

Puerto Rico's Luis Muñoz Marín: Poet, Politician, and Paradox

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Published online: 1 October 2014
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Abstract Some revere Luis Muñoz Marín (1898–1980); others condemn him. The author lived years of her childhood and adolescence in Puerto Rico, when prosperity—to a great extent the result of Luis Muñoz Marín's leadership—promised a socioeconomic reality different from the current one. To understand his life and legacy, she interviewed in San Juan his daughter Senator Victoria Muñoz Mendoza (1940–), spoke with professors, authors, and a spectrum of other individuals, and spent time at the archives of the Luis Muñoz Marín Foundation. The Foundation is a welcome oasis in an island where, despite its natural beauties, 21st century quandaries and traffic jams abound. Landing in the international airport named in Muñoz Marín's honor, she heard a Puerto Rican airline employee say that today Muñoz Marín is a fish out of water.

Keywords Spanish-American War · José Martí · Carl Sandburg · Octavio Paz · *Jibaros* · Legal Sovereignty · Pedro Albizu Campos · Nationalism · Abe Fortas · *Estado Libre Asociado* · 1952 Constitution · Godkin Lectures · Vieques · Francisco Rodón

Son and Father, Lyric Poetry and Sisyphus's Memory

(...)
*and breathless Sisyphus stops
reflects and starts again.
Who dares
to measure the anguish
of strong souls
that facing obstacles persist
until they win or succumb?*
-Luis Muñoz Rivera (1859–1916)

Muñoz Marín must have read his father Luis Muñoz Rivera's poem and could have interpreted it to be the bitter symbol of a poet's or a statesman's destiny. Son and father were both poets and statesmen. A founder of the Autonomist/Liberal Party, Muñoz Rivera had long struggled to obtain self-rule for Puerto Rico. In November 1897 Spain finally granted an Autonomist Charter to the island, which for centuries had been a colony, and Muñoz Rivera became head of the new government. He served in this position only until the Spanish-American War, when, in July 1898, the United States established military rule in Puerto Rico. In short, Muñoz Marín's birth in Old San Juan that same year, 3 days after the Maine exploded in Havana Harbor, coincided with the takeover by a new world power, the United States. He seemed from the start destined to play a crucial political role in a country whose international situation had changed so suddenly. Indeed, after serving 8 years as senator and 8 as president of the Puerto Rican Senate, Muñoz Marín became in 1948 the first popularly elected governor of Puerto Rico. Reelected to serve a total of 16 years, he succeeded in transforming the island into a remarkably literate and prosperous nation-state. He remained senator-at-large for the Partido Popular Democrático (PPD) (Popular Democratic Party) until retiring from public life in 1971.

Muñoz Marín's childhood and adolescence were spent in Puerto Rico, New York City, and Washington, D.C., where his father was Puerto Rico's first Resident Commissioner, the island's non-voting representative in Congress, from 1911 to 1916. Following his father's unexpected death, Muñoz Marín lived not only in Puerto Rico but also in Greenwich Village, Staten Island, and New Jersey until 1931. A self-taught journalist and translator, essayist, literary critic, and author of poems, short stories and plays, his works appeared in English in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, *The Smart Set*, *The Nation*, *The American Mercury*, *The New Republic*, *The Baltimore Sun*, *The New York Tribune*, and *World's Week*. These titles reflect the breadth of his interests: "New York," "Oscar Wilde," "My Aesthetics," "From New York, the Ku Klux Klan," "Contemporary Portraits" of Edwin Markham (1852–1940), Upton Sinclair (1878–1868), H.L. Mencken (1880–

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1956), “On *Babbitt* by Sinclair Lewis.” Surely his translation of Markham’s “The Man with the Hoe” introduced this American poet to countless Spanish-speaking readers. Like Cuban poet and thinker José Martí (1853–1895) who also spent crucial years in New York, Muñoz Marín was an admirer and critic of U.S. politics and society; he discovered force and inspiration frequently in American literature.

Mexican Nobel laureate Octavio Paz (1914–1998) believed that “poetry, undervalued in our century, is inseparable from the defense of liberty.” Muñoz Marín agreed. Defined by the unity and concentration of a single voice, lyric poems express a poet’s views and emotions rather than recount external events. They invoke a social presence, a listener, as did Muñoz Marín’s poems. Welcoming me in her house in Dorado, Senator Victoria Muñoz Mendoza, senator from 1986 to 1993 and first woman to run for governor of Puerto Rico in 1992, sparkled when asked how her father felt about his nickname “El Vate” or “The Bard.” “Oh, he had grown used to it,” she answered. We then discussed hatred and polemics as enemies of creativity. She added, “I remember my father asserting that he had political opponents but no enemies.” In fact, young Luis grew to accept Muñoz Rivera’s *Muerte a Barbosa!* lesson. (José C. Barbosa was Muñoz Rivera’s political opponent; the father had scolded 3-year-old Luis for calling for Barbosa’s death; the son quickly wished Barbosa a long life.) “In poetry and politics, creativity and good will were priorities for both son and father,” declared Muñoz Mendoza.

Poets of Democracy

Originally written in 1919 in Spanish, Muñoz Marín’s essay “Poetas de la democracia” (“Poets of Democracy”) underscores author Giannina Delgado Caro’s assertion that Muñoz Marín lived fully and constantly his “biculturalism.” The essay opens stating that Walt Whitman was “the voice of democracy,” for he saw the Declaration of Independence as “a source of the most profound poetry.” For Muñoz Marín poetry led to empathy and harmony, to reconciling thoughts and emotions. The essay highlights American poets Vachel Lindsay (1879–1931), Edgar Lee Masters (1868–1950), and Carl Sandburg (1878–1967). The poems that he selected (and translated) have clear political and social significance—Lindsay’s “Bryan, Bryan, Bryan, Bryan,” and “General William Booth Enters into Heaven” (the former inspired by William Jennings Bryan, three times the Democratic Party’s populist candidate for President, and the latter by the founder of the Salvation Army); Masters’s “Archibald Higbie,” “Father Malloy,” and “Anne Rutledge”; Sandburg’s “Choose,” “Places,” “Killers,” and “Chicago.”

Muñoz Marín felt that these poets would and should be recognized in Latin America because their works were unpretentious, real, and down-to-earth. Delgado Caro maintains that they exemplified “literary populism.” Like Muñoz Marín’s

poems, they were anchored in solidarity with the suffering of the oppressed, often longing for the simplicity and values of rural life and always favoring equality and inclusiveness. In “A Glance at Spanish-American Poetry,” published in *Poetry* (1925), Muñoz Marín praised the “militant femininity” of women poets, which had “broken down formidable barriers of social prejudice.” He applauded Uruguay’s Juana de Ibarbourou (1892–1979), Argentina’s Alfonsina Storni (1892–1938), and Chile’s Gabriela Mistral (1889–1957). Although still in his 20s, Muñoz Marín’s profound restlessness and yearning for human rights and democracy were evident. “Poets of Democracy” concludes by stating that Latin America’s voice deserves to be heard in “the concert of the world” since that “lyrical concert” must be “a democratic parliament.” Muñoz Marín was creatively at home in both English and Spanish. Award-winning poet Carlos Gómez Beras, who has written and published poems in both languages, remarked that for him, and probably for Muñoz Marín, it was a matter of artistic choice, as to whether the need for communication in one or the other language was imperative.

Miseries, Struggles, and Time

For a short time in 1920 Muñoz Marín was a member of the Socialist Party, but in 1931 he joined the Liberal Party, headed by Antonio Barceló (1868–1938), and was director of its newspaper “La Democracia.” Muñoz Marín grew increasingly aware of the miseries in his native land and of power struggles among its political groups. He acknowledged in his memoirs that politics captured his imagination totally when he associated it “with justice and creativity, which are, after all, functions of poetry, whether written or lived.” Acutely aware of World War I, the revolutions in Russia and Mexico, the Gómez dictatorship in Venezuela, and U.S. imperialism in Central America and the Caribbean, Muñoz Marín’s breadth of concern and involvement in these matters was notable. His prime focus nonetheless was the well-being of the Puerto Rican people. After all, hurricane San Felipe in 1928 and the Great Depression a year later hit the island hard and shattered many dreams. Dysentery and tuberculosis were everywhere; only 40 % of the population knew how to read and write. In “T.R.-P.R.,” an article published in *World’s Week* (July 1931), Muñoz Marín pointed out that Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. (Ted), appointed governor by Herbert Hoover, had recognized the conflict of interests between large corporations and the Puerto Rican underclass. His admiration for Socialist Eugene Debs and ACLU founder Roger Baldwin attest to Muñoz Marín’s open-minded quest for social justice.

Muñoz Marín’s first wife, American poet Muna Lee (1895–1965), translated his poem “Pamphlet.” It echoes his transition from poetry to politics—“I have broken the

rainbow/ against my heart/ as one breaks a useless sword
against a knee./ (...) I have drowned my dreams in order to
glut the dreams...in the veins/ of men who sweated and wept
and raged/ to season my coffee..." The poem painfully evokes
Puerto Rico's prevalent plights—illness, hunger, "bare feet,"
"calloused hands," and "trampled hearts." Muñoz Marín
closes saying that as "the pamphleteer of God," he will "go
with the mob of stars and hungry men/ toward the great
dawn.../!" The poem's emotional intensity is intertwined with
critical reflection. Conversing with Earl P. Hanson, Muñoz
Marín said, "I have always been a poet and I still consider
myself one—rather than a politician. The only difference is
that I no longer use verse as my medium. My medium today is
politics and my hope is that the future will consider the result
good poetry rather than bad."

Much began to change in 1932 when he was elected senator
and in 1934 when American journalist Ruby Black arranged for
Eleanor Roosevelt to come to Puerto Rico and meet Muñoz
Marín. The First Lady ended up visiting shacks where the poor
and jobless lived and died from illness and malnutrition. Fol-
lowing his wife's report, FDR included Puerto Rico in the New
Deal program. In Muñoz Marín's numerous speeches and in his
book on the history of the PPD, which he had founded in 1938,
he states, for example, "The people went on stage as protago-
nists of the Puerto Rican drama. They stopped being the chorus
and became the hero of their own epic." Briefly put, even
though in 1931 Muñoz Marín reordered priorities and changed
his means of communication, poetry did not disappear from his
political discourse. The PPD adopted as its symbol the red on
white profile of a *jibaro* (mountain peasant) wearing a *pava*
(traditional hat) with the words "Pan, Tierra, Libertad" (Bread,
Land, Freedom).

According to Octavio Paz "the contribution of poetry to the
reconstitution of a new political thought" is "not new ideas but
rather something more precious and fragile: memory." Paz
states that "where the so-called political sciences are taught,
the reading of Aeschylus and Shakespeare should be obligatory.
Poets nourished the thought of Hobbes and Locke, of Marx and
Tocqueville. Through the mouth of the poet speaks—I empha-
size speaks, not writes—the other voice. (...) To hear that voice
is to hear time itself, the time that passes and that, nevertheless,
returns..." Muñoz Marín heard that "other voice." Like his
father, who realized that independence was a legitimate but
impossible ideal, he could not cease caring about the common
good for Puerto Ricans. Their economic needs were at first to
take precedence over the issue of political status. In "The
Pamphlet," Muñoz Marín remembers that those who are ill or
poor literally ask for "a little air," "a little sunshine," "a bit of
bread," "fewer stones," "fewer broken bottles," and "clean
cambric." As University of Puerto Rico (UPR) historian Pedro
Reina Pérez sees it, "To understand Luis Muñoz Marín, one
must keep in mind that he was indeed a poet." Lyric poetry,
through similes and metaphors, speaks directly; its voice is not

hidden behind fictional characters or situations. Every year
Muñoz Marín celebrated the birth of his father at his birthplace,
the central mountain town of Barranquitas.

Democracy and Wars

*The vigor of his imagination, the true gift of a poet, is
held in check by a cautious, even suspicious streak of
sharp-eyed circumspection. While profoundly confident
of man's capacity to contribute to his own well-being, he
is no builder of utopias, no happy warrior who would
expose himself to unnecessary risks.*

—Carl Friedrich (1901–1984)

Exiles from the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) sought
refuge in Puerto Rico, among them poets Juan Ramón
Jiménez (1881–1958) and Pedro Salinas (1891–1951), and
José Ortega y Gasset's student, philosopher María Zambrano
(1904–1991). I enjoyed discussing with UPR historian Silvia
Alvarez Curbelo and with Julio Quirós, the Foundation's
Archives Director, the importance of Zambrano for Muñoz
Marín's political understanding. During her stay in Puerto
Rico, invited by UPR in the summer of 1940, Zambrano spent
time with Muñoz Marín and his second wife, essayist Inés
María Mendoza (Doña Inés) (1908–1990). The political land-
scape in Europe was catastrophic, and in Puerto Rico elections
were scheduled in November. Discussing democracy and
wars and focusing on the importance of human rights was
inevitable. Silvia Alvarez Curbelo brought up Zambrano's
essay, "Isla de Puerto Rico: Nostalgia and Hope for a Better
World," written not long after her encounters with Muñoz
Marín and Doña Inés. Alvarez Curbelo maintains that they
shared Zambrano's concept of "poetic reasoning," which
came from her reflections on hope and the presence of the
divine in human life. Muñoz Marín joined her also in
condemning totalitarianism and seeing democracy as essential
for liberty and personhood. Quirós points out that Zambrano's
later book *Persona y Democracia* also benefited from her
conversations with them.

Muñoz Marín always believed in representative democra-
cy. He campaigned to convince the *jibaros* not to sell their
votes, as had been a common practice. Instead, he asked that
they "lend" him their vote for only one election, saying that
they should take it back 4 years later if unhappy with his
performance. His Party (the PPD) then won with a solid
participation of *jibaros*, workers, and the middle class, making
him president of the Puerto Rican Senate in 1940. He would
later call this initial victory "a democratic revolution...a dra-
matic change in a nation's way of seeing things, as effective as
Franklin D. Roosevelt's triumph in the elections of 1932." Muñoz
Marín observed that it entailed the choice of "risking
despair or daring to carry the burden of hope." With that

burden, he helped advance legislation for agrarian reform, economic recovery, and industrialization. The Republican-Socialist Party coalition which headed the Puerto Rican House of Representatives, and Rexford Tugwell, the last non-Puerto Rican governor and a contributor to FDR's New Deal, at times worked with him. Muñoz Marín's program, known as "Operation Bootstrap," granted a 10–16 years tax exemption to American companies willing to open branches in Puerto Rico. Unemployment started to drop, and roads and urban developments were built.

Alvarez Curbelo focused on Muñoz Marín's political discourse—how he interwove land redistribution, agricultural diversity, industrial promotion, and public education with the complexities of World War II. In fact, the emergence of anti-fascism and later anti-communism (the Cold War) intensified the PPD's populist quest for bread, land, and freedom. Even though Puerto Ricans had served in the First World War—among them Alvarez Curbelo's paternal grandfather—their military service in World War II and Korea enshrined a new relationship between the island and the continental U.S. Muñoz Marín emphasized that they all had a common enemy, fascism or communism, and a common goal. Both she and Quirós called attention to Muñoz Marín's belief in internationalism and interdependence and his "new ways to old objectives," which he himself labeled "creative statesmanship."

For Muñoz Marín, according to Alvarez Curbelo, "Being a citizen meant practicing civic responsibility." Duties and obligations were as important as rights and liberties. It was paramount for everyone to understand that the reason for going to war was to ensure democracy. In fact, more than 65,000 Puerto Rican soldiers served in World War II, and more than 700 died in the Korean War. Reading about Puerto Ricans in Korea, I remembered "Killers," the poem by Carl Sandburg, which Muñoz Marín had translated for his essay "The Poets of Democracy." It is a classic antiwar poem, from Sandburg's *War Poems (1914–1915)*. Muñoz Marín must have remembered it too—

*I am singing to you
Soft as a man with a dead child speaks;
Hard as a man in handcuffs,
Held where he cannot move:
Under the sun
Are sixteen million men,
Chosen for shining teeth,
Sharp eyes, hard legs,
And a running of young warm blood in their wrists.
(...)*

In 1952, Sandburg, who had been among the U.S. troops that landed in Puerto Rico in 1898, wrote to Muñoz Marín, "Please know, my good and thoughtful friend, that I have you

in mind and that one of these days my work...will have slowed down so that I can get to Puerto Rico."

Sovereignty and Political Status

Senator Muñoz Mendoza recalled that already in 1946 her father had started advocating commonwealth or *estado libre asociado* (ELA) status for Puerto Rico, a relationship with the United States largely similar to that of New Zealand, Australia, or Canada with Great Britain. He envisioned a non-colonial autonomous state within American sovereignty. Furthermore, he reassured Americans by saying that Puerto Rico would support national security in exchange for economic concessions. She remembered how working together with future Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas, jurist José Trías Monge, and Resident Commissioner Antonio Fernós-Isern, Muñoz Marín had drafted the preamble to Law 600 (1950): "Fully recognizing the principle of government by consent, this Act is now adopted in the nature of a compact so that the people of Puerto Rico may organize a government pursuant to a constitution of their own adoption." The phrase "in the nature of a compact" implied for its authors that the U.S. could not unilaterally govern Puerto Rico.

Law 600, signed by Truman on 4 July 1950, was introduced as an amendment to the Jones Act (1917), a law imposed without representation which granted American citizenship to Puerto Ricans. Interestingly, Law 600 did not extend to Puerto Ricans all of the constitutional guarantees of American citizens living in the mainland, but it did empower them to write their own constitution. In a referendum, Puerto Ricans on 4 June 1951 freely accepted Law 600 by a vote of 76.4 %. This led 2 months later to the choice of delegates to the Constitutional Assembly, and ratification of the resulting Constitution of 1952 in a referendum, with a margin of more than 4 to 1. The Constitution renamed the island "the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico." Nonetheless, under the Territorial Clause (Art. IV, section 3, clause 2) of the U.S. Constitution, Puerto Rico lacks legal sovereignty. The U.S. government had and has complete authority over the island.

Muñoz Mendoza agreed with Pedro Reina Pérez that Muñoz Marín was troubled for the rest of his life since he had not been able to amend Law 600. Reina Pérez asserted that Muñoz Marín's failed attempts to convince Congress that *estadolibrismo* was good for the U.S. constitutes a problem to this day. According to Reina Pérez, Law 600 was not a compact or bilateral agreement between Puerto Rico and the United States. "Puerto Rico, though not a military colony since 2003—when the U.S. Navy stopped using Vieques as a bombing range and testing ground—is still a colony," he said. The U.S. continues to govern Puerto Rico unilaterally. But no one paused to explain clearly how the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is similar to or different from the

Commonwealths of Kentucky, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. Be that as it may, in 1953, the United Nations removed the island from the list of “non-self-governing territories.”

Muñoz Marín was ultimately a democrat, according to Muñoz Mendoza. After all, the Commonwealth Constitution stipulates that when the majority Party wins more than two-thirds of the total seats, the Senate and the House shall be enlarged by a number of additional seats sufficient to give minority parties representation based on the number of votes that each one polled. She recalled her father’s celebratory spirit upon learning in January 1959 of the Cuban Revolution, and how he welcomed Castro delegates and offered advice on agrarian reform, rural and urban housing, and education. He traveled with them through Cayey, discussing similarities between the culture of the Puerto Rican *jibaro* and the Cuban *guajiro*. Muñoz Marín believed that the Puerto Rican experience could be helpful. However, with other Latin American center-left democrats, like Costa Rica’s José Figueres (1906–1990) and Venezuela’s Rómulo Betancourt (1908–1981), he was soon to deplore the Castro regime’s turn to dictatorship and began welcoming thousands of Cuban exiles in the 1960s. By contrast, Muñoz Marín was no caudillo. Having won the governorship four times, he voluntarily refused to run in 1964, much to his supporters’ chagrin. Neither has nepotism been a factor in Puerto Rico. Muñoz Mendoza lost in 1992 and then supported PPD candidate Sila Calderón (1940–) who won in 2000.

Muñoz Mendoza brought up her father’s having consulted with others. For example, striving to improve standards of living, Muñoz Marín traveled to Scandinavia to learn from the cooperative movements in that region. Muñoz Mendoza also underlined her father’s belief in the importance of the arts—poetry, theater, music—and his capacity for friendship. In particular, she mentioned poet Luis Palés Matos (1898–1959) and composer Rafael Hernández (1892–1965). And she described his relationship with future Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas. Muñoz Marín and Fortas met when Fortas, as under secretary at the Department of the Interior, was the colonial secretary to whom Puerto Rico reported. Fortas, himself a violinist, played a key role in the decision of cellist Pablo Casals (1876–1973) to make Puerto Rico his official home and establish in 1956 the Casals Festival in the island, which continues to this day.

Citizenship and Nationalism

American citizenship tops the preamble of the Puerto Rican Constitution. Muñoz Rivera, Muñoz Marín’s father, had been present in 1916 in Washington, D.C. when Congress discussed the Jones Act. As Resident Commissioner, he had a seat in the House of Representatives but no right to vote. Today, almost 100 years later, that has not changed. A Puerto

Rican undergraduate said that Muñoz Rivera and Muñoz Marín had had status and citizenship on the agenda but had solved neither.

In Old San Juan, a law school student wondered what Muñoz Marín and his advisers thought of *Balzac v. People of Porto Rico* (1922), where the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that certain constitutional guarantees do not extend to Puerto Ricans residing in the island—for example, the right to trial by jury—because Puerto Rico is an unincorporated territory. Another student recalled *Harris v. Rosario* (1980), which held that, under the 5th Amendment Equal Protection Clause, it is legal to provide a lower level of aid to families with dependent children who reside in Puerto Rico, by comparison to those who live in the mainland. This is because, according to the Territorial Clause, Congress can discriminate against citizens in U.S. territories if it has a “rational basis” for doing so. Justice Thurgood Marshall’s dissent noted that Puerto Ricans are United States citizens and that the *Insular Cases* (1901), on which the Court to some extent anchored its reasoning, are indeed questionable.

A Spanish-born insurance broker and his Puerto Rican wife, an executive assistant at a local bank, feel marginalized. They say American citizenship is simultaneously a blessing and a curse. As U.S. citizens, Puerto Ricans can choose to relocate to the mainland. Yet many in the island consider their citizenship to be “second-class” since they can vote for members of Congress and for the President only if they reside in the continental U.S. “But remember,” a friend remarked, “that here as in other territories we pay no federal income tax.” In more than one way, the brain drain to the mainland is opportunity and threat. It raises questions of loyalty and provokes bitter reflection about Muñoz Marín’s “nationalism.”

Nationalism often satisfies the need for identity and community. In Puerto Rico it has generally been associated with seeking political independence from the United States. Both the Puerto Rican Socialist Party and the Puerto Rican Republican Party favored annexation to the United States. The Liberal Party, with which Muñoz Marín twice won a Senate seat, often had changed its name and ultimate goal—from autonomy to independence to an autonomy anticipating commonwealth status. Muñoz Marín, an opponent of colonialism, founded the PPD in 1938 with independence in mind. Yet, due to economic concerns, even when other parties favored independence, he changed course to favor establishment of a “free associated state.” Fellow PPD members felt betrayed and abandoned the PPD.

Because the island’s name had been misspelled in the Treaty of Paris, which ended the Spanish-American War, Puerto Rico’s official name was “Porto Rico” until 1932, when Congress passed a statute that established the correct spelling. Small mistakes can be indicative of deeper sentiments. Indeed, the only flag allowed to be flown in Puerto Rico from 1898 to 1952 was the American flag, and American

governors had often ignored the culture of the Puerto Rican people. Remarkably, in a country where Spanish had been spoken for centuries, the U.S. government insisted that teaching be mostly in English in public schools. Doña Inés Mendoza's experience was eloquent: in 1938 she, a Puerto Rican teacher with a Columbia University degree, lost her job at Central High School in San Juan for denouncing this American policy. Americanization policies further complicated and inflamed Puerto Rico's politics.

Confusion and Nightmares

In the first half of the 20th century, the island's politics had gone from confusion to nightmare. Gilberto Concepción de Gracia (1909–1968) founded in 1946 the Puerto Rican Independence Party. In fact, independence was already primarily identified with the Nationalist Party, founded in 1922, and with its president Pedro Albizu Campos (1891–1965), a First World War veteran, and the first Puerto Rican to graduate from Harvard Law School. The Nationalists presented independence as both a cultural and political issue. Muñoz Marín was impressed by Albizu Campos's arguments, although their strategies regarding political status and social reforms were altogether different. The Nationalists' poor performance in the 1932 elections drove them to armed struggle and revolutionary violence. Albizu Campos and his cohorts' dilemmas were often reminiscent of the Irish nationalist movement.

In the 1930s, Puerto Rico's Nationalists resorted to murderous attacks in the name of patriotism, and the government responded brutally, allegedly for the sake of peace and order. The Río Piedras Massacre (1935), where the police gunned down 4 Nationalists, the assassination by Nationalists of Police Commissioner Francis Riggs, and the immediate shooting at the police station of his killers (1936) speak for themselves. Another dreadful occurrence was the Ponce Massacre (1937) which resulted in the shooting of 20 unarmed Nationalist demonstrators, marchers, and onlookers. Charged with sedition against the U.S. government on the island, Albizu Campos was sentenced to 10 years. In 1947, having served his term, he returned to Puerto Rico. Intending to suppress the Nationalists, the Puerto Rican legislature passed Law 53 ("Ley de la Mordaza" or Gag Law) in 1948. Under this statute, closely modeled after the federal Smith Act (1940), it became a crime in Puerto Rico to speak against the U.S. government; to speak in favor of Puerto Rican independence; to print, publish, sell, or exhibit any material intended to destroy the Puerto Rican government, or to organize groups for such purposes.

Albizu Campos had become increasingly frustrated with discussions of Puerto Rico's status. Even though Puerto Rico had its own legislature, for the Nationalists the island remained a colony. Albizu Campos insisted that Law 600 was

a sham since any statute passed by the Puerto Rican legislature could be overturned by the U.S. Congress. In late October 1950, the Nationalists claimed responsibility for assaults on police stations in a number of towns, among them Jayuya and Utuado, and for an attack on La Fortaleza, the governor's mansion in San Juan, where Muñoz Marín, Doña Inés, and their daughters lived. More than two dozen persons died. President Truman declared martial law. Albizu Campos was indicted, and hundreds of Nationalists and Communists that had had nothing to do with the uprisings were arrested. On November 1st, 1950, 2 Nationalists attempted to assassinate Truman in Washington, D.C. He was not injured, but 1 of the Puerto Ricans and a White House guard were killed in the gunfire. Muñoz Marín pardoned Albizu Campos in 1953, although this pardon was revoked in 1954, when 4 Nationalists attacked the U.S. House of Representatives, wounding 5 congressmen. Though he may not have planned the details of the attack, Albizu Campos was again jailed.

During and following the Second World War, fears of an international communist threat abounded. In 1957, however, Justice John Marshall Harlan in *Yates v. U.S.* (1957) introduced the notion of balancing society's right of self-preservation against the right to free speech, and reinterpreted the Smith Act to proscribe only advocacy of concrete illegal action, not advocacy of abstract doctrine. Puerto Rico's Gag Law was repealed that year.

Muñoz Marín, who was governor during this tumultuous period, abhorred and deplored terrorism. According to him, nationalism could be political, based on ideological partisanship, or cultural, based on a common language, tradition, and history. Though Muñoz Marín had at times favored political nationalism and independence, he grew to condemn political nationalism for it could lead to war or terrorism, death and hatred, fear and resentment. He showed deep appreciation for cultural nationalism since it promoted beauty, peace, and understanding, solidarity and reciprocity instead of differences and distances. In a 1955 Harvard commencement speech, Muñoz Marín had stated, "In the U.S. Declaration of Independence the young republic was dedicated to the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In Puerto Rico we are trying...to bring to a harmonious success, for the good of our souls and bodies and for our fellow citizens...Operation Bootstrap—the right to life; Operation Commonwealth—the right to liberty; and Operation Serenity—the pursuit of happiness with some hope of really catching up with her."

As much as Muñoz Marín was committed to freedom from want, freedom of religion, and freedom of expression, freedom from fear caused by the Nationalists could trump the other three liberties. Given their record of violence, Muñoz Marín considered such advocates of Puerto Rican independence to be enemies of both Puerto Rico and the U.S. The Gag Law was repressive and violated the First Amendment. Did it

not cause fear as well? How could Muñoz Marín, the poet and democrat, support it? Was it justified, like the Smith Act that inspired it, by the dangers of giving liberty to antidemocratic groups, such as the Puerto Rican Nationalists? Had they not, after all, refused to participate in the democratic process?

On a coast-to-coast broadcast in 1950, following the attempt against Truman's life, Muñoz Marín said, "We are not a colony of the United States. We are citizens of the United States and our island is associated on the basis of freedom with the United States. (...) The last time the Nationalist Party risked the hazard of democracy by going to the polls was in 1932. At that time they managed to get only 5,000 votes out of 400,000 votes cast. Since then they have expressed the conviction that votes and democracy are not important. (...) As militant members of the democratic world, all Puerto Rico tonight is filled with wrath and indignation."

Paradox or "Civil Wars" Within

(...)

*At the end I was a rightful son of my father
and could not imagine what would come:*

(...)

*Sarcasm and idolatry which are the same,
this gigantic and stiff finger swollen in blood
tired of placing hope where it did not go.*

(...)

I am the father of the disaster:

Many understood my success.

No one understands my tragedy.

I curse whomever invokes my name.

-Eduardo Lalo (1960-)

UPR humanities professor Eduardo Lalo's poem "Muñoz Marín Ponders the End of the World" brings to mind the heartbreaking portrait of Muñoz Marín painted in 1974 by Francisco Rodón. Lalo told me that the poetic voice is Muñoz Marín at the end of his life, when no one paid attention to him anymore. Lalo remembered Muñoz Marín as someone whose priority was to be in power and to retain power. According to him, Muñoz Marín was naïve in hoping that the U.S. Congress would listen and improve or "perfect" the ELA. "This is pure wishful thinking for a man some considered to be brilliant," he said. Reina Pérez agreed and went further, "Muñoz was effective because he knew how to employ words as weapons, right at the frontier between reality and demagoguery. But the U.S. betrayed him, or he betrayed himself in believing that Congress would agree to discuss and 'perfect' Puerto Rico's political status." For both Lalo and Reina Pérez, Muñoz Marín's legacy is simultaneously a triumph and failure.

Commonwealth or ELA status is a paradox—a gap in logic or a constitutional impossibility. In some ways, Muñoz Marín's life was paradoxical too, like a poem that apparently contradicts itself, yet conveys a truth and promotes critical thinking. Muñoz Marín sometimes disagreed with himself and called those conflicts "civil wars." A.W. Maldonado explained well Muñoz Marín's reference to the civil war in his conscience between Puerto Ricans as a nation and as individual persons, "between the collective Puerto Rico that demanded nationhood" and the "flesh-and-blood" Puerto Rican who demanded socioeconomic justice. Muñoz Marín wrote, "From the clash of independence with social justice...commonwealth status emerged."

In April 1959, after several postponements, Muñoz Marín delivered the three Godkin Lectures at Harvard University. The lecture series, named in honor of Edwin Godkin, founder of *The Nation*, began in 1903 and aimed to encourage independent thinking and devotion to the common good. Pulitzer Prize winner Walter Lippmann (1889–1974), Swedish Nobel laureate Gunnar Myrdal (1898–1987), and U.S. Ambassador and Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1927–2003) had been Godkin lecturers. Muñoz Marín was well aware that the West had won the Second World War not long before, and now, in the midst of the Cold War, the planet could be close to a nuclear holocaust. Speaking eloquently in beautiful Sanders Theater, his presentations were rich in metaphors and insights. He yearned "to perfect the commonwealth status, and not to transform it into federated statehood or independence."

"Breakthrough from Nationalism, A Small Island Looks At a Big Trouble" was the title of Muñoz Marín's talks. In his concluding talk, he said, "I have looked at our predicament as one coming from a people who once considered themselves caught in a seemingly impossible trap, and yet, by transcending the emotion of nationalism were able to create a new imaginative form of political association well fitted to their needs and aspirations." "Puerto Rico modestly shows that there is plenty of life in the dynamic of federalism." He continued, "But some of us confused love of the homeland with a narrow and petty concept of the national state." Muñoz Marín clearly stood for "democratic federalism" and had in mind the Fernós-Murray bill, intended to amend Law 600, which had made the ELA possible. A month before the Godkin Lectures, Resident Commissioner Fernós-Isern and Senator James Murray had submitted the bill. But for an unincorporated territory like Puerto Rico its points were considered to be politically and constitutionally impossible. Fernós-Isern withdrew the bill on the advice of Muñoz Marín. This could be the key reason why not long after speaking at Harvard Muñoz Marín asked that his Godkin lectures not be published. Originally delivered in English, they first appeared in print both in English and Spanish, in Reina Pérez's *Cavilando el fin del mundo (Pondering the end of the world)* (2005). Lalo's poem opens the book and justifies its title.

During his political career, Muñoz Marín tried to pursue balance and moderation. He often listened to others, appealed to different sociopolitical classes, kept track of governmental developments, and delegated to able assistants. He was a statesman who lived as a citizen of two worlds, fluently adapting to his environment—whether it was Greenwich Village or Washington, D.C., the Puerto Rican legislature or the U.S. Congress, his middle-class house in Trujillo Alto or the governor's mansion in Old San Juan. Puerto Rico's democracy strengthened, and he helped to develop a sense of self-assurance and hope among the people, whether *jibaros*, workers, professionals, or businessmen.

Muñoz Marín was willing to tolerate uncertainties, disappointments, doubts, and contradictions. He believed in Puerto Ricans and Americans perhaps more than they believed in themselves. Only a generous spirit could be so sure. Again and again, he chose empathy over indifference. Like his father, inspired by humanism at many levels, he was an independent spirit. Paradoxical or not, confronted with economic realities, Muñoz Marín struggled and adjusted his position. He did not live long enough, however, to witness the longstanding consequences of the petrochemical industry's collapse, the ongoing results of socioeconomic dependence on the U.S., or a stable resolution of Puerto Rico's political status question.

Doña Inés did not like Francisco Rodón's painting. But, according to Muñoz Marín, "The picture captured the feeling of a phase of my life in which, recalling the past, I grieved not to have done or not having been able to do much more than what I did."

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