



# BUILDING A MORE PERFECT UNION

PART II



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FOR THE  
HUMANITIES

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**UNION**

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HISTORY DAY



# “SEPARATE BUT UNEQUAL” CITIZENSHIP: PUERTO RICO SINCE THE JONES- SHAFROTH ACT OF 1917

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## GUIDING QUESTION:

How has the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico affected the development of democracy and self-determination for Puerto Ricans?

## OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will explore Puerto Rico’s history as a Spanish colony through the U.S. occupation and the Commonwealth period. They will analyze primary and secondary sources to gain perspective on how the U.S. presence has both fostered and limited democracy for Puerto Ricans.

## OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this activity, students will be able to:

- > Explain how the Spanish-American War transformed the United States into an overseas power, which included the annexation and control of Puerto Rico from Spain;
- > Analyze American attitudes toward colonized people through political cartoons;
- > Evaluate the degree to which the Jones-Shafroth Act (1917) and the Puerto Rican Constitution (1952) offered citizenship and sovereignty to Puerto Ricans; and
- > Evaluate the impact that partial sovereignty has on contemporary Puerto Rico.

## STANDARDS CONNECTIONS

### CONNECTIONS TO COMMON CORE

- > CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
- > CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.6 Evaluate authors’ differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors’ claims, reasoning, and evidence.

### CONNECTIONS TO C3 FRAMEWORK

- > D2.Civ.2.9-12. Analyze the role of citizens in the U.S. political system, with attention to various theories of democracy, changes in Americans’ participation over time, and alternative models from other countries, past and present.
- > D2.His.16.9-12. Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.

## DOCUMENTS USED

### PRIMARY SOURCES

Jones-Shafroth Act, 1917 (excerpt)  
Puerto Rico Citizenship Archives Project, University of Connecticut  
<https://scholarscollaborative.org/PuertoRico/items/show/4>

Political cartoon, Charles Lewis Bartholomew, *Will Wear the Stars and Stripes*, May 7, 1898  
Library of Congress (2016678205)  
<https://www.loc.gov/item/2016678205/>

Political cartoon, Louis Dalrymple, *School Begins*, January 25, 1899  
Library of Congress (2012647459)  
<https://www.loc.gov/item/2012647459/>

Preamble, Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, 1952  
Justia US Law  
<https://law.justia.com/constitution/puerto-rico/constitution-of-the-commonwealth-of-puerto-rico-1952/>

Speech, Pedro Albizu Campos, September 23, 1950 (excerpt, translation)  
Belmont Media Center  
<https://www.belmontmedia.org/watch/part-2-nelson-denis-us-persecution-puerto-rican-independence-leader-pedro-albizu-campos>

The political cartoons used in this lesson use the terminology and imagery common when they were created. Remind students that in all discussions and written commentary, they should use modern-day terminology (Puerto Rican children, Puerto Rican women, etc.)

## SECONDARY SOURCE

“Fighting For Paradise: Puerto Rico’s Future,” June 24, 2021  
[5:45–27:20]  
CBS News  
<https://youtu.be/pfO5RwyEWfg?t=354>

## TEACHER-CREATED MATERIALS

- > Background Information
- > U.S. Imperialism Political Cartoon Analysis Activity
- > Source Analysis Packet

## ACTIVITY PREPARATION

- > Make one copy of the Background Information, U.S. Imperialism Political Cartoon Analysis Activity, and Source Analysis Packet for each student.
- > Arrange the classroom for group work.
- > Organize students into groups of three or four students each.
- > Preview visual materials to determine appropriateness for students.

## PROCEDURE

### ACTIVITY ONE: INTRODUCTION (20 MINUTES)

- > Distribute and review the Background Information with students. Be sure students can locate Puerto Rico on a map.
- > Project the political cartoon *Will Wear the Stars and Stripes* to the class.
- > Ask students to begin by making direct observations about the cartoon. Prompts may include:
  - » *Describe the two figures.*
  - » *What expressions do you see on their faces?*
  - » *What is the taller man holding?*
  - » *How is the shorter man dressed?*
- > Ask students to reflect on the cartoon. Prompts can include:
  - » *Who does the taller man represent?*
  - » *What is the artist’s purpose in drawing the shorter man with limited clothing?*
  - » *What is the cartoon’s message?*
  - » *How does the cartoon relate to the time period?*

### ACTIVITY TWO: PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS (60 MINUTES)

- > Organize students into groups of three or four students each.
- > Explain to students that they will analyze a political cartoon from 1899. Remind them that in all discussions and written commentary, they should use modern-day terminology in their analysis.
- > Distribute the U.S. Imperialism Political Cartoon Analysis Activity. Consider sharing this digitally so students can zoom in as needed to see the details in the cartoon.
- > Allow groups to analyze the cartoon and its various segments. Circulate among students to provide support and offer suggestions. Emphasize that their summary should incorporate evidence from the cartoon and the Background Information.
- > Explain that debates over democracy and sovereignty did not end in 1899.
- > Distribute copies of the Source Analysis Packet and give students time to analyze the sources and answer the questions.

## CONNECTIONS

As the United States expanded, it struggled to determine how best to engage the people who lived in the places where it took control. This resource provides lessons that help students see how individuals and groups acted as agents, resisting harmful policies in Native American boarding schools while moving to new locations to find a better life in the Great Migration.

### ACTIVITY THREE: SYNTHESIS (15 MINUTES)

- > Lead a class discussion:
  - » *The cartoons at the beginning suggested that the United States would teach Puerto Rico how to govern itself. To what extent is that true?*
  - » *The United Nations declared in 1953 that Puerto Rico was no longer a colony and was self-governing. Others argue that Puerto Rico is, in fact, still a colony. Based on what you have learned, what do you think?*

### ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

- > Teachers can collect student analysis of the political cartoon *School Begins*.
- > Students can respond to the guiding question in written or oral form.
- > Students can watch the video, *Fighting for Paradise: Puerto Rico's Future* [5:45–end] and discuss:
  - » *What are the effects of self-government on Puerto Rico today?*
  - » *How has Puerto Rico succeeded?*
  - » *How has Puerto Rico struggled?*

### STUDENTS INTERESTED IN THIS TOPIC MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN RESEARCHING THE FOLLOWING FOR AN NHD PROJECT

- > The Philippine-American War (1899–1902)
- > The Puerto Rican Nationalist Uprisings (1950–1953)
- > The Puerto Rico Olympic Movement (1948–present)
- > “Fuera La Marina de Vieques”—Puerto Rico Protests against the U.S. Navy (2000–2001)

**To access a PDF containing all of the sources and materials to complete this lesson plan, go to:**

**[NHD.ORG/250](https://www.nhd.org/250)**

## EDSITEment!

RELATED RESOURCES

BackStory: After Hurricane Maria—The History of Puerto Rico and the United States  
<https://edsitement.neh.gov/media-resources/backstory-after-hurricane-maria-history-puerto-rico-and-united-states>

Lesson Plan: Hawaii's Annexation and Statehood: How the Island Nation Became an American Frontier  
<https://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/hawaiis-annexation-and-statehood-how-island-nation-became-american-frontier>

Lesson Plan: Lesson 1: The Question of an American Empire  
<https://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/lesson-1-question-american-empire>

Lesson Plan: Lesson 2: “To Elect Good Men”: Woodrow Wilson and Latin America  
<https://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plans/lesson-2-elect-good-men-woodrow-wilson-and-latin-america>

# BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Puerto Rico has been populated by the Taíno people migrating through the Caribbean since approximately 1000 CE. In 1493, Christopher Columbus landed in Puerto Rico on his second voyage. In 1508, Juan Ponce de León established the first permanent Spanish settlement in Puerto Rico and was named as Puerto Rico's first governor by the King of Spain. In the next century, the Indigenous people were ravaged by disease.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1800s, the United States stepped onto the world stage as an overseas power. Between 1800 and 1822, most Latin American countries (including Argentina, Peru, Colombia, and Mexico) overthrew European colonial rule and became independent. In response, the U.S. issued the Monroe Doctrine, which warned the European imperialist nations to stay out of the Western hemisphere.

In 1898, the United States clashed with Spain in the Spanish-American War. This war allowed the United States to display its military power with victories in Cuba and the Philippines. In July 1898, American troops landed in Puerto Rico and took control. By August, the war was over. In the Treaty of Paris (1898), the United States annexed overseas territories in Asia (the Philippines and Guam) and the Caribbean (Puerto Rico).



Map of the Spanish-American War in the West Indies, published in 1898. Library of Congress (98687149).

The United States had long been interested in Puerto Rico because of its strategic military location. The U.S. quickly installed a military government on the island. In 1900, Congress passed the Foraker Act, which created a civilian government directed from Washington, D.C. The United States maintained direct colonial control over Puerto Rico for the next 50 years. In 1901, in a series of cases known as the Insular Cases, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld imperialist policy and designated Puerto Rico as an “unincorporated territory.” Residents were considered citizens of Puerto Rico and “U.S. nationals” but were not afforded full civil or constitutional rights.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Robert M. Poole, “What Became of the Taíno?,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, October 2023. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/what-became-of-the-taino-73824867/>.

<sup>2</sup> “Foreign in a Domestic Sense: Hispanic Americans in Congress During the Age of U.S. Colonialism and Global Expansion, 1898–1945,” United States House of Representatives, accessed January 23, 2023. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-CDOC-108hdoc225/pdf/GPO-CDOC-108hdoc225-2-3.pdf>.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION (CON'T)

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The Jones-Shafroth Act granted Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship in 1917, but the U.S. maintained control over the government.<sup>3</sup> Two months later, Congress passed the Selective Service Act of 1917, which meant these new citizens could be drafted into the military during World War I.

Following World War II, the United Nations began to push for decolonization. The United States authorized Puerto Rico to create its own constitution in 1950, and in 1952, Puerto Rico became the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico with limited self-government under U.S. authority. Puerto Ricans enjoy the benefits of U.S. citizenship and free movement back and forth to the mainland. After World War II, approximately 20% of the population (over 500,000 Puerto Ricans) moved to the United States, many settling in and around New York City.<sup>4</sup>



Photograph of a young man with a Puerto Rican flag, c. 1970. Library of Congress (2012649144).

In 1996, Congress revoked tax incentives for U.S. companies based in Puerto Rico, triggering a recession and debt crisis. The economic situation worsened in 2017, when Hurricane Maria battered the island and damaged or destroyed much of its electrical infrastructure. Some parts of the island were without power for over a year. In 2020, a 6.4-magnitude earthquake struck the island. These challenges led to increased emigration, and Puerto Rico's population decreased by 12% between 2010 and 2020.<sup>5</sup>

Today, approximately three million Puerto Ricans live on the island, with another five million living elsewhere in the U.S. Puerto Ricans are predominantly Spanish-speaking U.S. citizens.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "1917 Jones Act [H.R. 9533], Pub. L. No. 64-368," Puerto Rico Citizenship Archives Project, University of Connecticut, accessed February 24, 2023. <https://scholarscollaborative.org/PuertoRico/items/show/4>.

<sup>4</sup> Iván Román, "Why Puerto Rican Migration to the US Boomed After 1945," HISTORY®, updated October 5, 2022, accessed January 23, 2023. <https://www.history.com/news/puerto-rico-great-migration-postwar>.

<sup>5</sup> Jason Schachter and Angelica Menchaca, "'New Population Estimates Rely on Monthly Flight Data to Capture Puerto Rico's Migration Flows,'" U.S. Census Bureau, updated December 21, 2021, accessed January 23, 2023. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/12/net-outmigration-from-puerto-rico-slows-during-pandemic.html> and Matthew Martinez, "Puerto Rico Lost Nearly 12% of Its Population in a Decade," Population Reference Bureau, updated June 25, 2021, accessed March 1, 2023. <https://www.prb.org/articles/puerto-ricos-population-declined-by-12-percent-between-2010-and-2020-where-did-they-go/>.

<sup>6</sup> "Key Facts About U.S. Latinos for National Hispanic Heritage Month," Pew Research Center, updated September 23, 2022, accessed February 24, 2023. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/09/22/key-facts-about-us-latinos-for-national-hispanic-heritage-month/#:~:text=The%20U.S.%20Hispanic%20population%20reached,increase%20in%20the%20Asian%20population.>



# POLITICAL CARTOON

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Political Cartoon, Charles Lewis Bartholomew, *Will Wear the Stars and Stripes*, May 7, 1898  
Library of Congress (2016678205)  
<https://www.loc.gov/item/2016678205/>







# U.S. IMPERIALISM POLITICAL CARTOON ANALYSIS ACTIVITY (CON'T)

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Political cartoon, Louis Dalrymple, *School Begins*, January 25, 1899  
Library of Congress (2012647459)  
<https://www.loc.gov/item/2012647459/>



Who is the teacher and how is he portrayed? What are the books on his desk?

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# U.S. IMPERIALISM POLITICAL CARTOON ANALYSIS ACTIVITY (CON'T)

Political cartoon, Louis Dalrymple, *School Begins*, January 25, 1899  
Library of Congress (2012647459)  
<https://www.loc.gov/item/2012647459/>



Describe these “students.”

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# SOURCE ANALYSIS PACKET: SOURCE A

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Jones-Shafroth Act, 1917 (excerpt)  
Puerto Rico Citizenship Archives Project, University of Connecticut  
<https://scholarscollaborative.org/PuertoRico/items/show/4>

**Historical Context:** The U.S. Congress passed the Jones-Shafroth Act in March 1917 “to provide a civil government for Puerto Rico, and for other purposes.” The act established a Bill of Rights and a government of three branches for the island. It also gave Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship, which they still enjoy today. In this document (and others from the time) Puerto Rico is spelled “Porto Rico.”

Sec. 5. That all citizens of Porto Rico, as defined by section seven of the Act of April twelfth, nineteen hundred, “temporarily to provide revenues and a civil government for Porto Rico, and for other purposes,” and all natives of Porto Rico who were temporarily absent from that island on April eleventh, eighteen hundre and ninety-nine, and have since returned and are permanently residing in that island, and are not citizens of any foreign county, are hereby declared, and share been deemed and held to be, citizens of the United States . . .

Executive Department

Sec. 12. That the supreme executive power shall be vested in an executive officer, whose official title shall be “The Governor of Porto Rico.” He shall be appointed by the President, bu and with the advice and consent of the Senate, and hold his office at the pleasure of the President and until his successor is chosen and qualified. The governor shall reside in Porto Rico during his official incumbency and maintain his office at the seat of government. He shall have general supervision and contol of all the departments and bureaus of the government in Porto Rico, so far as is not inconsistent with the provisions of this Act, and shall be commander in chief of the militia. He may grant pardons and reprieves and remit fines and forfeitures for offenses against the laws of Porto Rico, and respites for all offenses against the laws of the United States until the decision of the President can be ascertained, and may veto any legislation enacted as hereinafter provided . . .

## Questions:

How did this act change the political status for the people of Puerto Rico?

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How does this act relate to the political cartoon, *Will Wear Stars and Stripes*, from 1899 studied earlier in this lesson?

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Who was the leader of the Executive Branch of Puerto Rico and how are they selected for the job?

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# SOURCE ANALYSIS PACKET: SOURCE B

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Speech, Pedro Albizu Campos, September 23, 1950 (excerpt, translation)<sup>1</sup>

**Historical Context:** Pedro Albizu Campos was the leader of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party from the 1930s through the 1950s. He held a law degree from Harvard University and was a World War I veteran. Albizu Campos believed that the United States’ control of Puerto Rico was illegal based on the fact that Spain had granted Puerto Rico autonomy in 1897. He was repeatedly imprisoned by the U.S. authorities for his actions. This speech was delivered on September 23, 1950, in Lares, Puerto Rico, on the anniversary of the “Grito de Lares” uprising against the Spanish in 1868.

“ . . . Within the framework of positive international law Puerto Rico was a sovereign nation on the date of the drafting of the Treaty of Paris . . . Spain could no more cede [give up] Puerto Rico than the United States could annex Puerto Rico . . . because the recognition of a nation’s sovereignty is irrevocable. And when the United States, with its artillery, obligated the Spanish plenipotentiaries [diplomats] to sign the so-called cession of Puerto Rico, like it was simply committing a holdup, of a sort that is typical of North Americans—and that coercion of Spanish will bore no legitimacy in Puerto Rico, because Puerto Rico is a sovereign nation. It had nothing to do with the Spanish-American War. It was never a belligerent party on behalf of the U.S. or anyone.

And the Yankees have been here for over 52 years, waging war on the Puerto Rican nation. And they’ve never once acquired a right in Puerto Rico. There is no legal government in Puerto Rico, and that’s incontestable. You’d have to knock to pieces the entire framework of world law, of international law, to validate the U.S. invasion of Puerto Rico and the present military occupation of our national territory. . . .”

## Questions:

What perspective does Albizu Campos have about the United States’ relationship with Puerto Rico? Provide evidence to support your claim.

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Why would Albizu Campos choose to give this speech in this place (Lares, Puerto Rico) on this date (September 23, 1950)?

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in “Part 2: Nelson Denis on the U.S. Persecution of Puerto Rican Independence Leader Pedro Albizu Campos,” Belmont Media Center, accessed February 24, 2023. <https://www.belmontmedia.org/watch/part-2-nelson-denis-us-persecution-puerto-rican-independence-leader-pedro-albizu-campos>.

## SOURCE ANALYSIS PACKET: SOURCE B (CON'T)

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Return to the Background Information. What happened immediately before and after this speech?

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Consider historical context: how did the events that happened influence this speech?

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# SOURCE ANALYSIS PACKET: SOURCE C

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Preamble, Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, 1952

Justia US Law

<https://law.justia.com/constitution/puerto-rico/constitution-of-the-commonwealth-of-puerto-rico-1952/>

**Historical Context:** After the U.S. Congress passed Law 600 in 1950 authorizing Puerto Rico to write its own constitution, three events happened. First, the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party members rebelled, but were quickly silenced by the U.S. military. Second, Puerto Rico wrote and adopted a constitution that created limited self-rule as the “Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.” And third, the United Nations removed Puerto Rico from its list of recognized colonies. Below is the Preamble to the Puerto Rican Constitution that states the principles of democracy within the authority of the United States.

“We, the people of Puerto Rico, in order to organize ourselves politically on a fully democratic basis, . . . do ordain and establish this Constitution for the commonwealth which, in the exercise of our natural rights, we now create within our union with the United States of America. In so doing, we declare:

The democratic system is fundamental to the life of the Puerto Rican community; We understand that the democratic system of government is one in which the will of the people is the source of public power, the political order is subordinate to the rights of man, and the free participation of the citizen in collective decisions is assured;

We consider as determining factors in our life our citizenship of the United States of America and our aspiration continually to enrich our democratic heritage in the individual and collective enjoyment of its rights and privileges; our loyalty to the principles of the Federal Constitution; the co-existence in Puerto Rico of the two great cultures of the American Hemisphere; . . . and our hope for a better world based on these principles.”

## Questions:

How does the Puerto Rican Constitution acknowledge U.S. authority over Puerto Rico? Provide evidence.

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How does the Puerto Rican Constitution relate to the political cartoon, *School Begins*, studied earlier in this lesson?

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