

PUERTO RICO

A Commonwealth of the USA



Article excerpt by Dr. Antonio Grillo-Lopez



Calle San Sebastian

On the 19th of November 1493, Christopher Columbus discovered the island of Puerto Rico. San Juan was already a city in the early 1500s. One of the first universities in the New World was founded there. Puerto Rico remained under Spanish rule and was granted autonomy in the late 1800s. During the Spanish American War, the US defeated the Spanish Navy in the Pacific and the Atlantic. The American fleet then proceeded towards Puerto Rico. The 5,000 defenders surrendered to the U.S. landing force of 15,000. Thus, in 1898, Puerto Rico became a colony of the USA.

The Foraker Act of 1900 made Puerto Ricans "citizens of Puerto Rico, entitled to the protection of the US". In 1917, congress passed the Jones Act granting US citizenship to all persons born in Puerto Rico. In 1950, congress enacted Law 600 that recognized Puerto Rico's right to self-rule and authorized the organization of a government based on a constitution drawn up by Puerto Ricans. The constitution creating the "Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico" (Commonwealth of Puerto Rico) was effective on the 25th of July 1952. Since then, Puerto Ricans have elected their own governor, cabinet members, and congress. Puerto Rico elects a "Resident Commissioner" in Washington who sits in congress (and can be a committee member) with voice but no vote. Puerto Ricans can vote in the US elections if they reside in the continental US. However, they cannot be candidates for the presidency of the US if they were born outside the continental US.

Puerto Ricans have contributed as citizens of the US in many different ways. Did you know that the first shot of World War I (by the US) was fired by a Puerto Rican serving in the US Army, Colonel Teófilo Marxuach, in Puerto Rico?

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