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VALUES IN A FRONTIER

University Services in Puerto Rico

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The University of Puerto Rico was established and has grown during a period in World History that experienced and is experiencing the greatest social change and challenge to our civilization. On a smaller scale and for reasons not unrelated, Puerto Rico was to go thru the greatest transformations in its history.

Our institution was founded in 1903, five years after Puerto Rico's political disassociation from the Spanish Empire. At that time the previous four centuries of feudal, agrarian and non-democratic political traditions decisively conditioned our society.

The Spanish settlers had brought with them, together with the social, economic, and political evils plaguing the mother country, other things which are most important to us even today. Outstanding among these were their Catholic religion, their profound belief in human equality independent-ly of race, their regard for learning which though not wide-spread was highly prized, their affection for the values of family life, the stoical bent of their outlook, which, in turn, steadied them through the frequent visitations of adversity. These values were not frozen at any particular time before or after 1898 but as happens to all living things have undergone and will continue to undergo modifications and changes as they

come in contact with new conditions. For instance the Catholic Church never achieved in Puerto Rico the stern and all-pervasive influence it held and holds in Spain. The Puerto Rican male, like his Latin American counterpart, is very lax in the observance of his religious obligations and tends to regard them as the particular province and responsibility of the womenfolk. Lately, there has been a rekindling of their fervour, particularly under the stimulus and leadership of Catholic priests and orders from supposedly Protestant United States. It is illuminating to note in this connection that when the Puerto Rican Constitution was up for discussion, three years ago, it was an Irish-American Bishop who led the fight against the explicit separation of Church and State. He was unsuccessful.

Likewise, the institution of the family, while stemming from the Spanish tradition, has evolved characteristics of its own which in my estimation make it our outstanding development in social structures. Today marriage for love is universal, women are emancipated, children are kings, and yet the strong family ties and the family values and patterns are visible everywhere.

The story of the impact of North American practices, institutions, techniques, resources, on Puerto Rican society, and the very many advantages resulting therefrom, together

with the readjustments, confusions and misunderstandings accompanying them, has never been adequately told or even sufficiently gauged. I will merely mention some of the principal facts as they relate to public education.

At the time of the American occupation in 1898, Puerto Rico had a population of 900,000. Only 8% of the children 5 to 17 years of age were enrolled in school. Only 20% of the total population were able to read and write.

Increased literacy was immediately regarded as of paramount importance. The University was organized as a training center for normal school teachers. The co-educational public school system was enthusiastically received, and the classrooms that spread throughout the Island started Puerto Rico on the road to social democracy. One of our most touching and beautiful sights has been and still is that of boys and girls, white and black, wealthy and destitute, well born and illegitimate, rubbing elbows in our crowded schools. The pent-up eagerness for knowledge and the parental determination to serve their children better than themselves, have brought our society together. A basic sense of unity has been achieved thru this daily relationship. It has provided the background for all our development.

Probably the worst mistake made in the educational program was the well meaning if unfounded assumption that democracy is something that happens only in English, that the principal task of the school was to make children bilingual and that students who didn't know English should be taught in that language by teachers who didn't know it either. It didn't quite work out that way. For many years now, Spanish has become not only the de facto language of the schools which it always was, but also the de jure language which it never should have stopped being. English is taught now from the first grade on as a second language. It is hoped that once the methodological tangles are un-snarled, the process of learning English will acquire the proficiency which all of us feel essential for the present and the future.

By now the Normal School, begun 51 years ago with 12 teachers and 172 students, has pyramided into one of the largest Spanish-speaking universities in the world. Its regular faculty numbers 727. Its student body is 13,158 -- not counting summer school. Its annual budget, including agricultural dependencies, is over \$11,000,000. Its graduating class a little under 2,000 students.

While we now train most of the professional men in Puerto Rico, and our graduates include doctors, engineers,

agronomists, lawyers, pharmacists, business men, and social workers, the University is ever mindful of its original purpose. Its Charter as amended in 1942 provides that:

"The University, without being limited in this to its pedagogical discipline, is to teach how to teach, and to teach how to learn. The aim of the University should be to have its graduates, in whatever professions or activities they undertake, serve as teachers in example and attitude, of the people of Puerto Rico in the development of their democratic mode of life.

"The aim of the University, as a center of education and as a center of research, is to point out the truth and to instill the methods of knowing it, of testing it, or of doubting it -- in an attitude of profound respect toward creative truth and creative doubt".

Ours is the only United States land grant institution functioning in a Latin American cultural area. Within the framework of its basic commitments, freedom to teach, freedom to search, freedom to doubt, it serves with unstinted devotion the growth and the well-being of Puerto Rico. In the pursuit of our responsibilities we have become, even without meaning

to, a dynamic laboratory in a cultural frontier. We are living through, testing, and validating the compatibility of the North American way of life with the cultural values of the Hispanic world as they have evolved in Puerto Rico.

We of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico have for some time recognized this compatibility. In recent years we have achieved extraordinary advancements in life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It has come as a fruitful culmination of a long, difficult, and oftentimes exasperating struggle with dissimilar cultural trends which, while stemming in the main from the common western tradition, had nonetheless evolved special characteristics, were at different stages of development and required important readjustments and reelaborations if they were to be assimilated or rather blended into a coherent and steady way of life. We have not succeeded, of course, in providing a complete solution to this interplay of forces. I expect that no exclusive or permanent or all-embracing answer can be given, for it is of the essence of cultural dynamics that the cross-fertilization of forms, attitudes, values, approaches, should continue as long as the vitality of individual and group differences endure and further that they should endure as stimulants and aids towards greater growth.

But I believe that at long last we have been successful

in achieving our own basic adjustments. We have come to grips with the realities of human misery as they exist in Puerto Rico materially and spiritually. The generation to which I belong has concluded that our own justification for existence is to participate in the struggle for the salvation of our fellowmen, that this calls for opportunities, for freedom, for education, for well-being, for values of expression, of conduct, of solidarity. We have further concluded that knowledge, democracy and modern science are indispensable to the successful prosecution of these goals and that the traditions which we hold most dear are in no way incompatible with these other values. We feel rather that they can grow and flourish and take their meaningful significance as integral parts of a great cultural complex. The effort to carry out the above is what I have called elsewhere the peaceful revolution of the forties.

During the depression years of the 1930's Puerto Rico had drifted into a situation of frustration, hopelessness, and despair that brought forth many lamentations rather than programs for improvement of the dire economic and social situation that had befallen the community. Puerto Rican Lament, our best known song of the times, dealt with the sad plight of the peasant who returns home late and empty-handed from the market place. Our best known poet, Luis Palés Matos, writing a

profile on the Caribbean was quite definite about the fate of Puerto Rico and its symbolic paschal lamb:

"Puerto Rico my ardent island
You are definitely thru
In a continental meeting
Your lamb is bleating and bleating
Bleating in a lamb stew."

Well it might bleat, since our leading economist looking at the Census figure of 1930 had proclaimed that we were already one million too many Puerto Ricans.

Most remarkable perhaps was that the President of the Insular Senate, at the height of his political career in 1937, declared in his official biography that he wished he had been born elsewhere and that he was training his son as an engineer so that he might if he wanted to, leave the Island.

A new political orientation arose in the late 1930's directed toward a programmed improvement of the social and economic welfare. It was to lead Puerto Ricans from the Slough of Despond to Operation Bootstraps.

This leadership resulted in the foundation of a new party which achieved control of the Legislature in the elections of 1940. Unlike many of the countries to the South and to the North and to the West, we have no gold, we have no mines, we have no land. We have people. It won on the basis of new approach to our quandaries. Population hitherto

regarded as our greatest problem was to be envisaged **also as** the key to all possible solutions. The advancement of man was to be the crucial test for all proposals. Our job was cut out for us. We had to turn traditional liabilities into assets. This called for the recognition of the human resources as our chief potential strength. It required the systematic amelioration of his lot that he might better himself and better his society. The full impact of this new approach is not reducible to statistical measurements. I will mention a few facts to stimulate your own imagination:

In the year 1940 the mortality rate was 18.4 per thousand. Today it is 7.7 per thousand. Life expectancy was 46 years -- today it is 61 years. We had then 509 doctors -- today we have 1,193. The school enrollment was 298,000 -- today it is 546,000. The net income for Puerto Rico in 1940 was \$225,000,000 -- in 1953, \$1,000,000,000. In 1940 the birth rate was 34.4 per thousand -- today it is 30.5 per thousand. The number of school rooms and teachers increased 75% between 1940 and 1954. Illiteracy has been reduced from 80% in 1900 to 15% now.

The Chase National Bank in the June 1952 edition of "Latin American Highlights" referred to Puerto Rico as the area registering the greatest progress during the past decade in all the world. My only concern is lest this record of achievement

lull us into complacency or marking time. The road ahead is a long one and just as challenging as the one behind.

As a single example, it will require doubling the current per capita income in Puerto Rico to reach the current per capita income level of the lowest state in the United States (Mississippi).

What is the relationship of the University of Puerto Rico to the progress accomplished since 1940 and its role in the challenge that lies ahead? I will again give you a few facts.

The enrollment for 1941-42 totalled 5,466 students. The budget for the year amounted to a little less than \$2,000,000.00. The faculty numbered 309. Scholarship assistance amounted to \$14,784.65.

Our current enrollment is 13,158 students, our budget \$11,000,000.00; our regular faculty 727 and our scholarship assistance this year adds up to \$657,000.00.

The Puerto Rico program that has effected a fourfold increase in net income in the past fourteen years projects a net income goal of \$2,000,000,000 within a decade or so. The demand for competently college trained personnel for such an expanding economy is self-evident.

Although the number of University graduates increased

150% in the past twelve years, we have no unemployed University graduates in Puerto Rico. Nor will there be any for a long time.

Our changing society has placed a changing emphasis on the demand for different professional skills. This can be seen thru a comparison of the rest of the graduates of our University in 1941-42 and 1953-54.

In 1941-42 there were but 52 M.A. degrees granted in Public Health, Sanitary Sciences, pharmacists and medical laboratory technicians.

This past commencement we graduated 118 in medicine and the allied branches, including the pride of the University -- our first 45 young doctors in Medicine.

In 1941-42 we granted 45 degrees in Engineering. In 1954 -- 102 such degrees were granted.

Since the founding of our A & M College at Mayaguez in 1911, some 1,550 engineers have been graduated. More than 2/3 of these degrees have been granted since 1942 while less than 1/3 were granted in the 28 previous years. Puerto Rico's industrialization program could be sharply stepped up, and unemployment would show an important drop if we would produce three times the number of graduate engineers as we have turned out this past year. We are on our way to do so. Our graduating class of 1957-58 will contain over 300 graduate engineers who will have completed our five-year curriculum in

engineering.

In 1941 we graduated 54 students with the degree of Bachelor in Natural Sciences while in 1954, 113 students received this degree.

In 1941 no degrees were offered in Social Sciences, while this past June, 92 such degrees were conferred.

In 1941 - 22 degrees were granted in Business and Accounting while in 1954 this was increased to 99.

In 1941, 46 degrees were granted in Liberal Arts as compared with 29 B.A. in Humanities degrees granted in 1954. In 1941, 66 B.S. degrees were granted in Agriculture. This past June only 22 such degrees were granted.

Puerto Rico has a great need for professionally-trained agricultural scientists. Our enrollment in the Faculty of Agriculture has been increased considerably in the past two years. 70% of the total agricultural enrollment of 360 students are in the Freshman and Sophomore classes. We expect to graduate approximately 140 B.S. in Agriculture in the class of 1958-59.

Our College of Law has the lowest enrollment of all of our colleges. In 1941, 32 degrees in law were granted as compared with 22 granted in 1954.

The University from its foundation has been the principal

outlet open to young Puerto Ricans for developing their natural abilities and enabling them to put their talents to use regardless of their economic background. Until that time, aside from the sons of well-to-do families who were sent abroad to study, and the small group of the self-taught, the future of a young man of modest family means was to become a time-keeper, a store clerk, or clerk in some professional office. The University has changed all of this. The opportunity for a university education, for professional training for talented young people, has been extended and made possible by a vast system of scholarships. This year the University is spending in the neighborhood of \$700,000 on scholarships and financial aid to enable a substantial number of our best students to continue their studies.

In 1946 of a representative sample of 1,148 University freshmen, 76.3% came from families having an annual income of under \$2,000 a year. While the net income of Puerto Rico has almost doubled since 1946, by 1954 we still find some 44.0% of our students belonging to families having an annual income of less than \$2,000 a year.

From the beginning of the University, women have served as teachers, thus brushing aside the age-old custom and belief that a woman's place is in the home. No one questions their

right to participate in the life of the community, and they, in turn, actively and efficiently carry out their civic responsibilities. More than any other institution, the University has contributed to affording women equal rights in Puerto Rico. Today of our total registration of 13,152 students, 6,127 are women. They are enrolled in all colleges, and even in the School of Medicine the percentage of women - 15% - is higher than the average in medical schools in North America. In our faculty we have 236 women.

The University is a regular member of the principal academic and professional associations of higher learning in the United States - The Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, The American Medical Association, The American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy, The Oak Ridge Institute of Nuclear Studies, The American Council on Education, etc. It is also a Charter Member of the "Unión de Universidades Latinoamericanas".

The University is aware of its commitments and obligations in the common effort to advance knowledge beyond our immediate geographical frontiers. We are deeply sensitive to the many advantages flowing from stimulus from outside. We have 35 professors from Latin America and Europe and 102 from Continental United States in our regular faculty.

During the past two and a half years we have had 674

foreign trainees. These trainees have come from 62 foreign countries and territories and were sponsored by the Foreign Operations Administration (and its predecessors), United Nations including UNESCO, Pan American Union and its affiliates, Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Sciences and other international organizations concerned with Technical Assistance Programs as well as individual foreign government training programs.

The training programs vary from periods of several weeks observation and consultation to training workshops of three to six month's duration as well as enrollment in regular baccalaureate or professional graduate courses.

The majority of these trainees received training in the fields of Public Administration, agricultural research, fundamental education, agricultural extension, educational supervision, social work, public health, tropical medicine, labor relations, cooperative education, and rural life improvement.

Some 29 special training courses and group training programs have been conducted in the past 2-1/2 years.

Numerous faculty members and technicians of the University and its dependencies have been granted leaves of absence to participate in Technical Cooperation Programs in a number of Latin American Republics, including Brazil, Panama, Cuba, Costa

Rica, Paraguay, Haiti, Colombia, Chile, and Mexico.

The University lays special emphasis on the study of the social, economic, political, administrative, educational problems affecting the Puerto Rican community. To this end it has set up a Social Science Research Center, and stresses the responsibility of seeking out such knowledge in keeping with the most scrupulous and exact methods and making the results known with complete impartiality. It is a source of satisfaction to us that when such studies have to do with controversial problems, the most opposed groups have repeatedly accepted our findings as a reliable source of information, and have drawn upon our data to support their conflicting points of view. It is impossible today to study a Puerto Rican problem seriously without consulting our extensive university bibliography.

In like manner to what we have done in the field of investigation, we have insisted that our teaching must comply with the most rigorous and uncompromising standards. This demands, first and foremost, a faculty of highest quality, whose tenure, freedom of teaching, opportunities for additional study, investigation, sabbatical leave, retirement, a salary making full-time occupation with university duties possible, are guaranteed, and resources of libraries, publications,

cultural activities and stimuli to make academic life pleasant and rewarding.

As for our program of study, we have endeavored to combine the practical demands of reality with the appreciation and values of a new, more searching Humanism to the end of eventually understanding and orienting this reality. This is the goal toward which our efforts are directed. We have established a program of general studies which all our students are required to take, designed to focus attention on the great achievements of human thought. We have worked out a summer program of travel and study in Europe, which makes it possible for hundreds of our students and faculty members to visit the old continent every year. We have organized special art programs, exhibits of great paintings, dramatic performances, lectures: we have set up a university press to make available to our student body at low cost the best possible editions of classic or modern works which are difficult to secure in Spanish.

To the tendency toward insularity, we have opposed another, much more in accord with our age, with the spirit of our history, and with our aspirations for the present and the future: we have conceived of Puerto Rico as a community forming part of Western civilization, a frontier region where at one and the same time the best and the most diverse influences of our culture meet, and where in consequence it is necessary to take stock of

the greatnesses, the temptations, the faults, and the possibilities of its way of life. Thus we avoid estrangement from our own ways of life, are able to use our capabilities to the full, and to take advantage of the exceptional circumstance which permits us to participate significantly in the great task which lies before men in this century, the building of the future through understanding, cooperation and freedom.

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