

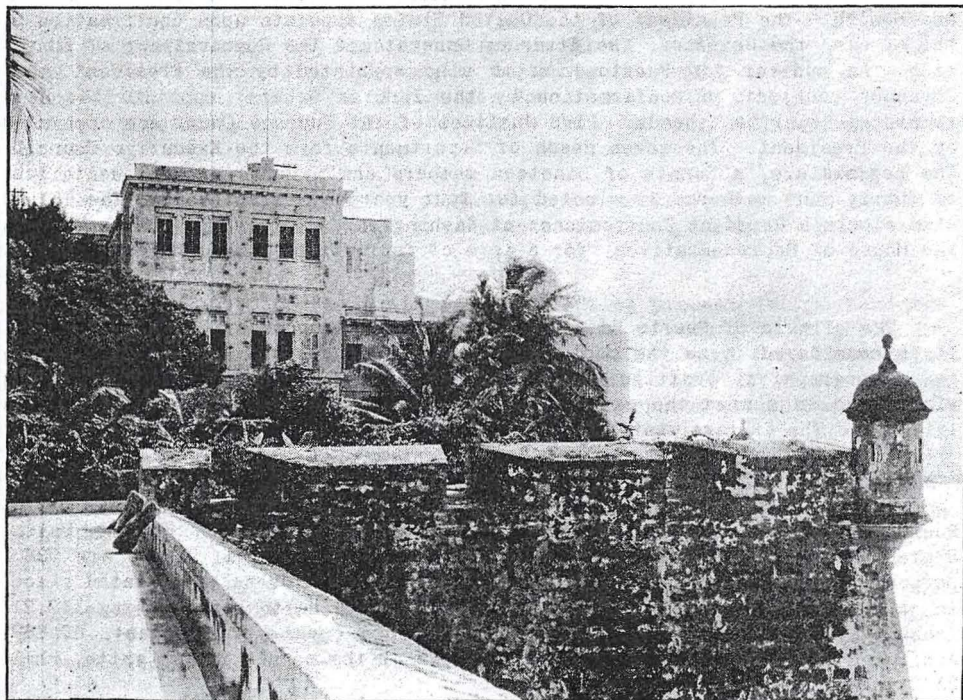
UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

HAROLD L. ICKES, Secretary

Division of Territories and Island Possessions  
Ernest Gruening, Director

General Information

PUERTO RICO



Governor's Palace and part of the old Fortifications  
(La Fortaleza), completed in 1540.

Geographical Location

The Island of Puerto Rico, which is approximately one hundred miles long and thirty-five miles wide, is the extreme eastern island of the West Indies Group known as the Greater Antilles, of which Cuba, Haiti and Jamaica are the larger units. This island is 1,399 miles southeast of New York, 963 from Key West, Florida, and 450 miles east of Cuba.

### History

Christopher Columbus discovered the Island of Puerto Rico on November 19, 1493, at which time he took possession of it in the name of Spain. Ponce de Leon, who is perhaps better known as the seeker of the Fountain of Youth and the discoverer of Florida, was the first Governor of the island.

As a result of the Spanish-American War in 1898, the United States took formal possession of Puerto Rico on October 18, 1898, although the Treaty of Peace whereby Spain ceded Puerto Rico to the United States was not proclaimed until April 11, 1899. With the evacuation of San Juan, the Spanish Empire lost its last foothold in the Western Hemisphere.

### Government

The government of Puerto Rico is administered under the Organic Act of March 2, 1917, as amended, which also granted American citizenship to Puerto Ricans. It is governed by a Governor under whom are the seven Executive Departments of Justice, Finance, Interior, Education, Agriculture and Commerce, Labor, and Health. The President of the United States appoints upon confirmation by the Senate, the Governor, the Attorney General and the Commissioner of Education. An auditor for Puerto Rico is also appointed by the President. The Governor, subject to confirmation by the Insular Senate, appoints the five remaining Department heads. Five Justices of the Supreme Court are appointed by the President. The seven heads of Departments form the Executive Council. The Legislature, a Senate of nineteen members and a House of Representatives of thirty-nine members, is elected for four years by direct vote. The island also elects a Resident Commissioner at Washington, with a voice but no vote in the House of Representatives, for a term of four years.

### Climate

The climate of Puerto Rico is warm but is not uncomfortable at any time. It is considered to be the coolest place in the tropics. Due to its advantageous geographical position, it is favored by the continually blowing trade winds, and is spared the extreme heat common to other countries of the same latitude. The average winter temperature is 73° and the summer average is 76°F.

### Population

The population, according to the census as taken under the auspices of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration under supervision of the United States Bureau of the Census in 1935, was 1,723,534 persons. There are 506.8 persons to the square mile, making it one of the most densely populated places in the world. The largest city is San Juan on the north coast having 137,215 inhabitants, and the second largest city, Ponce on the south coast, 60,867. According to the latest census figures, 76.2 of the population is white, while 23.8 is Negro.

### Language

Spanish is the predominating language of Puerto Rico. However, the majority of the educated persons speak, read and write English, and practically all commercial correspondence is carried on in that language. The visiting traveler or businessman from the continental United States will find no difficulty in making himself understood.

### Transportation and Communication

Puerto Rico has an adequate railroad system, the principal line being the American Railroad of Puerto Rico with a total mileage of 350. Rapid and dependable steamship connections with American and European ports provide means of

transportation of freight and passengers between the island and these points. The Pan-American Airways maintains a triweekly schedule for the transportation of passengers, mail and express between Miami, Florida, San Juan, Puerto Rico, and South American ports. Two radio broadcasting systems, telephone and telegraph service provide ample communication between Puerto Rico and the United States, and other countries.

#### Commerce, Agriculture and Industry

The largest single industry in Puerto Rico is the production of sugar. It represents the largest amount of invested capital and brings the greatest annual gross income to the island. In 1937, the value of sugar exported amounted to \$71,390,088.

The second important industry of Puerto Rico is the raising of tobacco which is of increasing importance to the island's economic life. This tobacco finds a ready market on the mainland, and large shipments are made each year. In 1937, an estimated 27,000,000 pounds of tobacco were produced.

A very high grade of Arabian coffee is grown on the western mountain slopes of Puerto Rico. Although ranging far below the sugar, tobacco and fruit production in value, coffee is of peculiar importance to the island in that the industry is entirely in the hands of native farmers, many of whom are small land owners.

The shipment of citrus fruit, pineapples, vegetables and cotton, coconuts and other products, constitutes the balance of the principal agricultural commerce of the island.

By far the most important single manufacturing product is the hand embroidery, or the needle work industry. Shipments of embroidered goods are valued at between \$15,000,000 and \$20,000,000 annually. And this industry is capable of great expansion under proper organization, both of production and marketing. The manufacture of cigars has long been a known art in Puerto Rico. The distillation of rum and alcohol is a new industry which is rapidly growing in importance. Excellent progress has been made in Puerto Rico in the fruit canning industry. Other industries which are productive of income are the manufacture of molasses, men's clothing, straw hats, shell buttons and jewel cutting and polishing.

#### Employment

As a natural result of the over-abundance of labor, the unemployment situation is very acute, and naturally preference is given to local residents whenever vacancies occur, or additional workers are needed.

#### Tourism

In Puerto Rico, all the year round, ample opportunities are afforded the visitor to indulge in all sorts of outdoor sports. Near San Juan is located one of the most beautiful submarine gardens in the world. There are numerous huge and unexplored caves full of mystery and beauty, which will serve to interest a lover of adventure. Incomparable scenes of mountains and sea offer great attraction to vacationists and world travelers. Of intense interest also are the massive forts and palaces -- quaint city gates and almost forgotten corners -- the old Spanish architecture mingled with the modern American -- beautiful homes of the rich -- quaint native huts -- all within a few minutes of each other. Many of these architectural structures, such as the Governor's Mansion, in San Juan, and the huge fortifications, are hundreds of years old.

