



Political Development of Puerto Ricans in New Haven

Curriculum Unit 82.05.02
by Irma E. Garca

The purpose of this project is to trace the political growth of the Puerto Rican community in New Haven, Connecticut. The study will concentrate on the more recent (last ten to fifteen years) history. It will also include a short compendium of the political history of Puerto Rico to serve as background for some of the important elements affecting the Puerto Rican communities on the United States mainland.

One of the important instruments for the study is the development of questionnaires to be answered by persons occupying key positions relative to the community.

It is hoped that these elements will make this project suitable for one or more units of material to be used in social studies, urban studies or other classes at the post-primary level.

Unit One: Government after Spanish-American War

After the Spanish-American War Puerto Rico was under a military government for two years (1898-1900). In 1900 the Congress of the United States passed the Foraker Act for civilian rule. It created the office of the presidentially nominated Governor, assisted by an Executive Council, at least five of whom had to be native inhabitants of the Island, with the remaining six offices open to American appointees. It was not until 1946 that the first Puerto Rican governor was appointed by the incumbent president Harry S. Truman.

In 1917 Congress granted American citizenship to all those who wanted it, through the Jones Act. In 1947 the Elective Governor Act was passed and Luis Mu-oz-Mar'n became the first elected Governor of Puerto Rico. In 1950 President Truman signed the Puerto Rican Commonwealth Bill. In 1952 Congress approved Puerto Rico's Constitution and it officially became a Free Associated State.

Today there are four political parties in the island.

1. Partido Nuevo Progresista (New Progressive Party)
2. Partido Popular Democrático (Popular Democratic Party)
3. Partido Independentista (Independence Party)

4. Partido Socialista (Socialist Party)

The New Progressive Party emerged in 1968 from discontented members of the estranged Republican Statehood Party and the Popular Democratic Party. The Popular Democratic Party was founded by former Governor Luis Muñoz Marín in 1938. It came into power in 1940, generated vital economic recovery programs, created the free associated state system for Puerto Rico and reigned continuously until 1968. The Independence Party advocates complete independence for Puerto Rico with the consent of the people. It has a small, but vocal minority. Up to now it has not been able to demonstrate a feasible plan for independence that will convince the majority of the people. The Socialist Party represents a more radical group that made it to the polls during the last elections. It has no relation to the Socialist Party of 1915.

Student Activities

Useful resources:

1. Connors, Robert E. and Hasner, Ronald R., *Puerto Rico: An Island On The Move* , Cooperstown, N.Y., Discovery Enterprise, 1972.
2. Figueroa, Loida, *History of Puerto Rico* , New York, Anaya Book Company, Inc., 1974.
3. Lewis, Gordon, *Puerto Rico: Freedom and Power in the Caribbean* , New York, Modern Review Press, 1968.
 1. Locate Puerto Rico on maps and globes.
 2. Learn about the Spanish American War and the Treaty of Paris of 1898.
 3. Discuss the difference between the Commonwealth and the colonial status (Some literature that might be helpful would be the Constituent Assembly debates of 1951-1952, and the federal Congress hearings on Public Law 600 of 1950, Washington, Government Printing Office, 1950, 1952).
 4. Read about the government structure provided in the Foraker Act of 1900 and Jones Act of 1917.
 5. Discuss the importance of the Elective Governor Act of 1947.
 6. Discuss the meaning of effective representation in Congress.

Unit Two: Migration

The Puerto Rican migration to the Mainland is mostly motivated by economic conditions. For this reason the vast majority of the immigrants are economically deprived. Unlike other migrant minorities and because of their special political status, Puerto Ricans do not have to make a firm commitment to stay in the continental United States. This has created a unique two-way migration movement. Another reason for this pattern was the dependence on the agrarian system. The dormant seasons on the Island coincided with the active seasons on the Mainland, thus, farmworkers were able to migrate back and forth to their advantage. The agrarian migration was mostly fostered by employers who usually came in the Island and hired farm workers. However, by 1947, in order to diminish the abuse of their employers, the Puerto Rican Legislature passed laws regulating the recruitment of farm workers and establishing the Office of Migration of the Commonwealth. This Office is centered in New York, investigates the working conditions and protects the migrant worker. It oversees that the recruitment of farm workers on the Island must be done under the form of a labor contract approved by the Department of Labor of Puerto Rico.

Student Activities

Useful resources:

1. Handlin, Oscar, *The Newcomers*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1959 .(especially good for comparative studies of immigrants).
2. Mills, C. Wright. *The Puerto Rican Journey*, New York, Russell and Russell, 1967.
3. Rogler, Lloyd H., *Migrant in the City* , New York, Basic Books, 1972 (The study was made in New Haven.
 1. Compare migration patterns of Puerto Ricans with those of other immigrants.
 2. Discuss why it is natural for Puerto Ricans to enjoy a two-way migration system.
 3. Visit the Office of the Migratory Program in Hamden and invite a representative to your school.
 4. Trace your family tree to the point of immigration to the United States.
 5. Discuss why the majority of the upper and middle classes do not migrate to the United States, except for educational purposes.
 6. Given the size (3435 square miles), the population (3.3 million) and the state of the economy of Puerto Rico, discuss the possibility of a mass migration to the Mainland.
 7. Compare the population density of Puerto Rico to the Mainland's.
 8. Discuss the following statement by Gordon Lewis (See above)

“Like all migrant minorities, they have been considered, once they have settled in New York, as the cause of metropolitan ills instead of merely the occasion for the full revelation of those ills.”

Unit Three: Religion and Religious Institutions

Puerto Rico is a Catholic Society by tradition, but there is an increasing number of protestant churches and some synagogues. On the Mainland, however, many Puerto Ricans become members of various Protestant churches (especially the Pentecostal Church). They seem to provide a preliminary sense of orientation recent migrant arrivals need, due to loss of traditional cultural bearings. Usually, as their needs change, their memberships to a particular church does too. In some instances they go back to their previous religion.

The religious institutions in New Haven have a dramatic impact on the political decisions of the community because they have the largest organized groups of people.

Although the religious institutions claim to be apolitical, the development of a civic conscience among parishioners seems to be a must in terms of political survival. As a result the religious representatives find themselves more and more involved in political decisions affecting the community as well as their parishioners.

Student Activities

Useful resources:

1. *Commonwealth Government of Puerto Rico, Civil Liberties committee, La Libertad de Religion* , San Juan, 1959.
2. Fitzpatrick, Joseph P., *Puerto Rican Americans: The Meaning of Migration to the Mainland* , New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1971.
3. Marden, Charles and Gladys Meyer, *Minorities in American Society*. New York , Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1968.
 1. Discuss the difference between the religious practice of Catholicism on the Island to that on the Mainland.
 2. Discuss the need of religious institutions for immigrants.
 3. Visit any of the local parishes.
4. Bring a representative of a local church to your classroom.
5. Discuss the results of the questionnaires (See below).

Unit Four: Political Involvement

The involvement of Puerto Ricans in the political process of the Island is very different to their political involvement on the Mainland. Politics in Puerto Rico are very important for its constituents. One of the reasons is the continuous debate on the political status of Puerto Rico. Consequently, the turn out of voters on the Island often reaches seventy-five percent.

On the Mainland, however, the attitude is more apathetic. Several factors like language, socio-economic groups, issues, and lack of effectively organized political machinery, have a great influence on this attitude. However, in older communities and in areas where the community leaders make evident the political effectiveness of block voting the attitude changes as well. As the Puerto Rican community becomes more informed, political activity grows. Additional factors like the advent of bilingual programs, the stable growth of certain kind of religious institutions, and the election of politically effective officials make it easier and rewarding to participate in the political process of the Mainland.

Student Activities

Useful resources:

1. Fernández-Méndez, Eugenio, *Portrait of a Society: A Book of Readings on Puerto Rican Society*, Rio Piedras, University of Puerto Rico Press, 1956.
2. Wells, Henry K., *The Modernization of Puerto Rico*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1969.
3. *Census of Population, Puerto Rico, General Social and Economic Characteristics*, Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1972.
4. Office of the Registrar, New Haven, Connecticut.
 1. Find out the number of Puerto Ricans in New Haven.
 2. Find out the number of registered voters.
 3. Find out wards with large population of Puerto Ricans.
 4. Find out wards with Puerto Rican aldermen.
 5. Invite alderman to your classroom.
 6. Discuss the importance of political strength and how the electoral process helps.
 7. Compare the population growth to the registered voters growth.

Unit Five: Results of Questionnaires and Interviews

After going over the questionnaires and notes from the interviews the following results were obtained:

1. The Hispanic population of the City of New Haven is mostly located in two areas, the Hill (oldest) and Fair Haven.
2. The main religious institutions are the Roman Catholic Church and the Pentecostal Church.
3. The Pentecostal Church has a much larger congregation.
4. The congregation of the Catholic Church does not receive information or guidance pertaining the electoral process. The Pentecostal congregation does.
5. Both the Catholic Church and the Pentecostal Church provide information and do referral to social service agencies.
6. The City of New Haven does not provide special services to the Hispanic Community, with the exception of the Bilingual Program, which is State mandated. However, it provides funds to community agencies.
7. There was a need for spanish-speaking personnel at the social services agencies.
8. The political progress was divided in two main categories:
 - a. *Involvement by the community* All persons interviewed considered there has been a considerable growth because for the first time they have been able to achieve three ward chairpersons and one alderman. It should be noted that at least two of them have bachellor degrees, from State Universities. Also, that their religion affiliation can be traced to the Pentecostal Church of the Hill except for one to the Baptist Church.
 - b. *Political effectiveness* The progress here was considered more limited.
9. In relation to the maintenance of funds for community service there was consensus indicating that they would not disappear as long as the need was there and that the community was still very mobile.
10. The main problems for the continuation of steady political progress were considered to be the lack of union within the community and the fostering of that problem by other politicians.

1. For how long has this Institution been in New Haven?
2. What is the size of the Congregation?
3. How many parishioners are of voting age?
4. What measures have been taken by the church or the congregation in order to develop a civic conscience?
5. Is there any participation in the electoral process?
 - a. How is the parishioner helped to reach a political decision?
 - b. Have you obtained any positive results? Negative?
6. Does the Church provide referral services to other existing social services agencies?

Questionnaire for Political Representatives

1. What special services are provided by the City of New Haven to the Hispanic Community?
2. Do you think that the funding for community agencies will increase? Stay the same? Decrease? Disappear?
3. How important is the involvement of religious institutions in the development of a civic conscience?
4. Which are the wards with a greater concentration of Puerto Ricans?
5. In your opinion, which are the major problems affecting the political growth in the community?
6. For how long have you been in New Haven?

Interviews

Government Agency

1. Carlos Rodr'guez, Director of Human Services and former Director of Junta for Progressive Action.
2. Francisco Echevarr'a, Assistant Principal for the New Haven School System.

Community Agency

1. Mar'a Rodríguez, Director of Latino Youth Development and former Alderwoman for the City of New Haven.

Religious Representatives

1. Margarita Hernández, Star of Jacob Pentecostal Church.
2. Elita Rivera, Centro San José.

Political Activist

1. Igdalia García

Community Resources and Religious Institutions

"Useful activities for students could include visits to these centers, lectures from representatives of these organizations, or private interviews with institutional representatives.

Community Agencies

1. Centro San José
290 Grand Avenue
Contact: Elita Rivera (562-3135, 562-2050)
2. Crossroads, Inc.
42 Howe Street
Contact: Miguel Laguna (865-3541)
3. Junta for Progressive Action
169 Grand Avenue (787-0191)
4. Latino Youth Development
324 Congress Avenue
Director: Mar'a Rodríguez (777-5219)
5. Spanish Cultural Center
413 Howard Avenue
Director: Celestino Córdova (787-0169)

Religious Institutions

1. Saint John the Evangelist (Roman Catholic)
140 Sylvan Avenue
Father Odell (777-3629)
2. Star of Jacob Pentecostal Church
Howard Avenue
Reverend Abraham Marsach (562-7066)
3. Star of Jacob Pentecostal Church II
Chapel Street
Reverend Armando Hernández (776-9603)

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1. Burdette, Barbara, *The Puerto Ricans*. Connecticut: Parousia Press, 1976.
2. Fitzpatrick, Joseph P., *Puerto Rican Americans: The Meaning of Migration to the Mainland*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1971.
3. Gruber, Ruth, *Puerto Rico : Land of Promise*. New York: Hill and Sang, 1960.
4. Lewis, Gordon, *Puerto Rico: Freedom and Power in the Caribbean*. New York: Modern Review Press, 1968.
5. Lloyd H. Rogler, *Migrant in the City*, New York: Basic Books Inc., 1972.
6. Marden, Charles F. and Gladys Meyer, *Minorities in American Society* : New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1968.
7. Wells, Henry, *The Modernization of Puerto Rico*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969.

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