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# Representing Development: New Perspectives About the New Deal in Puerto Rico 1933-36

MANUEL R. RODRÍGUEZ

## ABSTRACT

This article suggests an alternative approach to the traditional perspectives in which the New Deal, specifically the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration (PRERA), has been represented by Puerto Rico and United States historiography. The PRERA, far from being a short-term policy of emergency help, a strategy of imperial domination, or an initiative of the Roosevelt administration to provide temporary relief to a needy territorial possession on the verge of economic disaster, constituted a carefully crafted project of development that embodied a technology of domination over the colonial subjects, allowing the United States to establish new principles of colonial governmentality in Puerto Rico during the 1930s. [Key words: Puerto Rico/United States, New Deal, Puerto Rico Emergency Relief Administration (PRERA), Development, Rexford Tugwell, Franklin D. Roosevelt]

### **The New Deal in Puerto Rican Historiography**

Traditionally, the New Deal has occupied a small role in Puerto Rican scholarship. For scholars engaged in the study of the 1930s in Puerto Rico, the image of the Depression, based on either the collapse of the stock market in 1929 or the long lines in the city to get a bowl of soup and bread, did not represent an abrupt change with the past. These were elements experienced by Puerto Ricans even before the collapse of the stock market. Puerto Rican historiography instead focuses on the events of the 1930s as a period in which diverse sectors of Puerto Rican society started to question U.S. colonial domination over the Island, a time in which the metropolitan State attempted to implement some aspects of the New Deal reforms, in the midst of a re-emergence of a national identity.<sup>1</sup> Puerto Rican scholars have approached the New Deal in three ways: 1) the New Deal and the PRERA programs as a center of political controversy; 2) The New Deal as a platform to articulate the populist project of the Popular Democratic Party (PDP); 3) and, finally, the impact of the New Deal on the Puerto Rican working class.

Traditional studies of the New Deal in Puerto Rico have focused on the influence of their policies upon local politics. That is the particular case of the most representative (and only) study of the New Deal presence in Puerto Rico, written by Thomas Mathews in the 1960s.<sup>2</sup> Mathews provides a general description of the political changes in the United States and the Island by the early 1930s, a scenario for the political conflict that permeated the entire decade. His analysis addresses the implementation of the PRERA and the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRRA). Mathews vividly describes how local political organizations struggled to assume control of the federal funds in both programs. The result was that Puerto Rican political organizations used the Roosevelt reforms to further their partisan interests. Another interesting point addressed by Mathews is the important participation and reaction of U.S. officials on the Island at the moment when the New Deal programs were implemented. Mathews describes the ineptitude of Governor Robert Gore during the initial years of the New Deal in Puerto Rico, the partial support given by Governor Blanton Winship to the New Deal policies on the Island, and the importance of the visit of Eleanor Roosevelt.

Mathews also focuses on the controversies generated by James Bourne, Director of the PRERA, Ernest Gruening, Director of the PRRA, and Harold Ickes, Secretary of the Department of the Interior. These individuals and their continuous interactions with local political party leaders, government bureaucracy, business interests, and high-ranking officials in the Roosevelt administration provide a valuable exposition of the complex controversies and conflicts resulting from the implementation of the PRERA and the PRRA in Puerto Rico. The author demonstrates the participation of the local intelligentsia in this process, pointing out the presence of Carlos Chardón, Chancellor of the University of Puerto Rico, Luis Muñoz Marín, Senator of the Liberal Party, and others that contributed decisively to articulating a plan for the economic reconstruction in Puerto Rico.

According to the author, by 1937, the drive and enthusiasm for the initial New Deal years was almost gone. The main causes of the New Deal's failure were the reluctance of the Washington administration to delegate to the Puerto Rican intelligentsia the responsibility, the direction, and implementation of the New Deal programs on the Island, the lack of trust in local officials, and the excessive bureaucracy. Mathews concedes some apparent success to the New Deal. He argues that the rampant politics of laissez-faire were diluted with the strong presence of the federal

government. He also recognizes that, after thirty years, Washington finally assumed its responsibility over two million inhabitants of its Caribbean possession even though the excess of administrative management blurred this attempt. For example, he argues emphatically that “it was necessary to teach Puerto Ricans the things that were convenient for them.”<sup>3</sup>

Other English-language works, such as the one written by historian Gordon Lewis, follow Mathews regarding the limited effects of the New Deal in Puerto Rico, its disturbing effects over local politics, and its eventual failure to cope with the problems on the Island.<sup>4</sup> Lewis agrees with Mathews in that the New Deal ended the “imperialism of neglect” enforced by the United States after thirty-two years of colonial domination. Lewis sustains that the application of New Deal programs, such as the Federal Relief Administration FERA, the National Recovery Administration (NRA), the Agricultural Adjustment Act(AAA), and, later, the reconstruction plans envisioned by the (PRRA), constituted a valuable opportunity to deal with the socioeconomic problems brought by the Depression. But, according to Lewis’s analysis, “the New Deal died in Puerto Rico in 1940 as surely as it died in the continental United States.”<sup>5</sup>

Although Lewis accepts the failure of the New Deal on the Island, his analysis differs from that of Mathews. For Lewis, the causes of the New Deal’s failure were not exclusively the political havoc and intrigue caused by the New Deal in Puerto Rico. His analysis focuses more on the structural conception of the New Deal and its potential to change the colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. Lewis directs his criticism at the experimental nature of the New Deal programs and their Jeffersonian idealism in emphasizing the “rights” of the “small man.” As the author suggests, the New Deal failed in its attempt to solve U.S. employment problems, and instead directed its initiatives to relief and aid programs. The New Deal then was only able to supervise public policy and “perhaps, to civilize the public behavior of the American businessmen. But it did not in any serious manner restrict their private power.”<sup>6</sup> According to Lewis, these policies were reflected in the implementation of programs such as the AAA on the Island and their harmful effects on the sugar industry. Lewis also blames the backwardness of the Washington bureaucracy for the failure of the New Deal in Puerto Rico. The Departments of War, Interior, and Agriculture shared the same jurisdiction at the time to implement the diverse New Deal programs in Puerto Rico. To this bureaucratic chaos was added the lack of coordination between the diverse New Deal agencies regarding the implementation of policies on the Island, the appointment of technical personnel hostile to Puerto Ricans, and the ever-present difficulties competing with the other forty-eight states to get funding.<sup>7</sup>

According to Lewis the New Deal was also destined to fail because of the ambitions of local political sectors. Lewis illustrates this hostile environment when the FDR administration won the elections of 1932 and the right wing *Coalición* got control of the local legislature. The result of these events had two consequences:

First, that the local “New Deal” had to be initiated and largely continued by American liberal elements, with, of course, their Puerto Rican sympathizers and second, that they had to embrace this task in the face of growing opposition from the champions of the old order who remained in strategic command of the local legislative houses in the form of the Republican-Socialist coalition.<sup>8</sup>

As a consequence of these events, the New Deal presence in Puerto Rico was plagued with continuous hostility from elements of the Coalition Party. Throughout the 1930s this hostility involved denouncing the Liberal Party participation and corruption in the New Deal programs, demonstrating open hostility to the liberal U.S. officials appointed to the different agencies, and proposing substitute legislation in some of the New Deal programs. Following the argument that the main obstacle to the implementation of the New Deal programs resided on the Island, Lewis pointed out that incidents were caused by radical sectors of the island that supported independence from the United States, particularly the Nationalist Party. The assassination of local police commander Colonel Francis Riggs in 1936 and the massacre of members of the Nationalist Party on Palm Sunday in the southern town of Ponce by members of the police led to a violent period of political instability and violence during the 1930s. The U.S. government responded in different ways: it strengthened the Americanization programs in the education system and created a project to grant independence to Puerto Rico. This project, presented by Senator Myllard Tydings, responded directly to the acts of violence of the Nationalist Party, especially the assassination of police chief Francis E. Riggs, a personal friend of Tydings.

Lewis closes his analysis by pointing out that the lack of a rational and efficient administrative unit to regulate colonial affairs in Puerto Rico doomed the New Deal effectiveness. As the author suggests, “the absence of an ideological commitment to the empire naturally entailed, in its wake, the absence of any sustained effort to build up any sort of special and permanent machinery for the government of the new empire.”<sup>9</sup> In summary, Lewis suggests that the United States failed in its responsibility to provide the bureaucratic institutions needed for the administration and welfare of its Caribbean possession.

Another approach in the studies of the New Deal in Puerto Rico examines the contribution of the New Deal in articulating a technocratic and ideological base for the Popular Democratic Party (PDP) during the 1930s. Scholars such as Emilio González, Angel Quintero, Emilio Pantojas, Leonardo S. Rabell, and Nilsa Burgos have explained how New Deal programs such as the PRERA and PRRA led to the socioeconomic platform that sustained the Popular Democratic Party (PDP) in the 1940s.<sup>10</sup> In his examination of how the class transformation of the 1930s led to the emergence of a new political order in the 1940s, Emilio González explains how the New Deal policies constituted the base of the populist project proposed by the PDP during the 1940s.<sup>11</sup> González argues that the initial years of the PDP (1938-1944) were possible because of the ability of their leaders to assume the control of the populist state apparatus and not the appropriation of economic wealth. Such a process allowed the articulation of a class alliance within Puerto Rican society that facilitated for this elite’s hegemony over the political destiny of Puerto Rico for the next three decades. Concerning the contributions of the New Deal in the emergence of the PDP as a political force, González argues that the Chardón Plan was conceived as a development project intended to transform the deplorable economic conditions of the Island.<sup>12</sup> According to González, the development initiatives contained in this plan were utilized by Puerto Rican middle sectors to create the populist agenda of the PDP during the 1940s. Such an approach constitutes the main argument for the scholars interested in establishing a relationship between the New Deal and PDP populist platform.

Angel Quintero expands González’s analysis about the New Deal origins of the PDP. According to Quintero, in order to understand the emergence of the PDP

during the 1940s, it is necessary to take a close look at the social, economic, and political circumstances prior to the arrival of the Depression. The author maintains that the establishment of the U.S. regime in 1898 transformed the traditional sugar *hacienda* social order that existed in Puerto Rico during the Spanish domination period. Members of the Puerto Rican *hacendado* class contemplated how, in the early 1900s, their traditional political and economic power was eroded by U.S. corporate capital. The imposition of this new economic order, however, opened a window of economic opportunity to the members of a Puerto Rican bourgeoisie sector, native sugar centralists, local businessmen, and professionals.<sup>13</sup> One of the most important changes in Puerto Rican society, as a result of the transformation of the economic order that existed prior to 1898, was reflected in the emergence of a strong and militant working class. After the beginning of the century, Puerto Rican labor organizations gained strength and prominence in the local political arenas. Gathered collectively in two powerful organizations, the Socialist Party and the Free Federation of Labor, the working class constituted an important political force by the early 1920s. Quintero emphasizes that the three sectors of Puerto Rican society—the former *hacendados* and emerging bourgeoisie, the working class, and the United States—constituted a “triangular” sociopolitical scheme that characterized the colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico at least in the first four decades of the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> The events of the early 1930s transformed this “geometrical” power relation in which the Puerto Rican society was configured. The collapse of the Island’s economic structure, the terrible unemployment rates, and the drop in average workers’ salaries were among the main causes of the collapse of this social scheme. By the mid-1930s the social elements that constituted this “triangular” scheme realized the necessities of radical changes to the Island socioeconomic structure. The response to this concern within the different sectors of Puerto Rican society was the emergence of the PDP. Through a complicated array of informal alliances and political strategies, the PDP offered to the displaced *hacendado* class and the members of the professional elite a niche in which they could design, through their technical expertise, the details of the populist project to be implemented in the 1940s. For Quintero the New Deal only constituted a platform for the displaced *hacendado* class to assume power positions within the PDP populist initiatives. Thus, he overlooks the importance of the PRERA in other areas of Puerto Rican society, undermining its importance in redefining the role of the metropolitan State after thirty years of colonial rule.

Emilio Pantojas joined González and Quintero in their analysis about how the New Deal contributed to the articulation of the populist platform of the PDP.<sup>15</sup> Paralleling the other scholars, Pantojas agrees that the 1930s reflected profound changes in the economic, social, and political destinies of the Island. In the economic realm the sugar industry, which at that time constituted the core of the Puerto Rican economy, experienced a profound crisis. A collapse of sugar prices and the restrictive production quotas hit the sugar economy of the Island hard. As a result, the sociopolitical realm experienced profound transformations. One of these changes was reflected in the reactions of a traditional class stripped of its traditional economic power by the Americans at the beginning of the century. They were waiting for an opportunity that would catapult them to a prominent position within Puerto Rican society. The other group that experienced a profound transformation was the working class. As a result of the rupture of the base of the working class with their leadership, new labor organizations such as the Puerto Rican Communist Party



and the *Confederación General de Trabajadores* (General Confederation of Workers) emerged as alternatives to channel the aspirations of this sector. Pantojas maintains that these radical changes in the composition of the power relations in Puerto Rican society shared a common goal: a new economic framework to the Island's economy. As the author points out, "the clear manifestations within this power block were expressed in the debates about an alternative economic strategy. Since the notion of development strategy was not part of the lingo of economics at that time, the alternative strategy was conceptualized in terms of a program for economic reconstruction."<sup>16</sup> Pantojas also argues that the PRERA and the PRRA constituted strategies utilized by the United States to strengthen its colonial domination over Puerto Rico. The PRERA and the PRRA were designed as strategies to undermine the separatism represented by the Nationalist Party and the economic havoc caused by the Depression. That is the reason why the United States was interested in the creation of welfare programs paralleled to the local government institutions. Pantojas sustains that the policies implemented by the New Deal "were beyond" the simple task of providing relief aid to the population. Instead, the purpose of these programs was diverted to the constitution "of a basis for the mobilization of the political forces that could provide a solution to the crisis while preserving the interests of the United States."<sup>17</sup>

Other scholars, following the trend of González, Quintero, and Pantojas, have explored the connection between the New Deal programs and the PDP. Sociologists Leonardo Santana Rabell and Nilsa Burgos go further, studying specific programs of the populist agenda and tracing their origins back to the project offered by the New Deal during the 1930s. For instance, Leonardo Santana Rabell studies the New Deal policies in Puerto Rico as the origins of planning initiatives that would transform economic, social, and urban spaces on the Island for the next three decades.<sup>18</sup> According to Santana Rabell, the PRERA was one of the agencies that assumed such initiatives. Rabell sustains that the PRERA conducted studies in the areas of urban development, economics, transportation, housing, mining, and calorie intake consumed by Puerto Rican families. Although the PRERA programs were subject to local political conflict, Santana Rabell agrees that the PRERA "constituted the first effort by a government agency to work on a study directed to make a diagnosis of the Puerto Rican society and its problems."<sup>19</sup>

Other studies have also focused on the legacy that some New Deal period projects had over the PDP's populist programs. Social worker Nilsa Burgos analyzes the effect of the New Deal programs on the development of community social work in Puerto Rico during the 1930s.<sup>20</sup> One of the areas studied by Burgos is the impact that the PRERA had on the education, food distribution, and health programs offered to the children on the Island and the allocation of funds to train social workers to serve rural communities. The PRRA continued with the community programs already started by the PRERA. The PRERA made possible the extension of diverse federal community programs such as Social Security and the amendment to local laws to establish a welfare department on the Island. The PRRA social programs proposed that every person on the island obtain a reasonable position of independence and security—the same goals previously proposed by the PRERA.<sup>22</sup>

Another important category under consideration in the studies of the New Deal in Puerto Rico concentrates on the impact of its labor legislation over the Puerto Rican working class. Historians Blanca Silvestrini and César Rey, as well as *Taller de Formación Política* (TFP), have focused on the impact of New Deal labor legislation, such as the National Recovery Administration (NRA) and the Fair Labor Standards

Act (FLSA), on Puerto Rican working class. Silvestrini has studied the effects of the New Deal on the leadership of the Socialist Party and the working class during the 1930s. In her view, the impact of the New Deal labor legislation threatened the political alliance of the conservative Republican Party and the Socialists Party.<sup>23</sup> For these conservative members of the political elite, the New Deal represented a threat to their power positions in the political and economic arenas.<sup>24</sup> As a result, rank and file members of the working class felt betrayed by the ones who supposedly represented them. To explain this process, Silvestrini studied the economic and social conditions of the workers during the 1930s. The numerous strikes registered during this period, along with the emergence of alternate labor organizations that challenged the power of the traditional ones, contributed to the fragmentation of the loyalty of workers to the leadership of the Socialist Party. In the long term, all these factors contributed to the radical changes that the Puerto Rican labor class experienced at the end of the 1930s. According to Silvestrini, the NRA stimulated the process of organization of local unions, fueled the hopes for substantial changes in their labor conditions, and motivated the emergence of different strikes around the Island.<sup>25</sup> For many workers,

The codes were a light that provided hope for the desperate situation of the workers. It meant the opportunity to improve the labor conditions, earn better salaries and short days of labor, to be recognized as legitimate unions and organizations, and to undermine the intervention of the employers in their affairs.<sup>26</sup>

According to the author, several things impeded the full implementation of the NRA on the Island, disappointing thousands of workers. One of the most important reasons that explain why the regulatory initiatives of the NRA did not succeed was the discontent of workers toward their leadership over salaries. The leadership of the Socialist Party supported a rise in salary lower than the one approved in the United States, whose purpose was the support of local business and the maintenance of an elusive “industrial peace.”<sup>27</sup> In the long term, as Silvestrini points out, “the effects of the NRA and the FLSA on Puerto Rican laborers were limited.”<sup>28</sup>

César Rey follows Silvestrini’s political approach, adding some important insights about how the Socialist leadership of the Coalition enacted social legislation that benefited the working class in an effort to preserve their political alliance with the republicans.<sup>29</sup> Rey points out that the New Deal represented a dilemma for the different parts of the Coalition. The Republicans represented the most conservative and pro-business sectors in the country, and, at the same time, the Socialists were looking for the vindication of their rights as workers. At first glance, these two goals were irreconcilable and pushed the Socialist sector to decide between defending the rights of the workers or preserving its political power after thirty years of continuous struggle to obtain it. This impossibility made the New Deal a threat to the integrity of the Coalition and, in the long term, an obstacle to any kind of support by local political power. On many occasions, according to Rey, the socialists attempted to approve conciliatory legislation to please both parts of the alliance. In order to do so, the Coalition presented alternative legislation requesting loans for the different New Deal agencies to finance local infrastructure projects and to establish quasi-public agencies to administer the different New Deal programs.<sup>30</sup> The Coalition also enacted social legislation based on the reforms brought by the New Deal in housing



and agriculture. These initiatives attempted to establish agricultural cooperatives and to construct housing units for workers. Ultimately they were discarded due to Republican opposition. Other initiatives sought worker's life insurance, unemployment legislation, and better working conditions. The analysis of Silvestrini and Rey successfully describes the political impact of the New Deal labor legislation on working-class organizations during the 1930s; it does not, however, explore other forms of impact. How did rank and file workers perceive the New Deal? In what ways did the benefits brought about by the New Deal's labor legislation transform their daily lives? These are questions that remain to be answered. They open other angles to further research about the Puerto Rican working class of that period.

Other studies have also focused on the impact of the New Deal labor legislation on the Puerto Rican working class and local politics. Following Rey's and Silvestrini's arguments, the *Taller de Formación Política* (Workshop of Political Education) (TFP) adds another dimension to this debate: the use of the New Deal labor legislation to strengthen the colonial control of Puerto Rico by the United States. Their studies, *Huelga en la Caña* and *No estamos pidiendo el cielo*, provide an analysis of the impact of the New Deal's labor policies on the Puerto Rican working class.<sup>31</sup> Despite the contributions of TFP to a better understanding of the impact of the New Deal labor legislation in Puerto Rico, their analysis overlooks and misinterprets some important elements that characterized this important period. It overemphasizes the New Deal labor legislation as an imperialist strategy intended to strengthen the colonial rule of the United States over Puerto Rico, a position that is highly questionable. It is difficult to believe that the extension of the NRA and the FLSA, as well as other New Deal labor legislation initiatives, were simply extended to Puerto Rico as an imperialist strategy of domination. These measures were applied to every state and U.S. territory in a moment of national emergency. Moreover, in the early 1930s the United States possessed an unchallenged colonial rule over the Island, making it even more difficult to believe the use of the NRA as an additional instrument for colonial domination. Another area of weakness in the TFP analysis concerns the role played by labor bureaucracies, Puerto Rican workers, and U.S. officials in the implementation of the New Deal labor policies. "American capital," "the working class," and the "labor bureaucracies" are represented as abstract and faceless agents. Such an approach impedes us a full appreciation of how the Puerto Rican working class conceived the New Deal.

In the case of Puerto Rico, the New Deal has been regarded as a secondary actor in the context of the economically and socially chaotic times of the Great Depression. Mathews and Lewis emphasize—the political disruption that the New Deal programs caused in local politics and its contribution in ending an era of "imperial neglect." From the different perspectives of González, Quintero, Pantojas, Rabell, and Burgos, the New Deal in Puerto Rico is presented as the direct predecessor of the populist development projects established in Puerto Rico by the PDP during the 1940s. Labor scholars such as Silvestrini, Rey, and the TFP focus on the New Deal Labor legislation and the impact that it had on local politics and the Puerto Rican working class. All these works have studied the presence of the New Deal from different angles, contributing to a better understanding of its programs in Puerto Rico during the 1930s. However, this scholarship has underestimated the presence of the PRERA in Puerto Rico as a New Deal agency. The PRERA has been traditionally overshadowed by the

PRRA. Almost all these scholars considered the PRRA as the true representation of the New Deal policies in Puerto Rico, underestimating the impact of the PRERA on Puerto Rican society.<sup>32</sup>

### **The PRERA as a Development Project**

By 1933 the colonial model established by the United States in Puerto Rico in 1898 had begun to show signs of deterioration. Moreover, political unrest represented in the activities of the Nationalist Party arose throughout the Island, questioning the legitimacy of the U.S. presence. The arrival of the Great Depression also added hardships and widespread misery to the already deteriorated living conditions of thousands of Puerto Ricans. In the midst of all these hectic changes, the first New Deal reforms began to arrive by mid-1933. Puerto Rican and U.S. scholarship agrees that the extension of the New Deal policies to Puerto Rico and the implementation of the PRERA programs constituted limited policies subordinated to political opportunism and excessive bureaucratic control that did little to confront the serious economic and social problems experienced on the Island by the 1930s. These historiographic narratives tend to obscure other possibilities that concede that the PRERA had a more profound and decisive impact in its attempt to construct a new political relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States.

I maintain that the PRERA embodied in its diverse programs a well-articulated discourse of modernity that operated on a cultural and discursive level on the Puerto Rican society of the 1930s. This perspective escapes the traditional historiography that privileges the political events that affected this New Deal agency and its performance on the Island. Thus, this article suggests an alternative approach to such perspectives by demonstrating how the management and implementation of the modern discourse contained in the PRERA policies allowed the United States to re-think the parameters of its colonial regime in Puerto Rico. Thus, the PRERA, far more than being a short-term policy of emergency help, a strategy of imperial domination, or an initiative of the Roosevelt administration to provide temporary relief to a needy territorial possession on the verge of economic disaster, constituted a carefully crafted project of development that embodied a technology of domination over the colonial subjects, allowing the United States to establish new principles of government in Puerto Rico during the 1930s.

This work examines the implementation of a regime of representation by the American new dealers, the first step in establishing a New Deal order on the Island, and the complex bureaucratic structure of the PRERA. First, I focus in the establishment of such a regime of representation before the implementation of the PRERA in Puerto Rico. In order to guarantee the success of the development initiatives brought by the PRERA, U.S. authorities assigned to the Island had to develop a powerful discourse of modernity to convince broad sectors of Puerto Rican society to accept these projects as a chance to transform their daily lives and material conditions. Second, to understand the transformation of the PRERA in the context of a potential development project, it is necessary to map out the initial steps of other New Deal programs, such as the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) and the National Recovery Administration (NRA). Previous historical narratives have offered a scattered view of the implementation of the New Deal in Puerto Rico throughout the 1930s. The efforts to establish these programs on the Island can provide us with a point of departure necessary to understand the early origins of the PRERA. Third, in order to provide a context in which to situate the PRERA, this work focuses on the early

emergence of this agency and its complex bureaucratic structures. The complex and extensive organization of its programs demonstrated that it was more than an emergency relief agency. Its bureaucratic organization sought to reach almost every aspect of Puerto Rican society. The organizational structure of the PRERA reflected the basis of the development project envisioned by the agency and the Roosevelt administration. In its bureaucratic units we can follow the areas of relevance and interest that Americans, with the help of a local intelligentsia, tried to articulate in a potential modernizing project for the social and economic development of Puerto Rico in the initial years of the 1930s.

### **The Politics of Representation**

In the early stages of the implementation of the New Deal, Americans and elite sectors of Puerto Rican society sought in its initiatives an opportunity to bring progress and modernity to a struggling territorial possession. In order to accomplish such objectives, U.S. metropolitan authorities, with the close cooperation of Puerto Rican professional sectors, had to portray the desperate socioeconomic conditions of Puerto Rico prior to the establishment of the PRERA. The goal was to create a new “regime of representation.” By the phrase “regime of representation” I mean a strategy in which a developed country creates a representation of poverty and misery of an undeveloped country with the purpose to implement a series of developmental initiatives based on what is “better” for the economic and social reconstruction of this less developed country. In the case of 1930s Puerto Rico, the representation of poverty and misery was crucial in the justification of the decision to establish developmental initiatives offered by the United States. This idea of a regime of representation can certainly be applied to Puerto Rico as a preamble for the establishment of the PRERA developmental programs. Prior and during the implementation of the PRERA, U.S. investigators were sent to the Island in an effort to create a messianic image of the New Deal initiatives proposed by the United States. The articulation of this regime of representation also contributed to convince Puerto Ricans, regardless of class, of the necessity of a development initiative to “save” the Island from the chaos caused by the Depression and also to stop any potential social dissatisfaction with the U.S. colonial rule. This regime of representation operated at a discursive level, providing the necessity, the demand, the acceptance, and legitimization of the PRERA presence by the Puerto Ricans. The representation of the PRERA as a development project that would provide prosperity to Puerto Rico was a concept meant to ease and expand the political domination of the United States over this “un-incorporated” territory, transforming its former image of a distant colonial power to a regulative State concerned with the daily problems of a population deeply stricken by the Depression and widespread poverty.

This concept of representation is of great importance in formulating an interpretative model that would make sense of the articulation of a development project by industrialized nations on undeveloped countries. Powerful nations became the ultimate sources of knowledge and truth, the only ones entitled to decide (and impose) what is best for the people under their political control. One of the pioneers of the study of these complex processes is Edward Said. Since the early 1970s, Said has been studying the multiple ways in which Europeans have represented oriental people under their political hegemony. This process, called by the author “Orientalism,” has had remarkable influence on the study of colonial and post-colonial

history of the countries under the hegemony of European nations. Said describes Orientalism as a strategy that establishes the principles by which people who do not belong to the European establishment are categorized, managed, and governed. It is a way to establish the “otherness” of the people under the rule of the Europeans and justify the exercise of power over them.<sup>33</sup>

Said’s approach to explain how “first world” countries create an image about the countries under their economic and political orbit is seminal in understanding how the regime of representation, established by U.S. New Dealers and the Puerto Rican political and professional elite, operated on the Island in the early 1930s. Said’s analysis of the meaning of Orientalism can be readily extrapolated to a definition of development. As Orientalism, development can be seen as an intellectual construction that dictates, defines, authorizes, and implements what is or not “progress” to the people who are supposed to receive benefits. As we will see, U.S. authorities articulated and imposed through the PRERA an idea of development that was supported by the local elite and broad sectors of the subaltern population. Thus, the PRERA represented a depository of technical and organizational knowledge, an institution able to transform the economic calamities of a poor Caribbean territory.

The thesis of anthropologist Arturo Escobar helps to contextualize within Latin America Said’s analysis concerning the influence of authoritarian institutions with the power of dictate the problems, needs, and even the solutions of the subject under their jurisdiction. Taking Colombia as a case study, Escobar has devoted his investigative efforts to demonstrate how the development programs proposed by “first world” nations have failed to improve the socioeconomic conditions of these countries while they have at the same time exercised political domination upon them. Escobar’s analysis suggests that any regime of representation has to be constituted by three elements:

The forms of knowledge that refer to it and through which it comes into being and is elaborated into objects, concepts, theories, and the like; a system of power that regulates its practice; and the forms of subjectivity by this discourse, those through which people come to recognize themselves as developed or underdeveloped.<sup>34</sup>

Escobar’s definition of the regime of representation is important to understand the origins of the development rationale behind the PRERA policies. A new set of theories and practices and a regulative institution were seen by PRERA officials as necessary to improve the detrimental conditions of the Island. The agency envisioned for that task was the PRERA. Crucial to the representation of the PRERA as a development initiative was the attempt to establish, among Puerto Ricans, a difference between those who were developed and the undeveloped. The socioeconomic conditions of Puerto Rico at the eve of the 1930s were deplorable. Thirty-two years of a one-crop economy sent into abject misery thousands of Puerto Rican families. The PRERA offered hope to the Island population, which desired to improve material conditions. It is no wonder, then, that documents containing the particular views of the people depict the PRERA as an institution that had considerable and positive impact in their lives. The once far-off and indifferent metropolitan State suddenly demonstrated concern about their citizens in the Caribbean. Soon progress was identified with the intervention of the metropolitan

State, extending the regulative power of the United States and making its colonial presence more tolerable to Puerto Ricans.

The articulation of this regime of representation was possible thanks to the active participation of the U.S. New Deal officials assigned to the Island in the early 1930s. The discourses produced from the visits, examinations, writing reviews field trips, personal documents, and publications by New Dealers such as Rexford Tugwell, Alan Johnstone, and Robert Watson are seminal in helping us to understand how a regime of representation was able first to shape opinion and later establish the bases of the PRERA's development project. The arguments of these New Deal officials significantly contributed to the construction of a harsh image of the Island, whose only means of overcoming its precarious social and economic conditions depended on the scientifically constructed and modern programs brought by the PRERA.

Among the Americans who visited Puerto Rico in the early 1930s was Robert Watson. Watson was an examiner from the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), sent to Puerto Rico by Harry Hopkins to report the economic and social conditions of the Island.<sup>35</sup> Watson pointed out that the Depression hit the sugar industry hard in Puerto Rico; the Island's economy depended on sugar. He was impressed by the high volume in the production of sugar and the imports of foodstuffs, the high rate of unemployment, and the absence of gardens or land plots to supplement the peasant diet. One of Watson's most revealing comments was about the large number of blacks in Puerto Rico. Watson was clearly alarmed because of the proportion between blacks and whites in the Island.

The proportion of black and white population is unknown in Puerto Rico, the census data to the contrary outstanding. It is generally understood that most white families, with a residence of over a generation in Puerto Rico, have a black strain in their family lives, more or less pronounced; estimates of the proportion vary from two-thirds to 95 percent black. Many of the white race, attributing their ancestry to the Spanish nationality and with distinct Latin complexion, are in reality very largely Negro. These factors have contributed very largely to the lax of social standards, which are ever present in the Island.<sup>36</sup>

Watson's analysis about the racial composition of the average Puerto Rican clearly demonstrates his racial bias. Even the white elite is not saved from Watson's racial contempt. According to this U.S. bureaucrat, the white inhabitants of the island were "stained" with black blood in their veins. According to Watson, the Depression or the colonial policies implemented in the Island since 1898 were not valid reasons to explain its chronic socioeconomic problems. Instead, the racial composition of Puerto Ricans is the cause of "lax social standards" as the origin of its social problems. According to Watson,

Family customs and traditions of Puerto Rico are distinctly unique. The husband of the family may live with his wife for several years and very suddenly break off the family obligation, and start another family with no legal or moral responsibility for the first family, even though there may be five or six children. This family situation has



contributed largely to the social and economic difficulties of the island, and has a definite bearing on the administration of relief, because it is often very difficult to check names in the listing of applicants for relief in order to be sure there is no duplication.<sup>37</sup>

For Watson, the alarming numbers of births and the low mortality rates represented a lethal combination that contributed to the fragmentary nature of the typical Puerto Rican family. Following the logic of his analysis, all Puerto Rican families lived a precarious existence with a father who continuously deserted his obligations and undermined the society's familiar institutions. As Watson suggested, the absence of a social commitment or moral considerations made virtually impossible the implementation of the relief administration to provide assistance for the needy. The lack of "solid family values" and racial diversity constituted the cause of the detrimental social and economic conditions of Puerto Ricans. In other words, Puerto Ricans were the ones responsible for their own fate. Even the social order that the metropolitan State tried to implement in the Island throughout the Emergency Relief Administration was threatened by the lack of family planning. These moral and racial problems had to be resolved by the "civilized" intervention of the United States and the implementation of modern programs that were supposed to guarantee progress and better living conditions. Watson's solutions for Puerto Rico relied on the extension of the reconstruction programs in the areas of housing, industry, agriculture, and health programs.<sup>38</sup> In sum, Watson represented the Island as a place in which race and moral decay constituted the base of most of Puerto Rico's problems.

Alan Johnstone, field representative of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), echoed the representational model articulated by Watson.<sup>39</sup> In his description of Puerto Rico, Johnstone comments on the precarious conditions of its agriculture and the backwardness of its industries. Similar to other investigators, Johnstone concluded that the only profitable industry in the Island was sugar, controlled by absentee landlords. Nonetheless, Johnstone recognized that the Island had some peculiarities that made more complex the implementation of an emergency help program. Referring to Puerto Ricans, he argued,

The people are alike to the Latin peoples of the world, and their mode of living and reactions are in many respects unlike those of the people of the continental United States. It is, therefore, impossible and impracticable to inaugurate a system of social work and relief administration of the exact pattern as that which prevails in the States.<sup>40</sup>

As Watson, Johnstone argues that because Puerto Ricans and Latin Americans were different from the people living in the United States, it was virtually impossible to implement a federal aid system in those countries similar to the one existing in the United States. The metropolitan State reserved for itself the right to authorize or condemn the institutional policies to be implemented to the peoples under their political domination. Puerto Ricans and Latin Americans were represented as backward individuals because they were "different" from people in the United States. Therefore, special institutions had to be created to deal with these populations in an effort to guide them in the ways of a modern, progressive,



and civilized country. Johnstone portrayed the United States as an arbiter able to authorize and legitimize the institutions that are “good or bad” for the welfare of Puerto Ricans. Thus, Johnstone represented the people of the Island as infantile individuals who needed the guidance of the metropolitan State in order to bring order and prosperity to their country.

The representation of Puerto Ricans as people who needed guidance and the United States as the institution that would authorize what was correct for them was echoed by Rexford Tugwell. In the mid-1930s, Tugwell was commissioned by President Roosevelt to conduct a study about the possibilities of the establishment of a colonial tropical policy for the U.S. Caribbean possessions. For Roosevelt and Tugwell the tropics became the ultimate arena in which to prove the virtues of the American exceptionalism. The articulation of such policy was important in implementing all the knowledge necessary to govern and exercise economic domination over tropical possessions. One of the most important aspects of Tugwell is to recognize the failure of previous colonial policies applied on tropical possessions. In his report to President Roosevelt, Tugwell recognizes the failure of the colonial model established by the United States in 1898:

We are likely to try to play lady bountiful against the unanswerable bounty of the tropics and to attempt to Americanize people who are entirely different from North Americans. However, we can certainly make a start by ending our own exploitation of tropical inexperience and helplessness. We should direct our policy in the interest of encouraging a more effective and fuller use of the resources; obtaining a more equitable distribution of the income from the resources; and creating financial and economic reserves with which to cushion shocks as hurricanes, earthquakes, and economic depressions. It is probable that effective first steps in this directions will have to assume the form of reorganizing and redirecting the various institutions and services (credit facilities, use of federal funds, and control of the resources of the island in general, for example) as most of these inhabitants of these regions have shown themselves reluctant to raise their individual standards of consumption above the point necessary to support life with a minimum effort.<sup>41</sup>

Arguing that the United States had to put an end to its own exploitation on the tropics, Tugwell recognized the failure of the Americanization project established in 1898. He clearly argued that Puerto Ricans were different from North Americans. Consequently, the metropolitan State had the responsibility to provide a new economic model based on healthy credit and financial institutions and assume a “rational” control of the Island resources. Based on a Keynesian rationale, Tugwell assumed that such changes in Puerto Rican economy would arouse a rate of consumption necessary to “support life with a minimum effort.”

The “enlightened” approach for a policy in the tropics did not exclude Tugwell from creating an “uncivilized” representation of Puerto Ricans. According to Tugwell, Puerto Ricans loved their way of life and were not interested in bringing substantial changes to it. As Tugwell explained:

It is useless and stupid to attempt to do anything for such people without being positive that it is what they really want. Increased wages in the centrals (sugar refineries) have, in many cases, simply led to the men working half time, as a family can be supported on with three or four dollars a week. Increased wages in the needle industry have simply led to a higher birth rate. Their owners are using model houses for tobacco barns. Families removed from the unsanitary huts in the mangrove swamps and settled on subsistence homesteads have promptly returned to the mangrove swamps. The general belief is that the Puerto Ricans would rather have more children than increase their standard of living. Here is a condition, which calls for very slow and wise action on our part rather than indulgence in preconceived charities.<sup>42</sup>

Tugwell's solution for this situation is to "adapt" ourselves to the habits and desires of the Puerto Ricans.<sup>43</sup> According to the New Dealers previously mentioned and to Tugwell, the contempt of Puerto Ricans toward family values, good housing, and a Protestant ethic of work made them unworthy and unprepared to assume the modernity and the progress brought by the metropolitan state. Their cultural backwardness constituted an obstacle for progress and prosperity. As an alternative, Tugwell proposed a new and interesting policy:

For the lesson of the tropics is the object of the New Deal: a more abundant life. If we, by social control of wealth can confer upon our people a similar accessibility to wealth to that which is enjoyed by the inhabitants of these islands, we may re-establish a civilization in which women do not fear to bear children and men do not hesitate to undertake family responsibilities. Without that our race is doomed to degeneration and decay.<sup>44</sup>

The Tugwellian idea of the New Deal in Puerto Rico was conceived as a strategy to vindicate the awkward colonial policies of the United States toward Puerto Rico after decades of U.S. political domination. For the first time since 1898, a U.S. official recognized that the metropolitan State had the responsibility to provide the same access of wealth to Puerto Ricans as the one enjoyed by "our people," i.e., continental Americans. According to Tugwell, the failure of such responsibility would lead to the eventual degeneration and decay of the U.S. civilization, a devastating blow to the discourse of American exceptionalism. Tugwell's New Deal project also embodied the premises of a crusade to rescue Puerto Ricans from their moral backwardness. The application of the messianic policies of the New Deal would contribute by vanquishing Puerto Rican women's fear of bearing children and by teaching Puerto Rican men to take responsibility for their family. This meant that the New Deal policies transcended their economic goals, becoming the arbiter of morality and good customs throughout the implementation of their developmental programs.

The model of representation previously examined is correct in its assessment of the difficult economic conditions experienced in the Island in the early 1930s. The representation models presented by Watson, Johnstone, and Tugwell go beyond simple economic considerations. For Watson and Johnstone, racial and moral issues contributed in the articulation of a representation model that saw Puerto Ricans as

individuals responsible for their own economic and social problems. For them, Puerto Ricans were irresponsible people condemned by racial heritage and strange family practices. Despite Tugwell's sharing of this discriminatory representation about Puerto Ricans, he was able to propose a new approach to the problem. This approach was based on the implementation of an enlightened colonialism that demonstrated tolerance toward the Puerto Rican culture and at the same time assumed the responsibility to Puerto Ricans as "our citizens of the Caribbean." In any case, the metropolitan State was represented as an omnipotent institution, with the authority to determine what was right or wrong for their citizens in the Caribbean.

In sum, Puerto Ricans on the eve of the implementation of the PRERA programs were portrayed as needy creatures waiting for the benefits of an enlightened State to bring progress and modernity in an effort to transcend their racial and moral decay. Once the islanders learned about the "blessings" of progress and modernity they would be ready to occupy their place within the American union.

### **The New Deal in Puerto Rico**

At the same time that the organizational and funding bases of the PRERA were extended to Puerto Rico, other New Deal agencies reached the Island's shores at the beginning of the 1930s. However, previous historical narratives have constantly overlooked the existence of these agencies. In order to provide a general overview of how other New Deal agencies on the Island coexisted with the PRERA, I will devote the following pages to a succinct examination of the most important controversies that involved the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) and the National Recovery Administration (NRA). These bureaucratic units faced numerous logistical problems and legal controversies that caused their disappearance from the institutional scene or minimized their ability to solve the problems for which they were created.<sup>45</sup> In many cases, the controversies that these agencies experienced in the continental United States were inevitably inherited by their counterparts in Puerto Rico. In the particular case of Puerto Rico, these conditions were aggravated because the spirit of the legislation often overlooked the precarious and special conditions that the Island presented as a territorial possession.

The implementation of the AAA, which was approved by Congress in May of 1933, exemplifies this hectic scenario. The effects of this legislation began to be felt in Puerto Rico in the summer of 1933. Designed to raise the prices of agricultural products to the standards prevailing from 1909 to 1929, Title I of the legislation imposed a "processing tax" on agricultural surpluses and subsidized farmers for the destruction of crops and the maintenance of uncultivated tracks of land in an effort to avoid overproduction.<sup>46</sup> Such legislation affected Puerto Rico in two ways. First, consumers on the Island had to pay elevated prices since Puerto Rico imported a considerable amount of basic agricultural products from the United States, especially wheat, flour, rice, codfish, and meat; most of these products were subject to taxation as a result of the AAA legislation.<sup>47</sup> This process considerably impacted a low-income population already heavily struck by the Depression.<sup>48</sup> Second, Puerto Rican farmers were not covered by the benefits of the law because most of the products were not produced on the Island, but instead were imported, depriving them of the opportunity to be compensated by the federal funds.<sup>49</sup> The Governor of the Island at that time, Robert Gore, was among the people who complained about the implementation of the statutes of the AAA on Puerto Rico. According to Gore, the AAA legislation represented a "tremendous hardship to Puerto Rico" in terms of

its harmful effects on the Island's economy.<sup>50</sup> Attorney General Norman Thomings promptly responded to Governor Gore's concern by saying "that any tax imposed under the AAA would apply to the domestic processing of a commodity for export to Puerto Rico and also that there is no method by which Puerto Rico could be relieved of the possible effects of such tax, except by action of the Congress."<sup>51</sup> Despite the strong opposition of the business sectors and the U.S. governor, the statutes of the AAA were maintained in Puerto Rico.

Diverse sectors in Puerto Rican society feared that the implementation of the AAA would worsen the already devastated Island's economy. These sectors pleaded to local U.S. authorities and the United States Congress to exempt Puerto Rico from the legislation. The Chamber of Commerce and the Association of Industrialists were among these sectors. His President, of the Chamber of Commerce Filipo de Hostos, warned Governor Blanton Winship about the dangerous situation created on the Island as a result of the implementation of the AAA.<sup>52</sup> Hostos proposed to the AAA an amendment that would eliminate the processing tax imposed on local manufacturers for basic foodstuffs. In addition, Hostos warned the U.S. authorities about the harmful effects in the garment, fruit, and cotton industries.<sup>53</sup> The Association of Industrialists and its President, Lupercio Colberg, joined Hostos in his arguments of the potential problems posed by the AAA. As Colberg pointed out, the AAA caused a considerable reduction of the mercantile transactions and the production capacity of the country, the suppression of bank credit, and a reduction in general spending and personnel. Colberg demanded swift action in order to avoid a catastrophe that the government could not control, condemning one and a half million citizens to misery.<sup>54</sup> The AAA also attacked one of the pillars of the Puerto Rican economy during the 1930s: the sugar production industry. Because sugar did not qualify as a basic necessity according to the AAA standards, its production was subject to regulation.<sup>55</sup> In order to enforce the limitation of production, the President, in accordance with the AAA, proposed in January of 1934 the Costigan-Jones Act, a law aimed at the regulation of sugar production. According to the Costigan-Jones Act, the price of sugar would be stabilized, and a fair share of sugar production would be distributed in the form of quotas to the producers in the U.S. territories and possessions: Louisiana (beet sugar producers), the Philippines, Hawaii, Cuba, and Puerto Rico.<sup>56</sup> As a result, the Puerto Rican quota was reduced from 875,000 to 821,000 tons.<sup>57</sup>

Businessmen and U.S. officials were not the only ones concerned about the implementation of the Act. The Costigan-Jones Act was a subject of concern throughout the ranks of the labor organizations. For Prudencio Rivera Martínez, Labor Commissioner of Puerto Rico, and for Rafael Alonso Torres, Chairman of the Finance committee of the House of Representatives of Puerto Rico, the Costigan Act posed a threat to the stability of the Puerto Rican labor force.<sup>58</sup> According to these officials, the application of the Costigan Act would cause the dismissal of about 16,000 workers in the sugar industry.<sup>59</sup> To avoid this situation, Rivera and Alonso proposed a series of provisions, such as reassigning federal funds from other New Deal programs to pay wages to displaced workers, enforcing the statutes of the law forbidding child labor, and providing incentives for farms to diversify agriculture. They also suggested that the minimum wage for the following year (1935) be determined by the administration in an effort to avoid industrial "unrest."<sup>60</sup>

The impact of the Costigan Act was felt among all the sectors of Puerto Rican society involved in the sugar industry. To fight the implementation of this law,

U.S. officials and Puerto Ricans alike utilized the extension of the U.S. citizenship to Puerto Rico in 1917 as a strategy to defend the existing sugar quota production. These sectors thought that invoking the U.S. citizenship imposed upon them would result in a better chance to increase their production quota with respect to other foreign competitors. People such as Jorge Bird Arias, administrative employee of the Fajardo Sugar Company of Puerto Rico, demonstrated this strategy when he complained about the unfairness of the production quota assigned to Puerto Rico in relation to other U.S. possessions. According to Bird, Puerto Rico had been treated as the “Cinderella of the family.”<sup>61</sup> The Farmers Association of Puerto Rico complained about the imposition of the Costigan Act and its harmful effects on the Island’s sugar economy. As a basis of their argument, the Farmers Association accused the United States of considering Puerto Rico as a foreign country: “Puerto Rico is primarily opposed to this legislation because it is classed with and treated in the same manner as a foreign country. The Island feels that this bill does not accord it to the rights to which it is without question entitled as a community of American citizens.”<sup>62</sup> Puerto Rican sugar sectors did not hesitate in utilizing the U.S. citizenship to defend their interests. Thus, U.S. citizenship became a valuable strategy against the discrimination of the metropolitan State regarding the authorization of the sugar quotas. Even federal authorities in Puerto Rico complained about the implementation of the sugar regulation legislation, including Governor Blanton Winship: the governor argued that the implementation of such quotas would be affected by the arrival of a hurricane with a potential to disrupt the sugar quota.<sup>63</sup> Winship pointed out that, in the case of a hurricane, the “bill and the maximum quota that could be conceded to Puerto Rico would be unreasonably short because hurricane years were included in the estimated average production. This would aggravate unemployment.”<sup>64</sup>

Besides the potential threat posed by natural disaster as a deterrent for the imposition of the sugar quota, Winship did not hesitate to use the U.S. citizenship as a strategy to avoid the implementation of the Costigan law on the Island. Like the members of the Puerto Rican Farmers Association before, Winship pointed out that Puerto Ricans were U.S. citizens who worked their own cane fields, in contrast with the practice of Cuban producers who imported Jamaican and Haitian workers to their sugar fields.<sup>65</sup>

Some sectors had another perspective about the U.S citizenship and its use to defend the sugar industry. According to Aboy Martínez, President of the Association of Sugar Producers, the rise in prices proposed by the AAA was equivalent to a continuous rise in the prices of raw materials and foodstuffs as well as the reduction of labor hours and the salary raise proposed by the administration. As a result, if the Island was excluded from the policies of the AAA, it could gain temporary relief from the effects of inflation. In the long term, however, it would increase the harmful effects of a rise in the cost of living.<sup>66</sup> Martínez firmly believed that Puerto Rico had a responsibility to participate in the AAA legislation because of its “political” relationship with the United States. According to Martínez, Puerto Rico, as part of the United States, had the duty to respond positively to the initiatives of President Roosevelt in order to face the harmful effects of the Depression:



We do not believe that it is convenient for Puerto Rico not to cooperate with a national emergency program. We Puerto Ricans have a citizenship that compels us to struggle shoulder by shoulder with our fellow countrymen of the continent, especially in these times when it is necessary to reestablish the national normality.<sup>67</sup>

Martínez offered another perspective regarding the utilization of U.S. citizenship as a strategy to support and validate the sugar industry interests. For him, U.S. citizenship meant not a strategy to get a waiver from the sugar quotas but an opportunity to “struggle shoulder to shoulder with our fellow countrymen,” an opportunity to demonstrate to the United States the commitment of Puerto Ricans to the Roosevelt administration in its effort to overcome the terrible economic effects of the Depression. It is important to note how the implementation of the AAA made U.S. citizenship an important issue, to be used against the threat of legislation regarding local sugar interests. The controversies generated as a result of the implementation of the AAA in Puerto Rico allow us to appreciate how Puerto Ricans had multiple perspectives about the possible uses of their citizenship and how it can be used in their behalf regardless of their colonial condition.

Similar to the AAA, the NRA reflected the problems, confusions, and contradictions inherent in the experimental nature of the New Deal policies in Puerto Rico. Such confusions and contradictions were enhanced by the difficult situation of the Puerto Rican economy, the apathy of businessmen, low wages, and the peculiar situation of local politics. Many of the industries that epitomized the fragile island's economy, such as the garment and sugar industries, depended on low wages and onerous conditions of work to generate enough profit to compete in international markets and to guarantee their own existence.<sup>68</sup> To add more confusion to the situation, the arrival of the NRA coincided with one of the most intensive strike periods ever experienced in Puerto Rico's history.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, the NRA was implemented in the summer of 1933. Again, the Association of Industrialists assumed leadership in the articulation of a corporate front against the NRA. On July 10, 1933, the Association wrote to General Hugh Johnson, head of the NRA, telling him about the disastrous effects of the application of the NRA in Puerto Rico. According to Lupercio Colberg, president of the Association, Puerto Rican industries had the right to organize their own industries because the economic condition of the Island was different from that of the continental United States. The application of industrial codes by the United States, according to Colberg, would represent “the material destruction of our industries and will stop the progress of Puerto Rico as an industrial community.”<sup>70</sup> Colberg also appealed to the fact that Puerto Rico was the first Latin American market for the United States, and for this reason he had to consider the imposition of codes and practices by the United States to be an act of injustice that “will be satisfactory for the Americans but not to Puerto Rico considering the present conditions.”<sup>71</sup>

Perhaps the most significant impact of the NRA on the Island was noticed in the local political arena. The Socialist Party and the Free Federation of Labor, which represented the Island's workers, were allied with the Republican Party, an organization that represented the industrial and economic interests of a good portion of the dominant circles of Puerto Rican society. The NRA accentuated the antagonism among these political allies. On the one hand, the Free Federation of Labor was sympathetic to the labor legislation proposed by the Roosevelt



administration. On the other hand, as happened in the United States, the first sector that protested against this legislation was the business elite and corporate interests, prominent members of the Republican faction of the governing coalition. Meanwhile, the Free Federation of Labor supported the NRA unconditionally, especially section 7(a), which granted workers the right to unionize.<sup>72</sup>

The New Deal in Puerto Rico represented, at least in its initial period, a confusing, contradictory, and fragmentary mosaic that, instead of presenting hope for change, presented a continuity of the chaotic conditions brought by the Depression and a rapid deterioration of the colonial relationship with the United States. The confusion and impracticability of the initial New Deal legislation proved unsuccessful in solving the economic chaos of the Depression or improving significantly the living conditions of Puerto Ricans. This situation worsened in 1935, when the U.S. Supreme Court declared both the AAA and the NRA unconstitutional. To some extent, the uncoordinated New Deal initiatives represented through the AAA and the NRA strengthened the position of the PRERA as the only coherent and coordinated New Deal agency on the Island at the time. As a result, this agency absorbed and integrated other New Deal programs, especially the ones devoted to the distribution and coordination of public works and social assistance in the unemployed population of the Island.<sup>73</sup> One of the elements that contributed to the PRERA's structural cohesiveness was its careful planning and its capacity to encompass the functions of other New Deal agencies under one coordinated structure. This organizational rationale was in great part responsible for the way PRERA reached all sectors of the Island and had a considerable impact on Puerto Rican society throughout the 1930s.

### **The Deployment of Development**

In August 19, 1933, the PRERA was established as an operative extension of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) in Puerto Rico.<sup>74</sup> From the very beginning, James Bourne, the administrator of the newly formed agency, and most Washington New Dealers envisioned the PRERA as a bureaucratic unit that would provide the Island not only with work and food relief, but also with a comprehensive and feasible plan of development. The administrator's wife, Dorothy Bourne, shared that perspective, probably as a result of her experience as director of the local government program of social work.<sup>75</sup> The couple also had strong ties with the Roosevelts, a fact that contributed to the president being well informed of the new events concerning the agency.<sup>76</sup> As Tugwell argued in his report about the establishment of a tropical policy, the Bournes considered the application of this plan as an obligation toward their citizens in the Caribbean:

We assumed an obligation in 1898. In 1917, when we gave citizenship to Puerto Ricans this obligation was confirmed. If this means anything it means the establishment of American ideals and standards in education, in health and equal opportunities.<sup>77</sup>

The Bournes considered that the colonial policies implemented by the United States in Puerto Rico were in opposition to the ideals that made the U.S. exceptional among other colonial nations. Appealing to the fact that the United States had an obligation to the Island and its citizens, the Bournes justified the application of a complete and well-articulated program able to demonstrate that "American ideals"

were able to establish an exceptional model of developmental colonialism. By December 6, 1933, they proposed to the War Department a “constructive plan” for the rehabilitation of Puerto Rico.<sup>78</sup>

The plan, later called the PRERA, covered the areas of economy, health, education, taxation, labor housing, slum clearance, population, publicity, and even politics. Accordingly, the departments that constituted the PRERA were created along the following organizational lines: First, the core bureaucratic structures of the agency consisted of the following departments: Bureau of Social Service, Engineering Division, Division of Agriculture, and the Education Division. The second category offered logistical support to these core bureaucratic units. This category consisted of the Bureau of Accounts, the Personnel Division, and the Publicity and Safety Departments. The third category supported the other two with the data necessary to pinpoint the necessities of the agency operations and the establishment of an empirical rationale for future developmental projects. This category included the Research Bureau of Accounts and the Bureau of Statistics.

The agency in which the rest of the operational systems of the PRERA were based was the Bureau of Social Service.<sup>79</sup> The tasks performed by the Bureau were distributed in two areas: first, provide direct help to individuals, and second, recommend persons eligible to participate in the public works programs sponsored by the Civil Works Administration (CWA) or Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) or Public Works Administration (PWA).<sup>80</sup> Most of the personnel working under the Social Work Division did not possess a university degree in social work at the time the division started to operate in Puerto Rico. As a result, personnel with no university studies in the field were allowed to work as “aides,” especially in investigation and fieldwork.<sup>81</sup> The standard procedure in the processing of applicants consisted of completing an application requesting services from the division in their local town.<sup>82</sup> Once this step was completed, the local office of the division set a date for a home visit by two aides, who evaluated the conditions of the person or family that requested help. The evaluation of these social workers determined whether the family or person would be granted alimentary relief or assigned to public work if availability permitted. The Social Work Division constituted an agency of resources to the needy sectors of the Island’s population. The complex operation of the Social Service Division evidences the intricate bureaucratic net established by the PRERA in Puerto Rico. Far from constituting a distant institution, the Social Service Division represented a complex bureaucratic order with the purpose of examining, classifying, and designating the place of individuals within the society. The presence of this division, as part of the PRERA’s programs, suggests that the metropolitan State reserved for itself the responsibility of placing individuals within the occupational niches available in the Island’s job market and assign emergency help to the ones who needed it. This new image of the “welfare metropolitan State” certainly was the precedent for social service programs of the following decades, which were conceived to provide social services in urban and rural areas throughout Puerto Rico.

The Engineering (or Work) Division was another of the core agencies that made up the PRERA. Its agenda was directed at the development of the Island’s infrastructure, such as the construction of bridges, roads, sanitary systems, and dikes and the filling of lowlands.<sup>83</sup> To accomplish such a goal, the Work Division of the PRERA had the responsibility to distribute, organize, and determine the different engineering projects to be built on the Island.<sup>84</sup> Most of the funding assigned to the engineer division came from other New Deal agencies such as the CWA, PWA,

and other New Deal agencies.<sup>85</sup> The people who worked on the projects were chosen from lists provided by the Bureau of Social Work, based on the level of expertise and academic preparation required by the different constructions projects. From August 1933 to August 1934, the Work Division completed its projects with funds from the Civil Works Administration (CWA). Among the projects completed with CWA funds were the construction and reparation of bridges, insular and federal roads, public buildings such as schools and hospitals, athletic fields, and sewer disposal facilities. CWA funds also fought and isolated malaria, and disease sources such as stagnant water were eradicated. The works-engineering programs not only provided jobs for unemployed workers; their roads, bridges, and sanitary facilities also constituted a monument for the new regime of progress that the PRERA intended to establish in the Island. In the worst days of the Depression such projects demonstrated to thousands of Puerto Ricans the new image of a once distant metropolitan State. The impact of these projects on the Island's infrastructure would influence the traditional perspective in which Puerto Ricans conceived the federal institutions while at the same time constituting a reminder of the possibilities to change their material conditions.

The Educational Division was considered one of the pivotal offices of the PRERA. At the moment when the Educational Division started to function, the Puerto Rican Education Department was in the midst of one of its worst crises since the arrival of the Americans in 1898. About 370,000 children were not receiving education, the supervising system needed serious readjustments, and a grading system was needed to evaluate student performance and academic advancement. The insular Department of Education did not have enough resources to cover such areas.<sup>86</sup> This situation compelled the Educational Division of the PRERA to complement the efforts of the local Education Department to confront the serious problems of education of Puerto Rico. In its initial stages the agency concentrated its efforts on the construction of schools and the employment of teachers. For these purposes, the division also helped to provide statistical data to recruit and determine where to assign teachers specialized in fields of interest: home economic teachers, teachers for the bureau of extension and examination, athletic instructors, school directors, day care teachers, and urban teachers.<sup>87</sup> An aggressive plan to expand the physical facilities of the educational system was also proposed.<sup>88</sup> The division sponsored research projects designed to improve and develop reading and writing skills among the Island's students in coordination with the insular Department of Education, including the establishment of nursery schools and adult education programs for people who did not write or read.<sup>89</sup> Due to the enormous amount of work, the Educational Division was supported by a vast array of support and logistical offices within its own jurisdiction: Statistician Office, Bureau of Publications, and a Supervision Division. These offices provided the division with an empirical base on which to design and execute its programs and initiatives.<sup>90</sup> The Educational Division projects represented one of the pivotal divisions of the PRERA. Besides its contribution in terms of the physical expansion of the local educational system, the Educational Division had the responsibility of transmitting the modernizing discourses embodied in the PRERA programs. Their nurseries and adult education and vocational programs became arenas in which traditional cultural practices of the people were exposed to modern perspectives intended to ameliorate their daily problems.

The Agriculture Division completed the core agencies that constituted the PRERA. Organized in February 1934, this agency was in charge of the delicate task of facing the serious problems of an Island whose agricultural assets relied exclusively on a cash crop economy. Accordingly, its main objective was to design programs for the purpose of developing subsistence crops to complement the peasant diet and open new spaces to agricultural business.<sup>91</sup> One of the first problems attacked by this division was the need to deal with the excessive importation of basic foodstuffs to the Island. For this purpose, the Agricultural Division organized an extensive program of home gardens, in which “poor classes” would be able to plant their own food without depending on importation.<sup>92</sup> Another project proposed by the agricultural division was devoted to the production of community gardens, home canning of farm products, cooperative exchanges, and cotton production.<sup>93</sup> The establishment of the Agricultural Division of the PRERA illustrates the many contradictory situations created by colonialism. For decades the United States was reluctant to enforce the limitation of land devoted to the cultivation of sugar and privileged the importation of basic foodstuffs to Puerto Rico. By the 1930s PRERA planners realized that this situation was lethal for the material conditions of the average Puerto Rican. The rationale behind the activities of the Agricultural Division was designed to face this problem. This division sponsored an ambitious plan for the developing of subsistence crops in an effort to curb the damaging effects of a one-crop economy. Nevertheless, their efforts were limited because of their inability to transform institutional policies that did not allow the limitation of land for the cultivation of sugar.

Other divisions were created to provide logistical support to the diverse PRERA projects. Among those units are the Bureau of Accounts, the Personnel Division, and the Publicity and Safety Departments. The Bureau of Accounts had the difficult obligation of coordinating the complex financial transactions between the funds allocated by the federal government and the insular government.<sup>94</sup> The Accounting Department was crucial to the funding operations of the PRERA because of the complexity of the process and the added fact that all the funds coming from federal sources were deposited into the insular government treasury. Because of these particular circumstances, the PRERA appointed two of its accounting officials to speed up the payroll process of the different PRERA divisions, bureaus, and departments. The Department of Personnel was in charge of selecting and distributing the applications for jobs according to the social work department criteria. One of the most interesting aspects of this unit was its great interest in jobs in the white-collar sector. As of October 31, 1934, 8,300 applications were received for the following jobs: architects, bookkeepers, accountants, chemists, clerks, doctors, engineers, executives, foremen, health units, pharmacists, nurses, photographers, printers, inspectors of gasoline, typists, teachers, publicity men, watchmen, etc.<sup>95</sup> The impact of the PRERA, especially in the Island’s occupational field, was enormous. By 1930, the Puerto Rican labor force was constituted of approximately 500,000 members; of this total, the local government employed 11,500.<sup>96</sup> By August 1934, a total of 5,000 persons were employed by the PRERA in white-collar positions.<sup>97</sup> That means that the PRERA significantly contributed to expand the Island’s bureaucracy as a result of the implementation of its developmental programs. As a result the government became one of the largest employers in Puerto Rico, contributing to curb the unemployment rate during that period.<sup>98</sup>

The Safety Division of the PRERA also formed part of this logistical category. Organized on January 15, 1934, this unit was in charge of work protection regulations and health for the PRERA personnel throughout its bureaus and divisions. This division was also responsible for the distribution of printed material about safety procedures, the training of first aid through National Red Cross courses, and the coordination of workmen compensation with insular government authorities.<sup>99</sup> The Publicity Division was responsible for the distribution of information about the PRERA's activities and projects throughout the Island. Among the resources created for such a task were the weekly publication of the PRERA's newspaper, *La Rehabilitación*, the distribution and coordination of programs and recent news about the progress of the PRERA projects in local newspapers and on radio, and even the production of a short film about the agency.<sup>100</sup>

Other bureaucratic units of the PRERA were established to support the operation of the key relief units. These divisions provided the research and statistical knowledge by which other bureaucratic units of the PRERA, such as agriculture, work relief, and education, operated. The PRERA research bureau was one of the bureaucratic units designed for this purpose. According to this division, some of the reasons why the economy of Puerto Rico was in such a deplorable condition was the lack of knowledge of market conditions, indifference to local particularities, inability to comprehend details of competition, and failure to adapt projects to prevailing conditions.

The task of the Research Bureau was to examine the viability of the establishment of new industries and agricultural projects, to investigate the further development of already existing agricultural projects, to analyze the potential of recycling waste programs, and to make tables showing the comparative costs and profits per acre of various crops.<sup>101</sup> The Bureau of Statistics was also designed to establish a "knowledge field" to provide reliable statistical information for the establishment and implementation of the different PRERA projects. The statistical knowledge generated by this division constituted the basis of almost all the PRERA programs, especially the Social Work Division. As argued in the 1930s by journalist Carlos Mirabal, "the division of statistics offers to the Social Work Division a solid base, which provides the knowledge necessary to point out the problem areas where more help is needed and provides a scientific methodology to improve the social forces."<sup>102</sup>

The establishment of the Research and Statistics divisions represents another aspect of the new order that the PRERA wished to implement in the Island. Scientific and empirical knowledge became the tools that would guarantee the success of the developmental project envisioned by the PRERA. Once again the metropolitan State demonstrated itself as the supreme institution capable of transforming the harsh reality conditions of its Caribbean citizens.

Finally, PRERA officials realized that the success of the program greatly depended on the projection of its organization throughout the Island. Consequently, the distribution of the PRERA programs was coordinated through the senatorial districts in which Puerto Rico was divided. The agency also divided the Island into eleven regions, with one office in each town. Each "barrio," or neighborhood of the municipality, had its town head, usually a person in charge of coordinating and presenting community necessities to the local PRERA office. This complex organization of responsibility made possible the modernizing projects of the PRERA, and illustrates how its progressive discourse penetrated every corner of the Island.<sup>103</sup>



## Conclusions

Puerto Rican and United States historiography has regularly described the PRERA as a simple New Deal agency devoted to the coordination and distribution of emergency relief. As a result, the presence of the New Deal policies in Puerto Rico throughout the 1930s has been relegated to influence on the Popular Democratic Party (PDP) populist project or on the Puerto Rican working class. The use of the documentary sources to explain the presence of the PRERA on the Island has been excessively oriented to these areas, leaving behind numerous aspects that would provide a more integral perspective concerning the presence of this New Deal agency in Puerto Rico. Among the areas overlooked by traditional historiography are the chaotic circumstances facing New Deal programs such as the NRA and the AAA and the failure to study in a systematic manner the complexities of the bureaucratic organization of the PRERA. A revision of the documentary sources in regard to these previously mentioned areas would contribute to the clarification of the real and profound impact of the PRERA in Puerto Rican society. Perhaps the most critical of these overlooked areas is the participation of the New Dealers, who were responsible for the articulation of a regime of representation as a preamble to the establishment of the PRERA as a development project.

The discourse articulated by U.S. officials depicted a chaotic colonial society in which family values, economic infrastructure, and overpopulation were elements that had to be transformed to guarantee the success of any development programs on the Island. Watson, Hichock, Bourne, Tugwell, and Johnstone were facilitators who convinced not only Washington authorities, but also vast segments of Puerto Rican society, about the impact of the Depression and the perils that it posed to the preservation of the colonial regime. Their assessment of the Island's condition reflects Escobar's elements that make up a regime of representation. To save the Island from economic devastation, it was necessary to articulate a set of theories and practices first, so that the foundation for development projects and regulative institutions could be built. The establishment of the PRERA was the response for such concerns. This representational strategy also prepared the way to the acceptance of the PRERA by Puerto Rican society. Thus, the PRERA in Puerto Rico can not be seen as just an emergency relief program. The PRERA constituted both a well integrated and coordinated development plan aimed at transforming the deplorable conditions of the Island, as well as an incipient manifestation of a welfare state that in the long term transformed the colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico.

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*Float with caricature of Governor Rexford Guy Tugwell at the parade during the inauguration ceremonies for Governor Jesús T. Piñero (San Juan, September 1946). The sign on the float reads: "Rexford Guy Tugwell 1942 Bearer of the New Deal." Photo by Charles Rotkin. The Records of the Offices of the Government of Puerto Rico in the United States. Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.*

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See, Arturo Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico: a Political and Cultural History* (New York: W.W.Norton, (1983), 220-225.
- <sup>2</sup> Thomas Mathews, *Puerto Rican Politics and the New Deal* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1960). Other Puerto Rico general history texts mention the presence of the New Deal in the Island. See, Fernando Picó, *Historia general de Puerto Rico* (Río Piedras: Editorial Huracán, 1986), James Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico: Institutional Change and Capitalist Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), Blanca Silvestrini and Dolores Luque, *Historia de Puerto Rico: trayectoria de un pueblo* (San Juan: Ediciones Cultural Panamericana, 1988), Francisco Scarano, *Puerto Rico: cinco siglos de historia* (San Juan: McGraw Hill, 1993).
- <sup>3</sup> Mathews, *Ibid.*, 318.
- <sup>4</sup> Gordon Lewis, *Freedom and Power in the Caribbean* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1963).
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.
- <sup>10</sup> The Popular Democratic Party (PDP) was founded by Luis Muñoz Marín. The party professed a populist platform based on social justice, industrialization, and agrarian reform. It remained in power from 1940 to 1964. For a more complete analysis about the PDP see Arturo Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico A Political and Cultural History*, 256-307. For an excellent analysis of the origins of the PDP, see Rafael Bernabé, "The Prehistory of the 'Partido Popular Democrático': Muñoz Marín, the Partido Liberal and the Crisis of Sugar in Puerto Rico, 1930-35" (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York, 1989).
- <sup>11</sup> Emilio González, "La lucha de clases y la política en el Puerto Rico de la década del 40: el ascenso del PPD," *Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 22 (Mar-Jun 1980): 35-67.
- <sup>12</sup> Mathews, 191-247 The Chardón Plan of 1936 was a development initiative for the socioeconomic reconstruction of the Island. This initiative was sponsored by Washington and Puerto Rican politicians and intellectuals. See chapter six.
- <sup>13</sup> Angel Quintero Rivera, *Conflictos de clase y política en Puerto Rico* (Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1977), 58-59. Quintero argues that this sector was committed to the middle-class values represented by U.S. society as a way for advancement and progress within Puerto Rican society. Some segments of this middle sector of Puerto Rican society had important sugar interests in the U.S. sugar business. This native business elite sought the preservation of the economic order and was opposed to any political changes in the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico that might affect their profits.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-105. Sociologist Rafael Bernabé challenges Quintero's triangular theory. Bernabé argues that this triangle theory ignores the complex relationship between s, workers, and professionals during the first two decades after the American arrival. See Rafael Bernabé, *Respuestas al colonialismo en la política puertorriqueña* (Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1996), 125-143.
- <sup>15</sup> Emilio Pantojas, *Development Strategies as Ideology: Puerto Rico's Export-Led Industrialization Experience* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1990).
- <sup>16</sup> Pantojas, 35.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>18</sup> Leonardo Santana Rabell, *Planificación política: un análisis crítico* (Río Piedras: Editorial Cultural, 1989). Rabell defines planning as a human interest in forecasting the future using conceptual thinking; b) the belief that economic planning has to be

conceived as a social project; c) the recognition that capitalism is an obstacle to planning because the state and its bureaucratic apparatus influence the behavior of the different economic units in an attempt to provide integrity and rationality to functions of the global social system; and d) and the awareness that planning initiatives respond to political and ideological interests.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>20</sup> Nilsa M. Burgos, *Pioneras de la profesión de trabajo social en Puerto Rico* (Hato Rey: Publicaciones Puertorriqueñas, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 76-78.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>23</sup> For details about the Coalition Party, see chapter 3 of this dissertation.

<sup>24</sup> Blanca Silvestrini, *Los trabajadores puertorriqueños y el Partido Socialista* (Río Piedras: Editorial Universidad, 1979), 11.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> César Rey, "Parlamentarismo Obrero y Coalición 1932-1940," in *Senado de Puerto Rico: ensayos de historia constitucional 1917-1992*, ed. Carmen Raffuci, Silvia Alvarez Curbelo, and Fernando Picó (Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1992), 140.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Taller de Formación Política, *Huelga en la caña 1933-34* (Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1982), 12; Taller de Formación Política, *No estamos pidiendo el cielo, huelga portuaria de 1938* (Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1988), 194-197.

<sup>32</sup> An interesting study about the representation of subaltern sectors during the 1930s in Puerto Rico is authored by Kelvin A. Santiago-Valles: "*Subject People*" and *Colonial Discourses: Economic Transformation and Social Disorder in Puerto Rico, 1898-1947* (New York: State University of New York State), 1994. Despite Santiago's interesting proposal, the presence of the New Deal is barely mentioned in his study.

<sup>33</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978.), 3.

<sup>34</sup> Escobar, Arturo. *Encountering Development: the Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 10.

<sup>35</sup> Memorandum from Robert Watson to Harry Hopkins, file 002, Papers of Harry Hopkins, February 7, 1934, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>39</sup> Report from Alan Johnstone to Harry Hopkins, August 17, 1933, file 002. Papers of Harry Hopkins, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Report on American Tropical Policy from Rexford Tugwell to President Roosevelt, Roosevelt Official Papers, Appointments 400, 1934, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>45</sup> By 1935, both agencies were declared illegal by the United States Supreme Court. See Basil Rauch, *The History of the New Deal* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1963), 191-222.

<sup>46</sup> Memorandum for the Secretary of War from Creed F. Cox, October 20, 1933. "Agricultural Adjustment Administration and Federal Farm Board," RG 350, National Archives, Washington D.C.

47 Many Puerto Ricans feared that the increase in the prices of basic foodstuffs would condemn thousands to hunger. As explained by the Puerto Rican lawyer Ruiz de Valle in a letter to President Roosevelt: "The reason what I'm writing to you is the outrageous and incredible rise in the products of basic necessity. In the last years, our people have not had too much to eat but at least they have had something because of the low prices of the food. The rise in prices will force us to the very limits of our acquisitive power." Letter From Jose Ruiz to Governor Beverly, Mar 11, 1933, Archivo Fortaleza AGPR, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

48 Letter from R. Carrión to Secretary Dern, May 11, 1934, Bureau of Insular Affairs, RG 350, National Archives, Washington D.C. According to Carrión, after the approval of the AAA, Puerto Ricans had to pay \$20 million more for articles of primary necessity than 10 years earlier.

49 Most necessary foodstuffs were imported by Puerto Rico because of the negative impact of the sugar industries on subsistence agriculture.

50 Letter from Governor Robert Gore to General Parker Chief, the Bureau of Insular affairs, August 3, 1933, RG 350, National Archives, Washington D.C.

51 Letter from Homer S. Cummings to President Roosevelt, September 29, 1933. FDR Official Papers, Appointments 400, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park New York.

52 "El presidente de la cámara de comercio de Puerto Rico analiza la ley de Ajuste Agrícola y expresa su opinión al efecto," *El Mundo*, 5 December 1933, 1.

53 Ibid., 1.

54 "Documento sometido por la Asociación de Industriales con respecto a la aplicación de la ley de ajuste agrícola en Puerto Rico," *El Mundo*, 29 November 1933, 1.

55 A bill to include sugar beets and sugar cane as basic agricultural commodities under the Agricultural Adjustment Act and for other purposes. February 12, 1934, Bureau of Insular Affairs, RG 350, National Archives, Washington DC.

56 Thomas Mathews, *Puerto Rican Politics and the New Deal* (Jacksonville: University of Florida Press, 1960), 131-135. The case of Cuba presents some particularities. As a result of the political instability caused by the fall of the Cuban President Gerardo Machado and the rise of Fulgencio Batista to power, the U.S. was reluctant to recognize the government of the latter. The United States, fearing the fall of the importation of U.S. products by the Cubans, eased the importation tax on Cuban sugar to preserve the profits of that market. Puerto Rican producers felt betrayed by such policies and argued that as U.S. citizens they deserved preference in the sugar markets.

57 Letter from Prudencio Rivera Martínez to the Advisory committee of the Secretary of Agriculture, May 9, 1934, Bureau of Insular Affairs, National Archives, RG 350, Washington D.C.

58 According to Martínez and Alonso, 125,000 workers in Puerto Rico were engaged in sugar cane cultivation. Memorandum from Prudencio Rivera Martínez and Rafael Alonso to the Policy Committee Advisory to the Secretary of Agriculture, May 9, 1934, RG 350, National Archives, Washington D.C.

59 Ibid., 2-3.

60 Ibid.

61 Letter from Jorge Bird Arias to Governor Blanton Winship, June 2, 1934, RG 350, National Archives, Washington D.C.

62 Letter from José L. Pesquera of the Farmers Association of Puerto Rico to Secretary of the War Department George Dern, April 24, 1934, RG 350, National Archives, Washington D.C.

63 The point argued by Winship referred to the destruction of the sugar cane fields caused by hurricanes San Felipe in 1928 and San Ciprián in 1932. These hurricanes affected the production of sugar for the next two years. Winship's concern resided in the

possibility that the sugar quota assigned to Puerto Rico could not be met due to the impact of these hurricanes on the sugar crop.

<sup>64</sup> Cablegram from Governor Winship to the Department of War, April 23, 1934, RG 350, National Archives, Washington D.C.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> “Aboy Benítez dice que si se nos excluyese de la ley de ajustes agrarios sería crítica la situación del comercio y pequeñas industrias,” *El Mundo*, 4 December 1933, 1. In the final version of the Act, the Puerto Rican quota was trimmed to 803,000.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Mathews, 122-126. In the long term, an agreement was reached in the garment industries with the establishment of a differential salary, which meant that workers were paid less than in the states in order to preserve the very existence of this industry in Puerto Rico.

<sup>69</sup> In a letter to Stephen Early, Boaz Long (later appointed as Ambassador to Colombia) wrote about the experiences he had, with strikes on the docks, with sugar cane workers, and with the San Juan chauffeurs as a results of a rise in price in gasoline just a few days after his arrival. He was particularly impressed with the situation in the sugar cane strike: “for some days there has been a strike at one of the largest sugar mills, which look serious. If unsettled it might spread and end in tragic losses to the labor of this island. Every effort is being made to settle it.” Letter from Boaz Long Administrator of the NRA in Puerto Rico to Stephen Early, Jan 5, 1934, FDR official papers, Appointments 400, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

<sup>70</sup> “La Asociación de Industriales se dirige al General Johnson,” *El Mundo*, 10 July 1933, 1.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Section 7<sup>a</sup> legalized the right of the workers to unionize. “El asunto de los códigos industriales será discutido,” *El Mundo*, 20 July 1933, 1.

<sup>73</sup> Many of the funding of New Deal programs included the NRA and AAA where directed to the PRERA offices.

<sup>74</sup> Report from Alan Johnstone to Harry Hopkins, August 17, 1933, 002 papers of Harry Hopkins, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

<sup>75</sup> “Hablando con Mr. James R. Bourne,” jefe de “Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration,” *El Mundo*, 29 October 1933, 1. James Bourne was born on April 6, 1897. He was graduated from Yale University and served as an artillery officer in World War I. From 1928 to 1929, Bourne worked as administrator of the Canning Company Brothers in Puerto Rico. His wife Dorothy Bourne was the director of the Social Service Office in Puerto Rico.

<sup>76</sup> No other program in Puerto Rico had experienced the constant monitoring of an American President since the U.S. took possession of the Island in 1898.

<sup>77</sup> Letter from James Bourne to Harry Hopkins, October 26, 1933, RG 69, FERA Central files, State series, March 1933-36, National Archives, Washington D.C.

<sup>78</sup> Report from James Bourne to President Roosevelt “A constructive plan for Puerto Rico,” December 6, 1933, RG 350, National Archives, Washington D.C.

<sup>79</sup> PRERA, First Annual Report, August 1933 to August 1934, Library of Congress, Washington DC, 1935, 27-33.

<sup>80</sup> This agency operated in Puerto Rico under the auspices of the PRERA. Due to a lack of funding, the CWA only lasted for the initial months of 1934.

<sup>81</sup> PRERA, First Annual Report, 28. The bureaucratic structure of the Bureau was extremely complex. In a broad sense, the Bureau comprised a central office, a district office, a local office, and offices in remote rural areas. A vast amount of aides were responsible for running a good part of the operations of the Social Work Division. Because of the limited number of professional social workers, many of these aides



occupied executive positions as District Directors. This particular circumstance allowed sectors of society (not necessarily coming from an upper-class background) to enter into the white collar occupational realm, allowing them some extent of social mobility. Most of these people could not be considered as elements of a displaced *hacendado* class seeking a new social niche in the colonial society. See Angel Quintero Rivera, *Conflictos de clase y política en Puerto Rico* (Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1976), 57-59.

<sup>82</sup> PRERA, First Annual Report PRERA, 27-28. Every town throughout the island had a representative of the social work division. The Island was divided into 12 districts, with five to eight municipalities in each one. Usually the largest municipalities housed the headquarters. The local offices have a town head in charge, who employed the aides to support the operations of the Bureau. The bureau also had suboffices in distant rural communities.

<sup>83</sup> PRERA, First Annual Report, 168.

<sup>84</sup> The projects of the Work Division were deployed throughout 14 districts and classified according to the priority and nature of the project (construction of a bridge, road, or sewer etc..).

<sup>85</sup> PRERA, First Annual Report, 37-61.

<sup>86</sup> PRERA, First Annual Report, 404-404. By 1933-34, the Department of Education had no other option but to close 132 rural schools. Of a total of 600,000 students, only 230,000 were taking classes. According to the PRERA, a total of 1,589 urban teachers and 3,600 rural teachers were needed to meet student demand.

<sup>87</sup> PRERA, First Annual Report, 409-416.

<sup>88</sup> The PRERA proposed a plan of \$4,000,000 for the construction of new schools during the period of 1934-35.

<sup>89</sup> Brief report of the program of activities of the Puerto Rico Emergency Relief Administration, March 1933-36, RG 69, FERA Central files, State series. National Archives, Washington D.C.

<sup>90</sup> PRERA, First Annual Report, 409-410.

<sup>91</sup> PRERA First Annual Report, 391. The bureaucratic structure of the agency was responsive to those needs. The division had a director and assistant director. It also had a chief general supervisor of agriculture in charge of the programs of community gardens, home gardens, urban gardens, entomology, plant pathology, reports, and correspondence.

<sup>92</sup> PRERA, First Annual Report, 385-395.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Administrative Set Up of the PRERA, FERA Central Files State Series, March 1933-36, RG 69, National Archives Washington D.C.

<sup>95</sup> PRERA First Annual Report, 524.

<sup>96</sup> James Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico: Institutional Change and Capitalist Development* (Princeton: University Press, 1986), 177.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Dietz, 136. By 1933, the unemployment rate in Puerto Rico was 24.9 percent.

<sup>99</sup> Administrative Set Up of the PRERA, FERA Central Files State Series, March 1933-36, RG 69, National Archives Washington D.C.

<sup>100</sup> "Informe general de la división de publicidad de la PRERA," *La Rehabilitación* 2, (Sep 1934): 5-7, Library of Congress Washington D.C.

<sup>101</sup> Brief report of the program of activities of the Puerto Rico Emergency Relief Administration, FERA Central Files State Series, March 1933-36, RG 69, National Archives, Washington D.C., 16.

<sup>102</sup> "La división de estadísticas y su importancia en la PRERA," *La Rehabilitación* 2 Mayo 1934, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>103</sup> PRERA, First Annual Report, 9-13.