

HIGHLIGHTS OF PORTO RICAN HISTORY

Porto Rico was discovered by Christopher Columbus on November 19, 1493, on his second voyage to the New World. The Spanish fleet at this time took anchorage in a bay on the west coast where it remained for two days. Columbus went ashore and took possession of the island in the name of his king, calling it San Juan Bautista.

Ships seem to have stopped there to take on water from time to time, but the next visit of importance was that of Juan Ponce (de Leon) in 1508. At that time, Ponce set out from Espanola, where he was governor, to investigate rumors of the existence of gold on "San Juan". There the native chief, Guaybana, received Ponce with feasting and entertainment and gave him his sister in marriage. In 1509, after having visited the gold mines with Guaybana, Ponce returned to Espanola, leaving some of his companions behind.

King Ferdinand, eager to promote the colonization of Porto Rico and the exploitations of its mines, appointed Ponce as first governor and sent men liberated from galleys and prisons to begin the settlement of the island.

Dissension arose almost immediately. Diego Columbus, as Admiral and Viceroy, deposed Ponce and appointed Jean Ceron as governor in his place. A royal decree of March 2, 1510, made Ponce permanent governor of the island, but in 1511 Ceron and his officers were reinstated and Ponce withdrew to Caparra. This settlement which he founded in the district of Bayamon, became the first capital of Porto Rico.

Many circumstances contributed to the slowness of colonization in Porto Rico, which early acquired a bad name. The conflicting orders of king and viceroy, the rivalry of various factions, revolts of the natives, incursions of the dreaded and warlike Caribs from other islands, frequent hurricanes and the evils of the system of "repartimientos" kept down immigration.

Before the arrival of the Spaniard, the native Boriquenos had led a peaceful, Arcadian existence, spending their time in games and in idle pastimes. Suddenly they were called upon to work in the mines and then they were distributed as slaves by the system of "repartimientos". From 1509 to 1510 more than 1,000 were distributed in this way and an additional 4,040 were enslaved in 1511. Many escaped to the mountains or to neighboring islands from which they led frequent attacks against the Spaniards.

The sullen but passive resistance of the Indians finally broke into open rebellion. Having first determined that the mighty Spaniard was actually mortal by experimenting on one Salcedo whom they held under water until he drowned, the natives, under their leader, Guabana, attacked de Soto Mayor and his men returning to Aguada, killing the entire band. When the news of the uprising reached Ponce, he led a surprise attack against the natives in which Guaybana and 200 of his men were killed.

Leaderless, the natives lost courage. Physical abuse, disease, and lack of food decimated their ranks, and in order to preserve them from extinction, attempts were made to ameliorate their condition. The Ordinances of Valladolid, passed in 1513, recommended the construction of four huts for every fifty natives; the donation of small plots of land to the natives for cultivation of the Yucca, their principal food; the teaching of Christian doctrines; and the protection of pregnant women from work in the mines.

But the abuses of the "repartimientos" continued. With the advent of each new governor, a redistribution of slaves was made to accommodate partisans of the new regime.

Father Las Casas and others who tried to alleviate the lot of the natives, encouraged the introduction of negroes, whom they considered providentially ordained to become slaves. Negro slaves were first brought to the island in 1510, by special permission. In 1513 their general introduction was authorized on payment of two ducats per head. The traffic in negroes became exceedingly profitable, but they remained and scarce in Porto Rico, and the lot of the native Boriquenos was not sensibly altered by their advent.

In 1519 an epidemic of smallpox wiped out a third of the native Boriquenos. At about the same time, a scourge of ants devastated vegetation, destroying their principal food supply, and severe hurricanes in 1515, 1526, and 1537 brought further privations.

On July 12, 1520, a decree was issued forbidding "repartimientos" in the future and recognizing the principle that the natives were born free. All slaves belonging to non-residents from the king down were to be set free. The total number thus liberated was 664.

Official reports from 1530 to 1536 emphasized the fact that the Indians were rapidly dying out, and in 1538, the Emperor, in order to protect them, decreed that all owners should construct stone or adobe houses. In 1543 an Order in Council ordained that all Indians still alive should be freed and permitted to loiter and idle "that they might increase and multiply". However, they were still considered slaves and a traffic in them was secretly carried on. The last mention made of the Indians was in a letter of Presbyter Ponce de Leon, dated 1582. He wrote to the

authorities: "At the time when this island was taken there were found here and distributed 5,500 Indians, without counting those who would not submit, and today there is not one left, excepting 12 or 15, who have been brought from the continent. They died of disease, sarampion, rheum, smallpox, and ill-usage, or escaped to other islands with the Caribs." Within less than a century, the whole race had been exterminated.

During the early part of the 16th century, fugitive natives and the warlike Caribs who inhabited Santa Cruz, San Eustaquio and San Cristobal, led repeated attacks against the island and kept down immigration. In 1514 Ponce de Leon had headed an expedition against the Caribs, without much success, however, and their reprisals became increasingly bold. Aguada and even the capital itself were attacked.

When news of fabulous riches in Peru arrived in the island, the danger of a general exodus became imminent, and Governor Lando wrote the king that Porto Rico, the key to the Antilles, was likely to be depopulated. In order to prevent this, Lando imposed the death penalty on whoever attempted to leave the island, and he had some flogged and the feet cut off others for attempted flight.

The defenselessness of Porto Rico was a matter of grave concern to the early inhabitants of the island.. As a result of Spain's wars with almost every nation in Europe, Porto Rico became subject to the frequent attacks of pirates and of French, Dutch and English freebooters. Caparra, because of its exposed position and unhealthful climate, was deserted in 1521 and the capital was moved to its present site on the island of San Juan. On August 12, 1528, San German, the most important town with the exception of San Juan, was plundered and burned by a French caravel, and a second landing was recorded in 1538. Many of its inhabitants sought shelter inland.

By 1553, trade was at a standstill. The gradual extinction of the natives and the exhaustion of gold together with the depredations of the Caribs and of French, English, and Dutch pirates, retarded the economic progress of the island to an alarming extent. The cultivation of ginger, cotton, cacao and indigo were abandoned. In 1550, the culture of sugar was introduced into Porto Rico and this brought a slight increase in prosperity.

In the meanwhile, San Juan was striving to arm itself against attack. The city's growth was fairly rapid. In 1529 it contained 120 houses. The cathedral, where rest the bones of Ponce de Leon, was completed and the Dominican convent begun. Not until 1533, however, was work on a fort begun, and this was not completed as a fort but as a governor's palace, in which capacity it has continued to serve up into the 20th century.

By 1555, after many complaints to the king as to the lack of ordnance, the rocky promontory at the entrance of the harbor was provided with a heavy battery. Eight pieces of bronze ordnance were planted on the Morro. Extensions to the fortifications were made from time to time. In 1584, the castle grounds of San Felipe del Morro were laid out at a cost of 2,000,000 ducats. Between 1599 and 1609 Forts Santiago and Canuelo were constructed. The circumvallation of the city, begun in 1630, was completed between 1635 and 1641. Fort San Cristobal was completed in 1771. These defensive works made the city almost impregnable from the sea.

Of all the English freebooters that preyed upon Spain and her colonies from the beginning of the war in 1584 to the signing of peace in 1604, Francis Drake was the greatest scourge and the most feared. Indeed, the terror which his name inspired prompted the citizens of Porto Rico to take great precautions against a possible attack. Accordingly, when, on Novem-

ber 22, 1595, Drake's fleet anchored between Goat's Creek and the Morro, San Juan was ready with a force of some 450 men, five frigates under Tello, and about 70 pieces of ordnance of various sizes. Opening fire on the fleet, the Spanish damaged Drake's flagship and killed Hawkins, Drake's second in command. During the night, the English succeeded in firing three of Tello's ships, but their own loss in launches and men was considerable and after an hour's hard fighting they withdrew. They returned the following day, but finding the island too well fortified, they withdrew permanently.

At the time, 2,000,000 pesos in gold and silver were stored in the fort, brought there by a Spanish ship en route to the peninsula from Havana. Drake is reported to have pulled his beard with vexation when this intelligence was brought to him.

In 1597 Lord George Cumberland entered the city by a land attack, but he failed to capture the fortifications, and he retired after an epidemic of dysentery and yellow fever had carried off 400 of his men in less than three months.

In 1598 a third incursion of the English was reported.

Peace between England and Spain was signed in 1604 and for a short period the island was freed from the attacks of privateers. But in 1621 hostilities recommenced. The Dutch, with the aid of the English and French, outfitted privateers to prey on Spanish commerce and possessions. On September 24, 1625, 17 ships under the command of Bowdoin Hendrick, appeared before San Juan. From the 26th to the 29th, the enemy landed and put up entrenchments. On the 30th their commander demanded the surrender of the garrison, but the Spanish governor, Juan de Haro, answered by requesting the immediate delivery into his hands of the entire Dutch fleet. On October 21, the Dutch burned over 100 houses in San Juan, including Bishop

Balbueno's palace and library. The city archives were also destroyed. A gallant sally of 200 men under Captains Amezquita and Botella, however, routed the enemy and on November 2 the Dutch abandoned the siege, leaving over 400 dead.

On April 17, 1797, Admiral Henry Harvey's fleet of 60 ships under Sir Ralph Abercrombie appeared before San Juan. At that time, however, the city was in a good state of defence, its wall having been completed. On April 18th, Abercrombie landed his troops and began besieging the city, but finding the fortifications too strong, he reembarked on May 1. Another English attempt to land in Porto Rico was thwarted in 1801.

For three centuries Porto Rico had been neglected by the home government. Depredations by corsairs, privateers and buccaneers had sapped her vitality and robbed her of commerce, except for a contraband trade with St. Thomas and Santa Cruz. Her laws were reactionary and little freedom in civic matters was permitted.

A need for the encouragement of settlement and a commerce was felt when the more urgent demands of war ceased. In 1780 Porto Rico had a population of nearly 80,000. At the beginning of the 19th century, the population was increased by South American refugees.

A decree of 1815 conferring rights and privileges of Spaniards on foreigners and making concessions as to taxes and offering land gratis to settlers resulted in an influx of foreigners of intelligence and industry.

The reactionary policy of the governors, however, caused many to become dissatisfied and to emigrate. Suffrage cost 25 pesos direct. Censorship of the press was maintained. Gambling and vice were encouraged to distract the people from government and politics.

On September 20, 1868, occurred the so-called Insurrection of Lares. 200 or 300 individuals at this time met at the coffee plantation of Mr.

Bruckman, an American, who provided them with knives and machetes. The force, led by Mr. Rosas, who announced himself commander-in-chief, marched against Lares, awakening its inhabitants with yells and cries of "Long live Puerto Rico independent! Down with Spain! Death to the Spaniards!" A declaration of independence was drawn up and the "Republic of Boriquen" was proclaimed.

As soon as the news of the disturbance reached San Juan, the governor sent Lt. Col. Gamar to investigate. The majority of the "insurgents" disbanded upon reflection, but Rosas and his remaining followers were taken prisoner. Bruckman, who resisted, was shot down. Of those arrested, 79 died of an epidemic while in jail, 7 were condemned and 6 pardoned.

By Article 1 of the proclamation of 1869 the inhabitants of Porto Rico were recognized as Spanish citizens and given representation in the Spanish Cortes. But laws and reactionary policies robbed the island of the actual advantages promised. Restrictions on coasting trade persisted, duty on Spanish and island produce was not the same, monopolies and abuses continued.

From 1873 to 1880 the resources of the island grew gradually less, the country's capital was being consumed without profit, credit became depressed and the most intelligent industrial efforts remained sterile.

To relieve the financial distress of the country a series of ordinances were enacted which culminated in the reform laws of March 14, 1894. But these reforms came too late. A definite movement toward self-government had developed and the royal decree conceding a large measure of autonomy to Porto Rico was signed on November 25, 1897. The outbreak of the Spanish-American War, however, prevented the realization of this new freedom. On

April 21, 1898, Governor-General Manuel Macias suspended the constitutional guarantees and declared the island in a state of war.

On May 10, 1898, the brief campaign which ended in the transfer of Porto Rico to the United States was begun by a shot fired by Angel Rivero, a captain of artillery. The shot, fired from San Cristobal, was directed against the Yale, a cruiser of Admiral Sampson's fleet.

On May 12th, the American fleet bombarded San Juan, but no landing was made for more than two months.

It was near Guanica on the southern shore that the Americans first invaded the island. The landing was effected on July 25, 1898, under General Nelson A. Miles with 3,400 troops. Reenforcements soon brought the total to 10,000 men. General Miles marched his army across the island in four columns and everywhere the Americans were well received.

Peace was accepted on August 12th. On October 18th, military government was established over the island. At noon on that day, American flags displaced the Spanish, and the transfer was signalized by a salute of 21 guns. 1,600 Spanish troops left the fortification of San Juan.

By the Treaty of Paris, signed on December 10, 1898, Spain surrendered Porto Rico to the United States unconditionally.

For two years the island was administered by a military governor. The Foraker Act, of May 10, 1900, created civil government in Porto Rico, but the island was given no definite status as a territory. Its citizens were merely "citizens of Porto Rico," entitled to the protection of the United States. A duty of 15% on commodities brought from the island was continued until March 1, 1902.

Under the Foraker Act, the executive authority was vested in a governor to be appointed by the president, subject to approval of the Senate, for a

period of four years. The Organic Act, giving greater native participation in government, was passed in the same year. The legislature was to consist of an Executive Council, appointed by the president, and a House of Delegates, chosen by the people. For seventeen years, however, Porto Ricans had the anomalous position of being attached to a republic without enjoying any form of citizenship. Not until the passage of the Organic Act (Jones Act) of March 2, 1917, was United States citizenship conferred on Porto Ricans. All residents over 21 years of age were given the franchise, without property qualifications. A greater participation in government was granted. Legislative power in Porto Rico was now vested in a legislature consisting of two houses, the Senate and House of Representatives, both of which were to be elected by the people. The legislature was to elect a commissioner to the United States Congress.

The governor was given the right to veto any bill passed by the legislature, but the latter could, by a vote of 2/3 majority in each house, pass over his veto. All laws enacted in Porto Rico were to be submitted to the United States Congress. This Act, by which Porto Rico became a Territory of the United States, although it conferred citizenship collectively on Porto Ricans, allowed them to retain the old status if they preferred. Only 288 so declared.

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