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## Puerto Rican Migration: organized and spontaneous

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### Summary

Manpower shortages in the United States during recent years have led to an increase in the migration of Puerto Ricans from their Caribbean island to the mainland. Such migration has been taking place for many years on a small scale and as part of the internal redistribution of citizens of the United States in response to better economic opportunities in some areas than in others.

The Puerto Rican occupies an unusual status. He is a citizen and therefore a migrant but culturally he resembles an immigrant. Only about one-third speak English and they come from an area with many different customs. Any such group will encounter difficulties in its adjustment to a new social environment.

The government of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico has created machinery to help the migrants directly and to aid the social institutions of the communities into which they move. The Migration Division of the Puerto Rico Department of Labor supervises a seasonal farm labor program which brings sugar cane workers to the continental United States during the "dead season" on the island under an agreement which protects the workers from exploitation. This represents only a small part of its work, however. The spontaneous migration is several times greater than the organized program.

Those who come on their own are served through sections dealing with employment, social welfare, education, identification, and community organization. The Division works with labor unions and a wide range of civic, welfare and educational institutions to help speed up the adjustment process.

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\* General distribution of this document is limited to the introductory summary. Participants who have been invited to take part in the meeting referred to above will receive also the full text of the paper. Other participants in the Conference will receive the full text upon request.

Pour la traduction française voir au verso.

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Les mouvements migratoires porto-ricains, organisés et spontanés

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Résumé. La pénurie de main-d'oeuvre qui a sévi aux Etats-Unis au cours des dernières années a amené un plus grand nombre de Porto-Ricains à quitter leur île des Caraïbes pour le continent. Un mouvement migratoire de ce genre, d'importance assez faible, avait lieu depuis de nombreuses années; il n'est qu'un aspect de la nouvelle répartition des citoyens américains à l'intérieur du pays en fonction des perspectives économiques meilleures offertes par certaines régions des Etats-Unis.

Les Porto-Ricains ont un statut exceptionnel. Ils sont citoyens mais, du point de vue culturel, ils ressemblent à des immigrants. Seul un tiers d'entre eux environ parle l'anglais et ils viennent d'une région où bien des coutumes sont différentes des coutumes continentales. Un tel groupe de population éprouvera des difficultés à s'adapter à un milieu social différent.

Le Gouvernement du Commonwealth de Porto-Rico a créé un mécanisme chargé de fournir une assistance directe aux migrants et d'aider les organismes sociaux des collectivités où les migrants s'installent. La Division des migrations du Département du Travail de Porto-Rico surveille l'exécution d'un programme de travaux agricoles saisonniers selon lequel des travailleurs des plantations de canne à sucre se rendent dans le territoire métropolitain des Etats-Unis pendant la "morte-saison" porto-ricaine. Un accord protège ces travailleurs et leur évite d'être exploités. Ce n'est là cependant qu'une petite partie de l'oeuvre de cette Division. Les mouvements migratoires spontanés sont de beaucoup plus importants que ceux organisés dans le cadre du programme.

Les Porto-Ricains qui viennent aux Etats-Unis de leur propre initiative reçoivent l'aide des diverses sections chargées de l'emploi, des services sociaux, de l'enseignement, des services d'identité et d'entr'aide. La Division, en coopération avec des syndicats de travailleurs et un grand nombre d'institutions sociales et culturelles, s'efforce d'accélérer l'adaptation des migrants à leur nouveau milieu.

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<sup>x</sup> Seule la présente analyse d'introduction fait l'objet d'une distribution générale. Les participants qui ont été invités à assister à la séance mentionnée ci-dessus recevront en outre le texte intégral du document. Les autres participants au Congrès recevront le texte intégral sur leur demande.

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

**PUERTO RICAN MIGRATION:  
Spontaneous and Organised**

Severe population pressure is characteristic of the Caribbean area. Puerto Rico, with 650 persons per square mile, suffers from such pressure along with its neighbors, even though the population density is not nearly as high as in some other areas, Barbados for example. Population pressure is being combated throughout the Caribbean by programs of industrialisation, agricultural diversification, and education. These programs in Puerto Rico, raised the per capita income from \$122 per year in 1940 to \$417 per year in 1953. Unemployment has been reduced by one-third, although it is still an extremely serious problem.

The economic and social development program, commonly called "Operation Bootstrap", has had demographic results in a few years quite similar to those which eventuated from a century of profound social changes in western Europe. During twelve years from 1940 to 1952, for example, the death rate dropped from 18 per thousand to 9 per thousand. During the same period the expectancy of life, one of the most sensitive indices to the welfare of people anywhere, increased from 46 years to 61 years. The birth rate, on the other hand, only decreased from 38.7 per thousand in 1940 to 35.1 per thousand in 1952. Recent experience has simply represented a speeding up of a process which had been going on since 1898, when sovereignty shifted from Spain to the United States. The rate of natural increase has more than doubled during this century.

Migration has become one of the remedies worked out by the people themselves during the past few years. It is now contributing greatly to the reduction of popu-

lation pressures. It is obviously the only means, short of widespread disaster, of directly reducing the present population. That such reduction is needed to give the industrial, agricultural, educational, and other development programs a chance to work, seems clear.

Out-migration from the island now, as in the past, depends overwhelmingly on prosperous business conditions and therefore high employment in the continental United States. There are Puerto Rican groups in Hawaii and in the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Venezuela, Mexico, Brazil and several other Latin-American countries, but out-migration to any place other than the United States is a mere trickle. Restrictive national legislation in the possible immigration countries is only one of the factors responsible. Exploration of others would take us too far afield.

#### The Size of the Migration

It has been only since 1945 that net out-migration has helped significantly to reduce population pressures. An average of only about 4,000 persons per year were lost through migration between 1908, when dependable figures first became available, and 1945.

The annual net out-flow since the end of World War II has been:

1945	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	13,573
1946	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	39,911
1947	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	24,551
1948	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	32,775
1949	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	25,698
1950	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	34,703
1951	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	52,900
1952	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	59,103
1953	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	<u>69,124</u>

Total . . 352,338

A loss in population occurred for the first time in 1953 when the net migration counter-balanced natural increase by about 9,000 persons.

A combination of factors produced the sharp upturn at the end of World War II.

1. The disposition to migrate was founded on the heavy unemployment on the

island, with all it implies in terms of low wages, lack of opportunities for advancement, and so forth. This provided the "push" which is found in all migrations.

2. The "pull" was provided largely by plentiful job opportunities on the continent at a time when unskilled and semi-skilled labor was in demand. The favorable labor market attracted those whose aspiration levels had been raised by schools, radio, newspapers, and magazines, and the example of relatives, friends, and neighbors who had previously migrated and had advanced themselves economically.

3. Transportation cost to the migrant influences the strength of the "pull". Boats, which took 4 1/2 to 5 days and which cost around \$150, were largely replaced after the war by airplanes which now make the trip in 6 to 8 hours at a price of \$64. This has resulted in what the newspapers called the "first airborne migration in history".

### Two Migratory Streams

Two streams of migration flow from the island; they differ significantly in origin, destination, and length of stay. One flows up in the spring and back in the fall; the other is "permanent". The first consists of farm and railroad maintenance-of-way workers; the second largely of urban workers. The first is organized; the second is spontaneous.

### Farm Workers

The farm labor program started in 1947 when some 2,500 workers were recruited on the island for work on the mainland. Each year the number has increased until 15,000 were brought during the 1953 crop season. Recruiting on the island is allowed only if the employer signs a work agreement which provides that the local prevailing rate of wages shall be paid and that the worker shall be guaranteed 160 hours of work or wages per month and acceptable housing, rent free. It requires the employer to bring the migrant under workmen's compensation, since most states do not require

such insurance for farm labor. It also requires the posting of a performance bond and the opening of the employer's books to the agents of the Puerto Rico Department of Labor. Off-the-job accidents, death and illness are covered by a group insurance plan. The Migration Division of the Department, with offices in New York and Chicago, has a staff to investigate complaints, insure enforcement, and help both employer and worker solve their problems. The field staff attends to between 3,000 and 4,000 complaints per season.

Since Puerto Ricans are citizens of the United States, they may travel freely from the island to the mainland. Therefore, after a farm worker has worked for a satisfactory employer for one or two seasons, he may choose to return to that employer independently. Several thousand farm workers who have established such satisfactory relations with employers now come each season on their own. They are not included in the figures cited in the previous paragraph.

Since the crop season in the middle Atlantic and New England states of the continent coincides with the "dead season" on Puerto Rican sugar-cane plantations, this program is gaining increasing recognition as valuable to the continental farmer who is short of workers as well as to the worker who is looking for employment.

The railroad labor program is worked out with the employer and the union and has been judged highly successful by all concerned.

#### Spontaneous Migration

The stream of spontaneous migrants flows largely from the cities of the island to the cities of the mainland. It is migration for settlement in a new environment; it accounted for a net out-flow from the island of 363,539 persons in the decade 1944-1953.

These migrants enter urban, service, trade, and industrial occupations. Overwhelmingly, they settle in the industrial centres. About 80 per cent now live in New York City, although dispersion throughout the continental United States is

increasing.

The 1950 census showed 246,300 first and second generation Puerto Ricans in the metropolis, but the Puerto Rican-born population of areas outside New York City is increasing at a more rapid rate. This has been true since 1940. Between 1940 and 1950, the increase was 442 per cent outside of the city and only 306 per cent in it. Illinois led the states in percentage of increase, with 1158 per cent; Florida followed with 1136 per cent; Michigan came third, with 538 per cent; and New Jersey fourth, with 519 per cent.

#### Government Migration Program

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico usually neither encourages nor discourages such spontaneous migration. It realizes, however, that until its economic development has reached a point where it can offer job opportunities and future prosperity to its workers, the more ambitious of them will go elsewhere in search of better jobs and a better future.

The Puerto Rican government has taken steps to aid its migrants and the communities to which they go to work, through its Department of Labor. The Puerto Rican Employment Service is affiliated with the United States Employment Service and thus has the assistance of 1800 local offices in finding jobs throughout the continental United States. The Department of Labor set up its own office in New York City in 1948 and a second office in Chicago in 1949. In 1951 its Migration Division was established, which incorporated the two existing offices and added a national field staff to work in areas not covered by the existing offices. Its staff works with employers, the Employment Service, with unions, social agencies, churches, schools and any other institution which may help speed up the adjustment process through which all working-class migrants groups must pass as they move into new communities.

The Migration Division's national office contains two operating sections: service and information.



The major responsibility of the Service Section is the enforcement of the work agreement under which the agricultural workers come to the continent, but during the past few years it has increasingly become active in two other programs. The first is industrial placement and the railroad program and the second, community organization outside of New York City and the middle western region under the jurisdiction of the office in Chicago. Placement of industrial workers in areas where labor shortages exist is undertaken in cooperation with the United States Employment Service state and local offices.

The Information Section is responsible for the planning and administration of an orientation program for workers who come from Puerto Rico under the Division's program as well as providing information and orientation to the press and to the communities where these workers and their families settle. It produces and distributes literature, arranges film loans, provides speakers, and assists persons seeking information. The Division has produced one educational film, "A Girl from Puerto Rico", and is in the process of producing two more.

The New York City office of the Division is, of course, the one which carries the greatest work load and the greatest responsibility. It serves as a centre of aid and orientation for the Puerto Rican in his new community. It also serves as an agency to mediate between Puerto Rican residents of New York City and welfare, educational and labor institutions, public or private. The services of this office are in no way meant to duplicate the work of any existing and established agencies but rather to aid these agencies in their work with the Puerto Ricans. The New York Office is divided into five sections: (1) Employment; (2) Social Service; (3) Education; (4) Identification; and (5) Community Organization.

The Employment Section works in close cooperation with the New York State Employment Service, non-profit employment agencies, and Federal and local government offices dealing with labor matters. Its main function is to help the Puerto Rican in New York City in obtaining employment in the field in which he will be most apt



to attain a satisfactory job adjustment. It also assists applicants who are in need of orientation regarding fair employment practices, social security, discrimination and other pertinent legislation related to employment procedures in New York City.

The Social Service Section aids the Puerto Ricans to make effective use of the agencies which can best serve their particular needs in problems of housing, health, conflict with police, vocational rehabilitation, child care, juvenile delinquency, mental health, transportation, wage claims, burials and family relationship. This Section also provides information on legal and customary responsibilities of landlords and tenants, the right of citizens to fair treatment, and the means of securing it in this community. Staff members have taken part in many conferences and meetings, serving as representatives of the Puerto Rican office in the development of better organization of services within the city.

The Education Section deals with matters concerning the education of the Puerto Rican in New York. It cooperates with the Board of Education in studies of the difficulties arising in connection with the Puerto Rican children. It also cooperates with the Board in the programs for adult education, particularly the teaching of English and vocational guidance. It fosters a more active relationship between parents and school authorities. It provides information to the newly arrived migrant on educational opportunities in the city. The Section works in cooperation with the community centres, parents and teachers associations in the Spanish-speaking neighborhoods, labor unions and other English and Spanish-speaking organizations, helping them in the arrangement of educational, cultural and recreational activities. It also provides films, speakers and informational material on Puerto Rico in an attempt to foster a better understanding on the part of the general public toward the migrant and thus create the basis for mutual understanding and respect.

The Identification Section, after proper investigation, issues a card which enables the applicant to identify himself as an American citizen. This identification card is required in filing applications for employment for certain government jobs, defense work or any other position in which the person has to show proof of his American citizenship.

The Community Organization Section, works with both Spanish and English-speaking groups and organizations in the community. It aids them in developing programs and leadership in areas where Spanish-speaking people reside. It collaborates in community studies, projects for community action and intergroup cooperation. The section offers all possible assistance: advisory, technical, and functional to groups and agencies interested in community organization for Spanish-speaking residents.

Increasing employment opportunities in the middle western states led to the raising of the rank of the office in Chicago and the broadening of its jurisdiction to cover eight states with a total area of 458,305 square miles. The Midwest Office now contains employment, social welfare, and community organization sections with functions similar to those of the New York City office. The work of the office has more than doubled during the past year and gives every indication of continuing its upward trend.

The New York and Midwest offices served 44,421 clients during the 1952-53 fiscal year, compared with 33,695 the previous year. Most of these were job-seekers. Direct placements made by the offices rose from 8,158 in 1951-52 to 13,167 the following year. Several thousand more jobs were secured by secondary referral originating in the Division's offices.

In brief, the services rendered by the Migration Division endeavor to accelerate the adjustment process of the Puerto Rican in his new community. The current drop in employment has presented the kinds of difficulties which might be expected. The Puerto Rico Employment Service is now using press and radio outlets in

Puerto Rico to warn prospective migrants against coming to the continent unless they have jobs arranged.

### Importance of the Migration

Out-migration of substantial proportions carries with it many unfortunate consequences. No one likes to "pull up stakes"; it means leaving familiar scenes, old friends, dear relatives. It means coping with a strange set of living habits, ideas and attitudes. It often means both personal, family and community friction. No matter how carefully public and private institutions plan and aid; dislocations and misunderstandings can only be reduced --they cannot be eliminated.

The individuals concerned, Puerto Rico as a whole and the receiving communities benefit from the migration, however. The Puerto Rican economy benefits (at least in the short run) from the draining off of part of the numbers added each year to a population which cannot now be supported adequately. This may be demonstrated by the following table showing year by year the percentage which net out-migration represents of the total annual natural increase during the decade 1943-52.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Per Cent</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Per Cent</u>
1942	3	1947	41
1943	6	1948	59
1944	21	1949	42
1945	26	1950	56
1946	74	1951	85
		1952	98

Thus, 1951 without migration would have showed an increase of 62,151. The outflow of 52,900 persons lowered the population increase to 9,251.

The direct loss for the decade 1942-51 was 249,918. The actual loss was greater, of course, since the migrants would have contributed to the natural increase.

The average individual doubles or triples his cash income on his first job on the continent. He is able to save money, educate his children, take advantage of the greater recreational and other community facilities and send money home to relatives.

Postal money orders sent to the island by migrants on the continent totalled \$22,000,000 during the 1952-53 fiscal year.

Communities on the mainland where migrants settle benefit from their presence. Shortages of unskilled and semi-skilled labor, which frequently cannot be filled through nearer sources, are relieved.

Employers of Puerto Rican workers offer enthusiastic testimonials as to their dexterity and diligence. Local commerce, although sometimes tending to prey upon the uninformed newcomer, undoubtedly profits. Once initial misunderstandings are eliminated, the cultural contribution of the migrants' Spanish background enriches the new community's understanding of other areas and other peoples.

The migrant generally leaves a better-than-average job to move to the continent. This enables another person to move up and increases that vertical mobility without which an economy stagnates. These and other advantages arising from a reduction of population pressure on developed resources help to offset the dislocations caused by the migration. Until other, less disruptive methods of population control are more widely in use, migration will continue to help Puerto Rico solve its problems of population pressure. The major factor for years to come will be the presence or absence of high employment levels in the continental United States.

Migration, it should be apparent, can and does contribute greatly to a solution of population pressure. It cannot be expected unaided to provide the solution; as in any other complex human problem, there is no simple solution.

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