

4-24-2014

# “Una Isla Caribeña Sobrepoblada”: Luis Muñoz Marín’s overpopulation discourse, 1922-1948

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“UNA ISLA CARIBEÑA SOBREPoblADA”:

LUIS MUÑOZ MARÍN’S OVERPOPULATION DISCOURSE, 1922-1948

by

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Bachelor of Arts in Music Education, 2004

A THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate School of the

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-ST. LOUIS  
In partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

HISTORY

May, 2014

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## Abstract

In the years that preceded Luis Muñoz Marín's tenure as Puerto Rico's first elected and longest running governor, he used Puerto Rico's so-called alarming population growth as the explanation for the island's troubles and reform failures. In the early 1920s, the young neo-malthusianist, carved a place for himself as a staunch supporter of policies advocating for state provided birth control in a climate where critics of the jíbaros (Puerto Rico's peasants) deemed them immoral and barbaric for having too many children. Less than twenty years later though, the same jíbaros who were causing Puerto Rico's problems in the twenties were portrayed by Muñoz and his party as national symbols; and in journals and publications, the finger-pointing for Puerto Rico's overpopulation began to zero in on Puerto Rico's women. This eventually would lead Muñoz to commit to reform efforts that increased industrial production and migration to the mainland and to also dismiss independence as a viable status option. This thesis traces the course of Overpopulation Ideology~ by which I mean the comprehensive vision which dictated that there was a set carrying capacity for humans or an optimal number of people. I will examine what Muñoz Marín meant by overpopulation in the context of population movements around the globe over a period of more than twenty years, arguing that his Overpopulation Ideology was crucial to his vision for the 20<sup>th</sup> century's economic and social transformation of Puerto Rico; a vision that drove Puerto Rico's development on a particular path and would later stifle the independence cause.

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## Acknowledgements

It is almost a cliché to begin the acknowledgements section of a thesis or dissertation by declaring that such a work would be impossible without the help, encouragement, and guidance of others. Yet, in this case, the cliché is the honest truth. I stand on the shoulders of a great many people and their support carried me through what has turned out to be the most difficult and satisfying period of my life.

I would first like to thank Matthew Davis and Gerda Ray for their encouragement as I began my work as a “baby historian.” Dr. Davis told me early on that I was doctorate material and his belief in me helped me believe in myself. His kind words and his dedication to scholarship and activism are an example to emulate. Dr. Ray, on the other hand, taught me to believe in my project and her classes were stepping stones to the ideas that I talk about in this work. I would also like to thank Minsoo Kang, Priscilla Dowden-White, Kim Kleinman, and Peter Acsay. Dr. Kleinman and Dr. Acsay in particular, have sat through my ranting emails and conversations and have been the best sounding boards a girl could hope for.

I was very grateful for the opportunity to work in la Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín and the Colección Puertorriqueña of the Universidad de Puerto Rico during the research portion of my study. For three days, La Fundación gave me a cubicle and my very own archivist, Alex. It was a bit like Christmas, I have to admit. The fabulous people at La Colección Puertorriqueña put up with my stubborn ignorance of microfilm equipment time and time again. Their newspaper collection inspired a record number of “aha!” moments which fed into this work.

I would also like to thank the people who kept me relatively sane during the writing process. Dennis Lindwall, Miguel Rosario, Augusto Rosario, Johanna and José Ortíz, Tatiana Martínez, Ashley Ray, and Viviana Carrasquillo, were great friends who fed me, took me to the beach, listened to my rants, and on occasion, even brought me office supplies. Sara and Sofía Ortíz reminded me of the joy of being young and painted me in the most epic portrait of all time. Karla Rodriguez dragged me to crazy outdoor adventures that almost made me wish I was writing and Jesús Díaz taught me all about Gantt charts and downloaded Ray Barretto's *Indestructible*, the song that became my writing anthem, onto my phone. Adrien Fauquet, and his parents Claire and Claude, always believed in me and my fabulous violin professor, Alexis Velázquez, put up with my crappy practicing. Hopefully things will get better for his ears now. Last but not least, Las Piruchas, the tribe of Hernández women that I belong to, always encouraged me and made me laugh. Their kindness will not be forgotten.

Friends and professors have carried me but there are nine people whom I could not live without. First, I would like to thank my committee for being examples of excellence and solid scholarship. Laura Westhoff and Mark Burkholder were always incredibly professional and helpful and scary enough to make me want to do my best work. Deborah Cohen, my chairperson, deserves a particular mention which I will address to her. Dr. Cohen, you plucked me out of one of your classes and told me that I was meant to be a historian. It has taken me a while to fully agree but you were, as usual, right. You pushed me to perform in ways that I could not even imagine I could perform and without sounding cheesy, my life has found its purpose because of you. Thank you.

Then there is my core: My uncle Paco, my aunt Aida, and my grandmother Paquita Hernández clothed me, fed me, and put up with me beyond the realm of reason. Words cannot

describe what I feel for these three people. Gracias tío Paco por tus abrazos y tus tostones. Titi, te agradezco por llevarme a los archivos sin preguntar y por todos esos conciertos que compartiste conmigo. Te amo. Abuelita, palabras no pueden agradecer todo lo que has hecho por mí. Me hiciste sopita cuando estaba enfermita, me hiciste reír cuando lo necesitaba, y aunque creo que no entendías porque estaba tomando tanto tiempo escribiendo en la mesa del comedor, NUNCA te quejaste. Hasta dejaste que me quedara con la perrita! Eres una diosa. Grandma, you are a goddess. Speaking of goddesses, my friend Nuala Coamhanach's intellect, wit, and patience made the everyday writing process if not a joy, a smaller load to carry. While living far away from me in New York, her texts and phone conversations were an inspiration to push forward. You all will be hearing about her and her mad historian skills one day! Team Nualui to the end!!!

Finally, at the end of this long list of people who I am grateful to, I would like to thank my parents Luis Negrón and Mildred Pérez. From the womb, these two individuals instilled in me love, respect, integrity, discipline, laughter, joy, and a rebellious curiosity which just won't stop. They taught me that it is possible to change the world, that history matters, and that my talents were given to me for a higher purpose. They are the loves of my life and this small work is dedicated to them. Gracias Papi y Mami!

## Introduction

Thousands of miles from Washington, DC and its centers of power, Puerto Rican men and women returned home after World War II to find their island filled with a new optimism. Where poverty and hunger coexisted with disease, there was new talk of reform, as legislation created by Senate President Luis Muñoz Marín, and the Partido Popular Democrático (the PPD), the party Muñoz founded, began to be enacted. Roads and schools began to appear in faraway towns. Electric poles sprang in the sky; the so-called “democratic revolution,” started by Muñoz, was on its way. However, not all was pleasant on the island of enchantment. Dark clouds loomed by early February 1946, when opposition against Muñoz’s ambivalence towards resolving the status question came to a head and he was forced to take a public stand. In “Alerta a la conciencia puertorriqueña,” Muñoz Marín, who was considered a pro-independence leader at the time, shockingly argued that not only was there a group called Congreso Pro-Independencia sabotaging his work, but that independence would lead to an annihilation of “hope and civilization.”<sup>1</sup>

Central to the arguments of “Alerta” stood Puerto Rico’s supposed overpopulation.<sup>2</sup> According to census data cited by Muñoz Marín in the first article of the series titled “El Problema,” Puerto Rico’s 3,500 square miles—half of which were not arable—sustained a population of over two million. He continued: “The annual birth rate stands at around forty births for every thousand inhabitants while the annual mortality is fourteen deaths for every 1,000

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<sup>1</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín, “Alerta a la Conciencia Puertorriqueña, cuarto artículo: El estatus político” *El Mundo*, (10 Feb. 1946), 1. Archivo Luis Muñoz Marín (ALMM), section IV, series 11, binder, 13, document num. 11.

<sup>2</sup> All translations done by me unless noted.

inhabitants. The difference between deaths and births constitute the annual rise in the population which is twenty-six for every 1,000 inhabitants and consequently 55,000 for every 2,100,000 inhabitants.”<sup>3</sup> Good intentions would not be enough in solving this problem since failure would “make us criminally responsible of a catastrophe of proportions similar to losing a war.”<sup>4</sup>

The alarmist rhetoric of “war” and “catastrophe” and the use of statistics to define populations as problematic were part of Overpopulation Ideology- by which I mean the comprehensive vision which dictated that there was a set carrying capacity for humans or an optimal number of people in a region. While this vision often sounded harmless, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century such numbers were defined upon a solid foundation of eugenics. All “eugenically weak” non-whites were perceived as overpopulated vis-à-vis the number of white people or reproducing at an out of control rate; because of that weakness and their reproductive habits, they could also not be “modern.” In the case of Puerto Rico, the main targets of that rhetoric were, first, the jíbaros, the island’s peasants whose skin color, attitudes about procreation, and family life were ripe for scrutiny, and then Puerto Rican women of color.

Luis Muñoz Marín (1898-1980), in the years that preceded his tenure as Puerto Rico’s first elected and longest running governor, scrutinized the numbers and used Puerto Rico’s so-called alarming population growth as the scapegoat for the island’s troubles and reform failures. In the early 1920s, as a young neo-malthusianist, he carved a place for himself as a staunch supporter of policies advocating for state provided birth control in a climate where critics of the jíbaros deemed them immoral and barbaric for having too many children. Less than twenty years later though, the

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<sup>3</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín, “Alerta a la Conciencia Puertorriqueña, primer artículo: ‘El Problema’ ” *El Mundo*, (7 Feb. 1946), 1. Archivo Luis Muñoz Marín (ALMM), section IV, series 11, binder, 13, document num. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Muñoz Marín, “Alerta a la Conciencia Puertorriqueña, primer artículo: ‘El Problema’ ” (7 Feb. 1946).

same jíbaros who were causing Puerto Rico's problems in the twenties were portrayed Muñoz and his party as national symbols; and in journals and publications, the finger pointing for Puerto Rico's overpopulation began to zero in on Puerto Rico's women. This eventually would lead Muñoz to commit to reform efforts that increased industrial production and migration and to dismiss independence as a viable status option for Puerto Rico's future for the sake of "*la civilización*" or civilization, a term which encompassed commodities, a higher living standard, and education.

My thesis will trace the course of Overpopulation Ideology in the discourse of the father of modern Puerto Rico, Luis Muñoz Marín, from 1922 to 1948. I will examine what Muñoz Marín meant by overpopulation in the context of population movements around the globe over a period of more than twenty years, arguing that Muñoz Marín's Overpopulation Ideology was crucial to his vision for the 20<sup>th</sup> century economic and social transformation of Puerto Rico; a vision that drove Puerto Rico's development and would later stifle the independence cause.

An inquiry of this sort is necessary for many reasons. First, as the leading architect of Puerto Rico's commonwealth status and constitution, Muñoz Marín has had an almost overpowering presence on the island even thirty years after his death with writings and speeches that still resonate to this day.<sup>5</sup> He created the island's leading governmental institutions and the philosophy behind how many Puerto Ricans look at culture and the relationship between the people and the state. In the 1940s and 1950s at the height of his popularity, Muñoz Marín was almost worshipped as a man who could possibly even command the weather.<sup>6</sup> The vision of Puerto

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<sup>5</sup> The Luis Muñoz Marín's birthday is commemorated for a week although it is not a holiday.

<sup>6</sup> The love that individuals had for him is chronicled best in Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá's retelling of Muñoz Marín's funeral *Las Tribulaciones de Jonás*.

Rico articulated by Muñoz was *the* vision of Puerto Rico and he was its most articulate spokesman. No other political leader to this day has been able to overshadow his influence. Yet his influence did not just affect Puerto Rico. Muñoz was one of President Kennedy's leading advisors on Latin America during his administration and was an architect of the Alliance for Progress. Understanding Muñoz's overpopulation discourse gives incites to how Overpopulation Ideology was discussed and understood in Latin America and American diplomatic circles.

Second, my query will expand on ideas of imperialism, colonialism, and race first posited by Laura Briggs in her land-breaking study *Reproducing Empire*. While Briggs looks at how population policy became the "symbolic and real"<sup>7</sup> battleground for the meaning of the US presence in Puerto Rico, my study will look at how population policy was tied to meanings of civility, development, and nationhood, by defining Muñoz Marín's overpopulation discourse in the context of Puerto Rican and global population control movements of the twenties, thirties, and forties. These three concepts link especially to eugenics since race figured heavily into which populations were considered modern, developed, and civilized enough to be nations and which ones were not. My study will also look at issues of overpopulation from the perspective of the colony. Unlike Briggs who looked at overpopulation from the perspective of the colonial power, my study will look at how local agents, like Muñoz Marín, and intellectuals on the island, like Miguel Meléndez Muñoz, navigated population control and its supposed perpetrators: the jíbaros.

Thirdly, such a study is key to understanding the framework that grounded the creation of the Commonwealth in 1952. Muñoz Marín, the metropolis, and the *populares* (the nicknamed

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<sup>7</sup> Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 51.

given to the members of the party he founded the Populist Democratic Party) of the 1940s and 1950s reasoned that fast economic development was urgent due to the island's ever skyrocketing population growth -that is, development was more important than independence, since the latter was unsustainable without the former. This led Puerto Rican statesmen like Muñoz Marín to eventually reject independence as a viable option since the island's economic "backwardness" would not supposedly allow, according to social scientists and politicians, for the development needed to support the growing population.

Finally, my study is important to a comprehensive understanding of Puerto Rico's current plebiscite issues and apprehensiveness of independence. Since the nineteenth century, Puerto Ricans have been told by local, Spanish, and American politicians that they would starve to death if independence were given to the island. This belief was given credibility through Overpopulation Ideology. Our fecundity was making independence our impossible dream.

My thesis will be divided into five chapters and an epilogue. Chapter 1, the exposition, briefly introduces Population Control, Eugenics, and Birth Control in the international and Puerto Rican context before 1922, when Muñoz Marín begins to write on the subject. These movements often intermingled, yet each had its own agenda. Eugenicists believed that the quality of populations needed to be improved while population control advocates, who at this time were called neo-malthusianists, focused on the quantity of the population. Birth Control advocates, meanwhile, called for choice; they called for women to have a say in their own reproduction. All three of these movements, in vogue in the early twentieth century, were connected by human reproduction and the individuals that needed "help": the inferior, barbarian, and dark working masses. These movements are key to the understanding of Luis Muñoz Marín.

In the colony of Puerto Rico, the jíbaros- the island's peasantry- became the island's problematic subjects, up for the scrutiny of Eugenicists and Population Control advocates. In Chapter 2, the writings of a collective of such advocates from 1923 are analyzed and contrasted alongside Muñoz's. Muñoz, like many of the island's elite, was a neo-malthusianist, believing that birth control could be used to control population numbers; however, he did not call the jíbaro inferior, calling instead for Puerto Rico's proletariat or working class to have access to reproductive education and access to birth control. This, in his view, would lead to an increase in "civility and humanity" on the island.<sup>8</sup> By contrasting Muñoz's arguments to the arguments of contemporary writers and thinkers on the island, I show a clearer portrait of the importance placed on birth control compared to social inequality, colonial status, and a person's biological qualities.

Muñoz Marín's early ideas on "civility and humanity" are expanded in Chapter 3, which explores his vision for Puerto Rico in the late 1930s and into the election of 1940. Born of the idealization of the jíbaro by the 1930s generation -a group of men and women born during the time of the invasion who strived to understand the essence of what it meant to be Puerto Rican, Muñoz's vision called for equality, democracy, and the advancement of the jíbaro through governmental reforms. This vision became the priority of the Partido Popular Democrático and guided Muñoz Marín's tenure in political office, becoming the standard that Puerto Rico's population problem and potential independence would be measured against.

What Muñoz and other elites called the island's "population problem" in the 1920s became in the 1940s, a grave problem that needed to be studied by social scientists so that

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<sup>8</sup> Jacinto Ortega, "Malthusianismo Práctico," *La Democracia*, August 21, 1922.

Muñoz's vision of advancement could become a reality. This vision for the island was, through its framing philosophy, connected to development and modernization theory and Chapter 4 explores the overpopulation studies that emerged from that period. These studies concluded that the island's problems were due to the reproductive habits of women of color. Such studies saw the island's overpopulation as undisputable commonsense that did not even need to be defended.

Chapter 5 will then look at the policy conclusions of such studies and Muñoz Marín's rhetoric that emerged in 1946, a year in which he was forced to defend his vision for advancement in the face of an outpouring of Puerto Rican pro-independence sentiment and antagonism from the mainland. In articles and speeches Muñoz argued that the island's overpopulation, and its accompanying poverty, would only be eradicated through an industrial support impossible without North American aid. Puerto Rican independence, i.e. the end of aid from the United States, would lead to starvation and would stop Puerto Rico's development. Another political route needed to be explored; the commonwealth.

Lastly, the epilogue will conclude the thesis tracing its major themes, its development, and my thoughts going forward. It is my hope that this query can further shed light on how Puerto Rico became the symbol of overpopulation around the globe and further aid in the study of the oldest colony in the world.

## Chapter 1

### Disinterring Dead Cities: Understanding the Jíbaro and the Puerto Rican Poor in the Context of Eugenics and Neo-Malthusianism in the Early Twentieth Century

When Luis Muñoz Marín first spoke of overpopulation in 1922 he shocked public opinion by calling Puerto Rico's population numbers the greatest threat to island prosperity. "In every squared mile of our territory (on average) resides and tries to survive 350 human beings that are undernourished, badly attended in their basic necessities, and badly protected from the sun, wind, rain, and the moist soil."<sup>9</sup> The solutions that were discussed by members of the island intelligentsia at the time—re-distribution of wealth, the elimination of absentee ownership, and an increase in industrial production would help Puerto Rico's general "situation," Muñoz argued. However he believed those measures were inadequate for the scope of the problem and impossible to execute.<sup>10</sup> The consequences of the population growth that he deemed scandalous were not just poverty. Overpopulation was leading to something graver: it was leading to the physical, emotional, and social deterioration of the Puerto Rican people.<sup>11</sup>

The arguments that supported the problematization of Puerto Rico's population and its supposed deterioration in general grew out of arguments put forth by two leading movements that grew in industrial age Europe. Eugenics and Neo-Malthusianism tried to explain the dismal

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<sup>9</sup> Jacinto Ortega was a pseudonym used by Muñoz Marín in his writings for *La Democracia*, a newspaper started by his father and a vehicle for the Union Party. He felt he needed the pseudonym after encountering some controversy over his involvement in anti-Union Party activities. It is curious to note that he doesn't mention this in his memoirs. For information on the pseudonym see, Rosario Natal, Carmelo, *La Juventud de Luis Muñoz Marín (Vida y Pensamiento, 1898-1932)* (San Juan: Master Typesetting of P.R., Inc., 1976), 140. For information on the Union Party and Muñoz Rivera, Cesar J. Ayala and Rafael Bernabe, *Puerto Rico en el Siglo Americano: Su Historia desde 1898* (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2011), 87-89.

<sup>10</sup> Muñoz did not specify as to why they were inadequate or impossible to execute in this article.

<sup>11</sup> Jacinto Ortega, "Desde Nueva York: Maltusianismo Practico" *La Democracia*, August 21, 1922.

conditions of the poor while also absolving elites from such terrible conditions. Neo-malthusians believed that population growth caused poverty while eugenicists believed that deterioration of a people, the biological decay produced by bad breeding, was possible. In Puerto Rico, a colonial outpost of Spain and then the United States in the early twentieth century, jíbaros, the island's peasantry, became the scapegoat for the island's problems. During Spanish rule, the population numbers were considered too small and new immigrants from Europe needed to be brought to the island. While in the early years after the 1898 American invasion, that same population was seen as too large and in need of contract labor migration.

In this chapter I will provide the frame necessary to understand the overpopulation debates in Puerto Rico by giving brief backgrounds into the history of Eugenics and Population Control outside and inside the island noting the interconnections between the two. As Benjamin states, "he who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging. This confers the tone and bearing of genuine reminiscences. He musn't not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters the earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil. Only then will there be 'a successful excavation.'<sup>12</sup> I divide this chapter into three sections which act like snapshots: Section I will look at Eugenics, Birth Control, and Neo-Malthusianism as movements that arose to understand and solve the problems of the poor, while Section II will look at Puerto Rico, the discourses on women, and jíbaros. Finally, the conclusion will tie the argument of this chapter to that of chapter 2.

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<sup>12</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Volume 2: Part 2, 1931-1934* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 611.

Section I: Eugenics, Neo-Malthusianism, and Birth Control

The frame that Muñoz Marin's would draw on for his overpopulation narrative began before his birth, during the European shift from an agrarian to an industrial society in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. To its contemporary observers, the industrial revolution came with staggering side effects. In 1789 Robert Burns, for example, visited Carron Iron Works and wrote: "We came not here to view your works In hopes to be more wise, But only, lest we go to Hell, It may be no surprise."<sup>13</sup> The industrial revolution and the machine and factories that came with it were shocking to many of its contemporaries. Yet "hell" was not just a noun that could describe the furnaces where iron was made. As thousands of people crowded into industrial centers looking for employment, "hell" began to be used to describe the crowded and often unsanitary living quarters of millions of people, the illnesses acquired, and the horrendous poverty that drove many to their deaths. As Engels wrote in his description of Manchester in *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844*, "I am forced to admit that instead of being exaggerated, it is far from black enough to convey a true impression of the filth, ruin, and uninhabitableness, the defiance of all considerations of cleanliness, ventilation, and health which characterise the construction of this single district, containing at least twenty to thirty thousand inhabitants. And such a district exists in the heart of the second city of England, the first manufacturing city of the world. If any one wishes to see in how little space a human being can move, how little air - and *such* air! - he can breathe, how little of civilisation he may share and yet live, it is only necessary to travel hither. True, this is the *Old Town*, and the people of Manchester emphasise the fact whenever any one mentions to them the frightful condition of this Hell upon Earth; but what does that prove?

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Burns, *Impromptu On Carron Iron Works*, <http://poetry.rapgenius.com/Robert-burns-impromptu-on-carron-iron-works-annotated>, (February 26, 2014, date accessed).

Everything which here arouses horror and indignation is of recent origin, belongs to the *industrial epoch*.<sup>14</sup>

Writers and thinkers in major industrial centers began to ask themselves why such “Hell upon Earth” existed, who was to be blamed for it, and how it could be solved. Eugenics, Neo-Malthusianist, and Birth Control movements emerged from attempts at reaching answers to these important questions.<sup>15</sup> Not surprisingly, it was in England, the birth-place of the industrial revolution, that Eugenics and Neo-Malthusianism sprouted and where the Birth Control movement gained so much notoriety.

Malthusianism and its counterpart Neo-Malthusianism originated in 1798 with the publication of *Essay on the Principle of Population* by a vicar/math hobbyist named Thomas Malthus (1766-1834).<sup>16</sup> In his work he argued that food production was increasing incrementally while people reproduced exponentially. Because of this, he predicted that the world would run out of food by 1890 if individuals did not curtail their desires and abstain from sex.<sup>17</sup>

Years later another British math enthusiast and the founder of statistics introduced another revolutionary concept: Eugenics. Eugenics is most often defined as the science of improving human populations and was coined by Sir Francis Galton (1822-1911), a cousin of Charles Darwin, after he noticed that most great British men (he counted himself in that number) came

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<sup>14</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1892), 52-53.

<sup>15</sup> Matthew Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population*. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 1-76.

<sup>16</sup> Malthusianism believed that abstinence was the answer to overpopulation while Neo-Malthusianists believed that it was through birth control measures.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population as It Affects the Future Improvement of Society, with Remarks on the Speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and Other Writers* (London: J. Johnson, 1798), 6. Dooms year based on his calculation for England.

from the same families. The ideas developed by Darwin, Galton believed, could apply to humans and he reasoned that such “great” men came from great parents and grandparents; by calculating and managing men through good marriages, a highly gifted and graceful race of men could be bred.<sup>18</sup> Later in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, close to Malthus’ doom year and aided by the advent of the science of demography and a better understanding of women’s reproduction, a new crop of Malthusian followers emerged. Calling themselves the Neo-Malthusians, these individuals, like Malthus, believed that populations were growing too fast and needed to be controlled. Unlike Malthus however, they believed that artificial birth control means should be used in lieu of abstinence.<sup>19</sup>

Eugenics at the same time was growing in esteem becoming popular all over the world, especially in the United States. There, eugenicists contended that the economic failures of recent immigrants and African Americans were due to bad hereditary traits. Nordic and Germanic “peoples,” who for the most part comprised the upper rungs of American society, were seen as the most fortunate genetically and their numbers, according to eugenicists, needed to be increased through *positive eugenic policies* (policies which facilitated and helped “good marriages” and their offspring). Immigrants from central and southern Europe, Ireland, China, and African Americans, who comprised the lower classes, were called *undesirables*.<sup>20</sup> Their numbers needed to be decreased

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<sup>18</sup>Edwin Black, *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race*, (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003), 15.

<sup>19</sup>Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 414.

<sup>20</sup>Anthony M Platt, with Cecilia E. O’Leary, *Bloodlines: Recovering Hitler’s Nuremberg Laws, from Paton’s Trophy to Public Memorial*, (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006).

through *negative eugenic policies* (policies which stopped the birth of “defective” individuals).<sup>21</sup> These rationales would later be used on Puerto Ricans.

There were definite distinctions/disagreements between Eugenics and Neo-Malthusianism, and although their methods varied, they can be distilled into a few points. Both groups faulted the poor. For eugenicists reproducing “too much” was considered a genetic trait of undesirables; they could not control their sexual organs. Neo-malthusianists, in contrast, believed that those same people were having too many offspring. For both movements the poor needed to be controlled and who better than the state to do so. Both consequently advocated state regulation so the so-called “right people” could have the right number of kids<sup>22</sup>. In the case of eugenicists this was done through agendas that included state licensing of marriages and health exams for prospective couples while neo-malthusianists believed that the state needed to pass out birth control and educate the public on its use and benefits for the whole society.<sup>23</sup> Neo-malthusianists tended to not see “people” but rather populations without the feelings or sensitivity associated with witnessing or talking about misery. They, for example, saw the high death rates amongst children in industrial towns and big cities- in the town of Liverpool 4,604 of every 10,000 children died before the age of 5—and argued that “poor people already had too many offspring to care for them properly.”<sup>24</sup> Eugenicists had very similar rhetoric. Besides calling individuals inferior, they claimed that certain people were not even worthy of human life. Eugenicist support for Nazi policies in the 1930s and 1940s is evidence of this way of thinking.

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<sup>21</sup>US Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race* (Washington DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2004), 18.

<sup>22</sup> US Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Deadly Medicine*.

<sup>23</sup> US Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Deadly Medicine*, 6.

<sup>24</sup>Matthew Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population*. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 26.

Birth control was also a part of Neo-Malthusian and Eugenic goals. Eugenicists believed, like neo-malthusianists, that birth control could be a useful tool to prevent pregnancy of undesirables, though eugenicists preferred sterilization as a permanent end to their fertility. For both groups, control of births had nothing to do with individual choice. An undesirable should not be given free reign to choose his or her partner or the number of children he or she wanted. He or she needed to give up individual rights for the health of the human race or the collective.

Lack of access to birth control and reproductive rights lay at the heart of another movement: the Birth Control movement. Started by Margaret Sanger and other like-minded activists around the globe, like Marie Stopes in Britain, the birth control movement attempted to end the deplorable living conditions of women in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century believing that frequent unwanted pregnancies were partly to blame.<sup>25</sup> However, although members of the birth control movement called for women's right to control their bodies and their reproduction, they often were bedfellows with eugenicists and neo-malthusians who they believed had the social standing to push for wider use of birth control. Many birth control advocates, like Sanger, were also known eugenicists and spoke sympathetically of the population control initiatives pushed by the neo-malthusianists. However, there were distinct differences in the narratives that each movement used to justify their actions as we shall see in Chapter 2, each with distinct consequences.

In the end, all three movements tried to explain and/or help the harsh conditions of poor people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet the policies and discourses often conflicted. One such conflict occurred thousands of miles away from the economic hubs of New York and London, on a small island in the Caribbean.

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<sup>25</sup> Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 51.

Section II: *The Island of Enchantment*

“Preciosa te llama el mar que te baña”

The island of Puerto Rico is located in the northeastern Caribbean, east of the Dominican Republic and west of the Virgin Islands. Originally inhabited by Arawaks from the Amazon (the Taínos), the island nicknamed *la isla del encanto*~ the island of enchantment~ has been seen as strategically important since its “discovery” by Spain in 1493 as a gateway to the American continent because of its natural ports. Although its military value was undisputed, the island’s lack of natural resources, like gold, made it a peripheral colony with an economy built on smuggling for much of its time under Spanish rule.<sup>26</sup>

The successful independence of much of Latin America in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century meant that Puerto Rico gained a more prominent place in the eyes of the Spanish crown and refugees from other colonies, along with immigrants from Spain and Corsica, came to Puerto Rico through incentives and became the *hacendado* or landowning class.<sup>27</sup> This landowning class, seen as foreigners by the creole professional elite, was disliked even more so by the backbone of Puerto Rican society, the peasant class exploited by the hacendados and the colonial government, and looked down on by the professional creole elite.<sup>28</sup>

This peasant class comprised the majority of the population on the island well into the early twentieth century. Illiterate and often without medical care, they often relied on subsistence agriculture to survive or seasonal agricultural jobs. Their racial composition was varied, fruit of the

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<sup>26</sup> Fernando Picó, *History of Puerto Rico a: A Panomrama of Its People* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2009), 92.

<sup>27</sup> These incentives were mostly done to repopulate the island since the place was more or less empty. I will speak to this later on in this chapter.

<sup>28</sup> José Luis González, “El País de Cuatro Pisos,” *El país de los cuatro pisos y otros ensayos*, (Notas para una definición de la cultura puertorriqueña), (Río Piedras, Ediciones Huracán, 2001) 13.

mestizaje between the Spanish, Taíno, and African descendants who lived on the island. While most narratives on race stress the peaceful coexistence of different racial groups on the island and claim that there is no racism, Puerto Rican society is and has always been racially stratified, with African descendants and those with African phenotypes on the bottom, and European descendants on the top. Racial mixture was still looked down upon by the elite classes mostly of European ancestry. The relegation of the African influence is seen in the narrative of the nation that emerged in the 1930s, which tried to omit the influences of the African ancestry on the island and highlighted its Spanish-ness.<sup>29</sup>

There was not just racial and class tension in Puerto Rico. In the late 1880s as the developing Puerto Rican economy began to encounter conflict with a monarchy in trouble at home and in Cuba, a movement for the autonomy of the island began, culminating in 1897 when Puerto Ricans were for the first time allowed to form their own government and direct their own affairs. Unfortunately, just months after the Carta Autonómica or Autonomy Law was established, the island was invaded by the United States during the Spanish American War; under the ruse of liberating Cuba, they turned the island into an American territory.<sup>30</sup>

Class conflicts exploded around the American military invasion. Hacendados feared for their property while the professional elite and the mixed race masses (even the ones who believed in independence) were almost hopeful, believing that the American presence on the island would lead to reforms and a greater expansion of civil rights. Life under 19<sup>th</sup> century Spanish rule, after all, was no piece of cake. Labor unions were banned; Catholicism was an imposed religion;

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<sup>29</sup> Ayala and Bernabe, *Puerto Rico en el Siglo Americano*, 177-183.

<sup>30</sup> Howard Zinn *A people's History of the United States: 1492-Present*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 306-320.

divorces were illegal; and there was exploitation of the poor with the *libreta de jornada*, a document that workers had to carry under threat of imprisonment listing their place of employment.<sup>31</sup> It is then no surprise that riots against the hacendados, who again were seen as foreigners, and even murders by masses of discontent workers followed the invasion and that people in many cases even cheered the American forces.<sup>32</sup> This welcome unfortunately soon turned sour when the new American owners revoked the autonomy previously given to Puerto Rico and instituted a military dictatorship. Although military rule ended with the enactment of the Foraker Act of 1900,<sup>33</sup> this shift did not give way to a free and elected government but to a government where its top officials were appointed by the US president, and the elected official in Washington, the resident commissioner, could not vote. Anti-colonialists were left powerless and resentful.<sup>34</sup>

The economic transition from Spanish into American hands was also not easy. Washington heavily devalued Puerto Rican currency, causing an economic crisis that led to common peasants and hacienda owners alike to lose their land. Tariffs were imposed on Puerto Rican goods going to Europe, eviscerating the Puerto Rican market for coffee. Families who held land for centuries without official Spanish documentation lost it.<sup>35</sup> Although a provision of the Foraker Act of 1900 prohibited individuals or companies from owning more than five hundred acres of land, American sugar companies blatantly disregarded the law and set up huge states administered by absentee owners.<sup>36</sup> These large American firms began buying up Puerto Rican land and investing in sugar, causing further displacement. Within twenty years the Puerto Rican economy, known for its

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<sup>31</sup> Ayala and Bernabe, *Puerto Rico en el Siglo Americano*, 33-35.

<sup>32</sup> Ayala and Bernabe, *Puerto Rico en el Siglo Americano*, 32-34.

<sup>33</sup> The Foraker Act governed Puerto Rico from 1900 until the Jones Act of 1917.

<sup>34</sup> Ayala and Bernabe, *Puerto Rico en el Siglo Americano*, 43-47.

<sup>35</sup> Mari Bras, Juan et al. Luis Muñoz Marin... Reflexiones. (Hato Rey: Publicaciones Puertorriqueñas, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> Laird W. Bergad, "Agrarian History of Puerto Rico, 1870-1930," *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 13, no. 3 (1978): 78.

independence from the global market, its small coffee plantations, and subsistence agriculture, changed into an economy dominated by one crop: sugar.<sup>37</sup> This meant that food prices rose as importation of basic products became necessary for survival.<sup>38</sup> Unemployment became rampant as people became subject to the sugar harvest's dead time which lasted 6 months. Wages were extremely low in all sectors and in a country where food was mostly imported, wages did not respond to food costs. Malnutrition and illnesses became common, with malaria and tuberculosis becoming leading causes of death and parasitic anemia became widespread. A survey published in 1936, for example, stated that 70% of family members tested positive to tuberculosis and 79% carried parasites.<sup>39</sup>

### *Section III: Jibaros and Women*

The negative impact of the invasion and the great absentee estates were seen in all walks of life in Puerto Rico; however it was in the rural and agricultural regions where jibaros lived where the impact was seen most acutely.<sup>40</sup> The word jibaro roughly translates to peasant however the meaning is much more intricate. Francisco Scarano, talking about places other than Puerto Rico claims that, "the word has three essential-all sharply derogatory uses: in Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela, it is the name of an irrepressible Indian group (the jivaros, or Shuar) made famous in the colonial period for its effective resistance to colonial encroachment; in colonial Mexico, it was

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<sup>37</sup> While there was no abundance and the great majority of people lived below the so-called poverty line, most Puerto Rican peasants were subsistence farmers, cultivating enough food for themselves. Unlike Cuba whose main crop was sugar for example, even Puerto Rican commercial farmers intercropped, allowing space to grow fruits, vegetables, chickens and the grazing of animals.

<sup>38</sup> "By 1940 local growers produced only half the food required for consumption by residents of PR, compared to nearly total self-sufficiency in 1898" See Dionicio Nodín Valdés, *Organized Agriculture and the Labor Movement before the UFW: Puerto Rico Hawaii, California* (Austin: University of Texas, 2011), 39.

<sup>39</sup> Valdés, *Organized Agriculture and the Labor Movement before the UFW*, 42.

<sup>40</sup> Recent scholarship has argued that conditions in the countryside after the 1898 invasion did not collapse but stayed more or less the same. Ayála and Bernabe, *Puerto Rico en el Siglo Americano*, 75-79.

a racial category that signified the mixed offspring of Indians and Africans; and in Cuba and Santo Domingo, employed as an adjective, it has denoted since the colonial period as the state of wildness in certain animals, especially dogs (for instance, perros jíbaros are undomesticated forest dogs).<sup>41</sup> These negative associations of the term in Latin America, Scarano argued, were seen in Puerto Rico. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, island elites used the term jíbaro to describe a population that was itinerant, seminomadic, and whose indomitability posed a threat to modernization and the state.<sup>42</sup>

Descriptions of the jíbaro in literature and art are rampant. The most famous early picture appeared in *El Gíbaro*, the first novel by a Puerto Rican.<sup>43</sup> Written by Manuel A. Alonso in 1849 during Spanish governance, *El Gíbaro* gives a capsule look at Puerto Rican life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century through prose and verse using the jíbaro as the main character.<sup>44</sup> However, the jíbaro is not just a character in this book and the book is not just a sketch of the jíbaro: the jíbaro is given a special role as the idealized Puerto Rican consciousness and the author considered his work a sketch of Puerto Rico in general. Yet, this special role did not mean that the jíbaro was given a white-washed image; he is criticized for his primitive nature, aggressiveness, and temper.<sup>45</sup> Scene VI, for example, “El Baile del Garabato,” describes a dance which turns sour upon a provocation over a woman. In the dance, “they stabbed each other and partitioned more punches than a missal’s letters.”<sup>46</sup> In all

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<sup>41</sup> Francisco A. Scarano, “The Jíbaro Masquerade and the Subaltern Politics of Creole Identity Formation in Puerto Rico, 1745-1823” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 101, No. 5 (Dec., 1996): 1414.

<sup>42</sup> Scarano, “The Jíbaro Masquerade,” 1415.

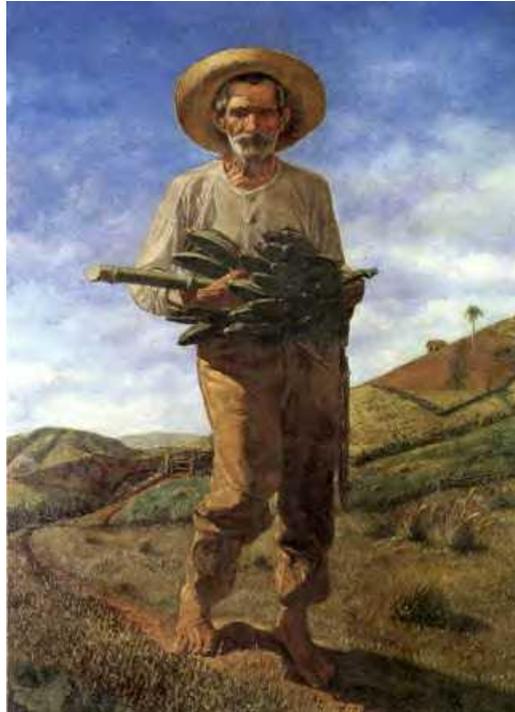
<sup>43</sup> Manuel A. Alonso, *El Gíbaro: Cuadro de Costumbres de la Isla de Puerto Rico*, (Barcelona: D. Juan Oliveres, Impresor De S. M., 1849), 7-8.

<sup>44</sup> *El Gíbaro* is mostly described as a “novela costumbrista” or a novel that looks at a particular nation’s customs.

<sup>45</sup> Carmen L. Torres-Robles, “La mitificación y desmitificación del jíbaro como símbolo de la identidad nacional Puertorriqueña,” *Bilingual Review / La Revista Bilingüe*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (September - December 1999), 242.

<sup>46</sup> “se dieron mas cuchiyas y repartieron mas palos que letras tiene un misar.” Alonso. *El Gíbaro*, 74. Scene XI examines a similar scene.

the verses in which the jíbaro is the main character, the language is in itself very unique, filled with r's where they do not belong and missing letters. These “misspellings,” which are not found in the chapters set in prose, suggest the speech patterns used by the jíbaro, patterns looked down upon for being uneducated and low class.<sup>47</sup>



Ramón Frade *El Pan Nuestro de Cada Día*, 1905

The balance between threat and emblem of cultural consciousness (in this case, “Puerto Rican-ness”), which the jíbaro in *El Gíbaro* embodied, is not just present in Puerto Rico. As a Caribbean island that only gained full independence in 1901, Cuba struggled with the question of how to interpret, represent, or incorporate a nonwhite population. In Cuba, according to Emily Maguire, blackness was the solution, but also the problem: what made Cuba unique and what made it problematic since blackness was considered primitive in a world in which progress and

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<sup>47</sup> The Spanish spoken in Puerto Rico has always been seen as somehow suspect, incorrect, and imperfect.

modernity were associated with the Western (European) idea of the nation.<sup>48</sup> Like the writers in Cuba described by Maguire, Alonso was imagining a Puerto Rico set in a colonial context in which the creole elite was at odds with the Spanish in power. The jíbaro was picked as a symbol of Puerto Rican-ness by Alonso and others because of its supposed indomitable and aggressive nature against an abusive Spanish power. However this masquerade, as Francisco Scarano calls it, did not translate into a better view of the jíbaro in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>49</sup>

Playwright Ramón Méndez Quiñones (1847-1889), in “Los Jíbaros Progresistas,” described jíbaros as ridiculously dressed and imitates their way of speaking. The historian and writer Salvador Brau (1842 -1912), in his *Disquisiciones sociológicas*, examines the misery of the Puerto Rican peasant with close attention to the jíbara (female peasant); defending a jíbara’s right to be educated for the sake of ending the problem of isolation, promiscuity, and indolence in “the women of the country.”<sup>50</sup> Yet even in the mist of Brau’s uplifting message, the writer could not readily see good in the stereotyped jíbara. Her religiosity, modesty, and sobriety were due to sinister reasons: a jíbara’s religiosity was due, according to Brau, to her superstitious and primitive nature while her sobriety was due to just a bad case of malnutrition.<sup>51</sup> Yet what was most frightening about the jíbaro was his or her supposed reproductive capacity and large families, which will be touched upon in the next chapter.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Emily Maguire “Introduction-A Folklore for the Future: Race and National Narrative in Cuba,” *Racial Experiments in Cuban Literature and Ethnography* (University Press of Florida, 2011) manuscript.

<sup>49</sup> Scarano, *Jibaro Masquerade*, 1414.

<sup>50</sup> Torres, “La mitificación y desmitificación del jíbaro,” 245.

<sup>51</sup> Torres, “La mitificación y desmitificación del jíbaro,” 245-246.

<sup>52</sup> Rafael Vidal, “Comentarios al problema de la población no existe tal nudo Gordiano” *El Mundo* 19 de Julio 1923. AFLMM Serie 13, Años 1923, Sub-Serie 3, Cartapacios 1, Caja No. 2, Doc No. 4.

The jíbaros were not the only group that was looked down upon. Women of color, jíbara or not, were deemed by some to be indecent and dishonorable regardless of class background. According to Eileen Findlay's *Imposing Decency*, decency, defined as a racialized sexual construct, was central to the social political divide between Puerto Ricans and Americans, elites and working class, blacks and whites. However, honor and decency depended on a person's lineage, wealth, and perceived racial categorization. The whiter an individual, for example, the more honorable he or she was believed to be.<sup>53</sup> Patriarchal control over women's bodies was the cornerstone of honor. The reputation of the family hinged on a woman's sexual reputation; a reputation that was maintained through what the community had to say about her.<sup>54</sup> While white women were seen as honorable by default, working-class women of African descent were automatically considered indecent by their dress, norms, and their shocking practice of concubinage.<sup>55</sup> Concubinage and consensual unions, Findlay argues, were the working woman's challenge of the honor codes. By refusing marriage and later adopting divorce, these women gave priority to economic stability, since marriage could forever tie a woman to an abusive husband or a terrible provider.<sup>56</sup> In sum, both women of color and jíbaros had undesirable reputations.

On top of the perceived immoral condition of women and jíbaros were the grave economic conditions of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century on the island. The rise of the sugar monoculture industry, the demise of the coffee plantation, and the drop in land ownership that followed those two trends within a period of twenty years created devastation and displacement. The grave economic conditions on the island, as well as its racial and class struggles, led intellectuals to try to

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<sup>53</sup> Eileen J. Suárez Findlay, *Imposing Decency: The politics of sexuality and race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 23.

<sup>54</sup> Findlay, *Imposing Decency*, 23.

<sup>55</sup> Findlay, *Imposing Decency*, 25.

<sup>56</sup> Findlay, *Imposing Decency*, 45-46.

understand the socioeconomic transformations occurring in Puerto Rico and the deterioration of rural life. Poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and unsanitary conditions were common and these intellectual men, as they were almost entirely men, used the tools afforded by Eugenics and Neo-Malthusianism, to try to understand these phenomena.

*Eugenics and Neo-Malthusianism in Puerto Rico*

According to Nancy Leys Stepan's "*The Hour of Eugenics*," a brand of Eugenics that was different from that which existed in the United States and in Britain arrived in the Puerto Rico of the twentieth century due largely to the use of Lamarckian evolutionary ideas rather than Darwin's.<sup>57</sup> Key was that individuals could change their genetic traits through better hygiene while in Darwinian evolution that was impossible.<sup>58</sup> This difference allowed Puerto Ricans "hope" of improving their stock and led to policies that pushed for better health and sanitary conditions in underprivileged communities. This difference would deepen the impact of Eugenics by tying genetic changes to immediate changes in local environments.<sup>59</sup>

While Eugenics hit the island in the early twentieth century, the problematic population narrative of Puerto Rico had been around since the early nineteenth. As *Sobrepoblación: Pobreza o Riqueza de Puerto Rico* indicates, the narrative about Spanish Puerto Rico deemed the island underpopulated~ so much so that in 1815 the Real Cédula de Gracia of August 10 tried to stimulate immigration of those individuals from friendly foreign nations who professed the Catholic faith.<sup>60</sup> As a result of this cédula and the revolutions in the Americas, thousands of immigrants came to

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<sup>57</sup>Nancy Leys Stepan, "*The Hour of Eugenics*": *Race and Gender and Nation in Latin America*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 8.

<sup>58</sup> Stepan, "*The Hour of Eugenics*," 67-68. This idea was ridiculed by American and European eugenicists.

<sup>59</sup> Stepan, "*The Hour of Eugenics*," 67-68.

<sup>60</sup>Juan Antonio Acevedo Nieves, *Sobrepoblación: Pobreza o riqueza de Puerto Rico?*, (Río Piedras: Publicaciones Gaviota, 2010), 87.

Puerto Rico transforming (and whitening) the population. Still, between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Puerto Rico's small population was considered ungovernable by the Spanish authorities.<sup>61</sup> In-migrations of Europeans could, in that frame, be argued to be a way to control and change the population. The way of thinking about Puerto Rico and its population however changed in a matter of days with the arrival of the American military. From the first years of the American invasion, it tied population numbers to a discourse of incivility and capitalism. The first evidence of overpopulation as a discursive cornerstone, according to Annette Ramírez de Arellano and Conrad Seipp, comes as early as 1899 when Brigadier-General George W. Davis decried the island's population "problem" in writing to his superiors. "The overpopulation of the island," the brigadier-general noted, "has made the struggle for existence so seriously as to engender an intense selfishness, apparent in all classes of society. The poor man to whom rations have been given by the government will sell them for rum, though his family starves. The planter who is dependent upon the peons for the labor of tilling his field seems to have no sense of responsibility for them."<sup>62</sup> Overpopulation was framed as causing selfishness in the peon and the planter class. Peasants are wasting their earnings on rum and planters are disregarding their workers. This discourse of incivility and overpopulation present after the invasion, however, was placed in a strict capitalist context. According to "Puerto Rican Reproduction and the Mainland Imaginary: The Problem of "Overpopulation" in the 1930s," overpopulation explained the need for contract labor migrations.<sup>63</sup> A year after the brigadier-general's comments, American authorities began to execute

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<sup>61</sup> Fernando Picó, *Vocaciones Caribeñas*, (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2013) 44-47.

<sup>62</sup> Curiously, the population of the island at that time was less than a million. Ramírez de Arellano, Annette B. and Conrad Seipp. *Colonialism, Catholicism, and Contraception: A History of Birth Control in Puerto Rico*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 13. Authors' quote from the *Report of Brigadier-General George W. Davis on Civil Affairs in Puerto Rico, Report of the War Department*, vol. I part 6, (1899): 790.

<sup>63</sup> Laura Briggs, "Puerto Rican Reproduction and the Mainland Imaginary: The Problem of "overpopulation" in the 1930s," *Revista/Review Interamericana*, 27:1 (1997): 81.

a sophisticated emigration policy, sending more than 5,000 sugar cane workers to harvest crops in Hawaii never return. This emigration policy continued for much of the early twentieth century. In 1915 for example, governor Arthur Yager (1913-1921) proposed a rise in emigration which prompted José de Diego [an elite writer and thinker] to ask: “Why are there so many? Why are Puerto Ricans “in the way” in Puerto Rico, and why does the wall that is our population density, which protects us from the destruction of our personality and race, need to be destroyed?”<sup>64</sup> As Acevedo Nieves indicates, “Population density was for the new empire the Achilles heel that promoted poverty and complicated economic development in the country and because of that, measures had to be taken to control it.”<sup>65</sup> By the early 1920s, it was not the American forces or the empire that was calling Puerto Rico overpopulated but elite Puerto Ricans. The overpopulation discourse of one man in particular, Luis Muñoz Marín, would become important to the future of the island.

### *Conclusion*

The arguments, explanations, and possible solutions for poverty given by the Eugenics and Neo-Malthusian movements corresponded to an era where writers and thinkers were trying to figure out the reasons for poverty. Eugenics tried to explain the poor biologically, claiming them to be inferior, while Neo-Malthusianism tried to control their numbers. They both did not see “people” but rather populations and saw the poor as inferior. Puerto Rico, an exploited colony of first Spain and then the United States filled with jíbaros, fell into that discourse. Filled with racial and class tension, and a population of peasants seen as unruly, it was a place ripe for population

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<sup>64</sup> Acevedo Nieves, *Sobrepoblación*, 88.

<sup>65</sup> Acevedo Nieves, *Sobrepoblación*, 87.

control. During Spanish rule, the population numbers were considered too small and new immigrants from Europe needed to be brought to the island. With the American invasion in 1898, though, that same population was seen as too large and overpopulation and eugenic discourses began to explain the need for contract labor out-migrations.

The next chapter will delve into Eugenic and Neo-Malthusianist arguments as laid out by the Puerto Rican elite of the 1920s. These arguments placed the working class, and particularly the jíbaro, at the center of Birth Control and Eugenic discourses. In particular, the chapter will introduce the main character of the thesis, Luis Muñoz Marín and his Neo-Malthusian and socialist roots. As a man of his time, Muñoz studied these movements and combined them to form his own pragmatic philosophy of populations. Although many of his contemporaries pictured the jíbaro at the center of overpopulation and the population problem, Muñoz Marín did not. Instead he argued that population control was for the moral benefit of all Puerto Ricans, calling for families to have control of their own reproduction to create a more civilized society.

## Chapter 2

### More Hungers than Food: The Jíbaro and the ‘Population Problem’ 1919-1923

“All that is high and noble in our collective soul has been threatened to death by this damned and grotesque circumstance that there are more hungers than there is food in PR.”<sup>66</sup>—Luis Muñoz Marín

Amid Margaret Sanger’s historic 1922 Asian tour, Puerto Rico’s *La Democracia* published an article calling for governmental support of birth control. Considering how popular the Neo-Malthusian and *anti-conceptivos* debate was all over the world at this time, its publication was not shocking. The idea that limiting the number of “mouths to feed” could be a strategy for ending poverty was, in fact, around since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Even in Puerto Rico, an island with strong Catholic roots, the subject was discussed in 1919 by Miguel Meléndez Muñoz (1884-1966), a Puerto Rican writer and intellectual in a series of articles titled “El Problema de la Población” in *El Mundo*.<sup>67</sup> Yet “Maltusianismo Práctico” has captured the attention of historians and intellectuals ever since because, although it was written under a pseudonym, its author was Luis Muñoz Marín.<sup>68</sup>

As the son of Puerto Rico’s most important politician of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Luis Muñoz Rivera, Muñoz Marín felt the responsibility of his name on his shoulders and began to participate in politics early. In 1920 he participated and was an orator in a series of sugar cane strikes and several years later while in New York, he wrote for *La Democracia*, his father’s

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<sup>66</sup> Jacinto Ortega, “Maltusianismo Práctico,” *La Democracia*, August 21, 1922.

<sup>67</sup> Miguel Meléndez Muñoz, “El Problema de la Población,” *El Mundo*, August 20-September 23, 1919.

<sup>68</sup> Jacinto Ortega, “Maltusianismo Práctico,” August 21, 1922.

newspaper under the pseudonym Jacinto Ortega.<sup>69</sup> “Malthusianismo Práctico” is important because it was his first incursion into the controversial topic of population control; yet, his much ignored second incursion into the topic a year later had an even greater impact.<sup>70</sup>

Muñoz Marín’s 1923 incursion into the topic of population control began innocently enough. A reporter interviewing Muñoz Marín, who was on the island compiling the elder’s writings for publication, asked the young man: “would a change of status [vis-à-vis the US] cure Puerto Rico’s problems?” Puerto Rico was then plagued by the “status question”: whether the island should become independent, become a state, or gain more autonomy.<sup>71</sup> The island’s colonial status was believed by some to be a major cause of turmoil since Puerto Ricans had to contend with not being able to govern themselves, with tariffs that were prohibitive, and with an American legislature that was indifferent to the needs of islanders.<sup>72</sup> Muñoz Marín’s response~ that the greatest threat to Puerto Rico was the number of inhabitants, rather than the island’s colonial condition~ produced an avalanche of responses from other writers and elites in the three major island newspapers *La Correspondencia*, *El Mundo*, and *El Imparcial*.<sup>73</sup> Some of these writers were eugenicists, while others were socialists, neo-malthusianists, and moralists.

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<sup>69</sup> As stated in Chapter 1, Jacinto Ortega was a pseudonym used by Muñoz Marín in his writings for *La Democracia*, a newspaper started by his father and a vehicle for the Union Party. He felt he needed the pseudonym after encountering some controversy over his involvement in anti-Union Party activities.

<sup>70</sup> “El Partido socialista-dice Muñoz Marín – es sencillamente un partido de gente pobre formado para mejorar las condiciones de vida y de trabajo de los individuos,” *El Mundo*, 27 junio de 1923.

<sup>71</sup> “El Partido socialista-dice Muñoz Marín,” 27 junio de 1923.

<sup>72</sup> Arturo Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico: A Political and Cultural History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1983), 208-211.

<sup>73</sup> *El Imparcial*, *El Mundo*, and *La Correspondencia* were considered the three most professional and “impartial” dailies in their time. *La Correspondencia* as tied to the Union Party in the 1920s while *El Imparcial* and *El Mundo* were mostly centrist. *El Mundo*’s founder saw the mission of his paper to help Puerto Rico be more modern. See Luis Fernando Coss, *Análisis histórico de la noción del periodismo profesional en Puerto Rico (del siglo XIX al XX)*, Thesis, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2007.

Universal to the discourse was the fact that it was not the rich or educated that needed their numbers reduced: it was the poor, and many of Muñoz's neo-malthusianist and eugenicist contemporaries correlated the excessive births of the poor with increased poverty, crime, and disease. For these writers, the poor's so called biological differences were causing alarming population increases. In the case of Puerto Rico, many intellectuals targeted the jíbaro for supposedly immoral practices attributed to high birth rates. Eugenicist Rafael Vidal, in articles addressing this dilemma, called the jíbaros "barbarian primitives"<sup>74</sup> while Miguel Meléndez Muñoz called them "underdeveloped."<sup>75</sup> Yet while such writers dedicated a great amount of attention to the supposed deficiencies of the jíbaro, Muñoz Marín reframed the discussion of the cause of Puerto Rico's poverty. In a newspaper article, he introduced this reframing to the Puerto Rican newspaper readership: that increased access to birth control would lead to civility. Families of all social spheres should have access to birth control, Muñoz believed; and they should be given the tools to determine when they should have children and how many children each family should have. Only after access was addressed, would Puerto Rico be civilized because, as he stated, civilization ran inversely to birth rates.<sup>76</sup>

This chapter introduces Muñoz Marín and analyzes his first writings on overpopulation and birth control in the context of the then contemporary Eugenics and Neo-Malthusian discourses presented in Puerto Rican newspapers from the late teens until 1923. In the 1910s and

<sup>74</sup> Rafael Vidal, "Comentarios al problema de la población no existe tal nudo Gordiano" *El Mundo* 18 de julio 1923, Archivo Luis Muñoz Marín (ALMM), section XIII, series 13, binder, 1, document num. 4.

<sup>75</sup> Miguel Meléndez Muñoz, "Estado Social del Campesino Puertorriqueño," *Obras Completas de Miguel Meléndez Muñoz Vol. 1*, (San Juan: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1963) 329.

<sup>76</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín, "El ambiente económico en que se agitan las clases pobres es mezquino aunque la riqueza producida por la sociedad en general sea mucha—dice Luis Muñoz Marín," *El Mundo*, 21 de julio 1923, ALMM, Section XIII, series 13, binder 1, box 2, document num. 2.

early 1920s, population growth and Neo-Malthusianism were high profile topics on the island, fostered by Margaret Sanger's exposure in the international press, home grown articles in local papers, and the legislation pushed by local government officials. These articles, which have been mostly ignored by scholars of overpopulation, form a rich primary source and chronicle the different outlooks on birth control and overpopulation during the period. Taken together they show how Muñoz Marín framed his overpopulation discourses in contrast to his contemporaries at a moment in time when he was free to publish his views unhampered by the constraints of political office.

I argue that, unlike contemporary Puerto Rican neo-malthusianists and eugenicists on the island who contended that the lower classes, specially the jíbaro, were biologically inferior, Muñoz articulated a broader island-wide agenda that saw birth control as a tool for equality and necessary to end poverty and incivility. Its availability would create a more civilized Puerto Rico~ that is, a Puerto Rico where cordiality, kindness, and peace would reign.<sup>77</sup>

#### *Section I: The elite, Muñoz Marín, and Puerto Rico's poverty*

Like many socially conscious intellectuals in other parts of the world, Puerto Rican intellectuals became interested in ideas that could explain and solve the problems on the island. From 1900 to 1910, Puerto Rico's sugar cultivation rose from 81,000 to 349,000 tons supplying 15% of America's sugar.<sup>78</sup> Half of that sugar was processed by four American companies—South Porto Rico, Central Aguirre, Fajardo, and United Puerto Rico. Overwhelmingly, these large sugar estates did very well through the exploitation of laborers and jíbaros, who during that same period

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<sup>77</sup> "El Partido socialista-dice Muñoz Marín - es sencillamente un partido de gente pobre formado para mejorar las condiciones de vida y de trabajo de los individuos," *El Mundo*, 27 junio de 1923,

<sup>78</sup> Ayala and Bernabe, *Puerto Rico en el Siglo Americano*, 63.

of time saw a continuous drop in their standard of life.<sup>79</sup> Meat was almost unheard of. Even during good times, “el tiempo muerto” (the period of non-cultivation and harvest) meant a precarious existence for workers and their families who survived on whatever work they could land eating rice and beans, bread, and coffee.<sup>80</sup>

The combination of a poor diet and back-breaking labor meant that average working-class Puerto Ricans were often sick. As stated in Chapter 1, a 1936 survey found that 70% of people tested positive to tuberculosis and 79% carried parasites.<sup>81</sup> The elite on the island looked for explanations for these health problems as they tried to understand their place in Puerto Rico’s colonial society and intellectual trends popular around the world, like eugenics, seemed to give them an answer.

While Puerto Rico was far from the intellectual centers famous in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Puerto Ricans remained connected to the world through newspapers, books, correspondence, visitors, and tertulias (intellectual gatherings). In 1922 the coverage given to Margaret Sanger’s Asian trip through India, China, and Japan led to a public discussion of overpopulation and birth control and her doings, arrests, and lectures were very much chronicled by Puerto Rican newspapers as they were a curiosity.<sup>82</sup> Some of this was due to the shock of having a woman talk in public about reproduction, an incredibly controversial subject in the 1920s. Women, after all, were expected to stay in their place and with their mouths shut.<sup>83</sup> Sanger was often ridiculed for her actions. H.L. Mencken, the respected writer and provocateur, for example, called birth control advocates like

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<sup>79</sup> Ayala and Bernabe, *Puerto Rico en el Siglo Americano*, 64.

<sup>80</sup> Ayala and Bernabe, *Puerto Rico en el Siglo Americano*, 64.

<sup>81</sup> Dionicio Nodin Valdés, *Organized Agriculture and the Labor Movement before the UFW: Puerto Rico Hawaii, California*, (Austin: University of Texas, 2011), 42.

<sup>82</sup> Jacinto Ortega, “Maltusianismo Práctico,” August 21, 1922.

<sup>83</sup> Findlay, *Imposing Decency*.

Sanger “women who have done their utmost to snare men, and failed.”<sup>84</sup> Yet this “trash talk,” instead of dissuading individuals from talking about birth control, inspired conversation. “Maltusianismo Práctico” was a reaction written to what author Muñoz Marín deemed the mocking coverage of Sanger’s doings in the local press.<sup>85</sup>

Such talk about birth control and its advocates inspired an amendment to the Penal Code as early as 1922 that would allow doctors to give birth control information to their patients.<sup>86</sup> Under the heading *Crimes Against Honesty and Public Morality*, the Penal Code made it illegal for anyone to voluntarily write, edit, and publish an announcement or ad for any specific procedure that would lead to abortions or to the use of birth control, similar to the Comstock laws in the United States. Although it did not pass on this first attempt, the amendment created quite a controversy. Even renowned American Socialist Presidential candidate, Norman Thomas, wrote in favor of the bill.<sup>87</sup>

Yet even in the context of the 1920s where birth control initiatives were discussed in the media, the 1923 controversy over Neo-Malthusianism was striking because of the notoriety it brought to the topic. Its participants were some of the leading thinkers of the time, and its main star, Muñoz Marín, who wrote at least eight articles on the subject, was not just an agitator or a common writer; he was the son of one of Puerto Rico’s most important politicians.

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<sup>84</sup> H.L. Mencken. “15. Mythical Anthropophagi,” *In defense of Women*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1270>, (March 12, 2014, date accessed).

<sup>85</sup> Ortega, “Maltusianismo Práctico,” 1.

<sup>86</sup> Norman Thomas, “Algunos aspectos Sociales de la regularización de los nacimientos,” *La Correspondencia*, May 2, 1923, Archivo Luis Muñoz Marín (ALMM), section XIII, series 13, binder, 2, document num. 10.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas, “Algunos aspectos Sociales de la regularización de los nacimientos,” *La Correspondencia*, May 2, 1923.

José Luis Muñoz Marín was born in 1898, the year of the American invasion, to Luis Muñoz Rivera, who had spent the last decade of the nineteenth century arguing for Puerto Rican autonomy, and Amalia Marín Castilla, the daughter of a newspaper publisher. A son of the Puerto Rican diaspora, Muñoz Marín's childhood was spent between Puerto Rico, New York, and Washington D.C. where his father was for a time Resident Commissioner to Puerto Rico, the island representative, in the American Congress. Despite this, the son had a life centered on Puerto Rican politics. Tertulias, or gatherings of notable visiting Puerto Ricans, were common in the Muñoz Marín household stateside, and through his father's connections, he became friends with many Puerto Rican poets and writers. However, the privilege of obtaining a fine education did not mean he excelled at school; despite his father's connections and large circle of influence, Muñoz Marín dropped out of Georgetown and was infamous for his poor academic habits (which gravely worried his parents). Still, despite his notoriety as a poor student, he was well read in Spanish, French, Puerto Rican, American, and English literature.<sup>88</sup>

As Muñoz Marín began to exert himself in the public eye after his father's death, it became clear that the son was not the father. Muñoz Marín had a distinctive path in life with both very "modern" influences and a rare solidarity with the poor. As a sensitive young man, he felt a calling to end their suffering. "Social justice" and "equality" were concepts which Muñoz Marín developed throughout his twenties into a unique personal ideology as he spent time in Puerto Rican and New York intellectual centers. During this time, Socialism, Anarchism, and Communism were seen as possible roads to end poverty. Muñoz Marín's literary interests reflected such trends.<sup>89</sup> Thanks to a

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<sup>88</sup> Muñoz Marín, *Memorias*, 74.

<sup>89</sup> Rosario Natal, *La Juventud de Luis Muñoz Marín*, (San Juan: Master Typesetting Inc. 1976), 148.

small branch of the New York public library in Staten Island near his home,<sup>90</sup> Muñoz Marín became acquainted with most of the radical and popular literature of the period. He read Marx's *Communist Manifesto* and *The Paris Commune*, Kropotkin's *Conquest of Bread*, and several of Trotsky's pamphlets.<sup>91</sup>

Eugene Debs' writings also were of great interest to Muñoz Marín and he frequently called him a "saint."<sup>92</sup> The passion palpable in the writings of this man incarcerated for speaking out for the rights of the common man deeply touched Muñoz and he considered Debs a great emotional influence.<sup>93</sup> Because of Debs' influence, Rosario Natal argues, Muñoz began attending lectures at the Rand School of Social Science and began reading the socialist newspaper, the *New York Call*, daily.<sup>94</sup>

Such an education and heritage afforded him some clout and prestige when he began to speak in sugar cane strikes and write articles under his own name in the early 1920s. As Felix Rivera commented in his article about the subject of Neo-Malthusianism on the island, Muñoz Marín was "heir to great civic prestige."<sup>95</sup> Puerto Rican socialists believed him to be the savior of their party, "a man of great energy, youthful vigor, strong and disquieting will" whose vocation and ample literary culture was undeniable.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Muñoz married Mississippi poetess Muna Lee in 1919. They decided to reside in Staten Island because life in New York was expensive for two writers.

<sup>91</sup> Rosario, *La Juventud de LMM*, 92.

<sup>92</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín, *Memorias 1898-1940*, (Puerto Rico: Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín, 2003), 62.

<sup>93</sup> Rosario, *La Juventud de LMM*, 94.

<sup>94</sup> The Rand School of Social Science was center founded in 1906 for the formation of workers by adherents of the Socialist Party.

<sup>95</sup> Félix Rivera, "La Teoría malthusiana un absurdo" *unknown newspaper*, julio 11 1923, AFLMM Sección XIII- Amalia Lluch, Serie 13, Años 1923, Sub-Serie 3, Cartapacios 1 Caja No. 2, Doc No. 7.

<sup>96</sup> Rivera, "La Teoría malthusiana un absurdo" *unknown newspaper*, julio 11 1923

*Section II: Eugenics and the Puerto Rican Jibaro*

Because of Muñoz Marín's parentage, intelligence, and charisma, Puerto Rican intellectuals entered the arena of ideas when Muñoz uttered that population growth was the island's biggest problem. However, their opinions were incredibly varied. To several writers in the Neo-Malthusian debate, like Rafael Vidal and Francisco Zeno, the Puerto Rican jíbaros were at the center of overpopulation, if not the real problem in Puerto Rico. As I stated in Chapter 1, jíbaros were marked off other groups as biologically inferior.<sup>97</sup> While Nancy Leys Stepan argues that the language itself "asserted differences and created boundaries," the inferiority attributed to the jíbaro was a "lack of civilization," a hard, if not impossible, designation to remove.<sup>98</sup> Even the most dedicated Neo-Malthusian efforts had to deal with the jíbaro's inferiority. To Rafael Vidal, a contributing writer to *El Mundo*, although the actual population numbers were still a problem, the jíbaro's quality was more of an issue than his quantity.<sup>99</sup> In other words, the genetic stock of the jíbaro was to blame. Vidal defined jíbaros as an antiquated group whose agricultural methods were ancient, and who "d[id] not know hygiene and s[aw] doctors as the enemy."<sup>100</sup> "If we took away the use of iron and the modern advances that the directive class introduced," he warned, "they would live in a lower level than the Greeks in the time of Agamemnon."<sup>101</sup> Fortunately, Vidal noted, their

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<sup>97</sup> Miguel Meléndez Muñoz, "El jíbaro en el Siglo 19," *Obras Completas de Miguel Meléndez Muñoz vol. 3*, (San Juan: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1963).

<sup>98</sup> Stepan, "*The Hour of Eugenics*", 11.

<sup>99</sup> Rafael Vidal, "El verdadero problema de la población 'IRRESPONSABLES,'" *El Mundo*, 23 de Julio de 1923. AFLMM Serie 13, Años 1923, Sub-Serie 3, Cartapacios 1, Caja No. 2, Doc No. 2.

<sup>100</sup> Vidal, "El verdadero problema" July 23, 1923.

<sup>101</sup> Vidal, "El verdadero problema" July 23, 1923.

death rate was high, meaning that, like many supposedly inferior peoples, they would eventually disappear.<sup>102</sup>

Although it would be more comfortable to insist that this narrative was only uttered on the margins of Puerto Rican society, the individuals who advocated these ideas on the island's newspapers were doctors, senators, and columnists, and respected in the community. As noted in *The Hour of Eugenics*, “[F]ar from viewing [eugenicists] as a bizarre notion of extremists at the fringes of respectable science and social reform, many well-placed scientists, medical doctors, and social activists endorsed it as an appropriate outcome of developments in the science of human heredity.”<sup>103</sup>

The works of Miguel Meléndez Muñoz (1884-1966), a proclaimed neo-malthusianist, attest to how not “on the fringe” Eugenics was in the 1920s.<sup>104</sup> Born in the town of Cidra, the self-taught sociologist and writer of Venezuelan and Spanish parentage believed that his mission in life was to help the jíbaro through his writings by using the “new ideas” popular in the progressive era.<sup>105</sup> He eventually became the most influential advocate of Neo-Malthusianism and Eugenics in the early twentieth century and his works on the jíbaro are often cited well into our present decade, although its Eugenics and Neo-Malthusian underpinnings have often been ignored.

Meléndez Muñoz's descriptions of the jíbaro in *El Estado Social del Campesino Puertorriqueño* followed the patterns of the paternalistic discourses used to describe African Americans in the

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<sup>102</sup> Rafael Vidal, “Comentarios al problema de la población no existe tal nudo Gordiano” *El Mundo* 19 de Julio 1923. AFLMM Serie 13, Años 1923, Sub-Serie 3, Cartapacios 1, Caja No. 2, Doc No. 4.

<sup>103</sup> Nancy Leys Stepan, *“The Hour of Eugenics”: Race and gender and Nation in Latin America*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 5.

<sup>104</sup> “Muñoz Expresa sus Opiniones de Ahora” *La Correspondencia de Puerto Rico*, 29 June de 1923, Sección XIII, Serie 13, Años 1923, Sub-Serie 3. Carapacios 2, Doc. No. 6.

<sup>105</sup> Miguel Meléndez Muñoz, *Obras Completas de Miguel Meléndez Muñoz Vol. 1*, 20. He is NOT related to Muñoz Marín.

American south and immigrants in the large cities in the US at the same time.<sup>106</sup> Although he saw himself as sympathetic towards the jíbaro and was perceived as such by his contemporaries, he was quick to critique the jíbaro's supposed parenting, his problematic morality, and lack of development. The jíbaro, he argued, was simply un-evolved. He challenged "ideas of evolutionary progress due to the fact that on the island it was the most astute who survived, not the most apt for sexual selection nor the strongest nor the most gifted for the fight for excellence."<sup>107</sup> In other words, conditions on the island itself were causing the jíbaro to multiply, despite there being others who were in better eugenic shape like, for example, middle class sons of Spaniards like Meléndez Muñoz. Their survival was not due to strength, intelligence, or savvy, but to astuteness.<sup>108</sup>

In pin-pointing the innate qualities of the jíbaro as a cause of Puerto Rico's problems, Rafael Vidal and Miguel Meléndez Muñoz followed the eugenic frame carefully. Muñoz Marín (no relation to Meléndez Muñoz), in contrast, refused to enter the blame game. Asking who was to blame was futile. "What is important is to liberate ourselves from this evil": the evil was overpopulation and for this the cure was birth control.<sup>109</sup> In fact, he did not once use the term "jíbaro," preferring to call Puerto Rico's agricultural masses the "working proletariat."<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Miguel Meléndez Muñoz, *El Estado del Campesino Puertorriqueño*, *Obras Completas de MMM*, vol. 1, 391, 334.

<sup>107</sup> Meléndez Muñoz, *Obras Completas Vol. 1*, 329.

<sup>108</sup> The narrative of the survival of the astute rather than the fit, was argued commonly by eugenicists to explain why the fit, meaning they, were reproducing less than the supposed weak, unevolved other. As only the fit could reproduce abundantly according to Darwin's theory of evolution which was studied and read by eugenicists. This narrative often blamed the environment for such factors for example; the hustle of cities often hurt the sensitive constitutions of the highest eugenic types as well as tropical climates, like those in Puerto Rico. See Nancy Leys Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>109</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín "El aumento de la riqueza solo tiene por resultado el aumento de la población y deja a la sociedad en igual estado." *La Correspondencia*, Julio 9, 1923.

<sup>110</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín "El aumento de la riqueza," *La Correspondencia* Julio 9 1923.

This difference in language is not insignificant since it gives clues to Muñoz's ideological background as well as whom he perceived to be the Puerto Rican masses. Although he does not explain his use of the term in the articles, "proletariat" is commonly associated with Marxist ideology and denotes wage workers who usually, because of the effects of periodic depressions on wages and employment, lived in poverty. By using the term proletariat, Muñoz is evoking this line of thought. The term proletariat was also more expansive than the term jíbaro. A jíbaro lived in a particular place (the country side) and his livelihood was connected to agriculture. The proletariat could potentially live anywhere on the island and work in the service sector, agricultural region, or the coast, and cities. By using the term proletariat, as when he stated that "the working proletariat has always had more kids than the rich," Muñoz Marín was being more inclusive of different Puerto Rican populations.<sup>111</sup>

Senator Francisco Zeno used the term jíbaro, however, he also used the term interchangeably with proletariat and "obrero agrícola" or "the agricultural worker."<sup>112</sup> Zeno was a learned man who served Puerto Rico not just as senator, but as a journalist, school principal, and even mayor during his lifetime and his writings, like Muñoz's, did not exhibit eugenic streaks in his treatment of the jíbaro. Zeno did not particularly care about the jíbaro's living situation, who was in his view, "destroyed by anemia and illiteracy." However, this destruction was not innate. It was due to illness and poverty.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín, "El aumento de la riqueza solo tiene por resultado el aumento de la población y deja a la sociedad en igual estado." *La Correspondencia*, Julio 9, 1923.

<sup>112</sup> Francisco Zeno, "La densidad de población y el salario insuficiente constituyen el "Nudo Gordiano" de nuestro problema político dice el senador Zeno" *El Mundo* 30 June 1923.

<sup>113</sup> Zeno, "La densidad de población," *El Mundo* 30 June 1923.

The jíbaro's innate traits and lack of evolution were not the only traits addressed by eugenicists and neo-malthusianists; motherhood and the jíbara were also topics of discussion. Eugenicists believed jíbaras to be weak and unable to carry worthy sons. Meléndez Muñoz asked about jíbaro motherhood: "How should we pretend that this mother with poor blood, prematurely aged, and severely weakened due to her constant labor superior to her forces, endows our race with healthy robust men?"<sup>114</sup> Furthermore, jíbaras were deemed lacking. *Estado Social del Campesino* went so far as calling the jíbaras a "contingency of degenerates who perpetuate those psychophysical degenerations in their progeny" clearly using terms like "degenerate," used by eugenicists.<sup>115</sup>

However, what was more alarming to neo-malthusianists was the number of children jíbaras were having. In the early twentieth century, families in agricultural (what some have termed pre-industrial) regions had large families for many reasons. Individuals saw children as free labor but there was also a different mentality regarding families. Large families were seen as a blessing; as the Puerto Rican saying goes, each child comes with a loaf of bread under each arm. Parenting was also strikingly different. The father and the mother were not left alone in the task of raising children and extended families consisting of cousins, grandparents, godparents, neighbors, and even older siblings helped raise the children and provided help. As nations became industrialized, there was a change in that social fabric and the model of two parents with three children became the norm. In Puerto Rico, the pre-industrial large family became problematized by neo-malthusianists.

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<sup>114</sup> Meléndez Muñoz, *Obras Completas Vol. 1*, 354.

<sup>115</sup> Meléndez Muñoz, *Obras Completas Vol. 1*, 391, 334.

Both Zeno and Vidal were intellectuals who tried to understand the large broods of the jíbaros. Zeno believed that his family size was due partly to his terrible life. A large family, he argued, could help carry the burden of a hard life despite destitution or poverty; it was, he believed, the only happiness in a life of depravation.<sup>116</sup> In less florid language, sex and the children who came from it were the only pleasures that the jíbaro could have. Vidal believed that the jíbaro lacked sexual self-control and reproduced *alarmingly*, especially when times were good; that is, when they received scraps from above.<sup>117</sup> This lack of self-control was increasing the island's illiteracy, pauperism, and prostitution in the face of an indifferent and uncivilized jíbaro.

Muñoz Marín did not directly point fingers to the jíbaro's lack of control but he did say that "the people who are least prepared economically to bring children into the world are often the ones who have the least will or sense of responsibility."<sup>118</sup> For Muñoz the jíbaro's problem of too many kids stemmed from lack of knowledge and resources about birth control; it did not signal high sex drives. He believed that, for population growth to be curtailed, families needed to be educated on the subject and given access to birth control. This was to be done "top down" through government intervention programs. He proposed, for example, that the municipality's health director should have contraceptives at his disposal to pass out to whomever would want them.<sup>119</sup> This, as well as the people's education about birth control, needed to be in the hands of the

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<sup>116</sup> Francisco Zeno "El Senador Zeno contesta una alusión favorece el fomento de las industrias y combate los ideales que persiguen los maltúsicos" *La Correspondencia*, Julio 10, 1923. Sección XIII, Serie 13, Años 1923, Sub-Serie 3, Cartapacios 1, Caja No. 2, Doc No. 9.

<sup>117</sup> Rafael Vidal, "Comentarios al problema de la población no existe tal nudo Gordiano," *El Mundo*, 18 de Julio, 1923. Sección XIII, Serie 13, Años 1923, Sub-Serie 3, Cartapacios 1, Caja No. 2, Doc No. 4.

<sup>118</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín, "El aumento de la riqueza solo tiene por resultado el aumento de la población y deja a la sociedad en igual estado." *La Correspondencia*, Julio 9, 1923.

<sup>119</sup> Jacinto Ortega, "Maltusianismo Práctico," August 21, 1922.

island's legislators and newspaper editors.<sup>120</sup> Legislators had to amend the Comstock-like laws that prohibited the distribution of birth control and its information materials. By legalizing birth control and the sharing of contraceptive knowledge, the playing field would be leveled. This reliance on the state and intellectual quarters to guide reform was not unlike other Latin American states that, feeling burdened by the peasant classes, concluded that state guidance was the only way out. In so doing, Muñoz disregarded the role of local medical caregivers, like mid-wives, who were not even mentioned by him or by any of the men in the articles.

Much like Miguel Meléndez Muñoz, Vidal blamed the jíbaro's excessive numbers on their own poor stock and lack of "civilization." Yet unlike Meléndez Muñoz, Vidal believed that such excessive numbers occurred through the imposition of higher culture upon "lower" cultures. Vidal expanded on the eugenic text, *The Expansion of Races*, with his own thoughts in the margins: "When civilization is forced upon a lower race (and that is the case of Puerto Rico if not because of congenital defects at least because of the lack of culture of our country men), establishing a higher government that they themselves can manage, there is more food production and a very rapid rise of the saturation point..."<sup>121</sup> In other words, the more food the jíbaro had, the more they would reproduce and saturate the earth with weak, uncivilized children.

For Muñoz Marín, uncivilized children and uncivilized nations did not arise from any such imposition, but from rampant population growth. In other words, the crowded conditions and the competition that emerged from a large population created uncivilized peoples. By controlling population, therefore, uncivilized nations or islands could become civilized. By such logic, good

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<sup>120</sup> Jacinto Ortega, "Maltusianismo Práctico," August 21, 1922.

<sup>121</sup> Rafael Vidal, "Comentario al problema de la población" *El Mundo*, 20 de Julio de 1923. AFLMM Sección XIII, Serie 13, Años 1923, Sub-Serie 3, Cartapacios 1, Caja No. 2, Doc No. 3. See Charles Woodruff, *Expansion of the Races*, New York: Rebman Company), 1909.

civilization became, for Muñoz Marín, connected to birth-control. All civilized nations practiced birth control, he argued (although in 1923 birth control was illegal in many countries); the inequality in access to birth control was Puerto Rico's real problem, not the immorality of the jíbaro or proletariat, as stated by other neo-Malthusian and eugenic writers.<sup>122</sup>

### *Section III: Muñoz's Arguments*

In his 1922 article written under the pseudonym Jacinto Ortega and in the articles that followed his neo-Malthusian coming-out, Muñoz Marín composed a cohesive argument for birth control based not on the supposed moral and physical weakness of the jíbaro, but on the premise that by educating the proletariat and allowing them the right to choose the size of their families, people would want to have fewer children, leading to a decrease in population. There was an inferred cause and effect in his argument. He assumed that the mere access of birth control would lower birth rates because people would want to restrict their brood. Limiting the size of families would decrease the population, which then would enhance the living standard or civilization of the entire island. Muñoz asserted this based on two points: first, that the disparity between parallel classes in different countries was due to different population numbers and densities; and second, that such population growth was the real cause of the island's misery. He proposed taking care of this crushing poverty not with re-distribution of wealth or more jobs, but with a policy of limiting the population.<sup>123</sup> Doing this was quicker and more feasible than other alternatives, he reasoned, like revamping industry; especially given that the island's colonial status limited the role of the insular government. He was so convinced of this that he predicted that within twenty to

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<sup>122</sup> "El Partido socialista" *El Mundo* 27 junio de 1923.

<sup>123</sup> Jacinto Ortega, "Maltusianismo Práctico," August 21, 1922.

thirty years Puerto Rico's terrible conditions would end if birth control were to be practiced.<sup>124</sup> At the core of his message was desperation. Facing a large peasant population, at times with more than fourteen children, Muñoz Marín asked: "how will those new beings confront the fight for life in a country where all opportunities have been taken by those that have preceded them?"<sup>125</sup> Birth control was the only reasonable option to take care of the future of the island.<sup>126</sup>

In the context of writing that problematized the family patterns of Puerto Ricans in general and jíbaros in particular, Muñoz Marín's seemed moderate and modern. He did not point the finger at a particular class or group of people. He did not alienate the poor by demeaning them and calling them inferior. Instead, he defended jíbaros or the proletariat from attacks against their supposed bad genetic stock and morals, while also asserting that they were having too large a family. In one debate on the subject in *El Mundo*, Muñoz responded to attacks by Dr. Quevedo Báez who had claimed the jíbaro to be the carrier of "bad morals" on the island.<sup>127</sup> What separated the poor from the rich, Muñoz Marín wrote, was the ability of the rich to avoid the consequences of their actions, which the "proletariat" could not.<sup>128</sup> The rich's sanctimonious attitude towards the poor's "morality" needed to change to change the course of Puerto Rico, he declared.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Muñoz Expresa sus Opiniones de Ahora" *La Correspondencia de Puerto Rico*, June 29 1923. AFLMM, Sección XIII, Serie 13, Años 1923, Sub-Serie 3. Cartapacio 2, Doc No. 6.

<sup>125</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín, "El promedio de natalidad en nuestro país es mayor cada vez y la miseria y las enfermedades endémicas de nuestros campos se desarrollan paralelamente con ella dice el ilustre escritor Miguel Meléndez Muñoz" *El Mundo* June 29 1923, Sección XIII, Serie 13, Años 1923, Sub-Serie 3, Cartapacio 2, Doc No. 4.

<sup>126</sup> "Muñoz Expresa sus Opiniones de Ahora" *La Correspondencia de Puerto Rico*, June 29 1923.

<sup>127</sup> Quevedo Báez "La aberración de una teoría" -califica el Dr. Quevedo Báez a la sustentada por los defensores del Malthusismo *La Correspondencia*, 6 de julio de 1923.

<sup>128</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín, "El aumento de la riqueza solo tiene por resultado el aumento de la población y deja a la sociedad en igual estado." *La Correspondencia* Julio 9, 1923. AFLMM XIII, Serie 13, Años 1923, Sub-Serie 3, Cartapacios 1. Caja No. 2, Doc. No 11.

<sup>129</sup> Muñoz Marín, "El aumento de la riqueza," *La Correspondencia*, Julio 9, 1923.

Muñoz instead called for government distribution of means of birth control “so that the families who want two children could have just two and the ones who want ten, ten.”<sup>130</sup> “It is all about families being able to determine WHEN they should have children and HOW MANY children they should have.”<sup>131</sup> However, there is a difference between this and a women’s right to choose. Choice in one’s reproduction, in this case, was put in the realm of the collective. Overpopulation was not about individuals and their problems. It was not about a woman in Barranquitas not being able to feed her child and needing economic independence, but more about how such misery was affecting society in general. Access to birth control, for example, could be curtailed if too many people were using birth control causing a decrease in population numbers.<sup>132</sup> This back-and-forth between personal rights and collective needs was common in all Neo-Malthusian and Eugenic discourses. Muñoz Marín, by mentioning that families should be able to choose the number of kids, nevertheless, was a step ahead of his contemporaries.

Unlike much of the discourse of Meléndez Muñoz, Vidal, and Zeno, who spoke of the jíbaro as a separate alien entity, Muñoz Marín spoke of the poor with dignity, sympathizing with their plight. He did not see himself as distant from them, but likened his own economic struggles to theirs.<sup>133</sup> In fact, in one particular article, he spoke of his inability to afford more children and

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<sup>130</sup> Jacinto Ortega, “Malthusianismo Práctico,” August 21, 1922.

<sup>131</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín, “Los problemas sociales de Puerto Rico,” *La Correspondencia*, July 10, 1923, ALMM, Sección XIII, serie 13, año 1923, Sub-serie 3, Cartapacio 1, Caja 2, Doc. 10. His emphasis.

<sup>132</sup> Jacinto Ortega, “Malthusianismo Práctico,” August 21, 1922.

<sup>133</sup> The letters between Muñoz Marín and his then wife Muna Lee stress their struggles on the subject of money. While he may have come from a political family, his earnings as a writer were meager and the couple lived off his wife’s salary. See Mario Pérez Miranda and Ángel Collado Schwarz, “#264 Muna Lee: poeta, esposa de Muñoz Marín, funcionaria en Washington,” *La Voz del Centro*, <http://www.vozdelcentro.org/2008/01/13/muna-lee-poeta-esposa-de-munoz-marin-funcionaria-en-washington/> (March 13, 2014, date accessed).

that he believed his duty was not to have any more.<sup>134</sup> Yet while he saw his struggles resembling the struggles of the proletariat, it did not mean that he did not see himself as something more.

As a young man and poet, Muñoz began to expand and write about the poor in his poems. *Proletarios*, *Escúchanos*, and *Panfleto* focus on the poor and their relationship to a god who does not listen to them. *Proletarios* describes three “proletarians”: a donkey climbing a mountain, a mason monotonously building a wall, and God and his “profound” silence as he deals with the stars. *Escúchanos* deals accusingly with *Proletarios*’ third subject, God, and the pleas of the suffering on Earth. God is addressed in the second person as an absent father. “Listen to us, God... one time... just one time... We are your heart.”<sup>135</sup> The silence of God and his indifference are the back story for Muñoz Marín’s *Panfleto*, in which the young man, barely into his twenties, proclaims himself the “pamphleteer of God and the agitator of God.”<sup>136</sup> In this poem, he agitates for the causes of the poor: he has drowned his own dreams for the dreams of the sick, the hungry, and the heart broken and for this, *Panfleto* marks an important shift in Muñoz’s discourse. The poem portrays an idealistic vision for Muñoz with the poor at its center; he closes with “a crowd of stars and famished men into the great dawn.”<sup>137</sup> While Muñoz empathized with the poor, he saw himself more as their leader than an equal.

Muñoz understood his own empathy for the poor and his connection to them as emerging from his childhood. As a small boy, he was buying a *piragua* (a snow cone) when he noticed a

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<sup>134</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín, “A mi me parece tan poco lógico esperar a que la naturaleza nos resuelva a medias el problema de la población como me parecería el que esperámos a que ella misma nos resolviera el problema de la Agricultura, dice M. Marín,” *El Mundo*, July 14, 1923, ALMM Sección XIII, serie 13, año 1923, Sub-serie 3, Cartapacio 1, Caja 2, Doc. 5.

<sup>135</sup> Muñoz Marín, *Memorias*, 230.

<sup>136</sup> Muñoz Marín, *Memorias*, 232.

<sup>137</sup> Muñoz Marín, *Memorias*, 231.

beggar with a ragged and sad appearance. The snow cone salesman made him a rather interesting proposition: for every 3 or 4 pennies Luis would spend on a piragua, he had to give a penny to the beggar. Many years later, Muñoz Marín saw this simple act, the act of giving change to that beggar, as the first time that he understood what social justice meant. “If someone could afford to eat a snow cone,” he commented, “it was natural that others should have money to eat bread.”<sup>138</sup>

His poetry and the snow cone anecdote, don’t just speak to his personal duty as a pamphleteer, or his thoughts about social justice, but to a greater conversation on the role of individuals and the state in helping the poor. In both instances he sees his responsibility as a person with more money and/or education to take care of the less fortunate. While this may seem to contradict the top-down approach Muñoz preferred for providing birth control, nonetheless, it falls within a paternalistic framework. In one extreme is the son of the most important politician of the early twentieth century trying to save his people one pamphlet at a time while in the other, it is the state which is doing the saving. In neither case is the poor working to solve their issues; they are resolved by an external agent.

The term “civilization,” which Muñoz used in the 1920s, in contrast to his “crowd of stars” in *Panfleto*, cannot be dismissed as just a whimsical poetic statement. As Duara noted, “When we look back to the usage of the word over the last hundred years or so, it is actually quite astonishing to observe how much difference and contention there has been in the meaning of the term *civilization*.”<sup>139</sup> The term can evoke a kind of evolutionary perfection, an ordered way of life; it is

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<sup>138</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín, *Memorias, 1898-1940*, (San Juan: Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín, 2003), 27.

<sup>139</sup> Prasenjit Duara, “The Discourse of Civilization and Decolonization,” *Journal of World History*, Volume 15, Number 1, (March 2004): 1.

also connected with ideas of western supremacy.<sup>140</sup> Muñoz Marín incorporated both ideas into his understanding when speaking of population control. A civilized life was one where cordiality and helpfulness prevailed against turmoil: two ideals defeating mayhem.<sup>141</sup> Puerto Ricans needed to strive for that type civilization; its overpopulation was causing its demise. “The gravest problem we face is overpopulation, Puerto Rico is a lost raft in the sea with 1.3 million shipwrecked men and women aboard that scratch, bite and kick each other for small viands.”<sup>142</sup> Overpopulation was causing individuals to act primal and animal like; the opposite of civilized. “The influence of this horrendous situation over our moral sensibility is every day more disastrous [...] We have generous blood in our veins but we can no longer be generous; we have in our souls good instincts but our fight for survival does not allow us to be good.”<sup>143</sup> Neo-Malthusianism was, for him, the best eradicator of an out of control population and a channel towards civilization.

In the end, Muñoz’s overpopulation discourse did not denigrate the jíbaro but instead emphasized paternalistically that control of the population’s size was necessary for good civilization, which he defined as being kind and generous to one’s neighbor. Such behaviors were contingent on reducing Puerto Rico’s population.

### *Conclusion*

In Puerto Rico, where the economic instability and maldistribution of wealth coming out of the rise of sugar monoculture was tearing the fabric of society, island intellectuals looked upon both Neo-Malthusianism and Eugenics for solutions to the crises around them. Although Eugenic

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<sup>140</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 122.

<sup>141</sup> “El Partido socialista-dice Muñoz Marín,” 27 junio de 1923.

<sup>142</sup> “El Partido socialista-dice Muñoz Marín,” 27 junio de 1923

<sup>143</sup> “El Partido socialista-dice Muñoz Marín,” 27 junio de 1923

and Neo-Malthusian thought intermingled freely, both strands on the island targeted the jíbaro, who was blamed for being of poor stock and having too many children. Muñoz Marín, as a man immersed in the culture of his times, studied such theories and applied them pragmatically, arguing for access to birth control in the hopes that proletarian families could have more choice in planning their families. This we can see in the 1923 Neo-Malthusian debate on the island which Muñoz participated in.

Such pragmatism emerged from Muñoz Marín's education, in addition to his socialist leaning philosophy; they tied grand ideas of civilization, Eugenics, and Neo-Malthusianism together to illustrate a very different vision from that promoted by island eugenicists and birth control advocates. Only his vision would enable the flourishing of Puerto Rico's good civilization.

In the next chapter, Muñoz's civilizing discourse is explored further as he ran for office in 1940. That vision of a democratic society, with good living conditions, grew out of his idealized jíbaro and called for governmental reform for economic advancement in the form of education, food aid, and land distribution; much like his call for governmental reform in the 1920s. This, he felt, would solve the island's population problem. That vision of Puerto Rico would be *the* vision of Puerto Rico for many years to come and would affect the island's development plans and status.

## Chapter 3

### Ending the Lamento Borincano: The Emergence of Muñoz Marín's Vision 1938-1940

As an unwritten rule of campaigning, all political parties and candidates must have insignias, mottos, and jingles that especially set them apart from the rest. In 1940, the Partido Popular Democrático<sup>144</sup> or PPD was no exception and its founder Luis Muñoz Marín wanted a theme song that reflected Puerto Rico's economic and political situation. He chose *Lamento Borincano*.<sup>145</sup> In a minor key, *Lamento Borincano* narrates the story of a poor peasant who goes to market to sell his goods only to find that no one would buy them. The jíbaro leaves, lamenting the condition of his life and wondering what will happen to his children, his home, and his country.

In his memoirs Muñoz Marín narrates how the song reflected the situation that the PPD wanted to change. "We wanted to break the circle of misery that surrounded the lives of Puerto Ricans and end the defeat of [their] good intentions."<sup>146</sup> The lament of a jíbaro unable to sell his wares became the lament of the entire island. Guided by Muñoz, the men and women who founded the Populist Democratic Party wanted to break a cycle of misery and poverty that choked the lives of regular Puerto Ricans and led frequently to desperation, illness, and death.<sup>147</sup>

The eradication of the island's entrenched poverty was centered on a humanistic philosophic vision put forth by Muñoz, which highlighted the innate rights of even simple *jíbaros*. Muñoz

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<sup>144</sup> Populist Democratic Party in English. Synonymous with PPD or Populist Party.

<sup>145</sup> roughly translated as Puerto Rican Lament

<sup>146</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín, *Memorias vol. I 1898-1940*, (San Juan: Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín, 2003) 194.

<sup>147</sup> Muñoz, *Memorias vol. I*, 193-194.

believed that all human beings had value and that such value must translate into decent living conditions and an abolition of the poverty that affected thousands of Puerto Ricans.

Accomplishing such lofty goals, according to the PPD, would require significant land reforms, economic development of the private and public sector, food aid, and education. But first, the PPD needed to get in power.

This vision of advancement through reforms shifted the focus away from what in 1923 Muñoz had called the island's greatest problem: its population growth. It did not speak of the large families which disconcerted Miguel Meléndez Muñoz or the uncontrolled sexual appetites of the jíbaro. Instead, the jíbaro, who in 1923 was the pariah of the intellectuals who claimed him eugenically inferior, became the symbol for Muñoz of the common Puerto Rican.

In this chapter I will describe the vision of Puerto Rico that Muñoz Marín delineated during the creation of the PPD and the 1940 election. This vision, I argue, mythologized in Muñoz's own writing, called for the equality and dignity of the jíbaro whom he saw as an exploited figure and as a symbol for the Puerto Rican people; this rendition was a clear departure from the downtrodden baby maker described by writers in the population control debate of the 1920s. Section I gives a brief background on economic, political, and social conditions on the island in the 1930s. Muñoz Marín, as part of the treintista movement ~an intellectual movement that emerged in the 1930s calling for the creation of an independent Puerto Rican nation, participated in the transformation of the jíbaro from hyper-reproducers into mythical heroes of the nation. Section II talks about Muñoz Marín and the foundation of the PPD in the late 1930s and the 1940 election while the third section, addresses Muñoz's vision for Puerto Rico. Finally Section IV will talk about the absence of birth control in Muñoz's vision and discourse in 1940.

Section I: Puerto Rico in the 1930s

*Y triste el jibarito va , diciendo así, llorando así por el camino ¿Qué sera de Borinquen mi Dios querido?¿Qué sera de mis hijos y de mi hogar?<sup>148</sup>*

--Rafael Hernández, *Lamento Borincano*

The tragedy of a jibaro struggling to feed his family put into song by Rafael Hernández was not far from the conditions lived in the 1930s. Two catastrophes struck the island in those years: Hurricane San Felipe in 1928 which left losses of upwards of \$50 million, and the Great Depression. Two of the island's biggest industries, tobacco and coffee, continued their steep decline while, according to the Brookings Institute, over 80% of people did not own the land they worked on.<sup>149</sup> Creature comforts like electricity and running water did not exist in most parts of the island and most people near cities lived in slums that were the embarrassment of American presidents and their functionaries. Tourists and government officials often toured the slums as tourist attractions.<sup>150</sup> Malaria and tuberculosis were leading causes of death, while parasites and anemia affected large segments of the population. Infant mortality was high and the Depression was killing the small local industries that remained.<sup>151</sup> Jobs were incredibly scarce. Women predominantly worked in the needle trade, slaving away over sewing machines making clothes for American markets for thirty to seventy cents, while over a quarter of the population languished unemployed for part of the year because the island's number one export—sugar—had monopolized the island's land and economic resources.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> “And sadly the peasant goes crying, and saying in his journey, what will happen to Puerto Rico my God? What will happen to my children and my wife?”

<sup>149</sup> Acevedo Nieves, *Sobrepoblación*, 110.

<sup>150</sup> José Anzagasty Rodríguez , “El Fanguito y los Comunistas,” <http://www.80grados.net/el-fanguito-y-los-comunistas/> (April 15, 2014, date accessed). Eleanor Roosevelt was taken on such a tour in her visit to Puerto Rico.

<sup>151</sup> Arturo Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico: A political and cultural history*, (New York: Norton and Company, 1983) 212-241.

<sup>152</sup> Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico*, 212-241.

Although a provision of the Foraker Act of 1900 prohibited individuals or companies from owning more than five hundred acres of land, American sugar companies blatantly disregarded the law. Aguirre for example owned 22,269 acres in 1929. United Puerto Rico owned 28,943.<sup>153</sup> Sugar trusts controlled 59% of the island's wealth and owned 26% of all lands.<sup>154</sup> In a country where over 70% of the population lived in rural areas, such high concentration of land ownership meant that unemployment rates were deplorably high at 36%.<sup>155</sup> However, employment did not secure one from misery. If one lived in the countryside and had a job, according Brookings Institution Report, the average yearly earnings were \$150 dollars a year.<sup>156</sup> Many people in the Puerto Rican countryside were close to starvation.<sup>157</sup> Yet as his livelihood faltered in the 1930s, the jíbaro's image received a makeover without precedent.

### *El Jibaro*

The people who lived in the countryside, disdained by some as the cause of overpopulation and immorality on the island, made a dramatic transformation in the 1930s, getting center stage on the island's cultural identity. Yet the jíbaro did not make this transformation alone. The transformation was spurred by a group of young intellectuals who wrote and tried to understand the jíbaro as a subject. Like Cuban writers who forged a unique literary space in which to imagine their nation using ethnographic and literary discourses, so did Puerto Ricans.<sup>158</sup> The treintistas (30-ers, named for the decade) built upon the works of their late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century intellectual

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<sup>153</sup> Bergad, "Agrarian History of Puerto Rico, 1870-1930", 78.

<sup>154</sup> Morales, *Puerto Rico*, 217.

<sup>155</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Puerto Rico," Census Population vol. I (1930)  
<http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/23761117v1ch12.pdf>

<sup>156</sup> Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico*, 216.

<sup>157</sup> Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico*, 216.

<sup>158</sup> Maguire, "Introduction-A Folklore for the Future: Race and National Narrative in Cuba."

predecessors who used the jíbaro as a literary figure in whom they found certain qualities, attitudes, and cultural mores.<sup>159</sup> Unlike Cuban writers, the treintistas forged the revolutionary and nationalistic jíbaro to counter the cultural influence of their American colonial overlords. They tried to recapture what made the “Puerto Rican personality,” which they saw as endangered by the Americanization process. As Antonio Pedreira, a leader of the movement wrote, “other laws, other ways of thinking, of being, other religions, all from the outside affected us and we looked to the outside, without preoccupying ourselves about our own ‘things’ which are the most precious parts of our personality.”<sup>160</sup> “We lost ourselves.... [but] in the search for ourselves we found the unending song of our expression: the theme of the jíbaro.”<sup>161</sup>

The treintistas, using the social and racial attitudes that prevailed in the Puerto Rican upper classes, reimagined the jíbaro as a proud strong self-sufficient white male. He became the treintista muse: an idealized muse. In contrast with early depictions of the jíbaro that highlighted his darkness, promiscuity, and scheming nature, the new jíbaros were claimed by treintistas to be the descendants of Spaniards, as Enrique Laguerre argues in his introduction to the volume *El jíbaro*.<sup>162</sup> This depiction runs clearly against Puerto Ricans as a biological mixture of Taíno, African, and European blood. Even the jíbaro music was exalted above “black” music, like the bomba and

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<sup>159</sup> Carmen L. Torres-Robles, “La mitificación y desmitificación del jíbaro como símbolo de la identidad nacional Puertorriqueña” *Bilingual Review / La Revista Bilingüe* Vol. 24, No. 3 (September - December 1999), 245.

<sup>160</sup> Enrique Laguerre and Esther Melón de Díaz ed., *El Jíbaro de Puerto Rico: Símbolo y Figura* (Sharon, Conn.: Troutman Press, 1968), 11

<sup>161</sup> Laguerre and ed., *El Jíbaro de Puerto Rico*, 12

<sup>162</sup> Laguerre and ed., *El Jíbaro de Puerto Rico*, 3.

plena,<sup>163</sup> in clear contrast to what Emily Maguire calls the incorporation of hybridity in Cuban culture.<sup>164</sup>

By positioning the jíbaro at the center of Puerto Rican folklore and whitening his skin to resemble that of a Spaniard, Puerto Rican intellectuals like Pedreira chose a vision of the jíbaro that was almost a myth, a symbol that had lost all touch with the reality of the island in the 1930s. The idealized jíbaro reimagined a present that went against the urbanization trends of the 1930s. These trends showed an increasing number of individuals leaving rural areas for cities. They also reimagined women as passive objects. Women, who had played an obvious integral role in society, were mostly ignored except as wives, mothers, or distant objects of desire known for their passivity.

Yet the jíbaro was above all portrayed by the treintistas as optimistic in the face of the misery that surrounded him; and he was even happy in his ignorance, as Luis Llorens Torres, another famous treintista, wrote in the last three stanzas of *Vida Criolla*:

¡Qué sabroso es tener frío y un buen cigarro encender!

(How delicious it is to be cold and have a nice cigar to light!)

¡Qué dicha no conocer de letras ni astronomía!

(What a gift it is to not know letters or astronomy!)

¡Y qué buena hembra la mía cuando se deja querer!

(And what a nice woman I have when she lets herself be loved!)<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Bomba and Plena is the autochthonous music of the Afro-Puerto Rican descendants. It is known for its drums and complex beat patterns reminiscent of western African music.

<sup>164</sup> Maguire, "Introduction-A Folklore for the Future: Race and National Narrative in Cuba."

<sup>165</sup> Luis Llorens Torres, *Vida Criolla (Décima)*, [http://www.elboricua.com/Poems\\_Llorens\\_VidaCriolla.html](http://www.elboricua.com/Poems_Llorens_VidaCriolla.html), (March 14, 2014, date accessed).

Luis Muñoz Marín, as a treintista, incorporated the idealized image of the jíbaro into his political thought and by reproducing it, perpetuated it. He associated with many of the popular writers and intellectuals of the time and counted many of them as personal friends and supporters. He himself saw the life of the idealized jíbaro as simple and closer to the “correct” values for which Puerto Ricans should strive. Three examples from his memoirs present this. The practice of “compadrazgo” or fictive kin relations, which the jíbaro largely followed, was portrayed by Muñoz Marín as the equivalent of social welfare; the jíbaro’s supposed disdain for marriage was due to the fact that he believed more in matrimony than in the ceremony; his “simple-ness,” due to poverty and lack of education, was exalted as humbleness.<sup>166</sup> The jíbaro’s idealized qualities became, for Muñoz, qualities to emulate in the face of a modern urbanized world.<sup>167</sup>

## Section II: Muñoz and the PPD in the 1930s

While Muñoz Marín preferred the bohemian life and enjoyed his position as a journalist for island newspapers like *La Democracia* and the US mainland press in the 1920s, his calling to be a “pamphleteer for God” for the jíbaro could not be easily dismissed and by the 1930s, he felt a vocation to help his people actively in politics.<sup>168</sup> He arrived back in Puerto Rico in 1931 ready to lead with stateside connections and, a year later, ran for political office for the first time, winning a seat in the Puerto Rican senate under the Liberal Party, a pro-independence party that was

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<sup>166</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín, *La Historia del Partido Popular Democrático*, (San Juan: Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín, 2003), 42-43.

<sup>167</sup> The “crash” between the jíbaro’s humbleness and simplicity and the island’s development project and newfound consumerism, became a major theme for Muñoz in the 1950s and 1960s out of the scope of this work. Many of the DivEdCo (Division de Educación de la Comunidad) films dealt with this dichotomy. See for example the film *Juan Sin Seso* from 1959, an entertaining short film that details what happens when a man without electricity buys a washer machine.

<sup>168</sup> Muñoz during the 1920s and 1930s, had the transnational life which many Puerto Ricans like myself enjoy, visiting the island frequently and being connected to other Puerto Ricans on the island and abroad.

connected by its membership to the party of his father, Luis Muñoz Rivera.<sup>169</sup> Espousing a philosophy that called for economic recovery through state intervention, Muñoz held ideas very much in harmony with the entering Roosevelt administration in Washington. As a senator, he became highly respected on the island and on the mainland because of the progressive currents he represented; with his political connections to the Roosevelt administration through Ruby Black (1896-1957), a personal friend of Eleanor Roosevelt and a well-known journalist, and his facility with English, he even had the ear of the President.<sup>170</sup>

During the early thirties, Muñoz was key to the introduction of two programs on the island that mirrored New Deal objectives: the PRERA (Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Act), which allocated funds to fix island infrastructure and create jobs, and the Chardón Plan.<sup>171</sup> The latter was a comprehensive plan for national reconstruction coordinated by University of Puerto Rico professor Carlos E. Chardón and had four main objectives: 1) to apply the 500-acre provision of the Foraker Act; 2) to appropriate all land that exceeded the 500-acres; 3) to create a corporation that distributed land to landless laborers; and 4) to create growing collectives. While the Chardón Plan was hotly debated and controversial on the island and in some quarters in the US despite Roosevelt's approval,<sup>172</sup> it would have a deep impact on later legislation pushed by Muñoz as Senate President.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> The party that Muñoz Rivera had founded was called the Union Party, however, after an alliance with the Republican Party fell through (that party was called *la Alianza*), the Union Party delegates were not allowed to go back to their original name and instead, adopted the name Partido Liberal de Puerto Rico. See Ayála and Bernabe, *Puerto Rico en El Siglo Americano*, 148-149.

<sup>170</sup> Pérez Miranda and Collado Schwarz, "#264 Muna Lee," *La Voz del Centro*.

<sup>171</sup> A. W. Maldonado, *Luis Muñoz Marín: Puerto Rico's Democratic Revolution*, (San Juan: La Editorial Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2006) 123.

<sup>172</sup> It lost much of its potency through the court cases that challenged it.

<sup>173</sup> Fernando Picó, *Puerto Rico, a Panorama of its People*, (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2006) 260.

In October of 1935 a peaceful assembly of nationalists led by Pedro Albizu Campos turned violent as five young men were killed by the police. Francis E. Riggs,<sup>174</sup> the American-appointed police superintendent, was assassinated in retaliation for this act as he left mass on February 23, 1936 by two young men who were later apprehended and shot by the police. Unfortunately, the events following the assassination of Riggs left Muñoz with many enemies, without a political party, and questioning his pro-independence beliefs. The Riggs assassination was seen with absolute horror in Washington and Muñoz was quickly asked to repudiate the Nationalist Party and the murder. He refused and he gained a very powerful enemy in Ernest Gruening, the Director of the Division of Territories and Insular Affairs, who had been a personal friend of Riggs and a close friend of Muñoz Marín. Gruening used his considerable power to try to destroy Muñoz and the independence cause. Together with Senator Millard E. Tydings,<sup>175</sup> Gruening and his department wrote a bill giving Puerto Rico immediate independence without any economic help. Muñoz saw the bill as incredibly unfair: considering that, in his eyes, the American government had bankrupted the island with policies that gave subsidies to sugar companies and high tariffs to desperately needed imported goods from the United States, and worked hard to kill it.<sup>176</sup> Turmoil erupted between Muñoz and the old guard of the pro-independence Liberal Party, led by Antonio R. Barceló who supported the Tydings Bill. Muñoz could not understand how politicians like Barceló, until then his mentor and supporter, could put independence above economic stability; Barceló and his supporters thought Muñoz had sold out the independence cause. The

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<sup>174</sup> Riggs was the top-ranking, U.S.-appointed police chief in Puerto Rico and a former U.S. Army Colonel. Since the entire police took their orders from Riggs, the Nationalists considered him responsible for the massacre.

<sup>175</sup> Tydings (1890-1960) was the Democratic Senator for Maryland. He wrote the bill that gave the Phillipines its independence in 1934. This act according to Zapata was not done because of any democratic considerations but out of deep seeded racism in the part of Tydings and Congress. See Carlos R. Zapata Olivieras *De Independentista a Autonomista: La Transformación del Pensamiento Político de Luis Muñoz Marín (1931-1949)*, (San Juan: Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín, 2003) 44.

<sup>176</sup> Zapata Olivieras, *De Independentista a Autonomista*, 52.

independence movement never fully recovered from the attack of Gruening and Tydings. More importantly, Muñoz began to be known as a leader who believed that economic stability had to come before even political liberty.<sup>177</sup>

Muñoz was eventually thrown out of the Liberal Party in March, 1937, with a group of likeminded young intellectuals who belonged to the treintista movement, and many thought his career was finished.<sup>178</sup> Yet out of the ashes of political disgrace, Luis Muñoz Marín emerged a year later with an idea to create a new political party that held democracy and a vision of Puerto Rican advancement at its center. The party was named the Partido Popular Democrático and its main goal was to abolish poverty for average Puerto Ricans. Less important was independence.

On July 22, 1938, they inscribed the party and its insignia under the words *Pan, Tierra y Libertad* (bread, land, and liberty) in the towns of Barranquitas and Luquillo. Both towns held symbolic significance. Luquillo was a coastal town known for its sugar cane and Barranquitas, as the birth place of Luis Muñoz Rivera, was a town selected because it represented political continuity from the father to the son. The political roots of the PPD lay in economic reformers who admired the style and substance of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and were reflected in the party's platform, which stressed economic and social reform, and in its populist style, which emphasized a connection to the voting public.

The new party counted as leaders battle-tested legislators, intellectuals, farmers representing the small sugar growers, and community organizers. Unlike the Liberal Party from which it spawned, the leadership of the PPD was not from the upper class but drawn from an array of

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<sup>177</sup> Muñoz, *Memorias vol. I*, 168-177

<sup>178</sup> Muñoz, *Memorias vol. I*, 196.

sectors of the middle and lower-middle class, the university intelligentsia, and small farmers or landowners.<sup>179</sup> While the PPD shared many of the same goals as the pro-statehood Socialist Party, the *populares* as they were called, although not anti-American, were committed to a strong sense of cultural identity. Many of its leaders were pro-independence, although some, like Teodoro Moscoso, held pro-statehood views. As a whole, the PPD adhered to a vision of equality and dignity for the jíbaro; from the prolific reproducers of the 1920s, in the 1930s they became a symbol of Puerto Rican-ness.<sup>180</sup>

The image of the jíbaro lauded by the treintista movement seeped throughout Muñoz's PPD. While in the late 1930s and early 1940s Puerto Rico was becoming increasingly urban, it gave the party a main character in a Puerto Rican advancement narrative that went beyond social class, race, and gender. The jíbaro, Córdova argued, "was a compelling symbol because it provided a shared vocabulary that structured and guided understanding of basic assumptions, orientations, and ideological commitments."<sup>181</sup> It gave the PPD an advantage they needed, as elections were just two years after the party's founding.



*PPD Insignia*

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<sup>179</sup> Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico*, 244.

<sup>180</sup> Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico*, 245.

<sup>181</sup> Nathaniel I. Cordova, "In his Image and Likeness: The Puerto Rican Jíbaro as a Political Icon," *Centro Journal*, Vol. XVII, Num. 2 (Fall, 2005), 185.

The PPD expressed its symbolic tie to the jíbaro in two ways: through its platform and its insignia, a red jíbaro wearing a straw hat. This hat shielded field laborers from the tropical sun and had been used in pictorial depictions of the jíbaro since the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a way to identify them as a collective group. For example, Francisco Oller (1833-1917) and the Spanish painter Luis Paret y Alcázar used the straw hat in depicting the jíbaro.



Luis Paret y Alcázar dressed as a jíbaro in *Self Portrait*, ca. 1780

The jíbaro's race, a point of difference among the phenotypically diverse Puerto Ricans, was made universal by the insignia's red paint. His gender was marked as male. This visual representation of the jíbaro recognizable to all provided the primary means for the campaign to communicate an ideology that, reminiscent of the Mexican cry for independence, called for food [bread (*pan*)], land reform (*tierra*), and liberty, whether be it political or spiritual (as Muñoz Marín later claimed), for the Puerto Rican people.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>182</sup>Córdova, "In his Image and Likeness," 174-178.

Combined with the platform of the PPD, the emblem resonated with a large constituency. As Arturo Morales Carrión narrated in his classic tome, *Puerto Rico: A Political and Cultural History*, over 568,000 people voted in the 1940 election with 214,857 votes going to the *populares*. Less than half of the electorate voted for the PPD, yet the opposition parties, divided into fractions, were not able to capture a majority of the vote. While the PPD did not win the office of Resident Commissioner, the Senate was won by one seat and the House was tied 18-18.<sup>183</sup> Muñoz's strategy to capture the jíbaro vote and to invoke the jíbaro image worked very well in the rural areas and he became senate president. The party that had only existed for 847 days before the 1940 election was able to capture enough ground to have a strong presence in Puerto Rican politics.

### *Section III: The Vision*

It was not just the use of the jíbaro as a symbol that was striking to Puerto Rican voters; it was the vision that the PPD "movement" promulgated. Through Muñoz, the party and its movement acquired a humanistic sensibility manifested in a vision for the future of the island based on "equality," "dignity," and "justice." In this vision all inhabitants would live lives of "sufficiency, modesty, and security."<sup>184</sup> This would be accomplished through eight points delineated in his *La Historia del Partido Popular Democrático*, his unfinished political memoir of the 1940 election. The eight points called for all Puerto Ricans to have enough food, decent and adequate dress, a roof over their head, medical attention in case of illness, healthy entertainment, education, and the freedom to follow the religion of his or her choice. Ultimately the goal of the PPD was for Puerto Ricans to have *libertad del espíritu humano* or liberty of the human spirit: a

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<sup>183</sup> Morales, *Puerto Rico*, 246-247.

<sup>184</sup> Muñoz, *Historia del Partido Popular*, 129.

liberty based on the calm and tranquility that came with a decent life and a consciousness about the meanings of such a life.<sup>185</sup>

It is hard to pinpoint exactly where Muñoz acquired these all-encompassing views about how Puerto Ricans should live and the role of politics in creating that life; however, scholar Rosario Natal has pointed to Muñoz having acquired a keen interest in Fabianism and ethical socialism as a young man from his friendship with Nemesio Canales (1878-1923).<sup>186</sup> Fabianism was a form of socialism popular in Britain that emphasized reforms rather than revolutions. It had a strong social justice component and, along with ethical socialism, highlighted the need for a morally conscious economy. Both currents of thought are present in his recollections and ideas on tranquility, morality, and decency in living. Oscar Wilde's *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, one of Muñoz's favorite texts, also shows fabianist and ethical socialist views.<sup>187</sup> Although there is no record or memoir that pinpoints specific passages Muñoz favored, Wilde argues that socialism led to the emergence of the "true personality of man": a personality that was "saner, healthier, more civilised, more himself"<sup>188</sup> which was something which Muñoz clearly connected to as he created Puerto Rico's vision.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Muñoz, *Historia del Partido Popular*, 137.

<sup>186</sup> Nemesio Canales was Muñoz Marín's friend and mentor. An ardent Socialist, he was considered one of the leading thinkers on the island in the areas of feminism, morality and sexuality during the period of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through World War I. See Rafael Bernabe and Ángel Collado Schuarz "53 Nemesio Canales- periodista, escritor, mentor de Luis Muñoz Marín" *La Voz del Centro*, <http://www.vozdelcentro.org/?s=Nemesio+Canales&x=0&y=0> March 14, 2014. Rosario, *La Juventud de LMM*, 93

<sup>187</sup> Rosario, *La Juventud de LMM*, 93.

<sup>188</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/wilde-oscar/soul-man/>, (May 5, 2014, date accessed).

<sup>189</sup> Rosario, *La Juventud de LMM*, 93.

Muñoz's goals that tranquility, modesty, decency, and equality should be experienced by all Puerto Ricans were not electoral gimmicks. As a politician he went back to this over and over again, with Operation Serenity as a culmination of his thoughts on the subject. Operation Serenity, which ran parallel to Operation Bootstrap<sup>190</sup> from the 1950s on to the 1960s, emphasized cultural development and education in an age of rapid industrialization. This education encompassed Western art, music, and community education projects. It pushed to give economic and political initiatives objectives that were "harmonious with the spirit of man."<sup>191</sup> These six words from a speech ten years after the all-important election of 1940, when his electoral success was no longer in question, is reminiscent of the sentiments shared throughout the election and shows that ideals of modesty, equality, and tranquility represent constancy in Muñoz's thought rather than an exception.

The humanistic vision that Muñoz had for all Puerto Ricans would be instilled through legislation. Redistribution of riches was of utmost importance in his legislation and, although highly controversial, it took place through the institution of a minimum wage, the *Ley de Tierras* that divided up agricultural company holdings of over 500 acres, and tax laws that were "friendlier" to the poor.<sup>192</sup> The Land Law also provided for an increase of production as the leftover lands could be used for high-yield agricultural products, such as vanilla, for export. This, though, is just a small part of the total legislation the PPD proposed during the election. Taken together, the legislation, which all party members running for office had sworn over a Bible to vote for,<sup>193</sup> would

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<sup>190</sup> Operation Bootstrap was Puerto Rico's much touted industrialization project.

<sup>191</sup> Muñoz Marín, *La Historia del Partido Popular Democrático*, 137

<sup>192</sup> Muñoz Marín, *La Historia del Partido Popular Democrático*, 128-129.

<sup>193</sup> The swearing over the Bible was done symbolically to instill trust in the electorate. See Muñoz Marín, *La Historia del Partido Popular Democrático*.

aim for the creation of a “modest” life: one only possible through employment that was justly paid, a better distribution of riches, and an increase in the island’s production.<sup>194</sup> Then Puerto Ricans, according to Muñoz, would be able to truly “live.”<sup>195</sup>

#### *Section IV: What about birth control?*

The 1940s PPD platform and vision avoided speaking of birth control, the Neo-Malthusian tool of choice for ending poverty. Although he had spoken of it readily in his early years, a wiser and more politically-minded Muñoz Marín running for political office did not even mention the issue. There are two main reasons for this omission: one is the Catholic Church and the other is the Nationalist Party view on sterilizations. The Catholic Church was in the 1930s dead set against birth control. In 1930 Pope Pius XI weighed in on the issue of birth control in the encyclical famously called *Casti Connubii* or Chaste Wedlock. This encyclical established abstinence as the preferred mode of contraception rejecting artificial means of birth control. It also tied the act of intercourse to procreation and to marriage following the doctrines of Augustine of Hippo, the 4<sup>th</sup> century Doctor of the Catholic Church. St. Augustine, as he is known as, deduced from the words of the Apostle Paul to Timothy that Paul “witness[ed] that marriage is for the sake of generation: 'I wish,' he says, 'young girls to marry.' And, as if someone said to him, 'Why?' he immediately adds: 'To bear children, to be mothers of families'.”<sup>196</sup>

In Puerto Rico, amendments to Article 268 of the 1902 Penal Code, for example, began as early as 1925 and garnered considerable headlines in the Catholic press. This article, based on the

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<sup>194</sup>Muñoz Marín, *La Historia del Partido Popular Democrático*, 130.

<sup>195</sup> Muñoz Marín, *La Historia del Partido Popular Democrático*, 54.

<sup>196</sup> Pope Paul XI, *Casti Connubii*, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xi\\_enc\\_31121930\\_casti-connubii\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_31121930_casti-connubii_en.html) February 25, 2013, date accessed).

Comstock laws in the United States mainland, made birth control and its dissemination illegal.<sup>197</sup> One of the Catholic Church's most vocal opponents of birth control and neo-malthusianism was Martin J. Berntsen, a Dominican priest and editor of the Church bi-monthly organ *El Piloto*.<sup>198</sup> Berntsen critiqued the hypothesis that a rising population produced hunger, prostitution, crime, and ignorance, as neo-malthusian thinkers liked to claim, and defended the position that sex was for procreation during marriage. He also critiqued American neo-malthusian pronouncements against the Puerto Rican people and the policies that followed them. For example in 1936, he vehemently chastised Governor Blanton Winship for saying that what would benefit Puerto Rico would be fewer children.<sup>199</sup> Muñoz then, in ignoring the subject of birth control, was avoiding Catholic controversy.

Birth control was also very contentious for many believers of independence who believed that government-provided birth control was equal to annihilating the Puerto Rican people. As Briggs notes in "Discourses of 'Forced Sterilization' in Puerto Rico," birth control politics had always been about nationalism. Nationalists, she argued, often argued a conservative pro-natalist position that criticized US colonialism while attacking birth control.<sup>200</sup> Muñoz Marín, by steering away from the nationalist question, Briggs argues, "finessed" the birth control issue;<sup>201</sup> he steered clear of attacks from both the Catholic Church and the Nationalists.<sup>202</sup> Instead, Muñoz Marín's

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<sup>197</sup> *Código Penal de Puerto Rico 1902*, 586.

<sup>198</sup> This newspaper, founded in 1926, was dedicated to the discussion of religious and non-religious topics and their impact on the moral and social life of its readers; who they called "simple people, students, and workers who find subscriptions to regular newspapers expensive." See Acevedo Nieves, *Sobrepoblación*, 93. Also see José Barrado Barquilla, Rodríguez, *Los Dominicos y el Nuevo Mundo, siglos XIX-XX: actas del V Congreso Internacional Querétaro, Qro. (México) 4-8 septiembre 1995*, Editorial San Esteban, 1997. 564.

<sup>199</sup> Acevedo Nieves, *Sobrepoblación*, 132

<sup>200</sup> Laura Briggs "Discourses of 'Forced Sterilization' in Puerto Rico," 46.

<sup>201</sup> Laura Briggs "Discourses of 'Forced Sterilization' in Puerto Rico," 46

<sup>202</sup> Laura Briggs "Discourses of 'Forced Sterilization' in Puerto Rico," 46.

incorporation of land reform, the idealized jíbaro, and a humanist perspective into his vision for Puerto Rico, meant that most people, regardless of their view on birth control, could stand behind his ideas for the future.

### *Conclusion*

The vision that Muñoz created in the late 1930s called for education, economic development, food aid, and land reform, medical treatment for the sake of “equality,” “dignity,” and “justice.” During the election of 1940 Muñoz Marín and the PPD delineated that vision for Puerto Rico upon a new idealized jíbaro. This jíbaro, unlike that of the 1920s, was no longer a childbearing pariah but a symbol of Puerto Rico and its people, reconditioned as a descendent of the Spaniards by the treintistas.

Muñoz did not air his Neo-Malthusian views during the electoral campaign by steering clear of the nationalist question, as Briggs argues, he had no reason to do so. Such talk, was divisive. Nonetheless, overpopulation would take leads in the social scientific research done in the 1940s and Muñoz himself, six years after that fateful election that led him into power, would retake overpopulation as the main cause of Puerto Rico’s poverty. My next chapter delves into the population research done in the 1940s, which Muñoz believed would lead to a realization of his vision. I argue that instead of problematizing the jíbaro as writers had done in the 1920s, this research pointed to a new overpopulation culprit: not just jíbaras but women of color.

## Chapter 4

### Puerto Rico as an Island Petri-dish: social science and overpopulation in the years before the Commonwealth

*“Sin entender en toda seriedad el problema poblacional no puede la conciencia tomar cuenta de su grave responsabilidad en cuanto el futuro de nuestro pueblo y de su civilización.”*<sup>203</sup>—Luis Muñoz Marín

Speaking on the inauguration of the School of Public Administration in 1945, Senate President Luis Muñoz Marín proclaimed his commitment to an unprecedented relationship between the Puerto Rico’s government and its academic center, the University of Puerto Rico. For Muñoz, the school would serve as a stepping stone into the “good civilization” he and his party, El Partido Popular Democrático, hoped for by providing the island with graduates trained in the best methods to serve the people. Such a relationship was necessary, Muñoz noted, because “[t]he magnitude of the problems confronted by Puerto Rico is precisely in inverse proportion to the small size of its territory and in contrast to its lack of resources. Puerto Rico confronts its livelihood problems in extremely difficult circumstances. Understanding that should not be a pretext for pessimism but a powerful stimulus for serious, methodical, decisive, persistent, and audacious action, when audacity is necessary and is presided over by comprehension and responsibility.”<sup>204</sup> The university, in Muñoz’s vision, would help give Puerto Rico the self-comprehension it needed to combat its problems by guiding the actions of the state. Muñoz then painted Puerto Rico’s bleak present like he had done in the twenties. He again brought

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<sup>203</sup> Muñoz Marín, “Alerta a la Conciencia Puertorriqueña, primer artículo: ‘El Problema’ ” (7 Feb. 1946) “Without understanding with all seriousness the population problem one cannot in good conscience consider the great responsibility in regards to the future of our people and its civilization.”

<sup>204</sup>Luis Muñoz Marín “Al establecerse la Escuela de Administración Pública de la Universidad de Puerto Rico,” 29 de octubre de 1945 *Palabras de Luis Muñoz Marín, 1945-1948*, (San Juan: Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín), 218-231.

overpopulation into the spotlight by giving the audience Puerto Rico's birth rate numbers. The island was overpopulated, he repeated, with a growing population of over 55,000 babies born each year, a child born every nine minutes.<sup>205</sup>

After being absent for several decades, Puerto Rico's so-called overpopulation problem made a comeback in that Luis Muñoz Marín speech, portrayed as the leading cause of poverty and misery on the island. This portrayal, however, differed from Muñoz's early writings on the subject. First, he did not describe overpopulation as a problem with a quick cure; it now had to be studied academically. Secondly, since overpopulation lay in the heart of all of Puerto Rico's problems, its solution would affect all areas of Puerto Rican life. Thirdly, birth control would not be presented, as Muñoz Marín had done before, as the best option for ending overpopulation: industrialization would. Finally, the magnitude of the overpopulation problem could be an asset to the country because solving it would push Puerto Ricans towards better solutions.

Beginning in the 1940s, social scientists, encouraged by a climate of research and planning fostered by Senate President Muñoz, the PPD, and the Rexford Tugwell administration, did studies and found evidence needed to push for reforms that would lead to the civilized Puerto Rico Muñoz envisioned: a Puerto Rico whose inhabitants would lead modest yet prosperous lives not bothered by the effects of overpopulation. In this chapter I will delve into the reemergence of overpopulation, this time as a rationale for modernist development. I argue that, instead of problematizing the jíbaro as previous 1920s writers had done, social science research pointed to all women of color as the new overpopulation culprit.

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<sup>205</sup> Muñoz Marín, "Al establecerse la Escuela de Administración Pública," 220-221.

The first section gives a brief overview to how research became the state driver for Muñoz Marín and Rexford Tugwell; I place special emphasis on Tugwell, social scientific research on the island, and the restructuring of the University of Puerto Rico. The second section will talk about the overpopulation research done in and outside the University of Puerto Rico's Centro de Investigación Social (CIS) during the late 40s. This research was grounded in the decidedly American attitudes on race and culture as their driver. It is my hope to help illuminate the ways in which overpopulation and research, collided with issues of race and development.

*Section I: Rexford Tugwell, the PPD, and the University of Puerto Rico*

By 1944 it was clear that fulfilling Muñoz's vision of a more civilized Puerto Rico needed more than an increase in electric customers or more tax breaks. What was needed was an economic development project to bring the island "up to date." This would take place through state planning; for Muñoz, good state planning for the island consisted of the massive building of infrastructure and industry, and the restructuring of government to address the needs of the poor through food programs, sanitation, and education.<sup>206</sup> This project however needed the full consent of all of the island's political agents. In theory, social science research, Muñoz and the *populares*<sup>207</sup> believed, could help push policy by going above political inclinations for the common good. In practice, the *populares* wanted experts whose research could agree with the party's ideology of state planning and give them scientific caché.<sup>208</sup> This would be accomplished through a partnership between the PPD and its biggest ally: Governor Rexford Tugwell.

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<sup>206</sup> Silvia Alvarez Curbelo and María E. Rodríguez Castro eds. *Del Nacionalismo al Populismo: Cultura y política en Puerto Rico*, (Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1993) 128.

<sup>207</sup> Members of the Partido Popular Democrático or PPD

<sup>208</sup> Alvarez Curbelo and Rodríguez Castro eds. *Del Nacionalismo al Populismo*, 131.

From his election in 1932, President Roosevelt showed himself to have a knack for appointing less than capable men to the governorship of Puerto Rico. During his presidency seven men took the helm of the most powerful office on the island, five of whom were only there for a year. One particular man, Robert Hayes Gore, was considered to be just “qualified enough to run his local Chamber of Commerce,” while another man, Blanton C. Winship, was summarily removed from office after charges surrounding the 1937 massacre of Puerto Rican nationalists in Ponce.<sup>209</sup> This gallery of mediocre men ended with the appointment of Rexford Guy Tugwell (1891-1979), an agricultural economist who was part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Brain Trust." Tugwell, like most Brain Trustees, had an impressive academic resume which included professorships at Columbia University and the American University in Paris, and a dissertation on government regulation of industry.<sup>210</sup> As an economist, Tugwell was highly experimental and held the view that social engagement and scholarship were compatible and could help shape society. As a member of the “Brain Trust,” he was the mastermind behind such programs as the Resettlement Administration, which resettled individuals living in rural areas to suburban areas where they could potentially find employment, and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, which paid farmers to reduce output. Such programs unfortunately gave him a rather controversial reputation and he was often called *Rex the Red* by mainland press.<sup>211</sup>

Tugwell’s supposed “redness,” which was seen as a liability in the states, was a blessing to Muñoz and the PPD. They loved Tugwell’s strong conviction that planning was the cure for a large assortment of social and economic ills. As Muñoz narrated in his memoirs, Tugwell “incarnated

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<sup>209</sup> Morales, *Puerto Rico*, 226.

<sup>210</sup> Rexford Guy Tugwell and Jorge Rodríguez Beruff ed., *La Tierra Azotada: Memorias del último gobernador estadounidense de Puerto Rico*, (San Juan: Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín, 2010).

<sup>211</sup> Tugwell, *La Tierra Azotada*.

the best traits of exceptional North American public service [...] He possessed a high caliber of social responsibility, of indigenous radicalism, serene disposition, and firmness to deal with the roots of the problems that reality presented without theoretical dogma.”<sup>212</sup> The appeal was such that Tugwell was even selected chancellor of the University of Puerto Rico by Muñoz several months before Roosevelt’s gubernatorial appointment.<sup>213</sup>

Tugwell saw his role as governor as a challenge to transform an ailing society through research. The Brain Trustee’s ideas on planning were very much welcomed by Muñoz and the PPD, who established a close professional relationship with the governor and provided, through his connections, an opportunity for collaboration between social scientists and Puerto Rican officials. They were open to Tugwell’s expertise for many reasons. First, Muñoz and other founding PPD members received their education in the United States. For example, Antonio Luchetti (a key member of the island’s reconstruction plan) studied engineering at Cornell; Roberto Sánchez Vilella (who served in federal and insular relief agencies and who later became Muñoz’s Secretary of State) completed his education at Ohio State; Antonio Fernós-Isern graduated from the University of Michigan (he was the resident commissioner of Puerto Rico for 19 years and a key popular); finally, Jaime Benítez, who became president of the University of Puerto Rico after Tugwell relinquished the job, graduated from the University of Chicago like Tugwell.<sup>214</sup> They were also less hostile to the notion that ideas and expertise came from the US. They spoke English, came from similar social and economic backgrounds as US officials, and had similar educations,

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<sup>212</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín, *Memorias, 1940-1952*, (San Juan: Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín, 2003) 77.

<sup>213</sup> He was later asked to relinquish that position since the press and many students felt that the independence of the University was being compromised with a double appointment as chancellor and governor. His leadership and academic standing though went unquestioned.

<sup>214</sup> Gabriel Villaronga, *Toward a Discourse of Consent: Mass Mobilization and Colonial Politics in Puerto Rico, 1932-1948*, Westport: Praeger, 2004.

sometimes in the same institutions as the researchers hired to work in Puerto Rico. Second, Puerto Rico's high unemployment, poor industrial development, and levels of illiteracy, hunger, and disease frightened most American and Puerto Rican elites alike. As such, they were open to any solutions to these problems.

Members of the PPD and Muñoz were conscious of the level of need on the island and wanted to change the lives of its inhabitants by transforming Puerto Rico into a modern civilized society.<sup>215</sup> To do so, they felt they needed the best minds; who better to lead this movement than a member of the Brain Trust itself. Yet Tugwell, Muñoz, and the populares were not enough. They needed the academy to sign onto their state planning.

Central to the role of island transformation was the University of Puerto Rico and its restructuring in the early 1940s. Founded in 1903 as a normal school and then organized into a university in 1925, the University of Puerto Rico was the premier institution of higher education on the island.<sup>216</sup> Yet according to Tugwell, Muñoz, and other populares, it needed to be reformed to solve Puerto Rico's fundamental problems.<sup>217</sup> To this end, the University Reform Law of 1942 was instituted to emphasize the social sciences and create more specialized schools and degree plans. Instead of a single College of Arts and Sciences, the university established the College of Natural Sciences, the College of Humanities, and the College of Social Sciences.<sup>218</sup> This last college became the hallmark for producing public servants invested in to the problems of Puerto

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<sup>215</sup> Lapp, "The Rise and Fall of Puerto Rico as a Social Laboratory, 1945-1965," 170.

<sup>216</sup> Other colleges existed like the Politechnic and the Colegio de las Madres yet these institutions did not have the prestige or the academic options as the University of Puerto Rico. See Alvarez Curbelo and Rodríguez Castro eds., *Del Nacionalismo al Populismo* 131

<sup>217</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín, "La Cancillería de Rexford Tugwell: Speech made September 10, 1941," *Palabras de Luis Muñoz Marín, 1941-1944 vol. III*, (San Juan:Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín): 114.

<sup>218</sup> Alvarez Curbelo and Rodríguez Castro, *Del Nacionalismo al Populismo*, 133.

Rico and the techniques to solve them: techniques which were closely aligned with the PPD and its agenda.<sup>219</sup> The appointment of Antonio J. Colorado, a PPD ideologue and founder close to Muñoz, as Angel G. Quintero Rivera postulates, demonstrates the importance that Muñoz and the PPD put into the social sciences.<sup>220</sup>

Just two years after the creation of the College of Social Sciences, Chancellor Jaime Benítez began to see the need for the creation of a center for the study of social sciences. He immediately contacted Lewis A. Dexter, his advisor and a renowned political scientist and sociologist, who made the initial development plans and first contacts.<sup>221</sup> With active support from Tugwell and Muñoz Marín, the CIS or Centro de Investigación Social ( known by its English name, the Social Science Research Center) was born with the grand goal of wooing social scientists from the United States and setting a research agenda aimed at guiding Puerto Rican economic development. According to anthropologist James Steward, a CIS lead researcher whose work on Puerto Rico became the landmark book, *The People of Puerto Rico*, the CIS was not supposed to be an academic enclave but a center that would bring the latest social science techniques to the aid of the Puerto Rican people.<sup>222</sup> To that end, government officials were consulted to assure that useful research findings would be put to practice. As Awilda Vélez Crespo noted, “the results of the investigations were to augment scientific knowledge and at the same time facilitate the processes of discussion, decision, and implementation of social policies. This mission defined the CIS as a center for

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<sup>219</sup> Alvarez Curbelo and Rodríguez Castro eds., *Del Nacionalismo al Populismo*, 139.

<sup>220</sup> Alvarez Curbelo and Rodríguez Castro eds., *Del Nacionalismo al Populismo*, 133.

<sup>221</sup> Awilda Vélez Crespo, “Centro de Investigaciones Sociales : inicios, evolución y desarrollo (1945-2000)” Master’s Thesis in Public Administration, University of Puerto Rico, (December, 2002), 10.

<sup>222</sup> Julian Steward, *The People of Puerto Rico: A study in Social Anthropology*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956), v.

applied investigation.”<sup>223</sup> Applied investigation was to turn was island into a petri-dish. Such a vision would be seen as highly attractive to researchers who wanted to see their work put into use.

The project directors or lead investigators hired by the CIS were prestigious, usually members of the social science community in the US, and they led the projects in coordination with the director of the Center. They would pick the social problems they wanted to study with the cooperation of Puerto Rican professors, who served as investigation assistants. This set-up of North American leadership with island assistants was viewed by Governor Tugwell, who was intimately involved, as highly desirable since he believed that hiring American experts would raise the quality of the university. This was of course done at the expense of local scholars and intellectuals. For example, all lead investigators in the CIS from 1945 until 1955 were American and worked at the center temporarily since many of them had their own centers in other universities abroad.<sup>224</sup> This created an uproar not lost to Muñoz, who was described by Tugwell as being “plaintively opposed” to the idea.<sup>225</sup> Yet this was cosmetic opposition and did not stop Muñoz from supporting such changes. His party, in the end, assiduously nurtured the intellectual migration of American expertise, seeking to harness this knowledge in their master plan to transform Puerto Rico into a modern society.<sup>226</sup> In fact, ten years after the reform was instituted, Arthur J. Vidich, an American sociologist working in Puerto Rico, wrote of the migration of foreign and American experts hired by the university. While the illustrious collection of professors recruited from around the world gave the University of Puerto Rico an international luster unmatched elsewhere in Latin America, Vidich argued that their presence led to the impression that jobs that belonged to Puerto Ricans

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<sup>223</sup> Vélez Crespo. “Centro de Investigaciones Sociales,” 13.

<sup>224</sup> Vélez Crespo. “Centro de Investigaciones Sociales,” 25.

<sup>225</sup> Rexford Guy Tugwell, *The Stricken Land: The Story of Puerto Rico*, (Garden City NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1947) 110.

<sup>226</sup> Lapp, “The Rise and Fall of Puerto Rico as a Social Laboratory, 1945-1965,” 170.

were given to outsiders. “Academic colonialism,” Vidich concluded, “seemed to pervade the university” and this was especially true in the Social Science Research Center.<sup>227</sup>

The hiring of North American men<sup>228</sup> to these positions had a decisive impact on the scope and direction of the projects the center carried out as CIS directors administered all operations. The men who headed the center in the 1940s each picked projects that fit their interests. Clarence Senior (1945-1948), a graduate of the University of Kansas City known for his socialist activities in the United States, for example, did extensive work on Puerto Rican migration and overpopulation; Millard Hansen (1949- 1964), also a graduate of the University of Chicago, was a development expert. Although directors were given free rein, the CIS agenda was very much influenced by the PPD, which controlled the chancellorship of the university, and by Muñoz, who was its supporter and took a personal interest in the research projects that the CIS conducted.<sup>229</sup> The top funded projects for example studied the social structure, population, culture, and economy of the island: all topics which were of great interest to the PPD.<sup>230</sup>

The University of Puerto Rico was in the 1940s integral to the transformation of Puerto Rico since it helped provide the research and agenda for development. Its reform and the creation of the CIS provided the intellectual architecture for development projects on the island, making the background of its personnel very important. Yet social scientists were not alone in directing the studies in the center; the populares and their vision were also crucial and both had a symbiotic

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<sup>227</sup> Arthur J. Vidich, *With a Critical Eye: An Intellectual and His Times*, (New York: Newfound Press, 2009) 353.

<sup>228</sup> In the first ten years of the CIS there was only one woman in the prestigious group of investigators: Lydia Roberts a home economics professor from the University of Chicago who later became an even rarer oddity by actually living in Puerto Rico (most lead investigators directed their projects from afar). See Franklin C. Bing, “Lydia Jane Roberts- A biographical sketch,” *Journal of Nutrition* 93 (1967): 1-14.

<sup>229</sup> Muñoz was part of the tertulias of university professors and intellectuals according to Vidich. This was not uncommon of Muñoz. He was known to watch all the DIVEDCO (division de educacion comunitaria) films produced on the island before they hit the streets. See Vidich, *With a Critical Eye*, 359-360.

<sup>230</sup> Alvarez Curbelo and Rodríguez Castro eds., *Del Nacionalismo al Populismo*, 143.

relationship. As Lapp noted, the CIS was the academic agent of the populares, offering both academic justification and technical support for their projects. More important still, the PPD needed the work of American social scientists to strengthen their sense that state planning projects were linked to forces of modernization and above politics. By nurturing such studies, PPD leaders hoped that they could influence American attitudes on Puerto Rico while also strengthening their reformist agenda.<sup>231</sup>

### *Section II: Overpopulation Research*

In the late teens and early nineteen twenties, as stated in Chapter 2, local writers tried to understand the island's poverty in Malthusian terms focusing on the jíbaro's fertility as the locus of the island's problems. In the 1930s and early 1940s, chronicled in Chapter 3, that same jíbaro was given a makeover of sorts, becoming an idealized vision of the Puerto Rican people. In the 1940s the impetus for the study of Puerto Rico and its problem population increased, due to several important factors. First was the demise of eugenics. As the horrors of Nazi Germany became visible to the international scene, eugenic ideas, commonly adopted by scholars around the world, began to be questioned. Modernization theory, the theory of how nations and peoples achieve the modern, defeated the eugenic models of advancement in academic, and consequently, governmental circles. Modernization theory was not racist per se. It did not deny non-whites modernity or progress; however, it did carry eugenic undertones: whiteness and maleness were still the standards of "the modern" and so, the United States and Europe became the epitome of the modern for which all nations needed to aspire to.<sup>232</sup> At this particular juncture, population control

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<sup>231</sup> Lapp, "The Rise and Fall of Puerto Rico as a Social Laboratory, 1945-1965," 178-187.

<sup>232</sup> Deborah Cohen, *Braceros*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2011), 3-4.

became prominent as a factor of modernization theory; one of the main defining factors of what made a nation modern. It filled a gap in explaining the differences between rich countries seen as “modern” and poor countries seen as “traditional.” In other words, rich nations were synonymous with population control while poor nations were synonymous with overpopulation. This Overpopulation Ideology was, in its time, as logical as Eugenics was in the early twentieth century. While Eugenics would argue that differences in income between nations were due to the racial stock of the population, Overpopulation Ideology reframed this, arguing that poverty was caused by the ratio of people to resources.<sup>233</sup>

Also bringing about the rise in overpopulation studies were the Cold War and the discourses emergent from it on issues of development. The third world, according to population researcher Alfred Sauvy who helped coin the term, was made up of nations who clung to tradition, religion, and superstition, and who suffered from overpopulation and the underdevelopment and political chaos that resulted from it.<sup>234</sup> To improve themselves, such nations (who happened to be former colonies of the west), had to create plans to end such problems, making overpopulation research and the decrease or maintenance of population numbers critical to the development of third world nations.<sup>235</sup> In Latin America, as Connelly stated, “differential fertility between North and South [between the United States and Europe versus Latin America] came to be seen as part of a crisis in

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<sup>233</sup> Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 118. Connelly argues that the demise of eugenics did not go without struggle.

<sup>234</sup> Carl E. Pletsch, “The Three Worlds, or the Division of Social Scientific Labor, Circa 1950-1975,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Oct., 1981), 569.

<sup>235</sup> Carl Pletsch, “Three Worlds,” 569.

the colonial world” and thus, needed to be fixed.<sup>236</sup> Yet it was in Puerto Rico, the gateway to Latin America where such ideas appeared the earliest.

Puerto Rico’s leadership was open to overpopulation as a possible explanation for island poverty because they approached Puerto Rico believing that it was true. As stated in Chapter 1, overpopulation rhetoric entered the Puerto Rican imaginary as early as 1899 and its leadership in the 1940s did not diverge from this sentiment.<sup>237</sup> Senate President Muñoz Marín, Governor Rexford Tugwell, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt believed that Puerto Rico was overpopulated.<sup>238</sup> Muñoz Marín called himself a neo-malthusianist in the 1920s (as we have already seen) and although he toned down his birth control rhetoric for the 1940 election, he increasingly spoke of overpopulation in public during his tenure as senator in the 1940s. President Roosevelt, according to Tugwell’s own memoirs, believed that birth control needed to be part of the poverty reduction plan for the island and Tugwell, although he was “weary of the probabilities of such deficient politics,” did not discard the idea all together.<sup>239</sup>

From the mid-1940s until the creation of the Commonwealth, which restructured the relationship between the US and Puerto Rico, researchers working on the subject of Puerto Rican overpopulation produced a remarkable output. As Vélez Crespo and Lapp noted, a big chunk of the funding put up by the University of Puerto Rico and external grants for CIS investigations went towards population research. From 1945 to 1955 over 26% of the CIS budget was taken up by population studies; this ran second only to more cultural studies such as anthropology which

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<sup>236</sup> Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 120.

<sup>237</sup> Conrad Seipp, *Colonialism, Catholicism, and Contraception: A History of Birth Control in Puerto Rico*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 13

<sup>238</sup> Rexford Guy Tugwell and Jorge Rodríguez Beruff ed., *La Tierra Azotada: Memorias del último gobernador estadounidense de Puerto Rico*, (San Juan: Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín, 2010), 233.

<sup>239</sup> Tugwell and Rodríguez Beruff ed., *La Tierra Azotada*, 233.

took up 27.9% of the total budget.<sup>240</sup> The CIS alone conducted three major overpopulation studies: *Puerto Rican Emigration (1945)*, *Population Problems and Policies (1946)* and *Problems and Potentialities of the Puerto Rican Economy (1946)*; two other studies, the social anthropological study that ended with *The People of Puerto Rico (1947)*, and 1945's *Patterns of Puerto Rican Family Living*, spoke of Puerto Rico's overpopulation in their conclusions.<sup>241</sup> Other social scientists not affiliated with the CIS also contributed to the overpopulation debate and two such works proved to be influential. Cofresi's *Realidad Poblacional (1951)* and Janer's "Population Growth in Puerto Rico and its relation to time changes in vital statistics" (1945), written by Puerto Ricans, were groundbreaking in their use of statistics and were quoted extensively by other authors studying Puerto Rican overpopulation. All the studies done during the period tried to understand how the population numbers related to economic, social, and racial factors. Several broad conclusions emerged from these studies. First, the population was growing and its growth was almost unstoppable; second, Puerto Rico's overpopulation problem was the main cause of island poverty. The island's colonial status and agricultural export models promulgated by the United States were not to be blamed for Puerto Rico's economic sad state. Finally, birth control was the best, albeit still problematic, option for taking care of overpopulation. In all, the social scientists who landed in Puerto Rico in the mid-twentieth century (with the government's approval) fueled an overpopulation craze, which would later have serious consequences for policy on the island.

Puerto Rico's overpopulation was considered an unchangeable and sometimes unsolvable problem by all studies coming out of the CIS, even those that dealt with topics that had nothing to

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<sup>240</sup> Alvarez Curbelo and Rodríguez Castro eds., *Del Nacionalismo al Populismo*, 143.

<sup>241</sup> One other major CIS study, *Family and Fertility in Puerto Rico: A Study of the Lower Income Group* was started in 1951. Its findings though were first published in 1955 and go beyond the scope of this chapter.

do with population, such as anthropological studies. It almost became part of the edifice of the island, like its topography or climate. Kingsley Davis' writings best epitomized this by a list of "facts" the reader was supposed to see as undisputable.<sup>242</sup> First among them, the island's population had an incredibly high population increase (1.1%) when compared to the rest of the world.<sup>243</sup> Its density in 1938 was of 520 persons per square mile, which meant that the population would double in 35 years. There was no sign that the birth rate would decline nor that the population would ever be less than 2.225 million. The situation was considered almost hopeless by Davis since a rural and poor population was on the rise and there would be a never-ending increase in the numbers of people of working age swelling the unemployed.<sup>244</sup> This condition was blatantly obvious to researchers like Clarence Senior, who in *Puerto Rican Emigration* argued that the problem was omnipresent. For these men such conclusions did not even require extensive analysis besides stating a few crucial points.<sup>245</sup> According to social scientists like José Luis Janer, Emilio Cofresi, CIS director Clarence Senior, and Kingsley Davis, overpopulation was the principal cause for Puerto Rico's many difficulties; and until it could be solved, Puerto Rico's modernization would be an impossible dream. As Emilio Cofresi, a professor in the Colegio de Agricultura y Artes Mecánicas of Mayagüez, noted in the introduction to *Realidad Poblacional*, "Until we resolve [the overpopulation problem] it will not be possible to once and for all solve our low salaries, low standards of living, our children without schooling, our poor health, and the

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<sup>242</sup> Kingsley Davis was the super star of demography in the 1940s through the 1960s. He famously gave testimony in the US Senate on the importance of population control in the fight against communism. See Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 320.

<sup>243</sup> Kingsley Davis, "Population and Progress," *The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Jul., 1948), pp. 300-308.

<sup>244</sup> Davis, "Population and Progress," 300-308.

<sup>245</sup> Clarence Senior, *Puerto Rican Emigration*, Río Piedras: Social Science Research Center, 1947.

other problems that overwhelm us and make our horizon darker and unknown.”<sup>246</sup> Charts and numbers were used to display “the facts” and the facts could be stated in one sentence: Puerto Rico was overpopulated. The “overpopulation as the overriding problem rationale” was pushed by Lydia Roberts in her study of the conditions of Puerto Rican families in rural and urban areas in 1945. Roberts, the only woman in the elite group of investigators in the CIS, was as a pioneer in nutrition studies in the United States and an acclaimed (and much beloved) professor at the University of Chicago.<sup>247</sup> In conjunction with Rosa Luisa Stefani, she described an island in which there were serious vitamin deficiencies because of lack of vegetables and where protein was scarce in people’s diets. Education was abysmal. According to Roberts and Stefani, 42% of rural mothers were not educated at all and 35% of children did not go to school.<sup>248</sup> Roberts pinpoints the island’s low salaries across the board as a significant factor in the Puerto Rico’s struggle against misery. If the income were raised for under-privileged families to about \$800, they argued, the whole standard of living on the island would rise.<sup>249</sup> Yet they avoided the subject of absent employers from the mainland exploiting the rural poor in the agricultural sector by paying them miserably low wages for maximum profits. Roberts and Stefani do not even call for American employers to raise wages in their conclusion. Instead, *Patterns of Living in Puerto Rican Families* implores the need for Puerto Ricans to control their population problem through contraception and out-migration since without it, the island would never support a normal standard of living for

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<sup>246</sup> Cofresi, *Realidad Poblacional*, 1.

<sup>247</sup> Franklin C. Bing, “Lydia Roberts- a Biographical Sketch” *The Journal of Nutrition*, 93 (1967): 1-14.

<sup>248</sup> Roberts, Lydia J. and Rosa Luisa Stefani. *Patterns of Living in Puerto Rican Families*, (Río Piedras: The University of Puerto Rico, 1949) 17.

<sup>249</sup> Roberts, *Patterns of Living in Puerto Rican Families*, 219.

all.<sup>250</sup> Not much attention is given to the disconnection between Puerto Rico's economic troubles and the island's colonial status. The statistics were considered enough.

The use of vital statistics in analyzing so-called overpopulation figures was seen by the social scientists and politicians of the 1940s as a sure way to bypass political ideology. They believed in the impartiality of science and research, and that their studies, well done as they were, were free of biases. However, the condition of high birth rates had causes unrelated to women's reproductive behavior; some were directly connected to changes instituted in the US occupation. In the beginning of the twentieth century, women in Puerto Rico gave birth at home with a midwife; and the parent was responsible for registering the birth of the child. The limitations on island transport and the often precarious economic conditions of the parents made travel and taking off from work almost impossible. With the occupation, there was improvement of infrastructure and increase in federal aid devoted to the keeping of demographical records, leading to an increase in the registration of births. As José Janer concluded when speaking of North American and foreign demographers: "[W]hat appears to be an increase in the birth rate may be found to be on further analysis, the result of more complete registration of births."<sup>251</sup>

These issues though were not accidentally "overlooked,"<sup>252</sup> as Janer liked to believe; they were not simply sloppy science; they were overlooked because they did not fit the given logic of the time: that certain individuals were responsible for overpopulation through their high fecundity. It explains why scholars like Davis, Janer, Cofresi, and Roberts and statesmen like Muñoz Marín did not believe it necessary to explain why they considered Puerto Rico to be overpopulated or how

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<sup>250</sup> Roberts, *Patterns of Living in Puerto Rican Families*, 219.

<sup>251</sup> José L. Janer, "Population Growth in Puerto Rico and its relation to time changes in vital statistics," *Human Biology*, 17:4 (December, 1945).

<sup>252</sup> Janer, "Population Growth in Puerto Rico."

the problem should be solved. Overpopulation was a fact. It was as, Deborah Cohen writes while analyzing a similar conundrum, “part of the language of opportunity and modernization [...] part of the wider logic of that moment, a logic structured around the desire for the modern.”<sup>253</sup>

Such conclusions did not come from ignorance or sloppy workmanship. Davis, Janer, Cofresi, and Roberts had well respected reputations. Davis, as stated earlier, was considered a demography guru. He was a Harvard graduate and a world recognized scholar who had an obituary in the *New York Times*.<sup>254</sup> José Janer graduated from John Hopkins University and distinguished himself as a world renowned Puerto Rican scholar creating the graduate program in demography, which was connected to the School of Public Health in the University of Puerto Rico. His biography calls him a “scientist, intellectual, and humanist with profound humanity that dedicated himself to pass and defend all values that were connected to liberty, equality, and the dignity of the human being.”<sup>255</sup> Cofresi taught in the College of Mayagüez while Roberts distinguished herself as a professor of excellence, deeply invested in the well-being of the Puerto Rican people until the day she was found collapsed in her desk.<sup>256</sup>

In short, Overpopulation Ideology was so ingrained and commonsense that, like modernization theory, they were unquestioned by the highly trained experts that studied it. These scholars believed that nations or geographical areas had to have certain population numbers for the transformation of its inhabitants into modern citizens. For that reason, they truly did not even

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<sup>253</sup> Cohen, *Braceros*, 10.

<sup>254</sup> Robert McG. Thomas, “Kingsley Davis, 88, Who Told Of 'Zero Population Growth,’” *The New York Times*, March 5, 1997.

<sup>255</sup> Biografía de José Luis Janer Mendiá, *Programa Graduado de Demografía*, <http://soph.md.rcm.upr.edu/demo/index.php/demografos-destacados/janer-mendia/janer-biografia>, (March 13, 2013, date accessed).

<sup>256</sup> Franklin C. Bing, “Lydia Jane Roberts,” *Journal of Nutrition*, 93 (1967): 1-14.

feel they had to explain why Puerto Rico was overpopulated or its effects. As contemporary critic of Puerto Rico's overpopulation rhetoric, Milton C. Taylor, argued in 1952, demographers and other social scientists working on the island did not even bother to prove that limiting births would lead to a higher standard of living.<sup>257</sup> It was a given that overpopulation led to a modern nation. For that reason he calls population control ideas a unique type of population-resource astrology."<sup>258</sup>

### *Section III: Women of Color*

In the works of demographers like Kingsley Davis and Puerto Rican researcher Emilio Cofresi who studied differential fertility, the negative interpretations of women of color's birth rates went unquestioned. In the 1920s the locus of overpopulation rhetoric was the jíbaro. He was deemed barbaric and his sexuality problematized. In the 1930s, his image was cleaned up and by the 1940s, as theories of development became popular, women of color became the focus in Puerto Rico's overpopulation studies. This was done through investigations that specifically organized statistics according to race, rural/urban markers, and gender. Kingsley Davis, in "Differential Fertility in Puerto Rico," examined four fertility differentials seen in the island's vital statistics: (1) rural-urban, (2) white-non-white, (3) class, and (4) education. Most of the paper's work concentrates though on the second difference: race. This investigation compares mother-child ratios of non-white mothers to those of white mothers.

As told in Chapter 1, Puerto Rico's racial composition was fruit of the mestizaje between the Spanish, Taíno, and African descendants that lived on the island. That mixture led to a system of racial classification that was not based on the one drop rule, like in the US, but on phenotypes

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<sup>257</sup> Milton C. Taylor, "Malthusianism in Puerto Rico," *Review of Social Economy*, vol x, no. 1 (March, 1952) 50.

<sup>258</sup> Taylor, "Malthusianism in Puerto Rico," 42.

with the whitest-“looking” individuals with the most European-understood characteristics like “good” hair on top and African characteristics at the bottom. In a place where racial mixture was common, this meant that individuals from the same family could be characterized as being in different races and racial barriers were more fluid.<sup>259</sup>

Unfortunately, Combs and Davis failed to note that in the Caribbean, where families are very much interracial and where definitions of race are more tied to class, use of a US racial binary is problematic.<sup>260</sup> Many white mothers in the Caribbean, for example, give birth frequently to children considered non-white. The opinion of the census taker as to the mother and child’s phenotype would weigh heavily in such analyses.<sup>261</sup>

Yet as problematic as their numbers were, it should not be the focus of this story. Rather race was a factor in the studies because men like Davis sincerely believed it. It was after all a key, although hidden, part of modernization theory and in turn, of Overpopulation Ideology. As stated earlier, modernization theory while not racist per se, did carry eugenic undertones as Overpopulation Ideology. Whiteness and maleness, hence, were standards of modernity, as non-whiteness became synonymous with backwardness as expressed in overpopulation.<sup>262</sup>

Of importance is *how* the conclusions on race were framed. Combs and Davis saw increases in white fertility from 1944 to 1947 as a "temporary phenomenon, uniquely connected with increasing prosperity and urbanization,"<sup>263</sup> while increases in the non-white population were seen

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<sup>259</sup> Ayala and Bernabe, *Puerto Rico en el Siglo Americano*, 177-183.

<sup>260</sup> A person who is well-off for example is more readily classified as white despite of his or her skin color.

<sup>261</sup> Combs and Davis, “Differential Fertility in Puerto Rico,” 104.

<sup>262</sup> Cohen, *Braceros*, 2-3.

<sup>263</sup> Combs and Davis, “Differential Fertility in Puerto Rico,” 107.

as an “abnormal fertility experience.”<sup>264</sup> Similarly, Cofresi’s *Realidad Poblacional* blamed a drop in the fertility of African American women in the United States on their high STD rates and spontaneous abortions.<sup>265</sup> This shows the problematizing of non-white fertility and the support for increasing white fertility. White women’s fertility rates were assumed to be low due to education and an increase standard of living (without any evidence) while non-white counterparts’ low fertility rates were assumed abnormal or due to promiscuity and misbehavior. A woman’s color and national residence literally colored the conclusions that scientists made. A birth in Puerto Rico made it part of the overpopulated throngs.

### *Conclusion*

Invited by a friendly, welcoming government who believed in state planning and individuals like Rexford Tugwell and Muñoz Marín, social scientists who worked in Puerto Rico during the 1940s wrote survey questions and interpreted data through their own worldview. In the teens and twenties writers blamed the jíbaro: their generation’s pariah, a man of supposedly little culture who lived his life unconcerned by the social mores of his times. Twenty years later, after the jíbaro had been reimagined, social scientists began to formulate arguments in the island using modernization theory’s ideas on population control; ideas that problematized women of color.

The demographers and sociologists invited by Muñoz and Tugwell to work in collaboration with the CIS or who worked alone, tried to understand what was wrong with Puerto Rico. They came to the conclusion that Puerto Rico’s overpopulation was growing due to the child bearing

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<sup>264</sup> Combs and Davis, “Differential Fertility in Puerto Rico,” 110. This is a similar idea to a study found from North Carolina in which a drop in black fertility was attributed to sexually transmitted diseases the black female population.

<sup>265</sup> Cofresi, *Realidad Poblacional*, 53.

patterns of Puerto Rican women. The jíbaro, who in the 1920s was pointed to as the cause of Puerto Rico's overpopulation problem, was absent from these conclusions. More seemingly scientific categories, like race, gender, or rural/urban markers, were preferred by these American and American-trained investigators.<sup>266</sup> The impact of thinking about the problem in scientific terms was staggering since it gave the semblance of impartiality and scientific rigor to studies founded on the prejudicial mores of the time. Locally and in the mainland, such research was seen as giving Muñoz and his government cache as innovators. Later on, the problematization of women of color would lead to Puerto Ricans being perceived negatively in the media in the late 1960s and 1970s.<sup>267</sup>

However, not everyone applauded those who labeled Puerto Rico as overpopulated and their conclusions. Milton C. Taylor emphatically criticized how the social scientists took overpopulation to be common sense and did not even give an optimal population number.<sup>268</sup> In questions of fertility and overpopulation, race mattered. Scientists' conclusions made women of color guilty of overpopulation even in the face of statistics that said otherwise.

Yet such issues should not be seen as errors. The leading scholars from prestigious US universities, who worked as social scientists in Puerto Rico and who came, came to the island with the best of intentions. They wanted their research to have a purpose and to help the island succeed and they truly believed that population control would change the island for the better.

In the next chapter I explore the role of overpopulation studies in the reforms and rhetoric of Luis Muñoz Marín in 1946. Muñoz Marín, in that critical year that saw him publically renounce

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<sup>266</sup> Davis, "Population and Progress," 300.

<sup>267</sup> Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*.

<sup>268</sup> Taylor, "Malthusianism in Puerto Rico," 46.

independence, used Overpopulation Ideology as the rationale for his modernist development strategy. This strategy was the main reason for the once pro-independence leader to renounce his beliefs, changing Puerto Rico forever.

## Chapter 5

### Getting Alice out of Wonderland: Overpopulation, Reform, and Independence in 1946

*“Thus, in the race between economic progress and population growth, the island finds itself in an Alice in Wonderland situation where one has to run very fast merely to stay in the same place.”*<sup>269</sup>-Harvey Perloff

In the midst of what was one of Muñoz Marín’s most turbulent years as a senator, the Association for Public Health held a symposium in the auditorium of the School of Tropical Medicine in San Juan that explored the island’s population problem from the economic, health, and educational perspective. While it is not known whether the symposium was well attended, we do know that it was believed to be of high importance to the country. A synthesis of the proceedings, after all, was broadcast over the airwaves and the Office of Information published a pamphlet in the hopes of “contributing to a better understanding of the grave problem.”<sup>270</sup> More importantly, the introduction to the pamphlet and to the broadcast was given by no other than Luis Muñoz Marín.

“I have been asked to prepare a few initial words for this radio synthesis of the Association of Public Health population forum in Puerto Rico [... and] I do it with pleasure because I understand that the population problem is the most serious problem that our country confronts.”<sup>271</sup> Chapters 1 through 3 showed how Muñoz Marín, during his youth and early tenure in office, saw overpopulation as a grave issue that “affect[ed] practically all the other problems in

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<sup>269</sup> Harvey S. Perloff, *Puerto Rico’s Economic Future: A study in planned development*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950), 9.

<sup>270</sup> Asociación de Salud Pública, *El Problema Poblacional de Puerto Rico: Introducción por Luis Muñoz Marín*, (San Juan: Oficina de Información de Puerto Rico, 1946), 2.

<sup>271</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín, “Introducción,” *El Problema Poblacional de Puerto Rico: Introducción por Luis Muñoz Marín*, (San Juan: Oficina de Información de Puerto Rico, 1946), 3.

Puerto Rico” and how he formulated his vision for Puerto Rico.<sup>272</sup> Chapter 4 explored the overpopulation studies that emerged from the 1940s in the context of ideological moves from Eugenics to development theory and how such studies saw the island’s overpopulation as commonsense. This chapter deals with the policy suggestions of such studies and how Muñoz Marín used Overpopulation Ideology as the reasoning for his reforms and stance against independence during the year 1946; a year in which he was forced to defend his vision for advancement in the face of critiques, of outpouring of pro-independence sentiment from Puerto Ricans, and a year of antagonism from the mainland. It argues that overpopulation rhetoric played a pivotal role in Muñoz Marín’s reform and independence discourses in 1946 and beyond and allows us to understand the local impact of Overpopulation Ideology from rhetoric to practice.

This chapter will be divided into three sections. Section I lays out Muñoz’s rhetoric around Puerto Rico’s problems. Like the social scientists in the 1940s, Muñoz used modernity and civilization as markers that Puerto Rico should strive for. Puerto Rico’s population growth, according to Muñoz, was an impediment towards those mighty goals and the island’s improving conditions were worsening the problems. Section II explores the solutions given by social scientists and Muñoz to the overpopulation problem. Muñoz believed that Puerto Ricans should strive for one solution: industrial production. Finally, Section III goes into the status problem and independence and how it links to production, overpopulation, and Puerto Rico’s “buena civilización.”

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<sup>272</sup> Muñoz Marín, “Introducción,” 3.

Section I: Muñoz and Puerto Rico's problems in 1946

In the midst of the feud over independence in 1946, Muñoz began a discussion in *El Mundo* about Puerto Rico's status issues by calling to mind the problems which the island faced. *La realidad* or the reality of the problem was meant to strike fear in his readership. It was, after all, as stated in Chapter 1, a "life or death issue of importance for civilization and for the existence of our people."<sup>273</sup> Puerto Rico had 3,500 square miles of territory, half of which were not arable, he said. Puerto Rico had no natural resources to help with the support of such large population numbers; no minerals, no fossil fuels. What the island had was people; with a population that grew at a rate of 55,000 a year, with a birth rate of 40 for every thousand inhabitants, and a mortality rate of 14 for every thousand inhabitants.<sup>274</sup> In the "clear" language of statistics, Muñoz declared Puerto Rico overpopulated like the social scientists who worked on the island. For him this meant an array of things; for the Puerto Rican people, it was a tragedy for it defined the island as undeveloped and this was a double edged sword.

Development and progress could lead to bigger problems. "The biggest tragedy of this, as it refers to population growth, is that in our actual stage of development, as the work of the people through its government becomes more effective, the population problem will become more intensified."<sup>275</sup> In other words, the more advanced and modern Puerto Rico became, the more food its citizens had, the better housing, the better health care, the higher the population growth. What was supposed to be a triumph~ the improvement of living conditions through his policies, became a source of its downfall. The strange rhetoric that progress could lead to bigger ruin did

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<sup>273</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín, "Alerta a la Conciencia Puertorriqueña, Primer artículo: El Problema," *Memorias, 1940-1952*, San Juan: Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín, 2003), 363.

<sup>274</sup> Muñoz Marín, "El Problema," 363.

<sup>275</sup> Muñoz Marín, "El Problema," 363-364.

not come out of thin air. Muñoz, in expressing his concerns for the island's particular stage of development, called to mind two schools of thought: modernization theory, which emerged after World War II, and what demographers in the 1930s and 1940s called "the demographic transition theory."

Demographic transition theory (DT) was devised by demographer Warren Thompson in 1929 and it posited that advancement towards more modern population figures (like those in Europe and the United States) occurred in three stages. In stage one, couples had many children with many children who died, producing little if no growth. In stage two, urbanization and industrialization reduced mortality rates but would not reduce birth rates, causing populations to soar, while in stage three, individuals would use birth control, causing mortality rates and birth rates to finally balance out.<sup>276</sup>

This theory, like that of modernization theory, is linear and posits that there is a standard that developing countries should follow: Europe, whose demographic trends had inspired the theory in the first place. By mentioning the stages of development, Muñoz tapped into the scientific knowledge of the period and the legitimacy it promised to offer. He puts Puerto Rico's overpopulation in the context of modernizing trends; trends that he was following in his plan for economic development.

## *Section II: Muñoz's Solutions*

In the 1920s Muñoz defended three possible ways to solve the overpopulation problem. These included: a reduction of the population through birth control, an increase in riches, and an

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<sup>276</sup> Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 22.

exhortation for people to migrate.<sup>277</sup> Twenty years later, social scientists working in Puerto Rico held more or less to the same conclusions. The Asociación de Salud Pública's forum on Puerto Rico's population problem gave the most comprehensive analysis of all solutions to a problem that was "bleeding, yet vivid, like a ghost."<sup>278</sup> Education, migration, birth control, redistribution of the population, and economic development through the modernization of the agricultural sector and an expansion of the industrial sector were seen as possible ends to the overpopulation problem.

Yet economic development was thought to increase population numbers and problems in the short-run, as Muñoz articulated in "El Problema." The Asociación's symposium posited more palatable options.<sup>279</sup> Education was considered by the Asociación to be a key component in the fight against overpopulation. As Connelly suggests, women's education, in comparison to other differentials like race, had a direct and proportionate although ignored relationship with fertility: the more educated the woman, the better of a chance she would wait to have children.<sup>280</sup> However, this is not the education that the Asociación was talking about. They were calling for a massive program to educate people about the population problem and to "intensify in man a sense of efficiency and social responsibility."<sup>281</sup> Education was to serve the needs of population control in the context of a society that was developing as Muñoz would put it.<sup>282</sup>

Two ways of decreasing the number of inhabitants were discussed: emigration and birth control. Emigration was discussed as a potential outlet for excess population; yet it was not to the United States but to Latin America, considered similar in culture. According to the writers and

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<sup>277</sup> Carmelo, *La juventud de Luis Muñoz Marín* 157

<sup>278</sup> Asociación de Salud Pública, *El Problema Poblacional de Puerto Rico*, 20.

<sup>279</sup> Asociación de Salud Pública, *El Problema Poblacional de Puerto Rico*, 28-29.

<sup>280</sup> Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 123.

<sup>281</sup> Asociación de Salud Pública, *El Problema Poblacional de Puerto Rico*, 23.

<sup>282</sup> Muñoz Marín, "Introducción," 3.

conference commentators, “Latin America is a world ready to be made and a world where Puerto Ricans can develop their aptitudes readily” (too bad Puerto Rico was not seen in that way). It was affirmed that such a solution was the cheapest but that it should only be voluntary.<sup>283</sup> Birth Control, as one of the Asociación’s panelists discussed, was the only solution which would help reduce birth numbers. It rested on the premise that Puerto Ricans needed to be convinced to space out and separate pregnancies; and clinics around the island were proposed to enlist at least 200,000 women. Such work and such a solution were thought to need massive amounts of money.<sup>284</sup>

Some scientists though favored certain solutions over others. Roberts, Stefani, Senior, and Combs and Davis favored a theoretical approach that combined emigration and birth control.<sup>285</sup> Yet because, as Davis and Combs stated, emigration would be inadequate in Puerto Rico, the only alternative would be “a reduction of fertility.”<sup>286</sup> *Puerto Rican Emigration* surprisingly had a similar conclusion. Senior argued in his study that emigration alone would never prove to be sufficient alone in reducing Puerto Rico’s overpopulation. Historically, there was only one case of emigration reducing a nation’s population “successfully”: the 19<sup>th</sup> century’s Irish potato famine migration. This migration, which Senior noted without sarcasm, might not have been as successful if one took into account the millions who died from starvation.<sup>287</sup> Instead, Senior proposed a four-pronged approach that included increasing the standard of living, emigration, education, and birth control.<sup>288</sup> In his tome Cofresi came to a similar conclusion. Without birth control, he noted, no

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<sup>283</sup> Asociación de Salud Pública, *El Problema Poblacional de Puerto Rico*, 24.

<sup>284</sup> Asociación de Salud Pública, *El Problema Poblacional de Puerto Rico*, 25.

<sup>285</sup> Roberts and Stefani, *Patterns of Living in Puerto Rican Families*, 219.

<sup>286</sup> Davis and Combs, *Patterns of Puerto Rican Fertility*, 364.

<sup>287</sup> Senior, *Puerto Rican Emigration*, 111.

<sup>288</sup> Senior, *Puerto Rican Emigration*, 113.

real solution would be found to the poverty and overpopulation of the island. He proposed a plan, with the Department of Health, that would target poor women for planned parenthood programs.<sup>289</sup> Men were again not seen as the source of the problem.

Like in the 1920s when birth control and emigration were seen as problematic options due to their difficulty, in the 1940s both these options were believed to have their drawbacks. Birth control would make little headway in ending the island's overpopulation problem, several authors concluded. Two authors gave reasons for this. Steward argued that the overpopulation problem that already existed could not be remedied with birth control because it could not get rid of those already born.<sup>290</sup> Birth control would only limit future population numbers. Secondly, the island's Catholic background prevented wide use of birth control and therefore was an impediment to a balanced population. Pope Pius the XI wrote the first encyclical against birth control in 1930, which stated that sex was solely for procreative purposes. *Castii Connubii*, while not strictly speaking against birth control, made sex while using birth control a sin. As Roberts and Stefani stated, this formal Catholic stance made acceptance of birth control at the very best slow.<sup>291</sup>

To solve the problem, Muñoz Marín and the populares had a program that they believed was specific and concrete. For the sake of "civilization," Puerto Rico had to provide job opportunities for all its population as quickly as possible so that the standard of living would increase and the island's population growth would slow down or stop.<sup>292</sup> In "El Programa" he details how this would be done. Puerto Rico should have full employment for 3 million inhabitants by 1960; this would be accomplished through public and private means, and an investment of upwards of 700

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<sup>289</sup> Cofresi, *Realidad Poblacional*, 115-116.

<sup>290</sup> Stewart, *The People of Puerto Rico*, 4.

<sup>291</sup> Roberts and Stefani, *Family Patterns*, 219.

<sup>292</sup> Muñoz Marín, "El Problema," 368-371.

million dollars for the best use of Puerto Rican lands, to create infrastructure, and to provide the public with the health and education needed to be competitive in the export market.<sup>293</sup> Muñoz was extremely proud of this proposal; he called it “the most specific program that democracy has known in a long time.”<sup>294</sup>

Industrialization though was not an end to itself. It was sought about for the purpose of “buena civilización”: the idea that industrialization brought about a calmer, modern, more educated, respectful society based on Europe and western ideals. This concept of modernity was strictly connected to reducing population numbers. The end goal was not betterment of the standard of living, but to better the standard of life *for lower birth rates and stable population numbers*. He stated that by 1960 Puerto Rico “should raise its production, [...] so that the minimum level of life of its population reaches a scale in which population numbers can drop.”<sup>295</sup> The frame began to change, though, and by 1946, Muñoz began connecting good civilization to not just population numbers but to the status issue.

### *Section III: The status question*

For ten years after his definitive return to Puerto Rico in 1931, Muñoz expressed a passionate pro-independence stance. For him, independence was not just a political status; it was a moral elixir that could liquidate poverty, morally, and economically. It was a moral elixir because Muñoz believed that the end of colonialism would mean an end to the denigrating, embarrassing, and unacceptable status eroding the morality of the Puerto Rican people. Economically,

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<sup>293</sup> Muñoz Marín, “El Programa,” 375.

<sup>294</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín, “Alerta a la Conciencia Puertorriqueña, Primer artículo: El Programa,” *Memorias, 1940-1952*, San Juan: Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín, 2003), 371.

<sup>295</sup> Muñoz Marín, “El Programa,” 369.

independence meant that Puerto Ricans would be able to control its tariffs, and in turn, control their own market.<sup>296</sup> Yet independence was not just about control of resources.

From the 1920s into 1940, Muñoz Marín maintained that independence was the spiritual salve that Puerto Rico needed. Independence, he concluded in 1932, “was a moral necessity in the eminent practical sense.”<sup>297</sup> Allowing “others to govern us against our will, makes every Puerto Rican less of a man, less strong, [and] less worthy of respect.”<sup>298</sup> Yet by 1946, things had changed. The US success as part of the allied front in World War II, led Muñoz to reevaluate Puerto Rico’s relationship with its colonial power. The change on the world stage led Muñoz to believe that small overpopulated nations like Puerto Rico would have a tough time surviving outside of the colonial system.<sup>299</sup> Pushed by the strength of the Congreso Pro- Independencia (CPI), Muñoz began to reevaluate his stance against independence, and between February and July 1946, took on the mostly pro-independence leadership of his own party and the Puerto Rican people in print, radio, and word, affirming that the island’s overpopulation required reforms and industrial growth that would be impossible as an independent country.

Many historians pointed to the Francis Riggs assassination in 1936 as a turning point in Muñoz’s independence views. As noted in Chapter 3, the Riggs assassination detonated a chain of events that made Muñoz’s objective of getting independence with federal aid impossible. However, problems were not just political for Muñoz; they were personal. After Riggs was assassinated, the director of the Department of the Interior and Muñoz Marín’s friend, Ernest Gruenig, asked him

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<sup>296</sup> Zapata-Oliveras, *De Independentista a Autonomista*, 1-11.

<sup>297</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín, “Puerto Rico y el Partido Liberal,” *La Democracia*, March 10, 1932.

<sup>298</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín, “Puerto Rico y el Partido Liberal,” *La Democracia*, March 10, 1932.

<sup>299</sup> Zapata-Oliveras, Carlos R. *De Independentista a Autonomista: La Transformación del Pensamiento Político de Luis Muñoz Marín (1931-1949)*, (San Juan: La Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín, 2003). 113-114.

to condemn Riggs' murder but Muñoz refused to do so. Muñoz was, at that point, a pro-independence leader.<sup>300</sup> However, this position earned Muñoz the label of radical in American circles and almost ruined his career.

Gruenig's anger at how Muñoz Marín dealt with the situation impacted the pro-independence movement. Gruenig became one of the architects of the Tydings Bill, a piece of legislation believed by certain historians like Zapata-Oliveras designed to destroy the independence movement by guaranteeing that an independent Puerto Rico would not get even a cent in compensation from the United States. Millard Tydings (1890–1961), the sponsor of the bill, had reasons for doing this. First, he was a personal friend of Riggs. Secondly, he wanted to get rid of the territories he believed cost too much money to maintain and only benefited undesirable people.<sup>301</sup> The Tydings Bill was received on the island with mixed results. Muñoz himself was revolted since he believed it gave Puerto Rico independence, on unfavorable terms. Pro-independence people believed that the US should grant Puerto Ricans certain benefits for a period of time since the colonial overlords had damaged Puerto Rico's economy.<sup>302</sup> They wanted, for example, preferential treatment in terms of tariffs since Puerto Rico's European markets had been destroyed. These concessions were refused under the Tydings Bill. By making independence so completely unattractive to some, such as Muñoz, the legislation divided the movement between those who wanted to deal with the island's economic problems first and those who favored independence right away.

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<sup>300</sup> Zapata-Oliveras, *De Independentista a Autonomista*, 44.

<sup>301</sup> Zapata-Oliveras, *De Independentista a Autonomista*, 43-50.

<sup>302</sup> Zapata-Oliveras, *De Independentista a Autonomista*, 45.

Following his fall from grace in 1936, when Muñoz decided to start a new political party, he discarded any status talk in the 1940 election and concentrated his efforts in combating poverty and misery. This was done for several reasons: First, independence was never really popular among the working class and the poor and he did not want to lose votes.<sup>303</sup> Secondly, was the war: Muñoz wanted to be on the good side of the US during World War II, not only because it was the nation commanding the allied forces, but because he truly believed in the causes of the war. Thirdly, he wanted the US to stop seeing him as a radical because he wanted to implement the New Deal on the island. Finally, by not dealing with the status issue he could still get the independence fraction of the party to do support his efforts.<sup>304</sup>

In 1946, fed up with what he called the “sabotage” of the PPD members of the CPI, and faced with a new Tydings Bill for independence, Muñoz began to make a case against independence and for a new autonomous status option. This was done through two series of articles. The first series, the “Alerta a la Conciencia Puertorriqueña,” discussed extensively in previous chapters, was written as a response to the CPI. The second, titled “Nuevos Caminos Hacia Viejos Objetivos,” was written in June, just days before the PPD adopted a new autonomous formula of status. What is truly fascinating about these sets of articles is not the diatribes that Muñoz wrote against the CPI, but the logic undergirding the articles. Looked at together, they give an important view into Muñoz’s sovereignty arguments and the role overpopulation in them. As he reasons in “El Problema,” “Without understanding in all seriousness the population problem,

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<sup>303</sup> González, “El País de Cuatro Pisos,” 3.

<sup>304</sup> Zapata-Oliveras, *De Independentista a Autonomista*, 93-94.

our conscience will not be able to take into account the grave responsibility we have as it pertains to the future of our people and its civilization.”<sup>305</sup>

For Muñoz, the whole issue of overpopulation and status connected to his modernizing vision for Puerto Rico. In the late 1930s and 1940s, he fostered a vision of Puerto Rico based on advancement through reforms. He sought land reforms, schools, and food aid so that Puerto Rico would become developed. He wanted the jíbaro to live a civilized life. Increasingly these reforms and the civilized life were tied to money given to Puerto Rico by the US. As Muñoz said in “El Problema,” in 1934, Puerto Rico received 8 million dollars; in 1935, 16 million; in 1936, 33 million; in 1937, 30 million; in 1938, 19 million; in 1939, 33 million; in 1940, 35 million; in 1941, 39 million; in 1942, 43 million and finally, in 1943 the island received a total of 35 million dollars.<sup>306</sup> The need for birth control policies plus aid to solve overpopulation made independence an unviable status option for Puerto Rico. Part of what “The Political Status,” argued was that a true independence would not be possible since Puerto Rico’s economic situation was so tied to the US. Without such aid Muñoz Marín’s work and mission of a better Puerto Rico would be hampered and commerce would be stifled.<sup>307</sup>

In “Nuevos Caminos Hacia Viejos Objetivos” Muñoz writes that independence would mean the immediate end of free commerce with the United States. The end result of this, he believed, would be staggering, leading to “the rapid and fatal destruction of our economic life which would affect equally the poor and the rich.”<sup>308</sup> He based this argument on the ceasing of aid that had occurred in the Philippines after its independence. As his *Memorias* attest, Muñoz had

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<sup>305</sup> Muñoz Marín, “El Problema,” 365.

<sup>306</sup> Muñoz Marín, “El Problema,” 367.

<sup>307</sup> Muñoz Marín, “El Status Político,” 393.

<sup>308</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín “Nuevos Caminos Hacia Viejos Objetivos,” *El Mundo*, June 29, 1946.

read through the public audience transcripts of the “Philippines Trade Act,” which established the economic relation between the United States and a sovereign Philippines. In the transcripts he saw that the most that was offered the Pacific Islands was several years of lower tariffs, some sugar quota percentages, and limited immigration.<sup>309</sup> Muñoz concluded that with Puerto Rican independence the belt would be severely tightened without help from the US. This meant that Puerto Rico would not just cease to advance but deteriorate, leading to starvation and an even more entrenched poverty.

In his work trying to convince Puerto Ricans, to let go of independence, he presented overpopulation as the leading problem on the island and gave his solutions as to how the problem should be and was being, solved—through North American aid. Yet this was not enough. Muñoz then put Puerto Rico in the global and imperial context, arguing that the form of colonialism that the United States inflicted on Puerto Rico was silly or “bobo,” and that concepts of nationhood and sovereignty were passé after World War II.<sup>310</sup> Puerto Rico, in Muñoz’s revisionist history, was a colony by error that had not been abused by the colonial power (in comparison to other imperial powers such as Britain). It was no longer even exploited, since so much aid had been going Puerto Rico’s way since 1934.<sup>311</sup> Nationhood and sovereignty were likewise discarded. What was nation and sovereignty when they were slaves to hunger?<sup>312</sup>

By July 1946, Muñoz reshaped his party, purging it of its pro-independence fraction (almost his entire leadership), and refashioned it to push for autonomy within a United States political frame. Doing this was not easy. Several of the party’s top men were convinced that

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<sup>309</sup> Muñoz Marín, *Memorias vol. II*, 204.

<sup>310</sup> Muñoz Marín, “Nuevos Caminos,” 404-410.

<sup>311</sup> Muñoz Marín, “El Status Político,” 396-398.

<sup>312</sup> Muñoz Marín, “El Status Político,” 404-405.

Muñoz gave up the independence cause without lobbying for the concessions that he stated would make a free Puerto Rico viable. In any case by October, a new party had formed on the island calling for independence. Yet that was not all for the story of Muñoz and independence. Two years later, the former independence advocate created the Ley de Mordaza or Seditious Law of 1948. The Seditious Law made it illegal to use the Puerto Rican flag and other symbols of independence and to be against the colonial government. It effectually made pro-independence thought illegal, causing the dismantling of a movement which he previously advocated in the name of progress.

A few years later in 1952 the Commonwealth was instituted through a congressional assembly later approved by the United States. In a “commonwealth” government, Puerto Ricans could elect their own governor, create their own laws, and have a fairly autonomous judiciary. Its creation was seen as novel; a new alternative to a nation state model and Muñoz pushed for the United Nations to remove Puerto Rico from its list of colonies. However, all laws could still be vetoed by the US congress and there was no voting representation in Washington as in the Jones Law. The *Estado Libre Asociado*, as it was called in Spanish, in essence continued the colonial government with cosmetic autonomy.

### *Conclusion*

1946 was a pivotal year in the political life of Luis Muñoz Marín. In that year, forced by internal feuds and failed plebiscite laws, Muñoz had to defend himself from attacks from his own party which believed that he had failed to address Puerto Rico’s colonial condition. He fended off attacks smartly, by reminding his constituency through two newspaper article series of his supposed dedication to the advancement of the Puerto Rican people, the vision for the island, and the work that he had done and the work that was yet to come. Yet such attacks came as a surprise

for the pro-independence people in his party. Muñoz claimed that independence was at odds with his vision for the country and began the intellectual creation of what he would later call the *Estado Libre Asociado* or Commonwealth: a government that was connected to the United States economically, yet had autonomy in its governance. A government which, he believed, would better meet the vision he had for Puerto Rico.

Central to the creation of the Commonwealth and Muñoz's defense, was Muñoz's overpopulation rhetoric. In speeches and in his writings during that fateful year he reiterated the words of the social scientists who came to Puerto Rico and which called overpopulation the island's biggest problem. He took their policy recommendations which called for industrialization, birth control, and migration and created what he believed would be the best plan of action for the island. His course would industrialize Puerto Rico using aid from the United States, increasing its production to meet its increasing population. That way, Puerto Rico would march through the lineal stages of development and modernity touted by social scientists. His goal was to have a civilized modern society, and sovereignty, with its lack of American aid, would end that. It would send Alice, the main character in Lewis Carroll's tale, down to another dimension she would not want to go.

## Epilogue

During Advanced Topics in Constitutional History, I wrote a paper that unbeknownst to me would change my life. The title of the paper was “*Buck v. Bell* and Forced Sterilizations in Puerto Rico” and it was my first entry in the world of reproductive rights and choice. This particular topic struck a chord with me because as a young Puerto Rican woman, I was aware of the sterilization abuses that took place on the island, the eugenics rhetoric behind them, and the lax ethics that governed its practice.

At this time, I was recommended *La Operación* to expand my knowledge on the topic of Puerto Rican sterilizations. This short documentary about sterilization abuse in Puerto Rico highlighted the interconnections between private spheres of choice and larger schemes such as modernization, race, and colonialism and how these caused Puerto Rico to have the highest rate of sterilization in the world.<sup>313</sup> The work’s most shocking turn, in my opinion, was not women retelling their botched procedures, but the role of Luis Muñoz Marín. The father of the Puerto Rican Commonwealth, who thought of himself as the patriarch to the Puerto Rican people, the movie claimed, controlled the population by sterilizations and migrations in order to curb population growth. His overpopulation rhetoric, it seemed, played a pivotal role in how he directed Puerto Rico.

Under the pseudonym Jacinto Ortega, Muñoz argued that Puerto Rico’s economic problems were due to the fact that Puerto Ricans had too many kids. He disregarded Puerto Rico’s colonial history of exploitation and class inequality as reasons for poverty, and instead, went for an

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<sup>313</sup> *La Operación*, Directed by Ana María García, 1982.

explanation that, in my view, sounded almost like apologetic treason for a man who was supposedly one of our founding fathers. I began to question more in-depth how he had come to those conclusions. The more I read, the more I came to understand that these views stemmed from an Overpopulation Ideology that went beyond his background, his readings, and the people around him, and the vision of Puerto Rico that he was developing as a young man through the 1940s. This ideology was not his alone and permeated how intellectuals saw the world and dictated the light in which Puerto Rico's problems and its people would be seen.

The first three chapters of this thesis chronicled the early course of Muñoz's vision for Puerto Rico and his ideas on population control as related to the Puerto Rican poor. Chapter 1 introduced Puerto Rico's situation and people, and the three movements that influenced Muñoz Marín's thoughts on populations and poverty: Neo-Malthusianism, Eugenics, and Birth Control. All these movements had specific goals, yet in Puerto Rico and on the international stage in the early twentieth century, all were linked since they attempted to "manage" who was to have children and how births would be prevented. In the 1920s, as described in Chapter 2, the group to be "managed" was the jíbaros, who were blamed by many writers for the island's large and supposedly immoral, unclean, and sexually unrestrained population. These writers used eugenic and neo-malthusian discourses to make their point. Muñoz Marín, however, although a neo-malthusianist, compared to his counterparts, had views that were moderate. He did not call the jíbaro inferior. While he acknowledged that the poor or proletariat had more children in several island newspapers, he advocated paternalistically for individuals to have more access to birth control in the hopes that this access would enable the poor and working class to have fewer children,

increasing the likelihood of "civility and humanity."<sup>314</sup> Birth control however, was not to serve the individual but the collective in order to spawn *la buena civilización*.

Muñoz carried the idea that civility and humanity were by-products of reforms throughout his years as governor and beyond as a respected retired statesman. Yet before then, there was a vision and Chapter 3 explored the development of this vision for Puerto Rico in the late 1930s through 1940, which called for equality, justice, and advancement for the jíbaro through governmental reform. Grounded in the rejuvenation of the jíbaro as a new positive figure, the vision became extremely popular and would be what the whole island would strive for. All reforms would be implemented for the sole purpose of making this dream a reality. However, for Muñoz and the social scientists working on the island in the 1940s (as stated in Chapter 4), overpopulation stood in the way of that dream. Consequently, it had to be understood and studied through statistics and "scientific processes" which ultimately legitimized his planning methods and his rule.

As a historian reading such studies proved to be difficult, not because I did not understand statistics, I actually had taken graduate level statistics in my stint as a doctoral student in education, but because I couldn't understand why such accomplished men and women came to such conclusions about Puerto Rico's population with what seemed to be hardly any evidence. They merely stated over and over again that Puerto Rico was overpopulated while governmental officials just nodded and applauded their studies. These writers, I noticed as I looked through their

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<sup>314</sup> Jacinto Ortega, "Maltusianismo Práctico," *La Democracia*, August 21, 1922.

biographies and their obituaries, were not poorly-trained social scientists; most in fact were at the top of their field.

I initially could not put my head around this conundrum but upon further investigation, I began to understand, albeit slowly, that overpopulation as an unchanging logic did not really need to be defended; it was common sense. Muñoz and men of his generation believed that, after analyzing four hundred years of European trends, human population numbers were connected to the wellbeing of the people. If populations got too high, they could potentially run themselves to the ground.

This had a real impact on policy and Chapter 5 looked at the impact of Overpopulation Ideology and overpopulation research in the rhetoric of Muñoz Marín in 1946, a year in which he was forced by political circumstances on the island and the mainland to publically defend his reforms and redefine his ideas on the island's status vis-a-vis the United States. Muñoz, in articles and speeches published that year, argued that overpopulation would only be eradicated through an industrial intervention funded with American dollars. Puerto Rican independence, which would lead to the end of aid, would cause starvation and stop Puerto Rico's development. For Muñoz, an independent Puerto Rico would destroy itself because of overpopulation. He used this as the rationale to disregard independence and justify his policies in the media.

Two scholars in particular have addressed this turn in events in the 1940s. Cesar Ayala and Rafael Bernabe recently argued that as Muñoz detached himself from his independence beliefs, he latched on to Overpopulation Ideology.<sup>315</sup> I disagree; detaching himself from his independence beliefs was not a preamble to latching on to Overpopulation Ideology, but a result of long-standing

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<sup>315</sup> Ayala and Bernabe, *Puerto Rico en el Siglo Americano*, 216.

views on overpopulation and a vision for the island. Muñoz entered the political scene already believing that Puerto Rico's biggest problem was its population numbers. He had expressed this as early as 1922, as I state in Chapter 2, and the Tydings Bill debacle in the late 1930s (Chapter 3 and Chapter 5) demonstrated that he would forgo independence as an immediate goal if the economic conditions were not met.

Overpopulation though was not just the thing to be fixed and independence its casualty. The population problem and Overpopulation Ideology were tools for Muñoz Marín's reframing of Puerto Rico's poverty and underdevelopment. 1946 was, as stated in Chapter 5, a year that called for redefinition. Muñoz was being confronted on the status question by his constituents and by members of his party and he was trying to sell a different answer: one that allowed Puerto Rico to maintain aid. His answer then, needed to allow for the continuation of aid from the US and therefore, a continuing relationship between an imperial power and its colony. Maintaining and prolonging this relationship was extremely tasteless to sectors of the population which saw the US as aggressors, especially since the events in the 1930s which led to persecution of Nationalists. Reframing Puerto Rico's problems under the banner of poverty and underdevelopment became detriment for Muñoz since it allowed him to shift blame from Puerto Rico's relationship with the US and therefore, perpetuated the aid that the island was getting in the 1940s. One can argue then that there were two beneficiaries of the overpopulation reframe: the relationship between the US and Puerto Rico (which would remain) and Muñoz Marín and his party who would remain in power through the consequent flow of aid coming from the mainland.

Yet the story of overpopulation and Muñoz Marín's rhetoric does not end with an exploration of what is gained from the reframing of poverty. As a historian, I am required to take

the story of Puerto Rico's overpopulation problem further. This particular story ends before the Commonwealth when Muñoz drove the overpopulation narrative into the heart of Puerto Rico's independence movement, however, the narrative continues. Social scientists continued to argue for population control into the 1950s and 1960s. In fact, J. Mayone Stycos did his land-breaking work on fertility in the 1950s after the Commonwealth was established. Overpopulation certainly impacted Puerto Rico's high profile programs like Operación Manos a la Obra or Operation Bootstrap and this needs to be explored. There is also a need to see the overpopulation narrative from its detractors. What were the arguments against Muñoz's policies from the perspective of the pro-independence movement, from the pro-statehood movement, and the Catholic Church? In 1960 a new political party, Partido Acción Cristiana was created around the issue of population control, yet little beyond that fact is known. It is also imperative to look at this story away from the powerful and look at the women who were mostly impacted by this narrative.

Most importantly though there are larger currents that feed into Muñoz Marín's overpopulation rhetoric that need to be explored further. Three such currents are touched upon in this thesis but should be studied in a larger project concerned with overpopulation: imperialism, race, and modernization. In "Alerta a la Conciencia Puertorriqueña," Muñoz argued that overpopulation was a legitimate problem that made independence difficult since he believed American aid was needed to combat it. For that purpose, he began to argue that the imperial power that the United States exerted on Puerto Rico, unlike the imperial power of the British in India, was *bobo* or feeble. In this argument Muñoz seems to be talking about physical and political imperialism. However, there is an intellectual imperialism that runs alongside the physical and political which Overpopulation Ideology is a part of. First, is the idea that Puerto Rico was

overpopulated in the first place. Puerto Rico was thought to be under-populated until the United States invaded but not only that, overpopulation rhetoric aided in the continuation of colonialism and US imperialism by leading Puerto Ricans to believe that it was an obstacle that could only be fought with American aid i.e. a prolonged imperial relationship with the United States.

The race factor in Muñoz's overpopulation rhetoric also deserves a look. Overpopulation Ideology was connected to race since it was non-whites that were targeted in the global scene. Yet in Puerto Rico, Muñoz Marín tried to bypass the whole race issue. His rhetoric tried to be inclusive in the 1940s by not targeting anyone in particular. However, by not targeting anyone in particular and avoiding issues of race, he replicated and perpetuated the racial patterns and hierarchy already in place in the island. Yet in questions of overpopulation, it is clear that Muñoz Marín's overpopulation rhetoric did affect disproportionately the poor and the non-white. The poor and the non-white were the ones working to increase production, the ones that emigrated, and the targets of birth control clinics.

Race and imperialism are two currents that feed into Muñoz's rhetoric, yet I find the questions that are brought up by modernization theory the most interesting. As stated in Chapter 4 and 5, Muñoz Marín believed in the lineal progression of development from traditional society, to developing society to a modern society; the progression after World War II would be transformed into modernization theory. This progression, according to the social scientists at the time (individuals who he listened to and respected), was done only through development, and overpopulation was a deep problem on the road to modernity that could not be easily shaken off. But when and how did Muñoz's vision of Pan, Tierra y Libertad turn into modernization theory? The answer to that question remains to be studied further. We know that Muñoz was speaking

about modernization and development a good ten years before this talk was mainstream. Yet the scientists and economists who came to Puerto Rico and advised Muñoz have not had their say in the historiography. A larger study on overpopulation must include further analysis on the subject, considering that crushing overpopulation was considered one of the signs of the modern. At the very least such a study should ask: Who were the major players that brought modernization theory to the island? What did they add to the question of overpopulation?

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A few years before his death, Muñoz Marín, embattled, ill, and suffering from the speech problems left by a stroke, was visited by Graciany Marchand, a lawyer and pro-independence leader. The once eloquent speaker had great difficulty putting words together without the help of his wife, yet was able to conjure the past reminding the younger man of his adventures as the island's most powerful man. Talk turned to the 1940 election and the elderly statesman cried recalling what he felt was his biggest accomplishment, helping the jíbaro understand his role in electoral politics and in turn idealizing his role as a symbol of Puerto Rico. His battles in the floor of the constitutional convention, and finally in a conversation about independence and self-definition he uttered, “¿Que somos? Una Isla Caribeña sobrepoblada...” “What are we? An Overpopulated Caribbean Island...”<sup>316</sup>

This question, “¿Que somos?” lays at the core of this work and I began it with the hope that the words of the man who had created modern Puerto Rico would give me the answer. Although I found “Una isla caribeña sobrepoblada,” a troubling answer at first, I began to see that for almost

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<sup>316</sup> Juan Mari Bras, Juan et al. *Luis Muñoz Marín... Reflexiones*. (Hato Rey: Publicaciones Puertorriqueñas, 2006).

80 years that was the answer that people gave when thinking about Puerto Rico. It even made its way into *West Side Story*.<sup>317</sup> I began the journey by trying to uncover what overpopulation was and instead of coming up with a simple reply, I began to see that the question was tied to bigger concepts and ideas that required turning upside down established notions of modernity, family, nation, country, superiority; ideas or concepts or schemes that I took much for granted that I really did not think they existed.

It is here then that I conclude that there is a lot of work to be done in the business of understanding overpopulation and its relevance can be palpable. Yes, palpable. Puerto Ricans now more than ever struggle with the question “Que Somos?” The status debate is alive and well, and promises to be here for many years to come, and as they lose population due to the failing economy, they are left with the population discursive from long ago and see them in new lights. I hope though that instead of answering “Que Somos?” with a mere descriptor about our population numbers, this time we are able to answer it like the jíbaro would have wanted to answer it: with pride and with hope of what could be.

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<sup>317</sup> Stephen Sondheim and Leonard Bernstein “America,” *West Side Story*, 1957.

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