

STATUS, CAUDILLISMO  
E IDENTIDAD:  
Recent Work on Puerto Rico

José O. Díaz  
*The Ohio State University*

- DIVIDED BORDERS: ESSAYS ON PUERTO RICAN IDENTITY.* By Juan Flores. (Houston, Tex.: Arte Público Press, 1993. Pp. 252. \$10.00.)
- PUERTO RICO'S STATEHOOD MOVEMENT.* By Edgardo Meléndez. (New York: Greenwood, 1988. Pp. 194. \$42.95.)
- PEDRO ALBIZU CAMPOS: REFLEXIONES SOBRE SU VIDA Y SU OBRA.* Edited by Ruth Vasallo and José A. Torres Martínó. (Rio Piedras: Marién, 1991. Pp. 223. \$10.00.)
- LAS LLAMAS DE LA AURORA: ACERCAMIENTO A UNA BIOGRAFIA DE PEDRO ALBIZU CAMPOS.* By Marisa Rosado. (San Juan: Corripio, 1992. Pp. 246. \$17.00.)
- LA MORDAZA: PUERTO RICO, 1948-1957.* By Ivonne Acosta. (Rio Piedras: Edil, 1987. Pp. 238. \$20.00.)
- LA INSURRECCION NACIONALISTA EN PUERTO RICO, 1950.* By Miñi Seijó Bruno. (Rio Piedras: Edil, 1989. Pp. 293. \$13.95.)

The 1992 Puerto Rican gubernatorial campaign ended not a moment too soon. In electing Pedro Roselló to a four-year term (1993-1997), Puerto Rico has survived yet another electoral cycle in a political maze that is difficult for outsiders to comprehend. For the pro-statehood Partido Nuevo Progresista (PNP), its electoral victory in November of 1992 offers the party a chance to reassert its commitment to achieving federal statehood for Puerto Rico. For the pro-commonwealth Partido Popular Democrático (PPD), the electoral loss could provide an equally valuable opportunity for introspection and analysis. For the pro-independence Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño (PIP), the old and familiar questions come to mind: what went wrong, and where does the party go from here?

The election results also offer an opportunity for students of the island's turbulent political process to survey the scene once again and ponder the country's political future. Will the 1990s mark the beginning of the end for the Estado Libre Asociado?<sup>1</sup> Is independence a viable

1. The Estado Libre Asociado was created in 1952. Under this pact, Puerto Rico chose to be

solution to Puerto Rico's and Washington's joint quandary? Is statehood? Can U.S. and Puerto Rican leaders come to the bargaining table and engage in a dispassionate debate about their "special relationship"? Will ballooning federal deficits and a shrinking economic pie force Washington to pull the rug out from under the island's tax incentive programs?

In the continental United States, knowledge of Puerto Rico, its history, and political trajectory is sketchy at best. The U.S. political psyche continues to associate Puerto Rican politics with the violence perpetrated by the Partido Nacionalista Puertorriqueño and its ideological second cousin, the *Macheteros*. The Partido Nacionalista Puertorriqueño masterminded the 1954 assault against the U.S. House of Representatives, while the *Macheteros* have claimed responsibility for more than a dozen serious acts of terrorism.<sup>2</sup> This mental link between the island's political travails and episodes of political violence remains fixed. As examples, the 1980s witnessed the appearance of two books and one film dealing with the Cerro Maravilla murders.<sup>3</sup>

This review essay will examine six important works analyzing some of Puerto Rico's political and cultural dilemmas. Those by Juan Flores and Eduardo Meléndez are particularly useful as sources of background and historical context, the latter being more valuable as an introduction to Puerto Rico–U.S. relations for those who lack reading knowledge of Spanish.<sup>4</sup> All six works make worthy contributions to a general understanding of the country's past and future. As the dawn of the twenty-first century approaches, it is appropriate to reappraise our understanding of this U.S. territory. Will colonialism by consent continue? Will the U.S. Congress finally face up to its "special responsibility" to Puerto Rico? Or will Puerto Rico continue to be what Luis Rafael Sánchez has described as "a pessimistic, bitter and tragic country"?

Juan Flores's *Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity* is by far the most comprehensive of all the works examined here and will be

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associated with, but not form part of, the United States. The island possesses some powers of local self-government, is included in certain federal programs, and is exempted from federal taxes. Detractors reject the *Estado Libre Asociado* as a vestige of U.S. colonial policy.

2. See Ronald Fernández's *Los Macheteros: The Wells Fargo Robbery and the Violent Struggle for Puerto Rican Independence* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1987).

3. The Cerro Maravilla murders involved the entrapment and murder of two young pro-independence activists by members of a Puerto Rican police intelligence unit in the remote mountain site of Maravilla. See Anne Nelson, *Murder under Two Flags: The U.S., Puerto Rico, and the Cerro Maravilla Cover-Up* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1986); and Manuel Suárez, *Requiem on Cerro Maravilla: The Police Murders in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Government Cover-Up* (Maplewood, N.J.: Waterfront, 1987). The movie was released by Paramount under the title *A Show of Force* (a John Strong production in association with Golden Harvest, 1990).

4. A good place to begin any study on Puerto Rico is with the seminal work of the late Gordon K. Lewis, *Puerto Rico: Freedom and Power in the Caribbean* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1963).

particularly useful as an analysis of Puerto Rico's literary and cultural history. The breadth of Flores's undertaking is daunting, yet he has produced a work of great scholarly merit. This compilation of ten previously published essays takes the reader on a unique intellectual journey. Flores avoids the lackluster historical narrative common in the chronological retelling of events via his almost evangelical zeal for tracing the missing links in Puerto Rico's literary and cultural experiences. As Jean Franco acknowledges in her preface to the work, Flores "brings into view what has been hidden from history" (p. 9).

Flores's method is also intellectually courageous. Although he makes no theoretical claims, his work seems framed within a Marxist perspective. *Divided Borders* is really two books in one. The first five essays offer a detailed analysis of the island's cultural, historical, and socioeconomic background and its effects on the formation of the Puerto Rican national character. The last five essays discuss the viability of the Puerto Rican community in exile and the role played by Puerto Rican culture in this group's survival and development.

The book's strongest section opens with two pieces of historical and cultural revisionism, in which Flores quickly challenges two of Puerto Rico's most influential interpretive essays: Antonio Pedreira's "Insularismo: ensayos de interpretación puertorriqueña" (1934) and José Luis González's "El país de cuatro pisos" (1980).<sup>5</sup> According to Flores, "El país de cuatro pisos" is to the 1980s what "Insularismo" was to the 1930s: "an engagingly written, metaphorically abundant watershed and germinal source for thinking about the issue of nationalism in a broad historical perspective" (p. 61).

Pedreira's "Insularismo" has for many years helped shape Puerto Rico's cultural psyche in serving as a rock on which the island's social and cultural elite built its credo of cultural acceptability and social rank. Flores presents concisely the philosophical pillars supporting Pedreira's most famous piece. Flores also demonstrates skillfully how Pedreira's argument is understood better in terms of its rather eclectic foundation, which is held together by the mortar of Spanish elitism and what Flores views as opposition to the proletarian revolution. Flores's two-pronged criticism of Pedreira's essay targets its elitist view of society and its neglect of significant periods of Puerto Rican history. Flores contends that some of Pedreira's views are better understood by examining the intellectual terrain covered by "Insularismo."

Readers of this critique are exposed to some of Latin America's most popular and influential ideas. According to Flores, Pedreira drew

5. These essays were published as part of larger collections of essays. See José Luis González, *El país de cuatro pisos y otros ensayos* (Río Piedras, P.R.: Huracán, 1980); and Antonio S. Pedreira, *Insularismo: ensayos de interpretación puertorriqueña* (Madrid: Tipografía Artística, 1934).

on Enrique Rodó's *Ariel* and José Ortega y Gasset's *La rebelión de las masas* for the philosophical elements that have fostered a society that is elitist and somewhat racist. Beyond the Latin American milieu, Flores finds that Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* seemingly gave Pedreira tacit approval for excluding indigenous elements and preferring "the universal."

Flores ends his critique by noting that the bourgeois underpinnings of this brand of social catechism did not go unchallenged. The intellectual assault was led by Cuban national hero José Martí and Peru's foremost Marxist thinker, José Carlos Mariátegui. Martí bluntly opposed the concept of enlightened conquistadors, while Mariátegui propounded pro-indigenous and anti-imperialist views that remain influential in Peru.

The second essay in *Divided Borders* introduces readers to another act of intellectual heresy as Flores takes on one of Puerto Rico's best-known and -discussed contemporary writings, "El país de cuatro pisos" by José Luis González. In this metaphor, Puerto Rico is envisioned as a four-story building. The first floor was built during four hundred years of Spanish domination and represents the Afro-Caribbean base of the national culture. The second floor belongs to the untold number of South Americans and European immigrants who flooded the island's shores. Construction of the third floor started shortly after the U.S. takeover in 1898, while the fourth floor consists of modern-day Puerto Rico, from the beginning of "Manos a la Obra" (the country's industrial revolution, also known as Operation Bootstrap) of the 1940s to the present.

Flores acknowledges the validity of some of González's arguments, praising his "popular grounding of the national culture" and attempts to "undermine the traditional version of the national history that attributes the first stirrings and origins of Puerto Rican consciousness to the patriotic aspirations of the national elite" (p. 62). But like Pedreira's "Insularismo," González's "El país de cuatro pisos" is weakened by the fault line of "periodization." González's historicity is severely undermined by his trivial handling of the indigenous inhabitants of the island. Worse yet, his four-story metaphor reduces the Puerto Rican diaspora to a nameless and homeless crowd. In virtually ignoring the fact that 40 percent of all Puerto Ricans now live on the U.S. mainland, González's edifice failed to make room for a new yet vibrant form of Puerto Rican cultural expression. Finally, according to Flores, González's use of ethnic rather than class analysis raises but fails to answer fundamental questions about Puerto Rico's claim to a distinct and viable national identity prior to the U.S. invasion.

Few scholarly studies have dealt seriously with the ideological roots and political development of the statehood movement in Puerto Rico. Raymond Carr's controversial *Puerto Rico, A Colonial Experiment*

devoted only twenty-five pages to what he termed “the statehood parties.”<sup>6</sup> Anthologies by Pamela Falk, Jorge Heine, and Richard Bloomfield have provided only limited forums for all political persuasions to debate their goals and aspirations.<sup>7</sup> Thus the welcome appearance of Edgardo Meléndez’s *Puerto Rico’s Statehood Movement* (slated for publication in Spanish as *El movimiento anexionista en Puerto Rico*) marks a serious attempt to probe deeply into the historical and ideological roots of this political phenomenon.

A political scientist at the University of Puerto Rico, Meléndez wisely avoids the partisan and propagandistic approaches common in previous studies.<sup>8</sup> His broader historical perspective analyzes the movement as the result of the relentless clash of social forces. From the outset, Meléndez rejects the straitjacket of conventional wisdom and “the explanatory approaches” used in the past to elucidate the statehood phenomenon. In doing so, he has captured the history and development of the movement, its private character, and its public image.

Historically, pro-statehood movements have been described as soulless and monolithic, bookish and dull. A different picture emerges from Meléndez’s account: that of a political organism still intellectually alive and susceptible to political caudillismo and ideological dissent a century after its birth. Bellicose and controversial, the Puerto Rican statehood movement remains vulnerable to abrupt shifts in rhetoric and strategy as it constantly reinvents itself to survive changing social and political challenges to the attainment of federal statehood for Puerto Rico.

Although the statehood movement is usually identified with modern-day conservatives, Meléndez’s study traces its roots back to the political machinations of nineteenth-century Puerto Rican liberals. In a detailed analysis, Meléndez follows the cyclical development of the movement from José Celso Barbosa’s spirited defense of “*la patria regional*” to Luis Ferré’s popular “*estadidad jíbara*” (creole statehood). Most fascinating about *Puerto Rico’s Statehood Movement* is its in-depth analysis of the movement’s last twenty-five years. Under the rubrics of “the politics of redemption” and “the politics of equality,” Meléndez compares and contrasts the philosophical assumptions and statehood programs created by the pro-statehood New Progressive Party after electoral successes in 1968, 1976, and 1980. He accomplishes this task by dissecting the political philosophies of two political caudillos, industrialist Luis Ferré, the represen-

6. See Raymond Carr, *Puerto Rico, A Colonial Experiment* (New York: New York University Press, 1984).

7. See *The Political Status of Puerto Rico*, edited by Pamela Falk (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington, 1986); *The Puerto Rican Question*, edited by Jorge Heine (New York: Foreign Policy Association, 1983); and *Puerto Rico: The Search for National Policy*, edited by Richard Bloomfield (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1985).

8. See Carlos Romero Barceló, *La estadidad es para los pobres* (San Juan: Romero-Barceló, 1976); published in English as *Statehood Is for the Poor* (San Juan: Romero-Barceló, 1976).

tative of the old industrial bourgeoisie, and his heir, a fire-eating “statehood now” politician named Carlos Romero Barceló.

For those who lived under these governments, the ideological differences were imperceptible. The statehood juggernaut enveloped the island in a sea of blue and white flags and palm trees, the party’s insignia. Behind this carnivalesque façade, two politicians with similar goals but diverse strategies were hard at work. According to Meléndez, Ferré as governor of the island (1969–1973) pursued a policy of social justice in his “search for stability through the eradication of social conflicts” (p. 119). Ferré’s view of “la nueva vida” entailed domestic tranquility and economic prosperity, with the former being seen as a by-product of the latter. During his tenure in office, Ferré rewarded public employees with wage increases and better working conditions. His social philosophy was encapsulated in his program “Patrimonio para el Progreso,” which was intended to “eradicate social conflict by turning society’s members into one class, the capitalist” (p. 122).

Ferré’s handling of the statehood issue was piecemeal. Under his leadership, the party sought to strengthen ties with the United States and treated commonwealth status as a stepping stone on the long climb to statehood. Slow but steady integration of the island into the U.S. milieu was attempted by seeking more federal funds and a vote in U.S. presidential elections. Ferré’s downfall was caused by internal party strife. Like previous pro-statehood parties, the New Progressive Party was a loose coalition of divergent economic and social interests, a party with weak structures and visible internal divisions. When the votes of the 1972 election were tallied, political newcomer Rafael Hernández Colón had been elected and the old Partido Popular Democrático restored to power. After this administration was defeated, it fell to Carlos Romero Barceló, the mayor of San Juan and a shrewd political operator, to save the statehood movement.

Don Carlos’s personality and approach differed greatly from those of don Luis. Ferré had preached redemption and social justice as vehicles for achieving statehood, but Romero Barceló’s political motto was equality. Ferré sought to eradicate social injustices through capitalism in order to create the social, political, and economic climate that would make statehood possible. For Romero Barceló, statehood was the party’s immediate goal. In his view, admission into the U.S. union would benefit the poor (and partially remedy societal injustices). More important, statehood would grant Puerto Ricans political parity with their fellow citizens on the mainland and do away with their current status as second-class citizens. Statehood and, to a lesser extent, independence were the only two options capable of eliminating the servile character of Puerto Rico’s political status. As governor, Romero Barceló argued that the country had paid a “blood tax” in military service and was entitled to statehood. His

administration even revised the island's previously sacrosanct tax-incentive program in an attempt to make it "like other states." He supported the twin-plant program and export of Puerto Rican products to other Caribbean countries, trying to turn the island into a center of trade and financing.<sup>9</sup> Fueling all these economic strategies was the elusive goal of statehood.

Romero Barceló's downfall resulted from a combination of long-standing difficulties. In his spirited quest for statehood, the governor showed the political dexterity of the proverbial bull in a china shop. Moreover, his administration was plagued by corruption and political scandals. After two controversial terms in office (1976–1980 and 1980–1984), he was ousted when the voters returned the Popular Democratic Party to power.

As far as the statehood movement was concerned, Romero Barceló's second term witnessed the reenactment of a Greek tragedy. Internal dissent and political trickery killed the party's chances for staying in power. Hernán Padilla, mayor of San Juan and a proponent of the politics of redemption, saw himself as the party's nominee for governor.<sup>10</sup> In a public display of raw political power, Romero Barceló bullied his way into the nomination. Padilla and his supporters promptly abandoned the party and founded the Partido Renovación Puertorriqueño (PRP). Creation of this splinter party thus split the pro-statehood vote and handed the governorship to the Populares.

The last chapter in the history of the statehood movement has yet to be written. Meléndez points out that the ideological struggle between redemption and equality continues unabated. Statehood supporters (led by the movement's most conservative factions) continue to chastise the movement's leadership publicly for its failure to move the island closer to statehood and for its willingness to administer what they have dubbed "the colonial government."

The remaining four books under review are united by a central theme: the great divide created in modern Puerto Rican history by the arrival on the political scene of the country's foremost nationalist leader, Pedro Albizu Campos. According to essayist José Ayoroa Santaliz, twentieth-century Puerto Rican history has been defined by two watershed events—the life and the death of Albizu Campos.<sup>11</sup> The editorial printed

9. The twin-plant program was part of an economic strategy that proposed the procurement and initial processing of certain products in wage-depressed zones of the Caribbean, followed by finishing the products in Puerto Rico, the most advanced economy in the region.

10. The politics of redemption was based on a governing philosophy aimed at attaining social stability through the use of state programs and political stability by integrating Puerto Rico further into the U.S. social and economic milieu.

11. Santaliz stated in a 1989 speech, "Don Pedro Albizu Campos partió la historia del siglo veinte en Puerto Rico. Con todo rigor este siglo se divide en antes y después de la aparición de Albizu Campos." José Enrique Ayoroa Santaliz, "Un hito en nuestra historia," speech given at the University of Puerto Rico College of Law, 19 Nov. 1989.

at his death in 1965 in the *San Juan Star* (the only English-language daily) reflected this sense of importance: “the death of Pedro Albizu Campos, last Wednesday night, closes a chapter in Puerto Rico’s history, a chapter that hopefully will never be reopened.”<sup>12</sup>

In *Pedro Albizu Campos: reflexiones sobre su vida y su obra*, editors Ruth Vasallo and José Torres Martinó have assembled a compilation of essays and newspaper accounts memorializing the life and death of the nationalist leader during the centennial year of his birth. Most of the essays were written by acquaintances who shared the nationalist leader’s views. The second half of the book is devoted to newspaper articles and editorials printed after Albizu Campos’s death in 1965. This volume makes no attempt to offer new insights into his “caudillismo” nor any critical analysis.

Probably the most complete and best-documented biography currently available is Marisa Rosado’s *Las llamas de la aurora: acercamiento a una biografía de Pedro Albizu Campos*. The author narrates Albizu Campos’s life from his humble childhood in the southern town of Ponce to his apogee as undisputed leader of the Partido Nacionalista Puertorriqueño. Although this biography offers no critical analysis, Rosado’s painstaking research has uncovered some intimate (and little-known) details about her subject’s life. Rosado thus contributes to the historiography on Albizu Campos by presenting information previously unknown about his early years and education, describing his sojourn throughout Latin America (1927–1929), and confronting the disturbing reality of racism within the ranks of his own party. *Las llamas de la aurora* also offers an extensive appendix that includes his military record, letters to his wife and family, and communications with members of his party. Unfortunately, however, like most works on Albizu Campos, this biography fails to convey a true sense of Albizu Campos’s political philosophy. Rather, Rosado seems to have accepted the nationalist dogma that perceives Albizu Campos as Christ-like and beatifies his followers.

Nonetheless, *Las llamas de la aurora* and *Pedro Albizu Campos* provide students of the island with some understanding of Don Pedro’s place in Puerto Rican history. For example, writer José Ferrer Canales likened Albizu Campos to a modern-day David facing the two-headed Goliath of imperialism and colonialism, while fellow writer Manuel Maldonado Denis compared him with Cuba’s José Martí and Nicaragua’s Augusto César Sandino.<sup>13</sup> Nobel laureate Gabriela Mistral went even further in praising Albizu Campos as “el primer puertorriqueño, y a lo mejor, el primer latinoamericano.”

12. Editorial, *San Juan Star*, 2 Apr. 1965, p. 25.

13. José Ferrer Canales, “Albizu Campos y José Martí,” and Manuel Maldonado Denis, “Sandino y Albizu Campos,” both in *Claridad: Suplemento en Rojo* (San Juan), Sept. 1982, pp. 10–26.



Nearly thirty years after Don Pedro's death, his life remains shrouded in mystery, his memory smothered under tales of struggle and sacrifice. In the process, Puerto Rico's man of marble has been slowly dehumanized. Most earlier accounts of his life and times resemble the two just reviewed in attempting to add to Albizu Campos's legend. Few have posed, let alone tackled, hard questions dealing with the real Albizu Campos. Will Puerto Ricans ever reconcile his seemingly conflicting double image? Was this spellbinder a patriot, a lunatic, or a bomb-throwing fanatic? Can a compromise be reached between the man and the myth?

Heirs to his nationalist philosophy take solace in pointing out that schools in Puerto Rico have been named after Albizu Campos, the man who masterminded the deadly assault against the United States House of Representatives in 1954.<sup>14</sup> The implications are clear: Albizu Campos's legacy is alive and well because his violent course of action has been tacitly approved by the Puerto Rican people; the nationalist ideology is a time bomb waiting to explode. But unfortunately for the serious student of the Puerto Rican political experience, the true nature of this time bomb remains unexplored. When it comes to analyzing Albizu Campos's legacy and its possible influence on the island's future, political rhetoric and at times sheer demagoguery have displaced scholarly analysis.

The last two works under review deal with what many consider to be Albizu Campos's most vivid legacy in examining one of Puerto Rico's most violent periods. In December 1947, after ten years in federal custody in the United States, Pedro Albizu Campos made a triumphant return to his native country. For Albizu Campos, this moment was high noon. Immediately, the old nationalist leader found himself back in the thick of the political fray. The metropolitan power, he contended (referring to the United States), was playing political games. For this former officer in the U.S. Army and admirer of Sinn Fein and the Irish Free State, the time had come to strike a blow.<sup>15</sup> For the authorities, however, the social and economic upheaval created by Albizu Campos's return could not have erupted at a worse time. The island's social tranquility and economic climate were being carefully monitored by federal lawmakers and business owners. The former were considering implementing "La Ley 600" or the Estado Libre Asociado; the latter were searching for investment opportunities. Government attempts to defuse the nationalists' threat are profiled in Ivonne Acosta's *La mordaza: Puerto Rico, 1948–1957*, and the

14. The remark was made by Carlos Gallsá, General Secretary of the Partido Socialista Puertorriqueño (PSP), during a televised hearing before the Subcommittee on Insular and International Affairs of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives. The hearings were held in March 1990 in Washington, D.C., and in the Puerto Rican cities of San Juan, Ponce, and Mayaguez.

15. See Antonio M. Arroyo Stevens, *The Political Philosophy of Pedro Albizu Campos: Its Theory and Practice* (New York: New York University Press, 1974).

nationalists' bloody response is covered in Miñi Bruno Seijó's *La insurrección nacionalista en Puerto Rico, 1950*.

In *La mordaza*, Acosta resurrects a forgotten episode in modern Puerto Rican history. *La mordaza* (the gag) refers to a series of legislative measures (commonly known as Bill 53) that were quietly adopted by the Puerto Rican legislature in 1948 and repealed in 1957. These measures were apparently aimed at those advocating overthrow of the government by force. But via the skillful manipulation of Puerto Rico's first elected governor, Luis Muñoz Marín, the gag law became a powerful tool for harassing and jailing individuals who openly (although not necessarily violently) supported Puerto Rican independence. College students and professors, workers, and housewives alike were convicted of crimes ranging from belonging to the Partido Nacionalista Puertorroqueño to such subversive activities as attending political rallies and participating in Sunday mass.

Acosta argues that the gag law of 1948 must be perceived as part of a larger and more ambitious strategy developed by U.S. and Puerto Rican authorities in reaction to cold war paranoia and capitalist development. Cold war fears were sweeping the United States, while capitalist development was being threatened at the national level by the violent exploits of the Partido Nacionalista Puertorroqueño and at the international level by indigenous forces adamantly opposed to a capitalist model of economic development. Hence passage of the fascistlike legislation in Puerto Rico represented part of a political and economic crackdown orchestrated by U.S. security agencies throughout Latin America. Fears of instances similar to the *bogotazo* (the violent riot that broke out following the murder of Colombian populist leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in Bogotá in 1948) were addressed either by passing legislation against subversive forces like Puerto Rican nationalists or by removing from office unfriendly regimes such as that of Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954.

In Puerto Rico, the nationalist "bogotazo" took place on 30 October 1950. On that day the Nationalist party launched a poorly coordinated armed insurrection that destroyed lives and property in seven Puerto Rican municipalities, San Juan, and Washington D.C. Miñi Bruno takes a closer look at these events in *La insurrección nacionalista en Puerto Rico, 1950*, a detailed account of what became popularly known as "*la revuelta nacionalista*." By scrutinizing the lives and motives of those behind the barricades, Seijó Bruno carefully dispels the cloak-and-dagger mystery surrounding armed struggle and its participants as she reveals the human faces of a number of less-than-perfect liberators. The courage and conviction of the nationalists is counterpoised against the human and logistical flaws that doomed the insurrection before it began. Seijó Bruno's ample documentation and the willingness of some participants to share their recollections freely contribute to an informative account.

Both *La mordaza* and *La insurrección nacionalista en Puerto Rico* are

readable and well organized. Careful use of oral testimony, archival materials, and secondary sources allowed the two authors to piece together an important chapter in Puerto Rico's history. The force of these works comes from their success in remaining faithful to the historical record while placing these events at the center of a power struggle between the United States and Puerto Rico.

Implicit in both accounts is the need to learn crucial lessons from the past in the art of statecraft. When Washington entrusted the "Puerto Rican question" to the sluggish and insensitive federal bureaucracy, it did so at its own peril. The neglect and misunderstanding that followed have weakened the body politic. Only a strong dose of old-fashioned honesty, tempered by political realism, can break the current impasse. The United States must accept the reality that the political paradigms that breathed life into the Jones Act of 1917 and the *Estado Libre Asociado* of 1952 no longer exist.<sup>16</sup> The need for consensus, or what the late historian Arturo Morales Carrión referred to as "the need for a new encounter," is critical.<sup>17</sup>

In November of 1993, Puerto Rico took an important step on the road to political consensus. Some 1.7 million Puerto Ricans voted in a nonbinding referendum that favored preservation of commonwealth status (48.4 percent) over statehood (46.2 percent) and independence (4.4 percent). The heavy voter turnout proved that Puerto Rican democracy is alive and well, while the referendum results revealed growing support for statehood, a shrinking independence movement, and Puerto Rico's understandable reluctance to cast off a political formula that some believe has represented "the best of both worlds."

At the same time, Puerto Rico must understand that it cannot have its cake and eat it too. In a world where colonialism is an unacceptable relic of the past, the United States and Puerto Rico must design and implement a new political paradigm that can meet the needs of both societies. As Morales Carrión judiciously pointed out, "the times call for a new encounter between Puerto Rico and the Congress. The realities of the United States–Puerto Rico relation must be placed afresh in the U.S. public mind. But we must build on the foundations that have been laid, on the experience that has been gained. If the past is prologue, it is a prologue that should be carefully read and remembered."<sup>18</sup> Failure to heed this sound advice could lead to more accounts of future repression, senseless violence, bureaucratic inaction, and political nonresponsiveness like those vividly narrated by Ivonne Acosta, Miñi Seijó Bruno, and Edgardo Meléndez.

16. The Jones Act granted U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans and reformed the local legislature.

17. Arturo Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico and the United States: The Quest for a New Encounter* (San Juan: Editorial Académica, 1990).

18. *Ibid.*, 84.