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Puerto Rican Nationalist Uprising

Pedro Caban

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

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school representatives. Law Day participants may attend workshops and panel discussions on the application process and the law school experience. PRLDEF cohosts a similarly well-attended orientation-day program for accepted students, which consists of panels on how to succeed in law school and provides an opportunity to network with members of various local Latina and Latino bar associations. PRLDEF has also established scholarships, internships, and mentorship programs for law students.

Policy Division

When PRLDEF merged with the Institute for Puerto Rican Policy, PRLDEF's Policy Division was formed to serve the needs of the Northeast and Puerto Rico-based Latino communities. The Policy Division turned its focus on three program areas: policy analysis and advocacy, civic participation, and policy networking/communications. The Policy Division works on these issues in the eastern United States, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The Policy Division organizes panels throughout the year on such significant matters as voter participation, redistricting, and education policy. The division also publishes several policy papers on various topics, including census analysis and socio-political matters such as Latina and Latino political identity and political power.

Legacy

Beginning in 1972, PRLDEF filled a vacuum by litigating and advocating on behalf of Puerto Ricans and other Latinas and Latinos in the Northeast and Puerto Rico. As a result of its litigation and advocacy efforts, dramatic changes have occurred in employment, housing, voting, and education rights for Latinas and Latinos. From board members to legal staff members to student interns, everyone who has walked through PRLDEF's doors has learned leadership and advocacy skills. Many, if not most, have established themselves as leaders within the legal community. They have become federal and state judges, administrative law judges, law professors, and heads of city and state agencies and bar associations. They have also been policy-makers at the highest level, and have assumed elected and appointed political offices throughout the Northeast. Through its community lawyering, PRLDEF has touched the lives of Puerto Ricans and other Latinas and Latinos, and brought the community closer to real equality and empowerment in the United States and Puerto Rico.

See also **ASPIRA and Puerto Ricans.**

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JENNY RIVERA

PUERTO RICAN NATIONALIST UPRISING. On October 30, 1950, in a dramatic but doomed attempt to free Puerto Rico from U.S. colonial control, the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico carried out armed insurrections in major towns and cities throughout the island. Under the leadership of the Harvard-educated attorney Pedro Albizu Campos, who was elected party president in 1930, the Nationalist Party adopted a radical revolutionary nationalism that rejected electoral politics. Independence would ultimately be achieved through anti-imperialist activism and armed confrontation with the U.S. authorities and the despised colonial government. The Nationalists believed that, as a result of continued agitation, the political costs of maintaining a colony would prove unacceptable for the United States. According to Albizu Campos:

Puerto Rico must create a grave crisis for the colonial administration in order that its demands be heard. What is needed is a rebel organization to make a clean break with the colonial regime and to request recognition of our independence from the free nations of the world

(Wagenheim, p. 168).

Albizu Campos was convicted of seditious conspiracy and was incarcerated in a federal penitentiary from 1937 to 1943. He returned to Puerto Rico in 1947 and immediately took up the cause of Puerto Rican independence. In 1949, the U.S. Attorney General labeled the Nationalist Party a subversive organization that sought "to alter the form of government of the United States by unconstitutional means" (*New York Times*, 1949). This designation provided a legal basis for the colonial government's persecution and harassment of the Nationalists.

The Puerto Rican Commonwealth Act

In a series of fiery speeches between 1948 and 1950, Albizu Campos excoriated the United States for keeping Puerto Rico's people in economic bondage and perpetual poverty. He condemned the Puerto Rican Commonwealth Act (Public Law 600) and called on the Puerto Rican people not to register to vote in a referendum on the adoption

of the law. This important legislation, which was enacted by the U.S. Congress but conceived by Governor Luis Muñoz Marín and his Popular Democratic Party, authorized the people of Puerto Rico to draw up and approve their own constitution. This constitution would have the trappings of a charter of autonomy under a republican form of government but would not alter Puerto Rico's fundamental relationship to the United States as a territorial possession subject to the unrestricted plenary powers of Congress. According to the Nationalists, Public Law 600 was a farce that allowed the United States to report to the recently established United Nations, which was actively promoting global decolonization, that the Puerto Rican people were sovereign.

By repudiating the colonial administration and Public Law 600, Albizu Campos was provoking the government to arrest him for violating the 1948 anti-free speech law known as *La Mordaza* (Law No. 53). The law made it illegal to advocate the overthrow of the Puerto Rican government "by means of force or violence." Under this law, the colonial authorities had tremendous latitude to suppress the activities of the Nationalists and other independence advocates, who comprised a substantial portion of the population in 1947.

The Start of the Insurrection

The Nationalist Party had planned to begin the island-wide insurrection on November 3. The uprising would not only disrupt the voter registration process slated to begin on November 4 but would also possibly provoke a crisis in authority that would compel the U.S. Congress either to rescind Public Law 600 or to delay its implementation. The Nationalists' long-term objective was to gain Puerto Rico's independence, but their immediate objective was to seize and retain military and political control of one or two large towns, including Utuado, for a month. The Nationalists were convinced that, if they succeeded, the authority of the colonial government would crumble and the United Nations would pressure the United States to allow Puerto Ricans to exercise their right of self-determination.

The decision to launch the attack on October 30 rather than November 3 was made because government agents learned of the impending insurrection and because Albizu Campos had discovered that a "plot existed in Washington to eliminate the nationalist leadership" (United Press). On October 30, the Nationalist Insurrection broke out in nine towns and cities, including San Juan, Puerto Rico's capital. Nationalists attacked La Fortaleza, the governor's residence, in an attempt to assassinate Governor Muñoz Marín. In an attack that appeared to be coordinated with the insurrection, two Nationalist Party members attempted to assassinate President Harry Truman in Washington, D.C.

Government Response

Muñoz Marín dispatched 3,500 National Guard troops to suppress the insurrection in Jayuya, Utuado, and Arecibo. Police held Albizu Campos's home under siege for two days before the Nationalist leader surrendered. The insurrection was quickly stamped out except in the mountain town of Jayuya, a Nationalist stronghold. There, the Nationalists burned the police headquarters, overthrew the local authorities, and for two days took control of the town. Blanca Canales, one of the Nationalist leaders, raised the banned Puerto Rican flag and declared Puerto Rico an independent republic. The National Guard launched its attack on Jayuya with heavy weapons, including mortars and tanks. Airplanes were ordered to bomb and strafe the rebels. The National Guard recaptured Jayuya on November 1 and arrested four hundred townspeople. According to a reporter at the scene, "Jayuya looked as if an earthquake had struck it, with several blocks destroyed and most of the other buildings in the town of 1,500 charred by fire" (*New York Times*, November 1, 1950). National Guard ground and air forces were also deployed to suppress the rebellion in Utuado. In all, about 140 Nationalists were active combatants in the insurrection. The police reported that twenty-eight people had been killed and fifty wounded during the uprising, including police officers and National Guardsmen.

Muñoz Marín sought to turn public opinion against the Nationalists by calling the insurrection "a conspiracy against democracy helped by the Communists" (*New York Times* November 2, 1950). Once the insurrection was suppressed, the reaction by the government was swift and draconian. Law No. 53 was used as a legal tool to arrest hundreds of individuals on the basis of their presumed affiliation with or membership in nationalist, socialist, Communist, and independence organizations. By arresting these activists and holding them in preventive detention, the government was able to severely restrict organized opposition to the referendum on Public Law 600. Hundreds were convicted and sentenced to prison terms. The entire leadership of the Nationalist Party was either killed during the insurrection or sent to prison. Albizu Campos was convicted of twelve counts of violating Law No. 53. He was also sentenced to prison for terms ranging from twenty-nine to seventy-eight years for attempted murder and for seeking to overthrow the government of Puerto Rico. Twenty-one Nationalists involved in the Jayuya uprising were convicted of murdering a police officer and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Legacy of the Uprising

In 1958, a Civil Liberties Commission issued a report on Law No. 53 that accused the government of using the law "under a façade of legality . . . as a dragnet to punish

members of hated minority groups, with the crime defined in a highly expansive manner to reduce or eliminate the problem of proof" (Lewis, p. 344). The Nationalist Insurrection and Pedro Albizu Campos remain symbols of defiance to colonial domination among many Puerto Ricans.

See also Albizu Campos, Pedro; Muñoz Marín, Luis; Puerto Rican Independence Movement; Puerto Rican Revolutionary Organizations; Puerto Ricans; and Puerto Rico, Colonialism in.

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PEDRO CABÁN

PUERTO RICAN POLITICAL PRISONERS. The history of Puerto Rico's independence movement in the second half of the twentieth century is marked by a virtual state of war between the FBI and the Puerto Rican government on one side, and the Nationalist Party, the Macheteros, and the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (FALN) on the other side. These Puerto Rican revolutionary groups employed violence against government, corporate, and military targets in a campaign to overthrow U.S. colonial rule of Puerto Rico.

Actions in the 1950s

On November 1, 1950, two members of the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico attempted to assassinate President Harry Truman. Oscar Collazo and Grisello Torresola, both residents of New York, carried out the doomed attack on Blair House, where President Truman was residing. Torresola killed one of the police officers who guarded the residence, and two other officers were wounded in the exchange of gunfire. In turn, Torresola was killed and Collazo was critically wounded, but recovered. Collazo was sentenced to death for the attempted murder, but one week before his scheduled execution in 1952, President Truman commuted the sentence to life

imprisonment. Collazo later explained, "It was not important if we did or did not reach President Truman. That was secondary. It was sufficient to create a scandal that focused world attention on the colonial case of Puerto Rico. And the assault was a success" (Fernández, p. 182).

The second notable attack occurred on March 1, 1954, when four members of the Nationalist Party shot at members of the U.S. House of Representatives. The attack was led by Lolita Lebrón, who shouted, "Viva Puerto Rico Libre" before she and her associates Rafael Cancel Miranda, Andrés Figueroa Cordero, and Irving Flores Rodríguez opened fire on the assembled congressmen. Five congressmen were wounded. Upon being arrested, Lolita proclaimed, "I did not come to kill anyone, I came to die for Puerto Rico!" The Nationalists, who did not resist arrest, were convicted of attempted murder and other crimes, and sentenced to death. President Truman commuted the sentences to life imprisonment. Pedro Albizu Campos, the Nationalist Party president, who had been pardoned for revolutionary activities in Puerto Rico, hailed the attack as an "act of heroism." Governor Muñoz Marín revoked the pardon and Albizu remained incarcerated for another decade.

Commutations of Sentences in the 1970s

In 1979, President Jimmy Carter commuted the sentences of Lolita Lebrón, Irving Flores, and Rafael Cancel Miranda after they had served twenty-five years in prison. Andrés Figueroa Cordero was granted clemency posthumously. He had died of cancer in March 1978 after having been released from prison because of his terminal illness. President Carter cited humane considerations for the commutations and said that the prisoners had served an "unusually long time in prison" and that "no legitimate deterrent or correctional purpose" was served by their continued incarceration. Their release coincided with Fidel Castro's release of several American CIA agents being held in Cuba on espionage charges. The Carter administration denied that there were any connections. For years, the Puerto Rican community had urged clemency. By 1977 a broad consensus existed among Puerto Ricans for the release of the jailed Nationalists. Four former governors of Puerto Rico joined with Robert García, the only Puerto Rican U.S. congressman, to urge the commutations. FALN had also demanded the release of the prisoners. The governor of Puerto Rico, Carlos Romero Barceló, stood virtually alone in opposing the pardons granted by Carter, stating that it would encourage terrorism and undermine public safety.

The FALN in the 1970s and 1980s

In 1974, FALN came to public attention as the latest Puerto Rican clandestine revolutionary organization