

Sunday, September 5.

10.30 a.m. A walk through Muiderberg to Petit Manoir-House, where a glass of wine has been served by Mr. and Mrs. A.I.J.M. Schollart, offered by the Foundation of Castle Records.

At hotel HET RECHTHUIS

14.30 p.m.

Mr. Whitney Smith, Winchester: AN INTRODUCTORY OF PUERTO RICAN FLAGS

Puerto Rico presents somewhat of a problem to the vexillogologist. A small island, its population barely exceeding two and a half million, Puerto Rico has not been independent since its discovery by Columbus in 1493 and previous to that date it was inhabited by primitive Indian tribes. Yet even a brief examination of the history of Puerto Rico reveals that it has flown numerous flags and that most of these flags have become the focal points for political disputes. The rich heritage of flags and the rôle they play in the politics of the island both provide topics worthy of a full and scholarly investigation. Much of the preliminary work in such a direction has been undertaken by the present author during the three weeks he spent in Puerto Rico (in 1962 and 1965), but the material outlined here is by no means exhaustive and it should serve rather as a spur to further researches than as a definitive study.

As a working hypothesis which may be used to test the meaning of the facts adduced concerning Puerto Rican flags, the proposition which seems best to characterize the subject posits that political symbols in Puerto Rico (both flags and coats of arms) constitute today and for at least a century have constituted a kind of "political barometer" by means of which it is possible to understand the temperament of the people on such questions as nationalism, unity, loyalty to the colonial power, and respect for indigenous culture.

Although different kinds of political symbols have been used in Puerto Rico, the flags of the military units, cities, Governors, and even of the political parties pale in importance beside the "national" 1) flag and coat of arms. Primary consideration will consequently be given to this flag and its predecessors; but this requires at least a superficial review of the history of Puerto Rico. Following the Spanish discovery of the island, large numbers of Africans and Spanish established settlements and the present socio-cultural environment. Puerto Rico remained a colony of Spain for 405 years since the revolutions which freed the rest of Latin America in the early 1800's never reached the isolated Caribbean isles of Puerto Rico and Cuba. The fate of the two were closely tied in the 19th century: revolutions in both in 1868 failed and both were "liberated" by the United States during the Spanish-American War (1898). Cuba, however, became independent in 1902 while Puerto Rico was held to be both unprepared politically and educationally and incapable economically to attain this status. During the 1930's pressure from the nacionalistas, who favored independence, forced moderates to propose statehood (hence their name, estadistas) as an alternative. Both positions were defeated at the polls in 1948 when Luis Muñoz-Marín was elected Governor on the Popular Democratic Party ticket. Under his leadership the present régime, known as a Commonwealth (Estado Libre Asociado), was instituted on 24 July 1952. The Commonwealth constitution in brief allows for internal self-government by Puerto Rico but U.S. control over foreign affairs, armed forces, coinage and commerce, and certain other areas.

Under the Spanish régime there were few local flags distinguishable from the regular military, naval and royal flags of Spain. The exceptions, however, are important since Puerto Ricans obviously could not feel loyalty to the emblems of a power which they were trying to overthrow. The earliest local flag of which there seems to be any record is the one accorded to Diego Ramos as part of a coat of arms, dating from 21 September 1546. The description is "una bandera verde é colorada, orlada de oro" 2) — a green and red flag bordered in gold. 3)

Prof. Aurelio Tió reconstructs this as a flag of green over red horizontal stripes with the gold castle and lion of Spain on the green over a white cross (extending to the edges of the field) on the red. 4) I rather think it may have had the lamb of St. John on green over the gold castle on red (of Castile), if any emblems were used at all; and surely the gold border must be included. The question remains rather academic as we have no proof the flag was actually used by Puerto Rico, as Prof. Tió himself admits. 5)

The next flag associated with Puerto Rico was hoisted during the revolt at Lares on 23 September 1868. The original flag, captured by the Spanish when the revolt was crushed, is now on display at the University of Puerto Rico Museum in Rio Piedras. It consists of a white cross and the four rectangles formed by it, blue at the top and red at the bottom. The blue rectangle in the upper hoist bears a large 5-pointed star of pale yellow. 6)

The design, created by Ramón Emeterio Betances and sewn by Mariana ("Brazo de Oro") Bracetti, is strikingly similar to two other flags -- the national flag of the Dominican Republic and the flag hoisted by the Cubans in their unsuccessful revolt of 10 October 1868 at Bayamo. 7)

This is accounted for by the close ties which were maintained by Cuban and Puerto Rican revolutionaries at this time and the sojourn of a number of them in the Dominican Republic.

A third flag of importance was the bandera de matrícula (registry flag) which was flown on Puerto Rican ships to indicate which Spanish province they were from. For the people, who had no flag of their own, the functional usage was quickly replaced by a nationalist sentiment and the flag was displayed in the 1890's as a distinctive Puerto Rican flag. The design was a bicolor of red over white horizontal stripes with a triangle cut from the fly. The same flag, but in a rectangular form, was later used by the Liberal Party and the colors were subsequently adopted by the Popular Democratic Party.

By far the most important flag is the one designed in the 1890's, used by the nacionalistas and others in the 1930's, and finally made the official Commonwealth flag in 1952. La banderita, as it is affectionately called,

consists of five equal horizontal stripes, alternately red and white, with a 5-pointed white star on a blue triangle whose base forms the hoist of the flag. This flag is held in high regard by the Puerto Ricans of all political beliefs and is frequently seen flying over even the poorest of homes. The flag ranks second to the United States flag on all public buildings and is not flown at all on Federal property or on ships visiting the island. It is clear, however, that it ranks first in the hearts of the people: it flies from ferry boats, before fire stations, on business firms, and in offices. The Constitution 8) even provides that a law changing the design of the Puerto Rican flag shall not take effect until one year after the first general election following the adoption of the law. The regulations for displaying the flag are fully as elaborate as those pertaining to the United States flag. 9)

The origins of the flag are in dispute, claims having been put forward for two different designers, Manuel de Besosa and Antonio Vélez Alvarado. On certain essential points the two tales are in agreement, namely that the design was inspired by that of the Cuban flag (since the Puerto Rican rebels continued to work closely with their Cuban compatriots), that the design was created in the 1890's, and that it was officially adopted on 22 December 1895. Moreover, both men were heroes of the struggle for independence and both were reputed to have had a Puerto Rican "Betsy Ross" make the first copy.

Besosa's story was, quite simply, that he designed the flag immediately before the 1895 meeting at which it was presented by Juan de Mata Terreforte to the Sección Puertorriquena del Partido Revolucionario de Cuba in New York. His daughter, Mina de Besosa, sewed the first flag. Vélez Alvarado's story, which seems first to have been published in 1927 in La Correspondencia de Puerto Rico, places the date of the conception of the flag as 11 June 1890 or 1891. (His ambiguity over the exact year is one of the factors counting against the plausibility of his story.) He claimed to have had a momentary case of dal-

tonism in which the red and blue colors of the Cuban flag over his desk were interposed in his view. This new design was then made up into an actual flag by Micaela Dalmau de Carreras and sent to Dr. Betances, creator of the Lares flag, who favored it over his own. Unfortunately, the letter from Betances to this effect has never been found and ultimately Alvarado's story rests on his own assertions unless new evidence is found.

To solve the question is a problem beyond the scope of this report 10) for it seems possible that either one might have been the original designer. (In the 1930's the historian Roberto Todd Sr. presided over a meeting of the historical association at which Besosa's claims were pronounced true; his book is the best documentation of both sides. 11) Far more important is the rôle of the dispute itself in Puerto Rican history. In as much as the flag in question was and is recognized as the flag of Puerto Rico by all parties, the exact nature of its symbolism becomes an important question. Thus to say that Alvarado, a nacionalista, was the creator is to affirm the revolutionary heritage of the flag; while to promote Besosa, a republicano (one who supported U.S. rule; the spiritual ancestor of a modern estadista), is to assert that the flag is distinctively Puerto Rican but not at all anti-American. Fortunately for Puerto Rico the dispute over this and related questions have been within the framework of a system that only a few reject completely and under a flag that all accept. To have created a new flag when the Commonwealth was set up would indeed have been dangerous politically, because the old flag could then have rallied to itself all those elements inimical to the Commonwealth concept. As one politician expressed it at the time, the nacionalistas had nothing but a flag and now Munoz has taken that from them. The coat of arms of Puerto Rico has also been subject to dispute, although it has not evoked the same impassioned debates and the disputes with the authorities 12) that the flag produced. Puerto Rico has the distinction of possessing the oldest coat of arms still in use in the Western Hemisphere 13). The original grant was made in 1511 and the arms have been in use ever since, except for the period 1901-1905. The dispute arises therefore

with regard to the design of the arms, rather than their propriety as the official Puerto Rican emblem. Lacking an illustration from 1511, historians throughout the succeeding 450 years have given many interpretations to the written description. The most important versions are the three that have been used by the government from 1898-1901, 1905-1958, and since 1958. As in the question of who designed the Puerto Rican flag, it will be necessary in determining the correct form of the coat of arms to undertake considerably more research than has so far been done and there is no guarantee either problem can be solved.

In general the other political symbols used in Puerto Rico are unimportant to most people. During the American administration a Governor-General's flag (white with the seal of Puerto Rico in the center) was adopted, but it does not seem to have been used since 1952. Consideration is being given to a suggestion by the present author that a square banner of arms of Puerto Rico be used by the Governor. City flags are being designed by the Instituto de Cultura on the basis of the municipal arms and the wishes of the town fathers. So far the only ones adopted are those of Mayagüez (green over blue horizontal stripes), Ponce (red over black horizontal stripes; the colors are those of the municipal fire station!), and Caguas (a blue flag with a saltire formed by six intersecting yellow strips which recall the arrows of St. Sebastian, patron saint of the local church). San Juan has a flag which is supposed to have been sanctioned centuries ago, but which was officially adopted only in 1948 (4). It is orange with the arms of San Juan in the center.

Puerto Rican political parties are modelled more on the ideological lines of European parties than on the pragmatic electoral coalition system found in Britain and the United States. Thus the party flags symbolize the principles of the different parties and one sees such flags flying even in years when there is no election. The great number of parties (and youth movements) precludes more than a mention of the more prominent ones. There are three traditional political groupings which over the years have formed the basis for the parties -- the republicanos or estadistas who favor close cooperation with

and eventual assimilation into the United States; the nacionalistas and independentistas who favor freedom for the island; and the Liberals (now the populares) who want a middle course of semi-autonomy. Quite logically, the estadistas have used the U.S. colors in their flag of three horizontal stripes (blue-white-red). The Popular Democratic Party has a jíbaro (Puerto Rican peasant) wearing his paya (straw hat) and surrounded by the motto "Pan-Tierra-Libertad" (bread-land-liberty) all in red on a white field. The Independentistas have employed the colors of the Puerto Rican coat of arms in constructing their flag -- a white cross on a green field 15). This reliance on a local symbol recalls various flags used or proposed by nationalist groups in the past 16). To the left of the Independence Party is the Movimiento Pro Independencia, a small party which uses a horizontal red over black flag with a 5-pointed white star on the top stripe near the hoist, a design similar to the flag used by Fidel Castro's 26th of July Movement in Cuba 17). The outlawed Communist Party has a flag like the Puerto Rican flag, except that 1) the stripes are blue as well as the triangle, 2) there is no star, and 3) there are white fimbriations between the blue stripes and triangle 18). The flag is remarkable in being probably the only Communist flag in the world without any red in it. The only other Puerto Rican party of note is the Christian Action Party established in 1960 by the Roman Catholic Church to promote its interests in government. It has a flag utilizing the colors of the Vatican flag (yellow and white) and of the Virgin Mary: the initials PAC and a bell to call the people to action appear in blue on a vertical white stripe flanked by narrower yellow stripes. Until a law was passed forbidding the use of religious emblems by political parties, the design in the center of the party flag consisted of the monogram of Christ (E) surrounded by a rosary.

Even this brief outline of Puerto Rican flags makes evident certain fundamental points about the political and cultural life of the island. Heavily influenced by Spanish and then United States ways of life, Puerto Rico has for at least a century sought to assert a personality of its own. Although the outside influences remain

apparent, Puerto Rican symbols are a focal point for indigenous culture and political self-assertion. In the 1800's the goal of independence (symbolized by the star in the flags) was asserted, albeit under the influence of other Latin countries. Following the American occupation of the island, loyalty tended to adhere to the flag which the Commonwealth adopted in 1952; yet the sentiments attached to the flag varied from nationalist to autonomous to conservative as exemplified by the disputes over the flag's origin. Now that the flag question has been deemphasized by its official status, interest has centered on related questions of flag etiquette, the design of the coat of arms, and on the creation of city flags. Thus an appreciation for the flags of Puerto Rico would seem to be a desirable if not absolutely necessary prerequisite to an understanding of the political life of the island.

NOTES

1. Officially, the design is known simply as "the flag of the Commonwealth" (Act No. 1, 24 July 1952).
2. Aurelio Tió, Nuevas Fuentes para la Historia de Puerto Rico, (San Germán: Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico, 1961), p. 526.
3. "Orla" is the Spanish heraldic term for border, not for orle.
4. Tió, op. cit., p. 527 and plate opposite p. 608.
5. Ibid.
6. The star is universally referred to as being white, but the author has examined the original flag and is satisfied that on at least this copy the star is pale yellow.
7. For the latter flag, which was the same as the present Chilean national flag but with the red and blue reversed, see Enrique Gay-Calbó, Los Símbolos de la Nación Cubana, (Havána: Sociedad Colombista Panamericana, 1958), pp. 61ff.
8. Article VI, Section 15.
9. See Reglamentos de Bandera...del Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico, (San Juan: Departamento de Estado, 1962).

10. It is hoped that eventually this report may be expanded into a full-length book which will treat this subject.
11. Roberto H. Todd, La Genesis de la Bandera Puertorriquena, (San Juan?: Fernandez, 1938).
12. During the 1930's the use of the Puerto Rican flag was frowned on by the U.S. administration and the nacionalistas frequently were arrested for using it in a manner conducive to civil disorder.
13. The oldest arms are those granted to Hispaniola which are no longer used.
14. See F.M. Zeno, Historia de la Capital de Puerto Rico, (San Juan: Gobierno de la Capital, 1959), Vol. II, pp. 207-220.
15. The design, but not the colors, are the same as the national flag of Sweden.
16. The nacionalista party flag, for example, used the cross of Jerusalem from the Puerto Rican arms.
17. This flag has the white star in the center and usually has the dividing line between the red and black running diagonally.
18. The flag is shown in Communist countries, but never in Puerto Rico.

14.55 p.m.

M. Pierre Lux-Wurm, Paris: LES DRAPEAUX DE L'AMERIQUE
ESPAGNOLE

L'ensemble des républiques que l'on réunit sous le nom commun d'Amérique Espagnole offre une très grande variété de drapeaux. A première vue, il est difficile de distinguer, dans cette abondance apparemment incohérente, qu'il existe, en réalité, des centres de rayonnement et des lignes d'évolution bien définies. Ces drapeaux, loin de ne représenter que des choix divers rattachés à des particularités nationales, reflètent des développements politiques parfois en rapports les uns avec les autres. Nous allons tâcher d'en dégager une brève synthèse et nous ferons appel, naturellement, à l'histoire de ces pays pour nous aider à éclairer le sujet.