

**THE PUERTO RICAN DIASPORA TO THE UNITED STATES:  
A POSTCOLONIAL MIGRATION?<sup>1</sup>**

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In 1953, the General Assembly of the United Nations removed Puerto Rico from its list of 'non-self-governing territories'. Officially, the Island was no longer considered a 'colony' of the United States. Since then, the US government has repeatedly claimed that the Puerto Rican people have exercised their right to self-determination, that they adopted their own Constitution, that they have attained self-government and that they are freely associated with the United States (Mekdad, 2002). The leaders of Puerto Rico's Popular Democratic Party (PDP), who favour the current political status, insist that in 1952 the Island entered into a 'bilateral compact' with the United States. That year, 81.9 per cent of the Island's electorate approved the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico (*Estado Libre Asociado*, in Spanish, or 'Associated Free State'). From this perspective, Puerto Rico may be deemed a 'postcolonial' state that has received the consent of the majority of the governed. This state is characterised by free elections, a competitive party system, respect for human rights and legal protection of civic liberties, as well as extensive welfare and social programmes.

However, the exact nature of the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States has been intensely disputed since the creation of the Commonwealth. Both independence supporters and proponents of the Island's incorporation as the fifty-first state of the American union have denounced the continuing 'colonial' relations between Puerto Rico and the United States. The Island remains under the 'plenary power' of the US Congress, and residents of Puerto Rico do not enjoy all the constitutional rights and privileges of US citizenship. In particular, the Island's residents cannot vote for the President and Vice-President of the United States or for their own congressional delegates, yet they depend greatly upon the actions of these elected officials. From this standpoint, the Island is an 'incomplete democracy' with 'partial

citizenship', subordinated to an external political entity that does not represent its own inhabitants. (For more details on Puerto Rico's enduring 'colonial dilemma', see Duany & Pantojas-García, 2005; Ramos & Rivera, 2001; Rivera Ramos, 2001).

Puerto Ricans in the United States have been dubbed 'colonial immigrants' because they are US citizens who can travel freely between the Island and the mainland but are not fully covered by the American Constitution on the Island (Grosfoguel, 2003; Rodríguez, 1989). As Ramón Grosfoguel (2004) has argued, Puerto Ricans share much with other 'colonial subjects', such as the residents of other Caribbean dependent territories who have relocated in large numbers to their metropolises. For instance, the parallels between Puerto Ricans in the United States and Antilleans in France and the Netherlands are striking, including their subordinate position within metropolitan societies, largely as a consequence of colonial racism, despite conditions of legal equality (see also de Jong, 2005; Giraud, 2002; Milia-Marie-Luce, 2002, 2007; Oostindie & Klinkers, 2004). For other analysts, Puerto Rico resembles a 'postcolonial colony' because it combines elements of classical colonial rule with political autonomy, relative prosperity and a strong national culture (Duany, 2002; Flores, 2000, 2008). In any case, Puerto Rico occupies a marginal space within the US academy and particularly within postcolonial debates, partly because it is not formally recognised as a colony.

Recent studies of Puerto Ricans have revisited their colonial history, national identity and transnational migration from various standpoints, including postcolonial, transnational, postmodern, queer and cultural studies (see Duany, 2002; Grosfoguel, 2003; Martínez-San Miguel, 2003; Negrón-Muntaner, 2004; Pabón, 2002; Pérez, 2004; Ramos-Zayas, 2003). Most scholars in the social sciences and the humanities no longer question whether Puerto Rico is a

colony of the United States. They often discuss, sometimes angrily, the precise form of US colonialism on the Island, the extent to which it has acquired certain 'postcolonial' traits such as linguistic and cultural autonomy, and the possibility of waging an effective decolonization process. The issue of national identity in Puerto Rico is still contested as intensely as ever. What is different about current scholarly discussions is that many intellectuals, especially those who align themselves with postmodernism, are highly critical of nationalist discourses. Other debates focus on the appropriate approach to population movements between the Island and the US mainland. For example, some outside observers insist that, technically speaking, the Puerto Rican exodus should be considered an internal, not international, migration, while others, including myself, refer to such a massive dispersal of people as transnational or diasporic. Much of this controversy centers on the significance of geographic, cultural, linguistic and even racial borders between the Island and the US mainland.

Puerto Rico is one of the overseas territories acquired by the United States since the end of the nineteenth century, including Hawaii (1898–1959), Cuba (1898–1902), the Philippines (1898–1946), Guam (1898), the Northern Mariana Islands (1898), American Samoa (1899), the Panama Canal Zone (1903–1979) and the US Virgin Islands (1917). The expansion of the continental United States into what has been called 'the imperial archipelago' in the Caribbean and the Pacific (Thompson, 2002) quickly displaced the inhabitants of one territory to another during the first decades of the twentieth century. Perhaps the most relevant case for comparison with Puerto Rico is the Philippines; both territories were ceded by Spain to the United States after the War of 1898 and both have staged large-scale population flows to the US mainland. The first migrations of Filipino workers were directed towards Hawaii and other US territories in the

Pacific. At the time, Filipinos were considered ‘nationals’ but not citizens of the United States, a spurious legal status that allowed them to move freely to the United States until 1934. That year, Congress established an immigration quota from the Philippines and the number of Filipino immigrants decreased sharply (Asis, 2006). In 1946, the Philippines became independent from the United States. After the US Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolished restrictions by national origin, Filipino migration increased greatly. Today, Filipinos are the second largest foreign-born group (with more than 1.7 million people) in the United States, after Mexicans.

Puerto Rico is the leading source of migration from the overseas possessions of the United States. Table 1 provides recent estimates of the population originating in the major territories annexed by the United States (though both Cuba and the Philippines are independent republics and Hawaii is a state of the union). The figures show that Puerto Rican immigrants and their descendants surpass by far all the other groups, including Filipinos, Cubans, Guamanians, Hawaiians, Samoans and US Virgin Islanders in the United States. Except for American Samoa, Puerto Rico also has the highest share of its population residing abroad. Moreover, Puerto Ricans have migrated en masse to the US mainland for more than six decades, the most sustained movement among all the territories acquired by the United States over the last century or so. Hence, focusing on the peculiarities of the Puerto Rican case seems well justified.

[Insert table 1 near here]

## BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Puerto Rico was one of Spain's two remaining colonies in the Americas until 1898 (the other was Cuba), when it became an overseas possession of the United States as a result of the Spanish-Cuban-American War. On 25 July 1898, US troops invaded the Island and have retained a strong presence there ever since. In 1901, the US Supreme Court paradoxically defined Puerto Rico as 'foreign to the United States in a domestic sense' because the Island was neither a state of the union nor a sovereign republic. The Court also ruled that Puerto Rico was an 'unincorporated territory' of the United States and that Congress would determine which parts of the American Constitution would 'follow the flag' (Burnett & Marshall, 2001). In 1904, the Court declared that Puerto Ricans were not 'aliens' in the United States for immigration purposes (Erman, 2008). In 1917, Congress granted statutory US citizenship to all Puerto Ricans, but the Island remained an 'unincorporated territory'. In the 1930s, the federal government extended the New Deal through the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration (PRERA) and the Puerto Rican Reconstruction Administration (PRRA). In 1947, President Harry S. Truman appointed the first Puerto Rican-born governor, Jesús T. Piñero. That same year, the Puerto Rican legislature approved the Industrial Incentives Act, which lured US investments through tax exemptions for manufacturing enterprises. Thus was launched 'Operation Bootstrap' (*Manos a la Obra*, in Spanish), the government's much-touted programme of 'industrialisation by invitation'.

In 1948, Luis Muñoz Marín became the Island's first elected governor, a post to which he was re-elected three times. In 1952, Puerto Rico became a US Commonwealth with limited self-

government in local matters, such as taxation, education, health, housing, culture and language. However, the US federal government retained jurisdiction in most state affairs, including citizenship, immigration, customs, defence, currency, transportation, communications, foreign trade and diplomacy. Beginning in the 1970s, the Puerto Rican model of development underwent a crisis, as many factories closed down and moved to more attractive locations, such as the Dominican Republic, Ireland or Singapore. In 1974, the federal government introduced the food stamp program in Puerto Rico to alleviate increasing poverty. In 1996, Congress eliminated Section 936 of the Internal Revenue Code, which since 1976 had allowed for the repatriation of untaxed profits from US companies operating in Puerto Rico. Consequently, manufacturing employment in Puerto Rico declined by 45,600 jobs between 1998 and 2007 (Junta de Planificación de Puerto Rico, 2008). The Island's export-led manufacturing strategy has lost most of its steam.

## **STATE POLICIES TOWARDS MIGRATION**

Since the first decades of the twentieth century, the colonial Puerto Rican government assumed an active role in promoting and managing migration to the United States (Lapp, 1990). This public policy was based on the widespread perception that Puerto Rico was a small, poor and overpopulated country with few natural resources. As the American Governor Arthur Yager wrote in 1915, 'the only really effective remedy [to the problem of overpopulation] is the transfer of large numbers of Porto Ricans [sic] to some other region' (cited in Whalen & Vázquez-Hernández, 2005:8). Early efforts focused on recruiting agricultural workers from the

Island to sugar plantations in Hawaii, the Dominican Republic, Cuba and the US Virgin Islands, especially St. Croix (History Task Force, 1979; Mustelier Ayala, 2006; Rosario Natal, 1983). However, the Puerto Rican exodus gained impetus during the 1940s, when it was largely reoriented towards the US mainland.

Notwithstanding its lack of sovereignty, Puerto Rico's government acted as a 'transnational' intermediary for its migrant citizens for most of the twentieth century (Meléndez, 1997). Thus, the Island's government established several agencies in the United States with different names: the Bureau of Employment and Identification (1930–1948), the Office of Information for Puerto Rico (1945–1949), the Bureau of Employment and Migration (1947–1951), the Migration Division of the Department of Labor (1951–1989) and the Department of Puerto Rican Community Affairs in the United States (1989–1993) (Duany, 2002). Among other initiatives, these agencies supervised an extensive programme for contract farm workers; promoted employment opportunities for Puerto Ricans in the United States; lobbied for the rights of migrant workers; negotiated cheaper airfares between the Island and the US mainland; led public relations campaigns for Puerto Ricans in the United States; registered thousands of Puerto Rican voters; and helped organise the Puerto Rican community in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia and elsewhere (García-Colón, 2008; Lapp, 1990; Stinson Fernández, 1996). The Department of Puerto Rican Community Affairs in the United States was eliminated in 1993 because pro-statehood leaders, then a majority in the Island's legislature, believed that the agency represented an unwarranted instance of applying public policy in another jurisdiction. Still, the Commonwealth government maintains a formal presence in the mainland through the



Puerto Rico Federal Affairs Administration. Nowadays, this agency has greatly reduced its budget and influence over the diaspora.

The project of organising and supervising migration from Puerto Rico was first elaborated by the American sociologist Clarence Senior, who later directed the Migration Division (1951–1960). In an influential monograph, Senior (1947) advocated establishing an emigration office attached to the governor’s executive staff and working closely with the Island’s Department of Labor. The main function of this office would be to recruit workers from Puerto Rico to the United States and Latin America, especially Venezuela. The office would provide migrant workers with information on job openings, training, transportation, settlement and insurance, as well as promote further emigration from the Island. Although the plan to relocate Puerto Ricans in Latin America proved too expensive, the idea of finding jobs for them in the United States, primarily in New York City, later crystallised in the Migration Division.

Senior’s blueprint for planned emigration was well received by Muñoz Marín, then President of the Puerto Rican Senate (1941–1948) and later Governor (1949–1964). Muñoz Marín agreed that it was ‘necessary to resort to emigration as a measure for the immediate relief to the problem posed by our surplus population, while we seek permanent solutions in the long run’ (Muñoz Marín, 1946; my translations throughout). An economist working for the Office of Puerto Rico in Washington, DC, Donald J. O’Connor, also urged the resettlement of Puerto Ricans in the United States and other countries such as the Dominican Republic or Brazil. According to O’Connor, ‘migration can accomplish what economic programs on the island cannot do quickly’ – that is, create jobs and sources of income, while reducing population growth (O’Connor, 1948). High-ranking members of the ruling PDP, such as Antonio Fernós-

Isern, Teodoro Moscoso and Rafael Picó, concurred with O'Connor's optimistic assessment. Thus began a state-supported project of emigration as 'safety valve' for Puerto Rico's demographic and economic pressures.

On 12 May 1947, the Island's legislature passed Public Law 25, creating the Bureau of Employment and Migration. From its inception, the Bureau (and its heirs, the Migration Division and the Department of Puerto Rican Community Affairs in the United States) sought 'to follow its migrant citizens to facilitate their adjustment and adaptation in the communities in which they chose to live'. According to Public Law 25, 'the Government of Puerto Rico does not stimulate or discourage the migration of Puerto Rican workers to the United States or any other foreign country; but it deems its duty to duly orient [them] regarding the occupational opportunities and adjustment problems in ethnologically strange settings' (Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico, 1972–1973:1; 1977–1978:6). The public policy of 'following migrant citizens' to the United States, while officially neither 'stimulating nor discouraging' their departure, paid off in the short run. The growth of the Island's labour force slowed down, while living standards rose substantially between the 1940s and 1960s. Population control was a key ideological tenet of the PDP's development strategy throughout this period (Pantojas-García, 1990).

Post-war Puerto Rican migration has ebbed and flowed according to various stages of Operation Bootstrap, as well as to the changing demands of the US economy, particularly in the large urban centres of the Northeast (Rivera-Batiz & Santiago, 1996; Rodríguez, 1989; Whalen, 2001). Although Operation Bootstrap created thousands of factory jobs, it could not absorb many more thousands of unskilled workers displaced by a swift agricultural decline. In 1940, agriculture employed 44.9 per cent of the Island's labour force; by 1970, that sector only

employed 9.9 per cent (Junta de Planificación de Puerto Rico, 1983). During this period, Puerto Rico's development strategy expelled a large share of its rural population, both on and off the Island, primarily to mainland cities that required cheap labour, such as New York City, Chicago and Philadelphia. Afterwards, Puerto Ricans tended to resettle abroad when job opportunities were more attractive on the mainland and returned when economic conditions improved on the Island. Today, many people travel back and forth in search of higher wages and living standards, as well as to reunite with their families, study or retire in either the Island or the mainland. US citizenship, cheap air transportation and far-flung social networks facilitate such comings and goings.

Defining himself as a return migrant, Governor Muñoz Marín advised stateside Puerto Ricans to adapt themselves to their new environment, by learning English and registering to vote in local elections. Nonetheless, he encouraged migrants to preserve their cultural identity, proudly assert their Puerto Rican origin and return to the Island, once socioeconomic conditions improved there. At the tenth anniversary of the Migration Division in New York, Muñoz Marín (1958) proclaimed: 'I envisage, not immediately or soon, but in the not too distant future, the time in [which] more citizens, of Puerto Rican origin or not, will follow my second example and migrate to Puerto Rico'. The number of returnees began to surpass those leaving for the United States in the early 1970s, especially as a result of minimum wage hikes on the Island and the fiscal crisis of New York City, the traditional core of the Puerto Rican diaspora (Meléndez, 1993). The ensuing shift from manufacturing to high-technology and service industries further eroded the socioeconomic position of Puerto Ricans in the United States.

## MAPPING PUERTO RICAN MIGRATION

The main destinations for Puerto Rican migrants towards the end of the nineteenth century were other Caribbean and Latin American countries, such as the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Venezuela and Panama. A small number of political exiles from the Spanish colonial regime also settled in the US mainland, particularly in New York City, between 1868 and 1898. The first major migrant stream under US rule was directed to Hawaii, another US territory, in 1900 and 1901. Until 1920, Hawaii had the highest concentration of Puerto Rican migrants. Smaller enclaves existed in states like California and Arizona.

The earliest and largest mainland Puerto Rican settlements emerged in New York City, the US port with the best transportation links with San Juan since the nineteenth century. Until the 1940s, most migrants arrived on passenger steamboats such as the *Marine Tiger*, the *Borinquen* and the *Coamo* (Matos-Rodríguez & Hernández, 2001). Many Puerto Rican communities (or *colonias*, as they were called then) developed alongside African American neighbourhoods such as Harlem in Manhattan or Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn. Over time, predominantly Puerto Rican *barrios* would become more mixed with other Hispanics, particularly Dominicans and Mexicans. From New York, Puerto Ricans spread out to New Jersey, Connecticut and Pennsylvania, especially those employed in seasonal agriculture. A secondary Puerto Rican concentration developed in the Midwest during the 1950s, particularly Chicago, Cleveland and smaller industrial cities such as Lorain, Ohio, and Gary, Indiana. A third nucleus emerged around Philadelphia, Camden, Lancaster and other cities along the Delaware River Valley (Whalen, 2001). After World War II, most Puerto Ricans arrived in New York by

airplane, making them the first large-scale airborne migration in history. During the 1970s, Puerto Ricans began to move en masse to the south, especially Florida.

As the diaspora has become more widely scattered, regional differences have intensified. Today, Puerto Rican communities in the Southeast and Southwest tend to be economically better off than in the Northeast and Midwest (Acosta-Belén & Santiago, 2006). Moreover, Puerto Ricans are more likely to come into contact with Cubans in Miami and with Mexicans in Los Angeles than in New York City, where they are more prone to interact with African Americans and Dominicans. Partly in response to local conditions, stateside Puerto Ricans have developed varied cultural identities. For example, 'Chicago-Ricans' embraced a pan-Latino label earlier than elsewhere, because they often mingled with Mexicans as co-workers, neighbours and marriage partners, and mobilised politically according to their common Hispanic origins. At the same time, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans in Chicago and elsewhere racialise each other's cultural and language practices and maintain their social distance, reinforced by distinct settlement patterns (De Genova & Ramos-Zayas, 2003).

Throughout the twentieth century, Puerto Ricans left their homeland primarily for economic reasons, such as chronic unemployment, poverty, low wages and a high cost of living. After World War II, Operation Bootstrap displaced many rural workers to urban centres, especially San Juan, the capital. Lack of sufficient jobs on the Island, combined with a growing demand for cheap labour in the mainland, produced the first massive exodus in the 1940s. Another reason for sustained high rates of emigration has been the wide discrepancy between wages in Puerto Rico and the United States. On average, Island workers earn less than half than their US counterparts. The gap is much higher in some occupations, such as the police force,

construction workers, electricians, nurses and physicians (Sotomayor, 2000). Recently, middle-class sectors have searched for a 'better quality of life' abroad, especially educational and health services. Some journalistic sources have sounded the alarm of a 'brain drain' from the Island.

The Puerto Rican diaspora has undergone three main phases since the beginning of the twentieth century (Rodríguez, 1989; Sánchez Korrol, 1983). The pioneering wave, between 1917 and 1944, clustered in a few neighbourhoods of New York City, such as East Harlem, Chelsea, Manhattan's Lower East Side and Brooklyn's Navy Yard. These early settlements were relatively small; were well integrated with other Spanish-speaking immigrants, especially Cubans and Spaniards; and were not stigmatised as 'social problems'. Many were skilled workers, especially cigar makers. About 90,000 Puerto Ricans moved to the mainland between 1898 and 1944 (Vázquez Calzada, 1979).

The second wave, often dubbed the 'Great Migration', took place between 1945 and 1965. Puerto Rican communities expanded into the South Bronx and Brooklyn, especially Williamsburg and Sunset Park. Puerto Ricans became the second largest minority in New York City, after African Americans; the second largest Hispanic population in the United States, after Mexicans; and one of the most disadvantaged groups, together with Native Americans. More than half a million Puerto Ricans moved abroad during this stage. Most were unskilled workers, with little education and knowledge of the English language, and were largely incorporated into the lower rungs of the US labour market, such as light manufacturing, domestic service and seasonal agriculture.

The third period, between 1966 and the present, has been characterised by a growing 'revolving-door' migration – the back-and-forth movement between the Island and the US

mainland. The return of Puerto Ricans to the Island has taken massive proportions since the 1970s. Between 1991 and 1998, Puerto Rico received 144,528 return migrants (Junta de Planificación de Puerto Rico, 2000). In 1994–95 alone, 18,177 persons immigrated to the Island; nearly 95 per cent were returnees and their children (Olmeda, 1998). In 2000, the US Census Bureau (2008) found that 6.1 per cent of Puerto Rico’s population was born in the United States and that 3.2 per cent had lived there in 1995. At the same time, large-scale emigration from the Island has continued unabated. As I have argued elsewhere, Puerto Rico has become ‘a nation on the move’ (Duany, 2002).

### **THE GROWING DISPERSAL OF THE PUERTO RICAN PEOPLE**

A basic problem in documenting the Puerto Rican diaspora is the absence of reliable records on the number of people who move between the Island and the US mainland. In turn, this situation is due to Puerto Rico’s peculiar condition as an ‘unincorporated territory’ of the United States as well as the treatment of Puerto Ricans as not ‘aliens’ by US immigration authorities. Although official statistics based on passenger traffic are notoriously unreliable, they provide a crude estimate of the net movement of people between Puerto Rico and the United States. These figures show that emigration became massive during the 1940s, expanded during the 1950s, contracted during the 1970s and regained strength during the 1980s (see figure 1).

[Insert figure 2 near here]

According to these statistics, the contemporary diaspora has equalled and perhaps surpassed the post-war ‘Great Migration’. Almost 8 per cent of the Island’s inhabitants relocated to the US mainland during the 1990s. Between the years 2000 and 2007, even more Puerto Ricans (some 415,000) emigrated than in the previous decade (326,000). More than two million people have moved from the Island to the US mainland since the mid-twentieth century. The proportions of this exodus are even more staggering when one recalls that Puerto Rico’s population had not reached four million in the year 2007. Aside from nineteenth-century Ireland and twentieth-century Suriname, the magnitude of the Puerto Rican diaspora has few historical precedents or contemporary parallels.

Census data confirm the spectacular growth of the diaspora after World War II (see figure 2). The number of stateside Puerto Ricans was relatively small until about 1940, when it began to expand quickly. Since 1960, the population of Puerto Rican origin abroad has increased less rapidly, but at a more accelerated pace than on the Island. By the year 2006, according to census estimates, the number of Puerto Ricans in the US mainland had overcome those on the Island. (For recent demographic portraits of the stateside Puerto Rican population, see Acosta-Belén & Santiago, 2006; Falcón, 2004a; Meléndez, 2007).

[Insert figure 2 near here]

Until the mid-twentieth century, the Puerto Rican exodus was primarily directed towards New York City. Hence the term ‘Nuyorican’ was coined in the 1950s to refer to all persons of Puerto Rican descent living in the United States. Other metropolitan areas in the Northeast and



Midwest that received large numbers of people from the Island included Chicago, Philadelphia, Newark and Hartford. Since the 1960s, the migrants have amply spread out (see table 2).

Although Puerto Ricans still concentrate in the state of New York, their proportion decreased from nearly three-fourths of the total in 1960 to slightly more than one-fourth in 2007. During the 1990s, New York was the only state that lost part of its Puerto Rican population (about 3.3 per cent). Still, New York City has the largest concentration of Puerto Rican residents in the world – 788,560 persons in 2007.

[Insert table 2 near here]

Correspondingly, the proportion of stateside Puerto Ricans has increased elsewhere, notably in Florida, which displaced New Jersey as the state with the second largest Puerto Rican concentration in the United States. The ‘Flori-Rican’ population grew from a little more than 2 per cent of all stateside Puerto Ricans in 1960 to nearly 18 per cent in 2007. Puerto Ricans have also congregated in north-eastern states such as New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and Connecticut. In 2007, nearly 640,000 Puerto Ricans lived in states that did not have the ten largest concentrations of immigrants from the Island. Altogether, census data document the dispersal of Puerto Ricans outside their original niche in New York during the past five decades. (For more details on the changing settlement patterns of Puerto Ricans in the United States, see Vargas-Ramos, 2006; for excellent studies of various diasporic Puerto Rican communities, see Whalen & Vázquez-Hernández, 2005; for the case of Florida, see Duany & Matos-Rodríguez, 2006.)

During the second half of the 1990s, Orange and Osceola counties in Central Florida became the primary destinations for Puerto Ricans, replacing the Bronx and other counties in New York, Pennsylvania and Illinois (see table 3). Moreover, Florida has five of the top ten places (including Hillsborough, Miami-Dade and Broward) where recent migrants from the Island congregated. This trend has continued over the last decade, according to the American Community Survey (US Census Bureau, 2008). Census data also confirm the constant coming and going of people – the *vaivén* – between Puerto Rico and the United States, which I have analyzed in more depth elsewhere (Duany, 2002). Many more Puerto Ricans are moving away from the Bronx and other traditional destinations (such as New York and Kings counties in New York City, and Cook county in Illinois, not shown in the table) than from most places in Florida.

[Insert table 3 near here]

A final demographic aspect I would like to underline is the swift expansion of the Island's 'Nuyorican' population – as all return migrants and their US-born descendants are commonly called in Puerto Rico, regardless of where they resided abroad. As figure 3 illustrates, the immigration of persons of Puerto Rican ancestry in Puerto Rico was statistically insignificant until 1950. Thereafter, the number of Island residents originating in the United States – mostly children and grandchildren of Puerto Ricans who had left before – increased substantially. The presence of more than 200,000 US-born Puerto Ricans – with all of its political, cultural, linguistic and even pedagogic consequences – has gone practically unnoticed in recent research

on the Island. (For some relevant studies, all published in the United States, see Aranda, 2007; Lorenzo-Hernández, 1999; Pérez, 2004; Vargas-Ramos, 2000; Zentella, 2003.)

[Insert figure 3 near here]

### **THE RISE AND FALL OF THE FARM LABOR PROGRAM**

A fascinating case study of how the Commonwealth government navigated the ‘colonial’ and ‘postcolonial’ intricacies of Puerto Rico’s political status is the Farm Labor Program. Between 1947 and 1990, 420,980 Puerto Ricans were recruited to work in the US mainland as part of the agricultural programme initiated by the Island’s government. At its peak in 1968, 22,902 contract farm labourers moved from the Island to the mainland (Monserrat, 1991). Most of the workers concentrated in north-eastern states, especially New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Connecticut and Massachusetts. The vast majority were young married men with limited schooling and proficiency in the English language. Most had been landless rural labourers in the sugar, coffee and tobacco industries (Cruz, 1998; García-Colón, 2008; History Task Force, 1979; Whalen, 2001). Although they were popularly known as *los tomateros* (‘the tomato pickers’), Puerto Ricans also planted and cut shade tobacco in the Connecticut River Valley; picked apples in New England and Washington; strawberries and cabbages in New York; corn, blueberries and asparagus in the Delaware River Valley; peaches in South Carolina; avocados, potatoes and lettuce in South Florida; and other crops like cranberries, oranges and mushrooms elsewhere.

Several diasporic communities originated as former contract workers resettled in cities such as Philadelphia, Lancaster, Camden, Buffalo, Hartford, Boston, Milwaukee, Detroit and Miami.

The Farm Labor Program of the Puerto Rican government was created by Public Law 89 in 1947, making the Island's Commissioner of Labor responsible for supervising the recruitment of agricultural workers in Puerto Rico. In 1951, the Wagner-Peyser Act, which established the Bureau of Employment Security within the US Department of Labor, was extended to Puerto Rico. Thereafter, the Island was formally recognised as part of the 'domestic' labour supply in the United States (Monserrat, 1991). In effect, Puerto Rico was treated as a state of the American union regarding seasonal agricultural workers. Hence, the Island's Farm Labor Program processed thousands of 'clearance orders' from US employers requesting Puerto Rican farm workers through the US Department of Labor. The arrangement between the Commonwealth and federal governments worked reasonably well between the 1950s and 1970s. It produced the peculiar situation of a 'colonial' state representing its 'migrant citizens' within a complex metropolitan legal structure and labour market. Throughout this period, the Commonwealth government insisted that Puerto Rican farm workers were legally 'domestic', but culturally 'foreign' to the United States.

The field representatives of Puerto Rico's Farm Labor Program had multiple duties. First, they supervised the transportation of agricultural workers from various recruiting stations on the Island and often welcomed them at US airports. Second, they oriented migrants about their rights and privileges as US citizens. Third, they inspected housing and eating arrangements at labour camps to ensure their compliance with the Commonwealth's contract with employers. Fourth, they investigated accident, salary and unemployment claims by disgruntled workers (and they

were many). Fifth, they mediated labour disputes between workers and representatives of the growers' associations. Finally, they coordinated the services offered by state, federal and private agencies, including insurance, health care, English language classes and recreational activities (Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico, 1966–1967). A character in a promotional film commissioned by Puerto Rico's Labor Department, *Los beneficiarios* ('The Beneficiaries', Viguí Films, undated), quips that the field representative of the Migration Division played the roles of 'father confessor, nurse, psychologist, chauffeur, translator, teacher, defence lawyer – and everything for the worker'. Another character adds, 'he's a friend of the worker. Someone who fixes everything (*arreglalo todo*)'.

Puerto Rico's Farm Labor Program declined steadily in the 1970s. To begin, the demand for seasonal agricultural workers in the Northeast decreased because of the mechanisation of several crops and the increasing availability of local labour. Furthermore, as US citizens, Puerto Ricans were generally paid higher wages and had better living and working conditions than other immigrants, such as Jamaicans or Mexicans. Puerto Rican farm workers also organised labour unions to defend their collective rights, which earned them the reputation of being 'troublesome' among employers (Bonilla-Silva, 1988). In 1968, the election of a New Progressive Party (NPP) government weakened the thrust for recruiting agricultural workers for mainland farms. By this time, Puerto Rico itself had become largely urbanised and fewer Puerto Ricans sought work in agriculture. Lastly, two legal controversies undermined the manoeuvring capacity of the Migration Division to recruit farm labour from Puerto Rico to the United States.

During the 1970s, Puerto Rico's Secretary of Labor bitterly complained that US apple growers preferred to hire West Indians over Puerto Ricans. In 1979, a class action suit, *Ríos v.*

Marshall, alleged that temporary foreign workers, especially Jamaicans, were recruited in the annual New York apple harvest, without first guaranteeing jobs for Puerto Ricans and other ‘domestic’ workers. The US Secretary of Labor at the time had certified that ‘no domestic workers were available’ because Public Law 87 eliminated Puerto Ricans from the labour supply. As the US Under Secretary of Labor wrote to the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Agricultural Labor of the US House of Representatives, ‘It is our hope that the regulations under Puerto Rican Public Law 87 can be adjusted to make these workers more effectively available for employment on the mainland’ (Aders, 1976). In 1978, Public Law 87 was amended to allow exceptions to the Commonwealth’s contract, which many mainland growers were unwilling to accept, particularly the jurisdiction of Puerto Rican courts in any disputes. This decision hampered the Island’s bargaining position vis-à-vis US agricultural employers.

Perhaps more damaging to the Farm Labor Program was the protracted litigation surrounding *Vazquez v. Ferre* (1973). This lawsuit accused former Commonwealth Governor Luis Ferré, Secretary of Labor Julia Rivera Vincenty, National Director of the Migration Division Nick Lugo and other public authorities of allowing unsafe, unsanitary and unhealthy living conditions in the agricultural labour camps. The main plaintiff, David Vazquez, was a Puerto Rican farm worker from Arecibo, employed by the Glassboro Service Association in New Jersey. Among other grievances, Vazquez alleged that the camp where he toiled had inadequate living quarters, unhygienic cooking facilities, no heating, insufficient sleeping space and unclean bathing and toilet facilities. Attorneys employed by the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund, which filed the suit on behalf of Vazquez and other migrant workers, charged that the farm’s housing conditions violated the Wagner-Peyser Act, Commonwealth laws and

regulations and the contract with the Glassboro Service Association. After years of negotiations, the Commonwealth government settled the case in 1977, agreeing to inspect farms before assigning them workers (Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund, various dates). By then, less than 4,200 Puerto Ricans from the Island had been recruited by US farms (Monserrat, 1991).

### **THE EMERGENCE OF DIASPORIC POLITICS**

Clearly, the *Estado Libre Asociado* did not eliminate Puerto Rico's colonial dependence on the United States, although it did provide greater local autonomy. On the one hand, Commonwealth status allowed – perhaps even required – that the Island's public authorities intervene on behalf of contract workers in the US mainland. On the other hand, the Island's government must comply with all applicable federal laws and regulations. In particular, the Commonwealth lacks the power to establish its own immigration policies. Currently, foreign immigration in Puerto Rico is under the jurisdiction of the US Department of Homeland Security, as in any other state of the union. Unlike a state, however, Island residents have no voting representatives in Congress and cannot help to elect the leading executive officials of the United States. In this regard, Puerto Ricans resemble colonial migrants in their metropolitan countries (Grosfoguel, 2003). As colonial subjects, Puerto Ricans share some benefits of metropolitan citizenship, yet lack power in decisive spheres of the federal government. But, once they move to the mainland, Puerto Ricans acquire all the legal rights and obligations of US citizens. Consequently, the

Puerto Rican diaspora, through its legislative representatives and other elected officials, could substantially influence the relations between Puerto Rico and the United States.

Despite (or perhaps because of) their ‘colonial’ condition, Puerto Rican migrants have preserved multiple political links with their country of origin. For decades, the Island’s political parties have had a formal presence in the United States. The pro-Commonwealth PDP, which controlled the Island’s government between 1941 and 1968, crafted the Migration Division as an informal ‘consular’ office in several cities with large numbers of Puerto Rican immigrants (Duany, 2002; Lapp, 1990). Moreover, official documents under the prolonged PDP administration explicitly connected Operation Bootstrap and sponsored migration. For instance, one annual report stated bluntly, ‘It is obvious that migration, although voluntary, is an integral part of the programme of economic and social development that is being carried on by the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico’ (Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico, 1966–1967:8–9). When the pro-statehood NPP gained power in 1969 and again in 1977 and 1985, it attempted to restructure the Migration Division to further the Island’s annexation into the United States. For their part, several left-wing groups have been active in the US mainland, including the Young Lords, the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, the Armed Forces for National Liberation and the Puerto Rican Popular Army, better known as *Los Macheteros* (literally, ‘The Cane Cutters’) (Torres & Velázquez, 1998).

Puerto Ricans in the United States have attained a relatively high degree of political representation, although they remain underrepresented in proportion to their numbers (Cruz, 1998, 2000). In 1999, there were 95 elected officials of Puerto Rican ancestry in the municipal, state and federal spheres of the US government (National Puerto Rican Coalition, 1999). By



2004, the figure had increased to 150 (*Puerto Rico Herald*, 2004). As of November 2008, the US House of Representatives had three Puerto Rican members (Luis Gutiérrez, José Serrano and Nydia Velázquez), in addition to the Island's nonvoting Resident Commissioner (Luis Fortuño, who would become Governor in 2009). More particularly, New York City had 23 elected officials of Puerto Rican origin, including the Bronx Borough President, several city council members, state senators and assembly members (Falcón, 2004b).

Much of the public behaviour of Puerto Rican politicians in the United States suggests that their electorates are located in the Caribbean as well as in North America. Puerto Rico's status is a primary concern for 'transnational' politicians such as Gutiérrez, Serrano and Velázquez, together with other issues that affect Hispanics, such as bilingual education and immigration reform. For instance, several community leaders from New York, Chicago and other US cities supported the 'Peace for Vieques' movement, which sought to end the US Navy's presence in Vieques, an offshore municipality of Puerto Rico. Among others, the three representatives of Puerto Rican origin were arrested during peaceful manifestations against military operations in Vieques. On 1 May 2003, due to public pressure on the Island and abroad, the US Navy terminated nearly 60 years of bombing exercises in Vieques. In various ways, the Puerto Rican diaspora has influenced US policies towards the Island.

Perhaps the most controversial issue is how the diaspora can contribute to solving Puerto Rico's 'colonial' status. Until now, all local elections, referenda and plebiscites have been restricted to US citizens who reside on the Island. Nonetheless, Puerto Ricans in the United States have reiterated their desire to participate in the definition of the political future of their country of origin (Delgado, 2006; Falcón, 1993, 2007). Judging from scattered evidence, the

ideological preferences of stateside Puerto Ricans are similar to those of Island residents. For example, a public poll sponsored by the newspaper *El Nuevo Día* (2004) found that 48 per cent of Puerto Ricans in Central Florida favoured the current Commonwealth status, while 42 per cent preferred the Island's annexation as a state of the American union and 5 per cent supported independence. At the time of this writing (November 2008), a legislative project to celebrate a new plebiscite on Puerto Rico's status is still pending approval by the US House of Representatives. The Puerto Rico Democracy Act of 2007 (H.R. 900), sponsored by Serrano and Fortuño, would extend the right to vote to US residents born on the Island. It is unlikely that the diaspora's participation would radically alter the plebiscite's results in Puerto Rico.

### **A TRANSNATIONAL NATIONALISM**

One concern of statehood supporters is that many leaders of the Puerto Rican diaspora prefer the Island's independence (Falcón, 2007). In particular, Puerto Ricans in Chicago have earned the reputation of being more nationalistic than their compatriots on the Island and elsewhere in the United States. Anthropologist Ana Yolanda Ramos-Zayas (2003) has argued that the leaders of Chicago's Puerto Rican community have often resorted to a nationalist discourse to further multiple ideological and material agendas, such as the immigrants' class, race and gender interests. Nationalism has brought together numerous activists and residents of the Puerto Rican *barrio* near Humboldt Park, where immigrants from the Island clustered since the 1950s. That neighbourhood now boasts *Paseo Boricua* ('Puerto Rican Promenade'), an urban revitalisation project extending over a mile along Division Street, marked by two enormous steel flags of

Puerto Rico. There one finds bakeries, grocery stores, restaurants, cafeterias, barber shops, record stores, cultural centres, housing cooperatives, schools, churches and a *casita* ('little house') in honour of the nationalist leader Pedro Albizu Campos. Every year, multitudinous public events are celebrated, such as Three Kings Day, *Desfile del Pueblo* ('People's Parade') and *Fiesta Boricua* ('Puerto Rican Festivity'). *Paseo Boricua* is one of the most successful community efforts of Puerto Ricans in the United States (see Flores-González, 2001; Pérez, 2004; Rinaldo, 2002).

According to Ramos-Zayas, Puerto Rican immigrants and their descendants have elaborated nationalist symbols (such as Albizu Campos's mythical figure) as proofs of cultural authenticity. These symbols have been disseminated through local institutions such as the Roberto Clemente and Pedro Albizu Campos schools, the Juan Antonio Corretjer and Segundo Ruiz Belvis cultural centres, the Institute of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture, and the Puerto Rican Arts Alliance. Unlike on the Island, Puerto Rican nationalism in Chicago combines an anticolonial ideology with cultural practices that do not rely exclusively on Hispanic traditions. Instead, it combats the public representation of a criminalised and marginalised community, by asserting its hybrid identity, including the use of rap music and 'Spanglish', the mixture of Spanish and English.

Despite its reputation as a bastion of radicalism, the 'Chicago-Rican' population consists largely of immigrant workers unlikely to sympathise with Puerto Rico's independence or left-wing politics. However, compared with other centres of the diaspora, Chicago's community is better organised to resist ethnic prejudice, racial discrimination and residential displacement. Ramos-Zayas's analysis confirms that the nationalist discourse enjoys more popularity in

Chicago than in other Puerto Rican settlements in the United States (and even on the Island). In Philadelphia, for example, the main organisations of Puerto Rican immigrants participated actively in the civil rights movement spurred by African Americans since the 1950s (Whalen, 2001). In most diasporic communities, the great majority of Puerto Rican voters have aligned themselves with the liberal ideology of the Democratic Party.

### **ECONOMIC INTEGRATION, RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION AND INTERMARRIAGE**

The incorporation of most Puerto Ricans into the US labour and housing markets has been problematic from the start. Traditionally, Puerto Ricans in the United States concentrated in lower-status occupations such as garment workers, dishwashers, waiters, porters, domestic employees and laundry workers (Chenault, 1938; Sánchez Korrol, 1983). In the 1940s and 1950s, most of the immigrants lacked the educational credentials, occupational experience or English language skills required for higher-wage white-collar jobs. Nowadays, compared to other ethnic and racial groups, Puerto Ricans are still more likely to be blue-collar and service workers, except for private household workers. Conversely, the proportion of managers and professionals (26.6 per cent in 2007) is much lower among Puerto Ricans than among most other groups, except Mexicans, Dominicans and other Hispanics.

Today, Puerto Ricans remain one of the most underprivileged groups in the United States. Most socioeconomic indicators place Puerto Ricans in the lowest rungs of the US social structure, below African Americans and other Hispanics such as Cubans and Colombians.

According to the 2007 American Community Survey, Puerto Ricans are more likely to be unemployed and poor, live in female-headed households and have lower levels of income, educational attainment and occupational status than the other major ethnic and racial groups, except all Hispanics (see table 4). Other census data confirm the economic disadvantages of stateside Puerto Ricans. In 2002, Puerto Ricans owned less than 7 per cent of all Hispanic businesses in the United States, even though they represented nearly 9 per cent of the Hispanic population (US Census Bureau, 2006). These figures document the continuing material deprivation of Puerto Ricans on the mainland, especially in New York City, six decades after the takeoff of massive migration. The deteriorated living conditions of Puerto Ricans in the United States are basically due to the economic restructuring of New York City, Philadelphia, Chicago, Boston and other industrial centres, as well as the increasing polarisation between well-paid skilled jobs and poorly-paid unskilled jobs, particularly in the service sector. The automation, computerisation, suburbanisation, overseas relocation and decline of entire manufacturing sectors like the garment industry displaced many Puerto Rican workers, who were heavily concentrated in such sectors (Rodríguez, 1989).

[Insert table 4 near here]

Another disturbing sign of the disadvantaged situation of stateside Puerto Ricans is their persistent residential segregation. In the year 2000, three out of five Puerto Ricans in the United States lived in central cities (US Census Bureau, 2008). In these urban areas, Puerto Ricans are more likely than other Hispanics (except perhaps Dominicans) to live in overcrowded and

dilapidated housing quarters. In 2007, Puerto Ricans had the lowest rate (40.3 per cent) of home ownership among the major ethnic and racial groups in the United States (table 4). This characteristic is related to high levels of poverty, unemployment and concentration in inner cities. Newer Puerto Rican communities in Los Angeles and Tampa are more likely to be suburban middle-class neighbourhoods than in Chicago or Hartford. Residential segregation from non-Hispanic whites, blacks and other Hispanics is much higher in places like Philadelphia than in Orlando (Rivera-Batiz & Santiago, 1994; Vargas-Ramos, 2006).

Another indicator of social integration (or lack thereof) is the rate of intermarriage between immigrants and other groups. During the 1990s, Puerto Ricans in New York City still tended to marry within their own community or with other Hispanics, especially Dominicans (Gilbertson et al., 1996). The relatively low outmarriage rate of New York Puerto Rican immigrants and their descendants reflects their spatial segregation, low educational attainment and relative economic deprivation. It also suggests that most Nuyoricans are racialised as ‘non-white’ Hispanics. Nationwide, Puerto Ricans had a higher outmarriage rate than most ethnic and racial groups (Aquino, 2004). By the year 2000, Puerto Ricans were the Hispanic group most likely to intermarry (with 21 per cent of all couples) in the United States (Lee and Edmonston, 2005).

## **ORGANISING THE PUERTO RICAN COMMUNITY IN THE UNITED STATES**

A pervasive myth about the Puerto Rican diaspora is that it is not as well organised as previous waves of immigrants. On the contrary, since the late nineteenth century, Puerto Ricans have

established numerous voluntary associations in the United States. Immigrants often adapted Island-based traditions such as labour unions, mutual aid societies, hometown clubs, religious congregations, Masonic lodges, political parties and athletic leagues. Between 1920 and 1945, they founded at least three dozen organisations in New York City (Estades, 1978:36). One of their earliest voluntary associations was the *Alianza Obrera Puertorriqueña* (Puerto Rican Workers Alliance), founded in 1923 and affiliated with the Puerto Rican Socialist Party. This group sought ‘to establish a better intelligence and cooperation among all of us Puerto Ricans living in New York City, principally among the men and women who militate in the ranks of labour’. That same year, the Porto Rican League was established in New Jersey to ‘unite in links of fraternity and mutual protection all Puerto Ricans residing in the United States and those who visit this country’ (Duany, 2002:187). The league was associated with the Democratic Party in the United States but not with any political party in Puerto Rico. Another early Puerto Rican organisation in New York City was *Los Jibaros* (The Peasants), a social, cultural and sports club founded around 1928.

Organised sports were especially appealing to Puerto Rican migrants. In the early twentieth century, baseball became the most popular pastime among Puerto Ricans in New York as well as on the Island. In 1924, for example, a Puerto Rican baseball team from New York’s East Side – ‘the unbeatable San Juan Baseball Club’ – played against the Porto Rican Stars from the Island (Duany, 2002:189). Since the 1930s, stateside Puerto Ricans have shown increasing enthusiasm for prize fighting, especially after several of their compatriots became world boxing champions. Although athletic activities have not received much scholarly attention in Puerto

Rican studies, sports played a key role in forging a sense of community and solidarity among migrants.

As New York's Puerto Rican population swelled, so did its community organisations after World War II. In 1940, at least 40 Puerto Rican associations were operating in New York City (Vega, 1944 [1977]:242). During the 1950s, grassroots groups increasingly focused on the educational, economic and political advancement of Puerto Ricans in the United States rather than on the Island. By 1960, around 300 community organisations were active in New York City (Senior, 1965:105). During the 1960s, second-generation immigrants began to claim a separate ethnic identity, both from the Island and from the American mainstream, combining cultural nationalism with the civil rights movement. In 1961, ASPIRA became the first Puerto Rican community agency in New York City to receive outside funds to develop young Puerto Rican leaders through educational counselling and occupational training. The radical wing of the Puerto Rican community, which supported the Island's independence, established eight core groups in the United States (Torres & Velázquez, 1998). Today, dozens of groups represent various sectors of the diaspora – from professionals and scholars to merchants and civil servants. More than 400 organisations are affiliated with the National Puerto Rican Coalition, a policy-oriented lobbying group based in Washington, DC.

Some of the earliest community organisations founded by Puerto Ricans in New York and New Jersey in the 1920s were Democratic voting clubs (Duany, 2002). As the party that has traditionally favoured immigrants and ethnic minorities, the Democratic Party attracted the largest number of Puerto Rican followers. In New York and other north-eastern states, Puerto Ricans now play a major role in that party. Elsewhere, as in Florida, they are more inclined to



vote for Republican candidates. However, most Puerto Rican elected officials are Democrats (Cruz, 2000). Nationwide, Puerto Ricans constitute one of the most solid blocs of Democratic voters, along with African Americans and Mexicans.

The most common voluntary association among Puerto Rican migrants – particularly in New York City – has been the hometown club, a small clique of relatives and friends from the same Island locality. Most of these groups have called themselves *ausentes* (the absent ones) or *hijos* (sons and daughters) of a town back home. The prototype of the hometown club was the *Caborrojeños Ausentes*, founded in New York in 1922. This group organised excursions and collaborated with other voluntary associations and government agencies in the south-western municipality of Cabo Rojo. Most clubs sponsored social and cultural activities such as dances, raffles, sports, beauty contests and parades (Estades, 1978; Herbstein, 1978). All provided help with shelter, employment, financial aid, recreation and other benefits to their members.

After World War II, hometown clubs proliferated in the diaspora. In 1956, Gilberto Gerena-Valentín founded *El Congreso del Pueblo* ('The People's Congress' or Council of Hometown Clubs) as an umbrella organisation in New York. By 1961, all of the Island's 78 municipalities were represented among the city's clubs (Senior, 1965). Annual celebrations in honour of *los ausentes* are still held in many Island towns, especially during patron saints' festivals. The perseverance of hometown clubs suggests that Puerto Ricans identify strongly with their locality of origin as well as with a broader conception of their nation. For the Migration Division, hometown clubs represented the backbone of the Puerto Rican community in the United States. Muñoz Marín (1960) himself recognised the resilience of the migrants' birthplaces in a speech addressed to Puerto Ricans in New York City.

Labour unions have played a prominent role in the organising of the Puerto Rican community in the United States. Since the late nineteenth century, Puerto Rican cigar workers led the struggle to protect their labour and civil rights through trade unions such as *La Internacional* and *La Resistencia* (Sánchez Korrol, 1983). During the 1930s and 1940s, many women employed by New York's garment and apparel industry joined unions, especially the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union. In the 1950s, Puerto Rican migrants were concentrated in labour-intensive manufacturing industries, and many of them belonged to the labour movement. However, since the 1970s, the transformation of the US economy, especially in New York City, from manufacturing to service industries, has produced a declining participation of Puerto Rican and other workers in labour unions, with the exception of those employed in the public sector (Figueroa, 1996).

In short, Puerto Ricans organised themselves to promote their social, cultural, economic and political interests within the United States. They often extended Island modes of association based on working-class solidarities and hometown origins. Local, regional and national allegiances were swiftly reconstructed in the diaspora. Like earlier European immigrants, Puerto Rican immigrants bonded together according to common origin, class background, political ideology and shared interests through dozens of self-help groups that catered to a growing immigrant population, especially in New York City and other centres of the diaspora.

## **CULTURAL MANIFESTATIONS OF PUERTO RICAN IDENTITY**

*The Language Issue*

After more than a century of US rule, Spanish remains the primary means of communication and a core symbol of national identity in Puerto Rico. Official efforts to impose the English language on the Island during the first half of the twentieth century largely failed. Since 1948, public school instruction, as well as college education, has been offered primarily in Spanish. Bilingualism is limited to a small minority of the Island's population, mostly the middle and upper classes and returnees and immigrants from the United States. In the mainland, many Puerto Ricans – especially those born and raised abroad – have adopted English as their dominant language (Zentella, 1997).

Clearly, the Puerto Rican diaspora subverts many of the traditional premises of the nationalist discourse, particularly the equation between the vernacular language and national identity. According to the 2007 American Community Survey, 32 per cent of Puerto Ricans in the United States spoke only English at home, compared with merely 4.7 per cent in Puerto Rico. Conversely, 81.5 per cent of the Island's residents spoke English 'less than very well', while 20.4 per cent of Puerto Ricans in the United States did so (US Census Bureau, 2008). Such statistics suggest a growing language gap between Puerto Ricans on the Island and in the mainland, which overlaps with other cultural differences, such as dress styles, physical appearance and musical preferences.

On the Island, the better-educated and higher-income groups tend to be bilingual. Their speech patterns approximate standard dialects of Spanish and English as taught in local schools and universities. In the United States, Spanish dominance is rapidly receding among second- and third-generation immigrants. However, many stateside Puerto Ricans are fluent in Spanish and

English, and often alternate between the two languages. Thus, Puerto Ricans display a broad repertoire of language practices – ranging from Spanish monolingualism (primarily on the Island) to English monolingualism (primarily in the mainland), including various degrees of bilingualism.

The combination of Spanish and English, commonly derided as ‘Spanglish’, is widespread among Puerto Ricans in the United States. Initially, many scholars thought that this practice impoverished and contaminated both languages. However, an increasing number of studies has re-assessed how Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics switch between Spanish and English (Urciuoli, 1996; Zentella, 1997, 2003). Accomplished writers often employ ‘code switching’ to recreate daily life in the *barrios*. Rhyming in English and Spanish, as in some popular rap songs, requires great verbal ability (Rivera, 2003). Rather than reflecting an intellectual or linguistic deficit, Spanglish may be considered a cultural asset, especially among second-generation immigrants, who often straddle American and Puerto Rican cultures.

### *Religious and Civic Manifestations of Identity*

For nearly four centuries, Catholicism was the only faith permitted by the Spanish colonial regime in Puerto Rico. Today, Catholic customs permeate Puerto Rican traditional culture. The annual calendar of the feasts in honour of the saints and other Church-sponsored celebrations such as Christmas and Easter structure the Island’s spiritual life. Puerto Rican Catholics traditionally emphasise communal rituals such as baptism, the cult of the saints, processions and festivals. Many popular customs persist in the diaspora, such as making the sign of the cross;

invoking the name of God and the Virgin Mary; lighting candles, making promises and asking for favours from the saints; blessing one's children and pouring holy water over babies to protect them from evil; treating godparents as part of one's immediate family; and having crucifixes, shrines and images of the Virgin and the saints in one's home (González & La Velle, 1985). Nonetheless, Puerto Ricans are less likely than most other Hispanics in the United States to attend church regularly (Pew Hispanic Center, 2007).

At the same time, Puerto Rico has one of the highest proportions (hovering around 30 per cent) of Protestants in Latin America. This is perhaps unsurprising given the Island's intensive exposure to US evangelical missionaries for more than a century. Similarly, the share of Protestants among stateside Puerto Ricans is the highest among all Hispanics in the United States (31 per cent are evangelical converts, according to the Pew Hispanic Center, 2007). One of the earliest Puerto Rican institutions in East Harlem was La Hermosa church, affiliated with the Disciples of Christ, founded in 1937. By the early 1960s, at least 284 Protestant congregations catered predominantly to Puerto Ricans in New York City (Senior, 1968:234). In 1968, Pentecostals had established as many as 30 storefront churches (*Asambleas de Dios*) in East Harlem (Herbstein, 1978:83).

Other popular practices include *espiritismo* (Spiritualism) and *santería* (originally an Afro-Cuban religion). In New York City, at least one-third of all Puerto Ricans has consulted a spiritual medium (Lewis-Fernández & Núñez, 1997). Many believe that spiritual disturbances can cause disease; that the spirits of the dead may manifest themselves directly in the daily lives of their close relatives; and that the two can communicate with each other. Spiritualist rituals, combined with folk remedies, are commonly used to heal both physical and psychological

ailments (Romberg, 2003). For many Puerto Ricans in the United States, Spiritualism reduces feelings of anxiety and depression, and strengthens their cultural identity and community belonging (Harwood, 1987).

Puerto Ricans in the diaspora celebrate numerous collective rituals, including parades, festivals, beauty pageants, religious processions and family-oriented ceremonies. One of the most important holidays is the extended Christmas season, officially beginning on the eve of 24 December, with a special emphasis on Three Kings Day or the Feast of the Epiphany (6 January), and ending informally eight days afterwards (*las octavitas*). Puerto Ricans usually commemorate Christmas with abundant food, preferably *lechón asao* (roasted pig), *pasteles* (green banana and meat patties) and *arroz con gandules* (rice with pigeon peas); drink, especially *coquito* (a rum-based coconut eggnog); and music and dancing, including *aguinaldos* (Christmas carols), salsa and *merengue*.

Since 1953, New York Puerto Ricans have observed the Feast of Saint John the Baptist, the patron of the city of San Juan. The feast was first celebrated in Spanish Harlem's La Milagrosa parish and sponsored by New York's Catholic Archdiocese. By 1964, about 60,000 Puerto Ricans attended an outdoor celebration in Randall's Island. Typically, the feast begins with a procession and mass on 24 June, the day of Saint John the Baptist, followed by performances by choirs, bands, dance groups and orchestras. The midnight before, following Island traditions, some Puerto Ricans seek good fortune by immersing themselves in Central Park lake waters or the Coney Island beach. The gathering has become the most important public festivity for New York's Puerto Rican Catholics, comparable to Saint Patrick's day for Irish Americans.

The National Puerto Rican Day Parade (*Desfile Puertorriqueño*) is the most visible display of Puerto Rican pride and power in the United States. The parade was first held in New York City in 1958 as an offshoot of the short-lived *Desfile Hispano*, organised in 1956 as an all-Hispanic affair. By the early 1960s, half a million Puerto Ricans watched their compatriots marching down Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. In 2007, more than two million persons attended the event. Most of the major community organisations now support the annual parade, many sponsoring *carrozas* (floats) with Puerto Rican motifs, such as the flag, folk music and a beauty queen. Many Puerto Rican municipalities, as well as the Commonwealth government, participate in the event. In addition to New York, Puerto Ricans have held parades in numerous cities, including Chicago, Boston, Cleveland, Lorain, Rochester, Buffalo, Camden, Newark, Tampa and Orlando.

### **IDENTITY POLITICS IN A MULTICULTURAL SETTING**

Diasporic communities remain tied to the Island by a steady circulation of people, capital, goods and information. New cultural identities, such as Nuyorican or even ‘diasporican’, and musical practices, such as salsa and *reggaeton*, attest to the enduring connections between the Island and the mainland. Another expression of these ‘transnational’ links is the money that migrants send back home. Although much smaller in volume than in neighbouring countries like the Dominican Republic and Cuba, private remittances to Puerto Rico increased more than tenfold from approximately US\$47 million in 1960 to 491 million in 2007 (Duany, 2007b; Junta de Planificación de Puerto Rico, 2008). Furthermore, ‘cultural remittances’ include a broad range of

customs, ideologies, artistic expressions and identities sent back from the diaspora to the homeland (Flores, 2008).

Many Puerto Ricans have developed two or more ‘home bases’, each with its extended networks of relatives and friends on and off the Island (Alicea, 1990). Such multiple residences allow migrants to combine various sources of income, housing and assistance. Some people shuttle between these households to expand their livelihood strategies and nurture their families. In particular, Puerto Rican women often organise and participate in ritual gatherings – especially baptisms, weddings, anniversaries and funerals – both in Puerto Rico and the United States. Moreover, many travel back and forth to take care of elderly parents, pregnant daughters and small children (Alicea, 1997; Aranda, 2007).

Circular migration is one of the reasons why Puerto Rican culture continues to thrive abroad. Many Puerto Ricans have not completely ‘assimilated’ into mainstream American culture, if the measure of assimilation is discarding Spanish and replacing it with the English language, becoming a hyphenated minority or abandoning their emotional attachment to the Island. This assertion of their national origins is partly due to the migrants’ resistance against Americanisation, both on the Island and abroad. However, the mixture between Puerto Rican, Latino and American cultures has advanced swiftly, especially among second- and third-generation immigrants in the United States. Even they often invoke romanticized images of their Puerto Rican homeland (see Toro-Morn & Alicea, 2003).

Another factor that has retarded the ‘assimilation’ of stateside Puerto Ricans has been their treatment as a ‘non-white’ racial minority. Since the 1940s, many Puerto Ricans – especially in New York City – have been publicly depicted as a ‘social problem’ because of their



dark skin colour, foreign language and culture, rural background, low educational status and lack of occupational skills. Consequently, Puerto Ricans have been stigmatised as lazy, ignorant, violent, sexually obsessed, physically unfit, culturally inassimilable and dark-skinned aliens (even though they are US citizens). Such stereotypes have been popularised through Broadway musicals and Hollywood movies such as *West Side Story*, as well as television programmes, journalistic reports and academic monographs such as Oscar Lewis's *La Vida*. This negative media portrayal is common among colonial migrants and racial minorities in the United States and elsewhere.

Puerto Ricans and African Americans share a parallel history of racial exclusion and marginalisation, especially in New York City (Rivera, 2003; Torres, 1995). Both groups have clustered in contiguous or mixed residential areas, especially in *barrios* and ghettos. Both were largely incorporated into the lower rungs of the labour market. Both have been lumped together as part of the 'urban underclass', because of their extreme concentration in inner-city neighbourhoods, chronic unemployment and socioeconomic problems ranging from high rates of female-headed households and welfare dependence to school dropouts and drug addicts. Linguistic and cultural differences have sometimes distanced Puerto Ricans from African Americans. However, no other immigrant group has developed a closer physical and social proximity to African Americans than Puerto Ricans (Flores, 1993).

Since the 1960s, Puerto Ricans have increasingly interacted with Dominicans, especially in New York City and in Puerto Rico itself. Cooperation, as well as underlying tension, has marked the relations between the two groups. As the city's largest Hispanic populations, Puerto Ricans and Dominicans often compete for scarce resources – from economic niches such as

small grocery stores (*bodegas*), to elected positions in municipal and state assemblies, to funding for academic programmes in local universities. Nonetheless, linguistic, cultural and religious affinities foster friendship and intermarriage between Puerto Ricans and Dominicans.

## CONCLUSION

The Puerto Rican case suggests that diasporic identities can prosper over long periods in a foreign country. Since the late nineteenth century, Puerto Ricans in the United States have retained close links to their homeland. Diasporic organisations have selectively appropriated the discourses and practices traditionally associated with being Puerto Rican, yet they continue to portray themselves as part of the Puerto Rican 'nation'. Nuyoricans have redefined Puerto Rican identity away from a sole reliance on the Spanish language to incorporate monolingual English speakers with family ties to the Island (Zentella, 1997). Thus, the Puerto Rican diaspora has nurtured long-distance nationalism, the persistent claim to a national identity by people residing away from their homeland, even for several generations. Today, speaking Spanish and living on the Island are no longer exclusive markers of Puerto Ricanness. In short, the diaspora has broadened the linguistic and territorial boundaries of the nation.

In the end, should Puerto Rican migration be considered 'colonial' or 'postcolonial'? The question can only be settled by clearly defining Puerto Rico's status vis-à-vis the United States, a formidable task for scholars as well as politicians. Recent writing confirms that the United States continues to dominate the Island politically and economically. The emotionally laden term 'colonialism' to describe the current situation has become widely accepted among Puerto Ricans

of various ideological persuasions, including advocates of an ‘enhanced’ Commonwealth. At the same time, Puerto Ricans display a vibrant sense of cultural identity that is usually associated with postcolonial nations (Duany, 2002; Flores, 2008; Grosfoguel, 2003; Negrón-Muntaner, 2007). Despite their US citizenship, most Puerto Ricans on the Island and in the diaspora assert that their nationality is Puerto Rican, rather than American. Even the hyphenated term ‘Puerto Rican-American’ is rarely used either in Puerto Rico or the United States. As José L. Torres-Padilla and Carmen Haydée Rivera (2008) suggest, Puerto Ricans in both places live ‘off the hyphen’. Furthermore, the Commonwealth government has acquired many of the symbolic trappings of contemporary nations, such as a flag, anthem, coat of arms, Olympic sports representation, participation in beauty contests and so on. Yet the Island lacks the most basic requirement of a nation-state: sovereignty. Hence, the Puerto Rican diaspora occupies an ambiguous space between ‘colonial’ and ‘postcolonial’ population movements. This ambiguity is the long-term historical consequence of the oxymoronic legal doctrine declaring that Puerto Rico ‘belongs to but is not a part of the United States’.

## NOTE

1. This chapter is a revised version of a paper delivered at the workshop on 'Postcolonial Immigration and Identity Formation in Europe since 1945: Towards a Comparative Perspective', International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, 7–8 November 2008. I would like to thank the workshop organisers, Ulbe Bosma, Jan Lucassen and Gert Oostindie, for their kind invitation and useful comments on an earlier draft of the paper. This essay expands and updates three of my previous analyses of the topic (Duany, 2004a, 2004b, 2007a).

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**Table 1. Population Originating in the Former or Current US Overseas Territories and Now Living in the Continental United States, 2007**

	<i>Number of People Living in the United States</i>	<i>Number of People Living in the Sending Territory</i>
Puerto Rico	4,120,205	3,958,128
Philippines	2,412,446	96,061,680
Cuba	1,611,478	11,423,952
Guam	79,947	175,877
Hawaii	72,643	1,283,388
American Samoa	69,615	64,827
US Virgin Islands	13,055	109,840

**Sources:** Central Intelligence Agency (2008); US Census Bureau (2008).

**Table 2. Geographic Distribution of the Population of Puerto Rican Origin in the United States, by State, 1960–2007**

	<i>1960</i>	<i>1980</i>	<i>2007</i>
California	28,108	93,038	164,460
Connecticut	15,247	88,361	218,219
Florida	19,535	94,775	725,724
Illinois	36,081	129,165	168,916
Massachusetts	5,217	76,450	232,375
New Jersey	55,351	243,540	401,230
New York	642,622	986,389	1,082,620
Ohio	13,940	32,442	80,315
Pennsylvania	21,206	91,802	309,644
Texas	6,050	22,938	96,896
Other states	49,156	155,045	639,806
Total	892,513	2,013,945	4,120,205

**Sources:** for 1960–1980, US Census Bureau (1963, 1982); for 1990–2007, US Census Bureau (2008).

**Table 2. Main Destinations of Migrants between Puerto Rico and the United States, by County, 1995–2000**

	<i>Immigrants from Puerto Rico</i>	<i>Emigrants to Puerto Rico</i>	<i>Net Migration to the United States</i>
Orange, Florida	14,347	4,927	9,420
Osceola, Florida	7,600	600	7,000
Bronx, New York	13,853	8,534	5,319
Hillsborough, Florida	6,147	1,401	4,746
Miami-Dade, Florida	8,754	4,029	4,725
Broward, Florida	5,170	1,058	4,112
Hampden, Massachusetts	5,580	1,864	3,716
Hartford, Connecticut	6,250	2,708	3,542
New Haven, Connecticut	4,897	1,761	3,136
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	6,017	2,946	3,071
Other places	164,358	82,940	80,398
Total	242,973	112,788	130,185

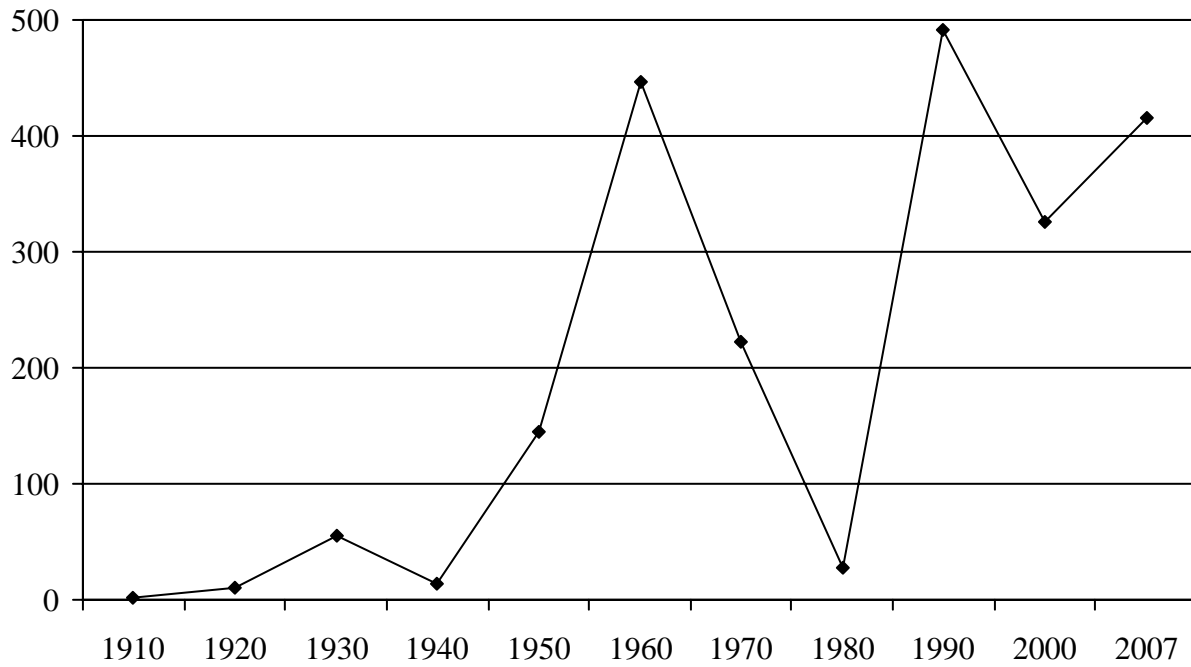
**Source:** US Census Bureau (2004).

**Table 3. Selected Socioeconomic Characteristics of Puerto Ricans and Other Major Ethnic and Racial Groups in the United States, 2007**

	<i>Puerto Ricans</i>	<i>Whites</i>	<i>Blacks</i>	<i>Asians</i>	<i>All Hispanics</i>
Female-headed households (%)	25.4	9.5	29.2	9.1	18.5
Bachelor's degree (%)	10.7	18.3	11.4	29.8	8.7
Graduate or professional degree (%)	4.8	10.7	5.8	19.6	3.9
Unemployment rate (%)	9.9	5.3	12.0	5.0	7.3
Managers and professionals (%)	26.6	36.6	26.9	46.9	17.7
Service workers (%)	21.9	15.0	24.1	13.2	24.3
Self-employed workers (%)	3.4	7.3	3.7	6.2	6.1
Median household income (US\$)	38,047	53,714	34,001	66,935	40,766
Per capita income (US\$)	17,747	29,503	17,550	29,466	15,502
Poverty rate (%)	24.3	10.2	24.7	10.6	20.7
Owner-occupied housing units (%)	40.3	72.2	46.5	60.7	49.9

**Source:** US Census Bureau (2008).

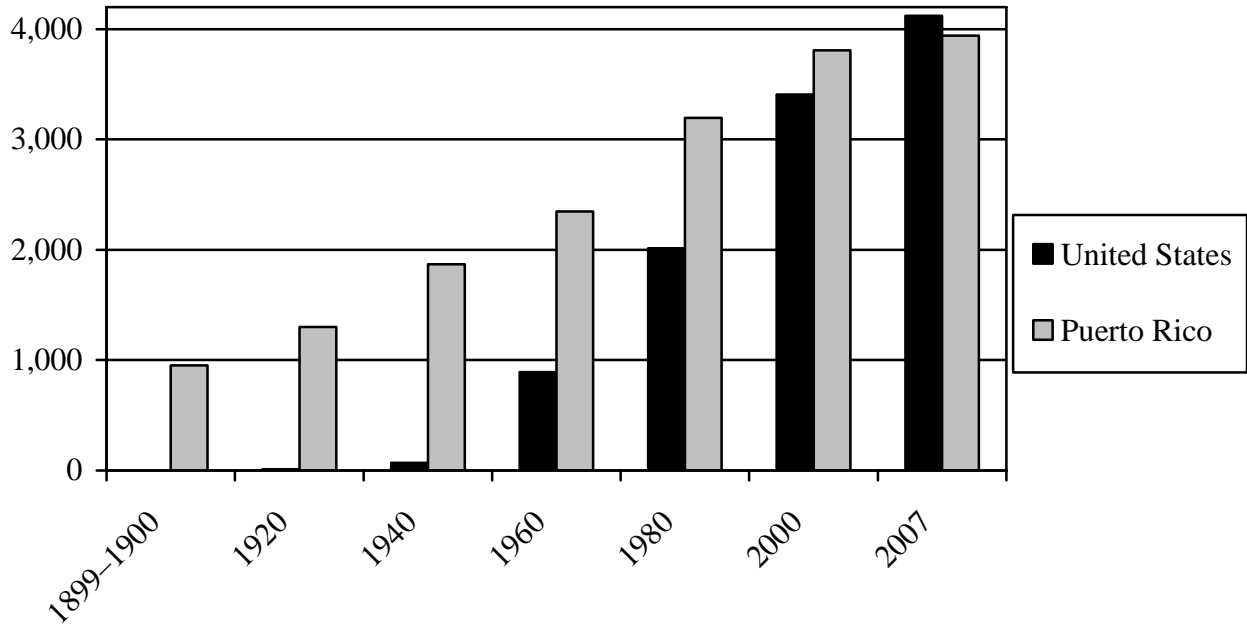
**Figure 1. Net Migration from Puerto Rico to the United States, 1900–2007 (Thousands)**



**Sources:** for 1900–1919, Vázquez Calzada (1979); for 1920–1949, US Commission on Civil Rights (1976); for 1950–1989, Junta de Planificación de Puerto Rico (1972–1989); for 1990–1999, Junta de Planificación de Puerto Rico (2001); for 2000–2007, Banco Gubernamental de Fomento para Puerto Rico (2008).

**Figure 2. Puerto Ricans in the United States and Population of Puerto Rico, 1899–2007**

**(Thousands)**

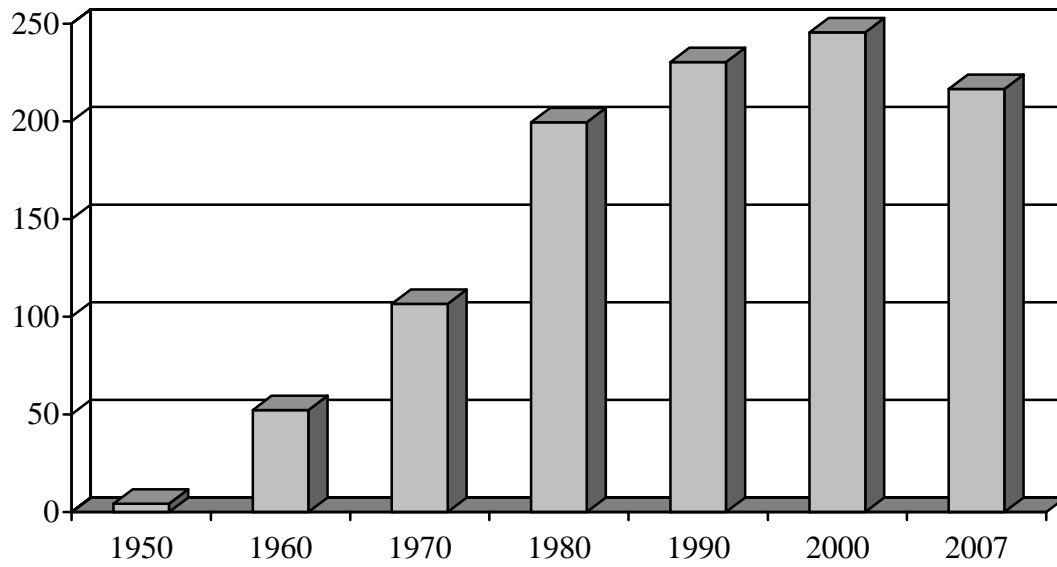


**Sources:** for 1900, Gibson & Lennon (1999); for 1899–1950, US Census Bureau (1953); for 1960–1980, US Census Bureau (1963, 1982); for 1990–2007, US Census Bureau (2008).

**Note:** between 1910 and 1940, the available figures for the United States refer to persons of Puerto Rican birth only; after 1950, they include persons of Puerto Rican parentage and, after 1970, they include all persons of Puerto Rican origin.



**Figure 3. US-Born Population of Puerto Rico (Thousands)**



**Source:** US Census Bureau (1953, 1963, 1973, 1983, 2008).