



# CIVIL RIGHTS DIGEST

A Quarterly of the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights

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SPECIAL ISSUE:

PUERTO RICANS IN THE PROMISED LAND



# CIVIL RIGHTS DIGEST

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## ABOUT THIS ISSUE



*This special issue of the Civil Rights Digest is devoted entirely to an account of the hearing on Puerto Rican problems held by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in New York last year. It was written by the noted Puerto Rican author, Piri Thomas. Mr. Thomas provides not only a description of the hearing, but also recalls events associated with growing up in New York's barrio. The author of two books and several plays and articles, Mr. Thomas was born in 1928 in New York, the*

*eldest of seven children. His childhood environment—poverty compounded by the Depression—contributed to his involvement in criminal activity and, eventually, a jail sentence for armed robbery. Upon his release he became engaged in drug rehabilitation work and published his best-selling autobiography in 1967. He is now involved in film, theatre, and various community projects, and has spoken widely on Puerto Rican affairs.*

Cover design—Del Harrod; Cover photo—Steve Schapiro; 13, 39—Michael Weisbrot; 6—Michael Abramson; *Black Star* 9, 21, 35—New York Times; 1, 2, 15, 16, 22, 26, 33, 35—Armando De Rivero. *Aspira of America, Inc.*, back cover

### U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

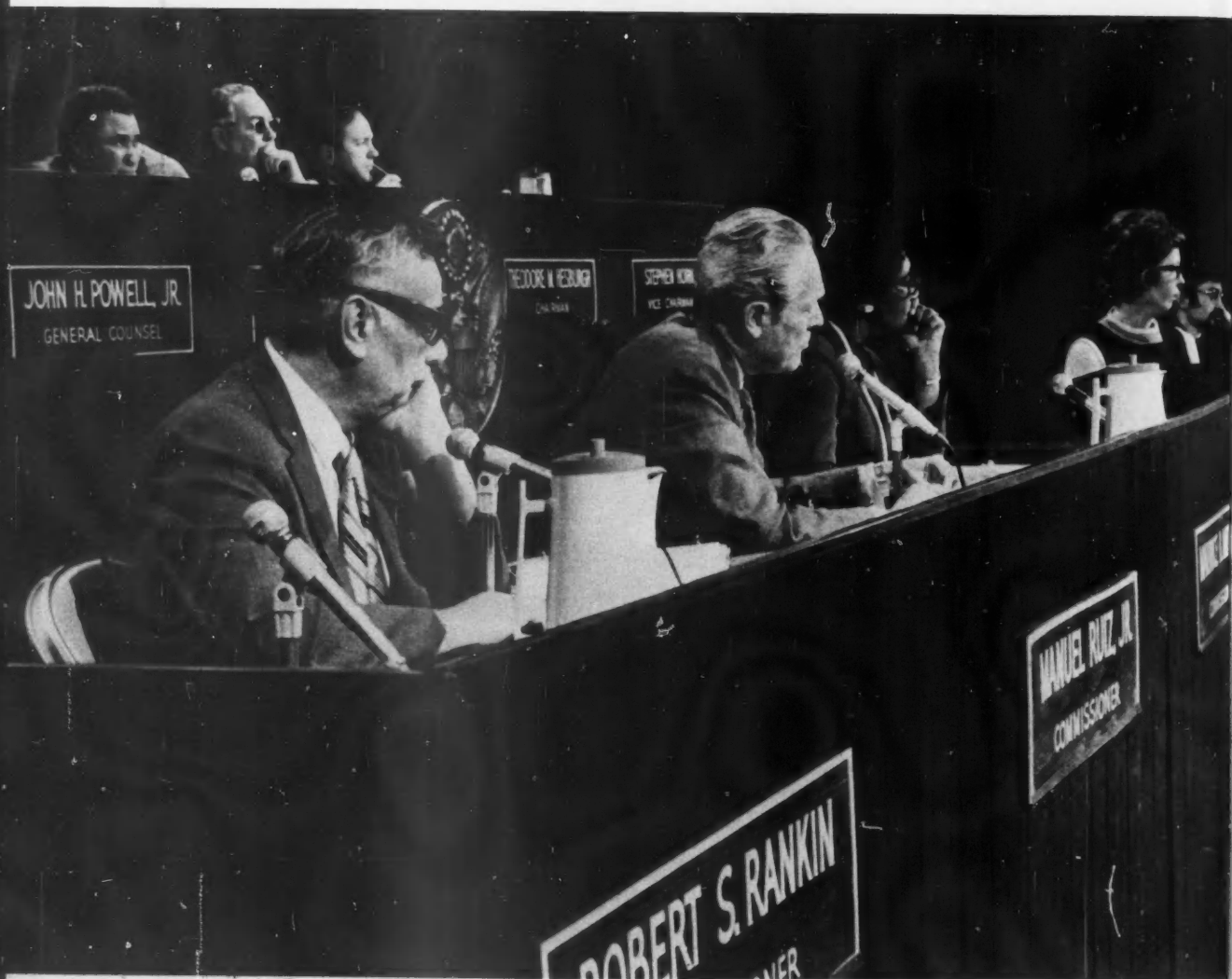
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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is a temporary, independent, bipartisan agency established by Congress in 1957 to:

- Investigate complaints alleging denial of the right to vote by reason of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, or by reason of fraudulent practices;
- Study and collect information concerning legal developments constituting a denial of equal protection of the laws under the Constitution because of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, or in the administration of justice;
- Appraise Federal laws and policies with respect to the denial of equal protection of laws because of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, or in the administration of justice;
- Serve as a national clearinghouse for information concerning denials of equal protection of the laws because of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin; and
- Submit reports, findings, and recommendations to the President and the Congress.

The *Civil Rights Digest* is published quarterly by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights as part of its clearinghouse responsibilities. Funds for printing the *Digest* were approved by the Director of Bureau of the Budget on January 29, 1963. Correspondence related to the *Digest* should be addressed to Editor, *Civil Rights Digest*, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Washington, D.C. 20425.

The articles in the *Digest* do not necessarily represent Commission policy but are offered to stimulate ideas and interest on various current issues concerning civil rights.



## A STATEMENT BY THE COMMISSION

In February 1972, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights held a hearing in New York City to investigate denial of equal opportunity to Puerto Ricans in the New York metropolitan area. The hearing culminated the factfinding aspects of the Commission's current Puerto Rican project. It was intended to put the public spotlight on problems in four broad fields: education, employment, public housing, and the administration of justice.

The hearing began on the morning of February 14 and was scheduled to run four days. However, it was cut short the second day after several demonstrations and disruptions carried out by a small portion of the audience advocating independence for Puerto Rico.

Before the hearing was held, the Commission contracted with Piri Thomas, noted Puerto Rican author, to write an account of the hearing intended for mass distribution.

(Copies of the hearing transcript are available free from the Office of Information, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Washington, D.C. 20425)

Mr. Thomas is well-suited for this task. He was born in New York and grew up in Spanish Harlem. He knows the conditions

there firsthand. His poverty-stricken boyhood led him into drugs, youth gangs, and eventually prison. His autobiography, *Down These Mean Streets*, was published in 1967 and won critical acclaim. His most recent book, *Savior, Savior, Hold My Hand*, was published in 1972.

Using excerpts from the testimony to document his report, Mr. Thomas has written a highly impressionistic and personal account of the hearings. Although it captures the mood of great frustration felt by many Puerto Ricans, it was clearly not intended to describe everything that happened in the hearing room. As a result, several things are left unsaid and unexplained.

The events which transpired during those two days were chaotic. There was, and remains, some confusion about exactly what happened. It is understandable that what Mr. Thomas witnessed as a member of the audience differs from what staff members saw in the room and behind the scenes and from what the Commissioners saw from the podium.

The situation is not unlike what often results after a traffic accident. While several people may observe parts of what happened, often no one person can describe

it from beginning to end. Unlike an accident, however, no investigation was ever made of the hearings to reconstruct the exact chain of events. So the comments which follow are merely an attempt to enlarge upon the overall impression left by Mr. Thomas's account, to call attention to oversights, omissions, and unexplained events, and to clarify Commission procedures.

At the end of his account, Mr. Thomas states that the Commission's contact with the Puerto Rican community was "brief and intense." While the hearing atmosphere was certainly intense, the Commission's contact with New York Puerto Ricans was anything but brief. Several months of staff preparation, including over 1,000 interviews, preceded the hearings. A ten-member Puerto Rican Advisory Committee helped to guide the staff work, as well as the State Advisory Committees in several Northeastern States which include substantial Puerto Rican representation.

Puerto Rican consultants to the Commission have conducted special demographic studies of the Puerto Rican community. A major report on Puerto Rican problems is still in preparation.

There are several references in

Mr. Thomas's account to "exclusion of the public" from the microphones. These references fail to explain the purpose of the hearing or the Commission procedure in selecting witnesses. Hearings are designed to build a factual record upon which recommendations for changes in law and policy may be based. For that reason, and to guard against unproven defamatory statements by witnesses (which the Commission is required to do by law), those selected to testify are subpoenaed based on prior interviews with Commission staff.

The Commission apportions the available time. It hears from officials who are responsible for dealing with the conditions under scrutiny and have authority to take steps to correct them, and from private citizens—including in this case, Puerto Rican leaders and rank-and-file citizens—who have pertinent experience and knowledge to contribute. Of the witnesses scheduled to testify in New York, 42 out of 80 were Puerto Rican.

One of the great strengths of the Commission is that it is non-partisan and independent. Its Commissioners are part-time and have individual careers of their own. They are not dependent on the Commission or the government for their jobs. Normally they hold two or three hearings a year, each lasting three or four days.

Mr. Thomas gives only a sketchy account of the disruptions themselves, and several incidents which would belong in a complete description of events are omitted. He notes that a marshal reportedly "hit somebody." Actually the marshal defended himself after he was attacked by a member of the audience.

He refers near the end to the presence of some sort of tear gas. It should be noted that at no time was tear gas used by the marshals or police. However, a stink bomb of some sort was apparently set off by someone in the audience.

Mr. Thomas does not fully describe the podium takeover which occurred at the end of the first day. Those who participated in that action approached the front of the room and overturned the table at which the translators were seated. They seized the microphones there and then proceeded to the stage where the Commissioners were sitting. The Commissioners withdrew from the stage to an area behind it as the demonstrators milled about, spoke into the microphones, and sang the Puerto Rican national anthem.

During the second day, chairs were hurled about in the audience and a news photographer was pulled off a platform by the camera strap around his neck. The photographer was roughed up and his clothing torn.

Mr. Thomas does not fully report the atmosphere at the end of the hearing and afterward. At that time in New York City, fear of bomb attacks was widespread. A secretary in a Manhattan office had been killed when a bomb threat proved all too real. During the second day of the Commission hearing, the marshals reported that a second bomb threat had been received. Injuries to innocent people had already occurred in the scuffles between marshals, police, and demonstrators. All but one (Vice-Chairman Stephen Horn) of the Commissioners present felt they had no choice but to end the hearing.\* They could no longer guarantee the safety of those present.

Following the hearings, several threats against Father Hesburgh's life and the lives of others were received, and the Commissioners and staff who remained at a motel in New York after the hearing were placed under armed guard. Thus the situation came to involve more than simple political protest or raucous behavior.

Apart from the story told here by Piri Thomas, the Commission has tried to analyze how such events came to pass. With hindsight, it is obvious that the limitations of the hearing format were not understood by all in the audience. It was also apparent that there were some in attendance whose sole purpose was to force an end to the hearings. In addition, some of the witnesses called to testify for their ability to add to the record were the objects of intense resentment by many present.

The resulting situation offered all the ingredients necessary to produce the chaotic scene which followed.

It is difficult to determine what steps the Commission might have taken to avoid this unfortunate result—short of planning no hearings at all. At the same time, the Commission feels a strong concern and sympathy for the people who tried to communicate their problems to it. It is in that spirit that it is publishing Mr. Thomas's account, despite some differences with its content and many objections to its language. It is hoped that his piece will stimulate public awareness of the serious problems of discrimination experienced by Puerto Ricans in the mainland United States.

\*Commissioner Robert S. Rankin did not attend the New York hearing.

# LOS PUERTORRIQUENOS EN LA TIERRA PROMETIDA

## PUERTO RICANS IN THE PROMISED LAND

An Account of the United States Commission on  
Civil Rights Hearing in the City of New York  
February 14-15, 1972

by Piri Thomas

So like they come to the Estados Unidos El Norte  
and after they wake up to what's really happen-  
ing they roll up their dreams and go to work  
making a beancoup fortune, like 40 or 50 bucks  
a week, even 60. Yeah, this is the *tierra prome-  
tida*...

—Excerpt from Jose's  
monologue in Piri  
Thomas' play *Ladées  
an' Mistus, What is a  
Man?*





## Introduction: "Me, My People, Our Island"

The disorders which disrupted the Commission on Civil Rights' hearing were not just a spontaneous event that came up out of nowhere, like just a happening. It was an ugly head of despair, frustration, exploitation, hot-and-cold running cockroaches, king-sized rats, crummy tenement slum houses, poor education, and mucho job discrimination. It was touched off by a long burning fuse to a bundle of dynamite that has been slowly burning since I was a kid in East Harlem in the early thirties.

We Puerto Ricans were the so-called "Johnny-come-latelies." We were the gentle, inoffensive, happy, intelligent, hard-working Puerto Ricans from a little island, smaller than Long Island in New York. And the majority of us suffered from a complex of "Me no speak English." Let me tell you, it was tough, because we were surrounded on all sides by different ethnic groups. In most instances we were not welcome—there was too much poverty already in Spanish Harlem. Who needed more poor people?

Our fathers and mothers came to El Barrio determined first to survive, by rolling up their sleeves and working (when there were jobs available), and then to create a better life for their children.

When I was a kid growing up in Harlem, we didn't see the slightest chance that someday we were going to be somebody—even though, even then, there were a few who were "making it." We felt ourselves living in a cesspool with no way out, except through the negative routes of rackets, drugs, and eye droppers, or running the numbers. The street philosophy at that time (even up to this time, although there is a little more hope now) was: "What's the use of making an honest dollar and starving?" We felt completely forgotten by society—or, if not completely forgotten,

completely ignored by complacent people living in very nice houses in very nice places. So we'll make the dishonest dollar and not starve, and get a chance to live like the people we saw in the motion pictures.

Our parents were resigned to their life. But we, the youngsters, would say, "Has this life gotta be for us forever?"

I remember my own mother's answer one day when I asked her, "Why can't we have a nice house like this?"—showing her a picture in a magazine. I can remember her now, laughing as she replied, "Of course; we can have it in heaven someday." And I could feel the anger inside me saying, "I want it now." I even felt it more strongly when our parents didn't have any food to give us and we would go to sleep on sugar water and corn meal.

People living in the ghettos all over this country of ours cannot be expected to react as first-class citizens when we are treated not only as if we aren't a part of America, but as if we aren't human beings.

Many Puerto Ricans who have come from the Island have attained positions of leadership and prominence in various fields on the mainland: Herman Badillo, first Puerto Rican United States Congressman; Robert Garcia, first Puerto Rican State Senator; Jose Monserrat, first Puerto Rican president of the New York City Board of Education; Rita Moreno, first Puerto Rican actress to win the Academy Award. There are countless others.

They are just the first of a wave of Puerto Rican firsts. With each generation comes the combined talents of the young, who will add to the world their own essence and the beauty and culture of their Puerto Rican heritage.

## Jesucristo, A Puerto Rican Civil Rights Hearing At Last

Monday morning, February 14, 1972, I headed down a chilly Seventh Avenue toward the Brotherhood in Action Building—doing some broken-field walking through a multitude of humanity of different ethnic backgrounds. A little old grey-haired lady crashed into me doing about 60 and I apologized, simply because the look on her face said it ought to be my fault.

Thoughts were running in my mind: "Wow, 15 years that the United States Commission on Civil Rights has been in existence and, diggit, this is the first time it's going to be talking to us Puerto Ricans about our civil rights."

My eyes dug the big letters, "Brotherhood in Action," and I thought to myself, "That's what America should be all about. Hell, for that matter, that's what the whole world should be about."

As I approached the building, I saw mucho Puerto Ricans pouring into it—old senores and senoras, young muchachos and muchachas—and I smiled because every one of them was walking tall with dignity. I went through the revolving door hoping, by God, that this was not going to be another blank. I ran into all sorts of greetings.

"Aye Negrito."

"How you been, Piri?"

"Do you think this is for real?"

They were all there—beautiful human beings from the Bronx, El Barrio, the Lower East Side, Brooklyn, from New Jersey, from whatever ghettos Puerto Ricans are forced to live in.

I entered the building and felt the undercurrent of the hundreds of Puerto Ricans present, the faces showing their feelings of hope and despair, many with neatly typed papers listing grievances beyond compare. It was bilingualism in action as we exchanged

greetings, slipping from English into Spanish and back into English again.

When some of them found out that I had been assigned by the Commission on Civil Rights to cover the hearing and eventually come up with a report, they gave me copies of their statements. Taking time from the growing crowd, I went through the papers. It was not so amazing to see that although they were from different communities in New York City, as well as from New Jersey and Connecticut, the grievances were all so similar: the inequalities in education, the indifference of the system to Puerto Rican culture and heritage, the exploitation, racism, and cultural discrimination pervading all aspects of our lives, especially our children's lives. Diggit!

I couldn't help feeling that it was kind of way out that for the first time since the Commission's inception 15 years before, we Puerto Ricans were gonna be heard. We were getting 4 days in which the Commission was to hear witnesses on education, housing, employment, and the courts—but only subpoenaed witnesses could testify.

It was no hard thing for my ears to pick up murmurings of "Ahora por fin vamos a poder hablarle a la Comisión de Derechos Civiles sobre la injusticia contra nosotros." ("At last we are going to be able to talk to the Commission on Civil Rights about the injustices against us.") I also saw many disgusted, angry faces, some twisted with the kind of despair that comes only of finding out you've had the door slammed in your face one more time. I heard the tense words that matched the faces.

"We of the community aren't going to be allowed to testify unless we've been subpoenaed."

"Only the big shot Puerto Ricans are going to be heard."

"Nosotros la gente (we the people) of these damn



ghettoes who live in all that mess and really know what's happening aren't even going to be heard." I shook my head up and down in mucho agreement that had been a bad mistake on somebody's part.

The community as a whole had a right to have their representatives testify on what was happening in their own communities, regardless of their political beliefs. The atmosphere was like stale sweat just before it breaks into anger.

"Maybe it won't be so bad," said a voice.

"Oh no? Just watch what gon to happen. We an' our children get shafted wan mor time," answered another voice.

"When you going to stop looking for pie in el cielo (the sky). I mean you must be used to being screwed a lot. It looks like you don't feel it any more."

My eyes split to different groups and they were carrying placards, and like they identified themselves right down to the nth degree. Like one was the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, started at a San Juan convention 2 months before as a successor to Movimiento Pro Independencia, with Juan Mari Bras as Secretary General and Ramon Arbona as First Secretary. The demonstrators let it be known that they were campaigning here to advocate socialism as the answer to the needs of Puerto Ricans living permanently on the Mainland.

With another group, I saw Gilberto Gerena-Valentin, president of the Congress of Puerto Rican Home Towns, which consists of 43 social clubs and 5,000 individual members. There was a group called Vanguardia Puertorriquena, headed by Frankie Miranda, and Ejército de Liberación Boricua (Puerto Rican Liberation Arms), led by Santana Ramos. There were many men and women educators, but the majority of the people were just workers, housewives, and many young students whose educational lives are but a game for an indifferent system.

I caught the looks exchanged between the militants and the so-called establishment Puerto Ricans and dug a yearning for togetherness entwined with the reality of east is east, west is west, and never the twain would meet.

"Damn shame," I thought. "Like history has taught us that in unity there is mucho strength, and division only makes for defeat."

I saw men who had the look of much power behind them, politely searching bulky brief cases and large handbags. They were U.S. marshals. Hearing someone greet me, I turned around to see a group of Puerto Ricans. I smiled at the pleasant, heavy-set woman,

and we fell into discussing what was going down.

"Don't you remember me, Piri?" she smiled.

My mind did all sorts of fast memory backflashes as she continued:

"It's Juana Lopez. I'm a community worker with the Puerto Rican Guidance Center over at 1616 Amsterdam Avenue."

And then I remembered. "Como está Senora Lopez?" (How are you, Mrs. Lopez?) "It's been a long time."

"Not so long that you cannot call me Juana." She flashed a smile that contradicted the troubled, concerned look in her eyes.

I let out a deep sigh. Having been born and bred in El Ghetto, I could read signs of uptightness as easy as a blind human could read braille.

"Qué pasa?" I asked, knowing damn well what was happening. But I was here to cover a situation at the request of the Commission, and getting the feeling of my people was part of the job, and I didn't want my own intense feelings as a Puerto Rican to affect my overall observations.

"Carramba, we work hard to write this statement!" Juana held out a four-page statement. "We got all the words together—the feelings of our community, our hopes, despairs. We put the rip-off against us in these pages.

"We came down with the understanding we would be testifying, and now no damn good. We cannot testify unless we have been subpoenaed. Only the well-known Puerto Ricans have been subpoenaed to testify. It is not fair. We are the people that live in those rotten buildings and have to fight against all the mierda (crap) that's put out. We should be the majority to testify."

"Amen," I said to myself. A lot of the people subpoenaed to testify were Puerto Ricans, and the majority of them once lived in ghetto conditions, but they're not living there any more. It doesn't mean they don't fight for all of us. But, hell, it's not the same saying, "I used to live in the ghetto," and, "I'm still living in the ghetto."

"You're damn right, Juana. You're damn right. I'm not saying they shouldn't have been subpoenaed. I'm just saying all of us should have been too."

There were murmurings of "whitewash hearings," "put-up job," "tokenism," "let's wait and see," and stronger ones like "Aw screw it" and "forget it," and a reply of "Yeah, that's the problem. We get screwed and then we forget it."

"Look at this statement, Piri." Juana put it in my hand. "Ours is not the only one. There are hundreds,

and we won't be able to state our grievances. They said to hand them in and they will be read and given careful consideration."

"Sure," said another voice. "They will be packed in a box tagged 'complaints' and filed away to be opened in a couple of hundred years from now by somebody who will probably say, 'Hey, look what I found. A whole box full of statements by those extremist ghetto people known as Puerto Ricans!'"

There was some laughter, but it was tightly intermingled with mucho anger. I didn't crack a smile at all. If our needs as human beings, as citizens, as Puerto Ricans, were constantly to be negated, we might well become extremists—mentally, morally, spiritually, and if push comes to shove, physically.

"Read it, Piri," Juana's grim face gently asked. "Since you're doing—how do you say?—the investigation."

"I'm covering the hearings so as to turn out a popular report, Juana. The Commission would like me to write it without the crap. Like it is, and without the 10-syllable words you got to have a doctorate in English to dig."

I read Juana's statement:

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**HOW PUERTO RICANS ARE DEPRIVED OF THEIR CIVIL RIGHTS: A STATEMENT BEFORE HEARINGS CALLED BY THE OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS, SUBMITTED BY MRS. JUANA LOPEZ, COMMUNITY WORKER, PUERTO RICAN GUIDANCE CENTER INC., 1616 AMSTERDAM AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY**

I am glad of having this opportunity to speak before all you on this subject of civil rights and how these rights bypass Puerto Ricans in New York City. I know very well that we are not the only victims of the racism and the inequality that cuts many of us out of equal opportunities just because we were born. First let me tell you that in our country, Puerto Rico, we are not members of a minority group; on the contrary, we are *el pueblo*, the people, the majority. There our children are the hope of the future, and we see them with pride in our country and pride in our culture. There we are all somebody, we are all Puerto Ricans. Here, as we would say, "The story has a different color."

I am a community worker at the Puerto Rican Guidance Center, a Puerto Rican agency in the Upper West Side ghetto of Manhattan. Since 1966, we are working with all the people and agencies in the community. We are color blind, and language has not

been a barrier for us in the community who want to work in preventing the destruction of our people.

I have seen and experienced the transformation of this community. As City College and Columbia University get bigger, housing for our residents decays, there are less and less garbage collections, services seem to shrink. The bigger agencies and the two universities, although crying poverty, seem to be stronger, while our community agencies seem weaker. Less—not more—services are available to the people.

There was a time, up to 1968, when we demonstrated and protested the injustices and the city, the State, and the Federal Government listened to us. I find that that is no longer effective. I also find that discrimination is now practiced in more subtle ways, and that is practiced in more destructive ways against Puerto Ricans than a few years back. I don't think that things are better for Puerto Ricans than they were five or six years ago.

In my work, I see how this has been happening and I will tell you about some of my experiences. First, I like to mention the situation of our schools—both private and public. Many Puerto Rican children cannot enter into good schools. They are simply not admitted. When they are taken out of our neighborhood, they are not necessarily going to better schools. They instead run into teachers who are bigoted and racist and despise them and, unless the parent has the time and the money to keep after what the school is up to, the children become casualties of the educational system that does not want them and does not do much for them.

In the past few years, under the Title I program, we began to see Puerto Ricans being hired as aides in some of the public schools. This year, we have seen how, under the excuse of budget cuts, Cubans and other Latins, not Puerto Ricans, have been hired.

Mind you, I am not against Cubans and other Latins having jobs; but I don't want Puerto Ricans to be excluded from jobs, particularly jobs in which they are important to the personality development and motivation of Puerto Rican children. We are not interested in seeing our children becoming Cuban or Catalonian or whatnot. We want them to learn to appreciate their background and heritage, because that is what will give them a sense of being, a sense of humanity—and that heritage is Puerto Rican.

Only by affirming our identity, and being recognized as such, can we be somebody again. We are a nationality, with our history and our culture, and we

don't want to be lumped into something called just Spanish-speaking people. I am sure that members of other nationalities who are living in this city, and who speak Spanish as their first language, do not like either to be thrown into invisible masses of language. They would like, like us, to be known by what they are. And, in our case, we are Puerto Ricans.

We also have been encouraging our youngsters to study and to learn, because the skills that they acquire will be important to their future and to the whole society. We see, as grassroot people—and our children see as youngsters—that our professionals are frequently discriminated against in crude and brutal ways.

Columbia University alone is worse than the plague. Now Columbia has discovered the community, but do you know what for? For training their doctors and their white nurses. Our community has become the "laboratory" where we are treated as colonials, the "underdeveloped" world of the Upper West Side. We are invited to meetings "to involve the community" by all kinds of doctors who compete with each other as to how many of the community people they get to know by name. They, of course, take over, dominate the meetings, and make the decisions. That is the Columbia University elite interpretation of community relations. They are in charge, they exclude, they decide. Nothing has changed, in a political sense, from the days of the Morningside gym\*—except that now Columbia has a larger playground, and we are clearly the toys.

I consider that discrimination in massive form. The real things that count—jobs, services, participation in forming policy and in evaluating what the City College and Columbia University are doing in this community—is negated. Only manipulations, half truths, and half lies are used to deal with us. So, all I can do is to challenge you, and both Columbia University and the City College, to produce evidence of how many Puerto Ricans from New York are attending school there, what has been done by them to make it possible for Puerto Ricans to complete their studies, how many professors that teach there—I don't mean only Puerto Ricans—have jobs that offer them some security, just the same kind of security as is offered to others?

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\*A reference to the controversy at Columbia University in 1968 in which the construction of a new gymnasium was opposed by the Morningside Heights community. The gymnasium was a major issue in subsequent student disturbances at the University.

I am not asking for special privileges or begging. I just want to know what is being done for our people, so that we can live with dignity. And the same question that I ask from you, City College and Columbia, I have to ask from every city, State, and Federal agency in this city. I also have to ask all business and all the voluntary agencies that receive public funds the same question—because all of them are playing still the anti-Puerto Rican game.

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"Bueno, Piri. Maybe you can get this statement to be seen."

"I'll do my best, Juana, all around."

"These school situation is so rotten," said another.

"Our kids don't have a chance. All around we're trying to survive in a big garbage can," said yet another.

"Dammit, what's wrong with bilingual education?" asked a third.

"I'll see you around, Juana. Let me move in and out and dig what's happening."

I turned my back and heard Juana's voice, "When you coming over to our guidance center, Piri?"

"Soon as I can, Juana. Like I'm spread out like oleomargarine as it is."

"We too, Piri, but we can always spread a little more."

I nodded agreement and walked toward the auditorium. At the door a marshal checked my duffle bag, nodded, and waved me in. I stood at the back checking out how many people I knew and saw a cross-section represented, from rank-and-file ghetto level to those of us in high positions.

Even with the murmuring hum of small talk and an occasional laugh, there was without a penny's doubt the current of intense interest and concern—the kind of feeling in one's guts that one has when getting set to air grievances and inequities against a system that only knows you exist if it hears you scream in agony loud enough—and then it's only a whisper to them.

I mulled over my thoughts. I didn't want to get too poetic and smiled at the next thought that jumped into my mind. I had read somewhere that poets are the conscience of the earth. *Quién sabe?* We do beat a blank.

I took a chair where I could get a good view of the hearings. I was thinking about what Juana had written in her statement about Puerto Rican children growing up in New York today. I was once a little *muchacho* like that myself. *Quién sabe?* We do beat a blank. . . .



## When I Was a Little Muchacho

I sent my mind back into time to recall my days as a child growing up in El Barrio in New York City. I can remember the anguish of living amidst poverty. But I can also remember the beautiful freedom of being able to speak Spanish in my home and in the streets. It was a most uptight feeling I went through finding out that in the schools Spanish was a taboo language—as if the school system had added another commandment to the existing Biblical ten: “Thou shalt speak no other language except English.”

I can remember my madre first taking me to school, leaving me in a classroom, and the only identification I had with that room was other children who looked like me—also dark-skinned and Puerto Rican. The teacher said something to me and I looked very blank-faced as I struggled hard to understand the meaning of her alien language. With a great sense of controlled impatience, she gritted her teeth and pointed a long white finger towards an empty desk. I smiled politely and whispered a courage-filled, “Muchas

gracias." She smiled sort of tightly and said what sounded like, "We speak on-lee Engleesh here."

It was with great difficulty that I was able to put words phonetically together in English. But learn I did, all the time wondering why I couldn't learn in the language with which I had been familiar since the moment I left my mother's womb.

I cannot count the times, as the year passed, that whenever I or other Puerto Rican boys and girls would take a seventh-inning stretch from English and converse among ourselves in Spanish, some teacher would remind us of the great American culture and that the "ugg-dy, ugg-dy" language we were speaking was going to be a handicap to us in America. If we were to grow up to be good Americans, then English had to be our forte (whatever that word meant).

It was mucho tough, running into all those kinds of racism and still trying to relate to wearing white shirts and red ties on auditorium day and pledging allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, singing at the top of our lungs the National Anthem, and learning the history of America. We learned about George Washington and Betsy Ross, about England with its King George, and France with its Lafayette, and on and on—never once hearing about the history, culture, roots, and heritage of Puerto Rico.

My God, I felt at times I could only identify with a fire hydrant and hot and cold running cockroaches. We were fed the diet of "You too can become the President of the United States." I wonder how they were able to keep a straight face.

The history the books taught us was geared toward the white children, who must have grown up with a sense of superiority in learning that whites had invented everything from a needle to the last star in the universe; that whites had painted all kinds of great masterpieces, from the paintings of Cro-Magnon man in his prehistoric caves to the ones hanging on the walls of the world's greatest museums. And whites had written all the literature, from a few scratches on some stone tablets eons ago up to "Popeye the Sailor Man—" including a particular piece of literature that somehow was felt to be relevant to us, known as "Little Black Sambo."

Any inquiries by us Puerto Ricans as to our background and heritage were usually answered with reference to the greatness of Spain, with its gold-crazed conquerors such as Pizarro and Cortez. These were the very men who had ripped off culture and destroyed contributions to the arts and sciences created by human beings from South and Central America and

Mexico. Another answer given to us, in our quest for our Puerto Rican background, was plain and simple: "We don't know much about Puerto Rico." Or, "You people are very primitive, and really the best thing in the world that has happened to Puerto Rico is that its people are now citizens of the United States."

But it was hard to accept that, because we Puerto Ricans felt no citizenship. We had had no choice as to what country we belonged to. It is certainly true that for human beings to know where they are going, they must first know where they come from. There is no doubt that English is important to know in the United States, but so is Spanish and so is any other language. Language and culture do not belong to any one country or ethnic group. It is like music or art; it belongs to the world, to all human beings.

For children, school in Puerto Rico is actually an extension of the home. The teachers not only love to teach, but love the children they are teaching and are like mothers and fathers to the children. In Puerto Rico, children are taught in the home to respect their teachers and are given respect in return.

In Puerto Rico, teaching is an honored profession, and there is a day set aside as a holiday to pay homage to teachers. In this country, teachers can be anyone who has had the means to become a teacher—regardless of the fact that they may be racist, bigoted, or hung up in similar neurotic ways. The system, not caring that teaching is such a responsibility, is turning its back on the untold damage done to the minds and lives of children who pass through the hands of uncaring or indifferent, racist teachers.

I couldn't help thinking of one such teacher who was part of a large group of teachers where I was conducting a seminar on sensitivity training. When I spoke of a teacher's responsibility and the importance of blending love for the children with their education, this pitiful woman glared at me in obvious bigotry and damn-near snarled, "I don't have to love them. All I have to do is teach them."

Obviously, she was not talking about white children but about Puerto Ricans, blacks, Asian Americans, and American Indians—any child that was not as white as she. I remember silently staring at her for a long moment and, with mucho control, quietly saying, "Why don't you get a job washing dishes? At least if you drop a dish, it is not a child's heart and mind you will be shattering."

... My thoughts were interrupted by the loud rapping of the gavel. The hearing of the United States Commission on Civil Rights was beginning.



## Hope These Hearings Beat a Blank

The hullabaloo of voices died out very quickly. The shuffling backsides, trying to make themselves comfortable, found their niche and relaxed. All eyes were staring dead ahead at the podium. A man behind a placard with the name "Theodore Hesburgh" opened up the hearings with a voice strong enough to carry even without mikes.

My people and I listened. I watched him make hand gestures once in while as his words came out, and part of them went so:

This is the commitment today as, once again, we turn to the problems of a minority that suffers deprivation because its language and culture are different than the dominant ones in the land.

Again and again, problems unique to Puerto Ricans



are lost in the general category of the "Spanish Surnamed." Puerto Ricans must be rescued from this anonymity. They are United States citizens from birth, whether that takes place on the Island or on the Mainland. And when they come from the Island, they bring a language of their own and possess a rich and cherished culture which is fortified by frequent travel between the Mainland and the Island.

I glanced around the room, and I could see a few heads slowly moving up and down in agreement and mucho other faces non-committed. My own mind made its analysis. I could almost hear my own thoughts aloud:

"Man, that sounds beautiful. What was that sentence? Oh yeah, 'They are United States citizens from birth, whether that takes place on the Island or on the Mainland.' And what is the next thing? Of yeah, 'When they come from the Island, they bring a language of their own and possess a rich and cherished culture which is fortified by frequent travel between the Mainland and the Island.'"

"Well," I thought on, "if that citizenship bit is for real, the racist and exploitative element in the American system sure as hell hasn't acknowledged our rights as citizens. As for 'frequent travel between the Mainland and the Island,' the majority have got to scrape and scrounge to save enough dinero for the trip once in a while, and many get back and forth to the Island via the Finance Happy Loan Co., plus interest rates."

But I told myself I was there to do an honest job of covering the hearings, and that was gonna be. Like whatever happened, it was gonna hang all out.

I heard a young voice say to nobody in particular, "Man, that piece must have been written by a House Puerto Rican."

Somebody else said, "Damn amigo, give the cat a chance to say his thing."

"Who's that talking?" said a muchacho in front of me.

"Man, that's the Chairman, Theodore Hesburgh."

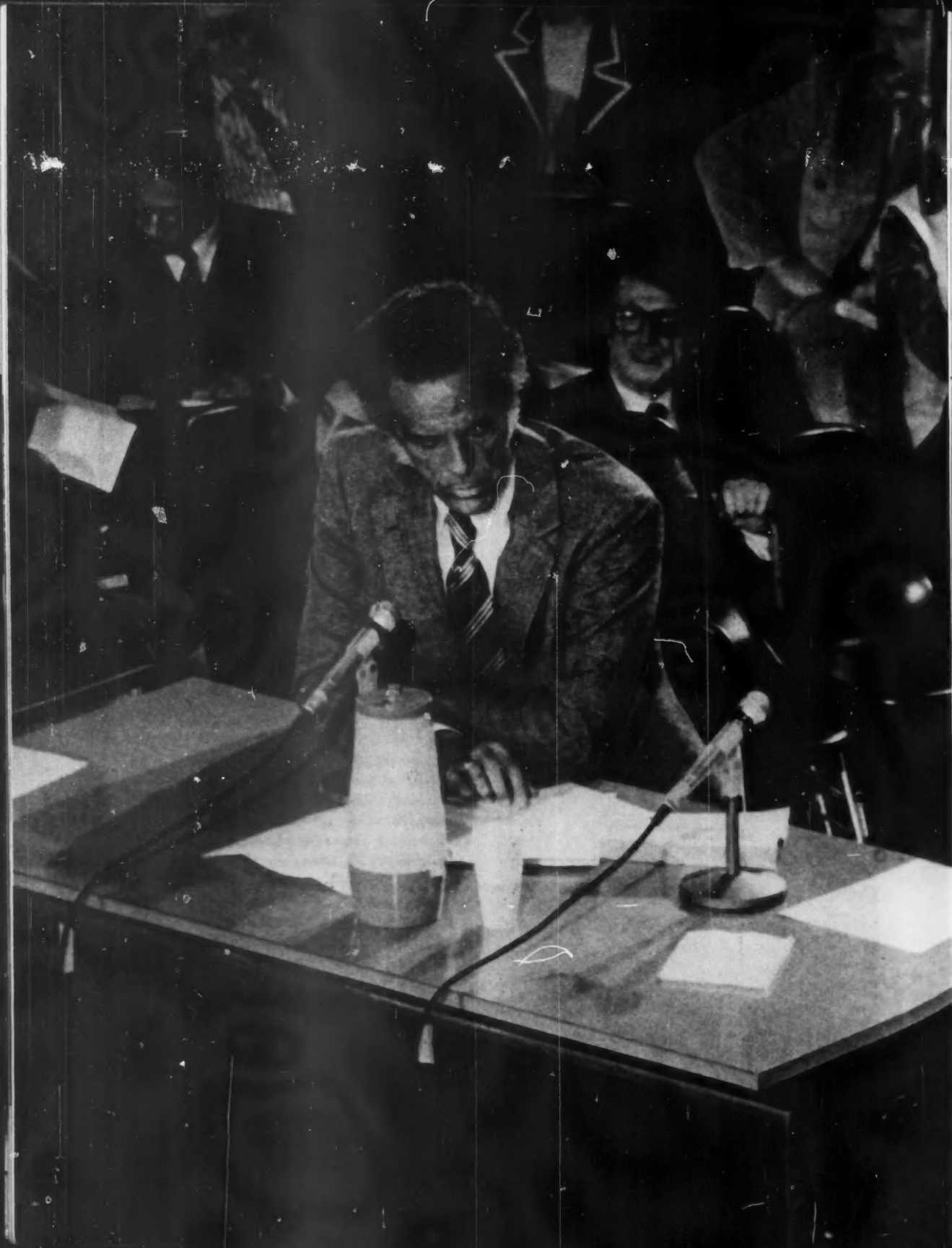
"Hey, I heard he's a priest."

"Diggitt, if he's a cura (priest), he can't be that bad."

"Oh man, I ain't downing him, but rip-offs come in all kinds of clothes."

"Sh, sh, sh," from some old Puerto Rican moms, stopped the whispering for awhile.

Father Hesburgh went on to say that since the Puerto Ricans' educational attainment is the lowest



and their unemployment is the highest of any ethnic group in this area, special attention would be paid to questions of education and employment.

"Goddammit, for who?" spurted an angry mutter "Practically all the people that are gonna testify are just local, State, Federal biggies, and the rest are a few members and leaders of our goddamned community. The biggies sure as hell ain't suffering from lack of jive education, and they sure as hell ain't out of a job."

"There's no doubt, man," I thought. "It was a bad mistake on somebody's part not to make this an open hearing." I went on listening and making mucho notes.

Chairman Hesburgh finished. There was polite applause. Commissioner Freeman was next, and she outlined the rules.

"What's this crap about rules?" demanded a young Puerto Rican wearing a dark beret. "If this Commission is supposed to be here to dig our grievances, what's all this rules crap?"

Congressman Herman Badillo was introduced next. He's like our first and only Puerto Rican member of Congress, and his words expressed what a lot of us were feeling. Here is part of what he said:

I don't think that the Puerto Rican community is going to forever be remaining in a second-class status. I think that over the years the Puerto Ricans and Puerto Rico will distinguish themselves in New York City as they have in Puerto Rico.

But we shouldn't have to wait three, four, or five generations before this process begins to happen. With the experience that we have (with immigrants) and with the help of your Commission, we should be able to do it in one or two generations, and I hope that that will be one of the results of this meeting today.

"Badillo,"—my mind threw thoughts at him—"tell them that the situation is so damn bad that it's jumping into worst. Tell 'em some of our young sangres (young bloods) don't even want to wait one generation, let alone two, before we get our rights. Second-class citizens, hell! Diggit, we're third, fourth, and fifth-class citizens now. That's the sound out there in our communities. Just because somebody tells you you're a citizen don't make you a citizen. A citizen is one who enjoys the inputs and outputs of rich America and can share in the chevere (nice) goodies. Tell 'em, right now the blacks have gotten off the bottom of the totem pole, and we Puerto Ricans are now holding the smelly end of the stick."

Next came Franklin Williams, Chairman of the Commission's New York State Advisory Committee, and he was with it as he brought out, statisticwise, just where we Puerto Ricans stood. He said that since 1969, when he assumed leadership of the Committee, the status, conditions, opportunities, and disadvantages experienced by Puerto Ricans had been a major concern of the Committee. In 1969, there was one Puerto Rican serving on the Committee. Today, 20 percent are Puerto Rican.

The work of the Committee is an ongoing job and does not end with the hearings. The Committee has investigated the status of Puerto Ricans in the construction industry in New York State, in the building trades unions, and it has reviewed the employment practices of the State University of New York, known as SUNY. SUNY, covering over 27 separate colleges, was discovered to have 32 full-time faculty members who were Puerto Rican, or about one-third of one percent, and only 14 full-time administrators, or four-tenths of one percent, who were Puerto Rican. The New York Committee also discovered that SUNY had no statewide equal employment policy and no affirmative action plans.

"How in God's name they hope to change that disgraceful picture of noninvolvement of our Puerto Rican citizens is beyond me," said Chairman Williams.

"It's been beyond us Puerto Ricans, too," I thought.

I lit a cigarette and heard Antonia Pantoja introduced as Executive Director of the Puerto Rican Research and Resources Center in Washington, D.C. She had been requested by the Commission to prepare a report, and she laid it on the line with her study of migration patterns of Puerto Ricans. It was tough and thorough. She cut down her original report in order to give time to others to testify, but I held onto her words. They spelled out the problem well. They jumped out con mucho truth. She said, in part:

Migration is not a new phenomenon for Puerto Rico. Between 1899 and 1944, approximately 75,000 Puerto Ricans migrated to the United States. . . . Around 1945 began one of the largest population movements recorded in modern history, which some believed moved about 1 million Puerto Ricans from the island by 1960.

Migrants have a better education than the population in general in Puerto Rico. Half of the migrants have completed 8 or more years of schooling, compared to 6 for the general population in Puerto Rico. Migration is a tendency among young people. In

1966, 79,600 migrants left Puerto Rico. 15,404 were between 14 and 20 years of age.

As I said before, the migrants start in the rural area, migrate to the cities of Puerto Rico; and then to the United States.

The problems experienced by the Puerto Rican migrants stem basically from two sources: the sickness affecting American society, which exploits, rejects, and relegates the poor, the racially and culturally different groups to the lower echelons of society.

The second source (is) a series of conditions and characteristics of the migrant group itself, such as being unskilled, not speaking English, and others. . . . On the race and color issue: most Puerto Ricans are either black or a mixture of black, Indian, and white. They suffer from the same racism and exploitation as American blacks. . . .

On the issue of the American urban crisis: Puerto Ricans live in the most urban Northeastern and Middle Western cities. These cities are being abandoned by the white middle class. Puerto Ricans are left behind, along with blacks and poor whites, to inherit the deteriorated services which these abandoned cities can still offer, without even sharing in the political power which governs them.

Following Ms. Pantoja's testimony, Diane De Priest, a Program Development Specialist with the Commission on Civil Rights, presented a staff report on the demographic, social, and economic characteristics of the Puerto Ricans in the metropolitan area. She said the metropolitan area is defined as New York City and four neighboring counties, Westchester and Rockland to the north and Nassau and Suffolk to the east on Long Island—a population numbering 11.5 million. Nine-tenths of the minority population is found in New York City.

Over the past decade, there have been substantial population shifts in the five boroughs. The Bronx is now a minority borough composed largely of Puerto Ricans. Brooklyn is approaching minority predominance; 42 percent of its population is counted as nonwhite and Puerto Rican.

Ms. DePriest's staff report indicated that Puerto Rican citizens are burdened with substantial problems. Since they are on the average more than 10 years younger than the white population, they suffer a disadvantaged position in the job market, where they compete with older whites who are both more educated and more experienced.

The average Puerto Rican family also finds it diffi-

cult to find decent housing. The supply of public housing is far short of the need. In large numbers, Puerto Ricans in Manhattan have been displaced through urban renewal activities, and they have not been absorbed by public housing.

In 1970, the national median income for all Puerto Rican families was approximately \$6,000, compared with \$10,200 for whites and \$6,300 for nonwhites. An urban employment survey, conducted by the Department of Labor in New York City in 1969, found that almost one-third of all Puerto Rican families were living below the poverty threshold. Ms. Pantoja's statement that the Puerto Ricans in the United States are "poor, voiceless, and invisible" was reinforced by these statistics.

I made some notes and then heard the next introduction being made and, like everybody else, leaned forward. Father Hesburgh was speaking:

"Ladies and gentlemen, we now have a Puerto Rican couple—a mother and a father of three children—who have been in this country a year and a half since coming from Puerto Rico. I would like to ask Antonio and Mrs. Martinez if they would kindly come to the stand and be sworn in."

I checked around and everybody including me was hanging in. For the first time since the hearings began, Puerto Ricans from the rank-and-file community were going to testify—some real, live Puerto Ricans, who live, eat, and sleep in a barrio community. All of us were silently rooting for the new witnesses. And though maybe a little nervous there was no lack of quiet pride and chevere dignity on their part.

The Puerto Rican couple were Sr. Antonio Candido Martinez and his wife, Antonia de Vera de Martinez. The questions were put in English and translated, and the Martinezes responded in Spanish. There was instantaneous translation of their testimony into English.

Their testimony revealed a story only too well known to many Puerto Ricans and other immigrants—a story of difficulty in finding a decent job, of securing adequate housing, of placing children in school, and of living in a society which speaks a different language. After only a few minutes of this, the hearing had to be recessed because of technical problems with the microphones.

I got up for a stretch and headed toward the toilet. I took leaflets being handed out, smiled at old friends, and went back into my mind. Congressman Badillo had covered the issues 360 degrees. I was memorizing as well as taking notes. For even though I'd be getting transcripts later, the first impressions

are usually the strongest in my mind. Herman had torn into the problems concerning bilingual education and the critical need for Federal and city funds for these programs. He made strong puntos (points) about job discrimination against us Puerto Ricans in the police, fire, and sanitation departments because of such a silly thing as height. "Caramba," I thought, "as if a six-foot tall man couldn't get wasted by a five-foot one and vice versa."

A joke told by comedian Dick Gregory began to tickle me. It seems that Puerto Ricans were having a rough go getting any representation on Chicago's police force, simply because they didn't meet the required height. Because of language and cultural barriers, they got little or no understanding from "Chicago's finest." Finally, when there was no other recourse, the Puerto Ricans rioted for 3 days and the height requirement was dropped to meet the Puerto Rican's average height of 5 feet 7 inches. "Imagine," Gregory would say, "if they had rioted for 3 weeks instead of 3 days, they'd have had midgets on the Chicago police force now."

"Man," I thought, "if they don't get you on your height, they'll do it intellectually." I walked back into the room thinking of Congressman Badillo saying, "Time for action is long overdue and it is time we be permitted to fully enjoy the benefits of this land."

Frustrated, angry cries had punctuated the testimony from time to time. It was the anger of a people forced to live as subhumans, crying "Let the People Speak" and "Equal Profits for Yankee Exploitation Equals Discrimination."

I found another chair, my first having been liberated. I listened idly to a hundred conversations and read signs held up by various groups:

**"THIS COMMISSION HAS NO POWER OTHER THAN TO CALL HEARINGS TO FOCUS ATTENTION AND SUSTAIN ITS EXISTENCE IN TERMS OF ITS BUDGET."**

**"USTEDES ESTÁN PREDICANDO LA MORAL EN CALZONCILLOS."**

In English that means, "You are preaching morality in your undershorts."

The gavel did its thing and the meeting was back in order. Everybody was ready to listen to Sr. Martinez. What follows is his story, told in his own words and translated for the official transcript. Each paragraph is his answer to a specific question. Several members of the Commission and its staff questioned Sr. Martinez. Consequently, Sr. Martinez had to cover

the same ground on several occasions. I have brought together his statements on each specific topic:

The reason for my coming to this country was because in Puerto Rico I was employed for 15 years (by) a U.S. firm there that (also) had a tax exemption for 15 years. . . . Upon the conclusion of these 15 years naturally, they either had to pay taxes to the government or they had to come back. So we in Puerto Rico found ourselves unemployed. . . .

I came to this country because I have four children and I had to think of a future for them. With this in mind I came to this country to work here and to educate them.

The first obstacle I ran into when I arrived was the problem of housing. I am living in a situation like I never thought I would find myself. In Puerto Rico I lived better than I do here. In Puerto Rico the conditions of housing that I had were much better than here. Here I am paying \$110 a month. I am living under conditions which are very bad.

I am paying \$110 for three small rooms. That is one bedroom, one living room which is very small, and a kitchen. And six of us are living at this apartment. We had to make the living room into a bedroom, put beds in there—beds that were given to me for my children to sleep. It is a shame to admit it, but ever since I have been living in that apartment we have been living there with no heat whatsoever. I have reported this numerous times to the owner of the building, and this man is only concerned about collecting the rent. But the service that he gives to the people that live there is very inadequate. I live in the lower end of Manhattan.

I have not tried in public housing because I have heard ever since I arrived that one has to have lived here at least 3 years to request public housing. This is the information that I have received. And after that you have to wait for several years.

I am now making \$84.50 a week and I work 35 hours a week. . . . Frankly speaking, I have had to take it because of necessity, not because I like it. According to my qualifications—I have had some education, I have completed one year of university studies at the University of Puerto Rico—I think that I should have some other type of work because the type of work that I am doing is like the work of a donkey. The type of work we are doing is carrying heavy loads and it is a very arduous physical work for the pay that we are getting.

The place where I work is a company where about

95 percent of the employees are Latins. Of this 95 percent, I would say about 3 percent are Puerto Ricans. The other persons who work in this company . . . are aliens. They come here as tourists and remain working here and then they send for other people. So you have the situation where a relative of mine, where I tried to get him a job in that company but I was not successful. But other persons were given employment of other nationalities, those who weren't nationals of the United States nor did they even have a resident visa to live in the United States.

We belong to a union. But . . . what they are interested in is getting their dues. They don't care once they get their dues.

Let me say, in Puerto Rico, the labor unions, when a collective contract is signed, they do have the kindness of providing the members of the union a copy of the contract in Spanish. That is the copy of the contract they have signed with management. But this is not the practice where I work here. I asked the chairman of the union for a copy of the contract, and he says he can't give it out because he is not authorized to do it or he doesn't have it. So I have to do whatever they tell me because I have no way or knowing whether it's according to the contract or not.

I was taking some courses at a school in Brooklyn but my English is not sufficiently good in comparison to the English of the teacher. I requested from the people the test in the Post Office, but since I don't know how to get around the city, the day I went to the place I got lost and I therefore lost the opportunity to take the test.

I have been reading ever since I arrived the different offers of employment that appear in the different periodicals, but all of these employments require young men, people under 40 years of age, and I am now 43 years of age. So I don't waste my time, realizing that I am being discriminated against because of age.

What I think about my children's education here in this country . . . they are practically wasting their time because they are not learning anything. First of all, they don't understand the language, and if they don't understand the language what good does it do to sit there in front of the teacher and just look at her face? It is wasting their time. They don't learn anything because they don't understand what she is saying.

I have two in school here, and the other one who

just arrived. . . . (She) took the Job Corps examination and is waiting for a reply from them. And the other one is not in school because she just arrived the other day.

Toward the end of Sr. Martinez's testimony, the following exchange took place between him and John Powell, the General Counsel at the Commission:

MR. POWELL. Mr. Martinez, if economic conditions were better on the island of Puerto Rico, would you like to return with your family to live there?

MR. MARTINEZ. Now we get to the point. In Puerto Rico, I wouldn't say that they are better.

MR. POWELL. No, Mr. Martinez. If economic conditions were better in Puerto Rico, would you like to return?

MR. MARTINEZ. If they were better, of course.

There was applause, and Chairman Hesburgh said: Gentlemen, may I break in for just a moment. We have a difficult time here making a record, and it's hard to make it if a witness is being pushed one way or another by applause or by harassment, and the only way we can possibly make an objective record for the good of all Puerto Ricans is to let the witness say what he has to say and refrain from clapping if you will. Thank you very much.

Throughout the meeting, there had been occasional outbreaks of shouting from some, interlaced with, "sh, sh, keep quiet" sounds from others. The atmosphere was tense. Now the people on the platform had reacted to what was happening out on the floor.

We all were obviously in mucho accord with Sr. Martinez's reply to his being asked if he'd like to return to Puerto Rico. No matter how bad or how good you got it here, the first generation Puerto Rican feels very strongly the pangs of homesickness for his Island, and those second and third generation Puerto Ricans like myself or my children feel the need for identification to a past. Diggit, only los pobres (poor) leave Puerto Rico to come to the United States.

I smiled, thinking of how many times in the past I had been told by non-Puerto Ricans who had been to Puerto Rico as tourist, "My God, I don't know why any Puerto Rican would leave such a beautiful Island."

"Bread, money, gold, a peso to make a living" was my answer. Diggit, wasn't that the greatest reason all the other different ethnic groups came to America for, "freedom from want?"

Like I was saying, I sure hope these hearings beat a blank. But I was worried, man. I was worried.

## Quality Education! Yeah, But For Who?

Next on the agenda was the subject of education. Michael Goldman, an attorney for the Commission, introduced a staff report entitled, "Public Education for Puerto Rican Children in New York City."

According to the report, New York City has a public school population of 1,141,075 children. It is the largest student population in the United States, with 392,000 blacks and 260,000 Puerto Ricans for a non-white enrollment of 57.2 percent. Mr. Goldman commented:

City schools have been plagued by low student achievement, high dropout rates, and a failure to graduate students with academic diplomas. For Puerto Ricans, these symptoms are especially severe. . . .

Part of the difficulty experienced by Puerto Ricans is attributable to language problems. In 1970, 14.4 percent of New York City's public school population, or 161,000 children, had moderate to severe language difficulties. Of these 161,000, 70 percent (137,000) were Puerto Rican.

Together, Mr. Goldman's report and the figures presented by Ms. DePriest painted a gloomy picture of Puerto Rican education in New York City.

Ms. DePriest had said that students with language difficulties made up 45 percent of all Spanish-surnamed.



students in the public schools and approximately 12 percent of the entire school population.

"The failure of the schools to educate the Puerto Rican student is documented further by citywide reading scores," according to Ms. DePriest. "The average reading score for Puerto Rican students at the eighth grade level was more than 2 years behind the national norm, and 81 percent of their group were reading below grade level." The Puerto Rican student was reading at a level below any other ethnic group in New York City.

"In 1971," said Ms. DePriest, "only 30 percent of the Puerto Ricans who had been enrolled in ninth grade in 1967 actually graduated from high school, compared to 50 percent of the blacks and 65 percent of the whites."



Puerto Ricans also have the lowest educational achievement of any identifiable ethnic group. According to Ms. DePriest, only 15 percent of the adult population over 25 have graduated from high school, compared to 48 percent of the nonwhites and 53 percent of the whites in the same age bracket. As for the school-age population, Puerto Rican children have the most severe reading retardation, the highest number of dropouts, and the smallest percentage attending college.

According to Mr. Goldman, the New York City school system operates over 900 schools, employing over 60,000 teachers and another 13,000 supervisory and administrative personnel. Only 7.8 percent of the teachers are black and 1.3 percent (or about 470) are of Puerto Rican or other Hispanic origin. There are 969 principals, and only nine are Puerto Ricans. Mr. Goldman concluded:

Puerto Rican school children have serious problems

of language and culture that are not being met by the community school boards, the Board of Education, or the State of New York. There are insufficient or inadequate bilingual and second-language programs. There is a lack of Puerto Rican and Hispanic or other bilingual teachers to conduct such classes, and there is a failure of the school system to utilize existing Federal programs for disadvantaged Puerto Rican students. These factors, Mr. Chairman, may well constitute a denial of the equal protection of the laws in New York City.

The hearings got nitty-gritty again with the testimony of three young Puerto Ricans who related their personal experiences as students in the New York City school system. The first to testify was Waldemar Gonzalez, age 24, employed by *Aspira*.<sup>\*</sup> Mr. Gonzalez wished to transfer from a vocational high school, Samuel Gompers, to an academic school, Morris High, in the Bronx. He was discouraged by school personnel who told him he was not equipped to handle an academic course. Because of his own hard work, and the support of his parents and *Aspira*, he successfully made the transfer, finished high school, and went on to college.

Asked about specific ways the schools could be more responsive to Spanish-speaking students, Mr. Gonzalez replied:

First of all, there have to be many more bilingual programs. What I would recommend is that bilingual programs be part of any curriculum, and that it should be offered throughout. And when I say bilingual, I'm referring to bicultural-bilingual classes. It isn't enough to have bilingual programs or token programs.

Another factor that I see as very important is economic imbalance that is found among students. Let's say a school in Queens gets allotted the same amount of funds per capita (that is, per student in the school) as a school, let's say, like Morris High School or Benjamin Franklin. It is not fair to the Benjamin Franklin School or to the Morris High School because there are economic variables that are involved outside of the school, and I'm referring to the home.

In other words, educationally there is much more invested in a student whose parents can afford to invest additional monies into that student's educa-

<sup>\*</sup>*Aspira* (*Aspire*) is an organization which fosters leadership in the Puerto Rican community through the pursuit of higher education.



tion outside of the school—anything from books to carfare to go to the library, etc. So that economically there is an imbalance. It isn't enough to give, across the board, (an) equal amount per capita in the schools.

Something else also which I know affected me, and I run across every day in my work, is the fact that there isn't Puerto Rican personnel, enough Puerto Rican personnel, in the schools. Our students do not have anyone they can identify with. They do not have anyone who really can identify with the problems and really be sympathetic to the problems of the Puerto Rican student. So that more Puerto Rican personnel are needed.

Gilda Serrano, age 23, a student at Columbia School of Social Work, was born in this country but went to school in Puerto Rico until the ninth grade. When she returned to the mainland, she came with recommendations to attend Hunter College High School, thanks to her academic achievement. But she was refused admission because she did not know English. The only school open to her was Morris High School, which had an "English as a Second Language" (ESL) program. When asked whether ESL was an effective teaching tool, she replied, "No, I wasn't learning English in the class at all. I was learning, or in other words, I was surviving with the other students."

MR. POWELL. Miss Serrano, did your lack of facility in English inhibit your ability to learn in other subject areas?

MISS SERRANO. Yes, it did.

MR. POWELL. Miss Serrano, would you describe the experience which caused you to realize that you had not developed much proficiency in English?

MISS SERRANO. A lot of it was reflected when I had to do homework. I couldn't read the book, and if I did read it I missed all the content. . . .

A good example of this is when I took the SAT to enter into college. I scored 277 in verbal, and I think I scored 500 in math, and that was because the math I didn't need anybody to teach it to me. That was self-taught with the background I had in Puerto Rico. And it also had a lot of personal meaning for me. The fact that I wasn't learning discouraged me, and I found that sitting in a classroom and not learning anything was really a blow to my ego. . . .

I take pride in saying that I learned English on my own and that whatever the teachers at Morris High School tried to push into me, they couldn't because of the mere fact they were pushing it. And if I had

the chance to learn in high school in Spanish, I would have learned something, so now I wouldn't have to say I wasted three years in high school.

Nineteen-year-old Madeline Rivera was a senior at the High School of Art and Design. At the age of five, she was sent to Puerto Rico to live with relatives. She attended school there up to the third grade. When she returned to the mainland, she did not speak English. There were no school programs designed to help her with the language problem, and even up to today she reads on an eighth-grade level. Although she hoped to enter college in the fall of 1972, she had had no encouragement from her school counselor.

MISS RIVERA. I was discouraged (from going to college) because when I entered the High School of Art and Design, they have there both programs, vocational and academic. When I applied for the school, I wanted academic. Therefore since my reading grade was so low I wasn't put in academic. I was put in vocational.

Now, I went thinking I was in academic all the time. I wasted really three years in vocational. Then when I'm trying to . . . be put in academic, my grade advisor, I went to her and she gave me a lot of run-around. She said I shouldn't bother going to college. I asked her why. She said, "Because you're going to be worrying too much about your homework." Now, she didn't tell me it was my reading grades at all. . . .

MR. POWELL. Miss Rivera, what changes would you bring about in the elementary and secondary schools to make them more responsive to the needs of the Hispanic and Spanish-speaking students?

MISS RIVERA. Well, I think if when I came to study here in this country if I would have been put in a bilingual class where the teacher communicated with the students in Spanish just as well as in English, I think my English language would have improved much more.

Later, Commissioner Manuel Ruiz asked Ms. Rivera some questions. Some of the people in the audience thought Mr. Ruiz was Puerto Rican, but he is a Chicano from Los Angeles.

COMMISSIONER RUIZ. You believe that from your experiences that if your teachers had been Puerto Rican and taught you to read in English, that you would have been a better reader and a better student. Is that correct?

MISS RIVERA. Yes, I believe so.

COMMISSIONER RUIZ. And insofar as the Puerto Rican child is concerned, and in the absence of a

bilingual program, do you believe that more would be accomplished if teachers were hired who spoke both Spanish and English and know the culture of Puerto Rico?

MISS RIVERA. I believe so. I believe that that would improve the students. It would even encourage him even more to learn by that.

COMMISSIONER RUIZ. That type of a teacher would be an inspiration to you?

MISS RIVERA. Yes.

COMMISSIONER RUIZ. And that type of a teacher would make you work harder and you would feel that you were accomplishing something, is that correct?

MISS RIVERA. Right, Right.

Commissioner Frankie Freeman was concerned about high school counselors and the attitude of the Puerto Rican students about the counselors' interest or lack of interest. Mr. Gonzalez said he had seen the college placement counselor at Morris High School only one time and did not get any type of assistance.

"Eventually what happened is I got into college through a special program, and it wasn't through the school efforts. It was through another agency's efforts." He meant Aspira.

Miss Rivera recounted her bitter experiences with her grade counselor:

"No, they don't make no effort to help you. And if something is wrong, they tell you you can't apply to this college because this and this and that. But they don't tell you how you can improve those means. They don't tell you that. I feel that's one of the worst things my school has. But the thing is, I've seen whites walking through the offices and come out with big smiles on their faces, and I say, 'what is this?' you know. I really think it's very bad."

Chairman Hesburgh and the Commission had visited Eastern District High School, the first high school with a Puerto Rican principal, and had noticed signs about Aspira. Mr. Gonzalez talked about the agency:

Well, as mentioned before, one of the important factors in the motivation of any student, especially in the elementary school, junior high school, is what happens in the peer group. And Aspira believes in the peer group methodology in developing motivation for higher education.

Also, one of the things that we have been doing and saying for a long time is that in order for a student to become motivated, in order for a student to want to succeed, he has to identify in a positive manner as Puerto Rican. We found that the Puerto Rican

student is stereotyped as a slow learner, mentally retarded. The fact that he speaks Spanish, he is labeled as a person who is not educated or is not intelligent enough to learn English.

We encourage our students to speak Spanish. We teach our students that it is a positive attribute to be bilingual. We point out to our students, for example, that in Europe you are considered an ignorant person if you don't know more than one language. These are the types of things that we communicate to our students and that our students spread throughout the school—positive self-identity, education, and, of course, being able to organize, to create change within the schools. . . .

(However,) we are not equipped, either in terms of personnel or financially, to correct all of the wrongs that the system has committed upon our high school students, all of our Puerto Rican students.

Following the testimony of the three students, Mrs. Bertha Gordon, principal of Morris High School was called upon to testify. Morris High School, located in the South Bronx—a poor, largely Puerto Rican community—has 63 percent Hispanic students, or 2,700 Puerto Rican students out of a total of 4,600. Of these, 409 are functionally illiterate. The school offers the traditional English as a Second Language (ESL) core classes and no bilingual programs. Mrs. Gordon agreed that there was a value in having a teaching faculty which is representative of the ethnic composition of the students. But so far her school only had eight bilingual teachers and three Hispanic teachers.

Mrs. Gordon said the school is beset by a heavy truancy and dropout rate. When asked what percentage of the dropouts were Puerto Rican students, Mrs. Gordon said:

Well, it is very difficult for us to determine accurately the percentage of dropouts of Puerto Ricans because of the housing pattern and the demolition of housing through the urban renewal development in the Bronx. . . .

A certain number, in fact 319 for this semester, have returned to Puerto Rico. There were 96 that we were not able to locate. There were 49 who were hospitalized or under medical treatment for drugs, for various reasons, and there are 401 that were transferred to other institutions.

So we say that on the whole, there is an overall 24 percent dropout of 17-year-olds that we cannot locate. Because of the housing patterns and the extended families that live within houses, we are not

able to accurately determine the percentage, and we feel this is an area where supplementary services are needed and definitely where more Spanish-speaking help is needed in order to go into the community, see what the problems are, and help these students return to school.

I had gotten up and moved around. There was some shouting from a young Puerto Rican and cries of "We have no representation up there on the Commission—only one House Puerto Rican." (They were referring to Commissioner Ruiz.) The marshals moved quietly but with a lot of efficiency and placed themselves in a ready position. Things were like getting tight, and one had to be dead not to feel the vibes. From the back-ground came an exclamation almost lost in the general shouting: "We don't even have a Puerto Rican flag up there as a sign of respect and courtesy." The militants ranged from young to pretty old.

MR. POWELL. We are talking about the Puerto Rican Spanish-speaking students and their dropout rate.

FROM THE FLOOR. Nobody can talk for the Puerto Ricans; just the Puerto Ricans. We don't want no blacks, we don't want no whites, we don't want nobody talking for the Puerto Ricans.

CHAIRMAN HESBURGH. I would like to ask the Federal marshal to kindly remove this person.

There was a lot of scuffling and people jumped out of their seats. Somebody yelled that the marshal had hit somebody, and in the melee everything became confusion. I saw some Puerto Ricans being led out. The shouting and chanting were deafening.

At this point, the official transcript reads: "General disruption of the meeting"—which is followed by Father Hesburgh recessing the meeting for 15 minutes. It was to be an hour and 20 minutes before the hearing continued, and it was to last only 5 minutes once everybody got back together.

CHAIRMAN HESBURGH: I would like to remind the lady walking out of the hall that these witnesses are under Federal protection and it is a Federal offense to either threaten, intimidate or harm them. (REMARKS FROM THE FLOOR.)

CHAIRMAN HESBURGH. I don't care whether you care or not, and I'm not going to get into a shouting match with you, but I just want to say— (REMARKS FROM THE FLOOR.)

To the best of my recollection, the remarks and shouting from the floor got stronger. One Puerto Rican woman was deploring the lack of grassroots commu-

nity participation in the hearings. She went from English into Spanish and back again into English, the gist of it being that they were sick and tired of all these educators and bigwigs testifying. They felt that the rule of subpoenaed witnesses could be waived and an open hearing conducted.

At this point—to the best of my memory, because too many things were happening in the pushing and shoving—someone said, "They haven't even got a Puerto Rican flag up there. Let's put one up there (meaning the podium)." The transcript again:

CHAIRMAN HESBURGH. Ladies and gentlemen, I want to apologize to our witnesses and to all of you for the affair this afternoon, and I would like to say that this is not a—

(REMARKS FROM THE FLOOR.)

CHAIRMAN HESBURGH. Ma'am, I would not like to have you put out, but—

Ladies and gentlemen, I want to say one word about this meeting. It is not an open hearing in the sense that you have many open hearings in New York. This hearing—

(GENERAL DISRUPTION.)

CHAIRMAN HESBURGH. Ladies and gentlemen, this is a Federal Commission and I see no point in getting into a shouting match with people who cannot keep order in this place. This meeting is adjourned until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

(Whereupon, at 5:25 p.m., the hearing was recessed, to reconvene at 10 a.m., Tuesday, February 15, 1972.)

A large group of men and women carrying a large Puerto Rican flag then came up on the podium. I heard the strains of the Puerto Rican anthem being sung. By this time, the Commission members had left the platform. I heard remarks: "So what if it got out of hand; they shouldn't have adjourned!"

As I walked out, a young sangre asked, "Hey, Bro, you coming tomorrow?"

"You bet."

I pushed my way through a sea of policemen, Puerto Ricans, and marshals and walked out into the street and down the block, leaving behind me a whole demonstration going full blast, complete with all kinds of police vans and outraged people. I split to a quiet place to make some notes while it was still burned into my mind. I looked back and I dug almost everybody was like shaking their heads from side to side in frustration.

I shook my head, too, and checked out.



## It's Going to Hit The Fan Again

The next day, because of what had gone down the day before, the streets around the Brotherhood in Action Building were chock full of more policemen. Bus loads were standing by, and placards and leaflets were all over the place. I sat in the hearing auditorium, trying to heat myself up with some hot coffee and a little angry at myself for having forgotten my rubber boots. The cold slushy snow out on the streets had left my feet soaked.

No need to say it, but even though people acted calm, the air was up tight. There seemed to be a small army of photographers and reporters moving all over the place. I think there were even more TV cameras. I guess some of the reporters were hoping for a news-

worthy, small-scale revolution. The gavel banged as Chairman Hesburgh opened up the second day.

**CHAIRMAN HESBURGH.** Ladies and gentlemen, the second session of the hearing of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights will kindly come to order. I would like to read a statement at the beginning here this morning.

Yesterday, in this hall, the only Federal agency designated by Congress to document facts concerning the denial of equal protection of the laws to minority groups in this Nation had its hearing disrupted while attempting to discharge this responsibility on behalf of more than one million Puerto Rican citi-

zens of the New York Metropolitan Area.

In the opinion of this Commission, Puerto Rican citizens have suffered too long and too severely to be deprived of any efforts of this Commission that might be spent on their behalf. . . .

We promised no miraculous solutions to the immense problems faced by this group of American citizens, but have committed ourselves to determining the underlying causes of these grievous situations. Using the findings we develop, we will report to the highest legislative and executive bodies in this land, the Congress of the United States and the President, on measures which, in our considered judgment, once we have assembled the facts, should be taken to start the long journey toward a resolution of these problems.

We do not intend to be dissuaded from this hearing and from this objective in New York City even though those who disrupted the hearing yesterday may have felt that they were acting on behalf of the Puerto Rican community. Neither were we dissuaded in Mississippi in 1965 or in other places and at other times by those who resented our presence on behalf of the civil rights of minority Americans.

I would like to underline here, ladies and gentlemen, that we are concerned with civil rights. We are not concerned with political matters, directly so-called.

In the 15 years of its existence, the Commission has adhered to a procedure that has effectively recorded the information it needed to back up its recommendations. That procedure cannot and will not be compromised.

It is a simple fact that in the preparation of this hearing we received the best advice we possibly could find from our Puerto Rican Advisory Committee, made up of Puerto Ricans in this city and from across the United States and from the Island. The Commission respects and sympathizes with those who wish to speak but have not had the opportunity because they have not been subpoenaed. We have simply said yesterday, and we say again today, that any man or woman here who feels that he or she has something important to tell us, if they would kindly put it in writing we will make it part of the record.

The Commission, however, must and will continue this hearing according to its statutory mandate. Any person or group not scheduled to testify can substitute written testimony. We would be happy to have

it. But the purposes of this Commission will not be served by shouting.

The Commission is pleased to announce that the Chairman of our New York State Advisory Committee, Ambassador Franklin Williams, has informed the Commissioners that the New York Advisory Committee to this Commission will assemble at an early date to hear the testimony of those members of the Puerto Rican community who are not heard at this Commission hearing. Such testimony will also be forwarded to the Commission, and all matters relevant to the jurisdiction of this Commission will be included in its report to the President and the Congress.

We would like to urge all persons attending the hearing to observe and abide by the procedures which were read yesterday by Commissioner Freeman. It is simply impossible for us to gather the facts to be presented to the President and the Congress with recommendations for improvement if people do not respect the presence of our witnesses and the presence of the Commission here to gather these facts. Anyone who refuses to abide by our rules or who speaks without being called here to speak will be invited to leave the hall by the Federal marshals.

The Commission intends to discharge its duty to the Puerto Rican citizens of this area and of the Nation. Your cooperation toward this end is a vital element in the success of this hearing, and we thank you in advance for this cooperation.

After Chairman Hesburgh finished, Commissioner Ruiz read the same statement in Spanish.

I looked around to get some kind of reaction to Chairman Hesburgh's words, and eavesdropping I got snatches of conversations.

"That's fair enough. If the Commission is going to get together with everybody that's got something to say, that's fair enough."

"If this had been done from the beginning, we could have all been spared all the screaming and yelling."

"Si, but look who's speaking today—all the big-wigs."

"You heard the man. Everybody's going to get their say."

"I hope we don't have any trouble today. Those militants don't represent all of us."

"They're just angry, woman."

"I'm angry too, and I'm not behaving like that."

"That's because you got a good education and a good job. You can afford to be angry in a cool way."

The conversations were in Spanish and English. It sounded like a humming tower of Babel.

"Tu sabes, maybe if people would shut up and listen instead of running off at the mouth we'd get something done."

"That's the trouble, amigo; we listen too much and don't run off at the mouth enough."

"O: man, if I ain't ashamed to be an American why the hell is America trying to make me be ashamed of being a Puerto Rican. There ain't a damn thing wrong with being bilingual."

"Yeah, if only your Spanish teachers were Puerto Ricans. How's anybody going to teach me of my culture if they don't know the first damn thing about us. Damn, that's arrogance."

And on and on the pros and cons intermingled. I turned off and went into my thoughts—like man, who bears the responsibility?

The Commission had been presented with overwhelming evidence of the failure of the New York City school system, with the high dropout rate, the high truancy rate, the low, almost negligible, number of Puerto Ricans educators and administrators, the severe reading and math problems of many youngsters, the lack of bilingual or even adequate English as a Second Language classes. How was this to change? Who bore the responsibility? For the entire second day of the hearing, the Commission sought the answers to those questions.

Until five or six years ago, the entire thrust was to teach English to non-English speaking students. It was not, and still is not, a requirement that teachers of English as a Second Language, who are teaching Spanish-speaking children, be required to know Spanish. Dr. Jerome Carlin, director of the Bureau of English, Central Board of Education, did state for the record that more bilingual instruction as such, and not merely English as a Second Language, was needed.

Students who are language-handicapped and who are frustrated in school naturally tend to drop out. Commissioner Mitchell was concerned with a possible correlation between the high dropout rate of Puerto Rican students and the inadequacy of the current language training programs.

There was no direct evidence presented on this question. However, Dr. Leo Bernardo, chairman, Department of Foreign Languages, New York City Board of Education, testified that "one ought to take a child exactly as he comes to school in terms of his strengths and skills. If he is Spanish-speaking, obviously much of the school day in the early years ought to be done

in Spanish until enough time has been given in the development of English skills."

CHAIRMAN HESBURGH. Now, if the reason that youngsters are dropping out, if you can believe the youngsters themselves who tell you this, is that they don't know what the teacher is saying. They are just sitting there listening, like as if I went to a Chinese school and sat there listening to Chinese all day, I wouldn't be getting much education. Now, if that's true, that one of the great reasons for students being frustrated, (is) that they don't know what the teacher is saying and they have got to have people whispering to them in Spanish saying what the teacher is saying, shouldn't it occur to you that your program of teaching a foreign language, or English as a Second Language, should have a much higher priority than it actually has? Do you think so?

I missed Dr. Bernardo's reply. My mind jumped back into time at Chairman Hesburgh's words. He was right. When I was a kid, I felt like I was sitting in a Chinese school. My God, there is nothing so frustrating as not to understand what is being said, what is being taught, and you can't ask a teacher who doesn't know Spanish, "What did you say?"

I can't count the times I got mucho bawled out for trying to find out in Spanish from another kid. No matter how bright you are, the lack of communication between the child and the teacher makes him a dull, backward child in the teacher's sight and a frustrated, rejected one in his own sight. So the child's mind is stunted perhaps for his or her whole life.

English must be a second language for such children until they become proficient in both. It has worked, it is working, and will always work. It's been proven. Out of these youngsters will be produced teachers, educators. My ears picked up the rest of Chairman Hesburgh's words.

You see, you are talking here about hundreds of thousands of youngsters. You are talking about a potential group being educated every year, certainly in the tens of thousands. But if tens of thousands of youngsters don't get an education and have no future, that means they are never going to have a decent job, they are never going to have a decent home, they are not going to be able to provide a decent livelihood for their . . . families.

I just think this is the cut-off point. If at this point the reason the kids are not getting educated is they can't understand what the teacher is saying, then the first thing to do is teach them to understand what the teacher is saying. And that ought to have

top priority. Otherwise, all the rest of the money, you might as well not be spending it.

Earlier, Chairman Hesburgh had said:

Now, the problem we have is that if we are going to get more Puerto Rican teachers, more Puerto Rican counselors, more Puerto Rican administrators, we are not going to get them unless we get youngsters through high school, into college and universities, and into specialized programs.

That's about the size of it, I agreed, except that it's not only getting them to understand what the teacher is saying but also for the teacher to understand what the kids are saying.

Frederick Williams, executive director for Personnel of the New York City Board of Education, was the next witness. He admitted that there was a limited pool of Puerto Rican professionals from which to draw because the school system simply was not producing them. In terms of affirmative action, the Office for Personnel had established a special unit for the recruitment and training of Spanish-speaking teachers. The program involves finding recruits, preparing them for the examinations, and paying their tuition for college courses. Also, it means recruiting in Puerto Rico. Yet, the net result is still relatively small.

Mr. Williams went on to say that the recruitment program was one-third its original size, because of cutbacks in Federal funding. He added that the Federal guidelines made the program difficult to implement.

In response to a question from Chairman Hesburgh, Mr. Williams admitted that only one-tenth of one percent of the principals in the New York City public schools were Puerto Rican. He was pressed as to what programs, if any, the school system had to train Puerto Ricans as principals.

It was at this point that some kind of hell started breaking loose. There was shouting in the audience from someone who wanted to testify.

CHAIRMAN HESBURGH. Look, please be quiet now. If we want you to testify we will call you up and swear you in.

(REMARKS FROM THE FLOOR.)

CHAIRMAN HESBURGH. I have asked the audience to kindly allow the man to testify.

(REMARKS AND SHOUTING FROM THE FLOOR.)

CHAIRMAN HESBURGH. Ladies and gentlemen, ladies and gentlemen.

VICE CHAIRMAN (STEPHEN) HORN. Lady, if you will calm down so the Chairman could speak it

would be appreciated. Ladies and gentlemen, everybody seated.

(SHOUTING AND DISRUPTION.)

CHAIRMAN HESBURGH. Would the gentlemen mind sitting? Ladies and gentlemen, this is the last time I am going to say this because I am not going to get in a shouting match. That is not what we are here for. We are here to try to interrogate witnesses and make a record. If someone in the room doesn't like that process, they are invited to leave. If we have any more of what we just saw, we are going to clear the room and we will have this hearing by ourselves and get the record made. Now, I want that to be understood. We are not going to go through this once more. If we have to have this hearing ourselves in a room with the witness, we will do it. There happen to be people here who would like to hear what the witness is saying, and nothing is being gained by all this shouting and yelling.

Now, I am asking the marshals, the next time someone in the audience speaks up like this, talks back to the witness, demonstrates in any way, I'm asking the marshals and the police to remove them immediately, and that's a standing order as of right now.

The hearing continued with Vice Chairman Horn raising the question if a Puerto Rican teacher can teach English in Puerto Rico, why can't that teacher also be in a bilingual program in New York?

Mr. Williams responded: "The only reason we can't is because of the requirement which is imposed upon us at the present time that they must go through a particular examination process before they can be used."

The Vice Chairman pressed his point by asking if a teacher's experience in Puerto Rico couldn't be counted as part of their qualifications. He asked, "Couldn't there be some equivalency worked out?"

Mr. Williams replied that there had been some success "in utilizing them in areas where there is not the same kind of specific licensed duties. . . . We can utilize persons who have a particular skill in the bilingual area and any number of developing bilingual and bicultural programs, because this is not solely a language matter but a cultural matter as well. . . ."

The next person called to testify was Albert Shanker, president of the United Federation of Teachers. Mr. Shanker's testimony was to be interrupted throughout with derision and catcalls, but not to the extent that total confusion reigned. The Chairman was able to maintain order during the lengthy testimony, but I

felt that the undercurrent from the murmurings going around was to let Shanker talk, and thereby hang himself with his "copout" of "quality education."

Mr. Shanker was asked what his union had done—positions adopted or programs supported—which might contribute to quality education for Puerto Rican children. He responded that the UFT called for universal early childhood education, the reduction of class size, programs in bilingual education, and integrated early childhood education centers.

"But we feel," he added, "that the basic answer, insofar as schools can provide the answer, is to provide a high quality of education, which includes starting earlier. It includes working with children, if necessary, on an individual basis."

Mr. Shanker went on to say that "the school is not the only agency in society that is responsible for educational failure." He also blamed poor housing, poor health conditions, and job discrimination. When asked if the school didn't have a significant degree of responsibility, he agreed and admitted, "It can do better than it is doing now if conditions were better within the system."

General Counsel Powell asked Mr. Shanker if he agreed that the Board of Examiners system "unduly screens out Hispanic teachers," since there are 260,000 Hispanic students and only 800 Hispanic teachers in the school system. Mr. Shanker not only did not agree; he found the question alarming.

"We do not recruit teachers from the ranks of children. And, therefore, the percentage of children who are in the school system has nothing to do with the percentage of teachers in the school system of any given ethnic or other group."

He added that the school system did not recruit teachers from the ranks of the adult population but from the ranks of college graduates, and concluded his answer by saying, "You cannot allege that the school system had discriminated."

A hot exchange took place between Mr. Powell and Mr. Shanker regarding the relative merits of the certification of teachers by use of the National Teacher's Examination and the Board of Examiners system. It turns out that all school systems in the State of New York, with the exception of New York City and Buffalo, use only the National Teacher's Examination.

Mr. Shanker said that his union had supported the use of the National Teacher's Examination, and that if he was to criticize the Board of Examiners it would not be on the basis of "narrowness," but rather because it was poorly funded.

Commissioner Mitchell, recalling that he was a product of the New York City school system, said that it seemed that since his time the city's population had changed, the school children had changed, but the "teachers in the classrooms haven't changed at all." Mr. Shanker disagreed.

Well, teachers in the classroom have changed. You know that if you go back a little bit at a time, when there were huge numbers of waves of Jewish immigration into the city, they were taught largely by Irish teachers, because the Irish had been a previous wave. . .

. . . we have always had with these waves of immigration a tendency for the teachers to be the group that had made up some previous wave, and that's exactly what's going on right now. There is nothing strange about it at all.

The union, Mr. Shanker said, represents 5,000 para-professionals, most of whom are members of minority groups. They had been selected by community agencies and were provided courses by the union and by the city. "Hundreds of them will begin teaching very soon," he added.

He noted that there were 15,000 unemployed teachers in New York City, which adds to the problem of hiring "new" teachers. He said that when there is full employment, the training and hiring of minority personnel is not seen as a threat—but the unemployed teacher sees it differently.

Mr. Shanker stated that there was no oversupply of teachers but a shortage of teaching jobs because of the failure of "expanding the public sector the way it should be." He said that teacher unemployment would be solved if children started to school at two and a half years of age, if class size was considerably reduced, and if special programs were developed.

Mr. Shanker said he was against the technique of using the term "bilingual" to hire a teacher from a specific ethnic or nationality group rather than any teacher who is truly bilingual. This, of course, does not satisfy many Puerto Rican parents who want the classroom teacher to be a Puerto Rican "success model" for their children. They also want someone who knows, and is proud of, the cultural heritage of Puerto Rico.

Mr. Shanker's statements were not going down well with many of the Puerto Ricans in the audience, and there were frequent shouts from the floor. After his testimony, a luncheon recess was called and I went out to grab a sandwich.





## More Big Shots . . . And More Trouble

The afternoon session of the second day of the hearing began with the testimony of three top school officials: Harvey Scribner, chancellor; Isaiah Robinson, president of the Board; and Joseph Monserrat, member of the Board and past president.

Mr. Monserrat, who is Puerto Rican, was asked if he felt that decentralization was working. He replied that he felt that the Board had "taken the first of a series of steps in the right direction" by providing information to the new District Boards—something that had never been done before.

Mr. Monserrat said that "one of the problems of the system is the mystery of the system." He went on to say that the Board had been busy trying to disentangle some of the mystery and provide information, not only to the local Districts but also to community groups. "But," he acknowledged, "we still have a long way to go."

Chancellor Scribner agreed with Mr. Monserrat and added, "I firmly believe that the concept of decentralization—that is, the decisions for the destiny of youngsters being made closer to the youngster—is a good concept." He conceded the Board was "somewhat in an era of tokenism in terms of decentralization" because local or District Boards did not have the right to "appoint, promote, or dismiss staff members within guidelines."

Mr. Monserrat said it was a big job to decentralize a school system which has more students than the population of all but seven cities in the United States, a staff of 113,000, and over 900 buildings. As he put it: "So when we start trying to decentralize this huge, monolithic structure that has been in existence for so long, many of the problems are not done that easily."

Mr. Robinson agreed with both Chancellor Scribner

and Mr. Monserrat that the local District ought to have the authority to appoint, promote, and dismiss teachers.

Mr. Robinson told the Commission about the case of one superintendent who had refused to accept teachers from the central eligibility list because he felt that none on the list met the special needs of his students, who were 6 percent Puerto Rican.

At this point, Commissioner Mitchell inquired, "The thing I can't help but ask you—here we are looking at the chancellor of the city school system, the president of the Board of Education, and the past president of the Board of Education—who are you going to ask for any changes in the rules?"

Chancellor Scribner replied: "We would have to go to the same place that the power structure goes to when they want to get us limited in our opportunity to move, and that's the legislature. We have more legislative control placed on New York City than we have the rest of the State."

Mr. Monserrat reminded the Commission that the dropout rate in the New York City schools in 1900 had been 90 percent and that the schools "have never done anything for the poor." He added: "The difference is that today, unlike yesterday, our kids can't afford just to fail out of school, because we now live in a society in which if you don't have the certification, you don't get the job."

Mr. Monserrat then stated what seemed to add up to his philosophy of education:

I really think that if we believe in the fact that education is for the youngster and if we can provide that teacher (one who loves children and enjoys teaching in the classroom)—because I don't believe it's going to be telephone machines or talking machines; it's going to be the teacher in the long run who is going to answer—then I think we are going to have to get some teachers who believe in children, who believe in the children they are teaching—and a lot of our teachers do but I'm afraid some of them don't—I believe we are going to have to believe in the fact our kids can succeed.

I think we are going to have to stop being afraid of our children, because I believe we live in a society in which adults are afraid of children, and any kind of a society like that is sick and we see this in the classroom. I think we've got to find a place where we can create a belief and a confidence in the ability of kids to succeed. I don't think we have that belief in our children.

That's for sure, I thought. If you got a sick society,

you can't help having sick children. So many adults in the schools fight and scuffle to hang onto their power that the children don't really mean a damn—like they're only a means to an end for the system's power structure.

The Commission seemed to like talking to witnesses in threes—the last had been Monserrat, Robinson, and Scribner, appearing together. The next trio consisted of Jacob B. Zack, assistant superintendent and coordinating superintendent of high schools; James Boffman, assistant superintendent, Office of High Schools, in charge of Manhattan high schools; and Joseph L. Brennan, assistant superintendent in charge of Staten Island high schools and roughly one-half of Brooklyn high schools.

Mr. Zack said that as coordinating superintendent he had "very limited direct line responsibility which operates through the individual superintendents." He did say he had one high school, John Dewey High, for which he has direct line responsibility.

Both Mr. Boffman and Mr. Brennan, as area superintendents, are responsible for high schools, academic and vocational, in their respective areas. The Commission's General Counsel wanted to know who was ultimately responsible for what.

MR. POWELL. Mr. Zack, what is the relationship between assistant superintendents and the principals in the high schools with respect to such matters as staffing, curriculum, bilingual, or second language, instruction, use of State and Federal funds?

MR. ZACK. That is a rather inclusive question. Let me begin by saying that in our judgment the high schools are the most decentralized operation of all of the operations of the Board of Education. Each of the high schools is encouraged by us to be an individual entity and to meet its own problems as it foresees them on the scene.

Therefore, the principals who operate with consultative councils consisting of students, parents, faculty, and also community members, who advise the principal and work with the principal in all areas affecting the school functioning, will attempt to meet their own problems directly on the scene.

We are not trying to put our fingers in their mouths. We work with them as hard as we can and as directly as we can and use the line authority when it is called for.

We meet, of course, in conformity with law which you heard explained by the members of the Board of Education and the chancellor, and we, perforce, must conform to the law as it is given to us.



MR. POWELL. Then you would say, would you, that principals have a rather wide discretion in meeting the needs of their students?

MR. ZACK. I definitely say that and they tell us that very frequently.

The exchange was important because the Commission was establishing for the record the degree of responsibility and authority of the central office staff, the local or area superintendents, and the principals. Pinning down which level of officialdom holds the responsibility and authority to appoint, promote, or dismiss personnel might help the Commission to recommend procedures which would lead to an increased use of Puerto Rican or Spanish-speaking persons.

Mr. Zack was asked how he would account for the

fact that "between the ninth and twelfth grades, 60 percent of the Puerto Rican students drop out." He blamed this dropout rate on "an examination which is required by the State which defines the range of ability or lack of ability in the handling of English." When asked if the dropout rate suggested that the needs of Puerto Rican students were not being met, he responded: "Well, it would suggest that they are handicapped. And I would not argue with you for a minute that their needs are not being met as well as they should be."

To hear Mr. Zack tell it, the high dropout rate was more because of an examination than the failure of the schools to reach and teach Puerto Rican youngsters.

Mr. Powell asked Mr. Zack if there was a citywide policy for bilingual education or second-language instruction for high schools. Mr. Zack said that "There is no citywide policy *per se*." Some few schools have such a program and it works, as we learned from the Puerto Rican students the day before. But Mr. Zack said there was no research or statistics to establish the validity of bilingualism as an improvement over current teaching methods.

Oh wow, I thought. What is this Mr. Zack saying? Look, you have one rare, articulate kid. It works for her but not the rest? In other words, Mr. Zack, you don't believe bilingual education is a valid method of teaching? Whew, I have always felt that what produces results is a good method.

What are you saying, Mr. Zack? That unless our children are taught your way, they can't learn? Later for you. There is mucho honor in bilingual education.

Mr. Powell didn't agree with Mr. Zack either, for he said: "I think officials at HEW might feel differently. They have a number of Title VII programs in the Southwest, and they maintain that there is data to indicate that bilingual education is effective."

Mr. Zack responded: "If that were well enough established, then I think it should become policy as the best method to be used, and we would, therefore, very rapidly and desiredly urge it upon our instructional staff."

Mr. Brennan was then questioned about the use of Title I funds for the College-Bound program and if he felt it met the needs of Spanish-speaking students. He replied that he thought it did but not for those with language handicaps. Which, of course, is *the* problem of most Puerto Rican students. It seemed to me we were going around in circles. I sensed that my people

in the audience felt the same way. The place was getting tight again.

Mr. Brennan was asked on what administrative level was the decision made to use Title I funds for the College-Bound program. He replied: "Those were made at the central headquarters level after application, generally speaking, by the high schools which wanted the program, the principals, the PTAs, and in conjunction or in consultation with the assistant superintendent."

He was asked pointedly: "Parents were consulted in the development of this program?"

He replied: "I really don't know. I have been superintendent in this area for less than—approximately two years. The College-Bound program was in the Eastern District prior to that time. I instituted College-Bound in the high school in which I was . . ."

He never finished the sentence. The room started to rock again. Amid the noise and confusion, the witness could not be heard.

And no wonder. We were hearing from people who were viewed by many as being against true equality education. Anybody could see that equality could come only from a bilingual program instituted by Spanish-speaking teachers. You didn't need experts to see that.

One very large question emerged from the crowd on the floor: "Did the Commission just come down to listen to those who wished to keep the education status quo or to listen to the Puerto Ricans of the communities whose lives and whose children's lives were being affected by the outcome of these hearings?"

People began to be escorted out forcibly. The angry shouts of some Puerto Ricans were intermingled with the frustrations of the silent ones. And from this point I will not describe the disturbances, for the majority were shouting matches of outrage. I will let the readers draw their own conclusions of what the frustration was like. There is no doubt in my mind that the Commission tried to do its best. Unfortunately, too often, the best comes when it may be too late. Like it took 15 years for the Puerto Ricans to get a hearing.

I personally do not think the hearing was a failure. It brought the problems out into the open—anger, emotion, truth of feeling, a people's right to a first-class citizenship. It did that and that's not a blank.

After awhile, the marshals restored some order to the hearing room. Chairman Hesburgh spoke to the audience: "Ladies and gentlemen, would you please be seated so that we can continue the hearing. Those who are not seated and who are talking can please leave. We will now continue the hearing. Please quiet

down. All right, Mr. Powell, start out." But the disturbances were already getting started again.

Mr. Powell tried to question Mr. Boffman, but the noise level was picking up. After a bit Mr. Powell said to Mr. Boffman: "Can you hear me? We have heard that another very serious problem in the high schools is poor counseling. Why aren't there more Puerto Rican or Spanish-speaking guidance counselors? Are the requirements too rigid?"

Mr. Powell was shouting over the noise. Mr. Boffman got the question and responded that the position of bilingual counselor was "of recent vintage" and anticipated an increase in their number in the near future. He added: "It is quite possible that the reason they had so few before is because of the examination system which prevented the offering of those candidates who might have known the second language very well."

He closed with: "I think an earnest attempt is being made now to get more bilingual counselors. We do have that position now."

Mr. Powell then turned his attention to Mr. Zack and inquired how principals were being selected now that the court had barred the old Board of Examiners tests for them. Mr. Zack replied that they were not being drawn from the old lists but that they did have to meet the requirements of the State Board of Education.

Mr. Marco Hernandez, acting principal of the Eastern District High School, was asked to step forward to testify. As he stepped forward, Vice Chairman Horn cut in to talk to the Federal marshals. "The witness is being intimidated from the audience here. I hope you will have the person removed if he intimidates the witness again."

Chairman Hesburgh repeated an earlier warning: "I would like to say again to our marshals, that anyone who yells out from the audience is to be asked to leave the hall immediately. With no exceptions."

Mr. Hernandez then testified, explaining that his high school is located in the Williamsburg area of Brooklyn and that the ethnic breakdown of the student population is roughly 60 percent Puerto Rican, 25 to 30 percent black, and about 10 percent others.

Just then the Federal marshals said they had had a bomb threat. The room was cleared and searched but no bomb was found.

Mr. Hernandez was not immediately available when the hearing was reconvened, so the Chairman called upon Dr. Murray Rockowitz, chairman of the New York City Board of Examiners.



## El Board of Examiners That's So Out of Date It Should Be Out of Sight

We Puerto Ricans already knew that the Board of Examiners is so set up that only those of their own ilk can pass through its pearly gates—like don't trouble yourself in applying for positions, Puerto Ricans. But read on and dig for yourself.

The Board of Examiners had come up time and time again in the hearing. Was it the main stumbling block, keeping out large numbers of Puerto Rican teachers in the school system? Dr. Rockowitz denied this charge and stated that there were opportunities af-



forded by the Board of Examiners for people of Hispanic background to enter the school system.

Commissioner Mitchell responded that, in fact, Dr. Rockowitz had been subpoenaed because the Commission was concerned with the possibility that the exams prepared and administered by the Board were unnecessary and, in fact, "a device to discriminate against the minority segment of the population of New York City."

Minority professionals and community groups have long believed that the Board operated to screen out Puerto Rican applicants. Chancellor Scribner, himself a member of the Board of Examiners, had not attended its meetings in over a year and a half and was publicly on record as opposed to its continuation.

Dr. Rockowitz, to demonstrate that the Board of Examiners was not winnowing out Puerto Rican candidates for positions in the school system, listed a number of newly created bilingual positions developed by the Board. Among them were the bilingual teacher of common branches, bilingual teacher of early childhood, bilingual teacher of school and community relations, bilingual guidance counselor, bilingual school secretary, and bilingual school secretary intern. He concluded: "I feel that these afford opportunity to people of Hispanic background to enter the schools."

Mr. Powell was interested in the results of testing for these and other positions. He asked Dr. Rockowitz if the Board of Examiners kept track, by ethnic background, of persons taking the tests, whether they passed or failed, and if they were appointed. Dr. Rockowitz said that the New York State civil rights laws prevented inquiries of this sort.

"Now I didn't say that," Mr. Powell replied, going on to point out that keeping records of the ethnic background of applicants, of those passing a test and of those winning appointment is not a "condition of employment" and is not, therefore, prohibited by law. Dr. Rockowitz responded: "Well, I am not familiar with the law. We have not invoked that option."

Dr. Rockowitz then declared: "I do not believe that this organization, which has been the open door policy to the New York City schools for 74 years, will be any different for any other group than it has been for the groups that preceded them. These conscious efforts (the new bilingual positions) are shown here in these documents to open the door wide to people of Hispanic background to positions."

Dr. Rockowitz said that the examinations served as "a civil service brake on efforts to control jobs and positions by means of influence."

Commissioner Mitchell spoke up: "Do you feel that other jobs elsewhere in the State are controlled by influence and that New York City is free from this because of the exams?" The audience broke into laughter.

Dr. Rockowitz noted that he, the son of an immigrant, had been able to "get into the New York City educational system" with the tests but would have had difficulty in some areas of the State where there was no test. Thus, he said that the absence of tests is no guarantee of nondiscrimination.

He continued: "If someone can point out to me that people of Hispanic background have been successful in Scarsdale, in Great Neck, in other parts of New York State, then I would say that . . ."

At this point Dr. Rockowitz was interrupted by shouting from the audience. Commissioner Mitchell tried to pose another question, but again there was a disturbance in the audience. Chairman Hesburgh again sought to proceed with the hearing:

Ladies and gentlemen, I have asked you a number of times not to bother the witness. He is here to answer the questions of the Commission and it may make you feel better to put in your two cents' worth, but at this point we would like him to answer the questions of the Commission and not be bothered as he does so. Go ahead, Mr. Rockowitz.

Dr. Rockowitz stated that speech patterns and accents are no longer a bar to passing the exams, and have not been since before World War II. "From World War II on, the speech standards have been those of a person who is literate, who can communicate with children, and accent is no bar whatsoever."

Commissioner Mitchell noted that the educational professional literature has included papers that suggest that a great deal of learning takes place when students teach each other and that some programs of self-instruction have been rated successful. He then suggested that the role of the teacher was changing and that the exams of the Board of Examiners did not reflect this change.

He asked: "Are we not coming up in a period of time when that kind of screen and that kind of evaluation is going to be increasingly less important and when other kinds of evaluation may be more important, one of them being a generally educated approach to the problem of relationships with young people?"

Dr. Rockowitz said that the bilingual teacher needs more skills to teach youngsters than does the teacher who doesn't come in contact with bilingual students.

He added that the bilingual child has a special learning "style," language problems, and economic difficulties, and that many of his problems are "grounded in the psychology of the ghetto." Such a child "needs understanding teachers, teachers who know not only the matter of educational theory but who have special training that we attempt to test in the bilingual examination."

Commissioner Mitchell was not persuaded. He asked: "If the exams are measuring competent teachers, what is happening to make the educational process so much less effective?"

Dr. Rockowitz answered that examinations are only one stage in the process. In addition, the teacher undergoes a probationary period and needs supportive services and further training. Dr. Rockowitz added that he didn't claim that the examination was the total answer to the problem of selecting teachers, but that "the examinations will say this much: that as of the entry date to service this individual had certain background and competency."

Commissioner Freeman then raised a question concerning test design that is of great interest to the Puerto Rican community "How much input, with respect to the examinations, do you get from the Spanish-speaking people, professionals?"

DR. ROCKOWITZ. That is a very pertinent question and a very complicated question to answer. (LAUGHTER.)

COMMISSIONER FREEMAN. Could we get an answer from the Doctor?

DR. ROCKOWITZ. Mr. Chairman I am speaking most earnestly and most seriously. I don't think that this entire subject is a subject for derision or laughter. I think it is a very important subject and I think Commissioner Freeman's question is a difficult question to answer and I am prepared to answer it.

CHAIRMAN HESBURGH. Mr. Rockowitz, you go ahead and answer it and I will keep banging the gavel.

Dr. Rockowitz explained that the four members of the Board of Examiners invite the supervisors of bilingual teachers and bilingual school and community relations personnel to participate in a committee to develop the examinations. Bilingual teachers and the bilingual community relations specialists are not invited.

COMMISSIONER FREEMAN. How many supervisors would there be?

DR. ROCKOWITZ. The answer is there are very few.

COMMISSIONER FREEMAN. How many of them would be Puerto Rican?

DR. ROCKOWITZ. On the order of approximately a hundred-odd.

COMMISSIONER FREEMAN. Did you say one hundred?

DR. ROCKOWITZ. Plus.

COMMISSIONER FREEMAN. One hundred Puerto Rican supervisors?

DR. ROCKOWITZ. Yes.

(DISTURBANCE FROM AUDIENCE.)

CHAIRMAN HESBURGH. Mr. Rockowitz, I am sorry to interrupt you and I apologize to Mr. Nyquist who is waiting to testify and to all the others who are waiting to testify.

For the second time this afternoon there has been a threat to the people in this building, and the last thing this Commission wants to do is to see people hurt or arrested and maltreated in several ways.

We came here seriously, to try to do something to find the situation in education, housing, the administration of justice, and employment. We began to make this record and the record was impeded every time we tried to make it, for the first time in 15 years. We have finished our record on education, practically, with the exception of the people who were going to testify from the Puerto Rican community in education.

So it has come to a point where the Commission believes it can no longer fruitfully carry on these discussions. We have been subjected to the kind of display of a small group of people trying to push around a larger group of people who wanted to do something serious. We don't take this to be the Puerto Rican community. We take it to be people perhaps not completely representative of that community.

(DISTURBANCE FROM AUDIENCE.)

CHAIRMAN HESBURGH. But, in any event—okay, that is your judgment and I accept it. But there are other people who don't.

Anyway, let me say that we are, as of this time, adjourning this meeting. We are adjourning this meeting and I think for everybody's personal safety it would be good to get out of the building as quickly as possible and as orderly as possible. Thank you.

## Conclusion: Our Country 'Tis of Thee, Too

Thus ended, with yet another bomb threat, the first hearing ever scheduled by a Federal agency to focus entirely upon the problems of Puerto Ricans. We never heard the planned testimony on problems in employment, housing, and the administration of justice.

What was to have been a 4-day hearing was cut short by demonstrations which got out of hand. What could the Commission have done to prevent this?

Some—if not most—of the problems might have been overcome by using a different hearing format, one in which time was provided for the appearance before the Commission of community organizations and groups not subpoenaed by the Commission. Or, perhaps it would have been possible to have had the New York State Advisory Committee hold public hearings, just prior to the Commission's hearing, and include that testimony in the overall record.

One thing is certain: the expectations of many members of the Puerto Rican community differed greatly from what was planned. The Commission failed to dig down deep enough into the community. I hope it won't make that mistake again.

It is only fair to say that the disruptions were not the will of *all* the Puerto Ricans present at the hearing. The overall consensus was that the hearing should not have been canceled. As one person put it: "If every time there was a disruption in a Democratic or Republican Presidential Convention and it were to be cancelled, where would the nomination for Presidents be?"

True, there were fears that the trouble would continue if the hearing continued. Uptight rumors had spun around the room that a phone call had been received that the Brotherhood In Action was going to be bombed.

It is very easy to believe such rumors. I can still remember the stinging in all our eyes from some sort of tear gas bomb that had been thrown during the hearing and yet, in my opinion, I find it hard to believe that even the most militant of our people would deliberately bomb the hearing and kill their own children and relatives present there. Only a mentally deranged person would be capable of such a terrible act.

The outburst of frustration only exploded verbally

against those present there who were continually striving to keep the educational system *status quo*, striving to keep total power of our children's education in their hands, and our people's dignity and rights ground into the ghetto dirt.

I am sure of one thing among others, and that is that the Commission on Civil Rights saw and heard from its brief but intense contact with us Puerto Ricans that our plight is a for-real *cosa* (thing). We as adults can, and have, stood a lot of punishment because of the inequity of justice in America. But it is more than anyone can bear to see our helpless children molded into nothingness and warped beyond repair—mentally, morally, spiritually, and worst of all, secretly. Any parent, regardless of ethnic background, would and must draw the line at this educational, emotional, social, and physical genocide.

The adjournment and cancellation of the hearing on the second day was filled with the heart-rending, emotion-packed agony that only year upon year of the society-inflicted burden of second-class citizenship can produce. It has been a long-suffering reality to Puerto Ricans on the bottom of America's totem pole here on the Eastern seacoast, as well as wherever Puerto Ricans are throughout the United States.

We are tired of our rightful place in America being denied because of color, language, and cultural differences. We are willing to learn about other ethnic groups, history and culture in the schools. Why is it so difficult to understand our wish and desire to learn of our own? It is written that "in order for one to know where he is going, he must know where he's come from." One must understand that when human dignity is involved, the human spirit cannot cop a plea. Humanity has got to walk tall or not at all, and continue in the struggle for a better today and *chevere mananas* (great tomorrows) for all children, which must and shall include Puerto Rican niños.

I once read somewhere that a land is only as great as its people. If every American could enjoy the fruits of true first-class citizenship, we would truly have a great land.

ADELANTE.

DIG IT!



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## READING AND VIEWING

### An Introduction to Recent Works about Puerto Ricans

by Paquita Vivo'

Consider this sign seen on a highway overpass during a recent political race in New York: "Badillo for Mayor. Viva Puerto Rico Libre!" Who are these U.S. citizens, many ask, who are clamoring for more par-



ticipation in the economic, social, and political life of the United States, while in almost the same breath they are asking for Puerto Rico's political independence?

Two very recent books shed some light on this perplexing question. In *The Puerto Ricans: A Documentary History* (New York: Praeger, 1973), Kal Wagenheim and Olga Jiménez de Wagenheim bring together a series of important documents and writings spanning five centuries of the island's history. The usefulness of this anthology, which also includes some selections on the migration to the United States, is enhanced by the fact that many of the selections included had not been previously available in English.

*The Puerto Rican Papers: Notes on the Re-Emergence of a Nation* (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973), by Alfredo López, explores the existence of the Puerto Rican in New York and attempts to explain it in terms of the island's history. Mr. López, who was born in New York of Puerto Rican parents, presents an account which, although sometimes blurred by its intensely nationalistic rhetoric, reflects the feelings of many young Puerto Ricans living in the United States today.

Several aids to locating the literature on the Puerto Ricans in the United States have been compiled and edited by Francesco Cordasco and Eugene Bucchioni. Among them is *Puerto Ricans on the United States Mainland: A Bibliography of Reports, Texts, Critical Studies and Related Materials* (Totowa, N.Y.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1972).

*Migrant in the City* (New York: Basic Books, 1972), by Lloyd H. Rogler, is a study of a Puerto Rican citizens' group in New Jersey, while Joseph P. Fitzpatrick's *Puerto Rican Americans* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971) examines the meaning of the Puerto Rican migration, focusing on the search for identity and the experience of Puerto Ricans in New York.

Two early works giving some insights into this subject have been reprinted in recent years: *The Puerto Rican Migrant in New York*, by Lawrence Royce Chenault, originally published in 1938, and *Puerto Rican Journey*, by C. Wright Mills, Clarence Senior, and Rose K. Goldsen, first published in 1950. Both books were reissued in New York by Russell & Russell, in 1970 and 1967 respectively.

Some reports and studies worth mentioning are *The Puerto Rican Study, 1953-1957*, J. Cayce Morrison, director (New York: Oriole Editions, 1972); *A Study of Poverty Conditions in the New York Puerto Rican Community* (3rd ed. New York: Puerto

Rican Forum, 1970); *Study of the Initial Involvement in the Social Services by the Puerto Rican Migrants in Philadelphia*, by Carmen García-Olivero (New York: Vantage Press, 1971); *Issues of Concern to Puerto Ricans in Boston and Springfield*, a report of the Massachusetts State Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights (Washington: 1972); and *Puerto Rican Dropouts in Chicago: Numbers and Motivations*, by Isidro Lucas (Washington: U.S. Office of Education, 1971).

Any introduction to the literature on Puerto Ricans in the United States, however, must necessarily take a glance also at the history, culture, and contemporary development of the island. Some English works by Puerto Ricans dealing with the island's history from its earliest periods include: Loida Figueroa's *History of Puerto Rico* (New York: Anaya Book Co., 1972); *Puerto Rico: A Socio-Historical Interpretation* (New York: Random House, 1972), by Manuel Maldonado-Denis; and Arturo Morales-Carrion's *Puerto Rico and the Non-Hispanic Caribbean* (2nd ed. Rio Piedras: University of Puerto Rico, 1971).

*The Sources of Puerto Rican Culture: A Critical Appraisal*, by Eugenio Fernández Méndez (San Juan: Ediciones El Cemi, 1967) is a useful inventory of basic documentary sources.

A glimpse into the island's soul might start with *The Puerto Ricans Spirit*, by María T. Babin (New York: Collier, 1971) and *Puerto Rico: La Nueva Vida—The New Life*, by Nina N. Kaiden, Pedro Juan Soto, and Andrew Vladimir (New York: Renaissance Editions, 1966).

Two scholarly and somewhat contrasting views of contemporary events in Puerto Rico are offered by Gordon K. Lewis in *Puerto Rico: Freedom and Power in the Caribbean* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1963), and Henry Wells in *The Modernization of Puerto Rico: A Political Study of Changing Values and Institutions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969).

This sampling has concentrated on English works that are readily available, published in recent years. Hopefully it will help readers understand not only the complexities and problems surrounding the approximately 1.5 million Puerto Ricans who live in the United States, but also the history, culture, and literature of the Puerto Rican community as a whole.

*Ms. Vivo* is the editor of *The Puerto Ricans: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: R.R. Bowker Co., 1973), the first source guide to 2,600 print and non-print items about the island, its history, and its people.



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