

University at Albany, State University of New York

Scholars Archive

Latin American, Caribbean, and U.S. Latino
Studies Faculty Scholarship

Latin American, Caribbean, and U.S. Latino
Studies

Spring 2002

Bombs, Ballots, and Nationalism: Vieques and the Politics of Colonialism

Pedro Caban

University at Albany, State University of New York, pcaban@albany.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/lacs_fac_scholar



Part of the [Latin American Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Caban, Pedro, "Bombs, Ballots, and Nationalism: Vieques and the Politics of Colonialism" (2002). *Latin American, Caribbean, and U.S. Latino Studies Faculty Scholarship*. 6.

https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/lacs_fac_scholar/6

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin American, Caribbean, and U.S. Latino Studies at Scholars Archive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Latin American, Caribbean, and U.S. Latino Studies Faculty Scholarship by an authorized administrator of Scholars Archive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@albany.edu.

Bombs, Ballots, and Nationalism: Vieques and the Politics of Colonialism

Pedro Cabán

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

The title of this essay refers to three enduring features of Puerto Rico's colonial encounter with the United States. "Bombs" is a reference to the naval and aerial bombardment of Vieques, but it is also a metaphor for militarism and the repression of independence and nationalist movements in Puerto Rico. "Ballots" is a reference to the nonbinding plebiscite on Naval training in Vieques held in July 2001, but it also captures the penchant for referenda and plebiscites on Puerto Rico's political status. "Nationalism," embodying the quest for sovereignty and autonomy in its various forms of political and cultural expression, is an irrepressible feature of Puerto Rican history and society.

The current campaign to demilitarize and bring peace to Vieques is significant because it is a singular episode in U.S.-Puerto Rico relations. While local opposition to the Navy's destructive use of Vieques is long-standing, until recently it was generally ignored in the United States. It is important to explore the array of factors that explain how a localized struggle, with limited organizational resources, forged a national consensus to acquire international notoriety, and succeeded in forcing the United States to reassess its treatment of Vieques. The struggle in Vieques has implications for alternative forms of resource mobilization by seemingly weak political actors to challenge the structures of colonial governance. But equally as important, the experience of resistance in Vieques yields lessons for other social movements that confront oppressive structures and practices.

In the following pages I will discuss two dimensions of the campaign to demilitarize Vieques. One dimension, of course, is colonialism and the history of Puerto Rican affirmation for political rights. The battle for Vieques is part of a century-old struggle by Puerto Ricans to liberalize the antidemocratic structures of colonialism and attain a measure of autonomy over policy arenas that affect their lives. I discuss how the most recent struggle to demilitarize Vieques illuminates the contemporary practice of colonial rule and exposes the multiple arenas of resistance to this rule. The second dimension is the heightened presence of Puerto Rico in the U.S. national political discourse, particularly the growing awareness that the Puerto Rican experience is an essential feature of Latino political empowerment.

Vieques and U.S. Politics

Vieques provides a set of lenses to reassess the role of Puerto Ricans in U.S. politics and highlights the emergence of national political mobilization based on an ethnically constituted notion of *latinidad*. Puerto Ricans have an electoral presence in such key electoral states as New York and Florida and are emerging as strategic players in national politics. The struggle to demilitarize Vieques is of vital concern to the U.S. resident Puerto Rican population because it is a dramatic affirmation of Puerto Rican national identity that is subsumed in a broader discourse of human rights and claims of citizenship. This struggle has also revealed the changing nature of Puerto Rican national identity, an identity that extends beyond insularity to encompass the ideal of nonterritorially-bounded Puerto Rican consciousness. Opposition to the Navy presence in Vieques has evolved from acts of resistance by a handful of fishermen in small boats into an international social movement whose calls for justice, demilitarization, autonomy, and government accountability resonate with other Latina and Latino constituencies.

The battle for Vieques represents another affirmation of nationalism that has been an inherent feature of Puerto Rico's political culture since at least the ill-fated 1868 Lares uprising to overthrow Spanish colonial rule. Just days before the attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center, the campaign against the U.S. Navy seemed on the verge of success. The protest activities had escalated in scope, drama, and intensity. Some commentators portrayed the movement as a case of David fighting Goliath, a small, powerless community in a virtual life struggle with the mighty U.S. military establishment.

The Navy attempted to contain the protests by directing a misinformation campaign that rebuked the protesters as misguided Puerto Ricans who were cynically manipulated by independence advocates in order to embarrass the United States internationally. As the cause gained island-wide, then national and finally international support, the Navy deployed its full arsenal of repressive assets to quash the civil disobedience that disrupted its training. The physical intimidation and psychological abuse of the arrested protesters, excessive jail sentences, use of harmful nonlethal weapons, a virulent campaign to defame the movement's leadership, and surreptitious tactics to disrupt and foment divisiveness were all deployed. Rather than intimidating the movement into submission, this gross retaliatory action actually generated increased sympathy and support for the protesters and their cause. Only the horrific terrorist events of September 11, 2001 moved most organizations engaged in the demilitarization campaign to impose a voluntary

moratorium on their activities. In the context of the patriotic outburst that consumed a grief-stricken nation that wanted vengeance, opposition to military training in the name of fighting terrorism was almost treasonous.

While the battle of Vieques appears quiescent for the moment, the forces that gave rise to it are still very much alive. The grassroots organizations that spearheaded the movement are very active and have not wavered from their resolve to resist the Navy's bombardment of Vieques. The Navy Department appears as determined as ever not to relinquish Vieques, its "crown jewel" for conducting weapons training and maneuvers. Yet the Bush administration seems convinced that come election time the Republican Party will be judged by the Latino electorate for its handling of the Vieques debacle and its treatment of the Puerto Rican protesters.

Before discussing the struggle to demilitarize Vieques in both its colonial and U.S. domestic political dimensions, I want to comment on two seeming paradoxes of the Puerto Rican situation. Although over 7 million Puerto Ricans reside in their nation and in the United States, they have been portrayed as peripheral political actors who do not factor into the calculus of policy makers or the electoral strategies of the Republican or Democratic Parties. The second paradox concerns continued U.S. insistence on the indispensability of Puerto Rico as a strategic asset despite the collapse of the Soviet Union over a decade ago, the end of insurrections in Central and Latin America, and the virtual irrelevance of Cuba as a regional force. The unintended consequence of the movement to expel the Navy from Vieques has been to expose these paradoxes to critical scrutiny and to reveal their casuistry.

The Paradox of Political Inefficacy

Puerto Ricans have historically been represented as inconsequential actors in U.S. society and polity. Puerto Ricans who live on the island have been treated as a subject people who have no voice in the decision-making process in Washington. Since 1898 Congress, acting under the authority of the territorial clause of the Constitution, has had plenary powers to administer Puerto Rico. As a territory Puerto Rico is denied representation in Congress and its people are precluded from voting in U.S. presidential elections. Consequently, Puerto Rico's capacity to shape policies that directly and immediately affect its people through formal channels is minimal. Historically, Puerto Rican input into the policy process in the federal government has either been improvised and informal or by invitation. Yet, an important achievement of the Vieques campaign, even if it turns out to be fleeting, was

to dramatically dispel detrimental portrayals of Puerto Ricans as a people who lack the will and capacity to affect politics and policy making at the U.S. national level. Although as colonial subjects they are denied a formal role in the national political process, Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens and have employed that legal distinction to influence policy.

Puerto Ricans who reside in the United States have been portrayed as a politically marginalized and poverty-stricken racialized minority that lacks agency. Generally low socioeconomic status and educational attainment levels correlate with the low levels of electoral engagement, not only for Puerto Ricans but for all racialized minorities. However, impediments intentionally designed to discourage electoral participation also affect participation. But the long-standing absence of Puerto Ricans from domestic political discourse and activity is not merely a consequence of their voting characteristics. More recently, Puerto Ricans are represented as forming part of a homogeneous Latino population. In the popular imagery Puerto Ricans become indistinguishable from other Latinos and they are often thought of as either recent immigrants or temporary workers who lack U.S. citizenship. The image of Puerto Ricans as “foreign” is reinforced in official discourse. George W. Bush’s reference in June 2001 to the U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico as “our friends and neighbors” reaffirmed this image of Puerto Ricans as foreigners. The ambiguity of the Puerto Rican political identity and the public representation of Puerto Ricans as peripheral to the events and forces that shape U.S. society are constructions designed to deprive a people of a sense of history and agency.

However, the images of the irrelevant colonial subject and inconsequential racialized minority are profoundly ahistorical characterizations. A history of Puerto Rican activism belies the image of a people who lack political will or capacity for decisive action. Puerto Rican demands for access and equity are derivative of Puerto Rico’s subordinate territorial status and denial of representation. The Vieques movement, which includes solidarity networks in Puerto Rican and Latino neighborhoods throughout the United States, serves to further rupture the imagery of an acquiescent people who countenance their subjugation under colonialism. Amílcar Barreto observes in his study of Puerto Rican politics and Vieques, that the particularly impressive feature of the movement was not only the alliance of grassroots organizations, political parties, and the state in Puerto Rico, “but also the active involvement of Puerto Ricans living in the continental United States.” These bonds demonstrated a vibrant cultural nationalism that transcended territory. From Washington’s perspective, Puerto Rican nationalists “were living among us” (Barreto 2002, 64).

It is not only the history of resistance, but the sheer size of the Puerto Rican population itself that defies attempts to represent them as extraneous to the political process. The nearly 3.4 million Puerto Ricans who reside in the United States comprise almost 10 percent of the Latino population. Another 3.8 million live in Puerto Rico. In fact, it is the remarkably delusory quality of these assertions—the facts plainly defy the depiction—that prompts one to reject the conventional representation of the marginality of Puerto Ricans and to rethink traditional approaches to the study of Puerto Rico political engagement and agency. Thus it is understandable that, despite the myth of powerlessness, the leadership of the Republican and Democratic Parties is heedful of the growing salience of the Latino vote and courting it aggressively.

Puerto Ricans have been engaged in a century-old struggle to decolonize their island nation. In fact, Puerto Rican politics is often depicted as obsessed with resolving the island's territorial status. Independence advocates have called for international mediation to resolve Puerto Rico's colonial status and challenged the U.S. government's position that this is a purely domestic political matter. They have made the case that Puerto Rico's colonialism is an international issue in hopes of bringing world pressure to bear on the United States. The quest for independence has been pursued by grassroots solidary groups, clandestine militant groups, student and political movements, and diverse political parties, including the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP) and now defunct Socialist and Nationalist Parties. The United Nations Decolonization Committee, Amnesty International, members states of the United Nations, the Socialist International, the Non-Aligned Movement and other organizations of international scope have called at various times on the United States to respect the right of Puerto Ricans to self-determination.

Many U.S. resident Puerto Ricans have been actively engaged in the independence movement and have worked closely with island-based groups. While the Young Lords is the most recognized stateside organization that took up the cause of independence, other solidarity groups have advocated for Puerto Rican independence. The independence movement, given its willingness to openly confront and defy U.S. authority and its resourcefulness in seeking strategic alliances globally, dispels the image that Puerto Ricans have passively accepted colonial rule.

The Vieques movement represents a legacy of community-based resistance that finds parallels with earlier environmental and antimilitarism campaigns in Puerto Rico. But in contrast to these earlier campaigns, it has successfully avoided being drawn into the interminable and ruinous politics of

territorial status. Although undeniably another episode of political assertion and opposition to U.S. rule, the battle for Vieques is a struggle for social justice and human rights, public health and safety, sustainable development and environmental protection, demilitarization, autonomy and government accountability.

The depiction of Puerto Ricans as colonized subjects who, despite occasional acts of political desperation, lack agency is contradicted by a history of activism and political engagement in Puerto Rico and the United States.

The Paradox of Strategic Indispensability

Over the last century the array of geopolitical concerns, ranging from European expansionism to national liberation insurrections in Latin America, that made Puerto Rico an indispensable strategic asset has disappeared. Yet, for the United States, Puerto Rico's strategic significance for national security remains undiminished. It is paradoxical that, despite these momentous changes, the Pentagon persists in treating Puerto Rico as a military asset it can unilaterally deploy in national defense. Although forcefully taken from Spain in 1898 for strategic reasons, it was not until the outbreak of World War II that Puerto Rico was assigned a cardinal role in hemispheric defense policy. During World War II the War Department converted Puerto Rico into an island fortress and enhanced its capacity to serve as a forward base of defense for the Panama Canal. In 1941 the Navy expropriated most of Vieques and prepared it as a home base for the British Navy in the event Great Britain was defeated by Germany. Hundreds of millions of federal dollars, an unprecedented amount, flowed into the island for construction of military and naval bases and airports.

Puerto Rico's military utility did not diminish after the war. In fact, the island-nation has served as training and staging area for the U.S. military forces and its surrogates. Its military installations were employed in the Bay of Pigs invasion and subsequent invasions of the Dominican Republic, Grenada, and Panama. Ironically, as conventional military threats to U.S. security in the region subside, Puerto Rico's value as military real estate has increased (see AFSC 1999). Since the closure of U.S. military bases in Panama, the Pentagon has consolidated virtually all of its Latin American and Caribbean military command structure in Puerto Rico. The U.S. Southern Command moved its operations from Panama to Roosevelt Roads in 1999. The U.S. Army South, another command component, also relocated its operations to Fort Buchanan. U.S. Southern Command's director, General Wilhelm, stated in June 1999 that, "Puerto Rico will now assume the role that Panama has had for Southern Command for about the last fifty

years. Puerto Rico will really become the hub of our operations” (quoted in AFSC 1999). Puerto Rico currently has the largest standing concentration of U.S. military forces outside the United States. The Roosevelt Roads complex, which includes Vieques, is currently the largest U.S. military base. Fort Buchanan is another key military installation and the headquarters for U.S. Army South. The 10,000-acre Camp Santiago serves as a National Guard training facility. Approximately 14 per cent of Puerto Rico’s land mass is under the supervision or authority of U.S. armed forces.

Since the threats of communist expansion and Cuban aggression have been invalidated as rationales for the continued militarization of Puerto Rico, the Pentagon has devised a new thesis to justify its presence on the island (see García Muñoz and Rodríguez Beruff 1999). According to the Pentagon, nontraditional threats to regional stability and democracy include narcotics trade, illegal immigration, drug money laundering, terrorism, natural disasters, and “the open-ended threat of critical uncertainties” (AFSC 1999). Given its geographical location and relationship to the United States, Puerto Rico is strategically positioned to respond to this array of threats. With the installation of the “Relocatable Over-the-Horizon Radar” (ROTHR) in Vieques and Fort Allen to detect narcotics smuggling flights in South America, Puerto Rico has been converted into a front line state in combating narco-trafficking.

In its zeal to retain Vieques for weapons training, the Navy has dismissed credible arguments that contravene its inflated claims that the island is an incomparable facility essential to maintaining national security. According to former Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Jay Johnson, “Vieques is an irreplaceable asset . . . it’s the crown jewel of combined arms, live-fire training. It’s the world standard” (U.S. House of Representatives June 27, 2001). Yet other experts report with equal certainty that the actual tactics employed in hundreds of engagements, since the last hostile amphibious assault in battle of Inchon in Korea in 1950, are unrelated to the type of combined amphibious, naval bombardment, and aerial strafing training exercises conducted in Vieques.

Admiral John J. Shanahan, a former commander of the U.S. Second Fleet, declared that “I cannot support the Navy claims that Vieques is critical for predeployment Navy and Marine Corps training, and that training obtained at Vieques cannot be duplicated elsewhere.” He challenged the assertion that Vieques is invaluable for Navy preparedness and testified that “the current training on Vieques is neither unique, nor in most instances necessary for modern amphibious warfare” (quoted in Puerto Rico Governor 1999). Rear Admiral Eugene Carrol has argued that the Navy continues to

adhere to doctrine of military engagement that is archaic and inappropriate for use in modern warfare (Carroll 2001; see Smith 2001). President Bush's surprising decision to suspend training exercises in January 2002, in the midst of the U.S. war on international terrorism, seems to dampen the Navy's claims that weapons training in Vieques is indispensable for military preparedness.

The Pentagon's contemptuous refusal to relinquish Vieques is a reflection of its barely suppressed racist attitude that the island is populated by a politically inconsequential community. But in addition, the Navy reasons that as a territorial possession, Puerto Rico and its people have no standing to object to the military use of their land, nor to interfere with the conduct of its activities.

The Battle for Vieques: Antecedents

The campaign to demilitarize Vieques exposes many dimensions of Puerto Rico's history under U.S. colonial rule. It reveals the relationship between militarism and repression of dissent, between imperial rule and the persistence of nationalism, and exposes the fallacy that the popular will as expressed through the ballot box will alter the exercise of colonial. But events in Vieques also demonstrate how grassroots organizations have been able to circumvent colonialism's restrictions on political and civil rights. The denial of representation in the federal government compels Puerto Ricans to pursue other forms of political activity to influence the policy process. For these reasons Vieques assumes significance for understanding contemporary politics, particularly the politics of marginalized sectors of the population.

Resistance to the Navy's military activities in Vieques and efforts to hold the federal government accountable for the economic and environmental despoliation on the island span almost five decades. The current campaign began in 1993. In August 1941, under the authority granted by Public Law 247, the Navy Department began a process of land expropriation. By the end of the decade it controlled 26,000 of 33,000 acres and had dislocated thousands of *viequenses* (see Ayala). Under the guise of national security and military preparedness, the Navy Department persistently sought to expropriate the remaining acreage and dispossess the population from Vieques—a population whose activism has been a continuous source of irritation to the military authorities.

In 1947, Governor Jesús T. Piñero, of the Partido Popular Democrático (PPD), vigorously challenged a Navy proposal to expropriate the remaining acreage and to relocate its residents to the island of St. Croix, part of the U.S. Virgin Islands. In 1961 the Navy again sought to depopulate Vieques and con-

vert the island into its exclusive training facility by forcefully relocating its 8,000 residents to St. Croix. PPD Governor Muñoz Marín appealed to President Kennedy to order the Defense Department to abandon the plan, which he termed “drastic, destructive and dangerous” and which would result in “the destruction of a community” (Meléndez López 2000, 188-89). Although its plan was rejected, the Navy was able to obtain congressional approval in 1964 to expropriate an additional 1,434 acres along the southern shore. Vieques Mayor Antonio Rivera and the newly created Committee to Recover Vieques strenuously resisted the attempted expropriation and eventually prevailed. Rivera lamented, “it is almost as if there was a master plan to strangle our economy and throw us into the sea” (*San Juan Review* 1964).

Protest activities with the aim of demilitarizing Culebra, Vieques’ sister island, began in 1967. Initially led by the Asociación de Pescadores de Culebra [Culebra’s Fishermen Association], the struggle attracted the support of the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP) and the Socialist Party (Barreto 2002, 28). At the request of Governor Carlos Romero Barceló, the United States Conference of Mayors also adopted a policy in 1972 to support efforts to terminate live firing training in Culebra. The Culebra campaign gained the formal support of the Democratic Party which pledged in its 1972 Party Platform “to end all Naval shelling and bombardment of the tiny, inhabited island of Culebra and its neighboring keys, no later than June 1, 1975” (Democratic Party 1972). Local protests against the Navy continued unabated and were gaining wide media coverage. To mollify the protesters, President Ford ordered the Secretary of Defense to conduct a study of weapons training in Culebra. The study recommended that the Secretary of Defense decide by the end of 1972 on an alternate naval training facility. However, he chose to disregard the recommendations and did not terminate military training.

A potential catastrophe, the unscheduled mortar barrage that landed on a beach where children were playing, finally compelled Ford to order the Navy to relinquish its control of Culebra on July 1, 1975. Unbridled outrage from all sectors of Puerto Rican society over the Navy Department’s flagrant disregard for Puerto Rican lives was too much for Ford to ignore. The Navy Department reorganized its Atlantic Fleet Training Center and concentrated all its weapons training in Vieques. A recent Defense Department report confirmed that “the transfer of training activities from Culebra to Vieques in the 1970s generated significant controversy, including organized protests” (U.S. Office of the President 1999). While victory in Culebra had a devastating impact on Vieques, it also spurred a grassroots protest campaign to disrupt Naval training on that island as well.

The emergence of the pro-statehood Partido Nuevo Progresista (PNP) in 1968 brought the period of PPD political hegemony to an end, and injected a new dimension to the politics of demilitarizing Vieques. The PNP attempted to recast the debacle over Vieques as a nonpartisan matter of citizenship rights and national dignity. From 1978 through 1983 the PNP supported the campaign to expel the Navy from Vieques (McCaffrey 1999, 330). Statehood advocates joined *independentistas* in making the case that the PPD's utter failure to restrain the Navy was a consequence of Puerto Rico's colonial status. According to former Governor Pedro Rosselló, "the problem of Vieques is a manifestation of the failure to resolve Puerto Rico's political status." While the commonwealth status gives Puerto Rico authority over local matters, "the activities of the military are not a local matter. This is a decision of the (United States) national government, and Puerto Rico does not have a vote there" (*El Nuevo Día* March 28, 2001). The PNP claimed that political equality through the grant of statehood was a precondition for effectively confronting U.S. military use of Puerto Rico in general, and Vieques in particular. The decision by the PNP, an avowedly pro-U.S., politically conservative organization, to support the Vieques protesters undermined the Navy's baseless declarations that the anti-militarization protests were devoid of merit and cynically orchestrated by radical independence advocates. By 1990, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and Cuba's economic meltdown, the argument that terminating Naval training in Vieques was a security threat lost all credibility.

The PIP described colonialism as the root cause of the Navy's ignoble treatment of the people and government of Puerto Rico. Without self-determination the Navy could not be forced to vacate Vieques and the civil and human rights of its residents would continue to be trampled. Like the PNP, the PIP also saw Vieques as an ideological and political battleground to advance its objectives. But by late 1990s the anti militarization campaign had evolved into a social movement imbued with a cultural nationalist character, and was resolute in its determination to evict the Navy and restore peace and dignity to the people of Vieques.

Opposition to the Navy's presence in Vieques occurred between 1978 and 1983, and commenced again in 1993. In 1978 the Vieques Fisherman's Association successfully halted a naval bombardment when it positioned a flotilla of small fishing boats in the line of fire of NATO warships. The dramatic and dangerous act of defiance generated international attention and precipitated the building of a broad-based coalition that included solidarity networks throughout the United States. The battle for Vieques became a national issue and a Vieques Support Network was set up in 1978 which

worked through 1983 coordinating action in various U.S. cities (McCaffrey 1999, 330). The fishermen and activists from the Crusade for the Rescue of Vieques continued to interrupt Navy training activities through 1979. In response to increasing public pressure, PNP Governor Romero Barceló filed suit on March 1978 to enjoin the Navy from conducting training operations in Vieques.

However, this legal maneuver did not dissuade the protesters. One of the first land invasions took place in May 1979, when protesters occupied Playa Caracas in an effort to block an amphibious landing. Twenty-one protesters were arrested; one was incarcerated in a Tallahassee, Florida jail and was found dead in his cell in November 1979, while awaiting trial. The ensuing outcry in the aftermath of the young man's mysterious death moved the U.S. House Armed Services Committee in December 1979 to appoint a panel to examine "Puerto Rico's perspective on the Navy's presence on Vieques" and to explore alternative sites in which to conduct training. The committee was split; three members recommended an alternative site, while two disagreed that a new site was necessary (U.S. Office of the President 1999, 1). Protest activities continued and eventually convinced the Navy Department to sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Governor Romero Barceló in 1983. The Navy Department affirmed that it "recognizes its obligation to be a good neighbor to the people of Vieques and will continue to strive to improve the welfare of the island's people" (Barreto 2002, 31). In return, Romero Barceló withdrew the Puerto Rican government's lawsuit. With the signing of the MOU the local protest movements abated significantly, and solidarity work in the United States on behalf of Vieques died down (see McCaffrey 1998). However, in 1989, after it became apparent that the Navy was explicitly ignoring the terms of the accord, the *viequenses* organized the Constitutional Assembly of the Great Council of Vieques to plan for a renewed campaign to expel the Navy.

Vieques and the Clinton Years

Faced with continued Navy's disregard for the health and safety of their community, Vieques' residents developed a new organization and strategy of resistance. In March 1993, they established the Comité Pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques (CPRDV) [Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques]. The CPRDV was a community based, nonpartisan organization "for the purpose of obtaining permanent end to the bombing . . . and [which] seeks the withdrawal of all military forces from Vieques" (CPRDV 1999). Like its predecessor, the Crusade for the Rescue of Vieques, the CPRDV shunned ties with the political parties and, instead,

sought alliances with national and international solidarity networks committed to peace and justice, the environment, and demilitarization. Local hostility to the Navy's presence escalated dramatically on October 24, 1993, when a fighter bomber missed its intended target by 10 miles, and dropped its payload of live bombs approximately one mile from the main town of Isabel Segunda. The Navy's indifference to the event contributed to growing Puerto Rican indignation. Aerial attacks by novice pilots resulted in another accidental bombing on April 19, 1999, this time of a manned observation post. David Sanes Rodríguez, a civilian security guard, was killed and four other civilians were seriously injured in this mishap.

Two days after the bombing Navy opponents launched a broad-based campaign of civil disobedience, protests, and invasions of the restricted areas at Camp García (the western third of Vieques island). The CPRDV, other community-based organizations, the PIP, religious organizations and church groups, university students, and local politicians engaged in acts of civil disobedience by establishing over a dozen encampments in the restricted weapons training area. Protest marches and demonstrations in solidarity with Vieques were organized by Puerto Ricans in the United States. In response to the outpouring of rage over Sanes Rodríguez's killing, PNP Governor Rosselló established a special committee on May 11, 1999, to study conditions on Vieques. The committee's report reaffirmed that the Navy had not honored the 1983 accords (Puerto Rico: Governor 1999).¹ According to Rosselló, the military activity had caused "disastrous economic and environmental damage and . . . violated the human and constitutional rights of the residents of Vieques" (Yarrow).

The special committee demanded that the Navy immediately cease all military activities on the island and decontaminate and transfer the land it had expropriated to the people of Vieques. Rosselló adopted the recommendations as the official position of the government. On July 4, 1999, a week after the release of the report, a protest march drew 50,000 people to the Roosevelt Roads military base in Ceiba. Possibly for the first time in Puerto Rico's history, a national consensus on Vieques that included the leadership of all the political parties and the multifarious organizations of civil society, and Puerto Rican and Latino organizations in the United States seemed possible. For Robert Rabin, a representative of the CPRDV, the civil disobedience galvanized by the once unthinkable notion of resisting the claims of the U.S. war machine was a historical moment: "Hundreds of people across the spectrum—fishermen, housewives, schoolteachers, political leaders—are united by an issue for the first time" (Clines 1999). Barreto correctly interprets this unprecedented consensus as a manifestation of deep-seated, but

latent, Puerto Rican cultural nationalism. The determination of Puerto Ricans, on the island as well as in the continental United States, to resist the Navy was rooted in a fervent cultural identity as a collective national subject and undoubtedly alarmed “powerful interests in the metropolis” (Barreto 2002, 64).

On Rosselló’s request President Clinton appointed a special panel on June 9, 1999, to explore the feasibility of alternative locations for weapons training. The Senate Armed Services Committee, which opposed terminating Navy use of Vieques, immediately called for hearings. While critical of Clinton’s actions, the committee was obligated to hear testimony from PNP Resident Commissioner Romero Barceló. He testified that the Navy’s “actions not only constitute a callous disregard, but a flagrant and crass violation of both the terms and spirit of the Memorandum of Understanding” (Romero Barceló Sept. 22, 1999). Governor Rosselló also testified that “we have reached the limit of our patience, after nearly six decades of empty promises, unreliable pledges and broken assurances.” He warned that “we, the people of Puerto Rico, have graduated from colonial passivity. Never again shall we tolerate abuse of the magnitude and scope the likes of which no community in any of the 50 states would ever be asked to tolerate.” Rosselló testified that any proposal that failed to include the immediate cessation of hostilities against Vieques would be rejected. He admonished, “You don’t negotiate with human rights” (Puerto Rico Governor 1999). The Special Panel on Military Operations on Vieques issued its report on October 18, 1999. It noted that “the relationship between the Navy and residents of Vieques, and the people of Puerto Rico had reached crisis proportions even prior to the tragic death of David Sanes Rodríguez” (2). The panel called on the Navy to review its training needs in Vieques with the objective of terminating its activities within five years.

Throughout 1999 the CPRDV and PIP spearheaded an aggressive and highly publicized campaign to disrupt Navy operations in Vieques. Its representatives traveled throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia to generate support. The Socialist International proclaimed its support for Vieques and its membership, comprised of leading European heads of state, elected PIP president Rubén Berríos as its president. The Vieques movement attracted the support of Latino organizations, religious groups, and community-based organizations throughout United States. *Newsweek* reported that “Latinos waged a state-of-the-art campaign aimed at running the Navy out of Vieques” (Campo-Flores 2001). Pressured to act by the escalating protests, increased international attention, and effective lobbying by important Latino organizations, President Clinton instructed Defense Secretary Cohen

on June 9, 1999, to establish a panel to assess the necessity of Vieques for continued operations and to explore alternative sites.

In the interim, the Senate Armed Services Committee convened hearings that were designed to put forth the Navy's position that "it would be irresponsible to deploy our naval forces" without training in Vieques (Cong. Rec. Nov. 19, 1999). Senator Inhofe, an ardent advocate for the Navy, argued against Clinton's moratorium on bombing and reported that we "would encourage him, for the lives of Americans" to continue training in Vieques (Cong. Rec. Nov. 18, 1999). Earlier, in September 1999, Inhofe had sponsored punitive legislation to close the Roosevelt Roads military base in the event live weapons training was terminated in Vieques (the base generates 2,500 civilian jobs and pumps about \$300 million into the local economy). The Hispanic Coalition for Puerto Rico's Self-Determination, comprised of six prominent national Latino organizations, rebuked the Senate for its treatment of Puerto Rico and warned that "U.S. Hispanics deplore the manner in which Puerto Rico has been threatened with economic reprisals by some senators. This is not the way to be treating people who have served valiantly in the defense of our country" (Puerto Rico Herald 2000).

Secretary Cohen's December 3, 1999, letter to Clinton recommended continued training at reduced levels with the use of inert ordnance and termination of the Navy's activities in Vieques within five years (Cohen 1999). Cohen also recommended establishing upon resumption of live fire training, a 40 million dollar community and economic development program. Clinton endorsed the report the same day, but his decision was immediately rejected by all parties engaged in the Vieques campaign. Rosselló denounced the plan as "unacceptable for the people of Puerto Rico and the people of Vieques" (CNN 1999). Resident Commissioner Romero Barceló penned an angry letter to Clinton indicting the Navy for a legacy of deceit and unscrupulous behavior toward the people of Puerto Rico. He protested, "The proposal is indeed a slap in the face to all Puerto Rican-Americans" and declared that it was "offensive to dangle financial incentives to disenfranchised and impoverished American citizens" (Romero Barceló Dec. 9, 1999).²

On January 31, 2000 Clinton, again sought to defuse the increasingly tense Vieques situation by issuing a presidential directive that authorized a referendum by February 22, 2001 (subsequently amended first to November 2001, and then to January 2002) of the registered voters of Vieques on whether to terminate all Navy training by May 1, 2003, or to reinstate live ordnance training. As an inducement for the second option, the federal government agreed to provide an additional 50 million dollars for "housing and enhancement of infrastructure" in Vieques. Clinton ordered that training be

confined to non-explosive ordnance until the referendum was conducted (U.S. Office of the President 2000). To the profound astonishment of most Puerto Ricans, Governor Rosselló endorsed the directive “as a fair and positive basis for resolution of a long standing and complex issue.” He also guaranteed that his administration would not initiate litigation that would constrain training and would “support Federal efforts to assure that trespassing . . . ceased entirely” (Burns 2000). On the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives, Romero Barceló announced that “as the sole elected representative of the four million American residents in Puerto Rico, I support the agreement” (Cong. Rec. April 13, 2000).

Virtually the entire Vieques movement regarded Rosselló’s decision as a devastating betrayal. The announcement effectively ruptured the national consensus that had informally emerged on Vieques. On February 4, 2000, the Coordinating Committee for Peace and Justice in Vieques, a coalition of civic, environmental, student, religious and political organizations, including the PPD and the PIP, denounced the accord. CPRDV issued a statement declaring that Rosselló had betrayed the people of Vieques, and vowed that it would block Naval training by conducting a campaign of civil disobedience in the firing ranges. On February 21 approximately 150,000 people held a boisterous rally and march in San Juan called by religious leaders to register popular repudiation of the Clinton-Rosselló accord.

Apprehensive that the massive popular demonstration would be interpreted in Washington as a repudiation of the party, the PNP countered by organizing its own rally and march. While conceived to demonstrate to Washington that the PNP still enjoyed broad-based support, the event also sought to assuage nervous politicians in the United States that the February outpouring of Puerto Rican national pride was not an act of anti-Americanism. Approximately 90,000 marched in the PNP-sponsored event March 2, to celebrate the anniversary of the 1917 Jones Act, which conferred Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship. The national consensus on Vieques, which had evolved as a nonideological, nationally-based campaign for human rights and environmental justice, had fallen victim to the traditional partisan politics of status.

Two months later, after the Rosselló administration had proven unable to resolve the Vieques debacle, the Clinton administration acted against the protesters. On May 4, 2000, 300 U.S. federal marshals, backed up by 1,200 Marines, descended on Vieques and cleared protesters from the entrance to Camp García, while FBI SWAT teams broke up the peace encampments. Approximately 216 protesters, all whom adhered to nonviolent civil disobedience, were detained and released. Throughout the year and well into 2002,

opponents of the Navy continued their forays into the restricted areas and served as human shields to disrupt training. On May 10, 2000, Berríos was arrested for entering the restricted bombing area. This was followed by a coordinated campaign by the PIP to disrupt the bombings which resulted in the arrest of 129 party members. On June 27, twenty protesters entered the range by sea, while another 106 attempted to penetrate the camp barriers. The CPRDV reported in an August 3, 2000 press release that “Despite the small Berlin Wall the Navy builds to separate the military and civilian sectors of Vieques, our people have entered the restricted area for reconnaissance missions over the past weeks” and threatened to escalate its civil disobedience campaign.

The election of PPD gubernatorial candidate Sila Calderón on November 7, 2000, was widely interpreted as a stunning rejection of the PNP for Rosselló’s accord with Clinton. During the election campaign Calderón emerged as a vigorous and uncompromising advocate for the immediate termination of weapons training in Vieques and withdrawal of the Navy (see Barreto 2002, Chapter 5). She refused to support the Clinton directive and announced that if elected the Puerto Rican government would take legal action against the Navy. Calderón also promised to hold a local referendum to give the residents of Vieques the option of voting for the immediate termination of naval training. Since the referendum was not binding on the federal government, it was largely a symbolic, but nonetheless significant gesture to increase pressure on the Navy. She also pledged 50 million dollars in economic aid to Vieques during a four-year period. These pledges, if honored, would have eviscerated the Rosselló-Clinton accord (see Marino 2000).

Fearful that Puerto Ricans would vote in the planned November 2002 referendum to permanently end training operations in Vieques, Clinton sent Secretary Cohen a memo on January 19, 2001 (his last day in office) requesting that Cohen identify alternatives to live ordnance training on Vieques. He warned that “A new governor, legislative majority and mayor have recently taken office.... They have also pledged to take actions that would be inconsistent with the resolution of these issues previously reached” (Ross 2000). Clinton left office having tried to bribe the *viequenses* with 50 million dollars in federal aid to vote for continued live firing training. The new millennium would witness a resurgence of militancy and virtual worldwide adverse reaction to the Navy’s mistreatment of the people of Vieques.

Vieques and George W. Bush

In a strongly worded message delivered at the National Association of Hispanic Journalists on February 22, 2001, Governor Calderón called on President Bush to order an immediate cessation of training in Vieques. She cited as particularly urgent factors the environmental contamination and cancer death rates that surpass the island average by 44 percent, and cardiovascular death rate that exceeded by 60 percent the death rate in the rest of Puerto Rico (García 2001). On March 6, Resident Commissioner Acevedo-Vilá requested “President Bush to order the permanent cessation of all bombing exercises in Vieques. Vieques is not a national security issue. It is a health and human rights issue” (Cong Rec. March 6, 2001). On March 8, 2001, 110 Democratic members of Congress sent Bush a letter requesting that he exercise his constitutional authority to immediately halt the bombing, and wrote that the issue of Vieques concerned health, environmental protection, and human rights of U.S. citizens. This rationale for the cessation of the bombing contrasted with the PNP’s insistence that the key issue was colonialism because it denied Puerto Ricans their civil rights and effective citizenship.

Calderón scored a partial victory when Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld ordered the Navy to temporarily suspend military training operations scheduled for March 2001 after meeting with her and New York State Governor Pataki. In an attempt to further delay the bombing, the Puerto Rican government enacted legislation to enforce strict noise limits in order to prohibit ship-to-shore bombing and the sonic booms caused by naval aircraft (see CRS 2001). On April 24, 2001, Puerto Rico filed a federal lawsuit in District Court alleging that Rumsfeld and the Navy violated Puerto Rico’s law as well as the 1972 Federal Noise Control Act (Miller 2001).³ Notwithstanding these victories, protest activity against the Navy continued to escalate in both the United States and Puerto Rico. Over 180 protesters were arrested in late April 2001 when they breached the security fences and occupied land in the restricted areas. Navy military police repeatedly fired rubber bullets and tear gas canisters at other protesters who were peacefully gathered outside the security zone (ACLU 2001).⁴

The violence against the peaceful protesters did not intimidate the anti-militarization movement. In fact, the abuse inspired notable public figures and celebrities from the United States to join the campaign. Many illegally entered the restricted area in Camp García and were arrested along side hundreds of Puerto Rican protesters. Former PNP Secretary of State Norma Burgos, who had chaired Rosselló’s Special Commission, was arrested and

given a two month jail sentence. U.S. District Judge Héctor Laffitte, who seemed personally offended with the protesters' defiant violation of the law, imposed harsh jail sentences and set extraordinarily high bail. On May 25, 2001, the *New York Times* editorialized that the punishments handed down by the judge seemed excessive.

By the end of August 2001 over 1,400 people had been arrested. Images of burly, heavily armed, helmeted U.S. troopers attacking Puerto Ricans proved embarrassing to the Bush administration. On May 12, 2001, President Bush unexpectedly announced during an interview on the Spanish language network Univisión that the time had come to “find a new base for the Navy to practice in.” He went on to say, “We've got to continue working to find another solution—because the agreement that was reached before evidently is not satisfactory with the current government of Puerto Rico” (Eisman 2001).

Bush's intention to have the Navy relinquish Vieques did not abate criticism of his administration's treatment of the protesters. On May 24, 2001, Congressman Owens warned that “both the Navy and a Federal judge are blindly pursuing a policy . . . of extremism. We should listen to the will of the people, not have a blind eye similar to the tanks that roll over the will of the people at Tiananmen Square” (Cong Rec. May 24, 2001). AFL-CIO President Sweeny declared that “The Navy should be ashamed of the way its guards have behaved—from disgusting body searches, to the roughing up of demonstrators, to the verbal and physical abuse of workers who were arrested” (Sweeny July 6, 2001). The Puerto Rican Lawyers Guild released a report accusing the Navy and Federal District Court of applying excessive use of force to suppress and punish acts of civil disobedience and lawful demonstrations of free expression. The Congressional Hispanic Caucus held hearings on June 5, 2001, to examine allegations about the “dehumanizing, degrading and punitive treatment received by those arrested at the hands of the United States Navy.” Congresswomen Velásquez testified that “Naval military police and U.S. Marshals displayed a total disregard for human well-being by applying brutal force against thousands of its own citizens (CHC 2001). These actions were outrageous and have absolutely no place in our society.” Senator Dodd shared his concerns about the “Overly harsh treatment of these protesters by the court” and noted that “continued civil disobedience is going to make the Navy's use of its facilities impossible” (Con Rec. July 20, 2001).

But Democrats were deeply split on the Vieques issue. The liberal sector of the party, which included Hillary Rodham Clinton, Mario Cuomo, Robert F. Kennedy, Christopher Dodd, as well as Democratic National Committee

Chairman Terry McAuliffe and all three Puerto Rican Congresspeople, Luis Gutiérrez, Nydia Velázquez, and José Serrano, were outspoken in their support for terminating Navy training in Vieques. Their criticism of the Navy and support for the protesters provoked a strong reaction from the conservative wing of the party, particularly congresspeople from southern and mid-western states (Hernández 2001).

In a June 14, 2001 press conference, President Bush announced that “the Navy ought to find somewhere else to conduct its exercises.” He did so because “there’s been some harm done to people,” and “these are our friends and neighbors and they don’t want us there.” Bush accepted Clinton’s target date to halt all training by May 2003 (U.S. Office of the President 2001; *New York Times* June 15, 2001). In a briefing on Vieques the following day, Secretary of the Navy Gordon England provided other details which included the idea of rescinding the referendum authorized in Clinton’s directive. While not acknowledging polls that indicated the residents of Vieques would vote in overwhelming numbers against the Navy, England claimed it was “very bad public policy—to have a referendum on issues critical to the Department of the Navy... and it sets very bad precedents.” He indicated that he would seek relief to the law that authorized the referendum (U.S. Department of Defense 2001).

Bush’s surprise announcement generated a strong reaction from the Navy’s supporters in Congress. *Stars and Stripes*, a U.S. armed forces publication, reported that Republican lawmakers were incensed (“spitting nails”) with Bush’s decision. Legislators railed against the planned referendum because “a mob of protesters can’t be allowed to dictate how and where the military will train” (Jontz 2001). The *New York Times* reported that senior Navy and Marine officers felt betrayed and that they had been sold out by the White House which was “acting out of political expediency regardless of the cost to military readiness” (June 15, 2001 A09).

The House Armed Services Committee hurriedly held hearings on June 27, 2001 to assess the Vieques situation. According to Chairman Bob Stump, the “Vieques training range is an irreplaceable asset, the closure of which would severely damage the readiness of U.S. military forces” (U.S. House of Representatives June 27, 2001). Secretary Gordon testified he did not agree that Vieques was indispensable to military preparedness (England 2001). In fact, the Navy Department was aware that Texas officials would soon announce that Laguna Madre could serve as a suitable alternative since the combined training exercises could be conducted on that site. The House Armed Services Committee would continue to resist Bush’s call for the Navy to vacate Vieques.

Divisions within the Republican Party over Vieques were unmistakable. Republican Congressperson Wicker came to the administration's aid "as one of a substantial number of Republicans who applaud" Bush for the decision. He challenged those who decried the supposed political nature of Bush's decision and asked whether "anyone realistically believes it is in our national interest to disregard, year after year, the overwhelming popular will of our United States citizens" (Cong Rec. June 19, 2001). Stating that "New York and Puerto Rico are closely tied together," Governor George Pataki called for "a permanent ban on the bombing to end the nightmare the people of Vieques were living through" (Pataki 2001). New Jersey Governor Donald DiFrancesco also endorsed an immediate halt to the bombings, while the state's Republican-led Senate unanimously approved a resolution for the immediate cessation of the bombings. The battle over Vieques was not being fought only in Puerto Rico, neither was it simply a Republican Democratic partisan battle. Major fault lines in the ideological, electoral, national security and pork barrel spheres divided the political parties, and put a seemingly pro-military Administration at odds with the senior military officer corps.

The Puerto Rican government was not dissuaded by the Bush announcement and held the nonbinding referendum as scheduled on July 29, 2001. As had been projected, the vote was overwhelmingly for the immediate cessation of all training and for "the ouster of the Navy" from Vieques.⁵ Two days later the House Armed Services Committee reaffirmed its position that "retaining the Vieques Island training facility is critical" for military readiness. The committee included provisions to the National Defense Authorization Act to cancel the referendum authorized by Clinton, to require continued training until an alternative site of equal or superior quality was located, and if such a site were located to transfer Navy lands to the Department of the Interior (U.S. House Aug. 1, 2001). This represented the initial move by the Republican-controlled House toward abrogating Clinton's initiative on Vieques. Bush's decision on Vieques seems to have provoked a cleavage in the party between right wing forces that endorsed patriotic militarism over all else and the advocates of political expediency that wanted to guarantee his reelection.

Bush, Vieques, and the Latina/o Vote

Why did Bush announce his intention to terminate Navy training in Vieques in 2003? The evidence from across the country seems indisputable; the Vieques issue resonates deeply with Latino and Latina constituencies nationwide and alienating them could cost the Republicans politically. The pundits agree that Bush made his Vieques decision in the hopes of increas-

ing Latino support for the Republican Party in the long term, and to enhance his own prospects in the 2004 presidential elections. His advisors are convinced that extending the Bush presidency into a second term requires diluting the Democratic Party's hold on the Latino electorate. According to the U.S. Census, the "Hispanic" population numbered 22.4 million in 1990; in 2000 the population had increased by 58 percent to 35.3 million. Despite his substantial Latino support in Texas (about 50 per cent of Latinos voted for Bush as governor), Bush gained 34 per cent of the national Latino vote, 3 percentage points less than Ronald Reagan. Eleven million Latinos and Latinas are expected to cast their ballots in the 2004 presidential elections. If they vote in the same proportion as they did in the 2000 presidential elections, George W. Bush is expected to lose the national vote by 3 million ballots (Keen and Benedetto 2001).

Karl Rove, Bush's chief political strategist, analyzes how major policy decisions could influence the voters in particular constituencies that are critical to the president's reelection. Rove was certain that Vieques was a make-or-break political issue for Bush. His thinking on this may have been influenced by prominent Washington lobbyist and Republican strategist Charles Black, who was retained by the Calderón administration. Black emphasized that "the problem would not go away," and that Bush would need to settle the Vieques issue (Campo-Flores 2001). Rove purportedly convinced Bush that the outcome of the Vieques debacle would have a major impact on Latino electoral support for his reelection.

Rove's maneuver was a preemptive move not only to blunt the widening criticism of the administration, but to frustrate a loosely organized and increasingly effective movement that rebuked Bush's actions and threatened to embarrass and politically damage him. The Democrats saw an opportunity in the Vieques debacle to assail the Bush administration for its treatment of Latinos. The Democratic National Committee was particularly critical of Bush and his officials, whom it faulted for being guilty of "bully tactic politics as well as their blatant disregard of the will of the people." DNC chief McCauliffe disparaged Bush for refusing to acknowledge that "the people of Vieques have contributed for 60 years to protecting our nation's defense." Citing deplorable electoral irregularities in Florida during the presidential election, McCauliffe decried the treatment of Puerto Rico where "we are once again seeing the administration's penchant for disenfranchising Latino voters" (DNC July 28, 2001).

The growth of the Latino electorate in key electoral states and its evolving political diversity were factors that influenced the Bush administration's thinking on how to resolve the Vieques crisis. Large scale Puerto Rican

migration to Florida, particularly to Orlando and Orange Counties, and increased Mexican migration to Tampa since the mid-1980s, have diminished the electoral significance of the heavily Republican Cuban-American community in the state. Although Puerto Ricans have voted overwhelmingly for the Democratic Party, Bush's advisors expect that a favorable resolution of the Vieques debacle might precipitate enough defections to lead to a Republican victory in Florida. Recent important elections reveal that Latinos no longer reflexively cast their votes for Democrats. The candidates' positions on issues of critical importance to Latinos, as well as perceptions of their sensitivity to Latino cultural and linguistic identities, will influence the vote. In New York, Rodham Clinton, Pataki, and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg were all acutely aware of the inescapable Latino electoral advance and consciously sought to fortify their ties with the community. All three are strong advocates for immediate termination of Navy training in Vieques. The implications of Republican Bloomberg's surprising mayoral victory over liberal Democratic Mark Green in the heavily Democratic New York City are not lost on Bush's strategists.

As if to dramatize that her administration has the capacity to affect elections in the United States, Calderón announced on December 13, 2001 that the Puerto Rican government, through its offices in major U.S. cities, would initiate a massive voter registration drive. The objective is to influence the outcome of the 2002 Congressional elections by targeting the approximately 600,000 Puerto Ricans residing in the United States who are eligible, but are not registered to vote. The timing of the announcement was not coincidental and seemed to convey the implicit threat of an electoral challenge to the Republicans (*Puerto Rico Herald* December 13, 2001).

Bush's decision on Vieques is part of a larger Republican strategy to garner Latino support in key swing states. But, beyond finding an equitable resolution of the Vieques debacle, the GOP will have to make significant ideological modifications of its domestic policy if it is ever to gain substantial adherents in the national Latino electorate, an electorate that overwhelmingly sees itself as a racialized community that has been historically marginalized and as predominately working-class and poor. In many respects very similar to the poor residents of Vieques.

Vieques and September 11

A week before the terrorist attacks of September 11, Calderón announced that the federally mandated referendum would be held in November. While opposed to the referendum since it did not provide for the

immediate cessation of the bombing, Calderón argued that she was constitutionally obligated to uphold the federal law. Subsequently, Calderón chose to endorse the referendum since it was the only legal means available to impose a date (on or before May 2003) for terminating Navy use of Vieques. However, on September 24, 2001, the Bush administration officially moved to seek relief from the law that authorized the referendum. It objected to the Senate version of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for failing to cancel the referendum which the administration “considered set a bad precedent and strikes at the heart of military preparedness” (Office of Management and Budget 2001).

The amended NDAA version of December 12, 2001, called for the “termination of referendum requirement regarding continuation of military training on the island of Vieques.” The Secretary of the Navy was authorized to close the Vieques base only upon certifying that he had secured comparable or superior locations for training. According to committee chairperson Stump, the bill “places the thorny issue” of Vieques “in the hands of Navy officials and out of the political realm” (U.S. House Dec. 13, 2001). The Bush administration had effectively nullified the Clinton directive, which had had the force of law, and substituted a legally unenforceable policy for terminating Navy activities in Vieques. Assuming the Navy does choose to relocate its training to another site, the law authorizes the transfer of military lands in Vieques to the federal government and does not provide for cleanup of the toxic waste that pollutes the training site (see *Vieques Libre*).

Democrat Congressman Rahall voted against the NDAA and condemned the provisions on Vieques since it was “a major retrenchment” from the Clinton directive and because it “harkens back to the age of colonialism” (Cong Rec. Dec. 13, 2001). Congressmen Engel and Baca agreed that the new legislation can permit Navy training past May 2003. In separate March 19, 2002 letters to President Bush, they urge him to “issue an Executive Order that formalizes the Navy’s commitment for an end to bombing and other training operations in Vieques.” They noted that President Ford issued an order for the immediate and permanent cessation of military activity in Culebra, and that President Bush, Sr. had done the same for Kaho’olawe, Hawaii in 1990 (see *Vieques-Libre* 2002).

By the beginning of 2002 Calderón appeared to be losing support in some quarters of the Vieques movement. Her decision to authorize deployment of the Puerto Rican Maritime Police to guard the perimeter of Camp García was roundly criticized. The PIP accused her of “betrayal” for cooperating with the federal authorities and berated her as an “accomplice” of the Navy for her administration’s unexpected quiescence on Vieques. The

CPRDV reproofed her for helping the Navy prosecute the war against Vieques. On January 2, 2002, a federal judge dismissed Calderón's lawsuit to enjoin the Navy from resuming its training on Vieques. After the court ruling the CPRDV and other organizations announced that they would conduct not only disobedience, but "protest events" in Puerto Rico and the United States. Calderón seemed to have endorsed this strategy when she stated that "the will of the people of Puerto Rico and our resistance as a society" were the only resources available to prevent Naval bombardment of Vieques, and referred to the protesters as heroes (Colón Díaz 2002).

Despite the legal set back, Calderón announced on January 8, 2002 that Navy Secretary England had canceled the training exercises scheduled for the end of the month. In a press release she called on the "people of Puerto Rico to maintain their unity of purposes" (Estado Libre Asociado 2002). The following day she reported that President Bush had personally reaffirmed "his commitment to halt military practices on Vieques by or before 2003." She told reporters that "I return to Puerto Rico inspired by the words of the president" (Delgado 2002). The respite from bombing may be short-lived. On March 15, 2002, the Navy Department, which remains adamantly opposed to relinquishing its training facility, informed Puerto Rican Secretary of State Ferdinand Mercardo that military exercises with non-explosive ordnance would begin on April 1. The PIP urged Puerto Ricans to engage in a massive campaign of civil disobedience to resist the bombing. CPRDV announced that it would coordinate protest actions and denunciations, while other activists announced that they would undertake civil disobedience, invade the firing area, and serve as human shields.

Calderón's paradox is the paradox of Puerto Rico under the current colonial status. While Calderón extols the protesters as heroes and eloquently expresses her admiration for their struggles to achieve human rights, as governor she has taken an oath of loyalty to the federal government which obligates her to enforce its laws. As an agent of the state the governor cannot endorse civil disobedience of federal legislation, no matter if it is judged by Puerto Rican society as morally repugnant. Lacking formal representation in Congress her government has resorted to an array of political maneuvers to affect policy. Although permanently barred from the halls of power in Washington, D.C., Calderón, as all Puerto Rican governors before her, has proven adept at orchestrating multiple points of political pressure on the federal government; whether it is hiring Washington insiders as lobbyists to influence policy makers, filing legal challenges to halt the bombing, publicly imploring the Navy to respect human rights, appealing to the Puerto Rican and Latino community in the United States, or negotiating for the sup-

port of U.S. politicians who believe that she can deliver the stateside Puerto Rican vote. But, ultimately, the Estado Libre Asociado [literally, Free Associated State]—as the colony of Puerto Rico is formally called—lacks the constitutional basis to protect the rights and property of Puerto Ricans who are U.S. citizens. Calderón's legal attempts to restrict the Navy have been rebuffed by the federal courts, poignantly revealing the futility of a colony attempting to employ the empire's laws against itself. The Navy Department's repudiation of the July referendum, the Senate and House leaders' disdainful and insulting dismissals of Puerto Rico's various petitions, the Bush administration's devious evisceration of the Clinton-Rosselló accords—including cancellation of a federal law authorizing a referendum on Vieques' future—convincingly demonstrate ways in which colonial power is exercised. Like Muñoz Marín, her predecessor four decades earlier, Calderón can only resort to appeals for fairness and equity from the President of the United States to protect the inhabitants of Vieques.

When queried about Calderón's handling of the Vieques debacle, Fernando Martín, executive president of the PIP, pointedly observed that "the humiliation to which Puerto Rico has been subjected has made even more evident the problems between Puerto Rico and the United States" (*Puerto Rico Herald* December 19, 2001).

Conclusion

The battle for Vieques embodies a number of issues that resonate deeply with many sectors of U.S. society. The nature of the struggle—a poor, politically disenfranchised people who are literally waging a life and death battle against a callous military agency—touches a collective moral chord. But while this moral basis for resistance is irrefutable, it was ultimately the relentless, creative, and courageous campaign that moved many other organizations and individuals to join the social movement to liberate Vieques. Historically portrayed as a local issue of limited scope, the battle for Vieques has emerged as a national-based movement for civil and human rights. The Vieques community deliberately avoided depicting colonial domination as the exceptional factor to explain their oppression. By representing the plight of Vieques as denial of citizenship rights and abuse of poor people, the struggle took on an ethic that resonated deeply with other vulnerable and ignored communities, as well as advocates of social justice and responsible government.

The Vieques movement demonstrates that the absence of legal channels for representation does not preclude social movements from affecting the

policy process. The ability to develop and coordinate the activities of dozens of organizations, to effectively employ a variety of informational sources to internationalize the cause, to work with solidarity networks nationally and internationally, to marshal substantial political support from elected officials, and to establish strategic alliances that transcend the limitations of partisan politics, constitutes a new challenge to colonialism. The campaign to demilitarize Vieques has ultimately served to recast Puerto Rican identity as an intrinsic constituent of a larger, national Latino movement that emphasizes civil and human rights and equal citizenship. In the process it has helped to further dispel myths that portray Puerto Ricans as incapable of unity and lacking agency.

Notes

1. I would like to express my gratitude to Amilcar Barreto for providing me with galleys of his excellent new study, *Vieques, the Navy and Puerto Rican Politics*. (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2002).
2. Romero Barceló complained that “the hallmark of Puerto Rico’s relationship with the Navy has been one of broken promises; when time and time again, despite pledges and commitments to the contrary, the Navy has ignored, lied and flagrantly failed to meet the obligations to which they adhered by signing the Memorandum of Understanding of 1983” (1999).
3. The Clinton-Rosselló plan was enacted in law on October 30, 2000 as P.L. 106-246 and P.L. 106-398, which authorized 40 million dollars for conducting the referendum and other community and economic assistance projects.
4. Federal Judge Gladys Kessler dismissed the lawsuit on January 1, 2002. The ACLU filed suit in U.S. Federal District Court on June 18, 2001 for a permanent injunction “to prevent a recurrence of the events of April 27 through April 29, 2001, when heavily armed Naval personnel in riot gear, and without justification or authority, dispersed hundreds of lawfully assembled protesters—including many young children attending a clown show—by firing upon them with chemical agents and other non-deadly weapons, such as rubber bullets and pellet-filled impact bags fired from shotguns. Scores of people were injured and required medical assistance” (ACLU June 18, 2001).
5. Of the 4,766 votes cast, 68.2 percent were for Option 2, “Immediate and permanent ceasing of the military exercises and bombings by the Navy on Vieques. The ouster of the Navy from Vieques, the cleaning and return of the land of Vieques to its people.”

References

- American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). "Navy Violated Free Speech Rights of Vieques Protesters, ACLU Charges in Lawsuit." Press Release June 18, 2001.
- American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). "History of the U.S. Military in Puerto Rico," 1999. Web page <http://www.afsc.org/lac/strings/prprograms.htm>.
- Ayala, César and Viviana Carro. "U.S. Navy's Expropriations in Vieques, Puerto Rico, 1940-1950." Web page <http://home.att.net/~cesarayala/index.html>.
- Barreto, Amílcar Antonio. *Vieques, the Navy, and Puerto Rican Politics*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2002.
- Burns, Robert. "Puerto Rico Reaches Navy Range Pact." Associated Press. January 31, 2000.
- Campo-Flores, Arian and Michael Isikoff. "On Vieques, No Hispanic Is An Island: Banding Together, Latino Muscle Forces W to Cave." *Newsweek*, June 25, 2001. Web page <http://www.puertorico-herald.org>.
- Carroll, Eugene J. Jr. "Vieques Not Needed for Navy Maneuvers." *Newsday*, August 3, 2001, p. A.42.
- Clines, Francis X. "Puerto Ricans Gain Ear of Washington But Seek Far More." *New York Times*, December 5, 1999.
- CNN. "Clinton tells military to end live-fire training on Vieques." December 3, 1999. Web page <http://www.cnn.com/1999/US/12/03/navy.vieques.02/#1>.
- Cohen, William S. "Letter to President Clinton," December 3 1999. Web page <http://www.chinfo.navy.mil/navpalib/facilities/vieques/secdef-v1203.txt>.
- Colón Díaz, Proviana. "Governor: People's Will Only Thing Preventing Live Bombing." PRWOW News Service January 25, 2002. Web page <http://www.prwow.com>.
- Comité Pro Rescate y Desarrollo de Vieques (CPRDV) Press Release, August 3, 2000; February 8, 2000.
- _____. "Report to the Commission of Inquiry c/o International Action Center." July 31, 1999. Web page <http://www.iacenter.org/warcrime/vieques2.htm>.
- Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC). "Hearing on Treatment of Protesters Detailed in Vieques on April 28 and April 29, 2001," June 5, 2001. <http://www.house.gov/reyes/CHC/viequeshearing.htm>.
- Congressional Record. 106th Cong. 1st Sess. 1999: Nov. 18 (S14755), Nov. 10 (S15084), April 13 (E582).
- Congressional Record. 107th Cong. 1st Sess. 2001: March 6 (H632), May 24 (H2684), June 6 (E1021), June 19 (S6442), July 20 (S7998), Dec. 13 (H10077).

CABÁN/BOMBS, BALLOTS, AND NATIONALISM

- Congressional Research Service (CRS). Vieques. Puerto Rico Naval Training Range: Background and Issues for Congress. RS20458. December 17, 2001.
- Delgado, José A. "Bush Reafirma Que La Marina Se Va En 2003 a Más Tardar." *El Nuevo Día*, January 10, 2002.
- Democratic National Committee (DNC). "Statement by Democratic Party Chairman Terry McAuliffe on Puerto Rico Referendum." Press Release. July 28, 2001.
- Democratic Party. "1972 Democratic Party Platform." Web page <http://www.reagan2000.com/Democratic/dem/972.html>.
- Eisman, Dale. "Bush Hints at Willingness to Strike a New Vieques Deal." *The Virginian-Pilot and the Ledger Star*, May 12, 2001. Web page <http://www.puertorico-herald.org>.
- El Nuevo Día*. March 28, 2001, San Juan, PR.
- England, Gordon R. Secretary of the Navy. "Implications of Closing the Vieques Training Facility." 107th Cong. 1st Sess. U.S. House Committee on Armed Services, June 27, 2001.
- Estado Libre Asociado. "Comunicado de Prensa: Gobernadora Satisfecha con Cancelación de Maniobras en Enero Ante Reclamo del Gobierno de Puerto Rico," January 8, 2002.
- García, James E. PR Governor Repeats Demand That Navy Should Leave Vieques." *Político: The Magazine for Latino Politics and Culture*, February 23, 2001. Web page <http://www.Politicomagazine.Com/Calderon22301.html>.
- García Muñoz, Humberto and Jorge Rodríguez Beruff. *Fronteras en conflicto*. San Juan: Red Caribeña de Geopolitics, 1999.
- Giusti-Cordero, Juan. "Vieques After September 11," *The American Prospect*, June 9, 2001(a).
- _____. "Vieques Wins the Eleventh Round," *The American Prospect*, November 16, 2001(b).
- Hernández, Raymond. "Differences Over Vieques Bitterly Divide Democrats," *New York Times*. August 5, 2001.
- Jontz, Sandra, "GOP Lawmakers fuming over Bush's decision to stop Vieques exercises," *Stars and Stripes*, June 2001. Web page <http://www.pstripes.com/01/jun01/ed061601a.html>.
- Keen, Judy and Richard Benedetto. "Republicans on Crusade to Gain Hispanic Voters." *USA Today*, August 8, 2001.
- Marino, John. "Puerto Rican Leader's Pledges on Vieques Appear to Break Pact," *Washington Post*, November 15, 2000, sec. A, p. 3.
- McCaffrey, Katherine Temple. "Culture, Power and Struggle: Anti-Military Protest in Vieques, Puerto Rico." Ph.D. diss. City University of New York, 1999.
- _____. "Forging Solidarity: Politics, Protest and the Vieques Support

- Network." In *The Puerto Rican Movement*. eds. Andrés Torres and José E. Velázquez. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998.
- Meléndez López, Arturo. *La batalla de Vieques*. San Juan: Editorial Edil, 2000.
- Miller, Bill. "Puerto Rico Sues U.S. on Vieques." *Washington Post*, April 25, 2001, p. A29.
- New York Times* Editorial, May 25, 2001.
- New York Times*, June 15, 2001, p. A09.
- Office of Management and Budget. "S. 1438-National Defense Authorization for FY 2002," September 24, 2001.
- Pataki, George. "Governor Pataki Announces Historic Visit to Vieques." Press Release, April 1, 2001.
- Puerto Rico: Governor. "Informe Comisión Especial Sobre Vieques," June 30, 1999.
- Puerto Rico Herald*. "Hispanics Warn Congress: Stop Threats to Puerto Rico Over Vieques," January 26, 2000. Web page www.puertorico-herald.org.
- Romero-Barceló, Carlos. "Letter to William J. Clinton," December 9, 1999. Web page <http://www.englishfirst.org/viequesromero12999.htm>.
- _____. "Atlantic Fleet Training Facility, Vieques, Puerto Rico." U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Military Readiness, September 22, 1999.
- Ross, Sonya. "Clinton Sends Briefing on Vieques to Pentagon." Associated Press, January 19, 2000.
- San Juan Review*. "Vieques: Tragic Island," June 1964.
- Smith, Col. Daniel. "Vieques—An Early Base Closure?," *Weekly Defense Monitor* 5, no. 1-3 (June 14, 2001).
- Sweeny, John J. Press Conference Vieques, Puerto Rico. AFL-CIO, July 6, 2001.
- U. S. Circuit Court for the District of Puerto Rico. *Father Nelson López v United States Navy*, June 18, 2001. Web Page <http://www.aclu.org/court/lopez.pdf>.
- U.S. Department of Defense. "News Transcript: Secretary of the Navy Briefing on Vieques," June 15, 2001.
- U.S. House Armed Services Committee. "Hearing: H.R. 2586: The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2002 - Summary of Committee," August 1, 2001.
- U.S. House of Representatives: Armed Services Committee. "Statement by Chairman Bob Stump Floor Consideration of FY02 Defense Authorization Conference Report." Press Release, December 13, 2001.
- U.S. House of Representatives: Armed Services Committee. Chairman Hon. Stump Hearing on Vieques. Press Release, June 27, 2001.

CABÁN / BOMBS, BALLOTS, AND NATIONALISM

- U.S. Office of the President: Special Panel on Military Operations on Vieques. "Report to the Secretary of Defense," June 9, 1999. Web page http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Oct1999/viq_101899.html.
- U.S. Office of President: Directive to the Secretary of Defense. "Resolution Regarding Use of Range Facilities on Vieques Puerto Rico (Referendum)." Federal Register 65, no. 24 (2000).
- U.S. Office of the President: Office of the Press Secretary. "Press Conference by President Bush, Prime Minister Goran Persson of Sweden, Massan Convention Center Goteborg, Sweden." Press Release, June 14, 2001.
- Vieques Libre*. "Editorial," March 19, 2002. Web Page [http://www.Vieques Libre.org](http://www.ViequesLibre.org)
- Yarrow, Mathew. "Colonial Legacy and Military Strategy." American Friends Service Committee Web page <http://www.afsc.org/lac/strings/vieques.htm>.