

**Ethnographic Overview and Assessment
of the San Juan National Historic Site: Final Report**



Photo courtesy of Dr. Vivianna De Jesús-Monge

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Executive Summary

- The purpose of this study was to document the ongoing relationships between associated communities and the resources of the San Juan National Historic Site (SJNHS) in Puerto Rico. The study sought to identify groups with both traditional and contemporary ties to the park.
- The study focused on the urban core containing the SJNHS and its surrounding communities of La Perla, La Puntilla, La Marina, and other neighborhoods of Old San Juan and Puerta de Tierra.
- The research team reviewed, summarized, and evaluated existing information derived from published and unpublished sources, including historic maps, documents, and photographs.
- Ethnographic methods were also employed to collect and document data through interviews, consultation, and site visits.
- Following National Park Service (NPS) guidelines, ethnographic resources in and adjacent to the park were identified and documented.
- Key findings described in this report include the following:
 - We found little archaeological evidence of the utilization of the site by the indigenous people of Puerto Rico before the Spanish conquest. Most of the available documentation is dated to the 18th and 19th centuries.
 - Several working-class communities have traditionally been affiliated with the area now occupied by the SJNHS. The most notorious of these communities is La Perla, originally a squatter settlement located outside the northern city walls.

- For most of its history, the land within and surrounding the SJNHS was employed primarily for military purposes, both under Spanish and U.S. rule. However, various groups have used this area for non-military purposes at least since the mid-19th century, including passive recreation, sports events, parades, and public manifestations.
- Nowadays, a few community organizations employ the facilities of the SJNHS, including an astronomical society, an educational foundation, a local public school, and volunteer groups interested in reenacting military history. The site is now commonly used as an outdoor park shared by local residents, residents of other places in Puerto Rico, and tourists.
- However, most residents of Old San Juan do not frequent the site's facilities and some actually resent their use by "outsiders." One group that seldom visits the park is the large number of Dominican immigrants who live in the San Juan metropolitan area.
- Major gaps in the ethnographic and historical literature include the scarcity of information on neighboring communities (aside from La Perla), such as La Puntilla, La Marina, Ballajá, and Puerta de Tierra.
- The research team compiled several recommendations for additional research on these communities, as well as practical suggestions for consideration by the NPS managing staff, including developing an oral history project with older residents of La Perla, training residents as tour guides, and encouraging the creation of small businesses in the neighborhood, such as food and beverage stands.

Introduction

Background. The Spanish conquistador Juan Ponce de León founded the city of San Juan, Puerto Rico, in its current location in 1521. From the mid-16th century to the late 19th century, San Juan would play primarily a defensive role within the Spanish empire in the Americas. The city was heavily fortified to protect it from Indian attacks from other Caribbean islands and from Spain's European rivals, especially the English, Dutch, and French. As a result, San Juan became a completely walled city, dominated by two massive fortresses, San Felipe del Morro and San Cristóbal, which ensured Spanish control of Puerto Rico until the island became a U.S. territory in 1898. During the first half of the 20th century, the U.S. Army controlled the fortifications, which became known as Fort Brooke (1943–64) and served a strategic role in the defense of the Caribbean during both World Wars. In 1949, President Harry S. Truman established the San Juan National Historic Site (SJNHS) in the area. The U.S. Army finally transferred the property to the National Park Service (NPS) in 1961. The area was designated as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1983 and as a U.S. National Historic Landmark in 2013.

This report identifies, documents, and assesses ethnographic resources within or near the SJNHS. An Ethnographic Overview and Assessment was conducted to provide baseline data on traditionally associated groups, the park resources with which they are associated, and traditional uses of and associations with these resources. Following NPS guidelines, the research team reviewed, summarized, and evaluated existing information derived from published and unpublished sources, supplemented by

ethnographic interviews with knowledgeable members of associated groups.¹

Ethnographic resources in and adjacent to the park were documented with data suitable for entry into the Ethnographic Resources Inventory database.

Study Purpose and Research Questions. The purpose of this study was to document the ongoing relationships between associated communities (such as long-term residents, neighbors, religious groups, youth, and underrepresented ethnic/cultural groups, including Afro-Caribbean communities, self-identified descendants of indigenous groups, women, and commemorative and patriotic groups) and the resources of the SJNHS. The study identified groups with both traditional and contemporary ties to the park. It also identified resource uses and concerns that may affect NPS management responsibilities for both natural and cultural resources located within park boundaries. The results will prepare managers to anticipate resource use issues that may affect the park and place them in a better position to understand and deal with such issues in the future.

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between the pre-Hispanic record and the more recent historic uses of the park's places and resources by contemporary peoples?
2. Which communities or groups are traditionally affiliated with the SJNHS?
3. How have these groups used the places within or surrounding the park?
4. Which groups use the park now?

¹ This project was directed by Dr. Jorge Duany and conducted by Drs. Juan F. Caraballo-Resto and Viviana M. De Jesús-Monge, with the assistance of Joseph Torres and Valeria Martínez. The research team would like to acknowledge the support of Félix López and Eric López of the SJNHS; Osvaldo Rivera, of the School of Communication Library at the University of Puerto Rico in Río Piedras; and José Izquierdo Encarnación, former Secretary of State of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

5. How does the park fit into the daily lives of the members of its surrounding communities?
6. Who are the “newer” park neighbors who do not make use of the park due to various cultural or structural reasons?
7. What are the major gaps in the ethnographic and historical literature on the communities affiliated with the park?

Previous Research. The urban core containing the SJNHS has attracted considerable historical attention. Several authors have dwelt on the origins and development of San Juan as the second oldest Spanish city in the Western hemisphere (de Hostos 1948; Seguinot Barbosa 1997; Sepúlveda Rivera 1989). The city’s military installations and neoclassical architecture have been the subject of much research, as well as their swift transformations throughout the 20th century (Alegría 1969; Castro Arroyo 1980, 1999, 2005; Flores Román et al. 2009; González Vales et al. 2005; Vivoni Farage 2000; Zapatero 1979). Architects and anthropologists have also traced the rise of a vernacular architecture, both popular and elite, in San Juan and other Puerto Rican cities (Joplin 1988; Quiles Rodríguez 2003, 2009; Rigau 1992). Some authors have focused on urban renewal plans in poor neighborhoods like La Puntilla and Puerta de Tierra (Ríos Cruz 2011; Vallés Vargas 1982).

For their part, historians and archaeologists have concentrated on reconstructing the daily lives of slaves, free people of color, women, and children in San Juan during the 19th century (Kinsbrunner 1996; Martínez-Vergne 1999; Matos-Rodríguez 2001; Mayo Santana et al. 1997; Negrón Portillo and Mayo Santana 1992; Schlafer Román 2009). The deplorable living and housing conditions in Puerta de Tierra and other working-class settlements during the first decades of the 20th century have been well

documented (Bird Carmona 2008; González Vales et al. 2005; Pérez Velasco 1984; Stevens 1985). Many of these settlements were inhabited by descendants of African slaves and free people of color, much like the outlying settlement of San Mateo de Cangrejos (Santurce). Since the 1960s, the growing metropolitan area of San Juan became a key site for the anthropological study of urban poverty, inequality, and segregation. Much of this literature centered on slum clearance and the problem of relocating the urban poor in public housing projects (Back 1962; Bryce-Laporte 1970; Caplow et al. 1964; De Jesús-Monge 2011; Duany 2010; Ramírez 1977; Safa 1974).

From an ethnographic perspective, the most notorious community in San Juan has been La Perla, one of the oldest slums in the city, dating back to the late 19th century. This squatter settlement emerged near a slaughterhouse known as *El Matadero*, outside the northern city walls (Sepúlveda Rivera 1989: 299).² La Perla was immortalized as the setting for the second act of René Marqués's classic play, *La carreta* (1963), where the members of a poor peasant family resettle on their way to New York City. La Perla was also the main subject of Oscar Lewis's bestselling work, *La Vida* (1966), under the pseudonym of La Esmeralda. Lewis dwelled on the pathological dimensions of daily life in the neighborhood, such as prostitution, gambling, and family disorganization, partly because of the area's proximity to the city's docks and U.S. military installations during World War II. La Perla is still renowned for its extreme poverty, high crime rate, and illegal activities, including drug trafficking. Various government efforts to intervene in this unplanned community since the 1970s have been largely unsuccessful (Marvel 2008).

² The Spanish colonial government carefully regulated the slaughtering of meat—especially the preparation and disposal of *mondongo* or tripe—for hygienic reasons and only allowed the sale of meat outside the city walls. See Ayuntamiento de San Juan (1894) and Matos-Rodríguez (2001: 87–89).

Demographic and Socioeconomic Profile. Today, the population of the area containing the SJNHS is extremely heterogeneous in its demographic and socioeconomic composition. The U.S. Census Bureau subdivides the San Juan Antiguo (Old San Juan) barrio into seven sub-barrios, each with its own peculiar characteristics: Ballajá, Catedral, Marina, Mercado, Puerta de Tierra, San Cristóbal, and San Francisco. The main historical buildings and forts, including San Felipe del Morro, San Cristóbal, and La Fortaleza, are located in the sub-barrios of Ballajá, San Cristóbal, and Catedral. Mercado, which includes La Perla, and Puerta de Tierra, have relatively high proportions of residents living under the poverty level. In contrast, Marina, Catedral, and San Francisco have higher proportions of middle- and upper-income residents (U.S. Census Bureau 2015). Puerta de Tierra also contains many monumental structures such as the Commonwealth's Capitol, the Carnegie Library, and Casa de España.

The 2010 Census of Population and Housing enumerated 7,085 residents of the San Juan Antiguo barrio, 49.9 percent of them male and 50.1 percent female, with a median age of 42.6 years (U.S. Census Bureau 2015). Seventy-three percent classified themselves as white, 17.3 percent as black or African American, 0.4 percent as American Indian and Alaska Native, 0.4 percent as Asian, 6.5 percent as some other race, and 2.3 percent as two or more races. In addition, 93.8 percent of the residents identified themselves as Hispanic (mostly Puerto Rican), while 6.2 percent did not. Furthermore, 83.7 percent were born in Puerto Rico, 6.1 percent in the United States, 1.1 percent in U.S. island areas or born abroad of American parents, and 9.1 percent were foreign born (mostly in the Dominican Republic). As for educational attainment, 67.7 percent had completed high school, while only 25.7 percent had a bachelor's degree. An astounding 23.9 percent of the civilian labor force was unemployed. The median household income

was only \$12,334. In short, the population of the area under study is predominantly white by Puerto Rican standards, Hispanic, native-born, and high-school educated, with a large share of unemployed and poor persons.

Methodology

The Site. The SJNHS includes San Cristóbal castle, San Felipe del Morro castle, San Juan de la Cruz fort (known locally as El Cañuelo), and three-fourths of the city walls. (The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico manages the remaining sections of the city's fortification system.) Although our project emphasized the area within the SJNHS, we also collected data outside the park's formal boundaries in order to provide a meaningful cultural context for analysis. Consequently, the study area for this project included the surrounding communities of La Perla, La Puntilla, La Marina, and other neighborhoods of Old San Juan and Puerta de Tierra, the sub-district that connects Old San Juan with the main island of Puerto Rico.³

As noted before, the area under study comprised the sub-barrio classified by the census as San Juan Antiguo. This area is bound by the Atlantic Ocean to the north, the San Juan Bay to the west, the San Antonio Channel to the south, and the main island of Puerto Rico to the east. Within this area, participants in the study were selected based on (1) their knowledge of associated community organizations and experience with

³ The study area excluded Palo Seco in Toa Baja and other communities in Cataño, across the San Juan Bay. Including these communities would have greatly increased the logistical problems, length, and expenses of this project. Leslie Walker conducted another research project in Palo Seco, funded by the NPS and supervised by Dr. Antoinette Jackson, around the same time as the present research was completed.

park-related activities; (2) their length of association with the park's resources; and (3) their willingness to participate in this study.

Instruments. Standard ethnographic methods were employed to collect and document data through interviews, consultation, and site visits. The format of the interviews was largely unstructured. After registering their basic demographic characteristics, we asked interviewees to describe their group's activities, use of the park, knowledge of park resources, and whether the park's resources contributed to their group's activities and identities. The interviewers summarized the contents of each interview for future reference. No formal surveys or questionnaires were administered. Consultations with park staff followed a similar open-ended format. Field notes were taken to document the visitors' use of the park.

Procedure. To begin, the research team consulted with NPS representatives; representatives of other relevant government agencies, including the Puerto Rico Tourism Company, the State Historic Preservation Office, and the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture; and local experts such as historians, architects, and urban planners. We built on the knowledge of park and other agency staff to identify the range of park users. We consulted NPS staff members in various departments, including the Superintendent's Office, Cultural Resources Management, Interpretation, and Security. We compiled an initial list of individuals and their associated groups from these contacts. Then we made telephone calls to representatives of each group to request face-to-face interviews.

Second, the research team reviewed the literature about the use of the site's ethnographic resources and the cultural groups in surrounding communities. Following NPS guidelines, an ethnographic resource was defined as any natural or cultural

resource, landscape, or natural feature linked by a subject ethnic community to the traditional practices, values, beliefs, history, and ethnic identity of that community. This phase of the research provided an inventory of these resources within the study area as reflected in existing records, including historic maps, documents, and photographs. We examined primary sources at the SJNHS and other archival depositories, such as the General Archive of Puerto Rico, the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, and the University of Puerto Rico in Río Piedras. We also scanned academic publications such as books, journals, theses, and dissertations. Lastly, we located references to the site in newspapers, magazines, photographs, films, and videos.

Third, the research team visited the communities traditionally associated with the site, especially La Perla and Puerta de Tierra. Onsite visits helped determine the contemporary uses of the park and its resources by affiliated cultural communities. Members of the research team also visited the park on multiple occasions and at different times between November 2013 and June 2014. In particular, they attended numerous public events connected with the site, such as the Community Day in La Perla in November, the Feasts of San Sebastián Street in January, El Morro Kite Festival in February, El Morro Pet Fest in March, a Stargazing event in April, and an excursion on “The Trees of San Juan” organized by the Sierra Club in May. Members of the research team took extensive field notes based on their observations of the location, frequency of use, and nature of use by different groups. A detailed description of the cultural uses of places and natural resources constituted an important element of this project.

Finally, the research team interviewed knowledgeable representatives of communities and organizations associated with the site, including long-time and recent residents, voluntary associations, and other local groups. For each of these groups, we

collected and summarized information about their history, demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, and current cultural practices. The interviews focused on each group's uses of the SJNHS. We identified 65 existing community organizations within the designated research area. After several attempts, we were able to contact 38 of these groups.

Key Findings

Pre-Hispanic and Historic Uses of the Site. Our first research question was: what is the relationship between the pre-Columbian record and the more recent historic uses of the SJNHS by contemporary peoples? The Island's first Spanish governor, Ponce de León, had established a small settlement in Caparra in 1508, but reluctantly transferred the city to its present site in 1521 because of its better access to the harbor, soil and vegetation, and defensive potential. The city's first fortifications, La Fortaleza and El Morro castle, began to be built in 1532 and 1539, respectively.⁴ Unfortunately, the use of the current site of the SJNHS by the Island's indigenous people before the arrival of the Spaniards in 1493 has not been well documented. Archaeological studies in the demolished Ballajá neighborhood of the city discovered that Saladoid (or Igneri) groups first occupied the area from 200 to 400 A.D. (Barnes and Medina 1995). Another archaeological source had previously identified a small pre-Hispanic village or fishing station in Puerta de Tierra (de Hostos 1948: 7; Seguinot Barbosa 1997: 36).

⁴ Hoyt (1943) provides a useful overview of the military history of San Juan during the Spanish colonial regime.

The archives of the SJNHS contain several reports of archaeological excavations within the area, conducted between 1961 and 2006.⁵ These records concern the recovery of cultural artifacts, principally ceramics, in the vicinity of the forts and city walls, mostly dating from the 18th and 19th centuries. Among the objects found were fragments of imported plates, pots, cups, containers, glass bottles, bone buttons, bullets, and dietary remains. Many of these items were associated with the Spanish military garrison in San Juan and particularly with common soldiers. Hence, little archaeological evidence is available on the pre-Columbian uses of the site; most of it refers to the Spanish colonial period of human settlement in the San Juan islet (1521–1898).

Groups Traditionally Affiliated with the Site. Our second research question was: which communities or groups are traditionally affiliated with the SJNHS? Historical records indicate that several working-class communities emerged near El Morro and San Cristóbal castles, outside the city walls. Of these neighborhoods, La Perla has attracted most historical and ethnographic scrutiny. Late 18th-century maps already mention a La Perla bastion, battery, or fort on the northern coast of San Juan. Twentieth-century maps show several sections of the neighborhood labeled as Guaypao, Nueva Perla, and San Miguel, near the Santo Tomás Gate and close to the city walls.⁶ Many wooden housing structures were erected close to each other, within the current boundaries of the SJNHS on public lands. Other poor neighborhoods located near the site include La Puntilla and La Marina in the south and Puerta de Tierra to the east of

⁵ San Juan National Historic Site, Park Resource Records Collection, Series VII: Archaeological Project Records, 1962–2006; Subseries A: Field Notes, Reports, and Correspondence, 1962–2006.

⁶ See Archivo General de Puerto Rico, “Murallas –planificación y delimitación de La Perla,” Fondo: Obras Públicas; Serie: Propiedad pública; Subseries: San Juan (Recinto Interior, Norte y Sur); Caja: 256; Legajo: 702; Año: 1933.

the walled city. The latter “extramural” residential area experienced a rapid population growth after the demolition of the city’s eastern wall in 1897 and its expansion beyond the overcrowded urban core.⁷ The adjacent peninsula of Santurce (known as San Mateo de Cangrejos before 1880) bore the initial brunt of suburban sprawl (Sepúlveda and Carbonell 1987).

Our historical and ethnographic research suggests that La Perla, La Puntilla, La Marina, and to a lesser extent Puerta de Tierra have been closely linked with the area that now belongs to the park (in addition to the extinct Barrio de Ballajá). Military maps from the Spanish colonial period usually identify these communities as part of the urban landscape surrounding the San Cristóbal and San Felipe del Morro castles. Nineteenth-century documents confirm that Spanish colonial authorities prohibited construction in this “polemic zone,” including key military structures, considered of strategic value.⁸ More recent records reveal that working-class communities nonetheless flourished on the margins of the city walls, often on government-owned properties.

As expected, La Perla drew the largest and most sustained public attention because of its proximity to the fortifications and its extreme poverty. Several planning efforts suggested removing the precarious housing structures of La Perla, relocating its residents, and converting the scenic area into a passive park next to the historic walls of San Juan.⁹ Nonetheless, the community survived several hurricanes, the collapse of part

⁷ The process of demolition of the eastern wall of San Juan, including the Santiago Gate, is amply documented in the Archivo General de Puerto Rico, especially the Fondo: Obras Públicas; Serie: Propiedad Pública; Subserie: San Juan, covering the years between 1890 and 1897.

⁸ See Archivos Históricos Nacionales (Madrid, Spain), “Prohibición de edificar en algunas zonas de San Juan,” Fondo: Ministerio de Posesiones de Ultramar; Serie: Real Hacienda de Puerto Rico; Año: 1846 (available at the Centro de Investigaciones Históricas, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras).

⁹ See, for instance, Administración de Renovación Urbana y Vivienda, Oficina de Investigación, “Aspectos sobresalientes de la vivienda y características socio-económicas de los residentes del sector La Perla en

of the city walls, multiple state interventions, a high crime rate, and persistent stigma as one of Puerto Rico's most infamous slums. At the same time, the neighborhood experienced a sharp decline of its population, from 3,392 residents in 1960 to 338 in the year 2000 (Marvel 2008: 160).

Uses of the Site. Thirdly, we were interested in documenting how various groups have used the places within or surrounding the SJNHS. For most of its history, San Juan was primarily a military bastion, as well as the administrative and religious center of the Spanish colonial regime on the Island. The Spanish armed forces closely regulated the use of spaces within the elaborate defensive system that defined the contours of the city. Accordingly, military authorities did not allow the areas located near the fortifications to be employed for residential development, commercial establishments, leisure activities, or other civic purposes.¹⁰ After the U.S. invasion of Puerto Rico in 1898, San Juan continued to have a strategic military significance, especially during World War II. In 1943, the U.S. Army established Fort Brooke on the grounds of El Morro and San Cristóbal castles, and retained control of a hospital in the old Ballajá barracks until 1949.

Nonetheless, we found scattered evidence of multiple non-military uses of the area now occupied by the SJNHS. For example, a botanical garden was inaugurated in

San Juan" (San Juan: CRUV, 1963); Administración de Renovación Urbana y Vivienda, "La Perla" (San Juan: CRUV, 1968); Juan Cruz et al., "La Perla," 1978 (Puerto Rican Collection, José M. Lázaro Library, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras); Yamira de León Pagán, "Reconstrucción de la historia y lucha de la comunidad de La Perla" (M.A. thesis, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, 1995); Servicios Sociales de Puerto Rico Inc., "Petición de los residentes de La Perla al Honorable Gobernador de Puerto Rico y la Asamblea Legislativa," 1967 (Social Work Collection, University of Puerto Rico Libraries, Río Piedras).

¹⁰ On Spanish military restrictions to the development of Puerta de Tierra during the 19th century, see Bird Carmona 2008; Medina Comas 1994; Vallés Vargas 1982.

1854 as part of La Princesa Promenade near the southern city walls. The wide esplanade in front of El Morro castle has been used to fly kites at least since the end of the 19th century. Between 1926 and 1928, athletic games, parades, dances, fireworks, and carriage contests were held on the grounds of El Morro during Carnival and other holidays. Members of the military played golf, football, and baseball, and swam in a pool located within El Morro esplanade.¹¹ A popular Kite Festival has been organized in the esplanade since 2004. Over time, ordinary people have utilized the land within and surrounding the SJNHS, in ways that defied or at least transgressed the official definition of those areas by powerful state institutions, especially Spanish and U.S. military forces.

The park's vicinity contained several plazas, churches, schools, a hospital, a marketplace, a jail, a cemetery, a mental health asylum, a slaughterhouse, and other public spaces that were appropriated by the civilian population for numerous purposes. The demolition of the eastern city walls in 1897 signaled the increase of civilian over military uses of much of the urban space. For the next five decades, Santurce absorbed the bulk of the capital's population growth. After World War II, the Old San Juan garrisons gradually lost their defensive value. In 1964, the U.S. Army closed down Fort Brooke and in 1967 the U.S. government transferred some of the historic buildings within the site to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. El Morro and San Cristóbal castles later acquired their contemporary allure as major tourist sites. Today, the SJNHS is one

¹¹ See Archivo General de Puerto Rico, "Inauguración del Paseo de la Princesa," Fondo: Documentos Municipales de San Juan; Caja: 102 I; Legajo: 1; Año: 1872; Colección Puertorriqueña, José M. Lázaro Library, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, Caja 10: P.R. Ilustrado, S-28, mayo-agosto 1928.

of the most popular recreational areas in Puerto Rico, enjoyed both by U.S. and foreign visitors, and local residents.

Contemporary Users of the Site. Fourth, we sought to identify which groups currently use the park. Our interviews with representatives of community organizations reveal that most of them do not employ the facilities of the SJNHS. Only seven out of 17 community representatives interviewed for this project declared that they utilized the park: an astronomical society, an educational foundation, a local public school, a child abuse prevention program, a historic buildings preservation society, and three volunteer groups interested in reenacting military history.

Archival research found that some youth organizations—such as the Boy and Girl Scouts—have held events at the SJNHS. Several public and private schools from the San Juan metropolitan area also participated in the celebration of “Junior Ranger Day” at the San Cristóbal castle during the 1980s. During the 1990s, the NPS organized a storytelling program, sponsored by a Spanish bank, for children at San Cristóbal. More recently, the Youth Conservation Corps recruited volunteers from La Perla, Puerta de Tierra, and other communities to help maintain and clean the fortifications and lands within the SJNHS.¹² Nowadays, a nonprofit organization offers walking tours about “the hidden San Juan,” featuring many architectural landmarks near the SJNHS (Fundación San Martín de Porres 2013).

The Park and Its Neighbors. Fifth, we wanted to document how the park fits into the daily lives of the members of the surrounding communities. Our interviews and observations suggest that popular uses of the SJNHS are now primarily recreational, as

¹² See especially San Juan National Historic Site, Park Resource Records Collection, Series II: Historic Preservation Records, 1940–2008, and Series V: Interpretation and Education Records, 1956–2008.

an outdoor park shared by local residents, residents of other places in Puerto Rico, and tourists. The most commonly used space is the open grass area in El Morro esplanade. Regular activities carried out within or near the park grounds include flying kites, playing soccer, riding bicycles, jogging, walking, stargazing, weddings, picnics, concerts, folk music performances, parades, festivals, holiday celebrations, and public manifestations. However, some interviewees perceived the site to be “disconnected” from the city and its people, noting that efforts to preserve the military fortifications did not encourage more active links with the surrounding communities. Many still lament that the NPS decided to cut down the palm and pine trees along El Morro road, which used to provide much-needed shade for visitors. In addition, the park’s administration by a federal agency raised some critical comments, based on the claim that the park is “ours” (meaning the Puerto Rican people) and not “theirs” (meaning the U.S. government).

Newer Park Neighbors. Sixth, we asked: who are the “newer” park neighbors who do not make use of the park? Most residents of Old San Juan do not frequent the site’s facilities and some actually resent their use by “outsiders.” For instance, residents often complain that municipal and federal authorities do not coordinate traffic into the city, making it very difficult for residents to reach their dwellings. Local business owners have expressed their dislike for public events that generate large amounts of garbage and bad smell in the streets. One group that does not appear to visit the park’s facilities is the large number of Dominican immigrants who live in the San Juan metropolitan area. Previous research has found that many Dominicans work in the construction industry in the historic city center, but most do not reside there (Barrios Romero 2012).

Research Gaps. Finally, we identified major lacunae in the ethnographic and historical bibliography on the communities affiliated with the SJNHS. As noted above, most of the existing literature focuses on La Perla, at the expense of other neighboring communities such as La Puntilla, La Marina, and Puerta de Tierra. This emphasis is understandable given La Perla's proximity to the SJNHS, its long recorded history, and the lingering social problems associated with this lower-class settlement (including lack of legal titles to federally-owned land, unplanned infrastructure, and drug trafficking). However, the history and current status of other communities associated with the park remain poorly understood. Furthermore, little information is available on other groups that may have used the park's resources over time, such as the descendants of indigenous groups and commemorative and patriotic organizations.

In our archival research, we found few primary sources on the origins and development of the barrios of La Puntilla, La Marina, and Ballajá. Moreover, most of the available information refers to San Juan as a military stronghold during the Spanish colonial period. In the case of La Perla, the bulk of the historical record concerns its precarious location outside the city walls, its unsafe and clandestine housing structures, and the government's numerous plans to demolish the structures and relocate the residents elsewhere. Unfortunately, many of the original buildings in Ballajá, La Marina, and La Puntilla have been razed down, displacing much of their population.¹³

Information Regarding Relevant Natural and Cultural Resources. We have included a table at the end of this report with a detailed list of the main structures,

¹³ The now defunct Urban Renewal and Housing Corporation (Administración de Renovación Urbana y Vivienda 1965, 1967) drafted several plans to renovate Old San Juan, including La Puntilla and La Perla, and Puerta de Tierra.

places, objects, and natural areas that contemporary people value and use in the SJNHS. Of the 23 resources listed, nine are former military structures and six are natural resources linked to the site.

Recommendations

Below are our main suggestions for additional ethnographic and historical research. The appendix contains practical recommendations for consideration by NPS managing staff.

- Explore the historical and contemporary relationship between the area presently occupied by the SJNHS and its neighboring communities, especially Ballajá, La Puntilla, La Marina, and Puerta de Tierra.
- Survey the Dominican community in San Juan, to understand why its members make little use of the park's resources.
- Document the historical transformations of El Morro castle, including the changes made in the esplanade, like the cutting down of trees, so people can understand the reasons for these changes and not only see a picture of how the site looked before.
- Survey the people who use the park for their activities, so they can evaluate the park services.
- Develop an oral history project with older residents of La Perla, to record their memories and anecdotes, which could be used for training of local tour guides.

- Examine the historical narratives related to the SJNHS, beyond the NPS, including other uses, stakeholders, and political powers that have been linked to the site in the past.

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Appendix

Practical Recommendations to the Managing Staff of the San Juan National Historic Site (SJNHS)

The following suggestions were made both by members of the research team and several interviewees.

- Meet with representatives of the Corporación del Proyecto Enlace del Caño Martín Peña, to learn from its experience working with local communities, while taking into account the differences between the NPS and the Corporación.
- Train NPS employees about community participation. Professors at the Graduate School of Social Work, at the University of Puerto Rico, could advise and help train them.
- With the advice of experts in community social work, cultural management, and entrepreneurship, the creation of local businesses in La Perla could be encouraged.
- Incorporate educational activities related to the park in the social sciences and history curricula in neighboring public schools.
 - During professionals' week, rangers could talk to students about their work or some occupations relevant to the park, like mason, restorer, and archaeologist.
 - In November, which commemorates the "Discovery" of America and the "Discovery" of Puerto Rico, park rangers could dress up as Spanish soldiers, to talk about that period.

- The schoolchildren of La Perla could later recognize the rangers when they visit the neighborhood.
- During Halloween week, a tour with rangers dressed up as Spanish soldiers, featuring the city walls and sentry boxes in La Perla, could attract younger residents. Participants would learn in a fun way about the historical significance of those cultural resources. Rangers could continue the tour by entering San Cristóbal castle, where participants could recognize its proximity to their houses and learn more about the Spanish defensive system. Many residents would enter the castle for the first time. At the end of the tour, rangers could give candy or snacks to attendees.
- Inform the public about current and potential uses of the park, so residents and members of community organizations can know what kind of activities may take place there in the future.
- Publicize the procedures for applying for park use permits.
- Offer a reduced fee for area residents, to stimulate their entrance to the park, so they could feel special and increase the probability of entering the park.
- Promote the entrance of residents to the park with advertising campaigns presenting NPS as the residents' neighbor or the park as their backyard. It is important to create a sense of belonging to the park, so residents can use and help maintain it.
- Organize a photographic contest—for example, to award a prize to the best photos of sentry boxes, forts, and other park resources.

- Plan activities during sunrise and/or sunset, such as a photographic or painting contest, and yoga classes for the general public. Since many people stand or sit to watch the sunset in El Morro esplanade, that interest could be developed.
- Provide extensive information about El Morro castle to the public as much as NPS offers about San Cristóbal. The information presented could be about how El Morro has changed through history. People are surprised when they discover that the esplanade used to have a swimming pool and an outdoor cinema.
- Organize more community activities in El Morro esplanade. In the case of La Perla, they could be a crafts fair, a gastronomic fair (including local dishes), and workshops on topics like how to build boats. Local fishermen could also lead workshops on how to make fishing nets.
- Sponsor a photographic exhibit created by La Perla's residents that captures the picturesque landscape of the neighborhood.
- Create an educational program intertwined with the museum program.
- Improve the dissemination of the educational programs to convey more information about the SJNHS to city residents and entities.
- Create a system to rent umbrellas that could not get buried in the esplanade. The prohibition to bury umbrellas in the terrain may estrange the public.
- Take better care of the green areas of Old San Juan.
- Emphasize the care of natural resources, such as the beach grape shrubs and trees.
- Organize more historical reenactments, like battles, where soldiers (reenactors) come out announced.

- Promote alliances with universities for stargazing groups.
- Design spaces to sell beverages and snacks without obstructing the vistas.
- Rent the space for trapeze and bicycle riding.
- Take advantage of the park's proximity to the San Juan cemetery (Santa María Magdalena de Pazzis). Both should be promoted together as tourist attractions.
- Improve the pedestrian connection among La Perla, the park, and the rest of Old San Juan.
- Consolidate the trails, particularly the Paseo del Morro and Paseo de La Princesa.
- Promote La Perla's improvement and community empowerment, so that residents can feel part of the park. In particular, encourage the creation of small businesses, like tour operators.
- Improve the promotion of the park with cruise ships and hotels.
- Maintain the walls where the vegetation has regrown.
- Establish an alliance with the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture to create a visitors' pass that includes admission to the park and museums.
- Establish an alliance with the Island's National Park Company to create a visitors' pass that includes admission to the park and other parks in Puerto Rico.
- Promote the park as a place for family and community activities.
- Plant more trees to provide shade in the park.
- Organize concerts and other musical activities.
- Make accessible the information about activities and programs that the SJNHS coordinates and offers.
- Coordinate more activities for students and communities near the park.

- Create interactive stations with information about various monuments and spaces within the SJNHS.
- Partner with other organizations to disseminate the cultural and historical resources of the SJNHS.
- Distribute promotional handouts to the tourists who arrive at the port of San Juan.
- Promote urban and architectural tourism.
- Install artistic, creative, and illuminative installations about the cultural aspects of the SJNHS.
- Provide more educational information about the cultural resources, other than military history, of the SJNHS and Old San Juan. This should include information about the shores of San Juan and the community of La Perla.
- Improve community relations between La Perla and the NPS with educational programs about the history of the SJNHS.
- Sponsor film screenings and video installations in El Morro.
- Hold more public celebrations in El Morro, like band concerts.
- Expand access to the San Cristóbal archive, which contains documents unavailable elsewhere.
- Sponsor specialty tours: nocturnal, for mystery and fantasy fans, accompanied with tales; architectural, by day and night; and photographic. Another tour could be led by La Perla residents trained for that purpose.
- Invite artists, like sculptors and painters, to inspire La Perla residents.

- Incorporate art students who live in La Perla by asking them to do workshops for local children.
- Because many tourists walk through La Perla, residents should be trained as tour guides. Residents should be encouraged to develop tourist-oriented businesses, such as food and beverage stands.
- Design signs with information about La Perla prepared by its residents and place them in the main entrances to the neighborhood.

Table

Inventory of Ethnographic Resources in the San Juan National Historic Site (SJNHS)

Name of Resource	Type of Resource	Location	Description	Group Associated with Resource	Existent or Nonexistent
1. San Felipe del Morro Castle	Structure	Bay entrance at northern coastline of the islet of San Juan	The oldest Spanish colonial fort within the SJNHS (and the United States as well). It is also the best-known structure of San Juan's defense system. It still stands as the park's main attraction. This fort, unlike neighboring San Cristóbal, holds an open—and free of charge—esplanade.	Historical reenactors, NGOs, schools, filmmakers	Existent
2. San Cristóbal Castle	Structure	Northeastern side of the islet of San Juan	The largest Spanish colonial fort in Puerto Rico. Currently, it is the structure where most historical reenactments take place.	Historical reenactors, NGOs, schools, filmmakers	Existent
3. City Walls	Structure	Bordering 2.5 miles around the islet of San Juan	The historic walls surround most of the islet of San Juan. Nowadays, they are among the most recognizable structures within the SJNHS. The	Residents, government agencies, experts	Existent

			city walls have become notorious for their numerous and fragmented conservation codes, which some informants deem problematic for their holistic management.		
4. Sentry Boxes	Structure	Placed throughout the city walls and forts	These structures are emblematic of San Juan and Puerto Rico as a whole. They are well-known icons for residents and schools, as well as filmmaking crews and tourist campaigns.	Residents, NGOs, schools, filmmakers, Tourism Company	Existent
5. World War II Watchtowers	Structure	Placed within the forts overlooking the Atlantic Ocean	Although no community organization uses this resource, some experts have alluded critically to these structures. They have nothing to do architecturally with the rest of the Spanish fortifications.	Experts	Existent
6. Casa Rosa Recreational Area	Place	Santa Elena Road	One of the few places surrounding El Morro Castle that provides shade. It includes playgrounds as well. It is often used by families with children visiting the	Residents, visitors	Existent

			grounds of El Morro, or having picnics.		
7. El Morro Esplanade	Place	South of Fort San Felipe del Morro	One of the most used, talked about, and versatile areas within the SJNHS. It has been used for recreation, concerts, festivals, kite- flying, stargazing, pet festivals, religious activities, political rallies, photography, dog-walking, protests, and manifestations. Residents often talk about this area as their “backyard.”	Historical reenactors, residents, religious personnel, amateurs, market vendors, NGOs, schools	Existent
8. San Juan Gate	Structure	Caleta de San Juan	An emblematic and picturesque entry point to San Juan and the only gate still standing. It is used as an iconic structure by NGOs such as the Felisa Rincón de Gautier Foundation, as well as filmmaking crews.	NGOs, filmmakers, strollers	Existent
9. Building 213 (Bunker)	Structure	Fort San Cristóbal	Some residents refer to this space as a historical testament to recent military structures in Puerto Rico.	Residents	Existent

10. Fort Chapels	Structure	Placed within the forts	Used by historical reenactors who celebrated a Catholic mass 200 years after the chapels ceased to operate.	Historical reenactors	Existent
11. Norzagaray Square	Place	Fort San Cristóbal	Used once a year (in December) by artisans invited to the Arts and Crafts Fair.	Artisans	Existent
12. Bastions	Structure	Placed throughout the city walls	Used by residents to walk their dogs. Many residents talk about these areas as their “backyards.”	Residents, NGOs	Existent
13. Australian Pines	Natural Resource	El Morro Road	This used to be a resource used by visitors for recreation and shade. Due to their cutting down, many informants referred to this nonexistent resource as one of the most contentious actions taken by the NPS.	Experts, government agencies, residents, visitors	Nonexistent
14. Grass	Natural Resource	El Morro Esplanade and bastions	Often overlooked as an ethnographic resource, grass is currently the only comfort element in the esplanade and bastions located within the SJNHS. It serves as	Historical reenactors, NGOs, residents, visitors, filmmakers	Existent

			the basis for the numerous and varied events that take place in the park.		
15. Palm Trees	Natural Resource	Esplanade	Very few trees are now scattered throughout the esplanade. In the past, there used to be many more. Residents talk about the ones still standing as some of the few “green” elements of the landscape.	Residents	Mostly nonexistent
16. Almond Trees	Natural Resource	Casa Rosa Recreational Area	Very few of these trees are found throughout the esplanade. They are concentrated around the Casa Rosa Recreational Area. Used by residents and visitors for shade and recreation in their walks through the grounds of the SJNHS. Some informants even talked about gathering and eating the almonds fallen from the trees.	Residents, visitors	Existent
17. San Juan Bay	Natural Resource	Northwest of San Juan islet, between Fort San Felipe del Morro and	One of the most panoramic and majestic views of the forts and city walls. The San Juan Bay is actually what gave	Residents, visitors, fishermen	Existent

		Fort San Juan de la Cruz (El Cañuelo)	El Morro its purpose as a military fortification. Nowadays, it is used as a viewing resource as well as a labor resource for fishermen.		
18. Atlantic Ocean	Natural Resource	North of San Juan islet	One of the most prominent natural resources bordering the SJNHS. It is actually what gave El Morro and San Cristóbal their original meaning. Nowadays, it is used as a viewing resource, as well as a labor resource by fishermen.	Residents, visitors, fishermen	Existent
19. Historic Cannons	Object	Fort San Felipe del Morro and Guard House	Historical reenactors have incorporated some of the cannons currently exhibited in El Morro Castle in their performances. They have also used these objects as learning opportunities about military history.	Historical reenactors	Existent

20. Archaeological Objects (Medals, Spanish Soldier Uniform Buttons)	Object	Archaeological Deposit at Fort San Cristóbal	Historical reenactors have used some of these artifacts to embellish their attires in a historically accurate fashion.	Historical reenactors	Existent
21. Paseo del Morro (Walkway)	Trail	Bordering the western side of Fort San Felipe del Morro	Some residents and visitors use this promenade as a walking and jogging track. They also use this area as a natural haven for cats, where they place food.	Residents, visitors	Existent
22. North Coastline View	Vista	North of San Juan islet	This vista encompasses all the elements that make up the SJNHS; the forts, city walls, bastions, sentry boxes, and esplanade. It also showcases important non-park elements, such as the municipal cemetery and neighboring communities inside and outside the city walls, particularly La Perla.	Residents, visitors	Existent

23. Beach Grapes <i>(Uva Playera)</i>	Natural Resource	Bordering the Paseo del Morro	Cats use the beach grape shrubs for share. An NGO also uses them to place food and water for the cats.	NGO	Existent
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