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INTRODUCTION:

Puerto Rican Politics in the United States

JOSÉ E. CRUZ, GUEST EDITOR

ALMOST TWO DECADES AGO, IN HIS FOREWORD TO JAMES JENNINGS AND MONTE RIVERA'S BOOK *PUERTO RICAN POLITICS IN URBAN AMERICA*, HERMAN BADILLO LAMENTED THE FACT THAT SCHOLARLY RESEARCH ON PUERTO RICANS IN THE UNITED STATES HAD FAILED TO PROVIDE A COMPREHENSIVE ACCOUNT OF THE COMMUNITY'S POLITICAL HISTORY. WRITING IN THE SAME VOLUME, ANGELO FALCÓN ARGUED THAT THE LIMITED AMOUNT OF RESEARCH ON THE HISTORY AND POLITICS OF PUERTO RICANS IN THE UNITED STATES WAS DUE TO THE COMMUNITY'S DISADVANTAGED SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS. IN HIS VIEW, CIRCULAR MIGRATION WAS ANOTHER LIMITING FACTOR. RESEARCH BY NON-PUERTO RICANS WAS PREVENTED, ACCORDING TO FALCÓN, BY THE IDEOLOGICAL BIAS IN MAINSTREAM SOCIAL SCIENCE AGAINST THE HISTORY AND POLITICS OF RACIAL-ETHNIC, WORKING-CLASS, AND RADICAL MOVEMENTS. PUERTO RICAN SOCIAL SCIENTISTS BORN AND RAISED IN THE UNITED STATES HAD NOT CORRECTED THE IMBALANCE DUE TO THEIR SMALL NUMBERS. AND FURTHER, IN AN ARGUMENT THAT BORDERED ON IN-GROUP XENOPHOBIA, FALCÓN ATTRIBUTED THE SPARSE SCHOLARLY WORK FOCUSING ON PUERTO RICAN HISTORY AND POLITICS IN THE UNITED STATES TO THE PREDOMINANCE AMONG RESEARCHERS OF ISLAND-BORN PUERTO RICANS.¹

The claims made by Falcón concerning ideological bias and nativity were never accepted outside a small circle of academics and activists. But they are worth mentioning only because changes within the social sciences and within the Puerto Rican scholarly community suggest that whatever truth there was to them before no longer holds. In other words, the explanation for the continued scarcity of scholarly research on Puerto Rican politics in the United States must lie elsewhere.

If the social-science-bias explanation made some sense in 1984, it makes little sense today. Works on racial and ethnic politics now proliferate. In the case of

Puerto Ricans, in 1998 a major university press published an important history of the community's radical movement of the 1960s and '70s.² Beyond the Puerto Rican case, even the American Political Science Association (APSA), the most conservative professional group within the discipline, has become more open to research on race, ethnicity, and politics. On the other hand, while the number of Latinos earning doctorates has increased systematically since 1976, their concentration has been in the humanities rather than in the social sciences.³ Thus, in the possible explanation of low outputs, the number of Latino social scientists continues to be a relevant factor.

At the 2002 PRSA conference, scholars from across the U.S. and Puerto Rico presented 171 papers in more than 40 panels. Of these, eight discussed Puerto Rican politics in the United States. Due to insufficient time for preparation, none of these papers could appear in this special issue. So there is more material that may be suitable for future publication. On the other hand, not only did a few of the papers deal with the question of politics, a mere 5 percent of the total, but only one was presented by a political scientist with a faculty appointment. This highlights the importance of enlarging the ranks of political scientists doing research on Puerto Rican politics. Scholars do not have to be Puerto Rican to carry out the task, but a larger cadre of Puerto Rican political scientists devoted to this work would not hurt.

Extant accounts of Puerto Rican politics in the United States reveal a complex process of incorporation riddled with exclusionary rules, partisan neglect, discrimination, persecution, and repression. For some participants the price of involvement has been as minimal as the loss of a job. For others it has been as high as imprisonment. Even though Puerto Ricans have been regarded as an apathetic electorate, at both the individual and community level they have confronted their socio-economic and political reality. While affirming their identity many have demanded the rewards that citizenship ought to provide to those who meet its obligations.

In the twentieth century, Puerto Rican politics in the United States unfolded in four interconnected yet distinct stages, marking periods of arrival and settlement, socio-cultural organization, bureaucratic and radical politics, and partisan as well as extra-partisan incorporation. During their initial years in the U.S., homeland issues held a prominent place on the agenda of Puerto Ricans both in and out of the political scene. From 1950 until the mid-1960s Puerto Rican groups focused on social and cultural issues. While the political force of nationalism declined during this period, at the beginning of the 1970s a new radical element began to show signs of relative strength. Sporadic instances of collective behavior gave way to bureaucratic political incorporation, beginning as early as the mid-1950s but crystallizing during the mid-1970s. This change was fostered largely by War on Poverty funds and by selected philanthropic organizations. Since 1980, electoral participation, grassroots advocacy, lobbying, and litigation have been the pillars of Puerto Rican politics in the United States. In the interstices of normality, movements for civil rights, for political empowerment, in solidarity with political prisoners and with the struggle of Vieques against the U.S. Navy, waxed and waned along with the ebb and flow of interest among mainland Puerto Ricans on Puerto Rico's colonial status.

Such is the framework that oriented the call for papers for this issue of *CENTRO Journal*. We wanted to assemble a collection of articles addressing questions about electoral participation; interest group mobilization; elite politics; redistricting; relations with African-Americans, with other minorities and with other Latinos; the role of women in politics; social movements; and the relationship between Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican politics in the United States. We were willing to consider work from all disciplines, articles guided by comparative or interdisciplinary approaches, and theoretical treatments as well. Works analyzing specific events, organizations, or individuals were also welcome.

The articles assembled here address some of the topics listed above. In fact, at the end of the process of preparation of this special issue we emerged with more questions and a more formidable research agenda than at its onset. Topics such as redistricting, inter-minority relations, and gender politics remain *en el tintero*. For their part, the articles raise a host of additional questions. Edgardo Meléndez rekindles the