

# History of Puerto Rico

Christopher Columbus reached the island and claimed it for Spain on November 19, 1493. He named it San Juan Bautista. It became known as Puerto Rico after 1521, when the city of San Juan had been founded and given the island's original name.

## Spanish Conquest and Settlement

Puerto Rico was conquered for Spain in 1509 by Juan Ponce de Leon, who became the first governor. The island was originally peopled by the Borinqueno, an agricultural people who were enslaved and largely exterminated as the result of harsh treatment. As the Native Americans were decimated, they were replaced by black African slaves who worked the plantations and sugar mills.

Privateers and pirates harassed the island's residents during the early colonial years. The Spanish constructed strong fortifications and in 1595 defeated the English navigators Sir Francis Drake and Sir John Hawkins when they attempted to capture Puerto Rico; Hawkins was mortally wounded. Raids, however, continued for a long time. San Juan was burned during a Dutch attack in 1625, and the English sacked Arecibo in 1702.

Puerto Rico was opened to foreign trade in 1804, and in 1808 it was accorded representation in the Spanish Parliament. Short-lived uprisings against Spanish rule occurred a few times during the 19th century (the most serious uprising, known as El Grito de Lares, took place in 1868), but all were quickly suppressed. Slavery was abolished in 1873. The island was granted autonomy in 1897.

## Spanish-American War and U.S. Control

As a result of the Spanish-American War (1898), Puerto Rico was ceded to the United States by the Treaty of Paris, December 10, 1898. In 1900 the U.S. Congress established a civil government on the island. U.S. citizenship was granted to Puerto Ricans in 1917, and the United States instituted measures designed to solve various economic and social problems of the overpopulated island. From 1940 to 1948 a hydroelectric-power expansion program was instituted to attract U.S. industry and to provide more employment for Puerto Ricans. Irrigation projects were also initiated. During World War II (1939-1945) the island became a key U.S. military base. Naval bases were constructed in San Juan harbor and on Culebra.

Under the leadership of Luis Muñoz Marín, head of the Popular Democratic party, a development program known as Operation Bootstrap was launched in 1942, resulting in greatly increased manufacturing and a large rise in the general living standard. In 1948, Muñoz became the first elected governor of the island.

## Government and Politics

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is governed under a constitution of 1952, as amended. An amendment to the constitution may be proposed by the commonwealth's legislature or by a constitutional convention. To become effective an amendment must be approved by a majority of persons voting on an issue in an election. Puerto Ricans share most rights and obligations of other

U.S. citizens; residents of the commonwealth may not vote in U.S. presidential elections, however, and, except for federal employees and members of the U.S. armed forces, are not required to pay federal income taxes.

## Executive

The chief executive of Puerto Rico is a governor, who is popularly elected to a four-year term and who may be reelected any number of times. The secretary of state succeeds the governor should the latter resign, die, or be removed from office. The governor, with the consent of the legislature, appoints the heads of the commonwealth's executive departments.

## Legislature

The bicameral Puerto Rico Legislative Assembly is made up of a senate and a house of representatives. In the early 1990s the senate had 27 members, and the house had 53 members. Legislators are popularly elected to four-year terms.

## Judiciary

Puerto Rico's highest tribunal, the supreme court, is composed of a chief justice and six associate justices, who serve until the age of 70. The major trial court of the commonwealth is the superior court, made up of 108 judges who serve 12-year terms. Judges of both courts are appointed by the governor, with the consent of the senate.

## Local Government

Puerto Rico is not divided into counties but has 78 municipios (municipalities). Each is governed by a popularly elected mayor and municipal assembly. The mayor appoints a secretary-auditor and a treasurer.

Puerto Rico, is now a freely associated commonwealth of the United States, composed of one large island and several small islands. Officially the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico (Spanish *Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico*), Puerto Rico is bordered on the north by the Atlantic Ocean, on the east by the Virgin Passage (which separates it from the Virgin Islands), on the south by the Caribbean Sea, and on the west by the Mona Passage (which separates it from the Dominican Republic). San Juan is the capital of Puerto Rico, as well as its largest city. Puerto Rico became a U.S. commonwealth on July 25, 1952. It was claimed by the explorer Christopher Columbus in 1493 and was subsequently a Spanish possession before the United States gained control in 1898. Its name, Spanish for "rich port," was first applied to its capital, known as San Juan Bautista de Puerto Rico in the 16th century. Gradually, the city came to be called San Juan and the island Puerto Rico. The name formerly was spelled Porto Rico. Puerto Rico is sometimes called the Island of Enchantment.

## National Representation

Puerto Rico is represented by a nonvoting resident delegate in the Congress of the United States. The delegate is elected by Puerto Ricans to a four-year term.

## Politics

In the early 1990s Puerto Rico's leading political parties were the Popular Democratic party (founded 1938), which advocates the maintenance of commonwealth status, and the New Progressive party (1967), which advocates Puerto Rico's becoming a U.S. state. The small Puerto Rico Independence party (1946) favors independence for the island.

## Commonwealth Status

On June 4, 1951, Puerto Rican voters approved in a referendum a U.S. law that granted them the right to draft their own constitution. The constituent assembly began its deliberations in the following September. In March 1952 the electorate approved the new constitution, and on July 25 Governor Muñoz proclaimed the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. The commonwealth held its first general election under the new statute on November 4; Muñoz and the Popular Democratic party received an overwhelming majority. The Nationalist party, which advocated independence, did not participate.

The attainment of commonwealth status did not halt agitation for total independence. Proindependence sentiment, which had led to an attempt on the life of U.S. President Harry S. Truman in 1950, again erupted violently in March 1954, when four nationalists fired shots into the chamber of the U.S. House of Representatives, wounding five members. The reelection of Governor Muñoz in 1956 and 1960 was regarded as a popular endorsement not only of his economic and social policies but also of commonwealth status. In a July 1967 referendum, Puerto Ricans once more voted to remain a commonwealth.

## The Statehood Question

In the election of 1968, Luis Alberto Ferré, candidate of the New Progressive party, was elected governor. He favored statehood for Puerto Rico, but not until the island's economy was stronger. In 1972 the Popular Democratic party returned to power with Rafael Hernández Colón, a supporter of commonwealth status, as governor. The electorate shifted again in 1976, as the New Progressives regained control of the legislature and Carlos Romero Barceló was elected governor.

Romero, a firm advocate of statehood, chose to play down the issue after the 1980 elections, in which he retained his office by only a narrow margin, and the Popular Democratic party scored impressive victories in legislative and mayoral contests. Meanwhile, extreme nationalist groups such as the U.S.-based Armed Forces of National Liberation (Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional, or FALN) used terrorist tactics in the late 1970s and early 1980s to press the cause of independence. In 1984 Hernández Colón won the governorship as his Popular Democratic party established commanding majorities in both legislative houses; he was reelected in 1988. The legislature voted to make Spanish the official language of Puerto Rico. After losing a symbolic plebiscite on the commonwealth question in 1991, Hernández Colón decided not to run for another term. In 1992 Pedro Rosselló of the New Progressive party was elected governor on a pro-statehood platform. He pressed the issue in a 1993 plebiscite, but 48 percent of the voters elected to petition the U.S. Congress to retain the commonwealth, with enhanced status; 46 percent chose statehood and 4 percent chose independence.

## Land and Resources

Puerto Rico is one of the larger islands of the West Indies, and the commonwealth also includes several small islands, such as Culebra, Mona, and Vieques. It is located about 1610 km (about 1000 mi) southeast of Florida and is almost twice as far from the mainland of North America as it is from South America. Puerto Rico is roughly rectangular in shape; its greatest east to west distance is about 180 km (about 110 mi), and its extreme north to south distance is about 65 km (about 40 mi). The highest point is 1338 m (4389 ft), atop Cerro de Punta. Puerto Rico has an area of 9104 sq km (3515 sq mi). Its coastline measures some 501 km (some 311 mi).

## Physical Geography

Puerto Rico is mountainous. The Central Mountains form an east to west backbone that extends almost the entire length of the island. The average elevation of these mountains, which include the Cordillera Central and the Sierra de Luquillo, is about 915 m (about 3000 ft). Although the mountains and adjacent foothills cover most of Puerto Rico, on the northern side of the island lies a coastal plain up to about 19 km (about 12 mi) wide, and a narrower coastal plain up to about 13 km (about 8 mi) wide extends along the southern coast. For most of its length the mountain system is nearer the southern coast than the northern coast, and the slopes are generally steeper on the southern side. At the eastern end of the island, however, the mountains curve toward the northeastern corner.

## Rivers and Lakes

Puerto Rico has many relatively short rivers and streams. Some of the rivers are dammed for hydroelectric power and thus have small lakes along their courses. One such body of water is Lago de Yauco, on the Yauco River. The longest river is the Grand de Arecibo, which flows to the northern coast. Other rivers include the Grand de Añasco, Bayamón, Cibuco, Culebrinas, and La Plata. None of the rivers is navigable by large vessels.

## Climate

Puerto Rico is a mountainous, tropical island directly in the path of the trade winds. These conditions account for its tropical rain forest and tropical wet and dry climates. Except at night, in the highest areas, the air is always warm. There is little difference from season to season in the energy received from the sun, and the length of the day remains fairly constant throughout the year. In addition, the average temperature of the seawater surrounding the island is about 27° C (about 81° F), with little variation during the course of the year. Trade winds reaching Puerto Rico from the east blow over this warm water and carry the warmth over the land. This air also contains much water vapor, and as the air is forced to rise over the mountains, it becomes cooler, and part of its water vapor condenses and falls as rain. The mountain areas receive more rain than almost any other part of the United States. The southwestern coastal area generally receives the least rain in Puerto Rico and has a distinct dry season. The mean annual temperature at San Juan, in the north, is about 26° C (about 79° F), and the city receives some 1500 mm (some 59 in) of precipitation each year. The recorded temperature in the commonwealth has ranged from 4.4° C (40° F) in 1911 at Aibonito to 39.4° C (103° F) in 1906 at

San Lorenzo. Puerto Rico is sometimes struck by damaging hurricanes traveling from the east, especially from August to October.

### Plants and Animals

Several thousand varieties of tropical plants grow in Puerto Rico, including the kapok tree (see CEIBA) with its thick trunk, the poinciana (a prickly tropical shrub with brilliant reddish blossoms), the breadfruit, and the coconut palm. A tropical rain forest in the northeastern section of the island has tree ferns, orchids, and mahogany trees; part of this tropical area is included in the Caribbean National Forest. In the dry southwestern corner of Puerto Rico are cactus and bunch grass.

Puerto Rico has no large wild mammals. The mongoose was brought in to control rats on sugarcane plantations. Iguanas and many small lizards abound, and bats are present. The island has one animal found almost nowhere else in the world—the coquí, a small tree frog that produces a loud, clear "song" from the branches of trees at night. Barracuda, kingfish, mullet, Spanish mackerel, tuna, lobster, and oysters are among the many fish inhabiting coastal waters.

### Mineral Resources

Puerto Rico's mineral deposits include limestone, glass sand, clay, copper, cobalt, chromium, nickel, iron ore, and peat. Great deposits of copper are in the central region near Adjuntas and Utuado.

### Population

According to the 1990 census, Puerto Rico had 3,522,037 inhabitants, an increase of about 10.2 percent over 1980. The average population density in 1990 was 387 persons per sq km (1002 per sq mi), a much higher density than for any state except New Jersey and Rhode Island. The great majority of Puerto Rico's inhabitants are of Hispanic background; Spanish is the official language of the commonwealth. About 80 percent of the people are Roman Catholic. In 1990 approximately 71 percent of the island's inhabitants lived in areas defined as urban, and the rest lived in rural areas. The largest communities in Puerto Rico included San Juan, the capital; Bayamon; Carolina; Ponce; Caguas; and Mayaguez.

### Education and Cultural Activity

In the 20th century Puerto Rico greatly improved its educational institutions, and by the early 1980s nearly 90 percent of the adult population was literate, compared with some 67 percent in 1940. The commonwealth also contains a number of notable cultural institutions and historical sites.

### Education

Puerto Rico's first free primary school was founded in the early 19th century in San Juan. By the late 1980s the commonwealth's public schools annually enrolled about 486,200 elementary pupils and about 165,000 secondary students.

The University of Puerto Rico, founded in 1903, is the oldest institution of higher education in Puerto Rico; it has branches in Arecibo, Bayamón, Cayey, Humacao, Mayagüez, Ponce, Río Piedras,

and San Juan . In the late 1980s the commonwealth had a total of 55 institutions of higher education with a combined enrollment of about 153,000 students. Besides the University of Puerto Rico, these institutions included Bayamón Central University (1970), in Bayamón; Inter-American University of Puerto Rico (1912), with major campuses in Hato Rey and San Germán; Catholic University of Puerto Rico (1948), in Ponce; and the University of the Sacred Heart (1935), in Santurce.

### Cultural Institutions

A number of Puerto Rico's major cultural institutions are in San Juan. These include the Museum of Puerto Rican Art, housing works from pre-Columbian times to the present; the Museum of Military and Naval History; and the Museum of Natural History. In addition, metropolitan San Juan is the home of the Symphony Orchestra of Puerto Rico, the Conservatory of Music of Puerto Rico (1959), and ballet and dance companies. It also is the site of the annual Festival Casals, which includes programs of orchestra and chamber music. Of note, too, is the Ponce Art Museum, which has exhibits of paintings by European and Puerto Rican artists.

### Historical Sites

Puerto Rico's Spanish heritage is preserved in many sites in San Juan, especially in the insular part of the city known as Old San Juan. Among these sites are El Morro and San Cristóbal fortresses, both part of San Juan National Historic Site; La Fortaleza, once a fortress and now the governor's palace, its oldest section completed in 1540; Old Santo Domingo Convent, built between 1523 and 1528; and Fort San Geronimo (completed late 18th century).

### Sports and Recreation

Puerto Rico's mild climate and sandy beaches make it a popular recreation area, especially for swimming, fishing, boating, tennis, and golf. Both horse racing and cockfighting attract many spectators. Baseball, basketball, and boxing also are popular sports in Puerto Rico.

### Communications

In the early 1990s Puerto Rico had 105 radiobroadcasting stations and 9 television stations, and cable television is available. The commonwealth's first radio station, WKAQ in San Juan, began operations in 1922. WKAQ-TV in San Juan, Puerto Rico's initial television station, first went on the air in 1954. *La Gaceta de Puerto Rico*, the island's first newspaper, was initially published in 1807. Influential newspapers in Puerto Rico now include the Spanish-language *El Nuevo Día* and *El Vocero de Puerto Rico* and the English-language *San Juan Star*, all published in San Juan.

### Economy

Economic development in Puerto Rico has historically lagged well behind that of most mainland states of the United States. Significant improvements have been made in economic conditions since the late 1940s, however, after the development program known as Operation Bootstrap was begun by the government. Growth has occurred largely through stimulation of the manufacturing sector. Much development has been concentrated in the San Juan metropolitan area. In the early 1990s manufacturing was the leading economic activity, and government,

commerce, and tourism also were important sources of income.

### Agriculture

Puerto Rico has two substantially different agricultural systems: one of very small farms mainly producing subsistence commodities, and another of much larger farms principally producing goods for export. Nearly half the commonwealth's approximately 20,000 farms encompass less than 4 hectares (10 acres) each. Only about 1700 farms exceed 40 hectares (100 acres) in size, but they account for the dominant share of the annual value of agricultural products sold. Coffee is the most valuable crop, followed by vegetables, sugarcane, bananas, pineapples, tobacco, and rice. Dairy products, poultry, and beef cattle and calves are also important sources of income.

### Forestry and Fishing

Much of Puerto Rico's forest cover had been cut by about 1900, and despite concerted efforts after 1935 to replant trees, the forestry industry remains small. Commercial fishing plays a relatively minor role in Puerto Rico's economy. Tuna species caught include yellowfin, skipjack, and bluefin. Small-scale freshwater fish farming is a growing economic activity; fish raised include bass, bluegill, and catfish.

### Mining

The value of the minerals extracted in Puerto Rico exceeds \$160 million annually. Almost all of Puerto Rico's mineral production consists of construction materials, notably cement, sand, gravel, and stone. Other minerals are clay, graphite, lime, and salt.

### Manufacturing

Manufacturing activity in Puerto Rico has been encouraged by government incentives such as tax exemptions, loans, and research assistance. The island has benefited from importing capital, technology, and entrepreneurship from the mainland United States. Apparel making is Puerto Rico's leading manufacturing industry in terms of employment, followed by the production of electronic goods, processed foods, and chemicals. The modern apparel industry evolved from a small-scale labor-intensive needlework industry of the 1940s, and most apparel plants are branches of mainland U.S. firms. San Juan and Mayagüez are the leading centers for making clothing. Other major manufactures include pharmaceuticals, industrial machinery, printed materials, rubber and plastics, metal items, precision instruments, timepieces, footwear, and alcoholic beverages.

### Tourism

The warm year-round climate in Puerto Rico and its abundant sunshine and coastal beaches attract about 3.5 million tourists each year; spending by visitors exceeds \$1.4 billion annually. Their primary destination is the San Juan area, where numerous luxury hotels are located.

## Transportation

San Juan dominates the transportation system of Puerto Rico. It is the leading port and also has the busiest airport, Puerto Rico International Airport. Transportation facilities in the rest of the island are generally much poorer than on the mainland. Altogether, Puerto Rico is served by about 21,737 km (about 13,507 mi) of roads, the great majority of which are paved. The island's limited railroad trackage is used to haul sugarcane, especially in the Ponce area of the south.

## Energy

Puerto Rico's installed electricity generating capacity is about 4.2 million kilowatts, and yearly production in the mid-1980s was approximately 14.4 billion kilowatt-hours. Approximately 98 percent of the commonwealth's electricity was generated in thermal plants, most of which burned refined petroleum. Most of the rest was produced in hydroelectric installations.

Contributed by: J. Dennis Lord and Donald J. Patton

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## HISTORY OF RINCON...

Rincon was established in 1772. The offspring of the original families still reside in the community. This area was originally known for its sugar cane plantations. It is very recent that this community has become a tourist destination.

Tourists from all over the world often pick this area for long term vacations due to the options available to them which range from watching the surf to exploring 500 years of history which is throughout the island.

Surfing experts have said that the waves in Rincon are world class. These can be found at Sandy Beach, Pools, Domes, Indicators, the Point, Marias, Dogmans, Tres Palmas, Steps, and Little Malibu. The world surfing championships were held in Rincon in 1966.

Rincon beaches and sunsets seem made for postcards. Mango groves, sugar cane fields, pastures, whales and dolphins at sea, surfers, fishermen --- all found here .

Here you find a relaxed atmosphere which you want to be part of when a noisy city is driving you crazy. You can enjoy exploring the country, swimming, surfing and endless other options. One that will make you return for more of the same .