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# Subjects and Immigrants During the Progressive Era

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## Subjects and Immigrants During the Progressive Era

Pedro Cabán

After the United States acquired Puerto Rico as war booty from Spain, it quickly embarked on a campaign to transform the country and its people. Less than a year after U.S. troops landed in Guánica on July 25, 1898, Dr. Henry K. Carroll, President McKinley's special commissioner to Puerto Rico, declared that the island "is American and will be Americanized" (Carroll 61). Although U.S. officials acknowledged that Puerto Rico had a functioning government, according to William Willoughby, a key colonial policy maker, the principles on which it was based "were so completely at variance with American theory and practice that it was inevitable that radical changes would have to be made at the earliest possible moment" (119).

In this article I examine the program of social engineering known as Americanization that U.S. officials zealously and optimistically pursued in Puerto Rico from 1898 to 1917. Since this campaign was devised in the aftermath of massive European immigration to the United States, I trace the development of federal and state programs to Americanize the immigrants and indicate parallels with the Americanization program in Puerto Rico. I also discuss how Puerto Rico's political leadership responded to the profoundly disruptive U.S. program to transform the island and its people.

During the turbulent years between 1898 and 1917, the U.S. attained the status of a global economic power that was determined

to establish unquestioned hegemony in the Western Hemisphere. But the very quest for empire threatened the racial recasting of society and was potentially disruptive to domestic political stability. In 1898 the United States claimed sovereignty over eleven million inhabitants of the former Spanish colonies. They joined the millions of European immigrants to form a huge non-citizen population of non-English speaking peoples who were unfamiliar with U.S. political institutions and civic values. By "Americanizing" the recent immigrants and the subject peoples the United States hoped to impose national unity and thus mitigate the demographically disruptive consequences of empire.

The process of Americanizing the new immigrants and colonial subjects was interrelated. The experience of assimilating millions of Southern and Eastern European immigrants influenced the U.S. government's efforts to Americanize the inhabitants of Puerto Rico and other colonial possessions. In turn, the experiences acquired during the first two decades of colonial rule also influenced the Americanization campaigns on the continent during the years preceding U.S. entry into World War I and until about 1920

The goals and content of the Americanization campaign in the United States and in Puerto Rico were similar in that both emphasized English language instruction and sought to build loyalty for the nation and its institutions. While Americanization entailed absorption into the dominant culture and acceptance of a new political identity in both Puerto Rico and the United States, in the latter Americanization focused on individual assimilation. In Puerto Rico it entailed the transformation of an entire people and the imposition of new institutions. The Americanization of Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Cuba was the U.S. empire's first attempt to implant its legal and government overseas. Americanization of the inhabitants of the former Spanish colonies was predicated on the militaristic ideology of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority. It also relied on a morally based judgment that the people of the tropics were culturally inferior and consequently should be denied those political rights reserved for the white male citizens of the United States.

In the Philippines and Puerto Rico Americanization included implanting a new system of governance and law and an educational campaign to win acceptance of the legitimacy of the new sovereign power. The ambitious Americanization program included compulsory universal public education that included mandatory English language instruction, patriotic exercises, civic classes and gender-based manual training programs (see Cabán). Through the education system Puerto Rico's youth would learn to accept the legitimacy

of the radically different economic and political order that the United States would install and administer.

But Americanization was not merely a crass exercise in imperial arrogance; its larger aim was to effect a peaceful and permanent absorption of Puerto Rico's people as subordinate members of the American empire. Puerto Rico was a testing ground for a comprehensive program of social engineering, which in theory could be extended to other countries Latin America. The campaign to reconstitute Puerto Rico into a bilingual and bicultural society was an important component of a broader goal of asserting U.S. hegemony in Latin America and the Caribbean. Officials were confident that after Puerto Rico was successfully Americanized, the task of expanding U.S. commercial and diplomatic relations in South America would be enhanced. Moreover, lessons learned in the campaign to transform a subject people could be applied domestically to Americanize the new European immigrants, who were also perceived as lacking the hereditary virtues of the superior Anglo-Saxon stock.

#### **Americanizing the Immigrants and Colonial Subjects**

The century dating from 1831 to 1930 was marked by a demographic transition never before experienced in the nation's history. During this period millions of Europeans immigrated to the United States, many of whom had been recruited as laborers by state governments and private contractors. In 1864 federal legislation was passed to facilitate European immigration to meet the labor shortages caused by the Civil War. Prior to 1890 the vast majority of immigrants to the United States arrived from Germany, Ireland, the United Kingdom and Norway-Sweden. However, entirely new challenges appeared with the arrival millions of Southern and Eastern Europeans immigrants after 1890 and the annexation in 1898 of colonial territories with a population of eleven million. Between 1891 and 1910 approximately 7,520,000 European immigrants arrived in the U.S. This wave consisted primarily of Southern and Eastern Europeans. Authorities feared that these new immigrants would erode the nation's Anglo-Saxon racial purity and republican civic values.

The influential Ellwood P. Cubberly, Dean of the Stanford School of Education, complained that since the 1880s the U.S. had "been afflicted with a serious case of racial indigestion" and faced the problem "of assimilating these thousands of foreigners into our national life and citizenship." Cubberly detested the masses of arriving immigrants, who "were of a very different type from the North

and West Europeans who preceded them.” He described them as “largely illiterate, docile, lacking in initiative, and almost wholly without the Anglo-Saxon conceptions of righteousness, liberty, law, order, public decency and government, their coming has served to dilute tremendously our national stock and to weaken and corrupt our political life” (341, 338). University of Wisconsin professor Edward A. Ross, who studied European immigration, agreed with Cubberly that “the blood now being injected into the veins of our people is sub-common.” He advocated limiting immigration if the United States was to be saved from “race suicide” (Carlson 103–4).

On the eve of U.S. entry into World War I, influential sectors of society expressed alarm that a non-English speaking foreign population would be particularly susceptible to anarchist and socialist ideas. Herbert Kaufman, of the U.S. Interior Department, warned that “foreign labor’s habit of living in special districts tends to accentuate racial solidarity and to perpetuate what misconceptions and theories of America they brought with them.” He warned that “anarchy shall never want for mobs while the uninformed are left at the mercy of false prophets. Those who have no way to estimate the worth of America are unlikely to value its institutions, fairly” (U.S. Senate. Committee on Education and Labor 20). Elites were obsessed with drawing distinctions between the different immigrant groups as to their intelligence and capacity to adapt to the U.S., and viewed the Eastern and Southern European arrivals as virtually incorrigible. Frances Kellor, a national leader in the Americanization campaign in the United States, claimed that unless the government “had a clear understanding of each race . . . and of its contributive relation to its own development” the country would not be in a “position to assimilate its many races and to select intelligently its future immigrants” (Davis 625).

Victory over Spain in the War of 1898 heightened U.S. anxiety about the possible racial erosion of American society. With the ratification of the 1898 Treaty of Paris the U.S. acquired sovereignty of the inhabitants of the Philippines, Guam and Puerto Rico. Lawmakers feared that the United States would be constitutionally obligated to annex the overseas possessions and to eventually grant them statehood. Congress was appalled that it might be forced to confer U.S. citizenship to these tropical people. Visions of mass immigration of Puerto Ricans and Philippines, a non-white, alien people fully empowered with the rights and privileges of citizenship, filled U.S. authorities with dread.

Congress would take decades to decide the political status of these subject people, who were variously portrayed as either savages or as culturally and racially inferior aliens. The notion that tropical

peoples were inherently inferior to white European immigrants, ultimately justified two distinct approaches to Americanization. Despite the bigotry and racism the Southern Europeans encountered, they were subjected to an Americanization process that was designed to incorporate them into the dominant culture and political process. In contrast, the Americanization of Puerto Ricans and Filipinos was an element of a campaign to legitimize colonial subordination and socialize them into becoming loyal wards of the empire. The state of being Americanized was an arbitrary and subjective standard that could be employed by colonial officials to deny Puerto Ricans and Filipinos certain political rights. Congress alone would decide whether Puerto Ricans and Filipinos were sufficiently Americanized to be granted the full benefits of U.S. citizenship. This decision contrasted with the routine, bureaucratic naturalization process adopted for Europeans.

### **Defining Americanization**

By the late 1890s the idea of a melting pot came to symbolize the enormous capacity of American society to amalgamate immigrants into the dominant society. Generally, most people subscribed to the notion that foreigners would gradually become assimilated through their exposure to the unifying beliefs and principles acquired in the workplace and institutions of U.S. society. During the 1890s the independently financed settlement house movement was heavily involved in Americanizing Eastern and Southern Europeans. Settlement house social workers were educators as well as effective proselytizers who had as “their ultimate goal the conversion of the immigrant to the prevailing American ideology.” In return for the educational services and training, the immigrants were expected to “repudiate their cultural peculiarities eventually and to adopt the American civic religion” (Carlson 83, 79). Other non-state actors, including labor unions, the YMCA and the Daughters of the American Revolution were the primary agents for assimilation during this period. The latter initiated programs to indoctrinate foreigners with loyalty to the United States (Higham 235).

In 1906 federal officials became concerned that state governments were failing to adequately prepare immigrants for citizenship. They decided that Americanization was too important to be the sole responsibility of local government and the sundry other institutions, and needed to be coordinated and monitored by the federal government. The government mandated proficiency in English as a condition for naturalization and in 1906 established the

Bureau of Naturalization to supervise and standardize the citizenship process. Before the outbreak of World War I the Bureau began to promote civic education for European immigrants. In 1907 the Senate set up the Dillingham Commission to examine and develop a comprehensive portrait of immigrant populations (See King 55–68). In 1909 the federal government organized citizenship classes with state governments for foreign residents who applied for naturalization. It also organized a number of national Americanization conferences in various cities and appointed Keller to coordinate National Americanization Day activities, which were celebrated on July 4, across the country (Miller).

Americanization was the necessary agent that would produce the unification of diverse peoples. But at the turn of the twentieth century proponents of Americanization complained that it was a concept devoid of “definition of principles, and of methods” (Keller 625). Ideally, Americanization would promote national unity by eradicating cultural, political and linguistic differences among the inhabitants of the U.S and create a homogeneous body politic united by its adherence to Anglo-Saxon values. In his classic 1920 study Isaac B. Berkson observed that “Americanization implied the unquestionable superiority . . . of the Anglo-Saxon race and culture.” According to the proponents of Americanization, “all newcomers from foreign lands must quickly divest themselves of their old characteristics, and . . . obliterate all ethnic distinctions. They must utterly forget the land of their birth and completely lose from their memory all recollection of its traditions in a single-minded adherence to American life in all its aspects” (63). Theodore Roosevelt emphasized that Americanization should be founded on three principles—“language, common civil standard and reasonable equality of opportunity” and called for deporting all aliens who had failed to learn English by “by a certain number of years” (Davis 655). One common aim of Americanization, as applied domestically and in the insular territories, was to erase the foreigners’ distinctive cultural identity and patriotic ties to their country of origin, and imbue them with a set of civic ideals that were at the core of the government’s concern—most prominently acceptance of the prevailing economic order and the legitimacy of the country’s political institutions.

Mass public education and English language instruction were to become foundations of a national Americanization program. Richard Campbell writes that according to the U.S. Secretary of Labor, 75 percent of the one million immigrants who requested naturalization hearings in 1915 ranged “from fairly admissible to unfit candidates” for citizenship, but he also believed that “nearly all

could be transformed through attendance at the public schools into desirable citizenship material” (Davis 675). Spurred by these troubling discoveries, the Bureau of Naturalization engaged in a campaign to work with the public schools in the actual “elevation of citizenship standards” (Davis 676). Public schools received assistance from the federal government to institute a “cooperative education campaign for the betterment and strengthening of the citizenship of the entire nation” (Davis 680). According to the Bureau, the educational campaign was the “first stage for the great Americanization undertaking” (Davis 680).

With the outbreak of World War I, driven as it was by a militaristic ultranationalism, U.S. authorities were apprehensive about the ethnic immigrant enclave communities which preserved their distinctive cultural and linguistic identities and ties to their home countries. They were deeply concerned that foreign, as well as native-born illiterates would be unable to acquire an appreciation for U.S. democratic institutions and practice, and thus were particularly susceptible to alien political ideologies and radical politics. Fred C. Butler, the Director of Americanization, emphasized that “bringing into full fellowship those who among us were born in other lands,” should be a national priority (Davis 702). During the war years political leaders called for a national education program to promote civic ideals and democratic beliefs, in addition to English language instruction. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis wanted to develop an Americanization process that would bring the foreigner “into complete harmony with our ideals and aspirations” (Davis 640). Cubberly stressed the need to inculcate the immigrants with “our conception of law and order and government, and come to act in harmony with the spirit and purpose of our American national ideals” (341–2). Keller, who had the ear of Theodore Roosevelt, called for a program of nation building, which would have to be “a deliberative formative process, not an accidental . . . arrangement” (Higham 234).

By 1917 the economies of Europe were devastated and the old social order seemed on the verge of collapse. U.S. officials feared that as a consequence the country would be overwhelmed by a massive influx of desperate immigrants fleeing the penury and anarchy of a devastated postwar Europe. Reacting in part to these fears, Congress passed the Immigration Act of February 5, 1917. The act excluded illiterate aliens from entry into the country and expanded the list of immigrants to be excluded for mental health and other reasons. Apprehension of Eastern European ethnic enclaves heightened as the Bolsheviks consolidated their power over a bankrupt and chaotic Russia and imposed an economic and political



order that was antithetical to Western interests. Americanization became a national security issue for the government given the fear that the country was gradually breaking up into ethnic and linguistic enclaves whose teeming industrial proletariat was particularly susceptible to the appeal of international socialism. The “unAmericanized” foreigners not only jeopardized the governability of the country, but also were a national security threat. The *New York World* editorialized that “foreigners tend to group themselves in compact bodies which were virtually impervious to American ideas and American ways of thinking” (U.S. Senate. Committee on Education and Labor). The hard-nosed Cubberly wanted to “break up their groups or settlements, to assimilate and amalgamate these people as part of our American race” (59).

The impetus for an extraordinary Americanization conference held in 1918 for state governors, the National Bureau of Education and the National Committee of One Hundred was a widespread misgiving that radical political ideologies were gaining adherents among the country’s vast industrial working class, a class which consisted mainly of European immigrants who labored in deplorable conditions and received miserly wages. The influential Keller warned that the “strikes and plots that have been fostered and developed by un-American agitators and foreign propaganda are not easily carried on among men who have acquired, with English language and citizenship, an understanding of American industrial standards and an America point of view” (Carlson 111).

U.S. authorities called for large-scale public education programs aimed specifically at the recently established European immigrant communities. In 1919 the Senate introduced the Americanization Bill aimed at both native born illiterates and “resident persons of foreign birth.” The bill called for federal support for English language instruction, education in principles of government and citizenship, and instruction “in such other work . . . for successful living and intelligent American citizenship” (U.S. Senate. Committee on Education and Labor 324). The measure incorporated many of the principles and components of the Americanization campaign that was conducted in Puerto Rico.

### **Debating Puerto Rico’s Future**

Confident that U.S. military forces would vanquish the Spanish, President McKinley and his advisors discussed Puerto Rico’s annexation months before the Spanish had sued for peace. The overarching strategic objective for the United States was to convert Puerto

Rico into a naval outpost. The Americanization of Puerto Rico, with its goal of creating loyal colonial wards, was a component of this grander U.S. aspiration for hegemony in the region. Puerto Rico was important to the calculus of empire for a number of reasons as well; among these, according to one U.S. official, was that it would serve as “our national social laboratory,” in which, “if we pursue a generous policy, we will win the hearts of the people of South America” (Lindsay 134).

After acquiring possession of the former Spanish colonies, U.S. public officials, academic figures and the press debated whether tropical peoples were capable of exercising democratic rule, speculated about the relationship between race and industry, the civil rights they should be permitted, and the constitutional protections that should be accorded them. Ultimately, the ascribed racial characteristics of these populations were determinative of the civil rights and democratic liberties the United States decided to confer. Paul Reinsch, the influential expert on colonial administration, emphasized that “the very first requirement in laying the foundations of a colonial policy is the careful study of the ethnical character of the races with whom we come in contact” (Reinsch 22). Indeed, one of the first projects ordered by the U.S. War Department was a survey of racial composition and characteristics of the inhabitants of Puerto Rico.

U.S. imperialists, besotted with their own myth of Anglo-Saxon supremacy, militantly preached that America’s destiny was to spread its civilization and democratic institutions to the territorial possessions and to treat their inhabitants as “subjects in tutelage, and not citizens.” The ultranationalist Senator Albert Beveridge, who personified the more virulent supremacist strain of Manifest Destiny, warned against “territorial independence for islands whose ignorant, suspicious and primitive inhabitants left to themselves, would prey upon one another” (Weston 47). Puerto Ricans were portrayed as incapable of appreciating the genius of Anglo-Saxon institutions, and simply not worthy of the political rights U.S. citizens enjoyed. Harvard law professor Simeon E. Baldwin wrote that “our constitution was made by a civilized and educated people. It provides guaranties of personal security which seem ill adopted to the half civilized Moros of the Philippines, or the ignorant and lawless brigands that infest Puerto Rico” (Cabranes, “Puerto Rico” 455).

Chroniclers and military officials portrayed Puerto Rico as a remarkably bountiful tropical garden that produced the necessities for life with minimal exertion. The racial discourse that underlay the imperial project constructed an imagery of Puerto Ricans as a tradition-bound, languid people who, if left to their own devices,

would forever wallow in poverty and misery. According to Reinsch, since “the natives have not generally been accustomed to steady toil” their capacity “for work should be fostered” (358). Consequently, development could only be realized if the native labor “comes under the more intelligent direction of the white race” (Giddings 600). The industrious Anglo-Saxons would not permit the abundant natural resources of the tropics to go fallow; they would apply their technical know-how to improve the productivity and bounty of the colonies.

Puerto Ricans were initially portrayed as lacking capabilities in virtually all realms of human endeavor because of their African racial heritage, and thus they were fundamentally doomed to live in a state of underdevelopment and continuous colonial subordination. But with the growing acceptance that Puerto Rico would be a permanent possession of the United States, the official discourse on the capabilities of its people for democratic rule and industry was recast from racial to cultural determinants. A new portrait of the Puerto Ricans gained currency as a people derived from hardy European stock, but unfortunately had been victimized by centuries of Spanish rule—an anachronistic regime that was mired in feudalism and authoritarianism and steeped in Catholic, anti-democratic values. W. Alleyne Ireland, a former British colonial official, was certain “that without the strong hand of the man of the north to hold things together the tropics will never advance beyond the point which has been reached by the Central American republics.” Ireland cautioned against granting Puerto Rico self-government since “the island has been for centuries under the rule of a nation whose political ideas and methods are fundamentally different from those of the American people” (60–5).

Lawrence Lowell, president of Harvard University, also believed that Puerto Ricans were not entitled to certain political rights since their values had been formed by centuries of Spanish political culture. He believed that political equality should be applied “rigorously only to our own race, and to those whom we can assimilate rapidly.” He wrote that former Spanish subjects were not entitled to the same political rights as the Anglo-Saxon race, which was prepared for the “art of self-government by centuries of discipline under the supremacy of law.” According to Lowell, republicanism succeeded in the western territories of the United States because the millions of immigrants who settled there came from northern European countries where self-government was institutionalized. Republicanism would not succeed in the former Spanish territories since their population was not “homogeneous with our own,” and lacked “the experience of a long training in self-government” (154).

Elites theorized about the ascriptive differences and capabilities of the inhabitants of the possessions, just as they had previously assessed differences between the Northern and Southern European immigrants. The desire to distinguish Puerto Ricans from Filipinos was particularly strong. Lowell believed that the “vital difference” between Puerto Rico and the Philippines is that civilization in Puerto Rico “as in the United States, is essentially European . . . hence our aim must be to develop the people in the lines of our own life” (154). Secretary of War Elihu Root, arguably the most influential architect of U.S. colonial policy, was sympathetic to the notion that Puerto Rico’s economic and political backwardness and illiteracy were legacies of centuries of Spanish misrule. He was convinced that since Puerto Ricans had “not been educated in the art of self-government, or any really honest government,” they “would inevitably fail without a course of tuition under a strong and guiding hand” (288, 164).

### **Army Rule in Puerto Rico**

With the change in sovereignty in 1898 Puerto Ricans were converted into foreigners in their own land and subjected to the arbitrary rule of a military government. Pending congressional action on Puerto Rico’s territorial status, the War Department was given jurisdiction of the island. Acting through the Bureau of Insular Affairs (BIA), the department lost little time in dismantling the system of governance that was the legacy of Spanish colonialism. Within two years the BIA had installed a highly centralized administration that ruled by decree and that was profoundly insulated from local political forces. According to Gen. Guy V. Henry, Puerto Rico’s military governor, he was responsible for “Americanizing a new colony inhabited by an alien people, of a race diametrically opposed to the Anglo-Saxon in very many respects” (1475).

The Americanization of Puerto Rico must have appeared to colonial officials as a disarmingly simple process. After all, Americanization ultimately meant institutional modernization and political enlightenment, as well as liberation from archaic ideas and inefficient forms of social and economic organization. It was a compelling ideology of modernity. For these reasons U.S. officials believed the inhabitants of a poor, economically underdeveloped tropical island would willingly embrace Americanization. Armed with their inherent belief in the superiority of Anglo-Saxon institutions and intellect, U.S. military governors were confident that Puerto Rico’s elite would adopt the values and ways of the new col-

onizers as their own and join the Americanization campaign. But to their dismay they encountered a society with vibrant political traditions, a national language and a distinctive cultural identity and institutions. A status-conscious political leadership that expected to be treated with the dignity and respect worthy of a highly educated cosmopolitan elite led Puerto Rico. Although the leadership was not unified, it did fully anticipate a high degree of self-government for Puerto Rico as it readied itself for incorporation as a state of the Union. After all, Congress could cite no historical precedent to deny statehood to Puerto Rico, a territory of the United States. As long as Americanization did not entail a diminution of its autonomy or material wealth, Puerto Rico's elite endorsed the Americanization project as a necessary preparatory stage that would culminate in statehood.

However, it soon became evident that the military governors had no intention of including Puerto Ricans in the governing process as equals. Continuously frustrated by lack of access, a sector of the political leadership—represented by the Federal Party—relentlessly criticized the military regimes for exercising authoritarian rule. The Federal Party bristled at the humiliation of being excluded from policy making during this historic period of profound institutional transformation. They had not imagine that Americanization meant an overpowering colonial administration that effectively denied Puerto Ricans a role in governing, as it set about to systematically destroy many of the political institutions that were sources of Federal Party political power.

Colonial officials had not anticipated the determination of Puerto Ricans to negotiate, contest and reformulate those features of the Americanization campaign they found obnoxious. The effort to "Americanize" the Puerto Ricans proved much more complicated and vexing than expected. Notwithstanding the rapid pace of institutional displacement, the Americanization proved frustrating and ultimately eroded the legitimacy of the colonial project for many on the island.

The Insular Commission dispatched in 1898 to Puerto Rico by President McKinley reported that "radical and immediate reforms are necessary for the protection of the people and the upbuilding of the island" (U.S. Secretary of War 8). The following year the influential Dr. Henry K. Carroll chaired another commission, which concluded that "the customs and usages and language of a people are not like old vestments, which may be laid aside at command." He predicted that with education and training Puerto Ricans would gradually "learn our customs and usages, in so far as they are better than their own" (58). U.S. colonial officials were enthusiastic,

almost evangelical, proponents of compulsory universal public education. Initially even the Federal Party, despite its opposition to the military regime, initially supported Americanization as a means by which to educate the general population. The school system was employed as an instrument to erode national identity and build popular acceptance for U.S. sovereignty. The Insular Commission recommended instituting the public education system that “now prevails in the United States,” and proposed universal English language instruction in order to make the school system “more effectual in . . . Americanizing the island” (U.S. Secretary of War 53,63). English language instruction was pursued with singular determination and was the dominant feature of the educational reforms the military enacted. As was the case in the United States “English language was portrayed as “the highway of loyalty” and as “an implement of Americanization” (Keller 627).

Puerto Rico’s legal system was also targeted for radical revision. According to the Insular Commission the best way to Americanize Puerto Rico was to replace it with the complete system of common law from the United States (U.S. Secretary of War 61). But General Davis, recommended repeal of only those Spanish laws that were “repugnant to our political character and institutions” (Gould 58). Through its missionary work the Catholic Church became another agent for Americanization. Eladio Rodríguez Otero, president of the prestigious Ateneo Puertorriqueño, criticized the activities of the church and its bishops. “From the beginning of the century, they set out to transform Puerto Ricans into good North Americans.” He concluded that the “Americanization of the upper and upper middle class as an indispensable tool for the total integration of Puerto Rico into the United States” (Beirne 9).

The Federal Party, unequivocally the dominant political force for the first two decades of colonial rule, resisted many of the institutional changes imposed by the War Department. By contesting the military regime, the party not only asserted the political rights of Puerto Ricans, but also impeded the Americanization campaign.

The Republicans, on the other hand, cooperated with the military regime and were prepared for a much longer transition under U.S. tutelage before the grant of self-government and eventual statehood. They proved to be staunch allies of the military governors and continued to aggressively promote Americanization long after many in Puerto Rico grew weary of the campaign. Celso Barbosa, Republican Party president, was an impassioned advocate of Americanization and statehood. He “defended the Americanization of the island” because he wanted Puerto Rico to “assimilate all that has made the American people great and powerful” (Meléndez 41).

According to Barbosa the Republican Party was an “auxiliary to the American government in Puerto Rico” since its “intention was to transform the political and social conditions of the country” (Barbosa 59). In 1910 Barbosa wrote that Americanization meant to “teach our people the spirit of the American people . . . and to endorse the American policy in Puerto Rico (Trías Monge 30).

Ironically, Americanization was never designed to prepare Puerto Ricans for U.S. citizenship or statehood. General Henry faulted the Puerto Ricans for their naiveté since they “expected to be admitted to American citizenship before they had passed through a sufficient period of probation” (1475). Yet for Puerto Rico’s elite the expectation seemed reasonable, since as Spanish subjects Puerto Ricans were entitled to Spanish citizenship and representation in the national government.

### **America’s First Overseas Colony**

The congressional debates on Puerto Rico’s political future, which culminated on April 12, 1900 with the passage of the Foraker Act, were highly contentious. At the core of the debates was constitutional uncertainty as to whether Congress was obligated to enact identical colonial legislation for Puerto Rico and the Philippines. Congress was determined to differentiate the legal status of Filipinos, who were waging a bloody insurrection against U.S. rule, from Puerto Ricans, who had welcomed the change in sovereignty. Conferring Filipinos U.S. citizenship was anathema for many congressmen. Alarmists warned of massive Filipino and Puerto Rican immigration if the islands were granted territorial status and U.S. citizenship. Congressman Newlands declared that “American civilization was in danger” from Asian immigrants, and decried the “evils of incorporating the Philippines into our government and industrial system” (Cabranes, “Citizenship” 29). Senator Gilbert raised the specter of “millions of Negroes in Puerto Rico and the 10,000,000 Asiatics in the Philippines . . . becoming American citizens and swarming into this country and coming in competition with our farmers and mechanics and laborers” (Raffucci de García 86). Given these fears, Congress abandoned any thoughts of U.S. citizenship and eventual statehood for Puerto Rico.

Congress opted to forgo legislation for the Philippines pending Supreme Court review of the constitutionality of the Foraker Act. If the act, which established colonial rule in Puerto Rico, was deemed constitutional, then Congress would enact similar restrictive legislation for the Philippines and other possessions in the future (Capó

Rodríguez, "Relations Between" 315). In effect Puerto Rico became an "experimental station" for testing the constitutionality of colonialism and the denial of political rights to subjects of the United States on the basis of presumed racial differences and cultural incompatibilities. In 1901 a deeply divided Supreme Court decided that the Foraker Act was constitutional and that Congress had complete plenary powers over the territories.

The Court that decided the Constitution and its full panoply of rights and protections did not automatically apply to Puerto Rico since it "is a territory appurtenant and belonging to the United States, but not a part of the United States." Justice Brown reasoned that "if those possessions are inhabited by alien races, differing from us in religion, customs, laws, methods of taxation, and modes of thought, the administration of government and justice, according to Anglo-Saxon principles, may for a time be impossible" (*Downes v. Bidwell*). The constitutionality of the Foraker Act rested on the prejudicial logic that Puerto Ricans lacked those cultural values and political norms that were constitutive of American identity.

The implied inferiority of Puerto Ricans underlay the legal decision to govern them without their consent and to deny them constitutionally-protected political rights enjoyed by U.S. citizens (see Duffy Burnett and Burke; and Rivera Ramos). This restrictive policy was justified because Puerto Rico was treated as a foreign territorial possession without any international legal identity. According to the Supreme Court the inhabitants of the island were "citizens of Porto Rico, and shall be entitled to the protection of the United States" domestically and while traveling internationally (*González v. Williams*). For Democratic Party boss William Bryan, the Foraker Act was "the first time that we have been told that we must cross an ocean, conquer a people, drag them under our flag and then tell them they are never to be citizens, but are to be subjects, and are to be treated with kindness by our people" (Capó Rodríguez, "Colonial Representation 537).

The Foraker Act set up a highly centralized civilian administration headed by a governor who was appointed by the president of the United States. An appointed eleven-man Executive Council served as both the governor's cabinet and the upper house of the colonial legislature. The council had virtually unrestricted powers to direct Puerto Rico's wholesale institutional transformation. In effect it served as the instrument through which the War Department imposed and directed the Americanization campaign. A prominent Puerto Rican jurist complained that "the people of Puerto Rico had no voice in the designation of the persons who



were to serve practically as their masters in the administration of their government" (Capó Rodríguez, "Some Historical" 568).

The installation of a legal system based on U.S. jurisprudence was critical to the success of Puerto Rico's Americanization. While some officials called for the radical and rapid imposition of a new legal order, others warned that a violent substitution of the U.S. legal code "would arouse a form of opposition which would thwart every effort to Americanize the island" (Rowe 38-9). Nonetheless, the changes the federal code commission authorized were so sweeping that Puerto Rican attorney Alfonso García Martínez complained of the "radical transformation" of the island's judicial institutions and warned they were "undergoing a process of change that was almost catastrophic" (Delgado Cintrón 325). Moreover, despite the strenuous objections of Puerto Ricans, Congress absorbed Puerto Rico into the U.S. District Court system. General Davis confidently reported that the "influence of this court is destined to be a potent agency in Americanizing the island" (Delgado Cintrón 222).

### **Public Education and Americanization**

For the first three decades of colonial rule the education commissioners, all of whom came from the United States, pursued three goals: "Americanization, extension of the school system and the teaching of English" (Osuna 281-2). Brumbaugh, Puerto Rico's first commissioner, believed that "no school has done its duty unless it has impressed devout patriotism upon the hearts and minds of all the children" (Negrón de Montilla 51). The Episcopal bishop of Puerto Rico called on the public schools to instill patriotism "as we know it," and reported that a leading feature of the curriculum was "loyalty to American principles and standards" (Van Buren 151-52). Hundreds of teachers, the vast majority young women, were brought from the United States to teach English to Puerto Rican teachers and students. Brumbaugh reverently observed that "they came as a solemn and sacred sacrifice for the Americanization of the people of Porto Rico" (Negrón de Montilla 39).

Scholarships were awarded to young men and women to study in the U.S. as "part of the plan for instituting American culture and American educational ideas into Porto Rico." In 1900 thirty-five students were selected for the program, while another group of ten boys and ten girls attended the all-African American Tuskegee Industrial Institute in Alabama. Students were also sent to the

Carlisle Industrial School (U.S. Department of State 157, 311). The education authorities assured Congress that these programs would result in the “further Americanization of the island by introducing many of the customs of the United States” (U.S. Department of War. 23rd Report 190).

U.S. educators who were “pitifully ignorant” of Puerto Rico’s educational needs organized the public school system (Osuna 281–2). Reflecting on the long history of the U.S.-run school system, a Puerto Rican education commissioner observed that colonial authorities attempted to “transplant to Puerto Rico the standards and methods with which they were familiar in the Continent” as an experiment to instill bilingualism through the public school system (Cebollero 1–2). Compulsory English language instruction was the most important and costly of all the education initiatives. According to one U.S. commissioner, “from the earliest days of the American occupation, the purpose of the department of education has been to establish and to develop a bilingual system of education which would insure the conservation of Spanish and the acquisition of English” (U.S. Department of War 15th Report 340).

A 1904 decision to substitute English for Spanish as the medium of instruction for the first three grades proved to be exceedingly controversial and provoked staunch local opposition (Negrón de Montilla 96–9). According to one Puerto Rican education official the language policy was the “result of an ill-advised and short sighted policy of Americanization” (Rodríguez Bou 159). For twelve years this decision was enforced despite mounting evidence of the program’s failure to achieve results. Finally in 1916, in the face of raising criticism, the incoming commissioner admitted that the policy had failed and adopted an alternative and less controversial approach (Cebollero 103). But the changes failed to quell opposition from the Teacher’s Association, which continued to insist that Spanish be used as the language of instruction (Negrón de Montilla 160).

The language policy was a catalyst for simmering anti-American sentiments. Many intellectuals and public figures criticized the aggressive pursuit of bilingual instruction as a flagrant manifestation of imperial arrogance and a repudiation of Puerto Rico’s cultural heritage. In a series of newspaper articles and editorials written between 1915 and 1931 Epifanio Fernández Vanga waged a withering attack against the public education system. He accused the administration of cynically using the public schools to carry out the “depuertorricanization” of the country. Convinced they were “relegating our language in our own schools to the mediocre category of a mere educational assignment,” he accused the colonial

authorities of “killing our people, our language” and doing so with the public schools paid for by taxes on Puerto Ricans (3, 107).

In response to the growing popular opposition to the language policy in 1915, the House of Delegates passed a bill to establish Spanish as the official language “of the People of Puerto Rico, and its lexicon shall conform to the texts of the Spanish Royal Academy, augmented by the idioms and local terms of Puerto Rico” (Domínguez 161). Not surprisingly, the bill was rejected outright by the Executive Council. The persistent challenges did little to dissuade the education commissioners from using the school system for political education and English language training. In fact the campaign to Americanize Puerto Rico’s school children was intensified during the war years. In 1916 Governor Yager proposed an “enlargement” of the powers of the education commissioner and to “fasten . . . final control in the hands of a responsible American.” This proposal in order to keep “the unskilled handful of well-meaning Puerto Ricans from interfering with the system of education . . . which they do not as yet fully appreciate.” In 1917 Commissioner Miller sent a memorandum in which “teachers are reminded that the aim is to make children bilingual” (Negrón de Montilla 166, 158). A few years later he petitioned congress for supplementary educational funding to expand English language instruction, and to prepare the new U.S. citizens “for the duties of citizenship” in order “that democracy made be made safe” in Puerto Rico (*School and Society* 72).

Independence and separatist sentiments intensified in reaction to the excessive zeal in promoting English instruction. Popular protest against the language policy coincided with a rising nationalism. Nationalists condemned the language policy as “a symptom of American imperialism and as a menace to the personality of Puerto Rico” (Cebollero 13). It is not surprising that opposition to colonial rule centered on the language issue, the most constitutive element of a people’s culture. Neither popular opposition nor the inadequacy of language policy dissuaded U.S. officials from the goal of forming a bilingual subject people, despite the realization that it could never succeed.

### **The Jones Act: Second Class Citizenship**

As Puerto Rican frustration with the despised Foraker Act mounted, sympathy for independence increased. According to the War Department, the humiliation Puerto Ricans felt at being denied U.S. citizenship fueled elite discontent and the ominous

growing popular support for separatism. In 1912 BIA chief McIntyre reported that the denial of citizenship was “the underlying cause of whatever political and social unrest there is in the island” (U.S. Department of War. 1912 Report 25–6). In 1912 address to Congress, President Wilson observed that “the failure thus far to grant American citizenship continues to be the only ground for dissatisfaction” (U.S. House “Message” 11). Muñoz Rivera rejected this idea, and told Congress that “Puerto Ricans will feel humiliated until you have abolished in the island a colonial” system (Trías Monge 33).

In January 1912 a bill to amend the Foraker Act was introduced in the Senate. The measure, known as the Jones Act, contained a provision for collective U.S. citizenship. The annexationist Republican Party was convinced that the statehood cause would be advanced with the grant of citizenship and agreed with the BIA that sympathy for independence would erode with the grant of U.S. citizenship (Barbosa 139). Fearful that the conferral of U.S. citizenship was a prelude to statehood, José de Diego, Speaker of the House of Delegates, warned Congress that “the admission of our Island into your sisterhood of States . . . is impossible” since the people of both nations were separated by “racial differences, by differences of languages and customs” (154–5). The measure died in committee, but bills to replace the discredited Foraker Act were regularly introduced in Congress during the next few years.

In 1913 Secretary of War Garrison again reported that the independence “agitation has been largely the result of the failure to confer American citizenship in some form to the people of the island, now known as citizens of Porto Rico.” According to Garrison “practically all the people of Porto Rico desire American citizenship” (Trías Monge 37). But in a message sent to Congress and the president, the House of Delegates rejected this idea and affirmed that “the sentiment of American citizenship for Porto Rico is neither in you nor in us . . . and through erroneous information . . . you have probably interpreted our displeasure and our protest as due to the fact that you have not granted us American citizenship.” At the 1914 Senate hearings to amend the Foraker Act an official of La Union Puertorriqueña testified that statehood for Puerto Rico was “almost impossible because she is a country thickly settled by a people of a different race and origin from that of the U. S.” (U.S. Senate Committee on Pacific Islands and Porto Rico 52, 10).

As US entry into the European war appeared ever more certain, the BIA exhorted Congress to enact a citizenship bill. Ostensibly the measure was meant to eliminate political, but the BIA’s intent was

also to preclude the possibility of independence in the strategic Caribbean island. General McIntyre assured Congress that “the people of Puerto Rico should be made citizens of the United States to make clear that Puerto Rico is to remain permanently connected with the United States” (U.S. Department of War 1916 Report 18).

Senator Jones introduced another citizenship bill in January 1916. Minnesota congressman Miller echoed the BIA’s support for U.S. citizenship “so . . . that the independence propaganda be discontinued, and that our sovereignty remain there permanently” (U.S. House “Cong. Record” 7473). Notwithstanding the political urgency to adopt the Jones Bill as a war measure, some congressmen waged a racially laden battle against U.S. citizenship. Congressman Canon argued that “the racial question” should be considered since “Puerto Rico is populated by a mixed race.” He was convinced that Puerto Ricans “did not have the slightest conception of self-government” (Weston 200–1). Other congressmen protested the racist tenor of the debates. Congressman Huddleston believed that “the people of Puerto Rico are of our race, they are people who inherit an old civilization—a civilization which may be fairly compared to our own” (Cabranes, “Citizenship” 97–8). Congressman Borland supported the measure because Puerto Ricans were “sufficiently like us in most respects . . . to be entitled to look forward to such recognition . . . they have both the capacity and the desire to enter as a loyal and integral part of the great American republic” (U.S. House “Cong. Record” 7485).

The bill permitted only those Puerto Rican males who were U.S. citizens to vote and hold public office; those who declined U.S. citizenship were prohibited from participating in the political process. Women, irrespective of their citizenship status, were barred from voting. Muñoz Rivera lambasted the measure as punitive because Puerto Ricans were forbidden from “the exercise of political rights.” The bill imposed on Puerto Ricans a “citizenship of an inferior order, a citizenship of the second class” (U.S. House “Cong. Record” 7472).

On February 22, 1917, President Wilson called “for immediate action” on the Jones Act, since “the imminence of war makes it wise . . . to insure the loyalty” of Puerto Ricans (*New York Times* 4). After years of procrastination, Congress acted quickly and the Jones Act was signed into law on March 2, 1917. The act conferred collective statutory U.S. citizenship on the citizens of Puerto Rico. Puerto Ricans choosing to reject citizenship were required to submit a sworn declaration to that effect.

The Jones Act did not alter Puerto Rico’s territorial status, nor did it diminish Congress’s plenary powers. While it contained a bill

of rights partially modeled on that of the United States, it did not extend constitutional privileges and protection to the inhabitants of the colony. Although the despised Executive Council was disbanded and an elective bicameral legislature was set up, the powers of the governor were actually augmented. The president retained the authority to appoint the education commissioner and the attorney general given their centrality in the ongoing Americanization campaign. According to federal court judge Peter Hamilton, the public school system along with the reviled federal court were “the two educational forces for Americanization on the island” (Fram 113).

The citizenship provision of the Jones Act was unprecedented in the annals of territorial legislation: Congress had never before granted citizenship to the inhabitants of a territory without the explicit condition of eventual statehood (Cabranes, “Citizenship” 99). As second class citizens of the United States, Puerto Ricans were identified as an ethnic/racial category, rather than as a nation with a distinct culture and language under U.S. sovereignty. The grant of collective U.S. citizenship was conceived as a legal and ideological device to tighten Puerto Rico’s dependency on the empire. Since citizenship was statutory it was not intended to elevate the Puerto Rican people to a level of equality with native born and naturalized citizens of the United States. The Jones Act conferred a “second-class” citizenship that made the applicability of constitutional rights subject to the territorial status of the U.S. possession. According to political scientist Rogers Smith, the Progressive Era produced a four-tiered hierarchical structure of citizenship laws. The second tiered citizenship was “usually understood as required by improvident grants of formal citizenship to races not capable of exercising it, and as the proper status for women.” African Americans, Native Americans, women and Puerto Ricans were assigned this second-class citizenship (Smith 429–30). Despite a twenty-year campaign to Americanize the people of Puerto Rico, Congress did not waiver from its prejudicial view that Puerto Ricans were so racially and culturally subordinate that they were unworthy of equal citizenship status and the right to self-government.

### **Americanizing Immigrants and Subjects**

The discourse on the capacity of Puerto Ricans for self-government and democratic political rule was ambiguous. At times Puerto Ricans were portrayed as a white race of European people who could overcome the liabilities of their Spanish cultural and politi-

cal formation, and eventually be as easily assimilated as Eastern and Southern Europeans. Yet they were also portrayed as a dependent people who given their mixed racial heritage were culturally inferior, incapable of self-government and in genuine need of the paternalistic and benevolent guidance of the technologically superior Anglo-Saxon people. The practice of colonial rule and the debates in Congress leave little doubt that the latter image prevailed.

The campaign to Americanize Puerto Rico gradually slackened after two decades of colonial rule. No doubt the relentless opposition, non-cooperation, obstruction and legal wrangling by Puerto Ricans proved enervating for arrogant U.S. officials who profoundly underestimated the capacity of colonial subjects to artfully subvert the campaign to transform their society. Clashes between the U.S.-controlled executive branch and the locally elected legislature complicated the business of Americanizing the Puerto Ricans. In addition to a persistent and resourceful local elite, U.S. officials encountered other vicissitudes, some of their own making. The colonizers enacted badly flawed measures so totally alien to Puerto Rican society as to render them absurdly unworkable. Moreover, the enterprise to win the hearts and minds of Puerto Ricans was impaired by the detached, arrogant, and imperious bearing of many colonial officials. When combined with ignorance and racial bigotry some colonial officials actually became liabilities. The deplorable conditions in the fields and factories and meager wages paid by the U.S. corporations frequently precipitated large-scale strikes by rural and urban workers. Some of these protests turned to pitched battles that disrupted the economy, and added another dimension to the complexity of Americanization.

By the end of the Progressive Era the belief that Puerto Ricans could be readily transformed into Caribbean variants of the ideal-type American citizens seemed overly optimistic and ultimately unattainable. Puerto Ricans may also have naively assumed that in the polyglot society of late-19th century U.S. they would be accepted as full-fledged Americans. However, within two decades of U.S. rule Puerto Ricans began to understand that despite learning the English language, saluting the flag, proclaiming their loyalty to the United States, serving in the U.S. army and finally attaining U.S. citizenship, they were still treated as second-class citizens. Americanization in Puerto Rico did not create Americans, but relatively loyal, albeit often discontented, subjects.

It is instructive to compare how the United States employed public education, the key agency for Americanization, to achieve different goals for its immigrants and colonial subjects. In the United States the individual states were initially responsible for

public education, but in Puerto Rico the education system was developed and administered by the War Department and other executive departments. These two education systems dealt with fundamentally different populations. The state-funded schools were designed to “naturalize” an ethnically and linguistically diverse European immigrant population. It was assumed that these immigrants did not plan to return to their countries of origin, and that they aspired to be “Americans.” However, Puerto Ricans were not migrants, they were inhabitants of a nation that was conquered and deprived of its sovereignty. They had not come to the United States, the United States came to them. These dissimilarities between immigrant and subject help explain the different objectives and outcomes of the Americanization campaign in Puerto Rico and in the United States.

Americanization in Puerto Rico entailed the systematic displacement of the government and court system that were the legacies of four centuries of Spanish rule. Puerto Ricans witnessed the rapid dismantling of familiar, albeit often deficient and corrupt, political institutions and the implantation of a myriad of alien and, at times abhorrent, agencies of the colonial state. They could not control the pace of institutional transformation, nor participate in delineating its properties. In contrast, the European immigrants abandoned their political institutions with the open knowledge that they had to adapt to those in the United States.

Americanization in the United States evolved from individual state programs on English language instruction and civics education. In the years preceding World War I the federal government began to work with state governments and private organizations to develop and coordinate Americanization activities at the national level after concerns were expressed that non-English ethnic enclaves threatened to Balkanize the country. Americanization as a philosophy of socialization was designed to prepare the European immigrants, despite their presumed deficient cultural lineage, for incorporation as political equals into the dominant society. For Puerto Ricans, Americanization held no such rewards. The goal of Americanization in the United States was to achieve national unity and conformity to basic democratic values by transforming the alien into a naturalized patriotic citizen. But Americanization assumed more urgency and adopted an imperious patriotic character at the end of World War I. Government officials worried that the burgeoning industrial proletariat might be susceptible to the appeal of radical anticapitalist ideologies. After World War I Americanization was used as an ideology to counter the appeal of Bolshevism, which purportedly menaced the stability of the United States. When this



perceived threat had evaporated the Americanization campaign was abandoned.

The Americanization campaign in Puerto Rico was driven by a very different set of considerations. The Americanization campaign in Puerto Rico was not designed to assimilate individuals, but to transform an entire society with a distinct culture, language and history. But the literature makes evident that Puerto Ricans, in contrast to the European immigrants, never wanted to assimilate if assimilation meant abandoning their cultural identity. Puerto Ricans mistakenly assumed that the goal of Americanization was not to transform them as a people but merely to add another dimension or layer to their well-developed national identity.

In Puerto Rico, Americanization was directly related to U.S. strategic and commercial aspirations in the hemisphere. Puerto Rico's importance in protecting the soon to be built Panama Canal was the determining factor for the United States' decision to seize control of the island. Gaining the loyalty of Puerto Rico's inhabitants and preserving political stability in this strategically critical island were priorities for the new empire builders, especially as the war in Europe pressed on. For this reason Americanization, seen as a process leading to the creation of a subject people who would accept the legitimacy of U.S. sovereignty and its political institutions, was an important component of the larger hemispheric concerns. Puerto Ricans would need to comprehend English sufficiently to understand and accept the terms of their subordination, and to absorb the political values deemed essential for preserving stability in this insular possession. This ongoing process continued at least until the establishment of the *Estado Libre Asociado* of Puerto Rico in 1952.

Ultimately the discrepancy between an egalitarian, democratic discourse and the actual practice of colonialism, which was politically restrictive, dismissive of popular aspirations and racially exclusionary, decisively undermined the moral basis of Americanization. U.S. officials were hard pressed to harmonize the civic ideals and democratic principles they enunciated with the racially constituted practice of excluding Puerto Ricans from full citizenship and participation in the political process. This exclusion, in combination with a draconian effort to force English on the population, stirred nationalist sentiments and encouraged some leaders to become advocates of independence. Colonialism severed the organic connections between sovereignty, self-government, citizenship and nationality. Although the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of colonialism a century ago, the United States has had to struggle to legitimize its exercise of power over the subject people of Puerto Rico.

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