

U.S. Navy versus Vieques, Puerto Rico: Social Justice Through Civil Disobedience

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SUMMARY. For over 60 years, the island of Vieques, Puerto Rico, served as a live munitions target range for the United States Navy. The Navy protected the U.S. Empire's colonial relationship with Puerto Rico. Within this context, the colonial, racial and oppressive paradigms shield most anti-military movements in Puerto Rico. The tragedy of a civilian killed in Vieques by an errant 500-pound bomb destroyed this protective shield, bringing to light the social, economical and environmental injustices and atrocities committed by the U.S. Navy. This tragedy increased the public awareness of how people's lives, beaches, environment, and livelihood had been destroyed. Social action by solidarity and civil disobedience proved powerful in the anti-military struggle for achieving justice for the people in Vieques. This paper provides an overview of the people's struggle against the U.S. Navy. The historic demilitarization of Vieques will commemorate the solidarity of people in their victory for justice and world peace. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2004 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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. . . with their people and defending their people, David has once again overcome Goliath.

—The Christian Century Foundation, 2003, p. 15

The end of the U.S. military presence in Vieques, Puerto Rico, represents a historical event for Puerto Rico, the Caribbean and Latin America. This event astonished other countries as its leaders recognized that in the midst of U.S. intervention in Iraq, the people of Puerto Rico defeated the U.S. Navy. Civil disobedience, social action and solidarity were tactics used in the struggle to demilitarize the island of Vieques. The most effective weapon was the strength behind the Puerto Rican united front. Never before has there been a cause so great and powerful that would embrace both islanders and mainland Puerto Ricans. Solidarity, collective action, and a national identity were instrumental in achieving social, economic and environmental justice for the people of Vieques (*Viequenses*).

The author intends to provide an overview of the island municipality of Vieques, Puerto Rico, and its struggle with the United States Navy. The militarization of Vieques is just one dimension of the colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the U.S. empire. Since the 1940s, the U.S. Navy has used Vieques for military maneuvers. The raw disregard for the rights of the people and the land of Vieques exhibits the injustices committed by the U.S. for the sake of power and imperial expansion. The author wishes to alert the reader that to provide a daily account of the Vieques movement falls beyond the scope of this paper. What the author hopes to achieve is an understanding of the challenges that the Vieques anti-military movement faced in the struggle for social justice and peace in Vieques.

PRE-COLONIALISM

The history of Puerto Rico's colonial status begins with the Spanish invasion on November 19, 1493. The roots of Spanish colonialism spread onward as Spain declared sovereignty over Vieques in 1524.

Neither Puerto Rico nor Vieques were exempt from the destruction of its indigenous people and the exploitation of African slaves. The imposition of Christianity on the indigenous Taíno population justified the mistreatment and the brutality of this colonial era. Over 45,000 of the island's indigenous population were slaughtered (Padrón, 1989). A series of Royal Decrees was enacted to limit the rights of the Taíno and African people of Puerto Rico, which by virtue increased the wealth and power of the colonizer, the church and the Spanish government. Officially, slaves could not obtain freedom by marrying someone who was free, could not walk alone at night; no appeal would be granted to those Indians and slaves condemned to death; mulattos or black people could not have Indian servants, slaves nor hold public office, etc. (Padrón, 1989, pp. 40-41). By 1530, 331 Spanish Colonizers owned or had control over almost 5,000 people of color (López, 1974, p. 21; Padrón, 1989, p. 41); 30,000 slaves, by 1834 (Silén, 1971, p. 25). Thus, the colonial foundation upon which Puerto Rico would be governed during the next 400 years was set.

Puerto Ricans protested violently the harsh and repressive treatment by the Spaniards. One historical uprising but short lived was *El Grito de Lares* on September 23, 1868. At least 400 patriots and other revolutionary leaders stood up against the Spanish colonial regime and fought for their autonomy from Spain and for the abolishment of slavery. The Spanish army quickly repressed the Puerto Rican quest for independence and emancipation (Jiménez de Wagenheim, 1997). In Vieques, after officially becoming part of Puerto Rico in 1843 (McCaffrey, 2002, p. 21), the free Black English speaking workers and the African slaves also rebelled in 1864 and 1874 (Rabin, n.d.). Even after the abolishment of slavery in 1873, Spain continued to persecute the Puerto Rican autonomists.

The end of the 19th century marked a turning point in the history of Puerto Rico. Although Spain granted autonomy to Puerto Rico on February 9, 1898, by July of that same year, U.S. armed forces occupied the island during their war against Spain. In August, as a result of the Spanish-American war, Spain agreed to cede Puerto Rico to the United States (Ribes Tovar, 1973, pp. 370-378). With this war, Cuba received its independence while Puerto Rico continued its subjugated state. By the end of 1898, the U.S. expanded its empire and colonized Guam, the Philippines and Puerto Rico (Barreto, 2002; Murillo, 2001). Puerto Rico became the "hapless victim of an explosive U.S. drive to assert military and naval hegemony in the Caribbean" (McCaffrey, 2002, p. 22). As part of Puerto Rico, the U.S. empire stretched to include Vieques and its sister island Culebra. These two islands are geographically located be-

tween Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands of St. Thomas and St. John. By the turn of the century, Culebra and Vieques were used for military maneuvers and offshore training facilities for the east coast military base, Roosevelt Roads. One type of maneuver was to target and shoot bombs from Vieques to Culebra. Eventually, the islands became laboratories for military and commercial ends.

COLONIAL STATUS

The colonial status of Puerto Rico constitutes the milieu for the historical resistance against the U.S. Navy. Deception and subjugation are some methods used for colonization (Yellow Bird, 2001). Since 1898, the American Empire colonized and disempowered Puerto Ricans in their quest for self-determination. By 1917, without being given a choice in the matter, Puerto Ricans were declared U.S. citizens (Jones Act). “Racialist constructions of Anglo-Saxon superiority were central ideological rationalizations for denying Puerto Ricans a decisive role in their own society” (Barreto, 2002, p. 13). This colonial, racial and oppressive paradigm permeated throughout the social, economic and political realms of Puerto Rico. The radical left historically resisted such ideology, struggling for Puerto Rico’s self-determination and national identity against the U.S. Empire.

Another conscious or unconscious colonial tactic is the deception that any small island in the Caribbean, as Puerto Rico, cannot survive in a macroworld without the U.S. (Conway, 1998). As stated by Silén (1971), “the first lesson a schoolboy learns is that we are small, as if our smallness were not something positive for grappling with the problems of communication, electrification, irrigation, and highways” (p. 15). The military’s presence in the Caribbean served to enable this state of dependency, powerlessness, constant fear, and therefore, perpetuate Puerto Rico’s colonial status.

By 1943, the U.S. Navy possessed 21,000 of Vieques’ 33,000 acres (Berman Santana, 2002, p. 39). The transformation from an agrarian to an industrialized society in Puerto Rico was paralleled by the growing presence of the military in Vieques. This transformation favored the U.S. economy by limiting Puerto Rico’s competition in the global market, thus creating an economic crisis. The U.S. provided federal funds to relieve poverty and the unemployment rate in Puerto Rico (Dietz, 1986, Ch. 3). Such welfare programs as the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration (PRERA) and the Puerto Rican Reconstruction Admin-

istration (PRRA) temporarily pacified the poor and unemployed while the growing U.S. industrial empire received military protection. However, Puerto Rico's economic ills were seen as a population growth problem (History Task Force, 1979, p.119). Three strategic programs that sought to solve such economic ills were Operation Bootstrap, Population Control, and Migration Propaganda (Nieves-Falcón, 1975, p. 11). Operation Bootstrap, the strategy used for transforming Puerto Rico's agrarian economy into an industrialized one, lured U.S. industrial enterprises through a 10 to 17 year period of tax exemption. Population Control, geared to the lower class, informed the public and provided access to birth control methods (Ramírez de Arellano & Seipp, 1983). Largely induced by U.S. Labor Contracts after World War II, migration became the 'escape valve' of the population problem. What appeared to be a migrant's quest for social and economic prospect was in fact a constant flow of cheap labor responding to the economic opportunities between the U.S. and Puerto Rico. The greatest population exodus occurred between 1940-1960 (Maldonado-Denis, 1972, p. 315).

At that time, in contrast to the population growth of the island, Vieques experienced its greatest population decline. During this post-depression era, some Viequenses anticipated that the military would create more jobs, while the eviction process devastated others, contributing further to the Puerto Rican diaspora. Many evicted Viequenses took part in Puerto Rico's 1940-1960's population exodus. Other Viequenses, attracted by the sugar cane industry, moved eastward to St. Croix. Unfortunately, St. Croix was found to be as economically depressing as Vieques (McCaffrey, 2002, p. 26). The Navy expropriated most of the remaining families to assigned plots. Each family had to sign a statement indicating that they understood the Navy's rights to repossess these lots when needed (Acevedo-Delgado, n.d.; Rabin, n.d.). McCaffrey (2002) captures Carlos Zenón, an anti-militarist activists and head of the fishermen's association, powerful narrative of the eviction process when he was a four-year old:

I remember the day we received the notice giving us 24 hours to move because we were being expropriated. My parents were divorced and I lived with my mother, a brother and a sister. At first my mother could not believe that after living her entire life there, they could suddenly tell her to leave . . . She did not know where to go or what to do with the house. Our house was made of wood and zinc, rather small for us but comfortable. She decided not to believe what was happening and to remain. But the following day they returned and told her that they had warned her.

They told my mother that she had to leave immediately. She asked to where. She explained that she had three small children and no means of transportation. They simply gave her a form indicating that . . . a small lot of land had been set aside for her . . . and four numbers indicating the four corners of the lot. Nothing more. . . . They told her to leave because they were going to tear down the house that instant. They had brought a bulldozer . . . I remember thinking that it was a huge toy. I had never seen anything like it. I was extremely happy with the bulldozer until I saw the fear on my mother's face and the way she was hurriedly putting things together to take with us. She thought they were going to tear the house down on top of us. At that time there was a fear of federal authorities that does not exist today. I remember vividly that many Puerto Ricans, including Viequeses, believed that the penalty for a violation of federal law was imprisonment in Atlanta. . . . I remember looking back and being fascinated as the bulldozer tore down our home. My mother, on the other hand, was crying, not knowing where to go. (p. 51)

JUSTIFICATION FOR MILITARY PRESENCE

U.S. involvement with various wars justified its military presence in Vieques. Historically, World War II, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Cold War, the war against the spread of communism, and the need to protect the Venezuelan oil fields and Saudi Arabia's oil tankers, were used to rectify the need for military training in Puerto Rico. Other historical events were:

the overthrow of Guatemalan President in 1954, the Cuban Bay of Pigs operation in 1961, the invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965, the overthrow of Chilean President Salvador Allende in 1973, the invasion of Grenada in 1983, and the invasion of Panama in 1989, . . . to train the Contras fighting Nicaragua's Sandinista government, . . . members of El Salvador's armed forces in their war against the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front . . . stopover for the British Royal Navy in the 1982 Malvinas/Falklands War . . . (1990s) to prepare for the war in the Persian Gulf. (Barreto, 2002, pp. 27-28)

After 9/11, the U.S. Navy sought to secure its presence in Vieques for training against terrorism. More recently, it trained for the invasion of

Iraq (Mullenneaux, 2000, p. 3). Ironically, mainly self-serving, the U.S. Navy trained to protect its empire by subjugating the rights, land, and the ecosystem of the Viequenses. Yet, Viequenses lacked local police protection from those U.S. servicemen that solicited prostitutes, harassed the local women and girls, and perpetrated violent criminal acts while intoxicated (Barreto, 2002, p. 29; Mullenneaux, 2000, p. 30).

The War on Drugs became another reason for upholding the U.S. Navy in Vieques. Thus far, the military presence has not curtailed the trafficking of narcotics to the U.S., nor has any protection been offered to the thousands of missing Latin American women and children exploited by the lucrative black market of prostitution and pornography (Twohey, 2000; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002).

Political Tactics

Puerto Rico's political ideologies, especially of the conservative side, have also confused, distorted and repressed those Puerto Ricans involved in the struggle for social and economic justice. Since 1940, protests against the atrocities committed by the military have existed. However, any anti-American movement was perceived as a threat to the existing political, social and economic ties with the U.S. According to this conscious or unconscious belief, anti-military movements were seen as tactics used by leftist militant partisans in favor of Puerto Rico's independence from the U.S. Leftist radicals have historically been labeled as communist, and/or terrorist. As a consequence, many Puerto Ricans were led to believe the myth that any support toward demilitarization was anti-American, therefore jeopardizing any designated federal funds (Barreto, 2000, p. 48). In reality, the use of such a repressive tactic would boomerang and dent the U.S. markets.

About 70% of the net domestic income generated in Puerto Rico leaves the island . . . (O)ne-third of the total value of the productive activity in Puerto Rico turns into payments that the residents of Puerto Rico never see. The net U.S. government transfers—\$8,315 million in 1999, most of them vested rights of the people as Social Security or Veterans Pensions—pale when compared to earnings remissions toward the U.S. for \$21,717 million in the same year. This comparison does not take into consideration that U.S. military forces in Puerto Rico do not pay rent for the bases and the 12% of the land it occupies. (Committee for Human Rights in Puerto Rico, 2000, p. 146-147)

In addition, the U.S. Navy made \$80 million a year for renting Vieques to other foreign countries for their military maneuvers (McCafferty, 2002, p. 6).

DEMILITARIZATION

The fear of being ostracized, discriminated against or classified as terrorist restricted most anti-military movements. On April 19, 1999, however, the death of a civilian security guard for the Navy, David Sanes Rodríguez underscored the myth of the U.S. Navy's protective role. As noted by Mullenneaux (2000),

the Navy's 'shooting script' went disastrously awry . . . the pilot of a FA-18C Hornet flying at 400 miles an hour was cleared to drop two Mark-82 500-pound bombs . . . payload missed its target by a mile and a half, killing a civilian security guard and injuring four others. Nothing in the bomb run, it turned out, went according to plan. And it would change the Navy's relationship with Vieques forever. (p. 13)

It also changed the views Puerto Ricans held of the Navy. The people of Puerto Rico realized that the Navy was as destructive as any terrorist attack and as oppressive as any military regime. The Puerto Rican community retaliated by dropping a heavier bomb. It dropped its fears, stereotypes, and self-doubts. This explosion produced a sense of solidarity, empowering the Puerto Rican people in the island and mainland to fight for human rights, social justice, and self-determination (Barreto, 2002). Social and radical activists in the Vieques movement were empowered to continue their efforts in organizing and networking with committed support groups in Puerto Rico and the U.S. (McCaffrey, 1998). No longer did the relationship with the U.S. and the Navy prove divisive between the various conservative, status quo and/or pro-statehood political parties. It was a human justice matter and a common cause, bonding Puerto Ricans in the island with those in the mainland.

The violation of human rights captured world attention. By June 1999, both the Governor of Puerto Rico and President Clinton appointed two separate committees to study the Navy's impact in Vieques. By the end of the year, President Clinton recommended for the Navy to sustain its training for the next five years and offered an economic incentive of \$40 million to Puerto Rico. The governor of Puerto Rico did not accept President Clinton's offer but agreed with the White House to have Viequesens vote on the demilitarization of Vieques (Mullenneaux, 2000, p. 9-12). Neither the Viequesens

nor the community-at-large accepted the Rosselló-Clinton agreement; much less the continuation of bombing with inept weapons. Protesters were met with pepper spray and tear gas by the riot squad and police. However, many activists called for a nonviolent civil disobedience and took bullhorns to remind 'people to stay calm' (McCaffrey, 2002, p. 171). The protesters remained resilient and committed to nonviolence during the Vieques crisis.

Ecology and Health

The impact of the U.S. Navy on the ecology of Vieques also captured great attention. Since 1947, the Navy used napalm, depleted uranium, carcinogens and other toxic substances at levels that violated the Pentagon's regulations (Murillo, 2001, p. 60). Elevated levels of several contaminants have impacted the water, food chain, and land. "The USS Killen, a destroyer used as a target ship during nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands, lies sunk 150 yards from shore" (Brown, 2003, retrieved 10/26/03). "Between 1983 and 1998, the Navy dropped 17,783 tons of bombs on Vieques" (Berman Santana, 2002, p. 41). William Risley (2002), a consultant to Analytical Research Laboratories, found a patient from Vieques to have the worst toxic and mineral level ever noted in the laboratory. Studies conducted by the Puerto Rico Health Department found that compared to Puerto Rico, Vieques had a higher rate of cancer, asthma, diabetes, hypertension (Roman, 2003; EFE World News Service, 2003), infant mortality, (Berman Santana, 2002) and mental illness (Business Wire, 1999). Some environment advisors consider that the U.S. Navy violated a number of federal laws, i.e., Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, etc. (Inter Press Service, 1999). By the end of 1999, at least 55 Vieques cancer patients and landowners had filed a \$109 million class-action suit against the Navy (Mullenneaux, 2000, p. 12).

Solidarity Through Nonviolent Civil Disobedience

The awareness and consciousness-raising planted for the struggle for human and environmental rights finally blossomed to full force. The Vieques crisis flourished into a united front, mobilizing people from different political parties, religious groups, artists and leaders from other countries. In contrast to previous anti-military movements, no buyouts or repressive threats of cutting federal education funds could regulate this movement (Barreto, pp. 56-57, 69). Over 150,000 people attended the Peace for Vieques March in San Juan, Puerto Rico, on February 21, 2000 (Mullenneaux, 2000, p.12). Other rallies were held in

New York City and the 2000 Democratic Convention in Los Angeles. Attracting worldwide attention, neither spectators nor U.S. politicians could ignore, deny or avoid the Vieques situation.

Regular efforts to educate and lobby Congress include a visit by hundreds of Viequenses and Puerto Ricans to Washington, D.C., during March 2001, when some legislators expressed surprise that Vieques was inhabited! By far the most powerful activism has been militant, nonviolent civil disobedience . . . within a year, 14 protest camps had been established, representing teachers, fishermen, church groups and others. (Berman Santana, 2002, p. 43)

Washington, D.C., became the national headquarters for the Vieques Support Network. Supported by the Puerto Rican Solidarity Committee, it linked various support groups from New York City, Philadelphia, Chicago, and other cities in the U.S. (McCaffrey, 1998; Mullenneaux, 2000).

Viequenses spearheaded the Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques (CRPDV) whose purpose was to achieve the Four Ds: Demilitarization, Decontamination, Devolution (return of all Navy land to Viequenses), and Economic Development (Mullenneaux, 2000, p. 8). In support of nonviolent protests, CRPDV provided resources to protest campers. Teachers from the Puerto Rican Federation of Teachers provided literature on civil disobedience. Attorneys from the Puerto Rican Bar Association taught campers their constitutional rights and provided free legal assistant to any camper arrested for trespassing. If arrested, leftist political leaders (e.g., Rubén Berríos) and lawyers advised the protesters to not resist arrest, and to go in a peaceful and civil manner. Even the far right pro statehood politicians in power “suggested the legislature hold all its sessions in the Navy’s live-fire zone if the military refused to back down” (Mullenneaux, 2000, p. 74).

It is not clear if the 1979 death of Angel Rodríguez Cristóbal was seminal to this nonviolent civil disobedience. Angel Rodríguez Cristóbal was one of 150 demonstrators that trespassed into Navy waters and territory. On May 19, 1979, Angel Rodríguez Cristóbal became one of the 21 protesters arrested by federal marshals during an ecumenical service in Vieques. Although the army of federal marshals intended to break-up the Vieques movement, the press captured the marshals’ repressive tactics used during the arrests. Known as the “Vieques 21,” Angel Rodríguez Cristóbal, along with eleven others, was fined \$500.00 and sentenced to serve six months in federal prison. Two months into his term, Angel Rodríguez Cristóbal was found dead at the Tallahassee

Federal Institution. U.S. authorities declared his death a suicide while friends and family claimed otherwise. Independent autopsy and photos of the cadaver showed severe beatings and inconsistencies to suicide by strangulation (McCaffrey, 2002, p. 90). Some suggested that he was assassinated and his death a repressive message to other activists in Vieques (Murillo, 2001, p. 49). In retaliation to his mysterious death, “the Macheteros (Machete Wielders), a revolutionary pro-independence organization attacked a navy bus, killing two servicemen” (Barreto, p. 31). Murillo (2001) noted that *ABC News* correspondent Bill Greenwood described this event as a “confrontation between Navy officials and terrorists” (p. 49). As previously discussed, such a misnomer serves to regulate any social anti-military movement in place. Finally, after a two decade span between the deaths of Angel Rodríguez Cristóbal (1979) and David Sanes Rodríguez (1999), the people of Puerto Rico were clear that only a nonpartisan approach would maintain the united front in the struggle for human and ecological rights of the Viequenses.

It can also be argued that the strong presence of the religious sector influenced the call for peace and nonviolent behavior. A coalition of ministers, nuns, bishops and the Puerto Rican Bible Society clearly demonstrated their opposition of the Navy in Vieques (The Christian Century, 2003; Mullenneaux, 2000). It was evident that neither protesters nor the Navy could afford to confront each other in front of a vigilant worldwide audience. Greater caution occurred during the arrests of Reverend Al Sharpton, Rev. Jesse Jackson’s wife Jackie Jackson, James Edward Olmos, and Robert Kennedy, Jr. This civil disobedient and peaceful movement inspired Guatemalan Peace Nobel Prize laureate Rigoberta Menchu, the Dalai Lama, Rev. Jesse Jackson, and Mayor Giuliani to visit Vieques and join the struggle for social justice and the demilitarization of Vieques. The movement flourished as the national media captured the visits of presidential candidate Al Gore. It has been suggested that New York candidates supported the demilitarization in Vieques in order to gain votes from the Puerto Rican community. Quite impressive was NY State Senator Hillary Rodman Clinton’s visit to Vieques during her campaign. Yet, some did recall when as First Lady, Hillary Rodman Clinton did not support President Clinton’s humanitarian action of granting clemency to the Puerto Rican activists imprisoned in 1979 (see section on Angel Rodríguez Cristóbal, page 14). Republican candidate for re-election, New York State governor George Pataki called for the bombing to stop during his high profiled visit. In a similar fashion, the AFL-CIO, world known entertainers (i.e., Ricky Martin,

Rosie Pérez), world-boxing champions (i.e., Felix ‘Tito’ Trinidad and José ‘Chegui’ Torres), and Miss Universe (Denise Quiñones) became conduits for peace in Vieques (Barreto, 2000). Their positions demonstrated to the world the Puerto Rican people’s camaraderie against the U.S. Navy. Since May 2000, more than 2000 people had participated in acts of civil disobedience (Acevedo-Delgado, 2003).

The Struggle Continues

Finally, on June 14, 2001, President Bush reaffirmed former President Clinton’s promise that the Navy would halt the military exercise and leave Vieques by May 2003. The U.S. government undermined the results of the July 2001 referendum where 70 percent of the residents in Vieques voted for an immediate end to military maneuvers (Hernández Betran, 2002). The last military maneuvers ended in February 2003. Unsurprisingly, the closing of the U.S. military base in Vieques on May 1, 2003 called for an island wide celebration. Viequenses and others rejoiced the ending of a 60-year-old battle.

Still in the hands of the federal government, the Navy transferred the property to the Department of Interior for developing a wildlife refuge. The U.S. Department of Fishing and Wildlife estimated \$400 million would be needed to clean up the environmental mess, contamination, toxins, unexploded bombs, and other harmful toxic waste generated by military activities. In spite of the U.S. government intervention, Vieques is now a part of the *international* struggle against military activities that contaminate the global environment (Acevedo-Delgado, n.d.).

As previously noted, the health crisis still exists. With a high cancer mortality rate, a program was proposed that would provide transportation to those needing treatment to the Oncology Hospital at the Medical Center in Puerto Rico. A mobile unit for screening out cancer was also proposed. In spite of the Diagnostic and Treatment Center in Vieques, the health care reform and specialized services located outside of Vieques makes access to care somewhat difficult (Roman, May 10/03; Sosa, 2003). As Albor Ruiz (2003) reported, of the 9300 people in Vieques, 72% live below the poverty line and 50% are unemployed. Such figures only accentuate the welfare state of the Viequenses.

It is anticipated that the tourism industry would alleviate Vieques’ economy. But, another environmental concern is the possible overflow of tourists invading the island. As the regional manager of the Puerto Rico Tourism Company reported: “They come in and ask if the water is

safe to swim in . . . They want to see Camp Garcia . . . And they want real estate brochures” (Myers, 2003).

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico will need to be vigilant of the powerful empire of the Hiltons, Hyatts, Marriotts, and other resort developers with U.S. corporate ties. To lose sight of those martyrs expropriated and forced to leave their homes would only pave the invasion of the new global colonizers.

CONCLUSIONS

Finally, after 60 years of military presence, Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico and the mainland recognized how the U.S. Navy destroyed their people’s lives, their beaches, environment, and livelihood. Awareness, consciousness-raising, solidarity, and civil disobedience were effective tools used in the struggle for achieving social, economic, and environmental justice for the people in Vieques. These tools served to overcome the repressive colonial tactics used by the U.S. Navy, maintain focus on the issue, and embrace Puerto Ricans in spite of political, religious, class, and geographical differences.

In essence, the bottom-up grassroots social movement relied on the reflection of the lives of those Viequenses historically oppressed by the U.S. Navy. The reflection of the people’s lives served to deconstruct false ideologies used by the U.S. to restrict any anti-military movement. This social movement welcomed others of different creeds, cultures, political ideologies, social class, occupation, etc. Such openness empowered and energized the people in their struggle for social justice. The remains of this social movement provides the foresight for understanding that, in spite of this victory, the struggle for a national identity, democracy, and the protection of human and environmental rights will continue. It hopes that people from other sectors of the world also recognize that the U.S. *cultural* imperialism will not cease to gain control over indigenous cultures in these post-modern times (Ritzer, 1998, p. 87). Therefore, the Vieques experience must serve as a model of social change and be passed on to future generations. The solidarity of the Puerto Rican people must be glorified during each and every commemoration of their victory over the greatest naval force in the history of the world.

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