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Foreign in Their Own Country: A Critical Analysis of Puerto Ricans in the United States

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Foreign in Their Own Country: A Critical Analysis of Puerto Ricans in the United States

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

By
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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Shoutout to me for stressing me out and making this project so hard on myself. Even when I win I lose.

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There's so much more I want to say in this paper *pero NO TENGO TIEMPO!! WEPAAA*

Abstract

Foreign in their own nation? The neglected United States territory? The 51st state that never was? Regardless of which of these questions one chooses to look through the prism of, they are all applicable when it comes to discussing Puerto Rico and its staggering relationship with the United States. These questions are all significant in some way because they are indicative of patterns of interaction and an overall story that has developed over the years between the two respective sides. These questions give a window into the contentious history that the island has had with the United States since being seized under its control in the late 19th century as a result of the Spanish-American war.

Puerto Ricans have long been the source of marginalization because of the ambiguity surrounding their identity within their own nation, but in this paper the Puerto Rican experience is really brought to light in a cohesive and thoughtful manner. This is an exploration of how Puerto Ricans have been/currently are perceived and received by Americans in the U.S. This is an exploration of the question of how Puerto Ricans assimilate, but at the same time attempt to not lose their cultural identity in which they were brought up on. This is an exploration of what it means to be regarded as “foreign” in one’s own country and what the implications of that perceived foreignness are. This is an exploration of the Puerto Rican experience--analyzed through both the lens of society and themselves.

Keywords: *Puerto Rico, Puerto Rican, Unincorporated Territory, Assimilation, Parade, Ethnic Identity, Barrios, United States, Colonial Power, Citizenship*

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Preface: Soy Boricua

San Juan, Puerto Rico -- There's an old man wearing a straw hat sitting in a Viejo San Juan street cafe.

"Soy Boricua," he tells me.

Not Puerto Rican?

No, he insists. He says it again: "!Soy Boricua!" I am Boricua!

All right. All right. Let's just order some cafe con leche.

But he raises an important distinction. Do you want to know the answers to some of the hot-button questions on the island these days?

Why were people here so eager to kick the U.S. Navy out of Vieques, even though the military provided thousands of jobs and pumped billions of dollars into the local economy?

Why is there a chasm between those who can trace their roots to the island and those who live here?

And, why is a radical political movement that's blamed for several deaths, bombings and acts of terrorism widely regarded as the conscience of the island?

If you want to know those answers, then you need to understand the difference the old man talked about.

The island's indigenous people once called their home Borinquen, which means "the land of the brave lord." By all accounts, this was a vibrant and peaceful civilization.

Shortly after the conquistadors arrived here in 1493, and gave the island its present name, they set about enslaving the native inhabitants. They called them Taino Indians because that's what Christopher Columbus named them.

That's where the differences between Boricua and Puerto Rican begin.

But there's more.

The term Boricua is about remembering. Making this fact a part of their everyday lives: Their native ancestors didn't just disappear -- they were conquered and slain by Europeans.

The term Puerto Rican means something different. As much as anything, it's about making the best of the here and now.

Such as in the 1950s, when in the name of improving the island -- the same place where their ancestors once had enough to support themselves -- Puerto Ricans were told they had to leave for the United States or face starvation.

So thousands left the island for minimum-wage jobs in the United States,

Here's how it shakes out (keeping in mind there are always exceptions):

You're Boricua if you know light blue is the original color of the triangle on the island's flag.

You're Boricua if you look cautiously upon those who come to the island every so often and seem in shock upon seeing chickens run loose in the yard.

You're Boricua if you don't wear your patriotism on your sleeve.

You're Boricua if you walk past Starbucks in favor of drinking island-grown coffee that's served in tiny Styrofoam cups.

You're Boricua if your parents told you to run out back and get a mango or a lime off the tree.

You're Boricua if you eat rice and beans every night for dinner.

You're Boricua if you roll your eyes every time someone comes to the island and says, "I'm with the government and I'm here to help."

You're Boricua if you eat at restaurants displaying large patriotic photos of Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos, one of the island's staunchest supporters of independence -- even though this movement has led to numerous deaths. (Locals are helping to shelter one of his followers in the mountains, despite federal warrants for his arrest on murder charges.)

You're Boricua if you even partially blame the U.S. government for using the island as a "laboratory" to test new ideas and inventions before taking them to the mainland, such as the birth-control pill, the ZIP code and the metric system.

You're Boricua if you call an orange a "china" rather than naranja, the Spanish word for orange.

You're Boricua if you either know someone who once worked in the sugar-cane fields, or did so yourself.

You're Boricua if you consider the island's agricultural underclass or "jibaros" as working-class heroes.

You're Boricua if you call your daughter Mami and your son Papi.

So, the old man asks me: Do you understand now?

Yes, is my response. It's actually quite interesting. Lots of questions about the island can be answered in those examples.

-Ray Quintanilla

Introduction: A Puerto Rican Day Parade in 1970

In a New York Times article written in June 1970, Peter Kihss gave an overview of some of the events that transpired during the Puerto Rican Day Parade in New York City during that same year.¹ During this parade, Puerto Ricans marched all the way from Fifth Avenue in Manhattan to 86th Street and First Avenue.² The parade included various forms of entertainment such as: personalized floats, dancers (including fire dancers with lighted torches), performers, bands & ensembles, and influential political figures both from Puerto Rico and the city. Some of these notable figures who attended included: **Manuel A. Casiano** (director of the *Commonwealth of Puerto Rico's Migration Division*), **Luis A. Ferré** (Governor of Puerto Rico at the time), **Johnny Manzanet** (parade's *grand marshal*), **Warren Richmond** (public relations man for the newspaper *El Diario-La Prensa*), **Nelson Rockefeller** (New York governor at the time), **Arthur J. Goldberg** (former associate justice of the Supreme Court), and **Jose Antonio Rodriguez** (Puerto Rican Parade Committee and sanitation department director), among others.

An estimated 60,000 to 70,000 people were said to have taken part in marching through the streets of New York City while about another 400,000 watched. In total, that is almost half a million people, so needless to say, this event drew a great deal of interest and was a massively important event for many to experience, not only directly, but also from a far as well. This parade was a great showing of unity and of the immense pride that Puerto Ricans take in identifying as such. They surely made their presence felt, which was something that was not lost on the part of Governor Ferré; as he applauded Puerto Rico for "becoming a creative part" of not just the city, but of the state as a whole.

Some people may read this and think that is a biased overstatement based on the Puerto Rican background of the governor, but I would beg to differ. This statement, while brief, I feel like says a lot about how Ferré views his people and their impact on their community. I say this because when reading

¹ Peter Kihss, "Puerto Rican Day Parade Mixes Pride and Politics With Protest," *New York Times*, June 8, 1970, 31.

² Kihss, "Mixes Pride," 31

this statement, two critical interpretations come to mind. In addition to the literal creative aspect that is required to carry out the parade and put on such an intricate show, on a more macro level, Ferré seemed to me to be referring to the overall greater impacts that Puerto Ricans had/continue to have on their environment as well.

As of the 2017 Census, there were an estimated 1.5 million Puerto Ricans living in the New York Metropolitan area (this number has likely increased by now)³. This is a pretty significant number; which means that Puerto Ricans are and have been critical to the economy of the New York Metropolitan area. Taking them out of the equation would leave a gaping hole in various job sectors and would almost certainly cause the economy in the area to falter, or at least undergo massive changes and throw things into flux.

While this statement was made by Ferré in 1970 when the Puerto Rican population in the New York area was much smaller at roughly 817,000 people, this is still a significant number and his words were still important because they highlighted the (at the time) expanding role and presence of Puerto Ricans in the city and recognized a group that historically has been marginalized. **Make Peter Keiss article intro**

During this parade, Puerto Ricans were still establishing themselves as a force to be reckoned with in New York, and really throughout the United States, but now fast forward 50 years later and their presence has only continued to expand. I think it is safe to say that Puerto Ricans have arrived in terms of establishing themselves as a force to be reckoned with. This is an ever expanding group that is only becoming more prominent over time.

Although this quote is very brief, I see it as kind of a celebration so to speak, or way for Ferré to give Puerto Ricans in New York their due for being able to navigate and add to the existing condition of the state. So, when governor Ferré highlighted the “creative part” of Puerto Ricans in the state of New

³ "Selected Population Profile in the United States, 2017 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates". [United States Census Bureau](#). Retrieved September 22, 2017.

York, I think there were layers to what he was saying. I believe he meant more than just the word in a literal sense. As one of the most influential voices for his people, Ferré exercised his platform in praising them, while at the same time I think trying to dispel any negative ideologies that may potentially be attached to Puerto Ricans both stateside and on the island.

As is a common theme that I see popping up when it comes to Puerto Ricans, it seems that Ferré wanted to make sure to paint his people in a positive light and try and dispel any negative stereotypes that may be held about them. Narratives are critical in shaping the opportunities and overall lives of Puerto Ricans, so being aware of those narratives has tangible benefits, and is in many ways necessary for Puerto Ricans in order to successfully navigate their dualness in the American society.



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Chapter 1: Historical Background

From the relatively small United States territory of Puerto Rico has come an overwhelmingly rich history filled with no shortage of key events and influential figures. Located in the Caribbean in between the Dominican Republic and the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico is made up of a collection of a main island and some smaller islands in which roughly 2.8 million people in total inhabit as of early 2020⁴. Even though it has been in a gradual decline since the turn of the century, this population combined with its area of 3,500 square miles, makes it one of the most densely populated islands in the world⁵. Its capital and largest city is San Juan; where about 400,000 Puerto Ricans currently reside⁶. The official languages in Puerto Rico are English and Spanish, however Spanish strongly prevails as about 95% of people speak Spanish on the island while there is a significantly smaller bilingual population⁷.

After the turn of the 21st century, Puerto Rico fell on hard times economically; the growth of the economy ceased and the amount of national debt inflated severely all the way up to 70 billion dollars with much of this debt being owed to U.S. investors. This economic depression led to a decline in the gross national income by 14% and led the governor of Puerto Rico to declare bankruptcy in 2015⁸. Two years later, in 2017, hurricane Maria struck the island and caused unprecedented widespread damage. The 150 plus mile per hour winds caused billions of dollars in damage and left the residents of Puerto Rico in shambles and having to face the reality of having to rebuild after having their lives completely turned upside down.

As a result of this hurricane, a shortage in resources such as: water, food, fuel, etc. ensued. This is significant from a humane perspective, but beyond the human element of people being forced to live without adequate resources, there is also the political aspect that has been brought to the forefront as well

⁴"Selected Population Profile in the United States, 2017 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates". United States Census Bureau. Retrieved September 22, 2017.

⁵(Not allowing to be deleted)

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as a result. The political aspect of this also holds significance because it has sparked an interesting debate about the level of responsibility that the United States should have towards aiding Puerto Rico, especially in the face of an island wide crisis such as this. Being that the island is a United States territory, is it the duty and responsibility of the U.S. to provide for Puerto Rico or should the island be expected to operate largely independent with little to no stateside assistance?

Regardless of how one may feel about the responsibility aspect, one thing that can be said that can not be debated is that it has been less than three years since this tragic event transpired. In the scope of history, this is still so recent of an event in which we are continuing to see the fallout from. The effects of this can still be felt among Puerto Ricans today, both in a tangible and non-tangible sense (for example many still do not have electricity as of this writing); as it has casted some doubt on both what the immediate and long term future of the island will look like.

This question of responsibility ultimately comes back to one of the large themes alluded to earlier in this paper; which is the understanding of the dynamics and level of connectedness between the United States and Puerto Rico. In delving into this through this case study, it will help provide a great deal of clarity towards the morality and ethics involved and where the responsibility should ultimately fall on. This is an interesting and critical concept that will be revisited in more depth in the sections to follow.

While it is believed that the first known settlers of Puerto Rico date back to as far as the year 2,000 BC, there is not substantial evidence for this. Furthermore, even if there were groups in Puerto Rico as far back as this time, they were not believed to have been indigenous to the land, but rather are believed to have come from somewhere in South America and had made their way up to the Caribbean.

There is substantial evidence however that a group known as the *Taino* people were indigenous to the land of Puerto Rico. The *Taino* people are in many respects regarded as the forefathers of Puerto Rico, as their culture came into existence on the island and was dominant there for a long time until being annihilated by Spanish contact in the late 15th century. Following the rise and fall of earlier more

short-lived groups such as: the *Casimroid* people, then the *Ortoiroids*, followed by the *Saladoides*, the stage was set for the *Taino* people to establish themselves in Puerto Rico around the 7th century; which is what they did end up doing.

Despite the *Tainos* establishing themselves in about the 7th century however, the culture did not become the dominant one in Puerto Rico until between the 11th and 12th century⁹. At its peak, this indigenous group was a highly skilled and peaceful society that operated with pronounced structure, however when Christopher Columbus and the Spaniards made way to the island in the late 15th century, this previous way of living was brought to an abrupt halt. The civilization that the *Tainos* had worked to build and evolve over multiple centuries became something of a distant memory, and in a short time, this group ceased to any longer exist. Initially it was enslavement, exploitation, and starvation at the hands of the Spaniards that was the leading cause of a *Taino*'s death, but when the smallpox epidemic broke out in 1518 in Puerto Rico (and throughout Latin America), this became the driving force behind the demise of the indigenous society. This smallpox outbreak was so deadly that it is believed to have killed roughly 90% of what was the remaining indigenous *Taino* population. They had previously never been exposed to this disease, therefore they were highly susceptible and had no immunity. A population that once consisted of an estimated hundreds of thousands of people during its most prosperous days suddenly declined down to a few hundred people and was rapidly brought to the verge of extinction, until ultimately it was extinct not long after.¹⁰

When contextualizing the history of the island however, it is important to note that the *Tainos* did not refer to the island in which they inhabited as Puerto Rico, but rather they called it *Borikén*, meaning “*Land of the valiant and noble Lords*” in their language. Although the island is called Puerto Rico today and universally recognized as such, the original naming of the island given by the *Tainos* is not lost on the part of modern day Puerto Ricans. To this day, Puerto Ricans pay homage to their original *Taino* roots by

⁹ <https://www.floridamuseum.ufl.edu/histarch/research/haiti/en-bas-saline/taino-culture/>

¹⁰ <https://www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk/article/section/pre-colonial-history/taino-indigenous-caribbeans/>

calling themselves “Boricua”, a term that derives from the word *Borikén*. This is not just a moniker that Puerto Ricans have taken on, but rather it runs much deeper than that. This term is about remembering. This term is about remembering not only the indigenous people and their civilization, but also the overall history of the island and what was there before being terminated by Christopher Columbus and the Spaniards.

When a Puerto Rican nowadays refers to themselves as “*Boricua*”, it is a mark of pride and honor, and is an exercise of remembering their descendants while at the same time pushing back on the colonizers who changed the name of the island upon arriving. There is a huge cultural significance tied to this word, so in a sense it has become more than a word and more so a symbol. It is a symbol of the cultural legacy; reminding us of what and who used to be present on the island before it abruptly ended and fell victim to the Spanish conquest of imperialism. The term *Boricua* serves the dual purpose of providing a window into the past while simultaneously not allowing it to be forgotten. Ask just about any Puerto Rican what the term *Boricua* means to them and they will be sure to gleam with pride and excitement when describing its cultural significance and the role it has had in helping them come to terms with their, at times, difficult history.

As mentioned, the name Puerto Rico did not exist at the time of Spanish contact because it was coined by the Spaniards when they came and established themselves on the island. Puerto Rico was not even the first name to be given to the island however, as the original names of the island and its capital were reversed from what they are today. Upon arriving, Christopher Columbus named the island *San Juan Bautista*. This was in order to commemorate St. John the Baptist, while the first settlement on the island was named Puerto Rico because of its rich resources and ideal location, specifically for ships to come in and trade and import goods. Shortly after however, those names were reversed and the entire island became known as Puerto Rico, while the first settlement and modern day capital became San Juan (Saint John in English).

While changing the name of the island may not seem all that significant today, it was in fact significant because of what it symbolized. The Spaniards changing the island from the original *Borikén* name to *San Juan*, and then ultimately to *Puerto Rico* holds significance because it was an exercise of power. Changing the name was a way for the Spaniards to come in and establish a new order while at the same time it attempted to suppress and disregard the history of what came before them on the island. At this time the Spaniards were hell bent on trying to expand their empire and assert dominance over less powerful groups, so establishing their own name for an island that they colonized was critical because it went a long way in helping them assert that dominance psychologically and move forward in their intended conquest. In knowing this fact, it is not difficult to tell why modern day Puerto Ricans have such an affinity for using the word *Boricua*. Even though the island largely speaks Spanish and the modern day culture is highly influenced by earlier Spanish culture, this word provides a continuous reminder that the Spaniards were not the first civilization there. They were simply the most dominant, and therefore were the ones to prevail and reestablish a new society with new societal norms.

This conquest of the island surely was quite the stunning development for the *Taino* people. They were indigenous to the island and helped manifest it into what it was over the course of centuries only to see it be taken over by an outside force which had no regard for what came prior. Plain and simple, the *Tainos* did not have the necessary means (both from a weapons standpoint and immunity standpoint) in order to combat the motives of the Spanish colonizers. Needless to say, this point of contact between the two disparate groups was a huge turning point; drastically changing the course of history on the island in irrevocable ways.

Chapter 2: Literature Reviews: Borderline Citizenship, Ethnic Identity, & Questions Regarding the American Mainstream

Making Sense of the Puerto Rican Journey to the Mainland

The Puerto Rican Journey written by C. Wright Mills is a book detailing the experience of Puerto Ricans in coming to New York City. This book covers everything from their thoughts, feelings, obstacles faced, and everything else in between in which gives insight into the Puerto Rican experience and what it is like to make the journey to the United States.

Despite being unique in the sense that they are the only Latin group to be incorporated into the united States and recognized as American citizens, books like *The Puerto Rican Journey* and others make it clear that the situational and life outlook that Puerto Ricans face breeds many similarities to other Latin groups. Despite being American in name, Puerto Ricans lack cultural connectedness with other more assimilated Americans because cultural differences between Puerto Rico and the United States are stark. This is not to say that Puerto Ricans are unaware of or ignorant of the dominant “mainstream” culture, because this is obviously not true, but it is not something that becomes necessary for them to learn and enact until coming to the United States. Thus, this is the peculiar plight of Puerto Ricans. This dual identity as an entire ethnic group is such a fascinating thing that really only they can speak to and is huge reason why Puerto Ricans are such an interesting case study.

The Puerto Rican Journey studies 1,113 households in New York City (more specifically Spanish Harlem and the Bronx) through interviews that were conducted in these predominantly Puerto Rican neighborhoods. The interviews were conducted by The Bureau of Applied Social Research of Columbia University with financial help from funds provided by the governor of the island.

In this book there were a number of critical points in which I would like to discuss brought about by the studies conducted. This study found that those who typically come over from the island are generally those in the “most productive” age range. This means that typically those coming over are not children and not elderly people, but rather young to middle aged adults who are at their peak physically. The average of a Puerto Rican living in the United States is 24 and has six years of education.

The study also found that the number of women coming over is far greater than the number of men. This is not representative of the population of Puerto Rico (it is not mostly women who or young to middle aged adults), as there are many elderly people and children in Puerto Rico, rather this is simply that age range that people feel is best to make the transition to the United States.

From the study, *C. Wright Mills* also reports that Puerto Ricans, as do other Latin groups, emphasize and place a heightened importance on the family unit inclusion. For example, some individuals in the family would be labeled “distant relatives” under the dominant United States culture because they do not fall under the immediate family tree or are not as familiar. Puerto Ricans on the other hand, know no such boundaries in that sense and regard everyone, whether “distant” or not as simply being a part of the family.

For Puerto Ricans, this notion of “distant relatives” is a foreign concept because family is so inclusive and such a pivotal part of their existence. This is the case so much so that even family friends and other close friends get labeled as family oftentimes because family in the United States sense and family in the Puerto Rican sense are vastly different.

When we say the word family in the United States, we usually speak of those who are immediately close to us, those who we were born into having a social bond with due to circumstance, Puerto Ricans however are seemingly much more comfortable with adopting and reconfiguring their idea of who is in the family post birth. This is why I would say the idea of friends and family are much more synonymous in Puerto Rico and Latin countries in general.

This is an interesting dichotomy because this shows that family can be a malleable term and shift based on culture and circumstance. I think this is really important to point out because this is something that is a simple concept, yet is not given its due attention and tends to be overlooked when discussing the dynamics of Latin interactionism.

Another concept that Mills discussed in this book is the downward mobility that inevitably occurs for those leaving Puerto Rico to come to the United States. As Mills alludes to, often times those who make the trip end up starting out with lower level jobs than the one they previously had in Puerto Rico.

This book has an interesting take on the phenomenon, and is one in which I do not agree with. According to this, Puerto Ricans experience a drop off in quality of work and ultimately pay because they demonstrate little ambition in improving their position in life. The book then goes on to say that Puerto Ricans fail to express aspirations for a better quality of life for their children.

I disagree with this and find there to be holes in this argument based on the fact that the sole reason that Puerto Ricans, and any other group that has immigrated, come to the United States is because of aspirations for a better quality of life. While it can not be taken to be a fact because the answer can not be known for certain unless each immigrant is asked on an individual basis; but if they did not seek a higher quality of life and better future both in the short and long term, would they not they stay in the country they were born in and have already been assimilated to? Would they potentially risk their lives coming to a country in which they likely do not know anyone and come to a place with those not speaking their native language if they did not see a real benefit that they could take advantage of?

As I stated, there is not one uniform answer because it depends on what each individual says on a case by case basis, but based on my knowledge and what I can surmise, it seems that coming to the United States is not something that individuals would do unless they were looking for tangible improvements in their quality of life and were intent on doing whatever it takes to make happen.

After hundreds of years of being under colonial Spanish rule, Puerto Rico was acquired by the United States in 1898 as a result of the U.S. victory in the Spanish-American war. This war, ended by the *Treaty of Paris* agreement, led not just to the U.S. takeover of Puerto Rico, but led to its dominance throughout the Caribbean and beyond. However, despite the island of Puerto Rico becoming a United States territory in 1898, it was not until the *Jones Act* of 1917 was passed that Puerto Ricans were officially recognized as U.S. citizens and granted most of those same rights that mainland Americans received. In that nineteen year window between the *Treaty of Paris* and the *Jones Act*, Puerto Ricans might as well not have been a part of the United States considering the way that they were largely disregarded and mistreated as a whole. Even though they were no longer such, they were seen as foreign aliens and could not shake that label because many of the advantages that were granted to other Americans were not given to them. Thus, in turn this played a role in creating a perception of differentness and lack of unity between Puerto Ricans and the more assimilated mainland Americans.

As alluded to throughout this paper, the transition from being a Spanish colony to an American one was a process that was rough for Puerto Rico, as it was a time marked with xenophobia and pushback. Particularly, early in the 20th century, assimilated Americans were not all that familiar with this idea that every American does not have to fit under the same umbrella as them in terms of culture and worldly understanding. However, with the addition of Puerto Rico as a United States territory (and the immigration of others from different nations), their reality was soon to be turned on its head.

In order to co-exist, they were confronted with the new concept of being forced to drastically change their perception of what makes up an American and how they should look. Some were able to do this, but for others this proved to be very difficult, and still is difficult to grasp for some in the modern day. This early lack of real acknowledgement and attempted understanding of Puerto Ricans and their place in the United States was in many respects the beginning of what has proved to be a controversial, conflict filled partnership between the two.

Fast forward to the modern day, and despite now being U.S. citizens for over a century, Puerto Ricans still to this day have to face the difficult reality that their granted citizenship does not/has not necessarily guaranteed them equitable treatment and acknowledgement in the same way it has for other mainland Americans. Whether fair or not, this situation has been a source of much adversity in the Puerto Rican community and has led to the manifestation of some greater questions surrounding them and their perceived place within the context of the United States.

While there is not one concrete answer or explanation that can outright prove the reason for this being the case, many sociologists have attempted to gain clarity on the matter and better understand why this lack of harmony exists between Puerto Ricans and more assimilated Americans born and raised in the United States. Throughout the years, sociologists have attempted to tackle this topic from a variety of angles, looking to leave no stone unturned in this quest for developing a deeper and more rich understanding; thus leading to a number of different theories to arise.

In my own personal quest for more deeply understanding this topic and developing my own theories, I studied the work of a few scholars who all approached this same topic, but from slightly different ways with slightly different focuses. One line of scholarship in which I looked at, focuses upon assimilation and ethnicity (Alba & Nee). Another line of scholarship focuses upon ethnic solidarity in cities and narratives about Puerto Ricans in local news sources (Wherry). Relating to that, a different line of scholarship looks at what the “borderline” experiences of Puerto Ricans are as they attempt to navigate between what seems like two different worlds of solidarity (McGreevy). Lastly, I looked at a line of scholarship in which focuses on the ways that prejudices about Puerto Ricans, or ethnic stereotypes, help play a role in creating barriers for assimilation into United States society (Mill). All of these scholars have been valuable in helping me conduct my work because they all have slightly different viewpoints and provide different ways in which to frame, look, and contextualize the baffling dynamics present between assimilated United States Americans and Puerto Ricans.

Blurring the Boundaries of the Ethnic “Mainstream”

While Richard Alba is best known for his work focusing upon immigration and developing assimilation theory while Victor Nee is known for his work as an economic sociologist, the two were able to use their respective strengths to come together quite well and co write a groundbreaking book in 2003. This critically acclaimed book, *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration* was so well received because of its influence on the field of Sociology on multiple levels.

In this book, Alba and Nee give a new way to frame how we think about immigrants and the immigrant experience. This includes the breaking down of the idea of assimilation and what it actually means/entails along with whether or not this is still an appropriate or relevant concept to be discussing. Alba and Nee look at immigrants and the concept of assimilation through a few different prisms, but they raise this particular question about the appropriateness of assimilation because they argue that at this point in time-- in this era of heightened focus on multiculturalism-, assimilation is something that we should question the nature and place of in our society. What they mean by this is not that assimilation is a topic that we should ignore within sociological discussions, but rather, they argue that the significance of assimilation is overstated, or at least less vital than it once was. This is because they believe that the multicultural democracy-centric times that we currently live in do not manifest the same need for full on assimilation to mainstream American culture as they once did. Alba and Nee see the ideology that there is a need for immigrants to assimilate to this greater mainstream American culture as being outdated and borderline offensive. These authors find this ideology bordering offensive largely because deeming full on assimilation as an absolutely necessary part of living in America insinuates a concerning and misleading narrative about immigrant people and the United States. This insinuates that American culture is the “right” way to live by and is the way that immigrants need to live by in order to be successful in this country and experience upward mobility.

While undoubtedly the nature of the system has made this true to a certain extent, this is still not a narrative that should be pushed or supported according to Alba and Nee because it has detrimental consequences to the existence of immigrants in the United States. Pushing the agenda of assimilation and seeing it as the be all end all for a prosperous United States existence is negative in the sense that it minimizes the rich and diverse culture that immigrants bring over from their home country; while at the same time it further asserts the notion that the United States is a more dominant, superior culture that everyone on its soil, including those who did not grow up practicing it, should abide by. Alba and Nee find this quite detrimental being that it limits agency and coerces people to express themselves in a way that they are not used to and maybe do not want to. Thus, limiting the personal freedom of its immigrants and suppressing their natural identity to a large extent.

Even with this pushback against the concept of assimilation however, Alba and Nee still both agree that under the current system, assimilation inevitably plays a large role in shaping the immigrant experience, regardless of what country these immigrants are coming from. This was pointed out by them as they noted a shift in the influx of immigrants coming historically from Europe, to now from places like Latin America, Asia, and Africa.

Their understanding and interpretation of assimilation however, is largely different than that of other scholars who have delved into this topic. They bring to the table an interesting point of the view as they argue that factors such as institutional changes-- more favorable immigration laws and civil rights adjustments-- have made way for more supportive and complimentary conditions for minority immigrants than was the case in the past. Just as, if not more interestingly however, the authors also argue that the general improvement in living conditions among immigrants additionally stems as a product of their own volition.

Alba and Nee assert that while immigrants still conduct themselves and frame their actions around what they believe will bring them the most reward in terms of improvement in social standing,

they also make the case that immigrants are reaping the fruits of their own labor, so to speak. Even though they come from exterior countries largely with different sets of values, beliefs, and norms, Alba and Nee see immigrants, especially in the contemporary day, as having irrevocably altered the nature of mainstream American culture. Bits and pieces of various immigrant's cultures have permeated through to American culture and further added to the richness and diversity of what it means to be an American.

For this reason, Alba and Nee are bullish on the fact that as immigration continues to become more prominent, becoming less prominent will be the divide between *mainstream American culture* and *immigrant culture*. As time progresses and the two disparate entities continue to collide and have an effect on one another, they will no longer be so disparate according to Alba and Nee. What have been historically distinct racially defined populations will be no more as immigrant minorities become more widely integrated into a once exclusive mainstream society.

Challenges of Neighborhood Development & Ethnic Stereotyping

In zooming back in and bringing the discussion back to the scope of the paper, the impact of immigrants, particularly Puerto Ricans can be greatly felt throughout the nation. As author Frederick Wherry explores in his 2011 book titled *The Philadelphia Barrio*, this is especially the case on the east coast where Puerto Ricans have a greater presence than any other region of the country. While Puerto Ricans are most prevalent in New York City, Wherry chooses to use the second most prevalent Puerto Rican population as his case study location. This is of course Philadelphia. As of 2016, in Philadelphia Puerto Ricans made up just under half of the Latin population at 49% and made up 3.5% of the state's total population. Moreover, as of 2017¹¹, it was estimated that at least roughly 134,000 Puerto Ricans live in Philadelphia. While not quite as drastic as New York (which is not surprising given the difference in

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size of the two), these numbers indicate just how much of a presence that Puerto Ricans have in this city, and to a lesser degree in this state.

As Fred Wherry highlights in his book, Puerto Ricans living in barrios go through a number of different challenges due to their circumstances. While economic and political hardships certainly exist among Puerto Ricans in barrios and certainly play a role in their day to day, there was another aspect of struggle in which he touched upon that was interesting.

Not quite as documented, however still largely important, one of these challenges that barrio residents have to contend with are the negative stereotypes in which people have about ethnic neighborhoods. Wherry highlights these stereotypes through his focus on newspaper coverage of events occurring within the barrio. This focus on newspaper coverage as revealing cultural expectations and understandings of ethnic groups was an important inspiration for my study.

In conducting his research for this book, Fred Wherry made some interesting discoveries. He found that much of the prior writing on this topic carried out an overwhelmingly cynical tone by scholars. Scholars were not skeptical in the sense that they were condemning Puerto Ricans or their place in these Philadelphia barrios, but rather essentially the opposite. They were particularly skeptical of the potential for exploitation by outsiders that could rear its ugly head and persist.



(Centro de Oro Barrio in Philadelphia--Visitphilly.com)

In this skepticism, many of these scholars essentially said the same thing; their central concern was that using the mediums of arts and tourism as a way to attract attention among wealthy outsiders and promote economic development was going to ultimately backfire. They believed that no good could come from capitalism, and as Wherry put it, *those in the barrios would be sowing the seeds of their own community's demise*. In basic terms, these scholars saw the danger in this development because they saw the process going something like this: the arts become an instrument for making the neighborhood more attractive so that more well off people would inhabit it. Once the neighborhood becomes more attractive and rich people see it safe to start to flood in, the original inhabitants of the barrios are forced to move out and leave what they built up only to go somewhere else and have to start all over again; thus losing all progress that was previously made in terms of possessing capital, resources, and ultimately a chance at upward mobility.

Critics of this process saw this as a vicious cycle because under this system of operation, Puerto Ricans in the barrio would never improve their living conditions and never live in neighborhoods that are suitable to build and grow in over an extended period of time. The lack of sustained continuity in the barrio would ultimately be chief among the factors derailing its residents because according to the critics, under this system in which operates on the basis of displacing people from their original neighborhoods, Puerto Ricans living in the barrios have no sense of security. They become expendable pawns called upon to do the work, then are kicked to the curb when that work is done. This creates a difficult plight for barrio residents because if residents do not make an effort towards overall neighborhood improvement, then crime and poverty will continue to be a daunting factor, however if improvement is made, there is always the threat in time of being displaced by those who see opportunity opportunity in the barrio.

As Wherry notes, barrio outsiders and investors celebrate the neighborhood going through positive changes and “turning itself around”, but this comes with a huge caveat centered around the enactment of exploitation and gentrification. The caveat lies in the fact that when these outsiders see a turn around in these historically impoverished barrios, this fails to take into account a large part of what makes the barrios unique and a place to invest in. This sentiment of the barrio “turning around” naturally does not include Puerto Ricans or any other minority group that may have inhabited it prior. The turn around is referring to the territory and infrastructure itself rather than considering those living there and what their presence provides as being a factor.

These outside investors have an interest in moving into the barrios in Philadelphia, but only under their terms. They do not want to budge in their stance and co-exist with the original barrio inhabitants if it jeopardizes their idealized way of living and interacting with the new environment. A majority of these investors are not outright kicking out Puerto Ricans from these barrios in a forceful or even calculated manner such as an eviction would, but they are essentially doing so in an implicit manner. This process is carried out by making the circumstances inhabitable, so that Puerto Ricans (and whoever else) have no choice, but to leave due to the financial strains of keeping up with the demands and lifestyle of the influx of new incoming residents.

While not everyone coming in from the outside is doing this (and not everyone who is doing this even is aware of what they are doing to a full extent), those who possess so much in terms of resources and influence, that this is enough to change the makeup of the barrios and send those who once called the barrios home, packing to another location. A new location in which they must pick up the pieces and look to start over as make an attempt to rebuild once again.

As Wherry highlights, the implications of this exodus of Puerto Ricans from their established barrios to new and unfamiliar homes and neighborhoods has real marked implications. One of the critical implications of this in which Wherry talks about in his book, is how the exodus of Puerto Ricans from their neighborhoods leads to false narratives and perceptions of change that do not provide a complete story.

Essentially what this means is, issues pertaining to the neighborhoods are not actually resolved, but rather are suppressed from mainstream consciousness, or if not suppressed, are discussed as being positive changes when in reality this is not entirely true. Yes, positive changes are happening in terms of the input of money and resources, however they are not positive or beneficial for all parties involved, particularly those who need them most. These changes largely benefit only the outside investors/new residents and largely disregard the condition of those in which were already there and had built the enclave from basically the ground up.

Moreover, when outsider investors, typically middle class to affluent people, move into the Philadelphia barrios and begin establishing themselves in these locations, poverty levels tend to decrease in the process, but as Wherry points out, this fact standing on its own can be deceiving because it does not highlight why and what causes the poverty to decrease. This process is not as simple as just the importation of people with more money and the subsequent exportation of people with less money changing these levels of poverty and making the neighborhood safer, thus making it an entirely positive process. This importation of money, safety, and structure would be ideal for poverty stricken barrio neighborhoods such as the ones in Philadelphia, however, the greater ethical factors at play make this particular method questionable for the already existing residents, argues Wherry.

As I already alluded to, many Puerto Rican in the barrios are forced to leave due to this process of change, however even for those who do have the means to withstand the changing landscape and stay in the barrio after the influx of outside influences, those original inhabitants' way of living and how they interact with their environment is substantially altered.

Due to the limited scope of cultural awareness and context of the barrio that outsiders possess, they enable police presence to become more involved, which has the adverse effect of causing the original inhabitants to become incarcerated at a much higher rate than otherwise. For example, in barrios and other low income neighborhoods in general, it is common for cars devoid of use (because they require repair) to be parked on the street for periods of time until they are back up and running and become functional again. This is a sight that is understood to occur and is not questioned by those who grow up in barrios because something like this has been internalized in these communities because of how common it is.

However, for those who recently moved into the barrios and are not used to seeing this because they already have a different set of established ideas about what their living environment should and should not look like, the idea of having a car parked on the street while not functional is a foreign concept. This lack of understanding and familiarity in many situations, (not just this--there are many more examples/situations that can apply) can best be described as a clash of cultures. This clash of cultures is significant because it tends to heighten the prospects of the police being called upon to diffuse situations, which in turn, leads to greater police involvement in the barrio, which in turn, ultimately has the potential to have a negative effect on the barrio-police dynamics.



(Protest Against Gentrification-Photo by Michelle Myers)

If law enforcement is often being called to the barrios, this decreases trust between law enforcement and the barrio, and increases the potential for law enforcement to go on a power trip and tighten up their policing regardless if it is warranted or not. A result of this heightened policing is of course, especially in predominantly Puerto Rican communities (and any community of color) such as the ones in Philadelphia, a greater rate of incarceration. When residents in the barrios are arrested with greater frequency, they are being taken out their community with greater frequency and their financial status is no longer factored in because they no longer reside in the barrio, but rather reside in jail. Thus, skewing the poverty numbers of the barrio and making them non reflective of what is actually going on.

Under this system of gentrification, original residents are not leaving the barrios because they found a way to get out and move into a neighborhood with less crime and better opportunity; rather they are either in jail or were forced to move to a neighborhood where opportunities may be even worse than where they started. This is why the decreased poverty and crime is not necessarily an indicator of increased positive change, but rather helps serve as a mask for what is really going on. Therefore, while on the surface, more money and less poverty in places such as the Philadelphia barrio seems like solely a positive development, it is not. Do not get me wrong, from this, positive change can and does happen, but it is a double edged sword because within that there are underlying factors that must be discussed in order to contextualize the entire picture.

This highlighting of the decreased poverty levels and crime paints a narrative that the state of the Philadelphia Barrio has been improved and enhanced on their own accord, but really it is gradually being replaced with new, much more affluent residents who have no connection to the previous residents, thus disrupting the cultural continuity of the barrio. The territory is being taken over by new residents and being improved by those new residents and they are the main ones to benefit rather than the same old residents living in a continually improving neighborhood, as is often believed to be the case.

As a result of this, the argument can be made that the influx of outside investors who bring money in and change the culture, weaken the stability of the barrios more so than they strengthen them. This is a highly interesting development considering the prevailing thought by many that pouring money into an impoverished neighborhood is all that is needed in order to “turn it around”.

When looked at more critically on a sociological level, the language of turning a neighborhood around is an interesting one in of itself. I find it interesting because diagnosing a neighborhood or barrio as in need of being turned around implies something deeper; it implies that the barrio in its current state without outside help and resources is corrupt and that bad things are expected to happen there.

While of course there are negative occurrences that take place in barrios such as the ones in Philadelphia, many struggle to see the other side of it and are not aware of the positive that takes place. Many fail to see that there is a great deal of uniqueness to these barrios, and as a result of this, uniqueness manifests fascinating results from fascinating people.

In barrios, or any neighborhood devoid of an abundance of resources where a high degree of hardships take place, the circumstances tend to test the limits of its residents and provide an ideal breeding ground for creativity and expression to manifest. The case is no different when it comes to the barrios in which Wherry wrote about in *The Philadelphia Barrio*. What he saw was people who were not bad or immoral people, but rather people who were fundamentally misunderstood, and more importantly he saw that their culture was fundamentally misunderstood and painted in a certain light by those who do not have an awareness or grasp of the context of the culture. Cultural context is critical because it informs others of various aspects regarding the neighborhood and allows its character to shine through and reveal itself.

In the Philadelphia barrios, Wherry saw graffiti on the walls, street performers performing, run down bodegas, residents socializing on front porches, domino playing, loud music and laughter, marijuana smoking, and everything in between. Upon the beginning of his case study of these barrios, this served as something of a culture shock to Wherry, but upon further examination and spending more time in these settings, Wherry realized that this is simply a way to live in which has been adapted as a result of their circumstances and life experiences. This way of living is a reflection of life in the barrios and is authentic to the life experiences they have had. This is a form of *adaptation* that has taken place in these barrios out of necessity in order to survive and hedge out a place in an American society that does not really have a natural place for Puerto Ricans.

In this book, Wherry highlights the feelings of *otherness* and *ambiguity* that engulf Puerto Ricans, as they attempt to fall in line with the mainstream United States culture just enough without losing their grasp on the culture that birthed and raised them. Wherry sees it firsthand, it is a fine line to toe and can be mentally taxing; give up part of one's self in order to adapt and adopt a new part of one's self.

It is such an interesting dichotomy that exists between the two cultures of the mainstream United States and Puerto Rico. This is why for Puerto Ricans, carving out a niche in the United States presents so many challenges that are difficult to fully understand and contextualize for those looking in from the outside. This is also why assimilation and ethnic identity specifically pertaining to Puerto Ricans have been so widely studied and dissected by a number of sociologists. Assimilation and ethnic identity is chief among the conversation when looking at Puerto Ricans and their relation to mainstream United States society.

Understanding What Helped Shape How the United States & Puerto Rico Got Here

While Fred Wherry and Richard Alba & Victor Nee give an astute assessment mainly of the state of Puerto Ricans in the United States in the contemporary day, it is critical to discuss the past as well because it is clear that these current dynamics have strong ties to the past.

As I have alluded to throughout this paper, since their early interactions that date all the way back to the late 19th century, the United States and Puerto Rico have had a tenuous relationship with one another. There has been a longstanding history defined by misunderstanding and neglect that its other more assimilated citizens have not experienced, at least not in quite the same way.

At the forefront of what has shaped these relations has been the intersection between United States colonial power and Puerto Rican migration. In his 2018 book *Borderline Citizens*, Robert McGreevy explores the nature of this relationship between the two; as he makes the claim that the border between the United States and Puerto Rico has been very much constructed. He claims that as a result of this, Puerto Rican migration has been fundamentally shaped by United States colonial policy on the island. He goes in depth in a number of areas pertaining to the history of Puerto Rico and the United States over the past few centuries, however he largely bases his argument around the significance of the island being an unincorporated territory of the United States.

To sum up his work in a succinct manner, in *Borderline Citizens*, he looks to trace the history and overall patterns surrounding the origins of 20th and early 21st century immigration to the United States. His work is discussed through the prism of United States and Puerto Rico relations because that is his focus, however he incorporates other ethnic groups into the discussion as well because it helps provide an added layer of context to what he is looking to convey in this book.

This was a time when immigrants came to the United States in large numbers, particularly from areas of U.S. influence in order to seek refuge from their previous homelands and begin what they believed would be a much better quality of life. However, McGreevy notes in his book that oftentimes Americans are not able to see this and make this connection so easily.

He believes that Americans tend to view those who come into the United States society as being eternally foreign and not having a real place within the country regardless of whether they integrate themselves. The case is no different when it comes to Puerto Ricans despite their colonial ties to the United States. McGreevy believes this leads to heightened feelings of separation and disconnect for those trying to establish themselves and make a way in the United States. The following literature review explores some of what helped shape these ideologies along with what came about as a result of the early United States, Puerto Rico interactions.

After the *Treaty of Paris* was signed in 1898, officially putting an end to the Spanish-American war, Puerto Rico and a host of other territories were relinquished from Spanish control and became the newest United States possessions. In addition, the United States was compensated twenty million dollars as part of the treaty. As a result of this war, Puerto Rico (in addition to the Philippines) became the first colony of the United States to be known as unincorporated.

McGreevy describes this unincorporated title as being significant because it was different from previous territories in which were acquired (California, Texas, Arizona) in the sense that these previous territories were acquired with the expectation that they would eventually become states. However, Puerto Rico on the other hand was not expected to follow suit in becoming a state due to the 1901 case of *Downes vs. Bidwell*. This was a case decided by the Supreme Court in which made a ruling on whether or not the United States constitution applies to and protects its territories.

In a narrowly cruel twist of fate, the Supreme Court decided 5-4 that newly acquired territories were not going to be protected under the United States constitution because it was decided that full constitutional protection of rights does not automatically apply to all places and people under American control. Furthermore, the United States also enforced the ability to create laws, mainly economic laws, within certain territories, such as Puerto Rico, when it sees fit. This was part of a series of cases within the United States supreme court in 1901, which were known as the *Insular Cases*. These court decisions paved the way for Puerto Rico to be defined as an unincorporated territory and more than likely drastically altered the future outlook of the island and the future outlook of Puerto Ricans.

Additionally, McGreevy sees this development as highly important because it serves as a legal way for the United States to define the island in two ways: part of the United States and outside of the United States simultaneously. In *Borderline Citizens*, McGreevy describes this dynamic as the “United States holding the island at arms length.” With these court decisions in 1901, Puerto Rico fell victim to the colonial power of the United States and got the short end of the deal on two counts: the island remained a territory of the United States, thus not allowing its independence, while at the same time not allowing the island to exercise its own sovereignty.

Another critical idea that McGreevy discusses in the book are racial ideas and racial views. According to McGreevy, race plays a critical role in understanding the history of relations between the United States and Puerto Rico because American imperialists justified their imperialism by using race as their central argument.

He gives the example of many Americans claiming that Puerto Ricans were less intelligent than the Chinese. The bringing up of specifically Chinese people into the equation is significant because of the context of where Chinese were placed on the social hierarchy and how they were viewed by Americans. This was a time of extreme American xenophobia and vitriol towards Chinese people; and just years before the colonization of Puerto Rico by the United States, there was an anti Chinese law that went into effect.

This was the *Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882*. This act restricted Chinese people from being able to immigrate into the United States and restricted the ability for them to become citizens of the country. While xenophobia surely played a role in the passing of this act, Americans placed the blame of declining wages and a declining economy on Chinese people, thus terminating their ability to enter the country. Needless to say, Americans did not look at Chinese people in a very favorable manner during this time.

In relating this back to Puerto Ricans and their relation to the United States, McGreevy discusses the concept of how labeling Puerto Ricans as unintelligent and unable, was a tactic used by the American government in order to soothe the growing fear that the quest for American imperialism brought to many of its own citizens. The reason there was even a fear and many of its own citizens opposed this imperial desire was because the growing sentiment among Americans at the time was that the more territories in which the United States invaded, the more susceptible it would become to an influx of immigrants coming in. However, in the case of ethnic groups like Puerto Ricans, United States leaders shaped the narrative that these people coming in are so unintelligent that they would not even be able to survive in a country such as the United States if they were to come.

For those who did not accept that ideology, United States leaders also claimed the forces of the United States government were so powerful, that if somehow the migrants were smart enough to survive in the country, they could exercise their legislative power to limit the means of Puerto Ricans or any other ethnic group in which came over. However, as evidenced by the influx of Puerto Ricans and more traditional foreign born migrants into the United States, this claim has proved to be untrue; as over time, migration has continued to have a palpable effect on the makeup of the mainland. Rather than subsiding, the immigrant population instead did the opposite; it increased and should continue to do so in the years to come.

While there was a great deal of oppression and xenophobia involved when it came to the early relations between the United States and Puerto Rico, McGreevy also points out aspects of the history which highlight the uniqueness of the circumstance of the island. One of the ways he does this is by bringing up a specific example about a pregnant widow who was named Isabel Gonzalez. In 1902, Gonzalez made the trip from San Juan, Puerto Rico to New York City hoping to begin a new life in the United States.

Upon arriving however, due to her status as a pregnant widow, she is immediately labeled as someone who is a *public charge*, meaning that she is seen as someone who is going to be reliant on public assistance from the government. This garnered a great deal of attention, resulting in the case being taken to the Supreme Court in what was known as the *Gonzalez vs. Williams* case. Ultimately, this case was a turning point in Puerto Rican history because this sparked widespread discussion about Puerto Ricans and the ethics behind having them follow immigration laws despite technically being a part of the United States.

As a result of this case, the Supreme Court ruled that Puerto Ricans should be considered U.S. nationals and not aliens when they enter the United States. This paved the way for the legality of Puerto Ricans to enter and leave the United States freely without restrictions, which was not the case for immigrants from non United States territories.

Additionally, United States nationals were granted protection from the military as a result of this case. Even though it did not solve every issue pertaining to law and immigration for Puerto Ricans, the legacy of this case has been huge because it helped shape the future of an entire ethnic group. This case forced the hand of the United States in making entry to the mainland for Puerto Ricans far easier than prior, and helped set the stage for the all important *Jones Act of 1917* (*passed by President at the time-Woodrow Wilson*), an act in which granted Puerto Rican citizenship.

Chapter 3: Coverage of the Puerto Rican Day Parade in the New York Times

In order to diversify my medium of research on this paper and expand my method outside of solely looking at literature, I engaged in New York Times articles ranging from the years 1850-2017. I looked at New York Times articles through the *Proquest Historical Newspapers* database.

In searching through the database, I realized that it would be nearly impossible to sift through a general search such as “Puerto Rico” or “Puerto Rican” because too many articles would appear and it would be much too tedious. Additionally, it would also provide me with much information which is most likely not relevant to the topic that I am looking at for this paper.

Therefore, I decided to look closely not at a specific idea or theoretical concept, but rather at an event which I thought would be revealing and give me some great insight into both Puerto Rico itself, and the Puerto Rico, United States dynamics. The event that I chose to focus upon is the *Puerto Rican Day*

Parade, specifically the largest one in the country, which takes place every year in New York City and has done so since its inception in 1958.

In looking at this parade, I did not want to look at random, isolated events or pieces of news coming from the parade just on their own; instead I categorized the parade by decade beginning with the 1960's (the first decade it was covered by the New York Times), extending all the way to the most recent completed decade of the 2010's.

Within these decades I associated a general theme, or set of themes that I see best fit for those ten years. What I ultimately found was an interesting mix of themes over the course of the almost sixty years that were covered. Some themes were for the most part prevalent and stretched across decades, but in other cases, the themes were vastly different and unique to that decade and only that decade. Due to some decades being more controversial than others, some decades featured a vast number of articles while others were far less controversial, therefore there was less to write about and less articles.

Here is a summary below of what I have found, I have written it in words and also depicted it in the table:

When the words "Puerto Rican Day parade" are typed into the basic search engine of the *Proquest Historical Newspapers* database, there are 483 New York Times articles that come up ranging between the years 1850-2017. For the years 1851-1959, when the words "Puerto Rican Day parade" are typed into the basic search engine of the *Proquest Historical Newspapers* database, there are 0 New York Times articles that come up because the Puerto Rican Day parade only existed for two years during that span and was not covered in either of the two years.

In the decade from 1960-1969 there were 23 articles that appeared when "Puerto Rican Day parade" was typed into the database. The major themes of these articles that I found were *government*, *voting representation*, *Puerto Ricans looking to establish their presence in New York City*. This was the

first decade in which the Puerto Rican Day parade was covered by the New York Times, and as evidenced by the low amount of articles, this was the most sparingly covered time period since coverage started approximately sixty years ago.

At this time, due to it being so new and not nearly the spectacle that it has become today, the Puerto Rican Day parade was not yet rooted in the consciousness of the majority of American residents on the mainland, therefore it was not widely publicized.

From 1970-1979 there were 76 articles and the major themes were Community Engagement, Puerto Rican Pride. From 1980-1989 there were 51 articles and the major themes of these were Financial Controversy, Hot Parade Temperatures, Dishonest Politicians.

From 1990-1999 there were 89 articles and the major themes were Tension & Stereotypes (*With Police and Politicians*), Celebration of Pride/Puerto Rican Desire For Representation, Politicians Seeking the Puerto Rican Vote .

From 2000-2009 there were 194 articles and the major themes were Focus on Safety---Increased Police Due to Violence & Sexual Assault--Leads to Tarnished Image of Parade, Anti-Gang Efforts--Leading to Unlawful Arrest(& Dispute in Arrests & Tense Relationship With Cops), Punishment, Puerto Rican Pride, Politicians Seeking the Puerto Rican Vote.

Lastly, from 2010-2019 there 59 articles on the Puerto Rican Day parade and the major themes were Financial Mismanagement--By Those Running the Parade, Betrayal-- By Parade Authorities to the Puerto Rican Community, Misrepresentation of Puerto Ricans/Flag, Focus on Getting Back to Parade's Roots--Attempt to Avoid Commercialization of Parade

Decade:	Count:	Common Themes of Narrative:
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1960-1969	23	Government, Voting Representation, Puerto Ricans Looking to Establish Their Presence in NYC-- Overall Limited Coverage on Puerto Ricans at This Time
1970-1979	76	Community Engagement, Puerto Rican Pride
1980-1989	51	Financial Controversy, Hot Temperatures, Dishonest Politicians
1990-1999	89	Tension & Stereotypes (<i>With Police and Politicians</i>), Celebration of Pride/Puerto Rican Desire For Representation, Politicians Seeking the Puerto Rican Vote
2000-2009	194	Focus on Safety---Increased Police Due to Violence & Sexual Assault--Leads to Tarnished Image of Parade, Anti-Gang Efforts--Leading to Unlawful Arrest(& Dispute in Arrests & Tense Relationship With Cops), Punishment, Puerto Rican Pride, Politicians Seeking the Puerto Rican Vote
2010-2019	59	Financial Mismanagement--By Those Running the Parade, Betrayal-- By Parade Authorities to the Puerto Rican Community, Misrepresentation of Puerto Ricans/Flag, Focus on Getting Back to Parade's Roots--Avoiding

		Commercialization
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In taking a holistic view at how Puerto Ricans have been covered by the New York Times through the lens of the Puerto Rican Day parade since the 1960's, it is apparent that Puerto Ricans have had an interesting and at times turbulent relationship with different agencies in New York City. This includes the media, government, political figures, and the police force. Despite beginning in 1958, the Puerto Rican Day parade was not covered by the New York Times with any detail really until 1965 when it became hard to ignore its presence anymore. There were already an estimated 800,000 plus Puerto Ricans living in New York city during this time¹². This was easily the largest Spanish speaking population in New York City at the time; and as the numbers have steadily increased since then, this still holds true today.

While the Puerto Rican Day parade finally was given some attention by the media in the 1960's, specifically the New York Times (which as I stated is the news database that I am analyzing and basing my information off of), it still had just 23 articles written about it for that entire decade. This was a considerably low number for an ethnic group that was rapidly expanding in New York City, but it should not come as a surprise because people were wary of writing about Puerto Ricans and their parade because at this time it had not become the widely recognized and accepted annual tradition that it has come to be today.

Upon looking at these 23 articles, the major themes that I gathered were politicians, voting representation, Puerto Ricans looking to establish their presence in NYC-- (overall limited coverage on Puerto Ricans at this time). The writing about the Puerto Rican Day parade this time was very political and almost all of it featured some mention of politicians and their political campaigns.

¹² <https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/education/story-us-puerto-ricans-part-four>

Impacts of Coverage of the 2000 Parade

It seems like police are only willing to help when they feel threatened by the Puerto Rican people and aren't so eager to help when Puerto Ricans, specifically Puerto Rican women, are feeling endangered. Prime example is in the fact that police were deployed in large numbers to watch over the Puerto Rican Day parade (especially after 9/11 and the violence of the 2000 parade) and don't have a problem with intervening when it comes to the use of marijuana and alcohol, but when women claim to the police they are being sexually assaulted, police minimize it and are slow to react. Police also arrested many parade goers because they were thought to have gang affiliation with the Latin Kings even though claims by many Puerto Ricans were that the police did not have substantial evidence, but rather were making arrests on the basis of the yellow and black clothing being worn (Latin King colors) and hand gestures being made in which were believed by the police to be gang signals.

Puerto Ricans recognized and admitted that some in attendance very well could have been/probably were gang affiliated, but others were wearing those colors to show cultural affinity with the Yoruba, a popular cultural practice native to West Africa and now prevalent among Puerto Ricans. As a result of this, parade goers were highly upset with the police's deliberate hunting of people wearing these colors. The thought process among Puerto Ricans was how could police go after and arrest people for simply wearing a color when it could have multiple meanings depending on the person who is wearing the clothing? At this parade, wearing the color yellow with black essentially meant you were a criminal in the eyes of the police, which I would agree is a slippery slope to slide down because as the Puerto Ricans in a lot of these New York Times Articles alluded to, this is not probable cause; you can not pursue and try to criminalize someone based off of what they wearing. A particular color, regardless of whether it is yellow, black or something else, is not illegal and should not be a cause for suspicion.

Many Puerto Ricans felt violated by this notion and spoke out in opposition to what they believed were unlawful arrests and a form of racial profiling. As I mentioned earlier, Puerto Ricans conceded that there was some inappropriate activity going on during the parade, and there were in fact gang members who attended the celebration, but their problem was that the police had no way of knowing who was guilty, and because of this they felt like they were all being grouped together and persecuted arbitrarily just so the police could make some arrests and feel like they mitigated the issue of violence and sexual harassment in the crowd. Puerto Ricans are not saying that their fellow “Boricuas” (a name that Puerto Ricans use to describe themselves derived from their Taino heritage) who actually committed crimes and are guilty should not be held accountable for their reprehensible actions, but rather they are taking issue with the fact that police were not there immersed directly in the crowd and could not clearly see who was doing what in the crowd, so their argument is how could police make arrests on something they do not have conclusive evidence of. Puerto Ricans argue that this widespread indiscriminate arresting of those in attendance(which is how they saw it to be) leads to innocent bystanders being arrested and the root of the problem not being addressed because those who are not part of the problem are framed to be criminals, while some of the actual criminals are allowed to get off free and allowed to continue to engage in inappropriate activity without being stopped.

What I get from these articles and the overall theme of the decade 2000-2009, is that Puerto Ricans do not have a problem with police doing their job and regulating the Puerto Rican Day parade in order to make it safer for everyone, but rather they would like the police to do their jobs in a more meticulous manner and have an actual probable cause before arresting people. Based off of these articles, Puerto Ricans who have attended the parade and witnessed firsthand the contentious dynamic between parade goers and police interactions have a problem with their civil liberties being taken away and many

of them being criminalized as a group rather than the few defiant people, so to speak, being removed from the festivities and dealt with accordingly.

As can be seen from the New York Times articles throughout the previous years, this contentious dynamic between Puerto Ricans and the police force is not something that is new. This dissension has been brewing for decades, so it only makes sense that in the 21st century, particularly with the increase in sexual violence at the parade playing a critical role (namely in the year 2000), contention between the two sides reached a breaking during this time and caused real discord.

This discord caused a firestorm of controversy and gained the attention of even mainstream media such as the New York Times and other large media corporations. This of course led to heightened media coverage of the Puerto Rican Day parade and caused Americans to pay attention on a much larger scale to not only the parade, but also the Puerto Rican people themselves. This event helped to give the average American who may have been previously disconnected from this ethnic group, some more insight into who Puerto Ricans were and what they faced.

With the burgeoning rise of mainstream media at this time, up to this point this was arguably the most attention that Puerto Ricans had received in their history. Despite the Puerto Rican Day parade being around since 1958 and Puerto Ricans being United States citizens since the 1917 Jones Act, up to this point Puerto Ricans were much less discussed and given much less attention (by the mainstream United States media that is) than mainland Americans. This was really the first time when the parade exploded to this extent and became a national story and the first time when Puerto Ricans were at the forefront of the consciousness of mainland Americans.

While receiving attention and being recognized as a group typically is a positive development (especially when that group has been historically neglected and minimized), I think in this case it was more so of a negative development because of the nature of what was being covered by news sources such as The New York Times and other corporate giants. The widespread attention on the Puerto Rican Day parade and its affiliation to gangs and sexual assault during this time period surely had many Americans (who were not previously too familiar with them) on edge about Puerto Ricans and weary of them because of this largely negative coverage that they were seeing about them.

This had to have led to a questioning of the morals of Puerto Rican people by many and I would say painted an initial large scale picture of them that was not very favorable. Based on this negative coverage that many mainland Americans were seeing, this helped make casting judgements and aspersions about Puerto Ricans much easier even though it did not take into account the full scope of the people and their actions throughout history, but rather only took into account the actions of a select few during this event.

This was of course something that I see to be harmful because it enabled and provided an excuse for mainland Americans (or any other ethnic group for that matter) to develop negative stereotypes about Puerto Ricans, and for those that already had preconceived notions about this ethnic group, it allowed them to perpetuate those stereotypes and continue to see the group in a negative manner despite only a few Puerto Ricans being responsible for painting that narrative. This had the real potential to lead to adverse effects, and as we will see in the next decade, it definitely did affect Puerto Ricans in the years that followed.

Chapter 4: A Controversial Spotlight

Beginning roughly in the early 1980's with outrage over corrupt political figures and financial disputes, the Puerto Rican Day parade has long been a source of controversy and dissension within the United States media. Over the last twenty years however, since the turn of the century, that controversy has only heightened and increased the spotlight on the parade in ways in which were previously unprecedented.

While the digital age and explosion of widespread social media use surely has played a part in this being the case, without a doubt it is not the only reason that this has happened. As the number of Puerto Ricans inhabiting the United States, particularly New York City, continues to grow- *the number of Puerto Ricans has risen from 1.1 million in 2010 up to nearly 1.5 million as of 2016-* , this increases the likelihood of larger crowds to attend the parade, which in turn increases the likelihood of havoc being wreaked.

However, during the decade of 2000-2009 when coverage by the New York Times surrounding the Puerto Rican Day parade substantially increased, controversy ensued. This was not necessarily because of the number of people attending the parade, but rather because of certain people who set out to terrorize the event and make it an uncomfortable environment for everyone, particularly for women.

The Puerto Rican Day parade controversy began in June of 2000 when a series of attacks occurred on women in the crowd looking to celebrate their Puerto Rican heritage. These attacks were carried out by men in the crowd who went on a spree of groping women, tearing off their clothes, splashing them with water guns, pouring beer on them, and shouting derogatory insults. Additionally, some of the men even chose random victims in the crowd to steal from. Many of the attacks were caught on camera and arrests were able to be made, but this still could not undo the mental and emotional damage that these attacks had on the women who were victims. More than fifty women reported to have experienced harassment at the parade in some form or fashion.

While this development was enough to spark widespread outrage throughout the nation, there was another element to the story in which further rubbed people the wrong way. Further adding to the outrage was the police force's handling of the attacks. In the aftermath, many were upset with the police because they felt as though they did a poor job in defusing the situation and showed a lack of urgency in taking action.

For example, while those in the crowd were adamant that marijuana and alcohol were illegally being consumed out in the open, the police vehemently denied this being the case. Another example states that a woman was attacked in Central Park by a group of men in which tried to throw her to the ground and take her pants off. The woman was able to fight back and scare the men off, but not before they stole her cell phone. When the women tried to report this incident that had just happened to her to the police, she was flat out ignored. Other examples include women being assaulted around friends and family members and the family members having to intervene and fend off the attackers because the police were not doing so themselves.

There were believed to be close to one thousand police officers on the scene that day, but this still did not prevent the attacks on the woman, and other women from taking place. This did not ensure safety and peace as many assumed such a large police presence would. As much as Puerto Ricans wanted this to be the case, the police were not exactly harshly reprimanded for their actions, or lack thereof.

This was because, New York City Mayor at the time, *Rudy Giuliani* defended the police and the job they did; stating that "we have 41,000 police officers, and they can not be everywhere at every point." Although he did later walk his comments back to a degree by saying that officers that did not help should be "severely punished," I still think that his initial comments (even if they may be somewhat true) were insensitive to the concerns voiced by those attending the 2000 Puerto Rican Day parade.

Those initial comments to an extent make me question the sincerity behind his call for police officers to be "severely punished." Did he just say those comments as an insincere follow up that he felt

like he had to say due to public pressure, or did he really mean it? I do not think those initial comments were the best thing to say considering the slew of scandals and dishonesty that Puerto Ricans have faced when it comes to the parade and political figures. From the financial controversies, to the betrayal of those running the parade, to the unfulfilled promises in order to earn votes in elections; Puerto Ricans did not want to hear this from the Mayor of New York City. Their patience had already been tested on multiple occasions, so for them to hear Giuliani initially come to the defense of the police in this situation, it had to be difficult to say the least.

All of this helped contribute to feelings of ill will towards the police and helped play a critical role in the lack of trust that would exist between Puerto Ricans in the years that would follow. While not able to be concretely proved, many Puerto Ricans took even more offense to this perceived lack of action because they believed there was a racial and stereotypical component to it. They saw this lack of action as a slap in the face to Puerto Rican women and Puerto Ricans in general, and wondered whether or not there would have been a greater sense of urgency had this been a predominantly caucasian event with a predominantly caucasian crowd.

During and after this event, Puerto Ricans felt like they were being left to fend for themselves and that they could not even avoid being alienated by the police force which was supposed to serve and protect them. Again, this idea was not able to be validated concretely because unsurprisingly, the police denied any racial bias or stereotype being a factor, but considering the tenuous place of Puerto Ricans in the United States, this should not be looked at as an absurd way of thinking.

Given the history of United States colonial power, and its interactions with the island of Puerto Rico over the years prior, it is understandable why Puerto Ricans would be cautious of the intentions of a governmental organization such as the police. When that trust between two disparate sides has a history of

being impeded, as has been the case here, any little perceived slight gets magnified as a bigger issue and leads to the development of further questions in order to justify that slight.

In order for any group of people to survive and thrive in a given environment or circumstance, they typically need a level of support and a base to stand on. However, as evidenced by the handling of the Puerto Rican Day parade attacks in 2000, that support still has not fully shown itself to be there for Puerto Ricans on the mainland. At least not for those who are visibly culturally disparate from the mainland American culture.

Due to this lack of support, Puerto Ricans have become sufficient in developing a critical tool necessary for survival in the United States: adaptation. This is especially relevant and important in shaping the mainland experience of Puerto Ricans who arrive in the United States already as adults and with limited previous exposure to the mainland.

This is because, for those who come from the island to the mainland as adults, they already have learned an established culture and set of customs different from what is for the most part prevalent in the United States. For Puerto Ricans born in the United States, or even for those who came to the mainland at a very young age, it is far easier for them to be recognized as Americans and find a niche in society because they have spent much less time internalizing Puerto Rican culture than someone like their parents for example; who need to go through the process of naturalization.

Thus, the less immersed in Puerto Rican culture the younger generation is, the less that they have to adapt to in regards to navigating the mainland. While there is no single uniform culture throughout the mainland because this is an extremely diverse nation with various subcultures, as long as one fits under the umbrella of one of those subcultures, then they will more than likely be seen and understood as American.

Because of the way these dynamics are set up, it makes it difficult for Puerto Ricans who reject the adaptation of the umbrella of United States culture to be able to experience sustained *upward mobility*.

The United States political system is set up in a way that if one rejects this critical need for adaptation, they are in many respects putting a cap on how far they can climb on the social rung. Of course this is not true in every instance, there are some exceptions to the norm, but generally this statement holds to be true.

The already existing culture/set of cultures that Puerto Ricans come into when making the move to the mainland is important standing on its own because it helps inform norms, values, expectations, etc., but it also has a much greater effect as well. Culture plays a distinct role in shaping, influencing, and supporting the overall structure of society. There is a name for this; this idea is known as *structural functionalism*. While he was not the first sociologist to play with this idea, discussed in his book *The Social System*, he developed a model of structural functionalism.

Chapter 5: Making Sense of It All

When a lack of understanding between two sides exists, this can create the potential for far reaching and destructive consequences depending on the given circumstance. In many cases, all that separates or places a barrier between two disparate entities is a lack of understanding. When we lack understanding, we tend to unfairly judge or cast aspersions on someone or something; regardless of whether or not those aspersions are warranted. The case is no different when it comes to people, particularly when it comes to social/racial/cultural groups that are regarded as foreign and unfamiliar to what mainstream America believes its people should look like.

While there are a number of groups in which can attest to experiencing this feeling of “otherness” upon leaving their home nation and immigrating to the United States, Puerto Ricans face a unique

circumstance in this regard. The circumstance is unique for this particular group because while it faces the outside narratives/coverage that many other “foreign” groups face upon living in the United States, this group is in a unique position based on the fact that it is a U.S. territory and is not actually foreign by definition. While not native to the United States, it is an

This group is simply perceived to be such because of the cultural and language differences from that of mainstream America. In turn, this perceived foreignness has helped play a role in a long and contentious history between the two sides and has helped set the tone for a dynamic that has been less than ideal at times.

While Puerto Ricans are just as much American citizens as those who are living in the states, this is a fact that many people in the United States struggle to grasp. Why is that? Could it be because of the preconceived notion of what an American should look and sound like? Could it be because Puerto Ricans are geographically disconnected from the United States? Or are there other factors responsible for this lack of understanding?

This has been important to me to investigate, as Americans come in the form of many different identities and backgrounds. White skin and English speaking can not be held as the sole, or even one of the main indicators of one’s Americanness. The reality of the situation is that of course there is no singular way to define an American because being American can entail a number of different things and look drastically different from person to person. Americanness can manifest in a multitude of ways and look like a number of different things outside of the stereotypical idea of a person in which speaks only English and has pale skin. This is largely due to the fact that Americans are a conglomerate of diverse groups of people; as this country is a melting pot made up of people whose roots can be traced back to nations all over the world. As a result, there is no uniform culture, but rather a number of cultures intermixing and influencing each other in some form or another. Therefore, this question of Americanness is a very interesting and important one to take into account for this study because it helps give a layer of

context to the relations that we see between Puerto Rican people and mainstream Americans in the United States. Exploring this question has helped in delving deeper into the understanding of Puerto Rican migration and assimilation on the mainland.

As I mentioned above, Puerto Ricans are in a unique situation because they are disregarded citizens. They are foreigners in their own land despite having been American Citizens since the early 20th century. Puerto Ricans have long been at the center of controversy when it comes to their perceived place within the context of American society because they do not fit into the narrative of what is typically seen as the quintessential American.

Puerto Rico is a U.S. territory, and has been since it was acquired in 1898 through the Treaty of Paris, yet there is still an obvious disconnect that exists between those on/from the island and the rest of the United States (*Bodenheimer 2019*). While a lot of this disconnect stems from the language barrier/cultural differences present between Puerto Rico and the rest of the United States, perception and the history of the perception of this particular group also plays a large role in perpetuating the disconnect as well. I do not believe that in every respect this disconnect is necessarily a negative thing because Puerto Rico has its own unique social, political, and cultural landscape that is distinct from the states (and should be celebrated), however from this, the issue of misunderstanding does have the potential to arise and affect people's perceptions of the group, often times in a negative manner. This part is of course when it becomes problematic because from these often incomplete or misinformed vantage points is where mainstream Americans tend to put out rhetoric about Puerto Ricans to the public. Because this rhetoric tends to be disementated without being rooted entirely in the basis of facts, the narratives often do not accurately depict the genesis of what the Puerto Rican people are really about.

Even if the narratives are not outright bashing Puerto Ricans or painting them in a negative light, any narrative that is incorrect or misinformed and comes from those who have not really spent time around this group is harmful because it takes away autonomy from the Puerto Rican people and does not

allow them to be authors of their own story. Instead, in a way it becomes demoralizing and categorizes them because it does not allow them to speak for themselves, but as I previously referenced, they are instead being spoken for. This is something that no group wants, especially when it is coming from another group that can not completely understand the culture because they are not fully immersed in it. Puerto Ricans are the most misunderstood Americans and a lot of that stems from the fact that they are not even understood to be Americans in the first place. This fact must first be changed before a true understanding of this group is to be established.

Driven largely by the fact that Puerto Rico is a territory and not a state, there tends to be this underlying narrative/tone of inferiority when it comes to discussing Puerto Ricans. Their Americanness is not so easily accepted or assumed the same way it is with an American from the United States. The intentions and moral character of Puerto Rican people is often brought into question by the mainstream media and by people during everyday situations as well, because as I mentioned earlier, there still is this feeling of foreignness when dealing with this social group. Even if mainstream Americans do not intentionally try to make flash judgements or have preconceived notions about Puerto Ricans; this ends up being the case for most because there is an underlying element of being uncomfortable that exists as a result of the unfamiliarity between the two disparate groups.

I acknowledge this unfamiliarity and lack of substantial interaction between the two groups, so I am not condemning this. It should be noted that of course not every American in the United States holds a preexisting prejudice or phobia towards Puerto Ricans; as there are some people who have engaged in great efforts to support this group and be strong allies, however for the most part, lack of understanding has caused many to be weary of Puerto Ricans. As a result, it has led to disassociation from Puerto Ricans and turning the other way in supporting them because they are seen as dangerous or not worthy of assistance by many.

While this affects all Puerto Ricans in some form or another, this has been, and continues to be a far greater issue for those in which were born on the island and have emigrated to the United States. As one may expect, for a Puerto Rican that was born in the United States, finding one's place in American society is far more realizable than for someone who came here after already learning an established culture and a set of rules. Puerto Rico is a U.S. territory, but only in name because the differences between the two locations are palpable. While some of the different narratives about Puerto Ricans may be rooted in some semblance of truth, unfortunately many of the ones perpetuated are not. I see this as a critical issue that is often overlooked, because as I learned from my research, narratives about a group are critical in shaping the way in which they live.

Narratives or perceptions of a certain social group may seem like just an innocuous interpretation of them that holds minimal weight (at least in a tangible sense), however, as I alluded to in the previous paragraph, it is quite the opposite. In particular, a narrative that wrongly paints a community or group of people in a negative light has the potential to have crippling implications on them just as a positive narrative has the potential to have an extremely positive effect on the group as well. Of course this is not ethical; as someone's outside perspective should not be taken as gospel in describing the nature of another group, however when one group's voice is given heightened importance this is what tends to result. Speaking more closely within the context of this paper, the narratives and perceptions from Americans in the U.S. about Puerto Ricans has had a profound effect on how they have been able to assimilate into American society.

Concluding Thoughts

I became aware of my Puerto Rican identity and what it means to be Puerto Rican at a young age; or at least I thought I did.

Although I am of half Mexican and half Puerto Rican descent, it has never truly felt that way for me. Growing up in a single parent household for a majority of my life around only my mother's (Puerto

Rican) side of the family has led me for a long time to feel a heightened sense of cultural connectedness when it comes to my Puerto Rican identity. This level of connectedness that I have with Puerto Rico and being Puerto Rican runs deep for me. On a cultural level, I am able to much more easily and authentically connect with this group than I am able to with my Mexican roots because Puerto Ricans are the people in which I am most familiar with; I have grown up around and have shared some of my closest experiences with them.

Growing up, although I ate Mexican food from time to time, it has been my Puerto Rican grandmother's cooking of *arroz con habichuela y bistec*, *arroz con salchichas*, *tostones*, *pasteles*, and number of other traditional dishes in which have been a staple of my diet. It has been Puerto Rican music, such as *Salsa* and *Reggaeton* in which I was introduced to by my older brother, mother, and grandmother at an early age. The Spanish that I heard growing up was spoken in a Puerto Rican dialect and with a Puerto Rican accent. The Spanish expressions in which I have been taught by those around me have largely been from Puerto Rico. Of my friends growing up in which were of Latin descent, many were Puerto Rican because this group was much more prevalent than other Latin groups where I lived.

I have been around Puerto Ricans, both in my family and outside my family, for much of my life. As a result, this culture has become ingrained in me and I would say is critical in making up the fabric of who I am. It has largely shaped how I think of myself, how I think of the world, and how I think of myself in relation to the world. Needless to say, Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican culture has had a large impact on me.

However, even with that being the case, I have felt for some time (especially when I got to college and had the time and intellectual capacity to think critically about this topic) that there has been a missing link in my understanding of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans, particularly in relation to the United States. A lot of this came from previously not knowing the history of the island and how it came to be an unincorporated territory of the United States, but also it is because of another critical element. Previously,

I did not have a great understanding of how Puerto Ricans are viewed by the United States society and I did not have a great understanding in turn of how they view themselves in relation to the U.S.

Prior to conducting the research for this Senior Project, I only thought about Puerto Ricans on a basic level and not in a context that really extended beyond themselves. This was because previously I never challenged myself and was never really challenged by others to do so critically. Growing up with and around Puerto Ricans afforded me the ability to see a perspective from inside the culture (while also being inside of U.S. culture at the same time), but it also simultaneously played the adverse role of not necessarily affording me the ability to contextualize in a cohesive manner what this means. Being Puerto Rican in the United States is a perspective that I could always speak from, but this did not automatically allow me to understand things like the history of Puerto Rico, how Puerto Ricans are perceived by United States media sources, how they view themselves in relation to the United States, whether or not Puerto Ricans from the island refer to themselves as Americans, etc.

In exploring this topic, I wanted to minimize the gaps in knowledge I have about the issues I discussed above, and I wanted to come out of this with not only a new understanding, but also appreciation of Puerto Ricans. At the same time, maybe most importantly, I wanted to shed some important light on Puerto Ricans and share the story/stories of people in this group and act as a voice for those who may not have the means of speaking for themselves. In doing this writing, I feel that I have grown closer with and now feel an even greater sense of cultural solidarity when it comes to Puerto Ricans. I did not know how much this project would mean to me until I started doing it and became deeply fascinated with all the interesting information I was finding, but it definitely was rewarding. This project has deeply shifted my perspective and understanding of the topic, and beyond the topic itself, it has greatly reinforced (in a way like never before) the value of hard work and dedication.

In addition, this project has really strengthened my mental fortitude and has forced me to reframe my understanding of what I believe is possible that I can achieve. Although there were times it was very

difficult and it pushed me to the limits, this project was a rewarding experience unlike any other academic endeavor I have undergone in my life. For that, I ultimately appreciate its complexity and the lessons I can and will take from doing this project. I am proud of the journey that this took me on, and am proud of the insight in so many different facets that it gave me. Lastly, but maybe most importantly, I am also proud to say that I am Puerto Rican and had the opportunity to write about a group and an island so endearing to me.

I would say that the goal that I had in mind in studying this topic was definitely achieved. The detailed and meticulous research of this process has alleviated much of these gaps in knowledge and has brought me a new, much more informed understanding of what the implications of being Puerto Rican are. As I delved into this process of reading, writing, and reflecting, I found that there are some discernible implications of being Puerto Rican in the United States; with some of these being positive while others not so positive. I appreciate being able to make critical meaning of it all.

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