

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

MC 2933

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## National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form

This form is used for documenting property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (formerly 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information.

  X   New Submission            Amended Submission

### A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Architecture of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration in Puerto Rico (PRRA)

### B. Associated Historic Contexts

(Name each associated historic context, identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)

Architecture of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration in Puerto Rico (PRRA), 1935-1943

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date July 10, 2017

### D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation.

Carlos A. Rubio Cancela, Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Officer

Signature of certifying official

Title

July 23, 2017  
Date

State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

[Signature]  
Signature of the Keeper

9-17-2018  
Date of Action

### Table of Contents for Written Narrative

Create a Table of Contents and list the page numbers for each of these sections in the space below.

Provide narrative explanations for each of these sections on continuation sheets. In the header of each section, cite the letter, page number, and name of the multiple property listing. Refer to *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* for additional guidance.

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Architecture of the PRRA in Puerto Rico  
Name of Multiple Property Listing

Puerto Rico  
State

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**Introduction**

Previous research on Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRRA) has been scarce and fragmented. No scholars in Puerto Rico or in the United States had published a comprehensive history of PRRA. There are a few publications which have looked at PRRA within larger research topics such as politics, economy, and planning. In addition, there are a few dissertations, which look at some aspects of the agency's work. The most recent publication is Max García Betancourt's *La influencia de la Escuela Institucionalista en la Administración de Reconstrucción de Puerto Rico (PRRA): proyecto de transformación económica y social (1935-1944)* presented in 2015 to the History Department in the Humanities Faculty at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras. Then, there is Geoff G. Burrows' doctoral thesis titled: *The New Deal in Puerto Rico: Public Works, Public Health, and the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration, 1935-1955*. Presented in 2014 to the Graduate Faculty of History at the City University of New York (CUNY), even if this work's title indicates a focus on public works and public health, the fact is that Burrows' research completely skipped architecture, which as will be demonstrated in this section, played a huge part in both of those operational aims within PRRA. His research's merit, Burrows' contends, is to have handled "the first archival analysis of PRRA."<sup>1</sup> Another dissertation worth mentioning is Marygrace Tyrell's *Colonizing Citizens: Housing Puerto Ricans, 1917-1952* submitted in 2009 to Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. Chapter three of Tyrell's work, titled "Colonizing the New Deal," focuses on PRRA's housing policy within a shifting imperialist discourse that started to view Puerto Rico as a valuable resource in international politics and hemispheric security. On the other hand, Norma Medina Carrillo researched PRRA's rural housing in her 2009 thesis, read at the University of Puerto Rico's History Department under the title *La vivienda adecuada: El proceso de reconstrucción rural de la Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRRA)*. Carrillo's main conclusion looks at the landscape reconstruction underscored by PRRA through their objective of sanitation through a new material (concrete) vocabulary. Delia Margarita Reyes, looked over PRRA's social work in her 1986 thesis for the University of Puerto Rico's Graduate Program in Psychology titled: *El trabajo de comunidad de la sección de servicios sociales de la Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration y el desarrollo de la comunidad en Puerto Rico en la década de 1930*. As the title suggest, this work overviews PRRA's Social Work Section and their directives in driving community practices.

**The New Deal: Toward a Policy of Economic Relief in the United States**

As a United States' colony, Puerto Rico was admitted into the New Deal programs that took place during the 1930s. Therefore, the Keynesian<sup>2</sup> theory on economic rehabilitation that pushed for governmental intervention in order to increase spending and in turn, increase production was also extended to the Island. However, soon it became evident that more than rehabilitation Puerto Rico needed an urgent economic reconstruction.

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<sup>1</sup> Burrows, iv.

<sup>2</sup> This economic theory first appeared in 1936 as proposed by British economist John Maynard Keynes in his book titled: *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*.

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In macro, the New Deal in Puerto Rico worked within two individual stages. The first, –from 1933 to 1935– under the Puerto Rico Emergency Relief Administration (PRERA), worked on direct aid and work relief. PRERA was a local agency with ties to New Deal's programs by way of administration of federal funding. However, by 1934, PRERA's inability to solve the Island's problems solely as an aid program was painfully recognized. Each year since 1934 population growth doubled, unemployment increased, and illness became more rampant as the majority of the population was poor, and had no hope for socioeconomic betterment. So, in 1935 President Roosevelt created the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRRA) in order to tackle the economic reconstruction of the Island. Contrary to PRERA, PRRA was created as a new federal agency under the Department of the Interior. As a New Deal organization operating in Puerto Rico, PRRA was responsible for all the work in the United States was handled by federal agencies. The Administrator's office was in Washington, DC, while there were regional offices working from San Juan. This, however, changed in 1937-1938 when PRRA's administrative headquarters were transferred to San Juan, leaving a small Washington liaison office.

This historical context frames PRRA's architectural production. PRRA's architecture is most significant for several reasons. First, there is its link to the New Deal. Second, it is the product of the first strategically organized island wide efforts in public works mostly focused on the rural areas. Third, PRRA guided the first scaled modernization program for the Island based on the ideas of experimentation and the application of the scientific method to problem solving; architecture was a cornerstone of such endeavor. Linked to this, as Rural Rehabilitation was considered its most important program, PRRA started to change the Island's countryside as part of the agency's intention to eliminate all unhygienic peasant huts by replacing them with sanitary and permanent concrete dwellings, which could withstand tropical storms and earthquakes. Arguably, then, PRRA's rural interventions accept interpretation as an experiment in building a new vernacularism. At the same time, in urban areas, PRRA's objective to clear Puerto Rican cities of slums encompassed beautification efforts within a modernizing and sanitizing urban project. Put simply, PRRA tackled education, health, and safety by building schools, dispensaries and hospitals, police stations, and other public buildings.

During the 1930s the world faced the weakening of Capitalism. As the system was at the verge of collapse, the Stock Market crash of October 29, 1929 was but the consequence of impactful changes in the global scene set into effect by the aftermath of World War I. Specifically, the readjustment of power and the economic advancement of the United States in contrast to the instability in European countries, left to deal with their complete financial and physical reconstruction.

Starting the 1920s, the outcome of WWI meant for the United States economic growth and a rapid path towards progress. However, the new but smaller, economic sectors which began to corner the popular buying trends in the US immediately after the War would prove to be too weak to carry the country's economy. Expenditures on massed-produced items, previously thought of as luxury products as well as on recreation, may have evidenced a renewed, vigorous and, as it seemed at the time,

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imperishable economy, but automobiles, the latest household technologies, and entertainment were still extremely small market niches. Therefore, even if growing steadily, these were not able to maintain the American economy in an upward. In addition, as industrial production demands diminished, the unavoidable rearrangements in war related manufacturing that followed, eventually shot unemployment to unprecedented numbers. Jason Scott Smith points at an increase of 600 percent from 1919 to 1921.<sup>3</sup> For their part, agricultural markets suffered from a lowering of prices in order to counteract the introduction of imported goods. More importantly, farmers faced the fluctuations of the credit based business model.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, since sales were lower than production costs, many farmers were unable to manage loan payments. This practice eventually impacted the banking industry. Therefore, in time, foreclosure enforcements were the only way for banks to maintain their solvency a while longer.

Foremost, the Market crash was symptomatic of huge problems in the United States' financial ecology. As Smith explains, the banking system was weak, as it was composed of several small private financial institutions that lacked mechanisms to deal with their own investment mishaps. Banks' investment capital, made up mostly of their clients' savings, was at risk because there were no federal or private insurance to safeguard the money deposited. Add this to the fact that speculative investing on high credit margins became the norm near the end of the 1920s and that most believed stock market performance to be directly proportional to the Nation's economic strength<sup>5</sup>, to find the causes for the devastating outcome that turned out to be the Great Depression in the United States during the 1930s.

It is a well-known fact that economic development depends on the capacity of capital exchange; that is, on the possibility to do business. Simply put, during the Depression –which in macro scale was nothing else than the global effect of the capitalist system's downfall– business transactions generally, just came to a halt. As mentioned before, for the United States that translated into an increase in unemployment that reached an all-time high of 25% in 1933<sup>6</sup> as bankruptcies also skyrocketed –yearly statistics between 1932 and 1935 show, for example, 70,000 cases each in only those start and end years.<sup>7</sup>

At the beginning of the crisis, then President Herbert Hoover, a Republican, did not want to set a precedent for federally funded direct assistance that could lead to dependence on government aid. Instead, Hoover set his scope of action at helping banks and private corporations. In his view, charities and state governments were the ones called upon to handle assistance to individuals.<sup>8</sup> And so, the people's discontent, while facing what appeared to be unsolvable economic problems and a devastating

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<sup>3</sup> Jason Scott Smith, *A Concise History of the New Deal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 11.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 15-16.

<sup>6</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Graph of U.S. Unemployment Rate, 1930-1945," *HERB: Resources for Teachers*, <http://herb.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/1510> (accessed: May 17, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Administrative Office of the United States Courts, *Tables of Bankruptcy Statistics* (June 30, 1948), prepared as part of Section 53 of the Bankruptcy Act of 1948. In Smith, 23.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, 23-24.

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social involution, leaned the 1932 elections in favor of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Roosevelt focused his campaign on the promise of work and security. His vision supported the farmer as an American icon and as the backbone of the US economy. In a now famous speech conducted in April 7, 1932 as a radio address from his home state of New York, Roosevelt emphasized how the rough times called “for the building of plans that rest upon the forgotten, the unorganized but the indispensable units of economic power, for plans...that build from the bottom up and not from the top down, that put their faith once more in the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid.” Further, he said, “[i]t is high time to get back to fundamentals. It is high time to admit with courage that we are in the midst of an emergency at least equal to that of war. Let us mobilize to meet it.”<sup>9</sup> For FDR the National emergency was a crisis of the people; however, it was precisely the people whom had been left out of the recovery equation by President Hoover by his favoring of big business’ interests. On July 2, 1932, the presidential hopeful accepted the nomination of the Democratic Party in Chicago by pledging “to a new deal for the American people”, by calling to “a new order of competence and of courage” viewed as a “call to arms”, a revolution of sorts led by government in a “crusade to restore America to its own people.”<sup>10</sup>

During the campaign, Roosevelt put together a team of advisors who would eventually design and implement, an experimental approach to public policy-making, a new way in which to “attack” the Depression. Among them, Rexford Guy Tugwell, economist, planner and Columbia University professor – who would later be instrumental in Puerto Rican politics, economic reconstruction, and modernization. This *Brains Trust* favored an innovative approach in governing where the State assumed, for the first time, a more direct social and economic role. With this, the *welfare state* was born. It was also the first time in US history that government expansion was instrumented for the purpose of a civic outcome and not as a war effort.<sup>11</sup>

Much of the economic and social stimulation was managed through public construction projects financed initially, by relief funds instead of loans, disbursed by the Emergency Relief Administration (1933), renamed later the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), and finally, reincarnated in 1935 –through Executive Order No. 7034 of May 6<sup>th</sup>– into the Work Progress Administration (WPA). Along with FERA, other agencies and laws were approved during the first one hundred days of Roosevelt’s first term as President. These formed the core of the new experiment in direct social and economic assistance *for the forgotten* that the New Deal intended to become. Among them: the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), and the Public

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<sup>9</sup> Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “The Forgotten Man,” Radio Address from Albany, New York (April 7, 1932). In The New Deal Network, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute for Learning Technologies at the Teachers College, Columbia University, <http://newdeal.feri.org/speeches/1932c.htm> (accessed: May 17, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “Nomination Address, Chicago, Ill.,” (July 2, 1932). In The New Deal Network, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute for Learning Technologies at the Teachers College, Columbia University, <http://newdeal.feri.org/speeches/1932b.htm> (accessed: May 17, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Smith, 32.

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Works Administration (PWA). Others, created later, which would also, have enormous impact were the Civil Works Administration (CWA), the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), and the Resettlement Administration (RA).<sup>12</sup>

So, to summarize: the New Deal was a bureaucratic strategy for reform. Put together to tackle the social and economic problems affecting the Nation in lieu of the Great Depression, it was comprised by multiple government programs developed to help jump-start the stricken economy. The New Deal's most impending goal was to reduce unemployment in urban industries and agriculture. This would enable monetary flow while advancing a liberalist political vision for long lasting social and financial security through federal reforms such as the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), and Social Security, which are still in place to this day.

**The Advent of the New Deal in a Caribbean Colony**

Historiography on economic history in Puerto Rico generally agrees on the fact that the dire situation of the island was not caused by the Great Depression. However, the economic break faced by the United States during the 1930s, certainly had a negative impact on the already dreadful socio-economic landscape of its Caribbean colony.

In 1928 *The Brookings Institution* of Washington DC was commissioned a survey of the Island. The results were published in 1930 under the title *Porto Rico and Its Problems*.<sup>13</sup> The document begins by considering the two issues needing most pressing attention. First, there was the economic situation, which obviously, significantly hindered the social development of the citizens.<sup>14</sup> Second, there was the political problem, or how to develop more "mutually satisfactory relations between the Island and the Mainland..."<sup>15</sup> However, as the research team headed by economist Victor S. Clark believed, the two conditions were not mutually exclusive. Therefore, "[i]f American political institutions [were] to succeed in Porto Rico, the material conditions of life there must be greatly improved" by "[raising] the incomes and the standard of living of...people to something approaching a parity with those prevailing in the

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<sup>12</sup> For a more comprehensive and detailed account of these public policies see Kenneth S. Davis, *FDR: The New Deal Years 1933-1937, A History* (New York: Random House, 1979); Robert S. McElvaine (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Great Depression* (New York: Macmillan Reference USA and Thompson Gale, 2004); Jason Scott Smith, *Building New Deal Liberalism: The Political Economy of Public Works, 1933-1956* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), and Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York and London: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Headed by economist and historian, Victor Selden Clark, the research team was comprised of Charles L. Dearing, James A. Dickey, Frederick H. Newell, Hugh J. Reber, Henry P. Seidemann, Frank Tannenbaum, and Erich W. Zimmermann. See Victor S. Clark and others, *Porto Rico and Its Problems* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 1930).

<sup>14</sup> Puerto Ricans born on the Island had been given US citizenship in 1917 through the Jones Act.

<sup>15</sup> Clark, xvii.

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continental US.”<sup>16</sup>

The economic and social situation in Puerto Rico had been aggravated by the devastation caused by the San Felipe hurricane (1928) and later, by San Ciprián (1932).<sup>17</sup> San Felipe hurricane, the stronger of the two storms, caused damage island-wide, “All parts of the Island suffered. Hardly a building of any kind was uninjured. When the tempestuous winds had subsided and the torrential rains had ceased, all the frail structures, the homes of the dwellers on the mountain sides, were found destroyed. Of thousands of these homes of the people not a vestige remained. In city and country alike the storm left its destructive mark. Sugar centrals, large manufacturing factories, costing millions of dollars were left a shapeless mass of debris. Schoolhouses were destroyed or unroofed. As result it is literally true that 500,000 people were left homeless, without food or clothing, except that they had worn throughout the storm”<sup>18</sup>.

Then again, there were also other factors at play. Among them, according to the 1930 census, an increase in population of 15.8% since 1920 with escalating numbers totaling 1,543,913 inhabitants; a 54% unemployment rate counting men, women, and children over ten years old; and 41% illiteracy among the population over ten years of age.<sup>19</sup> As the Brookings team reported, the average daily earnings of Puerto Rican sugar laborers was 70 cents –less for workers of other crop industries– jobs were usually scarce and unsteady, and most of the population worked, if lucky, four out of seven days.<sup>20</sup> Most of the rural workers

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> San Felipe hurricane, a category 5 hurricane with sustained winds of 160 mph, struck on early morning hours of September 13, 1928, the center of the storm crossed the Island at a rate of 13 miles per hour in eight hours traveling from southeast to northwest. San Ciprián, a category 3 hurricane with winds estimated to close to 120 mph, struck the Island on the night of September 26, 1932, crossing in seven hours affecting primarily the eastern and northern coast traveling from east to west. San Felipe left a loss of 210 lives, 2,771 injured, more than 20,000 sick and \$85,312,210 dollars estimated damages and property loss. Thousands of rural dwellings in the mountain area were destroyed leaving 400,000 people homeless. On the other hand, San Ciprián killed 257 people, 4,820 person injured and estimated financial loss of approximately \$35,568,345.06 dollars. In surveys conducted after the hurricane found that 49 municipalities were impacted, 42,431 houses were destroyed, 32,446 houses damaged and 76,926 families affected. See Oliver L. Fassig, “San Felipe – The Hurricane of September 13, 1928, at San Juan, PR.” In *Monthly Weather Review*, vol. 58, no. 8 (August, 1930): 350, <https://docs.lib.noaa.gov/rescue/mwr/056/mwr-056-09-0350.pdf> (accessed: May 18, 2017) and James R. Beverley, *Thirty-Third Annual Report of the Governor of Puerto Rico* (San Juan: Bureau of Supplies, Printing, and Transportation, 1933), 5, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b2998756;view=1up;seq=263> (accessed May 18, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Horance M. Towner, *Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Governor of Porto Rico* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1930), 2, 3. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015053274398;view=1up;seq=3> (Accessed July 17, 2018)

<sup>19</sup> US Department of Commerce, US Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 – Outlying Territories and Possessions* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1932), 123, 141, 170, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015079711845;view=1up;seq=5> (accessed: May 18, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> Clark, xix. For detailed numbers on laborers’ wages see also, Theodore Roosevelt, *Thirty-First Annual Report of*



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were tenants-at-will (*agregados*) who owned neither the land nor the crops they cultivated. As the report stated, "four out of five are landless, homeless, possess few or no animals and few or primitive agricultural implements." As the team concluded, this was "...a country where the masses depend for their right for a place to live, to raise a garden, or to keep a cow, a pig, a goat or a chicken upon the good will of the landowner..."<sup>21</sup>

What the survey revealed were in essence, the effects of a mostly single crop (sugar) agricultural economy controlled by big absentee corporations who owned the best lands. Also, the damage of an economic structure on which profits were not reinvested on the Island, but left to fill the pockets of predominantly United States' stakeholders. Evidently, Puerto Rican peasant workers (*jibaros*) were poor. This fact was that underlined by general malnourishment, illness, and their shaky huts built out of found materials such as palm and thatch or even discarded tin and cardboard. As such, the problems for Puerto Rican families, as summarized by Brookings' researchers, were: (1) insufficient income (poverty); (2) lack of permanent work; (3) inability for land acquisition; and (4) isolation and lack of social organization.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, the most astonishing comments written in the document were evidently based on a stereotypical perception of Puerto Ricans. Researchers suggested:

[t]here is a **degree of submissiveness to misfortune and lack of class feeling** that to an outside observer is difficult to understand. Perhaps it is the widespread illness, perhaps it is the extreme poverty, perhaps the terrific impact of the periodic storms that carry all away with them and make human efforts and ingenuity seem like naught, that explains the **passive helplessness** of the rural community.<sup>23</sup>

With this somewhat myopic view, Victor S. Clark and his team blamed the treacherous socioeconomic situation they lived, on the *jibaros* themselves. For the researchers, the general problem revolved around the fact that there were "[t]wo dissimilar cultures...in the process of mutual assimilation...." At the same time, they acknowledged Puerto Ricans "[wishing] to direct their own affairs" and how "[the] desire to do so [was] not anti-American but American." They thought their presence on the island had a greater objective as the findings of the survey they were conducting would ultimately "[point] the way toward a complete realization of this ambition, by building up an educated and economically independent citizenry and by governmental reform that [would] make the legislative and administrative machinery more

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*the Governor of Porto Rico* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1931); James R. Beverly, *Thirty-Second Annual Report of the Governor of Porto Rico* (San Juan: Bureau of Supplies, Printing and Transportation, 1932); James R. Beverly, *Thirty-Third Annual Report of the Governor of Porto Rico* (San Juan: Bureau of Supplies Printing and Transportation, 1933), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b2998756;view=2up;seq=256> (accessed: May 19, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Clark, 13.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 37. Emphasis in the quote is made by the author.

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manageable and efficient.”<sup>24</sup>

As Homi Bhabha argues, colonial discourse functions from within the acceptance or rejection of *difference*. As part of its mechanisms of domination, the empire will [re]produce the colonized as a recognizable *other* in the successive course of turning them into its *subaltern*. In that process, the hegemonic authority will take advantage of the workings of the stereotype, both with images and narrative forms, in order to maintain control and a position of power. By way of acts of distortion such as the one perpetrated by the Brookings’ researchers, Bhabha sustains that stereotype, as discourse, forces the colonized people into being at once, the cause as well as the effect of the system of domination.<sup>25</sup> Still the fact remains that by profiling Puerto Rican peasant workers as submissive, passive, and unwilling to actively change their fate, these foreigners did not seem to acknowledge the colonial mindset of these subject people, who had never known any other way but that of the political and class domination they were born into.<sup>26</sup> Nor did they place any responsibility on the US colonial administration for the miserable conditions they were forced to endure.

Let me underscore that historically, there has been a tendency on the part of imperial powers with colonies in the tropical region, to render a particular brand of stereotyping. Two of the most repeated discursive images and/or narratives have been the *noble savage* and the idea of laziness as a trait of tropical inhabitants. Sometimes, these two have been combined into one entity: the *lazy savage* (or lazy native, or lazy peasant). In it, of course, the traits of inactiveness or unwillingness to act are merged with—or come from—primitivism, backwardness, and/or underdevelopment. The discourse of laziness came about from the idea that a mild climate and the Eden-like qualities of abundance in the Tropics made work—or physical strain—unnecessary, as the territory provided for subsistence.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, ix.

<sup>25</sup> Homi Bhabha, *El lugar de la cultura* (Buenos Aires: Manantial, 2002), 95, 108.

<sup>26</sup> Before the Spanish-Cuban-American War, Puerto Rico had been, since 1493, a Spanish Colony. After said conflict and the victory of the United States over Spain in 1898, Puerto Rico was ceded into a new colonial arrangement along with Cuba, the Philippines and Guam.

<sup>27</sup> One important critical position, though, comes from Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre, who in order to deconstruct the concept, argued that it were the Catholic evangelical practices of the Iberian colonizers—Spanish and Portuguese—which were to blame for the apparent preference of leisure above work in Latin American countries. So, for Freyre, inaction or “laziness” were learned and imposed practices derived from the observance of multiple religious celebrations where people were allowed to skip on their labor in order to worship. Freyre’s argument seems logical if we mind that religious celebrations are often called *fiestas* (holidays) in Spain and Latin America. Notwithstanding, laziness as discourse, with variations, was surprisingly accepted and acknowledged by some Puerto Rican intellectuals. For example, as part of the first attempts to define a national character, in *Insularismo* (1934) Antonio S. Pedreira talks about a tropical *laissez faire*. That is, a willingness of the inhabitants of the Tropics (for his text specifically, Puerto Ricans) to “let things happen”. That passive attitude conformed by the acceptance of situations without opposition, arguably, is inscribed within the discourse of laziness. Pedreira’s reasoning on the *laissez faire* reads as follows: “geography and climate...strongly assist to the languishing of the will. [...] Climate melts our will and causes in our psychology a rapid deterioration. Heat ripens us before our time

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At first glance, in this Caribbean colony FDR's administration had two issues to solve. First, there were the contradictions inherent in dealing with Puerto Ricans as subjects or as citizens. Second, as James Dietz observes, as opposed to the metropolis, in which the New Deal functioned as a catalyst for economic rehabilitation, in Puerto Rico it had to produce some kind of effort toward "developing a productive and dynamic economic base..."<sup>28</sup> In other words, in the States the New Deal had to activate a stagnant economy while in Puerto Rico it had to build one, almost from the ground up.

Roosevelt's response to the crisis after his inauguration as President of the United States was swift. In May 1933—two months after taking the Oath of Office—there was a funding mechanism in place with the creation of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) to enact the Federal Emergency Relief Act in order to "provide for cooperation by the Federal Government with the several States and Territories and the District of Columbia in relieving the hardship and suffering caused by unemployment...." The Act authorized for those purposes \$500 million dollars from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. However, only half of said amount was directed toward grants totaling one third of the amount needed by the states for specific relief efforts.<sup>29</sup> Given that the assignments supplied by the Federal Government were grants and not loans, the states had no repaying responsibilities.

In the Island, the Puerto Rico Emergency Relief Administration (PRERA), created in August 19, 1933 would be FERA's administrative arm.<sup>30</sup> James Bourne, a longtime friend of Roosevelt's, at the time

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and before our time it also decomposes us. From its unnerving pressure over men comes that national characteristic we call *aplatanamiento* (unwillingness or powerlessness to move). *Aplatanarse* in our country is a kind of inhibition, a mental drowsiness, and a lack of willingness to undertake things.... It is an acclimation to tropical comfort and to have passive ideas in the form of *piraguas* (snow cones) to cool our civility's nap. *Musa paradiaca*, ineffable and scientific name of the plantain, is a rhetorical symbol of our vegetative state of mind." See Gilberto Freyre, "Americanism and Latinity in Latin America: Increasing Interdependence and Decreasing Separateness," Sidney Alexandre (trad.). In *Diogenes*, 11, issue 43 (1963), <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/039219216301104301> (accessed: May 19, 2017) and Antonio S. Pedreira, *Insularismo: Ensayos de interpretación puertorriqueña* (San Juan: Editorial Plaza Mayor, 2001 [1934]), 51, 56-57. The original text in Spanish; the translation is by this author.

<sup>28</sup> James L. Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico: Institutional Change and Capitalist Development* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), 144.

<sup>29</sup> For a complete transcript of the *Federal Emergency Relief Act* of 1933 see [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Federal\\_Emergency\\_Relief\\_Act\\_of\\_1933](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Federal_Emergency_Relief_Act_of_1933) (accessed: May 22, 2017).

<sup>30</sup> As the main objective of this multiple property documentation form does not intend a general overview of the New Deal, but of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRRA) as a specific agency created within its operational scope, I will not go into an extensive narrative on the PRERA. For that reason, I will stay within the context of the decision making process that led to the creation of the PRRA of which PRERA can be argued as a stepping stone. I want to emphasize, though, as discussed in the main text above, that in dealing with work relief, PRERA engaged in a very active, though short lived, building agenda which included infrastructure projects and architecture. Therefore, I strongly suggest that a future thematic nomination dealing with the PRERA be considered not only to complete the work I present here, but also, because it would be an important contribution

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residing in Puerto Rico, was appointed administrator. The Executive Order that created it, as cited in the agency's second and final report, defined PRERA as "[c]harged with the entire responsibility, subject to the general direction of the Governor, of the administration of all funds available from all public sources for the relief of the destitute unemployed of the island of Puerto Rico."<sup>31</sup> PRERA's executive board included the Governor as chairman; the commissioners of public works, education, and health; the judge of the San Juan District Court; the chairman of the hurricane relief commission; and a relief administrator—Bourne—who acted as vice-chairman and chief executive officer.<sup>32</sup> So, to clarify, PRERA "was strictly speaking, a dependency of the Insular Government," albeit with close ties to the Federal Government through the FERA.<sup>33</sup>

Even with an agency in charge of managing relief efforts, in general, the situation in Puerto Rico was not improving in any tangible way. In the introduction to the *First Annual Report of the PRERA* (1935), he reported that the funds assigned were "inadequate to carry out the program" therefore, only 25% of people eligible for assistance would actually get help.<sup>34</sup> As PRERA's Departments of Accounts and Audit reported, in July 1933 Puerto Rico received \$800,000 dollars from FERA, which after initial payments in August left approximately \$770,000 for operations.<sup>35</sup> Because of the limited funds, PRERA administrators decided to restrict direct relief only to the unemployable<sup>36</sup>—compromising only about 10% of the available budget—while directing most of their efforts toward work relief.<sup>37</sup> This way, they could indirectly assist the most people.<sup>38</sup> With that objective in mind, PRERA embarked in a very ambitious construction agenda in order to provide work for most able people—usually heads of family. Neither the Insular nor the

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to the topic of public works in Puerto Rico. Furthermore, if the reader is interested in a comprehensive view on the history of the PRERA, refer to Manuel R. Rodríguez, *A New Deal for the Tropics: Puerto Rico during the Depression Era, 1932-1935* (Princeton, New Jersey: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2010). Rodríguez's work, although not dealing with architecture, is a good resource for historical context within a specific interpretative positioning of the PRERA as a development project.

<sup>31</sup> PRERA, *Second Report of the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration from September 1, 1934 to September 30, 1935* and FERA, *Report of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration for Puerto Rico from October 1, 1935 to June 30, 1936 in Liquidation to October 1937* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1939), 2 in [https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.\\$b47241;view=2up;seq=12](https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.$b47241;view=2up;seq=12) (accessed: 23 May, 2017).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>34</sup> James Bourne, "Introduction to the First Annual Report," in *First Annual Report of the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration from August 19, 1933 to August 31, 1934* (San Juan: Bureau of Supplies, Printing, and Transportation, 1935), 8.

<sup>35</sup> See Ana Luisa Betancourt, "Report of the Bureau of Accounts" in *First Annual Report of the PRERA*, 444.

<sup>36</sup> Direct relief consisted of the provision of bare necessities such as food, clothing, and others to people in extreme need such as, for example, the disabled and the elderly.

<sup>37</sup> Work relief meant the provision of labor, usually through public works or "white collar" projects in order for people to be able to earn a modest salary. Work was dependent on budget and the recommendations of social workers, who reviewed individual cases registered on aids' lists.

<sup>38</sup> Bourne, "Introduction to the First Annual Report," in *First Annual Report of the PRERA*, 8.

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Municipal Governments in Puerto Rico were able to meet Federal disbursements requirements—not even on an equal allocation capacity—contrary to the States. Full funding for aid on the Island came solely from the Federal Government.<sup>39</sup>

During its 25 month in operation PRERA built roads, sewers, waterworks, drainage systems, electrical utility infrastructure, town squares, athletic fields, markets, town halls, schools, hospitals, and other public buildings as part of its work relief efforts.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, as early as 1934 it was already obvious to the Federal Authorities that aid was not enough to solve the economic and social problems of Puerto Rico. So, in September 30, 1935 PRERA ceased to exist as such and was converted into the Federal Emergency Relief Administration for Puerto Rico until official liquidation of relief funding in June 30, 1936.

Manuel R. Rodríguez has stated in his work that PRERA should not be looked at as a failed attempt in directing New Deal policies. However, because of the brevity of its operation, I do not share his interpretation of the agency as "...a complex development project that...transformed the role of the government and the way in which it exercises power...",<sup>41</sup> However, PRERA did set some precedents for the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRRA) to continue to build upon.

The difficulties in kick-starting economic improvements in Puerto Rico seemed to stem, among other factors, from the experimental and generalist approach New Deal efforts usually took. Add that to the fact that proper management protocols were not properly set and processes were being tested at the same time as projects progressed. On the other hand, as several New Deal initiatives coexisted, there was some redundancy. Also, multiple bureaucracies sometimes could hinder logistics. Other times, decisions were made and programs were implemented without taking into account the specific needs of the people and/or the contexts at play. Such was the case with the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) and the National Industrial Recovery Administration (NIRA); two of the first efforts designed by Roosevelt's administration to start to tackle the economic situation in the country.

James Dietz and Manuel R. Rodríguez explained how the AAA, approved by Congress in May 1933, became an economic strangulation device for Puerto Rico.<sup>42</sup> The AAA intended "to establish and maintain...balance between the production and consumption of agricultural commodities, and such

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<sup>39</sup> Jorge González, "Brief Report of the Economic Condition of the Island of Puerto Rico Before the Advent of the Relief Administration, Report of Activities Division," in *First Annual Report of the PRERA*, 25.

<sup>40</sup> For an overview of some of the construction projects handled by PRERA see *First Annual Report of the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration from August 19, 1933 to August 31, 1934* (San Juan: Bureau of Supplies, Printing, and Transportation, 1935) and PRERA, *Second Report of the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration from September 1, 1934 to September 30, 1935* and FERA, *Report of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration for Puerto Rico from October 1, 1935 to June 30, 1936 in Liquidation to October 1937* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1939).

<sup>41</sup> Rodríguez, 142.

<sup>42</sup> Dietz, 147 and Rodríguez, 31-38.

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marketing conditions therefore, as will reestablish prices..."<sup>43</sup> In other words, its aim was to control agricultural production of selected products in order to help increase and maintain steady prices as the Federal Government wanted to anticipate probable drops due to unsellable excess—as had happened before the Depression—and put in place mechanisms that could guarantee, or at least help drive, the intended economic restart. These *commodity items* the bill imposed a tax upon were "wheat, cotton, field corn, hogs, rice, tobacco, milk and its products."<sup>44</sup> Operationally, the Act looked to subsidize farmers for the disposal of residual crops and livestock in an effort to encourage a reduction in production. Of course, some opposed the measure, as the destruction of the food overstock seemed contradictory at a time when hunger was one of the most visible effects of the economic fallout. Still, its proponents thought the law provided a way to oversee agriculture in order to maintain, as far as possible, certain proportionality among farmers' production to ensure market stabilization. However, the price increase over the taxation was passed along to the consumer, and since some of those products—wheat, flour, rice, etc.—were primary foods in the Puerto Rican diet, and were also imported, the AAA meant for many families a tremendous blow in their already slim budgets. Furthermore, most Puerto Rican main cash-products—sugar, coffee, and fruits—were not recognized in the Act as *commodity products* and therefore, they were exempt from the benefits provided by a piece of legislature. Thankfully for Puerto Rico, the United States' Supreme Court finally deemed the AAA unconstitutional in 1936.

The NIRA, for its part, established the National Recovery Administration on June 1933. With it, industries were required to write "codes of fair competition" in order to regulate wages, working hours, labor provisions, trade practices, and administration policies in order to prevent monopolies and unfair competition.<sup>45</sup> Beside the fact that Puerto Rico had in place a commerce agreement that fundamentally opposed NIRA, the Manufacturers Association protested it as they sustained that the industrial landscape as well as living conditions in Puerto Rico were different than those on the Mainland. The group argued that business and manufacturing depended on low wages as a way to balance the importation costs for raw materials, which the Island did not produce. The representatives for the Garments Workers Union, for instance, insisted that since salaries in Puerto Rico were a third or even four times lower than in the United States, leveling them to those in the continent by setting a minimum wage would force businesses to close and so, the already difficult problem of unemployment would become even harsher.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Congress of the United States, *Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933*, May 12, 1933.

<http://nationalaglawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/farmbills/1933.pdf> (accessed: 21 May, 2017).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> See Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries, The Social Welfare History Project, "National Recovery Administration" in <http://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/eras/great-depression/u-s-national-recovery-administration/> (accessed: 21 May, 2017). For an example, see National Recovery Administration, *Code of Fair Competition for the Radio Broadcasting Industry* (November 27, 1933) (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1933) in <http://www.americanradiohistory.com/Archive-FCC/Code-of-Competition.pdf> (accessed: 21 May, 2017).

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Mathews, *Puerto Rican Politics and the New Deal* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1960), 122-125.

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On the offset, the implementation of the New Deal policies in Puerto Rico did not provide, at first hand, a vehicle for the improvement of the economic and social condition on the island. PRERA's efforts in relief were not enough, therefore, other avenues had to be explored in order to set into gear a comprehensive and evolutionary strategy toward economic [re]construction with which be able to support modernization and social improving.

**A Brief on the Political Landscape in/for 1930s Puerto Rico**

The development of the New Deal programs in Puerto Rico was not exempt from a complicated political landscape. During the 1930s, as Dietz observes, the political context of the Island was less than friendly for the New Deal. At the turn of the decade, with a new election in the midst, the colonial status—or how to change it—was the focus of every local political party. As each had tight grips on specific agendas, the setting was not exactly favorable to try to navigate new liberalist economic and social policies, some of which encountered strong opposition. As Thomas Mathews points out, “to say that the primary issue...was the relations with the United States would be an understatement. More accurate would it be to state that every election issue was discussed in the light of the particular party's stand on this primary matter.”<sup>47</sup>

The 1932 election favored the most incompatible of political alliances in *La Coalición* (the Coalition) between the Socialist and the Republican Union parties, who won control of the legislature over the Liberals—the largest political organization at the time. This partnership seemed contradictory because the Socialists represented the interests of the workers and consequently, had strong ties with the labor unions especially the American Federation of Labor, while the Republicans protected business interests, particularly those of the sugar companies. They had in common, though, a vision toward statehood as both parties wanted a definite union with the United States. The Liberal party, on the other hand, guided independence as their political platform on status, believing it to be an act of moral justice. Completing the 1932 Puerto Rican political scene were the Nationalists, who did not recognize Federal authority in Puerto Rico. Presided by Harvard University Law School graduate, Pedro Albizu Campus, the Nationalist party supported independence but believed in an immediate separation from the United States as soon as they were able to control the Legislature. Instead, the Liberals thought prudent to gradually negotiate a political, social, and economic transition into independence.<sup>48</sup>

Both factions of the Coalition were antagonistic to New Deal programs. The Socialists opposed some projects that aimed at transforming workers' social and economic conditions, deeming them insufficient, oppressive, or not in tune with Puerto Rican cultural preferences. Meanwhile, the Republicans opposed actions that threatened the *status quo* of absentee sugar corporations regarding profits and/or

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>48</sup> See Dietz, 148 and Mathews, 30-40.

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the control over land and the Island's agricultural economy. Liberals, for the most part, supported New Deal programs as they focused on the economic and social upgrading that some of the party's leaders, especially a young Luis Muñoz Marín (later, first Puerto Rican governor elected) believed a priority in order to set a successful path toward independence. In Washington, DC, it was a well-known fact that every proposition made by the New Dealers would encounter some opposition in the Island. The Federal Government was also aware that even somewhat altruistic programs such as rehabilitation and direct aid would be politicized and made the center of partisan controversies. For example, being that the Liberals were known supporters of most New Deal policies, the Coalition constantly insisted that there were preferential practices in hiring that mostly favored Liberal party members over other political constituencies.

As the Island became politically unstable with riots and outbreaks of violence, the imperial administration felt uneasy. Albizu Campos believed in armed conflict to achieve independence. The Nationalists, a comparatively small but extremely vocal and oppositional front against the colonial government on the Island, started to use violent labor union strikes as standard mechanism to advocate for better working conditions. As result the 1930s turned into a turbulent decade for Puerto Rico. The Federal Government, not willing to give up control of the Island began to set in place strategies to try to counteract possible popular unrest. Consequently, in 1934 president Roosevelt appointed Blanton Winship, a highly conservative former War Department Adjunct General and lawyer, not a New Deal reformer, as Governor of Puerto Rico (1934-1939) –the first career military officer to hold the position since 1900.

Roosevelt's *Good Neighbor Policy*, and how it overlapped and affected the administration of New Deal policies on the Island

During the Seventh International Conference of American States, held in Uruguay in December 1933, the countries present agreed not to intervene in the internal affairs of other nations on the region. This changed the United States' perspective on international politics, especially in dealing with Latin America and the Caribbean in what is commonly known as the *Good Neighbor Policy*. With this change in international politics, the metropolitan view on Puerto Rico shifted as well. As Robert David Johnson underscores, the United States had never included Puerto Rico in its Latin American agenda.<sup>49</sup> This should not surprise, since due of its colonial status the United States already controlled the Island's affairs. That is, for one part, Puerto Rico had no political autonomy. On the other hand, US officials had, for the most part, seen Puerto Ricans as inferior. So, the colonial subject-citizens were never really considered as a political asset outside economic or security affairs.

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<sup>49</sup> Robert David Johnson, "Anti-Imperialism and the Good Neighbor Policy: Ernest Gruening and Puerto Rican Affairs, 1934-1939 in *Journal of Latin American Studies* 29, no. 1 (February 1997): 93.



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However, after the Conference, and in lieu of this change in policy, in May 1934 Puerto Rico's administration was transferred from the War Department to the Department of the Interior headed by liberal reformist Harold Ickes, under the supervision of the newly created Division of Territories and Island Possessions (DTIP). Of course, the shift in the overseeing framework regarding Puerto Rico was totally incongruent with the designation of a career military officer as Governor, made just three months earlier; Winship's presence certainly did not highlight the fact that the Island was not under the War Department any longer. However, one decision had nothing to do with the other, as the determination on the President's part to remove Puerto Rico and the territories from the War Department was definitely intended to send an anti-imperialist message within a plan to gain hemispheric alliances; a commitment which seemed consolidated by the appointment of Dr. Ernest Gruening as DTIP's director. Gruening, a journalist and anti-imperialist advocate, —who in 1935 was asked to simultaneously head the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration— brought a diplomatic mindset, vast knowledge on Latin American affairs, and a personal agenda.<sup>50</sup> He wanted to use Puerto Rico in order to “promote reform in the Caribbean basin through cross-national alliances of activism” as he “hoped to illustrate how a positive, reform-oriented policy by the US government might serve as a model for the administration's overall inter-American agenda.”<sup>51</sup> Hence, *reform-oriented policy* would turn out to mean the New Deal as showcased by the Caribbean colony turned model for Latin America.

In January 1934 former Governor of Puerto Rico (1929-1932), Theodore Roosevelt Jr., wrote an article in *Foreign Affairs* where he stressed the need for “the two Americas” to collaborate in order to advance their economies. As he described, North and South America needed to put aside, and stop looking at their differences and instead, concentrate on the benefits of the relations they could foster. That would not be easy given the stereotypical perceptions, the cultural differences, and the language barriers. However, for T. Roosevelt it was precisely there where Puerto Rico could mediate. As the ex-Governor contended:

There is still a wide misunderstanding and antagonism between the two cultures. Neither North nor South Americans are linguists. The people who speak English south of the Rio Grande are as small a group numerically as those who speak Spanish to the north. The old hatred and misunderstandings bred during the last hundred years rankle still. We must overcome them. I believe Puerto Rico can be a most important factor in doing so. I believe that the United States should look at the Island and its problems with this new view. [...] If we deal with the Island rightly it can be of great value not merely to the United States but to the entire hemisphere. But if we are to develop it as a point in contact with South America we must adopt a different set of policies from those we have so often followed. We must recognize the cultural significance of Puerto Rico in particular and of all the Spanish-American countries in general. It is not the same as ours, but non-identity does not imply inferiority.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> See Ibid, 94.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>52</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, “Puerto Rico: Our Link with Latin America,” in *Foreign Affairs* 12, no. 2 (January 1934): 273, 275.

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Further, in the 1937 book *Colonial Policies of the United States*, T. Roosevelt amplified on the above by stressing once again Puerto Rico's potential to become the "connecting link..., so to speak, [a] show window looking south...." Educated Puerto Ricans, he said, could serve as diplomatic liaisons for American banking and industrial interests in Latin America.<sup>53</sup> It is possible that Gruening and T. Roosevelt had an exchange of ideas but even they did not, there was undoubtedly a mindset shift starting to happen in the United States with regards to Puerto Rico.

In February 1934 Winship replaced Robert H. Gore as Governor. Gore had no previous political experience and his appointment had been a prize for his generous contributions to FDR's campaign. Self-admittedly not knowing where Puerto Rico was located before his appointment, completely oblivious to the responsibilities of his mandate, and unable to deal with sensitive political issues, his governorship only lasted six months—from July 1933 to January 1934.<sup>54</sup> A.W. Maldonado explains how Winship's principal objective was set on putting an end to the Nationalist party.<sup>55</sup> In order to accomplish this objective, he brought Colonel Elisha Francis Riggs as the new Police Chief by recommendation of Maryland senator, Millard E. Tydings. In turn, Riggs, with full support from the new Governor, started to set military-training standards for the Insular Police in order to be able to tactically control turbulent manifestations.<sup>56</sup> During the decade, some of the exchanges between the Police and the Nationalists ended as blood filled encounters. Such were the cases of the Río Piedras (October 1935) and the Ponce Massacres (March 1937); in between those—in February 23, 1936—there was the assassination of the Police Chief by Elías Beauchamp and Hiram Rosado, two young Nationalists. Arrested later that day, they were killed by cadets at the San Juan police headquarters. Claiming the two had tried to escape, policemen completely disregarded the fact that there was no death penalty in Puerto Rico.

Riggs' assassination, along with the lynching of the Nationalists, prompted strong reactions in the States and on the Island. Puerto Ricans wanted the matter investigated but politically, they were divided on the moral implications of the whole occurrence.<sup>57</sup> The Nationalists for their part, did not lose the opportunity to spread their political agenda by turning their two young militants, as Frank Otto Gartell argues, into martyrs of the anti-American cause.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, the

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<sup>53</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *Colonial Policies of the United States* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1937), 118-119.

<sup>54</sup> Maurine H. Beasley, *Ruby A. Black: Eleanor Roosevelt, Puerto Rico, and Political Journalism in Washington* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017), 84-85.

<sup>55</sup> A.W. Maldonado, *Luis Muñoz Marín: Puerto Rico's Democratic Revolution* (San Juan: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2006), 120.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Frank Otto Gartell, "Independence Rejected: Puerto Rico and the Tydings Bill of 1936," in *Hispanic Historical Review* 38, no. 1 (February 1958): 29. In <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/puertorico/pr-tydings.pdf> (accessed: 23 May, 2017).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

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relevance of maintaining ties with Puerto Rico came into question. For instance, in the issue of February 25, 1936 –just two days after the incidents– the *Washington Post* called for the reevaluation of the Island's status.<sup>59</sup> Washington feared other assassination attempts on continental American citizens.<sup>60</sup>

Consequently, Albizu Campos and other Nationalists were accused and eventually tried and found guilty of conspiring to overthrow the Federal Government on the Island. Plus notably, two months after Riggs' death, senator Tydings, who served as chairman in the Territories and Insular Affairs Committee – also, a close friend of the Police Chief– introduced a bill to grant Puerto Rico its independence. According to Gattel's research, two masterminds behind the bill, which called for a referendum in November 1937, were Ickes and Gruening, as the issue had been discussed with President Roosevelt on March 18, 1936 and first drafts were written in the Department of the Interior using the Philippines independence bill as model.<sup>61</sup> Both, Ickes and Gruening, thought Puerto Rico should be given its independence if the citizens of the Island really wanted it. In Puerto Rico, the bill caused severe political upheaval.<sup>62</sup> Yet, the fact that the Coalition massively won the 1936 elections proved, according to its leaders, that Puerto Ricans did not want independence. Nevertheless, what it really evidenced was Puerto Ricans disagreements with the separation clauses provided in the bill –which would make the economic situation on the Island even more unbearable– and the unfavorable opinion most of the population had regarding the activities of the Nationalist party.

The Island's political panorama was not only complex but presented as well, a somewhat problematic scenario for the establishment of the New Deal programs. As was discussed, in support of international politics and the *Good Neighbor Policy*, the United States could take advantage of the Island's heritage as a connection strategy in order to gain alliances and to visibly manifest what a relationship with

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>60</sup> The political situation in Puerto Rico continued to be a topic of concern in Washington. At the same time, there was the matter of the lack of confidence and the bad blood between several of the Federal officials dealing with Puerto Rico. In his published diary, Department of the Interior head, Harold Ickes, wrote a rather long entry regarding the Ponce Massacre and his wish to conduct an investigation on the matter. He had discussed it with the President on May 20, 1937 after reviewing pictures showing the police shooting people in the back. Both, the President and Ickes agreed such actions "looked bad". Ickes had contacted Winship in order to have the investigation started in Puerto Rico but the Governor stalled; Ickes accused him of lack of cooperation and suspected conflicts of interest. And then, there was Winship's and Gruening's visit to Senator Tydings in June 3 which he had not been informed of nor was a report submitted to him afterwards. Ickes took it as insubordination. See Harold L. Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold Ickes, Vol. II: The Inside Struggle (1936-1939)* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), 148-150.

<sup>61</sup> Frederick Bernays Wiener, a lawyer in the Department of the Interior who worked under Gruening drew the first draft. Ickes instructed Gruening to give it to Tydings to introduce in Congress not letting it be known, as instructed by the President, that there were any ties to the Department of the Interior or its administration. Gattel, 31-32.

<sup>62</sup> The Coalition felt betrayed, as statehood was not considered while the Liberals were confronted with the prospect of independence as drawn in their political platform but in terms that would impoverish Puerto Rico.

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the United States could provide Latin and Caribbean countries in the hemisphere. For this purpose, New Deal programs, especially their efforts in public works, could prove invaluable in order to show how the US “friendly help” assisted in conquering backwardness, illness, hunger, and lack of education, while bettering economic and social standards. Conversely, given the anti-American sentiment of Albizu Campos party and the pro-independence allegiances shared by both the Nationalists and the Liberals, several sectors in the Mainland, especially after Colonel Riggs’ assassination, questioned the reasons why the United States should continue to spend resources in helping a people that apparently, did not want anything to do with them.

**A [Tropical] Outlook on Reform**

In the first months of 1934 the First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, planned an unofficial trip –from March 4 to 17– to US Caribbean territories. The visit was actually focused on Puerto Rico, where the First Lady spent six days –from March 4<sup>th</sup> until 10<sup>th</sup>. In a confidential letter to Blanton Winship, Roosevelt informed the newly appointed Governor of his wife’s trip. The President stated the First Lady had much interest in the Island’s wellbeing.<sup>63</sup> Ruby Black, a journalist for the United Press and Washington correspondent for the Liberal party’s newspaper *La Democracia*, edited by Muñoz Marín, made Mrs. Roosevelt aware of Puerto Rico’s situation.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, Lorena Hickok, former United Press journalist and close friend of Mrs. Roosevelt, was chief investigator of relief conditions of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, and had been commissioned by FERA’s director, Harry Hopkins, to go to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Mrs. Roosevelt decided to take the trip with Hickok,<sup>65</sup> as the two friends intended to change the role of the First Lady in the White House. Officially, though, the trip was described to the public as “a study of social and economic conditions undertaken on behalf of her husband.”<sup>66</sup> This, probably seemed odd since on the one hand, it broke the norm of previous First Ladies who did not have active agendas outside of Washington, and also, because at the time, Mrs. Roosevelt was not regarded as a presidential advisor.

In her 1949 memoir, the First Lady talked about how her husband felt the visit would show the natives his interest in the Island’s conditions.<sup>67</sup> Instead of taking reporters to spots that would encourage potential US tourists to spend vacations in Puerto Rico, the First Lady toured the most horrid slums. She even asked photographer Sammy Schulman to take pictures of her there in order for continentals to see how their fellow citizens lived [Fig. 1]. As the First Lady described what she saw, she painted a picture of hopelessness that covered the whole Island:

The condition in rural houses were unsanitary enough, but in the towns they were more

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<sup>63</sup> Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Letter to Blanton Winship, Personal and Confidential, February 15 1934, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library and Archives, Private Papers, 1.267. Cited in Mathews, 158-159.

<sup>64</sup> Beasley, xii.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, xvi.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, xi.

<sup>67</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt, *This I Remember* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), 138.

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shocking.... Most of the houses consisted of two rooms; the back room had no light, and practically the only light in the front room came through the doorway. There were no screens and, of course, no plumbing or other modern conveniences in these old brick buildings.... The real slums were worse...in the capital city. Huts made of bits of tin and scrap iron and wood picked up after the last hurricane were built out over water. We walked on duck boards placed precariously over the piling, and water came up under every house. There was also a slum, which hung precariously to the side of a cliff.... Again, there was no sanitation [Fig. 2].<sup>68</sup>



[Figure 1]

Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena Hickok in Puerto Rico  
 Photographer: Sammy Schulman  
 March, 1934



[Figure 2]

*El Fanguito* (Little Mud)  
 1947

Conspicuously, though officially not on the same party, Rexford Guy Tugwell visit coincided with the First Lady's trip. According to Johnson, the President had asked the Undersecretary of Agriculture and *Brain Trusts* member, to conduct a field survey of sorts, in order to advise him on administrative reforms after governor Gore's terrible political performance.<sup>69</sup> However, as in February Roosevelt's administration had started to set the course for a plan to control domestic sugar production and imports,<sup>70</sup> Ruby Black sent Muñoz Marín a story for the newspaper where she indicated: "a completely planned economy for Puerto Rico is expected from the sugar stabilization plan."<sup>71</sup> The Costigan-Jones bill, passed by Congress on May 9 1934, amended the Agricultural Adjustment Act by the reclassification of sugar as a "commodity product", imposing in turn, a system of quotas, taxation, and subsidies in order to stabilize the sugar economy and protect US markets and investments. However, as the bill outlined a cut in sugar production, for Puerto Rico it eventually meant 25,000 agricultural jobs lost.<sup>72</sup> In January, Muñoz Marín's views on economic restructuring were presented in the January 24 edition of *La Democracia*. Concurrently, the members of the Puerto Rico Chamber of Commerce agreed the Island needed economic rehabilitation.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 139.

<sup>69</sup> Johnson, 94.

<sup>70</sup> CQ Press, "Stabilization of the Sugar Industry," in CQ Researcher, <http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/document.php?id=cqresre1934031208> (accessed: 24 May, 2017).

<sup>71</sup> Ruby Black Collection, Chardón Plan, Story, February 5, 1934 as cited in Mathews, 154.

<sup>72</sup> Ernest Gruening, "Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration," in Harold L. Ickes, *Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1937), 316.

<sup>73</sup> Mathews, 153.

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So, it seems more likely that Tugwell's visit had to do, among other things, with taking a reading on agriculture industrialists on the Island and the gathering of information for the President on issues regarding socio-economic reconstruction.

Tugwell, who accompanied the First Lady in part of the tour of the Island, outlined his impressions in three letters to the Secretary of Agriculture, Henry Wallace. On the one dated March 16, 1934 Tugwell wrote:

The precariousness of all this seems to be realized by nature, and she compensates by an enormous fecundity. There are a dozen children behind every bush, many of them very indifferently nourished. But nature aided by our doctors had only added to the prevailing difficulty by such a growth of population that it outruns any possibility of furnishing opportunity in our terms.

There will be something like a crisis here soon...with the pressures that are accumulating. There must be either an increase in our charity or a mass movement outward of population.... I rather dislike to think that our falling fertility must be supplemented by these people. But that will probably happen. Our control of the tropics seems to me certain to increase immigration from here and the next wave of the lowly...succeeding Irish, Italians, and Slavs...will be these mulatto, Indian, Spanish people from the south of us. They make poor material for social organization but you are going to have to reckon with them.<sup>74</sup>

With what reads as much aversion, the presidential advisor underlines here the issue of birth control –or the lack of it– as its effect: overpopulation. Direct relief and work aid were not enough to handle Puerto Rico's economic and social problems, which, if left unattended, would literally migrate to the Mainland. This, said Tugwell, would not contribute to an improvement in the US social stock. The text in between the lines: PRERA was failing. Consequently, as a counteracting measure, New Deal reforms needed to be rethought in order to guide strategic efforts in economic reconstruction for Puerto Rico.

Still, there is yet another reason that, to my knowledge, has not been studied in depth by historians of the New Deal nor by historians of the Caribbean and/or Puerto Rico that could explain the suspicious coincidence of Tugwell's and Mrs. Roosevelt's 1934 visit to Puerto Rico, as well as the First Lady's stops in Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and the US Virgin Islands. In his book on the PRERA, Manuel Rodríguez discusses how "[f]or Roosevelt and Tugwell, the tropics became the ultimate arena in which proved [sic] the virtues of the American exceptionalism."<sup>75</sup> After the Puerto Rico trip, Tugwell drafted a document for the President titled *Report on American Tropical Policy*. The fact that it is deposited in the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library as one of the President's Official Files and also that the press dubbed it a "confidential memorandum"<sup>76</sup> suggests that Tugwell's visit had a subagent objective other

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<sup>74</sup> Rexford Guy Tugwell, Letter to Henry Wallace, March 9, 1934, National Archives, Record Group Number 126, Puerto Rican Folder, 1934, Secretary of Agriculture as cited in Mathews, 159.

<sup>75</sup> Rodríguez, 52

<sup>76</sup> See Rodney Dutcher, "Washington Newsletter" in *The Burlington (NC) Daily Times-News* (July 11, 1934): 4.

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than that of focused economic reconstruction. Or perhaps, that the Island's planned economic reconstruction truly was part of a bigger agenda.

In any case, the document succinctly places responsibility on the American Government for the precarious economic and social situation in the tropical islands. Tugwell wrote: "[w]e are likely to try to play lady bountiful against the unanswerable bounty of the tropics and to attempt to Americanize people who are entirely different from North Americans. However, we can certainly make a start by ending our own exploitation of tropical inexperience and helplessness."<sup>77</sup> For Tugwell, the island territories faced the result of the ineffectiveness of the colonial administration. Later, in the written account on his Puerto Rican experience, published in 1947, he was emphatic about how the prevailing attitude on the Federal Government's part had been neither selfish nor generous, but simply indifferent. In *The Stricken Land*, Tugwell argued that the almost endemic economic and social problems of Puerto Rico marked the failure of an administration who had blatantly as well as recurrently, ignored its colony. The future Governor (1941-1946) also underlined the fact that every public policy implemented on the Island ultimately responded to the strategic benefits the United States could gain, as opposed to altruistic corrective efforts.<sup>78</sup>

In the 1934 *Report on American Tropical Policy* Tugwell advised:

We should direct our policy in the interest of encouraging a more effective and fuller use of resources; obtaining a more equitable distribution of income from the resources; and creating financial and economic reserves with which to cushion shocks as hurricanes, earthquakes, and economic depression. It is probable that effective first steps in this direction will have to assume the form of recognizing and redirecting the various institutions and services (credit facilities, use of federal funds, and control of the resources of the island in general, for example) as most of these inhabitants of these regions have shown themselves reluctant to raise their individual standards of consumption above the point necessary to support life with a minimum effort.<sup>79</sup>

The proposal seems to redirect the New Deal by maintaining its bureaucratic base while enabling for customization. That is, policies needed to account for the territories' specific issues and idiosyncratic tendencies. Still, in these islands, in order to stabilize the economy, Federal Government's intervention had to pay attention to issues such as consumption patterns because natives on their own tended to be content if able to get the bare necessities. In other words, an economic development structure solely cemented on an injection of monetary flow based on consumption—which was essentially the bottom line of the public works' employment initiatives—would be difficult to maintain on these territories.

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<sup>77</sup> Rexford Guy Tugwell, *Report on American Tropical Policy*, President's Official File 400 – Federal Appointments: Puerto Rico 1934, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York. Cited in Rodríguez, 52.

<sup>78</sup> Rexford Guy Tugwell, *The Stricken Land: The Story of Puerto Rico* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1947), 70-71, 130.

<sup>79</sup> Rexford Guy Tugwell, *Report on American Tropical Policy*, cited in Rodríguez, 52-53.

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Tugwell further expanded on this issue:

It is useless and stupid to attempt to do anything for such people without being positive that it is what they really want. Increased wages in the centrals (sugar refineries) have, in many cases, simply led to the men working half time, as a family can be supported on with three or four dollars a week. Increased wages in the needle industry have simply led to a higher birth rate. Their owners are using model houses for tobacco barns. Families removed from the unsanitary huts in the mangrove swamps and settled on subsistence homesteads have promptly returned to the mangrove swamps. The general belief is that the Puerto Ricans would rather have more children than increase their standard of living. Here is a condition, which calls for very slow and wise action on our part rather than indulgence in preconceived charities.<sup>80</sup>

Even if a liberalist with strong views supporting advocacy for social change, Tugwell could not shake an imperialist mindset. As an outside observer, at least from what can be gathered from this excerpt, he seems to share the oversimplified believe that poverty in the islands stemmed from an attitude which when intellectualized, coincides with the stereotyped notion of laziness. Again, as the Brookings researchers had said four years earlier, natives were to blame for their living conditions. Hence, if we were to agree with these arguments, we would have to concede that islanders carried the responsibility of their suffered lives precisely because they were not [like] Americans. That is, because they did not subscribe to a Protestant work ethic and they wholeheartedly followed Catholic religious notions on procreation. Tugwell then, seems to contradict himself on the point he had made earlier regarding a restraint on the impulse “to Americanize people who are entirely different from North Americans” and on “ending [the] exploitation of tropical inexperience and helplessness”. However, his suggestion of a solution based on “very slow and wise action on our part rather than indulgence in preconceived charities”, is extremely telling. It is significant because his argument breaks away from the notion of the New Deal as a program in aid by setting sites in a new objective. By doing so, Tugwell acknowledged, though cryptically, the failure of the PRERA. But most importantly, this seems noteworthy because at the core his words are a call for the Federal Government to orchestrate changes in behavior in a less imperialist way. Not to Americanize, understood as cultural imposition, but to set the seed for changes to secure some success for the New Deal in the tropical territories. This, in general terms, would be called modernization.<sup>81</sup>

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when Tugwell wrote his report. However, it was sometime after his 1934 March trip to Puerto Rico and before President Roosevelt’s visit of July 7. This can be assured because Rodney Dutcher mentioned the President had it with him in a brief article in the July 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Burlington (NC) Daily Times-News*.<sup>82</sup> This news brief is telling because it indicates that Tugwell had

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<sup>80</sup> Rexford Guy Tugwell, *Report on American Tropical Policy*, cited in *ibid*, 53.

<sup>81</sup> Especially after World War II, modernization would end up aligning with a sort of Americanization. However, this “Americanization” would not happen under the blanket of culture but under the ideology of development which would be translated to mean the United States.

<sup>82</sup> Roosevelt’s was an informal trip in route to a vacation in Hawaii. This trip to the West Indies, as Dutcher called it, made stops also in Haiti (July 5-6); in Cartagena, Colombia (July 10), and in Panama City (July 11-12). See US



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suggested the placement of Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands, along with other island possessions and Alaska under the State Department. Of course, Roosevelt did not agree, the territories were finally transferred to the Department of the Interior in May. But, as the President had vowed in his March 4, 1933 inaugural address to a “good neighbor policy” and to “respect the rights of other [nations]”<sup>83</sup> and as the United States had agreed to a new foreign policy of no-interventionism at the Montevideo Conference that December, to place the territories under the Department of the Interior –in charge of domestic affairs– surely seem a better saving face tactic than putting them under the State Department –in charge of foreign affairs– especially, if wanting to show the world a US dissociation from interventionists and imperialist policies. However, it now seems ironic, as colonial ruling is nothing but interventionist. And the maneuver becomes suspicious when trying to understand the logics behind guiding an *American Tropical Policy* from a domestic policy-enforcing agency.

In Tugwell’s report put forth a rather radical proposition:

For the lesson of the tropics is the object of the New Deal: a more abundant life in which the ends of life are not confused with the means.<sup>84</sup> If we, by social control of wealth can confer upon our people a similar accessibility to wealth to that which is enjoyed by the inhabitants of these islands, we may re-establish a civilization in which women do not fear to bear children and men do not hesitate to undertake family responsibilities. Without that our race is doomed to degeneration and decay.<sup>85</sup>

By advocating for a “social control of wealth” Tugwell acknowledged major problems in the economic fabric of Capitalism as it developed in the United States. As can be seen, in this excerpt he talks about how to correct them. Edward Cary Hayes, arguing in favor of the social control of the acquisition of wealth explained that without such controls inequalities in wealth might become absurdly excessive and would keep growing until producing an unsalvageable socioeconomic distance between the very rich and the very poor. In 1918, speaking at the Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association, he discussed how under uncontrolled economic policies, poverty tended to grow. He also underlined that “[e]xperiments in the control of acquisition of wealth in the interest of society at large have not yet been carried as far as experiments in its control in the interest of the ruling economic class. Yet they have accomplished enough to demonstrate that there is nothing illogical or visionary in talking about the control of the acquisition of wealth in the interest of social policy.”<sup>86</sup>

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Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Travels of the President: Franklin D. Roosevelt* in <https://history.state.gov/departments/history/travels/president/roosevelt-franklin-d> (accessed: 26 May, 2017). See also, Rodney Dutcher, “Washington Newsletter,” in *Burlington (NC) Daily Times-News* (July 11, 1934): 4.

<sup>83</sup> See Franklin Delano Roosevelt, *Inaugural Address*, March 4, 1933 in The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=14473> (accessed: May 26, 2017).

<sup>84</sup> Tugwell, *Report on American Tropical Policy*, cited in Dutcher.

<sup>85</sup> Tugwell, *Report on American Tropical Policy*, cited in Rodríguez, 54.

<sup>86</sup> Edward Cary Hayes, “The Social Control of the Acquisition of Wealth,” *The American Economic Review*, vol. 8, no.1, Supplement, Papers, and Proceedings of the Thirtieth Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association

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So, arguably, what Tugwell recognized the New Deal could do in the tropics through the efforts in economic reconstruction was ultimately to define avenues for the prevention of a possible social involution in the United States. This could be so, because the New Deal was already socially minded. That is, policies on economic restart were aimed toward society's common good; they were *for* the forgotten man. Of course, to succeed in stopping US' "doom" by "degeneration and decay" a more prudent economic attitude in a redefinition of the notion of *abundance*, more along the lines of *being content with less*—or the lesson of the tropics—, were needed as well as a more even distribution of wealth grounded on a more egalitarian attitude. Perhaps, then, in the tropics, the New Deal could potentially become that experiment in the social control of wealth as in Tugwell's view "[t]hey [the tropics] provide[d] an admirable test tube for studying the impact of the New Deal on such elements in recalcitrant human nature as stupidity, greed, prejudice, superstition, ignorance and entrenched political and economic privilege."<sup>87</sup> Presumably, if the New Deal could succeed in these backward settings, optimistically, it would do so as well in the Nation. However, its true triumph would be the setting of trends toward a more even economic distribution. That is, a more socially minded Capitalism.

PRERA had been operating approximately six months when Mrs. Roosevelt and Tugwell visited Puerto Rico in March 1934. But even though there is evidence of Mr. Bourne and his wife Dorothy's—a well-known social worker who had trained the first group of professionals in the Island— participation in their agendas, the First Lady and the Undersecretary of Agriculture still underlined in their accounts the squalor in which the people lived and not the steps taken to correct it. Obviously, half a year is too short a time, but relief efforts were not visible at all. As previously mentioned, in 1934 it was very evident attempts in relief were failing in Puerto Rico. There had been budgetary restrictions and many difficulties in administration. Except for the Liberal party, especially Muñoz Marín, all the other political factions in Puerto Rico were set against New Deal policies. Also, New Deal legislature had been more hindering than helpful.<sup>88</sup> The need was overwhelming and PRERA simply could not handle the thousands of people who required assistance. The primary economic advisor for the President of the United States, the major political party, and the most important local industrialists and businessmen all agreed: a comprehensive, implementable plan on economic reconstruction was needed.

**The "Blue Prints" for a New Deal Experiment: The Chardón Plan**

Aware of the overwhelming situation regarding overpopulation and the limited resources, as director of PRERA, James Bourne tried to draw up a plan to supplement relief efforts. Bourne's plan included the issue of land utilization, the implementation of plot gardens in workers' houses, and an

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(March 1918) 196, 207 in  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1814641.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A589f39e587c33b358a7249753df78a93>  
(accessed: 26 May, 2017).

<sup>87</sup> Tugwell, *Report on American Tropical Policy*, cited in Dutcher.

<sup>88</sup> For a more details than those discussed here, see Mathews, 136-139, 143-148.

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industrialization program. Although President Roosevelt thought it had merit, Bourne's proposal was limited as it was thought of as an extension of the efforts in aid.<sup>89</sup> Muñoz Marín had other ideas. First, he thought the New Deal could be the vehicle to raise the production of wealth and culture in Puerto Rico.<sup>90</sup> Second, he had already established the basis for said reconstruction by agricultural diversification; through industrialization; by creating the environment for small farmers; and by fostering balance between production and acquisition of wealth.<sup>91</sup> The purposes were further explained by Muñoz in a letter to Mrs. Roosevelt dated December 8, 1933. In it, the politician talked about social justice, a planned economic development that could be somewhat autonomous, the end of the land monopoly, and the redistribution of land to the working masses.<sup>92</sup>

As part of Mrs. Roosevelt's 1934 visit to Puerto Rico, a *Round Table Conference on Possible Permanent Plans Relating to Relief and Civil Works Administration* was held on March 10. In the meeting, Carlos Chardón, Chancellor of the University of Puerto Rico, drew a general outline for what became the blue print for the reconstruction. What Chardón proposed sounded very similar to Muñoz Marín's recommendations for he also stressed that an economic readjustment in Puerto Rico meant taking on the absentee sugar corporations and enforcing the limit in land ownership provided for—but never enforced—in the Foraker Act. Chardón advocated as well, for the development of a comprehensive mechanism for the redistribution of land to benefit the workers and their families.

Mathews goes into great detail on the inner political workings that led to the plan for Puerto Rico's reconstruction.<sup>93</sup> For the purposes of this historical context, suffice it to say that after Tugwell's, Mrs. Roosevelt's and James A. Dickey's—the AAA administrator for Puerto Rico—briefings on the fact that, given Puerto Rico's singular conditions, relief was insufficient, President Roosevelt approved the establishment of an *Inter-Departmental Committee for the Economic Rehabilitation of Puerto Rico* composed of Rexford Guy Tugwell (Subsecretary of Agriculture), Jacob Baker (Assistant Administrator of FERA), William Meyers (First Deputy Governor of Farm Credit Administration and representative of the Treasury Department), and headed by Oscar Chapman (Assistant Secretary of the Interior).<sup>94</sup> Along with it, the President also established the *Puerto Rico Policy Commission* (PRPC) to formulate a strategic plan for the economic rehabilitation of the Island. Appointed as its members were Chardón, Rafael Fernández García (head of the University of Puerto Rico's Chemistry Department), and the Commissioner of

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 150.

<sup>90</sup> "El Plan es para poner sobre sus pies a todos aquellos cuyos trabajos en agricultura, el comercio y las profesiones producen riquezas y cultura en Puerto Rico, declaró a su regreso ayer de Estados Unidos el Senador Luis Muñoz Marín," in *La Democracia* (September 3, 1935).

<sup>91</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín, *La Democracia* (January 24, 1934) as quoted in Mathews, 151.

<sup>92</sup> Luis Muñoz Marín to Eleanor Roosevelt, copy to Ruby Black, December 8, 1935, Ruby Black Collection as quoted in Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> See Mathews' chapter on "Relief or Reconstruction", 143-188.

<sup>94</sup> Miles H. Fairbank, *The Chardón Plan and the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration* (San Juan: The Fairbank Corporation, 1978), 10.

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Agriculture, Rafael Menéndez Ramos. James Bourne, was not invited to take part, even if as PRERA administrator he made efforts to put together a plan on the matter at hand. The fact that he was overlooked as a key advisor for the planning efforts troubled Bourne as it did other members of the Puerto Rican intelligentsia.<sup>95</sup> Meetings of the PRPC were held in Washington between May and June 1934 to deflate political intervention as much as possible. Although not part of the Commission, Muñoz Marín was granted permission to participate in meetings and hearings.

The document produced by the PRPC, commonly known as the *Chardón Plan*, provided a comprehensive overview of the ways to attack unemployment and economic involution on the Island. On land policy it acknowledged that “[t]he problems of Puerto Rico, due to its density of population, [were] greatly aggravated by the concentration of its farm lands in a few large holdings, especially absentee corporations.”<sup>96</sup> The introduction to the report opened with the following guiding statement:

The economic problem of Puerto Rico, in as far as the bulk of its people is concerned, may be reduced to the simple terms of progressive landlessness, chronic unemployment, and implacable growth of the population. A policy of fundamental reconstruction should, therefore, contemplate the definite reduction of unemployment to a point, at least, where it may be adequately dealt with by normal relief agencies; the achievement of this, largely by restoration of the land to the people that cultivate it, and by the fullest development of the industrial possibilities of the Island. These achievements will be unavailing, however, if population growth cannot be checked, or at least reduced. This last factor is of very great importance because, even if a parity between population and employment—as to farming or to industrial jobs—can be approximately achieved, it cannot be maintained unless the rate of population growth can be kept within the scope of further economic development. It therefore seems to be highly desirable, probably imperative, that a land restoration and industrial development program, combined with a policy of emigration to suitable environments, be fully worked out as soon as possible. The carrying out of these programs should then progress as rapidly as the means at hand and the nature of the specific problems presented may determine.<sup>97</sup>

So, to tackle unemployment in the Island the Commission proposed a program of industrialization, a program in land rehabilitation and redistribution, and some form of population control. On industrialization the authors underlined the trainability of the Puerto Rican worker and the development of industrial exports. However, on the issue of the sugar industry, they were emphatic in their underscoring that the Constigan-Jones Act, in its efforts to stabilize the sugar markets, issued a reduction in production that for the Island projected 15,000 jobs lost—actually, as I already touched upon, they were 25,000. Therefore, their proposal was to use the dividends of the taxations imposed by the bill on the purchase of cane lands and sugar mills to be operated as public corporations. This way the Island could retain a portion of the profits that usually left due to absentee ownership of sugar lands. For the sugar

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<sup>95</sup> See Mathews, 171.

<sup>96</sup> Carlos Chardón and others, *Report of the Puerto Rico Policy Commission*, June 1934, 28.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 1

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industry in particular, the Commission supported the restriction on land ownership to 500 acres as supplied in the Jones Act. For this they proposed to:

1. [e]nforce the 500-acre clause of the Jones Act with its possible disruption of the economic structure of the Island; [and]
2. [m]odify the land policy of the Jones Act along the following lines:
  - a. [p]rohibit the further acquisition of land by owners of over 500 acres in area;
  - b. [c]reate a fund which will enable government to be on the market for any sale of land of over 500 acres in area;
  - c. [t]he Insular Government to exercise its power of eminent domain at intervals of over three years, acquiring 10% of the area of farms of 500 acres in area.<sup>98</sup>

Of course, the above would not come easy given that the big sugar corporations which monopolized the industry would not give up their lands without a fight and also, that the Republican faction of the Coalition would oppose almost every proposal on economic reform. The Plan also acknowledged the coffee, tobacco and fruit industries. The authors believed a program in rural rehabilitation could readjust the general welfare of the bulk of the population; provide means of employment in the rural areas; counteract the migration from the rural areas that fostered slum growth in the urban centers; might facilitate the return of said immigrants to their rural lands; and could provide an indirect way of relieving funds for those who remained unemployed.<sup>99</sup>

The reformists did not discard the possibility of some controlled and strategic migration to Santo Domingo, Cuba, Costa Rica, Venezuela or Brazil, though not on the basis of exploitation. For Chardón, Fernández García, and Menéndez Ramos, "Puerto Rico [was] headed toward a major social catastrophe, which [could] hardly be postponed for more than twenty years unless something fundamental [was] accomplished."<sup>100</sup> Therefore, at the core of the Plan, along with the purchasing of land and the creation and operation of semi-publicly owned agriculture industries, there was also the construction of adequate housing for new small farmers and the provision of agricultural education for 16,000 workers who were to be settled in subsistence farms where they would tend to food crops for themselves but which surplus could generate a primary or secondary income, depending on the case.<sup>101</sup>

As part of the rural rehabilitation efforts, in order to respond to the isolation of the *jíbaros*, as observed in the 1930's Brookings Report,<sup>102</sup> the Plan called for the construction of "colonia centers" around the mills. These would have modern commodities such as water systems, telephone connections, roads, a community house and first aid room. The Plan proposed 6,000 additional small houses in 40

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>102</sup> Clark, 35

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colonial centers. For these houses as well as the ones to be provided within the subsistence farms the authors proposed reinforced concrete as "the only durable building material under our conditions. Flying termites, hurricanes, earthquakes, and weather conditions make all other possible building materials inadequate."<sup>103</sup>

On the industry front, as derived from agriculture, the Plan suggested a restart of the citrus industry in Puerto Rico; especially the potential of the exportation of orange juice and canned fruits to the US market. The authors proposed as well, to look into the cotton industry, to research the possibilities for industrial development based on raw materials available on the Island as well as from byproducts from the agricultural production, a reforestation program that could provide lumber for construction purposes, hurricane research, and slum clearance, among others.

In his July trip to Puerto Rico Roosevelt had claimed:

One thing that seemed to be very clear was that your problems here on the island are very much the same kind of problems that we have in many other parts of the United States. They are social problems and economic problems, and the same methods that we use to solve them in other parts of the country will be applied in Puerto Rico.

I believe in better homes. That means bringing about a better family life, better living conditions, a better chance for education, and a better chance for every person to earn his livelihood. Then we shall have better health conditions because unhealthy conditions are caused by a lack of opportunity to earn one's bread. With the help of our Government in Washington and with the splendid help of the Island Government and of the Governor, I am looking forward to the solving of these problems here in the island just as quickly as we shall solve them in the continental part of the United States.

We cannot accomplish everything in one year. In fact, we must look ahead for a great many years, and that is why we have all come to an agreement in principle for the rehabilitation of Puerto Rico. That plan, of course, will take a great many years to accomplish, but I hope and I am confident that all of you will do your part in making the plan a success.<sup>104</sup>

As can be seen, the President was on board with the proposed economic and social reconstruction of Puerto Rico. However, even with his approval, ending 1934 the implementation of the *Chardón Plan* was not yet in sight. So, as Gruening wrote in his autobiography, "[a] rehabilitation program for Puerto Rico was already in being, but only on paper."<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Chardón, *Chardón Report*, 17.

<sup>104</sup> Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "Remarks in San Juan Puerto Rico", July 7, 1934 in *The American Presidency Project* <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=14722> (accessed: 30 May, 2017).

<sup>105</sup> Ernest Gruening, *Many Battles: The Autobiography of Ernest Gruening* (New York: Liveright, 1974) 188,

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As discussed earlier, in May Puerto Rico had been transferred to the Department of the Interior under the newly created Division of Territories and Island Possessions. Perhaps, as Johnson argues, it was Gruening's eagerness to put forth his vision for Puerto Rico as model for Latin America what served as the final catalyst for the creation of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration. This might be, as the presidential executive order that gave birth to PRRA was signed just days after May 28, 1935, when the division Gruening was to head under the Department of the Interior was created.<sup>106</sup> In any case, the economic reconstruction of the Island was underway, encompassed within the experimental reformist intentions of the New Deal, with Dr. Ernest Gruening at the helm.<sup>107</sup>

**The Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration: An Overview of Its Operation, Goals, and Architecture**

In May 28, 1935, afforded by the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935, President Roosevelt established, the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRRA) by Executive Order 7057, "[t]o initiate, formulate, administer and supervise a program of approved projects for providing relief and work relief and for increasing employment within Puerto Rico."<sup>108</sup> With only that text as reference, objectives of this new agency might seem exactly the same as PRERA's. However, President Roosevelt defined broader aims in an August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1935 letter to Dr. Gruening. There, he indicated:

[t]he Administration's program intends not merely immediate relief but permanent reconstruction for the Island. To this end the projects in contemplation will see to insure every person on the Island a position of reasonable independence and security. The economy of the Island is, of course, agricultural and the solution of its problems must be in terms of agricultural rehabilitation. It will therefore be sought to secure for each citizen a place on the land which will give him a fair share in the fruits of his own labor and a position of independence and security. This will require the establishment of many persons on small farming units. It will also require that these small farmers be insured adequate processing and distributing facilities at reasonable cost. Diversification of agricultural production will be sought by the program in order that the Island may approach a self-sustaining status. Cheap and available electric power, good roads, reforestation and adequate housing are also essential to effect the Administration's program.... I am anxious that the Government of the United States shall discharge fully its responsibilities to the Puerto Rican

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<sup>106</sup> Johnson, 95-96.

<sup>107</sup> In his autobiography, Gruening explained that the administration model and the budget needed to be approved by J.C. McCarl, the Comptroller General, who rejected all the suggestions given him. Finally the Comptroller's Office approved a board of seven to head Puerto Rico's reconstruction; the Secretary of the Interior would appoint the board members as he served as chairman. When the proposal was finally sent to the President, then the Bureau of Budget reworked the proposal by eliminating the board and substituting it for a single administrator. When the President signed the Executive Order, wrote Gruening, his named was listed as administrator. Gruening, *Many Battles*, 188.

<sup>108</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt: "Executive Order 7057 Establishing the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration," May 28, 1935. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15063> (accessed: 30 May, 2017).

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people.<sup>109</sup>

In that vein, as Gruening reported to the Secretary of the Interior in 1937, the consolidation of a comprehensive program within PRRA aimed at correcting the social and economic ills endemic to the Island.<sup>110</sup> At first glance, the correspondence between the proposals in the *Chardón Plan* and the goals of the new agency, as explained by Roosevelt, should be evident.

While the *Division of Territories and Island Possessions* (DTIP) was being put together and the *Chardón Plan* was under development, President Roosevelt requested improvement in the coordination of all the New Deal agencies' efforts involved or present in Puerto Rico.<sup>111</sup> Consequently, it was decided that the administration of all the New Deal programs on the Island—which on the Mainland were under the Work Progress Administration (WPA), the Public Works Administration (PWA), the Rural Electrification Administration (REA), the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), and others—would fall solely, upon PRRA.<sup>112</sup> This operational variation in the implementation and administration of New Deal policies and programs was unique to Puerto Rico. That, and the fact that PRRA was a federal agency operating on the Island under the Department of the Interior<sup>113</sup>—as opposed to an Insular dependency managing federal relief funding—were the most important differences between PRERA and PRRA.

As mentioned earlier, Gruening was given the position of PRRA Administrator; post he undertook while heading the DTIP. Problems with PRRA administration began to arise soon, when the initial budget of \$75 million dollars estimated by Gruening to start off the program was cut in half. The new Administrator reluctantly agreed to the reduction only because of Roosevelt's promise for further funding to be approved by Congress—up to \$100 million dollars—over the following years. Moreover, in order to guarantee operations a Revolving Fund was established. This allowed for the agency to reinvest income, profits, and surplus into the self-financing of its projects.<sup>114</sup>

Carlos Chardón, in turn, was appointed as the PRRA's Regional Administrator, but not without some difficulty, due to a struggle within the University Board of Trustees in granting the requested leave

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<sup>109</sup> Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Letter to Dr. Ernest Gruening, August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1935, cited in PRRA, Information Research Section, *Facts about the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration*, December, 1938 in <http://newdeal.feri.org/pr/pr10.htm> (accessed 30 May, 2017), and also, in Miles Fairbank, Assistant Administrator, *Annual Report of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration*, June 30, 1939, 1.

<sup>110</sup> Ernest Gruening, "Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration," in Harold Ickes, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1937), 318.

<sup>111</sup> See Mathews, 173.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Antonio M. Monteagudo and Antonio M. Escámez (eds.), "Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration" in *Golden Album of Puerto Rico: A Work of Intellectual Propaganda for American Fraternity* (Havana, Cuba: Artes Gráficas SA: 1939) NP.

<sup>114</sup> Fairbank, *The Chardón Plan...*, 29.



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of absence for the Chancellor.<sup>115</sup> Multiple controversies that arose surrounding PRRA appeared at the time in the Island's major newspapers. For example, just to list a few, the Coalition insisted there was partisan influence and favoritism of/for the Liberals in the reconstruction program<sup>116</sup>. For this reason, they tried to block the implementation of several of the projects.<sup>117</sup> In fact, there were accusations to the effect that people in supervising positions were bringing in members of the Coalition in order to carry out a disruptive agenda.<sup>118</sup> At the same time, the Socialist faction of the Coalition alleged PRRA programs sought to exploit workers.<sup>119</sup> In addition, Puerto Rican lawyers protested the hiring of American non-residents for positions in the legal department.<sup>120</sup>

Yet the most strenuous conflicts in direction and execution of projects stemmed from a power tug between PRRA Washington headquarters and the Puerto Rico offices.<sup>121</sup> To start, both the legal and auditing divisions were in Washington and as such, reported directly to Gruening. Furthermore, often, subordinate personnel with conflicting legal or administrative interpretations on the specifics of land utilization, agricultural diversification, and management of the sugar industry challenged Chardón's instructions by bypassing the chain of command and going directly to Gruening. This, in consequence, seriously undermined the Regional Administrator's leadership role.<sup>122</sup> In hindsight, as Fairbank points to, "the feeling of discontent and lack of confidence permeated the entire executive structure of PRRA."<sup>123</sup> That internal turmoil prompted first, the resignation of Rafael Fernández García –who coauthored the *Chardón Plan* and was appointed director of PRRA's Rural Rehabilitation Division– in October 1936, and in the following month that of Chardón.<sup>124</sup>

PRRA had two definite stages. As Geoff Burrows observes, the first, from 1935 to 1937 was more of an organizational and diplomatic period. During the second, from 1937 onward, PRRA was primarily

<sup>115</sup> See "No creo que existan entre los Síndicos de la Universidad, opositores al Plan de Reconstrucción de Puerto Rico, Dr. Ernest Guening," in *El Día* (September 6, 1935) and "Un mensaje del Senador Reyes Delgado para el Dr. Guening," in *El País* (September 7, 1935).

<sup>116</sup> "El Dr. Gruening reiteró ayer a la Comisión Coalicionista que no habrá partidismo en la reconstrucción," in *El País* (September 4, 1935).

<sup>117</sup> "Comenzó en Ponce la campaña de obstrucción Coalicionista a la implantación del Plan de Reconstrucción Permanente de Puerto Rico," in *La Democracia* (September 12, 1935).

<sup>118</sup> "Se ha suscitado un escándalo con motivo de los nombramientos para Oficiales del Censo de la PRRA," in *El Imparcial* (December 6, 1935).

<sup>119</sup> "Gruening declara que el Plan de Reconstrucción no tiende bajo ningún concepto a explotar al obrero," in *El Mundo* (November 5, 1935).

<sup>120</sup> "La delegación de abogados se dirige al Administrador Regional de la PRRA," in *El Mundo* (December 6, 1935).

<sup>121</sup> After a temporary stay at the Carnegie Library building in San Juan, PRRA offices were housed in prefabricated wood buildings, similar to those built by PRRA for Reconstruction Camps under the Rural Rehabilitation Division. PRRA offices occupied the east portion of the Muñoz Rivera Park where now stands the Supreme Court building.

<sup>122</sup> Fairbank, *The Chardón Plan...*, 32, 35.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*.

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oriented to the building of public works. This indicates a difference in vision on the part of the agency's heads –first Gruening with Carlos Chardón as Regional Administrator, then, Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes with Miles Fairbanks as local director.<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, PRRA fits within what historians have termed the Second New Deal. That is, a series of more aggressive and liberal federal programs that aimed to provide long-term solutions to the economic crisis.

As previously discussed was Gruening's diplomatic stance on the Good Neighbor Policy and how he planned Puerto Rico could aid in improving relations with Latin American countries using the New Deal projects as showcase. This however, was outlined as well, in revised versions for implementation of the *Chardón Plan*. For instance, a document of April 1935 highlighted the University of Puerto Rico's strengths in medicine and agriculture along with Puerto Rico's Spanish heritage, as part of an effort to gain access to Latin America. As mentioned in this document, Puerto Rico could serve both Americas by providing a bridge between them:

With our strength in medicine and agriculture, we are gradually laying the foundation for a great institution, –unique in its kind– to serve the two Americas. Puerto Rico is becoming a center of a cultural triangle whose corners are: Spain to preserve tradition and the purity of language, as well as to maintain a point of contact with European culture; the United States, serving as an inspiration in democratic thought with its great educational centers, Columbia, Boston, Cornell Universities with a different language, with its great advances in technology and organized social efforts; and finally at the apex, Hispanic America, 'the land of promise' the vast continent of immense natural wealth, little touched by human enterprise, peopled by a race of our common stocks, that speak our language, a race whom continental Americans have wholly failed to understand, due to past diplomatic blunders and to the preponderance of exclusive dollar seeking agents.<sup>126</sup>

So, as Rodríguez argued, with this outlook "Chardón proposed a new approach using Puerto Rico as a model...of how a Caribbean colony was able to preserve their Spanish cultural heritage in close cooperation with the US democratic traditions...[proving] that different cultural backgrounds were able to co-exist and establish friendly cultural, technological, and social relations."<sup>127</sup> As can be gathered, this attitude towards the New Deal as projected by the Puerto Rico Policy Commission was completely in synch with Gruenings' diplomatic intentions.

After Chardón's resignation as PRRA's regional head, Miles Fairbank –historian, lawyer, and coordinator for Puerto Rico of the Production Credit Corporation and the Baltimore Bank for Cooperatives, under the Farm Credit Administration– accepted the appointment. More changes in PRRA's administrative

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<sup>125</sup> Geoff G. Burrows, *The New Deal in Puerto Rico: Public Works, Public Health, and the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration, 1935-1955*, Doctoral Dissertation (The City University of New York, History Department, 2014), 24.

<sup>126</sup> Proposal of Chardón Plan, Puerto Rico Corporation, RG 126, April 11, 1935, Project #12, National Archives, College Park, Maryland, 2, as cited in Rodríguez, 133.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, 133-134.

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structure came the following year when Harold Ickes asked Gruening for his demission as Administrator.<sup>128</sup> Gruening steeped down in July 13, 1937; Ickes took over then, delegating much of the work to Fairbank. To some extent it seems logical that Ickes geared PRRA away from an international politics agenda. First, as evidenced in his autobiography published under the title *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes*, published in 1954, the Secretary of the Interior did not trust Gruening and often did not agree with his decisions. Also, as mentioned earlier, the Department of the Interior did not have any reach on diplomatic matters, since it oversaw domestic policy. Further, in the United States the New Deal had been adopted to provide a comprehensive means to reduce unemployment and stabilize the economy. Then, most New Deal programs relied on the construction of infrastructure and public buildings as economic drivers to accomplish the general objectives. Therefore, Ickes' shift in focus for PRRA and its new concentration on public works should not surprise. However, as Burrows points out, public works and public health projects drew attention from Latin American and Caribbean countries so, the original diplomatic intentions were partially accomplished.<sup>129</sup>

As discussed earlier, PRRA Administrator's office was in Washington while a Regional Administration Office worked from San Juan. PRRA was organized by divisions; each one in charge of a specific program. Since PRRA generally followed the blue print drawn by the *Chardón Plan*, the divisions responded mostly to the work objectives set there, plus the conclusions that arose as the agency began to research specific topics. Consequently, some variation registers along the operational and administrative time-line of PRRA. However from 1935 to 1943 PRRA main divisions may be listed as follows: Planning, Personnel, Legal, Rural Rehabilitation, University Buildings, Slum Clearance, Rural Electrification, Reforestation, Finances, and Public Health. Let me underscore that PRRA worked as a system. Therefore, divisions complemented each other and sometimes, their work overlapped. Also, as PRRA was the governmental arm in charge of the administration of the federal budget allocated through New Deal's objectives of economic reform, it also assisted in projects with/for the Insular Government.

For the purposes of this historical context this document will highlight the work that dealt mostly directly with the architecture produced for PRRA's divisions. Most architectural projects were developed for the Rural Rehabilitation, Slum Clearance, University Buildings, and Public Health divisions. Within the Rural Rehabilitation Division there was an Engineering Section in charge of the design and/or construction of several architectural types such as workers' camps, rural vocational schools, rural worker's houses, a canning factory, and rural schools. Under the Slum Clearance Division were an Architecture Section and an Engineering Section in charge of the designs for the housing projects in San Juan and Ponce. Meanwhile, the University Buildings Division was a design office in itself. The Public Health Division oversaw the program for rural dispensaries, public health units, and community centers. On the other hand, the Planning Division conducted research on manufacturing possibilities within the construction

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<sup>128</sup> There had been tension between the two men since Gruening's presidential appointment to the Division of Territories and Island Possessions. Ickes often thought Gruening went over his head and did not keep him informed of the decisions. See Ickes, *Secret Diary*... Vols. I and II.

<sup>129</sup> Burrows, 25.

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industry, such as a brick factory and a cement plant and also, supervised the construction of several experimental houses as an applied research project. Not discussed is the work of the Rural Electrification Division because it dealt primarily with infrastructure, except to acknowledge that included within its electrification program there were five hydroelectric plants which expanded and/or built.

Following are the most significant projects where architecture assisted with, showcased, or housed PRRA reconstruction objectives.

**Rural Rehabilitation**

At the time, the Rural Rehabilitation Division was recognized as the most important within PRRA's general objectives. This was consistent with the proposal of an island-wide economic reconstruction planned as an outline for agricultural rehabilitation. PRRA's administrators and planners argued that to look at industrialization in broad scale would be a waste of time in Puerto Rico since the island lacked any significant raw materials or fuels. Therefore, they believed that even if the Island developed industrial products these would have to stay secondary to agriculture. That is the reason why, during its time of operation, PRRA repeatedly emphasized agriculture as Puerto Rico's only wealth. However, only six percent of the population owned land as one third of the Island's total agricultural area was "kidnaped" by absentee corporations.<sup>130</sup> So, as countermeasure, agricultural rehabilitation efforts, as stated in the *Chardón Plan*, looked to implement a new land utilization policy. One objective was to break with the agricultural monopoly that had plighted Puerto Rican economic development and establish small land/farm owners. This provided an avenue for the reduction of unemployment and a more stable distribution of wealth, which in turn, allowed for the possibility of an increase in economic exchange. Aside from the need, this direction in reform fitted well within Roosevelt's idea of the farmer as icon.

Within PRRA's Rural Rehabilitation efforts, the Resettlement Program was implemented as one aspect of revised land utilization policies intended to break absentee ownership. As outlined in the *Chardón Plan*, PRRA tackled rural resettlement as an island-wide endeavor fashioned to be adaptable to sugar, tobacco, coffee, and citrus fruit regions, as these were the Island's main cash crops. The objectives of the Resettlement Program were twofold: first, to provide former land-owners with small plots for farming where they could reestablish their livelihood and second, to facilitate subsistence farms of approximately two to three acres for former farm hands who had never owned land. PRRA's intention was to build a house designed to withstand hurricanes, earthquakes, fires, and termites in each small farm plot. Finally, this would put an end to the palm and thatch huts that filled the country landscape, often described as treacherous and unhygienic. PRRA's farms would kick-start the process leading to agricultural diversification and introduce new produce in order to reduce the importation of food products and to

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<sup>130</sup> The original text is in Spanish; the translation is by the author. PRRA Information Section, "La PRRA explica a qué obedece su compra de tierras. Dice que depende de la cooperación de los grandes terratenientes," in *El Mundo* (February 28, 1936). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/01103?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

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supplement the average peasant's diet improving its nutritional value.<sup>131</sup> In a way, this complemented the Health Division's intended management of malnutrition and gastrointestinal ailments suffered by the poor. Also, PRRA's administrators viewed the Resettlement Program as a strategy to bring back to their rural homelands all those urban slum dwellers that migrated to the cities and towns in search for work after the devastation in agriculture caused by the 1928 and 1932 hurricanes.

Rural Resettlement in Puerto Rico did not vary much from the objectives traced in the US by the Resettlement Administration (RA). Tugwell proposed –and headed– the RA (April 1935-December 1936) in order to guide the strategic relocation of displaced people to Government planned communities, as in Puerto Rico, through rural rehabilitation, rural resettlement, and land utilization programs. However, in the United States, efforts also included suburban resettlement in projects known as the *Greenbelt Towns*.<sup>132</sup> Because of all the parallelisms between the Island's and the US program, Mathews argues that Tugwell must have had great input on the drafting of the *Chardón Plan*.<sup>133</sup>

In order to design the dwellings best suited in terms of materials, cost, and fostering of an appropriate moral life, PRRA's Planning Division supervised the construction of **Experimental Houses** as an applied research project. The best findings after this architectural experiment concluded were then, to be implemented by the Rural Rehabilitation Division in the new resettlement and/or subsistence farms. Martín Aparicio, an engineer and contractor in the Engineering Section of the Rural Rehabilitation Division, was in charge of the project. As Etienne Totti explained in his review of the models, published in the *Revista de Obras Públicas de Puerto Rico* (Puerto Rico Public Works Magazine), PRRA intended to explore native materials in order to protect –or build– a local construction industry in which workmen could develop an expertise<sup>134</sup> but also, the agency was looking into ways to hire as many of the unemployed as

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<sup>131</sup> Until PRRA, the farming of vegetables had not been undertaken in any large capacity on the Island, not even as a means to reduce food importation, which consequently raised product prices. As part of the land utilization efforts to maximize production and in order to supplement the peasant's diet, new vegetables were introduced such as turnips, cabbage, beans, okra, carrots, squash, beets, onions, potatoes, and radishes. PRRA also incremented and introduced the plantation management of plantains, bananas, cow peas, yams, corn beans, pigeon peas, sweet potatoes, rice, cassava, and pumpkin. See, Gruening, *Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, 322.

<sup>132</sup> For the Greenbelt Towns see Cathy D. Knepper, *Greenbelt, Maryland: A Living Legacy of the New Deal* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001); Diane Ghirardo, *Building New Communities: New Deal America and Fascist Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989); Joseph Arnold, *New Deal in the Suburbs: History of the Greenbelt Town Program* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 1971); Albert Meyer, *Greenbelt Towns Revisited* (Urban Planning Research and Demonstration, 1968); Resettlement Administration, *Greenbelt Towns, A Demonstration in Suburban Planning* (Washington DC: Resettlement Administration, 1936).

<sup>133</sup> Mathews, 158.

<sup>134</sup> Etienne Totti, "Memorandum sobre las casetas que se están construyendo en terrenos del Pueblo de Puerto Rico en el Manicomio Insular, utilizando distintas clases de materiales," en *Revista de obras públicas de Puerto Rico*, year XIII, no. III (March 1936): 1229. See [https://issuu.com/coleccionpuertorriquena/docs/1936-03\\_a\\_o\\_13\\_n\\_m\\_3](https://issuu.com/coleccionpuertorriquena/docs/1936-03_a_o_13_n_m_3) (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

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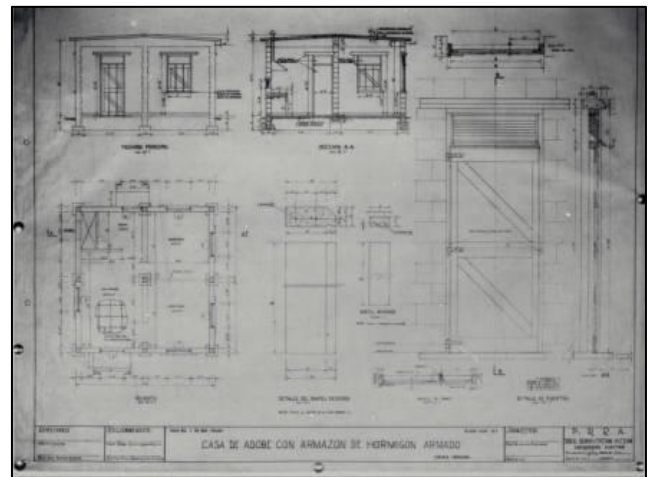
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possible. Prototypes were built in the grounds of the Insular Mental Hospital in Río Piedras. With these experimental houses PRRA assessed the performance of several construction materials in order to be able to provide customizable, but still typical housing models depending on the conditions and materials available in each region [Fig. 3-4].



[Figure 3]

Adobe block and rammed earth house  
under construction / 1936  
PRRA Collection, Puerto Rican Digital Library



[Figure 4]

Adobe and concrete frame house  
Drawing / 1936  
PRRA Collection, Puerto Rican Digital Library

The Design Section of the Rural Rehabilitation's Engineering Division conceived these housing units within the very modern and scientific idea of an *existenzminimum*<sup>135</sup>—minimum living space— but also, with future expansion in mind. Consequently, as the families grew and/or finances increased, owners could add to their houses in order to attain their desired level of comfort or to adapt the spaces to their living convenience. Original models, however, had a porch, living-dining room, kitchen and two bedrooms “distributed as to discourage promiscuity.”<sup>136</sup> Arguably, this scientific approach to problem solving points to PRRA as an incubator for modern architecture as discourse in Puerto Rico. The way these houses were thought out, for instance, aligns with the theories of one of the premier architectural modernists, Le

<sup>135</sup> Housing was one of the most important problems undertaken by the architects of the Modern Movement after World War I. For the reconstruction of European cities, social housing became fundamental. The idea of a minimum living space was at the heart of a solution based on the scientific method. In the *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM), architects gathered to work out the most universal problems in architecture at the time. The one held in Frankfurt in 1929, produced the framework for *Die Wohnung fu das Existenzminimum* or the minimum-space dwelling.

<sup>136</sup> The original text is in Spanish; the translation is by the author. PRRA, Information Section, “Casas que construirá la PRRA en las Granjas de Subsistencia. La reconstrucción aspira a eliminar los viejos bohíos de yagua en los campos de Puerto Rico,” in *El Mundo* (June 7, 1936). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/01200?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

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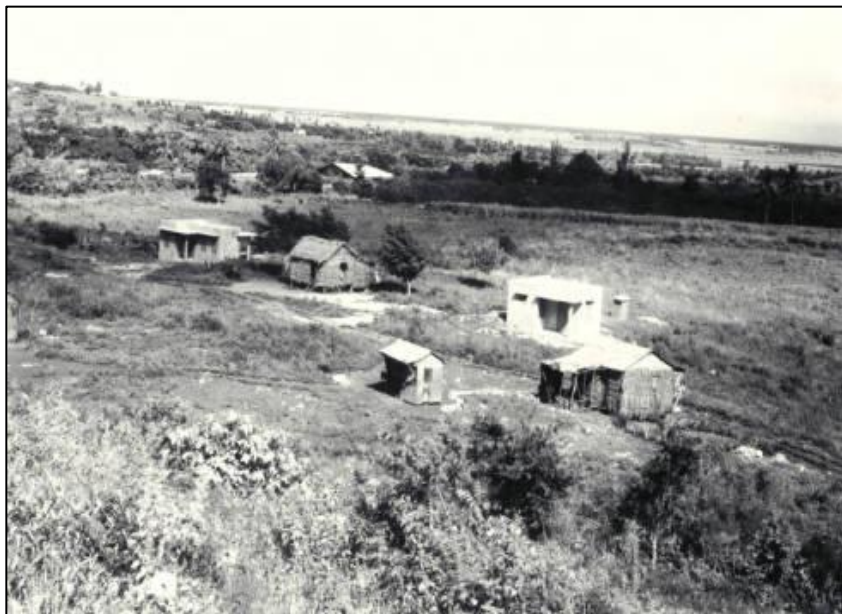
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Corbusier. Specifically, the merging the “engineer’s aesthetic and architecture.”<sup>137</sup>

Prototypes were built in adobe, rammed earth, bricks baked on site, masonry blocks, reinforced concrete, and hollow bricks. With them, PRRA wanted to “completely erase of...country landscapes the old huts in *yagua* (the fibrous part of the palm trunk) which [gave] a sinister aspect of abandonment and misery to [the] rural population.”<sup>138</sup> Then, as PRRA argued, “the traveler...[would] see in those houses efficient proof of Puerto Rican culture and civilization.”<sup>139</sup> So, as can be gathered, these experimental houses were conceived to serve as visible and tangible rubrics of the efforts to erase primitiveness and backwardness from Puerto Rico [Fig. 5]. For that reason PRRA proposed either a “modernist” or an evocative Spanish-colonial style.<sup>140</sup>



[Figure 5]

One-story single family concrete rural houses with flat roof / c. 1937  
PRRA Collection, Puerto Rican Digital Library

<sup>137</sup> See Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, 1986) 1.

<sup>138</sup> The original text is in Spanish; the translation is by the author. PRRA, Information Section, “Casas que construirá la PRRA...” in *El Mundo* (June 7, 1936). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/01200?search=mundo> (accessed: May 25, 2017).

<sup>139</sup> Original text is in Spanish. The translation is by the author. “La PRRA instala en granjas a 477 familias,” in *El Mundo* (April 5, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00778?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.



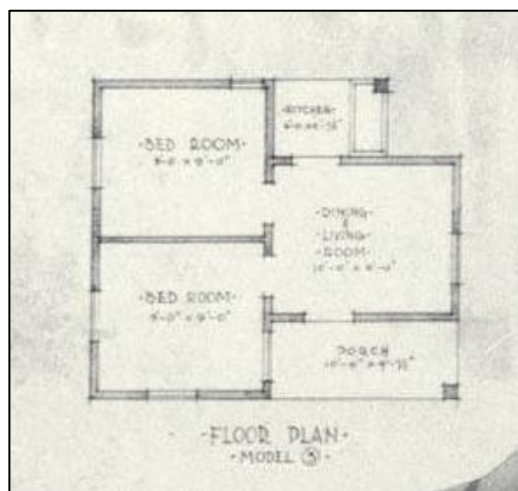
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In spite of the variations tested on the experimental prototypes, dwellings for resettlement farms were predominantly built in reinforced concrete. Most usual was a small one-story structure with flat roof. The typical program consisted of porch, living-dining room, two bedrooms and, a kitchen. In one architectural drawing we can appreciate how the kitchen was designed, in this version, as an exterior space, covered, but attached to the house. Approximately 18 by 19 feet, the interior configuration for the dwelling, followed a modified square cottage floor plan; very similar to houses in the sugar centrals for peons with families [Fig. 6]. Except PRRA's were in concrete while the standard houses in the company towns were built in wood. PRRA's also, had porches; while their counterparts in company towns did not [Fig. 7-8]. This is extremely significant as in the setting of the sugar plantations foremen were the only lower scale workers who lived in houses with porches. Moreover, we know that for their idealized dwelling *jibaros* tended to point to the porch as a desire space. Confirmation for this comes from a survey conducted during the 1940s. In order to design a suitable house, which



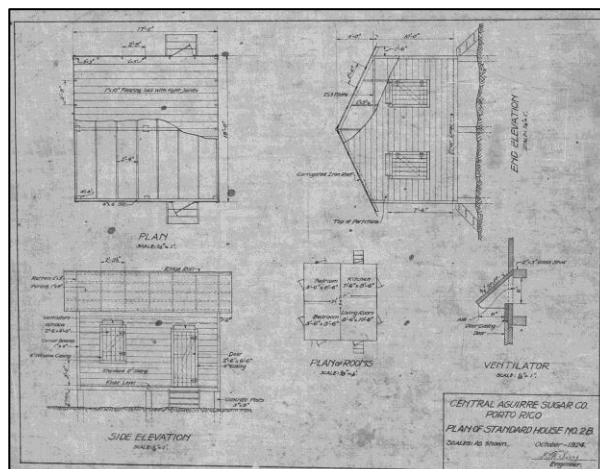
[Figure 6]

Model house for subsistence farm / 1936  
PRRA Collection, Puerto Rican Digital Library



[Figure 7]

Subsistence farm with concrete dwelling / c. 1937  
PRRA Collection, Puerto Rican Digital Library



[Figure 8]

Standard worker's with family house / 1908  
Central Aguirre, Salinas  
Central Aguirre Collection, AACUPR



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considered cultural patterns and future dwellers' preferences, in 1945 the Self-Help Program interviewed a number of peasants. This survey revealed that houses with porches were highly valued as the architectural feature was an indication of a higher social class.<sup>141</sup> So, it seems logical to assume that PRRA's houses provided for the *jibaros* not only secure and healthy living spaces, but also, homes with empowering connotations, especially since as small land-owners they could finally divorce from the usual asymmetrical power relations in the centrals; that is, be subaltern no more. Or that was the discursive intention.

In terms of aesthetics, these houses are neither Art Deco nor Spanish Revival. Yet, they allow for a taxonomic categorization fitted to what historiography on architecture has termed the International Style. These dwelling, clearly devoid of ornament, show a volumetric play derived from the double pile organization of the floor plan. The volume corresponding to the bedrooms extends forward, the one for the living room-dining room, recedes. In addition, the mass and solidity of the bedroom block –disrupted only by the window–, as represented in the façade, contrasts with the hollowness of the porch, which also marks the entryway. Both blocks are tied by the porch's roof slab, which extends to convert into the window's overhang on the other side. This reads as a suspended line on the façade's elevation. A single pillar helps support the porch's roof and in some houses it flares on the two sides facing the interior of the space, where the square post meets the roof slab. Surely, this was a structural consideration possibly derived from the mushroom column [Fig. 9].



[Figure 9]

Rural house model in concrete for subsistence farm  
La Plata, Aibonito / 2017

<sup>141</sup> P.B. Vázquez Calcerrada, "La vivienda en Puerto Rico bajo el Programa de Ayuda Mutua y Esfuerzo Propio", *Congreso Mundial de Planificación y Vivienda*, San Juan (28 de mayo – 3 de junio de 1960), 14.

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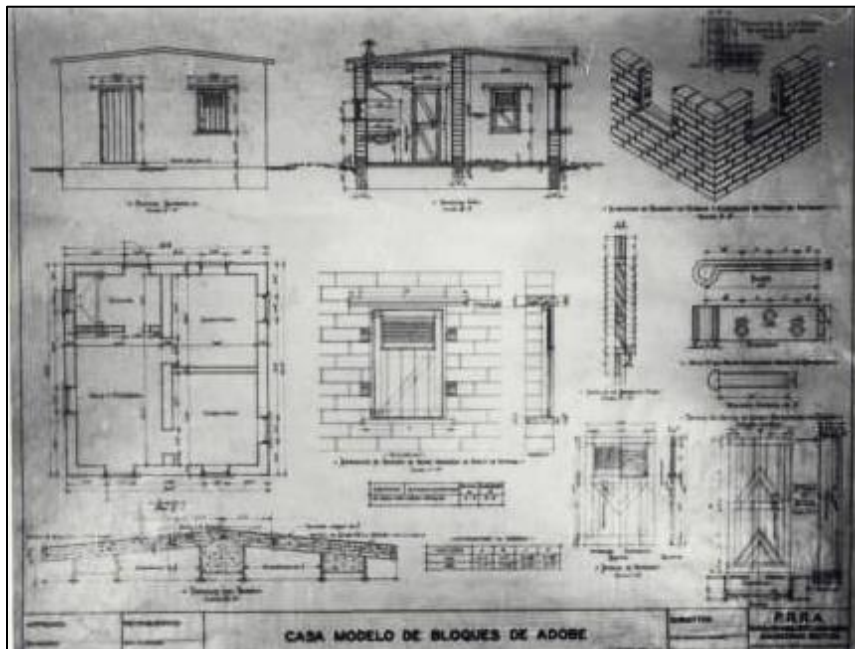
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When comparing the available drawings with photographs from the field research conducted in the area, in the La Plata region of Aibonito, in addition to the model discussed above, there are several houses with facades identical to drawings for the experimental adobe block dwelling [Fig. 10-11] These are small gable roof houses roughly the same size as the concrete type. The drawings show a square cottage plan with living-dining room and two bedrooms with attached kitchen incorporated to the configuration of the floor plan. These houses do not have porches, so, shy of the building materials they mimic in plan and in elevation the standard wood houses for workers in many of the Island's company towns and urban workers' *barrios*.



[Figure 10]

Rural house model for subsistence farm  
La Plata, Aibonito / 2017



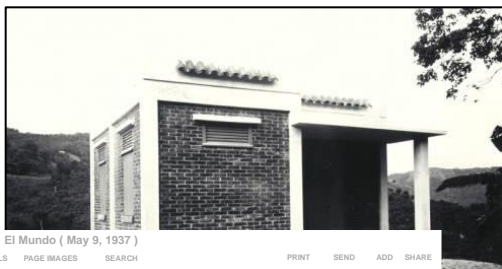
[Figure 11]

Experimental adobe block house / 1936  
PRRA Collection, Puerto Rican Digital Library

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Further, due to the composition of the soil, for Castañer, in the coffee region of Lares, PRRA supplied brick houses with reinforced concrete frames [Fig. 12].<sup>142</sup> Early on, PRRA had envisioned the development of a brick industry on that region [Fig. 13].<sup>143</sup> The typical brick house was very similar to the concrete model previously described. However, historic photographs show terracotta roof tiles used as decorative elements, giving these houses a Spanish Revival reference. Also in Lares, evidence was found of a few houses built in masonry block [Fig. 14].<sup>144</sup> There are also accounts of rammed



**[Figure 13]**  
Brick factory  
Castañer, Lares / c. 1937



**[Figure 14]**  
Rural masonry block house  
Castañer, Lares / 1937  
*El Mundo*, May 9, 1937

information section, "casas que construirá la PRRA en las Granjas de Subsistencia," in *El Mundo* (June 7, 1936). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/01200?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

Also, "Se fomenta fábrica de ladrillos," in *El Imparcial* (August 16, 1936).

<sup>144</sup> "Ocho granjeros en Lares" in *El Mundo* (May 9, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00812?search=mundo> (accessed: May 25, 2017).

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earthen houses, yet further research is required for confirmation.<sup>145</sup> If in fact this is corroborated, it opens an exciting possibility: a thematic nomination regarding experimental housing in Puerto Rico.

PRRA's efforts targeted at rural resettlement started in the **Worker's Reconstruction Camps**.<sup>146</sup> These, designed by the Engineering Section and built by the Construction Section, aimed to "[p]repare the Puerto Rican worker for a higher destiny through the complete knowledge of his rights and his duties; create in him a higher sense of responsibility, since from these workers [would] be chosen the new small land owners among whom the land acquired by PRRA [would] be divided for such purposes."<sup>147</sup> In these preparatory camps workers learned modern agricultural techniques;<sup>148</sup> were given health,<sup>149</sup> psychological, and social assistance<sup>150</sup> as they were instructed in hygienic principles<sup>151</sup> and in the benefits of living a moral and civic life in order to become useful citizens and good [profitable] workers.<sup>152</sup> In the camps, *jíbaros* were also taught methods of scientific nutrition by introducing them to balanced diet;<sup>153</sup> and many learned to read and write.<sup>154</sup> Furthermore, in order to undertake the long-term objectives of

<sup>145</sup> See "La construcción de casas de tapia en proyectos de la PRRA," in *La Democracia* (September 15, 1939) and "La PRRA distribuye casas de tapia en el barrio Juan Domingo," in *El Mundo* (September 17, 1939). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00548?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>146</sup> PRRA built its first Camps in Aibonito, La Plata (Fernández Juncos and Luis Muñoz Rivera); Cayey (Mariano Abril, Elizaburry and Agustín Stahl); Comerío (Ramón Emeterio Betances); Adjuntas (Janer); Luquillo (Sabana); Río Grande (El Verde); Canóvanas (Ciénega Alta); Mayagüez (El Caribe); Yauco-Sabana Grande (Susúa); Villalba (Matrullas and Lago del Guineo); Isabela (Guajataca); Patillas (Patillas).

<sup>147</sup> Antonio Cruz Nieves, PRRA, Information Section, "Los campamentos de la PRRA en preguntas y respuestas," in *Revista de Obras Públicas de Puerto Rico*, XIII, no. XI (November 1936): 1456. See [https://issuu.com/coleccionpuertorriquena/docs/1936-11\\_a\\_o\\_13\\_n\\_m\\_11](https://issuu.com/coleccionpuertorriquena/docs/1936-11_a_o_13_n_m_11) (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>148</sup> For more on PRRA's instruction on agriculture, aviculture, and horticulture as imparted at the Camps see PRRA Information Section, "La PRRA enseña agricultura a sus obreros. En cada campamento daba instrucción un experto agónomo," in *El Mundo* (May 7, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00810?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>149</sup> In order to be admitted in the reconstruction camps, men were given a physical examination. In addition, as part of their health efforts, in line with their regarding research and scientific methods for problem solving, the PRRA conducted the first ever survey of the health conditions of rural workers on the Island using as subjects the 5,220 men on the Camps. See "Los obreros agrícolas de Puerto Rico están de 9 a 24 libras bajo peso. Estudio realizado en 5, 220 trabajadores en los campamentos de la PRRA," in *El Mundo* (April 25, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00798?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>150</sup> For the purposes and reach of social work in the Camps see PRRA, Information Section, "El Plan de Trabajo Social que desarrollará la PRRA ha sido aprobado en principio por el Comité Ejecutivo," in *El Mundo* (May 5, 1936). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/01168?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>151</sup> For the rules regarding hygiene in the Camps see PRRA Sección de Informes, "Las reglas de higiene que han sido promulgadas en los Campamentos de Trabajadores de la Reconstrucción," in *El Mundo* (April 16, 1936). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/01150?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>152</sup> Cruz Nieves, "Los campamentos de la PRRA en preguntas y respuestas," 1456.

<sup>153</sup> The basic Puerto Rican diet at the time consisted of rice, beans and salted dried-cod; all imported products.

<sup>154</sup> PRRA reported that 75% of illiterate workers in the Camps learned to read and write during their stay. PRRA,



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economic reconstruction while dealing with the practical aim of agricultural rehabilitation, instruction in the camps included cultivation, product adaptability and dietary importance, aviculture administration, introduction to scientific agriculture, and market principles.<sup>155</sup>

In scope with agricultural rehabilitation, camps took on the previously unacknowledged problem of massive soil erosion that rendered land unusable for farming. This as well, mirrored similar attempts in the United States. As part of the New Deal, Congress passed the Soil Conservation Act in April 27, 1935 in response to the Dust Bowl of 1934.<sup>156</sup> This in turn, created the Soil Conservation Service, which in the US worked under the Department of Agriculture. In Puerto Rico, especially in the mountainous region of the Island, improper handling of steep plots and heavy rains caused topsoil to disperse, ending in the ocean. This represented a huge challenge for Puerto Rico's economic reconstruction because soil, as Gruening said, was [believed to be] the Island's "only true wealth". Through research and agricultural education, PRRA's Soil Conservation Section devised measures for the preservation of topsoil by researching, experimenting with, and perfecting farming techniques such as terracing, contour plowing, and other soil-saving methods as those used in countries like Japan and Spain.<sup>157</sup> These agricultural techniques were then, taught to the men in the workers' camps and later, to children in the vocational schools. To guarantee agricultural rehabilitation, as can be gathered, PRRA set out to modernize agriculture and to train workers in scientifically proven techniques in order to maximize its dividends.

Campers worked 40 hours a week in agriculture and on the construction of infrastructure such as roads and sewers.<sup>158</sup> So, to a great extent, although they did not share the same objectives, Reconstruction Camps were modeled after the Civilian Conservation Corps', which started operations in the United States in 1933 as one of the first New Deal projects. As those, camps in Puerto Rico could house about 200 men [Fig. 15]. Though, in order to qualify to own a Subsistence Farm, workers had to live in the Reconstruction Camp for a period of six months while in CCC Camps staying periods fluctuated from six

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Information Section, "Labor educativa realizada por la PRRA en la isla," in *El Mundo* (June 29, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00863?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>155</sup> "En la Unidad del barrio Turabo recientemente se llevó a cabo una interesante serie de conferencias y números de arte bajo los auspicios del Dispensario Rural de la PRRA que dirige el Dr. Manuel L. Valdés," in *El Mundo* (May 7, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00810?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>156</sup> A severe drought; decades of agricultural mismanagement that resulted in deforestation, weak grass rooting, and light soil; and high winds causing serious dust storms in the Great Plains region—Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexico—triggered an agricultural and ecological crisis that pushed 60% of the population to abandon the land. See Eric Foner and John A. Garraty (eds.), *The Readers' Companion to American History* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1991).

<sup>157</sup> Gruening, "Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration," *Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (1937), 320-321 and Monteagudo and Excámez, "Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration," NP.

<sup>158</sup> On average, they earned a dollar a day but 25% of their earnings redirected toward payment of room and board in the Camp. Antonio Cruz Nieves, "¿Qué eran y qué han hecho los campamentos de la reconstrucción? Diferencias entre los CCC y Campamentos de la PRRA," in *El Mundo* (September 11, 1938). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00252?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

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months to two years. At the end of their stay, Puerto Rican workers were evaluated on agricultural and academic progress as well as in good conduct.<sup>159</sup> Farms were then given out to “graduates” on merit.



[Figure 15]

Reconstruction camp  
Castañer, Lares / c. 1937  
PRRA Collection, Puerto Rican Digital Library

As they followed the CCC Camps model, Reconstruction Camps housed their dependencies in wood buildings following standardized layout.<sup>160</sup> As they were originally conceived to perform within military canons, buildings were temporary in character. Consequently, they were designed to be rapidly put-together and taken down [Fig. 16]. In Puerto Rico, camps' primary dependencies were four dormitories for 50 beds, a kitchen and dining-room building, and an infirmary [Fig. 17].<sup>161</sup> A plot of five to ten acres was reserved for a food farm that supplied produce to be consumed by the workers and served as a teaching tool and precedent for the ones they were to tend to in their future homesteads.<sup>162</sup>

<sup>159</sup> “PRRA instala en granjas 477 familias,” in *El Mundo* (April 5, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00778?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>160</sup> For the CCC Camps the Army had developed standardized plans and layouts as well as supervised the camp's construction. At first, campers were to be housed in tents although later, because of the availability and low cost of lumber wood buildings were supplied. Elizabeth Rosin, *The KERC and the New Deal in Kansas*, United States Department of the Interior, National Register of Historic Places, Multiple Property Documentation Form (2012), 6. See [https://www.kshs.org/resource/national\\_register/MPS/New\\_Deal\\_Era\\_Resources\\_Kansas\\_mps.pdf](https://www.kshs.org/resource/national_register/MPS/New_Deal_Era_Resources_Kansas_mps.pdf) (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>161</sup> PRR, Information Section, “Inaugurado el campamento de la PRRA en Luquillo. Está establecido en una magnífica finca de mil quinientas cuerdas.” *El Mundo* (August 7, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00902?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

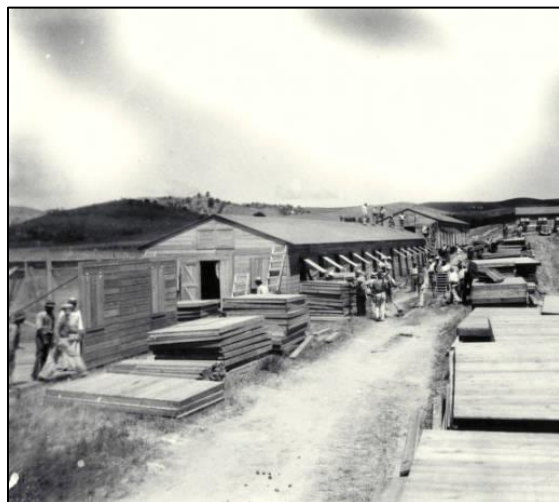
<sup>162</sup> “Resurgimiento del huerto y de la crianza avícola. Planes que está desarrollando al efecto la Reconstrucción,” in *El Mundo* (January 16, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00699?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

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[Figure 16]

Camp under construction  
Cayey / 1936

PRRA Collection, Puerto Rican Digital Library



[Figure 17]

Reconstruction camp  
Toita, Cayey / 1936

PRRA Collection, Puerto Rican Digital Library

From July 30, 1937 PRRA started to progressively close its Workers Camps as their six-month term of operation came to an end. After closing, for cost effectiveness, buildings were dismantled so lumber and other construction materials and architectural elements could be reused in other projects such as houses, schools, and/or community centers. When the program ended, PRRA labeled Camps' work a success since from them, as accounted by Antonio Cruz Nieves, head of PRRA's Information Section, "came out a surprising group of more apt Puerto Ricans, more nobly ambitious, healthier and stronger, as base and foundation of future Puerto Rico."<sup>163</sup>

### Public Health

Infirmaries in the 19 Workers' Camps that started the program provided for many rural regions the first medical and psychological assistance to ever reach the depth of the countryside in Puerto Rico. However, the medical care provided in these was only available to workers living at the Camps and was mainly directed towards caring for labor accidents. However, the agency rapidly extended their reach to workers' families and other *jibaros*, even if not affiliated with any of the PRRA initiatives. PRRA rural **dispensaries**, constituted then, the first large scale strategic efforts in public health directed to the peasant masses. In them, PRRA doctors and nurses gave physical exams, treated malaria and gastrointestinal illnesses, provided vaccinations, practiced lab exams, and provided pre-natal and

<sup>163</sup> Original text is in Spanish; translation by the author. Antonio Cruz Nieves, "Qué eran y qué han hecho los campamentos de la reconstrucción...." in *El Mundo* (September 11, 1938). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00252?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

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pediatric care. In addition, PRRA's Health Division also provided dental services.

PRRA's Health Division was organized in January 1936 and by 1937 there were 64 dispensaries in 49 municipalities. Under it, the Rural Health Section was in charge of implementing the plans to foster hygienic conditions in the workers' new farms and houses; provide preventive health care; and treat endemic illnesses such as malaria and hookworms. For its part, the Rural Medical Centers Section oversaw the administration of said centers. As annotated in a *Report of the Commissioner of Health*, one of the most difficult tasks was to attract the *jibaros* and gain their trust.<sup>164</sup> As in many premodern societies, many peasants relied on a mix of superstitious and natural healing practices, which were imbedded in rural culture.

However, PRRA believed they might be able to solve the health problems of the poorest population, as dispensaries were to take care of almost 400,000 people in the rural areas plus the families of PRRA's 30,000 workers.<sup>165</sup> By June 30, 1937 PRRA's Health Division had given 17,402 physical exams; 9,150 of these were done in dispensaries and the rest at the Camps. Doctors had treated 4,070 malaria cases and 13,122 cases of hookworms. Vaccination against typhoid fever had reached 40,720 people. Dentists practiced 11,930 oral exams, did 40,891 extractions, 2,444 cleanings, 345 tooth repairs, and 157 oral surgeries. Dispensaries held 6,613 clinics where doctors saw 127,569 patients. Also, there were 2,155 conferences and meetings with a total assistance of over 17,200 people.<sup>166</sup>

Three dispensaries made up a Medical Center. PRRA doctors held clinics twice a week in each dispensary (one doctor in charge of three units) but they were attended daily by a graduate nurse, a social worker, a clerk, and a maintenance person; all residents of the area. The Social Service Section, by way of their group of social workers, helped the families adapt to their new living conditions within the agency's expectation of morality and civility. Social Workers served also as mediators in family and labor conflicts. In addition, they were in charge of guiding and coordinating social and leisure activities in the community centers.<sup>167</sup> I will expand on this later.

Dispensaries were usually built near a school. In fact, today some have been adopted as school dependencies. Buildings were approximately 760 square feet, one-story, in reinforced concrete with flat roofs. They were designed as an architectural standard type with minimal aesthetic variations. In terms

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<sup>164</sup> Department of Health, Report of the Commissioner of Health to the Hon. Governor of Puerto Rico (San Juan: Department of Health, 1937-1938) 115-116.

<sup>165</sup> "Los dispensarios médicos de la PRRA en la zona rural. El Dr. Rafael Ramírez Santos explica su funcionamiento y desarrollo," in *El Mundo* (April 6, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00779?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>166</sup> PRRA, Information Section, "Obra de la División de Salubridad de la PRRA inicia al campesinaje en las disciplinas higiénicas y sanitarias" in *El Mundo* (August 3, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00898?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.



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of the program, they housed spaces for the doctor, the nurse, the social worker, and the clerk. There was also an infirmary, a bathroom, and a waiting-room/porch [Fig. 18-19].<sup>168</sup>



[Figure 18]

Standard rural dispensary / 1937  
PRRA Collection, Puerto Rican Digital Library



[Figure 19]

Dispensary building used today as a house  
Ciales / 2017

The handling of that space is most significant as it points to a solution guided by a modern approach to design. That is, a complete understanding (through observation) of the workings of the tropics (a synthesis) in order to put forth a favorable solution to a dilemma within the architectural program (a conclusion); in other words, through the scientific method. The problem at hand: how to accommodate considerable numbers of people within an economy of space that logically, translated into low construction costs. Yet, precisely because of the climatic conditions of the tropics –tolerable temperatures and mild dissipating rains– outside living spaces were perfectly conceivable. In many instances in Puerto Rican architecture, exterior habitation spaces already provided a desirable spatial quality and formulated part of a place-specific architectural vocabulary.<sup>169</sup> As such, in the tropics, it was entirely possible to translate the porch into a waiting room. That is why, a waiting-porch or *community porch*, as he called it, would also be the solution advanced by Richard Neutra in the 1940s for the rural health units he designed for the Committee on Design of Public Works; arguably, a continuation in the rural modernization and public works efforts commenced by PRRA. As Neutra's community porches, PRRA's waiting-porches served as didactic tools because patients could benefit from the medical advice given to others. So, architecture was used as resource in preventive medicine, and as such, assisted in the aims of PRRA's Health Division.

<sup>168</sup> "Los dispensarios médicos de la PRRA..." in *El Mundo* (April 6, 1937).

<sup>169</sup> As tropical type, the reader may refer to the bungalow. In Puerto Rico, the work of Antonín Nechodoma, specifically his houses, or some hacienda houses such as the houses for Americans in Central Aguirre are most significant.

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The use of concrete in rural areas most certainly contrasted with the peasant's traditional huts. However, PRRA's administrators believed it to be the most suitable material for durable, solid, clean, and hygienic buildings. And these were without a doubt, principles that the Health Division drove to inculcate as a new modern peasant culture PRRA aimed at developing. In terms of aesthetics, dispensaries were volumetric in character and architectural details were austere and few. In the façade, the most significant architectural feature was the porch. This, a void in an otherwise mostly solid-looking building, helped to soften an overall stocky appearance. What seems like a square column supporting the porch's roof in elevation and perspective views were actually, two short wall segments connected at the corner forming, in plan, an L shaped support. Over the porch's openings the beams were perceived as lightly relieved lintels. This added a subtle plasticity to the buildings' general planarity. In units that are still in use today, this detail is often painted a contrasting color in order to add a decorative element to the façade. In addition, the dispensary roofline is finished with a simple cornice that surrounds its perimeter.

As mentioned before, these were model-type buildings. However, there were minimal variations in order to introduce some diversity. By analyzing Gabriela Torres Ferrer's Mid-Career research,<sup>170</sup> historical photographs, and field research, six variations of the model have been identified. These consisted of [1] simple, straight protruding overhangs over windows, [2] inclined overhangs with clay roofing tiles over windows, [3] open pediment overhangs over main facade window with a bracketed sill, [4] plain inclined overhangs over windows, [5] no overhangs over windows, and [6] *cyma reversa* brackets on porch meeting the beam.

Just by the number of dispensaries built and the amount of treatments undergone in them, health was evidently a priority in the reconstruction efforts. Before they were turned over to the Insular Department of Sanitation in June 30, 1938, as its Health Division closed,<sup>171</sup> PRRA believed:

Economic rehabilitation of peasants would be worthless if attention is not given to their physical and mental health. This constitute[d] the ends of most fertile reach in all the reconstruction works. A sick man, mined by hookworms and tuberculosis or any other illness [was] not able to work and [did] not have the desire or the initiative needed to produce an efficient labor. That is why the men in charge of making the difficult task of reconstruction happen were not indifferent to the health of our masses and are trying through scientific methods to make of this man a most perfect example, healthy, noble, worthy, and adaptable to the society in which he lives.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Gabriela Torres Ferrer, *La efervescencia de la repetición: Estudio tipológico de los dispensarios médicos rurales de Puerto Rico (1936)* (unpublished), Mid-Career Research, ARCH 3030, May 2009, School of Architecture, Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico.

<sup>171</sup> Monteagudo and Escámez, "Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration," NP. See also, Miles Fairbank, "Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration," in *Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1939), 285.

<sup>172</sup> The original text is in Spanish. The translation is by the author. "Los dispensarios médicos de la PRRA en la zona rural...." in *El Mundo* (April 6, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00779?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

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Obviously, a sick worker was an unproductive and inefficient one. Thus, for PRRA, the economic and social reconstruction of the Island was contingent to a healthy, and as a result, a productive population.

Within PRRA's Health Division, the Social Service Section was in charge of another indispensable piece of architecture for PRRA objectives: **community centers**.<sup>173</sup> These were places of gathering that were built to train in social disciplines. PRRA believed rural workers and former slum dwellers and their families needed a supervised process of adaptation to the new living conditions the New Deal was providing them.<sup>174</sup> In addition to the recreational and entertainment purposes - guided by social workers as part of a program of group social work and community organization - the aim of those activities actually was to correct and prevent social dysfunctions supposedly present in the Puerto Rican poor.

Through the use of group leisurely activities as resources, PRRA intended, in general terms, to help build within the newly created community, a cooperative spirit and social responsibility. However, more specifically, the activities provided in these buildings were directed toward: [1] developing interest among the families to pursue a better life; [2] developing strategies to foment community participation in problem solution; [3] bettering health, family relations, education, and offer "more correct" recreational activities; [4] assisting individuals to interpret and be able to use all the resources provided by the community and the Insular Government in order to better their lives; [5] fostering friendships between neighbors and developing habits in good citizenship; [6] developing good taste, art appreciation, and interest in the study of nature; and [7] encouraging in the individuals an interest to enhance their productive capacity and economic conditions. All this, managed through participation in exhibitions, classes, lectures, games, conferences, performances, reading, tours, sports, music, and other activities.<sup>175</sup>

As underlined by section chief, Rafaela Espino:

[t]he importance of a program of this kind...falls in guiding people in activities that they can dedicate themselves to during their hours of leisure so that in the home, in church, and along every natural human relation can exist the best opportunity to have moments of healthy and pleasant distraction. [...] Normal men have more probability to develop from children who have played well and happily as far as it is easier for them to continue a healthy and normal life if they continue the

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<sup>173</sup> After June, 1938, when PRRA's Health Division ceased to exist, a Community Centers section was created. Social workers then, guided the programs held at community centers through this new section. See William D. Leahy, "Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration," in *Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1940) 430.

<sup>174</sup> PRRA, Information Section, "La PRRA inauguró recientemente en la zona de La Plata un centro comunal que estará al servicio de los pequeños agricultores," in *El Mundo* (January 12, 1938). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00016?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>175</sup> PRRA Social Work Section, Health Division, "El trabajo social de la PRRA y los campos de Puerto Rico," in *El Mundo* (January 16, 1938). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00020?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

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playful habits of their childhood. Having a community center will never be excessive if taken into account that it costs around three dollars per person a year to keep it, while the Insular Government spends an average of \$225 annually in a boy in a reformatory or a man in prison. [...] Our future is being modeled constantly and if this process is to be constructive, if we want to regain 'lost horizons', the process must be consciously molded, by all those interested in the wellbeing of our country.<sup>176</sup>

The premise, as explained by Espino, was that boredom was nothing if not a waste of energy which if not dealt with "could be used in a destructive and pernicious manner."<sup>177</sup> Her arguments, it seems, begin with the presumption of negative habits and personality traits in the poor population – *jibaros* and slums settlers– that needed to be dealt with in order for the New Deal projections to succeed.

It is clear that the aims of PRRA from the standpoint of the work in the community centers were obviously directed to correct and/or eliminate those negative character traits described, in a somewhat biased manner, by people like the Brookings' research team and even Tugwell: isolation, passiveness, laziness, and conformism. As well, they intended to inculcate others, more positive ones, such as civic mindfulness, a cooperative attitude, and social acknowledgement. Arguably, however, within the colonial discourse, these activities may be interpreted as ways indoctrinate the Puerto Ricans to convert them from subjects into American citizens. Acknowledgement of this purpose was supplied by Regional Administrator, Miles Fairbank in the accounts on PRRA included as part of the 1939 *Report of the Secretary of the Interior*. In this document, Fairbank pointed out that social workers had the responsibility to create ideal citizens by improving "the individual's habits; through those habits to improve the family; and through the family to improve the community."<sup>178</sup> So, as can be gathered, a project guided through social work seemed fundamental in the bigger scheme of colonial integration.

Community centers were originally under the Health Division as the social workers were the professionals in charge of most activities practiced in them. However, they were clearly associated to PRRA's dwelling programs. Hence, they were built in connection with Rural Rehabilitation as well as Slum Clearance projects. Architecturally, they configured a new building type introduced to the Puerto Rican architectural landscape by way of the US Government. Puerto Rico traditionally had social clubs and associations, however these were gathering places exclusive to the higher social classes. Community Centers, though, were for the working masses. PRRA built them in reinforced concrete –such as the ones in La Plata (rural) and El Falansterio (urban) – but narrative accounts and photographic records document the use of reclaimed wood rescued from dismantled Reconstruction Camps in early buildings. In any case, they were a fundamental part of the work in social reconstruction. The reconstruction was modeled by the US Government within their-own moral and social constructs.

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<sup>176</sup> Original text is in Spanish; the translation is by the author. Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Miles Fairbank, "Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration" *Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (1939), 363.

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The single most published image of a rural community center was that of La Plata [Fig. 20-21]. However, although in 1940 the PRRA accounted for 16 of them, they were not necessarily identical to La Plata in resettlement developments.<sup>179</sup> This, a single-story reinforced concrete symmetrical building, was emplaced in a small mound. Its most significant architectural features are a tripartite façade arrangement emphasizing the middle portion by a forward standing higher profile block. The main entrance is placed here. Designed in a simplified PWA Deco or Depression Modern, its noteworthy features are four pseudo-classical fluted pilasters with a beveled detail on top. This might have been an intention in *trompe l'oeil*



[Figure 20]

Community center  
La Plata, Aibonito / 1937  
PRRA Collection, Puerto Rican Digital Library



[Figure 21]

Community center  
La Plata, Aibonito / 2017

in order to introduce the perception of depth in a perspective and suggest monumentality. What appear as the pilasters' capitals feature reads as sunken panels with rustic texture. Flanking this central "pavilion" are two smaller ones, with independent entrances. There is no ornamentation except a concrete door surround in relief and a beveled detail in place of a cornice. In terms of program, La Plata community center had a small theater, a reading room, and spaces that often served as community classrooms where canning, needlework, and crafts training were performed.

### Education

Vocational Education complemented the work of the Rural Rehabilitation Program. As PRRA contended, the insertion of **vocational schools** within the rural landscape was:

...indicative of a better future for our next generations of young farmers. Those schools' students

<sup>179</sup> William D. Leahy, "Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration," Report of the Secretary of the Interior (1940), 430.

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will be better equipped to live in their country and outside of it. The success enjoyed by many Puerto Ricans who are experts in arts and crafts and in agricultural techniques in the neighbor South American nations, where there are vast extensions of land waiting for the hands of expert men to give their bounty, is well known. A well-prepared man can live anywhere. On the contrary, the tragedy for those who have no trade manifests with explicit characters in the lives of many of our compatriots who are in the exterior, incapable of participating in the daily competition to liberate their subsistence. Here or anywhere, a good carpenter or a good farmer has the life more or less secured. To prepare [students] to become them is work that the country will never be able to thank enough to the Department of Education and to PRRA.<sup>180</sup>

On one side, PRRA presumed that the sons of the new small farm-owners it supported would continue their fathers' footsteps and eventually work in agriculture. However, more revealing is perhaps, the assertion of a vocational education as a preparatory step for migration. Migration, as a reminder, had been contemplated in the *Chardón Report* as a possible solution for the Islands' problems of overpopulation and unemployment. In that document, as mentioned earlier, the authors had argued that if such a measure was undertaken it should not be under the premise of the potential exploitation of the Puerto Rican workers. Hence, PRRA administrators' evidently thought that preparing these possible future labor exports with skills that they could capitalize on could be a way to challenge such grim consequences.

Administrators underscored the latest scientific advancements and the most modern equipment provided by PRRA in order to adequately deliver in each vocational school a combined liberal and technical education to over 300 children. Furthermore, PRRA recognized that in rural areas, straightforward academic programs tended to produce informed peasants, but who, for the most part, would never be able to apply that basic knowledge as peons in a sugar central. Rural vocational schools, said PRRA, broke with the local pattern of exploitation in which the peasant workers were always subservient to others in the worst way possible. However, with these schools PRRA finally would be able to provide real opportunities for progress to these previously forgotten rural masses.

Puerto Rican architect Pedro Méndez, designed the one-story vocational school model in a standard type [Fig. 22-24]. Classrooms and other dependencies surround a central courtyard. Many, though, needed adaptation to their particular sites as topographical irregularities were considered. PRRA built 22 reinforced concrete schools that could stand "against hurricanes and earthquakes, as they should be in this part of the tropics."<sup>181</sup> Manuel Font, head of PRRA's Rural Engineering Section, described these as solid structures where "architecture follow[ed] serious and traditional lines. All loudness and futurism [was] deliberately eliminated...[as] the austerity in these buildings symbolize[d] the character of the

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<sup>180</sup> Original text is in Spanish; the translation is by the author. "Obra que realizan las unidades vocacionales que se están estableciendo dentro del Plan de Reconstrucción," in *El Mundo* (March 11, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00753?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>181</sup> Original text is in Spanish; translation is by the author. PRRA, Information Section, "Sobre las Escuelas Vocacionales instaladas por la PRRA," in *El Mundo* (June 12, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00846?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).



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training which the country's youth [would] receive in them."<sup>182</sup>



[Figure 22]

Perspective for standard vocational school  
Pedro Méndez / 1936  
PRRA Collection, Puerto Rican Digital Library



[Figure 23]

Vocational school  
Ciales / c. 1937  
PRRA Collection, Puerto Rican Digital Library



[Figure 24]

Vocational school  
Vega Baja / 2017

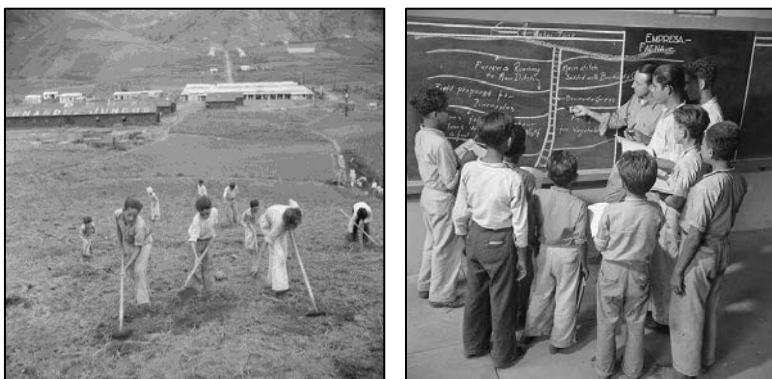
<sup>182</sup> Original text is in Spanish; translation is by the author. Ibid.

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[Figures 25 + 26]

Practical and theoretical education in agriculture

Photographer: Edwin Roskam

La Plata, Aibonito / 1938

Farm Security Administration Collection, Library of Congress

Vocational education was then part of a projected agenda where, by forming male students into skilled workers such as electricians, plumbers, joiners, carpenters, and blacksmith as well as girls into seamstresses and all kinds of textile crafters and weavers, PRRA diversified the opportunities for gainful employment among the neediest and perhaps provided them with the means for future self-employment [Fig. 25 + 26]. This, PRRA hoped, would help ease the migration of the *jíbaros* to the cities and towns where they invariably ended up living in slums. However, there was also a more philosophical outlook, as for PRRA administrators, "...unprepared youth produce[d] a sad and tragic country; an able youth, capable of working and bettering their situation produce[d], on the contrary, an optimist and happy country in route towards the best horizons of the future. This [was] the fundamental purpose of social good."<sup>183</sup>

Eventually, when funding for operation became scarce, PRRA transferred all its vocational schools to the Insular Department of Education. It should be noted that along with the vocational schools, PRRA also developed 11 needlework schools and ten canning [training] centers in rural areas at community centers. There, women learned sewing crafts and trained in food conservation.<sup>184</sup> In fact, as part of their initiatives in Self-Help, PRRA founded a Handcraft Cooperative which employed on average 160 women in garment production for local sales and export to the United States.<sup>185</sup> In addition, most cannery workers were women. This, said, PRRA, allowed for the farmers wives to take part in their families'

<sup>183</sup> Original text is in Spanish; translation is by the author. "Están dotados de todos los adelantos las unidades vocacionales de la PRRA," in *El Mundo* (April 29, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00802?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>184</sup> Monteagudo and Escámez, "Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration," NP.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.



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economic support by canning and selling the surplus from the production of their farm.<sup>186</sup> These efforts are very significant in terms of historic context, as this might have been the first time in Puerto Rico where there was an intentionally guided focus on the development of a female workforce for the capitalization of labor and contribution to a supplemental economy.<sup>187</sup>

\_\_\_ ***Rural Rehabilitation as System: The Rural Village***

In 1930 the Brookings Institution's Puerto Rican survey emphasized the isolation of the Island's *jíbaros*. Country-folk, said their report, needed to be organized in some sort of community as the research team pointed out that peasants "live[d] dispersed in isolated individual families; although the country [was] crowded with people." "The country," they continued, "[was] broken...into a series of isolated localities, which seem close together but [were] mutually inaccessible."<sup>188</sup> Further, they stressed:

Any real improvement of the very grave condition of the rural community will ultimately involve grouping the rural population in some sort of village communities —each with a school in their center, with some means of social organization. Some prospect of permanence — Something in the nature of a home in a group neighborhood instead of a hut at another man's will or an isolated mountainside. Until that is done, neither the rural school nor the governmental medical and sanitary campaigns will have their full effects as, perhaps, be able to achieve the ends which they are meant to serve.<sup>189</sup>

This must have been the foothold for the members of the Puerto Rico Policy Commission to suggest what they called "colonia centers", as part of the reconstruction guidelines described in the *Chardón Plan*. Chardón, Fernández García and Menéndes Ramos proposed modern rural villages with community centers and dispensaries around Government sponsored mills and central service farms acquired to break with the hold of the absentee corporations.

In 1938, Cruz Nieves, described the "semiurban and semirural villages" with "all the progress of the city and all the advantages of the country...where an efficient and enterprising humanity [was] taking grip around the Central Service Farm, the vocational school, the medical center, and the community center."<sup>190</sup> Cruz Nieves referred specifically to La Plata in Aibonito, Castañer in Lares, Lafayette in Arroyo,

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<sup>186</sup> René Malaret, "Lo que hace la PRRA en Castañer," in *La Correspondencia* (January 8, 1937) and PRRA, Information Section, "Enlatados de frutas y vegetales," in *El Mundo* (May 10, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00813?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>187</sup> By 1940 all efforts of this kind had ended. By this time, the needlework industry had closed and the intensified national defense efforts during World War II did not absorb women. See Leahy, "Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration," *Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (1940), 434.

<sup>188</sup> Clark, 35.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>190</sup> Original text is in Spanish; translation by the author. Cruz Nieves, "Qué eran y qué han hecho los campamentos de la reconstrucción..." in *El Mundo* (September 11, 1938). See

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Zalduondo in Luquillo, and Saint Just in Trujillo Alto, as these were orchestrated in principle, as model villages to foster social relations and community engagement among rural dwellers. In addition, they were designed under the premise of cooperative enterprise in order to push forth a sustainable economic development for the Island.

Of these experiments, the most ambitious was Lafayette. In 1934, the *Cardón Report* had proposed the purchase of cane lands and sugar mills in order to set up a series of public corporations. By April 1936, just four month after PRRA began operations, it bought the Lafayette Central from the Fantauzzi Succession, a French corporation.<sup>191</sup> With it, PRRA began a Sugar Program with the establishment of the Lafayette Sugar Cooperative Association encompassing the municipalities of Arroyo, Patillas, and Maunabo, where the workers would be partial owners of the land and the mill.<sup>192</sup> In order to begin the enforcement of the 500 acre restriction, Lafayette's land was divided into lots 500 acres or less.<sup>193</sup> The project had the full support from the Puerto Rico Sugar Workers Association, represented by Jesús T. Piñero, who would later become the first Puerto Rican governor appointed to the Island by the Federal Government.<sup>194</sup>

PRRA projections envisioned in Lafayette around 5,000 workers.<sup>195</sup> The 5,000 acres originally owned by a single absentee corporation were divided into 12 cooperatives of approximately 400 acres each.<sup>196</sup> By 1939 there were 405 small subsistence farms in the marginal lands with concrete houses, 93 with wood dwellings, three community centers, three vocational schools, three dispensaries, and a hospital, organized around the Central Service Farm.<sup>197</sup> The hospital, designed by PRRA architect, Jorge Ramírez de Arellano, in the Moderne version of Art Deco, housed in its first story the office of the administrator, the office of diagnosis, office for the dietician and four observation rooms. In this floor there was also the office for information and patient registration, a clinical laboratory, a pharmacy, examining rooms, emergency room, autopsy room, and X-rays. There was also space for storage, a dining

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<http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00252?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>191</sup> "La PRRA compró ayer la Central Lafayette," in *El Mundo* (April 14, 1936). See

<http://dloc.com/CA03599022/01148?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>192</sup> For details of the operation and the workings of the cooperatives see "La forma en que funcionará la Central Lafayette explicada en todos sus detalles por el Administrador Interino de la PRRA," *El Mundo* (January 9, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00692?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>193</sup> "Las plantaciones de la Central Lafayette serán divididas en parcelas de 500 acres o menos," *El Imparcial* (April 20, 1936).

<sup>194</sup> "Una Cooperativa regirá Central Lafayette," in *El Mundo* (April 15, 1936). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/01149?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>195</sup> "La Central de la PRRA dará empleo a 5,000 obreros," *El Mundo* (October 17, 1936). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/01327?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>196</sup> Miles Fairbank, "Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration," *Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (1938), 283.

<sup>197</sup> See Monteagudo and Escámez, "Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration," NP. In some respects the Central Service Farms continued the educational work started at the Reconstruction Camps. It also provided support as well as farming supplies and equipment to the small farmers.

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room, and kitchen. The second floor housed rooms for adults, a small private room, and children's room looking to a solarium. There was also, a small maternity ward with nursery and a small operating room. Nursing staff offices were to the sides of the building with direct access to patient's galleries.<sup>198</sup>

In the rural community of Castañer, between Adjuntas and Lares, PRRA established three coffee production cooperatives from the purchase of the Castañer and Llinás farms. There, 1,692 acres of single coffee production turned into 200 diversified farms with brick houses.<sup>199</sup> In Castañer PRRA guided experimental efforts in order to provide product diversification and maximization of land while intending to develop new agricultural industries. There, along the coffee production, PRRA introduced the cultivation of the Tung Tree Oil and Vanilla. At the time Castañer was the only region in the US territory to grow these, so PRRA had hopes that, especially vanilla, could become a major export product for the Island.<sup>200</sup> PRRA projected, Puerto Rico could become the third biggest producer of vanilla in the world, only surpassed by Madagascar and Mexico.<sup>201</sup>

In Zaldondo (Luquillo), PRRA intended to provide bigger plots for men with previous experience in agriculture such as foremen (*mayordomos*), graduates from the College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts in Mayaguez, or former landowners displaced by big sugar corporations.<sup>202</sup> For those purposes PRRA acquired a 1,500 acres farm to be divided into 200 plots.<sup>203</sup>

Saint Just (Trujillo Alto) was another type of experiment. Described as a colonization plan, PRRA projected 270 small farms in order to resettle urban slum dwellers in a 433 acres tract of land<sup>204</sup> that, because of its closeness to Río Piedras and San Juan, were expected to supply the domestic produce needs in those markets.<sup>205</sup> Further, Saint Just was nothing less than an experiment in slum clearance through a

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<sup>198</sup> PRRA, Information Section, "La PRRA construirá un magnífico hospital en Arroyo dedicado especialmente a los obreros de la Central Lafayette," in *El Mundo* (June 29, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00863?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>199</sup> Miles Fairbank, "Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration," *Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (1938), 282.

<sup>200</sup> Eugenio M. Rivera, "Breve informe sobre la labor de la PRRA en el Programa de Utilización de Tierras," in *El Mundo* (October 4, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00960?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017). Review as well, Monteagudo and Escámez, "Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration," NP.

<sup>201</sup> "El cultivo de la vainilla. La isla será un productor importante," in *El Mundo* (March 29, 1937), see <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00771?search=mundo>. Also, "Puerto Rico puede ser un importante productor de vainilla. Miles de obreros de la zona cafetalera hallarían trabajo durante 'el paro,'" in *El Mundo* (April 11, 1937), see <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00784?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>202</sup> PRRA, Information Section, "Inaugurado un campamento de la PRRA en Luquillo..." in *El Mundo* (August 7, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00902?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>203</sup> Miles Fairbank, "Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration," *Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (1938), 282.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid, 283.

<sup>205</sup> Tomás de Jesús Castro, PRRA, Information Section, "Avanzada de reconstrucción en la PRRA. Saint Just a vista de pájaro," in *El Mundo* (December 20, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/01037?search=mundo> (accessed" 25 May, 2017).

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semi urban development.<sup>206</sup> These farms exhibited the full objectives of the Resettlement Program and of the Rural Rehabilitation Division.

In the mountainous region in the municipalities of Cayey, Comerío, Ciales, and Aibonito, PRRA purchased 4,000 acres of tobacco land originally owned by two absentee corporations: the *American Suppliers* and the *Porto Rico Leaf Tobacco Co.* There, PRRA developed 461 small farms with small houses. La Plata was yet, another model project within the program of Rural Rehabilitation set around a Central Service Farm [Fig. 27]. For the benefit of the community and to advance the New Deal objectives, PRRA built a vocational school, a dispensary, and a community center which to date retain full integrity.



[Figure 27]

A model rural village in the tobacco region

La Plata, Aibonito / 1938

Photographer: Edwin Roskam

Farm Security Administration Collection, Library of Congress

<sup>206</sup> Miles Fairbank, "Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration," *Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (1938), 283.

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Slum Clearance

Generally, the proliferation of slums in Puerto Rico's urban areas, significantly in San Juan, responded to rapid and uncontrolled population growth, the concentration of land on absentee owners that diminished local ownership, and the migration of workers from rural to urban areas in search of work. Obviously, the high unemployment figures in the Puerto Rico explained that, with the lack of means for self-support, why many families lived in areas of squalor. A 1939 report on the living conditions in slums, carried out by Manuel A. Pérez and made public by the Research and Statistic Section of PRRA's Rural Rehabilitation Division,<sup>207</sup> revealed that more than 30% of people living in San Juan were slum tenants; that several new slum sections developed after the 1928 and 1932 hurricanes; and that "houses...[were] of the worst kind, built in wood and roofed with galvanized iron. Very frequently houses [were] made up of discarded materials" and pieces of the wood used for packing.<sup>208</sup> According to this report, many slum dwellers came from towns in the Island's interior.<sup>209</sup>

On the other hand, Jacob Crane, Director of Urban Development of the US National Housing Agency, observed that for the most part, poor urban families were "shack owners", usually paying from \$2 to \$3 dollars a month if renting privately owned land. However, in most instances, they were trespassing on public lands. Most houses had under 300 square feet and were built by their owners with "a high percentage of scrap material, flattened tin, etc. The workmanship [was] amateurish. Exterior or interior paint [was] not common. The furniture usually consist[ed] of wooden benches, cots, hammocks, and rough tables.... Usually built on stilts two or three feet above the ground, such houses [were] easy prey for the hurricanes...."<sup>210</sup> In addition to these descriptions, let me remind the reader of the First Lady and Tugwell's accounts after their 1934 visit, cited earlier in this document.

PRRA's urban housing program, as underscored in the 1937 report submitted to the Secretary of the Interior, "not only aim[ed] to produce more satisfactory shelters for hundreds of thousands of slum dwellers, but also, to distribute the population more rationally, and thus take the first steps toward breaking up the congested slum areas of San Juan and other island cities."<sup>211</sup> Therefore, parallelisms may be drawn from the objectives guiding PRRA's Slum Clearance Division's projects with those of the Suburban Resettlement Division of the Resettlement Administration in the United States. Especially, their experimental approach to modern community building and the intention to be regarded as models.

Even if design-wise Greenbelt Towns seem to have little in common with the Puerto Rican

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<sup>207</sup> The survey was originally conducted by the Health Division. However, it ceased operation on June 30, 1938.

<sup>208</sup> Manuel A. Pérez, PRRA Rural Rehabilitation Division, Research and Statistics Section, *Estudio preliminar de las condiciones de vida en los arrabales de San Juan* (San Juan: PRRA, 1939), 1-3.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>210</sup> Jacob Crane, *Workers Houses in Puerto Rico* (Washington, DC: US National Housing Agency, 1942), 3-4.

<sup>211</sup> Gruening, "Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration," *Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (1937), 339.

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projects, the fact remains that they shared similar aims and solutions. First, both PRRA and the RA knew that even if the economic conditions allowed, private development could not meet the demand for low-income housing. For the New Deal, then, and given the economic context of the times, housing became a public responsibility, as most families were “outside the market of commercial building” and “unaided private enterprise simply [could not] produce houses which they could afford.”<sup>212</sup> Second, New Dealers believed that for slum eradication efforts to be successful they had to be coordinated and scientifically designed. Also, new communities had to encourage family and community life and take into account the services the community would require, such as educational, religious, transportation, etc. Essentially, this afforded a planning opportunity for the US and for Puerto Rico.<sup>213</sup> In Puerto Rico, it would also be a chance to beautify San Juan.<sup>214</sup> Similarly as in the US, New Deal projects in Puerto Rico also began under a cohesive premise for the management of city growth; they started to clean squatter housing areas in a coordinated manner (or intended to do so); and developed better public housing alternatives.<sup>215</sup>

For PRRA, slums threatened public health and social organization.<sup>216</sup> At the time, the general perception was that these city areas were centers for social defects and so, spaces of crime and sickness.<sup>217</sup> Correspondingly, the United States managed a similar rhetoric, as shown in outreach and educational material prepared by the RA:

The public evils, social and economic, of such conditions are unquestioned and unquestionable. Slum areas are the breeding places of disease, which take toll, not only from denizens, but by spread from the inhabitants of the entire city and State. Juvenile delinquency, crime, and immorality are there born, find protection, and flourish. Enormous economic loss results directly from the necessary expenditure of public funds to maintain health and hospital services for

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<sup>212</sup> Resettlement Administration, *Greenbelt Towns* (Washington DC: Resettlement Administration, 1936), 11. In <https://ia802508.us.archive.org/31/items/greenbelttowns1936unit/greenbelttowns1936unit.pdf> (accessed: 7 June, 2017).

<sup>213</sup> Leonardo Santana Rabell, for instance, argues that PRRA started and became training ground in a planning perspective for Puerto Rico that later would serve Tugwell and Muñoz Marín’s administrations during the 1940s and 1950s. See “El Nuevo Trato y los orígenes de la planificación en Puerto Rico,” *en Planificación y política: Un análisis crítico* (San Juan: Editorial Cultural, 1989), 67.

<sup>214</sup> “Hay varios planes para embellecer a San Juan. La eliminación de arrabales figura destacadamente en estos proyectos. El Gobernador ofreció cooperar,” in *El Mundo* (July 7, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00871?search=mundo> (accessed: 7 June, 2017).

<sup>215</sup> New York Court of Appeals on the State Housing Law as cited in Resettlement Administration, *Greenbelt Towns*, 6-7.

<sup>216</sup> PRRA, Information Section, “Los planes para la reconstrucción económica de Puerto Rico. Un informe a la PRRA por el Sr. Earl Parker Hanson,” in *El Mundo* (September 5, 1936). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/01287?search=mundo> (accessed: 7 June, 2017).

<sup>217</sup> Kurt W. Black, *Slums, Projects, and People: Social Psychological Problems of Relocation in Puerto Rico* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1962), 4.

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afflicted slum dwellers and to war against crime and immorality.<sup>218</sup>

PRRA slum clearance projects, as well as Greenbelt Towns in the US, as models of the right community, were, of course, utopic aspirations. As Carol Christensen suggests, in these kinds of utopian neighborhoods healthy individuals were the product and the reflection of the fit environment they were part of. As determinist experiments, PRRA slum clearance projects and Greenbelt Towns were set on the premise that society's wellbeing depended on the quality of the communities and not on the individual himself. Therefore, in the New Deal utopian view, it was possible to ascertain a certain type of citizen because community and therefore, society, could be molded from a planned, scientifically designed, controlled environment.<sup>219</sup>

As in the United States, in Puerto Rico earlier efforts in social housing had been limited and fragmented at best. Thus, PRRA undertook the largest dwelling program ever attempted for the Island as it guided the most comprehensive housing development projects for the working masses. This included, as I have mentioned, a rural resettlement program with housing provisions, and for the urban areas, a slum eradication program. However, although there was intent within the agency to handle an island wide initiative, budgetary constrictions made it only possible for PRRA to build three projects: two in San Juan and one in Ponce.<sup>220</sup> However, for the purposes future individual nominations covered by this historical context, consideration must be given as well, to the projects built by the Housing Division of the Public Works Administration, which were funded by loans from PRRA. These were the *Mirapalmeras* (today *Villa Palmeras*) in Santurce and *La Granja* in Caguas, both inaugurated in 1937.

Tenement Group Project A: *El Falansterio*

Tenement Group Project A, commonly known as *El Falansterio*, was inaugurated in 1937, originally to house the residents from the *La Perla* and *Miranda* slums in San Juan. It was the first multi-story, multi-family, public housing project built on the Island [Fig. 28]. At the time, the decision to build a multi-family dwelling was strongly criticized even by some of PRRA's administrators as it was considered that "Puerto Rican families [would] not be able to live together because their excessive individualism

<sup>218</sup> Resettlement Administration, 8-9.

<sup>219</sup> Carol A. Christensen, *The American Garden City Movement and the New Town Movement* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1986), 3-6.

<sup>220</sup> For details on the subject see my essays: "Suppressing the Slum! Architecture and Social Change in San Juan's Public Housing" in Enrique Vivoni Farage (ed.), *Ever New San Juan: Architecture and Modernization in the XXth Century* (San Juan: AACUPR, 2000); "[Re]vision de la vivienda social en Puerto Rico: Notas sobre la arquitectura para el obrero" in Jorge Lizardi Pollock and Marin Schwegmann (eds.), *Espacios Ambivalentes: Historias y olvidos en la arquitectura social moderna* (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2012) and *New Deal Communities for Puerto Rico: The Urban Housing Projects of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration*, Master of Science in Architecture Thesis, Mississippi State University, 1994 (Michigan: Thesis International) 1996.

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would make them fight among themselves.”<sup>221</sup> However, the decision to build a multi-story building



[Figure 28]

Aerial photograph of Puerto de Tierra / 1939  
The photo shows the location of the Miranda slum and  
Tenement Group Projects A and B (not built)

responded to the limited area provided by the secured site in Puerto de Tierra; a small tract of land in between the train tracks (now Train street), the Fernández Juncos avenue, the Matías Ledesma street, and the San Juan Bautista street. The housing block was designed to provide comfortable and safe living accommodation for the most people possible at minimum construction costs.

<sup>221</sup> The original text is in Spanish. The translation is by the author. Antonio Cruz Nieves, “La fiesta del pequeño pueblo que vive en una sola casa,” *El Mundo* (February 13, 1936). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/01090?search=mundo> (accessed: 7 July, 2017).

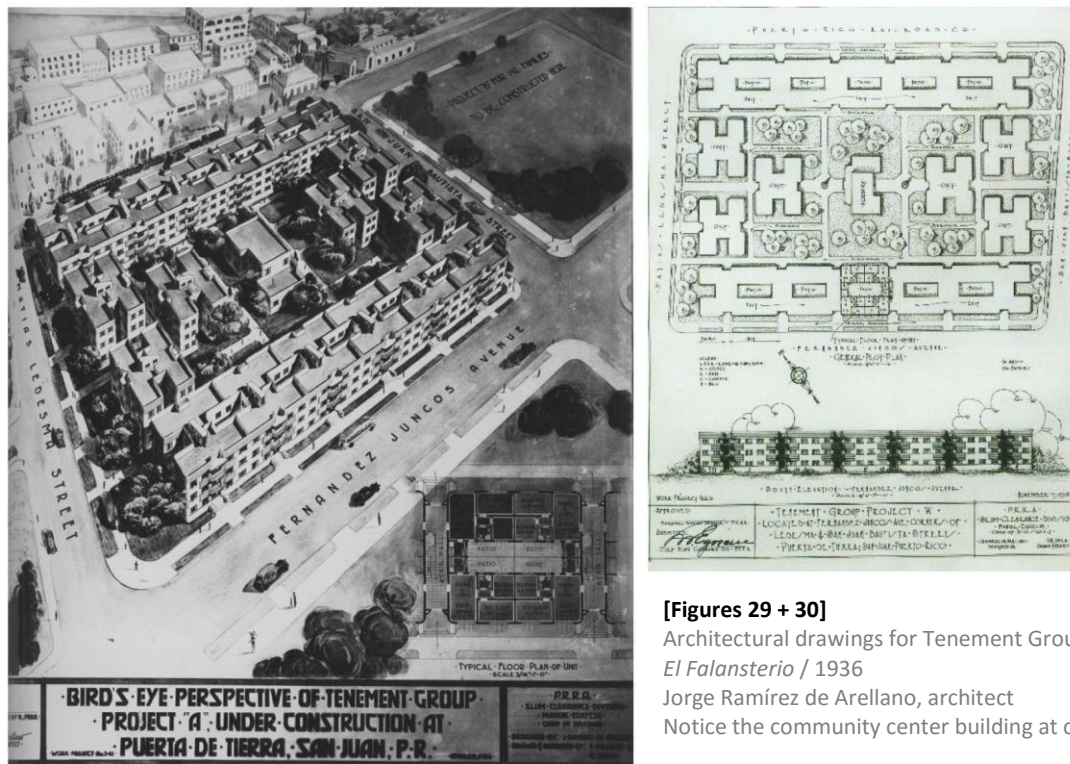


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[Figures 29 + 30]

Architectural drawings for Tenement Group Project A  
*El Falansterio* / 1936

Jorge Ramírez de Arellano, architect

Notice the community center building at center

*El Falansterio* consists of 216 units in 18 typical buildings [Fig. 29 + 30]. These are three-story exposed reinforced concrete, organized around a central ventilation and light courtyard. There are four apartments in each floor for a total of 12 per building. Apartments are typical with an architectural program consisting of living-dining room, kitchen, bathroom and two bedrooms. As with the rural houses of the Rural Rehabilitation Division, efforts were taken in this blockhouse to provide an *existenzminimum*. In addition, the organizational solution, interpreted as architectural and urban modules, points to *El Falansterio* as an example of rational architecture.<sup>222</sup> Hence, these buildings stand as local prime examples of the earliest modernist discourse as approached by local architects on the Island.

First floor apartments have a small patio each to serve as laundry area. For the tenants of the second and third floors laundry space was supplied at the roof. At the geographical center of the housing

<sup>222</sup> For more on this see Luz Marie Rodríguez López, "Suppressing the Slum! Architecture and Social Change in San Juan's Public Housing" in Enrique Vivoni Farage (ed.), *Ever New San Juan: Architecture and Modernization in the XXth Century* (San Juan: AACUPR, 2000) and "[Re]vision de la vivienda social en Puerto Rico: Notas sobre la arquitectura para el obrero" in Jorge Lizardi Pollock and Marin Schwegmann (eds.), *Espacios Ambivalentes: Historias y olvidos en la arquitectura social moderna* (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2012).

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complex, there is a two-story reinforced concrete building for a community center in which PRRA would foster its social and community aspirations for the new tenants. This building also housed a *kingdergarten*. Space between buildings served as recreational areas. So, *El Falansterio* was designed as contained and introspective pedestrian community. Designed by Puerto Rican architect Jorge Ramírez de Arellano in the Moderne version of Art Deco, one of its most significant architectural features is the redefinition of the balcony from a social but exclusive space of the dwelling, into a communal, inclusive, element (there is one for every two apartments in the second and third floors) [Fig. 31].

*El Falansterio* was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1984. However, there is no mention in the nomination of its connection to the New Deal or its architectural solutions linking the building to a modernist theory of design.



[Figure 31]

Tenement Group Project A  
*El Falansterio* / 2004  
Slide Collection, AACUPR

Eleanor Roosevelt Suburban Development

The *Eleanor Roosevelt* suburban development started construction in Hato Rey in 1937 to provide adequate living quarters for the *La Perla* and *Miranda* families that were left out of *El Falansterio*. Today, this housing development stands between Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Manuel Domenech, Eugenio María de Hostos, and César González avenues. In February 1938, PRRA announced the completion of this modern neighborhood. Jorge Ramírez de Arellano designed three housing models, all one-story in reinforced concrete. Houses are accounted as follows: 114 single family detached houses, 131 duplex houses, and four 32 dwelling row houses. These had no garages, as cars were not contemplated as far as the dwellers were concerned. There were five detached models, three for duplex houses, and one row-house model. The architectural program included a porch, living-dining room, kitchen, bathroom, and two

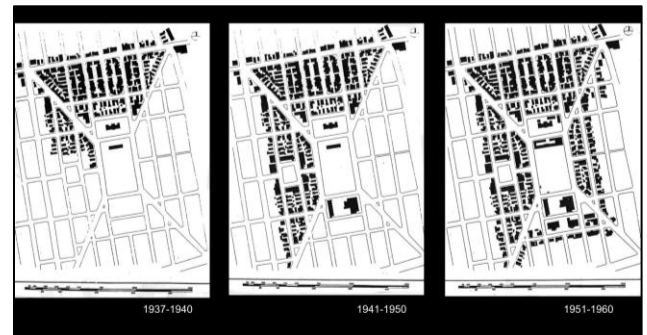
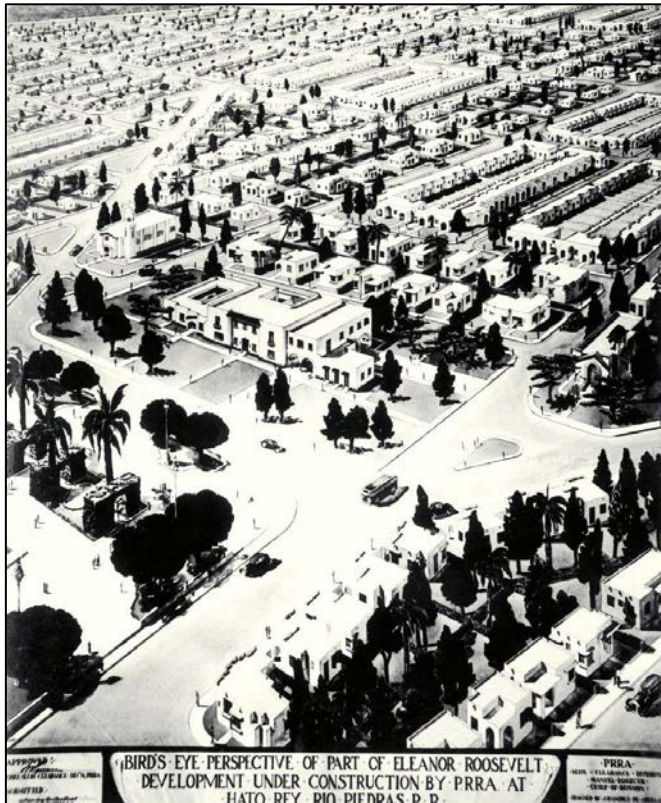
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or three dormitories with closets.<sup>223</sup> Stylistically, they were Art Deco, Spanish Revival, and International Style [Fig. 32].



[Figure 33]

Development of *Eleanor Roosevelt* suburban project 1937-1960

Hato Rey

Drawn by Archiplan

[Figure 32]

Perspective drawing for *Eleanor Roosevelt* Suburban Development Hato Rey / 1937

Jorge Ramírez de Arellano, architect

PRRA Collection, Puerto Rican Digital Library

In terms of urban strategies, the development features an orthogonal organization with four diagonal streets extending from the far corners of the neighborhood towards the center [Fig. 33]. Among the features of this suburban development was a proposed community center (not built), a park, and places of worship that were to be grouped together. These streets shortened the walking distances from the farthest sections, reason why, along with the possibility to cut through the interior of the row housing blocks, *Eleanor Roosevelt* is acknowledged as an effort in pedestrian urban design.<sup>224</sup> PRRA envisioned the project to function almost as a city. However, in order to maintain cultural ties with Puerto Rican urban traditions, a public square mimicking those in every town is surrounded by a commercial area.<sup>225</sup> Spaces

<sup>223</sup> PRRA, Information Section, "La barriada Eleanor Roosevelt está casi terminada," in *El Mundo* (February 3, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00717?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>224</sup> For further discussion on this point see my essays "Suppressing the Slum!..." and "[Re]vision de la vivienda social en Puerto Rico..."

<sup>225</sup> Antonio Cruz Nieves, "Una ciudad en Hato Rey con vivienda para diez y seis mil habitantes," *El Mundo* (October

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were reserved for a movie theater, three churches, a gas station and a cafeteria. PRRA also built an elementary school in reinforced concrete in the Art Deco style. This elementary school was originally a six-classroom one-story building with capacity for 250 students,<sup>226</sup> but was later expanded by PRRA with a second floor.

Even if few urban developments had been proposed earlier in Puerto Rico—as were the cases of *Miramar*, *El Condado*, or *Ocean Park*—, *Eleanor Roosevelt* was the first such solution for the housing of lower social brackets. In addition, arguably it stands as precedent for what would become, during the 1950s, the model that guided urban planning and housing policy in the Island. This, because in cultural terms, to own a single-family detached dwelling in an *urbanización* (suburban development) would represent, physically and ideologically, the final attainment of desire: the American Dream. For Puerto Rican laborers, to live each in their house was to live like they did in the United States. For the Puerto Rican government, however, developments like *Roosevelt*, as it is commonly known as today, were marks of progress and modernization.

*Juan Morell Campos Suburban Development*

The *Juan Morell Campos* development was built in Ponce, to the south of the Island. Began in 1937, it stands to the West of the Civil Cemetery and to the South and Southwest of the Old Catholic Cemetery. It was the only suburban development designed and built by PRRA outside of San Juan since they were unable to find a suitable location for a similar project proposed for Mayaguez. *Morell Campos*, as it is commonly known as, was designed for 150 dwellings outside of the city center and organized in an orthogonal grid pattern [Fig. 34]. Originally, there was no plan for building a community center or a school. However, both facilities were provided later. In contrast to *Eleanor Roosevelt*, neither the community center nor the school were placed at the exact center of the neighborhood. The school, though, occupies a rather centralized lot, while the community center is relegated to a peripheral tract to the south of the complex. *Morell Campos* does not appear to be as well thought out in terms of urban planning and design as *Eleanor Roosevelt*. However, this can be explained by the fact that in Ponce the architect had to work within a constrained irregular site, while in Hato Rey, there was the advantage of an undeveloped tract of land.

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3, 1938). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00274?search=mundo> (accessed: 25 May, 2017).

<sup>226</sup> PRRA, Information Section, "Escuela en 'Eleanor Roosevelt,'" in *El Mundo* (August 11, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00906?search=mundo> (accessed: 7 July, 2017).

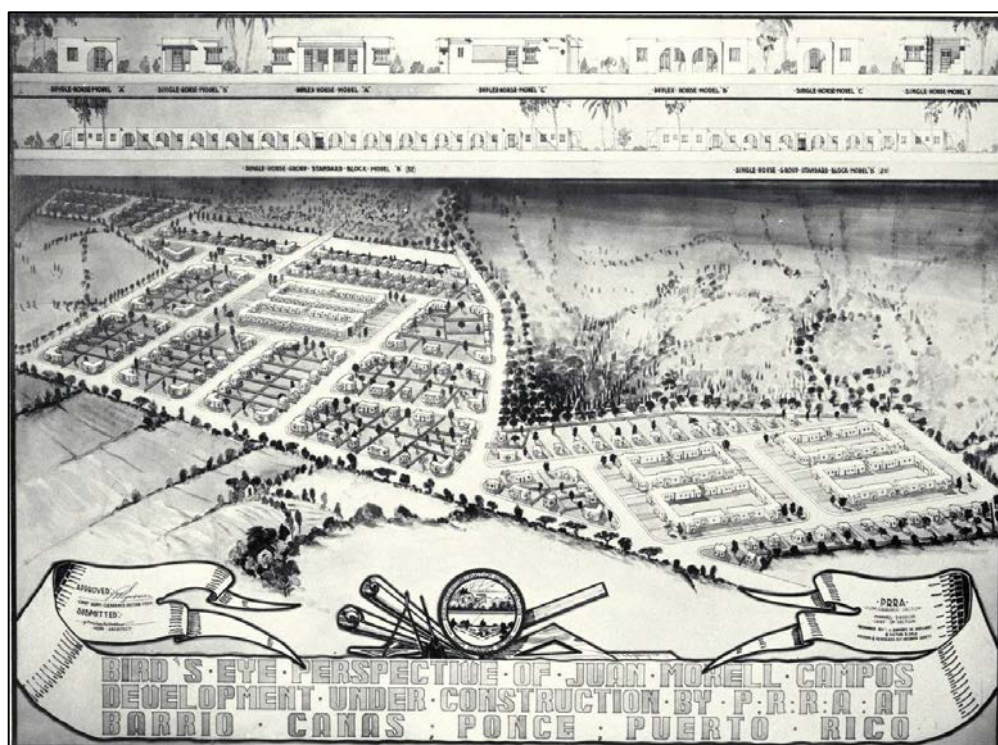


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[Figure 34]

Juan Morell Campos Suburban Development

Ponce / 1937

Jorge Ramírez de Arellano, architect

PRRA Collection, Puerto Rican Digital Library

Housing models for *Morell Campos* are the same as those in *Eleanor Roosevelt*, mostly subscribing to the Art Deco and the Spanish Revival styles. As explained earlier, all models were built in reinforced concrete due to the material's durability and strength given tropical climate and environmental challenges. On average, they were 625 square feet. As in *Eleanor Roosevelt*, *Morell Campos*' floor plans were basically typical; distinction was accomplished through repetition and through variations in the facades. Floor plans were a variable on the double pile without corridor type (with the addition of bathroom), possibly derived from typical wood framed workers' houses, especially those of the centrals' foremen [Fig. 35].

Nevertheless, there is one corner duplex model, which splits from the patterned repetitiousness of the complexes. These three-bedroom houses were combined in an L shaped overall plan. The two dwellings showed a similar cluster arrangement for the kitchen, bathroom, and bedrooms, but flipped. In order to compensate for the strict corner emplacement on the lot, they had different entrance porch and

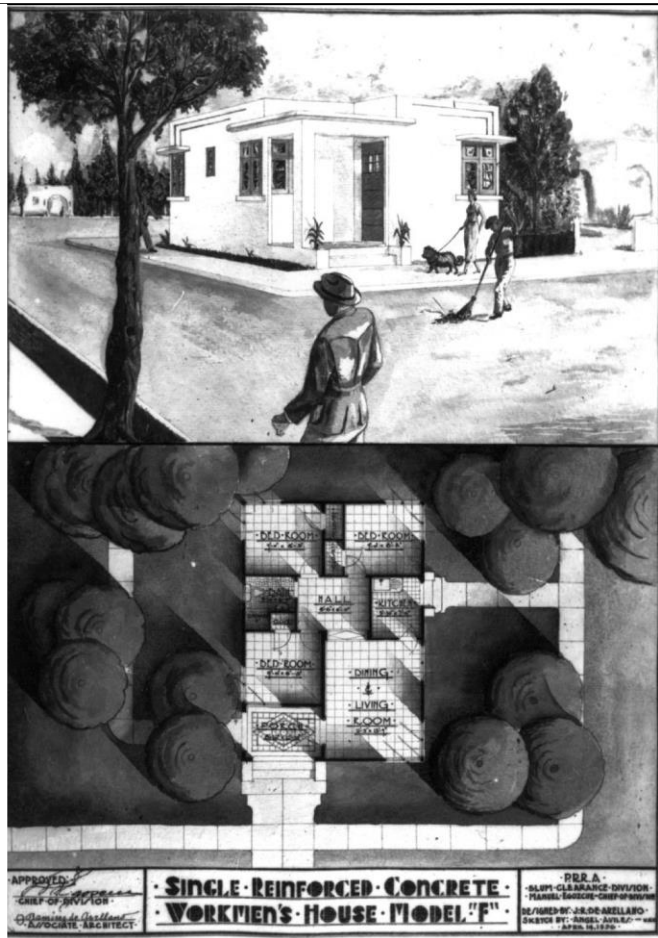
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living-dining room organizations. One of them, allowed for the curvature typical of the Moderne. I can



[Figure 35]

Some workmen's house models for *Eleanor Roosevelt* and *Morell Campos* development / 1937 and 2000  
Jorge Ramírez de Arellano, architect  
PRRA Collection, Puerto Rican Digital Library and the author

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only be inferred that this rearrangement of the plan responded to PRRA's requirement for economy, translated into efficient spatial utilization of the site.

The contrast between *Morell Campos* and *El Vigía*, where houses for some of Ponce's elite were built, was tremendous. In *El Vigía*, for example, Juan Eugenio Serrallés, owner of one of the largest rum distilleries and the *Mercedita* sugar central, built during the 1930s a home designed by Puerto Rican famed architect, Pedro de Castro. This *Cortijo* (country house) featured one of the fashionable styles of the times in its architect's preference for the Spanish Renaissance Revival. So, by comparison, it can be argued that PRRA's introduction of an aesthetic modernity was derived by architectural fashion of the day in the housing models designed for its Ponce suburban development. Differences, between these two housing subdivisions though, are not only in the private versus social minded development or notable in the scale of the houses but also, in the meanings of their emplacements or settings. While the *Castillo Serrallés – Serrallés Castle*, now a museum— occupies a hilltop overlooking *Ponce Pueblo* (downtown) —while the town looks up to the *Castillo* (the Castle)— argument may be made about the representation of Power from an image derived from the notion of *caput mundi* or the symbolism of “being on top of the world”. For *Morell Campos*, however, being located adjacent to two cemeteries, reference to discourses of marginalization come to mind, as in early urban planning strategies, these were segregated to fringe areas off the cities because of hygienic, health, and aesthetic reasons.

*Mirapalmeras and La Granja*

*Mirapalmeras* was built within *Barrio Obrero* in front of the Municipal Cemetery. It had 131 dwellings and five commercial spaces [Fig. 36]. These were available on a rental basis only to retail businesses, with exception of bars or others that served alcohol for onsite consumption.<sup>227</sup> On the other hand, *La Granja*, in Caguas, was built in a rural plot outside the urban center. It was designed for 78 dwellings, three commercial spaces, and a community center. Unit sizes for both projects varied —from one to three dormitories— depending on the families' density [Fig. 37]. These aligned forming typical row houses; the smaller were duplex models, while the largest housed up to seven dwellings. All apartments had a porch, living-dining room, kitchen, bathroom, and, as mentioned, a variable number of bedrooms. As announced in *El Imparcial*, in *La Granja* construction was limited to 11% of the site in order to provide recreational spaces. Each house had a garden and instead of looking toward the street, consistent with *Mirapalmeras*, dwelling units were organized around large yards.<sup>228</sup> Also, vehicular circulation was segregated —in *La Granja*, to a single circuit. Hence, children could play without danger. In terms of the aesthetic quality of the buildings, they were extremely austere, without any ornament whatsoever. Evidently, what can be called a Loosian character responded to the narrow budget available for the projects provided through a loan made available to the PWA by PRRA.

<sup>227</sup> “Hoy se inaugura en Seboruco el Caserío Mirapalmeras,” in *El Mundo* (October 1, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00957/2j?search=mundo> (accessed: 7 July, 2017).

<sup>228</sup> “El Caserío La Granja,” in *El Imparcial* (December 9, 1936).

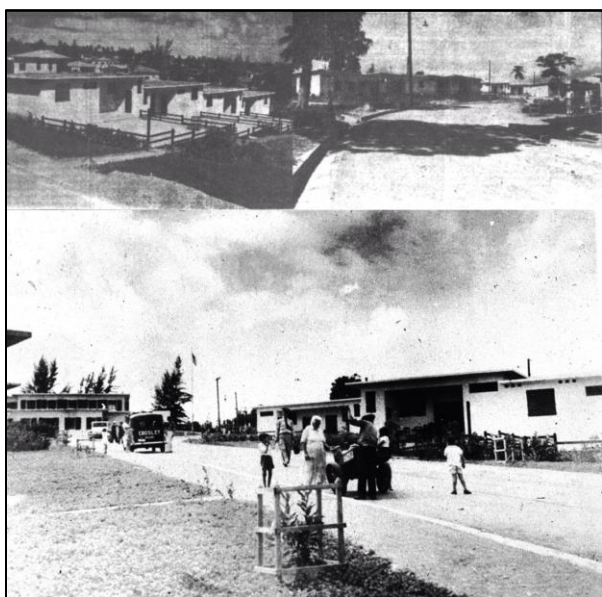


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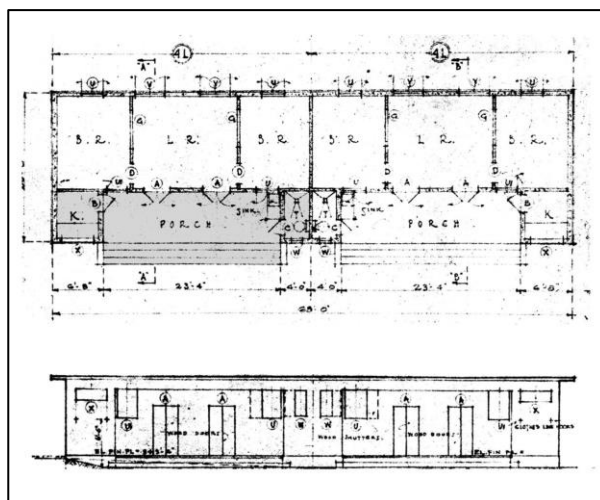
[Figure 36]

Mirapalmeras housing development  
Barrio Obrero, Santurce / 1937  
PRRA Collection, AACUPR



[Figure 37]

La Granja housing development  
Caguas / 1937  
PRRA Collection, AACUPR



[Figure 38]

Mirapalmeras housing development  
Plan of duplex building  
Barrio Obrero, Santurce / 1937  
Rafael Carmoega Collection, AACUPR

Originally, kitchens and bathrooms could only be accessed from the porch, obviously limiting privacy [Fig. 38]. However, that solution lends itself to a couple of interpretations. In one instance, it can be considered a response stemming from the acknowledgement of the exterior living space as part of the design resources possible in the tropics. But also, it may be thought of as an exercise in transition from a preindustrial or pre-modern society towards one in development. As the norm in poor families' dwellings,



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privacy was rarely present as part of their living conditions. Many accounts of rural and slum houses described how, at the time, family members tended to share a single living space divided, if by anything, by a piece of cloth hanging from the rafters. So, in *Mirapalmeras* and *La Granja*, the New Deal proposed a significant modification where along with the non-privacy of kitchens and bathrooms, bedrooms were also introduced as preconceived ideas about development connected to a certain moral behavior and decorum. Therefore, these projects must be acknowledged as experiments where privacy, as concept, appears as part of a teaching component in order to instruct workers' families to live in a more civilized and modern manner.

As they were being built in 1936, *Mirapalmeras* and *La Granja* were labeled vital to the rehabilitation program as they were two of the first New Deal projects to be conceived in order to lessen Puerto Rico housing problem. As PWA explained through the local press, they were to have "the traditional characteristics of the Island and at the same time modern sanitary equipment in a clean and happy atmosphere."<sup>229</sup> These houses definitely contrasted with the ones in slums as these had electricity and a bathroom with a shower. Also, they were built in reinforced concrete, a permanent, solid material. Each apartment also had a private yard where families could grow their own food gardens in order to lower their consumption of imported products. Slums, in contrasts, were usually cramped areas built over dirty, swampy water with no recreational areas.

Higher Education

PRRA established the University Building Division in order to push forth a construction program for the institution, which had grown from 1,400 students in 1929 to over 5,000 by mid 1930s. This was supported by an assignment of \$1,422,000 dollars by President Roosevelt. Because of the economic constraints derived from the Depression, the University had undergone budgetary cuts, which were making its operation difficult. In spite of this, by 1935 the University of Puerto Rico needed to upgrade its facilities and equipment in order to keep up with a steady growth due to a continued increase in enrollment.<sup>230</sup>

At the time, the University was gaining recognition in the fields of Tropical Medicine, Agriculture, and Hispanic Studies. As such, PRRA considered it "the peak of the Island's education system [where were] being formed the technical men for the development of agricultural resources, the protection of public health, as well as the educated citizens which [would satisfy] the cultural needs of the modern community."<sup>231</sup> For the New Dealers heading PRRA, the University of Puerto Rico could factor "...a

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<sup>229</sup> Original text is in Spanish. Translation is by the author. "Planes de la Administración Federal de Obras Públicas para atenuar el problema de la vivienda en Puerto Rico," in *El Mundo* (December 20, 1936). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/01389?search=mundo> (accessed: 7 July, 2017).

<sup>230</sup> Gruening, "Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration," *Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (1937), 336.

<sup>231</sup> Original text is in Spanish. Translation is by the author. PRRA, Information Section, "Los planes para la reconstrucción económica de Puerto Rico...", in *El Mundo* (September 5, 1936). See

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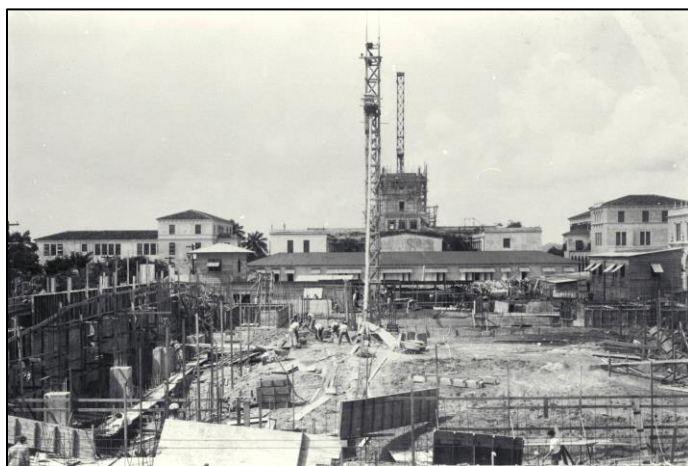
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powerful instrument in the establishment of fraternal Pan-American relations."<sup>232</sup> As discussed earlier, Gruening's intentions to use Puerto Rico as a bridge for the US in order to gain allegiances in Latin America seem to be underway and in sync with the University project.

By April 1937 six buildings had been completed. These were: the Library, the Normal School, a building for Home Economics, a Biology building, the Teachers College, and a building for Agricultural Sciences in Mayaguez. The fence had also been finished. Work continued for the alterations to the façade that would give a coherent and unified aspect to the new construction, as well as a monumental character. This included a 174 feet high clock tower with carillon, built between 1937 and 1939, named in honor of President Roosevelt. At this time, the Auditorium was under construction and work for the extensions to the School of Tropical Medicine had been started. Further, in 1939, PRRA built two armory buildings for the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) cadets of the University of Puerto Rico in Río Piedras and the College of Agriculture in Mayaguez [Fig. 39].



[Figure 39]

University of Puerto Rico under construction  
Río Piedras / c. 1937  
PRRA Collection, Puerto Rican Digital Library

<http://dloc.com/CA03599022/01287?search=mundo> (accessed: 7 July, 2017).

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

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[Figure 40]

PRRA University Buildings Division  
Architect Rafael Carmoega, director  
Río Piedras / c. 1937  
PRRA Collection, AACUPR

It is important to underscore that the University Buildings Division was made up of a group of architects who were (or would become) the most important exponents of the profession during the 1930s and 1940s. Among them: William Schimmelpfenning, Francisco Roldán, Francisco Gardón, and Augusto Plard. In the team also figured Gertie Besosa, the first Puerto Rican female architect. They were headed by Rafael Carmoega, who had been the first Puerto Rican to hold the position of State Architect (1921-1935); an appointment within the Puerto Rico's Department of the Interior [40].

In Río Piedras, buildings were arranged as to eventually complete a quadrangle. This followed the Master Plan first designed in 1925 by the firm of Bennet, Parsons, and Frost. Buildings connected by galleries surrounding what would later become a central courtyard. Reinforced concrete is the main construction material along with decorative details in polychrome glazed terracotta.<sup>233</sup> Probably because of its Pan-American aim, buildings were designed in Spanish Renaissance Revival style.<sup>234</sup> Architect Enrique Vivoni argues that in Puerto Rico, Spanish Revival was used for two purposes: as a representation of a Hispanic heritage cemented as identity and as a tool for Americanization.<sup>235</sup> In the University buildings, both interpretations seem to fit.

<sup>233</sup> For a detailed account on the history of the University's architecture see María Luisa Moreno, *La arquitectura de la Universidad de Puerto Rico* (San Juan: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2000).

<sup>234</sup> For an excellent look at Pan-Americanism through architecture see Robert Alexander González, *Designing Pan-America: US Architectural Visions for the Western Hemisphere* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).

<sup>235</sup> Enrique Vivoni Farage, "La arquitectura de la identidad puertorriqueña," in Enrique Vivoni Farage and Silvia Álvarez Curvelo (eds), *Hispanofilia: Arquitectura y vida en Puerto Rico, 1900-1950* (San Juan: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1998), 142.

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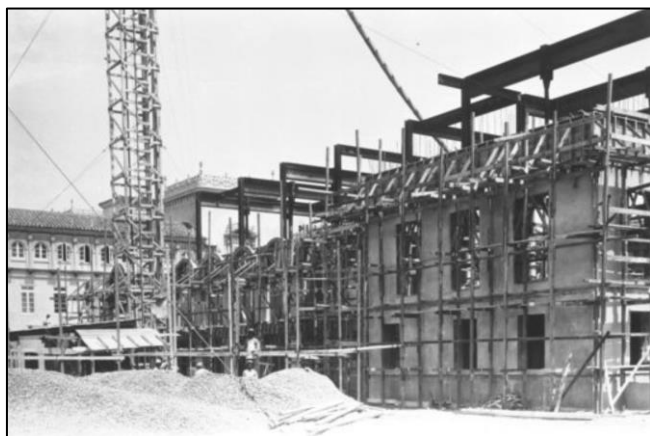
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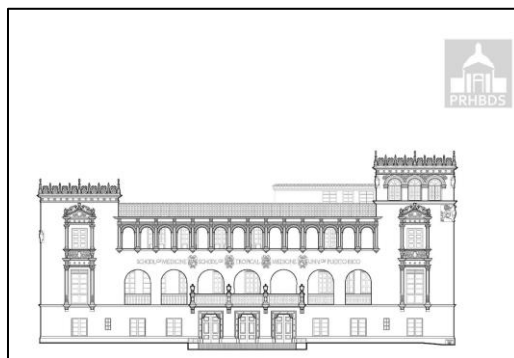
In 1936, as part of the University expansion, drawings had been completed for a Hospital for the School of Tropical Medicine. By 1937, further development continued with the construction of two wings connecting to the original building in Puerta de Tierra, adjacent to the Capitol building. The four-story laboratory wing, facing the Luis Muñoz Rivera Avenue, was designed to house the departments of Tropical Physiology and Medical Microbiology, as well as laboratories for animal experimentation and dormitories for visiting faculty. The three-story library wing, on Ponce de León Avenue, would contain spaces for a reading room, study hall, and an auditorium. Construction, under the supervision of architect Joseph O'Kelly, was done in reinforced concrete with a steel frame. Due to its location on a sea front, steel framing supplied the necessary structural support in order to withstand hurricanes. As in the University buildings, decorative details were designed in polychrome grazed terracotta [Fig. 41-43].

Aside from the functional aspect of the School, its "valuable beautification of the capitol" was amply acknowledged as the building complex "would form a landscape due to their architectural beauty and reality of entrepreneurial force, not exempt of certain air of romanticism supplied by the site they occup[ied]."<sup>236</sup>



[Figure 41]

Expansion to the School of Tropical Medicine under construction  
Puerta de Tiera / c. 1939  
AACUPR



[Figures 42-43]

School of Tropical Medicine  
Drawing and photo by  
Puerto Rico Historic Building  
Drawing Society



<sup>236</sup> "Las nuevas obras que se construyen en la Escuela de Medicina Tropical," in *El Mundo* (June 18, 1939). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00520?search=mundo> (accessed: 7 July, 2017).

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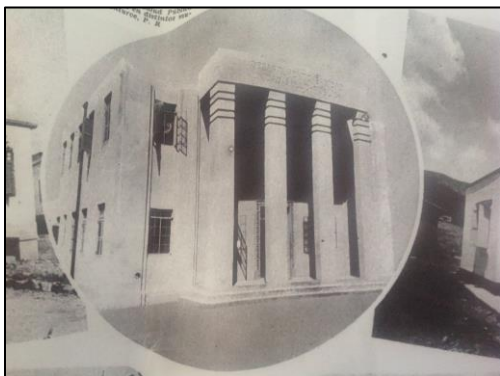
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A Collaborative Public Works Agenda

PRRA's general objectives, as well as its management of all New Deal funding, placed the agency as a key participant in collaborations with the Insular and Municipal Governments. For example, efforts in public health were not limited to rural areas. In urban zones, dispensaries had counter parts in **Public Health Units**. These were projects funded by PRRA and built for the Insular Department of Sanitation, which are noteworthy as a complementary attempt aimed to strengthen the Island's efforts towards salubriousness. By November 1937 PRRA was ready to transfer to the Insular Department of Sanitation 16 newly built units,<sup>237</sup> plus ending September, Insular Commissioner of Sanitation, Eduardo Morales Garrido, announced 14 more underway.<sup>238</sup> However, 22 public health units were finally built. Official documents list four types. However, there were essentially standard types. The first model is a two story concrete building in a PWA Deco or Depression Modern built only in Santurce, Bayamón and Arecibo (demolished) [44-45]. Its most significant architectural characteristic was a simplified pseudo classical two-story elevated portico with what appeared as four columns attached to a wider main building volume. The front façade had a monumental disposition. However, when viewing it from a perspective angle, the short depth of the two center supporting elements and the L shaped in the corners, gave the portico almost a two-dimensional quality, as that of a scenography. As a distinctive feature in these vertical elements, there were four horizontal depressed striations suggesting a capital.



[Figure 44]

Public health unit for Santurce, Bayamón, and  
Arecibo / c. 1937  
*Puerto Rico Golden Album* (1939)



[Figure 45]

Public health unit, Santurce (not in use) / 2017

The second model is a small Spanish Revival one-story concrete building with courtyard, featuring a gabled portico covered with clay roof tiles [Fig. 46]. This is supported by two sets of three-pillar clusters

<sup>237</sup> PRRA, Information Section, "Unidades de Salud Pública que ha construido la Reconstrucción," *El Mundo* (November 14, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/01001?search=mundo> (accessed: 7 July, 2017).

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.



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on façade and a couple of pilasters attached to the building's main body. Arches mark both the main and side entrances to the portico in all units. The most recognizable variation in this model type is the fact that some feature semi-circular arches, while others, horseshoe or Moorish arches [Fig. 47-48]. Molding elements places at imposts are decorative, as they supply plasticity in an otherwise plain composition. However, there are other variations on cornices and overhangs that help give somewhat of a distinctive character to a typical model type building designed, as others by PRRA, for repetition.



**[Figure 46]**

Public health unit second standard model / c. 1937  
*Puerto Rico Golden Album (1939)*



**[Figure 47]**

PRRA public health unit  
Yauco / 2017



**[Figure 48]**

PRRA public health unit  
Vega Baja / 2017

In the Puerto Rican towns, these Public Health Units were administered by the Insular Department of Sanitation. Each public health unit was in charge of one up to four municipalities, depending on population and geographical location. Each unit was operated by a Chief Physician, representing the Commissioner of Sanitation in each district. The doctor headed a team of up to four nurses and sanitary inspectors, demographic registrars, microscope technicians, secretaries, and milk station's assistants. As with the rural dispensaries, the activities in the Public Health Units ran the whole sanitary and medical gamut, from clinics for prenatal and pediatric care, hygiene, tuberculosis, anti-venereal, vaccination, investigation of contagious diseases, the administration of milk stations, and public health education and prevention. They were also, in charge of sewer and aqueduct inspections, public cleaning, and dwellings' regulations.<sup>239</sup>

As PRRA took notice of unattended health issues and its most impending related needs, in 1936 it studied ways to take care of the workers who for any reason, were needed hospitalization. For such purposes, PRRA constituted a special committee presided by doctor Jorge del Toro. The committee's

<sup>239</sup> Monteagudo and Escámez, "Sanitary Department," NP.

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report when finalized, stressed that hospitalization had been seriously mismanaged in Puerto Rico due, mainly, to the lack of hospitals on the Island. As stated in the report, only 61 municipalities had buildings that were called hospital but many did not fit into an acceptable definition for an institution of health care. Further, fourteen municipalities had never had a hospital, only 54 used hospital buildings as such, and few of the hospitals available attended to health care as they were supposed to, being used instead, as public health units. Also, as discussed in a survey conducted in the United States, none of the municipal hospitals were working to their full capacity. In addition, according to the 1930 Census there were only 1,920 hospital beds available in all of Puerto Rico, but statistically by population count, the Island needed 9,218. Moreover, PRRA believed a hospital stay was only part of a chain that connected with the patients' home life, work life, and habits.<sup>240</sup>

In June 1937, the Island's press informed of the construction of the first **district hospital** for the Insular Department of Sanitation in Fajardo. Also, that as plans were approved, similar hospitals in Aguadilla, Bayamón, and Arecibo would follow with minimal adjustments in the first floor plan in order to make it easier to adapt them to their selected sites.<sup>241</sup> These hospitals, funded in part by a loan from PWA and allocations granted by the Charity Hospitals Act of 1935, were to be able to care for 300 patients each.<sup>242</sup> The medical as well as surgical care given in these hospitals would expand the work begun at the Ponce District Hospital. PRRA built these as reinforced concrete two-story structures in the Mission Revival Style.

The **Insular Home for Boys** was another case in point. In June 1937, after closing the former Mariano Abril and Elzabury Camps in Cayey, PRRA ceded the land to the Insular Department of Sanitation in order to temporarily move, though indefinitely, the orphanage's children and staff from the building it occupied at Stop 19 in Santurce until new facilities were built.<sup>243</sup> PRRA allotted as well, \$400,000 dollars for the construction of the new buildings.<sup>244</sup> The Insular Home for Boys was a governmental welfare institution that housed around 400 orphaned or abandoned children from the ages of seven to 18. The new architectural complex, finally built by PRRA in Guaynabo in 1938, consisted of four two-story

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<sup>240</sup> PRRA, Information Section, "La PRRA proyecta construir un Hospital moderno para tender sus obreros agrícolas," in *El Mundo* (March 23, 1936). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/01127?search=mundo> (accessed: 7 July, 2017).

<sup>241</sup> "El edificio para el hospital de Fajardo será subastado la semana próxima," in *El Mundo* (June 3, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00837?search=mundo> (accessed: 7 July, 2017).

<sup>242</sup> "El diez de julio próximo empezará a construirse el Hospital de Distrito de Fajardo, in *El Mundo* (June 11, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00845?search=mundo> (accessed: 7 July, 2017). Refer also to Blanton Winship, *Thirty-Eight Annual Report of the Governor of Puerto Rico* (Washington DC: General Printing Office, 1938), 33.

<sup>243</sup> PRRA, Information Section, "La PRRA cede al Gobierno Insular dos campamentos por tiempo indefinido para instalar el Asilo de Niños, in *El Mundo* (June 16, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00850?search=mundo> (accessed: 7 July, 2017).

<sup>244</sup> Pablo Conde, "La PRRA dota al Gobierno Insular de un nuevo 'Hogar Insular de Niños,' in *El Mundo* (October 15, 1938). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00286?search=mundo> (accessed: 7 July, 2017).

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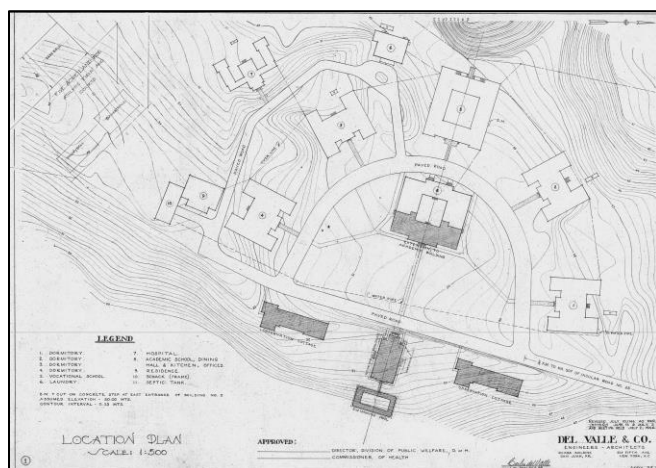
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dormitories, a two-story building for academic classrooms and a dining hall, a vocational school, and an infirmary building, all in concrete.<sup>245</sup> There, children were given elementary, as well as vocational education in electro-mechanics, carpentry, book making, shoe making, plumbing, tailoring, bricklaying, and barbering.<sup>246</sup>

Drawings, dated November 1937, place the project under the Public Buildings and Urban Housing Section of PRRA's Engineering Division, naming G. Ramírez de Arellano as senior architect. In addition, architectural documents acknowledge the Insular Sanitary Department's participation through the Bureau of Sanitary Engineering.<sup>247</sup> The buildings (now not in use) stand near Km. 507 in the Insular Road No. 25 in Guaynabo. The site plan drawing shows a panoptic plus introspective arrangement –understandable given the institutions' social control purpose– with the academic building and dining room as the central structure, occupying the highest zone of the site. Surrounding this main building, there were the four dormitories following a fan-like placement along an interior road. Directly on axis with the academic building stood the vocational school; their entrances facing one other. The infirmary and laundry buildings were placed to the southwestern corner of the site [Fig. 49].



**[Figure 49]**  
Insular Home for Boys, site plan  
Guaynabo / 1946  
Original buildings are the ones without hatch  
Original design by G. Ramírez de Arellano / 1937  
del Valle Zeno Collection, AACUPR

In the main building's first story there were a dining hall and kitchen, as well as the offices for the Home's director and staff. The second story had classrooms and offices for the school's director and his staff as well as a space for a library and public bathrooms. The original U shaped plan followed typical *Beaux Arts* arrangement *enfilade*. The open patio and building orientation facilitated the cross ventilation of the spaces while circulation was handled through arched galleries. The façade showed a tripartite-

<sup>245</sup> Miles H. Fairbanks, "Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration," *Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (1939) 367.

<sup>246</sup> Monteagudo and Escámez, "Sanitary Department," NP.

<sup>247</sup> I want to also point out the expansion to the facilities was designed in 1946 by the architectural firm of del Valle and Co. (Rafael and Carlos del Valle Zeno) for the Committee on Design of Public Works.



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symmetrical composition as patterned by the *Beaux Arts* tradition. In this instance, it featured a central shallow volume pushing forward. The remaining of the façade read as two receded pavilions flanking the centralized portion, which emphasized the entrance.

The vocational school building was square in plan. Designed around an interior courtyard, it housed classroom-shops for all the trades taught, as well as public bathrooms and several storage rooms. On the other hand, dormitories were organized in an H shaped plan. The program included bed wards as well as bedrooms for attendants and bathrooms. However, they also housed other spaces, such as storage and living room in buildings one and two; library, recreational hall, and music room in building three; and study hall and offices in building four. Surprisingly, the infirmary was no less than a miniature hospital. In its central pavilion it had rooms for a doctor and a dentist as well as a space for treatment, and operating room with scrubbing area. The program also included kitchen with pantry and a storage room. Two more pavilions, flanking the center one, housed the patients' wards with 12 beds each, nurses' stations and dormitories, linen closets, and bathrooms; all three pavilions were connected by a covered exterior gallery.

As mentioned, all buildings for the Insular Home for Boys were in reinforced concrete following the Spanish Revival aesthetic of the Mission Style. Most significant features were curved pediments; arched galleries and porticoes, terracotta roof tiles on sloping overhangs and eaves, austerity in decoration, a mostly planar disposition, and window, doors and arched openings reading as cutouts [Fig. 50-52]. Very noteworthy in these buildings was the architect's evident use of passive technology strategies in order to design within climate responsiveness paradigms. So, the Insular Home for Boys was an exercise in architecture for the tropics that puts G. Ramirez de Arellano in comparable ground to Osvaldo Toro, Miguel Ferrer, and Henry Klumb, usually underscored as premier proponents of a tropical discourse in Puerto Rican architecture.

When PRRA began to operate in Puerto Rico, education became one of the priorities in the reconstruction plan. PRRA "realiz[ed] that the success of this type of program depend[ed] on the ability to develop leadership and local responsibility."<sup>248</sup> And that could only be achieved through education. Therefore, one of the objectives of the agency supported the development of strategies to improve instruction, especially in rural areas. PRRA's vocational school program was orchestrated then, as a way

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<sup>248</sup> Miles Fairbank, "Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration," *Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (1938), 281.

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[Figure 50]

Insular Home for Boys  
Dormitory building / c. 1938  
PRRA Collection, AACUPR



[Figure 51]

Insular Home for Boys  
Infirmary building / c. 1938  
PRRA Collection, AACUPR



[Figure 52]

Insular Home for Boys  
Vocational school building / c. 1938  
PRRA Collection, AACUPR

to reinforce and expand the offer guided by the Insular Department of Education, but that had proven to be insufficient. Hence, in 1937, with a federal assignment of three million dollars, PRRA began to work with the Insular Department of Education and its Commissioner, Carlos M. Gallardo, in an ambitious plan for the construction of one thousand **school buildings**. Because of the nature of the funding, these had to be completed by June 30, 1938.<sup>249</sup>

By September, the Department of the Interior had approved the plans and PRRA was ready to begin construction of the first 50 schools; all that was needed were the sites.<sup>250</sup> The intention was to build these new units in the *barrios* that did not have a school nearby but had high school-aged children demographics.<sup>251</sup> The plan started modestly with the announcement of 89 classrooms in 46 municipalities ready to start building.<sup>252</sup> By October, there were 500 sites already selected both in rural as well as urban

<sup>249</sup> "Ya han sido seleccionados quinientos solares para la construcción de escuelas con los \$3,000,000 federales," in *El Mundo* (October 23, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00979?search=mundo> (accessed: 7 July, 2017).

<sup>250</sup> "La PRRA pidió ayer que se indiquen los sitios donde el Departamento de Instrucción desea construir las primeras 50 escuelas del plan federal," in *El Mundo* (September 8, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00934?search=mundo> (accessed: 7 July, 2017).

<sup>251</sup> "Los nuevos edificios escolares serán construidos en los centros donde sea mayor el número de los sin-escuelas," in *La Correspondencia* (September 8, 1937).

<sup>252</sup> "En cuarenta y seis municipios de la isla comenzará inmediatamente la construcción de salones escolares," in *El*

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areas.<sup>253</sup> Of course, along with the expansion of the Island's public school's program, these construction projects were to provide work to thousands of workers –10,000 according to PRRA's Regional Administrator, Miles Fairbank—<sup>254</sup> and to hundreds of teachers. Therefore, the New Deal objectives as of the reduction of unemployment kept being met.

November marked the official start of the school building plan with the construction of four units: in *barrio Jiménez* in Río Grande (three classrooms), in *barrio Río Blando* in Naguabo (four classrooms), in Comerío (two classrooms), and in Cayey (two classrooms). On November 13, PRRA's Information Section released the list of 66 schools already approved for construction in 37 municipalities. This meant approximately 124 new classrooms island-wide. Yet, by January 1938, 29 municipalities had been added to the public school-units building efforts, which PRRA informed aimed at constructing 285 new classrooms<sup>255</sup> in 169 buildings.<sup>256</sup>

According to the information available, of Puerto Rico's 78 municipalities, only in seven PRRA did not seem to build any schools.<sup>257</sup> In some, only one school unit was erected while others could have up to four. Depending on the number of school children to be served, educational units had from one up to seven classrooms.<sup>258</sup> Following the construction trends set by PRRA and the massive amount of schools projected, mostly small model types, one-story, flat roof buildings in reinforced concrete were built. Buildings consisted of a rectangular volume containing single loaded spaces for the classrooms, organized in a row. The typical two-classroom unit usually published, was a symmetrical dogtrot plan building with a centralized entrance flanked by unglazed window openings [Fig. 53]. Originally, windows were of the jalousie wood shutters type with a small rectangular glass panel above the blinds. The windows and doors had ventilation grilles over transoms.

*Mundo* (September 9, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00935?search=mundo> (accessed: July 7, 2017).

<sup>253</sup> "Ya an sido seleccionados quinientos solares para la construcción de escuelas con los \$3,000,000 federales," in *El Mundo* (October 23, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00979?search=mundo> (accessed: July 7, 2017).

<sup>254</sup> "Cuando la PRRA empiece a construir escuelas habrá trabajo para no menos de 10,000 obreros, informa Fairbank" in *El Mundo* (October 28, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00984?search=mundo> (accessed: July 7, 2017).

<sup>255</sup> PRRA, Information Section, "Adelantan numerosos proyectos de la Sección de Ingeniería Rural de la PRRA," in *El Mundo* (March 16, 1938). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00079?search=mundo> (accessed: July 7, 2017).

<sup>256</sup> "El Secretario Ickes felicita al Sr. Miles H. Fairbank por la rapidez con que se lleva a cabo la construcción de escuelas," in *El Mundo* (April 19, 1938). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/00112?search=mundo> (accessed: July 7, 2017).

<sup>257</sup> As part of the research for this historical context, I compiled a list of the schools from information provided by PRRA to newspapers, reports, photographs, books, and other resources. The municipalities which do not show any building activity by PRRA regarding public schools are Canóvanas, Culebra, Florida, Guánica, Patillas, Vega Baja, and Vieques.

<sup>258</sup> PRRA, Information Section, "Las escuelas que construirá la PRRA en la isla; dentro del plan existente podrán construirse más de 900 salones," in *El Mundo* (November 13, 1937). See <http://dloc.com/CA03599022/01000?search=mundo> (accessed: July 7, 2017).

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**[Figure 53]**

Rural two-classroom school building / c. 1938  
PRRA Collection, Puerto Rican Digital Library



**[Figures 54-57]**

Rural two-classroom school and details  
Coamo, 2017



Even if simple buildings with few ornamental details, schools had several characteristic architectural elements. First, there is the overhang extending on the façade over the door and windows. This is the only detail suggestive of the Art Deco style as it features rounded corners most visibly on the central portion over the door, which also, protrudes forward to mark the entrance. Second, below the

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eave, to each side of the door there are two apparently ornamental brackets. These introduced some variation in an otherwise typical model, as not all are identical. Third, under windows, there are brick sills courses vertically on edge. Due to ornamental considerations perhaps, the building was finished with a cornice where the designer clearly intended to take advantage of the visual possibilities of contrasting textures and materials. For example, in a two classroom building in Coamo, this is still visible. Even if the building is now painted when originally, materials seem to have kept exposed, the juxtaposition between the rusticated concrete, over the entrance, with the row of bricks filing to each side is evident. As in windowsills, bricks at the cornice are placed vertically on edge. However, where they join with the concrete band, the architect designed a subtle but elegant transition by using a quoin-like element made by stacking three bricks on bed. This detail was repeated on the building's sides [Fig. 54-57].

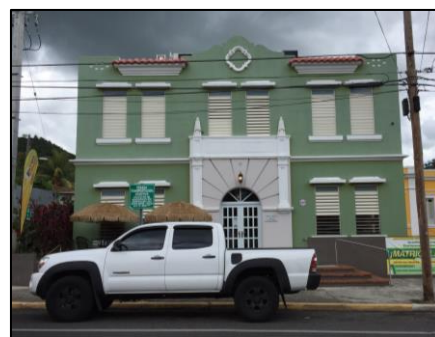
In addition to these buildings, PRRA also built larger urban schools in Arecibo (Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 30 classrooms, now abandoned), Bayamón (Agustín Stahl, 24 classrooms), Mayagüez (24 classrooms), and Caguas (vocational school, 16 classrooms), all in the Art Deco style.<sup>259</sup> The agency, as reported in official documents, frequently engaged as well, in repairs to public buildings, many of which were public schools.

As part of its collaboration with the Insular Government, and to expand on the building of public works geared to support education, housing, health, and social development, PRRA also assisted in public safety by the construction in 1938 of seven **headquarters and barracks** for the Insular Police in Aguadilla, Guayama, Arecibo, Humacao, Santurce, San Germán, and Coamo. These were part of a general police plan where \$250,000 dollars were invested in new construction. As most of PRRA sponsored buildings, these were model types with minimal variations. All were two-story concrete buildings in the Mission Style version of the Spanish Revival [Figure 58].



[Figure 58]

Insular Police standard headquarter building / c. 1938  
PRRA Collection, AACUPR



[Figure 59]

Insular Police standard headquarter building  
Coamo / 2017

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

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These buildings served as municipal Insular Police headquarters and in addition, provided a space for dormitory. The most significant architecture feature was an entrance detail composed by a syncretic-modified reredos with arch de triumph attached to the façade. This detail marks an archway as main and only entrance to the building on facade. From the impost, over the semicircular part of the arch and from its center point, radiate a series of striations, which make the entrance detail read as if they were keystones in a masonry arch. At the impost point there is a concrete molding. From it two short pilasters appear to rest on either side of the archway with a receding paneling detail. These pilasters read as if they hold what appears as a thick cornice or architrave. The detail was finished by a couple of concrete finials, which extended towards the second story. A belt cornice highlights the line of transition between the first and second floor on the facade. As an example of the Mission Revival Style, the façade showed as well, a curved pediment. The pediment included a molding quatrefoil detail, which was repeated as motif for windows on side elevations in the first and second stories. Flanking either side of the central curved pediment were cornice fragments adorned with terracotta roof tiles. All windows have simple overhangs and sills. Of course, given the function of social control inscribed in their function as police stations, even if relatively small, these are buildings with a clear monumental character [59].

In addition, to the ones described, other projects PRRA considered donations to the Government of Puerto Rico were: a Home for the Aged in San Juan; repairs to the Home for the Poor in Ponce; a two-story sanatorium in Río Piedras; a two-story administration building with auditorium for the Leper colony in Trujillo Alto; a dormitory for girls in the Institute for Blind Children; and an annex to the Insular Home for Girls. For the Army, PRRA built a building for the Weather Bureau and the Offices for the Naval Station in Puerta de Tierra. In terms of industrial buildings, documents show a corn mill and a cotton mill in Isabela funded by PRRA, a cannery in Arecibo, and the Pilot Plant for the Institute of Tobacco at the Experimental Station in Río Piedras.

This historical context does not include projects outside its focus such as the hydroelectric plants, the cement plant, recreational projects, and conservation projects in colonial buildings and structures such as the barracks of Santo Domingo, the old Artillery (*Parque de Artillería*), the old Charity Asylum (*Asilo de Beneficencia*), and repairs to a portion of the City Wall behind Casa Blanca.

### **Conclusion**

PRRA's construction projects may be the first efforts carried as a strategic physical modernization of Puerto Rico through island-wide-multi-type public works. Many of the accounts given by the agency, inscribed them within a modern discourse as several documents highlight their experimental and scientific approach to problem solving. That translated into rationally devised buildings, which followed the idea of efficiency and economy as standards. Significantly, these efforts focused mainly on the Island's rural areas where, the intention to substitute native materials and construction methods –as they were considered primitive–, with modern, more permanent and hygienic ones, such as concrete, may be interpreted as an initiation in the introduction of a new vernacularism. Certainly, PRRA's programs constitute the first time serious attention was given to solving the problems of the Island's poorest. Consequently, they were the

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first attempts by the Federal Government to outline a comprehensive plan towards the social and economic advancement of their Caribbean colony. However, this was not solely an altruistic concern.

Even if a claim cannot be made for the introduction of new stylistic registers on the Island by PRRA, the mere bulk and conception of specific building types as repeatable models, suggests these projects were at the time recognizable landmarks within rural and/or urban Puerto Rican landscapes. By the 1930s, what architectural historiography terms the Modern Movement already had icons and a specific recognizable vocabulary—as discussed by Henry Russell Hitchcock and Phillip Johnson in the 1932 MoMA exhibition and book titled *The International Style*. However, this aesthetic was rare in PRRA projects. With the information available it is not possible to determine if the scarce projects which leaned toward the International Style vocabulary did so because of a conscious expressive intention on the architects' part or simply because their elemental straightforwardness defaulted on said aesthetic. Be that as it may, PRRA acknowledged a preference for a “modernistic style” which was never strictly defined in narratives and for Spanish Revival.

On one hand, Architect Robert Alexander González argues that in order to foster closer relations to Latin American countries, the United States carved for itself a “Latin” identity as they argued on a shared heritage.<sup>260</sup> Architect Enrique Vivoni, on the other hand, suggests that the Spanish Revival in Puerto Rico accepts a dual reading as proponent of a Hispanic cultural identity and/or a tool for Americanization.<sup>261</sup> Both, González and Vivoni's opinions are inscribed in a historical context, which geopolitically, supported Pan-Americanism as a strategy for the US to maintain control over the region. Let me underscore that the Spanish Revival was a style introduced in the Island by the United States government. A style that originally, architects' working in Puerto Rico were opposed to, as they did not find it suitable for Puerto Rican architecture.<sup>262</sup> So, in many respect the Spanish Revival was synonymous with the American (colonial) Government in Puerto Rico.

Art Deco, as it is known, derived from ornamental designs used in some of the pavilions in the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, held in Paris in 1925. During the Depression, a particular version of the Art Deco style, commonly known as *Modern*, developed in the United States. However, some historians have called it PWA Deco, PWA Modern, or Depression Modern in order to describe a specific shift from earlier solely ornamental capricious interpretations linked to

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<sup>260</sup> See Robert Alexander González, *Designing Pan-America: US Architectural Visions for the Western Hemisphere* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).

<sup>261</sup> See Enrique Vivoni Farage, “La arquitectura de la identidad puertorriqueña,” en Enrique Vivoni Farage y Silvia Álvarez Curvelo (eds.), *Hispanofilia: Arquitectura y vida en Puerto Rico, 1900-1950* (San Juan: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1998).

<sup>262</sup> See Enrique Vivoni Farage, “Lo francés en nuestra arquitectura: Legitimidad y dignidad profesional en Puerto Rico (1900-1918),” en Enrique Vivoni Farage and Silvia Álvarez Curbelo (eds.), *Ilusión de Francia: Arquitectura y afrancesamiento en Puerto Rico* (San Juan: Archivo de Arquitectura y Construcción de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1997).



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Hollywood fashion.<sup>263</sup> As Martin Greif maintains, during the 1930s, responsive to the economic crisis, there grew a new attitude in architecture. Depression Modern was then, an expression –an antithesis, actually– of the complex times revealed as “an art stripped bare of all ornamentation...built for just one purpose: to work, and to look as though they worked... and with objectives of...efficiency, economy and right appearance.”<sup>264</sup> However, it was much more, as its designers intended to produce a truly modern American style. So, what better architectural vocabulary to evoke –and instill– the idea of modernity within an American construct?

Although PRRA was officially liquidated in 1955, its time of intervention was shorter. Congress ended funding in 1940, but PRRA continued to administer several projects which had not been passed along to the Insular Government. During World War II, the *Reports of the Secretary of the Interior* (1941-1945) highlighted PRRA’s aid in the war efforts, especially with maintenance of the Island’s food supply as US food imports were drastically reduced.<sup>265</sup> Indirectly, PRRA met emergency war conditions as well, since the Cement Plant it funded and built in 1937 directed more than two thirds of its production – roughly, 300 daily barrels– toward Army and Navy projects. In addition, many farmers were moved in order for homesteads to be used by the Army and the Navy.<sup>266</sup>

Progressively, funding for PRRA became ever so scarce that it relied on what was left of its revolving fund and other allocations conferred by the President. In fact, the last projects built by PRRA took place in 1939. So, from 1940 onward, the agency did not engage in any construction projects of relevance. In 1943, the newly created Committee on Design of Public Works (CDPW) projected to take on most insular public works, including those for rural areas. Although further research is needed in order to substantiate this position, arguably, the Committee on Design on Public Works may be recognized as a continuation of PRRA. This is so, because of the parallelisms in scope and even in project conception they both shared. This should not surprise as Rexford Guy Tugwell, the New Deal reformist who was instrumental in the design of the Island’s economic reconstruction, was appointed Governor of Puerto Rico in 1941; the Committee was his brainchild.

PRRA’s architecture was envisioned as crucial in the construction of modern scenarios where new Puerto Ricans could be molded by specific visions of citizenship and progress drawn by the United States. Furthermore, it should be underscored the obvious intention on the part of the US to use Puerto Rico, and the New Deal projects developed by PRRA, as a tool to foster allegiances with Latin American

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<sup>263</sup> See Daniel Prossner, “The New Deal Builds: Government Architecture during the New Deal, “ in *Timeline* vol. 9, no. 1 (1992) 40-54 and Martin Greif, *Depression Modern: The Thirties Style in America* (New York: Universe Books, 1975).

<sup>264</sup> Greif, 31.

<sup>265</sup> See Harold Ickes, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office) for the years 1941 to 1945.

<sup>266</sup> Guy Swope, “Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration” in Harold L. Ickes, *Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1942), 276.



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countries. As a new anti-imperialist and anti-interventionist outlook in international politics developed under the rubric of the Good Neighbor Policy, Puerto Rico became a key factor in showing the “friendly face” of the US. As such, PRRA projects mark the beginning of Puerto Rico’s transformation into the *bridge between the Americas* and the *showcase for democracy*. Concepts eventually consolidated as tactics for hemispheric allegiances after World War II.

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**Outlook on Property Types and Significance**

Differing from the norm in the United States, the administration of the New Deal programs on the Island was set under the umbrella of a single agency: the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRRA). This Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) considers PRRA's architectural production in Puerto Rico as it extended to the rural and urban areas, reaching almost the whole Island. As in the United States, architectural property types associated with the New Deal vary according to programs' objectives and buildings' functions.

Research conducted on PRRA –of which most significant findings are included in Section E of this MPDF– supports a national historic context. The impact of the New Deal in the Nation's political, economic, and social history, which extended to some of its territories and island possessions, cannot be contested. Further, decisions on colonial administration directed from a domestic policy making and enforcing agency –the Department of the Interior– as well as the shift in international politics –namely, the Good Neighbor Policy– point to PRRA projects as strategies in a national political agenda designed to impact international relations for the specific economic and political gains of the United States. This MPS will provide additional information on the significance of previous listed of properties to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) where the New Deal aspect was omitted, or not fully considered –such as the nominations for *El Falansterio*, the *School of Tropical Medicine*, and the *Tower and Quadrangle of the University of Puerto Rico*. It is understandable if at first glance researchers lean toward nominations of properties associated to this MPDF with a state level optic. No doubt, their impact on the Island may seem most evident. However, PRRA was part of a national liberalist agenda for reform that changed the way the United States dealt with its citizens and its colonial subjects and the architecture associated to it should highlight such facts accordingly.

Individual nominations stemming from this MPDF most likely will focus on buildings. As stated in the National Register Bulletin titled *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, eligible PRRA buildings “must include all of their basic structural elements.... The whole building must be considered, and its significant features identified.”<sup>1</sup> However, districts nominations are also plausible. Districts, as explained in the Bulletin, are composed of various resources that draw up a particular identity and a unifying character in an identifiable historic organization or in retraceable functional relationships. Districts should also justify significance by their importance.<sup>2</sup> With further research, rural developments in Lafayette, and Castañer, but most especially in La Plata, may be nominated as historic districts. Any of these would continue to amplify the stance of the Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office in committing to a true inclusive Register, given the trend of postmodern research interests leaning toward

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<sup>1</sup> See US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register Bulletin, “How to Define Categories of Historic Properties.” In *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, [https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15\\_4.htm](https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15_4.htm) (accessed: 24 June, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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topics relating to *difference* and/or the marginalized subject. As such, for Puerto Rico, rural properties or those associated to lower social classes gain significance when trying to draw a complete and symmetric historical map, which takes into account the histories of the *others* and their architecture. Furthermore, archaeological study of former PRRA Camps' sites, for example, may provide substantial information in order to consider one or more future site nominations to the NRHP. Although this MPDF did not consider infrastructure, with additional research nomination of structures might also be included in the Register in the future.

As supported by the research carried by this author, areas of significance for PRRA properties under this context cover agriculture, architecture, community planning and development, conservation, economics, education, engineering, health/medicine, industry, politics/government, and social history.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, properties eligible for the National Register under this context include architectural types exemplifying functional categories such as:

**domestic:** single dwelling, multiple dwelling, institutional housing, camp, and village site;

**commerce/trade:** organizational;

**social:** meeting hall;

**government:** correctional facility;

**education:** school, trade or technical school, college, research facility, and education related;

**recreation and culture;**

**agriculture/subsistence:** cannery and processing site;

**industry:** manufacturing facility;

**health care:** hospital, clinic, and sanitarium;

**defense:** armory and naval facility<sup>4</sup>

In addition, significance for properties within this MPDF fit under Criteria A and/or C. Following

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<sup>3</sup> See US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register Bulletin, "Data Categories for Areas of Significance," Statement of Significance. In *How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*, [https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb16a/nrb16a\\_III.htm#statement](https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb16a/nrb16a_III.htm#statement) (accessed: 24 June, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> See "Data Categories for Functions and Uses" in Ibid.

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the guidelines set by the Register, properties associated with single important events, with repeated activities, or gradual trends within this submission will accept nomination under Criterion A.<sup>5</sup> As such, nominations of properties under this MPDF must represent PRRA's/New Deal's policies, and/or their historical, political, economic, social, or other associated contexts. Within this criterion emphasis should be given to the ways in which buildings show PRRA's outlined policies for economic and social reconstruction as well as the New Deal reformist ideals. So, their political, economic, and social context as driver for such policies will need underscoring.

Architectural or engineering values must be considered under Criterion C.<sup>6</sup> In buildings within PRRA's scope, nominations must contemplate the resource's form, styles, building techniques, artistic value, architectural identity, etc. Under this context these will be resources that embody specific or distinctive architectural styles associated to PRRA or the New Deal era such as Spanish Revival, Art Deco, Moderne, PWA Deco or Depression Modern. For properties associated in this MPDF within Criterion C, technical construction aspects regarding materials and techniques demand central consideration. Issues of style and design must certainly emphasize certain aspects of variability within a standard, as these are the single most recognizable characteristic of most PRRA buildings. So, one noteworthy consideration regarding Criterion C within this context must drive the importance of standardized type design and the tendency within PRRA for site adapted typical models' repetition and economy of space. On the other hand, especially when nominating rural types, focus should be given to building materials as PRRA intended to propitiate a change in the rural landscapes' aesthetics through a shift toward stronger, more permanent buildings in concrete. In addition, aspect of the use of unskilled labor should be underscored as unrefined details or less than perfect construction techniques are part of these properties' significance. Also, there is the aspect of design for the tropics, which introduced distinct spatial and building considerations into the theme of New Deal architecture.

As discussed in Section E of this document, PRRA was organized in divisions. These may be helpful in navigating decisions regarding areas of significance in individual nominations. Of course, several elements of significance might need to be considered in order to convey a comprehensive map of a property's historic value. For example, projects overseen by PRRA's Rural Rehabilitation Division, such as rural vocational schools, encompass aspects of agriculture, architecture, economics, education, engineering, industry, and social history. Projects guided by the Slum Clearance Division in urban areas, however, draw significance due to their architecture, community planning and development, and social history. Projects undertaken by the University Buildings Division, most likely need to be assessed from their architecture, engineering, political, educational, and social history aspects.

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<sup>5</sup> See "Areas of Significance," Statement of Significance in Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

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**General Registration Requirements**

Properties eligible for nomination under this context must have been designed, funded, and/or built by PRRA between the years 1935 to 1943. This eight-year period begins with the creation of PRRA by Presidential Executive Order and ends with the year of foundation of the Committee on Design of Public Works. The creation of the Committee acknowledged an end to PRRA's public works involvement at the same time as it might be considered a continuation of sorts through a new insular agency. As discussed in aforementioned section, PRRA began to experience a reduction in funding that tightened during World War II. So, even if on paper PRRA existed until 1955, the fact of the matter is that operation started to decline much earlier.

Projects of infrastructure, recreation, as well as interventions, repairs, and/or building expansions (with exception of the School of Tropical Medicine or work done by PRRA in buildings of their authorship or stewardship) are not considered under this MPDF.

Over the years, some PRRA properties have been remodeled or added to. These may still be eligible for the Register under this context if the alterations are not adverse to PRRA's original architectural character. However, if the addition or expansion conceals or renders illegible defining PRRA architectural, design, or ornamental features, it is unlikely the property remains significant under this MPDF. Yet, as some houses, for example, were designed with expansion in mind, in the case of rural domestic architecture alterations might be justifiable under Criterion C because these were contemplated in their original conception. These decisions, however, must be made on a case by case basis, as the property must still retain enough dominant elements and features to continue to render it recognizable, at first glance, as a PRRA architectural example.

**Significance Summary:**

As contemplated through this MPDF:

1. Given the New Deal connotations and the impact it had on the Nation's historic, economic, social, and political development as well as the scope of the US colonial administration policies, all nominations associated with this context should be considered under a national level significance as they showcase specific aspects of the United States national history without discarding their impact on the Island's historic, political, economic, and social contexts.
2. Future nomination supported by this context most likely will be buildings and districts.
3. Areas of significance for PRRA properties cover agriculture, architecture, community planning

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and development, conservation, economics, education, engineering, health/medicine, industry, politics/government, and social history.

4. Properties eligible for the National Register under this context include architectural types exemplifying functional categories such as: domestic, commerce and trade, social, government, education, agriculture and subsistence, industry, healthcare, and defense.
5. Shared by all properties, as they were built under PRRA, is a common significance under Criterion A. As such, nominations supported by this context will highlight important events, repeated activities, and/or development of trends. For projects under this MPDF this translates into nomination of properties representative of PRRA's policies, decisions on, and outline of New Deal reformist intentions and economic reconstruction.
6. Resources that embody specific or distinctive architectural styles associated to PRRA or the New Deal era such as Spanish Revival, Art Deco, Moderne, PWA Deco or Depression Modern, should address significance under Criterion C. As one of PRRA's goals was to reduce unemployment through work relief, justification of significance under Criterion C for properties under this context include unskilled labor and might emphasize unrefined craftsmanship. In some cases, the introduction or experimentation with new building materials and construction methods will need consideration. Criterion C will also accept PRRA's use of standardized building plans and/or model types, as well as adaptations of local architectural and/or building patterns.

**Aspects of Integrity**

In order to be eligible for nomination to the NRHP, properties under this MPDF must retain historic integrity in order to be able "to convey its significance."<sup>7</sup> The National Register recognizes seven aspects of integrity, a combination of most of which must be present in properties associated with PRRA in order to be considered for nomination. Those are: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. PRRA projects must be filtered through these physical features in order to assess value as defined by the Register. Most crucial for properties associated to this MPDF are the aspects of design, materials, and workmanship as these relate directly to criterion of significance C. In the case of PRRA buildings, integrity tied to location should not present a problem as no buildings have been moved. Setting, however, might become a critical aspect in some rural projects when faced with some areas' development and modernization. Finally, the ways in which these aspects connect and relate to each other will define a PRRA's property *feeling* and *association*.

<sup>7</sup> See US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register Bulletin, "How to Evaluate the Integrity of a Property." In *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, [https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15\\_8.htm](https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15_8.htm) (Accessed: 24 June, 2017).

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According to the National Register's guidelines, the "location of a historic property, complemented by its setting, is particularly important in recapturing the sense of historic events and persons."<sup>8</sup> Some physical contexts of the properties associated with this MPDF will present some variation from their original setting, however, consideration need focus in their keeping of readable rural contextualizing elements, for those in the countryside. With regards to setting, nominations supported by this MPDF should consider how much of the original character and aesthetic presence of the property remains in elements such as vegetation and fencing as well as the relationship between buildings and other elements such as roads or natural landmarks in the general landscape.

The National Register defines design as the "combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property."<sup>9</sup> Therefore, original organization and conception should still be recognizable within the property. As mentioned before, for PRRA projects, alterations should not hinder from the readability of original design concepts such as spatial relations, sequence, scale, as well as proportion, style, massing, arrangement of elements on facades, ornamentation, and such. In order for nomination of properties within this MPDF to the National Register, any alterations should be minimal or reversible. Additions adversely affecting design will render a property not eligible to the NRHP. However, as mentioned earlier, exceptions justified through research could be considered for rural dwellings as these were originally designed with expansion in mind. Another exception should recognize alterations and/or additions by PRRA in buildings designed or built by the agency. Again, I should point that this context did not consider expansion projects, aside from that of the School of Tropical Medicine, nor repairs done by PRRA in existing buildings. Further, focus should be given to design driving theories or approaches such as the scientific method to problem solving and experimentation as these were fundamental in PRRA's development of architectural objects.

PRRA resources can be simple utilitarian buildings or grander, monumentally intended, architecture. However, due to budgetary restrictions in the agency, samples of the latter are fewer. In addition, given that colonial architecture tends to more austerity than their metropolitan counterparts, PRRA properties tend to be, in general terms, simpler than US New Deal architecture. Most PRRA buildings preferred symmetry, however a few architectural types, such as dispensaries and some single-family dwelling tend to more functional organizations in an asymmetrical ordering. Style-wise, PRRA buildings run the gamut from Spanish Revival to versions of Art Deco such as the Moderne and the PWA or Depression Modern. Arguments can be made in some instances in favor of an International Style. In addition, there were also adaptations of vernacular patterns, especially in rural housing. Reinforced concrete was almost universally used, as one of PRRA's objectives was to provide hurricane and earthquake sound structures. Ornament in PRRA buildings tend to be simplified and limited to polychrome glazed terracotta in some of the more monumentally inspired Spanish Revival buildings –such as the cases

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

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for the University of Puerto Rico and the School of Tropical Medicine— and the occasional striation favored in Moderne and/or PWA Modern versions of Art Deco. However, cornices and moldings appear more regularly in some buildings types as character features.

A property eligible to the National Register will retain its exterior materials. However, “if the property has been rehabilitated, the historic materials and significant features must have been preserved.”<sup>10</sup> In line with this, workmanship must still evidence the labor skill level and express the construction methods originally used in the property. New Deal intentions as managed through PRRA were to provide the most jobs possible. So, building construction often specified the most labor-intensive hand methods. Properties encompassed under this context, as already stated, were mostly built in reinforced concrete. It is unlikely that samples in wood remain today, as field research has been inconclusive to that regard. However, workmanship, as noted earlier, should represent the unskilled quality of the workers. Hence, rusticity, imperfection, and unrefinement, are extremely relevant in PRRA’s properties and somewhat define projects’ aesthetics. Include here the quality of construction materials such as bricks, and some details, which were produced, as well, by unskilled workers using craft techniques. Consideration should be given also, to the experimental materials and techniques introduced by PRRA especially for rural housing.

Properties must express the sense of the period of time represented by them. The National Register calls this integrity defining character, *feeling*.<sup>11</sup> In essence, the combination and level of the elements that define integrity are of utmost important to convey the specific “historicity” or recognizability of a PRRA building as such. For properties under this MPDF the relation between design (standard type in versions of Art Deco or Spanish Revival), material (reinforced concrete and/or polychrome glazed terracotta), workmanship (unskilled or craft), location (original site), and setting (rural or urban, still reflecting some aspect of the original function and environment) are fundamental to convey the feeling of a PRRA building. Demolition or new development surrounding a property may compromise its integrity of setting. However, for PRRA architecture this will be most critical when evaluating rural resources, which were defined in part by their natural landscape. In addition, association, as that which provides a link between the historic event and the property, under this context must consider the repetition of standardized architectural types. Association can be conveyed, as well, through the function of the buildings as they link to New Deal programs through PRRA.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



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Summary on Integrity

As contemplated by this MPDF, considerations for integrity should acknowledge the following:

1. **Location:** This aspect of integrity should not present problems as no properties seem to have been moved from their original sites.
2. **Setting:** Consideration should focus on the readability of original context elements like surrounding features such as vegetation, fencing, and relationships to other objects, buildings, and/or landmarks.
3. **Design:** Best cases will retain original organization and conception through form, plan, space, structure, and style. PRRA preferred styles –Spanish Revival, versions of Art Deco, and in some cases, International Style– should be recognizable and retain original features and details. Standardization of architectural types and repeatability should be considered as factor of integrity for most PRRA buildings. For properties under this MPDF consideration should be given to design driving theories or approaches such as the scientific method to problem solving and experimentation. In some cases climatic adaptability or “tropical design” should be considered when assessing value through integrity of design.
4. **Materials:** Most properties will feature reinforced concrete, as this was the main material of choice for PRRA. However, future nominations of properties in wood or other experimental construction materials such as rammed earth, masonry, and brick are plausible under this context. Ornamental details will most likely be in polychrome glazed terracotta and/or concrete, although in some specific cases brick was also introduced as a decorative addition highlighting the character of the material.
5. **Workmanship:** New Deal and PRRA objectives were to reduce unemployment. Therefore, work relief through public works was a strategy undertaken by the Federal Government for economic and social stabilization in the United States and in Puerto Rico. Most likely, construction workers for PRRA projects were not skilled, and so, workmanship should convey imperfection and an unpolished quality. Unrefined craftsmanship may also appear in some materials and their application, as may be the case with brick houses.
6. **Feeling:** The expression of the period, New Deal, and PRRA objectives and strategies should be conveyed through the combination of the integrity values listed above. In essence, what makes a PRRA building as such can be summarized as: a standard type building most likely repeated, most likely in reinforced concrete featuring either Spanish Revival or a version of Art Deco –in few instances International Style– with unskilled or craft workmanship standing

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in its intended site within an urban or rural setting still reflecting some aspects of original function and environment.

7. **Association:** For properties associated to this MPDF some development and/or demolition of contextual settings should be acknowledged. Integrity through *association*, as *feeling*, is derived from the assessment of the previously listed value aspects. For properties within this context most critical in regards to *association* will probably be rural resources as part of the original natural landscape might be now lost. However, for PRRA properties, repetition of a standard architectural type as well as building functions should be looked upon as associative elements between the historic context and the property.

**A[n] [Incomplete] Brief on Architectural Types**

Associated to PRRA, under the limits set by this context, two general property types are recognized: buildings and districts. Before this research, there had been no previous architectural survey of PRRA properties. The compilation of a project's list required the revision of many documents in various repositories. Most useful were the PRRA Photographs Collection available online through the Digital Puerto Rican Library (University of Puerto Rico), the *El Mundo* newspaper, digitally available through the Caribbean Newspapers Collection at the Digital Library of the Caribbean, and the *Reports of the Secretary of the Interior*, available online through the Hathi Trust Digital Library. This author was able to compile a comprehensive list of PRRA buildings, however it is not complete by any means as it is very difficult to pinpoint some of the rural projects with only a reference to the *barrio* where a school or a few dwellings were located. Also, in many instances information is contradictory or projects were announced in weekly reports but ultimately never built. The standardize character of the building strategy tackled by PRRA, also makes it challenging to ascertain a complete and fair listing of properties. Be that as it may, several were located and visited as field research was also undertook in several municipalities such as San Juan, Aguas Buenas, Aibonito, Ciales, Barranquitas, Comerío, Orocovis, Toa Baja, Vega Baja, Humacao, and Yauco.

Detail property descriptions are included in Section E of this MPDF. However, as required by Section F, narratives on significance and integrity for each associated type are listed below.

**\_ Districts**

Most probable to be nominated as districts are Lafayette, Castañer and La Plata. Specifically, La Plata seems to maintain most integrity aspects and so, Registration requirements for nomination. As stated in Section E of this document, Lafayette, Castañer, La Plata, Zaldondo and Saint Just were conceived as **model rural neighborhoods** within the Rural Rehabilitation Division of PRRA. These were model villages for rural resettlement as translated from the utopian idealist visions of the New Deal. My recommendation leans toward the future nomination of La Plata as historic district. Set around the

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original Reconstruction Camp (dismantled), La Plata originally had a Central Service Farm, which catered to the 461 subsistence plots with small houses settled there. Still remaining from the original scheme are the vocational school, the dispensary building, the community center building, and several of the houses. Feeling and Associational aspects are still present as well as the integrity valuations required by the Register regarding location, setting, design, workmanship, and material. As district, La Plata's significance falls under Criteria A and C. Context covers agriculture, architecture, community planning and development, conservation, economics, education, engineering, health/medicine, industry, politics/government, and social history.

In an urban setting, *Juan Morell Campos* and *Eleanor Roosevelt* Suburban Development in Ponce and Hato Rey respectively, may be considered for nomination as urban districts. Both should be assessed under Criteria A and C regarding significance. However, issues of integrity of design may need justification as in both suburban developments most dwelling units have had some architectural intervention in the forms of expansions and remodeling. Most obvious in both cases will be the addition of garages and bedrooms. Associational issues might also arise in *Eleanor Roosevelt* as some of the original houses now hold commercial functions. However, generally, both *feeling* and *association* remain mostly intact in both developments. Given the original intentions to develop an almost self-sufficient community with certain popular cultural characteristics, in *Eleanor Roosevelt* efforts should be made, if an intention for nomination arises, to include intangible aspects along with the tangible contexts usually defined.

\_Buildings

For nominations of properties to the National Register under this MPDF will mostly fall under the building category. As discussed in Section E, PRRA's architectural types were diverse and run a spectrum of civic, educational, social and recreational, institutional, medical, industrial, research, military facilities and housing. Let me clarify that for accurate assessments of industrial and some institutional buildings, further research is required. What follows then, are the building types as they correlate to the historic context developed in Section E of this document.

A. Government Buildings

police stations:

Police Stations served as municipal Insular Police headquarters and in addition, provided a space for dormitory. Buildings were standardized reinforced concrete types in the Mission Style version of the Spanish Revival. Ornamental details seem to also be in concrete. Today, PRRA built police stations may not hold their original function. However, given they were urban buildings, location and setting should remain somewhat intact. Integrity of design needs to be evaluated against possible interior alterations to the original organization of the plan. For most buildings in this category integrity of material

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and workmanship should remain recognizable. In most cases, alterations to the exterior appearance such as the replacement of original windows should be reversible. Nominations of police stations most likely will be justified under Criteria A and C.

**B. Educational Buildings:**

vocational schools

Vocational Schools were the cornerstone of PRRA's objective for the education of the rural masses in a trade or craft in order to guide a projected diversification of work that could eventually stabilize the economy by ensuring a steady possibility of labor. PRRA vocational schools were inscribed in a rural setting. They were reinforced concrete standard model buildings repeated in several Puerto Rican municipalities. Classrooms and workshops were organized around a central courtyard surrounded by arched galleries as circulation devices. Most noteworthy are the angled cornered arches that represent a simplified Art Deco detail in these buildings. Most likely, vocational schools would be nominated under Criteria A and C. In most cases, the association and feeling aspects of integrity as well as the ones pertaining to location, setting, design, material, and workmanship will be mostly present. Most alterations should be reversible if they only represent changes in architectural elements such as windows and doors. To be eligible for the Register, PRRA vocational schools must retain its educational function and its recognizable rural setting. It is also possible that settings now show additional components in the form of other buildings nearby. For nomination, these should not obscure any of the recognizable characters of the original PRRA building.

rural school

Rural Schools were built by PRRA for the Insular Department of Education. These were small simple concrete buildings housing from one to several classrooms in a row composition. As other PRRA buildings, these were standard school models repeated in several municipalities. Criteria A and C are the likely contexts of significance. As for integrity, the aspects of workmanship, design, and material are most crucial. When assessing these buildings, attention should be given to ornamental and detailing features, especially to windowsills and cornices, which should retain the original bricks. Important integrity-wise for this type are setting and association, as new buildings might have been included later within the site.

urban schools

Urban Schools built by PRRA are not standardized models. As such, each one will need

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individual assessment and further research in order complete the general context provided by this MPDF. These are for the most part, larger buildings, usually for ten classrooms and over. Built in concrete, these will most likely feature Art Deco styling. As all others buildings associated to PRRA, nominations will be justifiable through Criteria A and C. As outstanding architectural samples, most critical will be issues of integrity pertaining to design, materials, and workmanship. Setting and location should maintain integrity in most cases as will, feeling and association, especially for examples that are still functioning as schools.

**C. Social and Recreational Buildings:**

community centers

Social and recreational activities guided by PRRA social workers were carried in these buildings. Information available is not sufficient to render a complete list. However, they were an important piece in the objectives of modernization and new habituation of the peasant population and of slum dwellers. Evidently, further research should be conducted in order to gain a better perspective on this type. This author has been able to acknowledge buildings in reinforced concrete and wood. However, it is unlikely that the latter are still in use. Also, depending on where they are located, this type might be included as one of the architectural pieces in the nomination of a district because the relational aspects of the community center were intrinsic to its context and its function. As with most PRRA architecture, these too should be considered under Criteria A and C regarding significance. On aspects of integrity, setting, design, and association are most crucial. As it is unlikely most are still functioning as community centers, integrity by association might still be maintained if the current use is community driven or related.

**D. Institutional Buildings:**

University Buildings

School of Tropical Medicine

PRRA buildings connected to the University Buildings Division as well as the School of Tropical Medicine are already part of the National Register of Historic Places. However, revisions to those nominations should be conducted in order to strongly convey their associations to the New Deal and PRRA. This context supports a national level significance. Aside from revisions to the contexts under Criteria A and C, for both the Tower and Quadrangle of the University of Puerto Rico as well as for the School of Tropical Medicine, research to support significance under Criterion B might further enhance their historic value.

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**E. Health Care Buildings:**

dispensaries

PRRA's dispensaries were small rural buildings in reinforced concrete. For many municipalities they represent the first attempt to include Puerto Rico's peasant masses into a comprehensive program of public health. As many of PRRA's types, these were standardized models repeated in several rural locations. Usually, these buildings were associated to the rural school or to the vocational school. So, the issue of setting regarding integrity is most important and careful consideration must be given to the recognizability of said relationship. Design, materials, and workmanship should remain mostly intact acknowledging, however, some reversible elements added, such as new windows, doors, and iron grilles and gates for security. Feeling is maintained through architectural style, material, and exterior design. But, association through functionality might have been lost in most instances. As with most PRRA architectural types, significance should be justifiable under Criteria A and C.

hospitals

PRRA designed and built a hospital in Lafayette as well as collaborated with four district hospitals for Arecibo, Bayamón, Aguadilla, and Fajardo. The hospital in Lafayette might be included if a nomination for a historic district is ever justified. As for the district hospitals, there might also be severe issues adversely affecting integrity. Notwithstanding, most critical to support will be setting, design, workmanship, and association.

public health units

Public Health Units were small reinforced concrete buildings built for the Insular Department of Sanitation in the Spanish Revival Style. As most PRRA buildings these are standard models with variations. Significance is supported through Criteria A and C. These are urban buildings. Therefore, location and setting should be intact. For nomination purposes attention should be placed on aspects of design as material and workmanship should retain integrity. In most cases, however, some attempts at remodeling or restoration should be carefully studied in order to determine individual levels of integrity. Feeling is most likely maintained in most instances, as almost all examples are recognizable as a PRRA building. However, some are being used for functions others than the original.

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**F. Housing**

multifamily, multistory block

*El Falansterio* or Tenement Group Project A, as it was originally called, is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. However, this context supports its revision for the same reasons stated previously regarding the University of Puerto Rico and the School of Tropical Medicine. The original nomination of *El Falansterio* does not focus on its association to PRRA or the New Deal. However, these are important aspects under Criterion A which supports a higher valuation regarding its importance and level of significance on the National Register. In addition, Criterion C may also be amplified by including arguments on the scientific method of problem solving and the rational approach to design, which are not touched upon in the original submission. In fact, correctly justified, *El Falansterio's* nomination may be amended without problems as a national level property.

single detached house

duplex

row house

Single detached houses conformed pivotal pieces within the slum clearance projects as well as in the rural resettlement efforts. Duplex dwellings and row houses are model types included in projects such as *Eleanor Roosevelt* and *Juan Morell Campos*. *Mirapalmeras* and *La Granja*, were essentially housing subdivisions using row houses as organizing element. So, most likely, these housing types will be included in district nominations. Therefore, the location, setting, and association aspects of integrity are most crucial. However, design, material, and workmanship, should be considered carefully as these would be the aspects of integrity most affected by remodeling in individual cases. Yet, as stated before, in rural dwellings, as the issue of expansion was considered from conception, properties can still be suitable for nomination even if intervened if they retain feeling and association aspects which still render recognizable patterns linked to PRRA. As with other types, most probably, houses will admit significance through Criteria A and C.

Insular Home for Boys

The Insular Home for Boys was a government welfare institution that housed orphaned or abandoned children. It was a multiple building complex with dependencies built in reinforced concrete within the Mission Style version of the Spanish Revival. Nominations will most likely be based on Criteria A and C regarding significance. The Insular Home for



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Boys underwent further expansion in the 1940s under the Committee of Design of Public Works. This work, mostly affecting the original academic and dining hall building, done by the firm of Carlos and Rafael del Valle Zeno is also, of historical significance. So, for the Register, consideration should be given to both instances –the original buildings by PRRA and the intervention by del Valle Zeno, under contract for the Committee. So, the aspects of setting, feeling, and association are crucial regarding the assessment of integrity. In addition, integrity of design should be carefully weighed. Integrity of material and workmanship should be mostly intact.

As can be gathered, resources related to PRRA include a broad array of resource types. Properties include large public buildings with monumental flair as well as small-standardized buildings seeking to provide more with less. Given the enormity of PRRA's work in Puerto Rico, this author focused her resources in gaining a well-documented grasp on the agency's foundational and operational context and on the major programs developed by PRRA in order to tackle the Islands economic and social reconstruction. That translated into a catalog of standardized building types which comprise what may be considered the bulk of its building activity. However, I recognize the need for further research on infrastructure, industrial, and institutional individual projects in order to complete a panoramic view of PRRA's works.

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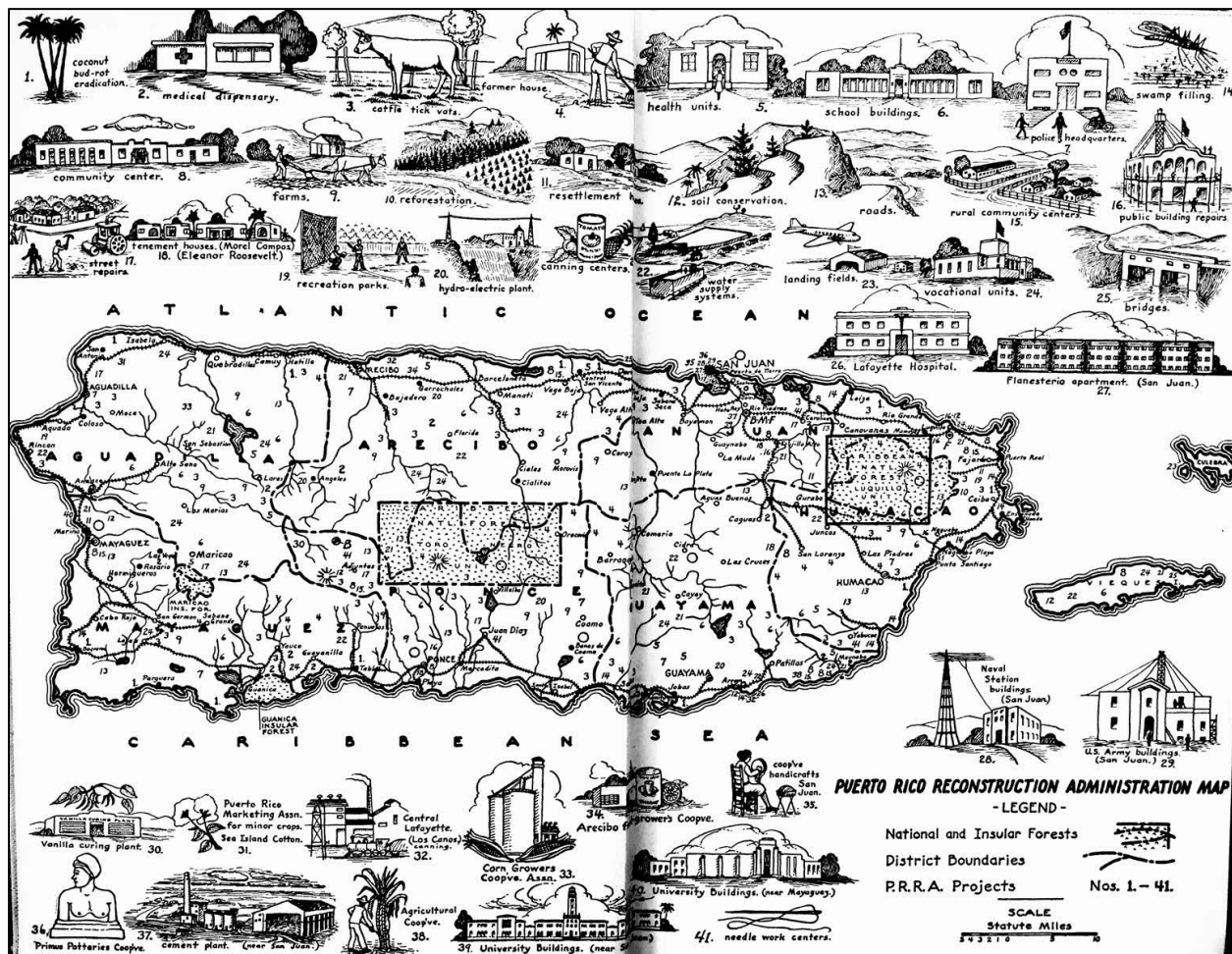
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Geographical Data

The area included in this Multiple Property Submission encompasses the territory of Puerto Rico with all its municipalities, including island municipalities of Vieques and Culebra.



[60]

Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration Map  
Drawing by: John Morgan and William Schuhle  
*Puerto Rico Unsolved Problem* (1945)

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Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

The Multiple Property Nomination titled *The Scenarios for the New Deal: The Architecture of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration [PRRA] (1935-1943)* focuses on the historic background and significance of the architecture designed, built and/or funded by this New Deal agency. The objective was to provide a broad context for the evaluation of built resources associated with PRRA as the representative and administrative arm of the New Deal in Puerto Rico –at the time, a United States’ colony. In order to prepare this context, this author reviewed other National Register Multiple Property Submissions, such as *New Deal-era Resources of Kansas*,<sup>1</sup> *New Deal Resources on Colorado’s Eastern Plains*,<sup>2</sup> and *New Deal Resources in West Virginia State Parks and State Forests*.<sup>3</sup> Helpful as well, was the document titled *The New Deal Builds: A Historic Context of the New Deal in East Kentucky, 1933 to 1943*, sponsored by the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet and the Kentucky Heritage Council.<sup>4</sup>

The content in this MPDF is based on archival research and bibliographic revision conducted from November 2016 until June 2017, as well as limited field survey managed during the month of April 2017 in Puerto Rico. Research became challenging from mid March onward, due to a student’ protest, that closed various repositories of the Río Piedras campus of the University of Puerto Rico. These repositories had most resources available on PRRA. However, this author had copies of several crucial resources from previous research. In addition, a good part of the documents reviewed in order to assemble PRRA context were available on-line through international digitization initiatives. Without the availability of these archival resources that use technological and digital platforms as mediums the completion of this work would have been seriously delayed.

PRRA resources include a variety of building types broadly distributed across the Island. Prior to the research for this MPDF, there was no list of PRRA associated properties to speak of. However,

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Rosin, Jon Taylor and Cathy Ambler (Historic Preservation Services), *New Deal Era Resources of Kansas* (National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, 2002). In [https://www.kshs.org/resource/national\\_register/MPS/New\\_Deal\\_Era\\_Resources\\_Kansas\\_mps.pdf](https://www.kshs.org/resource/national_register/MPS/New_Deal_Era_Resources_Kansas_mps.pdf) (Accessed: April 25, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Deon Wolfenbarger (Colorado Preservation Inc.), *New Deal Resources on Colorado’s Eastern Plains*, (National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, 2005). In [http://www.historycolorado.org/sites/default/files/files/OAHP/crforms\\_edumat/pdfs/649.pdf](http://www.historycolorado.org/sites/default/files/files/OAHP/crforms_edumat/pdfs/649.pdf) (Accessed: April 25, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Lena L. Sweeten (Gray and Pape, Inc.), *New Deal Resources in West Virginia State Parks and State Forests* (National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, 2010). In <http://www.wvculture.org/shpo/nr/pdf/cover/6451099.pdf> (Accessed: April 25, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Rachel Kennedy and Cynthia Johnson, *The New Deal Builds: A Historic Context of the New Deal in East Kentucky, 1933 to 1943* (Kentucky: Kentucky Heritage Council and State Historic Preservation Office) 2005. In <http://www.heritage.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/F142A86E-19C0-4FFD-8097-09474F37C9EF/0/NewDealBuilds.pdf> (Accessed: April 25, 2017).

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assembling a comprehensive list of PRRA properties, which could guide future field research under this context, was critical. As this author's Masters thesis dealt with PRRA's urban housing projects,<sup>5</sup> I was already familiar with the geographical scope and multiplicity of architectural types encompassed under the agency's work portfolio. During research in 1994, I uncovered PRRA's collection of negatives in an old file cabinet in the University of Puerto Rico General Library's photographic studio. That collection was later transferred to the Puerto Rican Collection on the Library and digitized for online access through the Puerto Rican Digital Library (*Biblioteca Digital Puertorriqueña*, <http://bibliotecadigital.uprrp.edu>). The Puerto Rican Collection also had a series of 1950's volumes (then not catalogued) with compilations dating all newspaper headlines pertaining to PRRA from 1935 to 1941 (Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration and Welfare Association of PRRA Employees, *Efemérides de la PRRA, La PRRA según la prensa puertorriqueña*).

Those primary resources, including the Puerto Rican newspaper *El Mundo* were very valuable, as were the *Reports of the Secretary of the Interior*. These are available on-line through the Caribbean Newspaper Digital Library (<http://dloc.com/cndli>) and the Hathi Trust Digital Library (<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/004761459>), respectively. *El Mundo* published weekly or biweekly reports supplied by PRRA's Information Section on the evolution of the agency's work. From these sources, as well as the *Golden Album of Puerto Rico* (1939) –available on-line through the library of the University of Turabo (<http://ut.pr/biblioteca/elibros/librodeOro/>) and Miles Fairbank's publication on PRRA titled *The Chardón Report and the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (1934-1954)* (1978) a remarkably comprehensive list could be compiled. This was tedious work demanding many hours of reading and the revision of almost every issue of *El Mundo* from September 1935 to December 1940.

As sometimes a project was announced but finally it was not built, PRRA photographic collections in the Puerto Rican Collection at the University of Puerto Rico –available on-line through the Digital Puerto Rican Library– as well as PRRA, *El Falansterio*, University of Puerto Rico, Rafael Carmoega Collection, and the del Valle Zeno Collections at the Architecture and Construction Archives in the School of Architecture at the University of Puerto Rico (AACUPR), Río Piedras Campus, were invaluable to discern which projects were actually completed. They were also very useful for integrity evaluation of current building conditions. At the AACUPR there are also digitized images and articles from the cultural and social magazine *Puerto Rico Ilustrado*; specifically, those related to architecture. This facilitated the search for PRRA information within said resource. Also helpful, was the digitization of the public works journal *Revista de Obras Públicas de Puerto Rico* undertaken by the Puerto Rican Collection of the University of Puerto Rico and available on-line through ISSU. Further, the collection of negatives from the Farm Security Administration, available on-line through the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Catalog, have several images

<sup>5</sup> Refer to Luz Marie Rodríguez, *New Deal Communities for Puerto Rico: The Urban Housing Projects of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration*, Master of Science in Architecture Thesis, Mississippi State University, 1994 (Michigan: Thesis International) 1996.

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important for the development of the properties' list as well as for visual information on PRRA's history and overall context. Also of value, are the photographs from 1940 to 1950 in the Mennonite Collection, as they document some PRRA properties in Aibonito and Cayey. A copy of the collection may be consulted at the Luis Muñoz Marín Foundation in San Juan.

For the historic context detailed in Section E of this MPDF, the research methodology focused on primary and secondary resources on PRRA and the New Deal in general. The fact that in Puerto Rico the New Deal was encompassed under one single agency certainly facilitated the task of research. However, in order to compare PRRA programs with those guided in the United States by multiple bureaucracies, secondary sources such as *The Encyclopedia of the Great Depression*, edited by Robert S. McElvaine (2004) and Jason Scott Smith's *A Concise History of the New Deal* (2014) were most useful.

In terms of the 1930s political context and the New Deal in Puerto Rico Thomas Mathews' *Puerto Rican Politics and the New Deal* (1960) is still the best reference. Notwithstanding, Secretary of the Interior, Harold L. Ickes' (*The Secret Diary of Harold Ickes, vols. I and II* (1954)), and Ernest Gruening's (*Many Battles: The Autobiography of Ernest Gruening* (1974)) autobiographies are enlightening as far of their particular take on the Puerto Rican political context as both, first Gruening, and then, Ickes were PRRA's Washington heads. In addition, newspapers were great resources in tracking specific developments within PRRA's political context as issues on the Island were extremely politicized and each party had at the time its own press outlet. However, given that PRRA generally used *El Mundo* newspaper as its official platform for outreach and information release, preference was given to this resource during the analysis and synthesis portions of this research.

Newspapers were extremely important in order to gather projects' specific aims and scopes. In addition, as mentioned before, the *Reports of the Secretary of the Interior* were vital, specially to weigh the importance of PRRA projects within the national outlook, as from 1936 until 1950 the work of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration was singled out as separate section in the Report. Another important resource, as it uncovers the internal turmoil in PRRA administration is former regional head, Miles Fairbank's publication on *The Chardón Report and the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration, 1934-1954* (1979). In addition to these, there are PRRA's account of their work published in 1939 as *Rehabilitation in Puerto Rico: Being an Outline of the Origins, of the Functions, and the Accomplishments of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration* and a few annual reports.

Regarding 1930s Puerto Rican economic context, James Dietz's chapter on "The Thirties: Crisis and Transformation" in his *Economic History of Puerto Rico: Institutional Change and Capitalist Development* (1986) is the obligated source. In the same vein, Leonardo Santana Rabell's analysis on planning in Puerto Rico, includes a required reading in the first chapter of his book, *Planificación y política: un análisis critico* (1989), titled "El Nuevo Trato y los orígenes de la planificación en Puerto Rico." Also, important within a historiography of PRRA is the brief analysis on

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“The Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration as a Continuation of the PRERA” in Manuel R. Rodríguez’s *A New Deal for the Tropics: Puerto Rico during the Depression Era, 1932-1935* (2010).

As pointed out in Section F of this Multiple Property Nomination, architectural resources associated with PRRA include a variety of building types. Following National Register’s categories for function they can be listed as: Domestic (single dwellings and multiple dwellings, institutional housing, camps); Government (police stations); Education (schools, vocational schools, college, research facility, education related); Social and Recreation and Culture (community centers); Agriculture/Subsistence (cannery, food processing); Industry (manufacturing facility); Health Care (hospitals, clinic); Defense (naval facility).<sup>6</sup> Because of the colonial nature of Puerto Rico/US relations at the time, many documental resources pertaining to the Island are currently housed at the National Archives and Records Administration. Such is the case for PRRA records, codified as Record Group 323. However, as research progressed this author did not deem it necessary to pursue any content review on said archival fund as this MPDF pursued a general overview on context which could be more than adequately built with the multiple primary and secondary sources available in Puerto Rico and in the United States through distance access. Notwithstanding, individual nominations linked to the context contemplated under this MPDF most likely will require archival resources, such as architectural drawings, deposited at the United States’ National Archives in New York.

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<sup>6</sup> United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*, “Functions or Use” in [https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb16a/nrb16a\\_III.htm](https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb16a/nrb16a_III.htm) (Accessed 3 July, 2017).

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Library of Congress, Photographs and Prints Collection (Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black and White Negatives) in <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/fsa/>

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: COVER DOCUMENTATION

Multiple Name: Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration MPS

State & County:

Date Received: 8/3/2018 Date of 45th Day: 9/17/2018

Reference number: MC100002933

Reason For Review:

<input type="checkbox"/> Appeal	<input type="checkbox"/> PDIL	<input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue
<input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape	<input type="checkbox"/> Photo
<input type="checkbox"/> Waiver	<input type="checkbox"/> National	<input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary
<input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission	<input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource	<input type="checkbox"/> Period
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> TCP	<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years
	<input type="checkbox"/> CLG	

☒ Accept ☐ Return ☐ Reject 9/17/2018 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: The Cover provides an excellent context for this unique New Deal agency and supports its important impact on the built fabric of the island. The registration requirements are not the best, but the property types are identified, significance is established, and baseline requirements are given.

Recommendation/ Criteria: Accept cover

Reviewer Jim Gabbert

Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2275

Date \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments: No see attached SLR: No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.





GOBIERNO DE PUERTO RICO  
Oficina Estatal de Conservación Histórica  
State Historic Preservation Office



July 23, 2018

## Joy Beasley

Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places  
National Register of Historic Places  
1849 C Street NW (Mail Stop 2280)  
Washington, DC 20005

**SUBMISSION - El Cortijo, Barranquitas / The Architecture of the  
Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration [PRRA] (1935-  
1943), Islandwide**

Dear archaeologist Beasley:

The enclosed disks that contain the true and correct copies of the nomination form for El Cortijo; Barranquitas and the multiple property documentation form for The Architecture of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration [PRRA] (1935-1943); Islandwide, to the National Register of Historic Places. Additional documentation related to both submissions is also included.

Should you have any questions on the nomination, please contact Elba Díaz, Executive Assistant, at 787-721-3737, ext. 2003 or [ediaz@prshpo.pr.gov](mailto:ediaz@prshpo.pr.gov).

*Sincerely,*

Carlos A. Rubio-Cancela  
State Historic Preservation Officer

CARC/GMO/BRS/JEM/SG

