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MOBILIZATION, PARTISANSHIP, AND POLITICAL PARTY DYNAMICS IN PUERTO RICO, 1917-1920s

Micah Wright

ABSTRACT

This article posits the significance of Selective Service and WWI for reshaping colonial administration and political party dynamics in Puerto Rico. It examines the aspirations of significant political groups on the island and details how each attempted to use the draft to further their agendas. During the war each of the three major political parties in Puerto Rico—Unionists, Republicans, and Socialists—struggled to claim the U.S. cause as their own in order to attract Washington's support for both a specific party and its favored solution to the status question. At the same time, the colonial administration and metropolitan authorities used the war to reshape the colonial relationship—but in contradictory ways. Rather than following the trend in the recent historiography that stresses the essential continuity in political practice after the war, this article highlights the changes that set the stage for the political and social upheaval of the 1920s.

Keywords: Puerto Rico, political partisanship, colonial studies, World War I, Selective Service

RESUMEN

Este artículo postula la importancia del Servicio Selectivo y la Primera Guerra Mundial para la remodelación de la administración colonial y las dinámicas interpartidistas en Puerto Rico. Examina las aspiraciones de los tres principales partidos políticos de la Isla —Unionistas, Republicanos y Socialistas— y detalla cómo cada uno utilizó el servicio militar obligatorio para promover sus agendas. Durante la guerra cada uno luchó para reivindicar la causa de los Estados Unidos como propia para atraer el apoyo de Washington hacia el partido y su alternativa preferida para solucionar el problema del estatus político. Asimismo, la administración colonial y las autoridades metropolitanas utilizaron la guerra para remodelar la relación colonial, pero en maneras contradictorias. Contrario a la tendencia historiográfica reciente que destaca la continuidad esencial en la práctica política después de la guerra, este artículo resalta los cambios que preparan el terreno para los trastornos socio-políticos de la década de 1920.

Palabras clave: Puerto Rico, partidismo político, estudios coloniales, Primera Guerra Mundial, Servicio Selectivo

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article défend l'importance du Service Sélectif et la Première Guerre Mondiale relatif à la restructuration de l'administration coloniale et les dynamiques de partis politiques à Porto Rico. Il analyse la volonté des principaux partis politiques de l'île (le Parti uni, les Républicains et les Socialistes), et présente comment les partis utilisent le service militaire obligatoire dans le but promouvoir leurs programmes politiques. Durant la guerre chacun de ces partis politiques se sont exprimés pour revendiquer la cause des États-Unis pour obtenir le soutien de Washington en faisant des propositions pour résoudre le problème de leur statu politique. Ainsi, l'administration coloniale et les autorités métropolitaines ont utilisés la guerre pour restructurer les relations coloniales, mais de façon contradictoires. Contrairement à la tendance de l'historiographie récente qui considère la continuité essentielle des pratiques politiques après la guerre, cet article explore les changements qui ont provoqué les crises politiques et sociales durant la décennie des années 1920.

Mots-clés : Puerto Rico, la partialité politique, les études coloniales, la Première Guerre Mondiale, Service sélectif

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On March 7, 1917, the Puerto Rican legislature gathered to hear Governor Arthur Yager report the passage of the Jones Bill, which granted Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship, and congratulate them for having “the privilege of holding the citizenship of the greatest, most progressive, and most liberal nation on the face of the earth” (*La Democracia*, marzo 8, 1917). Four months later, over 100,000 Puerto Ricans registered for Selective Service, which made them eligible for the U.S. military draft (Puerto Rico Office of the Adjutant General 1924:44-45). The correlation between citizenship and obligatory military service has complicated historians’ efforts to find consensus as to the meaning of World War I, either for Puerto Rico or the colonial relationship. Studies of the draft frequently reproduce a standard narrative of exploitation, with Puerto Ricans the objects of metropolitan policy decisions. Yet days after the extension of U.S. citizenship Antonio Rafael Barceló, President of the Puerto Rican Senate, cabled President Wilson to ask that Selective Service be extended to the island (Muñiz 1944:201). His offer came with an implicit string attached—one made explicit by a subsequent message from the Puerto Rican House of Representatives.

The House explained that the people of the island stood ready to contribute to the war effort “beneath the glorious flag of the United States,” but demanded in turn “the full extent of their rights to exercise their own government” (Rigual 1972:157). In other words, the proffered support was predicated on the extension of a greater measure of self-government than was provided by the Jones Act.

Much of the historiography treating WWI Puerto Rico is colored by the political debate concerning the ultimate status of the island. Several activist scholars present the bestowal of citizenship as a cynical ploy to conscript colonial soldiers for the war.¹ In contrast, military veterans and statehood advocates have evinced pride in Puerto Rican contributions to the war effort and loyalty to the United States.² Both interpretations portray the federal government as the principal actor, with Puerto Ricans either the victims or beneficiaries of U.S. policy decisions. But each underestimates the trepidation shared by the War Department and the governor’s mansion as they implemented the draft and the efforts of those Puerto Ricans who worked to ensure its success. More recently, scholars have simultaneously recovered Puerto Rican agency and minimized the significance of the war by positing an underlying continuity in political practice that both predated and outlasted this period.³ According to this construction, wartime politics are inseparable from those that came before and thus relatively unimportant for understanding subsequent events. A final, more ambivalent interpretation is advanced by Harry Franqui, who finds that Puerto Rican political support for the draft helped to cement the island’s loyalty and thus U.S. rule. However, he also contends that by the end of the war, “*criollo* leaders...had succeeded in wresting exclusive control over the nation-building project” from Washington (Franqui 2010:166).

This article seeks to contribute to this debate by examining the changes wrought by partisan politics during the war years. It begins by detailing the interests and strategies of the major contenders of the era—Washington and the colonial administration, as well as the Republican, Socialist, and Union Parties. It then examines the outcomes of these efforts in the years following the war. It asks how each party’s attempts to benefit from the draft affected insular politics and power dynamics between the island and Washington. Rather than following the trend in the historiography that highlights the continuity of political practice throughout the 1910s, I find that the war did mark a transformation in the party system and the colonial relationship. Like Franqui (2010), I find that mobilization allowed party leaders to elaborate alternate narratives which challenged the meaning that the metropole attached to mobilization. It also set the stage for the electoral transformation of the 1920s by galvanizing labor, delegitimizing the pursuit of independence

by political means, and fostering popular support for Washington. Yet, rather than wresting control of the nation-building project from the metropole, I argue that in attempting to use mobilization to further their own agendas, the island's leadership eased the consolidation of U.S. rule and forestalled political alternatives for much of the interwar period.

The Dangers and Opportunities of Mobilization

In 1917 Governor Yager and his staff had every reason to be concerned about the island's reaction to news of the coming draft. First, they "feared that compulsory service, coming so soon after the enactment of the Jones Act, might bring on a campaign of misrepresentation of the motives of the American government in granting citizenship" (Puerto Rico Office of the Governor 1917:2). Section 5 of the Jones Act allowed the residents of Puerto Rico to renounce American citizenship provided that they made a sworn statement before a district court within six months. Thus, the ongoing Americanization of the populace could be retarded if resistance to military service caused many to maintain their previous citizenship.⁴ Nor was this the only complication wrought by the island's unique status. Since the Treaty of Paris allowed Spaniards to retain their prewar nationality, more than five thousand Spanish citizens resided on the island. In 1918, one José López García applied for a writ of *habeas corpus* that would exempt him from the draft on the grounds that he was born to Spanish parents who had refused American citizenship. Although López lost his suit, the court's decision left unclear whether the island-born children of Spanish citizens were eligible for Selective Service (AGPR, Oficina del Gobernador, Corr. Gen., Caja 180, Años 1917-1918). The War Department and Governor Yager thus envisioned a flood of claims to Spanish citizenship which would both hinder the draft and slow the Americanization of the island by enlarging the foreign population.

Of still greater concern was the threat posed by what was viewed as rising support for political independence. In the years preceding the Jones Act, pro-independence rhetoric became a regular staple of insular politics thanks to repeated frustrations in the attempt to replace the much-hated Foraker Act. In 1912 the Union Party approved the first political program to endorse sovereignty as a possible solution to the status question (Bothwell González 1979:340). Soon after, Speaker of the House José de Diego began advocating the island's eventual independence. Likewise, the influential editor and *independentista* Vicente Balbás Capó published increasingly critical, and widely read articles about the United States. Rafael Bernabe has convincingly argued that serious initiatives to achieve independence had been largely abandoned

by the island's political parties in the years immediately prior to the U.S. entrance into the war. The most outspoken advocates of populist government and absolute independence from the United States, Rosendo Matienzo Cintrón and Rafael López Landrón, died shortly before the war.⁵ Thereafter, the democratic brand of independence championed by their short-lived Independence Party rapidly waned. Meanwhile, the conservative, paternalist *independentismo* of José de Diego may actually have strengthened colonial rule by encouraging the passivity of labor and the dispossessed (1996:82).

Yet this objective reality proved less significant than the perception of rampant disloyalty. Even before the war and the passage of the Jones Act the colonial apparatus zealously monitored the press for hints of anti-U.S. sentiment. When, in 1916, Balbás condemned the U.S. intervention in Mexico and mocked plans to recruit additional soldiers from Puerto Rico, translations were immediately forwarded to the War Department (CIH, Justicia y Paz, Caja 30, Cart. 4, Doc. 1i). Indeed, as Pedro Cabán has argued, the extension of citizenship was largely a measure to “dampen support for independence and to demonstrate U.S. resolve to retain Puerto Rico as a colony” (Cabán 1999:201). So great was their fear of an emboldened *independentista* movement that both Governor Yager and Frank McIntyre, the Chief of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, cautioned Washington officials that delay in extending citizenship to the island could undermine U.S. strategic interests. In 1913, McIntyre warned Senator James Clarke that those Puerto Ricans “hostile to American institutions...would take the greatest pleasure in having this boon, which is so much desired by the pro-Americans in Porto Rico, again denied them.” A year later, Yager noted that “The questions of citizenship and independence seem to be bound together in the idea of many Porto Ricans” and that “the interminable controversies concerning the matter in the Congress of the United States” threatened U.S. control of the island (NARA II, RG 350, Box 180G, Docs. 1286-91 and 1286-128).

In addition to concerns surrounding the budding *independentista* movement and the question of citizenship, colonial officials were wary of the recently formed Socialist Party. Closely connected to the *Federación Libre de Trabajadores* (FLT), a labor federation affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, the party championed the interests of the working class. Although it was comprised of members who held disparate opinions concerning the status question, the bulk of the party's moderate leadership supported either eventual statehood or self-government under the benevolent auspices of the United States. Yet the party traced its genesis to a rash of violent strikes, and some of its most vociferous supporters condemned nationalism as a capitalist plot to ensure the docility

of the international proletariat.⁶ Understandably then, U.S. officials feared that the Socialists would prove reluctant to support mobilization and the sacrifices necessitated by the war.

Despite its inherent dangers, both Washington and Governor Yager viewed mobilization as an opportunity to hasten the Americanization of the populace. Military training would encourage the spread of English, speed cultural accommodation and respect for American institutions, and provide a forum in which officials could introduce Puerto Ricans to American values. Conscription was also a means to cement colonial control by securing the loyalty of the Puerto Rican political leadership—comprised of members of the traditional *criollo* elite and their challengers from the embryonic professional classes and organized labor. As José O. Solá has argued, the “very function of the metropolis was to shape and preserve elite dominance over the masses without having to get involved in the day-to-day management of municipal or island affairs” (2010:7). Thus, Yager and the War Department permitted the island’s political leadership a key role in the mobilization effort. Harry Franqui (2010) finds that the representatives of the *criollo* elites and emerging professional classes, which comprised the bulk of the party leadership, were charged with mobilizing the *jíbaro* and raising support for wartime initiatives. Meanwhile, the training of some of these representatives as officers would “serve to preserve a certain social hierarchy” by lending federal legitimacy to elite supervision of the draftees (143).

Mobilization would also relieve unemployment, consolidate U.S. colonial control, and help educate the island’s workforce. Thus, the *jíbaro* and those who had remained at the margins of the ongoing Americanization crusade were specifically targeted for military service. On June 6, 1917, Yager explained that the registration for the draft would be briefly delayed to allow for “publicity work among the *jibaros* and illiterate men of the mountains so as to make the registration complete and effective” (CIH, Justicia y Paz, Caja 30, Cart. 7, Doc. 1J). Addressing the dolorous condition of the island’s laboring classes would serve the dual purpose of providing an efficient labor force and demonstrating the benevolence of the colonial regime.

Metropolitan authorities, steeped in the progressivism of the era, put their faith in scientific-military training as a panacea for the maladies affecting the island.⁷ It is telling that whereas before the war, Yager believed that the island’s ills could only be remedied by “the transfer of large numbers of Porto Ricans to some other region,” emigration was suspended shortly before the registration to ensure that eligible men would not leave the island (*Aberdeen Daily News*, October 20, 1915). Both the governor and the BIA recognized the political and economic value of reeducating young men rather than temporarily removing them

from the island's labor force. They believed that military service would prove "a great school for patriotism, character, and self-control for all of the men who came under its influence" (CIH, Justicia y Paz, Caja 30, Cart. 4, Doc. 1D).

Yet Yager's priorities frequently diverged from those of Washington, which was more concerned with the wider war effort than the economic and social conditions in Puerto Rico. Moreover, it is an oversimplification to view metropolitan opinion as monolithic, even within the relatively limited sphere comprised by the federal government. Throughout the war, numerous agencies involved themselves in the island's affairs. Some of them, such as the BIA and the Department of War, generally collaborated with the governor but tended to prioritize military necessity and the Americanization of the island over economic development. Meanwhile, the Bureau of Labor proved ambivalent or even hostile to Yager's efforts, since its goal of harmonizing labor and capital to assure uninterrupted production for the war ran counter to the governor's persecution of the FLT and *socialistas*. For his part, Yager seems to have believed that the economic needs of the island were paramount, since improvements in this area would translate to loyalty towards the United States, and the pacification of dangerous elements, such as organized labor and the *independentistas*.

One example of these diverging priorities can be seen in the struggle over where Puerto Rican conscripts would be trained. According to the War Department, training on the mainland would assure that Puerto Rican draftees would "come to feel themselves as part of the Army of the United States" (CIH, Justicia y Paz, Caja 30, Cart. 7, Doc. 1F). Moreover, separate training on the island would be a waste of funds that could better be used in other facets of the war effort since facilities "were available in the United States, in a climate more suitable for intensive training" (CIH, Justicia y Paz, Caja 30, Cart. 7, Doc. 1E). For Yager and his allies in the insular political establishment, however, the construction of an encampment on the island represented a badly needed economic stimulus. Despite shared interests, the War Department was forced to warn Yager in no uncertain terms against further defiance in the matter of the training site (CIH, Justicia y Paz, Caja 30, Cart. 7, Doc. 1E). Similarly, the governor's mansion and the War Department found themselves at odds over the creation of National Guard units on the island since Yager viewed these in terms of economic necessity while the War Department focused on military need.

Despite the dangers (real or imagined) posed by mobilization, the key decision makers in each of the parties accepted the role envisioned for them in the metropole's mobilization plans. Cooperating with the draft provided each party an opportunity to gain political capital and

press their preferred solution to the status question. Moreover, the Jones Act had radically shifted the terms of insular politics. With citizenship a *fait accompli* and pro-U.S. sentiment on the rise, politicians who overtly opposed conscription risked alienating voters, many of whom viewed military service as a symbol of their new status. Most importantly, the colonial power and native politicians shared a number of objectives, at least in the short-term. For example, even pro-independence leaders pushed for the incorporation of Puerto Ricans into the U.S. military. In 1899, Eugenio María de Hostos was among a group of representatives who asked President McKinley to allow Puerto Ricans to serve (Estades Font 1988:97). For the Republicans and those who supported statehood, military service was a way for Puerto Ricans to prove their worth and loyalty to the United States. For those who pushed for independence, military training would provide a civic education that would prepare the populace for self-rule. Thus, Puerto Rico's politicians hoped that military training would modernize the *jíbaro*, who was seen as an impediment to development (Franqui 2010:149). According to Republican partisan Norberto Escabí, the training camps were to "return to us the pariahs and the jíbaros...converted into men" (*El Diluvio*, agosto 17, 1918). Also, the traditional political establishment sought to meet the challenge to their position posed by the formation of the Socialist Party. Hence, both the Republicans and Unionists eagerly cooperated with Yager's efforts to set limits on the demands of labor during the war. In this sense, military training as officers would allow the elite to reinforce what they understood as an endangered social hierarchy. Ironically, the FLT and *socialistas* also supported the reeducation of the *jíbaro* since they believed that this would strengthen the movement by bridging the gap between skilled labor and the peasantry.

Thus, as the insular administration created or expanded mechanisms of control in order to forestall resistance to the draft, they enjoyed the support of both the Puerto Rican political establishment and organized labor. Beginning in 1917, officials used the wartime Espionage Act to force detractors into silence and close down the most audacious periodicals. An extensive network of informants combed the island for hints of disloyalty, while the Insular Police force repressed strikes.⁸ Each of these measures relied upon the support, or at least the acquiescence, of Puerto Rican politicians. For example, in February, 1918, the legislature approved a bill that allotted funds for the expansion of the Insular Police force during wartime whenever the governor considered this necessary for "the preservation of law and order" (CIH, Justicia y Paz, Caja 30, Cart. 6, Doc. 20). Rather than passive objects of metropolitan policy, party leaders actively contributed to the colonial agenda, even as they competed to redefine the meaning of that participation.

Statehood and the Draft: The *Partido Republicano* during the War

As draft preparations began, Yager and his staff turned to the parties for support. In many ways, the *republicanos* (Republicans) were Yager's most logical allies. The party "drew support from sectors of the emergent sugar interests, firmly addicted to the U.S. sugar market" (Ayala and Bernabe 2007:53). Yet it also included reformist professionals and claimed to represent the unskilled laborers. As such, *republicanos* were dedicated to increasing the people's participation in government under the leadership's paternalistic guidance; this in opposition to the more blatant paternalism of the *criollo* liberalism espoused by the Federal Party and its leader, Luis Muñoz Rivera (Negrón Portillo 1990:25). In pursuit of this aim, the *republicanos* had been ardent proponents of U.S. citizenship before 1917. When the Jones Act conceded that citizenship, they continued to press for Puerto Rican statehood. In the early years of U.S. rule, officers of the military government rewarded this devotion with preferential access to political positions.⁹ During the Republican Riots (*Turbas republicanas*) of 1900-1904, Governor William Henry Hunt had even turned a blind eye as the party unleashed a wave of violence against political rivals who protested U.S. hegemonic control of the political process (Negrón Portillo 1990).

After 1904, however, the Republicans were forced to accommodate to a new political reality. In the elections of that year, the newly formed Union Party cemented an alliance with the FLT that allowed them to dominate the ballot box. That alliance was particularly damaging for Republicans, since a new electoral law, which granted universal adult male suffrage increased labor's electoral significance. Moreover, although the party was nominally recognized as a territorial branch of the national Republican Party before 1916, those governors of Puerto Rico nominated by Republican presidents often sided with the Union Party, whose repeated electoral victories made them more valuable political partners (Pagán 1959:114). Yet despite the party's waning influence, their ardor for Americanization assured them a cordial relationship with the colonial regime.

Given this history, the wartime alliance between the representatives of the metropole and the Republicans was not without its challenges. In the short term, both were dedicated to Americanizing the island. Yet, Republicans defined the term differently than did U.S. officials. The former equated Americanization with democracy and the victory of bourgeoisie capitalism and the professional classes over the landed elite. The colonial administration, on the other hand, understood it as a long-term process of cultural assimilation in which Puerto Ricans would

be tutored in the principles of conscientious citizenship. As the party of the poor, Republicans also represented the island's Afro-Puerto Rican population and included several Afro-Puerto Rican politicians, such as party founder José Celso Barbosa.¹⁰ Unsurprisingly, Yager, a Southern Democrat from Kentucky, looked askance on these dark-skinned Republicans' capacity for responsible governance. Finally, the party's insistence on statehood as the ultimate solution to the status question ran counter to Washington's determination to keep Puerto Rico a colony. According to Harry Franqui (2010) "the Republican Party, which preached 100 percent Americanism and desired nothing but federated statehood, found itself at odds with Yager who seemed to favor some liberal reforms for the colony but not much else" (129). Both the governor and the Bureau of Insular Affairs supported the extension of U.S. citizenship to the island in order to stem the agitation for independence. Yet this was a far cry from accepting that Puerto Ricans were sufficiently Americanized to be allowed to participate in national elections.

Despite these underlying tensions, the Republicans proved stalwart allies to the insular administration during the war. In addition to voting for legislation favored by Washington and the governor's office, the party disseminated pro-U.S. propaganda from party newspapers, drumming up support for everything from the Home Guard to food rationing. More importantly, these publications sought to claim the U.S. cause as their own, thereby rhetorically erasing the distinction between colony and metropole (Franqui 2010:133). Front pages were strewn with letters from party members who announced their intention to give their lives for the sake of the United States, Puerto Rico, and democracy (*El Águila de Puerto Rico*, julio 9, 1918). For Republicans, the war was an opportunity to prove the island's loyalty, political maturity, and readiness for statehood. Thus, it was the duty of every Puerto Rican to fight for the stars and stripes and those who refused were deemed failures as both nationalists and men. One propagandist appealed to his readers' sense of shame by beseeching, "Puerto Ricans that love your Patria, that love your daughters, no longer doubt, come, enlist in the army that defends this sacred cause and secure...a bright future for our small island" (*El Águila de Puerto Rico*, julio 2, 1918).

If mobilization was an opportunity to demonstrate the island's potential for statehood, it was also a chance for Republicans to regain the political strength they had lost in previous years. To do so, they counted upon increased favor from the metropole in appreciation for their wartime efforts on the nation's behalf. Thus, it was not enough to swear their devotion to the United States, the war effort, and the draft. If party members wanted to ensure that they alone would reap U.S. gratitude, they would have to cast their political opponents as suspect.

Throughout the war, the majority Union Party worked to ensure that mobilization would lead to independence, or at least greater autonomy, by highlighting the contributions of Puerto Ricans as distinct from the wider U.S. war effort. The Socialist Party and organized labor also used mobilization to press for higher wages and increased government intervention in labor disputes. This presented the Republican press ample opportunity to court both voters and metropolitan favor by painting their rivals as either treasonous separatists or radicals. For example, *El Águila* condemned Unionist support for the adoption of a Puerto Rican flag, arguing that this signified “the ideal of separating our fortune and our destinies from those of the great American people” (*El Águila de Puerto Rico*, julio 21, 1918).

At the same time, Republicans had to be careful not to alienate their constituents, many of whom were less than pleased to be offered up for the war effort. In order to pacify these potentially disenchanted voters, they took advantage of the disconnect between San Juan and the countryside by condemning their rivals for failing in their duty, while at the same time blaming them for the draft in towns throughout the island. In July 1917, for instance, Republican propagandists in Morovis claimed that “the reasons for the Porto Ricans having to go to war was due to the Unionist Party, because Muñoz Rivera was to blame for their being American citizens” (AGPR, Oficina del Gobernador, Corr. Gen., Caja 180, Años 1917-1918, Doc. 1390).

The Union Party was particularly vulnerable to Republican attacks given the presence of *independentistas* within its ranks. Thus, along with the flood of pro-war propaganda came a steady flow of aspersions cast on the Union’s loyalty. The most strident denunciations came from the editors of *El Tiempo*, who insisted that “If many of the army boys are Unionists now, they will withdraw their allegiance...as soon as they understand that it means allegiance to a flag...under which disloyalty lurks under the pretense of loyalty” (junio 25, 1917). And although Republican rhetoric focused on the Union, the Socialists were not immune to criticism. Party newspapers snidely referred to Santiago Iglesias Pantín, the island’s sole Socialist senator, as “hermano Iglesias” and condemned his program as a “grotesque caricature” (*El Tiempo*, junio 25, 1917).

In addition to attacking Iglesias and other Socialist leaders, the party lined up solidly behind the colonial administration and made common cause with Unionist *terrateníentes* to oppose organized labor. For example, in response to the demands of strikers in Bayamón, Republican Representative Manuel F. Rossy claimed that any increase in wages would hurt production, because when workers “earn more, they work less” (*Unión Obrera*, octubre 31, 1917). Since 1898, the Republicans had struggled to attract the island’s working class vote in order to

counterbalance the electoral strength of their rivals. In 1899, the FLT had split from the *Federación Regional de Trabajadores* (FRT) largely due to Republican dominance over the latter organization (Negrón Portillo 1990). Yet after the Republicans fell from power in 1904, the FRT lost strength and eventually rejoined the FLT (Rodríguez-Silva 2012:186). After 1915, many of the island's workers transferred their allegiance, and their vote, to the newly formed Socialist Party. Thus, part of the Republican wartime strategy involved surrendering a losing battle to appeal to workers in exchange for Washington's favor and the chance to forestall the Socialist challenge.

In the end, the Republicans failed in both their efforts to win support for statehood in Washington and redress the electoral balance on the island. They did, however, succeed in further alienating the Puerto Rican working class. In terms of island politics, this failure sounded the Republicans' death knell. In 1924, the party splintered between those led by Rafael Martínez Nadal, who joined with the Socialists in the *Coalición*, and the conservative followers of José Tous Soto, who joined with the hated Unionists to form the *Alianza* (Ayala and Bernabe 2007:65). In essence, the formation of the latter was presaged by the temporary alliance between Republican and Unionist *terratenientes* during the war. More significantly, at least in the long term, the Republican strategy during the war foreclosed alternatives to Washington's colonial project. Each of the parties believed that their chosen answer to the status question would secure greater autonomy for the island as a whole. In their haste to criticize their opponents, the Republicans obfuscated this shared goal. Their presses' virulent attacks helped to further delegitimize *independentismo*—already on the decline after the extension of U.S. citizenship—and limit the gains made by the FLT and the *socialistas*. More perniciously, the party helped retard the growth of popular democracy by cooperating with the metropole to bolster the traditional social hierarchy. By war's end, their efforts would succeed in limiting the very freedom of action that statehood was meant to guarantee.

The *Partido Socialista*, Labor, and the War

Despite contradictory long-term goals, the Republican Party enjoyed generally cordial relations with American officials. The same could not be said of the Socialists, who suffered continual persecution from Governor Yager. The party was comprised of skilled workers, tradesman, and the sugarcane proletariat; and most members supported a permanent relationship with the United States.¹¹ Moreover, the leadership enjoyed some measure of federal recognition, owing to its affiliation with the American Federation of Labor. Nevertheless, the party had formed

in the crucible of the violent island-wide sugar strikes of 1915.¹² The Socialist Party that emerged from the conflagration was viewed with suspicion given its agitation against landholders, many of whom were U.S. proprietors. Moreover, both the *Partido Socialista* and the FLT were headed by a Spaniard—Santiago Iglesias Pantín—with a history of radical agitation stretching back to Spanish rule. As might be expected given its constituency and ties, the party championed the goals of organized labor: a shorter workday, higher wages, the right to strike, and the end of company stores. In short, its platform seemed to place it in opposition to the wartime measures about to be implemented.

Despite Yager's hostility, the Socialists reacted much as the bourgeois parties to news of the coming draft. In a letter to Yager soon before the first registration, Iglesias protested Republican charges that his party had opposed the draft and insulted the administration. He assured the governor that he had urged his party to make no unfavorable comments regarding the government, "especially when our government is at war" (AGPR, Oficina del Gobernador, Corr. Gen., Caja 180, Años 1917-1918). Like their rivals, Socialist party leaders sought to appropriate the U.S. cause, paint rivals in a negative light, and blame the other parties for the hardships of the war. In words similar to those used by the Republican press, Socialist organ *Unión Obrera* told the young men of the island to "go to foreign shores and pay your tribute of blood" (noviembre 7, 1917). Labor publications encouraged workers to contribute to liberty bonds and published patriotic letters addressed to the island's soldiers. In one, Manuel F. Rojas, one of the luminaries of Puerto Rican labor, asked his son "to take arms in the war to determine if the world will fall under autocracy or democracy" (*Unión Obrera*, junio 20, 1918). In the words of Federico Quinones Rodríguez, an analysis of *Unión Obrera* during the war years "clearly demonstrates an approval and endorsement" of the United States and its wartime policies (1994:64).

For the Socialists, mobilization was an opportunity to ease tensions with the governor's mansion by erasing the memory of 1915. Party leaders, many of whom headed the FLT, also hoped that by demonstrating their patriotism, they could secure Washington's support for badly needed labor reforms. Here, Puerto Rican labor's connection with the AFL proved significant. During the war, the AFL entered into partnership with the federal government by eschewing strikes and becoming the most outspoken advocates of what John Higham called "100 percent Americanism" (1955:205). In return, the government and the War Labor Board often favored workers over management when settling labor disputes. Iglesias and his followers believed that by emulating their patron's stance, they could similarly reconfigure the relationship between the federal government and the island's workers. Thus, in

addition to securing reforms, the FLT and the *socialistas* sought to erase the distinction between colonial and metropolitan labor. Partnering with the federal government and its representatives in San Juan also seemed to promise changes in the political sphere. If Washington recognized the Socialists as legitimate interlocutors, it would serve to attract voters and invalidate the traditional parties' self-proclaimed status as the island's only legitimate spokesmen. In sum, although the status question never assumed the same significance for the Socialists as it did for their rivals, the party's agenda included the renegotiation of both the colonial relationship and insular politics.

Though the Socialists and their competitors pursued similar strategies to win support from Washington and Governor Yager, the party's ideology dictated significant tactical differences. Given the internationalism of socialist rhetoric, party leaders were under less pressure to deny their support for the draft in the face of a reluctant constituency. Instead, labor publications cited the plight of European socialists to convince Puerto Rican workers to enlist.¹³ Moreover, because the party included members who supported independence, propagandists were hard pressed to paint Unionists as traitorous separatists. Most often, the Socialist press was too busy defending the party from opponents' charges of disloyalty to take the offensive. As one writer complained, "the reactionary press of the country struggles to make it appear...that the socialists and federationists are enemies of the nation" (*Unión Obrera*, junio 18, 1918). Instead, Socialist propaganda tended to accuse the bourgeois elements of betraying cherished American *ideals*. According to *Unión Obrera*, the Republicans and Unionists had proven themselves "un-American" by allowing proprietors to "take advantage of the exceptional circumstances of the war to enslave, exploit, and...industrially monopolize the rural masses" (enero 8, 1918). Socialist spokesmen argued that such policies were nothing short of a betrayal of the principles for which the United States was fighting. As soon became apparent, the same charges could be leveled at Governor Yager and his administration.

By 1918, labor agitation provoked by the exponential rise in food costs threatened the industrial stability necessitated by the war (Puerto Rico, Governor's Office 1918:15).¹⁴ Speaking of one family, an agent of the Department of Labor reported that "since the prices of foodstuffs have soared considerably during the past two years even the increased wages do not permit them to eat more than twice a day...for the daily wage of 70 cents must provide for six persons" (Marcus 1919:30). Veterans returning from training at Camp Las Casas found that they had to struggle to eke out a basic subsistence for their families. Propelled by hunger, workers across the island went on strike (Bureau of Labor 1918:5). Naturally, the Socialist Party turned to Governor Yager in the

hopes that their early support for the draft would translate into economic relief. As the situation worsened, the party attempted to woo support for labor reforms from an administration compelled by war to maintain production and quell labor unrest.

Instead of rewarding the workers' patriotism, U.S. officials used their expanded wartime powers to reinforce the dominance of the propertied classes. Governor Yager prohibited the display of the red flag of socialism in public meetings while the expanded Insular Police force was used to disband strikes and escort strikebreakers. Both the Socialist Party and the FLT denounced such anti-labor measures as arbitrary and un-American. Since the change in sovereignty, Puerto Rican labor had embraced Americanization. Despite all evidence to the contrary, many Socialists viewed the United States as a model of industrial democracy, where representatives of labor had access to elected officials who worked to ensure that laws "beneficial or prejudicial to the workers [were] passed or rejected" (Iglesias 1914:17). In their minds, Americanization referred to the destruction of the last illiberal remnants of Spanish rule, which Rojas decried as "Four centuries of ignorance and serfdom" (1914). In this perspective, if the colonial administration enacted anti-labor measures, it was due to the nefarious influence of those native proprietors who sought to return the island to a state of semi-feudalism (Bernabe 1996:85). Soon, the Socialists began to view Governor Yager as a tool of their traditional class enemies and an obstacle to both their political agenda and true Americanization. By 1918, articles in the Socialist press charged that Governor Yager "voluntarily and knowingly has given aid and comfort to the enemy" since he had "refused to help in any way to encourage meetings for the settling of the difficulties of the 26 thousand workers on strike and their patrons in the sugar industry" (*Unión Obrera*, mayo 24, 1918). Rather than revising their understanding of American democracy and the colonial relationship, the Socialist Party branded Governor Yager a traitor and sought to appeal directly to mainland sympathies. One article warned that, due to their meager salaries, workers would no longer be able to contribute to the noble U.S. cause by buying war bonds or making contributions to the Red Cross (*Unión Obrera*, mayo 22, 1918).

By war's end, efforts to divide Yager and Washington proved futile. The Socialists and the FLT had both overestimated the disagreement amongst the branches of the colonial apparatus and misconstrued the nature of American democracy. Rather than erasing the memory of 1915, these attempts reinforced Yager's distrust of Iglesias and his followers. The experience of mobilization did reconfigure the relationship between the party and American officials, but not in the form envisioned by party leaders in 1917. Iglesias faced a party revolt during the annual convention

of 1919, when a faction led by Manuel F. Rojas, Alfonso Torres, and Julio Aybar agitated for the adoption of independence in the party platform (Socialist Party 1919:44-45). Aybar specifically condemned Iglesias' support of the draft when he asked, "What do you say about a socialist representative who supports compulsory military service?" (Socialist Party 1919:49). The failure of the Socialist wartime strategy led to division within the ranks of labor and forced the party to face the realities of the U.S. colonial project. Over the course of the 1920s, more radical members were either marginalized or convinced to toe the party line.¹⁵ In this sense, the alliance with the Republicans and the formation of the *Coalición* in 1924 was a tacit admission that, in order to win Washington's recognition as legitimate interlocutors, they would have to incorporate elements of the very traditional elite they had hoped to displace.

Autonomy or Independence: The Union's Wartime Strategy

While colonial officials were concerned about the Socialists in 1917, it was the Unionists who had most consistently contested the terms of U.S. rule. The party was composed of the remnants of the defunct Federalist Party, who had opposed U.S. hegemonic control of the island's politics at the turn of the century, and a dissident wing of the Republican Party led by Rosendo Matienzo Cintrón. Following the work of Ángel G. Quintero Rivera (1986, originally published in 1977) much of the historiography identifies the party as the remnants of the patriarchal coffee *hacendados* of the nineteenth century who struggled to maintain their social and economic dominance in the face of U.S. agrocapi-talism. Yet a more recent analysis by Rafael Bernabe (1996) finds that it also included representatives of Puerto Rican sugar interests and professionals connected to U.S. firms. In many cases, Unionists and Republicans represented similar class factions who disagreed on how best to maximize the island's autonomy under U.S. rule. Like their political opponents, many Unionists proclaimed themselves in favor of Americanization. Yet by Americanization, Unionists meant liberalism and modernization—including political liberty, the separation of church and state, and public education—rather than the cultural assimilation predicted by the colonial regime.

Since its formation, the party had a contentious relationship with the insular government. In 1909, the Union controlled House of Delegates attempted to block passage of the budget proposed by Governor Regis Henri Post. Three years later, they adopted a political program that asserted independence would be the only viable option for the island if the United States refused to extend citizenship and greater autonomy

(Bothwell González 1979:340). While always in the minority, the party had also been home to some of the most outspoken opponents of the U.S. colonial project, including Matienzo, Rafael López Landrón, and José de Diego. By 1914, the Union officially settled on autonomy as the preferred status for the island with the passage of the Miramar rules, which limited party efforts to the realization of reforms to the colonial system. Yet, the party remained split between autonomist and *independentista* factions. As the island prepared for the first draft registration, colonial administrators feared that De Diego and his followers would use the issue of the draft to argue that accepting U.S. citizenship was a mistake.

Although Governor's Yager's fears proved unfounded, the career of *independentismo* between 1917 and 1922 stands as a clear example of the significance of wartime politics for understanding subsequent events. Soon after the passage of the Jones Bill, De Diego accepted U.S. citizenship in order to retain his position in the legislature (Rigual 1972:162).¹⁶ Under pressure from the majority faction, he called upon his followers to abstain from agitation until after the war was won. "We are citizens of Puerto Rico," he declared, "twenty thousand of our soldiers will go to fight and die beneath its glorious flag." Despite the worthiness of the cause, he feared that the clamor for independence "could transcend our country and perhaps perturb the American effort in the war" (Rigual 1972:171). *El Recluta*, a publication that catered to the trainees at Las Casas, even presented summaries of De Diego's speeches calling upon the island to make sacrifices for the war effort. Even after their leader's death in 1918, the *independentista* faction within the Union remained firmly wedded to the broader Union strategy to prove the island's fitness for self-rule.

Those who did not succumb to political pressure were soon stifled by colonial officials. In November of 1917, because of articles he published in his *Heraldo de las Antillas*, Vicente Balbás Capó was arrested and tried for six infractions of the Espionage Act of 1917.¹⁷ In essence Balbás, who had refused U.S. citizenship, contested the legality of drafting those who could neither vote nor hold office on the island (*Heraldo de las Antillas*, noviembre 11, 1917).¹⁸ Thanks in part to the collaboration of De Diego and the insular administration's persecution of hispanophile nationalists like Vicente Balbás Capó, *independentismo* steadily lost ground as a legitimate position in mainstream insular politics. By 1922, the Union removed sovereignty from its platform in favor of a vaguely defined "free associated state" (Ayala and Bernabe 2007:59; Bothwell González 1979:394-395). Thereafter *independentismo* was consigned to fringe groups such as the Puerto Rican Communist Party and the ineffective (at least until the 1930s) *Partido Nacionalista*.

During the war years, both factions of the Union Party sought to use

mobilization to advance their political agenda and solidify their electoral dominance. Thus, *La Democracia*, the official party organ, immediately set out to prove the party's allegiance to the U.S. cause. According to an article printed on the first day of registration, the Unionists revered "the flag that is loved, respected, and revered by all lovers of Liberty and feared by all tyrants" (*La Democracia*, julio 5, 1917). In Guánica, *Brisas del Caribe* praised the "thousand times blessed" mothers of the conscripts for "outdoing the Spartan mothers, by telling your sons that they have to fulfill their duty" (noviembre 6, 1917). The Unionists also spoke of the training camps in glowing terms and heaped praise on the Red Cross and other wartime initiatives.

The Union leadership hoped that mobilization would allow the island to prove its readiness for either independence or a greater measure of self-rule. Hence, while the Republicans worked to rhetorically erase the disparity between colony and metropole, Unionists sought to underline it by highlighting the distinction between Puerto Rican and U.S. contributions to the war effort (Franqui 2010:134). Rather than accepting the metropolitan narrative of 100 percent Americanism, the Unionists worked to craft an alternate script for the war—one in which Puerto Rico had selflessly allied with the United States for the greater good. Moreover, this script was as much for internal consumption as it was directed at the mainland. Thus, Resident Commissioner and Unionist Félix Córdova Dávila wrote to the Secretary of War to ask that those Puerto Ricans officers serving in the regular army be transferred to command the regiments about to be formed on the island. In order to ensure that both Washington and the island's residents learned the right lessons from the war, it was important that these regiments "be truly characteristic of the people of Porto Rico" and that they be "composed of Porto Ricans and commanded by them" (CIH, Justicia y Paz, Caja 30, Cart. 7, Doc. 1C). Likewise, it was this desire to maintain the Puerto Rican identity of the draftees that led the Unionists to join with Governor Yager in campaigning for the recruits to be trained on the island. The Union was thus able to maintain a fragile coalition with U.S. officials during the war years because they shared short-term goals. This alliance could never have been more than a wartime expedient given that both parties held diametrically opposed visions of the island's future.

More so even than their Republican rivals, Unionist politicians eagerly accepted the role envisioned for them in the metropole's mobilization plans. In addition to proving the island's fitness for self-rule, many hoped that the war would provide an opportunity to reinforce a social hierarchy besieged by the rise of populist labor. To this end, the party collaborated with Governor Yager's efforts to curb the growing power of the *socialistas*. Interestingly, rather than condemning socialism

as a doctrine, the Unionist press often argued that their party best exemplified its ideals. In the words of one editorialist, Iglesias and his followers were demagogues who misunderstood socialist principles and “diverted the working class from their betterment and social liberation” (*La Democracia*, julio 7, 1917). Many Unionists looked to the future and envisioned a Puerto Rico in which the *criollo* elite would regain the authority lost under U.S. rule. Party members thus stressed their paternal concern for the interests of the working class. In essence, they believed that the workers of the island would welcome their leadership once freed from the grip of false prophets such as Iglesias.

Like the other parties, the Union also hoped to use mobilization to strengthen their position in insular politics. But because the party sought to distance Puerto Rico from its metropole, Union propagandists went to great lengths to defend themselves from charges that the draft was their responsibility. In an article that sketched a frequent complaint, *La Democracia* condemned those Republicans who “in the Fortaleza accuse us of being traitors to the American flag and in the field inform the people against military service that this was the work of the Unionist Party” (julio 14, 1917). Ironically, given the party’s ultimate aims, Unionists insinuated that their adversaries had betrayed the faith placed in them by the United States. “The law of obligatory service has given pretext to certain propagandists...some seeking to combat this service and others...to combat the Union Party, presenting it as the truly ‘responsible’ for the obligatory service” (*La Democracia*, julio 2, 1917). In other words, by disavowing liability for the draft, the Republicans had proven their declarations of loyalty meaningless. During the war, Union leaders sought to lure votes from their insular opponents by painting the Republicans as opportunists and the Socialists as demagogues.

In part, the Union’s strategy succeeded. In the short term, the party’s electoral dominance continued unchecked. Despite the militancy of the Socialist Party, the Republicans’ alienation of labor left the Union the forerunner in insular politics. The party’s efforts to support Governor Yager in his persecution of organized labor also paid off in the long term. Although wartime repression galvanized the FLT and contributed to a rash of strikes in 1919-1920, it also curbed labor’s more radical elements and led to declining voter support between 1920 and 1924. In this sense, Unionist collaboration with Yager helped temper the populism of the working classes and stabilize the position of the more established parties. Most importantly, Unionist propaganda partially succeeded in challenging the meaning that the metropole attached to Puerto Rican mobilization. In the ensuing decades, Puerto Rico’s wartime contributions would be appropriated and celebrated by those on all sides of the status debate. Thus, insofar as collective meaning-making is a component

of nation-building, Washington was forced to share some measure of control over the nation-building project. But it is important to note that despite the alternate narrative sketched by the Unionists, the majority of the island came to view Puerto Rican mobilization as proof of the island's fitness for U.S. citizenship. Thus, while the Unionists succeeded in introducing a new narrative of the war, they were unable to seriously threaten Washington's monopoly on the war's meaning.

WWI and the Politics of the 1920s

In the years immediately following the war, the insular parties' wartime political strategies bore bitter fruit. Many mainland media outlets did notice the contributions to the war effort made by the nation's newest citizens. Thus, *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* extolled the Puerto Rican people for their patriotism and composed articles with headlines such as "How Porto Rico Helped to Win the War" (April 1919). The *Dallas Morning News* opined that the people of Puerto Rico had demonstrated their love of liberty (August 9, 1917). Yet few observers outside of the colonial apparatus made any efforts to differentiate between the island's parties and programs. Neither did Puerto Rico's loyalty result in immediate democratic reforms. Instead, the period between 1919 and the 1924 elections witnessed the reorganization of insular politics and the consolidation of the colonial relationship. As much as the culmination of an ongoing process of political readjustment, the changes of the early 1920s followed from the partisanship of the war years.

For the Republicans, mobilization provided a last ditch opportunity to revitalize their flagging electoral strength and attract metropolitan support for statehood. Immediately after the war, the party reaffirmed its commitment to Americanization and pressed Washington to reconsider the island's status. In 1919, a speech given by Joseph Gurney Cannon, a member of a visiting U.S. Congressional delegation, seemed to auger growing support for statehood in Washington (Rigual 1972:191; Pagán 1959:189). When it became obvious that this optimism was premature, Republican leaders sought to make common cause with labor to challenge the Union's perpetual majority (Bothwell González 1979:372; Pagán 1959:193). After an aborted attempt at rapprochement with the Socialists, the Republicans not only failed to garner more votes in the election of 1920, they also lost the contest in San Juan for the first time in the party's history. By 1924, the party of José Celso Barbosa had degenerated into factions that allied themselves with either the Socialists in the *Coalición* or Barceló's followers in the *Alianza*.

Just as the failure of the Republican wartime strategy forced the

party to reconsider its alliances, the labor unrest of 1919-1920 fostered conflict within the ranks of the Socialist Party and forced a reappraisal of the colonial relationship. Increasingly, the governor's mansion and the Unionists conspired to undermine strikes and counter labor activism. With the war over, the FLT could no longer rely on the support of the Department of Labor. Meanwhile, the Socialist quest to earn Washington's recognition as a legitimate participant in insular politics ran afoul of the red scare that swept the mainland after the success of the Bolshevik Revolution (Scarano 1993:655). An electoral law passed in 1919, apparently with Washington's blessing, divested the Socialist Party of representation on the newly created Insular Election Board (Pagán 1959:198). Thus, well before the formation of the *Coalición*, the Socialists glimpsed the truth of José Tous Soto's assertion that Washington would never accept a party identified with Marxism (Bothwell González 1979:432-439).

Washington's hostility and the repression unleashed by Governor Yager and his allies both galvanized labor and tempered its radicalism. Membership in the FLT tripled in the aftermath of the war (Ayala and Bernabe 1997:63). In the elections of 1920, the Socialist Party garnered more than double the votes it had collected in 1917, despite being denied representation on municipal electoral boards (Pagán 1959:199). Subsequently, the party attempted to consolidate their electoral gains and placate their detractors in the federal government by reaffirming its commitment to statehood and toning down its rhetoric. After the defeat of the independence plank during the 1919 convention, more radical elements of the Socialist Party and the FLT were marginalized.¹⁹ Throughout the 1920s, the Socialists drifted gradually toward the center of island politics, culminating in the formation of the *Coalición*. The failure of the Socialist wartime strategy had helped convince party leaders of the realities of American colonialism. As early as 1921, Yager's successor approved of the party's new orientation by praising Iglesias as "a very just person in all those questions that relate to capital and labor" (Bothwell González 1979 II:317). In the long term, the party's move to the center, its increasing bureaucratization, and the compromises needed to secure the recognition of the colonial regime led to the erosion of electoral support. It is telling that the Socialists attracted fewer voters in the 1924 elections than four years previously, despite the growing electorate.

In the postwar years, the alliance between the factions of the *Unión* collapsed in the face of the growing realization of Washington's intransigence towards the party's goals. Wartime successes and its cordial relationship with the insular administration emboldened the *independentista* faction within the party to begin agitating for a solution to the status question. By the end of 1918, De Diego's successor, Cayetano

Coll y Cuchí, supported a resolution asking President Wilson to grant Puerto Rico self-government and reminding the President that the Allies had fought to secure self-determination for all peoples (Franqui 2010:158). Meanwhile, in Washington, Córdova Dávila proposed that the U.S. Congress hold a referendum to decide the island's fate. Although both factions were careful to avoid the term independence, nationalist fervor gripped the party and contributed to the Union's success in the 1920 elections.

Reality set in with the appointment of Governor Emmet Reily, who replaced Yager after Republican Warren G. Harding's victory in the national elections of 1920. In his inaugural speech, Reily stated in no uncertain terms that while "Old Glory flies in the United States, it will continue to fly over Puerto Rico" (Pagán 1959:205). His speech was a declaration that the wartime alliance between Yager and the Unionists would not continue under the new administration. After a brief hiatus during Wilson's presidency, Puerto Rico's Republicans resumed their affiliation with the national party in 1919. Reily thus overtly favored his coreligionists. Once in office the governor began persecuting Barceló and his followers and removing Union appointees from government posts (Bothwell González II 1979:316-319). Pro-independence stalwarts within the Union founded the *Asociación Independentista* and the *Asociación Nacionalista* to pressure the party leadership to maintain its commitment to the island's independence. But in 1922, Congressman Philip Campbell introduced a bill in the U.S. Congress to designate Puerto Rico as a Free Associated State and provide a more liberal organic law for the island. After the bill was defeated, the bulk of the Union Party bowed to the realities of the colonial regime and amended the party's platform to explicitly reject independence in favor of the less ambitious goal of an *Estado Libre Asociado*. Thereafter the party split, with the most committed *independentistas* joining the newly formed *Partido Nacionalista* and the bulk of the *autonomista* faction siding with the Republicans in the *Alianza* of 1924.

Conclusions

Throughout the war, each of the three major political parties in Puerto Rico—Unionist, Republican, and Socialist—adopted the rhetoric of patriotism and devotion to the United States in order to obtain a greater measure of political autonomy for the island. Each party also tried to court Washington's favor to gain advantage over their political rivals, often while simultaneously disavowing responsibility for the draft when addressing reluctant constituents. Even those who advocated independence collaborated with the metropole in the hopes of proving

the island's fitness for self-rule. At the same time, Washington and the insular administration used the war as a spur to Americanization and as a means to mute criticism of the colonial relationship left largely intact by the Jones Act. These goals, however, depended upon the acquiescence of the Puerto Rican political elite. Rather than passive objects of U.S. policy, the island's politicians seized upon the draft as an opportunity to gain advantage over their rivals and force a resolution to the status question.

Partisanship, and the practice of appealing to Washington, antedated the war years. But mobilization and the politics surrounding it shifted the terms of both insular politics and the colonial relationship. Each of the parties sowed the seeds of the political turmoil and social unrest of the 1920s during the war. In their eagerness to bolster their waning electoral support, the Republicans helped delegitimize *independentismo* while bolstering the traditional social hierarchy at the expense of popular democracy. Moreover, in acquiescing to wartime measures detrimental to labor and contrary to its principles, the *republicanos* reified the metropole's dominance and contributed to the perception that the politicians in San Juan were incapable of achieving substantive results. In the case of the Socialist Party, it was their reaction to the failure of their wartime political strategy, rather than its content, that contributed to the political violence of the ensuing decade. The formation of the party and its showing in the 1917 election had kindled the apprehension of U.S. officials and the traditional parties. But it was the labor militancy of 1919-1920—itself a response to the repression of the war years—that led to the political reorganization of 1924. Finally, the Unionists partially succeeded in both elaborating an alternative narrative to compete with the metropole's nation-building project, and buttressing the traditional social hierarchy. The short-term alliance with Governor Yager allowed them to continue their electoral victories into the 1920s and limit the gains of organized labor.

In the end, however, partisanship rebounded to Washington's advantage. By backing Governor Yager, the Unionists unintentionally strengthened the colonial bond. Governor Reily's inflammatory speeches and overt discrimination against the Unionists resulted in his resignation in 1923. Yet his successor, Horace Mann Towner, continued his policies (albeit more tactfully) and built upon the successes of the war years by pursuing Americanization and speaking out against *independentismo*. In 1924, amendments to the electoral laws allowed for the formation of coalition parties. By permitting the Unionists and Republicans to join in the *Alianza*, Towner helped to stabilize the position of the traditional party leadership and provided for the continuation of indirect rule. Meanwhile, the U.S. Congress rejected a series of demands for

more liberal reforms, including the right for the island to elect its own governor. Thus, despite the transition to a Republican majority in Washington, national policy remained consistent towards Puerto Rico. Moreover, the conditions created by each party's response to mobilization allowed Washington to sustain that policy for much of the interwar period. Wartime rhetoric and the extension of citizenship combined to create widespread pro-American sentiment, which deprived the island's political leaders of the popular support needed to press for changes to the colonial system. Rather than simply a brief stage in an ongoing process of political readjustment, the war marked the beginning of the final consolidation of American control over the island.

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Notes

- ¹ In one of the most widely cited studies of conscription during U.S. rule, Ché Paralitici argues that Puerto Ricans accepted this injustice "for fear of the consequences of disobedience," while the majority saw the military as a way out of the poverty caused by U.S. colonial policy (1998:368). Likewise, Juan Antonio Corretjer characterized obligatory military service as "the grossest offense that imperialism can inflict on a colony" and interpreted the Jones Act as simply a wartime measure (1966:8).
- ² According to one veteran, "Camp Las Casas was the first transfusion of blood that our exhausted people received. Not only did it awaken our *jíbaro*, it taught him to live better" (Raúl Esteves 1951:42).
- ³ According to Rafael Bernabe, partisan infighting during the war was simply a continuation of prewar efforts to secure political favor from the colonial regime. He argues that in the preceding years each of the political parties "limited themselves to the practice of promoting some project or variant of a project of colonial reform" (1996:88). Likewise, José O. Solá argues that by the 1920s, the island's politics

represented little more than a contest between class-based factions for control of the insular government (2010:28). In this interpretation, the war years represent little more than a brief lull in the class-based political struggle initiated by the Socialist Party in 1915.

- ⁴ It is worth noting, however, that the 1917 Selective Service Law declared all U.S. residents eligible for the draft, whether or not they were citizens. Its provisions specifically included the inhabitants of “all States, Territories, and the District of Columbia.” Thus, the success of conscription in Puerto Rico was never in itself a concern (*Selective Service Regulations* 1918:1).
- ⁵ Rosendo Matienzo Cintrón died in 1913, soon after the establishment of the *Partido de la Independencia*. Originally a Republican, he supported Americanization—by which he meant political modernization, as opposed to the “false Americanization” and colonialism of the Foraker Act (Bernabe 1996:34-35). In 1904, he established the Union Party, after becoming convinced that Puerto Ricans had a duty to denounce the colonial regime, even at the risk of seeming anti-American. He later split with the Unionists after condemning the authoritarian rule of hispanophile José de Diego over the pro-independence wing of the party. His most radical compatriot, López Landrón, died only months before the draft, after rejoining the Union Party in 1916.
- ⁶ In an early example of the FLT’s more radical strain, *La Voz Humana* published an article that argued nationalism was a tool of control used by capitalist oppressors. “Nations...? They were formed at the whim and fancy of...Washington, Bonaparte, Bolivar and others... The Nation had its beginnings in the sacrifice of its sons, victims sacrificed on the altar of modern oppression and tyranny” (*La Voz Humana*, septiembre 2, 1906).
- ⁷ Beginning in 1915, a series of anthropomorphic studies sponsored by the insular government seemed to prove the efficacy of this approach. They concluded that Puerto Ricans were physically inferior to continental Americans in every physical category after the age of eighteen or nineteen. Yet, those students who participated in the study showed improvement over the space of only a year “resulting from regular and systematic physical exercises” and medical care (Fleagle 1917:21).
- ⁸ According to a memo from Lieutenant Colonel Orval P. Townshed, the “counterespionage” force on the island included: members of the federal court, a special agent from the Department of Justice, the

Commissioner of Immigration, “the Collector of Customs and his assistants” and informants at steamship and railway offices, amongst others (CIH, Justicia y Paz, Caja 18, Cart. 1, Doc. 4A).

- ⁹ For early examples, see Fernando Picó (1998).
- ¹⁰ As Ileana Rodríguez Silva (2012) makes clear, in Puerto Rico, idioms of poverty, morality, and social hygiene served as coded references to race in a nominally “raceless” society.
- ¹¹ According to Arturo Bird Carmona, “the organization of the sugarcane workers constituted, from its beginnings, one of the greatest dreams” of the FLT (2001:11). That dream was realized during the cane field strikes of 1915.
- ¹² Due to the war and the effects of the Underwood Tariff, living conditions on the island worsened considerably for workers between 1913 and 1915, provoking widespread labor unrest and violent strikes. The tension increased as sugar producers inflated their profits by raising prices and lowering wages. For a description of this period, see: Bird Carmona (2001:77-91).
- ¹³ For an early example of an attempt to spur intervention in the war by citing the plight of European coreligionists, see: “El Proletariado y la Guerra” (*Unión Obrera*, noviembre 12, 1915).
- ¹⁴ The monopolization of land by sugar plantations meant that island could not produce enough food to feed the populace. Since many staples of the Puerto Rican diet had to be imported, the lack of available transport ensured price increases.
- ¹⁵ The party revolt of 1919 was a culmination of tensions that had been building in the FLT since its inception. More radical socialists and anarcho-syndicalists like Julio Aybar and Juan S. Marcano were disgusted by the moderate leadership’s alliances with the AFL and bourgeois parties, and their collaboration with the colonial regime. In his tract *Páginas rojas*, Marcano declared that “To deny that Puerto Rico is ready to be an independent republic...is to commit lese majesty against society. It is to approve of slavery and favor the absorption of our wealth and the annihilation of our people by capitalism” (1919:42). Their experiences during the war years convinced these radicals that socialist democracy and U.S. citizenship were incompatible. Yet Iglesias and the moderate leadership were able to weather the storm by persuading the majority that their goals could be accomplished under colonial rule if they moved to the center of island politics and embraced elements of the traditional parties.

- ¹⁶ According to the terms of the Jones Act, those who renounced U.S. citizenship would be unable to vote or hold public office on the island. De Diego maintained that “if the decree of citizenship had not been compulsory, nor those who renounced deprived of their political rights...I would never have fled the maternal warmth of my own citizenship” (Rigual 1972:162).
- ¹⁷ Balbás was found guilty on four counts and sentenced to eight years imprisonment. The verdict was appealed and eventually overturned in 1919 (*The Federal Reporter* 1919:17-29).
- ¹⁸ Although the point was initially debated, the U.S. Attorney General eventually ruled that all residents of Puerto Rico, even those who rejected U.S. citizenship, were eligible for selective service (Paralitic 1998:151).
- ¹⁹ This process contributed to the expansion of marginal groups who began to endorse “propaganda of the deed” (El Grupo Soviet de Bayamón, AGPR, Robert Junghanns, Impresos, Caja 100, Carpeta 1576).

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