The Puerto Rican Culture of Resistance: National Liberation for Human Rights and Environmental Defense

As part of
the September 23rd Cultural Resistance

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Dedicated to all freedom fighters
of the past, present, and future
both known and unknown
Introduction: Healthy Foreign Relations and Responsible Work

There is a difference between healthy foreign relations and unhealthy, or destructive, foreign relations between nations. In the final analysis, it is better for the people within a national territory to take the greatest quantity and quality of responsibility for the work which sustains and develops their nation. This is true for three reasons: 1) as the people living in the national territory they have the ability to most intimately know what constitutes the most important national responsibilities according to the reality of national needs; 2) as the people living in the national territory they are in the best position to take on national work most immediately and as needed; 3) as responsible work is progressively undertaken the dignity and confidence of the people towards that work will also experience improvement and thereby allow further responsible work to be more positively undertaken, which results in 1) and 2) being constantly proven by the people in practice. Let it be noted that the first two of these reasons owe their logic to the people of the national territory being just that (the people of the national territory), while the third owes its logic to their also being humans with conscience.

Along with these reasons for maintaining the primacy of the people living within a national territory in terms of the responsible work necessary for authentic national development, goes the proposed thesis that when the greatest quantity and quality of responsible work within a national territory is undertaken by foreign elements, there is the existence of colonialism (an extreme form of unhealthy foreign relations). In terms of the struggle of the majority of the people on planet Earth for peace and progress, there can be no balance of leadership with regards to responsible work in a national setting where the influences of multiple nations are present, for once the people within a national territory lose control over the responsible work that affects their homeland and people, their national identity and dignity comes under immediate attack. This phenomenon of foreign relations within the context of a human struggle for peace and progress needs to be addressed not merely in theory, but in practice. Nevertheless, just as thought must always be accompanied and followed by practice, practice must always be accompanied and followed by thought. This writing, having presented the theory of the necessity of the peoples of all nations taking control of the greater quantity and quality of the responsible work within their territories that serves the purpose of the human struggle for peace and progress, will briefly document the history of Puerto Rico’s struggle to confirm this theory through cultural resistance—it will document the history, the creation and development, of the Puerto Rican
culture of resistance. This writing is also done in the hopes that, in presenting something to reflect and act upon, it will serve as a catalyst for further thought and action within a process of constant positive development among people. Finally, while using the case of Puerto Rico as the foundation for analysis, education, or the interplay of teaching and learning, will also be argued to be absolutely crucial to the process of human development, i.e. one of the most important forms of responsible work for national development.

**Puerto Rico’s Case of Colonialism**

Puerto Rico is a case of classic colonialism. This is true for two reasons: 1) it was illegal for the United States to accept the ‘giving’ of Puerto Rico by Spain in 1898 under the Treaty of Paris because just months before Spain had signed an autonomous charter that put such territorial decisions under the jurisdiction of a Puerto Rican autonomous government; 2) the greater quantity and quality of national work is under the authority of foreign American corporations and elements of the American capitalist ruling class. While 1) overpowers 2) in terms of establishing the colonial nature of the Puerto Rican experience, it is 2) that determines the state or intensity of the dialectical struggle between colonialism and anti-colonialism/national liberation.

As documented in United Nations reports, and elsewhere, under the current commonwealth government of Puerto Rico the United States maintains authority over defense, international relations, external trade, and monetary matters. In addition, the U.S. Congress holds ‘plenary’, or absolute, power over Puerto Rico. This is all while island-residing Puerto Ricans, despite being born with U.S. citizenship, cannot vote for the president/commander-in-chief of the U.S. Thus, it is clear that as a result of the July 25, 1898 military invasion of Puerto Rico at Guánica by the U.S. Navy, the greatest responsibility of national matters was taken by and placed under the control of a class of American capitalist-imperialists.

From the very beginning of American imperialism in Puerto Rico two of the most important aspects of any nation went under immediate attack: the educational system and the economy. Mandating the use of the English language in schools, and selecting textbooks commonly used stateside, American imperialism aimed to displace the national language and culture of Puerto Rico. Exchanging the Puerto Rican peso for the U.S. dollar at a rate devaluing native currency by 40%, and then buying the best lands in order to introduce an absentee-owned sugar industry that would replace the local subsistence agriculture where coffee supported the
livelihood of more than half the population, American imperialism effectively placed the majority of the Puerto Rican people in a situation of extreme poverty and misery. It was in this context, coinciding with the rise of capital driven, as opposed to labor driven, industry, that the Puerto Rican people began migrating to the U.S. in search of better and more opportunities. By the 1940’s the Puerto Rican colonial government, with the assistance of U.S. corporations, explicitly initiated the program known as Operation Bootstrap that essentially controlled the migration patterns already in place by securing contracted stateside work to island-residing Puerto Ricans. It was in this context of outright imperialist aggression towards the native forms of education and the native economy, which when combined with repression of anti-colonial freedom fighters and forced sterilization of Puerto Rican women is tantamount to genocide, that Puerto Rican communities in the U.S. began developing.

Within the U.S., Puerto Ricans face unique problems that are not present in their homeland. The clearest example of this is the extreme polarization of racial categories, for within the U.S. racial categories are often limited to black and white, whereas in Puerto Rico there are more than a dozen racial categories that can be used to classify an individual. Furthermore, whereas the Puerto Rican identity takes for granted the African as well as indigenous influences on Puerto Rican culture, within American culture the influences of these same groups are not as emphasized, nor as broadly, as they are among the Puerto Rican people. Indeed, it can be argued that Puerto Ricans have an older and more dynamic culture than “Americans” due to the nature of their culture.
Sugar cane workers resting, Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico - December 1941

Sugar worker's family near Yabucoa, Puerto Rico - 1941

Farmer’s family in Caguas, Puerto Rico - 1941
Puerto Rican public school under the Spanish regime – Pre-1898

Children at school in Puerto Rico - 1942

Three Kings' eve in tenant farmer's home in Guánica, Puerto Rico – 1935-1945
The Puerto Rican Culture of Resistance

The Puerto Rican identity arguably has its spark in the first Puerto Rican settlement created by Juan Ponce de León in 1508 on behalf of the Spanish. Established in Caparra as the island’s capital, it was moved to its current location in San Juan in 1521. Throughout that time the indigenous Boriken Taíno were enslaved and worked to death in the mines, fields, mountains, rivers, and seas. It is also well known that the misery faced by Boriken Taíno often pushed them to commit suicide, sometimes killing their children along with them rather than allow them to be raised in such oppression as slaves. Nevertheless, as the indigenous population of Puerto Rico rapidly declined, the Spanish further developed slavery on the island with the introduction of African slaves, who by 1520 numbered in the hundreds. Thus, by the time of the first permanent English settlement in America, the 1607 Jamestown, Virginia settlement, the islands of Puerto Rico were already experiencing a diverse and advanced intermingling of people within the context of Spanish colonialism. In fact, it was Puerto Rico that was used as a port for provisions by the three English ships on their way to establish the Jamestown settlement (the Godspeed, Susan Constant, and Discovery).

This history is not recalled to suggest or imply that the indigenous peoples of Puerto Rico became extinct in the early 1500s, for their culture and parts of their language remain, recent studies within the past decade proving that the mitochondrial DNA of all Puerto Ricans suggest an average of about 60% in indigenous influence. Our oldest ancestors to develop societies on the islands of Puerto Rico, the Boriken (they called themselves and the main island Boriken) were themselves the result of the encounter between the islands’ first Archaic settlers around 2000B.C. and the second wave of settlers coming from South America’s Orinoco around 400B.C. After developing a unique culture with elements that exist to today, like the canoe (canao), hammock (hamaca), maraca, güiro, hurricane (huracan), tobacco (tabaco), barbecue (barbacoa), and more, the indigenous people of Puerto Rico were by the time of Columbus only just beginning to develop the means for resistance to foreign invasion as a third wave of settlers, known as the Caribs, were just beginning to migrate from the smaller islands Southeast of Puerto Rico. It was in this context that the indigenous people greeted Columbus in 1492 (1493 in Puerto Rico) by declaring themselves as Taino, or Good/Noble People, to distinguish themselves from the recent Carib raiders.
The first humans to develop a new life and culture on the islands of Puerto Rico, the Taíno are the true beginnings of the Puerto Rican identity. Once they came under attack by Ponce de León and the foreign culture of the Spanish, the Taíno were immediately forced to place their lives, their culture, within the context of anti-colonial resistance. And this was not a simple task, for resulting from the encounter with such an alien culture was the belief in some Taínos that the Spanish were more than human, perhaps immortal gods on Earth. Nevertheless, three years after the first Spanish settlement at Caparra, Cacique (Chief) Urayoán ordered a Taíno to drown a Spaniard in the Río Grande de Añasco to put to the test the myth of Spanish immortality. Watching the corpse for a few days, waiting for the first stages of decomposition to appear, the Taíno of Puerto Rico convinced themselves of the mortality of the Spanish and immediately commenced the first major indigenous rebellions in 1511 Puerto Rico.

Although overpowered by the Spanish, the Taíno had successfully planted the seed of resistance within their culture. While many Taínos were killed or committed suicide during those first years of Spanish colonialism, many also fled to the mountains where they would establish maroon/cimarron societies. The African slaves that would later join these cimarron societies once in Puerto Rico and able to escape from the Spanish settlements, had also implanted resistance within their own cultures even before being placed on the boat that would take them across the Atlantic Ocean. Some kidnapped Africans no doubt developed resistance during their capture in Africa, on their way to the slave ship, on the ship, on their way off the ship, and off the ship, as well as every moment in between. Forced into slavery, their experience commanded the choosing between two forms of survival: acceptance of slavery or resistance to slavery—it was those slaves who resisted that joined the Taíno in developing a new culture of resistance in response to Spanish colonialism and that struggled for the human rights and independence of the people living on the land.

While the Taíno and Africans became the earliest developers of a new Puerto Rican culture of resistance for obvious reasons of colonization and enslavement, there was a third group, perhaps unexpected, that also contributed to the developing culture of resistance: the European. While it is true that poor European laborers lacking social, political, or economic power were among the colonists from the beginning, it is also true that over time the Spanish crown simply gave greater preference to Spanish born persons, ensuring injustice to and exploitation of these poor and, later, island born European laborers. In addition to the persons of
mixed descent (the first Spanish/European colonists did not bring women and often married natives), poor and island born Europeans became sympathetic to and cooperative with the resistance to colonial rule. This, mostly criollo (island born Europeans, mostly of Spanish descent), resistance was taking place very early in the colonization of Puerto Rico, and became most pronounced during the first quarter of the 19th century. Thus, from the beginning stages of Spanish colonialism in Puerto Rico, Taíno, African, and European peoples each contributed in their own ways to the development of a culture in Puerto Rico based on resistance to foreign domination.

These peoples established an anti-colonial, revolutionary process that would give birth to the Puerto Rican nation on September 23, 1868. It was on that day, after years of clandestine organizing and meetings throughout the island, that a group of islanders led by exiled Dr. Ramón Emeterio Betances staged a revolt intended to gain Puerto Rico’s independence from Spanish colonialism and to place power in the hands of the Puerto Rican people. The revolt had a broad network of support throughout the island and was most notable in the western mountain town of Lares, where the Free Republic of Puerto Rico would be first declared and the first flag of Puerto Rico unfurled. The act, which had a program created by Betances under the title “10 Commandments of Free men,” took on such significance with the people that Lares is to this day known as la Ciudad del Grito (the City of the Cry) in remembrance of the revolution that September 23, which is known as el Grito de Lares (the Cry of Lares). The city is also known as el Altar de la Patria (the Altar of the Fatherland) since it is where the Puerto Rican nation, the Puerto Rican spirit, was officially born in its open declaration. The nation declared on that September 23 is the Free Republic of Puerto Rico that lives on today whenever a Puerto Rican shouts “¡Viva Puerto Rico Libre!” (Long Live Free Puerto Rico!)

Although el Grito de Lares became a short-lived revolt soon quashed by forces loyal to Spain, the revolt succeeded in germinating the seed created by countless generations of Taíno, African, and European resistance to colonial rule over Puerto Rico—that is to say, it established the existence of a unique, multi-racial Puerto Rican identity that was founded on an intergenerational, interracial culture of resistance to foreign domination. The formal institution of slavery was abolished five years after el Grito de Lares in 1873, and just twenty-five years after that the U.S. Navy would invade Guánica in 1898, beginning the still existing military occupation of Puerto Rico by American imperialism. This means that, history considered, the
people that contribute/d to the Puerto Rican culture of resistance have not had the greater quantity and quality of responsible work (defense, international relations, external trade, monetary matters, etc.) in their nation for 390 years under Spanish colonialism (1508-1898), and 112 years under American colonialism (1898-2010). This context of colonialism creates a dynamic effect on the history of Puerto Rico, for it creates two strands of history: the foreign history of colonialism in Puerto Rico, and the peoples history of their Puerto Rican culture of resistance to colonialism. *El Grito de Lares* crystallized the patriotic spirit of Puerto Ricans that defends their unique identity through the culture of resistance made necessary by a continuing colonialism—that is the significance of September 23 since the year 1868.

*Ramón Emeterio Betances*
Depiction of Columbus and his men meeting Agüeybaná and his men

Statue depiction of Boriken drowning Spaniard Diego Salcedo in 1511 Añasco

Family of former slaves in Puerto Rico - 1898
The 10 Commandments of Free Men: the abolition of slavery, the right to vote on all impositions, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of trade, the right to assembly, right to bear arms, inviolability of the citizen, and the right to choose our own authorities.
Resistance to American Colonialism—Stage 1

Although there were advocates for the independence of Puerto Rico warning of American imperialism before 1898, such as Cuban patriot José Martí, it took a while after the illegal American military occupation for the Puerto Rican people to develop the kind of organization capable of realistically serving as the spearhead under American colonialism for the Puerto Rican culture of resistance. It was in 1930, when 39-year old Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos was elected president of the Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico, that the Puerto Rican people developed such organization. Under Don Pedro’s leadership, the Nationalist Party, with its cadets, nurses, and juntas in most of the island’s towns, became the vanguard of the Puerto Rican people’s struggle against colonialism and for independent, healthy development as human beings constituting a distinct nation of people. True to the September 23 culture of resistance, when asked about a political platform Don Pedro replied, “Our program, its general thesis, is to restore to the Puerto Rican people the moral intensity which they expressed in 1868…then they preached the revolutionary creed. We seek to transform that moral indignation into all the forms of resistance that will enable us to dispose of American colonialism.”

Very soon after Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos became president of the Nationalist Party, he began organizing and mobilizing it and the people of Puerto Rico using the example set by the patriots of 1868 Lares. The Nationalist Party, in deed, was able to stay true to the patriotic example of the Lares patriots while struggling within the context of American colonialism. This was clear when on October 30, 1950 Nationalists throughout the island staged an insurrection directly influenced by the leadership of Don Pedro. Nowhere was this insurrection more reminiscent of el Grito de Lares than in the mountain town of Jayuya, where a group of revolutionaries led by Blanca Canales seized power over the town and declared for the second time in history the Free Republic of Puerto Rico, unfurling the second revolutionary flag of Puerto Rico which is also the island’s current flag (the first revolutionary flag of Puerto Rico is now the flag of Lares). Nevertheless, as Don Pedro anticipated, the Nationalist Insurrection of 1950 was quickly quashed by American forces, which included National Guard planes that bombed the inaccessible mountain town of Jayuya in the first case where American citizens were air-bombed by fellow American citizens (the second case was an accidental one in 1958 Mars Bluff, South Carolina). In anticipation of this defeat, Don Pedro had planned other actions that
would make use of the strategic location of the then rapidly growing stateside Puerto Rican community concentrated mostly in New York.

Let it be known; the main motivation for Don Pedro’s commencement of the Nationalist Insurrection of 1950 was a law signed just a month prior by U.S. president Harry Truman. Public Law 600, signed on July 3, 1950, was meant to pave the way for the creation of a Puerto Rican constitution. Nevertheless, the text of the law makes clear that U.S. federal legislation would continue to apply, and U.S. federal courts would continue to operate, in Puerto Rico. Previous acts that established and defined the colonial relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico (such as the 1917 Jones Act and the 1900 Foraker Act) would remain unchanged—matters related to citizenship, immigration, coastwise shipping, commercial treaties, foreign relations, military activity, currency, and tariff policies would remain beyond the reach of Puerto Rican voters and their representatives within the colonial administration. In effect, P.L. 600, and the constitution it provided, dealt only with the structure of the insular Puerto Rican government and not at all with Puerto Rico’s actual relationship to the U.S. For these reasons, Pedro Albizu Campos ordered not only an insurrection to make clear the Nationalist Party and the Puerto Rican people’s opinion with regards to P.L. 600, but also an attack on the very person who signed it into law. This mission was to be headed by long-time Albizu follower Griselio Torresola, who was living in New York at the time for about two years. Once news of the commencement of the premeditated insurrection reached Griselio, he notified Oscar Collazo of the mission that would take place at the temporary residence of Harry Truman (while the White House was being renovated) on November 1, 1950.

Because a few Puerto Ricans chosen to assist in the attack on president Truman failed to show up on the morning of the commute to Washington D.C., Griselio and Oscar were by themselves expected to overpower secret service and other agents providing the president’s security. While they were clear on who was their target, the president of the U.S. who was solely responsible for the signing of a law that would perpetuate colonialism in Puerto Rico, they were even clearer on the reason for their action: the need to resist by any means necessary, and bring attention to, the colonial situation of Puerto Rico. Thus, it was resistance to colonialism that was the main motivation of their action, rather than some fanatical desire to assassinate the president. Nevertheless, somewhat owing to Oscar’s gun malfunctioning in one instance during the attack, the mission failed in reaching its target but was successful in bringing attention to their island’s
situation. Both Griselio and Oscar were shot in the attack, but only Oscar would survive, for Griselio, along with one secret service agent, would die on the scene. Oscar Collazo, after facing a death sentence, would later be released in 1979, after 29 years in prison, with other Puerto Rican nationalists under a commutation by then president Jimmy Carter.

The other Puerto Rican nationalists released in 1979, and another (Andrés Figueroa Cordero) in 1978, were also patriots ready to give their lives for the independence of Puerto Rico. Much like the Nationalist Insurrection of 1950 and attempted assassination of president Truman, Don Pedro had ordered their mission, this time in response to another injustice done to Puerto Rico by the U.S. government. After the charter of the United Nations went into effect in 1945, the United States, under Article 73(e) of the charter, was obligated to transmit to the UN information on the economic, social, and educational conditions of the territory of Puerto Rico since it consisted of a people that had not attained a full measure of self-government. This obligation, in fact, was the primary motivation for the U.S. government’s decision to pass P.L. 600 and create a constitution for the insular government of Puerto Rico. Thus, soon after P.L. 600 was passed in 1950, and a Puerto Rican commonwealth constitution was adopted on July 25, 1952 (the same day as the 1898 military invasion), U.S. officials made the necessary political maneuvers within the UN that would result in the 1953 decision to allow the U.S. to discontinue reporting on Puerto Rico. It was this sequence of events that led Don Pedro to select Lolita Lebrón, who had been living in New York since 1941, to lead an armed protest that would once again bring attention to American colonialism in Puerto Rico.

A female 34-years old, Lolita ordered Rafael Cancel Miranda to explore Washington D.C. for a strategic site that could be used for another armed protest. With a site selected, Lolita Lebrón would lead Rafael, along with Irvin Flores Rodríguez and Andrés Figueroa Cordero, onto a balcony in the chamber of the House of Representatives on March 1, 1954 where she would unfurl a Puerto Rican flag, shout “¡Viva Puerto Rico Libre!,” and begin the protest using handguns. While Lolita shot in the direction of the ceiling, and the gun of Andrés failed to go off, Rafael and Irvin’s shots succeeded in wounding five congressmen. Once again, while the selected targets were carefully chosen, members of the U.S. Congress that maintains absolute power over Puerto Rico, the reason for their armed protest was also very clear: the need to resist and publicize the colonial injustice being experienced by the Puerto Rican people. While the four patriots on that March 1st had decided to sacrifice their lives for the love of their country, they
each were able to walk away from the protest, although in handcuffs. Three of them would spend twenty-five years in prison and be released in 1979, whereas Andrés would be released after twenty-four years on humanitarian grounds due to his suffering from a terminal form of cancer.

Although the two events just mentioned, the Nationalist Insurrection of 1950 (which includes the attack on Harry Truman) and the 1954 attack on Congress, were in reaction to actions taken by the U.S. colonial government, they are nevertheless in agreement with the Puerto Rican culture of resistance—they are simply aspects of that culture’s notion of revolutionary justice. Such acts of resistance, of revolutionary justice, had precedent since the beginning of Don Pedro’s leadership of the Nationalist Party in the 1930s. One example is the 1936 assassination of U.S. appointed Puerto Rican Chief of Police, Colonel Francis Riggs, in retaliation for his direct involvement in the 1935 pre-meditated killings of four Nationalists on the University of Puerto Rico campus in Río Piedras. A second example is the attempted assassination of then Governor and former army major general Blanton Winship in 1938 by Ángel Esteban Antongiorgi, in retaliation for Winship’s involvement in the March 21, 1937 (Palm Sunday) killing of seventeen, and wounding of more than two hundred, unarmed protestors in what became known as the Ponce Massacre. Although the Puerto Rican culture of resistance is comprised of a history with a large amount of male involvement, women have nevertheless been important from the very beginning.

When the first free republic of Puerto Rico was declared during 1868’s Grito de Lares, the first revolutionary flag that was used was sewn by Añasco native Mariana Bracetti, who also helped to organize secret cells for the impending revolt. Also inspired to create during those revolutionary times, Lola Rodríguez de Tió would compose the revolutionary anthem La Borinqueña in support of the 1868 patriots. The 1954 patriot Lolita Lebrón has already been written about, as has Blanca Canales, the leader of the 1950 insurrection in Jayuya, but lesser known are Doris Torresola, sister of Griselio Torresola, and Carmen María Pérez who were present during day one of Don Pedro’s two day defense against a police attack on his home in 1950 after the outbreak of the insurrection. Doris would again defend Don Pedro, with fellow Nationalist patriots Isabel Rosado and Carmen María Baez, gun in hand, when police attacked his home in San Juan after the 1954 attack on Congress. While women certainly played major roles in the creation and development of the Puerto Rican culture of resistance, they were also certainly vulnerable to colonial repression; Isabel Rosado herself spent fifteen years in prison for
her involvement in the defense of Pedro Albizu Campos’ life. Even though writing the history of colonial repression is not the intention of this writing, it is nevertheless important to be aware of the historical tactics used to repress the Puerto Rican culture of resistance, because the interplay, or dialectic, between repression and resistance eventually aided in the development of the culture of resistance to its current stage.

Pedro Albizu Campos

Raimundo Díaz Pacheco commanding the Nationalist Cadets - December 15, 1947

Cadetes de la República in Lares - September 23, 1949
Policewoman holding pistol to female nationalists in San Juan – October 30, 1950

Jayuya combatants Reinaldo Morales and Egmidio Marin – October 30, 1950

Blanca Canales and Mario Irizarry under arrest – October 30, 1950
Oscar Collazo in police custody - 1951

Irvin, Rafael, Lolita, and Andrés in police custody – March 1, 1954

Carmen Pérez being placed into custody – October 30, 1950
American Repression of Puerto Rican Resistance

From the very beginning of the American military occupation of Puerto Rico in 1898, anti-colonial fighters were repressed. One of the earliest examples of this was the 1898 arrest of José Maldonado Román who led a small band of resistance fighters against the invading forces in Guánica under his alias of Águila Blanca. During the first two years of the American occupation, in fact, the island was ruled under a military government. Because of the nature of the purely military occupation in those first two years, resistance fighters were not only imprisoned but also forced into exile, most choosing New York City where at the time of the invasion there was already an established Puerto Rican community with strong ties to the Cuban Revolutionary Party that had also been established there prior to 1898. It was after those two years of military government that the U.S. decided to impose a civilian government where nearly all of the major officials, including the governor, were directly appointed by the U.S. president and congress. Once the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico was under the leadership of Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos, the first significant waves of colonial repression, in addition to new forms for such, began to be applied by the U.S.

The Nationalist Party, as the vanguard organization with the aim of national independence, became the number one target of government repression. The Río Piedras Massacre of 1935 mentioned earlier, in which four Nationalists were killed by police, was the earliest clear-cut example of violent repression directed towards the Nationalists. Occurring just after Don Pedro led two successful island-wide general strikes in 1933 and 1934 that essentially brought the island to a standstill, with the second general strike being initiated by sugar cane workers whose industry was among the most profitable for American corporations, it is clear why the colonial government resorted to such repression, in order to prevent such events in the future. The intent of the colonial government and police force to kill Nationalists if possible was made clearer once Elias Beauchamp and Hiram Rosado assassinated the Chief of Police, Colonel Francis Riggs, responsible for the Río Piedras Massacre, for once arrested, rather than facing trial, Elias and Hiram were killed once they arrived at the police station. It was during this time, and for years after, that the discipline of Nationalist Party members under the leadership of Don Pedro would earn them the nickname “Los Decididos” (“The Decided Ones”) by the people, who recognized their willingness to give their lives to a set of principles based on the just struggle of peoples to self-determination and independence.
The leadership and key members *Los Decididos* also earned the increased attention of the colonial government that, if unable to kill them, would just as quickly send them to prison. This happened when in 1936 Don Pedro and other Nationalist leaders, including Juan Antonio Corretjer, Clemente Soto Vélez, and six others, by the combined efforts of a federal grand jury and the U.S. Federal District Court, were arrested and sentenced for seditious conspiracy, or conspiring to overthrow the government of the United States (Rafael Ortiz Pacheco would evade arrest by escaping to the Dominican Republic). Transferred with his comrades in 1937 to the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, Don Pedro would finally be paroled in 1943, after which he would reside in New York until his 1947 return to Puerto Rico. During the initial period of imprisonment in Puerto Rico, shortly before the Nationalist leaders were transferred to Atlanta, Nationalists organized the tragic Palm Sunday protest demonstration in support of their imprisoned leaders where police again showed their resolve to go as far as killing Nationalists in order to repress their movement.

As a result of the conditions of confinement he faced in Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, Don Pedro’s health gradually deteriorated to the point where he suffered a heart attack, which in fact became the motivation for the prison system to parole him to New York’s Columbus Hospital in 1943. He would stay there for two years, leave the hospital still almost paralyzed, and finish his parole term there in New York City. He returned to Puerto Rico in 1947 only to face a greater degree of repression, where police cars were stationed outside his home day and night taking pictures of all visitors, and where police agents would follow him, and his family, wherever they go. Nevertheless, Don Pedro continued the struggle with even more commitment, within three years organizing the short-live second declaration of the Free Republic of Puerto Rico during the Nationalist Insurrection of 1950. While a main reason for the insurrection was the passing of P.L. 600, another law passed in 1948, Law 53, also known as *La Ley de la Mordaza* (The Gag Law), was a law so repressive that it also influenced the inevitability of nationalist resistance. Making it illegal to display a Puerto Rican flag, to sing a patriotic tune, to talk of independence, and to fight for the liberation of Puerto Rico, the law was a calculated tool for repression that served as the basis for the eventual arrest after the Nationalist Insurrection of over 1,000 Nationalists as well as general independence activists and Communists not connected with the insurrection.

Pedro Albizu Campos, as the leader of the Nationalist Party, was subjected to the most extended amount of repression in the form of torture through the conditions he was subjected to
while in prison. The torture he experienced during his second term in prison, having been charged under the Gag Law after the 1950 insurrection, was even more horrific than the misery he faced during his first term from 1936-1943. After experiencing ongoing, 24-hour attacks on his body from a strange light outside his cell that left burns all over, and after applying the understanding he received from his Doctorate in Chemistry at the University of Vermont, Don Pedro deduced that he was being subjected to high amounts of concentrated radiation. This claim would be later confirmed when an expert doctor on radiation from Havana, then president of the Cuban Cancer Association Orlando Daubry, examined his burns. Unwilling to compromise his principles and accept a conditional release, Don Pedro would be forcefully released from prison in 1953 due to the state of his health, only to return after the March 1, 1954 attack on Congress. He would then suffer from an embolism and cerebral thrombosis while in prison, leaving him with an almost fully paralyzed right arm and leg, and an inability to speak and even recognize people. Back and forth between the hospital and prison, Don Pedro’s health from this point would continue to deteriorate until he finally passed away on April 21, 1965 just four months after his final release from prison again on the grounds of his health.

Although during the years of Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos’ nearly constant incarceration and failing health, the outspokenness, militancy, acts of armed protest, and insurrectionary methods of the Nationalist Party influenced then Director of the FBI J. Edgar Hoover, in August of 1960, to make the decision to increase the repression faced by independence advocates. Worried about the “boldness” of so-called subversive groups, Hoover was “considering the feasibility of instituting a program of disruption to be directed against organizations which seek independence for Puerto Rico through other than lawful, peaceful means.” Hoover made clear to his subordinates that, “in considering this matter you should bear in mind that the Bureau desires to disrupt the activities of these organizations and is not interested in mere harassment.” The “dirty tricks” used (this description was given in 1978 by an aide to then president Jimmy Carter after surveying volumes of FBI files) included enlisting informant disrupters, spreading false stories, putting offensive cartoons in newspapers, beating suspects during interviews, and more. When a plebiscite scheduled for 1967 and gubernatorial election for 1968 was suspected to possibly be dominated by a new alliance between the Partido Independentista Puertorriqueña (PIP), who advocated independence but through the electoral arena established by the colonial administration, and the Movimiento Pro-Independencia (MPI), which was a more militant group,
Hoover directed the FBI to focus attention away from the so-called subversive groups and towards the PIP, inserting within that organization a number of informant disrupters. Thus, government repression of the Puerto Rican culture of resistance that fights for national liberation was widespread, the FBI going as far as directly influencing Puerto Rico’s 1967 colonial plebiscite and 1968 gubernatorial election.

*Elias Beauchamp giving a military salute shortly before being assassinated*

*José Maldonado Román, aka Aguila Blanca - 1906*
Clemente Soto Vélez, Juan Antonio Corretjer, and Pedro Albizu Campos in custody

Beginning of the Ponce Massacre – March 21, 1937

Pedro Albizu Campos suffering in prison from radiation torture
Resistance to American Colonialism—Stage 2

The FBI, as a single organization, influenced not only the workings of the colonial administration and groups that integrated their advocacy for independence within that colonial administration, but it also influenced the development of the culture of resistance that has its roots in the cimarron and other societies of anti-colonial resistance that crystallized into a single Puerto Rican culture in 1868. Future generations of Puerto Rican patriots would draw lessons from the struggle waged against U.S. colonial-imperialism by the Nationalist Party under Pedro Albizu Campos. Seeing the large number of arrests of patriots after the insurrection of 1950, and conscious of the killings of Nationalists who provided such a brave example to the Puerto Rican people, future patriots that continued the revolutionary culture developed in Puerto Rico would adopt clandestinity as a measure to ensure their continued ability to resist. The lessons drawn in blood over the years pointed in the direction of smaller, tighter organization to prevent infiltration by colonial agents, as well as clandestinity so as not to identify targets for such agents of repression. One of the first organizations to use such methods of struggle, the Comandos Armados de Liberación (CAL), would announce its aims in February 1968.

With the aims of “national liberation of Puerto Rico through armed action; an end to the monopolistic control of industry and commerce in Puerto Rico by U.S. firms; and the expulsion of all U.S. firms from Puerto Rico”, CAL, within their first week, conducted eleven bombings of the Shell Oil pipeline, U.S. banks and department stores, and other such targets. Within the first year, CAL would vow to “execute one Yankee” for each Puerto Rican jailed for refusing the draft into the Vietnam War. When Antonia Martínez Legares was killed on March 4, 1970 during an anti-ROTC demonstration at a University of Puerto Rico campus, the next day CAL executed two U.S. Marines in an act of revolutionary justice reminiscent of the days of the Nationalist Party. While staying true to the national liberation struggle that defines the Puerto Rican culture of resistance, CAL also made a clear effort to focus more on conducting actions that were in support of broader mass struggles occurring at the time. Thus, while anywhere from 30,000 to 100,000 Puerto Ricans marched in the streets on September 12, 1971 to protest a U.S. governors conference in San Juan, CAL was setting off a bomb in the hotel that the conference was taking place. It became clear that a new form of resistance, a new stage in the struggle, was emerging and which was nevertheless directly influenced by the tradition begun in 1868 and continued by Albizu Campos under American colonialism.
Within the United States, Puerto Ricans lived in long-established communities with their own history of struggle, and, thanks to back and forth migrations made easy by jet planes and an American citizenship, maintained strong ties to Puerto Rico. In cities like New York and Chicago, Puerto Ricans were increasingly fighting for social justice to the point where by the 1960’s they had a rich history of struggle that included rent strikes, labor strikes, demonstrations against police brutality, organizing for community control of schools as well as authentic bilingual and cultural education, in addition to demonstrations in acknowledgement of events occurring in Puerto Rico. No doubt, this history of struggle is the result of Puerto Ricans facing (and continuing to face) some of the worst conditions in the U.S. alongside ethnic categories such as Native Americans and African Americans. One of the more militant stateside organizations that came out of these conditions and struggles, and which sought the independence of Puerto Rico, were the Young Lords of both New York and Chicago. Influenced by the classic figures of the Puerto Rican culture of resistance, such as Ramón Emeterio Betances and Pedro Albizu Campos, the Young Lords created programs to meet the basic needs of their communities, all the while using a militant approach to public appearances, including the armed takeover of buildings (such as the second People’s Church). The Young Lords, both in New York and Chicago, faced many forms of government and police repression, including killings, as was the case in September 1970 when Vietnam Vet and Young Lord Julio Roldán was beaten to death by prison authorities in downtown Manhattan’s “Tombs” prison complex.

During these years of struggle and repression in New York and Chicago, a group of student activists, housing organizers, educators, and other such activists, who were becoming increasingly committed to the historic patriotic struggle for the national liberation of Puerto Rico, had succeeded in organizing a clandestine revolutionary group that would declare itself by means of a communiqué on October 26, 1974. In the communiqué, the Fuerzas Armadas de la Liberación Nacional (FALN) would take credit for the September 28 bombings of the Newark, New Jersey Police Headquarters and City hall, as well as the firebombing of five New York City banks the same day as the communiqué (October 26). Carried out in commemoration of the October 30, 1950 Nationalist Resurrection, the FALN also wished to support a mass demonstration at Madison Square Garden in support of Puerto Rican independence to be held the very next day, October 27 (where over 20,000 would attend). The FALN would continue to conduct its armed struggle with the purpose of defending the Puerto Rican people from
exploitation and injustice, providing a means for revolutionary justice and resistance, throughout its most active period in the United States between 1974 and 1983.

The most active of the Puerto Rican clandestine revolutionary groups, between 1974 and 1983 the FALN would assume responsibility for more than 120 separate bombings. On January 24, 1975 their bombing of Fraunces Tavern near Wall Street in New York City resulted in the death of four executives of great financial empires—this action was in retaliation to the January 11th CIA-ordered bombing in a Mayagüez, Puerto Rico restaurant that killed two Puerto Rican independence advocates, Angel Luis Chavonnier and Eddie Ramos, a child six years of age, and that also maimed ten civilians. On August 3, 1977 the FALN’s bombing of a Mobil Oil Company office in New York resulted in the death of one person—the action was taken against this corporation, according to the August 3 communiqué, because of their “underhanded and barbaric tactics to explore and exploit our natural resources, especially land and off-shore petroleum and minerals such as copper and nickel.” Of the more than 120 bombings during the nine-year period between 1974 and 1983, there were the five-abovementioned deaths resulting from FALN actions, showing their ability and desire to focus on attacking symbolic targets, respecting human life as much as possible, and issuing communiqués (see Appendix A) in order to bring attention to the national liberation struggle of the Puerto Rican people against colonialism and imperialism.

During this period, going back to the 60s, Puerto Rico would also see a marked growth in its clandestine revolutionary activity. Besides CAL, some of the organizations to appear were the Movimiento Independentista Revolucionario Armado (MIRA), Comandos Revolucionarios del Pueblo (CRP), Fuerzas Armadas de Resistencia Popular (FARP), Organización de Voluntarios por la Revolución Puertorriqueña (OVRP), and, the most active one, the Ejército Popular Boricua-Macheteros (EPB). The EPB made itself known on October 1, 1978 when two of its combat units, in conjunction with OVRP combatants, stole from a government explosives warehouse in Manatí 500 pounds of ammonium nitrate, 53 dynamite cartridges, 112 iremite cartridges, 988 detonating capsules, and 17,500 feet of detonating cable, leaving behind only two bags of ammonium nitrate that they found to be in bad condition (see Appendix B). Due to the sheer quantity of the materials seized, the highly planned operation was a bold and courageous act. The abovementioned clandestine revolutionary groups all performed a number of bold
revolutionary acts, and whereas the FALN operated exclusively in the U.S, these groups operated almost exclusively in Puerto Rico.

While all of the abovementioned groups targeted U.S. military installations, police stations, federal agencies, U.S. banks, and department stores, among other sites upholding colonialism in Puerto Rico, they also targeted members of the armed forces and police establishment. In April 1986, eight years after two independentistas, Carlos Soto Arriví and Arnaldo Darío Rosado, were lured into a trap by snitch Alejandro González Malavé and killed by police on July 25, 1978 in Cerro Maravilla, patriots of the OVRP assassinated Malavé. On December 3, 1979, a month after the November 11 torture and killing of Vieques activist Angel Rodríguez Cristóbal in the Florida prison he was transported to, the EPB, OVRP, and FARP conducted a joint armed assault on a U.S. Navy bus carrying uniformed personnel, killing two and wounding nine. Nevertheless, two of the most well known clandestine actions taken are attributed to the EPB. On January 12, 1981 eleven men and women of the EPB-Macheteros, after about eight minutes of work, set explosives on eleven National Guard planes in San Juan’s military-only area that were to be used in El Salvador’s repressive war against the revolutionary Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN), successfully blowing them up shortly after midnight and causing roughly $45 million dollars in damage. On September 12, 1983 Victor Manuel Gerena would take $7.1 million dollars in cash from the local West Hartford, Connecticut branch of Wells Fargo that he worked in with the help of members of the EPB-Macheteros.

It should be noted that while some of these actions were in reaction to acts of repression and murder by police and government forces, the great majority of these actions were taken in support of ongoing struggles of the time in addition to the ongoing national liberation struggle of the Puerto Rican people. Before the 1979 release of the five Nationalist prisoners in jail since 1950 and 1954, many of the communiqués by these organizations taking responsibility for specific actions called for the release of those political prisoners. In fact, Puerto Rico clandestine revolutionary groups were responsible for the 1979 escape from New York’s Bellevue Hospital Prison Ward of prisoner-of-war William Guillermo Morales who was captured in 1978 Queens, New York after a bomb he was constructing malfunctioned and blew off his hands. Like Morales, this new generation of clandestine-minded Puerto Rican patriots would soon find themselves prisoners of colonialism, with ten members of the FALN being arrested (along with
Alfredo Mendez who would later turn snitch) on April 4, 1980 in Illinois, another member, Oscar Lopez Rivera, being arrested on May 29, 1981 in Illinois, and another four FALN members being arrested on June 29, 1983 in Illinois. In connection with the 1983 Wells Fargo robbery in Connecticut, FBI agents arrested 14 Macheteros (12 in Puerto Rico) in a massive arrest operation on August 30, 1985. While a number of all those arrested got all charges dropped, the 16 convicted of seditious conspiracy and other charges would spend many years in prison: 11 FALN members would be released in 1999, Macheteros Juan Segarra Palmer and Antonio Camacho Negrón would be released in 2004, former FALN member Haydée Beltrán Torres would be released in 2009, and FALN member Carlos Alberto Torres would be released in 2010—of those arrested between 1980 and 1985, only Oscar Lopez Rivera remains in prison.

The development of the culture of resistance that these clandestine revolutionary organizations helped to realize was openly supported by a considerable number of activists working in the public arena. The most prominent of these public supporters, who also served as the movement’s direct link to the spirit of Don Pedro Albizu Campos and the Nationalist Party he led, was former Don Pedro disciple and founder of La Liga Socialista Puertorriqueña Juan Antonio Corretjer. Responsible for developing the concept of prolonged people’s war that many of the clandestine organizations created after the 60s would adopt, Don Juan, also the National Poet of Puerto Rico, would become known as el portavoz de las organizaciones clandestinas (the spokesperson of the clandestine organizations). Passing away in 1985, Don Juan had influenced the adopted program of this new generation of patriots: struggling for the national liberation of Puerto Rico by conducting clandestine armed struggle in direct support of mass mobilizations of the people based on their revolutionary needs and aspirations. Public supporters of the clandestine revolutionary groups would often face prison time, some even being charged with contempt for refusing to collaborate with Federal Grand Juries investigating such groups, as was the case with Norberto Cintrón Fiallo and Julio Rosado who spent a total of about 6.5 years in prison for civil and criminal contempt between 1977 and 1983. In any case, the interplay between mass demonstrations and clandestine armed struggle brought a number of victories to the Puerto Rican people in those years, including the 1979 release of the five political prisoners. The climate of Puerto Rican armed resistance to colonialism and the American capitalist-imperialist enterprise no doubt destroyed in many Puerto Ricans the myth of their own inferiority, but the decline of such resistance in the 1990s would pave the way for the victories
obtained by later strategic and mass demonstrations, such as the 1999 release of the 11 prisoners-of-war and the victories to come in the 21st century.

Young Lords Party members conducting a march

Logo of the FALN

Planes destroyed by the EPB-Macheteros
Machetero disguised as a Three King gives away toys after the 1983 robbery

Filiberto Ojeda Ríos, deceased Comandante of the EPB-macheteros

Carlos Soto Arríví and Arnaldo Darío Rosado
Navy police breaking up interfaith service in Vieques, dragging Angel Rodríguez Cristóbal onto the Navy boat

Protestors camping in Vieques on hammocks hanging from tank barrels

Macheteros Luis Colón Osorio, Filiberto Ojeda Ríos, Orlando González Claudio, Ivonne Meléndez, Juan Segarra Palmer and Luz Berrios
William Morales with Assata Shakur in exile - Cuba

Ricardo Romero, Julio Rosado, Maria Cueto, Steven Guerra and Andres Rosado before going to prison for contempt of a New York grand jury – 1983

Juan Antonio Corretjer
The Puerto Rican Struggle In The 21st Century

The Puerto Rican struggle has faced a number of victories as well as setbacks to those victories in the 21st century. The 20th century ended with two significant events: the August 1999 presidential pardon of 11 FALN members, and the April 1999 killing of 35-year old David Sanes Rodriguez. The killing of David Sanes, a Vieques island native working as a civilian security guard at the U.S. Navy’s Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Facility in Vieques when two 500-pound bombs went off target, was the driving force for mass demonstrations and popular protests that would produce one of the greatest victories of the Puerto Rican struggle for peace. Intending to use Puerto Rico as a military base to control popular movements in the Caribbean and Latin America, trade through the Panama Canal, in addition to threats posed by the beginning Second World War, the U.S. government under Franklin Roosevelt began in 1939 to turn Puerto Rico into a kind of Pearl Harbor of the Caribbean. Countless numbers of families would be forcefully moved from their lands in the eastern part of the main island, and from the islands of Culebra and Vieques. In the eastern part of the main island, in the town of Ceiba, the Roosevelt Roads Naval Station would open in 1943 and eventually become the largest naval base in the world, closing in 2004. Hundreds of acres in Culebra were used for bombing exercises in preparation for World War II, continuing after the war and ending only after popular protests forced the Navy to end these exercises in 1975, the Navy then moving them to Vieques. It is the story of Vieques, known to sailors as the “university of the sea”, which deserves some attention if the victories of the 21st century are to be fully grasped.

By 1943 the largest employer on Vieques, the Playa Grande Sugar Mill, was closed due to Navy expropriations, and by 1950 the U.S. Navy had effectively took over two-thirds of the island from its original inhabitants and was already two years into training exercises that would continue for decades. Split into three sections, the western section of Vieques was used for weapons storage, the eastern section for bombing exercises, and the middle section for the people of Vieques, turning the island from a largely sugar economy into a theatre of war. Forced to let this happen, Vieques residents became accustomed to hearing daily plane flyovers and the sounds of the bombs they dropped, which averaged more than 3,400 explosions a month. With personnel not only from the U.S. Navy but also all NATO forces, training on Vieques would increase in preparation of all major and most covert wars. Besides testing regular explosives, those training on Vieques would also test chemical weapons, such as Agent Orange, before their
actual use in war. The first considerable wave of protests in 1978 being unable to bring an end to this activity, the 1999 killing of David Sanes, who became known as the martyr of Vieques, proved enough to bring people together to secure an end to the destructive use of the beaches and waters of Vieques. Using old and new tactics of struggle, such as camp-ins on the bombing range and civil disobedience at the UN (such as that organized on December 7, 1999 by the New York City David Sanes Brigade), the results came when on May 1, 2003 the U.S. Navy handed over all its lands on Vieques to the U.S. Department of the Interior, ceasing their training and testing. After some 60 years the people of Vieques, the people of Puerto Rico, and their international allies, had finally succeeded in stopping the destruction of Vieques by the largest military in the world.

Although an immense victory of the people’s power to organize in its own defense, the ceasing of Navy bombings and trainings in Vieques created a new stage in the Vieques struggle—60 years of non-stop bombings have left not only unexploded bombs in the beaches and waters, but also areas too polluted for human use and a level of contamination that has given the people of Vieques one of the highest rates of cancer, diabetes, liver disease, and hypertension in the world. While the exploitation and destruction of the natural resources of Puerto Rico in general is remarkable, the current conditions of Vieques specifically justify the need for the Puerto Rican culture of resistance to very seriously take into account the clean-up and defense of the environment on many levels. The destruction of Vieques by the hands of American imperialism has made the island eligible for the label of “one of the most highly contaminated sites in the world,” according to Dr. John Wargo, a specialist on the effects of toxic exposures to human health. Thus, while the 21st century brought the Puerto Rican people an incredible victory over American imperialism in the ceasing of Navy bombings, the century has also brought more clarification to the needs of the Puerto Rican national liberation struggle.

Indeed, the Puerto Rican people of the 21st century are not only facing the continued miserable state of Vieques and its residents but also, despite the large decrease in clandestine revolutionary activity, continued repression and attacks against patriots. For example, the 137-year anniversary of el Grito de Lares, September 23, 2005, saw the tortured killing of Machetero leader Filiberto Ojeda Ríos, shot by FBI agents who allowed him to bleed to death. The most recent martyr of the Puerto Rican culture of resistance, Filiberto embraced clandestinity as a necessary strategy within the context of revolutionary armed struggle, openly resisting the
invading force of the FBI only when they attacked his home. His funeral was one of the largest in Puerto Rico’s history, proving his broad popularity among the people, who in turn understood his patriotic dedication to them and the national liberation of their patria. Situating the struggle of the Macheteros clearly within the framework of international law that recognized the legitimacy of the national liberation struggle of anti-colonial forces, Filiberto, especially in death, became a recognized martyr who served in the Puerto Rican struggle. His murder, and events that happened afterward, showed the clear intentions of the government to repress remaining and prospective members of the Macheteros (or any Puerto Rican revolutionary organization), partially fueled by the fact that individuals suspected in the 1983 Wells Fargo robbery were/are still wanted.

The year 2008 would begin in January with three of what would eventually become, by May, four Puerto Ricans being given a subpoena to testify in front of a Federal Grand Jury investigating links, mostly in New York, to the Macheteros. While three of the subpoenas would eventually phase out, the act on behalf of the U.S. government put the Puerto Rican independence movement on further guard, taking time away from projects in order to focus deserved time on defending the grand jury resisters (one of those given a subpoena, Julio Pabón, Jr., would cooperate with the grand jury). Despite this setback, the independence movement would continue to mobilize around specific issues, with an attempt in New York, Chicago, and other cities to establish fundraising projects that would be able to give consistent and substantial support in the form of money to the two prisoners-of-war then incarcerated (Carlos Alberto Torres and Oscar Lopez Rivera), any future political prisoners, as well as their families. Nevertheless, the movement would face yet another setback in February 2008 when, out of their commitment to capture all remaining fugitives of the Wells Fargo robbery, FBI agents captured 20-year fugitive Avelino González Claudio in Puerto Rico, who remains in prison today. Thus, in 2008 the federal government continued their repression by jailing Puerto Rican revolutionaries, and issuing grand jury subpoenas, the second being a tactic first used in 1936 with the Nationalist Party and again between 1976 and 1990 while investigating the FALN.

More recently, mass movements in Puerto Rico have developed a very respectable amount of strength. On October 15, 2009, in response to statehood governor Luís Fortuño’s prior firing of more than 20,000 public sector workers, labor organizations would organize a successful island-wide general strike. The strike, which saw the participation of over 250,000
people, consisted of mass demonstrations that blocked major highways in San Juan, closed the largest mall in the Caribbean (La Plaza de las Américas) for the day, stopped incoming and outgoing boat traffic in Vieques (thanks to local fisherman who used their boats to form blockades), and more, in addition to a protest rally held in New York City. Since Luís Fortuño is still governor of Puerto Rico, and still continues to plan and make decisions contrary to the majority of the Puerto Rican people and workers, labor organizations are still at attention should the moment arise to commit themselves to further necessary actions against the colonial government. While this is an incredible victory of the people, of the Puerto Rican workers in particular, another group that was present in large numbers during the mass demonstrations on October 15, 2009 would months later achieve an even more remarkable victory.

The students of the University of Puerto Rico, the largest university institution in the Caribbean, have nearly always been active, militantly, in a number of causes, including Puerto Rican independence. But on April 21, 2010, in response to the recently passed Law 7 that gave the colonial government powers to make emergency financial decisions, paving the way for government proposals to reduce the UPR budget despite a 1966 law that keeps the budget at 9.6% of the island’s general funds or more, university students would do something that they had never done before. Beginning with a 48-hour occupation by students of the main UPR campus in Río Piedras, within days a series of campus occupations by students would result in the first ever occupation of and strike in all of the 11 UPR campus sites. While there were significant ideological and tactical differences among sectors of the students, the strike, which lasted for 62 days until June 21, would bring the creation of the first ever National Student Assembly and National Negotiating Committee. Due to the militancy and unity of the UPR students, the strike ended on June 21 only after the government decided to uphold the agreements reached by the NNC and UPR Board of Trustees on June 16. The agreements stipulated that: tuition waivers for athletes, artists, honor students, and employees and their families will not be adversely modified in any way; no campus of the UPR system will be privatized in part or in whole, nor will they be subjected to the so-called Law of Public-Private Alliances; the $1,000-plus “special fee” proposed by the administration (and discovered in the course of negotiations, as a direct result of the strike) will not enter into effect in August; and that no member of the university community will be subject to summary sanctions for any incident occurred during the course of the strike. With a broad network of support, including from the parents of students who would bring food to
the strikers (some being beaten and arrested by police), the university students had achieved an enormous victory against the colonial administration, their greatest victory to date.

Just a month after the victory of the university students, all the people who demanded the release of prisoners-of-war Oscar Lopez Rivera and Carlos Alberto Torres gained a partial victory on July 26 when years of public pressure resulted in the release of Carlos Alberto Torres after 30 years in prison. Welcomed in Chicago by family and friends, Carlos would arrive to a crowd of hundreds the next day in Puerto Rico, where he is set to reside. While corporate and government officials speak of FALN members as terrorists, the welcome that the Puerto Rican people gave Carlos on that sunny July 27, and the FALN 11 in 1999, confirmed his/their place in the peoples hearts as dedicated and principled freedom fighters; patriots willing to give their liberty for their country and its culture of resistance. Indeed, the Puerto Rican people would again display their love for their patriots willing to resist by any means the imperialist policies of the U.S. that keep Puerto Rico a colony, when on August 1st the leader of the 1954 attack on Congress, Lolita Lebrón, would pass away in a Puerto Rican hospital at 90 years of age. Her death was clearly felt as shown by the several memorials and commemorations took place for her in Puerto Rico, New York, Chicago, and elsewhere, in addition to the heartfelt funeral services given her. Just as Carlos Alberto’s release from prison brought attention back to the FALN and the national liberation struggle they were committed to, as a patriotic spirit Lolita is bringing attention back to the Nationalist Party, Don Pedro Albizu Campos, and the struggle in the patriotic spirit of the Lares revolutionaries that they helped to preserve and develop in the face of American colonialism. With the ongoing environmental and human disaster in Vieques, the still-felt murder of Filiberto, the recent memory of the grand jury subpoenas, the capture of Avelino after 20 years in clandestinity, the struggle of the Puerto Rican workers, and the immense victory of the university students, the Puerto Rican people throughout the world are no doubt beginning to take notice of an odd situation in Puerto Rico… the people are seeing and perhaps feeling the contradictions of 112 years of U.S. colonialism.
An assembly of over 3,000 striking students voted to keep strike going – May 13

UPR students on strike
Political prisoners Oscar Lopez Rivera and Avelino González Claudio

Carlos Alberto Torres with stepmother Alejandrina Torres when he arrived in Puerto Rico after his release – July 27

Community altar for Lolita Lebrón in New York City – August 2
Conclusion: National Independence Through National Liberation

Paths to Independence

- National Liberation Struggle
- Concession by Colonial Power
- National Independence

In theory, there are two paths to the national independence of a colony such as Puerto Rico—by way of a national liberation struggle, and by way of the concession of independence by the colonial power. It should be clear that, since national liberation is an active means to independence requiring participatory democracy among the peoples of the nation held under colonialism, national liberation is a higher, more dignified means for attaining national independence than mere concession by colonial powers. This becomes even clearer when we realize that concessions by colonial powers require only actions on behalf of the colonial powers and no actions at all on behalf of the peoples of a nation. In other words, colonial concessions allow for the passivity of the peoples of a nation, which is the recipe for a nation of people ignorant to the necessary practice of participatory democracy in the interest of national development. Thus, national independence gained as the result of concession by a colonial power simply does not ensure the equal active participation of all peoples within a nation, therefore justifying the need to engage in national liberation struggles for the securing of national peace and progress, the rewards of authentic independence.

True national liberation struggles, as should be understood, respond not only to the need for actively resisting the influence of colonial policies (those policies being the main enemy of the people) and attacks, but also to the need for developing and strengthening the capacity of the people to resist, which is equivalent to the process of national formation and development. It is during this process of national development, which ought to be present in national liberation
struggles, that the authentic needs of the communities within a nation are addressed; needs that, once met, provide the people opportunity to become active and conscious participants in the creation and maintenance of their culture (both nationally and locally). Bearing also this in mind, it is clear that the independence gained through national liberation struggles is more sustainable than any independence a colonial power can concede, since such an authentic independence implies that the people, according to their local and national needs, have reached a stage of national development where the greater quantity and quality of responsible work is being undertaken by them. In other words, the social, cultural, political, economic, and military responsibilities within the national territory that affect the people’s lives are secured in the hands of the people, in turn securing their revolution against the foreign domination that amounts to colonialism.

In terms of the Puerto Rican struggle for national liberation, the use of one tactic in particular has remained a constant since the birth of the culture of resistance, and indeed has been the hallmark of some of Puerto Rico’s most dedicated patriots: armed struggle. It was Don Pedro that took the example of armed struggle given by the Lares patriots and said specifically that “la patria es valor y sacrificio” (the motherland is courage and sacrifice), for he understood that “the motherland is founded on the emulation of heroism… She belongs only to those who have won her by dying for her.” This is essentially the same sentiment expressed by American revolutionaries when they declared such things as “give me liberty or give me death,” and, “I regret that I have but one life to give for my country.” Indeed the United Nations has not only recognized this “passionate yearning for freedom in all dependent peoples,” but has also documented their belief that “the process of liberation is irresistible and irreversible.” Thus, the motive of the Puerto Rican culture of resistance, including all of the culture’s aspects, has been recognized by international law established in the United Nations, most explicitly in 1978 when it reaffirmed “the legitimacy of the struggle of peoples for independence, territorial integrity, national unity and liberation from colonial and foreign domination and foreign occupation by all available means, particularly armed struggle.” The Puerto Rican culture of resistance that has existed for more than 142 years, and which is essentially a national liberation struggle resulting from an unending colonialism, therefore has been clearly recognized internationally as legitimate, confirming to the people that their faith in struggle has been principled and righteous all along (as natural instincts had told them).
The main objective of the Puerto Rican culture of resistance, based on history, is the national liberation of Puerto Rico from colonialism through a national development towards socialism in the service of human rights as much as environmental defense. The strategy for working towards that objective that has been introduced, and which continues to be relevant, is a prolonged people’s war that relies on the combination of mass organization with clandestine revolutionary activity. There are many tactics that fall within this strategy, such as armed struggle, which for all intents and purposes has been discontinued in the previous decade by the Puerto Rican people. Armed self-defense specifically will always be a necessity in revolutionary movements, especially when the people reclaim more and more territory and work, simply because people will always need to be prepared to defend their lives and revolutionary gains.

Perhaps within the strategy of prolonged people’s war, initial revolutionary clandestine groups will little by little develop into what might be called a people’s army. Nevertheless, we must never confuse what we have in our heads, our ideals, with reality. In reality, organization of all kinds at all levels, based on participatory democracy where the people engaged in activities have a vote in those activities, is required in order to build any possibility of an effective people’s war. But since organization in favor of national liberation, in order to be ensured of its success, must be developed by people with a high level of revolutionary consciousness with respect to history and reality, this leads us to recognize the absolute necessity of another tactic that is in accordance with the strategy of prolonged people’s war: education.

As a naturally developed tactic of the Puerto Rican culture of resistance, education is absolutely indispensable, for if the dialectic between teaching and learning did not exist, the spiritual essence of the culture of resistance would have been long forgotten. It is our ancestors, most often those that raised children, who teach the tradition that is our unique identity. And without the dignity that comes along with being conscious of ones identity, there would not come the courage and sacrifice necessary to ensure its survival and development, its peace and progress. Without an identity, people lose themselves and cease to be people. The Puerto Rican identity has no doubt gone through changes and developments over time, but it remains to be essentially based on a culture of resistance created from the objective fact of colonialism in the Puerto Rican national territory.

This contradiction of colonialism, first under Spain and now under the U.S., has made it easy for us to distinguish the true revolutionary culture native to Puerto Rico from the imported
tendency towards reform within the colonial arena. What makes this distinction possible, however, is revolutionary consciousness. When a person is able to analyze reality both subjectively and objectively, taking into account the process of change through time, and then act according to that analysis, they can be said to have a critical consciousness. However, when a person consciously uses critical consciousness in favor of peace and progress for the majority of the peoples of Earth, and the Earth itself, that person can be said to have a revolutionary consciousness. Education, teaching and learning, as a collective and individual dynamic within a prolonged people’s war, is absolutely indispensable to the development of the high level of revolutionary consciousness needed in the individuals within organizations at all levels.

Rather than claiming the need for another Albizu, there ought to be the desire for eight million Albizu’s, for every Puerto Rican man and woman to be filled with the love for ones country that moved his heart to courageously sacrifice himself so that the Puerto Rican nation could be respected and protected. By understanding the long history of the Puerto Rican culture of resistance, the personal and collective history of oneself according to the reality of the environments and experiences throughout ones life, and the necessity for strategy, a person can develop the capacity to organize with others for lasting revolutionary change. This is the process and result of a true education, one that requires all to answer the basic questions, “Who am I?,” “Who are we?,” “What is the nature of the world we live in?,” and “How am I going to apply my consciousness in the world?” Engaging people in an educational process such as this is of incredible value to the revolutionary struggle for human rights and environmental defense, for it empowers individuals mentally to a point where they develop an increasingly disciplined commitment to, and increasing understanding of, that revolutionary struggle. Without a doubt, education is a crucial tactic for developing revolutionary consciousness and potential, but in order to educate people, you must first engage them.

An effective way to engage people is through culture since it is the most relevant thing to a people; culture being everything created by the people, materially and spiritually, according to their lived reality. Unique cultures exist among nations, regions, communities, families, and homes, so engaging people through culture must be carefully planned, taking into account any number of factors. To give an example, a committed revolutionary might engage young people in an urban setting using sports if the young people of that setting gravitate to sports in large numbers. Once, and as, strong, honest relationships are developed with people, moves can be
made to then organize those social relationships over time around the needs and interests of those people; the purpose being building relationships that actively look to organize around people’s work that needs to be done right under their feet. While a true revolutionary ultimately understands they are part of an international struggle of people for liberation towards peace and progress, it is important to act and organize locally according to reality-based needs. If the reality-based needs of the people are not met, they are not likely to engage themselves in the process that they can clearly see involves new, revolutionary, principles. Thinking globally, yet acting locally, is a rough description of that principle. This is what is meant by responsible work within a national setting, for it is that work that responds to the needs of people, actual human beings, according to the local reality that is at the same time a national and international reality.

Curiosity and irreverence, so that new questions/problems are constantly posed in the search for truths that knowingly change according to circumstances, are needed in order to seriously engage in an educational process that leads to revolutionary consciousness. That is to say, revolutionary organizing must constantly be in harmony with the changing conditions of reality, with no hesitation by the people to discard of habits no longer useful for the objective to be worked towards. Eventually, popular organizing on the grassroots level ought to produce education circles that develop the revolutionary consciousness needed in all levels of organization. It should also produce commitment within individuals to take on the independent initiative of developing their consciousness of history and reality through self-study. In order to produce the capacity for a people’s revolution, people must therefore participate democratically in all levels of necessary responsible work, constantly learning (and teaching) as they are acting and thinking about their acting as human beings for global peace and progress. Revolutionary organization must be built from the ground up, always with an educational component.

With particular consideration to the Puerto Rican culture of resistance and its national liberation struggle, educating and organizing around people’s human rights (let alone in defense of the environment) can threaten the active participants of such a process with repression by the established counterrevolutionary systems of domination. Thus we return to the strategy of prolonged people’s war, which guarantees the capacity for armed self-defense so necessary for the survival of an established people’s revolution. While the development of identity, dignity, and revolutionary consciousness in people through educational processes is crucial, it is also crucial to develop the capacity to defend the people’s interests, gains, and lives, at all moments
during the building of mass organization. The Puerto Rican people, and others internationally, have recognized and openly supported the national liberation struggle that is the Puerto Rican culture of resistance. The threat it poses to the interests of those that directly benefit from and actively develop colonial control over Puerto Rico has been made clear through recent events such as the killing of Filiberto Ojeda Rios and the arrest of Avelino Gonzalez Claudio, as well as through the continued imprisonment of FALN member Oscar Lopez Rivera. Nevertheless, true Puerto Rican patriots will always maintain the objective of the national liberation of Puerto Rico because of the fact that it is the objective responsible for the creation of the Puerto Rican identity, and because it remains relevant to the present reality of colonialism. To quote former FALN prisoner-of-war Carmen Valentín: “It is unfortunate that the mandate of the international community receives little recognition by this government. It is because of this continuous disregard of the people’s desire and of the international arena demand, that we are forced to meet this government with ongoing resistance and ongoing revolutionary justice… Today we faithfully reaffirm our commitment to serve our nation until final victory.”

_Educate to Liberate!_
Appendix A - FALN Communiqué

On Saturday, June 14, 1975, thousands of Puerto Ricans will be marching in
the Puerto Rican Day Parade on State Street. They will be protesting against
poor education, bad housing, racism, police brutality, unemployment—in
essence against the exploitation that they are subjected to on an everyday basis.

In solidarity with the protest contingent, we have undertaken the following
bombings of Yanki imperialist institutions: the United of America Bank, First
National Bank, and the United States Federal Building which houses various
agencies of repression, ex. CIA, FBI, LEAA. Also the Department of Immigration
which at this time is trying to blame the failing economic system on our chicano
brothers and sisters. This agency is responsible for the massive deportation and
repressive actions against our chicano and Mexican workers.

These actions also demonstrate to the United States Government that the
mobile guerrilla units of the FALN can hit anywhere in the United States.

Once again, we demand the immediate release of the five NATIONALIST
PRISONERS being held in Yanki jails, and the unconditional independence of
PUERTO RICO.

We also want to express our solidarity with the victorious people of
VIETNAM, CAMBODIA, and LAOS. Their victory is our victory!

COMANDO CENTRAL FALN

MANATI, PUERTO RICO
October 1, 1978

Appendix B - EPB-Macheteros Communiqué

October 1 at 1:00 in the morning, two combat units of the Ejército Popular
Boricua (Puerto Rican Popular Army) Macheteros—in conjunction with combatants of the Organización de Voluntarios por la Revolución Puertorriqueña
(OVRP—Organization of Volunteers for the Puerto Rican Revolution)—succes-
sfully carried out an incursion against one of the explosives depositories of the colonialist capitalist government, located on Highway #2 in the neighborhood of Manati.

The success of the operation was total. After outwitting the watchmen and
all the security measures of the installation, our fighters seized 500 pounds of ammonium nitrate, 53 dynamite cartridges, 112 iermite cartridges, 988 de-
tonating capsules and 17,500 feet of detonating cable. We seized all the material
that was in the depository with the exception of 2 bags of ammonium nitrate
that we abandoned because of the bad condition we found them in. All this
without casualties within our forces or the enemies.

The Ejército Popular Boricua, as has already been expressed in their first
communique to the Puerto Rican people, will always assume responsibility for their actions. As a revolutionary army, we will respect the lives of all innocents who we understand to be victims of an oppressive system, and of all
those enemies who surrender or fall prisoner. Unlike the terrorist government of
Romero, who has fired hundreds of workers and who applauds murder, we will
not make attempts against the lives of innocents. But we will be implacable
with those who exploit us and betray us, and who intend to obstruct our
revolutionary work.

EJERCITO POPULAR BORICUA (EPB-MACHETEROS)
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