



REMARKS BY THE GOVERNOR
OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO
HON. RAFAEL HERNANDEZ COLON
AT THE DINNER IN HONOR
OF THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR
TO THE UNITED STATES

APRIL 10, 1991

Mr. Ambassador, Madame Andreani, Mr. Consul-General, Madame Bouchet, distinguished guests:

It is a great honor and a real pleasure to welcome you to Puerto Rico. The distance between San Juan and Paris measured in kilometers is long, but measured in sentimental feelings it is not great. France is a country that has a special place in our hearts--for its long tradition of passion for liberty, for its deep concern for humanity, and for the rights which it ennobled in the celebrated Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen whose bicentennial we marked two years ago.

The numerous Puerto Ricans who have traveled to France or who fought in France as U.S. soldiers during both World Wars and others who have read French history and its literature, have come to know and admire the lively intelligence of the French people and the richness of their culture.

The first french Consulate in any foreign country was established in Puerto Rico more than one hundred and twenty five years ago. We felt

then and feel now that this is a distinct honor. We sincerely hope that the Consulate will continue for many years to be the focus and promoter of French culture in Puerto Rico, as it has been for many decades.

There is a minor but interesting detail about French and Puerto Rican relations of which you may not be aware. It took place during the reign of King Louis XIV, the Sun King. On that occasion our ambassador to Versailles was coffee. Puerto Rican coffee was so admired for its rich taste that the King chose to offer it at his banquets as evidence of his court's taste and sophistication. Menus dating back to that period feature "café de Porto-Rico". We like to believe that our coffee still enjoys favor abroad.

While you are in Puerto Rico, I hope you will take advantage of your stay to explore Old San Juan, which is, only after Santo Domingo, the oldest inhabited city in the Western Hemisphere, almost 500 years old. We do not live on our history, however. As you drive out into the

countryside, you will see some of the 2,000 industries which have transformed Puerto Rico from an impoverished island to a major industrial center. Since 1941, our economic growth rate has been the highest in the Western Hemisphere, and our per capita income exceeds that of any Spanish-speaking country. We are proud of these achievements.

We are very proud to have you here, Mr. Ambassador. Your visit to our country is a great honor and fills us with great pleasure. I raise my glass on behalf of all my fellow citizens and all those who have always seen in France a beacon of liberty, and wish good health and prosperity to the President of the French Republic, to you, Mr. Ambassador and to your lovely wife and to all Frenchmen and Frenchwomen wherever they may be. Long live the friendship between France and Puerto Rico. Vive la France! Vive la République française!