

In a colony, the primary human value at stake is the value of collective freedom. To assert that value, to make a society, a culture, a political order, conform to what a people is or want or cherish and not to the dictates of a remote power, is the ultimate task of honest thought and political action. It is the ever present challenge to the intellectual class. It is its great, inescapable dilemma: to be or not to be.

This is, then, the question of "status" -in Puerto Rico or elsewhere in the world, wherever faced, the onus of colonialism had to be fought and destroyed.

To criticize the intellectual and political leaders of Puerto Rico because they were preoccupied with the question of status, is tantamount to criticizing them because of their concern with the value of freedom. In 1940, an election was won in Puerto Rico by a party which insisted that the political status "was not at issue". But it was devotedly and passionately concerned with the need for a status of economic freedom, of economic self-respect -as the necessary foundation for the solution of the political "status". It did not relegate the question of "status" to a political limbo. It created a new social and economic order and proceeded, then, with the release of energies so achieved to find a workable, imaginative solution to the

problem of collective freedom.

And this was due to a considerable degree to a heritage of an intellectual struggle with the status question. The struggle began in the early Nineteenth Century with the Napoleonic invasion of Spain and the emergence of the "cabildo" movement in Latin America which led to the independence of all of the former colonies with the exception of Cuba and Puerto Rico. The Puerto Rican "cabildos" as the "cabildos" elsewhere in the continent drafted their petition of redress of grievances to the anti-Napoleonic Junta in Spain in strong, unequivocal language. They sent to the Spanish Cortes, a man of vision and energy, Ramon Power, who was elected Vice President of Spain's first modern constitutional body.

Ramón Power played a distinguished role in laying the foundations for a political and economic reform in Puerto Rico. But contrary to Mr. Boorstin's contention, regarding the narrowness of our political thinking, Power placed the struggle for reform in Puerto Rico within the wider framework of the need for reform of the whole empire. He made an impassioned plea for equality of representation between Spanish and American deputies. He denounced the arbitrary rule of the Vicerays and Captain Generals in the Spanish Indies.

Time and again he pleaded for reconciliation between Spain and the revolutionary factions under a liberal, tolerant and humane constitution. And he was also prophetic. "Let us examine -he said in a remarkable speech on January 11, 1811, before the Cortes- the public spirit of our American brothers. Let us study their just desires, and prevent fatal consequences, which we may lament some day. As a national representative, elected by my fellow-citizens, I would not be worthy of their trust if I would not lay before Your Majesty with dignity and energy, whatever honor and conscience dictate to pacify the movements which have already started in great regions of the new world and that pacified through the only happy means that Your Majesty could employ, there shall be reestablished in a closer bond than ever union, fraternity and concord among the children of this great family". (1)

It was through the efforts of Power and his Spanish American colleagues in the Cortes, that the Spanish Constitution of 1812 -the cornerstone of Spanish liberalism in the XIXth Century- finally established the principle of equality of rights between Spain and her overseas provinces. The Constitution -;Alas!- came too late to settle the old grievances, Latin American, in a turmoil of blood and thunder, finally separated itself from Spain. But men like Power had proved their worth in Spain and had kindled

the spirit of reform and liberalism in Cuba and Puerto Rico. It is a pity that Mr. Boorstin did not find the time in Puerto Rico to read about their contribution to Spanish constitutional thinking...

The principle of equality of rights between Spain and her remaining provinces was, to a considerable degree, the rallying cry of liberalism in the islands. To be a province of Spain, within a constitutional monarchy, with the same rights and privileges, was the desideration of Cuban and Puerto Rican liberals in 1812. The dream failed because of the reemerging Spanish reaction. Despotism returned and with it a renewal of the fight for a dignified collective status.

It was a long and strenuous fight, for Spanish military power was strong and well-entrenched in both islands. After more than half a century had elapsed, many already thought of separation. This was particularly true in the larger island of Cuba. It found some echoes in Puerto Rico, especially among intellectuals like Ramón Emeterio Betances and Eugenio María de Hostos. These two men who were to symbolize Puerto Rican separation in the second half of the century, however, did not narrow it down to a mere factional issue as Mr. Boorstin's superficial thesis would imply. Betances, the aggressive agent of Cuban independence in Paris, thought, like Hostos, in terms of an Antillean con-

federation, of a wider community of peoples in this area of the world under republican and liberal institutions. Hostos wrote to this effect:

"In spite of this (Latin-American disunity), the Twentieth Century will be ample time to organize the international American State which in all probability will be organized before the international European State. All the more probable, since we are simply concerned here with testing the flexibility of the fruitful principle of federation; whether it is by building the West Indian Confederation, and after her, the South American federation, which result would be to the federal union of the whole continent; or whether it is by proceeding through diplomatic channels to establish political, economic and social relations between the States of the various continental families. It is already clear that one of the tasks of this century will be the building of this international American State."(2)

He correctly foresaw the emergence of the Organization of American States, although his wider dream of a West Indian Confederation and a South American Federation still belong to an uncertain future.

(1) Buscar en el Bol. Ramírez, Lecturas, 71.

(2) Eugenio María de Hostos "Tratado de Sociología" en Obras Completas XVII, 174.