proved extremely valuable to securing the region’s defenses during the lethal Nazi U-boat campaign in the area between 1941 and 1943.

While the cement plant project was underway, PRRA electrical engineers were also working on a capital and labor intensive project to bring electricity, refrigeration, indoor plumbing, and clean drinking water to the rural interior of the island. Between 1935 and 1943, the PRRA constructed seven major hydroelectric projects in the Cordillera Central to generate inexpensive electric power while also providing adequate flood relief, year-round irrigation for the dry southern coast, and abundant reserves of clean drinking water. As with other PRRA projects, all property, constructions, and lands of the rural electrification program were
transferred in perpetuity to the local government, which established the Puerto Rico Water Resources Authority (WRA) to administer the water and electric resources of the island. Modeled on the New York Power Authority and Tennessee Valley Authority, this public corporation helped Puerto Rico recover from 1928 and 1932 hurricanes, improved long-term public health, and broke the power of private utility companies that had controlled water and electric resources for decades. Shaped by an alliance between local actors and new federal agencies that upended the corporate monopoly on utilities, these social and economic changes had direct consequences on the local political structure.
Chapter 4: “Para Permanencia” -- The Cataño Cement Plant and the Puerto Rico Cement Corporation

The first cement plant in Puerto Rico began operations on the humid morning of August 22, 1938, crushing magnesium-rich Puerto Rican limestone and mixing it into high-quality “Portland” cement. Locally-produced cement was a symbol for Puerto Rico and other Latin American and Caribbean countries that pointed to unknown future possibilities of national and regional development. As we know today, for many in the region these possibilities included state-led development programs during the 1940s and 1950s. Puerto Rico was no exception, and the island’s postwar industrialization program, known as “Operation Bootstrap,” continues to receive deserving attention in the historical literature. The Cataño cement plant, however, was not designed for its symbolic value nor built to address future unknown possibilities. Rather, it was built as a pragmatic response to the growing public health crisis facing the island during the Great Depression, and was a central development in the effort to build an all-weather infrastructure for parts of the island that had been devastated by the San Felipe and San Ciprián hurricanes of 1928 and 1932.

Built by the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration, the Cataño cement plant was located between the low hills and marshy bay shore of Guaynabo, about ten miles south of San Juan. Funded through the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act in a series of federal allocations between 1936 and 1938, the total cost of the cement plant was $1.44 million in Depression-era

dollars, or about $24 million today.\textsuperscript{214} The Cataño plant was a central component of all PRRA goals and projects. Hurricane-proof public works construction relied heavily on the locally-produced cement, fostered new private investment in hurricane-proof construction, and matched new federal actors and capital on the island with Puerto Rican engineers, farmers, workers, doctors, and administrators who sought an increased role in the island’s reconstruction during the Second New Deal.

Built during the crisis years of the Riggs assassination, Tydings bill, and Ponce massacre, the Cataño cement plant was one of the first major projects completed under the new leadership of Miles Fairbank and Guillermo Esteves. Designed by Manuel Font Jiménez, who had graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1913 and served as Assistant Chief Engineer of the Puerto Rico Irrigation Service before being named the head of the PRRA Engineering division, the construction of the plant was overseen by head foreman Arturo Cordova Infante.\textsuperscript{215} At 12:01 am on January 16, 1939, five months after its opening, full ownership and operations of the Cataño plant were turned over to the Puerto Rican Cement


\textsuperscript{215} Manuel Font to Arturo Cordova Infante, March 18, 1938, PRCC folder, Box 1, General Records Relating to the Cement Plant Project, RG 323, NARA-NYC.
Corpora
tion (PRCC), a newly-created, non-partisan, and publicly-owned corporation administered by the local government.\textsuperscript{216}

Though the Cataño plant has been noted as one of several small-scale industrialization projects built or planned by the PRRA, less attention has been given to the public health context of cement construction in the Caribbean.\textsuperscript{217} While the cement plant did make future industrialization possible, it was far more than a precursor to “Operation Bootstrap.” Local cement production aided Puerto Rican efforts to create greater stability and security by attacking the most pressing infrastructural and public health issues of the day. By examining the cement plant’s public health context, we see that public works in Puerto Rico paralleled the New Deal’s emphasis on building a more secure and lasting public health infrastructure while, at the same time, expanding a new vision of economic democracy for all citizens. In its concern for disease control, nutrition, constructing new water and sanitation systems, nurse and physician training programs, and extensive hospital building, the New Deal did not have a singular health program. Instead, it used the combined resources of many federal agencies working in cooperation with local and state governments to radically improve the nation’s long-term health.\textsuperscript{218} Public works construction was central to all New Deal public health initiatives, just as public health concerns

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{216} Memorandum on the Cement Plant, January 16, 1939, Box 2, Accounting and Cost folder, Records Relating to the Cement Plant Project, RG 323, NARA- NYC; Accounting Report, July 1944, Box 2, Accounting and Cost folder, Records Relating to the Cement Plant Project, RG 323, NARA-NYC; General Records Relating to the Cement Plant Project, RG 323, NARA-NYC.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{217} For example, see Dietz, 156; Pantojas-García, Development Strategies as Ideology, 44.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{218} Grey, New Deal Medicine, 99.}
were central to all public works construction, whether built by the PWA and WPA in the U.S. or
the PRRA in Puerto Rico. The publicly-owned Cataño cement plant was part of a strategy to
improve long-term health through the construction of clean drinking water and sanitation
systems. In addition to a modern cement-based public health infrastructure, the PRRA
provided direct medical care as well. In a series of 23,180 medical and dental clinics held
between 1935 and 1938, Puerto Rican and U.S. doctors and nurses working for the PRRA saw
541,435 patients (about 30% of the entire population of the island in 1938). At the same time, the production of local cement proved extremely valuable to Puerto
Ricans in the following decades, both in securing the island’s defenses during World War II and
in a variety of postwar industrialization programs. During the war, as José Bolívar has argued,
the Puerto Rican economy would have completely collapsed without federal intervention. This
intervention, centered on military construction, was largely carried out by a combination of
federal agencies, including the Federal Works Agency (FWA) and the PRRA. During the first
two years of U.S. involvement in the war, federal spending in Puerto Rico expanded over 275%,
from $40.2 million to $110 million. As in the U.S., this increase in federal war spending was

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219 Grey, 186n18, 208-209n70; Leuchtenburg, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 133; Smith, 94, 113, 156.


221 José L. Bolívar, Guerra, banca y desarrollo: El Banco de Fomento y la industrialización de Puerto Rico (San Juan: Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín / Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 2011), 22, 31. Bolívar argues that “sin la intervención del Gobierno de Estados Unidos, la economía local había colapsado. Afortunadamente, los desembolsos federales aumentaron de $40.2 millones en 1941 a $110.0 millones en 1942.”

222 Bolívar, Guerra, banca y desarrollo, 22, 31.
offset by a decrease in the domestic public works budget, and the PRRA underwent considerable retraction after 1938. While much has been made of the PRRA’s chronic “underfunding” problem, beginning with the reduction of its original budget in 1935, wartime public works on the island were a continuation of PRRA programs despite the change in political rationale from work relief to economic reconstruction to hemispheric defense. Though the pace slowed, PRRA funding did not end completely, and grew from $57,953,189 million in December 1938 to $82,063,703 million in 1955.

During WWII, however, the primary reason for the increase in federal spending in Puerto Rico between 1941 and 1943 was the building of military defenses to protect the Caribbean, the Panama Canal, the Mexican and U.S. coastlines, Mexican and U.S. oil interests in the Gulf of Mexico, and the Central and South American coastlines from the lethal effectiveness of Nazi submarine warfare in the Caribbean theater. As Gaylord Kelshall has argued, the defense of the Caribbean was not a peripheral event in the history of WWII, but was rather central to control of the entire Atlantic. Allied victory in the Battle of the Atlantic was vital to the defeat of the Nazis, made the D-Day landings possible, and was the survival link for both Britain and the United States in terms of the shipment of food, arms, and medical supplies from North America. The

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224 For examples of the focus on PRRA underfunding, see Dietz, 155; Mathews, 233. As in the U.S., part of the shift from a depression to war economy included a discursive rationalization for federal appropriations—whereas a rhetorical focus on jobs was necessary to extract money from Congress during the Depression, a rhetorical focus on war defense was essential to obtain money during WWII.

Caribbean Sea Frontier, which was divided into three headquarters in Panama, Trinidad, and Puerto Rico, was one of the largest anti-submarine commands in the world, ranging over 500,000 sq. miles and protecting thousands of miles of coastline. It was not only the “outer defense ring covering the soft underbelly of the United States, [but] the lynch pin for control of the central Atlantic” as well.\(^\text{226}\)

During these years, Nazi U-boats struck U.S. and Latin American cargo ships in the Caribbean with little restriction, as the U.S. sank just one Nazi submarine for every 23.5 U.S. cargo ships sunk by the Germans. These losses accounted for 80% of all Caribbean casualties during the war and 36% of all global shipping losses during the entire war.\(^\text{227}\) Recognizing the Caribbean basin as a soft target, as radar was not installed in the Caribbean or Western Atlantic region until 1943, German U-boats increased the number of attacks and relocated their focus to the Atlantic seaboard of the United States, the Florida straits, the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean Sea, and the northeastern coast of South America stretching from Venezuela to Brazil.\(^\text{228}\) Many Caribbean islands, each allied with the Allied nations against the Axis Powers, faced direct attacks from Nazi and Italian submarines and were covertly used as refueling stations or safe

\(^{226}\) Gaylord T.M. Kelshall, *The U-Boat War in the Caribbean* (1988; repr. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1994), xiii, 8, 16. A retired military officer from Trinidad and Tobago, Kelshall also founded the Chaguaramas Military History and Aviation Museum in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago.

\(^{227}\) Bolívar, *Guerra, banca y desarrollo*, 22, 31; Kelshall, xiv.

harbors. Although there is little evidence that German strategy included dividing the U.S. from Latin America or gaining control of the Panama Canal, Franklin Roosevelt directly warned the U.S. public in a fireside chat that the “Nazi attempt to seize control of the oceans is but a counterpart of all of the Nazi plots now being carried on throughout the Western Hemisphere,” including intrigues in Uruguay, plots in Argentina, sabotage in Bolivia, and machinations in Colombia—where “secret air-landing fields . . . within easy range of the Panama Canal” had been recently discovered.

While the main priorities of the U-boat campaign prior to December 1941 were to starve the British and halt U.S. entry into the war, the Nazi focus on the Caribbean had dire consequences for Puerto Rico. By sinking 181 cargo ships in the Caribbean and 175 more on the Atlantic coast of the U.S., the German submarine campaign reduced total imports in Puerto Rico by 55% from December 1940 to December 1943 and shrunk per capita food imports by 25%. That food imports declined at a lower rate than total imports tells us that all non-food items, such as building supplies, were given a lower priority during the submarine campaign. But, while imported building supplies were sharply restricted, local cement production at the Cataño plant

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increased over 300% from 374,910 barrels in 1940 to 1,169,719 barrels in 1945. This increase was due to purchases by federal sources, such as the FWA, PRRA, and War Department, which continued with New Deal reconstruction projects in housing construction and rural hydro-electrification while constructing a vast new defense infrastructure on the island of military bases, docks, and airfields.\(^{231}\) In addition, the PRRA contributed much more than cement to the war effort—facing the serious food and shipping crisis, the PRRA increased local food production by sowing over 15,000 acres of food crops in 1943 and 20,000 acres in 1944 to help make up for the decrease in food imports during the submarine crisis.\(^{232}\)

Although the possibility of U.S. entry into a future war was certainly real in 1938 and 1939, and known to historical actors living at the time, the extent of future Nazi warfare in the Caribbean was far from the minds of Guillermo Esteves and Manuel Font as they oversaw the Cataño plant’s opening in August 1938. For civil engineers like Esteves and Font, the plant was a longstanding goal that had not been imposed by future demands of the U.S. military. Rather, local cement production was a crucial weapon against epidemic disease and protection against devastating hurricanes. As the original Chardón Plan argued, any other construction material would need to be replaced and prove to be a bad investment of limited relief finances, as “under our exacting climatic conditions, concrete is the only durable and hence socially economical construction material.”\(^{233}\) The PRRA benefitted from local studies of the geological availability


\(^{233}\) “Memorandum on the Cement Plant,” January 16, 1939, Accounting and Cost folder, Box 2, Records Relating to the Cement Plant Corporation, NARA-NYC.
of raw materials and economic viability of markets and transportation. It’s construction, however, had been nearly impossible before the influx of new federal financing for public works during the New Deal. Taking advantage of the administrative change that brought public works champion Harold Ickes to control of the PRRA in 1937, Puerto Rican engineers completed projects that had been practically unimaginable prior to FDR’s election in 1932 and the coming of the New Deal to Puerto Rico.

One prohibitive factor had been cost. The total cost of the plant was $1.44 million, or about $24 million today, a figure that was financially impossible for the Puerto Rican legislature to supply and politically difficult for FDR to get from an increasingly resistant Congress. During 1935 and 1936, the future of the New Deal was in doubt despite its widespread popular approval. As the Supreme Court struck down the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) and Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), two seminal pieces of the legislation from the “First Hundred Days,” New Deal funding came under increased scrutiny from Congressional Democrats and Republicans alike. While much of the historical literature on Puerto Rico has noted the PRRA’s fiscal limitations, most analysis has viewed the problem in isolation and concluded that the limited funding was the product of “colonial” neglect. Instead, examination of the PRRA’s budget should be placed in context with the widespread impatience about and resistance to the entire New Deal after 1935.

234 “Memorandum on the Cement Plant,” January 16, 1939, Accounting and Cost folder, Box 2, Records Relating to the Cement Plant Corporation, NARA-NYC.


236 For example, see Dietz, 155; Trias Monge, 96-97. Others have argued that the limited resources of the PRRA were spent to build a technocratic patronage machine associated with Luis Muñoz Marín. See Pantojas-García, Development Strategies as Ideology, 37.
It is impossible to fully evaluate the New Deal in Puerto Rico without acknowledging how politically complex New Deal financing actually was, especially after 1935, the year the PRRA was created. As with nearly all New Deal programs in the U.S., funding for PRRA public works such as the Cataño plant had to be politically framed around their role in providing relief work—even as the PRRA refocused New Deal energies toward reconstruction. Highlighting its appeal as both a direct job creator through the cement plant’s 150 permanent jobs and $20,000 monthly payroll, and indirect job creator through the expansion of the local construction industry, PRRA administrators lobbied for and obtained $850,000 for the cement plant from the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of December 1935, and received four more allotments totaling $616,500 from 1936 through 1938. Job creation was the only reasoning that worked, even though the cement plant’s long-term value was substantially more important than the 150 full-time jobs it created.\(^{237}\)

While the costs were high, Puerto Rican engineers knew that the price of importing cement was even higher, as it fluctuated according to volatile global and local economic conditions. Prior to the cement plant’s completion, PRRA engineers made numerous internal complaints about the changing price of imported cement and the lack of stable transportation costs. These changing costs had rippling effects across a range of construction activities on the island and put added pressure on already strained budgets. In 1936, Carlos Chardón complained that while prices for materials such as lumber and cement had remained steady in U.S. markets,

the cost of ocean freight shipping had risen considerably and led to overcharges from original construction budgets.238

Like Second New Deal programs elsewhere, the PRRA navigated sharp political divisions between federal and local control by transferring ownership of large-scale construction

238 Similarly, Fairbank and Esteves worried about the effects of the 1938 Puerto Rican dockworkers strike on the PRRA’s ability to receive shipments of imported cement and made repeated inquiries into price and logistics of contracting European-made cement. The strike, which will be discussed below, was won by the dockworkers with the support of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and Puerto Rico Communist Party (PCPR) and played a pivotal role in bringing the CIO’s new form of industrial unionization to the island. The dockworkers strike points to the multifaceted scope of the New Deal in Puerto Rico. Despite the concerns of Fairbank and Esteves about obtaining imported cement, Puerto Rican workers benefitted from key Second New Deal labor policies such as the Wagner Act and Fair Labor Standards Act, which greatly enhanced the power of organized labor and the CIO. On the island, the dockworkers strike was an important step toward the formation of the Confederación General de Trabajadores (CGT) in 1940. Workers in the CGT supported Luis Muñoz Marín and the newly formed Partido Popular Democratico (PPD) in the 1940 elections, breaking the power of the Federación Libres de Trabajadores (FLT), an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) that was closely aligned with the Socialist Party and a major player in the Coalition between the Socialists and Republican Party, which had controlled the Puerto Rican legislature for most of the 1930s and was staunchly opposed to the New Deal. See “Increase in Prices of Construction Materials,” Carlos Chardón to Ernest Gruening, February 21, 1936, Box 1, Carlos Chardón folder, Confidential Records of the Assistant Administrator, 1936-1952, RG 323, NARA-NYC; Miles Fairbank, radiogram to Guillermo Esteves, January 20, 1938; Esteves, radiogram to E.E. Glover, Department of the Interior, January 20, 1938; Fairbank to B.S. Sloeau, Procurement Division of the Treasury Department, January 26, 1938. All Box 1, Cement folder, Confidential Records of the Assistant Administrator, 1936-1952, RG 323, NARA-NYC; Miles Galvin, The Organized Labor Movement in Puerto Rico (London: Associated University Presses, 1979), 93-94; Antonio Lauria-Perricelli, “Puerto Rico in the 1930s,” in Revisiting Caribbean Labour, edited by Constance R. Sutton (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2005), 3-5; Héctor Reyes, “Puerto Rico: The Last Colony,” International Socialist Review, 3 (Winter 1997), accessed March 28, 2013, http://www.isreview.org/issues/03/Puerto_Rico.shtml. For a detailed analysis of the Fair Labor Standards Act in Puerto Rico, see Anne S. Macpherson, “‘The Law Has Enflamed the Whole Island’: The Fair Labor Standards Act in Puerto Rico, 1938-40” (paper presented at the 45th annual meeting of the Association of Caribbean Historians, San Ignacio, Belize, May 2013).
projects to public corporations. In 1939, the legal transfer of the Cataño plant from the PRRA (a federal agency) to the PRCC (local control) marked a turning point towards the construction of truly public works in Puerto Rico. The cement plant offered public control of Puerto Rican natural resources, independence from the fluctuating global price of cement or international shipping, and the ability to construct all-weather public works in all areas of the island.

That the Cataño plant was an immediate success surprised and impressed regional neighbors also struggling to respond to the crisis of the Great Depression. Soon after the plant’s opening in 1938, the PRRA, local government, and U.S. State Department began receiving

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240 Throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, nearly all “public” works and utilities were constructed by private local and international capital before the 1930s. See Stephen Haber, ed., How Latin America Fell Behind: Essays on the Economic Histories of Brazil and Mexico, 1800-1914 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) and Haber, Political Institutions and Economic Growth in Latin America: Essays in Policy, History, and Political Economy (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2000).

letters from Latin American and Caribbean neighbors inquiring about purchasing Puerto Rico’s high-quality cement. Letters and telegrams came from Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Colombia, the Virgin Islands, Jamaica, Curaçao, and (even) Norway. Part of the excitement about the opening of the Cataño plant was that it was also part of a jobs program that provided limited economic stimulus through both direct and indirect hiring. The Cataño plant brought benefits to Puerto Rican workers who were hired directly by the PRCC or through many private contractors in multiple ways. As in the U.S., New Deal-related hiring, even when limited, led to improved working and living conditions at a time of unprecedented unemployment. In addition, PRCC jobs were celebrated in the local press for providing benefits completely new to island workers. In a banner headline, *El Mundo* announced an agreement signed between the CIO-affiliated CGT and the PRCC that provided Puerto Rican workers with paid leave, sick pay, Christmas bonuses,

retirement pay, and increased salaries. Sitting on opposite sides of the table, the PRCC and CGT were both products of the changing relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico during the New Deal. It should not be construed that only working-class men benefitted from these changes. For married and single women alike, the PRRA offered well-paying work in its offices across the island.

The Cataño plant was not only filling demand for cement products, but it was creating new markets for them as well. After just one year of operations, demand had risen so fast that Cataño was shipping over 2,000 barrels of cement per day, twice the plant’s original capacity. While engineers had originally estimated that the federal government would not see a return on its investment for 30 years, the plant had paid for itself by 1943. In these five years, the PRCC was producing over a thousand tons of concrete per year that was sold to 59 Puerto Rican owned small businesses, along with larger government and corporate customers as well. In all, the Cataño plant was doing over $168,000 per month business with private and government contractors, and held deposits in U.S. and Puerto Rican Banks, including the Chase National

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243 *El Mundo*, December 16, 1943, 10, Box 2, Accounting and Cost folder, Records Relating to the Cement Plant Project, RG 323, NARA-NYC. The agreement was approved by both Juan Saez Corals, Secretary General of the CGT, and Felix Morales, President of the Union of Canteros Operators and other employees of the Cement Industry.

244 For example, see Assistant Administrator’s Office folder, Box 1, General Records relating to Administration, RG 323, NARA-NYC; Records of the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

245 Manuel Font, to PRCC Board of Directors, Box 2, Accounting and Cost folder, Records Relating to the Cement Plant Project, RG 323, NARA-NYC; Miles Fairbank to E.K. Burliew, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Department, May 1, 1941, Box 1, Cement Plant folder, Confidential Records of the Assistant Administrator, 1936-1952, RG 323, NARA-NYC; “Federal Agencies Operating in Puerto Rico,” *Investigation of Political, Economic, and Social Conditions in Puerto Rico*, 1758.
Bank, the Banco de Ponce, Banco Crédito y Ahorro Ponceño, and the Banco Popular de Puerto Rico. This was exactly the type of “prime the pump” federal spending that Ickes and Hopkins used through the PWA and WPA to spur local spending and investment in the United States. In Puerto Rico, the response by local contractors was so strong that the PRRA had to scale back its advertising to once per week in just one newspaper in San Juan and Ponce. Originally, not knowing the response or availability of qualified contractors, the PRRA had originally advertised in daily, weekly, monthly and irregularly published newspapers.\footnote{Guillermo Esteves to Ernest Gruening, May 3 1937, Box 2, Construction Projects-General Memoranda, Reports on Activities, etc., folder, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed by the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.}

In addition to increasing demand for its own cement, the PRCC also encouraged private Puerto Rican investment in other parts of the island. In 1939, José Ferré began an exchange of letters with the PRCC board of directors asking for authorization and technical assistance in opening a new cement plant in Ponce. Ferré calculated that the newly-created Ponce Cement Corporation would aim to produce 1,000 barrels of cement per day for southern contractors, to compliment the PRCC’s 2,000 per day output from Guaynabo. The PRCC responded with enthusiasm to Ferré, expressing that the PRRA encouraged investment from the island’s private capital, and that Puerto Rican demand for cement could easily handle another thousand barrels per day, particularly on the southern and western coasts.\footnote{Jose Ferré to PRCC and Governor Winship to Ponce Cement Corporation, Letters, June 1939-January 1941, Box 2, Accounting and Cost folder, Records Relating to the Cement Plant Project, RG 323, NARA-NYC. Ferré is, of course, a big name in Puerto Rican politics. Jose Ferré’s father, Antonio Ferré Bacallao, founded the Puerto Rico Iron Works in 1918 and his brother Luis Ferré Aguayo was Governor of Puerto Rico from 1969-1973 and founder of the Ponce Art Museum.}
For Puerto Ricans, the Cataño plant was measured by this combination of economic opportunity, advances in workers’ benefits, and the island’s newfound ability to construct hurricane-proof houses, schools, hospitals, roads, waterworks, sewers, storm drains, and other public works out of local limestone and clay. Cement construction proved to be the most effective at tackling the multiple vectors of disease and poverty that were increasing on the island during the Depression. Not only were hundreds of thousands of Puerto Rican men and women made homeless by the 1928 and 1932 hurricanes, but strategies for recovery before the New Deal had actually increased the three deadliest public health crises confronting the island in the 1930s: malaria, hookworm, and malnutrition—which included dietary related gastrointestinal disorders such as chronic diarrhea and enteritis.\footnote{248 Progress Reports, Box 3, Engineering Division Construction Projects, “Swamp Land Filling and Draining for Malaria Control” folder, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed by the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC; General Records Relating to the Cement Plant Project, RG 323, NARA-NYC.}
Chapter 5: Concrete Changes: Hurricane-Proof Public Works

The increase in these deadly health threats was primarily caused by the spread of swampland “slum” houses built on wooden stilts, void of indoor plumbing, electricity, sanitation, or garbage disposal, prone to flooding and fire, and rife with infectious disease.\(^\text{249}\) During the early years of the Depression, this disease-vulnerable form of housing expanded a public health crisis that municipal governments and the local legislature, already stretched to fiscal limits with relief loans, were powerless to curtail.\(^\text{250}\) In both urban and rural areas of Puerto Rico, the PRRA relied upon Cataño cement to build affordable, hurricane-proof homes. In urban areas, New Deal public housing policy was centered on slum clearance—which combined swamp-draining, malaria control, and cement housing construction. In rural areas, New Deal public housing policy combined cement, brick, and packed-earth housing construction with several other rural rehabilitation programs, including forestry, soil conservation, agricultural diversification, road building, support for family farming cooperatives, and rural electrification. In all, the PRRA spent over $12.5 million (about $207.5 million today) on urban and rural hurricane-proof


\(^{250}\)Miles Fairbank, “PRRA Organization, Financial Policies, and Functions Prepared Pursuant to the Requirements of Senate Resolution 150, 75th Congress, First Session,” PRRA History Report folder, Box 1, Records of the Finance Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC. Fairbank submitted to Congress that the combined damage of the San Felipe and San Ciprián hurricanes was over $175 million ($2.99 million today) and that the “borrowing capacity of the local government was not sufficient to permit widespread reconstruction.” See also PRERA, Second Report of the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration, 2.
housing projects between 1935 and 1943, an unprecedented investment in the permanent stability and security of the island.251

**Slum Clearance**

One of the first customers for PRCC cement was the PRRA’s Slum Clearance division, which was essential to all other New Deal housing programs in Puerto Rico. Although “slums” had existed in Puerto Rico during both the Spanish colonial era and U.S. insular one, the decade following the San Felipe and San Ciprián hurricanes saw the rapid escalation of improvised slum houses. Their spread during the Great Depression was a direct result of the reliance on older models of relief efforts. During the 1930s, slum houses had been constructed in all low-lying urban areas of Puerto Rico. While global economic conditions quickened the pace of urbanization on the island in cities that did not have the jobs, houses, or resources available to migrants, the proliferation of slum houses built on rickety wooden stilts above polluted, swampy land exacerbated a local public health crisis that municipal governments and the local legislature were powerless to curtail.

To fully understand the increase in these swampland slums, it is necessary to consider the combined environmental and political contexts of the San Felipe and San Ciprián hurricanes. Prior to the New Deal, local and federal relief efforts relied upon an inherited paradigm of relief that enhanced the power of large landowners, precluded local participation, and failed to make long-term capital investments in Puerto Rico’s public infrastructure. During the New Deal, Puerto Ricans abandoned this paradigm of relief for one of reconstruction, and one of the clearest

examples of what this paradigm shift looked like can be seen in housing construction. Effective long-term strategies for the construction of hurricane-proof housing began with the creation of the PRRA in 1935. Essential to its success, the PRRA operated independent of the local legislature and forged alliances with Puerto Ricans farmers, workers, professionals, educators, and political actors in the study, planning, and construction of a public infrastructure in both urban and rural areas of the island. Urban hurricane-proof construction was part of a larger strategy that involved slum clearance, swamp-draining, and malaria control and relied upon great quantities of locally-produced concrete and cement. While U.S. and Puerto Rican New Dealers shared some of the assumptions of earlier relief efforts as to the moral and political aptitude of the corporate landowners, colono class of small farmers, and landless tenant farmers, the PRRA reconstruction projects differed from previous relief models by turning over infrastructural works to public agencies that served the public good. Building affordable, hurricane-proof houses that delivered clean drinking water, sanitation, electricity, and other public services to the island’s most vulnerable residents were among the PRRA’s primary objectives.

Improvised houses had multiplied in the wake of the hurricanes. Most were constructed on wooden stilts, balanced over brackish swamp water made unbearable due to food scraps, household trash, and human waste, and lacked all basic necessities such as clean water, sanitation, and electricity.\textsuperscript{252} Even as the slums proliferated, the extent of the problem was unknown as the local legislature lacked either the ability or desire to investigate the housing conditions of slum residents. In 1936, the PRRA conducted the first door-to-door surveys of

\textsuperscript{252} Luz Marie Rodriguez, “New Deal Communities for Puerto Rico: The Urban Housing Projects of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration,” (M.S. Thesis, Mississippi State University, 1994), 31-32.
slums in Puerto Rico, and concluded that slum areas were now built on flooded swampland outside of all 76 municipalities on the island, housing over 9,000 families. Three years later, the totals had increased by 25% to nearly 11,500 families.\textsuperscript{253} Not confined to the large San Juan-Santurce region, the worst slums were multiplying on semi-urban marshlands across the island, with slums in Arecibo, Ponce, and Mayagüez singled out as particularly deadly.

Across the island, post-hurricane slum residents faced a severe public health crisis. What set the PRRA slum clearance program apart from previous relief efforts was its emphasis on permanent reconstruction via capital-intensive projects, including swamp drainage, reinforced cement housing construction, and new public health amenities such as indoor plumbing, clean water, and sanitation services—a multi-pronged approach that Puerto Rican municipal and legislative bodies could not afford and had never attempted. Without these projects, hurricane relief efforts along the coastal regions were guaranteed to fail by exacerbating Puerto Rican efforts to combat proliferating diseases such as malaria, hookworm, and tuberculosis.\textsuperscript{254}

Before the PRRA, hurricane relief strategies \textit{created} new slums. Without a comprehensive strategy for long-term economic development that included the construction of a local cement plant, hurricane housing relief built by the American Red Cross, PRERA, and local government was often an inadequate short-term solution to a problem that was guaranteed to repeat itself, given the geological and meteorological conditions of the Caribbean. In fact, many of the wood-framed relief houses and \textit{tormenteras} (thatched-palm hurricane relief shelters) built

\textsuperscript{253} “Problems in Connection with Slum Clearance in Puerto Rico: With Special Reference to the San Juan Area,” 2-3, 1939, Box 1, “Slums” folder, Records of the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

\textsuperscript{254} Insular Department of Health, Annual Reports for 1934 and 1935, Progress Report folder, General Records Relating to the Cement Plant Project, RG 323, NARA-NYC.
after the 1928 and 1932 storms were already in disrepair. As the PRRA explicitly argued, most of the local government’s relief projects built between 1928 and 1936 “can hardly be justified, since without question the new settlement will become another slum area within a few years” or get blown away in another storm. The immediate dangers of the wooden houses were disease, flooding, mold, termites, dry-rot, and fire.

Even more serious was the PRRA claim that the local government had effectively “legalized” these new slums by condoning, sanctioning, and at times funding construction projects that did not even meet its own sanitary health codes and regulations. Rather than attack the problem of the slums, previous policy made it more permanent. Slum dwellings were built on land acquired in two ways: either the resident “ground-rented” land from a private landowner in a semi-official arrangement, or the resident squatted on public land. Under Puerto Rican law, residents owned their improvised houses regardless of whether they owned the land where the house stood. This applied equally to land owned by private citizens, municipal governments, or the local legislature. PRRA surveys of Ponce slums conducted by resident engineer Adolfo Nones illustrate the different locations on which slum residents acquired sanctioned slum land. The seven officially-sanctioned slums in Ponce were the: Mameyes-St. Thomas built alongside the irrigation reservoir but without sanitary plumbing or fresh drinking water; Machuelito on the eastern shore of the flood-prone Río Portugués, where slum houses had been washed away and rebuilt by surviving residents; Berlin–Peligro–Loma del Viento on the western shore of the Río Portugués (also prone to flooding); Salitral—Tablazo, on the beach shore of Ponce Playa also near the Portugués; the Hoya del Castillo, a small downtown slum,

255 “Problems in Connection with Slum Clearance in Puerto Rico: With Special Reference to the San Juan Area,” 7, 1939, Box 1, “Slums” folder, Records of the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.
facing the District Court, Castillo School, and Athletic Park; the Brooklyn, a small slum located just outside of the city alongside Road No. 1; and the Cuatro Calles, a slum entirely within the boundaries of the Fernando Toro estate. The PRRA located nine parcels of land available to purchase in Ponce, and two in Ponce Playa, and began construction on 4,290 concrete houses in Ponce and Ponce Playa. Built to house over 21,000 people, the PRRA also constructed an nearby incinerating plant, concrete storm sewers, new water supply system, and temporary workingmen’s residencies (for PRRA construction workers) as part of the Ponce slum clearance project. 256

Swamp-Land Slums and Public Health

Slums like these—whether newly created by the short-term relief policies of the 1920s or simply made worse by the storms—were cross-sections of malnutrition and disease. Lacking adequate food, electricity, and indoor plumbing, malnutrition was rife in swamp-land slums—whose residents literally lived in a condition of “slow starvation.” The PRRA Slum Report concluded that the island’s daily per capita intake of meat and milk could only be measured by “ounces and spoonfuls.” The effects of this acute malnutrition were magnified by increasing levels of infectious disease. Death from malaria, tuberculosis, and gastro-intestinal diseases comprised over 40% of all deaths in Puerto Rico during the Depression. In 1936, nearly 90% of the rural population and 40% of the urban population “harbored the hookworm in their intestines” and between 25% and 50% of the coastal residents carried the malaria parasite in their

256 Adolfo Noñes, “Slums and Settlements,” February, 24, 1936, Box 2, Ponce Slum Clearance Division, Records of the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.
blood. These evaluations were compiled from reports by the Puerto Rico School of Tropical Medicine, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Insular Department of Health, as well as PRRA surveys. The PRRA noted that while the local Department of Health had good plans and laws in place to address these health crises, they lacked funding and support from the local legislature.

Similarly, deaths from malaria following the hurricanes had increased 40% during the first five years of the Depression. At the time of the PRRA’s formation in 1935, deaths from malaria averaged nearly 2,800 per year, an increase largely attributed to the severe flooding of the hurricanes and the construction of slums on flooded land. The PRRA forged alliances with local doctors who were already working to ameliorate the effects of these diseases, but lacked the necessary capital, equipment, infrastructure, or staff to adequately do so. While the 1928 and 1932 hurricanes brought local anti-hookworm “operations to a standstill” by destroying 50% of the sanitary latrines previously built to fight the spread of hookworm, Puerto Rican doctors such as Eduardo Garrido Morales and José Rodriguez Pastor led the campaign against tuberculosis and advised the PRRA on its construction of major tuberculosis hospitals in Ponce, Guayama,

257 Progress Reports, Box 3, Engineering Division Construction Projects, “Swamp Land Filling and Draining for Malaria Control” folder, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed by the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC; Progress Reports, 1938, PRCC folder, General Records Relating to the Cement Plant Project, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

Mayagüez and Cayey as well as four new district hospitals at Bayamón, Fajardo, Arecibo and Aguadilla.

Garrido Morales, who worked for the local government as director of Epidemiology and served as Commissioner of Health for nine years, later co-founded the Puerto Rico Public Health Association in September 1941. He is an interesting figure. Although he consulted with the PRRA, Garrido Morales was one of the leading opponents of the New Deal. A staunch member of the Republican Party and supporter of the Coalition, Garrido Morales felt that PRRA public health policy was a threat to his own Insular Department of Health and claimed that the PRRA was a “political organization” established to crush the “majority parties” of Puerto Rico (such as the Coalition).

As for malaria, Guillermo Esteves, Manuel Font, and other engineers argued that permanent control of the disease was conceivable only through swamp-draining, mosquito eradication, and cement-based housing construction. By June 1939, the PRRA had completed or was working on 39 separate swamp drainage projects around coastal regions of the island. Funded by $1.75 million in federal funds, or about $29.8 million today, the swamp-draining

259 P. Morales Otero, Assistant Professor Bacteriology and Hygiene, to Miles Fairbank, Box 1, Carlos Chardón folder, Confidential Records of the Assistant Administrator, 1936-1952, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

projects included four primary methods: hydraulic fill, dry fill, canalization, and tile drainage. The mosquito-breeding area eradication program that complemented the projects was co-sponsored by UPR and the PRRA.\textsuperscript{261} Some of the swamp-draining projects were slowed by partisan politics in the Puerto Rican legislature. In 1938, for example, Miles Fairbank complained that Rafael Martínez Nadal interfered with swamp drainage projects because Felix Benitez Rexach, one of the leading experts, supported the Liberal Party and was an advocate of complete independence. Benitez Rexach, who had recently dredged the port of Ciudad Trujillo, owned his own diesel-electric dredging equipment and had inquired with the local legislature and PRRA for work. Despite this local opposition, the innovative combination of swamp-draining, mosquito eradication, and concrete construction attracted the attention of neighboring Latin American and Caribbean countries, which sent students, teachers, and health professionals to Puerto Rico to exchange ideas and information about these programs.\textsuperscript{262}

This exchange of information helped establish permanent intellectual relationships between Puerto Rico and other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean. In December 1940, for example, the UPR School of Tropical Medicine hosted the first Inter-American Institute for Hospital Administrators. This two-week conference provided both intellectual and physical space for international and local hospital organizations to meet with representatives from across the region. Led by Félix Lámela, the conference had 183 registered attendees that “represented a


\textsuperscript{262} Miles Fairbank to Blanton Winship, November 14, 1938, Box 1, Carlos Chardón folder, Confidential Records of the Assistant Administrator, 1936-1952, RG 323, NARA-NYC.
sizable cross section of hospital service personnel, principally from the Caribbean area, 27 of
whom were from outside Puerto Rico.” Extensive expansion of the university’s library, research
centers, and other buildings had just been completed by the PRRA, and made the conference
possible.\textsuperscript{263}

The PRRA expanded the public health infrastructure of Puerto Rico by building
hurricane-proof hospitals and health centers in rural and urban areas. By the end of 1937, the
PRRA had completed 64 of its 107 rural health centers in the interior of the island, 19 health
units in semi-urban towns, and a major hospital at Lafayette.\textsuperscript{264} By 1944, the PRRA had spent
$1.89 million on a variety of hospital and rural health dispensaries, including a two-story
sanitarium in Río Piedras; new tuberculosis hospitals in Ponce, Guayama, Mayagüez and Cayey;
four new district hospitals at Bayamón, Fajardo, Arecibo and Aguadilla; a new concrete school
for the blind in Santurce; and major repairs to the leper asylum in Trujillo Alto, which had been
damaged in the San Felipe hurricane.\textsuperscript{265} In addition, rural medical centers were built for the first
time in many areas, including in neighborhoods of Aguada, Arecibo, Barceloneta, Isabella, Juana

\textsuperscript{263} George W. Bachman, “Report of the Director of The School of Tropical Medicine of
stream/reportofdirector1941colu/reportofdirector1941 colu_djvu.txt.

\textsuperscript{264} Sección 3, Luis Muñoz Marín: El Politico 1920-1940, FLMM; General Memoranda,
Box 1, Records of the Engineering Division, Box 1, NARA-NYC.

\textsuperscript{265} Carlos Chardón folder, Box 1, Confidential Records of the Assistant Administrator,
1936-1952, RG 323, NARA-NYC; Folder 1, Box 1, Records of the Engineering Division, RG
323, NARA-NYC; “Federal Agencies Operating in Puerto Rico,” \textit{Investigation of Political,
Díaz, Las Marías, Loiza, Manatí, Moca, Morovia, Sabana Grande, San Germán, San Sebastián, Utuado, Villalba, and Yabucoa.\textsuperscript{266}

Though rural and urban health services focused on malaria, hookworm, and malnutrition, the PRRA health service also treated rural patients for typhoid fever, smallpox, and dental health conditions. By the summer of 1938, when the PRRA health service was transferred to local government control, the PRRA had directly treated 510,435 patients at 23,180 medical clinics held in all parts of the island. Puerto Rican and U.S. doctors and nurses conducted an extraordinary amount of medical examinations between 1935 and 1938, and treated a wide variety of health and dental conditions, conducting 22,060 physical exams; 27,792 malaria treatments; 91,550 intestinal parasite treatments (hookworm and other); 97,411 typhoid fever treatments; 26,021 smallpox vaccinations; 212,622 laboratory examinations; 48,499 dental exams; 169,330 extractions; 10,513 preventative cleansings; and 3,627 miscellaneous dental treatments.\textsuperscript{267}

**Urban Cement-Based Housing**

Another stage of the slum clearance program was the construction of cement-based houses that would provide a permanent bulwark against both hurricanes and the spread of disease. According to J.C. Hitchman, head of the Engineering division, the PRRA’s primary aim was to “provide a hurricane-proof house, and for that reason our construction work has gone

\textsuperscript{266} Fairbank, “Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration,” 285; Box 1, folder 1, Records of the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

largely to the building of concrete houses." Hitchman also argued that the cost of durable concrete construction would be less than wood when considered over a thirty-year period. By 1938, Puerto Rican architects and engineers were building thousands of concrete houses with electricity and indoor plumbing in urban areas that were either on top of or adjacent to former swamp land slums. Included among these was El Falansterio in Puerta de Tierra, a three-story group of nine Art Deco buildings comprising 216 apartments of reinforced concrete built to withstand hurricanes, earthquakes, and fires. Completed in 1937, the Falansterio replaced the “Miranda” slum and rented single-family apartments for $2.00 to $4.25 per week that included two bedrooms, indoor bathroom (including shower), indoor kitchen, clean drinking water, as well as access to an interior patio, community building, kindergarten, a small library, with maintenance and janitorial services. The PRRA also built storm sewers, curbed sidewalks, and an improved water supply system in the surrounding neighborhood.

Still occupied today, the Falansterio was built by Manuel Egozcue, head of the Slum Clearance division, and designed by lead architect Jorge Ramírez de Arellano. It was later integrated into a cooperative that allowed tenants to purchase their homes in the 1940s.

268 J.C. Hitchman to Miles Fairbank, August 19, 1938, Farmers Houses - General Memoranda folder, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed by the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

269 “Problems in Connection with Slum Clearance in Puerto Rico: With Special Reference to the San Juan Area,” 8-10, 1939, Box 1, “Slums” folder, Records of the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.


271 Carrero, 20. See also Records of the Engineering Division, Slum Clearance Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.
Despite stylistic complaints from some residents who complained of a “beehive” noise in the courtyard, the Falansterio benefitted Puerto Rican workers in terms of rent, design, and geographic location and clearly represented PRRA goals of providing a newfound security from the destructive force of storms and the promise of improved health for Puerto Ricans, who “would otherwise be living in the deplorable conditions of the slums.” Falansterio tenants included a cross-section of Puerto Rican workers, including secretaries, office workers, nurses, plumbers, teachers, conductors, policemen, and small business owners.272

Between 1937 and 1942, the PRRA completed slum clearance projects known as the Eleanor Roosevelt development in Hato Rey, the Mirapalmeras development in Barrio Obrero, Santurce, and the Morell Campos development at Barrio Cañas, Ponce. Apartments in these reinforced-concrete structures each had two or three bedrooms, indoor plumbing, electricity, indoor kitchens, and were bordered by paved streets, cement sidewalks, sanitary and storm drain sewers, public water systems, schools, and local police stations.273 Rents in these projects ranged from $8 to $18 per month at El Falansterio, $6 to $12 per month at the Eleanor Roosevelt, and $5 to $9 per month at the Morell Campos. Compared to the wooden relief structures built by the local government and the increasing construction of slum housing rampant on the island, the slum clearance projects of the PRRA opened worlds of opportunities for Puerto Ricans across the class spectrum that were unforeseen just years before.


Rural Cement-Based Housing

Hurricane-proof houses were also built in rural areas of the island, as part of the PRRA’s Rural Rehabilitation program. As of December 1937, at least 1,268 rural concrete houses were built as part of the PRRA rural rehabilitation and land tenure program, run by chief engineer José Benitez Gautier. By 1944, this program had spent $26.5 million supplying thousands of small coffee, tobacco, and fruit farms with seed, fertilizers, and experienced agricultural workers to “rehabilitate their farms, which had been seriously devastated by the cyclones of 1928 and 1932, and which [still] suffered seriously from the results of the economic depression that followed the First World War.”

Locally produced cement was central to rural rehabilitation, as the PRRA sought to build rural houses that were, in the words of engineer Manuel Font, “earthquake-proof, hurricane-proof, insect [and] pest-proof, fire-proof, cool, and sanitary, that will require very little maintenance, if any.” The PRRA solicited and accepted eleven designs, which included wood, brick, and concrete. When Gruening and others in Washington enquired about brick, Puerto Rican engineers argued that concrete was more assuredly earthquake and hurricane-proof and a

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274 Guillermo Esteves, “Activities of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration in Connection with the Agrarian Reforms in Puerto Rico,” in Caribbean Research Council, Caribbean Land Tenure Symposium of the Caribbean Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, Fisheries, and Forestry of the Caribbean Research Council (Washington: 1946), 163-164. Held in Mayagüez in August 1944, the symposium that this book was based on was attended by representatives from Antigua, British Guiana, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Surinam, the U.S., and the Virgin Islands. For budget, see “Federal Agencies Operating in Puerto Rico,” Investigation of Political, Economic, and Social Conditions in Puerto Rico, 1763.

275 Manuel Font to Miles Fairbank and Guillermo Esteves, January 19, 1937, Box 2, Farmers Houses-General Memoranda folder, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed by the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.
better financial investment.\textsuperscript{276} To help keep costs down, the PRRA redesigned rural houses to eliminate provisions that were specific for the urban houses. For example, the PRRA concluded that foundations in rural areas did not need to be two feet underground, as was the case in urban areas to protect against rats and possible outbreak of Bubonic plague. In rural areas, PRRA engineers advised, rats find shelter in trees, not under buildings.\textsuperscript{277}

These houses were only part of a larger plan of rural rehabilitation. Between 1936 and 1944 the PRRA transformed over 40,000 acres into small farms on previously uncultivated lands acquired from large or absentee landowners.\textsuperscript{278} For migrant workers and homesteaders displaced by the environmental damage of the hurricanes, the PRRA created two or three acre parcelas in the fruit, tobacco, and citrus regions, located work on neighboring farms, and built “hurricane-proof concrete, brick, or rammed-earth houses, thus creating subsistence farms where agricultural laborers have been installed as resettlers” and made available for rent or purchase.\textsuperscript{279} As of April 1944, the PRRA moved 6,111 farmers onto parcelas with houses and 3,871 farmers onto parcelas without houses. The average rent was $2.50 per month for land with houses, and 0.50 cents per month for land without houses. The price to buy these houses were within reach.

\textsuperscript{276} Font to Esteves, February 1, 1937, Box 2, Farmers Houses-General Memoranda folder, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed by the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

\textsuperscript{277} Fairbank to Jackson C. Hitchman, Principal Construction Engineer, Work Relief division, January 29, 1938, Box 2, Farmers Houses-General Memoranda folder, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed by the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.


\textsuperscript{279} Esteves, “Activities of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration in Connection with the Agrarian Reforms in Puerto Rico,” 164.
for many—but not all—Puerto Rican workers, as the PRRA sold land with houses to 3,101 settlers at a rate of $1.75 per month for 25 years, and land without houses to 520 settlers at a rate of 0.35 cents per month for 10 years.\(^{280}\)

The rural rehabilitation program took over the construction of flood relief houses that was started by the FERA and PRERA in 1933. By January 1937, the PRRA was constructing flood-relief houses in the southwestern towns of Humacao, Juncos, Gurabo, San Lorenzo, and Yabucoa. The PRRA expanded this flood-relief program into a much more comprehensive reconstruction plan that addressed community concerns such as repairing school buildings (with shared funding from the Puerto Rican legislature), and constructing entirely new rural schoolrooms, roads, waterworks, electricity, and sewers.\(^{281}\) The rural rehabilitation program also included the formation of farmer-owned cooperatives that provided shared access to seeds, stock animals, mechanical equipment, technical support, education, canning, and crop marketing services, in addition to over $6.25 million in low interest loans to small farmers. These agricultural cooperatives were a central component of PRRA rehabilitation programs covering the sugar cane, coffee, tobacco, citrus fruit, coconut, plantain, vanilla, pig, chicken, fresh water fish, Sea Island cotton, and other sectors.\(^{282}\) Like their counterparts in the U.S., Puerto Rican New Dealers in the PRRA experimented with new ideas. Some did not work. Among the


\(^{281}\) J.C. Hitchman to Guillermo Esteves, January 5, 1937, Box 1, General Memoranda, Records of the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

pastoral failures was the introduction of forty Nubian-Toggenburg goats for breeding. As Miles Fairbank wrote years later, these “splendid little animals made quite an impression on the countryside, but they soon fell prey to tropical parasites.”

As in the U.S., rural rehabilitation also involved agricultural pest eradication, reforestation, and soil erosion projects. Two of the most harmful pests in Puerto Rico were the cattle tick and the rhinoceros beetle (also called the coconut beetle). Cattle ticks had spread bovine babesiosis, called “Texas fever” or cattle tick fever at the time, which is a highly fatal disease that attacks the red blood cells of infected animals. Cattle tick treatment and eradication were major concerns of the cattle industry of Texas and Mexico from the 1860s through 1940s. In Puerto Rico, the Rural Rehabilitation division constructed 991 “dipping tanks” throughout rural areas so that owners of cattle, horses, mules, and other livestock could get them dipped as part of an island-wide cattle tick elimination program. The number of animals treated was impressive: in the western third of the island, where 315 dipping tanks were built, the PRRA treated 115,863 cattle, 18,776 horses and mules, and 79,688 goats and sheep in the first year alone. In all, multiple hundreds of thousands of animals were treated, with all labor, chemicals, and other supplies paid for by the PRRA. As in Mexico and the United States, quarantine districts were set up in the island to control the movement of infected animals. During the 1940s, the island was certified tick-free. Similarly, the PRRA worked to eliminate the rhinoceros


284 Avery S. Hoyt, Acting Chief of Bureau of Etymology and Plant Quarantine, USDA, to Ernest Gruening, March 25, 1936, Assistant Administrator’s Office folder, Box 1, General Records relating to Administration, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

beetle, which had been a major destructive factor in island coconut groves. Rhinoceros beetle elimination and coconut rehabilitation allowed coconuts to be exported to U.S. markets tariff-free, and resulted in the PRRA hiring of thousands of Puerto Rican workers on coconut plantations, cleaning up debris on over 30,000 acres and more than 95,000 trees. Without these kinds of projects, which revitalized farms and created jobs, PRRA cement-based houses would have been useless in rural areas.

Rural rehabilitation engineers also coordinated (and funded) reforestation and soil erosion projects in connection with the Puerto Rico Forest Service, Federal Forest Service, Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), and PWA in publicly protected lands such as the federally-run Caribbean National Forest (called the El Yunque National Rainforest today) and locally-run Toro Negro State Forest. Local cement production directly aided attempts to restore the environment of the central mountains, as the CCC and PRRA combined to build 100 miles of roads and trails in forestry regions, along with observation towers, picnic areas, campgrounds, bridges, swimming pools, parking areas, and water, sanitation, and recreational services. Aside from providing stable public access to sites of natural beauty and wonder, these roads allowed forest workers to plant millions of cedar, mahogany, and satinwood seedlings compiled from quick growing native and neighboring Caribbean trees. Between 1933 and 1942, the CCC employed 2,400 Puerto Rican men to work on these environmental infrastructural and reforestation projects in El Yunque. Like their U.S. counterparts, the Puerto Rican Tres C’s published its own

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Fairbank, The Chardon Plan and the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration, 45-46.
newspaper, the Spanish language *Ecos del Yunque*. The work of the CCC, still a central symbol of Puerto Rican culture today, was achieved with help from the $3.4 million investment—about $57 million today—in reforestation provided by the PRRA.

**Schools**

In some areas of Puerto Rico, the construction of new public schools by the PRRA were the first ever built. By March 1938, the PRRA had constructed 285 schools or school rooms in 189 towns or cities that were currently in use across the island, ranging from Aguas Buenas, Aguada, and Aibonito to Villalba, Yabucoa, and Yauco. Though these 285 rooms had exhausted the $500,000 budget allocated for rural school building projects, they were used as

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arguments for increased funding; just as the PRRA made requests to Congress for more money, Puerto Rican administrators and parents made requests for more schools. In 1938, Jose Gallardo, the Puerto Rico Commissioner of Education wrote to Ickes to protest the $500,000 construction budget when $3 million had been originally planned. Similarly, Evangelista Rosario, the local school director in the small northern coast town of Barceloneta wrote to Fairbank requesting PRRA help in repairing the existing school infrastructure. In smaller towns such as Villalba, in the coffee region of the south, and Bajadero, a small barrio of Arecibo on the east bank of the Rio Grande de Arecibo Puerto Rican parents sought to help shape the PRRA’s school building program by directly contacting reconstruction officials to make requests for schools in their areas. Letters also came directly from parents—one of the most underrepresented groups in the historiography of Puerto Rico. Santos Vega of the Association de Padres y Maestros (PTA) in Villalba wrote to the PRRA asking for a new school; from Bajadero, the president of the local PTA Rufino Gómez wrote asking for a new vocational school in his area.290

Because no accurate census of school-aged children existed at the time, the PRRA conducted its own in 1935, and found that only 39% of the 638,728 school-aged children in Puerto Rico were in school.291 This educational crisis was more pronounced in the rural mountains of the interior, where there were over twice as many school-aged children as urban

290 Santos Vega to PRRA, September 19, 1937; Jose Gallardo to Harold Ickes, December 9, 1938; Evangelista Rosario to Miles Fairbank, November 1939; Fairbank to Rufino Gómez, February 13, 1940. All Box 3, Construction Projects-School Building Program, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed by the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

291 The PRRA census of school-aged children found only 250,067 young students.
areas, but nearly the same total amount that attended school. The PRRA estimated that Puerto Rico needed at least 1,714 more urban schoolrooms and teachers and 6,065 more rural schoolrooms and teachers. While funding for schools was limited, the PRRA school construction program was enhanced by its commitment to empowering local communities through transferring privately owned resources to public control. Purchasing land for school construction from private landowners, the PRRA transferred land directly to Puerto Rican municipalities wherever PRRA schools were built, including in the municipalities of Carolina (in the barrios of Barrazas, Cacao, Cangrejos, Canovanillas, Carruzos, Hoyo Mulas, Matin Gonzalez, Pueblo, Sabana Abajo, San Anton, Santa Cruz, and Trujillo Bajo), Cayey, Cidra, Ponce, Rincón, and Río Piedras. In addition, the PRRA hired and paid teachers in these areas during the first few years of the school to relieve some of the new financial “burdens” caused by providing free public schools to all children. During the 1936 and 1937 school years, the PRRA employed 1,403 elementary teachers in urban areas at a salary of $900 per year and 2,022 teachers in rural areas at a salary of $700 per year.

Cement school construction was not uniform, but rather varied by demographic size of the city. Whereas in Aguada, a small town just northeast of Rincón, the PRRA built two


293 R.B. Perez Mercado, Chief, Land and Title Section, Legal Division, Memo, Oct 18, 1937, Box 3, Construction Projects-School Building Program, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed by the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

294 Box 3, Construction Projects-School Building Program, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed by the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.
classrooms, larger cities received many more, such as the 205 classrooms built in Ponce and 448 built in San Juan. At a cost of $2,500 for hurricane and fire-proof concrete rooms, $1,800 for hurricane-proof rooms, and $1,200 for standard wood framed rooms, school construction also provided a temporary boost to the local economy. For example, the two Aguada classrooms cost nearly $6,000 and employed 20 men daily for three months. By contrast, the Ponce classrooms cost $615,000 and employed 2,050 men daily for 36 months and the San Juan classrooms cost $1.34 million, employing 4,480 men daily for 36 months.295

While relief work was not the primary objective of the public school construction program, the PRRA often had to highlight the number of jobs created by school construction. As general council Henry Hirshberg explained, the PRRA did so not only as a strategy to secure financing but also out of legal obligation, since most PRRA funding was allocated from Congressional emergency relief funds. Nevertheless, Hirshberg continued, it was clear that school construction, like other PRRA programs in low-cost housing, swamp-draining and malaria control, rural electrification, rural rehabilitation, soil conservation, reforestation, cattle tick eradication, and the development of agricultural cooperatives differed from the work previous relief agencies in focusing on permanent reconstruction.296 It is an irony of the New Deal that the financing for many of its most far-reaching public works programs—the ones dealing with the physical and natural environment we live in—hinged solely upon how many

295 Box 3, Construction Projects-School Building Program, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed by the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

relief jobs they created. This framing has, in part, led to the conclusion that the New Deal did not “solve” the crisis of unemployment or “end” the Depression. But public works, like the construction of two classrooms in Aguada or 205 in Ponce, were never only about temporary relief employment.

The PRRA also enlarged the University of Puerto Rico. By 1938, the PRRA had completed eight new buildings for the UPR campus in Río Piedras as well as a medical research center in Mayagüez and hospital for the School of Tropical Medicine in Puerta de Tierra (now part of the UPR School of Medicine). The same year, the PRRA also allocated money and begun construction on the: university library; tower; biology laboratory for the Río Piedras Experiment Station; electrical installation in the administration building; electricity, seats, curtain in the auditorium; landscaping; reinforced concrete work on tennis and basketball courts; construction of a power plant and workshops for the engineering school; the normal school and teachers’ college; and an engineering building on the Mayagüez campus. By the end of 1943, the PRRA had invested $2.868 million in the physical enlargement of the university, which contributed directly to UPR’s consolidation and international accreditation later in the decade, and eventual expansion to include regional campuses in Aguadilla, Arecibo, Bayamón, Carolina, Cayey, Humacao, Ponce, and Utuado during the 1960s and 1970s. As with other schools, the

297 Box 1, General Memoranda, Records of the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

298 Miles Fairbank to Guillermo Esteves, July 23, 1937, Box 4, University Projects folder, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed by the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

physical enlargement of UPR was not solely about how many jobs it created or how fast it “solved” the crisis of the Depression. It was designed to empower generations of Puerto Rican students to shape their own reconstruction—a notion at the very heart of public education in democratic societies.

Roads, Waterworks, and Recreation

Puerto Rican engineers built thousands of miles of paved roads to connect rural areas with the main roads constructed during previous colonial periods. Between 1933 and 1938, the combined road building projects of the PRERA, FERA, and PRRA paved over 290,000 miles of Puerto Rican and municipal roads which connected Puerto Rican men and women to rural health centers, and rural health centers to city hospitals as never before. In place of flood-prone dirt roads, the PRRA spent $2.37 million—or $39.4 million today—placing block stone, Telford, and Macadam pavement over leveled and sub-graded roads, while they also removed landslides, graded and cleaned side ditches, extracted and crushed large rocks, and built reinforced concrete bridges in rural areas. Public roads were also built in Puerto Rican cities by asphalting streets, excavating side ditches, trimming road shoulders, building concrete sidewalks, curb and gutters, extracting and crushing stone, laying concrete foundations for bridges, and placing concrete forms and reinforcement steel for main sewer lines.

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300 Box 3, Construction Projects, Road Construction folder, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed by the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

301 Box 1, folder 1, Records of the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC; Box 3, Construction Projects-Patillas Bridge folder, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed
As with schools, public road construction drew close scrutiny from local residents, who filed their complaints and requests the PRRA engineers. While Eugenio Orsini, president of the Asociacion de Agricultores, Sección de Cafeteros, Comité de Mayagüez, and Germanico Belaval of Río Piedras each sought reimbursement for damage to their property caused by PRRA trucks, 20 coffee farmers and marketers from Río Prieto, Yauco (who also claimed to represent 300 agricultural workers) petitioned Governor Leahy asking that the Río Prieto highway construction be continued, and not terminated as the farmers had heard. The hand-signed petition claimed that this road was essential to the entire coffee zone, which affected their livelihood and that of their workers. In addition, the farmers worried that if the work was not continued soon, it would be lost forever due to “las continuas lluvias de estos meses en esta zona” (the continuous rains in these months in this area).  

Puerto Ricans were equally pragmatic regarding the construction of concrete and cement drinking water systems, sewers, and storm drains. Letters from mayors across the interior of the island—from San Sebastian to Ceiba, Cidra—asked for help repairing or building new sewer systems for their communities. From Adjuntas to Utuado, the PRRA repaired, modernized, and constructed drinking water systems, sewer systems, and storm drains across the island. By

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302 Eugenio Orsini to Miles Fairbank, May 21, 1937; Germanico Belaval to PRRA Engineering Division, December 1937. Both Box 1, folder 1, Records of the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC; Agricultores y comerciantes del Bo. Rio Prieto de la municipalidad de Yauco to Governor William Leahy, February 16, 1940, Box 3, Construction Projects, Rio Prieto Highway folder, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed by the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

303 Box 3, Construction Projects, Sewerage Systems folder, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed by the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.
In 1938, the PRRA had: repaired 15 municipal waterworks; built new water systems and filter plants in Comerio, Isabela, Patillas, and San Lorenzo; built eight water systems for rural housing and eight for vocational schools; and one new health sewer including concrete curb and gutters in Mayagüez. New waterworks also assisted in the construction of a public swimming pool in Guajataca, Quebradillas, one of several new sports and recreation centers built by the PRRA. In addition to the 130 new sports fields and recreation centers built in both rural and urban areas of the island, the PRRA built a basketball court and grand stand in Yauco and an assembly hall for girls in Santurce.

Comparison of PRRA Engineering Projects to Depression-Era Public Works Construction in Other Areas of the United States and Latin America

Efforts to build hurricane-proof infrastructure were integrated into a broader plan to improve life expectancy, economic opportunity, and physical mobility for island citizens. Taken together, the PPRA’s urban swamp-draining, slum clearance, cement-based housing construction, and rural rehabilitation housing programs aimed to halt the advance of several interrelated disease threats, buffer the island against the natural fury of tropical storms, and secure a lasting and permanent recovery from the Great Depression. Utilizing the supply of high-quality local cement from the Cataño plant after 1938 and purchased directly from the publicly-owned PRCC after 1939, the PRRA built permanent roads, schools, university system, hospitals,

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304 Box 1, folder 1, Records of the Engineering Division, Public Utilities and Misc. Section, Records of the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC; Box 3, Construction Projects, Sewerage Systems folder, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed by the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

rural health clinics, sports and recreation centers, agricultural experiment stations, municipal buildings, public drinking water systems, sewers, storm drains, and reservoirs.

The new paradigm of permanent reconstruction was not unique to Puerto Rico. Rather, it was similar to the new commitment to public works in the U.S. and other regions of Latin America and the Caribbean during the Great Depression. Not only were public works locally attractive as job creators, they were also bold and creative symbols of national pride in the face of widespread economic and psychological uncertainty. In the U.S., public works were constructed mainly through the PWA and WPA. Created as part of the National Industrial Recovery Act on June 16, 1933, the PWA funded and oversaw the construction of over 34,000 large-scale projects in the U.S. between 1934 and 1943, including the construction of airports, bridges, hydroelectric dams, schools, hospitals, and road paving projects. Led by the “energetic, courageous, [and] incorruptible” Harold Ickes who in 1937 also became head administrator of the PRRA, the PWA built over 70% of all public schools, 65% of all courthouses, city halls, and municipal sewers, and 35% of all public hospitals and public health clinics in the United States between 1933 and 1939. Far more about long-term economic recovery than political patronage or mere unemployment relief, the PWA spent over $6 billion in contracting to private construction businesses in an attempt to stabilize the national economy and provide the basis for future growth. Though not engaged in direct hiring, PWA projects were built in all but three counties of the U.S. and had a rippling effect across entire economy. In the U.S., the PWA built large-scale infrastructural projects such as the Lincoln Tunnel and Tri-borough Bridge, and the Hetch-Hetchy, Shasta, and Bonneville dams. In Puerto Rico, the PWA gave loans totaling $15 million
financed fifty-nine separate projects completed by the PRRA, and contracted large-scale work on non-federal projects with eleven Puerto Rican contractors.\textsuperscript{306}

Although the WPA differed from the PWA in that it directly employed workers in the construction of public works, its commitment to stabilizing the infrastructure and economy of the United States was the same. Created by executive order in May 1935, the WPA was headed by Harry Hopkins and hired over 8 million men and women between 1935 and 1943 in the construction of highways, roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, libraries, post offices, airports, dams, sewers, theaters, observatories, public utilities, public parks, and a variety of other projects to enhance the quality of public life in the United States. In addition, the WPA supported thousands of unemployed writers and visual artists through its innovative art, theater, music, and writing programs.\textsuperscript{307} Federally employed artists painted 2,566 murals and 17,744 sculptures that continue to decorate public buildings today in every region of the country.\textsuperscript{308} As part of a program of state-sponsored economic development, the PWA and WPA accomplished far more than simply building bridges, buildings, and roads. They also prepared the U.S. for participation in World War II and made the economic growth of the postwar period possible by promoting “a series of striking innovations and technical changes in such fields as civil and structural engineering, transportation, distribution, machine production, electric-power generation, and

\textsuperscript{306} Smith, 86, 90, 92-93; Leuchtenburg, \textit{Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal}, 70, 133-134.

\textsuperscript{307} Smith, 87.

In Puerto Rico, the PWA-type construction projects of the PRRA ensured that Puerto Rican engineers, architects, teachers, administrators, and health care professionals were not left behind the enormous changes in these fields during the U.S.-led economic boom following World War II.

During the Depression, the emphasis on permanent reconstruction in Puerto Rico paralleled large-scale infrastructural works projects in other regions of Latin America and the Caribbean. In Mexico, for example, the enlargement of cement factories, hydroelectric plants, and roads during the Depression “accelerated the transition from the railroad age to that of motor vehicles.” In Mexico, public works were framed as the living legacy of the Mexican Revolution, and constructed by the state run party that was formed in 1929 and went through several name changes before being called the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in the 1940s. As elsewhere in Latin America, Mexico was in the midst of a population explosion that saw its own population increase by seven times, from 13.61 million people in 1900 to 96.58 million people in 2000. This demographic transformation was in part the result of new state interventions in public health, including the construction of a public works infrastructure designed to provide clean water, sanitation, and disease control. As in the U.S. and Puerto Rico, public works construction in Mexico was a locally-driven response to the crisis of the Great Depression that, at the same time, helped generate future and unknown changes in

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309 Smith, 88.


banking, credit institutions, housing, public services, agriculture, industry, and tourism associated with the “Mexican Miracle” of the 1940s and 1950s.\textsuperscript{312}

In the Dominican Republic, a Caribbean island five times the geographic size of Puerto Rico, the Rafael Trujillo regime (1930-1961) began constructing a broad array of infrastructural projects that were directly modeled on the hurricane-proof public works built in Puerto Rico. In 1939, for example, Trujillo’s general council M.M. Morillo directly wrote to Miles Fairbank asking for copies of PRRA blueprints for construction on the University of Puerto Rico campus, as well as instructive pamphlets regarding the canning of fruit preserves.\textsuperscript{313} Trujillo attempted to buffer the Dominican Republic from hurricanes and tropical storms on the PRRA model of reconstruction after the San Felipe and San Ciprián hurricanes; further, he purchased Puerto Rican cement throughout his dictatorship to do so—as the Dominican Republic did not open its first cement plant until 1964.\textsuperscript{314} Hurricanes were important to Trujillo’s consolidation of power, as he personally oversaw Dominican recovery from the destructive and deadly San Zenón hurricane of 1930, which bypassed Puerto Rico but leveled Santo Domingo and killed between 3,000-6,000 people. Despite some similarities, the central difference between Puerto Rican and the Dominican reconstruction was the strikingly undemocratic terms on which these Trujillo

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\textsuperscript{312} Diaz Alejandro, 36-37; Enrique Cardenas, “The Great Depression and Industrialization: The Case of Mexico,” in Thorp, 222-223, 233-235.

\textsuperscript{313} Box 4, University Projects folder, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed by the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

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used “public” works to enhance his political and personal power over the Dominican Republic. For Trujillo, Dominican “reconstruction” did not include a transfer of public works and utilities to the people. As will be discussed below, it meant literally rebuilding the nation in his personal image and for his personal profit. In Puerto Rico, where infrastructural works were turned over to public control, public works did not enhance the power of a military dictator during the New Deal. Rather, the PRRA funded and constructed public works projects that touched nearly all aspects of Puerto Rican daily life. As with other New Deal programs, funding was not unlimited. Despite financial restrictions, however, the PRRA public works included the construction of urban and rural housing, the construction and/or repair of schools and hospitals with concrete buildings, electricity, clean drinking water, and island-wide waste disposal systems.

Conclusion

This chapter has stressed the importance of the San Felipe and San Ciprián hurricanes in assessing Puerto Rican response to the Depression. The storms not only contributed to the


316 Roorda, 55-59, 98.
infrastructural devastation and rising public health crisis on the island in the 1930s, but defined new possibilities and limits of recovery as well. Faced with the limits of all previous relief-based efforts from the Spanish colonial era to the PRERA, Puerto Ricans from several backgrounds aligned with the PRRA as the only viable avenue to fighting infectious disease through hurricane-proof reconstruction, which included several capital-intensive public works projects. The publicly-owned Cataño cement plant was central to these projects.

Local participation in these programs was understood as a pragmatic response to the infrastructural destruction of the hurricanes and growing public health crisis on the island during the Depression. If Puerto Rican-made cement was the answer to the destructive force of hurricanes, the construction of the Cataño cement plant should stand as one of the lasting achievements of the New Deal in Puerto Rico. This has not happened. Rather, large-scale public works have been marginalized in the historical literature on Puerto Rico as (at best) isolated bright spots in an overall dim picture of “disappointment” with the “failures” of the New Deal. This portrayal of disappointment conforms to a synthesis of the Second New Deal in the United States, in which historians have argued that the authentic reform impulse of the New Deal—to restructure capitalism—ended with the recession of 1937 and U.S. experience in World War II. It was here, between 1937 and 1945, that the “earlier and more dynamic period of activism and accomplishment” ended, and New Deal policy became “less diverse, and . . . less challenging” to the existing power structures that the New Deal had originally sought to reform.\(^{317}\) By

\(^{317}\) Brinkley, \textit{The End of Reform}, 3-4. Judith Stein provides a critique of this synthesis in \textit{Running Steel, Running America: Race, Economic Policy, and the Decline of Liberalism} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 309-310. In a recent book review, Gary Gerstle has suggested that we might refer to the 1933 to 1953 period as the “long New Deal.” Gary
overlooking the transfer of the Cataño cement plant to the locally controlled PRCC, historians have missed an opportunity to imagine public works as the beginning of reform.

Cement-based public works construction in Puerto Rico addressed several interrelated public health goals of Puerto Ricans, such as curtailing infectious and epidemic disease, protecting against future hurricanes, and providing direct and indirect employment to Puerto Rican men and women. Comparison with the New Deal in the U.S. mainland demonstrates that this multi-vectored approach to reconstruction was in line with the public works projects of the PWA and WPA that aimed to “raise, almost to a revolutionary extent, the standard of living in underprivileged homes.” As in the U.S., the New Deal’s large-scale public works projects should be regarded among most significant contributions to public health and physical mobility (through improved transportation and communication networks) in Puerto Rico.

Funding for the PRRA engineering program, which had come largely out of several emergency relief appropriation was sharply reduced with U.S. entry into World War II—though the PRRA continued until 1955 under Guillermo Esteves, who was promoted to Assistant Administrator at the start of the war and oversaw the completion of all projects that the PRRA had begun or planned. While defunding the PRRA ended its role in Puerto Rican recovery


318 Harold Ickes, *Back to Work: The Story of the PWA* (1935; repr. New York, Arno Press, 1975), 125-126. PWA money was also part of the New Deal in Puerto Rico, though actual construction projects were built by the PRRA.

from the Depression, it did not end the reconstruction paradigm that it helped bring to the island. Rather, by ceding control of Puerto Rican public works to locally owned public agencies and corporations such as the Puerto Rico Cement Corporation and Puerto Rico Water Resources Authority, the PRRA ensured that its work would continue regardless of future political events.

The end of the PRRA did not mean the reversion of colonial policy to the one of neglect that had dominated the Spanish colonial and U.S. insular colonial eras. Rather, the PRRA handed off many long-term projects to other New Deal agencies, such as the WPA and Farm Security Administration (FSA)—which continued to provide investment and support for rural rehabilitation and agricultural cooperatives in the mountainous farm regions of the island. In addition, recent analysis demonstrates that the wartime spending of $1.2 billion in Puerto Rico equated to nearly 4.6 times the amount per capita spent by the U.S. on Western Europe in the Marshall Plan.\textsuperscript{320} With the change to a war economy, federal agencies connected to war spending became the Cataño plant’s largest customers, and purchased 89% of the cement and concrete produced by the PRCC in 1942, and almost all of the Ponce Cement Corporation’s output as well.\textsuperscript{321} While the PRRA was not a direct link or precursor to these unknown future events, it should be remembered as a pivotal turning point from past colonial policy in Puerto Rico and a part of a broader change in U.S. domestic and foreign policy that begun during the New Deal.

\textsuperscript{320} Ayala and Bolívar, 25.

\textsuperscript{321} Bolívar, 33; Ayala and Bolívar, 167.
Puerto Rico’s recovery from the Great Depression included substantial new federal investment in rural electrification. Headed by Puerto Rican engineer Antonio S. Lucchetti Otero, the PRRA’s Rural Electrification division was a central component of several interrelated public works and public health projects taking place on the island during the 1930s. As with other Second New Deal programs, the PRRA combined immediate concern for recovery with the long-term goal of reconstruction by building a modern public infrastructure designed to: hurricane-proof the small, mountainous island through cement-based construction; eradicate deadly diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, and hookworm by increasing access to public sanitation and clean drinking water for residential use; and provide cheap electricity to rural Puerto Ricans for the first time in the island’s history.

As in the U.S., bringing electricity to rural areas was both a goal and consequence of the New Deal, and there are many similarities in how the process of rural electrification took place on the island and mainland. Between 1935 and 1943, the PRRA constructed seven modern hydroelectric projects in the Cordillera Central of the island by damming or diverting small rivers to create a series of man-made lakes, generating inexpensive electric power while also providing adequate flood relief, year-round irrigation for the dry southern coast of the island, and abundant reserves of clean drinking water. These projects did not only improve public health by increasing public access to clean drinking water. They also expanded communication systems through a network of transmission and distribution lines that cut across the mountainous interior of the island, bringing radio to the high interior of rural Puerto Rico. Similar to other reconstruction projects—such as the construction of hurricane-proof houses, schools, hospitals,
roads, sewers, and storm drains—the dams, tunnels, and reservoirs of the hydroelectric projects relied on locally produced cement purchased from the Cataño cement plant in Guaynabo that was built by the PRRA in 1938 and transferred to the local government in 1939.

As discussed above, analysis of the Great Depression in Puerto Rico must keep the 1928 and 1932 hurricanes at the center. In assessing the infrastructural, environmental, and public health crises of the 1930s, it is impossible to separate the local effect of the hurricanes from the global economic contraction of the Depression. The PRRA helped provide permanent recovery from the storms and led directly to the creation of a publicly-owned corporation that supplanted the private monopolization of electric power on the island. Modeled on the New York Power Authority (NYPA) and Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), the Puerto Rico Water Resources Authority (WRA) democratized the public control of water and power resources in Puerto Rico, which had been an unrealized goal of many political parties during the preceding decades.

Public control of water and electric power had far-reaching implications for the island’s internal political structure and for its relationship to the United States. To fully appreciate these implications, it is necessary to place Puerto Rico in comparative perspective with the U.S. by examining other rural electrification projects of the New Deal. Despite the personal emphasis Franklin Roosevelt put on rural electrification programs and the remarkable success of these programs, this comparison has not been made in the vast historical literature of the New Deal. Nor has it been made in the historiography of the “colonial” relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. As part of a larger question regarding the role of private and public development of natural resources, rural electrification in both Puerto Rico and the U.S. was
brought about by political solutions in administrative organization, law, and financing. While these policy changes began in the New Deal, they were not completed until after WWII.\textsuperscript{322}

As in the U.S., the arrival of electric power was delayed in rural Puerto Rico until the 1940s, decades behind the urban areas of the island. There were many reasons for this lag, including the colonial relationship between island and mainland, natural and geological disadvantages, and entrenched electric power monopolies and the local political interests that supported them. Of these three, the colonial context seems to be the least significant, as rural electrification in Puerto Rico began to occur at nearly the exact same time as it did in the U.S., and in some cases years before.\textsuperscript{323} Not all of “rural” Puerto Rico was without electric power, however. Many large-scale agricultural enterprises—particularly in sugar and tobacco—had their own private electric generating stations providing light for the estate interiors and power for some of the mechanical components of production. However, for the majority of small family farmers, agricultural workers, sharecroppers, and subsistence farmers who lived in the mountainous interior, indoor plumbing and reliable electric service did not exist.

The marginalization of the colonial question will strike some as unconventional, as Puerto Rican and U.S. historians have long blamed the island’s “problems” on the failures of the colonial relationship.\textsuperscript{324} The case of rural hydroelectricity, however, complicates this explanation


\textsuperscript{324} Victor S. Clark, \textit{Porto Rico and Its Problems} (1930, repr. New York: Arno Press, 1975). Since the 1930s, Puerto Rico has been consistently analyzed from the perspective of its “problems,” a term canonized by this Brookings Institution economic survey. Clark worked in various governmental and philanthropic capacities during the “insular” colonial period between
by demonstrating how alliances between Puerto Ricans of several backgrounds and new federal actors worked against local power monopolies and encouraged more direct participation in the island’s reconstruction.

Looking beyond the colonial context, there were many internal reasons for the lag in rural electrification in Puerto Rico, such as extreme geological obstacles, the entrenched power of electric utility monopolies, and the local political interests that supported them. By making alliances with the PRRA, Puerto Rican electrical engineers, administrators, and workers began a process of bringing affordable and dependable public electricity to all areas of Puerto Rico.

Electric power is so important to modern life that, paradoxically, it is somewhat easy to overlook when examining the political history of a nation, region, or society. This oversight can trick us into believing that the spread of electric service during the twentieth century was a natural development unmoored to larger political and economic issues. The rural electrification of Puerto Rico suggests otherwise, demonstrating that the generation and delivery of public hydroelectric power in Puerto Rico was reflective of Second New Deal strategy. This strategy was welcomed by electrical engineers who had long been unable to circumvent or dismantle the water and power monopolies on the island, and their local political supporters, that directed public water and electric resources to the large sugar corporations who had flourished between 1900 and the New Deal. It was also welcomed by Puerto Rican administrators, workers, and farmers who sought greater participation in the island’s recovery from the San Felipe and San Ciprián hurricanes. The pragmatic alliance between Puerto Rican men and women and the New

Deal was a local response to the global crisis of the Great Depression that resulted in substantial improvements to public health, transportation, and communication on the island. Rural electrification demonstrates that this locally supported shift was a break from the colonial past of the island toward a greater “democratization” of public services and local control of natural resources.

**Rural Life in the United States**

At the beginning of the Depression, access to electric power was unevenly distributed in both Puerto Rico and the United States. Whereas 90% of urban residents in the U.S. had electricity by the 1930s, only 10% of rural residents had access to electric power. Combined with housing shortages, soil erosion, and massive unemployment, the lack of electric power in the countryside contributed to the poor health, malnutrition, and susceptibility to disease that rural residents faced. Although there were more urban than rural residents in the U.S. beginning with the 1920 census, during the Depression there were over 54 million rural residents and rural majorities in 26 of the 48 states (plus five more between 48-50%). In all, 43.9% of the U.S. population lived in rural areas. Of these, about 32.7 million people lived on farms (26.5% of the total population), the vast majority of whom lived without indoor plumbing or electric

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light. In Puerto Rico, the discrepancy between electric service in rural and urban areas was very similar, as nearly all of the rural population also lived entirely without electric power or indoor plumbing. The key difference between Puerto Rico and the U.S. was that rural residents comprised over 70% of the 1940 population of 1.87 million people.

The lack of electricity in rural areas of the U.S. was the result of two factors. First, by geological disadvantages such as mountainous, marshy, or isolated terrain that increased the cost of building power generating stations and extending transmission and distribution lines to rural areas of the country. Second, by the political power of private utility companies that determined electric policy in the U.S. prior to the New Deal. Because electric service was considered to be an unavoidable “natural monopoly,” power companies were allowed to operate as unregulated regional monopolies, tied together through industrial association and complex financial holding companies—key parts of the business strategy of unregulated capitalism that dominated the presidencies of Warren Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover during the 1920s. Though rural electrification was explored, private power companies did not connect electricity to “unprofitable” areas of the country. By the start of the Depression, the combination of


328 Bureau of the Census, 16th Census of the United States, 1940, “Población: Boletín Núm. 1: Número de los Habitantes, Puerto Rico/Population: First Series: Number of Inhabitants, Puerto Rico,” 1. Rural Puerto Ricans comprised about 70% of the population of Puerto Rico throughout the 1930s. They were 72% of the population in 1930, 70.3% in 1935, and 69.7% in 1940. The total population of Puerto Rico was 1,543,913 in 1930, 1,723,534 in 1935, and 1,869,255 in 1940. A special mid-decade census was conducted by the PRRA in 1935.

geological and political factors meant that the U.S. had substantially lower rates of rural electrification per capita than several countries, including France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Australia, New Zealand, and Tasmania. Though industrialized, each of these countries had large rural or isolated areas.

When private companies did connect electric power to rural areas, it was generally to service the interests of large agribusiness rather than to support small family farmers, sharecroppers, tenant farmers, migrant workers, or other rural residents. The first successful private utility company to deliver electric power to farming regions was in California in 1898—where electricity was used to pump irrigation water into the Sacramento Valley. In 1911, the National Electric Light Association recommended that the Department of Agriculture study of potential use of electric power on farms, but the prospects of federal intervention were put on hold during WWI and grew even more remote in the 1920s, as the Republican-dominated White House promoted a laissez faire “return to normalcy” that introduced the era of welfare capitalism and business associationalism.

The refusal or inability of private power companies to provide electricity to rural areas indirectly contributed to the overall poor health and quality of life in rural areas of the United States. While extreme drought, poor soil management, and overproduction contributed to recurring crop failures, the lack of electricity added to the dismal living conditions of the rural poor. Throughout the Great Depression, Eleanor Roosevelt was a vocal advocate of rural electrification.

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330 Heutchy, 8-11.

331 Garwood and Tuthill, 3.
electrification as a means to help the millions of sharecroppers, tenant farmers, and small subsistence farmers who lived in chronic poverty—a disproportionate number of whom were African Americans living in the south. During the 1930s, Eleanor Roosevelt provided both vocal support and direct assistance in many New Deal programs designed to reconstruct public health in rural areas, including the TVA, Rural Electrification Administration (REA), Appalachian Regional Commission, Farm Security Administration (FSA), and PRRA.332

The lack of electricity and indoor plumbing had a negative effect on both the very poor and better-off rural or farm residents in the U.S., who, during the 1920s and 1930s, usually lived on “vicious, ill-tempered soil with a not very good house, inadequate barns, makeshift machinery, happenstance stock, tired, over-worked men and women—and all the pests and bucolic plagues that nature has evolved.”333 Cut off from the news and culture of the day the lack of access to radio, rural Americans lived without running water, refrigeration, or basic sanitation services. While the poorest farmers cooked with pots and pans placed over an outdoor fire, the majority of the better-off farmers cooked with wood or charcoal burning ovens in dim houses lighted by oil or kerosene lamps. Conditions for the industrial rural poor were just as bad, as many mill towns, mining centers, tenement houses, and African American neighborhoods were also without electric light, refrigeration, or indoor plumbing.

These conditions were especially hazardous for poor rural women, whose backbreaking labor included retrieving water from streams or outdoor pump-wells, hand-scrubbing laundry, and cooking over open fires. During the 1930s, farmwives spent an average of 20 more days per year doing laundry than women in the city who owned or had access to electric washing

332 Grey, 35.

333 Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace, quoted in Grey, 21.
machines. Poor nutrition during pregnancy, in part due to the “sharecropper’s diet” of salted fatback, cornmeal, and molasses, also contributed to poor health in the countryside as spoilage and dysentery lurked in perishable foods kept in creeks and streams for lack of refrigeration or ice delivery. The combination of rural toil, hand labor, and lack of sanitation contributed to the ill-health, economic backwardness, and chronic disease that plagued rural areas. Conditions were so bad that country doctors carried their own distilled water and towels with them on visits to rural residents.\(^{334}\)

Life was particularly hard for rural children, who were the most susceptible to the waves of treatable and/or preventable diseases that haunted rural areas of the U.S., such as malaria, tuberculosis, pellagra, typhoid, syphilis, and hookworm. Among migrant workers, the combination of inadequate housing and sanitation services resulted in a chronic, almost inescapable malnourishment as anemia and vitamin deficiency plagued migrant camps and caused infant mortality rates to soar.\(^{335}\) While most urban residences had indoor plumbing, dirt floor outhouses remained the most common form of rural plumbing during the 1930s and were a leading cause of hookworm, an infectious disease spread by a parasite that thrives in damp soil and spreads through human waste. Highly preventable through improved sanitation, plumbing, and education, hookworm was a serious and persistent health threat in many rural areas of the U.S. that lacked indoor plumbing (and where children often went barefoot), such as the

\(^{334}\) Brown, xiii-xiv.

Appalachian Mountains, the Pacific northwest, and the south. While rarely fatal, the parasitic disease produces listlessness, anemia, stunted growth, and contributes to long-term socioeconomic backwardness. By 1910, this “vampire of the south” had infected 40% of all school aged children in the South; their poor health was the leading reason that southern children were 20% less likely to attend school than their non-infected neighbors. Similarly, the FSA estimated that sickness and disease were the cause of 50% of all farm mortgage defaults in the U.S. during the Depression.

Rural Life in Puerto Rico

Living conditions in Puerto Rico were very similar to those in the U.S., and the lack of electric power and clean drinking water contributed to the spread of preventable diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, and hookworm; the overall poor health and nutrition of rural residents; and the quality of life in the mountainous countryside. Housing design and available building materials also impacted rural health. During the Depression, basic materials, design, and construction methods were virtually unchanged from the nineteenth century to the 1930s. While


338 Farm Security Administration, Medical Care for Farm Security Administration Borrowers (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1939), 2, quoted in Grey, 52.
most rural houses made of wood with either a thatched palm or corrugated tin roof, raised on stilts and protected from flooding by a small ditch dug out around the house, nearly all were without electricity, clean drinking water, or indoor plumbing. The kitchen, which was almost always outdoors, consisted of a few shelves attached to the side of the house with a nearby wood fire pit or a separate standing shed about 20 or 25 feet from the main house in which a homemade stove or fire pit was fueled by wood or charcoal.339

As in the rural U.S., dirt floor outhouses were the most common means of sanitation. Marked by a variety of intersecting public health crises ranging from rampant malnutrition to malaria and tuberculosis, nearly 90% of the rural population of the island had hookworm during the 1930s.340 Hookworm exacerbated other health threats as the parasite sapped iron and protein in the host body, led to anemia, and contributed to the “slow starvation” of island residents, largely because 60% of Puerto Ricans did have access to refrigerated milk.341 The jibaro diet of salted cod, rice, and beans provided perhaps more protein than the sharecropper’s diet of the

339 For rural housing conditions, see Clark, 15-17; Mintz, 51; Fernando Picó, Puerto Rico Remembered/Recuerdos de Puerto Rico: Photographs From the Collection of Tom Lehman (San Diego: Thunder Bay Press, 2010), 82-85.

340 “Progress Report” folder, General Records Relating to the Cement Plant Project, PRRA, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

rural U.S., but lacked the vitamins, iron, and nutrients (especially) essential during pregnancy and childhood.

Factors limiting rural electricity in Puerto Rico were similar to those in the United States. The first was geological, as the island contains no oil or coal reserves and has a mountainous topography of many small rivers and no natural lakes. Puerto Rico receives abundant but uneven amounts of rainfall, widely varying from between 100 and 250 inches per year in the tropical rainforests of the central mountains to less than 30 inches per year along the dry southern and southwestern coasts. Just as the length of rivers in Puerto Rico varies from the 60 mile Rio de la Plata on the north coast to the 7 mile Rio Cañas on the south coast, so too does the net water flow of these rivers vary considerably. Although flow is perennial in the north, many rivers in the south run completely dry for long parts of the year. This means that while hydroelectric power made the most sense for the island as a whole, its practicality and cost varied greatly from region to region. While today, annual rainfall in the El Yunque National Forest alone can amount to 100 billion gallons and provide clean drinking water to over 800,000 people, prior to the New Deal low lying urban areas such as San Juan-Santurce and Mayagüez supplied their own water via


343 “Puerto Rico Surface-Water Resources,” in U.S. Geology Survey Water-Supply Paper 2299 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1987), 399. The first time one drives south from San Juan toward Cayey and Salinas, the rapid change from tropical rainforest to arid terrain and climate can be startling.
gravity-based aqueducts and steam-generated power fueled by imported oil, and were unconcerned with the mountainous interior.\(^{344}\)

The second factor was political. As in the U.S., private utility companies controlled water and electric power through regional monopolies. Local experimentation with electric power began during the last decade of Spanish rule, as royal decree established construction and installation standards for Puerto Rico and Cuba in 1890. Spanish concessions to local entrepreneurs did not grant private or corporate ownership of electric power, but rather established “mercantile associations” that the crown could seize control of in the event of military necessity—though it is not clear that this ever occurred, even during the Cuba-Spanish-American war of 1898.\(^{345}\)

After the U.S. occupation of Puerto Rico in 1898, most of these mercantile associations sought to strengthen their local power by establishing legal corporate identities in the United States. Some, such as the Sociedad Anónima Luz Electrica of San Juan and the Compañía Anónima de la Luz Electrica de Ponce, horizontally integrated with smaller local companies and newly-formed holding corporations in the U.S. to form regional monopolies of electric power on the island by 1904.\(^{346}\) Following a decade of more mergers and consolidations, electric and water resources were increasingly controlled in the hands of a few regional monopolies—who were

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\(^{345}\) U.S. Bureau of the Census, Electrical Industries of Porto Rico, 22, 27. See also Quintero-Rivera, 23.

\(^{346}\) U.S. Bureau of the Census, Electrical Industries of Porto Rico, 24, 27.
linked more by their corporate style of organization than by any other aspect, including foreign or local ownership status. By 1910, the three largest regional monopolies were all publically traded in international markets. They were the Canadian-owned Porto Rico Railway, Light, and Power Company (RLPC), the U.S.-owned the Ponce Electric Company (PEC), and the Puerto Rican-owned Mayagüez Light, Ice, and Power Company (MLIPC). As in the U.S., these private electric corporations also obtained franchise and control of local water rights during these early years.347

The RLPC, PEC, and MLIPC took their organizational shape during the first decade of U.S. rule. Although the colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the U.S. must be noted, we should take caution before crediting this relationship too much weight in the movement towards consolidation and monopoly. The global history of industrial capitalism between 1890 and 1910 is one of widespread corporate merger via stock buyouts, takeovers, and consolidations, as new forms of corporate management steered the “visible hand” of the market toward greater vertical and horizontal integration.348 During the first decade of the twentieth century, which coincided with the first decade of U.S. rule in Puerto Rico, economic policy was articulated by Republican progressives who sought limited reform to this “mania” of mergers and consolidations by pursuing only the most egregious monopolies—typified by the forced breakup of John D. Rockefeller’s Standard Oil in 1911. Exposed by progressive journalist Ida B. Tarbell in 1904 in the serial publication of History of the Standard Oil Company in McClure’s


Magazine, the Standard Oil Trust was pursued by Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft who invoked the Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890 against the oil monopoly.

Between 1890 and the New Deal, electric power in Puerto Rico was generated to benefit large agricultural estates. Originally, this was in the form of electric railways that connected urban centers to ports, such as the 4.7-mile long track owned by the Ponce Railway and Light Company (a subsidiary of the PEC) that began carrying freight between Ponce and Playa de Ponce in 1905. By 1907, Puerto Rico had about 17 miles of electric railway track, nearly all of it built to transport agricultural freight.\(^{349}\) Just as electric power serviced agriculture in transportation, water resources were also allocated toward irrigation for sugarcane farming. On the dry south side of the island, electric power was used to pump irrigation water to the sugar estates that greatly expanded during the first three decades of the twentieth century—largely due to new irrigation methods using electric pumps. Even though most of the major sugar estates and tobacco farms had their own privately generated supplies of electricity for lighting and industrial operations, public water and electric resources were continuously diverted to service corporate agriculture.\(^{350}\) For example, the Puerto Rico Irrigation Service—which was established in 1908 by the local legislature—constructed four storage reservoirs and 98 miles of canals and distribution laterals to service the large sugar estates on the southern coast of the island. The development of limited hydroelectric power was strictly a secondary byproduct of agricultural


irrigation, while the complexity and cost of rural electrification prohibited it from even the scope of possibility.\textsuperscript{351}

In 1915, the insular government began building its own hydroelectric facilities, though the power generated was again geared more towards private irrigation projects than residential or rural customers. Even when the Irrigation Service began generating its own electricity, over 85\% of its power was used to pump irrigation water to the sugarcane sector and only 15\% was sold directly to local customers for lighting and domestic use.\textsuperscript{352} Reflecting a flexible corporate strategy, private power companies not only resisted insular efforts to establish hydroelectric systems, but also profited from increasing public competition after 1915 as well. In Ponce, for example, as the demand for expanded electric power and access to indoor lighting and refrigeration grew during the 1920s, the PEC declined to invest or expand their private power system. Instead, they purchased power from the limited public systems at wholesale rates, and resold it to their customers for a profit.\textsuperscript{353} For most of the 1920s and 1930s, Ponce was the only area in the south of the island with reliable electric power, and the PEC was the only supplier.

Greater access to electric power was desired by residents of Ponce, and became an island-wide political issue throughout the decade—particularly so as Ponce was the home of Pedro


Albizu Campos, the leader of the Nationalist Party, and the newspaper *El Nacionalista de Ponce*. Formed in 1922, the Nationalist Party had split by the beginning of the Depression with the more militant wing consolidated around Baize Campos, whose rhetoric increasingly took aim not just at the colonial rule of the U.S.—but at specific targets such as the corporate power monopolies of the PEC and the RLPC. In 1930, Albizu Campos called for government control of electric power, including lighting, phone, railroad, and street trolleys, which he included as one of the seven primary points of the Nationalist Party’s official platform.354

By the end of the decade, other groups had taken up a similar call for public ownership of natural resources and public access to basic utilities. In September 1939, the Unión Protectoral de Desempleados (UPD) or unemployed union planned a “hunger march” to mark the arrival of the new governor Admiral William D. Leahy. Supported by a broad coalition of unemployed workers and other groups such as the Communist Party and the Asociación de Choferes or taxi drivers union, the UPD called for the extension of New Deal slum clearance and hydroelectric development programs by asking that “running water and electric lights, first aid stations, schools and school lunch rooms be extended to [those] zones where most of our people live. We are against slums; we are for a program of building hygienic houses for the people.”355

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This call for public control of electric power was not unusual for the time, as similar developments in Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, and Mexico pointed to a rising economic nationalism in Latin America that specifically criticized foreign ownership of local resources such as electric power. It was also similar to the pressure for public ownership of water and electric power resources in the U.S. by progressive reformers in the 1920s, and New Dealers in the 1930s. The shared goal of publicly controlling water and electric resources in Puerto Rico was not realized until the Second New Deal, as Puerto Rican electrical engineers, working with the PRRA, were able to build the infrastructure, secure the financing, and develop new legal structures to transfer control of the island’s water and power resources into public hands. The PRRA bankrolled the buyout of the private power monopolies and helped form the publicly-owned Puerto Rico WRA in 1941.

The New Deal and Rural Electricity

In both Puerto Rico and the U.S., the New Deal fought against the corporate control of water and electric resources and provided rural access to electric power through hydroelectric development. New Dealers in Puerto Rico and the U.S. understood water power to be a “free” gift of nature, though one that required a “large capital outlay” by the federal government. The development of hydroelectric power was both a major goal and accomplishment of the New


358 Bauer and Gold, 35.
Deal—one that forever changed life in the rural countryside of both countries. It was, simply put, a central part of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s conception of the New Deal itself. Though long-term public works have been marginalized in academic discussions of the New Deal, Roosevelt’s focus on rural electrification during his presidency would not have surprised contemporary observers of his term as Governor of New York or of his presidential campaign, as it was one of the more clearly articulated goals he presented in stump speeches from coast to coast. As one of the few concrete proposals that voters could measure against his gubernatorial record, FDR’s commitment to rural electrification won him valuable support from both progressive intellectuals and rural voters.

To progressives, Roosevelt’s experience as Governor had already confirmed his commitment and ability to harness natural resources for the public good. During his first inaugural speech in Albany on January 1, 1929, FDR addressed the issue of developing hydroelectric power in New York by calling for an end to the “petty squabbles and partisan dispute” in Albany that had blocked previous attempts to break local power monopolies. Claiming that it was the government’s duty to “give back to the people the waterpower which is theirs,” Roosevelt vowed to “see that this power, which belongs to all the people, is transformed into usable electrical energy and distributed to them at the lowest possible cost.”

This was no easy task. Though Republican and Democratic governors dating back to 1907 had called for public ownership of the state’s water resources, proposals had been blocked by the entrenched interests of private utility companies and their constituents in the state legislature.

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In New York, Roosevelt relied on progressive reformers such as Morris Cooke who had been fighting an uphill battle against the power corporations at the federal level for much of the 1920s. The former director of public works in Philadelphia, Cooke had worked as a policy advisor to Gifford Pinchot, the conservationist governor of Pennsylvania, prior to joining FDR in New York. As the nation’s leading advocate for affordable public power, Cooke was an electrical engineer committed to fostering the role of applied science and technology in public planning. A disciple of Frederick Winslow Taylor’s model of scientific management, Cooke believed that civic engineers were the real key to long-term progressive reform. Engineers would not only build the infrastructure to provide rural electric power, they would also topple the control of private monopolies to make public control of electric power permanent. According to Cooke, the time was now, as “widespread rural electrification is socially and economically desirable and financially both sound and feasible.”

Unable to pass a bill establishing the New York Power Authority (NYPA) in his first term, Roosevelt nonetheless won valuable support from national progressives such as Republican Senator George W. Norris from Nebraska, a leading advocate for public power. Like Cooke, FDR believed that progressive engineers must lead. When the NYPA bill was signed into law during his second term in April 1931, FDR called its passage a personal and political “milestone” that “marked the end of a 20-year struggle against great odds, for it takes the first step towards securing cheaper electric light and power” for the homes, farms, and small businesses of New York.

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361 Brown, 33.
York through the construction of publicly-owned generating facilities on the St. Lawrence River and expansion of the state’s transmission and distribution lines. This was not an elite goal forced upon New Yorkers; it was a demand created by what Roosevelt called the “ever-growing, ever-insistent public opinion” that viewed cheaper electricity as a right and a path to improve the state’s economic prospects, its public health, and to “lighten the drudgery of housework” for rural men and women.\(^\text{362}\) Though its future was uncertain in 1931, the NYPA soon became a model for New Deal energy programs in the Pacific Northwest, Tennessee Valley, and Puerto Rico.

To rural voters across the U.S., who may not have followed the legislative ups and downs of the NYPA bill as closely as progressives, FDR argued the case for rural electrification throughout the 1932 campaign, making clear his personal conviction that wherever and whenever private corporations failed to deliver reliable or affordable electricity, it was the federal government’s \textit{duty} to do so in their place.\(^\text{363}\) As the campaign went on, Roosevelt argued that the public ownership of shared natural resources was one of the pillars of the New Deal. In September 1932, FDR campaigned in Portland, Oregon that electricity was a necessity to modern life, that the “new deal” for the American people would include the regulation or nationalization of electric utilities. The generation of new hydroelectric power resources, he argued, would result in the ownership of the nation’s “vast water power . . . by the people of the United States, or the several States, [and] shall remain forever in their possession.”\(^\text{364}\) The location of his speech was

\(^{362}\) NYPA, 3-5.

\(^{363}\) “Rural Electrification,” FERI.

\(^{364}\) Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Campaign Address in Portland, Oregon on Public Utilities and Development of Hydro-Electric Power,” September 21, 1932, UC Santa Barbara American
not a coincidence; in 1932, Oregon was a rural state whose population of 950,000 lived mostly without electric power or indoor plumbing.\textsuperscript{365} The following month, in October 1932, Roosevelt argued to an audience in Atlanta, Georgia that rural electricity was a cornerstone of future socioeconomic gains. Here, in the South, which had lagged far behind northern urban centers in economic measures such rates of electricity and indoor plumbing, as well as social measures such as infant mortality, life expectancy, nutrition, literacy, and education, FDR pledged that “our object must be the rebuilding of the rural civilization of America” with an inclusive and constructive program to attack monopoly power on every front, including against the water and electric power corporations that had failed to deliver electric service and clean water rural residents.\textsuperscript{366}

Taking office in March 1933, however, FDR knew that the struggle against the private control of water and electric power would prove more complex than his own campaign rhetoric had suggested. New Deal strategies were just as complex, and FDR’s attempt to break the power of electric trusts posed a series of political dilemmas that were difficult to overcome. As Ellis Hawley has argued, the New Deal’s answers “often failed to fit any logically consistent pattern.”\textsuperscript{367} While the crusade against monopoly power was popular with the public, Roosevelt’s relationship with corporate leaders and organized business associations was more ambivalent,

\textsuperscript{365} Oregon’s population in 1932 was less than that of Puerto Rico.


\textsuperscript{367} Hawley, \textit{The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly}, 325.
and industry insiders were often included in the drafting of regulatory legislation, much to the
dismay of progressive New Dealers. \(^{368}\) A fitting example is Roosevelt’s selection of Wall St.
insider Joseph P. Kennedy to head the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). Despite
nearly unanimous concern from progressives, FDR’s political instincts were unusually sharp, and
Kennedy won nearly unanimous acclaim during his tenure at the SEC. \(^{369}\)

The struggle against the electric trusts was particularly difficult as, in the decades prior to
the Depression, state-level reformers had not been able to prevent or control the growth of
complex financial institutions that created and protected the private control of electric power in
the United States. Employing the biggest lobby in Washington, including the Committee of
Public Utility Executives, the American Federation of Utility Investors, and the public relations
firm of Lee and Ross—who billed themselves as “physicians” for corporate bodies preyed upon
by progressive regulations—the power trust had withstood all attempts at reform. \(^{370}\) In the words
of Judson King, the director of the National Popular Government League, by the 1920s the
power trust had become “now more powerful than the railroads.” \(^{371}\)

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\(^{368}\) Hawley, The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly, 16.

\(^{369}\) David Nasaw, The Patriarch: The Remarkable Life and Turbulent Times of Joseph P.

\(^{370}\) Hawley, The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly, 326, 334. Ivy Lee had gained
notoriety defending the public image of the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company after the Ludlow
Massacre in 1914 and as John D. Rockefeller’s personal publicity council. See Lorenzo Chavez,
“Ivy Ledbetter Lee: PR Pioneer,” Public Relations Society of America, Colorado Chapter,
an=1&subarticlenbr=176.

\(^{371}\) Judson King, quoted in Christie, “Morris L. Cooke and Energy for America,” 239.
The New Deal struck against the power trust in a variety of ways, including: administration, such as the creation of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and Rural Electrification Administration (REA); legislation, such as the passage of the Public Utilities Holding Company Act; and infrastructure, such as public works construction through the Public Works Administration (PWA) and Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRRA).

Designed in May, 1933, the TVA provided cheap electricity to parts of seven southern states whose residents lived under gas or kerosene light and cooked with wood-burning or charcoal stoves. Modeled in part on the NYPA, the TVA was a federally-owned corporation responsible for coordinating a wide range of health and economic related improvements to the perennially flooded region, including: flood control, electric generation, navigation, soil and forestry conservation and rehabilitation, fertilizer production, agricultural diversification, and industrial development.\textsuperscript{372} Flooding was endemic in the region, and even urban areas such as Chattanooga and Knoxville faced the threat of powerful floods every spring that destroyed, killed animals, rotted vegetables, spread diseases such as typhoid and malaria, and limited barge traffic on the Tennessee River. In addition, the TVA met regional and national needs by hiring large numbers of engineers, scientists, technicians, and construction workers to solve the many logistical obstacles to dam construction and electrical generation in the region.\textsuperscript{373} Similar large-scale projects—such as Muscle Shoals, Alabama—had been planned since WWI, but were routinely


\textsuperscript{373} Van Fleet, 17-31.
thwarted by the influence of the power lobby; even when legislation was passed, it was vetoed by Republican presidents Coolidge and Hoover.\textsuperscript{374}

For Roosevelt, the TVA was not only a weapon against the power trust, but connected to an essentially republican vision of “small integrated communities in which the workers might still be attached to the land and yet have access” to modern conveniences such as electric lights, refrigeration, and industrial jobs as a source of supplementary income.\textsuperscript{375} In 1933, however, it was not clear where—or even if—the TVA would be an appropriate model for harnessing regional water and power resources. Rather than force the Tennessee River model onto other parts of the U.S., Roosevelt experimented with other means of democratizing access to electric power, including providing PWA subsidies and loans to municipalities to construct cooperative-run power plants and distribution services, and the creation of the REA in 1935, which was designed to supply rural areas with funding to electrify isolated farm communities.

Led by Morris Cooke, who had followed FDR from Albany to Washington, the REA had complete support from the most liberal New Dealers, including Rex Tugwell, Henry Wallace, and Harold Ickes.\textsuperscript{376} Similar to other New Deal programs, there was a two-step legal process involved in the creation of the REA. While Roosevelt created the REA by executive order in 1935, Congress empowered it with the passage of the Rural Electrification Act on May 20, 1936. The primary function of the REA was to make loans to local governments (including Puerto Rico) to build infrastructure and establish electrical cooperatives. It was a very effective


\textsuperscript{375} Hawley, \textit{The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly}, 328.

\textsuperscript{376} Brown, 42.
program. By 1939, REA loans had helped establish 417 co-ops, providing incandescent light to over 288,000 rural households, enabling running water to be pumped into rural houses, and improving communication through access to radio. By the end of World War II, 90% of all U.S. farms were electrified, up from 10% at the start of the Depression.377

While the REA centered on distributing loans and supervising electrification plans, it also worked in tandem with New Deal public works construction agencies such as the PWA and PRRA, both administered by Harold Ickes. When Cooke asked Ickes if perhaps the REA and PWA should work on joint solutions with the private utility companies, Ickes rejected the idea of corporate collaboration, responding in his typically curt manner that he will “have nothing to do with the sons-of-bitches.”378 In public, Ickes was no less bashful in his support for the creation of public utilities to service the rural areas of the country. In a lengthy article in the New York Times, Ickes argued in support of FDR’s claim that it was the federal government’s duty to provide rural electricity, and that the expensive and complex construction of hydroelectric dams and power stations would best provide for the “permanent and continuous” public control of natural resources.379 The New Deal combined new public works and agencies with new regulatory laws, and the TVA, REA, PWA and PRRA rural electricity programs were enhanced by the passage of both the Federal Power Act of 1935, which established accounting regulation


378 Harold Ickes, quoted in Brown, 40.

and rate control mechanisms in the utility industry, and the Public Utilities Holding Company Act of 1935, which forced electric utility holding companies under the jurisdiction of the SEC. Holding companies were a major target of the FDR administration.\footnote{The most egregious of all holding companies was that of Samuel Insull, who began investing in electric utilities in the 1890s and, by the end of Herbert Hoover’s New Era, controlled a pyramid of holding and operating companies worth over $2.5 billion from his offices in Chicago. The collapse of Insull’s financial empire during the Depression cost working-class investors over $750 million and resulted in his exile to France, Greece, and Turkey to (for a time) avoid prosecution. A constant target of FDR and Harold Ickes, Insull had been an advisor to and White House guest of Hoover even after the crash of October 1929. Although there were many areas of continuity between the Hoover and Roosevelt administrations, on the question of public power there was a sharp divide separating the New Era and New Deal. See Leuchtenburg, \textit{Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal}, 154-156; Hawley, \textit{The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly}, 325; Christie, “Morris L. Cooke and Energy for America,” 243-244; John F. Wasik, \textit{Merchant of Power: Sam Insull, Thomas Edison, and the Creation of the Modern Metropolis} (Gordonsville, VA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 187-188, 201-203; Bauer and Gold, 266-267, 276-277.}

Within two years of FDR taking office, the New Deal had developed and implemented a combination of regulatory and public works construction programs designed to electrify the countryside, improve public health, facilitate greater transportation and communication networks, and smash the power of the power trusts. As Ellis Hawley wrote, “in spite of numerous difficulties, a new power policy had taken shape” by the mid-1930s.\footnote{Hawley, \textit{The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly}, 329, 341.} It was a broad and innovative policy that did not end during the “Roosevelt Recession” of 1937 or with the onset of WWII, but was rather in its beginning stages. Not limited to the United States, Roosevelt wrote a letter translated and read over the radio in Puerto Rico that he was “anxious that the Government of the United States shall discharge fully its responsibilities to the Puerto
Rican people.” Continuing, Roosevelt wrote that “cheap and available electric power” was “essential” to his administration’s program for the island.382

Rural Electrification in Puerto Rico

The Rural electrification of Puerto Rico occurred at the same time, in large part due to the efforts of a large number of Puerto Rican electrical engineers, administrators, and workers of the PRRA. The single most important figure in the electrification of rural Puerto Rico was a 48-year-old engineer from Ponce named Antonio S. Lucchetti Otero. Similar to Morris Cooke and Harold Ickes, Lucchetti was a staunch believer in the ability of liberal engineers to lead the rural electrification of Puerto Rico. Aligning with the PRRA in 1935, Lucchetti ensured that the New Deal’s fight against the private monopolization of electric power was extended to the island. Over the next several years, Lucchetti oversaw the construction of the necessary infrastructure, obtained the needed financing, and fought for the permanent public control of the island’s natural resources through the legal creation of the Puerto Rico WRA.

Antonio Lucchetti was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico in 1888. Following his graduation from Cornell University with a degree in electrical engineering in 1910, Lucchetti returned to Puerto Rico and began a career in public service that lasted until his death in 1952. Like Guillermo Esteves, Lucchetti was a central figure in Puerto Rican civil engineering for two decades prior to the New Deal. Between 1915 and 1935, however, civil engineers faced an uphill

382 Franklin D. Roosevelt, August 1, 1935, quoted in Miles Fairbank, “PRRA Organization, Financial Policies, and Functions Prepared Pursuant to the Requirements of Senate Resolution 150, 75th Congress, First Session,” PRRA History Report folder, Box 1, Records of the Finance Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.
struggle against the power of the large agricultural estates, local politicians who protected their interests, and the discrepancy between the size of the public works budget and scale of the infrastructural need.

Because of his work at the *Utilización de las Fuentes Fluviales* (Utilization of Water Resources or UFF), Lucchetti was chosen to head the PRRA Rural Electrification division with the explicit idea that he would best coordinate the work of the local government with the ideas of the New Deal. His familiarity with rural electrification proved essential to the relative stability of the PRRA program during the political turbulence of 1936 and 1937. It also meant that there was stability within the New Deal as well, even as the PRRA went through a major organizational change, with the removal of Ernest Gruening and Carlos Chardón in favor of Harold Ickes and Miles Fairbank. The New Deal benefited from Lucchetti’s experience in Puerto Rican public works, and there was a great deal of continuity between the hydroelectric projects undertaken before the New Deal with those after it. This continuity underscores the extent to which Puerto Rican public works were products of Puerto Rican vision, dedication, expertise, skill, and labor—even if this contrasts with previously held beliefs regarding the colonial relationship between the island and mainland.

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383 Miles Fairbank to Leona Graham, August 6, 1938, Box 2, General Memoranda, Records of the Rural Electrification Division, NARA-NYC. While it was initially contemplated to bring a competent U.S. engineer to head the program, in part because they were not sure Lucchetti would agree to leave his position of UFF, and in part because of the early success of the TVA between 1933 and 1935, Gruening and Chardón settled on Lucchetti and paid him an annual salary of $4,000 (which was in addition to his salary at UFF). Three years later, in 1938, the PRRA renewed his contract without additional pay by arguing that the Rural Electrification division of the PRRA was little more than an expansion of the UFF. After vigorous protest, Lucchetti’s salary was set at $2,000 per year.
Despite similarities with rural electrification projects in the U.S., the PRRA rural electrification program was locally planned, administered, and built. In fact, its projects were designed and built by a far more locally comprised staff than many of its New Deal counterparts in the U.S., including the TVA, which hired local laborers but relied on engineers and administrators who were brought into the Tennessee Valley from other regions of the country.\footnote{Van Fleet, 33.}

Headed by Lucchetti, the PRRA rural electrification program was one of the largest public works projects in the history of Puerto Rico. The overwhelmingly Puerto Rican staff of engineers gained essential skills and experience working for the PRRA that assured the net effect of rural electrification would outlive the New Deal years. Key members of Lucchetti’s staff included: electro-mechanical engineer José R. Mera; resident engineers Pedro Colón and Horacio R. Subirá; assistant civil engineers Oscar M. Girod, Miguel A. Quiñones, Orlando R. Méndez, Félix Córdova Jr., and Harold Toro; assistant electrical engineers Justo P. Morales, Santiago Orsini, and Ulpiano Barnés. In addition, workers were overseen by Puerto Rican managers, foremen, and supervisors, such as construction foreman Angel Delgado and chief inspector Ernesto A. Coll.\footnote{“Efemerides de la PRRA,” Personal Directivo de la PRRA, Epoca 1935-1936, FLMM.}

The decision for Lucchetti and other Puerto Rican engineers to align themselves with the PRRA was a pragmatic one. In 1935, this new federal agency represented the only viable opportunity to expand public electric development into rural areas—which had been an unrealized goal of the local government. As Lucchetti explained, the PRRA gave “splendid impetus to the program of rural electrification which the insular government, under the spur of
public demand, had for several years been developing, contemplating its expansion to cover all the unserved areas within its territory.”

The PRRA provided the means and capital to make these contemplations into concrete reality.

As head of the PRRA Rural Electrification division, Lucchetti oversaw the completion of seven major projects between 1936 and 1942. Funded and constructed by the PRRA for over $9 million—or nearly $154 million today—the seven projects were “surrendered, relinquished and transferred” along with all property, constructions, and lands to the insular government as permanent “property belonging to and owned by The People of Puerto Rico.” Emphasizing the public nature of these works, Fairbank expressed his “most sincere wishes that this project will materially contribute to the welfare of the People of Puerto Rico and will redound to the ultimate improvement of their economic condition.” Comparing hydroelectric power to utilization of local materials at the Cataño cement plant, Fairbank continued that it was the PRRA’s “earnest hope that this may prove to be another important step in the development of the natural resources of the Island and in the production and distribution of electric power for its inhabitants at rates that can easily afford.”


387 Fairbank, The Chardon Plan and the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration, 41-42; Miles Fairbank to Blanton Winship, March 20, 1937, Folder 1, Toro Negro Hydroelectric Project, Records of the Rural Electrification Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC; Memo, November 12, 1936, Box 1, Las Garzas Hydroelectric Project folder, Records of the Rural Electrification Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

388 Fairbank to Winship, March 20, 1937, folder 1, Toro Negro Hydroelectric Project, Records of the Rural Electrification Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.
The PRRA’s first three projects were the enlargement of Toro Negro hydroelectric plant No. 1, the construction of Toro Negro No. 2, and of the Carite hydroelectric plant No. 3. Located three miles north of Villalba in the southern center of the island, Toro Negro No.1 was originally constructed by the insular government in 1925 with a special five-year tax levied on island residents. Beginning in 1936, the PRRA refurbished Toro Negro No. 1 with new turbines, penstock pipes, canals, transformers, switches, and other control equipment. All of this work was complemented by the construction of Toro Negro No. 2 at the headwaters of the Toro Negro River, which greatly increased the overall capacity of hydroelectric power generation in the area. Both projects, along with Carite No.3, which was located just north of Guayama on the southeastern coast of the island, were completed in 1937.\textsuperscript{389}

The next two hydroelectric plants built by the PRRA, Las Garzas and Dos Bocas, required more difficult and challenging feats of engineering. Located on the Río Las Vacas three miles southeast of Adjuntas and roughly ten miles northeast of Ponce, the Garzas project consisted of constructing the reservoir, hydroelectric plant, and three minor river diversions.\textsuperscript{390} The centerpiece was a 150-acre lake located 2,415 feet above sea level. It also called for one of the more remarkable accomplishments of Puerto Rican engineering. Here, working with a team of engineers that included José Benitez Gautier, Heliodoro Blanco, and Emilio Serra of the Engineering and Rural Engineering divisions, Lucchetti constructed an 11,700 foot long tunnel


\textsuperscript{390} Antonio Lucchetti to Miles Fairbank, March 24, 1938, Box 1, Las Garzas Hydroelectric Project folder, Records of the Rural Electrification Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.
to carry water from the wet north side of Mt. Guilarte to the dry south side, creating natural falls to generate 24.5 million annual kilowatt hours of power through two 5,000 horsepower water wheels. \(^{391}\) Just under 4,000 feet, Mt. Guilarte received 98 inches of annual rainfall that had been previously unusable for the dry southern part of the island. The Garzas hydroelectric project served the dual purpose of irrigation and power generation, as water was diverted and carried by gravity to Ponce and surrounding areas for irrigation and power was connected to the local government electric system over six 38,000 volt circuits. In addition, the PRRA built ten miles of all-weather access roads, 3,000 feet of incline railway for machinery, and a 65-foot diversion dam on the Garzas project. \(^{392}\)

Similar to Garzas, the construction of the Dos Bocas hydroelectric plant in the north central section of the island between 1937 and 1942 created a massive two-mouthed lake that covered over 600 acres and extended water surface of more than five miles. Located on the Río Grande Arecibo, the Lago Dos Bocas consisted of a concrete dam and two generation units directly below the lake measuring a combined 12,450 horsepower of electric power, enough to generate more than 30 million kilowatt hours per year. \(^{393}\) At the same time, the PRRA was enlarging the irrigation, water filtration, and generating plant system at Isabela and building more than 100 miles of high-tension transmission lines and 200 miles of distribution lines across all sections of the island. In about eight years with the PRRA, Lucchetti and the other engineers


and workers of the Rural Electrification division more than doubled the amount of kilowatts generated by Puerto Rican hydroelectric plants, from 29.2 million kilowatts in 1936 to 60.2 million kilowatts in 1941.394

The scale of the project was not lost on historical actors at the time. At the inauguration of the Dos Bocas plant on November 19, 1942, Esteves highlighted the public nature of the plant, and remarked that Dos Bocas would be administered, maintained, and improved in the future by the people of Puerto Rico.395 Governor Rex Tugwell, who been appointed by FDR in 1941, used the inauguration of hydroelectric power production at Dos Bocas to offer an unusually poetic testimony to the Puerto Rican engineers and workers of the New Deal:

The sun and waters of heaven are here made to operate for the people. This is pure gain. Here the energies of men are multiplied; here invisible, untiring servants work for everyone to whom the transmission lines can reach. We begin something here which is a miracle and which may miraculously go on into the far future. It was built with public funds, granted with foresight and wisdom; it will be managed by a public authority. It will produce continuous values. Alongside them its costs will recede until they are hardly visible. No man will profit from it; but all Puerto Ricans will share its services. I dedicate to the use of our people this source of benefits. It was built by them and no one shall ever take it away.396

Public works construction on this scale was nothing more than an infrastructural fantasy to Lucchetti and other Puerto Rican engineers during the preceding era, as public hydroelectric power was not supported by private power companies, the sugar industry they mostly serviced, and island political forces that protected the private ownership of electricity. The public nature of


395 Fairbank, The Chardon Plan and the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration, 41-42.

396 Tugwell, “Governor’s Message at Dos Bocas Dam, November 19, 1942,” in Changing the Colonial Climate, 265.
these infrastructural projects allows us to view the PRRA outside of the political divide of the status issue between independence and statehood that dominated Puerto Rican headlines. As never before, Lucchetti and other engineers were able to exploit the middle ground provided by the New Deal’s new emphasis on and capital for rural electrification. In Puerto Rico, this emphasis began as the relief-based First New Deal—embodied by the Puerto Rico Emergency Relief Agency (PRERA) that was replaced by the reconstruction oriented PRRA in 1935.

Lands Acquired for Rural Electrification Projects

As important as rural hydro-electrification was, it must be noted that there were human complexities and costs involved in the large-scale construction projects as well. One of the most complicated issues involves the lands on which the hydroelectric facilities were built. At first glance, the issue of land being transferred from Puerto Rican ownership to federal control (from private owners to the PRRA) may seem to support the notion that the New Deal was a tool of colonial exploitation, one that took by force or swindle the most basic form of property—literally the ground beneath Puerto Ricans’ feet. Analysis of the archival record of lands bought by the PRRA for its rural electrification program, however, suggests otherwise.

Far from being a symbol of colonial control, the rural electrification land purchase program represented a very real opportunity for Puerto Ricans to pragmatically confront, negotiate, and profit from the creation of a new land market in the central mountains. During the first half of the Great Depression, there was no market for these mountainous lands due to both the global economic slowdown and the environmental destruction wrought by the 1928 and 1932 hurricanes. While there were significant amounts of small private landowning, there was no way for farmers and homeowners to convert their fixed capital into liquid capital. Combined with the
high levels of debt incurred by these farmers and homeowners from U.S. and local banks, the Puerto Rico Hurricane Relief Loan Section, and from private—sometimes informal—Puerto Rican lenders such as large local or absentee estate owners, the inability to sell part or all of one’s land was a major burden that underscored the problematic nature of a relief system based on emergency aid and private loans.

The PRRA’s rural electrification program, which was designed to make permanent contributions to Puerto Rico’s long-term reconstruction from the Depression, had the ancillary effect of creating a new market for land. Rather than a transfer of land and natural resources from the colony to the metropole, the group of 97 land purchases by the PRRA Rural Electrification division demonstrate that Puerto Ricans who were already in debt and had no immediate prospects of obtaining value from their own land. For example, coffee bushes do not mature for about four years, meaning investment in coffee cannot be quickly turned into profit.397

Because land is always a contested issue, it will be helpful to establish how the PRRA land purchases actually operated. Only then can we establish whether Puerto Rican landowners were pragmatic agents of their own destinies who converted fixed assets into liquid capital, or powerless victims of an overreaching New Deal state which used the financial crisis of the Great Depression to appropriate the only enduring commodity—real estate—from unwitting men and women. What we know is that between 1935 and 1942, land was obtained by the PRRA Rural Electrification division in two ways: it was either signed over from the local government or purchased directly from individual landowners. At no time was land for rural electrification

397 “Statement of Miles H. Fairbank, Assistant Administrator, PRRA,” Hearings Before the Committee on Appropriations, United States Senate, May 16, 1938, on the Work Relief and Public Works Appropriation Act of 1938, 50. For a complete list of lands acquired by the PRRA Rural Electrification division, see Appendix B.
confiscated by force or eminent domain, and by 1942 the PRRA had legally transferred all
property, constructions, and lands back to the local government to remain forever in the public’s
possession, as the PRRA had done with other public works projects such as the Cataño cement
plant.

In May 1935, immediately after agreeing to head the PRRA’s Rural Electrification
division in May 1935, Antonio Lucchetti began seeking title to lands owned by the local
government. By the end of the summer, he had drafted a map of lands required for several
proposed hydroelectric projects (including Toro Negro No. 1 and No. 2 and Carite No.3) that he
submitted to Regional Administrator Carlos Chardón. His twenty-year experience working in
the Puerto Rican government was very valuable, as Lucchetti was well aware of the political and
physical topographies of Puerto Rico and was prepared to meet internal resistance. Like New
Dealers in the United States, Lucchetti had to balance competing forces and desires at the state
and local level; unlike his U.S. counterparts, he had to balance the partisan political forces of two
separate governments with three branches each. On the island, Lucchetti faced resistance from
all sides, including from Blanton Winship, the Puerto Rican governor between 1934 and 1939;
Coalition leaders in the local legislature; and federal advisors such as James Bourne, the former
director of the PRERA—which was currently being replaced by the PRRA. Despite this
resistance, the Rural Electrification division was able to acquire public lands from the local
government using a very narrow and specific scope. Over the next six years, lands requested for
rural electrification projects were carefully surveyed, and their direct use explicitly defined,
whether for large construction or the installation of transmission lines.

398 Antonio Lucchetti to Carlos Chardón, September 6, 1935, Box 3, Folder 1, Records of
the Rural Electrification Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.
Land was also purchased directly from individual landowners. Here, the types of lands acquired varied considerably. In some cases, the PRRA negotiated for the purchase of complete parcels of land—meaning the owner would move. For some, more productive land was made available for purchase from the PRRA Rural Rehabilitation division. In other cases, rural electrification land options involved small or partial amounts of land adjoining areas owned by the local government. These lands were obtained for a variety of reasons, including the construction of power transmission lines, service roads and trails, the installation of narrow gage tracks or other construction machinery. In other cases, lands were to be flooded as part of the creation of large man-made lakes. While some of the lands acquired by the PRRA were marginal or completely unusable for agriculture due to their steep slopes, exhausted soil, or lack of irrigation, others were planted with coffee, bananas, and other fruits for either subsistence, nutritional supplement, or for sale. The PRRA paid different amounts based on the quality of the land. The minimum price paid for lands in the central mountains relating to rural electrification projects was about $100 per cuerda (a cuerda is roughly 0.97 acres) and the average payment was about $190 per cuerda. In all, 1,037 cuerdas were sold to the PRRA for approximately $197,000 between 1936 and 1941.

Not only did the type of land vary, the landowners varied considerably as well. While some lands were owned by families who held thousands of acres of land on the island, others

399 Box 3, Folder 1, Records of the Rural Electrification Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

400 Box 1-8 alphabetical by last name, Records of the Land and Title Section of the Legal Division, Title Opinions on Lands Intended For Rural Electrification Projects, 1936-1938, RG 323, NARA-NYC; Box 1-19 alphabetical by last name, Records of the Land and Title Section of the Legal Division, Land Acquisition Case Files for Rural Electrification Projects, 1937-1941, RG 323, NARA-NYC.
were owned by small farmers with less than one acre. One question we must ask is if this land was not confiscated by force, why would large or small individual landowners sell their land to the PRRA? A sampling of the 97 land acquisition case files and title transfers for rural electrification projects between 1936 and 1941 provides some answers. For Norberto García Jimenez and his wife María Josefa Teresa Roig Casalduc, it had to have been with immense sadness that they sold their 26 cuerdas in Rio Abajo, Utuado. While the $2,800 in Depression era dollars (over $45,000 in today) surely helped condition the blow, the loss of their wood and zinc house and thatch-tobacco drying area to the flood waters of the Dos Bocas dam must have been personally painful. This personal story must be balanced, however, with the fact that Dos Bocas was designed to produce 30 million kilowatts of power per year and continues to serve the rural residents of Utuado and Arecibo with affordable electricity and fresh drinking water today.

The Oliver family also sold land to be used on the Dos Bocas project. For the extended family, including Andres Oliver, Eduardo Oliver, Isabel Bujosa Oliver, Juan and Aminta Oliver, and Juan and Hermina Oliver Maldonado, the sale of approximately 74 cuerdas in Rio Arriba, Arecibo returned over $32,000 (over $517,000 today). If the Oliver family was not already wealthy, this was an extremely good start. While this fortune may seem to overshadow the $244.26 that Estafania Martinez Rios pocketed from the 6.74 cuerdas in Don Alonso, Utuado she sold to the PRRA for the Dos Bocas project, it would be a mistake to assume that the money meant any less to her. A widow with six girls and two boys, all of whom except the oldest girl were below working-age, Estafania used the $1,063.26 she received to pay off a $459 personal loan from Manuel Serrano Fuentes and a $360 loan from the Puerto Rico Hurricane Relief Loan Act.

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401 Land Acquisition Case Files for Rural Electrification Projects, 1937-1941, Records of the Land and Title Section of the Legal Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.
Section. With the remaining money (nearly $4,000 today) she was able to begin anew with her eight children. Her indebtedness was most likely caused by the hurricanes.

The Puerto Rico Hurricane Relief Loan Section, which was not run by the PRRA, had been organized by the Hoover administration following the San Felipe hurricane of 1928. Coffee farmers in the central highlands—where Estafania Martinez Rios’ land was located—made up 96% of the Hurricane Relief Loan Section’s 3,033 loans given out between 1929 and 1943. Coffee farmers, whose faced a four year window if they replanted coffee on lands destroyed by the 1928 and 1932 storms, were loaned $5,209,526 of the $5,673,049 total provided by the relief loans. Demonstrating the difficulty of small landowners like Estafania Martinez Rios’ to re-cultivate coffee (and her case was undoubtedly made more difficult by eight dependent children) by 1943, only 37 loans were repaid in full while over 500 loans were rendered completely uncollectable because of foreclosures by prior lienholders, when properties failed to sell for the amount owed to the holder of the first mortgage. While over 1,000 loans were successfully readjusted, these data suggest that there was no land market in Puerto Rico other than those lands sought by the PRRA for public works construction. Viewed in the context of the Depression and the hurricanes, the evidence suggests that la viuda Estafania would have had little chance at re-entering the coffee market or escaping her accumulated debt. As with the example of Norberto García Jimenez and María Josefa Teresa Roig Casalduc, whose small farm is now at the bottom of Lago Dos Bocas, we must balance the personal story of individual families with the

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improvements in public health, communication, and quality of life experienced by the larger society of Puerto Rico in evaluating the impact of these land sales.

Like all other lands purchased by the PRRA Rural Electrification division, these three purchases were based on surveys conducted by Puerto Rican engineers, negotiated and contracted in Spanish, and notarized by local public notaries. While this should not be exaggerated, the fact that the PRRA was a bilingual New Deal agency sets it apart from almost all other federal agencies at the time. Not only were these land sales conducted in Spanish, but Puerto Ricans felt very comfortable contacting administrators directly in Spanish or English with requests, complaints, and concerns about PRRA construction projects. All such complaints were taken seriously by PRRA officials, who—despite operating outside of the direct political pressures of the local legislature or Washington—relied on the support of the Puerto Rican people as workers and beneficiaries for the survival of their programs.

Many letters referenced small damage claims, like that of Gerónimo Fontánes of Saltillo, Adjuntas, who wrote that PRRA trucks had damaged his small farm where they were building a road on the Garzas dam project. Fontánes also asked for employment on the project. In many cases, such as the June 1937 letter of complaint from Manuel V. Torres, which alleged that PRRA employees had twice trespassed and caused damage on his property in Peñuelas, senior officials were involved in the response. Referencing the Torres letter, Antonio Lucchetti personally wrote to Miles Fairbank and Tomás Bernardini Palés, instructing them that while he was not familiar with Torres’ name, the general area of the property in question was used to build transmission lines between Garzas and Tallaboa. Lucchetti informed Fairbank that he
would investigate the matter further to better determine the exact location of the Torres property and extent of the damages.403

Complaints also came in the form of hand-signed petitions that argued that PRRA public works—while serving the large rural population—conflicted with previous arrangements for irrigation and drinking water to large farmers. An August 1936 petition, signed by 82 merchants, industrialists, and colonos (usually small cane-growing farmers) of Jagua Pasto, Guayanilla, who argued that the Garzas project conflicted with previous irrigation arrangements between themselves and the local legislature. Located 16 miles west of Ponce, on the southern slope of the island, these Guayanilla farmers and entrepreneurs had most likely been served by the Ponce Electric Company (PEC) and Puerto Rico Irrigation Service, who had previously supplied irrigation water and limited electric power to the southern coast region. While this complaint pitted personal interest versus the collective improvement of extended rural electricity, other concerns demonstrated the long-standing legacy of environmental activism in Puerto Rico. For example, the municipal government of Peñuelas sent a letter to Miles Fairbank on behalf of the neighbors and taxpayers of Peñuelas that strongly protested the pollution of the Guiana River caused by the Garzas project. Writing that “los habitantes de este pueblo están protestando enérgicamente ante esta administración,” the letter continued that “por estar obligados a usar una agua sucia que temen ellos pudiera provocar una ruinosa epidemia.” The combined concern

403 Gerónimo Fontánes to Miles Fairbank, nd, Box 1, Las Garzas Hydroelectric Project folder, Records of the Rural Electrification Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC; Manuel V. Torres to Miles Fairbank, June 2, 1937, Box 1, Las Garzas Hydroelectric Project folder, Records of the Rural Electrification Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC; Lucchetti to Miles Fairbank and Tomás Bernardini Palés, June 1937, Box 1, Las Garzas Hydroelectric Project folder, Records of the Rural Electrification Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC. For information on colonos, see Dietz, 113-114.
for the natural environment and the public health reflected in this letter was common to Puerto Ricans in the 1930s, who aligned with the PRRA to combat these issues yet also expressed concerns and complaints when these needs were not met, or when new health or environmental problems arose.\footnote{Neighbors and taxpayers of Peñuelas to Miles Fairbank, August 10, 1936, Box 1, Las Garzas Hydroelectric Project folder, Records of the Rural Electrification Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC; Memorandum de Esta Administración Municipal de Peñuelas to Miles Fairbank, September 8, 1937, Box 1, Las Garzas Hydroelectric Project folder, Records of the Rural Electrification Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC. Writing that the inhabitants of Peñuelas are “protesting vigorously,” the letter explained that residents were “being forced to use dirty water that they fear could lead to a ruinous epidemic.”}

**Creating the Water Resources Authority**

Testifying before the Congress in spring 1940, Antonio Lucchetti declared that the formation of the Puerto Rico Water Resources Authority (WRA) was a matter of self-preservation for all of the hydroelectric facilities constructed by the PRRA and currently operated by the *Utilización de las Fuentes Fluviales* (UFF). When asked repeatedly by Republican congressmen such as Fred L. Crawford of Michigan and Charles Hawks, Jr. of Wisconsin, if the true purpose of the WRA was to place unfair pressure on the private electrical utility corporations in Puerto Rico, Lucchetti answered that the UFF was “struggling to preserve our own system. Private interests have been making opposition to [us] . . . by opposing any legislation” to raise funds or build new hydroelectric plants. When asked by Crawford if the WRA will attempt to move into all parts of the island, Lucchetti replied that he did not and could not know what the WRA would do in the future. Exasperated, Crawford exclaimed that the private companies would not be able to compete with the public corporation and would most
likely be driven out of business or forced to consolidate their business into the WRA. This was un-American. Further, the transformation of the UFF into the WRA would “take power out of the local legislature and remove it from local political influence.” This was undemocratic.\(^{405}\) Though the TVA had also made the argument that it would not conflict with private power, Crawford understood that in Puerto Rico, an island the size of Connecticut, public power would have a greater chance of dominating the private industry than in the United States where the Tennessee Valley was relatively isolated from other regions of the country.\(^{406}\)

Lucchetti had heard these arguments before, and remained undaunted by Crawford’s challenge. The idea of a self-financing public authority to control water and electric power in Puerto Rico was not new, though it had picked up momentum during the 1930s with the successful establishment of the New York Power Authority by Governor Roosevelt in 1931 and the Tennessee Valley Authority by President Roosevelt in 1933. Congressman Crawford, who had made his money building, financing, and operating beet sugar mills in the United States during and after WWI, and would later serve as the director of the Michigan National Bank and the Refiners Transport and Petroleum Corporation of Detroit, was one of many opponents of the bill.\(^{407}\) By 1940, at least three bills to create the WRA had been defeated, largely by the efforts of Rafael Martinez Nadal, the President of the Coalition-controlled Senate, whom Lucchetti had

\(^{405}\) “Creating the Puerto Rico Water Resources Authority,” 23, 31, 55, 66.

\(^{406}\) Bauer and Gold, 216.

publicly accused of using his position to advocate on behalf of the private utility companies. One bill was vetoed by Governor Winship in 1938, largely for technical reasons. Exactly what kind of technical reasons it is hard to say; any bill had to navigate a gauntlet of partisan politics in Washington and San Juan, corporate interests, a vigorous public debate in the island’s free press, existing laws in Puerto Rico, the Organic Act, and the changing goals and focus of the New Deal in context of national and global events.

New Dealers such as Ickes and Lucchetti remained convinced of the WRA’s importance, as did influential politicians to the left of the New Deal such as Vito Marcantonio, the American Labor party congressman from East Harlem who called the WRA bill especially good for the health of poor families, while also buffering the island from further tree depletion, soil erosion, and agricultural underperformance. But even as public support steadily increased, entrenched interests on the island persisted against all proposals to create the public authority. At the start of the 1940 hearings, the New York Times warned that the House Committee on Insular Affairs expected a “Puerto Rican free-for-all” today as hearings on the WRA were due to begin. Sugar farmers and large landowners, for whom private water and electric service had been catered, and who, according to Lucchetti, “owes [their] whole existence to the irrigation service” of the


410 “Creating the Puerto Rico Water Resources Authority,” 36.

insular government, preferred the status quo. To these large landowners, the Water Authority was too closely related to the enforcement of the 500-Acre law, which had been proposed by the Chardón Plan, attempted by the PRRA, and now being discussed by Luis Muñoz Marin and the newly-created Popular Democratic Party (PPD)—who would win the Senate in the upcoming 1940 elections. Testifying on behalf of the Juan Serrallés estate and Central Mercedita of Ponce, sugar attorney Arthur L. Quinn, who was also the lawyer for the Puerto Rico British West Indies Sugar Association, expressed his concerns about the water resources bill, as did the Coalición appointed Resident Commissioner Bolívar Pagán of the Partido Socialista. Pagán objected to the bill as a matter of principle, and argued that the new law would turn over the water resources of Puerto Rico to the “unbridled dictates of one man—the executive director.” Everyone knew that Lucchetti would be the director. 412

Called the “Little TVA” or “Puerto Rican TVA” by the U.S. and Puerto Rican press, the various attempts to establish the WRA were closely followed by newspapers such as El Mundo, El Dia, La Correspondencia, El Imparcial, and the New York Times. These newspapers reported that a growing majority of Puerto Ricans had embraced the idea of truly public works, and supported the creation of the WRA. In October 1939, El Mundo announced that its editors celebrated the recent resolution of the Asociación de Agricultores de Puerto Rico to support the bill. The Farmers’ Association, which had not previously supported the bill, appropriated the goals of the WRA as their own values by voting on an agreement that declared that “la extension de tal servicio a todos los distritos rurales de la Isla es imperiosa para proveer comodidad,

412 “Creating the Puerto Rico Water Resources Authority,” 24, 351, 391, 396. Juan Serrallés was the founder of the Central Mercedita and the Distilería Serrallés, the maker of Don Q rum. Arthur L. Quinn was the attorney for the Juan Serrallés estate which was run by his son, Juan Eugenio Serrallés after 1921.
difundir cultura, y mejorar el ‘standard’ de vida en los campos de Puerto Rico, lo cual constituye una de las principales aspiraciones de los agricultores organizados.” El Mundo agreed that the formation of the WRA was the first step to buying out the remaining private utility companies on the island, and expressed that it was “en favor del programa de nacionalización del servicio hidroeléctrico . . . no sólo para los usos corrientes del hogar, sino también para la industrialización de los campos.”

By February 1940, El Imparcial declared that “There is No Excuse for Not Passing the Bill to Create the Water Resources Authority of Puerto Rico,” which had the “thunderous” support of the people, who viewed the creation of the WRA as a chance to permanently extend of the coordinated work of the UFF and PRRA. For almost two years, the collaboration between the UFF and PRRA had increased rural access to power and lowered rates across the island, as the investment in public works had forced private companies to lower their rates for the first time.

As early as August 1938, as construction of the Garzas and Dos Bocas projects was just getting underway, José Enrique Colom, the Commissioner of the Interior of Puerto Rico, reported in El Mundo that public rates were much lower than the private utility companies, and that new public competition would drive private prices down as well. Colom noted that the new hydroelectricity projects of the UFF and PRRA were essential to reducing the costs of development across the island, as the UFF would sell electricity to the Cataño cement plant at a much lower rate than the

413 “Celebramos el acuerdo de la Asociación de Agricultores,” El Mundo, October 17, 1939. The text reads that “the extension of such [hydroelectric] service to all of the rural districts of the island is imperative to provide comfort, spread culture, and improve the standard of living on all the farms of Puerto Rico, which constitutes one of the principal aspirations of the organized farmers” and that the newspaper favors “the program of nationalizing hydroelectric service . . . not only for everyday household use, but also for the industrialization of the farms.”
private utilities, such as Porto Rico Railway, Light, and Power Company (RLPC), who has “flatly refused” to negotiate the price of power service to the plant.414

The WRA was seen by all as a chance to make permanent the gains of public power on the island. In March 1940, La Correspondencia expressed hope that “The Joke Will End This Year” and that the bill will be passed, as the WRA was urgently needed and would provide a crucial service to Puerto Rican farmers by placing the control electric power away from political forces and into professional hands.415 Over the next year, as WRA legislation continued to stall in the local legislature, La Correspondencia lamented the failure of the local legislature to pass the WRA bill but expressed concern that the Congress might try to do so from Washington. Deeply convinced that the WRA will “greatly benefit the whole island,” the editors warned that it would be wrong for the federal government to “humiliate” Puerto Rico by overriding the local legislature. Though they granted that the Coalition had some legitimate objections to the bill, La Correspondencia argued that many Puerto Rican politicians legislated “following the dangerous course of political passion and personal hatred,” the common good was better served by disinterested public service that was not motivated to “benefit private persons and private entities


[that] injure the social interests of the country.” The failure of the legislature to pass the bill had created a “caricature of a democratic system” whereby senators and representatives were attempting to govern as executives.416

In the spring of 1941, the “Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority Act” was passed by the local legislature and sent to La Fortaleza by new Senate President Luis Muñoz Marin and signed into law by Governor Guy J. Swope as Insular Act #83. The law created the WRA as a government authority that was owned by the people of Puerto Rico but existed as “a corporation having legal existence and personality separate and apart from that of the Government. The debts, obligations, contracts, bonds, notes, debentures, receipts, expenditures, accounts, funds, undertakings, and property of the Authority, its officers, agents or employees shall be deemed to be those of said government-controlled corporation and not to be those of the [local] Government or any office, bureau, department, commission, dependency, municipality, branch, agent, officer or employee thereof.”417

A product of the Puerto Rican New Deal, the WRA had both immediate and long-lasting effect on the island by lessening dependence on imported fuel, supplying cheap, renewable electric power for home and industry, conserving the wood supply in Puerto Rico (which had been depleted for use as charcoal), and contributing to improvements in public health. In


addition, the WRA was designed to be self-financing through the sale of revenue bonds, which allowed it to operate independently from the insular budget and/or credit limit, while also not creating new burdens on local or federal taxpayers. As one of the most politically feasible models of financing large-scale public works, revenue bonds were the most common method of constructing hydroelectric programs in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{418}

The creation of the WRA was the apex of Lucchetti’s long technocratic career in public service. Reflecting the same liberal faith in progressive engineering expressed by Morris Cooke regarding rural electrification in the United States, Lucchetti commented that the WRA would run as an efficient and nonpartisan agency that earned the people’s “good will and patronage irrespective of their position in party politics, religion, race, or class.” Its ability to serve all areas of the island without discrimination would be essential to its success, just as the UFF was widely respected by the people, who, he added, “speak highly of the service it renders, want it extended, and want it to grow and to be kept functioning with economic efficiency.”\textsuperscript{419} Most of all, the WRA meant the survival of the gains made during the brief tenure of the PRRA rural electrification program and the millions of dollars already invested by U.S. taxpayers. The WRA’s autonomy meant that these public works would survive and could be expanded. Expansion, autonomy, and increased coordination would save the U.S. the combined investments currently put into the UFF by the PRRA, REA, PWA, and Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC). Without the increased expansion and coordination of the island’s power supply, Lucchetti

\textsuperscript{418} Bauer and Gold, 326-327.

\textsuperscript{419} “Creating the Puerto Rico Water Resources Authority,” 19, 21.
had warned, the large-scale hydroelectric facilities such as Las Garzas and Dos Bocas would fall into private hands within a few years for pennies on the dollar already spent.420

Rather than allow this privatization of public works, Lucchetti planned on breaking up the private power monopolies that had dominated the electric and water supply on the island for decades. As for his earlier testimony that the WRA would not compete with private electricity corporations and had no plans for taking them over? It appears to have been skillful, but disingenuous lip service paid to the hostile Republican congressmen who were intent on protecting corporate interests. When Congressman Crawford informed him that private utility rates were falling in Puerto Rico, Lucchetti testified that this was only due to the new public competition represented by the New Deal’s rural electrification program (even though it did not service urban areas yet). Arguing that the private companies “wouldn’t build a line a half a mile long to reach a farmer,” Lucchetti was making his intentions clear even as he testified to not knowing what might happen in the future.421

Yet, Lucchetti had a pretty good idea that the WRA would continue to put pressure on the private monopolies. The PRRA had already bought out the Ponce Electric Company (PEC) in 1937, and Lucchetti pursued the other two regional monopolies immediately after the creation of the WRA in 1941. Though this pursuit was aided by the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1938 decision to dismiss a case brought by the Porto Rico Railway, Light, and Power Company (RLPC) against the local government and PRRA, Lucchetti was unable to reach agreements with the Canadian-

420 “Creating the Puerto Rico Water Resources Authority,” 122-123.

owned RLPC or the locally-owned Mayagüez Light, Ice, and Power Company (MLIPC).\footnote{Litigation – Puerto Rico Railway, Light and Power Company” folder, Claims, RG 323, NARA-NYC. On June 16, 1938, Judge Robert Cooper, U.S. District Court for Puerto Rico, sided with the RLPC, which was contesting the rural electrification program of the PRRA. However, the Supreme Court dismissed the case, citing the rejection of two other corporate attacks on New Deal rural electrification programs, Alabama Power Company v. Ickes and Tennessee Electric Power Company v. TVA. Cooper had sentenced Pedro Albizu Campos in 1936.}


The WRA continued and expanded the electrification work of the UFF and the PRRA. By 1951, more than 35,000 rural families used electricity at home for the first time.\footnote{Luis Muñoz Marin, “Mensaje del gobernador Luis Muñoz Marin, en la inauguración de la planta termoeléctrica de Palo Seco, en Cataño, 17 de febrero de 1951,” (Message of Governor Luis Muñoz Marin, at the inauguration of the Palo Seco thermoelectric plant in Cataño, February 17, 1951), FLMM, accessed April 26, 2013, http://www.flmm.org/v2/MENSAJES_PDF/2%201951%2017%20febrero%20.pdf.} Three years later, in 1955, the WRA operated 19 hydroelectric-generating stations, four steam-generating systems, and 108 distribution stations that sent electricity across thousands of miles of transmission lines.
In all, they serviced 294,539 customers in 75 municipalities in both urban and rural areas, which meant that about 90% of all Puerto Rican residences had electricity.\textsuperscript{425}

In addition, the WRA expanded the supply of clean drinking water to all areas of the island. In 1942, just one year after its formation, the PPD-controlled Senate passed the Aqueduct Act, which was the first step in nationalizing the water supply of Puerto Rico to prevent against regional drought or pollution. The law stipulated that any municipal water supply system found not meeting the health standards of the insular Health Department, would be turned over to the WRA. Almost immediately, declarations were made of the water systems of San Juan, Ponce, Mayagüez, Arecibo, Caguas, Aguadilla, Cayey, Juana Díaz, and Vega Baja. When San Juan filed an injunction suit against the new law, the law was upheld by the Puerto Rican Supreme Court. The water supplies of San Juan and Ponce, the island’s largest, were found to be “wholly inadequate, unreliable, and of inferior quality.”\textsuperscript{426} Three years later, in 1945, the local legislature passed the “Puerto Rico Aqueduct and Sewer Authority Act,” which was signed into law by Governor Rex Tugwell as Act #40 on May 1, 1945. The Aqueduct and Sewer Authority, modeled on the WRA, completed the work done by the PRRA and made impressive changes to the public health of Puerto Rico. In 1945, while 76 of the 77 municipalities had public water systems (many of which were unfit to drink at the time), only 42 of the 77 had public sewer systems.

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systems. Twenty years later, all Puerto Rican municipalities had clean drinking water and working sewers.\textsuperscript{427}

**Conclusion**

Between 1935 and 1943, PRRA engineers constructed a new rural infrastructure designed to make electricity publicly available. Like the cement plant and hurricane-proof public works, rural electrification was designed to protect Puerto Rican natural resources (water and electricity) from private corporate control. Part of a broader New Deal goal to enhance the quality of life for all U.S. citizens, these projects helped foster a new understanding of the “public” in Puerto Rico, one that had mass popular support. By 1941, in fact, the Puerto Rican public had earned a seat at the New Deal table. As Rex Tugwell reported to Harold Ickes during hearings on 500-Acre land law reform featured testimony from four distinct groups: “the sugar corporations, of course as the interests chiefly effected; the workers in the industry; the colonos or independent farmers; and what was called the ‘public’.”\textsuperscript{428}

The emergence of the public as a potential political force signaled a new era in Puerto Rican politics that must account for the popularity of New Deal reforms and reconstruction projects. For while the engineering of the New Deal in Puerto Rico distinguished the island from


\textsuperscript{428}Tugwell, “Investigation Into the Administrative Responsibilities Under the Five Hundred Acre Limitation on Land Holdings in the Organic Act of Puerto Rico,” in Changing the Colonial Climate, 44.
other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean, there were also elements of PRRA public work construction that brought Puerto Rico closer to its regional neighbors.

By the beginning of the 1940s, as WWII raged in Western and Eastern Europe and across the Pacific, two features distinguished the politics of the diverse nations, colonies, and territories of the Caribbean: the emergence of populist government and the unprecedented hemispheric solidarity in support of the Allied war effort against Nazism in Europe and Japanese imperialism in Asia. As we will see in the following chapters, Puerto Rico displayed an ambiguous relationship to the rest of the Caribbean during these tumultuous years, as the creation of public agencies like the PRCC and WRA highlight the complex ways in which mass-based support for New Deal liberalism corresponded to contemporary political developments in the Caribbean. This was particularly so in Cuba and the Dominican Republic—two nations that also had a close and conflicted relationship with the United States after 1900—where the Constitution of 1940 and the rise of Trujillo (respectively) displayed similar elements to the redefinition of public citizenship engineered by PRRA public works. At the same time, however, the experience of Cuba and the Dominican contrasted sharply with that of Puerto Rico during both the Great Depression and World War II. Therefore, no evaluation of the New Deal in Puerto Rico is complete without a broader comparison of socioeconomic and political life in a Caribbean context.
Between 1935 and 1943, the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration built hurricane-proof public works designed to secure the island from future storms, protect its natural resources from private corporate control, and increase physical and social mobility. These capital-intensive engineering projects, such as the construction of the Cataño cement plant and the development of rural hydroelectricity, attempted to provide short-term recovery from the infrastructural and environmental devastation of the 1928 and 1932 hurricanes while, at the same time, making a direct intervention into the long-term public good through the construction of a new public health infrastructure. Part of the Second New Deal, the PRRA was a locally-run federal agency that that brought together new federal reform energy, unprecedented sources of capital for public works construction, and a large contingent of Puerto Rican engineers, teachers, nurses, doctors, farmers, workers, and parents who conceived, designed, administered, and built the PRRA’s engineering projects.

As has been indicated previously, this alliance between Puerto Rican and U.S. New Dealers was far from an act of colonial domination orchestrated by Washington, but rather was based on a series of pragmatic decisions as Puerto Ricans closely followed the unfolding events of the 1932 and 1936 elections. Recognizing the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932 and his convincing reelection in 1936 as a potential for change, PRRA engineers and academics did not idly await administrative orders, but actively used the New Deal to implement long-standing goals of permanent recovery and reconstruction. To secure this permanence, the PRRA assisted the creation of public authorities and corporations such as the Puerto Rico Cement Corporation (PRCC) and the Puerto Rico Water Resources Authority (WRA). Made popular by the New Deal
in the U.S., publicly-owned agencies guaranteed that the social and economic gains of New Deal public works projects would remain separate from the intensely partisan nature of local politics in the 1930s. In Puerto Rico, public authorities also provided a means to lessen dependency on imported goods—as in the case of PRCC cement—and upend the corporate monopoly on basic utility service such as electricity and indoor plumbing—as in the case of WRA hydroelectric power.

The construction of public works and the creation of public authorities had direct political implications in Puerto Rico, as the idea of the “public” emerged as a substantial force in local politics by the end of the 1930s. Completed during the chaotic years from 1937-1943—almost exactly midway between the political dominance of the Coalition and the Partido Popular Democrático (PPD)—the creation of these public works and public authorities stood in stark contrast to the breakdown of party politics during the same years. As both a symbol of Puerto Rican pride and an unrivaled source of employment during the Great Depression, these projects intellectually and physically paved the way for a specific form of Puerto Rican populism that was marked by the formation of the Confederación General de Trabajadores (CGT) and the electoral victory of the Popular Democratic Party in 1940.429

Both events were linked to the New Deal. While the CGT was closely connected to the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in the U.S., which had been strengthened by the passage of the Wagner Act (or National Labor Relations Act) in 1935 that guaranteed organized labor’s right to collective bargaining, the PPD was led by Luis Muñoz Marín, formerly of the

429 Galvin, 94. For a discussion of the close connection between the PPD and the CGT, see Villaronga, 94-96; Emilio Gonzalez Diaz, “Class struggle and politics in Puerto Rico during the decade of the 40’s: the rise of the P.D.P.,” Two Thirds 2, Issue 1 (1979), 50.
Liberal Party, who had been one of the New Deal’s loudest champions in Puerto Rico until about 1937. Beginning that year, during the lingering debate over the Tydings Bill and visceral response to the Ponce Massacre, Muñoz Marín skillfully walked a political tightrope in which he distanced himself from U.S. policy makers like Ernest Gruening and Governor Blanton Winship, yet retained the image of being able to take over the popular PRRA public works and resettlement program and expand them into a broader policy of land reform, beginning with the enforcement of the 500-Acre law. This balancing act won Muñoz Marín and the Populares a narrow victory in the 1940 elections that displaced the Coalition of the Republican and Socialist parties, removing the most formidable critics of the New Deal from local political power.430

This victory should not be taken lightly. Like the formation of the CGT, the arrival of Muñoz Marín as President of the Puerto Rican Senate marked a more permanent place for New Deal public works and local public authorities. Fortified by FDR’s appointment of Rex Tugwell to the governorship in 1941, the election of Muñoz Marín allowed for the transfer of PRRA programs to local control while giving the PPD control over the powerful patronage mechanisms that, as in the U.S., formed the basis of his lasting political coalition. By controlling a patronage program that once dwarfed the budget and credit limit of the local government, the PPD introduced populist government to Puerto Rico.431

430 The 1940 election was extremely close, with the PPD earning just under 38% of the total vote but holding a new majority of Senate seats over the Coalition (10-9) which elevated Muñoz Marín to President of the Senate. The PPD and Coalition each held 18 Representatives. The Republican and Socialist parties lost between 26-28% of their vote count from the 1936 elections. For 1940 election results, see Anderson, 34; Córdova, 480n174.

431 As of New Year’s Day, 1937, the PRRA employed over 52,000 workers and maintained a payroll of nearly $1 million per month. Of these workers, only about 5.7 were in administrative or bureaucratic positions. Over 90% of PRRA administrators and 99% of all workers were Puerto Rican. See Fairbank, The Chardon Plan and the Puerto Rico
While the New Deal in Puerto Rico certainly distinguished the U.S. territory from other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean, the rise of Puerto Rican populism also brought the island closer to its regional neighbors. This was in part due to the large-scale public relations campaign that the PRRA conducted in Latin America. Run by Antonio Cruz y Nieves and John W. Thomson, the PRRA Information and Research division published a wide array of publicity and propaganda in print media, radio, and newsreels. Detailing all aspects of PRRA work from cattle tick elimination to rural electrification, Spanish-language publicity was printed in newspapers and magazines in both Puerto Rico and throughout Latin American and the Caribbean. The PRRA Information and Research division distributed publicity to Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

By comparing the role of patronage and public works in the formation of Puerto Rican populism with other areas of the Spanish Caribbean, the following chapter will argue that political developments in Puerto Rico paralleled those in Cuba and the Dominican Republic. As part of the rising nationalism in Latin America and the Caribbean, the emergence of the CGT and PPD displayed an uneven or ambivalent relationship with the rise of Fulgenico Batista in Cuba.


432 Antonio Cruz y Nieves to Miles Fairbank, August 18, 1937, Information and Research Section - General Memoranda folder, Box 2, General Records relating to Administration, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

433 “Lista de Publicaciones Hispanoamericanas Sobre Agricultura,” Information and Research Section - General Memoranda folder, Box 2, General Records relating to Administration, RG 323, NARA-NYC; Antonio Cruz y Nieves to Miles Fairbank, June 23, 1939, Information and Research Section - General Memoranda folder, Box 2, General Records relating to Administration, RG 323, NARA-NYC.
and Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. At the same time, however, Puerto Rican populism shared many important characteristics with the development of corporatist populism elsewhere in the region during the 1930s and 1940s, such as: its popular, anti-corporate discourse; its multi-class alliance and political coalition; its state-oriented nature; its focus on industrializing and modernizing key social and economic structures; the ambiguity between state-led populism and true representative democracy. In many ways, the comparison of Batista and the “populist” Constitution of 1940 in Cuba or the consolidation of all political and economic power into Trujillo’s “populist” dictatorship in the Dominican Republic will complicate our understanding of the election of Muñoz Marín and the PPD in Puerto Rico. In other ways, this comparison will speak directly to the FDR administration’s construction and maintenance of the New Deal coalition in the United States and the similarities between New Deal liberalism and Latin American populism on the eve of World War II.

Chapter 7: The Rise of Populism in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic
During the Great Depression

Puerto Rico

The emergence of Puerto Rican populism was signified by two unconnected events in 1940: the formation of the General Confederation of Workers (CGT) and the electoral victory of the Popular Democratic Party (PPD). Although these two organizations were not initially related, they soon developed a close relationship. Together, they were instrumental in disrupting the power of the Coalition. Whereas the CGT challenged the supremacy of the Federación Libre de Trabajadores (FLT) in Puerto Rico’s labor movement, thereby undercutting the political leverage of the Socialist Party, the PPD rose from an intraparty rivalry within the Liberal Party in 1938 and supplanted the Coalition in the closely contested election of 1940.435 Capitalizing on the paradigm of reconstruction that had been used in PRRA publicity and cemented in place by PRRA public works, Luis Muñoz Marín and the PPD secured the support of the “available mass” of Puerto Ricans who worked for or benefitted from the New Deal on the island. Using the imagery of the countryside, the PPD was able to build a New Deal-style political coalition of rural farmers and farm workers, industrial workers, and the urban middle class—who followed Muñoz Marín to the PPD after his ouster from the Liberal Party.436

The PPD victory in the 1940 elections was highly significant as it allowed Muñoz Marín to replace Rafael Martínez Nadal as President of the Puerto Rican Senate. Contrasting himself with Martínez Nadal, who had been one of the most formidable critics of the PRRA between

435 The divide between the CGT and FLT mirrored the split between the CIO and AFL in the United States. See Ayala and Bernabe, 146; Rodríguez Beruff, Strategy As Politics, 161.

1933 and 1941, Muñoz Marín advocated for the continuation of New Deal reconstruction projects. By constructing a New Deal-style coalition in Puerto Rico, based on party loyalty from rural and urban workers in exchange for direct government intervention in employment, land reform, and rural rehabilitation, the PPD was able to claim ownership of the large number of PRRA public works and public health projects that had been transferred to local control. In the tumultuous years surrounding its formation in 1938, when the island was still gripped by the assassination of Francis Riggs, the debate over the Tydings Bill, the Ponce Massacre, and the imprisonment of Pedro Albizu Campos, the PPD was able to distance itself from the most unpopular elements of the federal government. During the campaign in 1940, however, Muñoz Marín skillfully presented himself as the most logical heir to the patronage-driven public works projects of the New Deal years.

During World War II, the CGT and PPD became closer to each other. This period, which encompassed “brilliant rise and tragic fall” of the CGT, included a tightening and then fraying of their political relationship after 1945. Like the CIO in the United States, with which it was aligned, the CGT can only be understood in the context of the Great Depression, as it grew out of a decade of labor organization and strikes that not only challenged corporate capital, but also the leadership of the FLT—the dominant craft oriented union that held political sway on the island. The Communist Party of Puerto Rico (CP) also assisted labor mobilization between 1933 and 1940, when workers in tobacco, sugar, grapes, needlework, baking, gasoline, driving, and students all mounted serious and successful strikes. These strikes were not composed of men

437 Ayala and Bernabe, 136.

438 Huelgas, Caja 674-678, Fondo Oficina del Gobernador, Tarea 96-20, AGPR. See also Ayala and Bernabe, 136.
alone, as women workers played an important role in the mobilization of the tobacco and needlework industries. Women were active members of at least nine FLT-affiliated unions in needlework by 1934, and later formed the Congreso Obrero de Mujeres (Women’s Labor Congress) in support of the New Deal’s Fair Labor Standards Act in 1938.439

The high point of labor mobilization came in January 1938, when over 7,500 dockworkers went on strike in San Juan—paralyzing the dockyards, threatening island commerce, and transforming the organized labor movement in Puerto Rico into what would become the CGT in 1940. Leaving nearly 100,000 other workers unemployed for 37 days, the dockworkers’ strike solidified the affiliation between the CIO, the Puerto Rican CP, and the Puerto Rican labor movement—particularly in areas outside of sugar that had never before experienced labor mobilization on this scale.440 The strike was actively supported by the CIO-affiliated National Maritime Union, and the new alliance between the CIO and CGT was widely applauded by the Puerto Rican public in two ways. First, Puerto Rican workers gravitated to the CGT in large numbers, as the CGT grew to include over 80,000 members in 59 affiliated unions by October 1940, and more than 150,000 members in affiliated 159 unions by May 1942.441


440 Galvin, 93-94; Ayala and Bernabe, 109, 138; Villaronga, 57; Rodríguez Beruff, Strategy As Politics, 161.

441 Ayala and Bernabe, 145-146.
Among these workers were the employees of the Puerto Rico Cement Corporation (PRCC) at the Cataño plant.\textsuperscript{442}

Second, the new alliance between the CIO and CGT signified a new dimension of the New Deal in Puerto Rico, as the rise of the CIO (while explicitly \textit{not} a New Deal agency) was closely connected to the New Deal’s central goal of broadening the concept of economic democracy by enhancing the negotiating power of labor. Although the Wagner Act of 1935 essentially legalized the bargaining position of labor, it was the General Motors (GM) “sit-down strike” of the United Auto Workers (UAW) in the winter of 1936-1937 that forced GM to the negotiating table and solidified the position of the UAW and CIO.\textsuperscript{443} It was the CIO that made the Wagner Act a reality.

Like the GM strike of 1936-1937, the Puerto Rican dockworkers’ strike of 1938 galvanized the Puerto Rican labor movement toward the more inclusive industrial unionism of the CIO. The following year, in 1939, Puerto Rican workers in other industries utilized their enhanced position within the New Deal coalition to put pressure on the status quo. In the changed political atmosphere following the dockworkers’ strike, groups such as the \textit{Unión Protectora de Desempleados} (UPD) or unemployed union, the Puerto Rican CP, and the \textit{Asociación de Choferes} or drivers’ union each called for closer ties to the CGT and for any

\textsuperscript{442} El Mundo, December 16, 1943, 10, Box 2, Accounting and Cost folder, Records Relating to the Cement Plant Project, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

political organization that could extend the popularly supported slum clearance and hydroelectric development programs of the PRRA. As part of a planned “hunger march” in September 1939, these groups implicitly called for the extension of several PRRA reforms, demanding that “running water and electric lights, first aid stations, schools and school lunch rooms be extended to [those] zones where most of our people live. We are against slums; we are for a program of building hygienic houses for the people.”

Due to the breakdown of party politics that was occurring during these years, it was not clear who would sustain these public works projects in the future. As a federal agency, the PRRA was not designed to be a permanent political institution. In addition, by 1940, FDR was transitioning the New Deal towards the impending confrontation with Hitler’s Germany—even as Congress was steadfastly maintaining U.S. neutrality. One of the first casualties of the New Deal’s preparation for war was the idea of domestic public works, as the two massive public works agencies were merged into the Federal Works Agency (FWA) by the Reorganization Act of 1939, which consolidated the activities of a wide range of domestic public works agencies including the Public Buildings Administration (PBA), Public Works Administration (PWA), Work Projects Administration (WPA), Public Roads Administration (PRA), U.S. Housing Authority (USHA), Federal Fire Council (FFC), and Bureau of Community Facilities (BCF). From 1939 to 1941, the FWA was originally headed by John M. Carmody of the Rural

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Electrification Administration; after Pearl Harbor, the FWA was headed by Major General Philip B. Fleming.  

In the context of the coming war, the New Deal of the 1930s was not a viable vehicle for extending its program of public works and public authorities on the island into the 1940s. However, the PRRA played a vital role in the re-emergence of Luis Muñoz Marín after his split with the Liberal Party in 1938 and his success in the 1940 elections. This was because a large number of public officials who had migrated alongside Muñoz Marín from the Liberal Party to the PPD were also current or former employees of the PRRA. This included key PRRA engineers such as Regional Administrator Guillermo Esteves (who replaced Miles Fairbank as Assistant Administrator in 1941), Antonio Lucchetti, and Benigno Fernández García—the new Secretary of Labor, who had been the first Puerto Rican Attorney General (and was the brother of Rafael Fernández García, co-author of the original Chardón Plan). After the formation of the CGT in 1940, Secretary of Labor Benigno Fernández García was instrumental in settling disputes with the FLT and positioning the local government behind the strikers against the sugar industry—just as he had done in the 500-Acre law cases as Attorney General. As a “key leader of the PPD,” Fernández García’s actions against big sugar helped generate mass popular support for the PPD in the election of 1940 and after.

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446 Smith, 256.

447 Ayala and Bernabe, 145-146; Villaronga, 103; Rodríguez Beruff, Strategy As Politics, 190.

During the two years leading up to this election, the nascent PPD cultivated a new relationship with the Puerto Rican “public.” By turning PRRA public works and land reforms into the centerpiece of their platform, the PPD worked to make explicit the popular alliance between the PRRA and the public by targeting specific sectors such as CGT-affiliated workers (such as público drivers, dockyard workers, and communists), along with women, professionals, and religious groups.\textsuperscript{449} Catering its message to farmers, workers, and the professional classes, the PPD was led by the charismatic Muñoz Marín and portrayed itself in both personalistic and institutional discourse.\textsuperscript{450} For example, the campaign combined popular slogans designed to appeal to the rural masses and connect with broader developments in Latin American nationalism with explicit bureaucratic promises to continue and protect PRRA public works. While the campaign featured the prominent slogan “\textit{Pan, Tierra y Libertad}” (Bread, Land, and Liberty) and embraced the image of the rural farmer or \textit{jibaro}, it more directly focused on the enforcement of the 500-Acre law and the creation of a Land Authority modeled on the PRCC and WRA.\textsuperscript{451}

At the center of the campaign was Muñoz Marín. Personally campaigning through all parts of the island with “extraordinary energy,” Muñoz Marín and the PPD gave hundreds of speeches at “large and small roadside gatherings” throughout the mountainous interior.\textsuperscript{452}

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\item \textsuperscript{449} Villaronga, 45-71.
\item \textsuperscript{450} Franklin W. Knight, \textit{The Caribbean: The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism}, Second Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 269; Ayala and Bernabe, 136-137.
\item \textsuperscript{451} On the PPD’s use of Catholicism to further embellish its \textit{jibaro} image and enhance its rural popularity, Villaronga understatedly writes that the Muñoz Marín and the PPD “showed little reluctance to use religious values, symbols, and expressions as a source of political legitimacy.” Villaronga, 68.
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remote rural areas not yet lit by PRRA electric power, Muñoz Marín’s proxies amplified battery-powered recorded versions of his speeches, distributed thousands of free copies of the party newspaper *El Batey*, and, during the last days of the campaign, delivered campaign addresses over the radio—many of which were written by Lieban Córdova, Muñoz Marín’s personal secretary in charge of dictating, writing, and editing many of his speeches, letters, and articles. Even the title of *El Batey* was chosen to appeal to rural farmers and workers, as the word held colloquial meaning in Puerto Rico as the rural home of the *jibaro*. Breaking out of the closed-door image of Puerto Rican politics by speaking in “public plazas, streets, cane fields, and homes,” Muñoz Marín built a larger than life mythology for himself as he travelled the island “by car, on horseback, and by foot” during the campaign.

By saturating the countryside with propaganda, Muñoz Marín was able to appropriate the “cultural values of the island’s [rural] population” and present himself as the true heir to PRRA reform. While the PPD presented itself as the authentic voice of the *jibaro* through political slogan, visual image, and popular music, however, it should be stressed that the relationship

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452 Ayala and Bernabe, 136-137.


454 Villaronga, 73.

455 Villaronga 71, Córdova, 260.

456 Villaronga, 73.
between the rural public and the PPD that was forged during the 1940 campaign was mutually negotiated. Indeed, as Emilio González Díaz has written, the relationship between the rural public and the PPD “was not an unilateral dragging of the masses by the party, but rather a somewhat explicit compromise . . . [that] for the Puerto Rican peasantry, foretold of a participation mechanism in defense of their interests.”

This explicit compromise was reinforced by the PPD pledge to honor campaign promises in the form of a sworn oath that candidates took—such as that at Santurce on September 15, 1940—and in the popular “don’t sell your vote” campaign.

Positioning the PPD as a New Deal-style party that would both “converge” with the FDR administration in the U.S. and stand with “the people” against corporate interests in Puerto Rico, Muñoz Marín skillfully constructed a political coalition that included CGT affiliated workers, rural laborers, farmers, teachers, and professionals. Portraying the Coalition as a reactionary force, and the election of 1940 as one of dignity against greed and good versus evil, the PPD articulated a position on the moral high ground with its “don’t sell your vote” campaign. As Nathaniel I. Córdova has argued, this message was “constantly repeated in two simple yet powerful maxims of the campaign: dignity versus money, and, he who sells his vote sells his children.” By coloring himself as incorruptible, Muñoz Marín solidified his personal image as leader of the Puerto Rican public while lending credence to the central issue on the PPD

457 Gonzalez Díaz, 50.

458 Maldonado, Luis Muñoz Marín, 194-195; Villaronga, 79.

459 Pantojas-Garcia, “Puerto Rican Populism Revisited: The PPD during the 1940s,” 555.

460 Córdova, 260.
platform: the enforcement of the 500-Acre law. To be clear, we do not need to form opinions as to the sincerity or duplicitousness of Muñoz Marín’s moral posturing. It was no doubt politically motivated. Similarly, we do not need to analyze his own position as a member of the liberal elite. It was quite clear. The larger issue for us is that this appeal to the public was more viable after the PRRA than ever before. By framing himself as the only political figure capable of extending the Puerto Rican New Deal through the political powers of the PPD, Muñoz Marín was able to balance resonant cultural nationalism with extending the new Keynesian liberalism of the Second New Deal.

Taking control of PRRA engineering projects—including its popular public works program, extensive patronage networks, and land reform platform—was key. Muñoz Marín was able to do this in three ways: by maintaining a very close relationship with new PRRA Assistant Administrator Guillermo Esteves; by blurring the lines between the PRRA and the PPD in the public eye; and by assuring that federal public works spending was continued even as the U.S. economy shifted to defense spending during WWII. During his first three years in office, Muñoz Marín was kept up to date on PRRA construction projects through weekly, monthly, and yearly reports on PRRA activities. While such reports had been regularly sent to the Washington offices of the PRRA from San Juan during 1935 to 1941, there seems to have been a greater cooperation—in terms of sharing information—between the PRRA and local government following the removal of the Coalition and election of the PPD in 1940. As reporting on all activities shifted from impersonal memos about the number of buildings built to the type of

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Villaronga, 162-163. Villaronga argues that Muñoz Marín viewed both the PRERA and the PRRA as failures, and that by 1940 he “saw the New Deal crumble along with his vision of transforming Puerto Rico into a modern society.”
minutiae that struck at the heart of the public’s relationship to PRRA projects, Muñoz Marín was able to speak about PRRA projects with authority.

For example, in discussing the progress of the newly constructed Castañer General Hospital and Community Center in Adjuntas during July through September 1943, Esteves informed Muñoz Marín of: the exact number of patients and treatments (251 new patients admitted, 244 discharged, 4 died, 16 of 25 beds currently filled); an ambulance report (567 business miles and 1,050 emergency miles); a detailed kitchen report (11,842 total meals served comprising 2,964 patient meals and 8,878 staff meals); a recreation report (detailing all kinds of new recreational activities, including the construction of cement tennis, volleyball, badminton, basketball courts; a horseshoe diamond installed; chairs repaired and painted; grounds and playing fields maintained; Recreation Center open every day from 8am to 9pm, with supervised children’s hours and organized sports; movies; talent shows; used clothing distribution organized and run by the community; sports training classes free from local teacher; classes in first aid, English, music including choral singing and private piano lessons; woodshop (youth and adult); boys and girls clubs; library with new books in Spanish provided by the Institute de Literature Puertorriquena available to patients). These were exactly the kinds of details that allowed Muñoz Marín to connect with the Puerto Rican public for whom there was very little to distinguish the PRRA from the PPD, as many people wrote to Muñoz Marín seeking

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employment on PRRA projects. In addition, Muñoz Marín helped secure over $51 million dollars from the War Emergency Program (WEP) for relief and reconstruction projects outside of direct military spending—largely to continue PRRA style projects during the war.

Familiarity with the intimate details of these public works projects made Muñoz Marín seem like an authority on all aspects the PRRA. Combined with the “don’t sell your vote” campaign, it also strengthened Muñoz Marín’s position on the central issue of his campaign—the enforcement of the 500-Acre law. While enforcement had been a political issue throughout the 1930s, resistance from big sugar companies had curtailed any legal or legislative attempts to rein in the landholding power of agricultural corporations, limited companies, partnerships, trusts, voluntary associations, or other private organizations—whether owned by local or absentee capital. Even the Coalition’s attempt at limited land reform in 1935 had stalled, as sugar corporations challenged the legislation in court. Following five years of appeals, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the 1935 law in March 1940. Through his newspaper La

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463 Julio A. Perez to Guillermo Alicea, September 26, 1942, Cartapacio 68, Sub-series 29, PRRA 1944-1942, Serie 1 - Gobierno Federal, Correspondencia, Seccion 4, Luis Muñoz Marín, Presidente del Senado, 1941-1948, FLMM.

464 Relief and Construction Appropriations and Expenditures of the WEP for the Fiscal Years 1942-43 to 1945-46, Cartapacio 76, Serie 1 - Gobierno Federal, Correspondencia, Sub-series 34, War Emergency Program (WEP) 1945-43, Sub-Seccion 1: Datos y Estadisticas, Seccion 4, Luis Muñoz Marín, Presidente del Senado, 1941-1948, FLMM.

465 Villaronga, 163. Villaronga writes that in mobilizing mass support for the PPD, Muñoz Marín’s hope for the New Deal was “revived” as it “offered [him] a platform to enhance the appeal of economic development.”


467 Pantojas-Garcia, “Puerto Rican Populism Revisited: The PPD during the 1940s,” 535.
Democracia, Muñoz Marín praised the decision. The case, which had been originally brought by Attorney General Benigno Fernández García, was quickly capitalized on by Muñoz Marín and the PPD. The following spring, when the PPD-controlled Senate established a public corporation to enforce the law and oversee the PRRA’s land resettlement program, the connections between the Chardón Plan, PRRA, and Puerto Rico Land Authority were made explicit as Carlos Chardón was asked to return from Venezuela to run the land program and enforce the 500-Acre law. Modeled on the PRCC and WRA, the Land Authority was established to liquidate the PRRA Land Resettlement and Agricultural Rehabilitation divisions without giving up the essential services of the PRRA programs. Speaking, as always, to both New Deal administrators in the U.S. and the Puerto Rican public, Muñoz Marín compared his version of the Land Law to the Homestead Act of 1862, passed by Radical Republicans during the Civil War and signed into law by Abraham Lincoln.

Even after the PPD passed the Land Law of 1941, however, actual enforcement of the law and direct attack on the sugar interests was contingent on a strong working relationship between Muñoz Marín (as President of the Senate) and the governor of Puerto Rico. The PPD’s position became greatly enhanced in 1941 when Franklin Roosevelt appointed the first New

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469 Tugwell, Puerto Rican Public Papers of R. G. Tugwell, Governor, 45, 346-347.

470 Tugwell, Changing the Colonial Climate, 147.

471 Luis Muñoz Marín, recordatorio de Luis Muñoz Marín para el dictado en ingles, April 14, 1944, Cartapacio 330, Tierras, Serie 10, Legislatura, 1948-40, Sub-Seccion 22, Leyes, Seccion 4, Luis Muñoz Marín, Presidente del Senado, 1941-1948, FLMM.
Dealer as Governor of Puerto Rico—Rexford G. Tugwell. Tugwell, who had run the New Deal’s Resettlement Administration between April 1935 and December 1936—the agency was reconstituted as the Farm Security Administration (FSA) in September 1937—originally viewed FSA as the logical heir to the PRRA and began negotiations with Roosevelt and the FSA. After taking office on September 19, 1941, however, Tugwell became convinced that the new PPD-led government was the optimum successor to the New Deal in Puerto Rico.472

By the end of 1941, the basic elements of Puerto Rican “populism” were in place. Two of the most crucial turning points in establishing a populist-style coalition in Puerto Rico were the formation of the General Federation of Workers (CGT) in 1940 and the victory of the Popular Democratic Party (PPD) in the 1940 elections. Both were closely connected to the New Deal: the CGT to the political economy of the Wagner Act and CIO—which gave industrial labor a new seat at the table by protecting the right to collective bargaining—and the PPD to the legacy of PRRA public works and land reform. The PPD’s victory was further strengthened by the appointment of one of the New Deal’s most progressive champions—Rex the Red—to the position of governor. That Rex Tugwell was the last U.S.-born governor of Puerto Rico was not the result of his own altruism nor of some enlightened understanding among men, but the product of the Puerto Rican populist moment in the 1940s, which arose in convergence with the New Deal in the U.S. that Tugwell had helped shape.473

472 Tugwell, “Investigation Into the Administrative Responsibilities Under the Five Hundred Acre Limitation on Land Holdings in the Organic Act of Puerto Rico,” in Changing the Colonial Climate, 40-44. Tugwell notes that Ralph Will, Regional Director of the FSA, was included on the Land Authority board. 346. For more on Ralph Will, see Caribbean Research Council, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, Fisheries, and Forestry, Caribbean Land Tenure Symposium (Washington DC: Anglo-American Caribbean Commission, 1946).

473 Rodríguez Beruff, Strategy As Politics, 303-304.
If it was not a “true” populism that existed in Puerto Rico in the 1940s, it is because there is no singular “true” populism in Latin American or elsewhere. Greatly dependent on the New Deal, political populism in Puerto Rico was also shaped by the limits and possibilities of Puerto Rican strategies of recovery from the Great Depression and the 1928 and 1932 hurricanes which, as we have seen, included pragmatic alliance with the PRRA. The limits and possibilities in Puerto Rico were different from those of other strategies in other places. Although historical scholarship of “Latin American populism” continues to be dominated by discussion of Juan Perón’s Argentina, Getulio Vargas’ Brazil, and the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) under Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico, Antonio Gaztambide-Géigel has called for a more nuanced understanding of Caribbean populism.474 Using the example of Puerto Rico, Gaztambide-Géigel argues that proximity to the U.S. and the North Atlantic economy has had a greater influence on

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474 Gaztambide-Géigel, 136. With some exceptions, the rise of Juan Perón’s Argentina, Getulio Vargas’ Brazil, and the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) under Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico continue to dominate scholarship on the development of “Latin American populism” in the 1930s. For more on the rise of the populist nation state and the relationship between populism and political democracy (often used as a measure of the “true” measure of populist government), see Ignacio Walker, “Democracy and Populism in Latin America,” Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies Working Paper #347—April, 2008; Florencia Mallon, “Decoding the Parchments of the Latin American Nation State: Peru, Mexico, and Chile in Comparative Perspective,” in Studies in the Formation of the Nation State in Latin America, edited by James Dunkerly (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2002), 13-53; Jorge Duany and Emilio Pantojas-Garica, “Fifty Years of Commonwealth: The Contradictions of Free Associated Statehood in Puerto Rico,” in Extended statehood in the Caribbean: Paradoxes of quasi-colonialism, local autonomy, and extended statehood in the USA, French, Dutch, and British Caribbean, edited by Lammert de Jong and Dirk Krujit (Amsterdam: Rozenberg Publishers, 2005), 21-57. Duany and Pantojas-Garcia write that “paradoxically, Puerto Rico is one of the most democratic countries in the Caribbean region, as measured by massive electoral participation, a competitive party system, and legal protection of individual rights and freedoms,” but that it is also “one of the most undemocratic ones” due to the limited nature of Puerto Rican citizenship—such as full Constitutional protections but no voting representation in Congress or as President for island residents (Puerto Ricans living in the U.S. can vote and are represented in Congress).
the internal political developments of Caribbean societies than has been widely acknowledged. Although a comparison of the emergence of populism in the entire Caribbean region remains beyond the scope of this dissertation, the remainder of this chapter will put the experience of Puerto Rico into comparative perspective with internal political events in the Spanish Caribbean during the late 1930s and early 1940s. As with Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Cuba went through substantial political transformations during the Great Depression in ways that reflected and exploited new understandings of the nation and the public.

**Dominican Republic**

Whereas the rise of populism in Puerto Rico was predicated on a popular alliance between the Puerto Rican public and the New Deal, which was made possible by the election of FDR, its rise in the Dominican Republic is almost solely associated with Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina. The contrast between Trujillo—notorious for the ruthless dictatorship he headed in the Dominican Republic between 1931 and 1961—and the PRRA/PPD public works program may at first seem simplistic due to the obviously different contexts and legacies. But a closer look reveals many unanticipated similarities. While this section does not intend to give a comprehensive overview of the thirty years of Trujillo’s reign or of the complete legislative arc of the PPD from 1941 to the present, it will discuss the similar circumstances from which Puerto Rican and Dominican populism arose during the Great Depression and the widely divergent ways the populist experience was articulated and manifested in power.

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475 Gaztambide-Géigel, 135.
A few basic similarities between Trujillo and the PPD are clear. Both originated in natural disaster and economic crisis. Both grew out of close ties to the United States. Both took advantage of a softening of U.S. foreign policy during the Good Neighbor Policy of Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt. And both, over time, established domestic power over a broad coalition of supporters. However, while Puerto Rico under the PPD achieved political autonomy within the framework of U.S. citizenship as the *Estado Libre Asociado* (Associated Free State), the transition to populism in the Dominican Republic was corrupt, violent, racist, and blatantly undemocratic. During both of his official presidencies (from 1930 to 1938, and 1942 to 1952) and during his time out of office, when the “ceremonial affairs of state [were relegated] to puppet presidents such as his brother, Hector Bienvenido Trujillo Molina, who occupied the National Palace from 1952 to 1960, and Joaquin Balaguer Ricardo, an intellectual and scholar

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Secured by the “efficiency, rapacity, [and] utter ruthlessness,” of his authoritarian police force that tightly censored the Dominican public sphere and closely monitored all potential political opponents, Trujillo’s rule was also based on institutionalized personalism.\footnote{Haggerty, 27-29; Roorda, 94-99, 99-102. For an excellent examination of the performative aspects of Trujillo’s dictatorship—and his use of “populism as a vernacular practice”—see Lauren Derby, \textit{The Dictator’s Seduction: Politics and the Popular Imagination in the Era of Trujillo} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).} Not only was Trujillo’s name and image regarded as the savior of the Dominican Republic in popular culture, he was named by (his own) official decree as \textit{El Benefactor} of the Republic—later expanded to Benefactor of the Fatherland.\footnote{Roorda, 95-96.} Referred to as an emperor, saint, super-man, and god, Trujillo enriched himself and his family through Dominican development strategies in ways that dwarfed even the most corrupt regional governments of the nineteenth century. By centering the newly formed Dominican Party around himself, and making membership in that party virtually mandatory, Trujillo erased the lines between himself and the state and led an impressive and popular development program based on the expansion of state-built “infrastructural works” in the fields of education, health, sanitation, communications, agriculture, and roads and highways.\footnote{Meetz, 39, 42. As discussed above, there is an extraordinary difference between infrastructural development and public works. The divergent legacies of state building of the New Deal Puerto and the Dominican Republic under Trujillo exemplify this difference.} As we will see, much of Trujillo’s infrastructural construction program was
influenced by the New Deal in Puerto Rico, which he followed very closely through both PRRA publicity campaigns and diplomatic channels. Unlike the Puerto Rican public works program, however, which was based on federal funding, the transfer of all property to local ownership, and the formation of independent public agencies and corporations, Trujillo established a personal and political monopoly over all major infrastructural constructions and land appropriations.

Not only did his family own the natural resources and finished product of Dominican industrialization, Trujillo renamed countless new infrastructural works in his honor, from schools and hospitals, to irrigation projects, to many new roads and bridges—for which he seems to have had a special fondness. As Eric Roorda has written, four of the first new bridges built by his government were named for his mother, father, grandfather, and son. Three others were named for himself: the Generalísimo Trujillo Bridge, the San Rafael Bridge, and the Trujillo Bridge. His capacity for self-glorification did not end there, as Trujillo placed dozens of statues of himself in cities and villages across the island, and renamed the island’s capitol and largest city as well as its highest mountain in his own honor; Santo Domingo was rechristened Ciudad Trujillo and Pico Duarte renamed Pico Trujillo. Despite the personal enrichment and self-glorification of these projects, their larger effect on the development of populist government in

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482 “Ciudad Trujillo Will Celebrate 450th Anniversary August 4,” St. Petersburg Times, July 28, 1946. Trujillo built at least 70 new bridges during the 1930s and irrigated over 85,000 acres of land.

483 Roorda, 98.

484 Roorda, 98; Meetz, 39-40. The St. Petersburg Times reported that the renaming of Santo Domingo was enacted by the people’s will over Trujillo’s own protests. See “Ciudad Trujillo Will Celebrate 450th Anniversary August 4,” St. Petersburg Times, July 28, 1946.
the Dominican Republic should not be taken lightly, as Trujillo’s emphasis on infrastructural development had major political consequences in the Dominican Republic.

As in Puerto Rico, the transition toward populism in the Dominican Republic originated with a devastating natural disaster that exacerbated all other local aspects of the Great Depression. Directly striking Santo Domingo with 100 to 150-mph winds on September 3, 1930, the San Zenón hurricane killed between 4,000 and 6,000 people, leveled thousands of buildings and other infrastructure in Santo Domingo, and flooded the Ozama River—straining communication and transportation while leaving survivors homeless, grief stricken, and facing a living “nightmare of bad water, decaying bodies, and shortages of food and medicine.”\footnote{Roorda, 55-56; F. Eugene Hartwell, “The Santo Domingo Hurricane of September 1 to 5, 1930,” \textit{Monthly Weather Review} 58, no. 83 (September 1930), 362-363.} The Associated Press reported that San Zenón, which was also called the Santo Domingo hurricane, left only 400 out of 10,000 buildings standing and that local authorities were forced to cremate 50 bodies at a time, as newly buried bodies were rising from the flooded cemeteries where “coffins float around like corks.”\footnote{Rene M. Lepervanche, “1,000 Dead in Santo Domingo,” \textit{The Evening Independent} (St. Petersburg, FL), September 5, 1930; Rene M. Lepervanche, “4,000 Now Dead in Hurricane,” \textit{The Southeastern Missourian}, September 6, 1930. Based in Cape Girardeau, MO, the \textit{Southeastern Missourian} article appeared on the front page alongside continuing coverage of the Mississippi flood of 1928.}

Initial reaction to the storm was similar to that in Puerto Rico. Striking Santo Domingo only three weeks after Trujillo was inaugurated President, initial relief efforts to San Zenón paralleled those in Puerto Rico following San Felipe in 1928 and San Ciprián in 1932, with a heavy emphasis on volunteerism, charitable relief, and coordination with the American Red
Cross. But, as both Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic looked to redevelop their destroyed infrastructure, the similarities faded. Whereas the PRRA fostered the construction of a permanent hurricane-proof reconstruction through publicly-owned authorities and corporations, Trujillo used the destructive storm to seize nearly absolute control over all aspects the Dominican Republic’s redevelopment program. This was not done in secret. In 1950, speaking before an international audience of public health officials, Trujillo claimed to have “no reason for regrets in my executive program” that begun after the 1930 hurricane, and that he needed to establish “strong foundations . . . for a new Dominican ethical code” that would embrace his government’s new “duty and responsibility to build roads and bridges, hospitals and schools.”

To accomplish both of these aims—the political and the infrastructural—Trujillo established the Dominican Party, for “without a working institution, without an active organization, without a flexible, disciplined, and responsible force identified with the government’s constructive aims, the fulfillment of such aims . . . would have never materialized.” Through this party, which might as well have been called the Trujillo Party, Trujillo personally led relief efforts while also creating a myriad of new agencies, bureaucracies, and corporatist-styled government associations centralized under party rule. While his initial

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487 Roorda, 67, 70-71.


489 Trujillo, 22.

source of power in the 1920s was based in the U.S.–influenced National Guard, in the aftermath of San Zenón Trujillo extended his personal authority over the island through a “vast web of controls . . . over the armed forces, governmental machinery, national economy, communications, education, intellectual life, and though processes.” During the thirty years of his “democratic” dictatorship, “no group, institution, or individual could function independently of [his] control.”

In addition, the infrastructural works program created thousands of jobs through a system of political patronage. Based largely on his infrastructural works program, Trujillo’s form of totalitarian populism differed from nearly all other examples: from that of Nazi Germany, Fascist Spain and Italy, or the many forms of caudillo rule that existed throughout nineteenth-century Latin America.

Despite the obvious differences between Trujillo’s dictatorship and the New Deal in Puerto Rico, there were several convergent points between their programs. Emerging in the aftermath of such destructive storms during the Great Depression, Trujillo and the PRRA both used the socioeconomic aspects of the natural disaster to begin long-term programs of increased public expenditures. Between 1936 and 1970, disbursements from the central government in the Dominican Republic rose over 24 times, from $10.6 million in 1936 to $259.6 million in 1970, while in Puerto Rico disbursements from the local government increased over 52 times, from $18.7 million in 1928 to $975.7 million in 1970.

In both countries, these public expenditures

491 Wiarda, 256-257.

492 Wiarda, 257.

were part of socioeconomic development programs based on investments in infrastructure, irrigation, and electricity. But while the increased expenditures in the Dominican Republic were “partially financed by a rather high tax burden on the Dominican populace” in part to pay off the island’s external debt and in part to maintain its high military expenses, in Puerto Rico the development of public works such as the cement plant and hydroelectric facilities was subsidized by the creation of self-financing and “semi-autonomous public corporations which also served to carry out policy objectives” of the reform-oriented government after 1941.494

As with the PPD, the Trujillo regime combined infrastructural development with agrarian reform, which it used successfully in “shoring up political stability and transforming peasant practices.”495 As Richard Lee Turtis has written, after rising to power through the military, Trujillo’s rule was supported by a political coalition that included urban nationalist intellectuals and popular support from the agrarian sectors. Demonstrating the connections between infrastructure and environment, Trujillo strengthened his populist project through combining infrastructural development and agrarian reform, building infrastructural works that would appeal to nationalist sentiment, provide popular support for his dictatorship, and grow the Dominican economy. For example, the roads, bridges, and irrigation systems he built (and named for himself) were “crucial prerequisite[s] for peasants to be able to profitably market their surplus crops.” Indeed, political support for the dictator relied upon a successful strategy of infrastructural expansion that remained a large component of the state budget.496

494 Mann, 59-61.
495 Turtis, 84.
496 Mann, 47, 49; Turtis, 83-84, 215.
In addition, there was another point of congruence between the Puerto Rican and Dominican infrastructural works programs. Just as Trujillo sought to ingratiate himself with U.S. foreign policy makers from the Good Neighbor Policy to the Cold War, he also sought to personally and politically benefit from the expansive and energetic engineering program of the PRRA. Whether inquiring about the procurement of Puerto Rican cement after the opening of the Cataño cement plant in 1938 or in directly asking for copies of infrastructural, agricultural, and architectural blueprints—such as for the PRRA-constructed administration building of the University of Puerto Rico or for pamphlets regarding the PRRA preserves canning program.\(^{497}\) A few years later, after closely following the success of the Puerto Rican cement plant, Trujillo sought to build his own, and again sought the assistance of the PRRA, although the project never got underway and the Dominican Republic did not have its own functioning cement plant until 1973, over 10 years after Trujillo was assassinated.\(^{498}\)

\(^{497}\) Miles Fairbank to Manuel Font, Accounting and Cost Folder, Box 4, Records Relating to the Cement Plant Project, RG 323, NARA-NYC; M.M. Morillo (General Council for the Dominican Republic) to Miles Fairbank, September 27, 1939, Box 4, University Projects folder, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed by the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

Whether viewed in terms of his personal benefit or in terms of global politics on the eve of WWII, Trujillo’s desire to curry favor with the U.S. through acquisition of plans, blueprints, and cheap cement from the New Deal in Puerto Rico reflected the long legacy of U.S. involvement in the Dominican Republic. Once again, however, this basic point of similarity between Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic—both felt the pressure of an expanding U.S. empire after 1898—reveals a wide gap in the history of U.S. imperialism in the two Caribbean islands, and an equally wide gap in domestic history of the two islands as well. The U.S. military occupation of the Dominican Republic between 1916 and 1924 was dissimilar from that of U.S. territorial rule in Puerto Rico, whose residents acquired U.S. citizenship in 1917. Neither experience can be reduced to a framework of “colonialism.”

Similarly, the experience of public works construction in Puerto Rico and infrastructural development in the Dominican Republic cannot be reduced to a simple colonial framework. In both cases, state-built construction projects and state-provided patronage jobs grew political support. In both cases, this political support legitimated populist rule by the PPD and by the Trujillo dictatorship. In both cases, this political support was strongest in the rural countryside—where the spread of clean drinking water, electricity, and hurricane-proof roads, bridges, sewers, storm drains, irrigation canals, houses, schools, hospitals, health clinics, and other public health necessities of modern life had their most direct and long-lasting effect. In the Dominican Republic countryside, for example, where support for “el Benefactor” remained strong even after his demise in an emotionally complex combination of fear and nostalgia, the rural public depended on the Trujillo regime to “distribute land, resolve property disputes, and provide
agricultural aid and infrastructure,” and this dependence, in turn helped legitimate his rule.499

Although the same can be said about the growth of populism in Puerto Rico—that public works spending and patronage jobs helped legitimate PPD rule—this comparison would be incomplete by not analyzing the vast differences between the growth of local political democracy in Puerto Rico and the nearly complete absence of it in the Dominican Republic under Trujillo. While the words are often used interchangeably, there is a vast difference between infrastructural development and public works. Whereas Puerto Rican public works built and financed by the PRRA were turned over to public ownership administered by autonomously run public agencies and authorities, whose services enhance democracy through increased social and physical mobility, infrastructural works developed by Trujillo—even those modeled on the New Deal in Puerto Rico—remained the tools of dictatorship. While participation, critique, and benefit from PRRA public works transformed the meaning of U.S. citizenship in Puerto Rico through the establishment of a New Deal style coalition, dependence on infrastructural works under Trujillo reduced democracy and turned citizens into subjects of a militarized police state.

Cuba

In contrast to Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, the rise of populism in Cuba is closely associated with Revolution of 1933 and the impressively democratic Cuban Constitution of 1940. Both were influenced by Fulgencio Batista, the populist President, and later dictator, whose personal climb to power in Cuba reveals ambiguous similarities to both Luis Muñoz Marín and Rafael Trujillo. This should not surprise, as the rise of institutional populism in Cuba

499 Turtis, 206, 215.
during the Great Depression and 1940s reflects the broader ambiguity about the meaning of populism in the Spanish Caribbean. Highlighting some of those ambiguities, this section will compare the experience with populism in Cuba with that in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic.

The Revolution of 1933 built upon the social changes of the 1920s, when the popular classes emerged as a potent force in Cuban politics. During the presidency of Gerardo Machado, however, which lasted from 1925 to 1933, these popular classes were largely repressed from full political participation. While elite groups debated over how the masses would be incorporated into state politics, the revolution interrupted the Cuban political process amid the rapidly declining global economy. Occurring during the depth of the Great Depression, the Revolution of 1933 introduced a brief and socially progressive period in Cuban politics that undermined the regressive oligarchic rule of the previous era.\textsuperscript{500} In the decade that followed the revolution—which was spurred by social protest from the popular classes and led by a physiology professor at the University of Havana named Ramón Grau San Martín—Cuba experienced an unprecedented era of democratic reform that included basic labor protections, women’s suffrage, and intellectual autonomy for the University of Havana. As will be discussed below, these reforms and other protection of civil liberties, social justice, and economic reform were institutionalized in the populist Constitution of 1940.\textsuperscript{501}


Despite this, the revolution has been largely remembered as an “incomplete and frustrated” political exercise that failed to interrupt the long period of “graft, corruption, malfeasance, administrative incompetence, and blatant social insensitivity to the lower social orders, especially the Afro-Cubans,” that existed in Cuba between 1902 and 1959.\footnote{Samuel Farber, \textit{The Origins of the Cuban Revolution Reconsidered} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 7; Knight, 238.} One of the primary reasons that this era of democratic reform has been regarded as incomplete and frustrated is that the revolution’s statutory legacy—the Constitution of 1940—was enacted during the first presidency of General Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar, who later became the corrupt military leader overthrown by Fidel Castro in the revolution of 1959. Castro himself was in part responsible for the historical ambiguity over the meaning of the Revolution of 1933, as he consciously framed his government as both the antithesis of the Bastista regime and the culmination of “true” Cuban history.\footnote{Nicola Miller, “The Absolution of History: Uses of the Past in Castro’s Cuba,” \textit{Journal of Contemporary History} 38, no. 1 (2003), 148, accessed January 16, 2014, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3180702.} These interrelated positions, which he articulated in a “large-scale propaganda campaign,” contradicted his own use of Batista’s legacy as he initially mobilized “as broad a constituency of support as possible by talking only of social justice and a restoration of the democratic and reformist Constitution of 1940” throughout the early days of his rule.\footnote{Nicola Miller, 147.} He used the memory of

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and sugar sector . . . such as the urban and rural wage laborers, peasants, the lower middle-class groups of students, low level government employees and those involved in petty commerce.” See Whitney, “The Architect of the Cuban State: Fulgencio Batista and Populism in Cuba, 1937-1940,” 435n1.
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democratic reform for good reason, as, by 1959, the 1940 Constitution was a source of both lament and pride for Cubans. At the time its passage, it was “hailed as a triumph of civilization” that heralded the “end of one age and the onset of another.”505 A decade later, in 1952, when Batista led a military coup of the democratic government he himself had helped organize, collective and national pride in the Constitution of 1940 became a source of “embarrassment and humiliation, doubt and diminished confidence.”506 Castro’s intentional “forgetting” of the brief decade after 1933, however, belies the changing conception of public citizenship that had emerged in Cuba and the role of patronage and public works in creating the mass movement toward the Constitution of 1940.

During the 1930s, populism in Cuba blended the democratic with the authoritarian. In this, certain similarities bind the populist experience in Cuba with that in both Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. If this seems to be a historical paradox, it is the fault of Fulgencio Batista, the enigmatic leader of Cuban populism between 1933 and 1959 whose hold on power included terms as: military strongman who influenced Cuban politics from behind the scenes from 1934 to 1940; democratically elected President from 1940 to 1944; President following his military coup from 1952 to 1959.507 While Batista’s rule was based on his control of the military


507 For more on Batista, see Whitney, State and Revolution in Cuba: Mass Mobilization and Political Change, 1920-1940; Irwin F. Gellman, Roosevelt and Batista: Good Neighbor Diplomacy in Cuba, 1933-1945 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973); Frank
and police, which he used to enforce his doctrine of social harmony, Robert Whitney has argued that his power was also derived from a pragmatic and astute political sense, and a corporatist and patronage-driven economic development program. Combined with the use of heavy-handed repression, which assured that the popular classes did not enjoy any real political autonomy, Batista’s reliance on patronage and public works was redefined in the Constitution of 1940 as a new form of mass or public citizenship guaranteed by the state.

While Batista used these guarantees to help secure power, Cubans from many backgrounds viewed the new constitutional guarantees as the fruits of hard fought campaigns for a new relationship between the people and the state defined by social justice, public citizenship, and a new nationalist identity. Two groups that most influenced the rise of this new relationship were organized labor and Afro-Cuban activists. During the Great Depression, these two groups—sometimes united in Communist-led unions—had become “major actors” in Cuban politics whose political militancy and cross-race class identity “extracted significant concessions from [both] employers and the state,” culminating in the new Cuban Constitution at the end of the decade. But, as Alejandro de la Fuente has argued, while the Constitution “symbolized the culminating battle of the 1933 revolution,” it also marked a new departure in the struggle for racial equality in Cuba. Indeed, noting the Nazi expansion across Europe between 1939 and

Argote-Freyre, *Fulgencio Batista: From Revolutionary to Strongman* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006); Farber.


510 De la Fuente, 212.
1940, Afro-Cuban activists called for a new sense of national unity against racism at home and abroad and used the 1940 constitutional convention “as an opportunity—if not the opportunity—to legislate effective equal rights for blacks, turn racial discrimination into a punishable crime, and effectively eliminate racism from the island.”

Though the Constitution of 1940 did not “eliminate” racism from Cuba, it did institutionalize a wide range of political rights directed at the cross-race, cross-class section of the Cuban public through a comprehensive and lengthy (286 Articles) series of Constitutional guarantees. Recognizing that “All Cubans are equal under the law,” the Constitution asserted “any discrimination by reason of sex, race, color, or class, and any other kind of discrimination destructive of human dignity, is declared illegal and punishable.” After enumerating a series of specific guarantees in terms of legal and penal rights, freedom of speech, religion, family life (including motherhood and marriage), primary education, and access to universities, the constitution’s populist provisions are detailed in a section on labor rights.

In Section 6, concerning labor and property, the Constitution of 1940 makes several guarantees to Cuban workers regarding wages, social insurance, and working conditions. This section, which is premised on the idea that “labor is an inalienable right of the individual,” contains many provisions that—in the U.S.—were managed by the U.S. by the New Deal. For example, Section 6 defines the right to a minimum wage based on changing standards of living; federal pensions for workers against illness, old age, unemployment, or other exigencies of labor;

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511 De la Fuente, 211-212.

512 Cuban Constitution of 1940, art. 20, sec. 1, title IV.
social insurance against occupational hazards, injuries, and diseases; the eight-hour day and
eleven-month work year; a ban on child labor; and the protected right to organize and strike.  

Similarly, during the New Deal, Roosevelt’s administration attempted to tackle some of
these populist issues in a wide range of measures, laws, regulations, and new government
agencies, ranging from the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) and the Federal Emergency
Relief Agency (FERA) to the Social Security Act, Fair Labor Standards Act, Wagner Act, and
National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). By not attempting to amend the U.S. Constitution to
protect these rights, however, Roosevelt chose a more conservative route on these labor issues
than Batista’s Cuba. Although critics from his left and right denounced his use of executive
power, FDR deliberately chose to not pursue constitutional amendments to enhance the New
Deal, believing that such amendments would never be approved by three-fourths of the state
legislatures rapidly enough to produce desired results.  

While FDR needed to persuade
American workers that his use of executive power was being used to strengthen mass democracy
and economic recovery, Batista was able to present the Cuban Constitution as a more immediate
populist document in terms of labor rights.

On the issue of women’s rights, Batista’s Cuba went much farther than the New Deal was
willing or able to go, and the Cuban Constitution of 1940 makes explicit commitments to women
that are missing from virtually any New Deal legislation. While the Social Security Act of 1935
deliberately excluded millions of women from its benefits (and nearly all African American
women)—women working in agriculture, domestic service, or laundry service for example—the

513 Cuban Constitution of 1940, art. 60-86, sec. 1, title VI.

514 Richard Polenberg, “Introduction,” The Era of Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Brief History
Cuban Constitution made no such exclusions in its social insurance provisions and, further, declared that there would be no wage differential between married and single women workers and guaranteed basic protections for pregnancy, such as paid leave before and after childbirth and extra break time for nursing.\textsuperscript{515} Guarantees such as these, that respected the rights of women, were unknown to the New Deal, which was crafted with the support of the southern wing of the Democratic Party. Congressmen and Senators from the South (as well as others from the North and West) were able to shape New Deal labor policy along strict racialized and gendered lines in order to protect and enhance Jim Crow segregation in the United States.\textsuperscript{516} Roosevelt, who based much of his political coalition on the support of the southern Democrats, grounded the New Deal on a working-class populism that championed “pocketbook issues” but was far more ambiguous on social and cultural issues. He did not attack segregation or support women’s rights directly.\textsuperscript{517}

The Cuban Constitution of 1940 codified several developments related to patronage and public works that were simultaneously occurring in Puerto Rico through the PRRA. There are three primary similarities between the Cuban Constitution and the PRRA program: 1) the construction of low-cost housing and a public health infrastructure; 2) direct government employment of education and health workers; 3) the establishment of worker owned cooperatives in agriculture, industry, and commerce. Article 79 of the Cuban Constitution

\textsuperscript{515} Cuban Constitution of 1940, art. 68, sec. 1, title VI.

\textsuperscript{516} Katznelson, \textit{When Affirmative Action Was White}, 48.

\textsuperscript{517} Polenberg, 15-16. The exclusion of women from New Deal legislation was indirect rather than direct, and classified the type of labor that was included and excluded from safety net benefits. As written, New Deal reforms such as the Social Security Act generally favored industrial (male) labor. However, as millions of women entered the U.S. industrial labor force during WWII, Social Security benefits were extended to an ever-increasing number women.
declares that the state “shall support the creation of low-cost dwellings for workers,” and that the construction and maintenance of all essential services such as schools, hospitals, and health clinics would be now regulated by law. While the Cuban government would provide these public works in the urban centers, all private enterprises employing workers outside of urban areas were required to do so.\footnote{Cuban Constitution of 1940, art. 79, sec. 1, title VI.} As we have seen above, the construction of hurricane-proof housing was a central aspect of the PRRA engineering program. Between 1935 and 1943, thousands of concrete houses and apartments—manufactured with locally-produced cement products—were built in both rural and urban areas of the island and made available to workers through highly subsidized rents and mortgages. Some structures, like the el Falansterio complex in Puerta de Tierra, surpassed nearly all low-cost housing constructions of the New Deal in the U.S. in both durability and design.

While Article 79 attempted to regulate the construction of a new public health infrastructure, Article 80 focused on the employment of education and health workers, requiring the government by law to establish and allocate funding for doctors, nurses, medical examiners, and all other public health positions. In Puerto Rico—though it was not required by law to provide employment in these areas as in the Cuban example—the PRRA was a massive employer during the Great Depression in all types of work, including health services. While its employment rolls peaked in November 1936 at 58,238 persons (over 90% of all administrative, supervisory, and clerical personnel and 99.9% of all other workers were native-born Puerto Ricans), by January 1939 these workers had completed more than 108.6 million man-hours of work, the vast majority of it on long-term reconstruction projects in housing, education,
sanitation systems, and public health.\textsuperscript{519} For example, at least 57.7\% of these man-hours were devoted to rural rehabilitation projects such as hurricane recovery, agricultural development, and worker housing. An additional 25.8\% of these man-hours were dedicated to long-term, capital-intensive reconstruction projects such as the construction of the Cataño cement plant and the rural electrification program.\textsuperscript{520} Dedicated to non-long-term projects, the remaining 16.5\% of PRRA man-hours included an extraordinary number of direct public health interventions by male and female doctors, nurses, and administrators employed by the PRRA. As discussed above, these interventions included the treatment of over 500,000 Puerto Rican patients (over 1/3 of the island’s population of 1.8 million) for a variety of medical and dental ailments and issues ranging from malaria, intestinal parasite (hookworm), smallpox, and typhoid fever treatments to thousands preventative tooth cleanings and/or extractions.\textsuperscript{521} Additionally, the PRRA employed thousands of elementary teachers in urban and rural areas of the island, many of them women.\textsuperscript{522}

In addition to similarities in public works and patronage employment, the Cuban Constitution of 1940 paralleled developments in Puerto Rico coordinated by the PRRA in its


\textsuperscript{520} “Facts About the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration.”


\textsuperscript{522} Box 3, Construction Projects-School Building Program, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed by the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.
attempts to establish worker-owned cooperatives in agriculture, industry, and commerce.\textsuperscript{523} Though not the focus of this dissertation, which has instead concentrated on the engineering program, the establishment of worker or public-owned cooperatives was a major focus of the island’s long-term rural rehabilitation program. In Puerto Rico, the focus on cooperatives was directly tied to the environmental and economic crises caused by the San Felipe and San Ciprín hurricanes of 1928 and 1932. According to Guillermo Esteves, Regional Administrator (later Assistant Administrator) of the PRRA, the Rural Rehabilitation and Land Tenure Program was established in 1935 with three interrelated goals: to directly aid coffee, tobacco, and fruit farmers whose land had been destroyed by the 1928 and 1932 hurricanes (and who “had also suffered seriously from the results of the economic depression that followed the First World War”); to provide opportunities of work to thousands of unemployed agricultural workers, who suffered “because of the fact that there was no work available in these farms of the highlands of Puerto Rico and the fruit growing regions along the sea coast” due to the hurricanes; and to “create subsistence and small sized family farms and make them available to agricultural laborers and small farmers who had lost all they had, in order to offer them the facilities of permanent homesteads and improve their social and economic position.”\textsuperscript{524} The establishment of these small farms overlapped with PRRA public works programs, as the Rural Rehabilitation division of “the PRRA built neat and hurricane-proof, concrete, brick, or rammed-earth houses, thus creating subsistence farms where agricultural laborers have been installed as resettlers.”

\textsuperscript{523} Cuban Constitution of 1940, art. 75, sec. 1, title VI.

\textsuperscript{524} Esteves, “Activities of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration in Connection with the Agrarian Reforms in Puerto Rico,” 163-164.
The Rural Rehabilitation program also attempted to instill a new sense of economic citizenship in the Puerto Rican countryside, through the establishment and promotion of agricultural and commercial cooperatives. Coordinated by the Cooperative division of the PRRA, the focus on cooperatives in sugar, coffee, vanilla, fruits, and other agricultural products produced mixed results. The program, which involved the resettlement of large numbers of Puerto Rican workers who had been displaced by the storms and depression, resulted in the replanting of over 15,000 acres of food crops and 3,000 acres of cash crops by resettled workers. Two noteworthy examples of the PRRA experiment in cooperative farming are the Casteñer Cooperative and the Central Lafayette.

Located on 1,645 acres of land in the municipalities of Adjuntas, Lares, and Yauco, the Casteñer Cooperative attempted to rehabilitate large-scale coffee farming on a hurricane-ravaged land. Combining a focus on soil conservation with crop diversification, large-scale land utilization, and scientific management, the cooperative was essential to coffee’s recovery; as coffee bushes take about four years to mature, it was improbable that the coffee growers of this region could have recovered without an enormous private investment. Nearly 200 agricultural workers were resettled at Casteñer, each provided with a PRRA-purchased one-acre homestead and hurricane-proof house. The cooperative not only helped revive coffee, but diversified the agricultural output in this region as well. Of the 1,163 acres of crops and seed beds planted at Casteñer, 63.4% was in coffee, 5.7% in sugar cane, 4.8% in vanilla bean, 1.7% in citrus, and 24.3% in banana, tannia roots, and other subsistence vegetables, seed beds, and pasture. In 1943, the PRRA coordinated the construction of the first-ever rural hospital in rural Puerto Rico.

at Casteñer, which provided free service to both cooperative resettlers and other rural workers, and developed an important education and disease prevention program in the area as well.\footnote{Esteves, “Activities of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration in Connection with the Agrarian Reforms in Puerto Rico,” 168.}

The Central Lafayette, which was established on 9,738 acres (4,427 acres owned by 12 newly formed land cooperatives and 5,311 acres owned by the PRRA), was designed to operate as a cooperatively owner sugar mill. It was a massive failure. Begun in 1936 when the PRRA—fulfilling one of the earliest goals of the Chardón Plan to break up (absentee-owned) corporate sugar estates—purchased nearly 10,000 acres of land in Arroyo, Patillas, and Maunabo owned by the Fantauzzi family, which had planted sugar in the area since the nineteenth century. Financed by the PRRA, various land and mill sugar cooperatives formed the Lafayette Industrial Cooperative and purchased the Lafayette Central for $4,414,943.11 in 1936.\footnote{“Facts About the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration”; Esteves, “Activities of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration in Connection with the Agrarian Reforms in Puerto Rico,” 168.} In addition to providing the capital for the purchase of the mill, the PRRA also subsidized and performed a series of engineering tests and services at Lafayette—surveying, deep well testing, pumping for water supply, pumping, ditch cleaning, leveling, rendering, mapping, blueprinting, and constructing ten workers camp units.\footnote{Box 1, Folder 1, General Memoranda, Records of the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.} Despite the project’s complete failure—marked by its complete liquidation in 1940—the Lafayette cooperative left behind a two-story hospital for the region’s families.\footnote{Box 2, Reports on Activities folder, General Memoranda, Records Relating to Construction Projects Directed by the Engineering Division, RG 323, NARA-NYC.}
Although the failure of the Lafayette project reminds us of the New Deal’s limitations, the establishment of modern, hurricane-proof hospitals at Casteñer and Lafayette suggests that even these failures produced lasting legacies of increased physical security and social mobility through the construction of a new public health infrastructure.\(^{530}\) Puerto Rican populism, which emerged as the PPD presented itself as sole heir to the PRRA public works, patronage programs, rural rehabilitation, and land reform, was in large measure built upon these public health legacies. While sharing some similarities with other forms of Latin American and Caribbean populism that took root in the region during the Great Depression and World War II, this Puerto Rican populism based on the expansion of New Deal liberalism stands in contrast to the experience of populism in Cuba and the Dominican Republic. In Cuba, the promises of the Constitution of 1940 reflected many PRRA programs and impulses but ultimately failed to increase democracy or expand economic citizenship. When General Batista—who served as Cuba’s first president under this constitution—overthrew the government in a military coup and led as dictator from 1952 to 1959, the unlimited promise of a new Cuban era was destroyed and replaced with a decade of longing and self-loathing, which was itself replaced by a new era of hope and expectation following the overthrow of the Batista regime by Fidel Castro.\(^{531}\)


\(^{531}\) On Cuban disappointment during the Batista regime’s rule in the 1950s, see Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality and Culture*, 446-447.
Conclusion

As the 100-year anniversary of the Jones Act of 1917 approaches, the study of the New Deal in Puerto Rico takes on greater significance. As one of the most important turning points in American politics during the twentieth century, the New Deal contrasted with the laissez faire political economy of Warren G. Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover—Franklin D. Roosevelt’s three Republican predecessors in the White House. In doing so, the New Deal altered the meaning of U.S. citizenship by enhancing the ability of the public to benefit from a more democratic economy. These benefits covered a wide scope of daily life, including changes to U.S. law such as the Wagner Act which guaranteed labor’s right to collective bargaining; efforts to regulate the financial industry through the establishment of the Security and Exchanges Commission; and the construction of large-scale, capital-intensive public works projects and new interventions in public health through a variety of federal agencies—including the Public Works Administration (PWA), Works Progress Administration (WPA), Farm Security Administration (FSA), and Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PPRA). As Morton Keller has argued, the “flood of new laws, government action, and social planning after 1932” produced long-lasting effects, as “never before—save in wartime—had the activities of the [federal] government had such profound and far-reaching consequences for the way of life” of U.S. citizens. Due to the unprecedented federal activity on the island during the FDR years, Puerto Ricans—U.S. citizens since 1917—also experienced the New Deal’s “profound and far-reaching consequences” whether they were born in the U.S. or on the island.

532 Keller, 1-2.
The New Deal in Puerto Rico was as transformative on the island as it was in the United States. Exacerbated by the San Felipe and San Ciprián hurricanes of 1928 and 1932, the Great Depression was the most disruptive event in the history of Puerto Rico during the twentieth century—surpassing even the trauma of 1898 when the island was transferred from Spanish to U.S. military control in the aftermath of the Cuban-Spanish-American War. During the 1930s, the destruction wrought by these hurricanes combined with the global economic collapse of the Great Depression to alter nearly all aspects of Puerto Rican life. From the widespread infrastructural, agricultural, and environmental damage of the storms to the fracturing of partisan politics, the Depression years in Puerto Rico witnessed a crisis in public housing and deterioration in public health. As this dissertation has argued, these adverse conditions were partly the result of a failed political economy of relief that had strengthened the position of private and corporate interests from the Spanish colonial system of the nineteenth century through the era of laissez faire individualism of the 1920s. Insufficient before the 1930s, the system of voluntary relief was overwhelmed by the magnitude of the Great Depression. Lasting recovery did not begin until the emergence of the PRRA in 1935.

The PRRA was a very unique and yet very representative New Deal agency. One of the least studied aspects of the entire New Deal, the PRRA was fueled by local labor and ideas and was the most creative and significant federal endeavor to ever take place on the island. As a locally-run federal administration operating out of San Juan after 1937, the PRRA employed over 58,000 workers at its peak in November 1936. Among these, roughly 98% were Puerto Rican, comprising at least 90% of all administrative, supervisory, and clerical personnel and 99.9% of all other workers. Somewhere between 90% and 95% were hired directly off of relief rolls of unemployed workers and given new jobs in the reconstruction of the island’s infrastructural and
agricultural sectors. This hiring not only mobilized local labor resources, but also formed a direct relationship between the federal government and Puerto Ricans that had lasting effects.

The PRRA spent unprecedented amounts of money on public works, as Puerto Rican engineers spent $32.6 million on capital-intensive projects in infrastructure, utilities, housing, roads, sewers, and buildings. This figure—which was about 40% of the total figure of $82 million spent by the PRRA between 1935 and 1955—equates to over $543 million today (of a total budget equating to $1.36 billion today). The bulk of these engineering projects were constructed between 1935 and 1943 and transferred to complete local public control regardless of the island’s future political status, which, during the 1930s, was highly uncertain. Dollar amounts alone, however, do not tell the story of the PRRA. The real measure of the PRRA’s value to Puerto Rico was its role in transforming the life expectancy and economic opportunity of the island’s citizens.

To that end, the public works projects of the Engineering division made concrete contributions to the physical security of millions of Puerto Ricans through the construction of hurricane-proof houses, schools, and hospitals connected to modern water supply and waste disposal systems. From a public health standpoint, this construction amounted to a revolution in the island’s built environment, understood today as one of the primary keys to increasing life

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expectancy across socioeconomic lines. Likewise, improved public transportation and communication networks expanded the physical mobility of rural and urban Puerto Ricans alike, increasing the public’s ability to move from one area of the island to another in search of better paying jobs, educational opportunities, health care, or social services for themselves and their families.

By building the island’s first truly public works and establishing its first public authorities to administer them, the PRRA constructed a hurricane-proof infrastructure capable of addressing three interrelated goals: increasing life expectancy through concrete interventions in public health; providing more egalitarian public access to a safer built environment; and limiting the power of private corporate holdings on the island’s natural resources. This dissertation has demonstrated that these goals were addressed in three primary ways: 1) the construction of the Cataño cement plant in 1938 and creation of the Puerto Rico Cement Corporation in 1939; 2) the slum clearance program and construction of a new public health infrastructure; 3) the rural electrification of the mountainous interior of the island and creation of the Water Resources Authority in 1941.

The PRRA was a unique New Deal program run by a local staff and administered to the island’s specific needs in the wake of the hurricanes and Depression. At the same time, the PRRA was highly representative of the New Deal’s effort to provide immediate solutions to the most critical problems of the day while attempting to make permanent changes to social and

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economic life.\textsuperscript{536} In Puerto Rico, this effort was reflected by the shift from a paradigm of relief to one of reconstruction. Related to the New Deal’s larger goals of expanding the public’s opportunity to take part in a more democratic economy, the New Deal in Puerto Rico produced one of the most significant contributions to the overall social mobility of Puerto Rican citizens in the island’s history.

While the political status of Puerto Rico as a U.S. territory has occupied the bulk of historical scholarship on island’s relationship with the United States, the status of Puerto Ricans as U.S. citizens is crucial to understanding the extraordinary extension of New Deal capital and energy to the island. As former Assistant Administrator Miles H. Fairbank summarized, the PRRA was a “vigorous and unprecedented” federal program designed to reduce immediate suffering and begin long-term economic planning in agriculture and industry. While unique to the island, it was part of the New Deal’s effort to improve the lives of all U.S. citizens. As Fairbank continued, although it “was only a small part of an over-all national picture, [Puerto Rico] was not overlooked.”\textsuperscript{537} Comparing the New Deal to the mere “palliative” relief efforts of the Hoover administration, Fairbank and Harold Ickes (Administrator after 1937) viewed the PRRA as an unparalleled “opportunity to . . . make more bearable some of Puerto Rico’s more serious economic and social problems.”\textsuperscript{538}

\textsuperscript{536} Grey, x-xi.

\textsuperscript{537} Fairbank, \textit{The Chardon Plan and the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration}, 9-10.

\textsuperscript{538} Fairbank, \textit{The Chardon Plan and the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration}, 9-10.
Like the New Deal in the U.S., the New Deal in Puerto Rico was not able to meet all of its goals. Faced with political opposition, legal obstacles, and chronic funding shortages, the New Deal was not an efficient and monolithic program instituted from the top-down. Sometimes legislated through Congress, other times created by executive order, its agencies were diverse, fluctuating, and oftentimes run by local officials. Emphasizing central planning, it also encouraged private investment; seeking to regulate corporate power, it also created new opportunities for American big business. For these reasons the New Deal looked different in California than in Mississippi, in New York than in Puerto Rico. Despite its complex and sometimes chaotic nature, however, the New Deal worked for the public good. While making substantial contributions to social and economic life, it also expanded public access to politics in the form of the New Deal coalition. In the U.S., the New Deal coalition created new “seats at the table” of the federal government for groups that had been largely excluded from formal politics, including women, African Americans, and organized labor. Contoured by the advantages and limits of Keynesian liberalism, the New Deal was often restricted by the conflicting interests of these groups with other members of the coalition: Southern Democrats, large-scale agribusiness, and industrial corporations.539

In Puerto Rico, the New Deal also had profound political consequences. By the end of the 1930s, two new organizations with close ties to the New Deal had emerged. Nearly coinciding, the formation of the General Confederation of Workers (CGT) and the electoral victory of the Popular Democratic Party (PPD) both occurred in 1940; together, they marked the beginning of a

particular form of Puerto Rican populism based on the support of a New Deal-style coalition of farmers and workers. Largely predicated on the promise of agricultural rehabilitation and land reform, the rise of the PPD electoral coalition was also based on the massive amounts of new public works construction and patronage jobs associated with the PRRA. The rise of a CIO-affiliated union and a new mass-based political party in control of the local legislature signaled the end of the political domination of the Coalición between the Republican and Socialist parties that had lasted most of the decade.

Even though the PRRA was slowly phased out in favor of defense spending following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and official U.S. entry into World War II, the defeat of the Coalition—the New Deal’s most prominent local adversary—ensured the transition from a federally organized reconstruction to one that was locally controlled and operated. As if recognizing this transition, Roosevelt appointed Rex Tugwell to be Governor of Puerto Rico in 1941. As the first “New Dealer” to be Governor, Tugwell recognized the considerable overlap between the PRRA’s goals and projects and the political platform of the PPD. Tugwell and Luis Muñoz Marín, the leader of the PPD and President of the Puerto Rican Senate after 1941, developed a close and fruitful working relationship through 1946. That year, President Harry Truman replaced Tugwell with Jesús T. Piñero, a close ally of Muñoz Marín in the PPD and the first (and only) Puerto Rican to be appointed Governor of the island. During the Piñero administration, the PPD successfully lobbied the U.S. Congress for greater political autonomy through the direct election of the governor.\footnote{The Elective Governor’s Act, signed by Truman Torruella, 142-143; Maldonado, \textit{Luis Muñoz Marín}, 258-261.}
the next year on August 5, 1947, guaranteed Puerto Rico’s right to elect its own governor for the first time.

The following year, in November 1948, Muñoz Marín convincingly won the election by taking 61.2% of the popular vote and sweeping 76 of 77 municipal districts. On January 2, 1949, he was sworn in as the first locally elected Governor in the island’s history. In office, Muñoz Marín moved Puerto Rico closer to political autonomy within the U.S. territorial system, finally resulting in the establishment of the Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico (Associated Free State) or Commonwealth of Puerto Rico on July 25, 1952, about three years before the final liquidation of the PRRA.

These future events, however, were not a referendum on the New Deal. The emergence of Puerto Rican populism, election of Muñoz Marín, and establishment of the Commonwealth were developments of the 1940s and 1950s that cannot be reduced solely to the influence of the New Deal. Similarly, the PPD’s postwar industrialization program, run by the Puerto Rico Industrial Development Company and known as Fomento or “Operation Bootstrap,” was a product of the changing conditions of the global postwar economy of the late-1940s, 1950s, and 1960s rather than a direct development of the Depression-era New Deal. While they were not directly associated with the New Deal, however, these transformations in Puerto Rican social,


542 Ayala and Bernabe, 167-168; Dietz, 236-237; Maldonado, Luis Muñoz Marín, 313-327.

economic, and political life would have been impossible without the extraordinary investment in public works and public health by the PRRA during the Depression’s darkest years. It was this investment that assisted, in part, in the rapid transformation of Puerto Rico from an export-dependent agricultural economy to a fully industrialized one in about twenty years.

The construction of the Cataño cement plant is an apt example. Just as its construction was not possible prior to the influx of new federal financing for public works during the New Deal, the later industrialization program of the PPD would not have functioned without the high volume of locally manufactured cement produced by the Puerto Rico Cement Corporation. This does not imply that the cement plant was created with the express purpose of future industrialization. This dissertation has argued otherwise, demonstrating that the Cataño plant was central to a locally-driven response to the infrastructural and public health crises of the hurricanes and Depression.

While its original purpose was to assist in the construction of hurricane-proof houses, schools, hospitals, and other public infrastructure and serve as a weapon against epidemic disease, the Cataño plant’s broader legacy includes its centrality to military construction during WWII and the industrialization program of the postwar years. Without exaggeration, it is reasonable to credit the PRRA—through the financing and construction of the island’s first cement plant— with a substantial contribution to the Allied defense of the Caribbean Sea Frontier from Nazi U-boat and potential Luftwaffe campaigns. As Gaylord Kelshall has argued, Puerto Rico was central to both Allied success in the Battle of the Atlantic and the defense of over 500,000 sq. miles of the western hemisphere, ranging from the Caribbean and Panama Canal to the Mexican and U.S. coastlines of the Gulf of Mexico to the Atlantic coasts of Central and
South America. These future events were unknown to New Deal administrators and workers during the 1930s.

Analysis of the New Deal in Puerto Rico has major implications to the study of citizenship and national identity in the U.S., particularly as U.S. historians have consistently failed to consider the role that Puerto Ricans played in the New Deal and World War II or analyze the effects of New Deal and wartime policy on U.S. citizens living on the island. As Louis A. Pérez, Jr. has argued, the failure of U.S. historians to consider the archives or historiographies of Latin America and the Caribbean has stunted historical knowledge of how U.S. policy has impacted the world and how the world has impacted U.S. policy. The result, according to Pérez, has been a “self-possessed—to say nothing of self-contained—historiography, given to the conviction that it alone has raised all the relevant questions and, of course, provided all the appropriate answers, and the rest of the world has little useful to add.”

This study has taken a different approach to that criticized by Pérez, and has found in Puerto Rico—a small Caribbean island with distinct and persisting social and cultural ties to Latin America despite its political relationship with the United States—new ways of understanding the New Deal. At the same time, this study has utilized federal archives to shed new light on Puerto Rican and Latin American history during the Great Depression. In analyzing the public works and public health projects of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration, this dissertation has argued that the New Deal was central to widespread and enduring transformations in Puerto Rican social, economic, and political life since 1935. These

544 Kelshall, xiii, 8, 16.

transformations add texture not only to the lives of the millions of Puerto Rican citizens who have experienced them, but more broadly to the study U.S. citizenship as well. As the Latino population of the United States continues to grow—currently estimated to make up nearly 30% of the total U.S. population in 2050—the study of the New Deal in Puerto Rico will help provide historical context to the fluctuating meaning of Latino citizenship over the last century and into our own time.546

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546 For data on the rising Latino population in the U.S., see “Latino Data Project,” Center for Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino Studies, CUNY Graduate Center, http://clacls.gc.cuny.edu/courses/.
## APPENDIX A: Total Expenses on PRRA Public Works Projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT</th>
<th>COST 1938 (USD)</th>
<th>COST 2014 (USD)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural Electrification</td>
<td>9,240,493.72</td>
<td>$153,864,706.10</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reforestation</td>
<td>3,408,487.70</td>
<td>$56,755,187.99</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Puerto Rico School of Tropical Medicine</td>
<td>2,868,817.28</td>
<td>$47,769,063.11</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highways, Roads, Streets</td>
<td>2,366,687.92</td>
<td>$39,408,039.47</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction of Schools</td>
<td>1,935,664.52</td>
<td>$32,231,010.76</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Health Dispensaries Construction and Operation</td>
<td>1,889,357.49</td>
<td>$31,459,946.16</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eradication of Cattle Tick</td>
<td>1,751,036.02</td>
<td>$29,156,736.72</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drainage and Land Fill for Malaria Control</td>
<td>1,743,439.94</td>
<td>$29,030,253.37</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soil Conservation</td>
<td>1,677,448.28</td>
<td>$27,931,416.52</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cataño Cement Plant</td>
<td>1,444,831.14</td>
<td>$24,058,078.01</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational Schools, Construction and Operation</td>
<td>1,058,779.33</td>
<td>$17,629,877.30</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Utilities</td>
<td>824,262.09</td>
<td>$13,724,899.13</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Buildings</td>
<td>757,238.20</td>
<td>$12,608,875.31</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigations, Studies Regarding Cooperatives, Census of Farm Debts, Mortgages, and Liens</td>
<td>418,084.09</td>
<td>$6,961,574.52</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home for Orphan Children</td>
<td>399,991.17</td>
<td>$6,660,306.87</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks and Recreational Facilities</td>
<td>164,989.39</td>
<td>$2,747,260.57</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surplus Food Distribution</td>
<td>162,842.10</td>
<td>$2,711,505.75</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eradication of coconut bud-rot</td>
<td>125,443.12</td>
<td>$2,088,770.29</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sewing Centers and Training</td>
<td>90,104.73</td>
<td>$1,500,346.00</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canning Centers</td>
<td>85,163.35</td>
<td>$1,418,066.42</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrigation Canal, Isabela</td>
<td>81,158.46</td>
<td>$1,351,380.45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Home for the Aged, San Juan</td>
<td>46,492.36</td>
<td>$774,150.55</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marketing Centers</td>
<td>26,077.46</td>
<td>$434,219.30</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historic Manuscripts</td>
<td>21,455.86</td>
<td>$357,264.42</td>
<td>-1%</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>AMOUNT 1938 (USD)</th>
<th>AMOUNT 2014 (USD)</th>
<th>% Change</th>
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<td>Home for the Poor (repairs), Ponce</td>
<td>17,068.65</td>
<td>$284,212.39</td>
<td>-1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compiling Puerto Rico Guide</td>
<td>12,065.16</td>
<td>$200,898.60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>32,617,479.48</td>
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Total PRRA Funds:

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<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>AMOUNT 1938 (USD)</th>
<th>AMOUNT 2014 (USD)</th>
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<td>Congress Appropriated</td>
<td>$69,741,843.32</td>
<td>$1,161,280,830.85</td>
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<td>PRRA-Generated Revolving Fund</td>
<td>$12,321,859.80</td>
<td>$205,172,947.40</td>
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<td>Totals</td>
<td>$82,063,703.12</td>
<td>$1,366,453,774.74</td>
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APPENDIX B: Lands Sold to the PRRA Rural Electrification Division, 1936-1941.\textsuperscript{548}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Cuerdas\textsuperscript{549}</th>
<th>Amount paid in 1936-41 (USD)</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Hydroelectric Project</th>
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<td>Marco Tomas Caneja</td>
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<td>$20,311.54</td>
<td>Guaynabo</td>
<td>n/a\textsuperscript{550}</td>
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<tr>
<td>Petronila Aguesanta Salaverría</td>
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<td>Barrio Jagua, Penuelas</td>
<td>Garzas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clemente Bartolomei y Luiggi and Ignacio Bartolomei y Luiggi</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$4,200</td>
<td>Barrio Jagua, Penuelas</td>
<td>Garzas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Esposos Don Lucas Candelaria and Dona Maria Medina</td>
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<td>$433</td>
<td>Utuado</td>
<td>Dos Bocas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aquilino Hernandez Rivera</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td>Barrio Rio Ariba, Arecibo</td>
<td>Dos Bocas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan Irizarry</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>$2,011</td>
<td>Barrio Saltillo, Adjuntas</td>
<td>Garzas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jose Junoz Uncion</td>
<td>9.84</td>
<td>$2,700</td>
<td>Arecibo on east bank of Río Arecibo</td>
<td>Dos Bocas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Land Bank of Baltimore</td>
<td>7.63</td>
<td>$2,500</td>
<td>Utuado</td>
<td>Dos Bocas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Land Bank of Baltimore</td>
<td>15.46</td>
<td>$1,546</td>
<td>Barrio Ala de la Piedra, Orocovis</td>
<td>Toro Negro #2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan y Herminia Oliver Maldonado</td>
<td>7.91</td>
<td>$2,700</td>
<td>Barrio Rio Ariba, Arecibo</td>
<td>Dos Bocas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benigno Olivieri y Olivieri</td>
<td></td>
<td>$454</td>
<td>Barrio Ala de la Piedra, Orocovis</td>
<td>Toro Negro #2</td>
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<td>$978.90</td>
<td>Barrio Ala de la Piedra</td>
<td>Toro Negro #2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel Lugo Serrano y Margarita Carbonell Fernandez</td>
<td>23.47</td>
<td>$3,550</td>
<td>Arecibo</td>
<td>Dos Bocas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buenaventura Ortiz Rivera</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>$500</td>
<td>Barrio Caniaco, Utuado</td>
<td>Dos Bocas</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{548} Box 1-8, alphabetical by last name, Records of the Land and Title Section of the Legal Division, Title Opinions on Lands Intended For Rural Electrification Projects, 1936-1938, RG 323, NARA-NYC; Box 1-19, Records of the Land and Title Section of the Legal Division, Land Acquisition Case Files for Rural Electrification Projects, 1937-1941, RG 323, NARA-NYC.

\textsuperscript{549} 1 cuerda = 0.97 acres

\textsuperscript{550} Marco Tomas Caneja lived in Spain, and was represented in Puerto Rico by Juan Martino Gonzalez. This land was possibly acquired for the electrification of the Cataño cement plant in Guaynabo.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Belen Jimenez y Ramirez de Arellano</td>
<td>$897.22</td>
<td>Barrio Rio Arriba, Arecibo</td>
<td>Dos Bocas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and su esposo Juan Figueroa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomas Jimenez y Ramirez de Arellano</td>
<td>4.275</td>
<td>Barrio Saltillos, Adjuntas</td>
<td>Garzas</td>
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<tr>
<td>and su esposa Isabel Becerra</td>
<td>$427.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camilo Rodriguez Serrano y Petronila</td>
<td>24.85</td>
<td>Barrio Alia de la Piedra,</td>
<td>Garzas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldonado</td>
<td>$3,869.14</td>
<td>Adjuntas, Toro Negro #2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabel Rodriguez y Monserrate Quinones</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luciano Rodriguez y Monserrate Irizarry</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>Adjuntas, Garzas</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Victoriano Ruiz</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>Saltillo, Adjuntas, Garzas</td>
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<td>Aurelio Serrano y su esposa Juana Bautista</td>
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<td>Garzas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Molina Diaz</td>
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<td>3.46</td>
<td>Barrio Garzas, Adjuntas</td>
<td>Garzas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela Torre Ortiz</td>
<td>19.157</td>
<td>Barrio Garzas, Adjuntas</td>
<td>Garzas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juana Torres Candelaria and her 8 children</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Garzas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francisco Vega Quinones y Faustina Navarro</td>
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<tr>
<td>Domingo Vivaldi Pacheco</td>
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<td>Saltillo, Adjuntas, Garzas</td>
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<td>Jose Bujosa Jaume</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Maria Josefa Teresa Roig Casaldug</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norberto Garcia Jimenez</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Tomas Garcia Moya y Georgina Santoni</td>
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<td>Aurele M. Gatti</td>
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<td>11.5</td>
<td>Barrio Don Alonso, Utuado,</td>
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280
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<th>Location</th>
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<td>Dos Bocas</td>
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<td>Tomas Jimenez y Ramirez de Arellano y su esposa Isabel Becerra</td>
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<td>Municipio</td>
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<td>Utuado</td>
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<td>Geronimo Carmen y Genaro Rivera</td>
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<td>Saltillo, Adjuntas</td>
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<td>La viuda Estefania Martinez Rios y sus 8 hijos</td>
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<td>Jeronimo Serrano</td>
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<td>Pedro Jose Serrano Muniz</td>
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<td>Buenventura Torres Gonzalez</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
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