

THE ROLE OF PUERTO RICO-AMERICAN IN REDUCING RACIALISM IN UNITED STATES

Wili Astuti

Language Center – LPID – UMS

ABSTRACT

America is a nation, which is built from many ethnic groups. This condition makes America and surely among most multi-ethnic nation in the world, persistence of both “nationalism” and racism is clearly present. Nationalism and racism are also evident in the mounting resistance to non-white migrants across the entire country. Among those ethnic groups, there is one which has a very special color. The Puerto Ricans, although they already living far away from their motherland, they still keep the same way of life just like they were living in the island. They able to live together with both colors resident, Blacks and Whites, especially in 1960s. They become the bridges to connect between the upper class and the lower class of society. Beside that they still preserver their native culture in United States.

I. INTRODUCTION

American has been along time become the *land of hope* for everyone who likes to change his or her life in his or her motherland. That is why we can find many nations for all over the world in America. So we can say that America is a nation, which is built from many ethnic groups.

Moreover, it is possible for each ethnic group to bring their culture into American culture, and have to try as long as possible to keep their way of living in a new land. This condition makes America and surely among most multi-ethnic nation in the world, persistence of both “nationalism” and racism is clearly present. Nationalism and racism are also evident in the mounting resistance to non-white migrants across the entire country. In United States, continued discrimination against African-American, in both northern and southern areas, is the only obvious case. Puerto Rican, people from various countries in Asia and the Middle East, Native American and the other non-whites are still subject to stereotyping and different treatment (Rose 1997: 4-5).

In a society made up by many cultural groups as America, the intensity of ethnic identity or ethnicity is apt to be determined by the attitude of the members of dominant members of society toward the “strangers” in their midst.

The relationship between membership in an ethnic group and social acceptance has been studied by many sociologists. They concur in the conclusion that “when the combined cultural and biological traits [of the ethnic group] are highly divergent from those of the host society the subordination of group will be great, their subsystem strong, the period of assimilation long, and the processes slow and usually painful” (Warner & Srole 1954: 286).

Among these ethnic groups, there is one which has a very special color, the Puerto Ricans. Although they already live far away from their motherland, they still keep the same way of life as these who live in the island. And they still have a hope to be able to go back to the island to live peacefully in their old days together with their relative. In other words, America just a place for looking a pot of gold. This also happens in Indonesia. People think Jakarta, the capital city, is the place for getting money but not for getting peace of life. So they work in Jakarta but spend their old ages elsewhere. In this simple paper, the writer is likely to explain in brief about the migration of

people from Puerto Rico to America, what make them do the migration, and the life style of Puerto Rican in United States.

II. THE RELATION BETWEEN AMERICA AND PUERTO RICO

In order to understand the migration of Puerto Rican from the mainland to the United States, it is better for us to look up the kind of relationship between the two countries. Because we know that other tribes which can be found in America put a kind of quantity or restriction because too many of them coming to America. This is make the government of the United State finds obstacle in providing their daily life and work.

To do this is a bit difficult because the limitation of the source about Puerto Rico, but I tried to finish this because it's very important part of the reasons of the migration.

Puerto Ricans are both old and new American. Puerto Rico has been part of the United States since the end of nineteenth century, and Puerto Ricans are born as American citizens – but this migration still make them as foreigner in America. They, by American government, are considered as white but their residences are separated from the white. They are living together with the Blacks. They are multicolor migration cause by the ancestor (Sowell 1981).

Puerto Rico first became part of the United States in 1898, as a result of Spanish-American war. Puerto Rican have legally become American citizen at birth since 1917, but the culture still embraces the Spanish, and they are obedient Catholics in everyday life, because their ancestor, Spanish, already played a role in the country since Columbus discovery. Because of their religion, Catholics, they can not blend into American mainstream, White Anglo Saxon Protestant (WASP), as Irish immigrants do so.

Although the island has been apart of America almost many centuries, its people continue to develop way of life which is different from America. This tribe is less assimilated than other group (Sowell 1981).

American directed their attention to immigration in the nineteenth century, the concept of ethnicity and relationship between government, individualism and equality of opportunity were transformed. Many of the genteel class saw immigrant as fodder for vulgar and materialistic “captain of industry”. To counter the power of industrialists – who welcomed immigrants as workers, consumers, and producers of profit – the genteel reformers turned to federal government in the hope that the flow of immigrants could be regulated. But for Puerto Rican, all regulations do not work because they are also American citizen (Altschuler 1982: 42).

III. THE PUERTO RICAN IN AME-RICAN

A. The Migration.

In its most general sense, “migration” is ordinarily defined as the relatively permanent movement of persons over a significant distance. People who goes to another country and remain there for the rest of his life, we say, is a migrant: and one who pays a two-hour visit to the nearest town is not.

The numbers of Puerto Ricans have come to this country since 1920. The migration of the Puerto Rican to some big cities in United States, especially New York, is a part of a general migration of the people urban centers which was started by the demand for industrial labor created by the World War and which was stimulated in later years by restriction of immigration (Chennault 1938:3).

The migration from Puerto Rico, unlike the movement of people from any of South American countries. Puerto Rico is a small island, even smaller than state of Connecticut. The land of Puerto Rico is the

top of partially submerged mountain range with very limited rainfall. This made the land not very good to cultivate. The annual average variation in temperature between the summer and winter month is about ten degrees, with tropical climate. Puerto Rico is in hurricane zone, and has had numerous destructive storms in the course of its history (1938: 12).

Puerto Rico in the middle 1930's, after thirty-five years of American administration, was a scene of unrelieved misery. Rexford Tugwell, the American governor of the island during the early forties, titled his big book on Puerto Rico *The Stricken land*. The tiny island held a population of one and three quarter million. Its death rate had been reduced from the very high figure of about 30 per thousand at the time of American occupation at the end of the nineteenth century. Sanitary facilities were primitive and a prevalent malnutrition produced a stunting of growth and susceptibility to a wide range of diseases (1963:87)

With this condition, the island became incapable to supply enough food for its citizen. The island also lacks of mineral resources and industrialization and the poorly pay labor. It is quite possible that the condition of the people inhabit the island are familiarized with poverty.

Because of the movement of the Puerto Rican to the United States is officially one of internal migration, movement inside one country, there is no legal restriction again his coming to the United States. (1938:53)

Considering the condition described above, the motivation force of the high money wages reported to be paid in United States for the same job is easily understood. Practically all reports, which reach the workers in Puerto Rico, emphasize the great difference in wealth, wages and opportunity. So strongly, this idea of wealth of the American people fixed in the mind of uneducated Puerto Rican. So it is difficult to make Puerto Rican to believe that the United States also has a group of poor people (1938:52).

Unquestionably, economic factors were and the most decisive in explaining why the great migration out of the island. And yet there were other matters too. There was first the growing impact of contact with the mainland – its products arousing dreams of material comfort, its mass media publicizing them, its merchandising techniques spreading the desire for a change to every hamlet on the island. The American standard of living experienced indirectly and directly through mass media and personal contact, was a powerful agitating contact.

B. The Place of Settlement

It might seem at first glance that the logical place for the settlement of the Puerto Rican workers in the United States would in the rural and agricultural section in the South, like Florida, Louisiana. The localities are similar to Puerto Rico, which is not highly industrialized (1938:57).

In fact some of the immigrants prefer to live in big cities in United States. The reason in doing it is due with the dream, which they pursue from their homeland, that is to gain the better life. New York becomes their favorite city, because of its industrialization. They usually live in urban area like Harlem, Brooklyn, together with the Black, and not with other white immigrants (1938: 48).

The links between the New York-Puerto Ricans and the island Puerto Ricans are close and complex, and quite different from the relationship of earlier migrant groups to their homeland. Puerto Rico is a part of the United States, and there is no control over movement between the island and mainland (1963:100-103).

Another important factor is that when once a settlement is started and becomes as large as the Puerto Rican in New York, there is a sort of pull from it to people in the island. People planning to migrate want to join relatives and friends in New York and to be

with people of their own racial group rather than to go to some isolated rural place in Texas or Florida. Added to this is the attraction found in the very size of New York (1938:57).

C. Occupation and Employment Opportunity

Although no solid data which show in detail about the wages, degree of skill, and occupation of the Puerto Rican worker in New York, the background of a large number of these workers, uneducated, suggests the kinds of occupation which they might be able to follow. Most of them employed in agriculture, domestics and personal service and independent hand trade (1938:70).

The immigrants, in their former year in United States, just after they arrived, did unskilled work and menial task. The Puerto Rican is not the only ethnic group, which came to United States; there are people from West Indies and Negroes from the South. They came to big cities as a result of demand labor during period after World War.

In New York there is a small group of professional Puerto Rican who work as Physicians, dentists, teachers and another group of merchants. The Puerto Rican who engaged in some kind of business of trade is very small. In New York most of them have to depend upon finding employment, which will pay them a weekly wage (1938: 72-75).

The Puerto Rican women usually work in domestic work or find a manual work in garment. They do the needlework and get a very low payment. Sometime they just sit and rise their children at home. The Puerto Rican mother works in United States more often than she does in Puerto Rico, but they tend to stay home to take care of the children. Fewer of them work than Negro mothers.

In Puerto Rico, despite rapid urbanization and industrialization, and many consequent social changes, it is perfectly clear how one raises children. The boys are taught to be proper males, the girls warned to keep their virginity – without a proper marriage.

The changes among women are even more striking. In 1950, more than four-fifths of young Puerto Rican women migrant were working in factories and only 7 percent were in clerical and sales. There has been a great increase in native-born in these ten years, and there has been major change in the over all employment figure (1963:116).

There is another factor why the Puerto Rican get low payment, that is, their lack ability in English. Most of the immigrants speak Spanish as their mother language rather than speak English. Even nowadays, at their home they still communicate which each other do their mother language. It makes them closer to their homeland and families (*crazy and beautiful*, American movie 2001).

IV. THE ROLE OF PUERTO RICAN IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

The degree of success of the Puerto Rican worker can not be separated from the effort to adjust themselves into their new community. It takes up crime and delinquency as evidence of social mal-adjustment.

The Puerto Rican, in New York usually live in Harlem and Brooklyn. In those areas also live the immigrant from Africa, Italy and other white immigrant. The environmental influences of the Brooklyn in which the Puerto Rican have settled are also distinctly unfavorable from the standpoint of behavior. In addition to poor housing and unsanitary condition, the Crime Commission selects this area as an area to study delinquency because of its very high offenses (Chenault 1970:129-137).

Puerto Ricans themselves say that serious social problem exist among certain proportion of the group living in these neighborhoods. The immigrants of Puerto Rico feel that the people are different from the people in the mainland. They seem to be influenced by the industrialization of big cities (1963:131).

The more significant Puerto Rican contribution to the city of New York, one suspects, will be in the attitude toward colors. The Puerto Rican introduces into the city a group that is intermediate color, neither all white nor all dark, but having some of each. The Puerto Rican are not paragon of democratic color attitudes, but in contrast with the American prejudices they show a very different picture. In Puerto Rico, the high and the middle status are usually white, and in Puerto Rico one knows that whatever the status of the Black is just because the historical circumstances in which color only plays a little part.

Indeed, the mixture of races in Puerto Rico has been proceeding on a level that is almost without example of history. In 1860 almost a half of Puerto Rico was Black, in 1950 Only one fifth. There is color discrimination on the island, but often reflect the attitude to the poor, the worker, the miserable (1963: 133).

There is little question that Puerto Ricans has faced considerable racial discrimination in the United States. Some experts feel that it has been especially hard for member of this particular color to cope with the “racially dichotomous” (white Vs non-white). Puerto Rico is the first major group to migrate to the urban centers in The United States bringing with them a tradition of widespread racial mixing (1997: 71-72).

V. CONCLUSION

The migration of the Puerto Rican to big cities in United States is a classic example of movement of people who expect a better her/his life. The Puerto Rican, finding himself land-less, unemployed and herded with other into his native towns and cities, has for some time begun to look to the Unite States as a possible means of escape from economic condition and poverty.

Certain important differences exist, however, between the migration of Puerto Rican and that some of the other groups. This

assimilation of culture makes some social conflict within urban community. But somehow with the social ability, which they possess, they are able to overcome the problem and might some get dream that they want for.

Puerto Rican is a very special ethnic group in United States. They can live together with both color residents: Blacks and Whites, especially in 1960s. They become the bridge to connect between the upper class and the lower class of society. Beside that, they still preserve their native culture in United States.

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