



CONFERENCIA DICTADA POR EL HON. PRESIDENTE
DEL SENADO A UN GRUPO DE ESTUDIANTES DE
TEMPLE UNIVERSITY.

28 DE AGOSTO DE 1970



FIRST OF ALL, LET ME SAY THAT IT IS INDEED A PLEASURE
TO BE HERE WITH YOU TONIGHT TO DISCUSS SOME OF THE PROBLEMS
FACED BY TEACHERS WORKING WITH PUERTO RICAN STUDENTS WITHIN
THE UNITED STATES FRAMEWORK.

IT ISN'T EVERY DAY THAT A POLITICIAN HAS THE PLEASURE
OF ADDRESSING SO MANY PH. D. CANDIDATES WITH AN ACTIVE
INTEREST IN THE PUERTO RICAN PEOPLE AND IN POSITIONS TO AFFECT
POSITIVELY THE CLIMATE IN WHICH PUERTO RICANS LIVE ON THE,
MAINLAND.

FOR THESE REASONS, I AM GOING TO DISCUSS WITH YOU

SOME OF THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS INVOLVED IN BEING
A PUERTO RICAN, RATHER THAN A POLITICALLY-ORIENTED SPEECH
ON GENERAL PUERTO RICAN PROBLEMS. BESIDES I AM INFORMED
THAT YOU HAVE ALREADY LISTENED TO SOME VERY WELL-THOUGHT
OUT DISCUSSIONS ON THE MORE GENERAL PROBLEMS OF PUERTO RICO'S
HISTORY, ITS STATUS QUESTIONS, AND ITS POLITICAL MAKE-UP
AND SO ON.

THE FIRST POINT THAT MUST BE MADE IN DISCUSSING
PUERTO RICANS AND THEIR PROBLEMS IS THAT PUERTO RICANS

ARE DIFFERENT FROM OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS WITHIN THE GENERAL AMERICAN CONTEXT, EVEN IF MANY OF THESE GROUPS LIVE WITHIN WHAT OSCAR LEWIS CALLED THE CULTURE OF POVERTY.

THE REASON FOR THIS IS THAT FOR FOUR CENTURIES, PUERTO RICANS LIVED WITHIN THE SPANISH EMPIRE AND AT NO TIME HAVE THEY EVINced A DESIRE TO GIVE UP THEIR SPANISH HERITAGE. ON THE CONTRARY, TO THE INTELLECTUAL CLASS OF PUERTO RICO, THIS HERITAGE IS VIEWED AS POSSIBLY THE MOST IMPORTANT CULTURAL ELEMENT IN THE MAKE-UP OF THE PUERTO RICANS.

WHEN AMERICA, IN 1898 TOOK POSSESSION OF PUERTO RICO

THE UNWILLING COLONY BEGAN TO LOOK TO THE NORTH FOR AID IN ITS

MATERIAL SUSTENANCE, BUT IN MATTERS OF THE SPIRIT, IT STILL

LOOKED TOWARDS SPAIN.

IN THE SEVENTY-TWO YEARS IN WHICH PUERTO RICO HAS EXISTED

WITHIN THE AMERICAN SYSTEM, WE HAVE SEEN OUR ISLAND ACCEPT

THE SURFACE GLOSS THAT IS COMMON TO AMERICA: FACTORIES,

BUSTLING STORES, AMERICAN-STYLED HOMES, CARS, CLOTHES AND

THE EVERPRESENT TELEVISION SET, WITH ITS OWN WARPED VIEW OF

WHAT CONSTITUTES AMERICAN CULTURE.

HOWEVER, WHAT FAULKNER CALLED THE "OLD VERITIES"

CONTINUE TO LIVE ON WITHIN THE PUERTO RICAN SOUL , ,AND GENERALLY

THESE VERITIES ARE HISPANIC IN TRADITION AND OUTLOOK.

IN HIS RECENT WORK, THE MODERNIZATION OF PUERTO RICO;

HENRY WELLS POINTED OUT THAT THESE CULTURAL DIFFERENCES ARE

NOW BEING MODIFIED BUT A TREMENDOUS GAP STILL EXISTS.

ACCORDING TO MR. WELLS, THE BASIC VALUE SYSTEM OF

AMERICANS ON THE MAINLAND CAN BE DESCRIBED AS ONE PLACING

SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON WELFARE VALUES SUCH AS WELL-BEING, WEALTH,
SKILL AND ENLIGHTENMENT.

THE PUERTO RICANS, ON THE OTHER HAND, PLACE SPECIAL
EMPHASIS ON WHAT MAY BE CALLED THE "DEFERENCE VALUES," WHICH
INCLUDE POWER, RESPECT, AFFECTION AND RECTITUDE.

THE MEANING OF THESE VALUES WAS BROUGHT HOME FORCEFULLY
TO ME RECENTLY WHEN A 17-YEAR-OLD PUERTO RICAN YOUTH IN
NEW YORK TRIED TO IMMOLATE HIMSELF BECAUSE HE HAD BEEN SCOLDED
FOR COMING HOME LATE. ALTHOUGH THIS IS JUST ONE ISOLATED

INSTANCE, I BELIEVE THAT ANOTHER AMERICAN BOY IN THE SAME

CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD HAVE LIMITED HIS PROTEST TO RUNNING

AWAY FROM HOME. YET, WHEN A PUERTO RICAN HAS HIS PRIDE

WOUNDED, HE VERY WELL MAY CONSIDER THAT THERE IS NO

RUNNING AWAY FROM THE DISGRACE AND MORE DRASTIC ACTION IS

NECESSARY.

OTHER POINTS MADE BY WELLS ARE THAT PUERTO RICANS TEND

TO BE FATALISTIC, BELIEVE IN MALE SUPERIORITY AND THE GENERAL

THEORY THAT ONE IS BORN TO A SPECIFIC SPOT IN THE SOCIAL PYRAMID

FROM WHICH IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO RISE.

COMPARE THIS WITH WHAT ONE MAY CONSIDER THE CENTRAL

VALUE ETHIC OF THE UNITED STATES: THAT ALL MEN ARE CREATED

EQUAL AND THAT HUMAN PROBLEMS CAN BE RESOLVED IF ONE WORKS

HARD AND LONG ENOUGH.

MANY OF THE PUERTO RICAN CHILDREN THAT YOU WILL BE

WORKING WITH SUFFER FROM A DOUBLE HANDICAP: NOT ONLY HAVE

THEY ABSORBED THE GENERAL HISPANIC VALUE SYSTEM, WITH THE

AIR THEY BREATHE YOU MIGHT SAY, BUT MANY HAVE ALSO HAD THESE

FATALISTIC AND ASCRIPTIVE VALUES DRUMMED HOME WHILE LIVING

IN THAT SUB-CULTURE OF POVERTY SO GLARINGLY ILLUSTRATED IN

LA VIDA.

IN HIS WORK, LEWIS POINTS OUT THAT THOSE EXPOSED TO

EXTREME POVERTY SIMPLY CEASE TO FUNCTION IN THE SAME MANNER

THAT MOST OF US DO. THEY DIVORCE THEMSELVES FROM THE GENERAL

ETHIC OF THEIR SOCIETY SINCE TO ATTEMPT ANYTHING ELSE SEEMS

HOPELESS.

IT IS WITH MANY OF THESE STUDENTS THAT YOU WILL BE

DEALING WITH. INTELLECTUALLY, IT IS POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEMS FACED BY THESE GHETTO CHILDREN. BUT TO REACH DOWN AND TOUCH THEM, TO CHANGE THEIR LIFE STYLES WILL NOT BE AN EASY TASK. IN MANY CASES, YOU WILL NOT SPEAK THE LANGUAGE OF THESE CHILDREN, AND COMMUNICATION, WHICH BEFORE SEEMED DIFFICULT, WILL NOW SEEM HOPELESS.

BUT THIS IS ALL THE MORE REASON FOR TRYING. IN PUERTO RICO, WE, LIKE SISYPHUS, HAVE ALWAYS BEEN TRYING TO PUSH THE ROCK OF OUR FORTUNES UP THAT LARGE HILL CALLED SUCCESS. AND

MANY TIMES WE HAVE FALLEN BACK WHEN WE ALMOST SEEMED TO

HAVE REACHED THE TOP. WE WERE NOT DISCOURAGED AND WE CONTINUED.

AND WE HAVE PERSEVERED, JUST AS I KNOW THAT THOSE OF YOU WHO

HAVE DECIDED TO HELP THOSE CHILDREN LIVING BETWEEN OUR TWO

CULTURES, WILL ALSO PERSEVERE.

FOR THERE IS ONE WEAPON THAT YOU HAVE WHICH WILL MOVE

MOUNTAINS. AND THAT IS EDUCATION. THE ONE AREA WHERE OUR

TWO CULTURES HAVE FUSED IS IN THEIR CONCERN FOR THE EDUCATION

OF THEIR PEOPLES. NO MATTER HOW POOR A PUERTO RICAN CHILD MAY

BE, HE CAN BE SURE THAT HIS PARENTS WILL DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE

TO FIND THE MONEY TO BUY THE NECESSARY BOOKS TO HAVE HIM

CONTINUE IN SCHOOL.

THE STUDENT IF HE IS TOUCHED BY YOU, WILL TRANSFER ALL

THOSE VALUES WHICH FORM THE BAGGAGE OF HIS BEING TO YOU AS

THE ALL-POWERFUL HUMAN BEING WHO CAN HELP HIM TRANSFORM HIS

LIFE.

AS AN EXAMPLE, A TEACHER WHO UNDERSTANDS THE HUMAN

MATERIAL WITH WHICH HE WORKS WILL NOT TEND TO LABEL AS INDI -

DIFFERENT AND LAZY A PUERTO RICAN CHILD WHO IS LISTLESS IN THE
CLASSROOM. INSTEAD, HE WILL ATTEMPT TO REASON WITH THAT
STUDENT AND ATTEMPT TO CONVINCHE HIM OF THE OPPORTUNITIES
THAT LIE WITHIN HIS REACH. AT NO TIME CAN A TEACHER WORKING
IN THE GHETTO ACCEPT THE SELF-EVALUATION OF THE GHETTO-STUDENT
AT FACE VALUE. THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IS TO CONTINUALLY ATTEMPT
TO CHANGE THE GHETTO VALUE SYSTEM OF THOSE CHILDREN WHO SEEM
DOOMED TO FAILURE AND MISERY.

EVERY DAY, PUERTO RICANS COME BACK TO THEIR HOMELAND

AFTER YEARS OF LIVING IN THAT STRANGE AND WONDERFUL WORLD

THAT IS THE UNITED STATES. AND SOON, THEY REALIZE THAT THE

ONE GIFT THAT WILL INVARIABLY HELP THEM READJUST TO PUERTO

RICO IS THE EDUCATION THEY RECEIVED. THEY SOON FIND OUT THAT

THEIR NEW VALUES AND THEIR ACQUIRED SKILLS MAKE THEM DESIRED

EMPLOYEES. THEY SOON DISCOVER THAT WHAT MAY HAVE SEEMED

AS A LIMITED EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES HAS AT LEAST

OPENED THE DOOR TO SELF-IMPROVEMENT. THIS IS A FACT THAT ALL OF

YOU SHOULD BE PROUD OF, AND THAT ALL OF YOU SHOULD REMEMBER

IN THOSE MOMENTS OF DESPAIR WHEN ALL PROBLEMS SEEM
INSURMOUNTABLE.

I AM SURE THAT SOME OF YOU HAVE ASKED YOURSELVES
WHY ANYONE WOULD LEAVE SUCH A LOVELY TROPICAL ISLAND AS
BORINQUEN TO FACE THE WINTRY WINDS OF THE NORTHEAST. UNFOR-
TUNATELY, THE MAJOR PROBLEMS FACED BY THE PDP FOR MORE THAN
30 YEARS STILL CONTINUE TO PLAGUE US. MUCH HAS BEEN DONE,
BUT MUCH IS STILL LEFT TO DO.

ON ONE OCCASION, THE LATE PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY,

QUOTED A POEM BY VACHEL LINDSAY TO POINT OUT THAT IT IS ONLY

WHEN DESPAIR COMPLETELY TAKES CONTROL OF A HUMAN LIFE THAT

WE HAVE REASON TO MOURN. WE DO NOT MOURN THE FACT THAT

PEOPLE DIE, "BUT THAT THEY DIE LIKE SHEEP." YOU MUST MAKE

SURE THAT GHETTO DWELLERS DO NOT TURN INTO SHEEP.

ON ANOTHER OCCASION, KENNEDY QUOTED FROM A T. S. ELIOT

TO POINT OUT THAT AMERICAN CULTURE SHOULD DO MORE THAN

PRODUCE GOLF BALLS.

THE INTEREST THAT PEOPLE OF YOUR TALENTS AND MERIT ARE

TAKING IN THE WELFARE OF THOSE DISADVANTAGED BY LIFE AND

FORTUNE IS THE BEST HOPE AMERICA HAS THAT ITS GREAT LEGACY WILL

NOT BE "A THOUSAND LOST GOLF BALLS."

THANK YOU.

