



Memorias. Revista Digital de Historia y  
Arqueología desde el Caribe

E-ISSN: 1794-8886

memorias@uninorte.edu.co

Universidad del Norte  
Colombia

Franqui-Rivera, Harry

National Mythologies: U.S. Citizenship for the People of Puerto Rico and Military Service  
Memorias. Revista Digital de Historia y Arqueología desde el Caribe, núm. 21, septiembre

-diciembre, 2013, pp. 5-21

Universidad del Norte  
Barranquilla, Colombia

Available in: <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=85529051004>

- How to cite
- Complete issue
- More information about this article
- Journal's homepage in redalyc.org

redalyc.org

Scientific Information System

Network of Scientific Journals from Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal

Non-profit academic project, developed under the open access initiative

**National Mythologies: U.S. Citizenship for the People of Puerto Rico and Military Service****Mitología nacional: Ciudadanía norteamericana para la gente de Puerto Rico y Servicio Militar****Harry Franqui-Rivera<sup>1</sup>****Abstract**

That Puerto Ricans became American citizens in 1917 have been attributed by many to the need for soldiers as the U.S. entered the First World War. Such belief has been enshrined in Puerto Rican popular national mythology. While there is a rich body of literature surrounding the decision to extend U.S. citizenship to Puerto Rico and its effect on the Puerto Ricans, few, if any, challenge the assumption that the need for manpower for the armies of the metropolis influenced that decision. Reducing the issue of citizenship to a need for manpower for the military only obscures complex imperial-colonial relations based upon racial structures of power. In this essay I hope to demonstrate that the need for soldiers was unrelated to the granting of citizenship in 1917. As the U.S. prepared for war, domestic politics and geopolitics were mostly responsible for accelerating the passing of the Jones Act.

**Keywords:** U.S. citizenship, military service, World War I, Puerto Rico

**Resumen**

En 1917 el congreso de los EE.UU. extendió la ciudadanía norteamericana a los habitantes de Puerto Rico. La creencia que tal decisión estuvo influenciada por la necesidad de tropas al prepararse la metrópolis a intervenir en la Primera Guerra Mundial se ha convertido en parte de la mitología nacional. La vasta literatura que trata este tema no se ha preocupado por desmentir esta creencia. Reducir la extensión de ciudadanía a una treta para hacer a los puertorriqueños elegibles para la conscripción nos inhibe ver complejas relaciones imperio-coloniales basadas en estructuras y prejuicios raciales. En este ensayo espero demostrar que la necesidad de tropas no influenció la extensión de ciudadanía en 1917. Más bien, preocupaciones domésticas y geopolíticas influenciaron la aprobación del Acta Jones.

**Palabras claves:** Puerto Rico, servicio militar, ciudadanía, primera guerra mundial.

---

<sup>1</sup> Harry Franqui-Rivera, Ph.D., is a Research Associate at the Center for Puerto Rican Studies in Hunter College, City University of New York. He specializes on the role of the military in state/nation building projects and how it influences the development of national identities. His upcoming publication (Fall 2013-Centro Press) Puerto Rican Veterans and Service Members' Wellbeing and Place within the Diaspora explores the socio-economic condition as well as the contribution of the Puerto Rican soldiers and veterans to the spreading of the diaspora in the U.S.

Harry Franqui-Rivera, Ph.D. trabaja como investigador en el Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños en Hunter College, City University of New York. El Dr. Franqui-Rivera se especializa en el estudio de las fuerzas armadas y su rol en proyectos de construcción de estado/nación y en el desarrollo de identidades nacionales. Su próxima publicación, Puerto Rican Veterans and Service Members' Wellbeing and Place within the Diaspora (Otoño 2013- Centro Press) explora la condición socio-económica de los militares y veteranos puertorriqueños y su contribución a la dispersión de la diáspora en los EE.UU. Research Associate at Centro at Hunter College, Poughkeepsie, New York. [harry.franqui-rivera@hunter.cuny.edu](mailto:harry.franqui-rivera@hunter.cuny.edu)

On June 28 1914, the assassination of the Hapsburg heir Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo by the Bosnian-Serb nationalist Gavrilo Princip activated several European alliances triggering the First World War. By August 4, five European empires were at war and would soon drag other nations into the conflict.<sup>2</sup> On April 6, 1917, after years of carnage and an unbreakable stalemate on the Western Front the United States entered the conflict on the side of the *Entete*. On March 2, 1917, the U.S. Congress had enacted the Jones-Shafroth Act, better known as the Jones Act. This law extended American citizenship to the people of Puerto Rico, created an elective bicameral legislature, provided for the election of the Puerto Rican representative to Congress (Resident Commissioner) and basically served as the island's constitution until 1952. Many have argued that the granting of American citizenship to Puerto Ricans was related to the need for soldiers as the U.S. entered the First World War.<sup>3</sup> Such a belief has been enshrined in Puerto Rican popular national mythology to the point that it is taken as an almost irrefutable fact. Puerto Ricans, popular wisdom maintains, were invested with citizenship so they could become cannon fodder for the metropolis' wars. However, citizenship was one of the many provisions included in the Jones Act and the result of years of constant negotiations between the new metropolis and its Caribbean colony.<sup>4</sup>

While there is a rich body of literature surrounding the legal, psychological, and political aspects of the decision to extend U.S. citizenship to Puerto Rico and its effect on the Puerto Ricans, few, if any, challenge the assumption that the need for manpower for the armies of the metropolis influenced that decision.<sup>5</sup> Reducing the issue of citizenship to a need for

---

<sup>2</sup> Martin Gilbert. *The First World War: A Complete History*. Henry Holt and Company. New York, 1994. P. 14-17, 32-34, 473-80, 497-523.

<sup>3</sup> Even the last-appointed Continental American governor of Puerto Rico, Rexford G. Tugwell shared this opinion. See Rexford G. Tugwell. *The Arts of Politics As Practiced by Three Great Americans: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Luis Muñoz Marín and Fiorello H. La Guardia*. Doubleday & Company, Inc. Garden City, New York, 1958. P. 35-36.

<sup>4</sup> Unlike its antecedent, the Jones Act allowed Puerto Ricans to elect their own territorial legislature and provided for universal male suffrage. For a detailed discussion of the legal and political debate surrounding U.S. citizenship for the inhabitants of Puerto Rico see, Charles R. Venator-Santiago. *Extending Citizenship to Puerto Rico: Three Traditions of Inclusive Exclusion*. In: *CENTRO, Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies*. Vol. XXV No.1. New York, Spring 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Some recent important additions to such literature include; Christina D. Burnett and Burke Marshall., Eds. *Foreign in a Domestic Sense: Puerto Rico, American Expansion, and the Constitution*. Duke University Press. Durham, 2001. And; Efrén Rivera Ramos. *The Legal Construction of Identity: The Judicial and Social Legacy of American Colonialism in Puerto Rico*. American Psychological Association Washington D.C.,

manpower for the military only obscures complex imperial-colonial relations built and predicated upon racial structures of power. In this essay I hope to demonstrate that the need for soldiers was unrelated to the granting of citizenship in 1917. I will argue that as the U.S. prepared for war, domestic politics and geopolitics were mostly responsible for accelerating the passing of the Jones Act. In essence, the fear of a growingly discontent population in Puerto Rico influenced the passing of the Jones Act. The U.S. War Department considered that stability in the island was essential to secure U.S. hegemony in the Circum-Caribbean. Powerful lobbies in the metropolis argued that citizenship would quench unrest in the island leading to socio-political stability. The Woodrow Wilson administration also believed that it would gain diplomatic clout from granting citizenship and some measures of self-government to the Puerto Ricans.

American citizenship for the people of Puerto Rico- known then as Porto Rican citizens- had been contemplated by U.S. leaders well before 1917. President Theodore Roosevelt consistently proposed granting collective American citizenship to Puerto Ricans, but did not find much support in Congress. As early as 1909, officials from the War Department studied the possibility of granting citizenship to the Puerto Ricans. They came to the conclusion that even though the status would be well received by the Puerto Ricans, collective citizenship was a premature step since the majority of Puerto Ricans, they argued, were illiterate and unprepared for full political rights. As an alternative, the Office of the Secretary of War suggested facilitating the individual acquisition of U.S. citizenship by natives of the island who were educated and owned business or land.<sup>6</sup> This recommendation was clearly aimed at appeasing the local landlords and merchant class and did not gain much traction either in the metropolis or in the colony.

Despite opposition from prominent congressmen, projects to grant U.S. citizenship to the Puerto Ricans were presented before Congress in 1912 and 1913. President William Howard Taft, (and later President Woodrow Wilson) the Bureau of Insular Affairs (a branch

---

2001. And; Pedro Cabán. *Constructing a Colonial People: Puerto Rico and the United States, 1898-1932*. Westview Press. Boulder, CO, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> This opinion was shared by Secretary of War Jacob McGavock Dickinson (March 1909-May 1911) and Secretary Henry L. Stimson (May 1911-March 1913). Stimson shifted his position later. See, María Eugenia Estades Font. *La Presencia Militar de Estados Unidos en Puerto Rico 1898-1918: Intereses estratégicos y dominación colonial*. Ediciones Huracán Inc. Río Piedras, P.R., 1988. P. 204-06.

of the War Department entrusted with administering the island) and most of Congress supported these projects. Taft's appointee as governor of Puerto Rico, George Colton (1909-1913), also endorsed taking this step thinking it would improve the United States' image in Latin America.<sup>7</sup> Colton's support for citizenship was not an aberration. His successor, Arthur Yager (1913-21) was even more vociferous regarding this matter.<sup>8</sup> These projects, as well as the support for granting American citizenship to the Puerto Ricans shown by Taft, Wilson, the BIA (if reluctantly), Congress, and opinion-making groups in the mainland, responded to both local and international considerations.

In Puerto Rico, the emergence of a radical wing within the dominant political coalition- *Unión*, which under the leadership of José de Diego demanded independence under an American protectorate, and the creation of the Independence and the Socialist parties in 1912 and 1915 respectively underlined the socio-political unrest festering in Puerto Rico.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, in 1913 *Unión*, though still working towards autonomy, had made independence its final solution to the status question after a period of self-government under American tutelage.<sup>10</sup> However, as early as 1915, convinced that the U.S. would never grant independence, nor statehood to Puerto Rico, Luis Muñoz Rivera- moderate leader of the *Unionistas* and Resident Commissioner in Washington (the island's representative before Congress) between 1910 and 1916- came to believe that a type of self-government or autonomy in the likes of Australia's or Canada's was the best option for the island.<sup>11</sup> That the dominant party in the island had renounced inclusion into the Union highlighted the growing discontent with American rule in Puerto Rico.

<sup>7</sup> *The New York Times*, September 13 1909, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html>; and, Governor George Colton to Secretary of War, December 13, 1912, in María Eugenia Estades Font, *La presencia...* Op. Cit. P. 208.

<sup>8</sup> Albert Shaw, Ed. Puerto Rico under Dr. Yager: Citizenship in the New Bill. *American Review of Reviews: An International Magazine*. Vol. XLIX, No.1. Irving Place, New York. April 1914. P. 399-400. Yager served as governor of the Island from 1913 to 1921. He was appointed by President Woodrow Wilson, a fellow Democrat and a former classmate from John Hopkins University. Yager had a Ph.D. in political sciences and had headed Georgetown College in Kentucky.

<sup>9</sup> Fernando Bayrón Toro. *Elecciones y partidos políticos de Puerto Rico, 1809-2000, Nueva edición revisada y ampliada*. Editorial Isla. Mayagüez, P.R., 2000. P. 143 ss.

<sup>10</sup> Between 1913 and 1922 *Unión's* dominant plan to change the political arrangement of the Island consisted of three stages: first, securing autonomy; second, exercising such autonomy; and finally, demanding independence. Historian Rafael Bernabe explains that this platform was more likely intended to restrain de Diego and his most radical wing than the party's actual goals. See Rafael Bernabe. *Respuestas al colonialismo en la política puertorriqueña: 1899-1929*. Ediciones Huracán. Río Piedras, Puerto Rico, 1996. P. 48 s.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*. P. 49 s.

On the eve of World War I it certainly looked as if the metropolis' control over the Island was becoming precarious. Several Puerto Rican political leaders opposed extending U.S. citizenship to Puerto Rico without statehood or a general referendum on it. Furthermore, Puerto Rican politicians unanimously opposed a bill's version sent to the U.S. House of Representatives which included restricted suffrage based on literacy and taxation which would deny voting rights to 165,000 registered voters from a total of roughly 250,000.<sup>12</sup> Also, while extra powers would be accorded to Puerto Ricans, such as the right to have a two house elected legislature; the bill included veto power for the governor who remained a presidential appointee. Moreover, collective U.S. citizenship was in fact imposed on the Puerto Ricans who would not be allowed to have a referendum on this matter. The natives of the island had the right to reject U.S. citizenship but doing so would leave them in a political limbo. Muñoz Rivera, originally one of the bill's main architects, opposed passing the Jones Act if it included U.S. citizenship. He believed that such action would curtail the political development of the island while doing little to eliminate the colonial relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico. He and his fellow *Unionistas*, who had abandoned statehood as a goal in 1913, saw collective American citizenship as a cultural and political drawback.<sup>13</sup> Muñoz Rivera and the *Unionistas* probably understood that U.S. citizenship for the Puerto Ricans could have a defusing effect with regard to political tensions, which could hinder the chances of advancing his party's political goals. By then, the U.S. colonial administrators also understood the political value of granting collective U.S. citizenship to the people of Puerto Rico.

Probably no one was more adamant about granting American citizenship to the Puerto Ricans than Governor Arthur Yager. His campaign to bring U.S. citizenship to all Puerto Ricans was closely followed in the continental United States. In 1914 the *American Review of Reviews* observed that Puerto Ricans should be granted American citizenship and measures of self-government to reward their *continued improvement under American*

---

<sup>12</sup> Restricting suffrage on the basis of literacy and taxation was opposed by all political parties as it would deny voting rights to 165,000 registered voters from a total of roughly 250,000. Bolívar Pagán. *Historia de... los partidos políticos puertorriqueños* (1898-1956) Tomo I. Academia Puertorriqueña de la Historia. San Juan, P.R., 1972. P. 174 s.

<sup>13</sup> The *unionistas* argued granting American citizenship would kill the chances of independence by definitely incorporating Puerto Rico as a territory. Jose de Diego, Speaker of the House argued as such. See Bolívar Pagán, *Historia de...* P. 173 s.

*tutelage*. Additionally, American citizenship, the journal stressed, would eliminate *the germ of nationhood* fostered by the *ill-conceived Porto Rico citizenship*.<sup>14</sup> The article continued by stating that complete self-government (independence) was not an option because the Puerto Ricans ...*are a Latin American people with the characteristics and traditions of their forebears still clinging about them*.<sup>15</sup> This kind of reasoning is typical of the civilizational imperialism discourse of the early twentieth-century which claimed as the *right and duty* of the Anglo-Saxons to rule and *civilize* inferior races.<sup>16</sup>

When the United States took over Puerto Rico in 1898, the rationale used to retain the new colony, as well as the Philippines, was that Puerto Ricans were not capable of self-government mostly due to their racial composition, and centuries of Spanish obscurantism. Contemporary imagery of the inhabitants of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines, presented them as ape-like black beasts, or as black children in need of Uncle Sam's guiding (white) hand.<sup>17</sup> Coincidentally, the War Department started to restrict the role of African Americans in the U.S. military after the Spanish-American War of 1898. Excluding African Americans from the military was the local manifestation of an imperial ideology justified on the grounds of the incapability of the so-called darker races for self-government. Conversely, all the prejudices used to explain segregation and the *inferiority* of African Americans were applied to the new territories.<sup>18</sup>

The outbreak of World War I probably accelerated the passing of the Jones Act, however, it is unlikely, however, that Congress granted citizenship to one and a half million Puerto Ricans just to have more manpower for a war in which they were not yet involved, especially when at the time *dark races*, including Puerto Ricans, were neither trusted nor

---

<sup>14</sup> *American Review*... Op. Cit.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>16</sup> Anders Stephanso. *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right*. Hill and Wang. New York, 1995. P. 28, 42 s, 60, 79, 81 ss; And, Alfred Thayer Mahan. *Lessons of the War with Spain and Other Articles*, Reprint 1970. Books for Libraries Press Freeport. N.Y., 1899. P.245-249.

<sup>17</sup> For a collection of cartoons and caricatures explaining the development of American stereotypes of Latin America and the Caribbean see, John J. Johnson. *Latin America in Caricature*. "The Texas Pan American Series". University of Texas Press. Austin and London, 1980.

<sup>18</sup> To see the trajectory of the policy of excluding African Americans from combat positions see, Richard M. Dalifume. *Desegregation of the U.S. Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts, 1939-1953*. University of Missouri Press. Columbia, 1969. P. 26 s.

wanted in the military- much less as combat troops fighting for the nation.<sup>19</sup> Neither is it feasible to argue that Congress granted citizenship to Puerto Ricans in order to deter a German attack on the island. Attacking Puerto Rico, regardless of the citizenship of its inhabitants, would have meant both an attack on U.S. soil, and a flagrant violation of the Monroe Doctrine, and hence a major *causus bellis*.<sup>20</sup> The U.S. did not need Puerto Ricans to become American citizens to exercise its right to protect the island which was an American possession recognized as such under international law.

However, the strategic location of Puerto Rico at the heart of the archipelago of islands blocking access to the Panama Canal indeed influenced the rapid passing of the Jones Act in 1917. A friendly native population that could assist in the defense of the Island, mostly by not joining or welcoming invading forces, was deemed imperative by the U.S. Navy and the War Department since 1899.<sup>21</sup> This point had been stressed before the war and linked to U.S. citizenship for Puerto Ricans years before the United States entered the conflict. The

---

<sup>19</sup> The War Department limited African American participation to eight segregated combat regiments during WWI. 380,000 African Americans either volunteered or were conscripted during WWI. However, 89% of those soldiers were assigned to labor units instead of combat ones. See, Jack D. Foner. *Blacks and the Military in American History*. Praeger Publishers Inc. New York, 1974; and, Richard M. Dalfiume. *Desegregation of the U.S. Forces...*; and, Morris J. McGregor. *Integration of the Armed Forces, 1940-1965*. Center of Military History. Washington, D.C., 1981.

<sup>20</sup> In 1900, Congress approved the creation of the General Board of the Navy to advise the Secretary of the Navy on long range naval strategy. Based on rumors that Germany was seeking to buy the Dutch Virgin Islands, or any suitable island that would provide it with a naval base in the region, the General Board designed an Atlantic Battle Plan for 1900-1919. According to the battle plan, the U.S. Navy expected the German Empire to challenge the Monroe Doctrine. In the initial planning, Great Britain, compelled in 1901 to accept American dominance over the projected Isthmian canal, would remain neutral. The German forces would probably attack Culebra island off the east coast of Puerto Rico, forcing the U.S. Navy into an unfavorable battle, and would then proceed to New York or Chesapeake Bay. American fears were not unfounded. As a matter of fact, in the early twentieth-century the German Navy conducted naval exercises that for the first time had as the imaginary enemy, the United States instead of Britain. Moreover, those exercises largely confirmed the assumptions of the U.S. Navy battle plan. See Robert L. Beisner. *From the Old Diplomacy to the New, 1865-1900*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. The American History Series. Harlan Davidson, Inc. Arlington Heights Illinois, 1985. P. 132; and, Lester Langley. *The Banana Wars: An Inner History of American Empire 1900-1934*. The University Press of Kentucky. Lexington, Kentucky, 1983. P. 21, quoting: Holger Herwig. *Politics of Frustration: The United States in German Naval Planning, 1889-1941*. Little Brown. Boston, 1976. P. 101-09.

<sup>21</sup> In 1898, General Miles' had relied on the active support of the Puerto Ricans to quickly defeat the Spanish forces holding the Island. The need to hold and preserve Puerto Rico, as well as maintaining a large friendly population to defend the Island, was first argued in 1890 by Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, who later rose to the rank of admiral and served as president of the Naval War College. Mahan believed that a U.S. fleet based in Puerto Rico would make it very difficult for a foreign power to sustain operations in the western Caribbean just like the British naval base in Malta precluded the enemies of the British Empire from operating in the eastern Mediterranean. Therefore, its possession was vital to defend the envisioned Panama Canal, as well as the U.S. Pacific Coast. This strategy became a dictum within American strategists well into the 1960s. See Alfred Thayer Mahan. *Lessons of...* Op. Cit. P. 29, 245, 247 ss.



*American Review of Reviews* made clear the dominant attitude towards the island among opinion-making groups and the true reasons for the change of heart regarding granting U.S. citizenship to the Puerto Ricans:

*The interest of our own country and Porto Rico demand this perpetual connection. It is for Congress therefore to make the people of this tropical isle reasonably satisfied with our rule; for the Stars and Stripes cannot permanently wave over a discontented and rebellious people.*<sup>22</sup>

Thus, it is more than likely that the need to prevent unrest in such an important possession accelerated granting American citizenship to the Puerto Ricans. It is clear that American politicians recognized the calming effect that granting citizenship and somewhat broadening political rights would have in the island. Moreover, by granting them American citizenship, Congress and President Woodrow Wilson were affirming that the U.S. intended to hold the island in perpetuity since there was no precedent for an American territory populated with American citizens to be allowed to separate from the Union. Puerto Rico had to be held as an American possession for its militarily value, and American citizenship might very well do the trick.<sup>23</sup>

Quenching social and political unrest in the island to secure arguably the most strategic U.S. possession in the Caribbean, and restoring a positive image of the United States in Latin America had moved American leaders and opinion makers to decidedly favor different forms of U.S. citizenship for the Puerto Ricans as early as 1909. Furthermore, Wilson's approach to international mediation, his *New diplomacy* based among other things on *Self-determination*, was incompatible with the outright colonial status of Puerto Rico. On December 7, 1915, President Wilson declared before Congress that it was imperative to solve the Puerto Rican question by granting them a higher degree of self-government. More importantly, Wilson tied the passing of the Jones Act being drafted to national security and

---

<sup>22</sup> *American Review...* Op.Cit.

<sup>23</sup> The type of citizenship granted by the Jones Act is known as statutory citizenship, meaning that citizenship was granted by an act of Congress and not by the Constitution; hence it was not guaranteed by the Constitution.

defense preparedness. He argued that it was also a matter of credibility; the world was watching whether the U.S. was serious about self-determination and freedom.<sup>24</sup>

In his October 26, 1916 closing campaign speeches, President Wilson became the first statesman to commit his government to the pursuit of a League of Nations and to *articulate a comprehensive synthesis of Progressive Internationalism and the New Diplomacy*<sup>25</sup> based upon the principles of the equality of nations, self-determination, peaceful settlement of disputes, freedom of the seas, disarmament and collective security.. Securing the loyalty of the island's population and international credibility moved Wilson to adamantly support U.S. citizenship for Puerto Ricans and some measures of self-government as early as 1915.<sup>26</sup> Wilson's promises would be well-received and tested in Puerto Rico. The Jones Act was finally signed into law on March 2, 1917 and, for the most part, it was welcomed in Puerto Rico.<sup>27</sup> Muñoz Rivera did not live to see the passing of the bill. He had returned ill to the island in September 1916 and died on November 15 of that year. At least, his concerns about restrictive suffrage, which were shared by all political factions, especially by the Socialists, were addressed in the Senate and the act finally approved came to include male universal suffrage.<sup>28</sup>

On April 6, 1917, triggered by Germany's resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare and the public outrage created by the Zimmerman telegram, the United States declared war on Germany.<sup>29</sup> Three days later the Porto Rico House of Delegates, in a message to President Wilson offered the *...absolute solidarity of the people of Puerto Rico to you and*

<sup>24</sup> Bolívar Pagán. *Historia de...* Op. Cit. P. 172.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas J. Knock. *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order*. Princeton University Press. Princeton, 1992. P. 97 s, 116 s. The speech also included a call for social justice for women, children, and workers

<sup>26</sup> Bolívar Pagán. *Historia de...* Op.Cit. P. 171 s.

<sup>27</sup> Republicans and Socialists celebrated the passing of the bill as a victory and stepping stone towards equality. The *Unionistas*, under the leadership of its new president, Antonio R. Barceló, welcomed the act but saw it just as a measure of self-government before the last stage of their political solution- independence, was attained. Though officially the *Unionistas* talked about self-determination their leaders started to publicly call for independence after the Jones Act passed. See Bolívar Pagán., *Historia de...* Op. Cit. P. 179-86. Some 288 Puerto Ricans rejected U.S. citizenship. Charles R. Venator-Santiago. *Extending Citizenship...* Op. Cit. P. 66.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. citizenship and majority of age were the only requirement. See Bolívar Pagán, *Historia de...* Op. Cit. P. 179.

<sup>29</sup> See Thomas J. Knock. *To End...* Op.Cit. P. 116 s; and, Martin Gilbert. *First World...* Op. Cit.

*the great American Nation in the conflict with Germany.*<sup>30</sup> Immediately after the declaration of war, Puerto Rican politicians volunteered their service and that of their fellow countrymen. They requested the enlargement of the Porto Rican Regiment to brigade and the acceptance of Puerto Ricans as volunteers. The Secretary of War declined the offer.<sup>31</sup> Even at this stage the U.S. military was reluctant to admit Puerto Ricans in great numbers into the military.

On May 18, 1917 Congress passed the Selective Service Act of 1917 calling for all males between the ages of 18 and 32 to fill out registration cards.<sup>32</sup> The territories of Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico were not included in the original Selective Service Act. Almost immediately the newly elected Puerto Rican legislature asked Congress to extend the draft to the island.<sup>33</sup> Leading newspapers echoed leading politicians and called the legislature's actions an act of patriotism. President Wilson promised to remedy the situation allowing for Puerto Ricans to be included in the draft.<sup>34</sup> A presidential proclamation set the registration day in Puerto Rico for July 5, 1917.<sup>35</sup> Puerto Ricans responded to the draft. On that first day, 104,550 Puerto Ricans registered for the draft. Eventually, 236,853 men inscribed for selective service and 17,855 were called to service. All of those called, except for 139, reported for duty.<sup>36</sup>

In the days following the commencement of registration in Puerto Rico, Governor Yager declared: *This [the number of registered men] is larger than the official estimate and I think it is a great compliment to the people of Porto Rico that they should have met this situation so patriotically.*<sup>37</sup> Yager who had hoped that military service would alleviate unemployment in the island and instruct a martial spirit into the Puerto Rican masses, had

---

<sup>30</sup> Declaration Reprint in, *El Águila de Puerto Rico*, April 10, 1917.

<sup>31</sup> Centro de Investigaciones Históricas, Proyecto Caribeño (CIHPC). Universidad de Puerto Rico, Río Piedras. Secretary of War, Memorandum. Washington D.C. February 25, 1918. Caja 30 Cartapacio 7 Documento 1, B.

<sup>32</sup> CIHPC. Caja 18 Cartapacio 1 Documento 10, A.

<sup>33</sup> Microform Collection. University of Massachusetts, Amherst. House Committee on Public Lands, Subcommittee on Territorial and Insular Possessions, *A Bill to Amend the Organic Act of Puerto Rico, Election of Governor: Hearings on H.R. 3309*, 80<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1 sess. May 19, 1947. P. 35-36.

<sup>34</sup> CIHPC. Caja 18 Cartapacio 1 Documento 10, A.

<sup>35</sup> CIHPC, Caja 18, Cartapacio 1, Documento 10, A; and, José Muratti. *History of the 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, the Borinqueneers* (Microfilm). U.S. Army Forces Antilles. San Juan, 1953. P. 8.

<sup>36</sup> All of those called, except for 139, reported for service. *Ibidem*.

<sup>37</sup> CIHPC. Yager to McIntyre. San Juan July 10, 1917. Caja 30, Cartapacio 7, Documento 1, I.

harbored reservations, just like most of the metropolis' observers, about the Puerto Ricans' receptiveness to the draft.<sup>38</sup> He was surely mistaken. Over 700 applications were received for the first training camp for Puerto Rican officers, which began in August of the same year. The 200 slots allowed for the officers' camp were filled with celerity by the elite and professional class.<sup>39</sup> The speed with which the war effort in the island advanced and the eagerness to show support led Governor Yager to comment that the *patriotism of the island has been stirred and intensified by America's entrance into the Great War as shown by the eagerness with which the people responded to the recent draft*. Yager was quick to find the root of these demonstrations of patriotism stating that Puerto Ricans were *as eager to get into the 'big war game' as any other class of citizens [italics added for emphasis] under the Star and Stripes*.<sup>40</sup> For Yager it was clear that citizenship, even if of a different class, had bought much goodwill and secured the loyalty of the Puerto Ricans at a critical historical junction.

However, the War Department was reluctant to proceed with the mass mobilization of the Puerto Ricans and had to be cajoled into it. Governor Yager (who was a close friend and advisor to President Wilson), Puerto Rican elected officials, and much of the press, argued for the Puerto Rican's right to fight. The War Department responded with plans to accept Puerto Ricans and to send them to the continent for training and disperse them among racially segregated White and Black units according to skin color. The War Department was adamantly opposed to creating Puerto Rican units and to train them in the island.<sup>41</sup> Such opposition echoed the previous debates regarding U.S. citizenship for Puerto Ricans.

Eventually, under political pressure but still unconvinced of their value as first line combat troops, the War Department came to believe that mobilizing the Puerto Ricans would prove

---

<sup>38</sup> Harry Franqui. *Fighting For the Nation: Military Service, Popular Political Mobilization and the Creation of Modern Puerto Rican National Identities: 1868-1952*. 2010. Open Access Dissertations. Paper 229, [http://scholarworks.umass.edu/open\\_access\\_dissertations/229](http://scholarworks.umass.edu/open_access_dissertations/229). P. 138 s, 150 ss.

<sup>39</sup> Doctors, dentists, engineers, lawyers, professors, businessmen, industrialists and landowners became the bulk of the Puerto Rican officers' corps. See, José R. Nadal. *Guardia Nacional, Sucesora de las Milicias Puertorriqueñas*. Talleres Adria Luisa Monserrate. Santurce, P.R., 1962. P. 42. Yager was not easily impressed with the volunteer s showing up for the officer camp. He wrote the chief of the BIA: "700 applicants for the officer's training camp, not the best quality. I'm sure that many more young men of a better class than this could have been secured." See, CIHPC . Yager to McIntyre. San Juan July 20, 1917, Caja 30, Cartapacio 7, Documento 1, H..

<sup>40</sup> CIHPC. Memorandum. February 25 1918. Caja 30 Cartapacio 7 Documento 1, B.

<sup>41</sup> Harry Franqui. *Fighting For...* Op. Cit. P. 138 ss, 140, 147 s, 150 ss.

useful. These soldiers could relieve Continental American soldiers from non-combat assignments freeing them for combat duty, while inspiring loyalty among the population of the Island. The political and economic value of mobilizing the Puerto Ricans was added to the rationale for a War Department which did not want Puerto Ricans as fighting troops. Frank McIntire, Chief of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, wrote a memorandum to the chief of War Plans Division informing him of the political, economic, and social benefits of mobilizing Puerto Rico's *...large surplus population, that is, a population for who in the present there is no continuous employment.*<sup>42</sup> Dealing in strict utilitarian terms and after making clear that his views were not of a military nature, McIntire reported that the men who had gone through military training in the Island *...have been very much improved, physically and otherwise, and are better off for having had it and to that extent are of greater economic value.*<sup>43</sup> Throughout the rest of the conflict the War Department moved slowly to mobilize the people of Puerto Rico. The Porto Rican Regiment – a regular army unit based in Puerto Rico- was sent to Panama but by the war's end all units raised and trained in Puerto Rico remained in the island.<sup>44</sup> The War Department had no use in a theater of war for what they considered racially inferior men lest their participation in equal terms undermine the racial hierarchies of the American Empire.<sup>45</sup>

**Conclusion** Edgardo Meléndez has argued that the type of citizenship extended to Puerto Ricans in 1917 was not simply of a second class type but of a colonial nature. By granting U.S. citizenship by an act of Congress and not by extending the 14 amendment to the island, Congress had created a type of colonial citizenship that provided for the *alien*

<sup>42</sup> CIHPC. Memorandum from Chief of the War Plans Division. December 18, 1918. Caja 30 Cartapacio 7 Documento 1, A.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>44</sup> Ordered to full strength in 1914, the 654 vacancies of the Porto Rico Regiment were filled with volunteers in three days. CIHPC. McIntyre to Yager. Washington D.C. March 13, 1914. Caja 30 Cartapacio 4, Documento 1, I; and Muratti, *Historia del...* Op.Cit. P. 9.

<sup>45</sup> For an example of racial hierarchies' construction within the military and how the mirrored and supported similar civilian structures see for example, Richard Dalifume. *Desegregation of the...* Op.Cit.; and Harry Franqui. *Fighting For the Nation...* Op. Cit. The racial rationale for extra-continental expansionism and empire is discussed on Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny...* Op. Cit. Seminal works on the intersectionality of racial and gender narratives supporting racial stratification domestically and empire abroad include; Gail Bederman. *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917 (Women in Culture and Society)*. Chicago. University of Chicago Press, 1996; and, Kristin Hoganson. *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars*. Yale University Press. New Haven and London, 1998; and, Amy Kaplan, *Black and Blue on San Juan Hill in Cultures of United States Imperialism*, 219-236, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease. Duke University Press. Durham and London, 1993.

*exclusion* of those born in the island from the body politic. Thus, in this way the new U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico were disenfranchised given the type of citizenship extended to them.<sup>46</sup> This move has been understood by many as a way to impede the Puerto Ricans from influencing national politics and policies.<sup>47</sup> The small numbers of Puerto Ricans born or living in the U.S. before WWI could hardly pose a threat to the metropolis' hegemonic political groups. However, if Puerto Ricans in the island were granted the type of citizenship and rights guaranteed by the 14 amendment, and true political equality within the Union- they could have become a threat to the established racial order and the national polity built around the supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon.<sup>48</sup>

The War Department followed a similar path to the one chosen by Congress. Forced to accept Puerto Ricans in the military and then to train them in the island as Puerto Ricans units (the Porto Rican Contingent to the National Army), the War Department sought to limit their role to that of support troops and made no serious effort to send the Puerto Rican Division to Europe. Just as island-based Puerto Ricans had their citizenship limited so the island-based soldier saw his service relegated to that of colonial and support troops. Similarly, African Americans who participated in the war were also mostly relegated to labor units and those in combat units had their record misconstrued to satisfy the narratives of white supremacy.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Edgardo Meléndez. Citizenship and the alien exclusion in the insular Cases: Puerto Ricans in the Periphery of the Empire. In: *CENTRO, Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies*. Vol. XXV No.1. New York , Spring 2013 .

<sup>47</sup> See, Pedro Cabán. The Puerto Rican Colonial Matrix: The Etiology of Citizenship- An Introduction. In: *CENTRO, Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies*. Vol. XXV No.1. New York , Spring 2013.

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem. P. 13ss.

<sup>49</sup> 380,000 African Americans either volunteer or were conscripted during WWI. Roughly 89% of those soldiers were assigned to labor units instead of combat ones. The all-Black 93<sup>rd</sup> division distinguished itself fighting under French command, but this was poorly received by the Southern-dominated Wilson administration and military commanders who argued that the French were giving away military accolades to Black soldiers unnecessarily and unmerited. The American Expeditionary Force Command in Europe even insisted that the French banned African Americans from fraternizing with white French women because they worried of the social unrest the return of these Black soldiers might cause in the United States. Based on distorted accounts of the African-American performance during WWI, the War Department concluded that in future wars African American and, by extension, other "dark" races should be limited to labor tasks. See Jack D.Foner. *Blacks and the Military...* Op.Cit., and, Richard Dalfiume. *Desegregation of...* Op.Cit., P. 26s, and - Morris McGregor, *Integration of...* Op. Cit.

A different type of U.S. citizenship was imposed on the Puerto Ricans in 1917- one that reaffirmed their colonized status. The agents of the metropolis thought that granting Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship would serve many purposes- from bringing socio-political stability to a strategically important possession as the metropolis ready itself for war, to helping improve U.S.' image in Latin America and giving credence to President Wilson's *New Diplomacy* and plans to end the war. But plans to use the island's population to boost the armies of the metropolis were not part of the rationale for granting U.S. citizenship to the people of Puerto Rico. Such action- just like granting a non-colonial citizenship to those born in the island- would have undermined the racial and gender narratives behind domestic racial stratification and the U.S. imperial drive.

### **Bibliography**

Albert Shaw (Ed.). Puerto Rico under Dr. Yager: Citizenship in the New Bill. *American Review of Reviews: An International Magazine*. Vol. XLIX, No.1. Irving Place, New York. April 1914.

Alfred Thayer Mahan. *Lessons of the War with Spain and Other Articles*, Reprint 1970. Books for Libraries Press Freeport. N.Y., 1899. P.245-249.

Amy Kaplan. Black and Blue on San Juan Hill in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, 219-236, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease. Duke University Press. Durham and London, 1993.

Anders Stephanso. *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right*. Hill and Wang. New York, 1995.

Bolívar Pagán. *Historia de los Partidos Políticos Puertorriqueños (1898-1956)* Tomo I. Academia Puertorriqueña de la Historia. San Juan, P.R., 1972. P. 174 s.

Centro de Investigaciones Históricas, Proyecto Caribeño (CIHPC). Universidad de Puerto Rico, Río Piedras.

Charles R. Venator-Santiago. Extending Citizenship to Puerto Rico: Three Traditions of Inclusive Exclusion. In: *CENTRO, Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies*. Vol. XXV No.1. New York , Spring 2013 .

Christina D. Burnett and Burke Marshall (Eds.). *Foreign in a Domestic Sense: Puerto Rico, American Expansion, and the Constitution*. Duke University Press. Durham, 2001.

Edgardo Meléndez. Citizenship and the alien exclusion in the insular Cases: Puerto Ricans in the Periphery of the Empire. In: *CENTRO, Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies*. Vol. XXV No.1. New York , Spring 2013 .

Efrén Rivera Ramos. *The Legal Construction of Identity: The Judicial and Social Legacy of American Colonialism in Puerto Rico*. American Psychological Association Washington D.C., 2001.

Fernando Bayrón Toro. *Elecciones y partidos políticos de Puerto Rico, 1809-2000, Nueva edición revisada y ampliada*. Editorial Isla. Mayagüez, P.R., 2000.

Gail Bederman. *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917 (Women in Culture and Society)*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago, 1996.

Harry Franqui. *Fighting For the Nation: Military Service, Popular Political Mobilization and the Creation of Modern Puerto Rican National Identities: 1868-1952*. 2010. Open Access Dissertations. Paper 229, [http://scholarworks.umass.edu/open\\_access\\_dissertations/229](http://scholarworks.umass.edu/open_access_dissertations/229).

Jack D. Foner. *Blacks and the Military in American History*. Praeger Publishers Inc. New York, 1974.

John J. Johnson. *Latin America in Caricature*. "The Texas Pan American Series". University of Texas Press. Austin and London, 1980.

José Muratti. *History of the 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, the Borinqueneers* (Microfilm). U.S. Army Forces Antilles. San Juan, 1953.



José R. Nadal. *Guardia Nacional, Sucesora de las Milicias Puertorriqueñas*. Talleres Adria Luisa Monserrate. Santurce, P.R., 1962.

Kristin Hoganson. *Fighting for American Manhood. How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars*. Yale University Press. New Haven and London, 1998.

Lester Langley. *The Banana Wars: An Inner History of American Empire 1900-1934*. The University Press of Kentucky . Lexington, Kentucky, 1983.

María Eugenia Estados Font. *La Presencia Militar de Estados Unidos en Puerto Rico 1898-1918: Intereses estratégicos y dominación colonial*. Ediciones Huracán Inc. Río Piedras, P.R., 1988.

Martin Gilbert. *The First World War: A Complete History*. Henry Holt and Company. New York, 1994.

Morris J. McGregor. *Integration of the Armed Forces, 1940-1965*. Center of Military History. Washington, D.C., 1981.

Pedro Cabán. *Constructing a Colonial People: Puerto Rico and the United States, 1898-1932*. Westview Press. Boulder, CO, 1999.

\_\_\_\_\_. The Puerto Rican Colonial Matrix: The Etiology of Citizenship- An Introduction. In: *CENTRO, Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies*. Vol. XXV No.1. New York, Spring 2013.

Rexford G. Tugwell. *The Arts of Politics As Practiced by Three Great Americans: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Luis Muñoz Marín and Fiorello H. La Guardia*. Doubleday & Company, Inc . Garden City, New York, 1958. P. 35-36.

Richard M. Dalifume. *Desegregation of the U.S. Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts, 1939-1953*. University of Missouri Press. Columbia, 1969.

Robert L. Beisner. *From the Old Diplomacy to the New, 1865-1900*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. The American History Series. Harlan Davidson, Inc. Arlington Heights Illinois, 1985.

Thomas J. Knock. *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order*. Princeton University Press. Princeton, 1992.

*El Águila de Puerto Rico*, April 10, 1917.

*The New York Times*, September 13 1909, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html>

University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Microform Collection.