The Forces of Conflict and Change Faced by the Puerto Ricans in New York City

Carole L. Reuther

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The Forces of Conflict and Change Faced
by the Puerto Ricans in New York City
(TITLE)

BY

Carole L. Reuther

PLAN B PAPER
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1964

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS PLAN B PAPER BE ACCEPTED AS
FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE DEGREE, M.S. IN ED.

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ADVISER

DEPARTMENT HEAD
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to reveal some of the forces of conflict which are present in Puerto Rico and the changes that have occurred as migrants from that island have arrived in this country for the first time. The study will describe briefly the historical and economic backgrounds of the Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico and will compare the housing, schooling, economic level, health, color discrimination, alien discrimination, and working conditions of these people on the island with the same factors as they exist among Puerto Rican migrants here in New York City.

To comprehend fully the conflicts and changes faced by this group of migrants, one must first understand their history. Only thus, can one come to realize fully why they chose to migrate.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This paper will be limited to those Puerto Ricans who migrated to New York City between the years of 1940 and 1958. Second and third generations of Puerto Ricans will be referred to only if they were born
and reared through adolescence in New York City. The writer will try to show how and why these conflicts have arisen.

Terms used in this study in a special sense are defined as follows:

Minority group: Any group of people who suffer some form of special social disability.¹

Puerto Rican: Any individual whose birthplace is in Puerto Rico or an individual who has at least one parent whose birthplace was Puerto Rico.² This term includes both white and dark Puerto Ricans.

Alien: A person of another family, race, or place; one who owes allegiance to another country.

Visible: A person whose skin is light enough for him to pass as white but dark enough so that he can pass for colored.


CHAPTER II

PUERTO RICO AND ITS HISTORY

New York is the city to which traditionally all new waves of immigrants have come and upon which ships, trains, and planes converge. The Puerto Rican migrants too generally come first to New York. They have heard much about it. To these Puerto Ricans, it is the city of bright lights, the city where they hope to find better housing conditions, better jobs, and more pay.

The Puerto Ricans come from "... the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico which is situated on a small tropical island about the size of Long Island, one hundred miles long and thirty-six miles wide. One can drive from one end to the other in a few hours. Puerto Rico is located in the tropics, about the same latitude as Mexico City, sixteen hundred air miles from New York City."  

Unlike other immigrants, the Puerto Ricans are American citizens and are able to travel freely to any point in the United States without passports or visas. But because New York City is their port

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of entry, most of them stay and try their luck here.

In order to understand their motives for leaving their own land and coming to an entirely new one, it is necessary to learn about the history of this tiny country.

Spain ruled the island for four centuries until the 1800's. Spain left a rich cultural heritage of art, music, dancing, and writing, but she did not leave much for the people as individuals. The Spanish rule failed to establish a public school system. Under this rule, approximately 90 per cent of the people were illiterate. It left behind birth and death rates characteristic of an underdeveloped, uneducated, and poverty-stricken area. The political machinery was primarily designed to serve the interests of a distant Spain.

The revolutionary movements of the nineteenth century in all of Latin America found little response in Puerto Rico during the first half century. One brief, abortive uprising occurred in 1868 and lasted only three days. Finally, after a long, persistent non-violent campaign by Puerto Ricans, Spain granted the island a liberal autonomy at the close of 1897.4

A Charter made Puerto Rico a dominion. It vested executive power in a Governor-General appointed by the Crown on the nomination of the Spanish council of ministers. Legislative authority was vested in a two-chambered parliament, one

of which was elected and the other partially elected. The Charter gave Puerto Rico complete freedom in external trade, empowering it to make commercial treaties.\(^5\)

However, before this autonomous government could be put into effect, the United States declared war on Spain in April, 1898. American troops were sent to the island, and in August the Spaniards surrendered and the troops withdrew from the island. In the same year, the Treaty of Paris was signed by Spain and the United States, giving Puerto Rico to the United States.\(^6\)

The United States had little experience in governing another people, and it was not until the end of the 1930's that social, economic, and political reconstruction gave Puerto Rican citizens a share in their own government.

In 1917, United States citizenship was granted to those Puerto Ricans who desired it. No really significant progress in the internal democracy was made until 1948, when the Puerto Ricans elected their own governor for the first time. The leading advocate of the Puerto Ricans became Luis Munoz Marin, who was elected governor in 1948, and was re-elected in 1952, 1956, and 1960.


Self-government was only one of the problems that Puerto Rico had to face. Poverty, lack of resources, and too little imagination in using what resources there were, all were serious handicaps for this little country.

Operation Bootstrap was launched by the United States and Puerto Rico as an effort to develop the people themselves as a major factor in raising levels of living: agricultural improvement and diversification, industrialization, greater education and the knitting together of all these goals by coordinated planning, have been the major goals. 7

Because of the island's historical interest, its natural beauty, and the general friendliness of the people, there is a thriving tourist industry. Educational facilities have been expanded. The agricultural base has been broadened from a simple sugar, coffee, and tobacco economy to include such diversified products as pineapples, vegetables, coconuts, avocados, sweet potatoes, and bananas. Cattle raising and dairying have also become important sources of income.

By the end of February, 1960, Operation Bootstrap had furnished jobs for 45,900 persons directly, and about an equal number were working in such industries as the manufacture of clothing, shoes, television and radio sets, electric home appliances, tools and dies,

surgical instruments, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, plastics, electronic devices, cement, and glass.

Many people are unable to obtain adequate jobs because of illiteracy. However, illiteracy among the population ten years of age and over was brought down from 31.5 per cent in 1950 to about 13.4 per cent or less in 1959, and is still decreasing. Most of the illiterates are now found among the older people, those forty-five and over.  

The government's educational television and radio stations have helped in adult education campaigns, especially with the study of English. One of the greatest but least publicised programs is the Community Education program which reaches people in the rural and mountain areas.

These communities are gradually being awakened from their apathy toward an awareness of their problems, and toward the ability to solve those problems.

This awakening is being achieved by sending teachers into these rural and mountain areas to hold classes for older, uneducated people. Much is being accomplished, both through pamphlets and

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9Matters, op. cit., p. 64.
other written materials and through audio-visual devices.

During the depression years of 1944-1945, Puerto Rico was in a state of economic depression. Many people, finding that simple farming no longer afforded them a livelihood, abandoned their farms and crowded into the cities. In the capital city of San Juan, the population rose steadily, and the new migrants formed large pools of unskilled labor working for low wages. The "pressures of a labor surplus created among those with some means and ambition a pool of Puerto Ricans available for emigration."¹⁰

CHAPTER III
MIGRATION TO NEW YORK CITY

The immigration of Puerto Ricans led to the shores of the United States Continent. There seem to be many reasons for this tide of migration to New York. For one thing, the city's "closeness to the island is unquestionably a factor . . ."11 For another, the cost of flying has decreased within the past few years so that more people can afford the fare. But the most important is the economic motivation. The Puerto Ricans, unlike most European immigrants, do not come to this country for political or religious reasons. They come in search of better housing, more pay, and better jobs.

Like other groups before them, the Puerto Ricans look upon the city of New York as their heaven, whose streets are paved with gold. According to Handlin, the Puerto Ricans', "... opportunity to come to the mainland was enlarged by the post-war immigration laws of the second world war which virtually put an end to the admission of Europeans."12 At the same time no restrictions were placed on


12Handlin, op. cit., p. 50.
Puerto Rican migration; and as Handlin points out, "any plan to limit arbitrarily the number of Puerto Ricans entering the United States would be impossible to carry out without drastic changes in the relationship between the United States and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico." This limitation on other immigrants left a vast number of vacant jobs for unskilled workers. Many of the jobs were filled by Negroes, but opportunities for Puerto Ricans were also increased.

Migration to New York City resumed when the second world war restored the demand for manpower. Over half a million Puerto Ricans and their native born children migrated to the United States between the years of 1941 and 1956, and they formed a population of considerably more than 700,000.

As mentioned before, unskilled workers are not the only Puerto Ricans who have come to the United States. Members of the professional classes have come also, in considerable numbers. But unlike the workers, these professional men have not remained here. For the most part, they have come to the mainland for training, and have then returned to the island. This exodus of professionals has resulted in a serious lack of trained Puerto Ricans in the United States.

13 Ibid.
to "... interpret the new ways of life to their countrymen, and to form a much needed core of leadership."\textsuperscript{14}

The pattern for migrating seems to be about the same for the majority of Puerto Ricans. The first to come is the male, who finds a job, rents a room, and then sends for the family to join him. It is typical of migrants to write enthusiastic letters to relatives and friends in Puerto Rico, letters full of details about how much better their homes are, how much more pay they get, and how wonderful in general the American way of life seems to be. The writers of such letters tend to exaggerate the truth, but often seem themselves afraid of failing to find this happier life.

The links between New York Puerto Ricans and the island Puerto Ricans are, indeed, close and complex, and quite different from the relationship of earlier migrant groups to their homeland. This is due to the closeness of the island to the United States and also the fact that Puerto Rico is a part of the United States.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14}bid., p. 51.

\textsuperscript{15}Glazer, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 3.
CHAPTER IV
PATTERNS OF ADJUSTMENT

After having established their families, usually in dwellings near other Puerto Ricans, the newly arrived people tend to become clannish. This tendency, of course, is characteristic of any immigrant group just arriving in the United States. Being together gives the people a sense of security in this strange land. It also provides a group with whom communication is possible, as, because of the language difference, it is not possible with most other residents of the city. For these reasons, a family already established to some degree often will gladly share its home with newly arrived friends, even if the "home" consists of only one room.

After a migrant has found some place to stay, his next step is finding a job. A major handicap for Puerto Ricans in this country is their inability to speak English fluently. In many cases, the Puerto Rican who is applying for a job takes along with him an English-speaking friend. This is, to be sure, one way of communicating with a prospective employer, but it is ordinarily not very satisfactory, for it gives the friend too much opportunity to insert his own feelings and attitudes into the interview. Further, since the interpreter's
English is often not much better than the applicant's, misunderstandings, mistranslations, and misinterpretations are apt to occur, and, in the end, the applicant is likely not to get the job.

Added to the perennial handicaps of skin color and ignorance of English, the economic depression of the second world war made it even harder for Puerto Ricans to find work in New York. If lucky, they were placed in the most menial jobs. Later they filtered into the light-industry and garment trades, which utilized the high degree of manual dexterity many had acquired on the island, where almost everything was done by hand.

Of Puerto Rican men who have entered these fields, two-thirds are considered operatives and service workers. The service workers are primarily bus boys, kitchen and pantry workers, dishwashers, and laundry workers. The operatives are usually trained to work simple machines.

More than three-fourths of the women are also operatives, running simple machines, usually in the garment factories. Many of the Puerto Rican women did household sewing on the island; therefore, this type of work is familiar. There are almost forty thousand needle-trade workers; their training usually requires one week.

In Puerto Rico, these women did not work outside the home, for they had large families to raise and household chores to perform.
In New York they have found that incomes usually fall far below living expenses, and therefore have been forced to take jobs to supplement their husbands' pay checks.

The Puerto Rican woman has found also that her role as a person has changed with the move to New York. The city presents her with a "... multitude of social contacts and diversions outside the home." When she goes to work, she finds that her new wage-earning ability raises her status in the family to the point where she may be considered equal or even superior to the male.

The salary schedule in New York City is considerably better than that in Puerto Rico. The per capita income in Puerto Rico, which in 1957 was around $121 had risen in 1961 to approximately $621 a year. The median family salary of Puerto Ricans in New York is considerably lower even than that of Negro families. In 1960 in the United States, the income of the average Puerto Rican family was "found to be $3,811 as compared with $4,437 for non-white families." Many of the jobs are seasonal, or are created for a special purpose and terminated as soon


18Glazer, op. cit., p. 6.
as the production requirements have been met. Even though the total wage earned here appears to be higher than that earned on the island, the Puerto Ricans are often misled, by their ignorance of our system of taxation and deductions, into expecting far more than they actually receive. As with most newly arrived immigrants, failure to inquire seems to be the chief reason for this ignorance. Failure to inquire can result from not knowing the language well enough to make inquiries, from not knowing where to go to inquire, or even from not knowing that there is anything about which to inquire.

Low pay is not the Puerto Rican's only disadvantage. In addition, the benefits of unemployment insurance and workman's compensation are frequently not extended to immigrant groups. Social and welfare services too are usually denied, for only legal residents of communities can obtain such benefits.

If the Puerto Rican is lucky enough to get a job at any pay, he may find that because of his darker skin he is not accepted by his fellow workers or employers. In Puerto Rico, everyone is born into a class structure from which he seldom moves. There are a few chief determinants which separate the ordinary farmers from the professional or so-called "successful" people. A person is considered successful if he has, at least, a high school education or more, Spanish lineage, and inherited money, or even only one or two of these.
The migrant, upon arrival or shortly after, finds himself enmeshed in a new situation. He becomes aware that the white people discriminate against the Negroes, not only because of their skin color, but also because of their apparent lack of education. The Puerto Ricans see this discrimination and are affected deeply by it, since some of them have dark skins too, as well as kinky hair and broad noses.\textsuperscript{19} Hence, to avoid being themselves the objects of such discrimination, they are driven into strenuous efforts not to be identified with the Negro.

The "visible" Puerto Rican has somewhat the same problems; he is accepted neither by Negroes nor by whites. He is, in a sense, left in a group by himself.

As in any large city, competition for status is acute. The Puerto Ricans enter the labor market at the bottom, and are expected to work their way toward the top. Since, as a group, Puerto Ricans are far less acquisitive and competitive than most Americans, a serious conflict may be set up in the individual Puerto Rican between his cultural heritage and the demands of his new environment.

CHAPTER V

RELIGION OF PUERTO RICO

Puerto Ricans come from a predominantly Catholic country. The Catholic Church in Puerto Rico "is a monolithic organization which rejects as heresy the notion of divided religious communities."\(^{20}\)

"In the United States tradition, however, the Constitution of Puerto Rico provides specifically for separation of Church and State and specifically guarantees freedom of worship."\(^{21}\) This was one of the guarantees that the island sought to achieve after throwing off the rule of Spain. Nevertheless, it is estimated that about twenty per cent of the people belong to one or another of the Protestant sects and that a few are Spiritualists, although most of them are Catholics. As a result, religion is a source of strength as well as of conflict. The Catholic church is an important element in the lives of the migrants, and helps to integrate them into the life of the city.

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The Catholic Church is not a loose assemblage of denominations and parishes expressing various social backgrounds, but rather it is a big organization for rich and poor alike. Even on their island, the church has always tended to the people closely. In New York City, it has a definite policy, laid down by the church, of assimilating the Puerto Ricans into existing parishes. 22

The importance of the church in the lives of the migrants is shown by Senior in the following quotation:

The Puerto Ricans can't be matched by any previous ethnic group coming to New York City, in terms of money contributed and in hours per week devoted to church work. The per capita contribution of members of the churches averages $65, with some of the churches averaging more than $100 per year. The national average of all Protestant churches in the United States is $57. 23

The religion of the Puerto Ricans is also important in relation to population figures.

The dramatic decline in Puerto Rico's death rate in recent years (the result of island-wide public health programs and advances in levels of living), together with smaller decreases in birth rate, has led to a rising rate of natural population increases. 24

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23 Senior, op. cit., p. 73.

It was not until the 1950's that the birth rate fell below the level of 40 per 1,000. But even the lowered rate was still too much for the agricultural economy of this island to absorb, although "... there are indications of a changing ideal of family size and of an increased tolerance and use of birth control devices."25 This still-high birth rate has resulted in a surplus of laborers, often without land or with holdings too small to sustain their families, which in turn has given rise to the great wave of migrants moving to New York City.

TABLE I
Puerto Rico--Vital Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Annual Birth Rate per 1,000</th>
<th>Annual Death Rate per 1,000</th>
<th>Rate of Natural Increase per 1,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1887-1899 Ave.</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935-1940 Ave.</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954 Ave.</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957 Preliminary</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26 Offices of the Migration Division, op. cit., p. 3.
CHAPTER VI
LIVING CONDITIONS IN NEW YORK CITY

Through Puerto Ricans may be found in any section of New York City, most of them settle in the Harlem area, which lies between Third Avenue and One Hundred First Street. This area is considered undesirable partly because other minority group, primarily the Negroes, occupy it. The majority of the dwellings were build more than forty years ago, and many lack modern conveniences. It has been estimated that about ". . . ten per cent of all Puerto Rican households lack private toilets or baths and hot running water."\(^{27}\)

Many people are forced to pay exorbitant rents because of a lack of understanding between landlord and renter, often resulting from an inability to communicate in English. "Landlords, unscrupulous Puerto Ricans among them, violate legal obligations to avail themselves of undeserved benefits."\(^{28}\) Too, Puerto Rican tenants, unaware of the right to obtain redress, frequently fail to report owners for violations.

\(^{27}\)The Graduate School of Public Administration and Social Service, op. cit., p. 11.

\(^{28}\)Ibid.
It is typical of the shrewd business men who own such property to increase the percentage of income from it by converting the old block barracks into many small apartments. Huge blocks of such barracks are rented, purchased on time, or taken in charge at a percentage and held for the Puerto Ricans to sub-lease. As a result, these slum properties are considered excellent investments for those who know how to operate them.

The slum tenants on the West Side of New York City, for instance, pay an average of $2.10 per square foot for their hovels, while the inhabitants of the well-maintained, elevatored apartments within a block or two pay an average of $1.02. By crowding a large number of people into the old barracks, the owner realizes a return of twelve to fourteen per cent on the purchase price.

The Puerto Ricans experience color discrimination also when applying for jobs. The first reaction to this is frustration and confusion. More importantly, "... the colored Puerto Rican may find his self-esteem reduced by two possible, perhaps simultaneous demotions. First, instead of being a dignified human with full social rights, he has become a member of a minority group. Second, he may be further lowered to the position of a minority within a minority: a Negro within a Puerto Rican group." The latter is not one by choice, but one in which

29Senior, op. cit., p. 22.
the lighter skinned people have placed the colored Puerto Rican.

The census figures show that fewer non-white than white
Puerto Ricans come to the mainland (in proportion to their members
in the population) and that a larger per cent of the non-whites return to
their original homes after a stay in the United States. In New York
City, the percentage of white and non-white Puerto Ricans is approxi-
mately the same as on the island of Puerto Rico, seventy-five per cent
white and about twenty-five per cent dark.

It comes as a shock to Puerto Ricans to discover that in the
United States white skin is a sign of superiority, when the Puerto Ricans
have lived together for hundreds of years on the island without color
discrimination as we know it here.

It all seems very hard for the Puerto Rican to understand, for
on the one hand he is discriminated against because of the color of his
skin and on the other hand he carries prestige because of his Spanish
background.

A group which is rejected will either disintegrate or
huddle together for protection and develop its own
attitudes and values which may or may not be those
of the dominant groups in society. 30

30Ibid., p. 37.
It is understandable that the colored Puerto Rican does not want to identify himself with the Negro, for he sees that being a Negro carries a stigma. The light Puerto Rican (visible) can pass himself off as white, for his skin is light enough to fool people, and he is able to mingle with other white groups. At the same time, he can maintain relations with all of the members of his own group, whether they are white or colored.

In addition to color discrimination, the migration of new groups of Puerto Ricans to New York City seems, to those already there, to represent a threat to their own acceptance in the city by the other people living there. The new migrants are regarded as a source of conflict, partly because of the recognition that non-Puerto Ricans will react to the newcomers in an unfavorable way, and that this unfavorable attitude will be extended to the settled Puerto Ricans as well. This disrupts the way of living for both the newcomers and the settled migrants and results in segregation of the newcomers and the long-established Puerto Ricans into separate groups.

As Padilla states, perhaps "... racial discrimination is one of the many tools used to limit changes for upward mobility in this society."31

The crowding together of Puerto Ricans into a small area also presents a serious health hazard. The buildings in which they live are in bad shape to begin with: "The apartments of Harlem are susceptible to rodent infestation due to many openings or breaks in the pipes or walls."32 But deterioration is rapid during the Puerto Ricans' occupancy.

One characteristic peculiar to the Puerto Ricans coming from their semi-tropical background and which persists, manifests itself in the form of condensation. Contrary to the advice of the project staffs, Puerto Ricans keep casement windows tightly shut during cold weather. The resulting condensation of water vapor (from steam heated rooms) on walls and ceilings causes telling damage to the paint and plaster.33

For this reason, the buildings are usually in poor condition even though the landlords may repair them enough so that they give the appearance of being in satisfactory condition.

Another element of the health problem is sanitation. It is typical of migrant groups to have two or three families in one apartment. This doubling and tripling of numbers often places a strain on the drainage facilities. The methods of garbage disposal are often unhygienic.

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32Graduate School of Public Administration and Social Services, op. cit., p. 46.

33Ibid., p. 19.
In fact, some families continue their old custom of throwing the garbage out of the windows for the animals to eat.

Each spring, the city of New York provides a full-scale information campaign. The Department of Sanitation sends float and sound trucks into these neighborhoods. Spanish translations of sanitation regulations are also distributed.

Closely related to sanitation is the physical health of the migrants. Malnutrition is perhaps one of the greatest factors lowering the resistance of these people. They come from an environment where green vegetables are not commonly included in the diet. In fact, it is dangerous to eat raw vegetables in Puerto Rico because of worm infestation. When migrants come to this country, they bring with them their old fears and habits. In general, as a result, the physical growth of the young Puerto Ricans seems to be lagging behind that of children of the same age here in the United States.

Puerto Rico itself is reaching a public health status similar to ours in the United States. The life span has been increased from "38 years in 1910 to 68 years in 1957." 34 Nevertheless, serious problems remain to be solved, particularly in the rural areas of the island where the incidence of enteric infections

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34 Offices of the Migration Division, op. cit., p. 5.
is still very high. Tuberculous and pneumonia rates are much higher than those on the mainland, reflecting the overcrowded living conditions and malnutrition from which the majority of the people on the island suffer. 35

Because of the dietary problems, the children are also in need of good dental care. A program has been started in Puerto Rico to fluoridate the water. The Puerto Ricans in the United States are exposed to "poor surroundings, poor drainage, lack of heating, questionable drinking water, inadequate ventilation, crowded sleeping and cooking rooms, lack of adequate screening, absence of receptacles for garbage disposal, filthy privies; all contribute toward endangering the health." 36

Health education is one of the basic needs for Puerto Ricans, and, naturally enough, the school is the chief agency for providing it. Children are taught at school such things as the basic principles of hygiene and sanitation, and the fundamental dietary requirements, the importance of citrus juices, for example. Because of the language barrier, teachers rely heavily on charts and other visual aids. But


since there is a shortage both of visual materials and of teachers, the Department of Health and Education supplies for distribution to parents pamphlets and leaflets in Spanish, containing such things as cooking suggestions, and information on the importance of vitamins and the vitamin content of various foods.

Some of the children are fortunate enough to be in schools in which they are provided with at least one good meal a day. Usually the meal consists of "a hot bowl of soup, a sandwich, dessert, and milk. A large percentage of the Puerto Ricans participate in this program and most of them receive it free, since any family earning less than a prescribed amount for its particular size, is entitled to have their children receive free lunch."\(^{37}\)

Despite the efforts of the schools, many children find it hard to adjust to their new environment. Besides having trouble with the language, some are too old or too big for the grade to which they are assigned. The result is boredom and disruptive behavior.

\(^{37}\)Graduate School of Public Administration and Social Service, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 41.
CHAPTER VII

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

A child who is unable to adjust properly at school will bring into the home all the signs of this maladjustment. Parents have two alternatives for combatting it. The first is tightening discipline, which may result in overprotecting the child and creating in him a strong desire for escape. The second is letting the child run loose. Either course may result in his becoming a member of one of the gangs of juvenile hoodlums for which New York is notorious.

These gangs seem to be a product of the city, a by-product of lost and bewildered generations of people uprooted from their environment and moulded into a new way of life. The result is social and economic breakdown. As Fitzpatrick points out,

Delinquency is not something that Puerto Ricans bring with them. It is something that happens to them when they get here. They come from a way of life which they cherish; they have traditions of respect; they know what to expect of others and what others expect of them; they know the things for which they will be honored and the things for which they will be punished or despised.38

Here they find many things different. Some things which were considered right to do in Puerto Rico are not accepted in New York and vice versa. Values are different or at least inconsistent. The resultant uncertainty makes it especially difficult to raise children; as Glazer says,

The changing city no longer provides the neighborhood that is exclusive to one ethnic group, and so the models for new conduct in rearing one's children vary. 39

New York, with the largest Puerto Rican population of any mainland city, has naturally given a great deal of attention to the problems of these newcomers, and has tried to speed up the adjustment process in the schools. The tremendous influx of migrants, pouring into the city year after year, has made the problem almost insuperable. One third of the population of New York City is composed of youths between the ages of 14 and 21; of these, thirteen per cent are Puerto Ricans. The numerical importance of the Puerto Ricans is indicated by the following table, showing the percentages of public school students in the New York area by ethnic groups in the year 1957.

TABLE 2
PERCENTAGE OF PUBLIC ELEMENTARY AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, BY ETHNIC GROUPS, 1957.40

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Borough</th>
<th>Negro</th>
<th>P. Rican</th>
<th>Others</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Richmond</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>93.0</td>
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<td>Queens</td>
<td>10.7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manhattan</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>33.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronx</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>65.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooklyn</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>72.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total     | 18.3  | 14.0     | 67.7   |

Actual number of students

132,402   101,671   491,161

40Handlin, op. cit., p. 143.
CHAPTER VIII
EDUCATION

In order to understand fully the impact of the 101,671 Puerto Rican students on the New York educational system, one must first comprehend the type of education these youngsters received before migrating to the United States.

Because Puerto Ricans consider education to be one of their basic human rights, it is included in the Puerto Rican Bill of Rights. Free education is offered to all children through high-school age. School attendance is not compulsory, since the facilities are still inadequate, properly trained teachers are scarce, and funds are not so large as desired. There are some funds available, however, for the Puerto Rican government saves "twenty-five to thirty cents of every dollar for education."41 Operation Bootstrap increased the available funds by taxing businesses which before paid no taxes.

The school system is largely similar to that of the United States. There is a six-year elementary school, a three-year junior

41Matters, op. cit., p. 40.
high school, and a three-year high school plan. The same textbooks had been used for twenty or more years, until recently, when new ones were adopted. The question of which language to use as the medium of instruction was not settled for many years; some favored English because of the connection with the United States; others favored Spanish because of its universal use on the island and because it was the language the children were accustomed to using. The result was a confusion which produced students who were unable to communicate by writing in either language. The question was finally settled when the Puerto Ricans began to govern themselves in 1948. Spanish was their language and was therefore continued as the language of instruction, but English was taught as a second language throughout the whole system.

Overpopulation has been one of the greatest obstacles to universal education on the island. The population has been increasing faster than teachers can be trained. "The children in schools have increased from 44,000 in 1894 to over 625,000 in 1958 and the teachers have increased from 600 to 13,250 in public schools alone." 42 Nevertheless, illiteracy among those aged forty-five and under is now about

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42 Ibid. p. 63.
one per cent. Among those over the age of forty-five, the rate is about twenty-two per cent. \textsuperscript{43} "The present intensive literacy program is expected to lower this to about 10 per cent by 1960." \textsuperscript{44}

Today there are special programs for parents and other adults who cannot read and write. There are English courses for those who missed out on them in grade school.

It must be kept in mind that most of these programs are very new, and many people who have migrated to the United States within the past ten years may not have received the benefit of such educational opportunities as are now offered by the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

The children who migrate here without the benefit of education are quite at a loss. The American system places these children in classes with pupils of their own age, but since many of them are slight in body build (typical of Puerto Ricans), the Board of Education in New York City allows some to be placed one or two grade levels below their age group, for the purpose of learning to communicate in English with their peers.

\textsuperscript{43}Brown, op. cit., p. 359.

\textsuperscript{44}Matters, op. cit., p. 63.
Newly arrived children tend to be shy because of their lack of familiarity with the city. They seem timid toward school authorities because in Puerto Rico discipline is stricter.

This shyness and timidity does not constitute a threat, "but there is a danger that they will take advantage of this new found freedom,"\(^{45}\) by disruptive behavior or an "I-don't-care" attitude.

Mary Finocchiaro says, speaking of the essentials for the education of these youngsters in New York City:

> These children must be helped to acquire the necessary skills for them to live in an American community regardless of the amount of education they have received.\(^{46}\)

Chief among these essential skills is the fluent use of English. Few migrant children possess this skill. Nathan Glazer says,

> It is probably particularly hard for the adolescent boys to adjust to this situation, for the Puerto Rican's emphasis on masculine dignity makes it embarrassing to speak English with an accent.\(^{47}\)

As a defense mechanism, the boys tend to cling to their Spanish origin. They continue to speak Spanish and are often reluctant to learn English. Another way of retaining their masculinity is by taking a defiant attitude toward peers and parents.

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\(^{46}\)Ibid., p. 158.

The administration has developed various techniques for integrating and developing skills in Puerto Rican and other migrant children whose educational achievement is substandard. The curriculum for these students has been under intensive study. There is greater concentration on the English language; there are remedial speed-reading classes. Much of the time in language study is devoted to the improvement of communication skills. There is also an emphasis on the sciences. Sometimes English and the social sciences are merged to form a core program.

Everyday experiences are utilized for discussions. Charts are used in place of textbooks. Field trips are taken to familiarize the students with their surroundings. Practically every phase of the program is designed to acquaint students with the new language and the new culture and to encourage them to use both freely.

Evaluation of the program is difficult, for any tests given in English will require culture and communication skills which these students do not possess. It must be remembered that Puerto Rican youngsters cannot be expected to profit fully from a program designed primarily for English-speaking children. They must be evaluated in light of their experiences in their native country and by what they have experienced here in a new culture. If they are able to adjust themselves so that they can get along in this new environment, their educational progress can be regarded as satisfactory.
It is true that in some areas the entire student body is constantly being relocated. This change is caused by students moving into one school district and then moving to another. This constant moving has caused many emotional upsets. As a result there are many early drop-outs, either because the students find school too difficult or because they find it boring or too unimportant. Students who drop out often assume the wage-earning role, since the family may not have enough money to sustain itself. In many cases, girls leave school in order to help with household chores and the care of young siblings.

Teachers as well as students are affected by this continual moving around. Teachers are under great stress, for the number and composition of their classes are always changing. Children are moving in and leaving throughout the year; classes are always in a state of confusion. Discipline is very difficult. Competent teachers find this type of situation frustrating and often seek employment elsewhere. For this reason, in most of the schools where there is a significant number of Puerto Rican students, the teachers are usually young and in their first year of teaching.

The teacher's attitude is reflected by the students. Some of the teachers expect the students to be able to understand English the first time they arrive at school. In some instances, the teachers forget to take into consideration such items as the length of formal
study of English in Puerto Rico, the natural timidity caused by a
totally different environment, the length of time spent in a school,
and the eagerness of these students to use their new language.

Because of their own ignorance of Spanish, some of the
teachers feel insecure about teaching Puerto Rican children. Mixed
classes also put a strain on the teachers, since they find it necessary
to prepare two different types of lesson plans, one for the English-
speaking group and another for the Spanish-speaking children. In
addition, the teacher must prepare other lesson plans for the
different ability groups within the English- and Spanish-speaking
groups.

One of the most important devices for helping these children
was the hiring of bilingual teachers, who would "work with the class-
room teachers during the day and visit the homes of the students
during the afternoon or evening, to follow up on the children who
were beginning to display the results of culture changes." Even
though this method has been helpful, however, the availability of
teachers is still somewhat limited. In addition, funds are insufficient
for hiring the needed number of teachers to work with these students
at home as well as in school. The most essential factor is "careful
teacher selection and continual training for these teachers."

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48 Finocchiaro, op. cit., p. 47.

49 Ibid.
An interesting method of helping to acquaint students with their environment is the Buddy plan. This plan is already in use in New York City. Under this plan, a child who is already well adjusted to life in the United States becomes responsible for a newcomer and assists him to adjust to the best of his ability. The buddy makes friends with the newcomer and shows him the things he should know about the classroom; he listens to his problems, and, under teacher supervision, advises him as to what course of action should be taken. This plan is still in its beginning phases. It takes time and patience to train the buddy so that he is able to take the responsibility of helping a newcomer. This plan also requires that children who are to act as buddies must be well adjusted themselves. They are the children who may someday take the responsibility of caring for their own families, and will help their parents and newer friends to adjust.

In order to help alleviate the pressure placed upon the child under the Buddy system, parent-teacher organizations are now in operation. It has been found however, that some of the parents are either too busy to attend or are unable to understand the meaning of such organizations. Still, a beginning has been made, even though the participation of parents is not what the city would like it to be. In any case, the results of this culture conflict cannot yet be seen in their totality, least of all by these migrants who have lived such a short time in their new environment.
CHAPTER IX
CONCLUSIONS

It is impossible to foresee very clearly or completely the effect
which migration to the mainland will have on Puerto Ricans. It should
be possible to suggest some ways in which the American people can
help them adjust to the new culture and the new environment.

Perhaps the greatest need of the Puerto Ricans is to be
accepted as individuals. As long as they are rejected by other groups and
as long as they cannot find a pattern of society to conform to, they will
continue to form separate groups of their own, alien, defiant, and
confused.

One specific area in which help is needed is that of job
opportunities. Senior says, "from the viewpoint of New York's
economic future, facilitating the entrance of Puerto Ricans into its
industry is of vital importance."50

Another area in which immediate action is vital is that of
color prejudice. It is the opinion of the writer that unless the United
States moves quickly to end discrimination against people with dark

50Senior, op. cit., p. 45.
skins, one of two things will happen.

The first possibility is that the mulattoes, or colored Puerto Ricans, will identify themselves more closely with the Negroes. By banding together, both groups will gain strength for combatting color discrimination. The white Puerto Ricans will also identify more closely with their own group. This group may in turn identify and merge with other white ethnic groups in order to obtain more strength. The total result will be to intensify the color barrier.

The second possibility is a decline in color consciousness. If this occurs, the white and colored Puerto Ricans may be able to develop a "coherent community to which newcomers would be added and which would grow stronger through immigration. Its identity would thus be preserved over a much longer time." This second possibility is preferred by most of the Puerto Ricans. In this way, they will be able to cooperate to help remove the stigma of color discrimination, without losing their own cultural identity.

With color discrimination decreased, economic pressures will also be reduced, for more jobs will be available in this country for those Puerto Ricans who qualify. As the parents become better

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51Handlin, op. cit., p. 60.
able to adjust, the children will also adjust more easily, and the pressures of being "different" or "foreign" will be reduced. This will enable the children to find school a happier place, and with greater contentment in school, they will respond more readily to the educational process. Through education, they will acquire a broader knowledge of health rules, with the result that the poor health associated with slum living will tend to decrease. In short, eliminating color discrimination should have a beneficial effect on almost every phase of the migrant's lives.

To be sure, much is already being done to help these migrants. Studies show that they are being assimilated into the life of the city faster than any other previous group, partly through their own impressive efforts and partly because we are learning better how to help the process of adjustment. Both city and state agencies are helping to meet their special needs. Slum clearance and urban renewal are in progress, and seems to offer hope not only of reducing delinquency, but also of giving the Puerto Ricans as a group a greater feeling of equality and a chance to strive for better lives for themselves and their compatriots.

One thing seems certain: as long as the demand for labor continues to increase in this country and the conditions on the island
remain such that it is difficult for the people to sustain themselves, migration will continue to occur.

Social and economic conditions in Puerto Rico still seem to be impelling migration. The birth rate, life expectancy, the combination of high fertility and decreasing death rates will alone negate the island's excellent attempts at industrialization and increased living standards. Despite the increase of 334% since 1940 on the island's gross product, it is manifestly impossible for the government to anticipate the elimination of unemployment and under-employment.\(^\text{52}\)

It is true that as the economic level rises in Puerto Rico there will be more jobs available, and living conditions should be expected to improve. This does not mean, however, that jobs will be available for all those who desire them. On the whole, if we take into consideration the willingness of the people to move and their desire to find better employment opportunities for themselves and their children, as well as the quick, easy airline passage to New York City, it seems likely that there will continue to be a steady stream of migration from the island. In fact, this migration may even be essential to the welfare of the island. However, the rate of migration should fall as long as the island's economy continues to improve.

\(^{52}\)Graduate School of Public Administration and Social Services, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 63.
But we on the mainland can benefit from this migration too. The Puerto Ricans, with their rich cultural background, have much to offer us. Already, in New York City, they have introduced their Latin music onto the American scene.

Most Puerto Rican people have a love and feeling for music, and make it a part of their daily lives. Singing and dancing, by professionals and amateurs, goes on indoors and out of doors.53

Even with all the adjustments and hardships they face, Puerto Ricans are a happy and courageous people, and American life and culture and indeed enriched by their coming.

53Board of Education, City of New York, _op. cit._, p. 51.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


