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Author(s): Truman R. Clark

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PRESIDENT TAFT AND THE PUERTO RICAN APPROPRIATION CRISIS OF 1909

WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT was a central participant at the birth of American imperialism. He won praises for his work with the Philippine Islands, first as head of the commission created to restore the Islands to a peaceful state, then as the first civil governor. He gave up this office to become Secretary of War under President Theodore Roosevelt in 1905. In his position in the Cabinet Taft had direct or indirect oversight over most of America's scattered empire.

By March, 1909, when Taft succeeded Roosevelt in the Presidency, the constitution of the American empire had largely been formulated, even if strictly speaking, it had not been formalized. Civil governments had been set up in Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and the Philippine Islands. The "insular cases" of 1901 had defined the limits of claims of the dependent peoples upon the Constitution of the United States; the new possessions were neither foreign nor domestic, and thus even though the Constitution did not follow the flag, tariffs might. The only armed resistance to American control—in the Philippines—had long since ended. It was then to the surprise and dismay of President Taft that tiny Puerto Rico immediately presented a hostile challenge to his new administration, the constitutional rebellion known as the appropriation crisis of 1909.

The tempest in America's imperial teapot proved important for what it revealed. First, it uncovered the attitudes developed among Puerto Ricans during a decade of American control, including a widespread regret for the loss of constitutional autonomy which Puerto Rico had begun to enjoy under Spain. Second, it displayed President Taft's stance toward colonial dependencies as astonishingly similar to that of the British Crown and the American colonies on the eve of the American Revolution.¹ Third, it further defined the Puerto Rican constitution, and helped to lay the groundwork for the replacement of that constitution. Fourth, the appropriation crisis presented an unusual facet of William Howard Taft. Taft is usually portrayed as a jovial,

¹ Neither the appropriation crisis nor Puerto Rico were mentioned in either Henry F. Pringle, *The Life and Times of William Howard Taft* (2 vols., New York, 1939) or Mrs. William Howard Taft, *Recollections of Full Years* (New York, 1914).

pleasant, lazy, unperturbable, bumbling though intelligent man who was hopelessly out of his element cast as a politician. His Winona speech on the tariff, his confusing shifts in regard to Cannon, and his alienation of the progressive wing of his party are all held up by historians as evidence of Taft's political ineptitude. He is seen as a good jurist but lacking T. R.'s knack for dealing with people. Taft's strong reaction to the Puerto Rican appropriation crisis and his subsequent manipulations of some of the Puerto Rican political leaders show another, perhaps more Rooseveltian, side to him.²

During the period of the Foraker Act as Puerto Rico's "organic act"—1900 to 1917—there were three sources of United States control over the Island. First there were legal controls built into the Foraker Act. It provided for the governor and the eleven-man upper house of the Puerto Rican legislature being appointed by the President of the United States. It made it necessary for legislation to have a majority in both houses and the governor's approval for passage. It left the Congress of the United States empowered to nullify any act passed by Puerto Rico. And it contained a very intentional lack of separation of functions in the insular government; six of the eleven members of the upper house, the Executive Council, also served in administrative capacities as the governor's "cabinet."

A second source of control over Puerto Rico was the power given the executive branch of the government by some laws passed in the first few years of the Foraker Act. The governor was enabled to appoint men to a host of vacancies occurring in local government; in a typical fiscal year, 1912-13, the governor appointed replacements to almost a hundred vacancies as mayors, judges, and municipal councilmen.³ This power, we shall see, was abused and played a large role in the appropriation controversy. In addition, the secretary in the Executive Council could "veto any municipal ordinance or annul any act of a municipal officer."⁴ And the physical control of the police power was also in the hands of the central government rather than the

² It is also possible that Taft's skill in this situation, where he enjoyed a commanding position over the colonials, was due to the imperial relationship and implied no similar political acumen in his dealings with Americans.

³ *Report of the Governor of Porto Rico to the Secretary of War: 1913* (Washington, 1913), 36.

⁴ William F. Willoughby, "The Problem of Political Education in Porto Rico," *Report of the Twenty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian and Other Dependent Peoples* (Lake Mohonk, New York, 1909), 167.

local communities, as the sole agency of law and order was the insular police force, its head appointed by the governor.

The third source of United States control lay in traditional patterns of action. The Foraker Act did not stipulate that the governor or executive members of the upper house had to be Americans, but merely that the upper house include at *least* five native Puerto Ricans. But not until 1946 was there a Puerto Rican governor and not until 1914 were any of the administrative positions in the Executive Council given to Puerto Ricans.

Puerto Ricans thus had only a minimal voice in their government; the House of Delegates, although popularly elected biennially, was clearly inferior to the Executive Council and the governor. The people of the Island had no strong advocate in Washington, either. Their Resident Commissioner was suffered to sit, speak and offer bills in the United States House of Representatives, but he could not vote and he was rarely consulted by the American administrators who dealt with Puerto Rico from the War Department or other departments.⁵ For that matter, another weakness in Puerto Rico's position was that it was not the responsibility of any one executive department: the various members of the Puerto Rican Executive Council were constrained to make annual reports not only to the War Department (which had a type of colonial office in its Bureau of Insular Affairs), but also to the Interior Department, the Attorney General, the Secretary of State, the Treasurer of the United States, and other places.⁶ President Theodore Roosevelt had tried in vain to correct this with congressional action to put Puerto Rico under either the Department of War or the Department of the Interior.⁷

Puerto Rican politics early were polarized on the issues of American citizenship and insular status. It happened that the names of the Puerto Rican political parties were at first identical to the names of the first political parties the United States had known, Federalists and Republicans. The Republicans (who had only a ghost of a connection with the Republican Party of the mainland United States) were in general the party of pro-American policies, working toward American citizen-

⁵ *Cong. Record*, 61 Cong., 2 Sess., XLV (June 1, 1910), 7228.

⁶ U. S., *Statutes at Large*, XXXI, 81-82.

⁷ Roosevelt to Senator Foraker, March 30, 1904. Elting E. Morison and John M. Blum (eds.), *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt* (8 vols., Cambridge, Mass., 1951-54), IV, 765-66. See also Roosevelt's annual message for 1906, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, comp. James M. Richardson (21 vols., New York, 1897-1929), XIV, 7051.

ship and statehood. They cooperated well with the Americans at the inception of civil government, and when their opponents, the Federalists, boycotted the election of 1900, the Republicans took over as the only native political force with which the Americans had to work. Governor Charles H. Allen did not object, and made the comment that it was easier to work with only one political party.⁸

The Federalists were led by Luis Muñoz Rivera, long a famous name in Puerto Rican politics and letters. After this party had withdrawn from the elections of 1900, it was reorganized in 1902 as the Union of Puerto Rico. In its new form, the Union Party added a number of liberals who were disgusted with the subservient manner of the Republicans toward American rule. By 1904 the Unionists were the majority party of Puerto Rico, and by 1906 there were only Unionists in the House of Delegates. The Unionists were known as the party of independence sentiment, although they did not always make independence a direct goal. The general Unionist objectives were for more autonomy in several ways. First, they pushed for a separation of the cabinet and legislature. Second, they wanted Puerto Ricans in some of the cabinet positions of the Executive Council. Third, they worked toward less power for the governor, especially in his appointments.

Puerto Rican politics tended to swing from domination by one party to monopolization by the other. From the beginning of civil government, the governors tried to use their appointive power to mitigate this. Governor Charles H. Allen said in 1902:

In order to secure minority representation and to check the abuse of political power in municipal administration it has been found helpful when vacancies occur in the municipal councils to appoint councilmen of the political party opposite to that of the majority to fill such vacancies until the next municipal election. At first, this was very distasteful to the majority, but we kept the plan up and it has accomplished the greatest good.⁹

If this refusal to accept the nominations of the local political bosses for such vacancies was "distasteful" to the Republicans, how much more of an irritant it became to the Unionists when they were the majority party after 1904! It was this issue that precipitated the legislative revolt of 1909.

⁸ Charles H. Allen, "How Civil Government Was Established in Porto Rico," *North American Review*, CLXXIV (Feb. 1902), 165.

⁹ *Second Annual Report of the Governor of Porto Rico to the President of the United States* (Washington, 1902), 57.

During the Puerto Rican election campaign of 1908 there were more than the usual cries for independence and anti-Foraker oratory. Within the Unionist Party itself several conservative politicians were replaced by radicals.¹⁰ In the November election the Unionists again took all the thirty-five seats in the House of Delegates.¹¹

When the House of Delegates met in January, 1909, its members had a caucus with the central committee of the Unionist Party. The radicals present proposed that the legislative body refuse to pass any legislation, and thus arouse the United States to the need of reforming the Foraker Act. The group rejected this resolution as being too extreme; a similar caucus voted in February and another boycott resolution lost by a narrower margin.¹² The radicals were gaining ground. At this point it was taking very little to push the other members of the House of Delegates into the anti-administration camp. The final irritant for many was Governor Regis Post's refusal to accept party recommendations for vacancies in some judicial positions in the Island. As the legislative session neared its end, the House of Delegates passed a bill to make judicial vacancies elective, but the governor and the Executive Council stopped this bill, along with several other controversial measures desired by the Puerto Ricans.¹³ The Unionist lower house retaliated with its strongest weapon; it refused to appropriate funds for governmental expenses for the coming fiscal year.

This was not totally unexpected. In a speech in the United States several months later, Governor Post recalled:

It was not alone the trouble of last year, but a question of six or eight years; we have always had trouble in the legislature, and the very last bill to pass was always the appropriation bill . . . every year the appropriation bill has been held back and held back to see what little advantage could be gotten out of it. We have always known that Armageddon was coming, and every year it has been a little harder to come to an agreement between the House and the Council. . . .¹⁴

¹⁰ *Report of the Governor of Porto Rico to the Secretary of War: 1909* (Washington, 1910), 25.

¹¹ This they accomplished by winning in all seven of the electoral districts of the Island, as the winning party in each district got all five of the seats, no matter how close the margin of victory.

¹² *Report of the Governor: 1909*, 26.

¹³ These included a bill establishing an agricultural bank for small landowners, a bill promoting taxpayer representation on tax appraisal boards, and a bill to establish some manual training schools. *Cong. Record*, 61 Cong., 1 Sess., XLIV (May 24, 1909), 2340.

¹⁴ Post, "Some Facts of Interest Concerning Porto Rico," *Report . . . Twenty-Seventh . . . Lake Mohonk Conference*, 183.

Governor Regis Post, who had been Auditor of Puerto Rico in 1903 and Secretary from 1904 into 1907, was accustomed to an annual tug-of-war over the appropriation bill, traditionally ending in its passage. If passage did not come before the end of the session, the usual practice was to extend the legislative session by stopping the clock at eleven o'clock of the final night of the session and carry on as long as necessary thereafter.¹⁵

The situation this time would not be so easily resolved, Governor Post feared. He had gained a number of enemies—especially among the Unionists—in his years on the Executive Council. By this time it was common knowledge that the insurgents were not as anxious for the governor to give in and choose party-nominated men for judicial vacancies as they were to disrupt the government of Puerto Rico. Because he saw the refusal of appropriations as serious, Governor Post was persuaded by some Americans and Puerto Rican conservatives not to try to bargain with the unruly lower house, but rather to let the session end and call the legislature back into special session. He did this and the special session convened Friday, Saturday, and the following Monday, but rather than come to an accord the two sides hardened their stands.

The House of Delegates was quite firm even on the Thursday night when the regular session ended. Its last piece of business was to unanimously approve a slightly less harsh version of this resolution:

The House of Delegates of Puerto Rico in the name of the people of Puerto Rico lay bare their complaints and their desires to the People of the United States.

Our people are not in sympathy with the tyrannical organic law or Foraker Act, and we ask that that law be struck from existence or at the least amended to the extent that all the legislative Assembly might be popularly elected.

If we were a numerous people we might win our liberty in the same way your people won yours.

But since we are a small nation we limit ourselves to pleading our liberty trusting that your democracy will know enough to concede us justice.¹⁶

On Sunday, March 14, the Unionist Party held a general assembly in San Juan, at which time it decided on a plan of action. After con-

¹⁵ *Report of the Governor: 1909*, 26.

¹⁶ In its final form the resolution omitted the statement about Puerto Rico gaining its liberty by force if it had more people; it also called the Foraker Act "unjust" and "forceful," not "tyrannical." San Juan *La Correspondencia de Puerto Rico*, March 12, 1909. (All translations from Puerto Rican sources by the author.)

sidering several courses, the more than two hundred delegates finally voted to follow the advice of their leader, Luis Muñoz Rivera, and leave the next move in the hands of the governor. The public resolution embodying this strategy was this:

First—The General Assembly declares that the Union of Puerto Rico, rather than promote or foment in the public opinion a sentiment of hostility against the People of the United States, maintains a policy of profound respect and openly loyal sympathy toward the American people, in their purest doctrines dignifying the personality of all the countries or regions they rule over, as an ensign of liberty and glory, the flag of the United States.

Second—But, within this supreme norm of conduct, and by the same efficacy of the principles genuinely proclaimed and realized by the People of the United States in the course of their history and in their governmental practice, the Union of Puerto Rico will combat the American functionaries or any of the representatives of the rule of the United States, inasmuch as those functionaries or representatives fail to develop in Puerto Rico, in the circle fatally drawn by the Organic law which rules over us, the doctrines and procedures with which the American people have exalted and perpetuated in the world the efficacy of democratic institutions.¹⁷

No compromise was attained and the “appropriation crisis” finally developed not only because of the Unionist caucus, but also because Governor Post aggressively made a deadline for the House of Delegates to do as he said, or else. When he sent his messages to the two houses convening them in special session, he boldly included with them a threat. He told the Puerto Rican legislators that the United States Congress would begin its session the week of March 15, and that early in the week President Taft would send a message to Congress. Governor Post then told them that if they did not pass the appropriation bill by Monday night he would cable Washington, with hopes that his complaint be included in Taft’s message to Congress.¹⁸ It would have been too clearly a surrender of the legislature to the governor, for the House of Delegates to have passed the appropriation measure after this tactless step.

What little possibility of compromise remained was shattered Monday. First the Executive Council refused to consider for passage any of several reform bills the House of Delegates now proposed as a compromise; presumably, passage of some of these by the upper house (and the signature of Governor Post) could have persuaded the House of

¹⁷ *La Correspondencia de Puerto Rico*, March 16, 1909.

¹⁸ *Report of the Governor: 1909*, 5.

Delegates to pass the appropriation bill.¹⁹ Next came a conference between the leaders of the two sides, in the office of Attorney General Henry M. Hoyt. Present for the administration were Hoyt, Governor Post, and Secretary of Porto Rico William F. Willoughby. Representing the House of Delegates (and Union Party) were Luis Muñoz Rivera and Speaker of the House José de Diego. This conference broke up in thirty minutes, with nothing accomplished.

At this meeting Governor Post warned Muñoz Rivera and de Diego of the possible consequences of this stand-off. He offered to compromise, on his terms; the legislature would reenact the appropriation bill of the preceding year. He did not consider the compromise proposed by the House: passage of the judicial reform bill in exchange for passage of the appropriation bill.²⁰

The final step to a complete break was the activity of the House of Delegates in the evening and night of March 15. When the less radical members of the lower house tried to move toward compromise, they were repeatedly thwarted by rumors which swept through the House. Some of these rumors concerned cablegrams Governor Post was supposed to have sent or received from Washington.²¹

Throughout the day and into the night, Governor Post remained in the office of the Attorney General, going home only briefly for supper, until the House of Delegates brought its special session to a close at 2 a. m. After that the Governor went home to bed. But the House of Delegates was not through for the night. At the request of Luis Muñoz Rivera, the House met in secret session for another hour and a half.²² At that closed meeting they decided to send a committee to the United States to present their grievances to Congress and President Taft. Eugenio Benítez Castaños, Cayetano Coll Cuchi, and Luis Muñoz Rivera were chosen for this mission. They made plans to leave that very day, and the House consigned to them \$3,000 for their expenses.²³

It must have been a strained voyage to the mainland, for on the same ship with the Unionist commission was another group going to present the opposing point of view. This group was composed of Attorney General Hoyt, Secretary Willoughby, and George Cabot

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁰ *La Correspondencia de Puerto Rico*, March 16, 1909; Cong. Record, 61 Cong., 1 Sess., XLIV (May 24, 1909), 2341.

²¹ *La Correspondencia de Puerto Rico*, March 16, 1909.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

Ward, the Auditor.²⁴ During the next few weeks President Taft and his Secretary of the Interior Richard Ballinger heard both groups, the latter even holding a session with both groups at once in a fruitless attempt to resolve the conflict.²⁵

On the Island feelings ran higher than ever at this time. It was now clearly the Puerto Ricans in the government versus the Americans, for the latter stood in the way of reform of the Foraker Act. On the same evening that the complaint commissions departed for the United States, the Secretary of the Interior on the Executive Council ordered the lights and water cut off in the insular library. He said this was necessary because there was no appropriation to pay these expenses.²⁶ At the same time the government ordered the light and water services in all public offices cut off, there was also a demand for all mayors to specify the minimum number of police they needed in their communities so the rest could be laid off.²⁷

The newspaper of Muñoz Rivera, *La Democracia*, reported the next day the departure of the commission from the Executive Council in this tongue-in-cheek fashion: "Today on the steamship *Caracas* the President of the Executive Council, Mr. Willoughby, and Councillors Ward and Hoyt embarked for the United States. We wish for a good voyage and long stay in their country for such distinguished travellers as these."²⁸

La Correspondencia editorialized against the American members of the Executive Council, saying they never considered an idea good if it originated with the "natives." Further, *La Correspondencia* accused the Americans of subverting the organic law, assuming powers they were never given. "The Foraker Law is bad, but the system with which they use it is a thousand times worse than the law itself."²⁹

La Democracia used its entire front page, and more space inside, on March 18, to compare the Foraker Act with the 1897 "Autonomous Constitution" granted Puerto Rico by Spain, under the massive headline, "ESTUDIO COMPARATIVO." The Foraker Act, of course, came out on the bottom end of the "study."³⁰

²⁴ *Report of the Governor: 1909*, 27.

²⁵ San Juan *La Democracia*, March 29, 1909.

²⁶ *La Correspondencia de Puerto Rico*, March 17, 1909.

²⁷ *La Democracia*, March 17, 1909.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *La Correspondencia de Puerto Rico*, March 17, 1909.

³⁰ *La Democracia*, March 18, 1909.

Governor Post did not help matters by telling a *Cleveland News* reporter, Archie Bell, in June, that America was doing too much educationally for the Puerto Ricans, and that Puerto Ricans had by nature a "ridiculous pride."³¹

The Puerto Ricans were sure President Taft would see the justice of their side of the conflict. They hoped the autonomous reforms that the House of Delegates had proposed would now come from the United States Government. Federico Degetau stated that the actions of the House of Delegates "are true acts of self-government and thus the people and the government of the United States are bound to recognize them."³² An editorial in *La Correspondencia* assured Puerto Ricans that the American people "will say where justice is, whether with [the Americans in the insular government] or with the country."³³ After the Unionist group met with President Taft, the common report was that he had promised an investigating committee to come to Puerto Rico before July to study the Foraker Act in operation and to suggest reforms.³⁴

President William H. Taft indeed did have plenty of experience in colonial affairs. But this did not mean he believed native non-Anglo-Saxon peoples to be capable of self-government. His governing attitude was one of paternalistic authority, seen clearest perhaps in his characterization of the Filipinos as "unreasonable and childish in many ways."³⁵

Governor Post had sent with his three-man delegation his solution of the problem: Congress should amend the Foraker Act so that whenever the Puerto Rican legislature might fail to pass an appropriation measure for the continuation of governmental operations, there would be an automatic appropriation of the same amount of money appropriated by the insular government the preceding year. Such a safety clause was included in the organic laws of Hawaii and the Philippine

³¹ San Juan *El Tiempo*, July 1, 1909. This newspaper, the organ of the Puerto Rican Republican Party (as *La Correspondencia* and *La Democracia* were for the Unionist Party), had consistently condemned Muñoz Rivera and the Unionists for the appropriation crisis. With this tactless, indiscreet interview, Governor Post alienated a potentially powerful ally. On July 6, 1909, *El Tiempo* editorialized: "*El Tiempo* is opposed to the policy which Mr. Post carries on in Puerto Rico."

³² *La Correspondencia de Puerto Rico*, March 17, 1909.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *La Democracia*, March 31, 1909.

³⁵ Pringle, *Taft*, I, 293.

Islands, but somehow it had been overlooked in the hastily-passed Foraker Act.³⁶

On May 10, 1909, President Taft sent a note to Senator Chauncey Depew, the Chairman of the Committee on Pacific Islands and Puerto Rico, saying:

I send to-day my message on the Porto Rican business, and make the recommendation I told you. The amendment could be made in many different forms. I suggest the following as a satisfactory one, and as a copy from the Philippine Act:

Taft then quoted from the appropriation clause of that act, exactly the type of law Governor Post had recommended.³⁷

Later that day the President sent his special message on the Puerto Rican appropriation crisis to Congress. After recommending the amendment, he criticized the House of Delegates for rendering the insular government helpless instead of leaving the question of changing the Foraker Act in the hands of Congress. He said he had no doubt that the Foraker Act could be improved, but that this must be "sought in an orderly way." No congressional action should be taken to revise the organic act until "the absolute power of appropriation is taken away from those who have shown themselves too irresponsible to enjoy it." Puerto Ricans had "forgotten the generosity of the United States," but this was to be expected from a people with so little education. The appropriation crisis proved that "we have gone somewhat too fast in the extension of political power to them for their own good." Taft concluded by affirming:

There is not the slightest evidence that there has been on the part of the governor or of any member of the executive council a disposition to usurp authority, or to withhold approval of such legislation as

³⁶ Taft had a hand in the Philippine appropriation statute, for he wrote a letter in 1902 to Henry A. Cooper of Wisconsin which strongly recommended the clause, saying he would not want to return to the Philippines as civil governor without it. That letter, read by Cooper in the House of Representatives, was powerful testimony during debate on the Philippine organic act. *Cong. Record*, 57 Cong., 1 Sess., XXXV (June 19, 1902), Appendix, 471. One ironic note is that the Foraker Act had provided for a commission to study the laws of Puerto Rico, and that commission, after its study, recommended in 1901 an emergency appropriation amendment of this exact type. But Congress did nothing with the suggestion. Julius W. Pratt, *America's Colonial Experiment: How the United States Gained, Governed, and In Part Gave Away a Colonial Empire* (New York, 1950), 412.

³⁷ Copy of letter, Taft to Depew. William Howard Taft Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Letterbook Series 8, Presidential, Vol. 3, 342. (Hereafter as Taft Papers.)

was for the best interests of the island, or a lack of sympathy with the best aspiration of the Porto Rican people.³⁸

This message was a bombshell for American-Puerto Rican relations. If Congress responded with the amendment Taft asked for, the upshot would be *less* autonomy for the Island, not more. There were suggestions in Puerto Rico that the House of Delegates should stop meeting. There was a great deal of hostility toward Hoyt, Willoughby, and Ward.³⁹ And Governor Post was practically anathema to the Union Party.

President Taft was strongly criticized, not only in Puerto Rico, but in other parts of Latin America. *La Correspondencia* reported a newspaper in Mexico, *El País*, sending the President a telegram saying that with his message he had "demonstrated to the world what a despot you are."⁴⁰

In Congress Taft was both praised and condemned. Agreeing with him, James Kennedy of Oklahoma told the House of Representatives that "the great mistake we made was in assuming that the Porto Ricans had any capacity for self-government whatever." The Spanish race, Kennedy said, had nothing more than a false and silly pride of knowledge, and had never added to human knowledge anything but the thumbscrew. Thus, the United States was quite justified in granting no autonomy to colonials of Spanish descent.⁴¹

Congressman John A. Martin of Colorado, on the other hand, tore into the President's speech with venom. He compared Taft's statement on the tariff with the message on the appropriation crisis:

In some 300 words we were told to get busy and legislate on the tariff. Whether that legislation should be up, down, or sidewise, the message did not indicate . . . while more than 3,000 words, and very strong and decided words, were employed to point the way of Porto Rico's little craft into the harbor of carpetbag government.⁴²

Initially, the Unionists in Puerto Rico had assumed that their Republican foes were happy about the way President Taft had slapped down the all-Unionist House of Delegates. But the prospect of less self-government did not please any Puerto Rican, and Taft's speech had not drawn any party distinction in implying that Puerto Ricans were

³⁸ *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, XV, 7386-87.

³⁹ *La Correspondencia de Puerto Rico*, May 12, 1909.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, June 12, 1909.

⁴¹ *Cong. Record*, 61 Cong., 1 Sess., XLIV (June 7, 1909), 2928.

⁴² *Ibid.* (May 27, 1909), 2468.

backward children. Thus, the Republican Party sent a pair of their leaders to Washington about two weeks after Taft's message.

Manuel V. Domenech and Francisco Quiñones got an appointment with President Taft on May 27, 1909. At that conference Domenech did all the talking for the Puerto Ricans, but as it turned out, Taft did most of the talking for everyone. Domenech quickly brought out his main complaint:

We feel, Mr. President, that your message is a "roasting" which is not deserved by all of us—by a great number of our people, who are fully appreciative of the benevolence and generosity with which the United States have treated the Porto Rican people.⁴³

In the next moment, President Taft changed the subject entirely. He ignored Domenech's charge and asked him "how it has happened that the Unionist Party has now become so all-controlling in the Island?" Through the rest of a fairly lengthy interview, Taft continued to prevent discussion of anything concerning his criticism of Puerto Ricans or the appropriation crisis. He assiduously built up a sense of identification of the Puerto Rican Republican Party with that of the United States, when in fact there was no real connection. He played heavily on his visitors' hostility toward the Union Party, and pictured the latter as the serpent in the garden. He maneuvered smoothly to get his Puerto Rican guests to agree with all he said, Domenech responding, "Yes, sir. You described the situation a great deal better than I could." He used his Philippine experience to make him the expert on native "trouble-makers," boasting, "I know them pretty well."⁴⁴

On only a few points did President Taft really deal with issues more practical than theoretical. He assured Domenech and Quiñones that:

I do not think the present Governor wishes to stay. I think he wishes to leave as soon as he can, and "save his face" . . . that he wishes to leave without the impression that he leaves because he has had to do so as a result of agitation. It won't be long. . . .⁴⁵

Taft talked to them about their choices for Post's successor, asking if William Willoughby would be a good governor. Domenech replied that while Willoughby was the ablest American official in Puerto Rico, he was "too cold and not in sympathy" with the Puerto Ricans, and not apt to make anything but enemies with his brusque manner.

⁴³ The verbatim transcript of this interview is in the Taft Papers, Presidential Series 2, file 106.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Finally, just before leaving, Domenech got back to the thing for which he had come, and from which he had been so well sidetracked. He expressed the fact that Taft's message had carried with it the idea that the President believed it had been a mistake to give the Puerto Ricans even the measure of self-government in the Foraker Act. Taft adroitly switched the question again to the problem of the Foraker Act's not reflecting "the Spanish beginnings of the Island and the Spanish civilization there," and its being "too much like an American document." He told Domenech that his message had meant to say that "it was a very unwise step to confer suffrage upon all the people of Porto Rico," that an educational or property qualification would have been wiser.⁴⁶ The rest of the discussion concerned suffrage limitation; Taft bade Domenech and Quiñones farewell without any harsh words—and with few meaningful ones, beyond Domenech's early complaint.

Just as President Taft had indicated, Governor Post's days were numbered. Rumors to this effect had circulated in the United States and Puerto Rico for some time. In April, Taft wrote Jesse Overstreet of Indianapolis, "I have your letter of April 9th recommending Charles Landis for Governor of Porto Rico. The report is not true, for I do not intend to make a change there at present."⁴⁷ Among those interested in the question of Post's successor were the Catholic Church prelates who were involved in Puerto Rico. William Ambrose Jones, Bishop of Puerto Rico, wrote to Father Alexander Patrick Doyle in Washington that while he would regret to see Post leave ("he has done very well in a very difficult position"), he would like to see Henry F. Hord, an attorney in San Juan, made the new governor in the event the rumors of Post's imminent dismissal or resignation proved true. Bishop Jones believed that the next governor should be someone with experience on the Island, but not a member of the present Executive Council.⁴⁸ Two weeks later, Bishop Jones wrote to President Taft and recommended that Governor Post be retained in office.⁴⁹

By late August Post thought enough time had elapsed since the heated controversy that he could resign without seeming to surrender. He wrote to the War Department on August 30, offering his resignation;

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Copy of letter, Taft to Overstreet, April 12, 1909. Taft Papers, Letterbook Series 8, Presidential, Vol. 2, 367.

⁴⁸ Jones to Doyle, May 26, 1909. Taft Papers, Series 7, Folder 471.

⁴⁹ June 2, 1909. *Ibid.*

on September 8, the Acting Secretary of War, Robert S. Oliver, informed President Taft of the resignation.⁵⁰ On the same day Frank McIntyre, of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, wrote President Taft's personal secretary that the B. I. A. had received the following cablegram from Governor Post:

If proper, cable official statement by the President whether the Porto Rican Republicans in Washington last May requested my removal. See also cable Assistant Secretary of the Navy to me May 25th. Interested officially and personally. I am trying nail lies.⁵¹

McIntyre went on to say about Governor Post's circumstances:

I am afraid that the President will not remember what these two delegates of the Porto Rican Republican Party did recommend last May. They were Messrs. Domenech and Quiñones. . . . I thought that his [Post's] letter of resignation was a model of good taste, and I hope that in accepting it the President may feel that he can say some kind things about Post which will help his feelings . . . the two so-called political parties each desire to have credit for having the governor removed. Probably neither party had the nerve even to suggest the removal of the governor, but now that his resignation is about to be accepted the newspapers in Porto Rico are clamoring for the honor of having had him removed.⁵²

McIntyre was wrong, for in that interview in May, President Taft and the two Puerto Ricans had extensively discussed Post's dismissal and replacement. It had probably not been proper, but at the time it had gotten Taft off the hook.

Now the President had to find a new governor for Puerto Rico. He wrote a nice letter to Governor Post, thanking him for waiting to resign until neither the resignation nor Taft's acceptance of it "would be regarded as in some way affected by the controversies," and for his "patriotic and disinterested service." Finally, he asked the Governor to be patient for yet a few more weeks, while Taft found his replacement.⁵³

William A. Jones, the Bishop of Puerto Rico, had wanted a Mr. Hord selected for the governorship. For some reason Cardinal Gibbons

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Presidential Series 2, File 3515. In an interview with a reporter on September 2, Governor Post indicated his desire to leave, giving as reasons his desire to be near kinfolk in the United States, and the illness of his wife. *El Tiempo*, September 3, 1909.

⁵¹ McIntyre to Fred W. Carpenter, September 8, 1909. Taft Papers, Presidential Series 2, File 3515.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Copy, September 9, 1909. *Ibid.*, Letterbook Series 8, Presidential, Vol. 7, 126.

of Baltimore instead suggested to President Taft the name of a Mr. de Lima of New York. Taft thanked Gibbons, but told him he was strongly considering Colonel George Colton for the position.⁵⁴

George R. Colton had several things in his favor as a potential governor of Puerto Rico. Before he was twenty-five he had graduated from Knox College, ranched in New Mexico, and served a term in the Nebraska House of Representatives. During the Spanish-American War Colton went to the Philippines as Lieutenant Colonel of the First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry. He stayed in the Islands as Collector of Customs (a very important position in the American empire) until 1905. Later Secretary of War Taft chose Colton to handle the customs service of the Dominican Republic during the American takeover in 1905-07. Later, he returned to the Philippines to continue working with the customs facilities there. On November 7, 1909, Colonel George Colton began his duties as Governor of Puerto Rico. His military title was meaningful to those who looked on his appointment as part of the general "tightening-up" process inaugurated by President Taft since the appropriation crisis.

That "tightening-up" was earlier found in the amendment to the Foraker Act which Congress obediently passed in July. The Olmsted Amendment (named for Marlin Olmsted of Pennsylvania, the man who put it forward in the House of Representatives) might better have been known as the "Taft amendment"; it faithfully followed the President's recommendations. It provided that when the Puerto Rican legislature failed to pass an appropriation bill, the appropriation figure of the preceding year might be used. It further tightened the reins on Puerto Rico by placing it officially under the jurisdiction of a single department of the government, that department to be named by the President. It came as no surprise then that President Taft, after signing the Olmsted amendment on July 15, 1909, gave responsibility for Puerto Rico to the War Department. Not only did that department have the ability to keep down any real disturbance which might arise, it also had within it the administrative machinery of the Bureau of Insular Affairs.

Post apparently never feared the appropriation crisis would turn into violent rebellion. One of his economy measures in 1909 was to cut the salary of many of the insular police, and lay off others.⁵⁵ In his *Report* for that year he recommended sending the "Porto Rican Army Regi-

⁵⁴ Copy, September 8, 1909. *Ibid.*, 93.

⁵⁵ *La Democracia*, March 17, 1909.

ment" (which had no connection with the insular government) to someplace in the United States for a year, as an educational experience for the troops.⁵⁶ In October, at Lake Mohonk, New York, Post told an American audience that he was proud of the way Puerto Ricans fought peaceful, *constitutional* battles, and said it was a hopeful sign that three legal suits had been brought against him during that year.⁵⁷

One of these suits after passage of the Olmsted amendment was an injunction to stop Post from using the appropriated money in a different fashion from the exact way it had been spent the year before. Post, however, contended that only the total amount need be the same, not the specific allotments to each governmental function. Attorney General Hoyt moved the case out of the Puerto Rican courts into the much more friendly United States District Court of Puerto Rico, where the governor, of course, won.⁵⁸

There were several important results of the appropriation crisis of 1909. The Olmsted amendment was one; never again could Puerto Ricans use appropriations for a constitutional weapon. A second result was the change of governors. Colton's four years were the longest tenure yet for an American governor of Puerto Rico. He had no difficulty with the Unionists equal to that faced by his predecessor.

Unlike Post, Colton did not take office as Governor after a previous position in the insular government; as a newcomer, he had no old enmities or personal frictions to plague him. Thus, the Puerto Rican politicians immediately courted the new chief executive.⁵⁹ Colton's job was made easier, too, by the departure of several men who had bitter relations with either the Unionists or Puerto Ricans in general. Secretary Willoughby finished his term in September, and left, not being reappointed. Colton himself asked the War Department to see to it that George C. Ward, the auditor, and Judge Bernard S. Rodey of the United States District Court in Puerto Rico were not continued in their posts when their terms expired soon.⁶⁰ These recommendations

⁵⁶ *Report of the Governor: 1909*, 29.

⁵⁷ Post, *Report . . . Twenty-Seventh . . . Lake Mohonk Conference*, 184.

⁵⁸ *Report of the Governor: 1909*, 5, 25-29. This partiality of the Federal District Court in Puerto Rico was a long-standing source of irritation to Puerto Ricans. See the *Cong. Record*, 64 Cong., 1 Sess., LIII (April 19, 1916), 6412.

⁵⁹ "Both parties seeking favor with administration." Coded cable, and translation, Colton to Secretary of War Dickinson, December 6, 1909. National Archives, Bureau of Insular Affairs Records, File 858/13.

⁶⁰ Ward, said Colton, was "despised" and distrusted by both Americans and Puerto

by the new governor were carried out, and by July, 1910, both men were gone.

As a result of these changes, the firm pressure of the Olmsted Amendment, and perhaps the hope of reform represented in the bill put up in Congress early in 1910 by the same Marlin Olmsted—a bill to replace the Foraker Act—the Puerto Rican legislature under Governor Colton was very cooperative. Colton cabled the Bureau of Insular Affairs of two “records” for Puerto Rico; on January 15, 1910, the first time an appropriation bill had passed through the Executive Council without a “fight or single amendment,” and exactly two weeks later, approval of that appropriation measure by the House of Delegates as the first law enacted for the session.⁶¹

The most beneficial result of the appropriation crisis was its part in the developments leading to a new organic law for Puerto Rico. In December, 1909, President Taft sent the Secretary of War, Jacob M. Dickinson, General Clarence R. Edwards, Chief of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, and Colonel Jefferson R. Kean of the medical corps to Puerto Rico. Their report played a part in later legislature efforts at governmental reform for Puerto Rico.

More than once since 1898 Puerto Rico leaders have pointed out the analogy between their situation and that of the American colonies in the eighteenth century. It is an uncomfortably apt comparison for Americans to contemplate. The governmental pattern set up for the Island was very similar to the eighteenth century British colonial system. It did not speak well for the nation which so often and so proudly proclaimed the right of self-government, to terminate this non-violent rebellion by further reducing Puerto Rico's autonomy. The pre-Revolutionary comparison would have been especially irritating to President William Howard Taft, for it made him out to be—to Puerto Ricans—a successful George III.

Puerto Ricans had no thought of fighting the United States; they could only hope for reform of the Foraker Act. Such a reform came, but not under President Taft. Although almost annually bills were put up in Congress either to increase autonomy or to grant American citizenship to the islanders, it was not until 1917 that the Jones Act achieved both goals. The appropriation crisis of 1909 and President Taft's angry

Ricans; Rodey, besides having sustained the former governor in his allocation of funds, had never made friends among the Puerto Ricans. Colton to General Edwards, December 8, 1909. *Ibid.*, File 858/14.

⁶¹ Cable, Colton to Bureau of Insular Affairs, January 17, 1910, *Ibid.*, File 247/52; Copy of letter, Edwards to Colton, February 3, 1910, *Ibid.*, File 247/54.

reaction to it helped to publicize the need for change in Puerto Rico, and from that standpoint, the Unionists were successful. They lost the immediate battle against both their "enemies"—the Foraker Act and the American executive council—but in time they saw both these replaced by more autonomous means of governing Puerto Rico. Meanwhile the United States seemed to govern its new empire in a chronic fit of absentmindedness as though its own spirit of independence was forgotten or unsuitable for export.

TRUMAN R. CLARK

*Montgomery County Community College,
Conshohocken, Pennsylvania*