



Struggle-La-Lucha.org

# Consequences of colonialism in Puerto Rico (Borikén)

written by Berta Joubert-Ceci  
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Berta Joubert-Ceci, left, with Miriam Morales, Cuban Ambassador to Nigeria, and Maggie Vascassenno.

*From the Aug. 16 [Vanguard](#) newspaper in Abuja, Nigeria, on the International Conference for the Eradication of Colonialism, which was held in Abuja, Nigeria, from August 12-13, 2024:*

*“It pointedly reminded those who are free of the fact that there are at least 61 territories still under colonialism. ...*

*“Berta Joubert-Ceci, who flew in from the United States, presented the case of the 3.3 million Puerto Rican people. The reception of her presentation indicated that the*

*conference wants the 125-year colonization of Puerto Rico by the U.S. to be brought to an end."*

## **A Puerto Rico (PUR) without Puerto Ricans**

*"The yankees want the cage, but not the birds" - Pedro Albizu Campos*

We are witnessing the deepening of a colonial process through neoliberalism by the United States in PUR that, if not stopped now, will completely displace the native population to create another entity with the substitution of our population ... to the point of no return. They did it to Hawaii and Alaska. We don't want it to happen in Borikén!

But first, let's briefly see these attempts of extermination and displacement throughout the years.

In 1934, after an island-wide agricultural strike, the then-U.S. chief of police Francis Riggs stated, "There will be a war to death against all Puerto Ricans."

In the same decade, Dr. Cornelious Rhoads, first Director of the Sloan Kettering Cancer Institute, stated to a friend while in PUR for "scientific" research: "I have done my best to further the process of extermination by killing off eight and transplanting cancer into several more."

In the 1950s, the USA, as part of a birth control (eugenics) experiment, 1/3 of Puerto Rican women were sterilized. In the 40s, hundreds of families were displaced from Vieques to make room for a U.S. Naval storing and practicing range, leaving only 1/3 of the island for the population. Then, in the 60s, President Kennedy wanted to remove every person on the island, including their dead, emptying even the cemetery so there would be no reason for families to visit their deceased loved ones. And most recently, in the now-famous ex-governor Roselló's Telegram chat, which

once publicized, brought great outrage to the people, publicist Edwin Miranda said: "I saw the future, it was marvelous, there are no Puerto Ricans."

### **How is this colonial deepening being accomplished now?**

We are under a Process of Bankruptcy for an Odious or Illegitimate Debt under International Law. The government sold Bonds "triple tax free" that paid very high interest. Municipal bonds to finance operations, borrowing also to pay the interest. Not to develop the island's economy. Vulture hedge funds bought at pennies on a dollar once rated downwards, expecting a massive return. The PUR government accumulated \$74 billion in debt, which it could not pay.

As a result, Obama's U.S. Congress passed the PROMESA Law in 2016, imposing a dictatorial board that until now has put into practice a profound neoliberal process with austerity measures that affect every segment of our lives.

It reinforces the privatization of essential services that have already been in place by the local government's lackeys.

Making these services very expensive and in some cases, unattainable for a vast segment of the population. **In health care:** It used to be a universal type, the Arbona System, but now has been privatized through insurance companies that open their own clinics and don't allow PR's recent medical graduates to work. Different level hospitals and clinics were closed. Loss of specialists, mostly due to migration to the USA, resulting in deteriorated health services in general.

**In energy:** After having a public entity that offered affordable electricity to the most remote areas in the difficult topography of the island, it has recently been privatized. Political abuse and corruption of successive administrations over the years destroyed this important agency. The new entities, Luma Energy (a quick deal merging USA Quanta Services and Canadian ATCO) for distribution and

transmission, and Genera PR for generation.

Some outrageous facts are that neither Luma nor Genera have to put one cent! The government had to give them \$1,500 million ... to start their businesses. They subcontract other companies, usually related to their parent company. For example, Luma's parent company - ATCO & Quanta Services, or Genera PR - New Fortress Energy (gas). The result has been an increase in electric bills, frequent power outages, dismissal of knowledgeable workers under the union UTIER (which was also an attempt to destroy this militant union), and instead hire incompetent mostly foreign workers who are not familiar with PR topography.

**In Education:** Eugenio Maria de Hostos vs. Julia Keleher

De Hostos ("The Great Citizen of the Americas"), was a Puerto Rican educator, philosopher, intellectual, lawyer, sociologist, novelist, and Puerto Rican independence advocate. His educational program was highly regarded. Yet, instead of following his teachings, governor Roselló hired a USA education business "professional" (Julia Keleher) as Education Secretary in PR, who, after closing more than 100 schools, was charged with corruption and sent to a USA jail! The vast Education budget, a whopping \$7 billion for 2022-23 meant to "[strengthen education in PUR](#)," has instead been the source of historical corruption. The money has not gone to the badly needed schools' infrastructure, teachers' and other education workers' salaries, nor educational materials.

**PUR for Sale!**

Other policies and laws enacted by the acquiescent local PUR government, like Law 60, give tax incentives to foreign millionaires who move to PUR, consistent with the neoliberal aims, deprive the population of access to affordable housing, and push our people out of the islands, particularly those in the "productive and reproductive age" in their 20's through 40's. It also produces the selling off of PUR's precious,

important, and even historic real estate.

This Law 60 affords millionaires with a 4% corporate tax rate, 100% tax exemption on all dividends and interest income and 100% tax exemption on all capital gains. As a result, \$35 billion in profits leave PUR per year!

Some examples of the effect of Law 60: In 2018, Brock Pierce converted a former monastery in the Old City of San Juan, Puerto Rico into his headquarters. John Paulson, took an 80% stake in an upscale hotel and condominium complex outside the capital, San Juan, in a bet that recent tax changes will lure rich financiers to the island. He stated, "The economy needs to reinvent itself, to shift from MANUFACTURING to SERVICES, and that is the reason for these tax changes."

As a result of the uncontrollable luxury estate building and the rapid spread of short-term rental apartments, the affordable housing sector has greatly reduced and, as a consequence, families in PUR cannot find an adequate place to live, pushing them away from the PUR archipelago.

In terms of the destruction of the environment, there has been illegal dumping of toxic ashes buried and used for construction, illegal coastal construction, the cutting of mangroves, damaging coral reefs and turtle nests, cell phone antennas (due to privatization of the National Telephone Company ... many companies have arrived, and each one puts its own antenna...)

In terms of the general SECURITY, there has been an increase in: general crimes, drug trafficking and mafia-related crimes, femicides, and widespread violence. Resulting in a deterioration of quality of life, increase in the cost of living and aggressive behavior.

Accelerated process of "deculturalization," which detaches the population from its historical and cultural roots (trying to erase language, history, traditions, even our

food habits) facilitates the migration, particularly to the U.S., where there are more Puerto Ricans than in our islands.

These effects have been carefully planned. In 2015 it was published in the Krueger Report, an IMF neoliberal prescription, "Puerto Rico - a way forward." The 30-page report provides a detailed study of the economy of the colony and its practices for 10 consecutive years by Anne O. Krueger, Ranjit Teja, and Andrew Wolfe, former economists in none other than the International Monetary Fund.

Some measures of this five-year plan are:

- Elimination of the minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour, which it says is too high for PR and must be lowered until the situation of PR approaches that of the poorest state in the USA.
- End to the year-end or Christmas bonus
- Holidays reduction from 30 to 15 days
- Redefine overtime based on 40 hours a week and not as they do now, after 8 hours per day
- "Reducing onerous requirements for proving just cause in layoffs"
- Reduction of the number of teachers and consolidation (closing) of schools; reduction of funding to the University of Puerto Rico, etc.

It also includes privatization of public agencies such as the PUR Electric Power Authority, and other government agencies that are efficiently generating income as the State Insurance Fund.

THESE FACTS POINT TO THE URGENCY OF DECOLONIZATION NOW!

***Berta Joubert-Ceci*** is a contributing editor at *Struggle-La Lucha*. Following is her presentation to the Conference for the Eradication of Colonialism.

