Reports on the Ponce Massacre: How the U.S. Press Protected U.S. Government Interests in Puerto Rico in the Wake of Tragedy

by

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Yo dedico este trabajo a mis padres Ana Pérez y Carlos Rubén Rodríguez. También a todos los puertorriqueños que han perdido sus vidas en las manos del Estado.
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Introduction

“[P]ropaganda is to democracy what violence is to a dictatorship.”

On September 23, 1868 Puerto Rican revolutionaries declared the creation of an independent Republic of Puerto Rico in a failed rebellion against Spanish colonial rule that was later called El Grito de Lares or the Cry of Lares. Many Puerto Ricans celebrate this day as one of the most important events in the history of the movement for Puerto Rican independence. Exactly 137 years later, on September 23, 2005, a well-known advocate for Puerto Rican independence, Filiberto Ojeda Rios, was shot and killed by an FBI agent. Ojeda Rios was actively involved in the Puerto Rican independence movement since the 1960s. As one report recounts:

In 1967 he [Ojeda Rios] founded and led the Armed Revolutionary Independence Movement. He was later a key organizer with the FALN, the Armed Forces of National Liberation and then the Boricua Popular Army, also known as the Los Macheteros. The FBI considered Ojeda Rios a wanted fugitive because of his ties to a $7 million bank robbery in 1983 in Connecticut. He had been living underground for 15 years.

A group of FBI agents broke the gates to his home in the mountainous area of Homigueros, Puerto Rico, where Ojeda Rios had led a quiet life with his wife, Elma Beatriz Rosada Barbosa. There are conflicting reports on whether Ojeda Rios or the FBI agents began the gunfire, but the Office of Inspector General’s (OIG) 2006 report claims that Ojeda Rios “fired 19 rounds, 8 of which struck FBI agents. One agent was

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3 Ibid.
wounded seriously in the abdomen. The FBI agents fired approximately 104 rounds
during the initial gunfight, none of which struck Ojeda.\textsuperscript{4} Next, the OIG report claims
that there was a standoff in which Ojeda Rios’ wife surrendered, but he refused to do
the same. Finally, “At 6:08 p.m., an FBI agent who was about 20 feet away saw
Ojeda through a kitchen window with a gun in his hand. The agent fired three shots,
one of which struck Ojeda. Several agents heard Ojeda cry out and fall.”\textsuperscript{5} Following
these shots, the FBI allegedly waited over 18 hours until they allowed anyone—
including any medical help—into Ojeda Rios’ house.\textsuperscript{6} This caused the leader to slowly
bleed to death from an injury that could have been successfully treated with proper
medical attention.\textsuperscript{7} Many, including Ojeda Rios’ wife, claimed that the FBI fired first
and that the leader acted in self-defense.\textsuperscript{8} However, the FBI had a different story:

Armed with a federal arrest warrant, the agents contend that they found the
fugitive armed. “He started the whole thing. He fired first and wounded an
agent,” said the FBI's Special Agent in Charge Luis Fraticelli. Ojeda Ríos's
widow, Elma Beatriz Rosado Barbosa, who was briefly detained by agents at
the house and then released, has countered that the FBI contingent entered
the house firing. Apparently the bureau contemplated neither Ojeda Ríos's
surrender nor his survival. The wounded agent was airlifted to a hospital.
Ojeda was not. Special Agent Fraticelli said the FBI “feared explosives might
be present in the house” and waited eighteen hours after they shot Ojeda Ríos
for “fresh agents to arrive in a flight from Quantico to attempt a tactical
entrance to the hideout.”\textsuperscript{9}

The OIG report would later state: “We found that the senior FBI officials who
ordered the delayed entry believed that the concerns about agent safety outweighed

\begin{itemize}
\item[5] Ibid.
\item[6] Ibid., 3.
thenation.com/doc/20051024/jimenez>.
\end{itemize}
Ojeda’s need for medical attention.”\textsuperscript{10}

Most Puerto Ricans, of various party affiliations, denounced the shooting and even the then pro-commonwealth governor of Puerto Rico demanded an investigation. As political analyst Félix Jiménez put it:

Puerto Rican independence leaders termed the FBI intervention “a shameful spectacle, an unconscionable show of force” against the popular hero, but on this politically divided island even hard-line statehood advocates such as Resident Commissioner Luis Fortuño, along with pro-Commonwealth Governor Aníbal Acevedo Vilá, have aggressively chastised the FBI for its "highly irregular" procedures. The governor formally asked Washington for a thorough internal investigation and vowed to conduct his own.\textsuperscript{11}

Thus even political leaders who did not support independence, posed tough questions against the federal government about this assassination. This is the kind of complex relationship that many Puerto Ricans have with regard to the independence issue and one which I discuss throughout this work; the importance of this event is related to the research that I document and critically analyze in this thesis.

In another ironic and revealing twist, that fateful day for Ojeda Ríos was not the first time that he had a skirmish with the FBI, and not the first time that fellow Puerto Ricans came to his defense. In August of 1989, Ojeda Ríos was on trial for shooting and assaulting FBI agents.\textsuperscript{12} In his closing argument, acting as his own attorney, he stated:

> You heard several members [of the FBI] tell you how much they feared for their lives when they heard shots. They, who came attacking, bombing, shooting, breaking down doors, shattering windows…They with all their experience as members of a unit that specializes in assault operations, say that

\textsuperscript{10} Office of Inspector General, 3.
\textsuperscript{11} Jiménez, October 7, 2005.
they were afraid. And I, alone with my wife, listening to their screams and
deafening blows, their shots, their battering and destruction…, [they] in their
ware uniforms with their weapons and painted faces—I was not supposed to
fear for my life. I was not supposed to do anything to defend my wife’s life, or
my own. This is typical of oppressors. The oppressed are never supposed to
think and act according to our own human nature, because for them, we are
not human! And much less should we, according to their mentality…have the
audacity to prevent their abuses, attacks, and assassinations.13

As the authors points out, “[t]he prosecutor had been appointed by President Reagan,
the judge by President Carter, and the American flag stood in the courtroom, but the
jury was Puerto Rican.”14 This jury, in a unanimous decision, “found Ojeda Rios
innocent of all charges, including even illegal possession of weapons. It was the first
time in history of federal prosecutions that a defendant successfully claimed self-
defense after shooting agents of the FBI.”15 This case is not an isolated incident. In
my research I have identified two other cases where all the Puerto Ricans in a jury, if
not already an all-Puerto Rican jury, unanimously decide to acquit pro-independence
advocates charged with violent acts. Below, I will discuss this kind of history
juxtaposed against the fact that the officially recognized body of the Puerto Rican
independence movement, the Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño (PIP) or Puerto
Rican Independence Party, has maintained little support in terms of popular votes. For
now, I want to point to the ways in which the U.S. media failed to adequately and
accurately report on these kinds of incidents.

As with many major events on the island, the 2005 murder of Ojeda Rios was
widely reported in the Puerto Rican press while barely visible in U.S. newspapers. I

13 Filiberto Ojeda Rios, quoted in ibid.
14 Kunstler and Kuby, ix.
15 Ibid., x.
was intrigued by the idea that fellow U.S. citizens would not be aware of the event because of this lack of reporting and how this affects those citizens’ education about and perceptions of the Puerto Rican independence movement or even the relationship between the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the United States more broadly.

The historical lack of media coverage is one that has not thoroughly discussed in scholarly texts, but it has been touched upon briefly and with respect to particular events. One example of this is the issue of Navy bombings in Vieques, one of the islands that makes up the archipelago of Puerto Rico. As Mario Murillo notes, the Vieques issue, which exploded in the late 1990s, was not reported in U.S. papers in a timely and balanced manner. He states the following about U.S. media coverage with respect to Puerto Rico:

It can be argued that one of the tools of maintaining a colonial system in place is the deliberate manipulation of the media in order to keep the colonial

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16 In 1950, President Harry Truman signed Public Law 600, “authorizing a constitutional convention. That convention, in turn, led to the approval in a 1952 referendum of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the news status by a vote of 76.4 percent. This result inaugurated the Commonwealth, but did not put an end to the status debate,” (Burnett and Marshall, 18). Many consider the designation of “Commonwealth” to be a misnomer, and consider the Spanish estado libre asociado literally “free associated state” to be a bit more accurate yet still insufficient. (Malavet, 43). “Free associated state,” is also a misnomer because Puerto Rico is still subject to a unilateral relationship with the U.S. where the U.S. holds plenary power versus a bilateral relationship that other freely associated states have under international law. Under the new Puerto Rico’s new constitution, which was subject to Congressional approval, the relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico seemingly took a shift. The status of the island was neither independence nor an official state of the union, but rather an ambiguous political status that stood somewhere in-between. While U.S. government leaders tried to convince the world that this change was an act of self-determination and a form of self-government, many Puerto Rican leaders saw it as an attempt by the U.S. government to keep its colonial stronghold over the Island while masking it in a bright new (and deceitful) package. “Between the Foreign and the Domestic: The Doctrine of Territorial Incorporation, Invented and Reinvented,” by Cristina Duffy Burnett and Burke Marshall in Foreign in a Domestic Sense: Puerto Rico, American Expansion, and the Constitution, ed. by Cristina Duffy Burnett and Burke Marshall, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 18. Also see “The Establishment of the Commonwealth” in José Trías Monge, Puerto Rico: Trials of the Oldest Colony in the World, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

17 While I refer to Puerto Rico in this paper as a single island for purposes of shorthand, the mainland of the same name is actually part of a small chain of islands. The island of Vieques, which forms part of that chain, is well-known for its past use by the U.S. Navy to test weapons.
subjects misinformed. Perhaps more effective, however, is making sure the people whose interests are supposedly being served by maintaining a colonial regime in place in a certain part of the world, are kept in the dark about what is going on ‘back in the colonies.’ To a certain extent, if we observe U.S. media coverage of Puerto Rico, we can see this latter model operating in full effect. Indeed, throughout the past 100 years, misinformation, lies, and distortions have been part of the regular fare when it comes to coverage of Puerto Rico, making it understandable why there is a general misunderstanding if not ignorance on the part of the U.S. public regarding the island, its people, and its politics […] The overt racism of the past has diminished. However, what we see in today’s coverage is that the tendency to frame events within the perspective of U.S. politics and strategic interests remains unchanged.  

The notion that the U.S. maintains its “colonial system” by “making sure the people whose interests are supposedly being served by maintaining a colonial regime in place in a certain part of the world, are kept in the dark about what is going on ‘back in the colonies,’” is what prompted my own investigation into how this unfolded back in the 1930s when the Puerto Rican independence movement experienced tremendous growth and development.

The questions I address in this body of work with respect to comparing U.S. and Puerto Rican media representations are inspired by the theories outlined in Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky’s 1988 work, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. Here these authors map out the idea of a “propaganda model” and how that model applies to U.S. mass media productions. They claim the following about their work:

This effort reflects our belief, based on many years of study of the workings of the media, that they serve to mobilize support for the special interests that dominate the state and private activity, and that their choices, emphases, and omissions can often be understood best, and sometimes with striking clarity.

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and insight, by analyzing them in such terms.\textsuperscript{19}

In the case of Puerto Rico, as Murillo touched upon above, these “special interests” include various strategic military and economic interests that the U.S. has protected since occupation. Herman and Chomsky found in their research that news that “failed to conform to the framework of established dogma (postulating benevolent U.S. aims, the United States responding to aggression and terror, etc.),”\textsuperscript{20} rarely made a presence in mass media outlets. They assert in their “propaganda model” that the dominant interests are what filter the news, allowing only their particular message(s) to reach print.\textsuperscript{21} Furthermore, they claim that this domination is so deeply embedded in the U.S. mass media that “media news people, frequently operating with complete integrity and goodwill, are able to convince themselves that they choose and interpret the news ‘objectively’ and on the basis of professional news values.”\textsuperscript{22} Thus, the very people that produce mass media, are largely unaware of this systematic filtering applied by dominant powers.

Another layer to this theory that I address is the relation between propaganda and democracy and the link between the mass media and an effort by dominant powers to control the way people think. Chomsky makes these points clear:

It’s not the case, as the naïve might think, that indoctrination is inconsistent with democracy. Rather, as this whole line of thinkers observes, it’s the essence of democracy. The point is that in a military State or feudal State or what we would nowadays call a totalitarian State, it doesn’t much matter what people think because you’ve got a bludgeon over their head and you can

\textsuperscript{20} Herman and Chomsky, xiv.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid. 2.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
control what they do. But when the State loses the bludgeon, when you can’t control people by force and when the voice of the people can be heard, you have this problem. It may make people so curious and so arrogant that they don’t have the humility to submit to a civil rule and therefore you have to control what people think. And the standard way to do this is to resort to what in more honest days used to be called propaganda. Manufacture of consent. Creation of necessary illusions. Various ways of either marginalizing the general public or reducing them to apathy in some fashion.  

In relation to my research, I argue that the U.S. government uses propaganda to create apathy among the U.S. public with respect to Puerto Rico, especially concerning the political status question but also regarding the general political, economic, and social problems that plague the Puerto Rican people. This apathy, coupled with Puerto Ricans’ own ambivalence towards the status question is what has allowed Puerto Rico to remain as a U.S. territory for over a century.

A final consideration with respect to this propaganda model is the way that it connects to as well as the function of the U.S. government’s participation in the criminalization of independentistas. With the use of propaganda, the U.S. government is effectively able to maintain a patriotic agenda with claims of U.S. benevolence. In the twentieth century and especially now in a post-9/11 era, the U.S. is able to place independentistas within a framework of fighting terror. As Chomsky and Herman state: “Even in this exceptional case [of the Vietnam War], however, it was very rare for news and commentary to find their way back into the mass media if they failed to conform to the framework of established dogma (postulating benevolent U.S. aims, the United States responding to aggression and terror, etc.,).”

They continue to discuss this in terms of the fight against communism (today it would be the fight

23 Noam Chomsky quoted in Achbar, 43.
24 Herman and Chomsky, xiv.
against terrorism) and the creation of patriotism:

A constant focus on victims of communism helps convince the public of enemy evil and sets the stage for intervention, subversion, support for terrorist states, an endless arms race, and military conflict—all in a noble cause. At the same time, the devotion of our leaders and media to this narrow set of victims raises public self-esteem and patriotism, as it demonstrates the essential humanity of country and people.\textsuperscript{25}

Thus, with respect to members of the Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico (PNPR) or Puerto Rican Nationalist Party\textsuperscript{26} in the early to mid-twentieth century and members of organizations such as the Macheteros today, the U.S. is able create a sense of patriotism by framing these activists as home-grown terrorists which further serves stigmatize all independentistas, whether they are part of violent and/or radical organizations or not, under this image or representation.

As I have already pointed out, these representations that lead to stigmatization form part of the dominant power structure (in this case the U.S. government), which links ideology to social control. Leith Mullings argues this same point with regards to stereotypes of women of color, where she claims that these kind of images serve to limit social action: “These constructions, then, seek to define the categories through which reality is to be understood, and thereby to define the limits of social action.”\textsuperscript{27}

She also states:

How ideologies—used here in the sense of production of meanings—are generated, maintained, and deployed is intimately related to the distribution of power. Dominant ideologies often justify, support, and rationalize the interests of those in power: they tell a story about why things are the way they are, setting out a framework by which hierarchy is explained and mediating

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., xv.
\textsuperscript{26} In this thesis I will refer to this political party by its Spanish acronym, PNPR, or the phrase “the Nationalist Party.” Members of this party will be referred to, for the most part, as “Nationalists.”
contradictions among classes, between beliefs and experiences.\textsuperscript{28}

In this thesis, I focus on how particular ideologies are “generated, maintained, and deployed” through the press in order to “justify, support, and rationalize” U.S. presence in and domination of Puerto Rico. This is key to the colonial relationship that the U.S. has continued to maintain with the Island—still a U.S. territory in the twenty-first century.

It is this kind of news manipulation and covert agenda setting that I address through the comparison of U.S. and Puerto Rican press reports on a particular event. Keeping the recent Ojeda Rios case in mind, I wanted to look at how other violent events in the history of the Puerto Rican independence movement were represented by these media outlets. Specifically, I decided to focus on an important event in Puerto Rican history—one that is not just important in the context of the independence movement but considered momentous across the board: The Ponce Massacre of 1937. I explore the ways in which the two most popular and arguably most influential newspapers of the time in both regions—the New York Times and the Washington Post in the continental U.S. and El Mundo and El Imparcial in Puerto Rico—reported on this event. My central argument is that these U.S. papers, working in a system that pursues strategic interests, represented the Ponce Massacre and its aftermath in terms that protected U.S. reputation while criminalizing advocates for independence. In this way, the media reflected the interests of the federal government and preserved its image of (colonial) benevolence towards the Puerto Rican people. Beyond a difference in conceptualization and representation in the most basic forms, I argue

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 266.
that the U.S. government played a deliberate role in manipulating the mass press to protect the interests I have outlined above. My reason for examining the Puerto Rican press as well, is that in juxtaposing the two regions’ press reports, we can get a better sense of the extent to which the U.S. media bought into the propaganda model. Because the Puerto Rican press was not under the same kind of influence that the mass media was in the United States at the time, we are able to see a significant difference in terminology, the presentation of the facts, what is left out, and whose voices are (or are not) reflected. Yet before these points can be clear to the reader, I must first offer some historical background about the Ponce Massacre and how it relates to the history of the Puerto Rican independence movement.

**The Ponce Massacre**

Much has been written about the Ponce Massacre in Puerto Rico—mostly different accounts of what occurred on March 21, 1937. However, little work has been done to place the Massacre in historical context and closely analyze the political complexities of that time. The following is my own rendition of what took place that day based on my research of several accounts including the 2001 study *Verdadera Historia De La Masacre De Ponce* or “The True History of the Ponce Massacre,” by Raul Medina Vazquez and Manuel E. Moraza Ortiz’s work *La Masacre De Ponce* or “The Ponce Massacre” published in the same year. I also include primary source research of newspaper coverage including the four papers mentioned above.
In the wake of the incarceration of eight Puerto Rican patriots, the PNPR planned a demonstration that was to take place in the municipality of Ponce. The plan included a parade to commemorate the abolition of slavery in the island in 1873 and a protest of the indictment of those eight Nationalists. The Party, whose headquarters was based in the center of the city, had been granted the necessary permit for the parade that was scheduled for Palm Sunday March 21, 1937, and Nationalists from around the island had been arriving with their families all day. Many point to this fact as evidence that this demonstration was meant to be pacifist. According to two authors, the fact that many brought their children along was “a sure suggestion that they weren’t expecting a gun battle.” What some Nationalists did not know, however, was that the local mayor revoked the permit for their parade at the last minute and that proceeding with the demonstration was then considered illegal. Apparently the government officials that were made aware of the event perceived it to be of a military nature and thought it should be prohibited. Indeed the demonstrators did perform their parade in a military style—the way a marching band would today, but they never bore actual firearms, instead they often held fake wooden rifles or nothing at all. Puerto Rico’s U.S.-appointed governor, Blanton Winship, was instrumental in ensuring that the parade be stopped. It was under his guidance that the Chief of Insular Police, Colonel Enrique de Orbeta, ordered other towns to send

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29 On July 31, 1936, a group of Nationalists were charged with conspiracy to overthrow the U.S. government by means of force. I describe the trials in more detail in Chapter Two.
30 Through most of the twentieth century, Puerto Rico’s population was mostly (but certainly not exclusively) Catholic. Thus the sacredness of the Palm Sunday holiday is significant here.
police reinforcements to Ponce to support the local police force.\textsuperscript{32} According to Manuel E. Moraza Ortiz in his account of the Massacre, “Ponce normally counted on 35 active police officials, on March 21\textsuperscript{st} there were 200 police officials present.”\textsuperscript{33} On the morning of the day before the parade was scheduled, Governor Winship called Colonel Orbeta with orders that the parade must be stopped.\textsuperscript{34} The following day (the day of the parade), Colonel Orbeta met with the mayor of the city of Ponce to ask him to rescind the permit for the parade. He told the mayor that the demonstration was considered to be of a military nature and that he had information about Nationalists coming from Mayaguez that were expected to come armed.\textsuperscript{35} Initially, the mayor resisted, insisting that the demonstration would be orderly. Colonel Orbeta responded by saying that it would be the mayor’s responsibility if any bloodshed were to take place in lieu of police intervention if anything were to happen.\textsuperscript{36} Consequently, the mayor gave in and proceeded to send his secretary to deliver the news of the cancelled permit to Nationalist Party leaders.

Nevertheless, after failed attempts to negotiate and with the determination to exercise their right to assemble and to free speech, the Nationalist Party members proceeded anyway. As the group of Nationalist men and women took their places on Calle Marina and arranged themselves into their respective formations, surrounded by friends and family who served as spectators, several police officers–equipped with

\textsuperscript{32} Raul Medina Vazquez, Verdadera Historia De La Masacre De Ponce, (Ponce: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriquena, 2001), 15.
\textsuperscript{33} Translation mine and all following unless otherwise noted are my own, Manuel E. Moraza Ortiz, La Masacre De Ponce, (Hato Rey, Puerto Rico: Publicaciones Puertorriqueñas, Inc., 2001), 43.
\textsuperscript{34} Medina Váquez, 15.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid,
such weaponry as rifles, tear gas, and ten-pound Thompson submachine guns—began to surround the crowd and protesters as well. Interestingly enough, some witnesses claimed that once the police had surrounded the Nationalist Party members and proceeded to block off the section of the street where the demonstration was to take place, they only let those who identified themselves as Nationalist Party members get through.\textsuperscript{37} Thus, those who did not identify as such were forced to watch the parade from the balconies that overlooked Calle Marina. Soon after the musical procession began, the first shots were fired. Investigators were never able to confirm who fired the very first shot, although they never found any weapons on the Nationalists. These first shots catapulted a completely chaotic outpouring of shooting by the Puerto Rican police. The afternoon of deadly shooting resulted in nineteen deaths and over two hundred injuries, the police shot many of the victims in the back as they attempted to run for their lives and escape the line of fire. Along with the parade participants, many of the victims were innocent bystanders, including children and two police officers who got caught in the line of their own crossfire. No police officers were convicted (although several Nationalist Party members were arrested) and not one police officer spent time in jail; there were no demotions or suspensions within the police, Governor Winship—as chief of insular police—never issued a public apology.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 45.
\textsuperscript{38} Stephen Hunter and John Bainbridge, Jr., 179.


Caption reads: “Funeral of the first martyrs of the Massacre when they were conducted into the Civil Cemetery of Ponce.” Medina Vázquez, 264.
The Ponce Massacre of 1937 is a defining moment in the history of political repression in Puerto Rico since U.S. occupation in 1898. The kind of state-sponsored violence that took place that day shocked Puerto Ricans both on the island and in the diaspora, and, I argue, profoundly affected them. More immediately, one can point to the thousands of people who came to the funeral processions of the victims.\textsuperscript{39} In the long term, one can look to the number of ways the Massacre has been depicted in Puerto Rican cultural art and historical productions, including a famous play, numerous paintings, poems, and other forms of literature. Beyond the surveillance carried out by intelligence agencies, the repressive laws that limited self-expression, the infiltration of different organizations (including the Puerto Rican police) by U.S. intelligence agents, the criminalization of independentistas,\textsuperscript{40} and the incarceration of political prisoners, this massacre appeared to many Puerto Ricans as such a public display of violence and obvious display of repression that shook them to their core.

Because of the nature of this event, marked by state violence against seemingly innocent victims, I am interested in how the media discussed it at the time and represented the event. A critical analysis of these representations highlights how both Puerto Ricans and non-Puerto Rican U.S. citizens were conceptualizing this event. Furthermore, these discussions can serve as a comparison of how independentistas are treated in the media when they are the victims of violence versus when they are the instigators.


\textsuperscript{40} Advocates for Puerto Rican independence. I will use this term along with the phrase “pro-independence advocates” interchangeably.
The importance of these representations lies in the relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico. As I mentioned earlier, between U.S. occupation in 1898 and the establishment of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in 1952, it was mainly non-Puerto Rican U.S. citizens who had the official capacity to shape Puerto Rico’s history. The largest and most enduring question about Puerto Rico was concerning its political status. Since commissioners from the United States and Spain signed the Treaty of Paris on December 10, 1898, to end the Spanish-American War, the U.S. treated Puerto Rico as a sort of prize from the conflict. Unlike the Philippines, for example, it seems to have never intended to give Puerto Rico its autonomy but rather to use the island for strategic military and economic purposes.41 While many Puerto Ricans first viewed the U.S. occupation in a positive light, and as an opportunity to free themselves of Spanish rule, it soon became clear that U.S. foreign policy did not necessarily reflect U.S. ideals about “liberty and justice for all.”42 This realization marked the beginning of a more widespread Puerto Rican resistance to U.S. occupation.

The Ponce Massacre is unique because it is the one moment in Puerto Rican post-occupation history where the most lives were lost (not to mention those injured)

41 Ronald Fernandez argues that because of Puerto Rico’s unique location in the Western Hemisphere which would be under the rule of the Monroe Doctrine and because there did not exist the kind of resistant that, for example, existed in Cuba, the U.S. took possession of Puerto Rico with the intention of keeping it as a U.S. territory, the future of which was ambiguous at best. Fernandez, 2, 7.
42 Fernandez states: “To islanders General Miles’s pledge [to promote the “blessings of the liberal institutions of our government”] meant that U.S. actions were married to U.S. ideals; thus despite losing on constitution [under Spanish rule], island politicians expected to write an even better one as soon as the military government was quickly abolished,” (3-4). Soon after it became clear that this would not be the case, and that the island was actually being exploited, he states: “So, in a country ruled by soldiers, Puerto Ricans resorted to peaceful yet not so subtle reminders of their dissatisfaction with U.S. authorities,” (10). Ronald Fernandez, 3-4, 10.
at the hands of the state. While several historical accounts of what took place that day have been written by Puerto Rican scholars in Spanish, the English-language literature written on the Massacre has been scant at best, and no one has yet explored and analyzed the way that this event was represented in the media. But before I get into Puerto Rican historiography and how violent events like the Ponce Massacre have been largely absent from these scholarly texts, I would like to look more closely at the complex relationship that Puerto Ricans hold with respect to the status question of Puerto Rican—with a particular emphasis on the independence option.

**Puerto Ricans and the Question of Independence**

The U.S. government’s criminalization campaign of independentistas differs greatly from the support these leaders gain when Puerto Ricans of varying political affiliations believe that the U.S. government has acted unjustly toward these pro-independence figures. Within the wide-breath of Puerto Rican history that scholars have written, there exist gaps that we need to explore and analyze more closely. The history of the Puerto Rican independence movement has especially suffered. Works on the movement, especially those written in English, have been kept to a minimum and often lack analyses of important events. Furthermore, recent political turmoil in Puerto Rico has affected Puerto Ricans beyond the island shores and raises questions about how certain political views developed in the first place. In fact, in the twentieth century, Puerto Rico has been a nation with one of the highest voter participation rates in the world. Ever since U.S. occupation (and even to an extent when under


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Spanish rule), Puerto Ricans have expressed great concern over its political status and today its main political parties each represent a unique solution to the status question.

On July 3, 1950, the U.S. Congress passed U.S. Public Law 600 which authorized Puerto Ricans to draft their own constitution including a bill of rights. This law is what paved the way for the establishment of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico under the leadership of Puerto Rico’s first U.S.-appointed governor Luis Muñoz Marín. As a U.S. Commonwealth, Puerto Rico was considered a self-governing “unincorporated” territory that is still at the hands of plenary power. 44 I must note here that Public Law 600 and the resulting establishment of the commonwealth took place under specific circumstances that undermined support for independence. As one scholar notes:

Inscription of new voters for the referendum of Law 600 was held in an atmosphere in which over 1,000 independence advocates were jailed, an undeclared martial law atmosphere (Helfeld 1964) […] With this repressive mechanism, the majority party made sure that the votes against Law 600—the votes against the Commonwealth, as it exists today—were eliminated beforehand. 45

44 One author notes the ambiguity of the term “plenary powers” and concludes that it holds a different meaning other than “absolute.” Instead, he argues that is can be read as meaning “exclusive.” “In other words,” he states, “whereas in the case of the states, the powers of the government over their populations are deemed to have a dual origin—some derive from the people of the state and others from the will of the people of the United States as a whole—in the case of the territories, all governmental power derives not from the will of the their peoples, but from the powers conferred upon the federal government by the people of the United States […] In short, the Supreme Court subscribed to the proposition that the United States, like other sovereign powers of the times, had the right to acquire territories and govern their populations without their consent. This was decidedly an imperialistic conception of power.” Efrén Rivera Ramos, “Deconstructing Colonialism: The ‘Unincorporated Territory’ as a Category of Domination,” in Burnett, et. al., 105-106.
These independence advocates were jailed with the help of what in Puerto Rico was officially known as Law 53 and unofficially as “La Ley de la Mordaza,” The Gag Law, or Gag Order of 1948. This law, a copy of a section of the Smith Law in the U.S. known as the Federal Sedition Act,

made it a felony ‘to encourage, defend, counsel, or preach, voluntarily or knowingly, the need, desirability, or convenience of overturning, destroying, or paralyzing the Insular Government, or any of its political subdivisions, by way of force or violence; and to publish, edit, circulate, sell, distribute, or publicly exhibit with the intention to overturn…(etc.), as well as to organize or help organize, any society, group, or assembly of persons who encourage, defend, counsel, or preach any such thing, or for other ends.’

Put more simply: this law “made it illegal to display a Puerto Rican flag, to sing a patriotic tune, to talk of independence, and of course to fight for the liberation of the island.” It is obvious that this law was enacted in Puerto Rico in an effort to quell nationalist sentiment that was gaining momentum throughout the island. In fact, for the ten years that the law was active in Puerto Rico, this law managed to do just that: it provoked fear among islanders, it criminalized independentistas, and it “decrease[d] the electoral force of independence between 1954 and 1956, when the PIP lost nearly 80,000 votes.”

After the establishment of the commonwealth, the status of the island was debated among Puerto Ricans with particular fervor. Today, the three main political parties on the island, namely the Partido Popular Democratico (PPD) or Commonwealth Party, the Partido Estadista Republicano (REP) or Republican Statehood Party, and PIP are all based on specific status-centered platforms. The

46 Ivonne Acosta-Lespier, fn. 3, 65; 59.
47 Rivera, “1948.”
48 Ivonne Acosta-Lespier, 63.
PNPR, was distinct from the PIP in that it held much more radical views and advocated violent resistance against U.S. colonialism. The party was formed in 1922 but later disbanded after the death of its fervent leader Pedro Albizu Campos in 1965. I discuss the details of the formation of this party and its influence in Chapter One.

As mentioned earlier, the reaction to Ojeda Rios’ assassination went beyond supporters of independence and reached even pro-statehood and pro-commonwealth party members. Thus while one might initially assume that perhaps these other parties would not come to the support of an independentista, the Ojeda Rios case is just one of many examples where this is not the case. These relationships that Puerto Ricans
have with respect to the political status issue—one that is so sensitive and volatile—are consequently quite complex. Here I wish to focus specifically on the status option of independence. While on the surface one might look at the exceptionally low membership of a party that supports independence such as the PIP and determine that it is a non-issue, closer inspection reveals that Puerto Rican support for independence is not a simple matter. On one hand, advocates for independence, are often stigmatized with a reputation of radicalism and violence and are either denounced and/or delegitimized because of such reputation. For example, during the 1950s, in an attempt to gain greater popularity throughout the island, PIP leaders made deliberate efforts to distinguish their organization from the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party, seen as a radical, violent group, and not a party that would successfully attain independence for the island in legitimate (non-violent/legal) ways. On the other hand, Puerto Ricans have often showed public outpourings of support and respect for these leaders, especially those that have become political prisoners and/or have lost their lives in their fight for independence. In fact, the PIP released a statement in 1950 where the party “sends it profoundest respects to its fellow countrymen [read: Nationalists?] who have given and are giving their lives in the cause of Puerto Rican independence.” Other more recent illustrations of this is the thousands of Puerto Ricans that have welcomed back released political prisoners or that attended the funeral of a leader like Filiberto Ojeda Rios.

Notwithstanding this circumstantial support, when one looks at the history of U.S. involvement with the movement, it is clear that independentistas have been criminalized by the U.S. government on numerous occasions. I suspect that the surveillance and persecution that Puerto Ricans have been subjected to over the past century has injected fear into the people of Puerto Rico. Some suggest that the U.S. deliberately began a criminalization campaign in the 1930s to deter the growing popularity of the independence movement on the island. Surveillance and political repression of this movement however, began even earlier. During the course of the twentieth century, the U.S. government, especially intelligence agencies such as the General Intelligence Division (GID), which operated until 1924, and later the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), played key roles in undermining the Puerto Rican independence movement. Their strategies included creating fear among the Puerto Rican public, and, I argue, the criminalization of independentistas, misinformation about their activities, and the perpetuation of negative images meant to curb Puerto Rican support and non-Puerto Rican U.S. sympathy. Puerto Ricans who did not seek political independence for the Island often bought into these tactics in order to promote their own agendas and curb growing support for the independence movement in the 1930s and 1940s. Once negative images of independentistas flooded the public, they were continually reproduced in public productions such as the media. Thus these representations and the misinformation that we see in these newspapers served to further undermine the independence movement.\(^{50}\)

\(^{50}\) With respect to Puerto Rican newspapers, events like the Ponce Massacre and the murder of Filiberto Ojeda Rios, were exceptions to this in that those not in support of Puerto Rican independence
I believe that an analysis of these representations can give us a better understanding of where the independence movement stands today—especially in light of the recent repressive activity that the U.S. has carried out against Puerto Ricans on and off the island. Some examples of this include not only the murder of Ojeda Rios on the 137th anniversary of el Grito De Lares, but also the Grand Jury subpoenas of three young Puerto Ricans in 2008 by the FBI/NYPD Anti-Terrorism Task Force,\(^5\) and the arrest of another key leader of the Macheteros, Claudio Avelino Gonzalez also in 2008.\(^2\)

With the kind of complex, even schizophrenic relationship that Puerto Ricans seem to have with independentista leaders, their desire for sovereignty, and resentment of colonialism, looking at the history of the independence movement more closely can prove quite useful for understanding these relationships on a deeper level. Such insight sheds light on how to regain support for such a movement, in a more positive and productive light, especially since it has struggled to gain popular support within the past eighty years. This movement is also interesting to explore in an age where such radicalism is often labeled as terroristic and a threat to national (continental U.S.) security.\(^3\)


\(^2\) Avelino Gonzalez was involved in the same 1983 armed robbery of a Wells Fargo bank in West Hartford, Connecticut as Ojeda Rios. I discuss his case in more detail in my conclusion.

\(^3\) Similar to the stigmatization applied in the McCarthy era, today it is not a far cry to label someone with radical views as a terrorist. For more on the similarities between the McCarthy Era and today’s “age of terror,” see Haynes Johnson, The Age of Anxiety: McCarthyism to Terrorism, (Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 2005).
Discussion of Terminology

There are a few terms in this paper that need to be addressed before I continue. First, my use of the word “schizophrenic” here is neither unique nor isolated. The relationship that Puerto Ricans have with the U.S. has often been described as schizophrenic. Schizophrenia, in the most basic psychological terms, is the inability to differentiate between real and unreal experiences. Nevertheless, this term has been used outside of psychology to refer to specific Puerto Rican problems. One of the first instances where this term surfaced in Puerto Rican literature is in the work of the renowned Puerto Rican writer and playwright, René Marqués. According to Marqués, Puerto Rican society can be described as a schizophrenic one. Puerto Ricans are constantly navigating between U.S. cultural productions and spaces and those that are specific to Puerto Rico. “This is really a schizophrenic society,” he writes, “Puerto Ricans have two languages, two citizenships, two basic philosophies of life, two flags, two anthems, and two loyalties. It is very hard for human beings to deal with all of this ambivalence.”

Thus, according to Marqués, these dichotomies actually trigger a state of confusion that he thinks would overwhelm any human being. Like a schizophrenic who has difficulty differentiating between the reality and illusions, Marqués suggests that Puerto Ricans have difficulty balancing the various dichotomies of loyalty, “philosophies of life,” etc. I argue that this kind of ambivalence that Marqués points to, intrinsically tied to what is described by many as

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an ambiguous political status that Puerto Rico holds as a U.S. Commonwealth,\(^{55}\) trickles down to reach Puerto Rican’s relationship with the status option of independence. In other words, if one looks at the surface of Puerto Rican politics, one might determine that by poll numbers alone, Puerto Rican support for independence is quite minimal. However, one must look deeper than that to see how complex the relationship Puerto Ricans have with independence actually is. Contrary to Marqués, I suggest that this relationship is not composed of a set of binaries, but rather various inter-connected, fluid, contradictory, and multi-layered connections influenced by history as well as current political climates and trends.

Next, I would like to explain my use of the word “nation” when referring to Puerto Rico. Although Puerto Rico is not politically recognized as an independent sovereign State, Puerto Rican people imagine it as a culturally distinct nation and assert its sovereignty. In other words, even as a United States territory, where Puerto Ricans are also U.S. citizens, most Puerto Ricans imagine themselves first and primarily as part of the Puerto Rican community and do not claim a “Puerto Rican-American” identity—even those in the diaspora.\(^{56}\) Jorge Duany discusses this in his article about cultural identity construction among Puerto Ricans. He notes:

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\(^{55}\) Many have pointed to ambiguity of this status not only in terms of definition but also in terms of application. In other words, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico actually has a unique relationship to the United States, which, as I mentioned in Chapter One, the label “commonwealth” fails to accurately describe. Furthermore, the application of this status to specific areas in Puerto Rican government, politics, and culture get quite complicated. For example, Puerto Ricans living on the island can vote in Presidential primaries but not in the actual elections. Another point of ambivalence is the extent of the permanence of this status. Many Puerto Ricans and non-Puerto Rican U.S. Americans alike have long considered this status to be a temporary one. Yet it has remained the status of the Island now for almost sixty years. For more on the ambiguity of the commonwealth status of Puerto Rico, see “One Hundred Years of Solitude: Puerto Rico’s American Century,” by Juan R. Torruella in Burnett, et. al., 241-250.

\(^{56}\) In her work Sponsored Identities: Cultural Politics in Puerto Rico, Arlene M. Davila States: “Yet despite their lack of political sovereignty, most Puerto Ricans consider themselves a territorially
The case of Puerto Rico is distinctive because of its persistent colonial status and the sheer magnitude of its diaspora. Although Puerto Ricans have been U.S. citizens since 1917, the legal definition of their identity does not entirely correspond to their self-perception as “Puerto Ricans first, Americans second.” The juridical status of Puerto Rican citizenship (as opposed to U.S. citizenship) is still being debated by both the United States and the Island's legislative and juridical branches. Much of the recent dispute was sparked by pro-independence leader Juan Mari Bras's well-publicized resignation of his U.S. citizenship. Most Puerto Ricans, however, see no contradiction between asserting their Puerto Rican nationality at the same time that they defend their U.S. citizenship (Morris 1995, 1997).

Thus, it is evident that Puerto Ricans self-identify in a unique way, especially when compared to other ethnic and racial groups within the United States. Similar to other groups though, this self-identification remains ever-changing and ambiguous—constantly being redefined for various purposes. Duany comments on this ambiguity with respect to the diaspora living in the U.S.:

Scholars cannot even agree on a common terminology to refer to Puerto Ricans in the United States. The papers for the 1996 Puerto Rican Studies Association Conference in San Juan suggested the following alternatives: Neo-Rican, Nuyorican, Niuyorican, nuyorriqueno, mainland Puerto Rican, U.S.-born Puerto Rican, Boricua, Diaspo-Rican, and even Tato Laviera's curious neologism AmeRícan—but never that hyphenated mixture, Puerto Rican-American. Several studies have found that Island-born Puerto Ricans perceive Nuyorican as a different group, and Nuyorican also tend to view themselves distinctly from both Island-born Puerto Ricans and Americans (Hernandez 1996; Morris 1995; Rodriguez-Cortes 1990). Still, most Puerto Ricans in the United States maintain strong cultural, psychological, economic, distinct national unit, a nation defined by its cultural distinctiveness notwithstanding its political and economy dependency on the United States.” (2-3). However, she also notes: “Due to the politically divided nature of Puerto Rican society and to years of repression and persecution of separatists and pro-independence advocates, “nation” and “nationality” are highly contentious terms on the island. Many apply these categories to the United States or Puerto Rico according to their particular political goals for the island—U.S. statehood, commonwealth, or independence—or according to whether they take as basis the island’s cultural identity or politically dependent status.” (10). Arlene M. Dávila, Sponsored Identities: Cultural Politics in Puerto Rico, Puerto Rican Studies Series, Edited by Luz del Alba Acevedo, Juan Flores and Emilio Pantojas-Garcia, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997).

and political ties to the Island (Alicea 1996; Falcon 1993). A discussion here about the Puerto Rican diaspora and questions of identity are beyond the scope of this paper, but at the least these points illustrate the complexity of Puerto Rican identity formations.

This leads me to a discussion about nationalism. Benedict Anderson defines the nation as “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.” Thus the act of imagining oneself self as part of a national community is, in its most basic form, a part of nationalism. In her definition of black nationalism, Wahneema Lubiano defines “nationalism” in terms of a shared narrative. She writes:

For the moment I will define ‘nationalism’ as the activation of a narrative of identity and interests. Whether or not concrete in the form of a state (or the idea of it possibility), this narrative is one that members of a social, political, cultural, ethnic, or “racial” group relate to themselves, and which is predicated on some understanding—however mythologized or mystified—of a shared past, an assessment of present circumstances, and a description of or prescription for a shared future. Nationalism articulates a desire—always unfulfillable—for complete representation of the past and a fantasy for a better future. It is social identification.

There are two keys things about this definition that are particularly relevant to Puerto Rican nationalism. First, is the absence of a concrete state. As I have described above, the politically ambiguous nature of the commonwealth status leads to an unclear permanent political status of the island. Nevertheless, Puerto Ricans are able to

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58 Duany, 13.
identify with a shared narrative, a shared history, and the hope for a better future. Second, there is the desire “for a complete representation of the past.” As I argue in this thesis, this representation—especially in the continental U.S.—has been largely controlled by the U.S. government. Nevertheless, the people of Puerto Rico, like any nation under colonial dominance, share and express a desire for accurate and honest representations of the past. Keeping these definitions of nationalism in mind, it is important that I make a clarification of Puerto Rican nationalism and where the PNPR fits in.

Puerto Rican nationalism consists of how Puerto Ricans, both on the mainland and in the diaspora, imagine themselves as part of the Puerto Rican “nation.” Within that, there exist various ways of imagining that nation and complex questions about Puerto Rico as a nation-state and what the political status of the Island should or should not be. More specifically, when discussing advocates for independence, or independentistas, there also exist various opinions about how to realize independence and what exactly sovereignty would look like. The PNPR, created in 1922, developed a platform that exhibited a radical desire to fight for political, cultural, and economic sovereignty.

Puerto Ricans use the word independentista to describe Puerto Ricans who believe in and advocate for the independence of Puerto Rico and they make a distinction between independentistas and nacionalistas, or Nationalists who are members of PNPR. Thus, all Nationalists are independentistas (because they

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61 Please note that I use the term Nationalist in this paper with this definition, that is, members of the PNPR.
support independence) but not all independentistas are Nationalists (not all Puerto Ricans who support independence hold the radical views that Nationalists express) in this logic. This is an important distinction and one that I stress. Herein, I use the term independentista as an umbrella term for Puerto Ricans who advocate for Puerto Rican independence, and point to different ways that independentistas envision independence. For example, as I have already mentioned, the Nationalist platform is one marked by radicalism–the desire to get to the root of the problem (i.e. U.S. occupation, colonialism, and dominance)–and (in this case) the use of violence to reach the goal of independence.\footnote{The term radical comes from the Latin term \textit{radicalis} meaning of or relating to the root. In Nationalist ideology, radicalism and violence are inextricably linked as Nationalist leader Pedro Albizu Campos saw violent insurrection as the most effective way to get to the root of the Puerto Rican problem.} As I will discuss in the literature review, few English-language authors have made this distinction and most have failed to point to different ways of imagining independence. In fact, I found that many actually conflated all advocates for independence with Nationalists, which is part of the culture that succeeded to undermine PIP’s success. I will discuss these examples and other issues in the literature next.

**Independentistas in the Literature**

Even while there have been a number of English-language scholarly texts written on Puerto Rican history since U.S. occupation of the island in 1898, there still remains a great deal of research to be done to further understand the complexities of Puerto Rican history in the twentieth century. In this section, I discuss a few select English-language texts that discuss Puerto Rican history and politics in the twentieth
It is not my intention here to place more value on English language texts than those written in Spanish, nor to look solely at scholarship written by non-Puerto Rican U.S. citizens (in fact, a few of these are written by Puerto Ricans); instead, my reason for focusing on these English-language texts is that they are written mainly for an English-language audience, including, for those written later in the twentieth century, Puerto Rico. Conversely, texts written in Spanish would not have been as widely read in the U.S. by non-Puerto Ricans. Thus, my aim is to focus on texts written by U.S. authors (Puerto Rican and non-Puerto Rican) in an effort to examine Puerto Rican historiography that was targeting an English-language audience as this would correlate largely with U.S. scholars more than Spanish-language texts would. Additionally, the non-contemporary texts provide a better understanding of how non-Puerto Rican U.S. scholars understood Puerto Rican politics and culture. This is important in that it was (and through a certain extent still is via plenary power) mostly non-Puerto Rican U.S. political leaders that decided Puerto Rico’s fate. Surely these leaders were not immune to the scholarly debates about the Island that took place during the century. I chose these texts in particular because I found that they offered a variety of perspectives and approaches to the study of Puerto Rican history and specifically address the complexity of Puerto Rican politics (some more thoroughly than others). Not only do these works provide good background knowledge on this subject, but each piece also presents a unique set of questions that I think need to be

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63 While early in the twentieth century Puerto Ricans primary language was Spanish, American domination and influence (especially early “Americanization” campaigns) made the use of the English language along with Spanish more common. Thus authors writing later in the century when Puerto Rico’s official languages were established as Spanish and English, must be aware that their work would be read by some Puerto Rican scholars in Puerto Rico and in the diaspora.
further explored. Overall, I found that all these texts failed to explore some of the most violent incidents in twentieth-century Puerto Rican history. My limited knowledge of such controversial events in this period allowed me to see that some of what was being excluded or merely addressed in passing were the more shocking moments of this history: the Rio Piedras Massacre of 1935, the Ponce Massacre of 1937, the horrendous treatment of Nationalist leader Pedro Albizu Campos in U.S. federal prison, the mass sterilization of Puerto Rican women in the 1930s,\textsuperscript{64} the 1950 Nationalist revolt including an assassination attempt of President Harry Truman, the congressional shootings by Puerto Rican Nationalists in 1954, the assassination of key independentista leaders such as the killings at Cerro Maravilla in 1978, general FBI surveillance and harassment of independence advocates, and more. In my own research I decided to focus on the Ponce Massacre, but all of these incidents have been largely ignored in English-language Puerto Rican historiography, a few of which I discuss in more detail below.

First is Truman R. Clark’s study of Puerto Rico between the year that U.S. citizenship was established on the island (Jones Act of 1917) and the New Deal entitled \textit{Puerto Rico and the United States, 1917-1933}, (1975). This text offers a close analysis of the American governorships on the island and highlights the U.S. government’s apathy towards the Island during this period. Clark’s main argument is that there were no significant changes for Puerto Rico from 1917 to 1933, but rather

that it was a time marked by a “continuous status quo.”

As a professor of history, Clark situates his work as a historical text that relies on documentation primarily but not exclusively found in the United States written in both English and Spanish. According to Clark, at the time of his writing, materials that were located on the island were “not available to historians and possibly never will be. Perhaps the imperial relationship is largely at fault in this; perhaps a slightly paranoid fear of being hurt by the documents has made Puerto Rican political figures and their descendants reluctant to open the materials they have for general use by scholars.”

These materials included unpublished manuscripts found in the Library of Congress, including papers of several presidents of the time, several U.S. and Puerto Rican newspapers, many articles in American academic journals such as the North American Review and the American Review of Reviews, and other documents published both in the U.S. and in San Juan.

This text has proven to be problematic in a number of ways. First, Clark frames his discussion of Puerto Rico wholly in terms of the U.S. instead of giving Puerto Rico a chance to stand on its own when appropriate and afford it some agency. For example, he states that Puerto Rican politics always “operated within the framework of United States control.” To an extent, this is true even today considering the colonial nature between the two regions. Yet Clark never discusses the role that Puerto Rican leaders had in molding their own fate. To him, Puerto

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66 Ibid., xiv.
67 Clark, 76.
Ricans were simply puppets in the U.S.’s spectacle and the growing resistance to U.S. occupation is never acknowledged as the active fight for sovereignty that it was. He is also often critical of but largely empathetic towards U.S. appointed governors of Puerto Rico, and presents Puerto Rican leaders as passive men who spend more time arguing with each other than actually producing any significant economic or political changes; the former of which he argues was largely ignored by these leaders. Another issue is Clark’s language. While I acknowledge that he wrote this book in a different political climate than we are living in today, there are instances when Clark could have been more selective about his word choice. For example, in “Prohibition, War, and Woman Suffrage,” Clark asks: “Were the activities in these three areas [Prohibition, War, Woman Suffrage] merely Puerto Rican efforts to please their new masters?” (emphasis mine).68 A final note about language use or, more accurately, terminology, is that Clark falls into the pitfall of using the labels “independentistas” and “Nationalists” interchangeably. He does not recognize nor acknowledges that Nationalists are one type of independentista and that more often than not these advocates for independence held different beliefs about how Puerto Rico should achieve its sovereignty (see Ayala and Bernabe, 2007).

This leads to a discussion about how Clark represents independentistas, Nationalists, and Nationalist leader Pedro Albizu Campos in particular. Clark is explicit about labeling the Nationalist Party as a violent and radical group that according to him is largely ignored by the Puerto Rican community and its leaders: “The Nationalists were loud and distracting, but as far as insular politics were

68 Ibid., 31.
concerned (and even U.S. relations until 1936), they were largely ignored." He also discusses Albizu Campos for quite a few pages, in an effort to explain how he came to his radical views and claims that: “Pedro Albizu Campos was responsible for bringing bloodshed to the island that has prided itself on being peaceful.” While it is true that Albizu Campos was blatant about using revolutionary violence when he felt was necessary, one can hardly say that the blood that was shed on the island in the 1930s was solely caused by independentistas; one need only look at the Rio Piedras Massacre of 1936 and the Ponce Massacre of 1937 to see that U.S.-lead officials played a large part in this as well. Additionally, Clark borders on romanticizing Puerto Ricans in this quote by claiming that they all pride themselves “on being peaceful,” erasing the violent moments of opposition to Spanish rule in the past and devaluing the violent moments of opposition in the time period he discusses.

Ultimately, Clark comes to the conclusion that this period can be characterized as having “a total lack of any real policy or plan for the island—benevolent or malevolent.” Accordingly, he argues that this “would indicate that there was no plot or concerted effort to exploit or hurt Puerto Rico.” Furthermore, these statements are interesting when one considers those that he makes just before regarding Puerto Rican leaders. He says: “There is no way to prove that Barceló or

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69 Ibid., 87
70 Ibid.
71 It is true that based on the time period Clark chooses, these massacres are out of his defined scope. Yet as I have already pointed out, he does not strictly adhere to this period and indeed goes beyond 1933, particularly in the last chapter. Furthermore, it is quite probable that by the time his writing was published in 1975, he was aware of the event yet chose to leave it out.
72 Clark perpetuates the historical romanticization of Puerto Ricans, by feeding into the existing narrative of the “noble savage.”
73 Clark, 175.
74 Ibid.
other Puerto Ricans did not feel about status as they said they did, so we must assume that they sincerely desired more self-government and some major economic changes.\(^7^5\) Thus, while Clark ultimately accepts that Puerto Rican views about status were indeed sincere, his reluctance suggests a level doubt and uncertainty. Meanwhile, he claims that the fact that the U.S. was completely apathetic (consequently removing agency and responsibility from U.S. actors) is virtually undisputable. While this argument remains unconvincing, I do see how this supposed apathy could have played a significant role at this time, I would go farther than mere apathy to suggest that the U.S. had very specific intentions during this period that the U.S. government most actively took steps to realize. Interestingly, Clark’s perspective on this perceived apathy is highlighted by a paraphrase of author Whitney T. Perkins that Clark ends his book with: “Perhaps […] by formulating no stated policy for empire, the people of the United States could successfully deny to themselves that their nation was an imperial power.”\(^7^6\) Consequently, Clark suggests that while the U.S. “policy of no policy” may not have been a consciously deliberate attempt by U.S. government leaders to negatively impact Puerto Rico and its people, it was, at the very least, an effort to evade the label of colonizer on behalf of the nation in a climate where anti-imperialism was taking hold worldwide.\(^7^7\)

\(^7^5\) Ibid.
\(^7^6\) Ibid.
\(^7^7\) Malavet later points to a legal scholar who also refers to this evasion, Ediberto Román is quoted state: “the United States has attempted to elude the colonizer label through legal fictions such as incorporation doctrine and the creation of the commonwealth status and the half-truths repeatedly told to the international community.” Ediberto Román, “Empire Forgotten: The United State’s Colonization of Puerto Rico,” Villanova Law Review 42 (1997): 1119 quoted in Malavet, 149.
Nonetheless, it is Clark’s representation of independentistas that I mentioned above that most relates to my own research. His failure to acknowledge the complex relationships during the time that existed between members of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party, advocates of independence who were not members of this party, other political parties, and certain government organizations such as the FBI proves that the gaps in Clark’s research led him to overly-simplistic conclusions. I would question the reason why details about the period he cover were left out such as the government-sponsored sterilization of Puerto Rican women which began in the 1930s.78

The following three texts are contemporary ones that examine Puerto Rico throughout the twentieth century. I chose to focus on these works to highlight how neglected the history of the Puerto Rican independence movement is in English-language scholarship even today while still giving examples of the few texts that have touched upon it but did not go quite far enough. First is Ronald Fernandez’s *Disenchanted Island: Puerto Rico and the United States in the Twentieth Century*, (1996). This sociologist provides a thorough account of the negotiations between politicians from the United States and Puerto Rico that shaped the island’s history. In terms of sources, Fernandez relied mainly on U.S. government documents to describe all of the inner-dealings that took place in Washington and San Juan with a focus on status debates and economic policies. Fernandez highlights the inner-workings of

78 “[…] during the 1930s with eugenic concepts in their intellectual prime and with international demographic data-gathering well underway, ‘a major break-through’ towards limiting fertility in Puerto Rico took place under the administration of William Moran, Director of the U.S.-Puerto Rican Reconstruction Administration.” Mass, 68.
government bureaucracy, pointing out false promises, contradictions, misunderstandings, triumphs and surrenders. His main argument is that Puerto Rico has remained a colony since U.S. occupation in 1898 and that the U.S. government has fostered a level of dependency that will be difficult to undo.

This book is valuable in terms of my research here in that the author by no means gives the independence movement a cursory glance and actually provides valuable insight into the workings of FBI surveillance of independentistas. Furthermore, he provides several reasons as to why the PIP was never able to gain a majority vote and why he thinks that Puerto Ricans in more recent times hesitate to express their independence leanings in public. According to Fernandez, the independence movement was never given a fighting chance. Not only was the U.S. government against the movement, but so was Luis Muñoz Marín (by the end of his career). The island’s first elected governor who proved to be quite influential in shaping Puerto Rico’s history, and both parties (PPD and PNP) were more than willing to stop the independentistas from gaining popularity on the island.

Ramón Grosfoguel’s *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (2003) offers some provocative ideas about Puerto Rico’s position within what Grosfoguel describes as a “modern/colonial/capitalist world-system.” While “situating the knowledge produced in this book from a “Puerto Rican subaltern location,” this scholar proposes that he and other scholars “go ‘outside’ our paradigms, approaches, disciplines, and fields,” thus making his position with a

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specific discipline ambiguous at best.\textsuperscript{80} Even while warning against a universalistic “god’s-eye” view, Grosfoguel manages to make inaccurate generalizations of different groups in Puerto Rican society.\textsuperscript{81} Ultimately, Grosfoguel argues for a rethinking of past leftist notions of gaining independence and what that could realistically achieve when considering the “[c]oloniality of power” where subaltern groups would remain oppressed even if Puerto Rican did gain political independence. Instead, he suggests that Puerto Ricans fight for change in those specific areas of oppression in order to avoid what he sees as a neocolonial state.\textsuperscript{82}

Grosfoguel fails to define the terms he uses in his work consequently leading to some confusion. When he begins his discussion of “nationalist discourse” it is unclear whether he is referring to nationalism in a more basic sense as I have already outlined, or a kind of nationalism that advocates strictly pro-independence views. I think his use of the term nationalism reflects the latter definition because he preempts his discussion of nationalist discourse by first dismissing the independence option. He also does not recognize the diversity of views within pro-independence advocates and tends to essentialize them. He rarely uses the term independentista\textsuperscript{83} but instead refers to “proindependence” votes and uses the terms “nationalist/nationalism” much more frequently. Ultimately, Grosfoguel fails to nuance his discussion of nationalism – in other words, providing a more complex picture–and instead arrives at conclusions that seem to ignore the depth of history that one must consider in relation to the way

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{81} Grosfoguel, 36.
\textsuperscript{82} Grosfoguel, 4-5.
\textsuperscript{83} Grosfoguel only uses the term once in the entire text, on page 62.
the support for independence unraveled in the twentieth century. While I do appreciate this author’s attempt to situate his work in the subaltern, it is overshadowed by these pitfalls.

As soon as he begins discussing the question of Puerto Rico’s status, Grosfoguel does not hesitate to dismantle the option of independence and quickly resorts to generalizing all “nationalists” as racist “‘white’ creole elites”\(^\text{84}\) that have little to no respect for the lower classes and who’s belief in independence is mostly one of principle (thus deeming it impractical and highly ideological and idealistic). He states:

“Independence” and “sovereignty” in the Caribbean periphery are a fictional narrative of the hegemonic developmentalist geoculture of the modern/colonial/capitalist world-system. […] Nationalist discourses in Puerto Rico fall into a trap of a colonialist underestimation of Puerto Rican agency and subalternity. Puerto Rican nationalist discourses portray the “Puerto Rican masses” as “colonized,” “docile,” and “ignorant” because of their consistent rejection of “independence” for the island and the “ambiguity” of their political and identification strategies. Similarly to colonialist/Eurocentric positions, nationalist ideologues do not recognize the cultural and political strategies deployed by Puerto Rican subaltern subjects as valid forms of knowledge and politics.\(^\text{85}\)

Thus, this author claims that the notion of independence is a fictional one and that those who advocate for it undermine the agency of the lower classes. While I see where his perspective stems from, I think that Grosfoguel is actually undermining the effects of hundreds of years of colonialism on a society.

I would also like to note that while the reality is that a number of Nationalists can be described as white creoles (sometimes racist) elites, some of the strongest

\(^\text{84}\) Grosfoguel, 9.
\(^\text{85}\) Ibid., 8-10.
leaders of the PNPR were not, for example, Pedro Albizu Campos whom I would
describe as neither creole nor white. Additionally, as one author notes in their study
of the 1950 Nationalist Insurrection, of the 140 Nationalists that partook in the event,
only six (5.5%) were white-collar workers and 7 (6.4%) professionals, while 75
(69%) were laborers (this is then followed by 8 (7.4%) who were self-employed, 7
(6.4%) were owners of companies in areas of manufacturing, service production,
transportation and commerce, and 6 (5.5%) landowners. “This indicates,” the author
claims, “that the majority of the combatants came from the working class.” This is
one example where Grosfoguel’s one-dimensional classification fails to describe the
diversity of participants in Puerto Rican history and thus fails to provide a dynamic
representation. In this way, Grosfoguel does not successfully provide a full picture of
this history and oversimplifies it, while also making a blanket categorization of all
pro-independence advocates as ‘racist white creole elites.’

Finally, we have Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898
(2007), co-authored by César J. Ayala and Rafael Bernabe, which attempts to fill
some of the gaps that simplistic notions of Puerto Rican history (as demonstrated here
by Clark [1975] and Grosfoguel [2003]) have left open and thereby provide a more
complete history, highlighting what has often been overlooked. Both sociologists,
Ayala’s extensive scholarship on the Puerto Rican economy is ever-present alongside
Bernabe’s training as a literary scholar. These backgrounds shape the authors’

86 Miñi Seijo Bruno, La Insurreccion Nacionalista En Puerto Rico, 1950, (San Juan: Editorial Edil,
Inc., 1997), 245.
87 César J. Ayala, and Rafael Bernabe, Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History since 1898,
disciplinary framework for this book—one with a world-economy backbone and a focus on Puerto Rican politics and culture. While acknowledging the colonial structure that the U.S. imposed upon the island, the authors’ central argument is that Puerto Ricans are partially responsible for the status question and the social and economic conditions that have characterized the island in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In other words, they resist the rhetoric of U.S. as the sole cause and perpetrator of Puerto Rico’s problems (placed upon supposedly agent-less victims) and hold that Puerto Ricans themselves also played a role in determining their fate. In affect, it appears that they base their argument on the belief that Puerto Ricans are “actors in this intricate drama” of Puerto Rican history.\textsuperscript{88} In other words, Ayala and Bernabe re-read Puerto Rican history to reinscribe an agency that has very often been undermined by simplistic visions of the history between the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

This work recounts Puerto Rican history in chronological order, beginning with U.S. occupation of the island in 1898. Ayala and Bernabe discuss Puerto Rico’s situation in relation to the international economic trajectory with WWI and WWII as major defining landmarks. Often, Puerto Rico is placed within the context of larger trends of the boom and busts of capitalism and the social ideologies that provoked so much controversy world-wide. At the same time, the unique nature of Puerto Rico’s colonial relationship with the United States is not overlooked. Additionally, these authors must be applauded for their attempt to discuss important figures that have historically been forgotten. This proves to be yet another way that these authors reinscribe Puerto Ricans’ agency by bringing forth these lost historical voices.

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 10.
Overall this book serves as a great introductory text—especially if one is interested in the historical impact of the Puerto Rican economy on other areas of Puerto Rican life. The authors attempt to provide a more complete picture of Puerto Rican history—to acknowledge its complexities and refuse to come to overly-simplistic conclusions that beget a superficial understanding of it. Still, such a vast undertaking, that is, attempting to write a general history that spans over 100 years, has its limitations. While the authors do admit that they had to leave things out, the question is: what else did they leave out and why? Through my own research, I became aware of a number of controversial and particularly violent events that I have already mentioned above which were also left out by these authors. Nevertheless, when one takes into account the limits of writing such a book, I would say that these authors did an impressive job. They managed to put together an extremely complex and multi-layered history into a coherent text that is accessible and engaging—a feat that every writer of history strives to achieve.

I have outlined some of the many gaps that have plagued Puerto Rican historiography, especially with respect towards the independence movement. My own work serves to expound upon an exceptionally important event in Puerto Rican history that these and other scholars have failed to elaborate on.

They admit to leaving out certain aspects of Puerto Rican culture, such as religion sports, as well as “other aspects of the Puerto Rican experience, from many facets of the evolution of social mores or daily life to Puerto Rican participation in military armed conflicts as part of the U.S. armed forces.” Ibid., 12.
Overview

Several investigations took place after the Massacre. However, many felt that it did not make sense for the Island administration to investigate itself. Local political leaders and professionals demanded an independent investigation which led to one of the most noted investigations which was conducted by the Commission of Inquiry on Civil Rights in Puerto Rico, led by Arthur Garfield Hays, one of the founders of and general counsel to the American Civil Liberties Union. This investigation and its impact on public opinion will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 2.

In Chapter One, I lay out the historical background of the time leading up to the Massacre and help place it in perspective. I will also analyze the initial reporting of the event by the papers I mentioned earlier. This comparative analysis shows the stark difference of representations of the Ponce Massacre between U.S. and Puerto Rican newspapers. While U.S. papers criminalized members of the Nationalists parties and deemed the Massacre a “riot,” “battle,” or “clash,” Puerto Rican newspapers place the blame of Governor Winship and juxtapose the Puerto Rican public against his administration and the police who were all under his orders.

Chapter Two, as I already discussed, includes more background about the investigations that followed the Ponce Massacre and discuss the way that these investigations affected both U.S. and Puerto Rican reports on the incident. An analysis of press reports in both regions shows how U.S. papers delegitimized a landmark investigation and continually placed blame on Nationalist Party members while defending the police involved and Governor Winship. In contrast, the Puerto
Rican pressed took the investigation seriously and saw it as a confirmation of what the Puerto Rican public already knew to be true about the tragedy.

Finally, in Chapter Three, I conclude the events following the Ponce Massacre by discussing a set of trials that charged the surviving Nationalists who participated in the parade that day with murdering one of the policemen that died. An examination of the reports on these trials shows how the U.S. press continued to criminalize Nationalists even after the criminal court system in Puerto Rico effectively removed their blame from the incident. The repeated representations of Nationalist Party members as violent criminals effectively overshadowed any evidence to the contrary with respect to the Massacre. This reiterates my argument that the U.S. press served only to regurgitate an established narrative (created by the U.S. government) and failed to accurately and fairly report the facts.
Chapter 1: Historical Background and Initial Reporting

Liberty was never able to be bought but by the price of blood honorably shed. That is how these young men paid, with their lives dedicated to the flag. Governor Winship, representative of the United States in Puerto Rico, congratulated the police for their behavior. But Puerto Rican society, horrified, calls the event: THE PONCE MASSACRE! [emphasis theirs]
–Translation mine. “¡Al Gesto Altivo, La Tración a Tera!” El Imparcial, April 1, 1937, 1.

“Nationalist agitation for an independent Puerto Rico led to a serious riot this afternoon at Ponce, second [largest] city on the island.”

“In the accounts of civilian witnesses as well as in those of the police there is agreement that the shooting was first started by the Nationalists [...]”

“The Sunday battle was started, police said, when Nationalists fired on police assigned to prevent them from holding a mass demonstration which had been banned by city officials.”

These quotations are just a small sample of the sentiments and representations in the many articles that I analyze in this chapter. They are the immediate reactions to the Ponce Massacre in the U.S. and Puerto Rican press and they highlight the stark contrast between the ways both regions treated the incident in their reports. I provide a close, critical analysis of the terminology used in these papers as well as the general framing of the event and the extent to which these papers provided (or failed to provide) balanced reporting. Ultimately, I conclude that U.S. papers not only failed to provide its readers with various sides of the story of the Ponce Massacre, but that they actually protected U.S. government interests by repeatedly incriminating the
Nationalists involved while defending the insular police and Governor Winship. Yet before I discussed these reports in detail, I first want to explain why I chose the newspapers I chose and setup the historical context for the Ponce Massacre. This history is crucial to understanding the relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico at the time and more specifically, the relationship between the federal government and the PNPR.

Herein, I focus on the two leading newspapers in the United States during the time, namely the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, and the two largest and most widely circulated newspapers in Puerto Rico, namely *El Mundo* and *El Imparcial*. I chose the *Times* and the *Post* because they are arguably the most influential major U.S. newspapers in the twentieth century. I chose to look at the newspapers *El Mundo* and *El Imparcial* because they were the most widely circulated daily newspapers in Puerto Rico during the bulk of the twentieth century. I decided to focus on newspapers that were not officially affiliated with any one political party, and thus not tied to a specific stance on the status question. If I had selected a paper that openly supported the independence movement, we would expect that they would be sympathetic to the cause and would likely cast independentistas in a more positive light. Additionally, it is easy to assume that, for the most part, the majority of readers of independentista newspapers would be independentistas themselves and not necessarily a diverse readership that would better reflect the general Puerto Rican

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90 According to Luis Angel Ferrao, the newspapers *El Mundo* and *El Imparcial* were the most widely circulated in this time period (early to mid-twentieth century). Luis Angel Ferrao, *Pedro Albizu Campos y El Nacionalismo Puertorriqueño, 1930-1939*, (Harrisburg: editorial cultural, Banta Co., 1990), 17. Another source also points to the fact that *El Mundo* was the largest newspaper at the time. Ayala and Bernabe, 145.
public. Instead, I selected newspapers that were widely distributed, appeared to maintain politically neutral views, and were highly influential during the time. According to one author, “El Mundo was a respected, conservative newspaper, and was one of the best sources of news until its collapse in 1990.” Finally, another source points out that Ángel Manuel Ramos Torres, who bought the newspaper after being its head administrator along with journalist José Coll Vidal once its founder (Romualdo Real) retired in 1929, was “the most important entrepreneur in the development of mass media communications in Puerto Rico,” (translation mine). In fact, some claim that it was through Torres that El Mundo established itself as the most widely circulated newspaper of the time on the Island. Another source states: “The end of World War I, saw the founding of two newspapers, El Imparcial (founded in 1918) and El Mundo (founded in 1919), which until 1973 were the newspapers with the largest circulation in Puerto Rico […] These two new companies built an audience in a society with high literacy rates, 68.5 percent in 1940 and 74.4 percent in 1950, providing information on current affairs, advertising, and entertainment, while combining ideological, informative, and explanatory reporting.” This literacy is important to point out in that it is safe to assume that

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91 It would be interesting, however, to see if these papers established a difference between Nationalist Party members, for example, and other pro-independence advocates.
92 Lefebvre, Andy, “Puerto Rico Press, Media, TV, Radio, Newspapers,” <http://www.pressreference.com/No-Sa/Puerto-Rico.html> 2007. The official collapse of this paper appears to be contested for I have found several different dates in my research including: 1990 (Lefebvre, 2007), (The Library of Congress); 2000 (Torres-Gonzalez, 2002); and others that claim the paper collapsed in 1986 only to come back for a brief period in the late 80s before its final printing.
more than half of the Puerto Rican population likely has access to these types of lower-cost reading materials. On a different note, I must stress that while these papers appear to be the most politically neutral they, like U.S. papers, do tend to align themselves with specific political views.\textsuperscript{96} According to one scholar, “In the decades of 1940 and 1950, each [political] party in Puerto Rico had a mass commercial newspaper at its disposal. The republicans (statehooders) counted on the newspaper \textit{El Mundo}, which completely supported them. The Puerto Rican Independence Party had the support of the newspaper \textit{El Imparcial}, of [Antonio] Ayuso Valdivieso, who was [an] independentista.”\textsuperscript{97} This difference is apparent in the way these two newspapers initially reported on the Ponce Massacre, however we will see that they eventually team up and treat the Massacre in largely the same way.

\textbf{The Historical Context of the Ponce Massacre}

It is important that we understand the context under which the Ponce Massacre took place. The 1930s in Puerto Rico was an eventful time in Puerto Rican history. Not only were there worldwide crises such as the Great Depression, but there were also local natural disasters (including the devastating San Felipe hurricane of 1928 and the San Ciprián hurricane of 1932) that added to the turmoil. The 30s was also a time of transition for the island. As Puerto Rico went from Spanish colonial rule to that of the United States at the turn of the century, the U.S. government instated a number of laws in an effort to setup a civil government, maintain order and

\textsuperscript{96} For example, today, many of the U.S. reading public would say that the \textit{New York Times} reflects much more political views than say the \textit{Wall Street Journal}.

exploit the island(s) for economic and military purposes. Additionally, in the early twentieth century, the U.S. government created a number of Americanization programs that proved to be quite controversial. The independence movement was rapidly growing during the decade of the 30s, as was U.S.-sponsored political repression against those who pushed for that cause. The PNPR, under the radical leadership of Pedro Albizu Campos, was especially vulnerable to this repression.

*The Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico*

The PNPR was formed in 1922 by a group of professional men, some of whom were also recognized as intellectuals. It began as somewhat an exclusive club where these men discussed issues of national sovereignty, especially “the problem of language, the flag, and Hispanic traditions.” As the Puerto Rican scholar Luis Angel Ferrao points out, for the first seven years of its existence, the five men that took on the role of president of PNPR were all white Catholic male lawyers and the small membership consisted of professional men, namely lawyers, journalists, students, a few doctors and more. It was not until 1930 when the Harvard-educated lawyer from Ponce, Pedro Albizu Campos—a dark-skinned Puerto Rican who would not be considered white in U.S. nor Puerto Rican classifications at the time but whose self-

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98 Ferrao, 40. During this time period, it was much more common to lend greater emphasis on Hispanic traditions over African and indigenous traditions. Many independentistas, including Albizu Campos, were no strangers to this Eurocentrism.
99 Ibid. I must point out here that racial identification in Puerto Rico is quite different from that in the continental U.S. Contrary to the binary Black/white model we see in the U.S., race in Puerto Rico lies on a continuum of phenotypical differences such as skin color, hair texture, the size of the nose, etc. Additionally, there has been a historic tendency, especially before the more recent acceptance of African and indigenous ancestry, for many Puerto Ricans on the island to self-identify as white. It is not clear what criteria Ferrao used to characterize these leaders as white, but the possibility that someone from the U.S. could (or could have, at the time) identify them as something other then white is a clear possibility.
identification remains unclear (see table below)—took on the primary leadership role that the nature of the party changed shape, and moved beyond intellectual discussions to more blatantly political action.

<table>
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<th>Major Folk Racial Terms Used in Puerto Rico</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Term</strong></td>
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<td>Blanco(a)</td>
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<td>Blanquito(a)</td>
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<td>Colorao(a)</td>
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<td>Rubio(a)</td>
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<td>Cano(a)</td>
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<td>Jincho(a)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blanco(a) con raja</td>
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<td>Jabao(a)</td>
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<td>Trigueño(a)</td>
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<td>Moreno(a)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mulato(a)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indio(a)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Café con leche</td>
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<tr>
<td>Piel canela</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prieto(a)</td>
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<td>Negro(a)</td>
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<td>Negrito(a)</td>
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100 On Albizu Campos’ self-identification, one author states: “Albizu, in a famous speech from October 12, 1933, speaks proudly of the fact that he had black blood (as well as Indian and Spanish) in his veins and vehemently criticized the racial realities of the U.S. as being barbaric (Albizu Campos 1972: 191-218). However, he ultimately saw race as divisive to his political goals and subsumed race under the overarching concept of Puerto Rican culture. Albizu shared a point in common with intellectuals of the Thirties Generation, such as Tomás Blanco (1900-1975) and Antonio S. Pedreira (1899-1939): in trying to counteract U.S. cultural and ideological influence in Puerto Rico, they fell back on an acritical and ahistorical Hispanophilia, which had a strong racial (and anti-black) undercurrent.” Alan West-Durán, “Puerto Rico: The Pleasures and Traumas of Race,” *Centro Journal*, spring, año/vol. XVII, número 001, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, (New York: City University of New York, 2005), 55.
Pedro Albizu Campos joined the Nationalist Party in 1924 after leaving the Unionist Party—which promoted greater self-government for Puerto Rico but was quite divided in what that would look like (i.e. complete independence or an ambiguous form of autonomy)—because of his disagreement with the direction the Unionist Party was headed.\footnote{According to Robert Anderson, the Unionist Party also had the option of statehood under its platform but that option was eliminated in 1913. Robert Anderson, \textit{Party Politics in Puerto Rico}, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), 95.} The divisions between these political ideologies seemed to intensify and it appeared that many Unionists began to lose faith in the option of independence. The influence that Albizu Campos had on the Nationalist Party, not only in terms of ideology and direction but also in terms of membership growth, is quite impressive. One place where this is obvious is in the electoral system where Albizu Campos’ influence led to a dramatic growth in electoral participation, from 329 votes for the Nationalist Party in 1928 to over 5,300 votes for the party in 1932.\footnote{Moraza Ortiz, 24.} Ironically though, the year 1932 would be the last time that PNPR would participate in the local electoral system because Albizu Campos would from then on denounce the system and demand that Nationalists refrain from participating in it in an effort to show resistance to a system that he felt was ultimately defined by the U.S. government. For Albizu Campos, it was a contradiction to participate in a system that had no validity in the first place. Participating in the electoral process meant accepting U.S. rule on the island and that was exactly what the Nationalists were fighting against.
The 1932 elections also marked another important shift in the Nationalist Party; it was soon after that Albizu Campos took steps towards militarization of the organization. Two groups were created under the party at this time consisting mostly of university students: the male “Cadetes de la República” or “Cadets of the Republic,” and the female “Enfermeras de la República” or “Nurses of the Republic.” These two groups were established in an effort to attract new membership. Albizu Campos’ idea was that these two groups would perform peaceful public demonstrations such as parades and protests that would promote independence and denounce U.S. presence and authority on the island and that those demonstrations would spark the interest of other Puerto Ricans. However, Albizu Campos’ intention was also to acquire firearms for the male group and provide military training in an effort to build an armed struggle for the fight for independence.103

_U.S. Appointments of Governors in Puerto Rico_

As support for independence began to grow on the island, the U.S. government also made a shift towards militarization in their leadership appointments in 1934.104 As one author notes:

The United States opted to face this situation [the growing popularity of independence] with the militarization of the Puerto Rican government. With this purpose, Blanton Winship was named governor, Elisha Francis Riggs was appointed chief of police, and Robert A. Cooper was named judge of the U.S. government.

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103 Ibid., 26-27.
104 This shift is especially interesting when one looks at it in the context of what the U.S. government was doing with other territories this same year. One example is the Tydings-McDuffie Act, a proposal for Philippine Independence, Philip C. Jessup, “Philippine Independence” in _The American Journal of International Law_, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Jan., 1935), 83, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2191052>. Another example is the U.S. military troops withdrawing from Haiti after a nineteen-year occupation also in 1934.
District Court for Puerto Rico. All three were directly linked to the U.S. armed forces.\textsuperscript{105}

Before I go into further details about Governor Winship’s appointment in particular, I would like to note here the importance of these U.S. appointments on the island. Since U.S. occupation in 1898 until President Harry Truman passed the Elective Governor Act (H.R. 3309) in 1947, Puerto Ricans had no say in their choice of leadership. Between the creation of a civil government post-occupation through the Foraker Act of 1900 and the swearing in of the first elected governor, Luis Muñoz Marín, in January 1949, there were 16 U.S.-appointed governors, all non-Puerto Rican U.S. citizens except for the first and only native Puerto Rican appointed in 1946: Jesús Toribio Piñero.\textsuperscript{106} Nevertheless, even today the U.S. still holds ultimate plenary power. With enactment of H.R. 3309, the Department of the Interior released a report that made it clear that this legislation “would not alter Puerto Rico’s political or fiscal relationship with the United States. Congress does not surrender any of its constitutional authority to legislate for Puerto Rico or to review insular laws. Neither would this legislation prove an obstacle to a subsequent determination by the Congress of the permanent political questions.”\textsuperscript{107} Thus, after half a century of a lack of U.S. American-bred democracy, the United States government finally allowed

Puerto Ricans to elect their own governor but made clear that this change did not constitute a form of true self-government.\textsuperscript{108}

There were many pressures on the U.S. government when making their appointments for 1934. In the context of the Great Depression, the U.S. government put in place a number or relief measures in an effort to alleviate a bleak economic situation and social unrest. Additionally, they had to overcome the controversial rule of Governor Robert Hays Gore. According to Ronald Fernandez, Gore received his appointment as governor of Puerto Rico after helping Franklin Roosevelt campaign for the presidency and “…throughout 1933 he created so much controversy that his tenure reminded the islanders of the reign of “King Monty.”\textsuperscript{109} This is in reference to E. Montgomery Reily whom President Warren G. Harding appointed the Puerto Rican governorship in 1921. Similar to the circumstances surrounding Gore’s appointment, Reily was given this position as a political favor from president Harding whom he helped get elected.\textsuperscript{110} Nevertheless, many Puerto Rican politicians saw Reily as incompetent for such a job and after a controversial year in leadership the Puerto Rican Senate pushed for his impeachment in 1922 even though they had no

\textsuperscript{108} Between the years 1901 and 1905, the United State Supreme court addressed issues concerning the U.S.’s newly acquired territories. Many legal scholars consider \textit{Downes v. Bidwell} to be the most important of these cases because it is where Justice Edward Douglass White outlined the “doctrine of incorporation,” where these territories would be considered (in Justice White’s words) “foreign to the United States in a domestic sense.” (Burnett and Marshall, 1, 7). “This holding,” as theses authors put it, “simply rejected a long-standing assumption that territorial status must, eventually, lead to statehood,”(emphasis in original, ibid., 12). It was also the case where the Supreme Court emphasized the right of Congress to exercise full plenary powers over these territories.

\textsuperscript{109} Ronald Fernandez, 115.

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 86.
official power to impeach the governor under the terms of the Jones Act, the second organic act which is widely known for granting Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship.\textsuperscript{111}

In the case of Governor Gore almost ten years later, Gore was, like many of these appointees, unqualified for the position. Not only did Gore lack any kind of familiarity with the island or the region (one scholar claims that he did not even know where Puerto Rico was located) but he also had no public administration experience.\textsuperscript{112} Gore was an entrepreneur who had just recently entered the public eye and while he had “hoped for something better,” he accepted the position, expressing a desire to apply the New Deal in Puerto Rico in the same fashion that Roosevelt did on the mainland.\textsuperscript{113} Ultimately, Gore’s tactless campaign for Americanization and opposition to the Liberal Party which he saw as anti-American, led to much discontent on the island and eventually forced him to resign.\textsuperscript{114} As tensions rose on the island, former Governor James Beverly wrote to the Bureau of Insular Affairs suggesting that an ex-army officer be appointed the next governor, “one who has

\textsuperscript{111} Trías Monge, 80. Under than granting U.S. citizenship, the Jones Act also included a number of other changes including a restructuring of the government, the creation of a bill of rights, declaring Puerto Rico an “organized but unincorporated” territory, and establishing English as the official language of the island, (Gonzalez, 60-61). Additionally, the U.S. retained the authority to have the last word on all matters decided by the government of Puerto Rico. The first organic act, also known as the Foraker Act after its sponsor Senator Joseph B. Foraker (R-OH), marked the beginning of colonial control over Puerto Rico by the United States (in an official, legal, and systematic sense) by way of a system that offered little to no room for true self-government. Under this act, Puerto Rico was officially declared a U.S. territory and the U.S. president had the authority to appoint all major administrators in addition to the island’s governor (whom the president was also free to remove from office). Juan Gonzalez, \textit{Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America}, (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 60-61.


\textsuperscript{113} Mathews, 57, 58.

\textsuperscript{114} Mathews, 66, 87. Ironically, in a letter he wrote upon his resignation to another politician, Gore expressed that only a governor who is familiar with the Puerto Rican people and “knows them intimately and has had a long association with them” could be successful at the job. Quoted in Mathews, 111.
sufficient experience to know how to size up and handle delicate situations and who has the courage to do his duty whether it is popular or not.”

Beverly pointed specifically to the Adjutant General of the War Department, Blanton Winship, who’s “willingness to ‘do his duty’ [eventually] led to some of the bloodiest moment of a dramatic decade.”

The President, after “a never ending barrage of complaints” adhered to Beverly’s request, and “[i]n a move to counteract possible loss of prestige, to establish in a clearly chaotic situation some degree of order and decorum, and to bring in a strong hand if a proved administrator, the President appointed General Winship as governor of Puerto Rico.”

General Blanton Winship fought in the Spanish-American War, and later helped defeat Filipino resistance. Additionally, unlike Gore, Winship had a reasonable amount of public administration experience not only through his work in the War Department of which he had recently retired from, but also through other positions he held years earlier in Cuba, Mexico, and the Philippines. Within a year in office, there was already opposition building on the island. The economic situation seemed to be stagnant and many Puerto Ricans were desperate for help. They blamed Winship for not getting aid to the island fast enough and soon the newspaper El Imparcial began a campaign that pushed for Winship’s removal from office.

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115 Letter quoted in Mathews, 112.
116 Ayala and Bernabe, 97.
117 Fernandez, 115.
118 Mathews, 114.
119 Fernandez, 115.

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the next few years violence on the island (both by and against the state) escalated, eventually leading to the Ponce Massacre.

A Rise in Violence and the Incarceration of Nationalist Leaders

With this surge in the militarization of U.S.-appointed administrators in 1934, tensions across the island led to a rise in violence. On October 24, 1935, a group of students from the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras, organized a protest against comments that Albizu Campos made about them being “effeminate, cowardly, and traitors.”

Albizu Campos’ aim in using these epithets is not clear, yet I suspect that it is an attack on a different ideology of and strategy for gaining independence. In other words, perhaps these students did not buy into the violent strategies that the Nationalists purported and Albizu Campos saw that as cowardly. We also see the presence of masculinity in Albizu Campos’ conceptualization of who will lead the independence cause. Nonetheless, many women were involved in the Nationalist Party and many even took on leadership roles in organizing and carrying out violent insurrections.

One account of the incident in Rio Piedras notes that the Puerto Rican police claimed to have information about a group of Nationalists that planned to come to the UPR campus to disrupt the protest against Albizu Campos. As police presence on the campus grew, a group of students decided to call off the protest. Nonetheless, their efforts were unable to quell the violence that was about to take place. As four Nationalists approached the campus in their car, police officers quickly

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122 Moraza Ortiz, 29.
123 For example, Blanca Canales Torresola in the Nationalist Insurrection of 1950.
124 Moraza Ortiz, 29.
detained them. An altercation ensued and when the smoke settled three of the four Nationalists were dead; the police officers that took them into custody had proceeded to shoot and kill them. This incident of state violence is known as the Rio Piedras Massacre and catapults a series of events that ultimately leads to the even more violent Ponce Massacre of 1937.

Pedro Albizu Campos was seemingly deeply affected by the Rio Piedras Massacre. He himself coined it as a massacre in a speech he delivered at the funeral of the three Nationalists that were killed.125 In the same speech, he called for an avengement of their deaths. According to a New York Times report, Albizu Campos “asked the 8,000 present [at the funeral] to raise their right hands and swear to avenge the ‘murdered national heroes, fallen for their country’s honor.’”126 On February 23, 1936, two Nationalists assassinated the Chief of Police Colonel Riggs in retaliation for the Rio Piedras Massacre. Police officers took the two Nationalists into custody and proceeded to shoot and kill them, claiming later that the Nationalists were trying to escape. A few days after Colonel Riggs’ assassination, on March 5, the federal government ordered the arrests of seven Nationalists (including Albizu Campos) on charges of conspiracy to overthrow the U.S. government in Puerto Rico by means of force. About a month later, the federal Grand Jury accused three more Nationalists with the same charge, although two of those cases were eventually dismissed.127

125 Ronald Fernandez quotes Albizu Campos’s speech that he gave in the funeral of the Nationalists, referring to it as “la Massacre de Ponce.” Fernandez, 122.
127 Moraza Ortiz, 36.
The trials of these eight Nationalists is quite telling of the kind of systematic injustices that Puerto Ricans endured during this time of severe U.S. political repression; many claim that they are the most important trials in the political history of Puerto Rico in the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{128} In the first trial, the jury–consisting of seven Puerto Ricans and five non-Puerto Rican U.S. citizens–was unable to come to a decision: “The seven Puerto Rican members of the jury refused to convict a Puerto Rican patriot [Albizu Campos, who took full responsibility for the charges], the five North American jurors said Albizu and his colleagues were indeed guilty of trying to overthrow the government of the United States.”\textsuperscript{129} In the second trial, which took place only a week after the first, the jury consisted of ten non-Puerto Rican U.S. citizens and only two Puerto Ricans which were “closely associated with American business interests.”\textsuperscript{130} This jury found the defendants guilty, with Albizu Campos receiving the harshest sentence. That the U.S. officials deliberately chose a jury that would convict these Nationalists becomes clear when one considers the private conversations that took place between them. For example, Ronald Fernandez points to a letter written by juror Elmer Ellsworth addressed to President Roosevelt in which he states: “My associates on the jury all seemed to be motivated by strong if not violent prejudice against the Nationalists and were prepared to convict them

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 37.

\textsuperscript{129} Fernandez, 128. A note about the use of the term “North American” here. In Puerto Rico this term is often used to refer to non-Puerto Rican U.S. citizens even though it casts such a broad regional area. Another common term that is often used that happens to be more accurate is “estadounidense” or literally “United Statian.”

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
regardless of the evidence.”\textsuperscript{131} Also is the claim by authors such as Manuel E. Moraza Ortiz and Luis A. Ferrao that District Attorney Cecil Snyder showed the list of jurors to non-Puerto Rican U.S. artist Rockwell Kent at a party at Governor Winship’s house stating “that these were [the jurors] that would declare Albizu Campos guilty. [He] also said that he had instructions from the [U.S.] Federal Department of Justice to incarcerate him.”\textsuperscript{132}

This case is significant for various reasons. First, it is another example of where the justice system seems to have failed the Puerto Rican people. The fact that the composition of the jury was changed so drastically from the first trial and allegations that this was done intentionally in order to incriminate Albizu Campos and his followers is unacceptable. Secondly, the reason that the Nationalist Party members organized a demonstration on March 21, 1937 was in order to protest the results of this trial. Finally, as we will see in the coming chapters, the judge in this case and the trial overall become remain relevant in the story even months after the day Ponce Massacre left a dark stain on the history of this Island. Right now, I would like to shift gears to discuss the actual press reports that were published immediately after the tragedy in order to determine what this kind of analysis can tell us about the relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico in this moment in history.

\textbf{Media Representations of the Massacre: Initial Reports}

The U.S. newspapers, the \textit{New York Times} and the \textit{Washington Post}, and the Puerto Rican newspapers, \textit{El Mundo} and \textit{El Imparcial}, exhibit in their initial reports

\textsuperscript{131} Elmer Ellsworth, letter dated October 17, 1938 available at the American Civil Liberties Union, Vol. 2053, quoted in Fernandez, 128.
\textsuperscript{132} Translation mine, Moraza Ortiz, 38, also mentioned in Ferrao, 164.
immediately following the Ponce Massacre, a stark contrast. U.S. reporters labeled the incident a “riot” and a “clash,” and blamed Nationalists for the violence. Puerto Rican reporters used terms like “massacre” and “mass assassination” and blamed Governor Winship as chief of insular police.

When looking at the way that the Ponce Massacre was represented in these press outlets there are a few things to keep in mind. The relationship that Puerto Rico has had with the U.S. makes Puerto Rico’s positionality with respect to the Massacre particularly complex. The political stance of many Puerto Ricans at the time was still taking shape. Many were still trying to determine what they believed was best for the Island and the extent of U.S. presence and support was a major component of that process. While the independence movement experienced rapid growth in the 1930s, many Puerto Ricans were still a bit unconvinced about the possibility of independence becoming the official and ultimate political status of the Island. Thus, in defending the Nationalists’ civil and human rights in this case, many non-independentistas and independentistas that were members of the Nationalist Party, risked association with the Nationalists. However, unlike the way the continental U.S. government and perhaps many in the continental U.S. public saw it, most Puerto Ricans did not conceive of the Massacre as a conflict between the Nationalists and the state. Instead, they juxtaposed the Puerto Rican public against the state (both the insular and federal U.S. government), citing the injustice committed against innocent people that day. In Puerto Rican newspapers, we see that as the public and political leaders began learning more about the Massacre as the months passed, a growing voice of people blamed U.S. authorities for the incident, particularly the presiding
governor at the time, Blanton Winship, as commander-in-chief of the insular police. Thus, while not explicitly so, this suggests that Puerto Rico’s colonial status was at the axis of Puerto Ricans’ understanding and processing of this horrible tragedy. This is in stark contrast to U.S. newspapers which, by basing their information on sources like Governor Winship’s official press releases, blamed the Nationalists for the incident and criminalized them even while (sometimes) acknowledging that the police shot straight into the crowd.

Another consideration is the limits to and sources of information that each paper had access to. Of course, in the case of U.S. papers, there was the problem of geographical distance. Most of the information printed in these papers was cabled to them from different sources on the island. Unlike the Puerto Rican papers, the Times and the Post did not have many reporters right on the island delivering news back to their headquarters. For the most part, I have concluded from my research that most of the information that the U.S. papers gathered on the Massacre came from two basic sources: the news conglomerate The Associated Press and the governing administration on the island. The latter of these two sources is particularly problematic in that this very administration was implicated in the events of that Palm Sunday. This fits right into the propaganda model advanced by Herman and Chomsky that I introduced earlier. They point to the fact that dominant powers such as the U.S. government ultimately control and filter the information that goes to the mass media. According to them, the media fails to see this filtering, not only because of the extent to which it is embedded in the system, but also because that very system makes them think that they are the ones actually making the choices as to what reaches the
public. As these authors put it:

[...] the media do not stop to ponder the bias that is inherent in the priority assigned to government-supplied raw materials, or the possibility that the government might be manipulating the news, imposing its own agenda, and deliberately diverting attention from other material.

In my research with respect to the Massacre, I found that when one analyzes U.S. press reports of the incident, especially in contrast to the Puerto Rican press, it is clear that the U.S. government played a role in “manipulating the news, imposing its own agenda, and deliberately diverting attention from other material” in order to protect its reputation internationally and its economic and military interests in the Island.

It is safe to say that the voice(s) of the Puerto Rican public was not very present at all in these U.S. papers. Not one quoted an eyewitness or even referred to reports that were published in Puerto Rican newspapers. One could say that the language barrier could have posed a problem, but I would think that these papers would at the very least make an effort to hire translators if that was an obstacle to fair and balanced reporting. On the other hand, Puerto Rican newspapers obviously had much easier access to the scene itself and were able to interview not only the governing administration but also members of the public, especially eyewitnesses to the event. Additionally, Puerto Rican newspapers sometimes commented on U.S. reports. Although I will not discuss those instances in detail here, I do think it suggests that Puerto Rican reporters were engaged with and aware of U.S. coverage.

Before discussing questions of blame, I would first like to look at the terminology that was used in these papers to describe the Massacre. In general terms,

133 Herman and Chomsky, 2.
134 Ibid.
I have observed that the New York Times and The Washington Post commonly used the term “riot” to describe the Massacre, even after an independent investigation (which I detail in Chapter Two) deemed the incident a “massacre.” In fact, of the fourteen articles that discuss the Massacre in the New York Times in 1937, eleven of them included the use of the word “riot” to describe the incident. Of the nine articles published in The Washington Post that year, seven of them used the same term. The use of the term “riot” is very telling of the way that the U.S. press conceptualized the event. The word implies disorder caused by the public.\textsuperscript{135} Other words and phrases used in these papers include “Nationalist Riot,”\textsuperscript{136} “outbreak,”\textsuperscript{137} “battle,”\textsuperscript{138} “disturbance,”\textsuperscript{139} “political riot,”\textsuperscript{140} “March uprising,”\textsuperscript{141} “pandemonium,”\textsuperscript{142} “liberty riots,”\textsuperscript{143} and a “lamentable affair.”\textsuperscript{144} When compared to the kinds of words we will see used in Puerto Rican newspapers, such as “slaughter,” “killing,” and “massacre,” those used in U.S. newspapers not only appear much more reserved and inert, but they also suggest that there was a sort of fight where more than one party was participating. In other words, words like “battle,” “clash,” and descriptions using the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{135} According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a riot is defined as “4. a. Violence, strife, disorder, tumult, esp. on the part of the populace. b. A violent disturbance of the peace by an assembly or body of persons; an outbreak of active lawlessness or disorder among the populace; a hostile attack or encounter.” Oxford English Dictionary, Second Edition, (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1989).
  \item \textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{140} "Lets in Plot Evidence at Puerto Rican Trial," New York Times, September 18, 1937, 8.
  \item \textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{142} "Puerto Rico: Guns Blaze Afresh," The Washington Post, March 28, 1937, 3.
  \item \textsuperscript{144} Clark, J.M. "What Destiny?" The Washington Post, November 3, 1937, 9.
\end{itemize}

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word “between” such as: “the fierce street battle between the police and agitators for independence”\textsuperscript{145} and “firing between police and demonstrating Nationalists”\textsuperscript{146} clearly depict the Nationalists as participants in the shooting when at the time it was clear that the police did most if not all of the shooting and while the question of who fired the first shot was hotly debated, the fact that the Nationalists were unarmed was widely believed to be true, especially among the Puerto Rican public. Beyond these specific labels and use of terminology that we can see across the board, there are certain articles that I would like to examine more closely. Let us explore the U.S. reports first, followed by Puerto Rican ones.

\textit{The Ponce Massacre in U.S. Newspapers}

The ways that U.S. newspapers treated the Ponce Massacre in their initial reports are quite telling of the manner in which these reporters conceived of this event and chose to frame it to their readers. As I mentioned in the introduction, these reporters could have very well thought that they were providing objective and balanced reports, but the reality was that they were influenced by dominant powers that filtered media production very carefully in order to protect their interests.

From the first report on the incident published by the \textit{New York Times}, for example, the language and specific stance on the subject is quite indicative of how the paper treats the event in the months to come, even after gathering new information. Just from the article’s title, we can see how the event is framed: “7 Die in Puerto Rico


Riot, 50 Injured as Police Fire on Fighting Nationalists.147 First, is the aforementioned label of “riot,” then we see a clear acknowledgement of the police fire. However, here is where it gets tricky; who/what are the police firing upon? The New York Times reports that the police fired upon “fighting Nationalists.” Thus, not only is there an inaccurate depiction of who is being fired upon (no mention of the innocent bystanders who were also shot), but there is also an inaccurate (but very clear) depiction of the Nationalists as “fighting.” Then we go beyond the title. In addition to the use of the word “riot,” the (unnamed) reporter also uses the words “disorder” and “clash.” This terminology is seen over and over again in both U.S. newspapers. Beyond some of the blatant misreporting of the facts, including the very name of the mayor of Ponce, it is interesting to see the way that things are framed in this article.148 The article begins by stating: “Nationalist agitation for an independent Puerto Rico led to a serious riot this afternoon at Ponce, second [largest] city on the island.” 149 From the beginning, the reporter makes it clear that the Nationalists and their fight for independence are the reason so many lives were lost and so many were wounded that day. The Times gives only the police version of the story, but at least they clearly mark it as such. Another clear instance where the paper blames the PNPR for the Massacre is apparent when they state: “The riots were believed here to be the outgrowth of a movement led by Pedro Albizu Campos” whom they describe as “an

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148 The mayor’s name was reported as Ormes when in fact it was José Tormos Diego. Ibid.
149 Ibid.
American Negro Harvard graduate.”150 They also discuss the Rio Piedras Massacre, although they place the word massacre in quotation marks. In the final section of the article, titled “Violence Has Been Frequent,” the author cites other cases of violence or “disorders” on the island where Nationalists had been involved including a set of bombings and an incident the previous May where “[…] the Puerto Rican police, after student zealots had started disorders in various parts of the island, surrounded the Nationalist club in Ponce and suppressed a drill of the ‘Cadets of the Republic,’ described as one of the units of the Nationalist force,” (emphasis mine).151 The reporter’s use of the word zealot here is also an interesting choice as it implies fanaticism, in a way delegitimizing the Nationalist cause. This incident is, in all probability, was another case where the Nationalists’ civil rights to free speech and assembly were violated even though the Cadets often made peaceful demonstrations to raise awareness and funds for their cause.

The next article published by the Times about the Massacre is also very telling. While it is one of the only articles in the U.S. papers that actually quotes eyewitnesses and a Puerto Rican political leader, it still offers a skewed perspective on the incident. This time they got the mayor’s name right but proceeded to refer to “Sunday’s street rioting.”152 While they do state that the cause of the incident was the mayor’s “granting and then withdrawing at the last minute a permit for Nationalists to parade at Ponce,” they claim that: “In the accounts of civilian witnesses as well as in those of the police there is agreement that the shooting was first started by the

150 Ibid.
151 Ibid.
Nationalists […]”¹⁵³ This is not surprising, however, for there were many conflicting opinions and testimonies about this particular detail soon after the incident. Still, the report includes a lot of speculation, including the following claim: “There appears to be ample evidence bearing out the Governor’s statement that the Nationalists were prepared and looking for trouble; that they did much sniping from roofs and balconies.”¹⁵⁴ They do not cite what “evidence” proves this claim, but it is clear that they relied heavily on the Governor and his administration for their information.

Additionally, the unnamed reporter also cites Senator Antonio R. Barceló, president of the Liberal Party who stresses that “the disturbances were ‘purely local’” and the Nationalist Party had a small and local (to Ponce) following. Barceló also dismisses the Nationalists by claiming that the party was “‘made up almost entirely of young students, some of them only 15 and 16 years old,’” and thus their threats should not be taken very seriously.¹⁵⁵ He also comments on the status issue stating that while the Nationalist “demand for Puerto Rican independence is not practical,” Puerto Ricans “‘look forward to the establishment in Puerto Rico of a regime somewhat similar to the in the Irish Free State.’”¹⁵⁶ “‘Meanwhile,’” he states, “‘the police will be able to cope with any difficulties that arrive.’”¹⁵⁷ I think that the fact that this paper chose to interview Barceló is significant. While they may have simply been taking advantage of the fact that the Senator was in New York City undergoing medical treatment, I question why they did not include any Nationalist voices. Consequently, I also

¹⁵³ Ibid.
¹⁵⁴ Ibid.
¹⁵⁵ Barceló quoted in ibid.
¹⁵⁶ Barceló quoted in ibid.
¹⁵⁷ Barceló quoted in ibid.
wonder about the specific stance of the eyewitnesses they spoke to (who were they; did they speak to any Nationalists?) and what they actually saw versus speculation about what happened.

*The Washington Post’s* first article on the Massacre, submitted by The Associated Press, was had similar conclusions as the *Times*. They also call it a (political) riot, blame the Nationalists, and point to a past case of violence. However, unlike the *Times*’ report, they do not deem this version of the story as a “police version” but instead state: “Reports received here said […]” They fail to mention where the reports came from, but it is likely they came from Governor Blanton Winship’s administration and they do not indicate it as a specific version of the story. This report, of course, also has its inaccuracies such as stating that the parade was unannounced, which in fact it had been announced ahead of time in the paper *El Mundo*. Again, it is also reported here that it was the Nationalists who “allegedly” fired the first shot, but at least the term allegedly suggests that it is not a fact. Then, before discussing the assassination of Colonel Riggs, the paper states: “Much of the recent disorder in Puerto Rico in recent years is laid at the door of the Nationalist Party which under leadership of Pedro Albizu Campos has pushed the doctrine that the island is an unwilling vassal of the United States.” Thus, this paper suggests that past violence and subsequently the Ponce Massacre is solely the fault of Nationalist discontent with Puerto Rico’s relationship with the U.S. Then, perhaps in

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159 Ibid.
160 Ibid.
an effort to quell the American (continental U.S.) public’s potential fear or simply to play down Nationalist influence, the reporter makes a point to end the article by stressing that “the Nationalists are a minority group on the island” in terms of poll numbers.\footnote{Ibid.}

The next article in the Post about the Massacre, printed the following day, also only tells the police side of the story but is at least more explicit about it. This article reports on the “heavily armed police” that patrolled the city of Ponce the night of the Massacre “to guard against further Nationalist riotin [sic].”\footnote{“Puerto Rico Riot Toll Reaches 10; Others near Death,” The Washington Post, March 23, 1937, 14.} It describes the Nationalists simply as those “who seek independence from the United States,” and refers to fighting between the Nationalists and the police.\footnote{Ibid.} Then it claims: “The Sunday battle was started, police said, when Nationalists fired on police assigned to prevent them from holding a mass demonstration which had been banned by city officials.”\footnote{Ibid.} The use of the word “battle” here is quite interesting for aside from the question of who fired the first shot, it was clearly the police that did most of the shooting that day. In this particular article, there is no mention of this and one might get the inaccurate impression here that there was a more even exchange of fire than there actually was.

The following week, The Washington Post printed another article entitled “Puerto Rico: Guns Blaze Afresh” which offered a more accurate account of what happened and was less accusatory of the Nationalists. In fact, they state here that

\footnote{Ibid.}
“police fired on Nationalists paraders.” They are also less clear about who fired the first shot, stating: “Suddenly a shot was fired, pandemonium broke loose and bodies of dead Nationalists littered the street.” At the same time, they used words like “rioting” and “clashed.” Also, what is most disturbing about this article is the last paragraph which claims that “The Ponce incident has been one in a long series of clashes…” The unnamed reporter goes on to cite the assassination of Colonel Riggs, the attempted killing of resident commissioner Santiago Iglesias and “Other disorders for which the Nationalists have been blamed” including some bombings in 1934 and 1935. What is striking about this is that there is not mention of the violence that took place against the Nationalists such as the subsequent killing of the two Nationalists that killed Riggs by the police without having been given a fair trial, and absolutely no mention of the four Nationalists that the police also murdered in what was later deemed the Rio Piedras Massacre in October 1935.

The significance of these types of depictions that were present in U.S. newspapers is that the reporters were effectively criminalizing Nationalists through them. In misrepresenting the Nationalist demonstrators as instigators of violence and participants of the tragedy of the Ponce Massacre, these reporters managed to construct quite a different picture of not only the event itself but also of the PNPR to the U.S. public, meanwhile the very police officers that were the perpetrators of this horrific violence remained free of incrimination. One gets the impression from U.S. reports that the Puerto Rican police, under the leadership of Governor Winship and his administration, were simply doing their job, and the many fatalities and injuries

that resulted from that were a tragic price to pay for keeping the Puerto Rican public in general (read: non-Nationalists) safe. Furthermore, when contrasting these representations against those in Puerto Rican newspapers, these points become increasingly clear.

_The Ponce Massacre in Puerto Rican Newspapers_

Both Puerto Rican newspapers have many more articles about this incident and are much more detailed. While the _Times_ and the _Post_ reported similarly on the events and used similar language, I must note that _El Mundo_ and _El Imparcial_ have a greater difference in their reporting of the Massacre. Nevertheless, what we see here is a completely different way of framing the Massacre than U.S. newspapers. Not only did these papers tend to publish accounts that were more balanced than U.S. ones, they also placed the blame on the opposite party (the police and Governor Winship).

In my research I have found that the language used in _El Imparcial_ is much stronger and suggestive than that of _El Mundo_, even accusatory at times (towards Governor Winship and his administration). This difference is especially noticeable in the early reports soon after the incident took place. _El Mundo_’s coverage is very sterile at first, careful to not come to premature conclusions and attempting to cover different perspectives on what happened. In fact, they successfully avoid labeling it at all, often using phrasing like “los sucesos”\(^\text{166}\) or “the happenings,” and “el caso de

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Ponce” or “the Ponce case.” Whenever we do see labeling in these early reports, it is in the quotes of people the paper interviews such as the Governor’s administration, local (Ponce) authorities, and eyewitnesses.

In contrast, *El Imparcial* uses very clear language and labeling from the very first report. Taking over the entire front page of its first printing since February 1937, a Puerto Rican flag appears to be torn at the end and a picture of some of the victims of the Massacre. The single block of text on the page reads:

Liberty was never able to be bought but by the price of blood honorably shed. That is how these young men paid, with their lives dedicated to the flag. Governor Winship, representative of the United States in Puerto Rico, congratulated the police for their behavior. But Puerto Rican society, horrified, calls the event: THE PONCE MASSACRE! [emphasis theirs]

The language present in here is quite different then that used in *El Mundo*. Here we see a block of text that is laced with patriotic (maybe even Nationalistic) language including talk of liberty, honor, bloodshed, and the (Puerto Rican) flag. Furthermore, the unnamed author of this text places the Governor juxtaposed to Puerto Rican society and proceeds to label the incident “the Ponce Massacre.” Finally the headline on this page reads “False legend of a photo,” referring to a widely circulated photograph that some claimed showed the Nationalists firing the first

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168 For some reason, *El Imparcial* was out of print for the month of March so its reporting of the Massacre did not begin until April 1st, about 11 days after the incident. While I do recognize that this does effect how this paper reports on the incident, I see it as minor because it is still so close to the day in question and new information was coming in on a daily basis.
169 The translation and all following will be my own. “¡Al Gesto Altivo, La Tracción a Tera!” *El Imparcial*, April 1, 1937, 1.
170 The difference between “patriotic” and “Nationalistic” language that I allude to here is that because of the radical nature of Nationalist views, Nationalistic language would be much stronger in tone.
The photo, due to the quality of photography in 1937 and the chaotic nature of the event itself, depicts a cloud of smoke coming from the front of the Nationalist club. It is unclear where this cloud of smoke came from and especially difficult to pinpoint the specific person or party that created it. This paper critically questions the claim that this photo incriminates the Nationalists; they publish the photo on several issues, taking up an entire page, and ask the public to judge for itself. On page three, an unknown reporter goes on to describe the Massacre (they use the label again) as a “circle of terror drawn by gunpowder, lead, and blood by the machine guns fired against the pueblo by agents of order” [emphasis mine] and points to the distrust of the investigations being carried out, calling “the regime that governs us” irresponsible. Again, the vivid imagery that the reporter uses is unique when compared to other papers and it is clear that he/she conceptualized the event as a massacre whereby police officials shot at the public and there is no blame placed on the Nationalists. In fact, in this very article, *El Imparcial* announces the start of their own investigation whereby they interview many eyewitnesses that were not pursued by or even completely ignored by the local officials in their investigation. Other striking words and phrases in this article include: “matanza” [emphasis mine] which means “(mass) killing,” “the crimes of Palm Sunday” (committed against the

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171 Cuchi, Cayetano Coll, "Falsa Leyenda De Una Foto," *El Imparcial*, April 1, 1937, 1,2. The word “pueblo” here is used to indicate the Puerto Rican people/community.


173 According to the Spanish-language dictionary, Real Academia Española, “mantanza” is defined as the action of killing but can also be defined as: “2. f. Mortandad de personas ejecutada en una batalla, asalto, etc.” or “Mass of persons executed in a battle, assault, etc;” (translation mine). *Real Academia Española*, 22nd ed., <http://buscon.rae.es/draeI/SrvltConsulta?TIPO_BUS=3&LEMA=matanza>. 

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Puerto Rican public), “horrified witness,” and “human carnage.”174 Throughout the month of April, *El Imparcial* not only publishes full versions of these eyewitness testimonies, they also publish several photographs, asking the Puerto Rican public to study them carefully and submit their thoughts and observations.175 The paper’s photographer himself also uses strong language when giving his own eyewitness account including words and phrases like: “fear,” “terror,” “mass assassinations” and even expresses a suspicion that the police was willing to stop the parade “at any cost.”176

The reports in *El Mundo* have a different trajectory than that of *El Imparcial*. At first, the reporters at *El Mundo* appear to rely mostly on official reports of the incident which, written by local officials, placed the blame on the Nationalists. However, as new evidence appeared including eyewitness testimonies and the participation of the editorial staff of the paper (along with the editor of *El Imparcial*, in the Hays Commission investigation, the paper begins to take a different tone that is more closely aligned with *El Imparcial*, not U.S. papers. I will discuss this change later in Chapter Two. For now, I would like to look more closely at the initial reporting of *El Mundo* and how it compares with *El Imparcial* and the U.S. reports I have looked at thus far.

The first article on the Ponce Massacre in *El Mundo* gives two different versions of the story: that of the police and that of the Nationalists. They quote individuals from both groups and print a copy of the parade permit and the official

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174 Ibid.
statement that later revoked said permit. The reporter, A. Castro, Jr. describes the incident as a “shooting between the members of said organization (the Nationalists) and members of the Insular Police with fatal consequences.”\textsuperscript{177} In the police version, the police chief Guillermo Soldevila claims that a shot was fired and the policeman Juan Rodríguez fell injured. Then a shoot-out took place where no less than 300 bullet capsules were dispersed. In the Nationalist version, a policeman shot into the air when then initiated a shoot-out solely on behalf of members of the police force which “‘machine-gunned them like rats.’”\textsuperscript{178} When asked why there were police injured, the Nationalists responded that the police surrounded them and thus when both sides of policeman shot, they got caught in their own colleagues’ gunfire. The reporter then goes on to discuss the current climate at Ponce (police reinforcements being heavy) and the number and names of those that they had gathered thus far of the dead and injured (details that were never included in the U.S. reports). Castro, Jr. also reports on the many arrests (over 150, according to him) of Nationalists that day. He also interviews a doctor at one of the local hospitals that claims that many of those injured were shot in the back. The reporter then goes on to quote many more witnesses and discus various details about the event. Overall, Castro, Jr. most frequently uses the words “los sucesos” or “the happenings” and “el tiroteo” or “the shooting” or “shoot-out” to describe the incident.\textsuperscript{179} However, I must note that there are two instances in this long article where he calls it a “motín” which means a

\textsuperscript{178} Unnamed person quoted in ibid.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid.

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mutiny, riot, or rebellion, mirroring the language used in U.S. reports. Yet that is where the similarities with the U.S. papers end. Unlike the Times and the Post, *El Mundo* actually gives a Nationalist version of what happened and quotes not only local officials, including police, but also many eyewitnesses. Upon reading this article one gets the sense that even though the reporter offers many details, especially about the aftermath, he does refrain from making premature conclusions and seems to leave things open to new information that will surely follow.

The following report published in *El Mundo* about the Massacre was printed the next day and was also very long and detailed. Again, there are more descriptions of the scene and interviews with local officials and eyewitnesses—both Nationalist and non-Nationalist—with conflicting accounts of what transpired. What is most interesting, however, are the Nationalist interviewees who immediately place the blame on Governor Winship and use stronger language. One Nationalist, the captain of the Cadets of the Republic who was in charge of leading that group’s march claimed that soon after he gave the “forward march” order, he witnessed a police officer shoot into the air, a signal, he believes, for the rest of the police to begin shooting. Another Nationalist leader, interim President of the Nationalist Party, is quoted as stating the following:

> The educated city of Ponce was, yesterday Palm Sunday, witness to the coldest massacre that history can know. Men, women, and children were machine-gunned en masse. The list of the dead speaks for itself. We hold responsible the government of the United States in having ordered, through its armed institutions, the assassination of an entire town. We demand that responsibility be held for this horrendous crime that has consternated the entire [Puerto Rican] nation. Nationalism has initiated a detailed investigation.

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180 Ibid.
of this assassination in order to denounce, before all civilized and Christian
countries of the world, the massacre of Palm Sunday.\footnote{Eliseo Combas Guerra, Castro-Combas, and José E. Pujals, "Aumentan a Quince Los Muertos En Ponce," \textit{El Mundo}, March 23, 1937, 1, 5.}

First, I must note here the use of the word massacre. This is the first instance of the word in \textit{El Mundo} with regard to the incident, but it is within a direct quote of a Nationalist Party leader. Then is the strong accusation against the U.S. government of having ordered “the assassination of an entire town.” Another interesting component here is the demand to hold the U.S. government responsible for the Massacre on an international level. Other Nationalists interviewed in this piece echo this language. I think this is significant because even though these words are not coming from the reporters themselves but rather from an individual they are interviewing, the presence of these words in the paper, their exposure to the public, and the fact that these reporters decided to interview Nationalists in the first place, are all things that are absent from U.S. reports.

A final note about this article is that the reporters discuss the funeral of many of the victims. Thousands of people attended these services, filling up the streets of Ponce. This kind of expression of support on behalf of the Puerto Rican public is something that is also absent from U.S. reports. There is no sense from the articles in the \textit{Times} or the \textit{Post} that the Puerto Rican people disagreed with their representation and consequent blame for what happened. In another article printed in this issue, reporters interview Chief of Police Colonel Orbeta and Governor Winship who claims that the Nationalists fired first and that they were also the ones that did most of
the shooting that followed. Again, this does echo U.S. reports, but the difference here is that those at *El Mundo* make a concerted effort (as we have already seen) to also include the Nationalist version as well as accounts from non-Nationalist eyewitnesses. In this sense, both *El Imparcial* and *El Mundo* appear to do a better job of providing fair and balanced reporting than do *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.


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Hand pointing at Governor Winship. Text on hand reads “La Mano Del Pueblo” or “the hand of the public.” *El Imparcial*, March 4, 1937, p. 19.

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Image of Winship casting a dark shadow on the Island. Text translates to “the shadow of ill-fate.” El Imparcial, March 6, 1937, p. 3.

Ultimately, when comparing the way that all of these newspapers reported on the Ponce Massacre, the largest contrast is seen between U.S. newspapers and Puerto Rican ones. While U.S. papers stressed the participation of the Nationalists in the violence, blaming them for the entire tragedy, Puerto Rican papers stressed the innocence of the parade participants and the spectators and quickly placed the blame on local authorities, especially Governor Winship. It seems that the Puerto Rican presses conceptualized the Massacre as another (yet most tragic and traumatizing) result of U.S. colonialism on the island. To the U.S. press, this was a sad story of yet another case of violence sponsored by Nationalists in their vain struggle for independence whereby local officials did what they needed to do in order to maintain order.

While this is only a small sample of the initial reports written in these four newspapers just after the Massacre, they illustrate a few important things about the history of Puerto Rico and U.S.-Puerto Rico relations. First, in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, we see a criminalization of Nationalist Party members that continued through the 1950s. Secondly, the treatment of the Ponce Massacre in U.S. newspapers is indicative of a trend that continues to this day concerning Puerto Rican news in U.S. media outlets. Later in the twentieth century and now in the twenty-first, it is rare that Puerto Rico and its fellow U.S. citizens make it into mainstream U.S. news and often, when they do, the reports reflect similar dynamics to what we saw almost eighty years ago. These misrepresentations and the omission of certain voices and facts (or at the very least, careless and inaccurate reporting) indicate a lack of commitment to Island news. In other words, one could imagine that if these
newspapers had a vested interest in Puerto Rico and its people, there would have been a greater effort in producing more exhaustive pieces or at least more exhaustive research to write succinct yet accurate reports. In other words, I do not expect that the *Times* or the *Post* would have printed such detailed and lengthy articles as the Puerto Rican newspapers did, but I would think that in an effort to provide the public with the most accurate and truthful accounts, there would have been more research done and less instances of coming to hasty conclusions. Instead, U.S. papers used concision, to their advantage. Chomsky has referred to the U.S. mass media’s use of concision as part of the propaganda model. “The beauty of concision,” he states in an interview, “is that you can only repeat conventional thoughts.”\(^{183}\) In another instance, he adds: “You can’t give evidence if you’re stuck with concision. That’s the genius of this structural constraint.”\(^{184}\) Thus, in contrast to the lengthy and detailed articles that Puerto Rican newspapers published, the U.S. government was able to use the “structural constraint” that was and still is conventional in U.S. media to disseminate their particular message (one inline with their interests) while leaving certain information out that did not “conform to the established dogma” of “benevolent U.S. aims.”\(^{185}\)

Additionally, comparing and contrasting the U.S. papers I have looked at here and the Puerto Rican papers *El Mundo* and *El Imparcial* highlights the differences in language and overall treatment of such a tragic event in each region. Close analysis of

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\(^{183}\) Chomsky quoted in ibid.  
\(^{184}\) Chomsky in bid., 158.  
\(^{185}\) Herman and Chomsky, xiv.
the Puerto Rican papers reveals an underlying contempt for U.S. presence and consequently U.S. colonialism. In the initial reports, this is especially visible in *El Imparcial*, however, as I show in my upcoming chapters, we eventually see a similar sentiment in *El Mundo*.
Chapter 2: A controversial Search for the Truth:

Investigations on the Ponce Massacre

When we started our investigation, we objected to the title “Committee for Investigation of the Ponce Massacre.” We designated the Ponce tragedy as the Ponce affair, or melee, or riot, or by other words which would indicate our desire to consider the matter objectively. After hearing the evidence, we have come to the conclusion that the people of Ponce have given this tragedy the only possible descriptive title: This was the PONCE MASSACRE—and the more so because it occurred in time of peace.


As it was, Dr. Gruening and Governor Winship, aided by a Nationalist attack on a continental judge on the island, were able to get to the President and convince him that it would not be to the best interests of the administration to have an investigation of the island administration and the Ponce Massacre. The prestige of the federal authority was to be maintained at an unquestionable level no matter what the costs.


These quotations highlight two major tensions in the aftermath of the Ponce Massacre that I address in this chapter. One is the continuing question of terminology that I initially examined in Chapter One. In the first quotation we have an official statement, made on behalf of an independent group of investigators, that directly addresses the question of how to label the Massacre. The second quotation captures the decision made by the U.S. government not to conduct a federal investigation into the Massacre in order to protect “the prestige of the federal authority.” This dismissive attitude towards the Massacre coupled with the desire to protect U.S. interests, one linked to already embedded issues of colonialism and the
criminalization of independentistas, is reflected in U.S. newspapers. When one compares U.S. newspapers to Puerto Rican ones, the differences in the framing of the Massacre is striking.

In this chapter, I discuss the different investigations that did (and did not) take place after the Ponce Massacre. These investigations are significant because they play a large role in the creation of a historical record of the incident and play into—through the information filtered to the public by the media—Puerto Ricans’ historical memory of the event. They are also revealing in terms of official assignment of blame for the event, the kind of terminology used, and the general frameworks invoked, as well as the investigative methods employed and the question of who is ultimately in charge. The investigations run by government officials are controlled in the same fashion that U.S. media coverage was controlled in an effort to protect certain reputations and political and economic interests on the Island.

The Island government’s investigation of the Massacre failed to meet the expectations of Puerto Ricans. Many felt that this investigation was biased because government officials were essentially investigating themselves. This recognition led Puerto Rican leaders to begin an investigation of their own. This independent investigation, which I refer to as the Hays investigation, is the next section of this chapter and serves as the crux of my discussion. Because this investigation was run by an independent organization—the American Civil Liberties Union—and not by government authorities, the results of the inquiry are groundbreaking. Nevertheless, the local government, especially Governor Winship, as well as continental U.S. papers did everything they could to delegitimize the entire investigation and
undermine its significance. I also discuss the failure of the U.S. government to conduct a federal investigation in an effort to protect its imperial interests in the Caribbean. Finally, I include a critical analysis of U.S. and Puerto Rican news reports in response to the Hays investigation and explain the differences in reports. Ultimately, I show that even with the findings of the Hays investigation, U.S. reports continue to defend Governor Winship and accept his view of the investigation, while Puerto Rican reports show that this independent investigation confirmed what they already believed to be true about the Massacre: that Governor Winship, not the Nationalists, was to blame for the tragedy and that he should be held responsible.

After the initial reports, Puerto Rican newspapers began discussing the details of the official investigation that the local government was carrying out. There was little to no mention of this investigation in the U.S. press, which, as I detail below, focused mostly on statements (including, but not exclusively, official press releases) made by Governor Winship. Due to what it perceived as the biased nature of this investigation, the Puerto Rican public demanded that an independent inquiry take place. A group of Puerto Rican leaders decided to do just that and enlisted the help of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). This investigation proved to be very influential on Puerto Rican public opinion about the Ponce Massacre, solidifying the view that Governor Winship bore responsibility. Winship completely dismissed the findings, however, a position that appears to have affected the degree to which the U.S. press took this investigation seriously. There is a clear difference in the way that

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U.S. and Puerto Rican newspapers continued to frame the Massacre and its aftermath. While Puerto Rican papers showed an interest in how the U.S. government had reacted, especially in light of the findings of the independent investigation, U.S. papers followed their initial reporting trend in the way they framed the event. Many reports side with Winship’s version of the event, quickly coming to his defense and portraying him as blameless.

**The Local Investigation**

The local government’s investigation, led by Ponce’s District Attorney Rafael V. Pérez-Marchand, began shortly after the Ponce Massacre to determine exactly what took place on that tragic afternoon. Unfortunately, what took place following the Massacre was almost as questionable as what occurred during the Massacre itself, leading Pérez-Marchand eventually to resign his post as D.A. The flaws of this investigation were many, and Governor Winship, as head of the insular police and the political figure with the most power on the island, did nothing to correct those flaws. He actually added to the lack of integrity that pervaded the inquiry. The questions that this investigation raised—along with the lack of continuity between reports issued by Ponce’s D.A. and statements released by Winship—are what ultimately led to the Puerto Rican people’s demand for an independent investigation. This investigation is thus important not only because it was the catalyst for Hay’s investigation, but also because it highlights the irresponsible way in which the Massacre was being handled locally by government officials and the governor’s clear disregard for a thorough exploration of the incident.
Winship and his aides made it clear that they believed the Nationalists were to blame for the incident and that the police involved that day were simply doing their job. Many of the claims that the administration made during the weeks after the Massacre, along with the actions of some of the local officials themselves, were very problematic. Not only were the two highest commanding officers (the Insular Chief of Police, Colonel Enrique de Orbeta, and Ponce’s Chief of Police Captain Felipe Blanco) conveniently absent from the scene, but the District Attorney, who only lived ten minutes away, was also not notified of the incident until roughly two hours later.

Pérez-Marchand submitted a series of reports to Governor Winship about the Massacre and Winship claimed to use these as a basis for his own official statements about the incident. Yet, as the independent investigation of the Commission of Inquiry on Civil Rights in Puerto Rico later points out, Winship makes some claims in his report to the Department of the Interior that were unfounded and that did not match up with Pérez-Marchand’s reports. On May 19th, Pérez-Marchand wrote a letter to Arthur Garfield Hays, who headed this independent investigation, pointing out that he never reported that it was a Nationalist who fired the first shot or that there were snipers on rooftops and balconies, all claims that Winship made in his report. The Hays investigators also debunked the Governor’s claim that the first two shots were

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187 The Hays’ report states: “We have heretofore noted that Col. Orbeta and Captain Blanco, who had apparently expected serious and dangerous happenings because of the assumed ferocity of the cadets, had taken a little adventure around town. Captain Blanco testified before the Legislative Committee that no one was left in command, and that sub-chiefs Soldevila, Bernard and Perez Segarra, each having charge of a contingent of the police, had no orders.” Hays, et. al., 16.
188 Hays, et. al., 35.
190 Ibid., 36-37.
struck policemen. They pointed to the photographs taken that day as evidence that these two policemen were still standing firm, weapons drawn, after the first shots were fired. Although Winship and his team claimed that the Nationalists participated in the shooting, no weapons were found on any of the civilians except for one parade observer. Witnesses claimed they saw a police officer place a weapon in this gentleman’s pocket. Some also say that the weapons the police claimed to have found in the Nationalist Club (mentioned in Winship’s report) were likewise planted by policemen. The Hays Commission was unanimous in its opinion that: “the Nationalist cadets never had any pistols on their persons, or in the headquarters at Ponce, and that the statement to the contrary in the report to the Department of the Interior is unsupported.” The members of the Commission even go as far as to challenge a statement in Winship’s report that the Chief of Police “showed great patience, consideration and understanding, as did the officers and men under him.”

According to the Commission,

This statement in the report praising the chief of police as well his officers and men is the most objectionable of all the errors made in this message. Instead of showing “patience, consideration and understanding of the situation,” the Insular Chief of Police and the local Chief of Police were not there when they were needed and no one was in command. The proper words to describe the conduct of the officers and men would be lack of consideration, lust for blood, and vicious destruction of life.

Based on these points, it appears that Winship was at the center of many unsupported claims. Unfortunately, U.S. newspapers like the *Times* and the *Post* took Winship’s

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191 Medina Vázquez, 43fn9.
192 Ibid., 42fn5 and Hays, et. al., 26-27, 39.
193 Hays, et. al., 40.
194 Ibid., 41.
words at face value and made little effort to question or challenge any of his assertions, even those that appeared premature and lacking in proof or evidence.

In addition to the deficiencies in this government-sponsored investigation, it appeared that higher-ranking government officials tried to limit the power of District Attorney Pérez-Marchand. In his own account of the Massacre and the investigations that followed, Pérez-Marchand describes a meeting with the Attorney General and two judges in which they claim that as District Attorney he could not order the arrest of government officials or members of the police force without a prior “superior” order.195 Apparently, Pérez-Marchand was free to arrest as many Nationalists as he wanted, but when it came to bringing charges against the police, he was not allowed to do his job. It was at that moment that the D.A. decided to resign. He later wrote to the Hays Commission about the incident, stating: “[W]hen confronted [with] the alternative of upholding constitutional liberties and truth at a small sacrifice or gaining personal advantages at the price of my concept of civil duty[, I] did not hesitate in resigning my post to abide by Liberty and the Constitution.”196 Pérez-Marchand clearly saw this incident as a direct violation of the U.S. Constitution and a threat to civil liberties. He had the courage to resign rather than accede to the unreasonable and unethical requests of his superiors.

Ultimately, the official (local) investigation that was carried out immediately after the Massacre was extremely flawed and appeared to be quite biased due to the Governor’s influence. Not only did these investigators fail to question key

195 Pérez-Marchand, Rafael V., Reminiscencia Histórica De La Masacre De Ponce, (San Lorenzo, P.R.: Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico, Movimiento Libertador de Puerto Rico, 1972), 24.
196 Pérez-Marchand’s letter reprinted in Hays, et. al., 37.
eyewitnesses, they also failed to use some of the most substantial evidence of all: the photographs that captured such crucial moments. Additionally, as the Hays Commission later showed, some of the investigative work that government officials did execute, such as paraffin tests to determine whether any civilians had fired arms, were extremely unreliable and inconclusive.

From the beginning, the basis of this investigation was questioned by many who recognized its biased nature: government officials were essentially investigating themselves. Those at *El Imparcial* were quick to demanded that an independent investigation to begin immediately. As I discussed briefly in Chapter One, they also took the initiative to launch a small investigation of their own, interviewing eyewitnesses and publishing their sworn statements. Many of the individuals they interviewed were people whom local officials failed to interview in their own investigation, including key eyewitnesses such as *El Imparcial*’s photographer, Carlos Torres Morales. The flaws in the local investigation are among the many things that the Hays Commission addresses in their investigation of the Massacre and allegations of other civil rights violations. In the following section, I review the contents of their final report and analyze what the report meant in a larger context of Puerto Rican reception versus U.S. reception and the colonial relationship between both regions.

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197 It appears that the government officials that carried out the local investigation completely ignored these photographs and the photographers that took them. The Hays’ Commission expresses disbelief as this disregard to such important evidence: “We have pondered in vain to arrive at any conclusion as to why the authorities did not make use of these photographs, so widely published, in their investigation of this tragedy.” Hays, et. al., 18.

198 Ibid., 26.

The Hays Investigation

Eventually, the Puerto Rican public joined in the call for an independent investigation and a group of Puerto Rican leaders took the initiative to create a committee—called the Commission of Inquiry into the Causes of the Ponce Massacre—that would not only investigate the Ponce Massacre, but would also look into other charges of civil rights violations. These leaders included the president of the Bar Association, the president of the Teacher’s Association, the former president of the Medical Association, and leaders of local newspapers including *El Mundo* and *El Imparcial*. This investigation and its reception both in the U.S. and in Puerto Rico are crucial to the story of the aftermath of the Ponce tragedy. The following two sections include a discussion of the how the Hays Commission came to be and what exactly their findings were as well as an analysis of what this investigation means in the larger context of U.S.-Puerto Rico relations.

Initially, the Committee attempted to draw on the legal resources available on the Island, requesting that a grand jury carry out the investigation. These efforts were unfruitful. Their Grand Jury petition was denied and they were also unable to acquire a permit for a public meeting to discuss the Massacre and their grievances against the government and the official investigation. Finally, after being denied an

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200 Hays, et. al., 2.
201 “The courts denied the petition for a Grand Jury because of the vigorous opposition on the part of the government of Puerto Rico to summoning the Jury; an opposition based on mere legal technicalities in the interpretation of a new statute enacted by the Legislature last year at request of the present Governor of Puerto Rico [Winship] to abolish the Grand Jury as an institution of justice in Puerto Rico.” Letter to A.C.L.U. from the Committee of Citizens of Ponce for the defense of Civil Liberties in Hays, et. al. 2.
injunction that would allow for such a meeting, the Commission decided to seek outside help.

Arthur Garfield Hays was a successful American attorney with a large private practice that represented financiers, brokers, and merchants. In 1920, Hays helped establish the A.C.L.U., an organization committed to protecting the rights and liberties afforded to American citizens by the U.S. Constitution. Of these rights, Hays was especially adamant about protecting freedom of speech. The Commission saw the A.C.L.U. as a reputable institution and requested that it join the Commission and lead an independent investigation into the Ponce Massacre. Hays, as general counsel of the A.C.L.U., accepted the invitation and arrived on the island on May 13th. In a letter the Commission, thanked the A.C.L.U. for its willingness to help and outlined the measures already taken. They also discussed the reasons for creating this committee in the first place and presented some of the questions about the Massacre that they wanted addressed in this inquiry. Hearings for the investigation began the day after Hays’ arrival to the island and concluded little over a week later.

By May 22nd the Commission released a seventy-page report that discussed not only the details of Ponce Massacre but also an array of other current issues, including the assassination of Colonel Riggs and subsequent murders of the Nationalists involved; the 1936 trials of eight Nationalists, including Pedro Albizu Campos; the violation of the civil rights of University of Puerto Rico faculty members, and many other issues concerning the civil rights of Puerto Ricans on the

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202 In an effort to be as unbiased as possible, not one Nationalist nor citizen of the municipality of Ponce formed part of the Commission.
island. As for of the Massacre itself, the Commission pointed out numerous aspects of the incident that were quite troublesome. For one, the Commission argued, the Nationalists never needed to get a permit in the first place. According to the 1926 case *Pueblo v. Alonso*, “plazas” were public spaces that did not require permits under the Municipality of Ponce.\(^{203}\) The Nationalists were actually going out of their way to cooperate with authorities when they applied for a permit through the Mayor of Ponce.\(^{204}\) The Commission also questioned police motives and tactics, wondering—as does Moraza Ortiz in his 2001 study\(^ {205}\)—why the police did not stop the Nationalists from gathering at Calle Marina or stop the cadets from getting into formation if the demonstration was considered illegal. Why was no one arrested at that point? The Commission also questioned the police’s formation: If the goal was to disperse the cadets, then why block all avenues of escape? The investigators cited the National Guard training manual to show that the proper technique during a riot is to use the “wedge” formation, splitting the crowd into sections, which can then be dispersed separately.\(^ {206}\) The Commission came to the following conclusion about this aspect of the incident:

The photograph shows the defenseless cadets, hemmed on by all sides by heavily armed police. The thought occurs as to why the police took such a formation, if their endeavor was to disperse the cadets. Not only military rules as shown by testimony, but simple common sense, would seems to suggest that plenty of room be left for escape.\(^ {207}\)

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\(^{203}\) Hays, et. al., 8.

\(^{204}\) It is possible that the Nationalists that applied for this permit were not even aware that they had no legal obligation to do so. Either way, the fact that they did apply shows that they made an explicit effort to coordinate with local authorities and make them aware of their activities.

\(^{205}\) Moraza Ortiz, 50-51.

\(^{206}\) Hays, et. al., 16. The Insular police are considered to be similar to the National Guard in the continental U.S. except that they report to the Governor of Puerto Rico.

\(^{207}\) Ibid.
This statement suggests more subtly what Moraza Ortiz claims outright: that the police did not intend to arrest the Nationalists, disperse the crowd, or allow people to escape. This is actually Moraza Ortiz’s central argument: “[…] that police officials had orders to stop the parade at any cost, even though this implied the public killing of human beings. The evidence presented in this work will prove that the intention of the police was to massacre, not arrest or disperse the demonstrators.” A charitable explanation might be that the police were not properly trained. For the most part, however, the Commission found that there was no harmless explanation for their actions, especially shooting into a crowd of innocent bystanders, none of whom were determined later to have been armed. The Commission’s account deviates significantly from the story that Winship and the U.S. papers upheld—even after the release of the Hays report—about the Massacre, which was that Nationalists shot at police and the police acted appropriately in an effort to restore order. This is one example of how the governor and the U.S. press stubbornly ignored evidence that suggested criminal behavior on the part of the police. It supports my contention that the evidence was irrelevant to these parties—they had a story they were going to stand by and nothing to the contrary would be accepted or even considered.

Ultimately the Hays Commission, after reviewing several other matters aside from the Massacre, reached conclusions at the end of their report that pointed to a responsible party and explicitly stated the source of the conflict. These conclusions consisted of the following five statements:

208 Moraza Ortiz, 14.
1. The facts show that the affair of March 21st in Ponce was a “MASSACRE.”
2. Civil Liberties have been repeatedly denied during the last nine months by order of Governor Blanton Winship. He has failed to recognize the right of free speech and assemblage. Force has been threatened toward those who would exercise these rights.
3. The Ponce Massacre was due to the denial by the police of the civil rights of citizens to parade and assemble. This denial was ordered by the Governor of Puerto Rico.
4. The Regulation of the University of Puerto Rico, passed September 26, 1936, is designed to curb academic freedom and should be cancelled.
5. The people demand and have a right to free speech, free assemblage and to petition by parade for a redress of grievances. The Commission is hopeful that Governor Winship will make public a proclamation of his willingness to abide by constitutional guaranties.209

The first conclusion is key to my overall argument. It expresses unambiguously the importance the Commission attached to the label of “massacre.” Not only was there an explicit discussion of the problem of labeling the incident—a discussion I explore in more detail below—but this issue was so significant that it appeared in the very first conclusion the Commission stated at the end of its report. The rest of the conclusions, with the exception of number four, point to Governor Winship as the person responsible for the recent violations of civil rights, with number three explicitly blaming him for the Massacre. This conclusion starkly illuminated the difference between the Puerto Rican press accounts of the Massacre and its aftermath and those in the U.S. press. The Commission members saw the tragedy in Ponce as far more than a conflict, a riot, a shooting, they saw it as a massacre—a gross violation of civil rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, including the right to assemblage and the right to free speech.210 The last finding is clear in its call for Governor Winship to

209 Hays, et. al., 62.
210 I would also like to point out that this massacre was likewise a violation of several human rights including the right to life, the right to “freedom from arbitrary arrest, detention or exile,” and many
publicly announce his willingness to uphold these rights—a demand that was never met by the Governor. Below, I document and analyze how Winship and the U.S. and Puerto Rican newspapers represented these findings. But first, I would like to look more closely at the political nature of this report to highlight the awareness that the Commission had of the larger issues at stake with respect to the Massacre and other violations of civil liberties.

The question as to the political status of the Island and the colonial relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico were intricately linked to the Massacre and the aftermath, something of which the members of this Committee were aware. In their report, they included a statement from the A.C.L.U. that directly addressed this which stated:

The continued conflict in Puerto Rico between members of the Nationalist Party committed to complete independence from the United States, and the island officials, challenges us to render whatever service we can in establishing an understanding which will preserve complete civil liberties and at the same time public order. The fatal riot at Ponce was only one tragic incident in a long series of clashes over the independence issue.211

Thus, this report goes far beyond the Massacre itself to examine the question of civil rights on the island.212 This “long series of clashes” undoubtedly refers to many of the


211 Ibid., 6.
212 One of the most interesting things about reading this report over seventy years after it was written is how many of the issues are still relevant today. From the militarization of the police force to the civil rights of educators, Puerto Ricans today are still plagued by some of these problems that I think are intrinsically linked to the colonial dilemma. In terms of police militarization, there is a line in the Hays Commission report that reads: “Yet the people of Puerto Rico seem to feel that the police were courteous and friendly before they were militarized.” Hays, et. al., 41. This militarization has continued to today: it is common to see policeman in Puerto Rican ghettos heavily armed. There has also been a history of conflict between university students and the police force. In 2009, there was an incident in which police attacked students at the University of Puerto Rico campus. See the The
violent events discussed in Chapter One that led up to the Massacre including the Rio Piedras Massacre, the assassination of Chief of Police Colonel Riggs, and the questionable trial of eight Nationalists that same year. The A.C.L.U. did not see the Ponce Massacre as an isolated incident, but as part of a larger pattern of violence and conflict between members of the Nationalist Party and local police officials. The Commission tied these conflicts to the political status issue, or, more specifically, the independence option. Many U.S. news reports also discussed the Massacre in terms of a larger pattern of violence, but, as I showed in Chapter One, they characterized the Nationalists as the sole source of the violence, thereby reinforcing the Nationalists’ public image as criminals in the eyes of a largely continental U.S. audience.

**The Influence of the Hays Report**

One of the most interesting aspects about the effect of this report is the extent to which it changed the way in which Puerto Rican newspapers talked about the Ponce Massacre. Within the report itself, a change in approach can be detected. As I showed in Chapter One, while the paper *El Imparcial* did not hesitate to label the incident a “massacre,” *El Mundo* seemed more hesitant to use such a term or to label the incident at all. The language of *El Mundo* appears to shift once the Hays investigation is under way. Curiously enough, we also see a shift in language in the report itself. On page six, the event is twice referred to as a “riot,” the same label U.S. papers were using at the time. However, by page twenty-three, the incident is referred

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to as a “holocaust,” and on page twenty-seven, the question of what to call the incident is directly addressed. The Commission stated:

When we started our investigation, we objected to the title “Committee for Investigation of the Ponce Massacre.” We designated the Ponce tragedy as the Ponce affair, or melee, or riot, or by other words which would indicate our desire to consider the matter objectively. After hearing the evidence, we have come to the conclusion that the people of Ponce have given this tragedy the only possible descriptive title: This was the PONCE MASSACRE—and the more so because it occurred in time of peace.213

From this point on, the incident is largely referred to as a “massacre” in this report. It is apparent here that the terminology used to describe this incident was important enough to warrant an explicit discussion about the matter in the official report release. Furthermore, the report shows a clear and decisive shift from using words like “riot” and “affair” to using the word “massacre.” This is significant in that this issue of terminology is largely ignored by U.S. newspapers. These papers continue to use the words riot, clash, etc. even after the release of this report. This usage suggests that these reports either did not actually read the entire report carefully and/or did not take the report seriously. Yet what is really concerning is that whether they agreed with the contents of the report or not, they should have given their readers a better sense of the content of the report so that they could have the opportunity to form their own opinions about the investigation and the Massacre itself. I discuss this question in more detail below in my section about U.S. newspapers, but first I would like to address Winship’s response to the Massacre, because U.S. papers follow suit.

Additionally, I want to explore the federal government’s failure to initiate its own

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213 Hays, et. al., 28.
investigation because it highlights the relationship between the U.S. government and Puerto Rico at the time—a relationship in which U.S. newspapers are also implicated.

The Governor’s Response and the Lack of a Federal Investigation

From beginning to end, Governor Winship showed no support of the Hays Commission investigation. At the onset of the investigation, Hays wrote to Winship to make him aware of their work and to ask for his cooperation. The Governor never responded or cooperated and actually advised against the investigation, claiming that it would interfere with the upcoming trials involving those he saw as responsible (the Nationalists).²¹⁴ Hays and the Commission addressed this issue in their report:

> It has been suggested that since the facts concerning the affair of March 21st will be the subject of hearing in the criminal courts, that the time of our inquiry is inopportune. In answer I [Hays] may say that the issue in the criminal court is as to who did the shooting, when and under what circumstances. Guilt or innocence may depend upon whether the defendant shot too soon, and without the reasonable apprehension of danger which would justify self-defense. Primarily we are not interested in who shot, or whether it was too soon. We are interested in the question of why anyone shot at all.²¹⁵

Here, Hays dismisses Winship’s excuse about the investigation and emphasizes the independent nature of their work. Hays and the Commission were not trying to replace the work of the criminal courts; instead their intention was to ask deeper and more central questions about why this tragedy occurred in the first place. Even after receiving this explanation and defense of their work, Winship never supported their efforts.

²¹⁵ Hays, et. al., 5.
It is also reasonable to ask how the Hays investigation would have interfered with the criminal trials when the Hays Committee had a report out by May 22 and the trials did not begin until September 13. As one can imagine, his lack of cooperation only served to further implicate Governor Winship in the events of March 21st, especially in the eyes of the Puerto Rican public. In contrast, U.S. papers sometimes appeared to side with or be sympathetic towards Winship and did little to challenge or question his authority and his statements about the Hays investigation. It appears that U.S. reporters took Winship’s claims at face value and did not do enough to provide more balanced reporting. I discuss this in more depth below, but for now let us examine how Winship was implicated in denying Puerto Ricans their right to a federal investigation on the Massacre.

If not for an attempt to protect his image and that of the police force, why would Winship not have welcomed this independent investigation? Why would he want to deny the truth? Beyond his lack of support and cooperation with the Hays investigation, Winship also failed to cooperate with the request of some of his superiors. According to one source, Winship failed to adhere to a request by Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes to conduct a federal investigation. Mathews states the following in his study of Puerto Rican politics:

The Secretary secured permission from the President for an investigation of the matter with the understanding that Governor Winship would publicly request the investigation before any move be taken. Harold Ickes felt that if Winship was innocent he would welcome an investigation by the federal
government. To secure this cooperation from Winship was not was easy as Ickes and the President assumed.\textsuperscript{216}

Instead, Winship avoided the matter and kept the Secretary waiting until he finally went to Washington with Dr. Ernest Gruening, Director of the newly created Division of Territories and Island Possessions in the Interior Department and administrator of the Puerto Rican Reconstruction Administration, to explain his actions. Mathews continues:

As it was, Dr. Gruening and Governor Winship, aided by a Nationalist attack on a continental judge on the island, were able to get to the President and convince him that it would not be to the best interests of the administration to have an investigation of the island administration and the Ponce Massacre. The prestige of the federal authority was to be maintained at an unquestionable level no matter what the costs.\textsuperscript{217}

Thus, it seems that while at first the Secretary and the President may have wanted to uncover the truth, they quickly realized that the truth was ugly, and, if revealed to the public, would be detrimental to the federal government’s reputation with respect to its territories. That U.S. administrators had committed a gross violation of civil and human rights against U.S. citizens would not have been acceptable to the rest of its population and the international community. Essentially, the U.S. government’s desire to protect its interests in the Caribbean eclipsed any supposed intrinsic respect for and effort to seek truth and justice, values originally articulated by the nation’s Founding Fathers—the myth that this nation was built upon. That the President

\textsuperscript{216} Mathews, 313. I want to note here that Ickes appeared to do what he could to bring Winship to justice but was clearly overpowered by the President. Ickes noted in his personal diary: “I always believed that this was a cold-blooded shooting by the Ponce police and that those who were killed were shot by the policemen themselves.” It seems that Ickes was one of the only people in the U.S. government with any common sense at the time, but he did not hold enough power to do anything about it. Harold L. Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes, v. II, 329, quoted in Moraza Ortiz, 85.\textsuperscript{217} Mathews, 313.
decided to conduct no federal investigation at all amounts to criminal negligence. The colonial relationship had everything to do with what caused the Massacre and everything to do with the cover-up that protected the U.S. government’s reputation and presence on the island. Essentially, U.S. papers aided in this cover-up. Neither the *Times* nor the *Post* published any articles about the meeting between Dr. Gruening, Winship, and the President (although there were several reports in Puerto Rican newspapers), and in fact there was never any mention in U.S. papers that a federal investigation had been proposed. At most, there were only references to Dr. Gruening’s expressed desire to conduct an independent “inquiry” into the matter.

When the Commission’s investigation was complete and its report was released to the public, Governor Winship still showed no support. In fact, the *New York Times* reported that Winship and his aides had prepared a statement for Harold Ickes and President Roosevelt “to sustain his contention that the American Civil Liberties Union report is one-sided, biased and vulnerable, and that the government cannot reveal all the facts until they are presented in the Ponce murder trials.”218 Winship also discounts the findings in a statement he made in the Puerto Rican Senate.219 Interestingly, Hays defends himself against such statements, but we see his words only in Puerto Rican newspapers, not U.S. ones. For example, in one article published in *El Mundo*, Hays says: “[Winship’s] reference to ‘a series of falsehoods’

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is a plagiarism of the description I made about the Governor’s report. Does he sustain [the claim] that our photographs lie?220

Essentially, Governor Winship completely dismisses this important investigation and attempts to discredit its objectivity, thereby delegitimizing it. Again, the implications of this dismissal are quite important. It appears almost as a defensive act when someone completely discredits an independent investigation that places the blame on that individual and his administration. Nevertheless, like the President himself, many non-Puerto Rican U.S. citizens either believed Winship’s defense or did not truly believe it but expressed otherwise in public in order to protect certain reputations. This is especially evident in U.S. newspapers reports.

**U.S. Newspapers**

As I have already suggested, the Hays report seemed to have little effect on the opinions and terminology that appeared in U.S. newspapers. I suspect that this had much to do not only with the source of information that U.S. reporters were accessing—especially Governor Winship and his aides—but also with the actual relationship between U.S. and Puerto Rico. A critical analysis of a few news reports from the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* reveals the differences between U.S. and Puerto Rican reports in response to the Hays investigation. Even with clear evidence to the contrary, U.S. newspapers continued to frame the Ponce Massacre in a way that criminalizes Nationalists. Essentially, the evidence was irrelevant because


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these reporters were unable (or unwilling?) to see these Nationalists as victims and policemen as perpetrators of merciless violence.

Many of these U.S. newspaper articles followed the established pattern set in initial reporting discussed in Chapter One, which showed agreement with Winship’s statements and made no effort to challenge or question them or include a different side of the story. One example is an article entitled “More Smoke in the Caribbean,” published in The Washington Post on June 6, 1937. Here an unnamed author comments on the claims that civil rights have been violated in Puerto Rico and on the “unrest” on the island. The reporter cites the killing of Colonel Riggs and other killings, bombings, and acts of violence. Colonel Riggs is described as a victim of this violence, and there is absolutely no mention of the retaliatory murder of the two Nationalists that took place after Riggs’s murder or other incidents in which Nationalists were unjustly murdered (such as the Rio Piedras Massacre), even though they were discussed in Hays’s report. Thus, this author manages to perpetuate the criminalization of Nationalists as sources of the violence and fails to incriminate the police force who used violence fatally in attempts to silence and repress as well as retaliate. Actually, this author goes as far as defending “the authorities.” The author admits that perhaps, “under the circumstances,” civil liberties might be “affected somewhat.” “But,” he/she continues, “if reports as to the activities of the Nationalists are to be trusted, it would seem that the authorities have been exceedingly tolerant.”221 Certainly, political repression, the violation of civil rights, and the

221 Ibid.
murder of innocent people fail to exhibit tolerance on behalf of police authorities. The author then goes on to agree with Governor Winship’s denial that “civil rights are in eclipse” in Puerto Rico and that the Hays investigation is “ill-timed.”

S/he claims that the crux of the problem of instability is neither the status of the island nor a question of civil rights but rather the territory’s economic situation. Thus, the author completely dismisses the conflict between Nationalists and local authorities and the underlying question of independence. Such an account serves to reinforce dominant (i.e. U.S. government) interests in the region. The reporter’s dismissal of the status question makes it a non-issue and his/her emphasis on Puerto Rico’s economic problems suggests that the island needs the U.S. for economic stability and future economic growth, thus the success of the island is completely dependent on U.S. presence and aid.

In another article published in the New York Times, an unnamed reporter actually does a good job of summarizing the Commission’s work, offering several direct quotations from the report. The title and subsequent subtitle of the article are complete misnomers, however, reading: “Hays Lays Clash in Ponce to Curbs: Suppression of Civil Liberties Resulted in Riot, He Says in Report After Inquiry,” (emphasis mine). First, I question what the editor(s) of the Times mean to convey in the first part of the title. What are they suggesting by claiming that Hays “lays” the Ponce incident “to Curbs”? And why insist on continuing to use the word “clash”? Even more disconcerting is the subtitle, which claims that Hays says in his report that

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222 Ibid.

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the “Suppression of Civil Liberties Resulted in a Riot.” Again, as I showed earlier, the Hays report clearly states that the use of the term “riot” is inadequate and does not do justice to the event; that it instead should be called a “massacre.” In total, the word “riot” is used three times and “clash” used twice in this short piece. The last section of the article is not much better. Here the paper claims that “Five photographs of the Palm Sunday clash in Ponce, Puerto Rico between Nationalists and the police were brought [to Washington] to support the Insular Government’s claim that responsibility for the disorders rests with the Nationalists.” First, they were still characterizing the Massacre as a “clash” between Nationalists and the police even though the Hays report clearly determined that the Nationalists were not participants but rather victims along with spectators in the crowd. If the Times had properly researched the incident, they would have found out that the only photographers who took pictures of the Massacre were the two photographers from El Mundo and El Imparcial. They would also be aware that, as I mentioned above, the Hays report directly addresses these photos and concludes that they provide no evidence that the Nationalists were responsible for the bloodshed that day. At the very least, if this reporter, like the author of the Washington Post article discussed above, believed that the Hays report was biased, he/she could have referred to these points in the report and allowed the reading public to come to its own conclusions. It is clear here that some of the major findings in the Hays investigation were completely ignored in this article. The issues of terminology (which I address in more detail below) and the

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224 Ibid.
225 Hays, et. al., 15-18.
central question of blame remain unchanged in these reports even in the face of evidence to the contrary presented in Hays’s report.

Aside from these examples of bias toward (not against) Winship, there is the question of the labels that U.S. journalists continued to use after the Hays report was released. These reports dismiss the Commission’s point about the appropriate way to label the incident. As I have already explained, the Commission was clear in their opinion that words like “riot” and “affair” were not sufficient to describe the event. Rather, they came to the conclusion that the only fair description was to call it a “massacre.” In the Times and the Post, however, reporters continue to use words like “riot” and “clash” in their articles immediately after the release of the Hays report and, consequently, continue to implicate the Nationalists at the responsible party or at the very least a party that contributed to the violence. The refusal of these papers to call this incident a “massacre” is significant because it suggests that these reporters considered the term too strong or inappropriate in some way. It says something about the way that these reporters were thinking about and consequently (re)constructing it in their pieces.

The importance of these articles at the time was not overlooked by Puerto Ricans. In fact, there was a consciousness among Puerto Ricans of how the Ponce Massacre was being (re)presented in the U.S. and internationally. One of the core reasons that the group of Puerto Rican leaders that made up the Hays Commission originally organized themselves for this investigation and asked the A.C.L.U. for help

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was “to enable the people of Puerto Rico as well as the people of the United States to obtain information worthy of full belief, since American public opinion of the matter has been molded so far by conflicting reports […]”

Thus one of the major reasons this committee decided to initiate this investigation was to bring more accurate information not only to the Puerto Rican public but also to the non-Puerto Rican U.S. continental public. Later in the report, there is even an example of an individual expressing a desire the truth be reported in Puerto Rican as well as U.S. papers:

“I want the truth to vindicate my father. I want the truth to go to the newspapers, not only in Puerto Rico, but all over the United States so that everybody will know that my father was an honored man, and a gentleman.”

This boy’s father was killed during the Massacre and later accused of being the man who fired the first shot. It is an example of how the demand for truth affected an individual on a very personal level in a culture where personal honor and reputation are highly regarded. Ironically, as I have already shown, this desire to transmit the “truth” about the Massacre to the “American” public was never met by major U.S. newspapers like the Times or the Post, which instead largely ignored the findings of the Hays investigation and continued to (mis)characterize the Massacre in the same light as they did immediately after the incident when little was known about the details of the tragedy.

Additionally, the Puerto Rican press also expressed an awareness and conceptualization of the Ponce Massacre by the Puerto Rican people within a larger context. Beyond a few small references to how the rest of the world might see the

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228 Hays, et. al., 2.
229 Boy quoted in ibid., 21.
event, there is an article in *El Imparcial* that actually attempts to historicize the event. The reporter Antonio J. Colorado discussed other violent events in world history—such as the 1562 Massacre of Vassy (France), the 1572 St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre (France), the 1916 Sinn Féin Rebellion (Ireland); the 1777 Boston Massacre (U.S.); the 1905 Red Sunday (Russia), and the 1914 Belgium Case (Belgium)—in an attempt to show that the Ponce Massacre was not an isolated case in terms of human tragedies. This perspective contrasts U.S. papers, which (as I mentioned above and in Chapter One), discussed the Massacre as part of a larger trend of violence for which solely Nationalists were to blame.

**Puerto Rican Newspapers**

In Puerto Rican papers, we see a distinctly different way of framing the investigations. Contrary to the dismissive attitude and unbalanced portrayal of these investigations in U.S. papers as we saw above, Puerto Rican papers took the investigations seriously and provided detailed and balanced reporting. In this section, I focus on the way that Puerto Rican reporters responded specifically to the Hays investigation in *El Mundo* and *El Imparcial* and how those responses compare with what we have already seen with regard to U.S. newspapers. The issue of terminology with respect to Puerto Rican papers shows how, in contrast to the U.S. press, the word “massacre” was continually used after the Hays report was released. I also explore the differences in the way the Massacre and the investigations that followed were framed.

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231 Ibid.
by these two groups. In contrast to U.S. papers, which largely defended Winship and his aides, Puerto Rican papers actually come to the defense of Hays and refute accusations by Winship that the Hays report was biased. Puerto Rican reporters also focused on the way that government officials responded to Hays’ investigation—a topic that was not even touched by U.S. reporters. Ultimately, my emphasis here is to highlight the stark contrast between the way that the Puerto Rican and U.S. press responded to this groundbreaking investigation in an effort to underscore how important the investigation was to Puerto Ricans and what little interest U.S. reporters showed in discussing a report that ultimately pointed to Governor Winship and consequently the U.S. insular and federal government as the responsible parties in the Ponce tragedy.

While Puerto Rican newspapers do not consistently use the word “massacre” as a label for the event after the Hays report is released, it is still much more visible than in U.S. newspapers. In El Mundo, an article appeared with the title “El Comité Civico Resuelve que en Ponce Hubo una Masacre,” (“The Civic Committee Resolves that in Ponce there was a Massacre”), describing the meeting in which the report was discussed in public. El Mundo actually published the report in its entirety as well.232 El Imparcial also published the report and used the phrase “la masacre de Ponce” in its introduction to the report.233 Luis Muñoz Marín, at that time a former senator and later Puerto Rico’s first elected governor, used this same expression several times in a

232 “El Comité Civico Resuelve Que En Ponce Hubo Una Masacre,” El Mundo, May 24, 1937, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 19.
letter to Dr. Gruening published in *El Imparcial* on May 25, 1937. Muñoz Marín demanded that Dr. Gruening make a “statement” about the Massacre. He stated that as Director of Territories and Island Possessions, Gruening had direct responsibility for Puerto Rico. He asked Dr. Gruening to consider his culpability for the Ponce Massacre. He stated: “Will you discredit and repudiate governor Winship? Or are you willing to support him and fall with him?”

As we later find out, Gruening does decide to support Winship and helps him persuade President Roosevelt not to carry out a federal investigation, none of which is actually discussed in the *Times* or the *Post*.

Beyond terminology, there is a clear difference in the way that these Puerto Rican and U.S. newspapers framed the Ponce Massacre and its aftermath. As we saw earlier, there were some articles in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* that clearly came to Winship’s defense and aided in the dismissal of Hay’s investigation. Among the articles in *El Mundo* and *El Imparcial* that came to Hays’ defense and sought to legitimize him as an honest and unbiased authority, is an article published in *El Imparcial* titled: “Arthur Garfield Hays: Cuidadano Libre de America,” (“Arthur Garfield Hays: Free Citizen of America”). The reporter, Antonio J. Colorado, describes Hays’s work on the island as “a pure and noble air that will blow away the foul smell of our colonial environment, full of fetid emanations.”

Not absent a problematic nature, he continues: “Objective, like all Americans, [Hays] was very careful to demand, like Saint Thomas, to see and touch in order to believe. And he

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touched and he saw things that we know by memory but that we needed a North American to tell us so that we could believe it better.”236 It is not clear whether, when Colorado chooses to use the word “American,” he is referring to the Americas, North America, or the United States. Nonetheless, his claim that this entire group is objective is clearly an inaccurate and sweeping statement and his assertion that Puerto Ricans needed a “North American” to help them believe more concretely what they already knew is nothing short of a symptom of colonialism. It is also an inaccurate representation of the original intentions of the committee that asked for the A.C.L.U.’s help after exhausting all legal avenues in Puerto Rico without success. They sought out what they saw as a respectable and established organization that could help them carry out an independent investigation. This committee never indicated a need for non-Puerto Rican United States citizens to affirm things about the Massacre they already knew. They did not seek legitimation through these citizens but rather collaboration in their search for truth and justice.

Colorado ends his article pointing to “pro-americanos”—according to the author, pro-Americans in Puerto Rico acted like know-it-alls but did not even know the English language—who were bothered by Hays because they felt he simply came to the island to give them a lesson about principles and ideas they already knew well.237 The author responds by stating:

236 Ibid.
237 Colorado’s reference to pro-Americans and Americanism is in reference to the concept of “Americanization” in Puerto Rico. According to Ayala and Bernabe, by “1913 the word was almost universally used to refer to the attempts to reshape Puerto Rican life according to the preferences of U.S. colonial administrators.” Ayala and Bernabe, 78.
Mr. Hays has done great work not only for Puerto Rico but for the United States. If that which defends Hays is Americanism, we have absolutely no objection—not of moral order nor intellectual order—to raise. We needed a true American to come to Puerto Rico […] Arthur Garfield Hays, free citizen of America, the Puerto Ricans that themselves also feel like free men, salute you!238

This article is important in that it reveals a number of things beyond a defense of Hays’s work. It shows a different perspective on why Hays was welcomed by some Puerto Ricans and not welcomed by others. It highlights the intersections and tensions between Americanism, colonialism, and issues of language and U.S. presence and intervention.

Another defense of Hays appears in an article published in the same edition of El Imparcial as the one I just discussed. In this article, a letter published in The Nation in 1932 is reproduced. A U.S. magazine widely known to have politically left views, The Nation published a letter in support of the Socialist Party candidate, Norman Thomas. This letter was later reproduced in the Puerto Rican press under the title “Revolución en Puerto Rico.” According to those at El Imparcial, this letter, whose authors discuss Hays as a supporter of Franklin D. Roosevelt, shows that Hays cannot be accused of being “prejudiced against the government” because he took a risk in backing Roosevelt for that election.239 I am not very convinced by this myself, but it is another example of Puerto Ricans attempting to defend Hays in the press.

What we see in El Mundo is a bit more subtle than what we have already observed with El Imparcial when considering the trends I have outlined in U.S.

papers. In *El Mundo*, there is a lot of re-printing of letters and statements from Hays, almost in an effort to allow the Puerto Rican public to come to its own judgment on the Hays investigation and the integrity of Hays himself. In this sense, the editors and reporters at *El Mundo* give the Puerto Rican public great agency. Even though the editor (like that of *El Imparcial*) served on the Hays committee, he still allowed his readers to reach their own conclusions. In other words, unlike *El Imparcial*, and to an extent the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, *El Mundo* does not appear to try to make an explicit argument. Rather, *El Mundo* presents what it considers “the facts” (which is, of course, subjective) and avoids making judgments. That said, this newspaper like any other is vulnerable to subjectivities but my point here is that they seem the most explicitly invested in objectivity.

What is most notable about the articles appearing in *El Mundo* soon after the Hays report was released to the public is the paper’s focus on the response by and between government officials. Headlines such as “Gruening Investigates the Ponce Happenings,” 240 “Relations Between Governor Winship and Secretary Ickes Are Not Cordial,” 241 “Winship Will Prepare a Memorandum for Secretary Ickes,” 242 “The Speaker of the House of Representatives [of Puerto Rico] Considers the [Hays] Committee Report Biased,” 243 “Gruening Goes with Documents About the Ponce Case,” 244 “Roosevelt Will Give His Personal Attention to the Happenings of Puerto

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Rico,”245 and “Ickes and Hays Will Meet about the Ponce Case,”246 demonstrate that Puerto Ricans had a vested interest in the U.S. government’s response to the Massacre. The press followed the actions of Winship, Gruening, Ickes, and Roosevelt closely, waiting for a statement about the Hays report, waiting for an official announcement about a federal investigation, neither of which ever came. Instead the U.S. government decided to protect its reputation and its interests in its territories, leaving the Puerto Rican public to vainly hope that justice would one day prevail.

In conclusion, the contrasts between Puerto Rican and U.S. (re)presentations of the Ponce Massacre and the investigations that followed point to fundamental differences in how these two groups saw the incident within the larger context of the colonial relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico. Even with the overwhelming evidence presented in the Hays report, representations in the U.S. press did not change. Instead, these papers continued to criminalize Nationalists and refused to place any blame on the police force and/or Governor Winship, as well as refusing to call the incident a “massacre.” Thus, while we might have expected this independent investigation to affect these reports in one way or another, what remained was that newspaper accounts maintained their original interpretation in the face of conflicting claims about the Massacre. Meanwhile, in the Puerto Rican press, this investigation served to confirm details about the Massacre and recent violations of civil rights that the Puerto Rican public already believed to be true and sometimes self-evident.

It may be unfair to expect continental U.S. newspapers to report on the Ponce Massacre to the same extent as Puerto Rican ones. The geographical distance caused difficulties that no longer exist in today’s globalized, world and local news is of course of a greater interest to the reading public. Nevertheless, it seems fair to expect that these papers treat such a tragedy with the same respect, dignity, and fairness and they would a local one. The fact is that fellow innocent U.S. citizens were murdered in cold blood, but it seems that their “Puerto-Ricanness” served as a factor in disinterest. Furthermore, as I have already shown, the criminalization of members of the PNPR was something that these reporters either could not or did not want to escape. The government interests the U.S. media was protecting far outweighed any standards of fair reporting.

Notwithstanding, at the very least, we citizens of the United States would expect the federal government to honor the virtues of justice, civil rights, and truth. In this way, the U.S. government managed to fail the Puerto Rican people yet again. They had a chance to investigate the Massacre, to shed light on the administration and come to terms with their fatal mistakes, but instead they chose to protect their image, to privilege reputation over justice, their own interests over the people who depended on them and at one point looked up to them for what they valued. In this way, the colonial stronghold was also valued over justice, and this is something that the U.S. continues to show the world even today. The U.S. media perpetuated this defense of

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247 Ideally we would expect this, but historically the federal government has failed to uphold these values with many groups of its own citizens.
U.S. administrators like Winship on the island and failure to report on the criminal neglect of the federal government.

As we see in the following chapter, after the initial release of the Hays report, the U.S. press failed to keep it in the conversation. The reports that followed instead continue old patterns that I have shown in these past two chapters and serve to further criminalize Nationalist Party members. Newspapers from both regions reported on a set of trials that directly set out to incriminate those Nationalists who survived the Massacre but were later actually unanimously acquitted of their charges.
Chapter 3: Who is responsible? The U.S. and Puerto Rican Press on the Ponce Murder Trials

Between May 1937 when the Hays report was released and September 1937 when the first of these trials began, an important event took place that added fire to U.S. representations of Puerto Rican Nationalists. On June 7, 1937 the eight Nationalists who were charged in 1936 with conspiracy to overthrow the U.S. government in Puerto Rico by means of force were transferred from a Puerto Rican prison to a federal penitentiary in Atlanta, Georgia.\textsuperscript{248} The following day, a group of Nationalists fired at Judge Robert A. Cooper who presided over the original case in 1936 and later ordered the transfer of those imprisoned.\textsuperscript{249} The judge was in his car with his driver, his bodyguard, and a detective when the Nationalists fired fifteen shots in his direction from another car.\textsuperscript{250} The judge narrowly escaped the bullets thanks to the quick thinking of his bodyguard who told him to get down on the car floor as soon as he heard the shots.\textsuperscript{251} This act of violence was unacceptable in the eyes of most Puerto Ricans. Those at \textit{El Imparcial} denounced the violence as “the most primitive and uncivilized form of vengeance and rancor.”\textsuperscript{252} But Puerto Rican newspapers did not make the same explicit links to other events/issues as U.S. newspapers did. One \textit{New York Times} article on the incident connects the event to the

\textsuperscript{248} “Llegan a Atlanta,” \textit{El Imparcial}, June 8, 1937, 1.
\textsuperscript{249} “Disparan a Cooper,” \textit{El Imparcial}, June 9, 1937, 1, 3.
\textsuperscript{250} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{251} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{252} “Execran La Violencia,” \textit{El Imparcial}, June 10, 1937, 2, 5.

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The Acting Governor and others connect the attack on Judge Cooper with the departure of the Nationalists for prison and with the recent investigation by Arthur Garfield Hays of the Civil Liberties Union into the Palm Sunday killings at Ponce. The Acting Governor said he had complained to Dr. Ernest Gruening, Director of the Interior Department Division of Territories and Island Possessions, that Dr. Gruening and Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes had been listed by the Civil Liberties Union as members of the organization to give a false appearance of government sanction for disturbing influences.\textsuperscript{253}

The claims made in this statement are interesting for a number of reasons. First, the claim about Gruening and Ickes being listed at members of the A.C.L.U. is something that was absent from Puerto Rican papers at the time. Another consideration is what exactly this claim has to do with the attempt on Cooper’s life. There is no question that the attack was in direct retaliation to Judge Cooper’s decision to move the prisoners to Atlanta and of course for the sentencing he did in the first place back in 1936, but it makes little sense to link the attack to this claim about the A.C.L.U. and the Hays investigation at this point. Where did this claim come from? Was it a recent development? If so, how is it relevant to the Cooper incident? If it was not a recent development, how come it had never been mentioned before in either region’s press? Additionally, the language used here is quite telling about the way the Hays investigation was perceived. The unknown reporter here claims that Gruening and Ickes were listed as A.C.L.U. members in order to “give a false appearance of government sanction for disturbing influences.”\textsuperscript{254} This part of the statement, the last sentence in the article, is quite ambiguous; I can only relay here what my

\textsuperscript{254}Ibid.
interpretation of these words is which is the claim that the A.C.L.U. deliberately and falsely listed these individuals as members of their organization in order to make it seem like the government was a sponsor of their work and consequently, their investigation into the Ponce Massacre. But instead of showing an unbiased attitude to the Hays investigation, one that does not delegitimize it and one that at the very least represents it in a fair way, the reporter deems their work as “disturbing influences.” Again, this phrase in particular in unclear, but I think it suggests that these investigators were agitators, that they were intentionally trying to create a stir. In this sense, by coupling Nationalist violence (in this instance, the attempt against Cooper) with the Hays investigation, this report, like those that I outlined in the previous chapter, delegitimizes the investigation and further criminalizes not only Nationalist Party members, but those who defend or support those individuals in any way such as Arthur Garfield Hays and his investigative commission.

The trial against the Nationalists that led this attack against Cooper took place on January 10, 1938. While the court expected the trial would take at least three days to deliberate, the proceedings took just over four hours.\(^{255}\) One *New York Times* article reports:

> Eight Puerto Rican Nationalists, accused of an attempt to assassinate United States District Judge Robert A. Cooper, were found guilty today after the refusal of the defense to take part in the selection of jurymen, introduce evidence or cross-examine witnesses had brought their trial to an abrupt close. […] Following Nationalist principles, the defense challenged the court’s jurisdiction at the outset, but entered not guilty pleas.\(^{256}\)


\(^{256}\)Ibid.
The U.S. press later used this guilty verdict against the Nationalist Party Members in the Ponce Murder Trials by linking the two after the latter group of Nationalists were acquitted in connection with the Ponce Massacre. Citing both as examples of Nationalist violence, U.S. newspapers were quick to link the Cooper case with the Ponce Murder Trials and the Massacre itself. In this way, they let the Cooper case overshadow the acquittals in the Ponce Murder Trials and thus perpetuated the image of Nationalists as violent criminals. By linking these cases, U.S. reports managed to sustained a specific representation of Nationalists and discount the significance of the final verdict in the Ponce Murder Trials.

The final chapter of this saga, is a series of trials of the eleven Nationalist Party cadets that survived the Ponce Massacre with the charge of murdering police officer Ceferino Loyola Pérez. I will refer to these trials here as the Ponce Murder Trials. My intent is not to go over all the details—there could be an entire book written about these trials—instead, I wish to highlight certain aspects that are particularly relevant to my points so far, especially how the patterns that I have outlined so far in U.S. newspapers continued even after jurists unanimously agreed that the Nationalists were not guilty and were thereafter released.

Nevertheless, as I prove in this chapter, the U.S. newspapers that I examined continue to criminalize Nationalists and blame them for the Massacre by linking the incident with other violent events. This is relevant to my overall argument by showing that even when these Nationalist Party members were deemed innocent by an official institution (in this case, the Puerto Rican criminal court system), it had no effect on the way that these Nationalists and Nationalist Party members in general
were represented in the U.S. media. This suggests that no matter what an official party such as the A.C.L.U. or the criminal justice system determines about the Nationalist Party and their members, it is deemed irrelevant and holds little weight with these U.S. reporters because they have already made up their minds about who Nationalists are (violent criminals, fanatics, etc) and that is the way they would continue to represent them in their reports.

The following will include brief summaries of each trial after which I provide a critical analysis of U.S. and Puerto Rican newspaper coverage of the trials, highlighting the differences in reports as part of my larger argument that U.S. papers published stories that reflected dominant interests and failed to provide accurate and balanced reporting to its readers. Linked to this is another violent incident that occurred during the summer of 1937. I will discuss this event now in order to set the reader up for the rest of chapter. In order to understand why the reports that I discuss are important and how they connect to the rest of this thesis, it is important to gain an understanding of what exactly occurred during the Ponce Murder Trials and in what context.

The Ponce Murder Trials

The charges that eventually developed into the Ponce Murder Trials were originally submitted by the District Attorney of the municipality of Ponce. After the resignation of Pérez-Marchand as D.A. of Ponce, which I discussed in Chapter Two, he was replaced by his assistant, Pedro Rodríguez Serra, who quickly filed away all the accusations that Pérez-Marchand made against police officers in connection with
the Ponce Massacre. The new D.A. then went ahead and placed two sets of charges against a number of PNPR members. One set of charges was against eighteen Nationalists for rioting. This case was eventually archived by judge Fernando H. Usera and never went to trial. The second set of charges was against eleven Nationalists—including the acting President of the Nationalist Party—for the murder of policeman Ceferino Loyola Pérez. This case did go to trial—twice. The first trial, presided over by Judge Domingo Sepúveda took place between September 13 and December 6. The jury of the first trial had to be dissolved because a few of the jurors fell ill. The second trial was between February 1 and 13, presided over by Judge Robert H. Todd, Jr.

One interesting thing about the first trial was that it was heavily connected with the assassination of Colonel Riggs that took place on February 23, 1936 and the trial of the eight Nationalists that followed shortly after, all discussed in Chapter One. The majority of the prosecution’s (the local government) witnesses in this first trial testified in relation to the 1936 trial. “It was common in the cross-examination of the witnesses that [the defense] limit itself to asking if these [witnesses] had any personal knowledge about the happenings of March 21, 1937 in Ponce, to which they responded that they did not.” Thus while the prosecution tried to frame the Ponce Massacre in terms of a larger pattern of violence and conspiracy on behalf of

257 Medina Vásquez, 59.
258 Ibid., 59-60.
259 Moraza Ortiz, 82.
260 For example, on September 16, 1937, the prosecution submitted as evidence the weapons used against Colonel Riggs. Arturo Castro, Jr. “Admitido En Evidencia El Llamado Archivo Del ‘Ejército Libertador,’” El Mundo September 17, 1937, 1, 5, 9.
261 Moraza Ortiz, 83.
Nationalist Party members, the defense focused on the Massacre itself, and argued that allowing such evidence in the trial was unfair to the Nationalists as it gave the jury a biased representation.\textsuperscript{262} They stated that they considered the act illegal and that the jury would now be incapable of understanding the case because of their exposure to these details that were irrelevant to this case.\textsuperscript{263} In this sense, the defense realized that the prosecutors were attempting to build a case that effectively criminalized the Nationalists based on past incidents of violence in order to blame them for the Ponce Massacre. Nevertheless, the judge presiding over this first trial allowed this evidence–that was not directly relevant to the Ponce incident–to be used, citing \textit{El Pueblo v. Pérez} which declared: “As an exception to the general rule, evidence of prior offenses is admissible in order to demonstrate intention, plan, etc.”\textsuperscript{264} Because of this, the first trial took much longer than originally expected, with the local government bringing in over three hundred witnesses in their attempt to prove the Nationalists’ blame in the Massacre.\textsuperscript{265} Finally, as I mentioned above, on December 6 this trial ended in a non-trial because several jurors fell ill.\textsuperscript{266}

The second trial only lasted two weeks, with Judge Todd making it clear that he would not support the kind of tangential evidence that was so prevalent in the first trial.\textsuperscript{267} In their opening statement, the prosecution stated the following:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[263] Ibid.
\item[267] Moraza Ortiz, 82.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
We ask for a guilty verdict against the accused, for understanding that each and every one of them were responsible, not only for the death of Ceferino Loyola, but for everything that occurred that afternoon at that place.\textsuperscript{268}

The attitude of the prosecution in this case was one that clearly saw the Nationalists on trial as not only responsible for the death of a policeman, “but for everything that occurred,” (emphasis mine). Thus, the prosecution was blaming the Nationalists for the entire Massacre. This is especially important when considering the final outcome of this trial where these Nationalists were acquitted of their charges of murdering officer Loyola Pérez. Hence, the prosecution, in failing to win this case, failed to prove their contention that the Nationalists were responsible for the Massacre.

Conversely, the opening statement of the defense included the following:

[The defense will prove] That the police, without legal justification, machine-gunned and shot at the backs of the group of demonstrators, all of who were unarmed, and at the defenseless public in general who fled in terror falling heavily by way of homicide, and by blows of police clubs, women, elderly persons, and innocent children. That the police, by way of satanic and devastating impulse, ended lives, injured and mutilated bodies, ran over the injured and carried out unnecessary crimes, perpetrated a true massacre, the largest crime in our history, in which twenty one people lost their lives, those injured more than one hundred and fifty […] We will prove, gentleman of the Jury, that this process is a result of a conspiracy to justify that horrible killing and hold the survivors of that tragedy responsible. If we manage to prove all these facts, Gentleman of the Jury, we confidently await a verdict that absolves the accused, in honor of Justice and for the good name of the Puerto Rican public.\textsuperscript{269}

The defense’s statement, is also interesting in that it highlights the police’s role juxtaposed against “the defenseless public”; claiming that they not only “perpetuated a true massacre” (emphasis mine), but also “the largest crime in [Puerto Rican]

\textsuperscript{268} Prosecution statement quoted in Medina Vásquez, 93.
\textsuperscript{269} Defense statement quoted in Medina Vásquez, 97-98.
history,” (emphasis mine). This is key because the defense made it a point to claim that the police involved in this incident committed a grave crime, one that they explicitly labeled as a massacre. Consequently, the fact that they win this case suggests that succeeded in convincing the jury of these points. It is interesting that even though none of the policemen involved were ever charged with anything before or after this trial, the defense managed to present them as criminals while successfully proving Nationalist innocence.

Ultimately, the defense was able to prove that officer Loyola Pérez died due to police crossfire. Moraza Ortiz points out:

> The most convincing proof that the defense presented was the testimony of Dr. Luis Passalaqua, medic who attended to the policeman Ceferino Loyola Pérez in the Doctor Pila Clinic. He declared that the bullet that caused the death [of the police officer] entered through the eye and came out through the cranium, sustaining the defense theory which alleged that the bullet had ricochet against the pavement before penetrating the eye. This suggested that Ceferino Loyola Pérez died by cause of police crossfire and not by cause of a bullet shot from a rooftop of one of the surrounding buildings.  

As a consequence of the omission of irrelevant evidence that the prosecution submitted in the first trial, the second trial wrapped up quickly with a unanimous decision by a conservative, non-Nationalist jury that the Nationalists were not guilty of the accused charge.  

### The Trials in the Press

Considering the landmark decision in this case, one might expect it to have an effect on U.S. reports of the Massacre, especially in terms of blaming Nationalists for

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270 Ibid., 83.
271 Pérez-Marchand, 30.
the tragedy, but as I show in the following section, this was not the case. These reports are important because they are a continuation of how the Massacre and those involved were represented in both regions. Not only do I continue my discussion about terminology, but I also look at whether previous patterns that I have outlined continued after the acquittal of these Nationalists or not. I look at that the way the Ponce Murder Trials and the Cooper case are conceptualized and represented in these reports and how that reflects dominant interests in the U.S. and follow established patterns of labeling the Massacre as anything but a massacre, blaming the Nationalists for the tragedy and underscoring their role in violent acts, and the omission of details that clarify context for the reader. In contrast, the ways that Puerto Rican reporters conceptualize these trials in their articles and how the differences between U.S. and Puerto Rican reports underscore problems of colonialism, representation, the criminalization of Nationalist Party members and problems with accurate and balanced reporting.

_U.S. Newspaper Reports on the Ponce Murder Trials_²⁷²

The first *New York Times* article about the trial was published September 13, 1937. They followed their old pattern of calling the Massacre a “political riot” and a “clash.”²⁷³ This short piece simply announced the start of the trial. The second article published was also rather short and consisted of a discussion about the prosecution’s attempt to establish that the accused were part of “a well-organized Nationalist

²⁷² The newspaper articles discussed here are mostly from the *New York Times*. I only mention a few number of *Washington Post* articles that discuss the attempt on Judge Cooper because it failed to publish anything about the Ponce Murder Trials.

conspiracy to free the island from United States rule [that] was responsible for the March uprising and fatalities.”

Again, the words “political riot,” “disorders,” and “uprising” were used to describe the Massacre here. Interestingly these reports focused more on the prosecution’s arguments rather than both sides. In an article published on September 19, an unnamed reporter discusses the “documentary evidence” introduced the day before in the trial “purporting to show [the Nationalists charged] took oaths to fight for the separation of Puerto Rico from the United States.”

The reporter continues to discuss the prosecution’s charges that the Nationalists were part of a military group that was created under the Nationalist Party. S/he states: “The evidence was intended to prove [that Nationalist Party members] supported obligatory military service in the ‘army of liberation’ and [that they] swore to defend their ideals with their lives.” This kind of language looks like an attempt to justify the loss of Nationalist Party members’ lives during the Massacre. Almost as if the Nationalists that died that day asked for it; as if their murders were an inevitable part of the kind of lives they chose to lead. Ironically, this loss of Nationalist Party members lives is never directly addressed in these reports even though this reporter tries to justify it is passing here.

Often, the articles are clear that these Nationalists were on trial for murdering a police officer, but when they mentioned the other people that died and were injured during the Massacre, they fail to identify that the majority of those people were either

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275 Ibid.
277 Ibid.
Nationalists or innocent bystanders that were there to watch the procession. For example, in this same article, the reporter states: “The Nationalists are on trial specifically on charges of killing a provincial policeman, Ceferino Loyola [sic] in disorders last Palm Sunday. A score of other persons were killed.”\textsuperscript{278} This is a common occurrence that I identified in these reports. Consequently, aside from the policeman, the other eighteen people that died and over two hundred that were injured that day remained nameless.

After the initial reports, there were not many articles published by the \textit{Times} on the Ponce Murder Trials until the second trial began in February of the following year. Surprisingly, one of the first articles that the \textit{Times} published about this second trial actually touches upon the arguments made by the defense. While the unknown author fails to point out that the “repetitious material which dragged out the first trial three months”\textsuperscript{279} was on behalf of the prosecution and their insistence on using evidence that was not directly related to the Massacre, they did point out that \textit{El Imparcial}’s photographer Carlos Morales Torres testified that he “saw the police kill without justification.”\textsuperscript{280} The article also includes the photographer’s claim that he “specifically saw Policeman Ortiz Fuentes shoot four men who pleaded for mercy with their hands raised.”\textsuperscript{281} This is one of the only times that a negative claim is made against the police with respect to the Ponce Massacre in these two U.S. newspapers with no rebuttal or explicit attempt to defend the police or criminalize the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{278} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{279} “Puerto Rico Case Speeded,” \textit{New York Times}, February 9, 1938, 10.
\item \textsuperscript{280} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{281} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Nationalists. Needless to say, it is a rare occurrence and certainly not characteristic of the general pattern I have already outlined in this work. What is in line with this pattern is that the word “riot” is used to describe the Massacre here and the same term along with the word “clash” is used to describe the incident in the next article published about the second trial in the Times on February 13, 1938.282

Ultimately, the reports that the Times published after the acquittal of the Nationalists (and during the course of the trials) served to represent Nationalist Party members as violent criminals by highlighting the attempt on Judge Cooper’s life during the summer of 1937.283 In one article published on December 8, 1937, an unknown Times reporter discusses the suspension of the first trial while also pointing out that another trial was to begin on January 10 to try ten Nationalists in connection with the Cooper shooting.284 The reporter even emphasized the fact that Julio Pinto Gandia, acting president of the Nationalist Party, was a defendant in both cases.285

Another note about this article is that its ending is both vague and inaccurate. The last paragraph states:

Judge Cooper was fired on while going home in an automobile the day following the departure of Pedro Albizu Campos, then the party president, and seventy other Nationalists convicted of attempting to overthrow the

283 The Washington Post also reported on the Cooper case soon after it occurred with two very brief articles. The first, entitled “Judge in Puerto Rico Escapes Gun Shots of Revolutionaries: Sentenced Conspirators’ Friends Fire on U.S. Jurist in Auto,” is a simple summary of the attempt against Cooper submitted to the paper by the Associated Press. The Associated Press, “Judge in Puerto Rico Escapes Gun Shots of Revolutionaries,” The Washington Post, June 9, 1937, 1. The second, “Puerto Rican Ends Life After Baring Death Plot,” consists of four sentences that claim that a man by the name of Antonio Rivera Cordova who gave information to the authorities about the attempt on Cooper allegedly committed suicide after receiving anonymous violent threats against him. The Associated Press, “Puerto Rican Ends Life after Baring Death Plot,” The Washington Post, August 30, 1937, 2. Neither of these mentioned the Ponce Murder Trials that were to take place just a few months after.
285 Ibid.
government. The shots went wild.\textsuperscript{286} 

First, there is the vague statement about the “departure” of Pedro Albizu Campos. Unless the reader has already been following the story, s/he would likely question what exactly this meant. Where was he going and why? Next, is the inaccurate claim that “seventy other Nationalists,” (emphasis my own) where convicted along with Albizu Campos. This is perhaps a typographical error on the part of the reporter, since the number was actually seven \textit{not} seventy. But if one thinks about the consequences of such an error, which makes the case appear literally ten times larger than it actually was, the criminalization of Nationalist Party members is duly magnified. Finally, the statement “The shots went wild,” could not be more vague. Again, a reader unfamiliar with the story could easily ask: What shots? Those unleashed against Cooper? What does it mean that they went wild? Was he caught in the fire? Who exactly fired the shots and what was the motivating factor? These inaccuracies and vague statements do nothing less than worsen the representations of Nationalists in the U.S. press. The criminalization of these individuals is only exacerbated by such irresponsible journalism.

Another \textit{Times} article that connects the Ponce Murder Trials to the Cooper case is “11 Puerto Ricans Freed in Killings,” published on February 14, 1938. Here, the acquittal of the Nationalists in the Ponce trials is overshadowed by the charges in the trial of Nationalists that attempted against Judge Cooper. Again, the reporter here points to Gandia being a defendant in both cases. S/he also states: Gandia and nine other Nationalists will start by plane tomorrow for Atlanta, Ga., to begin five year

\textsuperscript{286} Ibid.
sentences for an attempt to kill Federal Judge Robert A. Cooper, who sentenced Albizu Campos and seven others for their part in the conspiracy. They also give an overview of the Massacre (calling it a riot yet again). Counter to the findings that were reported by the Hays Commission and the acquittal of the Nationalist Party members charged with killing policeman Loyola, the article states:

Statements of witnesses and of the police indicated that the rioting started at the Clinica Pila, in the heart of Ponce, when shots were fired from the Nationalist ranks at a group of police officers […] At the previous trial of the eleven defendants who have just been acquitted, the prosecution, over defense protests, introduced documents purporting to prove the existence of a revolutionary plot against the United States. The prosecution did this in support of a contention that an organized conspiracy to free the island from United States rule was responsible for the Ponce riot and the fatalities.

The first thing we can see in this quote is that the Times continued to report that the Nationalists fired first, at the police, and the police responded accordingly. As I discussed in Chapter Two, the Hays report showed that there were no weapons found on any of the Nationalists that day and that the policeman reportedly shot at are seen in photographs still standing with their guns drawn after the first and second shots. The other problem is the focus on the prosecution versus the defense. And even though the prosecution lost their case, this article ends with their contention that the Nationalists were entirely responsible for the Massacre. Consequently, the final thought that this paper leaves its readers with is not that these Nationalists were acquitted of their charges, but that they were responsible for the entire tragedy. Meanwhile, like many reports I have already discussed, there is no mention of the arguments made by the defense. This, as I show with a few examples below, is very

288 Ibid.
different from reports in Puerto Rican papers whose reporters were expectedly much more detailed but also quite balanced in terms of presenting both sides of the case to their reading public.

*Puerto Rican Press Reports on the Ponce Murder Trials*

Similar to what we saw in Chapter Two with respect to the Hays report, Puerto Rican newspapers show a markedly different way of framing the Ponce Murder Trials, where a belief that truth and justice will prevail reigns strong. In contrast to U.S. papers, the Nationalists Party members on trial were not criminalized and the defense’s case had an equal presence in the reports as that of the prosecution. Additionally, we do not see Puerto Rican papers linking other acts of violence such as the Riggs or Cooper incidents like U.S. papers did as part of their strategy to frame Nationalists within a larger genealogy of violence and criminality. Overall, Puerto Rican press reports provided a much more balanced portrayal of the trials and how they still considered the Hays report to be an important contribution. Also interesting is how these reporters conceptualized these trials within a larger international context, something U.S. reporters failed to acknowledge entirely. This omission by U.S. reporters in contrast to Puerto Ricans ones suggests that by failing to recognize and/or report on the significance of the Ponce Massacre and its aftermath in a international context, these reporters managed to evade the question of how the world would respond if the Nationalists were found to be innocent and Governor Winship and consequently the U.S. government were held responsible for the tragedy.

When the first set of the Ponce Murder Trials began on September 13, 1937, Puerto Ricans were paying close attention to the case. *El Mundo* reporter A. Castro,
Jr. noted the “great public anticipation”\textsuperscript{289} surrounding the trial. He described the scene outside of the courthouse on the first day of the trial, stating: “Since early this morning, a large group of the public has congregated around the building where the court will settle.”\textsuperscript{290} Another article described the frenzy surrounding the trial; \textit{El Imparcial}’s piece “With Great Public Anticipation Begins Today the Grand Ponce Trial,” conveys a sense of excitement and serious interest on behalf of the Puerto Rican public. The unnamed reporter states:

There are many people who have looked for excuses in order to not serve as a jurist in this sensational process in which almost all the witnesses have already appeared before investigative commissions to give their testimony. The hotels are full. In the streets one sees many groups of people discussing the case animatedly, even though their faces reflect great sadness. The majority of them have printed in their retinas, the memory of those tragic happenings.\textsuperscript{291}

This passage shows how this trial was of great importance to the Puerto Rican public and spurred intense debates. It also demonstrates that no matter each Puerto Rican believed about what actually occurred that day, there was still a great sense of sadness surrounding the Ponce Massacre six months after the tragedy. Of course, as we saw with U.S. reports, there was no mention of how the Puerto Rican public may have felt about the trials in those papers or any coverage of the public’s reception of the case.

Another difference that is exemplified in this article is that the reporter also talks about the importance of the Hays investigation. It claims: “Nothing brought more light to the unfortunate happenings of Ponce.”\textsuperscript{292} The writer continued:

\textsuperscript{290} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{292} Ibid.
The most complete and detailed history of the sad happenings of the Ponce massacre, facts that were hidden from the first moment, details that were not made palpable in those moments, witnesses that [certain investigators] did not want to hear because they could be “detrimental,” all of this and more, the reader finds in the interesting and valuable historic document with the name THE HAYS REPORT. This report also contains a section of photographs that protect the historical and irrefutable facts of whom were the only ones guilty of the terrible killing. Now that the trial of the nationalists accused with killing a policeman in said happenings of Ponce, and that the attention is no longer solely on Puerto Rico, but rather on the whole world which will be waiting to see the results of this trial, now that, like we first informed our readers of, the Ponce case has been discussed in the world press and even German radio stations spread to the world the news accusing Yankees of imperialism, the Hays Report comes to be the best auxiliary for finding truth in light of the rationalizations and justice, in mouths of persons impartial and lovers of order and the law.²⁹³ (emphasis in original)

It is clear from this passage that this reporter took the results of the Hays Report to be the truth about the Ponce Massacre. S/he claims that the photographic evidence presented by the Hays Commission proves who were actually to blame for the Massacre; undoubtedly this suggests that s/he believes that Governor Winship and the insular police were ultimately responsible for the tragedy for that is the conclusion that the Hays Commission also issued. As I pointed out above, the importance of the Hays investigation with respect to the Ponce Murder Trials was something that was completely omitted in U.S. papers.²⁹⁴ This suggests that while Puerto Rican papers appeared to view the Ponce Murder Trials in light of investigations like Hays’, U.S. papers continued to ignore the importance of these inquiries and instead focused more on the Trials as an avenue to prosecute those that they continued to believe were responsible for the Massacre—the surviving Nationalist Party members. The passage

²⁹³ Ibid.
²⁹⁴ The only article in the New York Times that discussed the Hays report with respect to the Cooper incident is inaccurate and nonsensical as I discussed on page one hundred and nineteen.
also suggests that the Massacre and the Ponce Murder Trials were not only important to Puerto Ricans but to an international audience. As addressed in Chapter Two, this reflects a conceptualization of these incidents transnationally—something that is absent from U.S. reports. As I discussed above, the fact that U.S. papers failed to convey a sense that the rest of the world was watching and anticipating the outcome of this trial only served to further undermine the significance of findings by official institutions such as the A.C.L.U and the Puerto Rican criminal justice system.

In addition to these conceptualizations and (mis)representations about the Hays Report, the Ponce Massacre, and Ponce Murder Trials in an international context, there are many other stark contrasts between Puerto Rican and U.S. reports to consider. One striking difference is that unlike U.S. papers, both El Imparcial and El Mundo provided detailed daily updated about the trials, discussing both prosecution and defense arguments. This is significant considering that the trial dragged on for three months. While this may be expected considering the significance of the trials to Puerto Ricans on the island and the lack of interest it held by reports in the U.S., one would at least hope that in the very few reports U.S. papers published, they would provide as balanced reporting as possible. Yet, strategy of concision again comes into play here. In contrast to Puerto Rican papers, the U.S. press limited their reports as much as possible which allowed only a specific, regurgitating image of the Massacre and of Nationalists to be reproduced. As I detailed in previous chapters, and as exemplified by Chomsky and Herman’s theory of “manufacturing consent,” these U.S. reporters were working within a system that protected dominant interests on the Island and consequently reproduced representations of Nationalist Party members as
criminals and arbiters of violence and fanaticism. By making sure that the U.S. focused on the criminality and violence of Nationalist Party members, the U.S. government was able to deflect any accusations against its appointed Governor and U.S. administration on the Island in general. As I argued in the previous chapter, by protecting its reputation as a benevolent sponsor, the U.S. could continue to carry on business as usual on the Island and avoid a negative image of its management of the Island that could impede on maintaining a colonial stronghold over its overseas territories. Thus, it is actually not a surprise that these U.S. newspapers tended to focus more on the parts of the trials that sought to represent these Nationalist Party members as part of a larger “conspiracy” to overthrow the U.S. government on the island. Through this kind of representation, these papers could effectively convey an image of Nationalists as fanatics and independence as a cause not worth fighting for.

Another significant difference between U.S. and Puerto Rican press reports is that the Puerto Rican papers treated the Ponce Murder Trials and the Cooper case separately. Unlike what I have already shown with U.S. papers, Puerto Rican papers do not link the cases in the same way but rather treat them as two separate cases. In one article published in *El Mundo* about the Cooper case, there is absolutely no mention of the Ponce Murder Trials even though the first murder trial was in full swing at the time.295 Thus it seems that Puerto Rican reporters did not see these cases as part of an overall pattern of violence, especially when at this point the Massacre was widely considered to be a case were the police perpetrated violence against an innocent public and an unarmed group of protesters (the Nationalists). This suggests

that while U.S. papers represented the two cases simply as continuations of past trends of violence on behalf of Nationalists, Puerto Rican papers represented the cases as two separate incidents with different circumstances and different motivations behind the violence. Since U.S. reporters failed to acknowledge that the Nationalists were ultimately not responsible for the Ponce Massacre, they simply grouped the incident with other violent events and misrepresented it as a simple line of Nationalist violence in which the state (the insular police, Governor Winship, and his aides) played no role beyond what is expected of them.

Ultimately, even though the Nationalists charged in the Ponce Murder Trials were unanimously found innocent from murdering policeman Loyola Pérez, and consequently not responsible for the Ponce Massacre, the U.S. press continued to represent the Nationalist Party under a veil of violence and criminalization. The results of this trial, even when considering the results of the Hays report, had no effect whatsoever on U.S. representations of Nationalist Party members specifically and the conflict between the insular and federal government and those that advocated for Puerto Rican independence more widely. Furthermore, these reporters allowed other incidents of violence such as the Cooper case to overshadow the results of the Ponce Murder Trials and continued to perpetuate the notion that the Nationalists were solely responsible for the Ponce Massacre and all other recent violence on the island. U.S. reporters continued to follow the same patterns of terminology, framing, and blame-placing discussed in Chapters One and Two and thus continued to protect U.S. government reputation and imperial interests in its territories which would be marred by the truth of this tragedy.
Conclusion

We have to investigate in such a way that neither the interviewed persons nor those under investigation learn about our work. [...] This is so, because our investigations deal with individuals who hold pro-independence ideals and when they learn that we are investigating they argue that we are engaging in persecution and repression because of their political beliefs and, as we all know, this is prohibited by our constitution.

–Intelligence Division, Police of Puerto Rico, from a confidential Investigations Handbook, discovered in 1987

Throughout the rest of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, the U.S. government, through intelligence agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) repeatedly and ruthlessly participated in the political repression of Puerto Rican pro-independence activists, by impeding on their civil and human rights. The quotation above demonstrates how those involved in these actions were well aware of the illegality and repressive nature of their work. They knew that persecuting independentistas was unconstitutional yet they proceeded anyway and did everything did could to keep the operation confidential. While another tragedy on the scale of the Ponce Massacre has not taken place in Puerto Rico on a single day since that horrific Palm Sunday in 1937, the U.S. government has played a role in many acts of violence against the Puerto Rican people and their land throughout the past one hundred and twelve years. As I pointed to in the introduction, this has included: the political repression and persecution of independence activists that really took off

in the 1930s and continues to today including the assassination and incarceration of key leaders (where some have experienced torture); repressive of legislation such as the Gag Order of 1948; the non-consensual sterilization of Puerto Rican women; the military practice of bombing, environmental destruction, and exploitation of Vieques island; the FBI’s counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO) of the 1970s; the use of Puerto Rican soldiers in U.S.-fought wars such as the Korean War where the 65th Infantry was in the front-lines; cases of insular police brutality; and many more.


After the death of Pedro Albizu Campos in 1965, the PNPR lost much of its weight on the island. Today, a group called the New York Junta (Board) claims to be “an autonomous organ with mutual recognition to the National Junta in Puerto Rico.” Essentially they claim to be a modern arm of PNPR. The more notable organizations that have come to exist after 1965, however, include many clandestine groups such as: the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional Puertorriqueña (FALN) or “Puerto Rican Armed Forces of National Liberation” created by Filiberto Ojeda Rios in the 1960s; the Movimiento Independentista Revolucionario en Armas (MIRA) or the “Revolutionary Independentista Armed Movement”; the Organización de Voluntarios por la Revolución Puertorriqueña (OVRP) or the “Organization of Volunteers for the Puerto Rican Revolution; and Los Comandos Armados de Liberación (CAL) or “The Armed Commandos of Liberation” which served as predecessor for what would later become El Ejercito Popular Boricua (EBP)/ the Boricua Popular Army also known as the Puerto Rican Popular Army or Los Macheteros/”The Machete Wielders.” All of these groups existed alongside the officially recognized electoral party, PIP, which was created in 1946, as well as the Movimiento Independentista Nacional Hostosiano (MINH) or the Hostosian National Independence Movement, created in 2004–seen by many as an umbrella organization for different pro-independence groups. PIP has been unsuccessful in


The organization derives its name from the Puerto Rican intellectual, poet, and advocate for Puerto Rican independence Eugenio María de Hostos.
gaining popular support since its initial success in the 1940s.\textsuperscript{306} In fact, in the last elections during November 2008, PIP only managed to gain less than 2% of the vote and was in danger of losing official recognition because the Puerto Rican legislature requires all officially recognized political parties to gain at least 3% of the popular vote.\textsuperscript{307} However, PIP leaders submitted a petition of over 100,000 signatures in support of keeping the party officially registered and Puerto Rico’s elections commission accepted the petition in May 2009.\textsuperscript{308}

After the assassination of Filberto Ojeda Ríos in 2005, the U.S. government unfurled another wave of repressions against independentistas. In January 2008, U.S. federal authorities served three young Puerto Ricans—Tania Frontera, a thirty-five-year-old graphic artist; Christopher Torres, a thirty-one-year-old social worker; and Julio Pabón, (Wesleyan University class of 2002), a twenty-seven-year-old budding filmmaker—with Grand Jury subpoenas in connection with the FBI’s investigation of \textit{Los Macheteros}.

\textsuperscript{309} In June 2008, soon before the hearings were to begin, these authorities postponed the process indefinitely.\textsuperscript{310} These three individuals, who were ready to fight the subpoenas, are an example of unwarranted persecution by the FBI. It was also clear in this case that the government was impeding on these individuals’


\textsuperscript{308} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{310} Jessica Pupovac, 2008.
rights. As the attorney of Christopher Torres stated: “My concern is that the grand jury is being used in a way that undermines the First Amendment rights of people who are engaged in constitutionally protected political activity.”311 Additionally, on February 7, 2008, another Machetero leader who was involved in the Connecticut Wells Fargo bank robbery along with Filiberto Ojeda Ríos in 1983, was arrested by the FBI at the age of sixty-seven. Similar to Ojeda Ríos’ situation, Avelino González Claudio had been in hiding, leading a quite life in Manatí, Puerto Rico under a different alias and working as a computer teacher to support his family.312 Soon after his arrest, allegations arose of Gonzalez Claudio being tortured in prison. One report states:

We have information that they have already started to torture him, covering up the windows so he cannot know whether it’s day or night,” said [Héctor] Pesquera in a radio interview (WSKN). Pesquera, a doctor by profession, said that the supposed “different treatment” González Claudio is receiving in the jail is meant to “soften him, preparing to break his will.” Asking about the matter, governor Aníbal Acevedo Vilá said that any allegation of mistreatment must be “immediately” taken to the highest levels of federal jurisdiction by González Claudio’s attorneys. However, he said that in Puerto Rico, ”let’s not fool ourselves. Here, historically, federal and state authorities...the way they treated independentists was very different from the way they treated other citizens.”313

In 2009, reports documented how González Claudio is also being denied medical

311 Pupovac, [http://www.alternet.org/rights/75196/].
treatment. On February 5, 2010, the former fugitive pleaded guilty to charges related to the 1983 robbery. He is scheduled to be sentenced on May 26, 2010, “at which time he faces a maximum term of imprisonment of 15 years and a fine of up to $20,000. In a binding plea agreement, subject to approval by the Court, the parties have agreed that a sentence of seven years of imprisonment and fine of up to $10,000, should the Court find that the defendant is able to pay a fine, is an appropriate disposition of this case.” In addition to González Claudio, two other pro-independent activists remain political prisoners today: Carlos Alberto Torres and Oscar López Rivera. With many independentistas still in hiding, one can expect the FBI to make many more arrests (and possible assassinations) in the years to come.

Another consideration in the U.S. government’s effort to persecute and repress independentistas is the kind of legislation that has been proposed in the past couple of years. In April 2007, Rep. Jane Harman (D-CA) introduced H.R. 1955, known as the “Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act,” to the House of Representatives. The premise of the legislation is as follows:


On March 3, 2008, Wesleyan University held a campus forum to discuss this legislation. The forum included presentations from Professor John Finn from the Government Department, and Barbara Jones, Olin Library, awardee of the 2007 Downs Intellectual Freedom Award for her work on behalf of the Committee on Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE), and was moderated by J. Kehaulani Kauanui, Associate Professor in Anthropology and American Studies. Approximately ninety-five people attended the event.
The bill would establish two government-appointed bodies to study, monitor and propose ways of curbing what it calls homegrown terrorism and extremism in the United States. The first body, a National Commission, would convene for eighteen months. A university-based “Center for Excellence” would follow, bringing together academic specialists to recommend laws and other measures.  

But there are critics that say that this act would impinge on the right of intellectual freedom and would serve to stigmatize dissident groups in the country. The same report quoted above states: “Critics say the definition of extremism and terrorism is too vague and its mandate even more broad. Under a false veil of expertise and independence, they say, the government-appointed commissions could be used as ideological cover to push through harsher laws.”  

Another piece of legislation that has recently crept by rather quietly is the "Puerto Rico Democracy Act of 2009" (H.R. 2499) mentioned above. If passed, this bill would not adequately allow Puerto Ricans to exercise their right to self-determination. It is biased towards statehood and against independence. Several members of congress have already expressed opposition to the bill. For example, Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez (D-NY), Chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), wrote a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi stating:

The closed drafting process used to develop H.R. 2499 reflects a lack of collegiality and a mindset that seems dismissive of other points of view. This approach must not be sanctioned. It would be particularly unfortunate for such a non-transparent approach to be applied to an issue that is highly controversial and so central to the lives of all Puerto Ricans.  

318 Amy Goodman quoted in ibid.  
When campaigning for president, Barack Obama wrote to then Governor of Puerto Rico Aníbal Acevedo Vilá, stating: “My Administration will recognize all valid options to resolve the question of Puerto Rico's status, including commonwealth, statehood, and independence.” With President Obama’s pledge to resolve the political status question of Puerto Rico, and bills like the one I just described that is making its way through Washington, we must all watch closely at what will unfold in the next decade.

All of these recent events are important because they show how prevalent and relevant the question of political persecution and repression of independentistas is to this day. In other words, while this thesis has been primarily an exploration of an important event in Puerto Rican history, the truth is that the U.S. has continued to violate the civil and human rights of these advocates up through the present. While I think it is important that we understand the history behind this thread—indeed, that is why I chose to focus on a particular historical moment—I would like to remind the reader that we cannot afford to lose sight of the fact that this is an on-going process and one—with the permanent political status of Puerto Rico still unresolved—that holds grand implications for the future of the Puerto Rican people.

The Ponce Massacre remains on the Island as one of the most well-known and collectively mourned events in modern Puerto Rican history. Different versions of the legislation is still making its way through Congress. The last action states that on October 8, 2009, the bill was “[p]laced on the Union Calendar, Calendar No. 164.” “HR 2499: Puerto Rico Democracy Act of 2009,” Govtrack.org: a civic project to track Congress, <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h111-2499>. It does not have a companion bill in the Senate.

story have been told time and time again through various mediums such as film, paintings, and theater. In 1987, the Puerto Rican legislature designated the two-story house at the intersection of Calle Marina and Calle Aurora where the Massacre took place, a national landmark by passing Joint Resolution Number 2951. In 1988 the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (ICP) or the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture purchased the property and turned it into a museum called El Museo de La Masacre de Ponce or the Ponce Massacre museum. The fact that ICP runs this museum, and even added a section dedicated solely to Nationalist Party figurehead Pedro Albizu Campos, relates to my earlier discussion of the ambivalence that Puerto Ricans have toward the independence movement. Far from being politically neutral, the Institute has spent most of its existence under the rule of the pro-statehood party of Puerto Rico. This has undoubtedly affected the direction of the ICP in promoting Puerto Rican culture. According to anthropologist Arlene Dávila: “Since the 1960s, when [the pro-statehood party] first came into power, some party officials had promoted the idea of a ‘creole statehood’ in order to enhance the appeal of statehood status. In this conception, Puerto Ricans would retain enough autonomy to defend their language and cultural identity under statehood.” Thus, it is clear that this party was strategic with its control of the ICP, using it as a channel through which they could further their political ends. Nevertheless, it is interesting that an organization so greatly influenced by the pro-statehood party, would sponsor and run a museum that

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showcases independence ideals. Perhaps because it is seen as a moment in the past, the party considered it to offer no threat to their organization as it stands today.

In 2005, the U.S. National Register of Historic Places, under the National Park Service (NPS), added the museum to its list under the name of the Casa de la Masacre which translates to “the House of the Massacre.”\(^{323}\) Interestingly enough, while the San Juan National Historic Site which houses the forts that were built by the Spanish to fight off invaders is listed on the National Park Service website, the Casa de la Masacre is not yet present, five years after its initial addition to the registry.\(^{324}\) Thus while the NPS has recognized the property as a place to be preserved and used


as a tourist attraction in the southern side of the island, the location is not showcased or at all present on their website.

The significance of this absence lies in the institutional recognition of the Ponce Massacre. The U.S. government has a history of resisting such labels in the historical record, and it appears that it did so in this case until recently, but the recognition is still at the most minimal level. Concurrently, as with the Ponce Massacre and the numerous incidents that have unfolded since then, the U.S. media today still fails to provide full reports on major events in Puerto Rico. These include: the "Puerto Rico Democracy Act of 2009" (HR 2499), a bill purporting to provide for a federally sanctioned process for self-determination but is actually slanted towards statehood that Rep. Pedro Pierluisi (D-PR) introduced to the House of Representatives on May 19, 2009; an incident of police aggression against students in August of 2009 that I pointed to in Chapter Two; an enormous protest that took place on the island as thousands of government layoffs were announced on October 15, 2009--as the CNN television network spent an hour following an empty

325 Such is the case with Native American history. As author Vine Deloria, Jr. points out: “The real problem today is the irresponsibility of the ruling class of white man and the propensity of people to reclassify such massacres as ‘battle’-to use euphemisms to cover a multitude of sins.” Quoted in “History Revisited: An Old War, A New Battle,” by Edmund Mahony, The Hartford Courant, May 26, 1994, <http://archnet.asu.edu/archives/ethno/Courant/day5.htm>. Also with respect to Hawai’i when the U.S. finally acknowledges in apology that what took place was an “overthrow” versus the previously used label of “revolution.”
326 Another example in which the label of “massacre” was evaded is evident in a 1951 government report on the Nationalist Party at the request of the U.S Congress House Committee in Interior and Insular Affairs that calls the incident the “Palm Sunday Riots.” United States, and William H. Hackett, “The Nationalist Party; a factual study of the Puerto Rican insurrectionists under Albizu Campos, the Blair House shooting, various assassination attempts, and of the Communist praise and support for these seditionists,”(Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off, 1951), 9. Now, you can find select photographs in the Library of Congress that include “Ponce Massacre” in the caption: see <http://loc.gov/pictures/resource/fsa.8b30709/>.
balloon in the sky over Colorado;\textsuperscript{328} and a massive gas explosion that took place just eight days later in San Juan metropolitan area.

This lack of media coverage, as I argued in my introduction, plays a large role in why the U.S. public is so ill-informed of Puerto Rico, its people, and the current political, economic, and social crises that are affecting their fellow U.S. citizens. This can be explained by the propaganda model that Chomsky and Herman outlined in their 1988 theory of “manufacturing consent” which suggests that the U.S. government, through mass media, manipulates the information that is released to the public to fit established dogma and protect dominant interests. Applying their theory to the case of Puerto Rico, one can conclude that the goal of the U.S. government is to keep the U.S. public uninformed about Puerto Rico because in that way, the government can keep the public from thinking about Puerto Rico. Thus if the public is not thinking about Puerto Rico, and is unaware of the injustices that the U.S. government has committed against the Puerto Rican people, the chances of the public taking action are minimized as much as possible. In this case, the “consent” of the U.S. public to maintain Puerto Rico as a U.S. territory as it stands today is “manufactured.”\textsuperscript{329} This was the case during the Ponce Massacre, throughout most of the twentieth century, and remains the case today. Consequently, I think that it is

\textsuperscript{328} This incident was later known as the “balloon boy hoax,” where parents of a young child claimed that their son could be in danger and in the helium-filled balloon in an effort to gain media attention – which they certainly acquired.

\textsuperscript{329} As I have already discussed, Puerto Rico is unique because it is one of the only U.S. territories today that remains under total plenary power. Unlike other territories, the U.S. has denied Puerto Rico’s right, under international law, to govern its relationships with other countries for example. The fact is that, today, most Americans do not acknowledge Puerto Rico as a U.S. colonial “possession” while most Puerto Ricans do.
important to break the silence, to remove the veil from U.S. public eyes so that they can learn the truth about their neighbors. If the public is informed not only about current events, but where the genealogy of these incidents stems from in history, I believe that significant change can occur.
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