

PUERTO RICO'S HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A response to Michael Janeway's op-ed column, "Puerto Rico's Moment in the Sun,"
(*New York Times*, May 22, 2008)

By Hector L. Lopez

My name is Hector Lopez; I currently reside in the State of Connecticut with my family. I was born and raised in Ponce, Puerto Rico, until my family immigrated to the United States when I was fourteen years old. Although I have lived here for quite some time now, fifty-one years, I still feel as much a part of Puerto Rico as I did as a child but with more intensity and passion. Which is why I am writing this today. After reading Mr. Michael Janeway's article, "Puerto Rico's Moment in the Sun" on May 22, 2008

(<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/22/opinion/22janeway.html>), I felt that as a Puerto Rican, I needed to provide a different side to the argument in favor of assimilation or statehood. We Puerto Ricans are not settlers from the U.S. asking their country to admit them into the Union; we are a nation occupied by a foreign power.

On June the 9th, 2008, the United Nations Decolonization Committee will meet to discuss the colonial case of Puerto Rico at 9:00 AM at 46th Street and First Avenue. It will require the U.S. to give a report about how it is implementing a decolonization program as mandated by the committee mentioned above.

In 1897, after a protracted struggle, Spain granted Puerto Rico the "Charter of Autonomy," which gave the Puerto Rican archipelago all the attributes of an independent nation, except that of defense. We lost that autonomy when the United States took possession of our country. According to International Law, once a nation or territory is given those freedoms, the colonial power cannot cede its former colony, nor can the colony be invaded, unless it is consulted. The Puerto Rican People did not participate in the negotiations of the Treaty of Paris that "granted" Puerto Rico to the United States. After 1897 Puerto Rico had a juridical personality of its own. Both the United States and Spain violated such laws. Therefore the U.S. is occupying Puerto Rico illegally. Any legislation or "treaties" with the puppet regime that are or were installed are illegal, null and void. It would not fool anybody who is informed and is a person of conscience and an independent thinker. Any properties acquired under such conditions are therefore devoid of any value before an international court of justice. The latter country, Puerto Rico, was not a belligerent party to the Spanish U.S. War and had not committed any aggression against the invader.

In 1898, when the United States invaded the subject nation, its navy bombed San Juan, the capital, unnecessarily killing one hundred people and destroying much property. It is ironic to see the United States fight so "passionately" against terrorism, when such an atrocity was and is committed on Puerto Rico by the United States Navy that year and in the present. That was and is terrorism par excellence. Colonialism is terrorism itself and Puerto Rico has the right to its own freedom and security. The U.S. did not invade a "New World" of wildlife and wilderness. Puerto Rico was not an uninhabited island; it was and it still is a nation of people with their own beliefs, culture, traditions, national heroines and heroes. Further, it has its own flag and a national consciousness. To paraphrase the "Centro Bulletin" published in Hunter College in New York City, the above-mentioned country "is a strange entity to the personality of the United States, governed by the force of arms."

The invasion of Puerto Rico was an act of “international piracy,” as stated by Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos, the 20th century father of Puerto Rico, a graduate of Harvard University with the highest honors of the class. By such act, the United States violated the spirit of both its Declaration of Independence and its Constitution.

Hawaii, the Native U.S. people’s lands, the land of Mexico, Guam, the Philippines, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Iraq, Afghanistan and the lands of the Natives of Alaska are other examples of the implementation of an imperial policy which has made the U.S. a Hegemony and has put this country on a path of economic and moral bankruptcy. Manifest Destiny and similar doctrines of conquest of past and modern empires are the guides to domination and exploitation. On a U.S. national level the abuse of the laws of Eminent Domain are a reflection of that imperial policy that pervades the ruling Elite of both Europe and the U.S.

The People of the United States are also victims of such atrocities in different degrees that will be accentuated as the system runs out of economies to control worldwide. Jobs are being exported, leaving the people without employment, the prices of gasoline and food are turning the U.S. economy upside down. The People of the U.S. are being turned into an internal colony of the Ruling Elite. Let’s be careful: this country’s people might be headed into virtual slavery of a new type, and it will be the whole population this time.

Exporting the U.S. electoral process to politically enslaved countries, such as Puerto Rico, is a gross violation of their dignity and national sovereignty. This is not the Puerto Ricans’ moment in the sun, it is what I deem the Puerto Ricans’ moment in the depths of colonial ignorance, pauperizing and denationalization.

Mr. Michael Janeway, in his column in the *New York Times*, shows that his knowledge of Puerto Rican history seems to be very limited. His arguments seem to evoke colonialist, paternalistic and imperialistic ideals. He states that there were “outbursts of violent nationalism in mid century” in the Puerto Rican nation. Can we not compare the “violent outbursts” of several United States episodes in history to the ones Mr. Janeway likes to point at in Puerto Rican history? The Boston Massacre of 1770, where colonists were shot by the British musket, can also be seen as a consequence of violent nationalist activities in defense of the Colonies’ freedom. There, they rebelled against British soldiers, and are seen today as heroes who died at the hands of oppressors. The Puerto Ricans in the so-called violent outburst did the same things as these colonists back in the revolutionary era of the North American Colonies. Mr. Janeway seems to imply that freedom and armed struggle was good for revolutionaries of 1776, today proper for the oppressor, but not for my enslaved motherland. If a firecracker goes off in Puerto Rico, it is deemed “violence.” When Puerto Rico is used for experimentation and military practice that negatively affects our health and tranquility, that is said to be necessary for the sake of Democracy. When one third of our women in the decades of the Forties and Fifties were sterilized, that was according to the colonizer good for Puerto Rico, but when it was done to Europeans by other Europeans, that was a crime against humanity, genocide.

Puerto Rico’s struggle for liberty dates back to the uprisings of its Native Americans, the Taino Indians, the revolts by the African slaves sent to work on the island, and the revolution of 1868 to be freed from Spanish colonialism. Let’s not forget the uprising in Jayuya, Puerto Rico, in October 1950. Furthermore the attack on Blair House in the same year, the assault on the U.S. Congress in 1954, the student strikes during the Fifties and subsequent decades up to now, the struggle for Vieques against the U.S. Navy. The continuing strikes by workers all

over the Puerto Rican Nation. The fight to protect our environment from the predatory U.S. corporations and the fight to keep in our hands our national artifacts, arts and heritage are acts of resistance that weave the spirit and soul of our sense of nationhood and our nationalism. To paraphrase our 20th century National liberator, Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos, “The Mother Land is and has been going through its glorious transfiguration.” This historical process inflames our hearts and passions for our hallowed land and our national symbols. It is our Mother that is being assailed and attacked together with our brothers, sisters, wives and children. Anybody who allows this to happen has lost his or her sense of belonging and shame as a rational human being. Those heroic acts mentioned above gave Puerto Rico its identity and nationhood.

The uprising against Spain was led by Dr. Ramon Emeterio Betances, a mason, Lola Rodriguez de Tio, and other patriots, who founded the nation, pledged their allegiance to the Puerto Rican flag and God, gave their treasure, their liberty and lives so the motherland could live. Puerto Rico’s struggles against oppressors have a clear similarity to that of the United States in its early years against the British. Puerto Rico is simply doing exactly what the people of the thirteen colonies did back in the revolutionary era. Mr. Janeway is not aware that all these sacrifices make Puerto Rico worthy of freedom. But even without struggle a people have rights.

That Puerto Ricans vote under a colonial-controlled and CIA-financed election is no surprise. Any investigator or researcher who works scientifically in finding the substance of colonialism will realize the socio-economic, political, and oppressive facts that lead a people to be afraid of being free. That fear is instilled in the population through repression, denial and suppression of the subjects’ history, terrorism, and economic pressures. “You have no natural resources and you are too small, for that reason you cannot be free,” says the colonizer, and the slaves believe it because they have no other information to have different criteria and opinion. Remember that the colonizer controls the mass media and therefore the minds of the People.

The U.S. made attempts to erase our language and most importantly our identity from our lives. Until 1949, when I started my first grade, the public school educational system was taught in a foreign tongue, English. The People of Puerto Rico put up resistance and finally such a pedagogical monstrosity was abolished. The United States also is attempting to destroy our culture by imposing their trends, arts and way of life in the everyday lives of Puerto Ricans. Why should we give up our Puerto Rican customs to adopt an alien culture which is rotting at its core?

By leaving its population without medical care, by letting its bridges fall into disrepair, by denying women and minorities basic rights and by violating its own constitution, which in turn carries this country into a police state where citizens are watched and spied upon, the U.S. reveals signs of decay. Why should we follow that path?

* * *

One cannot forget Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, which showed openly what statehood would be like for Puerto Rico. Is that what’s awaiting us Puerto Ricans? What about the “benefits” of becoming killers, of dying and coming back destroyed psychologically and morally in those wars of aggression that periodically are applied upon Innocent nations with the pretext of bringing them freedom? In such wars the U.S. Armed Forces torture, abuse, bring in drug

use, destroy their water systems, their water treatment plants, destroy their hospitals, electrical grids and make whole populations leave their areas of residence. All these to extract their petroleum and take possession of their natural resources in general and in turn raise the price of gasoline in the United States and everything in general. All of the above are proof that statehood is for our annihilation.

* * *

In 1917, by fiat, a second-class citizenship was imposed on us against our will, namely by the Jones Act. It is a citizenship that can be revoked at any time and it is not a birthright. The Puerto Rican governing body in those days rejected that imposition, but the U.S. Government threatened our population by stating that if we did not accept, we would be classified as aliens in our own homeland. Put yourself in our place and imagine if that happened to the population of the U.S. How would it feel if an invader came to your country, told you to abide by its rules, and if you did not, you would not be considered a citizen of your own nation, subject to expulsion? For a foreigner to tell you that you yourself are a foreigner in your own country is an oxymoron that unfortunately has devastating results. The “military umbrella” and the U.S. trade system have a sad history that has affected us adversely and disadvantageously in treasure and lives.

England applied the Sea Acts on the Thirteen Colonies, and the U.S. applies to us the laws of Cabotage, which are the same thing with a different name, and that costs the Puerto Rican People close to \$800 million a year. That is the federal tax we pay even if they do not call it that.

Luis Muñoz Marín was an eloquent advocate of independence, says Mr. Michael Janeway, but what he does not know is that Munoz did not have the moral fiber and the bravery to stand up to the threats of the Corporatocracy (the U.S. Government) that if he kept preaching about independence he would be arrested and incarcerated. Contrary to Luis Muñoz Marín, Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos, the Nationalist Party leader, stood up as a real Patriot and defied the Empire. In jail, he was offered the governorship of Puerto Rico, but he refused and said, “I don't betray my people,” and remained there for ten years. He was tortured in jail with laser or atomic rays until he died three months later after being released to have his last days. Today he is the conscience of the Puerto Rican nation, and Luis Muñoz Marín is its Benedict Arnold, an eloquent speaker in treasonous language, who deceived his followers into the cesspool of ignorance and betrayal. His traitorous language has led his People into the process of national dissolution.

We fit well within a Latin American Union, which is natural, as long as its constitution has a clause of secession from it in case it does not work for us. The U.S. has no such option in its constitution, once a nation or territory agrees to join its union, it cannot escape it, unless there is a total breakup as in ancient Rome in its decay. Puerto Rico has gone through a series of repressive measures such as the Rio Piedras and Ponce massacres, perpetrated by Governor Blanton Winship, a butcher appointed by Franklin Delano Roosevelt; gag laws; the burning of *Claridad*, a pro-independence newspaper; and the murder of independentista leaders, their children and other individuals. The yellow press and the other media will not let the People of the U.S. know about its history in Puerto Rico and in our America. Puerto Rico has suffered terrorism at the hands of the different U.S. administrations for a long time. I wish that the United States could remember the “Gunboat Diplomacy,” the “Good Neighbor Policy,” the Policy of “The Carrot and the Stick,” the overthrow of democratically elected governments,

the training of terrorists in the School of the Americas and the installation of dictators in our America namely Latin America.

Mr. Michael Janeway seems to be oblivious about all of this and he wants to write a history of Puerto Rico from the perspective of the colonizer and the enslaver. I am not claiming that Mr. Janeway is at all unintelligent, he simply does not know the truth, his mind is saturated with the historical account of the colonizer. There are far too many people in the U.S. who are not at all familiar with Puerto Rico and its people. Through this letter, I wish to clarify the haziness that most people in the United States cannot get through. Puerto Rico is not simply an island with an undefined nationality. Again, we are a nation under military occupation, alienated from its own territory, that has its own culture, beliefs, and traditions; that is completely capable of governing itself as an independent nation, contrary to the lies and myths that the colonizer puts in our heads. It is time for Puerto Rico to finally be given the independence it so greatly deserves and desperately needs.

By becoming a State of the United States Union we would be condemned to national suicide, and since we could not be exactly assimilated, we would be pariahs in the United States with no land to call our own, we would be in a complete diaspora even in our own land.

For once and for all, let my people go!

Freedom now! Freedom now! Freedom now!

Hector L. Lopez