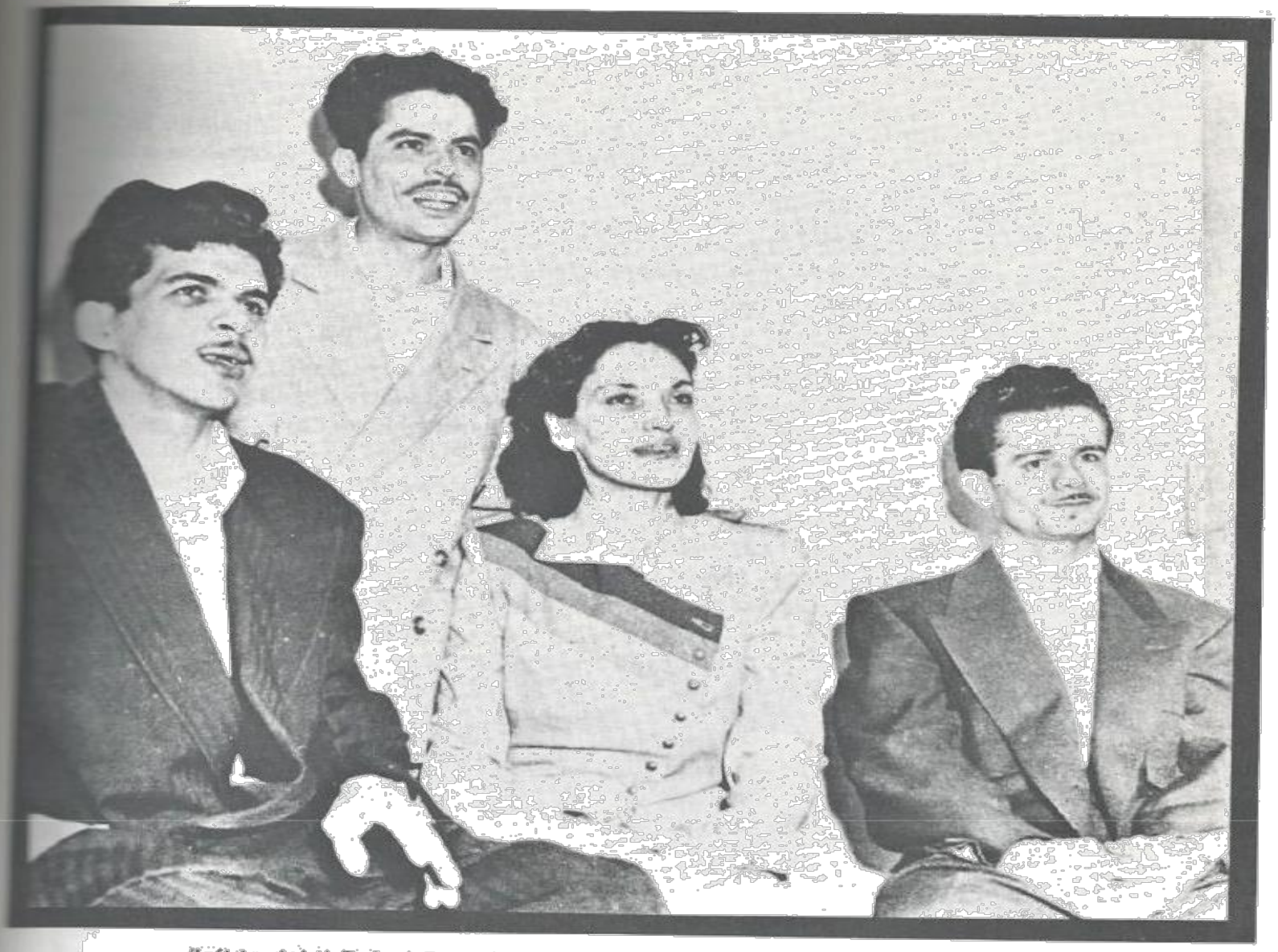


(left to right) Rafael Cancel Miranda; Andres Figueroa Cordero; Lolita Lebron; Irvin Flores.

The four Nationalists had a long history of participation in the independence movement. Lolita Lebron was born to a poor, working class family in Lares in 1919; "My classmates were very pale, sickly looking children, mostly all barefoot and in rags, with swollen stomachs, skinny bodies, nervous and uneasy," she wrote. "The meals at the school were bad, the sanitation horrible, the latrines flooded." The school was named "Mariana Bracetti" after the leading woman revolutionary at Lares in 1868, but neither Lolita nor any of the other students were taught a word about Bracetti, or the other Lares revolutionaries. "The classroom . . . taught two principles," Lolita wrote, "to do the will of God, and to do the will of the United States." The students were encouraged to celebrate, not the anniversary of Lares, or Betances's birth, but Columbus Day, and Lincoln's and Washington's birth.

Moreover, they were required to salute the Stars and Stripes and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. Lolita Lebron recalled,

> As a little girl, I went to school where the first thing I learned was, after the bell rang and the line was formed, to place my little hand on my heart to salute and pledge allegiance to the flag. I learned afterwards that the flag was the

highest symbol of the nation and that the nation was not Puerto Rico but a faraway country named the United States of America. We were not taught the meaning of the words. Our education was taught in the English language by Puerto Rican teachers who had a strange sound or accent like this of mine.

In the town and the surrounding countryside, the lessons of exploitation and oppression were blatantly obvious:

> Diseases were rampant among the people. The peasants' wooden homes belonged to the landowners and were very old and broken . . . The peasants and their families worked long hours for the landowners. For this they got a few cents.

In 1936, when she was 17, Lolita's father died. He was 42 years old; he had worked his whole life, but he had no savings, no home, nothing to leave his wife and children.

In the warehouse of *La Casa*, the landowner's *hacienda*, the peasants built her father's casket. "I still hear the sounds of the hammers," Lolita wrote forty years later. "At the warehouse . . . I saw caskets close to sacks of coffee and of vegetables and fruits — the produce that the dead peasants had produced. Yet they died very young because of lack of proper food, proper human care and attention."

"I have always dreamed of a better life for my people, especially the children."
~ Lolita Lebron

Yet there were also deep human affection and loyalties in Lolita's childhood community. She explained that

> Love was the motivating force of the working people . . . The great poverty I saw . . . moved me to deep thought. I always have dreamed of a better life for my people, especially the children . . . One day I heard myself saying: if I could make another world, I would make a world where the hard working people would be able to live more abundantly, just like other people.

In the 1930s, Lolita was not yet an activist, but her political education was well underway. "It was the Ponce Massacre," she wrote, "that cultivated instantly my personal duty to the homeland." But this duty to the homeland was not fulfilled on the island. In 1940, at the age of 21 — "amid a very difficult life and suffering" — Lolita was "advised to do as the other poor women . . . were doing — to sail to New York." In New York City she encountered oppression, exploitation, negation. "There came a day," she wrote, "in which after having tried for three days looking for jobs, getting left in trains, walking under snowfalls, without lunch or shelter, I had to deny that I was a Puerto Rican woman in order to have a job."

Lolita found work, along with thousands of other Puerto Rican women, in the garment industry. She had children and raised a family. After the 1950 assault on Blair House she was active on Oscar Collazo's defense committee.

The 1954 attack on the U.S. Congress was, in Lolita Lebron's words, "conceived and ordered by our supreme leader, Don Pedro Albizu Campos." Congress was chosen because (again in Lolita's words) "there U.S. laws are legislated and directed against Puerto Rican national emancipation."

Working with Lolita was Rafael Cancel Miranda, a young man born on the island, a draft resister who had spent two years in prison. Rafael joined the Nationalist Party on March 22, 1937, the day after the Ponce Massacre. Rafael tells us:

> I remember my parents and their friends who went to Ponce to participate in a peaceful demonstration. I knew where my parents had gone that day. I also understood why they had gone and that there was a good possibility they might not return. They did return, but many of their friends (my friends) returned in wooden boxes.
>
> The next day I went to school. There I was told to salute the flag of the U.S. I refused. I could not understand how the same people who were responsible for massacring my parents' friends one day could turn around the next day and ask me to pledge allegiance to a colonialist power that was responsible for the domination and murder of my people. That was the day I decided on my own to be a Nationalist.

Early in 1954 Lolita Lebron sent Rafael Cancel Miranda to Washington D.C. He says:

> I went first, like they say in the books, to 'case the joint.' When I returned, I decided that I was going to join the brigade . . . I wanted to do it for my people. Anything that would help the dignity of my people, helped my dignity. Upon my return I organized Andres and Irvin.

On March 1st, 1954, the four Nationalists arrived in Washington D.C. They went directly to the Capitol building and climbed the stairs to the visitor's gallery above the House of Representatives. The House was debating a bill to allow Mexican farm workers to enter the U.S. for temporary jobs. At 2:20 p.m. — at a signal from Lolita — Rafael, Andres and Irvin began to fire their guns. Lolita unfurled the Puerto

Rican flag and proclaimed the free and sovereign Republic of Puerto Rico. She took a piece of paper from her purse and read:

> I state forever that the U.S.A. is betraying the sacred principles of humanity in its continuous subjugation of my country, violating its rights to be a free nation and a free people, in their barbarous torture of our apostle of independence, Don Pedro Albizu Campos.

Five Congressmen were wounded before guards overpowered Andres Figueroa Cordero, Rafael Cancel Miranda, and Lolita Lebron. Irvin Flores escaped down the stairs, but he too was soon captured and taken to police headquarters. Interrogated by the FBI and the Secret Service, questioned by TV, radio and newspaper reporters, the four Nationalists maintained their dignity. Lolita Lebron explained that she and the others did not intend to kill anyone, that they did not regret their action, and that they would do it again if it would help to free their nation. "I assume all responsibility before God and the world," Lolita wrote. "My blood cries out for the independence of my country. This is an outcry of victory."

The House of Representatives and the Senate were adjourned. Hundreds of policemen patrolled the Capitol grounds, and new security measures went into effect. Extra secret service guards were assigned to protect Vice President Richard M. Nixon and two Cabinet members, Douglas McKay (Interior) and Ezra Taft Benson (Agriculture), both of whom cancelled their scheduled visit to Puerto Rico.

U.S. politicians and reporters called the four Nationalists "terrorists." Lolita Lebron replied that the U.S. was waging "atomic terror." The U.S. government dropped atomic bombs on Japan in 1945, and threatened to use them again against any nation that sought independence and self-determination. Lolita noted that the Puerto Rican struggle would be "conducted according to the only means possible amidst the impossible circumstances in which we must fight to liberate ourselves."

At their trial, Andres Figueroa Cordero, Irvin Flores, and Rafael Cancel Miranda were charged and found guilty of five counts of assault with intent to kill, and were sentenced to maximum terms totalling 75 years. Lolita Lebron was charged and found guilty of five counts of assault with a dangerous weapon. She was sentenced to a maximum term of 50 years in prison. Of the trial she observed:

> I think that the U.S. judicial system violated international law . . . We are prisoners of a battle of liberation; the enemy has no moral or political right in international law to judge us. Our case should be tried by a world court. The U.S. tried us as 'common criminals' in violation of all known national and international rights — to cover up the right and mandate of our Puerto Rican people to nationhood.

The 1954 action of the four Nationalists stands out as a clear signal; even during the most repressive years, the resistant flame of nationhood survived. But those years were difficult indeed for the forces of independence. By the mid-fifties many members of the Nationalist Party were dead or in prison, the trade union movement was under control, and the Commonwealth in operation. Puerto Rico was rapidly industrialized. The Puerto Rican people went to work for U.S. factories and corporations.

"I state forever that the U.S.A. is betraying the sacred principles of humanity in it's continuing subjugation of my country, violating it's rights to be a free nation and a free people."

—Lolita Lebron

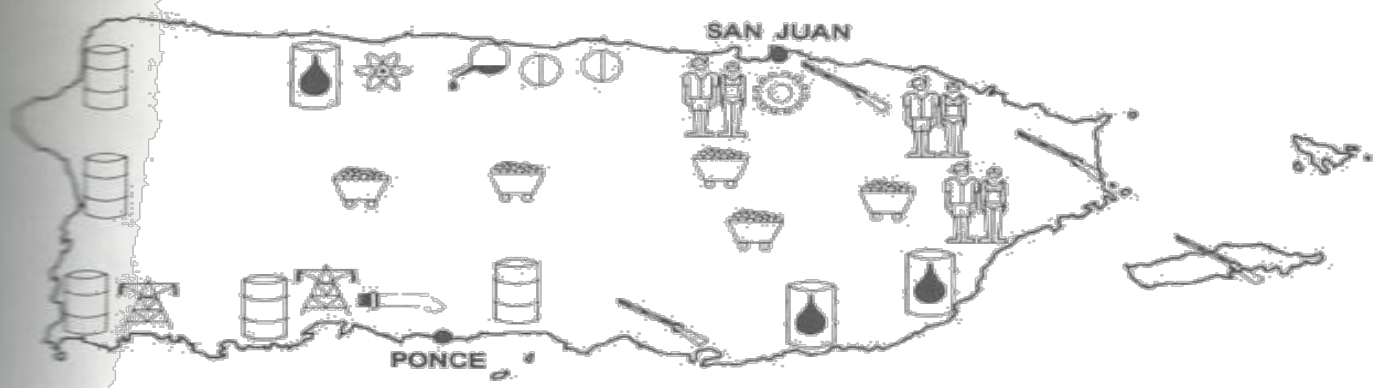
8
PROFIT ISLAND, U.S.A.

"Profit Island, U.S.A."

In 1950 the Puerto Rican Economic Development Agency changed the name of its industrialization plan from "Operation Bootstrap" to "Fomento," meaning to promote or develop. The Director of the Economic Development Agency was Teodoro Moscoso, one of the bright young men that Governor Rexford Guy Tugwell appointed to the colonial bureaucracy during World War II.

Together with U.S. government officials, Moscoso's agency developed an ambitious campaign to bring investment to the island. "Puerto Rico is the most profitable address in the U.S.A.," Moscoso told U.S. businessmen. And Governor Muñoz Marin proclaimed, "We want new and expanding industry. To get them we promise freedom from all taxes." Fomento guaranteed U.S. corporations freedom from taxes for periods ranging from 10 to 20 years, depending on the location of the plant.

Fomento built highways and roads for U.S. corporations — 3,000 miles of them — that linked offices to plants, industrial centers to seaports, and mines to factories. Fomento built warehouses, office buildings, mills and shops for U.S. companies. The agency provided technical assistance to U.S. corporations, trained employees for jobs, and created managers for the elite positions. Fomento granted loans and subsidies, rent-free space, and paid the cost of shipping machinery from the U.S. to the island. It delivered a large workforce. In every way the Puerto Rican Economic Development Agency paved the way for the development of U.S. industry and finance.



U.S. PENETRATION OF PUERTO RICO

- Chemical
- Copper Mining (in the planning stage)
- Copper Refinery (in the planning stage)
- Light Industry
- Military
- Nuclear Reactor
- Petrochemicals
- Petroleum Complex
- Pharmaceutical
- Thermo-electric Plant
- Tourism

In the 1950s hundreds of textile mills descended on the island like a swarm of locusts. Thousands of Puerto Rican women who had worked at home in the needle trades went to work in factories sewing jeans and slacks for the New York market. They were paid 25¢ an hour — one third to one half the wages paid to garment workers in the sweat shops of New York City in the early 1950s. They received few, if any, benefits and very little union protection. The rhythm of their lives was set by the timeclock, the assembly line, the sewing machine.

For ten years the textile industry boomed; North American businessmen became millionaires from the garment industry on the island. Then, in the early and mid-1960s, the factories began to move to the Dominican Republic. Wages were low in Puerto Rico, but in the Dominican Republic they were still lower, and profits for U.S. corporations were still higher.

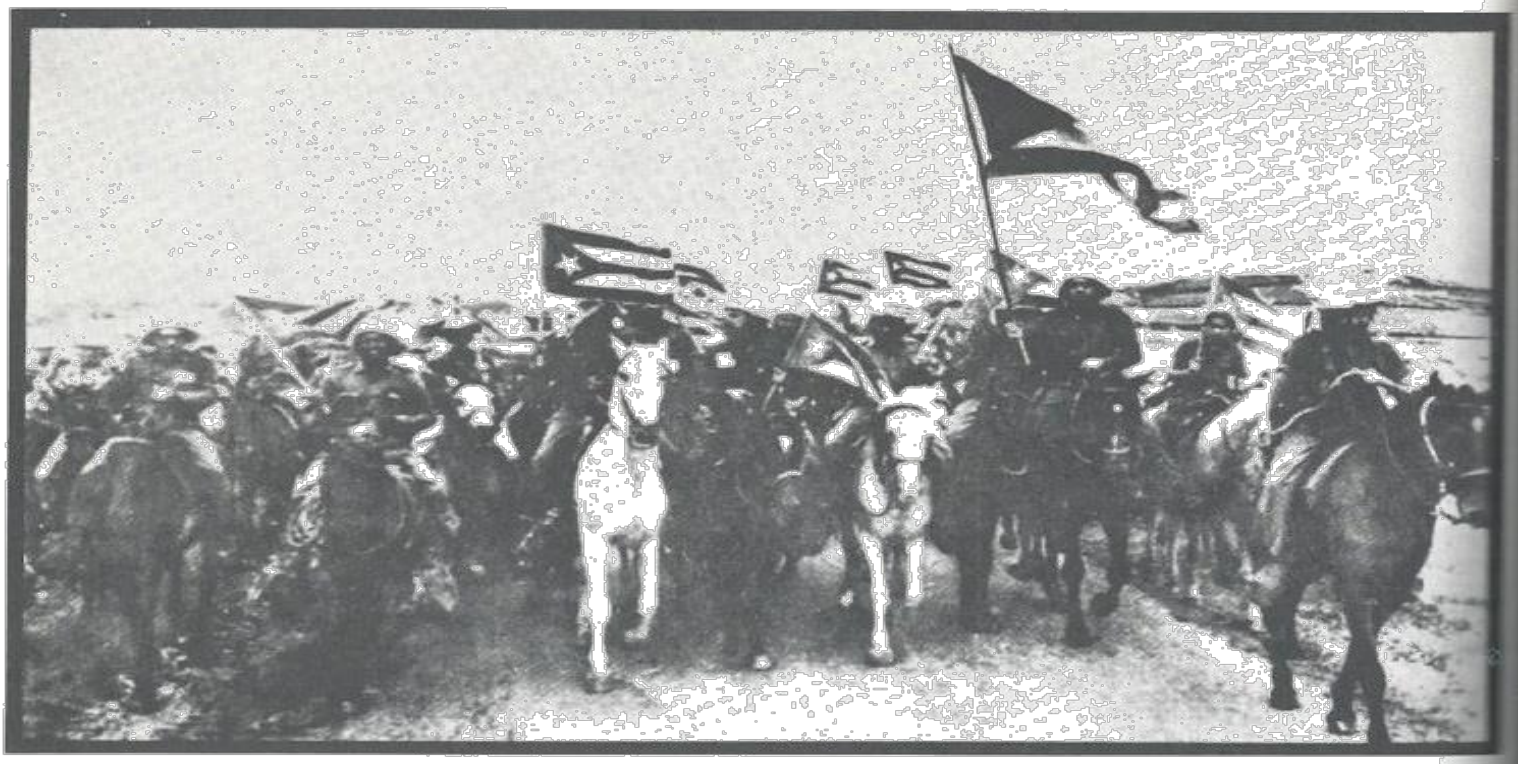
Now, heavy industry, attracted by tax-exempt status and the absence of strictly-enforced environmental protection laws, settled in Puerto Rico. Moscoso and the Economic Development Agency carved up the island into industrial parks: the north coast was served to the pharmaceutical companies, the south coast handed to the petrochemical plants. New oil refineries were built over the old sugar cane fields; hundreds of thousands of barrels were processed a day. The oil was then shipped to the U.S. for use in North American industries and homes.

The petrochemical and pharmaceutical industries required sophisticated machinery and modern technology, but a very small work force. North Americans, rather than Puerto Ricans, filled most of the positions as technicians and engineers. Unemployment rose and Puerto Ricans were again forced to migrate to the U.S. in search of jobs.

In the 1960s the major U.S. corporations also flocked to Puerto Rico. Immense buildings of steel, cement and glass loomed over the old textile plants. Puerto Rican men and women found unskilled jobs for General Electric, the Ford Motor Company, the Radio Corporation of America, Westinghouse, Gulf Oil and Union Carbide.

In the 1960s dozens of hotels were built along the San Juan coast, including the $20,000,000 Caribe Hilton. Puerto Rico was transformed into a major resort area for North Americans. The sun and the sand become commodities, the oceanfront a private beach. The tourist industry, owned and operated by multinational corporations like International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT) and by the Rockefeller interests, was, throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, a $250,000,000 a year business. But here too, few Puerto Ricans were employed; only 1% of the work force found jobs in tourism, and then mostly in unskilled, low-paid positions.

By 1970 U.S. corporations had more money (14 billion dollars) invested in Puerto Rico than in any other country in Latin America. Ten percent of U.S. corporate profits around the world were taken from Puerto Rico. The rate of profit on the island was three to four times greater than the rate of profit in the U.S. Each year North American banks accumulated $1,450,000,000 in profits from Puerto Rico. No wonder that Wall Street called Puerto Rico "Profit Island, U.S.A."



Cubans celebrate triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959

One Wing Is Free

In the 1960s the U.S. government used Puerto Rico as a "model" to show how a poor, agricultural people could move into the prosperous, industrial world when they cooperated with U.S. business. Indeed the U.S. government could point to a steady rise in the per capita income of the Puerto Rican people. In 1950 it was $279, in 1960 it was $577, in 1968 $1313, and in 1970 $2,000 — the highest in Latin America. If only the people of the Third World would work hand in hand with North American interests they would "progress" like the Puerto Rican people, Wall Street and Washington D.C. proclaimed. But the Puerto Rican people had a different story. Puerto Rico was "the most profitable address in the U.S." for U.S. corporations, but not for the Puerto Rican people. Development and progress North American style meant underdevelopment and poverty for Puerto Rico and all Latin America. Increasingly, the people of the Caribbean and Latin America sought independence from North American political and economic interests, as the only way to end underdevelopment.

In 1959 Cuba became the first Caribbean nation to break from the yoke of the U.S. Empire and to pursue the road of genuine independence. Cuba and Puerto Rico had a common history of struggle against both Spanish and U.S. colonialism that extended back to the 19th century. In 1868 Cuban and Puerto Rican patriots staged coordinated uprisings against the Spanish Empire at Lares and Yara. In the late 1890s Puerto Ricans fought side by side with the Cuban people in their war for independence. Lola Rodriguez de Tío, the 19th-century Puerto Rican poet and patriot wrote:

> Cuba and Puerto Rico are two wings of the same bird
> They receive flowers and bullets in one heart.

After the victory of the Cuban revolution a new line was added:

Now one wing is free, soon the other will be too.

The victorious Cuban guerrillas, led by Fidel Castro, turned to Marxist economics and to socialism as the only way to develop the Cuban economy and to end unemployment, poverty, hunger, illiteracy — the social and political ills of colonialism. The Cuban government developed an economy that benefitted the Cuban people, not U.S. corporations.

In 1898, after the Spanish-American War, Cuba became a U.S. colony. U.S. companies bought up Cuban land and monopolized Cuban agriculture. They made vast profits from Cuban sugar, tobacco, and rum. A small class of Cubans benefitted from U.S. economic domination, but the bulk of the Cuban people were poor, hungry, homeless. Their life span was one-third the life span of North Americans.

Throughout the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, Cuban patriots and workers combatted U.S. colonialism and the U.S.-backed Cuban dictators. In the 1950s the struggle for independence matured quickly. On July 26, 1953, Fidel Castro, a young lawyer from a well-off landowning family, led a band of guerrillas in an attack on the Moncada Fortress. The attack failed, many of the guerrillas were slain, and Castro was captured and put on trial. But in the courtroom, Castro put U.S. imperialism and the Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista on trial. The judge found Castro guilty, and sentenced him to 15 years in prison, but Castro succeeded in awakening a great many poor Cuban peasants and workers to the necessity for independence.

In 1956 Castro was granted amnesty. He left Cuba, sailed to Mexico, and trained in guerrilla warfare. Soon he returned to Cuba with a group of dedicated revolutionaries aboard a small ship, the *Granma*. Fidel, Che Guevara, and their armed band took to the Sierra Maestra mountains. They combatted the troops of the dictatorship. At the same time students and workers, often in underground groups, organized resistance in the cities. Finally, in 1959, the rebel army marched into Havana. Batista fled, and Cuba was at last independent.

Fidel speaks in the Plaza de la Revolución in 1964.

The new revolutionary Cuban government nationalized U.S. companies; workers and peasants took control of factories and farms, and reaped the fruits of their own labor. The government reduced rents, offered free health care and education to the people. Illiteracy was abolished. The Cuban people began the long, hard task of ending the underdevelopment that was imposed on the island by U.S. imperialism.

Cuban independence meant the loss of tremendous profits for U.S. corporations. It meant a weakening of the U.S. Empire throughout Latin America. Naturally, the U.S. government and U.S. businesses didn't accept Cuban independence and socialism, 90 miles from Miami. Immediately they planned to topple the Castro government with military force. In 1961 the CIA used Puerto Rico as a base of operations for its invasion of Cuba at Playa Giron (the Bay of Pigs). The invasion was defeated, but the CIA continued to direct military attacks against Cuba, and the U.S. government instituted an economic blockade against Cuba.

Throughout the 1960s Puerto Rico played a crucial military role in U.S. plans to prevent another "Cuba" from happening in Latin America. Atomic bombs and nuclear weapons were stored in ammunition depots on Puerto Rico, ready to be used when needed. The tropical rain forests on the island were used to train U.S. troops to combat guerrillas. In 1965 25,000 U.S. troops stationed in Puerto Rico were sent to the Dominican Republic. They toppled the democratically elected government of Juan Bosch because it was leaning away from the orbit of the U.S. Empire.

And of course, the U.S. wanted to prevent a revolution in Puerto Rico. Its military forces were used to intimidate and repress Puerto Rican *independentistas*. After the Cuban revolution Puerto Rico became a home for 30,000 Cuban exiles or gusanos. With the assistance of the CIA some of them formed "Alpha 66," a right-wing military group that carried out bombings and assassination, not only against the Cuban government but against the Puerto Rican independence movement too.

Showcase of Poverty

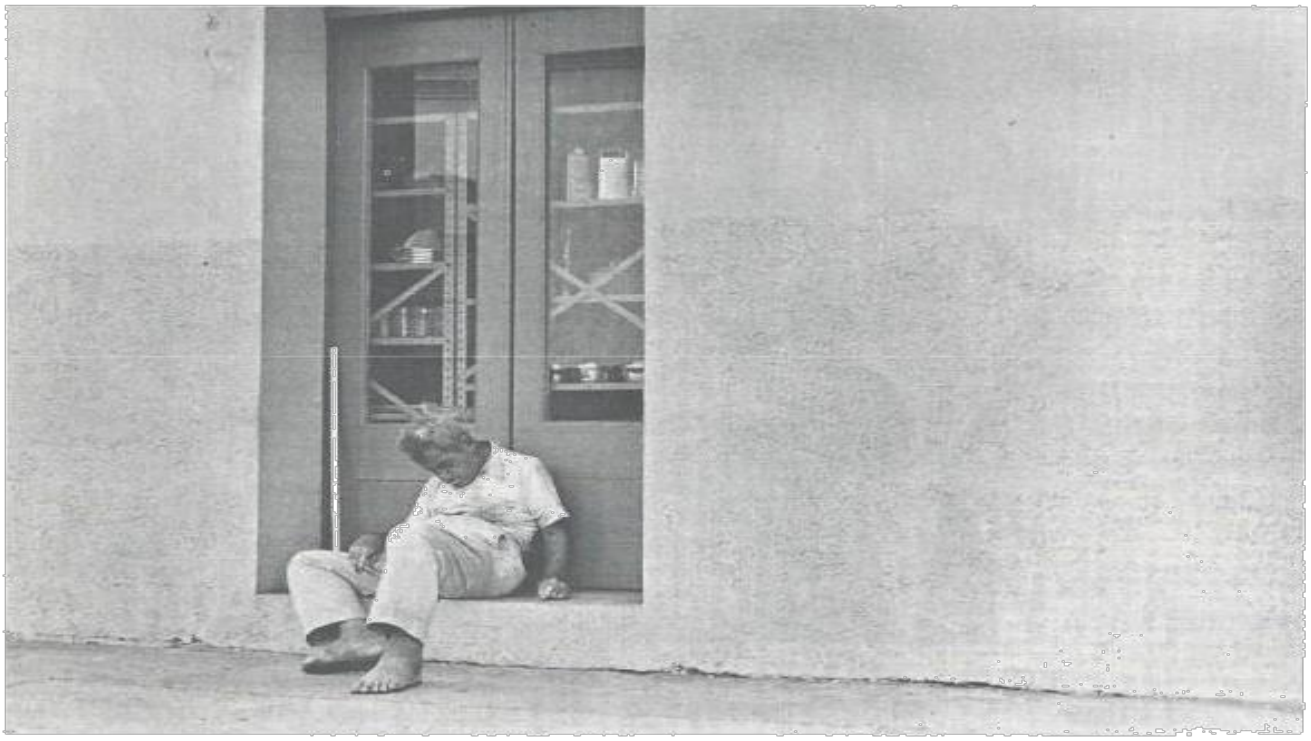
The U.S. military offensive in the Caribbean and Latin America was combined with a new political and economic strategy. Here too Puerto Rico played a crucial role. In 1961 U.S. President John F. Kennedy created the "Alliance for Progress." The Alliance was meant to prevent revolution in the Caribbean and Latin America, and to tighten U.S. control over the continent along the lines already established in Puerto Rico. At the first meeting of the Alliance for Progress, C. Douglas Dillon, a Wall Street banker and Secretary of the Treasury in the Kennedy administration, promised $20,000,000,000 to Latin American countries that helped to isolate the Cuban revolution and embraced the capitalist way.

John F. Kennedy and Luis Muñoz Marin

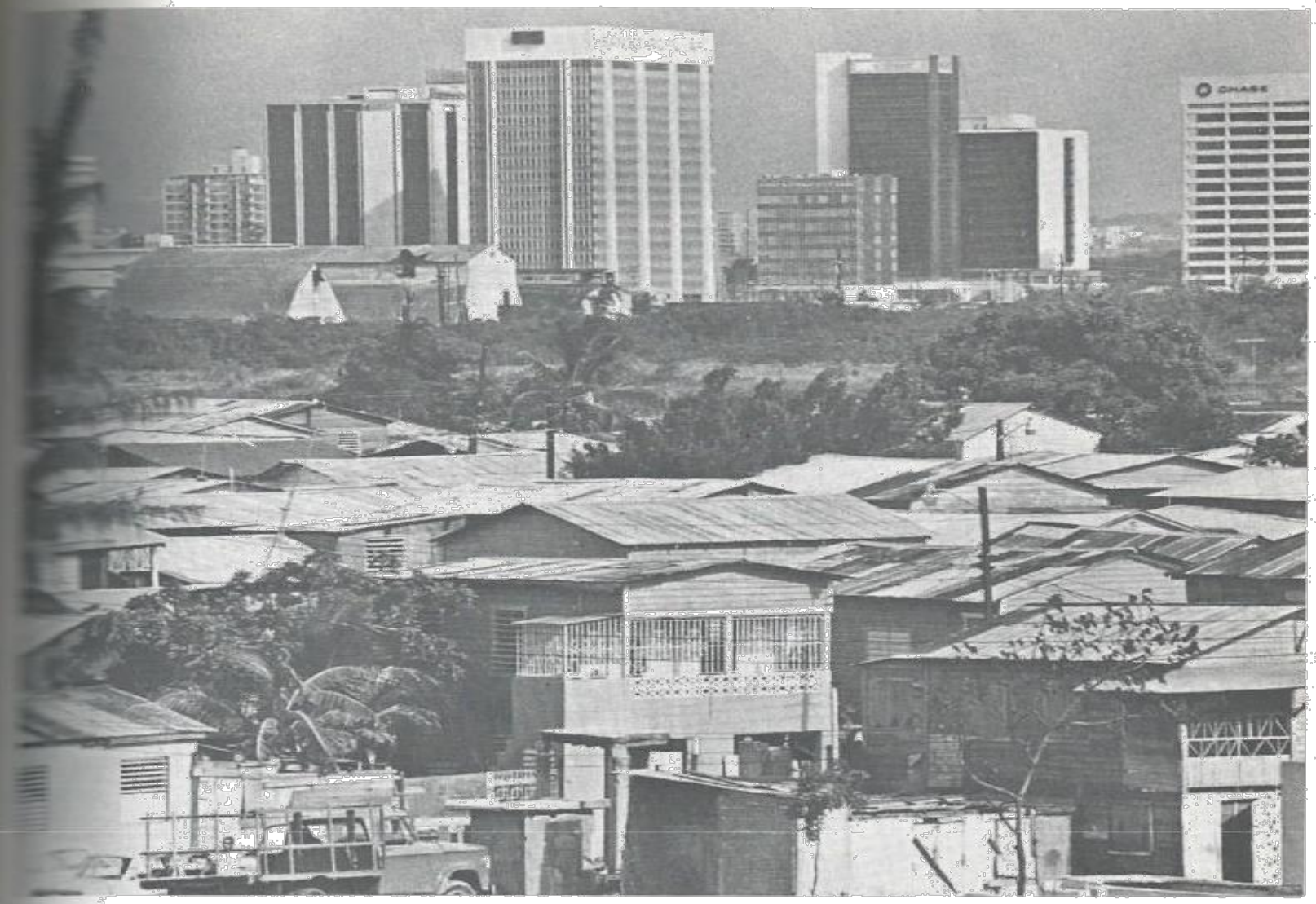
Dillon and other U.S. officials pointed to Puerto Rico as the "model" for Latin American growth and development. President Kennedy appointed many of the leading Puerto Rican statesmen to serve on the Alliance. Muñoz Marin joined with C. Douglas Dillon and the Kennedy advisors to map out an economic and political strategy for the entire continent. Teodoro Moscoso, the Director of Fomento, was appointed Director of the Alliance for Progress.

But at the first conference of the Alliance, held at Punta del Este, Uruguay, there was another choice beside "development" North American style, and the Puerto Rican "showcase." Che Guevara, the Minister of Economic Development in the new revolutionary Cuban government, told C. Douglas Dillon, Teodoro Moscoso and the other delegates that genuine progress for Latin America meant independence and socialism. Che pointed out that the development of U.S. corporations meant underdevelopment for the Latin American people. Premier Fidel Castro explained the relationship between development and underdevelopment in "The Second Declaration of Havana" (1962):

The summary of this nightmare which torments America from one end to the other is that on this continent of almost two hundred million human beings, two thirds — the Indians, mestizos, and Blacks — are discriminated against. On this continent of semi-colonies, about four persons per minute die of hunger, curable illness, or premature old age; 5500 per day, two million per year, ten million each five years. These deaths could easily be avoided, but nevertheless they take place. Two thirds of the Latin American population lives briefly and lives under the constant threat of death. A holocaust of lives, which in fifteen years has cost twice the number of deaths as World War I — it still rages. Meanwhile, from Latin America, a continuous torrent of money flows to the United States; some four thousand dollars a minute, five million a day, two billion a year, ten billion every five years. For each thousand dollars which leave us, there remains a corpse, that is the price of what is called imperialism — a thousand dollars per death, four deaths every minute.



A "continuous torrent of money" flowed from Puerto Rico to the U.S. The wealth that was created on the island was taken from the island; the industry that was developed in Puerto Rico was used for the benefit of U.S. corporations. Fomento built roads for U.S. factories, not for the men and women who worked in the factories. International Telephone and Telegraph constructed hotels on the island, but not as vacation resorts for the farmers of Utuado or the fishermen of Mayaguez. The jeans and slacks that Puerto Rican women stitched in the Ponce sweatshops were not destined to be worn by Puerto Ricans. They were exported to the U.S. The oil that was refined on Puerto Rican soil was shipped to North America. Downtown San Juan was dominated by elegant, modern skyscrapers, but they mocked the poverty, the hunger, and the unemployment of the thousands of people who lived in the Martin Pena slum.



Independence leader Juan Mari Bras exposed the phony promises of "Operation Bootstrap" and "Fomento." He rejected industrialization Kennedy style, and development as outlined by the Alliance for Progress. Mari Bras observed that:

> The false illusion of progress in Puerto Rico has been limited to the well-being of a small clique of bureaucrats and servants of North American capitalism. For at most it has enriched a minority of the middle class. The society of consumption . . . is the reality of a small minority. And the majority of the people have never tasted this consumption society . . . Puerto Rico is increasingly polarized between the poor and the rich.

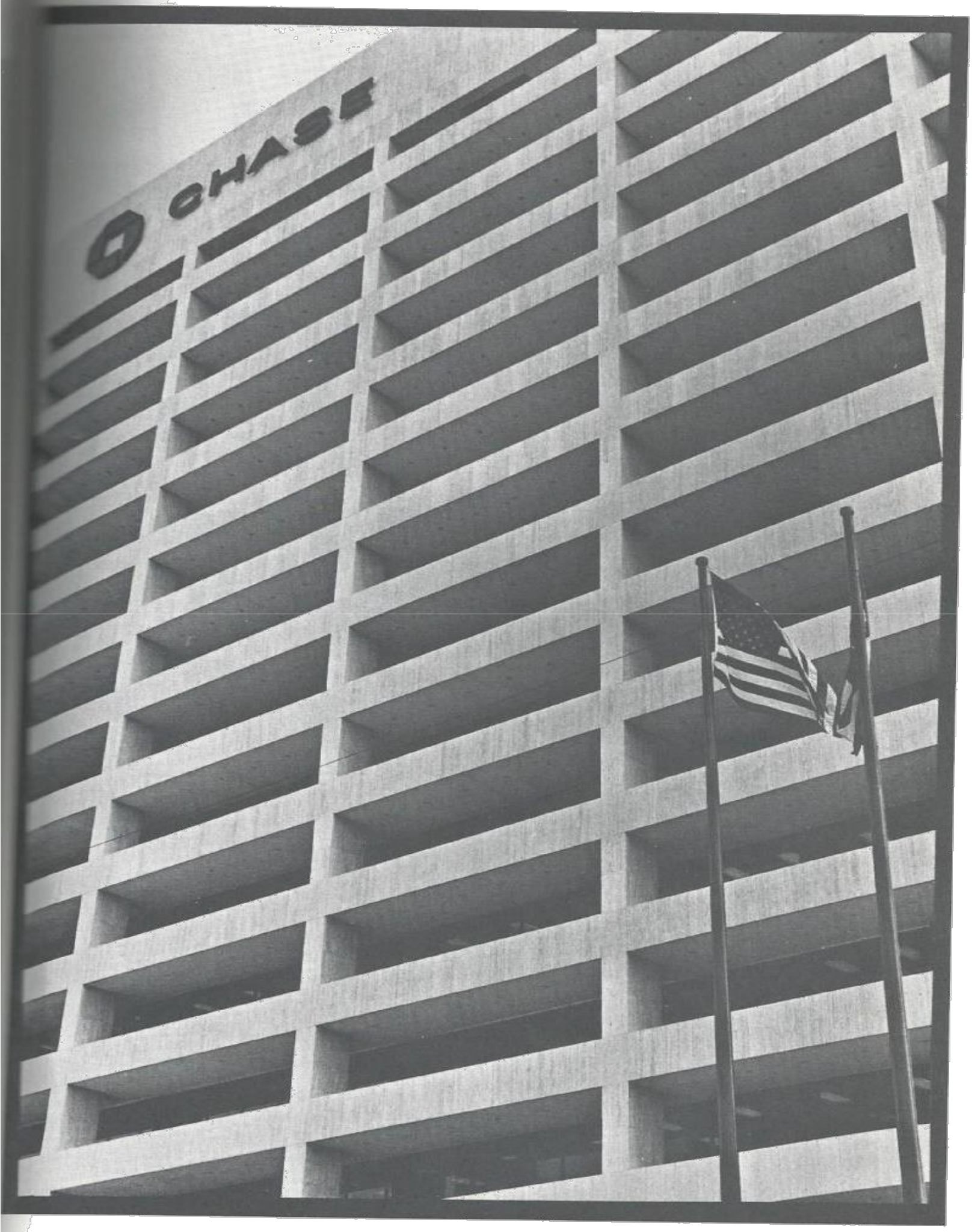
The industrialization of the island created a class pyramid with a very few rich people at the top and a great many poor people at the bottom. At the top of the pyramid were the North American executives of the multi-national corporations. Then came a thin layer of Puerto Rican executives and managers for the U.S. corporations, the government bureaucrats, and the Puerto Ricans who owned hotels, banks and factories. This thin layer includes the 30,000 Cuban exiles who fled their country after the 1959 revolution. With a little help from their friends in the CIA they were soon back in the business of running gambling casinos, houses of prostitution, and drug syndicates. Next came a layer of Puerto Rican professionals — lawyers, doctors, and teachers.

Composing the fragile middle of the class pyramid were the Puerto Ricans who owned small grocery stores and shops and who more and more were driven out of business and into bankruptcy by the U.S. supermarkets and department store chains — Grand Union, Sears, and J.C. Penney.

At the bottom of the pyramid is the broad base of the Puerto Rican working class — underpaid, underfed, unemployed, poorly housed, poorly clothed — the economic reality that shatters the myth of progress and the "economic miracle." By 1970 the Puerto Rican people lived better than most other people in Latin America, but they still lived in poverty. "The holocaust of lives" Castro described still raged in Puerto Rico. 10% of all Puerto Rican families had a yearly income of $250; 35% of all families had a yearly income of less than $2,000. 70% of the population was eligible for food stamps. Infant mortality was 45 per thousand (as compared with 25 per thousand in the U.S.).

The industrialization of the island burdened the Puerto Rican people with a double exploitation. As consumers of goods that were produced in the U.S. and imported to the island the Puerto Rican people paid 25% higher costs than the people of North America. As workers who manufactured goods that were exported to the U.S. Puerto Ricans received one-third to one-half the wages that North American workers received. In 1970, despite Teodoro Moscoso's "Herculean tasks" as head of Fomento, unemployment was higher than it was in 1950 when he first took the job. By 1975 unemployment was 40% in the cities of Puerto Rico and as high as 95% in rural areas. 400,000 Puerto Ricans were unemployed every year. Those who had jobs worked as waiters, waitresses, janitors, bell-hops, chauffeurs, dishwashers, and as prostitutes. Puerto Ricans were beginning to say that their island looked more and more like underdeveloped Cuba before the 1959 revolution.

The industrialization of Puerto Rico impoverished the Puerto Rican people and enriched the U.S. corporations. It widened the economic gap between rich and poor, between the colony and the imperial power. "Operation Bootstrap" and "Fomento" tightened the noose of economic dependency around the neck of the Puerto Rican people. The island became a prisoner of the Rockefeller economic interests, a captive of the multinational corporations. The U.S. banks commanded the island; they demanded higher taxes, lower wages, assembly-line speed ups, lay-offs, and a higher level of productivity by a smaller number of workers. The economic and political crisis intensified. To more and more Puerto Ricans it looked like the only solution was genuine independence—a violent break from the U.S. Empire.


CHASE

9
THE PEOPLE ARE THE TARGET

Emilia Mendez, a Woman of the People

In 1961 Emilia Mendez was 23 years old. She lived with her husband and her two daughters in a small house in Arecibo. "'61 was the worst year of my life," Emilia explained in an interview. "I got pregnant again and Pablo and I started to fight. I had a job and he didn't and with another child on the way we didn't know how we'd survive."

Emilia Mendez was born on a small farm near Utuado. In 1952 her father was injured in an accident on the job and was unable to work. Emilia's older sister Carmen left home and moved to Arecibo. She found work as a maid in a tourist hotel. Emilia was then 14 years old; she was a bright student and Carmen encouraged her to finish

her education. But with her parents unable to work, Emilia applied for a job in a button factory. The manager needed an employee who wrote English, and did simple addition. Emilia qualified.

Meanwhile Carmen left Arecibo and moved to San Juan. She worked in a hotel on the Condado strip, then moved again, this time to the U.S. She got a job in a hotel in Manhattan but then had to go on welfare. Emilia was tempted to join her sister, but she had to look after her parents, and then she met Pablo. They were married when Emilia was 18. At the end of the first year a daughter was born, then another. Emilia's mother helped her to raise the girls; she was able to continue working.

"The third time I was pregnant was the worst," Emilia said. "My mother and father had moved to the Bronx. Pablo lost his job in the restaurant, and we had to borrow money to buy food. I was sick mornings and I missed two days of work. I'd been with the button company for a long time but the manager told me 'You'll have to go if you lose one more day.' That's when I considered losing the child. Pablo was opposed to it. He wanted a son badly. 'I'll find work,' he said. For three weeks he looked. Then one day he came home and said 'Emilia, you'll have to go to the clinic.' I had the abortion the next day. It was painful. While I was still on the operating table the doctor sterilized me, though I didn't find out until my check-up a week later. After that Pablo and I fought again. Then he found a job. For a year we stayed on in Arecibo. Then we moved to the Bronx to be nearer Carmen and my parents."

The story of Emilia Mendez and her family is a common story in Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rican communities of the U.S. It is the story of unemployment, migration, sterilization, welfare, of attack on Puerto Rican culture, and the Puerto Rican family. U.S. colonialism drove the Puerto Rican people from the countryside to the cities. It turned peasants and farmers into unskilled factory workers, servants for the tourist industry, and clerks for the colonial government. It generated an unemployed population and forced the Puerto Rican people to migrate from the island to the U.S. in search of work. U.S. colonialism regulated material production in factories, and sexual reproduction in homes and hospitals. It governed the life span, the birth and death rates of the people.

As we have seen, Lolita Lebron was caught in this same web of colonialism. She was born in the countryside; she knew poverty, disease, and ignorance at first hand. In school Lolita Lebron was taught to deny her Puerto Rican identity and to accept North American values, traditions, and identity. Unable to find work on the island, she travelled to New York City and took a low-paying job in the garment industry. But Lolita Lebron broke through the colonial web; she gave political definition and focus to her experiences, and to the experiences of women like Emilia Mendez. Lolita wrote:

> The U.S. has done everything scientifically and otherwise to destroy the Puerto Rican independence movement. It uses all kinds of weapons, psychological and of myriad forms, to kill the liberation spirit of Puerto Rico.
>
> It is struggling very hard to destroy the Puerto Rican family, the Puerto Rican revolutionaries, the Puerto Rican would-be-born children. It sterilizes our young mothers and young women to avoid Puerto Rican human harvests, as it has killed almost all our agriculture and many of our men in its wars of conquest and aggrandizement.

U.S. colonialism imposed a total environment. The Puerto Rican people were attacked through their minds and their bodies. The rhythms of life itself were violently disrupted.

Education: Creating the National Inferiority Complex

When the U.S. army invaded Puerto Rico in 1898 all teaching in Spanish was abolished. English was compulsory in the schools and colleges. Puerto Rican children were taught to pledge allegiance to the U.S., to sing "The Star Spangled Banner," and "America the Beautiful." They were taught the dates, facts and names of U.S. history, not Puerto Rican history. In the 1920s, when Lolita Lebron was in school this meant lessons about George Washington, and Abe Lincoln, not lessons about Betances, or Mariana Bracetti. In the 1960s it meant lessons about Washington and Lincoln, as always, and also about Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Muñoz Marín, but not about Albizu Campos or Lolita Lebron.

Students in Puerto Rico, like students in the U.S. were not taught about Indian resistance to European conquest, or the insurrection of Black slaves. The history of Puerto Rico was rewritten to serve U.S. economic and political interests. Puerto Rico's true heroes and heroines were buried and false gods and goddesses were elevated.

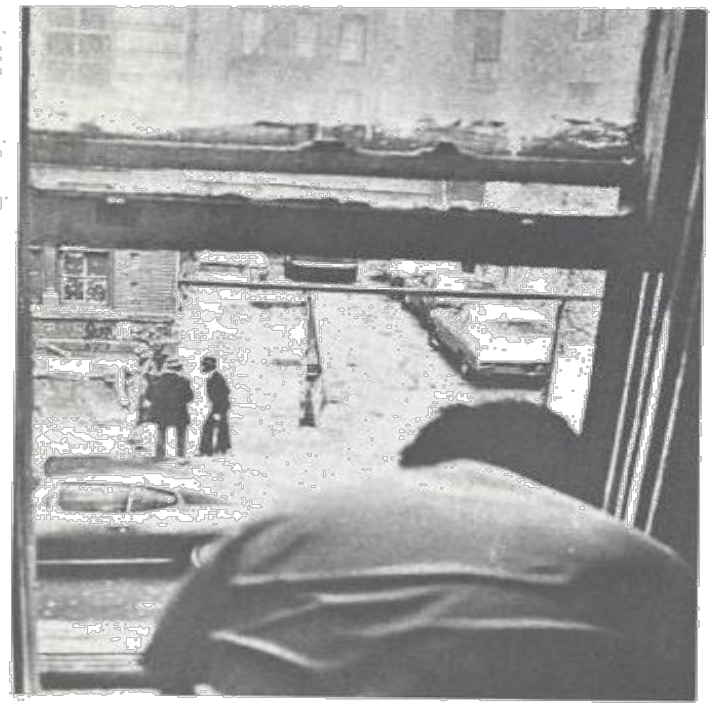
The Puerto Rican people were told, in schools, factories, offices, and through the U.S.-controlled media, that they were docile, weak, small, helpless. David Perez, a young Puerto Rican writer and activist, noted:

> Puerto Ricans are taught three things: Puerto Rico is small and the U.S. is big; Puerto Rico is poor and the U.S. is rich; Puerto Rico is weak and the U.S. is strong. Sort of a national inferiority complex. These things are constantly put into our heads, and in this way people are conditioned to believe that independence is impossible because our country could never survive without the help of big brother U.S.

The U.S.-created education system aims at the destruction of the Puerto Rican peoples' awareness of themselves as a nation.

Migration: Broken English Dream

1941, the year Lolita Lebron travelled to New York, was the beginning of a major wave of immigration from Puerto Rico to the U.S. Between 1940 and 1970 one million Puerto Ricans travelled to North America. Puerto Rican life in North America was no romantic, West Side story with words and music by Leonard Bernstein. The forced migration of the Puerto Rican people divided the nation. It had a profoundly disturbing effect on the peoples' identity. Pedro Pietri, the New York-based Puerto Rican poet, wrote in "Broken English Dream;"



To the united states we came
to learn how to misspell our name
to lose the definition of pride
to have misfortune on our side
to live where rats and roaches roam
and sing a house is not a home
to be trained to turn on television sets
to dream about jobs you never get
to fill out welfare applications
to graduate from school without an education
to be drafted distorted and destroyed
to work fulltime and still be unemployed
to wait for income tax returns
and stay drunk and lose concern
for the heart and soul of our race
and the weather that produces our face.

Puerto Ricans began to arrive in the U.S. some 40 years before Lolita Lebron set foot on Manhattan Island. Shortly after the 1898 Spanish-American War sugar cane workers were imported to California, then shipped to Hawaii to work on U.S.-owned sugar plantations. In the 1920s, with starvation and unemployment on the island and the U.S. economy in need of cheap labor, 40,000 Puerto Ricans migrated to the U.S. and found jobs in industry and agriculture. In the 1930s, with unemployment acute in the U.S., there was little, if any, need for white North American, let alone Puerto Rican workers; migration slowed to a trickle. Then in the boom times between 1940 and 1970, when the U.S. needed a cheap, abundant supply of workers, one million Puerto Ricans travelled to the U.S. By 1970, 1,700,000 Puerto Ricans lived and worked in the U.S. In 1910 only 500 Puerto Ricans lived in New York. In 1930 there were 45,000, in 1960 600,000, in 1970 there were 1,125,000. Many of these Puerto Ricans travelled back and forth between the U.S. and the island; new immigrants arrived every day and old time residents returned to their homes in Puerto Rico.

On the island Puerto Ricans worked at low wages in unskilled jobs. In the U.S. they worked on the bottom rung of the economic ladder, with immigrants from Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and with Blacks from the Southern States of the U.S. Industry plugged the Puerto Ricans into the most undesirable jobs, or held them in reserve and employed them when needed. One Young Puerto Rican woman noted:

My father was a cane cutter in Puerto Rico . . . When things got rough [1947] he came over here to make some money to be able to send back to the family. He worked in a hotel when he first came here, as dishwasher. Then I guess he graduated to elevator operator — and he's been there ever since . . . He would leave the houe at about 5:30 in the morning and he wouldn't come home until four or five. He can be sick or whatever, but he's never missed a day of work — not even a day — because you've gotta support, you've gotta do it. He says 'In Puerto Rico I worked and got my money, and here I'm working and getting my money. But I can't make ends meet. I can't pay the rent.'

Puerto Rican men were hired for every menial task imaginable. Petro Pietri catalogues these jobs and the racist framework behind them in his book *Puerto Rican Obituary:*

As dishwashers porters
messenger boys
Factory workers maids stock
clerks
Shipping clerks assistant
mailroom
Assistant, assistant, assistant
assistant
To the assistant, assistant
dishwasher
And automatic smiling
doorman
For the lowest wages of the ages
And rages when you demand
a raise
Because it's against the
company policy
To promote SPICS SPICS SPICS

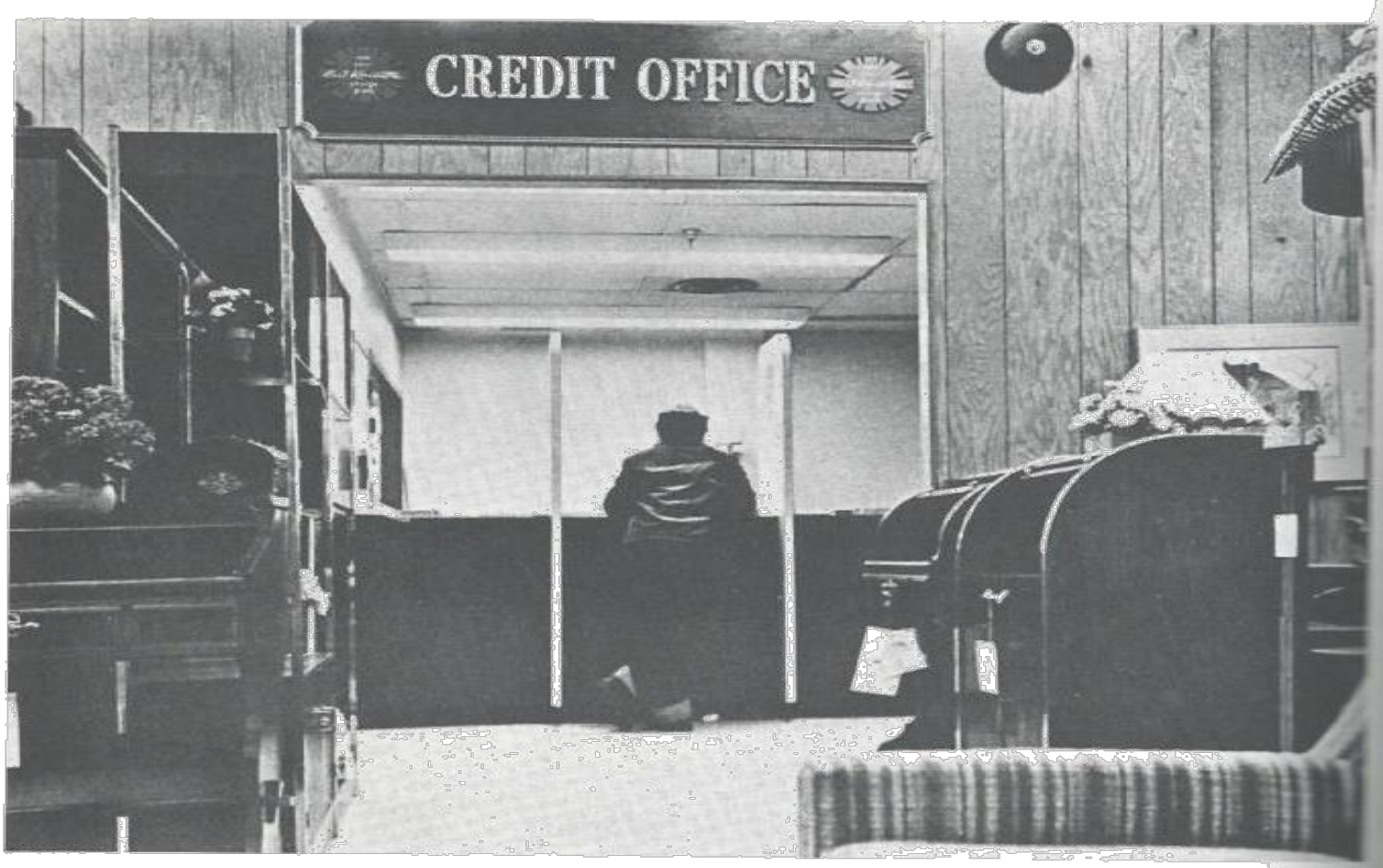

London Character Shoes
TRUCKING CO.

In the 1950s, 75% of all Puerto Ricans in the U.S. worked at blue-collar jobs or as migrant, agricultural laborers. Only 27% had desk or clerical (white collar) jobs. In 1975 75% of all Puerto Ricans *still* had blue-collar jobs. The average Puerto Rican worker in the U.S. earned less than $100 a week before taxes. Under these circumstances families were left with little option but to borrow, go into debt, buy on credit, and go deeper into debt. As workers who were hired during good times and among the first to be fired during hard times, Puerto Ricans suffered especially during the recessions of the 1950s and the Depression of the mid-1970s.

Official statistics show that in 1975, 21% of Puerto Ricans in New York were unemployed — 2.4 times the rate for the city as a whole. Official government statistics do not count the men and women who tried to find jobs and gave up when none were available. The under-employed constitute 22% of the men and 71% of the women in the U.S.-Puerto Rican community. When added to official unemployment figures the total adds up to a shocking 50% of the workforce.

In 1975 Puerto Ricans in New York lived in worse conditions than they did in 1959. In its 1976 study "Puerto Ricans in the Continental U.S.: An Uncertain Future" the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights reported that:

1. 33% of all Puerto Rican families subsist below the poverty level — compared to 11.3% of all U.S. families.
2. 25% of Puerto Rican families in the U.S. — compared to 5% of the total population — are forced to go on welfare.
3. $7629 was the median income for Puerto Rican families in the U.S. in 1975; $12,830 was the median income for all U.S. families.



In the U.S. thousands of Puerto Ricans were unable to find work. Some returned home, but jobs were even harder to find on the island. There was very little choice but to go on welfare. Welfare was defined as a charitable institution that helped a poor and hungry people, but in fact it was an essential part of the colonial system of oppression. Welfare maintained a large body of potential workers at the subsistence level — the bare minimum necessary to survive. In boom times industry drew these workers into production and paid them the bare minimum wage. During hard times the welfare system was especially important in controlling the surplus of workers that industrialization and migration created.

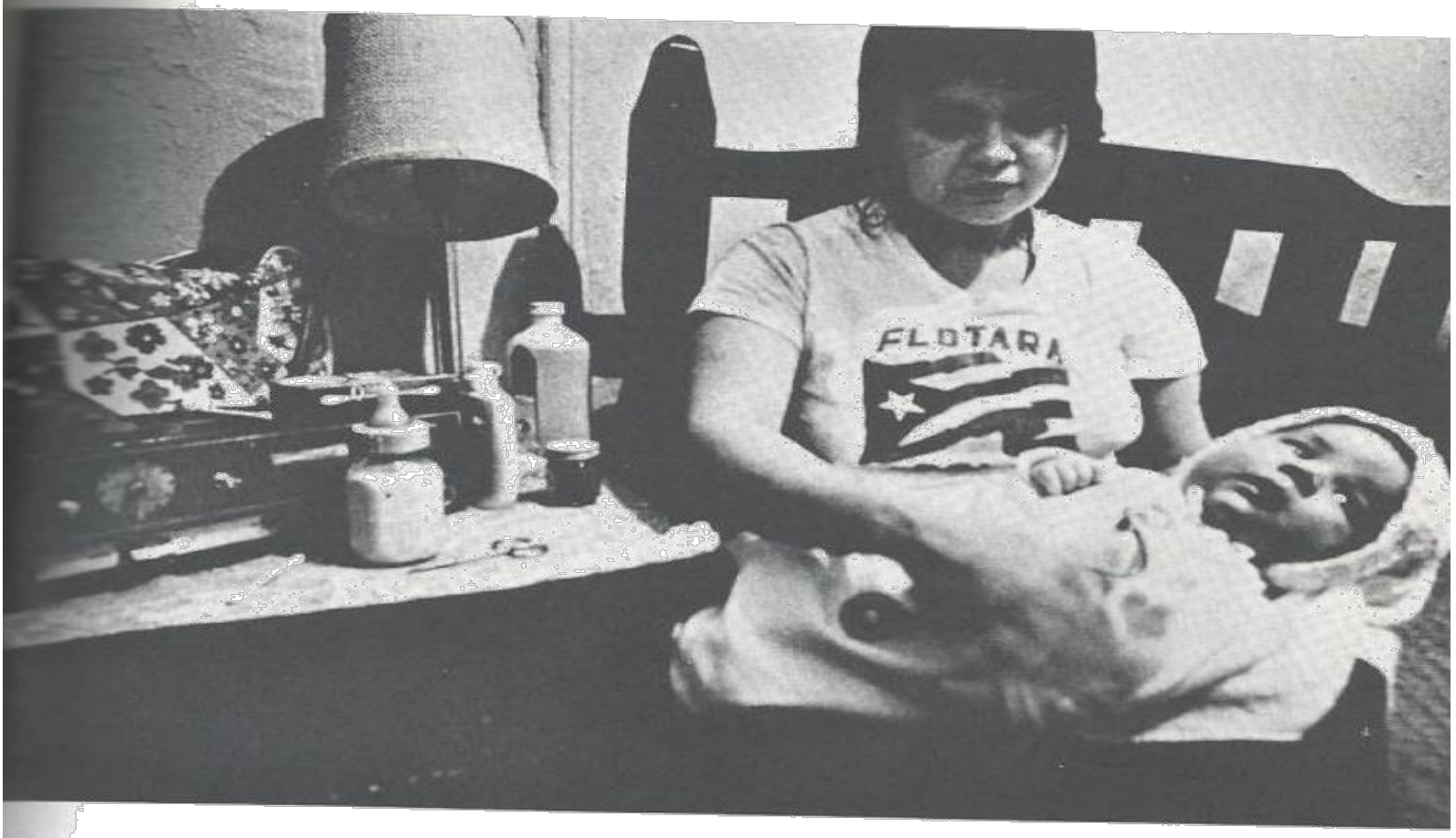
In the 1960s and 1970s half the Puerto Ricans excluded from the workforce were welfare mothers. Their allotments were so small that they, their daughters and sons, were locked on the edge of survival month after month, year after year. They were degraded by the miserable living conditions that welfare enforced — rooms in resident hotels, starchy diets, poor clothing, and shoddy medical care. In addition, the welfare system attacked the dignity and self-respect of women. Welfare officials questioned Puerto Rican, as well as Native American, Third World and poor White women, about their personal lives. They were spied upon, handed moralizing sermons along with their checks, patronized and abused. Welfare officials told women that they, and not the economic and political system, were to blame for poverty, hunger and unemployment. They made Puerto Rican women feel ashamed for not having a job, and humiliated for having children.

Sterilization: The Crisis of Production and Reproduction

Forced migration, and the welfare system did not "solve" the population problems created by colonialism. There was still a "surplus" of people. Migration flooded the U.S. labor market. The welfare system ate up funds that, from the point of view of government and industry, were better invested in businesses that returned a handsome profit. In this crisis situation the government developed a sterilization program. Sterilization was directed against all Third World peoples, but especially against the Puerto Rican people. By 1976, 24% of Native American women of child-bearing age were sterilized; 20% of Black women of child-bearing age were sterilized; 35% of Puerto Rican women and 20% of Puerto Rican men had been sterilized. The incidence of sterilization in Puerto Rico is the highest in the world.

From the point of view of the colonial system, sterilization gets to "the root of the problem" — the people. It disposes of future generations that would otherwise be forced to migrate, and that would form a permanent base of the welfare system.

Sterilization took the reproduction of the Puerto Rican people out of their hands and placed it in the hands of U.S. government and industry. It thereby "solved" the production problem of too many workers. Furthermore, it "solved" the potential problem of rebellion; a hungry and unemployed population, with political organization and leadership, could become a revolutionary force. Sterilization served a basic ideological function. It shifted blame away from the colonial system and placed it where it didn't belong — on the people. The sterilization campaign argued that the Puerto Rican people created their own poverty and hunger, that by "voluntary" eliminating of children they would "eliminate" their social problems.



Finally, sterilization was a direct attack on Puerto Rican women. It was both racist and sexist. The directors of North American corporations — ruling class men like the Rockefellers, and the Vanderbilts — decided how and when Puerto Rican women would give birth to Puerto Rican children.

Puerto Rican women were not forced into sterilization clinics at gun point, but forced they were. Like Emilia Mendez, many of them were faced with the impossible choice between work and survival or children and hunger.

Puerto Rico was one of the first nations in the world targeted for birth control. As early as 1925 pilot programs were set up in rural areas. By 1934, 67 birth control clinics were in operation. At first, U.S. laboratories and chemical companies used Puerto Rican women as "guinea pigs" to test birth control pills. When "the pill" was judged "safe" for use in the U.S. it was no longer available on the island, and sterilization became the chief method to prevent births.

In the late 1930s Governor Blanton D. Winship signed a bill that legalized sterilization for "health reasons only," but sterilization was soon the unofficial government method for limiting the population.

The extensive sterilization campaign began at about the same time that large numbers of Puerto Rican women entered the workforce. In the 1920s and 1930s many women worked at home in the needle trades. In the 1940s and 1950s they left their homes and took jobs in the textile and garment industries. U.S. factories did not provide maternity leaves or child-care centers to Puerto Rican women, often the only wage earners in the family. Faced with the impossible choice between job or child, hundreds of women resigned themselves to sterilization.

By 1947, 7% of Puerto Rican women of child-bearing age were sterilized. By 1954, 17% were sterilized. In the 1960s and 1970s sterilization increased as the highly mechanized petrochemical and chemical industries expanded. By 1965 34% of all women of child-bearing age in Puerto Rico were sterilized.

Let's plan today in order to avoid this disaster in the future.
Puerto Rican
Family Planning Association

An amply endowed propaganda campaign on radio and TV pressured women to become sterilized. The walls of San Juan and Ponce were covered with posters calculated to frighten women about the perils of over-population. Medical health officials issued dire predictions of an island so densely crowded that it would immediately sink into the Caribbean Sea if one more child was born.

Puerto Rican women were made to feel like criminals guilty of the crime of over-population. They were made to feel responsible for the poverty and hunger on the island. Doctors used their expertise, their status and power to threaten, and frighten pregnant women, prospective mothers and teenage girls. Puerto Rican women were lied to, and kept in ignorance about their own bodies. Doctors rarely explained the consequences of sterilization to their patients, and many women learned what had been done to their bodies months and sometimes years after the operation.

Puerto Rican women report that Commonwealth officials told them that their welfare payments would be cut-off unless they agreed to sterilization. Others were told that they had cancer, and that sterilization would save their lives. With still other women, the operation was performed in hospitals immediately after delivery. The mother, exhausted by hours of labor, would submit to the doctor's cold "logic."

U.S. education policies, forced migration, and sterilization are cloaked in a language of charity and friendship. Migration is supposed to benefit the "backward" Puerto Rican people by bringing them into an "advanced" society. Sterilization is supposed to help a hungry people. Education is described as a ladder to success. However, in the hands of U.S. government and industry these programs have consistently brought destruction. Sterilization robs the Puerto Rican people of their future, U.S. education denies them their past, and migration fragments the nation and divides the people. Together they add up to genocide, a deliberate and systematic attempt to obliterate the Puerto Ricans—their culture, identity, and nation.

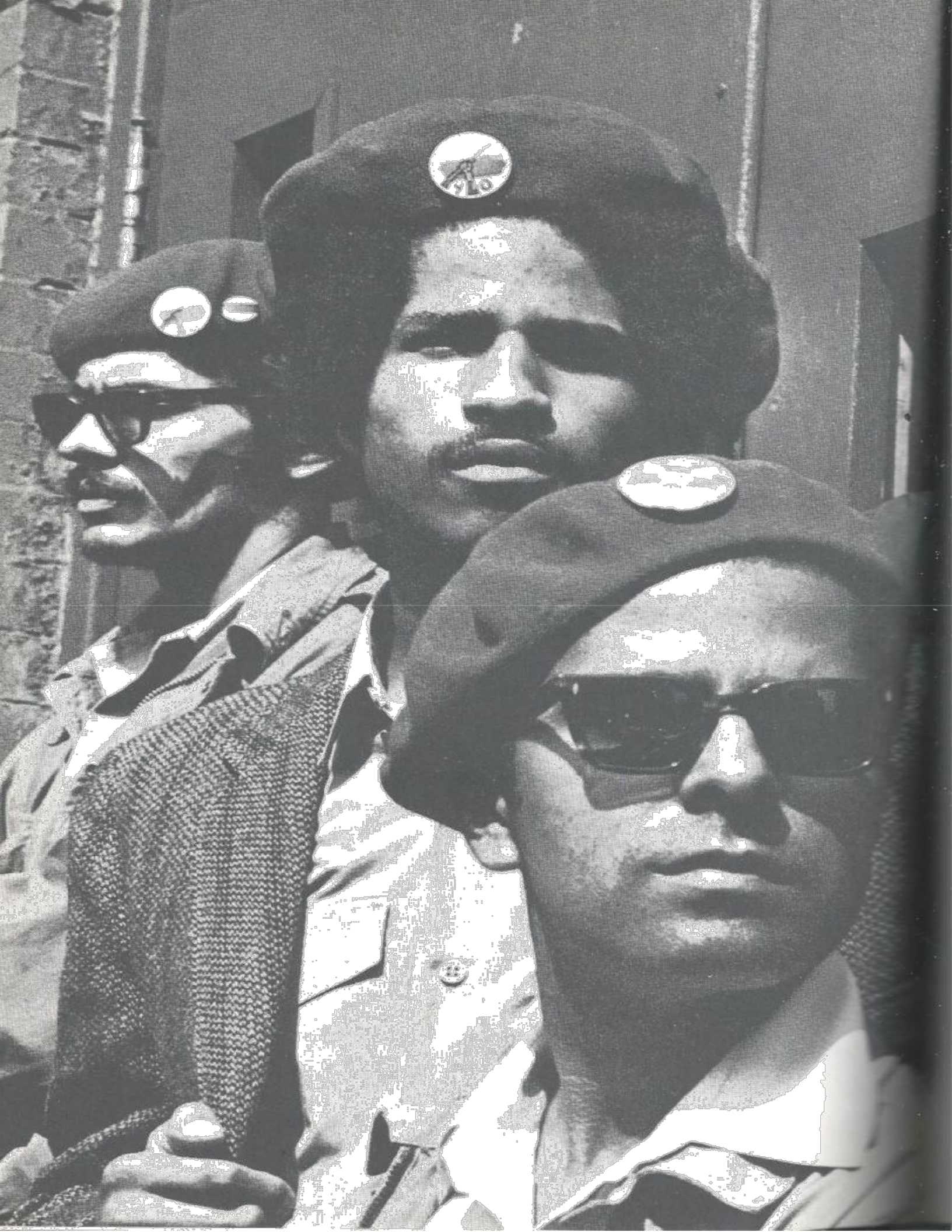
The Puerto Rican people on the island and in the U.S. have resisted this attack. They resisted it at Ponce in 1937, at Jayuya in 1950, and in the dramatic action led by Lolita Lebron in Washington D.C. in 1954. Throughout the 1930s, 40s and 50s, the Puerto Rican people fought to preserve their heritage, their values, their families, their culture. They fought for the right to have Spanish taught in their schools. They fought to preserve their revolutionary past; they celebrated their national heroes and heroines. Year after year they marched to Lares to honor the 1868 insurrection. They sang *La Borinqueña* and raised the Puerto Rican flag. Decade after decade they demanded the right to be Puerto Ricans, not North Americans, to have their own nation and not to be a colony of the U.S.

In the U.S. Puerto Ricans maintained their island roots, and at the same time created a new Puerto Rican culture of resistance. Puerto Rican poets, novelists, and musicians like Pedro Pietri, Piri Thomas, Roy Brown, and Tito Puente expressed the beauty, the anger and the outrage of the people in *los Barrios* of the U.S. Puerto Rican women joined with other Third World and poor White women to fight sterilization abuse. They fought for the right to determine their own futures and to raise their own families. They combated colonialism and male chauvinism.

Seven decades of U.S. rule did not destroy the movement for independence, or crush the national identity. As Lolita Lebron noted:

> A great upsurge of Puerto Rican sons and daughters has lifted up for nationhood . . . As a Puerto Rican mother I rejoice in my prison for this celebration of what Puerto Rico heroes and heroines have fought for and died for, and been imprisoned and persecuted in the revolutions of 1868, 1950, and 1954.

In the 1960s and 1970s the Puerto Rican people again defied U.S. economic, political, and cultural domination.



10 JÍBARO SÍ YANKEE NO

Ready to be Free

Decade after decade resistance to genocide and U.S. colonialism was led by the Nationalist Party, by Albizu Campos, Lolita Lebron, Oscar Collazo and by hundreds of unsung heroes and heroines. But the Nationalists were not alone. They were flanked by other groups and parties; each decade new organizations came into existence. In 1946 the *Partido Independentista Puertoriquenos* (PIP), the Puerto Rican Independence Party, was formed. Led by Ruben Berrios, PIP took part in elections, combatted Munoz Marin and the Commonwealth Government, and brought the issue of independence to hundreds of thousands of voters. "In Puerto Rico we have a very strong nationality," Berrios explained. "We have a very compact, well-defined, strong culture . . . After decades of economic, political, and cultural domination by the most powerful empire in the history of the world, we have tens of thousands of people fighting for independence. We are ready to be free. If ever there was a country in the history of humanity that was prepared for independence, it is Puerto Rico."

In 1956 Puerto Rican students formed the *Federación de Universitarios Pro Independencia* (FUPI), the University Federation for Independence, that agitated for Puerto Rican sovereignty, and for democracy in the university community. Through rallies, demonstrations, pamphlets, and leaflets FUPI educated students and teachers about U.S. control of the economy and the political arena, and of the need to break U.S. domination.

In 1959 Puerto Rican patriots created the *Movimiento Pro Independencia* (MPI), Movement for Independence. Led by Juan Mari Bras, the MPI revived the political ideas of native patriots — Betances, Lola Rodriguez de Tío, and Albizu Campos —

and brought the ideas of international revolutionaries — Lenin, Castro, Guevara and Ho Chi Minh — to the Puerto Rican struggle. MPI organized both on the island and in the U.S. Through mass protest the organization tried to create a crisis in the colonial government that would force the U.S. to grant independence.

In the 1960s and 1970s many new organizations sprang up — both on the island and in the U.S. There were several underground groups, including the Commandos of Armed Liberation (CAL), new trade unions, and women's organizations that both reflected popular discontent and gave it clarity and force.

There was also support for Puerto Rican independence internationally. Cuba provided the bulk of this support, but the Puerto Rican independence movement had friends and allies throughout Latin America, in the Socialist camp, and from Third World liberation groups. In the U.S., poor and working people and progressives aided the Puerto Rican nation.

Sixto Alvelo Refuses to Fight in Viet Nam

In the early 1960s young Puerto Rican students refused to participate in the compulsory Reverve Officer Training Corp (ROTC) on campuses. FUPI organized the first actions against ROTC on the Rio Piedras campus of the University of Puerto Rico. Students picketed, petitioned, passed out leaflets, sat-in, and went on strike. At a rally against the U.S. military, Bishop Antonio Parrilla, a Catholic and an *independentista,* declared:

> Compulsory military service in Puerto Rico is illegal because the colonial status is illegal. Also illegal is the presence of armed forces in our country without our consent. The ROTC is illegal, as well as militarism and the use of force.

In the mid-1960s, as the U.S. launched total war against the people of Viet Nam, protests went beyond the issue of ROTC on the campuses. In 1964, Sixto Alvelo, a young Puerto Rican worker, refused to fight in Viet Nam. Soon other men followed his example. The MPI, and the Nationalist Party — long an opponent of the U.S. military — gave them full support. By 1966 over 1,000 Puerto Ricans on the island had refused to serve in the U.S. armed forces. On September 23, 1966, the 98th anniversary of *El Grito de Lares,* 1500 men burned their draft cards in a public protest.

The refusal of Puerto Ricans to join the U.S. Army deprived the Pentagon of troops it desperately needed. Puerto Ricans expressed their outrage against the U.S. invasion in Southeast Asia, against the napalm, the tiger cages, and at the same time affirmed their solidarity with the struggles of the Vietnamese people. Puerto Ricans recognized the National Liberation Front (NLF) as the legitimate representative of the Vietnamese people. The resistance of the Vietnamese people inspired the resistance of the Puerto Rican people to U.S. domination. From her prison cell in Alderson, West Virginia, Lolita Lebron wrote:

> I thank the heroic Vietnamese people and their leaders with deep feeling and great admiration — men and women who support our effort and liberation struggle and with whom militant Puerto Ricans are identified, because we are victims of the same brutal political power that subjects us to its colonialist oppressive regime.

The U.S. government arrested and jailed young Puerto Ricans who refused to join the U.S. Army. In turn, the Puerto Rican people intensified their resistance. In 1967, the Commandos of Armed Liberation (CAL), an underground group, was formed. CAL took up arms against the U.S. military and corporate presence on the island. CAL bombed luxury hotels and the headquarters of the multi-national corporations, causing over $25,000,000 in damages. In a communique CAL explained:

> Our enemy is . . . yanqui imperialism, the monopolies who have evicted the Puerto Ricans from the land we inherited from our ancestors, who have seized commerce, banking and industry from us, reducing us to the category of outcasts in our own territory and forcing us to emigrate to the filthy slums of the U.S.
>
> Our goal: to recuperate for our people everything that the enemy has stolen from us. We will return the land to our farmers and agricultural workers. We will put an end to monopoly control over commerce and industry in our country. Puerto Rico's wealth will be reconquered by our country. Our goal is national liberation. The method for reaching this goal is armed struggle, the highest expression of the people's discontent.

The movement for Puerto Rican independence accelerated side by side with the movement against the war in Viet Nam. In 1968, when North American students

demonstrated in Chicago against the war, thousands of Puerto Rican students demonstrated against the war and at the same time rallied for Puerto Rican independence. On September 23, 1968 tens of thousands of Puerto Ricans marched into the mountains to celebrate the 100th anniversary of *El Grito de Lares*. Juan Mari Bras and Ruben Berrios joined with a new, young generation of *independentistas* to denounce U.S imperialism, revive the flame of Albizu Campos and pledge to carry on the long struggle for sovereignty.

Lords in the Belly of the Beast

The resistance in Puerto Rico was paralleled by resistance among Puerto Ricans in the U.S. One of the most important organizations to emerge from *El Barrio* of New York was the Young Lords Party. The Young Lords Party (YLP) was formed on July 26th, 1969, the 16th anniversary of the Cuban guerrilla attack on the Moncada Fortress. In October the Lords issued a 13 point program:

> The Young Lords Party is a revolutionary political party fighting for the liberation of all oppressed people.
>
> 1. We want self-determination for Puerto Ricans, liberation on the island and inside the U.S.
> 2. We want self-determination for all Nations.
> 3. We want liberation for all Third World People.
> 4. We are revolutionary nationalists and oppose racism.
> 5. We want equality for women. Down with machismo and male chauvinism.
> 6. We want community control of our institutions and our land.
> 7. We want a true education of our Afro-Indio culture and Spanish language.
> 8. We oppose capitalists and alliances with traitors.
> 9. We oppose the Amerikkkan military.
> 10. We want freedom for all political prisoners and prisoners of war.
> 11. We are internationalists.
> 12. We believe armed self-defense and armed struggle are the only means to liberation.
> 13. We want a socialist society.

The Lords opposed the war in Viet Nam, and the U.S. military presence in Puerto Rico. "No Puerto Rican should serve in the U.S. Army," they declared. "We demand the immediate withdrawal of all U.S. military forces and bases from Puerto Rico and Viet Nam." In New York City the Lords held demonstrations against the war. They chanted:

Jíbaro Sí, yankee no
A Viet Nam yo no voy
Porque Yankee yo no soy
(Jíbaro yes, Yankee no
I won't go to Viet Nam
Because I'm not a Yankee)