

PUERTO RICANS IN NEWARK  
(THE CASE AND THE CALL FOR ACTION)

TO: PUERTO RICANS and to ALL CONCERNED CITIZENS

FROM: Hilda A. Hidalgo, a Puerto Rican and fellow citizen.

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## INTRODUCTION

Puerto Ricans in Newark are reaching that point where frustration can no longer be tolerated. Newark has the largest number of Puerto Ricans in the state of New Jersey. The great majority are poor, very poor. They are hopeless and desperate. Violence and confrontation are very much in the making. The word is "Cono, que tenemos que perder con un riot?"

My purpose is not to agitate or spread "be scared" news. My purpose is to disclose honestly my perception of the situation or problem, analyze some of its major causes, and propose constructive action.

## THE SITUATION OR PROBLEM

Hard data about Puerto Ricans in Newark is scarce. That which is available is not reliable because it is either outdated or gathered by methods that are bound to produce broad margins or error. (Interviewers who do not speak Spanish and/or are not trusted by Puerto Ricans who believe data would or could be used for punitive purposes.) The Puerto Rican population of Newark is estimated between 25,000 (Sternlieb 1967) and 50,000 (Perez 1969) or 10 to 20 percent of the population. From 1960 to 1968 the Puerto Rican population in Newark public schools was projected to increase by 118% (Margolis 1968). One fact seems to be evident, the trend is toward increasing numbers of Puerto Ricans moving into the city. Nearly half live in inadequate housing, less than 100 own their own homes. (Sternlieb 1967) Many live in Public Housing. Median family income is reported at \$3,665 (Sternlieb 1967) Eleven percent have incomes under \$3,000. (Cherneck, Indák, Sternlieb 1967) Seventy (70%) percent of the Puerto Ricans over 25 years of age have not completed high school. (Cherneck, Indik, Stenlieb 1967) Unemployment rate among Puerto Ricans is 13% against 11.5% among Negroes (Chermick, Indik, Sternlieb 1967).

A quick survey reveals the following data of Puerto Ricans employed in white collar, skilled jobs, or professional positions in some of the most relevant agencies or institutions:

City Welfare Dept.	5	In anti-poverty programs:	
Human Rights Commissioner	1	U.C.C. - board member	1
Staff	2	employees	5
City Court Interpreter	1	Newark Day Care - social worker	1
		para-professional	
Police Department - Policeman	1	Newark Pre School - teachers	4
Trainee	1	or assistant teachers	4
Board of Education - Teachers	5	TEAM - staff employed	4
School Social Worker	1	counselors borrowed from	
Secretary	1	the State Employment Service	4
Neighborhood Youth Corps, Staff		Area Boards	
Member	1	New careers	2
Model Cities - Staff Member	1	C.O.P.E.	
Assistant to the Mayor	1	F.O.C.U.S.	9
(low ranking)		Job Corps	0
Newark Housing Authority	4	The Council of Social Agencies	0
(including 2 managers)			
Urban League	0	The Urban Coalition - secretary	1
		professional to be hired shortly	1
Martland Medical Center - staff		Bell Telephone Company - community	
member	1	relations	1
Public Service - bus driver	1	Planned Parenthood - field worker	1
Rutgers Newark Campus - urban		Puerto Ricans enrolled in all	
specialist	1	Rutgers Schools	15
Child Service Association		Prudential	0
professional and administrator	1	Major banks	0
bus driver	1		

Newark has one Spanish agency: F.O.C.U.S. As recently as April 28, 1969 it had a total staff of 3 persons (Perez 1969) and a Federal grant budget of \$30,000 a year. As of May 1969, 6 additional staff members have been hired and the budget has been increased to \$90,000. It has opened a new service center in the Iron Bound section.

Newark has one Puerto Rican agency: ASPIRA. It has just gotten off the ground with a grant from the Ford Foundation (\$61,000). However, it will not become operative until some time in the summer of 1969. \$50,000 must still be raised to meet its budget during the next year. It will have a professional staff of 4 and 3 clerical staff. The Board of Directors and the staff are all Puerto Ricans. ASPIRA represents the only self-help effort controlled by Puerto Ricans for Puerto Ricans. Its purpose is to help develop an educated leadership in the Puerto Rican community.

F.O.C.U.S. and ASPIRA represent the two most serious efforts directed toward meeting the needs of the Puerto Ricans in Newark. However, the present budget and staff limitations of both agencies make these efforts inadequate. They constitute a mere "drop in the bucket" in relation to the needs.

Puerto Ricans who participate in political life are predominantly Democrats. The Democratic Party organization takes the Puerto Rican vote for granted. Their modus-operandi in relation to Puerto Ricans is to throw a few "skinny political bones" to a few controlled "political leaders". The extent of the concessions made by the organization have been a few minor, low-paying political jobs and a few free tickets to political banquets. Five Puerto Ricans have run unsuccessfully for political office in the county and city. They have run as independents or against the official democratic organization slate.

Churches, Roman Catholic and Protestant, have made attempts to service Puerto Ricans. Their efforts vary in degree of success. However, in general, church-sponsored programs are usually inadequately funded and staffed, and tend to perpetuate a paternalistic-dependent relationship.

There is a growing number of Puerto Rican merchants who own their stores. Their capital is limited and their overhead too high for their resources.

The result is that they must charge more than other stores who sell the same products. Most of the time their owners are just struggling for survival.

There are quite a few "civic-social" organizations. However, their emphasis seems to be recreational and social and they live in a constant struggle to remain solvent.

The most prominent display of Puerto Rican numerical strength is evident in Newark at the Puerto Rican annual parade. The parade has lacked a real philosophical core and has not been used as a leverage or tool to effect changes that will benefit the majority of the Puerto Rican community.

Prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes and practices are very evident in the way the Puerto Rican poor majority is treated by Whites, Blacks, Cubans and middle class Puerto Ricans.

Puerto Ricans are docile people. Their long colonial history has developed the psychology of the "ennangotao" (Marques 1966). In essence, this means Puerto Ricans have accepted the inferior submissive role imposed on them by Spain the U.S.A. This psychology has been prevalent in the attitude and behavior of Puerto Ricans in Newark who "have accepted being kept in their place". The various Newark spheres of power, are complacent and believe there is little reason for concern in regard to the Puerto Rican. Their attention is directed toward Blacks. They seem to be more sensitive and responsive to the needs of Blacks. Puerto Ricans are the silent, invisible desperate poor of Newark.

Television is teaching Puerto Ricans the tactics of violent, destructive confrontation. The message that fire, rocks, and even bullets can be the only way to gain attention and change the lot of the majority of Puerto Ricans has reached many hot young ears. Hasta cuando?!

MAJOR FACTORS PREVENTING CONSTRUCTIVE ACTION

The conditions described call for immediate, drastic action. In themselves they suggest changes that must and could be implemented immediately. However, before suggesting definite constructive action we must examine and expose some of the major factors preventing such action.

1. The present lack of effective leadership in the Puerto Rican community.

Puerto Rican leadership (the little there is) falls into several categories or leadership styles: (a) the issue oriented leaders, (b) the narcissistic leader, (c) the professional Puerto Rican, (d) the young emerging leader (e) the angry irrational leader.

The issue-oriented leaders are a handful of educated Puerto Ricans whose goal is to affect basic changes in the quality of life of the majority of the Puerto Ricans. They try to mobilize the community around central issues. This is the philosophy that permeates their efforts and tactics. They are in conflict with the power structure and established institutions, although they are part of some of those institutions. Most of the people in this group have professional careers unrelated to their leadership roles in the Puerto Rican community. Therefore, they are "part-time" leaders and do not have time for intensive, continuous involvement with the man in the street. They are in conflict with the "narcissistic leader," the "professional Puerto Rican leader," and the angry irrational leaders.

The narcissistic leaders are also a handful and better educated than the majority of the Puerto Ricans. Their interest lies in using the community to meet their own needs for power and prestige.



They view themselves as an "elite" and often have little sympathy for poor Puerto Ricans which they use to promote their own self-interests. The narcissistic leaders are predominately interested in getting jobs for themselves and for others that they can control. They work in pseudo-cooperation with "the professional Puerto Rican leader", and are in conflict with the other leadership categories or styles, especially the "issue oriented leader".

The "professional Puerto Rican leaders" use their ethnic identification to gain access to certain token jobs. These jobs have been opened as window-dressing to give the illusion that Puerto Ricans share the "minority pie". Their major job seems to move endlessly from meeting to meeting for the purpose of being visible. They have little knowledge of the techniques and skills needed to effect change. They move without an inner sense of purpose and are erratic in following through with a project. They are accommodating to the power structure which manipulates them with patronizing benevolent contempt. There is great rivalry among the professional Puerto Rican leaders. This group is jealous of the educated Puerto Ricans, and fearful of the mass of Puerto Ricans. Their fear stems from the reality that if this mass "wakes up," and for their quality of life is significantly improved, the professional Puerto Rican leaders will be out of a job. The "Professional Puerto Rican leaders" views are parochial, their understanding of problems are shallow, and their attempts to service the community superficial, paternalistic and very personal.

There is young emerging leadership in the Puerto Rican community. Their impact has not been felt yet in the community in general. This group tends to be idealistic and impulsive and has yet to consolidate a style or a plan for action. Its members are in their twenties. They came to the USA as children or are second generation Puerto Ricans.

This group will find its allies in the "issue-oriented" Puertorican leadership. In my opinion, the young emerging leadership represents the greatest potential and hope for constructive action in the Puertorican community.

The "angry, irrational leaders" are young, bitter "pushouts" of the educational system, and they are desperate. They look at violence as an escape valve for their own frustrations, with the hope that it will produce the needed changes in their lives. They are a small group of "desperadoes" that constitute a great danger because they can effectively mobilize and exploit the many real grievances of the Puertorican community. They have little, if any, communication with the other leadership categories. They will be the ones who will call the "rumble". This group also has potential for developing into constructive leadership.

In summary, all different leadership categories have at present, deficiencies in varied degrees. The result is a lack of strong, effective leadership in the Puertorican community.

2. The negative relationships between ethnic and racial minorities and the Puertoricans; between the whites and the Puertoricans. The negative results of lump labels: "Black and Puertoricans" and "Spanish-speaking community". (1)

Relations between blacks and Puertoricans are usually strained. There are tones of racial or "color discrimination" among Puertoricans. These discriminatory racial tones are reinforced in the USA milieu. It is significant that while most Puertoricans have some African blood heritage (free inter-marriage among races in Puerto Rico and the 300 year occupation of the Moors in Spain), black Puertoricans called themselves "trigueños".



The Puertoricans have coined the term "molleto" to differentiate between the American negro and the Puertorican negro, who is euphemistically called "trigueño".

Puertoricans resent the fact that when "Blacks and Puerto-ricans" are lumped together, the result is that Blacks are served, Puertoricans are left out.

Puertoricans also resent the fact that they lose their individual identity when lumped under the "Black and Puertorican" generic label.

At the present time a meaningful partnership between Blacks and Puertoricans in Newark is a goal to pursue rather than a workable reality.

The term "Spanish-speaking" lumps the Cubans, the Puertoricans and other Latin-Americans. Most of the Cubans are a professional exiled middle class that came to the USA for political reasons. They were lauded and rewarded by the U.S. government for their rejection of Communism and Castro. They lean toward the political right and are fearful of the involvement of masses of poor people. Being middle class, they are familiar with "the system" and operate successfully in this structure. They are competitive and upwardly mobile. They have little sympathy for the uneducated poor.

In contrast, the majority of Puertoricans are unskilled or marginally skilled poor class. They have been pushed to the USA by the extreme poverty and lack of opportunity in Puerto Rico. They were ~~neither~~ invited nor wanted in the USA. They are not familiar with the system, fearful of the establishment, non-competitive. They have been marooned for generation in economic poverty. The result: Programs and services designed to serve the "Spanish-speaking community" end up benefitting the Cubans

It is obvious that Puertoricans represent a unique constellation of cultural, historical, ethnic and class factors that demand a special tailor-made approach to meet their needs. The fallacy of the "melting pot" ideology, to which most Americans pay lip service must be replaced by an attitude that will allow different cultures to co-exist and cooperate without having to dilute their identities.

Relations between whites and Puertoricans are characterized by patronizing attitudes of whites toward Puertoricans, by racism and prejudice. There is also a conceited effort by some whites to capitalize and widen the rift between Blacks and Puertoricans.

3. The lack of commitment by government (federal, state, municipal), business, industry and other established institutions to resolve the problem of the urban poor.

The major cause of the intolerable situation of the poor Puertoricans in Newark is the unwillingness of most Americans to recognize and deal squarely with the problems of racism and poverty. Prevalent American ideology seems to keep the Puertoricans, the Blacks, the American Indians, the Mexican Americans and those American Whites that have remained poor through generations in second-class citizen status, with little, if any, chance for economic social mobility.

Newark is a city fast approaching bankruptcy. The federal and state tax structures are not providing the monies needed to attack the problems of the poor. Frankly, there is no money to do the job that needs to be done, not because America is poor and cannot do it, but because America is rich and will not do it.

Newark, like other urban centers, has a complex and uncoordinated network of institutions and services. Unskilled jobs have all but disappeared from the labor market and the public welfare system is inadequate and punitive.

Of all our public services, the public school system shows the greatest failure in teaching minorities. Puertoricans have the highest rate of "pushouts". The public school system, despite statistical evidence to the contrary, insists that it is individual Puertorican children who fail and not that the public school system has failed.

The longer the Puertorican child attends the Newark public schools, the less he seems to learn. There is a Puertorican boy graduating number 25 out of a class of 600 in Barringer High School. He is described by his teachers as "bright, motivated, an excellent student". YET he scored 225 in verbal ability in his SAT. This case is typical of what happens to industrious Puertorican youngsters in the education trap of Newark.

SUGGESTED CONSTRUCTIVE ACTION

Many will find loopholes or rationalizations that will enable them to negate the veracity of the conditions presented here. I admit that these conditions represent predominant behavior and trends. Exceptions can be found to each and every condition reported, but they are the exception and should not be used to negate the urgency of beginning constructive action.

1) The data reveals that key agencies and services have an extremely low number of Puerto Ricans employed. It is inexcusable that the Council of Social Agencies have not one single Puerto Rican on its staff. Key agencies of government, private agencies, and business must mobilize themselves and hire Puerto Ricans. They must stop playing the game "get us someone who is qualified". They must actively recruit Puerto Ricans with potential, train them, and employ them.

2) The situation with the U.C.C. is shameful. The demands submitted to the U.C.C. at their annual dinner have been completely ignored by the U.C.C. (see Appendix) These demands should be granted immediately.

3) FOCUS needs additional funds and personnel that will enable it to have more relevance to the Puerto Rican community. The Puerto Rican community must demand that FOCUS becomes more responsive to their needs.

4) ASPIRA must receive the additional funds needed. It must become relevant to the Puerto Rican community, addressing itself specifically to the need to develop educated young leadership.

5) Puerto Ricans must be included in a meaningful way in the political life. Both major parties must include Puerto Ricans in their official slate.

6) Churches must take an active role in developing independent, effective Puerto Rican leadership.

7) It is time to use the Puerto Rican Parade as a tool for the benefit of the Puerto Rican community. Puerto Ricans, let's use the parade, and not let others use us in the parade.

8) It is the job of the Puerto Ricans to start identifying themselves who their leaders are, rather than have outsiders select them. It is our job to get rid of "leaders" who use us and do not serve us.

9) Puerto Rican youth should receive priority in leadership development.

10) Services and programs must be designed to meet Puerto Rican needs.

11) The public educational system must be drastically changed. A minimum of 2 Puerto Ricans should be appointed to the Newark Board of Education, at present there is none. Programs similar to that instituted on P.S. 192, New York should be adopted.

12) Rutgers, The State University, must honor the demands and commitments made on November 8, 1968. (See Appendix) A minimum of 10 of the new positions demanded by the new admission policy should be filled by Puerto Ricans.

13) A significant number (over 30%) of the Puerto Ricans in the 16-40 year old bracket, who are presently un-skilled must be recruited, trained and employed in the next 3 years.

FOOT NOTES

1. Let me make very clear that I share the aspirations and goals of the Black community and actively support their goal.
  2. P.S. 192 places Puerto Rican children in a special class with specially trained teachers who can speak and teach in Spanish.  
The results in P.S. 192 are encouraging. The average reading level among Puerto Rican children in P.S. 192 is very close to the national average. (Margolis 1968)
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