

History of Environmental,
Economic, and Political
Debts:
Puerto Rico and the US

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Puerto Rico

- **Carta Autonómica 1897** (after more than 400 years of Spanish colonial rule, Puerto Rico became an autonomy; which meant that from Feb 1898 until the US invasion in July, Puerto Rico had representation and vote in the Spanish Cortes, more control of its commerce, and administration).
- **Spanish American War in 1898**- resulted in Puerto Rico becoming a colony of the United States.
- **Foraker Act 1900** -determined that the governor and the Executive council would be appointed by the President of the US, the Supreme Court in PR would also be appointed by the US; and there would be a non-voting Resident Commissioner in Congress (no voting rights, no real representation); PR could have a House of Representatives with 35 elected members
- **Insular Cases:** “an unincorporated territory of the US”

- 1899 (august) **Hurricane San Ciriaco** devastated the island, specially its coffee industry and it created a humanitarian crisis, with high rates of poverty and hunger.
- **1917 Jones Act** President Woodrow Wilson granted Puerto Ricans **US citizenship** (just before the US entered World War I); created the Senate of PR (substituting the US appointed Executive Council, a bill of rights, and an elected position of the Resident Commissioner (still without a vote in Congress)).
- Commerce between the US and PR had to use only US ships and go through US ports.

- As Nelson A. Denis explains: “After World War I, America was worried about German U-boats, which had sunk nearly 5,000 ships during the war. Congress enacted... the Jones Act, to ensure that the country maintained a shipbuilding industry and seafaring labor force. Section 27 of this law decreed that only American ships could carry goods and passengers from one United States port to another. In addition, every ship must be built, crewed and owned by American citizens. Almost a century later, there are no U-boats lurking off the coast of Puerto Rico. The Jones Act has outlived its original intent, yet it is strangling the island’s economy. Under the law, any foreign registry vessel that enters Puerto Rico must pay punitive tariffs, fees and taxes, which are passed on to the Puerto Rican consumer.
- Thanks to the law, the price of goods from the United States mainland is at least double that in neighboring islands, including the United States Virgin Islands, which are not covered by the Jones Act. Moreover, the cost of living in Puerto Rico is 13 percent higher than in 325 urban areas elsewhere in the United States, even though per capita income in Puerto Rico is about \$18,000, close to half that of Mississippi, the poorest of all 50 states.”

Luis Muñoz Marín (1898-1980)

- 1948 the first Governor of Puerto Rico elected democratically
- “Architect” of the Estado Libre Asociado (Free Associated State) y del **Partido Popular Democrático (PPD)**
- 1920-40 Initially he was an independentist but then he changed his position, arguing that the country needed to tackle its socio-economic problems and then discuss the political status of the island.
- 1948 **La ley de la mordaza (Gag Law)** (political persecution of independentistas y nationalists) (LMM- Pres del senado- Gob Jesús T Piñero)
- 1948-1964 Luis Muñoz Marín as Governor of Puerto Rico



Pedro Albizu Campos

1891-1965

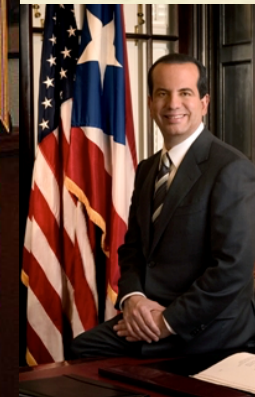
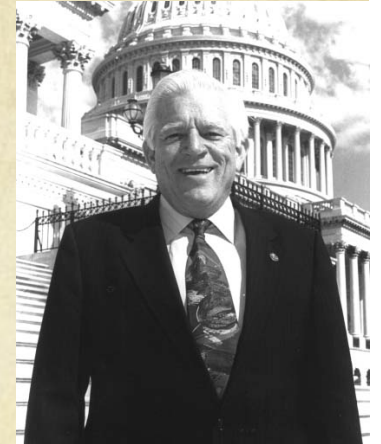
- Leader of the (Nationalist Party) **Partido Nacionalista Puertorriqueño**
- Studied at Harvard Law School
- US Army 1917-1919
- 1936 Hiram Rosado y Elías Beauchamp killed Col. Riggs
- 1950 October Revolution (jail, persecution, torture)
- 1937 Ponce Massacre
- (21 dead, 200 wounded)



Political parties in Puerto Rico

- PPD (Partido Popular Democrático) (Popular Democratic Party) in favor of the status quo, keeping Puerto Rico as a territory of the US.
- PNP (Partido Nuevo Progresista) (New Progressive Party) in favor of annexation, of Puerto Rico becoming a state of the US.
- PIP (Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño) (Pro-Puerto Rican Independence Party) in favor of political independence of the US.
- Plebiscites on the status of PR (1967, 1993, 1998, 2012, 2017)

- Partido Nuevo Progresista (pro Estadidad de Puerto Rico) **la era del bipartidismo**
- Luis Ferré (1969-1973) Fundador del PNP
- Carlos Romero Barceló (1977-1984)
- Rafael Hernández Colón PPD (Partido Popular)
- (1973-1977) (1985-1993)
- Pedro Roselló PNP (1993-2001)
- Sila María Calderón PPD (2001-2005)
- Aníbal Acevedo Vilá PPD (2005-9)
- Luis Fortuño PNP (2009-13)
- Alejandro García Padilla PPD (2013-17)
- Ricardo Roselló PNP (2017-)



- Puerto Rico— has 3.5 million US citizen residents who do not have the right to vote for president or representation in Congress—
- Has \$74 billion debt owed to holders of its devalued bonds, often issued through such entities as PREPA, the electrical power authority; and \$49 billion of unfunded pension obligations.
- In May 2017 Puerto Rico's Governor Rosselló asked for a form of bankruptcy protection under the law, called PROMESA, a federal oversight board will handle the territory's debt negotiations and obligations.
- Before Hurricane María, the population had dropped 10 percent since 2007; and nearly half of PR residents are below the poverty line.
- After Hurricane María, the island has been devastated

Hurricane María

- Category 5
- Tenth most intense Atlantic hurricane on the record, it reached winds of 175 mph; and struck Puerto Rico as a high end category 4 on Sept. 20.
- After the hurricane, 100% of Puerto Rico 3.5 million residents lost power and access to water.
- Much of Puerto Rico still lacks access to water, electricity and basic services. As of [October 11](#), 5,037 people (and 82 pets) were living in shelters, 50 percent of banks were closed, 59 percent of land lines and 43 percent of cell towers were down, and 86 percent of the island lacked power. Moody's estimates that rebuilding will cost between [\\$45 billion](#) and [\\$95 billion](#).
- As of today November 21, 49% of the population have power, 88% have water, 75% telecommunications service, 84% gas stations, 46 shelters are still open with 1,472 shelterees, and 93 displaced pets, 45 assisted dialysis shelters, 69% of hotels are open.